

III. THEOLOGY OF NT IN ITS UNITY AND DIVERSITY: BOOKS, CORPUS AND BEYOND

1. THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS: WHICH THEOLOGY(IES)?

The gospels of Mt, Mk and Lk have been called "synoptic gospels" because they share several elements (stories, themes, a certain order, etc.). For this reason, the question that concerns us is the following: Is it possible to extract theological features that are more or less common to them? Although it is not easy, we are setting ourselves this task. We will begin by recalling the essential theological lines of each book before seeing if there is a link between them that can facilitate further connections. This means that we will be attentive to the degree of extensibility of each theme, observing, for example, the cross-references and remembering everything that revolves around the synoptic fact (synoptic problem) and considering the contexts of each text, section, book, corpus....

A. Characteristics and theological lines of Matthew

1. Particularism and universalism

A double movement can be discerned in the first gospel. In the first place, its Jewish particularism. -Mt. is a connoisseur of the Judaism of his time. For example, he is well acquainted with the scribes and Pharisees, whom he says "are seated on the flesh of Moses" (23:2). -The mathean Jesus is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition: as we know, he did not come to abolish one iota of the Law (5:17ff); he paid the Temple tax (17:24-27); he sent his disciples only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:4-5; cf. 15:24), meaning he came specifically for the Hebrew race and not for any other race. Paradoxically, however, this profound Jewish particularism coexists with a universalism resolutely polemical in tone: The Magi (three wise men) from distant lands (the East) are the first to come to prostrate themselves before the child Jesus, whereas Herod wants to kill him and the scribes of Jerusalem are not interested (2:1-12); and when the newborn Jesus is chased by King Herod, God told Joseph

to escape with the child to Egypt, a foreign country. Jesus heals the servant of the Roman centurion and emphasizes that he has never seen such great faith in Israel (8:5-13); the daughter of the Canaanite woman is healed after much resistance, underlining the difficulty for Jesus and the disciples to admit this openness to the Gentiles (15:2-28). Finally, after Easter, Jesus himself extends the proclamation of the Good News to all the peoples of the earth (28,16-20).

2. Christology

The Christology of Mt. is essentially found in the narrative. Mt is much more interested than Mc in the ministry and content of the teaching of the earthly Jesus (*didascal* Christology). Mt does not understand Jesus as a person from a past history, but he wants to attest to the total identity between the earthly Jesus and the Risen One (who is/will always be) present alongside his own. The story of the historical Jesus is therefore always in harmony with the challenge of the Risen One to his disciples in the following generations. The mathean narrative thus functions as an appropriation and actualization of the story of Jesus and his teaching in the life of the community.

For Mt, Jesus of Nazareth is the *Messiah* of Israel. This manifests itself in three ways:

- Jesus is presented twice as the one sent or sending the disciples to the house of Israel (10,5-6; 15,24);
- through the fulfillment quotations, we discover that Jesus is the expected and announced envoy: those who receive him therefore remain faithful to the tradition of the Fathers;
- Jesus bears the Christological titles borrowed from the Old Testament (Son of David, Messiah, Son of Man). This Jesus Messiah is redefined as the living presence of God in the midst of his people, and more broadly in the midst of the world (Christology of *Emmanuel*). Although Jewish messianism is radicalized, it is also reinterpreted in depth, with the classical themes of Judaism (the Law, the question of election, the community question, the relationship to the pagans, etc.). The identification of Jesus with the "little ones" (10:42) is a reframing of certain titles that puts him in parallel with great elders such as Moses.

Matthew's Portrait of Jesus (Felix Just, SJ)

The Gospel according to Matthew accepts and uses the main Christological titles found already in his main narrative source (Mark's Gospel), including Christ/Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, Rabbi, and Teacher. But in contrast to Mark, Matthew adds several new titles and emphasizes certain aspects of Jesus' identity differently from Mark. Matthew's Gospel begins by identifying Jesus as "the **son of David**, the **son of Abraham**" (1:1), thus indicating Jesus' Davidic/royal and Abrahamic/Jewish heritage, respectively. Throughout Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is also presented as "the **New Moses**" for the people of Israel, and is given a variety of other titles, including **Emmanuel**, **Savior**, **Prophet**, and **King of the Jews**.

A. Jesus as the Son of Abraham (and Isaac and Jacob)

- Matthew stresses Jesus' **Jewish heritage** much more directly than Mark's Gospel does; references to "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" focus on the Israelites, the "twelve tribes of Jacob/Israel."
- Yet the mission of Jesus extends beyond the Jews; recall that the name "Abraham" means "the Father of *many* nations" (see Gen 17:5; Rom 4:17-18).
- The very beginning of the Gospel: "An account of **the genealogy of Jesus** the Messiah, the son of David, **the son of Abraham**. / **Abraham was the father of Isaac**, and **Isaac the father of Jacob**, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers..." (Matt 1:1-2)
- In summarizing Jesus' genealogy: "So all the generations **from Abraham** to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations." (Matt 1:17)
- In John the Baptist's preaching to the scribes and Pharisees: "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have **Abraham** as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to **Abraham**." (Matt 3:9)
- When Jesus complements a Roman centurion's faith: "I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with **Abraham and Isaac and Jacob** in the kingdom of heaven, / while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt 8:11-12)
- When Jesus argues with the Sadducees about the resurrection of the dead: "And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, / '**I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob**' ? He is God not of the dead, but of the living." (Matt 22:31-32; citing Exod 3:6; par. Mark

B. Jesus as the Son of David and King of the Jews (and King of Israel)

- Matthew's version of Jesus' genealogy also stresses that he is the royal "Son of David": "An account of **the genealogy of Jesus** the Messiah, **the son of David**, the son of Abraham... / ...and Jesse the father of **King David**. And **David was the father of Solomon** by the wife of Uriah... / So all the generations from Abraham to **David** are fourteen generations; and from **David** to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations." (Matt 1:1, 6, 17; cf. 1:20)
- More subtle references to King David in this genealogy are three mentions of the **number fourteen** (the number of the name "David" in Hebrew gematria, since D=4, V=6, and only consonants are counted; thus D+V+D = 4+6+4 = 14). Moreover, the **deportation to Babylon** is also a subtle reference to the royal line of David, since it was at that time when the descendants of David ceased to rule as Kings of Judea (in contrast to the promises made in 2 Sam 7:11b-13).
- Matthew later frequently stresses that Jesus is the royal "**Son of David**" (Matt 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:1-9; 21:15; 22:42-45).
- In Mark, the title "**King of the Jews**" is only used near the end of the Gospel: during the trial of Jesus before Pilate (Mark 15:2, 9, 12; cf. Matt 27:11), when the soldiers mock the condemned Jesus (Mark 15:18; cf. Matt 27:29), and on the *titulus* on the cross stating the reason why Jesus was crucified (Mark 15:26; cf. Matt 27:37). Before Jesus dies on the cross, some bystanders also mockingly call him "**the King of Israel**" (Mark 15:32; cf. Matt 27:42).
- Already near the beginning of Matthew, the Magi from the East come in search of **the newborn "King of the Jews"** (Matt 2:2); and they seek information from **King** Herod the Great!
- Note that **kings** also appear as characters in *several parables* in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 18:23; 22:2-10; 22:11-13; 25:34-40), much more frequently than in Mark or Luke.

