This article continues the summary and evaluation of evangelicals and redaction criticism which began in an earlier essay (see GTJ 4 [1983] 263–88). Recent studies are surveyed, as are recent events in the Evangelical Theological Society. The need for careful articulation of biblical inerrancy in the light of the synoptic phenomena continues to exist. The hermeneutics statement of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (1982) is a step in the right direction. However, further clarification and refinement are needed if evangelicals are to avoid doctrinal deviation, on the one hand, and unnecessary division on the other.

* * *

INTRODUCTION

A study in the last issue of GTJ surveyed and evaluated important aspects of evangelical redaction criticism since N. B. Stonehouse. The present essay is essentially a brief update on recent developments in evangelicalism, many of which center in the Evangelical Theological Society and the commentary of R. H. Gundry on Matthew. Three topics will be surveyed: (1) the recently published third volume of Gospel Perspectives, (2) the dialogue between Gundry and two critics in the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (26:1, 1983), and (3) the developments at the 1983 Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting.


2Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).
The Tyndale House (Cambridge, England) Gospels Research Project has now produced its third volume of studies in the gospels. In view of Gundry's position that Matthew is midrashic, this volume is especially timely and noteworthy. In general, the various contributors to this book believe that midrash is a very complex matter, poorly understood by many NT scholars. The essays in the volume serve to introduce the various nuances of this word as used to describe the historiography of extra-biblical Jewish literature. Further, several of the contributors come to specific conclusions especially relevant to the questions of historicity and inerrancy in the gospels.

R. Bauckham's study of Pseudo-Philo has convinced him that there is no *creatio ex nihilo* of narrative involved. Bauckham states, "Pseudo-Philo's ingenuity in this field of exegesis is displayed not in creating events to fit prophecies, but in finding prophecies to fit events." Gundry seems to think that Matthew has done just the opposite in some places in his gospel. While Bauckham acknowledges that the possibility exists that the gospels could contain substantial non-historical sections, he believes that this does not fit in with literature such as Pseudo-Philo's writings which adds only "relatively minor embellishments of stories whose main outlines already existed."

The implications of F. F. Bruce's study of biblical exposition in the Qumran materials are similar. Bruce summarizes exegetical principles and procedures evident in the Qumran materials and also provides some illustrations of Qumran biblical exegesis. One of his concluding observations is that

> It was the Christ-event that made the OT a new book to the early Christians: their new interpretation of the OT did not create the Christ-event or the narratives in which they recorded it. In so far as the Qumran literature provides an analogy, it lends no support to the view that the evangelists engaged in free redactional activity uninhibited by historical fact.

3. Ibid., 60, cf. 64, where it is stated that there is no precedent in Jewish "midrashic" literature for the creation of events to fulfill prophecies.
7. Ibid., pp. 97–98. The implications of this statement appear to be quite negative for Gundry's approach to Matthew. Interestingly, Bruce had earlier written some very positive remarks about Gundry's commentary which appear on the back of the commentary's dust jacket.
Bruce's conclusion appears to deny that one finds the type of "midrash" in the Qumran documents that Gundry attempts to find in Matthew.

R. T. France's contribution to Gospel Perspectives III is also pertinent. He denies that there is any significant tendency in Jewish literature, apart from two examples, to create or embellish narratives found in Scripture. In his view there was no uniform Jewish historiography in the early Christian period such as would be demanded by Gundry's view of Matthew. France also cautions against the excessive use of "parallels" between Jewish literature and the NT. The time interval between the OT and the Jewish literature under consideration is much greater than that between Christ's earthly ministry and the writing of the gospels. A comparison of fulfillment formulas in 1 Maccabees and Matthew results in France's conclusion that both have an interest which is "quite compatible with the historical reporting of events." It is evident that these conclusions run against the grain of Gundry's approach to Matthew.

D. J. Moo's study also calls attention to the same distinction between rabbinic and NT exegesis of the OT noted by France: the NT is influenced by very recent events. Moo believes that there are more differences than similarities when one compares "midrash," as the term is used today, and the use of the OT in Matt 27:3–10. He views the term "midrash" as inappropriate for Matt 27:3–10, if the term refers to the creative influence of the OT on tradition.

