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**Martin Francis Ramsden**

**Heeding the Great Commission: The Significance of Matthew's Gospel for  
Baptismal Theology and Practice in a Post-Christian Age**

**Abstract**

This thesis represents a worked example in the application of Scripture to a contemporary theological situation. The Scripture applied is Matthew's Gospel and the theological situation is the ongoing practice of Christian baptism by paedobaptising churches in the context of a post-Christian cultural milieu. Matthew's Gospel is a particularly relevant text with respect to baptism as the church traditionally has cited the baptismal command of Matthew 28.19 as a warrant for its baptising activity.

The interpretation of Matthew in this thesis has emerged from a reflection on practice and is also directed back towards practice. The notion of 'performance', therefore, is regarded as an especially helpful metaphor for interpretation: the believing community 'performs' its Scripture as a company of players would perform a play or a musical score. The formulation of this metaphor in the work of Kevin J. Vanhoozer is particularly utilised in the thesis. Vanhoozer suggests that Scripture testifies to the dramatic saving activity of God (the theo-drama) in which the church is called to participate. Therefore it is important to understand the plot of the drama as it is communicated in Scripture so that the church can work to continue the action faithfully. As such this thesis functions as a case study in 'performance' hermeneutics and will be of interest both in the academy and in the church. In terms of exegesis, therefore, this thesis is concerned with the place of baptism in Matthew's presentation of the theo-drama. I argue that baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (28.19), in the context of the Matthean narrative, is a symbol of narrative inclusion for a new disciple. Christian baptism makes connection with key moments in the Gospel such that it declares the gospel of the kingdom whilst enabling a rich expression of repentance and acceptance of a call to discipleship.

The theo-dramatic significance of baptism is then considered alongside the challenges of paedobaptismal ministry in post-Christian contexts. This creative interaction leads to strategies for baptismal performance being imagined that are not only faithful to the Great Commission but which are also culturally meaningful.

Heeding the Great Commission  
The Significance of Matthew's Gospel for Baptismal  
Theology and Practice in a Post-Christian Age.

Martin Francis Ramsden

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Ph.D. Thesis

Submitted for examination to the University of Durham

Department of Theology and Religion

2006



17 APR 2007

## **Declaration**

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## Abbreviations

<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
<i>ATR</i>	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
BCC	British Council of Churches
<i>BEM</i>	<i>Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
ICEL	International Committee on English in the Liturgy
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>MSB</i>	<i>Methodist Service Book</i>
<i>MWB</i>	<i>Methodist Worship Book</i>
<i>Nov T</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>RBC</i>	<i>Rite for the Baptism of Children</i>
<i>RCIA</i>	<i>Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
TMCP	Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes
WCC	World Council of Churches

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **Why and How Am I Reading?**

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‘We would heed thy great commission:

Go ye into every place –

Preach, baptize, fulfil my mission,

Serve with love and share my grace.’

Hugh Sherlock<sup>1</sup>

#### **1) The Nature and Scope of the Thesis**

In what follows I seek to present a study in the application of Scripture to a contemporary theological situation. The Scripture to be applied is Matthew’s Gospel and the theological situation is the ongoing practice of Christian baptism in the context of a post-Christian cultural milieu.<sup>2</sup> The nature of this study is such that it will need to take account of insights from the spheres of biblical studies, ecclesiology, liturgical studies and missiology. According to accepted views concerning the traditional division of labour in the theological academy these areas

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<sup>1</sup> From his hymn: ‘Lord thy church on earth is seeking’, in Methodist Publishing House, *Hymns and Psalms* (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1983) no.774.

<sup>2</sup> I concentrate on those denominations that have traditionally practised both infant and adult baptism. It is not my intention to consider, within this thesis, the debate between those that would baptise infants and children and those who would not. Rather, I seek to say that given that some traditions are convinced of the appropriateness of baptising children, how can such a practice be carried out in a



of study are normally pursued in relative isolation from one another. Recently, however, there have been calls for theological enquiry to adopt a more integrated approach.<sup>3</sup> This study is one response to that challenge. I have entitled this introduction 'Why and How am I Reading?' The answers to the two parts of this question will be given in what follows. Firstly I will describe the particular historical situation that has led me to engage in this study and then, secondly, I will elucidate my approach to reading Matthew in order to apply its teaching in my own specific context.

## **2) Why I Am Reading:**

### **Seeking to Practise Baptismal Ministry Faithfully in a Post-Christian Age.**

My experience of reading Mt.28.16-20 has been affected by its intertextual<sup>4</sup> relationship with various baptismal liturgies. Since 1975 The Great Commission has been central to the baptismal liturgy of the Methodist Church of Great Britain.<sup>5</sup> Although I was baptised in a Methodist congregation in 1973 I had no strong church attachment until 1988 when I returned to the church and was made a Methodist

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way that is faithful to Mt.28.19-20 whilst also being edifying to both church and community in a post-Christian cultural context. This thesis is my answer to that question.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons In Hermeneutics* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1992) pp.556-558 and 604-605; Nicholas Lash, 'What Might Martyrdom Mean?' in N. Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986) pp.75-92; Stephen C. Barton, 'New Testament Interpretation as Performance' in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52/2 (1999) pp.179-208, esp. 179; Joel B. Green and Max Turner eds., *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000); cf. Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) pp.32-61.

<sup>4</sup> 'Intertextuality' is an important term that has emerged as part of the post-structuralist project to account for the polyvalency of reading and to expose ideological assumptions in what have often been regarded as ideologically neutral readings. This approach has empowered previously marginalised groups to read the Bible on their terms and with their ideology made explicit. A good example of the use of 'intertextuality' in biblical studies is Fred W. Burnett, 'Postmodern Biblical Exegesis: The Eve of Historical Criticism' in Gary A. Phillips, ed., *Semeia 51: Poststructural Criticism and the Bible: Text/History/Discourse* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990) p.51-80.

member. It was at my local congregation, in the context of baptismal services that I first became familiar with the words of The Great Commission. Juxtaposed with Mk.1.9-11 and Mk.10.13-16 in the 1975 *Methodist Service Book (MSB)*, they provided a liturgical justification for the practice of baptism and especially infant baptism. The 1999 *Methodist Worship Book (MWB)* has retained the reference to Mt.28.16-20 but has omitted the Marcan readings. In their place has been inserted Acts 2.38-39. The choice of Scripture usage in the 1999 baptismal liturgy again emphasises the importance of Mt.28.19-20 for a Methodist understanding of baptismal ministry. It is also true to say that by choosing to baptise in the three-fold name, rather than in the name of Christ, the church catholic has traditionally privileged Matthew 28.19 in its baptismal practice. It is this usage of Mt.28.19-20 in the context of baptismal practice that has led me to consider it an important text in influencing our theology of baptism and our practice of baptismal ministry. For this reason I have undertaken a study of Matthew paying particular attention to its message with respect to baptism.

The missionary context and liturgical history of the church in the industrialised West has led to a great need to re-consider the basis of our theology and practice with respect to baptism. My reading of this history and the missionary context I find myself in are significant influences on my reading of Matthew. It is important, therefore, that before I describe my approach to the Gospel, I first describe my understanding of the context in which I find myself. I recognise that

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<sup>5</sup> See Methodist Conference Office, '*The Methodist Service Book*' (*MSB*) (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1975) p.7, and TMCP, '*The Methodist Worship Book*' (*MWB*) (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999) pp.64, 77, 89.



this in itself is an exercise in ‘interpretation, a product of readerly activity, of selection and “emplotment.”’<sup>6</sup>

I am now an ordained presbyter in the Methodist Church of Great Britain. From this position I experience three major challenges in baptismal ministry. The first regards knowing how to respond to the dozens of families each year who request baptism for their children but who do not attend church and have no desire to do so beyond the baptism they seek. Such families are hardly ever able to articulate a faith in Christ or the Holy Spirit, though sometimes acknowledge a sense of God. In almost every case the main reason baptism is important to them is that ‘it’s just something we’ve always done in our family’. Often people cannot say why this tradition is important in their family, those that can, offer two main reflections. Some state that baptism remains important because ‘it’s just the right thing to do,’ for others baptism offers assurance that should the child die its soul would be safe in heaven.

The second challenge is related to the first and concerns the place of baptism in the consciousness of those who regularly attend church. Often such people are not engaged by the church’s approach to baptism in a way that encourages them to treasure their own baptism and to see it as something with spiritual value in their own lives.<sup>7</sup> The Christian community’s understanding of baptism is shaped significantly by the particular church’s baptismal practice. Often, in paedobaptising churches,

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<sup>6</sup> See Burnett, ‘Postmodern Biblical Exegesis’, pp. 63-64, after Haydon White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1974)

<sup>7</sup> Resources that articulate the importance of baptism in the Christian life include: Lawrence Hull Stookey, *Baptism: Christ’s Act in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982); Gayle Carlton Felton, *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections For Identity and Ministry* (Nashville: Discipleship

children are baptised after only a brief initial contact and the families often do not attend church again following the baptism. It is a widespread practice in the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain, for practical reasons, to hold baptismal services for infants at a time when the main faith community will not be gathered. The liturgical celebration of baptism, particularly in Methodist Churches, tends to involve only a small amount of water in fonts of miniscule proportions. All of these aspects of the liturgical celebration of baptism serve to communicate to congregations that baptism is not something central to our faith and practice.<sup>8</sup> Rather baptism is often presented as something that is detached from a life of Christian discipleship and not integral to it. This situation highlights that the paedobaptising churches urgently need to reconsider their baptismal theology and practice, not simply with regard to those outside of the church who may seek baptism for their children but also with respect to those inside the church who have not been enabled to understand the value of their own infant baptism.<sup>9</sup>

The third challenge of baptismal ministry in a post-Christian setting relates to the less frequent but growing number of situations in which people, who have not

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Resources, 1997); Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999) esp. pp.365-391.

<sup>8</sup> See John Drane's comments on this in *The McDonaldization of the Church: Spirituality, Creativity and the Future of the Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000) pp. 97-98.

<sup>9</sup> At the Methodist Conference in Huddersfield in 2000 a motion was considered that asked the church to debate issues of baptism with particular reference to second baptism. This was referred to the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church. For several months the *Methodist Recorder* was inundated with letters which emphasised the widespread feeling amongst many in the church that their own infant baptism was worthless or irrelevant to them. The Faith and Order Committee responded in 2001 with a short report to the Methodist Conference which highlighted the need for extensive education within the church helping Christians to reflect on the issues involved (2001 Conference Agenda Vol.1, pp.318-320). Since that time the Faith and Order Committee have also contributed small reports to Conference on infant baptism (2004 Conference Agenda Vol.2, pp.571-572) and second baptism (2005 Conference Agenda Vol.2, pp.703-704). Each report affirms the importance of Christian education surrounding all aspects of baptism particularly for those already part of the church. One resource has been offered to the church to assist with the preparing of parents to celebrate the baptism of their children: Janet Morley, *All This For You: The Meaning of Baptism in*

previously been baptised, seek baptism for themselves in later life. The issue here is the nurture of such people in the Christian faith so that their baptism has deep significance and that they are prepared for a life of Christian discipleship.

These challenges emerge out of society's general drift away from the church and its faith. For many the central importance of Christian faith and practice has diminished but attachment to baptismal ritual has remained important. This leads to requests for infant baptism from those not normally associated with the worshipping life of the church. For others attachment to baptismal ritual has been abandoned along with faith and practice. This leads to a number of people not being baptized in infancy and some of these seek baptismal ministry for themselves in later life. In order to understand this situation we need to look more deeply at the ways in which changes in society have affected the role of the church.

In 1999 the Methodist Church of Great Britain provided a statement on Methodist ecclesiology entitled *Called to Love and Praise*.<sup>10</sup> This statement recognised that since the previous 1937 document *The Nature of the Christian Church*<sup>11</sup> the context in which the church found itself had changed so much that a new statement was warranted. *Called to Love and Praise* describes the changing society in which the church seeks to serve. British society, it argues, is a fast changing, pluralist culture. Britain has become much more racially mixed. In addition to the growth of second and third generation black and Asian communities

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*the Methodist Church* (Peterborough: MPH, 2004). There are still no Connexional resources which help Methodists to understand how their own baptism is related to their life as disciples.

<sup>10</sup> 'Called to Love and Praise (1999)' in TMCP, *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order. Volume Two 1984-2000. Part One*. (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2000) pp.1-59

the unstable political situation of many African, Eastern European and Middle Eastern states has led to an increase in the migration of people into the industrialised West. This has led to an increased plurality of religious expression and belief.<sup>12</sup> In addition to this, materialism and growing affluence have helped to nurture a greater individualism. In the midst of this increasingly materialistic society we see that whilst some are withdrawing from the spiritual others are gaining an interest in spiritual things.<sup>13</sup> This represents both a retreating from institutional public forms of religion and an embrace of personalised and private spiritual expressions drawn from an eclectic range of influences.

This new spirituality is influenced by consumer culture, a user is able to pick and mix depending on perceived need and compatibility with lifestyle.<sup>14</sup> The experience of many is that life is becoming more fragmented and complex. Increased mobility and the need to travel to find employment have led to the emergence of dispersed families with parents and adult children scattered over a large area. This has often led to a severing of links with a local Christian community without these links being replaced in a new environment. This drive towards a more secular society is being fuelled by a revolution in leisure possibilities, and a demand for more flexible patterns of work.<sup>15</sup> With the relaxation of the Sabbath concept and

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<sup>11</sup> 'The Nature of the Christian Church (1937)' in TMCP, *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, Volume One, 1933-1983* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2000) pp.7-28

<sup>12</sup> TMCP, 'Called to Love and Praise', p.3 and Daniel T. Benedict Jr. *Come to the Waters: Baptism and Our Ministry of Welcoming Seekers and Making Disciples* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1996) p.15. See also Archbishop's Council, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004) pp.1-12; Steven Croft, *Transforming Communities: Re-imagining the Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002) pp.20-29.

<sup>13</sup> TMCP, 'Called to Love and Praise', p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> See Michael Riddell, *Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West* (London: SPCK, 1998) pp.114-115

<sup>15</sup> TMCP, 'Called to Love and Praise', p. 3

the disappearance of the societal convention of church going, families are choosing to spend their leisure time in a whole range of different pursuits. The Sunday service has now become one option amongst many.<sup>16</sup>

In the United States there is a greater level of church attendance than in Western Europe and amongst those not attending church there is a greater willingness to articulate an association with the faith of the Christian church. Yet even within this context there is a deepening recognition from some that the prevailing culture is more and more post-Christian.<sup>17</sup> One important issue in the United States, as in the United Kingdom, is the increasing trend towards individualism and privatised religion. This is that sense in which one can argue that faith and spirituality are, in essence, private matters between one's self and one's God. The church then becomes obsolete: there is no need to gather together to praise and seek God. One can do that on the golf course or wherever one chooses. In this mode of privatised Christianity there is no mutuality of spiritual expression with a worshipping body and no grounding conversation within the faith community. In these conditions theological convictions can become diluted and blend into a mix with the materialistic and consumer oriented vision of our age. This leads to theological convictions moving gradually from the centre of life to the periphery and hence not passed down to succeeding generations.<sup>18</sup> What remains often is a memory of a ritual around a font, in which a family's Christianity becomes located.

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<sup>16</sup> Riddell, *Threshold*, pp.4-5

<sup>17</sup> See Claudia A. Dickson, *Entering the Household of God: Taking Baptism Seriously in a Post-Christian Society* (New York: Church Publishing, 2002) esp. pp. ix-xiii, 3-8 and 49-53 also Benedict, *Waters*, esp. pp.45-53.

<sup>18</sup> It is also true that over time theological consensus within the church changes whilst for those outside of the conversation the theological positions of an earlier age may still remain dominant.

It is this kind of process that Claudia Dickson, an associate rector in The Episcopal Church of the United States of America, has observed. It has led her to write:

For many people today, people who would define themselves as Christian, baptism is no longer the step a person takes – on their own behalf or on behalf of their child – when they are ready to give their allegiance to Jesus Christ. No longer does it imply for them that they will devote their lives to serving God and God's people within the context of membership in a Christian community. Indeed, for many people baptism has become simply a reflex action. Something you automatically have done when your baby is born, a cultural rite of passage, rather than an initiation into a way of life and a community of faith.<sup>19</sup>

This quotation, although written from an American context, could accurately describe my experience of baptismal ministry in England.

Two indicators of a post-Christian cultural milieu are declining church attendance and a diminishing prominence of the Christian story in society at large.<sup>20</sup> Western Europe and the United States of America are experiencing these effects. At the same time, however, the memory of the tradition of baptism has remained powerful in the lives of many. In spite of a general indifference to the church during periods of stability in family life, the general populace still looks for the ministry of the church at times of change. Such times include the marriage of a couple, the death

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<sup>19</sup> Dickson, *Household*, p.x

<sup>20</sup> Riddell, *Threshold*, pp.3-5

of a loved one and the birth of a child.<sup>21</sup> For many, the impulse to the font when a new life is born is driven by a deep-seated desire to do 'the right thing'. This sense in the general population that baptism is the right thing is part of an ongoing 'Christian' memory that has been passed down through the generations. Those that have a deep feeling that baptising their child is the 'right thing' often have no idea why they hold this conviction so strongly. This 'folk' or residual religion is an expression of a societal Christian memory which has become removed from its wider theological context.

In the opening directions of the baptismal services of the 1975 *Methodist Service Book* it states that 'A solemn obligation rests upon parents to present their children to Christ in baptism.'<sup>22</sup> Whilst the directions go on to say that this baptism is carried out on the parental promise to nurture their children in the Christian faith, and the rite itself states that infant baptism is only for the children of Christian parents, there was and is a strong sense of the 'solemn obligation' to present one's child for baptism. This sense of 'solemn obligation' continues whilst the church's definitions of 'Christian' and 'Christian nurture' have become more and more polarised from those of the general populace. In terms of 'folk' religion, helping a child to develop into a 'good' person is often considered to be the fundamental requirement of Christian nurture and the mark of a Christian parent. Hence when families gather around a font in front of a Christian congregation they are able to do

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<sup>21</sup> See Wesley Carr, *Brief Encounters. Pastoral Ministry Through the Occasional Offices* (London: SPCK, 1985) in which Wesley Carr develops a model of pastoral care to be worked out in the ministry of the clergy with respect to baptisms, weddings and funerals. His work relating to infant baptism is contained especially in pp.9-59 and 63-85. It is revealing that baptismal ministry in a post-Christian setting is described as a 'Brief Encounter'. Preparation for, celebration of, and feedback from the sacrament of baptism, for Carr, plunges the Christian minister into a brief relationship with a family in which there is an opportunity to provide care. This care is offered as the baptismal request is taken seriously and God's grace is proclaimed at a point of change in the life experiences of the family.

<sup>22</sup> *MSB*, p.2

so in all good faith, whilst the gathered congregation wonders how, with a clear conscience, the parents can promise to nurture their children in the Christian faith. What is more, the parents do so with a sense of having carried out that which is right in the eyes of God. They have fulfilled their 'solemn obligation.'

This residual religion goes back far beyond 1975 and is much more wide-ranging than the limited influence of the *MSB*. The teaching that the mark of 'original sin' could only be removed from a person by baptism and that without such baptism the person could not be saved was influential in the medieval church and continues to be important especially in Roman Catholicism. The influence of this theology can be seen in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer (BCP)*.<sup>23</sup> The practice of the Church of England in the seventeenth century was to teach the importance of baptism at the earliest opportunity. The opening rubric for 'The Ministration of Private Baptism of Children In Houses' states:

The curates of every Parish shall often admonish the people, that they defer not the Baptism of their children longer than the first or second Sunday next after their birth, or other Holy-day falling between, unless upon a great and reasonable cause, to be approved by the curate.

Baptism was assumed. It was necessary. Even a slight delay had to be granted by an official of the church. The theological reason for this position is made

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<sup>23</sup> For a more detailed accounts of the history of this process see: Mark Dalby, *Open Baptism*, (London: SPCK, 1989) pp.17-26; but especially Johnson, *Christian Initiation*, pp.147-157



clear in the opening words of 'The Ministration of Publick Baptism of Infants To Be Used In The Church':

Dearly beloved, forasmuch as all men are conceived and born in sin, and that our Saviour Christ saith, none can enter the kingdom of God, except he be regenerate and born anew of Water and of the Holy Ghost: I beseech you to call upon God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that of his bounteous mercy he will grant to this child that thing which by nature he cannot have; that he may be baptised with Water and the Holy Ghost, and received into Christ's holy Church, and be made a lively member of the same.

This theme of baptismal regeneration of an infant born in sin is carried through in the prayers and declarations of the service. Prayer is made that the child 'being delivered from thy wrath, may be received into the ark of Christ's church,' and that in Holy Baptism the child 'may receive remission of his sins by spiritual regeneration.' The rubric at the end of the service states that 'It is certain by God's Word, that children which are baptised, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved.' *BCP* was used regularly for the service of infant baptism in the Church of England into the second half of the twentieth century. The view of 'original sin' that was operative in the church of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century has continued influence today. It is worth noting, however, that in Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism the traditional view of 'original sin' has been reviewed in recent discussion. Original sin is now less often thought of as that by which we are conceived and into which we are born. In ongoing theological discourse within the

church, 'original sin' is often considered in terms of that human condition of fallenness whereby from the womb we enter a sinful society and are set on a course towards certain actual sin at some future point. Infant baptism in this view becomes a breaking of solidarity with the sinful nature of humanity and claiming of solidarity to the God who by grace, in Christ, has saved his people from sin. This salvation is known, experienced and deepened by incorporation into a being saved community – the church.<sup>24</sup> The church's theological discourse in this regard may have developed in four centuries, however, much of the residual religion of the people of England has been formed by the use of *BCP*.

Churches practising infant baptism in post-Christian contexts face a dilemma in knowing how to respond to the requests for infant baptism they receive from families who do not attend church and have no desire to do so. This problem had begun to present itself as early as 1952, by this time society's drift towards a post-Christian cultural milieu had already begun. The 1952 Methodist Statement on Holy Baptism describes the position thus:

The spread of unbelief, indifference to religion, and nominal Christianity in Western Europe has created a difficult situation in relation to the administration of Infant Baptism. The mixed character of a community which is neither Christian nor pagan gives rise to acute practical problems. It is notorious that many parents who do not themselves attend Church, seek baptism for their children, often with

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<sup>24</sup> Examples of this view are found in Dalby, *Open Baptism*, pp.17-23 and also Johnson, *Christian Initiation*, pp.353-354

the most vague and erroneous ideas about its meaning, and with no intention of accepting the solemn obligations involved.<sup>25</sup>

What to do about this increasingly apparent situation has long been debated. The debate has been cast between the so-called 'rigorist' and 'indiscriminate' positions. The 'rigorist' would not baptise any infant unless the parents of that child were committed members of a local Christian community. The 'indiscriminist' would baptise the children of any parent who requests baptism for their child regardless of judgements about that family's Christian commitment. The 1987 Methodist Conference report on Christian initiation sought to explain the differences between the two positions. The issues are explained in a way that is very sensitive to the challenges faced in post-Christian culture:

Both schools of thought are concerned about the place of baptism in our missionary strategy. The 'rigorists' perceive the dangers attending the reduction of baptism to the level of 'folk religion'. The 'indiscriminists' are more hopeful about the role of 'folk religion' and 'conventional Christianity' in God's plan of salvation; they believe that even the residual Christianity left now in British social custom can be a foothold for the gospel, and they fear that every refusal to baptise marks a further de-Christianisation of British society.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> 'Statement on Holy Baptism(1952)' in TMCP, *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order. Volume One 1933-1983*. (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2000) pp. 33-38

<sup>26</sup> 'Christian Initiation(1987)' in TMCP, *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order. Volume Two 1984-2000. Part One*. (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2000) pp.63-101

The indiscriminate position was criticised and counselled against in The World Council of Churches' 1982 document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. The document challenged paedobaptising churches to take more seriously 'their responsibility for the nurture of baptized children to mature commitment to Christ.'<sup>27</sup>

Mark Dalby points us to the use of the term 'indiscriminate baptism' as early as 1896, when Hensley Henson declared that 'Indiscriminate baptizing is indecent in itself, discreditable to the Church, and highly injurious to religion.'<sup>28</sup> Here Henson was referring to that practice of baptism which involved 'no preparation, no explanations, no questions, and no follow up.'<sup>29</sup> Whilst this kind of non-discrimination is rare in the churches today, it is still true that in baptismal ministry only a brief amount of time is invested in preparation, explanation, questioning and follow-up.<sup>30</sup>

Practitioners of 'brief encounter' approaches to baptism often defend such a practice by arguing that, given the nature of the post-Christian society we find ourselves in, even this brief encounter is showing a regard for the Christian nurture of the family. It is hoped that families will in some way move nearer to Christ through the process. Others would argue that whilst such an approach does promote the church as a community of welcome and accommodation, it does not show a serious concern for the nurture of a child into 'mature commitment to Christ'<sup>31</sup>. Such an undertaking is not possible without parental cooperation and contribution. For

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<sup>27</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. Faith and Order Paper No.111* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982) p.6

<sup>28</sup> Dalby, *Open Baptism*, p.4

<sup>29</sup> Dalby, *Open Baptism*, p.4

this reason, some would argue, baptism should be deferred until such a time as Christian nurture into mature commitment to Christ can realistically be pursued. Those arguing from this perspective would suggest that 'brief encounter' baptismal ministry is, in effect, indiscriminate baptismal ministry and that this approach should be discouraged.

In British Methodism the individual minister is able to determine a baptismal policy in conversation with the lay leadership of a local congregation. Guidance centrally is deliberately left open and vague in order to allow for local policy making. 'Called to Love and Praise' states:

In infant baptism the norm will be the baptism of the children of Christian parents. But in a post-Christian age in which many families' hold on the Christian faith and experience of Christian worship come through the occasional offices of baptism, marriage and the funeral service, the pastoral practice of this understanding of infant baptism is not easy.<sup>32</sup>

This recognition of the difficulties facing practitioners of infant baptism in post-Christian culture lies behind the present study. The question I ask is, 'what strategies could be adopted so that the practice of infant baptism might be both faithful to the gospel and edifying to church and community in the context of post-Christian society?' In proposing an answer to this question I will reflect on the experience of four denominations which practise paedobaptism in contexts that

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<sup>30</sup> See note 21 on p.10 above.

<sup>31</sup> WCC, *BEM*, p.6

could be described as post-Christian. This will give the thesis an ecumenical dimension in order that it might be possible to learn from the insights of others and understand how the conclusions of this study might have relevance beyond the confines of my own denomination. The denominations I will consider are: The Roman Catholic Church, The Church of England, The United Methodist Church in the United States of America and The Methodist Church of Great Britain. My treatment of baptismal theology and practice in these denominations will be presented in Chapter Two.

The church has established Mt.28.16-20 as a foundational text for baptismal practice but has provided little guidance as to how our baptismal ministry in post-Christian settings might continue to be faithful to that Scripture. There is a need for a fresh consideration of Matthew's Gospel in the light of baptismal questioning. Conversely, there is a need for a fresh appraisal of baptismal practice in the light of Matthew's Gospel. This is why I am reading. It is to the question of how I am reading that we will now turn.

### **3) How I am Reading:**

#### **Seeking to Understand the Place of Baptism in the Saving Activity of God in Order that Baptismal Practice Might Be More Faithful to the Gospel.**

The primary purpose of this study is not to reflect on the historical circumstances surrounding the production of Matthew's Gospel - though such

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<sup>32</sup> TMCP, 'Called to Love and Praise', p.43

knowledge is an important factor within it. Neither is this study solely concerned with textual understanding even if such understanding is essential for the study to be effectively carried out. Rather, I am reading Matthew in order to discern its significance for the ongoing practice of the church, particularly with regard to its practice of baptism. I am therefore a reader who is concerned primarily with 'performance'. The strategy I have adopted for reading Matthew, therefore, owes much to those who have reflected upon the 'performance' metaphor in interpretation in order to argue that the 'life, activity and organisation of the believing community' is the 'fundamental form of the 'Christian' interpretation of Scripture.'<sup>33</sup> That is to say, 'Christian practice as interpretative action, consists in the 'performance' of texts which are construed as 'rendering', bearing witness to, one whose words and deeds, discourse and suffering, 'rendered' the truth of God in human history.'<sup>34</sup>

This thesis is developed on the basis that the performative metaphor is a useful framework on which to locate the interpretation of the Bible as Scripture. A successful attempt to apply the metaphor, however, needs to take account of questions like, 'how do we determine the adequacy of attempts to perform Scripture?' and 'How do we judge the appropriateness of given strategies to perform Scripture in different contexts?' In order to propose answers to questions like these

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<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Lash, 'Performing the Scriptures' in *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986) pp.37-46, p.42. Those that have reflected on the relevance of the performative metaphor with respect to interpretation include: Frances Young, *The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992) pp.140-143 and *Scripture and the Authority of God* (London: SPCK, 2005) pp.84-93; Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp.113-114. An argument against such an approach to the Bible can be found in P.R. Davies, *Whose Bible Is It Anyway?* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995)

<sup>34</sup> Lash, 'Performing', p.42

we need to reflect on the 'turn to practice' in interpretative theory.<sup>35</sup> A good place to begin is with a consideration of the post-liberal, cultural-linguistic proposals of George Lindbeck.<sup>36</sup>

Lindbeck's approach to theology is directed towards understanding religion in terms of the cultural and/or linguistic framework that shapes the entirety of its life and thought.<sup>37</sup> Lindbeck sees religions as examples of comprehensive interpretative schemes which themselves are usually embodied in myths or narratives and which structure human experience and understanding of self and world.<sup>38</sup> The goal of theology is therefore to describe the interpretative scheme in operation as 'thickly' as possible.<sup>39</sup> Lindbeck observes that religions usually have 'relatively fixed canons of writings that they treat as exemplary or normative instantiations of their semiotic codes.'<sup>40</sup> He suggests that a description of a religion would be regarded as faithful by its practitioners to the extent that it corresponded 'to the semiotic universe paradigmatically encoded in holy writ.'<sup>41</sup> In Lindbeck's analysis of Christianity, however, it is difficult to tell whether he regards the grammar of religious language, i.e., the use of Scripture by the community, to be the fundamental norm of the religion, or whether he regards the text of Scripture itself to be the fundamental norm for the community's religious grammar.<sup>42</sup> To a large extent he seems to regard the community's use of Scripture to be the normative principle for the religion. This

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<sup>35</sup> The term 'turn to practice' is used by Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.120

<sup>36</sup> Lindbeck's proposals concerning a cultural-linguistic understanding of theology are contained in his seminal work *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984).

<sup>37</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, pp.32-33

<sup>38</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.32

<sup>39</sup> See Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.115

<sup>40</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.116

<sup>41</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.116



comes across strongly when Lindbeck reflects on the notion of *meaning*. For Lindbeck, meaning is constituted by the 'uses of a specific language rather than being distinguishable from it.'<sup>43</sup> He argues that human experience is 'shaped moulded, and in a sense even constituted by cultural and linguistic forms.'<sup>44</sup> Indeed he strongly implies that what can be regarded as true within a cultural and linguistic form is that upon which the majority of competent speakers agree.<sup>45</sup> In this sense Lindbeck seemingly advocates the view that authority in Christian theology is located primarily in the Christian community.<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, Lindbeck speaks about Christian Scripture in such a way as to give the impression that he believes that Scripture has foundational truth value in itself apart from the particular uses to which it is put in the community. This is apparent in the way that Lindbeck talks about intratextual theology which sees Scripture as the basis and foundation of Christian grammar. For Lindbeck, all reality is to be redescribed within a scriptural framework rather than the other way around. He infers that there is a normative way of approaching Scripture when he advocates that the interpretative direction should always be from the Bible to the world and not vice versa. He reflects on the 'danger' of making extra-biblical materials the basic framework of Christian theology. He states that whenever this has happened in Christian history it has been because 'better theological and exegetical procedures

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<sup>42</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.95, comments, 'Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model betrays a structural instability of sorts just at this point, unsure whether it is accountable to the story or to the practice that allegedly embodies and enacts it.'

<sup>43</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.114

<sup>44</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.34

<sup>45</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.100

<sup>46</sup> Hans Frei also located theological authority primarily in the Christian community in *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) p.15. This point of view has drawn criticism from Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997) p.125, note 11.

were needed'.<sup>47</sup> This causes him to reflect on and agree with the insights of Hans Frei who showed that theological enquiry into the meaning of the Gospels had become preoccupied with historical-critical considerations which privileged the world of the text's production as the object of study. This approach to the Gospels, according to Frei, had ceased to take appropriate account of the narrative nature of the Gospels and their function in presenting a theological story of the saving activity of God in Christ.<sup>48</sup> Lindbeck develops the work of Frei to argue that there is a proper way to interpret Scripture. This proper way of interpreting, for Lindbeck, is not in actual fact necessarily the way that finds most agreement in the cultural-linguistic community of the church but rather, Lindbeck seems to argue, is intratextually derived from 'the literary structure of the text itself.'<sup>49</sup> On the one hand, then, Lindbeck seems to be saying that primary theological authority should reside in the cultural-linguistic community within which a fundamental interpretative framework evolves and is applied. On the other hand, Lindbeck infers that primary theological authority in the Christian church dwells in the Christian Scriptures when they are interpreted in a particular way even when the majority of Christians do not interpret in this way.

In one sense, therefore, Lindbeck seems to advocate a greater emphasis on the authority of the biblical text itself for directing the faith and practice of the church. This is in tension, however, with his emphasis on the role of the cultural-linguistic community in formulating an interpretative scheme which causes particular forms of life to develop and which evolves in relationship to those forms of life. In

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<sup>47</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.118

<sup>48</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.119. This aspect of Frei's work has been deeply influential and has led to the development of narrative approaches to the study of the Gospels.

<sup>49</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.120

as much as Lindbeck infers that meaning does not exist in the text itself but rather in the aims and interests that an interpretative community brings to the text he is in close alignment with the work of Stanley Fish. In *Is There a Text in this Class?* Fish set out to demonstrate that the meaning of a text is established and controlled not in response to the communicative intention of an author but rather in the make up of 'interpretative communities'. In his Preface Fish writes:

The answer this book gives to its title question is "there is and there isn't." There isn't a text in this or any other class if one means by text what E.D. Hirsch and others mean by it, "an entity which always remains the same from one moment to the next"; but there is a text in this and every class if one means by text the structure of meanings that is obvious and inescapable from the perspective of whatever interpretative assumptions happen to be in force.<sup>50</sup>

In 'Interpreting the Variorum'<sup>51</sup> Fish argues that what appear to be formal patterns in the text are not inert properties of the text at all but appear as a consequence of the interpretative strategy utilised by the reader:

There are still formal patterns, but they do not lie innocently in the world; rather they are themselves constituted by an interpretative act. The facts one points to are still there ... but only as a consequence of the interpretative (man-made) model that has called them into being. The relationship between interpretation and text is thus reversed:

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<sup>50</sup> Stanley Fish, *Is there a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1980) p.vii

interpretative strategies are not put into execution after reading; they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as is usually assumed, arising from them.<sup>52</sup>

So if a reader is able by interpretative strategy to make the text he or she reads then there is the potential for interpretative anarchy, with no two readers conceptualising a given text in a similar way. Yet, as Fish notes, this is not the case and indeed readers, by and large, do find areas of agreement in their interpretative approaches to texts and are able to debate their disagreements in a manner which is able to appeal to commonly held ideas of interpretation. For Fish, this is not due to some inherent stability in a given text but is attributable to the stability of interpretative communities:

Of course this stability is always temporary (unlike the longed for and timeless stability of the text). Interpretive communities grow larger and decline, and individuals move from one to another; thus, while the alignments are not permanent, they are always there, providing just enough stability for the interpretative battles to go on, and just enough shift and slippage to ensure that they will never be settled.<sup>53</sup>

In Fish's approach to interpreting texts he assumes the absence of a communicative intent in the text to which the reader and her community have a responsibility. Rather Fish is claiming that the interpretative community is free to

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<sup>51</sup> Fish, *Text*, pp.147-173

<sup>52</sup> Fish, *Text*, p.13

<sup>53</sup> Fish, *Text*, pp.171-172

make its own meaning in the text as long as it is able to find enough agreement to be able to establish and maintain a viable linguistic community. This is different from Lindbeck's view. For all Fish and Lindbeck can be said to share similarities in that each reserves a primary place for the interpretative community as controlling authority they are separated in that Lindbeck argues for the presence of a communicative intention in the interaction between the text and the reading community. He argues that, this communicative presence is the Spirit of God. For Lindbeck, the linguistically competent within the interpretative community of the church are those who are 'spirit-filled' and who are able to apply an interpretative scheme that allows them to recognise the communicating intent of God's Spirit.<sup>54</sup> This may well be the key to resolving the tension in Lindbeck's work between his assessment of the place of the Bible in the community's practice of interpreting life intratextually and his assessment of the place of the community in formulating interpretative schemes. Lindbeck seems to offer the point of view that the interpretative community is only being responsive to God's communicative intent in Scripture when they are willing and able to approach the text, and indeed all of life, intratextually in a way that understands all of life through the categories of thought and expression given in the Bible.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.100

<sup>55</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, pp.118-124. This is part of what Lindbeck means when he writes that 'it is best to think of the co-inherence of Bible and Church, of their mutually constitutive reciprocity' in 'Scripture, Consensus and Community' in James J. Buckley ed., *The Church in a Postliberal Age* (London: SCM, 2002) pp.201-222, quote taken from p.205. A similar view is articulated by Fowl in *Engaging Scripture*, pp.38-39. Loughlin, *God's Story*, p.113, makes the point that 'Christ and the church are understood properly only in the light of Scripture, and Scripture is understood properly only in the light of Christ and his church... For to be inspired is to be in the Spirit, and that is to be in the community to which the Spirit is given'. In the light of this, Loughlin goes on to say that the appropriate question for the Spirit-filled interpretative community of the church is, 'How does God, as the true author of Scripture, intend us to use this text in our present circumstances?' p.133.

Considerations of the church's practice of baptism in a post-Christian context help to illustrate the tensions in Lindbeck's approach and highlight some difficulties with Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic proposal as a model for the church's performance of the Gospel. Lindbeck speaks of a 'performatory use of language'.<sup>56</sup> He defines this in connection with his category of correspondence. That is the extent to which the culture and language of a religion are able to bear witness to a truthful reality. With respect to the performatory use of language Lindbeck says:

A religious utterance, one might say, acquires the propositional truth of ontological correspondence only insofar as it is a performance, an act or deed, which helps create that correspondence.<sup>57</sup>

For Lindbeck, a religious utterance can only make claim to 'the propositional truth of ontological correspondence' if it is also 'intrasystematically true'.<sup>58</sup> That is to say, that the utterance not only coheres with other utterances in the cultural-linguistic framework of the religion but also with its correlative forms of life. It follows from this that if a religion claims to bear witness to what is ontologically true and if a particular utterance can be shown to be intrasystematically true within the cultural-linguistic framework of the religion then the religion verifies that the particular utterance is ontologically true. Lindbeck illustrates his understanding of intrasystematic truth by referring to the crusader's battle cry "*Christus est Dominus*". Lindbeck shows that this cry is false when it is used to authorise the cleaving of the skull of the infidel (even though the same words in other contexts may be a true utterance). The context of the crusader's use of the religious language is in

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<sup>56</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.65

<sup>57</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.65

contradiction with the Christian understanding of the Lordship of Jesus which embodies suffering servanthood and not violent domination.<sup>59</sup> This particular illustration of the inappropriate performance of religious language is particularly striking because of the grating incongruence between the crusader's words and actions. There are times in the church's performance of its linguistic codes, however, in which the incongruence of language and practice is less obvious. The baptismal practice of the church in post-Christian contexts is one such instance.

The post-Christian social context in which the church in the West finds itself presents significant challenges to the church's baptismal ministry as we have already seen. The difficulties arise because the circumstances in which we practice render earlier styles of performance ineffective and anomalous. Therefore the church needs to consider changes to its practice. Lindbeck describes such scenarios accurately:

[R]eligious change or innovation must be understood not as proceeding from new experiences, but as resulting from the interactions of a cultural-linguistic system with changing situations. Religious traditions are not transformed, abandoned or replaced because of an up-welling of new or different ways of feeling about the self, world, or God, but because a religious interpretive scheme (embodied as it always is, in religious practice and belief) develops anomalies in its application in new contexts.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.64

<sup>59</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.64

<sup>60</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.39

In the present context, the cultural-linguistic situation of a church that baptises children routinely because of a reasonable assumption about the Christianity of its parents is now being replaced. Now the church is much more likely to be asked to baptise the children of parents who have little or no understanding of the Christian faith and little or no desire to be associated with that faith beyond the celebration of the infant's baptism. In these changed circumstances the church is being challenged to evolve. This evolution will need to lead to a new way of performing baptism that the church can satisfy itself is intrasystematically true.

A key aspect of the church's thinking in post-Christian settings is the notion of 'validity'. For paedobaptising denominations, a baptism is valid if it is performed using water, in the threefold name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with the intention to baptise into the Christian church.<sup>61</sup> This statement of the validity of baptism is associated with the church's belief that even if human beings are not faithful to God then God is still faithful to them. This is the basis of the paedobaptisers' insistence that baptism cannot be repeated even if the human individual has not remained in fellowship with the church.<sup>62</sup> So in practising baptism in a post-Christian context the individual ministers of the church are confident that regardless of the faith of a family, as long as the correct words are said in the right way then their baptismal practice is valid and a sign of God's faithfulness even in the face of human unfaithfulness. So for many ministers there is no problem whatsoever with baptising the children of non-Christian parents, even in the absence of any significant attempt at Christian nurture. The problem in such situations is that the liturgy of baptism requires an expression of repentant faith on the part of a candidate

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<sup>61</sup> The Methodist Church, *MSB*, p.3. cf. Stookey, *Baptism*, p.67

<sup>62</sup> Stookey, *Baptism*, pp.49-56



or, in the case of infants, the candidate's parents. Minister's often find that it is nonsensical to expect parents with no or little commitment to Jesus to express repentant faith in the context of the liturgy. The increasingly practised solution is to omit the statement of faith from the rite. This can be done with appeal to intrasystematic truth because the baptism is still valid and God is still faithful even when baptismal sponsors are not.

In this set of circumstances, the cultural-linguistic framework is allowed to define baptism and its practice without reference to foundational baptismal texts like Mt.28.16-20. In fact the new evolving baptismal culture becomes juxtaposed in the cultural-linguistic interpretative scheme with texts like Mt.28.16-20 and the new ways of practising come to define for the church what the Scripture means rather than the other way around.<sup>63</sup>

In the case outlined here we do not have the jarring incongruence of the crusader cleaving the infidel's head whilst declaring "*Christus est Dominus*". Rather we have a situation in which a particular performance of the gospel in baptism can be considered intrasystematically true when placed alongside the minimum criteria for baptismal validity.<sup>64</sup> It may even be in an important, but limited, way ontologically true because the church does always affirm the truth of God's faithfulness even in the face of human unfaithfulness. This argument for intrasystematic consistency may work in terms of the entire cultural-linguistic framework of the religion, however it does not necessarily offer a rich and faithful performance of the Gospel. Indeed the position has been arrived at without a

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. The Methodist Church, *MWB*, p.89

<sup>64</sup> Stookey, *Baptism*, p.67

significant consideration of the Gospel's teaching with respect to baptism. Prevailing baptismal practice, therefore, may indeed be intrasystematically coherent with respect to the minimum criteria for baptismal performance *in extremis*, but this gives rise to a culture and language of baptismal minimalism spread wide which is neither edifying for the church, meaningful to the candidates and their families or faithful to the rich baptismal vision of Scripture. This brings us to a major criticism of performance models of interpretation, namely that performance interpretation accords pride of place to the reader-performer rather than the author-playwright.<sup>65</sup> That is to say, authority is primarily located in the reading community and not in the text. Or as Fish would have it: 'The relationship between interpretation and text is thus reversed: interpretative strategies are not put into execution after reading; they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than is usually assumed, arising from them.'<sup>66</sup>

In a recent work, Kevin J. Vanhoozer has addressed this concern about performance interpretation. He argues that performance interpretation can be conceived of in two ways. We can apply either an 'ecclesial' or 'canonical' approach to performance interpretation.<sup>67</sup> 'Ecclesial' performance interpretation is that which we have just considered. That is to say, the church's evolving culture and language is assumed to be primary and Scripture comes to mean what the church says it means according to the interpretative schemes it sees fit to apply in any given set of circumstances. In this 'ecclesial' performance, pride of place is conferred

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<sup>65</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.165-170

<sup>66</sup> Fish, *Text*, p.13

<sup>67</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.165-185. Vanhoozer gives the label 'Performance II' to 'ecclesial' performance interpretation and refers to 'canonical' performance interpretation using the term 'Performance I'. In the current work I will avoid this nomenclature preferring simply to refer to

upon the reader/performer who, within the limitations of the church's grammar, is free to make the meaning to be found in the text. The dangers of such an approach are that church practices themselves become their own source and norm. In such a situation, as Vanhoozer asks, 'how can we ever distinguish well-formed practices from those that are deformed?'<sup>68</sup> His answer to that question is that we can't.<sup>69</sup> So Vanhoozer proposes an alternative approach to performance interpretation which advocates that the divine discourse in Scripture should be the source and norm of church practice.<sup>70</sup> This is not to reject the insights of Lindbeck with respect to the importance of culture and language in interpretation. Indeed, Vanhoozer accepts Lindbeck's insight that theology is always developed in and affected by the culture and language of particular interpretative communities.<sup>71</sup> Vanhoozer argues that, because of this, it is necessary to give an account of the proper dogmatic ordering of Scripture and church practices with respect to one another.<sup>72</sup> Vanhoozer makes the case that Scripture exists as witness to the communicative intention and activity of God in the history of salvation and is the 'normative specification' for God's ongoing revelatory and redemptive communicating activity in His church.<sup>73</sup> As such, Vanhoozer argues, attention to God's voice in Scripture should be primary in the church's theologising.<sup>74</sup> This point of view seeks to affirm that God is a member of the linguistic community who has the role of being the 'ultimate communicative agent speaking in Scripture. ... The church recognises in the plurality of human

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'ecclesial' and 'canonical' performance as these terms are sufficient for distinguishing the two approaches.

<sup>68</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.7

<sup>69</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.184

<sup>70</sup> In developing this argument Vanhoozer draws heavily from the work of Nicholas Wolterstorff particularly his *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>71</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.16

<sup>72</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.153; cf. p.233.

<sup>73</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.177

<sup>74</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.11.

discourses [present in Scripture] a distinctive unity that it ascribes to a single authoritative agent: the word ministering Spirit.’<sup>75</sup> In defending this position Vanhoozer makes a move from the cultural-linguistic theory of Lindbeck and argues for a corrective which he designates ‘canonical-linguistic’ theology.<sup>76</sup> In terms of performance interpretation, Vanhoozer relocates pride of place to the author/playwright, to whom the reader/performer responds.<sup>77</sup> My own reading of Matthew presented in this thesis will to a large extent be guided by Vanhoozer’s canonical-linguistic approach.

Vanhoozer’s canonical linguistic approach is very close to that advocated by the Methodist Church, at least in its constitutional formulation, *The Deed of Union*. At the heart of British Methodism’s constitution is a clear statement of the priority of Scripture:

The *Deed of Union* (which sets out the purposes, doctrine, basis of membership and constitution of the Methodist Church) acknowledges ‘the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures’ to be ‘the supreme rule of faith and practice’.<sup>78</sup>

If, therefore, Methodist Christians are to consider the basis of their theology and practice with respect to baptism, they are committed – at least their constitution commits them - to using the Bible as a key source of meaning in that process. In fact they are committed to seeking ‘divine revelation’ in ‘Holy Scripture’ and to allow

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<sup>75</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.177; cf. p.99.

<sup>76</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.22; p.322

<sup>77</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.165-170

<sup>78</sup> TMCP, ‘Called to Love and Praise’, p.5

that 'divine revelation' to rule their faith and practice. As Vanhoozer would put it, 'It is the canonical text that directs the community of readers rather than the community of readers the text.'<sup>79</sup> It is consistent with the constitution of the Methodist Church, therefore, to seek direction for our ongoing baptismal ministry from Scripture. Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic proposal offers a strong platform for Methodists who seek to theologise in a way that is consistent with their stated denominational priorities.

The difficulty for Methodist theology, and therefore for Vanhoozer's proposal also, is that attention to divine revelation in Scripture does not necessarily produce agreement between interpreters on the crucial issue of what exactly God is saying, through the Scriptures, to us in our current circumstances. Recourse to Scripture may well lead to a certain level of agreement on matters basic to Christian faith and doctrine but there are manifold examples of well-meaning, Spirit-filled, Christ-like interpreters disagreeing over how exactly to interpret the Scriptures in particular given circumstances.<sup>80</sup> Each will have a different perspective because of the effect of each one's particular experience and exposure to church tradition. There is no unmediated experience of Scripture in which the divine discourse is delivered to the interpreter unaffected by the particularities of social position and cultural-linguistic location. As the church considers its faith and practices, therefore, it will inevitably engage with Scripture in a way that is mediated by its own language and culture. In such circumstances we are left wondering how it is that we can decide between conflicting interpretations. Whose view is correct and how can we

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<sup>79</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.400

<sup>80</sup> A current example is the ongoing debate in a large number of denominations about how the Bible directs the church to respond to the issue of homosexuality and the place of homosexuals within the

know? Put differently, we are left wondering who defines how God uses Scripture. If the objective is applying Scripture to the life of the church in order to direct its practices and language then it seems clear that it is the church that has the task of defining how God uses Scripture. In this case it would appear that the nearest we can get to knowing 'God's use' of Scripture is 'Scripture as the church thinks God uses it.'<sup>81</sup> Even this formulation begs the question, 'Which church?'

Ultimately Vanhoozer's canonical performance interpretation functions less as a means of overcoming such differences and more in terms of suggesting a set of readerly assumptions and emphases. Vanhoozer does not undermine the place of the church as the interpretative community which decides corporately on how Scripture should effect doctrine and practice. Rather Vanhoozer proposes that the ecclesial interpretative community will most likely establish truthful interpretation showing forth in truthful forms of life when it emphasises the following:

- a) a faith-filled approach to reading;<sup>82</sup>
- b) a tradition of 'proper' interpretation;<sup>83</sup>
- c) a truly canonical approach to interpretation<sup>84</sup>
- d) a truly catholic approach to interpretation;<sup>85</sup>
- e) the application of appropriate interpretative practices and virtues;<sup>86</sup>
- f) a recognition that the church is part of Scripture's dramatic plot;<sup>87</sup>

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Christian community. A more historical example with relevance to the present study is the debate between those who would baptise children and those who would not.

<sup>81</sup> This may also be the nearest we can get to Loughlin's notion of the church using Scripture as God would have it use it. Cf. Loughlin, *Story*, p.133.

<sup>82</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.4, 14, 67, 150, 177, 211-213.

<sup>83</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.153-157, 164-165, 203, 206, 207, 233.

<sup>84</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.149, 221-224, 258-259, 287, 330-331, 355.

<sup>85</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.27, 322.

<sup>86</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.22, 144, 150, 208, 211-212, 216, 220, 222-225, 241, 274, 303-304, 333, 358, 409, 419, 421, 425.

These assumptions and emphases are important in my own ‘performance’ interpretation of Matthew’s Gospel with respect to baptism. As I deal with each feature in turn I will, where appropriate, indicate in what ways they relate to my own thesis.

### **a) A Faith-Filled Approach to Reading**

Vanhoozer’s canonical-linguistic approach is grounded in a steadfast belief that God addresses the church in Scripture and that it is possible for the church adequately to receive the communicative agency of God in Scripture because of the role of the Holy Spirit in ministering that communication to us. Without these two foundational assumptions Vanhoozer’s approach collapses into mere ‘Fishian’ pragmatism but with them it becomes possible to begin to argue for the authority of Scripture in the church. It is interesting, however, that in referring to the “Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture”,<sup>88</sup> Vanhoozer is drawing from the Westminster Confession of Faith. This raises a question over the relationship between tradition and Scripture as sources of authority in Vanhoozer’s scheme. On the one hand he claims to be advocating a form of *sola Scriptura*, on the other he is citing tradition as his justification for this approach. So could it be that it is really a particular understanding of tradition that is primary for Vanhoozer and not actually Scripture at all?<sup>89</sup> This is parallel to my own desire to affirm the priority of Scripture in theology

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<sup>87</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.2-3; p.16-19; p.21-22; p.53; p.56; p.101-102; p.105; p.129; p.145-146; p.237; p.240; p.259; p.262-263; p.331

<sup>88</sup> See, Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.67

<sup>89</sup> The same could be said of a Methodist conception of the authority of Scripture. Do evangelical Methodists claim that Scripture is a prior norm because it is or because the *Deed of Union* says it is. If it is the latter then clearly it is actually the *Deed of Union* that serves as prior norm. Cf. ‘Called to Love and Praise’, p.5; TMCP, *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, Vol.2, 2005 (Peterborough, MPH, 2005) p.213.

which itself has been influenced by the evangelical tradition of the Methodist Church.

### **b) A Tradition of 'Proper' Interpretation**

Vanhoozer's main criteria for judging between proper or improper interpretation of Scripture in tradition is the church's historical fidelity or infidelity to the understanding of Scripture set forth in the so called 'Rule of Faith'.<sup>90</sup> The role of the 'Rule of Faith' in Vanhoozer's approach is to structure the adequate and accurate interpretation of Scripture by providing a summary of the history of salvation contained in Scripture and also giving guidance as to the nature of the main protagonist(s), Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>91</sup> The 'Rule of Faith' is then, for Vanhoozer, 'a hermeneutical norm' for the church to apply in its interpretation of Scripture. This would seem to suggest that, in actual fact, Vanhoozer does not regard Scripture as prior norm for the church's theological task, but rather by accepting the crucial place of the 'Rule of Faith' for proper interpretation of Scripture, he is in fact privileging the place of tradition in interpretation. Vanhoozer counters such a critique by clarifying his understanding of the dogmatic role of the 'Rule of Faith'. Vanhoozer rejects Young's opinion that the Rule is 'related to these books but 'extra' to them'.<sup>92</sup> Instead, Vanhoozer argues that the 'Rule of Faith' is derived from Scripture and not imposed upon Scripture. He writes that, 'The Rule of Faith is nothing less than a summary of Scripture's own story line: "It is generally understood to have been drawn from Scripture, and in biblical interpretation it is

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<sup>90</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.204; cf. Young, *Performance*, pp.48-62; Loughlin, *Story*, pp.78-79; Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, pp.7-8.

<sup>91</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.204-205

<sup>92</sup> cf. Young, *Performance*, pp.60-61



reapplied to Scripture.”<sup>93</sup> The Rule, therefore, only has authority because it conforms to Scripture rather than the other way around.

### **c) A Truly Canonical Approach to Interpretation**

This emphasis on the ‘story-line’ of Scripture is the basis of Vanhoozer’s commitment to claiming that the whole of Scripture is to be considered primary in the church’s theology as opposed to simply the New Testament or the Gospels. Vanhoozer’s canonical approach is one that seeks to read individual passages and books as elements within the divine drama of redemption and this means reading the canonical witness as a whole.<sup>94</sup> A full understanding of Jesus, for example, cannot be arrived at unless the interpreter is willing to give attention to the Jewish Scripture which pointed to Him and to which He often referred.<sup>95</sup> Vanhoozer argues that Jesus is at the centre of the canon and that the “plot” of the canon finds its unity in Him.<sup>96</sup> The canon as a whole is a testimony to ‘God’s word-act in Jesus Christ’.<sup>97</sup> It is only when we give weight to the different ways in which the canon points to Jesus that we can fully understand Him and therefore our role as disciples seeking to follow after Him in our ongoing performance of the Gospel.<sup>98</sup> This being said, Vanhoozer recognises that:

No theology can bring the totality of Scripture to bear on each and every situation. Some process of selection would thus appear to be in

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<sup>93</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.206

<sup>94</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.149; cf. Watson, *Text and Truth*, pp.55, 119-123.

<sup>95</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.221

<sup>96</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.259; cf. Wright, *Scripture*, pp.31-44

<sup>97</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.287

<sup>98</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.287

order, a process that matches specific parts of the Bible with particular situations in the present.<sup>99</sup>

It is necessary to apply particular parts of Scripture relevantly to distinct aspects of the church's ongoing performance interpretation but not in a way that loses sight of the wider canonical witness. This thesis offers the example of applying Mt.28.16-20 to the church's ongoing theology and practice of baptism. In interpreting Matthew, however, it is also important to recognise the place of Matthew within the wider canonical witness to the history of salvation.

#### **d) A Truly Catholic Approach to Interpretation**

Vanhoozer acknowledges that particular interpretations of Scripture are never neutral but are always affected by our social location. He also recognises that we can never claim to interpret the Scriptures exhaustively because our grasp after truth is finite and limited.<sup>100</sup> This leads him to qualify his canonical approach by stating that it should avoid reductionism by being aware of and open to the diversity of Scriptural interpretation practised in the church across space, time and culture. This is not to say that church practices are primary. It is still the case that church practices should conform to God's communicative activity in Scripture. Rather it is to humbly acknowledge that my and my community's grasp of the divine discourse is provisional and limited. The catholic aspect of reading refers to allowing one's own perspective on God's word to be broadened by that of others that the richness of

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<sup>99</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.355

<sup>100</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.27

the canonical communication may be more richly appreciated.<sup>101</sup> This catholic interpretative attitude is demonstrated in the present thesis as I consider the baptismal practice not just of my own denomination but of several.

#### **e) The Application of Appropriate Interpretative Virtues and Practices**

Vanhoozer argues that interpretation is biblical when it is bound up in an interpretative cultural-linguistic context that is itself biblical.<sup>102</sup> This means reading in a way that displays those virtues that Scripture encourages.<sup>103</sup> This amounts to what Vanhoozer calls 'a fitting posture towards Scripture'.<sup>104</sup> This notion of a 'fitting posture towards Scripture' is hinted at in Methodist tradition. John Wesley's sermons are held to be doctrinal standards for Methodists. One sermon in particular speaks about the important role played by Scripture in the Christian life. In *The Means of Grace* Wesley argues that although God is unlimited in the means by which he can impart his grace to humanity there are some that are to be considered normal. These are the private and public reading of Scripture, regular private and corporate prayer, regular sharing of the Eucharist and the fellowship of the believing community.<sup>105</sup> So if we are to receive the grace to understand what God's will is for us, it follows that this is to be found in the Holy Scriptures and especially when these are read in an attitude of private and corporate prayer, and in Eucharistic fellowship with other believers. In Methodist tradition, discussing one's understanding of

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<sup>101</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.322

<sup>102</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.22. In this respect Vanhoozer is close in approach to Fowl who emphasises the importance of interpretative virtues in biblical interpretation. See Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, pp.62-96.

<sup>103</sup> See Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.144, 208, 211, 222, 224, 225, 241, 274, 293, 303, 304 n.110, 333, 358, 419.

<sup>104</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.211-212

<sup>105</sup> See 'Sermon XII: The Means of Grace' in John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions* (London: The Epworth Press, 1944) (First published as *Sermons Vol.1* in 1746) pp.136-137.

Scripture with other believers in such a spirit is a means of inspiration and accountability.

With respect to the key question of how we can know that we have arrived at a truthful understanding of Scripture the notion of interpretative virtues and practices is extremely important. Vanhoozer speaks of adopting an appropriate, canonically guided, posture towards Scripture. It is such a posture that guards against interpretative arrogance and idolatry. Such a posture does not guarantee that an interpreter will adequately account for the divine discourse in Scripture but it does make it more likely. Part of this appropriate posture is the willingness to submit one's own interpretative understanding to the testing of the Christian community. A willingness to submit to such testing is an expression of the virtue of humility. In conversation with others we acknowledge the limitations of our own individual thinking and open ourselves up to the necessity of accountability in the application of our ideas. It is true that communities are themselves subject to their own social location and finitude, however, reaching theological decisions in community does open up the possibility of the testing and refinement or even rejection of ideas. This way of thinking in community is an important part of the Methodist tradition. We have come to refer to it as 'Conference'.<sup>106</sup> The principle of 'conference' is exercised, with respect to the current work, to the extent that it is available for scholarly scrutiny and the ideas it puts forward are discussed informally as well formally within the life of the church.

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<sup>106</sup> See W. Stephen Gunter, Scott J. Jones, Ted A. Campbell, Rebekah L. Miles and Randy Maddox, *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997) pp.14-15

## **f) A Recognition that the Church is Part of Scripture's Dramatic Plot**

The category of salvation history is a helpful formulation to assist the faithful interpreter in reading the canon in a way that is sensitive to its overall plot. Salvation history, with its implied focus on the past, is not, however, the most helpful designation for a performance interpretation which seeks to understand how God's activity in the past is related to God's call on the church now.<sup>107</sup> Vanhoozer, drawing on the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, suggests that the salvation historical plot of Scripture is in fact its testimony to the dynamic and dramatic activity of God on behalf of His people.<sup>108</sup> This 'theo-dramatic' activity, to which Scripture testifies is not fully contained within the pages of Scripture because Scripture points beyond the time of its production to the eschaton. The life of the church today, therefore, continues to be bound up in Scripture's theo-dramatic perspective because the drama has not yet come to an end. The church continues to have a role in the ongoing drama of recognising and responding appropriately to God.<sup>109</sup> The challenge is to behave, in our own circumstances, in theo-dramatic consistency with the dramatic salvific activity of God in Scripture. When the church theologises and acts in ways that do not give Scripture the primary place as a source of authority it is, quite literally, in danger of losing the plot. Or as Vanhoozer, more helpfully, puts it 'To fit in rightly with the action, of course, one must first have some sense of what is going on'.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> For instance Jack Dean Kingsbury focuses on Salvation History in his *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (London: SPCK, 1975), but it is difficult to see how such a focus on Matthew is yet a suitable approach for helping the church to perform the gospel effectively in the present day.

<sup>108</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.2-3, 17-18, 35-56. Cf. Wright, *People of God*, pp.140-143 and *Scripture*, p.39-43, 84-85; Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004) pp.53-57.