C. Jesus as Emmanuel ("God with Us") and One Who "Saves"

- In Matthew's infancy narrative, an angel tells Joseph in a dream: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. / She will bear

a son, and **you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.**" / All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: / "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and **they shall name him Emmanuel,**" which means, "**God is with us**" (Matt 1:20-23; citing Isaiah 7:14).

- During a storm at sea, Jesus' disciples cry out, "**Lord, save us**" (Matt 8:25); and when Peter attempts to walk on water, but begins sinking, he similarly cries, "**Lord, save me**" (Matt 14:30).
- Jesus several times teaches, "**Whoever endures to the end will be saved**" (Matt 10:22; 24:13; cf. 24:22).
- When Jesus tell his disciples how hard it is for rich people to enter the Kingdom of heaven, they ask, "**Then who can be saved?**" (Matt 19:25; cf. 16:25)
- While dying on the cross, Jesus is taunted by various groups of people: "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, **save yourself!** If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." (Matt 27:40; cf. 27:42, 49).
- When the risen Jesus speaks to the disciples on a mountain in Galilee, his very last words are, "And remember, **I am with you always**, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:20; cf. 26:29)

D. Jesus as a great Prophet and Teacher, like a new Moses

- The name "**Moses**" is not directly used in a Christological Title, nor can Jesus be called the "Son of Moses," since Jesus belongs to the Tribe of Judah, while Moses belongs to the Tribe of Levi. However, Jesus is *portrayed* as being very **similar to Moses** in several interesting and significant ways:
 - Just as Pharaoh (King of Egypt ca. 1300 BC) *killed all the baby boys* of the Hebrews, and only *Moses is saved* (Exod 1:22–2:10),
 - so also Herod (King of Israel at that time) *kills all the male babies* in Bethlehem, and only *Jesus is saved* (Matt 2:13-18).
 - When Moses' life is in danger, he flees from *Egypt to Israel*, but returns to *Egypt* after many years (Exod 2:15; 7:6-7);
 - when Jesus' life is in danger, he takes the reverse itinerary: from *Israel to Egypt* and later back to *Israel* (Matt 2:13-21).
 - Just as Moses goes up to a *mountain* to receive the *Law* (incl. the Ten Commandments) from God (Exod 19:3),
 - so also Jesus goes up to a *mountain* to give a *new Law* (incl. the Nine Beatitudes) to the people (Matt 5:1).
 - Just as Moses *does not eat or drink for forty days and forty nights* while on the mountain, recording God's Law (Exod 34:28),
 - so also Jesus *fasts for forty days and forty nights* in the desert, being tempted by Satan (Matt 4:2).

- Just as Moses was thought to have written the first *five books* of the Hebrew Bible (Gen, Exod, Lev, Num, Deut),
 - so also the teaching of Jesus is contained in *five speeches* or extended "discourses" in Matthew (ch. 5–7, 10, 13, 18, 23–25).
- Overall, Moses was considered the greatest *teacher, prophet and lawgiver* in the Hebrew Bible (and throughout the NT);
 - so also Jesus is portrayed in Matthew's Gospel as a great *teacher, prophet and lawgiver*, equal to or even greater than Moses.
- Moses is explicitly mentioned seven times in Matthew (8:4; 17:3-4; 19:7-8; 22:24; 23:2), most of which have parallels in Mark;
 - the Matthean Jesus also explicitly upholds the law of Moses, rather than abolishing it (5:17-20; 22:35-40; etc.)
- For many more parallels between Moses and Matthew's Jesus, see Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993).

E. Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Law and Prophecies of the Old Testament

- **Quotations:** Matthew's Gospel contains over sixty direct quotations of (or strong allusions to) Hebrew Bible texts.
 - It often says the words or actions of Jesus or other Gospel characters have taken place "to fulfill" the scriptures.
 - The scripture quotations are sometimes introduced by what scholars call a "fulfillment formula."
- **Fulfillment Formulas:** In over a dozen texts, the narrator (Matthew) says, "All this took place *to fulfill* what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet" (or something similar), often followed by a specific OT quotation:
 - Matt 1:22-23; 2:5b-6; 2:15b; 2:17-18; 2:23b; 3:3; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:14-15; 13:35; 21:4-5; 26:56; 27:9-10
 - In most references, the particular "prophet" is not named; but several times Matthew explicitly names *Isaiah* (3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14; 15:7), *Jeremiah* (2:17; 27:9; see also 16:14), and *Daniel* (24:15)
- **Jesus himself** says something very similar in several texts:
 - Matt 5:17 (Sermon on the Mount, speaking to the crowds) - "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; *I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.*"
 - Matt 15:7 (in Galilee, to Pharisees) - "You hypocrites! *Isaiah prophesied rightly about you*

when he said..."

- Matt 26:54 (Gethsemane) - "But how then would *the scriptures be fulfilled*, which say it must happen in this way?"
- Matt 26:56a (Gethsemane) - "But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may *be fulfilled*."

