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MATTHEW'S CONCEPT OF THE SON OF GOD IN THE CONTEXT  
OF JESUS' BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION

Short Title

MATTHEW'S CONCEPT OF THE SON OF GOD

Bretscher

STM 1964

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia University, St. Louis,  
Department of Divinity and Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

by

Paul G. Bretscher

May 1964

28457

Approved by Martin H. Schaefer  
Advisor

David O. Bentley  
Reader



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CHAPTER I  
THE PROBLEM

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM

Through most of its long history, the Christian Church has understood the name "Son of God" to express the deity of Christ. Such an understanding is validated, of course, in the Scripture itself, notably in the Lucan birth narrative where the account of the Virgin birth gives definition to this name (Luke 1:34-35). The classic formulation of this concept is the Nicene Creed, in which the Christological expressions, "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made" stand parenthetically to the identification of Jesus as "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds."

In recent decades, however, some critical questions have been directed at the traditional assumption, that the name "Son of God" expresses basically Jesus' deity. Rudolph Bultmann finds such an association so alien to the thought-world of Judaism, that he feels compelled to give the post-Resurrection Hellenistic church the credit for applying this name to Jesus. Bultmann understands it as a royal title, a Messianic name, dependent upon Ps. 2:7. He adduces Rom. 1:3f. as proof "that the earliest Church called Jesus Son of God (Messianic) because that was what the resurrection made



him."<sup>1</sup> In the account of the transfiguration, which he interprets as "originally an Easter story,"<sup>2</sup> Bultmann finds additional support for his position. Not the original disciples, but the later Hellenistic church, applied to the earthly Jesus the designation "Son of God," meaning thereby "a supernatural being begotten by God."<sup>3</sup>

Though Bultmann's conclusion that the name Son of God was applied to Jesus only after the Resurrection has been challenged by many, his basic question cannot be evaded. Assuming that Jesus was called and knew Himself to be the Son of God during His ministry, what was the sense of the title? Oscar Cullmann in The Christology of the New Testament surveys the evidences. In Hellenism and in ancient oriental religions "all kings were thought to be begotten of gods."<sup>4</sup> Beyond this, however, the Hellenistic world could ascribe the name to anyone who was "believed to possess some kind of divine power."<sup>5</sup> In Judaism, Cullmann points out, the name "son of God" was applied first of all to the people of Israel. Ex. 4:22, Hos. 11:1, and other passages are cited, some of which will enter into our study. "In all the texts," Cullmann says,

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<sup>1</sup>Rudolph Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, translated from the German by Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), I, 50.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Oscar Cullmann, The Christology of the New Testament, translated from the German by Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), pp. 270-305.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 271f.



"the title 'Son of God' expresses both the idea that God has chosen this people for a special mission, and that this his people owes him absolute obedience." The name is applied in the Old Testament not only to Israel as a people, however, but also to the kings, as in 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7, 89:26.

"The king too is 'son' as one specially chosen by God."

Cullmann minimizes the association of the king-son idea in the Old Testament with divine-king patterns elsewhere in oriental culture. With reference to Israel he says, "The king is son of God because the nation is."<sup>6</sup> Cullmann cautions that "we must carefully distinguish between Messiah and Son of God in the New Testament," and concludes:

the Old Testament and Jewish concept of the Son of God is essentially characterized, not by the gift of a particular power, not by a substantial relationship with God by virtue of divine conception; but by the idea of election to participation in the divine work through the execution of a particular commission, and by the idea of strict obedience to the God who elects.<sup>7</sup>

Cullmann argues that the original content of the name "Son of God" as applied to Jesus is rooted in the Old Testament, and that the name emphasizes "the absolute obedience of a son in the execution of a divine commission."<sup>8</sup> This obedience he ties to the concept of the ebed Yahweh, and sees it fulfilled primarily in what he calls Jesus' "task of suffering."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 277.



Two further emphases associated with this name emerge in Cullmann. One is that this Son is "radically and uniquely distinguished from all other men . . . sent to all other men to fulfil his task in complete unity with the Father."<sup>10</sup>

Thus Jesus' identity as the "Son of God" expresses His

constant experience of complete unity of will with the Father, the full perception of revelation, which makes itself known to him as a unique recognition of himself by the Father.<sup>11</sup>

The other emphasis in Cullmann is that this is a hidden relationship, a "secret." For this insight Cullmann leans on Matt. 11:27 and 17:17. In the Synoptic Gospels, he says,

the relationship of Jesus with the Father is his exclusive secret, the perception of which demands a supernatural knowledge which can only be given to a man from outside himself--either from the Father, as in the case of Peter (Matt. 16:17); or from Satan, as in the confession of those possessed by demons (Mark 3:11, 5:7).<sup>12</sup>

The recognition that Jesus is the Son of God requires, therefore, some kind of "superhuman understanding."<sup>13</sup> In sum, in the few passages in the Synoptics in which Jesus speaks of himself as the Son of God or simply as the Son,

these two elements always appear: first, the obedience of the Son in fulfillment of the divine plan; second, the profound secret that Jesus has been aware of since his baptism and constantly experiences in executing his obedience, the secret that he is related to God as no other man is.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 283.



There is much of value in Cullmann's insights, especially his emphasis on the Old Testament roots of the terminology of sonship, and on its ethical implications. We shall build on such foundations. Some tensions also arise, however. Cullmann draws no real connection between Israel's sonship and that of Jesus. His stress is rather on Jesus' uniqueness, hence on His discontinuity with Israel. The uniqueness itself seems to be understood more in terms of ontological identity, than of function. The discussion of the "secret" also leaves us dissatisfied. Cullmann does not make clear what it means to know Jesus, or what really inhibits such knowledge. It would not seem valid to assume that Jesus wanted the essential saving truth about Himself and the Father to be a secret. Since Cullmann does not take into consideration or define the basic skandalon against knowledge, we are left with a notion of a kind of undefined spiritual knowledge or unmediated special revelation, akin to enthusiasm. This question is one with which we shall hope to deal more effectively in our present study.

Though our dialogue will be primarily with Cullmann, we wish to acknowledge also the contribution of Reginald H. Fuller in The Mission and Achievement of Jesus.<sup>15</sup> Fuller points out that there is not a single passage in the Synoptics, excepting

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<sup>15</sup>Reginald H. Fuller, The Mission and Achievement of Jesus (London: Student Christian Movement Press, Ltd., 1954), pp. 84-86.



only what he calls "the notorious 'Synoptic thunderbolt from the Johannine sky'" at Matt. 11:27,<sup>16</sup> in which Jesus explicitly calls himself by the name "Son of God." This is not surprising, Fuller suggests, for "Jesus did not come to teach a Christology or doctrine about his person, but to perform a mission."<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Fuller is quite willing to conclude, on the basis of the baptismal encounter, that

Jesus knew himself to be the . . . Son of God in a unique sense, although this is a status he would never directly claim. . . . For sonship means to Jesus not a dignity to be claimed but a responsibility to be fulfilled.<sup>18</sup>

We find this emphasis on the reticence of Jesus to call himself the Son of God rather one-sided, in view of the complete lack of inhibition He exhibits in calling God His Father.

Fuller rightly points out, however, that

to the Hebrew mind the father-son relationship meant far more than a statement of physical origin. It connoted favour and care on the part of the father, and the response of filial love, authority on the one side, and obedience on the other.<sup>19</sup>

These factors contribute to Fuller's definition of Jesus' sonship:

When Jesus calls God his Father in a unique sense, and by implication himself the unique Son, he is not making a Messianic, still less a metaphysical or a mystical statement. Neither Jewish Messianism, nor Hellenistic mythology, nor Nicene metaphysics, nor the modern idea of a unique religious experience gives the clue to the

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 85.



sonship of Jesus as he himself understood it. The Father-Son relationship in which Jesus knew himself to stand is a relationship involving choice and response, authority and obedience. The basic pattern for this relationship is to be found in the sonship of Israel in the Old Testament.<sup>20</sup>

Thus Fuller also sees no basic continuity or identity between the sonship of Israel and that of Jesus, but only conformity to a pattern. To Fuller as to Cullmann the sonship of Jesus is unique, though his definition of the uniqueness differs. Fuller says that, whereas the mission of Israel as the son was to obey the Torah, the mission of Jesus relates to "the eschatological will of God." Jesus is "to proclaim the imminent advent of the Reign of God, and to perform the event in and through which God would set it in motion."<sup>21</sup> Like Cullmann, Fuller sees a close conceptual relationship between the language of sonship and that of the Servant in Deutero-Isaiah.

It is to this kind of inquiry that the present study hopes to make a contribution. We shall not attempt, as others have done, to construct a total Christology, or even to trace our single term through the whole of the New Testament. We shall concentrate on one Book, the Gospel of Matthew, and within that Book on one moment, the baptism of Jesus and His first (wilderness) temptation. Resources which contribute to this limited area of study we shall tap, of

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 86.



course. We shall leave many questions still to be answered. Nevertheless, what we lose in breadth we shall hope to gain in depth, and thereby to suggest a course for further inquiry.

Our study falls into three parts. In the first we investigate the idea of "sonship" in relation to the concept of the wilderness. Some relationship between the idea of sonship and that of wilderness would seem to be indicated, since, according to Matthew's presentation, the wilderness plays a role both in the story of the baptism of Jesus and in that of His first temptation, as does also the name "Son of God."<sup>22</sup> In this context we explore the question of the relationship between the sonship of Jesus and that of Israel. We point out that the first pronouncement of the sonship identity of God's people was made in the history of the exodus, and confirmed in the events climaxed by the crossing of the Red Sea--an event which for all its triumph left Israel, the son of God, exposed and helpless in the wilderness. We argue that the baptismal word to Jesus, "This is my beloved Son" (Matt. 3:17), corresponds directly to the ancient word "Israel is my first-born son" (Ex. 4:22). We then test our conclusions against the other Synoptics, and particularly against the common

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<sup>22</sup>Though the second temptation also builds on the name "Son of God," the setting has changed to the temple. In the third temptation the setting is the mountain, and identity of Son is subordinated to that of King. Matt. 4:4-10.



supposition that the baptismal word pronouncing Jesus' sonship is rooted in Isa. 42:1 (cf. Matt. 12:18).<sup>23</sup>

To this point we have not as yet answered the question concerning the relation of Jesus' sonship to that of Israel. We evaluate the hermeneutics of typology over against Matthew's concept of fulfillment and find it wanting. When Matthew speaks of fulfillment, we suggest, he has in mind a vessel. The vessel is God's plan or intention for His son. That plan or goal has been on public display for ages, but Israel has forever frustrated it. Now, in the Son Jesus, God gets what He has wanted all along. The vessel is filled. We find support for this definition, first in the phrase "with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17), and again in the expression of Jesus' determination to "fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). In the context of the latter we explore John the Baptist's question (Matt. 3:14), as well as the terms "fulfil" and "righteousness." We find support for our definition of fulfillment in Matthew's use of the prophet Malachi, as well as in his use of the verb πληρόω in Matt. 23:32 and 5:17. We conclude that Jesus' sonship expresses not merely a typological correspondence with Israel's, but

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<sup>23</sup>On this point we take issue with Cullmann, for whose Christology the rooting of the baptismal word in the suffering servant passages beginning with Isa. 42:1 is a fundamental premise. Cullmann, op. cit., pp. 66-68 and passim. Similarly Fuller, op. cit., p. 81.



His essential identity with Israel, so that His life and action fulfill the sonship of Israel.

In our third part we pursue the question of the uniqueness of Jesus' sonship. A key consideration here is Matthew's emphasis on righteousness. We begin by exploring the relationship of righteousness to repentance, and of the righteousness of Jesus to His own repentance as manifested in His coming to the wilderness to be baptized by John.

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## PART I

### THE SONSHIP OF JESUS IN THE CONTEXT

#### OF THE WILDERNESS

kingdom and explore the function of John's baptism. The significance of its location at the Jordan. We suggest that the kingdom, in Matthew's conception, arrived in the moment of Jesus' baptism by John. Here it was that Jesus as Israel met God and received the promised Spirit. This leads to the final question, of the relationship between sonship and righteousness. We examine the role these two concepts play in the Lament on the Mount, and discover that this dual theme underlies Jesus' parabolic appeal to the son Israel to know his Father and to live out his sonship in righteousness. We suggest that Jesus longs to identify His own sonship with that of Israel, and Israel's with His own. At the same time, however, the appropriation of Israel by Israel's own true "Self" as manifest in Jesus, the Son of God, becomes Israel's last call and eschatological crisis.



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## CHAPTER II

### THE "BAPTISM" AND "TEMPTATION" OF JESUS AND ISRAEL

In Matthew the stories of Jesus' baptism and first temptation are a unity. This is indicated not only by their contiguity, but also by certain basic themes that move from the one into the other. In both accounts the setting is the wilderness. In both the Spirit of God is associated with Jesus. Both give prominent place to the name "Son of God" as applied to Jesus, and both are concerned with obedience or righteousness. To some extent the same unity is evident in Mark 1:9-12. Mark, however, does not record the substance of Jesus' temptation. Hence his record gives no direct indication that the focus of the temptation is the name "Son of God." Luke interposes the genealogy of Jesus between the stories of His baptism and temptation, thus breaking the continuity between the two (Luke 3:21-4:12). An investigation into the concept "Son of God" and centering in the baptism and temptation narratives will, therefore, focus inevitably on the Gospel according to St. Matthew. It is, of course, this very feature in Matthew which has suggested the present study.

Once we are alerted to the continuity in Matthew's account between the baptism of Jesus and His first temptation, another possibility suggests itself. The whole situation seems, then, to correspond in some ways to the exodus history



of Israel. It is our purpose in this chapter to survey such correspondences, for from these the questions arise to which we then address ourselves.

As a first correspondence between this history of Jesus and that of Israel in the exodus, we may note that each marks the beginning of a divine activity. The baptism of Jesus is the inaugural event for His appearance and ministry. In effect, the context suggests, the work of John the Baptist is hereby climaxed and in a sense completed. Whereas in Matt. 3:2 it is John who cries, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," Matt. 4:17 puts these words into the mouth of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> The scene of baptism implies inauguration, and it looks toward the work and destiny now to unfold.<sup>2</sup>

Parallel to this, the exodus inaugurates the history of Israel and looks at the same time toward the destiny God has in store for this people. Israel's later theology of her covenant relation to God, her calling, and her destiny, is consistently rooted in the events of the deliverance from Egypt and the wilderness era.<sup>3</sup> Since the Exodus is regarded

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<sup>1</sup>Scripture quotations are in the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup>The inaugural character of the baptism of Jesus is indicated by Mark, whose opening words are "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). The reading "the Son of God" in this verse is disputed, however, the chief witness for its exclusion being the codex Sinaiticus.

<sup>3</sup>Ulrich W. Mauser, Christ in the Wilderness (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1963), pp. 16-17, comments



as the moment of Israel's "creation" as the people or "son" of God (Deut. 32:6; Mal. 2:6), there may be some justification in applying to that event the analogy of a "birthday." Moses at the border of Canaan can survey the events and define their implication in the words, "Keep silence and hear, O Israel: this day you have become the people of the Lord your God" (Deut. 27:9). We do not thereby deny or minimize the patriarchal history and promises, to which even Ex. 2:24 refers. Those promises we might liken to the inception of pregnancy, and the years of bondage to the darkness of the womb.<sup>4</sup> In any case, in the later history the exodus is regarded as the beginning of the history of the chosen race, and pointing to a future destiny of service and blessing.

Secondly, the baptism of Jesus and the exodus of Israel correspond in that the event in each instance includes a divine pronouncement, a word of grace, consisting basically in the conferring of a name. In the case of Jesus that word is the baptismal sentence, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17), by which declaration God relates

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on the fact that while some Old Testament passages point to the deliverance from Egyptian bondage as the central point of Israelite faith (Hos. 12:9; 13:4), others see the wilderness period as decisive (Hos. 9:10). "It is probably safer to assume that at least since the eighth century the themes of the exodus and the wilderness were so thoroughly amalgamated that whenever either of them was mentioned the association of the other was covertly implied."

<sup>4</sup>In Abraham's vision (Gen. 15:12ff.), "a dread and great darkness" is associated with the period of enslavement of his descendants.



Jesus to Himself. The exodus history of Israel rests upon a similar divine pronouncement. Two basic names are spoken upon Israel in that context, both of them fundamental to her future history. The one name is "my people." A classic statement of its implications is Ex. 6:7-8:

I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.

The concepts of destiny, relationship, and promise conveyed in these words have their parallel in the Fatherly word to Jesus at His baptism. More important for our purposes, however, is the other basic name which the exodus history attaches to Israel, the name, "my son." The key passage is Ex. 4:22, where the Lord commands Moses to say to Pharaoh:

Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me"; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son.

The name "my son" here conferred by the Lord on Israel is more than just a name. The context suggests two immediate implications. One is that God will deliver His son from Egypt. The son will have freedom and security in the Father, and the proud might of Egypt will not be able to touch him. The other is that the son is to serve the Father, to participate in the work of the Lord.

In the later history this name, "my son," is not forgotten, though most of the passages in which it recurs reflect



a kind of divine disappointment and frustration. The son proves to be an unrighteous child who will not come through in faithfulness to serve the Father, share His mind, and do His will. Yet God never ceases to yearn that Israel be His son in spirit and in truth. See, for example, the following:

They have dealt corruptly with him, they are no longer his children because of their blemish; they are a perverse and crooked generation. Do you thus requite the Lord, you foolish and senseless people? Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you? (Deut. 32:5-6)

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me. . . . Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. (Hos. 11:1-3)

Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand. (Is. 1:2-3)

For he said, Surely they are my people, sons who will not deal falsely; . . . For thou art our father . . . thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer from of old is thy name. (Is. 63:8,16)<sup>5</sup>

We shall see that the pronouncement of the name "my Son" on Jesus at His baptism must be understood not only in relation to the naming of Israel in the exodus, but also in relation to the long history of the failure of this son to live out the implications of his name.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Oscar Cullmann, The Christology of the New Testament, translated from the German by Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 273, gives additional references. See also Mauser, op. cit., p. 28; and George Nickelsberg, "Sons of God," The Seminarian (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis), LII, No. 1 (December 1960), 27-34.

<sup>6</sup>The exodus history is also the moment in which God



There is a third correspondence between the baptism-temptation story of Jesus and the exodus history of Israel. In both instances the name "my son" is spoken, not merely by words, but by an event. Israel could never separate its identity as son from the events of the exodus which confirmed this initial promise of God and turned the word into reality. God not only named Israel His son and people; He also summoned them to leave, performed the plagues on the Egyptians, opened the Red Sea for them and closed it on their pursuing enemy, sustained His people through the wilderness, and finally brought them across the Jordan and into the land. The baptism of Jesus appears to be a small, even insignificant event, when set alongside so dramatic a history. Yet we shall explore the likelihood that John's baptism in a way recalled, epitomized, and re-lived that very history of Israel's deliverance, as focused on the crossing of the Red Sea out of slavery, and of

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reveals His own name YHWH to His people. Mauser discusses this, op. cit., pp. 23-25. In terms of the source hypothesis, he associates the giving of the name at the burning bush (Ex. 3:13f.) with E, but sees an essential statement of the self-revelation of God in J at Ex. 33:19 and 34:6f. In summarizing the significance, Mauser says, "The name of a god or person is not an accidental means of identification; rather it denotes the essence of a being. . . . Only by disclosing the knowledge of his name does Yahweh enable his people to have communication with him." We can only add that God's naming of His people must also be understood as denoting "the essence of their being." It is no light matter, therefore, when God's creative word is thwarted by Israel's reluctance to be the "Son of God" in spirit and in action.



the Jordan into the realization of the promise.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, in this recounting of correspondences, we must mention the temptation of Jesus itself, and its setting in the wilderness. The parallels with the history of Israel are too abundant to be accidental. Israel is led into the wilderness by the pillar of cloud and of fire; Jesus by the Spirit of God.<sup>8</sup> Israel wanders in the wilderness forty years, and at one point succumbs to the terror of Moses' absence for forty days, during which time the people lack any sign of the presence of God (Ex. 32). Jesus is in the wilderness forty days. Israel faces the crises of survival--lack of water and of food; Jesus is hungry. Israel is sustained by divine intervention; angels come and minister to Jesus.

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<sup>7</sup>Mausser, *op. cit.*, cites a study by J. Jeremias in Der Ursprung der Johannestaufe, which on the basis of rabbinical evidence indicates "that the reason given for proselyte baptism was found in the necessity to make the convert undergo the same experience which Israel as a people had once undergone--the passing through the Red Sea. Israel's passage through the Red Sea and under the cloud is assumed to be her baptism which is re-enacted at the baptism of the proselyte. It is established by I Cor. 10:2 that the parallel between baptism and the crossing of the Red Sea was not unknown to Christian interpretation." Without judging the validity of Jeremias' deduction, Mausser does consider it established that "the idea of baptism as a re-enactment of the event which stood at the beginning of Israel's exodus into the wilderness was possible at the time of the Baptist" (p. 88). We shall have occasion to return to this later, in connection with an evaluation of the significance of the Jordan as the location of John's baptising.

<sup>8</sup>Ex. 13:21-22; 14:19-20; 16:10. The cloud is breath (spirit) made visible. A direct association of this cloud and fire with the Spirit of God is indicated in Isaiah 63: 10-14.



True enough, there is in the history of Israel in the wilderness no such obvious tempter as there is in the account of Jesus' temptation. The basic thrust of the first temptation is there, however, and in such a way that the corresponding histories illuminate each other. If the name and identity of "Son of God" is under attack as Jesus is tempted, the same may be said of Israel. They have the name, not only in words but sealed in the action of God, as "the horse and his rider are cast into the sea" (Ex. 15:1). Hardly has the song of victory died away, however, when they take note of their new situation. The prospects are not at all glorious. They are stranded without food and water in the middle of nowhere. The burden of the immediate crisis quickly and repeatedly obscures the events by which the Lord has made Himself known to them. What good is it to be called God's people, or God's son, if they perish with hunger? Instead of trusting the God who called and saved them, they devise their own salvations. They complain and accuse, (Ex. 15-17), they make the calf (Ex. 32), they compute the size of the giants of Canaan and the strength of the walled cities and are ready to return to return to Egypt (Num. 12-14). They want new leaders (Num. 16). They become sick and tired of manna and long to return to Egypt where they at least had fish and meat, onions and garlic



(Num. 11:5f.). It is better to be slaves in Egypt than the "son" of God.<sup>9</sup>

When Moses later reviews the history, he explicitly calls this the history of Israel's "testing," and speaks to it by way of application the very words which Jesus quotes in response to the devil in Matt. 4:4:

And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. . . .

Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you. . . . Take heed lest you forget the Lord your God, by not keeping his commandments and his ordinances and his statutes, which I command you this day: lest when you have eaten and are full . . . then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness . . . that he might humble and test you to do you good in the end. (Deut. 8:2-16)

If Jesus answered the devil out of this very Scripture, we cannot escape the conclusion that He was fully conscious of the whole history of Israel's temptation and fall, in relation to His own wilderness situation. Following Moses, He

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<sup>9</sup>Mausser, *op. cit.*, p. 29, summarizes the rebellion of Israel in the face of these stresses. He speaks of "the threat of death" which "accompanies them continually in various disguises," and makes the valid comment that "the fact that the people lose courage on the way is not interpreted as the breakdown of a noble decision, but as a rebellion against God."



put His finger on the exact point of Israel's failure.

