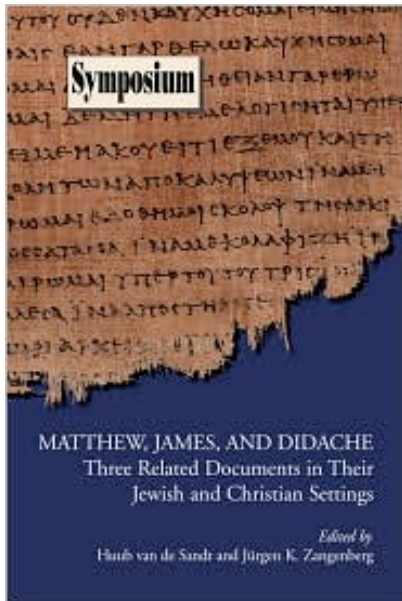


RBL 10/2009



Sandt, Huub van de, and Jürgen K. Zangenberg, eds.

Matthew, James, and Didache: Three Related Documents in Their Jewish and Christian Settings

Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 45

Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008. Pp. xii + 475. Paper. \$54.95. ISBN 1589833589.

William Varner
The Master's College
Santa Clarita, California

Since the publication of the *Didache* by Bryennios in 1883, scholars have noticed affinities between it and the Gospel of Matthew. In 2003 New Testament and *Didache* scholars organized a conference at Tilburg University to explore and better define that relationship. The papers were published under the editorship of Huub van de Sandt as *Matthew and the Didache: Two Documents from the Same Jewish-Christian Milieu?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). Some of these same scholars desired to explore further those affinities and even to include the Letter of James in the discussion. The volume before us consists of seventeen presentations delivered at a similar conference at Tilburg in April 2007. Each author examines critically a specific area of commonality between the three documents, particularly giving attention to both their Jewish and Christian settings. The volume also contains an introductory essay by van de Sandt and Jürgen K. Zangenberg (1–9) as well as a quite thorough bibliography (397–427).

These international scholars teach in eleven countries from three continents. The essays are divided into four parts. The first three authors examine “Methods and Milieus.” The last word, however, was found hard to define precisely for each of the three documents. The next three discuss the “Conflicts and Contacts” each of the documents faced in their respective locales and historic situations. Beginning with this section, each of the essays

compares and contrasts all three of the documents. The four essays in the third part take a close look at the “Community and Identity” that can be discerned in all three. The fourth part examines how each document engages in “Interpreting Torah.” These four essays engage in intertextual exercise on how such *topoi* as law, love, and ethics are handled in light of their treatment in earlier Jewish writings. The last part studies what these three books teach about “Observing Rituals” such as baptism, oaths, and ritual purity.

As is the case in so many anthologies, it is difficult to engage in a micro-analysis of the separate essays, which total nearly four hundred pages. Suffice it to say that each of the authors has ably examined the relevant literature and offers some creative answers to the questions raised in the respective milieus of Matthew, James and Didache. This review will focus on the first three chapters and then describe three of the most penetrating of the remaining chapters (see below for a full list of essays).

Each of the first three authors engages in “Reconstructing the Social and Religious Milieu of Matthew [or James or Didache]: Methods, Sources, and Possible Results.” David Sims (13–41) proposes a much later date for the Gospel than most current critical scholarship: the early decades of the second century. On the way, he rejects by name the evidence for an early date presented by Richard Bauckham in *The Gospels for All Christians*. This reviewer believes that he has not answered Bauckham adequately and has entirely ignored Bauckham’s more substantive arguments in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, published a year (2006) before the Tilburg conference. In any case, it is striking that the similar work of the Martin Hengel in *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* is nowhere cited by Sims nor by any of the other authors in this volume.

Oda Wischmeyer spends much time defining what is meant by the expressions “social milieu” and “religious milieu” and offers only a summary of his conclusions about James in a much shorter chapter (33–41; four page titles wrongly identify the chapter as dealing with Matthew!). James is mainly concerned with ethics, not Christology or heresy. In an apparent contradiction, Wischmeyer once asserts that the pseudepigraphic author “does not use the ethical authority of Jesus” (40) but also “transmits his ethical advice to Jesus and the Judaeo-Christian community of Jerusalem” (41). While useful as a summary of critical thought about James, this chapter is the weakest in the volume.

Jürgen K. Zangenberg, also the co-editor of the volume, not only attempts to reconstruct the milieu of the Didache (43–69), but also offers a good summary of the vexing issues raised by this little document over the years. He also carefully offers some creative suggestions of his own. While he is skeptical of Huub van de Sandt’s and David Flusser’s bold reconstructing of the Jewish *Vorlage* of the “Two Ways” section, he is certain that 1:1–6:3 incorporates material that comes from a Jewish background. His careful

conclusion is: “From what Didache tells us directly, we can only conclude that the text came from anywhere in the Greek-speaking (eastern) Mediterranean, that it was deeply rooted in Judaism and shows striking similarities with Matthew and—to a lesser but still significant degree—with James, and all three might well have come for a common ‘milieu’” (69).

