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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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MATTHEW 5:17-20:
SOME CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH PERSPECTIVES

by Elaine Guillemin

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INTRODUCTION

The passage in Matthew dealing with Jesus' relationship to the Law (5:17-20) has long been a storm center of New Testament interpretation. Since the early Fathers, and right up to the present day, we have attempted, with greater or less success, to determine to what extent these verses represent the mind of Jesus, of the primitive church, and of Matthew himself. Using historico-critical methods, scholars have tried to discover the origin of several key words and phrases, to determine their meaning in Matthew, and to discover the meaning of the pericope as a whole.

In this paper, we shall examine, first of all, the attempts of Christian exegetes to determine exactly what these verses mean in terms of Matthew's purpose and our understanding. We shall first consider the place of the Sermon on the Mount within the structure of the gospel, and then place the pericope within the structure of the Sermon itself. The pericope, four verses dealing with the permanent validity of the Law, will be examined from the point of view of sources and redaction in an attempt to clarify what Matthew said and what he meant. The verses will necessarily be interpreted in relation to one another, with such key words as "to fulfill" (v. 17), "until all is accomplished" (v. 18), and "righteousness" (v. 20) being explained in the light of their general contexts. Some

of the questions we shall attempt to answer are the following: How does Jesus "fulfill" the Law? What is this "Law," an ethical code, Scripture, the Mosaic Law? How is Torah to be understood? What is the relationship between prophecy and fulfillment of Torah? Is the Law eternally valid or does it become obsolete? What is this "surpassing righteousness" that Jesus demands?

After having seen what Christian exegetes have found in the text, we shall then examine the Judaic background of the Sermon on the Mount, and try to determine if the exegetes' conclusions are supported by what the historian has discovered. In this section, we shall deal with how Jesus is portrayed in Matthew's gospel. Was he seen as a New Moses giving a New Law on a New Mount? Is he pictured as bringing his own Messianic Torah? Against what complex background did Matthew write these verses, and to what extent was he influenced by the first-century phenomenon of Messianic expectation and the trends in the then current Judaism? How did the ultimate factor, i.e., the life of Jesus himself, influence Matthew's presentation of Jesus as coming to "fulfill" the Law?

In the third and final section we shall look at a contemporary Jewish appreciation of Matthew's text and its interpretation by Christian scholars. Since we are dealing with a point fundamental for both Christianity and Judaism, the place of Jesus and/or the Law as the focal point of

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revelation, it may perhaps be very useful to hear how Jewish commentators have reacted to a Christian point of view. It must be admitted that the "superiority" of Christianity over an "obsolete" Judaism is a concept that must be examined and critically assessed today. A contemporary Jewish perspective is a necessary corrective to ensure an adequate Christian understanding and interpretation of these verses.

CHAPTER I

MATTHEW 5:17-20: SOME CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES

The pericope in the form we have it today is as follows:

5:17 Μὴ νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον καταλύσαι τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας· οὐκ ἦλθον καταλύσαι ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι.

5:18 ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν, εἰὼς ἂν παρέλθῃ ἡ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ, ἴωτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται.

5:19 ὅς ἐάν οὖν λύσῃ μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων καὶ διδάξῃ οὕτως τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἐλαχίστος κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν· ὅς δ' ἂν ποιήσῃ καὶ διδάξῃ, οὗτος μέγας κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν.

5:20 λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι εἰ μὴ περιστεῖσθαι ὑμῶν ἢ δεκκαοσύνῃ πλείον τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων, οὐ μὴ εἰσελεσθῆτε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν.

1

5:17 Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them.

5:18 For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

¹ Bruce M. Metzger, et al. (eds.), The New Greek Testament (3rd ed.), United Bible Societies, 1975.

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5:19 Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

5:20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

[RSV translation]

These verses occur within the context of the Sermon on the Mount (Ch. 5-7), the first of the five great discourses of the gospel. They occupy a pivotal position within the context of this first discourse, since they deal with the crucial question of Jesus' relationship to the Law and the notion of the "justice" which should characterize Christian life. Immediately preceding this pericope are the Beatitudes (5:1-12) where Matthew, in a moral paranesis, exhorts his hearers to adopt attitudes and conduct befitting a Christian. Verses 13-16 define the disciples' role in terms of relationships to other men; they are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Our passage, verses 17-20, deals with fidelity to the Law. Jesus declares that he has come not to destroy but to fulfill. Here also is laid down the condition for entry into the kingdom, that is, a "justice" exceeding that of the Law-abiding scribes and Pharisees. Verses 21-48 which follow, form the antitheses, which sometimes repudiate, sometimes intensify the prescriptions of the Law. In any case, the Law is reinterpreted, and the teaching of Jesus becomes the authoritative norm. The con-

cluding verse of the antitheses with its command to be "perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect," sums up what is at once the motivating force and the final goal of Christian life.

1. Matthew 5:17-20 Within the Structure of the Sermon on the Mount.

What is the structure of the Sermon on the Mount, and how does 5:17-20 fit into it? While there have been many attempts to discern the structure of the Sermon, it may be more realistic to present several different understandings of how Matthew may have possibly structured his text. Let us look at three such understandings.

J. Dupont, after comparing the accounts of Luke and Matthew (Sermon on the Plain, Sermon on the Mount), concludes that there was an initial sermon on which each evangelist built his own discourse. He declares that the only true structure to be discerned in Matthew's discourse is that of this earlier sermon which Matthew did not essentially change, although he did alter it and make some additions.

La structure initiale s'estompe, submergée par la masse des apports nouveaux; les cadres sont disloqués, mais aucun indice ne montre que l'évangéliste ait voulu fournir des cadres différents.

Le discours n'a pas d'autre structure réelle que la structure initiale, et nous ne voyons pas d'inconvénient

à ce que par rapport à cette structure, les additions postérieures apparaissent comme des éléments adventices.²

This basic discourse seems to Dupont to be a strongly original work, developed according to the Jewish pattern of general recommendations followed by concrete examples, with each of the developments having a generally triadic structure. It is not just a collection of sentences, but has a unity derived from its emphasis on communicating the messianic consciousness of Jesus.³ Dupont offers the following schema of the original discourse:

EXORDE: les béatitudes. 5:3-12

1re partie: la justice parfaite
énoncé général: 5:17, 20
illustrations concrètes: 5:21-24;
27-28; 33-37; 38-42; 43-48.

2e partie: les bonnes oeuvres
énoncé général: 6:1
trois illustrations concrètes: 6:2-4;
5-6; 16-18.

3e partie: trois monitions
1. Ne pas juger: 7:1-2
Illustration: parabole de la paille
et de la poutre. 3-5
2. Prendre garde aux faux prophètes: 7:15
Illustration: parabole de l'arbre et
des fruits. 16-20
3. Mettre en pratique: 7:21
Illustration: parabole des deux
maisons. 24-27.⁴

² J. Dupont, Les Béatitudes, "Le problème littéraire" (Vol. I), Louvain, E. Nauwelaerts, 1958, p. 184.

³ Ibid., p. 182. n. 1.

⁴ Ibid., p. 181.

Dupont remarks that the changes and additions made by Matthew form one half of his discourse and are evidence of his desire to give a complete account of Jesus' teaching. He notes that the new elements which Matthew introduces are integrated into the original text with an admirable sense of literary style. Matthew's discourse is characterized by the moralizing tone of a catechist who is preoccupied with the moral conduct of the Christians to whom he is writing, and the Sermon itself is presented as a teaching which they must live.⁵

W. D. Davies attempts to shed light on the structure of the Sermon in Matthew by considering, among other things, the sources in Jewish forms of teaching, and tries to determine whether or not these influenced Matthew's composition.⁶ His thesis is that, at the time of Jamnia when the rabbis were engaged in a formulation of the Way of the Old Israel to continue, they were a stimulus to Matthew and influenced him in his construction of a Way for the New Israel to follow. Basing himself on rabbinic sources, Davies concludes that the passage for Mishnah Avot 1, 2, which was of great significance for the Jews of Jamnia, was the key text which gave Matthew his triadic structuring of the Sermon on the Mount. His conclusions are roughly analogous to what Dupont discovered with literary analysis.

⁵ Ibid., p. 186. n. 5, p. 34-35.

⁶ W. D. Davies, The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount, Cambridge, University Press, 1964, p. 305ff.

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Dupont

Davies

(Discours de base)

| | | | |
|----------|----------------------|------------|-----------------------------------|
| 5:17-48. | La justice parfaite. | 5:17-48. | The TORAH of Jesus ⁷ , |
| 6:1-18. | Les bonnes oeuvres. | 6:1-18. | The TRUE Worship. |
| 7:1-27. | Trois monitions. | 6:19-7:12. | Acts of Piety- |
| 7:21 | (mettre en pratique) | | The Golden Rule. ⁷ |

Davies has been influenced by T. W. Manson who noted the same division, but did not directly attribute the Matthean structure to the structure of the rabbinic source. For Davies, Matthew's division suggests that he is working under the influence of a traditional, stereotyped arrangement. He suggests that the form of the Sermon was fashioned under the impact of the discussion and activity at Jamnia, and that one fruitful way of dealing with the Sermon is to regard it as the Christian answer to Jamnia. It would be a kind of Christian mishnaic counterpart to the formulation taking place there. Davies tries to find a material connection between his Jamnian sources and the Matthean text, and draws material conclusions. Dupont, on the other hand, makes no pretense of arriving at such conclusions, since his approach is a literary one. Both authors have found a triadic structure to the Sermon: for Dupont, 5:17-20 falls under the heading of "la justice parfaite," while Davies classifies it under the title of the Torah of Jesus,

⁷ Ibid., p. 307.

the teaching with eschatological authority of a rabbinic Christ whose words are halakhah.⁸

In what measure do these analyses correspond to the reality of the structure of Matthew's text? Dupont has found the structure in the sources, not in the text, as it is. His attempt to schematize a "discours de base" whose structure Matthew would not have essentially altered may be too simple a solution. He does not respect the structure of the text as it stands, with the result that he is unable to consider the Our Father, for example, as an integral part of the original text--it disturbs the symmetry of the structure! For Dupont, the structure was determined by identifying formal elements, pronouncements, and illustrations which are characteristic of the rabbinic method. Yet, in his schematic presentation of the text, the title of the divisions seem to be based on content rather than on structure. Davies' point of departure is exterior to the text, and there is no concrete evidence for him to assert material, historical conclusions regarding Matthew's use of the Jewish source. It may be more useful to consider a third approach based on internal evidence, a method used by J. Radermakers.⁹ He suggests that there are three main divisions in the Sermon as we read it today:

⁸ Ibid., p. 189.

⁹ J. Radermakers, Au fil de l'évangile selon St. Matthieu (Vol. II), Hervelee-Louvain, Institut Théologique, 1974, p. 79ff.

the introduction, i.e., the Beatitudes 5:3-16; the body of the discourse which is a long development of the theme of the "justice" of the Kingdom revealed in Jesus, 5:17-7:12; and finally, the conclusion of the discourse, 7:13-27.

I. EXORDE: Les béatitudes du Royaume des cieux. 5:3-16.

II. LA JUSTICE DU ROYAUME DES CIEUX. 5:17-7:12.

Introduction: Jésus, accomplissement de la Loi et des Prophètes. 5:17-20.

A. La Loi accomplie par une Justice surabondante. 5:21-48.

B. La Justice faite dans le secret, devant le Père. 6:1-18.

C. L'engagement exigé par la Justice du Royaume. 6:19-7:11.

III. FINALE: La parole est aux actes. 7:13-27.

By identifying key words (justice, 5:6, 10, 20, 6:1; father, 6:6, 9-15, 7:11, 21) and finding inclusions like that between 5:17 and 7:12 (the Law and the Prophets), Rademakers builds up the structure of the texts. He searches for refrains, stereotypes, typical Matthean words (kingdom, generation) which give expression to dominant themes in a passage. He finds the meaning of the text in the structure itself, and the titles he gives to each section of the Sermon are given in function of what is found explicitly stated in the text and not in virtue of some supposed "content." From his perspective, our passage, 5:17-20, forms the introduction to the literary unit closing at 7:12. Is this conclusion taken a little too easily? Do these verses really introduce the theme

of justice in the manner in which he says they do? Is it justice or is it the Law that the passage deals with predominantly? Is the Golden Rule really the culmination of Jesus' teachings? The inclusion which he presents is more or less acceptable, depending on whether or not the expression "the Law and the Prophets" is interpreted in the same manner in each instance. Finally, are there not other perspectives from which to view the Sermon, such as the relationship to the Father, which forms a substantial part of the Sermon, and of Chapter Six?

In any case, to limit our conclusions to the passage immediately concerning us, we may say the following: 5:17-20, according to the authors we have seen, is a link between the Beatitudes which precede it, and an introduction to what follows, i.e., the antitheses. Dupont has seen that this introduction (5:17-20) is given in the form of a general statement, followed in the rabbinic manner by concrete illustrations (21-48). Davies considers 5:17-48 to be Matthew's presentation of the Torah of Jesus. Jesus is presented as one in whom not only the Law but also the prophets find their perfect fulfillment. The verses are situated in a generally triadic structuring of the Sermon, which is an exposé of the seriousness of the commitment which Jesus asks of his followers. From this brief look at 5:17-20 within the structure of the Sermon, we may say that Jesus' declaration of having come not to destroy but to

fulfill is a key verse for the understanding of how Christians were to carry out the program of life lived in "righteousness" before a God who is a "perfect" Heavenly Father. The Sermon seems to be so structured that the use of words such as "law," "justice," and "Father" express the dominant idea that Christians are to live in fidelity to the Law as expounded by Jesus and, in so doing, practise a "justice" before their Heavenly Father which will assure their entrance into the Kingdom. It will now be necessary to look at our verses more closely, and at some exegetes' attempts to determine the sources Matthew may have used and how he adapted them to his own purpose.

2. Matthew 5:17-20. Sources and Redaction.

Let us now look at the four verses of our passage from the point of view of sources and redaction. In Dupont's analysis of the pericope 5:17-20, only verses 17 and 20 belonged to the primitive discourse. Verses 18 and 19 were seen to be additions taken from another source. He conjectures that verse 17, if it is part of the initial discourse,¹⁰ is naturally

¹⁰ Dupont, op. cit., p. 180. Dupont does not seem to be sure about verse 17 being redactional. On page 144, he notes: "...nous ne voyons donc aucun motif de croire que le v. 17 ne se trouvait pas à cet endroit dans la source qui livre à l'évangéliste le texte traditionnel du Sermon sur la montagne." But then, on page 180, he states: "Le v. 17, s'il en fait partie (de la trame du discours)... ."

attached to verse 20, and that these two verses define the theme of verses 21-48 where Matthew also made additions (25-26, 29-32, 36, 48 modified). In the third part of his trilogy entitled "Les Evangélistes," twenty years later, Dupont took into account the studies made at the redaction-criticism level (especially Boismard and E. Schweizer).¹¹ In light of their findings, he modified somewhat his analysis in that he is now prepared to say that verse 17, while built on the anterior tradition, is redactional, Matthew having amplified it. Verses 18 and 19 are seen as pre-Matthean, traditional additions from elsewhere with verse 18 being completed by a Matthean addition. Verse 20 is seen as Matthean redaction introducing the subsequent development of the antitheses. Dupont's change of position regarding the structure of 5:17-20 can best be explained by his shift in methodology from preoccupation with sources to an interest in the fact that the insertion of certain elements into the text gives a whole new orientation to the original material.¹²

J. Meier¹³ takes as point of departure the position that Matthew was working with an eclectic Q source rather than

¹¹ J. Dupont, Les Béatitudes, "Les Evangélistes" (Vol. III), Paris, Gabalda, 1973, p. 251.

¹² Ibid., p. 13.

¹³ J. P. Meier, Law and History in Matthew's Gospel: A Redactional Study of Matt. 5:17-48, Analecta Biblica, 71, Rome, Biblical Institute Press, 1976, p. 121.

with the unified "Discours de Base" posited by Dupont. He presents Matthew as a careful redactor of the Q form of 5:17-19 who refashioned the original material to fit his own theology.¹⁴ For Meier, it is not clear where 5:17-19 came from. He seems certain that 5:18 is from Q (with Matthean addition), and he argues that 5:19 also comes from Q as a conclusion to 5:18's thesis. (Matthew has not altered 5:19; it is an "undigested morsel." He would not have included this embarrassing logion unless it had already been joined to 5:18 in Q.) Regarding 5:17, he offers no definitive answer, but adds that nothing militates against positing a Q source for it as well.¹⁵ He concludes that "Matthew has taken over and redacted 5:17-19 because he already found this statement on the Law as a unit in Q, and considered it a useful compendium of his view of the Law, provided certain changes were made."¹⁶

Meier suggests that the material Matthew received from tradition was the following:¹⁷

- 5:17 a,b a. ouk ēlthon katalysai ton nomon
 b. (ouk ēlthon katalysai) alla poiein
 [plērōsai?]

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 122.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 120 (transliteration of Meier).

traditional, although verse 17 is seen to be built on anterior tradition. He says nothing new about verses 18 and 19; they are still "additions from elsewhere," with verse 18 being completed by a Matthean addition ("until all is accomplished"). His shift in perspective regarding the sources does not seem to have changed his view on the meaning of these verses. (This fact will be criticized later on.) Meier's view of 5:17-20 differs from Dupont's in that his basic presupposition is that Matthew used the Q source as a base, and then built up a unified pericope by reworking the material. Matthew would have found verses 17, 18, 19 joined in Q, and after having made significant changes, would have joined them to his own creation of verse 20 and the antitheses which follow. In Meier's view, the changes and additions made by Matthew include the emphasis on "prophets" (verse 17) and on "until all is accomplished" (verse 18), the same changes accepted by Dupont and by the majority of scholars today.

The different perspectives in which these authors see the passage 5:17-20 influence their interpretation of the meaning of the verses and the relationships among them. An analysis of each verse in detail will clarify some of their presuppositions. Let us now consider each of the four verses of our passage in detail.

A. 5:17 Μὴ νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον καταλῦσαι τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας οὐκ ἦλθον καταλῦσαι ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι.

The problem in this verse centers mainly around the meaning of πληρῶσαι . How does Jesus fulfill the Law? By observing it perfectly? By adding to it? By bringing it to its full significance? (Cf. verse 20, "unless your righteousness exceeds..."). Does this fulfillment occur in what Jesus does or in what he says? Or is it a question of who he is? Does he fulfill the Law and the prophets in his own person? There are also questions regarding the Law. Why has Matthew joined the Law and the prophets in this verse? Is there a strong note of "prophetic fulfillment" here? Is this what Matthew wished to stress?

Dupont, following Ljungman, notes five major opinions on the meaning of the word :

1. Jésus "accomplit" la Loi, en ce sens qu'avec lui ce qui était "dit" dans l'écriture devient réalité; la parole se réalise par l'événement" [...Zahn, (et autres).]
2. Jésus "accomplit" la Loi en ce sens qu'il lui donne son achèvement sa plus haute expression; il la complète en la dépassant, en étendant sa portée, et lui donne ainsi sa figure définitive; ou encore, en la prolongeant il en tire toutes les conséquences et lui donne ainsi sa plénitude [(Harnack, et autres).] ... [Ceux qui tiennent cette opinion] ...refusent de considérer le verset comme représentant la pensée de Jésus; ce serait un produit de la communauté judéo-chrétienne.

3. [Selon Descamps, le verset 17 en lui-même] "oppose simplement à l'abrogation de la Loi, son observance scrupuleuse. "Accomplir" doit s'entendre naturellement dans le sens de "observer fidèlement". Le contraire d'abroger, en effet, c'est respecter, garder intact. ..." [...] Les paroles ont donc un sens immédiat strictement juif: Jésus est venu "accomplir" la Loi en ce sens qu'il entend l'observer jusque dans ses moindres détails, reconnaissant ainsi sa valeur obligatoire; mais sous ce sens immédiat, la déclaration prend des résonances différentes, par suite de son rattachement à l'ensemble du message évangélique. [...]
4. [...] Jésus vient "accomplir" la Loi en ce sens qu'il entend la confirmer, établir sa vérité. [...] Si l'on tient compte du langage des rabbins, dont on retrouve l'écho dans Rom 3,31, "accomplir" doit s'interpréter au sens de: établir le sens d'un texte, lui donner sa vraie portée. Les adversaires de Jésus prétendent avoir la Loi de leur côté; Jésus réplique que, par sa conduite et son enseignement, il satisfait à toutes les exigences de la Loi et leur donne leur signification réelle [(Dalman, Daube, et autres).]
5. [Ljungman, lui-même:] S'appuyant sur le contexte immédiat de la sentence, [...] il arrive à cette conclusion: [...] Jésus accomplit la Loi et les Prophètes parce que, étant le Messie, il en réalise à lui seul toutes les promesses et les exigences; la Loi et les Prophètes son présents en lui dans leur entièreté, sans qu'il y manque rien.¹⁹

After presenting this summary of opinions, Dupont himself looks to the relationship between verse 17 and the phrase in verse 18 $\acute{\epsilon}\omega\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha\ \gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\eta\tau\alpha\iota$ to clarify the meaning of $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\omega\sigma\iota$:

La manière dont Matthieu l'entend paraît devoir être cherchée dans la clause finale du v. 18 "jusqu'à ce que tout arrive." La raison pour laquelle l'évangéliste a ajouté cette formule est sans doute son désir d'harmoniser le v. 18 avec le sens qu'il prête au

¹⁹ Dupont, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 140. n. 3, p. 138-140.

v. 17 [...] (Au v. 18)], l'expression a un lien étroit avec l'idée de l'accomplissement des Ecritures, considérées comme oracles prophétiques devant nécessairement se réaliser. [...] Jésus, venu "accomplir" la Loi et les Prophètes, assure leur réalisation aux Ecritures envisagées comme le recueil des prophéties messianiques. 19a

This explanation is close to Ljungman's, and Dupont adds:

Il nous semble que, pour comprendre la pensée de l'évangéliste, il ne suffit pas de tenir compte du fait que des sentences disparates ont été rapprochées; il importe davantage encore de remarquer la retouche opérée dans le v. 18, très révélatrice du sens précis que Matthieu paraît avoir donné au v. 17. 19b

After such a statment, one wonders why Dupont notes (citing Descamps and Bonnard) that Ljungman has (rightly?) been criticized for his method:

La méthode, établir le sens du v. 17 en fonction d'un contexte avec lequel il semble n'avoir qu'un rapport très superficiel, est contestable, et non moins contestable l'interprétation qui s'accorde mal avec le sens naturel du verset [...].²⁰

Does Dupont himself agree with this? It is not clear. In fact, after seemingly giving credence to such an explanation of *πληρωσαι*, Dupont then takes another approach completely, one which he ultimately seems to favor, that of considering verse 17 in itself.

-A prendre le verset en lui-même, l'antithèse qui oppose les verbes "détruire" et "accomplir" conduirait plus naturellement à comprendre le second dans le sens de: porter à son achèvement, à sa pleine mesure, à sa perfection. [...] Dans cette perspective la Loi et les Prophètes sont pris comme un code de vie religieuse. Il était encore incomplet; Jésus vient, non l'abolir, mais

19a Ibid., p. 140-141. 19b Ibid., p. 141, n.2, p.140-141.