The failure of early Christian fathers to see and develop this correspondence between Jesus and Israel in the baptism and temptation account, imposed upon Christendom a theological handicap that lasted through many centuries. Though the church fought for and kept the Old Testament, it had nevertheless to a considerable degree lost it. The sense of theological history implicit in these Scriptures was utterly foreign to the Gentile church and, with the loss of Jews, beyond recovery. Klaus-Peter Koeppen, in his detailed study of the history of the interpretation of the temptation story, points out that patristic emphasis concentrated almost exclusively on the parallel between Jesus and Adam.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the dialogue with the tempter in Matt. 4:1,<sup>11</sup> coupled

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<sup>10</sup>Klaus-Peter Koeppen, Die Auslegung der Versuchungsgeschichte unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Alten Kirche (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1961). Koeppen points out, for example, how Irenaeus handled this material (in Adversus Haereses, V.21). Irenaeus begins with the mention of the birth of Jesus from a virgin, from which he recalls Gen. 3:15. This introduces the conflict with Satan, which is therefore a recapitulation. "Christus nennt sich deshalb Menschensohn, weil er Adam in sich recapitulierte, denn durch einen Menschen sind wir zugrunde gerichtet worden, und durch einen Menschen sollen wir wieder aufgerichtet werden." Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>11</sup>Though both Jewish and Christian exegesis of Genesis 3 has long identified the serpent with the devil, this association cannot be taken for granted, and is not explicit in the text. Though there are limited evidences of a demonology in the Old Testament, the clear consciousness of a single tempter whose express purpose is to incite men to sin, does not emerge until the apocalyptic literature of the post-exilic era. This history is surveyed and instances cited by Trevor Ling, The Significance of Satan (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1961), first chapter. See especially p. 8.



with the Pauline theme of Jesus as the last Adam (Rom. 5:12-18; 1 Cor. 15:20-22, 45), proved an insurmountable distraction. Apart from certain traditional proof passages, the Old Testament lay dormant and essentially unknown for long ages.

We turn now to a closer examination of the name "Son of God" as it occurs in the divine declaration at Jesus' baptism, "This is my beloved son." "If you are the Son of God . . ." (Matt. 3:17; 4:3). By these words the tempter tries to cast doubt on the word spoken by the Father, and to exploit against the testimony of God the evidences of hunger and loneliness which seem to contradict it. Thus, as Matthew seems to indicate, the temptation itself presupposes the Word which antecedes it, and has meaning only in the light of that word. The unity between these two stories in terms of the name "Son of God" is, as we have indicated, a feature peculiar to the first Gospel, and the starting point of our investigation.<sup>1</sup>

A second peculiarity in Matthew is the grammatical form of the Father's declaration from heaven. In Mark 1:11 the sentence is, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased." Luke's rendering is identical to Mark's, although in the so-called "Western texts" the sentence is replaced by

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 3:17. The article "if" occurs in Matthew's account of the mockery at the cross: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross. . . . He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desired him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (Matt. 27:40, 43). Neither Mark nor Luke has such a saying.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE BAPTISMAL WORD

In Matthew's presentation the declaration of the voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son," is immediately answered by the challenge of the devil, "If you are the Son of God . . ." (Matt. 3:17; 4:3). By these words the tempter tries to cast doubt on the word spoken by the Father, and to exploit against the testimony of God the evidences of hunger and loneliness which seem to contradict it. Thus, as Matthew seems to indicate, the temptation itself presupposes the Word which antecedes it, and has meaning only in the light of that Word. The unity between these two stories in terms of the name "Son of God" is, as we have indicated, a feature peculiar to the first Gospel, and the starting point of our investigation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Supra, p. 11. The Satanic "if" recurs in Matthew's account of the mockery at the cross "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross. . . . He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (Matt. 27:40,43). Neither Mark nor Luke has such a saying.



a direct quotation from the Septuagint reading of Ps.2:7, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." Whereas both Mark and Luke have the Word as an address to Jesus spoken in the second person, Matthew has the third person: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."<sup>2</sup> How shall we account for such a variation? It is true that Mark 9:7, in the context of the transfiguration, has the voice speak in the third person, exactly as in Matt. 3:17.<sup>3</sup> The change of person is appropriate at this point, however, for now there is an audience of witnesses for whom the declaration is intended. At the baptism, when there is no such audience, Mark presents the word as having been spoken in the second person, addressed to Jesus Himself. Assuming that the Gospel of Mark was a basic resource when our first Gospel was written, we might explain Matthew's variation by arguing that the first evangelist inadvertently employed Mark's transfiguration wording in his own account of the baptism of Jesus. A more reasonable explanation for Matthew's choice of the third person, we suggest, is that he recognizes and wants to reflect the essential correspondence between this word spoken concerning Jesus, and the ancient Old Testament word spoken of Israel

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<sup>2</sup>The variant "You are" (second person) is found in a few manuscripts, notably D (Codex Bezae), probably through the influence of its parallels in the other Gospels.

<sup>3</sup>Matthew's wording of the declaration at the transfiguration (Matt. 17:5) is exactly that of Matt. 3:17 and Mark 9:7.



in Ex. 4:22. There God had made the declaratory statement, "Israel is my first-born son." Here, we suggest, God fulfills that pronouncement in another declaratory statement, "This is my beloved son." (Matt. 3:17)

Can this proposal be established? It must be granted, of course, that in spite of similarities, the two statements (Ex. 4:22 and Matt. 3:17) are not really identical. For example, in the one we have the word "Israel," in the other merely the pronoun "this." This variation is hardly critical, however. If an essential identity can be demonstrated between the rest of the respective sentences, the inevitable conclusion will be that Matthew intends to equate "this" with "Israel," and thus to point to Jesus as the realization of God's covenant word concerning His people in Egypt.

A further difficulty is that the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew at Ex. 4:22 offers no encouragement to our proposal. The Hebrew reads  $\text{בְּרִאשׁוֹן} \text{ בְּנִי} \text{ יִשְׂרָאֵל}$ . With almost an absolute literalness the Septuagint reproduces the Hebrew even in its word order,  $\text{υἱὸς πρωτότοκός μου Ἰσραήλ}$ . But this very literalness neutralizes any contribution the Septuagint translation might otherwise make, positively or negatively, to our present discussion. Matthew, as we shall illustrate in other contexts, is not bound to the familiar Greek versions.<sup>4</sup> More often than not he does his own

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<sup>4</sup>Infra., pp. 36f.



translating, and he seems to abhor the rigid literalism which often characterizes the Septuagint. The thought is what matters, not the words. Therefore it is not at all difficult to imagine that Matthew thinks of Ex. 4:22 as saying, Ἰσοεὐὴλ ἔστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ πρωτότοκος, in conscious and even deliberate parallelism of structure to the baptismal word, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός (Matt. 3:17).

Granting all this, we are left still with one decisive problem, and that is the variation in adjectives. Ex. 4:22 has Ἰσοεὐὴλ or πρωτότοκος. Matt. 3:17 has ἀγαπητός. In the first instance the son is called "first born," in the second "beloved." Yet even this difference is not as great as may at first glance appear. C. H. Turner in a significant article has demonstrated that the word ἀγαπητός, when associated with the masculine or feminine singular in the Septuagint, must mean "only."<sup>5</sup> In classical Greek usage, as he shows, ἀγαπητός regularly meant an only child. Liddell and Scott, in fact, offer as the primary definition of the term, "that wherewith one must be content, hence of only children." That the word takes on the meaning "beloved" in the Septuagint in association with plurals or with the neuter gender, Turner acknowledges. But he insists,

The assertion may be safely hazarded that when ἀγαπητός is used in connection with υἱός, θυγάτηρ, παῖς, or

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<sup>5</sup>C. H. Turner, "Ο ΥΙΟΣ ΜΟΥ Ο ΑΓΑΠΗΤΟΣ," The Journal of Theological Studies, XXVII (January 1926), 113-29.



similar words, no Greek of pre-Christian times would have hesitated in understanding it of an "only child," or would for a moment have thought of any other meaning as possible.<sup>6</sup>

In the Septuagint ἀγαπητός is used in a number of passages to render the Hebrew יְחִידִי, meaning "only child."<sup>7</sup> The illustration which is of particular significance for our study, since it contains almost the exact phraseology of the baptismal word, is Gen. 22:2. Here the Septuagint reads Ἄβελ τὸν υἱόν σου τὸν ἀγαπητόν, ὃν ἠγάπησας, translated "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love . . ." Was Matthew conscious of a relationship between the account of Abraham's call to sacrifice his יְחִידִי, and the event he unfolds in his Gospel, concerning that Father who Himself actually carries through the act which He did not finally demand of Abraham, namely, the offering of His Son, His יְחִידִי or ἀγαπητός? Turner would reply with an unqualified "Yes," not only because the "thrice repeated" phrase in Gen. 22:2,12,16 is so exact a

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>7</sup>Gen. 22:2,12,16; Amos 8:10; Jer. 6:26; Zech. 12:10. Elsewhere יְחִידִי is translated μονογενής as in Ps. 22:21; 25:16; 35:17. In Judges 11:34 Septuagint (A) amplifies the word in describing Jephthah's daughter by both terms, καὶ αὕτη μονογενής αὐτῷ ἀγαπητή. Codex B here has simply μονογενής. Commentators generally agree that the variation in the Septuagint renderings is due to different translators, and that John's ὁ μονογενής υἱός in 1:18 and 3:16,18 is equivalent to the "beloved" or "only Son" of the Synoptics. On μονογενής as meaning "only" in John, see Dale Moody, "God's only Son: The Translation of John 3:16 in the R.S.V.," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXXII (1953), 213. For μονογενής as expressing יְחִידִי, see also Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38.



counterpart of the word of the Father at the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus, but also because St. Paul's reference to the Father who "did not spare His own Son" (*οὐκ ἐφείσατο*, Rom. 8:32) so obviously leans on the *οὐκ ἐφείσω τοῦ υἱοῦ σου τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ* of Gen. 22:16, and thus reflects the early consciousness in the Church of this association. "No story in the Old Testament is more susceptible of a Christian application," is his judgment.<sup>8</sup> For our purposes it is enough to be aware that, whatever emotional implications the term may carry, the fundamental meaning of *ἀγαπητός* is "only," the only Son the Father has.

This does not yet establish an essential identity between the "first-born" son of Ex. 4:22 and the "beloved" Son of Matt. 3:17. Even granting that "beloved" means "only," the Hebrew behind it is *ט"ן*, while the Hebrew of Ex. 4:22 is *בְּכֹרֶת*. The former is rendered in the Septuagint by *ἀγαπητός* or sometimes by *μονογενής*. For the latter the Septuagint regularly has *πρωτότοκος*. Yet we do detect here a movement in the direction of convergence, for *ט"ן* and *בְּכֹרֶת* are conceptually quite closely related. In one passage, the parallelism suggests that here at least they are to be regarded as synonymous:

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and

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<sup>8</sup>Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 123.



supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only child (Hebrew  $\text{יָחִיד}$ , LXX  $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\pi\eta\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ ), and weep bitterly over him as one weeps over a first-born (Hebrew  $\text{בְּכֹרֶת}$ , LXX  $\pi\epsilon\omega\tau\acute{o}\tau\omicron\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ ). (Zech. 12:10)<sup>9</sup>

Ordinarily, of course, the terms are not synonymous. Though the "only son" is of necessity also the "first-born," the reverse is not necessarily true. Both terms imply peculiar responsibility, special rights as to inheritance, and therefore a special relationship to the Father. Both terms have their emotional overtone also, but the  $\text{יָחִיד}$  to a higher degree, since if he should be lost, there is no alternative son to fill his role.

The final question we must ask, then, is whether there may be a reason why the baptismal word, assuming it relates basically to the covenant declaration in Ex. 4:22, should substitute  $\text{יָחִיד}$  for  $\text{בְּכֹרֶת}$ ,  $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\pi\eta\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$  for  $\pi\epsilon\omega\tau\acute{o}\tau\omicron\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ . In Gen. 22:2  $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\pi\eta\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$  is obviously appropriate. Isaac is the only son of Abraham, at least in the sense that he is the only son to whom God has attached His promise. In Ex. 4:22 the reason for the choice of "first-born" over "only" is less clear. May we infer that God's intention is here reflected, to have other sons through the instrumentality of Israel? If so, we could see the promised blessing of the nations hinted in this

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. John 19:37.



language.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps, all that is intended is the sharpening of the threat against Pharaoh's "first-born son."

We return then, to Matt. 3:17. If Matthew does see a basic connection between God's ancient declaration concerning Israel and this declaration concerning Jesus, he must also consider the change from *πρωτότοκος* to *ἀγαπητός* both appropriate and necessary. The reason would not be hard to see. Jesus here stands to the Father in utter uniqueness. Everything rests on Him. All the pride and purpose, yet with it all the tension and potential agony associated with the *Τ' Π'*, is here confessed by the Father. This the *ἀγαπητός* conveys. Essentially, therefore, the change in terminology from *πρωτότοκος* in Ex. 4:22 to *ἀγαπητός* in Matt. 3:17 would not refute our initial proposal, that the baptismal word concerning Jesus has its Old Testament roots in God's declaration to Pharaoh, "Israel is my first-born son."

Elsewhere in the New Testament Jesus is indeed called the "first-born," the *πρωτότοκος*. St. Paul, for instance, reverts to the concept of the *רִבְּוֹן*, and with reason. Through Jesus the Son we too have become the sons of God. He is the

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<sup>10</sup>One wonders whether St. Paul may not derive his application of *πρωτότοκος* to Jesus from just such a sequence of thought. In Rom. 8:29 he speaks of Jesus as the Son of God, the first-born among many brethren. In this same context is Rom. 8:32, the passage which Turner cites as relating to Gen. 22:16 (*supra*, p. 27), "God did not spare his own son." Here Paul has *τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ*, while the Genesis passage has (in the Septuagint) *τοῦ υἱοῦ σου τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ*. Conceptually the two expressions may be very close.



"first-born among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29); "the first-born of all creation" (Col. 1:15); "the first-born from the dead" (Col. 1:18). In the baptismal word, however, by the necessity of the task before Jesus, by the totality of the Father's investment in Him, the concept of the "first-born" must be narrowed even more radically to the "only." This Jesus is Israel, but He is also Israel's final moment and narrowest focus.

"This is my beloved (my only) Son."

The possibility that Ex. 4:22 may be the Old Testament root for the baptismal word has not been recognized or adequately explored. The margin of the Nestle text of the Greek New Testament omits it as a cross reference, though it cites Gen. 22:2; Ps. 2:7; Is. 42:1; and Jer. 31:10. Cullman and Fuller call attention to the passage, as we have said,<sup>11</sup> but do not associate it with the baptism of Jesus. Mauser comes close, for his concentration on the wilderness theme in Mark inevitably leads to a stress on the events of the exodus.

The words of the heavenly voice are based on Old Testament words. Ps. 2:7 and Is. 42:1 are used, but Taylor remarks rightly that it is not a quotation and echoes other Old Testament passages. At any rate the great theme of sonship is introduced, whose vital connexion with the wilderness theology in the Old Testament has already been pointed out. In the wilderness, Israel is first designated to be the son of Yahweh (Ex. 4:22f.; Hos. 11:1; Jer. 2:2), and in the event of Israel's return to the desert her sonship will be renewed. In

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<sup>11</sup>Supra, pp. 2-7. Similarly Vincent Taylor, The Names of Jesus (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1953), p. 42. Also Edward P. Blair, Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 62.



Jesus the old prophecy is fulfilled. Israel is, so to speak, concentrated in the person of Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

A difficulty still to be faced is the quotation of Is. 42:14 in Matt. 12:18-21. Here we find some very obvious verbal correspondences to the baptismal sentence. Must we conclude that the Old Testament root of the declaration of sonship at Jesus' baptism lies in the servant poems of Isaiah? To this question we now turn.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ulrich W. Mauser, Christ in the Wilderness (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1963), p. 96.

<sup>13</sup>A word may be in order regarding the possibility that the baptismal declaration be associated with Ps. 2:7, "You are my son, today I have begotten you." In Luke's account of the baptism, many witnesses transcribe this verse verbatim from the Septuagint into the text (Luke 3:22). These include D, most of the old Latin manuscripts, and the indirect support of Justin, Clement, Origen, Methodius, Hilarius, and Augustine. Albert Huck, A Synopsis of the First Three Gospels (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1936), places it into the text. The major attraction here is three-fold. (1) The second person construction conforms to the baptismal word as found in Mark and Luke. (2) The designation "my Son" occurs here, and is defined by "begotten," in complete conformity with the Lucan birth narrative. (3) There is a strong accent on Messianic identity, for this "Son" in Psalm 2 is expressly called also the "anointed" (v. 2), and God's "king" (v. 6). We suspect that this is a later interpretation of the baptismal word. The "son" of Psalm 2 is the king, as in 2 Sam. 7:14, Ps. 72:1; 89:26-27. We concur with Oscar Cullmann that the king is designated the son of God because he embodies the nation which first bears the name (Christology of the New Testament. Translated from the German by Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957], p. 273), but also that in the New Testament the Son of God theme and the Messiah theme must be carefully distinguished (*ibid.*, p. 274). It is worthy of note in Matthew that, apart from the birth narratives, the name "Christ" does not occur with reference to Jesus until 11:1. The entire concentration of the early chapters is on Jesus as the Son of God, the fulfillment of the sonship of Israel.



## CHAPTER IV

### ISAIAH 42:1 IN RELATION TO THE BAPTISMAL WORD

In chapter 12:18 Matthew quotes from Is. 42:1, "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased," ἰδοὺ ὁ παῖς μου ὃν ἠρέτισα, ὁ ἀγαπητός μου ὃν εὐδόκησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου.

Two elements of the Father's baptismal proclamation are expressed in this verse. Jesus is called "my beloved," and He is described as the one with whom the Father is "well pleased." Though the structure of the clause ὃν εὐδόκησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου differs from the ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα of Matt. 3:17, the link between the passages seems obvious. The only element of the baptismal sentence that seems to be lacking in this quotation from Isaiah is the name "Son," but even this can be inferred from παῖς, which allows the meaning "child" as well as "servant." The ready conclusion is that the purpose of the word spoken at Jesus' baptism is to proclaim His identity as the "servant" of Is. 42:1ff. and of its companion pieces in so-called Deutero-Isaiah. Further encouragement toward this conclusion is supplied by the very next sentence of Is. 42:1, "I will put my Spirit upon him." In the account of Jesus' baptism this becomes a visible reality in the descent of the dove.

For Cullmann's Christology this inference is a key



premise, and he returns to it again and again. His initial argument on this issue is as follows:

At which point in his earthly life did Jesus reach the consciousness that he had to realize the task of the ebed? The key to the solution of this problem is the voice from heaven which Jesus hears when he is baptized by John in the Jordan (Mark 1:11 and Parallels). The saying, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased," is a quotation from Is. 42:1. In the Old Testament these words are addressed to the ebed Yahweh; indeed, they are the introduction to the ebed Yahweh hymns.<sup>1</sup>

Cullmann continues:

We may consider it certain that the words of the voice from heaven are really a citation of this passage in Isaiah. Nothing to the contrary may be deduced from the fact that Mark 1:11 translates the Hebrew ebed with  $\pi\alpha\iota\varsigma$  instead of  $\nu\acute{\iota}\omicron\varsigma$ , the translation in the Septuagint and in Matt. 12:18.  $\pi\alpha\iota\varsigma$  means both "servant" and "son" (and this is relevant also for the translation of ebed) . . .<sup>2</sup>

Appealing as this argument may appear on the surface, there are considerations which give us pause. A major one is the maverick character of Matthew's rendering of Is. 42:1-4 in Matt. 12:18-21. It is curious that his wording does not derive from the Septuagint, but represents a radical departure from the traditional Greek version. The Septuagint translates Is. 42:1:  $\gamma\acute{\iota}\alpha\kappa\omega\beta\ \delta\ \pi\alpha\iota\varsigma\ \mu\omicron\upsilon\cdot\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\iota\lambda\acute{\eta}\mu\psi\omicron\mu\alpha\iota\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\cdot\ \gamma\iota\omicron\epsilon\alpha\eta\lambda\ \delta\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\lambda\epsilon\kappa\tau\acute{\omicron}\varsigma\ \mu\omicron\upsilon\cdot\ \pi\epsilon\omicron\sigma\epsilon\delta\acute{\epsilon}\xi\alpha\tau\omicron\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu\ \eta\ \psi\upsilon\chi\acute{\eta}\ \mu\omicron\upsilon\cdot$ <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Oscar Cullmann, The Christology of the New Testament. Translated from the German by Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p.66.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. See this entire context in Cullmann. Similarly, pp. 276, 283f.

<sup>3</sup>The reference to Jacob and Israel in the Septuagint text



A comparison with Matthew's rendering reveals that the only words he has in common with the Septuagint are the designation  $\delta\ \pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho\varsigma\ \mu\omicron\upsilon$ . Yet these words, Cullmann notwithstanding, contribute nothing to the baptismal word as we have it in Matt. 3:17.

Shall we conclude that Matthew does not know the Septuagint version of the Scriptures? Such an inference is not justified. In the very next sentence, "I will put my spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles," Matthew follows the Septuagint exactly except in his choice of verbs. For "I will put" he has  $\theta\acute{\eta}\sigma\omega$  in place of the Septuagint's  $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\delta\omega\kappa\alpha$ , certainly a less literal rendering of the Hebrew  $\text{אָנֹכִי}$ . In the second clause, where the Hebrew has  $\text{אָבִי}$  ("he will bring forth"), the Septuagint's  $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\xi\omicron\lambda\omicron\upsilon\sigma\epsilon\iota$  is again quite literal. Matthew's translation,  $\alpha\pi\alpha\gamma\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\iota$  ("he will proclaim"), is natural, and yet true to the original sense. It has the added virtue of being a term which the Church can use to indicate the proclamation of the Gospel. As Matthew proceeds to quote the rest of Is. 42:1-4, he is free to talk Greek, but at the same time to point his words interpretatively toward the situation for the sake of which he is citing the prophecy. The final verse, however, conforms

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may derive from Is. 41:8. The Hebrew for Is. 42:1a reads:

וְיִצְחָק יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂמַח  
וְיִשְׂמַח יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂמַח



exactly to the wording of the Septuagint, "and in his name will the Gentiles hope."

In this quick survey of Matt. 12:18-21 we have, no doubt, betrayed our own conclusion that this is the private translation of the author of this Gospel, though he remains conscious of the Septuagint rendering and employs its wording when it suits him. An alternative possibility would be that Matthew is citing the prophet in some translation familiar to Christians in his time, but now lost to us. This is the position of Willoughby C. Allen in the International Critical Commentary.<sup>4</sup> Allen reasons that the baptismal word even in Mark 1:11 derives from Is. 42:1. Since Matthew's Gospel did not exist when Mark wrote, it follows that Mark (or his source) must have been familiar with a form of Is. 42:1 very much like that preserved for us in Matt. 12:18-21. Hence such a translation must have existed. Thus the theory that the baptismal word derives from Isaiah's servant poem, requires the presupposition of a lost translation of this portion, at least, of the Old Testament, and of its rather wide currency. Such speculation we regard as strained and precarious.

Krister Stendahl in his The School of St. Matthew has thoroughly analyzed all of Matthew's explicit citations from

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<sup>4</sup>Willoughby C. Allen, "A Critical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew," in International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912), pp. 130f.







translating from the Hebrew, or to targumize his renderings in the direction of that interpretation which he wants his readers to catch, which moves Stendahl to conclude that such a "targumizing process has not taken place independently, but in connection with traditions of interpretation known to the Matthew school."<sup>7</sup>

John J. O'Rourke in a recent article has reviewed the Old Testament quotations in Matthew. In his summation he, too, reaches the conclusion that Matthew operates with considerable freedom.