P. B. Payne has contributed a study to this volume which specifically criticizes Gundry's view of Matthew. Payne's lengthy evaluation is quite critical of Gundry for reasons which were advanced by other contributors to the volume. Specifically, Payne convincingly

11Ibid., p. 119.
12Ibid., p. 120.
13Gundry (Matthew, pp. 634–35) suggests that Matthew's readers were familiar with a historiography which mixed actual events and unhistorical embellishments. France's conclusions appear to deny this.
15Ibid., p. 122. Along this line attention should also be directed to France's earlier study, "Scripture, Tradition, and History in the Infancy Narratives of Matthew," in Gospel Perspectives, vol. II, ed. R. T. France and D. Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981) 239–66. In this study France affirms not only the historicity of Matthew's infancy narratives, but also that such historicity is an essential foundation of Matthew's overall theology.
17Ibid., p. 168.
refutes much of Gundry’s evidence for midrashic intent in Matthew. Next, he points out the literary problems with Gundry’s theory that Matthew is midrashic. Payne views Gundry’s theory as anachronistic and emphasizes several differences between Matthew and midrash. Overall, this critique is quite telling against Gundry’s views, even though there are some overstatements.

The upshot of all this is ably summarized by France in a postscript. France repeatedly emphasizes that the term “midrash” cannot be equated with “creative unhistorical embellishment,” which appears to be an essential part of Gundry’s main thesis. France concludes:

All this . . . throws grave doubt on any suggestion, whether advanced in the name of ‘midrash’ or not, that the narration in historical form of unhistorical events, whether derived from scriptural meditation or from pure imagination, was typical of first-century Jewish literature, the more so when it is recent ‘events’ which are in question.

France declares the following syllogism, which fits Gundry’s view of Matthew fairly well, to be invalid, since both its premises are false:

Midrash is unhistorical writing in the guise of history.
The gospels (or parts of them) are midrashic.
Therefore, the gospels (or parts of them) are not to be taken seriously as history.

GUNDRY AND CRITICS: JETS 26:1 (1983)

The March 1983 issue of the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society featured a debate between Gundry and two critics, D. J. Moo and N. L. Geisler. The format involved an initial critique and response by Gundry, followed by a rejoinder by the critic and a surrejoinder by Gundry. This approach enables the reader almost to sit in on a conversation between the two men involved.
Moo's initial critique is mainly methodological, not theological. Moo agrees with Gundry on the question of Markan priority, and with the corollary that Matthew used Mark. Yet Moo attempts to show that Gundry exaggerates the extent of Matthean redaction. He also supplies three solid reasons for doubting that Matthew should be compared so directly with Jewish midrashim. Moo believes that Matthew's concern for "the significance of the space-and-time facticity of events" would preclude his writing a gospel like Gundry believes he has written. Gundry's initial response to Moo attempts to answer some of Moo's specific points and also lists supposed parallels in Jewish literature. However, the detailed studies in Gospel Perspectives III (which have been summarized above), came to conclusions which are the opposite of Gundry's. Moo's rejoinder to Gundry's response expresses concern over Gundry's complete confidence in Markan priority and his reliance upon statistics which are questionably produced. Additionally, Moo shows how some of Gundry's "contradictions" can be harmonized while retaining historicity. It is emphasized again that Matthew should be compared with Mark and Luke rather than with extra-biblical Jewish works. Moo concludes that Gundry's position is methodologically unconvincing and theologically uncomfortable. Gundry's surrejoinder traverses once again point by point the territory Moo has covered and concludes that there is no need to modify the position taken in the commentary.

