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Scribal Diakonia

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When calling some piece of writing 'Holy Scripture', one admits that religious experiences can be verbalized by gifted spokesmen or inspired authors and that they can be preserved in writing as a divine revelation for the benefit of other people. One postulates, therefore, the need of persons who write, or rewrite, or write about the original communication. The Holy Bible has been such a written as well as Living Word due to the service of many scribes who have copied or translated its authentic text and have acted as the charismatic interpreters of the Spirit behind the letter. There exists, however, a caricature of the 'scribe' as a hypocritical doctor of the Law or as a pedantic show-off. The question arises whether scribes, through their mighty pen, have sometimes not been prophetic critics of oppressive conditions in their own time and whether new scribes are not again called to be the bold exegetes of contemporary life situations. But, who exactly were those scriptural scribes and what was their clerical function in Israel till the beginning of the Church ?

The Hebrew Terminology

From ancient historical time scribes started inscribing on cuneiform tablets and engraving rock-edicts. Upper class scribes cared for temple archives and served as secretaries in the king's palace. Egyptian archivists had great self-esteem. In *The Satire of the Trades*,¹ composed c. 2,000 B.C., the scribal profession is extolled above all other occupations: 'There is nothing which surpasses writing, because the scribe acts as his own boss and he enjoys prosperity and health. Scribedom is the highest of all callings!' According to a papyrus from Thebes, written c. 1,300 B.C., learned scribes are praised because 'theirs is an everlasting name; their books of wisdom are their pyramids. . . More

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¹ J. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969³, p. 432f, and M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, University of California Press, (1971) 1975, vol. I, pp. 184-92.

effective is a book than a decorated tombstone . . . It is writing that makes a scribe remembered in the mouth of a reciter'.²

Most Bible translations, however, tell us about 'magicians' in Egypt (Gen. 41 : 8-24 ; Ex. 7 : 11-22 ; 8 : 3. 14-15 ; 9 : 11) or in Babylon (Dan. 1 : 20 ; 2 : 2) ; but the Hebrew term *hartummîm*, lit. 'incisers', is probably not so depreciatory since it is related to *hêret*, i.e. the stylet of a scribe. Indeed, in the Greek, Septuagint we find *exegetai*, 'interpreters', or *epaoidoi*, 'incantators'. In Egyptian the title for a royal secretary in charge of official correspondence was *shisha* and it is apparently used as a proper name in I Kings 4 : 3, 'the sons of Shisha were scribes' (though one could read 'Shavsha' as in I Chron. 18 : 16, if not the 'Seraiah' of 2 Sam. 8 : 17 or 'Sheva' of 2 Sam. 20 : 25).

The trained Egyptian scribes were, of course, experts in their own hieroglyphic and hieratic script, but with the increase in foreign embassies they had to correspond also in Assyro-Babylonian, Hittite or Ugaritic wedge-shaped characters. Much later they had to master the widespread Aramaic script.³ According to Jewish tradition, echoed in the writings of Josephus Flavius and Philo of Alexandria (see also Acts 7 : 22), Moses himself was educated as an Egyptian scribe. This may not be mere wishful thinking, for besides the Egyptian taskmasters Israelite 'foremen' are mentioned in Exodus 5 : 6, 10, 14, 15, 19. They were, in fact, 'scribes' (as translated in the LXX, cf. the French versions *TOB* fn. and *Bible Osty*). The Hebrew term *sôterim*, lit. 'writers' (*sâtaru* in Babylonian, 'to write') is further translated 'officers' in RSV, e.g. Numbers 11 : 16 ; Deuteronomy 1 : 15 ; 2 Chronicles 34 : 13 ; but the LXX invariably keeps *grammateis* (17 times or *grammato-eisagôgeis*, i.e. 'registrar'; 6 times). The Mishnah considers Moses to be Israel's primeval scribe, since he had direct access to the Torah commandments, the very prescriptions inscribed by God's finger. Yet, to attribute already to Moses the characteristics of a Hebrew scribe in the sense of an authoritative expounder of the God-given Law is, certainly, anachronistic. At the most, we idealize him as the first *scriptor*⁴ of divine utterances. There were also lower class scribes, seated at city gates and in rural markets. The first scribes in pre-monarchical Israel must have been such ordinary 'scriveners', employed by illiterate land-owners and traders.

² Pritchard, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

³ P. Grelot, ed., 'Les Scribes de la Haute Araméenne', in *Documents Araméens d'Égypte*, Paris : Ed. Cerf., 1972, pp. 48-59.

⁴ In Latin both *scriba* (public writer, official scribe, clerk, secretary) and *scriptor* (independent writer, copyist, author, historian) are used ; also *libarius*, at first, meant scribe or copyist.

The common Hebrew word for scribe, however, was neither *hartom* nor *sofer*, but *sopher*. Its primary meaning seems to be 'penman, clerk, recorder'. The original meaning of the Semitic root *s-p-r* is probably not 'to count, reckon, number',⁵ but 'to send' (*siparu* in Babylonian). It was customary to correspond by sending (*epistello* in Greek) epistolary ostraca or potsherd tablets. Private communications were locked in a diptych tablet, called *deleth* (lock, door, *edelu* in Akkadian, 'to close'). The word *deltos* in Greek for writing tablet or slate is clearly derived from that desire of keeping personal notes 'closed' to indiscreet readers!

Military Scribes

The nouns *sopher* in Hebrew or *sâpher* in Aramaic occur sixty times in the Bible. One of the earliest texts, the Song of Deborah, mentions chieftains who bear 'the staff of a scribe' (Judg. 5:14, *sebhet sopher*). Undoubtedly, the meaning 'scribe' does not fit in this case. According to the NEB one should understand the staff of a 'musterer' who musters the batallion; the TOB takes it for a gloss that is fully expanded in some Mss of the LXX (*en rhabdōi diegeseōs grammateōs*, lit. 'with the sceptre of narration by a scribe'); and the *Biblia Hebraica* edition proposes to read *sopher* in the sense of bronze, like the Akkadian *siparru*. Moreover, a scribe would normally not carry a marshal's staff but a simple feather, as the witty rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah observes: 'Great is man's work, for every craftsman walks out with the implements of his calling and is proud of them. Thus, the weaver walks out with a shuttle in his ear, the dyer walks out with wool in his ear, and the scribe walks out with his pen behind his ear. Indeed, all are proud of their craft'.⁶ Metaphorically, the psalmist speaks of his tongue as 'the pen' (*et*, LXX: *kalamos*) of a ready (*mâhîr*, LXX: *oxugraphos*, NAB: 'skillful', NEB: 'expert') scribe' (Ps. 45:1).

Still, when analysing all occurrences of *sopher* in a Bible Concordance, one finds at least three other texts which give it a military overtone. The first passage is 2 Kings 25:19, which lists 'the secretary of the commander of the army who mustered the

⁵ E. Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979 (rev. Eng. ed. by G. Vermes, F. Millar and M. Black), 8 vol. II, p. 324; n. 2: 'The Talmudic etymology of *soferim* as they who count the letters of the Torah . . . is without historical significance. . . . A *s-w-p-r* is a person professionally concerned with books, e.g. as a writer. . . . or a book-binder. . . . In the O.T., a *sofer* is originally an officer dealing with written records, esp. the king's chancellor charged with drafting state documents'.

⁶ C. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, New York: Schocken, 1974, p. 444.

people of the land' as an important person to be executed straight-away after the fall of Jerusalem. Instead of 'secretary' the NAB translates plainly 'scribe'; the NEB prefers 'adjutant-general' and leaves out the subsequent genitive 'of the commander in chief' as an addition; the TOB keeps this genitive as an apposition: '*le secrétaire, chef de l'armée*'—indeed, the critical Hebrew text has an article with *sopher*: '*has-sopher šar haš-šābhā*', though it is left out in some variants (cf LXX). The Latin Vulgate supports the interpretation of 'commander in chief' as an apposition yet, it takes *sopher* as a proper noun⁷: '*Sopher, principem exercitus*'. Finally, the Syriac version splits the two as distinct individuals: 'the secretary *and* the army commander'. On the whole, the RSV version agrees better with the context, namely, that the secretary of the commander is singled out for merciless treatment because of his prominent role in mustering armed forces against the Babylonian enemy. This reading is confirmed by the parallel passage in Jeremiah 52 : 25.

The next passage illustrating the militant position of a *sopher* is 2 Chronicles 26 : 11, where a certain Jeil is specially mentioned as the scribe who made a census of the standing army of king Uzziah, assisted by the registrar (*sofer*) Maaseiah. Thirdly, recalling the days of Jerusalem's siege in Isaiah 33 : 18, the prophet asks repeatedly: 'Where is he who counted?' The object is not specified at first; it could be the counting of ransom to be paid or of manpower still available for the city's defence. Then, again, he asks: 'Where is he who counted the towers?', i.e. either towers still standing for the city's defence, or towers employed by the Assyrians to storm the city. The LXX renders *sopher* first in the plural (*hoi grammatikoi*), then in the singular (*ho arithmōn*); therefore, first as a noun, then as a participle. The TOB translates 'he who inspected' instead of 'he who counted.' The idea of inspecting defence towers is also found in Isaiah 22 : 10 (cf 2 Chron. 32 : 1-7), whereas in Psalm 48 : 12 there is a mere counting of towers by pilgrims who marvel at the city's impregnability.

Hence, the scribal function of numbering or mustering is just occasional; but it would be a rather shaky hypothesis to hold that scribes were originally mere calculators or computers. Whenever *sopherim* are serving in the armed forces, it is due to a war situation. Similarly, the *soferim* (Bible Osty: 'scribes'), who were appointed as judicial assistants for each tribe (Deut 1 : 15; cf 16 : 18; 29 : 9), had occasionally to perform a military role (Deut. 20 : 5-9; Josh

⁷ Such proper noun fits in 1 Chron. 2 : 55 'the clans of the Sophrites' (NEB; NAB: Sopherim), though RSV translates 'the families also of the scribes' (cf. LXX *patriai grammatēon*).

1 : 10 ; 3 : 2 ; see also 1 Mac. 5 : 42 : ' scribes of the people '—*grammateis tou laou*—in fact, ' scribes of the army '). It would not be the only time that pacifists in a clerical job have felt obliged to trigger off a revolutionary coup.

