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# Redaction Criticism on Trial: The Cases of A. B. Bruce and Robert Gundry

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In 1890, Professor A. B. Bruce was tried for heresy by the Free Church of Scotland because of his published description of the evangelists' licence in adapting their sources. Almost a century later, Robert Gundry was forced to resign from the ETS for his published redaction-critical views on Matthew. The purpose of this article is to compare and contrast the trials of the two scholars and consider potential implications for evangelical scholars as they pursue redaction-critical approaches to the gospels.

## I. Professor A. B. Bruce

Alexander Balmain Bruce was born in Dupplin, Scotland, in 1831, twelve years before the Great Disruption in the Church of Scotland, in which most of the evangelical party left the Church of Scotland and formed the Free Church of Scotland.<sup>1</sup> At that time, Bruce's parents, who were sympathetic to the Free Church's beliefs, moved the family to Edinburgh. In 1845, Bruce entered Edinburgh University but moved to the Divinity Hall of the Free Church in 1849. During his time at university, he experienced a crisis of faith that would later factor into his academic career and his defense at his heresy trial. After graduating, Bruce served as a minister to several Free Church congregations until he was appointed to the chair of Apologetics and New Testament Exegesis at Free Church Hall in Glasgow in 1875.<sup>2</sup>

Bruce's works on apologetics and church hymns had made him popular in the Free Church, though his comfort with German biblical criticism caused many to question his role as a professor. In 1881, he spoke before the General Assembly of the Free Church in defence of his friend, Professor William Robertson Smith of the Free Church College in Aberdeen, who was ultimately removed from that

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1 Stewart J. Brown, 'Religion and Society to c.1900', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Scottish History*, ed. by T. M. Devine and J. Wormald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 78–98, here 92.

2 Michael Jinkins, 'Bruce, Alexander Balmain (1831–1899)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, Sept 2004, online edn), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3724>.

role. Bruce's speech, in which he stated his desire that in the future the Free Church 'shall appear orthodox yet not illiberal, evangelical yet not Pharisaical, believing yet not afraid in inquiry',<sup>3</sup> gave insight into his ecclesiastical perspective. Little did Bruce know that nine years later his professorship would be jeopardized and that he would have to answer to the Assembly as Smith had done.

### 1. Bruce's The Kingdom of God

Controversy erupted after the publication of Bruce's *The Kingdom of God: Or Christ's Teaching According to the Synoptical Gospels* (Edinburgh, 1889) where the primary catalyst was the author's discussion of synoptic issues. In the 'Critical Introduction', Bruce argued that Matthew and Luke used at least two sources – 'one a collection of sayings, the other a collection of narrations similar in contents to the second Gospel'.<sup>4</sup> He noted that Holtzmann argued for an *Ur-Markus* source for the Synoptics,<sup>5</sup> but made clear he opted for the *logia*-source-plus-Mark solution advocated by Bernard Weiss.<sup>6</sup> While the contents of the *logia*, or sayings source, could not be fully known, a good reckoning of them could be deduced from the common material in Luke and Matthew. The two gospels were 'strangely divergent on the whole', but contained such similar content that they certainly often reported the same events.<sup>7</sup> This led Bruce to the conclusion, 'One of two inferences is inevitable. Either one of the reporters (or possibly both) has taken considerable liberties with the source, or the source existed in different recensions, arising in different circles, and under different influences.'<sup>8</sup> While Bruce allowed that the latter was possible, he preferred the former, and immediately began to explain that Luke took the most liberty with the sayings source. However, Bruce was careful to explain that the evangelists wrote to edify:

acting not in a spirit of licence, but with the freedom of men who believed that it was more important that their readers should get a true impression of Christ than that they should know the *Ipsissima Verba* of His sayings.<sup>9</sup>

Bruce considered that all of Luke's variations to the *logia* source could be broken down into three categories: modifications, omissions and additions. One example of a modification, from the Sermon on the Mount/Plain, was Luke changing μισθός (Mt 5:46) to χάρις (Lk 6:32) as the reward for loving others. It was conceivable, said Bruce, that Luke inserted χάρις here and other places 'as if he took pleasure in repeating this watchword of Pauline theology'.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Luke

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3 Ibid.

4 Bruce, *Kingdom*, 3. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations and page numbers are from the first edition of 1889.