20 Ibid., p. 140, n. 3, p. 138-140.

lui donner sa plénitude. [...] Cette deuxième interprétation du v. 17 a naturellement pour résultat de l'accorder merveilleusement au sens de tout le développement des vv. 21-48, en même temps d'ailleurs qu'au v. 20.21

While Dupont was still of the opinion that verses 17 and 20 were traditional material, he treated them as a unit introducing and developing the theme of the antitheses.²² When later on, he came to different conclusions regarding their origin, i.e., that verse 17 was probably redactional (although based on anterior tradition) and that verse 20 was certainly redactional, he nonetheless maintained that these two verses were the framework for the antitheses. His initial hypothesis that Matthew did not essentially change the "structure de base" seems to be giving way here to an appreciation of the structure of verses 17 and 20 as Matthean rather than traditional material. In his stress on the relationship between verses 17, 20, and 48 as "key-verses," whether or not they are Matthean or traditional does not seem to be too important. He gives credit, in his most recent analysis, to Matthew as redactor:

L'importance de l'intervention de Matthieu dans la rédaction des versets-clés [17, 20, 48] qui encadrent les antithèses du Ch. 5 invite à interpréter ces versets l'un par l'autre et à y reconnaître la pensée directrice de tout le développement.²³

21 Ibid., p. 141-144.

22 Dupont, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 251, n. 2.

23 Ibid., p. 251-252.

But, still, he reached these same conclusions regarding the development of thought when there was no question in his mind of Matthean redaction!

Dupont admitted a clear link on the final redaction level between verses 17 and 18, that is, between πληρῶσαι and ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται. Jesus has come to fulfill the Law and the prophets in the sense of accomplishing what the scriptures had foretold. But he prefers to see the meaning of πληρῶσαι clarified in relation to verse 20 since, for him, verses 17, 20, and 48 are the key verses of the passage:

En même temps que l'emploi de περισσεύω au v. 20, le développement de 5,21-48 éclaire le sens du verbe πληρῶ employé au v. 17. Une certaine parenté unit ces deux verbes, plusieurs fois associés dans les épîtres pauliniennes. En "accomplissant" la Loi et les Prophètes, en donnant leur signification complète aux normes de vie que l'écriture propose aux hommes, Jésus accroît leurs exigences. C'est ainsi que la justice qu'il réclame dépasse celle dont se contentait l'exégèse des scribes et des Pharisiens. Il faudra faire davantage pour être "parfait."²⁴

In the analysis that Dupont makes, to fulfill means to bring to full perfection a religious code of conduct. He points out that, in this context, Jesus' fulfillment is in his teaching.

Le point de vue n'est pas exactement celui dans lequel on se préoccupe d'observer intégralement la Loi, mais plutôt du maître qui enseigne la portée totale de ses prescriptions. [...] Le langage de Jésus s'apparente à celui des rabbins, c'est-à-dire de ceux qui interprètent la Loi; simplement, il ne se contente pas de

²⁴ Ibid., p. 250.

dégager tout ce qui est impliqué dans ses prescriptions, mais il remonte à l'intention divine pour donner à ces prescriptions toute leur étendue. Jésus ne dit pas seulement qu'il est venu pour observer la Loi; il est venu donner un enseignement qui, loin de s'opposer à la Loi, l'amène au contraire au plein épanouissement de son sens authentique.²⁵

Dupont bases his understanding of the Law as a "code of religious life" on such passages as Matthew 7:12, 22, 40 and Luke 16:16, 29, 31. Even though he admits that Matthew's center of interest is the prophecies contained in scripture, he insists on interpreting the phrase "the Law and the prophets" in an ethical sense:

Le verset considère la Loi et les Prophètes (l'Écriture dans son ensemble) [...] dans leur caractère normatif, en tant qu'ils instruisent le peuple élu de la conduite que Dieu veut lui voir suivre.²⁶

Should he not have taken more into account Matthew's prophetic interest in his interpretation? We shall present Meier's understanding of this aspect farther on.

What is the most accurate rendering of this much debated word, *πληρωσα*? It has been interpreted by various authors in what R. G. Hamerton-Kelly categorizes as the "ethical" or the "prophetic" meaning.²⁷ Hamerton-Kelly presents a summary of these interpretations by various authors.

25 Dupont, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 143, n. 1, p. 142-143.

26 Dupont, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 242, n. 5.

27 R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, "Attitudes to the Law in Matthew's Gospel: Matt. 5:18," Biblical Research, Vol. 17, 1972, p. 24-25.

In the first sense, the "ethical," Barth holds that *πληρωσαι* in verse 17 means the same thing as in 18c, that is "the complete establishing of the will of God." Ethically speaking, this establishment takes the form of the commandment to love. Schweizer argues that with Jesus' coming, the Law and the prophets were transcended by his commandment to love. For Strecker, in the commandment to love, Jesus both affirms and transcends the Old Law, the freedom to do so being consonant with the essential purpose of the Law, namely, Love. Blain holds that Jesus affirmed the Mosaic Law and attacked only the moral law. "Surely ... he had come to show what they (the commandments) really mean, how they should be obeyed, to obey them in this way himself, and to lead others to such obedience." In this line of interpretation, the usual meanings given to *πληρωσαι* are (a) to do, (b) to reveal their true meaning, (c) to establish or "validate." Trilling's understanding is that Jesus' teaching brings the normative element of the Law to full expression. Its prophetic or "heilsgeschichtliche" meaning has been removed by fulfillment, but the normative element persists.

The prophetic or "heilsgeschichtliche" interpretation argues that 5:17 should be interpreted in the light of 3:15, where to fulfill all righteousness means to carry out God's eschatological judgment and salvation rather than to do righteous deeds. In 5:17, "fulfill" means to accomplish the

purpose of judgment and salvation set forth in the scriptures by means of the sacrificial death on the Cross (Ljungman). Hasler would put 5:17 and 18c together as an expression of the view that in the death (or parousia) of Jesus, the Law has or will reach its end. But this categorization into "ethical" or "prophetic" interpretation is not acceptable to everyone.

J. Meier holds that in 5:17, 18, the Law is being re-interpreted in analogy with prophecy, and that there can be no such simplistic division of either an ethical meaning or a prophetic meaning for plērōsai (emphasis mine). Rather, the Law itself prophesied, pointed ahead to Jesus as its eschatological fulfillment. Matthew does not use plēroō in the context of obeying or carrying out the Law and its commands.

Out of sixteen occurrences of plēroō, twelve uses of plēroō (plus one occurrence of anāplēroō) refer explicitly to the fulfillment of prophesied events. At least some of the other four cases also carry the nuance of eschatological consummation or fulfillment of a pre-ordained destiny. The prophetic note in the plērōsai of 5:17 seems unmistakable.²⁸

Meier points out the relationship between plērōsai and the probably redactional è tous prophetas. The phrase ton nomon è tous prophetas ... plērōsai seems to him to indicate that the Law is viewed as in some way prophetic. Katalyo makes sense with nomon--to abolish the Law, but what can it mean with prophetas, and how does plērōsai refer to nomon?

²⁸ Meier, op. cit., p. 82.

He suggests that since plērōsai ton nomon is not the most common usage, Matthew may have originally used the verb poiein. But what would be the rationale behind adding ē tous prophetas and possibly even changing a verb to fit it? Meier suggests that Matthew's redactional activity in 5:17 and 18 was aimed at modifying a traditional statement about Law so that the emphasis of the logia would be shifted from keeping the Law to prophetic fulfillment. This involved making ton nomon along with tous prophetas the object of plērōsai. This made sense to Matthew, since he saw the Law in analogy with the prophets.²⁹

How is this analogy of the prophets and the Law to be understood? According to Meier, the Law, both in its ethical demands and in its occasional prophecies, pointed ahead to Jesus. But when the eschatological fulfillment came, the Law lost its main function of pointing ahead, and Jesus, not the Law, is now the center of Christian faith.

And the gospel ends not with a validation of the Mosaic Law, but with a universal mission to the Gentiles, with baptism in place of circumcision as the initiation rite, with the commands of Jesus as the norm of Christian morality, and the presence of the risen Jesus as the morality's sustaining force. [...] We see, then, what it means to say that, for Mt, the Law is interpreted in analogy with prophecy. It is not only a matter of the prophets' stress on mercy and compassion, a stress which acts as a criterion for interpreting the Torah. [...] Mt's

29 Ibid.

total view of the Law also means assigning the Law a prophetic role in a given period of salvation-history--a role and a period that are superseded by the eschatological fulfiller of the Law and the prophets, Jesus the Messiah.³⁰

This interpretation of Meier has taken into account the nuances of both the "ethical" and the "prophetic" positions. It is firmly based on a close redactional analysis in the light of Matthew's theological interest in the fulfillment of prophecy.

Verse 5:17 posed questions concerning the meaning of "fulfillment" and "Law." Dupont favors the meaning of fulfillment as a bringing to full perfection a religious code of life. Jesus teaches men in such a way that if they follow his teaching, they will be observing the law of God in its deepest and most authentic sense. This "ethical" interpretation of fulfilling the Law is based in Dupont on his view of verses 17 and 20 being key-verses in the passage, and also, as we shall see farther on, on his interpretation of "justice" in verse 20 as signifying moral conduct pleasing to God. But, his approach is ambiguous; he cannot avoid taking into account the obvious logical link between verses 17 and 18 on the redactional level, yet he holds to his hypothesis of verses 17 and 20 being key verses, and therefore to be interpreted only in the light of each other. His difficulty seems to stem from his stance regarding sources; he is unwilling

30 Ibid., p. 88.

to admit that verse 18, culled from "somewhere else," could possibly enlighten the meaning of verse 17. Or rather, he does admit it and, then, unaccountably, disregards it. For him, there is no emphasis on a "prophetic" understanding of "fulfill"; his bias is towards an ethical understanding of both "fulfill" and "law." He gets around the presence of "and prophets" by casuistically interpreting the phrase "the law and the prophets" to mean scripture taken only in its "normative sense," as instruction to the people in what they should do to please God. The prophetic element, for Dupont, is completely subsumed under the ethical. Whether or not this is what Matthew intended is another question.

Meier, on the other hand, gives full value to a "prophetic" interpretation of *πληροῦται* in Matthew in 5:17, and shows how, in the gospel as a whole, it consistently refers to the fulfillment of prophesied events. His methodology is more credible than that of Dupont. His examination of the word is based on its Matthean context and usage, not on some hypothesis of possible sources used by Matthew. For Meier, when Jesus says "I have come ... to fulfill," he is speaking in a prophetic manner; as Messiah, he is the eschatological fulfiller of the Law and the prophets. But Meier also claims to see in this text the emphasis on Law itself as prophetic; as pointing ahead to Jesus, and thus losing its prophetic function once the Risen Jesus, as eschatological Messiah, has

come to fulfill it in his own person. Meier's interpretation of law as prophetic does not seem to be entirely clear. If the Law, even in its ethical demands, pointed ahead to Jesus, did those same ethical demands suddenly become obsolete once Jesus "fulfilled" them? This hardly seems likely. It would seem to us that they would be perfected in Jesus and gain moral force because of his appropriation of them. As for the "occasional prophecies" pointing ahead to Jesus, Meier says nothing. We would ask if the picture of Jesus as the center of Christian faith could not also include the portrait of one who does not abolish the Law in the sense of destroying its validity, but who rather completes and perfects in his person things which were once valid and continue to be valid. While it is true that the two key Matthean words, plērōsai and prophetas, cast a prophetic light upon the whole verse, Meier's thesis that Matthew wished to shift away from the idea of keeping the Law (in an ethical sense) to that of "prophetic fulfillment" in this verse, is debatable.

What may we conclude from our study so far? Briefly, this: Jesus has come to fulfill the Law, not only by observing it perfectly, nor by simply adding to it, but by bringing it to its full significance. This means that not only does he reveal the true meaning of the Law, but that only in the light of Jesus as eschatological fulfiller can its full meaning be appreciated. Jesus is the fulfillment of what God's Law prophesied.

Questions regarding the Law still remain. It is in the next verse that the question of the terminus of the validity of the Law will be raised. How are we to understand the phrase "until all is accomplished"? What is this "Law"--an ethical code; scripture, or the Mosaic Law as such? Does the Law become obsolete, or is its validity eternal? This verse is for Meier the crucial pivot on which Matthew's thought turns, and the key to understanding his position on Law in relation to Jesus.

B. 5:18 ἀμὴν γάρ λέγω ὑμῖν, ἕως ἂν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ, ἑὶ μὴ κεραία ἢ κῆλη παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου ἕως ἂν πάντα γενήτῃ.

This is the only verse in the pericope with a parallel in another gospel, i.e., Luke 16:17: Εὐκοπώτερον δὲ εἶπεν τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν παρελθεῖν ἢ τοῦ νόμου μίαν κεραίαν πρῆξαι.

"But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one dot of the Law to become void."

[RSV version]

Both Matthew and Luke were probably using a common Q logion, which dealt with the perduring validity of the Mosaic Law.³¹

Meier suggests that Matthew was working with the following traditional material:

³¹ Meier, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

18b. ἕως ἃν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ

18c. ἵνα ἕν ἢ μία κεραία οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου.

But neither Luke nor Matthew would have been able to accept such a statement without modifying it. Luke changes this stringent affirmation of the validity of the Law by emphasizing the great difficulty with which change in the Law will come about. He compares the violence and struggle which must accompany the confrontation of Jesus' teaching with the prescriptions of the Law to the great eschatological upheaval which will constitute the passing away of the heavens and the earth. In Luke, there is really no question of any temporal connection between the two events.

Dupont claims that Matthew had the same understanding as Luke, but expressed it differently.

L'expression employée par Matthieu "jusqu'à ce que passent le ciel et la terre" n'insiste pas sur le fait que le ciel et la terre passeront, et qu'alors la Loi passera également; il s'agit simplement d'une comparaison, et Luc a bien saisi le sens. Quand donc il écrit: "Il est plus facile que passent le ciel et la terre," il traduit en un langage plus clair et plus accessible ce que Matthieu exprime à la manière sémitique.³²

But, whereas Luke avoids any question of temporal connection between the passing away of the Law and the passing away of heaven and earth, Matthew has retained the ἕως ἃν clause.

How does he understand it? And why does he add yet another ἕως ἃν clause to specify what he means? Dupont seems not

³² Dupont, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 116, n. 2.

to consider this. Also, the general context of verses 17-20 is that of the question of the permanent validity of the Law. Therefore, Matthew must have intended to deal with this question in some way.

Let us look at the meaning of 18b, *ἕως ἃν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ*, and its implications for our understanding of 18d, *ἕως ἃν πάντα γένηται*. In the first *ἕως ἃν* clause the conjunction is used as a temporal conjunction to denote the end of a period of time, "till," "until," and this is the only possible meaning. It cannot mean "in order that." In the second *ἕως ἃν* clause, it also has a temporal meaning, not a final one, as some authors would hold. The whole verse, then, cannot mean that "until the heavens and the earth pass away, not any part of the Law will pass, in order that all of it be accomplished." This would imply that "all" the Law must persist in all its vigor until the end of creation, so that it might be fulfilled. Rather, the meaning is "until the heavens and the earth pass away, the Law in all its parts remains, at least, until all is accomplished." (The awkwardness apparent here indicates conflation or editing.)³³

In 18b are we to understand "until heaven and earth pass away" as just another way of saying the Law will never

³³ Meier, op. cit., p. 48.

pass away, or is there a notion of an unstable universe soon to come to a close? Meier notes:

Especially in the heady apocalyptic atmosphere of the first century A.D., "till heaven and earth pass away" would not have had the note of stability that we associate with it.³⁴

It hardly seems to mean never. Just as the heaven and earth will pass, so too will the Law, says Matthew. Especially in the light of Matthew 24:35 it seems clear that, for Matthew, the passing of heaven and earth was a certain future event predicted by Jesus. 18b,c, the primitive logion, affirmed the validity of the Law for a limited time period. Matthew makes explicit what this limited period is by adding the second clause, ἕως ἂν πάντα γενήσονται. Before clarifying the precise meaning of this last phrase, it is necessary to consider in what sense Law is being used here. Is it to be translated as Law, Pentateuch (Torah in this sense), or as Law, scripture? Meier notes that "the use of nomos as opposed to prophetas in verse 17 [and] ... the references to teaching or setting aside entolai in verse 19"³⁵ favor the use of Torah (Pentateuch). The use of kerata in the sense of ornamentation of script "shows that nomos here means the written Law, and not the oral traditions that also counted for Torah

³⁴ Ibid., p. 49-50.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 52.

among the Pharisees." Meier cites A. Sand on an important aspect of the question, and emphasizes the fact that "nomos for Matthew means the Torah of the Old Testament seen as a whole, both as the revelatory Word of God and as a normative Law." The sense of the passage then would be that "even the smallest commandment of the Law is an integral and inviolable part of the whole Law."

Dupont seems unable to accept the understanding of the Law in such a comprehensive sense by Matthew. In his analysis of 5:18, he states that in 18 (without d) the Law has the meaning of commandment, "code de vie religieuse,"³⁶ This part of the verse is considered to be pre-Matthean, a traditional fragment. In 18d, a Matthean addition, Law means "recueil d'oracles prophétiques." Matthew, according to Dupont, attempts to interpret Jesus' words in the sense that everything in the Law (scripture), down to the smallest detail, must be accomplished. Following Ljungman, he explains the sense of the Matthean formula by underlining the biblical tradition which possibly and probably inspired it. He holds that Matthew had in mind the fundamental theological theme of Judaism that:

"tout ce que Dieu a dit (et la Loi n'est pas autre chose que sa parole), ne peut pas ne pas "arriver," se produire, se réaliser."³⁷

"La Loi" n'est ici qu'un autre mot pour "l'Écriture"; Matthieu y voit un recueil d'oracles prophétiques qui se réaliseront tous, jusqu'au plus petit détail. On sait assez que cette idée lui est très chère.^{37a}

³⁶ Dupont, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 135.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 135, n. 4, p. 134-135.

^{37a} Ibid., p. 135.

But if Matthew is indeed inspired by this theological conception of Law, Dupont is hard-pressed to explain how the rest of the verse (non-Matthean) fits in so well with the material in chapter five, and especially in the antitheses where Law is seen as commandment. A more integrated view of the Law on the part of Matthew the redactor seems likely. It is possible that Matthew, using material from elsewhere, was not able to harmonize everything perfectly, but his attempt in the addition $\epsilon\omega\varsigma \ \alpha\upsilon\ \ \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha \ \gamma\epsilon\iota\eta\tau\alpha\iota$ points to just such an effort to synthesize various understandings of Law. It is in looking especially at the meaning of the verb ginomai that this becomes clearer. If the verb means "to do" or "obey," the meaning could be "until all (the Law) is obeyed, or done." If it means to "fulfill" in the sense of an event taking place, we would read "until all (an event or events) has happened." The verb, according to Meier, should probably be translated "happen," "take place," "come to pass." He notes that Matthean usage does not favor a translation of ginomai as "be done" or "obeyed," referring to Law. He cites Trilling who notes that there are some seventy examples in Matthew of ginomai referring to the "happening" of an event, while there are only two places where it means "do"³⁸ (6:10, 26:42), cases which are not parallels to 5:18d. Verse 18d seems to refer to the coming to pass of prophesied events.

³⁸ Meier, op. cit., p. 53.

What are these events? What is it that will be accomplished? There are many divergent opinions, noted by Dupont.³⁹ For Lagrange, the meaning is that the Law will never pass away, everything in it will be kept, but will be perfected and elevated. Schmid says that this passage means that the Law will remain obligatory right up until the end of the world. Davies proposes that the "all" that is to be accomplished is the suffering and glorification of Jesus. The Law is in force up until the moment of Jesus' death and resurrection. After that it is abrogated; there is no more distinction to be made between Jew and Gentile. Feuillet gives a similar interpretation in which Christ is the fulfillment of all the Law and in him there is a new earth and a new heaven. The old economy of salvation has been replaced by the new.

Meier reaches conclusions similar to Feuillet. His claim that 5:18 is an explanation of the analogy set up in verse 17 between the Law and prophecy leads him to reason in the following way. Matthew understood the primitive form of 18b,c as an affirmation of the Law's validity within a limited period of time. He brings this time limit into harmony with his view of when the Law passes away by adding 18d. The logion with which he was working was re-interpreted by

39 Dupont, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 134, n. 4.

Matthew by the insertion of material from the Markan eschatological discourse. *ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται* refers to the fulfillment of prophesied events in an apocalyptic context and bears the idea of the fulfillment of prophecy as the time limit of the law. Both *ἕως ἂν* clauses refer to eschatological events as some sort of terminus to the validity of the Mosaic Law, but the precise content differs radically in each. 18b expresses the limiting eschatological event in traditional apocalyptic language, while 18d re-interprets the language in terms of the fulfillment of all prophecy in Christ. The phrases are mutually interpretive.

The time limit in the primitive, stringent Jewish-Christian logion 18b&c was probably the apocalyptic event of the passing of the old heaven and earth at the end of time. By adding 18d, Mt has re-interpreted this eschatological event as the entire career of Jesus, culminating in his death-resurrection. [...] The death-resurrection of Jesus is the turning point between the old and the new aeon. [...] After the prophecies pointing to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus had all been fulfilled, the exalted Son of Man proclaims a universal mission that dispenses with circumcision. The new heavens and the new earth have come. The binding force of the Mosaic Law as an inviolable whole and qua Mosaic has passed with the passing of the old creation.⁴⁰

The preceding analysis of this verse shows how crucial an understanding of it is to grasp the meaning of the whole pericope. According to Meier, Matthew deals with the question of the permanent validity of the Law by making it clear that

⁴⁰ Meier, op. cit., p. 64.

it has a temporal terminus, the life and death of Jesus Christ. The Law, the Torah of God, both as revelatory Word and normative Law, is completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ who becomes the authoritative norm for Christian life. Matthew may very well have had in mind the Judaic concept of Torah as God's prophetic and eternally valid word which must be accomplished, but for him it is the "event" of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection which constitutes that accomplishment in full. Verse 18, with the Matthean addition of 18d, is an example of how Matthew adapted an originally stringent affirmation of the enduring validity of the Mosaic Law to a Christian view of the Law as completely fulfilled only in Jesus Christ. Dupont's analysis of "law" as here referring only to scripture and not to normative law seems inadequate by comparison. Meier's position on Torah in Matthew as including both prophetic word and prescriptive law is bolstered by the reading of ginomai as the happening of an event. The Law will not pass away until "everything has happened." We should note here that, once again, we do not find Meier's interpretation of the verse completely satisfying. He had found in verse 17 that the Law became obsolete in the sense that its prophetic function was no longer necessary once Jesus had come as the fulfillment of all prophecy. In this verse, he makes a case for the abolition of the Mosaic Law "in its entirety and qua Mosaic" with the coming of the glorified Christ. We ask whether

a Christian view of the Mosaic Law as completely fulfilled only in Jesus Christ necessarily means that this same Law is no longer a valid element in Christianity. Jesus' fulfillment of the Law in verse 17 was seen to mean that he brought the Law to its full significance. Even if the Law is "surpassed" in some sense, does this mean that it suddenly becomes useless because it is "replaced" by Jesus? In a "new" economy of salvation, i.e., the Christian one, the "old" vehicle of the revelation of God's will, i.e., the Torah, comes to some sort of terminus, but that it is replaced in the sense of being no longer necessary or useful seems to us extreme. It would seem more appropriate to see the new order introduced by Jesus as embracing and developing Torah.

C. 5:19 ὅς ἐάν οὖν λύσῃ μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων καὶ διδάξῃ οὕτως τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἐλάχιστος κληθήσεται ἐν βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν. ὅς δ' ἂν ποιήσῃ καὶ διδάξῃ, οὗτος μέγας κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν.

It is evident that verse 19 does not fit easily into the context of 5:17-20. It is no longer a question of Jesus and his relationship to the Law, but rather of a larger group, "whoever..." of teachers or disciples. There is a marked change in vocabulary, with *λυεῖν* instead of *καταλυεῖν* and *ἐντολῇ* instead of *νομος*, and the thought itself is almost in contradiction with the rest of the pericope.

To what precisely do "these commandments" refer, and what kind of sanction is it to be called "least in the kingdom of heaven"? It sounds strange after the firm statements regarding the fulfillment of the Law in verses 17 and 18, and it fits no better with verse 20 which threatens total exclusion from the kingdom.

