

## MATTHEW 11:28-30: JESUS' REST AND THE SABBATH\*

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"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28-30). Familiarity with this logion often leads to the assumption that its meaning is well understood. However, a reading of critical studies of this passage reveals otherwise.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps "the deception lies," as noted by Hans Dieter Betz, "in the character of the passage itself," which is "open to meaning, i.e., it is like a vessel which itself has no content, but which stands ready to be filled."<sup>2</sup> This situation has resulted in considerable discussion regarding the form, the origin, and the significance of this passage.

The attention given to this logion is indicative of the importance attached to it. A. M. Hunter, for example, views the broader passage in which it occurs, Matt 11:25-30, as "perhaps the most important verses in the Synoptic Gospels."<sup>3</sup> In a study published in 1909, Claude Montefiore candidly admitted that, as a Jew, he wished "that Jesus may not have said these words," for if he did so, they would provide notable encouragement to Christianity by the exclusive claims set forth by Christ in this passage.<sup>4</sup>

The primary purpose of the following discussion is not to examine the question of the origin and the authenticity of this

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<sup>1</sup>For an extensive bibliography, see Quell/Schrenk, "Pater," in *TDNT*, 5: 992, n. 288; Lino Randellini, "L'anno di Giubilo: Mt. 11:25-30; Lc. 10:20-24," *Rivista Biblica* 22 (1974): 183, n. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Hans Dieter Betz, "The Logion of the Easy Yoke and of Rest (Matt. 11:28-30)," *JBL* 86 (1967): 10.

<sup>3</sup>A. M. Hunter, "Crux Criticorum—Matt. 11:25-30—A Re-appraisal," *NTS* 8 (1962): 241.

<sup>4</sup>C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels* (London, 1909), 2: 616; cf. p. 604.

logion, but some attention will be given to these matters in an excursus at the end of this article. Rather, my purpose herein is to ascertain if Matthew's intent is to present Christ's promise of his rest as the fulfillment of the Messianic rest typified by the OT sabbath. Consideration will also be given to some cultic implications of the passage, including attention to the question of observance of the sabbath day in the Matthean community.

### 1. *The Literary Context*

Our primary objective is to ascertain the meaning of Christ's "rest" (*anapausis*) in Matt 11:28, and in pursuing this objective we must consider carefully the literary context. In the parallel passage in Luke 10, the specific saying about "rest" is omitted, and the "hymn of Thanksgiving" (vs. 21; cf. Matt 11:25-26) is placed in the context of the return of the Seventy (Luke 10:17-20). In Matthew's context, however, the whole passage 11:25-30 is connected with the rejection of Christ by the cities of Galilee.

Indeed, as for this wider context, the theme of opposition precedes and follows the passage and is central to both chaps. 11 and 12. Obviously, there were reasons for inserting the logion about Christ's offer of his rest at this juncture. A clue to the reasons is suggested by the overall structure of chaps. 11 and 12, as the following outline endeavors to show:

- I. Rejection of the Messiah: Matt 11:1-24
  - a. 11:1-6: Doubting by John the Baptist and his disciples
  - b. 11:7-19: Rejection by unbelieving generation
  - c. 11:20-24: Rejection by Galilean cities
- II. Revelation of the Messiah: Matt 11:25 to 12:13
  - a. 11:25-26: Thanksgiving for revelation and its recipients
  - b. 11:27: Self-disclosure of Messiahship
  - c. 11:28-30: Invitation to Messianic "rest"
  - d. 12:1-13: Explanation of Messianic rest
- III. Rejection of the Messiah: Matt 12:14-50
  - a. 12:14: Plotting of Pharisees
  - b. 12:15-21: Withdrawal of Christ and secrecy of his Messiahship
  - c. 12:22-37: Rejection of Christ's healings by Pharisees
  - d. 12:38-45: Rebuke to unbelieving generation
  - e. 12:46-50: Misunderstanding by relatives

The above outline indicates that Matthew has placed the passage containing the Messianic self-disclosure of Jesus between several accounts of rejection or opposition. Presumably the contrast between *rejection* and *revelation* is designed to heighten the significance of the latter. What the Matthean structure of the narrative seems to say is, specifically, that at the very time when Jesus was experiencing unusual opposition and misunderstanding from the "wise and understanding" (11:25—the custodians of Israel's wisdom [cf. Isa 29:14; Deut 4:6]), he disclosed his Messianic identity and mission to the "babes" (11:25—the childlike disciples), promising them his "rest."

To interpret the significance of the "rest" logion, it is also necessary to examine its *immediate context*. The passage in Matt 11:25-30 is generally recognized to be a "Thanksgiving Hymn" consisting of three strophes: (1) thanksgiving for revelation (vss. 25-26), (2) Messianic self-disclosure (vs. 26), and (3) invitation to "rest" (vss. 28-30).<sup>5</sup> Although the suggestion has been made that originally the sayings of this passage may have been spoken in isolation, in Matthew they form a coherent unit.<sup>6</sup>

### *The First Strophe*

The first strophe (vss. 25-26) contains Christ's prayer of thanksgiving to God for concealing "these things [*tauta*] from the wise and learned" and for revealing "them to babes." The term "these things" in the Matthean setting most probably refers to the "mighty works" (vs. 23) mentioned in the previous paragraph. The connection is suggested by the editorial link, "at that time" (*en ekeinō tō kairō*; cf. 12:1), which, as Pierre Bonnard points out, "has more theological than chronological or topographical value."<sup>7</sup> These works were done by Christ in the Galilean cities, centers of rabbinical learning. Such "works" had eschatological significance since they witnessed to the appearance of the Messianic kingdom. The

<sup>5</sup>E.g., Hunter, pp. 242-249, analyzes each of the three strophes independently. Cf. Leopold Sabourin, *Il Vangelo di Matteo* (Rome, 1977), 11: 627-633.

<sup>6</sup>Pierre Bonnard, *L'Évangile selon Saint Matthieu* (Paris, 1970), p. 166, remarks that "the Lucan context of the passage (10:23) gives us reason to think that Matthew has brought together here three sayings that Jesus could have uttered on different occasions" (vss. 25-26, 27, 28-30).

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 167.

thanksgiving of Christ would then be motivated by God's gracious willingness (*eudokia*, vs. 26) to disclose the secret of Christ's Messiahship, not to the "wise and learned" as Scribes and Pharisees, but to the "simple" (*nēpiois*) as the circle of his own disciples.<sup>8</sup>

### *The Second Strophe*

The second strophe (vs. 27) is logically connected to the first by explaining the medium through which the revelation occurs, namely, from the Father through the Son: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (vs. 27). This verse has been a real storm center. Some have argued that Jesus could not have made such an absolute claim to be "the Son" who "knows" and "reveals" "the Father" in a most unique way.<sup>9</sup> Such a consciousness of Christ's unique-sonship relationship to the Father is regarded by them as a later christological development, reflected especially in several sayings in the Gospel of John (cf. 3:35; 10:15). A century ago, such a view led K. von Hase to call Matt 11:27 a "meteor from the Johannine heaven."<sup>10</sup>

However, to condemn as spurious any saying in the Synoptics which has a parallel in John seems to be a rather arbitrary canon of criticism. A. M. Hunter rightly remarks that the "precise opposite might indeed be argued: that if we find in John a logion with parallels in the Synoptics, John either depends on the Synoptics or

<sup>8</sup>Obviously, Jesus is not here making ignorance a qualification for the reception of the gospel. As Alfred Plummer well puts it, "Not all clever people are shut out from the Kingdom, although some shut themselves out; for it is not intelligence, but the pride of intellectual people, that excludes. And not all simple folk are admitted; for it is not stupidity, but the humility of simple-hearted people, that qualifies" (*An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* [London, 1915], p. 166). On the matter of Jesus disclosing his Messiahship at the juncture I am here suggesting, cf. William Manson, *Jesus the Messiah* (Philadelphia, 1946), p. 108.

