

***THE STRUCTURE OF THE GOSPEL OF
MATTHEW AS NARRATIVE****

By H. J. Bernard Combrink

I PROBLEM

Concerning the structure - or composition - of the Gospel of Matthew, no consensus has thus far been reached among New Testament scholars. This is actually quite surprising in the light of the great number of redaction-critical studies devoted to the Gospel of Matthew in recent times.¹ But perhaps it is really not so surprising, since the tension, between tradition and redaction, so important for redaction-critics, very often leads to an emphasizing of the additions and changes in the redactional sections of a gospel, without really coming to grips with the problem of the composition as a whole.²

Research in recent years has also underlined that there are various structural features in Matthew which can be utilized in determining the composition of this gospel. Recently D. O. Via again drew attention to two of the most obvious competing structures in Matthew, *viz.* the well-known five-fold formula (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1), and the repetition of the phrase ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς in 4:17

* Research for this paper was made possible by a grant from the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa. The guidance and advice of Roland M. Frye, Felix E. Schelling Professor of English Literature at the University of Pennsylvania, is gratefully acknowledged.

1. Cf. S. P. Keally, 'The Modern Approach to Matthew', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 9 (1979) 165-178.
2. R. C. Tannehill, 'The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role', *JR* 57 (1977) 386-387.

and 16:21.³ The first scheme remains to this day the basis for many varying outlines of Matthew based on the five discourses of Jesus and alternative narrative sections, with a strong emphasis on such matters as the law, the five books of Moses, and Jesus as the new Moses.⁴ The second scheme divides the gospel into three sections dealing with: (1) the person of Jesus Messiah (1:1 - 4:16); (2) the proclamation of Jesus Messiah (4:17 - 16:20); (3) the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Messiah (16:21 - 28:20).⁵

Various other principles for analysing the structure of Matthew have been proposed. According to some Matthew followed Mark's geographical outline. This implies that 4:12 - 18:35 deals with Jesus' public ministry in Galilee; 19:1 - 20:34, from Galilee to Jerusalem; 21:1 - 27:66, the last week in and near Jerusalem; and 28:1-20, the resurrection and appearances of the Lord.⁶ F. W. Beare, however, maintains that the changes by Matthew in Markan order are pedagogical and literary, not chronological.⁷ Various topical outlines have also been proposed - *e.g.*, on based on the metaphors of Father and Son: (1) Father and Son: establishing the metaphor (1:1 - 12:50); (2) Father and Son: exploring the metaphor (13:1 - 27:66); (3) Father and Son: transcending the metaphor (28:1-20).⁸

Some scholars detect a symmetrical or concentric pattern in the composition of Matthew, although there are also differences of opinion amongst them. According to H. B.

3. O. Via, 'Structure, Christology, and Ethics in Matthew', in R. A. Spencer (ed.), *Orientation by Disorientation: Studies in Literary Criticism and Biblical Criticism Presented in Honor of William A. Beardslee* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1980) 199-200.
4. W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (New York: Holt, 1930). *Cf.*, *e.g.*, J. P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York: Paulist, 1978).
5. D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 25.
6. *Cf.* the introductory notes to Matthew in the TEV.
7. W. Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew: A Commentary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981) 15.
8. O'Connor and J. Jimenez, *The Images of Jesus: Exploring the Metaphors in Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1977) 13.

Green⁹ chapter 11 is the central point of the symmetrical pattern, while P. F. Ellis sees chapter 13 as the centre, with the other your discourses and narrative sections arranged in symmetrical fashion around it.¹⁰

In the face of such a confusing array of proposed outlines it may be wise to take note of R. C. Tannehill's remark that all the neat topical outlines may not necessarily be appropriate to a narrative and that biblical scholars ought to have a greater awareness of how stories are told and how they communicate.¹¹

II THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW AS NARRATIVE

A. *A Change of Paradigm*

The previous remark of Tannehill, as well as the title of this paper, are to be seen as indicating a shift of emphasis, or rather a change of paradigm in biblical studies. Without for one moment recommending that all historical research in relation to the Gospels should be abandoned, one has to admit that there is an awareness of a methodological crisis in historical criticism.¹²

At the same time New Testament scholars have been urged to rely more heavily upon the best tested and most effective literary critical methods.¹³

9. H. B. Green, 'The Structure of St Matthew's Gospel', in F. L. Cross (ed.), *Studia Evangelica, IV. Part I: The New Testament Scriptures* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 19.8) 47-59.
10. P. F. Ellis, *Matthew: His Mind and His Message* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1974) 12. Cf. C. H. Lohr, 'Oral techniques in the Gospel of Matthew', *CBQ* 23 (19.1) 403-435, and A. Di Marco, 'Der Chiasmus in der Bibel: 3. Teil', *LingBibl* 39 (1976)
11. Tannehill, 'Disciples in Mark' 387.
12. P. Stuhlmacher, 'Thesen zur Methodologie gegenwärtiger Exegese', *ZNW* 63 (1972) 18-26; F. Hahn, 'Probleme historischer Kritik', *ZNW* 63 (1972) 1-17; L. E. Keck, 'Will the Historical-Critical Method Survive?' in R. A. Spencer (ed.), *Orientation* 115-127.
13. Cf. R. M. Frye, 'The Jesus of the Gospels: Approaches through Narrative Structure', in D. Y. Hadidian (ed.), *From Faith to Faith: Essays in Honor of Donald G. Miller* (Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series 31) (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1979) 75.

his growing interest in a literary approach to the Bible covers a broad spectrum of views and approaches.¹⁴ In all of this a great deal of attention has been focussed on narrative. A considerable amount of this work is fully developed literary structuralism. Although the various proponents of these approaches have done so much to develop narrative theory and methodology as well as to produce exegetical studies aimed at verifying and elucidating the method, D. Patte recently had to concede that 'the *parousia* of structural exegetical results is delayed'.¹⁵ It is therefore, significant to see that R. Alter finds the new narratology's usefulness limited. He also cautions Biblical scholars against just taking over some modern literary theory and applying it to ancient texts 'that in fact have their own dynamics, their own distinctive conventions and characteristic techniques'.¹⁶ It is, therefore, important not to be content with a mere analysis of formal narrative structures, but to continue to a deeper understanding of the values and message of the narrative.