Matthew differs greatly from the Septuagint. . . . It is also obvious that Matthew did use the Septuagint. . . . He never uses the Septuagint when the Hebrew presents a more apt expression for his purposes. . . . With the exception of the rendering of Zechariah 11:12-13, all of the quotations are in general a possible translation and not just an interpretation of the Hebrew. Undoubtedly the author of the Gospel was influenced by the work of others--no man is an island--but the final choice of wording was his.<sup>8</sup>

Neither Stendahl nor O'Rourke feels any need whatsoever to speculate that the author of the Gospel according to St. Matthew may have been operating from some Greek translation of the Old Testament now lost to us.

We may now set forth our conclusions.

1. Whether or not the concluding phrase of the baptismal word, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα, is related to Is. 42:1 by way of

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>8</sup>John J. O'Rourke, "The Fulfillment Texts in Matthew" (*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 1962), pp. 401-3. Italics are Mr. O'Rourke's.



Theodotion's version, we may leave for the moment as an open question. We shall return to this phrase shortly from another perspective.

2. Though the word  $\pi\alpha\iota\varsigma$  in the Septuagint and in Matt. 12:18, rendering the  $\tau\lambda\psi$  of Is. 42:1, may mean "child" as well as "servant," it cannot by itself account for the  $\upsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\varsigma$  in the baptismal declaration.

3. There is no Greek version of Is. 42:1 which can account for the term  $\acute{\alpha}\delta\alpha\pi\eta\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$  in Mark 1:11, presumably the first of the Gospels and a resource for Matt. 3:17. Indeed, there is something very peculiar about Matthew's choice of this term in his rendering of the prophecy of Isaiah. Stendahl comments:

$\delta\ \acute{\alpha}\delta\alpha\pi\eta\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$  lacks a counterpart in any Greek Version of Is. 42:1. When Matthew gives his targumizing interpretation, he uses the verb  $\acute{\alpha}\iota\epsilon\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu$  (which may have the meaning "to adopt") and thereby  $\delta\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\lambda\epsilon\kappa\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$  has been anticipated. It is replaced by the typically N.T.  $\delta\ \acute{\alpha}\delta\alpha\pi\eta\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ , perhaps due to the influence of Mk. 1:11 and 9:7.<sup>9</sup>

If Stendahl's reasoning is sound, and we believe it is, Is. 42:1 cannot be regarded as the Old Testament antecedent of the divine pronouncement at Jesus' baptism. Quite the contrary, it is the baptismal word which influences and

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<sup>9</sup>Stendahl, *op. cit.*, p. 110. We shall have occasion later to examine more closely Matthew's use of  $\acute{\alpha}\iota\epsilon\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu$ . See *infra.*, p. 56.



determines Matthew's rendering of Isaiah in the quotation at Matt. 12:18.<sup>10</sup>

4. If the words οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός do have an Old Testament antecedent, that antecedent cannot be either Is. 42:1 or Ps. 2:7.<sup>11</sup> We hold that the antecedent is Ex. 4:22. Once this connection is recognized, however, it affects our

<sup>10</sup>That Matthew cites Is. 42:1-4 in such a way that his readers cannot miss its association with the familiar baptismal word, is altogether appropriate to his purpose in the context of the twelfth chapter. Here Jesus encounters, on the one hand, the hatred of the Pharisees which threatens Him with death (Matt. 12:14). On the other hand He encounters the enthusiastic support of men who are excessively eager to make Him known, a zealous pressure, we may presume, toward a political Messiahship (vv. 15-16). In such a situation Matthew cites Isaiah 42 to show what Jesus really is. He is not the warrior of the zealots (Matt. 12:19-21), but neither is He the blasphemer against the Law. He is the servant who truly represents and expresses the character of God (Matt. 12:18). This implies ultimately that He, as the servant, will not resist but submit to the hatred of men. If his readers knew the Septuagint translation, to which Matthew's ὁ παῖς μου would surely direct their attention, they could hardly miss the point of the message. In effect Matthew is preaching Christ out of an Old Testament text, and this was without a doubt a basic and familiar characteristic of Apostolic preaching.

<sup>11</sup>To the voices that connect the baptismal sentence to these passages we may add that of Adolph Schlatter, Der Evangelist Matthaeus (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1948), p. 94. Schlatter makes reference to Gen. 22:2, but not to Ex. 4:22. Also Julius Schniewind, Das Evangelium nach Matthaeus (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950), p. 26, omits any reference to Ex. 4:22. His resources are 2 Sam. 2:14; Ps. 89:27f; Ps. 2:7. The reference to God's pleasure in His Son he derives from Is. 42:1. Schniewind, like Gullmann, lays considerable stress on the servant theme. "Der Knecht ist Der, den Gott liebt vor allen Andern, denn er erfuehlt Gottes Rat an Israel und an allen Voelkern (Jes. 42:1), erfuehlt ihn durch Sterben und Auferstehen (Jes. 53)." Loc. cit.



entire outlook on Matthew's concept of Jesus as the Son of God. Then the name "Son" spoken to Him at His baptism serves to identify Him with the son Israel. At the same time it relates Him to the Father in the very way in which God had wanted the son Israel to be related to Himself. In Jesus' baptism the son Israel is baptized. The temptation He enters as the Son of God is Israel's temptation.

Such assertions require further exploration, however. In our second part we face the question of the relationship of the sonship of Jesus to the sonship of Israel.

THE SONSHIP OF JESUS AS THE  
FULFILLMENT OF ISRAEL



CHAPTER V

MATTHEW'S CONCEPT OF FULFILLMENT

It is not necessary to suspect at this point that the...  
...of the correspondences between the...  
...of Jesus and that of ancient Israel has...  
...which were thus suggested by the familiar context...

PART II

THE SONSHIP OF JESUS AS THE  
FULFILLMENT OF ISRAEL

...of history, as...  
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## CHAPTER V

### MATTHEW'S CONCEPT OF FULFILLMENT

We have reason to suspect at this point that Matthew's interest in the correspondence between the wilderness experience of Jesus and that of ancient Israel has dimensions more profound than those suggested by the familiar concept of "typology."

Though G. W. H. Lampe, in his essay on "The Reasonableness of Typology,"<sup>1</sup> does not formally define his term, his understanding of it may be inferred from a number of statements. He calls typological interpretation the exercise of "ingenuity in balancing Old Testament incidents and characters against their New Testament antitypes in such a way that both contribute to expound the Christian Gospel."<sup>2</sup> Typology is the discernment by New Testament writers of prophetic foreshadowings in the history of Israel.<sup>3</sup> It is seeing "the past episodes of Israel's history as a foreshadowing of the future."<sup>4</sup>

As this author sees it, the dilemma which the historical

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<sup>1</sup>In G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woolcombe, Essays on Typology (London: Student Christian Movement Press Ltd., 1957), passim.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 20.



approach to the Bible has raised for the modern reader is much like that

which confronted the Church of the second century; either the typological and allegorical method of dealing with the Old Testament, so as to make it readable as a Christian book, or the more drastic solution advocated by Marcion. Either follow such rules of exegesis as will allow the Gospel to be read out of the Hebrew Scriptures, or throw away the Old Testament as irrelevant to those who live under the New Covenant.<sup>5</sup>

To Lampe, that typology is reasonable which does not violate or undervalue the integrity of the various writings of the Old Testament in their original settings. There is, after all, a central religious theme, which runs through the entire Old Testament and New in spite of all diversity. The theme of God's people and his covenant with them is basic.

Since the New Covenant which is the basic principle of the Church's life did not abolish but rather fulfilled and completed the old, the books of the New Testament . . . continue that central theme of the covenant relationship between God and his chosen people. . . . It was the immense task of the early Christian preachers and teachers to . . . establish a relationship of prophecy to fulfillment, type to antitype, image to reality. . . .<sup>6</sup>

Similarly,

The Christian will naturally look back on the Old Covenant with its fulfillment in Christ continually in mind, and he will be able to discern in the light of the fulfillment how the earlier stages in the working out of the divine purpose, each of which was significant for its own time, fall into place in a harmonious pattern and foreshadow the character of the final culmination.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 24. Our emphasis.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 27.



Lampe's concept of typology may be valid as far as it goes; yet it leaves us uncomfortable and dissatisfied. Establishing the relationship of prophecy to fulfillment was not, we feel, "an immense task of early Christian preachers and teachers," or, if it was, a dreadful loss had been suffered by the Church. For this relationship was there! It was, and had to be, inherent in the situation of Jesus Himself. If it was not altogether real in the moment of His impact and ministry, no forcible effort of men could succeed in establishing it later, nor could there be any sufficient reason to make the effort. The unity between Jesus and the Old Testament was a fundamental "given" in His own life and ministry. It cannot be the task of the Church to "establish a relationship of prophecy to fulfillment," but only to recover that understanding of the relationship which was implicit in the event.

We submit that Matthew understood well what that relationship was. To Matthew much more is involved in the concept of fulfillment than type and antitype, shadow and reality, prediction and corresponding event. Let us now propose a definition, and then proceed to demonstrate its validity. By the terminology of fulfillment Matthew expresses his awareness that God has continually and publicly been in pursuit of something, that He has just as continually been frustrated, and that now finally, in Jesus Christ, God fully attains what He has been determined to get. It is as though a vessel were



being filled. The vessel is God's purpose. That vessel has been on continuous display throughout the Old Testament era, for the law and the prophets have made it altogether clear what God wanted His son Israel to be. Now, finally, the vessel is filled. In Jesus God has what He has always been determined to have.

What God wanted through all Old Testament history was a son who would really be a son in the fullest sense of the name. This son would fully share the mind, heart, and will of the Father. He would be the instrument of the Father's purposes, not by compulsion but in freedom, because those purposes were his own. Such a son would know, love, and trust the Father, would reflect on earth the character of the Father, and would value his identity with the Father above all treasures of dignity, comfort, honor, wealth, or life, which the created earth could ever offer him. This is what God was after, as Israel well knew, when He created man in His own image and breathed into his nostrils the breath of His own life (Gen. 1:26; 2:7). This is what God was after, and Israel knew this too, when He called His son out of Egypt and declared, "Israel is my first-born son. Let my son go that he may serve me," and "You shall be my people and I will be your God!" (Ex. 4:22; 6:7) This is what God continually pursued in a long history of judgment and deliverance, threat, and promise--but never found! Deuteronomy



32 is a classic recital of the divine frustration. For example:

You were unmindful of the Rock that begot you,  
and you forgot the God who gave you birth.  
The Lord saw it, and spurned them,  
because of the provocation of his sons and his daughters.  
And he said, "I will hide my face from them,  
I will see what their end will be,  
for they are a perverse generation,  
children in whom is no faithfulness." (Deut. 32:18-20)<sup>8</sup>

Yet, side by side with the picture of such frustration the prophets present another vision: that of the God who will not be frustrated, but will take drastic action on His own to achieve His purpose. Isaiah 59 is a classic statement of this kind of prophecy.<sup>9</sup> The first fifteen verses vividly describe the sin that divides the people from their God. They are a people in whom justice, righteousness, and truth are altogether lacking--these terms depicting the character of God's action that ought to be manifest in the lives of His

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<sup>8</sup>See also the citation of Deut. 32: 4-6 from this song, *supra*, p. 15. The concept of a "perverse and crooked generation" and "children in whom is no faith" (Deut. 32: 5,20) is reflected in Matt. 17:17; perhaps also in the stronger language of Matt. 13:39 and 16:4.

<sup>9</sup>Is. 59:11, "so they shall fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun," seems to be reflected in Matt. 8:11, "Many will come from east and west." That Matthew was familiar with this context might be inferred also from the rather obvious echoes of Is. 60 and the account of the visit of the Wise Man, Matt. 2:1-12. We cite this chapter, however, not on the evidence of any direct use of it in Matthew, but because it affords an effective sample of what we believe Matthew understood by "fulfillment." Other passages with a similar thrust are Is. 63:5 and context; and Ez. 34:11-16 and context. The latter chapter with its "shepherd" theme plays an important role in Matthew's Gospel. Compare Ez. 34:5f. with Matt. 9:36; Ez. 34:17-22 with Matt. 25:32-33; Ez. 34:11-16 with Matt. 10:6; 15:24.



children. Finally, when the Lord finds the failure of His people unbearable, and when there is no one in sight who can bring them to righteousness, God himself takes action.

The Lord saw it, and it displeased him  
 that there was no justice.  
 He saw that there was no man,  
 and wondered that there was no one to intervene.  
 Then His own arm brought Him victory,  
 and His righteousness upheld Him. (Is. 59:15-16)

Such a passage illustrates what fulfillment means in Matthew. In Jesus God Himself takes drastic and final action to achieve His long announced and long frustrated goal, to have the Son who in character and heart truly is His Son and wants to be nothing else, and through whom all His saving purposes for the world may be realized. In Jesus God has the Son of His own heart.

In the context of our present study, this concept becomes clear by way of two phrases in Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism. One is the Father's word, "with whom I am well pleased." The other is Jesus' response to John the Baptist, "It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." The investigation of these concepts is the task of our next two chapters. At the same time, we shall be putting our preliminary definition of Matthew's concept of fulfillment to the test.



## CHAPTER VI

### "WITH WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED"

In the Gospels of Mark and Luke the clause ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα occurs only in the heavenly declaration at Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22).<sup>1</sup> In neither of these Gospels does it recur as part of the parallel declaration in connection with the transfiguration (Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35).<sup>2</sup> Matthew, by contrast, repeats the clause in reporting the words of the voice from heaven at Jesus' transfiguration (Matt. 17:6) and makes a third reference to this theme in his translation of Is. 42:1 (Matt. 12:18). We have reason to believe, then, that these words contribute something essential to Matthew's understanding and proclamation of Jesus as the Son of God. What this factor may be we must now try to determine.

Gottlob Schrenk in his article on εὐδοκέω in Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament surveys two possible accents which this term, usually used in the Septuagint to render the

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<sup>1</sup>We follow Nestle here in assuming that the substitution of Ps. 2:7 for the baptismal word in some manuscripts of Luke is a secondary reading. See supra, p. 31, n. 13.

<sup>2</sup>In the transfiguration word (Luke 9:35), Luke has ὁ ἐκλιθεὶς ἰκλιθεὶς for ὁ ἀγαπητός, perhaps a conscious reference to Is. 42:1. If the ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα really derived from Isaiah, as Cullmann and others have assumed, Luke's failure to repeat that clause here would seem the more curious.



Hebrew נִחַח or נִחַח, may convey.<sup>3</sup> The first is that of God's gracious pleasure in His people because they are His possession, or in individuals belonging to that people. Thus Ps. 149:4 says, "The Lord takes pleasure in his people" (Septuagint: εὐδοκεῖ κύριος ἐν λαῷ αὐτοῦ).<sup>4</sup> In some contexts the additional consideration emerges that God's good pleasure rests on those who fear Him, or who walk in the right way. Ps. 146:11 (Septuagint 147:11) may be cited, "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him." Contrasted with these are the faithless people in whom the Lord does not take pleasure. Here Schrenk cites Jer. 14:10, καὶ ὁ θεὸς οὐκ εὐδόκησεν ἐν αὐτοῖς. In this category he also places Mal. 2:17, a passage to which we shall shortly pay special attention.<sup>5</sup>

The second meaning Schrenk finds for εὐδοκίω in the Septuagint, admittedly less common, is that of choice. His key example is from the extra-canonical Ps. 151, where David says:

He sent his messenger and took me from my father's sheep. My brothers were handsome and strong, and the Lord did not take pleasure in them.

Οὐκ εὐδόκησεν ἐν αὐτοῖς in this instance means simply that they were not chosen. Schrenk finds support for this meaning

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<sup>3</sup>Gottlob Schrenk, "εὐδοκίω," in Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1933), II, 636ff.

<sup>4</sup>Similarly Ps. 43:4 (44:3); Is. 62:4 (B); 2 Kings (2 Sam.) 22:20.

<sup>5</sup>Schrenk, op. cit., p. 738.



in passages which equate God's displeasure with rejection (Verwerfung). Thus Hab. 2:4 is cited, particularly in view of the significance given it in Heb. 10:38, as well as Paul's reference to the Israelites with whom "God was not well pleased" in 1 Cor. 10:5. It is this latter sense of "choosing" which Schrenk finds in Is. 42:1, which he calls the model for the baptismal word in the New Testament.<sup>6</sup>

This evidence, to us rather slender and subject to dispute, Schrenk augments by the circumstance that Is. 42:1 contains a strong accent on "choosing," both in Matthew's *ἡέτιμα* for the Hebrew *יְבָרַךְ*, and in the Septuagint's *ὁ ἐκλεκτός μου* for the Hebrew *יְבָרַךְ*. This context leads Schrenk to the conclusion that the major intent of this final clause in the baptismal sentence is to pronounce Jesus to be God's elect.

Gemeint ist Gottes beschliessende Wahl, naemlich die Erwaehlung des Sohnes, die einschlieszt Sendung und Bestimmung zum koeniglichen Messiasamt. Als *ὁ υἱὸς ὁ ἀγαπητός* ist Jesus der Traeger dieses erwaehlenden Wohlgefallens.<sup>7</sup>

Schrenk does concede, however, that the idea of obedience also plays into the term.

Und zwar empfaengt er das besiegelnde Wort als der Gehorsame, zum Zusammenschluss mit der Suenderwelt Willige, was in der Taufe zum Ausdruck kommt.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>"Diese Bdtg erwaehlen kommt auch zum Ausdruck in Js 42,1, der Vorlage fuer die Taufepiphanie im N.T." Ibid. Schrenk simply assumes the existence of a translation of Is. 42:1 like that found in Matt. 12:18.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.



We suspect that Schrenk is unduly influenced by the initial prejudice; that Is. 42:1 is the source of and must be determinative for the meaning of the sentence spoken from heaven at Jesus' baptism.

That Is. 42:1 cannot be the source of at least the key portion of the baptismal word, ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, has been demonstrated. This declaration we have traced instead to Ex. 4:22, and we have concluded in consequence that a primary function of the baptismal word is to identify the sonship of Jesus with that of Israel. What the nature of that identification is, is our present question, and it involves us inevitably in an examination of Matthew's concept of "fulfillment." Toward this we have suggested a preliminary definition. Matthew is conscious of the divine purpose implicit in Israel's call to sonship, a purpose never realized in the character and service of this "son," but now accomplished to the full in the Son Jesus.

Against this background the meaning of the ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα seems clear and rather obvious. These words are an exclamation of fatherly delight in the achievement of a goal, in the realization of a long-thwarted purpose and dream. We suspect that this is exactly Isaiah's sense in Is. 42:1, when he describes the "servant," God's "chosen," in whom God's soul "delights" (שִׂמְחָה). In the verses that follow Isaiah portrays the character of the "servant," a description which stands in marked contrast to anything Israel has ever been. God's intention



was clear already in the exodus history, when He said to Pharaoh, "Let my son go, that he may serve me" (לֵךְ עִמִּי). Isaiah affirms that God will have His way. The לֵךְ quality of the son will be realized, and by Him God will accomplish His purpose for the world.

So simple and natural an understanding of the ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα is fully consonant with the usages Schrenk has gathered for us. The clause expresses God's good pleasure in His people, and in the individual who embodies that people. Jesus is indeed the chosen. He is one with the elect son Israel. But there is one thing more. The words ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα define the uniqueness of the Son who is called the ἀγαπητός. He is unique in His obedience, unique in the full conformity of His character to the character of the Father. This Son does not and will not thwart the divine purpose, but accomplish it. Thus this final clause of the baptismal word implies a contrast with that other son Israel with whom God is not well pleased. We cannot see these words applied to Jesus without being conscious of the antithesis, e.g., in 1 Cor. 10:5, "With most of them God was not pleased . . ." (οὐκ . . . εὐδόκησεν).<sup>9</sup>

We have left open the possibility, suggested by Stendahl, that the clause ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα in the baptismal word may derive,

<sup>9</sup>Compare Jer. 14:10; Hab. 2:4 (Septuagint); and Mal. 2:17, the discussion of which follows.



by way of Theodotion's version, from Is. 42:1, even though the statement, "This is my beloved son," cannot have its roots here.<sup>10</sup> Let us now explore an alternative possibility, namely, that God's pleasure in Jesus is expressed here in conscious reaction to a prevailing attitude which Malachi protests. Mal. 2:17 reads:

You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them" (Septuagint: ἐν αὐτοῖς αὐτὸς εὐδόκησεν. Hebrew: יְדוֹשֵׁן אֱוִילִים בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה).

In these words, as Malachi sees it, an unrighteous people boasts of its claim on God, and assures itself that it enjoys God's pleasure even in unrighteousness. It may not be coincidence that this image of a self-assured Israel conforms closely to the picture Matthew's Gospel presents of Judaism in its encounter with Jesus (e.g. Matt. 7:21-23). In that case the Father's proclamation at Jesus' baptism, with an eye to just this verse, may serve quite deliberately to define the line of battle between the true and the false son, and to set the Father squarely on the side of the true. The implied antithesis to the sentence, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased," would then be, "and not that son who, though boasting of his relationship to me, refuses really to know or to serve me."

This suggestion gains force when we examine the balance

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<sup>10</sup>Supra, pp. 35ff. But see p. 38, n. 5.



of Mal. 2:17, a further reflection of the arrogance and self-righteousness of a people who now stand ready to accuse God of letting them down. Malachi adds, "Or by asking, 'Where is the God of justice?'" "Justice" in the Hebrew here is  $\text{צְדָקָה}$  but the Septuagint translates  $\text{καὶ ποῦ ἴσται ὁ θεὸς τῆς δικαιοσύνης}$ , "Where is the God of righteousness?" In our next chapter we shall examine the significance of this very word as it occurs in Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism, where Jesus tells John, "It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). Is it sheer coincidence that the dual themes of "righteousness" and of God's "good pleasure" occur both in Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism and in Mal. 2:17?

A careful reading of Malachi reveals, in fact, a number of links between this last of the prophets and our first Gospel. Malachi's third chapter, which follows immediately upon the verse with which we have been dealing, opens with the messenger prophecy which Jesus in Matt. 11:10 applies to John the Baptist. In this very context Mal. 3:1 adds, "The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple," a saying which, we believe, must be taken into account in any interpretation of Jesus' second temptation (Matt. 4:5ff.). Thereupon Malachi proclaims the judgmental character of the day of the Lord, with its purifying fire (Mal. 3:2), a theme amplified in Mal. 4:1 under the imagery of the burning of the stubble, and underlying the thrust of John the Baptist's proclamation



in Matt. 3:10,12. Mal. 4:5 prophesies the coming of Elijah the prophet, a theme which Jesus sees fulfilled in John the Baptist (Matt. 11:14; 17:10-13). The Father-son language as descriptive of the covenant relationship between God and His people occurs in Mal. 1:6 and 2:10, but this is, as we shall see, a prominent theme in Matthew.

We cite these examples only to indicate the likelihood that the author of the Gospel according to St. Matthew was thoroughly immersed in the message of Malachi, and appreciated well the correspondence between the distortions which Malachi protested, and those which Jesus confronted. Let us now direct our special attention to one further passage from Malachi. In Mal. 3:16-18 the Lord expresses once again the hope and desire He has for His people. Speaking of those who "feared the Lord and thought on his name" Malachi says:

They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serve him. Then once more you shall distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

The passage reaffirms the covenant in terms directly reminiscent of Ex. 19:5, where the term "special possession" (סֵדֶרֶת) also occurs. The application to this faithful people of the analogy of "the son who serves him" reminds us of our root passage for the baptismal word (Ex. 4:33), and secondarily of the סֵדֶרֶת in Is. 42:1. Most interesting, however, is the sentence, "I will spare them as a man spares his son who



serves him." For this the Hebrew has:

:חַוֵּי עַל־בְּנוֹ הָעֶבֶד אֲחֻי  
 חַוֵּי עַל־בְּנוֹ הָעֶבֶד אֲחֻי

The Septuagint, however, translates, καὶ αἰρετιῶ αὐτοὺς ὄν  
 τρόπον αἰρετίξει ἀνδρωπος τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν δουλεύοντα αὐτῷ.