<sup>9</sup>Among those who hold this view are Ferdinand Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel. Ihre Geschichte im frühen Christentum* (Göttingen, 1964), p. 327; W. G. Kümmel, *Verheissung und Erfüllung* (Zürich, 1956), pp. 40-42; and Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Naperville, Ill., 1967), pp. 37-49.

<sup>10</sup>K. von Hase, *Die Geschichte Jesu* (Leipzig, 1876), p. 422.

else draws upon an independent tradition."<sup>11</sup> Moreover, as Oscar Cullmann points out, Jesus speaks of his sonship not only in John but also in the Synoptics, though in a more reserved fashion. Consequently, he concludes that "at this point the 'Johannine heaven' is really no different from the Synoptic heaven, although it does of course appear from a different point of view."<sup>12</sup>

*Messianic Self-Disclosure.* More important to our investigation than this discussion of authenticity is the question of what the saying means. Joachim Jeremias notes that "Matthew 11:27 is a key statement by Jesus about his mission."<sup>13</sup>

This saying is viewed by several scholars as a Messianic proclamation. For example, Rudolf Otto writes: "Matthew regarded the words as a Messianic proclamation made in public, corresponding to the later standpoint that Jesus came as the complete Messiah and appeared as such from the start."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, William Manson comments: "Jesus knows himself, as the Chosen One, the Beloved, the 'Son' of the Father. The saying, therefore, is definitely Messianic in form."<sup>15</sup>

In Matthew, this unique self-disclosure of Jesus comes long before Peter's Confession at Caesarea Philippi (16:15-16), apparently as an early prelude to that later Petrine Confession. The Matthean gradual disclosure of Jesus' Messiahship is well recognized. Thus, the saying could represent an initial unveiling of the secrecy of Christ's Messiahship. At this early stage, however, Matthew still relates that Jesus ordered his followers "not to make him known" (12:16).

<sup>11</sup>Hunter, p. 245. In a similar vein M. D. Goulder writes: "In view of the evidential and *a priori* case for supposing that John had read Matthew, it is possible that Matt. 11:27 was seminal for this theology" (*Midrash and Lection in Matthew* [London, 1974], p. 362).

<sup>12</sup>Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1960), p. 287. See also pp. 288-290, where Cullmann examines the crucial texts on the "Son of God."

<sup>13</sup>Joachim Jeremias, *Abba* (Göttingen, 1966), p. 51. Jeremias, however, interprets the Father-Son generically: "Just as only a father really knows his son, so only a son really knows his father" (p. 50).

<sup>14</sup>Rudolf Otto, *The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1956), p. 235.

<sup>15</sup>William Manson, p. 106.

*The Title "Son."* Jeremias and others have objected to the Messianic interpretation of the saying because they contend that the title "the Son" is never used in Jewish sources as a designation for the Messiah.<sup>16</sup> But this view is not exactly accurate. R. H. Fuller and other scholars have drawn attention to the evidence of the Florilegium from Cave 4 at Qumran where the text of 2 Sam 7:14 ("I will be his father and he shall be my son") is quoted and applied to the *Mashiah ben David*.<sup>17</sup> A similar usage can be found in 2 Esdras 7:28, where the Most High says: "For my son the Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him."<sup>18</sup> Though these are not explicitly titular uses, it would seem fair to conclude with Fuller that "Son of God was just coming into use as a Messianic title in pre-Christian Judaism. . . . It meant not a metaphysical relationship, but adoption as God's vice-gerent in his kingdom."<sup>19</sup>

Regardless of whether or not the title "Son" was a current Messianic designation, we must reckon with the possibility that Jesus may have used it to express his Messianic identity. As I. H. Marshall observes, "The evidence strongly suggests that the fundamental point in Jesus' self-understanding was his filial relationship to God and that it was from this basic conviction that he undertook the tasks variously assigned to the Messiah, Son of Man and Servant of Yahweh, rather than that the basic datum was consciousness of being the Messiah." Consequently, Marshall concludes, "the argument that 'the Son' was not a current messianic title becomes irrelevant."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Jeremias, p. 40; and idem, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York, 1965), p. 73; cf. W. G. Kümmel, *Heilsgeschehen und Geschichte* (Marburg, 1965), pp. 215-217.

<sup>17</sup>R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York, 1965), pp. 31-33. A detailed discussion is provided by Otto Betz, "Die Frage nach dem messianischen Bewusstsein Jesu," *NT* 6 (1963): 20-48; and additional rabbinic evidence is given by Hahn, pp. 284-287. For a perceptive fairly recent study, see I. H. Marshall, "The Divine Sonship of Jesus," *Int* 21 (1967): 87-103.

<sup>18</sup>Similar references are found in 2 Esdr 7:29; 13:32, 37, 52; 14:9; cf. also 1 Enoch 105:2; 90:37.

<sup>19</sup>Fuller, p. 33.

<sup>20</sup>Marshall, p. 93. For a discussion of the christological usage of the title "Son" in John, Hebrews, and Paul, see Randellini, pp. 209-214, and also Cullmann, pp. 275-290.

In the Synoptic Gospels it is abundantly clear that the title "Son" or "Son of God" represents the Christian equivalent of the Jewish term "Messiah."<sup>21</sup> This is indicated by the fact that at the moments of supreme revelation of Baptism and Transfiguration, the voice from heaven addresses Jesus not as "Christ" but as "My Son, the Beloved" (Matt 3:17; 17:5 and par.).<sup>22</sup> Similarly, demons (Matt 8:29), the disciples (Matt 14:33), and the centurion at the cross (Matt 27:54) acknowledge Jesus as "the Son of God." Peter's confession of Christ, which in Mark 8:29 reads "You are the Christ," is expanded in Matthew: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16). Messiahship and divine sonship are equated very explicitly also in Matt 26:63, where the High Priest commands Jesus, "Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." In the light of these indications, we can safely conclude that for Matthew, Jesus by proclaiming himself to be "the Son" who "knows" and "reveals" "the Father" was indeed, in an exclusive way, asserting his Messianic claims.

### *The Third Strophe*

What is the connection between Jesus' Messianic self-disclosure found in the first two strophes (vss. 25-27) and his offer of "rest" repeated twice in the third strophe (vss. 28-30)? Those who interpret the passage in the light of concepts and terminology of wisdom literature see the theme of "wisdom" or "teaching" as the connecting link of the whole passage. Jesus as the Revealer of the Father's wisdom offers "rest" to those burdened with the Pharisaic interpretation of the law, through the mild and easy yoke of his

<sup>21</sup>Marshall, pp. 91-98, cogently refutes the contention that the title "the Son" must be distinguished from "the Son of God."

<sup>22</sup>Cullmann, pp. 284-285, observes: "It is certainly no accident that the words from heaven at the transfiguration partially repeat those of the heavenly voice at the baptism. Just at the moments of his life when for him the barriers between heaven and earth disappear briefly, Jesus hears the address 'Son of God.'" Richard S. McConnell, *Law and Prophecy in Matthew's Gospel* (Basel, 1969), p. 158, concludes his analysis of the Matthean passages using the titles "the Son" or "the Son of God" by saying: "These various passages indicate that Matthew thinks of Jesus as the Messiah in terms of his unique relationship with God the Father, that is, as the divine Son of God."

teaching.<sup>23</sup> Without denying the insights that wisdom categories may offer into the significance of the whole passage, we may nonetheless question the failure of such an interpretation to recognize the Messianic implications of the saying.

