TORAH AND TROUBLESOME APOSTLES IN THE DIDACHE COMMUNITY

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1. Introduction

The Didache has long been one of the most puzzling of the early Christian writings. It is routinely left out of consideration when an analysis of the evolution of early Christianity is attempted. Alternatively, it is relegated to some rural backwater out of the mainstream of development. J. P. Meier, for instance, throws in the towel and declines to use Didache at all in his reconstruction of the development of Antiochene and Syrian Christianity, concluding that:

We are left with something of a paradoxical situation: while some of the theological and liturgical traditions of the Didache show expansion upon and perhaps decline from those of Matthew’s gospel, the church structure remains more primitive than that of Ignatius. Meier sees Didache as the product of an isolated rural community, yet its influence is too widespread and early for this marginal origin. J.-P. Audet’s attempt at a redactional analysis of the

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1 This is a development of a paper presented to Dr. E. Bammel’s Seminar on Christian Origins in Cambridge, while the author was on sabbatical leave sponsored by the Human Sciences Research Council.


3 Even the textual evidence argues against this, since texts or fragments of the Didache have been found in Egypt, Ethiopia, Asia Minor and Syria. It has been used by a wide variety of secondary authors and was by some regarded as “Scripture”.

Didache is more convincing, as is his early dating for the writing, although his reconstruction is speculative and unlikely. In this paper, I will be attempting to follow one trajectory through the Didache, namely the question of false apostles, and the threat they posed to the community. This represents the situation of the community at a particular stage of its development, which has been superseded by the final redaction of the text.

Form criticism seeks, by isolation and delineation of a literary form, to determine the life situation of the community which uses the form. On the other hand, since it is in the redaction of a text or tradition that the developing interests of a community at any particular stage of its history can be determined, particular care needs to be taken to map out the different layers of a developing tradition. This article seeks, on the one hand, to make certain deductions concerning the Sitz im Leben of the Didache on the basis of the form of instructions given in a community rule, and on the other hand, to draw conclusions on the basis of the redaction of this form and its contents in the face of changing circumstances and controversy. The tradition concerning apostles and its redaction represent a historical dynamic, which is analysed in terms of its relation to the use of the same traditional material in Matthew’s gospel.

2. The Form and Redaction History of Didache 11:1-6

While, as we have seen, it has often been noted before that Didache 11 is a patchwork of differing redactional stages, the process of

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5 It is in the nature of the community rule to be constantly updated, in accordance with the changing situation of the community. The manifest redactions of the Manual of Discipline are a contemporary example of such an ongoing process. For a convincing analysis on this process in 1QS, see J. M. O’Connor’s analysis (“La genèse littéraire de la Règle de la Communauté”, RB 76, 1969, 528-549).

6 H. Conzelmann succinctly sums up the methodology with regard to the gospel material in Theology of St. Luke, trans. G. Buswell (Harper & Row, 1960), 12: “The first phase in the collection of the traditional material ... has been clarified by form criticism. Now a second phase has to be distinguished, in which the kerygma is not simply transmitted and received, but itself becomes the subject of reflection.... This new stage is seen both in the critical attitude to tradition as well as in the positive formation of a new picture of history out of those already current, like stones used as parts of a new mosaic”.

7 Failure to take account of these stages has created confusion in the use G. Theissen makes of this passage in his theory of Wanderradikalismus (The First Followers of Jesus [London: SCM, 1978], 7-30). This confusion is present also in