the existence in the first century of phenomena closely comparable with the
types modelled. But even if this was wrong, it is indisputable, as noted by
Malina and Neyrey on p. 72, that the values and meanings shared by con-
temporary Mediterranean villagers are far closer to those of the ancient
Mediterranean area than those of modern North Americans or North Eu-
ropians.

The Social World of Luke–Acts is an indispensable entree to the cultural
script in which the Lucan corpus is composed. It offers interpreters a
wealth of socially realistic and sophisticated scenarios and possibilities to
use in probing the meaning of the text for its original audience.

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OVERMAN, Andrew J., Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social

J. Andrew Overman’s Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social
World of the Matthean Community marks a significant milestone in the ever
widening use of the social sciences in New Testament interpretation. In
this book Overman systematically applies insights from the sociology of
knowledge across a wide range of Matthean data. His concern is with the
extent to which the social world of the Matthean community has been in-
fluenced by pressures of various kinds acting upon it. For his sociology he
relies on writers such as Max Weber, A. Schutz, E. Hirsch, Thomas Luck-
mann and, above all, Peter Berger, whose works The Social Construction of
Reality (1969), co-authored with Thomas Luckmann, and The Sacred Canopy
(1969), with their detailed elaboration of the process of legitimation within
a religious community, Overman rightly recognizes as offering an invalua-
ble body of material for comparative use with the New Testament texts.
The significance of the notion of symbolic universes, an important part of
Berger’s notion of legitimation, in the higher reaches of New Testament
theology has recently been endorsed by Heikki Räisänen in Beyond New

At the same time Overman very properly insists upon the continuing
necessity of redaction criticism in this task. His subject is Matthew and his
community and to isolate that as a truly distinctive area of inquiry depends
primarily upon redaction criticism, since otherwise we could not be sure
we were dealing with Matthew as opposed to some more general phenome-
non in first-century Christianity.

After an initial chapter which focuses on certain features common to
both the Matthean community and formative Judaism, such as the central
ity of the law (which he relates to what he calls the "sectarian" nature of many of the "communities" in Palestine), Overman proceeds in Chapter 2 to present a profile of the formative Judaism of the post 70 CE period. He treats such issues as patterns of leadership, community definition and defence, means of expulsion and various forms of legitimation employed. The Jewish texts occupying much of his attention are 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra, the Psalms of Solomon, various parts of 1 Enoch and the Testament of Levi.

In Chapter 3, which occupies nearly half of the work, Overman investigates the social development of the Matthean community and deals with topics such as scripture, interpretation and tradition, ordering the life of the community, institutionalization and Matthew’s presentation of discipleship. The treatment of discipleship is perhaps the most important section in the book for demonstrating the fruitfulness of his social-scientific models.

Overman’s conclusions are presented in Chapter 4—"The Nature and World of the Matthean Community". He sees the community for whom the Gospel was written as clearly "sectarian" in relation to formative Judaism, deliberately responding to, even confronting, developments in that Judaism in a number of significant respects—in the use of the ekklesia as a gathering place instead of the synagogue, in the emphasis given to the teaching authority of the disciples, and in the centrality accorded the law.

Although Overman’s aims are laudable and his style of analysis appropriate (with the caveat that a longer study than this would benefit from attention to the literary characteristics of the work), it is submitted that his methodology has failed to live up to its potential and that, accordingly, many of his exegetical conclusions are suspect. There are two main reasons for this.

First, he seems to have an insufficiently firm grasp on the social-scientific perspectives he employs. This is especially so with regard to the critically important issue of sectarianism. His definition of "sectarian" to mean a group which is, or perceives itself to be, a minority in relation to the group which it understands to be the parent body, by whom it is persecuted (p. 8), is unacceptably wide. There is a critical distinction to be drawn between a reform movement and a sect; although both entities fit Overman’s definition, a sect demands of its adherents exclusivity of membership. A sect has broken decisively from its mother church, whereas a reform movement remains within its ranks, even in spite of opposition to its activities. For this critical distinction see the present reviewer’s Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts (1987) (especially at pp. 51–53), Francis Watson’s Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles (1986) (especially pp. 19–20) and Bengt Holmberg, Sociology and the New Testament (1990) (pp. 101ff.) The introduction of the notion of reform movement might have saved Overman from some of the unfortunate consequences of his excessively wide definition of sect.