(cf. F. JUST, *Christology: Matthew's Portrait of Jesus*,
<https://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Matthew-Christology-Discipleship.htm>; 30/12/2020)

3. Ecclesiology

For a long time, Mt. was considered the "**Gospel of the Church**" par excellence. In this Gospel, the Church (2 recurrences of the word *ecclesia*, in 16:18 and 18, 18) is founded by JESUS Christ, son of the living God, present in the community. It is built on the model of the historical disciples of the earthly JESUS who summoned them from Galilee. Let us say rather that Matthean Christology is immediately open to an ecclesiology. Jesus of Mt. constitutes a new community of the Twelve of which Peter is the spokesperson (Cf. Mt. 14:22-33; 16:13-23). By extension, every disciple to whom the Gospel is proclaimed is called to join this community (28:16-20). The nature of the disciple-the one who fulfills God's will (12:46-50), because he follows and obeys his Master's teachings-must not mask his condition, for he is confronted with his own weakness and the evil of this world (cf. 14:22-33). In fact, one of the terms used to designate the disciples of Jesus is "little" (10:42; 18:6.10.14; perhaps 25,3-46; 11,25), but the greatness of this disciple's following comes from the fact that his Lord promises him the grace to overcome trials. According to Matthew, no one is appointed judge here below of who is truly a member of the community of Jesus. The separation between the tares and the good grain belongs to God alone, to the final judgment (13,36-43; 25,31-46). For Mt, the Church is therefore, in fact, a *corpus mixtum*. The only exception, the famous ecclesiastical discipline of Mt 18 on the exclusion of the brother (vv. 15-18), is to be understood in the context of the whole community discourse, indeed of the Gospel itself: an unrepentant brother is not to be rejected, but to be called forth without ceasing (9:13b), for he is the one with whom Jesus always wishes to share his table (9:9-10).

4. The Matthean Jesus and the Law

The question is: in his relationship to the Law, is the Matthean Jesus in continuity or in rupture with all or part of the Jewish tradition and particularly the Pharisaic tradition? The analysis of one of the texts of the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5:7-20, immediately followed by the antitheses, as well as the study of the controversy over divorce (19:1-9) and the episode of the rich young man (19:16-22), reveal the tension between obedience to the commandments within the framework given by the Law, and the radicalization to which the Matthean Jesus invites. On the one hand, the Law remains valid as long as the order and logic of this world continue. The coming of Jesus, therefore, does not annul the Law which, in this context, belongs to things "before last". On the other hand, in the face of this logic of the Law, Mt sets up the logic of Christ's "fulfillment" of the "law and the prophets" (v. 17), that is, the bringing to light of God's first will. It is then the notion of "righteousness" that takes place here. Justice that surpasses the law as practiced by the scribes and Pharisees, and it is on this justice that entry into the Kingdom, and not on the law, is decided. Mt. therefore wants to surpass this worldly justice and invites believers to a radical new existence involving higher justice (5:20), hence the antitheses of 5:21-48 (see "not only, but even...").

Three remarks to conclude: 1) the coming of Jesus provokes a questioning of the law among his disciples. Anyone who claims to be a follower of the Law should note that it is not Jesus who is subject to the Law, but the opposite. 2) The validity of the law is limited ("until the end of the world", cf. 24:35), but the words of Jesus will not pass. 3) For Matthew, the law belongs to the order of this world: the disciple is certainly invited to obey it - inasmuch as it governs the living together of men - but also to go beyond it in order to accede to the Kingdom of Heaven (5:20). The law as practiced by the Scribes and Pharisees is not, therefore, the source of life; it is the "law and the prophets" reinterpreted by Jesus who alone give access to life. That the "law and the prophets" are a promise to Matthew is only possible in the name of the One who is its eschatological interpreter. For Matthew, we have passed from the Law (the thing

from here below) to Justice (which brings us into the Kingdom), from the Torah to the Messiah.

5. Eschatology and Judgment

While continuing the Old Testament prophetic tradition, where the language of judgment is the call to repentance, Matthew recognizes that it has another function. It is a language of revelation that makes men appear for what they are: individuals trapped in hypocrisy and evil (cf. the invectives of Mt 23). For this reason, it should be noted that the threat of divine judgment does not only concern Israel or unbelievers. It concerns figures of the narrative behind which the members of the Matthean community can recognize themselves. The Matthean language of judgment then establishes man in general and the disciple in particular in a regime of responsibility. However, in Mt. the cross makes a break: the risen Jesus no longer utters any words of judgment. He is not the eschatological judge, but the One who sends his disciples to proclaim the Good News to all nations (Mt 28:16-20).

Two forms of the eschatological "event" in the Gospel of Matthew¹

The linguistic traces of the eschatological "event" take two forms in the Gospel of Matthew. The first, which is the most common, is the expression "Kingdom of Heaven". The second is the evocation of the *parousia* of the Son of Man, who plays the role of eschatological Judge. If the *parousia* and the Last Judgment are presented as events of the end, although the date is unknown, it is more delicate to pronounce on the relationship of the Kingdom of Heaven with the time line². The common hypothesis is that the latter concept is used to say that in Jesus and in the community of disciples inhabited by the Emmanuel, the *eschaton* is

¹ Focant Camille, "Eschatologie et questionnement éthique dans l'évangile de Matthieu", *Revue théologique de Louvain* 39 (2008), 520-546. Our translation

² Discerning the difficulty of imagining any conception of the ultimate, C. Focant, "Eschatologie", p. 522, writes: "Any discourse on the archè and the telos is necessarily mythical, that is to say that it inscribes in a narrative that obeys our spatio-temporal conditions realities that are at least partly outside this framework and which, as such, are in some way untold... The end is impregnable until the moment of unveiling, when we will no longer see in a mirror in a confused way, but when we will finally know as we are known (1 Cor 13:12). The eschaton sets us in motion by an event that cannot be adequately described, but whose trace appears on our human action. Our humanity can bear the invisible mark of it. And what ultimately concerns us can be apprehended in a writing of the trace left by an unreadable end in itself ... "

already present even though its definitive fulfillment is still awaited, while the concept of *parousia*, which Matthew is the only one of the evangelists to use, and the idea of judgment associated with it direct the gaze towards the end.

Although Matthew is the only one to use the expression "Kingdom of Heaven" in preference to "Kingdom of God", from the point of view of the Kingdom he is in the same line as the other synoptics. However, this particular usage allows him to show that the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus is very different from that of the Jewish establishment. The true people of God is not ethnic in nature; rather, the Kingdom of heaven brings together those who do the will of the heavenly Father by living according to his commandments. As such, the Christian community constitutes for Mt. the microcosm of the heavenly macrocosm. Certainly, the theme of the Kingdom is rooted in Old Testament traditions. Nevertheless, the NT has its own eschatology, namely that the new times began with Jesus. Are we close to their definitive fulfillment? No synoptic takes a completely clear position on this question. However, the intensity of the expectation of the *parousia* seems more distended in Mt. than in Mk. This can be seen in particular in the fact that Mt. considers it important to give a substantial ethical content to the eschatological existence that has been begun. The fruits of the Kingdom of Heaven can already be seen in the life of Jesus and in Christian communities.