In a recent publication G. W. Stroup refers to 'the promise of narrative theology'.¹⁷ However important this approach may be, it should be differentiated from the investigation of the formal features of narrative in the texts of the Gospels. Stroup acknowledges that his real interest is the hermeneutical process which is the foundation for Christian narrative, and not the literary genre.¹⁸ So even

14. Cf. K. Berger, *Exegese des Neuen Testaments: Neue Wege vom Text zur Auslegung* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1977); J. D. Crossan, 'Waking the Bible: Biblical Hermeneutic and Literary Imagination', *Int* 32 (1978) 269-285; J. Gottcent, *The Bible as Literature: A Selective Bibliography* (Boston: Hall, 1979); N. R. Petersen, 'Literary Criticism in Biblical Studies', in R. A. Spencer (ed.), *Orientation* 25-50, and this volume as a whole.
15. 'Structuralism, Semiotics and Biblical Exegesis', SBL Special Lecture, San Francisco, December 19, 1981. Cf. D. and A. Patte, *Structural Exegesis: From Theory to Practice* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).
16. R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) 15. Also cf. V. S. Poythress, 'Structuralism and Biblical Studies', *JETS* 21 (1978) 221-237.
17. G. W. Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology. Recovering the Gospel in the Church* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981). Cf. B. Wacker, *Narrative Theologie?* (München: Kösel, 1977).
18. Stroup, *Narrative Theology* 96.

when narrative is being used as a theological category, it is not necessarily in a consistent literary manner.

B. *Genre of the Gospels*

This raises the question of the genre of the Gospels, a debate that is still being continued.¹⁹ The claim that the gospel form is absolutely *sui generis* is being disputed more and more. And when the gospels are seen to function as means of communication, one has to remember that in order to decode the message, the code must have been conventionalized already, at least to a certain degree.²⁰ In this respect it is interesting to see that various Greek and Semitic antecedents ought to be kept in mind. Although not precise enough for some,²¹ R. M. Frye's proposal to consider the Gospels as examples of the literary genre of dramatic history, takes us a long way in the right direction: 'a dramatic history is a literary work which presents a basically historical story with economy and narrative effectiveness, which remains essentially faithful to the historical tradition but which may alter elements of that tradition as appears necessary in order to represent *multum in parvo*, and which is designed to convey important insights and understandings (both factual and interpretative) to a wide audience'.²² W. A. Beardslee also emphasizes the dramatic structure of the Gospels, moving to a climax and a resolution. He also underlines the background of Old Testament narrative,

19. Cf. R. H. Gundry, 'Recent Investigations into the literary genre "Gospel"', in R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney, *New Dimensions in New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 97-114; C. H. Talbert, *What is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); W. S. Vorster, *Wat is 'n Evangelie? Die plek van die tekssoort evangelie in eie literatuurgeskiedenis* (Pretoria: N. G. Kerkboekhande, 1981).
20. Cf. N. R. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 43-44.
21. D. O. Via, *Kerygma and Comedy in the New Testament. A Structuralist Approach to Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 97-98.
22. R. M. Frye, 'Literary Perspective for the Criticism of the Gospel', in D. G. Miller & D. Y. Hadidian (eds.), *Jesus and Man's Hope. II. A Perspective Book* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1971) 219 n. 28.

but sees as characteristic of the Gospel form the reenactment of the past and the leading into the future.²³

One thing is, however, clear: in whatever manner the genre of Matthew can be defined in more detail, it can be taken to be a narrative as it meets the two basic characteristics: 'the presence of a story and a story-teller'.²⁴ And it is no *simple* narrative, to a large degree chronological as in a newspaper story, but it is a 'narrative with plot, which is less often chronological and more often arranged according to a preconceived artistic principle determined by the nature of the plot . . .'.²⁵ In our discussion of Matthew's structure, the literary features of a narrative should then be kept in mind. This does not mean that the distinctiveness of the Gospel form in, which everything centres on Jesus, the vehicle of the kingdom of God, is discounted.²⁶ Within the road category of narrative, L. Ryken still sees the Gospel as a unique literary form in being more episodic in its plot than the heroic narratives of the Old Testament, and more concentrated than the biographies embedded in historical surveys.²⁷ He also calls attention to the uniqueness of the characterization of Jesus as the protagonist. Alter also emphasizes that a literary approach need not imply a blurring of necessary distinctions between sacred and secular literature.²⁸

C. *Narrative Paradigm*

The growing awareness of the need for a literary approach to the New Testament led to a wave of 'anti-historicism' with an almost exclusive synchronic approach to the text.²⁹ Against

23. W. A. Beardslee, *Literary Criticism of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) 21.
24. R. Scholes and R. Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) 4. Cf. W. S. Vorster, 'Mark: Collector, Redactor, Author, Narrator?' *JTSA* 31 (1980) 57 ff.
25. C. H. Holman, *A Handbook to Literature: Based on the Original by William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard* (Indianapolis: Odyssey, 1972) 335.
26. Cf. Beardslee, *Literary Criticism* 25.
27. L. Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974).
28. *Biblical Narrative* 46.
29. Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1976) 91.

this one-sided view it has to be stressed that the Gospel of Matthew - as narrative - is to be seen in a communication model as the message, as mediation between author and readers.³⁰ This has to be seen as part of an encompassing *narrative paradigm* in which the following distinctions are also important: on the one hand the distinction between the message (signified, content) and the means (signifier, expression), but on the other hand also the distinction between the text (form, sense) and context (substance, reference). These distinctions can be charted in the following manner:³¹

	MEANS (Signifier, expression)	MESSAGE (Signified, content)
TEXT (Form, Sense)	<p>Textual means</p> <p>Discourse How In-what</p> <hr/> <p>Narration</p> <p>Narrative voice + mood</p> <p>style, rhetorical techniques</p> <p>Narrator, narratee</p>	<p>Textual message</p> <p>Story What</p> <hr/> <p>Narrative world</p> <p>Existents, events, sequence</p>
CONTEXT (Substance, Reference)	<p>Contextual means</p> <p>Effect Why For-what</p> <hr/> <p>Context of Narration</p> <p>Creation + reading</p>	<p>Contextual message</p> <p>Manner By-what</p> <hr/> <p>Context of Narrative world</p> <p>Cultural + literary codes</p>

30. Cf. Petersen, *Literary Criticism* 33-34.
 31. W. Wuellner, 'Narrative Criticism and the Lazarus Story', (Paper read at the SNTS meeting in Rome, August 1981), 3 and Appendix I. Cf. S. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1980²) 22ff, 267. See also D. Rhoads, 'Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark', *JAAR* 50 (1982) 411-43'; S. M. Praeder, 'Luke-Acts and

This approach has the advantage of not only concentrating in a text-immanent manner simply on the textual means and message, but also being open to the role of the context - the literary and cultural codes, the author and readers.

As far as Matthew's structure is concerned, this means that we have to acknowledge the importance of Old Testament narrative and even Jewish *haggadah*,³² as well as the structural importance of the manner in which the distinction between 'reporting speech' and 'reported speech' function in Deuteronomy, Joshua and Judges as a structural criterion.³³ This can be an important factor in deciding whether the device of the five discourses in Matthew should have structural significance.