This dramatic conception of God's saving activity in history yields an approach to interpretation in which the church can understand itself as being called to participate in the drama (cf. Mt.28.16-20) by bodying forth God's saving intentions through appropriate theo-dramatic performance.<sup>111</sup> Such performance will be in-keeping with Scripture, both in terms of the plot of the drama of redemption it establishes and the guidance for truthful performing it gives (i.e., Phil.2.5-12).<sup>112</sup> Such truthful performance will involve the tasks of exegesis, which in these terms is concerned with adequately discerning the nature of the plot of the drama as recorded in Scripture,<sup>113</sup> and *phronesis*, which relates to making wise judgements as to how the story-line of Scripture may be effectively continued as the church responds creatively but faithfully to new situations.<sup>114</sup> In terms of the current thesis, my exegetical task is to determine the plot of the theo-drama as presented in Matthew's Gospel and particularly to establish the place of baptism in the dramatic saving activity of God there presented. My phronetic task will then be to imagine a performance paradigm that can enable the church to be faithful to the plot of the theo-drama as it continues to engage in baptismal ministry in changed cultural circumstances.

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<sup>109</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.331.

<sup>110</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.53; cf. pp.2-3, 241.

<sup>111</sup> cf. Loughlin, *Story*, p.86; Barton, 'Performance', p.196. Both Barton and Loughlin are quick to counter any suggestion that the performance metaphor yields a form of 'play-acting' in which the interpreter assumes a mere role rather than becoming 'transformed into a different kind of person' absorbed in the drama of true reality. See Barton, 'Performance', p.189 and Loughlin, *Story*, p.134; cf. Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.365.

<sup>112</sup> Such language of 'plot' and 'drama' may lead to some of the same criticisms as have been levelled at language of 'narrative'. Watson is concerned that recourse to 'narrative' as a means of conceiving the nature of Gospel obscures their function as 'historiographical testimony to the reality of Jesus as the Christ' in *Text and Truth*, p.41. The notion of 'drama' presented by Vanhoozer and worked out in this thesis is not intended to suggest an abstraction from the function of corresponding to the real. Quite the reverse is true. The notion of drama presented here is one that is aimed at assisting the church in recognising that we are caught up as characters in a true drama, the nature of which is revealed in Scripture's testimony to the historical figure of Jesus. Proper attention to that life leads us to realise that the life continues and is affective today. Each person has the opportunity to participate in the ongoing real drama in more or less fitting ways. cf. Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.295-299.

<sup>113</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.249; cf. pp.265-305; Young, *Performance*, p.27.

Vanhoozer elaborates on the interpretative metaphor of performance when he argues that the type of performing that the church is called to is akin to the creative act of improvising with a Biblical script.<sup>115</sup> This recalls the work of Frances Young who also speaks of improvisation in connection with the church's performance of Scripture. Young draws her analogy between the church performing Scripture and a soloist musician improvising a cadenza at the climax of a classic concerto.<sup>116</sup> Young's comparison is between the performance of music and the performance of Scripture, whereas Vanhoozer prefers the notion of dramatic performance as a corollary for performance interpretation. Having said this though, there is much commonality in what they have to say about improvisation. Young observes that,

In order to improvise effectively, the performer not only has to have technical competence, but also needs to understand musical theory, the rules of harmony and counterpoint, the accepted conventions of development, the stylistic character of the work within which the cadenza is to figure. She has to have a sensitivity to the actual score of that work, its form, its themes and subjects and their 'generative' potential. .... But it is no good if it is simply a firework show of technical brilliance. It must be integrated with the 'given' score, though a development of it, and it must engage others in the unity of the whole.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.307-359; cf. Loughlin, *Story*, pp.139-175.

<sup>115</sup> This is referred to particularly in Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.129 and 388.

<sup>116</sup> Young, *Performance*, pp.160-161.

<sup>117</sup> Young, *Performance*, pp.160-161

In the same way, but with reference to dramatic improvisation, Vanhoozer seeks to emphasise that improvisation does not mean that an actor can do whatever he or she pleases in whichever way they think best. Rather true improvisation upon a script is concerned with being both ‘creative and faithful’ at the same time.<sup>118</sup> The notion of ‘improvisation’ is central in the church’s task of performing the same drama as the church through the ages has been called to perform but doing this ‘with different actors, on a different stage, with different scenery’.<sup>119</sup> This involves the two tasks of analysing the script carefully, seeking to be faithful to its text whilst also articulating the substance of the play in ways that are ‘compelling and intelligible to contemporary audiences.’<sup>120</sup> The aim is to achieve ‘patterns of speech, thought and action [that] will be fitting insofar as they discover and display a real similarity to the Christo-drama in spite of the culturally dissimilar.’<sup>121</sup> As the musician improvising a cadenza is both bound by the musical conventions of her piece and yet free to imagine a new way for it to be expressed so the actor improvising with a script is both bound by the evolving story of which she is a part and yet free to continue that story in a fresh way within the constraints of its narrative coherency.<sup>122</sup> In the present work I argue that the church needs to explore a new improvisation with fresh potential to body forth the richness of baptism to candidates and sponsors alike in a new missiological setting.

This undertaking will involve reflecting on different horizons, the horizon of the canonical script and the horizon of the present socio-cultural context of the

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<sup>118</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.129

<sup>119</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.240.

<sup>120</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.245

<sup>121</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.263



church. Famously, Hans George Gadamer has proposed that such a project involves an interpreter in a 'fusion of horizons'. That is to say that interpretation may be conceived of as a kind of dialogue in which the reader is exposed to the effects of the text, whilst at the same time she exposes the text to her own interests and prejudices. Understanding, viewed in this way, is a matter of fusing the horizons of text and reader.<sup>123</sup>

This analysis of the interpretative process has much to commend it. It is clearly the case that when an interpreter reflects on a particular text they inevitably do so in a way that has been shaped by their participation in a cultural and linguistic interpretative framework. In my case this is most clearly displayed in that my approach to the Matthean text is concerned with questions of baptism because these have arisen in my own experience of that text being read in the liturgy of the church. Conversely, the cultural-linguistic framework within which I read is one in which baptism has been practised alongside a liturgical reading of the Matthean text.<sup>124</sup> The fact that this study is being carried out at all gives eloquent testimony to Gadamer's insight that reading involves a coming together – even, to some extent, a fusion – of horizons. The metaphor of 'fusing', however, falls short of being able to describe effectively what is taking place in the interpretative encounter between reader and text. This is because the idea of 'fusing' suggests that the two horizons in fact become one. There is no sense in which the text can be understood on its own terms and there is no sense

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<sup>122</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.337 quotes Martha Nussbaum who says, 'An improvising actress, if she is improvising well, does not feel that she can say just anything at all. She must suit her choice to the evolving story, which has its own form and continuity.' Cf. Wright, *Scripture*, p.93

<sup>123</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury, 1975). See also Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), ch.11.

in which the interpretative context can be understood on its own terms - both become one, indissolubly part of the other. This goes beyond saying simply that a reading process is always affected by the context of the reader and that an interpreter's reflection on context will always in some part be influenced by the texts she has read. Ultimately, then, it is better to think less of a fusion of horizons and more of a juxtaposition of horizons. It is this act of juxtaposing horizons that helps the interpreter to improvise new performances of a text effectively.

That is to say, horizon 1, the horizon of the interpreter's cultural context is analysed as far as possible on its own terms; horizon 2, the horizon of the text, is interpreted as far as possible on its own terms; the reflections on each horizon are juxtaposed with one another such that the interpreter's imagination can be engaged to envisage horizon 3. Horizon 3 is the state of affairs that is brought into being as horizon 1 becomes transformed by fresh but faithful theo-dramatic improvisation in the light of reflection on horizon 2. In terms of the current thesis, horizon 1 pertains to the baptismal practice of the church in a post-Christian cultural environment; horizon 2 refers to the text of Matthew's Gospel; horizon 3 is that, not yet present but hoped for, state of affairs in which the baptismal theology and practice of the church is revitalised because of an imaginative, more faithful, improvisatory performance of the Gospel in new circumstances. For such a new baptismal improvisation to be faithful to the plot of the theo-drama as presented in Scripture it is important for the interpreter to gain an insight of the place of baptism within the canonical theo-drama. In the

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<sup>124</sup> *MSB*, p.7; *MWB*, pp.64, 77, 89.

present study, such an insight will be sought by reflecting particularly on Matthew's Gospel. In order to achieve such a task it is first necessary to clarify the method of textual investigation that will be employed.

#### **4) Discerning the Role of Baptism in Matthew's Account of the Theo-Drama**

The recognition that the baptismal command at the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel presents interpretative difficulties is not new. Otto Michel in his 1950 short article described the sequence of the two participles in Matthew 28.19-20 (baptising .... and teaching .... ) as 'very difficult'.<sup>125</sup> The fact that the Gospel places 'baptising' before 'teaching' is difficult because it seemingly contradicts *Didache* 7.1 which states, 'Having said all this beforehand, baptise them.'<sup>126</sup> To a church that through its history has placed weight on the importance of catechetical instruction prior to baptism, the order presented in the conclusion to Matthew's Gospel seems less natural than that described in the *Didache*. Given the recent moves in Catholic and Protestant circles to restore the catechumenate, the interpretation of Matthew 28.19-20 is no less difficult now than it was for Michel in 1950. In this thesis I aim to consider the words of Matthew 28.19-20 in the light of the Gospel as a whole with a view to understanding how the words 'Make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you' relate to the story that they conclude.<sup>127</sup> The scholarly difficulty in this area is well illustrated with reference to the work of David Bosch

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<sup>125</sup> Otto Michel; 'The Conclusion of Matthew's Gospel: A Contribution to the History of the Easter Message' in Graham Stanton ed. *The Interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew* (London, SPCK, 1983) pp.39-51.

<sup>126</sup> See E.C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (London: SPCK, 1970) p.1

who writes, 'Matthew 28.16-20 has to be interpreted against the background of Matthew's gospel [*sic*] as a whole and unless we keep this in mind we shall fail to understand it.'<sup>128</sup> However when Bosch tries to explain the order of the participles in Matthew 28.19-20 he does so not with reference to the Gospel as a whole but by claiming that the 'Matthean Jesus makes a theological statement.'<sup>129</sup> The order of these participles is thus explained with reference to a systematic view of baptism as a calling to discipleship rather than 'against the background of Matthew's Gospel as a whole.'<sup>130</sup> With respect to the baptismal command Bosch has drifted away from the commitment he makes at the opening of his essay. It is, however, just as true for the baptismal command as for other parts of the Great Commission, that if we do not interpret it against the background of Matthew's Gospel as a whole then we shall fail to understand it. There are various approaches to reading that could assist us in considering the Gospel of Matthew as a whole. Some focus attention on the original author / final redactor of a text. Others focus on the text in itself, and yet others on the reader of the text. These various approaches are briefly described below.

### **i) Focus on the Author**

Redaction Criticism is one particular reading strategy that has been primarily concerned with what the text meant at the time of its production. In the period between 1945 and 1980 the Gospel of Matthew received much scholarly attention from the perspective of redaction criticism. This work has been well documented

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<sup>127</sup> This is part of a truly contextual approach to the Gospel. As Wright has it, 'Each word must be understood within its own verse, each verse within its own chapter, each chapter within its own book, and each book within its own historical, cultural and indeed canonical setting,' in *Scripture*, p.93.

<sup>128</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York, Orbis, 1991) p.57.

<sup>129</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p.79

elsewhere so it will suffice here to summarise the redaction critical approach.<sup>131</sup> Redaction criticism can broadly be separated into two forms of investigation. These have been characterised as ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ forms of exegesis.<sup>132</sup> The ‘vertical’ approach has also been described as composition criticism and is concerned with the overall structure of the Gospel in order to determine the theological aims of its redactor.<sup>133</sup> The ‘horizontal’ methodology of redaction criticism builds on the work of form criticism and source criticism and is dependent upon adopting a viewpoint in respect to the sources that were available to the evangelist. Whilst the majority of scholars are persuaded by the two source hypothesis which claims that Matthew had access to Mark, Q and his own separate sayings source, it would be a mistake to claim that this view is undisputed.<sup>134</sup> Having developed an opinion on the nature of the sources available to the evangelist it is then possible to assess how the author had re-arranged, modified and, hence, interpreted those sources.<sup>135</sup>

The ‘vertical’ approach, sometimes referred to as ‘composition criticism’, is concerned with the composition of the Gospel as a whole in search of the themes and structure of the Gospel. This approach is not so dependent on a particular view of the sources available to the evangelist and is more concerned with the theology of the Gospel rather than the theology of the Gospel’s final redactor. Having said this, the

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<sup>130</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p.57

<sup>131</sup> See Graham Stanton; ‘The Origin and Purpose of Matthew’s Gospel: Matthean Scholarship from 1945 to 1980’ *ANRW*, 2.25.3 (1985) pp.1889-1951

<sup>132</sup> See W.G. Thompson, *Matthew’s Advice to a Divided Community: Mt. 17.22-18.35* (Analecta Biblica 44: Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970).

<sup>133</sup> See N. Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) pp. 65-67.

<sup>134</sup> See A.M. Farrer, ‘On Dispensing with Q’ in D.E. Nineham, ed., *Studies in the Gospels* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), pp.55-86. Also B.C. Butler, *The Originality of St. Matthew* (Cambridge: University Press, 1951) and W.R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Macmillan, 1964).

<sup>135</sup> A good example of this approach to the study of Matthew is Gunther Bornkamm’s 1948 essay, ‘The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew’ in G. Bornkamm, G. Barth and H.J. Held; *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, trans. Percy Scott (London: SCM Press, 1963) pp.52-58.

‘vertical’ approach is often used in association with the ‘horizontal’ approach in order to access information relating to the community in which the Gospel was originally formed and preserved.<sup>136</sup>

It has been argued that the limitations of the redaction critical method are that it is not able to account for the meaning of the Gospel that becomes apparent when it is read as a story.<sup>137</sup> When categories such as plot, point of view and characterisation are studied they point to different aspects of a Gospel’s meaning which may or may not have been equally a part of the original redactor’s intention as those aspects drawn out by redaction criticism.<sup>138</sup> The redaction critical approach also fails to give any account of the subjectivity of the interpreter and those active pre-suppositions that are a part of any act of reading. In response to these limitations different approaches to reading Gospels have been developed, one such approach is narrative criticism.

## **ii) Focus on the Text**

The narrative character of the Gospels has been explored using methods derived from secular literary criticism. This has led to the development of an approach to reading biblical narrative which has come to be known as narrative

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<sup>136</sup> See J.D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (London: 1976) and O.L. Cope, *Matthew: A Scribe Trained for the Kingdom of Heaven* (Washington: The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Monograph Series 5, 1976). For an interesting challenge to some of the assumptions of redaction criticism see Richard Baukham, ed., *The Gospels for all Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>137</sup> Mark Allen Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990); Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1974).

<sup>138</sup> See Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, pp.1-21; Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) pp.3-13.

criticism. Narrative Criticism has been well described elsewhere.<sup>139</sup> It will suffice for me to summarise its main characteristics. Narrative criticism changes the focus of attention from the real author to the implied author of the Gospel. The implied author is not perceived as that real person in history responsible for constructing the Gospel in its final form. Rather, the implied author is a theoretical construct of a real reader on the basis of the material found in the Gospel. The goal of constructing an implied author is not to form an opinion of what the real author must have been like but to establish a perspective from which the story can be interpreted. As all narrative works have an implied author it does not matter that the real author is unknown to us, the identification of the implied author provides all that is needed in order to comprehend the literary meaning of the narrative.<sup>140</sup> When the text is approached in this way, according to the narrative critic, it is allowed to speak for itself. As opposed to historical-traditional methods of interpretation in which meaning is located 'behind the text,' narrative criticism locates meaning 'in the text.'<sup>141</sup>

As well as an 'implied author' narrative criticism also speaks of an 'implied reader'. The 'implied reader' of narrative criticism was first introduced to the world in the writings of Seymour Chatman and Wayne Booth.<sup>142</sup> The 'implied reader' is the 'implied author's' interlocutor. The actual author is not present in the text itself but there is an image of the author, the 'implied author'. This is the one who is perceived to be communicating in the world of the text. The 'implied author' has a

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<sup>139</sup> Powell, *Narrative Criticism* and Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978)

<sup>140</sup> Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, pp.5-6

<sup>141</sup> Joel B. Green, 'The Challenge of Hearing the New Testament,' in Joel B. Green ed., *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) pp.1-9

perceived interlocutor, 'the implied reader', this is a construct of a real reader; a persona which is able to respond to all the cues and promptings of the 'implied author'. The 'implied reader' in this view knows all of the things communicated by the 'implied author' and only those things. The 'implied reader' responds in 'ideal' ways to the message communicated by the 'implied author.' This technique has been applied to the Gospels by various writers. Jack Dean Kingsbury tells us that such an 'implied reader' of Matthew's Gospel 'is told by the 'implied author' the past story of Jesus of Nazareth, fully understands it, and responds appropriately to it.'<sup>143</sup> This is a problematic statement and is revealing of some of the dangers of pressing the narrative critical method too far. It seems to suggest that the 'implied reader' in this model is an actual feature of the text independent of an actual reader. This is not the case even though many writers employing this reading strategy write as though it is. The terms 'implied author' and 'implied reader' in this sense, are no more than constructs of actual readers. If an 'implied reader' can be said to fully understand, it is only because a real reader is claiming to 'fully understand'. If an 'implied reader' can be said to 'respond appropriately' it is only because a real reader is claiming to know what responding appropriately means. The notions of 'implied reader' and 'implied author' are interpretative constructs theorised by actual readers who have then granted them independent status and made them properties of the text being studied. They thus enable the actual reader to project understandings and responses onto their constructs and then to suggest that such understandings are normative. This is a way of saying "My reading of this text should be considered normative" without ever actually having to come out and say it. However, the 'implied reader'

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<sup>142</sup> See Chatman, *Story and Discourse* and Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983)

<sup>143</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, 'Reflections on 'The Reader' of Matthew's Gospel.' In *New Testament Studies* 34, (1988) PP.442-60 quoting from p.456



of narrative criticism is simply a theoretical construct. Therefore narrative criticism is as much subject to the individual reader's consciousness, social location, personal history as any other approach to interpretation.<sup>144</sup>

### **iii) Focus on the Reader**

Richard Hays has written that:

The New Testament is always read by interpreters under the formative influence of some particular tradition, using the light of reason and experience and attempting to relate the Bible to a particular historical situation.<sup>145</sup>

In this quote Hays is accepting that Biblical truth is never an entity that simply lies embedded in the Biblical text, there to be discovered, polished and presented like a diamond from a mine. Meaning derived from any text, including the Bible, emerges from an interaction between the text and reader. The perspective of the reader, her experiences, social location, faith and reading strategies will influence the kind of meaning she is able to discern in the text. In this interaction between text and reader the reader contributes something to the meaning of the text that is being read. This is to say that a story, for example, will not mean exactly the same thing for two different readers and neither can it mean the same on a second reading as it did the first time around. This is because the first reading has affected the reading

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<sup>144</sup> This is something that some narrative critics realise but rarely express. See Mark Allen Powell, *Chasing The Eastern Star: Adventures in Biblical Reader-Response Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) p.211 no.126.

subject and hence has altered the subject's ability to reflect on the text being read. The observation that any reading subject encountering a text will contribute something to the textual meaning they find therein has led to a broad field of study in literary criticism known as reader-response criticism.<sup>146</sup>

For some reader-response critics the focus of attention is on describing how actual readers read.<sup>147</sup> For others the emphasis is on the role a reader plays in reading. Those readers who wish to posit this reader's role in a conservative way will present a reflection on a reader who, sensitive to the successive promptings of the text will present a story of reading. Such an approach will flesh out a meaning of a text as understood in a particular text/reader encounter. A key thinker in developing such an approach is Wolfgang Iser.<sup>148</sup> Other reader-response critics argue that meaning does not merely emerge in the encounter between the text and a reader reading in a particular way. These more radical proponents of reader-response methodologies, such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, suggest that readers do not merely find meaning in texts, neither do readers simply contribute to the meaning they are able to find in a text. For the radical reader-response critic, readers actively make or produce the meaning of the text they are reading. According to such

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<sup>145</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament. A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1997) p. 209

<sup>146</sup> This broad category is introduced in the following: Susan Suleiman, 'Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism', in S.R. Suleiman and I. Crosman, ed., *The Reader in the Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp.3-45; Jane Tompkins, 'Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism', in J. P. Tompkins, ed., *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1980) pp.ix-xxvi; Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) pp.64-83; Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

<sup>147</sup> Norman Holland, *Five Readers Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975); Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star*, pp.28-56; Daniel Patte, *The Challenge of Discipleship. A Critical Study of the Sermon on the Mount as Scripture*. (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999).

<sup>148</sup> See especially Iser's *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction From Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974) and *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978)

thinkers a reader is free to use a text, exposing its gaps and aporias and interpreting them to develop new and innovative interpretations of the text.

In such a view the text can mean whatever the reader wants it to mean. The interpreter becomes free to use and play with textual meaning as he or she is able. This is the deconstructive move in reader response criticism. Such an approach seeks to emphasise that textual understanding is completely in the hands of the reader. It would argue that those conservative interpreters who seek to follow the promptings of the text in search of textual unity and narrative consistency are themselves producing interpretations that are ideologically and socio-culturally affected. Therefore producing a reading that reads against the text according to some ideological motive is in actuality no different from producing a so-called conservative reading.

The approach that I prefer in my reading of Matthew is one that seeks to implement a conservative reader response strategy. Whilst this is in many respects dependent on the thinking of Wolfgang Iser it also acknowledges that this search for narrative consistency in Matthew's text is ideologically motivated. It comes from the perspective of religious faith which believes that the story of Jesus presented in Matthew's Gospel can have theological meaning in the contemporary church. More specifically it emerges from the conviction that Matthew's story of Jesus can be understood as a unified narrative and that it is possible to establish the place of baptism within the overall story. If such an understanding can be presented and accepted it has the potential to inform the ongoing baptismal practice of the church.

The approach to reading implemented in my study of Matthew's Gospel is derived from Iser's theory of aesthetic response and his concept of the implied reader. Wolfgang Iser's theoretical construct, 'the implied reader', has been influential in the development of both secular and biblical reader-response criticism. We should note at this point that Iser's concept of the 'implied reader' is conceived of differently from that of Booth and Chatman which is implemented in narrative criticism. In developing the concept of the 'implied reader' Iser is dependent on the work of the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden.<sup>149</sup> Ingarden was the first to suggest that a literary work was in itself incomplete, requiring an act of consciousness to process it, realise its meaning and complete its informational gaps. For Ingarden, however, it was possible to posit true and false realisations of literary works. Iser was opposed to this view, seeking to affirm an acceptable spectrum of interpretations of any given text.<sup>150</sup>

Iser's theory of reading rests on the key concept of the 'implied reader' which, as defined by Iser, 'incorporates both the pre-structuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualisation of this potential through the reading process.'<sup>151</sup> That is the implied reader includes both the textual structure and the structured act of realisation. Iser's 'implied reader' therefore, emerges in the dialectical relationship between text and reader. The nature of the 'implied reader' is determined by the immanent features of the text being studied but 'it is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader.'<sup>152</sup> The analogy that Iser uses to bring his theory of reading into focus is that of two people gazing at the night sky

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<sup>149</sup> Moore, *Literary Criticism*, p.101

<sup>150</sup> Moore, *Literary Criticism*, p.101

<sup>151</sup> As quoted in Janice Capel Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web: Over and Over and Over Again*, JSNTSS 91 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994) p.27-28

‘who may both be looking at the same collection of stars, but one will see the image of a plough, and the other will make out a dipper.’<sup>153</sup> Iser’s ‘implied reader’ is responsive to the cues and promptings of the literary text (the fixed stars) but when there are gaps and ambiguities in the text, the ‘implied reader’ is free to negotiate them and supply meaning. For different readers the gaps in the meaning of the text will be filled in differently. This leads to a pluralism of interpretative possibilities and for Iser this is to be expected. He affirms that, ‘the potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individual realisations.’<sup>154</sup>

This approach to reading may be disturbing to some who may see it as a turning away from historical critical considerations and a rejection of the interpretative control that is a benefit of reading to discern authorial intention. It is neither my intention to turn away from historical critical considerations nor reject the importance of authorial intention as an interpretative goal. It is my intention, however, to recognise that the author’s intention in committing words to a written medium was to address a ‘context beyond the range of the human voice.’<sup>155</sup> The relationship between author and reader is different, therefore, to the relationship between conversation partners in oral-speech. Nonetheless, that which is written ‘retains its character as communicative action, in which the reader freely adopts the role of addressee of the authorial message’.<sup>156</sup> Watson makes the point that written

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<sup>152</sup> Iser, *Implied Reader*, pp.274-275

<sup>153</sup> Iser, *Implied Reader*, p.282. See, however, Stanley Fish’s challenge to Iser, ‘Why No-one’s Afraid of Wolfgang Iser’ in *Diacritics 11* (1981), pp.2-13 and also Iser’s rejoinder ‘Talk Like Whales’, *Diacritics 11* (1981) pp.82-87. Fish critiques Iser by suggesting that without the reader there are no constellations and no fixed stars. All is apparent only from the perspective of one particular set of interpretative principles. As was noted above, Fish’s theory works on the assumption of absence of normative function of communicative intention. Such an approach is theologically flawed when dealing with biblical interpretation. cf. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction*, pp.73-78.

<sup>154</sup> Iser, *Implied Reader*, p.280

<sup>155</sup> Watson, *Text and Truth*, p.98

<sup>156</sup> Watson, *Text and Truth*, p.99

communicative actions are often addressed to intended readers with a clear 'institutional profile'.<sup>157</sup> That is to say that when there is historical distance between the author and reader the success of the communicative intention is dependent upon an 'institutional continuum' which is able to function as the 'comprehensive context within which author, text and readers are comprised.'<sup>158</sup> It is, therefore, this 'institutional continuum' which mediates the historical distance between the author and reader and brings them into a certain proximity with one another.

The 'institutional profile' of Matthew's readers is characterised by an interest in following Jesus of Nazareth as his disciples. The reading presented in this thesis, although derived from reader-response criticism is one that acknowledges and adopts the intended 'institutional profile' of the author's 'communicative action'. As such it recognises in Matthew's Gospel a subject matter, namely the place of baptism in Christian theology and practice, which the author is competent to communicate about. Further to this, it demonstrates a willingness not only to read the words of Matthew, but also to consider the response that Matthew seeks to evoke. A writer though is able to communicate more than he or she intended to. This might work in the following way: The reader notices that an author has written about *x*. However, in the process of writing about *x*, the author has also said some very interesting things about *y*. *Y* may not have been uppermost in the author's intention but nonetheless the reader realises that the author has actually made a significant contribution to how *y* should be understood. The reader stands in a tradition of reading in which what the author says about *x* is held in high esteem and that what is said about *y* actually enables a deepened understanding of what is said about *x*.

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<sup>157</sup> Watson, *Text and Truth*, p.100

<sup>158</sup> Watson, *Text and Truth*, p.100

Reading about  $y$  in the author's work does not mean, therefore, that the reader is reading against the intentions of the author.

In the case of baptism and Matthew's Gospel, it may be that we could insert 'Jesus' for  $x$  and 'baptism' for  $y$  with respect to this example. Particular questions about baptism may have emerged in the world in front of the text and these questions may be of a nature that the author could not have anticipated. We cannot interpret in a way that suggests the author intended to answer such questions. We can, however, read in a way that claims to be faithful to the intentions of the author whilst also finding in his work the answers to some questions that he could never have anticipated. The conservative reader-response paradigm I bring to this work is one which acknowledges that my questions come from the world in front of the text but which seeks to find answers to those questions by reading in a way that is respectful of authorial intention. This will involve a historical emphasis that seeks to understand the meaning of the Gospel's locutions in the context of its production.

A second objection to applying Iserian reader-response principles to a Gospel is that they were developed to be applied to the modern novel. There is a need, therefore, to justify the application of this method to the very different genre of the ancient Gospel. The key to such a justification is the notion of reader involvement. Iser's phenomenology of reading is designed to explain and facilitate the inclusion of a real reader's experiences and pre-dispositions within the perceived plot of the novel being studied. Such involvement for Iser included the possibility that the story of the novel would then become included in the reader's understanding of his or her experiences. This would seem to offer possibilities to the biblical interpreter who is

seeking to understand the possible significance of a Gospel for the interpreter's ongoing faith and practice. In *The Implied Reader* Iser writes, 'Like no other art forms before it, the novel was concerned directly with social and historical norms that applied to a particular environment, and so it established an immediate link with the empirical reality familiar to its readers.'<sup>159</sup>

This has some important similarities with the action of a Gospel on a believing reader. Unlike the modern novel, a Gospel describes social and historical norms that are different from those encountered by modern day readers and so is unable to establish an immediate link with an empirical reality. However, the Gospels are concerned with the encounter between humanity and God which is focussed in the story of the life of Jesus. In this sense the Gospels provide an immediate link with the religious, theological and spiritual realities familiar to those readers who continue to profess and practice the Christian faith. A Gospel, therefore, has the potential to involve the reader in moments of Christ's ministry so that the reader may ultimately come to understand the life of Christ and its ongoing significance more clearly. As an involved reader hears the words of Christ and judges the appropriate responses to his message the reader will be inspired to respond to the circumstances of her own life differently.<sup>160</sup> Encountering the Gospels in such a way grants them the power to shape our lives by influencing the decisions we make. This approach to reading a Gospel is most responsibly implemented when the reader considers the Gospel in the light of the history of its interpretation. This ensures that any reading is grounded in a conversation with those who have studied the text in the past. The influence of this tradition is important for the reader in

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<sup>159</sup>Iser, *Implied Reader* p.xi



ensuring that appropriate attention is given to historical considerations and that the world in which the text was produced is appreciated. Reading in this way has the significant benefit of ensuring that the reader's actualisation of the potential meaning of the text through the reading process is one which is sensitive to the directing of that text and also the scholarly tradition of interpreting that text. It is clear, however, that different readers will bring different aspects of that tradition to bear on the study of any given text. In addition to this, interpreters will also be influenced and motivated by other factors. In my case, the incorporation of Mt.28.16-20 into the liturgical practices of the Christian church inevitably shapes my appropriation of that text.<sup>161</sup>

Implementing a reader-response approach to the text does not necessarily imply a rejection of historical or narrative critical approaches. Indeed historical-critical and narrative critical considerations are important aspects of the reader response approach to the Gospel that I utilise. It is important to account for how insights from each of these areas are combined in my reading of Matthew. In order to do this it will be helpful to make reference to the concept of intertextuality. Julia Kristeva defined intertextuality as 'the transposition of one (or more) system(s) of signs into another.'<sup>162</sup> Roland Barthes has further elucidated this by stating that 'the quotations from which a text is constructed are anonymous, irrecoverable, and yet already read.'<sup>163</sup> In this sense the notion of intertextuality is implicit in much historical-critical method. Critics have an interest in piecing together those sources

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<sup>160</sup> Stephen D. Moore, *Post-structuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) p.6

<sup>161</sup> cf. Iser, *Implied Reader*, pp.xi-xii and Patte, *Challenge*, p.234.

<sup>162</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) pp.59-60

<sup>163</sup> Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text' in Josue V. Harari, ed., *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979) pp.73-81, quoting from p.77.

that have been brought together to combine in the final form of a Gospel. Matthew's Gospel invites such enquiry by frequently quoting from and alluding to the Old Testament. Historical critics of the Gospel have contributed much to our understanding of the Gospel's message by identifying texts that the redactor of the Gospel may have been influenced by. This interest in the intertextual background to the Gospel's composition will be operative in my own reading.

A further implication of the theory of intertextuality is the recognition that just as the author of the Gospel had an intertextual background so the reader of the Gospel has an intertextual background also. Aichelle and Phillips have written, 'texts acquire meaning to the extent that they are situated in relation to other texts in a web of mutual interference and illumination.'<sup>164</sup> As I have encountered Matthew it has acquired meaning to the extent that it has been situated in relation to the baptismal writings of Christian denominations and aspects of the scholarly tradition of interpreting Matthew. I have sought in this introduction to give an indication of my own context and to assess how this has influenced the approach to reading that I choose to adopt. To the extent that I recognise the effect of my own 'predispositions' on the reading process, this thesis displays an affinity with the more conservative breed of reader-response criticism.

Some assumptions derived from narrative criticism are also operative in my reading of the Gospel. This is important particularly as I seek to establish the theo-dramatic plot of the Gospel and baptism's place within it. My narrative critical assumptions are:

- i) The text of Matthew's Gospel can be viewed as a unified and coherent document rather than a compilation of loosely related pericopes.
- ii) The finished form of the Gospel is the primary focus of study rather than the compositional processes that brought it into being.
- iii) The flow of the narrative should be understood according to those features that preserve continuity between episodes rather than according to the editorial activity of a redactor.
- iv) The development of themes throughout the narrative are regarded as being important for understanding the plot of the story as a whole rather than enquiry being focussed upon the nature of sub-units of text.<sup>165</sup>

In the current study my aim is to understand the significance of the baptismal command at the end of Matthew's Gospel in the light of the Gospel as a whole. This correspondingly involves me in reading Matthew's Gospel in the light of the baptismal command at its conclusion. That is, the reading I present here is from the perspective of a second or subsequent reading of the Gospel. It assumes a first reading in which the baptismal command in Matthew 28 has come as something of a surprise. It has left the reader with unresolved questions and a desire to seek the answers to those questions from a further appropriation of the narrative of Matthew's Gospel. So this reading of Matthew is one that seeks answers to questions like these:

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<sup>164</sup> George Aichele and Gary A. Phillips, 'Introduction: Exegesis, Eisegesis, Intergesis', in George Aichele and Gary A. Phillips, ed., *Semeia* 69/70 (1995) pp.7-18 quoting from p.8

<sup>165</sup> These assumptions are amongst those stated by Mark Allan Powell in 'Toward a Narrative Critical Understanding of Matthew' in *Interpretation* 46 (1992) pp.341-346

If Matthew 28.16-20 summarises some of the Gospel's key themes<sup>166</sup> then in what sense, if any, is baptism a key theme in the narrative as a whole?

If a ministry of disciple-making involves baptising and teaching then how are these two to be related in the overall process?

Given that some have suggested that the character of Jesus functions as an example for discipleship then how are we to understand the fact that Jesus commands his disciples to baptise, something that he apparently did not do himself?<sup>167</sup>

In a Gospel that seems primarily to focus on the work and nature of Christ, how are we to understand a command to baptise in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?

Whilst the appropriation of the Gospel presented in this thesis assumes the perspective of a second or subsequent reading of the Gospel it nonetheless values the nature of the text as a linear entity. That is to say, Matthew's Gospel is a story with a clear progression from beginning to middle to end. Every effort will be made to understand the text in these terms. Whilst the reader is sensitive to matters of baptism in the narrative this does not mean that, for instance, the material concerning John the Baptist is to be understood as a response to Christ's command to baptise. Rather, because Christ's baptismal command is encountered after the ministry of

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<sup>166</sup> As has been suggested by many interpreters. See note 3 on p.123 below for a list of examples.

<sup>167</sup> One example of this view is David B.Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel*, JSNTSS 42 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990) pp.249-259.

John the Baptist, the interpretative direction will require reflection on how such a command relates to John's ministry and not the other way around.<sup>168</sup>

## **5) The Shape of Things to Come in the Thesis**

In the chapters to follow I present my reflections on the three horizons to which I referred earlier. Horizon 1 is the horizon of the reading context. This reading context is explored further in Chapter Two by considering baptismal theology and practice in four paedobaptising denominations which are engaged in ministry in post-Christian cultural settings. This is intended to provide an understanding of approaches to baptism that is wider than my own Methodist perspective. This gives opportunity for my own preconceptions to be challenged by attending to the approach of others and also for the eventual conclusions of this study to be relevant to a wider constituency than my own denomination.

Chapters Three to Six will focus on a second horizon: the horizon of the text of Matthew in relation to its interpretation.<sup>169</sup> I will demonstrate, in Chapter Three, that the importance of baptism in Matthew has often been overlooked in the history of its interpretation. In Chapters Four, Five and Six I will consider the development of the Matthean narrative and the extent to which it prepares the reader to understand the baptismal command at 28.19 in a particular way. This will allow me to

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<sup>168</sup> Rowan Williams in 'The Literal Sense of Scripture', *Modern Theology* 7 (1991) pp.121-134, argues for the superiority of a diachronic approach to Scripture over a synchronic approach. The method I apply in the present thesis can be said to be diachronic in that it is concerned with the time of the text's production, its history of interpretation, the temporal context of its present appropriation and the narrative time of the text itself.

<sup>169</sup> Fred W. Burnett in 'Postmodern Biblical Exegesis', p.52, has argued thus: 'when one reads an introduction to the NT, one has already begun to read, understand and configure the NT in a certain way. However, one cannot understand the particular introduction to the NT until one reads the text

demonstrate that baptism is presented in Matthew as a symbolic ritual which points to the story of God's gracious saving activity and allows a new disciple to express repentance and acceptance of a call to follow Jesus. Such repentance and acceptance of the call to follow Jesus are the means by which the new disciple is incorporated within the sphere of God's saving grace.

Chapter Seven is concerned with a new horizon. This third horizon is a renewed baptismal performance which takes place within the cultural context described in my reflections on horizon 1. However, this renewed performance is concerned with how baptism might be thought about and practised in a way that is more faithful to Mt.28.19 but that is still relevant in post-Christian cultural settings.

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itself. .... i.e., each text has the other as its condition of possibility for a particular reading configuration (or understanding) of the other.'

## **Chapter Two**

### **Baptismal Theology and Practice in Four Denominations**

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#### **1) Introduction**

In this chapter it is my aim to provide a ‘thick description’ of the baptismal theology and practice of four Christian denominations.<sup>1</sup> Each denomination I consider practices both infant and adult baptism in a cultural milieu that could be described as post-Christian. The denominations are The Roman Catholic Church; The Church of England; The United Methodist Church of The United States of America; and The Methodist Church of Great Britain. I include this chapter as part of my reflection on the context in which I read Matthew and towards which my reading of Matthew is directed. Although this chapter is largely descriptive, it is possible, and indeed useful, to apply some preliminary evaluative criteria to the study of these denominations. For the purposes of this chapter I will therefore consider the intrasystematic consistency<sup>2</sup> of each denomination’s theology and practice especially, though not exclusively, with respect to the relationship between baptism and teaching within an overall approach to disciple-making. This is appropriate

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<sup>1</sup> This term is borrowed from Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London, Hutchinson, 1975) p.3-30. Geertz used the term in connection with his anthropological project. The ‘thick description’ I offer is of the baptismal theology, liturgy and practice of four denominations.

<sup>2</sup> The notion of ‘intrasystematic consistency’ is drawn from the theory of George Lindbeck. See *Nature*, p.64.

because each of the denominations to be studied claims, in some way, to be practising baptism in response to the command of Jesus in Mt.28.19. A further level of evaluation is concerned with the extent to which strategies to locate baptism and teaching within an overall approach to disciple-making are actually realistic and effective given the starting points of many who seek such ministry from the church in post-Christian society. It will be possible in Chapter Seven to return to questions of gospel faithfulness in baptismal theology and practice having had opportunity to reflect more fully on Mt.28.19 in the context of Matthew's Gospel as a whole (Chs. 3-6).

## **2) Baptism or Christian Initiation? Defining the Terms.**

In the various denominational documents referred to in this chapter the terms 'baptism' and 'Christian initiation' are often used. It is necessary to acknowledge at the outset that 'Christian initiation' is a term on which the various denominations of the Christian Church have failed to agree.<sup>3</sup>

Roman Catholics have set out their understanding of Christian initiation very clearly.<sup>4</sup> The Roman Catholic understanding is that Christian initiation is comprised of three distinct but related sacraments: baptism for the forgiveness of sins and new birth, confirmation for a pneumatological strengthening and finally the eucharist in which the candidate receives eternal life and is united to all God's people. This understanding is markedly different from that set forth in the findings of the

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<sup>3</sup> British Council of Churches, *Christian Initiation and Church Membership: Report of the British Council of Churches Working Party on the Theology and Practice of Christian initiation and Church Membership* (London: BCC, 1988) p.24.



International Anglican Liturgical Consultation in Toronto in 1991. This consultation published the following statement:

Baptism is complete sacramental initiation and leads to participation in the eucharist. Confirmation and other rites of affirmation have a continuing pastoral role in the renewal of faith among the baptised but are in no way to be seen as a completion of baptism or as necessary for admission to communion.<sup>5</sup>

In this statement the consultation clarified the Anglican understanding of baptism and its relationship to confirmation and the eucharist. The 1991 conference declared that baptism is complete Christian initiation and as such is the only prerequisite for participating in the eucharist. The eucharist does not form part of initiation but is a privilege of those that have been initiated through baptism. Confirmation in this scheme is a pastoral rite of affirmation and renewal of faith that is not to be understood in the same way as sacramental initiation.

The Methodist understanding of Christian initiation is akin to the Anglican position. That is, full sacramental initiation is complete in baptism and that following baptism there exists no theological barrier to a person sharing in the eucharist. The issue of admittance to the eucharist, however, is yet more complicated in the traditions of the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the United Methodist Church. Widespread pastoral practice is to invite all to the table of the

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<sup>4</sup> ICEL, 'Christian Initiation, General Introduction', in ICEL, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985) p.xii .

<sup>5</sup> 'Extract from the Findings of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, Toronto, 1991', in General Synod, *On the Way, Towards an Integrated Approach to Christian Initiation* (London: Church House Publishing, 1995) p.121.

Lord regardless of their status with respect to baptism. Celebrants will often welcome all those that love the Lord Jesus Christ whether such people have previously been baptised or not. In 2000 the Methodist Conference issued guidance to those ministering where such practice is common:

If from time to time, it is judged appropriate for unbaptised children to be admitted to the Lord's Supper, it is expected that, after due consideration, baptism will follow. It is inconceivable that a person holding out his/her hands would, at that moment, be refused bread and wine. If it is subsequently discovered that an unbaptised person of whatever age, has presented himself/herself at Holy Communion, a pastoral conversation should follow without undue delay.<sup>6</sup>

This is very similar to the policy of the United Methodist Church in the United States of America.<sup>7</sup>

This clarification of terminology provides a background for the focus of the current study, which is the theology and practice of baptism and its relationship to teaching in a process of making disciples in four denominations.

### **3) Approaches to Baptism in The Roman Catholic Church**

The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) considered some changes to the Roman Catholic position on the Christian initiation of both infants and adults. This

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<sup>6</sup> TMCP, 'Children and Holy Communion (2000)' in *Statements and Reports Volume Two*, p.187.

resulted in some recommendations in the *Sacrosanctum Concilium*<sup>8</sup> that would change the practice of initiation in the Roman Church as well as influence discussions in many Protestant traditions. About the initiation of infants the council said, ‘The rite for the baptism of infants is to be revised ..... The roles of parents and godparents, and also their duties, should be brought out more sharply in the rite itself.’<sup>9</sup> In addition to this the Council sought to stress the association between baptism and confirmation. The Council also decided to radically revise the process of initiating adults into the faith; ‘The catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps, is to be restored and to be put into use at the discretion of the local ordinary. By this means the period of the catechumenate, which is intended as a time of suitable instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals.’<sup>10</sup> In what follows I will focus on the revised initiation rites called for at Vatican II, before assessing the extent to which the Roman Catholic rites of initiation for both children and adults establish baptism, along with teaching the commandments of Christ, as part of a process of making disciples.

#### **a) The General Introduction to Christian Initiation.**

The Roman rites for baptising children and adults are prefaced by a *General Introduction to Christian Initiation*.<sup>11</sup> This general introduction demonstrates the importance of Matthew 28.19 in the Roman Catholic approach to Christian baptism. Immediately after quoting Matthew 28.19 the document goes on to say:

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<sup>7</sup> Gayle Carlton Felton, *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections For Identity and Ministry* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1997) pp.43-44.

<sup>8</sup> Full text in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1992) pp.1-282. Flannery’s work also includes *Lumen Gentium*, pp.350-440 and *Ad Gentes*, pp.813-862 which will be referred to later in this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 67

<sup>10</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 64

Baptism is therefore, above all, the sacrament of that faith by which, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we respond to the Gospel of Christ. That is why the church believes that it is its most basic and necessary duty to inspire all catechumens, parents of children still to be baptised, and godparents to that true and living faith by which they hold fast to Christ and enter into or confirm their commitment to the New Covenant. In order to enliven such faith, the church prescribes the pastoral instruction of catechumens, the preparation of the children's parents, the celebration of God's word and the profession of faith at the celebration of baptism.<sup>12</sup>

Here, in principle at least, the importance of baptism as part of a process of disciple making is made clear. There is an emphasis on the sense in which baptism involves an element of response to God's grace rather than baptism simply functioning as a sign of God's grace. Those seeking baptism are to avail themselves of the church's most basic and necessary duty, the ministry of inspiring to faith. This ministry is to be worked out amongst catechumens, parents of children still to be baptised and godparents. This is important amongst parents and godparents because 'infants are baptised in the faith of the church and brought up in that faith'.<sup>13</sup> The important ministry of the church with an infant's parents is considered more fully in the *Rite of Baptism for Children*, whilst the ministry of the church to catechumens is considered more fully in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. We will now consider these two important documents in turn.

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<sup>11</sup> *RCIA* pp.xii-xiv and *RBC* pp.vii-xiv

<sup>12</sup> *RCIA* p.xii and *RBC* p.viii

**b) Rite of Baptism of Children (RBC)**

It is envisaged, in the Roman Catholic pattern, that infants who are baptised will be involved in a process of formation in the faith so that having gradually learnt God's plan in Christ they may eventually claim for themselves the faith of their baptism. Indeed, the Rite argues that this is necessary in order for the true meaning of their baptism to be fulfilled.<sup>14</sup> In this sense the baptism of children in the Roman Catholic Church is the foundation of a wider process of forming disciples. *RBC* articulates an understanding of the local church as a community in which such formation can take place.<sup>15</sup> The vital role of the parents of the child to be baptised is outlined in the introduction to the rite:

‘Before the celebration of the sacrament, it is of great importance that parents, moved by their own faith or with the help of friends or other members of their community, should prepare to take part in the rite with understanding. They should be provided with suitable means such as books, letters addressed to them, and catechisms designed for families. The parish priest (pastor) should make it his duty to visit them or see that they are visited; he should try to gather a group of families together and prepare them for the coming celebration by pastoral counsel and common prayer. .... After baptism it is the responsibility of the parents, in their gratitude to God and in fidelity to the duty they have undertaken, to assist the

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<sup>13</sup> *RCLA* p.xiii and *RBC* p.ix

<sup>14</sup> *RBC* p.3

child to know God, whose adopted child it has become, to prepare the child to receive confirmation and participate in the holy eucharist. In this duty they are again to be helped by the parish priest (pastor) by suitable means.’<sup>16</sup>

In this approach to the formation of faith in baptised infants a great degree of responsibility is placed upon the parents. They are primary catechists for their children and are supported by the parish priest upon whom there is also placed a great responsibility. It seems right that the preparation of the parents for this demanding ministry in the life of the church is afforded considerable attention. The rite stipulates that ‘sufficient time’<sup>17</sup> be allowed for adequate preparation of the family for the celebration. It is not clear, however, what length of time may be considered ‘sufficient’ and there are no clear guidelines as to how a local community might discern when the parents of the infant to be baptised could be considered ready to begin their ministry as catechist to their child. There exists though, a certain pressure within *RBC* for the infant to be baptised quickly following birth. The baptism should take place ‘within the first weeks after birth’.<sup>18</sup> It is only in ‘the complete absence of any well-founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion’<sup>19</sup> that the baptism should be delayed. This delay is regulated according to the provisions laid down by the Conference of Bishops and in accordance with the direction of the rite which says:

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<sup>15</sup> *RBC* pp.3-4

<sup>16</sup> *RBC* pp.4-5

<sup>17</sup> *RBC* p.5

<sup>18</sup> *RBC* p.6

<sup>19</sup> *RBC* p.6

In many countries parents are sometimes not ready for the celebration of baptism or they ask for their children to be baptised even though the latter will not afterward receive a Christian education and will even lose the faith. Since to instruct such parents and to inquire about their faith in the course of the rite itself is not enough, conferences of bishops may issue pastoral directives, for the guidance of parish priests (pastors), to determine a longer interval between birth and baptism.<sup>20</sup>

Currently there are no such pastoral directives on this matter that have been issued by the Episcopal Conference of England and Wales. This serves to place the emphasis on ensuring that baptism is received as early as possible in an infant's life and does not allow for a significant period of pre-baptismal catechesis for parents. In these circumstances it is difficult to see how lapsed Catholic parents are able to fulfil their role as primary catechist to their children. Vatican II sought to emphasise the roles and duties of parents and godparents and the relationship between baptism and the other sacraments of initiation. The lack of pastoral direction on the preparation of parents suggests that such considerations are given insufficient attention in Roman Catholic pastoral practice in England and Wales.

In spite of the lack of pastoral direction to prepare parents gradually and over an extended period for the baptism of their children the liturgical celebration of infant baptism does clearly express the conviction that baptism forms part of a gradual development of discipleship. The rite alludes to Matthew 28.19 by linking baptism to an ongoing ministry of teaching in which the infant is encouraged and

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<sup>20</sup> *RBC* pp.9-10

formed to obey the commandments of Christ. The responsibility of fulfilling this ministry is clearly attributed to the parents of the infant during the liturgical celebration of the rite. The priest addresses the parents and says, 'You have asked to have your children baptised. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbour. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?' The parents respond, 'We do'.<sup>21</sup> This theme continues throughout the rite.<sup>22</sup> It is also clearly stated that the baptism of the children already points beyond itself to the celebration of confirmation and their sharing in the Eucharist.<sup>23</sup> The pre-baptismal catechesis that is possible in the first weeks after birth is insufficient to enable a lapsed Catholic parent adequately to understand what it means to catechise their infant in the way of Christ.

The Roman Catholic approach to the baptism of children can be contrasted with the rite for the baptism of adults which is especially concerned to develop understandings of initiatory process. A consideration of the adult rite leads to an awareness of the tensions between the extent of provision for Christian nurture availed to adult and infant candidates. It is to the adult rite that we will now turn.

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<sup>21</sup> *RBC* p.17

<sup>22</sup> See *RBC* p.18 in which the purpose of the homily is defined as leading the parents to a deeper understanding of the mystery of baptism and to encourage them to a ready acceptance of the responsibilities that arise from the sacrament; p.19 includes a prayer that the infant will become a faithful follower and witness to the gospel; p.23 directly quotes Mt.28.19; p.28 exhorts the parents to make it their constant care to bring up their children in the practice of the faith..

<sup>23</sup> *RBC* p.33



### **c) Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)**

Following the recommendation of the Second Vatican Council the Roman Catholic Church restored the practice of the adult catechumenate, to be structured as a staged rite, rooted in initial proclamation and continuing with the prospective convert on the journey of faith through the sacraments of initiation and beyond. This staged rite is known as the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* or *RCIA*. *RCIA* has its origins in the practice testified to in the *Apostolic Constitution of Hippolytus* (c.215AD).<sup>24</sup> *RCIA* is a collection of integrated rites that take place over an extended period of time. In this time a new convert will be introduced to the gospel of Christ, enrolled as a catechumen and nurtured in the faith, elected for the rites of initiation, intensively prepared for baptism, confirmation and first eucharist before completing the process in a period of post-baptismal catechesis or mystagogy. To facilitate this process the rite is divided into four distinct periods of time. Each period of time is separated by a liturgical step. The inter-relationship between the periods of time and the liturgical steps are shown thus:

Period of Evangelisation and Pre-catechumenate;

First step: Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens;

Period of the Catechumenate;

Second Step: Election or Enrolment of Names;

Period of Purification and Enlightenment;

Third Step: Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation;

Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy.

The period of evangelisation and precatechumenate is a time of no fixed duration or structure, for inquiry into the faith and introduction to gospel values. This is a time leading to faith and initial conversion in which candidates are given a suitable explanation of the gospel by priests, deacons, catechists and other lay people. Once a candidate has exhibited the beginnings of the spiritual life, shown an intention to change and possesses a sense of the church they can then be accepted into the Order of the Catechumens by means of the first liturgical step. This is celebrated publicly, usually on some annual date or dates, marking the beginning of the catechumenate proper, as the candidates express and the Church accepts their intention to respond to God's call to follow the way of Christ. This may be followed by a celebration of the eucharist; although the catechumens are not yet able to partake this is often included as a symbol of the goal to which their journey progresses.<sup>25</sup>

The period of the catechumenate is the time, of no fixed duration, for the nurturing and growth of the catechumens' faith and conversion to God. This is no mere period of doctrinal catechesis but instead is structured in order to provide the catechumens with an apprenticeship in the Christian faith. The catechesis is aimed at bringing to maturity those Christian dispositions that were first manifested in the catechumens at their acceptance into the catechumenate.<sup>26</sup> The catechesis is strongly related to the liturgical year, thus presenting Catholic teaching in its entirety but also enlightening faith, directing the heart towards God and nurturing a life

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<sup>24</sup> See Geoffrey J. Cuming,, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students, Grove Liturgical Study No.8*, (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1976) and E.C. Whitaker, *The Baptismal Liturgy* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1988) pp.29-51.

<sup>25</sup> *RCIA* no.68

completely in accord with the Spirit of Christ.<sup>27</sup> In this period the catechumens will grow in their practice of faith, turning to God more readily in prayer, bearing witness to Christ and practising love at the cost of self-renunciation. This will have a consequence in terms of social action. Celebrations of the word and prayers of exorcism and blessing take place throughout the process. Whenever the services of the word include a celebration of the eucharist the catechumens are to be kindly dismissed as they are not yet incorporated into God's priestly people by baptism nor are they empowered to share in Christ's new worship.<sup>28</sup>

The second liturgical step, the rite of Election or Enrolment of Names, is usually celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent. In this rite the Church formally ratifies the catechumens' readiness for the sacraments of initiation and the catechumens, now the elect, express the will to receive these sacraments. This rite is the focal point of the Church's concern for the catechumens. Therefore it is here that the bishop plays a special role in the formation of the candidates. It is the bishop who admits candidates to the rite of election and the bishop or his delegated representative who presides at the rite. In the rite itself, the catechumens are presented to the gathered community as those who are seeking to participate in the sacraments of initiation at the Easter vigil. The catechumens are invited to enrol

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<sup>26</sup> RCIA no.78

<sup>27</sup> Catechetical resources include: Christine Dodd, *Making RCIA Work: An Anthology of Material For Use In RCIA Groups* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993); Thomas H. Morris, *The RCIA Transforming the Church: A Resource for Pastoral Implementation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989). An example of a church developing its own approach is St. Marie's Cathedral Parish in Sheffield who entitle their programme *Journey Into Faith*. This takes place over thirty four sessions, five of which would be post-baptismal catechesis. These sessions take place in seven modules these are: Introduction; Aspects of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; The Catholic Church; The Sacraments of the Church; Living as a Catholic; Preparing For Easter; Catholic Life, Issues and Community.

<sup>28</sup> RCIA no.75.3

their names in the book of the elect and the celebrant declares them to be ‘members of the elect, to be initiated into the sacred mysteries at the next Easter vigil.’<sup>29</sup>

The Lenten season following this election is known as the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. It is a time of intense interior reflection rather than catechetical instruction. This spiritual reflection is assisted by the celebration of a number of preparatory rites known as the ‘scrutinies’ and the ‘presentations’. The scrutinies are solemnly celebrated on Sundays and include an exorcism. These are meant to uncover and heal all that is weak and sinful in the hearts of the elect and to strengthen all that is upright.<sup>30</sup> Holy Saturday is the culmination of the Lenten period of purification and enlightenment. On this day the elect are advised to refrain from work and gather together for rites which complete their preparation for baptism.<sup>31</sup>

Once all of this is complete there follows the liturgical rites of the sacraments of initiation, usually integrated into the Easter Vigil, by which the elect are initiated through baptism, confirmation, and the eucharist. These rites are carried out by the bishop or a delegated representative who must be a priest. The rite of baptism involves a blessing of the water, the renunciation of sin by the elect, an anointing with oil, unless anticipated on Holy Saturday, profession of faith, baptismal washing by submersion of either the whole body or the candidate’s head as the baptismal formula invoking the Trinity is said. The celebrant prays for the gift of the Holy Spirit to be upon the neophytes before anointing them with chrism and saying the

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<sup>29</sup> *RCLIA* no.120

<sup>30</sup> *RCLIA* no.128

<sup>31</sup> *RCLIA* no.186

words, 'be sealed with the Holy Spirit'.<sup>32</sup> The eucharist, the climax of the sacraments of initiation, is then shared before the Lord's Prayer is said by the whole of the people.

In the time following the initiation, usually leading to Pentecost, the new converts enter into the Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy. This is the time in which the newly initiated experience being fully a part of the Christian community by means of both pertinent catechesis and particularly by participation with all the faithful in the Sunday eucharistic celebration. This period usually closes with some sort of celebration and one year on the neophytes are brought back together to reflect on their experiences.<sup>33</sup>

*RCIA* does not simply function as a liturgical process seeking to facilitate the smooth initiation and integration of new converts into the Christian community. Much more than this, the liturgy seeks to draw out and enhance the theological commitments of Vatican II, seeking to establish them as a living tradition in the practice of the worshipping community. Examples of these theological commitments are:

- 1) that the Church is by very nature missionary;<sup>34</sup>
- 2) that this mission is fulfilled as men and women become joined to the church through baptism, confirmation and eucharist;<sup>35</sup>
- 3) that conversion is a gradual process leading to Christian maturity;<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *RCIA* no.229

<sup>33</sup> *RCIA*. See esp. p. 14

<sup>34</sup> See *Ad gentes*, no.2; *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1; *Lumen Gentium*, no. 17; *Ad gentes*, no.5; and cf. *RCIA* p.xii General Introduction number 3.

<sup>35</sup> See *Ad gentes*, no.5 *Ad gentes*, no.36; *Lumen Gentium*, no. 7; *Lumen Gentium*, no. 14; and cf. *RCIA* no.198 and *RCIA* p.xii General Introduction no. 1 and 2; also see *RCIA* nos. 75, 198 and General Introduction nos. 5 and 6; and *RCIA* nos.47 and 95.

- 4) that this missionary activity is rightly the responsibility of all members of the Christian community and that each has an important role to play.<sup>37</sup>

#### **d) RCIA and RBC: A Unified Approach to Christian Initiation?**

There is a large disparity, in the Roman Catholic approach to initiation, between the preparation offered to adults seeking baptism and the degree of preparation offered to parents who seek baptism for their children. Indeed there is a debate concerning the differences between the adult catechumenate and the very different processes accompanying baptism in infancy. This debate is well illustrated by reference to a paper by Paul Covino entitled, 'The Post-Conciliar Infant Baptism Debate in the American Catholic Church.'<sup>38</sup>

In his paper, Covino discusses four positions on the subject of infant baptism that have been proposed in response to the challenge of *RCIA*. Covino simplifies these positions in order to emphasise their differences. In reality practitioners may hold to aspects of each approach holding them together in a more nuanced way. Covino refers to these approaches as 'the mature adulthood school'; 'the environmentalist school'; 'the initiation unity school'; and 'the corresponding practice school'. The 'mature adulthood school' argues that the pattern of initiation worked out in *RCIA* should be regarded as the norm. Those who adhere to this

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<sup>36</sup> See *Ad gentes*, nos.13 and 14; and cf. *RCIA* nos.1, 4, 9.4, 42, 52a, 75 and 107.

<sup>37</sup> See *Ad gentes*, nos.35 and 36; Also *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 17 and 33; and cf. *RCIA* nos. 9, 65 106, 108, 140, 154, 161, 234 and 236.

position seek to establish Christianity as an adult faith for adults. They argue that those infants whose families seek initiation on their behalf should be enrolled in a catechetical school and only initiated at such a time as they are able to make a mature commitment to the faith.<sup>39</sup> 'The environmentalist school' is concerned with the development of faith in infants once they have been baptised. There is no desire here to make baptism an adult only experience, instead the emphasis is on the environment in which the child will develop. Adherents to this position seek to emphasise the responsibility of the Church in the life of the baptised infant, seeking to bring that child to a point of mature adult faith commitment. 'The initiation unity school,' welcomes the fact that the sacraments of initiation are celebrated consecutively and in the traditional order in the *RCIA*. Those supporting this position seek to establish the traditional order of the sacraments and their consecutive administration. Their main concern is to argue that there is no reason why an infant cannot participate in all the sacraments of initiation consecutively and in the traditional order at the time of baptism. 'The corresponding practice school,' sees the current approach to infant baptism followed by confirmation and first eucharist in maturity as complimentary to the approach of *RCIA*. This position rests on the idea that two routes into the kingdom are better than one and that the current practice has been developed to correspond with the multitude of ways that people can grow in the faith.

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<sup>38</sup>Published in Maxwell Johnson (ed.), *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995) pp.327-349.

<sup>39</sup> The rise and influence of this view is demonstrated by the necessity and force of its official rebuttal. In 1980 the Roman Catholic Church issued an *Instruction on Infant Baptism* which counters the views of those who 'think it better to delay the baptism of children until the completion of a catechumenate of greater or lesser duration ..... [or who] wish the celebration of the sacrament to be put off until such an age when an individual can make a personal commitment, perhaps even until the beginning of adult life.' Catholic Truth Society, Document 525, Number 2.

In the United States of America material is becoming available that seeks to demonstrate how *RCIA* and *RBC* form part of a coherent Roman Catholic approach to initiation and how the church might helpfully prepare and support parents who seek baptism for their children.<sup>40</sup> James Moudry argues that the adult rite illustrates important aspects of the sacrament of baptism that are no less important when children are baptised.<sup>41</sup> He observes that ‘The emphasis on conversion that marks the adult rite underlines the necessity of a living faith as the context for the celebration of infant baptism.’<sup>42</sup> He draws from this principle the implication that ‘the adult rite reinforces the need for the community to work with parents and godparents, supporting them in their own practice of the faith, which is to be the matrix for the child’s developing faith.’<sup>43</sup> Another lesson to be drawn from the adult rite is that Christian initiation is a journey that extends over time. The elaborate preparation for baptism in the adult rite is to help the candidates to receive the sacrament fruitfully. This discernment of the right time for baptism can help a parish when they are tempted to rush the baptism of infants. The parental faith context, which takes time to emerge, is an important factor in the baptism and faith development of infants.<sup>44</sup> Moudry says that ‘The goal of initiation is not to “get the sacrament” but to make disciples.’<sup>45</sup> This means that a parish should carefully consider its provision for parents in terms of pre-baptismal and post-baptismal catechesis.

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<sup>40</sup> For example, Paul Covino, ed. *Catechesis and Mystagogy: Infant Baptism* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996).