The Royal Scribes

Leaving aside exceptional situations, one can distinguish three stages in the evolution of the scribal role in Israel. The first stage is that of professional penmen, employed mainly as royal secretaries by king David (2 Sam. 8 : 17 ; 20 : 25 = 1 Chron. 18 : 16), Solomon (1 Kings 4 : 3), Joash (2 Kings 12 : 11 = 2 Chron 24 : 11), Hezekiah (2 Kings 18 : 18 ; 19 : 2 = Isa. 36 : 3,22 ; 37 : 2), Josiah (2 Kings 22 : 3,8,9,10,12 = 2 Chron 34 : 15,18,20 ; Jer. 36 : 10), Jehoiakin (Jer. 36 : 12,20,21), and Zedekiah (Jer. 37 : 15-20). The title of royal scribe appears also for non-Israelite administrators like the Samaritan Shimshal (Ezra 4 : 8,9,17,23, cf. 1 Esdras 2 : 16,17,25,30) and some Persian secretaries (Esther 3 : 12 ; 8 : 9 LXX 9 : 3, *basilikoi grammateis*). Otherwise, in all passages quoted above, only royal scribes of the southern kingdom, and of Jerusalem in particular, have been referred to.

The royal scribes are not mere office clerks who only have to mechanically execute their writing function. They are men of initiative, acting with personal responsibility. They appear in the company of religious figures too ; for instance, king Joash's secretary accompanies the priest Jehoiada to check the temple treasury for repair work (2 Kings 12 : 11—surprisingly, the post-exilic title ' high priest ' is used ; whereas in a definitely later text, 2 Chron. 24 : 11, we see the scribe associated with the ' chief priest ' , possibly because it was quite normal for the Chronicler to identify the scribe himself as the (high) priest and, therefore, to place him in the company of another category of (chief) priests. Another example : the secretary Shebna appears in between Eliakim, the master of the palace, and Joah, the recorder (2 Kings 18 : 18).

The secretary Shaphan (2 Kings 22) greatly influences the religious reform. He is the bearer and reader of the newly found book of the Law. He and his sons favour the revival movement under king Josiah and heartily support the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 26 : 24). As a matter of fact, the friendship between Shaphan's family and the prophet went on from the early days of the reform (622 B.C.) till after the fall of Jerusalem (Jer. 39 : 14 ; 40 : 6) : one of Shaphan's sons (Jer. 29 : 3) carried the prophet's letter to the victims of the first deportation (c. 594 B.C.), and one of his grandsons (Jer. 36 : 11-14) diffused the prophet's oracles from the secretary's chamber, i.e. the office of the royal scribe. Moreover, Shaphan's family controlled a room in the fortress at the temple

gateway. From a window in this room Baruch read out a stern prophetic warning to the people. Now, Baruch himself acted as a kind of private secretary to the prophet; in Jeremiah 36 : 26-32 he is named forthright a secretary (though LXX drops the title twice; TOB on the contrary honours him with the title 'Chancellor', whereas the NAB translation 'his secretary' makes him a humble scribal assistant of the prophet). The same text further explicates the function of Baruch, as one who writes down what the prophet dictates.

The early Israelite scribes acted, therefore, as esteemed officials at the royal court; some entertained connections with the temple personnel, and a few of them devoted themselves to the courageous task of supporting outspoken prophetic radicals, even to the point of becoming their channel of wider communication. We can draw some comparisons with the functions of an Islamic *kâtib*, as described by Mohiuddin :

The technical ability of writing was a special accomplishment and rare novelty at the time of the advent of Islam in Arabia. It was during the lifetime of the Prophet that there arose a pressing need to commit to writing the 'Words of Allah'. Those companions who wrote down the revelation were called *kâtib-al-Wahy*. Others acted as amanuenses to the Prophet and conducted the correspondence with the neighbouring countries; esp. with the view of proselytisation. . . The *divân* was the public register under the Caliphs, and in India came to mean the officer of the *divân* himself. . . The Chancellery developed with a whole staff of scribes (*muharrirs*) and redacteurs (*munshis*). In state parlance a *kâtib* denoted a functionary of the secretariat, ranging from clerks to the first departmental secretary, and in some cases the minister himself.⁸

Scribal activities in the period of the monarchy in Judah were often of such a secular or profane nature that it can safely be presumed that they were performed by lay scribes or non-priestly clerks. Some posed as court poets, as can be seen in the wedding Psalm 45. According to the NEB version of 1 Chronicles 27 : 32 'David's favourite nephew Jonathan, a counsellor, a discreet and learned man (lit. "a scribe")', was one of the 'tutors to the king's sons' (see also Dan. 1 : 4-17). Besides taking up literary and educational employments, scribes must have been engaged also in matters of legislation. But the secular character of this judicial function at the early stage is more problematic, because Israel

⁸ M. Mohiuddin, 'The Chancellery and Persian Epistolography under the Mughals', in *Indo-Iranics* 17, 1964, N : 1, p. 2. Besides *katib*, there is also the term *mazman navis*, a writer.

was basically ruled by a theocratic Law, by which even the king's house could be judged. And the competent exponents of the divine Law were the priests.

Still, it appears that 'sages', wise men among the people, enjoyed some judicial authority. Certain scribes must have been well-lettered sages too, (but as explained below, at this stage there was no special category of 'scribe-sages'). Not unlike their sophisticated Egyptian colleagues (cf. Is. 19 : 11), some may have claimed to possess unquestionable wisdom. Fortunately, in Israel an erudite scholar would not *ipso facto* be considered a wise man, unless he earned respect by his orthopraxis. Hence, the severe criticism of Jeremiah 8 : 8 : 'How can you say⁶ "We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us"? But, behold, the false pen of the scribes has made it into a lie . . . They have rejected the word of the LORD'. This is often considered a key text in the evolution of the concept of Biblical *sopherim* from royal to priestly scribes. Indeed, the Jerusalem Bible understands it as a direct attack on a group of priests, who are supposed to be the guardians of traditions which they are already transcribing.

The *Bible Osty* supports this view by referring to Jeremiah 2 : 8, where priests are typified as those who 'take hold' of the Law, and by paraphrasing it as experts of the Law who 'study and interpret' the Law. Indeed, the same picturesque very 'take hold' occurs in the Hebrew text of Sirach 15 : 1 : 'the one who "takes hold" of the Law catches also wisdom', and there the meaning of deeply 'studying' the Law is quite appropriate.⁹ But in Jeremiah 2 : 8 the expression is negative and applies to priests who 'distort' the Law. Moreover, in the same verse, their responsibility and guilt is shared with 'the shepherds', i.e. the kings, as well as the prophets. Scribal activity in matters related to the Law is not yet solely in the hands of the priests. Hence, the *TOB* remarks more correctly about the false pen of the scribes in Jeremiah 8 : 8 that it is aimed at a recrudescence of too much leniency or laxity in the royal legislature, after the enthusiastic transformation of Deuteronomy into state law during the heyday of the reform.

The Priestly Scribes

The second stage consists in the prevalence of priestly *sopherim*. It is not so clear when and how priests assumed the prerogative of playing a scribal role in Israel. At the high-water mark of

⁹ In a note on Sir 15 : 1 G. Box and W. Oesterley (R. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the O.T.*, Oxford, 1913, vol. 1) refer to 'the handlers of the Law' in Jer. 2 : 8 as a separate category, in anticipation of those 'technically known as Scribes'.

their power, some time after the exile, priests and scribes were completely amalgamated. It is the common opinion of historians that 'the priestly *sopherim*, or scholars, formed a link in the chain of Hebrew tradition between Moses (cf. Mt. 23 : 2), and the sages and prophets, and Jesus (Mt. 23 : 34). They made acceptable copies of the Scriptures and also interpreted (Neh. 8 : 8) and taught them. The Chronicler, himself a Biblical scholar (c. 300 B.C.), viewed Ezra the priest as the first scribe (Neh. 8 : 1 ; 12 : 26-36 ; Ezra 7 : 6, 11) and Zadok as the second (Neh. 13 : 13) and made Ezra the founder of the guild of scribes at Jerusalem.'¹⁰

The destruction of Jerusalem was a death-blow to the glorious period of the royal scribes. Yet it would be a gross simplification to think that priests were never writing before, or that the official scribes were never allowed to intrude in cultic matters. Presumably, no special group of priestly scribes was ever constituted. There was a gradual take-over. We should not think of priests, prophets, scribes and sages in terms of watertight compartments. At least, in early Israel, there were no such caste distinctions. The gift of sagacity was not restricted to a circle of wise men. Wisdom was not the sole possession of a professional class. Whybray¹¹ rightly notices the general impact of the scribal wisdom :

Although at least some sections of Proverbs must have been composed, like their foreign counterparts, mainly for use as textbooks in schools whose purpose was to educate a small scribal class, the tone of the book as a whole is less purely professional than that of the majority of the Egyptian Instructions, and much of its teaching is of more general interest. This may be due to a progressive enlargement of the educated class in Israel during the course of its history. During the later stages of its composition the book tended to lose its purely scholastic character and came to be read by a wider circle of readers for both instruction and entertainment.¹¹

Another example of mutual interpenetration is the Deuteronomic literature. On the one hand, prophets play an important role in 1 Samuel to 2 Kings, and some scholars speak of a prophetic redaction of the Deuteronomic history. Other scholars, however, attribute its origin to levitical preachers, whose edifying stories were edited in a Deuteronomic school. But M. Weinfeld¹² defends

¹⁰ M. Miller and J. Miller, *Black's Bible Dictionary* 1973 art. 'Scribes'.

¹¹ R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972, p. 87.

¹² M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, summarized by C. Brekelmans, 'Wisdom Influence in Deuteronomy', in M. Gilbert, ed., *La Sagesse de l' A.T.*, (Bibl. Eph. Theol. Lov. 51), Leuven, 1979, p. 29.

the view that the Deuteronomic style originated in the scribal circles of the Jerusalem court. He holds that 'the authors of Deuteronomy must be sought among the circles that held public office, that had at their command a vast reservoir of literary material, that were particularly well acquainted with international treaties, that were capable of developing and had developed a rhetorical technique, that were experienced in literary composition, and that were skilled with the pen. Consequently, the authors must have been *sopherin-hokhânim*.'