If the first two strophes present Jesus not merely as a wise teacher, *in persona sapientiae*, but as the Messiah, then the third strophe (vss. 28-30) about the "rest" offered by Christ presumably also has Messianic connotations, even though couched in sapiential language. Support for this view is provided by the hope for rest and peace which played a major role in the Jewish Messianic expectations. Joseph Klausner provides numerous examples from the OT and later Jewish literature where the Messianic age is idealized as a time of rest, peace, and prosperity.<sup>24</sup> This notion of Messianic rest and peace seems to have been derived from the concept and experience of the sabbath "rest" (*menuha*), which, as A. J. Heschel explains, "to the biblical mind . . . is the same as happiness and stillness, as peace and harmony."<sup>25</sup>

## 2. The Sabbath Rest

The notion of "rest" was utilized in the OT to express the national aspirations for a peaceful life in a land at rest (Deut 12:9; 25:19; Isa 14:3), where the king would give to the people "rest from all enemies" (2 Sam 7:1; cf. 1 Kgs 8:5) and where God would find his "resting place" among his people and especially in his sanctuary at Zion (2 Chron 6:41; 1 Chron 23:25; Ps 132:8, 13, 14; Isa 66:1).<sup>26</sup> These references to political "rest" (*menuha*) do not, of course, allude specifically to the sabbath rest. The connection between sabbath rest and national rest is clearly established in Heb 4:4, 8,

<sup>23</sup>See, e.g., Tomas Arvedson, *Das Mysterium Christi. Ein Studie zu MT 11.25-30* (Uppsala, 1937), pp. 201-208; also Fohrer Wilkens, "Sophia," *TDNT*, 7: 516-517.

<sup>24</sup>Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (New York, 1955), pp. 63-71, 283, 300, 309, 341, 376-379, 468-469. Among numerous references to Messianic rest and peace are Isa 32:18; 65:19-23; Zech 9:9-10; 1 Enoch, chaps. 5, 10, 11, 48, 70, 71; *Jub.* 23:26-31; *T. Sim.* 6:15; *T. Levi* 18:2-6; 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 29:3; 4 Ezra 8:52.

<sup>25</sup>Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York, 1951), p. 23.

<sup>26</sup>On the development of the rest-theme in the OT, see Gerhard von Rad, "There Remains Still a Rest for the People of God," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York, 1966), pp. 94-102.



where appeal is made to a familiar concept. Another indication is provided by the following midrash on Ps 92: "A Psalm, a song. For the Sabbath day . . . for the day when God's people abide in peace as is said: And my people shall abide in a peaceable habitation, and in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places [Isa 32:18]."<sup>27</sup>

### *The Sabbath Rest as a Symbol of the Messianic Age*

The Sabbath rest and peace became a symbol of the Messianic age, often known as the "end of days" or "world to come."<sup>28</sup> Theodore Friedman notes that "two of the three passages in which Isaiah refers to the Sabbath [Isa 56:4-7; 58:13-14; 66:22-24] are linked by the prophet with the end of days," and he goes on to say:

It is no mere coincidence that Isaiah employs the words "delight" (*oneg*) and "honor" (*kavod*) in his descriptions of both the Sabbath and the end of days (58:13—"And you shall call the Sabbath delight . . . and honor it"; 66:11—"And you shall delight in the glow of its honor"). The implication is clear. The delight and joy that will mark the end of days is made available here and now by the Sabbath.<sup>29</sup>

The *Testament of Levi* (ca. 110-70 B.C.) enumerates the events to occur during the seven weeks (or jubilees) preceding the coming of the Messianic priest, who "shall shine forth as the sun on the earth, and shall remove all darkness from under heaven, and there shall be peace in all the earth."<sup>30</sup> In the apocalyptic work known as

<sup>27</sup>*The Midrash on Psalms*, trans. William G. Braude (New Haven, 1959), 2: 113. The book of Hebrews presents what may be called three different levels of meaning of the Sabbath rest: creation-rest (4:3), national-rest (4:6, 8), redemption-rest (4:3, 7, 9, 10). For my analysis of the passage, see *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Rome, 1980), pp. 135-136, 164-170; and *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome, 1977), pp. 63-69.

<sup>28</sup>W. D. Davies points out that "the distinction between the Age to come and the Messianic Age is a comparatively late development, and it follows that they were often synonymous terms in early apocalyptic" ("Rabbinical Sources," in *Messianism in the Talmudic Era* [New York, 1979], p. 255; cf. p. 261). Generally speaking, the Messianic age is seen as flowing into the world-to-come (cf. Klausner, pp. 23-25, 516-517).

<sup>29</sup>Theodore Friedman, "The Sabbath: Anticipation of Redemption," *Judaism* 16 (1967): 445.

<sup>30</sup>*T. Levi* 18, in *APOT*, 2: 314. The "weeks" are a seven-year period, but the author sometimes confuses them with jubilees. For an analysis of the passage, see Klausner, pp. 313-314.

*The Books of Adam and Eve* (ca. first century A.D.), the archangel Michael admonishes Seth, saying: "Man of God, mourn not for the dead more than six days, for on the seventh day is the sign of resurrection and the rest of the age to come; for on the seventh day the Lord rested from all His works."<sup>31</sup> This "age to come" or "world to come" is frequently equated with the Messianic age,<sup>32</sup> which is characterized by material abundance (Amos 9:13-14; Isa 30:23-25; Jer 31:12), social justice (Isa 61:1-9), harmony between persons and animals (Hos 2:20; Isa 65:25; 11:6), refulgent light (Isa 30:26; Zech 14:6-7), and peace and rest (Isa 32:18; 14:3).

These various characteristics of the Messianic age are grouped together in 2 Baruch, another Jewish apocalyptic work from the latter half of the first century A.D., where the author describes "the time of My Messiah," saying: "'And it shall come to pass, when He has brought low everything that is in the world, and has sat down in peace for the age on the throne of His kingdom, that joy shall then be revealed, and rest shall appear.'"<sup>33</sup> In 2 Esdras, still another apocalyptic book of approximately the same period, the seer is assured: "It is for you that paradise is opened, the tree of life planted, a city is built, rest is appointed" (8:52).<sup>34</sup> In the *Testament of Daniel* 5:11-12 (about 110-70 B.C.) the expected Messiah will "give to them that call upon him eternal peace. And the saints shall rest in Eden."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup>*Adam and Eve* 51:1-2, in *APOT* 2: 153. Cf. *Apoc. Moses* 43:3. A similar view is found in *Gen. Rab.* 17:5: "There are three antitypes: the antitype of death is sleep, the antitype of prophecy is dream, the antitype of the age to come is the Sabbath." See also *Gen. Rab.* 44:17.

<sup>32</sup>See above, n. 28. Willy Rordorf states, "In the overwhelming majority of passages the sabbath of the end time was thought to be paradise restored," which was associated with the days of the Messiah. Some of the supporting references he gives are: "Isa 2:2-5; 25:6ff.; 60-61 and passim; Assumption of Moses 10:1; Testament of Daniel 5; Enoch 107:1; Syriac Baruch 73ff.; Sibylline Oracles 111:367-380, 652-660; 767-795; v: 281-3." Other references, however, according to Rordorf, indicate that the Messianic age precedes or anticipates the actual establishment of the new age. See his discussion in *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia, 1968), pp. 48-50.

<sup>33</sup>2 *Apoc. Bar.* 72:2 and 73:1, in *APOT*, 2: 518 (emphasis supplied).

<sup>34</sup>From *The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha* (New York, 1965), p. 45 (emphasis supplied).

<sup>35</sup>*T. Dan.* 5:11-12, in *APOT*, 2: 334.

Rabbinical literature provides explicit examples where the sabbath rest and the septenary structure of time are used to signify the world-to-come and the coming of the Messiah. For example, in Sanhedrin 97a in the Babylonian Talmud we read: "Our Rabbis taught: at the conclusion of the septennate the son of David will come. R. Joseph demurred: But so many septennates have passed, yet has he not come!" The seventh age of the world, associated with the coming of the Messiah, is often described as a time of sabbatical rest. Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer 18 states: "The Holy One, blessed be He, created seven aeons, and of them all He chose the seventh aeon only, the six aeons are for the going in and coming out (of God's creatures) for war and peace. The seventh aeon is entirely Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting."<sup>36</sup> In the Mishnah *Tamid* 7:4 we read: "On the Sabbath they sang *A Psalm: A Song for the Sabbath Day*; a Psalm, a song for the time that is to come, for the day that shall be all Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting."<sup>37</sup>

### *Jesus' "Rest" and the Sabbath Rest*

The foregoing examples suffice to show the existence of a Messianic interpretation of the rest of the sabbath. The weekly rest-experience of the sabbath served to epitomize the future peace and rest to be established by the Messiah. The time of Messianic redemption came to be viewed as "all sabbath and rest."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup>*Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer*, trans. Gerald Friedlander (New York, 1971), p. 141. A similar view is expressed on p. 136: "'And on the seventh day God finished his work' (Gen. 2:2). The Holy One, blessed be He, created seven dedications, six of them He dedicated, and one is reserved for the (future) generations."