D. *Macrostructures and Superstructures*

There may be more contextual factors influencing the composition or structure of Matthew. T. A. van Dijk makes the useful distinction between macrostructures and superstructures. Semantic macrostructures are global or highlevel properties of discourse relating to the meaning or content, often referred to by language users in terms of theme, topic, gist, the upshot or the point of what has been said, in distinction from the details. Macrostructures are

the ancient novel', in K. H. Richards (ed.), *SBL 1981 Seminar Papers* (Chico: Scholars, 1981) 269-292, and D. Rhoads and D. Michie, *Mark as Story. An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 4-5.

32. E. Güttgemanns, 'Die Funktion der Erzählung im Judentum als Frage an das christliche Verständnis der Evangelien', *LingBibl* 46 (1979) 5-61.
33. R. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History* (New York: Seabury, 1980) 20 Cf. V. N. Volonšinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (ET by L. Matejka and I. A. Titunik) (New York: Seminar, 1973) 115: 'Reported speech is speech within speech, utterance within utterance, and at the same time also *speech about speech, utterance about utterance*'. Volonšinov points to the fact that once a reported utterance becomes part of the author's (reporting) speech, it becomes part of that speech and the original autonomous theme thus becomes a theme of a theme. It is therefore very important to inquire into the dynamic relations between reported speech and its reporting context (119).

therefore essentially semantic, functioning to reduce or organize complex information, and to store or retrieve information. Macrostructures are defined by way of deletion, generalization or construction, and one should furthermore bear in mind that there may be several hierarchical levels of macrostructures.³⁴

Superstructures are global structures of a more schematic nature. In this case notions such as outline, construction, order or build-up are relevant. Here contextual factors again may play a role as these features pertain to the global 'forms' of texts which may be conventionalized in a given culture to organize the global meaning of a text. One could thus distinguish between the narrative structure of a story, the argumentative structure of a lecture or the schematic structure of a research paper. Superstructures are, therefore, not the same as the global content of a story.³⁵ Van Dijk then, declares that narrative is perhaps the best example of such a conventional, schematic superstructure, consisting of a setting, complication and resolution, followed by an evaluation and the pragmatic moral.³⁶

Without forcing this superstructure on to Matthew, it may be worth while to see whether this narrative superstructure imposes any constraints on the macrostructure of Matthew.

III 'TEXTUAL MEANS' OF NARRATION AND THE STRUCTURE OF MATTHEW

A. *Literary Rhetorical Techniques*

Due to the fact that ancient authors did not have our modern methods of delineating the structure/composition of their works by way of chapter headings, titles, etc., any clues an author did leave us would have to be within the text itself.³⁷ In another paper by the present author more

34. T. A. van Dijk, *Macrostructures: An Interdisciplinary Study of Global Structures in Discourse, Interaction, and Cognition* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1980) 5, 14, 46-47, 84.
35. *Ibid.* 5-6, 108ff.
36. *Ibid.* 115.
37. N. Perrin, 'The Evangelist as Author: Reflections on Method in the Study and Interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts', *BibRes* 17 (1972) 15-16.

attention is given to the relevance of various literary techniques with respect to the composition of Matthew.³⁸ The various techniques of repetition may perhaps be one of the most salient characteristics of Matthew's narration. The repetitive pattern of five speeches of Jesus alternating with narrative sections establishes a symmetrical pattern for the gospel as a whole. It is also worth noting that patterns such as these are not unique to Biblical literature, but that literary critics have found various numerological and symmetrical patterns integrated into the structure of literary works.³⁹

In the light of other textual indicators (*e.g.*, the three passion predictions and a basic pattern repeated after each prediction), the concentric pattern can be modified to include chapter 18 (Fourth Discourse) in a section 16:21 - 20:34. The significance of the formula ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς repeated in 4:17 and 16:21 also leads to accepting a major section/unit starting in 4:18. The symmetrical composition of Matthew can be diagrammed as follows:

38. H. J. B. Combrink, 'The Macrostructure of the Gospel of Matthew', *Neotestamentica* 16 (1982) 1-20.
39. R. G. Peterson, 'Critical Calculations: Measure and Symmetry in Literature', *PMLA* 91 (1975) 367-375.

- A. 1:1-4:17 Narrative: The birth and preparation of Jesus.
- B. 4:18-7:29 Introductory material, First Speech: Jesus teaches with authority.
- C. 8:1-9:35 Narrative: Jesus acts with authority ten miracles.
- D. 9:36-11:1 Second Discourse: The Twelve commissioned with authority.
- E. 11:2-12:50 Narrative: The invitation of Jesus rejected by 'this generation'.
- F. 13:1-53 Third Discourse: The parables of the kingdom.
- E'. 13:54-16:20 Narrative: Jesus opposed and confessed, acts in compassion to Jews and gentiles.
- D'. 16:21-20:34 Fourth Discourse within Narrative: The impending passion of Jesus, lack of understanding of the disciples.
- C'. 21:1-22:46 Narrative: Jesus' authority questioned in Jerusalem.
- B'. 23:1-25:46 Fifth Discourse: Judgement on Israel and false prophets, the coming of the kingdom.
- A'. 26:1-28:20 Narrative: The passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Sections B and C can be grouped together in the light of the repetition of 4:23 in 9:35. This can be done with C' and B' too, as both sections deal with Jesus in Jerusalem before his passion and death, and are also held together by the themes of authority and judgement.

According to this pattern the pivotal point F, the parables dealing with kingdom of heaven, is emphasized. The larger section E - F - E' can, however, be taken to be a larger turning area. In this section of the Gospel the repeated rejection of Jesus (E) is followed by the parables (F) dealing with the mystery of accepting and rejecting the gospel of the kingdom - a speech divided into two due to a change of setting and audience. In E' Jesus is then confessed as Messiah and Son of God. The symmetrical pattern furthermore emphasizes the correspondences between the beginning and the end of the Gospel (A - P'), between the various speeches (B - B'; D - chapter 18 in D'), and even between the various narrative sections (C - C'; E - E'). It remains, however, to be seen

what manner this pattern in the HOW of the narrative can be correlated to the WHAT, the story, the linear development of the narrative.

B. *Point of View*

It is a commonplace of literary theory to distinguish author and narrator. Either statements are presented directly to the audience - being, as it were, overheard by the audience - or statements are mediated by a teller, the narrator.⁴⁰ The essence of narrative art lies in the relationship between the teller and the tale, and the teller and the audience.⁴¹ Any investigation of the means of narration involves dealing with the narrator's point of view. And although the narrator's voice is but one of many heard in Matthew, it is an extremely important voice to take note of, especially since the narrator tells his story from the third person 'omniscient' point of view, and his point of view, in important aspects completely aligned with that of Jesus.⁴²

It is therefore important to note that the heading (1:1), the genealogy (1:2-17), the formula in 4:17 and 16:21 and the formula demarcating the five speeches of Jesus, all stem from the narrator and are valid indications for his point of view on the means, the how of the narrative.