<sup>41</sup> James Moudry, ‘The Reform of Christian Initiation: An Introduction’ in *Catechesis and Mystagogy*, pp.1-18 quoting from p.3.

<sup>42</sup> Moudry, ‘Reform’, p.4

<sup>43</sup> Moudry, ‘Reform’, p.5

<sup>44</sup> Moudry, ‘Reform’, p.5

<sup>45</sup> Moudry, ‘Reform’, p.5. This language of ‘making disciples’ is indicative of Moudry’s attempt to (re-)locate Catholic baptismal practice within a framework influenced by Mt.28.19.



This appraisal of Roman Catholic approaches to baptism leads to the conclusion that whilst attention to Mt.28.19 - with its emphasis on the relationship between baptism and Christian nurture - is prominent in both official documents and in the actual practice of the *RCIA*, it is significantly less prominent in approaches to infant baptism in post-Christian cultural contexts.

#### **4) Approaches to Baptism in the Church of England<sup>46</sup>**

##### **a) Reviewing Baptismal Practice in the Church of England**

On the 13<sup>th</sup> July 1991 at the Church of England General Synod there was a debate concerning initiation practice in the Church of England. The synod discussed the question of infant baptism and considered restricting infant baptism to those children whose parents were willing and able to make the requisite promises. Also on the agenda was a discussion relating to the traditional sequence of baptism, confirmation and eucharist considering proposals to alter this traditional pattern in some cases. In addition to this there was the question of implementing a catechumenal approach to adult initiation within the Church of England. The conclusion of these debates was to pass a motion asking the House of Bishops to commission more detailed studies so that these debates could be more effectively informed. One of the clauses in this motion concerned the question of the catechumenate and recommended that the synod 'ask the House of Bishops in consultation with the Board of Education, Board of Mission and the Liturgical

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<sup>46</sup> In 1998 revised initiation services for use in the Church of England were authorised by General Synod. Matthew 28.16-20 is a recommended Gospel reading in three of the four sets of readings suggested for use at a baptism. See General Synod, *Common Worship: Initiation Services* (London: Church House Publishing, 1998) p.90. In this way the Church of England indicates, in the context of its liturgical provision, that Mt.28.19 is a key text for their understanding of baptism.

Commission to prepare a paper on patterns of nurture in the faith, including the catechumenate'.<sup>47</sup>

The paper that resulted from this request was entitled *On the Way: Towards an Integrated Approach to Initiation* which also took the opportunity to respond in detail to the *RCIA*. In the course of making this response the group recognised that any consideration of the Christian initiation of adults would have significance for approaches to the Christian initiation of children.<sup>48</sup> In what follows we will consider the background to *On the Way*, its main recommendations and its relationship to the ongoing baptismal practice of the Church of England.

## **b) The Background to *On the Way*:**

### **i) A Culture of Residual Christianity**

In assessing attitudes to Christianity in British society the report made use of the work of John Finney.<sup>49</sup> Finney provides information on the kind of people that are coming to faith in contemporary society and also an assessment of the spiritual make-up of society.

Finney studied the experience of more than 500 adults from different denominations who had recently made a public commitment to the Christian faith. It was found that the most important factor for those coming to faith was a personal relationship with a practising Christian. It was also found that people normally

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<sup>47</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.11

<sup>48</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.76

<sup>49</sup> Especially his two books: *Finding Faith Today* (Bible Society/Churches Together in England, 1992) and *Church on the Move* (London, DLT, 1992)

experience Christianity gradually and that Christian commitment takes time to develop. Finney concluded that people on average grow into Christianity over a period of about four years. A great majority of those interviewed expressed a sense that membership of a nurture group was either helpful or very helpful in the development of their faith. The fellowship of a local congregation and the friendship of the clergy were identified as important factors in a journey to faith and people expressed a sense of the importance of human relationships and lived Christianity rather than an over reliance on the communication of a verbal message.<sup>50</sup> *On the Way* concludes from this that 'A pastoral framework for supporting people coming to faith needs to recognise that most experience this as a gradual process.'<sup>51</sup>

*Church on the Move* provides an assessment of the spiritual make up of British society as perceived by Finney in 1992.<sup>52</sup> On the basis of his research, Finney offers some observations which, he judges, would apply to the majority of people in Britain:

These people have virtually no knowledge of the Christian faith, yet many of them pray. When they swear they usually blaspheme 'Christianly' but know nothing of what or who they are invoking. .... It cannot be expected that the concept 'God' has any meaning whatsoever; 'sin' has no personal significance and 'life after death' is

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<sup>50</sup> Reported in General Synod, *On The Way* pp.20-21

<sup>51</sup> General Synod, *On The Way* p.21

<sup>52</sup> General Synod, *On the Way* summarises Finney's findings on pp.22-24

as likely to mean reincarnation as a more traditionally Christian view.<sup>53</sup>

The report recognises the gulf between well-formed Christian discipleship and the faith perspective of many in British society. It refers to the importance of ‘bridge situations’<sup>54</sup> in which people can explore Christianity at its most basic at their own pace. The report mentions various courses that have sought to achieve this and also refers to the work of Peter Ball and others who have successfully applied a full scale catechumenate akin to the *RCIA* in some Anglo-Catholic parishes.<sup>55</sup> The report draws together the experience gained through such approaches in the Church of England and places it alongside the Roman Catholic experience of *RCIA* with a view to proposing an approach to Christian initiation in the Church of England that takes account of such experience.

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<sup>53</sup> Quoted in General Synod, *On the Way* p.24. I recognise this description as applicable to those that I would normally encounter in my own baptism, marriage and funeral ministry. I would add that in my experience people tend to think of life after death as something which is available to ‘good people’ and that such people go to a better place regardless of any ‘religious’ conviction or practice. Also it is very common for those that hold such a view to say that they do not believe in God. With respect to baptismal ministry people claim to be Christian but either do not know who Christ is or do not believe in his claims or in the church’s claims about his ongoing significance. Their Christianity is located in their culture and society which they still describe as ‘Christian’.

<sup>54</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.24

<sup>55</sup> See General Synod, *On the Way*, pp.14-15 and also pp.129-139 which presents research into the use of the catechumenate within the Church of England in 1992-93. *On the Way* mentions the courses *Saints Alive* and *The Alpha Course* in connection to catechumenal styles of learning. A course called *Emmaus* has also been widely used in an Anglican and ecumenical context. It is beyond the scope of this project to comment on the material presented in these courses. For an excellent critical review of *Alpha* see, Stephen Hunt, *Anyone for Alpha?: Evangelism in a Post-Christian Society* (London: DLT, 2001). For an insight into Peter Ball’s work with the catechumenate in the Church of England see *On the Way* pp.35-36 and also Peter Ball and Malcolm Gundry, *Faith on the Way: A Practical Parish Guide to the Adult Catechumenate* (London: Mowbray, 2000). Other useful resources in this area include Malcolm Gundry, *Evangelization Through The Adult Catechumenate* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1991) and John W. B. Hill, *Making Disciples: Serving Those Who Are Entering The Christian Life* (Toronto: The Hoskin Group, 1991). *Emmaus* material is presented in three stages. Stage 1 *Contact*; Stage 2, *Nurture* and Stage 3, *Growth*. The material in Stage 3 is vast and includes several short courses arranged under the following headings: *Christian Lifestyle*; *Growing as a Christian*; *Knowing God and Your Kingdom Come*. Mike Booker and Mark Ireland offer a thoughtful evaluation of such approaches in *Evangelism – Which Way Now?: An Evaluation of Alpha, Emmaus, Cell*

## **ii) A Culture of Attachment to the Ritual of Infant Baptism**

The culture of residual Christianity is well demonstrated in the experience of the Church of England with respect to its ministry of infant baptism. It is the experience of a large number of parishes in the Church of England that families with little or no church contact often request baptism for their children. *On the Way* speaks of 'The clash of expectations' that exists when non church-going parents request baptism for their children:

Parents may well be moved by little more than social convention or they may have profound but inarticulate feelings of their child's need of God's favour; they are likely to have very little sense of what might be expected or asked of them. Clergy and congregations are often sharply aware of the demands as well as the joys of public Christian discipleship. The two groups have very different starting points and there is often, in the nature of things, too little time for the clash of expectations to be explored.<sup>56</sup>

*On the Way* refers to aspects of Anglican thought and practice that have sought to respond to this 'clash of expectations'. There is reference to the writings of Ronald Dowling who is an Anglican priest in Australia. Dowling proposes three key principles that should be embodied in pastoral practice. These are that: 'The sacraments are the celebration by, of and for the gathered Christian community,

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*Church and Other Contemporary Strategies for Evangelism* (London: Church House, 2003) esp. pp.12-60.

Preparation for parents and godparents of infants is essential, and the responsibility for the entire baptismal process, including preparation belongs to the whole church.<sup>57</sup> Some of the pastoral strategies of local congregations to achieve this ideal are listed in the report. These are:

Care and expense being taken to welcome and affirm enquiring parents;

The involvement of lay people in welcoming and in baptismal preparation;

The provision of supporters to provide prayer and help to parents;

The provision of parents and toddlers groups to provide support and an accessible starting point for further exploration;

The provision of help and material to encourage the personal formation of the child. Particularly interesting are various signs of the adoption of some sort of staged baptismal rite. Common is the use of the *Alternative Service Book's* service of thanksgiving as a first stage for all couples rather than an alternative to baptism;

Another practice is the holding of a brief prayer service a day or two before the baptism. This provides an opportunity to rehearse the baptism as well as space for quiet prayer for the child and the family.<sup>58</sup>

These initiatives seem to have their basis in a commitment to implement an intentional process of Christian nurture, however minimal, in relation to baptism. They seem to recognise that the potential for the future growth of the child into a mature disciple of Christ is more likely to be realised if the faith and commitment of the child's parents are also nurtured. Such approaches co-exist, however, with

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<sup>56</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.85

<sup>57</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.80

practices which do not offer any preparation or ongoing support whatsoever for parents and godparents. In these situations a time is simply arranged to meet the priest at the font. Alongside this there are priests who either refuse baptism to families with no church background or impose stringent qualification criteria, for example church attendance for six months prior to baptism.<sup>59</sup> *On the Way* seeks to propose pastoral and evangelistic strategies that can enable the church to respond very positively to parents who seek baptism for their children but who have had little or no previous contact with the church and its message.

### **c) On The Way and RCIA**

The authors of *On the Way* cautiously endorse the approach to initiation modelled in the *RCIA*.<sup>60</sup> They particularly appreciate the integration of evangelism, Christian formation and liturgy that lies at the heart of the *RCIA*.<sup>61</sup> The group prefers to refer to a 'catechumenal process' rather than adopting the term 'catechumenate'. It is noted that terms such as 'catechumen' and 'catechumenate' have historically been used to relate to the unbaptised. It is recognised, however, that in a post-Christian context in which enquirers have often been baptised in infancy, it is inappropriate to use terms which seem to undermine the baptism such people have already received. Instead the term 'catechumenal process' is favoured and is used in the way suggested in the 1991 Toronto Statement:

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<sup>58</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, pp.80-81

<sup>59</sup> See General Synod, *On the Way*, p.83

<sup>60</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.38

<sup>61</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.38

The catechumenal process begins with the welcome of individuals, the valuing of their story, the recognition of the work of God in their lives, the provision of sponsors to accompany their journey, and the engagement of the whole community in both supporting them and learning from them. It seeks to promote personal formation of the new believer in four areas: formation in the Christian tradition as made available in the Scriptures, development in personal prayer, incorporation in the worship of the Church, and ministry in society, particularly to the powerless, the sick and all in need.<sup>62</sup>

*On the Way*, therefore, does not recommend that the Church of England adopt a formal catechumenate akin to the *RCIA*. Instead it seeks to affirm approaches to evangelism and formation within the Church of England that embrace aspects of catechumenal process. The report also seeks to identify ways in which such approaches might be improved and how such practice might be extended.<sup>63</sup>

#### **d) Implications of Catechumenal Process for Infant Baptism**

*On the Way* recognises that any consideration of catechumenal process and the sacramental initiation of adults inevitably raises questions concerning approaches to infant baptism. The Report considers such questions with particular reference to the institutional framework in which the initiation of children takes place and also with regard to the place of infant baptism within a wider understanding of Christian

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<sup>62</sup> As quoted in General Synod, *On the Way*, p.30

<sup>63</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, pp.2-3



initiation as a whole.<sup>64</sup> The Report speaks of the ‘clash of expectations’ between non-churchgoing parents who seek baptism for their children and clergy or congregations.<sup>65</sup> Much of the thinking in the Report about the challenge of the catechumenate to the practice of infant baptism revolves around a consideration of how this ‘clash of expectations’ might be managed.

The report acknowledges that, at its heart, the principle of catechumenal initiation is concerned with welcoming the individual in baptism and accepts the responsibility of nurturing their faith in a way appropriate to their circumstances and capacity.<sup>66</sup> Catechumenal process, therefore, encourages ‘respectful engagement with the starting point of unchurched parents; and the creation of space and an appropriate context in which genuine encounter and welcome can occur.’<sup>67</sup>

Part of the church’s response to this issue of respectfully engaging with the starting points of unchurched parents is to enter into a re-consideration of the concept of a proxy profession of faith made by the parents on behalf of the infant to be baptised. *On the Way* reminds us that this is a tradition that goes back to the third century and the baptismal practice of Hippolytus.<sup>68</sup> The report also notes that in *The Book of Common Prayer* the godparents answer ‘in the name of the child’ when asked questions of faith. Also there are no explicit demands made regarding the nature of parental faith.<sup>69</sup> *The Alternative Service Book (ASB)*, by contrast, calls upon parents to make the baptismal renunciations and profession of faith in their own

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<sup>64</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.76

<sup>65</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.85

<sup>66</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.77

<sup>67</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.87

<sup>68</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.87

<sup>69</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.87

name as well as that of the child. The approach of *ASB* in this respect has been widely criticised within the Church of England. Many object to 'the tone of the rite, to its absence of welcome and to its apparent failure to accept the goodwill of the parents at this moment. A second criticism objects to the bracketing of the parents' and the infant's baptismal profession. .... Some object that this has the effect of disguising the real commitment to Christ being made on behalf of the child in the act of baptism. .... Others object to the requirement that the parents should make a personal commitment of the seriousness of a baptismal commitment at this moment when the child and not themselves is the focus of the rite.'<sup>70</sup> On the other side of the debate are those that would defend the requirement of parental faith on pastoral grounds. Advocates of this point of view would suggest that 'the child's only chance of the meaningful Christian nurture implied by its baptism is the full involvement of a believing parent.'<sup>71</sup> The authors of *On the Way* judge that the problem with this pastoral defence of the principle of parental faith is that it 'does not take seriously the starting point of many parents, and therefore risks asking too much too soon. And forces people to make statements in the rite for which they are not yet ready.'<sup>72</sup>

When the Church of England published revised rites of Christian initiation in 1998, intended to replace those in *ASB*, it re-instated the tradition of proxy speaking by the parents, godparents and sponsors on behalf of the infant to be baptised. The proxy nature of the renunciations and the profession of faith is only made clear in the rubrics to the rite.<sup>73</sup> Hence for those saying the words, sponsors who are usually unaccustomed to processing the subtleties of liturgical rubric, it feels like they are

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<sup>70</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, pp.87-88

<sup>71</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.88

<sup>72</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, pp.88-89

<sup>73</sup> General Synod, *Common Worship*, p.63

making this profession for themselves. In fact they are not. This represents a carefully thought through compromise which allows the more rigorous practitioners of infant baptism to emphasise the importance of parental faith, whilst the more indiscriminate can satisfy themselves that unbelieving and uncommitted sponsors are not speaking hypocritically when they recite the words.

*Common Worship* provides a commentary on the rationale behind the inclusion of a proxy profession in this form. The rationale explains that although proxy speaking takes place as the infant is presented for baptism ‘committed Christian faith is presupposed in parents and godparents, but that in practice the extent of such faith is often limited and unarticulated. .... [Therefore] questions ought not to ask more than can realistically be expected. .... While a high level of serious commitment to the child’s development is required of parents and godparents of child candidates, this needs to be expressed in terms of encouragement and to recognise that baptismal sponsors are themselves still on a journey of faith that they will continue in companionship with the newly baptised. .... It is, of course, presupposed that pastoral practice secures an explanation of this rationale to the parents, godparents and sponsors in advance of the service itself.’<sup>74</sup>

The logic of this explanation seems to be inherently flawed. Firstly it seems difficult to sustain a position that conceives of sponsors who have not established a pattern of regular contact with a Christian community but who have a ‘committed Christian faith.’ Secondly, if one imagines that baptismal sponsors have a faith that has remained unarticulated then it seems to follow that such sponsors will not have entered any significant period of training in the faith and practice of Christianity. If

this is the case then the sponsors will not truly appreciate what it might mean for them to give ‘a high level of commitment’ to the development of the child in the Christian faith. Thirdly, it seems clear that if the faith of the sponsors has remained unarticulated and that there has not been a significant attempt to communicate the faith and practice of Christianity to them then it would surely have proven impossible for pastoral practice to have secured an explanation of the subtle and nuanced rationale for the inclusion of proxy speaking in the form referred to.

Part of the rationale for the inclusion of proxy promises in *Common Worship* is the desire not to ask more of unchurched parents and godparents than can reasonably be expected.<sup>75</sup> However, even if we are to say that the parents do not really profess anything in the service because they are speaking on behalf of their child, it is still entirely reasonable that we should ensure that a good understanding has been reached about what they are getting their children into. This is only possible after the church and family have spent a significant amount of time together thinking through the significance of the rite. A great deal of encounter needs to take place before a parent can understand what it means for their child to ‘submit to Christ as Lord’.<sup>76</sup>

Within the baptismal rite parents are asked, ‘Will you pray for them [their children], draw them by your example into the community of faith and walk with them in the way of Christ?’<sup>77</sup> It is difficult to understand how an ‘unchurched’ parent can be expected to grasp what this question and others like it are demanding of them without significant encounter taking place prior to the celebration of the rite.

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<sup>74</sup> General Synod, *Common Worship*, pp.200-201

<sup>75</sup> General Synod, *Common Worship*, pp.200-201

<sup>76</sup> General Synod, *Common Worship*, p.64

<sup>77</sup> General Synod, *Common Worship*, p.63

It seems unfair and unkind to expect them to do so. Some kind of significant catechumenal and mystagogical provision for the parents of infant baptismal candidates is desperately needed. Without this time and commitment offered by the church to the parents and by the parents to the church, it is very difficult for 'unchurched' parents to begin to understand the nature of their child's baptism, or indeed, their own. Such a period of encounter should be seen as a gift of the church to the parents and vice-versa. It should not be seen as an onerous demand. Only in this way can the church legitimately claim that they are not asking more of these parents than can be reasonably expected.

Gilly Myers writes to justify the inclusion of proxy speaking in *Common Worship*. In her argument she also demonstrates the importance of significant encounter between parents and church prior to the celebration of baptism. It seems from her argument that the inclusion of proxy speaking in the rite only really begins to make sense in conjunction with such a significant period of encounter:

[A]t the end of the day, when we have spent time with the parents, explored their journey with them and tried to make connections with the road of faith, and explained the gospel in accessible and relevant ways, we may still see no outward sign of faith emerging. Nevertheless, when the parent continues to ask for the child's baptism, we cannot deny the sacrament.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Gilly Myers, *Using Common Worship. Initiation: A Practical Guide to the New Services* (London: Church House, 2000) p.37

Theologically, the Church of England is committed to the notion that parental faith should not be a barrier to the baptism of a child. It makes it clear in various places however, that parental faith is presupposed in the rite and that parental commitment to the nurture of a baptised child is expected.<sup>79</sup> There is also an acknowledgement that many who request baptism for their child have little appreciation of what the church pre-supposes and expects.<sup>80</sup> If the church seriously expects such parents to move beyond a mere sense of social convention to an appreciation of the demands and blessings of Christian discipleship then the church needs to be prepared to invest love, time and energy in catechumenal encounter with such parents. *On the Way* makes recommendations regarding the development of a catechumenal process for parents approaching the baptisms of their children. These recommendations include:

[P]roviding a context in which the parents feel affirmed and supported and in which they can begin to explore the implications of Christian discipleship; exploring ways of staging the rite of baptism so that families and congregation are able to experience it as a celebration of Christ; to present baptism so that it is clear that growth in faith and participation are integral to Christian initiation and not additions to it; openness to the possibility of inviting individuals or families to enrol as enquirers.<sup>81</sup>

The Church of England has yet to endorse these recommendations formally.

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<sup>79</sup> General Synod, *Common Worship*, pp.63, 200-201

<sup>80</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.85

<sup>81</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.89

### **e) Unfinished Business**

*On the Way* makes several suggestions concerning the further development of the project towards an integrated approach to Christian initiation in the Church of England. Many of the suggestions and commitments made have not yet been fulfilled. For instance, the report recommends that a new Church of England Catechism be prepared.<sup>82</sup> It also proposes that extensive liturgical provision be made available to surround baptism, providing rites to support those preparing for baptism and those beginning to live out their baptism. Such rites would also support parents as they prepare for and begin their ministry as baptismal sponsors to their children.<sup>83</sup> It is also recommended that any revised baptism service for infants should incorporate rites which enable baptism to be experienced as a 'staged baptismal rite'. This would extend the time period over which a family experiences and reflects upon the nature of baptism.<sup>84</sup> When the *Common Worship* initiation services were published in 1998 they did not include any provision for a 'staged baptismal rite'.<sup>85</sup> These positive recommendations from *On the Way* seem to have been lost. The recommendations are very much in keeping with an approach to baptism which seeks to locate the sacrament within a process of disciple-making in which obedience to the commandments of Christ can be taught. A rediscovery of these recommendations from *On the Way* would represent significant progress in the Church of England as it seeks to practice baptism faithfully in response to Mt.28.19-20.

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<sup>82</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.3

<sup>83</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.4

<sup>84</sup> General Synod, *On the Way*, p.81

<sup>85</sup> The term 'staged baptismal rite' comes from General Synod, *On the Way*, p.81.

## **5) Approaches to Baptism in the United Methodist Church (UMC)**

### **in the United States of America**

A statement on the United Methodist understanding of baptism was adopted by the 1996 General Conference of the UMC. The statement is called *By Water and the Spirit*.<sup>86</sup> *By Water and the Spirit* was developed in response to a climate of theological questioning and uncertainty in the UMC with respect to baptism. The final form of the document reflects the work of a number UMC scholars that have contributed a great deal to the UMC understanding of baptism.<sup>87</sup> In what follows I present my reflections on that document and also on the services of the Baptismal Covenant that are included in the United Methodist Book of Worship.<sup>88</sup>

United Methodist baptismal theology and practice are considered according to the sense in which teaching obedience to the commandments of Christ is considered to be a complementary ministry to that of baptism within a framework of making Christian disciples.<sup>89</sup> Reflecting in this way seeks to determine the extent to which Mt.28.19-20 has influenced the development of baptismal thought in the United Methodist tradition. It will become clear that the baptismal understanding presented in *By Water and the Spirit* is one which is informed by a strong sense of

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<sup>86</sup> The text I refer to in this chapter is to be found in a volume containing both *By Water and the Spirit* and a study guide for the statement. This text is by Gayle Carlton Felton and is called *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1997).

<sup>87</sup> Notable examples being: Gayle Carlton Felton, *This Gift of Water: The Practice and Theology of Baptism Among Methodists in America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992); Laurence Hull Stookey, *Baptism: Christ's Act in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982); William H. Willimon, *Remember Who You Are: Baptism – A Model for Christian Life* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1980) and James F. White, *Sacraments as God's Self-Giving* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983)

<sup>88</sup> These are to be found in United Methodist Publishing House, *Book of Worship* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1992) pp.81-114



the relationship between baptism and the formation of Christian disciples. Indeed the statement itself is offered as a tool for making disciples.<sup>90</sup> In what follows I will consider *By Water and the Spirit* with reference to what it says concerning:

- i) Traditional United Methodist Perspectives on Baptism;
- ii) Our human need for the divine gift of grace;
- iii) Theological reflection on the meaning of baptism;
- iv) The baptism of infants and adults;
- v) The relationship between baptism and nurture.

#### **i) Traditional United Methodist Perspectives on Baptism**

The statement advocates an understanding of baptism which is attributed to John Wesley and which seeks to blend both ‘sacramental and evangelical aspects’<sup>91</sup> of baptismal understanding. Drawing on the work of Felton,<sup>92</sup> the statement argues that John Wesley’s appreciation of baptism could be described as both ‘sacramental’ and ‘evangelical’. There is reference to his Anglican heritage and his understanding that in baptism ‘a child was cleansed of the guilt of original sin, initiated into the covenant with God, admitted into the church, made an heir of the divine kingdom, and spiritually born anew.’<sup>93</sup> In this sense the baptismal theology of Wesley could be described as ‘sacramental’. That is, baptism was regarded as ‘the ordinary means

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<sup>89</sup> Matt. 28.16-20 is referred to in *By Water and the Spirit* on p.17 and again on p.46. In this sense we are simply asking to what extent UMC is faithful to one of its own stated sources of influence.

<sup>90</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.i

<sup>91</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.1

<sup>92</sup> Felton, *This Gift of Water*, pp.13-48

<sup>93</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.1

that God had designated for applying the benefits of the work of Christ in human life'.<sup>94</sup> For Wesley, the act of baptism was effective as well as symbolic.

Wesley's 'sacramental' view of baptism was balanced by an understanding of the need for a baptised person to grow into mature commitment to Christ. This aspect of Wesley's understanding is regarded in *By Water and the Spirit* as 'evangelical'. That is to say that 'without personal decision and commitment to Christ, the baptismal grace is rendered ineffective.'<sup>95</sup> The statement argues that Wesley regarded baptism to be part of a lifelong process of salvation in which the baptism of an infant is followed in later life by a willing response expressed in terms of Christian discipleship.

The statement recognises that during its history, the Methodist Church in America had lost an appreciation of baptism as sacrament. This was due, in part, to an over emphasis on the importance of an individual's decision for Christ as the means of salvation. In this climate, 'infant baptism was variously interpreted and often reduced to a ceremony of dedication. Adult baptism was sometimes interpreted as a profession of faith and public acknowledgement of God's grace, but was more often viewed simply as an act of joining the Church. By the middle of the twentieth century, Methodism in general had ceased to understand baptism as authentically sacramental. Rather than an act of divine grace, it was seen as an expression of

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<sup>94</sup> Felton, *By Water*, pp.1-2

<sup>95</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.2



human choice.’<sup>96</sup> The statement notes that since 1964 the denomination has been making efforts, in official documents, to recover the sacramental nature of baptism.<sup>97</sup>

## **ii) Our Human Need of the Divine Gift of Grace**

*By Water and the Spirit* reflects on the nature of human fallenness. It contrasts a vision of humanity as it was intended with the vision of humanity as it is.<sup>98</sup> The statement defines original sin as ‘an inherent inclination towards evil’ that may be expressed as ‘errant priorities, deliberate wrongdoing, apathy in the face of need, cooperation with evil and injustice.’<sup>99</sup> This fallenness, the statement argues, means that all people are ‘in need of divine mercy and forgiveness.’<sup>100</sup>

In response to this condition of sin, God is said to have acted preveniently. This is expressed in the history of the Old Testament covenant community of Israel and especially in the person of Jesus. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus have revealed to us all that can be comprehended about the nature of God and, crucially, have broken the power of sin and death. All of this is possible because of the prevenient action of God. As *By Water and the Spirit* puts it, ‘Since God is the only initiator and source of grace, all grace is prevenient in that it precedes and enables any movement that we can make towards God.’<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.3

<sup>97</sup> This renewed sense of baptism as sacrament in United Methodism is expressed in the Services of the Baptismal Covenant in the *Book of Worship*, p.87 no.1.

<sup>98</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.9

<sup>99</sup> Felton, *By Water*, pp.9-10

<sup>100</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.10

<sup>101</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.10. See also United Methodist Publishing House, *Book of Worship* p.87 no.1

*By Water and the Spirit* recognises that this grace of God is received by faith which is understood as both a gift and a response. 'It is the ability and willingness to say "yes" to the divine offer of salvation.'<sup>102</sup> This affirmative answer to God's prompting is expressed as the human being becomes aware of utter dependence on God and resolves to surrender selfish desires and trust in God's mercy. Such a response to God will involve a turning away from sin and a turning towards God. This faith is related to God's grace and is an expression of a person's sharing in the benefits of Christ's work. The United Methodist Church understands baptism to be a means of God's grace. In this sense it takes its place alongside Holy Communion, preaching, teaching, prayer, fasting, Bible study and the fellowship of disciples meeting for mutual support and encouragement. Baptism and Holy Communion, however, have a special significance within these means of grace. This is because they are 'effective means of God's presence mediated through the created world. ... Combining words, actions, and physical elements, sacraments are sign-acts which both express and convey God's love.'<sup>103</sup> The United Methodist Church holds that, God's grace expressed and conveyed in the sacraments must be accepted by human faith if it is to transform human lives.<sup>104</sup>

### **iii) Theological Reflection on the Meaning of Baptism**

*By Water and the Spirit* affirms several principles that United Methodists regard to be central to the meaning of the sacrament of baptism. One such principle is the idea of covenant. The United Methodist liturgical provision for the celebration

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<sup>102</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.11

<sup>103</sup> Felton, *By Water*, pp.12-13

<sup>104</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.13 See also *Book of Worship* p.82 and p.88 no.4

of baptism is headed 'Services of the Baptismal Covenant'<sup>105</sup> and hence the covenantal theme of baptism has acquired considerable prominence in the UMC. Such an understanding is rooted in an appreciation of God as covenant maker with humanity. This covenant making God is revealed initially in the covenant with Israel. The circumcision of male infants is regarded as a sign of this covenant.<sup>106</sup> *By Water and the Spirit* refers to the death and resurrection of Jesus as a fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy that God would establish a new covenant. This new covenant brings into being a new covenant community, the church.<sup>107</sup> The statement asserts that a covenant is 'instituted through a special ceremony and expressed by a distinguishing sign.'<sup>108</sup> United Methodists therefore express their understanding of baptism thus, 'The baptism of infants and adults, both male and female, is the sign of this covenant.'<sup>109</sup>

One effect of the prominence of covenant theology in UMC baptismal practice is the strong emphasis on the promises and responsibilities of all parties involved in the covenant. *By Water and the Spirit* affirms that 'The covenant connects God, the community of faith, and the person being baptized; all three are essential to the fulfilment of the baptismal covenant. The faithful grace of God initiates the covenant relationship and enables the community and the person to respond with faith.'<sup>110</sup> This understanding contributes to the ability of the church to focus on the relationship between baptism and Christian nurture, not just for new candidates for baptism, but for the whole people of God. There is a recognition that

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<sup>105</sup> United Methodist Publishing House, *Book of Worship*, pp.81-114

<sup>106</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.18, citing Gen.17.1-14 and Ex.24.1-12

<sup>107</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.18, citing Jer.31.31-34 and 1 Cor.11.23-26

<sup>108</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.17.

<sup>109</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.18. Felton does not cite any scriptural reference to support this alignment of baptismal ritual to covenantal sign. Whilst this is derived by comparison of baptism to circumcision the report could also have made reference to Col.2.11-12.

members of a new covenant community established in baptism have a responsibility to grow in discipleship and to encourage other members of the community to do the same. This view of baptism encourages the Christian community to view their own baptism as a rite with significance for their ongoing Christian expression rather than simply a one off ritual moment. In *By Water and the Spirit* the UMC consistently emphasises the responsibility of baptised people to remain open to the benefits of God's grace and to present those benefits to others. Hence, the UMC is able to acknowledge the relationship between baptism and the ongoing Christian nurture of the baptised.

#### **iv) The Baptism of Infants and Adults.**

The UMC practices the baptism of both infants and adults, believing that every person, regardless of age, stands in need of the grace of God symbolized in the sacrament. In adult baptism the UMC expects that the candidate will be in a position to consciously profess the faith, whereas in infant baptism the UMC looks for mature faith to be developed in the candidate as he or she is nurtured in the Christian faith. This Christian nurture of the baptised infant is the responsibility of the infant's parent(s) and the community of faith.<sup>111</sup> Increasingly in the West societies can be termed post-Christian. The UMC recognises the decline in Christian belief and commitment in American society and that this will lead to more people reaching adulthood without being baptised. *By Water and the Spirit* acknowledges that 'contemporary society demands more attention to evangelizing, nurturing, and

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<sup>110</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.18

<sup>111</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.27

baptizing adult converts.’<sup>112</sup> This recommendation is supported by considerable resources to assist churches in the implementation of catechumenal approaches to baptism.<sup>113</sup> A catechumenal approach is also recommended to prepare parents for the celebration of the children’s baptisms.<sup>114</sup>

With respect to infant baptism in a post-Christian context, *By Water and the Spirit* directs:

The baptism of infants is properly understood and valued if the child is loved and nurtured by the faithful worshipping church and by the child’s own family. If a parent or sponsor (godparent) cannot or will not nurture the child in the faith, then baptism is to be postponed until Christian nurture is available. A child who dies without being baptized is received into the love and presence of God because the Spirit has worked in that child to bestow saving grace. If a child has been baptized but her or his family or sponsors do not faithfully nurture the child in the faith, the congregation has a particular responsibility for incorporating the child into its life.<sup>115</sup>

This understanding of the practice of infant baptism holds the sacrament of baptism and the expectation of Christian nurture inseparably together. United Methodists are left in no doubt that the Christian baptism of an infant is only appropriate when there exists a realistic opportunity for the ongoing Christian nurture

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<sup>112</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.27

<sup>113</sup> Benedict, *Waters*; William P. McDonald, *Gracious Voices: Shouts and Whispers for God Seekers* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1996); Lester Ruth, *Accompanying the Journey: A Handbook for Sponsors* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1997); Grant S. Sperry-White, *Echoing the Word: The Ministry of Forming Disciples* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1998).

<sup>114</sup> Benedict, *Waters*, pp.123-137

<sup>115</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.29

of that infant. This can be contrasted with the Church of England's view that even when a parent has been instructed and shows no willingness to nurture their child in the faith, baptism cannot be withheld from the child for the child remains an object of God's grace as does the family.<sup>116</sup> This highlights different views about the relationship between baptism and God's grace. The UMC holds that if God's grace is truly to be conceived as prevenient then it is clear that it precedes even baptism and is not instituted by baptism. The UMC recognises that even when a child is not baptised, God's saving grace is operative for that child. They also realise that, 'The faithful covenant community of the Church serves as a means of grace for those whose lives are impacted by its ministry.'<sup>117</sup> This means that a postponement of infant baptism is not a denial of God's grace, even though it might be associated with considerable disappointment for a family. God's grace continues to function for the family, beckoning them to Christ. The Christian community continues to be a means of the grace of God in its ongoing ministry to that family.

#### **v) The Relationship Between Baptism and Christian Nurture**

*By Water and the Spirit* recognises that Christian nurture 'enables Christians to live out the transforming potential of the grace of their baptism.'<sup>118</sup> Such nurture begins prior to the baptism of either an infant or an adult and, it is hoped, continues throughout their lives. The statement makes clear that such nurture should always be appropriate to the 'stages of life and maturity of faith of individuals.'<sup>119</sup> As in the Roman Catholic approach to Christian nurture, worked out in *RCIA*, the UMC

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<sup>116</sup> See Myers, *Using Common Worship*, p.37

<sup>117</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.28

<sup>118</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.36

<sup>119</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.35



regards Christian nurture to be more than cognitive learning and reflect a commitment to spiritual formation. This would involve the bringing of a person to acknowledge his or her need of salvation, to an acceptance of Jesus Christ as saviour and a willingness to commit to a life of Christian service. Such a journey in Christian nurture will involve the candidate in a public ritual of Christian discipleship. For those baptised in adulthood there is the opportunity to give testimony to the grace of God in a service of baptism and confirmation. For those baptised in infancy, who have grown into discipleship in later life, there is the opportunity to be confirmed and also to give testimony to the grace of God. The UMC understands confirmation to be a repeatable act. The services of the Baptismal Covenant make clear that 'the first and primary confirming act of the Holy Spirit is in connection with and immediately follows baptism.'<sup>120</sup> As such a person grows into Christian discipleship it is appropriate for this act of the Holy Spirit to be repeated, indicating a new stage in the individual's journey of faith.<sup>121</sup>

### **c) Disciple-Making at the Centre of a United Methodist Understanding of Baptism**

The UMC, in its provision of liturgy, its expression of baptismal understanding and practice contained in *By Water and the Spirit*, and in other scholarly publications referred to at the beginning of this section, has made considerable progress in becoming a denomination with a profound baptismal spirituality. There is an impressive emphasis on the role Christian baptism plays in initiating, shaping and resourcing ongoing Christian discipleship. The importance of

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<sup>120</sup> Felton, *By Water*, p.39

<sup>121</sup> See Felton, *By Water*, pp.35-40 and United Methodist Publishing, *Book of Worship*, pp.111-114

such Christian nurture into the fullness of discipleship is regarded as an essential aspect of baptism itself. Nowhere in the official literature of the denomination is baptism understood as something that is distinct and separate from Christian nurture. Everywhere the two are regarded as belonging one with the other: mutual expressions of humanity's need of saving grace and our gift of new life in Christ. There is a high degree of intrasystematic consistency in UMC theology and practice in this regard and a large corpus of resources has been made available to assist local churches in implementing these principles. In terms of my stated criteria of evaluation, namely the extent to which baptism and teaching exist as complementary ministries within a framework of disciple-making, the UMC appears to be very strong indeed.

## **6) Approaches to Baptism in the Methodist Church of Great Britain**

Several aspects of British Methodist baptismal thinking and practice have already been discussed in Chapter One of this thesis. A brief reminder of the material considered there is necessary in order to set the scene for what follows. Since 1975 the Methodist Church, in its authorised baptismal liturgies, has quoted the words of Mt.28.16-20,<sup>122</sup> thus emphasising the importance of this text in its baptismal practice. It is also useful to recall the words of the introduction to the 1975 authorised baptismal service which exhorted, 'A solemn obligation rests upon parents to present

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<sup>122</sup> See Methodist Conference Office, *MSB*, p.7 and *TMCP*, *MWB*, pp. 64, 77 and 89.

children to Christ in baptism.’<sup>123</sup> It is helpful, however, to remember that, for decades, reservations have been expressed within British Methodism about the appropriateness of baptising the children of non-practising parents.<sup>124</sup> The two poles of this debate are often referred to as the rigorist and indiscriminatist positions respectively. A rigorous practitioner of baptism would only baptise the children of committed Christian parents, whilst an indiscriminate practitioner of baptism would baptise the children of all that come seeking baptism regardless of questions of faith and commitment. Needless to say there are many positions between these two extremes.<sup>125</sup>

In what follows I seek to widen the consideration of British Methodist baptismal thought and practice with reference to the last full scale British Methodist report on baptism which was approved by the Conference of 1987. This report is far from recent and does not reflect adequately British Methodist thought and practice at the present time. ‘Christian Initiation (1987)’ was approved by the Conference midway between the authorisation of baptismal liturgies in 1975 and 1999 respectively. A comparative study of these two forms of liturgical provision will helpfully delineate some current issues in British Methodist baptismal thought and practice. In all of this I seek to evaluate Methodist thought and practice according to its effectiveness in locating baptism, in relation to teaching obedience to the commandments of Christ, in a process of Christian disciple making. In this way it is possible to consider the extent to which British Methodism responds to the words of Mt.28.19-20.

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<sup>123</sup> See Conference Office, *MSB*, p.2

<sup>124</sup> Cf. TMCP, ‘Statement on Holy Baptism (1952)’, p.34

### **a) The Report on Christian Initiation (1987)**

British Methodism, unlike its American sibling, has not recently presented a statement intentionally defining denominational understanding with respect to baptism. The last report to come close to this goal was the 1987 report on 'Christian Initiation'.<sup>126</sup> Even that report, however, was of a different nature to the UMC's *By Water and the Spirit*. Whilst the report came about as a request from the Plymouth Conference of 1982 for 'a thorough examination at a fundamental level of the whole theology and practice of Christian initiation in the Methodist Church',<sup>127</sup> its findings were particularly directed towards two pastoral issues of the day. These were, the position of some Methodist ministers who felt 'unable in conscience to baptise infants' and the predicament of adult Christians, already baptised as infants, who sought re-baptism as an expression of an experience of renewal.<sup>128</sup>

*Christian Initiation* (1987) considered some key NT passages along with evidence from the history of the church, in order to move towards recommendations on how the church should respond to these problems. Surprisingly, given its central prominence in the Methodist baptismal liturgy and its function as dominical command to practise baptism, Mt.28.16-20 was not considered in the report. The report, therefore, did not articulate an understanding of baptism as a complementary ministry to teaching obedience to the commandments of Christ in an overall framework of disciple-making.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. TMCP, 'Called to Love and Praise' p.43

<sup>126</sup> See TMCP, *Statements and Reports Volume Two*, pp.63-101

<sup>127</sup> TMCP, 'Christian Initiation', p.63

<sup>128</sup> TMCP, 'Christian Initiation', p.63

<sup>129</sup> Perhaps it is also significant that the report only mentions John's baptism of Jesus to argue that the evangelists pass quickly over the event. Later, in Chapter Four, I will show that this does not take seriously what is being communicated in Matthew's account. Indeed, I will argue that it is only when

The biblical material considered was organised in the report under three headings. These were:

- a) Passages where the divine initiative comes to the fore,<sup>130</sup>
- b) Passages where the repentance and faith of the baptised is to the fore,<sup>131</sup>
- c) The consistent emphasis on the once-for-allness of Christian baptism.<sup>132</sup>

Especially relevant to our consideration of the relationship between baptism and teaching, within a framework of disciple-making, in the British Methodist Church is the commentary offered in the discussion of repentance and faith. At this point the report asks a question, which it does not seek to answer. The question, however, has continued relevance for Methodist baptismal understanding and practice. It relates to the need for baptismal candidates (or their sponsors when the candidate is an infant) to demonstrate repentant faith. The question is asked in recognition that the mission of the church in a post-Christian environment takes a different character to the mission of the church in the first century.<sup>133</sup> The report asks whether or not the church should still expect repentant faith to be demonstrated in the lives of baptismal candidates and/or their sponsors. We will see below that the baptismal liturgy, authorised for use by the Conference of 1999, suggests an

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the Gospel is viewed as a narrative whole, with the baptism of Jesus seen as part of the context for Christ's command to baptise in Mt. 28, that we can be fully aware of the baptismal message that emerges throughout the narrative.

<sup>130</sup> TMCP, 'Christian Initiation', p.67. Here special reference is made to Rom.6.3-4, Gal.3.27, Col.2.12, Jn.3.5, Acts 2.38, Acts 22.16, Acts 2.39 and 1 Cor.7.14.

<sup>131</sup> 'Christian Initiation', p.68. Here special reference is made to Mt.3.11, Mk.1.4, Lk.3.3, Acts 13.24, Acts 19.4, Acts 2.38,41, Acts 8.12-13, Acts 16.14-15, Acts 16.33-34, Acts 18.8 and Acts 19.2-3.

<sup>132</sup> TMCP, 'Christian Initiation', pp:68-70. The argument recognises that 'it was precisely the once-for-allness of John's baptism which distinguished it from the regular ablutions of ritual purification particularly as practised in the Qumran community.'

<sup>133</sup> TMCP, 'Christian Initiation', p.68

affirmative answer to the question. We will also see, however, that the interpretation of the 1999 liturgy in British Methodism has not always been consistent with the substance of that text as a whole.

The 1987 report did not offer guidance on how baptism and teaching might be combined in an approach to making Christian disciples. This means that the most recent advice to the people of British Methodism on the Christian nurture of the baptised and their sponsors was put forth as long ago as 1966. Much of this advice was simply a re-statement of that which was offered in 1952.<sup>134</sup> The guidance calls for seven days notice, prior to the baptism, to be given to the minister in order to permit interview and preparation. In this time it is envisaged that ‘all necessary instruction’ will be given by the minister or other suitable representative of the church. Even in its day this advice was overly optimistic. It does represent, however, a commitment to the concept that the Christian nurture of the candidate for baptism is an integral part of the ministry of baptism itself. Such a commitment was absent from the thinking presented to and accepted by the Methodist Conference in 1987.

#### **b)The 1975 and the 1999 Authorised Baptismal Liturgies**

In the absence of a recent report on baptismal theology in British Methodism it would be useful to consider a comparison between the authorised baptismal liturgies of 1975 and 1999 respectively.<sup>135</sup> This is helpful in discerning theological

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<sup>134</sup> See TMCP, ‘Statement on Holy Baptism (1952)’, pp.37-38 and ‘Parents and Infant Baptism (1966)’, in *Statements and Reports Volume One*, p.39

<sup>135</sup> In 1975 two alternatives were provided. These were for infants and those who could answer for themselves with public reception into membership or confirmation. In 1999 there were four different

developments, with respect to baptism, in the intervening period. One particular comparison is significant in understanding some views in contemporary British Methodism with respect to the relationship between baptism and Christian nurture. In the 1975 liturgy for the baptism of infants, parents or guardians were asked to make promises prior to the baptism being administered. These promises were a pledge of commitment to the ongoing task of nurturing the Christian faith of the child.<sup>136</sup> In the 1999 service, such promises are only made once baptism has been administered.<sup>137</sup> This is to emphasise that baptism is not a response to such promises, rather the promises are a response to the grace of God offered in baptism. This is consistent with the Methodist theology of prevenient grace. That is to say, God's grace is offered to us before we are able to make any response to it.

In the 1975 service there is no point at which parents or guardians are required to make an explicit statement of their own Christian faith or their own repentance. There is an affirmation of faith but this is said by the congregation as a whole not the parents or guardians in particular.<sup>138</sup> The repentant faith of the parents or guardians is implicit, however, in the whole service. In the 1999 service the parents are required to voice explicitly their own repentant faith prior to the baptism of their child. This is in the form of two questions and subsequent responses. To each question the response is 'By the grace of God, I do.' The two questions are 'Do you turn away from evil and all that denies God?' and 'Do you turn to God trusting

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services each taking into account a different set of pastoral circumstances. In the 1975 service there is a concentration on the candidate for baptism (See *MSB* p.7), whereas the 1999 services focus more on the nature of the sacrament, presented as a gift of God and an invitation to respond (See *MWB* pp.60 and 63). In the *MSB* there is an emphasis on the expectation that the candidate will be nurtured and grow in Christian faith (See *MSB* pp.11-13) in the *MWB* this emphasis is followed by a concern for the ongoing significance of baptism in the lives of all Christians (See *MWB* p.95).

<sup>136</sup> Conference Office, *MSB*, p.9

<sup>137</sup> TMCP, *MWB*, p.94

<sup>138</sup> Conference Office, *MSB*, p.10

in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and in the Holy Spirit as Helper and Guide?’<sup>139</sup> This repentant faith is the context in which the baptism takes place and, as Neil Dixon has argued,<sup>140</sup> its affirmation properly comes prior to the administration of baptism. This does not deny the prevenient action of God because the parents respond ‘By the grace of God I do’ as they affirm their repentant faith.

Obviously, a person motivated to seek baptism for their child by little more than social custom will need significant help in understanding the commitment to ‘trust in Christ as Lord and Saviour and in the Holy Spirit as Helper and Guide.’ For such a person repentant faith will emerge by the grace of God expressed in the devoted and loving ministry of the church. If repentant faith is the proper context for baptism, then the ministry of the church to encourage such repentance needs to be viewed as part of God’s grace poured out in baptism. *Christian Initiation* (1987) questioned the ongoing importance of repentant faith in the lives of candidates for baptism and/or their sponsors. *MWB* seems to answer this question categorically. By placing a statement concerning the repentant faith of the baptismal candidates, and/or their sponsors, prior to the water rite itself, the 1999 authorised baptismal liturgy affirms that repentant faith is the proper context for Christian baptism. In spite of this, the importance of repentant faith as the context for baptism is not universally acknowledged within British Methodism. Reference to a debate in the *Methodist Recorder* in February and March 2002 demonstrates this effectively.

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<sup>139</sup> TMCP, *MWB*, p.91

<sup>140</sup> See Neil Dixon, *Wonder, Love and Praise: A Companion to the Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003) p.60. Neil Dixon was the convenor, chair and secretary of the Liturgical Sub-Committee responsible for the 1999 service.



The debate was initiated by the pastoral decision of a church not to baptise a child suffering from leukaemia because the child's parents did not fulfil a commitment to attend services beforehand. The policy of the church involved was to insist on regular church attendance of families prior to the baptism of children and to seek some ongoing commitment to church attendance following the baptism of the child.<sup>141</sup> The *Methodist Recorder* sought clarification on the issues surrounding this controversy from a Connexional spokesperson. The response made reference to *MWB* and the fact that the parental promises are now located after the baptism has been administered. The following conclusions were drawn from this:

By not putting the promises before the baptism we are stating there is no condition to the baptism. Therefore there is no condition for receiving God's grace.<sup>142</sup>

This is a view that I have heard repeated numerous times by practitioners of baptism in British Methodism. It is open to question however. Firstly it does not seem to be consistent with the *MWB* rite itself. It is true that the ordering of the rite seems to communicate a strong sense that the making and fulfilling of post-baptismal promises is not a pre-requisite for baptism. This is a very different thing from saying that 'there is no condition to the baptism'. The 1999 rite, as we have seen, makes it very clear that the repentant faith of parents (and godparents) is regarded as the proper context for the baptism of an infant. If the candidate is an adult then the repentant faith of the candidate is regarded as the proper context for the baptism. It would appear then that the liturgy itself does not justify a practice of unconditional

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<sup>141</sup> See *Methodist Recorder* on Thursday, February 21, 2002, p.3 and also subsequent letters printed on March 7<sup>th</sup> and March 14<sup>th</sup> both on p.7

baptism in the Methodist Church. On the contrary, repentant faith of candidates and / or their sponsors is regarded as the condition upon which a person can be baptised. Secondly, the statement does not seem consistent with traditional Methodist understandings of grace and soteriology. The statement 'there is no condition for *receiving* God's grace' is open to question. Methodism has traditionally sought to emphasise the prevenient nature of God's grace. That is to say, God works to bring about the salvation of human-kind before we are able to do anything to save ourselves. This prevenience is demonstrated in the incarnation, living, dying and rising of God's son Jesus. It continues as the Spirit is poured out in the lives of individuals convicting them of their sin and prompting them to embrace Christ through repentance, faith and discipleship. Thus the gift is offered before we can do anything for ourselves but it is only *received* as human beings turn to accept it. Hence Wesley could preach:

'By grace' then 'are ye saved through faith.' Grace is the source, faith the condition, of salvation.<sup>143</sup>

Wesley goes on to define this saving faith. He describes it as that which:

Acknowledges the necessity and merit of His (Christ's) death, and the power of His resurrection. It acknowledges His death as the only sufficient means of redeeming man from death eternal, and His resurrection as the restoration of us all to life and immortality. ...

Christian faith is then, not only an assent to the whole gospel of

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<sup>142</sup> *Methodist Recorder*, February 21, 2002, p.3.

Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ; a trust in the merits of His life, death and resurrection.<sup>144</sup>

It is entirely consistent, therefore, with traditional Methodist doctrine to suggest that there is a condition to *receiving* God's grace. This condition has been understood for centuries within Methodism to be that faith which trusts in Jesus.<sup>145</sup> It is wholly appropriate then for *MWB* to require a statement of repentant faith to be made prior to the application of water in a celebration of Christian baptism. This has extensive implications for the practice of baptismal ministry in a post-Christian setting. If non-church going parents seek baptism for their child, then it is incumbent upon practitioners of baptism to take steps to see that these parents understand what it might mean for them to 'turn to God, trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and in the Holy Spirit as helper and guide.'<sup>146</sup> It would then be important to encourage within their lives those dispositions of heart that would enable them to say such words with integrity. This places a great emphasis on pre-baptismal catechesis. In a post-Christian setting, the ministry of introducing candidates/sponsors to the story of Jesus with its implications for human living becomes an important part of pre-baptismal and post-baptismal ministry. Indeed, if the prior ministry is carried out with love and care then there is a greater chance of having the opportunity to carry out the latter.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> 'Sermon 1: Salvation By Faith' in *Sermons Several Occasions* (London: Epworth Press, 1944) (first published in 1746) p.2

<sup>144</sup> Wesley, 'Sermon 1', p.3

<sup>145</sup> For a detailed definition of this faith see Wesley, 'Sermon 1', pp.2-4

<sup>146</sup> TMCP, *MWB*, p.91

<sup>147</sup> The recent Methodist resource, Morley, *All This For You*, may be a helpful resource as part of this process but more comprehensive resources are required.

The liturgy, official reports and comments by Connexional representatives reveal that considerable ambiguity and disagreement continues in British Methodism with respect to the relationship between baptism and Christian nurture. The Methodist Church of Great Britain would benefit from a re-appraisal of these issues in its ongoing approach to Christian baptism in a post-Christian age.

## **7) Conclusion**

Each of the four denominations considered in this chapter have, in one way or another, referred to Mt.28.19-20 as a source of influence with respect to baptismal theology and practice. It has, therefore, been appropriate to consider, in a preliminary way, the extent to which the baptismal theology and practice in these four denominations have located baptism as part of a process of making Christian disciples in which teaching obedience to the commandments of Christ is viewed as a complementary ministry. Following my consideration of Matthew and its interpretation in Chapters Three to Six, it will be possible in Chapter Seven to consider how the significance of baptism in the dramatic saving activity of God as presented in Matthew's Gospel should inform baptismal ministry in a post-Christian setting.

In this Chapter it has been possible to recognise that the Roman Catholic Church, through its commitment to the catechumenate, places substantial emphasis on the Christian nurture of those baptised in adulthood. At present, however, there does not appear to be a similar emphasis placed upon nurturing those baptised in infancy and their sponsors into mature disciples of Christ. The Church of England

was also considered. Its 1995 report, *On the Way*, was found to have made several important recommendations that sought to emphasise the important relationship between baptism and Christian nurture. It was noted, however, that several of these recommendations have yet to be implemented in the Church of England. The United Methodist Church published a statement on baptism entitled, *By Water and the Spirit* in 1996. This statement and the authorised baptismal liturgies of the denomination demonstrate considerable commitment to ensuring that Christian nurture continues to be regarded as an integral dimension of baptism. The development in Christian discipleship of those baptised in infancy or adulthood and their sponsors is considered to be an important element of baptism. Indeed the whole community of faith is reminded of its ongoing baptismal responsibility to grow in discipleship and encourage others to do the same. The Methodist Church of Great Britain gives Mt.28.18-19 central prominence in its baptismal liturgy. There has been no recent consideration, however, within British Methodism, of the relationship between baptism and teaching in a framework of making Christian disciples. Hence there is a need for British Methodism to re-assess its baptismal theology and practice in the light of Mt.28.19-20 and also in response to the particular challenges of post-Christian society. This is not to suggest that Mt.28.19-20 is the only important text when considering baptismal theology and practice but it is one that British Methodism has, on the one hand given central prominence to, and on the other hand has overlooked.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Two Tendencies In The Interpretation of Matthew**

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#### **1) Introduction**

In Chapter Three I begin to reflect on the place of baptism in the Gospel of Matthew and its interpretation. In dealing with the Gospel and its interpretation together like this I am recognising that interpretative enterprise provides a level of understanding that is supplementary to the text but which contributes to the ways in which it can be understood by contemporary readers. Fred W. Burnett has argued that ‘when one reads an introduction to the NT, one has already begun to read, understand and configure the NT in a certain way. However, one cannot understand the particular introduction to the NT until one reads the text itself. .... i.e., each text has the other as its condition of possibility for a particular reading configuration (or understanding) of the other.’<sup>1</sup> In Chapters Three to Six, therefore, I present my reflections on the Gospel of Matthew and the tradition of its scholarly interpretation. In some instances it will be necessary to refer to the Gospel

in order to show how the tradition of interpretation has overlooked aspects of its message. In others it will be important to refer to aspects of the tradition of interpretation in order to support the interpretation of the Gospel that I seek to propose. In this process it is important to recognise that the text of the Gospel is always the primary object of study but that the Gospel is always understood in relation to what others have said about it. In what follows in this chapter I consider and challenge two particular tendencies that I discern in the tradition of interpretation of Matthew.

The first interpretative tendency I seek to address is the scholarly inclination to emphasise the theme of teaching in the Gospel of Matthew without a corresponding awareness of the Gospel's motif of baptising. Undoubtedly the theme of teaching is important in the Gospel but this has often been emphasised at the expense of the theme of baptising.<sup>2</sup> To illustrate this tendency I will consider the work of B.W. Bacon who particularly highlighted the importance of the theme of teaching within the Gospel of Matthew and has been followed by several others in so doing.

Following this I will reflect on how the Great Commission has often been referred to as the Gospel's conclusion but that scholarly activity in this respect has failed to give sufficient attention to the importance of the baptismal command in

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<sup>1</sup> Burnett, 'Postmodern Biblical Exegesis', p.52

<sup>2</sup> Richard B. Hays, 'The Gospel of Matthew: Training for the Kingdom of Heaven' in *Moral Vision*, pp.93-111; Mortimer Arias and Andrew Johnson, *The Great Commission* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992) esp. pp.11-34; David J. Bosch, 'Matthew: Mission as Disciple Making' in *Transforming Mission*, pp.56-83 Ernst Von Dobschütz, 'Matthew as Rabbi and Catechist', trans. Robert C. Morgan in Graham Stanton, ed., *The Interpretation of Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1983) pp.19-29; Paul Minear, *Matthew: The Teacher's Gospel* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982).

concluding a baptismal emphasis within the Gospel.<sup>3</sup> In so doing I will refer primarily to the work of David Bauer who has displayed this interpretative tendency in his work, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel*. In later chapters I will argue that the baptismal command in Matthew 28.19 should be understood as an integral part of the Gospel's conclusion. It evokes in the reader the memory of the baptismal themes encountered in the narrative and emphasises that this baptismal understanding should continue to be part of the post-resurrection ministry of the church.

## **2) B. W. Bacon: Matthew's Teaching Gospel**

B.W. Bacon was greatly exercised in discerning the sources from which our canonical Gospels were compiled.<sup>4</sup> In investigating Matthew in this way he built on a number of assumptions that formed the basis of his study. Bacon argued that the sources behind our canonical Gospels dictated three principal lines of enquiry. These he described as '[T]he story of Jesus' career as prophet and messianic leader up to his tragic fate in Jerusalem'; 'the nature and content of his message' and 'the permanent significance of his personality and work for the history and practice of

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<sup>3</sup> Examples of this are manifold. See P.F. Ellis, *Matthew: His Mind and His Message* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1974) p.22 who describes Mt. 28.16-20 as 'a table of contents placed at the end'; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) p.593. Gundry, however, does attempt to deal with the baptismal command (p.596) but he does not consider baptism as a key theme in the Gospel. He merely describes the Trinitarian aspect of the command as evidence of 'Mattheanisms'; Daniel J. Harrington, *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991) p.416; David J. Bosch, 'Matthew: Mission as Disciple-Making', p.57, writes with regard to Matthew 28.16-20, 'all the threads woven into the fabric of Matthew, from chapter 1 onward, draw together here'; Donald Senior, *Matthew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998) p.344; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (Dallas: Word Books, 1995) p.881; Richard B. Hays, 'The Gospel of Matthew', pp.93-111 esp. 93; Tom Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2, Chapters 16-28* (London: SPCK, 2002) p.205; to name but a few!

<sup>4</sup> See B.W. Bacon, *Beginnings of Gospel Story: A Historico-critical Enquiry into the Sources and Structure of Mark* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1909); 'The "Five Books" of Matthew Against the Jews'. *Expositor* 15 (1918) p.56-66; 'Jesus and the Law: A Study of the First Book of Matthew



religion'.<sup>5</sup> Bacon delineates the sources which correspond most closely to each of these categories, suggesting that Mark's Gospel should be associated with the first as this is the earliest extant Gospel and is attributable to John Mark an associate of the apostle Peter.<sup>6</sup> The third category is related to the Gospel of John because 'only in this late product of the Hellenistic Church has the ultimate question of religious values been placed in the foreground.'<sup>7</sup> Bacon's description of the sources that best correspond to the second category gives a clear summary of the source theories that underpin his work and which have influenced much subsequent redaction criticism:

The second conducts to a record of the teaching of Jesus no longer extant save as it may be reconstructed from extracts made by the canonical evangelists. Mt and Lk contain considerable sections not found in Mk which cannot have been derived by either from the other, but coincide even more closely in language than the sections which they independently derive from Mk. This "double tradition" material, as it is still often called, has come to be known as Q (from the German *Quelle* = Source), although it is not itself the source, but only the most easily traceable factor of a lost work which we shall designate S, drawn upon independently by Mt and Lk to supplement Mk's deficiencies of teaching material. S cannot, of course, be fully reconstructed from Q alone, though the Q material shows enough of inner consistency to prove it derived by Mt and Lk from a single Greek document. Nevertheless with Q as a nucleus.<sup>8</sup>

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(Mt. 3-7). *JBL* 47 (1928) p.203-31; *The Making of the New Testament* (New York: Henry Holt, 1912); *Studies in Matthew* (New York: Henry Holt, 1930)

<sup>5</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.vii

<sup>6</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, pp.vii - viii

<sup>7</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.ix

Bacon is clear then that he argues for two main synoptic sources which he designates as Mk and S. He does, however, recognise three classes of material which he encounters in pursuit of those sources. He accords to them the designations Q, which is explained above, P which refers to that “single tradition” material which is in Matthew only or Luke only and which Bacon believed to have its origins in S, and R which is that material that is supplanted into a Gospel by the redactor himself.<sup>9</sup> Implicit in all of this is the suggestion that Matthew is not to be approached from the perspective of understanding the nature of Jesus’ activity as prophet and messianic leader nor as a document which sheds light on the fate of Jesus in Jerusalem. Neither should Matthew be understood as a basis for discerning the permanent significance of Christ’s personality and work. Rather Matthew, for Bacon, is to be regarded as a text which speaks to us about the nature and content of Christ’s message. Even then Matthew is not to be considered of worth in its own right but only insofar as it can shed light on an earlier source when taken in association with Mark and Luke. This itself depends upon a commitment to a particular source theory, to which Bacon holds strongly and which is described above.