5 H. J. Holtzmann, *Die Synoptischen Evangelien* (Leipzig, 1863).

6 Bruce, *Kingdom*, 4. See B. Weiss, *Das Matthaus-Evangelium and seine Lukas-Parallelen* (Halle, 1876).

7 Bruce, *Kingdom*, 5.

8 Ibid., 7.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 8.

changed the τέλειοι as quoted in Matthew's sermon (Mt 5:48) to οἰκτίρμονες (Lk 6:36), to 'remove an element of apparent legalism' and to make the phrase comport more with 'evangelic, or Pauline, habits'.<sup>11</sup>

Bruce posited that Luke made not only alterations to the *logia*, but also omissions to edify his readers. He may have left out the story of the Syrophenician woman to avoid 'scandalizing Gentile readers' by reflecting a harsh manner toward 'pagans'.<sup>12</sup> As an example of an addition by Luke, Bruce mentioned Luke's unique 'Mission of the Seventy', suggesting the possibility that the number seventy may have been symbolic and the mission may have only involved the Twelve.<sup>13</sup> Bruce maintained that one could form 'a very vivid idea of Christ as [Luke] conceived Him', by remembering that Luke primarily sought to avoid misrepresenting Jesus and more generally to provide edification for his readers.<sup>14</sup> However, Bruce was also careful to emphasize that, while Luke may have 'furnished unhistorical settings for' and 'modified some sayings',<sup>15</sup> 'there is not the slightest reason to believe that he invented *logia*'.<sup>16</sup> Bruce generally deemed Matthew's accounts to be closer to the *logia* source than Luke's. Evidence for this conclusion was offered in Luke's less frequent use of 'Father' (a term that was 'truer to the style of the Master')<sup>17</sup> as well as Luke's oft-used terms 'the Apostles' and 'the Lord' in place of 'the disciples' and 'Jesus', reflecting the terminology of the later first-century church.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. Bruce's Trial

A furore erupted at the university when the book was published and the College Committee of the Free Church was called upon to act on the matter. The Committee reviewed *The Kingdom* and then submitted a report to the General Assembly of the Free Church stating that Bruce's writing did not 'afford ground for instituting a process against... [him] as teaching what is at variance with the standards of the Church'.<sup>19</sup> On May 27–29, 1890, the General Assembly met in Edinburgh, and because of the trials of Bruce and another professor, Marcus Dods (whose views on inspiration had been challenged), attendance was the greatest it had been in recent memory, with extra benches having to be added to the

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11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 9.

13 Ibid., 27.

14 Ibid., 32.

15 Ibid., 27.

16 Ibid., 26. See R. T. France, 'The Authenticity of the Sayings of Jesus' in *History, Criticism & Faith*, ed. by Colin Brown (Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 101–43, here 125, for an almost identical description of the redactional activity of the evangelists.

17 Bruce, *Kingdom*, 11.

18 Ibid., 13.

19 *The Case Stated: Statement by Ministers and Other Office-Bearers of the Free Church in regard to the decisions of last General Assembly in the cases of Drs Dods and Bruce* (Glasgow, 1890), 36.

2,000 seat hall and attendees still standing in the door.<sup>20</sup>

Three advocates spoke in Bruce's defense. First, Dr. Ross Taylor reminded the Assembly that Prof. Bruce did not invent the questions concerning gospel origins which he addressed, but that he had 'valiantly striven' to answer them, while choosing to neither ignore them as some 'panic-stricken alarmists' would have, nor to accept the empty philosophy of 'German rationalism'.<sup>21</sup> Next, Principal Robert Rainy defended Bruce's handling, which maintained a high view of inspiration, of the 'vexed questions' of gospel sources and urged the Assembly to remember the importance of professors being allowed to carry on teaching and writing from their own convictions, and not those of others.<sup>22</sup> Last of all, Bruce spoke in his own defense, delivering a remarkable thirty-minute speech (discussed below).

His opponents accused Bruce of holding a view, akin to that of German critics, which was 'dishonouring to our Divine Saviour'.<sup>23</sup> They submitted a motion branding Bruce's work 'irreconcilable with the standards of the church and the position and responsibilities of a professor of theology', and recommending that his case be remitted to the Presbytery of Glasgow, but it failed to pass.<sup>24</sup> Bruce's supporters, led by R. G. Balfour, submitted a lengthy motion that can only be summarized here. First, it concurred with the finding of the College Committee there were no grounds against Dr. Bruce for teaching contrary to standards of the church. Second, it found that Bruce had not been careful enough 'in his modes of statement, and by his manner of handling debated questions as to the motives and methods of the evangelists', thus resulting in 'misunderstandings' and 'painful impressions'. Third, it reminded Bruce of his responsibilities to produce scholarship consistent with the faith and the church, and that this should be evident to the church and to the world. Fourth, it commended Bruce for using his 'many good gifts' in service to the church provided by his theological publications and encouraged his future work.<sup>25</sup> This motion passed by a vote of 392 for and 237 against.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. Bruce's Speech

Bruce began his defence by explaining to the Assembly that *The Kingdom* dealt with a relatively new field of criticism, but that his aim had always been to provide an apologetical and exegetical defense of the reliability of the synoptic gospels. Considering the skepticism of the gospels in 'free-thought circles', Bruce

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20 W. W. Moore, 'The Dods-Bruce Decision', *Presbyterian Quarterly*, Vol. 4 (Jan–Oct 1890), 621.