Here we find αἰρετίξω, the word that occurs so strangely in Matthew's version of Is. 42:1, ἰδοὺ ὁ παῖς μου ὃν ἠρέτισα (Matt. 12:18)! The word means "choose." In 1 Chron. 28:6 the Septuagint employs it to render רַב־בְּרִי, the substantive of which occurs in Is. 42:1 and is translated "my chosen." David, in announcing Solomon as his successor, quotes God as saying, "I have chosen (ἠρέτικα) him to be my son, and I will be his father."<sup>11</sup> Does the occurrence of this term in Mal. 3:17 govern Matthew's use of it in his translation of Is. 42:1? We believe it does. In this immediate context in Malachi we find the themes of sonship, election, service, righteousness, and judgment by fire, all of which play a role in our Matthean context.

Let us now gather the elements which Matthew associates with the sonship of Jesus, in the context of the baptismal word. We begin with Ex. 4:22, the ancient covenant declaration now spoken upon Jesus, the Son, and implying the Father's purpose "that he may serve me" (Ex. 4:23). We follow Matthew as he directs our attention to Is. 42:1, which the evangelist wants us to associate with the baptismal word, and out of

<sup>11</sup>See the quotation from Stenåahl, supra, p. 38.



which he unfolds the character of the serving Son, the *ἡγαπητός*. But Matthew's *ἡμίτις* also brings Mal. 3:17-18 into the picture. This suggests that Matthew is clearly conscious of an alternative "sonship," and of the necessity of making a distinction. Jesus is the Son who serves the Father. By being this, however, He confronts Israel with a real and final crisis. By His very presence and character He demands that every man in Israel "distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him" (Mal. 3:18), in short, between the true and the false sonship.<sup>12</sup> The clause *ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα* now confirms that this is the issue, for the Lord is wearied by the words of those who say, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them" (Mal. 2:17). With this boast of sonship in unrighteousness God is not well pleased. The Father, therefore, identifies Himself with the sonship of Jesus and summons the false son to repent. Only in total repentance, in the nakedness of honesty, can God's people

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<sup>12</sup>This passage of Malachi is quoted in "The Zadokite Document" of the Dead Sea Scriptures, chapter viii. "But they of Jacob that have repented, that have kept the Covenant of God, shall then speak each to his neighbor to bring him to righteousness, to direct his steps upon the way. And God will pay heed to their words and hearken, and He will draw up a record of those that fear Him and esteem His name (cf. Mal. 3:16), to the end that salvation shall be revealed for all God-fearing men. Then ye shall again distinguish the righteous from the wicked, him that serves God from him that serves Him not." Theodor H. Gaster, The Dead Sea Scriptures (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), p. 73. Our emphasis.



acknowledge that Jesus is the Son, the only Son--in order that God by grace may grant them participation in His sonship and life. Without such repentance they will have no alternative but to rise up against the sonship of Jesus, in defense of that sonship which they claim to be their own. This, we submit, is the primary issue between Jesus and Judaism in the first Gospel. The ministry of Jesus confronts Israel with the judgment which Malachi describes immediately following each of the above passages. Mal. 2:17 leads to Mal. 3:1-3, and Mal. 3:17-18 leads to Mal. 4:1-5.

We have now accounted for every element in Matthew's peculiar translation of Is. 42:1. Let us review the verse phrase by phrase, as it appears in Matt. 12:18. Ἰδοὺ ὁ παῖς μου, Matthew begins. His readers will recognize the familiar Septuagint expression, and will have no difficulty following Matthew in associating the servant with Jesus. The evangelist continues with ὃν ἠρέτισα. By using this term he associates the servant-chosen theme of Isaiah with the chosen-servant-son context of Mal. 3:17-18. The next term, ὁ ἀγαπητός μου, connects Isaiah's prophecy to the baptismal word, and through it to Ex. 4:22. In Jesus the word "Israel is my first-born son. . . . Let my son go that he may serve me" attains its final reality, but only in Jesus. Therefore His sonship brings into judgment any conception that wants to oppose itself to Him. This theme is carried through by the final clause, "with whom I am well pleased." Matthew's



translation of Is. 42:1 has to take into account the Hebrew *נַפְשִׁי*, "my soul," and may reflect also a consciousness of the Septuagint's rendering of Hab. 2:4. There the Lord declares of those who cannot trust Him, οὐκ εὐδοκῆσιν ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἐν αὐτῷ.<sup>13</sup> Matthew's wording is οὐκ εὐδόκησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου. It seems to us that Matthew's choice of words here can be adequately explained without assuming that he knew or needed recourse to Theodotion's version. This clause means that God fully identifies Himself as the Father with that sonship which is manifest now in Jesus.

We believe that Matthew's readers understood all of this without difficulty. They had access to the Septuagint and knew the passage well enough. What Matthew did in his translation was to identify the "servant" of Isaiah's poem with Jesus, who in His baptism was declared by the Father to be the fulfillment of His creative word to ancient Israel.

Our initial definition of fulfillment in Matthew's Gospel finds confirmation, then, in the ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα. It gains further support as we consider another sentence in this baptismal context, "It is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness." (Matt. 3:15)

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<sup>13</sup>The familiarity of the early church with this context in Habakkuk may be inferred from the fact that the very next clause, "But the righteous shall live by his faith," is quoted in Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; and Heb. 10:38.



## CHAPTER VII

### "FULFIL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS"

#### A. John's Question

A brief dialogue with John the Baptist which prefaces the baptism of Jesus is peculiar to Matthew (3:14-15).

John would have prevented him saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness."

Critical questions as to whether this dialogue actually occurred within the history, or whether perhaps it is Matthew's way of meeting a problem of the Church for whose sake he writes this Gospel, need not detain us. Our great concern is to understand what Matthew would have us know about Jesus.

We have reason to suspect that Matthew's insertion of this little conversation has implications more profound than to answer curious questions like, "How can it be that one who was conceived by the Holy Spirit should have to be baptized in order to receive the Spirit?" Or, "How could one who was sinless submit to a baptism for the remission of sins?" Or, "How could one who was Himself to baptize with the Holy Spirit come to John for baptism with mere water?"<sup>1</sup> Mauser, whose primary concern is, of course, with Mark, remarks in passing:

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<sup>1</sup>Willoughby C. Allen, A Critical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912), pp. 27f.



Matthew, already, felt the necessity of explaining why the sinless one placed himself on a level with all sinners.<sup>2</sup>

Cullmann, though he goes beyond this, is also unsatisfactory. He suggests that the heavenly voice at the baptism answers a question the first Christians asked, "What is the meaning of baptism for forgiveness of sins for Jesus himself?" By way of answer Cullmann suggests:

The other Jews went to John the Baptist to be baptized for their own sins. But when Jesus is baptized just as all the others were, he hears a divine voice which implicitly says to him, "You are not baptized for your own sins, but for those of the whole people. For you are the one whose vicarious suffering for the sins of others the prophet predicted." This may also be the sense of Jesus' words in Matt. 3:15 about "fulfilling all righteousness."<sup>3</sup>

Here again it is evident that Cullmann builds his Christology to an excessive degree on the assumption that the baptismal declaration derives from Is. 42:1. For Cullmann as a consequence, the key factor in Jesus' self-consciousness is that He is the suffering servant, and the central focus of His righteousness and obedience is that He must effect the vicarious atonement.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ulrich W. Mauser, Christ in the Wilderness (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1963), p. 94.

<sup>3</sup>Oscar Cullmann, The Christology of the New Testament. Translated from the German by Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 67.

<sup>4</sup>Supra, pp. 33f. Henrik Ljungman, Das Gesetz erfuellen (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1954), p. 194, comments that the tendency of interpreters to burden the context with an alien question (e.g., Why did Jesus who was not a sinner have to submit to baptism?) leads them to miss Matthew's point. As



Two factors encourage us to look for more in this little dialogue than has generally been seen. One is that in the structure of Matthew's Gospel, this is only the first of three questions which come to Jesus from John or John's disciples, each of which introduces an area of specific theological conflict which then runs like a notable thread through the rest of the Gospel. The others are the question concerning fasting (Matt. 9:14) and that concerning His identity as the Christ (Matt. 11:2). We cannot say more on this point in the present study, but only assert the likelihood that this first question is seriously undervalued when it is interpreted only in terms of the baptismal moment.

The second factor which encourages us to view this dialogue with greatest seriousness is that the reply of Jesus, short as it is, contains two terms, both of which seem to have unique importance in this particular Gospel. One is  $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\acute{o}\nu$ .

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Ljungman sees it, the relevant point in this context is that John recognizes that the time has come when he must step back and the Messiah step forward. Since the One to come after him is here, his own task is ending. There is a correspondence between the work initiated by John and that carried on by Jesus, between John's baptism to repentance and Jesus' baptism into death, for the restoration of mankind. The gift of the Spirit which comes with the Messiah and by which a righteous humanity is created, can come only after Jesus' baptism into death is fulfilled. Thus Ljungman, though he takes issue at some points with Cullmann's interpretation, concurs with him in the view that Jesus' baptism points to his death as the suffering servant, and in the association of Is. 42:1 as the root source of the baptismal declaration. Compare also Oscar Cullmann, Baptism in the New Testament (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1950), pp. 16f.



In the sense of fulfilling the Scriptures or the purpose of God, it occurs fourteen times in Matthew, compared with only two in Mark, and four in Luke. The other is *δικαιοσύνη*, found six times in Matthew, never in Mark, and only once in Luke (but then in birth-narrative poetry, Luke 1:75). Even its cognate *δικαίος*, a righteous man, occurs in Matthew sixteen times, compared with two in Mark and seven in Luke.

We look, then, for another possibility behind John's question. Let us set aside for the moment the search for questions the church in Matthew's day might have been asking and take this dialogue at face value. In terms of the story itself, one rather obvious alternative immediately emerges, namely, that John is disappointed. For John the moment of Jesus' arrival at Jordan is a let-down. John has been preaching the imminent arrival of the kingdom (Matt. 3:2). He has been describing this great moment in terms of an encounter between Israel and the Lord (Matt. 3:3; Is. 40:2). We shall establish later that the One whose coming he proclaims, who will meet Israel in the wilderness, the One mightier than John, who will purge with fire and pour out the promised spirit, thus completing what John's baptism has only signalled (Matt. 3:11-12; cf. Mal. 3:2; 4:1f.), is no less than God Himself.<sup>5</sup> When the reality which should fulfill that kind

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<sup>5</sup>Infra., pp. 110-13. There we take up also the one phrase which might seem to oppose this interpretation, "whose sandals I am not worthy to carry" (Matt. 3:11).



of expectation turns out to be nothing but a young man named Jesus, hailing from Galilee (of all places) and not from Sinai or from the heavens, bringing neither fire nor baptism of the Spirit but asking rather to submit to John's baptism of water, acting as though He Himself anticipates the arrival of the kingdom rather than Himself inaugurating it--is not that sufficient ground for dejection? This is not the way it is supposed to be! John's whole heart has been set on the apocalyptic moment of the arrival of God, the moment when he and repentant Israel with him will be filled with the Spirit of God, when all the enemies of God will perish and the whole world will become the dwelling-place of Jahweh, when "the son of righteousness shall rise with healing in his wings" (Mal. 4:3-4). If the face of such grand hopes, this is the reality, who would not feel crushed? It is a cry of disappointment that we now hear. "No, not this way! This isn't what's supposed to happen! You are supposed to baptize me, to fulfill the baptism of the Spirit! That's what I need, what I have hoped and longed for!" Matthew does not record this as a word of pious humility from John's lips, but as one of offense and protest against the way God chooses to bring His promises to fulfillment.

The great prophet, John the Baptist, engaging in personal battle against the skandalon of that kingdom which Jesus brings and proclaims--that is Matthew's picture of John in the context of all three of John's questions. We sense in



Matt. 9:14-15 the tension between the questioner who believes the kingdom has not yet arrived and the Jesus who says it has. The skandalon is altogether explicit, the word is even used, in the third dialogue between John and Jesus (Matt. 11:2-6), which opens with the question, "Are you he who is to come?" and closes with the appeal, "Blessed is he who takes no offense at me." Whether John raised his first question to Jesus in the immediate context of Jesus' baptism, or whether Matthew's insertion of it at Matt. 3:14 is a literary device which helps give form to his Gospel, need not concern us. But that Matthew preserves for us a valid picture of the conflict which tore the heart of John the Baptist after Jesus arrived on the scene and began His ministry, we have no reason to doubt. It is the inevitable conflict between the form of pious Jewish kingdom-expectation on the one hand, and the form of the kingdom-reality in Jesus on the other. For Matthew, with his intense concern that the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament Scripture in Jesus shall be thoroughly understood and not polluted with images born out of false expectation, this is a central issue.

Expectation as opposed to reality, there is the problem. Perhaps it is more than chance, then, that this is essentially the problem of Jesus' first temptation (Matt. 4:1-4). If Jesus is the Son of God, there are certain things he may expect--dignity, advantages, recognition, a full stomach, ease of life. When these are not forthcoming, let Him infer that



God's Word is meaningless; or that God is unjust, or asleep; or that Jesus must take action on His own to assert His dignity and to achieve the advantages and comforts that validate His name. "Command these stones to become loaves of bread" (Matt. 4:3). So also for John the Baptist, if he is the Elijah of the last days, there are certain things he may expect--the validation of his proclamation in the cataclysmic arrival of God, the immediate personal participation in the glory of the outpouring of the Spirit, the evident destruction of all evil in the dawn of God's world. But when none of this happens, the tempting inference is that the Word of God has failed, that he the preacher has been a false prophet whose word does not come true (Deut. 18:22), that God is unfaithful, or that he, John, must do something (like stopping Jesus from being baptized) to change the reality so that it may accord with the dream.

Against this crushing burden it is Jesus who sustains John. He includes John with Himself when He says, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:16). John is more than merely a necessary instrument who launches Jesus on His way by baptizing Him.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>So Henrik Ljungman, *op. cit.* pp. 110f. Ljungman's view is certainly more satisfactory, however, than that of other interpreters whom he cites, e.g., C. G. Montefiore who includes the rest of the Israelites in the ἡμῶν, or Fridrichsen who would include all those who later receive Christian baptism.



John experiences Jesus' own first, and perhaps primary, temptation, and is summoned to overcome it with Jesus Himself. The summoning of men to righteousness is a major ingredient in Jesus' own fulfilling of righteousness. We may even say that when John yields to Jesus on this point, he has become Jesus' disciple. His willingness to go to Jesus when other dimensions of the same basic problem torment him testifies that he also continues as Jesus' disciple. Jesus' own sympathy for John (Matt. 11:6), and the high honor in which He holds him (Matt. 11:11), as well as Jesus' consistent identification of Himself with John and John with Himself (Matt. 11:7-19; 17:9-13; 21:31-32), these elements constitute a remarkable confirmation of the "for us" of Matt. 3:15. For Matthew John the Baptist epitomizes the struggle of pious Israel against the skandalon of violated expectations.

#### B. Jesus' Answer

Once we recognize the skandalon implicit in John's question, we cannot escape the conclusion that Jesus' reply must have fundamental significance for the whole of Matthew's Gospel. "Thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness," Jesus says. With this sentence Jesus shifts the attention of John (and Matthew shifts the attention of his readers) away from those popular passages in Malachi which describe the fury of judgment and the drama of salvation in the coming of the Lord (Mal. 3:1-2; 4:1-6) to those passages



which convey this prophet's profound concern for righteousness. In the Septuagint of Malachi the term δικαιοσύνη occurs three times, and δίκαιος once. All of these occurrences lie in the immediate context of the advent prophecies.<sup>7</sup> The two which are critical for our discussion of righteousness have already been examined from the perspective of the ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα.<sup>8</sup> We must now look at them from the perspective of that righteousness which Jesus says He (and John) must fulfill.

The first of these is Mal. 2:17:

You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them." Or by saying, "Where is the God of justice?"

That the ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα of the baptismal word (Matt. 3:17) answers to the ἐν αὐτοῖς αὐτὸς εὐδόκησεν in the above passage, we suggested in our sixth chapter. We may now press the additional likelihood, that Jesus' reply to John "It is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness," answers in some way also the rebellious complaint, "Where is the God of justice?" Or, as the Septuagint has it, Πού ἐστιν ὁ θεὸς τῆς δικαιοσύνης;

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<sup>7</sup>In the context of Mal. 3:1-2, see δικαιοσύνη at 2:17 and 3:3. In the latter the prophet expresses God's promise that out of the purifying which must take place, the sons of Levi will bring the Lord their sacrifice "in righteousness." In the context of Mal. 4:1-6, see 3:17 (δίκαιος) and 4:2, where the dawn of the Lord's day is described to those who fear God's name as the rising of "the sun of righteousness."

<sup>8</sup>Supra., pp. 53ff.



The reason these people do not know where the righteous God is, is that they themselves are a rebellious and unrighteous people. John's complaint is of a piece with theirs, for John also, in his disappointment, is raising the question, "Where is the God of righteousness?" The answer is that when the people of the righteous God become what their God is, when they live in and reflect the righteousness of God as a son reflects the character of the father, then such a question becomes unnecessary. The righteous know God and do not have to ask to see Him or complain because He does not act the way they think He ought to act. Therefore Jesus summons John to join Him in fulfilling all righteousness.

But more is involved. As Jesus really does this fulfilling, as He manifests the character of the righteous Father in His own life and work as the Son, this complaining people will have the answer to their question in another form, namely, in Himself. Now they shall know what the righteousness of God is, and they shall know it in such a way that they can no longer evade its implications. The complaining son will encounter the righteous Son. Unrighteous Israel will be confronted by the Self he was called to be, and is not. If the question is pressed, "Where is the God of righteousness?" here is the answer. This is the form the expected "day of the Lord" will take. In the Son Jesus, Israel shall meet "The God of righteousness." This sets the stage for the crisis to which the word of Mal. 3:2 then applies, "But who



can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire."

A similar point can be made on the basis of Mal. 3:17-18, a passage we examined in some detail in our sixth chapter. For our present purpose, let us quote it in our own translation from the Septuagint:

And they shall be mine, says the Lord Almighty, until the day which I shall make their special possession, and I shall choose them the way a man chooses his son who serves him. And you will repent, and you will see the difference between a righteous man and a wicked man, between one who is serving God and one who is not serving him.<sup>9</sup>

The point is that the son Israel will come to know himself. Repentance will be evident in the capacity, now wholly lacking, to see the difference between righteousness and hypocrisy. Any who persist in their unwillingness to see that difference, so it is implied, exclude themselves from God and from the promises. In effect they reveal themselves for what they really are, the wicked who, though clinging to the ritual

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<sup>9</sup>Though we render *αἰετίζω* with "choose," we are sure that there is something in Malachi's metaphor, arising perhaps from his cultural situation, which we have not grasped. The mere use of the word does not tell us very much, nor does the Revised Standard Version's "spare" for the Hebrew *בָּרַךְ*. "You will repent" renders *ἠπιστεράψοσθε*, which in turn renders the Hebrew *אָפַתְתֶּם*. In the New Testament the idea of repentance is commonly expressed by *μετανοῶ*, though *ἠπιστεῖρω* in this sense is not abandoned (cf. Matt. 13:15; Luke 1:16; 22:32; 1 Thess. 1:9). In Acts 3:19 and 26:20 the two terms are used together and probably synonymously. The Revised Standard Version, by translating simply "once more," obscures the possible association this passage may have with Matt. 3, also in terms of John's call to repentance.



and to the hope of their sonship, have no real intention of serving God.

This theme is fundamental to the Gospel of Matthew, and to the name "Son of God" as Matthew presents it. In Matt. 16:16 Peter confesses Jesus to be the Son of God. Thereby Peter is making Malachi's distinction. He is aligning himself with the righteous sonship manifest in Jesus, while at the same time rejecting any claim to sonship on the part of unrighteous Judaism. The courtroom of Caiaphas dramatizes the alternative possibility. When Jesus acknowledges under oath that He is the Son of God, the high priest accuses Him of blasphemy (Matt. 26:63ff.). Thereby Caiaphas proves himself incapable of making the distinction between the son who serves God, and the one who does not serve Him. Caiaphas defends the sonship which unrighteous Israel still wants to claim--and thereby condemns himself. So do also all those who turn the name "Son of God" into mockery at the foot of the cross (Matt. 27:40,43).

The drama over the name reaches its climax with the confession of the centurion (Matt. 27:54). The Gentile proves capable of making the distinction! His οὗτος is emphatic. It stands at the end of his declaration. "Truly, God's Son was this One!"<sup>10</sup> The Roman sees the difference between the

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<sup>10</sup>Our translation. Mark 15:39 has the οὗτος first, though following ἀληθώς. Luke 23:47 subordinates the οὗτος even further, as an adjective following ὁ ἄνθρωπος. Recall that in both these evangelists the baptismal word stands in



righteous and the wicked, between the Son who serves God and the one who does not serve Him. As surely as his confession exalts Jesus, it condemns Judaism. His emphatic οὗτος answers to the οὗτος of the baptismal declaration. This man indeed, this, and not the other!

Thus righteousness is a key term in Matthew's description of the sonship of Jesus. So also, the phrase "fulfil all righteousness" corresponds in its implications to the clause in the baptismal word, "with whom I am well pleased."<sup>11</sup>

We shall develop the meaning of righteousness more concretely later. In our present context it is necessary to examine the verb πληρόω.

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the second person, and therefore lacks the οὗτος. That the testimony to Jesus as the Son of God in Matthew begins with οὗτος in Matt. 3:15 and ends with οὗτος in Matt. 27:54 is hardly accidental.

<sup>11</sup>Ljungman, *op. cit.*, pp. 105f., finds an Old Testament connection with the theme "fulfil all righteousness" in the latter chapters of Isaiah. He cites Is. 66:15f. as presenting the judgment aspect of the end-time, and Is. 60:20, "Your people shall all be righteous," as indicating the nature of the hope. Ljungman lays particular stress on Is. 63:7, where, for the Hebrew וְיָרֵץ לְךָ, the Septuagint reads κατὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ. "Wie die Jesajastellen zeigen, ist der Tag des Zornes zugleich die Zeit des Anbruchs der dikaiosyne" (*ibid.*, p. 110). We concur with Ljungman in sensing an affinity of Matthew for the last section of Isaiah, where the theme of righteousness is strongly interwoven with the hope for the future. Out of some such sense we have ourselves cited Isaiah 59 (*supra*, pp. 46ff.). We suspect, however, that the accent of Malachi on righteousness makes the more direct contribution to the Matthaean context with which we have been working.



## CHAPTER VIII

### "FULFIL"

The word πληρόω occurs fifteen times in Matthew. Eleven of these instances, all of them with the verb in the passive, are associated with the fulfilling of the Scriptures, usually with the citation of a passage. The investigation of these we shall pass by, as being somewhat secondary to our immediate concern. The passive occurs in one further instance, in the parable of the net (Matt. 13:48). "When it was full (ὅτι ἐπληρώθη) men drew it ashore." The basic meaning of a vessel, filled to capacity, is the implication here. In the three occurrences which remain, the word is used in the active voice. These include our text, "fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15), the sentence from the Sermon on the Mount, "I have come not to abolish them (the law and the prophets) but to fulfil them" (Matt. 5:17), and Jesus' final challenge to the scribes and Pharisees, "Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers" (Matt. 23:32).