In *Studies in Matthew* Bacon declares his aim which is to ‘clear the way for such appreciation of the great religious Teacher as can only be gained by placing the witness of Mt in right relation to the higher resources and more sympathetic touch of Lk.’<sup>10</sup> In order to achieve this Bacon makes other assumptions which he fails to adequately acknowledge. The first is an assumption pertaining to the structure of the Gospel. Bacon enters into a circular presentation which asserts that the structure of Matthew is given, therefore he arranges his interpretation according to that given

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<sup>8</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.viii

<sup>9</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.ix

structure, and then uses this arrangement to argue that the structure of Matthew is such. It is interesting that the tradition of Matthean scholarship attributes to Bacon the theory that Matthew is structured around five main discourses (teaching blocks).<sup>11</sup> Bacon however, acknowledges that '[A] half century ago it was recognised that its [Matthew's] compiler has followed the plan of aggregating his teaching material from all sources into five great discourses corresponding to the oration codes of the Pentateuch, each introduced, like the Mosaic codes, by a narrative section, each closing with a transition formula as the reader passes from discourse to narrative.'<sup>12</sup> This structural assumption that Matthew is ordered around teaching material is not necessarily an anomalous one. It is, however, a mistake to move from this to conclude that Matthew's Gospel is significant only because it bears witness to Christ's teaching.<sup>13</sup>

This has ramifications for how one is to conceive of the mission of the church. When Bacon considers this mission he conceives of it in the following way:

[The Gospel's] compiler conceives it as the chief duty of the twelve to be "scribes made disciples to the kingdom of heaven" (11.52). It is their function, in the words of Jesus, to evangelize the world by "teaching all men everywhere to obey all things whatsoever I have commanded you"

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<sup>10</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.x

<sup>11</sup> See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew: Vol. 1* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) p.59; David R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988) pp.27-30 and Kingsbury, *Structure*, pp.2-7.

<sup>12</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.xiv

<sup>13</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, pp.vii-viii

(28.19 f.). Mt's own task could only differ from the disciples' as respects method, his being indirect and literary instead of direct and oral.<sup>14</sup>

Bacon's assumptions about the structure of the Gospel, Matthew's use of sources, and the identity and aims of the redactor have led to an interpretation of the Gospel that reduces the post-Resurrection activities of the disciples of Jesus to the presentation of Christ's teaching. It seems clear that Matthew's Gospel leads to the conclusion that one important activity of the post-Easter community of disciples was to present the teachings of Jesus. The Gospel, however, explicitly states in the baptismal command that the mission of the church is to be more than teaching alone. If one was to choose a clause from the Gospel's conclusion and use it exclusively to prove the intentions of the redactor then one could just as easily suggest that the redactor's aim was to present an understanding of Christian baptism. One could infer therefore that the mission of the church was to baptise. If one did this without a consideration of the teaching command then it is clear that one would be in error. The Gospel suggests that teaching and baptism are complementary ministries in the act of making disciples (28.19).<sup>15</sup> It follows then that it is equally erroneous to consider the Gospel from the perspective of teaching alone and to ignore the Gospel's message about baptism.

Bacon was exercised by the teaching characteristics of the Gospel to the extent that he was blind to other facets of the narrative's meaning. In fact he goes so far as to say:

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<sup>14</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.81

<sup>15</sup> See Minear, *Teacher's Gospel*, pp.38-45, who makes an effort to consider the Gospel in this way but his assertions make little sense. For example on p.40 Minear states that 'Matthew made it clear that Christian baptism must continue to embody both the promises of Isaiah and the warnings of

[T]he doctrinal interest of Mt scarcely goes beyond the point of proving that Jesus is the Christ foretold by the prophets. Doctrine as well as history is subordinate to the one great aim of teaching men to “observe all things whatsoever Jesus commanded.”<sup>16</sup>

It is easy to understand how this could have happened. If one starts from the perspective that the redactor had access to Mark and another source, and if one is interested in how the redactor used Mark along with another source, then the most obvious additions to Mark appearing in Matthew are the teaching discourses of Jesus along with a preamble (or introduction) and an epilogue (or conclusion). If an interpreter regards the preamble and the epilogue to be of little significance because they seem to arise out of a third or subsequent source then the sections of Matthew that are of most interest are the teaching discourses of Jesus. All of this is true for Bacon. He has aligned his own interest in the redactor’s use of teaching material with an ill-conceived notion of the redactor’s intention. As Bacon has been primarily interested in Matthew’s teaching material he has also suggested that this teaching material was the primary interest of the Gospel’s redactor. He has used the teaching command in Mt.28.19 to support his thesis but has applied this without giving any consideration whatsoever to the meaning of this teaching command in its immediate literary context. In order to demonstrate the nature of Bacon’s approach and how this has lead to the conclusions he proposed I will consider his treatment of what he describes as Matthew’s *Preamble* (ch.1 and 2), *The First Book of Matthew* (ch.3-7) and *The Epilogue* (ch.26-28).

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John.’ He does not explain which promises of Isaiah or which warnings of John or how a ritual like baptism is able to ‘embody’ such things.

For Bacon, the *Preamble* of The Gospel of Matthew represents a stage in the development of the tradition regarding 'the epiphany of the Son of God'.<sup>17</sup> The first two chapters of Matthew along with the birth narratives in Luke represent a third stage of that tradition. Bacon, who is interested in the sources of the Gospels and their development, articulates an understanding which regards Paul's 'word of the cross' as the starting point for 'primitive apologetic'.<sup>18</sup> This 'word of the cross' is developed backwards by the Gospel writers. Mark traces the events that led up to the crucifixion. Matthew and Luke, according to Bacon, prolong Mark's narrative backwards. Using 'similar but independent legends of the finding of the heaven-sent child who redeems the world to peace and righteousness, Matthew and Luke carry it back to Jesus' birth.'<sup>19</sup> Bacon explains the development of tradition in this way by suggesting that the *Preambles* to Matthew and Luke were included to answer docetic and adoptionist views that had emerged and were being justified by appeal to Mark. Matthew and Luke, therefore, were keen to include material that stressed that Jesus was fully Son of God from his conception/birth onwards.<sup>20</sup> Hence Bacon understood the *Preamble* as an appendage, an incorporation of a Hebraistic source which the redactor of Matthew has bolted on to the front of Mark in order to correct those who thought Jesus was in some way less than fully divine.

There is then, in Bacon's work, no appreciation that the *Preamble* is an important part of the Gospel message as a whole. Bacon does not conceive of the first two chapters of Matthew as the context within which the rest of the narrative is

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<sup>16</sup> Bacon, *Making of the New Testament*, p.153

<sup>17</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.147

<sup>18</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.145

<sup>19</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.148

to be understood. This is indicative of a tendency in Bacon's work to regard the role of narrative as subservient to the role of discourse. For Bacon, Matthew's narrative elements are on the whole regarded as a mere adoption and, in some cases, dilution of Mark. He often fails to see the instructive nature of Matthew's narrative sections. This tendency is perfectly illustrated by reference to Bacon's treatment of what he calls *The First Book of Matthew* (ch.3-7).

Bacon divides each of his *Books of Matthew* into two sections. The first section of each *book* takes the form of a narrative element whilst the second section in each *book* is always discourse material. Bacon suggests that this is after the method of presentation found in the Pentateuch in which the Mosaic oration codes are each introduced by a narrative section.<sup>21</sup> A consideration of Bacon's work in reflecting upon Matthew ch.3-7 provides a striking example of his tendency to suggest that the narrative is a mere foil for the more important discourse. This view of the relationship between narrative and discourse is partly a result of Bacon's narrow conception of Matthew's aim and even narrower assumptions regarding Matthew's method in achieving that aim:

In the carrying out of a purpose such as that of our first evangelist it is natural that the first of the five great Discourses should be devoted to the theme of Jesus' teaching regarding Righteousness, and that the narrative framework leading up to it, after the plan followed throughout the Gospel, should place this Discourse at the first available point in the story of Mk. In point of fact Division A of Book 1 gives a striking

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<sup>20</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, pp.148-149

<sup>21</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.xiv

example of that abbreviation of narrative, that rearrangement and epitomizing of Markan material in the interest of better presentation of the Discourse, which have been shown to be salient features of Mt's method.<sup>22</sup>

Bacon understands the Discourse in each of his *Books of Matthew* to be of primary significance. The role of the narrative is merely to provide a scenario in which the Discourse can be heard. Bacon cannot conceive that the converted rabbi redactor that he imagined would ever use a narrative arrangement as an occasion for teaching about the nature of the kingdom of heaven. Rather Bacon heaped significance onto the Discourse aspects of his scheme and minimised the influence of the narrative sections when considering the nature of Matthew's presentation of the gospel. Thus Bacon has not been open to the Matthean perspective on the truths pertaining to the nature of Christian discipleship and its relation to baptism that are contained in the narrative of chapters three and four of the Gospel. Rather Bacon is merely concerned to stress the shortening of Mark with respect to the preaching of Jesus in the synagogue in Galilee. Matthew sums up Mark's report of this in a single verse, 4.23. Bacon considers that this is done because Matthew wishes to either postpone or omit everything that is not essential to set the scene for the Discourse.<sup>23</sup>

If Bacon had regarded the baptismal command of 28.19 to be as indicative of the Matthean purpose as the teaching command then he may have viewed the material in a different way. It could be said that the information relating to Jesus' preaching in Galilee was omitted from Matthew because the redactor wanted it to be

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<sup>22</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.165

<sup>23</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.169



clear that this first narrative section was concerned with explaining the nature of baptism and that this is why the baptismal narrative of Matthew is actually extended in comparison with the baptismal narrative found in Mark. Matthew's extension to the Markan baptismal narrative is noted briefly by Bacon. He explains it by suggesting that Matthew restores the teaching element of the witness to the Baptist from S and includes this as Mt.3.7-12.<sup>24</sup> We are not told why this material is thought to come from S nor is the apparent contradiction explained between Bacon's notion that the narrative is shortened to clear the way for the Discourse and the lengthening of the baptismal narrative in this place. It could easily be explained by considering the possibility that by so doing a key objective of the Gospel was being met. Namely to explain aspects of the nature of Christian baptism. That is to say, through baptism God is able to make descendants of Abraham as if from the stones themselves.

Further to this Bacon acknowledges the extension to the Markan narrative in 3.13-15 and suggests that this is the work of the redactor. Bacon sees in these verses an answer to the question of Jesus' baptism by John. They are included to make it clear that Jesus had no need to repent having not committed any sin.<sup>25</sup> This is likely though it seems that 3.13-15 may also have served another purpose. They indicate that the baptism of Jesus, though related to the preceding ministry of John, was an event of an entirely different nature. The baptism of Jesus, the sign of the Spirit and the voice of the Father are elements which do not merely describe a happening in the life of Christ but go further to foreshadow the meaning of Christian baptism. If the Gospel is acknowledged as a text which is instructive about Christian baptism as well as the commandments of Jesus then the deep significance of Matthew's baptismal

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<sup>24</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* p.170

<sup>25</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* p.171

narrative is clear. Unfortunately Bacon only saw a connection between chapters 5-7 and 28.19. He was unable to see any connection between the account of the baptism of Jesus in chapter 3, for instance, and 28.19. For this reason he was not able to appreciate the Gospel as a text pertaining to the understanding of Christian baptism. It is to Bacon's reflection on the closing chapters of the Gospel that we now turn.

Bacon suggests that the *Epilogue* is included as a matter of editorial balance, reflecting that 'Mt, which began with an elaborate *Preamble* relating to the miraculous birth and ancestry of the Saviour and his Epiphany to wise men from the East, would have been a sorely ill-balanced composition if it had not closed with an *Epilogue* telling of the Saviour's crucifixion by his own people, followed by resurrection through the power of God to bring knowledge of salvation to the world. The seventh and final section of the Gospel was therefore a "foregone conclusion."<sup>26</sup>

Bacon's opinion of the activity of the Matthean redactor in these closing chapters is not high. He suggests that beyond the short ending of Mark 'Mt offers little more than a parallel to this late and lame attempt to round off a mutilated stump.'<sup>27</sup> Bacon, therefore, concentrates his effort on identifying and explaining Matthew's 'apocryphal outgrowths'.<sup>28</sup> There is no attempt to relate Matthew's closing to the rest of the Gospel apart from the use he makes of the teaching command to demonstrate the aim of the redactor. This, as we have already noted, is referred to throughout his work to give weight to the assertion that Matthew is a Gospel about teaching. Rather Bacon compares the ending of Matthew with 1 Corinthians 15 and also with the Gospel of Mark to conclude:

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<sup>26</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.250

<sup>27</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.251

We need only compare his [Matthew's] *Epilogue* first with Paul, and afterwards with the Gospel it transcribes and embellishes with apocryphal supplements, to appreciate a further step along the pathway to degeneracy.<sup>29</sup>

Bacon thus regards the closing chapters of Matthew as a degenerate account of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Bacon sees in this a blend of Mark, N and S, which are combined by the Matthean redactor to present the resurrection story in its 'latest canonical form'.<sup>30</sup>

Bacon's assessment of the importance of Matthew is limited to an appreciation of the record of teaching material in the Jesus tradition which is presented in the Gospel's five discourses of Christ. This is largely due to the assumptions about meaning which are contained in Bacon's method. When one is primarily interested in those explicit changes that Matthew has made to Mark then major blocks of addition will seem most relevant. One will not be sensitive to those aspects of Matthew that have changed little from Mark but in which deep meaning is communicated in a less obvious way. The five-fold structure of narrative and discourse sections became so important in Bacon's scheme that he chose to focus his interpretative energy on analysing each section in turn. He treated them as self-enclosed units. He was unable, therefore, to see points of connection between sections in which themes were developed. He placed the stress upon the discourse aspects of Matthew and was therefore limited to the degree in which he could

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<sup>28</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.251

<sup>29</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.254

account for meaning in the narrative parts of the story. He was also therefore deprived of the opportunity to see points of connection and development between narrative and discourse. Bacon understood the *Preamble* and *Epilogue* as mere editorial tops and tails and therefore their significance for understanding the aims of Matthew's Gospel and the nature of its message were not fully appreciated in his work. Bacon shows no appreciation that Matthew has significance when read as a whole. In his consideration of the *Epilogue* there is no close reading of the text nor is there, with the exception of the teaching command, an appreciation of the significance of individual phrases for our understanding of the Gospel's message. These factors caused Bacon to overemphasise the importance of Matthew as a Gospel about the teachings of Jesus and to fail to account for other themes in the narrative including baptism.

It is hoped that the interpretation of Matthew that I propose in Chapters Four to Six will go some way to achieving an increased emphasis on the importance of baptism within the Gospel. In this way it might be possible for the participals of Mt.28.19 to be appreciated in a more balanced way to enable an enriched understanding of the church's ongoing task of disciple-making and the place of baptism within that.

### **3) David Bauer: Matthew's Climax with *Inclusio***

A number of interpreters have in different ways claimed that the closing verses of Matthew's Gospel provide a summary of the narrative's key themes.<sup>31</sup> David Bauer considers Mt.28.16-20 in this way as part of his work, *The Structure of*

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<sup>30</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, p.257

*Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*. As the title suggests Bauer implements a method in the study of the Gospel which has its roots in literary criticism. Bauer's purpose in this work is to examine the structure of Matthew's Gospel. It is not my aim here to undermine Bauer's conclusions in this respect. Rather I simply wish to engage with one aspect of his work as it provides us with an interesting example of the scholarly tendency to treat Mt.28.16-20 as a summary of the Gospel's key themes without giving adequate attention to the function of the baptismal command in this respect. It is with this aspect of Bauer's work that I take issue.

Bauer implements tools acquired from the arena of literary criticism to consider the literary structure of the Gospel. He states that, '[T]he task of the investigation of literary structure is thus twofold: (a) to determine the major units and sub-units within the Gospel, and (b) to identify the structural relationships within and between these units. The latter relates to the unique structural contour that defines the composition of the Gospel of Matthew.'<sup>32</sup> In order to determine the structure of the Gospel, Bauer considers several 'rhetorical features' or 'compositional relationships' of the text, noting that such features are simply assumed in the study of literary structure.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless Bauer identifies and explains them, offering examples of their application.<sup>34</sup> The most relevant compositional relationship for our thinking about Mt.28.16-20 is that of 'climax'. With respect to climax Bauer writes:

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<sup>31</sup> See Note 3 above.

<sup>32</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.13

<sup>33</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.13

<sup>34</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, pp.13-20

*Climax* is the movement from the lesser to the greater to the greatest (or most intense). It comes from the word meaning 'ladder' or 'staircase' and hence suggests the element of climbing. It is the movement towards a culmination and usually comes at or near the end of a unit.<sup>35</sup>

This key compositional relationship is applied to Mt.28.16-20 in Chapter Six of Bauer's study entitled, 'The Structure of Matthew: Climax with *Inclusio*'.<sup>36</sup> In this chapter Bauer argues that 'the promise of Jesus to be 'with us' (28.20) serves with 1.23 to bracket the Gospel, thus indicating *inclusio*.'<sup>37</sup> In addition to this he seeks to demonstrate that the major themes of the Gospel move toward climax in 28.16-20. This climax, for Bauer, has a supra-historical dimension. Matthew presents Jesus as one who 'endures forever with his disciples, the church.'<sup>38</sup> This points to a Jesus who continues to inhabit the time of the implied reader, continuing to instruct disciples and address his community now. For Bauer, this is the meaning of the open-ended nature of the Gospel's conclusion. Matthew is also concerned to demonstrate continuity between the earthly Jesus and the exalted Christ in his story. This is accomplished through literary devices which link 28.17 to 14.31-33 and also 28.18 to 11.25-27. 'Thus, the earthly Jesus who taught his disciples in Galilee and travelled with them to Jerusalem is one with the exalted Christ who continues to dwell with his disciples, teaching and guiding them as they seek to fulfil the charge Jesus has given them.'<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.15

<sup>36</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, pp.109-128

<sup>37</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.109

<sup>38</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.114

<sup>39</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.114

The open-ended nature of the Gospel's conclusion, for Bauer, not only emphasises the continuity of the ministry of Christ in his church but also demonstrates an enlargement of the ministry of the disciples. This is the point at which Bauer begins to emphasise aspects of the Great Commission that function as a natural outworking of that which has gone before in the narrative. He conspicuously, however, overlooks the baptismal command. Bauer observes that in Matthew 28.19 the disciples are for the first time given authority to teach. The disciples are also now, following the resurrection, given authority to announce publicly the messianic status of Jesus.<sup>40</sup> Bauer's description of the enlargement of the disciples' ministry is very enlightening. He does not see the envisaged baptismal ministry of the disciples as worthy of mention. It is as though Christ does not command the disciples to baptise and therefore such a command cannot be in any way significant. Therefore the command to baptise is not allowed to illuminate the meaning of the Gospel as a whole, whilst the rest of the 'climax' to the Gospel is. Yet the command to baptise demands our attention because it contributes to the Gospel's sense of climax. Its position here at the end of the Gospel suggests that the interpreter should be prepared to consider baptism as a key aspect of the Gospel's message. Each of the other clauses in Mt.28.16-20, Bauer argues, functions as a climax to what has gone before. It would be consistent to treat the baptismal command in the same way.

Bauer assesses the relationship of Mt.28.16-20 to the rest of the Gospel in terms of the Gospel's key themes which reach a climax in the Gospel's final verses. Firstly, Bauer addresses the theme of the authority of Christ. Bauer suggests that virtually no paragraph in the Gospel escapes the expression of Jesus' authority.<sup>41</sup> He

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<sup>40</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, pp.114-115

<sup>41</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.115

points to the first verse of the Gospel as an expression of the majesty of Jesus and then argues that through the titles of majesty applied to Jesus throughout the Gospel Matthew is able to convey the notion of the authority of Jesus. These titles include 'the coming one' (3.11, 11.3, 21.9, 23.39); 'shepherd' (2.6, 26.31), 'servant' (12.18), 'Son of Abraham' (1.1) and 'Emmanuel' (1.21). Bauer notes that 'the coming one' and 'shepherd' have particular eschatological ramifications. In 23.39 the title 'the coming one' is used explicitly in connection with the coming of Jesus in eschatological judgement as Son of man. Whereas the title 'shepherd' indicates, in line with its Old Testament usage, the authority of Jesus to rule over the eschatological people of God.<sup>42</sup> Bauer also points to other titles that are used much more frequently throughout the Gospel. These titles are listed as 'Christ', 'King', 'Son of David', 'Lord' and 'Son of God'. All of these christological titles are said to convey a sense of the authority of Christ, identifying him as the promised messiah to Israel, one who is accorded divine status and who holds a special filial relationship with God, his Father.<sup>43</sup>

For Bauer, the ministry of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus, point to the authority of Jesus:

'John associates the coming of the kingdom with the coming of Jesus and emphasises the authority of Jesus as eschatological judge (3.8-11). ... [W]hen John baptizes Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus, empowering him for eschatological ministry in Israel (3.16); and God attests directly that Jesus is his Son (3.17). The divine

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<sup>42</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.115 and also his notes 10 and 11 on p.159.

<sup>43</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, pp.115-116



Sonship of Jesus and his anointing for eschatological ministry are confirmed by the authority Jesus exercises over Satan in the temptations (4.1-11).<sup>44</sup>

John's prophecy of 3.11 that Jesus will baptise with Holy Spirit and fire is cited by Bauer as evidence that Jesus has authority as eschatological judge. He then interprets the baptism of Jesus as an anointing for eschatological ministry and suggests that this is worked out as Jesus encounters Satan in the wilderness. This implies that Jesus' eschatological ministry begins immediately following his baptism (though it is not concluded until Jesus returns on the last day (26.63-68)). This then, to follow Bauer's logic, sets a context for the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus as the outworking of the eschatological ministry described by John as baptising in 'Holy Spirit and fire'. The ministry of Jesus, his death, resurrection and final judgement, on this view, form the basis of his baptism with Holy Spirit and fire. This conclusion follows naturally from Bauer's own assessment of Christ's eschatological ministry and the testimony of John the Baptist.

If the Gospel is seen as a story about Christ's eschatological ministry and if, as Bauer implies, this eschatological ministry is in some way the outworking of John's testimony to the 'baptising' activity of Jesus, then the story itself, in an important sense is about Christ's ministry of baptising with Holy Spirit and fire. If this is the case then it would appear that baptism may indeed function as a major theme in the narrative and that the baptismal command of Christ in Mt.28.19 has a context for interpretation which arises out of our understanding of the ministry of Jesus. When the theme of authority in the Gospel is considered without

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<sup>44</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.118

acknowledging Christ's authority to engage in a ministry of eschatological 'baptising', the baptismal command in Mt.28.19 will be a puzzle. This is perhaps the reason that Bauer has overlooked the significance of the baptismal command as a key aspect of the climax to the Gospel. In my own interpretation I consider the contribution of the notion of 'baptism' to the outworking of the Gospel's plot. When this work is done it becomes clear that the baptismal command in Mt.28.19 concludes a key aspect of the Gospel's story of Jesus and introduces a new way of being for the disciples in the period following the resurrection.

The second key theme of the Gospel which Bauer presents as reaching a climax in Mt.28.16-20 is 'the notion of universalism'.<sup>45</sup> Bauer acknowledges the tension in the Gospel between 'particularism' and 'universalism'. There is an overarching limitation of the ministry of Jesus and the disciples to the Jews (10.5-6; 15.24) and there are a number of negative references to the Gentiles (5.47; 6.7; 6.32; 18.17; 20.19; 20.25).<sup>46</sup> However, Bauer also notes the tendency throughout the Gospel to hint at 'a universal extension of the ministry and blessings of the Gospel'.<sup>47</sup> This is seen in the title of Jesus as Son of Abraham (1.1-2, 17), recalling the promise of God to Abraham that through him all nations shall be blessed (Gen.12.3). The genealogy refers to Gentile women (1.3, 5a, 5b, 6) and the deportation to Babylon (1.11). The magi arrive to pay homage to Jesus as part of Matthew's infancy narrative and are contrasted with King Herod, the chief priests, the scribes and the whole of Jerusalem who reacted negatively to the news of the Messiah's birth (2.1-6). Bauer sees indications that the mission of the disciples will lead to the evangelisation of the Gentiles in 4.19 where Jesus calls his disciples to

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<sup>45</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.121. This is developed on pp.121-124

<sup>46</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.121 and also see his note 36 on p.161.

become fishers of people and in 5.13-14, where they are described as ‘the salt of the earth’ and ‘the light of the world’. In addition to this Jesus heals Gentiles (8.5-13 and 15.21-28) pointing to the greatness of their faith. In 8.11-12 Jesus prophesies regarding the future inclusion of Gentiles at the eschatological banquet. Jesus again prophesies about the extension of the kingdom to include Gentiles in 10.18, 10.22, 12.17-21, 13.38, 21.43, 22.9, 24.14, 24.41, 26.13.<sup>48</sup> In chapter 27 we are told that ‘the Roman soldiers, facing the cross and beholding the supernatural events surrounding the death of Jesus, cry out, ‘Truly, this man was the Son of God!’ (27.54)’.<sup>49</sup>

Bauer suggests that Mt.28.16-20 brings the notion of universalism in the Gospel to a climax when, for the first time, it is ‘clearly and unambiguously set forth. Here universalism is made explicit and binding. Indeed this universalism could come to full expression only in 28.16-20, since it is linked to the universal authority of the exalted Christ.’<sup>50</sup> This is true and it leads to Christ’s commission to ‘Go into all the world’ which is the ‘clear and unambiguous’<sup>51</sup> statement of the expansion of the kingdom to include the Gentiles. Bauer does not comment on the role of baptism in this ministry of expanding the kingdom. To understand this we need to reflect on this command in terms of the ministry of John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan and Jesus’ ministry of baptising with Holy Spirit and fire. This consideration has not featured in Bauer’s work because he overlooks the importance of the baptismal command in Mt.28.19. He, therefore, does not see a sense in which the baptismal command contributes to the notion of ‘universalism’ he advocates. My

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<sup>47</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, pp.121-122

<sup>48</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, pp.122-124

<sup>49</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.124

<sup>50</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.124

interpretation of these key moments in the Gospel will be developed in Chapter Four and their relationship to Mt.28.16-20 made clear in Chapter Six.

Finally, Bauer presents the notion of ‘God (or Jesus) with us’ as one of the Gospel’s key themes that reaches climax in Mt.28.16-20.<sup>52</sup> It is this presence, according to Bauer, which enables the disciples to take up the task of ‘continuing the redemptive work of Jesus in the world.’<sup>53</sup> Bauer’s summary of his conclusions in this chapter on climax is revealing of how he understands the sense in which the disciples are empowered to share in this ‘redemptive work of Jesus’:

To begin with, the activity of the disciples is expanded in 28.16-20; they are now given authority to teach (as well as to preach and to heal; cf. ch. 10). ... In addition, Mt. 28.16-20 deals with these major themes in terms both of continuity and discontinuity. Not only does this climactic passage include the major themes as they are presented throughout Matthew, it also pushes them beyond their earlier descriptions.<sup>54</sup>

It is incredible to me that when Bauer observes the expansion of the role of the disciples he deems their new baptismal ministry unworthy of mention and hence without any articulated significance. Instead there is this unbalanced stress on the role of teaching. This lack of balance skews our understanding of the Gospel’s climax and hence our understanding of the Gospel as a whole. When Bauer notes that the climax to the Gospel mentions key themes from the narrative but ‘pushes

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<sup>51</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.124

<sup>52</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, pp.124-127

<sup>53</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.127

<sup>54</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.128

them beyond their previous descriptions' he is right. Unfortunately he has failed to account for how this is also the case for the baptismal command and its relationship to the notion of baptism flowing through the narrative. The motif of baptism is introduced with John the Baptist (3.1-12), and is developed as John prophesies about the ministry of Jesus as a baptising with 'Holy Spirit and Fire'. The baptism motif is given further significance as John baptises Jesus in the Jordan (3.13-17), and this is stressed further to the extent that the implied reader's understanding of the concept of baptising in Holy Spirit and fire is extended during the ensuing narrative (4.17-28.20).<sup>55</sup> The baptismal command fits very well into Bauer's category of 'expanding the meaning these concepts carried within the course of the Gospel.'<sup>56</sup> This expansion takes the form of including the disciples in a ministry of baptism into 'the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit' (28.19). I will argue, in Chapter Six, that this is a reflection of the exalted Christ's eschatological baptism with Holy Spirit (cf. 3.11). Bauer, however, does not perceive that the baptismal command is a conclusion to an important element of the Gospel and he therefore fails to recognise the significance of the baptismal command in his reflection on the expansion of the disciples' ministry in Mt.28.16-20.

This failure to give sufficient weight to the baptismal command in 28.16-20 is largely due to an over emphasis of the theme of teaching in the narrative. As Bauer himself later notes, with reference to Mt.28.16-20, 'It is at this climactic point that Christ charges his disciples to make disciples, by 'teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you'.<sup>57</sup> This is with a view to explaining the structural function of the five discourses of chs. 5-7, ch. 10, ch.13, ch.18 and chs.24-25. These discourses

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<sup>55</sup> This assertion is justified in Chapters Five and Six of this thesis.

<sup>56</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.128

underscore for Bauer the nature of the Christ who ‘continually present with his community’ speaks words of ‘instruction, encouragement and commandment’.<sup>58</sup> The ministry of Christ, the teacher, and the ongoing teaching ministry of the post-Easter disciples is articulated. The baptising ministry of Christ and the ongoing baptismal ministry of the post-Easter disciples is, by contrast, not considered. Bauer can therefore state that Christ charges his disciples to make other disciples by engaging in a teaching ministry without also acknowledging that Christ’s command postulates baptising as a complementary activity within the act of making disciples.

In other chapters of his work Bauer makes interesting claims that have a bearing on our understanding of Matthew as a Gospel with a baptismal emphasis. In Chapter 3 Bauer suggests that ‘[T]he relationship between Jesus and the expectations for the disciples in Matthew is essentially that of comparison. Matthew sets the expectations for the disciples and the person of Jesus side by side in terms of their relation to God, manner of living, and mission.’<sup>59</sup> This is related to Bauer’s conclusions about the climactic nature of Mt. 28.16-20. The ministry of Jesus throughout the Gospel is to be viewed as paradigmatic for the future ministry of the disciples in the post-resurrection era. In this respect, Bauer again refers to the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the disciples by emphasising the disciples’ commission to teach but by ignoring their commission to baptise:

In line with these general connections between the ministry of Jesus and that of the disciples, Matthew records that Jesus and the disciples perform generally the same acts of ministry. Both Jesus and the

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<sup>57</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.133

<sup>58</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.133

disciples (eventually) teach, and they teach the same thing: ‘all that I have commanded you’ (28.19). In ch. 10 Jesus gives his disciples the authority to perform the same eschatological works that he accomplishes. Jesus thus gives his disciples authority (10.1), even as he has been given authority (11.27; 28.18).<sup>60</sup>

Bauer does not account for the baptismal command of 28.19 in his review of the comparisons between the ministry of Jesus and the subsequent ministry of the disciples. This is a problem because, whilst Bauer is clear in stating that Jesus engages in ministry that is not shared by the disciples like ‘giving his life as a ransom for many’ (20.28) and thus ‘saving his people from their sins’ (1.21),<sup>61</sup> the ministry of the disciples is consistently presented as a derivative ministry that always has its precedent in the activity of Jesus. It is difficult to understand the envisaged baptismal activity of the disciples then if we do not also acknowledge and seek to understand the baptismal ministry of Jesus with ‘Holy Spirit and fire’ (3.11). If we do not consider the sense in which Jesus ‘baptises’, then it is difficult to see how the baptismal command of Mt.28.19 functions as an instance of ‘comparison’ between Jesus and the disciples. According to Bauer’s appropriation of the Matthean narrative, therefore, the baptismal command of 28.19 does not fit his category of ‘comparison’. Consequently, the baptismal command is a real problem for Bauer’s hypotheses of ‘climax’ and ‘comparison’. This may explain why Bauer has overlooked the significance of the baptismal command in his treatment of Mt.28.16-20.

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<sup>59</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.57

<sup>60</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.58

A corollary to the above is the comparison between John the Baptist and Jesus. Bauer states that '[I]n Matthew's Gospel John is the forerunner of the Messiah and of the work of the Messiah (17.10-13)'.<sup>62</sup> Bauer also notes that 'in 1.1-4.16 Matthew is concerned to establish a picture of Jesus for the reader which is presupposed throughout the narrative concerning Jesus work and passion'.<sup>63</sup> So for Bauer, John the Baptist is a 'forerunner of the work of the Messiah' yet baptising is central to the ministry of John. If John is a forerunner for the work of the Messiah then it seems to follow that the Messiah will be engaged in a work of baptising also. One of the presuppositions established for the reader about the ministry of Christ in 1.1-4.16 is that he will 'baptise with Holy Spirit and fire' (3.11). If the narrative pertaining to the ministry of Jesus is understood in these terms then we can see that whilst the baptisms of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples are different in nature and significance they do form part of a continuum in the Gospel. Each one displays elements of the other and each is to be understood in light of the other two. When the Gospel is interpreted in this way then the claims of Bauer regarding climax, inclusio and comparison all hold true. Baptism becomes part of this scheme and fits very well.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> See Bauer, *Structure*, p.154 note 1

<sup>62</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.78

<sup>63</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.78

<sup>64</sup> An alternative to such a proposal would be to suggest that baptism is not a key theme in the Gospel and that the baptismal command comes as a shock to the reader. This means that the command interrupts the summary of the Gospel. Daniel Patte has argued this in *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Gospel* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1987) p.401. Patte argues that the command has to be interpreted not in terms of its relationship to the Gospel as a whole but by reference to its context in 28.16-20. Patte proposes that baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is a way of making it possible for new people to have the same status as the disciples, that of sharing in Jesus' authority and ministry. There is no reason, however, why Patte's proposal cannot hold true and indeed be strengthened by reference to the development of a 'baptism' motif throughout the Matthean narrative.



#### **4) Conclusion**

In this chapter I have sought to address two influential aspects of the interpretative tradition of reading the Gospel of Matthew. Firstly, with particular reference to the work of B.W. Bacon, I have sought to stress the inadequacy of an approach to Matthew which highlights the theme of 'teaching' in the narrative at the expense of an awareness of the important 'baptising' emphasis in the Gospel. Secondly, illustrated by reference to the work of David Bauer, I have sought to draw attention to the difficulties created when Mt.28.16-20 is considered as a summary of the Gospel without sufficient deliberation concerning the function of the baptismal command in this respect. In my own interpretation of the Gospel I seek to demonstrate that 'baptising' and 'teaching' are both important aspects of the Gospel and, therefore, they are integral features of the Gospel's conclusion at Mt.28.16-20.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Matthew 1.1—4.16:**

#### **Introducing the Theo-Drama and the Place of Baptism**

##### **Within it.**

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##### **1) Introduction**

The section of Matthew's Gospel beginning at 1.1 and ending at 4.16<sup>1</sup> is of great importance for understanding the significance of baptism in the Matthean narrative as a whole because it contains within it the baptismal pericope of Mt.3. Indeed it has often been said that 3.17 is the climax of Matthew's opening section.<sup>2</sup> The Gospel introduces its message concerning baptism in Mt.3.1-17 in which the person and ministry of John the Baptist is described. In these few verses the reader is introduced to four different but related baptisms. There is John's baptism in water for repentance (3.6, 11). Then there is John's prophetic announcement of a coming one, stronger than he, who would baptise in both Holy Spirit and fire (3.11). Following the arrival of Jesus from Galilee, there is the baptism of Jesus by John (3.16-17). These references to baptisms that are either described in the text or are referred to by means of prophetic proclamation are important for introducing and establishing the

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<sup>1</sup> Kingsbury and Bauer hold that 4.17 marks the beginning of a new section of the Gospel. This is largely because Ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ ἰησοῦς + infinitive occurs both here (where the public ministry of Jesus begins) and at 16.21 (where Jesus begins to show his disciples that he must suffer). See Kingsbury, *Structure*, pp.1-39 and Bauer, *Structure*, pp.135-142. This view has not been unanimously accepted, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1*, pp.386-387.

place of baptism in Matthew's story of Jesus. Matthew's treatment of the notion of baptism reaches its conclusion in the final scene of the Gospel in which Jesus commands his disciples to baptise 'in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit' (28.19). In order to understand the place of baptism in the Gospel and therefore the impact of 28.19, it is first necessary to consider the contribution of the baptismal narrative of Mt.3 in the development of Matthew's story as a whole. The significance of Mt.3 can only fully be appreciated when it is understood in relation to the ongoing story of which it is a part.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, before addressing Mt.3 it is first necessary to reflect on the first two chapters of the Gospel which can be understood as introducing the plot themes of 'divine initiative' on the one hand and 'human response' to that divine initiative on the other.<sup>4</sup> In what follows I will show how these plot themes emerge in Mt.1-2 in order that it might be possible to locate Mt.3 within the broader Matthean narrative.

In this chapter I will also deal with Mt.4.1-11 because the events described there are causally related to the baptism of Jesus described in Mt.3.13-17. Mt.4.1-11 narrates the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, which occurs because the Spirit that descended on Jesus in 3.17 immediately leads him to that place. This direct narrative link between the spirit descending and alighting on Jesus in 3.17 and the

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<sup>2</sup> For example: Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) pp.51-55; Bauer, *Structure*, p.81; Gary Yamasaki, *John the Baptist in Life and Death: Audience Oriented Criticism of Matthew's Narrative* JSNTSS 167 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) pp.98-100.

<sup>3</sup> This is the logic of Dorothy Weaver's approach to her analysis of Matthew's literary discourse. Whilst her main focus is on Mt.9.35-11.1 she recognises that she cannot adequately account for the meaning of these verses unless she is able to demonstrate how they relate to the rest of the Gospel. Therefore she also considers 1.1-9.34 which she calls the implied reader's pre-information for understanding her particular passage of concern. See *Matthew's Literary Discourse: A Literary Critical Analysis*, JSNTSS 38 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> These are related to the plot themes of promise/fulfilment and acceptance/rejection proposed by Howell in *Inclusive Story*, pp.111-114. Both schemes acknowledge that Matthew seeks to communicate about the Messiah, Jesus, who is presented as the fulfilment of Israel's eschatological hope, who is accepted by some and rejected by others.

spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness in 4.1 serves to highlight the continuity between the baptism of Jesus and the temptation narrative. The temptation can thus be seen to be a direct result of the events surrounding Christ's baptism and as such is instructive for the reader in interpreting the meaning of Christ's baptism and the signs that accompanied it.

## **2) Mt.1—2: The Theo-Dramatic Perspective of the Gospel is Introduced**

In Mt.1-2 the character of Jesus is introduced and the significance of his birth and presence in the world is made clear. Here we discover that Jesus is the Messiah who comes as fulfilment of Israel's eschatological hopes. We also come to understand something of the appropriate response to his coming as we are confronted by characters that react positively and negatively to his birth. This presentation of the eschatological significance of Jesus and the appropriate response to his coming is essential pre-information for an adequate appreciation of the events described in Mt.3.<sup>5</sup>

### **a) The Plot Theme of 'Divine Initiative' in Mt.1—2**

Matthew's Gospel opens with the words Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαβὶδ, υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ (1.1). This verse is significant for our understanding of the Gospel because of the information it communicates about the Gospel's chief protagonist, Jesus, who is introduced using

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<sup>5</sup> This is because, in appropriating the linguistic and literary conventions of the text, the reader develops a predisposition to understand the rest of the narrative in a particular way. Cf. Howell,

the term Christ. Whilst here as elsewhere in the New Testament,<sup>6</sup> the expression 'Jesus Christ', is used in a way that brings together personal name and status into one title; nevertheless the reader is informed that here is a book (Βίβλος) that describes the Christ, the Messiah. Such a Messiah was expected and had been foretold in various writings.<sup>7</sup> In describing Jesus as the 'Son of David' and the 'Son of Abraham' Matthew locates Jesus as a Jew<sup>8</sup> and also a person in the kingly line of David. Abraham and David stand out in Jewish history because of the covenants associated with them.<sup>9</sup> God's covenant with Abraham promises that all the nations will be blessed through his descendants and David is the king who will have a descendant who will rule in Israel forever with justice and equity. Such expectations were associated with an eschatological vision in which the people of Israel are gathered together under the kingship of a righteous shepherd.<sup>10</sup>

The genealogy itself serves to further indicate that God is active in the coming of Jesus to fulfil the eschatological hopes of Israel.<sup>11</sup> The genealogy is a mechanism that allows Matthew to present Israel's history from Abraham to Jesus. This history is divided into three distinct epochs each of fourteen generations from Abraham to David, from David to the deportation to Babylon and from the deportation to Babylon to the coming of the Christ (1.17). This arrangement of the

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*Inclusive Story*, p.115; and Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (London: Indiana University Press, 1979) p.7ff

<sup>6</sup> Rom.1.1; Gal.1.1; Jas.2.1; Rev.22.21

<sup>7</sup> See Psalms of Solomon 17-18, in which the Messiah is described as an ideal king in the line of David. The concept of 'anointed one' is also present in 1 Enoch 48.10 and 54.4. For 'Son of David' as a standard Messianic title see Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.156; cf. David Hill, *The New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) p.75; Luz, *Matthew 1-7* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989) p.104; Kingsbury, *Structure*, pp.96-103.

<sup>8</sup> See Gen.12 and 15; also Jub.12.24; 13.3; 4 Ezra 3.13-15.

<sup>9</sup> For Abraham see Gen. 12.3 and 18.18. For David see 2 Sam. 7.12; and its later development in passages like Jer.33.15; Ezek.37.23-24.

<sup>10</sup> See Ezek. 37.24-28

epochs of Israel's history works to convey that Jesus comes at a divinely appointed moment.<sup>12</sup> The time period associated with the coming of the Christ is instructive as to his significance. The Christ comes at the end of the third epoch of Israel's history. The first epoch referred to a time in which Israel grew out of pilgrimage in the wilderness becoming settled in the land that God had given them. In this epoch we see the establishment of a divinely ordained monarchy and the reign of David. The second epoch referred to the ultimate failure of that monarchy leading to a time of judgement. The third related to a time of exile and the expectation of restoration. In dividing the genealogy in this way Matthew suggests to the reader that the time of exile is coming to an end and the time of restoration is about to begin. It is as though the period from the return to Israel from Babylon and up to the coming of Jesus is included as part of the exile time. Only with the coming of the Messiah, the expected Davidic king, does the restoration properly take place.<sup>13</sup> As such the history of God's dealings with Israel is reaching its *telos*, the promises of God to Abraham and David are about to reach their fulfilment.<sup>14</sup>

The lineage of Jesus is mostly described in a repetitive style as one progenitor 'begets' the next male heir. However, Joseph is not described in terms which allow the reader to think of him as the biological father of Jesus. Rather Joseph is simply described as the husband of Mary and Mary's role in the conception and birth of Jesus is minimised also as is indicated by the use of the passive ἐγεννηθη.

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<sup>11</sup> A good account of the scholarly considerations of the genealogy is offered in Herman C. Waetjen, 'The Genealogy as the Key to the Gospel of Matthew', *JBL* 95 (1976) pp.205-230.

<sup>12</sup> On the historical accuracy of such a claim see Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.167-183. On the possible meanings of the number fourteen see Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.161-165 and Waetjen, 'Genealogy', pp.205-230.

<sup>13</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.187, details the eschatological calendar suggested by Dan. 9.24-27; 1 En. 93.3-10; 91.12-17; and 2 Bar. 67.1-74.4. In each instance the epoch of the exile is placed directly before the epoch of redemption. See also Charette, *Restoring Presence*, pp.36-38.

(1.16). The unusual circumstances surrounding the birth of the Messiah serve to demonstrate that God was working to fulfil his promises by intervening in human history in an amazing way. This description of the genesis of the Messiah provides the narrative framework for explaining the identity of the Messiah as Son of God.

The notion that Jesus was born to fulfil God's promises is made explicit as the narrator comments on the angel's message to Joseph, stating that all of this takes place to fulfil the prophecy of Is.7.14. There is here, through the use of the name Emmanuel, the communication of the expectation that, in Jesus, God is to be uniquely present with his people.<sup>15</sup> This is a powerful demonstration of God's intervention in Israel's history and contributes to the developing sense that God is fulfilling his promises to Israel. These promises are fulfilled in the specific sense that Jesus will 'save his people from their sins' (1.21).

In Mt.2 the story of the Magi who come to Jerusalem from the East is narrated along with the various consequences of their arrival.<sup>16</sup> They came seeking one who had been born  $\beta \alpha \sigma \iota \lambda \epsilon \acute{\upsilon} \varsigma \tau \hat{\omega} \nu \iota \omicron \upsilon \delta \alpha \acute{\iota} \omega \nu$  (2.2). As the Magi make enquiry in Jerusalem as to the whereabouts of the new king the theme of divine initiative is developed further. The chief priests at Herod's court announce that Bethlehem is the place of the Messiah's birth because this had been foretold by the prophet Micah. This announcement also brings to mind the eschatological expectation that the Messiah would gather in the twelve tribes of Israel. For we are

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.187

<sup>15</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.217-218, suggest that the inclusion of this prophecy in the Gospel ties in with broader eschatological expectations. Whilst God had been with his people in the past (e.g. Num.23.21; Dt.2.7) he would, it was hoped, be especially 'with' them in messianic times (Is. 43.5; Ezek. 34.30; 37.27; Zech. 8.23; Jub. 1.17, 26).

<sup>16</sup> Powell, *Eastern Star*, pp.131-184, has traced the development of traditions concerning the Magi.

told that this Messiah will 'shepherd the people' (2.6).<sup>17</sup> As Davies and Allison have put it:

Mt 2 offers an 'inaugurated eschatology'. The pilgrimage of the nations foretold in Isa 60 and Ps 72, has commenced. The one destined to shepherd the scattered sheep of Israel, the one who fulfils the words of 2 Sam 5.2, has already appeared. And the promise of a Davidic ruler to be born in Bethlehem, the promise of Mic 5.2, has been fulfilled. The time of eschatological fulfilment ... has dawned.<sup>18</sup>

The plot theme of divine initiative is developed as Joseph experiences three more dreams which reveal God's determination that the Messiah's mission should not suffer a premature termination at the hands of Herod. They also have the effect, alongside the quoting of prophecy and narrative parallels with the tradition of Moses, of revealing a Divine itinerary for the Messiah's childhood (2.13; 19; 22). Moses typology is especially strong in this.<sup>19</sup> Exod.1.15-22 reveals a parallel between the actions of Pharaoh at the time of the birth of Moses and the actions of Herod at the time of the birth of Jesus. In Exod. 2.15, we are told that Moses, as a young man, was forced to leave his homeland for fear that he would be killed by Pharaoh. Mt. 2.13-14 shows Jesus fleeing to Egypt because his life was in danger due to the violent intentions of Herod. Exod. 4.19 tells us that Moses was commanded to return to his homeland following the death of Pharaoh. Mt. 2.19-20 shows Joseph being commanded to return with Jesus to Israel. Hos. 11.1, 'Out of Egypt I have

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Samuel 5.2; Ps.78.70-71; Ezek. 34.4-16; Mic. 5.1-9; Ps. Sol. 17; 4 Ezra 13.34-50; 2 Bar.77-86.

<sup>18</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.253



called my Son', is quoted as part of the story of the flight to and return from Egypt. This resonates with the eschatological expectation that the Messiah's ministry would involve a repeat of the pattern exodus/return. That is to say, the Messiah would lead God's people, as Moses did, from captivity to liberation.<sup>20</sup> Here we see more of the eschatological nature of Matthew's presentation of Christ's significance. Here is one in whose life messianic prophecies are fulfilled, who is the fulfilment of Israel's history and in whom that history is repeated and the events of the consummation are prefigured. There is a strong sense in all of this that the coming of Jesus has inaugurated the end time events. In him the end has started and the reader anticipates a story to unfold of how these eschatological times will be concluded.

With this understanding we are now in a position to comprehend the baptismal pericope of Mt.3 as a further outworking of God's initiative that demands appropriate human response.

### **b) The Plot Theme of 'Human Response' in Mt.1-2**

As the Gospel establishes the plot theme of divine initiative it also develops the idea of appropriate human response to the divine initiative. The narrative indicates that acceptance of God's activity is the appropriate response whilst rejection of God's activity in Jesus is seen to be an inappropriate response. The notion of the importance of human obedience in the outworking of God's plan is made clear as Joseph responds positively to the angel's direction to take Mary as his

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<sup>19</sup> For discussion of this feature of Matthew see: Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.192-193 and 261-264; Harrington, *Gospel of Matthew*, pp.46-50; Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (Dallas: Word, 1993) pp.34-35.

wife. It is this obedient acceptance of the will of God that ensures that the Messiah is adopted into the line of David. In addition Joseph is asked to give the child a divinely directed name (1.21). Such obedience is expected of Joseph for we are told in verse 19 that he is  $\delta \iota \kappa \alpha \iota \omicron \varsigma$ . This proves to be the case as Joseph obeys the commandments of God (1.25).<sup>21</sup>

The portrayal of the obedient Magi and their comparison with the fearful people of Jerusalem is particularly important in illustrating appropriate and inappropriate responses to God's activity in sending Jesus as the fulfilment of Israel's eschatological hopes. This contrast is made explicit as the Gentile Magi respond to the birth of the Messiah by coming to worship ( $\pi \rho \omicron \sigma \kappa \upsilon \nu \eta \sigma \alpha \iota$ ) him (2.2, 11), yet Herod and the people of Jerusalem are said to be troubled by the news that their Messiah had been born (2.3).<sup>22</sup> The awful scale of Herod's rejection of God's initiative in bringing about the Messiah's birth is made plain in verse 16 when he orders the slaughter of Bethlehem's male infants. The humble, worshipful acceptance of the activity of God exemplified by the Magi is contrasted with the fearful and violent rejection of God's will demonstrated by Herod. In this way the

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<sup>20</sup> See Is.40.3-4; 42.14-55.13; Ezek. 20.33-44; Hos. 2.14-15; 1 Macc. 2.29-30; 1QS. 8.12-18. Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.263

<sup>21</sup> In verse 19 the righteousness of Joseph was connected with his caring observance of the law in resolving to dismiss Mary quietly; cf. Num.5.11-31. This is the extent of the term which is allowed by Benno Pryzybylski in *Righteousness in Matthew and his World of Thought*, SNTSMS 41 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) p102. However, the sense in which Joseph is  $\delta \iota \kappa \alpha \iota \omicron \varsigma$  is extended as in 1.24 he obeys the angel in order that the Scripture (Is.7.14) and the wider eschatological purposes of God might be fulfilled. Cf. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005) pp.94-103.

<sup>22</sup> 'and all Jerusalem with him' in verse 3 is related to verse 4 which immediately sees Herod summoning the chief priests and scribes of the people. Here we find an emphasis on the centre of political and religious power in Israel. Those that should have welcomed the Messiah are disturbed by his coming whilst Gentile Magi exemplify the appropriate response. Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.237-241.

narrative communicates that obedient acceptance of the eschatological activity of God in Jesus is the only appropriate response.

Having considered the importance of the plot themes of 'Divine initiative' and 'human response' in Mt.1-2 we are now in a position to understand the theodramatic impact of the baptismal pericope of Mt.3.

### **3) The Baptismal Pericope (Mt.3.1-17) in Theo-Dramatic Perspective**

#### **a) The Portrayal of John the Baptist as a Reliable Character**

The character of John the Baptist is central to Matthew's presentation of the place of baptism in his Gospel. Indeed John is introduced using a title that combines his name and the distinctive activity that accompanied his proclamation. In order to understand the Gospel's treatment of baptism it is imperative that we appreciate the character of John the Baptist and recognise the credibility that Matthew ascribes to him and therefore also to his activity of baptising. In Mt.3.1-6 John the Baptist is established as someone whose life is in accord with the eschatological activity of God. He is an eschatological messenger of God who comes to prepare the way for the Messiah. Here we see, in the character of John the Baptist, one who is able - by word and deed - to communicate to his people concerning the initiative that God is taking. This is because he himself has embodied the appropriate human response to God's action by living a life of obedience.

The temporal setting of John's ministry is described as  $\text{ἐν ὅττι τὰ ἡμέραι ἐκείναι}$  (3.1). This phrase is used in an eschatological

context in several Old Testament texts such as Jer.3.16, 18; 31.33; 50.4; Joel 3.1 and Zech. 8.23. Given the eschatological nature of Matthew's narrative it is likely that the phrase 'in those days' indicates an eschatological significance in John's activity.<sup>23</sup> In spite of the significant passage of time that has passed between the birth narrative and the ministry of John, the phrase 'in those days' serves to emphasise that the ministry of John is temporally connected with the coming of the Messiah. John's ministry is thus presented as the next stage in the fulfilment of God's eschatological purpose.<sup>24</sup>

The association of John the Baptist with the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel is reinforced as the reader discovers that John comes as a fulfilment of the prophecy that 'the way of the Lord' shall be prepared (3.3).<sup>25</sup> John comes not just as a fulfilment of prophecy, however, but also as a prophet. This is made clear by the striking parallels between the figure of John and the description of Elijah in 2 Kings. 2 Kings 1.8 speaks of Elijah as wearing a garment of haircloth and a girdle of

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<sup>23</sup> cf. John P. Meier, 'John the Baptist in Matthew's Gospel', *JBL* 99 (1980) pp383-405 esp.387-388; Kingsbury, *Structure*, pp.28-30; and Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.288. But note Davies and Allison's word of caution that the phrase appears in Gen. 6.4; Exod. 2.11; Deut. 17.9; 19.7; 26.3; and Dan. 10.2; 'without pregnant meaning or eschatological content'. An eschatological interpretation of this phrase, however, is most compatible with the narrative context of the Gospel of Matthew at this point.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, p.166.

<sup>25</sup> Note the re-appropriation of Is.40.3 for a new context. Originally the prophecy was given concerning the people exiled in Babylon. The prophet originally spoke to comfort these people to show them that their path back to their homeland was being prepared. Here Matthew applies the passage to the ministry of John to suggest that John has come to prepare people for the coming ministry of Jesus. See Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.293 in which they suggest that Matthew shows a 'thorough reinterpretation that disregards original context'. Such a view of Matthew's use of prophecy, however, seems to miss the point of Matthew's view of Israel's history. The genealogy shows us that, for Matthew, Jesus comes at the end of the epoch of exile in order to initiate the epoch of restoration. For Matthew, in spite of the peoples' return to their homeland, the post-exilic restoration and the fulfilment of eschatological prophecy have not yet taken place. Therefore, Matthew can quote Is.40.3 to explain the significance of John the Baptist and to show that John precedes the restoration of Israel that will take place through the Messiah, Jesus. Such an understanding of Matthew's use of prophecy is supported by Charette, *Restoring Presence*, p.43.

leather.<sup>26</sup> This prophetic parallel adds to the eschatological significance of the pericope, as does the location of John's ministry. The wilderness as Meier notices is 'reminiscent of the first exodus and portending the final exodus'.<sup>27</sup> As Nolland has observed, 'The wilderness location of John's activity is to be related to the biblical (Ez.20.33-38; Ho.2.14-23) and contemporary (CD 8.12-15; 1QS 9.20) tradition which located the beginning of eschatological renewal in the wilderness.'<sup>28</sup>

All of this serves to introduce John's credentials to the reader. John is portrayed as an end-time prophet after the tradition of Elijah, who is himself a fulfilment of prophecy and ministers to prepare the way for the eschatological ministry of Jesus. In this way the narrative persuades the reader that the words and activities of John the Baptist are in full accord with God's initiative described in Mt.1-2.

John's first words are ΜΕΤΑΝΟΕΙΤΕ· ἡγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (3.2). The typically Matthean phrase 'kingdom of heaven' is widely regarded to be equivalent to the phrase 'kingdom of God' which is more apparent in the other Synoptic Gospels.<sup>29</sup> The sense of this

<sup>26</sup> For a fuller consideration of the intertextual parallels with John's attire, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.295-296.

<sup>27</sup> Meier, 'John the Baptist in Matthew', p.389

<sup>28</sup> Nolland, *Matthew*, p.136. Cf. Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study*, JSNTSS 62 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) p.360, who notes that other prophetic movements in late second temple Judaism derived their symbolism from important events in the past history of the people, especially the Exodus and Conquest.

<sup>29</sup> This view is expressed by Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.389-392; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, p.167; Kingsbury, *Structure*, p.134; Hill, *Matthew*, p.90. For a challenge to the accepted point of view see M. Pamment, 'The Kingdom of Heaven According to the First Gospel', *NTS* 27 (1981) pp.211-232 in which it is argued that the phrase Kingdom of God should be interpreted as a present reality whilst kingdom of heaven refers to a future state. Davies and Allison's rebuttal of Pamment's view is persuasive, *Matthew I*, p.391.

phrase is 'rule of God'.<sup>30</sup> In the context of the narrative to this point it is clear to the reader that when John speaks of the kingdom of heaven having drawn near he is referring to God's initiative to establish his purposes through Jesus.<sup>31</sup>

John can be seen not only to be in complete accord with the plot theme of 'divine initiative' but also to be an advocate of the correct 'human response' to that initiative. In Mt.1-2 characterisation is utilised in the form of Joseph and the Magi to introduce exemplary responses to the divine eschatological initiative. Now in 3.2 John specifies the nature of the expected human response to the proximity of God's sovereign rule. The appropriate response is repentance.<sup>32</sup> Thus John opens his proclamation with the imperative  $\text{Μετάνοεῖτε}$ , an exhortation to a radical change of heart and mind.<sup>33</sup> Such repentance goes beyond simply feeling remorse

<sup>30</sup> See Kingsbury, *Structure*, pp.133-149; cf. Hill, *Matthew*, p.90; Harrington, *Matthew*, p.51; Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.389.

<sup>31</sup> Excellent accounts of the Jewish expectation of the kingdom of God are to be found in Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) pp.16-32; Kingsbury, *Structure*, pp.134-136.

<sup>32</sup> The opening words of John in Matthew's Gospel have often been considered from the perspective of redaction criticism with particular emphasis placed on the significance of Matthew's alterations to the words associated with John in Mark's Gospel. For instance Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.292; Meier, 'John the Baptist', p.388; Webb, *Baptizer*, pp.56-57; Lars Hartman, 'Into the Name of the Lord Jesus': *Baptism in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), p.17; John Nolland, 'In Such a Manner it is Fitting for us to Fulfil All Righteousness: Reflections on the Place of Baptism in the Gospel of Matthew', in Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, eds., *Baptism in the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R.E.O. White* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) pp.63-80. Nolland states that Matthew modifies Mark in such a way to show that forgiveness of sins is clearly the role of Jesus and also to build up parallels between Jesus and John as Jesus repeats John's words verbatim in Mt.4.17. The implication being that John is legitimised in 3.2 because he uses words of Jesus. A sequential reading interprets John's words in 3.2 on the basis of what has preceded 3.2 in the narrative and not what will follow it. The act of reading that deals with information sequentially and in a linear fashion takes John's words at face value recognising that the narrative at this point uses other techniques to legitimise John. The effect of considering the Gospel in this linear sequential manner will not be fully realised until 4.17 is considered. According to a linear sequential paradigm 4.17 links the proclamation of Jesus with the prior proclamation of John. Not vice-versa. Thus when Jesus repeats John it has the effects of: a) further legitimising John and his message; and b) indicating that Jesus' ministry is in continuity with that of John and that a proper understanding of the ministry of Jesus will, therefore, be rooted in an understanding of the prior ministry of John.

<sup>33</sup> As defined by Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.388. The need for repentance was recognised by other Jews writing in New Testament times as has been demonstrated by Hartman. Here though it seems that such repentance may have been viewed as a necessary pre-cursor for liberation from occupying forces. See Hartman, *Into the Name*, pp.12-13. See also Hill, *Matthew*, p.90

for one's sins, sometimes referred to as 'penitential repentance'.<sup>34</sup> Rather, the repentance required in the face of the nearness of God's eschatological kingdom, is more accurately described as 'conversionary repentance'. That is to say, 'a reorientation of all spheres of a person's life to a new relationship with Yahweh'.<sup>35</sup> Conversionary repentance involves the penitent in turning away from sin and turning to God. Conversionary repentance was often the subject of Old Testament prophetic proclamation.<sup>36</sup> As Webb notes 'Looming judgement is often a threat against those who refuse to repent. By contrast, to those who do repent God grants forgiveness, remission of judgement and life. Sometimes the restoration of a remnant from exile is associated with repentance'.<sup>37</sup> Webb is therefore able to demonstrate that the message of John the Baptist is consistent with the tradition of OT prophecy in which he stands. In Matthew's Gospel John is shown to be a prophet who comes at the dawning of the time of fulfilment. As such, he not only announces the nearness of the eschatological sovereign rule of God but also proclaims that the appropriate response to the nearness of this rule is nothing less than a radical turning away from one's sins and towards covenant faithfulness to Yahweh. In the prophetic tradition, such turning was associated with the faithful remnant that would return from exile. In the age of fulfilment, the truly repentant would experience the promised restoration to be affected by the Davidic king. This relates well to the information about Jesus and his significance conveyed by the genealogy in Mt.1.1-17. There the reader was told that Jesus is 'the Son of David' (1.1) who comes at the close of the epoch of judgement and exile to begin the expected eschatological restoration of

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<sup>34</sup> See Webb, *Baptizer*, p.184 for more on this form of repentance.

<sup>35</sup> Webb, *Baptizer*, p.184

<sup>36</sup> cf. Is.10.20-21; 30.15; Jer.3.22-23; 18.8; 26.3-5; 34.15; Zech.1.3-4; Mal.3.7. See also William Holladay, *The Root subh in the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1958), p.120.

<sup>37</sup> Webb, *Baptizer*, pp.184-185, makes reference to the following O.T. passages to justify his claims, Amos 4.6-8; Hos.11.5-6; Ezek.33.9-11; Is.55.7; Jon.3.9-10; Ezek.33.13-16; Jer.12.15-16; Is.10.20-22.

God's people (1.17). John the Baptist, therefore, can be seen to be preparing his hearers to receive the eschatological ministry of their Messiah. John's character is legitimised in the eyes of the reader to the extent that he is presented as acting in accordance with the divine initiative in Jesus and encouraging his hearers to make the appropriate human response to that divine initiative.<sup>38</sup>

### **b ) John's Baptism in Water For Repentance**

Matthew's Gospel does not describe or explain John's baptism in any length. It is simply mentioned in passing by means of three references in Mt.3.1-11. Firstly in 3.1, John is introduced as 'John the Baptist', the title itself expressing the characteristic activity with which he was associated. The narrative introduces John as though a reader is envisaged who will already know that John had a distinctive ministry of baptising. Matthew is at no great pains to explain the Baptist's title.<sup>39</sup> Rather, John is described not so much in terms of his baptising activity but more in terms of his prophetic activity and his role in fulfilling prophecy. This has the effect of suggesting to the reader that the key to understanding John's baptism lies in understanding his message. The one is an expression of the other. Submitting to John's baptism is a sign of submitting to his message. Secondly, in 3.6 we discover that those who responded positively to John's message were baptised by him 'confessing their sins' (3.6). This element of confession associated with John's baptism, indicates that participants were expected to display a humble recognition of

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<sup>38</sup> Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, pp.82-85, has worked from the perspective of audience-oriented criticism to show that John's character is constructed in Matthew in a way that persuades the audience that he is a reliable character.