21 Henry F. Henderson, *The Religious Controversies of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1905), 264.

22 *Ibid.*, 263.

23 *Ibid.*, 260.

24 Moore, 'Dods-Bruce Decision', 623.

25 *Ibid.*, 624.

26 *Appleton's American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1890* (New York, 1891), 747.

wanted to use lines of reasoning which they might deem valid. He wondered whether a candid reader who approached his book would not consider it done in a 'loyal spirit' and 'conservative on the whole'.<sup>27</sup> He expressed his regret that, though he intended 'to do a service to the faith', his work had created misunderstanding by 'infelicity of expression'. He then clarified a matter some had apparently questioned concerning his view of the Bible. Regardless of the great and historic works one might compare it to, the Bible 'is a book by itself, the marvellous literature of a very real revelation which God had made to mankind'. He admitted that while exact definitions of inspiration might differ, he and his opponents agreed on the main question.<sup>28</sup>

Bruce then referred to his days at the university, during a time of church controversy, when he 'made escape from the strife of the Churches to the teaching of Jesus'. He explained that he experienced a crisis of faith when reading of the 'Christian ideal' in the gospels and considering the shadow it cast on 'one's own character, on the religious life of the community, on the course of ecclesiastical history'.<sup>29</sup> He acknowledged the Committee's report and its compliment of his work, but he demurred from accepting it if that acclaim meant only personal success. He stated, 'The question is, "Have I seen Christ and helped others to see Him?"' He added the poignant statement, 'I have been trying all my life to see Jesus and to show Him'.<sup>30</sup>

Thus far in the speech, Bruce had only dealt with his intentions for the book, but he closed by mentioning evidence in his defense from a seemingly unlikely source. Bruce referenced the *Review of Reviews* February 1890 volume in which was given a list of 'Best Hundred Books' for a minister's library.<sup>31</sup> Among those selected was his own *The Kingdom*, and the selection was made by C. W. Hodge of Princeton Theological Seminary, renowned for its conservative positions on matters of inspiration and interpretation of the bible. Bruce puzzled over how 'orthodox Hodge' could endorse a book by a 'heterodox' professor in a list of best books for ministers.<sup>32</sup> As he finished on a conciliatory note, Bruce admitted the grief he had experienced because he had been 'misunderstood by good men' but expressed love for his brethren.<sup>33</sup>

Dr. Bruce's professorship survived his trial in 1890, and he continued to teach Apologetics and Exegesis in Glasgow. He went on to publish a work on apologetics,<sup>34</sup> and he did not shy away from addressing the Synoptic Problem in

27 Henderson, *Religious Controversies*, 266.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., 267.

30 Ibid., 268.

31 C. W. Hodge, 'For a Minister's Library', *Review of Reviews and World's Work: An International Magazine*, Vol. 1 (Jan 1890), 130. Though Bruce did not mention it, Hodge also recommended Alexander B. Bruce, *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ: A Systematic and Critical Study of the Parables of Our Lord* (New York, 1883).

32 Henderson, *Religious Controversies*, 268.

33 Ibid., 269.

34 Alexander B. Bruce, *Apologetics, or, Christianity Defensively Stated* (New York, 1892).

later works. The tone of his language, though, was more guarded concerning the evangelists' liberty with their sources. For example, in 1896 he described Luke's gospel as bearing 'traces of editorial discretion', but refrained from insinuating Lukan inventions.<sup>35</sup> Bruce's last publication was the entry on the 'Synoptic Gospels' in *Expositor's Greek Testament*,<sup>36</sup> which was later cited favorably by Paul W. Felix in *The Jesus Crisis*,<sup>37</sup> a work highly critical of the use of redaction criticism by evangelical scholars in the late twentieth century.

#### 4. Bruce's Later Addition to The Kingdom of God

The controversy surrounding his arguments in *The Kingdom* caused Bruce to reconsider his approach in future editions. Rather than rewrite the 'Critical Introduction' that had caused much of the disquiet, he opted to include a 'Preface' to the Third Edition, which he composed in June 1890.<sup>38</sup> He explained that he added the Preface 'to remove misapprehensions as to the views stated therein regarding the reports of our Lord's words in the Synoptical Gospels'. He admitted that determining whether Luke or Matthew contained the more original form of a saying of Jesus was 'a question of subordinate interest for the practical religious use of Scripture' but important for any work dealing with New Testament theology.<sup>39</sup> He clarified his position on the originality of sayings by stating that the Synoptics give the teachings of Jesus with 'substantial accuracy, though with varying degrees of literal exactness'.<sup>40</sup> He noted that he had always worked with the assumption that his opinions were 'compatible with the inspiration of the evangelists'. Realizing that this assumption had not been understood by some of his previous readers, Bruce included quotes from one of his earlier works to indicate his belief in inspiration.<sup>41</sup> He defended his conclusion that the evangelists may have modified the form of some teachings, but always 'for good and worthy reasons' and with the 'spiritual needs' of their audiences in mind.<sup>42</sup> He preferred this solution, where he attributed the modifications to 'the responsible hands of the inspired evangelists', to one in which the differences in the Synoptics were accidental or dependent upon unknown sources.