Brekelmans disagrees with this explanation and asks ironically: 'Are the sermons in Deuteronomy literary compositions made at a writing desk or are they real sermons intended to be delivered?'¹³ His own answer is that the highly developed rhetorical style of Deuteronomy can best be explained by a long preaching tradition and 'that we ought to look for the origin of these sermons in the same circles as those in which the preaching tradition had its origin, i.e. the priestly circles. I have no objection to calling these priestly scribes. But one must, it seems to me, object rather strongly against the identification of scribes and sages.'¹⁴

A similar widening of fields is suggested by C. Seow, while discussing the authenticity of the ending of Hosea. It is a faulty assumption, he feels, 'that wisdom was based in the royal courts and therefore not readily accessible to rural prophets like Amos and Hosea... The occurrence of sapiential elements within a pre-exilic prophetic corpus does not, in and of itself, indicate a redaction or a gloss.'¹⁶

Let us now return to Jeremiah 8 : 8. If one cuts off the areag of legal, prophetic, or sapiential literature, one must hold a turnins point in this text, for it would show that wise (though wicked) scribes, just before the exile, started invading the sphere of religious literature. 'The argument is too weak and rests on wrong pre-suppositions', says Brekelmans. 'That the scribes considered themselves to be wise (adjective!), does not prove that they are to be identified with the sages as members of a special professional class.'¹⁵

Undoubtedly, long before the exile, temple archives were increasing and after the destruction of the temple the cult-ministers were keen on preserving their traditions. Priestly *sopherim* then reinterpreted the available writings from their Levitical background.

¹³ Brekelmans, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁵ C. L. Seow, 'Hosea 14 : 10 and the Foolish People Motif', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 44, 1982, p. 213.

¹⁶ Brekelmans, 'Wisdom Influence in Deuteronomy', p. 36.

A text like 2 Chronicles 34 : 13 rewrites material about Josiah's reign, explicitly mentioning that 'some of the Levites were scribes, and officials, and gatekeepers.' According to the Chronicler this happened even in David's time, for 'the scribe Shemaiah the son of Nethanel, a Levite,' (1 Chron 24:6) was recording things.

Scribal activity of priests reached its climax when Ezra the priest could be presented as 'a scribe, skilled in the Law' (Ezra 7 : 6, *sopher mahir be-thorah* ; LXX : *grammateus tachus enfnomoi*). One opinion is that Ezra was originally not portrayed as a Doctor of the Law, but that the term *sopher* was only meant to qualify him as an outstanding functionary at the Persian court, as a kind of special secretary for matters pertaining to Jewish questions.¹⁷ Afterwards, in the light of Ezra's activity in Jerusalem as an expounder of the Law to the people of the Land, the scribe-secretary would be idealized as the priest-scribe par excellence, 'who had set his heart to study (*li-dhros*, LXX : *zetesai*) the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel' (Ezra 7 : 10).

Henceforward, the word scribe was loaded with a new resonance, for the great Ezra was 'the priest, the scribe (*has-sopher*), learned (*sopher* again) in matters of the commandments of the LORD and his statutes for Israel' (Ezra 7 : 11). The Vulgate understands the double *sopher* in the same way as noun and adjective : 'scriba eruditus'; but some LXX MSS read the second *sopher* as *sepher* (book): '*ho grammateus biblion*', while other MSS translate it as *anagnostes* or 'reader' (later, the Pharisees will find here, in the double use of *sopher*, an argument that Ezra was both scribe of the written Law and scribe of the oral Law). Also in the Aramaic section, Ezra is honoured as 'the scribe (*saphar*) of the Law of the God of heaven' (Ezra 7:12-21), while the apocryphal 1 Esdras calls him both 'scribe' (4 times) and 'reader' (6 times ; Vulgate : *lector*). The Book of Nehemiah highlights the mission of Ezra the scribe (Neh. 8 : 1,4,13 ; 12 : 36) or priest-scribe (Neh. 8 : 9 ; 12 : 26), when he brings the book of the Law and from a wooden pulpit reads it 'clearly' (*mephoras*, or 'with interpretation', or 'in translation'?)¹⁸ before the whole congregation. Later on, the leaders of the people gather regularly in order to 'study' (*d-r-s*) the words of the Law being read by Ezra the scribe. In 2 Esdras 1 : 1 there is a unique reference to the 'prophet' Ezra

¹⁷ Brekelmans compares the translation of H. Schader (1930) '*Sekretar*' (secretary) with that of S. Mowinckel (1965) '*(Schrift) Gelehrter/Studierter*' (scholar).

¹⁸ The root *p-r-s* means 'to separate, decide'. In Neh. 8 : 8 the meaning is not so certain ; but, at least, its effect is sure enough : the people were made to understand the sense of what was read to them.

(cf. 2 Esdras 14 : 22,40,45 ; 15 : 1) ; but the idea of a priest-scribe is certainly the traditional picture. By coincidence the appearance of ' a man clothed in linen with a writing case at his side ' is transformed in the LXX version of Ezekiel 9 : 2 as a man wearing a girdle with ' sapphire ' (reading *sappor* instead of *sopher*), but this is exactly the term found in Ex. 28 : 18 as part of the highpriestly dress !

The ideal of a scribe was no longer to be an expert calligraphist, but to be an assiduous student of God's Law. From a creative author he becomes a conservative stock-keeper of written traditions ; from a penman he becomes a bookman. The gradual change in attitude and occupation brings about a shift of meaning in the verbal root *d-r-s* ' to search.' A devout priest would ' seek ' God's will mainly in temple worship, whereas a priest-scribe started ' scrutinizing ' God's Law. Later scribal researchers will gather at a ' house for study of the Law ' (Sir 51 : 23, *beth ham-midhras*, LXX : *oikos paideias*). In the Dead Sea scrolls we meet the pious Jewish scribe who ' studies ' the Law day and night (1 QS VI : 6), not only to penetrate into the spirit of the Law but also profitably to comment on it. The further meaning of *d-r-s*, to explain, to interpret, is however post-biblical. In Aramaic the preacher or commentator of the synagogue will be called *darsan*.

The Lay Scribes

According to Jewish tradition Ezra founded The Great Assembly as a synod of 120 scholars, drawn mainly, if not entirely from the *sopherim*. Initially they were mostly Levites ; but increasingly laymen took over the study of the Law, at first side by side with the priests, then independently so that a non-priestly order of orthodox Doctors of the Law came into being (praised in 2 Esdras 8 : 29 as those who ' gloriously teach Thy Law '). In this process we reach the third stage of the scribal function in Israelite society Schürer describes the evolution as follows :

When in Hellenistic times some of the priests of higher rank turned to Gentile culture and more or less neglected the tradition of their fathers the scribes set a very different example. It was no longer the priests but the scribes who were the zealous guardians of the Torah. Consequently from then on they were also the real teachers of the people, over whose spiritual life they increased their control. In N.T. times this process was already complete ; the scribes are represented as the undisputed spiritual leaders of the people.¹⁹

¹⁹ Schurer, *History of the Jewish People*, vol. II. p. 323.

For this third stage we have no biblical testimony in the Hebrew Canon ; yet, after the sixty cases of the Hebrew Bible Concordance discussed above one most enlightening use of *sopher* occurs in the Hebrew text of Sirach 38 : 24, originally written c. 190 B.C., hence slightly before the canonical book of Daniel. It is met in the very title verse of the portrait of the wise man in Sirach 38 : 24-39 : 11, also called 'The ideal scribe described.'²⁰ The first five strophes (38 : 25-34a) depict in a contrastive way what the scribe is not ; the four subsequent strophes (38 : 34b-39 : 11) idealize the wise man as a scribe.

The term *sopher* is no more a designation of an official in the royal or priestly administration. The present passage goes even beyond the well-known figure of the priest-scribe Ezra, who occupied himself with the study of the Law and its application in people's lives through his own example and instruction. The Doctor of the Law, in the view of Jesus ben Sirach, should be a spiritual man, not necessarily a priest, filled with interior peace and wisdom, so that he can discern, in an open attitude, deeper values and also communicate to others concrete demands of God's spirit.

Before tackling the passage, we should note that the word *grammateus*, which is the Greek equivalent of *sopher*,²¹ is found also in Sirach 10 : 5. This is surprising because the Hebrew text at this place is *m-h-w-q-q*, 'a legislator.' This indicates a further secularization of the term, for in Ptolemaic Egypt scribes were among high government officials assimilated to the legislators. That is why the LXX translator spontaneously understands the 'magistrates' of Ezra 7 : 25 as *grammateis*, though the original is *saphetin* (judges) and not *sapherin* (scribes). Also in Sirach 44 : 4 we find the abstract noun *grammateia* in the sense of 'legislation' (*m-h-q-q* in Hebrew), followed by an objective genitive : 'legislation or law-making for the people', in parallel with 'instruction (*paideia*) of the people.' Indeed, scribedom is meant for the welfare of the people and is, therefore, no self-centred erudition.

In our passage for consideration,²² Sirach 38 : 24, the first characterization of a scribe is rather misleading : he is a man of leisure, *en eukairiai scholes*, with plenty of free time ! But, what is meant is, of course, not lazy idleness ; it is the free time to do something, according to the sense of the Greek idiom : *schole esti*

²⁰ Box and Oesterley, *op. cit.*, n. 9 *sudra*, p. 455.

²¹ There are 88 occurrences in the LXX, 75 for the Hebrew Canon, out of which 51 correspond to *sopher*, 17 to *soter*, and 7 are peculiar readings.

²² We shall follow the German article of J. Marboeck, 'Sir 38 : 24-29 ; 11 : Der Schriftgelerte Weise', in Gisbert, ed., *La Sagesse de l. A.T.*, pp. 293-316.

pros. ti, leisure for something else. *Schole* (hence, 'school') is the occupation of somebody who is free for personal study or public teaching. Elsewhere, throughout his 'ecclesiastic' book, Ben Sirach praises effort and work, e.g. in 10 : 26 : 'Don't play the wise man, while you are busy doing your work ; true wisdom is your skillful occupation itself', or 11 : 20 : 'Be firm in your work' (according to the Hebrew ; LXX : 'in your covenant'). It would not do justice to Ben Sirach to regard him as a mere bourgeois,²³ a *scholastikos* doing nothing, or a theorist behind dusty bookshelves. Yet, from experience, Ben Sirach knows that oppressive toil does not stimulate brainwork, that a certain time of detached leisure is needed in order to make one grow in mature wisdom and open-mindedness. Furthermore, the occupations described in 38 : 24-34a are not ridiculed as in the Egyptian *Satire on Trades* referred to earlier, but they are valued realistically as being very time-consuming (v. 27), requiring strenuous effort (v. 28), absorbing one's whole attention (v. 29). Still, in between the lines, Ben Sirach admires the skill of the craftsman (v. 31 ; cf Ex. 35 : 10,30-35) and the service he renders to society in perfecting God's creation (v. 34).