<sup>39</sup> This has the effect of intensifying the reader's anticipatory tension. John's distinctive activity has been introduced but narrative time passes before the distinctive activity is referred to. Cf. Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.86.



past unfaithfulness to the will of Yahweh and a new determination to accept the will of Yahweh in the kingdom of heaven that was drawing near.<sup>40</sup> Thirdly, in 3.11 John describes his baptism as a 'baptism in water for repentance'. That is to say, a ritual act that was performed by John for those he believed to have embraced his message, 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'<sup>41</sup> This close association between John's message and the meaning of his baptism has led Webb to suggest that John calls people to a 'baptismally expressed repentance'.<sup>42</sup>

Mk.1.4 and Lk.3.3 present John proclaiming a 'baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.' The sense in which John's baptism might be conceived as a mediation of divine forgiveness is absent from Matthew's account.<sup>43</sup> Matthew makes no mention of forgiveness being directly associated with John's baptism. Even in Mark and Luke a close reading reveals that the forgiveness of which John speaks is associated with the repentance expressed in John's baptism rather than with the baptism itself.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> It may be that this notion of 'confession' in connection with baptism had an antecedent at Qumran as may be demonstrated with reference to *IQS* 3.6-9. See Webb, *Baptizer*, pp.146-152 for further comment on this. Webb has also found a reference to an ablution connected with confession in *The Addition to T. Levi 2.3 in Manuscript E*. He accounts for this in *Baptizer*, pp.116-120.

<sup>41</sup> James D.G. Dunn in *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1970) puts it like this: 'John's baptism was the concrete and necessary expression of repentance' pp.14-15. This is echoed by Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.312; and Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.91.

<sup>42</sup> Webb, *Baptizer*, p.189; cf. Dunn, *Baptism in Holy Spirit*, p.15.

<sup>43</sup> Nolland, 'In Such a Manner', p. 69, is wrong to suggest that 'It is probably too much to say that Matthew in 3.1 [*sic.*] withholds from John's baptism the forgiveness of sins with which it is associated in Mk.1.4 and Lk.3.3.' This illustrates a methodological inconsistency in Nolland's work. For on p.63 Nolland tells us that his interest is in 'the significance of baptism within Matthew's Gospel as such.' Reference to sources, according to Nolland, will only be made in his work 'to clarify the functioning of the finished work as an integrated entity'. It seems strange therefore that Nolland has chosen to refer to source material to make a claim about Matthew's treatment of John's baptism that is absent from the finished entity of Matthew's Gospel.

<sup>44</sup> Dunn, *Baptism in Holy Spirit*, p.15

In Jewish culture immersions primarily had a purificatory function.<sup>45</sup> In fact, as Webb notes, 'if John's baptism ... did not have a cleansing function, this would probably be the most surprising and distinctive feature.'<sup>46</sup> Josephus articulates an understanding of John's baptism that associates it with 'purification of the body because the soul had already been cleansed before by righteousness'.<sup>47</sup> This sense of a purificatory function of John's baptism is not stated explicitly in Matthew's account. It is, however, likely that such a function for John's baptism is assumed given that this function is usually associated with immersions in Judaism of the time. In the context of Matthew and John's cultural milieu it is likely that if Matthew had wanted to deny John's baptism this function he would have made it clear. The context of John's baptising ministry in Matthew and its close association with John's message indicates, contrary to Josephus, that John was primarily concerned with moral uncleanness in the lives of his hearers. Matthew, in keeping with the other NT accounts does not mention physical uncleanness. It is possible that John's baptism is to be thought of as a literalisation of Isa.1.16 which states, 'Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from my sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good.' In any event, the narrative makes it clear that any purificatory

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<sup>45</sup> Good surveys of possible antecedents to John's baptism are to be found in G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1972) pp.1-44; and Webb, *Baptizer*, pp.95-162. The most important antecedents for our understanding of John's ministry are the stipulations about ritual washing in Lev.13-16 (cf. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, p.6 and Webb, *Baptizer*, pp.106-108) and the practice of ritual ablutions at Qumran (cf. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, pp.11-18 and Webb, *Baptizer*, pp.133-162). Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, p.14, reflects on the practice at Qumran and observes the emphasis on both moral and physical purity: 'Here is a striking example of the Jewish ability to distinguish between 'outward and visible' and 'inward and spiritual', the ritual and the moral, flesh and spirit, yet a refusal to separate them. Water cannot cleanse the rebellious spirit, but submission to the ordinances of God can cleanse the flesh. The desire of the covenanters evidently is to have an outward cleansing accompanied by an obedient spirit, for in the conjunction of both the desired purity of body and soul is gained.' Cf. Webb, *Baptizer*, pp.158-159.

<sup>46</sup> Webb, *Baptizer*, p.194

<sup>47</sup> *Ant.* 18.117b, though as Webb, *Baptizer*, p.195, notes, it is likely that Josephus separated body and soul in order to 'clarify for his Gentile Roman readers that the Jewish rite of John's baptism was not a magical rite which Jews simplistically believed could pardon sins'.

function associated with John's baptism is only preparatory in anticipation of a more powerful spiritual and eschatological ablution (3.11). We will return to this below.

The conclusion that John's baptism is presented in Matthew's Gospel as a ritual act that demonstrated a person's willingness to embrace his call to repentance is further encouraged by John's fiery rebuke of the Pharisees and Sadducees in 3.7-10. In verse 7 we are told that Pharisees and Sadducees come to observe<sup>48</sup> John's baptismal practice.<sup>49</sup> The verse and John's subsequent sermon imply that John considered them both to be worthy of criticism and considered that their lives did not display genuine repentance.<sup>50</sup> John's response to the Pharisees and Sadducees is uncompromisingly condemnatory. Describing them as 'offspring of vipers' he asks them who it was that warned them to flee from the coming wrath.<sup>51</sup> This is the Gospel's first explicit reference to the judgement that accompanies these eschatological times and awaits those whose repentance is less than genuine.<sup>52</sup> John goes on to tell them what they must do for their repentance to be considered genuine and for them, therefore, to become appropriate candidates for his baptism. Namely,

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<sup>48</sup> This is the best sense of Matthew's use of ἐπί in the clause ἐρχομένους ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα. cf. Hill, *Matthew*, p.92; Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.303-304; Webb, *Baptizer*, p.57. Though, Nolland, *Matthew*, p.142, holds that the Pharisees and Sadducees were coming to John to seek his baptism.

<sup>49</sup> This implication that the Pharisees and Sadducees shared a unity of purpose is historically unlikely as the two groups were rivals. Their being linked together here is probably a literary technique to communicate to the reader that neither group had responded adequately to John's message.

<sup>50</sup> Meier holds that Matthew sees Judaism as a 'united front' that opposes Jesus and his disciples (and John) just as the Israel of old opposed and martyred the prophets sent to it. cf. 'John the Baptist' p.389. Meier's conclusion here seems to ignore the fact that John seems willing to baptise many ordinary Jews who come to him claiming to be repentant. It is not so much Judaism per se which forms a united front against Jesus and his allies in the story. Rather it would seem to be the powerful and privileged of Judaism who do not repent genuinely cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.238-239.

<sup>51</sup> Davies and Allison note that the expression 'offspring of vipers' stands over and against the designation 'children of Abraham'. They also vividly picture the image of snakes scurrying before dry scrub that is about to ignite. Such is John's metaphor for the Pharisees and Sadducees seeking to escape the eschatological wrath See, *Matthew I*, p.304. cf. Joan Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist Within Second Temple Judaism*, (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), p.135; and Daniel Patte, *Matthew*, pp.46-48.

produce fruits worthy of repentance. That is to say that true repentance is evidenced in the life of the penitent. The implication here is that John saw no such evidence in the lives of these Pharisees and Sadducees. John's response to the Pharisees and Sadducees in verse 8 sets up an interesting question in the mind of the reader: will these Pharisees and Sadducees bear the fruit of repentance as the story unfolds or will they continue to demonstrate a way of living which is contrary to God's way?<sup>53</sup>

For the moment, at least, they have to endure John's uncompromising condemnation which continues into verse 9. John accuses them of relying on their status as 'children of Abraham' to find favour with God. The implication being that such ancestry is secondary to 'bearing fruits worthy of repentance'.<sup>54</sup> John's condemnation of the Pharisees and Sadducees suggests that their lives are not yet oriented towards God's purposes. They are therefore in danger of relying too heavily on their lineage. John is saying that genuine 'conversionary repentance' is the key to being considered a child of Abraham. Those oriented towards the purposes of God and covenant faithfulness to God are the ones who are true descendants of Abraham.<sup>55</sup> Only those who have embraced the message of John that the kingdom of heaven is near and who have responded appropriately in 'conversionary

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<sup>52</sup> For background to such eschatological expectation see Amos 3.2; 4.1-13; and 4 Ezra.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor, *Immerser*, p.200, has noticed this feature of the text. She writes, 'Logically, Matthew does not tell us that John rejected the Pharisees. They came to him to be immersed and, one could conclude, in due course they were immersed after bearing good fruit.' Whilst it is true that an isolated reading of Mt.3 could yield such a view, as we shall see a reading of the whole Gospel precludes this conclusion. It is however true to say that a reader reading the Gospel sequentially in a linear manner is caused to wonder in chapter 3 how the Pharisees and Sadducees might respond to John's warning.

<sup>54</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.306-307, reflect on the implications of John's words to the Pharisees here. It would seem that John is denying 'the validity of what most Palestinian Jews took to be the heart of their faith, namely, 'covenantal nomism''. For more on 'covenantal nomism' see E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) pp.33-428.

<sup>55</sup> See Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.308-309. For a counter point of view see Taylor, *Immerser*, pp.127-130. Taylor here suggests that there was a widespread realisation in Judaism that to be called a child of Abraham meant that one should demonstrate Abraham's righteousness in addition to being his descendant.

repentance' can be considered adequately prepared to encounter the Messiah.<sup>56</sup> John's baptism, therefore, is not to be understood as a ritualistic act of purification from moral contagion that is effective even in the absence of fruit bearing repentance. Rather, John's baptism is a ritual expression of fruit bearing repentance in response to the nearness of the kingdom of heaven. It is a mark of readiness to experience and respond appropriately to the next stage of the in-breaking of God's kingdom in the world.<sup>57</sup>

### **c) The Coming One's Baptism in Holy Spirit and Fire**

In 3.10f John outlines the consequences of responding positively and negatively to the nearness of God's rule. John declares that, for those who do not respond appropriately to his message, God's judgement is imminent. 'Already' (ἤ ὅ ς), he says, the axe is at the root of the trees. Those branches that do not produce good fruit will be cut off and thrown into the fire (v.10).<sup>58</sup> This reinforces 3.7 and works to emphasise that those failing to display 'conversionary repentance' in the face of God's eschatological initiative expose themselves to the likelihood of impending eschatological destruction.

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<sup>56</sup> Webb, *Baptizer*, p.197, argues that John's baptising ministry creates a fundamental distinction between two sets of people. In Matthew's Gospel it is not so much that there exists a fundamental distinction between the baptised and the unbaptised, rather it is the case that John's ministry of baptising highlights a fundamental distinction between those who would respond to the nearness of God's rule in repentance and those who remain impenitent in spite of God's approaching rule.

<sup>57</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.389-390, speak of the coming of God's kingdom in terms of an 'extended time' which involves a 'process or series of events'. In terms of understanding our present pericope this is a useful concept as it helps to explain the sense in which the kingdom is near at the time of John's preaching but also accounts for the sense in which the kingdom draws nearer still as the Gospel proceeds.

<sup>58</sup> Note the parallels with Is.10.15-19, 33-34; Is.66.24; Jer.11.16, 19; 46.22; Ezek.31; Dan.4; Jdt. 16.17; 4 Macc. 9.9; Jub.9.15; 1 En.10.6; 54.1-2; 90.24-25; 100.9; 4 Ezra 7.36-38; 13.10-11. Especially see Mal.4.1. In all of these the eschatological expectation of a fiery final judgement is expressed. In John's ministry the imminence of this coming judgement is declared along with a proclamation of who is liable to be judged and why. Cf. Webb, *Baptizer*, pp.300-306.

In verses 11 and 12 John begins to speak of a coming one who would effect eschatological judgement which would result in the destruction of some and the salvation of others. John makes clear his own inferiority to this coming one. The coming one is both stronger than John and is of abundantly higher status. This is communicated as John acknowledges that he is not worthy even to carry the sandals of the coming one.<sup>59</sup> It is significant that John describes the activity of the coming one in terms of baptising. The coming one will minister in a way that demonstrates continuity with the practice of John. However, the coming one's baptism will be of a completely different order to the baptism of John. John's baptism is a baptism in water to express fruit bearing repentance in the face of the kingdom of heaven which has drawn near. This baptism functions as part of John's task of preparing the way of the Lord (3.3). The 'coming one', on the other hand, will baptise not in water but in 'Holy Spirit and fire'. As Dunn puts it, 'The implication is that John's water-baptism is only a shadow and symbol of the Christ's Spirit-baptism.'<sup>60</sup>

Having recognised the difference in order between the baptismal ministry of John and that of the coming one, the reader is still exercised in considering what it means for this 'coming one' to baptise in 'Holy Spirit and fire'. Does this refer to one baptism in which Holy Spirit and fire are combined and through which all will have to pass? Or does this refer to two baptisms, a baptism in Holy Spirit which brings salvation to the penitent and a baptism in fire which brings destruction to the

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<sup>59</sup> Nolland, *Matthew*, p.146, observes that carrying the clothing of another became a rabbinic image of self-humiliation and argues that the carrying of footwear expresses graphically the status differential involved.

<sup>60</sup> Dunn, *Baptism in Holy Spirit*, p.19

impenitent? Scholars are divided in their answers to these questions. Dunn<sup>61</sup>, who is followed by Davies and Allison<sup>62</sup> and Charette<sup>63</sup>, prefers to think of one baptism which combines the elements of spirit and fire into one act of eschatological judgement. These scholars postulate that this fiery stream of judgement will effect those immersed in it in different ways according to the state of their repentance. On the other hand, Webb<sup>64</sup> sees two baptisms involved here: a baptism of fiery judgement for those who turn away from God and a baptism of Holy Spirit, a blessing, for those who choose to orient their lives in accordance with God's purposes.

Dunn bases his conclusions on a close reading of the text. For Dunn, the text itself makes it clear that when John says, αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς βαπτίσει ἐν Πνεύματι Ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρὶ (3.11), he is talking about a single baptism in Holy Spirit and fire, rather than two separate baptisms, one in Holy Spirit and the other in fire. This is because the ἐν can be seen to embrace both elements. This leads Dunn to conclude that 'Spirit-and-fire' together describe the purgative act

<sup>61</sup> See Dunn, *Baptism in Holy Spirit*, pp.10-22

<sup>62</sup> See Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.316-317 in which they justify their point of view with further reference to literary parallels that exist in the Old Testament and in Second Temple eschatological literature. They note that the concepts of fire, water and spirit are sometimes combined to produce metaphors of God's eschatological judgement. In particular, they draw a parallel between 4 Ezra 13.8-11 and John's words in Mt.3.11. 4 Ezra 13.8-11 speaks of 'a stream of fire and a flame of breath (which) issue from the Messiah's mouth as judgement. ... For the Baptist, fire and Spirit were not two things but one. ... He proclaimed that, at the boundary of the new age, all would pass through the fiery *rôah* of God, a stream which would purify the righteous and destroy the unrighteous.' Davies and Allison, p.317. This particular parallel needs to be made with caution, however, because of the relatively late date of 4 Ezra. It is not at all clear that the tradition attested to in 4 Ezra was influential for John or Matthew. It may well be that later readers of Matthew read the Gospel in the light of 4 Ezra but for our purposes of understanding the place of baptism in Matthew's account of the theodrama it is best not to use 4 Ezra as a justification for preferring a particular interpretation. More important by far is the literary context and its relationship to intertextual evidence that can be shown to be contemporary with Matthew.

<sup>63</sup> See Charette, *Presence*, p.44

of messianic judgement which both repentant and unrepentant would experience, the former as a blessing and the latter as destruction.’<sup>65</sup> Dunn notices the different senses in which the prophets referred to God’s Spirit. In Isaiah this is sometimes a ‘spirit of purification and judgement (4.4; 30.28), for some purely retributive (29.10) and destructive (11.15), but for God’s people the bringer of blessing, prosperity and righteousness (32.15-17; 44.3). .... It is quite conceivable, therefore, that John spoke of such a baptism – in which the ‘spirit’ neither was merely gracious nor bore the sense of storm wind, but was God’s Holy Spirit, purgative and refining for those who had repented, destructive ... for those who remained impenitent.’<sup>66</sup> For Dunn then, the coming one will bring one baptism and one baptism only. This baptism will be characterised by fire and Holy Spirit, a ‘fiery πνεύμα’.<sup>67</sup> This would mean total destruction for the impenitent but for the repentant it would mean a refining and purging of sin and result in salvation and eschatological blessing. Dunn also argues that the subject of the first ὁ μὲν in 3.11 is important. If ὁ μὲν refers to those baptized in water then it is reasonable to conclude that the second ὁ μὲν refers to the same people and that this penitent group will undergo the coming one’s Spirit/fire baptism. However, Dunn concedes that the first ὁ μὲν could be addressed in general to the crowd which could be conceived of as containing repentant and unrepentant. This would then lend credence to the view

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<sup>64</sup> See Webb, *Baptizer*, pp.289-296. Webb finds support from Nolland, ‘All Righteousness’ pp.70-72; Taylor, *Immerser*, p.139; Hartman, *Into the Name*, pp.13-14; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, pp.171-172; Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.93.

<sup>65</sup> Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, pp.10-11.

<sup>66</sup> Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, p.13

<sup>67</sup> Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, p.13



that the penitent receive a baptism of salvific blessing in Holy Spirit, whereas the impenitent are to receive a baptism of eschatological judgement in fire.<sup>68</sup>

Webb argues against the view expressed by Dunn. Webb responds to Dunn's argument by contending that 'when two or more nouns used with the same preposition are joined by a conjunction the preposition may but does not need to be repeated. ... Therefore, the solitary  $\epsilon \nu$  should not be used to support a single baptism unless the context also requires this sense.'<sup>69</sup> Webb goes on to argue that the sense of the context of John's statement in Mt.3.11 does indeed point to two baptisms. This is largely because John does not refer to *a baptism* in Holy Spirit and fire, but rather to one who *will baptise* in Holy Spirit and fire. For Webb, this is crucial. Holy Spirit and fire, therefore are not two elements of the same noun 'baptism' but instead, relate to the same verb 'baptise'. The number of a verb is determined by the number of its subject rather than the number of its object. So the verse can legitimately be taken as 'he will baptise in Holy Spirit and he will baptise in fire'.<sup>70</sup> Webb concludes that the 'coming one' announced by John will therefore baptise in Holy Spirit<sup>71</sup>, which is a blessing to the repentant, and also in fire, a different baptism involving the destruction of the unrepentant.<sup>72</sup>

Webb's arguments are persuasive and fit well with the literary context of John the Baptist's ministry within the Gospel of Matthew. The Gospel itself to this

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. Dunn, 'Spirit and Fire Baptism', *Nov T* 14 (1972) pp.81-92. See especially pp.84-85 and 86

<sup>69</sup> Webb, *Baptizer*, p.290

<sup>70</sup> See Webb, *Baptizer*, p.291

<sup>71</sup> Webb, *Baptizer*, pp.292-295 argues that we are to understand John's  $\pi \nu \epsilon \upsilon \mu \alpha \tau \iota \ \alpha \gamma \iota \omega$  'as a spirit of holiness'. For such language has parallels in Second Temple eschatological literature (eg. Jub.1.23; and 1QS 4.20-21). In these passages the 'spirit of holiness' is referred to in terms that speak of a purification of God's people as part of the restoration of Israel.

<sup>72</sup> See Webb, *Baptizer*, p.292-295

point in the narrative has used the term Holy Spirit to describe the power of God which intervenes in human experience. In 1.18 and also in 1.20 the term 'Holy Spirit' is seen to refer to the gracious, creative power of God which brought about the conception of the Messiah.<sup>73</sup> However, the use of the word 'fire' is only introduced in 3.10 and is linked particularly with John's words about the 'wrath that is to come' and the notion that any branch not bearing good fruit will be cut off and thrown into the fire. Therefore, the literary context of 3.11 points us in the direction of conceiving of two different baptisms in the ministry of the coming one: a baptism in Holy Spirit for those bearing fruit worthy of repentance and a baptism in fire for those who do not. The baptism in fire refers back to 3.10 and relates to the imminent judgement envisaged by John for those who fail to respond appropriately to his message. The word βαπτισμις is used to describe this activity of the coming one in order to demonstrate that the ministry of the Messiah is in continuity with the ministry of John and is also the fulfilment of John's ministry.

Earlier we concluded that it is likely, given that immersions were normally considered to have a purificatory function in Judaism, that John's baptism in water for repentance is also most naturally thought of as effecting a purification. We also noted that the content of John's message indicated that any purificatory significance claimed for his baptism would refer to a moral rather than ritual cleansing. We observed, however, that the narrative makes clear that John's baptism in this respect is only preliminary and that it points to a more powerful spiritual and eschatological ablution (3.11).<sup>74</sup> This future eschatological purificatory baptism is to be

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<sup>73</sup> See Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.200 and 208, in which comment is made on the fact that Holy Spirit should be understood as God's creative energy.

<sup>74</sup> See p. 165-166 above.

administered by the coming one and it is to this that John refers when he speaks of one who will baptise in Holy Spirit (3.11).<sup>75</sup>

1QS 4.20-21 speaks of God purifying some from mankind with a 'spirit of holiness' that will destroy all the 'spirit of perversity'. The 'spirit of holiness' is mentioned in the same verse as a 'spirit of truth' that God will sprinkle 'like waters for impurity' (1 QS 4.21).<sup>76</sup> The sect at Qumran practised immersions for purification for those who would enter the community and also for members of the community. The eschatological cleansing was understood to be of a far greater significance than the immersions practised by the community and would cleanse from all defilement.<sup>77</sup> The parallels between the expectations at Qumran and the expectations of John are clear. The community at Qumran regularly practised ablutions to establish and maintain purity in anticipation of a future eschatological and spiritual cleansing administered by God. John, on the other hand, appears to have administered one baptism for those who were genuinely repentant to prepare them to receive a future baptism in Holy Spirit, administered by the Messiah. This baptism in Holy Spirit would completely achieve that which John's baptism was preparing people for by enabling them to express their repentant response to the nearness of God's rule.<sup>78</sup>

John continues to speak of the coming one in verse 12. Here the coming one's activity is still spoken of in terms of judgement and salvation but the imagery

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. Ez 36.25-26; Isa.4.4; Joel 3.18; Zech.13.1, 14.8; Mal.3.2-3

<sup>76</sup> Nolland, *Matthew*, p.147; cf. Webb, *Baptizer*, pp. 156, 293, 295-300; Hill, *Matthew*, p.95

<sup>77</sup> Webb, *Baptizer*, p.157, suggests that the sect may have understood their own immersions to foreshadow the expected eschatological cleansing.

<sup>78</sup> Nolland, *Matthew*, p.147, observes that, 'Bestowal of the Spirit is not a normal part of Jewish messianic expectation. ... but it is only a small step to linking the OT expectation of an eschatological

is no longer that of baptism but is now that of harvesting. John declares that 'His winnowing shovel (πτύον) is in his hand, and he will cleanse his floor and will gather his wheat into the barn. But he will burn up the chaff with fire that cannot be put out.'<sup>79</sup> In 3.12 we find metaphors of the eschatological restoration and judgement to be effected by the Messiah. The metaphor of burning the chaff functions in the context of 3.10 which introduced fire as a metaphor of eschatological judgement. In this context the coming one's baptism in fire is seen to refer to eschatological judgement also. The metaphor of burning chaff is clearly a further way of referring to the impending eschatological condemnatory judgement to be effected by the coming one.

The metaphor of gathering wheat into the barn is contrasted with the notion of burning chaff. As such its literal significance is to be thought of as the opposite of the literal significance of the chaff being burned. The wheat gathered into the barn, therefore, can be seen to signify metaphorically the eschatological salvation to be effected by the coming one for those who bear fruit worthy of repentance. Webb argues that the winnowing shovel (πτύον) was the implement that was used to clean the threshing floor once the wheat and chaff had already been separated. Therefore, Webb argues, the expected figure's ministry is to take these two groups to their end, whether to the granary or to the fire.<sup>80</sup> In this sense gathering of wheat and the burning of chaff can be seen to be explanatory metaphors to further illuminate the meaning of baptism in Holy Spirit and fire. We cannot presume at this stage that the

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outpouring of the Spirit with the equally OT expectation of a Spirit-anointed messiah and to thinking in terms of a Spirit-dispensing messiah.'

<sup>79</sup> Note the eschatological expectations that the Messiah would 'gather' God's people together in an eschatological kingdom: Deut. 30.3; Is.35; Jer.29.14; 31.1-25 esp. 7-14; Ezek.20.33-44; 34.11f, 24. See also Hartman, *Into the Name*, pp.13-14.

baptisms in Holy Spirit and fire refer only to the eschaton but what 3.11-12 makes clear is that the end point of baptism in Holy Spirit is eschatological salvation whilst the end point of baptism in fire is eschatological destruction. The urgency with which John speaks of these matters suggests an imminent fulfilment (3.10, 12).

The prophecy of John in 3.11-12 is critical to the theology of baptism presented in the Gospel of Matthew. The way in which the reader perceives this prophecy to be fulfilled will be determinative for the reader's understanding of the place of baptism in Matthew's account of the theo-drama. John's words in 3.11-12 are an example of what Genette has called a 'prolepsis'. This is 'any narrative manoeuvre that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later'.<sup>81</sup> There are three categories of 'prolepses'. References to events which will occur within the narrative are called 'internal prolepses'. Events that will occur after the narrative has finished are called 'external prolepses'. Those predictions that begin to be fulfilled within the narrative but do not reach their completion until after the narrative has finished are called 'mixed prolepses'.<sup>82</sup>

Given that the themes of promise and fulfilment are particularly strong in the Matthean narrative and given that John is a reliable character, the reader is encouraged to believe that John's predictions will indeed reach their fulfilment. But will such fulfilment occur within the narrative, will it only begin after the narrative has finished, or will it begin within the narrative but not conclude until after the narrative has finished? The reader will need to continue reading the Gospel to

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<sup>80</sup> Webb, *Baptizer*, pp.295-300

<sup>81</sup> Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin. (Oxford: Blackwells, 1980) p.40.

<sup>82</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p.68ff

discover the answer but the reader's knowledge at this stage of the narrative provokes a degree of confusion. On the one hand, John is very clear in pointing to the imminence of the events he describes and because Mt.1-2 has already informed us of the Messiah's presence in the world, the reader expects to encounter something of their fulfilment quickly in the narrative. On the other hand, however, the reader continues to live in an environment in which repentant and unrepentant rub along together, so this leads to the expectation that John's words do not reach their consummation until after the end of the story presented in the narrative.<sup>83</sup> This degree of uncertainty and confusion leads the reader to view John's words in 3.10-12 as a mixed prolepsis. The reader expects them in some way to be fulfilled imminently within the narrative but does not expect them to be fulfilled completely prior to the eschaton. This mixed anticipation causes the reader eagerly to pursue the answers to this paradox as the story unfolds.

#### **d) John's Baptism of Jesus**

In 3.13 Jesus enters the scene. He comes from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptised by him.<sup>84</sup> Already this strikes the reader as being a strange development. John has just finished describing the 'coming one' in terms which clearly demonstrate the expected figure's superiority over himself. In fact John has described his own ministry in comparison to that of the Messiah as the difference between baptising in water and baptising in Holy Spirit and fire. So now it is

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<sup>83</sup> *Contra* Howell, *Inclusive Story*, p.123. Here Howell regards 3.11 as an internal prolepsis, ie: The coming one appears in Mt.3.13. In regarding the text in this way Howell has clearly failed to appreciate the full significance of the Baptist's words or indeed the words of Jesus in v.15, 'Let it be so for now' which suggest a deeper fulfilment which has yet to come.

difficult to comprehend why Jesus comes to seek John's baptism. Nolland has suggested that there are four possible reasons that are consistent with the view of Jesus presented in Matthew's Gospel. These are: (1) he felt impelled by God to do so; (2) he was convinced of the rightness of the thrust of John's ministry; (3) he wanted to be publicly identified with the radical orientation towards God to which people were committing themselves in coming for John's baptism; and (4) he came in human solidarity to identify himself with the sinners whom he had come to save.<sup>85</sup> All of these options are consistent with the text and there is no reason to doubt them but it may be possible to go further when considering verses 14 and 15.

In verse 14 John voices the surprise already felt by the reader when he says 'I have need to be baptised by you and do you come to me?' Jesus replies in verse 15 saying, 'Let it be so for now because in this way it fitting for us to fulfil (π λ η ρ ō σ α ι ) all (π ᾠ σ α ν) righteousness (δ ι κ α ι ο σ ū ν η ν )'. This answer to John's question is illuminating in a number of ways.<sup>86</sup> We have already seen that Joseph is described as a righteous (δ ι κ α ι ο ς ) man. In this instance the context made it clear that such righteousness was demonstrated as Joseph accepted the will of God and was obedient to it. For Joseph this involved adopting God's Messiah into the line of David and giving him the divinely appointed name (1.19 and 1.21). In his reply to John the Baptist in 3.15, Jesus is making it clear that by submitting to John's

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<sup>84</sup> Meier, 'John the Baptist', p.391, has noticed that John and Jesus are introduced using the same verb, π α ρ α γ ι ν ε τ α ι . For Meier this is a subtle example of a tendency in Matthew to draw parallels between the ministry of John and the ministry of Jesus.

<sup>85</sup> See Nolland, 'All Righteousness', p.73; cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.321-323, who produce a longer but less credible list of options. In terms of δ ι κ α ι ο σ ū ν η ν see Przybylski, *Righteousness*, pp.77-123

<sup>86</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.321-323; cf. Nolland, 'All Righteousness', p.65; and Hartman, *Into the Name*, p.24, have rightly observed that π λ η ρ ō σ α ι and δ ι κ α ι ο σ ū ν η ν are words that have particular significance in Matthew's Gospel.

baptism he is acting with righteousness (δικαιοσύνην), that is in accord with God's purposes.<sup>87</sup>

Jesus also uses the word, πληρωσάι. The concept of fulfilment has already been presented in the narrative with respect to the fulfilment of Scripture (cf. 1.22, 2.15, 2.17, 2.23 and by implication in 2.6). In 3.15 however, Jesus does not speak about fulfilling particular Scriptural passages but rather he speaks about fulfilling 'all righteousness'. Jesus' words in 3.15 tie in with the earlier fulfilment quotations which have established that in the person of Jesus Scripture is fulfilled but they go beyond this to state that his baptism is a necessary element in the fulfilment of the divine will.

One might also notice that at this stage John the Baptist and Jesus are partners in fulfilling the purposes of God. Just as the obedience of Joseph was a necessary part of Jesus being adopted into the line of David (1.19-25), so the obedience of John is necessary in 3.15 so that Jesus might receive John's baptism in order to fulfil all righteousness.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> This is consistent with the thinking of Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, p.178, who interprets the phrase 'all righteousness' to refer to 'The entirety of the Divine will as Matthew interprets it.' In 1.19 the righteousness of Joseph was connected with his caring. Przybylski, *Righteousness*, p.102, only allows that Joseph is righteous to the extent that he observes the law in resolving to dismiss Mary; cf. Num.5.11-31. However, the sense in which Joseph is δικαιοσ is extended as in 1.24 he obeys the angel in order that the Scripture (Is.7.14) and the wider eschatological purposes of God might be fulfilled. Cf. Nolland, *Matthew*, pp.94-103.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Meier, 'John the Baptist', p.391. Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.98, has it that 'John's primary role within the divine will is to be the way-preparer of the Messiah (3.3). Since Jesus is the Messiah – the 'Anointed One' – his anointing is basic preparation to his ministry. Given this understanding, the act of baptism takes on an entirely different significance for Jesus than the significance it holds for others who were baptised by John. For the crowds, baptism is a symbol of repentance. For Jesus, however, it constitutes his anointing for ministry as the Messiah.' This is probably an important aspect of John's role in the baptising Jesus though it needs to be stressed that the important anointing was not Jesus' anointing by John but the later anointing by God (3.16).



The conversation between John the Baptist and Jesus serves to notify the reader that what is about to happen is of a different order from that which has gone before. John's baptism of Jesus does indeed form part of a continuum with John's other baptisms because it is performed in the same place and by the same person but its significance is different. John's earlier baptismal ministry has been performed for those who are not the Messiah in order to prepare them for the Messiah's coming. John's baptism of Jesus is performed for one who is the Messiah. As John acknowledges, John has need to be baptised by Jesus, not the other way around. Jesus submits to the baptism of John because by so doing he complies with the divine will so that the next stage of God's eschatological rule can be realised.

Only in verses 16 and 17 does the reader realise in what way God's will, purposes and promises are fulfilled by John's baptism of Jesus.<sup>89</sup> This is because the baptism of Jesus is the occasion that leads to an extraordinary manifestation of God's Spirit. The narrator describes Christ's vision of the heavens being opened and the Spirit of God, like a dove descending upon him. We are also informed of the voice from heaven that was heard saying, 'This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I have found delight.'<sup>90</sup> In this vision the secrets of heaven are made known on the

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<sup>89</sup> Kingsbury, *Structure*, pp.1-39 and Bauer, *Structure*, pp.135-142, have described 3.17 as the 'climax' of the first section of the Gospel which they understand to be 1.1-4.16. Whether or not we can be so precise about the relationship of 3.16-17 to the structure of the Gospel is still an open question. We can be clear, however, that 3.16-17 is constructed to leave a lasting impression on the reader which continues to influence the reader's experience of the rest of the Gospel. cf. Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, pp.99-100.

<sup>90</sup> Dunn, Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, pp.33-37, is emphatic in his desire to separate the event of the baptism of Jesus and the events of Jesus being anointed by the Spirit and hearing the voice of God. In so doing Dunn is seeking to respond to ecclesiological sacramentalists who have used the accounts of Christ's baptism to support their view that Christian baptism itself accomplishes the gift of the Spirit in the life of the candidate and also achieves the candidate's adoption into the kingdom of God as children of God through Christ. Dunn is eager to show that it is not the baptism of Christ that achieves the theophany but his identity and his willingness to comply with the will of God. For Dunn, the baptism of Jesus is no different from any other baptism performed by John. Clearly it is, however, as the text is at pains to show that Jesus had no need to be baptised by John and no need to repent because he was already focussed on 'all righteousness'. Dunn's view seems to create an unnecessary

earth as is demonstrated by the opening of the heavens.<sup>91</sup> As part of this great heavenly declaration the Spirit is seen to descend upon Jesus. This makes visible the fulfilment of the eschatological hopes of the prophets that a Spirit-anointed Messiah would come to Israel.<sup>92</sup> The appearance of God's Spirit in the form of a dove is deeply significant and is particularly evocative of Gen.1.2 in which God's Spirit brooded over the waters in the first creation.<sup>93</sup> In this theophany the presence of the Spirit and the voice of God in the context of the waters of baptism to which Jesus, God's Son, submits bring to mind Gen.1.2. This serves to communicate that, through the promised Messiah, God is bringing about his purposes to renew creation.<sup>94</sup>

Following the descent of the Spirit in the form of a dove a voice is heard from heaven saying, 'This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I have found delight'. This heavenly declaration is significant for the narrative as a whole because here the divine ideological point of view is explicitly stated.<sup>95</sup> God is confirming that he has taken an initiative in human history through his Son Jesus, and he is underlining the identity of Jesus. This is effectively accomplished by using words in this declaration from heaven that allude to Old Testament expectations concerning the Davidic

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minimalisation of what takes place between Jesus and John at the Jordan. It is possible to say that there is a baptism of John for the people of Israel that demonstrates their repentance from sin and that the baptism of Jesus is in continuity with but different from that. It is also possible to say that Christian baptism is in continuity with but different from both John's baptism for repentance and the baptism of Jesus. This would allow Dunn to make his point against the sacramentalists and would also seem to be more consistent with what we find in Matthew.

<sup>91</sup> See parallels in Ezek.1.1; Jn.1.51; Acts 7.56; 10.11; Rev. 11.19; 19.11 and also see comment in Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.329; and Dunn, *Baptism in Holy Spirit*, p.26.

<sup>92</sup> See Is.11.2; 61.1 and Dunn, *Baptism in Holy Spirit*, p.27; cf. Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.98

<sup>93</sup> The rabbis sometimes described the spirit of God brooding over the waters as a dove. See Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.331-334 and Dunn, *Baptism in Holy Spirit*, p.27. The presence of the dove is also reminiscent of the dove that was sent out by Noah following the flood of Gen.8.8-12; cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.332. In any event the presence of a dove in this theophany points to intertextual connections which serve to emphasise the possibility of creation being restored as part of the divine initiative at work in the anointed Messiah.

<sup>94</sup> See Stookey, *Baptism*, pp.94-95

Messiah which are found at Ps.2.7 and Is. 42.1.<sup>96</sup> As such this is a direct declaration by God that here is the Messiah who is able to fulfil the eschatological expectations of Israel because he has been given the authority of a king but has shown, through the humility expressed at his baptism, that this authority will be utilised as he adopts his role as a servant.

#### **4) The Immediate Aftermath of John's Baptism of Jesus (Mt. 4.1-11)**

In *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, W. D. Davies argues that Matthew's presentation of the baptism of Jesus implicitly displays exodus typology as the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan evokes the memory of Israel passing through the Red Sea.<sup>97</sup> He justifies this position by making appeal to the 'dove' as a symbol of creation and by suggesting that 'in Judaism the act of creation had become linked with that of redemption from Egypt'.<sup>98</sup> Further to this Davies finds allusions to the exodus in God's acknowledgement of Jesus as 'Son' when he states, 'that the declaration of Jesus' sonship at his baptism recalls the adoption of Israel as Yahweh's son at the Exodus'.<sup>99</sup> In his later work with D.C. Allison, Davies appears to have retreated from his earlier position when it is stated that 'we have not found in the dove or in 'Son' evidence of a new exodus motif, it would be wrong to exclude the idea altogether from Matthew's story of the baptism. This is because 3.13-17 is followed immediately by the temptation narrative, in which Jesus the Son repeats the

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.100; Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, p.52

<sup>96</sup> See Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.326, 336-339; Hill, *Matthew*, p.100; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, pp.180-181, 185-186; Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, p.55 and *Structure*, p.51

<sup>97</sup> W.D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964) pp.36-45.

<sup>98</sup> Davies, *Setting*, p.36

<sup>99</sup> Davies, *Setting*, p.39

experience of her desert wanderings.<sup>100</sup> Davies and Allison's latter position is correct. Whilst there is nothing in Matthew's account of the baptism of Jesus to suggest a typological interpretation, the fact that it is followed immediately by the obviously typological account of the temptation serves to cast typological light back on to the baptism scene. It is from the perspective of having encountered the temptation narrative that the reader can look back and discern the new exodus typology in the account of Jesus' baptism.

The typological aspect of the baptism narrative is established in 4.1-11. Following the theophany at the Jordan, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by Satan. Just as God led Israel out of Egypt and through the waters into the desert so Jesus comes through the waters of baptism and is led out into the desert by the Spirit.<sup>101</sup> The quotation of Hosea in Mt.2.15 has already established a precedent in the narrative for understanding Jesus to be God's Son such that he personally is given the status as God's son previously ascribed corporately to Israel. We have also seen in the typological aspects of Mt.1-2 that there is a precedent for understanding the experiences of Jesus as a representation of Israel's history.<sup>102</sup> In 3.17 a voice from heaven identifies Jesus as God's Son who has passed through the waters and who now enters the wilderness to be tested just as Israel had been tested before. The parallel with the exodus is made more striking when the reader discovers that Jesus fasted in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. This calls to mind the words of Deuteronomy 8.2-3: 'your God has led you these forty

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<sup>100</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.344

<sup>101</sup> See Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.354. cf. Num.20.5; Ps.80.1. Also see link between the 'spirit of God' and the exodus wanderings of Israel, Num.11.17, 25, 29; Neh. 9.20; Ps.106.33; Is.63.10-14.

<sup>102</sup> See pp.155-156 above.

years in the wilderness that he might humble you and test you'.<sup>103</sup> So in the testing of Jesus that is presented here we have a parallel with the testing of Israel. There are several detailed exegetical studies of 4.1-11.<sup>104</sup> It is not necessary for our purposes to undertake a detailed exegesis of the temptation narrative. It is sufficient simply to observe that Jesus passes through water into the wilderness to be tested just as Israel had done before. Whereas Israel failed several times in their journey through the wilderness, now Jesus, the Son of God, remains faithful. The narrative demonstrates through the baptism of Jesus and his subsequent temptation that Jesus is the 'new Israel' who exemplifies obedience to the will of God. Jesus faces his temptation in a manner of perfect obedience which can be contrasted with the failings of the people of Israel.<sup>105</sup> The temptations offer a picture of Jesus, the Son of God who 'fulfils all righteousness' (3.15) by being faithful to the commandments and purposes of God. The setting of the temptations and the scriptures quoted by Jesus help to make a comparison with Israel, the Son of God that had often failed in its calling to be faithful to God. The temptations form 'an attempt to induce Jesus to be unfaithful to a pattern of Sonship conceived in terms of the relationship between ideal Israel and the divine Father'.<sup>106</sup> As Howell puts it, 'In contrast to Israel the first Son, however, Jesus withstands the temptations and accepts the way of humble obedience to God'.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> For further intertextual parallels see Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.358-359.

<sup>104</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, pp.182-191; Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.351-374; Donaldson, *Mountain*, pp.87-104

<sup>105</sup> See Exod.16; Num.11.

<sup>106</sup> Donaldson, *Mountain*, p.92

<sup>107</sup> Howell, *Inclusive Story*, p.125

## **5) Mt.3.1—4.16: Introducing the Place of Baptism in Matthew's Account of the Theo-Drama**

Mt.3.1-4.16 forms part of Matthew's ongoing story about God's eschatological initiative in Jesus (cf. 1.1; 1.21; 2.2; 2.6) and the responses of human characters to that divine initiative. The responses of acceptance and obedience are presented positively in the narrative (cf. 1.25; 2.2; 2.11) whilst the responses of fear and rejection are presented negatively (cf. 2.3; 2.16). In this way the reader is persuaded that the appropriate response to the initiative of God is worshipful and obedient acceptance whereas rejection of the divine initiative in Jesus is shown to be inappropriate.

It is in this narrative context that John the Baptist is introduced and in which his message and baptising ministry are to find their meaning. John is introduced as an eschatological messenger of God, whose life is in accord with the purposes of God and who has come to prepare the way for the ministry of God's eschatological Messiah whose identity is already known to the reader (cf. 1.1; 1.21; 2.2). John comes as a prophet and as a fulfilment of prophecy (3.3) to prophesy in the wilderness, an environment that had come to be associated with the dawning of eschatological fulfilment (cf. Ez.20.33-38; Ho.2.14-23; CD 8.12-15; 1QS 9.20). In this narrative, geographical and historical context John announces God's eschatological initiative by declaring that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near. He also develops the reader's understanding of the appropriate human response to that initiative by calling his hearers to repentance in the light of the imminence of God's reign (3.2).

John practised a baptism in water for repentance (3.11) and as his hearers received this baptism they confessed their sins (3.6). Hence John's baptism in water was a ritualistic expression of having received John's message. Those who received his baptism are presented in the narrative as being those who genuinely demonstrate a radical change of heart and mind in the light of God's eschatological initiative. The participants of John's baptism are contrasted with those who do not bear fruit worthy of repentance (3.7-8). John's baptism is to be understood as a preliminary and preparatory purification which works alongside his message to make his hearers ready to receive the Messiah (3.11-12). John pointed beyond his own message and ministry to one coming after him who would be more powerful and who would administer the eschatological baptisms in Holy Spirit and fire. The baptism in Holy Spirit would result in salvation for the truly penitent whereas the baptism in fire results in condemnatory judgement for those who reject God's eschatological initiative.

In 3.13 Jesus enters the narrative seeking the baptism of John in the Jordan. This is a surprising development given John's words about the coming one being more powerful and about his baptism being of a much more powerful order. Yet Jesus persuades John to baptise him by stating that by so doing John and Jesus together will be fulfilling all righteousness, acting in accordance with the fullness of God's eschatological purpose (3.15). Once Jesus is baptised he is acclaimed from heaven and acknowledged as God's own Son using language that makes allusion to Ps.2.7 and Is.42.1. Thus the heavenly point of view is made clear giving divine expression to the point of view of the narrator already expressed in the narrative:

Jesus is God's eschatological Messiah – God's Son. The expression of the divine point of view is accompanied by a vision of the Spirit coming upon Jesus in the form of a dove. The Spirit, the waters and the heavenly voice function together to bring to mind Gen.1.2 and the account of creation. This serves to communicate that, through the promised Messiah, God is bringing about his purposes to renew creation.

In 4.1 the Spirit that descended upon Jesus at his baptism leads him into the wilderness to be tested by the devil and to overcome the temptations placed before him. The temptation narrative (4.1-11) displays clear new exodus typology as Jesus, the Son of God, who overcomes temptation in the wilderness is to be contrasted with Israel, the Son of God, who often failed in its calling to be faithful to God. Jesus is presented as an ideal Israel relating to the divine Father. The typological significance of the temptation narrative throws typological light back onto the baptism narrative and the two scenes work together to give the impression that the baptism of Jesus functioned as a typological passing through the Red Sea and on into the wilderness. Therefore, it can be seen that the baptismal pericope not only communicates that, through Jesus, God is fulfilling his purposes to renew creation but also that God is at work to redefine Israel through the obedience of his Son Jesus.

The baptism of Jesus and his subsequent obedience in the wilderness reveal to the reader that the one through whom God draws near is also the one who exemplifies what the appropriate response to God's eschatological activity should be. Those who seek to live a life that truly bears fruit worthy of repentance, therefore, will find that life exemplified in the model presented by Jesus.



Interestingly, although Jesus demonstrated a desire and a capacity to fulfil all righteousness prior to his baptism (3.15) he did not enter the wilderness to overcome temptation until after he had received the anointing of the Spirit. It may be, therefore, that the reader is to understand that the Spirit has a role in enabling the penitent to follow the example of Jesus who models a life perfectly oriented towards God's purposes. This may be an aspect of what it might mean to receive his eschatological baptism in Holy Spirit. This would reflect a possible parallel between the envisaged baptism in Holy Spirit and the Qumran expectation of a cleansing by a 'spirit of holiness' (1QS 4.19-22). John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would come imminently and baptise in Holy Spirit and fire. The end-point of these baptisms is defined by John as eschatological salvation and eschatological destruction (3.10-12). It is not clear how or when exactly this prophecy of John will reach fulfilment. The reader's experience of the rest of the narrative, therefore, is conditioned by the questions, 'How does Jesus baptise the penitent in Holy Spirit?' and 'How does Jesus effect the baptism of fiery judgement on those who reject the kingdom of heaven?' The answers to these questions will be important for the reader at the end of the Gospel in seeking to understand the meaning of Christ's baptismal command in 28.19.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Matthew 4.17—28.15:**

### **Baptising in Holy Spirit and Fire? The Ministry of Jesus**

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‘Matthew 28.16-20 has to be interpreted against the background of Matthew’s Gospel as a whole and unless we keep this in mind we shall fail to understand it.’

David Bosch<sup>1</sup>

#### **1) The Nature and Scope of Chapter Five**

Given that baptism is mentioned explicitly only once in Matthew’s Gospel in the intervening chapters between Mt.3 and Mt.28,<sup>2</sup> it is tempting to suggest that we can proceed directly from our treatment of Mt.3.1—4.16 to a consideration of Mt.28.19. Such an approach would assume that an understanding of Mt.3.1—4.16 is a sufficient pre-requisite for grasping the significance and impact of Christ’s baptismal command in 28.19. It would also assume that the narrative presented in

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<sup>1</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p.57.

<sup>2</sup> In Mt.21.25 where Jesus questions the chief priests and the elders about the authority by which John the Baptist baptised. This verse is part of a scene in which the chief priests and elders question the authority of Jesus. Jesus asks them the question about John to avoid having to answer questions about his own authority. The implication of the scene is that John’s baptism had the authority of God and therefore Jesus has the authority of God also.

4.12—28.18 contributes little or nothing to the reader's understanding of the baptismal command in 28.19. Such an approach would be mistaken because it would not take full account of the literary nature of Matthew's narrative. The Gospel is not a textbook in systematic theology that presents neat doctrines in discrete units. Rather the narrative is just that, a presentation of a story, albeit with deep theological significance. The narrative makes connections between events, settings, characters and their discourses in all kinds of explicit and implicit ways. In the development of a story the implicit can be as powerful as the explicit in shaping a reader's understanding and conveying meaning.

At several points in the narrative between 4.17 and 28.15 the events of Mt.3.1-17 are evoked for the reader. One way in which this is achieved is by the use of verbal repetition of the language introduced in Mt.3, another is by references to the ongoing importance of the character of John the Baptist, another is by the outworking of the anticipatory tension created for the reader in 3.11-12 when John prophesied that the 'coming one' would baptise in 'Holy Spirit and fire'. In these ways the narrative continues to develop and strengthen the reader's understanding of the significance of baptism in the Gospel. In this chapter I aim to demonstrate how, by means of implicit narrative connections, the Gospel continues to shape the reader's understanding of baptism.

The approach of this chapter is very much influenced by Wolfgang Iser's work on the importance of anticipation and retrospection in a reader's appropriation

of prose. It will be necessary to elucidate this influence before turning to the specifics of Mt.4.12—28.15.<sup>3</sup>

## **2) Reflection on Method: Wolfgang Iser and the Reader's Wandering Viewpoint**

Matthew's Gospel is a narrative, with a beginning and an end and with sequentially arranged material which eventually connects the beginning with the end. The reader is not intended to proceed directly from Mt.3 to 28.19. The intervening material is there to be read and the act of reading causes the reader's perspective to be modified. Wolfgang Iser has helped us to appreciate how this act of reading functions.<sup>4</sup> He draws from the metaphor which likens the reader of prose to a traveller on a stagecoach. The traveller gazes out of the window encountering different landscapes and landmarks. As the journey progresses the traveller links together the changing scenery to build in her mind a consistent picture of the journey being travelled. The accuracy of the picture will depend on the traveller's memory and the degree of attention she has paid. This, Iser argues, is an apt metaphor for the act of reading prose. The reader makes her journey through the narrative encountering different scenes, characters and events. The reader is called upon to

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<sup>3</sup> The influence of Iser is also present in Janice Capel Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web: Over, and Over, and Over Again*, JSNTSS 91 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994) esp. pp. 83-89 and 172-174; and Yamasaki, *Life and Death*. Anderson and Yamasaki have both utilised literary critical techniques regarding the importance of the implicit in understanding the character of John the Baptist in the Gospel of Matthew. Anderson, *Narrative Web*, p.225, describes Matthew as 'a narrative web spun with the threads of verbal repetition.' She argues, p.205, that such repetition has the power to 'order, unify, reinforce and evoke associations not explicitly stated.' Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.41, conceives of the interpreter being engaged in a 'dynamic enterprise' with the text rather than approaching the text as a 'static entity'. Yamasaki, p.56, applies Iser's literary theory to the Gospel and argues that retrospection in narrative serves to 'influence the reader's perception of an earlier text' or to use an earlier text to exert influence on the reader's understanding of a later text. Anderson and Yamasaki have drawn from the thinking of Iser in order to understand the character of John the Baptist in Matthew, though neither have developed this in order to consider the role and function of 'baptism' in Matthew. Redaction critical considerations of the character of John the Baptist in Matthew include: Wink, *John the Baptist*, esp. pp.18-41; and Meier, 'John the Baptist', pp.383-405.

<sup>4</sup> In his works: *Act of Reading* and *Implied Reader*.

remember the stages of the journey, to combine them in her memory in an act of consistency building that allows the narrative to exert its intended effect – the telling of a story. Of course the success of the reader will depend on the level of attention she has paid and the reliability of her memory. At no time, however, can the reader access the whole work, with every episode as equally present for the reader as every other one. The reader of prose, therefore, is engaged in the application of her wandering viewpoint.<sup>5</sup>

A second metaphor which Iser applies to the process of reading is the metaphor of experiencing an event, or better, a series of inter-connecting events.<sup>6</sup> Events are not discrete entities, each one represents the ‘intersecting point of a variety of circumstances’.<sup>7</sup> As circumstances develop, however, the event is changed. It happened, it was real, it was experienced but as the situation develops the significance of what was experienced may be understood in a new way. In reading prose, ‘the reader is constantly feeding back reactions as [s]he obtains new information, there is just such a continual process of realization, and so reading itself ‘happens’ like an event, in the sense that what we read takes on the character of an open-ended situation, at one and the same time concrete and yet fluid’.<sup>8</sup>

There is a need to understand how this open-ended situation works in terms of its ability to convey meaning to the reader. An important part of this is comprehending the reader’s position in the text as she encounters different viewpoints on her textual journey. Iser describes the reader as being ‘at the point of

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<sup>5</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, pp.16, 108-118; cf. *Implied Reader*, pp.280-281

<sup>6</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.68

<sup>7</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.68

<sup>8</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.68

intersection between retention and protension'.<sup>9</sup> That is to say, each sentence in the text will prefigure a particular horizon as it contributes to the development of the story's plot. However, the original sentence is immediately transformed into the background as the next one continues the task. The reader is continually considering how each sentence is prefiguring what is to come and, at one and the same time, the reader is also seeking to comprehend how the new sentence can be understood in terms of what had already been pre-figured. As sentences give way to one another the reader is constantly modifying her understanding of what was pre-figured and is imagining what might be being pre-figured by the sentence being processed. The pre-figured horizon will contain a view which may well have a large degree of concreteness but will also contain indeterminacy. The ensuing sentences will either confirm, modify or frustrate the expectations aroused. In so doing they exercise a 'retro-active effect on what has already been read'.<sup>10</sup> The past horizon is 'constantly evoked in a new context and so modified by new correlates that instigate a restructuring of past syntheses ..... That which is remembered becomes open to new connections, and these in turn influence the expectations aroused by the individual correlates in the sequence of sentences'.<sup>11</sup> In terms of Matthew, 3.11 creates a particular expectation for the reader which is frustrated in 3.13. The expectation created in 3.11 remains active in the narrative but it is modified by 3.13 so that the reader begins to look for the expectation to be realised in different ways. The passing narrative makes connections with 3.11 and serves to modify the reader's understanding of what was communicated there.

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<sup>9</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.111; cf. *Implied Reader*, p.278

<sup>10</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.111

<sup>11</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.111

Iser continues to discuss how this 'retro-active' effect works. He notes that pointers and stimuli in the text have the power to evoke not just their immediate predecessors but also other events, actions, settings, conversations that had been described much earlier in the narrative.<sup>12</sup> 'If the reader is prodded into recalling something already sunk into memory, [s]he will bring it back, not in isolation but embedded in a particular context.'<sup>13</sup> In terms of Matthew's Gospel, we can see that the text contains pointers and stimuli which refer back to Mt.3, for instance the repetition of John's phrases later in the narrative (i.e. 3.2=4.17=10.7; 3.10b=7.19; 3.12 similar to 13.30). At these moments of pointing back to Mt.3 the reader recalls not just the words that John spoke but also the context in which he uttered them. The invocation of John's teaching about judgement has the power also to invoke John's practice of baptism because the words about judgement were embedded in a particular context.

This, however, as Iser points out, is beyond the strict limits of the linguistic sign. 'The words in the text can only denote a 'reference and not its context'. The connection with context is established by the retentive mind of the reader.'<sup>14</sup> This retrospective action of the reader is affected by a number of factors including the degree of attention the reader has paid to the development of the narrative,<sup>15</sup> and the subjective predispositions the reader brings to the narrative.<sup>16</sup> The connections the reader makes are therefore of a dual nature. 'They emerge from the reader, but they are also guided by signals which 'project' themselves into him [/her]. It is extremely difficult to gauge where the signals leave off and the reader's imagination begins in

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<sup>12</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.116

<sup>13</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.116

<sup>14</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.116

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.16

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.17

this process of projection.’<sup>17</sup> In terms of Matthew’s Gospel, this leads us to ask questions like this: how much of the context of Mt.3 are we intended to recall in response to the prompting of 4.17 which repeats 3.2? We may respond that we are only intended to make connections with 3.2, or that we are intended to make connections with 3.2 in its context of the baptismal ministry of John and what he says about Jesus in 3.11, or that we are not intended to see a connection at all – the repetition being mere authorial accident. We cannot, of course, know for sure exactly what connections the author wanted the reader to make. The reader must recognise and assign significance to connections based on memory, attention, mental capacity and clearly readerly predispositions will play a part in the reader’s decisions in this respect.

This does not mean that, for Iser, the reader should be free to have the text mean whatever she wants it to. Iser can talk about interpretative ‘failure’, which comes about when interpretation is filled ‘exclusively with one’s own projections’ as opposed to the perspective of the text becoming established in the reader. One measure of success is whether the text has been able to achieve ‘changes in the reader’s projections’.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, Iser finds that ultimately ‘there is no frame of reference to offer criteria of right and wrong’ in interpretation.<sup>19</sup> That is to say that there is no morally neutral grounds for determining right and wrong interpretation. All criteria for judging are expressions of some system of interest, desire or value. As I am proposing a reading of Matthew as Scripture in order to discern its message

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<sup>17</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.135

<sup>18</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.167; cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ‘The Reader in New Testament Interpretation’ in Joel B. Green, ed., *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) pp.301-328 particularly 315-325.

<sup>19</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.230



about baptism, I therefore suggest that the following criteria of judgement are appropriate:

- 1) Has the interpreter been sensitive to what is communicated by the Gospel about the saving activity of God in Christ?
- 2) Has the interpreter been sensitive to what is communicated by the Gospel about baptism with respect to the saving activity of God in Christ?

So when discerning narrative connections between one part of the Gospel and another the interpreter will need to demonstrate that such connections are reasonable with respect to the Gospel's plot. Any connections which undermine the overall plot of the story are not reasonable and should be dismissed. At the end of this chapter it will be necessary to return to Iser's concept of 'the wandering viewpoint' in order to consider the reasonableness of the narrative connections made in the present interpretation with respect to the development of the theme of baptism in 4.12-28.15.<sup>20</sup>

### **3) How the Gospel's Baptismal Message is Developed in Mt.4.17—28.15**

When we consider what the Gospel communicates about baptism and specifically the ongoing influence of 3.11-12 in the ensuing narrative we are very

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<sup>20</sup> I am grateful to Stephen Barton who has pointed out some similarity between my approach here and that of Richard B. Hays in *Echoes of Scripture in The Letters of Paul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

much in the realms of considering the Matthean ‘plot’.<sup>21</sup> As Weaver has suggested, ‘it is the plot of the story which engages the sustained attention of the implied reader and leads him/her from beginning to end of the story by arousing curiosity, dropping hints along the way, raising or shattering expectations, creating and resolving tensions.’<sup>22</sup> John’s prophecy in 3.11-12 about the ministry of Jesus creates anticipatory tension for the reader, the extent to which this tension is resolved in the narrative is the extent to which this aspect of the narrative can be said to contribute to the Gospel’s plot. In what follows, I intend to consider the tension created for the reader by 3.11-12 and suggest that this tension finds partial resolution in the unfolding narrative culminating in the baptismal command of 28.19. At the last, the reader finds this tension assuaged but not completely dissipated. The reader is encouraged by the narrative to continue the story in her own experience and thus come finally, through participation in the drama of following Jesus, to comprehend the meaning of 3.11-12 and the place of baptism in the narrative.

Space does not permit a detailed reflection on each and every point of retrospection to Mt.3. I will not, therefore, re-state the arguments of Wink, Meier, Anderson and Yamasaki with respect to the shared suffering and martyrdom of John the Baptist and Jesus.<sup>23</sup> Neither will I repeat Yamasaki’s work, with respect to the authority and identity of Jesus, on retrospective allusion to 3.16-17.<sup>24</sup> I will focus

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<sup>21</sup> For a range of perspectives on the notion of plot in Matthew see: Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, pp.3-9; Frank J. Matera, ‘The Plot of Matthew’s Gospel’, *CBQ* 49 (1987) pp.233-53; Mark Allan Powell, ‘The Plot and Sub-Plots of Matthew’s Gospel’, *NTS* 38 (1992) pp.187-204.

<sup>22</sup> Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.59 and note 157 on p. 180, who draws on the work of Scholes and Kellogg to observe that such an understanding of plot does not relate merely to the overall shape of a narrative but also to each separable element of that narrative so that each segment of the story has its own little system of tension and resolution which contributes its bit to the general system.

<sup>23</sup> Wink, *John the Baptist*, esp. pp.18-41; and Meier, ‘John the Baptist’, pp.383-405; Anderson, *Narrative Web*, esp. 83-89 and 172-174; and Gary Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, see esp. pp.110-122 and p.129-142.