<sup>37</sup>*The Mishnah*, trans. Robert Danby (London, 1933), p. 589. (Cf. *Roš. Haš. 31a; Ber. 57a.*) I too consider the saying as being genuine; but it should be pointed out that even if the logion were spurious, the fact remains that the Evangelist thought it worthy and the Church accepted it as worthy. Thus, irrespective of the question of origin and authenticity, this saying has something to tell us about how Matthew and his community understood Christ's person and mission.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.* The viewing of the sabbath as the symbol and anticipation of the Messianic age gave to the celebration of the weekly sabbath a note of gladness and hope for the future. Cf. *Gen. Rab. 17*. Friedman, pp. 447-452, shows how certain sabbath regulations established by the school of Shammai were designed to offer a foretaste of the Messianic age.

The existence of this Messianic understanding of the sabbath rest strengthens the concept that Matthew's reference to the "rest" promised by Jesus was considered as the fulfillment of this expected Messianic rest. Such an interpretation fits not only the immediate context, as we shall soon see, but also the overall fulfillment scheme of the Gospel, where significant teachings and events of Jesus' life from his birth to his death are presented as the fulfillment of the OT Messianic prophecies.

In terms of the immediate context, Matthew's placing the logion of the "rest" offered by Jesus right after Jesus' Messianic disclosure was presumably intended to substantiate the latter through the former. In other words, through the structural arrangement of the narrative, Matthew seems to be saying that Jesus not only *revealed* (vss. 25-26) and *proclaimed* (vs. 27) his Messiahship, but *also demonstrated* it by offering the Messianic rest typified by the sabbath.<sup>39</sup>

Luke provides a somewhat similar parallel in the account of the Nazareth address (Luke 4:16-21). Here Jesus announces his Messianic program by quoting a passage from Isa 61:1-3 (and 58:6) which describes, by means of the imagery of the sabbatical year, the liberation which the Servant of the Lord would bring to his people. It would seem that as in Luke 4:16-21 Jesus inaugurates his public ministry by proclaiming himself to be the fulfillment of the Messianic liberation nourished by the vision of the sabbath years (vs. 21), so in Matt 11:25-30 he discloses for the first time his Messiahship by offering the "rest" typified by the weekly sabbath day.<sup>40</sup>

### *Jesus' "Rest" and Sabbath Pericopes*

That Matthew intends to connect the rest offered by Christ with the sabbath rest is suggested by his placing the former (11:28-30) in the immediate context of two sabbath pericopes (12:1-14). The two are connected not only *structurally* but also *temporally* or

<sup>39</sup>Quell/Schrenk, p. 993, points out that Matt 11:28-30 "is not an unimportant appendix" to the preceding two strophes. "It develops further the contents of I and II (vs. 25-27) . . . As *anaw* Jesus promises the *aniyyim* Messianic *menucha*."

<sup>40</sup>For my analysis of Luke 4:16-21, see *Divine Rest*, pp. 145-149, and *From Sabbath to Sunday*, pp. 19-23; and concerning Matt 11:25-30, cf. Plummer, p. 167, and Sabourin, p. 629.

*theologically* by the Matthean phrase "at that time" (*en ekeinō tō kairō*, 12:1). This connection has been noticed by several scholars.<sup>41</sup> Donald A. Carson has noted the significance of the juxtaposition of Jesus' invitation and the two sabbath pericopes as follows: "As if such a juxtaposition were not enough, Matthew then carefully points out that the Sabbath conflicts occurred 'at that time' (ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ)—presumably at or near the time when Jesus had spoken of His rest."<sup>42</sup>

### "Rest" and the "Easy Yoke"

The connection which Matthew establishes between Jesus' offer of his rest and the two sabbath pericopes suggests the possibility that the meaning of the former may be illuminated by the latter. This possibility will be explored shortly. First, let us consider the nature of the "rest" (*anapausis*) that Jesus offers to "all who labor [*kopiōntes*] and are heavy laden [*pephortismenoi*]."

The formula for "rest" is expressed in a conscious paradox: "Take my yoke [*zugon*] upon you and learn from me . . . and you will find rest [*anapausin*] for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (11:29-30). How can a "yoke" be easy and give rest? The paradox evaporates when we remember that the saying is part of Jesus' Messianic self-disclosure. Jesus is speaking to those who already bear a "yoke," that is, to those who "labor" to find truth and assurance of salvation, and who feel "heavy laden" by religious observances (Matt 23:4) or perhaps by the sorrows of life which make them restless. To these Jesus offers his Messianic "yoke," that is, the restful assurance of redemption through attachment to him.

The metaphor of the "yoke" was commonly used to express subordination and loyalty to God, especially through obedience to his law. Thus Jeremiah speaks of the leaders of the people who knew "the law of their God, but they all alike had broken the yoke, they had burst the bonds" (5:5; cf. 2:20). In the following chapter,

<sup>41</sup>See, e.g., J. Daniélou, *Bible and Liturgy* (South Bend, Ind., 1956), p. 226; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London, 1972), pp. 209-210; Rordorf, p. 109; Sabourin, p. 629.

<sup>42</sup>D. A. Carson, "Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels," in D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1982), p. 98.

the same prophet says to the people: "Find rest for your souls" by learning anew obedience to God's law (6:6; cf. Num 25:3). Rabbis often spoke of "the yoke of the Torah," "the yoke of the kingdom of heaven," "the yoke of the commandments," "the yoke of God."<sup>43</sup> Rabbi Nehunya b. Kanah (ca. 70) is reported to have said: "He that takes upon himself the yoke of the Law, from him shall be taken away the yoke of the kingdom and the yoke of worldly care" (*Pirke Aboth* 3:5). What this means is that devotion to the law and its interpretation is supposed to free a person from the troubles and cares of this world.

The imagery of the law as a yoke could deceive us into thinking that the law was generally viewed as a burdensome strait-jacket. In reality, however, to the devout believer the law expressed not slavery, but, as M. Maher aptly puts it, "the desire to place oneself under the direct rule of God and devote oneself entirely to performing his revealed will."<sup>44</sup> Thus, the Psalmist declares "blessed" the person whose "delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps 1:1, 2; cf. 112:1). "Great peace have those who love thy law" (Ps 119:165; cf. 119:18, 105). The conflict between Judaism and early Christianity has unfortunately obscured the fact that there were indeed noble Jews to whom, as C. G. Montefiore affirms, "the Law was a delight and no burden."<sup>45</sup>

### *Yoke: Principle or Person?*

The contrast between Jesus' teaching and the Pharisaic concept of religion has undoubtedly been exaggerated by the apologetic interests of the early Church in frequent conflict with Judaism. The fact remains, however, that Jesus did preach a new

<sup>43</sup>"The yoke of the Torah": *Pirke Aboth* 3:5; *Sanhedrin* 94b; *Gen. Rab.* 67:7. "The yoke of the kingdom of heaven": *Soṭa* 47b; *Sanhedrin* 111b. "The yoke of the commandments": *M. Ber.* 2:2. "The yoke of God": *Pss. Sol.* 7:8. For additional references to the "yoke," see H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash* (Munich, 1933), 1: 608-610; I. Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels* (Cambridge, 1924), pp. 4-14. Cf. also Ecclesiasticus 51:26; Acts 15:10; Gal 5:1; *1 Clem.* 16:17; *Did.* 6:1.