Dupont notes that verse 19 is a corrective, modifying the thought of verses 18 and 20. In verse 18, it is stated that the Law remains valid in entirety, while in verse 20 those who observe it are still not fulfilling the requirements necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven. Verse 19 shifts the emphasis by introducing a more comforting thought: that of greater and lesser places in the kingdom. "L'abrogation des petits commandements n'exclut pas du royaume comme on pourrait le croire après le v. 18; elle entraîne seulement un certain déclassement."⁴¹ In Dupont's view, Matthew has deliberately inserted this verse into the context in order to modify the harshness of the other statements:

C'est le souci de nuancer des affirmations très absolues qui semble justifier son insertion au milieu des sentences qui représentent un point de vue fort différent; ce souci caractérise la tournure d'esprit de l'évangéliste plutôt que celle de ses sources. Il ne semble donc pas téméraire de lui attribuer l'insertion du verset à cet endroit.⁴²

⁴¹ Dupont, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 138, n. 1.

⁴² Ibid. p. 138.

Meier agrees that verse 19 is not a Matthean creation, but holds that it was originally joined to verse 18 in Q in the form of a conclusion to a thesis. This is especially clear when verse 18 is considered in its primitive form without the Matthean addition:

- 5:18b& Until heaven and earth pass away
 18c not one yod or stroke shall pass from the law.
- 5:19a Therefore, whoever annuls one of these least
 commandments and so teaches men
- 19b shall be called least in the kingdom.⁴³

The "least commandments" here seem clearly to refer to the Law of verse 18, and not to the commandments of Jesus as some would hold. Meier notes that entolē in Matthew is never used in the Johannine sense of the commands of Jesus, but always in reference to specific Old Testament precepts.⁴⁴

If the Q source was indeed an eclectic gathering of different logia as Meier considers it to be, then the juxtaposition of such different verses as 18 and 19 would seem normal enough. They do not actually contradict each other, so much as give a different emphasis, 18 being more severe, 19 more moderate.

Matthew, then, would have found both verses in Q, but would have modified them to suit his particular purpose. In verse 18, the modification was substantial, with the addition

⁴³ Meier, op. cit., p. 104.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 91.

of the $\epsilon\upsilon\varsigma \delta\upsilon \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha \gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\eta\tau\alpha\iota$ clause. Verse 19 was more difficult to modify, partly because of its fixed form of a "Satz"⁴⁵ or "sentence of Holy Law" (Käsemann), partly because of its content. In any case, Matthew most probably did not deliberately insert such difficult material (contra Dupont). Rather, he retained verse 19 as an "undigested morsel" because it had some meaning for him. Meier suggests that the meaning could be discerned on two levels: that of Jesus' public life and that of the life of the Church. Jesus himself was faithful to the Law during his public life and taught the same fidelity to his followers; in the church of Matthew the teachers hand on all that Christ commanded, which included important parts of the Mosaic Law.

Meier speculates about the origin and precise Sitz-im-Leben of 5:19:

... we think that 5:19 and its union with 5:18 should be traced back to debates among various tendencies within the primitive Jewish-Christian community. [...] In 5:18bc we have the severe view of stringent Jewish-Christian tendencies. [...] Mt. 5:19 is the answer or corrective of a more moderate Jewish-Christian group, which tries to strike a balance between the "die-hards" and the "radicals," and arrives at a rather unusual, not to say idiosyncratic, view. [...] The result was a position that was neither strict Jewish Christianity (annulling a small commandment does not result in the direst of consequences) nor total freedom from the Mosaic Law (neglect of a small commandment will result in a very low place in the Kingdom). This attempt to

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 104.

blunt the sharp edge of Jewish Christianity, while saving its principle, produced a curiosity piece, one might even say a fossil, now embedded in Mt. 5:19.⁴⁶

Following Descamps, Meier attempts to give a precise life-setting for this particular verse:

.... the concern with teaching and doing, the distinction of great and small commandments, and the theme of different degrees of rewards in the Kingdom reflect a catechetical or parenetic setting. Besides serving as an apologia to some opposing group, perhaps 5:19 also served as an exhortation and admonition to the official teachers of the community to be faithful in word and work. The parenetic note of reward makes this likely.⁴⁷

From this survey of verse 19 we conclude that it is part of the block of traditional material which Matthew incorporated into the pericope on the Law. It is the least assimilated and most difficult of the verses to integrate into the passage. Because it formed a unit with verse 18 in the Q source, Matthew retained it and used it as a sort of bridge between verse 17 and verse 20. It softens the demands of these two verses. While this may have been in accord with Matthew's intentions, it is also possible that he saw in the verse a reference to Jesus' fidelity to the Law and his teaching of this to the Church; she, in turn, must pass on this fidelity to Christ's commands. We cannot be sure of who composed verse 19 or for what purpose; neither can

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 104-105.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 105.

we state as confidently as does Dupont that it reflects "la tournure d'esprit de l'évangéliste plutôt que celle de ses sources."^{47a} What we can say is that it reflects a concern of the early Jewish-Christian church to balance the strict observance of the Mosaic Law with complete fidelity to the commands of Jesus. Matthew shared this concern, and his preoccupation with moral exhortation throughout the gospel suggests that the tone of paranesis in verse 19 is very much in keeping with his thought. Finally, the tension apparent between verses in the pericope, especially between verse 19 and the rest, may well reflect the tension and uncertainty regarding Christians' relation to the Law in the mind of the early Church and of Matthew himself.

D. 5:20 λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐὰν μὴ περισσεύσῃ ὑμῶν ἡ δικαιοσύνη πλεῖον τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν.

In this verse the theme of Law is subtly shifted and reinterpreted in terms of Christian justice. Verses 17-19 are summarized and the antitheses, verses 21-48, are introduced. It is highly probable that verse 20 is Matthew's creation, with the word *δικαιοσύνη* being the key to much of his theology.⁴⁸ Questions center around the meaning of "righteousness" or "justice." Does it refer to ethical

47a Ibid., p. 138.

48 Ibid., p. 117.

conduct, moral activity, or to the saving activity of God?

Does one necessarily exclude the other? What is the "more,"

περὶσσεύση that is demanded? Does it have a quantitative or qualitative meaning? How is the "exceeding righteousness" related to Jesus' all-embracing command to love?

There are divergent opinions on Matthew's use of *δικαιοσύνη*. Dupont is among those who hold that Matthew consistently uses the term with always and everywhere the same meaning, i.e., ethical or moral conduct in keeping with God's will.⁴⁹ Meier, on the other hand, objects that in the Old Testament *δικαιοσύνη* as divine activity and as human behavior stand side-by-side, and that no either/or approach is necessary in dealing with this term. He holds that Matthew knew and used the Old Testament concept, and that he uses

δικαιοσύνη three times in the sense of moral conduct (5:10, 5:20, 6:1) and twice as eschatological gift (5:6, 6:33). In 21:32, he considers that both meanings may come together. It is especially in regard to 3:15, 5:6, and 6:33 that Meier differs from Dupont.

A look at how these authors approach "But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented."^{49a}

⁴⁹ Dupont, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 304.

^{49a} Meier, op. cit., p. 78.

(Matt. 3:15) [RSV translation], can be enlightening in order to see just how they both come to their individual positions on the meaning of *δικαιοσύνη* in 5:20, the verse in question. In his first work, Dupont adopted the position of Bonnard and drew a parallel with 5:20. He notes that in Jewish thought, justice is linked to the observance of the Law, and then refers to its meaning in 5:20:

[...] justice [...] dans la pensée juive, se définit essentiellement par référence au précepte divin dont elle est l'accomplissement: est juste celui qui pratique la Loi.^{49b}

[...] le verset 20 se place manifestement au point de vue du judaïsme traditionnel et s'exprime dans les cadres de ses formules habituelles. Il faut entrer dans cette perspective pour l'entendre comme l'auteur l'entendait: "le substantif justice désignera l'ensemble des pratiques concrètes de la vie religieuse du juif fidèle." Cette définition; P. Bonnard l'accorde pour Matt. 3:15 (art. Juste, Vocabulaire biblique, Neuchâtel-Paris, 1954, pp. 151-53); nous ne voyons pas pourquoi la refuser en Matt. 5, 20.⁵⁰

In his later work, Dupont still seems to see no reason for not giving *δικαιοσύνη* the same sense in both 3:15 and 5:20, but this after extended research in both passages. How does he arrive at this conclusion or, rather, what prompts him to keep his initial position? After an exhaustive survey of the numerous possible interpretations of *δικαιοσύνη* in 3:15, Dupont makes the following observations. The passage in question deals with two difficult words: "accomplish" and

^{49b} Dupont, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 131.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 131-132, n. 6.

"justice." The many different interpretations of the verse can be explained by the tendency of exegetes to concentrate on one term to the detriment of the other. Also, exegesis can sometimes be a pretext to put forward personal theological views. He also notes that there is a great risk of interpreting the terms in function of preconceived theological views rather than in function of the text. According to Dupont, Ljungman is guilty of the latter; also Cullmann is not solid in his exegesis, and Barth reads Paul into Matthew's use of *δικαιοσύνη*. He then cites one author who has attempted at least to interpret 3:15 within its context:

M. Sabbe croit qu'il est possible de conserver ici le sens que le verbe "accomplir" prend habituellement chez Matthieu à propos de l'accomplissement des prophéties messianiques. "Accomplir toute justice" signifierait donc "réaliser toute parole de la Loi et des Prophètes". Matthieu s'inspirerait du langage du Second Isaïe où la parole de Dieu est "justice." Il peut ainsi présenter le baptême de Jésus et la théophanie dont il est l'occasion comme un accomplissement de l'Écriture. Nous ne pensons pas que cette interprétation insolite rende compte du langage et des préoccupations de l'évangéliste dans ce passage.⁵¹

Granted that this particular interpretation is somewhat limited, it has nonetheless struck on an important aspect, that of prophetic fulfillment, which Meier develops more fully and more accurately in his interpretation of 3:15 (see below). Dupont's summary dismissal of Sabbe indicates that his initial position regarding 3:15 and 5:20 has hardened

⁵¹ Dupont, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 237-238.

to the point where he cannot perceive the possibility of differences of meaning for *δικαιοσύνη* in a given context. It is perhaps an indication of this when he comments, somewhat defensively:

[...] nous avons le droit de souligner l'avantage qu'il y a à retrouver partout la même acception du terme et la même préoccupation dans son emploi. Le fait de constater que l'évangéliste se montre cohérent avec lui-même peut compter comme une confirmation de l'interprétation à laquelle l'analyse du texte nous a conduit.⁵²

Does one seek to establish the internal coherence of an author in his use of terms in order to confirm one's analysis of the text? It would seem to be the reverse. In order to establish the coherency of the author's use of terms, one's analysis must be as objectively correct as possible. The additional fact that Dupont does not really give his own interpretation of this verse but contents himself with following Strecker

[...] en Mt. 5,17, *πληρώω* doit se traduire [...] "réaliser"; [...] il s'agit de la "réalisation" que Jésus donne à Loi et aux prophètes par son enseignement, tandis qu'en 3,15 il s'agit d'une "réalisation" de la justice au moyen d'un acte, le fait que Jésus se soumet au baptême. La "justice" qui fait l'objet de cette réalisation désigne "la conduite juste, celle qui est exigée des disciples."⁵³

leads one to question his position on this verse.

52 Ibid., p. 304.

53 Ibid., p. 238.

Meier, on the other hand, is not convinced that δικαιοσύνη always and everywhere in Matthew means one and the same thing; moral conduct in keeping with God's will. He points out that if the meaning of πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην in 3:15 refers to Jesus as the one who obeys and does the Father's will, then certain problems arise.

The emphasis here would be on the moral conduct of Jesus as an example given to his disciples (hymn!), who are also called to practise δικαιοσύνη (5:10, 5:20, 6:1). But immediately we notice some differences [...] all the clear examples of δικαιοσύνη as moral conduct refer only to the disciples, not to their Lord (cf. the hymn in 5:20 and 6:1). And none of these clear examples uses πλήρωσαι in reference to the practice of the moral life. [...] It is thus a dubious procedure to assimilate 3:15 to these three cases and to say that Jesus here performs an act of obedience as a moral example to his disciples. Since Mt's use of πλήρωσαι is so dominated by the idea of fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, and since the theophany that immediately follows 3:15 (vss 16-17) alludes to Messianic prophecies [...] the sense of πλήρωσαι seems to be likewise colored by the motif of fulfillment of prophecy. [...] it is incumbent upon both John and Jesus [...] to fulfill every kind of justice, —i.e., to fulfill every detail of God's eschatological plan for salvation, marked out beforehand in prophecy. It is a question of both John and Jesus playing their appointed roles at this moment of fulfillment [...] taking πλήρωσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην in a prophetic or heilsgeschichtliche sense (instead of reducing it to a question of obedience and moral example) provides the whole pericope with a closely woven, unified motif.⁵⁴

What, finally, is the meaning of δικαιοσύνη for Dupont in 5:20? He investigates it from the points of view of a "more abundant justice," its immediate context, the

⁵⁴ Meier, op. cit., p. 79-80.

finale of the discourse: 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" [RSV], and the condition for entry into the kingdom of heaven. He notes that the expression "your" justice seems to be linked with "your" good works: 5:16 "... that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven," and that the two are set in the context of a "justice de vie, qui vaut à ceux qui la pratiquent l'appellation de 'justes.'"⁵⁵ He finds that the "more" of *περισσότερη πλειον* is quantitative, that Jesus' disciples must "do more" than the Scribes and the Pharisees; that they must submit to even heavier demands upon themselves than do the Jewish religious leaders. He does not enter into the question of a qualitative meaning for this "more," as will Meier in his analysis. Rather, he claims that the immediate context of the antitheses will reveal the nature of the "more" demanded.

Les différences qu'on peut constater entre ces antithèses n'empêchent pas d'y reconnaître un trait commun: le souci d'étendre davantage les exigences de la justice, de définir la justice chrétienne par un dépassement de la justice juive.⁵⁶

According to Dupont, the obligation of practising a more abundant justice in verse 20 is re-emphasized by verse 48, where Matthew speaks of the "perfection" of God, exhorting

⁵⁵ Dupont, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 247.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 249.

his listeners to the practice of a "perfect" justice, lacking nothing. The idea of "fulfill" in verse 17 is linked to the "abundance" of verse 20 in that by "fulfilling" the Law and the prophets, Jesus increases their demands.

En "accomplissant" la Loi et les Prophètes, en donnant leur signification complète aux normes de vie que l'Écriture propose aux hommes, Jésus accroît leurs exigences. C'est ainsi que la justice qu'il réclame dépasse celle dont se contentait l'exégèse des scribes et des Pharisiens. Il faudra faire davantage pour être parfait.⁵⁷

For Dupont, verses 17, 20, and 48 form a framework for the section 5:17-48, and Matthew's redactional activity in these verses (Dupont here admits 5:20 to be redactional rather than traditional, but only in a footnote!) makes it necessary to interpret these three verses in the light of one another. He also finds a link between 7:21 "... he who does the will of my Father ...," near the end of the Sermon on the Mount, and 5:20 "... unless your righteousness exceeds" Only one who does the will of the Father will enter the kingdom of heaven; likewise, the one to enter the kingdom is he whose justice exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. The "entry into the kingdom" of 5:20 supposes a moral condition of conversion, which results in concrete action:

... comme la conversion dont parle 18,3 la justice plus abondante réclamée en 5,20 doit se vérifier dans la conduite du chrétien. Nous restons dans la

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 250.

ligne de pensée indiquée par 7:21 et les autres passages qui évoquent les conditions d'entrée dans le Royaume.⁵⁸

Dupont then gives a possible historical background for Matthew's use of *δικαιοσύνη* as a requirement for entry into the kingdom. It is comparable to the traditional biblical concept of the justice necessary to enter the Temple or the Promised Land. Moral qualities are demanded, as well as specific observance of the commandments:

Qu'il s'agisse d'entrer dans le sanctuaire ou dans la Terre Sainte, la condition posée est la même; observer les commandements, pratiquer la justice.⁵⁹

Dupont concludes by saying that 5:20 expresses only one aspect of justice, that of exact observance of the commandments. It is only in 6:1 "Beware of practising your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven" [RSV] that the "intention" of the one who does the acts of "righteousness" is considered. The two verses define two different aspects of evangelical justice. In both verses, the justice spoken of qualifies the conduct of one acting in conformity with God's will, and is the condition upon which one will be admitted into the kingdom.

58 Ibid., p. 258.

59 Ibid., p. 259.

Meier's position on the meaning of 5:20 is both similar and different from that of Dupont. He understands *δικαιοσύνη* in the same sense as does Dupont, i.e., that of moral conduct in conformity with God's will, but he considers *περὶσσεύση* to mean, not a quantitative "doing more," but rather a qualitative "being more radically motivated" in the practice of this justice.

As is clear from the gospel taken in its entirety, Mt's conception of the "plus" in the disciples' justice is not a bigger and better Pharisaism, an ever more minute, punctilious observance of small points. What constitutes the "more abundant" justice of the disciple is explained by the antitheses which follow. What Jesus demands is a radical interiorization, a total obedience to God, a complete self-giving to neighbour, that carries the ethical thrust of the Law to its God-willed conclusion, even when this means in some cases abrogating the letter of the Law.⁶⁰

He holds that Matthew took over the basic Old Testament and rabbinic (Meier somehow seems to identify or confuse the two) concept of *δικαιοσύνη*, but modified it "by making it a vehicle of Jesus' own eschatological demand."

Ultimately, what is new about Christian justice is Christ himself, who confronts his disciples with the radical demand, "Follow me," (cf. Mt. 19:21, and the *hysterō-*, the opposite of *perisseuō* — in 19:20).⁶¹

Here Meier closely follows Dupont's remarks on the "best commentary" on 5:20, the story of the rich young man to whom

⁶⁰ Meier, *op. cit.*, p. 109-110.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

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something was still "wanting" (Matt. 19:21). Meier notes:

In 19:18-19, Mt. adds the love command to a number of commandments of the decalogue. For Mt. the love command is the summation and center of all these commands; but it still stands with the other commands of the Torah. After the young man states he has kept all these (pánta tauta, including, therefore, the love command!) he can still ask, *ti eti hystarō* (v. 20). To this Jesus replies, *pōlison... kai akolouthēi moi* (v. 21).⁶³

Meier's treatment of the "Scribes and Pharisees" in this verse is enlightening and throws into question some of Dupont's remarks concerning the "lack" in their practice of justice. He notes that in Matthew there is no historically accurate picture of the scribes and Pharisees as they were during the life of Jesus. Following Hummel, he holds that Matthew sees the Pharisees as the great adversaries of Jesus, and "subordinates and assimilates all other groups (scribes, elders, priests, Sadducees) to the Pharisees."⁶⁴ For Meier, then, Jesus' exhortation to practise a justice "greater" than that of the scribes and Pharisees indicates that it must be "greater" than that of the official representatives of Jewish theology and piety who lead the attack against him, who are hypocrites who say but do not do; who act only for the applause of men. It is obvious that to such men something is indeed

⁶² Dupont, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 132, n. 1.

⁶³ Meier, op. cit., p. 110, n. 166.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 112.

lacking before their "justice" will be pleasing to God. Dupont, however, does not make this distinction between Jesus' historical adversaries (or the Jewish leaders after 70 A.D., for that matter),⁶⁵ and Matthew's interpretation of them. He points out that, in his confrontation with these men, Jesus has not yet even considered their hypocritical excesses; 5:20 refers to "something" already lacking in scribes and Pharisees who represented the Law in its integrity! His criticism strikes at the very heart of the Jewish Law.

La justice évangélique s'oppose à la justice des Pharisiens par sa plénitude, son "abondance," (πλουτησιαν). Pour l'instant, Jésus ne vise pas encore certains gauchissements de la religion pharisaïque (6:1-18); il s'en prend simplement à son insuffisance, au fait qu'il lui manque quelque chose. A cette justice partielle et incomplète, il oppose une justice complète, plénière.⁶⁶

It is here that Dupont makes the comparison between the rich young man, representing Israel in all her integrity, to the scribes and Pharisees in all their justice.

Le parallèle qui éclaire le mieux notre texte par contraste est la déclaration de Jésus au jeune homme riche: "Une chose te manque" (ἐν σὲ ὑστερεῖ: Mc. 10,21, cf. Mt, 19;20). Il a accompli tous les commandements; le voilà "juste" à la mesure des scribes et des Pharisiens. Jésus exige davantage; la justice complète, telle qu'il la conçoit, réclame de lui, qui est riche, le sacrifice de tous ses biens. Ce passage nous paraît être le meilleur commentaire de Mat. 5,20.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Dupont, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 247, n. 5.

⁶⁶ Dupont, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 132.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 132, n. 1.

It would seem that Meier took over Dupont's thought to illustrate this point that not the love command, which the young man had already fulfilled, but rather the following of Jesus is what Jesus is demanding of his disciples. He did not take into account to what extent Dupont understands Matthew to vitiate the "justice" practised by the Jews who were still faithful to the Law. In his later work, Dupont reaffirms this point of view of the inadequacy of the Law in itself, quite apart from the hypocritical practice of it by some of its representatives.

Par rapport à la justice des scribes et des Pharisiens, conçue comme observance exacte des commandements, celle qui est exigée des disciples doit aller beaucoup plus loin; au-delà de la lettre, leur soumission à la volonté divine doit aller jusqu'aux intentions profondes de Dieu qui n'ont trouvé dans la Loi ancienne qu'une expression inadéquate.⁶⁸

Meier, on the contrary, presents the so-called "justice" of the scribes and Pharisees, who practise it only hypocritically, and opposes this to a more abundant Christian justice. This abounding Christian justice is opposed also to the "letter of the Torah." Meier, while holding that Jesus "radicalizes the Law in its innermost intention," does not speak about a Law that essentially lacks "something."

What, then, can we conclude about 5:20? It is generally accepted to be a Matthean creation, with the typically

68 Dupont, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 271.

Matthean term *δικαιοσύνη* presented in terms of a moral conduct pleasing to God. The verse sums up the thought of 5:17-19 by stating that the Jewish Christians to whom it is addressed must be as faithful to the command of Jesus as they had been to the Mosaic Law before. The resurrected Jesus, as Messiah, has brought the Law and the prophets to their fulfillment in himself, and now his word is the authoritative norm for Christian life. Verse 5:20 also introduces the theme of the antitheses, verses 21-48, in terms of the "exceeding" justice demanded of Jesus' followers. This "more abundant" justice is not a more punctilious observance of laws, but rather a radical interiorization of the Law and a total obedience to God. Meier observes that possibly Matthew and the community were still not yet clear about how their observance of Torah fitted with their fidelity to Jesus (verse 19), but that it was clear that in contrast to the hypocrisy of the "scribes and Pharisees," their righteousness before God must be qualitatively superior.

Dupont's position on this verse regarding the meaning of *δικαιοσύνη* (moral conduct) was not comprehensive enough to include an understanding of "fulfilling all justice" as meaning anything other than a perfect observance of the Law and the prophets, an observance surpassing even that of the strictest of the scribes and Pharisees. For him, the Christian must somehow do "more" to enter the kingdom. For

Dupont, the point is that "justice" or "righteousness" must be verified in everyday conduct. But, in his interpretation, even the most sincere observance of the scribes and Pharisees does not reach the heart of God, for they are observing a Law which in itself is inadequate as an expression of God's will. He fails to give credit to a sincere practice of Judaism. Somehow, Judaism is inadequate in itself to ensure entrance into the kingdom. An exegesis (eisegesis?) and an interpretation such as this sets the teeth of Jewish readers on edge, and with good reason. Also, a definition of Christian justice as one that "surpasses Jewish justice" seems to be no definition at all. Are there two different kinds of "righteousness" before God? Is there not rather one state of integrity before a God who knows each man's soul and judges accordingly?