The real challenge for the early disciples in the land of Palestine is to lead a life oriented towards the newness revealed by Jesus while remaining within institutions built on the old landmarks. It is within this framework that we can speak of an eschatological conflict. The primary aim of ethics in this context is not the observance of rules required for existence in society, since the institutions of that society are perceived as outdated. Rather, ethics is centered on personal becoming, the transformation of the person who becomes a disciple, dies and rises with Christ, shares his or her way of seeing, walks in the Spirit.

The Last Judgment that appears in a principal way in eschatological discourse constitutes the horizon of the Gospel of the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus and which the Church is called to transmit to all nations (24,14). And this horizon gives the Gospel its status as a decisive message for the world. By adding to the

apocalyptic discourse of Mk five pericopes (24,37 - 25,46), Mt insists on the need to prepare for the coming of the Son of Man. These texts instill in the minds of their listeners/readers the fear of God and motivate them to do His will while there is still time. They invite vigilance, but also to treat others justly and mercifully (25,31-46). Eschatology can lead to antinomism and a form of irresponsibility. It can also reinforce the call to conversion, remind us of the demands of the Torah and radicalize ethics. This last path is certainly the one that no evangelist has developed as much as he has the theme of the Last Judgment, absent from Mk. Alone, Mt. unites the theme of the *parousia* of the Son of Man with that of his judgment (Mt. 25:31-46, see v. 3118). The importance of the eschatological judgment and of retribution can easily be seen is seen here.

B. The Gospel according to Mark

“The Gospel according to Mark takes the reader into a world of conflict and suspense, mystery and secrets, questions and the reversal of apparent truths, irony and surprise. Jesus, the main character, is disconcerting in the extreme – not surprisingly to the religious authorities who oppose him, but also to his disciples who go through progressive stages of astonishment, opposition, incomprehension and abandon. He even puzzles the ambivalent crowd who, in the end, will cry for his life. Issues of meaning, life and death, good and evil are constantly being raised; yet they are not treated as simple oppositions of vice and virtue. The reader perceives them through the complexity of an ironic and paradoxical narrative which constantly unsettles in the aim of transforming. This book is a subtle invitation to go beyond apparent truths and enter into a new world, that of God’s Kingdom to come, where the first shall be last and those who seek to save their lives shall lose it.” (C. Focant, *L’évangile selon Marc*, CbNT, 2, Paris, Cerf, 4^e de couverture)

1. Christology

Here is Jesus, as Mark envisaged it

Jesus, Messiah and Son of God

Mark begins his gospel by describing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God announced by Isaiah (Mk 1:1-2). Although Mark reveals Jesus' messianism very early on, the characters in the story only discover it during the narration. For the evangelist, Jesus takes his authority from God. Being the Son of God, it is legitimate for him to be the king of his father's kingdom. Jesus' authority is never questioned by the author who, 16 times, calls Jesus a rabbi (or rabbouni) which means "master". Jesus' divine filiation is attested a few times at key points in the narrative. Twice God recognizes his son in Jesus: at baptism (1:11) and at the transfiguration (9:7). The Transfiguration is a perfect summary of Mark's Christology: the presence of Moses and Elijah confirms Jesus' prophetic lineage (Mk 9:4), while the heavenly voice shows his messianic superiority and divine filiation (Mk 9:7). Jesus recognizes himself as Christ (Mk 9:41; 12:35; 13:21-22). Other people confirm that he is the Messiah, such as Peter and the Roman centurion, which leads the reader to recognize Jesus' messianic superiority and divine filiation.

Jesus, prophet, teacher, healer and critic

Mark describes Jesus as a teacher, charismatic and of great renown. His miracles, healings and symbolic gestures serve as evidence that he is a messenger of God. Jesus' actions are similar to those of the other great prophets of Israel. Some of the miracles are reminiscent of Elisha's actions: the cleansing of a leper (Mk 1:40-45; 2 Kings 5), the multiplication of the loaves (Mk 6:30-44; 2 Kings 4:42-44) and the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus (Mk 5:35-43), which is similar to the resurrection of the son of the Shunammite (2 Kings 4:18-37).

Jesus' teachings are often in the form of parables, a form of discourse that reveals the truth to the righteous, but hides it from those who are unworthy. In addition, Mark uses a parable to describe Jesus' action. For the author, Jesus is the sower of the word of God.

His teaching is not like that of the scribes or Pharisees. He speaks with authority and delivers a new teaching that seems subversive to the established religious order. He calls for conversion and commitment from all who wish to follow him. According to Mark, Jesus has the right to criticize the actions of

religious and political authorities who dominate and abuse the poor. Mark insists on Jesus' opposition to the various manifestations of religious power that seem excessive to him. Whether it be the Pharisees or the priestly authorities of the Temple and the Sanhedrin, Jesus spares no one.

A Christology that is a critique of the images of God

Through his christology, Mk problematizes any access to seeing, to knowledge. His challenge to the ease of speech has gone so far as to put the confession of faith in the mouths of demons (1,24; 3,11; 5,7). There is therefore a demonic way of giving the right answer. No knowledge protects against the possible perversion of its use. The believer is thus questioned not only on the object of his faith, but in his authenticity as a subject who confesses.

A christology of the cross

Moreover, Mark's Christology is understood by some exegetes as a "theology of the cross"³. This category becomes the key to understanding the identity of Jesus and the whole message of the gospel. For them a study of Mark's gospel should begin with the Passion narrative, the summit from which the whole ensemble can be dominated and towards which the whole narrative tends. The events of Easter do occupy three chapters, 14-16, out of a total of sixteen. Three chapters, 11-13, are also reserved for the events and speeches in Jerusalem. And this is prepared by three announcements of the Passion, repeated regularly, beginning at Mk 8:26, where the second part of the Gospel begins, under the sign of the suffering of the Son of Man. The first part also presents such a climate, though in a less marked and less obvious way. From the beginning we encounter the opponents who, after a series of oppositions, resolve to eliminate Jesus, Mk 3:6. In the fourth chapter the parables are presented as a discourse conditioned by the incomprehension of the crowd. In Mk 6:1-6 we find the rejection of the inhabitants of Nazareth, which constitutes another stage in the drama of Jesus, and in Mk 6:14-29 we read the tragic end of John the Baptist, which announces that of Jesus. In this context, the disciples continue not to understand (Mk 8:21) while the scribes and Pharisees do not cease to oppose Jesus (Mk 7:1-23; 8:11.21). Within this climate and structure is our pericope, which raises the

³ Cf. « Die 'Kreuzestheologie' als Leseschlüssel zum Markusevangelium », in A. DETTWILER – J. ZUMSTEIN eds., *Kreuzestheologie im Neuen Testament*, (WUNT 151), Tübingen, Mohr, 2002, p. 107-150.

question of Jesus' identity and forces us to make a choice: to be part of those around him or to remain outside; and this applies to everyone without distinction, especially to parents.