The fulfilment quotations are also worth noting as these characteristic quotations are a significant form of direct commentary by the narrator (except perhaps in one instance - 26:56) to the (implied) reader. The repeated fulfilment formula expresses the point of view of the narrator that Jesus' life and actions are to be seen as a fulfilment of Scripture. The quotations are distributed in an interesting manner. In the first section of Matthew, A (1:1 - 4:17), five quotations are found (1:22-23; 2:15; 2:17-18; 2:23; 4:14ff).

After that, at least one quotation can be found in each of the narrative sections, with the exception of E' (13:54 - 16:20): 8:17 in C (8:1 - 9:35); 12:17-21 in E (11:2 - 12:5C

40. Chatman, *Story and Discourse* 146-147:

41. Scholes and Kellogg, *Nature of Narrative* 240.

42. J. C. Anderson, 'Point of View in Matthew: Evidence', Paper read at AAR-SBL Meeting in San Francisco, December 1981,2 (a revised version of this paper may be published in the future). Also cf. W. S. Vorster, 'Mark', 58ff; and N. R. Petersen, "'Point of view" in Mark's Narrative', *Semeia* 12 (1978) 97-121.

21:4-5 in C' (21:1 - 22:46) and 27:9 (26:56?) in A' (26:1 - 28:20), with 13:35 in F, the central parable discourse (13:1-53).

Although no explicit formula quotation is used by Jesus in 5:17, the narrator's point of view is here explicitly ratified by Jesus in his first speech, the beginning of His teaching activity in Matthew's narrative. Although opinions may vary, 26:56 can be taken as a statement by Jesus, in the Light of 26:54. This would then mean that He closes his public statements with this fulfilment quotation, thereby again demonstrating how closely the point of view of Jesus and the narrator are aligned.

Nothing can be proved by this distribution of quotations. But when compared with the distribution in John, where the bulk of the fulfilment quotations can be found in the passion narrative,⁴³ the point of view in Matthew is obviously that beginning with the birth and early years of Jesus, every aspect of his life is to be seen as a fulfilment of the Scriptures. One is even tempted to suggest that in the only narrative section (E') where such a quotation is lacking, Peter's momentous confession (16:16) - revealed to him by the Father in heaven Himself - balances the fulfilment quotation in E (12:17-21) characterizing Jesus as the Servant of the Lord.

IV 'TEXTUAL MESSAGE': THE STRUCTURE OF THE NARRATIVE

In our discussion of the textual means, the narration, the how of the narrative, we have seen that a symmetrical pattern can be detected in Matthew. It now remains to be seen how this structure is related to the what of the narrative, the story itself. Our attention, therefore, shifts to the characters, setting, and especially the events as turned into a plot.

A. *Plot*

Varying view have been advanced concerning what plot is,

43. Cf. H. J. B. Combrink, 'Die vervulling van die Ou Testament in die Matteusevangelie', in D. H. Odendaal, B. A. Müller en H. J. B. Combrink (eds.), *Die Ou Testament Vandag* (Cape Town: Dutch Reformed Church, 1979) 56-57.

shifting from an emphasis on the creation of a narrative to an emphasis on the reading of a narrative.⁴⁴ Plot has to do with the relationships existing among the incidents of a narrative. 'For the author it is the chief principle for *selection* and *arrangement*; for the reader it is something perceived as *STRUCTURE* and *UNITY*'.⁴⁵ It must also be noted that since plot consists of characters performing actions, it also involves conflict, a struggle between two opposing forces. It can be said that all plots depend on *tension* and *resolution*. As R. Scholes and R. Kellogg formulated it: 'The reader of a narrative can expect to finish his reading having achieved a state of equilibrium - something approaching calm of mind, all passion spent. Insofar as the reader is left with this feeling by any narrative, that narrative can be said to have a plot'.⁴⁶ A close reading of Matthew will reveal that it definitely has plot.

Since the time of Aristotle a plot has been said to require the basic elements of a beginning, middle and end. These elements are usually defined in more detail as: (1) the exposition; (2) the initiating action; (3) the rising action; (4) the falling action; (5) the *dénouement* or conclusion.⁴⁷ In dealing with Matthew the basic threefold scheme still appears to be preferable. One may compare van Dijk's superstructure of a narrative consisting of a. setting, b. episode, subdivided into b.i. complication and b.ii. resolution, c. evaluation (of the episode) and d. moral of the narrative as a whole.⁴⁸ Here the basic structural elements are: setting, complication and resolution. With this can be compared Via's 'deep narrative structure' consisting also of three elements: (1) initial situation and initial state; (2) process of amelioration or degradation; (3) goal (final state).⁴⁹

44. A. Preminger et al. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1965) 623.

45. Holman, *Handbook* 397 (my italics).

46. Scholes and Kellogg, *Nature of Narrative* 212.

47. Preminger, *Encyclopedia* 624-625.

48. Van Dijk, *Macrostructures* 112-116.

49. Via, 'Structure' 201-202.

The hypothesis of this paper is that the narrative plot of Matthew consists of the following three elements: (1) Setting (1:1 - 4:17); (2) Complication (4:18 - 25:46); (3) Resolution (26:1 - 28:20). Although the criteria for demarcating the basic elements of the plot are quite different from those discussed in III.A, it will be immediately evident that the plot is in congruence with the main division according to a symmetrical pattern (viz. A; B - B; A').⁵⁰

B. *The Setting (1:1 - 4:17)*

1. The first element of the plot or superstructure contains the *beginning* of the narrative. Biblical narratives often begin with introductory statements concerning the principal characters, significant family relationships and the geographical location.⁵¹ After this expository information, other essential narrative data are usually given and then the dialogue - so characteristic of Biblical narratives —begins.

In Matthew the setting very prominently features Jesus as the main character. But in this section another important group of characters also appears, *Jesus' opponents*, as well as a second important group, *Jesus' helpers* (or followers). And even though this section is only setting the stage (so to speak) for the main section of the narrative, the *conflict and tension* start very early in this section. Nevertheless, this initial section of the Gospel is to be demarcated from what follows for Jesus' public ministry and encounter with Israel only begin from 4:18 onwards.⁵²

2. The opening sentence (1:1) already implies the concept of Jesus which the narrative will fully develop as it proceeds - He is characterized by names ('the son of David, the son of Abraham') representing golden moments from the history of God's people. This is then strengthened by the genealogy and 1:17 with its

50. Cf. p. 67.

51. Alter, *Biblical Narrative* 80.

52. B. Gerhards on, 'Gottes Sohn als Diener Gottes. Messias, Agape und Himmelsherrschaft nach dem Matthäusevangelium', *ST* 27 (1973) 78; Via, 'Structure' 203.

numerical symbolism. 'His coming will be as portentous an event for Israel as the coming of Abraham and David, and as uprooting as the exile to Babylon'.⁵³ What these titles mean will have to become evident in the rest of the narrative when Jesus' actions identify Him with the names and titles given to Him.⁵⁴ These titles, therefore, actually imply the giving of a commission or task to Jesus.⁵⁵ Not only was *Abraham* the father of the Covenant people, but God's promises to him explicitly mentioned His blessings to all nations (Gn. 12:1-3; 18:18; 22:15-18). This universalistic trend can be seen in different places in Matthew, but it is significant that 'Abraham' is mentioned again in 8:11 in the crucial episode of the healing of the heathen officer's servant. In direct contrast to this is John the Baptist's warning (in 3:9) that the Pharisees should not take it for granted that they are 'sons of Abraham' as God can raise, up sons of Abraham from the stones (*cf.* 27:52f!).