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35 Alexander B. Bruce, *With Open Face: Or Jesus Mirrored in Matthew, Mark and Luke* (New York, 1896), 43.

36 Vol. 1, ed. by W. R. Nicoll (London, 1897).

37 Paul W. Felix, 'Literary Dependence and Luke's Prologue', in *The Jesus Crisis*, edited by Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 271–88, here 274.

38 As indicated by his dating at the conclusion of the Preface on page xii. Quotations of the preface are from the sixth edition (New York, 1896).

39 'Preface', vii.

40 *Ibid.*, ix.

41 Bruce, *The Miraculous Elements in the Gospels* (London, 1888), 111–12.

42 'Preface', xi.

## II. Robert Gundry

Robert Horton Gundry was born in Hollywood, California in 1932. Some of his earliest years were spent in Nigeria, where his parents served as missionaries, but he grew up primarily in the US. He received the B.D. from Los Angeles Baptist College and Seminary, and completed his Ph.D. under F. F. Bruce at the University of Manchester in 1961.<sup>43</sup> The following year, Gundry took a professorship at Westmont College in California, an institution where he has continued to teach until present day, though as Emeritus Professor since 2001. His first publication was his doctoral dissertation, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel with Special Reference to the Messianic Hope*.<sup>44</sup> Though Gundry has a lengthy list of publications to his name, it was his commentary on Matthew that brought him the most significant attention in the evangelical world.

### 1. Gundry's commentary on Matthew

Gundry began working on a commentary on Matthew in the 1970s for the *Expositor's Bible Commentary (EBC)* series, but each time he made a submission to the editors – Merrill C. Tenney and James M. Boice (both members of the ETS) – he was told to revise it.<sup>45</sup> As his views on Matthew's use of sources became known, Gundry was asked to present a paper on his upcoming commentary at the 1979 Annual Meeting of the ETS.<sup>46</sup> In the paper, Gundry explained the reasons for his methodology in his soon-to-be-published commentary, which he presumably still thought would be part of the *EBC* series. Gundry tried to persuade his evangelical audience that 'there is a certain theological advantage in combining apostolic authorship with midrashic and haggadic style', and that the Christian faith could not be provided 'a haven secure... from every threat of historical criticism'.<sup>47</sup> Someone sent a copy of Gundry's paper to Harold Lindsell, a former editor of *Christianity Today* and author of *The Battle for the Bible*. In *Battle*,

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43 He also did a half year of research and seminars under Professors Karl Barth and Bo Reicke at the University of Basel, Switzerland, and four months of research at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Dr. Gundry shared much of this information in personal correspondence.

44 *Supplements to Novum Testamentum*, XVIII (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 1967).

45 Leslie R. Keylock, 'Evangelical Scholars Remove Robert Gundry for His Views on Matthew', *Christianity Today* 47 (Feb. 1984); available online at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/novemberweb-only/11-17-42.0.html>. In 1984, D. A. Carson's commentary on Matthew for the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* series (Vol. 8, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) replaced the rejected volume by Gundry. In it, Carson also used redaction criticism, but in a manner more amenable to the ETS's views on inerrancy.

46 According to Donald J. Hagner, 'Interpreting the Gospels: The Landscape and the Quest', *JETS* 24/1 (March 1981), 23–37. Also recounted by Keylock, 'Evangelical Scholars'.

47 Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982; reprint 1994) 636. The paper was published as a 'Theological Postscript' in the commentary, pages 623–40.

Lindsell had positioned himself as one of the most public and vocal evangelical leaders against the historical-critical method.<sup>48</sup> After reading the paper, Lindsell immediately set about the process of trying to have Gundry removed from the ETS. However, at the urging of Richard Longenecker, the ETS decided to wait until Gundry's commentary was published to take any action.<sup>49</sup> Thus, before the commentary was even published, Gundry already had a group of critics waiting for an opportunity to remove him from the ETS. It should be noted that, in March of 1981, also before Gundry published the commentary, Donald Hagner came to Gundry's defence in the pages of *JETS*,<sup>50</sup> demonstrating that there were also others waiting to come to Gundry's aid when controversy erupted.

