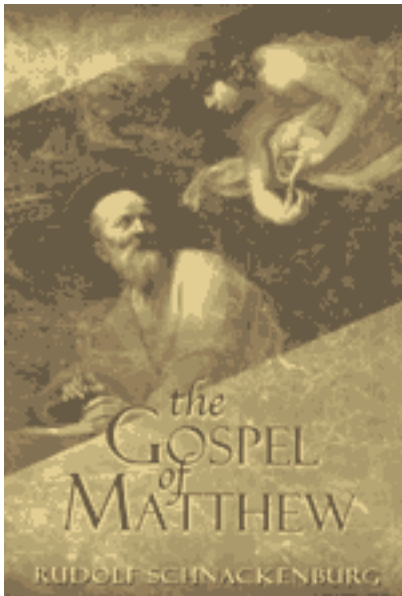


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Schnackenburg, Rudolf

The Gospel of Matthew

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. Pp. 336. Paper. \$24.00.
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This is not a new commentary on the Gospel of Matthew but rather is translated from the two-volume German commentary published in 1985–87. At that time a dearth of commentary on Matthew was slowly being filled by Gundry’s commentary and this one by Schnackenburg. Since then the massive work by Davies and Allison along with other commentaries, large and small, have filled the gap amply in English, if not in German.

This commentary is the work of a scholar, but it is not a scholarly commentary. Lacking in footnotes and references to the work of other scholars, this seems to be a commentary for preachers and interested laity. Like Schnackenburg’s Ephesians commentary, this commentary on Matthew does not try to break new ground but rather condenses scholarly opinion on the Gospel. The introduction is brief, at thirteen pages, but the subject and text indexes take up twenty-nine pages.

Schnackenburg strikes an uneasy balance between the scholarly and lay worlds in this commentary. References to sources, including Q, may be a bit distracting to a careful reader. He speaks of a “sayings source” in the introduction, and the reader is left to wonder whether this is Q until page 44, where he makes this identification. Afterwards he is inconsistent, using one term, then the other. Differences from both Mark and Luke are attributed sometimes to an outside source and sometimes to Matthew himself, but without a clear explanation why one is chosen over the other. On page 29 he identifies Qumran as

“that monastic community” and makes a simple identity between the settlement at Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls, an identity that would require some nuance today.

Other odd identities are his use of the Gospel of John as a historical resource for John the Baptist (30) and his recommendation of Paul’s text of Rom 12:17–21 as a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount (61). The *Gospel of Thomas*, which could have been referenced throughout this commentary, is mentioned only three times within the span of five pages (210, 213–14) and nowhere else. Apparently he did not digest *Thomas* before either volume was written.

Frequently Schnackenburg draws the attention of the reader to larger literary patterns in which a particular event or teaching is found. A strong example is the theme of authority that concludes the Sermon on the Mount and introduces the authority pericopes that follow. In general this commentary does a good job of identifying these literary patterns. However, occasionally even the most obvious connections are missed, such as the theme of rest introduced in 11:28–30 that leads to the Sabbath pericopes in 12:1–14.

Also frequent are attempts of the author to turn the reader away from obvious readings of the text, presumably for devotional purposes. On page 77 he takes pains to explain that the broad and narrow way do not indicate a ratio of the redeemed and damned. On page 85 he contends that one particular miracle is not a “nature miracle” even though the text states, “even the winds and waves obey him.” On page 120 he assures the reader that 12:46–50 suggests “Jesus’ special appreciation of Mary.” Especially in the final portions Schnackenburg carefully undercuts potential anti-Semitic readings. The church’s use of this Gospel is consistently a concern to Schnackenburg.

Historical issues weigh heavily on the mind of this commentator. Schnackenburg is often attempting to identify events that were “historical” and those that were not, events he describes in various ways such as a “sign,” a “theological concept,” or simply “apologetic” (290–92). The reader should remember that this commentary was written early in the most recent wave of scholarly interest in the historical Jesus, so it does not benefit or suffer from the mass of scholarly work done in this area.

Schnackenburg’s commentary is a good commentary on Matthew, odd in places but generally sound. However, a translation needed to be published over a decade ago. To a current scholar this new translation of his commentary will seem rather out of date and perhaps of more interest to the historian of biblical scholarship than to a current scholar in the field.