But there is yet another connotation to 'Abraham'. B. Gerhardsson draws attention to the rabbinical views on the suffering of the righteous, and the special position occupied by Abraham in this respect. He then 'relates this to Jesus: 'Die Haltung, die Jesus in der Stunde der Prüfung einnimmt, ist die Vater Abrahams. Und diese kann näher präzisiert werden: es ist die Haltung des idealen "Diener des Herrn" (Jes. 53:7). Er "schweigt" (σιωπᾶν)'.⁵⁶ Then 12:17-21 could also be an allusion to Jesus as, the true Son of Abraham.

The expression '*Son of David*' would have evoked Messianic expectations of a King (*cf.* 1:6) from the house of David. Yet the contents of this title in Matthew is the compassionate healing and helping Son of David, although Israel does not recognize Him as the Son of David.⁵⁷ That the title *Christ* would also have been liable to misunderstanding, is seen from John's question in 11:2 and Jesus' question in 22:42.

53. O'Connor and Jimenez, *Images of Jesus* 40.

54. *Cf.* H. W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 96.

55. *Cf.* R. C. Tannehill, 'The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology', *Semeia* 16 (1979) 60-61.

56. Gerhardsson, 'Gottes Sohn' 98.

57. *Cf.* Kingsbury, *Matthew* 99ff.

3. Closely related to 1:1-17 is 1:18-22 (note the use of γένεσις in 1:1 and 1:18). Reference to Jesus' commission is here continued, as He is to be *Immanuel*, God with us, and *Jesus*, saviour of His people. From the repetition of the 'with us/you' formula in 18:20 and 28:20, we learn that this theme of 'God with us' (with its significant Old Testament background from Dt. 31:6, 8, 23; 2:7; 20:1-4; 2 Ch. 20:17, etc.) is of great importance in Matthew and underlines the role of the covenant.⁵⁸ Immanuel occurs in the first of the series of fulfilment quotations by the narrator and structurally is in a central and emphasized position in 1:18-25.⁵⁹

It should not be overlooked that a faint, subtle element of opposition may be detected here with regard to a person who should be classified as one of Jesus' 'helpers'. The narrator informs us that Joseph, being just, plans to break his engagement to Mary because of her pregnancy. But Joseph has a role to play, so the angel intervenes with the first reported speech⁶⁰ in the narrative (1:20-21) and specifies the role of the Holy Spirit and the name of the child as Jesus. From then on Joseph is a prototype of a 'follower' of Jesus, obeying exactly what is commanded.

4. The next pericopes immediately develop the plot as the audience is informed of very real opposition against Jesus but also of very real worshipping, while even more is said about who Jesus really is.

The first reported speech by human beings (2:2) is by gentiles who come to worship - as true 'followers' - the King of the Jews before His task to His own people has even yet begun: Thus the commission to be Son of Abraham (1:1) is here already going into effect.

King Herod's violent reaction to the news of the birth of

58. H. Frankemölle, *Jahwebund und Kirche Christi: Studien zur Form- und Traditionsgeschichte des "Evangeliums" nach Matthäus* (Winster: Aschendorff, 1974) 79ff.

59. Cf. *Neotestamentica* 11 (1977) 8; and H. Boers, 'Language Usage and the Production of Matthew 1:18 - 2:23', in Spencer, *Orientation* 224.

60. Cf. for the phenomenon of 'reported speech' Vološinov, *Marxism* 112ff.

King Jesus signals the beginning of a commission/task of opposition against Jesus. In this he is joined by the whole of Jerusalem, probably a synecdoche for the leaders, thereby foreshadowing their later rejection of Jesus (27:20-25). It is therefore ironic that Herod inquires about the 'Christ', and the scribes and chief priests know from Scripture where to find the born King - but they leave it at that. The opposition against Jesus becomes explicit in 2:13-23, although Herod's plan to kill Jesus fails. Yet the slaughter in Bethlehem is seen as fulfilment of prophecy (2:18).

On the other hand, the quotation in 2:6 informs us that Jesus is also to be Davidic ruler and shepherd. In 2:15 God Himself (through the prophet Hosea) calls sl. Jesus his Son, and in the fulfilment quotation in 2:23 the narrator again sees prophecy fulfilled when Jesus comes to Nazareth.

5. The narrative moves quickly along to the next stage of the setting, skilfully demarcated by way of inclusion, with the identical reported speech of John the Baptist (3:2) and Jesus (4:17).

The narrator informs us of John's commission as the forerunner by a quotation from Isaiah 40:3. John's sharp denunciation of the 'sons of Abraham' foreshadows Jesus' judgement on them later, and his basic message (3:2) is repeated by Jesus in 4:17. It is, therefore, unexpected and strange that the forerunner himself is attempting to correct Jesus in 3:14 (διεκώλυεν). This is but the first of many occasions when Jesus' helpers or followers try to change His mind and even oppose Him, due to lack of understanding.

Nevertheless, through John's witness Jesus' commission is elaborated further: He will be Lord (3:3) and will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (3:11). He also has to fulfil (as does John too!) all righteousness (3:15) by being baptized. In His baptism He is commissioned as Son of God and Servant of the Lord.⁶¹

61. Cf. R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 53. See also Tannehill, 'Narrative Christology' 61.

Immediately of after being proclaimed Son of God by the Father, Jesus is tempted as Son of God (4:1-11). This entails a testing of the Son in his total commission that was received at the baptism and was intimated in the preceding pericopes of the opening section, the setting of the narrative. Jesus emerges here as resisting the temptation to the three (summarizing) sins of preoccupation with fleshly needs (4:3), pride in spiritual power (4:5-6), and pride in the glory of the kingdoms of the world (4:8-9), but especially as resisting the temptation to be Messiah in any other way than that of the obedient Son and Suffering Servant.⁶² This assault by Satan not only constitutes the most radical opposition mentioned as yet, but also forms a prelude to the ongoing line of resistance to and tempting of Jesus (*cf.* 6:1; 19:3; 22:18, 35).⁶³ In the final temptation, the tempting promise of the βασιλείας τοῦ κόσμου is in marked contrast to the announcement of the coming of the βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (3:2; 4:17) and the ἐξουσία of Jesus, so decisive in the following chapters.