<sup>44</sup>M. Maher, "Take my Yoke upon You (Matt. 11:29)," *NTS* 22 (1976): 99.

<sup>45</sup>C. G. Montefiore, *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings* (London, 1930), p. 239.

religion and offered a new "yoke" of discipleship, which is characterized in Matthew as "easy" (*chrēstos*) and "light" (*elaphron*). This newness must be seen in Jesus' claim to be the Messiah—the One who fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of the OT (cf. Matt 1:22; 2:5, 6, 15, 16; 4:13, 16; etc.); the One who brought the expected salvation and inaugurated the kingdom of God (Matt 4:17; 12:28); the One who possesses "all authority" (*exousia*) and promised to be present with his disciples "to the close of the age" (Matt 28:18-20).

Matthew sets forth the "yoke" of Christ, not as commitment to a new Torah, but as dedication to a *Person* who is the true Interpreter and Fulfiller of the Law and the Prophets. The emphasis on the Person is self-evident in our logion: "Come to *me* . . . take *my* yoke . . . learn from *me* . . . I will give you rest."<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the parallel structure of vs. 28 and 29 indicates that taking the "yoke" of Jesus is equivalent to "come to" and "learn from" him. That is to say, it is to personally accept Jesus as Messiah. Such an acceptance is an "easy" and "light" yoke, not because Jesus weakens the demands of the law (cf. Matt 5:20), but because, as T. W. Manson puts it, "Jesus claims to do for men what the Law claimed to do; but in a different way."<sup>47</sup> The difference lies in Christ's claim to offer to his disciples (note the emphatic *kagō*) the rest of Messianic redemption to which the law, and more specifically, the sabbath, had always pointed.

### 3. *Two Sabbath Pericopes: Matthew 12:1-14*

The two sabbath pericopes which Matthew links structurally and temporally to the logion of the "easy yoke" and "rest" seem to provide what may be called "an halakic interpretation" of how the Messianic rest offered by Jesus is related to the sabbath.

#### *The Disciples' Plucking Ears of Corn: Matthew 12:1-8*

In the first pericope about the disciples' plucking ears of corn on a sabbath (Matt 12:1-8), Jesus employs two arguments to defend

<sup>46</sup>The emphasis on the "rest" to be found in the *Person* of Christ, is made even more emphatic, as noted by William Hendriksen, in the Syriac (Peshitta) translation: "Come to me . . . and I will rest you . . . for *I am restful* . . . and you shall find rest for yourselves" (*The Gospel of Matthew* [Edinburgh, 1973], pp. 504-505).

<sup>47</sup>T. W. Manson, *The Mission and Message of Jesus* (New York, 1938), p. 478.

the conduct of his disciples: the first from the prophetic section of the OT, namely, the example of David (1 Sam 21:1-7); the second, from the Torah proper, namely, the example of the priests, who "in the temple profane the sabbath, and are guiltless" (12:5; cf. Num 28:9, 10; Lev 24:8, 9).

Some exegetes rightly note that the analogy between David and Christ may indicate not only a correspondence of a situation of need but also of persons—on the one hand, David, the king of Israel and the type of the Messiah-king; and on the other hand, Jesus, the Messiah, the antitype of David.<sup>48</sup> However, the second argument about the priests is more directly related to our inquiry into the possible relationship between Jesus' offer of rest and the sabbath. A host of activities, illegal for ordinary persons, were performed by the priests on the sabbath. On that day, Temple services and sacrifices were intensified (four lambs were sacrificed instead of the daily two, Num 28:8, 9). Even though working more intensively, the priests were "guiltless" (Matt 12:5).

Why were the priests "guiltless"? The answer seems to be found in the redemptive nature of their sabbath work. An important function of the sabbath was to provide physical and spiritual "release" (*aphesis*).<sup>49</sup> The intensification of the Temple services and sacrifices on the sabbath pointed to the special release from sin and guilt that God offered to the people on that day. The Book of Jubilees explains that "burning frankincense and bringing oblations and sacrifices before the Lord . . . shall be done on the Sabbath-days in the sanctuary of the Lord your God; that they may atone for Israel with sacrifice . . ." (50:10-11). According to Matthew, Christ finds in the redemptive work performed by the priests on the sabbath a valid basis to justify his own sabbath

<sup>48</sup>See P. Benoît, "Les épis arrachés (Mt. 12:1-8 et par.)," *Exégèse et Théologie* 3 (1968): 238; A. J. B. Higgins, *Jesus and the Son of Man* (Philadelphia, 1964), p. 30; and Sabourin, p. 636.

<sup>49</sup>The term "release" (*aphesis*) is commonly used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew designations for the sabbatical and jubilee years. The same term is used in the NT almost always with the meaning of "forgiveness." This suggests that the vision of the sabbatical release from social injustices functioned as the prefiguration of the Messianic release from the bondage of sin. For an informative treatment of this question, see Robert B. Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord: A Study of Jubiliary Theology in the Gospel of Luke* (Austin, Texas, 1977), p. 27.



ministry, because he views it as "something greater than the temple" (12:6). This apparently means that the redemption offered *typologically* through the Temple's services and the sacrifices offered by the priests, is now being provided *antitypically* through the saving mission of the Son of Man, the Messiah.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, just as the priests were "guiltless" in performing their sabbath services in the Temple, so were Jesus' disciples in serving the One who is greater than the Temple.

A similar argument is found in John 7:22-23, where Jesus argues that if the priests could circumcise on the sabbath a newborn child in order to extend to him the salvation of the covenant, there is no reason to be "angry" with him for restoring on that day "a man's whole body."<sup>51</sup> It appears that Matthew alludes to this redemptive function of the sabbath also in the following verse, where Jesus quotes Hos 6:6, saying, "If you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless" (Matt 12:7). The implication seems to be that the disciples are "guiltless" though they had contravened the sabbath law of complete rest, because the meaning of the commandment is not merely "sacrifice" (that is, a Godward-directed and outward religious duty), but also "mercy" (that is, a manward-directed attitude and activity of compassion and concern motivated by love for God).<sup>52</sup>

The sabbath is linked both to creation (Gen 2:2, 3; Exod 20:8-11) and to redemption (Deut 5:15). By interrupting all secular activities, the Jew was remembering the Creator-God; by acting mercifully toward fellow beings, he was imitating the Redeemer-God (Exod 23:9, 12; Lev 25:41, 42, 54, 55). This was true, not only in the life of the people who on the sabbath day were to be compassionate toward the lower orders of society,<sup>53</sup> but also in the Temple,

<sup>50</sup>This view is held by various scholars. Gerhard Barth, e.g., comments that by the phrase "something greater than the temple is here . . . undoubtedly Jesus is meant, for in him the Messianic fulfillment and consummation has come and he is therefore more than the Temple" (*Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* [Philadelphia, 1963], p. 82).

<sup>51</sup>The text of John 7:22-23 is examined in my *Divine Rest*, pp. 155-156.

<sup>52</sup>For a valuable study on Matt 12:7, see David Hill, "On the Use and Meaning of Hosea 6:6 in Matthew's Gospel," *NTS* 24 (1978): 107-119.

<sup>53</sup>The humanitarian concern of the sabbath is expressed in Exod 23:12—"Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh you shall rest; that your ox and

where the priests engaged in a host of activities designed to extend salvation to the people.

Thus, what Matthew appears to be saying is that the observance of the sabbath must be viewed from the perspective of God's redeeming mercy. On that basis, the conduct of the disciples can be defended.<sup>54</sup>

In the context of this interpretation of the sabbath, Matthew inserts a Messianic proclamation of lordship over the sabbath: "For the Son of man is lord of the Sabbath" (12:8). While Mark links this saying to the previous affirmation, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath" (2:27),<sup>55</sup> Matthew connects ("for" — *gar*) the lordship of Christ over the sabbath to his being "greater than the temple" and to divine mercy contemplated by the sabbath. This suggests that for Matthew, Jesus' lordship over the sabbath is determined by Jesus' Messianic fulfillment of the redemption and mercy typified by the Temple and its sabbath services. If this interpretation is correct, then the logia about Messianic rest (11:28-29) and about Messianic lordship over the sabbath (12:8) are theologically connected by the same fulfillment-motif of the Messianic redemption prefigured by the sabbath.