Gundry was finally able to publish the commentary in 1982, but not as part of the *EBC* series. In it, he offered a meticulous redaction-critical analysis of the Greek text of Matthew.<sup>51</sup> Considering the breadth of Gundry's commentary, it is possible only to offer a brief explanation of the main points regarding the Synoptic Problem. First, the commentary is written from a Two-Source (Mark plus Q) Hypothesis. In fact, Gundry surprisingly posited that Mark and Q were the only sources available to Matthew when composing his gospel.<sup>52</sup> Second, the Q to which Gundry referred was an enlarged one, containing elements normally considered well outside its bounds, including a birth narrative.<sup>53</sup> Third, because of his limited sources, Matthew's divergences from Mark and/or Q were explained by appealing to Matthew's redaction, which the evangelist used quite freely for theological reasons.<sup>54</sup> Fourth, that redaction often came in the form of *haggadic midrash*, or unhistorical embellishment, inserted to compliment the historical narrative which formed the basis of the gospel.<sup>55</sup> Though Matthew's midrash was

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48 'Orthodoxy and the historical-critical method are deadly enemies that are antithetical and cannot be reconciled without the destruction of one or the other'. Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 82.

49 Keylock, 'Evangelical Scholars'.

50 Hagner, 'Interpreting the Gospels', *passim*.

51 So meticulous, in fact, that Carson considered that it should be read 'only in conjunction with a Greek synopsis'. See D. A. Carson, 'Gundry on Matthew: A Critical Review', *Trinity Journal* 13 (1982), 71–91, here 72.

52 Gundry, *Matthew*, xiv–xvi. All quotations and page numbers are from the 1994 reprint.

53 Gundry rejected any appeals to unique traditions to which Matthew may have had access, and preferred to consider all traditions available to Matthew to be present in Q, which was not necessarily a single document, or Mark. See *Matthew*, xvi.

54 See Gundry, *Matthew*, 639, where he explained that 'comparison with the other gospels, especially with Mark and Luke, and examination of Matthew's style and theology show that he materially altered and embellished historical traditions and that he did so deliberately and often'. Most often, Gundry considered Matthew's redaction to be in the form of slight changes of wording and emphasis, but there were times when Matthew's additions were completely unhistorical. The best-known example of this is Gundry's suggestion that Matthew's birth narrative was a 'theological tale'. See his discussion on page 20.

55 For example, Gundry considered the account of Peter walking on the water in Mt 14:28–31 to be 'haggadic midrash on discipleship' based on the previous storm in Mt

not strictly historical, it was an honest literary device used by authors of the time which would have been accepted by his audience.<sup>56</sup> Fifth, unlike the traditional understanding of the Two-Source Hypothesis, Gundry also considered Luke had seen Matthew's gospel, in addition to Q and Mark, when composing his own, but only lightly making use of it.<sup>57</sup>

One can easily see that some of these ideas, especially the notion that the gospels have substantial unhistorical embellishments, could receive an uneasy reception with an evangelical audience.<sup>58</sup> Is not the admission that Matthew created material *ex nihilo* to sermonize a denial of the inerrancy of the Bible?<sup>59</sup> Gundry did not think so, and in the 'Theological Postscript' he went to great lengths to explain why. He warned against pushing modern notions of accuracy and reporting back into history, as well as the conservative tendency to attempt to harmonize biblical differences with unlikely explanations. He offered that the doctrine of inspiration should also consider the notion of canonization; that is, what was chosen for the canon and why. When God closed the New Testament, with Matthew included, it was his inerrant word. Gundry opined,

The verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture implies the full authority of his editing, whatever liberties he took, just as the closing of the canon blocked authoritative editing subsequent to the New Testament. We are not to think, in other words, that materials attributable to Jesus himself possess more authority than materials attributable to Matthew. The Spirit of Christ directed the editing, so that its results, along with the historical data, constitute God's word.<sup>60</sup>

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8:23–27 because of the prominent Mattheanisms (λέγει, Ὀλιγόπιστε, and ἐδίστασας). This midrash embodied confession and obedience, as well as the presence of little faith, crying out, and salvation, making it likely that Matthew inserted it apart from any tradition he knew. See *Matthew*, 299–300.

56 Gundry made a detailed argument ('Theological Postscript', 634–35) that Matthew's audience may well have been accustomed to receiving history mixed with sermonizing, and offered the example from the Old Testament of the Chronicler's adaptation of the history of Samuel-Kings to reflect his more ideal notion of a messianic king. Gundry considered that both the Chronicler and Matthew relied on their readers' knowledge of previous accounts without trying to 'pull the wool over anyone's eyes'.

57 Gundry, *Matthew*, 5, considered the presence of 'Mattheanisms as foreign bodies' in Luke to be evidence that Luke used Matthew 'as an overlay' on Mark and Q.

58 It is appropriate to acknowledge that the furore over the commentary described below was much more the result of Gundry's acceptance of the unhistorical elements in the gospels than his solution to the Synoptic Problem.

59 Gundry, along with all members of the ETS, was required to sign annually the ETS statement that the Bible is 'inerrant in the autographs'.