Geisler's initial critique is strikingly different from Moo's. He insists that a sincere orthodox confession does not guarantee orthodox conclusions. In other words, Gundry's official (de jure) affirmation of inerrancy is denied in fact (de facto) by Gundry's method. In all this the questionable assumption seems to be that belief in the truth of the

27Ibid., p. 32. It is important to realize, however, that a growing number of NT scholars are dissatisfied with the Markan priority approach to the synoptic phenomena. For example, a provocative article in the same issue of JETS being considered here argues that Gundry's view that "drastic changes" were made from one gospel to another is much less likely if Matthean priority is held. According to the author of this article, J. Breckenridge, "we seem to have two choices: either opt for Matthean priority and a reasonable exercise of form criticism, or accept Markan priority and suffer the consequences of a more severe redaction criticism." See "Evangelical Implications of Matthean Priority," JETS 26 (1983) 117-21, especially p. 121.
entire Bible is identical to belief that everything "reported" in the Bible occurred. Gundry's initial response to Geisler points out, with a degree of legitimacy, that Geisler has ignored the necessary data of the NT phenomena. He convincingly shows that his approach is not allegorical, as Geisler has urged. Undaunted, Geisler's rejoinder presses the same points made initially. He comes closest to the real problem with Gundry's view when he asserts that "Matthew presents these events [= alleged unhistorical embellishments] as history in the same way he presents other events as history, with no literary clues that they should be taken unhistorically." Geisler also charges that Gundry has misused the concept of authorial intent. He concludes by asking some very pointed questions about Gundry's views and conclusions on inerrancy. Gundry's surrejoinder expresses the conviction that Geisler has missed the point. Additionally, his surrejoinder exhibits a better understanding of authorial intent than Geisler's rejoinder. Gundry concludes with answers to Geisler's pointed questions, even though he correctly concludes that Geisler is baiting him. It is disturbing here, however, to see how Gundry attempts to stretch the sense of Articles XIII and XIV of the I.C.B.I "Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics." Here Geisler's concern about evangelical concession to the subjective "new hermeneutic" appears to be legitimate.

From the JETS debate several conclusions can be drawn. It is clear from Moo's critique that Gundry's approach is methodologically suspect. Granted, proper interpretation of scripture involves recognition of a variety of literary forms. Yet a hypothesis about the form or genre of a book of Scripture which negates the historicity of events which present themselves as historical fact is invalid. The available data from Matthew, the other gospels, and extra-biblical Jewish literature indicates that God did not superintend the writing of such a book as Gundry perceives Matthew to be.

16Ibid., p. 102.
19I have previously alluded to these two articles and their ominous implications for Gundry's approach in "Evangelicals . . . and the Inerrancy Crisis." p. 282. The entire text of the Chicago Statement has been published in JETS 25 (1982) 397–401.
40Geisler, "Methodological Unorthodoxy," p. 94.
41See the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics, Articles 10, 13, 14.
The Evangelical Theological Society met in Dallas, Texas on December 15–17, 1983. At this meeting an *ad hoc* committee, formed to propose what E.T.S. should do in light of the current debate, gave its report. At the plenary business section this committee presented three recommendations. The first was that the E.T.S. executive committee appoint a special, broadly-based committee to study the complexities of the situation and to make recommendations designed to meet the long range need of the Society to clarify its doctrinal statement. The second recommendation from the *ad hoc* committee advocated the adoption of both "Chicago Statements" of the I.C.B.I. (on inerrancy and hermeneutics) as interim statements meeting the immediate need for E.T.S. to take a clear stance on inerrancy. The third recommendation simply was that E.T.S. adopt Robert's Rules of Order, Article XIII, section 75, regarding due process for members of voluntary organizations whose membership is being challenged.

Since the third proposal amounted to a constitutional amendment, it could only be read at the 1983 meeting. It will be discussed and voted on at the 1984 meeting. The first two proposals were both defeated. The great majority of the Society evidently believed that it would be too costly to fund another committee and that the present brief doctrinal statement need not be clarified. Similarly, the proposal to adopt the I.C.B.I. statements was viewed as an unnecessary addition to the doctrinal statement, one which was not framed by E.T.S. and which contained ambiguities. Evidently, many believed that additional stipulations were unnecessary since the Society’s Constitution already made provision for dealing with members whose status was controversial.

At this point in the business meeting a motion was made to the effect that E.T.S. go on record as rejecting any position that states that a biblical author materially altered or embellished historical traditions, or departed from the actuality of events in writing the Bible. This motion, obviously aimed at Gundry’s position on Matthew, occasioned lengthy debate. A motion to table it failed, and when the question was called, a ballot vote passed the motion 119 to 36. At this point another motion was made, to the effect that Gundry be requested to resign from the Society unless he could acknowledge his

42 The present statement reads: “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs.”

43 The relevant section of the Constitution is Article IV, Section 4: “In the event that the continued membership of an individual be deemed detrimental to the best interests of the Society, his name may be dropped from the membership roll at an annual meeting, but only after a two-thirds vote.”