The positive aspect of the scribe's leisure, or his liberty from oppressive toil, is his ability to apply his mind (*didonai kardian*) with full attention and devotion. This is not a mental attitude only, but also a religious respect and commitment of self (*didonai psuchen*), as stated explicitly in 39 : 1 ; (cf. 6 : 37 and 15 : 1). The reverential 'fear' of God (1 : 27) is a constant readiness to obey His will, as expressed in the Torah (23 : 27 ; 37 : 12). The Doctor of the Law, who is dedicated to authoritative study and comment, first bows down in total surrender to God, 'Seeking' (*d-r-s*, as in Ezra 7 : 10) God's will (2 : 16-17). Then he can teach in all humility, like Moses (45 : 4-5). He realizes that God's Torah is not restricted to the revealed Covenant-Law for Israel, but that it is also the law of creation as such, the law of life for all mankind (17 : 11).

Sirach's scribe is further characterized as a man of prayer. If he can free himself and give time to meditate on Scripture and to study the vast sapiential literature of the nations, the worthy scribe should not forget to pray, to establish a personal relationship with God from within his own life-experiences. Sirach 39 : 5 refers to an intensive seeking, even early in the morning (*orthrizein*) ; and, according to the Hebrew, this seeking is not *d-r-s*, a study of texts, but *s-h-r*, an encounter with a living person (6 ; 36), personified wisdom (4 : 12), or God himself (32 : 14). The search for God in

²³ Duesberg-Fransen, *Les Scribes Inspires*, 1966, p. 595, describes Ecclesiasticus as a 'livre de raison d'un bourgeois de Jerusalem'.

Prayer is accompanied with petitions for enlightenment (37 : 15), forgiveness (17 : 25) and deliverance from sin (23 : 3-6) ; for the scribe not only needs outward leisure, but especially inner peace and freedom from the oppressive burden of sin. Thus, his prayerful study leads to grateful praise of God (39 : 6, 14-16). Ben Sirach had a liking for public cult too ; but this does not mean that he was a priest himself. J. Marböck calls him rather a ' proto-pharisee ', because the book contains the warmth of personal devotion. As a devout layman, Ben Sirach was more familiar with the local synagogue, where the Law was being taught and studied, than with the temple ceremonial.

Prayerful surrender leads to receptiveness for God's free gifts. If it pleases His Majesty (1 : 27 ; 2 : 16 ; 35 : 5), the scribe receives a communication from the divine Spirit (39 : 6). The spirit of wisdom and understanding (*pneuma suneseōs*, 17 : 7), one of the royal blessings (Is. 11 : 1), is poured out on the scribe-disciple, so that he may, in turn, exteriorize this gift for the benefit of others, pouring out himself words of wisdom (39 : 6-8). He is not only echoing or repeating traditions, but speaks out from deeper experience and inspiration. He has something of a prophetic role, as is unhesitatingly evoked in 24 : 33. Ben Sirach admires the prophets (44 : 3 ; 46 : 1) and himself uses prophetic language (33 : 17-18 ; 51 : 15 = Is. 55 : 1 1).

Perfect wisdom, therefore, is identified with prophetic insight and utterance for others. This trend is enforced in later Jewish literature. The Book of Wisdom 7 : 7-27 brings out the relation between wisdom and prophecy ; The Psalm-Scroll of Qumran (11 Q Ps. 27 : 11 : 2-11) calls David a wise *sopher* who writes psalms in a spirit of prophecy. Ben Sirach is, however, the first to visualize the scribe as having also the traditional characteristics of the sage. The *sopher* is not only a scribe-doctor of Scripture, but also a scribe-prophet and a scribe-sage who dares to write his own reflexions (cf. the Prologue of Sirach). Not satisfied with revealed traditions, he investigated the wisdom sayings of the elders (39 : 1). In an open, universalistic outlook he makes transcultural contacts and explores even the *apokrupha* (39 : 7), i.e. the higher mystical wisdom of apocalyptic literature and the sacred lore of the East. Though confessing to be a mere ' grape gatherer ' of tradition (33 : 16), he aptly rewords it into a fine drizzle of kind monition (50 : 27—Hebrew : ' as his heart overflows with Scriptural explanation ', which is God's gift, Gen. 40 : 8 ; Dan. 2 : 22 ; 5 : 14-16).

Other literature from the transition period under the Greeks confirms the fact that Jewish lay scribes were assuming the role of spiritual leadership. Antiochus III is still known to have made

concessions to the ' temple scribes ' (*grammateis tou hierou*, *Jewish Antiquities* XII, 138-144) in matters of taxation. In Daniel 11 : 33 we get a vivid reference to the persecution under Antiochus IV, who had ' learned men from the people ' (*maskile 'am*) put to death. They were probably *hasidhim* or devoted ones who formed a group of religious resistance around the priest Mattathias; the group was called *sunagoge Asidaion* in 1 Maccabees 2 : 42 or a more restricted *sunagoge grammateōn*, a scribal elite, in 1 Maccabees 7 : 12. Most of these scribes were Levites, but more and more lay people joined who were keen to consult the book of the Law (1 Maccabees 3 : 48 ; 12 : 9). According to 2 Maccabees 8 : 23 one Eleazar (son of Mattathias ?) is made to read from the Holy Book, while another venerable Eleazar is singled out as a martyr from the group of ' leading scribes ' (2 Maccabees 6 : 18) who are ready to die for the sacred Law (v. 28). In 4 Maccabees 5 : 4, however, the same martyr Eleazar is presented as ' a priest by descent and a doctor of the Law (*nomikos*) by his great knowledge ', who gave the maximum witness of ready obedience (*eupeitheia*) to the Law.

Reaching New Testament Times : Scribe Lawyers

There is a marked shift of accent from Law-abiding people to Law-experts as we glide unawares into New Testament times. The Jewish diaspora revered the Law as a divine instruction (*Torah*) which in its Greek concept (*nomos*) was also the legal code of all citizens. In the Greek *koine* dialect *nomikos* was the usual term for a lawyer, a ' *juris peritus* ' in Latin and a Roman jurist in particular. It is remarkable that this term is totally absent from the gospels according to John and Mark, but that it is used six times by Luke for the Jewish teachers of the Law (Luke 7 : 30 ; 10 : 25—parallel to ' scribe ' in Mark 12 : 38— ; 11 : 45,46,52—in the parallel of Matthew 23 : 13 ' scribe ' is used — ; 14 : 3). *Nomikos* occurs once in Matthew (22 : 35) ; but it is so unusual that B. Metzger remarks in his Textual Commentary that, though there is widespread testimony in favour of the received text, yet ' apart from this passage Matthew nowhere else uses the word. It is not unlikely, therefore, that copyists have introduced the word here from the parallel passage in Luke 10 : 25 '.²⁴

Luke is the only evangelist to use the term *nomodidaskalos*, which more explicitly signifies a ' teacher of the Law ' ; in Luke 5 : 17 it is clearly a synonym with ' scribe ' used in a subsequent verse (v. 21) within the same context, and in Acts 5:34 it is the title of the Pharisee Gamaliel, who is held in honour by the people.

²⁴ B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, London : United Bible Societies 1971, p. 59.

Nomodidaskalos is found once more only in 1 Timothy 1 : 7 against Christian teachers who busy themselves with vain speculations and discussions. Also *nomikos* is used only once outside the Gospels Acts in Titus 3 : 13 (in the sense of 'lawyer'—in v. 9 it is used as an adjective, meaning 'matters concerning the Law').

The question arises, therefore, why Luke wished to characterize the Jewish scribes as Law-specialists. Could it be that Luke was a lawyer himself? In fact, according to the earliest witness about the author of the third Gospel, in the Muratorian fragment, Luke is called '*juris studiosus*', which means a jurist as well as a scribe studying law. Jurists were also needed in the Jewish context, for the divine Torah was to regulate social life as well. According to Schürer,²⁵ scribes were in the first place lawyers responsible for helping to administer the law. As learned counsellors in the courts of justice, they derived legal principles from the Torah itself (as we shall see later, this differentiates them from the 'Pharisees' who rely on oral tradition also).

Josephus Flavius, the Jewish historian of c. A.D. 85, qualified the scribes as *patriōn exegetai vomōn*, (*Jewish Antiquities* XVII, 149) interpreters of ancestral laws. Elsewhere he calls them also 'sophists' (*Jewish War* I, 648), but this is probably a mere assonance with *sopherim* : 'Scribes in particular speak out wisdom (*sophia*), because they know wisely (*saphōs*) everything related to the Law and are able to express the forcefulness of the sacred letters (or writings)' (*Jewish Antiquities* XX, 264). In fact, being wholly occupied with sacred writings, Jewish scribes (*grammateis*) deserve to be called 'sacred scribes (*hierogrammateis*)' (*Jewish War* VI, 291).

Scribes in the Synoptics

In any Greek city of the first century *ho grammateus*, with a definite article, would mean 'the city clerk, the chief secretary'. 'Clerk-secretary' should also have been the ordinary sense of *grammateus* in the Greek New Testament,²⁶ but it occurs only once in this sense for the Ephesian official who addresses the people (*dēmos*) gathered in illegal assembly (*ekklesiā*) due to the riot of the silversmiths (Acts 19 : 35). We must, therefore, find out why this meaning is so exceptional among the sixty-three occurrences of the term *grammateus* in the New Testament. Moreover, we shall have to explain the pejorative meaning which is most fre-

²⁵ Schurer, *History of the Jewish People*, Vol. II, p. 330.

²⁶ Listed at the first meaning *scriba publicus* in F. Zorell, *Lexicon Graecum N.T.*, Paris, (1930) 1961 and W. Buer, *Griechisch-Deutsches Wort.*, Berlin, 1934. See also J. Jeremias, '*Grammateus*', *TDNT* vol. I. pp. 740-2.

quently attached to the term by the three Synoptics (the first 'scribes' of the Jesus tradition).