The identity of Jesus is a secret that is normally misunderstood or ambiguous; it will be revealed in its truth only at the end of the passion, when the centurion solemnly proclaims: "Truly this man was the Son of God. "(Mk 15:39).

Until then he is the object of incomprehension on the part of practically everyone, including the disciples who lack faith (Mk 4:10) and the capacity for understanding (Mk 4:13; 6:49-52; 7:18; 8:17-21; 9:32). They are particularly resistant to the announcements of the passion. To complete the picture, let us add that Mark, unlike the other Gospels, emphasizes the human traits of Christ, even the most disconcerting ones. He idealizes neither Jesus nor his family. Thus, for example, at the beginning of the ministry (Mk 1:40-44), Jesus is presented filled with compassion for the leper he heals, v. 41; but immediately afterwards, "rebuking him severely, he immediately sent him away" (Mk 1:43).

C. The Gospel according to Luke

Here are some of Luke's theological features

1. History as Theology

Lc is the only evangelist to think theologically about time and to make history an object of theological reflection. What interests Luke is not profane history, but that in which God intervenes. Hence his famous synchronisms of 2:1s; 3:1s and 13:31s, that is to say, his effort to ensure that the events of salvation history have a chronological reference point borrowed from the history of the Roman Empire. The history of God and the history of men are not divorced, in his eyes. For Luke, salvation is not said to be outside of history. If history does not prove the existence of God, it serves to recognize his interventions.

According to Luke, salvation history has a calendar, what some call the periodization of salvation history. According to Gonzelmann, this Lucanian

calendar has three periods: the time of Israel (which ends with John the Baptist); the time of Jesus, which is the "middle of time"; the time of the Church inaugurated by Pentecost. However, it is difficult to separate theologically the time of Jesus and the time of the Church in the thought of Lk. In fact, the apostles, legitimate witnesses of Christ's revelation (Acts 1:21) are the continuators of Jesus' work through preaching and miraculous activity. Between Jesus and the Church, the Ascension (Lk 24:50-53; Acts 1:6-11) functions as a hinge and not as a rupture. The time of Jesus has for Lk the status of a time of salvation, from which the Church is born and to which it must constantly refer.

2. Christology

The portrait of the Lucanian Jesus is more positive compared to the presentations of Mc. Luke's Jesus is a man of compassion, generous in gestures of healing: the resurrection of a young man at Naïn (7:11-17) is motivated by Jesus' "pity" for his widowed mother, and after having raised the boy, he "gives him to his mother".

The rewriting of the Passion is symptomatic of the accesses of Lucanian Christology. Jesus does not die on the cry of abandonment of Mk 15:34, but on the confident statement: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (23:46). in Getsemania, his anguished prayer had received the help of an angel to sustain him (22:43). He heals the ear of the man wounded by a girl during the arrest (22,51), and to the crucified criminal who implores him, he answers: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (23,43). Although the presence of his statement in 23:34 ("Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do") is uncertain in several manuscripts, it does fit in well with the Lucanian image of a Christ who, dying a martyr, abandons nothing of the Savior's dignity and compassion.

Jesus is the promised Messiah whom God sends to his people Israel to save them (the childhood gospel, notably 1:32ff; the confirmation of Simeon in 2:30-32). The universal dimension of salvation in Christ is already apparent; it will only become effective in Acts, with the rejection of Jesus and his envoys. In general, the historicization of this salvation restricts Jesus' activity to the chosen people (except 8:26-39). The episode of the Syro-Phoenician woman of Mk 7:24-30 has

no equivalent in Luke, and the healing of the servant of the centurion of Capernaum takes place at a distance (compare Lk 7:1-10 and Mk 8:5-13).

3. Pneumatology

The historical line of salvation is dominated by the interventions of the Spirit. The Spirit is granted to some figures of the Gospel of childhood (1,13-17.35.41.67; 2,25-28), but as soon as Jesus is baptized (3,22), he becomes the only bearer of the Spirit. From then on, all the heavenly inspiration available is concentrated in him: motion of the Spirit, vision, ecstasy, angelic intervention. It is this power that he promises to give to his disciples after his death (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8), which will be realized at Pentecost. From then on, the apostles, then the evangelists (Acts 8), then the believers of Samaria (Acts 8:15-17), then those who came from paganism (Acts 10:44-48) will receive the Holy Spirit as their share. But let us note that the reception of the Spirit is constantly linked to Jesus, to the reception of the Gospel, to the baptism in Jesus Christ.

4. Ecclesiology

More than Mark and more than Matthew, Luke wants to show that Jesus attracts large crowds and that a significant number of men and women are attached to him (6:7-19; 8:1-3). The word and especially the compassion of Jesus constantly mobilizes a community around him.

From this Lucanian influx, the Twelve are distinguished as those whom Jesus calls and to whom he confers the name of apostles (6:13). The scenes of vocation, summarized in Mark, are amplified in Luke by related miracles. The missionary work to which the apostles are invited is clearly profiled (abundant fishing, in 5:1-11); they will carry it out in the book of Acts (Acts 1-15). Contrary to Mc, who underlines the slowness of the apostles to understand the message of Jesus, those of Luke remain close by. The altercation between Peter and Jesus following the first announcement of the Passion is omitted (9,18) and their incomprehension is softened (9,43-50 // Mk 9,30-37); to the announcement of their dispersion during the Passion is substituted the promise of their association with Christ in the Kingdom (22,28-30).

Since the heart of Jesus' preaching to all, including his Pharisaic opponents, is the presence of the Reign of God among them, this same Reign will also be preached by the apostles (Acts 8:12) and by Paul (Acts 14:22; 20:2; 28:23,31). This preaching, animated by the Spirit, will ensure the presence of Jesus in the Church.

5. Ethics

Of all evangelists, Luke is the one who is the most insistent on the ethical implications of faith. The demand for conversion resounds throughout his account (3,3.8; 5,32; 10,13; 11,32; 13,3.5; 15,7.10; 16,30; 17,3s; 24,47). The expiration of the eschatological judgment intensifies this call to practice the works of justice. Luke's ethical program also has a very preponderant socio-economic component: the correct use of goods becomes central (3,11; 12,13-34; 16,1-31; 21,1-4). The call to follow goes hand in hand with the abandonment of goods (5,11.28; 9,3; 10,4; 18,28). The evangelist seems to have integrated into his ethic of conversion the Ebionite traditions, linked to the expectation of an eschatological reversal of values. With the breaking of familiar bonds and the acceptance of suffering, the renunciation of goods is part of the norm of following. We sense that Lk is addressing a rich Christianity, or calling the rich among his Christian audience.