44 Note the similarities to Gundry’s statements in *Matthew*, pp. 623, 639.
position to be in error. Here another lengthy and tense debate followed. Eventually the question was called, and the motion passed 116 to 41. When the vote was announced, Gundry spoke briefly, resigning from the Society, and expressing concerns for the future.

It should be noted that in the debate summarized above there was evidence that many who disagreed with Gundry's position still held him in high esteem as a Christian scholar and gentleman. Also noteworthy were the statements of a few of the Society's "founding fathers." Unanimously they asserted that Gundry's conclusions regarding Matthew were contradictory to what they understood inerrancy to entail. These assertions seemed to be quite influential in determining the outcome of the final two motions.45

CONCLUSION

In concluding this study, an evaluation of the current situation is necessary. First, the crucial need for clarification of what evangelicals mean by inerrancy still exists. Recent events in the E.T.S. indicate that the word "inerrancy" has implications not shared by all who sincerely claim to believe in it.46 It is disappointing that E.T.S. has decided not to speak to this crucial need. Evidently, I.C.B.I will be the main catalyst toward this needed clarification. In the event that such clarification is not attempted or forthcoming, at least two dangers surface.

The first danger is that of doctrinal deviation. Evangelicals dare not compromise their sole basis of authority, the written Word of God. One important implication of inerrancy has been historicity.


46There seems to be a tendency for commonly used words to become increasingly vague the longer they are commonly used. The founders of E.T.S. in 1949 had certain implications in mind when they framed the brief E.T.S. doctrinal statement around the term "inerrancy." I have heard more than one of them affirm that one of the reasons E.T.S. was founded was to get away from a dehistoricizing approach to the Word of God. Thirty four years later the word does not carry the same implications to all who use it. However, if the authors of the E.T.S. doctrinal statement are banished when it comes to sorting out the implications of the statement, verbal anarchy or semantic autonomy will result. Here I am obviously applying the literary theory of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. See his Validity in Interpretation (New Haven and London: Yale University, 1967), pp. 1–23. Hirsch's view of meaning as a willed type, having boundaries and being reproducible (pp. 44–51) is an excellent insight. Applying his insights regarding the subconscious implications of an author's willed type of meaning (pp. 52–57) to the situation in E.T.S. is instructive. It is clear that historicity is a necessary implication for any orthodox view of the Bible and the events which it describes in its pages.
Evangelicals who confess inerrancy believe that the Bible is true in all that it affirms. The Bible’s apparently historical affirmations must be viewed as historical unless there is convincing evidence from the Bible itself, interpreted in its historical context, which shows such apparently historical affirmations to be figures of speech. Gundry simply has not supplied convincing evidence for his “less historical” approach to Matthew. Thus it is legitimate to view his position as dangerous.

A second danger is that of a vigilante approach to these issues. When there is no official clarification of the implications of inerrancy upon the synoptic phenomena, evangelical schools and societies run the risk of confusing agreement on the doctrine of inerrancy with agreement on the interpretation of specific biblical problems. I personally believe that Gundry has not done justice to the historicity of Matthew, but it is also possible, as Gundry has warned, to read historical precision into biblical texts which do not warrant it. The complexities of the synoptic phenomena indicate that a brash, cavalier attitude about difficulties is not wise. If it must be insisted that every historical assertion the Bible makes is true, it must likewise be insisted that only those historical assertions which the Bible really makes are true.

These two dangers underline the need for clarification of the implications of inerrancy for the synoptic phenomena. Gundry’s approach appears to be doubtful both methodologically and theologically. However, only the theologically myopic will view Gundry’s resignation from E.T.S. as a long-term victory for inerrancy. Much work remains to be done.

47 Gundry believes he detects such an attitude in Geisler. See Gundry’s “Response,” p. 95. I have argued that neither a dehistoricizing nor an overconfident approach is valid in a review of Archer’s Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties (JETS 26 [1983] 208-10).