60 Gundry, *Matthew*, 640.

## 2. Controversy erupts

When the commentary was published in 1982, it became the focus of the 1982 Annual Meeting of the ETS.<sup>61</sup> In Gundry's presence, a highly attended and heated discussion took place concerning his work. While most in attendance were uncomfortable with Gundry's conclusions, 'two camps' emerged with differing opinions as to the proper way to handle such methodology. One camp sought to issue a statement to be attached to the ETS's doctrinal basis about 'hermeneutical methodologies deemed to be inimical to biblical inerrancy', and thus rule Gundry's beliefs outside the bounds of evangelicalism. The other felt that Gundry's methods, while exhibiting 'bad hermeneutics', could still be consistent with his insistence that he held to inerrancy and his claim to be an evangelical. Ultimately, the executive committee affirmed the second approach to Gundry's commentary and Gundry himself.<sup>62</sup> The following item was included in the 'Minutes of the Annual Meeting' of that same volume:

Because of questions raised with respect to Robert Gundry on methodology in interpreting Scripture, the executive committee called attention to the brevity of the Society's doctrinal basis and deemed that this basis does not provide criteria for distinguishing which methodologies are incompatible with the Society's stance on inerrancy.<sup>63</sup>

The committee, under the leadership of outgoing president Alan F. Johnson, declined to take action on Gundry because they considered it sufficient that he had signed the ETS doctrinal statement on inerrancy. However, those opposed to Gundry would continue their fight.

Before Gundry faced his critics at the ETS in a face-to-face forum, he debated with them his methodology in *Matthew* in the March 1983 volume in *JETS*. It is worth noting that Douglas J. Moo's critique of Gundry's commentary was respectful,<sup>64</sup> but disapproving of the methodology on a technical level. Moo questioned the notion of an enlarged Q, Gundry's use of statistics, and his assumption that Luke tended to follow Q most closely. He was particularly dismissive of Gundry's broad use of the category *midrash*, not only because it was ill-defined, but because it called into question the historicity of the gospels (which evangelicals believed the early church prized).<sup>65</sup> The critique provided

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61 This meeting took place at Northeastern Bible College, Essex Falls, New Jersey on Dec. 16–18, 1982.

62 John S. Feinberg, 'Truth, Meaning and Inerrancy in Contemporary Evangelical Thought', *JETS* 26/1 (March 1983), 17–30, here 30.

63 *Ibid.*, 125.

64 Douglas J. Moo, 'Matthew and Midrash: An Evaluation of Robert H. Gundry's Approach', *JETS* 26/1 (Mar. 1983), 31–39; 'Once Again, "Matthew and Midrash": A Rejoinder to Robert H. Gundry', *JETS* 26/1 (Mar. 1983), 57–70.

65 Two important evangelical responses aimed directly at Gundry's definition of Matthew's midrash appeared in the *Gospel Perspectives* series overseen by David Wenham. The first was R. T. France ('Scripture, Tradition and History in the Infancy Narratives of Matthew', in *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 2: *Studies of History and Tradition*

by Norman Geisler was more of a philosophical one,<sup>66</sup> namely that Gundry's methods contradicted his claim to believe in the inerrancy of the Bible. He compared Gundry's midrash to allegory and determined both were unacceptable hermeneutical approaches for evangelicals. Geisler's articles demonstrated his strong desire that Gundry either reject his own work or leave the ETS, and not necessarily by choice. For his part, Gundry spent the better part of four articles explaining and defending his approach and findings.<sup>67</sup> He refused to accept that his methodology was inconsistent with his evangelical convictions.

### 3. *The quest to have Gundry dismissed from the ETS*

Early in 1983, Geisler began circulating a letter calling for Gundry's dismissal from the ETS, a letter that eventually garnered 59 signatures of faculty members from various evangelical institutions. The new ETS president, Louis Goldberg of Moody Bible Institute, decided to form an *ad hoc* committee of six ETS members to present a recommendation for how the society should proceed at the upcoming 1983 ETS Annual Meeting in Dallas. At the business meeting that convened to vote, the committee presented the following three recommendations:

- (1) to appoint a special committee to consider an amendment to the ETS constitution specifying the relationship between biblical inerrancy and 'critical methodologies' such as redaction criticism, (2) to adopt in the interim the Chicago statements of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy as the official interpretation of the ETS doctrinal statement, and (3) to adopt rules for the trial of members.<sup>68</sup>

The suggestion that the ICBI Chicago Statement on Inerrancy become the official interpretation of the ETS was an interesting one. Of the over 300 evangeli-

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*in the Four Gospels*, ed. by R. T. France and David Wenham [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1981] 239–66), who argued that, in the case of Matthew's use of the Old Testament, it was much more likely that Matthew was inspired by actual events to include scriptural comment than the Old Testament influencing Matthew to invent stories. The second was Philip Barton Payne ('Midrash and History in the Gospels with Special Reference to R. H. Gundry's *Matthew*' in *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 3: *Studies in Midrash and Historiography*, ed. by R. T. France and David Wenham, [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1983] 177–215), who placed a similar emphasis on Matthew's 'interpreting an event in terms of the Old Testament' (201). Also note that the entire third volume of the *Gospel Perspectives* series was devoted to the subject of midrash and historiography.

