BOOK REVIEW

Talbert, Charles H., *Matthew* (Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010). vii + 376 pp. Pbk. $29.99.

In this addition to the Paideia Commentary Series, Talbert aims to shed light on the historical issues, soteriological elements and methodological assumptions that scholarship has contributed to Matthew's Gospel. Composed by Matthew, one of Jesus' twelve disciples, this Gospel, it is posited, was first composed in either Hebrew or Aramaic and later translated into Greek sometime between 80 and 100 CE. Talbert suggests that Matthew's audience was primarily Jewish, perhaps an audience affected by Roman imperial ideology and power.

Talbert also suggests the two-source theory as the method of Matthew's composition. Viewing Matthew through a new 'lens' as suggested by Genette, Talbert proposes that Matthew is the *hyper-text* of Mark. He also aligns himself with Riches's theory that Matthew was written as a retelling of Mark, a practice demonstrated in the retelling of Genesis by *Jubilees*, Josephus (*Ant.*), Pseudo-Philo (*L.A.B.*), and the *Genesis Apocryphon* (1QapGen ar). Talbert also suggests that Matthew was written in the tradition of ancient biography.

There is a focus on the dichotomy of imperative and indicative ethics within the Gospel. Willi Marxsen contrasts these two sets of ethics and defines them this way: an *imperative* set of ethics supposes that God has approached humanity with set requirements that each person must fulfill in order to engage in a relationship with God. An *indicative* set of ethics supposes that God approaches humans without any precondition for their behavior; that is, God establishes a relationship with humans from which their ethics are created. The former is considered Pharisaic and the latter Christian by Marxsen, who suggests that Matthew primarily encompasses the Pharisaic type. Talbert provides an excellent summary of the various positions within the debate, and separates his position from Marxsen's by arguing for an indicative

ethic in Matthew. Since an indicative ethic can be defined as God not needing preceding human actions for a relationship with humanity, divine activity is essential and can be found in what Sternberg calls 'omnipotence behind the scenes' (p. 14). This omnipotence is manifested in four ways within the narrative: (1) 'I am with you/in your midst'; (2) invoking the divine name; (3) 'it has been revealed to you/you have been given to know'; and (4) being with Jesus. Each of these suggests a process of transformation in the disciples as a result of their relationship with Jesus. Disciples are then able to act in a way that resembles the imperative ethic proposed by Marxsen. Thus the indicative aspect evident in Matthew underlies the imperative.

Talbert divides his commentary into seven sections, the first centered on the birth narrative in Matthew (1.1–2.23). Talbert then divides the next five sections into Parts 1–5, each subdivided into 'Narrative' and 'Discourse'. Part 1 (3.1–8.1) narrates the beginning of Jesus' ministry and includes a discourse between Jesus and his disciples about the righteousness of God; Part 2 (8.2–11.1) centers around Jesus' authority in his mission with a discourse on how that authority enables the disciples' mission; Part 3 (11.2–13.53) discusses the divided response that such a mission incurs in those who listen to Jesus as well as a discourse on Jesus' reflection on that division; Part 4 (13.54–19.2) focuses on Jesus' relationship with his disciples, with a discourse on how his disciples should relate to those who accept their message and those who do not; Part 5 (19.3–26.1a) discusses Jesus' position on various ethical positions and how those relate to God's judgment. This is followed by a discourse on the final judgment of humanity. The final section is devoted to the passion and resurrection narrative (26.1b–28.20).

Talbert begins with an interesting observation: when considering the division between 1.1–2.23 and 3.1–4.17, he notes a theme of withdrawal and separation as fulfillment of prophetic utterance (2.22-23/4.12-13). Traditionally this has been seen as evidence for a three-fold division of the Gospel as suggested by Kingsbury and Krentz. However, Talbert prefers to separate the narrative into five distinct parts calling attention to introductory phrases and perorations in the narrative such as 'he began' and 'when he had finished'.

In addition, Talbert notes that the function of Matthew's birth narrative is to compare Jesus and Moses, placing Jesus as a challenge to the imperial power of Rome as Moses was to the Egyptians.

Comparing Jesus to Moses in this way sets up what Talbert calls an *encomium* of Jesus. Jesus is praised, much as Moses was, by being placed within a lineage of Jewish legendary names. Also, by being named Emmanuel, meaning 'God with us', Jesus stands juxtaposed to the Caesars who were thought of as gods amongst their people. Talbert compares Matthew's description with the Priene inscription that describes Caesar Augustus as a savior who will save the world. Not only this, but having divine lineage was essential to any story of a great person in antiquity; many Greek myths contain stories of their heroes being the product of union between a mortal and an immortal.