Matthew 4:12-17 closes the first element (setting) of the narrative. The mentioning of John's imprisonment is an important time signal, but also a foreshadowing of what will later happen to Jesus and his disciples too (παρεδόθη *cf.* 24:9; 26:2, 25). The last fulfilment quotation of this section (4:14-16) is crucial: the ministry of Jesus is situated in

62. Frye, 'The Jesus of the Gospels' 85; *cf.* Gerhardsson, 'Gottes Sohn' 78.
63. It should 'e noted that the only four direct quotations of Scripture not given by Jesus or the narrator are offered by Jesus' enemies (2:5-6; 4:6; 19:3-9; 22:24). 'In the first case the chief priests and scribes of the people end up ironically testifying that Jesus is the Christ. This irony occurs because they express their own view on the phraseological plane and the narrator's view on the ideological' (Anderson, 'Point of View' 8). In the other instances, the devil and the Pharisees and Sadducees tempt Jesus by using Scripture. But Jesus replies with Scripture! Only He and the narrator correctly interpret Scripture (*Ibid.* 8)

Capernaum in Galilee, 'land of the gentiles', in order that those who live in darkness may see the light. Now the stage is set for Jesus to commence His task of saving His people. Matthew 4:17 acts therefore like a hinge, terminating the setting, while at the same time introducing the body of the narrative. We may also note that 3:1 - 4:17 exhibits a chiastic pattern: a. John's proclamation of the coming of the Kingdom and his unmasking of false 'sons of Abraham'; b. Jesus commissioned as Son and Servant; b'. Jesus tested as Son and Servant; a'. Jesus' proclamation of the coming of the Kingdom to true 'sons of Abraham' from the gentiles.⁶⁴

C. *The Complication (4:18 - 25:46)*

In this section of the narrative a process of amelioration and opposition/degradation is initiated.⁶⁵ This will build up until the resolution, or goal is arrived at in the final section of the narrative (26:1 - 28:20).

1. 4:18 - 11:1 *Jesus ministering to Israel in word and deed, authorizing the Twelve to continue this*

(i) 4:18-22 The first episode in Jesus' public ministry and His first reported words in this section is the commissioning of the four brothers to follow Him and become fishers of men. At this stage it also implies a commission for Jesus to make them fishers of men. Throughout section C.1 the importance of ἀκολουθεῖν should be noted.

(ii) 4:23 - 9:34 This section is demarcated by the repetition of 4:23 in 9:35, indicating that it deals with Jesus' teaching (chapters 5-7) and healing ministry (chapters 8-9).⁶⁶

64. Cf. F. S. Malan, *Matteus as die argitek van 'n boek oor Jesus die Konig* (Pietersburg: University of the North, 1981) 6.

65. Cf. Via, 'Structure' 204.

66. Cf. A. B. du Toit et al. in *Neotestamentica* 11 (1977): *The Structure of Matthew 1-13: An Exploration into Discourse Analysis* (Pretoria: New Testament Society of South Africa, 1977), for the structure of separate subsections.

Chapters 5-7 underline Jesus' ἐξουσία but also spells out more clearly and in challenging language what following Jesus (see (i) above) really implies.⁶⁷ The underlying, tension in the narrative is subtly heightened by the fact that Jesus' view of 'righteousness that exceeds' is contrasted with the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, already so vigorously denounced by the forerunner of Jesus. It should also be observed that the persecution of disciples is already mentioned at this stage (5:10-11) and implied for Jesus who came to fulfil all righteousness. Jesus' views on His followers and opponents also highlight the possibility of a surprising reversal of roles (7:21-23).

Matthew 8-9 constitute a substantial contribution to the characterization of Jesus and the narrative plot. The ἐξουσία of Jesus is again stressed (8:27; 9:7, 33). Interspersed between the three pericopes dealing with the ten mighty deeds of Jesus are two sections on 'following' Jesus (8:18-22 and 9:9-17).⁶⁸ There is tension in 8:18-22 when people volunteering to follow Jesus are deterred from overhastily taking this on, and again when the people of Gadara beg Him to leave (8:34) and the Pharisees disapprove of His compassion (9:10). Jesus' followers (8:23) also give the impression of failing in their commission (8:26), while John's followers actually take sides with the Pharisees (9:14). In 8:11ff Jesus' task clearly encompasses the gentiles too, and the ominous warning of judgement on the so-called 'sons of the kingdom' is clear.

(iii) 9:35 - 11:1 In this section the Twelve receive ἐξουσία to continue Jesus' commission of proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom in word and deed, their task being strikingly formulated in the same manner as that of Jesus (10:1; cf. 9:35).⁶⁹ Yet Jesus' task is here

67. R. C. Tannehill, 'Tension in Synoptic Sayings and Stories', *Int* 34 (1980) 138-150.

68. Cf. J. P. Louw, 'The Structure of Mt. 8:11 - 9:35', *Neotestamentica* 11 (1977), 91ff.

69. Cf. H. J. B. Combrink, 'Structural analysis of Mt. 9:35 - 11:1', *Neotestamentica* 11 (1977) 98ff.

further defined as the bringing of division (10:34ff), an following Him is described as taking up one's cross (10:38).

2. *11:2 - 16:20 Jesus rejected and confessed*

In this section the narrator now largely deals with the reaction to Jesus' proclamation, although this was already touched on in the previous section.⁷⁰

(i) *11:2 - 12:50* Central to chapter 11 is 11:16-24 where the failure of Israel to respond to either Jesus or John is underlined. This is framed by statements outlining the unique authority and proclamation of John and Jesus.

In chapter 12 it is the other way round. Pivotal to this chapter is the longest fulfilment quotation in Matthew (12:15-21) depicting Jesus as the Servant of the Lord endowed with the Spirit, evading conflict and being the hope of the nations. This is enclosed by healings and dialogues in which the opposition against Jesus culminates in the Pharisees planning his death (12:14) and ascribing His mighty deeds to the power of Satan (12:24). This section is concluded by 12:46-50 where we may have an implied reference to opposition against Jesus even by His own family, a line taken up directly after the parable discourse.

(ii) *13:1-53* The mystery of the reaction to Jesus is dealt with in the parable discourse which is divided into two sections.⁷¹ This chapter, therefore, very aptly links the two sections E (11:1 - 12:50) and E' (13:54 - 16:20), since in E and E' the rejection and confession of Jesus form the main turning area of the narrative. And the message of the division brought by the coming of the kingdom in Jesus is clearly emphasized in 13:1-53.