Meier's understanding of δικαιοσύνη is broader than that of Dupont, and in his mind, "to fulfill all justice" connotes the fulfilling of all that had been prophesied in the Old Testament, all that God's plan of salvation entails. The "righteousness" practised by Jesus was surely evident in his deeds and in his teaching, but its scope was broader than just the observance of commandments. The "more" that he demands, as Meier rightly remarks, is a qualitative more, a deeper self-giving and commitment to God than the superficial practice of hypocrites, whoever they may be. Meier likewise

rightly emphasizes that, in Matthew, the scribes and Pharisees are types, and that Matthew does not give an historically accurate picture of them. Dupont ignores this entirely. Meier emphasizes that it is not the love-command of Jesus which is the summation of his teaching, but rather the decision to follow him. (The rich young man already was observing the love-command; what he still lacked was this commitment to Jesus.) This is quite different from saying, as does Dupont, that the sincere observance of the Law was somehow inadequate in itself to procure salvation!

3. Conclusions.

We have seen in this exposé of 5:17-20, the following points.

1. Matthew 5:17-20 is a passage linking the Beatitudes with the antitheses. It is in the form of a general statement regarding Law followed by concrete examples, after the manner of the rabbis. In it, we see Jesus as the fulfiller of the Law and the prophets.

2. From the point of view of sources and redaction, our two authors (Meier and Dupont) agree that verse 17 is most probably redactional, but built on anterior tradition. Verses 18 and 19 are not Matthean, but from "elsewhere," probably Q for Meier. Matthew made a significant addition to the verse with the phrase "heos an panta genetai." Verse 20 is a purely

Matthean creation, introducing the antitheses. Whereas Dupont saw Matthew's text as an eclectic juxtaposition of sentences, Meier sees him using an eclectic Q source, and building up a unified pericope by reworking and changing the material. This view is to be favored since it treats the text as a whole, and as it stands.

3. Verse 17 seems to mean the following: Jesus has come to fulfill the Law, not only in the sense of observing it perfectly, but in the sense of fulfilling it completely as Lord and Messiah, in his own person. He speaks prophetically; what the Law prophesied, in him, has been accomplished. In Dupont's view, the fulfillment is limited to the observance of moral precepts; for Meier, to fulfill means the accomplishment by Jesus of the eschatological plan of salvation. Meier sees in this verse a shift from Law to that of prophecy, and finds this emphasis throughout the gospel of Matthew. He makes a good case for this interpretation of $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\omega\sigma\tau\alpha\iota$ as having a prophetic nuance.

4. In verse 18, "until all is accomplished" refers to the time limit for the accomplishment of the Law, i.e., the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which marks the end of the old era of the Law. According to Meier, the validity of the Mosaic Law has come to an end. Jesus is now the authoritative norm for Christian life.

5. Verse 19 reflects the difficulty of the early Church in reconciling the demands of the Mosaic Law with complete fidelity to Jesus' teachings. It is perhaps the best indicator of the difficulties inherent in the beginning stages of Christianity regarding the Law, and for that reason may be the most enlightening, though least intelligible verse.

6. The "justice" of verse 20 is presented as a justice practised in sincerity of heart before God. It is presented as opposed to that of the scribes and Pharisees, i.e., to those who are hypocritical in this observance. Dupont suggests that a definition of Christian justice is one that shows how it surpasses "Jewish justice."

In our study of verses 5:17-20, we have reached some conclusions and raised some questions. Generally speaking, the pericope seems to be stressing Jesus' fidelity to the Law, and his intention to fulfill it in its deepest sense. Matthew seems to be exhorting his hearers to be faithful to the Law with a greater integrity than that of the hypocritical "scribes and Pharisees." Our Christian exegetes, Dupont, Meier, et al., have interpreted the key words and phrases in different ways and have raised several questions. Does the "fulfillment" of Torah by Jesus necessarily mean its disappearance as a valid element in Christianity? If Jesus, and not the Law, is now the authoritative norm, is there no room left for the norms of Judaism in the Christian dispensation? If the Law shall

not pass away until "all is accomplished," could it not be argued that the accomplishment of salvation in Jesus Christ continues now, and still awaits the perfection of full accomplishment at the end of time and that, therefore, the Law somehow is still in force? We shall attempt to shed some light on these questions by examining the Judaic background of the Sermon on the Mount with particular reference to the passage on the Law, 5:17-20.

CHAPTER II

THE JEWISH BACKGROUND OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

After having attempted an examination of a Christian exegesis of Matthew 5:17-20, we now turn to the Jewish background of the Sermon as a whole, as seen by a Christian author who has examined both the Old Testament and rabbinic sources of the Sermon on the Mount. Questions that arose in our study of 5:17-20 can now hopefully be illumined by a look at the historical background out of which they came. Was Jesus seen as a New Moses, giving a new Law? What idea of Torah existed in the Messianic expectation of first-century Judaism? How is Jesus the "fulfillment" of Torah? Is there a radical continuity or discontinuity between Jesus and Torah? How are we to understand Jesus' interpretation of the "real sense" of the Law?

W. D. Davies¹ has approached the setting of the Sermon on the Mount using critical historical analysis. He looks at the Sermon in Matthew's gospel, in Jewish Messianic expectation, in contemporary Judaism, in the early Church, and in the ministry of Jesus. He does not claim to deal with the theological problems raised by the relation of gospel and Law, but

¹ W. D. Davies, The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount, Cambridge, University Press, 1964.

poses the question of whether or not history itself may be theologically significant. In this particular sense, he notes:

To examine the setting of the Sermon on the Mount is to be compelled to recognize that "these sayings of mine," the "law of Christ," "The New Commandment," played a more significant part in the New Testament as a whole than is often recognized.²

According to Davies, it has not been emphasized enough that the moral teachings of Jesus were as much a part of Christian faith as were the kerygmatic pronouncements about him. In order to better understand the interaction between the Torah and the gospel, Davies has examined the role that the Torah was expected to assume in the Messianic Age and in the Age to come. This study of the impact of the gospel on the Torah and vice versa will supposedly lead to a better understanding and appreciation of Matthew's presentation of the Sermon as the Law of the Messiah. We are particularly interested to see how the interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20 is clarified or modified by Davies' findings on the Judaic background of the Sermon as a whole. It should be noted that his work treats the Sermon only tangentially, with application to the Sermon itself being incidental, a weakness noted by Davies critics.

² Ibid., p. 437.

1. The Setting in Matthew.

Davies looks first at the structure of the gospel as a whole, and at the Sermon within the structure of the gospel. Approaching the Sermon in the light of its setting in Matthew's gospel, he finds that Bacon's alleged fivefold structure of the gospel is highly debatable. Matthew does not seem to have structured his gospel in five "books," i.e., narrative sections followed by legal sections, analogous to the structure of the Pentateuch. While it is true that the four connecting passages (7:28-29, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1) are used with deliberation and are characteristic Matthean use of repetition of formulae (and, therefore, perhaps significant), the resulting structure need not necessarily point to the Pentateuch. As for other motifs which would reveal Matthew's theological intentions of presenting the Sermon as the counterpart of the Old Law, with Christ as the New Moses, the mountain as the New Sinai, and the Christian dispensation as a New Exodus, Davies finds that, "while these motifs have influenced Matthew's gospel, it is not clear that they have entirely fashioned or moulded it. This also appears when we consider chapters 5-7.³ Davies notes that, when speaking of Matthew writing a New Pentateuch, there is some confusion as to whether it is the entire gospel or the Sermon which is to be considered. Since the Pentateuchal

3 Ibid., p. 93.

structure of the gospel is so uncertain, he terms chapters 5-7 alone as the "New Law."

Davies then turns to Matthew's treatment of material from Mark and Q as well as that peculiar to Matthew himself. He is looking for elements which might possibly show the New Exodus theme. Perhaps Matthew has introduced this motif by changing the content or form of Markan and Q material, modifying details or even rearranging various pericopae to suit this end. Davies examines four pertinent passages:

1. The Ministry of John the Baptist. Matt. 3:1-11, Mark 1:1-18, Luke 3:1-18.
2. The Temptation of Jesus. Mark 1:12-13, Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13.
3. The Feeding of the Five Thousand. Mark 6:30-44, Matthew 14:13-21, Luke 9:10-17.
4. The Transfiguration. Mark 9:2-8, Matthew 17:1-8, Luke 9:28-36.

We shall consider the first and last passages since it is in these that Davies shows the development of the Mosaic motif to be present most strikingly.

In the first passage, the Ministry of John the Baptist, he notes that it has been claimed that Matthew has enhanced the parallelism with the Exodus by making John's ministry precede the establishment of a New Law (Matthew 5-7 and a New Covenant founded on the forgiveness of sin (Jer. 31:31ff)).

Matthew's schematization (that is, the claim that the incidence of the Baptist's activity in Matthew between the flight from Egypt in Matt. 2, and the

giving of the New Law from the New Sinai in Matt. 5-7, makes it correspond to the period of the wilderness in the first Exodus) must be given due weight.⁴

It must be remembered, however, that the Exodus motif in the Prologue as a whole is not the predominant one; it coexists with themes of Messiah, Son of David, Emmanuel, New Creation, and prophecy fulfilled; it is one motif among others.

A second positive indication of the presence of an Exodus motif in Matt. 3:1-11 is the significance of the act of baptism for John. First, if his baptism was an adaptation of proselyte baptism, then the Exodus motif was integral, not only to John's thinking, but to that of the evangelist's as well.

... proselyte baptism owes its imagery to the Exodus from Egypt ... [it] was part of that ceremony of dedication by which a Gentile was made a member of Israel. He did so by recapitulating in baptism and other aspects of the ceremony, those historic acts whereby Israel was constituted as a people. As W. L. Knox expressed it: "The proselyte through circumcision and the proselyte's bath, was enabled to come out of Egypt and pass through the Red Sea into the Promised Land of Israel."⁵

Secondly, the baptism of John was thoroughly eschatological, pointing towards the time of the End and the coming of the Kingdom of God. The eschatology of Israel, Davies notes, was a protology, the End being considered in terms of the

⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

Beginning, of the creation of the universe and of the people of Israel at the Exodus.

Thus the possibility is a very real one, in view of the climate of expectation within which John labored, that "baptism" no less than "wilderness," was a term evocative of "Exodus" associations ... we must be prepared to allow the existence of such associations in the ministry of the Baptist, both historically and in the interpretation of the Church. The extent to which Matthew may have emphasized these associations is bound up primarily with the argument from schematization Apart from this it can hardly be said that there is any such emphasis in Matthew.⁶

The baptism of Jesus itself makes no explicit reference to the New Exodus or New Moses motif. However, Matthew 3:15: "But Jesus answered him: 'Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness'" [RSV] reveals Matthew's awareness of the identification of the Messiah with his people. Davies, following Bornkamm, connects the phrase "to fulfill all righteousness" with Matthew 11:29; "the meekness and lowliness of Christ" is expressed in his readiness to participate in John's baptism. With this agrees Jesus' interpretation of the Law, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (9:13, 12-17).⁷ He notes that:

... the phrase "to fulfill all righteousness" at least means the identification of Jesus with the New Israel that John's baptism had proleptically inaugurated. In fulfilling the demand of God, which he himself expounded in 5-7, he had to know himself

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., p. 44, n. 1.

as one with his own. In this Jesus is like Moses. Nothing is more clear in the Exodus story than the identification of Moses with the people of Israel, and at the same time, his moral transcendence over them, which, nevertheless, so far from securing for him a treatment different from theirs, demands of him the readiness to die on their behalf. Solidarity is of the essence of the Exodus story.⁸

We may note here that Davies' interpretation of the righteousness, dikaioyne in 3:15 as Jesus' identification of himself as the New Israel corresponds somewhat with Dupont's view of "justice" in 3:15 as a characteristic of the mission of Jesus and John the Baptist. Matthew's preoccupation here seems, to Dupont, to be one of inculcating into his listeners their obligation to fulfill their duties as Christians. He sees Christian "justice" as an accomplishing of the will of God; a concept valid for both Covenants:

Il n'y a de part à la promesse du Royaume que pour ceux qui accomplissent la volonté de Dieu[...] qui aspirent à réaliser par leurs actes l'idéal religieux que l'Ancien Testament résume dans la notion de "justice" et auquel l'Evangile apporte un approfondissement radical qui n'en change pas la nature.⁹

For both Davies and Dupont, "to fulfill all righteousness" means "to put into practise," to "observe fully" whatever God has commanded. Meier, on the other hand, emphasizes that plēroō in Matthew 3:15 must be taken in a prophetic sense

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ J. Dupont, Les Béatitudes, "Les Evangélistes" (Vol. III), Paris, Gabalda, 1973, p. 383.

rather than just a moral one (see p.22). Jesus is not performing an act of obedience as a moral example to his disciples so much as he is fulfilling every detail of God's eschatological plan for salvation. Here we also find some affinity with Davies' interpretation, for Davies reads this "fulfillment" as Jesus' identification with the New Israel announced (prophetically!) by John. This solidarity of Jesus with Israel will bring about the fulfillment of her salvation, marked out beforehand in the event of the Exodus. This last example showing a parallel between Jesus and Moses must be admitted as merely illustrative, since the motif of a New Moses is not present either implicitly or explicitly. Although Davies concludes that it is "not impossible" that the New Exodus motif is to be discovered both in the ministry of the Baptist and in the baptism of Jesus himself, it is not explicitly present. Matthew does not explicitly present Jesus as King-Messiah and Servant, who is to be identified with, and is representative of, a New Israel undergoing a New Baptism.

Davies has here presented us with an example of how Matthew possibly has arranged his material to show a sequence of events illustrating the Exodus theme: Flight into Egypt, Baptism, Giving of New Law on the Mount, with the baptism representing the time in the wilderness and with the nature of the baptism of John illustrating definite Exodic themes. He finds that, while none of this is explicitly emphasized in

Matthew, still there is a strong argument to be made in interpreting the phrase "to fulfill all righteousness" as meaning that Jesus, like Moses, is identifying himself with his people. He concludes that, while we may allow for the validity of this interpretation, Matthew does not present the New Exodus/New Moses motif explicitly.

There is a more explicit association, however, in the following example of the Transfiguration.

Davies notes that in the Transfiguration (Mk. 9:2-8, Matt. 17:1-8, Lk. 9:28-36), Matthew has significantly changed the Markan material in order to emphasize the Mosaic parallel. In Mark, the scene is probably best understood in relation to the Passion and the Resurrection. There is insistence on the Cross of the Son of Man (9:12); there is identification of Elijah with the Baptist whose death foreshadowed that of Jesus (9:12); there is the fact that the witnesses of the Transfiguration are the same as those in Gethsemane (9:2, 14-33) and, finally, the glory of the Resurrection (16:12). Mark presents Jesus as suffering and triumphant Lord in the Transfiguration, certainly not as "Mosaic teacher."

Matthew, on the other hand, has altered details and changed the order of the material precisely to emphasize the figure of Jesus as teacher comparable to Moses. Davies notes the following changes: Matthew refers to Moses before Elijah (17:3), probably evidence of an emphatic reference

to Moses. In addition to having Jesus' garments become intensely white, he adds that "his face shone like the sun" (17:2), reminiscent of Moses in Exodus 39:29-35. Matthew emphasizes that "on the face of Jesus is seen the glory of the mediator of the Law, Moses" (and this in later rabbinic tradition is none other than the glory of the Law itself). The "cloud" in Matthew is a "bright" cloud that overshadows, as did the Shekinah, the presence of the Lord which used to fill the tabernacle in the wilderness. It is particularly in the climax of the story that Matthew's intent is revealed. "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" refers in Matthew to both Psalm 7 and Isaiah 42:1, as in his account of the Baptism. Davies notes that "Matthew seems to have added the phrase 'with whom I am well pleased' to signify Jesus as the one who was destined to bring his law to the nations (Isa. 42:4)."¹⁰ Finally, the Voice from heaven gives a command to obey Jesus as God's Son; in Matthew this points to Jesus as ethical teacher, like Moses. The "Hear ye him" of 17:5 looks backward to the Sermon on the Mount, 5-7, and forward to 17:5-18:35. When Moses and Elijah disappear, it is Jesus "himself" (emphasized only in Matthew) who remains as the unique teacher, the "new Moses." The "Awe" felt by the disciples was caused by the Transfiguration itself in Mark, and by the "cloud" in Luke, whereas in Matthew, it is

¹⁰ Davies, op. cit., p. 52.

only after the words "Hear ye him," that they are afraid. It is his word, his teaching, that inspires awe in them.

In conclusion, Davies notes that in the baptism and temptation passages, Jesus appears not so much as a New Moses but as the "representative of the New Israel, who recapitulates in his experience that of the Old Israel."¹¹ It is above all in the Transfiguration scene that the "Mosaic" character of Jesus is delineated and emphasized by Matthew. Jesus replaces Moses as "the one who is to be heard." The Mount of the Transfiguration recalls the Mount of the Sermon, and supports the interpretation of the Jesus of the Mount as a New Moses and a greater.

In his examination of the prologue (1, 2) and the epilogue (16-28:20), Davies finds that it is the broader question of the continuity or discontinuity of Jesus with Judaism that is important in the prologue, rather than that of the Mosaic motif which is present, but not of primary importance.

Taken as a whole, the Prologue presents two aspects of the coming of Jesus Christ: On the one hand, it is discontinuous with Judaism, a new act of creation, unprecedented as the creation of the universe itself. This is the import of the Virgin Mary story ... and possibly the title On the other hand, the coming of the Christ is continuous with Judaism, the fulfillment of its Davidic and, if we may so express it, its "Messianic" hope. Because of this last, we seem to

¹¹ Ibid., p. 61.

be justified in finding in the Prologue support for regarding the Sermon on the Mount in the light of Sinai and the Christ of the Mount in the light of Moses, though we emphasize that this is never made explicit in Matthew. But just as the words in Jer. 31:15, referring to the present distress of Israel, precede its future redemption and the expression of a hope for a New Covenant in 31:31ff, so in Matthew 2:18, where they are cited, they precede a New Covenant and a New Sinai.¹²

In the epilogue, it is principally 28:16-30 which possibly bears a "Mosaic" sense. The "Mountain" in 28:16 recalls 5:1 and 17:1. Here we have an implicit presentation of Jesus as a New Moses, which may also be true of 5:1 since the antitheses (5:21-48) suggest this. Finally, in 28:16-20, the disciples are sent out to teach the commands of Christ under which the Church is to live. The actual moral demands of Jesus have become the content of their teaching. "Here in Matthew 28:16-20 Jesus surely is the new Moses, a greater than the old, who is the source of a new tradition of a New Israel. The substance of such a figure is here if not the Name."¹³

Why, then, if Matthew really had Moses in mind when he drew the picture of a teaching, resurrected Christ, did he not make it more explicit? Davies observes that Matthew seems to have been well aware of the interpretation of Christ with Moses as prototype, and that at certain points, he may

¹² Ibid., p. 82.

¹³ Ibid., p. 86.

have allowed it to color his gospel. His restraint and reserve in the use of the New Exodus and New Moses motifs is therefore all the more striking. He concludes that the strictly "Mosaic" traits in the figure of Christ as presented in Matthew have been taken up into a deeper and higher context; that he is not Moses come as Messiah, so much as Messiah, Son of Man, Emmanuel, who has absorbed the Mosaic function. This leads Davies to examine the Sermon in terms of a Messianic Torah, in which Mosaic categories are transcended.

In order to understand the Sermon on the Mount as "Messianic Torah," Davies first examines how Matthew presents the relationship between the Christian community and Jesus. He asks if the term Messianic Torah adequately expresses what Jesus taught and demanded morally. In the Sermon itself, are there characteristics in the terminology used or in the circumstances of the Sermon that point to an interpretation of Jesus' teachings as Messianic Torah?

Davies argues that Matthew conceives of the Christian life as a life lived under the imperative of the words of Jesus. This relationship is expressed in Judaic terminology as the religion of the Law. To "bear the yoke of Christ" (11:29) means to obey the law of Christ. Matthew saw the Christian community as a sort of Beth Midrash, a school of interpretation, with its scholars, wise men, and prophets, who "bind

and loose" in a kind of legal discipline. For Matthew, Christians stand under the "new Sinai" of a "new Moses." But, while this aspect is a true one, it is not the whole picture. Matthew presents the ethical demands as coming from Jesus himself, not detached from his life, but personalized in him. The believing disciple must be conformed to the person who speaks the words; faith in him is what is asked. A life under the word of Jesus is a life of trust in him. Ultimately, to obey the Law of God is to follow Christ. The framework of the Sermon on the Mount is one of healing and mercy and, before making demands, Jesus offers pity and compassion. He has come not to exact obedience but to proclaim a blessing. Therefore, the merely Mosaic character of Jesus' relation to his disciples has been transcended. In a significant development of terminology, the term "rabbi" gives way to "Lord." While Moses commanded as mediator, Jesus commands as Lord. The Jewish concept of "shaliach," of the solidarity that the Messiah would bring with him as he established the eschatological community, is expressed in the intimacy that Jesus has with his own. For Matthew, the Christian disciple is so related to his Lord that there is a kind of identity between them. The whole of Christian life is to be understood in the light of this relationship. The "oneness" in Christ consists in relating to one another in the acceptance of mutual service. Davies concludes that the Mosaic motif cannot be said to be predominant in the Sermon.

Thus the context of the Sermon in the totality of the Gospel's thought on the nature of the Christian life forbids any exclusive or even predominant "Mosaic" approach to it. The Sermon is that of the Messiah, the Son of man and the community addressed is incorporated in him.¹⁴

In the terminology used in the Sermon itself, and in the circumstances surrounding it, Davies finds that there is little evidence of anything that would recall the giving of the Law on Sinai. The location of the delivery on "the mountain" is reminiscent more of Exodus 19 where Moses descends from the mount to give the commandments he had received upon it, rather than of the actual giving of the Law. He also finds no support for the view that Jesus was presenting anything radically new in his teachings. He notes that Matthew significantly closes the Sermon (7:28) not with the words of Mark, which he presumably knew: "And when Jesus had finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his NEW teaching . . .," but rather with the simple statement that "he taught with authority." Here, Davies finds that verses 17-20 confirm the view that nothing new was intended by Jesus in his teachings. He observes that both 17-20 and the antitheses support this.

The verb "to fulfill" in v. 17, variously interpreted, is best taken, in the light of its total context, to mean "to complete" or "bring to its

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 99.

destined end." From v. 18, 19, 20, this would seem to allow of the continuance of the Old Law in force, since it is not abolished (v. 17) but remains in every jot and tittle.¹⁵

Neither do the antitheses offer examples of any abrogation of the Law. Here, Davies follows Daube in claiming that "we cannot speak of the Law being annulled in the antitheses, but only of its being intensified in its demand, or reinterpreted in a higher key" (p. 102). Jesus simply offers his own interpretation of the Law. Davies holds that in specific passages where the question of Jesus' attitude to the Law is treated (Matt. 12:1-14, 15:1-20, 19:1-9), Matthew has so changed or added to the Markan material as to make it perfectly clear that not the validity of the Law as such is in dispute, but interpretation in the tradition.

Davies' observations on the interpretation of *plērōsai* in 5:17 correspond only partially to what we have previously seen. Fulfillment must be understood in a broader sense than simply as the carrying out of the Law and its commands. What "to bring to its destined end" implies for Davies is not what Meier would admit. In order to bring the Law to its perfect fulfillment, Meier maintains that change and even the abrogation of certain laws is essential, while Davies maintains that nothing is annulled. Dupont had criticized Davies for quite opposite reasons! He found that Davies' first position

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 100-101.

(that the antitheses abrogate the Law in some cases) was questionable from the point of view of method. Dupont's pre-occupation with sources may account for his reaction to Davies' methodology. It is especially in their different interpretations of the antitheses that this is evident. Meier shows that, while antitheses 1, 2, and 6 (murder, adultery, and love of neighbor) radicalize the Torah to a certain extent, they do not revoke its letter. However, antitheses 3, 4, and 5 (divorce, oaths, talion) do revoke the letter of the Torah.¹⁶ He criticizes Davies for following Daube, wrongly.