Lexicons and commentators generally divide the four instances of πληρόω cited above into two classifications. Matt. 13:48 and 23:32 belong together, for the meaning "fill up a vessel" is quite clear. These passages even mention a vessel, in the first instance the net and in the second the measure. In Matt. 3:15 and 5:17, however, no vessel is mentioned, nor



does the context seem to suggest one. The "vessel" imagery does not seem to come through, either in the former where "all righteousness" is to be "fulfilled," or in the latter where "the law and the prophets" are subject to such fulfillment. Hence it is necessary to suggest some meaning for πληρόω which de-emphasizes the image of a vessel. The Arndt-Gingrich Lexicon suggests that in Matt. 5:17 "fulfil" is the equivalent of "do" or "carry out"; or perhaps "bring to full expression" in the sense of "show forth its true meaning"; or perhaps "fill up" in the sense of "complete."<sup>1</sup>

Gerhard Delling in Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament also treats Matt. 3:15 and 5:17 in a separate category from Matt. 23:32.<sup>2</sup> Since in the latter passage a vessel (τὸ μέτρον) is expressly mentioned, the idea of filling a vessel is inescapable. In Matt. 3:15, however, Delling suggests that "fulfil all righteousness" focuses on the evident demand of God that Jesus submit to baptism, and means simply obedience. In Matt. 5:17 Jesus is asserting the continued relevance of the Old Testament, but sees it as His task to

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<sup>1</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957). Alfred Schmoller, Handkonkordanz zum griechischen Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: Privilegierte Wuerttembergische Bibelanstalt, 8. Auflage, 1949) also classifies πληρόω in Matt. 3:15 and 5:17 quite separately from its occurrences in Matt. 13:48 and 23:32.

<sup>2</sup>Gerhard Delling, "πληρόω," in Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1933--), VI, 292-93.



accomplish (verwirklichen) the will of God there revealed. To "fulfil" the law and the prophets means to do the law, to assert the demands of the law, but also to bring the promises to completion.

Henrik Ljungman has written an entire book, Das Gesetz erfuellen, on the problem of Matt. 5:17 and similar passages. In this passage, as well as in Matt. 3:15, he sees this fulfillment as the accomplishment of the Messianic salvation by Jesus' own death.<sup>3</sup> Edward P. Blair takes issue with Ljungman on the ground that other occurrences of *δικαιοσύνη* in Matthew

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<sup>3</sup>"Der Text legt deutlich Gewicht darauf, dass Jesus das Gesetz 'fuehlt.' Das 'Fuellen' des Gesetzes haengt gerade mit der Sendung des Messias zusammen, es ist 'Fuellen' des Gesetzes eben durch den Messias. Das 'Fuellen' des Gesetzes gehoert damit ineins, dass er zur Stelle ist, das er gekommen ist, mit dem die Worte der Schrift ueberhaupt 'gefuehlt' werden, v. 17. . . . Es liegt nicht so, dass die 'Gesetzes-erfuellung' Jesu eine ideale Auffassung vom Gesetz zur Grundlage hat und zur Anwendung bringt, sondern so, dass Gesetzeserfuellung Jesus voraussetzt, mit dem die Worte der Schrift und die Gebote des Gesetzes 'gefuehlt werden,' d.h. mit dem 'alles geschieht, vorauf die Schrift (das Gesetz) zielt.'" Henrik Ljungman, Das Gesetz erfuellen (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1954), p. 75.

What the author is getting at in the emphases he presses is finally the cross. Fulfillment of the law and the prophets means essentially fulfillment of the suffering servant prophecies by the Messiah who is that servant. This is his interpretation, both of Matt. 3:15 and of 5:17, for which the former is determinative. "Mit Christus wird die Schrift (das Gesetz) in Gerechtigkeit 'gefuehlt.' Durch Christus kommt Gerechtigkeit. Der Akt, der die Gerechtigkeit mit Christus verbindet, ist sein Opfertod (Matth. 3:15-17). Auf diesen Tod wird bezogen, wenn es heisst, die Taufe Jesu geschehe 'um alle *δικαιοσύνη* zu fuehlen.'" Ibid., p. 124. For a similar statement see ibid., p. 110.



do not seem to support the narrow eschatological interpretation Ljungman finds in the term in Matt. 3:15.<sup>4</sup> Blair dismisses Matt. 13:48 (the net) and 23:32 (the measure) from his discussion with the comment, "Here the idea is simply completion, filling up what is lacking."<sup>5</sup> On Matt. 3:15 Blair concludes that Jesus meant:

He was not baptized because he was a sinner, as were the others, but because it was fitting and his duty to do all that God had declared to be his will.<sup>6</sup>

"Fulfil," then, comes to mean little more than "obey." In his interpretation of Matt. 5:17, Blair argues that Jesus fulfilled the law by obeying it and by revealing in that obedience its true meaning.

What then did Matthew conceive Jesus to mean in the statement, "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them"? Surely that he had come to show what they really mean, how they should be obeyed, and to lead others to such obedience.<sup>7</sup>

We can only wonder why, if Matthew meant merely obedience, he could not have spared us much trouble by using the word "do" or "obey." Floyd V. Filson in his commentary on this passage speaks of "the divine intent" and the "full purpose . . . of God" as that which Jesus is fulfilling. This kind of language we ourselves find fruitful, though Filson's own

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<sup>4</sup>Edward P. Blair, Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 120.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 120f.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 123.



conception is limited too much to the law itself, and does not take into account the total divine intention and purpose of God for Israel and through Israel for the world. The passage in Filson reads:

The Law stands; he supports it. The freedom he exercises in interpreting and applying the Law does not abolish it but rather fulfils it, that is, gives the fullest expression to the divine intent in the ancient utterances. The changes he makes are conservative, true to the aim of Scripture; they more clearly express the full purpose and will of God.<sup>8</sup>

It seems to us that the commentators have done themselves a disservice by dismissing too quickly the use of πληρέω in Matt. 13:48 and especially Matt. 23:32 from their consideration of its meaning in Matt. 3:15 and 5:17. It has been assumed that the idea of a vessel to be filled cannot be pressed in the latter passages, just because no vessel is mentioned, and because neither "righteousness" in Matt. 3:15, nor "the law and the prophets" in Matt. 5:17 seem to qualify for such imagery. As a result, the question what the vessel might be has not been pressed. This is, in a way, a curious lapse. Certainly Matt. 23:32 does have some contribution to make to our problem. Though the word "measure" expressly occurs in the sentence, "Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers," the mere use of that term does not resolve the exegetical problem of the meaning of πληρέω even here. The

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<sup>8</sup>Floyd V. Filson, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 83.



word "measure" is used metaphorically. Jesus is not talking about some literal earthen jug which the present generation must fill full. But if we ask what this metaphorical expression, "Fill up the measure," really means our question turns out to be not unlike that which we address to the saying in Matt. 3:15, "fulfil all righteousness," or to the saying in 5:17, "fulfil the law and the prophets." The element of metaphor underlies the language in all three cases.<sup>9</sup>

There is another curious feature which encourages us to keep Matt. 23:32 in the picture. This verse talks about fathers and sons! It is the measure of the fathers that the sons are to fill up. But a conception very like this underlies Matt. 3:15. The righteousness which Jesus, the Son of God, wants to fulfill is that of His Father. Again, in the Sermon on the Mount from which Matt. 5:17, "fulfil the law and the prophets," derives, the Father-son imagery is an underlying theme. Even here Jesus speaks as the Son, and the law and the prophets which He must fulfill cannot be dissociated from His Father.

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<sup>9</sup>Blair holds that  $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\acute{\omega}$  in Matt. 23:32 signifies completion or "filling up what is lacking" (*op. cit.*, p. 119). Filson paraphrases, "Complete the evil work of your ancestors" (*op. cit.*, p. 248). No doubt this approximates the meaning. Nevertheless this interpretation fails to account for Matthew's choice of just this terminology. If the work of the scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' generation completes the work their fathers had done, then "evil work" describes the content which fills the vessel. The vessel itself, or the measure, remains undefined.



When we add to this the reminder that in the above three passages, and in these alone, *πληρώω* is used in the active voice, we have more than enough encouragement to re-examine the neglected passage, Matt. 23:32, for the light it may throw on the problem of the word "fulfil." In its wider context, Matt. 23:29-33, it reads:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, saying, "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets." Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?<sup>10</sup>

Let us dissect the key verse, with the help of its context.

- a. Something called a "measure," a container with fixed capacity, is to be filled up.
- b. This filling is to be done by sons.
- c. The container itself has belonged to and been prepared

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<sup>10</sup>The parallel in Luke 11:47-48 lacks the critical sentence which we have underscored, as well as the word "sons" in the preceding sentence. Matthew's emphasis on the "father-son" concept is unmistakable. The translation "against yourselves" is excessive. The Greek has simply the dative, *ἑαυτοῖς*. The point is that the hearers, though they disavow the actions of their fathers, will not disavow their sonship of these men. The tradition of genealogical descent means more to them than does their relationship to their heavenly Father. A hint of this same failing is found in Matt. 3:9, where John the Baptist calls to judgment those who boast that they have Abraham as their father. It is hardly coincidence that John's epithet, *γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν* (Matt. 3:7) is repeated by Jesus in our passage (Matt. 23:33); and that John's question, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" is restated by Jesus in the words, "How are you to escape being sentenced to hell?"



by their fathers, who, the context suggests, have themselves already contributed to its content. They have "murdered the prophets."

d. A true father-son relationship involves more than physical descent, more than the proper name, address, and birth registration. Sons "take part" with their fathers. They are *κοινωνοί* of the fathers. The relationship implies community of heart, purpose, attitude, and activity.

e. By their attitudes and actions, the sons bear witness who their fathers are. As the identity of the son is determined by the father, so the father is known in his son.

f. Behind all this we may detect an implication like that openly expressed in Jesus' dialogue with His countrymen in John 8:39-44. There Jesus exposes His opponents as being sons of the devil, and not of God. Here Jesus' insistence on their identification as sons of the fathers who murdered the prophets contradicts any claim they make that they are sons of the Father in heaven. By rejecting Jesus they reveal whose sons they really are.

g. The vessel is not yet filled. The best the fathers could achieve was to shed the blood of the prophets. It remains for the sons to fill up the measure, by killing Jesus. The parable of the heir, Matt. 21:33-39, makes just this distinction between the persecution of the prophets and the murder of the son.

h. What, then, is the "measure"? It consists, we suggest,



in the intentions and purposes which the fathers have set for themselves, in the self-centered dream which they want to bring to reality. The parable of the heir makes their intention very explicit. The tenants want to give God no fruit. They usurp the vineyard as their own, and repel all intervention. When the son is sent they verbalize their dream, "this is the heir; come, let us kill him and have his inheritance" (Matt. 21:38). That intention is the measure which must be filled. This generation must succeed to the full in accomplishing the age-old purpose of unrighteous Israel. The time has come. God will let them do exactly what they have always wanted to do.

That Matt. 23:32 describes a father-son relationship which is the exact perversion of that which God desires, is obvious. If we can detach ourselves from the specific content of this word of judgment, however, and examine simply the implications of the language, its affinity to the "fulfillment" terminology in Matt. 3:15 and 5:17 is inescapable. God is the Father. His intentions and purposes constitute the vessel that is to be filled full. This vessel, in Matt. 3:15, is called "righteousness," a word which summarizes the whole purpose of God.<sup>11</sup> The law and the prophets also have talked

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<sup>11</sup>Ljungman presses the "vessel" metaphor in Matt. 23:32, and suggests that it is the measure of iniquity which is being filled. The unrighteousness of the fathers, who in their day persecuted the truth, is the vessel, to the filling of which the Pharisees are now summoned to make their contribution. Ljungman even remarks that the coming of righteousness has



about and desired nothing more (and nothing less) than that this divine desire for righteousness shall be satisfied, that the purposes of God shall be realized. It is the son of God who is to fulfill that righteousness, but the son Israel has never done so. Jesus is now the Son who came specifically to bring the Father's purpose to reality in Himself. He is the Son who shares the mind of the Father, does the work of the Father, and so proclaims to the world who His Father really is. To be everything the Father has wanted His Son to be, that is to "fulfil all righteousness," to "fulfil the law and the prophets."

The declaration, then, "I came not to abolish them but to fulfil them" (Matt. 5:17), implies a view of the law and the prophets quite different from that of Jesus' critics. The difference is not merely a matter of degree of depth or inwardness. For Jesus the law and the prophets cannot be seen apart from the Father. They have no substance apart from the relationship between God and His people out of which they came, which they always imply, and in which Jesus Himself stands. When Jesus, after the third temptation,

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the effect of the coming of judgment, and makes the filling of the vessel of unrighteousness an inescapable necessity. This is a delightful insight, for its effect is to set the vessel of the fathers in Matt. 23:32, which consists in their unrighteousness, in sharpest contrast to the vessel of the Father in Matt. 3:15, which consists in righteousness. Though Ljungman does see a connection between the words of wrath in Matt. 23:33 and in Matt. 3:7, he fails to exploit his insight by linking Matt. 23:32 to 3:15 as we have done. Op. cit. p. 111.



dismisses Satan with the words, "You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve" (Matt. 4:10), He means that totally. He will no more worship and serve the law than He will Satan. He does not know His Father by way of the law; on the contrary, He knows the law because He first knows His Father. He serves God! Period! And in that service He fulfills the law. He is everything the law has ever wanted, everything the prophets have ever fought for, everything the law with its growing rigidity of detail has been unable to attain.

The great commandment of the law (Matt. 22:36-40) can rightly be drawn into this area of discussion. "Love" is not a higher law, or an inwardness of law, or even a summary of commandments. Love, like righteousness, expresses the total relationship in which the Son Jesus stands to His Father, and into which He invites Israel. Love is total because all heart, all soul, and all mind is in it. The  $\delta\lambda\eta$  in Matt. 22:37 corresponds to the  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha$  in Matt. 3:15. Out of that relationship flows the character of the divine righteousness, expressed in love for the neighbor. That Matthew cannot talk of the great commandment of the law without remembering Jesus' determination to "fulfil" the law and the prophets (Matt. 5:17) is indicated by the verse he alone preserves in connection with the saying of the great commandment, "On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:40).



Jesus lives out in utter consistency His relationship as the Son to the Father. This is His "fulfilling of all righteousness" and His "fulfilling of the law and the prophets." Out of that relationship comes victory over temptation, accomplishment of His mission, and obedience to the death. His is always a free and joyful sonship, the more disconcerting to Judaism because no threat or attack can diminish its freedom and joy. It stands in startling contrast to a people who have bowed their necks under the law in a posture which denies and contradicts their privilege and calling as the son of God. The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is a hopeless endeavor, inadequate to conceal the inner rebellion of hearts that do not really know God. From such an enslavement God is determined to deliver His people.

In Jesus, then, the creative word, spoken long ago in Egypt, attains full reality. It will not do to imagine that the word, "This is my beloved Son" (Matt. 3:17), is only typologically related to the word "Israel is my first-born son" (Ex. 4:22). More is involved in fulfillment than mere correspondence of events, more even than recapitulation of events in order to effect what was thwarted in the first history. One could still construe this to mean that the new thing merely has affinities to the old, looks like and recalls the old, but essentially replaces the old. Matthew would insist that the new and the old are one. God has not cut Himself off from His ancient word to Israel or given up on it.



In Jesus, Israel stands before Him--not merely someone who represents Israel or looks like Israel, but Israel--the same Israel to whom the exodus word was spoken. The centuries are bridged by the fatherly word at Jesus' baptism. To assert anything less would be to deny the character of God, both as Father and as Creator. A "fulfillment" which is less than this would leave God's ancient word frustrated and devoid of the reality it calls into being. It would sever the essential unity between Jesus and the Old Testament, a unity which to Matthew is of overwhelming importance, a unity he affirms in the very opening verse of his Gospel, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

To explore ways in which the deity of Jesus does emerge from the First Gospel, is a task which exceeds our present purpose. If it were our task, we would begin, perhaps, by pointing out the force of kingdom-expectation that emerges in Matthew's account of the preaching of John the baptist. What the Jews expect, and what John heralds, is the coming of God, and a meeting of God with His people.<sup>1</sup> The power of Matthew's

<sup>1</sup>This point we develop in our next chapter.



## CHAPTER IX

### SONSHIP AND DEITY

In the long tradition of the Church the name "Son of God" as applied to Jesus has been understood as an affirmation of His deity. We have shown that in the Gospel of Matthew at least, this name serves rather to identify Jesus as the fulfillment of the sonship of Israel. The question must then inevitably arise, "Is it at all a function of the name 'Son of God' in the Gospel of Matthew, to affirm the deity of Him who bears it?"

We have worded the question with care. Let it be noted that we are not addressing it to the whole of the New Testament, but only to the Gospel of Matthew. Let it be noted further that we are not asking whether Matthew proclaims the deity of Jesus, but only whether he does so by applying to Him this name.

To explore ways in which the deity of Jesus does emerge from the first Gospel, is a task which exceeds our present purpose. If it were our task, we would begin, perhaps, by pointing out the form of kingdom-expectation that emerges in Matthew's account of the preaching of John the Baptist. What the Jews expect, and what John heralds, is the coming of God, and a meeting of God with His people.<sup>1</sup> The point of Matthew's

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<sup>1</sup>This point we develop in our next chapter.



Gospel is that this expected meeting does indeed take place, but precisely in the encounter between Jesus and Israel, and nowhere else. All the salvation there is, and all the judgment there is, is executed in the person of Jesus. His is the kingdom, the authority, the lordship--and apart from Him there is no kingdom of God, nor ever will be. The nation must come to terms with God in Jesus, and there can be no evading the issue. Thus the deity unfolds in the drama of the encounter. Jesus is God. God is in Him, and will neither be understood nor known apart from this Son of His. The final verses of the Gospel (Matt. 28:18-20) recapitulate this theme. We would confess, of course, that Matthew's definition of the deity of Jesus, were he inclined to offer one, would probably be more functional than speculative, more historical than ontological. Matthew does not invite his readers to marvel at Jesus' amazing person but to meet God in him. His approach is not the way of wisdom, but of faith and life (Matt. 11:25-30). There is something profoundly valid in this, we are inclined to think. We suspect, for example, that Matthew himself would not readily permit the Jew to escape from the fundamental question of his righteousness, into a false skandalon over the doctrine of the Trinity.

To return to our question, there are three passages still to be considered, which might seem to associate the name "Son of God" more directly with deity. Since a full study of each of these would be in itself a major project, we shall have to



be satisfied only to indicate in each instance that the necessity of seeing Jesus' deity heralded here is not quite as compelling as may at first hand appear.

One of these is Matthew's account of the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-9). In terms of the traditional understanding of the name "Son of God," it is natural to infer that the event on the mountain is intended to be an affirmation of Jesus' deity. Not only is the baptismal word repeated, but it is repeated in the context of a vision of divine radiance, and in the presence of the two prophets who had themselves spoken with God in ancient times on Mt. Horeb or Sinai. Yet it is precarious to regard the matter as settled without pressing the question of alternatives. If the baptismal declaration serves to identify Jesus as the fulfillment of the ancient word to Israel, "Israel is my first-born son" (Ex. 4:22), as we have demonstrated, it would be unfair to Matthew to expect that the sentence should now mean something else. It is appropriate, furthermore, that these two great representatives of the law and the prophets should converse with Jesus, for He is the realization of that which they have longed to see, as Jesus Himself testifies in Matt. 13:17. And if His face shines like the sun, this is language He Himself, in the tradition of Daniel 12:3 and 2 Esdras 7:97, has applied to the righteous who share the triumph of the kingdom (Matt. 13:43). We have every reason to assume, therefore, that Matthew is consistent, and that the affirmation



of Jesus' sonship in Matt. 17:5 means exactly what it has meant in Matt. 3:15.

A second passage, of greater difficulty perhaps, is Matt. 14:33. After the event of Jesus' walking on the sea and Peter's involvement in the same action, we are told that the disciples in the boat worshiped Him saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." Oscar Cullmann recognizes that this passage presents a special problem. He calls it "the only story in which Jesus is called 'Son of God' in a sense which corresponds to the Hellenistic concept," and he expresses his rather cavalier judgment that "even within Matthew it has no special significance whatsoever."<sup>2</sup> The "Hellenistic concept" which he sees in evidence here, he has defined elsewhere:

Anyone believed to possess some kind of divine power was called "son of God" by others, or gave himself the title. All miracle workers were "sons of God."<sup>3</sup>

If Cullmann is right, if the rational processes of Greek culture become the ground upon which the church must base its confession of the deity of Jesus in the name "Son of God," then such an insight can hardly be called edifying. We suggest, however, that it is both presumptuous and unfair to attribute so grave an inconsistency to our evangelist, without

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<sup>2</sup>Oscar Cullmann, The Christology of the New Testament. Translated from the German by Shirley C. Cuthrie and Charles A.M. Hall (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 277.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 272.



first exploring every possibility of an alternative. There are reasons for caution. Consider the following.

a. As Mark tells this story, the reaction of the disciples is that "they were utterly astounded" (Mark 6:51). But if Matthew really understood the confession of the disciples in a Hellenistic sense, as a response to the wonder of the miraculous, and if Mark's Gospel (as is generally assumed) was one of his resources, why does he drop all reference to the astonishment? Can we assume, as Cullmann does, that the factor of astonishment is simply implied? Or is it possible that the factor of astonishment at the wonder of the event simply was not, for Matthew, the critical issue in this confession of His sonship?

b. Assuming for the moment that a Hellenistic sense of awe is not for Matthew the critical issue here, we must search for another possibility. An obvious alternative is that Matthew sees theological implications, not so much in the demonstration of sheer power as in the thing itself that has happened. Whether it is by the stilling of a storm (Matt. 8:23-27) or by walking on water (Matt. 14:22-23), the sea has been controlled. It has been compelled to yield to a higher authority. The picture of God's control of the storm and of His deliverance of sailors in Ps. 107:23-32 suggests parallels which Matthew, steeped as he was in the Old Testament, would hardly have missed. Beyond this, however, the fact that we are dealing with Galilee and Galileans and that Galilee was



the hot-bed of zealotry and of the apocalypticism which fed its fervent and dynamic hopes, suggests the possibility that the disciples saw apocalyptic associations in the event. The sea, as Dan. 7:2 already indicates, is the place of origin of all those evil kingdoms that oppose the kingdom of God. Must not such associations be explored and tested if we expect to draw any valid conclusions at all regarding this event and the confession that springs from it?<sup>4</sup>

c. Even the concept of a man commanding the waves of the sea and of a man walking on water was a familiar one. A zealotry steeped in the Maccabaeen tradition could hardly be unaware that in 2 Macc. 9:8 and 5:21 this very terminology is applied to the presumptuous Antiochus Epiphanes, who boasts that he can do just such things. Let us pursue this further. In Dan. 7:8 Antiochus is described under the imagery of the little horn with "a mouth speaking great things." In the verses that follow the beast with the boastful horn is slain before the throne of the "ancient of days" (Dan. 7:9-11). Then comes "one like a son of man," to whom the eternal dominion is given and who in later verses is equated with "the saints of the Most High" (Dan. 7:13-14, 18, 22, 27). May this imagery lie in the background of Matthew's account of the

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<sup>4</sup>See Paul Achtemeier, "Person and Deed, Jesus and the Storm-tossed Sea," Interpretation, XVI (April 1962), 169-80. This is a fine survey of the concept of waters in the context of Biblical and near-Eastern thought, and in relation to the texts of Jesus and the sea.



walking on the sea? Are the powers Antiochus had boastfully appropriated to himself now revealed as the powers of the "son of man," Jesus? Or, if the sea is the source of all evil kingdoms (Dan. 7:2), does walking on it assert the complete triumph of the kingdom of God, that is, of the saints of the Most High, that is, of the son of man? Is it Peter's goal, then, to test just this inference by seeing whether he can share in that triumph?