1. *Mark* : In Mark the term is used twice in a positive sense, denoting an open attitude of a scribe towards the kingdom (Mark 12 : 28 'one of the scribes' ; and in v. 32 a rare singular number 'the scribe'—elsewhere always plural in Mark —). In the parallel passage of Matthew 22 : 35 and Luke 10 : 25 the synonym *nomikos* is used with a less sympathetic, even inimical, connotation. Twice again the Marcan usage can be called neutral, in passages where scribes are mere authoritative interpreters of Scripture ; Mark 9 : 11 (paralleled only in Matthew 17 : 10, not in Luke) and Mark 12 : 35 (made into a direct saying of Pharisees in Matthew 22 : 42 and a general statement 'they say' in Luke 20 : 41).

In the majority of cases, however, Mark uses *grammateis* in a context which is unfavourable towards Jesus or His disciples. Yet, only four cases are identically negative in the Synoptic Gospels : Mark 2 : 6 (at the healing of the paralytic, see Matthew 9 : 3 ; Luke 5 : 21), Mark 8 : 31 (first prediction of the passion, see Matthew 16 : 21 ; Luke 9 : 22) ; Mark 11 : 18 (at the cleansing of the temple ; less vehement in Matthew 21 : 15, but equally strong in Luke 19 : 47 adding 'and the principal men of the people') ; Mark 12 : 38 ('beware of the scribes', also in Luke 20 : 46 ; but Matthew 23 : 2f enters into more details and adds 'and the Pharisees').

Five negative cases of Mark are also kept in Matthew ; whereas Luke has either altered or dropped them : Mark 1 : 22 (Jesus' teaching authority is contrasted with the way scribes are used to teach ; see Matthew 7 : 29—placed at the end of the Sermon on the Mount) ; Mark 7 : 1 (introducing the remark on eating with hands defiled ; Matthew 15 : 1 presents the remark straightaway ; Luke 11 : 38 refers to a remark of one Pharisee only, dropping the whole discussion on the tradition of the elders) ; Mark 10 : 33 (third prediction of the passion, also in Matthew 20 : 18 ; altered in Luke 18 : 32f) ; Mark 14 : 53 (introducing the trial before Caiaphas, see also Matthew 26 : 57) ; Mark 15 : 31 (at the mocking of the crucified Messiah, see also Matthew 27 : 41 ; altered in Luke 23 : 35).

Four other negative cases of Mark are preserved only by Luke ; whereas Matthew has changed them : Mark 2 : 16 ('the scribes of the Pharisees' are displeased that Jesus eats with sinners and tax-collectors ; Matthew 9 : 11 has only 'Pharisees' ; Luke 5 : 30 'The Pharisees and their scribes') ; Mark 11 : 27 (the questioning of Jesus' authority, also in Luke 20 : 1 ; altered in

Matthew 21 : 23) ; Mark 14 : 1 (the decision about Jesus' death, also in Luke 22 : 2 ; altered in Matthew 26 : 2) ; Mark 15 : 1 (the morning session ; elaborated in Luke 22 : 66 as a plenary session of the Sanhedrin ; in Matthew 27 : 1 only chief priests and elders are mentioned).

Finally, there are still four negative cases of Mark which have no parallel in either Matthew or Luke ; Mark 3 : 22 (accusing Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebul ; not so in Matthew 9 : 34 or 12 : 24 and in Luke 11 : 15) ; Mark 7 : 5 (continuing 7 : 1) ; Mark 9 : 14 (discussion with the disciples before the healing of the epileptic boy ; not related in Matthew 17 : 14 and Luke 9 : 37) ; Mark 14 : 43 (specifying who is behind the arrest of Jesus ; altered in both Matthew 26 : 47 and Luke 22 : 47-52). Still, our findings about Mark's use of *grammateus* cannot be too denigrating, since the four unparalleled negative passages are balanced by three other unparalleled passages which are either positive or neutral.

A closer look at the Marcan scribes reveals that 'the scribes' in general are referred to only three times, as teachers or interpreters of Scripture (1 : 22 ; 9 : 11 ; 12 : 35). Elsewhere, specific scribes are singled out as individuals or as a group. Nine times there is a reference to 'the chief priests and the scribes (and the elders)' in Jerusalem, and three times the scribes mentioned during the Galilean ministry are in fact 'from Jerusalem' (3 : 22 ; 7 : 1-5). It is statistically relevant that Mark uses the term scribe sixteen times out of twenty-one in connection with Jerusalem, and that he reserves the denomination 'Pharisees' eleven times out of twelve for a Galilean context (and even the one case in Jerusalem—namely in Mk. 12 : 13—speaks of some Pharisees and Herodians—as in 3 : 6 ; see also 8 : 15—, sent by the chief priests and their supporters). In 12 : 28-32 one scribe speaks up ; in 2 : 6 'some of the scribes' and in 9 : 14 'scribes' (without article) are discussing ; in 12 : 38 there is a warning against '(those) scribes who...' behave like show-offs. It is evident therefore, that Mark has no bias against *all* scribes.

What is particular to Mark, however, is the contrast between Jesus' disciples and certain scribes. In Mark 2 : 16 the unusual expression 'the scribes of the Pharisees' is contrasted with the verb 'follow', used only for Jesus' disciples (v. 15).²⁷ Moreover, the next paragraph distinguishes between 'the disciples of the Pharisees' and Jesus' disciples (v. 18). The scribes of Mark 2 : 16 and 9 : 14 are also made to speak apart to the disciples. In Mark 7 : 1 they object to what the disciples are doing. Though Fledder-

²⁷ Metzger, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

man²⁸ does not mince his words in saying that 'the scribes are the chief adversaries of Jesus in Mark,' yet he is right in interpreting the scribe as a contrastive type of the non-disciple; 'Mark portrays the scribes as the opposite of what Jesus is and what the disciple should be.'²⁹ This appears especially from Jesus' warning against the scribes (Mk. 12 : 37b-40), which happens to be the last public address of the Master. Jesus criticizes the scribes who claim honour by walking about in long robes, that is splendid out of the ordinary clothing. Their desire for honour is also betrayed in the way they expect to be greeted or seated. Fledderman says,

The warning about the scribes contains the key to Mark's understanding of them. They are the opposite of what Jesus is and what the disciples should be. Jesus has real authority, but he does not seek honour. The disciples are not to strive to be first. The scribes, on the other hand, do not have authority, and yet they seek honour. They are non-disciples... The good scribe of 12 : 28-34 does not disprove this. In this passage Mark is saying that this state of affairs does not have to exist, the scribes need not oppose Jesus... (The true disciple should be *diakonos*: 10 : 43—but the request of James and John shows that even) the disciples exhibit the same desire for positions of honour for which the scribes are condemned... The two groups are interchangeable: a scribe can be a disciple, and a disciple can be a scribe! (Furthermore), the rapaciousness of the scribes is contrasted with the generosity of the poor widow (12 : 41-44).³⁰

The last remark of Fledderman could still be magnified into an even more radical prophetic criticism of clerical tyranny over the conscience of simple believers. According to Wright³¹ Jesus' attitude to the widow's gift is a downright disapproval: 'The story does not provide a pious contrast to the conduct of the scribes in the preceding section (as is the customary view); rather it provides a further illustration of the ills of official devotion.'³² Jesus had already made a blunt attack on the perverse tolerance of a 'corban' gift to the temple instead of supporting one's parents (Mk. 7 : 11). Now, Jesus protests against the religious exploitation of a poor widow who donates 'her whole living' instead

²⁸ J. Fledderman, 'A Warning about the Scribes (Mark 12 : 37b-40)', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 44, 1982, pp. 52-67.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³¹ A. Wright, 'The Widow's Mites: Praise or Lament?—A Matter of Context', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 44, 1982, pp. 256-65.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 262.

of keeping it to support herself. 'She had been taught and encouraged by religious leaders to donate as she does... Her contribution was totally misguided, thanks to the encouragement of official religion; but the final irony of it all was that it was also a waste!' Donations are collected for the temple treasury and the next verses (Mk. 13 : 1-2) announce the destruction of the whole complex.

2. *Matthew*: Out of twenty-one references to scribes in Mark, Matthew retains one neutral reference (Mt. 17 : 10) and seven hostile references in the context of Jerusalem (Mt. 15 : 1 ; 16 : 21 ; 20 : 18 ; 21 : 15 ; 23 : 2f—joined to 'the Pharisees'... ; 26 : 57 ; 27 : 41). Two hostile references of a Galilean context are either glossed (Mt. 7 : 29 'not as *their* scribes') or softened (Mt. 9 : 3—27 words of Mark are reduced to 10 words only). The other eleven cases of Mark are not retained; three times the Marcan parallel is simply dropped (after Mt. 15 : 1 ; 17 : 13 ; 22 : 40); three times altered to 'Pharisees' (9 : 11 ; 9 : 34 ; 12 : 2 ; 22 : 41-2)—and even a fourth time in 22 : 34-5, especially if *nomikos* is introduced by a copyist, see above—; four times the scribes are left out in the group of 'the chief priests and elders of the people' (21 : 23 ; 26 : 3 ; 26 : 47 ; 27 : 1). Hence, we can conclude with Goulder :

Matthew's sympathy for the scribes is shown plainly in his omission or change of their name in two-thirds of the hostile Marcan references. He leaves them in when they are essential to a legal controversy; whenever he can, and in all serious matters like the Beelzebul blasphemy or the Passion plot, he quietly exonerates them... Each omission or gloss either lessens the blackness of the scribal image, or contrasts 'their' scribes with (presumably) 'ours'. But although Matthew thus consistently rescues the reputation of the *sopherim* as such, the presence of an active scribal movement at the heart of the Jamnia reform involves him in an ambivalence.³³

Goulder means to say that Jewish scribes started supporting the Pharisees, especially after the destruction of Jerusalem, in growing opposition to Jesus' disciples. Henceforward, the 'good scribe' of Mark 12 : 28-34 is no longer presented in a bright light in Matthew 22 : 35-40: the fact that the scribe answers correctly with a confirmation from an appropriate scriptural quotation is not yet a guarantee of right discipleship. Goulder's argument should still be weighed through a proper explanation of the twelve additional references to scribes in Matthew.

³³ M. D. Goulder, 'A Scribe Discipled', in his *Midrash and Lektion in Matthew*, London : SPCK, 1974, p. 15. Goulder counts the hostile references in a slightly different manner.