One of the ways in which European New Testament scholars differ from their academic colleagues in North America is that their “New Testament” professors do not limit themselves to those twenty-seven books but include early Christian literature in their scholarly concerns. Specialization has hampered most American New Testament scholars from saying anything profound about early Christian literature. Such specialization is usually left to the “church history” people. While both Jonathan Draper and Huub van de Sandt are titled as “New Testament” professors in South Africa and the Netherlands (429–30), they have both produced significant works on the Didache. In this volume Draper further elaborates some of his previous research in “Apostles, Teachers, and Evangelists: Stability and Movement of Functionaries in Matthew, James, and the Didache” (139–76). Van de Sandt also synthesizes New Testament, Didache, and Judaic studies in “Law and Ethics in Matthew’s Antitheses and James’s Letter: A Reorientation of Halakah in Line with the Jewish Two Ways 3:1–6.” The last reference is to a section of his creative reconstruction of the Two Ways document drawn from Did. 3:1–6.

This reviewer was also impressed with the masterful treatment by Patrick J. Hartin, “Ethics in the Letter of James, the Gospel of Matthew, and the Didache: Their Place in Early Christian Literature” (289–314). Not only does Hartin succeed in explicating his title, but he offers a concise yet insightful summary of his own informed opinions on a number of topics in these books and how they may be related. The writers’ consciousness of their identity among the people of Israel, their allegiance to Torah, their stress on “perfection” as well as the love command, and their creative use of “Jesus sayings”—all of these subjects are clearly and reasonably explained. His conclusion about how these three documents are related is both reasonable and satisfying in light of the evidence that we possess.

The Letter of James was the first writing to appear. It is addressed to communities in the Diaspora that were still clearly within the orbit of the house of Israel, but as a result of the teaching of Jesus saw themselves as the beginning of a reconstitution of the “twelve tribes of Israel.” The Gospel of Matthew was written from one of these communities in the Diaspora within two decades of the writing of the Letter of James. The traditional location of Antioch as the home of Matthew’s Gospel would also correspond well for the home of the sayings Source Q. Distinctive to the Gospel of Matthew was the openness that it urged for the acceptance of Gentiles into their community. Finally, the Didache would be seen to emerge

from the same community (Antioch) a few decades later than the Gospel of Matthew in which it aimed at giving form and direction to a community where many Gentiles were accepting faith in the message of Jesus. (313–14)

While I in no way suggest that the authors in this invaluable volume would agree with all of Hartin's conclusions, they do concisely convey about as well as could be expected a *précis* of the insights from these helpful studies in three foundational documents from early Jewish Christianity.

It should be noted that in one very real sense this volume is clearly unique. Nowhere to my knowledge has there been a monograph dedicated specifically to the comparison of these three Christian documents. But not only because of its uniqueness should scholars seriously consider this volume. While it offers a sort of *status quaestionis* of current thought about these books, it also offers some fresh ideas about their role in the early church.

Contents

Part 1. Methods and Milieus

- “Reconstructing the Social and Religious Milieu of Matthew: Methods, Sources, and Possible Results,” by David Sim
- “Reconstructing the Social and Religious Milieu of James: Methods, Sources, and Possible Results,” by Oda Wischmeyer
- “Reconstructing the Social and Religious Milieu of the Didache: Methods, Sources, and Possible Results,” by Jürgen K. Zangenberg

Part 2. Conflicts and Contacts

- “The Didache, Matthew, James—and Paul: Reconstructing Historical Developments in Antioch,” by Magnus Zetterholm
- “Transformations of Post-70 Judaism: Scholarly Reconstructions and Their Implications for Our Perception of Matthew, Didache, and James,” by Peter Tomson
- “Jewish Christianity, a State of Affairs: Affinities and Differences with Respect to Matthew, James, and the Didache,” by Joseph Verheyden

Part 3. Community and Identity

- “Apostles, Teachers, and Evangelists: Stability and Movement of Functionaries in Matthew, James, and the Didache,” by Jonathan Draper
- “The ‘Ideal Community’ according to Matthew, James, and the Didache,” by Wim J. C. Weren
- “Poverty and Piety in Matthew, James, and the Didache,” John Kloppenborg
- “Jesus Tradition in Matthew, James and the Didache: Searching for Characteristic Emphases,” by Jens Schröter

Part 4. Interpreting Torah

“Problems with Pluralism in the Second Temple Judaism: Matthew, James, and the Didache in Their Jewish-Roman Milieu,” by J. Andrew Overman

“The Love Command in Matthew, James, and the Didache,” by Matthias Konradt

“Ethics in Matthew, James and the Didache: Their Place in Early Christian Literature,” by Patrick J. Hartin

“Ethics in the Letter of James, the Gospel of Matthew, and the Didache: A Reorientation of Halakah in Line with the Jewish Two Ways 3:1–6,” by Huub van de Sandt

Part 5. Observing Rituals

“*Ἀποκύησις λόγῳ ἀληθείας*: Paraenesis and Baptism in Matthew, James, and the Didache,” by Alistair Stewart-Sykes

“The Presence and Absence of a Prohibition of Oath in James, Matthew, and the Didache and Its Significance for Contextualization,” by Martin Vahrenhorst

“Purity in Matthew, James, and the Didache,” by Boris Repschinski