

RBL 06/26/2000

**Carter, Warren.**  
***Households and Discipleship: A Study of Matthew 19-20***

JSNTSup 103

Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994. Pp. 249, Cloth, £35.00/\$52.50, ISBN 1850754934.

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*Households and Discipleship: A Study of Matthew 19-20* is a revised version of Carter's doctoral dissertation presented to Princeton Theological Seminary in 1991. Here Carter employs audience-oriented, social-scientific, and historical-critical tools in order (1) to establish the internal coherence of the sequence of pericopes in Matthew 19-20 and (2) to assess the contribution of this larger block of text to the overall portrait of discipleship which emerges from the audience's interaction with the Gospel of Matthew.

In the preface, Carter sets out a twofold thesis for his work: (1) "In chs. 19-20 the audience encounters a series of pericopes which employ the four standard subjects of household codes: the rule of husband over wife, of father over children, of master over slave, and the task of acquiring wealth." This pattern, however, "is employed only to be subverted," as Matthew's Jesus rejects "hierarchical and patriarchal assumptions and practices" and proposes an "alternative" and "more egalitarian" household pattern which contrasts with conventional societal expectations of first-century Antioch (p. 9). (2) This concept of an alternative household structure "forms an integral part of a coherent understanding of discipleship gained by the audience through hearing the Gospel narrative," an understanding which is "best identified by Victor Turner's concept of 'normative/permanent' or 'ideological' liminality" (p. 9). Carter concludes that "Matthaean discipleship is to be marked by a transition from the call of Jesus to the new world fully instigated at his return, by an anti-structure existence which opposes hierarchical social structures, and by an existence on the margins of society as social participants yet as those with a different focus and lifestyle" (p. 9).

In the chapters that follow, Carter works with admirable clarity and evident logical sequence to establish this thesis. In chapter 1 ("The Coherency of Matthew 19-20 and Matthaean Discipleship?") Carter first identifies Matthew 19-20 as a unified block of text framed by 19:1 ("When Jesus had finished saying these things," NRSV) and 21:1 ("When they had come near Jerusalem," NRSV). He then critiques previous attempts to find a

coherent pattern in this sequence of pericopes (instruction concerning discipleship; journey motif; dependence on Mark 10) and determines that "the coherence of these two chapters lies in the Gospel audience's cultural knowledge" (p. 18) concerning household structures, a motif present in the writings of Aristotle, Stoicism, Hellenistic Judaism, and elsewhere throughout the NT.

In chapter 2 ("Methods") Carter defines the three primary tools that he will use to analyze Matthew 19-20: audience-oriented criticism, historical criticism, and Turner's social-science model of "liminality." Carter uses the term "audience-oriented criticism" to refer to a narrative approach to Matthew's Gospel informed by such literary critics as W. Booth, S. Chatman, and W. Iser and applied to Gospel studies by J. D. Kingsbury. In place of widespread reference to the "implied reader," however, Carter adopts P. Rabinowitz's term "authorial audience" to designate "[the] 'contextualised implied reader' who understands the text's communicative and interpretive environment" (p. 36). Accordingly, Carter's goal in this study is "to actualize the text in terms of its interaction with the authorial audience" (p. 38).

With regard to historical criticism, Carter identifies four sources of information that he will use to "bridg[e] the temporal divide" (p. 39): (1) clues within the text itself that point to its historical context; (2) literary texts, papyri, inscriptions, and artifacts from the ancient world; (3) the wider community of interpreters of the ancient world; and (4) use of literary theory and a social-science model. Accordingly, after setting out a general historical portrait of Antioch-on-the-Orontes, Carter turns his attention to Turner's study of "liminality," a social-science model according to which transition rites of social groups occur in three stages: (1) separation (pre-liminal); (2) margin (liminal); and (3) reaggregation (post-liminal). Liminality (stage two) is characterized by an awareness of temporality (movement from stage one to stage three), by egalitarian, anti-structure community relationships, and by alienation from the dominant society with its hierarchical system. Carter asserts that this model fits the view of discipleship evident throughout Matthew's Gospel. Here Jesus' disciples live in a marginal, anti-structure existence between the "separation" of Jesus' call and the "reaggregation" of the coming parousia.