Matthew's sympathy for the scribes is enhanced by his addition of three positive texts : Matthew 8 : 19 (whereas Lk. 9 : 57 does not specify that the would-be follower of Jesus is a scribe) ; Matthew 13 : 52 (an unparalleled saying about the (Christian) scribe, who has become a disciple (*grammateus mathēteutheis*) for the kingdom, like the evangelist *grammateus Maththaios* himself—as suggested in TOB, footnote) ; Matthew 23 : 34 (scribes, sent by Jesus, together with ' prophets and wise men ' ; in Lk. 11 : 49 they are even assimilated to ' apostles '). These three cases leave no doubt about the possibility of a vocation and a mission within the scribal ranks. Matthew 2 : 4 is a neutral text, though the gathering of ' chief priests and scribes of the people ' in Jerusalem prefigures the Passion context (especially because the supplementary expression ' of the people ' is typical for Matthew).³⁴

The remaining additional mentions of the scribes in Matthew are all negative and in all of them the pen of the evangelist can clearly be recognised. This is because in all eight cases the combination ' scribes and Pharisees ' occurs (in that order, naming the scribes first), which is again typical for Matthew (Mark uses twice ' the Pharisees and (some of) the scribes ' in 7 : 1 ; 5 and once ' the scribes of the Pharisees ' in 2 : 16 ; when Matthew uses ' Pharisees and scribes ' in 15 : 1 it is manifestly in dependence on Mark's order). Hence, the passages are redactional. Matthew 5 : 20 (' unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees . . . ') strikes one as a Matthean creation which has to be read on the level of the author's parenthesis addressed to Christians. Matthew 12 : 38 inserts ' scribes ' before ' the Pharisees ' of Mark 8 : 11, probably in order to differentiate from a similar occasion in Matthew 16 : 1 when ' Pharisees and Sadducees ' come to test Jesus with a demand for a sign. The six other cases are found in Matthew chapter 23 in a series of woes against ' scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! ' : v. 13 (transposed as *nomikoi* in Lk. 11 : 52) ; (v. 14 is an unauthentic passage, in imitation of Mk 12 : 40) ; v. 15 (unparalled in Lk) ; vv. 23,25,27 (found as ' Pharisees ' in Lk. 11 : 42,39,44 respectively) ; v. 29 (indirectly ' you ' for *nomikoi* in Lk. 11 : 47).

The question arises why Matthew has composed this whole anti-scribal chapter. What was wrong with the scribes that they are identified with legalists and hypocrites ? Goulder is not too sure how to answer this problem. But, if Matthew was himself a scribe trained for the kingdom put in charge of some Christian

³⁴ Mt. may have used ' scribes of the people ' instead of ' elders of the people ' , because it fits better with the subsequent Scriptural quotation (2 : 5-6), or also because of a subtle contrast between the wise men from the Gentiles and the priests and scribes from the chosen people.

community in Syria c. AD. 75, he may have expanded Jesus' words for the benefit of his congregation. Indeed, Derrett³⁵ sees in Matthew chapter 23 a warning to Christians rather than an attack against Jewish scribes as such. It is addressed 'to the crowds and to his disciples' (v. 1), aiming at the Church leaders of Matthew's era. By 'hypocrites' he means those who misinterpret the Law, similar to the *dôresê halâqôth* of Qumran, 'those who give false interpretations of Scripture.' The right attitude is portrayed in the same chapter, vv. 8-12: 'But you are not to be called rabbi . . . Matthew means to say 'There is no room for a professional class of expositors.'³⁶ There will be a teaching of the elect by God directly, in fulfilment of texts like Isaiah 54:13 and Jeremiah 31:33-34. The Christian scribe is to be a *diakonos* (v. 11), for Jesus himself was not an intermediary teacher, but a dispenser, a furnisher. His *diakonia* was a ministry of dispensing the Word of God, not a mediating of it. Therefore, Derrett paraphrases Matthew's intention:

You have had the privilege of direct instruction from God (Mt. 13:17; Lk. 10:24). Do not vitiate or betray it by setting yourselves up as professional exponents or patrons for the next generation who do not have the privilege you enjoyed (so Jn.20:29). They are entitled to the same status relative to you *vis-à-vis* the one source of instruction, and this must not be jeopardised.³⁷

3. *Luke*: When we turn to the third Gospel, we see that Luke has none of the twelve additional scribal references of Matthew, though he transmits at least eight parallel verses (six of them being parallel with Mt. ch. 23). Does it mean that Luke does not share Matthew's sympathy for the scribes? Moreover, Luke has left out or changed thirteen Marcan references (two positive, two neutral and nine negative), out of which six are still kept in Matthew. The eight cases which Luke has taken from Mark are all negative. Though Luke uses the denomination 'Pharisees' rather frequently (fifteen times out of twenty-seven) in a context where scribes or teachers of the Law or lawyers also appear, he has no typical order of his own: we find the Matthean sequence 'scribes/lawyers and Pharisees' in 5:21; 6:7; 11:53 and 14:3, but also the sequence 'Pharisees and scribes/lawyers/teachers of the Law' in 5:17; 5:30; 7:30 and 15:2.

Luke has added six cases in his Gospel (i.e. one positive, Lk 20:39, and five negative, Lk. 6:7; 11:53; 15:2; 20:19.

³⁵ J. D. M. Derrett, 'Mt. 23:8-10 a Midrash on Ir. 54:13 and Jer. 31:33-34', *Biblica* 62, 1981, pp. 372-86.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

23 :10) and four cases in his Acts (i.e. one positive, Acts 23 :9, one neutral Acts 19 :35, and two negative, Acts 4 :5 ; 6 :12). We can also join the synonymous cases of Lucan references to *nomodidaskaloi* (one positive, Acts 5 :34, and one neutral Lk. 5 :17) or *nomikoi* (four unparalleled negative, Lk. 7 :30 ; 11 :45-46 ; 14 :3). The key to understand Luke's criticism of the scribes is the way he treats Mark's episode of the 'good scribe'. First of all, it should be admitted that Luke knew the episode (Mk.12 :28-34) for elements of the opening verse (a scribe observed that Jesus replied *kalōs*) and the closing verse ('no one dared to ask him any question'), followed by the question about David's son (vv. 35-37) occur in Luke 20 :39 (some scribes remarked : 'You spoke *kalōs*') and v. 40 ('they no longer dared to ask him any question'), followed by the parallel question about David's son (vv. 41-44). But Luke has shifted the episode in order to emphasize the need of hearing and doing : inspite of his praiseworthy ability to read Scripture with proper understanding, the *nomikos* cannot be a good scribe or a real disciple unless he practises concrete love like the 'good Samaritan' (Lk. 10 :25-37). He has to be concerned for the needy neighbour, not only through some social awareness but through active involvement and service.

If it could be said about Matthew that for him both scribes and Pharisees 'are the official representatives of Jewish theology and piety, representatives who lead the attack against Jesus and who in return bear the brunt of Jesus' rebuke,'³⁸ then it should be asserted that in Luke they lie at the antipodes of what the Gospel for the poor, the sinners and the Gentiles stands for. Scribes and Pharisees object to Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness (Lk. 5 :21) ; 'the Pharisees and *their* scribes' murmur because repentance is celebrated with 'a great feast' by a large company of tax collectors and sinners (5 :30 ; see also 15 :2). During another meal, when lawyers and Pharisees are displeased with an act of healing (14 :3), Jesus tells them to invite 'the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind'. It is also on the occasion of a banquet that Jesus shames a Pharisee who does not know that great love comes with an experience of forgiveness (7 :36-50). Again, being at table, Jesus denounces the behaviour of Pharisees and lawyers or scribes, that in all their great learning they neglect justice and the love of God (11 :37-54). They are 'lovers of money' (16 :14), devour widows' houses (20 :47) and for a pretence make long prayers in self-conceit (18 :9-14). Therefore, it is the uncharitable attitude of the scribes that is severely criticised in Luke. It is this attitude rather than a mental outlook which leads to opposition against Jesus' teaching (6 :6f ; 19 :47 ; 20 :1). Consequently

³⁸ J. P. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel. A Redactional Study of Mt. 5.17-48*, (*Analecta Bibl.* 71), Rome, 1976, p. 111.

it is a position which is radically anti-people (19 : 47f ; 20 : 19 ; 22 : 2 ; 23 : 35). Luke has nothing against the scribes as such ; Jewish scribes are not always bad (see the open attitude of Gamaliel, Acts 5 : 34). The tragedy of any learned teacher in Judaism or in the Gentile communities is the chasm between his teaching and his practice, which keeps him away from the kingdom.

Survey of all New Testament Texts

The overall picture is, therefore, not as negative as it may appear from a mere statistical survey. The one negative case left out from the Gospels is in the unauthentic Johannine account of the woman caught in adultery. She is brought to Jesus by 'the scribes and the Pharisees' (Jn 8 : 3) ; but the greatest 'Scribe', writing with his finger on the ground, gives us the finest example of all scribal *diakonia* : he recreates a person and liberates her unto the possibility of a new love.

Thus, we have reached a fiftieth occurrence (when leaving out Synoptic parallels) of the terms *grammateus*, *nomikos* or *nomodidakalos*. This makes it easier to calculate all cases in the Gospels and Acts :

37 negative cases (17 in Mk. ; 8 others in Mt. ; 11 in Lk. ; 1 in Jn.)

5 neutral cases (2 in Mk. ; 1 in Mt. ; 2 in Lk.)

8 positive cases (2 in Mk. ; 3 in Mt. ; 3 in Lk.)

This makes a grand total of fifty unparallelled cases : 74% negative, 10% neutral, and 16% positive. The total percentage of negative cases is lower than the absolute percentage of negative cases for each evangelist separately.⁸⁹

To be complete, we should also consider the one case outside the Gospels and Acts, namely in 1 Corinthians 1 : 20, 'Where is the wise man (the *sophos* of the Greeks)? Where is the scribe (the *grammateus* of the Jews)?' Indeed, the context speaks of a false wisdom in both Greeks and Jews, and it follows a quotation from Isaiah 29 : 14 (LXX), which echoes 19 : 12 (about Egyptian *sophoi*, LXX) and 33 : 18 (about Jerusalem's *grammatikoi*, LXX). Yet, because of the third question, 'Where is the debater of this age?', and because of the absence of any article before either *sophos* or *grammateus*, the terms 'wise man, scribe, debater' could also be taken as synonyms for the proud 'scholar' (that is how

⁸⁹ In absolute figures (counting also the parallels) *grammateus* is negative in 17 out of 21 cases in Mk. — 80.9%,
17 out of 22 cases in Mt. — 77.2%,
15 out of 18 cases in Lk. + Acts — 83.3% (+ 6 cases of *nomikos*)
once in Jn. and once in Paul (1 Cor.)

the Good News Bible translates *grammateus* ; the Jerusalem Bible has '*l'homme cultivé*'). The true disciple should be humble, believing in the 'foolishness' of the Cross—no matter whether he be 'well versed in the Scriptures' (Acts 18 : 24) or appearing 'unlettered' (*agrammatos*, Acts 4 : 13).