It may be argued that all of this is irrelevant, since the disciples do not, in Matt. 14:33, confess Jesus as "the Son of man," but as "the Son of God." Suppose, however, that "Son of man" and "Son of God" are really one and the same! We see it as a likely possibility that the name "Son of man" is a late surrogate for "Son of God." Its introduction into Judaism arose, we suggest, out of the same piety which compelled this people to demonstrate their profound reverence for God by discontinuing all use of the divine name "Jahweh" and substituting the name "the Lord"; which chose to speak of the "kingdom of heaven" rather than of the "kingdom of God"; and which was moved to swear "by heaven," or "by the earth," or "by Jerusalem," or "by my head" rather than "by God" or "by Jahweh" (Matt. 5:35). Surely a people so awed by the divine transcendence that they came to regard the direct use of the divine name as a form of blasphemy, could hardly be bold enough to call themselves as a people, "the



son (or sons) of God"! <sup>5</sup> In spite of all that has been said

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<sup>5</sup>The discomfort Judaism felt in applying to itself the name "son of God" is reflected in the surrogates found within the Gospels. Caiaphas' "Son of the Blessed" in Mark 14:61 becomes "Son of God" in Matt. 26:63. Similarly "Holy One of God" in Mark 1:24 and 5:7 becomes "Son of God" in Matt. 8:29. Compare also Peter's confession in John 6:69 with that in Matt. 16:16. Notice in each instance that the basic structure of the phrase is maintained, while one or the other of its members suffers reduction. This is exactly what happens in the phrase "Son of man," though here the reduction is the most severe of all, moving as it were from heaven to earth. There is precedent for this, however, in Matt. 5:35, where among the options that have developed for the expression of oaths we find a similar chain of reduction, one of the lowest forms of which is "by the earth." In the face of such a clear pattern of evidence, we would find it as difficult to distinguish between the substance of the names "Son of God" and "Son of man," as we would between the terms "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven." For the traditional argument regarding the name "Son of man," see Cullmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-92. Also Vincent Taylor, The Names of Jesus (London: Macmillan and Co., 1953), pp. 25-35.

Eduard Schweizer, in an article on "The Son of Man," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXXIX (June 1960), 119-29, has an intriguing idea which unconsciously lends support to our suggestion. Summarizing the character of the Son of man as it emerges from a study of the Biblical material, he says, "The Son of man described in those sayings which seem to be original is a man who lives a lowly life on earth, rejected, humiliated, handed over to his opponents, but eventually exalted by God and to be the chief witness in the last judgment. This picture is very similar to that of the humiliated and exalted righteous one which is found in Wisdom 2-5, where however the term Son of man does not appear. Could it be that Jesus himself understood his mission in the light of this picture of the suffering righteous man?" (pp. 121f. Our emphasis.) What Schweizer fails to point out is that the term which does appear as the name of the righteous man throughout these chapters, and indeed, throughout this apocryphal book, is the name Son of God! See Wisdom of Solomon 2:12-20 (at v. 18 cf. Matt. 27:40,43); 5:1-8; 16:10,26 (οἱ υἱοὶ σου, οὓς ἠγάπησας, cf. Matt. 3:17; 4:4); 18:13.



or written on this subject, we are increasingly certain that the name "son of man" is a pious surrogate for "son of God" already in Dan. 7:13. In Daniel and onward, the theology of Israel's sonship of God emerges under the title "son of man." Until this suggestion is either established in full or refuted, we must leave open the possibility at least that the name "Son of God" in Matt. 14:33, consistently with the rest of this Gospel, identifies Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel, though here in an apocalyptic context.

The third passage on the basis of which we might be tempted to infer that the name "Son of God" in Matthew must express Jesus' deity, is the account of the Virgin birth (Matt. 1:18-25). Oscar Cullmann attempts no distinction between the birth narratives of Matthew and of Luke, but lumps them together as he interprets the intent of these evangelists:

They try by means of the infancy narratives to explain Jesus' sonship, and to lift the veil from the question "how" the Father begets the Son.<sup>6</sup>

What validity this judgment may or may not have for the Gospel of Luke is not our present concern. With respect to Matthew we would contend that the matter is not so clear-cut as Cullmann's rather casual argument would suggest. Consider the following:

- a. The name "Son of God" does not even occur in Matthew's

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<sup>6</sup>Cullmann, op. cit., p. 294.



account of the Virgin birth. This would seem a curious omission if Matthew's intention in telling that story was to "explain Jesus' sonship." Furthermore, when the name "Son (of God)" does occur for the first time in Matthew's Gospel, in the quotation of Hos. 11:1 (Matt. 2:15) it serves to identify Jesus as the Son of God, with the son Israel whom God loved and called out of Egypt. This is precisely the sense of the name that we have found in our exposition of the baptismal declaration, Matt. 3:17. The situation, therefore, calls for considerable exegetical caution. We dare not draw inferences casually or lightly read a certain concept or terminology into a context in which the evangelist himself does not express it.

b. A second factor worthy of note in Matthew's account of the Virgin birth is its matter-of-fact tone. There is not the slightest indication of awe at the miraculous. Indeed, the contrast with the spirit of awe and wonder in Luke's "How can this be . . . ?" and "With God nothing will be impossible" is great enough to be startling (Luke 1:34-37). We find in Matthew no evidence whatsoever that the purpose of this evangelist was, as Cullmann suggests, to "lift the veil from the question 'how' the Father begets the Son." We have no right, therefore, arbitrarily to impose such an interpretation on Matthew.

c. To establish an alternative interpretation of Matthew's purpose would be an enormous task, involving among other things



a critical re-evaluation of Is. 7:14. This is for the present more than we can do. We shall have to be satisfied simply to suggest a possible alternative. What Matthew is emphasizing, so it seems to us, is that the birth of Jesus represents the deliberate intrusion of God into the history of His people, to bring His creative purpose in that people to fulfillment. God is acting on His own initiative, in the spirit of Is. 59:16.<sup>7</sup> This is indicated first of all by the involvement of the Holy Spirit, the Creator-Spirit who sets the plan of God in motion. It is indicated also by the quotation of Is. 7:14. God refuses to be frustrated any longer by a people who falsely invoke His name on their unrighteousness with the slogan, "Immanuel," "God is with us." God acts, He breaks in, to get the true "Emmanuel" He has always been determined to have. Something like this, we suspect, Isaiah himself intended to say in Is. 7:14, a prophecy paralleling in dramatic force that of John the Baptist, "God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Matt. 3:9). This is the eschatological moment, when God intervenes to fulfill the intention which His covenant presence with Israel ("Immanuel") has always heralded. Thus what the Lord had spoken is fulfilled (Matt. 1:22).

That more needs to be done with the passages we have just examined we would readily grant. To speak the final word is not our intention, but only to point to alternative possibilities, in order to show that there is no instance of

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<sup>7</sup>Supra, pp. 46ff.



the name "Son of God" in Matthew which clearly demands the interpretation of deity. The evidence points rather toward what ought to be our first and obvious premise, that Matthew is deliberate and consistent in his use of the name, and not at all casual or ambiguous.

With this statement we are calling into question and pleading for a re-evaluation of many an accepted theological judgment. When Frank Stagg in a recent article asserts as his key point, "In Matthew's Gospel the term assumes Jesus Christ to be divine,"<sup>8</sup> he not only misreads the Gospel in favor of a traditional presupposition, but he also forfeits much of the power of what Matthew really is saying. Again, when Edward P. Blair describes Peter's confession as resting on a special revelation from the Father, and then defines that revelation as one which unfolds sheer deity, he has lost Matthew. Blair says:

Flesh and blood can never perceive who Jesus really is. Since Jesus belongs to the world of deity, only deity can know the truth about him.<sup>9</sup>

Even Cullmann, for all his concern to press the theme of obedience in connection with the definition of Jesus' sonship, finally returns to the idea of the "exclusive secret" of Jesus' relationship with the Father,

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<sup>8</sup>Frank Stagg, "The Christology of Matthew," Review and Expositor (October 1962), LIX, 464.

<sup>9</sup>Edward P. Blair, Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 66.



the perception of which demands a supernatural knowledge which can only be given to a man from outside himself.<sup>10</sup>

As far as Matthew is concerned, at least, such an interpretation represents a wholly inadequate apprehension of the real problem of knowing Jesus. To these authors, to know that Jesus is the Son of God means to perceive His deity; to Matthew it means to acknowledge His righteousness. To them "mystery" exists because of the inadequacy of the intellect to apprehend God; to Matthew "mystery" exists because man is captive in sin. A man who is compelled to defend his fallen self and the worth he thinks he can create and demonstrate in himself, cannot possibly see, or hear, or acknowledge a righteousness which condemns him (Matt. 12:50; 13:1-17).

We must examine more fully, therefore, the meaning of righteousness in Matthew. As we come to grips with this term we begin to appreciate what the uniqueness is that Matthew sees in the sonship of Jesus. But this study inevitably confronts us also with the dimension of repentance, the great theme of the opening verses of Matthew 3. With this we shall begin.

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<sup>10</sup>Cullmann, op. cit., p. 278.







## CHAPTER X

### RIGHTEOUSNESS AND REPENTANCE

The call to repentance in John's preaching is inevitably associated with the wilderness (Matt. 3:1-3). This is not a matter of chance, but has theological significance.<sup>1</sup> The theme of the wilderness, directly expressed in the quotation of Is. 40:3 (Matt. 3:3), runs through much of the Old Testament.

In the background of wilderness theology lies the memory of the fathers who wandered in the desert wastes of the Sinai peninsula for forty years after leaving Egypt, and until they entered the promised land. In the wilderness they met their God and received His word and law. There they possessed no wealth and security, but only the presence and promises of Jahweh who led them and fed them. This era they were never permitted to forget. It stood on the one hand for total hardship and loss, but on the other for an intimacy in the knowledge of God which utter dependence turned into a cherished treasure. The prophet Hosea could therefore call a prosperous Israel who loved the comforts of Canaan and

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<sup>1</sup>Ulrich W. Mauser, Christ in the Wilderness (London: Student Christian Movement, 1963), pp. 46-48. "The root of the prophetic usage of  $\pi\lambda\omega$  (return) is the idea of Israel's time in the wilderness as the genuine status of Israel's sonship to God, into which Yahweh is going to lead his people again."



honored Baal as the giver, the wife of God turned "harlot," and threaten that God will

strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and set her in a parched land, and slay her with thirst. (Hos. 3:2)

On the other hand, when God longs to know His people as He had once known them, the dreadful wilderness can convey the yearning for reconciliation:

Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. . . . And there she shall answer as in the day of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. (Hos. 2:14-15)

The prophet who embodied the wilderness theme in his own person more than any other was Elijah of the ninth century B.C. His clothing was "a garment of haircloth, with a girdle of leather about his loins" (2 Kings 1:8), a garb characteristic of the desert, as was that of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:4).<sup>2</sup> It dramatized his life-long protest against the degeneracy of Canaanite civilization, which Israel was all too ready to admire, imitate, and enjoy in exchange for worship of Baal. By summoning the famine on the land (1 Kings 17:1), Elijah in effect turned the land itself into wilderness, a dramatic underscoring of the call to repent

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<sup>2</sup>Mausser (*ibid.*, p. 83) points out that only the leather girdle is not necessarily characteristic of wilderness garb. The fact that this detail applies to both John and Elijah may lead to the inference that Mark is signaling an association between the two. We would be inclined to go farther. One would almost have to attribute ignorance of the Old Testament to John, in order to suppose that the Baptist himself was innocent of any association between his own ministry and that of Elijah.



and to know God as their fathers had once known Him.

Jeremiah 35 preserves the record of the family of Rechab, who conformed through the generations to the command of their father not to drink wine or build houses or sow seed or plant vineyards, but to live in tents. This was their way of expressing repentance. Since they treasured their God above all, they returned literally to the way of life of the wilderness, and became a symbol of protest against the idolatrous syncretism which had become the bane of Israel's possession of the promised land.

These samples serve merely to illustrate the theme. The point is that the wilderness could never be for Israel just a geographical location. With the wilderness the true knowledge of God was associated, and to a degree directly proportionate to the association of Canaan with Baal. The theme was written large even in worship. Each year the Feast of Tabernacles, during which all Israel lived in booths seven days, summoned the people to return to the wilderness as in days of old, to forsake the life of luxury that so readily corrupted them, to acknowledge the Lord alone as the source of all blessings, and to look to the day when they would again meet Him face to face.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>See Lev. 23:42ff. The water libations and the lighting of the temple at this feast (Zech. 14:7-8) and Jesus' identification of both water and light with Himself in the same context (John 7:37f.; 8:12) are evidence of the vivid association of this "wilderness" celebration with the eschatological hope of Israel. For a valuable Rabbinic background document, see C. K. Barrett, New Testament Background: Selected Documents (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1956), pp. 157f.



This was the significance of the withdrawal of the Qumran community from the cities and prosperous farmlands of Judaea, into the wilderness. As Theodor H. Gaster describes it, they conceived of themselves as repeating in a later age the experience of their remote forefathers in the days of Moses. When they left the cities and villages and repaired to the desert, they pictured themselves as going out into the wilderness to receive a new Covenant.<sup>4</sup>

Or, as the Manual of Discipline directly describes it:

They will separate themselves from the midst of the habitation of perverse men to go to the wilderness to clear there the way of HUNA [evidently a substitute for the divine name], as it is written: In the wilderness clear the way of . . . : Level in the desert a highway for our God. That means studying the Torah which he commanded through Moses, so as to do according to all that which the prophets revealed through his Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

Flavius Josephus in his autobiography describes how he became a disciple of a man named Bannus,

who dwelt in the wilderness, wearing only such clothing as trees provided, feeding on such things as grew of themselves, and using frequent ablutions of cold water, by day and night, for purity's sake.<sup>6</sup>

The wilderness association is fundamental if we are to appreciate the impact of John's preaching. In dress and diet he was a man of the wilderness. He did not go to the people

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<sup>4</sup>Theodor H. Gaster, The Dead Sea Scriptures (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 264; Gaster, op. cit., p. 56. Note that Is. 40:3 plays a role in the thought of the Qumran community, as it does in the record of John the Baptist in the Gospels (e.g., Matt. 3:3).

<sup>6</sup>Barrett, op. cit., p. 191. Barrett would date this passage after 100 A.D.



to bear his message to every village and town, as Jesus later did. Jerusalem and Judaea, the heart-land of the people of God, had to come out to him!<sup>7</sup> They did not do so out of mere curiosity, or attracted by his reputation for inspiring sermons. They did so because the very action of leaving home and city and wealth behind and going to the wilderness was an integral part of repentance. It was a liturgical enactment, as it were, of their response to John's cry, "Repent." For "repent" is in the Hebrew שׁוּב (in the Septuagint ἐπιστρέφω), which means "turn" or, better, "return."<sup>8</sup> As people left their cities, they detached their hearts as it were from all prosperity and livelihood and returned to the situation of their fathers, whose one resource and treasure was their God and His promises. John's cry, "Repent," raised as it was in the wilderness, summoned the people to turn from a life in which they found security in labor and property or destiny in their own creative skill--and to stand before God naked and

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<sup>7</sup>This aspect of the meaning of repentance seems to be obscured in Luke. Thus Luke 3:2-3, "The word of God came to John . . . in the wilderness; and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism for the forgiveness of sins." Here the distinction is blurred between the ministry of John, to whom (as in Matthew and Mark) the people had to come as an act of wilderness-repentance, and that of Jesus who went into the cities and towns of the whole land to confront Israel.

<sup>8</sup>See Mauser, op. cit., pp. 46-48. On the terminology in the Septuagint see also supra, p. 70, n. 9.



in waiting for what God will say, and do, and offer.<sup>9</sup> A man must let it all go, as Jesus Himself insists so uncompromisingly (e.g., Matt. 24:17-18). No man in Israel can escape that summons. The sinner must leave his sin behind, the Pharisee his righteousness, the Scribe his law, the Priest his Temple, the Sadducee his authority, the hypocrite his deception. Only in total detachment and the surrender of every claim and self-determined prejudice is a man as open as the fathers were in the wilderness, to meet God, to hear Him, and to follow Him into an unknown future without resistance, or self-protectiveness, or fear of loss. Only in such a returning can a man exhibit in his life that differentness of mind and character signified by the Greek word *μετάνοια*, which bears the fruit which is righteousness.<sup>10</sup> Anything less than this will only expose a man to wrath and judgment of the ax, the fan, and the fire (Matt. 3:10,12).

The place is the lower Jordan. The exact location has

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<sup>9</sup>"The return to the wilderness means the acknowledgment of her whole history as a history of disobedience and a willingness to begin at zero. This reduction to nothing is divine judgment acknowledged by the people of Judea and Jerusalem in the confession of their sin, but it is also the starting-point for a new history of grace." Mauser, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>10</sup>W. F. Flemington, however, cites J. M. Creed as his authority in suggesting that "the etymological meaning of the Greek word 'change of mind' should not be pressed." *Μετάνοια* simply translates *ἁγία*, the fundamental idea being a turning away from sin and a turning toward God. The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1957), p. 18, n. 4.



not been identified,<sup>11</sup> but it must have been somewhat in the region at which the tribes of Israel in a past age had crossed the Jordan to enter the land. Mauser reports a study by J. Jeremias in rabbinical evidence, which suggests the possibility that behind the practice of proselyte baptism lay the necessity to make the convert undergo the same experience which Israel as a people had once undergone--the passing through the Red Sea.<sup>12</sup> St. Paul's association of baptism with that ancient crossing in 1 Cor. 10:5 may lend support to the conjecture. Perhaps the accent on the Jordan in connection with John's baptism also has some such association.<sup>13</sup> Though Judaea has its own wilderness, the Jordan marks the traditional boundary between the wilderness of the wanderings and the land of promise. To go to the Jordan is to surrender the land--and having surrendered everything, to be cleansed in baptism from all the corruption and guilt of the past, from everything that had incurred judgment or separated the people from their God--and to stand ready, detached, and waiting.

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<sup>11</sup>Mauser, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 88. G. R. Beasley-Murray in his Baptism in the New Testament (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1962), pp. 40ff., throws considerable doubt on the view that proselyte baptism was in any way an antecedent for the baptism of John the Baptist.

<sup>13</sup>In Ps. 114:3 and 6 the two crossings merge into a conceptual unity: "The sea looked and fled, Jordan turned back. . . . What ails you, O sea, that you flee? O Jordan, that you turn back?"



Waiting for what? We have taken the consistent position that what John preached and expected in the announcement of the coming of the kingdom was a meeting with God Himself. This we must now establish.

Our assumption is the natural one, for all the Old Testament wilderness promises speak in terms of a meeting with God. There is the passage quoted as the keynote of John's ministry (Matt. 3:3), "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight," or, as Is. 40:3 has it, "Make straight in the desert a highway for our God."<sup>14</sup> This prophecy has a parallel in Isaiah 35, a chapter of hope spoken to a depressed people who have been thrust back into the wilderness (a metaphor of severe loss and judgment) by the wrath of God:

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
 the desert shall rejoice and blossom; . . .  
 They shall see the glory of the Lord,  
 the majesty of our God . . .

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<sup>14</sup>Matthew follows Mark 1:2 exactly in quoting the verse with this last portion omitted. Mauser conjectures as to why Mark (or his source) so altered and limited the quotation, as follows: "Although in the LXX the 'Lord' in v. 3 means God, there can be no doubt that in Mark's context it signifies Christ. Otherwise Mark's slight alteration of the text of the LXX in v. 3 would make no sense. In the LXX Isa. 40,2 gives exactly the same rendering as we have in the Marcan text except that at the end it reads 'the paths of God,' which is altered in Mark to 'his paths.' Mark, or more likely the source which the Evangelist followed, altered the text to make it applicable to the one who was known to the congregations as the kyrios Christos" (op. cit., p. 80). Though Matthew employs the quotation as it has been handed down in Christian usage, the reasoning behind this alteration, even if valid with reference to Mark, would not necessarily reflect Matthew's thinking. In view of other evidences which follow in our argument, we would say it cannot be applicable to his Gospel.



Say to those who are of a fearful heart,  
 "Be strong, fear not!  
 Behold, your God will come with vengeance,  
 with the recompense of God.  
 He will come and save you." (Is. 35:1,4)

We have already referred to the wilderness theme in Hosea, who by it can express both judgment and the hope of a renewal of the original communion of Israel with God (Hos. 2:3,14).<sup>15</sup> In back of all of this stands the exodus experience, the presence of God in pillar of cloud and fire, and perhaps, most vividly, God's presence at Sinai. That climactic moment is described in Ex. 19. The Lord declares to Moses, "Lo, I am coming to you" (Ex. 19:9). In preparation for that coming, the people are to consecrate themselves for two days, and this includes the washing of their garments, as well as of themselves (Ex. 19:10). That coming is attended by vivid signs of thunders and lightnings, thick

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<sup>15</sup>Supra, p.101. Though not directly in a wilderness context, the last chapters of Isaiah have much to contribute to this background of thought. Is. 64:1-5 contains a plea that the Lord would "come down," and the promise, "Thou meetest him that joyfully works righteousness . . ." Is. 66:15 introduces the element of fire: "For behold, the Lord will come in fire, and his chariots like the storm-wind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire." In other contexts we have seen the importance of Malachi for Matthew's Gospel. Malachi does not use wilderness language, but speaks of the temple as the meeting place. "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to his temple" (Mal. 3:1). Similarly the Lord speaks of "the day when I act" (Mal. 4:3), and urges repentance "lest I come . . ." (Mal. 4:6). "The Zadokite Document," xiv, 2, likewise anticipates the visitation of God: "These, in fact, are the regulations for the social conduct of the 'enlightened' until God eventually visits the earth, even as He has said (whereupon Is. 7:17 is quoted)." Gaster, op. cit., p. 82.



cloud and trumpet blast, and finally by the voice of God Himself, talking to them from heaven (Ex. 19:16; 20:22). Dreadful as this moment is (Ex. 20:19-20), it affirms the covenant relation (Ex. 18:3-6), spells out its implications for the character of God's people (Ex. 20:2-17), and prepares them for their inheritance.

Past history and promise, therefore, determine the form of expectation associated with John's preaching of the kingdom. This does not imply that John knows precisely what will happen. Sinai may furnish some imagery, but a literal repetition is not in the picture. To be ready does not mean literally to stay out on the barren wastes, waiting as Israel once had waited. It means simply to be free from attachments, unencumbered by commitments, flexible, prepared to receive this encounter in any form it may take, yes, even the form of a young man from Galilee.

That form, however, is unexpected. Many Jews were indeed waiting for a Messianic king, for a person of the line of David who would restore and fulfill the splendor of the original conquest of a limited land by his world-wide and eternal reign (Ps. 72:8). There is no evidence, however, that such a line of expectation converges with that which anticipates a meeting with God. There is no evidence of any expectation that Israel, standing tensely in the wilderness, will see the figure of a man walking toward them over a hill and recognize him to be both God and Messianic leader. When in the ministry



of Jesus such a convergence of themes begins to be suggested, then the demand is that it be proved--that the person exhibit the glories which all Israel's expectancy associates with the meeting with God. Signs from heaven must then validate his authority and identity (Matt. 12:38; 16:1). Jesus does not conform to expectation, and that, as we have suggested, is exactly the point of John's question in Matt. 3:14.

There is one difficulty on this point in Matthew, however. In describing the mightier One who is to come, John the Baptist speaks of him as One "whose sandals I am not worthy to carry" (Matt. 3:11). God, of course, does not wear sandals. A sandal-wearing person must be a human figure, and John's statement here must imply, then, a meeting with God under the form of the Messianic person. Commentators have consistently interpreted the passage just this way, equating Matthew's terminology here with that of Mark 1:7, "The thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie." The picture in Matthew, as it has generally been understood, is that of a slave walking behind his master, carrying his sandals. This is a strange assignment even for a slave, however, and though literally possible, it hardly seems probable or common enough to inspire such a metaphor.