At each important stage of his ministry, Jesus prays: at his baptism, before choosing the apostles, before Peter's profession of faith, during the Transfiguration, in agony and on the cross. To pray without ceasing is a necessity in order to live the time of the Church, which, according to the Lucanian conception of history, is destined to last a long time.

D. What about the Synoptics?⁴

Common Theological Themes

The first three gospels of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark and Luke are called *synoptic gospels* because they can be placed in parallel columns. Indeed, more often than not, they deal with the same event and thus create what we call in greek a ***synopsis***: literally "a together look". Considering the content and the chronology of events, the three gospels are more similar than different while John, compared to any or all of them, is more different than similar.

There are mainly **two approaches to be used for detecting the theology of the synoptic gospels**.

- *Firstly*, to determine what are *the dominant and common themes across the three gospels*.
- *Secondly*, to highlight not only *what is distinctive to each of the three*, but also *to the three from the gospel of John*, which is not among the synoptics.

Each of these approaches has its place. But, it is better for them to be used in complementarity.

1. Common Theological Themes

It is not easy to define the typically common theological matter in the synoptic Gospels. However seven themes which are some how common in Matthew, Mark and Luke :

a. The "Kingdom of God," the "Kingdom of Heaven"

Even if some scholars disagree, this is, for many, the central theme in the teaching of Jesus as presented in the synoptics. The expressions "Kingdom of God," "Kingdom of Heaven" appear around 104 times in the synoptic gospels, when they appear 36 times in other Books of New Testament writings (only 5 times in the gospel of John, 7 times in Acts, 13 in Paul, 3 in Hebrews, 1 in

⁴ See G.E. LADD, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI : Eerdmans), 1974, 1993, p. 29-245.

James, 1 in Peter and 6 in the book of Revelation). The word "Kingdom " is a translation of The Greek term is *basileia*, and the Hebrew equivalent is *malcouth*. It has not to be used like it is in English, in sens of modern sociopolitical divisions (kingdom of Jordan, or the kingdom of Syria). But in the ancient Greek and Hebrew, and particularly in the concept of speaking of God or heaven, kingdom was much more a power than a place. In our context, it can and has been translated as God's reign or rule or power or even dominion. It is good to understand it today more as God's kingship or His kingly rule.

⇒ **The main idea : The Kingdom of God has Arrived and also Remains Future**

After the Synoptics, with Jesus, his teaching and ministry, the kingdom is present or has arrived ; In the same time, the kingdom remains future, to arrive only with Christ's second coming.

Some scholars refuse this kind of complex mixture, and choose only one or another side of this eschatology. We have here two schools :

- **The futurist eschatological school** (Albert SCHWEITZER, at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century). Focusing almost exclusively on the future dimension of the kingdom.
- **The present or realized eschatology** or interpretation of the kingdom (Charles Harold DODD, 20th century) : At the opposite of the previous ideas, this school focuses so much attention on the present arrival of the kingdom in Jesus' ministry and teaching, in his death and resurrection, that it can appear to leave little or no room for some supernatural intervention of God in Christ at what has popularly come to be known as the second coming.

Most of Scholars recognize that the Kingdom of God is not a matter of pitting present against future, but of affirming both at the same time (Joachim JEREMIAS, George Eldon LADD, etc). The slogan that the kingdom is "already but not yet", both present and future, or inaugurated (a term claimed by Werner Georg KÜMMELL in Germany) continue to dominate scholarly understanding of the gospels today.

⇒ **John the Baptist's message of the Kingdom of God**

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" : change (*metanoia*)

John is the first to insist that all Israel must demonstrate their repentance through baptism in water⁵. But John predicts the superiority of one (Jesus of Nazareth) who has to come baptizing not in water but with the Holy Spirit and with fire. This is a reference to both the cleansing and purging effects of the Spirit in those who responded with repentance. The repentance that John spoke so centrally of is based on the Greek *metanoia*. This reflects the Hebrew concept of the verb *shub*. This means not simply a change of mind, but a change of behavior, turning around – likening the moral transformation of the individual to 180 degree about-face in one's travel.

When Jesus came, he approved John's message and ministry by submitting to baptism Himself – even though He does not need to repent of personal sin. But He could well be identifying with the sins of His nation and of His people. By this presence, he was already teaching that the Kingdom of God was in midst of them⁶.

⇒ **Jesus' Message of the Kingdom of God**

In summary, the message of Jesus is that :

- The kingdom is not to be localized to or in one particular place or territory or national or religious entity. The kingdom of God is present with them wherever Jesus was present with them.
- His life, ministry and teaching manifest already this Kingdom. Giving the Good news of mercy and global healing (spiritually, physical, socially...speaking), his kind of presence testifies that Jesus was from God and He was the Redeemer of Humanity and all nations, not in political perspective.
- The new era exiges the change. As the delivrance that the Son of God has to operate is not necessary from Rome (but from all kind of sin), Israel and all

⁵ Before John The Baptist, Immersion in pools of ritual purification characterized priestly washing rituals ; see also the daily ritual washings of the group of Jewish Essenes at the monastic community at Qumran on the shores of the Dead Sea ; and, probably, the Jewish proselytes, that is, Gentiles converting to Judaism, who were already being immersed in water as an initiation rite.

⁶ For more information about the role of John The Baptist as a teacher of the Kingdom of God, see G.E. LADD, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI : Eerdmans), 1974, 1993, p. 31-41.

nations are called to hope, but also to repent, to have a new life. This eschatological life call to the ethical manners of being with the Son of God.