#### *The Man with the Withered Hand: Matthew 12:9-14*

The Messianic claims of lordship over the sabbath is followed immediately in all three Synoptic Gospels by the sabbath-day healing of the man with the withered hand. The collocation of this story at this juncture seems to serve as the climactic demonstration of how Jesus exerted his lordship over the sabbath, namely, by offering on that day Messianic healing and restoration.

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your ass may have rest and the son of your bondmaid and the alien may be refreshed." Cf. also Exod 20:10; Deut 5:14, 15. Niels-Erik Andreasen aptly comments: "The landlord must be concerned with the human value of his subjects, just as Yahweh was when he secured freedom for his people" ("Festival and Freedom," *Int* 28 [1974]: 289). Cf. Hans Walter Wolff, "The Day of Rest in the Old Testament," *CTM* 43 (1972): 504.

<sup>54</sup>Barth, p. 83, comments: "The saying 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice' thus means here in the first place that God himself is the merciful one, the gracious one, and the Sabbath commandment should therefore be looked upon from the point of view of his kindness."

<sup>55</sup>The logion is examined at length in my *From Sabbath to Sunday*, pp. 55-61.

Matthew omits the scenic details given by Mark, such as the watching of the people and the "anger" of Jesus, in order to focus more sharply on the significance of the healing. In Matthew, the Pharisees voice the question: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" (12:10). Jesus replies by two piercing questions, followed by a conclusion. The questions are: "What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep?" (12:11-12a). The conclusion is: "So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath" (12:12b). The form of the question ("What man . . .?") suggests that Jesus is appealing, not to a rabbinical rule, but to a natural human response and practice.<sup>56</sup>

The type of argument employed by Jesus was commonly used by Rabbis and known as "light and heavy" (*qal we-ḥōmer*), the equivalent of our *a fortiori*.<sup>57</sup> If a sheep can be rescued on the sabbath, then surely a man! But this argument does not speak *directly* to the question raised over the legitimacy of healing in general on the sabbath, particularly of a chronically ill person, like the case in question. Rescuing an animal in urgent need hardly seems to provide the basis to infer a principle about healing sick persons in general on the sabbath. And thus, this answer was not designed to provide the basis for such a broad principle, which, if it were to be implemented literally, would reduce sabbathkeeping primarily to ministry to the sick, thus making impossible any organized form of church or synagogue life. Indeed, Christ's answer avoids such a restrictive view of the sabbath by substituting for the verb "to heal" (*therapeuein*) the expression "to do good" (*kalōs poiein*).

This change in terminology suggests that the example of rescuing an animal serves, not to answer specifically the question about the legitimacy of healing on the sabbath, but to illustrate the general principle of doing good on such a day. The human concern exemplified by the rescuing of a sheep even on the sabbath points to the greater "value" God attaches to a human being. Such a value (cf. the primacy of mercy in vs. 7) is shown by Jesus' act of restoring the man to wholeness. The healing done by Jesus on the

<sup>56</sup>Cf. T. W. Manson, p. 481: "The question is addressed to men as men; and ordinary humanity is expected to supply the answer."

<sup>57</sup>On the *qal we-ḥōmer* argument, see J. W. Doewe, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts* (Assen, 1954), pp. 106-110.

sabbath was intended, not to legitimize medical service as a preferable form of sabbathkeeping, but to reveal his Messianic redemptive mission.<sup>58</sup> The rescuing of a sheep and the restoring of a human being seem to function in the account as Messianic indicators.

In this passage in Matthew, Jesus is not acting on the sabbath as a professional physician, diagnosing diseases and prescribing cures. Nor do the other Gospels present Jesus as healing on the sabbath critically sick patients, emergency cases. In the case of the man with the withered hand, as well as in each and all of the seven sabbath healings reported in the Gospels, it is never a question of help given to a sick person in an emergency, but always to chronically ill persons. These miraculous sabbath healings on behalf of persons with incurable diseases seem to serve as demonstration of the Messianic fulfillment of Jesus' ministry. The pericope of the healing of the man with the withered hand, writes Carson, "pictures Jesus performing a messianic healing on that day. This, then, agrees with Matthew's fulfillment motifs. The gospel rest to which the Sabbath had always pointed was now dawning."<sup>59</sup>

The Messianic nature of Jesus' sabbath healings is reflected in other pericopes, such as the one about the healing of the crippled woman, given in Luke 13:10-17. As in Matthew, Jesus in Luke argues *a minori ad maius*, i.e., from a minor to a greater case. Building upon the practice of untying an animal on the sabbath, he draws the conclusion, "And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan has bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?" (vs. 16). The imagery of loosing a victim bound by Satan's bonds recalls Christ's announcement of his mission "to proclaim release to the captives" (Luke 4:18)—a delightful imagery of the sabbatical year found in Isa 61:1-3 (and 58:6).

#### 4. Conclusion

The conclusion that emerges from this study is that in the Matthean setting the "rest" offered by Jesus (11:28-30) represents

<sup>58</sup>Cf. Sabourin, p. 640, n. 51.

<sup>59</sup>Carson, p. 75.

the fulfillment of the Messianic rest typified by the sabbath. We have found that the two sabbath pericopes which Matthew links structurally and temporally to the logion about the "rest" seem to provide the theological interpretation of the nature of such "rest." The first episode (plucking off ears of corn) seems to qualify the promised "rest" as Messianic *redemption* through its references to mercy and to sabbath services performed by priests in the Temple. The second pericope (man with a withered hand) seems to interpret the "rest" as Messianic *restoration* through the examples of rescuing a sheep and restoring the sick man to health.

### *Was the Sabbath Still Observed?*

In the light of this conclusion we may ask, Did Matthew and his community view the sabbath day itself as no longer to be observed because Jesus had fulfilled its Messianic typology; or was it still to be observed, but in the light of its Messianic fulfillment?

The fact of its *continued observance* is presupposed in several additions in the text of Matthew as compared with Mark. For example, in 12:1 Matthew adds the phrase "his disciples were hungry" (*epeinasan*). The Evangelist's concern to explain by means of this insertion that the disciples did not carelessly break the sabbath suggests that, as Gerhard Barth writes, "in Matthew's congregation the Sabbath was still kept, but not in the same strict sense as in the Rabbinate."<sup>60</sup>

Similarly, Matthew's insertion of the saying about the rescuing of a sheep (12:11), which functions as a basis for the positive principle of sabbath behavior ("so it is lawful to do good on the sabbath," 12:12), presupposes that the congregation observed the sabbath—though with a new perspective, namely, as a time to show "mercy" (12:7) and "to do good" (12:12). The latter, as Montefiore acknowledges, "would have been much too wide an extension or application of the Rabbinic principle for the Rabbis to have accepted."<sup>61</sup>

Another indication of sabbathkeeping is found in Matt 24:20, where the sabbath is mentioned, not polemically, but incidentally

<sup>60</sup>Barth, p. 81; cf. also pp. 79, 83, 163, 244.

<sup>61</sup>Montefiore, *Rabbinic Literature*, p. 243.

as an element unfavorable to a flight of Christians from Jerusalem.<sup>62</sup> The fact that Matthew includes the phrase “neither on a Sabbath” (*mēde sabbatō*), which is omitted in Mark 13:18, “is sufficient proof of the high regard in which they [the Matthean community] held the Sabbath.”<sup>63</sup>

### *How Was the Sabbath Observed?*

How was the sabbath observed by the Matthean community? The expression used by Matthew, “he entered *their* synagogue” (*tēn sunagōgēn autōn*, 12:9; Mark and Luke have “the synagogue”), suggests that his Christian community no longer shared in the sabbath service at the Jewish synagogue. Presumably they had by then organized their own meeting places of worship. The distinction in sabbathkeeping between the Matthean and Jewish communities appears to have been not only topological but also theological. The two sabbath pericopes of Matt 12:1-14 which we have examined seem to reflect the existence of an ongoing controversy between the Christian congregation and the nearby Jewish synagogue. Basically, the controversy centered on the nature of sabbathkeeping. Was the day to be observed primarily as “sacrifice,” that is, as an outward fulfillment of the sabbath law? Or was the sabbath to be observed as “mercy,” that is, as an occasion to show compassion and “to do good” to those in need?

