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**Newport, Kenneth G. C.**  
***The Sources and Sitz im Leben of Matthew 23***

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In this work Kenneth Newport addresses the troubling twenty-third chapter of the Gospel of Matthew and attempts to determine its sources and *Sitz im Leben*. Most simply stated, Newport argues that the source of Matt 23:2-31 is a pre-70 CE Jewish-Christian polemical tract, and that the remaining verses (23:32-39) are a later redaction. Additionally, the author suggests that other Matthean material (most significantly the Sermon on the Mount) appears to be of the same traditional extraction as 23:2-31.

He begins the book with a lengthy analysis (fully one-third of the monograph) of compositional theories. Unconvinced that source critics are able to trace Matthew's own hand--and thus distinguish source from redaction--Newport reviews a broad range of such theories, including those of Michael Goulder, Dennis Tevis, M. E. Boismard, the two-document hypothesis, and the four-document hypothesis. Having conveyed in the introduction his skepticism regarding redaction criticism, Markan priority, and the existence of Q, Newport does not surprise us by his rejection of four of the five theories.

After a thorough examination of Goulder's argument for the Matthean origin of Matthew 23, Newport states that this theory (based on arguments from vocabulary) is inconclusive. While the author admires the detailed argumentation of Goulder's hypothesis, he finds the theory as a whole unconvincing and weak. He further argues that the validity of word statistics (even those as carefully compiled as those of Goulder) as an approach to gospel study is questionable.

Boismard's theory regarding Matthew 23 is equally unconvincing to Newport. Unlike Goulder's hypothesis, this theory posits a variety of sources, but the lack of tangible evidence for Boismard's hypothetical documents renders the theory inconclusive. Moreover, Newport argues, there is too much inner unity in chapter 23 for it to be the amalgamation of so many sources.

The last two theories rejected by Newport are the two- and four-document hypotheses. The two- document hypothesis is inadequate on two counts: (1) the amount of Markan material in Matthew 23 is limited, and (2) although similar to Luke, the material's dissimilar order, setting, and outcome do not support the idea of Q. Similarly, even though the four-document hypothesis addresses some of the problems left unanswered by the two-document hypothesis (e.g., attempts to explain the unparalleled material of Matthew 23), it does not answer the question of the chapter's unity and its divergence in Q material.

The one theory Newport does find convincing is that of Dennis Tevis, a theory quite similar to his own. In contrast to the single vocabulary arguments of Goulder, Tevis's theory concentrates on phrases--a more palatable and productive approach, according to Newport. Indeed, Tevis's overall conclusions are synonymous with Newport's: Matthew 23 is comprised of one source (vv 2-31) which has undergone redaction (vv 32-39).

In the second chapter Newport argues that at least part of Matthew 23 stems from a *Sitz im Leben* different than that of the final redaction of the whole Gospel. While some scholars (e.g., David Garland) have argued that this chapter serves as a mirror image of the Christian church and leaders in a post-85 CE setting, Newport does not find this "paradigmatic" understanding of Matthew 23 convincing as an explanation of the whole chapter. The first section of the chapter is a direct attack on the scribes and Pharisees, the second on the Jews in general. The understanding of the chapter as paradigmatic may be an effort to relieve Christian scholars' consciences by freeing Jesus or Matthew or both from anti-Semitism, but it is not the most satisfactory analysis of the material in this chapter of the Gospel. A better approach, Newport suggests, is to recognize that Matt 23:2-31 can be lifted from the context as an integral unit. This section cannot be the work of Matthew, who is clearly (to Newport, at least) in an *extra muros* community. Instead, it has been brought into the text and a different *Sitz im Leben*.

In an effort to support this theory Newport offers (in chapter 3) a thorough analysis of the Jewish customs and practices mentioned in 23:2-31 and attempts to show their congeniality with a pre-70 setting. He concludes not only that all the religious practices in 23:2-31 are at home in pre-70 CE Judaism, but also that nothing in these verses requires a post-70 *Sitz im Leben*. Indeed, according to Newport, several sayings presuppose a pre-70 *Sitz im Leben* and betray an accurate knowledge of the workings of Judaism. Thus, suggests Newport, they pre-date 70 CE and come from a Jewish milieu. He goes to great length (perhaps too great a length) to show how customs and practices in 23:2-31 are typical of first-century Jews and are indicative of an intra-Jewish debate.

Chapter 4 marks a return to Newport's argument regarding division in chapter 23. Verses 2-31 are *intra muros*, an attack on just one group and non-eschatological (and not from Q). Verses 32-39 are an attack on all Jews, an eschatological appendix by Matthew in

which he intensifies the polemic of his sources. Newport's argument is based both on his assumption that Matthew and his community had separated from the synagogue (while the author of 23:2-31 had not) and on the conclusions drawn in chapter 3.

In chapter 5, Newport links Matt 23:2-31 with the Sermon on the Mount because of its "hard-line" Jewish tone. Significant verbal overlap and a similar *Sitz im Leben* render both the Sermon and Matt 23:2-31 different from "the Gospel as a whole" (p. 157). He contrasts this to Matt 23:32-39, which can be linked to eschatological sections of the Gospel. Newport closes this chapter by demonstrating how Matthew has added eschatological endings to the parables of the tares, dragnet, and wedding--further indication of the eschatological concerns of this redactor.

Finally, in a brief concluding chapter, Newport argues that the domination of the two-source hypothesis has blinded us to the conclusion he has drawn. Matthew 23 contains a largely coherent unit that is from a pre-70 *Sitz im Leben*--a conclusion, suggests Newport, that has far-reaching implications for redaction-critical studies of the Matthean text.

Newport's work is useful in several respects, such as his careful analysis of compositional theories in chapter 1 and chapter 4's detailed exegesis of Matthew 23, in which he includes considerable discussion of other scholarly work. The monograph does, however, have several weaknesses. The writing contains an excessive amount of apologetic language. So many uses of "possibly," "maybe," "perhaps" leave the reader wondering what conclusions are indeed arguable. One conclusion is deemed "possible, indeed perhaps probable" (p.151). Contrast this with the certainty with which he comments on oft-debated ideas. See, for example, his description of the community behind 23:32-39 as one whose "members had *obviously* [my emphasis] split from the main body of Judaism, and no longer thought of 'their synagogues' as the place of true worship" (p. 176).

More serious, however, are some of the foundations upon which Newport builds his theory. I question, for example, his underlying assumption that Matthew 23 does not fit the rest of the Gospel and thus must be explained. This misplaces the burden of proof, because however difficult the passage, it is in the text. The lengthy presentation of Jewish customs and practices found in Matt 23:2-31 is equally problematic. His efforts to demonstrate their pre-70 CE setting lose credibility when we recognize (as so many do) that we cannot and should not automatically transport material from the Mishnah into a pre-70 CE setting.

In sum, Newport offers a source-critical theory regarding Matthew 23 that once again brings this troubling chapter to our attention, but his arguments regrettably do not bear the weight of the theory.