(iii) *13:54 - 16:20* This section starts with the rejection of Jesus by His hometown, and the flashback of the death of John the Baptist (14:1-12) functions as a

70. Cf. B. C. Lategan, 'Structural interrelations in Matthew 11-12', *Neotestamentica* 11 (1977) 115ff.

71. Cf. W. S. Vorster, 'The Structure of Matthew 13', *Neotestamentica* 11 (1977) 130ff.

warning of impending opposition. But a decided emphasis on the disciples and their reaction can be detected in this section as a whole. Although the disciples' lack of understanding is here emphasized, the narrator's remark that the disciples do understand (16:12), and their confession of Jesus (14:33), as well as Peter's confession (16:16), clearly balance the negative reaction to Jesus' proclamation to Israel in 11:2 - 12:50.

The section 11:2 - 16:20 therefore functions as a major turning area of the narrative. After Jesus' proclamation of the gospel (chapters 5-10), the rejection and acceptance of this message lead to the next phase of the narrative.

3. *16:21 - 25:46 Jesus on His way to His passion, death and resurrection*

16:21 is a major shift in the unfolding of the narrative.⁷² Up to this point the narrator has repeatedly used ἀναχωρεῖν to indicate how first Joseph (2:14, 22) and then Jesus evaded the growing opposition against Him (4:12; 12:15; 14:12-13; 15:21). But from this point on Jesus openly talks to His (uncomprehending) disciples about His impending passion. His resolve to go this way is immediately tested by Peter in an episode that recalls the temptation after the baptism.⁷³ This final subsection of the central part of the narrative (complication) continues the line of Jesus' concentration on His disciples, highlighting time and again their (to the reader) almost incomprehensible lack of understanding.

(i) *16:21 - 20:34* The unity of this section is constituted by Jesus' three passion announcements (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19), which in each case are followed by instructions to and dialogue with the disciples as well as other episodes underlining their small faith or lack of understanding.⁷⁴

72. Cf. Kingsbury, *Matthew* 22.

73. Gerhardsson, 'Gottes Sohn' 90.

74. Cf. W. G. Thompson, *Matthew's Advice to a Divided Community: Mt. 17, 22-18, 35* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1970) 16; Combrink, *Neotestamentica* 16 (1982) 12.

(ii) 21:1- 22:46 Then Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and His authoritative action in the temple is narrated. Closely linked to this is a series of eight dialogues, beginning with Jesus' opponents questioning His ἐξουσία and ending with Jesus questioning His opponents concerning their view of the Messiah. At this stage of the narrative the reader senses that the passion is imminent.

(iii) 23:1 - 25:46 Whereas John narrates a farewell speech by Jesus in the upper room after the beginning of the passion narrative proper, Matthew narrates Jesus' last discourse (cf. 26:1) before the beginning of the final climactic phase of Jesus' passion (26:2) Jesus' scathing judgement on the religious leaders of his day underlines that the passion is inevitable and raises the tension. In His apocalyptic teaching to His disciples (chapters 24-25), Jesus deals with events presupposing His passion and resurrection.

D. *The Resolution (26:1 - 28:20)*

It has been recognized that there are some remarkable correspondences between this concluding section of Matthew, and the Setting (1:1 - 4:17).⁷⁵ At this point, however, we are interested in the resolution of the problem, or the attainment of the goal or, task set earlier in the narrative. The correspondences between 1:1 - 4:17 and 26:1 - 28:20 are important in so far as they underscore the demarcation of this section.⁷⁶ The various narrative lines here reach a climax.

1. The opposition against Jesus now reaches its goal. Yet in a strange manner Jesus still seems to have the initiative and authority. In 26:2 He announces the exact time of His crucifixion before the narrator tells us (26:3-4) of the Jewish leaders' latest meetings to plan their final assault. R. C. Tannehill emphasizes

75. Cf. B. J. Malina, 'The Literary Structure and Form of Matt. XXVIII. 16-20', *NTS* 17 (1970/71) 87-103; O. S. Brooks, 'Matthew XXVIII 16-20 and the design of the First Gospel', *JSNT* 10 (1981) 2-28; Combrink, *Neotestamentica* 16 (1982) 16 - 17.

76. In contrast to Via ('Structure' 208) who sees this section as starting only in 27:35, or even 27:50.

the dramatic irony of the congruence of Jesus' own commission with the plans of His opponents: 'They intend to bring Jesus and His mission to an end, but their actions have a place within Jesus' mission, and his work does not end'.⁷⁷ Even the betrayal by Judas is qualified by the last fulfilment quotation (27:9-10), being seen as a fulfilment of prophecy.⁷⁸

The tension in this section is further heightened when certain events suggest that the opposition might perhaps fail.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, since the resolution has to come by way of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection, the conflict intensifies.

When Jesus' opponents sarcastically mock and jeer at Him as King of the Jews (27:29) and Son of God (27:43), the reader - who knows that Jesus is King and Son of God - perceives the dramatic irony here.⁸⁰

Even after His death, the opposition against Jesus does not abate. The grave is therefore guarded (27:62-66), and after the resurrection a false report is spread 'to this very day!' The narrator clearly implies an ongoing opposition.

77. Tannehill, 'The Disciples' 78.

78. Note the tragic change of role in the case of Judas, a former follower or 'helper' of Jesus.

79. *E.g.*, when the Jewish council at first fail to find the false witnesses they were looking for (26:60), when Judas returns the money and confesses that Jesus has been innocently betrayed (27:4), when Pilate's wife also declares Jesus to be δίκαιος (27:19), and when Pilate even gives the people the opportunity to let Jesus be set free (27:15).

80. According to E. W. Bullinger (*Figures of Speech used in the Bible: Explained and Illustrated* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968] 815) this is an example of simulated irony. This could, however, be rather taken to be *sarcasmos* - 'Irony is so called when it is used as a taunt or in ridicule' (*Ibid.* 807). Cf. Preminger (ed.), *Encyclopedia* 407: 'Dramatic irony is a plot device according to which (a) the spectators know more than the protagonist. . . '.

2. After Gethsemane, *Jesus* becomes silent.⁸¹ Yet He still influences the reader through His passive and silent going of His way as the Servant of the Lord (*cf.* 12:18-21). It is remarkable that His last words to His disciples and His captors in Gethsemane are that in His passion and being handed over the prophecies of Scripture are being fulfilled (26:54, 56). Jesus' commission to serve and save His people (*cf.* 20:28) is fulfilled on the cross and in His resurrection from death. 'Indeed, in the Gospel story the human person of Jesus of Nazareth becomes most fully himself in the resurrection. Moreover, the focusing of his full identity in the resurrection is what enables him to turn and share his presence with his disciples.'⁸² As the risen one He can declare that He will be 'God with us' to the end of the age (28:20). Thus His commission to be Immanuel is fulfilled but also is still being fulfilled - to the end of the age.