Davies, in his earlier work, "Matthew 5:17-18," especially pp. 430 and 439, saw revocation, and precisely in Nos. 3, 4, 5. It is to be regretted that under the influence of Daube, Davies changed his opinion in his The Setting, p. 101, especially n. 1 and 2. Davies no longer sees annulment in the antitheses.¹⁷

This is true. Davies, commenting on the antitheses concerning the sabbath, things clean and unclean, and divorce, states:

Matthew makes it clear that the teaching of Jesus is not in antithesis to the written Law of Moses, though it is critical of the oral tradition: it is the full interpretation of the former, rather than its annulment.¹⁸

¹⁶ J. P. Meier, Law and History in Matthew's Gospel: A Redactional Study of Matt. 5:17-48, Analecta Biblica, 71, Rome, Biblical Institute Press, 1976, p. 135.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 160, n. 81, p. 159-160.

¹⁸ Davies, op. cit., p. 105.

He notes that Matthew is very careful not to present Jesus as in opposition to Moses, even to the point of rewriting Markan material and substituting such phrases as "For God commanded..." (Matt. 15:4) rather than the Markan "For Moses said..." (Mark 7:10). He suggests that "the understanding of the Law of Moses both within and without the Sermon in Matthew forbids any emphasis on an antithesis to the Law of Moses and must be allowed ... to temper our eagerness to see in Jesus a New Moses opposed to the first."¹⁹ Davies holds that neither in the gospel as a whole nor in the Sermon on the Mount in particular is there any basis for understanding Jesus' teachings as a "new" revolutionary law in sharp antithesis to the Law of Sinai. Matthew is seen as avoiding using the phrase "new teaching" to describe Jesus' words. He rather presents them as the true interpretation of the Judaic Law. "Not antithesis but completion expresses the relationship between the Law of Moses and the teaching of Jesus."²⁰ Jesus, however, is presented as a teacher of impressive authority. Matthew's Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' authoritative interpretation of the Old Law; it is a Messianic Torah, authoritative in a new way because given by Jesus the Messiah.

19 Ibid., p. 106.

20 Ibid., p. 107.

Davies' insistence on the continuity between Jesus' teachings and the Mosaic Law finds its roots perhaps in what Meier remarks on in Daube:

He tries to show that the relationship between the two members in the antitheses is not one of pure contrast; rather we are dealing with a wider interpretation which includes the old rule. ... Part of Daube's difficulty stems from his presuppositions; Matthew is a rabbinic gospel, revocation of the Torah in the antitheses would contradict what is said in 5:17-20; and pleron equals the Hebrew qiyem .21

Davies has followed Daube in this interpretation of the antitheses perhaps too uncritically. He seems to share the opinion that Matthew's gospel is a "rabbinic" one, or at least is so heavily influenced by the "setting" in which it was composed that it could not escape being formulated in parallel terms. It is this way of thinking that may account for Davies' preoccupation with the whole Judaic background of the Sermon, even to the point of concentrating more on it than on the Sermon itself, and thus perhaps missing the point.

Davies does admit of an element of newness in the words of Jesus, as presented in Matthew. The Sermon is the "law" of Jesus, the Messiah and Lord. Matthew presents him as giving a Messianic Law on a Mount, that is, a new interpretation of the Old Law. But, although his words are strictly interpretative, they are authoritative in a new way. Whereas the rabbis had given dialectic expositions of the Law, Matthew's Christ is proclaiming the true Law.

21 Meier, op. cit., p. 134, n. 21.

In conclusion, Davies finds that the concept of the Sermon on the Mount as the "law" of Jesus is an ambiguous one. Jesus gives a Messianic Law on a Mount, but Matthew avoids the express concept of a New Law and a New Sinai. Jesus is an honored teacher, but Matthew does not refer to him as a New Moses explicitly. Although there is much in the gospel of Matthew to evoke the use of such terms, and where the substance of New Law, Sinai, and New Moses is, in fact, present, Matthew does not explicitly use these terms. Davies suggests that the reason for this may lie in the eschatological expectations of and conditions within first-century Judaism, which we shall now consider.

2. The Setting in Jewish Messianic Expectation.

Davies holds that if we could clearly distinguish the role that the Torah was expected to play in the Messianic Age, then the early Christian attitude to the Law would be set in true perspective. In order better to understand Matthew's presentation of the Sermon on the Mount as the Law of the Messiah, we must ask what role, if any, the Torah was expected to assume in the Messianic Age or in the Age to Come. The terms Messianic Age and Age to Come are sometimes synonymous, but there are differences. Davies notes that the distinction between the two was late, but probably

established by the time of Jesus.²² The Messianic Age was conceived of as a time when the disobedience of Israel would cease and justice would reign. The days of the Messiah would be the religious and political consummation of the national history of Israel.²³ The Age to Come, as distinguished from the Messianic Age, was the post-Messianic period. It would be either the time of life-after-death or, in yet another sense, the Age to Come is already in history; it is the time when the Law is no longer in effect, similar to the state after death. In treating of the role of Torah in these Ages, we shall indicate what interpretation is most probable in each example given.

Davies notes that there are several serious obstacles in the search for a better understanding of the role of Torah in the Messianic Age. Few authors have attempted such a task. Most rabbinic sources used are dated late, and post-Christian material presents difficulties regarding content. Even such basic terms as Torah are ambiguous, meaning different things in different contexts. Forewarned of the possible confusion which may plague any research into the question, we shall now follow Davies in his analysis of the sources. It is his concern to discover whether or not Judaism contemplated a

22 Davies, op. cit., p. 183.

23 Ibid., p. 155.

New Torah in the future, and from the conclusions he reaches, to better understand the Sermon on the Mount in its treatment of Torah.

Davies begins by pointing out that the theme of the Exodus was highly significant theologically in any Messianic speculation on the part of Israel. The memory of the Exodus was the essence of the Old Testament, its kerygmatic core, and its point of reference throughout all its history. He describes as twin poles this memory of a past Exodus and an anticipation of a New Exodus that characterized the faith of Israel, and points out that the Qumran community represented the "Exodic current" in Messianism, organizing themselves in terms of a New Exodus. He notes also that the ease with which New Testament writers interpreted Christianity in terms of a New Exodus can be explained only if such a view were readily available to them.

How is this theme of the Exodus related to the Messianic expectation and the role of the Torah? Within the context of the Exodus, did the figure of Moses take on "Messianic" proportions? And, was the giving of the Law, so important to Israel in retrospect, also significant in its anticipation of the future? Would the giving of the Law mark the end as it had the beginning of Yahweh's relationship with Israel? Davies notes that each period of Israel's history reflected on Moses and depicted him in its own image, so that

he emerges sometimes as priest or sage, possibly as king, as well as humble mediator and intercessor. It is, however, as prophet that he appears most clearly--he becomes the type of the prophet to come (Deut. 18:15). In Deutero-Isaiah, where the New Exodus motif is most apparent, the instrument of deliverance, the Servant of the Lord, has long been connected with Moses.²⁴ The expectation of a prophet, as a mark of the end, emerges clearly in 1 Maccabees, and Davies finds that "especially in 4 Ezra, it is reasonable to connect such an expectation with Deut. 18:15 even though no precise identification of the prophet with a New Moses occurs."²⁵ The figure of Moses seems to have had eschatological significance. Whether or not the figure of the Messiah itself became a "Mosaic one" or, further still, whether the Messiah is identified with a Second Moses is another question. Davies finds that it is only in the New Testament and in rabbinic sources that:

... the full force of the comparison between the first Exodus and the last and the first Redeemer and the last appears. That the Redeemer would be the New Moses for contemporary Judaism is implicit in much of the New Testament, outside Matthew, and explicit in the rabbis.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., p. 117.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 118.

The concept of a Messiah like unto Moses was "inchoate in the milieu of Matthew." "If the world into which the New Testament came had not already produced this concept, it had already provided the raw materials out of which it could be produced. Jesus from this point of view was a catalyst."²⁷

The second thing to be considered is that of the relationship between Torah and the Messianic period. In Messianic speculation, was there a demand for a "Messianic Torah" as a counterpart to the Mosaic Torah? The Exodus as event was accompanied by a demand, the Law. In fact, the act of grace which was the Exodus was the very ground of this demand. One cannot separate the covenant relation from the demand of the Law. It is therefore reasonable to expect that, in its thought of a New Exodus, Judaism would have included speculation on the role of the Law. Two things must be noted. First, Judaism fully expected that the End would be marked by radical newness and, in some sources, we find the expectation of the recreation of all things. In the Old Testament, the Exodus had been connected with the thought of creation. "Redemption" and "creation" were bound up together, so that when the End came to be conceived of as a "New Exodus," it also took on the marks of a "New Creation." By the first century, the Messianic idea had incorporated the expectation of a radical transformation of the existing order.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 118, n. 4.

The End was to be not only like the Exodus and like the ideal period of the wilderness, but also like the very creation itself. A new heaven and a new earth, a new Jerusalem, a new Covenant, a new Temple, all these we meet in the sources.²⁸

Secondly, it must be noted that in Judaism's understanding of the Messiah as a kingly figure, it was necessary to define his relationship to the Law. For the early Church, this relationship of the Messiah to the Law was to become a crucial one. The king in Israel necessarily stood in close relationship to the Law, maintaining it, although not necessarily imparting it. For the first Christians, Jesus as Kingly Messiah had to be seen in relation to the Law as well.

Davies examines the role of Torah in Messianic expectation in sources in the Old Testament, the Apocrypha and Dead Sea Scrolls, and in rabbinic sources. Did Judaism contemplate a New Torah in the future? The most pertinent Old Testament passages are in Jeremiah 31:31-34, the Servant passages in Deutero-Isaiah (42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-11, 52:13-53:12), and Isaiah 2:1-5, paralleled by Micah 4:1-5. In Jeremiah 31:31-34 we read:

Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant, which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will

²⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. [RSV]

In this passage we see that "in the days to come" there will be a covenantal relationship between Yahweh and his people; the covenant will be a new one, and one element of it will be Torah. In this new covenant, the Torah will be written "in the heart"; it will not need to be taught by human teachers, for all who share in it will "know the Lord" because he has forgiven their sins. The resulting state is one in which Israel will become the people of Yahweh and he will be their God. Davies makes the following observations concerning the Torah "written in the heart." He notes that, for some, Torah here is taken, not in the legal sense of "law," but rather as "instruction" or "revelation."²⁹ He also points out that many Christian commentators have interpreted this passage as a nullification of any external Torah.

... most Christian scholars have concluded that Jeremiah here introduces a new conception of that covenantal relation between "Israel" and Yahweh which in effect nullifies the necessity for all Torah in any external sense.³⁰

If one were to follow this interpretation, then the concept of an external Torah is really transcended, and even annulled

29 Ibid., p. 123-124.

30 Ibid., p. 124.

in Jeremiah's New Covenant. Davies reacts against this idea, and argues that a law "written in the heart" does not necessarily imply a rejection of the written Law as such. Jeremiah and the Deuteronomic school were of different spirits, but Davies doubts that there was sharp antagonism between them. The prophet distrusted not so much the written Torah as such, but rather a Torah written merely in a book or on stone tablets. He does not necessarily imply that the written Torah was evil in itself and needed to be transcended. Also, it is possible to speak of the "written" Torah as being "in the heart." Here, Davies buttresses his argument by referring to other passages where this idea is found, the most pertinent being Ezekiel 11:9, and 36:26ff where it is Yahweh's spirit which teaches Torah in the New Covenant. The "new heart" and "new spirit" are explicitly connected with the written statutes and judgments of Yahweh and from this it is possible to conclude that the Torah of the New Covenant will be the Old Torah.

Another significant point, according to Davies, is that Torah, in the context of the covenant, must somehow be translated so that the sense of demand (both ethical and ceremonial) is preserved. It means more than simply "instruction" or "revelation"; it is also Law, an essential element in any covenant. There is no antithesis between Torah as Law and Torah as revelation of love. In fact, the giving of the Law was in itself a mark of Yahweh's love. We note in passing

that Davies is correct in the nuance that he has underlined, and his observation that a Christian commentator who sees in Jeremiah's thought a contrast between law and love "is surely reading back into the Old Testament a false antithesis derived from later Christian theology"³¹ would seem to be well founded.

Davies concludes by noting that, in Jeremiah's concept of Torah, the Torah is new in some sense and yet not divorced entirely from the Old Torah, that is, the external one. There is a tension in Jeremiah's thinking between the old and the new, a duality of desiring to preserve and yet to fulfill. The New Covenant for him would probably demand both the letter and the Spirit.

Deutero-Isaiah's series of Suffering Servant passages (42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-11, 52:13-53:12) are later than Jeremiah and deal with the Servant of Yahweh and Torah. Davies notes that in later Judaism there is no isolation of an individual Servant figure and, that in dealing with the Servant, it is generally agreed that we are dealing with Israel. Still, the Messianic significance given to the Servant by the Church (Acts 8:32-33, 1 Pet. 2:21-25) makes it necessary to consider the relation of the Servant to the Torah. Davies remarks that many scholars have been led to see in the Servant a

³¹ Ibid., p. 129.

teacher of the Law, especially on the basis of the first of the Servant poems, Isa. 42:1-4. "He shall announce judgment (mishpat) to the nations," introduces the idea of the mission of the Servant being the giving of the Law, which Israel had already received, to other nations: Mishpat would be interpreted as a generalized term for Law. The Servant, therefore, was a teacher of the Law. This imparting of Torah is a central function of the Servant of Yahweh; this Torah will be directed to the world. Some indications that the traits of a "teacher" emerge in the Servant are

... like the prophets, the Servant is endowed with the Spirit (42:1) who delivers Torah (42:4); he is a disciple either of another prophet or of one endowed with the Spirit of God (50:4); he has been called from his mother's womb to his task, as were other prophets (Jer. 1:5), he opens his ears daily for revelations (50:4) and it is by his message, as well as by his suffering, that he works salvation (Isa. 42:4).³²

If, as some have claimed (Jeremias and others), the Servant and Messianic ideas were already fused in pre-Christian Judaism, then the Messiah as Servant would not only have had to define his attitude to the Law, but also, in the light of Isaiah 42:1ff, to bring his own Law.³³

In Isaiah 2:1-5 (paralleled by Micah 4:1-5), it is said that "Torah shall go forth from Zion" (v. 3) in the "end

³² Ibid., p. 136.

³³ Ibid., p. 136-137.

of days." The meaning of Torah here would seem to be similar to "instruction": but if the passage is post-Exilic, then Torah

... would naturally draw to itself a more legal connotation, because the instruction of Yahweh was increasingly being thought of in terms of "the Law" which was principally expounded at the sanctuary by prophet and priest.³⁴

It should also be noted that here Yahweh himself is the teacher. In the ideal future, God himself will exercise judgment (mishpat) and give Torah.

Before looking at relevant material outside of the Old Testament, let us recapitulate briefly. Within the context of the Exodus, we have seen the figure of Moses emerge as "eschatological prophet." The figure of a "Mosaic" Messiah seems to have been in the background of the New Testament writers. Davies acknowledges that it cannot be held that first-century Judaism had a well-defined doctrine of a New Exodus and a New Moses as Messiah, and he remarks that the haggadic fluidity of these concepts must be recognized.³⁵ In the speculation on the role of the Law and the concept of New Law in Messianic times, we cannot definitely say that there was a demand for a specific "Messianic Torah" as the counterpart to the Mosaic Torah. It is not clear

³⁴ Ibid., p. 138.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 118.

whether Jeremiah's hope for a New Covenant implied a New Torah, or whether better obedience to the Old Torah was what was envisaged. There remains a certain unresolved tension between the written Torah and Torah of the New Covenant in Jeremiah's thought. There does seem to be evidence for seeing in the Messiah as Suffering, Servant one who brings his own law, and it was held by some that, in the end, God himself would give Torah.

Davies turns to apocalyptic literature in the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha, and notes that apocalyptic and Pharisaism should be seen not so much in opposition as in complementarity, being at one with each other in their attitude to the Law. He finds in the Similitudes of Enoch the idea that "the righteous are those who have been faithful to the Torah and it is in accordance with the Torah ... that the Elect one shall judge (see 38:2, 39:6, 46:2, 53:6). In the Psalms of Solomon (Ch. 17), the Messiah is seen as establishing a condition when the life of righteousness in accordance with the Torah will prevail. Passages from I Maccabees refer difficulties in the interpretation of the Law to a coming prophet who should have a communication from God which would solve these. These passages confirm the view that "Torah would at least be better understood in the future than in the present, and that prophetic revelation was part

of the hope of Judaism."³⁶ In the Dead Sea Scrolls, a pre-occupation with the Law of Moses is apparent. This community would be governed by rules in their Manual until a prophet and "Messiahs," one of Aaron and one of David, would arise. The prophet would not bring a New Law, but the rules of the community would be subject to change at his coming. It was, therefore, not the Mosaic Law itself but the regulations of the Sect which rest upon its interpretation of the Law, that would be changed. The Sectarians expected the Messianic Age to remove the inadequacies of their understanding of the Law. In this renewal, the Law itself required redemption, at least in its interpretation. An eschatological figure, that of the Prophet, the New Moses, was to give this new understanding of the Law. The new interpretation of the Law was a mark of the Messianic Age, but not particularly of the Messiah.

In summary, Davies concludes that in the Old Testament and in the apocalyptic literature examined, the "righteousness" which would be accomplished in the Messianic Age does not seem to differ from that demanded by the Torah. It was common belief that, in the days of the Messiah, "the law should not only be in force ... but should be better studied and better observed than ever before."³⁷ It was held that Torah would

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

be interpreted in a more satisfactory and glorious fashion and would apply also to the Gentiles. The hope of a New Covenant persisted throughout the history of Judaism and there was anticipation of changes in the interpretation of the Law in the Messianic Age. All this took place against a rich background of convenantal, Mosaic, and Exilic themes.

In his investigation of rabbinic sources, Davies notes two difficulties. First, he remarks that he is dealing, not with a representative selection of first-century Judaic sources, but rather with one aspect, the Pharisaic, and particularly R. Johanna ben Zakkai. There is also the possibility of deliberate suppression or modification of material concerning the nature and role of Torah in the Messianic age. He feels, however, that despite the heterogeneity of first-century Judaism, Pharisaism as a dominant influence was well established and that, for many Jews, the Torah had become the "cornerstone of life," shaping their past, present, and future. It is especially with this latter aspect, the place of the Torah in the future, that we are concerned. Davies speaks of the "doctrine" of the immutability of the Torah wherein the Torah given to Moses by Yahweh was the perfect and unchangeable ground plan of the Universe. This was the belief of Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism.³⁸ He

³⁸ Ibid., p. 158.

notes that Matt. 5:18a "adequately expresses what came to be the dominant 'doctrine' of rabbinic Judaism." There are two things to keep in mind in our exploration of rabbinic texts. First, Torah was treated in a variety of ways in first-century Judaism; secondly, there seems to be a dominance, even in pre-Christian times, of the "doctrine" of the immutability of the Torah. Davies examines selected passages dealing with the eschatological role of the rabbinic Elijah, and then passages in which the Torah is seen as modified or even abrogated, and sometimes as replaced by an explicitly new Torah.

In the rabbinic treatment of the prophet Elijah, he had become a Messianic "forerunner" who appeared especially as one who would explain points in the Torah which had baffled the rabbis (Mishnah Eduyoth viii:7). The significance of Elijah was a living issue in first-century Judaism, and it was possibly significant in its dialogue with Christianity as well. Elijah had come to reconcile differences among scholars, to give the true interpretation of the Law. In the rabbinic treatment of his role, what is insisted upon is not so much that he has come to interpret Torah, but that he has come to "make peace in the world." Davies asks:

Is the Christian claim to have had its "Elijah" and his interpretation of the Law, reflected in this insistence on the part of the rabbis that this was not what mattered so much as peace?³⁹

One can only conjecture, but in any case, as precursor to the Messianic Age, Elijah is a "Messianic" or "eschatological" figure who prepares for Messianic unity, partly by reinterpreting the Law. This leads to the question of how the immutable Torah would be modified.

Again, in a selection of passages, Davies finds evidence of three points of view: changes are envisaged regarding enactments pertaining to festivals, regarding things clean and unclean and, finally, there seems to be a real expectation expressed of changes in the Torah. In a second-century text, Yalqut on Proverbs 9:2, it is said that Purim and the Day of Atonement alone among the festivals are to survive the Messianic Age. In another passage, distinctions between clean and unclean animals are to be abrogated in the Messianic Age. In a much debated passage, Leviticus Rabbah 13:3, which deals with a New Torah in the Messianic Age, Davies favors the interpretation that allows for its concept of a really New Torah in the fullest sense of Hadash. He cites Barthélemy on the meaning of hadash:

³⁹ ibid., p. 160.

Or, dans le Judaïsme du début de l'ère chrétienne, le substantif hiddush et le verbe haddesh ont une signification eschatologique bien établie de "renouvellement apocalyptique," une "transmutation radicale."⁴⁰

Davies concludes that despite the "doctrine" of the immutability of the Torah, "there were also occasional expressions of expectations that Torah would suffer modification in the Messianic Age."⁴¹ He remarks that most of the changes were seen as occurring within the context of the existing Torah and therefore presuppose the continuance of its validity. He also notes that "much of the traditional Christian interpretation of some passages cited does violence to the text and has to be rejected."⁴² Here, Davies seems to be referring particularly to Bonsirven as an example. He shows how Bonsirven's interpretation of a text in Siphre on Deuteronomy xvii:18, N. 160, which deals with a New Torah, does not correspond with a parallel passage in Tosefta, Sanhedrin iv. 4ff which refers specifically to the change in the script which was to be used in the writing of the Torah, and not to change in the Torah itself!

Changes in the substance and interpretation of Torah do not necessarily imply that a New Torah was expected. But there are other passages which seem to say that a New Torah

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 167, n. 1.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 170.

⁴² Ibid.

would be substituted for the Old. Davies cites several instances, the most striking of which is Yalqut on Isaiah 26:2.

"Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps faith may enter in." Davies notes that the comment in Yalqut takes "which keeps faith" (shomer 'emunim) to be "who say Amen" (she 'omer 'amenim), and on that basis declares:

For the sake of one simple Amen which the wicked respond from Gehinnom, they are rescued therefrom. How so? In time to come, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will take his seat in Eden and expound. All the righteous will sit before Him: all the retinue on high will stand on their feet. The sun and the Zodiac (or, constellations) will be at His right hand and the moon and the stars on His left; God will sit and expound a New Torah which He will, one day, give by the Messiah's hand. [Lowe's translation]⁴³

Davies notes that this seems to be the most unambiguous reference to a new, Messianic Torah. Here, we have an explicit reference to a Messianic Torah new in kind, the exposition of which takes place in a context of universalism. "All the righteous" includes the Gentiles. It is to be noted that Yalqut as a compilation is not earlier than the 13th century, although parts of it are dated earlier. Our section dealing with the New Torah is from the Othiyyoth of R. Akiba. Although Davies has pointed out the dangers inherent in using texts of a late date, this does not seem to have deterred him from using the texts to substantiate his claim in this case.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 176.

We may now summarize Davies' position on the nature of the role which the Torah was to play in the Messianic Age. He has found that in the Old Testament, the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha and in the rabbinical sources there is "the profound conviction that obedience to the Torah would be a dominating mark of the Messianic Age."⁴⁴ Although there was a certain tension in Jeremiah regarding the external Torah as operative when the New Covenant would be in effect, still it may be said that the Torah in its existing form was expected to persist into the Messianic Age, when its obscurities would be made plain, when certain changes and adaptations would occur, and when the Gentiles too would be included among those who accepted Torah. In the Qumran literature there was a conscious emphasis on the need for legal changes in the Messianic Age. Was the expectation of a New Torah, brought by the Messiah, a well-defined element in Messianic hope? The evidence is not conclusive. But neither can we conclude that this expectation, if present, was merely a late development in a Judaism influenced by Christianity. Davies affirms that:

[...]there were elements inchoate in the Messianic hope of Judaism, which could make it possible for some to regard the Messianic Age as marked by a New Torah, new indeed, [...]not in the sense that it contravened the old, but yet not merely new in the sense that it affirmed the old on a new level, but in such a way as to justify the adjective *hadash* that was applied to it.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 183.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 184.