Some translations render the Greek here *entos humōn* as "**within you**" which would lead Jesus to have said: "Because the kingdom of God is within you". But this seems much less likely, since His audience is a group of Pharisees who are typically Jesus' opponents rather than His followers in the gospels. Jesus would not have affirmed that the kingdom had already taken up residence inside these Pharisees, as He might have if He were addressing His disciples. Rather, it is an affirmation that, *with the presence of Jesus*, God's kingly reign is present as well.

b. The God of the Kingdom

Jesus is not coming, as the kingdom is coming, to reveal a new God. This is still **Yahweh, the Lord God of Israel**. And Yahweh's love has been present from the beginning of creation and even before. But **the way** in which it is being clearly and visibly demonstrated in the ministry and teaching, and culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

If we reflect on the topic for a moment of what has been called the God of the Kingdom, we note that in the Synoptic Gospel He is :

The Fatherly God : God is seeking out sinners and inviting them to submit themselves to his reign that he might be their Father. An inseparable relationship exists between the Kingdom of God and his Fatherhood; and it is particularly notable that this affinity between the two concepts appears most frequently in an eschatological setting. In the eschatological salvation, the righteous will enter into the Kingdom of their Father (Mt. 13:43). It is the Father who has prepared for the blessed this eschatological inheritance of the Kingdom (Mt. 25:34). It is the Father who will bestow upon Jesus' disciples the gift of the Kingdom (Lk. 12:32). The highest gift of God's Fatherhood is participation in God's sovereignty, which is to be exercised over all the world. In that day Jesus will enjoy a renewed fellowship with his disciples in the Father's Kingdom (Mt. 26:29). Since the greatest joy of children of God is that of sharing the blessings of the Kingdom, Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven... thy kingdom come" (Mt. 6:9, 10). Clearly kingship and Fatherhood are closely related concepts.... A universal Fatherhood of God has been seen in Jesus' saying, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that

you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt. 5:44f). This saying has been interpreted to mean that love for one's enemies is required because God is the universal Father and Jesus' disciples must love all people because God loves all people as his children.

After Jeremias, the original meaning of the Fatherhood of God of the Kingdom can be understood in **Jesus' own form of addressing God**. He calls Him "**Father**" in terms of "**Abba**" (in Mark 14 when Jesus prays in that intimate scene in the Garden of Gethsemane), discloses a term that could almost be translated in English as "**daddy**". This is a term of dear intimacy for God as Father relatively unparalleled in other previous Jewish literature. '*Abba*' represents the new relationship of confidence and intimacy imparted to men and women by Jesus

- ***The Seeking God*** : In Jesus, God has taken **the initiative to seek out the sinner, to bring the lost into the blessing of his reign**. He was, in short, the seeking God.... When he was criticized by the Pharisees for violating their standards of righteousness and associating with sinners, he replied that it was his mission to minister to sinners (Mk. 2:15-17). It is those who know they are sick who need a physician. Jesus must bring the saving good news of the Kingdom to such sinners. He does not deny that they are sinners, nor does he make light of their guilt. Rather he points to their need and ministers to it.... The great truth of God seeking out the sinner is set forth at length in Luke 15 in three parables given to silence the criticism that Jesus welcomed sinners to the intimacy of table fellowship. He said that it was the divine purpose to search out the sheep that had strayed; to seek the coin that had been lost; to welcome the prodigal into the family even though he did not merit forgiveness. In each parable there is a divine initiative.... The heart of the "good news" about the Kingdom is that God has taken the initiative to seek and to save that which was lost.

The Inviting God : The God who seeks is also the God who invites. Jesus pictured the eschatological salvation in terms of a banquet or feast to which many guests were invited (Mt. 22:1ff.; Lk. 14:16ff.; cf. Mt. 8:11)... Table fellowship to the Jew was a most intimate relationship, and it played an

important role in Jesus' ministry (Mk. 2:15). The Pharisees were offended because he ate with sinners (Lk. 15:2). He was called "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Mt. 11:19). The word "call" means invite. "To invite sinners to the Great Banquet of the Kingdom was precisely the Lord's mission." Jesus called people to repentance, but the summons was also an invitation. In fact, the character of Jesus' summons to repentance as invitation sets his call apart from the Jewish teaching. In Judaism, the doctrine of repentance held a place of greatest importance, for it was one of the means by which salvation was to be obtained... The order of events is: a person repents, God forgives. The human action must precede the divine. "According to Jewish teaching, the forgiveness of sins depends upon the sinner, for there is no question of a mediator." Jesus' demand for repentance was not merely a summons to men and women to forsake their sins and to turn to God; it was rather a call to respond to the divine invitation and was conditioned by this invitation, which was itself nothing less than a gift of God's Kingdom. This distinguished Jesus' call to repentance from that of John the Baptist. John called upon people to forsake their sins in view of the coming day of judgment; Jesus called on them to accept an invitation... Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God is the announcement by word and deed that God is active and manifesting dynamically his redemptive will in history. God is seeking out sinners; he is inviting them to enter into the messianic blessing; he is demanding of them a favorable response to his gracious offer.

The Judging God : While God seeks the sinner and offers him or her the gift of the Kingdom, he remains a God of retributive righteousness to those who reject the gracious offer. His concern for the lost does not dissipate the divine holiness into a benign kindness. God is seeking love, but he is also holy love. He is the heavenly Father. His name is to be hallowed (Mt. 6:9). Therefore those who reject the offer of his Kingdom must stand under his judgment... This note of retributive righteousness sounds repeatedly in Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom. In the preaching of the Baptist, the coming of the eschatological Kingdom will mean salvation for the righteous but fiery judgment for the unrighteous (Mt. 3:12). Jesus taught the same thing. The obverse of inheriting the Kingdom will be to suffer the punishment of everlasting fire (Mt. 25:34,41). To those who refused to enter the Kingdom and who tried to prevent

others from entering (Mt. 23:13), Jesus said, "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape the sentence of hell?" (Mt. 23:33). The power of the Kingdom was present and active in Jesus to deliver people from bondage to evil, and God not only offers free forgiveness to the penitent but even seeks out the sinner to bring him or her to himself. When one has become so blind as to be unable to distinguish between the power of God's Kingdom and the working of the devil but thinks that the Kingdom of God is demonic, that person can never be forgiven, but is guilty of an eternal sin (Mk. 3:29). A fearful doom awaits those who try to turn believers away from the Kingdom of God (Mt. 18:6). The great truth of God as seeking love does not nullify the righteousness and justice of God. The meaning of God's Kingdom is both salvation and judgment...Jesus wept over Jerusalem because it had rejected the offer of the Kingdom (Mt. 23:37-39; Lk. 13:34-35).

c. Jesus uses Parables to illustrate that the Mystery of the Kingdom is that it has arrived but not without Irresistible Force

What is this mystery that is portrayed, particularly prominent in Jesus' parables about seeds and planting and their growth (particularly in Mark 4 and Matthew 13 and Luke 8)? George Ladd would appear to have gotten it exactly right when he describes this mystery as the fact that the kingdom has arrived, but not with irresistible force. It has arrived in seed-form. It may seem as small as a mustard seed or as hidden as leaven in a loaf of bread, but over time it will grow to a surprising size.