In the following six chapters Carter analyzes the individual pericopes of Matthew 19-20 in sequential fashion and assesses the relevance of each one to a Matthaean portrait of "liminal" discipleship. Four of these chapters address the four component elements of household structure as identified by Aristotle: the role of wives (chapter 3: "Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage: Matthew 19:3-12"); the role of children (chapter 4: "Children, Household Structures and Discipleship: Matthew 19:13-15"); the acquisition of wealth (chapter 5: "Discipleship and Wealth: Matthew 19:16-30"); and the role of slaves (chapter 7: "'It Shall Not Be So Among You': Matthew 20:17-28"). Each of these chapters is structured in similar fashion. Carter first offers a close reading of the text as it focuses on household structures. He follows this with an assessment of the "authorial

audience's" knowledge of this aspect of household relationships, including reference to the philosophical traditions, evidence from the wider Graeco-Roman world, and indications of changing social patterns. In each case the results are the same. Viewed against a sharply hierarchical and patriarchal social system that restricts and oppresses wives, children, and slaves and places high value on the acquisition of wealth, Jesus calls his disciples to a radical restructuring of social relationships. In this egalitarian, anti-structure society, marriage is a lifelong commitment and "eunuchs" are valued members of the community, children and slaves are models of discipleship, and wealthy persons are called to redistribute their property among the poor.

In Carter's view the remaining two pericopes of the text function to assist the "authorial audience" in its reception of the other four accounts. In chapter 6 ("The Parable of the Household: Matthew 20:1-16") Carter points out that the example of the householder, who does "what is right" by paying all of his laborers the same wage, serves to provide "affirmation and strengthening" for "those who predict and assent to the householder's action" (p. 159), while it offers a "warning" to "those who grumble against the redefinition of 'what is right' that the kingdom initiates, who question the goodness of God's rule, and who reject its household organization as stipulated in chs. 19-20" (pp. 159-60). In chapter 8 ("Opening Eyes: Matthew 20:29-34") Carter highlights Matthew's portrayal of two marginalized blind men who beg Jesus for their sight, then "follow" him on his road toward death. Through this story, Carter asserts, "the audience is reminded not only that discipleship entails following the one who is soon to be crucified by the Jewish leaders and the Gentiles (20:17-28), but also that God's mercy enables this way of life to be lived" (pp. 202-3).

In chapter 9 ("Conclusion"), Carter summarizes the results of his study and offers further reflective work on the task he has completed. Here he identifies three primary factors which would point the authorial audience to a liminal way of life as they encounter Matthew's Gospel: (1) the eschatological perspective of the text; (2) the text's portrayal of Jesus as an anti-structure figure who opposes the dominant values of the society; and (3) a changing social situation both in terms of hierarchical societal structures and in terms of the recent separation between Matthew's community and the Jewish synagogue. Carter suggests that the actual audience of Matthew's Gospel will read chapters 19-20 both as confirmation of present lifestyle and as challenge to further faithfulness. Carter then concludes his analysis by pointing backward to the contributions that his study makes to Matthaean scholarship and by pointing forward to further questions that it opens up for future consideration.

There are two prominent strengths of Carter's work. First and most significantly, Carter offers a solid, creative, and convincing illustration of the value of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the Gospels that combines attention to the literary character of the text with attention to its social context. With this work Carter points the way toward a productive new approach to Gospel studies. A second major strength of Carter's work lies

in its lucid style and clear organization. At the same time, however, Carter's methodical approach leads to a highly repetitive style. Frequently he states in advance what he is going to conclude from a text, works through the text itself, then recapitulates for the third time what he has found.