66 Norman L. Geisler, 'Methodological Unorthodoxy', *JETS* 26/1 (Mar. 1983), 87–94; 'Is There Madness to the Method? A Rejoinder to Robert H. Gundry?' *JETS* 26/1 (Mar. 1983), 101–08.

67 R. Gundry, 'A Response to "Matthew and Midrash"', *JETS* 26/1 (Mar. 1983), 41–56; 'A Surrejoinder to Douglas J. Moo', *JETS* 26/1 (Mar. 1983), 71–86; 'A Response to "Methodological Unorthodoxy"', *JETS* 26/1 (Mar. 1983) 95–100; 'A Surrejoinder to Norman L. Geisler', *JETS* 26/1 (Mar. 1983), 109–15.

68 Keylock, 'Evangelical Scholars'.

cal scholars and leaders from around the world who had constructed the 3,871 word document at the request of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, several were prominent in the furore over Gundry's commentary. Prominent signatories included Geisler, Harold Lindsell, Roger Nicole, Robert Thomas, George Knight III, and William F. Luck, chairman of the *ad hoc* committee later appointed by ETS president Goldberg to help solve the Gundry dilemma.<sup>69</sup> The first two motions were defeated by a vote, and the third required a constitutional change to the ETS and therefore could only be read at the meeting and voted upon at the next year's meeting.<sup>70</sup>

That a vote on more than those three suggestions would take place would not be a surprise to many in the audience. Before the business meeting, Geisler had circulated a document with the title, 'Why We Must Vote Now on Gundry's Membership, and Why We Must Vote No on Gundry's Membership'.<sup>71</sup> Two motions, dealing specifically with Gundry and his methods, were made. First, ETS member George Knight III offered the motion that 'the ETS go on record as rejecting any position that states that Matthew or any other biblical writer materially altered and embellished historical tradition or departed from the actuality of events'. A vote was taken and the motion passed by a margin of 119 to 36. Second, Roger Nicole offered the crucial motion that 'the Evangelical Theological Society officially request Dr. Robert Gundry to submit his resignation from membership in this Society; unless he acknowledges that he has erred in his detraction from the historical trustworthiness of the gospel of Matthew in his recent commentary'. The motion passed with a similar margin, 116 for and 41 against. At this, Gundry offered his resignation.<sup>72</sup>

After Gundry's resignation in 1983, the editor of *JETS*, Louis Goldberg, who had been president during the controversy, provided the following admonition to his colleagues at the ETS:

Our society should be spiritually and intellectually mature enough to enable each of us to listen to one another in an atmosphere of respect, giving opposing viewpoints a fair hearing, and then make decisions that are honest before the Lord and intellectually compatible within the framework of evangelical scholarship. Strident propaganda on behalf of one position

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69 'List of Signers of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy'. Facsimile of the original available at the Dallas Theological Seminary Archives, provided at [http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI\\_1\\_typed.pdf](http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1_typed.pdf).

70 Keylock, 'Evangelical Scholars'. Though it is beyond the scope of this study to further investigate, it is worth noting that in November 2006 the ETS officially voted to make the ICBI Chicago Statement on Inerrancy the official definition of inerrancy for the ETS in response to a dispute over Open Theism. See Andreas Köstenberger, *Quo Vadis Evangelicalism? Perspectives on the Past, Direction for the Future: Nine Presidential Addresses from the First Fifty Years of the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 218.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

or another should never be the tactic to ascertain the truth that all of us seek.<sup>73</sup>

Goldberg made clear that such an 'atmosphere of respect' was not present in the Gundry case.

Of course, Gundry's resignation from the ETS did nothing to diminish his work as a scholar thereafter. He continued as professor at Westmont and published multiple books and articles over the next two decades, including monographs on Mark and John.<sup>74</sup> The work on John was especially revealing because it made clear, in no uncertain terms, that Gundry remained an evangelical scholar with a concern for evangelicalism.

### III. A Comparison Of The Two Cases

There are a few obvious parallels between the cases of Bruce and Gundry worth noting. First, both scholars were professing evangelicals with membership in evangelical movements. Second, both published works on the gospels which caused controversy among their evangelical fellowships. Third, both faced accusations of unorthodoxy from some within their fellowships. Fourth, the accusations were the result of redaction-critical assessments which both had made. Fifth, even after their trials, both men continued to work as evangelicals for the evangelical cause.