The more important question, of course, is why Matthew should have wanted to introduce such a variation from Mark--assuming again that he had the Gospel of Mark as a resource in composing his own. Let us compare the readings. Mark 1:7 has:



ἔρχεται ὁ ἰσχυρότερός μου ὀπίσω μου,  
 οὐ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἱκανός,  
 κύψας λῦσαι τὸν ἱμάντα τῶν ὑποδημάτων αὐτοῦ.

Over against this stands Matt. 3:11.

ὁ δὲ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἰσχυρότερός μου ἐστίν,  
 οὐ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἱκανός  
 τὰ ὑποδήματα βασιτάσαι.<sup>16</sup>

It would seem at first hand, that the relative οὗ in Matthew should attach to ὑποδήματα, thus identifying the shoes as those of the coming One. The Revised Standard Version translates, "Whose sandals I am not worthy to carry." This may not be the intention of the evangelist, however. In Mark, where the middle clause corresponds exactly to Matthew, the οὗ is a genitive of price depending on ἱκανός.<sup>17</sup> Literally translated the clause would read, "Of whom I am not worthy." If these same words were so translated in Matthew, the effect would be to make the ownership of the sandals somewhat ambiguous, for Matthew lacks Mark's clarifying αὐτοῦ. We are encouraged to believe that Matthew does intend the οὗ as a genitive of price, by the fact that Matthew accents the preceding

<sup>16</sup>Luke 3:16 follows Mark, though omitting ὀπίσω μου and . In John 1:27 ἄξιός replaces ἱκανός. The construction also varies, but the thought follows Mark.

<sup>17</sup>F. Blass and A. Debrunner, Grammatik des Neutestamentlichen Griechisch, in the translation of Robert W. Funk, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament (University of Chicago Press, 1961), §182(2).



phrase, ἰσχυρότερος μου ἔστιν, by drawing it to the end of the first clause, with the οὐ οὐκ εἰμι ἱκανός immediately following. These two themes seem then to answer to one another: "He is mightier than I. . . . I am not worthy of him."

The problem remains, however. Whose sandals are these? If βασιτάζω really means "carry," they must belong to the coming One. Let us propose an alternative possibility, however, namely that βασιτάζω with shoes or sandals as its object, simply means "wear." Not even Liddell and Scott offers this translation. We are certain, however, that this is what the verb must mean in Luke 10:4, "Carry no (μὴ βασιτάξῃτε) purse, no bag, no sandals." When it comes to the sandals, Luke is not saying, "Don't carry sandals in your hands or on your back." He is not talking about an extra pair of sandals either. He means "Don't wear sandals. Go barefoot!" Luke 22:35 supports this, for there Jesus asks, "When I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?" "No sandals!" Matt. 10:10 also makes the barefootedness of the expedition clear, "Take . . . no sandals." Mark alone equips the expedition with sandals, but he has to make an express point of it to do so! Within the series of items which they are told not to take (bread, bag, money) comes suddenly the permissive ἀλλὰ ὑποδεδημένους σανδάλια, "but to wear sandals" bound to their feet; then follows one further negative, "and not put on (μὴ ἐνδύσασθε) two tunics" (Mark 6:9). What word should the Greeks use to express "wearing" sandals?



*Ἐνδίω* and *περιβάλλω*, used for garments, are certainly not appropriate. *ὑποδέομαι*, meaning to tie on (or under) is indeed a useful circumlocution. But why not *βαστάζω*? The foot "bears" a sandal by wearing it.

What, then, does John the Baptist say, according to Matthew? John says concerning the mightier one whose coming he anticipates, "I am not worthy of him to wear sandals." The sandals are John's own! The memory is that of Moses before the burning bush, hearing the command,

Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet,  
for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.  
(Ex. 3:5; cf. Joshua 5:15)

What happened in Mark, Luke, and John, seems evident. When they told the story of John's preaching, they cast it in the light of that fulfillment which had already taken place in the sandal-wearing person of Jesus. Matthew's intent, however, is clear and consistent. He wants us to understand that the coming of Jesus was a shock and disappointment to John. The fulfillment did not accord with the imagery of popular expectation. John expected to encounter God. That is why his question at the baptism is so critical--for himself and for the Church--and indeed for Jesus' preaching and self-revelation. But that expectation is also the context in which we must understand the baptism of Jesus Himself. When Jesus heard John's summons He came as all Israel was to come--freed of every encumbrance of world and past, ready and expectant, to meet God. We shall return to this in a moment.



It is in terms of this entire background of repentance in association with wilderness and meeting God, that we must view also the concept of "remission of sins" or "confession of sins" in connection with the baptizing activity of John. The tendency in the Church has been to understand sin in the narrow dimension of guilt and personal wrong-doing. If this is all sin means, and if the function of repentance is no more than to expunge such guilt, then the baptism of Jesus does indeed raise the problem which has continually colored the interpretation of the dialogue between John and Jesus in Matt. 3:14-15. W. C. Flemington quotes Jerome on just this point:

Behold the Lord's mother and brethren said to him, John the Baptist is baptizing unto remission of sins; let us go and be baptized by him. Then he said to them, What sin have I done that I should go and be baptized by him? --unless perchance this very saying of mine is a sin of ignorance.<sup>18</sup>

Two points should be made here, One is, that the concept of "sinner" in the New Testament conveys not merely the notion of moral fault, but of exclusion from the covenant. Sometimes the latter is the whole emphasis, as when St. Paul in Gal. 2:15 contrasts those who are "Jews by birth" (therefore included in the promises) with "Gentile sinners" (excluded, not by specific moral fault, but simply by virtue of their being Gentiles). The problem of the "sinner" for Judaism, when

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<sup>18</sup>Flemington, op. cit., p. 27.



moral fault or violation of God's Law is involved, is that transgression pollutes the people as such. Hence for the sake of maintaining the holiness of Israel, the sinner must be excluded. Matt. 18:17 makes this clear. The tax collector is excluded from Israel and is joined to the ranks of the Gentiles. It is just this principle which makes Jesus' association with tax collectors and "sinners" such an offense to the Pharisee, for it violates the principle of exclusion upon which the sanctity of God's people rests. When the people come to John "confessing their sins" (Matt. 3:6), and when by baptism they are cleansed, this means both the removal of guilt and the elimination of all that would incur judgment and so exclude them from participation in the coming vision and reign of God.

But even this does not exhaust the meaning of repentance. Repentance means detachment from everything that would inhibit following God or participating in His reign on His own terms. It means readiness to lose all, even to die. The truly repentant man stands in naked helplessness, and yet without fear of being naked. He is wide open for the dawn of the new age, for the rising of the "Sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2). The judgment must fall, therefore, on the Pharisee and Sadducee just at this point (Matt. 3:7-12). They come for baptism, thinking to add one more trophy of righteous religious work to those on which they already rely--their descent from Abraham and their obedience to the law. They want to



have the new on their own terms, without surrender of anything. They are not open to a new age. Their repentance is no repentance. Their knowledge of God is distorted and destroyed by the presumption that they can negotiate with Him and hold Him to their terms. Their repentance is a work for which the kingdom should be a reward. This is exactly what calls for the ax and the fire--and what makes the "fruit" God is after impossible (Matt. 3:8-12).

The other point concerning this act of coming to John in repentance is that it is always communal. No one comes simply as an individual; everyone comes as a participant in and representative of the people. If Matthew says that "Jerusalem and all Judaea and all the region about the Jordan" (Matt. 3:5) went out to John, the issue is not whether there might not have been one or two who stayed home. The terms are theologically valid because they imply the totality of the nation. Within that central focus of geography in the land which is God's own, the true people of God are to be found. And all those who come express in their coming the returning and waiting of Israel itself for God.

Therefore Jesus comes to be baptized. He comes all the way from Galilee, but in doing so He confesses His participation in the hopes and promises of Israel. We need not search for guilt feelings in His coming. The repentance, the return to the wilderness, is a confession of faith, and as such its validity in the context is full and complete without



pressing upon it a confession of sin. He comes as a representative of Israel, just as does everyone else who makes this pilgrimage, a participant in the whole people. In His coming He detaches Himself from home, from all encumbrances and pre-suppositions of the past--in complete emptiness waiting to be filled. Nothing will inhibit Him from hearing God on God's own terms, whatever they may be, and following His will. He is baptized, and the repentance is complete and sealed.

But now the one thing happens which marks the difference between the baptism of Jesus and that of all the rest of those who came. They are ready and waiting to meet God. Jesus does meet Him. They wait for the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus receives that baptism immediately as the spirit descends on Him like a dove.<sup>19</sup> They want to

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<sup>19</sup>The Spirit of God is closely associated with the kingdom of God. Thus see Matt. 12:28: "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." The promised outpouring of the Spirit (Num. 11:29; Joel 2:28) stands behind John's proclamation and the descent of the dove on Jesus. Is. 4:4f. even talks about a "spirit" of "judgment" and of "burning" in the context of the "washing" and "cleansing" of Zion and Jerusalem, and as a preface to the glory and security of God's city under His cloud and fire. For a baptism with Spirit and fire, this is perhaps the most direct Old Testament resource. But the One who does all this is again the Lord Himself. Cf. Beasley-Murray, op. cit., p. 37.

We cannot concur, then, in the suggestion of some scholars, that the references to the Holy Spirit are not an original part of John's teaching, but rather represent an interpretation of the early church, and that John himself spoke only of a baptism with fire. For evidence of this Acts 19:2 is cited, where disciples of John at Ephesus have "never even



hear God's voice. Jesus does hear it: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." In this moment the kingdom of heaven has arrived. The single, unnoticed grain of mustard seed has been planted.

The rest of Matthew's Gospel is the story of its fruit.

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heard that there is a Holy Spirit." But it is hardly conceivable that they should never have heard of the hope of the Spirit in the context of the hope of the kingdom. We suspect that what they have not heard of is the reality of the fulfillment of the Spirit-kingdom theme, in the man Jesus. What they were still expecting was a vivid meeting of Israel with God. Cf. Flemington, op. cit., p. 19. Also Beasley-Murray, op. cit., pp. 35f.



## CHAPTER XI

### RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SONSHIP

When John the Baptist lays down the challenge to the Pharisees, "Bear fruit that befits repentance" (Matt. 3:8), he is in effect asserting that what God wants is a righteous, fruit-bearing Israel. At least three implications of his statement ought to be sorted out, for they carry through the entire Gospel of Matthew.

1. Righteousness is the very character of the kingdom of God, its great and inescapable presupposition. God is not interested in making His people merely superior to the nations in dominion and glory. Down through their history His intention has been that they should be different from the nations, and that the quality of this "differentness" (holiness) should be their glory and His.<sup>1</sup> Therefore a conception of the kingdom which is dominated by pity for self and hatred for the world around constitutes rebellion against the character and purpose of God.<sup>2</sup> In the Gospel of Matthew the

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<sup>1</sup>Lev. 20:26; Ez. 36:23-28; Matt. 5:10-16; 6:9.

<sup>2</sup>Recall 1 Sam. 8:5,20, where the desire of Israel to have a king so that they "may be like all the nations" amounts to rejection of the kingship of Jahweh. The whole point of the law and prophets is that this people shall be different from the nations, in order that they may be like their God. That is the meaning of "holiness" in Lev. 20:22-26 and elsewhere.



association of the kingdom with righteousness is a key theme. Matthew uses the word *δικαιοσύνη* seven times, while Mark uses it not at all and Luke only once.<sup>3</sup> In four of the seven instances in Matthew, the word *βασιλεία* lies in the immediate context.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:10)

Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:20)

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. (Matt. 6:33)

The tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him. (Matt. 21:31f.)

In the remaining instances the kingdom concept is close at hand, even though the term does not occur in the immediate context.<sup>4</sup>

2. What God means by righteousness and what the Pharisees mean by it are two different things. From the protest of John the Baptist in Matt. 3:7-10 we may infer that the Pharisees and Sadducees found righteousness in their lineal descent from Abraham, or in their physical participation in the

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<sup>1</sup>Luke 1:75, the song of Zechariah.

<sup>2</sup>Matt. 3:15, where Jesus "fulfills all righteousness" in the context of John's proclamation of the kingdom (Matt. 3:2); Matt. 5:6, where the "hunger and thirst for righteousness" may be equatable with longing for the kingdom in the terms in which Jesus brings it (note the promise "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" in Matt. 5:3,10); and Matt. 6:1 (quoted in our next paragraph), where the "reward" which those who practice piety before men are seeking is essentially the promised kingdom.



circumcised race, or in a ritual conformity expressed at the Jordan by their willingness to add baptism to the list of their qualifications. All of this falls under judgment. The basic clash which begins here carries through the entire Gospel of Matthew, and culminates in the cross. Matt. 5:20 and 21:31f., quoted above, illustrate it. Another pertinent passage, where the word *δικαιοσύνη* again occurs, is Matt. 6:1:

Beware of practicing your piety (*δικαιοσύνη*) before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

3. True righteousness is the fruit of repentance. Repentance means a genuine returning to the wilderness in response to God's gracious call, and thereby the abandonment of every entanglement of life and of every claim to advantage which would inhibit a man's knowing God on God's own terms and following Him in perfect trust and obedience. Righteousness is the willingness to be formed by God without knowing what the form will be, to follow God even though the direction in which God leads seems to be wholly wrong and contrary to all expectation. This, of course, is exactly what Jesus asks in summoning men to "follow me" (Matt. 4:19; 8:18-22; 9:9; 10:26-39).

We detect in the third and fourth chapters of Matthew a masterful interweaving of related themes. The subject of the Gospel is announced as the kingdom of the heavens, the heralding of which Matthew alone attributes to John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2). The coming of the kingdom requires repentance, not merely as a liturgical act, but as a genuine detachment



from all values and presuppositions of the past and a total openness to the future (Matt. 3:2,6-7). Such repentance is declared and sealed in baptism (Matt. 3:6). It bears a fruit peculiar to itself, however (Matt. 3:8), a fruit which Jesus calls righteousness (Matt. 3:15). Thus Jesus is presented in the first sense, not as a preacher who succeeds John, nor as the king of the kingdom, but as the "fulfiller of all righteousness." For righteousness not only prepares the way for the kingdom, but is itself the essential character and expression of the reign of God. But now one more factor is added, that of sonship. This is not a new thing, for Israel itself has been the son. The very cry "repent" has presupposed this, for repent means "return" to the wilderness, and return is possible only for a people who have once been there, precisely as God's "first-born son" (Ex. 4:22). But the sonship is fundamental, for without it righteousness is impossible. Not the law, but the relationship between the Father and the Son gives meaning to righteousness. When we have said this we have defined the gulf between Jesus and the Pharisees.

Therefore it is around the theme of sonship that the battle between Jesus and the devil rages in Matt. 4:1-11. Already here Jesus shows what it means to "fulfil all righteousness." The evidence of hunger cannot contradict the declaration of His Father, nor can the glitter of the kingdoms the devil offers Him distract Him from the treasure that



is His in the baptismal word. It is in the person of the righteous Son that the light dawns for the people who have sat in darkness (Matt. 4:15-16). He in whose own person the kingdom has dawned now summons men to "repent" (Matt. 4:17) and to "Follow me" (Matt. 4:19).

At the heart of it all is the sonship. For Matthew that conception is the core of the evangel and the power of new age. That is why the theme of Father and son is so dominant in this Gospel. The statistics we may borrow from Blair:

The term "Father" with reference to God occurs in Matthew some forty-five times. Seventeen of these appear as "my Father," often with the modifier "heavenly" or "who is in heaven." Eighteen times "your Father" (often with the above modifiers) occurs. "Our Father" appears only once--in the Lord's Prayer. Found also are the vocative "Father" (two times), "the Father" (five times), "his Father" (once), and "their Father" (once). In Mark "Father" occurs only four times, and in Luke fifteen. . . . The term "Father" in some form appears in Matthew more than twice as often as in Mark and Luke together.<sup>5</sup>

The strength of Blair's book is that it distills critically the considerable literature that has addressed itself to the Gospel of Matthew in recent decades. Apparently Blair has not found cause in all his studies, however, to take with full seriousness the phenomenon of the "Father-son" language in Matthew. "That the author of this Gospel liked the term is evident," he says, and he cites instances in which "God"

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<sup>5</sup>Edward P. Blair, Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 58.



in Mark becomes "Father" in Matthew.<sup>6</sup> His explanation for its frequency in Matthew follows:

Various scholars have shown that Jesus actually used the term sparingly, not profusely as the Gospels of Matthew and John represent. But in the church the term before long became a metonym for God and as such worked its way profusely into the tradition of his sayings.<sup>7</sup>

We cannot now stop to evaluate this judgment, since the question of the "historical Jesus" lies beyond our immediate concern. Suffice it to say that our own study would move us to respond with considerable doubt.

Another question does demand attention, however. We have argued that the righteousness of Jesus must be understood in terms of the relationship in which He stands as Son to the Father. It is just at this point that His righteousness clashes with that of the Pharisees, which finds its definition in the law. If Blair, therefore, dismisses from further consideration the "Father-son" theology of Matthew, how will he define righteousness? The result is predictable. He cannot avoid defining the righteousness proclaimed by Jesus in terms of the law, and therefore on the basic premises of Pharisaism. To his credit Blair is aware of the difficulty and resists it.

The higher righteousness and perfection, about which Matthew talks, mean simply being and acting like Jesus. Matthew was no legalist who wanted to turn Jesus' teaching into a code of conduct to replace the law of

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 59.



Moses and Pharisaic tradition. He wanted to raise up disciples of Jesus--men who would have his spirit and do his works in the world.<sup>8</sup>

The question is not answered, however, what it was that made Jesus Himself "righteous and perfect," or what "His spirit" was, or how it was possible for Him to obey to the death. The answers lie in the concept of sonship, but if this is overlooked, the demand to "be and act like Jesus" turns out to be nothing but a devastating and impossible new law. When Blair, then, asserts that the function of Jesus' sonship is to establish the authority of His word of command to Israel, the situation of the disciples becomes the more hopeless. Commenting on the scene of the Great Commission in Matt. 28:16-20, Blair says:

When he appeared to the disciples on a mountain in Galilee, he was endowed with all the attributes of deity. Had not God so come on a mountain in times of old? Had he not come with his word of command to Israel? So God, the Son, comes to his disciples, the new Israel, with his authoritative word.<sup>9</sup>

Thus the sonship of Jesus becomes authority for the law, not the source of freedom from the law. The triumph of Jesus is the triumph of His higher law.

Matthew . . . is obviously against the Pharisaic way of interpreting it. The true interpretation of the law is that given by Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

In 5:17-48 he (Matthew) wishes to say that Jesus asserted the full validity of the law and the prophets . . . and that he wished to show how they should be understood and obeyed. The true righteousness is

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 114.



inner goodness and integrity, not adherence to regulations governing outward behavior.<sup>11</sup>

The second Moses, by so much as he is greater than the first, can declare the will and the purposes of God with absolute authority: "Listen to him."<sup>12</sup>

The Jesus Blair finds in the Gospel of Matthew we ourselves can hardly recognize. The root of the problem, of course, is the failure of Blair and those whom he represents to appreciate the meaning of sonship in Matthew and therefore the unity between sonship and righteousness. Matthew's Jesus, as we have seen, defines righteousness in terms of the covenant relationship of a son to the heavenly Father. What this means to Jesus Himself Matthew unfolds to us in the history of His repentance, baptism, and temptation. What it should mean, and can mean, for the son Israel is the theme of the Sermon on the Mount, to which Matthew, after the briefest of transitions (Matt. 4:12-25) now brings us.

The importance of this sermon for our theme is indicated by simple statistics. The term righteousness, we have said, occurs in Matthew's Gospel seven times. Five of the seven occurrences are in this sermon. We have said that Matthew uses the name Father for God forty-five times. If these instances were distributed evenly through the Gospel, we would expect about five of them in chapters 5 to 7. Actually sixteen are concentrated here. In addition the name "sons"

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 134.



is twice applied to the hearers (Matt. 5:9,45). The Father-son relationship in which Israel stands to God is the fundamental premise of the sermon. Its thrust is the plea to this people to take their sonship seriously and to live it out consistently, by expressing in their lives and character the nature of their Father. For this is righteousness! Righteousness is the status and the expression of sonship. It is the character of the Father manifest in His children. Their sonship of God--this is the rock-foundation upon which Jesus invites His hearers to build their house, even as this is the foundation upon which He builds His own. To build on the foundation of their sonship of the heavenly Father is to "hear these words of mine and do them" (Matt. 7:24). Any alternative to that foundation, whether it be superior achievement under the law, or the subtle pursuit of positions of power and advantage, is building upon sand--and the consequence can only be utter collapse. The covenant relationship of promise, here expressed in terms of the sonship identity, is the foundation of all life and hope--for Israel as for Jesus Himself. As the word of the Father is the life of Jesus (Matt. 4:4), so it is their life, but to let go that word in the face of pressures or fears or ambitions for glory is to forsake all righteousness. In that case no righteousness under the law (Matt. 5:20; 6:1) and no boasting of religious works (Matt. 7:21-23) can possibly recover the loss.

How the righteousness of sonship expresses itself in



practical terms we may summarize under five points.

1. To be the son of the Father is to trust the Father to supply every need, to be free therefore both of anxiety for survival and of personal obligation to achieve advantages (Matt. 6:24-34). Such anxiety constitutes an invasion into an area of responsibility which man cannot fulfill anyhow, and which the Father has reserved to Himself. The son who cannot entrust such concerns to his Father is distracted from righteousness, bears the impossible burden of serving two masters, and in a moment of crisis will reject God for the service of mammon. The promise to those who seek first their Father's kingdom and righteousness is that "all these things shall be yours as well" (Matt. 6:33). The true son does not have to calculate consequences or try to anticipate his tomorrows, for this belongs to his Father in heaven. Therefore the sons of the Father learn to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11).

2. To be the son of the Father is to share the mind and goal of the Father. The son seeks the Father's kingdom and righteousness, not a kingdom of security and glory like that of the Gentiles (Matt. 6:32-33). The kingdom comes not apart from, but in the doing of the Father's will. This the sons understand, and for this they learn to pray (Matt. 6:10). No pious profession can substitute for such a "doing" (Matt. 7:21; 12:50; 21:31), nor is there any possibility of postponing the doing of the Father's will into some



eschatological future. The Father wants it done right now, on earth. Sons who pray "Our Father" commit themselves to that vision, as did Jesus in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:42). The question with which Jesus confronts Israel, therefore, is not, "Are you righteous in terms of the law?" but, "Are you, and do you really want to be, the sons of the Father in heaven?" Any prophet who permits Israel to evade this issue is a false prophet (Matt. 7:15). This is where the gate is narrow (Matt. 7:15), and where the fruitlessness of the tree of Israel becomes glaringly apparent (Matt. 7:16-20).

3. To be the son is to imitate the Father, to reflect His character. For example, the Father is the great peacemaker, who pours out His grace on men without asking whether they are evil or good, just or unjust (Matt. 5:45). The character of the Father is not to dominate men, but to serve them; not to alienate them but to reconcile; not to fracture the world with retaliatory wrath, but to be the source of its unity by patience, love, and forgiveness. What the Father is, He summons His sons to be (Matt. 5:9, 38-48). His sons do not need to be concerned with maintaining their advantages or securing justice for themselves. The Father is sufficient security for such things. Their concern is rather with the question how to create peace, break through barriers, and win the enemy (Matt. 5:21-26). Here the dramatic difference between their character and that of the Gentiles shines like a light and burns like a salt, so that in such sons the



world must know what the Father is like (Matt. 5:13-16, 46-48). The sons of God understand this, and they learn to pray, "Hallowed be Thy name" (Matt. 6:9). As the Father holds the sons under no obligation to repay all His bounty, so the sons also expect no return for their giving (Matt. 6:12). Therefore even trespasses committed against them become altogether forgiveable, and the loss incurred thereby quite bearable (Matt. 6:14).