<sup>24</sup> Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, esp. pp.101-103; 127-128; 137-141; 145-146.

particularly on those instances of retrospection to Mt.3 that serve to develop the reader's understanding of Matthew's baptismal motif. I will also consider the sense in which the reader's anticipations about baptism are modified as Jesus teaches about the nature of the disciples' expected vocation. Specific passages to be considered in this chapter are:

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|--------------|---|
| a) 4.17-22   | Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee    |
| b) 5.1-7.28  | The Sermon on the Mount                 |
| c) 9.36-11.1 | The Missionary Discourse                |
| d) 11.2-30   | John asks a question and Jesus responds |
| e) 12.17-50  | On repentance and the Holy Spirit       |
| f) 28.10     | Restoration of Relationship and Status  |

#### **a) Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee (4.17-22)**

When Jesus begins his public ministry in 4.17, the reader is reminded of John the Baptist. This is because the first words of Jesus' public proclamation are identical to the first words of John's public proclamation (3.2 = 4.17). This also reminds the reader of the relationship of Jesus to John and the relationship of Jesus' ministry to the ministry of John. In Chapter Four we established that John is given great credibility in Mt.3, he comes as a prophet and as a fulfilment of prophecy. He comes as an eschatological agent of God to prepare the way for the Messiah by his call, Μετανοεῖτε· ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. In making this announcement John not only makes it clear that the time of fulfilment has come but also declares to the people that fruit bearing repentance (3.2 and 3.8) is the only

appropriate response. John not only declared that the coming one, Jesus, is stronger than him, but also that the ministry of this coming one will be in continuity with but greater than his own. Whereas John baptised in water for repentance, Jesus will baptise in Holy Spirit and fire. So when Matthew places the same words that began John's ministry of baptising on the lips of Jesus it causes the reader to wonder whether or not these same words initiate the greater baptismal ministry of Christ in Holy Spirit and fire.<sup>25</sup> In 3.10 John indicated that the final judgement is near at hand. It is in this context that John spoke about the baptisms that 'the coming one' would administer. They are, on the one hand, associated with the eschaton, but on the other hand John indicated that these eschatological baptisms of Jesus are imminent. The reader is intrigued as to how this prolepsis will be worked out. The effect of 4.17 is to increase tension as the reader is reminded of John the Baptist and the senses in which the ministry of Jesus is both in continuity with that of John whilst also being of a much more powerful order and significance (3.11-12).

Now as Jesus continues where John left off by repeating his proclamation there is a heightened sense of urgency. If the rule of God was near when John was preparing the way then it is so much nearer still in 4.17 when the Son of God begins his public proclamation. Now the sovereign rule of God draws nearer still and the need for repentance is growing ever more crucial.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Whilst Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.145, is correct in arguing that retrospection to Mt.3 always brings in the memory of 3.16-17 as climax to that chapter he is wrong to assert that 3.16-17 is so powerful it overwhelms the rest of Mt.3 in the reader's memory. When the Gospel makes retrospective allusion to 3.2 as it does in 4.17, the Gospel is explicitly evoking 3.2 and the reader's memory supplies the context in which 3.2 was originally encountered. It is a mistake not to consider what is within the limits of the linguistic sign, i.e., a specific reference, in order to proceed directly to a consideration of the literary context of that reference which is outside the limits of the linguistic sign and which can only be inferred by the reader's memory and preference. One can proceed to a consideration of context but the reference itself needs to be considered in its own right also.

<sup>26</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.390, strive to harmonise the views put forward by proponents of 'realised' eschatology and the those advocating 'consistent' eschatology. They make reference to the

Following the announcement of 4.17 Jesus' next act is to call the two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew and James and John, to follow him. In 4.18-22 Jesus, recognising those that would exhibit fruit-bearing repentance (it is hardly likely that Jesus having issued a call to repentance in 4.17 would then issue a call to discipleship in 4.18 to those who had rejected his earlier call) calls them to become his disciples making the radical demand of them to leave behind their nets and family and to follow him.<sup>27</sup> Thus Peter, Andrew, James and John are presented as those who are prepared to leave everything in a radical expression of repentance and discipleship.

It is interesting to note that the Gospel makes no effort to link the first disciples with the baptismal ministry of John. It is not explicitly stated that these disciples were present at the Jordan in Mt.3 to hear John's proclamation or to receive his baptism. The text does nothing to deny this possibility either. The implication would seem to be that Matthew is content to stress the disciples' relationship to Jesus as in comparison to this any relationship they had with John was relatively unimportant.<sup>28</sup> Whether or not the first disciples received the ministry of John the Baptist is secondary to the fact that the disciples received the proclamation and ministry of Jesus. This observation sheds further light on the place of John's baptism

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eschatological programme envisaged by Deutero-Isaiah that would not belong to a moment but that would constitute a series of events that would cover a period of time. Thus Davies and Allison can observe that 'Jewish thinking could envision the final events – the judgement of evil and the arrival of the kingdom of God – as extending over time and as a process or series of events'. The beginning of Jesus' public proclamation is the next stage in the nearing of this kingdom of heaven.

<sup>27</sup> This is consistent with the findings of Stephen C. Barton in *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew*, SNTSMS 80 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p.128, who says of the response of the disciples, 'It is as if Matthew is signalling that repentance in response to the coming of the kingdom (4.17) is to be like this: leaving everything immediately and following Jesus in radical obedience to his call.'

<sup>28</sup> Though it clearly was to Luke, cf. Acts 1.21-22.

in the Gospel as a whole. John functioned as an important figure to prepare the way for Jesus, to announce his coming, to provoke the appropriate response in his hearers (and the readers of the Gospel), and to anoint Jesus for his own ministry. Responding to John's ministry was not, however, a necessary prerequisite for responding to Jesus. This is partly why Jesus is seen to repeat John's announcement (3.2=4.17). John's baptism of repentance was an important expression of a person's willingness to receive the kingdom appropriately. Yet the truly important thing, for Matthew, was that people responded appropriately to the message of Jesus and that by bearing fruit worthy of repentance they made themselves available for Jesus' baptism in Holy Spirit, thus escaping the 'wrath that is to come' (3.7), the fiery judgement of baptism in fire (cf. 3.11-12).<sup>29</sup> It is possible to envisage, therefore, that some people did not respond appropriately to John but then later responded to Jesus. It is also possible to envisage that some people did respond appropriately to John but later rejected Jesus. The effect of 4.17, along with 3.11-12 and 3.16-17, is to show that the ministry of Jesus is of a far more powerful order than that of John. John was a forerunner for Jesus but the thing that truly matters is that people respond appropriately to Jesus in order to receive his eschatological baptism in Holy Spirit. The first disciples in 4.18-22 demonstrate what such appropriate response looks like, a willingness to leave everything to follow Jesus – to prioritise the call of Jesus to discipleship above all other things.<sup>30</sup>

The placing of the call narrative in Matthew is instructive. The calling of the two sets of brothers is placed right at the outset of Jesus' public ministry. The implication being that the calling of disciples is in some way crucial to the carrying

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Dunn, *Baptism in Holy Spirit*, pp.14-15

<sup>30</sup> Note that only Jesus – not John – gives the imperious command/invitation: 'Follow me'.

out of Jesus' own ministry.<sup>31</sup> Jesus does not engage in mission as a lone operative but from the outset calls the truly repentant to be part of that mission.<sup>32</sup> This is a remarkable facet of the outworking of Jesus' eschatological activity in Israel. We have already discovered that such activity is directed towards salvation from sins (1.21), that this salvation will ultimately involve baptism in Holy Spirit (3.11-12). As this mission to save begins to be fulfilled in the calling of the first disciples the reader is confronted with the startling development that Jesus does not envisage that such gathering will be a solitary activity. Rather, Jesus seeks to form those that he gathers into fellow gatherers. This is made clear in Jesus' words of call 'Follow me and I will make you fishers for people' (4.19). This metaphor of harvesting the fruit of the sea is appropriate given the profession of those that Jesus called. Yet the relationship between this metaphor and the agricultural harvesting imagery of 3.12 is clear. In 4.19 we discover that the 'harvesting' is not just to be thought of as a ministry for Jesus alone but that it is, at some future time, to be extended to the disciples also. 4.19 reveals to us that the disciples are not yet ready to begin such a task but that in calling them Jesus is seeking to prepare them to share in his work in such a way. The Gospel's presentation of the public ministry of Jesus does not commence until after the Spirit has descended upon him at his baptism. This gives the impression that the anointing of the Spirit is necessary in order for Jesus to carry out his eschatological ministry in Israel. In 4.19 Jesus indicates that the disciples are to become his partners in eschatological ministry. This causes the reader to anticipate that the disciples, like Jesus, would need the anointing of the Spirit in

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<sup>31</sup> Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.66.

<sup>32</sup> Note Barton, *Family Ties*, p.134, who says 'the location of the call stories at the very start of the narrative of Jesus' public ministry to Israel is significant. The disciples are with him from the beginning. Conversely he is with them from the beginning. He does not engage in mission on his own: nor (after Easter) will they (28.20b). This solidarity between Jesus and the disciples is a fundamental motif of the work as a whole.'

order to carry out such a task. Yet at this stage in the narrative the reader can only wonder about how this might come to pass and if such an anointing should be conceived as part of the messiah's ministry of baptising in Holy Spirit. Hence the reader approaches the continuing story eager to discover more about how Jesus forms these disciples to assume such a privileged role in the eschatological activity of God.

#### **b) The Sermon on the Mount (5.1—7.28)**

The Sermon on the Mount is an important part of the disciples' formation as Jesus makes them into 'Fishers for people' (4.20). It also contains verbal repetition of language introduced into the narrative in Mt.3. Specifically this occurs at 5.3; 6; 10; 20; and 7.16-23. This serves to encourage retrospective association to be made with the baptismal pericope of Mt.3 which allows the notion of baptism to be developed implicitly in the narrative.

The sermon begins with the beatitudes which are a series of 10 statements that follow the pattern of declaring the blessedness of a particular group with a particular character trait and then announcing the specific reward that such a group would receive.<sup>33</sup> The beatitudes begin in 5.3 with the statement 'Blessed are the poor

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<sup>33</sup> The sermon is directed towards Jesus' disciples who come to him (προσῆλθον) after he sat upon the mountain (5.1-2). Cf. David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel*, SNTSMS 90 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p.69. The presence of the crowds at 7.28 may indicate that whilst the eschatological community around Jesus is limited to those who have responded appropriately to his call, this community is not exclusive and that membership within it is available to the multitude. The 'gathering' ministry of Christ (and later his disciples) will be directed towards them. Cf. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, p.224; Donaldson, *Mountain*, esp. pp.111-121.



in spirit (πνεύματι) for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν).<sup>34</sup>

This is significant in terms of retrospective connection with Mt.3 because of the reference to 'the kingdom of heaven'. This phrase was first introduced in the narrative by John the Baptist in 3.2 and later by Jesus in 4.17 in which the appropriate response to the nearness of God's kingdom was defined as repentance. In this first beatitude (5.3) Jesus promises his hearers that the kingdom of heaven announced by John and Jesus (3.2=4.17) is the reward of God for those that are poor in spirit. The term 'poor in spirit' in the context of the Gospel to this point can be seen to be referring to those that acknowledge their spiritual need before God, who sense that they depend on God for their place in the eschatological community of salvation. This can be contrasted with 3.9 in which John the Baptist addresses Pharisees and Sadducees rebuking them for relying on their lineage as a guarantee of finding favour with God and hence failing to acknowledge their need of repentance.<sup>35</sup> The opening words of this sermon can therefore be seen as a further explanation of those dispositions necessary for a person's repentance to be considered genuine. Recognition of one's spiritual poverty before God is a motivation to respond appropriately to the nearness of the kingdom of heaven in Jesus and therefore receive its blessings. It may be that there is a relationship implied here between the poverty of spirit acknowledged by the repentant and their ability to receive the eschatological baptism in the Holy Spirit that Jesus offers.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> It is interesting that the reward of the kingdom of heaven is described as belonging to the poor in spirit in the present. Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.446, suggest that this is a 'futuristic or proleptic present' that is designed to express 'vividness and confidence'. They go on to suggest, however, that the use of the present tense 'also hints at the fact that the kingdom is already in some sense present and therefore a blessing enjoyed even now.' See also R. Guelich, 'The Matthean Beatitudes: "Entrance Requirements" or Eschatological Beatitudes?', *JBL* 95 (1976), pp.415-434.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Luz, *Matthew I-7*, p.233 and esp. note 49.

<sup>36</sup> See Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, p.444 esp. note 26. Also Charette, *Presence*, p.137, who states, 'The promise (that the kingdom of heaven belongs to them) is fitting since only those who honestly admit to God their own inadequacy receive the power to fulfil the righteousness appropriate to the

The concept of righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) is present in 5.6 and 5.10 (cf.3.15) and the reward for those in 5.10 who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness is identical to the reward of the 'poor in spirit' in 5.3 who receive the kingdom of heaven.<sup>37</sup> These verses cause the reader to reflect retrospectively on Mt.3 for two reasons. Firstly there is the reference to the kingdom of heaven that links with 3.2 (=4.17) but also there is the reference to righteousness that makes connection with 3.15. In considering 3.15 we concluded that Jesus recognised that in submitting to John's baptism he would be acting in accordance with the purposes of God and in so doing John and Jesus together were fulfilling all righteousness. In 5.6 then, the beatitude is referring to those that hunger and thirst both to do the will of God and to see the will of God being done. The reward for such people is that they will be filled (χορτασθήσονται - future tense).<sup>38</sup>

The beatitude of 5.10 also points to the future and a time when those that do the will of God will suffer persecution for so doing but who nonetheless will be blessed because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. This notion of being persecuted for righteousness' sake is paralleled with being persecuted on account of

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kingdom and essential for final entrance into it. It would seem that the ensuing teaching of Jesus concerning the demands of discipleship presupposes that proper attention has been directed to the far reaching implications of the first beatitude.'

<sup>37</sup> The notion of righteousness is highlighted again in 5.19-20. Here Jesus is speaking about the ongoing importance of the Torah for his eschatological community and he tells the disciples that they shall not enter the kingdom of heaven unless their righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees. Again in 6.33 the disciples are told, this time in connection with wealth and anxiety over possessions, to 'seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness'. For more on righteousness in Matthew see, Pryzybylski, *Righteousness*, esp. pp.77-123

<sup>38</sup> That is to say their hunger and thirst will be satisfied fully, they will both do the will of God and will see the will of God being done. This reaches its fulfilment in the kingdom of heaven which, as we have seen, is beginning (drawing near) in this ministry of Jesus and will at some point be consummated fully (when 3.11-12 is fulfilled). Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.453-454; Hill, *Matthew*, p.112; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, pp.237-38.

Jesus (5.11) something that is also regarded as blessing for it leads to a great eschatological reward. These complementary beatitudes lead to two main conclusions. Firstly, in terms of understanding the nature of righteousness: the disciples are told that they should expect at some stage to suffer persecution if they hunger and thirst for righteousness and that such persecution will be on account of Jesus. The implication in this is that allegiance to Jesus is the way of righteousness that could result in persecution and suffering. Secondly, the reward ascribed to the poor in spirit in 5.3 is identical to the reward in 5.10 for those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. The implication here is that the truly repentant eschatological community of Jesus, who acknowledge their need for the eschatological salvation of God, may at some point in the future suffer on account of Jesus. These ones who will be given the ministry of fishing for people (4.19) and who thus share with Jesus in his work of eschatological gathering should expect to suffer as they carry out that work. Such a task does not seem easily achievable by those who are poor in spirit. The reader at this stage has still not fully discovered how Jesus will baptise such people in Holy Spirit. It is becoming clear, however, that for the poor in spirit to share in the demands of Jesus' eschatological gathering they will need access to a power that is greater than that which they possess in and of themselves.

In 5.20 Jesus declares that the righteousness required for entry into the kingdom far exceeds the righteousness exhibited by the scribes and Pharisees. In its immediate context this verse forms a bridge between 5.17-19 and 5.21-48. As Jesus came to fulfil the law so his followers must uphold the law in accordance with his interpretation of it and in so doing they will be involved in practising a righteousness

that exceeds that of even the scribes and the Pharisees.<sup>39</sup> In the context of the narrative as a whole to this point, however, it is possible to discern much more about the nature of the better righteousness that fits one for the kingdom. In 3.7-10 the Pharisees were referred to as they came with the Sadducees to John. John rebuked them exhorting them to bear fruit worthy of repentance (3.8) and denouncing them for relying on their heritage as children of Abraham as a guarantee of their status and eschatological salvation (3.9-10). The implication of 3.7-10 is that the Pharisees did not see that they had to change. They are portrayed as thinking that they already possessed all the resources necessary to attain salvation. 5.20 speaks about the kind of righteousness necessary to enter the kingdom but 5.3 has already made it clear that the ones to whom the kingdom belongs are the poor in spirit. That is to say that a key characteristic of the better righteousness is a recognition of one's own spiritual poverty before God and an acceptance of the need to repent in the light of the kingdom. The mystery at this point in the narrative is the apparent conundrum concerning how the spiritually impoverished will be able to demonstrate the better righteousness that exceeds the legal observances of the scribes and the Pharisees and which is further outlined by Jesus in 5.21-48. Again the reader is puzzled as to how the spiritually impoverished (5.3) will be able to live lives characterised by obedience to Christ's ethical teaching. This causes narrative connection to be made with 3.16-4.11 in which the reader observed that Christ's overcoming of temptation in the wilderness followed his anointing by the Spirit.<sup>40</sup> It is difficult to see how the disciples would be able to overcome the temptations that they would surely face without access to a power that is greater than that which they possess in and of themselves. It may be that the anointing of Jesus followed by his subsequent

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.498-499.

<sup>40</sup> See pp.182-184 above.

obedience in the wilderness functions as a narrative paradigm for what might be experienced by the disciples. The reader needs to continue with the narrative to seek answers to this conundrum.

Later in the Sermon on the Mount there is further verbal repetition of language first introduced to the reader in Mt.3. Jesus speaks in 7.15-23 about a future time in which the eschatological community of disciples will be in danger from 'false prophets' (7.15).<sup>41</sup> In giving advice about how such 'false prophets' can be recognised, Jesus uses language first used by John the Baptist (3.10b=7.19). John used this language to speak to the Pharisees and Sadducees about the impending judgement to which they are liable unless they respond to the nearness of the kingdom of heaven by demonstrating fruit-bearing repentance. Jesus in 7.19 is speaking in a similar way but this time about those who would claim to be his disciples but who, in spite of prophesying in his name and even casting out demons, do not do the will of the Father (cf. 5.6). These people will not enter the kingdom of heaven when it arrives in all its fullness. 7.21 makes it clear that in the future day of judgement even some of those that had become part of the group of disciples would face judgement and not salvation. This is because the measure is not a mere statement of allegiance to Jesus nor an ability to perform charismatic acts but rather a desire and an ability to do the will of the heavenly Father (7.21).<sup>42</sup>

This has further implications for the reader's understanding of what it might mean to receive the eschatological Spirit baptism prophesied by John in 3.11. The

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<sup>41</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew I*, pp.701-702 give a good review of the main proposals concerning the identity of such 'false prophets'. I am in agreement with them that because of 7.21 we should regard these as a group that professed to be Christian.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Eduard Schweizer, 'Observance of the Law and Charismatic Activity in Matthew', *NTS* 16 (1969-70), pp.213-30

baptism in Holy Spirit of which John spoke is a phenomenon related to eschatological salvation (3.12) which is for those who respond to the nearness of the kingdom of heaven with fruit-bearing repentance. The Sermon on the Mount outlines the life of obedience that would characterise those who are saved at the last. This causes narrative connection to be made between the expected baptism in Holy Spirit, which is related to eschatological salvation (3.11-12), and the life of obedience outlined by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. It is not yet clear, however, whether such obedience is necessary in order to receive the eschatological baptism in Holy Spirit and therefore salvation or whether the eschatological baptism in Holy Spirit is necessary in order for a person to live a life of obedience to the purposes of God and therefore receive eschatological salvation. It is becoming clear, however, that the eschatological baptism in fire which is associated with judgement and destruction (3.11-12) is the fate of those who reject the purposes of God in Jesus and who fail to demonstrate fruit-bearing repentance (cf. 3.15; 5.20; 7.21-22).

### **c) The Missionary Discourse (9.36—11.1)**

The Missionary Discourse is significant because it represents an extension of the role of the disciples. Prior to this the disciples have been passive recipients of the ministry of Jesus but in 9.36-11.1 Jesus teaches about how they are to become more actively engaged. Jesus has already indicated that the disciples will come to participate with him in his mission (4.19). Jesus benefits from a pneumatological anointing in the outworking of his eschatological vocation (3.16). To this point it is not yet clear to the reader whether or not the disciples will receive the Holy Spirit for their own envisaged ministry. John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would baptise

in Holy Spirit (3.11). It is not yet clear to the reader how exactly John's prophecy would be fulfilled and if this prophecy is in some way connected to the disciples receiving an anointing of the Spirit for ministry and righteousness (cf. 5.20). This uncertainty has served to heighten a sense of anticipation.

In 9.35-11.1 the disciples are specifically sent out by Jesus to proclaim the message that he has already proclaimed (10.7=4.17=3.2). As part of this assignment the disciples are given authority by Jesus to perform the same deeds that he has already performed (10.1). There is a strong sense that this is the moment that the tension created by 4.19 and 3.11 might be resolved.<sup>43</sup> We shall see, however, that the narrative continues in 11.1 with the focus very much remaining on the character of Jesus. There is no report of the disciples actually going out and doing anything. They remain with Jesus, their moment, it appears, has not yet come after all. In what follows I intend to analyse the effects of all this on the reader, particularly in terms of retrospective contact made with Mt.3. In so doing it will be possible to reflect on how this episode effects the reader's developing understanding of the place of baptism in the narrative.

The 'Missionary Discourse' is introduced in 9.36-10.4 in the following way. Jesus sees the crowds and has pity on them because they are 'like sheep without a shepherd' (9.36). He then speaks to his disciples concerning the crowd by using the different metaphor of a large harvest to be gathered but remarks that the workers are few (9.37). Jesus then exhorts the disciples to pray that God might send workers to help with the gathering (9.38). Then, in 10.1 onwards, Jesus appears to be providing the answer to such a prayer by sending out the twelve (10.2-5), having given them

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.80

authority over unclean spirits and authority to heal every disease.<sup>44</sup> As well as performing the same acts as Jesus (10.1; 10.8) the disciples are also charged with delivering the same message (10.7).<sup>45</sup> 10.7 repeats the words of John that have already been repeated by Jesus (cf. 3.2 and 4.17).<sup>46</sup> Anderson argues that one effect of this verbal repetition is to link the ministry of John, Jesus and the disciples together and to show that they are all on the side of heaven.<sup>47</sup> The alignment of the ministries of John, Jesus and the disciples continues to develop the reader's understanding of the place of baptism in the Gospel. We know that John, who first issued this proclamation (3.2) had a ministry of baptising in water for repentance and that he also baptised Jesus, an act that led to the anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit to carry out messianic ministry. We also know that Jesus, at some point, will carry out a ministry of baptising in Holy Spirit (3.11). Here in 10.7-8 the disciples are being asked to share in Jesus' eschatological ministry. Such ministry in the life of Jesus only began after his anointing with the Holy Spirit. The reader wonders whether or not the disciples are to receive such an anointing also and if they are whether this would constitute part of the baptism in Holy Spirit of which John spoke (3.11). An awareness of these tensions and their lack of resolution continues to build a sense of anticipation for the reader.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.79

<sup>45</sup> This adds weight to Barton's view, *Family Ties*, p.143, that 'the crowd (around Jesus) are potential disciples, at least'; Cf. P.S. Minear, 'The Disciples and the Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew', *ATR*, Supplementary Series, no.3 (1974), pp.28-44.

<sup>46</sup> See Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.84 and also note 68 on p.193. Here she considers the significance of the absence of the exhortation to repent in the message the disciples are to proclaim. She considers Schlatter to provide the most satisfactory explanation who observed 'that Matthew has no intention of downplaying the concept of 'repentance' but simply assumes that the reader will, on the basis of previous reference, know what is expected of the one who wishes to attain to the kingdom of heaven. I concur with Weaver's assessment. Cf. Anderson, *Narrative Web*, pp.87 and 173.

<sup>47</sup> Anderson, *Narrative Web*, p.173

<sup>48</sup> The *Missionary Discourse* also serves to develop the reader's understanding of John's prophecy that Jesus will baptise in fire. In 10.15 Jesus speaks of judgement day. This makes retrospective contact with 3.11-12 in which John the Baptist makes it clear that Jesus is the eschatological judge who will baptise in fire and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. The concept of this baptism in fire is becoming clear for the reader by this point in the narrative. 7.22-23 and 8.12 have already pointed to



In 10.16-42, Jesus goes on to speak about the persecution that the disciples will need to endure as a result of engaging in eschatological ministry in his name.<sup>49</sup> This evokes the memory of 5.10-12 in which Jesus points the disciples to a future time when they would be persecuted on account of him and in which they would find themselves to be blessed. 10.20 hints at the nature of such a blessing. Here Jesus promises that at this future time of persecution the disciples should not worry about what they say for it will be given to them as the Spirit of their Father (Πνεῦμα τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν) speaks through them. This is an especially significant development given our interest in retrospective connection to Mt.3. We have already noted in terms of our consideration of 4.17-22 that Jesus desired to include the disciples in his eschatological harvesting ministry. We also have wondered about how this might be possible given that Jesus had received the authority of God and the anointing of the Spirit for such messianic ministry (3.16-17). We noted that if the disciples were to become partners in this task then they would need the resources of a power that was beyond their own (cf.5.3). Here in Mt.10 we find Jesus sharing his own authority with them (10.1) and also we discover that Jesus is promising that at a future time of testing under persecution the disciples will have access to the power of the Spirit of

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a future consummation at which point there will be a judgement for those who have not received Jesus with the repentance that results in the will of the Father being done. This rejection of the Father's will is the disposition that leads to judgement. See Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.88 who observes 'The disciples' ministry is thus shown to have a significance which reaches far beyond the physical effects of their present ministry and which in turn magnifies to eschatological proportions the seriousness of rejecting that ministry'.

<sup>49</sup> In this passage at 10.18 it becomes clear that Jesus is preparing the disciples not just for persecution that they will face in a mission to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (10.6) but also for a future mission that moves beyond that limited framework into the sphere of the Gentiles. This problem of understanding the significance of the setting envisaged for the disciples' mission is considered by Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, pp.14-16; 95-96; note 120 on 199-200.

God who will speak through them. This causes the reader to make retrospective connection with 3.11 in which we are told Jesus will baptise in Holy Spirit.

10.20 points to a time when, in the outworking of their mission, the disciples will receive the resources of God's Spirit just as Jesus had received this blessing for his mission (3.17). In addition 10.20 makes reference to the Holy Spirit by means of the phrase 'Spirit of your Father'. This is evocative of 1.18; 1.20; and 3.17. These verses relate the Sonship of Jesus to the activity of the Holy Spirit. There is therefore, in the term 'Spirit of your Father', a hint that one effect of the Holy Spirit empowering the eschatological ministry of the disciples is inclusion within a circle of divine kinship available to those who respond appropriately to the activity of God in Jesus. Further to this, the explicit reference in 10.20 to the power of the Spirit of God working through the disciples causes the reader to wonder if this is also an implicit aspect of 10.7-8. For just as Jesus carries out his messianic vocation in the power of God's Spirit so the disciples would need this power also in order to share in Jesus' eschatological ministry. So the tension created by 3.11 and 4.19 is partially resolved here because we now have evidence that a time will come when the disciples will be engaged in the tasks of eschatological ministry and in which they will possess the 'Spirit of their Father' to help them in that ministry.<sup>50</sup> This is the clearest indication to this point in the narrative that Christ's ministry of baptising in Holy Spirit (3.11), though directed towards salvation at the last, may find expression prior to the eschaton as the disciples fulfil their vocation.

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<sup>50</sup> On this key verse (10.20) Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, pp.185-186, say, 'Perhaps one should recall the baptismal story, where the Spirit comes down and a divine voice speaks. ... Once again therefore we have a parallel between Jesus and his apostles: both are vessels of the Spirit.' Hill, *Matthew*, p.189, writes, 'This is the only place, other than 3.11, where the gift of the Spirit is said to be available to the disciples, it is usually regarded as given only to Jesus as the endowment for Messianic ministry. It is promised now to the disciples as they extend that ministry, especially in times of distress and danger. The general viewpoint here is very similar to that put forward by John in relation to the Paraclete (14.16, 26)'.

This sense of resolution, however partial, is short-lived because, as we have observed, the disciples, in the short term at least, do not actually go on the mission that Jesus imagines for them. 11.1 points to Jesus simply continuing as before. Weaver suggests an explanation as to why this should be the case. In 10.25 Jesus indicates that the suffering that the disciples will endure is a reflection of the suffering that he endures himself. As Weaver notes, ‘Jesus predicts for the disciples things which lie far beyond what he himself has yet experienced. ... And since Jesus himself has not yet suffered such persecution, neither can his disciples: not until Jesus himself has suffered can his disciples ‘reflect’ that suffering in their own.’<sup>51</sup> As Weaver notes this ‘forces the reader to an ongoing search for the expected but as yet suspended fulfilment of the missionary commission’.<sup>52</sup> To Weaver’s insightful observation I will add an observation of my own. The missionary activity of the disciples is to involve them in speaking in a way that allows the Holy Spirit to speak through them (10.20). It also involves them in speaking and acting in the same way as Jesus has done already (10.7-8). We know that Jesus is able to speak and act in this way because he is the Spirit-anointed Messiah of God. To this point in the narrative we have seen Jesus share something of his authority with the disciples (10.1) but we have not yet witnessed him sharing with them the source of his power for eschatological ministry, namely the anointing in Holy Spirit. It is expected that he will at some point do this (3.11) but it has not happened yet. Inasmuch therefore as the reader is searching for the ‘expected but as yet suspended’ mission of the disciples the reader is also searching for the ‘expected but as yet suspended’ baptism in Holy Spirit which will empower them for such a task.

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<sup>51</sup> Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.128

<sup>52</sup> Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.127

#### **d) John asks a Question and Jesus Responds (11.2-30)**

In 11.2 John the Baptist, having heard about the works of Christ in prison, sends his disciples to Jesus with a message. The message takes the form of a question, 'Are you the coming one or should we wait for another?' This expression of doubt concerning the identity of Jesus, coming from such a key character in the story, comes as something as a shock to the reader. John had hitherto been presented in the narrative as one whose ministry and proclamation were integrally related to those of the coming one, Jesus. So to discover in 11.2 that John was querying the identity of Jesus appears startling to the reader. The shock of this request for clarification is such that it underscores for the reader that here a new section of the story is beginning, a new stage in this messianic ministry of Jesus.<sup>53</sup>

The motivation for John's question was that he had heard of the 'works of Christ'. The messengers who relate John's question are John's disciples. Accordingly the reader is to understand that John's disciples are in contact with John in prison. The reader has already witnessed that John's disciples have struggled with the ministry of Jesus and the conduct of his disciples (9.14-17). It is reasonable to assume that the disciples of John had related to their master much of what they had found perplexing in the ministry of Jesus. Certainly it is not clear to what extent the miraculous healing ministry amongst the crowds and the dining with tax collectors and sinners (Mt.8-9) corresponded to John's prophecy that the coming one would

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<sup>53</sup> Matera, 'The Plot of Matthew's Gospel', p.244, states 'John's question introduces the leitmotiv of this section: Who is Jesus?'; Kingsbury also makes this point in *Matthew As Story*, p.72.

‘baptise in Holy Spirit and fire’.<sup>54</sup> The inclusion of John’s question at this point in the narrative establishes a narrative connection between this passage and Mt.3 in which the message and ministry of John the Baptist had been communicated to the reader. This narrative refreshing of the reader’s memory encourages the reader to consider the validity of John’s question and ask in what sense Jesus has fulfilled John’s prophecy regarding him. The question of John from prison therefore causes the reader to reflect on the narrative to this point in a particular way. The reader is then ready to understand, in the light of Mt.3, the answer that Jesus will offer to John’s question.<sup>55</sup>

The answer that Jesus gives to John begins in 11.4 and initially takes the form of a direct response to John’s disciples concerning the nature of his messiahship. Jesus says ‘Go and relate to John what you hear and see’. This has the narrative effect of qualifying 11.2 in which John is said to have heard about the ‘works of Christ’. Now in 11.4 Jesus is saying that the evidence of his messiahship is contained not just in the gracious deeds which he performs (cf. Mt.8-9) but also in the content of his proclamation. This therefore, takes into account the whole of the preceding narrative from 4.17.<sup>56</sup> In 11.5, Jesus speaks in a way evocative of Isaiah 29.18-19; 25.8; 35.5-6; and 61.1. Thus Jesus seeks to demonstrate that the eschatological age of God’s kingdom is present in his message and ministry and that

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Meier, ‘John the Baptist’, pp.392-393; Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, pp.106-107; Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, p.240.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.105 who argues with respect to 9.14 that the appearance of John’s disciples serves to refresh the reader’s memory of Mt.3. Whilst I disagree with Yamasaki that John’s disciples were at that point acting with John’s authority I do think that the scene has retrospective force in causing the reader to recall Mt.3. The question of John in 11.2 has greater force because it is a question from John himself and therefore calls into question the words that John spoke about Jesus in Mt.3

<sup>56</sup> Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, pp.108-109; Meier, ‘John the Baptist’, p.393; Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, pp.240-242.

he is indeed performing messianic acts.<sup>57</sup> To have acted consistently in such a gracious way, however, and to have only referred briefly to eschatological judgement (7.21-23; 8.11-12; 10.15, 22, 28, 32-33, 42) does not neatly correspond with John's expectations (3.11-12) but Jesus aims to show by his response that he is indeed the one of whom John spoke. Jesus' allusion to Isaiah in 11.5 is followed in 11.6 by the beatitude proclaiming blessing to those who are not offended by Jesus. This is designed to encourage John (and the reader) to trust that although Jesus' methods may not so far correspond to the expectations of 3.11-12, he is the Messiah and he will fulfil the eschatological promises of God.<sup>58</sup>

Having made this response to the disciples of John, Jesus now turns to address the crowds and begins by speaking to them about John the Baptist (11.8-15). If the question of John from prison (11.3) has served to throw a slightly negative light, in the eyes of the reader, on the character of John then Jesus in 11.8-15 speaks in order to restore the balance. This is crucial for the continuing credibility of John the Baptist in the narrative. In the light of John's question from prison it is important that the general reliability of John's character is reinforced in order that the words of John in Mt.3 will continue to have validity for the reader. So Jesus asks the crowds, rhetorically, who it was that they went into the wilderness to see. He then offers a list of possible answers, the first two obviously incorrect and ironic in order to emphasise the truth of the third. Firstly Jesus suggests that John may have been a reed shaken by the wind. The imagery being of a fragile and insignificant reed on the banks of the Jordan, one that moves this way and that according to the direction of the breeze. The narrative has already persuaded the reader that this is not a fitting

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<sup>57</sup> So Hill, *Matthew*, p.198; Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, p.242; Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.109;

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, pp.109-110; Howell, *Inclusive Story*, p.221; Meier, 'John the Baptist in Matthew', p.393.

description of John. For John came proclaiming the word of God that the kingdom had drawn near, he came calling to repentance and rebuking those of influence who by their actions displayed a way of life antithetical to true repentance (3.2-10). The reader knows that John was no reed shaken by the wind. Secondly, Jesus ironically likens John to a man clothed in soft things, an affluent and materially comfortable character. The ridiculous nature of this suggestion is apparent as the reader knows that John was clothed in camel's hair and that he dined on locusts and wild honey (11.4). This ironic suggestion brings to mind the vivid image of one who actually wore the raiment of Elijah and hence Jesus can finally underscore what the reader already knows to be the truth, John was a prophet and more than a prophet because he came to make ready the path of the Messiah (11.10).<sup>59</sup>

In 11.11 Jesus speaks enigmatically about the greatness of John and his place with respect to the kingdom of Heaven. On the one hand Jesus says that John is the greatest of any born of a woman but on the other Jesus states that the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than him. This is a difficult phrase to interpret because it is seemingly contradictory. Yamasaki has considered this phrase at length and as well as considering the major scholarly suggestions also proposes his own interpretation based on his linear sequential treatment of the Matthean narrative.<sup>60</sup> Yamasaki's thinking in this respect is attractive because it does not result in the

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. Meier, 'John the Baptist in Matthew', pp.392-394; Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.111; Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, pp.248-249.

<sup>60</sup> Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, pp.113-117. As part of his consideration Yamasaki refers to the range of scholarly opinion as stated by Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, pp.251-252. See also O. Lomar Cope, *Matthew: A Scribe Trained For the Kingdom*, CBQMS 5 (Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1976) pp.74-75. The treatment in Meier, 'John the Baptist', pp.394-395 and 404, suggests an interpretation of this saying that is based on an understanding of the Gospel as a whole and on the imposition of a particular tripartite vision of salvation history. Thus Meier argues that here Jesus is pointing to a future time of the church which 'enjoys a heightened eschatological quality over that of the time of Jesus'. Such a view seems unsustainable especially in the light of the challenge from Kingsbury, *Structure*, pp.25-36. It also appears that Meier is in danger of saying that the disciple is greater than his or her Lord which clearly cannot be true.

exclusion of John the Baptist from the kingdom. Such a view would be difficult to maintain given John's role in proclaiming repentance (3.2), thereby inferring his own repentance, and his role with Jesus in fulfilling all righteousness (3.15). Yamasaki's proposal is also commendable because it attempts, in the context of the Gospel up to this point, to make clear sense of the words of Jesus in 11.11. We shall see, however, that Yamasaki has not been entirely successful in this respect. Yamasaki's proposal draws attention to 10.40-42 in which Jesus refers to those who 'receive' the ministry of the disciples who have been commissioned in 10.5. In this respect Jesus had pointed to those who receive prophets, righteous people and little ones (μικρῶν) (10.41-42). Yamasaki argues that these classifications seem to qualify 10.40 and appear to refer to different groups within the wider sphere of disciples.<sup>61</sup> The 'little ones' are compared to those who are identified either as 'prophets' or as 'the righteous' (10.41). In relation to these the 'little ones' appear as 'the least prominent group in the whole kingdom'.<sup>62</sup> In 11.11, according to Yamasaki, John, the prophet, is being compared with 'the little ones' (μικρότερος). Yamasaki concludes that the point of 11.11 is to suggest that whilst John may be considered great in human perspective, in the perspective of the kingdom the least prominent of Christ's disciples are regarded as the greatest.<sup>63</sup> For Yamasaki, John as a prophet (11.9-10) is clearly included in the kingdom (cf. 10.41) but the 'little ones' (11.11 cf. 10.42) should be regarded as being greater in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>64</sup> This interpretation of Yamasaki is creative in that it seeks to solve the problem of John's inclusion in the kingdom from within the narrative to this point. It is however open to two questions.

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<sup>61</sup> Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.115

<sup>62</sup> Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.116.

<sup>63</sup> Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.116

<sup>64</sup> Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.115



The first question is: can we consider the prophet of 10.41, who has been sent out as a disciple of Jesus, to be equivalent to those prophets who pointed to Jesus prior to the commencement of his messianic ministry? Yamasaki seems to equate those prophets sent by Jesus and those prophets who preceded Jesus into a unified group and makes this group the subject of Jesus' pronouncement in 10.41. Such correspondence is not inferred in Mt.10 as it is clear that the prophets referred to in 10.41 are those from amongst the group of disciples who are the recipients of Jesus' discourse in Mt.10 (10.1-8).

Secondly, it is questionable as to whether 10.40-42 is designed to communicate that the group of disciples in 10.1-8 are to be thought of as forming three different groups, namely prophets, righteous and little ones. Rather than thinking of these three classifications as different groups within the wider group of disciples it is better to think that these three classifications each refer to a quality of discipleship. Therefore each true disciple is a prophet because he speaks the word of God (10.7); and each disciple is to be thought of as a righteous one because they strive to fulfil the will of God (9.38-10.8; 10.22 cf. 5.6; 10; 20); and each disciple is to be thought of as a 'little one' because they are humble and accept the rule of Christ (10.24-25; cf. 5.3).<sup>65</sup> If this view of 10.40-42 is accepted then it is clear that in 11.11 Jesus is not speaking of John as a prophet in a quasi-technical way to imply that John is part of one group within the wider sphere of Christ's disciples and that the 'little ones' is another quasi-technical expression to describe a further sub-set of disciples who are to be thought of as greater than John.

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<sup>65</sup> This is the view articulated by Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, p.227.

The questions I ask of Yamasaki's proposal expose its inadequacy in fully explaining 11.11. They also demonstrate the difficulty of this verse for an understanding of the Gospel's treatment of the Baptist. John has clearly been shown to be within the rule of God because he has come as a prophet proclaiming the nearness of the rule of God (3.2-3). He has demonstrated obedience to Jesus and has acted with him in fulfilling all righteousness (3.15-16). He has been arrested because of his faithfulness to this vocation (4.12) and Jesus has repeated his words verbatim (4.17=3.2 cf. 10.7; 3.10=7.19). Yet 11.11 seems to imply the injustice that John is not included in the reward of the eschatological kingdom of heaven (cf. 5.3; 10-12; 8.11). This difficulty is explained, as Yamasaki rightly acknowledges,<sup>66</sup> by J.C. O'Neill who, with respect to 11.11, stated:

Jesus is not contrasting all begotten [*sic*] of women, with John at their head, and some other group of men, the least of which is greater than John; he is contrasting the present state of the greatest of men with the future state of the least in the coming kingdom.<sup>67</sup>

The notion of the least in the kingdom does not however refer to a specific group within the wider body of disciples however, rather it relates to all genuine disciples of Jesus. The sense of the expression therefore becomes clear. In effect Jesus is saying 'In the future kingdom of heaven those disciples following my example will be regarded as greater than John'. In terms of the development of the story this is a remarkable thing for Jesus to be saying to the crowds. For they have witnessed the powerful ministry of John the Baptist and know of his influence in the

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<sup>66</sup> Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, p.114

<sup>67</sup> J.C. O'Neill, *Jesus the Messiah: Six Lectures on the Ministry of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cochrane, 1980) pp.10-11; cited by Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, p.251

wilderness by the Jordan (3.5). Thus far they have not witnessed anything like this from Jesus' disciples. Yet for the reader the logic of this statement is clear for the reader knows that:

- 1) Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God (1.1; 3.17);
- 2) the disciples, whom he calls, will join him in eschatological ministry (4.19);
- 3) that this is likely to involve them in great suffering on account of Jesus (5.11);
- 4) they will take the message of the kingdom to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (10.6);
- 5) they will perform miraculous deeds (10.1-8);
- 6) they will be called upon to testify to the nations (10.18);
- 7) they will speak with the words of the Spirit of their Father (10.20).

All of this is as yet merely anticipated but when Jesus speaks of the disciples being regarded as greater than John the Baptist in the future kingdom the reader already has a sense of why this must be the case. In 11.11 Jesus is emphasising the significance of John the Baptist and is highlighting, as 11.12-14 makes clear, John's importance in announcing the nearness of the kingdom. However, Jesus is communicating that the ministry of John was not an end in itself but is part of a wider continuity of purpose in manifesting the divine saving initiative. Jesus is, therefore, making clear that whilst the kingdom was visible in the ministry of John, this kingdom is even more visible in his own ministry, a ministry that he will at some point share with his disciples. Once more this causes the reader to wonder if and when the disciples will receive a pneumatological anointing for their envisaged

ministry and if such an anointing should be understood as an aspect of Jesus' messianic ministry of baptising in Holy Spirit (3.11).

In 11.12-19 Jesus contrasts his own ministry with that of John. He recognises that the kingdom of heaven has been present not just in his own ministry but also in the ministry of John the Baptist (11.12)<sup>68</sup> but that this kingdom has consistently been rejected. Such rejection has taken the form of violence (11.12) as in the arrest of John. Such rejection has also been expressed by those who have variously rendered the presence of the kingdom in John to have been nothing but the work of a demon (11.18) or who have dismissed the kingdom present in the ministry of Jesus as the deeds of gluttonous man (11.19). Jesus identifies the proponents of such rejection as 'this generation' (11.16) and in so doing he, for the first time, begins to speak words of reproach to the Jewish crowds (11.20).<sup>69</sup> This is an interesting development in the outworking of the Gospel's plot. We have seen that John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would baptise in fire and that this would be related to a fiery judgement of those who had failed to demonstrate fruit bearing repentance in the light of the nearness of God's kingdom (cf. 3.2; 7-12). Here in Mt.11 John has sent word to Jesus seeking clarification as to whether Jesus was indeed the one that John had expected (11.2-3). As part of Jesus' response to the question of John he now begins to display his identity as eschatological judge by pronouncing judgement on those Jewish cities that have not responded to the kingdom in him with repentance. Matthew has used the question of John very effectively as a device to remind the reader about the nature of Jesus' ministry and

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<sup>68</sup> cf. Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, pp.119-121; Meier, 'John the Baptist', pp.396-397; Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, pp.254-256.

<sup>69</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, pp.260-261, are right to identify the words 'this generation' in 11.16 with the contemporaries of Jesus. When Jesus uses this phrase he is addressing the crowds and it precedes his reproach of the cities in 11.20.

also as a bridge to link the gracious acts of ministry performed amongst the crowds (Mt. 8-9) and the reproach of 11.20-24.

11.20 is also helpful to the reader because it defines the theological significance of the gracious deeds performed in Mt.8-9. The key to this is that the reader is told that the proper response to these gracious acts is repentance but that the cities in which the deeds were performed did not make this appropriate response. In 3.2 and 4.17 John and Jesus announced that the kingdom of heaven was near and that the fitting response to this news should be repentance. The fact that the expected response to this message and that the expected response to the gracious acts of Mt.8-9 is the same declares to the reader that these gracious deeds of Jesus are to be understood as manifestations and demonstrations of the message. As Jesus has cleansed lepers (8.1-4); cured the paralysed (8.5-13; 9.2-6); healed the sick (8.14-15; 9.20-23); banished demons (8.16; 28-34; 9.32-33); raised the dead (9.23-26); and given sight to the blind (9.27-31) he has been declaring by deed as well as word that 'the kingdom of heaven has drawn near'. The crowd has not repented because of either the word or the deed. Therefore they are liable to the eschatological judgement that John had predicted and which Jesus now pronounces. For this reason, Jesus can say to the Galilean cities, 'It will be more bearable for the land of Sodom in judgement day than for you.' (11.24). In Mt.11, following the question of John the Baptist from prison, the motif of baptism in Matthew's Gospel takes a new turn as the one acknowledged as the eschatological judge who would baptise in fire begins to pronounce such judgement on those who fail to receive him with genuine repentance.<sup>70</sup> However, as 11.28-30 makes clear, it is not too late for the crowds to

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<sup>70</sup> cf. Yamasaki, *Life and Death*, pp.126-127; Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, pp.267; 270-271; Hill, *Matthew*, pp.203-204; Daniel Patte, *Structural Commentary*, pp.162-164; Senior, *Matthew*, pp.129-

change and to receive Jesus appropriately. Having pronounced statements of woe he speaks tenderly once more and invites them to change their position by taking his yoke upon themselves and committing themselves to learn from him, i.e. become his disciples. For those who accept his invitation he offers rest for their souls.

#### **e) On the Holy Spirit, Repentance and Discipleship (12.17-50)**

The fulfilment quotation of Is.42.1-4 in 12.18-21 makes narrative connection with Mt.3 because the words of this prophecy correspond to some of the words that were proclaimed by God at Jesus' baptism (12.18 cf. 3.17). Furthermore, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus in 3.16 is recalled in 12.18 as the quotation from Isaiah reminds the reader that God's messianic servant would be endowed with God's Spirit (12.18). The Isaiah passage quoted in Mt.12 also states that the Messiah would declare judgement to the nations (12.18). This recalls 3.11-12 in which John the Baptist prophesied that the coming one would bring fiery judgement with Him. Jesus has been seen to speak of such judgement in 11.20-24. The judgement referred to in 11.20-24 was explicitly directed to those Jewish cities in which Jesus had demonstrated the power of God through miraculous and gracious acts. 8.11-12 and at 10.18f. have both served, however, to indicate that the scope of the judgement to be exercised by Jesus is more universal than the limited boundaries of Judaism.

Is.42.1-4, included at this point in the narrative, refers directly to Jesus' actions in 12.15-16 of healing many and instructing them not to make this public.

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131; Douglas R. A. Hare, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching, Matthew* (Louisville, John Knox, 1993) pp.125-126; David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2001) p.132; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, p.313.

The context of the quotation seems to call attention to its middle section, therefore, which speaks of the Messiah not striving or crying out (12.19). Thus it appears that the actions of Jesus in Mt.12 only actually fulfil a fraction of the cited prophecy. It becomes clear in the following verses, however, that the inclusion of the prophecy quotation serves not simply as a conclusion to 12.15-16 but also, and more powerfully, as an introduction to 12.22-50.<sup>71</sup>

This becomes apparent to the reader in the controversy that follows the exorcism performed by Jesus in 12.22. Quickly, the exorcism is seen to fade into the background as the focus falls on the responses of certain groups to Jesus' actions. The crowds begin to wonder if Jesus is indeed the son of David (12.23). This positive reaction of the crowds to Jesus precipitates a strong and immediate negative reaction from the Pharisees (12.24).<sup>72</sup> The extent of the Pharisees' antagonism towards Jesus and their utter rejection of his ministry is made plain as they denounce him by asserting that his power over demons is given by Beelzebul, the chief of the demons (12.24 cf. 10.25).<sup>73</sup> There is however a key distinction between Jesus' meaning in 10.25 and the accusation of the Pharisees in 12.24. The context of 10.25 indicates that Jesus is instructing his disciples that the very things that he must endure they should expect to be exposed to also. In 10.25 Jesus is effectively saying 'If they call me Beelzebul, then don't be surprised if they do that to you as well'. In 12.24, however, the Pharisees are not calling Jesus Beelzebul. Rather they are saying that the power that enables Jesus to cast out demons is in fact Beelzebul, ruler

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Cope, *Scribe*, p.36; Charette, *Presence*, p.74; J.H. Neyrey, 'The Thematic Use of Isaiah 42, 1-4 in Matthew 12', *Biblica* 63 (1982), pp.457-472.

<sup>72</sup> As Davies and Allison note in *Matthew II*, p.335, 'The Pharisees respond not so much to Jesus' exorcism as to the crowds. The narrative accordingly implies that what the Pharisees are interested in above all is keeping others from belief'; cf. Gundry, *Literary and Theological Art*, p.232.

<sup>73</sup> See Hill, *Matthew*, p.215 cf. p.191

of demons. Here therefore the Pharisees are saying that the Spirit of God, prophesied by Isaiah to rest upon the Davidic Messiah (12.18), is in fact Beelzebul.<sup>74</sup> No greater act of blasphemy can be imagined. Therefore Jesus begins to make a robust defence of the Spirit of God and proceeds to proclaim judgement on those who would commit such blasphemy.

Jesus' defends the power by which he is able to perform acts of exorcism by firstly arguing that it is ridiculous to imagine that Satan will stand in opposition to his own forces of evil (25-26). Secondly, Jesus points to those amongst the Pharisees who perform exorcisms (27). Jesus' strategy is to ask the Pharisees by whose power these other exorcisms are performed. The weight of the rhetoric demands the response that the same power effective in other Jewish exorcisms performed at the time is now made manifest in the ministry of Jesus.<sup>75</sup> Following on from this Jesus makes the statement, 'But if I cast out the demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (12.28). This verse causes some difficulties because, following on from 12.27, Jesus appears on the one hand to be comparing himself with other Jewish exorcists in a way that suggests his exorcisms and theirs' derive from the power of God not Beelzebul. On the other hand Jesus seems to be claiming a significance for his own exorcisms which he denies to all the others. Jesus indicates to the Pharisees that if his exorcisms are the result of the power of the Spirit of God working through him then the kingdom of God has come upon them. Davies and Allison resolve this difficulty by suggesting that it is not the power of the Spirit of God that is the decisive factor for understanding Jesus' phrase in 12.28. Rather, they contend that it is the identity of the exorcist that is the

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<sup>74</sup> Charette, *Presence*, p.78; Cope, *Scribe*, pp.38-39;

<sup>75</sup> See Hill, *Matthew*, p.216 for ancient sources bearing witness to other Jewish exorcisms; cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, p.338



significant factor. It is because the exorcist is the Messiah that the kingdom of God can be said to have come in his ministry.<sup>76</sup> This interpretation is exegetically strong in the sense that it responds to the detail of the text itself, recognising the force of the emphatic *ἐγὼ*. It also takes account of the flow of the narrative to this point which, from the first verse onwards, has consistently made clear that the rule of God is at hand only because of God's initiative in sending the Messiah, Jesus, to save his people from their sins (1.21). The position of Davies and Allison is weakened, however, because they fail to take account of the role of the Spirit in establishing Jesus as Son of God and Messiah and in empowering his eschatological ministry (1.18; 25; 3.16-17; 12.18). When this is taken into consideration it seems more likely that, in 12.28, Jesus is emphasising his unity of purpose with the Spirit, effectively saying, 'because the Spirit of God works through me in the particularly powerful way that it does the Kingdom of God has come upon you'.

Jesus is presented in the narrative to be the Messiah who is authorised to effect the judgement of those who reject the reign of God in his ministry as well as dispense eschatological salvation to those who receive him with repentance (3.11-12; cf. 11.20-25). Such salvation and judgement are central characteristics of the arrival of God's kingdom. When Jesus declares to the Pharisees that if his deeds are done by the power of God then God's kingdom has come upon them he is referring to the presence of judgement for the unrepentant that is integral to his eschatological vocation. He is saying that if he is the Messiah of God by virtue of God's Spirit working in him then the effects of the kingdom will be felt by people according to their reaction to Him. The Pharisees have rejected Him and the Spirit working

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<sup>76</sup> See Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, pp.339-341.

through him, so they are, therefore, liable to judgement, hence the forceful sense of ἐφ' ὑμᾶς. This is made explicit in the proceeding verses as Jesus once more repeats the words of John the Baptist (12.33 evokes 3.10 and 12.34 repeats 3.7 verbatim).<sup>77</sup> As such the role of Jesus as eschatological judge, the one who will baptise in fire (3.11) is recalled. Jesus demonstrates this by pronouncing judgement on those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit (12.32).<sup>78</sup>

Within Jesus' words of reproach to the Pharisees there are two phrases that are useful in terms of helping the reader to understand the role of the disciples in the Gospel. Firstly, Jesus states that 'those not with me are against me and those not gathering with me scatter' (12.30). This is helpful by means of comparison between the disciples and the Pharisees in the story. The Pharisees are not with Jesus either in terms of sharing his outlook (ideological point of view) or in terms of actually accompanying him as part of his eschatological community. The disciples on the other hand are being formed into those who will share Jesus' ideological point of view by means of being recipients of the discourses of Jesus (Mt.5-7 and 10.5-42) and they are physically present with Jesus, having been gathered by him into an eschatological community of those accepting his call (4.17-22; 8.18-22; 9.9; 11.28-30). They have also been told by Jesus that they will work with him in his ministry

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. Anderson, *Narrative Web*, pp.23, 87, 102-103, 107, 130, 174.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Charette, *Presence*, p.78; Hill, *Matthew*, p.217; Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, p.343. In 12.41 Jesus speaks to the Pharisees once more about repentance and the judgement that is to be faced by those who do not repent. In order to make this point he contrasts 'this generation' with the people of Nineveh who repented having received the message of Jonah. In contrast 'this generation' has failed to respond appropriately to the presence of the kingdom in his own ministry. The theme of repentance as the appropriate response to the activity of God is re-stated as is the consequence of failing to receive Jesus in such a manner. Cf. Charette, *Presence*, pp.79-81; Hill, *Matthew*, p.221. The notion of condemnatory judgement is developed further in the Gospel notably in 13.24-30, 36-43; 23.33; 25.31-46. These passages will not be explored in depth as the principle that 'baptising in fire' relates to Christ's role as the eschatological judge who will pass eschatological condemnatory judgement at the last has been established. The focus of the remainder of the chapter will be the meaning of 'baptise in Holy Spirit' as this is worked out in the Gospel.

of eschatological gathering (4.19). Thus 12.30, though directed towards the Pharisees, causes the reader to make comparison between those in the narrative who reject Jesus and those who accept him.

12.28 is significant in contributing to the reader's developing understanding of the phrase 'he will baptise in Holy Spirit' (3.11). In 10.8 the disciples were commanded to cast out demons, an activity that according to Jesus (12.27-28) is only possible because of the working of the Spirit of God. So these verses work together to give further indication that the disciples will at some point minister in the power of the Spirit of God. A careful examination of the Gospel to this point, however, encourages caution in this respect because the Gospel indicates that the performance of charismatic acts in the power of the Spirit cannot be equated with having received Christ's baptism in Holy Spirit. We have already seen that the performance of charismatic acts alone, according to Matthew, does not guarantee eschatological salvation even for those who claim to be disciples of Jesus (7.21-23). 7.21 makes clear that the criterion for eschatological salvation is doing the will of the heavenly Father. Thus the Gospel successfully communicates that Christ's Spirit-baptism leading to salvation is integrally related to obedience to the divine will but not necessarily related to charismatic acts. It is true to say that some who receive Christ's Spirit-baptism will engage in charismatic acts (cf. 10.8, 22) but it is not true to say that all those who engage in charismatic acts have received or will receive Christ's Spirit-baptism. The concept of baptism in Holy Spirit is, for Matthew, related to obedience to the divine will but it is not yet clear whether such obedience is rewarded by Spirit-baptism or whether Spirit-baptism enables obedience.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Schweizer, 'Law and Charismatic Activity'.

The relationship between righteousness and Christ's Spirit-baptism is implicitly apparent in 12.46-50. As Jesus is speaking against 'this evil generation' (12.45), he is interrupted by the news that his mother and brothers were seeking to speak to him (12.46-47). To this news Jesus responds in a manner that illuminates the nature of discipleship and develops further the reader's perspective as to what might be involved as Jesus baptises in Holy Spirit (3.11). Firstly he asks the rhetorical questions, 'Who is my mother? And who are my brothers?' (12.49). Then he stretches out his hand to his disciples and says, 'Behold my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in Heaven, that one is my brother and sister and mother' (12.49-50). This saying of Jesus is striking for several reasons. Firstly, it may appear that Jesus is denying his relationships within his own earthly family but the phrase does not need to be taken this way. The familial relationship between Jesus and his mother and brothers in an earthly sense is obvious and assumed. Rather, Jesus speaks of the relative unimportance of his earthly human family in comparison with his relationship with a wider spiritual family that exists because he has partnership with its other members in doing the will of the Father.<sup>80</sup>

Secondly, the words of Jesus in 12.49-50 are striking because of the gesture that accompanies them. Jesus does not engage in a generalised and theoretical comparison between himself and some anonymous others with whom he has partnership in doing the will of the Father. Rather he specifically identifies his disciples as those who do the will of the Father with him and who are therefore to be considered members of his family. In so doing Jesus indicates that it is the will of

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<sup>80</sup> See especially Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, p.364, who claim, 'The words (of Jesus) do not dissolve family bonds but rather relativize them'. Cf. Barton, *Family Ties*, p.180; Hill, *Matthew*, p.222; Hare, *Matthew*, pp.145-146; Senior, *Matthew*, pp.144-145; Patte, *Structural Commentary*, pp.182-183.

the Father that people should respond to the kingdom of heaven by showing genuine repentance and answering a call to discipleship.<sup>81</sup>

Thirdly, Jesus' words and the accompanying gesture serve to echo 7.21 in which Jesus said, 'Not everyone saying to me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but the ones doing the will of my Father in Heaven.' 12.49-50, therefore, in making narrative connection with 7.21, reminds the reader that it is possible for a person to make claim to being a disciple of Jesus but for such a person not to live out that commitment in obedience to the will of the Father. Indeed Jesus foresees that such people would come but that they would not be judged favourably by him and that they would not enter the kingdom of heaven (7.21-23). Such people will be recognisable by their fruits (7.15-20 cf. 3.8-10).

All of this has relevance to the question of what it means for Jesus to baptise in Holy Spirit. This relevance is inferred from reflection on the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit. We have already recognised that Jesus is designated Son of God (2.15; 3.17) because he is brought to birth by the Holy Spirit (1.18; 1.25). We have observed that the declaration, 'This is my Son' in 3.17 is accompanied by a manifestation of the anointing of the Spirit upon Jesus (3.16). We have witnessed Jesus, guided by the Spirit, overcoming the temptations of Satan in the wilderness and we have reflected that, in so doing, he demonstrated that he is to be regarded as the ideal Israel, the Son of God who is faithful in the time of testing as compared to Israel, the first son, who was not. So we are able to see that Jesus is the Son of God

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<sup>81</sup> So Hill, *Matthew*, p.222, who states that doing the will of God, in the context of Matthew's Gospel, 'necessarily involves belief in and commitment to Jesus'.

because of the power of the Spirit in which he was conceived and which has continued to empower his mission.

In 10.20 Jesus promises the disciples that in the future they will know the Spirit of their Father speaking through them. In this same context Jesus speaks of the relative unimportance of human family ties in comparison to the importance of their ties to their Lord (10.37). Here in 12.49-50 Jesus is making a similar point. Now, though, he says that his human family ties are less important than his relationship with those who follow him and who do the will of the Father. Jesus regards his relationship with such people as being a familial one. Hence he can say to the disciples that the ‘Spirit of your Father’ will speak through you (10.20) because Jesus thinks of them as having a familial relationship with himself and therefore with the Father.<sup>82</sup> Such a familial relationship between humanity and God is only possible because of the work of the Spirit (1.18; 1.25; 3.16-17, 4.1-11). Therefore it may be that the reader is to perceive one element of the Spirit’s work in the life of an obedient disciple to be an inclusion of the disciple into the family of God. Thus, we come to recognise that those who respond appropriately to the divine saving initiative in Jesus undergo an eschatological re-definition of their identity both in personal terms – how they relate to the Father as his children – and in corporate terms, how they relate to one another as brothers (and sisters). It should also be noted that 7.21 points to the final judgement and teaches that eschatological salvation is only available to those who do the will of the Father. 3.11-12 indicated that Christ’s Spirit baptism is directed towards eschatological salvation. 12.50 tells us that those who do the will of the Father have a familial relationship with God. It

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. Bauer, *Structure*, pp.62-63; Patte, *Structural Commentary*, pp.182-183; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, p.360; Howell, *Inclusive Story*, pp.140-141.

may well be, then, that here we have an indication that one aspect of the notion of 'baptism in Holy Spirit' is the inclusion of the one being baptised within a new family formed according to allegiance to Jesus, a brother in the doing of the Father's will, and the eschatological Son of God. As has been stressed throughout, however, we still cannot say whether this Spirit-baptism is to be thought of as a reward for obedience or whether it is the means by which obedience is possible.

#### **f) Restoration of Relationship and Status (28.10)**

In terms of the reader's 'wandering viewpoint',<sup>83</sup> to recall Iser's phrase, various narrative connections with the expected baptism in Holy Spirit (3.11) have become established in the narrative. The relevant inter-related features of the narrative are:

- 1) Baptism in Holy Spirit is connected with eschatological salvation (3.11-12).
- 2) Eschatological salvation is connected to obedience to the divine will (7.21-23).
- 3) Obedience to the divine will is connected with divine kinship (12.46-50).
- 4) Divine kinship is connected with the work of the Spirit (10.20; 1.16, 18; 3.16-17).
- 5) Obedience to the divine will is connected with the Spirit (4.1-11).
- 6) The Spirit is connected to baptism (3.16-17).

