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Keener, Craig S.

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew

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During the 1960's and 70's there was a dearth of up-to-date, comprehensive commentaries on Matthew suitable for academic work with advanced seminary and college students. The new wave began with Robert Gundry in 1982, followed by the 3-volume commentary by W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison and D. Hagner's 2-volume contribution. (Unfortunately, only one volume of U. Luz's excellent commentary has been made available in English; the second volume is promised for November, 2000.) Now, at the turn of the century, Craig Keener has produced a careful, 1000-page academic commentary that will be very useful for Matthew seminars, although its high price will keep many students from buying it.

In the Introduction Keener states his intention: to provide an analysis of the socio-historical contexts of Matthew and of his traditions, and unit-by-unit suggestions about the evangelist's exhortations (with proposals concerning their modern relevance). Because of his concern for the literary and historical context, he is assiduous in providing references to Greco-Roman literature where parallels exist, even though he very often concludes that the parallels are too remote to be relevant. References to contemporary Jewish sources and later rabbinic literature are also extensive.

Keener regards the evangelist as a Diaspora biographer who is influenced by contemporary pagan models. Matthew, he argues, is conservative in his use of his sources; the burden of proof rests on those who deny the historical authenticity of the Gospel's contents. He is inclined to ascribe the Gospel to the disciple Matthew, but concedes that certainty is impossible. He favors a date after 70 C.E. The *intra muros/extra*

muros debate, he proposes, is largely reducible to semantics; the Jewish Christians who constituted Matthew's primary audience had structures distinct from those of the synagogues, but clung to their Jewish heritage, which means that they remained members of their local synagogue communities. Gentile converts were expected to adopt some elements of Jewish culture.

Keener proposes that "where Mark adapted Jesus to a broader (more 'universal') Greco-Roman audience, Matthew has consistently 're-Judaized' Jesus" on the basis of solid traditions (p. 13). I find it strange that he illustrates this claim with 27:51-53; I cannot see how the signs following the crucifixion make Jesus more Jewish. I expected to find a reference to Matthew's editing of Mark 7:1-23, where most commentators find "re-Judaization" (I disagree).

Matthew manifests a high christology; Jesus is the Wisdom of God incarnate and God's presence (the Shekinah) both during his earthly life (1:23) and after the resurrection (28:20).

This is not a verse-by-verse commentary; each pericope is dealt with as a whole, and, as should be expected in such an approach, many interesting verses are not addressed. A title heads each pericope, and sub-titles in bold-face type identify what the commentator selects as significant points. For example, 17:24-27, "Solidarity with Israel, Obedience to Rome," has the subtitles: "First, Jesus cares about his disciples' social obligations," "Second, disciples need to be ready to surrender their privileges and 'rights' for the sake of the gospel," and "Third, Jesus supplies needs like these as well as other needs."

The table of contents does not subdivide the commentary, but the treatment of each of the five discourses (ch. 23 is taken with chs. 24-25) begins with a new page, and is similarly separated from the succeeding comments. There is no such structural clue at 16:21 or 21:1. Indeed, the commentator seems little interested in literary structure and composition criticism. The inclusio that links 9:35 to 4:23, bracketing the Sermon on the Mount and the two chapters of miracles, is neglected; 9:35 is presented rather as an introduction to the second discourse, paralleling the function of 4:23. Nor is there consideration of why the Sermon on the Mount is placed where it is on the Markan story line. Far more interesting to him is the question of the historicity of the sayings and narratives, a matter to which he gives considerable space. For example, concerning 16:13-20 he writes, "As in Mark, this revelation is pivotal in the development of Matthew's narrative," but then he goes on immediately to discuss authenticity. The same is true of 16:21; Keener devotes two pages to defense of the historicity of this saying, but nothing to its narrative function in relationship to the second and third passion predictions.

The tone of the commentary is irenic. Although he frequently cites scholarly views with which he disagrees, Keener is not polemical.

Although it may seem picayune to point out a specific error, I do so because it is so common; it is taken by the commentator from others who should have known better. On p. 262 he writes, “Wrede contended that Mark invented the messianic secret to explain...” William Wrede himself wrote: “Is the idea of a messianic secret an invention of Mark’s? The notion seems quite impossible” (*The Messianic Secret* [Cambridge and London: James Clarke, 1971] p. 145).

The commentary will be welcomed by students who do not know Greek. There are occasional transliterations of Greek words, but little attention is paid to grammatical questions arising from the Greek text. Sometimes, however, the author seems to assume that students have access to the Greek text, as on p. 181, where he introduces “Amen, I say to you” without noting that none of the common English versions retain the amen. Helpful excursi (one or two pages in length) are scattered through the commentary. For example, following comments on 19:1-12 we find: “Excursus: *Porneia* As Incestuous Unions?”

Undoubtedly one of the greatest strengths of this commentary consists of citations ancient and modern. Innumerable references are made to contemporary studies (including foreign works), both parenthetically and in footnotes (which often occupy a half page). The bibliography is 150 pages long. It is accompanied by an index of authors. The index of ancient sources occupies 141 pages. This book will be a special boon to doctoral students and others who desire a one-volume reference to contemporary Matthean studies.