Setting the stage with Jesus' lineage and his affiliation with God, Matthew commences to tell of Jesus' great deeds. Jesus surrounds himself with disciples, and begins to teach the basic tenets of his message in Matthew 5–7. Talbert suggests that the sermon found in these chapters 'functions as a catalyst for character formation, altering one's perceptions, dispositions, and intentions' (p. 72). He contrasts these aspects with those of the scribes and Pharisees, creating a theme of contrast between what is correct and what is not. This seems to correlate with the prologue in the sense that Jesus, as the Son of God, is set apart from other mortals, not only by heritage, but also by his understanding of what is righteous. In this way, it can be said that Jesus, rather than the scribes and Pharisees, becomes the source of knowledge of what is righteous.

Further evidence of separation and dichotomy is outlined by Talbert in Part 3 of his discussion. Matthew 11.2–13.53 concerns a division between those who understand Jesus' message and those who do not. Talbert compares the 'mysteries of the kingdom of heaven' in Matthew with certain Qumran hymns that give thanks for God's revelation to the elect (1QH 7.26-33). Jesus' declaration in Mt. 11.27 reflects the hymns by situating Jesus as the mediator of God's message, a message given to those whom Jesus chooses. Again, a similarity can be noted between Jesus' position and that of Moses who could teach his people because of his intimate relationship with God (Deut. 34.10; cf. Exod. 33.12-23).

Talbert also notes the frequency of judgment discourse paired with talk of the kingdom's mystery. These topics usually surround questions of Jesus' authority (9.33-34; 12.23-24; 21.23), which he divulges by way of telling a parable. Three judgment parables speak of God's impending judgment: the Two Sons (21.28-32), the Tenants (21.33-44, 45-46) and the Marriage Feast (22.1-14). These parables seek to draw a

distinction between a true and false understanding of God's law that implicates its current interpreters. This affects not only the experts—now that Jesus has offered proper teachings to the masses, they too will stand before a greater judgment. Nations will be divided into the righteous and unrighteous (sheep and goats) and be judged by the Son of Man (25.32-33) according to their giving of service to each other (25.46). Again, one must notice Matthew's inclination to dichotomize and polarize two distinct positions.

These polarized positions culminate in the passion narrative of Matthew. Readers empathize with Jesus as he is betrayed, sentenced to death and crucified. Talbert offers keen insights into the varying stages of Jesus' trial and crucifixion with comparisons to other literary traditions surrounding death and betrayal. However, readers discover yet another dichotomy in the death and resurrection of Jesus combined with the resurrection of other believers (27.52-53). Noted by Talbert as a potential parallel with Ezek. 37.12-14 and *2 Bar.* 50.3-4, this section is exclusive to Matthew. Scholars tend to see it, not as a historical event, but rather a fulfillment of promise in Scripture. Talbert notes a large number of allusions to Old Testament texts and suggests they are typological in nature to reveal how Jesus has willingly become a part of a divine plan.

Overall, I find this book to be very helpful. Talbert's attempts to educate twenty-first-century readers about a first-century mindset are well taken. For example, there are several sections throughout the book that help the reader understand how a first-century Hellenistic Jew would have thought of Jesus as a mortal–deity. There are also many Greco-Roman references in addition to the Jewish ones. These are helpful since Matthew's world would have been influenced by both cultures.

In addition to this, I find Talbert's presentation of dichotomies in Matthew to be fascinating. However, I expected that Talbert would make more of other dichotomies, such as space, for example. Little attention is given to Matthew's allusions to going and coming (to or from Jerusalem, for example), or preaching from elevation versus a lower space. This is surprising since Jesus is constantly drawing people 'out' from Jerusalem through his itinerant preaching.

Another positive feature of Talbert's book are the photographs that illustrate the areas of Israel where Matthew's narrative takes the reader. Talbert is able to capture some of the more important locations

pertinent to Matthew's account, and the pictures are extremely helpful for those people who have not visited Israel.

I recommend this book because I see it as more in-depth than other elementary commentaries. It gives the reader more insights than other, more elaborate, commentaries regarding the Greco-Roman influence on Matthew's Gospel.

Adam Z. Wright
McMaster Divinity College