He notes that the passages using the specific term torah hadashah are late, and that authors such as Klausner claim that they are the result of Christian influence by way of reaction upon Judaism. Passages dated earlier than these speak rather of the belief that before the Messianic Age Torah would almost fail in Israel, but that it would later return. Davies, however, presents two points of view to counteract statements like Klausner's. He notes first that the question of the New Torah did agitate Judaism, and that the silence of the sources as to an early belief in a New Torah may be due to deliberate surgery by the Pharisaic element who had polemic (anti-Christian) tendencies. The early presentation of Christianity as involving a New Law in the Sermon on the Mount or in the kaine entolé of the Fourth Gospel, which produced counter-claims, within Judaism (cf. Deuteronomy Rabbah 8:6), may also account for the absence in rabbinic sources of any specific early references to a New Torah.

By the time that the passages which actually speak of a New Torah are found, the separation of Church and Synagogue had become such that speculation among Jews and Christians could be mutually stimulating without being dangerous. It is arguable, at least, that this might account for the greater readiness of later Judaism to speak of a New Torah.

He adds, however, [in note 4]:

I am not quite sure ... that it would be easier for later Judaism to contemplate a New Torah than it

would have been for first-century Judaism. The antipathy to Christianity had become greater, not less. The concept of a New Torah might perhaps have been indigenous and not merely the outcome of Christian influences. Within Christianity, the concept of a New Law developed coincidentally with that of the Church as a New Israel.⁴⁶

Secondly, Davies points out that the rabbinical sources deal very sparingly with the idea of covenant, centering their attention on Law. He suggests that one reason for this attitude may very well be that the convenantal idea was so prominent in Christianity that it became

... deliberately disused because of its marked Christian associations. It is the same kind of reaction against the New Law preached by early Christians which may have caused the comparative silence of the rabbinic sources on the concept of a New Law.⁴⁷

It may be well to cite Davies himself at this point regarding the dangers of the approach he has chosen to take. He points out that there is danger in too easily systematizing what was varied, vague, and amorphous in its original state, and thus distorting the perspective.

Moreover, the isolation of passages dealing with one theme and their presentation in a concentrated, consecutive manner can too easily create an erroneous impression of their significance: to isolate in this context is to magnify, and to view the passages with which we have dealt in true perspective it is necessary to set them over against the vast continent of the rabbinical sources; only then can they be rightly

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 186, n. 4.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 187.

assessed. Nor must it be forgotten that the passages which we have cited are all haggadic, so that they must lack a certain seriousness which more halakic passages would afford.⁴⁸

One wonders if Davies has heeded his own warning, especially in regard to the rabbinic sources. One of his Jewish critics, Samuel Sandmel, finds that in Davies' treatment of rabbinic sources,

... his citations stem not from reading and absorbing the rabbinic literature deeply and in its own context, but rather from looking up passages related to his context. The rabbinic materials which he quotes more often seem to me to say something quite different from the content Davies ascribes to them. And parallelomania abounds here.⁴⁹

Unfortunately, Sandmel does not elaborate nor give specific examples, but he does mention specifically that there is a difficulty in reconciling the supposed "heterogeneity of first-century Judaism" with the remainder of his (Davies') discussion which revolves around Pharisaism (never defined or described) in the first century.⁵⁰

Davies is also open to the charge that he fails to challenge his own premises. One wonders if, after having traversed so much material, he does not end up with the pre-suppositions he began with. His recourse to scholars such as

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 184-185.

⁴⁹ Samuel Sandmel, reviewing W. D. Davies' The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount, in Theology Today, Vol. 23, No. 2, 1966, p. 293.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 292.

Daube has been shown to have left him lacking in perspective on the antitheses (despite the fact that his earlier position corresponded to that of Meier). His presupposition that knowledge of the historical context of the Sermon on the Mount will illumine for us the motivation of Matthew in writing it is also highly questionable. Was Matthew indeed a Jew? How is one to determine what made him write the way he did? Davies' scholarly, informed opinion is just that, opinion. One would have hoped that with the critical apparatus at his disposal, Davies could have produced a less ambitious book in terms of scope, but perhaps a more useful one in which, for example, rabbinic sources would have been carefully studied in their own context before being used to illustrate a specific point which some author may be trying to make. Davies is aware of the dangers of Christian misinterpretation of the Old Testament (cf. Jeremiah 31:31), but has perhaps unwittingly fallen into the same sort of trap himself in dealing with the "supposed" sources which influenced Matthew's sermon. The reference to the Sermon brings us to Davies' rather sketchy and summary application of the results of his research to the Sermon itself.

Davies asks how Jewish expectations illumine Matthew's approach. He states that his study of the Jewish sources has not allowed him to see, except very ambiguously, what attitude to the Law would have been natural to early Christianity. There seemed to be very little evidence in favor of the idea

of a New Messianic Torah in Judaism's Messianic Hope. The distinction between the Age to Come and the Messianic Age was not always clear. And it is neither possible nor correct to speak of any one generally accepted Jewish expectation as to the role of the Torah in either Age. However, there is some illumination on how Matthew understood the Sermon on the Mount. For him, the Christian dispensation denies the Old Law on one level, but affirms and fulfills it on another; this is the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew does not explicitly claim to have received a New Torah, although he does present the substance of such in his gospel. He portrays a teaching in the Messianic Age, a teaching with eschatological authority. Although Matthew has sectarian affinities, he differs from Qumran in that he presents Jesus the Messiah as promulgating new laws, as giving a moral teaching of high significance, which in Qumran was a function of the Prophet rather than of the Messiah. He therefore departs from Sectarian anticipation in ascribing the role of teacher to Jesus Messiah. But does he share a rabbinic anticipation? Davies supports the supposition that Matthew adopted one rabbinic view of the Messiah which saw him as teacher, and that he depicted "a rabbinic Christ, whose words were for him halakah and the ground for halakah both for Israel and for the Gentile world."⁵¹

⁵¹ Davies, op. cit., p. 189.

Therefore Matthew reveals rabbinic as well as sectarian affinities. Davies concludes:

... even if the concept of a New Torah in the Messianic Age had not become explicit in Judaism before Christ (which is not at all sure), his figure was a catalyst which gave life to what was inchoate; with him came also a nomos Kristou.⁵²

He asks if it is unreasonable to suggest that in Jesus the eschatological figures of the Old Testament became identified, because "historically he suggested that he was all these-- Messiah, the Prophet, Rabbi."⁵³

Why, then, did Matthew hesitate to speak explicitly of a "new teaching" or of a "new Law of the Messiah"? Was it just his sensitivity to the "niceties of the expectations of Judaism"? Or was it the ambiguity of the Jewish expectation itself? It is a fact that the phrase "New Torah" did emerge in Judaism. Both Paul and John used such phrases as "the Law of Christ," and "the New Commandment." Davies suggests that there were other factors which made Matthew less eager to use such phrases, factors inherent in the contemporary Judaism, and in the early Church. We shall now examine some of these.

52 Ibid., p. 189.

53 Ibid., p. 190, n. 2, p. 189-190.

3. The Setting in Contemporary Judaism.

The contemporary life-setting of Matthew's gospel, that is, first-century Judaism, is treated by Davies in terms of Gnosticism, the Dead Sea Sect, and Jamnia. It is especially the latter which will be of interest to us in our study of Matthew's treatment of Jesus and Law. Davies examines those forces at work which made Matthew elevate the moral teaching of Jesus to the dominating position it occupies in the Sermon. To the possibility that Gnosticism was a significant force in Matthew's presentation of his gospel, Davies replies in the negative. He refutes Schlatter's claim that the structure of the gospel itself was anti-Gnostic in nature (with the moral demands of Ch. 5-7 being given precedence), by pointing out that Matthew's theological interests centered on the understanding of Jesus as a New Moses. This interest is sufficient to account for whatever structure is found to be pentateuchal; there is no need to look for anti-Gnostic motivation. In such passages as the temptation of Jesus, the sayings of "light" (4:16); the mention of "false prophets" (7:15ff), or the "anomia" (7:23) associated with Gnostics, Davies finds that:

The circles within which Matthew emerged were not particularly faced with the problems of syncretism, such as lie behind Gnosticism and its attendant dangers, but with typical Jewish eschatological expectations, albeit in a Christian key. This is

another way of claiming that the concern of Matthew is not with peripheral, esoteric movements in Judaism and Christianity, characterized by incipient Gnosticism, expressed in "myths and endless genealogies" (1 Tim. 1:4), but with the Gospel as it confronted the main currents of Judaism in rabbinism and apocalyptic and Essenism.⁵⁴

In his examination of the possible influence of the Qumran sectarians on Matthew, Davies finds that there are similarities in their respective ecclesiologies.

The Church in Matthew is an eschatological community dedicated to a perfection based on a revealed knowledge of the purposes of God and of his true intent in the Law; as was the sect at Qumran, except that Jesus was even more central for the former than was the Teacher of Righteousness for the latter.⁵⁵

He notes that any elements in the Matthean Jesus which recall the Teacher of Righteousness are taken up into the larger complex of Jesus as the Christ, who is not merely interpreter, but Saviour. He points out that, in general, while the thought-forms of Matthew are similar to those of Qumran, the content of his thought is fundamentally different. The themes of "perfection" and "knowledge" and the ethics of Matthew are infused with a specifically Christian element. The relationship between Matthew and Qumran enlightens our approach to the Sermon in that we recognize that Matthew utilized the traditions from which he took his material to present an interpretation that was uniquely his own.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 207.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 215.

Davies argues that, while Matthew's sources probably dealt with some sort of dialogue between Jesus, the disciples, and Qumran, Matthew adapted this material to emphasize the Pharisaic-Christian dialogue. While much of the original sitz-im-leben of the gospel involved the Essenes, Matthew concentrated on the Pharisaic element. For Davies, this explains the collation of sectarian and rabbinic forms in Matthew. Material dealing with the confrontation with Qumran has been adapted into that dealing with Pharisaic Judaism, and given a new emphasis. This tendency is particularly clear in the Sermon where Jesus' interpretation of the Law is brought into focus.

The sectarians had been given a rigid interpretation of the Law, by the Teacher of Righteousness, which was designed to lead to perfection. There is every reason to believe that Jesus offered an interpretation of the Law which was set over against this, his radicalism standing over against that of Qumran. But when Matthew constructed his "sermon," he utilized the tradition of the teaching for his own purposes, to set the Christian ethic not over against Qumran, but over against Pharisaic Judaism, the ethic of the New Israel over against that of the Old.⁵⁶

Davies next turns to the Pharisaic-Christian encounter which took place after 70 A.D., and examines how the form and purpose of the Sermon on the Mount were dictated by it. First of all, the reconstruction of Judaism at Jamnia under R. Johanan ben Zakai was a period when Judaism was consciously

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 255.

confronting Christianity. Evidence of this is seen especially in the Birkath ha Minim where fear of the subversive influence of Christianity resulted in the twelfth Benediction becoming a petition against heretics, among whom were Jewish Christians. But we may also ask whether or not Matthew was also consciously confronting Judaism. His gospel emerged in a time when the codification of the Law in Judaism and the reformation of worship was taking place in Jamnia. Davies looks at the antitheses and the structure of the Sermon for evidence that Matthew was deliberately reacting to Jamnia in the composition of his gospel. Matthew gives the antitheses in a sixfold manner: the Mishnah is divided into six orders, representing the essentials of the Law. Was Matthew concerned in his six antitheses to provide a parallel to the Mishnaic sixfold distinction? It must be admitted that Matthew does not make many specific references to the number six, and also that the contents and the order of the antitheses are totally different from those of the Mishnah. Matthew was, however, interested in codal activity such as took place at Jamnia. This is shown in the genealogy (1:1), which may be looked upon as a counterpart to the beginnings of the Aboth.⁵⁷ The antitheses, however, do not provide an important instance of parallel structure.

57 Ibid., p. 304.

The most telling example is the Sermon itself. Davies holds that if the Beatitudes and the concluding material after 7:12 are omitted, the body of the Sermon reveals a sequence which can be connected with a theme which may have especially occupied the sages at Jamnia. He notes:

The force of this suggestion has to be considered in the light of the comparison with Pharisaism drawn in 5:17-20, 6:2, 5, 16, where the references to the Synagogue are clear and where the "hypocrites" are almost certainly the Pharisees.⁵⁸

What theme was of significant import for the Jamnian sages?

At the time of R. Johanan ben Zakai, there existed in Mishnah Avot 1.2 the following dictum:

Simeon the Just was of the remnants of the Great Synagogue. He used to say: By three things is the world sustained: by the Law, by the (Temple) service, and by deeds of loving kindness.⁵⁹

At the time of Jamnia, one element mentioned in this saying had disappeared, i.e., the Temple service. Also, the tragedy of the fall of Jerusalem had led to a situation where a new emphasis was put on piety as deeds of loving kindness toward the poor and dispossessed people of the ravaged city. Rabbi Johanan ben Zakai reinterpreted the original saying of Simeon the Just, and insisted that mercy had replaced Temple worship. In a dialogue with the ruler Vespasian, Johanan ben Zakai said:

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 304-305.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 305.

I ask naught of thee ... save Jamnia, where I might go and teach my disciples, and there establish a prayer (house) and perform all commandments.⁶⁰

Davies remarks that, here, Torah of the first quotation has become the study and teaching of Torah; sacrificial worship has been replaced by prayer, and the acts of piety (loving kindness) by the performance of all commandments. Looking at the structure of the Sermon on the Mount, he finds that the teaching of Jesus is presented in a roughly triadic way, similar to the saying of R. Johanan ben Zakai.

In 5:17-48, we find the Torah of Jesus set forth; in 6:1-18, the true avodah or worship, and in 6:19-7:12, what corresponds to gmilot hasidim (deeds of piety) the culmination in 7:12, expressing the true piety or obedience in terms of the Golden Rule.⁶¹

He suggests that Matthew's neat division of his material shows that he is working under the influence of a traditional arrangement. Matthew confronts the synagogue with a triadic formulation which would not be alien to it, i.e., that of Johanan ben Zakai's reinterpretation of the quotation in Mishnah Avot. Davies notes that Matthew remains closer to the original saying of Simeon than does Johanan. There is no reference in Matthew to study or teaching of the Law. Temple worship is defined explicitly in terms of almsgiving, prayer and fasting, not prayer alone. He desires mercy and

60 Ibid., p. 306.

61 Ibid., p. 307.

not sacrifice (9:13, 12:7). Therefore, Matthew would seem to be reinterpreting the original saying for the specific needs of Christians.

Davies concludes that, while we cannot certainly connect the structure of the Sermon on the Mount with the discussion and activity at Jamnia, "the possibility is a real one that the form of the Sermon was fashioned under their impact." He suggests that one fruitful way of dealing with the Sermon is to regard it as the "Christian answer to Jamnia," a kind of "Christian mishnaic counterpart to the formulation taking place there." He conjectures that "it was the desire and necessity to present a formulation of the way of the New Israel at a time when the rabbis were engaged in a parallel task for the Old Israel that provided the outside stimulus for the Evangelist to shape the Sermon on the Mount."⁶²

We have seen that Davies' evaluation of the impact or lack of it of Gnosticism on the gospel of Matthew is solid, and his observations on the relationship between Matthew and Qumran also rings credibly. In his hypothetical structuring of the Sermon on the Mount as a counterpart to the saying in Mishnah Avot, he seems to be on less firm ground. The textual evidence is rather precarious, being external to the text and based on possibility only. It seems reasonable to assume that

62 Ibid., p. 315.

Matthew's Sermon may very possibly have been composed in some kind of relation to what was occurring at Jamnia, but there is no concrete proof. One wonders again if this is the task of the historical, critical analysis that Davies has used. Is all to end in conjecture? In hypotheses of probabilities? One must admit, however, that it does, perhaps, open the way for the adoption of new attitudes and new perspectives on the Sermon, attitudes which, combined with serious literary analyses of the texts, may help us to penetrate Matthew's view of Jesus and the Law.

4. The Setting in the Early Church.

Since the previous elements examined in the background of the Sermon have helped us to understand it only to a degree, Davies now turns to the life of the early Church, the foreground of the gospel. He tries to determine if Matthew's emphasis on the words of Jesus and the Law of the Messiah was an innovation or a continuation of early Christian attitudes. He asks whether Matthew imposed a "Christian legalism" upon Jesus or whether he was simply making more explicit than others what the Church generally accepted.

Beginning with the assumption that Matthew's gospel is not anti-Pauline (an assumption well based on an examination of the general character of the gospel, the alleged anti-Pauline references and the elevation of Peter in the gospel,

presumably to discredit Paul), Davies then sets the Sermon over against the Gospels and Epistles in which are reflected the understanding of Jesus' teaching in the primitive community. In his treatment of Paul and the tradition, he presents the possibility that for Paul the person and the words of Jesus had assumed the significance of a New Torah.

... in ascribing to Paul the concept of Christ as the New Torah we are going outside Paul's explicit words or formulae, (but) we are hardly going beyond his implicit intention, if we can judge this from his use of Jesus' words and life in his ethical exhortations, and his application to Jesus of those categories that Judaism had reserved for its highest treasure, namely, the Torah, that is, pre-existence, agency in creation, wisdom. To be "in Christ," was for Paul to have died and risen with him in a New Exodus, and this in turn meant that he was to be ennomos Christou, that is, subject to the authority of the words and Person of Christ as a pattern.⁶³

Davies maintains that when Paul refers to himself as an imitator of Christ, he is doubtlessly thinking of Jesus as the Torah he has to copy both in words and in deeds (Rom. 6:15ff). He finds that Paul is at one with Matthew who also places the Law of Christ in the context of the grace of Christ. Paul and Matthew share a common understanding of Christ and his words; both can speak of a law of Christ, composed in part, of Jesus' words.

In his examination of the Q and M sources, Davies shows that Q sets the ethical teaching of Jesus in its

63 Ibid., p. 363.

radical context as part of the coming of the kingdom, while in the material drawn from M, this teaching was applied to everyday life. The result was that the teaching of Jesus in M takes on a regulatory character; it becomes a guide for the actual daily living of Christians. These two sources of the Sermon reveal a twofold approach to the words of Jesus. In Q, it is their absolute character, their radicality that is emphasized. In M, there is an attempt to make these teachings applicable to the problems of daily living, and reflects perhaps more adequately the experience of the early Church after Easter. This process of making the radical regulatory was continued in the Christian-rabbinism of Matthew.

In the New Testament outside of Matthew there was another tendency concerned to subsume the ethical teaching of Jesus under one all-embracing norm, that of the law of love. In James, the words of Jesus constituted a new law (1:25, "the perfect law, the law of liberty," and 2:8, "the royal law"). Davies notes that for both Palestinian and Hellenistic Jewish-Christians, the "acceptance of Jesus as Messiah would have involved no rejection of Law, but merely the substitution of the New Law of the Messiah for the Old."⁶⁴ In John's gospel, the Law which had come through Moses is contrasted with the grace and truth which came through Jesus. Jesus.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 405.

appears in John, not as the interpreter of the Old Law, but as the Torah in person. The whole of his ethical teaching is summed up in a new commandment, the command to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

Davies concludes his examination of the various approaches to the words of Jesus in the New Testament. He finds that, in Matthew and to a lesser degree in Paul,

... the revelatory and radical demands are used in what we may loosely call a regulatory, rabbinic manner, that is, they come to constitute a base, or given ground, from which halakoth are deduced or to which they are attached. For both Matthew and Paul the commandments of Jesus came to constitute a law of the Messiah and the same was true for James.⁶⁵

In John, the words of Jesus are summed up in the love commandment. In the material in the New Testament directed to Gentile Christians (catechetical elements in the epistles and the pastorals), the Church turned to Jewish and Hellenistic sources, sometimes taking over their ethical teaching without attempting to root this in the gospel in any direct way.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the demands placed upon Gentile Christians were significantly "heroic," that the notion of the teaching of Jesus as Law would not have seemed strange to the Gentile churches. Finally, Davies points out that the understanding of the gospel in terms of law provides a bridge between the first and

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 413.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

second centuries. The Apostolic Fathers did not hesitate to interpret the Faith as a new Law. If Matthew was hesitant to use such a term because of his proximity to Judaism, what was implied by him could become explicit in the Fathers who were farther removed from late Judaism than he. In any case, any rigid characterization of first-century Christianity as a religion of grace over against that of the Fathers as one of law is to be rejected.

5. The Setting in the Ministry of Jesus.

In Davies' final section, he attempts to define the relation in which the Christ of the Mount stands to the person of Jesus himself. He holds that the Church inherited and preserved Jesus' words, modifying them for its own purpose, and then re-ascribed them to Jesus in a new form. He examines the rabbinic and eschatological traits in the teaching of Jesus, and compares his teaching with that of Qumran; but it is in the awareness that Jesus had of himself as interpreter of the will of God that we are best able to understand the import of his teaching.

It is a fact that, in both Jewish and Hellenistic sources, Jesus is presented as teacher, as one who had disciples. But this discipleship was the result of a response to a call to follow Jesus, involving personal commitment to him, and so differed from the rabbi-student relationship.

Jesus' exegesis differed from that of the rabbis as well. He used scripture as a witness to himself; the content of his preaching revealed an eschatological awareness on his part that, in his coming, the rule of God had drawn near. Nevertheless, there are rabbinic traits in the relationship of Jesus to his disciples, and the continuity of his message was preserved by his followers who passed on his words faithfully to the Church. Jesus, then, appears both as rabbi and as eschatological preacher. This twofold aspect reflects the Judaic background from which he came, where,

... in the Jewish hope for the future, eschatology was never divorced from the ethical, the Messianic king was to be also a teacher or interpreter of the Law; the Messiah could be like Moses. And the same is true in the New Testament: Jesus as Servant-Messiah had also to define his attitude to the Law; as the eschatological figure he was necessarily a teacher of morality.⁶⁷

In first-century Judaism, Jesus was one among others who preached repentance, and who thought of repentance in the light of the Law. He honored the Law and sympathized with the Pharisees who were concerned to apply the Law to life. He came into conflict with them, however, when he saw that the tradition which they sponsored no longer expressed the spirit of the Law and had even annulled the intention of the Law itself. The Qumran sectarians, in their attitude toward repentance, demanded an absolute and intense obedience to the

67 Ibid., p. 425.

will of God. Jesus' demand was for the same intense, absolute obedience, but he differed radically from them in his understanding of the will of God. Davies points out that "the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament remained valid for Jesus as the expression of the will of God; there is no complete break in Jesus with the ethical teaching of Judaism."⁶⁸ Although he did exercise great freedom in regards to the Law, Davies holds it as doubtful whether at any point Jesus specifically annuls the Law. Rather, the Law and the prophets remained valid for him as the expression of the will of God.

Not his estimate of the Law as the revelation of the will of God set him apart ... but his interpretation of this revelation. In this sense there is a real continuity between his ethical teaching and that of the Law.⁶⁹

What was Jesus' interpretation of the Law as revelation of the will of God? He realized that, in his ministry, the Kingdom of God was actively at work; he was aware that the Sovereign Rule of God was expressed through and in himself. Whereas, in Judaism the Law expressed the will of God, for Jesus his immediate awareness of the will of God became "Law." Jesus, knowing himself to be Messiah, came to terms with the Law of Moses. Setting his own teaching in relation to the Law, he summed up morality in the one Law of Love. The norm of love became his own pure self-giving; the Law of the

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 428.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 429.

Messiah to "love thy neighbour as thyself" was practised perfectly by Jesus-Messiah and his example is the unique and radical norm for all Christians.