Not all can accept this redefinition of God's kingly power and relegation of the arrival of the messianic era to two periods of time with a period of growth in between.

d. Cost of Discipleship

But it goes on to speak of the cost of discipleship, particularly in the area of the stewardship of one's material possessions.

e. Final Judgment

And the God of the kingdom looks ahead to a time of final judgment of all people and peoples of the world when Christ returns and, as in Matthew 25 for example, separates the metaphorical sheep from the goats.

2. The Kingdom : from the Old Covenant to the New one

a. "New" or "Renewed" Israel

Jesus is thus making a claim to constitute what has been variously described as a new or renewed or true or freed Israel. That is to say, the elect (and therefore saved people of God) are no longer going to be faithful Jews who live out their commitment to Yahweh by following Torah, both those born into ethnic Judaism and those who through conversion adopt the Jewish religion. But rather the elect, saved people of God will be those of any nationality or ethnicity who become Jesus' followers. They will be those who have faith in Him and live out their allegiance by following His commands and His fulfillment of the Old Testament, with all of the continuity and discontinuity with the law that that produces (and about which we shall speak more when we turn to the ethics of Jesus).

Because of this radical and bold claim, a majority of the Jewish people and especially of their leadership, increasingly over the approximately three years of Jesus' public ministry, come to reject His claims. But a minority accept, akin to those many periods of Israelite history when there was only a righteous remnant. And Jesus uses similar imagery when He speaks of His followers as a little flock or of the recovery of some of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Indeed, Luke in 19:10 gives what may be Luke's take as a one verse or sentence summary of Jesus' ministry when Jesus declares: "I came to seek and to save the lost."

b. Are Jesus' Teachings anti-Semitic ?

Because of this radical difference from conventional Judaism and because so many did reject Him and He in turn rejected them, there are those who have accused the portrait of Jesus and His teaching of the arrival of the kingdom in

the synoptic gospels, and indeed even in John, of being anti-Semitic. But that would require Him not to have been a Jew. It would require all of His first followers not to have been Jews. But they were. And indeed, there is nothing even in the harshest of Jesus' woes against the scribes and Pharisees (for example, in Matthew 23 and parallels) that does not parallel as harsh or even harsher indicting prophecies by some of the writing prophets of the Old Testament against many, though never all, in their generations. And, as with those prophets, there is a hint (no more than that), of future restoration in such texts as Matthew 23:39 and parallels. Also in Matthew 24:30, when Jesus looks ahead to the time when people will cry blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord and will mourn (possibly including the mourning of repentance) when they see Him returning and coming on the clouds back to earth. The kingdom then is a powerful and central concept.

c. Relationship between the "Kingdom" and the "Church"⁷

Today, many people use the term "kingdom" as if it were interchangeable with the word "church", but it is much, much bigger. This brings us to the question of the relationship between the kingdom and the church. Some have argued that: "Jesus preached the kingdom, the Jews rejected it, so the church was God's plan B." Or they argue that Jesus preached the kingdom and His later followers misinterpreted or deliberately changed His teaching to be about the church. But, in fact, the Greek word (appearing three times in two verses in Matthew 16 and 18), *ekklesia*, is simply the Septuagint's translation of the Hebrew *qahal*. And indeed, in secular Greek this also was a common term, as it was in these Old Testament contexts, for an assembly (in this case, the assembly of God's people).

The church as the elaborate institution that it began to evolve into beginning already in the second century is most admittedly not in view in the synoptic gospels, or arguably anywhere in the New Testament. But that Jesus expected a community of His followers, who regularly gathered together for distinctive purposes just as the children of Israel had done (in the tabernacle, in the temple and eventually in synagogues), seems beyond reasonable doubt.

⁷ Cf. G.E. LADD, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 103-117.

Matthew 16:18-19 promises that Peter will be the leader of that group, the rock on which the church is built. And we need not reinterpret that most straightforward understanding of the text in light of those who later supplemented this simple concept with far more elaborate definitions not found in Scripture. The book of Acts in its first twelve chapters describes Peter as the leader of the initial apostolic band. That may well be the sum total of the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy here.

For concluding, George Ladd gives five points to explain the relationship of the church to the kingdom. First of all, from the interpretation of the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13 (especially 38 and 41), we learn that ***the church is not identical to the kingdom***. The church is a group of people; the kingdom is God's regal reign. Indeed, the second point is that ***the kingdom creates the church*** (Matthew 13:47, 50) – the parable of the dragnet sifting the good fish from the bad fish. ***The church, furthermore, witnesses to the kingdom*** (see those missions already commissioned by Jesus of the twelve disciples in Matthew 10 and of the seventy in Luke 10). ***The church is also the instrument of the kingdom*** (Matthew 10:8, Luke 10:17 and Matthew 16:18). God's regal rule works throughout the entire cosmos in all kinds of ways, but most centrally through the gathered community of His people, and then as they are sent out for mission in the fullest sense of being God's conduit to meet people's spiritual and physical or material needs. And then finally ***the church is the custodian of the kingdom***: the expression Ladd uses to describe the role of the keys in locking and unlocking doors in such texts as Matthew 16:19, 18:18 and John 20:23.

d. Jesus' Ethical Teaching requires a Gathered Community extending into time

And the fact that much of Jesus' ethical teaching appears to require a gathered community extending into time for a significant period also supports the idea that Jesus expected an assembly of His followers to outlive Him. His ethical teachings on such topics as marriage and divorce and remarriage or celibacy (Matthew 19:1-12); on paying taxes; on living with and among earthly governments (in Mark 12:13-17 and parallels); on coming hardships and

persecution (in Matthew 10:17-42 and parallels) and other such teaching, all suggest that the fullness of the arrival of the kingdom was not as imminent as Schweitzer first thought.

QUESTIONS FOR EXAM

1. MANDATORY QUESTION

"The New Testament Theology"

is the title of some academic syllabi (courses). Does it exist?

2. OPTIONAL QUESTIONS (choose one of the following)

- A. The importance of the Old Testament
for the theological study of the New Testament
- B. Christology of the Synoptic Gospels
- C. Ecclesiology of Marc, Matthieu, Luc-Acts. Comparison.
- D. Pneumatology in Luke
- E. The Kingdom of God/Heaven
as a common theological theme in the Synoptic Gospels.
- F. Essential aspects of the Eucharist in the New Testament

For your preparation, read deeply :

- LADD G.E., *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI : Eerdmans), 1974, 1993.
- MATERA F.J., *New Testament Theology : Exploring diversity and Unity* (Louisville, KY : Westminster John Knox Press), 2007, p. 1-90.
- Different documents and notes sent to you.