3. The *disciples* just seem to fade away in the passion narrative. We read about their lack of understanding (26:6-13), and Jesus' foretelling His betrayal by one of them (26:20-25) and that all will leave Him (26:31-35); we read that the three could not watch and pray with Him (26:36-46), and about Peter's denial (26:69-75), and then nothing more. They appear again at the mountain in Galilee - to worship Jesus 'even though some of them doubted' (28:17). The narrative then ends with a renewed commission to these men - some of whom came even there with some doubts! - to go and be fishers of men and make disciples of all peoples. Thus Jesus' task of 4:19 is also fulfilled.

4. The resolution also illuminates a decisive change in the role the *crowds* play. From the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, the crowds have been with Him, following Him, wondering at His teaching and healing, even hailing Him as the Prophet and the Son of David. But in the resolution of the narrative the crowds choose Jesus Barabbas above Jesus Christ, calling down Jesus' blood on

81. *Cf.* B. Gerhardsson, 'Confession and Denial before Men:' Observations on Matt. 26:57 - 27:2', *JSNT* 13 (1981) 58ff.

82. Frei, *Identity* 49.

them and their children - a complete about-turn. At the cross they now mock and jeer Jesus, together with the Jewish leaders.

E. *Correlation of Means and Message*

After following the linear development of the narrative plot (in IV. B-D), we may comment very briefly on the correlation of the textual means and message with respect to the structure of the narrative.

The schematic superstructure, the conventional framework into which the narrative plot has been cast, correlates in a remarkable manner with the broad divisions of the symmetrical structure of Matthew. According to this latter approach, the five speeches of Jesus (B - B') enclose and demarcate the central section⁸³ of the gospel that deals with Jesus' ministry of proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom in word and deed and the reaction to this. This corresponds to the central section of the narrative plot, the complication (IV. C). The device of alternating speeches and narrative sections is therefore used to delimit this important central section of the narrative. Without going into details again, we have already noted that although larger sections of the narrative may function as units when tracing the plot line (e.g., 4:23 - 9:35), these units can still be correlated to sections delimited according to the symmetrical approach.⁸⁴

V THE PRAGMATIC DIMENSIONS OF THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

In taking the narrative paradigm (see p. 67 above) as a point of departure, we found that the context of the narrative, *inter alia* the author and the readers, is part of our horizon of interest. And since the text is taken to be a means of communication between a sender and the receivers, the pragmatic (rhetoric) dimensions of the narrative are important. The shaping of a narrative, therefore, often reveals that the story was meant to

83. B - B', cf. p. 71.

84. Cf. p. 71.

influence its readers in various ways by dealing with the *tua res agitur* and not only with the *illic et tunc* of the narrative.⁸⁵ Tannehill convincingly demonstrates the 'depth rhetoric' of various sayings of Jesus 'challenging the hearer to radical change'.⁸⁶ This is surely also true of the narrative as a whole.

W. Wuellner outlines ways by which the role of the implied author and implied reader (the appellative nature of the narrative) can be discerned in the text.⁸⁷ At this stage it is relevant to draw attention only to two: textual means (tense changes, questions, negations, commands, etc.), and the design of the whole.

Matthew's use of the historical present has been discussed elsewhere.⁸⁸ This device, as well as often stressing the 'Anwesenheit der christologischen Gegenwartsverheissung',⁸⁹ also serves to incorporate the listener into the action of the narrative, actually putting him into the same position as that occupied by the characters of the story.⁹⁰ The device of the five speeches of Jesus (structurally quite significant), as well as the introduction of direct speech with the present participle of λέγειν, create a sense of contemporaneity between narrator, characters and implied reader.⁹¹ In this manner the implied reader is strongly challenged throughout this gospel in the discourse and narrative sections.

Wuellner also emphasizes the pragmatic focus of the

85. Cf. Güttgemanns, 'Die Funktion' 43-44.

86. Tannehill, 'Narrative Christology' 58; cf. his *The Sword of His Mouth. Forceful and Imaginative Language in Synoptic Sayings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 18-19.

87. Wuellner, 'Narrative Criticism' 64ff.

88. Combrink, *Neotestamentica* 16 (1982) 6-7; cf. W. Schenk, 'Das Präsens historicum als makrosyntaktische Gliederungssignal im Matthäusevangelium', *NTS* 22 (1975/76) 464-475.

89. Schenk, 'Präsens historicum' 474.

90. Anderson, 'Point of View' 12; cf. B. Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973) 71..

91. Anderson, 'Point of View' 13.

internal organization of a text.⁹² The narrative clearly proclaims Jesus as 'God with us' (1:23; 18:20; 28:20). The main section of the narrative, the complication (4:18 - 25:46), begins with Jesus' calling of four disciples to follow Him and to become fishers of men, at the same time implying a commission for Jesus - that of making them fishers of men. It is only in the final commission of the disciples that this is fulfilled. Yet throughout the narrative the implied reader (together with the characters in the narrative) faces the challenges of discipleship and of the appropriate reaction to Jesus' proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Throughout 4:18 - 11:1 the implied reader is shown what following Jesus and discipleship really imply. The mission discourse is also clearly directed to the implied reader, with a view to the ongoing task of the church.⁹³

Although already hinted at in 4:18 - 11:1, the divergent reactions to Jesus' proclamation are central to the turning area of the narrative, 11:2 - 16:20. The commands to listen (and understand) (11:5; 13:9, 43; 15:10; *cf.* also 17:5) would thus be relevant to the implied reader too as a challenge not to react in the same manner as Jesus' opponents.

This challenge becomes more radical in 16:21 - 25:46 for here the focus is even sharper on the disciples' lack of understanding of what following Jesus really entails. This is underscored especially by two of the discourses of Jesus (chapters 18 and 23-25).

In the resolution (26:1 - 28:20) the description of the failure of the disciples, with whom the implied reader would have identified himself, is continued.⁹⁴ Fortunately, this is not all. In the final scene, the disciples, Jesus, the narrator and the implied reader are the only ones present. 'The Great Commission places all four temporally in the same position: the period of

92. Wuellner, 'Narrative Criticism' 54, 72; *cf.* W. Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1974) 281.

93. *Cf.* C. E. Carlston, 'Interpreting the Gospel of Matthew', *Int* 29 (1975) 8.

94. *Cf.* Tannehill, 'The Disciples in Mark' 392-393.

mission following the resurrection and prior to the close of the age . . . If one may be permitted an historical inference, the actual author wanted the actual readers or hearers to carry over the ideological viewpoint adopted in assuming the role of the reader or hearer in the text into real life and obey the final commission'.⁹⁵

Thus the pragmatic or appellative design of the narrative as a whole challenges the reader, to accept Jesus' call and mission for His followers. Jesus' stern warnings and the inadequacy of the disciples' response, even their conflict with Jesus on important issues, serve as warnings to the reader. But the reader is finally assured that Jesus has all authority, and it is He who will enable His followers to fulfil the commission to which He – even today - is still calling His church.

95. Anderson, 'Point of View' 16-17.