Historical Investigation

Our next task is to test the impression gained from the New Testament texts by investigating, who really were those 'scribes' of New Testament times. The anti-scribal sayings of Jesus himself may have to be weighed accordingly. Jesus, certainly, had no *a priori* reactions ; he may have been more affable to some scribes, but also harsher to others. The Gospel writers may have been influenced by the Pharisaic type or even the ambitious lordly type among co-disciples within their own generation.

It is generally accepted that, at the time of Jesus' ministry, the scribes were still the true spiritual leaders of Israel. They were close to the people and could easily be approached for questions. The priests, on the whole, had turned out to be mere cultic functionaries. 'Scribes', according to Miller, 'not only investigated and mastered every portion of the Scriptures, but possessed general wisdom ; shared human problems and activities ; travelled ; lectured in synagogues ; were accepted in the best society ; were often themselves writers ; and, if not of independent means (scribes were unpaid), were diligent enough to pursue a trade as well as perform their scribal duties'.⁴⁰ According to this description the apostle Paul would fit perfectly as a scribe (1 Cor. 4 : 6), for instance in respect of his attempt to support himself by some manual occupation. Rabbi Gamaliel III warned that all Torah study without secular labour would come to nothing and eventually cause transgression (Pirge Aboth 2 : 2). Probably, most scribes did accept some remuneration for their educational activity, only their judicial function remained strictly unpaid.

Trained Torah scholars were to be found mainly in Jerusalem (cf Luke 2 : 46), whereas 'the elementary teachers, as we may call them formed the lowest rank in the powerful guild of the scribes. They are "the doctors (literally teachers) of the Law", who, in our Lord's day, were to be found in "every village of Galilee and Judea" (Luke 5 : 17)'.⁴¹ Some of those provincial scribes are mentioned by Josephus Flavius as *kōmogrammateis* (*Jewish Antiquities* XVI, 203) i.e. ; 'village clerks or (perhaps) elementary

⁴⁰ Miller and Miller, *Black's Bible Dictionary*, p. 653.

⁴¹ J. Hastings, rev. F. Grant and H. Rowley, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 1963, p. 231.

school teachers rather than experts in the Law'.⁴² It is recorded that the scribe Simon, brother of queen Alexandra, got a law passed c. 75. B.C. that children should attend the elementary school, called *Beth Sepher* or 'House of the Book', at each local synagogue. The teaching consisted mainly in *misneh* or repetition, as a continuous exercise of the memory.⁴³

Even the ordinary village *sopher* was respected by the people. He was their dear *moreh* or teacher (cf. *kathēgētēs* in Matthew 23 : 9f), addressed as *marj*, '(my) sir' (cf. *kurie* or *epistata* in the Gospels), or *rabbi*, '(my) master' (correctly interpreted as *didaskalos* in John 1 : 32, for the suffix *i* lost its pronominal meaning). Only after A.D. 70 was the title *rabbi* reserved for fully qualified doctors, trained in the House of Study or College of Scribes. Rabbinical scribes were held in high esteem and, like the Indian gurus, were placed above one's parents. They took precedence everywhere, without any claim (though Mark 13 : 29 says so). Their ordinary dress was a *stole* or robe (though the Synoptics make it a sign of special honour), but some *sopherim* were fond of foreign cloth, especially the fine cotton cloth known as *othonion indikon* or *sindōn indike*. If the 'seamless tunic' of John 19 : 23 is not symbolic, (for a high-priestly dress?) it may be an indication that Jesus was wearing a scribal garment. It is not totally impossible that the 'linen cloths' for his burial were originally imported from India. Whatever be Jesus' apparel, at least the appellation *rabbi* was firmly established in tradition. John, who never uses the word 'scribe', has made ample use of the scribal title *rabbi* (Seven times as an address to Jesus and once for John the Baptist, 3 : 26) or its equivalent *didaskalos* (again seven times for Jesus and once for Nicodemus, 3 : 10).⁴⁴

Still, Jesus was not a village scribe properly speaking. As a teacher one should call him rather a *mosel* or a 'parabolist', one who spoke skilfully in parables and pithy sayings. Admittedly, he spoke in a prophetic spirit and with messianic authority ('not like the scribes', Mark 1 : 22 !); yet, 'from a purely formal point of view', says B. Gerhardsson, 'if we characterize Jesus according to the way in which he shaped his oral teaching, he was a *moshel*... He had a message—the kerygma concerning the reign of God—and he presented it with the aid of parables and sayings (as well as deeds)'.⁴⁵

⁴² Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, vol. II, p. 329.

⁴³ Cf. Jerome, *Epistle 121 Ad Galgiam*, Quaest. X : 'Solent dicere, hoi sophoi deuterodin, id est Sapientes docent traditiones'.

⁴⁴ It is interesting to see that the address 'rabbi' is used in Mt. 9 : 5 ; 11 - 21 ; 14 : 45 (and in 10 : 51 'rabbouni'), but never in Lk. ; whereas it occurs only in the mouth of Judas in Mt. 26 : 25-49, and therefore, for Matthew, does not fit the true disciple-scribe (23 : 7-8) !

⁴⁵ B. Gerhardsson, *The Origins of the Gospel Tradition*, London ; SCM Press 1979, p. 70.

According to Pirge Aboth 1 : 1 the scribes had a triple task : ' to be deliberate in judgement, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Torah '. Though the scribal movement of the laity came up as a reaction against cultic institutionalism and brought about an interiorization of religion, it became itself legalistic. Some lay *sopherim* taught the Law without direct reference to the Scriptures. They acknowledged rather, as a sacred rule of life to be strictly obeyed, the statutes developed by the ancient sages. Students of the New Testament background know that this outlook gave rise to the party of the Pharisees, whereas the party of priestly Sadducees would base their religious beliefs primarily on the five books of the Law and reject oral traditions. But this distinction leads to ambivalence with regard to the position of the scribes : ' In so far as Torah scholars were men " learned in the Law ", says Schürer,⁴⁶ ' some of them were bound to be Sadducees '. Hence, all scribes would not *ipso facto* be Pharisees.

Can this principle be applied to the Synoptics ? According to Jeremias,⁴⁷ a distinction is to be made, for instance, between Jesus' sayings against the scribes (Luke 11 : 46-52 ; 20 : 46) and those against the Pharisees (Luke 11 : 39-42,44). Thus, also in the Sermon on the Mount, the sayings illustrating a new understanding of the Law six times (Matthew 5 : 21-48) would be meant chiefly for the scribes, while the corrections of the three forms of practical piety (6 : 1-18) would aim at the Pharisees. In this way, Jesus levelled bold charges against all theologians of his time. Jesus saw a lack of humility, of selflessness and of sincerity in their conduct. His most serious accusation, however, was that they did not practise what they demanded in their teaching and preaching. The main reproach against their doctrine was that their casuistry defeated the true will of God contained in the law of love.

Do the Synoptics make any distinction between scribes and Pharisees at all ? Meier⁴⁸ brings in the following nuances :

The scribes were a professional class of theologians/lawyers who had spent some time in formal study of the Law. The Pharisees were a group of pious Jews who pledged themselves to strict devotion to and observance of the Law (both oral and written). Thus, scribes and Pharisees can be neither simply identified nor absolutely separated. At the time of Jesus, the two groups partly—but not completely—overlapped. Many scribes were Pharisees in their interpretation of the Law and in the conduct of their lives, though some

⁴⁶ Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, vol. II, p. 329.

⁴⁷ Jeremias, ' *grammateus* ' TDNT, vol. I, p. 741.

⁴⁸ Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel*, p. 112.

were Sadducees. Most Pharisees were not specially educated men. They were simple, zealous Jews belonging to a popular religious movement that followed the interpretations of the stricter scribes. But some Pharisees, as we have said, were scribes by profession; so we cannot say that all Pharisees were without formal education in the Law. The Pharisees who were scribes would naturally be looked to as leaders of the movement. This complex situation is reflected with historical accuracy in Mark 2:16, if *hoi grammateis tōn Pharisaiōn* is the original reading (which it probably is). Such a distinction is unknown to Matthew.

This reasoning seems to be quite logical; but the arguments brought up by Rivkin⁴⁹ are even more stringent. He asks whether the genitive case in the expression 'scribes of the Pharisees' should not be understood as an explicative: 'scribes, that is, Pharisees'. This could also have been the original meaning of the parallel expression 'scribes and Pharisees', since an explicative *kai* is even more common in Greek. The reason for thinking this is that the portrait of the scribes in the Synoptics, whether called Pharisees, lawyers or hypocrites, never alters with the shifting of names. 'Whereas in Matthew and Luke the Scribes are almost invariably conjoined with the Pharisees, they frequently stand alone in Mark. Indeed, the teachings which Mark attributes to the Scribes are attributed in Matthew and Luke to the Scribes and Pharisees, or to the Pharisees alone, or to the *nomikoi*, the legal experts'.⁵⁰

If there was need of adding an explicative, it means that the term *grammateus* in Greek did not fully convey the intent of the author. Indeed, *grammateus* by itself means a scribe in the literal sense of a writer, a copyist or a secretary. As long as the Hebrew *sofer* carried the meaning of a true scribe, copyist or secretary, there was no ambiguity in the Greek equivalent *grammateus* of the Septuagint. Rivkin maintains that a change of meaning occurred, but that the Greek lagged behind the Hebrew:

This simple congruence, however, was dissolved when Ben Sira applied the Hebrew term *sofer* to individuals, like himself, who devoted themselves to the pursuit of wisdom. *Sofer* now need not be a scribe (copyist, secretary), but could very well be an intellectual who was not a scribe in any technical sense. This is evident from the fact that one looks in vain for any *scribal*, i.e. copyist, or secretarial function attached to the *sofer* in Ben Sira's fulsome portrait of the scribe of his day (Sirach 38:24, 39:1-11).... The *sofer* of Ben Sira's day was an intellectual, not a scribe; a scholar,