Matthew’s positive humanitarian interpretation of sabbathkeeping is, it appears, in an understanding of how Christ fulfilled the Messianic typology of the sabbath rest. Viewing the “rest” offered by Christ’s redemptive mission as the fulfillment of the Messianic rest typified by the OT sabbath, Matthew does not do away with the literal observance of the day, but rather heightens and broadens its meaning by interpreting sabbathkeeping as utilizing the sabbath day to celebrate and experience the Messianic redemption-rest by showing “mercy” and doing “good” to those in need.

<sup>62</sup>See my analysis of the text in *From Sabbath to Sunday*, pp. 69-71.

<sup>63</sup>Rordorf, p. 120. Cf. E. Lohse, “Sabbaton,” *TDNT*, 7:29—“Matt. 24:20 offers an example of the keeping of the Sabbath by Jewish Christians.”

## EXCURSUS: ORIGIN AND AUTHENTICITY OF THE LOGION

The question of the authenticity of the logion of Matt 11:28-30 is to some extent interrelated to that of its origin. A popular view traces its origin to the wisdom literature, especially the book of Sirach (written ca. 200 B.C.), which offers the closest parallel to our passage:<sup>64</sup>

Turn in unto me, ye unlearned,  
 And lodge in my house of instruction . . .  
 Acquire Wisdom for yourselves without money.  
 Bring your necks under her yoke,  
 And her burden let your soul bear; She is nigh unto them that seek her,  
 And he that is intent (upon her) findeth her.  
 Behold with your eyes that I labored but (little) therein,  
 And abundance of peace have found (51:23, 25-27).<sup>65</sup>

The striking similarity between this passage and Matt 11:28-30 has caused some to conclude that Matthew has created the logion by drawing from Sirach or from a lost wisdom writing which both Sirach and Matthew presumably utilized as their source.<sup>66</sup> The most influential comparative analysis of the literary composition of both texts was done by Eduard Norden in the concluding section of his famous book *Agnostos Theos*, first published in 1913. Norden shows that Sir 51:1-11 begins with a prayer of thanksgiving like Matt 11:25-26.<sup>67</sup> It continues by describing how God gave wisdom to Ben Sirach (51:13-22), comparable to Matt 11:27, where Jesus says "All things have been delivered to me by my Father." Then it closes with an appeal to the ignorant of Wisdom (51:23-27), somewhat similar to the appeal found in Matt 11:28-30.

<sup>64</sup>For a good defense of this view, see M. Jack Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology and Law in Matthew's Gospel* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), pp. 99-108; cf. H. D. Betz, pp. 10-24.

<sup>65</sup>APOT, 1: 516-517.

<sup>66</sup>Rudolf Bultmann holds that "Matt. 11:28-30 is a quotation from Jewish Wisdom Literature put into the mouth of Jesus," yet he sees "no compelling reason for denying it to him [i.e., Christ]" (*The History of the Synoptic Tradition* [New York, 1963], p. 160).

<sup>67</sup>Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos. Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede* (Leipzig & Berlin, 1913; with further printings). For the following discussion of Norden's views, see pp. 277-308.

The presence of these similarities, as well as of certain divergencies, led Norden to conclude that both Matthew and Sirach are dependent upon an existing tripartite literary schema which he calls *Redetypen*, consisting of (1) thanksgiving for revelation; (2) transmission of wisdom (*gnōsis*); (3) invitation and appeal. To support this literary historical model, Norden adduces examples where variants of this basic pattern are found, namely, Sir 24; Odes of Solomon 12 and 33; Poimandres, *Corpus Hermeticum* 1:31 and 10:15; and in the NT, Rom 11. He believes this type of discourse derives from the "mystical-theosophical literature of the Orient," which after a long historical evolution would have reached and influenced primitive Christian literature. Thus, in Norden's view, Matt 11:25-30, often called "The Hymn of Thanksgiving," derives from a mystical treatise which the author of Q (the source used by Matthew) would have placed in the mouth of the historical Jesus at a time when the exaltation of his person had been accomplished. The logical conclusion of Norden, then, is that Matt 11:25-30 constitutes a literary unit which was already found in Q, but which is not genuine because Jesus could not have utilized "forms and ideas of theosophical mysticism."

Norden's methodology and conclusions are open to serious questions which I can touch upon only briefly here. For example, is it not arbitrary to argue for the original unity of our passage and against its genuineness on the basis of its alleged dependence on an existing literary model and ideology? First of all, the existence of a *Redetype* is not self-evident even in Sir 51. David Hill, for example, maintains that "Sir. 51 did not originally form a unity; it is a thanksgiving-hymn to which an alphabetical acrostic was attached."<sup>68</sup> Second, if the entire passage (Matt 11:25-30) constituted a literary unit in the Q source used by Matthew, why then did Luke (10:21-22) omit the latter part (vss. 28-30), which deals with the easy yoke and rest? The immediate context in Luke (the return of the Seventy, Luke 10:17-20) hardly seems to justify such an omission. Third, can genuineness be legitimately questioned or denied on account of literary similarity? Alexander B. Bruce perceptively queries that if Ben Sirach ended his prayer by inviting fellowmen "to share the benefits which σοφία has conferred on himself," why could not "Jesus of Nazareth close *His* prayer with a similar address?"<sup>69</sup> Fourth, the contrast between Sir 51:23-27 and Matt 11:28-29 is perhaps more important than their similarity. Ben Sirach invites the unlearned to himself, saying: "Bring your necks under her yoke . . . Behold . . . I have labored but (little) therein and abundance

<sup>68</sup>Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, p. 204.

<sup>69</sup>A. B. Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels*, The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1942), p. 1979. Similarly T. W. Manson, p. 478, notes, "If the author of *Ecclesiasticus* could think of such words, so might Jesus."



of peace have I found" (vss. 26-27). Here the *sophos*, the scholar of the law, counsels men to accept the yoke of law, as indicated by his reference to the "house of instruction" in vs. 23 (an obvious reference to the *Beth ha-Midrash*, the school of the Law). Unlike Ben Sirach, however, Christ in Matt 11:28-29 has not learned the secret of rest at the school of the Law, but claims to possess it in himself ("I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you"). It appears, as noted by T. W. Manson, that "Jesus claims to do for men what the Law claimed to do; but in a different way."<sup>70</sup> These conceptual differences discredit the view that Matt 11:28-30 derives directly from wisdom literature, such as the book of Sirach.

Other theories have been adduced to explain the origin of our pericope. Eduard Meyer believes that Matt 11:25-30 is a unified "hymn" created by the primitive church to express the yearning for salvation and peace, for direct communion with the supernatural world of the divine.<sup>71</sup> A somewhat similar view is expressed by Tomas Arvedson in his *Das Mysterium Christi*. He regards the whole passage as a liturgical hymn produced by certain mystical elements within Christianity in order to invite believers to the celebration of the mysteries.<sup>72</sup> The hymn consists of two parts: (1) the "hymn of thanksgiving" (vss. 25-27), presumably composed in Hellenistic religious language; and (2) an "invitation to take part in the mystery" (vss. 28-30), written in typical wisdom speech.<sup>73</sup>

Martin Dibelius sees the saying as being derived from the kind of Hellenistic piety which emphasizes revelation through the sons of the gods. He finds support for his view in the emphasis which the passage places upon "gnosis," upon the person of Christ as revealer, and upon salvation as "rest."<sup>74</sup> Dibelius argues that the "combination of self-recommendation and of the preaching of conversion is the typical mark of the divine or semi-divine herald of revelation in Hellenistic religiousness, i.e., of a mythological person."<sup>75</sup> Therefore, the *Sitz im Leben* of the pericope is to be sought, he concludes, not in the historical teaching of Jesus, but rather in certain Christian circles which transformed Christ's message of repentance and judgment into a kind of redemption-mystery revelation.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>70</sup>T. W. Manson, p. 478.