4. To be the son of the heavenly Father is to take the full risk that righteousness will incur the hatred of an unrighteous world--and in the face of such a threat to stand firm. This is, in fact, an occasion for joy, for it testifies that the world is being hit hard, that it cannot evade and hide from God, that the kingdom is breaking in upon it (Matt. 5:10-15). The sons of God are ready to lose everything for righteousness' sake, to bear every disadvantage, because they know and trust their Father. The Pharisee dare not take such a risk. If he gives alms, prays, fasts, or performs other religious works, he must protect himself against the loss he may incur in the process by seeking compensation in the form of the approval of men (Matt. 6:1-18). This is not the true sonship, for it distrusts the free givingness of the Father. The true son knows that no evidence of humiliation and defeat, accusation and loneliness, pain and death, can in any way overthrow his Father's promises or rob him of his dignity, his victory, his inheritance (Matt. 5:10-12).



Yet the son knows also how utterly dreadful the threat of the world and devil may become, and learns to pray fervently not to be confronted with such an ultimate threat, but to be delivered if it comes. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13; 26:41).

5. To be the son of the Father is to see and to know God. The sons are the pure in heart (Matt. 5:8), who do not have to hide from their own sins and failures, who do not try to manipulate religion for their own advantage or to escape from the implications of their high calling and identity, but who rejoice in their sonship and desire no higher treasure. They alone can "see God," and upon them the Father confers the greatest of blessings (Matt. 16:17; 11:25-27; 13:16-17). They have no need to stand in trembling uncertainty of their Father's will or intention, as though the Father might betray them, or turn against them, or simply leave them out on a limb. "Every one that asks receives. . . . How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?" (Matt. 7:7-12). To the Gentiles God is distant, obscure, and unknowable, but the sons know their Father, and therefore know how to pray. "Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: 'Our Father who art in heaven . . .'" (Matt. 6:7-9).

The Sermon on the Mount is a grand call to those who have the name of sons of God, to know their Father and to rejoice in and live out their identity. It is a call out of



the slavery of those who imagine that they must and can secure and maintain a position of favor before God by staring intently at the written code and by multiplying commandments. It is a call into sonship and freedom, for those who know their Father rejoice to be participants in His work and doers of His will. The glory of the character of God shines in them.

This is the righteousness which Jesus Himself fulfills, even to His cross. And to this joyful possibility He summons an Israel which has ceased to know its sonship:

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matt. 11:29-30)<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>For Jesus the yoke is the sonship, with the totality of its implications, as the context (Matt. 11:25-27) makes clear. The Rabbis could speak similarly concerning the relief granted to those who take up the yoke, but for them the yoke is the Law. C. K. Barrett, The New Testament Background: Selected Documents (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1958), p. 147, cites the following:

"Aboth 3. 5. R. Nehunya b. H-Kanah (c. A.D. 70-130) said: He that takes upon himself the yoke of the Law, from him shall be taken away the yoke of the kingdom and the yoke of worldly care; but he that throws off the yoke of the Law, upon him shall be laid the yoke of the kingdom and the yoke of worldly care." Barrett comments that "the kingdom" here means the present authorities, probably the Roman Empire.

In the concluding verses of his book of Wisdom, Jesus, the son of Sirach, invites the unlearned, "Put your neck under the yoke, and let your souls receive instruction; it is to be found close by. See with your eyes that I have labored little and have found for myself much rest" (Sir. 51:26-27). We need not assume that either the Rabbis or Sirach were out and out legalists. In the latter, at least, there is much that may be called evangelical. Jesus' approach is quite positive. He presents to Israel the radical sonship, and expects the response of sons. This, however, is the test, for God's people are compelled now to indicate whether their real "rest" lies in the gracious call of the Father or in the works they have performed under the law.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS' SONSHIP

That Jesus is the unique Son of God is signaled by the word ἁγαπῆτός in the baptismal declaration.<sup>1</sup> In the tradition of the church this uniqueness has generally been understood to consist in His deity. Jesus alone is Virgin born, and He alone therefore partakes of the divine essence. Though Israel was called the son of God for long ages, and though the saints of the New Testament era by baptism also possess that name, a qualitative difference between such sonship and the sonship of Jesus must always be maintained. Jesus is the Son of God in a way which, at least at some critical point, is closed to us. Whereas He is the Son of God by generation, we are sons by adoption. This is one way, at least, in which the distinction may be expressed.

This is not the definition of the uniqueness of Jesus' sonship that we have found in the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>2</sup> Whether or where it may be the sense of the name Son of God as applied to Jesus elsewhere in the New Testament we are not now prepared to argue. What the uniqueness is in Matthew we may summarize and reaffirm under two points.

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<sup>1</sup>Supra, pp. 25ff.

<sup>2</sup>See chap. ix, supra, pp. 86ff.



1. Jesus is unique in that He as the Son of God fulfills all righteousness. In contrast to the son Israel, He is the Son with whom the Father is well pleased, in whom the whole intention of the Father for His son is realized. He is the Son of God, not only by His Father's declaration (as Israel was declared to be the son in Ex. 4:22), but also by the totality of His own response. Therefore He sees and knows the Father on personal terms (Matt. 11:27), and this knowledge begets His authority, an authority which demands recognition either by way of acknowledgment (Matt. 7:29) or by total resistance (Matt. 21:23).

2. Matthew is fully aware, however, that the righteous sonship manifest in Jesus is not and could not be the product of some development within Israel. The coming of Jesus is a divine breakthrough. That such a Son confronts Israel means that the Father has taken radical action to fulfill His own word, and at the same time to call His disobedient and fruitless son to repentance. That Matthew tells of the Virgin birth because he wants to explain the deity of Jesus is doubtful, and requires reading much into his narrative. That he tells this story in order to affirm the determined intervention of God is certain. God will be thwarted no longer. He will have His Immanuel.

To force into Matthew's understanding of Jesus' sonship a conception of uniqueness which goes beyond this, e.g., the conception of divine descent, is to distort and nullify much



of his Gospel. To Matthew the sonship of Jesus is not that which distinguishes Him from Israel, but which identifies Him with Israel, as the genealogy already suggests in calling Him "the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). That Jesus does not want to create a cleavage between His sonship and that of Israel we may sense in the Sermon on the Mount. When He says "my Father" He means the Father He knows. When He says "your Father" He means that very same Father, who has called Israel to sonship, and who yearns that Israel should know, and trust, and follow Him. Jesus pleads with the son Israel to know the Father as He Himself knows Him, and there is nothing except the skandalon of man's rebellious, self-assertive piety that stands in the way.

Examples could be multiplied to show how the traditional assumption that the name Son of God in Matthew serves to affirm Jesus' deity has led to forced and prejudicial interpretations. Let us cite just two.

For the first we return to Blair. Blair, as we have seen, does not press the phenomenon of the Father-son language in Matthew for its theological implications, but dismisses it as reflecting largely a terminological development in the early church. When he does make use of it to establish a point, however, the conclusion he reaches is exactly the opposite of our own. We have held that Jesus, in calling God Father, wants to identify Himself with Israel, and summons this people to know their Father as He knows Him. But Blair says:



The frequent differentiation in the Gospel of Matthew between "my Father" and "your Father" and the single occurrence of "our Father" leads one to suspect that the author wished to emphasize Jesus' unique relation to God.<sup>3</sup>

And again:

The author of the first Gospel obviously regarded God as the Father of Jesus in a sense in which he was not the Father of the disciples.<sup>4</sup>

If our own study has any validity, such a judgment is untenable. It contradicts the fundamental intention of the evangelist.

Our second example of distortion of the sense of Matthew lies in Cullmann's interpretation of the "our" in the "Our Father" (Matt. 6:9). Cullmann points out in the preceding verse, οὕτως οὖν προσεύχεσθε ὑμῖς, that the concluding ὑμῖς is emphatic. Jesus means to say, "You pray, not I," Cullmann concludes from this.<sup>5</sup> There is an alternative explanation

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<sup>3</sup>Edward P. Blair, Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 59.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>5</sup>Oscar Cullmann, The Christology of the New Testament, translated from the German by Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 289. It may be well to quote Cullmann's entire paragraph. He writes, "If Jesus' consciousness of sonship really has such great significance for the understanding of his person and work, then once more we may not limit ourselves to the few sayings in which the word 'Son' itself occurs. We must also consider above all the way in which Jesus speaks of God as 'Father.' He always says 'my Father' or 'your Father,' but never 'our Father.'" The prayer which according to Matthew begins with the last phrase is not spoken by Jesus with the disciples, but is part of the prayer he taught them to



for the emphasis, however, and one which accords much more closely with the character of Matthew's Gospel. Jesus emphasizes the ὑμεῖς because He is urging the disciples to grasp what He Himself has and what they as sons ought to have.

"You pray, as I do," would be the sense. For this is exactly the problem, that Israel has been reluctant to know the Father as the Father yearns to be known. God's people have tended to regard any claim of sonship, even though this has been given them, as a degree of blasphemy, and their whole piety has recoiled against it.<sup>6</sup> Jesus will not suffer under such an inhibition, for He does know the Father and is not afraid to accept the gift and honor and delight of the sonship. What He has He wants His disciples, yes, and all Israel to possess in full freedom, for it is a distorted piety which rejects what God wants and offers. They are the sons of God and theirs is the privilege of such prayer.

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pray: 'When you pray, pray like this' (Matt. 6:9: οὕτως προσεύχεσθε ὑμεῖς). It is just the more unconscious way in which Jesus thus sets himself in a special Son-relationship with the Father without directly stating it which confirms the fact that he understands this as his innermost secret, knowable only through special knowledge. At the same time, it also explains why he uses the expression 'Son' only in exceptional cases."

<sup>6</sup>Supra, p. 92. Blair, *op. cit.*, p. 59, says "To the Jews of Matthew's time 'my Father' was regarded as a phrase which only a particularly worthy person would take on his lips." He cites an instance from Rabbinic literature, in which a Rabbi, urged by his disciples, consents to pray "My God," instead of "Our God."



What Cullmann's suggestion amounts to is that Jesus did not pray this prayer Himself, a strange conclusion indeed! Is this prayer to be conceived as something that He, from some lofty majestic height, confers on sinful mortals, but which He Himself did not need? Does not a teacher teach what he himself knows, and confer the values that he himself has lived and experienced? If Jesus did not pray just these petitions, then what did He pray for? Surely the Lord's Prayer was His own prayer first!

In our quick summation of the thrust of the Sermon on the Mount under the dual theme of righteousness and sonship in the preceding chapter, we have tried to indicate the extent to which all Jesus' preaching comes to a focus in this prayer. This prayer expresses what it means to be the righteous Son, who trusts the Father, rejoices in the promises, shares the vision, and does the work of the Father in the midst of an offended world. Every word of it has meaning for Jesus' own life and attitudes, His own temptations and battles. The only petition at which we might hesitate to draw this conclusion is the fifth, "And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." Here the question of Jesus' sinfulness seems to arise, in what might be a contradiction of His righteousness.

But the word for "debt" is not *παράπτωμα* as in Matt. 6:14, nor is it *ἀμαρτία* as in Luke's version of the prayer.<sup>7</sup> We

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<sup>7</sup>Luke's rendering is curious. Almost as though he felt



suspect that Matthew would not want his term, *ὀφείλημα*, to be lightly equated with these. It is probably not by chance that, though Peter in Matt. 18:21ff. raises his question concerning forgiving a brother with the term "sin" (*πόσακις ἁμαρτήσῃ εἰς ἐμὲ ὁ ἀδελφός*), Jesus responds in terms of "debt" (*ὀφειλέτης, ὀφείλω, ὀφειλή*). The point, we would suggest, is that a man owes God far more than merely the sum of his embezzlements. He owes Him everything, for God is the Source and Giver of all the world and of all of life. No man can repay God, or prove his worth to God, or establish his right to what God has freely given. The man who tries to do so immediately incurs judgment for his total failure. It is the character of God to be the Giver without conditions, and this is the character also of His sons. Therefore, to paraphrase the petition, we are taught to pray, "Don't expect us to repay Thee for all Thy benefits, even as we don't expect return for the benefits we have conferred on others." That the spirit of the petition includes and makes it possible for us to forgive as we have been forgiven is obvious, and Jesus reaches just this conclusion both in Matt. 6:14 and in Matt. 18:35. A freedom of love that can bear the loss involved in giving is equally capable of bearing the loss involved when others seize what is not theirs. But that

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to interpret the troublesome *ὀφείλημα*, he uses both terms: *καὶ ἄρες ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ ἀφίομεν πάντι ὀφείλοντι ἡμῖν* (Luke 11:4).



the petition should be understood only in the restricted sense of the latter is an unfortunate reduction of a grand vision of sonship--a vision fully expressive of Jesus' own relation to the Father and of His own character as the Son who lived under His Father's grace.

We hold, therefore, that there is no indication in Matthew that Jesus wants to separate Himself from His disciples, or to distinguish between His sonship and theirs, or to change the meaning of words so that, applied to Himself they deal in one ontological reality, while applied to mere men they deal in a different and lower level of ontological reality. There is one sonship of God in Matthew. Jesus possessed it in the fullest dimension of His knowledge of the Father, and He lived it in full consistency. But the Jews ought to have possessed it, and Jesus' saving concern for them was to summon them to possess it and to live it with all seriousness and glory, as they discovered in Him what that great name of theirs really implied.

By our baptism we receive that sonship in full, and without any degree of inferiority to His own. To say this is not to reduce Jesus' glory. It is only to accept without false reluctance or shame the fullness of what the Father has conferred on us by His Word, and in terms of that richness of grace to enter with Jesus, the Son of God and our very brother (Matt. 12:50), into the kingdom of heaven. This is the Gospel of the sonship in Matthew. And this is the dynamic of righteousness.



## CHAPTER XIII

### CONCLUSION

In our three major parts we have established three essential points regarding Matthew's concept of the Son of God.

1. Matthew understands the name "Son of God" not as an affirmation of the deity of Jesus, but as the expression of His identification with and as God's son Israel. Thus the name stands in clear continuity with Old Testament usage.<sup>1</sup>

2. When Matthew speaks of the "fulfillment" that takes place in Jesus, he has in mind not so much specific predictions that now come to pass, but rather the intention and purpose of God for His son which pervades the entire Old Testament. What God wanted when He called Israel to sonship out of Egypt was a son who would truly be His son, not in name only but in all trust, love, character, and willing service. The history of Israel is one long record of divine frustration, however, for the people fail to express in their lives that purpose of the Father.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to the son Israel who has not fulfilled all righteousness,<sup>3</sup> and with whom God is not well pleased,<sup>4</sup> stands Jesus. He is Israel, the true Son, the full realization of God's intention, and

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<sup>1</sup>Supra, pp. 11-40.

<sup>2</sup>Supra, pp. 45f.

<sup>3</sup>Supra, pp. 67-72.

<sup>4</sup>Supra, pp. 51f.



therefore the instrument of the divine purpose for Israel.<sup>5</sup>

3. Jesus is called the "beloved," that is, the "only" Son.<sup>6</sup> From the moment of His baptism God declares His sonship to be the single true one. The uniqueness of Jesus' sonship does not consist in His divine nature, however,<sup>7</sup> If this were so, Jesus would not truly be Israel, and the true sonship would be unattainable by men. Matthew does not present Jesus as related to the Father in a manner unknown and closed to Israel.<sup>8</sup> His unique sonship lies rather in two factors. One is His righteousness over against the unrighteousness of Israel.<sup>9</sup> The other is the wonder that such a Son is actually there at all, in the history and presence of men. For His presence, as Matthew makes clear, is not the end-product of a long development, but a sudden, eschatological event, the breakthrough of God into history with the determination that His purpose and will shall be frustrated no longer.<sup>10</sup> To the radical divine intrusion that takes place in Jesus both the birth<sup>11</sup> and the baptism<sup>12</sup> narratives bear witness. For Israel, however, this is the moment of crisis and judgment, the moment of the kingdom. The unrighteous son shall be confronted by his own righteous

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<sup>5</sup>Supra, pp. 84f.

<sup>6</sup>Supra, pp. 25-30.

<sup>7</sup>Supra, pp. 86f.

<sup>8</sup>Supra, pp. 134-40.

<sup>9</sup>Supra, p. 134.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Supra, p. 96.

<sup>12</sup>Supra, pp. 117f.



Self, the Self he was called to be and yet refused to be.<sup>13</sup> Thus in Jesus God meets His people, as John the Baptist has proclaimed such a meeting. God meets them for judgment and for salvation, and He will meet them in no other way. It is in such terms that Matthew's concept of the deity of Jesus would emerge, but not as an essential factor in the name "Son of God."<sup>14</sup>

In the process of establishing these points we have undertaken a number of exegetical studies. We consider the following results to be particularly important.

1. The baptismal word to Jesus rests on God's original declaration of sonship to Israel (Ex. 4:22-23), and is, from the perspective of fulfillment, one with that ancient creating word.<sup>15</sup> The baptismal sentence does not derive from Is. 42:1. On the contrary Matthew in 12:18ff. is deliberately translating Isa. 42:1 in such a way as to bring it into clear conformity with the familiar baptismal word.<sup>16</sup> Thus the beloved Son is identified with the "servant" of Isaiah's hymns.<sup>17</sup>

2. The dual themes of "righteousness" and of God's being "well pleased" in the context of the account of Jesus' baptism, derive most directly from Mal. 2:17.<sup>18</sup> Similarly

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<sup>13</sup>Supra, pp. 57f., 69f.

<sup>14</sup>Supra, pp. 86f.

<sup>15</sup>Supra, pp. 31, 85.

<sup>16</sup>Supra, pp. 32-40.

<sup>17</sup>Supra, pp. 58f.

<sup>18</sup>Supra, pp. 53f.



Matthew's injection of the term *αἰετίῳ* into his translation of Is. 42:1 probably derives from the Septuagint version of Mal. 3:17.<sup>19</sup>

3. "Fulfil" in Matt. 3:15 and 5:17 is best understood in the light of Matt. 23:32 as meaning "fill up a vessel," the vessel being the Father's intentions and purposes. It is unfortunate that Matt. 23:32 has generally been dismissed from any serious discussion of the meaning of the term in Matt. 3:15 and Matt. 5:17.<sup>20</sup>

4. Sonship, repentance, and righteousness are interlocking themes which cannot be understood except in reference to one another.<sup>21</sup> What Jesus is in the baptism-temptation story He summons the son Israel to be in the Sermon on the Mount. The theme of that sermon is the righteous sonship. It is capsuled in the Lord's Prayer, which is first of all His own prayer.<sup>22</sup> By inviting His disciples to pray it with Him He offers them full participation in His own righteous sonship.<sup>23</sup>

5. John the Baptist announced and expected that a repentant Israel, returned to the wilderness, would meet God.<sup>24</sup> He did not anticipate their meeting a Messianic person wearing sandals. The phrase "whose sandals I am not worthy to carry" (Matt. 3:11) is a mistranslation. What John means, as

<sup>19</sup>Supra, pp. 55f.

<sup>20</sup>Supra, pp. 77-82.

<sup>21</sup>Supra, pp. 82ff., 115-17, 120-22. <sup>22</sup>Supra, pp. 119-32.

<sup>23</sup>Supra, pp. 136-40.

<sup>24</sup>Supra, pp. 63f., 86, 107-109.



Matthew tells it, is, "I am not worthy of Him, to wear sandals."<sup>25</sup> It is the high expectation of a meeting with God, who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire, which leads John to express his initial disappointment with Jesus in Matt. 3:14, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"<sup>26</sup>

In addition we have made a number of suggestions for the interpretation of Matthew, some of which will require further study.

1. The confession of Peter that Jesus is the Son of God (Matt. 16:16) implies that he is making the distinction of which Mal. 3:18 speaks, between the son who serves God and the one who does not serve Him. The implication of this contrast underlies also Caiaphas' accusation of blasphemy (Matt. 26:63-65) and the confession of the centurion (Matt. 27:54).<sup>27</sup>

2. The confession of Jesus' sonship of God in the story of His walking on the sea (Matt. 14:33) ought perhaps be interpreted with an eye to the apocalyptic associations of the event itself.<sup>28</sup> Our exploration led us to suggest that the name "son of man" may be simply a pious surrogate for "Son of God," parallel to designations like "Son of the

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<sup>25</sup>Supra., pp. 110-13.

<sup>26</sup>Supra, pp. 63-67.

<sup>27</sup>Supra, pp. 71f.

<sup>28</sup>Supra, pp. 89-92.



Blessed" (Mark 14:61) and "Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24; John 6:69).<sup>29</sup> Much more work would be required here, not only to establish the point, but to trace its implications for the conflict between Jesus and Judaism.

3. Matthew's birth narrative, and particularly the quotation of Is. 7:14, is not designed to explain Jesus' sonship in terms of deity, but to make it clear that His coming is an act of divine determination, an eschatological breakthrough. This, and not the equivalent of a divine semen, is for Matthew the significance of the Virgin birth.<sup>30</sup> Though the evidence points us in this direction, much work would be necessary to establish the point. Particularly necessary is a re-examination of the passage in Isaiah.

4. Though we have pressed to the limit the sense of a "vessel" implicit even in the metaphorical use of *πληρώω*, and have found this tactic to be fruitful, we have excluded from our consideration the passages in which this verb occurs in the passive, with reference to the fulfillment of the Scriptures.<sup>31</sup> In our study of Matt. 5:17 we concluded that Jesus refused to see the law and the prophets as having any substance apart from the relationship between God and His people out of which they came, which they always imply, and in which Jesus Himself stood. He knew His Father, trusted

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<sup>29</sup>Supra, pp. 92-94.

<sup>30</sup>Supra, pp. 94-96.

<sup>31</sup>Supra, p. 73.



and served Him. He received His sonship with joy and lived it out in utter consistency. This was His fulfilling of the law and the prophets.<sup>32</sup> These two lines of argumentation with reference to the idea of fulfillment need still to be pressed through all of Matthew's references to the fulfillment of the Scriptures. We anticipate that such a study would reinforce our impression, that Matthew really understood the prophets and was never just adducing proof texts.

5. We have seen that the theme of the son who serves the Father is expressed already in Ex. 4:22-23, as well as in Is. 42:1-4 (Matt. 12:18-21) and in Mal. 3:17-18.<sup>33</sup> We have defined the righteousness which characterizes that service.<sup>34</sup> To trace this theme through the ministry of Jesus to the cross is a necessary, though unfinished task. Particularly important is it to see how the Father turns the service of this Son into a "ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28), how by it He not only judges Israel but redeems this estranged son of His and sets him free; and how this serving Son at the same time breaks through the barriers of Judaism so that the Gospel of the kingdom may break forth to the nations. Until this story is unfolded, it should be understood that we have not really proclaimed Matthew's Gospel. We hope, however, that we have laid the foundations.

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<sup>32</sup>supra, pp. 82ff., 126-32. <sup>33</sup>supra, pp. 51-56.

<sup>34</sup>supra, pp. 84, 126-32.



There is much that lies beyond the range of our study. We have dealt with the wilderness temptation. The temptation of the temple and that of the kingdoms remain. We have spoken of Matthew's concept of the Son of God. Matthew also has a concept of the Christ and of related names like Son of David, King, Shepherd, and perhaps Lord. Our theme, therefore, would not exhaust the Gospel of Matthew even if we were to follow it through to its limits. The sonship idea is, of course, a fundamental strand running through this Gospel, but the study of it is not really complete until it is seen how other strands interweave with it in a movement of confrontation and conflict which emerges triumphantly in cross and resurrection, and in the commission of the church.



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