These narrative connections work together to suggest that those who are obedient to the will of God are to be considered Christ's brothers (/sisters) and that

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<sup>83</sup>Recall Iser, *Act of Reading*, pp.16, 108-118; cf. *Implied Reader*, pp.280-281

such as these will receive salvation at the last. Obedience, divine kinship and eschatological salvation are all connected in the narrative to the work of the Spirit. Eschatological salvation in particular is related to receiving the expected baptism in Holy Spirit. To this point in the narrative, however, it has not yet become clear whether this baptism in Holy Spirit is to be considered in terms of a reward for an obedient life leading to eschatological salvation or whether such a baptism is to be considered as an empowering which enables and sustains obedience and therefore makes salvation possible. 28.10 by means of implicit narrative association helps us tentatively to suggest an answer to this question.

In 28.10 the risen Jesus meets Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (cf.28.1). Jesus tells the women to go to the disciples to tell them to go to Galilee where they will see him. As he refers to the disciples he calls them his brothers (ἀδελφοῖς μου).<sup>84</sup> This gracious bestowal of status and identity serves, by means of implicit narrative associations, to answer many of the questions about the nature of the expected baptism in Holy Spirit that have puzzled the reader to this point.<sup>85</sup> The important role of the Spirit in effecting divine kinship has been apparent throughout the narrative. This is particularly clear in the birth narrative in which we are told that Jesus was conceived in the power of the Holy Spirit (1.18, 20). At his baptism when

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<sup>84</sup> Surprisingly this reference to Christ's brothers is overlooked by Barton in his treatment of discipleship and family ties in Matthew. Cf. Barton, *Family Ties*, pp.125-219. The designation of the disciples as Christ's brothers at this point in the narrative is widely acknowledged to communicate a sense of forgiveness and restoration of relationship between Christ and his disciples. See: Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, p.91; Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.151, suggests that the designation 'brothers' suggests to the implied reader that the disciples 'in spite of their recent failures ... will once again respond to Jesus as 'disciples' to 'Lord''; Anderson, *Narrative Web*, p.71; Hare, *Matthew*, p.331; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p.874; Nolland, *Matthew*, p.1253, states 'That the risen Jesus speaks of those who have deserted him as 'my brothers' speaks eloquently of restoration.'

<sup>85</sup> C.H. Giblin, 'Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Matthean Burial – Resurrection Narrative (Matt. 27.57-28.20)', *NTS* 21 (1975), pp.406-420 makes the point on p.409 that this is a gracious act of Jesus on behalf of his disciples 'without reference to morally good deeds' on their part.



Jesus is acknowledged as God's Son the Spirit is seen to descend on him (3.16-17). When the disciples are promised by Jesus that they will benefit from divine help under persecution he refers to that divine help as being 'the Spirit of your Father' (Πνεῦμα τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν) (10.20). 10.20 revealed to the reader that the disciples would at some point receive God's Spirit to empower their ministry and to bestow upon them the status of divine kinship. They would be regarded as children of the father and therefore brothers of Christ.

This aspect of divine kinship was seen in 12.46-50 to be related to the doing of the Father's will (12.50). This established narrative connection with 7.21 in which Jesus makes clear that the ones who do the Father's will, who we now know are his brothers, are those who receive eschatological salvation at the last and receive entry into the fully established kingdom of heaven. We also observed that 7.21 made narrative connection with 3.11-12 in which John prophesied that the coming one, Jesus, would baptise in Holy Spirit, which would be eschatological blessing for the repentant and is directed towards eschatological salvation which is represented by the metaphor of wheat being gathered into the barn. The logic in all this is that divine kinship, doing the will of the Father, eschatological salvation and receiving Christ's baptism in Holy Spirit are all related in Matthew's story. What has not been clear before 28.10 is the nature of the relationship between these aspects of God's salvific work in Christ. The reader has constantly been asking: are the baptism in Holy Spirit, the bestowal of divine kinship and the giving of eschatological salvation rewards for a person who achieves obedience to the Father's will or is baptism in Holy Spirit the means by which a person is empowered to obey the Father's will and therefore receive divine kinship and eschatological salvation? Christ's description of

the disciples as his brothers in 28.10 helps us to answer this question and to understand the nature of Matthew's understanding of the giving of the Spirit even though such a giving of the Spirit is nowhere described or even articulated in the narrative. Nonetheless the implicit narrative logic enables the reader finally to understand.

In 12.50 Jesus links together the concepts of divine kinship and obedience to the Father's will. The narrative has also given the clear impression that Jesus, of all the human characters, understands what the Father's will is. This is apparent in his request to receive John's baptism, a request which he justifies by appealing to a commitment to 'all righteousness' (πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην). The implication being that Jesus had knowledge of the purposes of God. This presentation of Jesus as one who perfectly understands the will of the Father is consistently put forth and is established as Jesus quotes Scripture with authority in the wilderness (4.1-11) and interprets the law for his followers (5.3-7.29). So the impression is effectively given by the narrative that if the disciples wish to do the will of the Father and so be regarded as Christ's brothers (12.50) and receive salvation (7.21) then they need to obey the commandments of Christ. Yet in the Gospel from 20.20 to 27.66 the reader witnesses several instances of the disciples' failure to understand the will of the Father and to be obedient to Jesus. Examples of this include: their rebuke of the woman who anoints Jesus (26.8-9), their inability to follow Jesus' instruction to stay awake (26.36-46), their attempt to forcefully prevent Jesus' arrest even though Jesus had made it clear to them what must happen (26.51-52 cf. 16.21); their attempt to establish themselves as greatest in the kingdom (20.20-26 cf. 18.1-4); and perhaps

most damning of all the denial of Peter (26.69-74 cf. 10.33).<sup>86</sup> In the passion narrative the disciples are presented as failing in their task of obedience to Jesus. They do not follow the instructions of Jesus and hence do not obey the will of the Father. In terms of 12.50, therefore, the designation 'my brothers' to refer to the disciples is puzzling.

It becomes clear that here in 28.10 we find a gracious bestowal of status and identity that the disciples have not deserved. Matthew does not contain an explicit bestowal of the Spirit as does Luke (Acts 2.1-4) or John (John 20.22). Yet the narrative logic contained within 28.10 in the context of the Gospel hints to the reader that here the Spirit is given in order to bestow the status of divine kinship, therefore enabling obedience to the divine will and making salvation possible. The disciples have not been obedient yet because of his own obedient death (26.36-39) Jesus is able to effect forgiveness (26.28), to save his people from their sins (1.21) and to bestow upon them the eschatological status and identity of members of God's family – his brothers.<sup>87</sup>

In spite of the failure of the disciples in their efforts to be obedient in the time of testing the narrative has, nonetheless, presented them as those who have responded appropriately to Jesus. They have left everything to follow him (4.19-22), a demonstration that they had responded with appropriate repentance to his call in 4.17. They have accompanied Jesus throughout, hearing his teaching even though they have not as yet been able to put it into practice. The disciples in Matthew, in

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Terence L. Donaldson, 'Guiding Readers – Making Disciples: Discipleship in Matthew's Narrative Strategy' in Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) pp.30-49 esp. 38.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Senior, *Matthew*, p.342; Gundry, *Literary and Theological Art*, p.591; Kingsbury, *Structure*, pp.55-56.

following Jesus, recognize their poverty of spirit (5.3 cf. 19.25-26). Unlike the Pharisees and Sadducees in 3.7-10, they have relied on Jesus for their standing in the kingdom of heaven and as such in 28.10 they benefit from his forgiveness (cf. 26.28). They are given an eschatologically redefined identity and status that they could not possibly have earned. This blessing of divine kinship is presented in the narrative as a gift of the Spirit (cf. 1.18, 20; 3.16-17), it will enable them to do the will of the Father (10.20; 12.50); and hence it will result in eschatological salvation (3.11-12; 7.21). In 28.10 neither the Holy Spirit or baptism are mentioned. Yet by means of implicit narrative associations the logic of the story's plot enables the reader to discern that the eschatological blessing of baptism in Holy Spirit is very much in view as the risen Jesus refers to his disciples once more as his brothers.

#### **4) Summary: The Development of Matthew's Baptismal Message in 4.17—28.15**

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that my application of Iser's concept of the reader's 'wandering viewpoint' would need to be subjected to two questions in order to assess whether or not the interpretation I propose here can be considered to be valid. These two questions are:

- 1) Has the interpreter been sensitive to what is communicated by the Gospel about the saving activity of God in Christ?
- 2) Has the interpreter been sensitive to what is communicated by the Gospel about baptism with respect to the saving activity of God in Christ?

My main aim in approaching Matthew 4.12—28.15 has been to understand how the reader should understand John's prophecy in 3.11-12 and how this is worked out in the narrative as a whole. Whilst there has been no explicit reference to baptising in Holy Spirit and fire in the narrative since 3.11-12 there have been several significant references to eschatological destruction and salvation. The cumulative acquisition of connections that the reader has benefited from through the application of the 'wandering viewpoint'<sup>88</sup> has shown that the eschatological salvation of which John spoke in 3.11-12 is a gift that is granted to those who do the will of the Father (7.21). Those who do the will of the Father are also considered to be his children and therefore brothers (sisters) of Christ (10.20; 12.50). However, perfect obedience to the will of the Father is only attained in the narrative by Jesus who is the model for the fulfilment of all righteousness (cf. 3.15; 4.1-11). Therefore, for anyone at all to receive eschatological salvation, Jesus needs to bestow a status of divine kinship and a capacity for righteousness upon them. This he does for his disciples in 28.10 by forgiving their disobedience and restoring their identity as eschatological children of God. The disciples are beneficiaries of this blessing because they have recognised their poverty of Spirit (5.3; 19.25), their need to repent and their dependence on Jesus. The predispositions of acknowledging one's need for salvation and recognising Jesus as one who can grant such a gift are the criteria for receiving the gift of salvation that Jesus bestows. Those who do not acknowledge their need of salvation or that Jesus is able to offer it and who do not repent as Jesus declares the kingdom by word and deed are not beneficiaries of his gift of salvation. The one group receive Christ's baptism in Holy Spirit, the other are liable to his baptism in fire. Hope remains, however, for those who have failed to repent in the narrative. This is because there is an expected but as yet suspended mission of the

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<sup>88</sup>Recall Iser, *Act of Reading*, pp.16, 108-118; cf. *Implied Reader*, pp.280-281

disciples to Israel (9.37-10.42) that will impact on the nations (10.18). The disciples had not received the example of Christ's suffering in 9.37-10.42 and neither had they received the power of the Spirit. Following the resurrection the disciples have both witnessed the suffering example of Jesus and have been restored to the eschatological identity of children of God, brothers of Jesus (28.10), a blessing of God's Spirit (cf.1.18, 20; 3.16-17; 4.1-11). As brothers of Jesus they are again acknowledged as those who do the will of the Father (cf.12.50). Those who do the will of the Father receive salvation at the last (cf.7.21). Those receiving salvation at the last are those who have received Christ's baptism in Holy Spirit (3.11-12). Thus the gracious bestowal of identity and status upon the disciples implied in 28.10 suggests that Christ's baptism in Holy Spirit is to be conceived of as a gift that enables obedience and salvation rather than as a reward for attaining them. This gift is for those who recognise their poverty of Spirit and respond to Jesus in genuine repentance which accepts his call to discipleship.

In discerning this aspect of the Matthean narrative I have been sensitive to what the Gospel communicates concerning the saving activity of God in Jesus and to the place of baptism within that. I submit, therefore that the interpretation of the Gospel proposed here has implemented Iser's concept of the 'wandering viewpoint' in a manner that is in keeping with the flow of the narrative being studied and therefore represents a valid meaning configuration for the understanding of the Gospel. The meaning configuration here proposed forms the context for appreciating Mt.28.16-20 and Christ's command that the disciples should baptise as part of their fulfilment of their missionary commission.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Matthew 28.16-20**

#### **The Command to Baptise**

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##### **1) Introduction**

In Mt.3, as the ministry and message of John the Baptist was described, the notion of baptism was introduced into the Matthean narrative. In that short chapter the reader was made aware of John's baptism of preparation for the ministry of the Messiah, the expected baptising ministry of the coming one in Holy Spirit and fire, and John's baptism of Jesus which was followed by a theophany in which the Spirit descended upon Jesus and the voice of God was heard to declare that Jesus is God's Son. From 4.12 to 28.15, baptism is hardly ever referred to explicitly but by means of verbal repetition of language associated with John the Baptist in Mt.3, by the reintroduction of the character of John the Baptist into the narrative at key points, and by the outworking of the anticipatory tension established in 3.11-12, the notion of baptism remains active and is developed implicitly as the narrative continues.

In 28.16-20, we are once more confronted with an explicit reference to baptism which appears in this climactic pericope in the form of a command from the risen Christ. It is in this striking manner that the Gospel's baptism motif is

concluded. Scholars have often commented that 28.16-20 forms a conclusion to many of the Gospel's key themes.<sup>1</sup> As far as I am aware, however, the relationship of the baptismal command to the rest of the Gospel has not yet been considered in detail.<sup>2</sup> The baptism command comes as part of a clause in which the notion of baptism is intrinsically related to other aspects of the envisaged post-resurrection mission of the disciples. It will be necessary, therefore, to consider the place of baptism within its immediate literary context in 28.18b-20 as well as in the context of the narrative as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Firstly, however, it will be helpful to consider the narrative setting of Jesus' closing commission. This is established in 28.16-18a.<sup>4</sup>

## **2) The Narrative Setting of Jesus' Closing Commission (28.16-18a)**

The narrative setting of the closing commission emphasises its continuity with what has preceded it in the narrative. This is achieved, not only by the use of

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<sup>1</sup> See note 3 on p.123 above.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed the command to baptise is sometimes regarded as being an awkward interjection into the Gospel's conclusion with no real place in the narrative. Cf. Kupp, *Emmanuel*, p.104, who considers that Matthew's story does not provide sufficient background for the significance of the baptismal command to be understood; and Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p.887, who states that 'Matthew tells us nothing concerning his view of Christian baptism'.

<sup>3</sup> This is consistent with my method throughout and follows Bauer, *Structure*, p.113, who states: 'Our contention is that its [28.16-20] meaning is to be determined by its structural relationship to the Gospel as a whole rather than by a putative allusion to one or more Old Testament passages or forms'; cf. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p.883. This is not to overlook the wealth of scholarship devoted to form and source critical approaches to understanding this passage. It is simply to acknowledge that such approaches are not best suited to the exegetical and theological aims of the present study. Source and form critical proposals for understanding the nature of 28.16-20 are manifold and include: Otto Michel, 'The Conclusion of Matthew's Gospel' in G. Stanton, ed., *The Interpretation of Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1983) pp.30-41 esp. p.36; J. Schaberg, *The Father, Son and Holy Spirit: The Triadic Phrase in Matthew 28.19b*. SBLDS 19 (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1982) pp.111-141; J.B. Malina, 'The Literary Structure and Form of Matt. xxviii.16-20' *NTS* 17 (1970-71) pp.87-103; B.J. Hubbard, *The Matthean Redaction of a Primitive Apostolic Commissioning: An Exegesis of Matthew 28.16-20*, SBLDS 19 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974), see esp. pp.101-128; K. Smyth, 'Matthew 28: Resurrection as Theophany', *Irish Theological Quarterly* 42 (1975), pp.259-271.

<sup>4</sup> This is to follow the division suggested by Kupp, *Emmanuel*, p.203, though some would rather divide the pericope into 28.16-17 and 28.18-20, cf. Bauer, *Structure*, p.209.



δέ , but also by reference to ‘the eleven’, to Galilee and the recollection that the mountain of meeting had been appointed by Jesus. All of this serves to evoke the memory of previously narrated events. The poignant use of ἐν δεκά can be contrasted with the earlier references to δώδεκα (10.1; 19.28). The inclusion of the numerical reference in 28.16 causes the reader to reflect on the betrayal of Judas (26.14-16; 26.25; 26.47-50) and therefore the betrayal of the others also (26.33-35; 26.70-74) and the memory of betrayal causes the reader to remember the suffering and death of the Messiah that was its consequence (27.1-50). The mention of Galilee and the sense in which Jesus appointed the meeting in this specific place brings to mind for the reader, not just Jesus’ prediction of this resurrection Galilean encounter (26.32) but also the words of the risen Jesus to the women that spoke about Galilee and the disciples’ restored status and identity in relationship to Jesus (28.10).<sup>5</sup> Further to this, the geographical setting of this pericope causes the reader to reflect on the ministry of Jesus in word and deed which had taken place in Galilee as a fulfilment of Scripture (Mt.4.15) and which was the setting for the calling of these disciples into the eschatological community of Jesus (4.17-22; 8.18-22; 9.9; 11.28).<sup>6</sup> This notion of returning to a place of obedient acceptance of the divine activity in Jesus consolidates the impression given in 28.10 when Jesus refers to his disciples as his brothers once more (cf. 12.50). The disciples in 28.16 return to Galilee in obedience to Jesus and so the reader is prepared to experience the unfolding episode of restoration as the disciples are once more to be commissioned by Jesus (cf. 10.7-

<sup>5</sup> See pp.234-239 above. Note also that whilst 26.32 and 28.10 point to this resurrection encounter in Galilee they do not point to a particular meeting place and do not refer to a mountain.

<sup>6</sup> For similar reflections on the importance of Galilee as a retrospective device see: Kupp, *Emmanuel*, p.204; and Bauer, *Structure*, p.204.

8).<sup>7</sup> Further to this, the setting of all of this on a Galilean mountain also appears to be instructive. For in such a place the disciples have received the instruction of Jesus before (5.2-7.27)<sup>8</sup>. Again the reader is directed back to a consideration of how the disciples began their task of following Jesus. The overwhelming effect of this is to reinforce 28.10. The restoration of the relationship between the disciples and Jesus reflects the new order that comes about because of the resurrection.<sup>9</sup>

When the disciples see Jesus their initial response is to worship (π ρ ο σ ε κ ύ ν η σ α ν ) him.<sup>10</sup> This indicates that they recognise him and also suggests that they realise that he has risen from the dead. This worship, however, is accompanied by doubt. The words ο ἱ δ ἑ ἑ δ ἰ σ τ α σ α ν at the end of verse 17 are surprising given the response of worship and are difficult to interpret. This is because it is unclear as to whom the definite article applies. This is because ο ἱ δ ἑ can be used in a partitive sense meaning ‘some of the eleven’ or it can simply be taken as a pronoun meaning ‘they’.<sup>11</sup> It is most likely that ο ἱ δ ἑ should be

<sup>7</sup> Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.150, acknowledges this aspect of the Galilean setting. With respect to 28.7 and 10, she points to the concern of Jesus for his disciples, who he still refers to as ‘his brothers’ (cf. 12.48-50). Already in 28.7 and 10 the reader has come to suspect that the disciples ‘will once again respond to Jesus as ‘disciples’ to ‘Lord’’. Further, Weaver comments that 28.7 and 10 shows that the disciples ‘remain subject to Jesus’ word of command after his resurrection just as they were before’. She argues that this hints to the reader that ‘Jesus will have a further word of command for the disciples when they get there.’

<sup>8</sup> See Davies and Allison, *Matthew III*, p.681. Donaldson, *Mountain*, pp.170-190, argues persuasively that the mountain motif in Matthew is brought to a conclusion by the mountain setting of this climactic pericope. Donaldson understands the mountain in 28.16 to function as a device by which eschatological Zion expectations are ‘transferred to Christ in whom they find their fulfilment.’ p.188.

<sup>9</sup> cf. Morna D. Hooker, *Endings: Invitations to Discipleship* (London: SCM, 2003, p.36; Kupp, *Emmanuel*, pp.203-204.

<sup>10</sup> Note π ρ ο σ ε κ ύ ν ε ω can also mean to do obeisance.

<sup>11</sup> For evidence of both possibilities see BAGD, pp.549b-550a. Those who argue that all of the disciples worshipped and doubted include: R. Edwards, ‘Uncertain Faith: Matthew’s Portrayal of the Disciples’ in F.F. Segovia, ed., *Discipleship in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) pp.47-61; C.H. Giblin, ‘A Note on Doubt and Reassurance in Mt.28.16-20’, *CBQ* 37 (1975) pp.68-71; and K. Grayston, ‘The Translation of Matthew 28.17’, *JSNT* 21 (1984) pp.105-109; R. W. L. Moberly, ‘Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel as Son of God’ in *The Bible Theology and Faith: A Study of*

understood as a pronoun meaning ‘they’ as this corresponds with the usage of the οἱ δὲ construction throughout the Gospel (see 2.5; 4.20; 4.22; 14.17; 14.33; 15.34; 16.7; 16.14; 20.5; 20.31; 21.25; 22.19; 26.15; 26.67; 27.4; 27.21; 27.23; 28.15).<sup>12</sup> In contrasting worship, on the one hand, with doubt, on the other, Matthew is communicating something of the mixed response of the disciples to this encounter with the risen Jesus. The sense is that each disciple was divided within himself; that recognition, acceptance, worship and doubt existed together in each individual. This second view is most consistent with the use of the verb διστάζειν. I.P. Ellis has persuasively argued that the verb does not refer to disbelief nor even perplexity but rather to hesitation, indecision or uncertainty.<sup>13</sup> Further to this, Matthew has already used the word in 14.31 at the conclusion of the account of Peter’s abortive attempt to walk with Jesus on the Sea of Galilee in a storm. Jesus uses the word ἐδίστασας having called Peter an ὀλιγόπιστε, a ‘little faith’. In 14.22-33, Peter is rebuked by Jesus, not for his utter lack of faith in the presence of Jesus, but for his lack of confidence and his hesitating certainty that the power of Jesus would be sufficient for him also.<sup>14</sup>

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*Abraham and Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) pp.191-192. Those who argue that some disciples worshipped and others doubted include: K.L. McKay, ‘The Use of *hoi de* in Matthew 28.17’, *JSNT* 24 (1985) pp.71-72; and P.W. van der Horst, ‘Once More: The Translation of *hoi de* in Matthew 28.17’, *JSNT* 27 (1986) pp.27-30.

<sup>12</sup> As Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p.884, notes, ‘some of these occurrences may be ambiguous, none of them demands a division. All of them could be, and several must be, taken as inclusive. .... Furthermore, if the evangelist had wanted to say “some” he had available to him the unmistakable τινές or τινές αὐτῶν to make his point.’ Hagner finds agreement in Kupp, *Emmanuel*, pp.205-207; Ellis, *Mind and Message*, pp.574-577; Senior, *Matthew*, p.345, but the alternative view is preferred by Gundry, *Mixed Church*, p.594; B.J. Malina, ‘Literary Structure’, p.98

<sup>13</sup> See I.P. Ellis, ‘But Some Doubted’, *NTS* 14 (1968), p.574-580. Ellis points out that the evangelist could have used ἀπιστεῖν to communicate disbelief or ἀπορεῖν to communicate perplexity. Further, Ellis documents the meaning of the verb in Plato and Aristotle to establish a basis for translating it as hesitation, indecision or uncertainty.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Hooker, *Endings*, pp.36-37; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p.885; Garland, *Reading Matthew*, pp.270-271 who comments, ‘The disciples are initially hesitant, but they have been like that throughout the narrative. Matthew understands that the fluctuation between worship and indecision is every disciple’s struggle’; Bauer, *Structure*, p.110; Senior, *Matthew*, p.345; Kupp, *Emmanuel*, p.206.

In 28.18a the disciples are met by Jesus who approaches (π ρ ο σ ε λ θ ῶ ν ) them. This is a characteristically Matthean term which is often used of those who approach Jesus with reverence in search of healing (e.g., 8.2; 8.5; 8.25; 9.20; 9.28; 15.30; 17.14; 21.14).<sup>15</sup> This is only the second time in the narrative that the verb has been applied to Jesus. The first time was in 17.7 when Jesus “approaches” the disciples to reassure them following the transfiguration.<sup>16</sup> The transfiguration, like this resurrection encounter, was a mountain top event with the potential to cause hesitation, indecision and uncertainty on the part of the disciples. Again, as in 17.7, Jesus speaks to reassure the disciples.

### **3) The Baptismal Command in its Literary Context**

The approach of Jesus in 28.18a completes Matthew’s description of the context of the words of Jesus in 28.18b-20. Jesus has met with his worshipful but hesitant disciples on a mountain in Galilee and is acting to reassure them. This reassurance continues in the words that he speaks which declare to them that his authority is now universal (28.18b) and that his presence with them will be constant to the completion of the age (28.20). It is in the context of these words of reassurance that Jesus commissions the disciples, sending them to the nations to make disciples, baptising them in the triadic name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all that he has commanded (28.19-20a). These words of Jesus, along with his promise of constant presence (28.20b), underscore the totality

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<sup>15</sup> Senior, *Matthew*, p.346

and completeness of his sphere of influence, his sovereignty and his lordship. This is made apparent by the fourfold repetition of the word ‘all’ (πᾶσα / πᾶν τὰ / πᾶν τὰ / πᾶσας). His authority extends over the earth and the heavens, therefore the mission of his disciples needs to extend to all the nations of the earth (cf. 24.14) and should include teaching obedience to his commandments in their entirety. In undertaking this mission the disciples will know the constant and unfailing presence of the risen Jesus.<sup>17</sup> The closing words of Jesus in the Gospel will be considered according to the following structure:

- a) “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me” (28.18b)
- b) “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (28.19)
- c) “and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” (28.20a)
- d) “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (28.20b).

**a) “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me” (28.18b)**

The declaration by Jesus that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him makes striking connection with Dan. 7.13-14.<sup>18</sup> In Daniel, one like a son of man

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<sup>16</sup> cf. Kupp, *Emmanuel*, p.206; Hubbard, *Commissioning*, pp.77-78; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p.386, who states that this is ‘a comforting approach that takes the initiative to reestablish [sic] an intimate relationship’.

<sup>17</sup> See Garland, *Reading Matthew*, p.270.

<sup>18</sup> Michel, ‘The Conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel’, pp.30-41 esp. p.36, sees 28.18-20 as taking the form of an enthronement hymn like the one in Phil.2.9-11 and based on Dan.7.13-14; cf. Schaberg, *The Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, pp.111-141; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p.888

was given dominion and glory, all peoples, nations and languages were required to serve him. As Hartmann has noted, there are both similarities and differences between Dan.7.13-14 and Mt.28.18-20. This is because, whilst Jesus is to be thought of as Son of Man, who ultimately will judge the nations (25.31-32; 24.30; 19.28; 16.27; 13.37-43; cf. 3.11-12), he is presented in Mt.28.19-20 as one who exercises his authority not by compelling people to serve him but, through his disciples, by issuing an invitation to follow him. As Hartman notes, ‘making people disciples involves respect for their own free will, a feature which hardly is to be imagined behind Daniel 7.’<sup>19</sup>

Hartman also reflects on the nature of Jesus’ relationship to the Father that is implied by 28.18b. In recognising that Jesus’ authority has become universal in 28.18b, Hartman also seeks to emphasise that this authority ‘has been given’ (ἐ δόθη) to him. This is an example of the divine passive and is equivalent to the active, ‘God has given’. This is to be paralleled with Phil.2.9, which reads ‘God has exalted him and given to him the name which is above every name’. These examples of God giving power and authority to Jesus serve to emphasise that such power and authority is the Father’s to give. Of course, it is clear that Jesus was acting with divine authority throughout his earthly ministry. He demonstrated the authority to

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<sup>19</sup> Hartman, *Into the Name*, p.150.

forgive sins (9.2),<sup>20</sup> the authority to reveal the Father (11.27),<sup>21</sup> and the authority to divest his own God-given authority to others (10.1).<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the notion of Jesus' authority, which has been a key theme in the Gospel,<sup>23</sup> reaches its climax in 28.18b but is also expanded. Now the authority of Jesus has been demonstrated by his death and resurrection and now Jesus stands as one exalted by the Father as 'God's plenipotentiary Son',<sup>24</sup> and God's 'viceroys with cosmic authority'.<sup>25</sup> It is because God has given such universal authority to Jesus that he is able to command the universal mission of the disciples in 28.19-20.<sup>26</sup> This is the right of one who has persevered in faithfulness and obedience, remaining true to his messianic vocation and a privilege that could not have been granted by Satan despite his promises (4.7-11).<sup>27</sup> The obedient Sonship of Jesus that was initially demonstrated in the wilderness (4.1-11) and has reached its ultimate expression in his obedient death (cf. Phil.2.8) has enabled Jesus to fulfil his mission (1.21 cf. 26.28). This utter achievement of the divine eschatological objective is declared in the resurrection. Now Jesus can serve as a model of complete obedience for his disciples. The resurrection testifies to God's vindication of true obedience. Having obediently fulfilled his vocation Jesus is now authorised to command a mission not

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<sup>20</sup> Hartman, *Into the Name*, p.149.

<sup>21</sup> Note G. Bornkamm, 'The Risen Lord and the Earthly Jesus', in Bornkamm, Barth and Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (trans. Percy Scott), pp.301-327, who states, on p.304, that the authority described in 28.18b is not simply the authority of the Revealer, 'it describes rather the enthronement as Lord of heaven and earth, which is here (as often) connected directly with the resurrection, or, to put it more exactly, equated with it.'; cf. Hare, *Matthew*, p.333; Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel*, p.211.

<sup>22</sup> Note, Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.151 who reflects that 'the 'authority' undergirding the disciples as they go has been extended .... to 'all authority in heaven and on earth'.

<sup>23</sup> See Bauer, *Structure*, pp.115-121.

<sup>24</sup> Hare, *Matthew*, p.333.

<sup>25</sup> Hartman, *Into the Name*, p.149.

<sup>26</sup> This is the force of οὐρανῶν in 28.19. cf. Hare, *Matthew*, p.333.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Donaldson, *Mountain*, pp.101-103 and pp.188-189; Howell, *Inclusive Story*, p.227.

just to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (cf.10.6) but beyond this to all the nations of the world.

**b) “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (28.19)**

In the closing commission of 28.19-20a, Jesus, having assured his disciples of his universal authority, commands them to go, that they might make disciples of all nations. Integral to this envisaged ministry of disciple-making are the activities of baptising and teaching. This represents a significant extension of the earlier commission (10.5-8) that Jesus had given to his disciples. In that earlier commission Jesus had spoken of a mission that would be limited to ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (10.6) and whilst this earlier mission would involve the proclamation of the kingdom (10.7 cf. 3.2 and 4.17) accompanied by demonstrations of the same (10.8 cf. 11.2-4; 11.20; 12.28) it would not result in a call to discipleship (cf. 4.17-22; 8.18-22; 9.9; 11.28-30; 19.21) and would not involve either baptising or teaching. In what follows we will consider this expansion of the role of the disciples in detail with particular reference to the importance of the baptismal command.

Interestingly, the command to go (π ο ρ ε υ θ έ ν τ ε ς ) does not come in the form of an imperative. Rather it is a participle clause related to the imperative verb, ‘disciple’ (μ α θ η τ ε ú σ α τ ε ). So, whilst the command ‘to go’ takes on an ‘imperative force’<sup>28</sup> because of its relationship to the main verb, ‘disciple’, it is

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<sup>28</sup> Hagner, *Matthew*, p.886.



clearly syntactically subordinate.<sup>29</sup> Bauer is right to suggest, following Malina, that we are to think of this as ‘a circumstantial participle, expressing the circumstances which surround or attend the activity of making disciples.’<sup>30</sup> The participle nature of the command ‘to go’ has led Donaldson to suggest that ‘the emphasis in the passage is not on “going” at all’ and that ‘there is a curious permanence about the situation described in the closing scene.’<sup>31</sup> He notes that, as in 9.35-11.1, the ‘going’ of the disciples is not actually narrated. Rather the story finishes with the disciples gathered together on the mountain around Jesus. The disciples are indeed commanded by Jesus to share in his eschatological ministry of gathering but the narrative itself does not narrate their ‘going’ to fulfil this command. Donaldson is right to suggest that the Gospel finishes with this mountain top gathering of disciples around Jesus in order to emphasise that Jesus ‘has replaced Zion as the centre of eschatological fulfilment’, and that ‘the mountain motif in Matthew acts as a vehicle by which Zion expectations are transferred to Christ.’<sup>32</sup>

The role of the disciples in helping to bring about the fulfilment of eschatological expectations is emphasised however. They are intended by Jesus to go and join in the gathering just as they themselves have been gathered by him (cf. 4.19; 9.37-38; 12.30). The going and the gathering are not narrated, however. The reasons for this are different to the last time the disciples were sent on a mission without going (cf. 10.1-11.1). At that stage in the narrative they had not yet received all of Jesus’ teaching and had not yet witnessed the example of Jesus’ obedient suffering that would define true obedience for them and sustain them in the carrying

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<sup>29</sup> Hagner, *Matthew*, p.886.

<sup>30</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.111.

<sup>31</sup> Donaldson, *Mountain*, p.184.

<sup>32</sup> Donaldson, *Mountain*, p.184.

out of their task (10.17-42 esp. 10.24-25 cf. 5.10-12; 16.24-26; 24.9-14).<sup>33</sup> Neither had they received the anointing of God's Spirit for their envisaged vocation. This anointing by the Spirit has been presented in the narrative as an essential aspect of Jesus' ministry (3.16-4.1; 12.18). It is difficult to understand how the disciples could fulfil their task if they are denied the source of power that had been granted to Jesus. Indeed the reader knows that the disciples will have access to such a power (10.20). Yet only in 28.10 is there any narrative event that can be considered as a giving of the Spirit and even this is not explicit but only apparent by means of implicit narrative associations.<sup>34</sup>

Now in this closing commission, the disciples have not only witnessed the example of Jesus' obedient suffering but have also encountered him risen from the dead. The resurrection functions as a demonstration for them that in following the example of Jesus, in his suffering, they will also share in his vindication (cf. 5.11-12; 10.22, 32; 13.43, 49-50; 16.28; 19.28; 24.13; 24.31; 25.34). It is the presence with them of the risen Jesus that communicates his trustworthiness as he commissions them to embark on their task of disciple-making.<sup>35</sup> The anticipatory tension regarding the gift of the Spirit to empower their mission (cf. 3.11-12; 10.20) is as yet, however, only partially resolved. The implicit implications of 28.10 aside, the explicit giving of the Spirit to empower the disciples' mission is as yet, like the mission itself, still projected into the future. The reader has no doubt that this gift will be forthcoming and that the mission will proceed because these have been predicted by reliable characters in the story, i.e., John and Jesus (cf. 3.11-12; 10.20)

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<sup>33</sup> This point is made by Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, pp.127-128. See also, Bauer, *Structure*, pp.58-60; and Howell, *Inclusive Story*, pp.137-138.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter Five, p.234-239 above.

but the reader still looks with anticipation for the explicit fulfilment of these promises.

Their post-resurrection mission is not narrated, not because it does not happen, but because its happening is projected beyond the bounds of the narrative and into the experience of the reader. The reader is then challenged to consider the appropriate response to that mission and even encouraged to participate in it.<sup>36</sup> With the exception of the connotations of 28.10, it would appear that the giving of the Spirit for their task is also projected beyond the bounds of the narrative into the experience of the reader, who like the disciples in the narrative, will know in the fulfilment of the missionary task that the power of the Spirit is a reality (cf.10.20).

The extent of the disciples' 'going' is to be such that their ministry of 'discipling' might effect  $\pi \acute{\alpha} \nu \tau \alpha \tau \acute{\alpha} \xi \theta \nu \eta$  (28.19).<sup>37</sup> This corresponds with what the reader was told in 24.14, that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the earth before the end comes.<sup>38</sup> Hare and Harrington argue that  $\xi \theta \nu \eta$  in this sense means Gentiles (exclusive of Jews),<sup>39</sup> though the majority of scholars prefer to

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<sup>35</sup> On the importance of trustworthiness in this closing commission see: Patte, *Structural Commentary*, pp.400-402.

<sup>36</sup> cf. Howell, *Inclusive Story*, p.228 and 243-248; Bauer, *Structure*, pp.57-59; Hooker, *Endings*, p.31 and note 1 on pp.90-91, Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, pp.152-153; Davies and Allison, *Matthew III*, pp.688-689; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p.889; Wright, *Matthew for Everyone II*, pp.209-210.

<sup>37</sup> Hare, *Matthew*, p.333 and Hartman, p.150 recognise that it is not possible to disciple a nation or to baptise a nation but only the individuals that comprise it. Therefore the sense of 28.19 is 'Disciple the people of the nations'.

<sup>38</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, pp.121-124 reflects on universalism as a key theme in the Gospel which comes to a climax in Mt.28.19-20. cf. Gundry, *Literary Art*, pp.595-596.

<sup>39</sup> See: Hare and Harrington, "'Make Disciples of all Gentiles" (Mt 28.19)', *CBQ* 37 (1975), pp.359-369.

take ἔθνη in this case as referring to nations (inclusive of Jews).<sup>40</sup> In any case, even if ἔθνη in 28.19 should be translated ‘Gentiles’, this does not exclude the Jews from the missionary activity of the disciples but rather simply extends the locus of missionary activity so that it is no longer restricted to Israel only but now includes the Gentiles as well (cf. 10.23).<sup>41</sup>

The imperative command to make disciples (μ α θ η τ ε ὁ σ α τ ε ) is connected to two participles, baptising (β α π τ ι ζ ο ν τ ε ς ) and teaching (δ ι δ α σ κ ο ν τ ε ς ).<sup>42</sup> It has often been stated that ‘baptising’ and ‘teaching’ are instrumental participles, and that they refer to the ways in which disciples are to be made.<sup>43</sup> That is to say that here Jesus is giving his disciples a blueprint for the task of disciple-making which will be achieved as the disciples go out and baptise people and teach obedience to the commands of Jesus. However, the narrative itself makes it clear that the envisaged practice of disciple-making will not simply begin with baptism. Rather it will develop from the disciples’ prior ministry of announcing the gospel of the kingdom (10.7; cf. 3.2 and 4.17; 24.14). The Gospel has already persuasively communicated to the reader that the appropriate response to this kerygmatic announcement is repentance on the part of the hearers of the message (3.2; 4.17; 11.20-24). In addition to this, the disciple-making practice of Jesus

<sup>40</sup> See: Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p.887; Donaldson, *Mountain*, pp.183 and note 74 on pp.281-282; Kupp, *Emmanuel*, p.213; Davies and Allison, *Matthew III*, p.684; Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.151; Gundry, *Literary Art*, pp.595-596.

<sup>41</sup> Though Harrington, *Matthew*, pp.416-417 and Hare, *Matthew*, p.333 continue not to accept this point.

<sup>42</sup> “Make disciples” (μ α θ η τ ε ὁ σ α τ ε ) is a characteristically Matthean expression (see 13.52 and 27.57). Note, Senior, *Matthew*, p.346, who states, ‘Now the disciples themselves are to call and instruct followers of Jesus in the same manner they themselves had experienced.’

<sup>43</sup> So, Bauer, *Structure*, p.111; Kingsbury, ‘Composition’, pp.573-584; Hubbard, *Commissioning*, p.73; A.H. McNeile, *The Gospel According to Matthew: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and*

throughout the narrative is instructive for the reader's understanding of the verb  $\mu\alpha\theta\eta\tau\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\alpha\tau\epsilon$ . Having commenced his public ministry with an announcement of the gospel of the kingdom and a call for repentance (4.17), Jesus goes on to begin his ministry of calling people to follow him (4.19; 9.9; 19.21). It is clear from the narrative that those who accept this call become disciples from that moment and are referred to as such before they begin to receive formal teaching from Jesus (5.1).<sup>44</sup>

When the imperative  $\mu\alpha\theta\eta\tau\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\alpha\tau\epsilon$  (28.19) is understood in the light of the pattern of discipling presented in the Gospel we can see that care needs to be taken before we can simply assert that the participles, 'baptising' and 'teaching' are instrumental participles - that they refer to the ways in which disciples are to be made.<sup>45</sup> In one sense it is correct to say this because as a disciple is formed and develops towards maturity baptism and teaching will be key aspects of this development. In another important sense though the participles, 'baptising' and 'teaching', can be said to be consecutive participles. That is to say they follow on from the act of disciple-making. Such a view recognises that a new disciple is brought into existence as he or she responds in repentance to the gospel of the kingdom and accepts a call to follow Jesus.<sup>46</sup> In this basic sense proclaiming and

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*Indices* (London: McMillan, 1938) p.435; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p.887; Kupp, *Emmanuel*, pp.104, 212.

<sup>44</sup> In support of this view see: Davies and Allison, *Matthew III*, p.684, who write, 'one can become a disciple of Jesus ... only on the basis of a call which leads to discipleship. That Peter and the others become disciples not in response to Jesus' teaching but his call is suggestive.'; Hare, *Matthew*, p.334, states that 'Matthew apparently can take for granted that the missionaries will proclaim the good news and call for faith.'; cf. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, p.89.

<sup>45</sup> So, Bauer, *Structure*, p.111; Kingsbury, 'Composition'; Hubbard, *Commissioning*, p.73; McNeile, *Matthew*, p.435; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p.887; Kupp, *Emmanuel*, pp.104, 212.

<sup>46</sup> It is often said that after the resurrection the disciples' ministry is extended to include teaching for the first time. See: Bauer, *Structure*, p.58; Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.152; Charette, *Presence*, p.129; J.P. Meier, *Matthew* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1980) p.372; A.T. Lincoln, 'Matthew - A

calling can be seen to be the instrumental participles in the act of making a disciple. However, to make a mature disciple, the participles of baptising and teaching are necessary also.<sup>47</sup>

With respect to the immediate literary context of Jesus' command to baptise, we note that this baptism is to be 'into the name' (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In considering this we must firstly reflect on the possible meanings of the εἰς τὸ ὄνομα construction, before giving thought to the importance of the triadic phrase, which is unique amongst New Testament baptismal formulae, which more commonly invoke the name of Jesus only.<sup>48</sup> Lars Hartman has written at length about the meaning of εἰς τὸ ὄνομα in the context of First Century, Greek-speaking, but biblically influenced culture. He notes that the expression, εἰς τὸ ὄνομα, is un-biblical, insofar as it does not appear in the Septuagint, and therefore considers parallels from Hellenistic culture and also from Jewish ritualistic life.<sup>49</sup> One possibility is that the background to the use of the construction is to be found in banking terminology, wherein, money was paid 'into the name of somebody' thus designating that the money was the possession of the named person. This leads to the hypothesis that when a person is baptised 'into the

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Story for Teachers?' in D.J.A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl, and Stanley E. Porter eds., *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Study in the University of Sheffield* (JSOT Sup, 87; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990) pp.103-125 esp. 114-118. Often proponents of such a view appear blind to the fact that at the same time the disciples' ministry is also extended to include calling people into discipleship and baptising.

<sup>47</sup> This model of proclaiming, calling, baptising, teaching is suggestive that adult converts are particularly in mind at this point of the Gospel. In Chapter Seven I will consider how this relates to the making of a disciple from infancy.

<sup>48</sup> Acts 8.16 and 19.5 use 'into the name of the Lord Jesus'; Acts 10.48 uses 'in the name of Jesus Christ'; Acts 2.38 utilises 'because of the name of Jesus Christ'. Note that 'Into the name of the Lord' stands in *Didache* 9.5 but in *Didache* 7.1 baptism is referred to as being 'into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. cf. Hartman, *Into the Name*, p.37.

<sup>49</sup> See Hartman, *Into the Name*, pp.38-42.

name' of Jesus, or the triadic name in the case of Matthew, then this person becomes the property of the one whose name is evoked. Hartmann treats this proposal with caution because he recognises that in taking a term from banking and applying it to the context of religious ritual the earliest Christians would be making a dramatic leap of context.<sup>50</sup> We should not foreclose on this possibility entirely however as Phil.3.7-8 offers a precedent for metaphors of economics, i.e., gain and loss, to be used in giving expression to the reality of Christian discipleship.

A further proposal is that 'into the name' has its roots in Jewish ritual practice, where the construction is used to refer to the one whose cult the rite belongs to. 'Into the name', therefore, refers to 'the one whom the worshipper 'has in mind' or 'with regard to' whom the rite is performed and who thus makes it meaningful.'<sup>51</sup> The sense of this is that the participants in the rite are entering into, or expressing, a particular relationship with the fundamental referent of the rite.<sup>52</sup> In the case of Christian baptism, as described in Mt.28.19b, the new disciple enters into a particular relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that is defined as that relationship implied in being a disciple. Reflection on the narrative as a whole gives the reader a context within which she can appreciate the identity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and also the particular relationship with them that is associated with becoming a disciple of Jesus and therefore with receiving the baptism of a disciple as envisaged by Jesus.

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<sup>50</sup> See Hartman, *Into the Name*, pp.39-40.

<sup>51</sup> See Hartmann, *Into the Name*, pp.40-42, who has been followed by Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p.888; Gundry, *Mixed Church*, p.596, who writes, "'In the name of" means "with fundamental reference to" and distinguishes Christian baptism, specifying allegiance to the triune God, from John's baptism, specifying only repentance.'

<sup>52</sup> See: Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, pp.90-92; and Davies and Allison, *Matthew III*, p.685.

The baptismal command directs the reader's attention to Mt.3, in which the notion of baptism was first introduced into the narrative. The reader, therefore, is encouraged to understand the baptismal command in the light of the baptismal material of Mt.3 but in a way that is mindful of how different perspectives upon this material have opened up as the narrative has developed. The meaning of the baptismal command of 28.19 is, therefore, to be understood in the light of:

- i) John's baptism of preparation in water for repentance;
- ii) The expected baptism in Holy Spirit;
- iii) Jesus' baptism at the Jordan.

#### **i) The Baptismal Command in the Light of John's Baptism of Preparation in Water for Repentance**

In Chapter Four I reflected on the narrative's presentation of John's public ministry of baptising in the wilderness by the Jordan.<sup>53</sup> In my treatment of that material I argued that John's baptism functioned as a tangible and symbolic expression of peoples' response to his message. John was an eschatological messenger of God who came to prepare the way for the ministry of God's chosen Messiah (3.3). He spoke of God's initiative in the world in terms of the kingdom of heaven (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) having come near (ἤγγικε). By this stage in the narrative, following the preparation made by Mt.1—2, it was obvious to the reader in what way the kingdom of heaven had drawn near. The kingdom of heaven had

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<sup>53</sup> See pp.163-168 above.



drawn near because Jesus, Emmanuel, the one who would save his people from their sins (1.21) had been born into the world. John announced that the appropriate response to the in-breaking of the kingdom of heaven into human experience was repentance (3.2).

The narrative development from 3.2 to 28.18 has provided an expanded basis for understanding what it means for the kingdom of heaven to have drawn near and what the appropriate human response to the nearness of that kingdom should be. This is communicated to the reader by the example of Jesus who has been presented as one whose life is in complete alignment with the purposes of God. Jesus exemplifies the pattern of obedience that a repentant disciple is called to follow. It is significant, however, to observe the nature of such repentance as it has been worked out in the lives of the disciples. The disciples are a character group who have demonstrated repentance in as much as they have left everything to follow Jesus but this repentance ultimately failed to issue forth in obedience to the instructions of Jesus in the days before his death (26.8-9; 26.36-46; 26.51-52 cf. 16.21; 20.20-26 cf. 18.1-4; 26.69-74 cf. 10.33). The disciples however acknowledge their poverty of Spirit (5.3 cf. 19.25-26) and in this way recognise their dependence on Jesus. In spite of their failings, the risen Jesus refers to them as brothers (28.10). This gracious bestowal of identity and status leads to the hope that the disciples would receive the ability to live obediently (cf. 12.46-50) and that they would therefore receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit as Jesus had done before demonstrating obedience in the wilderness (3.16-4.11). The nature of the repentance exhibited by the character group of the disciples is, therefore, characterised by a willingness to commit to following Jesus and a recognition of their own poverty of spirit. The

disciples demonstrate an inability in and of themselves to conform to the example of obedience offered by Jesus. In order to follow this example they depend on God's help (19.25-26). The repentance necessary for discipleship is therefore characterised by devotion to Jesus and acknowledgement of one's own inability in and of oneself to conform to his pattern of obedience. This recognition of one's own spiritual poverty can be contrasted with the Pharisees and Sadducees who were dismissed by John because they thought to rely on their Abrahamic descent (3.7-9).

The baptismal command of 28.19 causes the reader to reflect upon the meaning of baptism introduced in the narrative by the practice of John but also to consider how that meaning has been expanded and transformed by the story of Jesus and the role of the disciples within that story. The baptismal command of 28.19 involves the disciples, like John before them, in offering a symbolic expression of the appropriate human response to the message of the kingdom. However, because of the events described in the narrative between Mt.3 and Mt.28.19, it is clear that when the disciples announce that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near they are saying more than John said in 3.2. John's ministry was preparatory. In 3.2 the reader knew that the Kingdom of Heaven had drawn near because God, in Jesus, was working to fulfil his eschatological promises to Israel (1.1f). The post-resurrection disciples, when they proclaim that the kingdom has drawn near, are announcing that Jesus has lived amongst them, that he has called them to follow him (4.19-22; 9.9), that he has shared with them his teaching about the kingdom, that he has journeyed to Jerusalem and has died there, but that he is risen from the dead and is constantly present in his church (18.20) and that he has promised that one day he will return with the angels to be the judge of the world (25.31-32).

When the disciples look for the appropriate human response to their announcement of the kingdom they are necessarily looking for more than John looked for. He was getting people ready so that they might be able fruitfully to receive the ministry of the Messiah when it came. The disciples are charged with sharing the fullness of that Messiah's ministry and challenging people to respond by repenting in a way that acknowledges their poverty of spirit before God but which receives a call to discipleship with acceptance and seeks to live in accordance with his teachings and example.

## **ii) The Baptismal Command in the Light of the Expected Baptism in Holy Spirit**

In 3.11-12, John the Baptist prophesied that one would come after him who would baptise in Holy Spirit and fire.<sup>54</sup> To a large extent the context of this prophecy, within the preaching of John, helped its meaning to become clear. This was largely due to John's repeated and consistent use of the metaphor of 'fire' to indicate eschatological condemnatory judgement (cf. 3.10 and 3.12). These words of judgement are directed towards those who do not, by their lives, 'bear fruit worthy of repentance' (3.8). The 'baptism in fire' that John refers to in 3.11 is, therefore, most naturally understood to be a reference to the fiery eschatological judgement that would, at some future point, be administered by Jesus to those who have not responded appropriately to the divine saving initiative that he came to announce and embody. This 'baptism in fire' indicating fiery eschatological judgement is a theme to which the Gospel returns again and again (cf. 5.22; 7.19; 13.30, 42, 50; 25.41). The threat of eschatological condemnatory judgement is always directed towards

those who do not receive the divine saving initiative appropriately. It is clear, therefore, that the baptism to be practised by the disciples is not related, except antithetically, to the promised baptism in fire. This is because the baptismal ministry envisaged for the disciples is to be practised in the context of disciple-making. This context is one in which the gospel of the kingdom is received in repentance by those who accept a call to follow Jesus. The baptismal ministry of the disciples, therefore, is to be associated with Christ's expected baptism in Holy Spirit.

In 3.12 John contrasted the chaff that was to be burnt in the fire with wheat that would be gathered into the granary. As the phrase baptise in fire in 3.11 is most naturally related to the burning of chaff it is likely that the phrase baptise in Holy Spirit is related to the imagery of the wheat being gathered into the granary. This view is given further credence in 13.30 when Jesus speaks using harvest imagery in a parable of judgement and salvation. In 13.43 as part of his explanation of the parable Jesus makes clear that τὸν δὲ σῖτον συναγάγετε εἰς τὴν ἀποθήκην μου in 13.30 refers metaphorically to the righteous who would shine out like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The placing of such agricultural gathering language in parallel with the notion of baptising in Holy Spirit in 3.11-12 indicates that the notion of baptising in Holy Spirit refers to Christ's gracious saving act which affects the blessing of eschatological salvation for those who receive him appropriately.

John's prophecy that Jesus would baptise in Holy Spirit is directed towards the end point of eschatological salvation at the last (3.11-12). However, John's words in 3.11-12 leave open the possibility that this prophecy may begin to be

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<sup>54</sup> I considered this prophecy in Chapter Four. See p.168-177.

fulfilled in some way prior to the eschaton. The prophetic announcement from a character as reliable as John introduced anticipatory tension into the narrative by creating a sense of expectation for the reader. This anticipatory tension was enhanced as the reader discovered more about the disciples, their envisaged vocation, and their relationship to Jesus. It quickly became clear that they were to share in eschatological ministry with Jesus (4.19-22; 9.36-10.42; 12.30) but Jesus had received the anointing of the Spirit for his ministry, whereas the disciples had not yet received this anointing for themselves. In addition the disciples were expected to demonstrate obedience to the law as interpreted by Jesus (5.1-7.27) but Jesus had received the anointing of the Spirit before overcoming temptation in the wilderness (3.16-4.11), whereas the disciples had not received such an anointing. The disciples had been told by Jesus that they were to be regarded as his brothers because they did the will of the Father (12.46-50). Jesus is God's Son because he had been born according to the power of the Holy Spirit (1.18, 20) and the Spirit anointed him as his Sonship was acknowledged from heaven. The disciples, on the other hand, had not been touched by the Spirit in the same way. The narrative has encouraged the view that the Spirit will at some point work powerfully through the disciples (10.20) but this eventuality is projected into the future beyond the time of the narrative.

The nearest thing to an anointing with the Spirit that can be seen to take place within the narrative is the gracious bestowal of identity and status by Jesus who is seen to refer to them as his brothers in spite of their failures (28.10). In this moment Jesus regards them as brothers even though they have not been obedient to his commands.<sup>55</sup> This works with 12.46-50 to imply that Jesus is giving them the status and identity of divine kinsfolk even though they have not exhibited the necessary

qualities. The disciples receive a status and identity associated with the Spirit (1.18, 20; 3.16-17) and associated with obedience (12.46-50; 4.1-11). Obedience in the narrative had been associated with salvation at the last (7.21) and as we have seen the prospect of eschatological salvation is the end-point of the expected baptism in Holy Spirit (3.11-12). These implicit narrative associations lead one to tentatively suggest that in the restoration of the disciples' status and identity in 28.10 there is a hint of a baptism in the Holy Spirit, one which if compared with the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism can serve to enable a righteous life and empower eschatological ministry. Now in 28.18-20a Jesus is commanding the disciples to embark on a post-resurrection mission to teach obedience to his commandments. The implication here is that now they are able to obey because they can receive the power they need to fulfil the envisaged task. All of this indicates that the prophecy of John in 3.11 should be regarded as a mixed prolepsis.<sup>55</sup> That is to say that whilst for the most part the prophecy of John is to be fulfilled only after the end of the narrative there has been the slightest indication that this prophecy begins to be fulfilled within the narrative itself. Matthew records no explicit description of a pneumatic anointing (cf. Acts 2.1-4; John 20.22) but this is communicated implicitly within the narrative and is pointed to explicitly as a feature of the disciples' experience in the outworking of the task to which Jesus commissions them. The baptismal command in 28.19 has the prophecy of John in 3.11 as part of its narrative context. The baptismal ministry to which the disciples are called symbolically testifies to the baptism in Holy Spirit which is effected by Jesus. In so doing the baptism speaks to new disciples of a promise for those who receive the good news of the kingdom appropriately. The promise is of a gracious bestowal of status and identity as divine kinsfolk, of an

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<sup>55</sup> See pp.234-239 above.

<sup>56</sup> See pp.176-177 above and Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p.40

empowering for righteousness and eschatological ministry and of eschatological salvation at the last.

### **iii) The Baptismal Command in the Light of Jesus' Baptism at the Jordan**

The events surrounding the baptism of Jesus (3.15-17) conveyed a great deal about the nature of Jesus' character and the significance of Jesus as the agent through whom the saving activity of God is both expressed and implemented.<sup>57</sup> In being baptised by John, Jesus demonstrated a willingness to submit to God's purposes (cf.3.15). Following his baptism the Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove and God's voice was heard to acknowledge the identity of Jesus as his Son. The image of God's Spirit in the form of a dove descending above the water was evocative of Gen.1.2.<sup>58</sup> The theophany following the baptism of Jesus, therefore, symbolically declared that the divine initiative in Jesus was akin to the divine initiative at the dawning of creation. Following his baptism Jesus is propelled by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by Satan and to overcome temptation. Jesus' passage through water at baptism and entrance into the wilderness made typological connection with the passage of Israel through the Red Sea and into the desert at the Exodus. The typological contrast between Israel and Jesus is clear. Whereas Israel had failed to be obedient, Jesus had been obedient. Jesus is therefore depicted in terms of ideal Israel, God's Son who is fully obedient. The baptism and temptation narrative of 3.15-4.11, therefore, not only evokes a sense of creation being renewed in Jesus but also a sense that, in Jesus, Israel is restored.

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<sup>57</sup>In Chapter Four I considered the baptism of Jesus by John and the events that followed immediately after that baptism. See p.177-184 above.

<sup>58</sup> Recall that the rabbis sometimes referred to the Spirit in Gen.1.2 as a dove. Cf. note 93 on p.181 above.

These manifestations of eschatological fulfilment at the baptism of Jesus serve as a narrative context within which 28.19 is to be understood. This is further encouraged because 28.19 speaks of baptism into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were all explicitly present and in some way active in the events that surrounded the baptism of Jesus. As those events signified the renewal of creation and the restoration of Israel so the baptism commanded by Jesus in 28.19 achieves a narrative involvement and inclusion for the new disciple for whom the nearness of the kingdom of heaven is received in genuine repentance. This sense of narrative inclusion involves the new disciple in the story of Jesus in such a way that connection is made with God's paternal declaration in 3.17. As God acknowledged Jesus to be his Son at his baptism, so baptism declares to the new disciple that God receives her as his child (cf. 10.20; 12.46-50; 28.10). The new disciple, through baptism, is involved in the narrative to the extent that she knows the promise of the power of God's Spirit for eschatological ministry (3.16 cf. 4.17-22; 10.20). As Jesus was impelled by the Spirit into the wilderness to overcome temptation, typologically declaring that Israel finds restoration in him, so the new disciple, in baptism, is involved in the narrative to the extent that she knows herself, through devotion to Jesus, to be a member of the restored Israel receiving the power of the Spirit for a righteous life (4.1-11 cf. 5.3, 20; 12.46-50; 19.26; 28.10).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> The importance of narrative connection and inclusion achieved by baptism is recognised by Loughlin in *God's Story*, p.217: 'Baptism is entry into the story of Christ as the story of the Church; as the people who are learning to grow in the strength and shape of Christ, who are learning to live in the world as people who are not of the world.'



**c) “And teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”**  
**(28.20a)**

The act of baptising is connected to the accompanying participial of ‘teaching’ (28.19-20a). The relationship between baptising and teaching in the process of bringing a new disciple to maturity has often been considered to be puzzling. The key question has been what should come first the baptising or the teaching?<sup>60</sup> It is not necessary to presume a systematizing intent in the ordering of the participals in 28.19-20a however. The linear nature of communication dictates that the evangelist had to put one participial before the other in the context of his sentence. This should not be taken as evidence that there was such a linear framework envisaged for the relationship of teaching and baptising in the formation of a new disciple to maturity. The pastoral practice of the church since very early times has revealed that the relationship between baptising and teaching is a good deal more complex than a simple consecutive outworking of tasks.<sup>61</sup> Rather, baptising and teaching are inter-dependent facets of the identity-formation of a disciple and their development into maturity.<sup>62</sup>

Of course, it may not be envisaged that the full significance of a disciple’s baptism will be appreciated in the early days of their discipleship. Whatever

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<sup>60</sup> This dilemma is well expressed by Michel, ‘Conclusion’, p.37, who states: ‘the sequence of the two participles, “baptizing ... teaching” is very difficult, since the *Didache* 7.1 order, “having said all this beforehand, baptize them”, seems the natural one’.

<sup>61</sup> See Acts 8.26-38. As church history developed there became a greater pastoral need to include significant teaching in a catechumenate, towards the end of which the convert and any children would have been baptised together. In this circumstance the adult will have received a large amount of teaching prior to being baptised whilst any children would receive their largest extent of teaching only after they had received baptism.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Hare, *Matthew*, p.334, who writes: ‘It looks as if Matthew perceives baptism as occurring in the middle of a discipling-and-teaching process that must continue indefinitely.’ Also see Davies and Allison, *Matthew III*, p.686.

teaching occurs prior to baptism will need to be supplemented by a life-time of teaching beyond it.<sup>63</sup> In this teaching the fullness of baptism may come to be appreciated but as 28.20a makes clear, the focus of such teaching will be the commandments of Jesus. Interpreters differ in their understanding of ‘all things whatever I commanded you’ (π ᾶ ν τ ᾱ ὅ σ α ἐ ν ε τ ε ι λ ᾶ μ η ν ). The spectrum of opinion ranges from those who think these words refer only to the Sermon on the Mount,<sup>64</sup> to those who see significance only in Jesus’ extended discourses,<sup>65</sup> to those, like myself, who see relevance in every word spoken and every action performed by Jesus. As Davies and Allison eloquently express:

ἐ ν ε τ ε ι λ ᾶ μ η ν ... refers ... to all of Jesus’ teaching – not just imperatives but also proverbs, blessings, parables, and prophecies. But more than verbal revelation is involved, for such revelation cannot be separated from Jesus’ life, which is itself a command. ἐ ν ε τ ε ι λ ᾶ μ η ν accordingly unifies word and deed and so recalls the entire book: everything is in view. The earthly ministry as a whole is an imperative.<sup>66</sup>

Hence, Howell can speak of Jesus as ‘Exemplary for Discipleship’,<sup>67</sup> Weaver can speak of the disciples’ needing the example of Jesus before they can carry out

<sup>63</sup> Hare, *Matthew*, p.334; Kupp, *Emmanuel*, pp.214-216.

<sup>64</sup> Gundry, *Mixed Church*, p.594 (implied in ‘for Jesus issued his commands, to which he refers in the present passage (v.20), from the former mountain (5:1).’)

<sup>65</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.133.

<sup>66</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew III*, p.686.