<sup>71</sup>Eduard Meyer, *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1921), pp. 289-290.

<sup>72</sup>Arvedson, p. 108.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>74</sup>Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (New York, 1965), pp. 279-282.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 282.

The presence of conceptual and terminological similarity between Matt 11:25-30 and some Qumran texts has led other scholars, such as H. Braun and W. D. Davies, to argue for a purely Jewish background of the pericope.<sup>77</sup> Referring to Matt 11:25-30, Davies writes: "They probably emerge from a milieu in which Judaism had been invaded by Hellenistic terminology which had not, however, modified its essential nature."<sup>78</sup> Hans Dieter Betz objects to the attempt to trace the origin of the saying exclusively to either Jewish or Hellenistic religious thought, maintaining instead that "the pericope belongs within hellenistic-Jewish syncretism."<sup>79</sup> The existence of an almost literal parallel to Matt 11:28-30 in gnostic texts, such as logion 90 of the *Gospel of Thomas* and chap. 95 of *Pistis Sophia*, leads Betz to conclude that the saying derives from an independent wisdom tradition from which both Matthew and the gnostic texts have borrowed.<sup>80</sup>

No attempts can be made in this short excursus to evaluate each of the above-mentioned theories, but a few general observations are in order. First of all, one notices that although the explanations given for the genesis of the form and/or content of the saying under consideration differ considerably, there is substantial agreement in viewing the logion as being, not a genuine pronouncement of Christ, but rather a creation of the community or of Matthew. Methodologically, it seems rather arbitrary, however, to hold that the historical Christ in principle could not have uttered this logion and could not have utilized some concepts of the wisdom literature to clarify the nature of his mission. "If the primitive community," Lino Randellini points out, "allegedly made use of wisdom and apocalyptic literature to express her faith in the work of Christ, why could not Christ have done something similar?"<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, we may ask, Is it conceivable that Matthew or the primitive community invented this saying with the help of Jewish wisdom literature or Hellenistic religious thought? It is important to recognize, as noted by F. Burkitt, that "it is not so easy to make new sayings and new parables like those in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke; at least that kind of speech does not make itself heard in the extant remains of what the first four

<sup>77</sup>See H. Braun, "Qumran und das Neue Testament," *TRev* 28 (1962): 119-121; and W. D. Davies, "'Knowledge' in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Matthew 11:25-30," *HTR* 46 (1953): 113-139.

<sup>78</sup>W. D. Davies, *Christian Origins and Judaism* (London, 1962), p. 144.

<sup>79</sup>H. D. Betz, p. 19.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>81</sup>Randellini, p. 215.

generations of Christians wrote."<sup>82</sup> This recognition is not in conflict with William Manson's observation that "form may be bestowed or imposed on words or traditions which have originated in some quite other milieu than that which finally stamps them."<sup>83</sup> At the same time, as Manson also remarks, it is possible "to hold with Harnack that these logia originated on the lips of Jesus and reveal his authentic claim to offer men in his teaching a saving knowledge of God."<sup>84</sup>

A common argument against the genuineness of Matt 11:28-30 is its supposed absence in Q, since Luke omits it. This argument was especially popular thirty or forty years ago, when any Synoptic text which could not be traced to the Two-Document theory was inevitably regarded as suspicious. "That this was a dangerous assumption we now realize," writes A. M. Hunter. "For, on this reasoning, about half of Christ's parables, including many of his greatest, would at once be branded with a reputation of dubious historicity; which is plainly absurd."<sup>85</sup>

Whether or not Matt 11:28-30 stood in Q should not be the factor determining the genuineness of the logion. We have no criteria for establishing whether Q was any more or less authentic than other existing sources Matthew may have used. In fact, there are still unanswered questions regarding the origin, development and Greek translation of Q. If one wishes to express a judgment on the authenticity of the logion in question, it is perhaps preferable to give greater attention to its linguistic and conceptual characteristics. Several scholars argue in favor of the authenticity of the passage on the basis of Semitic originals glimmering through the Greek text. T. W. Manson, for example, notes that "the passage is full of Semitic turns of phrase" and is "certainly Palestinian in origin."<sup>86</sup> Arnold Meyer discerns a Semitic word-play in the text which speaks for authenticity.<sup>87</sup> R. H. Gundry sees in the logion allusions to Jer 31:25 and 6:16, and to Exod 33:14, which lead him to conclude: "Although this pericope may reflect a stereotyped form of speech used by Oriental teachers, the saturation in OT language and thought and the paronomasia in the

<sup>82</sup>F. Crawford Burkitt, *The Gospel History and Its Transmission* (Edinburgh, 1907), p. 199; cf. Plummer, p. 169.

<sup>83</sup>William Manson, p. 75. As a case in point, cf. Matt 11:25-30 with Luke 10:21-23.

<sup>84</sup>William Manson, p. 75.

<sup>85</sup>Hunter, p. 247.

<sup>86</sup>T. W. Manson, p. 371.

<sup>87</sup>Arnold Meyer, *Jesu Muttersprache* (Freiburg, 1896), p. 84; cf. Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford, 1946), p. 140.

Aramaic speak for authenticity.”<sup>88</sup> Wilfred L. Knox also concludes that “the whole structure of the sentences is Semitic”; thus, he says that if we reject the saying as an authentic utterance of Jesus, “it must be on the grounds of our general attitude to the person of Jesus, not on the ground that its form or language is ‘hellenistic’ in any intelligible sense.”<sup>89</sup>

The content of the saying also has a ring of authenticity, since it harmonizes with OT thought and with the tradition of Jesus’ teachings and person. For example, the promise of “rest” (*anapausis*) to those “who labor and are heavy laden” is consonant, as we have seen in our earlier discussion, both with the expectation of Messianic “rest” and with the attitude of One who rebukes Scribes and Pharisees for loading people with “heavy burdens, hard to bear” (Matt 23:4; Luke 11:46). Similarly, as Hunter points out, “the self-description, ‘I am gentle and lowly in heart’ echoes the description of the Servant in Isaiah 42:2f. and 53:1f. and is apparently confirmed in 2 Corinthians 10:1 where Paul appeals to ‘the meekness and gentleness of Christ’ as to something familiar and well known.”<sup>90</sup>

Indications such as the foregoing have led a number of scholars recently to view this logion as being substantially a genuine utterance of Christ.<sup>91</sup> This is also my own position.

<sup>88</sup>Robert Horton Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Leiden, 1967), p. 136.

<sup>89</sup>Wilfred L. Knox, *Some Hellenistic Elements in Primitive Christianity* (London, 1944), p. 7. The same view is expressed by Quell/Schrenk, p. 993, n. 289.

<sup>90</sup>Hunter, p. 248.

<sup>91</sup>Among those who regard the logion as being essentially an authentic saying of Jesus are Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, p. 207 (“By reason of its form and content, this logion is usually, and rightly, regarded as substantially genuine”); M. V. Lagrange, *Évangile selon S. Matthieu* (Paris, 1948), pp. 226-231; J. Dupont, *Gnosis. La connaissance religieuse dans les épîtres de saint Paul* (Paris, 1949), pp. 58-61; L. Cerfaux, “Les sources scripturaires de Mt. 11:25-30,” in *Recueil Lucien Cerfaux* (Gembloux, 1962), pp. 139-159; Jeremias, *Abba*; and Cullmann, pp. 286-287. Fohrer Wilkens, “Sophia,” *TDNT*, 7: 516, n. 356, lists the following among supporters of the authenticity of the saying: W. Grundmann, J. Bieneck, E. Stauffer, and C. H. Dodd. See also nn. 85-90, above.