Of course, there are as many differences between the two cases as there are similarities, with the most obvious being the gulf between the times and places. The nature of the evangelical organizations of which Gundry and Bruce were a part were categorically different, with Gundry facing expulsion from a voluntary fellowship of scholars, and Bruce facing the censure of his own church as well as the loss of his faculty position supported by that denomination. The stakes were higher for Bruce. Likewise, the difference in the degree to which the scholars were willing to allow that the evangelists took liberties with their sources was unmistakable. Gundry attributed a much greater role to Matthew's use of midrash than Bruce did to the 'considerable liberties' taken by Luke. However, the distinction between the methods of both scholars could be seen as one of degree and not of kind, because both scholars portrayed the gospel writers as embellishers of their sources. But without a doubt, the most striking difference between the ordeals of the two is the outcomes of their trials. A natural question which arises is: 'Why did Bruce's professorship survive his trial while Gundry's membership in the ETS did not'?

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73 Louis Goldberg, 'Guest Editorial', *JETS* 27/1 (Mar. 1984), 1–2, here 2.

74 R. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); *Jesus the Word according to John the Sectarian: A Paleofundamentalist Manifesto for Evangelicalism, Especially Its Elites, in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

#### IV. Potential Lessons

It is difficult to question Bruce's evangelical convictions given the body of his work devoted to the evangelical cause. His statements after the controversy created by *The Kingdom* reveal several conclusions he had reached regarding the appropriate manner for evangelical scholars to discuss source- and redaction-critical issues. First, the evangelical scholar must be careful in his or her descriptions of the evangelists' use of sources.<sup>75</sup> By contrast, Gundry went to great lengths to describe Matthew's creativity, but often failed to link Matthew's creations with reliable tradition.<sup>76</sup> Second, even with the best of intentions, evangelical scholars can easily be misunderstood when addressing issues regarding the gospels because those documents are so integral to the evangelical faith. Both Bruce and Gundry faced critics who assumed their use of historical-critical methods was a tacit endorsement of the results obtained by liberal scholars. Third, it is important for the evangelical scholar, if he or she wants to avoid or at least minimize misunderstandings, to explicitly affirm a belief in the inspiration of scripture. If Bruce's experience is typical, then this affirmation can include an explanation of the complicated nature of defining inspiration. Admittedly, Gundry also offered an explicit statement of his belief in the inspiration of the Bible.<sup>77</sup> Fourth, though the subject can be divisive, many, if not most, of an evangelical scholar's literary audience can accept his or her critical conclusions given the appropriate reasons to trust the scholar. Bruce was respected as a defender of the faith with the highest regard for Jesus, and this reputation aided him both in his defense and the confidence with which his allies defended him. While Gundry had his defenders at the ETS, it is obvious that few members were willing to stake their own reputations in defense of Gundry's methods. While Gundry had certainly produced 'evangelical-friendly' works,<sup>78</sup> his use of redaction criticism in the commentary on Matthew overshadowed the less controversial contribu-

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75 See Grant Osborne, 'The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism: Critique and Methodology', *JETS* 22/4 (Dec. 1979) 305–22, for similar arguments.

76 A rough parallel may be seen in the work of E. Earle Ellis, an evangelical contemporary of Gundry, who also appealed to midrash at times to describe the liberties taken by the evangelists. However, Ellis was careful to couch his redaction-critical assessments in terms of the prophetic nature of the early church, so that additions made by the gospel writers were inspired expansions of their sources. See, for example, E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, *The Century Bible* (London: Nelson, 1966, rev. 1974), x, 8, 40, 172–73, 191, 219, 244–45; 'Reading the Gospels as History', *Criswell Theological Review* 3.1 (1988), 3–15, here 13–14; *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 29. While Gundry's methodology has been scrutinized and rejected by many evangelicals, Ellis's work has received little criticism from evangelicals.

77 See Gundry, *Matthew*, 640.

78 See, for example, R. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), which has been reprinted five times; *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973); 'Recent Investigations into the Literary Genre "Gospel"' in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. by R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 97–114.

tions he had made to evangelical scholarship before its publication. In fact, this kind of careful attention to tradition, language, and the role of inspiration when using critical methodologies has been called for before by evangelical scholars who have avoided the kinds of scrutiny faced by Bruce and Gundry.<sup>79</sup>

### Abstract

This article deals with the trials of two evangelical scholars, one from the late nineteenth century, Alexander B. Bruce, and the other from the late twentieth, Robert Gundry. Both faced accusation and judgment from their peers because of their redaction-critical remarks about the synoptic gospels. Bruce was tried by the Free Church of Scotland, while Gundry's membership in the Evangelical Theological Society was challenged. After considering the cases of both, consideration is given to potential lessons that evangelical scholars who use redaction-critical methods may learn from the experiences of both men.

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79 See the above citations of R. T. France, and Grant Osborne, as well as David Wenham, 'Source Criticism', in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. by I. Howard Marshall, (Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1977), 139–52, and David Wenham, *The Rediscovery of Jesus' Eschatological Discourse* (Gospel Perspectives 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1984), 7.