⁴⁹ E. Rivkin, 'Scribes, Pharisees, Lawyers, Hypocrites: a Study in Synonymy', *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Cincinnati, 49, 1978, pp. 135-42.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

not a copyist ; a sage, not a secretary. But he was a special kind of intellectual—an intellectual who spun off parables, tossed off maxims, framed proverbs, concocted riddles and composed sweet psalms in praise of Wisdom. At the same time, this scribe was a devotee of the Written Law, a prayerful worshipper, and a fervid admirer of the sons of Aaron.⁵¹

There was no such change of meaning for the word *grammateus*, if read by Greeks and Romans who were not familiar with this kind of Jewish literature. There was also a political development. After the Hasmonean revolt there was a growing number of *sopherim* who no longer regarded the Zadokite priests as true custodians of the Law. They sought confirmation from the unwritten Law and did not want to write anything. Rivkin says,

This new class of *soferim* who sat themselves in Moses' seat are better known to us as the Pharisees, the *perushim*. And because we know the *soferim* better as Pharisees than as *soferim*, we tend to forget that for the Jews living in Palestine, teachers of the twofold Law (written and oral), were *soferim* not *perushim*, Pharisees. And with good reason. The Sadducees regarded these scholars as 'usurpers', 'separatists', 'heretics', because they proclaimed that God had given, alongside the Written Law, an Oral Law as well. These upstart teachers who had sat themselves in Moses' seat were not, for the Sadducees, '*soferim*', i.e. Aaronide intellectuals and sages like Ben Sira, but *perushim*, 'separatists' and 'deviants' who, by proclaiming an Oral Law, were defying the very word of God.⁵²

Except for the passing remark on Ben Sirach we can accept this historical explanation. Its application to the Synoptic usage of the terms is far-reaching. First, it bears on the way the historical Jesus would have spoken: 'Jesus was not a Sadducee. Indeed, he shared with the teachers of the twofold Law their belief in the resurrection. He would thus not use the term *perushim*, Pharisees, but the term *soferim*, Scribes'.⁵³ Hence, we can understand better Mark's terminology. Since 'scribes' was the name for the teachers of the twofold Law used by non-Sadducees,⁵⁴ this was the

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ That Pharisees called themselves *sopherim* or *hakhmamim* is proved from two parallel quotations in the Mishnah, tractate Yadayim. In 4 : 6 we read 'The Sadducees say, "We complain against you *Pharisees*, because you say that Holy Scriptures renders the hands unclean"'. But in 3 : 2, without the context of Sadducees we find simply 'The *Scribes* say that Holy Scriptures renders the hands unclean'. According to J. Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, *perushim* would not always be 'Pharisees', they were rather extremists.

name which Jesus and his disciples would have used. Therefore, Jesus and his disciples called those teachers by their honorific title *sopherim*, a term which had long since come to mean 'intellectual, scholar'. They did not call them by the Sadducean epithet 'Pharisees'.

Why, then, was the epithet introduced into the Gospels? Rivkin now comes to the point,

This name *soferim*, so clearly understood in Galilee and Jerusalem, was a source of grievous misunderstanding the moment it was translated into *grammateis* for the ears of Greek and Roman gentiles. For them, *grammateis* conjured up real scribes, copyists, secretaries, writers, and not teachers of the twofold Law who did not write at all . . . To clarify this confusion, the term *pharisaioi*, Pharisees, was either added or substituted. *Pharisaioi* might not convey anything substantive, but it did conjure up the picture of some prestigious class, since *pharisaioi*, unlike *grammateis*, is a proper, not a common noun . . . But since *pharisaioi* itself is meaningless, it does not surprise us that the term *nomodidakaloi*, or *nomikoi* was drawn upon to clarify it.⁵⁵

Rivkin concludes that three distinct names came to be attached to the same class of teachers. 'At first synonyms, these terms came to be thought of as separate entities, as fewer and fewer Christians had any awareness of Palestinian Judaism—indeed John uses Scribes not at all . . . But however we translate 'kai', Mk, Mt and Lk drew a single portrait. A Scribe, by any other name—be it Pharisee, *nomikos*, or hypocrite—turns out to be, no less a Scribe'.⁵⁶

Thus, the view of Goulder that 'scribes and Pharisees' means in fact 'Pharisaic scribes'⁵⁷ is not seriously challenged. Even if the Gospels basically portray one and the same type of scribes, this does not mean that they all reproduce a stereotyped scribe. This has been shown at length in our analysis of the Synoptic variations in the use of the term. Let us reconsider for a while the way Matthew does it, because his approach especially opens up new vistas on the likelihood of a specific Christian vocation to scribedom.

Matthew, the Scribe

It is widely assumed that Matthew enhances the role of Jesus as a teacher and legislator. Teaching material abounds in Matthew :

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁵⁷ Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew*, p. 14.

if there are nineteen miracle narratives in the eighty-four pericopes of Mark, only eighteen miracle stories are counted in the 141 pericopes of Matthew, which occur moreover in a shortened presentation. Matthew has thrown the mantle of a lawgiver around Jesus. Has he brought about an undue 'rabbinisation' of Jesus? Has there been a recrudescence of a legalistic mentality in early Christianity? This is too hasty a conclusion. The right explanation, according to Goulder, is that Matthew himself was 'a scribe, a provincial schoolmaster', familiar with the rabbinical way of thinking. 'Matthew does not, of course, think of himself as a humble provincial copyist-schoolmaster, a mere scribe as opposed to the rabbis or Learned Ones (*hakhamim*); in his eyes he is the Christian inheritor of the noble title borne by a line of servants of God from Ezra to Ben Sirach and Hillel and Shammai, but betrayed by their Pharisaic descendants'.⁵⁸

We have already discussed above Matthew's sympathy for the scribes, how he foresees that some of them wish to become disciples (Mt. 8 : 19) and that those who do so have much to contribute to others in teaching (13 : 52) and under persecution (23 : 34). Matthew himself incarnates the ideal of the Christian scribe, who as a good householder brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. For him the Law, both written and oral, in its very fulfilment is still valid (5 : 17-19), though it needs constant enforcement for the new community (16 : 19 ; 18 : 18). Matthew knows how to employ the scribal method ; his Gospel is but a midrashic expansion of Mark.

Could there have been a Christian scribe who was not first a scribe of the Jews? J. P. Meier⁵⁹ thinks it is not necessary to 'judaize' Matthew. His Gospel may have been written from Antioch as late as A.D. 90, in the heart of Syria, where a long and well developed scribal tradition could be present in the Christian community itself. Hence, Matthew's redactor was either a Gentile Christian or, at least, an enlightened (liberated) Hellenistic Jewish-Christian. Meier takes, therefore, Matthew 5 : 18 at face value: the Law stands only *until* all things prophesied come to pass. Jesus has brought radical newness, exceeding the righteousness of the old scribes. 'The binding force of the Mosaic Law as an inviolable whole and *qua* Mosaic has passed with the passing of the old creation. What stands in its place are the words of Jesus'.⁶⁰ The Christian scribe fulfils the mission to make disciples and teach all that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28 : 20). In his pastoral care for his church, Matthew inculcates fidelity to the teachings of the Master. Christian scribes are needed to safe-

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵⁹ Meier, *Law and History in Mathew's Gospel*.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

guard the community's wholehearted commitment to the Spirit of the new Law. Meier's final remark is worth quoting :

One cannot dismiss Matthew's radical voice as hopelessly legalistic or re-judaizing. It is not Matthew's Gospel but the Church which is always in danger of re-judaizing. And it is the constant function of Matthew's radicalism (and of modern prophetic scribes !) to call the Church out of the life-style of the religions of this world, and to call her to a renewed living of that radical, eschatological existence which is the gift of the Fulfiller of the Law and the Prophets.⁶¹

Scribal Diakonia

Consequently, we can determine this as the permanent aspect of scribal *diakonia*. Certainly, at the beginning of Christianity there was need of a 'clerical service' in its literal and literary sense. We can think of some scribal activity like that at Qumran up to A.D. 70 or later at Nag Hammadi, where scribes first filled their scrolls in the form of long rolls and then adopted the codex for writing on separate pages. But the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Gnostic Writings were not only produced by faithful copyists; they were also the first fruits of deep reflexion by original commentators and interpreters. Among them someone acted as *meturgeman* or official translator, another as *tanna* or legal doctor, lit. 'repeater'. In his *The Origins of the Gospel Tradition* Gerhardsson⁶² underscores the role of similar Christian bookmen. Early Christianity had both to preserve the Jesus tradition faithfully and to interpret it with insight as well as creative freedom. Christian scribes tried to understand Jesus' words and deeds more fully and to transmit their importance for the congregation in its own setting. This was 'early Christianity's work with the world'.⁶³

Yet, the new scribes are not just ministers of a written word; they are servants of the Living Word. There is a scribal function for the translation and the transmission of the original message; there is also the need of rewording the abiding Good News in ever new socio-cultural and economic situations. Scribal *diakonia* may now be at the service of a process of conscientization and liberation of the masses; it may also lift the pen against mad consumerism, global pollution, and the self-destructive arms-race.

Though the writers' ministry is not listed among the charismatic gifts to the Church (1 Cor. 12 : 28 ; Eph. 4 : 11—unless it be in-

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁶² Gerhardsson, *The Origins of the Gospel Tradition*.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

cluded in the gift of prophetic teaching), it has certainly been enacted by scores of educated Christians and also non-Christians (who have the Law written on the heart).⁶⁴ It has not been outlived. Though others had been 'servants of the Word' (Lk. 1 : 2), Luke was still called to compose his Gospel of the Spirit. 'Everyone when he is fully taught will be like his teacher' (Lk. 6 : 40) ; but those who undertake explicit scribal service in following the Master should heed his warnings too : ' Woe to your scribes . . . ' or those of Paul : ' You, then, who teach others, will you not teach yourself ? ' (Rom. 2 : 21). The scribe has finally but one sublime task : to write out in his own life the one Law of love of God and neighbour.

⁶⁴ An example of an early Christian *grammateus* is given in Preisigke's *Dictionary of Greek Papyri* : ' the (hermitage) of the saintly abba Enoch, the scribe '. Modern scribes would probably be more like busy journalists than like secluded ashramites. We can also think of the *lokapāla* Jaya Prakash Narayan.