Matthew, then, in presenting the words of Jesus as a "new law" has been faithful to the mind of Jesus. There is a danger though that the unified collection of Jesus' words into a "law" can be interpreted apart from the whole setting of the mercy and compassion of the kingdom which surrounds them.

In this sense, Matthew has helped to generate an isolated understanding of his commandments which has often prompted, on the one hand, a shallow moralism and, on the other, what sometimes appears to be a kerygmatic amorality which, in its despair before the utter radicalism of his words, evacuates them of any real significance for the understanding of Jesus himself or for the business of living.⁷⁰

Davies concludes that because the mind of the Church has been at work interpreting the words of Jesus for themselves and for us, we cannot define precisely in what sense they are "Law." But we can be certain that the elements of demand and compassion are both present in all he said and taught.


What we can be certain of is this: that Jesus displayed the utmost agapé to "the Lost" and demanded the utmost agapé of his own. His words as Messianic "law" lie between these two poles and are themselves congruous with them: it was this insight that made Matthew set the Antitheses after the Beatitudes and close them with the demand for watchfulness before a

70 Ibid., p. 433.

"threat," implied at least; but embed the whole of the Sermon on the Mount in a context of his Lord's ministry of compassion.⁷¹

In an attempt to discover whether or not the Judaic background of these verses could enlighten us about their meaning, we have looked at the setting of the Sermon on the Mount. In his research, W. D. Davies attempted to determine first of all if Jesus was presented by Matthew specifically as a New Moses giving a New Law. He finds that this is not so. Jesus is shown, rather, as a representative of the New Israel, who recapitulates in his experience that of the Old Israel. Jesus as Messiah is presented as having absorbed the Mosaic function. As Messiah, then, did he bring with him a Messianic Torah? In Davies' view, the Sermon on the Mount is the authoritative law of the Messiah. He is not giving a New Law here, but is rather interpreting the Mosaic Law so as to reveal its true meaning. This teaching of Jesus stands in a relation of completion, not of abrogation, to the Mosaic Law. In an attempt to discover what a "Messianic Torah" really meant, Davies enquires whether or not in the Jewish Messianic expectation there was hope of a New Torah. He finds that the evidence is ambiguous. There seems to be expectation of some kind of New Torah, not the same as the Old but yet not specifically new. It was generally expected that, in the Messianic

71 Ibid., p. 435.



Age, Torah would be better understood and more perfectly observed. The "newness" of change would be more in the comprehension and interpretation of Torah rather than in the Law itself. This change was also seen as occurring within the context of the existing Torah, thereby ensuring its eternal validity. Davies observes that Christian scholars have often been guilty of misreading Jewish sources and finding "evidence" for the abrogation of the "old law" in favor of a "new."

In applying the insights gained by this research to Matthew's gospel, Davies finds that, although it cannot be stated unambiguously that Judaism certainly awaited a new Messianic Torah, still, Matthew seems to affirm the substance of one in his gospel where he portrays a teaching with eschatological authority. While he does not speak explicitly of a New Torah, he does present the teachings of Jesus in an elevated manner. Davies then looks to factors in contemporary Judaism, which may have influenced Matthew in his presentation of the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon, and finds that a principal influence may have been the center of Jamnia where a reformulation of the Torah was being carried out by the rabbis. He conjectures that Matthew, in reaction, may well have consciously been setting up a New Way for the New Israel. The Sermon would then be a kind of Mishnaic counterpart to the activity at Jamnia.

Within the context of the early Church, Matthew's "Christian rabbinism," i.e., his tendency to present the teachings of Jesus as a Law, is not basically at variance with either Paul or the other Evangelists. The gospel was understood in a certain sense as a law, in John specifically as a law of love. Finally, Davies examines the teachings of the Sermon in relation to the person of Jesus himself. He finds that in Jesus' awareness of himself as the interpreter "par excellence" of God's will, he used scripture as a witness to himself. In his preaching, he evidenced the eschatological awareness that the Kingdom had drawn near to men in him. He was an eschatological preacher as well as a rabbinic interpreter. He preached repentance in the light of the Law, a Law which remained valid for him as the expression of the will of God. There was no complete break with the ethical teaching of Judaism in his teaching; it was, rather, his interpretation of this revelation that set him apart. This interpretation was linked to his person: For Jesus, his own immediate awareness of the will of God became "Law." His teaching was of the Law of Love, the unique norm for all Christians. Matthew's presentation of the teaching of Jesus as a law was faithful in substance to Jesus' thought. Because these words of Jesus have been interpreted throughout the history of the Church, we cannot know precisely how they are "Law," but what is sure is that the Law of Christ is always

and everywhere encompassed by mercy and compassion as well as by demand.

6. Conclusions.

What may we conclude regarding the meaning of Matthew 5:17-20 from this research on its Judaic background? First of all, it would seem that Meier's assertion that the Mosaic Law "[...] has an inviolable whole and qua Mosaic has passed," is debatable. Davies has shown that in Jewish Messianic expectation most changes in the Torah were seen as occurring within the context of the existing Torah and therefore presupposed the continuance of its validity. Obedience to the Torah was seen in some circles to be the dominating mark of the Messianic Age. Davies also emphasizes that there is no radical break between the ethical teaching of Jesus and that of Judaism. The Law and the prophets remained valid for Jesus as the expression of God's will, but he interpreted them with an ultimate authority. From these observations, it would seem that Meier's insistence on the temporal terminus of the Law in this passage of Matthew is misplaced. We seem to find support for the view that Jesus' declaration in verse 17 of coming to fulfill the Law, not destroy it, is in harmony with the view that a Messianic Torah would include a more perfect understanding and observance of the Mosaic

Torah. The eternal validity of Torah as revelation of God's will seems to be preserved in the assertion in verse 18 that "the Law will not pass away. "Until all is accomplished," in referring to the event of Christ's death and resurrection, would mean that after this event, the Mosaic Law, qua Mosaic, ceases to be, for Christians, the principal source of the revelation of God's love. Whether or not and to what extent it continues to be normative for them is not clear. The "righteousness" of verse 20 would consist in Christian fidelity to the teachings of Jesus; teachings which were not "new" in the sense of discontinuous with the Mosaic Law, but rather in the sense that they were the true interpretation of the Law, an interpretation authoritative in a new way.

CHAPTER III

SOME JEWISH PERSPECTIVES ON MATTHEW 5:17-20

In an attempt to discover how a Jewish point of view could enlighten us in our research, we shall now look at two Jewish authors who have written specifically on the Sermon on the Mount. One is an Orthodox Jew, the other a Liberal; but both felt compelled to study the New Testament. The central question in Matthew 5:17-20, i.e., that of the relationship of Jesus to the Law was for both men one of crucial importance for their understanding of themselves as Jews as well as for their relations with Christianity. Although both wrote some time ago, it is enlightening to see how their remarks and insights have been taken up or simply ignored in subsequent Christian approaches to this question.

1. Claude G. Montefiore: A Liberal View.

We shall deal first with a personal statement of the theological point of view of a liberal Jew in England in the early 20th century, Claude G. Montefiore. In his commentary on Matthew in The Synoptic Gospels, Montefiore characterizes Matthew 5:17-48 as the main portion of the Sermon, dealing with "the relation of the morality and religion of Jesus to the morality and religion of the Law, or rather, it

should perhaps be said the relation of the teaching of Jesus to that of the Scribes or Rabbis."¹ This narrowing of perspective to the "teachings" of Jesus rather than the consideration of his life and personality reflects Montefiore's preoccupation throughout his work, and is an important factor in how he interprets the verses under consideration. He has argued in his Introduction to the gospels that "the great interest or value of the Synoptic Gospels lies in the teaching ascribed to Jesus rather than in the personality or life...."² He states that even for a Jew, "bits of Jesus' teaching ... go beyond O.T. teaching, or ... bring out occasional utterances and teaching of the O.T. more clearly and fully."³ He is even ready to say that "Jesus links onto the Prophets and sometimes seems to go beyond them."⁴ But his perspective is always one in which the emphasis is on the teaching found in the gospels, rather than on the person of Jesus. Montefiore's method is not a scientifically rigorous one, nor does he claim it to be such. He cites the work of Christian exegetes, but reads them from a Jewish point of

1 Claude G. Montefiore, The Synoptic Gospels (Vol. II), New York, Ktav, 1968 (2nd rev. ed.), p. 46.

2 Claude G. Montefiore, The Synoptic Gospels (Vol. I), New York, Ktav, 1968 (2nd rev. ed.), p.

3 Ibid., p. xxiv.

4 Ibid., p. xxv.

view. It is this point of view regarding 5:17-20 that we shall now consider. We shall look at his understanding of the key terms "fulfill" and "righteousness," and also at his interpretation of the antitheses.

Montefiore notes that if "fulfill" in verse 17 means "give a deeper meaning to," then it can only be applied to some of the moral commands and not to all. He favors the view that, in the teaching of Jesus, the Law is sometimes annulled or abrogated; "it can only with difficulty be maintained that the new teaching does not occasionally 'annul' or disavow or traverse the old."⁵ This being admitted, it must be noted that Jesus was dealing with the moral Law alone and not the ceremonial Law. In verse 17, for example, it is an impossible meaning to say that Jesus fulfilled the ceremonial Law by overcoming it and making it needless! But Jesus, in pointing out the essence of the moral Law, was not necessarily making its minor or ceremonial injunctions unnecessary. Montefiore notes that although for the needs of the moment a rabbi would often use words which would seem to imply a "fulfillment" of the Law by an ignoring of its details, this was not his intention.

Moreover, the Rabbis habitually "fulfilled" the Law in the same sort of way as Jesus fulfills it in his remarks about adultery and anger, which are singularly Jewish and Rabbinic; but, because they

⁵ Montefiore, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 47.

well knew the difference between legal enactments and ethical perfection, they did not mean to imply that the legal enactment was not to be observed.⁶

In Montefiore's view, the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:40, "On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets," cannot be interpreted to mean that the fulfillment of all the Law and the prophets implies that all ceremonial injunctions need no longer be obeyed. The first point to remark regarding the "fulfill" of verse 17 is that it cannot be interpreted to refer to anything but certain specific commands of the moral order. Secondly, the "fulfillment" of the moral Law proclaimed by Jesus in no way implies that ceremonial Law be disregarded.

Montefiore finds Marriott's remarks regarding "fulfillment" of such negative laws as the "lex talionis," for example, an inadequate understanding of and explanation of Jewish Law. Marriott explains that the lex talionis, far from being only negative, i.e. justice demands that the offender be punished, actually marked an ethical advance by limiting the harm that could be done to the culprit. Therefore, it was entirely fulfilled by Christ who forbade what it had only restrained. Montefiore's only comment on this ingenious explanation is: "Mr. Marriott's remarks are not by any means entirely accurate as regards the Jewish and

⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

Rabbinic law, which was a much higher law ethically than he appears to know."⁷ One can only regret that Montefiore did not elaborate on this point and show explicitly how a Christian exegete failed to grasp the true meaning of the Jewish Law.

In regard to the "righteousness" of verse 20, Montefiore asserts:

... Christian commentators continue to repeat one after the other the old theory that Jesus taught and proclaimed a "new righteousness," that he taught and demanded this new righteousness consciously and deliberately, and that his claim was true. ... I believe both assertions to be false. They are obtained by an exaggeration of the ethical perfection and comprehensiveness of the Sermon, on the one hand, and by unjustified depreciation of "Jewish" teaching, upon the other. In spite of the "antitheses" of the Sermon, I do not believe that Jesus had any deliberate intention of teaching a new religion or a new "righteousness." He was well content with Micah's "What does the Lord require of thee," and with the love of God and neighbour demanded by the Law. And Rabbinic righteousness was vastly higher, purer, and more inward than Heinrici [a Christian commentator] and his like know or allow.⁸

This is not the thought of a "non-Christian," hostile to the teachings of Jesus. On the contrary, these are the remarks of a Jewish believer, sympathetic to the gospel teachings and well acquainted with the Christian commentaries of his day on these New Testament verses regarding Jesus' attitude to the Law. The "unjustified depreciation" of Jewish teaching which he notes has been perpetuated in such remarks as that of Dupont when he defines Christian justice as a "dépassement

7 Ibid., p. 50.

8 Ibid., p. 54-55.

de la justice juive." Again, one regrets that Montefiore does not continue to elaborate more specifically. He is content to state his belief in a Jewish righteousness equal in every way to that proclaimed by Jesus. Perhaps his remarks on our Christian interpretation or misinterpretation of the value of the Jewish religion speak for themselves by revealing the lack of sensitivity to the values of our Jewish heritage manifested in some Christian exegesis.

Montefiore, in his treatment of the antitheses, notes that here we are "shown in detail how the new 'gospel' righteousness must exceed the old 'legal' righteousness and differ from it."⁹ The "Ye have heard" is contrasted with the "But I say to you," and what is said is something finer and deeper, something more inclusive, completing, and profound.¹⁰ How is this so? In the formula used by Matthew, Montefiore notes that the use of the words "Moses" and "God" is avoided. In his view, Matthew has used an artifice to suppress references to the Decalogue and to the Mosaic Law. He has substituted "You have heard that it was said to men of old" for what would have been closer to the "real truth," i.e., "You have heard that God said to Moses." Montefiore's position here is that Jesus is not presented as being in

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

direct conflict with the Mosaic Law or the Decalogue, even though this is implied. His argument is based on the conviction that the authentic Jesus would not, and could not, have had such an attitude. He is always concerned to determine whether or not the "real Jesus" would have said such-and-such a thing. For him, it is inconceivable that the historical Jesus would have put his teaching in contrast with the Decalogue, for instance.

He would scarcely have wished to depreciate the Decalogue by the higher nobility of his own teaching or wished his disciples to believe that the Decalogue was a poor and meagre sort of law, which it was reserved for him to deepen and to enlarge. Shall we, then, upon the whole, conclude that Jesus, as the prophetic teacher of inwardness, wanted to show that the true fulfillment of the Law included and implied an inward and enlarged interpretation of the leading moral enactments? He did not mean to rail against the very Decalogue itself, by depreciating it in contrast with the new law which he was giving to his disciples. There seems all the more reason to think that his was the original form and intention of this section of his sermon, inasmuch as the greater part of his interpretations are so thoroughly Rabbinic in character and tone.

In Montefiore's view, Matthew has not depicted Jesus as being in direct contradiction or opposition to the Mosaic Law and this because, for the historical Jesus, such an attitude would have been unthinkable. Montefiore interprets at least some of the antitheses as indicating an abrogation of the Law by Jesus, but seems unwilling to believe that that was

11 Ibid., p. 57.

actually the case. For him, Jesus' thought was cast in too "rabbinic" a mold to entertain ideas of opposition to the Torah. Meier has shown (above) that although Jesus' purpose was indeed to fulfill the Law, this very fulfillment was sometimes effected in abrogation of certain laws; an interpretation foreign to Montefiore. Montefiore's point that Jesus is not presented as being in opposition to the Torah finds support in W. D. Davies' observations that Matthew never explicitly presents Jesus as a New Moses giving a New Law. He suggests that this would have been repugnant to the Jews of his time, but finds the real reason for Matthew's reluctance to speak in such a way the fact that Jesus transcends such categories. He himself is the fulfillment of Torah; in him are the law and the love of God most perfectly and most fully expressed. This is a Christian point of view and in complete opposition to any Jewish view.

We must now examine on the level of the historical Jesus Montefiore's contention that his interpretation of the Law's commands was "thoroughly Rabbinic in character." Was Jesus "rabbinic" in his teaching? Montefiore notes that, for Schechter (a Jewish commentator), the rabbis in their "enlarged" interpretations of scripture argued that more was intended and included by a given command or saying than the mere letter would imply. Schechter gives the example of the rabbinic parallel which would interpret the "you have heard" as "you might understand a given passage or law to mean, or to mean

only, so and so, ... therefore, there is a teaching to say that, etc." (This was also later noted and developed by Daube and picked up by W. D. Davies (contra Meier) to explain the positive character of the antitheses, see p. 75² above). Montefiore, while appreciating Schechter's hypothesis as "based upon a profound and also instinctive knowledge of Rabbinic and Hebrew usage, which is wanting to the Christian commentators,"¹² concludes that this interpretation cannot explain the last two antitheses where the Law definitely seems to be contradicted. He observes that it is not fulfillment but negation that is stated regarding the lex talionis and love of enemies. . . It is only with the first two of the antitheses (anger and adultery) that Jesus' interpretation of the Law was to a large extent in keeping with the rabbinic spirit. Montefiore finds that at some point Jesus seems to go beyond an "enlargement" of the prescriptions to an opposition to them. In an attempt to save his argument for the rabbinic character of Jesus' teaching; he notes that "perhaps in the list of contrasts some things only go back to Jesus, and some are due to later writers who were more hostile to the Law than Jesus was, and more deliberately opposed to Judaism."¹³ A stronger argument for his position lies in his observation that the

12 Ibid., p. 56.

13 Ibid.

conception of the "Law" or of "law" as opposed to some higher principle of religion was unknown to the Jews at the time of Jesus. "Torah" to the rabbis was not only "law" but "teaching," and was applied by them to teaching on passages even outside the Pentateuch. Also, the distinction between the letter and the spirit of the Law was recognized and made use of by them, and presumably by Jesus himself. This did not in any way imply that the Torah was to be opposed. Montefiore asserts that the historical Jesus would have shared this rabbinic mentality and would not too easily have depreciated or opposed the commands of the Decalogue.

Montefiore's claims regarding the historical Jesus, i.e., that he thought and taught in so thoroughly a rabbinic manner that no question of opposition to the commands of the Torah could have entered his mind, are based on his intuitive reading of Jesus as a first-century Jew. For such a "rabbi," there was no greater revelation of God's will than Torah, and he would have attempted always to deepen and enlarge the understanding of this Torah, never to depreciate or demean it by offering his own Torah instead. That would have been unthinkable. At the same time, he would have made the distinction between the letter and the spirit of the Law and would presumably have been ready to admit that, at times, the letter must be put aside to ensure the keeping of the Law in spirit. Such a portrait of Jesus is, for Montefiore, the only allowable one.

It is in his commentary on the antitheses that Montefiore illustrates his position, finding grounds for his claim especially in his treatment of the first two. In the first antithesis dealing with anger against one's brother, Jesus speaks of murder and anger quite generally. The command "do not murder" does not merely mean "do not murder," but it condemns also all angry feelings. Montefiore notes:

In these verses Jesus appears to regard the feeling of anger as no less terrible a crime than murder. Such paradoxical equivalences were quite usual among the Rabbis. But they must not be pressed too far, just as to feel anger and to control the feeling is obviously a less sin than to give free play to it. The teaching of 21 and 22 is Rabbinic, and contains nothing that is new.¹⁴

He notes again that the teaching contained in the passage on reconciliation is "perfectly Rabbinic and usual." In the second antithesis as well, the letter of the Law is deepened by Jesus, whose teaching parallels the rabbinic doctrine that desire is sinful. Here, Montefiore makes an example of a Christian commentator who observed: "The Rabbis had legislated for actions, not for thoughts." He writes:

But who can legislate, in the literal meaning of the word, for "thoughts"? The Halachah deals with actions, as any other system of codified law must. But in their teaching, the Rabbis dealt with "thoughts" no less than Jesus.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 63.

He then goes on in a passionate defense of the Jewish ethic which Christian commentators seem to have ignored:

... it is false that Rabbinic ethics knows of nothing but "actions." It is false that Jesus, in saying that God's law has to do with Gesinnung (inward disposition, motive, character), was opposed to the whole spirit of Judaism. It is false that in Judaism religion was mere outward obedience; it is false that the relation of man to God was conceived of only as one of action and reward, and that character remains wholly out of account. It is false that the Law was an outward taskmaster, which evoked fear and not love. No one can understand the Rabbinic religion with these presuppositions. There is no such fundamental contrast between it and the religion of Jesus. The Law was not a mere external law, fulfilled from fear of punishment and for hope of reward. It was the Law of the all-wise and all-righteous God, given to Israel as a sign of supremest grace. It was a token of divine affection, and in its fulfillment was the highest human joy.¹⁶

It would seem that this reaction from a sympathetic and open-minded Jew must make Christian exegetes look to their presuppositions in their various interpretations of Jesus' relationship to the Law of his fathers and of his Father. False presuppositions, e.g., that the Law was essentially inadequate, that Jesus put an end to it, that fulfillment somehow negates completely what went before, must give way to an unprejudiced appreciation of the Jewish understanding of Torah in relation to Matthew 5:17-48.

In other antitheses, Montefiore maintains that, again, Jesus' teaching is in close parallel to that of the rabbis. Regarding divorce, which was merely permissive and not

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 60.

prescriptive in Judaism, he proposes the possibility that "Jesus did regard his prohibition as a 'fulfilment' of the concession made in old days to the weakness of human nature and the hardness of men's hearts."¹⁷ He finds it difficult to believe in the next antithesis regarding oaths that Jesus is deliberately adopting a principle opposite to the Law. He points out that:

... the Rabbinic Laws about oaths must be distinguished from the Rabbinic teaching about the morality of oaths. Apart from legal distinctions, discussions, and pronouncements, the Rabbinic teaching, in its higher and highest moments, does not greatly differ from that of Jesus.¹⁸

In regard to the lex talionis, he remarks that the literal application of this "law" had probably (not certainly) been abolished by the rabbis as early as the time of Jesus. Jesus is here saying that a man must not stand on his rights. He seems to be asking for an extreme moral effort, in the unqualified "giving" that he counsels. This is in harmony with the rabbinic concept of rachmonouth or pity, whereby one is counselled not only to give unconditionally but also to be grateful to the one to whom one has given, for he has been the occasion for one to practise virtue. Here again, the teaching of Jesus and that of the rabbis is in close harmony, and not in opposition.

17 Ibid., p. 66.

18 Ibid., p. 69.

The most important passage is that dealing with love of enemies. Nowhere is it said in the Pentateuch that enemies are to be hated. Do Jesus' words fairly sum up actual Pentateuchal legislation? And do they fairly represent what the rabbis had to say? Two cases are to be distinguished: that of the relationship between Jew and Jew and that of Jew and non-Jew. Montefiore notes that it is utterly false to assert that the rabbis taught a man to hate his private and personal enemy. Neither does the Law teach this. He concludes that, in this case, Jesus' teachings and that of the rabbis are in harmony, but "Jesus puts the teachings in a more inspired and enthusiastic way and carries it to the extremest lengths."¹⁹ As regards the attitude of Jew to non-Jew, the facts are different. Montefiore admits that "the universalism of Paul was never attained by Rabbinic teaching ... that the Old Testament is, on the whole, particularistic, and identifies the enemies of the Jews with the enemies of God."²⁰ But, although theoretically the attitude of the Jews towards the enemies of their religion has been one of hatred, Montefiore maintains that "their practise has often risen superior to their theory." He concludes by stating that "one may feel fairly sure that Jesus never said these unfortunate words."

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 78.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 80.

This recourse to the "authenticity" or "non-authenticity" of the words of Jesus weakens Montefiore's position, since there is no proof one way or the other. All we have is Matthew's text. One wonders if Montefiore's criticism of some Jewish commentators' polemics regarding this passage might not apply to him here as he perhaps tried to show that "the teaching, so far as it is good, is not new, and so far as it is new, is not good," which is what he seems to be saying.

Montefiore's claim that Jesus' teachings are closely linked to what the rabbis taught has been demonstrated to be well founded. But this does not preclude the possibility that Jesus' teachings went beyond that of the rabbis, not simply by enlarging upon the Law, but also by contradicting it. His recourse to the argument of "authenticity" reflects his weakness in methodology. His insights, however, into the Christian misinterpretations of rabbinic thought and teaching are valid and striking. Christian exegetes have not emphasized the rabbinic cast to Jesus' formulations in these verses, but have been more preoccupied to show how his teaching was essentially superior to that of Judaism. Montefiore's remarks provide a corrective to this narrow and prejudiced point of view.