<sup>67</sup> Howell, *Inclusive Story*, p.248; this theme continues to p.259.

their mission,<sup>68</sup> and Bauer can speak of Matthew setting the 'expectations for, or the role of, the disciples and the person of Jesus side by side in terms of their relation to God, manner of living, and mission.'<sup>69</sup> The sense in which Jesus' commandments comprise of his saying and his doing is nowhere better illustrated than in the institution of the Eucharist at 26.26-29. It is also significant that all disciples should be taught obedience to all of Jesus' commandments which include 10.7-8 and 28.18-20. Mission activity is clearly seen, therefore, in Matthew's perspective, not to be the remit of a mere proportion of Christians but, the responsibility of all, a basic aspect of discipleship.<sup>70</sup>

Howell and Bauer make much of the sense in which the character of Jesus is able to function as a model for the future ministry of the disciples. Neither, however, are able to account for the sense in which Jesus is a model for the envisaged baptising activity of the disciples nor do they reflect on how Jesus is a model for those future disciples, envisaged in the narrative, who will respond to the disciples' ministry and submit to baptism.<sup>71</sup> It is clear, however, that Jesus functions as an exemplar for the baptismal ministry of the disciples because he himself is one who baptises in Holy Spirit those who respond appropriately to the message of the

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<sup>68</sup> Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.127.

<sup>69</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, p.57.

<sup>70</sup> See Howell, *Inclusive Story*, pp.258-259; Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.152; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, pp.888-889; Hooker, *Endings*, pp.46-47; Garland, *Reading Matthew*, p.273, states, 'Some disciples of little faith may hesitate; but, according to Matthew, the mission to the world is their very reason for existing.'

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Howell, *Inclusive Story*, pp.249-259; Bauer, *Structure*, pp.57-63. Note that neither Howell nor Bauer seem to have given any consideration to the significance of baptism for their theses. If we are to regard Jesus as an exemplary for discipleship then attention needs to be given to the sense in which Jesus gives an example for the baptising ministry to which he calls his disciples. Neither Howell nor Bauer make any reference to baptism in this regard. In fact Howell, *Inclusive Story*, pp.248, 251, 256 and Bauer, *Structure*, pp.114-115, 133 seem to proceed on the basis that the disciples' mission of disciple-making involves teaching only and that the baptismal command is either minimised in importance or completely overlooked. Howell and Bauer are joined in this regard by: Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, p.152; Kupp, *Emmanuel*, pp.104-105; Bornkamm, 'Risen Lord', p.320f; Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*.

kingdom. Only Jesus baptises in Holy Spirit but his command that the disciples engage in baptising is a command that they engage in a form of ministry that is derived from his own. In addition Jesus functions as an exemplar for those who would receive the disciples' ministry of baptising because he himself received baptism as a demonstration of his desire to fulfil all righteousness. In submitting to baptism the new disciple is demonstrating a response to the kingdom of heaven which seeks to be in accord with the purposes of God.

**d) "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (28.20b).**

The closing statement of the Gospel is a word of promise. This story concludes by way of inclusio with 1.23, in which Jesus, who was then announced as Emmanuel by the angel, now declares to his disciples that he will be with them always to the end of the age. This assurance also reminds the reader of the pledge in 18.20 in which Jesus guaranteed his disciples that whenever they gathered in his name he would be there in the midst of them.<sup>72</sup> In the context of the missionary charge that Jesus has just delivered to the disciples, this promise of presence, along with the declaration of authority in 28.18, comes as encouragement to those who would need to embrace the dangers and difficulties of mission (5.10-12; 10.16-25; 24.9-14) in order to work out their discipleship.<sup>73</sup> Donaldson has shown that the motif of God being with his people has its roots deep in OT thought.<sup>74</sup> This was particularly

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<sup>72</sup> Bauer, *Structure*, pp.124-127, regards the motif of 'presence' to be a central organising feature in the Gospel; cf. Kupp, *Emmanuel*; Howell, *Inclusive Story*, p.227; Harrington, *Matthew*, p.415; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, pp.686-688; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p.888; Donaldson, *Mountain*, p.185.

<sup>73</sup> Wright, *Matthew for Everyone Pt. 2*, p.209, states, 'The three instructions he has given are held in place by the promises at the beginning and the end of the passage. The reason we are to do these things is because he already possesses all authority; the promise that sustains us in the task is that he is with us always and forever'; cf. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, pp.888-889.

<sup>74</sup> Donaldson, *Mountain*, p.186, where he states: 'Frequently throughout the OT Yahweh promises to be 'with' individuals or the people as a whole, thereby pledging his assistance, comfort and strength.'

expressed in the belief that God was present with his people at Zion (Ps.68.16; Ps.135.21; Ps. 74.2; Is.8.18; Joel 3.17, 21). Following the exile, the restoration of God's presence with His people at Zion came to be regarded as a key eschatological expectation (Ezek.34.30; Ezek 37.26f; Ezek. 43.7; Ezek.48.35; Zech.2.10-12; Zech.8.3, 23; Jub. 1.17f; cf. Rev.21.2f). Donaldson concludes, therefore, 'that the eschatological hope of the renewed presence of God with his people ... was intimately bound up with the hope for the restoration of Zion.'<sup>75</sup>

Jesus' promise of abiding presence, made on this Galilean mountain, declares that the expectation of the restoration of God's presence with his people has come about not by a renewal of Zion, but because of the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus. As Donaldson puts it, 'God is with his eschatological people, not when they gather to Zion, but when they gather to Jesus who is himself called Immanuel (1.23; cf. 18.20).'<sup>76</sup> This motif of presence is therefore intimately connected with the ἐκκλησία (18.15-20), the baptised and baptising community of disciples projected from the narrative outwards into the extra-textual world of 'the nations' (28.18) and forwards into the future towards 'the completion of the age' (28.20).<sup>77</sup> No longer is this presence bound to the specifics of geographical location, but rather, to the end of the age, Jesus promises to be with his missionary community, his 'brothers' (12.46-50; 28.10; cf.10.20) wherever they are gathered. The extension of Jesus' authority and presence, along with the universalising of the disciples' mission has the effect of throwing open the boundaries of the text so that it now embraces the reader and challenges the reader to respond. The story bursts out and includes the

<sup>75</sup> Donaldson, *Mountain*, p.187.

<sup>76</sup> Donaldson, *Mountain*, p.188.

<sup>77</sup> cf. Kupp, *Emmanuel*, pp.106-107 and 219.

reader as a character in the story. Confronted with the message of the kingdom and the call to discipleship the reader must make a decision.<sup>78</sup> A decision to follow is a decision to embrace a life of repentant and obedient allegiance to Jesus. The rewards are inclusion in God's renewed creation (3.16-17), membership of a new Israel in Christ (4.1-11), a new eschatological community of brothers (and sisters) (12.46-50; 19.29); the power of the Spirit in being made perfect (5.20; 10.20; 12.46-50; 28.10 cf. 3.16-4.11); a sharing in Christ's eschatological vocation (4.18-22; 10.7f; 12.30; 24.14); the power of God's Spirit in the outworking of this vocation (10.20); the promise of Christ's eternal presence (1.23; 18.20; 28.20), and the hope of salvation at the last (3.11-12; 5.10-12; 7.21; 10.22; 13.43; 19.29). The promise of Christ's constant presence gives the disciple confidence to trust that he will continually give the Spirit to his people as they desire to be obedient to his commandments and fulfil their mission. The knowledge of the ongoing constant presence of Jesus is their assurance that, following perseverance, they will receive the promised salvation (3.11-12 cf. 5.10-12; 10.22; 13.43; 19.29). It is the fullness of all that discipleship implies, both on the part of God and on the part of the disciple, that is expressed in baptism. This tangible moment of enacted grace and response declares that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near, it enables a rich expression of a disposition of genuine repentance, it announces that the disciple is received into the family of God and that Jesus accompanies the new disciple blessing him or her with the Holy Spirit for the practice of righteousness that ultimately results in salvation at the last.

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<sup>78</sup> The effect on the reader of 28.16-20 is recognised by many. Examples include: Kupp, *Emmanuel*, pp.108 and 202; Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, pp.151-153; Hare, *Matthew*, p.335; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p.889; Hartman, *Into the Name*, p.153; Howell, *Inclusive Story*, p.227; Hooker, *Endings*, p.47.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Stage Directions for Faithful and Effective Baptismal**

### **Performance in Post-Christian Cultural Settings**

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#### **1) Performing the Gospel: Completing the Responsive Reader's Task**

In his assessment of Iser's theory of reader-interaction Thiselton refers to Iser's concept of 'the implied reader', noting that such a reader, in actualising the potential meaning of the literary text, is engaged in 'performing' the reader's role.<sup>1</sup> Thiselton also notes that this 'performance' of the reader's role is partly achieved as he or she becomes involved in 'narrowing down'. That is to say, demonstrating an appropriate reading competence which is able to observe textual features such as interconnections which allow the reader to account for the text's meaning.<sup>2</sup> In Chapters Four to Six of the present work I have detailed the 'narrative connections' apparent in Matthew's Gospel which allow for an extensive understanding of the importance of baptism in the narrative. In so doing I have sought always to read in a manner that is sensitive to the Gospel's plot concerning the saving initiative of God in the person of Jesus. By reading in this way it is hoped that it has been possible

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<sup>1</sup> Thiselton, *New Horizons*, p.517; cf. Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.38

<sup>2</sup> Thiselton, *New Horizons*, p.518

competently to discern the relationship, envisaged by the Gospel, between this saving initiative and baptism.

A further aspect of Iser's theory of 'the implied reader' is that sense in which the 'performance' of the reader's role is not only structured by the immanent features of the text but also includes 'the individual disposition of the reader'.<sup>3</sup> In this sense Iser's 'implied reader' can be said to incorporate 'both the pre-structuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualisation of this potential through the reading process'.<sup>4</sup> This gives rise to what Iser termed the 'productive matrix', which 'enables the text to be meaningful in a variety of different contexts'.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly a study of Matthew which seeks to perform the reader's role in terms of competently following the textual structures will find in those structures a certain encouragement to move beyond them. A good example of this is to be found in Mt.13.52 in which Jesus says to his disciples, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.' These words of Jesus come in the context of a story in which Jesus, the authoritative teacher (7.29), can be said to be training his disciples for the kingdom of heaven (cf. 5.3—7.27; 10.5-42; 13.3-51). As such 13.52, as a conclusion to Christ's teaching in parables in ch.13, may well be an encouragement to the Matthean reader to follow the teachings of the Gospel in a way that is sensitive and relevant to changing contextual circumstances. As Hagner has written with reference to the earliest readers of the Gospel:

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<sup>3</sup> Iser, *Implied Reader*, pp.274-275

<sup>4</sup> Iser, *Implied Reader*, p.xii

<sup>5</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, p.231; cf. pp.180-230; Thiselton, *New Horizons*, p.518



The evangelist and his readers must have rejoiced to have this saying from Jesus. They saw themselves in this reference: *sopherim* (scholars of the law) having been trained in the kingdom. But this involved bridging between the old and the new – precisely what they as Jewish Christians recognized themselves to be doing.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to this the reader at the conclusion of the Gospel finds herself and her own circumstances incorporated within the story-time of the narrative. This is because, at the last, Jesus promises to accompany his disciples ‘to the end of the age’ (28.20). This promise has the effect of including the time of the reader within the sphere of the story and therefore within the time that Jesus continues as Lord and companion to his obedient disciples (cf.18.15-20). In addition to this temporal inclusion of the reader there is also a spatial inclusion as the sphere of the ministry of Christ’s disciples is said to include ‘all nations’ (28.19). In this way the competent and responsive reader, if she is to continue in accepting her role, needs to consider herself as a recipient of Christ’s proclamation of the kingdom (4.17; cf. 3.2, 10.7), Christ’s call to discipleship (4.19, 9.9; cf.28.19) and Christ’s teachings about the kingdom (5.3-727; 10.5-42; 13.3-51; 18.3-35; 24.4-25.46). As the Gospel consistently emphasises the appropriateness of accepting the ‘gospel of the kingdom’ with its blessings and challenges (1.18-23; 2.1-2; 3.1-12; 4.18-22; 12.46-50; 13.18-23) so the competent and responsive reader who continues to accept her role will respond to the Gospel’s invitation with acceptance. Such acceptance from the reader will lead to her following the commandments of Jesus but in the context of her own time and place. Hence, in order to fully ‘perform’ the reader’s role, with respect to

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<sup>6</sup> Donald A. Hagner, ‘The *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospel of Matthew’ in David R. Bauer and Mark Allan Powell, ed., *Treasures Old And New: Contributions to Matthean Studies* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996) pp.27-68, quoting from p.68

the Gospel of Matthew, the interpreter must participate in the ‘productive matrix’ thus returning to extra-textual situations but relating to them in a manner that has been transformed by the experience of reading.<sup>7</sup> Following any other pattern, in response to Matthew, is to have decided at some stage no longer to ‘perform’ the reader’s role. In this sense, therefore, the text demands that the interpreter move beyond the boundaries of the text itself in order to continue participating in the story which it indicates is ongoing. In order to complete the role of the responsive reader, therefore, it is necessary to consider how that role might be ‘performed’ in the specifics of cultural context. We can see, therefore, that to adopt a ‘performance’ model of interpretation as advocated by Lash, Young, Wright, Barton and Vanhoozer is simply to read the Gospel in a way that fully accepts the ‘role’ of competent and responsive reader.<sup>8</sup>

## **2) Performing the Gospel: An Exegetical and Phronetic Task**

Kevin J. Vanhoozer speaks about the different virtues and gifts that canonical performance interpreters need to possess. He speaks about the virtue of *scientia* which he relates to the practice of exegesis. It is the aim of such a practice within canonical performance interpretation to conduct a ‘disciplined attempt to understand the theo-drama in its canonically scripted versions’.<sup>9</sup> This practice involves applying appropriate methods to the various genres of canonical text to understand their message and in particular how they contribute to the overall message of the canon

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Kupp, *Emmanuel*, pp.108 and 202; Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, pp.151-153; Hare, *Matthew*, p.335; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p.889; Hartman, *Into the Name*, p.153; Howell, *Inclusive Story*, p.227; Hooker, *Endings*, p.47.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Lash, ‘Performing the Scriptures’; Young, *Performance*; Vanhoozer, *Drama*; Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* pp.140-143 and *Scripture and the Authority of God* pp.84-93; Loughlin, *God’s Story*, pp.113-114.

<sup>9</sup> See Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.249; cf. pp.13; 247-248; 266-271; 288; 293; 300-301

about the nature of the divine protagonist and the ‘redemptive plot that culminates in the death and resurrection of Christ’.<sup>10</sup> In the study of Matthew’s Gospel that is presented in this thesis I have attempted, in a disciplined fashion, to apply methods appropriate to biblical narrative in order to understand what Matthew communicates about the place of baptism in the theo-dramatic action. Such exegetical *scientia* is, however, only part of what is needed in a canonical performance interpretation of the Gospel.

In addition to *scientia*, according to Vanhoozer, the canonical performance interpreter needs also to demonstrate the virtue of *sapientia*, in the application of *phronesis*.<sup>11</sup> Vanhoozer, speaks of *sapientia* as ‘engaged knowledge’ which is directed towards practice.<sup>12</sup> As he states, ‘If *scientia* as exegesis involves leading meaning out of the biblical text, *sapientia* involves carrying meaning on, going beyond the biblical text biblically’.<sup>13</sup> *Sapientia* is the virtue that is directed towards significance and application which draws upon exposition of text in order that the meaning of that text might be applied faithfully but in new ways in new situations. The use of *sapientia*, engaged knowledge directed towards performance, is related to the notion of *phronesis*, which Vanhoozer variously defines as ‘practical wisdom’,<sup>14</sup> ‘practical reason’,<sup>15</sup> and ‘deliberating well’.<sup>16</sup> At the heart of *phronesis* is the capacity for good judgement which is able to combine textual exegesis and

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<sup>10</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.249; cf. Lash, ‘Performing’, pp.42-43; Young, *Performance*, p.4

<sup>11</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, pp.244-245, has posited that this two-fold task of performance interpretation finds its counterpart in the theatre in the role of the dramaturge: ‘[T]he dramaturge is the person responsible for helping the director make sense of the script both for the players and the audience. ... If the first aspect of dramaturgy is script-oriented, the second looks toward the performance. The dramaturge advises the director how best to communicate the text and articulate the play’s ideas in terms that would be compelling and intelligible to contemporary audiences.’

<sup>12</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.13

<sup>13</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.252

<sup>14</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.257

<sup>15</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.309

<sup>16</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.325

contextual deliberation in a way that allows the interpreter to discern what a given situation requires of us if we are to bear faithful witness to the world about the dramatic saving activity of God and enable others to join us as participants in the drama.<sup>17</sup> The application of the sapiential virtue of *phronesis* can be said to require three distinct skills. The first is narrative attentiveness, the second is contextual perceptiveness and the third is imagination, the ability ‘to see simultaneously what is and what might yet be for the best.’<sup>18</sup>

In order to illustrate the importance of narrative attentiveness in ‘performance’ models of interpretation Vanhoozer makes comparison with the notion of improvising with a script.<sup>19</sup> Canonical performance interpretation can be likened to improvising with a script because it seeks to look back at a dramatic story that has been in progress since the birth of the universe and to respond to new situations in order to continue the plot of that same story in as yet unscripted ways. Narrative attentiveness involves the improviser in remembering the development of the play being improvised. Good improvisation is not just random or made up of several plots which serve to undermine one another but which lend themselves to the actor’s convenience. Rather good improvisation involves improvisatory choices being made in accordance with the ‘evolving story – which has its own form and continuity.’<sup>20</sup> Dramatic improvisation can helpfully be compared with jazz improvisation in this respect: ‘the jazz musician is responsible both to the core idea of the music and to the

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.324

<sup>18</sup> James McKay ed., *Religious Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986) p.23 as quoted in Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.337

<sup>19</sup> See *Drama*, p.129, in which Vanhoozer states, ‘The directions drawn by Scripture’s normative specification of the theo-drama enable the church to improvise, as it were, with a script.’

<sup>20</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) p.94 as quoted in Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.337

other players'.<sup>21</sup> Narrative skills are, therefore, essential for good improvisation. The improviser must keep the 'full picture in memory' in order that the scene might be moved forward.<sup>22</sup> By reincorporating past elements of the narrative into the evolving scene the improviser is able to give form and structure to a scene whilst also allowing it to develop and expand.<sup>23</sup> Canonical performance interpretation is similar to the notion of improvising with a script in that it requires the actor to respond to changing situations in ways that are consistent with the plot of the theo-drama as this has been expressed in Scripture.<sup>24</sup>

As situations change the canonical performance interpreter must combine narrative attentiveness with contextual perceptiveness in order that the plot of the drama can continue to be expressed in ways that remain intelligible in the new situation. Such a task involves a disciplined practice of cultural listening. It includes a willingness to empathise with occupants of a culture in their challenges, their joys and sorrows, their wise observations and their misunderstandings. In the context of post-Christian culture and the impulse of successive generations to return to the font with their children, there is a need to understand their motivation and to understand in what ways the church through its practice has failed to engage them with the gospel in a way that helps them to respond in a deeper and more committed way. Such perceptive observation is necessary in order that a performance of the gospel might be imagined that is faithful, relevant and effective.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.338; cf. Young, *Performance*, pp.161-186

<sup>22</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.339

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Vanhoozer, *Drama*, p.340

<sup>24</sup> So Lash, 'Performing', p.44, '[W]hat we may not do, if it is *this* text we are to continue to perform, is to tell a different story.'; cf. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, p.93.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) p.172, who states, 'In taking the gospel to the world one must pay attention to the context of the hearer, making a careful study of the social and personal circumstances of the hearer or hearers. ... This is especially important when the gospel is taken across significant cultural and linguistic borders. ... On the one

Knowing the plot of the theo-drama in its canonically scripted form and understanding the cultural context in which the gospel is performed are important aspects of the phronetic task but this task is not complete unless the interpreter is able imaginatively to deliver a fresh performance of the gospel that is both culturally accessible to players and audience alike and which remains faithful to the flow of the drama as a whole. A good example of this, in terms of comparison with the dramatic arts, is the recent BBC Series of television dramas entitled *Shakespeare Retold*. One of the dramas presents the story of *Macbeth*. The action, however, is not set in the highlands of Scotland in the eleventh century but rather in a top London restaurant in the twenty first century. In spite of this, the classic story of Macbeth is convincingly and faithfully portrayed. All the same themes are present: lust for power, blood thirsty ambition, profound guilt, tragic destruction of personality. Yet because of the more contemporary setting for the drama, these themes are set forth in a manner that is able to shock and include the contemporary audience in a way that the traditional Elizabethan presentation may no longer be able to. The drama successfully presented a faithful account of Shakespeare's work in a way that was contextually perceptive and which imaginatively engaged the contemporary audience.<sup>26</sup> The drama was not set in its original spatial or temporal context but it was clearly Macbeth. The challenge facing the church's ongoing performance of baptism is to achieve the same effect. So that, whilst we are no longer in first century Galilee, our performance of the gospel might clearly be just that, the gospel with all its force and

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side, the evangelist must proclaim the gospel with integrity and without compromise; on the other, he or she must be willing and able to meet people where they are, drawing them into the orbit of the kingdom, taking up all that is valid, true and God-given in the native culture.'

<sup>26</sup> See *Shakespeare Retold: Macbeth*, written by Peter Moffat, directed by Mark Brozel, produced by Peter Wilkie (BBC Drama, 2005). Available on DVD, distributed by Acorn Media: [www.acornmediauk.com](http://www.acornmediauk.com).

power to transform human living in spite of our cultural distance from the world of its production. Staging fresh productions of the gospel in a post-Christian cultural setting will require narrative attentiveness, contextual perceptiveness and imagination.

### **3) Conclusions from the Exegetical Task**

If a contemporary ‘performance’ of baptism is to be considered faithful then it must demonstrate narrative attentiveness. In terms of the present work, baptismal ‘performance’ in post-Christian culture must faithfully respond to the baptismal commission of Christ (Mt.28.19) by accurately representing the place of baptism in the theo-drama. In order to assist in this task of narrative attentiveness it would be helpful succinctly to re-state the findings of Chapters Four to Six with respect to the place of baptism in the theo-drama as presented in Matthew.

The notion of baptism is first introduced into the Matthean narrative as a key aspect of the ministry of John the Baptist (3.1-11). John’s ministry is placed within the wider context of Matthew’s account of God’s saving initiative which is demonstrated in the birth of Jesus who is born to ‘save his people from their sins’ (1.21). The birth of God’s Messiah, Jesus, is responded to in both positive and negative ways in the Gospel’s first two chapters. This is most clearly illustrated in the stark contrast between the worshipful homage paid by Magi (2.2, 11) and the fearful and violent rejection exhibited by Herod (2.16). Thus the reader is prepared for John’s declaration ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near’ (3.2). The reader knows that the rule of God is dawning because Jesus has been born and

that this good news should elicit a positive accepting response from those who hear it. In 3.2 John specifies the nature of the expected response by challenging his hearers to repent, that is to demonstrate a radical change of heart and mind.<sup>27</sup> John's baptism in the Jordan is a symbolic expression of such positive acceptance of the news of the kingdom. He baptises in water for repentance (3.11). Those who receive this baptism confess their sins as they do so (3.6). This encourages the reader to consider that John's baptism had a purifying function yet, as John himself testifies, his baptism is but a preparatory rite which points beyond itself to one who will baptise with Holy Spirit and fire (3.11). This ministry of baptising in Holy Spirit and fire is related metaphorically by John to the eschatological judgement to be effected by the coming one (3.12).<sup>28</sup> The exact nature of these baptisms is not understood by the reader until later in the narrative.

The next significant events in the Gospel, with respect to baptism, are the baptism of Jesus and his subsequent temptation. Following his baptism the heavens are opened to Jesus and he sees the Spirit descending and alighting upon him like a dove and a voice from heaven declares, 'This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased (3.16-17). This presence of God's Spirit, the waters of baptism and the voice of God are all evocative of Gen.1.2 in which God's Spirit brooded over the waters in creation. This serves to communicate that, through the promised Messiah, God is bringing about his promises to renew creation.<sup>29</sup> The meaning of Jesus' baptism is extended, however, as immediately Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (4.1). The temptation narrative (4.1-11) displays clear new exodus typology through which Jesus, the obedient Son of God, is

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<sup>27</sup> See pp.161-163 above.

<sup>28</sup> See pp.168-177 above.

<sup>29</sup> See pp.177-182 above.



contrasted with Israel, the Son of God, who often failed in its calling to be faithful to God. The typological significance of the temptation narrative throws typological light back onto the baptism narrative such that the two scenes work together to depict Jesus as the new Israel who, in baptism, typologically passed through the Red Sea and on into the wilderness. Therefore the baptismal narrative is able to communicate that, through Jesus, God is fulfilling his purpose to renew creation and redefine Israel through the obedience of his Son Jesus.<sup>30</sup>

Between 3.16 and 28.19 the importance of baptism in the Matthean narrative is developed by implicit narrative association rather than explicit comment. This narrative association particularly serves to clarify the nature of the baptisms in Holy Spirit and fire that were referred to by John the Baptist (3.11). The baptism in fire is seen to be a reference to the eschatological judgement to be effected by Jesus upon those who fail to respond to God's saving initiative with repentance and obedience to the divine will (7.21; 11.21-24; 12.33-42; 13.24-30, 36-43; 23.33; 25.31-46). More pertinent to the reader's understanding of 28.19, however, are the narrative connections in Matthew which serve to explicate the nature of the baptism in Holy Spirit of which John spoke. The narrative logic serves to establish a connection between baptism in Holy Spirit and eschatological salvation (3.11-12). In addition eschatological salvation is connected to obedience to the divine will (7.21-23) which is in turn connected to the work of the Spirit (4.1-11). Also obedience to the divine will is associated with the gift of divine kinship (12.46-50), such divine kinship is related to the work of the Spirit (10.20; 1.16, 18; 3.16-17) and the work of the Spirit is made apparent both in the baptism of Jesus and in the baptism in Holy Spirit that

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<sup>30</sup> See pp.182-184 above.

he would effect. The meaning of these narrative connections becomes clear in 28.10 when the risen Jesus graciously bestows the status and identity of ‘brothers’ upon his disciples in spite of their unfaithfulness in the lead up to the crucifixion (cf. 12.46-50). This emphasises that the disciples do not receive this status as a reward for obedience but rather this status and identity is given to them in spite of their failings. Yet Jesus has already stated that those who do the will of his Father in heaven are to be considered his brothers (12.50), and that those who do the will of his heavenly Father are to receive salvation at the last (7.21), and John has communicated that those receiving salvation at the last are those who are baptised in Holy Spirit (3.11-12). All of this indicates to the reader that the baptism in Holy Spirit of which John spoke is not to be considered as a reward for obedience which leads to salvation, but rather it is better understood as a gift such that Jesus’ repentant disciples may receive the status and identity of divine kinsfolk, be enabled to live obediently and ultimately receive eschatological salvation.<sup>31</sup> The clearest indication in the narrative that the disciples, after the resurrection, will know themselves to be the children of God who have received his Spirit is given in 10.20. Here Jesus promises them that as they endure persecution in the fulfilment of their mission they will know the Spirit of their Father speaking through them.

In 28.19-20, Jesus commissions his disciples by saying ‘make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you’. This command finds its full meaning in the context of the Gospel it concludes. The narrative makes clear that the disciples’ ministry of disciple-making does not simply begin with baptism

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<sup>31</sup> See pp.234-249 above.

but rather that this will develop from their prior ministry of announcing the gospel of the kingdom (10.7; cf. 3.2 and 4.17; 24.14). The Gospel has also persuasively communicated that the appropriate response to this announcement is repentance (3.2; 4.17; 11.20-24). In addition to this, as the disciple-making pattern of Jesus makes clear, the repentant are to be called to follow Jesus (4.19; 9.9; 19.21). Baptism and teaching, therefore, take their place in this complex of disciple-making activities along with proclamation and call.

Within this complex of disciple-making activities baptism can be seen to achieve a very important function. Baptism, in a physical and tangible way, achieves a sense of narrative inclusion for the new disciple. Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit symbolically expresses that, through repentance and the acceptance of a call to discipleship, the new disciple is taken up into the theo-drama, the story of God's saving initiative in Jesus as both a recipient of grace and a partner in God's ongoing mission. Baptism is able to symbolise the new relationship between the disciple and God to the extent that it achieves narrative connection with the theo-drama as it is presented in the Gospel. Baptism evokes the ministry of John the Baptist who ministered baptism as an expression of people's positive response to the gospel of the kingdom (3.2; 3.11). The baptism of a new disciple makes narrative connection with the baptism of Jesus and so communicates that the new disciple is given the gift of divine kinship, being part of God's renewal of creation and the new Israel established in Jesus. The baptism of a new disciple relates to John's prophecy that Jesus will baptise in Holy Spirit and hence baptism is able to express that the repentant disciple is graciously given the status and identity of a child of God, a brother or sister of Jesus, who is enabled by that Spirit to be obedient

to the divine will especially in the outworking of mission (cf.10.20) and who, therefore, will receive the blessing of eschatological salvation at the last. Just as Jesus received the blessing of God's Spirit at his baptism before he was led into the wilderness to overcome the devil (4.1-11) so baptism expresses that the blessing of God's Spirit is a necessary gift for the new disciple to learn obedience to everything that Christ commanded (cf.28.20a). Baptism, therefore, functions as a glorious symbolic ritual, which serves to make apparent the fullness of the Gospel by physically, as well as spiritually and emotionally, including the new disciple within the ongoing story of God's saving initiative in Jesus, the theo-drama.<sup>32</sup> In the ongoing performance of baptism in post-Christian cultural settings the church should remain attentive to this narrative in order that it does not inadvertently 'tell a different story.'<sup>33</sup> For including someone within a different narrative does not have the power to save.

#### **4) Creative Interaction of Text and Context**

Frances Young, in her book *The Art of Performance: Towards A Theology Of Holy Scripture*, develops the analogy between the interpretation of Scripture and the improvisation of a cadenza at the climax of a concerto. She writes:

The performer, not just the composer, needs inspiration, and the old tradition that the Holy Spirit is necessary for proper interpretation needs to be reclaimed. It is not just a matter of acquiring technical skill, nor is it just a matter of skills in

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<sup>32</sup> See pp.251-273 above.

<sup>33</sup> See Lash, 'Performing', p.44; cf. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, p.91-93.

communication and in projecting personality. The inspired 'musicality' of the performer has to be fostered by bringing the old score and present experience into creative interaction.<sup>34</sup>

What follows is an exercise in bringing the 'old score' of the biblical narrative and the 'present experience' of the church's baptismal ministry in a post-Christian age into 'creative interaction' with one another. In order to do this it will be helpful to reflect on the work of Hays who has written concerning the use of the New Testament in Ethics. Faithfully performing paedobaptism in post-Christian contexts involves what Hays has called 'an integrative act of imagination, a discernment about how our lives, despite their historical dissimilarity to the lives narrated in the New Testament, might fitly answer to that narration and participate in the truth that it tells.'<sup>35</sup> For Hays, such a task involves the interpreter in the act of 'metaphor-making, placing our community's life imaginatively within the world articulated by the texts.'<sup>36</sup> This recognises that metaphors are 'incongruous conjunctions of two images – or two semantic fields – that turn out on reflection, to be like one another in ways not ordinarily recognized.'<sup>37</sup> In terms of the ongoing baptismal ministry of the church in a post-Christian setting, the community's life has a clear point of contact with the world articulated by the biblical text. This point of contact is the command to baptise as part of a process of disciple-making that should also include teaching obedience to the commandments of Jesus. As we have discovered, however, the act of baptising itself involves the incongruous conjunction of two images – or two semantic fields that turn out to be like one another in ways

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<sup>34</sup> Young, *Performance*, p.162

<sup>35</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, p.298

<sup>36</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, p.299

<sup>37</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, p.300

not ordinarily recognised. That is to say, the application of water and the invocation of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is in itself a metaphor for the entirety of the theo-drama as presented in the Gospel and metaphorically represents the inclusion of a new disciple within that story with its many blessings and challenges. Yet the success of that metaphor, in whatever cultural context, depends upon a sharing of linguistic/cultural code between the sender and the receiver. In this case, God mediated through biblical narrative and faithful interpretation in the church is the sender. The candidate/sponsors for baptism are the recipients of the enacted metaphor which is baptism. However, a metaphor which is removed from its place within a particular interpretative scheme is unable to achieve its intended effect.<sup>38</sup> As the church mediates the enacted metaphor of baptism it has a responsibility, therefore, to locate that metaphor within its intended interpretative scheme, the theo-drama, so that the receivers can be assisted in grasping its significance and benefit from its intended effect. Therefore the church must, in culturally intelligible fashion, proclaim the gospel of the kingdom, challenge its baptismal candidates/sponsors to repentance and invite them to accept a call to discipleship. Without this, the enacted metaphor of baptism is translated into other interpretative schemes and comes to signify something different to, something less than the fullness of the theo-drama.

Consider the pastoral practice of paedobaptism in post-Christian contexts. In Chapter One I referred to the concept of 'Christian memory' which is a key aspect of a society that can be termed as being 'post-Christian'.<sup>39</sup> This can be contrasted with a society that can be thought of as 'Christian', in which the culture reflects the

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Lindbeck's reflection on winks or signs of the cross in *Nature*, p.114: 'They are quite distinct from nonmeaningful but physically identical eye twitches and hand motions, and their reality as meaningful signs is wholly constituted in any individual occurrence, by their place, so to speak, in a story.'

<sup>39</sup> See pp.6-10, 85-87 above.

message and story of the Christian faith to a large degree and the population is naturally engaged by the Christian proclamation and expresses its response to that gospel in a more or less regular way. A post-Christian society differs from a 'Christian' society in that the culture has ceased to be organised around a Christian world-view and the faith and practice of the church have moved from the centre of society to its margins.<sup>40</sup> In such a context, many who would continue to define themselves as Christian, do so in spite of a lack of knowledge of the Christian story and the demands it is intended to make on the responsive practitioner. For such people, their grasp on Christianity is maintained via the so-called 'occasional offices'.<sup>41</sup> These are rites which impact on individuals and families at times of great change in their lives, as when they get married or when they are bereaved or when they have a child.<sup>42</sup> For many in post-Christian societies, there exists a 'Christian memory' which is detached from the ongoing worshipping and missiological life of the Christian community. This 'Christian memory' may not recall a message (the gospel), or a person (Jesus), or even often a belief in God. What continues to be 'remembered' by many is a ritual around a font where a baby receives the sign of water and some religious words are said. The wider theological context of this rite is not remembered, a deep sense of its importance certainly is. Many families, for reasons they cannot articulate, consider this 'christening' to be an essential part of their baby's upbringing. 'It is something we've always done in our family', they say, 'It's just the right thing to do.'<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. TMCP, 'Called to Love And Praise', p.3; Benedict, *Waters*, pp.16, 45-53; Dickson, *Household of God*, pp. ix-xii, 3-8, 49-53

<sup>41</sup> Cf. TMCP, 'Called to Love and Praise', p.43; General Synod, *On The Way*, p.24; General Synod, *Common Worship*, pp.200-201.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Carr, *Brief Encounters*, pp.9-59 and 63-85

<sup>43</sup> This creates an interesting parallel with the words of Jesus in 3.15 (see pp.177-180 above). Jesus sought baptism by John in order to comply with divine will in order that the next stage of God's eschatological rule could be realised. The baptism of Jesus was 'the right thing to do' because it was located within a framework which saw Jesus acting in accordance with God's saving initiative. The

Pastors, priests, ministers in such cultural contexts are regularly faced with this pastoral dilemma and have to decide how they will perform the gospel in this situation. In delivering this performance the priest/pastor/minister needs to establish a relationship with the family, decide whether or not it is appropriate to comply with their request, prepare them for the celebration of the rite, celebrate the rite with them and continue to minister to them following the celebration. In all of this the celebrant will need to consider carefully the role of the wider Christian community. In coming to a conclusion as to how the wider community should be involved the priest/ pastor/ minister then needs to facilitate such involvement. Often in the pressures of pastoral ministry there is little time to give ample consideration and resource to each step of this process.<sup>44</sup> Also, within this challenging pastoral framework it is difficult for a local practitioner to consider the situation in the perspective of Scripture.<sup>45</sup> Denominational guidance in this respect is often confusing and vague.<sup>46</sup> In these circumstances baptismal practice is typically

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symbolic action had meaning because it was part of an ongoing theological and narrative pattern which it served to illustrate and progress. It is in this sense that the baptism of an infant can be said to be the 'right thing to do', i.e., when it is an expression of and a progression of a family's desire to respond to the saving initiative of God in Jesus. The sprinkling of water and the recitation of words in the absence of such an understanding cannot be said to be, by itself, 'the right thing to do'.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. General Synod, *On the Way*, p.85; Carr, *Brief Encounters*, pp.9-59 and 63-85

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Lindbeck, *Nature*, pp.117-121, speaks of traditional exegetical procedures which assume that Scripture creates its own domain of meaning and that the task of interpretation is to extend this over the whole of reality. The pressing danger with the paedobaptising churches engagement with post-Christian culture with respect to baptism is that the extra-biblical cultural situation will become the basic framework for interpretation and thus become inserted into the biblical universe and not the other way around. This means that baptismal theology and practice evolves in accordance with mere cultural convenience. In such circumstances post-Christian culture is allowed to become the interpreter of Scripture rather than that which is interpreted in the light of Scripture. Lindbeck demonstrates that this is exactly what happened in the early church with respect to Gnosticism. 'Here Hellenism became the interpreter rather than the interpreted. The Jewish rabbi who is the crucified and resurrected Messiah of the New Testament accounts was transformed into a mythological figure illustrative of thoroughly nonscriptural meanings.' Quote taken from *Nature*, p.118. Great care needs to be taken such that baptism, the symbolic action commissioned by Jesus to represent so much of the message of the Gospel and its effect on human lives, is not allowed to be transformed into a mere cultural rite of passage, a celebration of infancy, illustrative of thoroughly nonscriptural meanings.

<sup>46</sup> TMCP, 'Called to Love and Praise', p.43; ICEL, *RBC*, pp.9-10; contra: Felton, *By Water*.



characterised as either being 'indiscriminate' or 'rigorous'.<sup>47</sup> The question is whether or not these approaches are attentive to the narrative (plot of the theo-drama) and contextually perceptive (intelligible in the context of the culture). I would suggest that neither approach represents a faithful and effective performance of baptism in a post-Christian age. Neither the rigorous or indiscriminate approaches satisfactorily engage with what has perceptively been referred to as 'the clash of expectations' between those seeking baptism for their children and the church's understanding of baptism.<sup>48</sup> Neither approach, therefore, takes seriously the location of the baptismal command as a participle which is syntactically subordinate to the imperative 'make disciples' and neither approach seeks to promote an understanding of baptism that is governed by attentiveness to the wider framework of the Christian story. The rigorous and indiscriminate approaches both fall short because neither invests sufficient time and energy in the encounter between the church and those seeking baptism. Without such investment, given the starting point of many who seek baptism for their children, it will be impossible to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom intelligibly such that the response of repentance might develop which enables the acceptance of an invitation to discipleship. In a post-Christian society in which the prominence of the Christian story is considerably diminished, in comparison with earlier eras, the acts of proclaiming, challenging and calling, alongside which baptism takes its place, necessarily take time. Neither a headlong rush to the font nor a perfunctory refusal to baptise takes any of this seriously. Neither, therefore, can function as an effective performance of the Gospel. Instead there is a need for a baptismal performance in post-Christian settings that finds ways to invest time and energy in the relationship between the church and those who seek

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. TMCP, 'Christian Initiation 1987', p.95; WCC, *BEM*, p.6.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. General Synod, *On The Way*, p.85

its baptismal ministry. This will neither be indiscriminate or rigorous but will be discriminate yet open. The aim of such an approach would be to enter into a meaningful encounter with families. This would take account of their starting point and seek to build with them an interpretative framework in which baptism can be understood. Such a framework is vital in order that baptism might be received as an enacted metaphor of God's grace which is to be responded to in order to be effective and which brings with it both blessings and challenges.

The work of William Abraham in his book *The Logic of Evangelism* is helpful in thinking about such a process. In it he writes:

To be sure, each new generation can adopt this or that civil religion, or it can settle for a nominal relation to its national faith that is satisfied with Christianity as a splendid system of rites adapted to cope with the vicissitudes of birth, marriage, and death. To confuse these with entry into the kingdom of God is ludicrous and self-serving. Yet elements of folk religion are not to be despised. They represent brittle aspects of Christian initiation that have been cut off from their natural home, and given the right handling they can be repaired and renewed in a process of evangelism that sees initiation as central to its goal and execution.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Abraham, *Logic*, p.114. Interestingly in note 14 on p.115 Abraham observes, 'We are in one sense saying nothing new; for my suggestions seek to implement the full force of the Great Commission.' Abraham makes this claim without having entered into a major study of the Great Commission in the context of Matthew. As will become clear, however, from my perspective of having conducted such a study I concur with much of what Abraham has proposed.

Abraham writes to engage the practice of evangelism which neglects a proper concern for baptism as part of the process of initiation into the kingdom of God.<sup>50</sup> This is related to my own concern that the practice of baptism should not neglect a proper concern for such initiation. As such many of Abraham's arguments are relevant to my own project. For Abraham, initiating 'someone into the kingdom of God is to admit that person into the eschatological rule of God through appropriate instruction, experiences, rites and forms.'<sup>51</sup> This way of thinking about initiation seeks to locate initiation and therefore baptism within 'the sweep of God's action in Christ and in the Holy Spirit.'<sup>52</sup> To do this well, according to Abraham:

[I]nvolves a complex web of reality that is at once corporate, cognitive, moral, experiential, operational and disciplinary. Initiation into the kingdom of God is not only one of these; nor is it all of these strung together as a mere human enterprise driven simply by earthly passion and planning; it is all of these set and bounded within the dramatic action of God that is manifest in Christ and fuelled by the Holy Spirit.<sup>53</sup>

The aim of baptismal ministry in post-Christian settings should be to re-locate baptism as an integral aspect of initiation into the kingdom of God. In so doing the 'brittle aspects of Christian initiation' that have been absorbed into folk religion 'can be repaired and renewed.'<sup>54</sup> A request for an infant baptism from a family not normally connected with the church can become an occasion for making disciples so

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Abraham, *Logic*, pp.132-133

<sup>51</sup> Abraham, *Logic*, p.96

<sup>52</sup> Abraham, *Logic*, p.98

<sup>53</sup> Abraham, *Logic*, p.103

<sup>54</sup> Abraham, *Logic*, p.114.

that the candidate and sponsors are given an opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel of the kingdom. This process will involve the church in a performance of baptism which in its preparation, celebration and follow-up consistently, clearly and intelligibly places the enacted metaphor of baptism within its theo-dramatic framework such that it can once more exercise its intended effect. As Hays has pointed out '[t]he power of metaphor is dialectical: the text [or rite] shapes the community, and the community embodies the meaning of the text [rite].'<sup>55</sup> Hence the tragedy of a practice of baptism that fails adequately to locate the enacted metaphor within its proper theo-dramatic framework: many who do embody the theo-drama in their lives are not enabled to treasure baptism as a rite of narrative inclusion within that theo-drama whilst many who value baptism, but only as a rite of infancy, are not empowered to understand its true significance for their lives or the lives of their children. This situation can only be changed as the church performs baptism in a way that is acutely aware of its essential relationship to the theo-dramatic practice of initiating people into the kingdom of God.

## **6) Lessons from an Experimental Baptismal Performance**

Lindbeck talks about the property of applicability in theology. He is speaking of the criterion that judges the 'relevance' and 'practical-ness' of particular theological proposals in concrete situations. He speaks about the applicability of theological proposals by suggesting that their purpose is 'not to foretell what is to come, but to shape present action to fit the anticipated and hoped for future ... to discern those possibilities in current situations that can and should be cultivated as

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<sup>55</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, p.304

anticipations or preparations for the hoped-for future ... a theological proposal is adjudged both faithful and applicable to the degree that it appears practical in terms of an eschatologically and empirically defensible scenario of what is to come.’<sup>56</sup> In short, Lindbeck is suggesting that a theological proposal can be said to demonstrate the property of applicability to the extent that it is able to imagine a hoped for future and persuade people that such a future is a realistic hope so that they might take the required action in order to pursue it. This experimental performance of baptism is included here in order to demonstrate that it is possible to exhibit narrative attentiveness and contextual perceptiveness in a creative way with respect to baptismal ministry such that it can be an effective representation of the gospel. In what follows I present some possibilities in the current situation that should be cultivated in order to move towards a more faithful and effective form of baptismal practice.

My proposals with respect to baptismal performance have both emerged and been rehearsed as I have practised baptismal ministry in a post-Christian culture. It will be helpful, therefore, to describe the baptismal performance achieved in my own pastoral setting indicating how this sought to respond to the Gospel of Matthew in a culturally relevant way. This provides a concrete example of an attempt to engage in a performance interpretation of Mt.28.19 that sought to hold together narrative attentiveness and contextual perceptiveness in an imaginative, meaningful and relevant way. It will be necessary as part of this exercise to state the positive and negative lessons learnt in this context as this has the potential to inform future performances.

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<sup>56</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.124-125

From 2000 to 2005 I was the minister of Conisbrough Methodist Church. Baptism was an important issue in the life of the church there. When I visited, prior to taking up my appointment, the first question I was asked was ‘What will your baptism policy be?’ The church, over a period of years, had received around thirty requests per year, from non-churchgoing families, to have their young children baptised. The minister before me had practised an indiscriminate approach to baptism, in which all requests were granted. These baptisms usually took place on a Sunday afternoon, outside of the main worshipping life of the congregation. The minister before that had implemented a very rigorous approach to baptism, few requests were granted though the alternative of a thanksgiving service was usually offered. The people were keen to discover what breed of baptiser I was. My answer to the question was something like, ‘Let *us* work out together what *our* baptismal policy might be.’ When I arrived in post we set out on this journey of discovery together. It was not an easy journey as we had to overcome the pain of initially finding that our best efforts did not work. Our problems centred around the damaging effects of disruption to a community’s worshipping life and our struggle to effectively convey the meaning of baptism to enquirers who came with little or no appreciation of the relationship of baptism to the rest of the Christian story. This pain was a consequence of us feeling together the effects of ‘a religious interpretative scheme (embodied, as it always is, in religious practice and belief) develop[ing] anomalies in its application in new contexts.’<sup>57</sup> In our, sometimes painful, journey of discovery we were able to imagine and implement a way of ‘doing’ baptism which removed some of the anomalies. This process then resulted in an outcome that

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<sup>57</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.39

helped us to feel more satisfied that our 'performance' of baptism demonstrated narrative attentiveness and contextual perceptiveness in a way that was intelligible in our post-Christian cultural context.

When I first arrived in Conisbrough I, initially, continued the approach that my predecessor had taken. This involved granting all requests for baptism, conducting these services on a Sunday afternoon away from the main worshipping life of the community. Members of the congregation were encouraged to attend the baptismal services but rarely did in any significant numbers. Baptismal preparation involved three sessions of work with families. These conversations considered the grace of God expressed in baptism and the importance of human response to God's gift of grace.<sup>58</sup> The third session included a time of thinking through the logistics of the service. Follow-up ministry after the baptism usually occurred but was limited to one ministerial visit. No baptismal families attended church following the baptism of their children.

A key moment in the journey of discovery was the decision of the church council that baptisms should take place in the congregation's main act of worship on a Sunday. This allowed the congregation to be confronted with the realities of baptismal ministry. On a monthly basis the regular worshippers were 'overwhelmed' by a large influx of baptismal guests who did not respect the usual reverence of the act of worship and made the time of worship much less enjoyable and peaceful for regular worshippers. This was very much a negative experience for the people of the church and this negative experience led the congregation to question the wisdom of

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<sup>58</sup> TMCP, *MWB*, pp.88-90; General Synod, *Common Worship*, pp.19-22; WCC, *BEM*, p.3.

the indiscriminate approach. The congregation asked me to try and steer those seeking infant baptism for their children towards a simple service of thanksgiving instead, which could be conducted in the afternoon. It was hoped that many families who did not have a strong faith in God and who did not desire a meaningful relationship with the church would opt for a thanksgiving. This did not prove to be the case. The worshipping life of the congregation continued to be 'disrupted' on a monthly basis by 'unruly' baptism parties.

In my third and fourth years in Conisbrough I began to re-encounter families that I had met before. The birth of further children had prompted these families to return seeking a further baptism. In this process of re-acquaintance it became apparent that these families actually remembered very little about the process that I had taken them through previously. They remembered that there were three sessions and that the service was 'nice'. They did not remember what we had shared about God's grace. They did not remember what we had talked about concerning the appropriate response to God's grace. They did not remember the words that they had said in the service. It became very clear to me that the time I had devoted to baptismal preparation had been utterly insufficient and ineffective. The families I encountered were approaching me with such a slight knowledge of the Christian faith that they needed longer, much longer in which to consider God's saving love in order that the hoped for response might begin to develop.<sup>59</sup>

I had become a father myself in the intervening period and so I now was beginning to empathise more with these other parents of small children and could

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. General Synod, *On the Way*, p.85.



understand why the liturgy had not impacted upon them in a significant way. The liturgy paled into insignificance behind the combination of pride and anxiety associated with this public moment of celebrating new life. It was clear that the baptismal policy of Conisbrough Methodist Church was not working. It did not help the regular worshippers and it did not serve to announce the fullness of God's grace to the families we ministered amongst, neither did it encourage them to make the anticipated response of repentant faith and obedient discipleship. The words of 'repentance' in the rite were either not being understood by baptismal sponsors or else I knew and they knew that as they were saying them they were engaging in an act of hypocrisy and I was placing them in that situation. The extent of this failure of baptismal policy gave us the courage to try something radical and different – things got better as a result.

From September 2004 we introduced *The Christening Course*. *The Christening Course* was the name we gave to a staged approach to baptism. This was an experiment, an invitation to families seeking baptism for their children to join us in a process rather than receiving from us an event. In designing the *Christening Course* we knew we had to strike a balance between seeking to spend as much time as we possibly could sharing conversations with families about faith and not spending so much time that families would be put off before we could even begin. We prepared a course that would take place over ten sessions and that would include three ritual moments along the way.<sup>60</sup> The course was designed to fit in to one school term with a break in the middle for half term. The aim of the course was to present something of the saving activity of God in Christ and to communicate as

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<sup>60</sup> Note the comparison with *RCLA* as described on pp.76-81 above. ; Cf. General Synod, *On the Way*, pp.30, 38, 85; Benedict, *Waters*, pp.123-137.

effectively as possible the nature of the response that God was seeking to that grace. Baptism was thus presented as this sacrament of grace and response. In addition, the course was designed as a gentle introduction to church premises, church people, the Bible, prayer and worship.<sup>61</sup> It was hoped that as the course developed the beginnings of a Christian spirituality would begin to take root in the lives of the families. The course was mindful of the circumstances of individual families: it was made clear that only one parent needed to attend the sessions, but that two parents, or one parent and a companion would be very welcome to attend if this was more helpful for the family.

The course took place at the Methodist Church, refreshments were always served at the beginning of each session and we were disciplined in finishing on time. The course outline was as follows:

**Session 1**                      Saying 'Thank you'.

Service of Thanksgiving

**Session 2**                      Love is flowing like a river

**Session 3**                      God's love flowing through history

**Session 4**                      Turning around

**Session 5**                      Decision time

Service of Decision

**Session 6**                      New Beginnings 1 - New Creations

**Session 7**                      New Beginnings 2 - Dying and Rising

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<sup>61</sup> Note Lindbeck, *Nature*, p.129, 'The grammar of religion, like that of language, cannot be explicated or learned by analysis of experience, but only by practice'; and Abraham, *Logic*, pp.96-97, '[I]nitiation into the kingdom of God will have its own internal grammar, its own internal structure, constraints and logic ... the unique character of the rule of God and how it has come into history shapes and informs from beginning to end how initiation is to be carried out.'

**Session 8**                      New Beginnings 3 - Living a new life.

Service of Baptism

**Session 9**                      How was that?

**Session 10**                    What next?

Session 1 and the service of thanksgiving were intended to be a gentle introduction to the process. They gave an opportunity to reflect on the grace of God in the gift of a child and to say thank you. These elements of the process are very important to new parents and yet are missing from a normal liturgical celebration of baptism.<sup>62</sup> The session and the service introduced ideas of worship, of prayer, of thanksgiving in the Bible in a way that sought to draw from familiar aspects of contemporary culture. God was presented as one who loves us, who gives us good things and who is worthy of our praise. The service took place in the afternoon away from the main worshipping life of the congregation. It was brief, gentle, family oriented and to the point. The families had been introduced to God, worship, prayer, the Bible and church in a way that had helped them to feel comfortable and that made sense in the context of their experiences.

Sessions 2 and 3 dealt with the saving activity of God through history and made use of the metaphor of a river of grace that has flowed through the ages and has reached us here. The sessions spoke about how baptism symbolises this river of grace. Participants were encouraged to consider their own infant baptisms in a new way and were asked to think about how they felt about the river of God in their lives. This led into a consideration of how God's grace is and will be operative in the lives

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. TMCP, *MWB*, pp.88-96; General Synod, *Common Worship*, pp.60-70.

of their children and how the baptism they sought for them symbolises this. In all of this the parents/carers of the children to be baptised were encouraged to consider their own baptisms in parallel with considering the baptisms of their children. This was important in terms of helping them to reflect on their own spiritual journey which in turn enabled them to consider their own role in the spiritual development of their children.<sup>63</sup> All of this was done in a way that continually sought to make connections with contemporary culture, film and music.

Sessions 4 and 5 developed the reflection on baptism to consider how baptism is not just a presentation of God's grace but is also a means by which we declare our response to that grace. Parents were asked to consider if they had found themselves turning towards God in the course as it had developed. The meaning of phrases like 'Do you turn to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour?' were explored.<sup>64</sup> Parents were asked to consider how they felt about participating in a service of baptism as a baptismal sponsor for their children. They were asked to express a decision. In the light of what they had heard and experienced so far in the process, did they still want to go ahead with a service of baptism for their child?

This decision was expressed privately to myself as minister but was then publicly acknowledged in a service of decision.<sup>65</sup> This service was part of the main act of worship on a pre-arranged Sunday in the life of the church. The baptismal

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<sup>63</sup> Note the importance of giving consideration to one's own spiritual journey which is also a feature of: Stephen Cottrell, Steve Croft, John Finney, Felicity Lawson and Robert Warren, *Emmaus: Stage 1 Contact; Stage 2, Nurture and Stage 3, Growth*. Cf. Peter Ball and Malcolm Gundry, *Faith on the Way: A Practical Parish Guide to the Adult Catechumenate* (London: Mowbray, 2000); John W. B. Hill, *Making Disciples: Serving Those Who Are Entering The Christian Life* (Toronto: The Hoskin Group, 1991). Note also how the church in doing this is taking the opportunity to be faithful to the promises made to parents at their own baptisms, which often took place two or more decades earlier. Cf. Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *MSB*, pp.8-9.

<sup>64</sup> TMCP, *MWB*, p.91; cf. General Synod, *Common Worship*, p.22

<sup>65</sup> Cf. ICEL, *RCIA*, no.120

family, without their entourage of guests, was invited to attend and to express their decision to continue the baptismal process or else to end their involvement in the knowledge that they would always be welcome in the future. Those that decided to continue made their expression of repentant faith in that service. The congregation made their promise of support at that time and also a promise of openness and welcome to those that would not continue with the process. The service afforded an opportunity for baptismal reflection appropriate to all. This worked to develop a deeper appreciation of baptism in the lives of the 'regular' congregation and enabled a relationship to develop between congregation members and baptismal families.

The course continued and intensified. In Sessions 6, 7 and 8 the sense in which baptism symbolises the Christian life of discipleship was expressed. The participants were encouraged to consider the joys and challenges of Christian discipleship, how these related to their own baptisms and how they would be expressed in the baptisms of their children. The importance of modelling Christianity to their children as well as speaking of it was considered. All of this led into the celebration of baptism itself. The baptismal service took place on a Sunday afternoon away from the main worshipping life of the congregation. The 'regular' congregation was told that they were very welcome to attend but that they did not need to as they had already expressed their commitment to the families in the service of decision. They did not need to come, and yet they turned out in force nonetheless. The church had witnessed the integrity of the families seeking baptism and now they wanted to share in this important moment in their lives. Again the congregation participated in a service in which the meaning of baptism was set forth. The people

of the church were becoming more aware of their own baptism and understanding how it related to their ongoing life of discipleship.<sup>66</sup>

Sessions 9 and 10 provided opportunity for a kind of *mystagogia*.<sup>67</sup> They countered what had been a decisive weakness in the baptismal practice of the past. The weakness referred to was that inescapable sense that the baptism service itself was a kind of graduation, the end of all that 'preparation stuff', rather than the glorious beginning of a Christian journey. Sessions 9 and 10 focussed on helping the families think about how they could make Christianity work in the context of their own lives. Participants considered how church could fit into the circumstances of their lives. The church considered how it might need to change so that these families could have access to spiritual expression that was relevant to their circumstances and cultural standpoint. In this sense the church was able to experience the renewing effects of initiating new members.

This experimental baptismal performance was a positive experience for all involved in all kinds of ways. The 'regular' congregation were enabled to understand and, therefore, treasure their own baptism in a way that had not previously been possible for them. This took place as the various ritual acts within the process provided natural opportunities for baptism to be talked about but perhaps more importantly in working together to develop this baptismal performance the congregation had to think through the realities of paedobaptising ministry in post-

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<sup>66</sup> In addition this made the celebration of baptism more effective as a means of communicating that the new disciple is received within a family of divine kinsfolk, the new Israel of God. Cf. Thomas H. Schattauer, 'Liturgical Assembly as Locus of Mission' in Thomas H. Schattauer, ed., *Inside Out: Worship in an Age of Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) pp.1-21 esp. 12-13; Lawrence H. Stookey, 'Three New Initiation Rites' in Maxwell E. Johnson, ed., *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995) pp.274-291 esp.281.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. ICEL, *RCIA*, p.14; With respect to the baptism of infants see Moudry, 'Reform', pp.3-4

Christian contexts. This process particularly helped the congregation to understand that their involvement in the missionary task of the church is a specific aspect of the outworking of what is symbolised in their own baptism.

This process also benefited from thoughtful, caring and sensitive planning which sought to take account of the starting points of those seeking baptism for their children. *The Christening Course* started by celebrating God's goodness in blessing families with children. Themes of thanksgiving for God's provision were explored firstly as well as thinking together about God's companionship and goodness to people through their lives. This faithfulness of God was considered both with respect to the 'spiritual journeys' of the parents themselves but also in terms of what they hoped would be the case for their children. The families had approached us wanting a 'christening' so this process began from the position of thinking how 'christenings' related to the Christian story and how these rituals involve us within that story. This process of encounter enabled the church in a friendly and gentle way to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom, challenge people to respond in repentance and to extend an invitation to discipleship. In so doing a platform was established that enabled baptismal families to reconsider their own baptisms in order that, in partnership with their brothers and sisters in the church, they could help their children to develop into the life of discipleship implied in their baptisms.

*The Christening Course*, however, remained limited in its effectiveness and is clearly insufficient by itself. It did establish a platform of faith, repentance and discipleship in the lives of baptismal families but this platform by itself would not represent a sufficient 'performance' of the Great Commission. The limited nature of

the process had not allowed for an ample consideration of the role of the Spirit in discipleship to enable the ethical life of obedience to the commands of Jesus. *The Christening Course* did not allow for a full consideration of the story's ending. The eschatological dimensions of the Gospel were beyond the introductory and exploratory limits of the process. Therefore, the main outstanding challenge to the baptismal performance staged by Conisbrough Methodist Church is that it needed to have in place ways of being church, of nurturing faith and discipleship in new believers through worship and teaching that continued to honour the circumstances of their existence and their cultural preferences. Sunday morning traditional Methodist worship did not always effectively facilitate this. In spite of this the majority of families who participated in *The Christening Course* continued to relate to the church through Sunday morning worship but this tended to be more occasional than regular. The congregation and their minister, however, could see that this experience was difficult for such families and therefore concern endured as to the extent to which we were able to relevantly complete the commission that Jesus had given us and nurture these families into mature discipleship.<sup>68</sup>

## **7) The Show Must Go On**

In this thesis I have sought to demonstrate something of what might be involved in performing paedobaptism in post-Christian contexts in a way that is both faithful to the Great Commission and relevant in terms of a post-Christian cultural context. I am, however, aware that whilst this thesis contributes to the

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<sup>68</sup> I moved from Conisbrough in September 2005 to take up an appointment in Middlesbrough. Since that time various resources have become available which are designed to support churches in imagining 'fresh expressions' of church which are more culturally relevant and accessible. These resources include: Archbishop's Council, *Mission-Shaped Church; Expressions: The DVD* (Peterborough: The Methodist Church / Church Publishing House, 2006); Mike Bossingham, *Building Family Friendly Churches* (Peterborough: Inspire, 2004)



project there is still much more work to be undertaken. For example, more textual work needs to be done with respect to other New Testament perspectives on the theo-drama and the place of baptism within it. In addition the church would benefit from more empirical studies into the effectiveness of baptismal performances like *The Christening Course*. Such performances need to be staged all around but not in a one-size-fits-all type way but rather in a way that seeks to demonstrate narrative attentiveness, contextual perceptiveness and imagination in the particular circumstances of different communities. This task is actually never ending because culture never stops changing. As this continues, however, the church should always remember that it baptises according to the command of Christ and that this command should be understood in the context of the story of which it is a part. As such baptismal performance should always develop in ways that continue to body forth:

- 1) The gracious saving initiative of God in Jesus;
- 2) The expected repentant response to that grace which accepts Christ's invitation to follow as a disciple;
- 3) The inclusion, as a disciple of Jesus, within God's renewed creation;
- 4) Membership of a new community, the church, with the status and identity of children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus and one another;
- 5) A call to obedience and the blessing of God's Spirit in the outworking of that calling;
- 6) A sharing in God's mission to the world;
- 7) The promise of salvation at the last.

I submit that a baptismal performance that embraces these themes is attentive to the narrative of the theo-drama and the place of baptism within it. These themes

should be bodied forth in a baptismal ministry that is aware of the cultural contexts in which the church practises and that imaginatively seeks relevantly to communicate in those contexts. Such narrative attentiveness, contextual perceptiveness and practical imagination are fundamental virtues that the church should constantly seek to apply in her continuing efforts to heed the Great Commission in a post-Christian age.

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This thesis brings together scholarly reflection from three main areas of thought. I have, therefore, arranged the bibliography accordingly in the hope that this will assist the reader.

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