2. G. Friedlander: An Orthodox View.

Gerald Friedlander, an Orthodox Jew and a contemporary of Claude Montefiore, in his book The Jewish Sources of

the Sermon on the Mount,²¹ looks at the relation of Christianity to Judaism within the scope of the Sermon. He tries to "estimate at its true worth" the religious value of the Sermon by comparing it with the contemporary religious teaching current among the Jews at that time. Throughout his work he refers to and criticizes Montefiore's more moderate position. Friedlander is writing, out of a late nineteenth-century mind-set, when the controversies over the historical Jesus and the historical value or non-value of the gospels were creating a climate of extreme scepticism. As a Jew reacting to the "Christian unrest" of this period, Friedlander attempted in a polemical spirit to answer the Christian theologians who claimed that the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount were superior to the teachings of the sages of Israel. He did not use historical discipline regarding the rabbinic literature to which he refers in his analysis of Jewish sources and, like Montefiore, deals with the words and feelings of the historical Jesus as though they could be clearly determined. Because of his presuppositions regarding Christianity, his conclusions differ radically from those of Montefiore, to whom he refers as a blunderer, "relying on Christian scholars [and] ignorant of Jewish sources."²²

21 Gerald Friedlander, The Jewish Sources of the Sermon on the Mount, New York, Ktav, 1969 (reprint of 1911 ed.).

22 Ibid., p. iii.

Friedlander's position, as opposed to Montefiore's, can be summarized in the statement he makes early in his book:

The Jews have refused steadfastly to see in the hero of the Gospels either a God, or an inspired prophet, or a qualified lawgiver, or a teacher in Israel with a new message for his people. Now that the Christian theologians have begun to reject the Jesus of dogma, and to attempt to find the Jesus of history, it has been left to an English Jew [Montefiore] to invite his co-religionists to enter into the heritage that is fast slipping away from the Christian grasp.²³

The first point of difference with Montefiore noted by Friedlander is that of Jesus as a prophet. He rejects Montefiore's appreciation of Jesus as not only "the last of the prophets" but as "greater than any of the Hebrew prophets."²⁴ The point in his argument of interest for us is his statement that Jesus' claim to give a new law, "I say unto you," disqualifies his claim to be a prophet. He notes:

The Jews have always relied on the passage in Deuteronomy (xiii.1ff) that a prophet who attempts to alter the Mosaic Law is not to be credited. The Rabbis express this by saying, "No prophet is permitted to introduce a new law in Israel" (Joma, 80a). The fact that Jesus abrogated several Mosaic commandments would also disqualify him as a prophet. None of the Old Testament Prophets attacked the Law. They frequently attacked the hollow worship, the irreligious manner in which the people kept their Sabbaths or Festivals (Isa. 1:14), but they did not abrogate the Mosaic precepts. Nay, they told the people to remember the Law of Moses. This Jesus did not do, and again for this reason we cannot call him a prophet in Israel.²⁵

23 Ibid., p. 11.

24 Ibid., p. 1.

25 Ibid., p. 7.

The "I say unto you," for Friedlander, is a dilemma. He conceives of Jesus as being either one who "imagined himself to be the only Son of God and therefore knew the Divine Will which he was called upon to reveal, or else he deliberately used the words 'I say unto you...' without any authority or justification."²⁶ It is evident here that the problem of Jesus' relationship to the Law is ultimately and foremost a Christological problem, not easily resolved among Christians and Jews in the past and the constant locus of the deepest difficulties in dialogue.

In the passage regarding the Law, Matthew 5:17-20, Friedlander notes the different explanations for the presence of conflicting views in the gospel on the Law and its immutability. He reviews the theories, i.e., that there are two strands of thought in the gospel, pro-legal and anti-legal, or that Jesus first intended to keep the Law but modified his attitudes toward the end of his career or, again, that the gospel reflects the conflict of the early Christian community regarding the Law. He notes that "the eternity of the written law was an accepted belief among all classes of Jews in the age of Jesus."²⁷ It was only after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., according to Friedlander, that for the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

Christians, "in the place of the Holy Law a new system of dogma arose. The Jewish affection for the Law grew into the Christian worship of Jesus."²⁸ Whereas, for Montefiore, Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law in various ways, for Friedlander, the Law itself had been replaced by worship of Jesus as Son of God.

In Matthew 5:20, the claim that the "righteousness" of the Scribes and the Pharisees was insufficient to enter the Kingdom of Heaven leads Friedlander to consider the unfair caricature of the historical Pharisees in the gospel. He comments:

Here the gospel denies the possibility of the Pharisees or Scribes being able to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Their righteousness is sin, only the new and higher righteousness of Jesus will enable his disciples to enter into the coming Kingdom. One would like to know how and why the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was believed to be so hollow and unreal as to exclude the whole class from the divine Kingdom.²⁹

He considers this verse (20) as an "addition" of the editor, or as an "interpretation," because it is not found in any of the other gospels and because it contradicts the preceding verses. The importance of the verse for him is that it speaks of the insufficient righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees and implies the higher righteousness of Jesus.³⁰ He questions

28 Ibid., p. 28.

29 Ibid., p. 35.

30 Ibid., p. 36.

Montefiore's reticence in criticizing the unfair picture of the Pharisees perpetuated in the early twentieth century dictionaries of the Bible then in use. He rightfully remarks that, although

... the Evangelists believed that Jesus had a new and genuine message, a "higher" righteousness that replaced the Jewish religion and its interpretations by the Scribes and Pharisees, the great difficulty is to know where we are to look for an honest account of the Pharisees of the first century.³¹

He points out that Hillel and his disciples were Pharisees who led a life as pure and simple as the disciples of Jesus. "We ask, in no sarcastic spirit, where is the higher morality of the Gospels, and where can one trace its effect?"³²

Friedlander's remarks on the Christian misunderstanding and ignorance of Jewish literature are justified. While his analysis of Matthew 5:20 on the redactional level lacks scientific basis, his reaction as a Jew to the "unhistorical" presentation and distortion of the Pharisaic class is worthy of attention and respect.

Friedlander then considers this "higher righteousness" of Jesus illustrated in the antitheses. The first antithesis, dealing with anger, is seen by Friedlander in the same light as Montefiore, i.e., that Jesus does not here go beyond the Mosaic Law.

31 Ibid., p. 37.

32 Ibid.

Mr. Montefiore (S.G., p. 499) says that "Jesus, as the prophetic teacher of inwardness, wanted to show that the true fulfilment of the Law included and implied an inward and enlarged interpretation of the leading moral enactments." Quite so, the true fulfilment of the Law included and implied an inward and enlarged interpretation. This was the work of the Scribes, who, although they are not called by Mr. Montefiore "the prophetic teachers of inwardness," agreed with Jesus in his interpretation of the sixth commandment. Mr. Montefiore truly remarks (p. 501) that "the Rabbinic Jew has nothing here to learn from the Sermon." Jesus, like the Rabbis, made a fence to the Law.³³

It is the same for the other antitheses regarding desire:

This superb teaching [of the Mosaic Law] is more than one hundred years earlier than that of Jesus, and enforces the lesson of chastity as finely as any passage in the New Testament.³⁴

In the case of divorce, Friedlander finds that the school of Shammai taught exactly the same as Jesus is said to have done. In the matter of oaths, where Jesus opposes the Jewish Law which permitted oaths, Friedlander notes that the Law and the prophets had always demanded righteousness of the heart before God, something which Jesus' teachings could not hope to surpass.

It is in the last two antitheses regarding the lex talionis and the love of enemies that Friedlander differs most vehemently with Montefiore. He remarks that, for Montefiore, Jesus was giving counsels of perfection for those who wanted

33 Ibid., p. 41.

34 Ibid., p. 51.

to enter the Kingdom. His words are not to be taken literally and do not, in any case, refer to public justice. Friedlander notes that Jesus' proclamation of a new law, "resist not evil," surely does refer to public justice, and that if Jesus' words are not to be taken literally, neither are those of the rabbis, when they advocated an eye for an eye. In his opinion, Jesus is enunciating a principle that, if followed, would destroy the structure of society, whereas the Jew does not forget that, although one can and must overcome evil by good at times, justice cannot be forgotten in an attempt to fulfill the divine law of love.

Justice demanded that wrong should be resisted. Judaism, unlike Christianity (as taught in the Sermon on the Mount), recognizes the duty of fighting against evil. It repudiates the "higher and newer" law, "resist not evil."³⁵

Jesus' teaching on the love of enemies, as interpreted by Montefiore, enlarges upon the universalism or rather the particularity of the Old Testament. Friedlander objects strenuously to this, stating unequivocally that the Old Testament is not particularistic and does not identify the enemies of the Jews with the enemies of God.

The Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi, is full of the universal spirit of God's love, mercy and grace. The spirit of the Old Testament is summed up in the words (Gen. 5:1) "This is the book of Man's history." The Old Testament is the Charter of Humanity.

The enemies of the Jews arose from political or economical causes. The enemies of God, whether Jews

³⁵ Ibid., p. 68.

or non-Jews, are absolutely independent of these causes. Their sin is in the moral sphere and here alone can they become enemies of God. In ancient life the alien was necessarily an enemy. Only in Israel was the alien considered as a friend who is to be loved (Lev. 19:34). This is the message of the Old Testament.³⁶

He concludes that Jesus was not saying anything new when he taught his disciples to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecuted them.

While Friedlander's position is less scientific and more polemical than that of Montefiore, his reaction to the Christian interpretation of Matthew 5:17-48 deserves consideration. He echoes Montefiore in the conviction that a "prophetic" Jesus would not have set himself up in conscious opposition to the Torah. He comes closer to the heart of things than Montefiore, perhaps, when he states that for Christians the worship of Jesus as Lord "replaced" the Torah as focal point. Jesus did more than interpret fully; in Christian belief he embodies and encompasses the Torah in his own person as Lord. In drawing attention to the caricature of the Pharisees with their "insufficient righteousness," Friedlander rightly provides a corrective for biased and unfounded exegesis of Matthew 5:20. Meier (see above, p. 51) was at pains to clarify this important point in his analysis. Friedlander sees nothing in Jesus' teaching that could add in any way to the teachings of Judaism. Montefiore seems to be grasping at

36 Ibid., p. 71ff.

certain "intangibles" in the teachings of Jesus which show that he somehow went "beyond" Judaism. In their views on Matthew 5:17-48, both men stress the continuity of Jesus' teachings with the teachings of Torah and emphasize the high moral quality present in the Judaism of Jesus' time. They rightly criticize a Christian interpretation of these verses which would attempt to show Jesus' superiority to Torah by depreciating or downgrading the latter.

A Jewish understanding of Jesus' relationship to the Law is not an easy one to delineate. For the most part, Jewish scholars see Jesus as a Jew born "under the law," who lived and died obedient to the Torah and its demands. For such a one, the "fulfillment" of Matthew 5:17 could only mean: "the Law will not pass away; it will attain all its fullness in me ... not only do I not overthrow the Law ... or empty it of its content, but on the contrary I increase that content, so as to fill the Law full to the brim."³⁷ Although the gospels present Jesus as taking certain liberties vis à vis ceremonial laws, still, for a Jewish reader it would be evident that:

Jésus s'indigne seulement contre ceux-là qui accordent aux pratiques plus d'importance qu'aux préceptes de morale; mais loin de lui de vouloir abolir les premières ... Jésus n'a songé à abolir la Torah, ni même les pratiques, ni à créer une nouvelle Torah.³⁸

³⁷ Jules Isaac, Jesus and Israel, New York, Rinehart & Winston, 1971, p. 63.

³⁸ J. Klausner, Jésus de Nazareth, Paris, Payot, 1933, p. 528.

Martin Buber finds that "the attitude of the Sermon on the Mount to the Torah [...] in reality [...] is only the sublimation of a Pharisaic doctrine from a definite and fundamental point of view."³⁹ David Flusser, another distinguished Jew and a historian, holds that anti-Pharisaic polemic such as found in Matthew 5:17-20 also occurs in rabbinic literature, which is an expression of true Pharisaism. Jesus, therefore, was representative of the best rabbinic tradition. For Gregory Baum, a Jewish Christian, Matthew's presentation of Christianity is one that depicts it as the true Judaism:

[...] Matthew emphasizes Jesus' fidelity to the Torah [...] to prove to his countrymen that the Lord was no antinomian revolutionary, that he lived in perfect obedience to the religion of the Law, and that following this example his disciples, the Christians, will not overthrow the established order by rebellious protests and radical innovations. The Christian way, Matthew wishes to say, is the true and authentic Judaism.⁴⁰

There are, however, basic differences between the teachings of Jesus and that of the rabbis and, as one Jewish author has observed:

[...] these issue from two considerations which form the frame of reference within which the teachings of Jesus must be studied:

³⁹ M. Buber, Two Types of Faith, New York, Harper & Row, 1961, p. 62.

⁴⁰ G. Baum, The Jews and the Gospel, Westminster, Md., Newman, 1961, p. 73.

(1) Jesus' conviction that the world as men knew it--the human and the natural alike--was coming to an end and that a new heavenly kingdom was about to dawn; and (2) the glad news of salvation and his own unique part in this divine drama.

These convictions: the apocalyptic expectations and his role as heavenly Messiah--gave his teachings a new direction, and these teachings were discouraged in the prevailing Judaism. Here is the Great Divide between Jesus, as interpreted by the Gospel writers and the Pharisaic masters.⁴¹

It is true, indeed, that Jesus, as a true Jew, obeyed the Law by living up to its heart and essence, that he showed an attitude of respect and obedience toward its true requirements, that he "fulfilled" it as it was meant by God to be fulfilled; but it is also true that he brought about a deep and radical transformation of that same Law. In reference to the whole question of Jesus' relationship to the Law and to the passage in Matthew, in particular 5:17-48, the contribution of the Jewish point of view is not to be underestimated. Even though a Christian exegesis will take as its point of departure the conviction in faith that Jesus as Lord is presented as the supreme authority vis à vis the Law, this attitude must also be accompanied by an authentic appreciation of Jesus as one who loved and revered the Torah. If Jesus is seen as the authoritative interpreter of the Law, the only one who can ultimately discern which parts of Torah really express the will of God, still, it must be realized that he recognized

⁴¹ D. Beryl Cohen, Jewish Sources and Parallels, New York, Bookman Associates, 1956, p. 10.

at the heart of Torah an authentic divine revelation of God's will. This he did not attempt to modify or change, for he was essentially faithful to the Jewish ethic of obedience to the will of God. In this sense, the Torah and the gospel are fundamentally in agreement. The value of the Jewish point of view expressed by Friedlander, Montefiore, and others lies in their insistence on the positive aspect of Torah as teaching of God, something which they rightly recognize as found in the teachings of Christ, and not always emphasized by Christian exegetes and commentators.

In this analysis, we have seen in contemporary Jewish interpretations a reaction from both an orthodox and a liberal Jewish point of view, against a type of Christian scholarship which would attempt to show the "superiority" of Christianity over Judaism by depreciating the latter. They react on the level of the interpretation of Matthew 5:17-48 rather than as exegetes. Typically, both authors treat the antitheses in detail as concrete examples of what 5:17-20 outline in general. They are proceeding in a good rabbinic manner, by expounding upon a general statement of Jesus regarding the Law and, in the process, using concrete and specific cases to prove or disprove the statement.

Montefiore's conviction that Jesus' interpretation of the Law was thoroughly "rabbinic" in character and that the historical Jesus would never have abrogated the Torah, does

not prevent him from seeing Matthew's presentation of the antitheses as being at least partial abrogation of the Law. He explains this by attributing such an attitude to later writers, more hostile to Judaism than was Jesus. He rightly defends a "Jewish righteousness" as equal before God with "Christian righteousness." Friedlander clarifies this when he underlines the falseness in Matthew's portrait of the scribes and Pharisees as historically "unrighteous" people. The righteousness of hypocrites is obviously not to be valued, but whether or not all Pharisees were so hypocritical is not a proven fact. Friedlander is less ready than is Montefiore to see anything in Jesus' teaching which would in any way surpass the teachings of Judaism, and sharply criticizes Montefiore for saying that the Old Testament was "particularistic" in regard to love of enemies. He maintains that it was universalistic in the best sense. He is convinced that Jesus, if he did claim to bring a New Torah, is not only not the Messiah, but is not even a true prophet. The fact that Jesus, and not Torah, is now the focal point for Christians seems to suggest to him that Christians have discarded Torah as unnecessary. There is no conception for Friedlander of Jesus as "fulfiller" in the sense of authoritarian interpreter of Torah; there is only an either/or situation: either Jesus is worshipped or Torah is revered. Montefiore seems more able to conceive of a vital link in Jesus between Christianity and Judaism.

3. Conclusions.

Our reaction to the Jewish interpretation that we have just seen is the following. It seems to support the view that we have already expressed, that Jesus was not in conflict with Torah but, rather, complemented it. He preserved the Torah by observing it faithfully and teaching his disciples to do the same. We agree that he did go beyond it, but it is also true that he remained true to its basic intuition, i.e., that in obedience to God's will lies salvation. He made no attempt to replace the Law with one of his own. Whether or not he abrogated some of the laws (in the antitheses) does not seem to us to be crucial to an understanding of his "fulfillment" of the Law, for with Meier we agree that, even in abrogation, there was a fulfillment of the true meaning of Torah. Matthew 5:17-20, according to our Jewish authors, contains nothing new, nothing not found in Judaism already. Nevertheless, the person of Jesus himself, for us, makes all the difference for, although he preserved Torah, in these verses it is apparent that he interpreted it with an authority that belongs ultimately only to God who gave it.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

J. Dupont has examined the sources and various types of redaction of the two accounts of the Sermon, i.e., in Matthew and in Luke. His preoccupation with sources seems to have limited him in his exegesis of the text, since his pre-supposed "discours de base" determining the structures of 5:17-20 necessarily influences his analysis of the meaning of the text. Even in his later work, when he pays more attention to the whole text as redacted by Matthew, it is still evident that he has not really relinquished entirely his former pre-suppositions: Verses 17 and 20 still seem to him to form the basic framework for the introduction to the antitheses, while verses 18 and 19, although admittedly influencing the interpretation especially of verse 17, remain clouded in vagueness as to their origin and, for an exegete like Dupont, vagueness in origin means vagueness in meaning.

In Dupont's analysis (through source criticism and then redaction criticism) the practice of "justice," even by the sincere leaders of Judaism, was incomplete in itself because the Law that they followed was also essentially inadequate. He points out specifically that Christian justice must be a "surpassing" of Jewish justice. Such an interpretation is offensive to both Christians and Jews if

that is to be the criterion for defining "Christian" justice. Also, the portrait of the Scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew is not historically accurate, a point Dupont does not recognize. Dupont's attitude seems to be unenlightened on this point.

J. Meier has attempted to show the meaning of verses 5:17-20 in the light of Matthew's theology of salvation-history. He has used both tradition criticism and redaction criticism but with emphasis on the latter, and he does so with more sensitivity to the nuances of the text than does Dupont. For Meier, Matthew tries to preserve yet reinterpret the Jewish-Christian tradition. In his view of salvation-history, Jesus' public ministry is limited to Israel until after the death-resurrection, when the apostles are to go to all nations. The death-resurrection of Jesus is the end of the Old Testament cult; it is the breaking into time of the kingdom in a new way. The limitations of territory, nation, and Mosaic Law fall away; they have been transcended. He notes that the gospel ends "not with a validation of the Mosaic Law, but with a universal mission to the Gentiles." But, in our opinion, this does not necessarily mean that the Mosaic Law was invalidated. We maintain that it can be argued that Jesus' authority has "replaced" that of the Torah, not in the sense of "taking its place," or of "displacing it," but rather in the sense that only Jesus can now authoritatively interpret Torah; that now only he can

delimit what is the revelatory word of God and where it is to be heard. It can be said that, essentially, the Torah remains valid, for it is the revelation of God to men and demands from them faithful obedience, which Jesus himself always gave.

W. D. Davies, in his "historical" approach, presupposes that knowledge of the historical background of the Sermon on the Mount will help us to determine how and why Matthew wrote what he did. This is open to question for, as his critics have pointed out, Davies' use of Jewish sources has not been the most objective nor the most discerning. While claiming to have avoided the "frustration of that honest dissection, which in New Testament scholarship ... so often seems to end in murder," Davies has perhaps killed off a few valid and valiant approaches to the understanding of the gospels through use of rabbinic sources. If he has chosen only those rabbinic texts which support his preconceived opinions without respecting their context, then he has done Christian and Jewish scholarship no service. It is beyond our competence now to judge these criticisms of Davies' work. We can only note them here and perhaps at a doctoral level of research attempt to verify whether or not they are valid critiques. In any case, the methodology he has chosen to use, that of research into the supposed Jewish background of the Sermon, must be considered inadequate unless linked with

real textual analysis of given passages if any solid conclusions are to be drawn.

In his attempt to clarify the meaning of the Sermon by delving into its Judaic background, Davies' main insight seems to have been that Jesus is not presented explicitly by Matthew as a new law-giver in contrast to the Moses of old. He understands "fulfillment" of the Law by Jesus in a broad and positive sense, and admits no abrogation of the Mosaic Law by Jesus. This seems to be in agreement with the findings of our Jewish commentators, although both Meier and Dupont see Jesus as at least partially abrogating the Law in the name of fulfillment. Davies' various analyses of the Sermon through the prisms of five different historical perspectives enlarges our knowledge of possible and perhaps even probable influences on Matthew's teaching regarding Jesus and the Law, and his indictments of Christian scholars who are too eager to see something completely "new" in Jesus' teaching, to the detriment of the "old" teachings of Judaism, are a shrewd and necessary corrective to such shallow methodologies.

The contribution of our Jewish commentators on Matthew 5:17-48 are valuable, not from the point of view of a "scientific" methodology, for they haven't any, but rather for the corrective influence they can have on a Christian perspective which fails to emphasize the fact that Jesus was a Jew who was born and lived under the Law. It has been evident

throughout our study that it is only too easy to speak and think in terms of Christian "superiority." A theology of Jesus as Messiah and Lord cannot but be impoverished if it fails to integrate Jesus as Jew and rabbi into the picture.

From our study of the exegesis of the pericope, of its historical background, and of the insights gained from a Jewish understanding, we may briefly state the following conclusions:

1. Matthew's presentation of Jesus in verse 17 as "fulfiller" of the Law should be taken to mean that he both observes the Law perfectly himself and that he interprets its true meaning with a supreme authority. In a prophetic sense, he is the accomplishment of the will of the Father revealed in Torah and also perfectly revealed in himself.

2. The eternal validity of Torah, both as ethical norm and as revelatory word of God, seems to be preserved in the declaration of verse 18 that the Law will not pass away.

"Until all is accomplished" refers to the death-resurrection of Christ, not as the terminus to the validity of the Law but as a condition which still exists today--the full accomplishment of salvation for everyone of all times. It is begun in Jesus glorified and will be completed in him.

3. The "righteousness" before God that Jesus demands in verse 20 is a sincerity of heart and a fidelity to Torah as interpreted by Jesus. It in no way implies that the

observance of Torah was itself inadequate to gain entrance into the kingdom.

We conclude with the observation that ultimately the question of Jesus' relationship to the Law is a Christological one. While Jews may not be able to accept him as the Christ, Christians must be able to accept him as Jew, with all that this implies in terms of continuity with the essence of Torah, or else their "Christ" will be some detached remote figure, unrelated to either history or to any real eschatological future. To say that Jesus is the authoritative interpreter of Torah or that in his person Torah is perfectly fulfilled, presupposes that he knew, loved, and obeyed the Judaic Torah and that, as exalted Lord, this profound attachment to the will of God as revealed in Torah was radically strengthened and renewed. This further implies that his followers have a deep and lasting common bond with their Jewish brothers and sisters, i.e., obedience to what the Law and the prophets call us to practise, a common righteousness in sincerity of heart before our one God and Father.

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