

THE MATTHEAN CHRIST, CENTER OF SALVATION HISTORY

~ Leroy Huizenga ~

University of Mary

Introduction

Christian Scripture presumes and presents a coherent story, the story of salvation history. Indeed, that story is the canon's formal organizing principle, from Genesis to Revelation. But the canon's coherence has largely been lost among modern Christians, thanks largely to contemporary convictions about the competence and authority of the individual to interpret texts however he or she will. These convictions have their roots not only in intellectual currents in modern philosophy or post-Reformation theology but also in socio-cultural realities brought about by the technological revolution of the printing press.¹ With its advent in the West, inexpensive Bibles and increasing literacy went hand in hand, making for the possibility of personal and private interpretation. Further, our detailed, precise system of versification first used in the 1560 Geneva Bible has caused many of those modern Christian individuals to approach the Bible as a jigsaw puzzle of individuated pieces to be memorized as discrete units and thus often interpreted quite apart from their native context. The blessing of widely-available Bibles and a largely literate Christian population brings with it the challenge of finding some whole within which the parts make sense, of perceiving the sweep of the forest and not just the trees.

For the Bible is not an undifferentiated mass of textual signs, a cacophony of diverse and discordant voices, a random jumble of discrete Bible verses. It is not a mere collection of textual artifacts bearing witness to long-dead disparate and diverse Israelite, Jewish, and Christian communities. Rather, it is Scripture, for it has functioned as Scripture in history for very real communities who persist and thrive today.² Therefore it can and must be studied as such, with due attention given to its reception history and history of interpretation within those communi-

1 On the effects of the printing press on religion in Western Europe, see Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004); Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution of Early Modern Europe*, Canto Classics, 2d ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450-1800*, Verso World History Series, 3d ed. (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2010); and Andrew Pettegree, *The Book in the Renaissance*, repr. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

2 See Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 73: "A corpus of religious writings which has been transmitted within a community for over a

ties. In this way the story of the canon of Christian Scripture may emerge, through attention to the democracy of the dead, whose descendants yet live.

In this essay I wish to show how the Matthean Christ in particular stands at the center of salvation history. First, I will delineate a simple version of the story of salvation history that reflects the structure of the Christian Bible, with the added advantage of being easy to teach in religious education and catechesis. Second, I wish to make the claim that the Gospel of Matthew stands at the theological center of that story and thus at the center of Christian Scripture. Third, I wish to expend the bulk of my energies sketching the story that the Gospel of Matthew tells. And fourth, I wish to engage in some hermeneutical reflection, asking how the Gospel of Matthew's centrality to the story of Scripture helps us perceive the unity of Scripture as we read it today.

I. The Story of Salvation History and the Structure of the Canon

Following St. Augustine, the Christian faith may be conceived as a drama in four acts: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Glory.³ Genesis relates how God created all things with Adam and Eve at the pinnacle, making a covenant with them, but then Adam and Eve fell, introducing both moral and natural evils into creation. Genesis then recounts how God began the process of redemption, instituting a sacred, covenantal line, a covenantal family running from Adam and Eve through Noah and Abraham to Jacob, who becomes "Israel," the father of twelve sons who become the twelve tribes of Israel. In addition to the covenants made with Adam and Eve, Noah and his family, and Abraham and his descendants, The LORD God of Israel continues the line in making covenants with Moses, David and the kingdom of Israel, and ultimately Jesus and the Church.⁴ From beginning to end, salvation history flows in covenantal continuity.

In Christian understanding, then, the Old Testament story of Israel's sacred covenantal line culminates in Jesus, the ideal Israelite, who founds a Church to continue the line. Redemption is thus divided into three scenes, Israel, Jesus, and the Church. The Church looks forward to the end (Judgment Day, the Second Coming), which is Glory. The Bible, then, presumes and presents this drama: The Christian Old Testament presents Creation, Fall, and the first scene of Redemption, Israel. The New Testament tells of Jesus and the Church, the second and third

thousand years cannot properly be compared to inert shreds [*sic*] which have lain in the ground for centuries."

3 See St. Augustine, *Catech.* [Catechizing the Uninstructed], 5, 10–11, 29–49 *et alibi*.

4 On the covenantal structure of Scripture and the familial nature of the covenants therein, see Scott Hahn, *A Father Who Keeps His Promises: God's Covenant Love in Scripture* (Cincinnati, OH: Servant Books, 1998), and Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises*, Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

scenes of Redemption, and the Church in all times and places looks forward to that Glory of which the prophets and Jesus himself spoke.

The Christian drama assumes continuity. Jesus and the Church do not make doctrine and practice up out of whole cloth. Even those elements that may seem new have Old Testament antecedents. Christian convictions concerning continuity explain the shape of the Christian Old Testament and New Testament and their relationship to each other.

We see the Church's concern for continuity in the order of its Old Testament (which is not the "Hebrew Bible" of modern terminology, which properly belongs to Judaism). The Hebrew Bible is structured according to the acronym TaNaK, for Torah (Law), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings). The Law takes priority, while the Prophets call people back to fidelity to the Law, and the Writings give guidance for life before the Messiah's coming.

But Christians believe the Messiah has indeed already come in Jesus. And based on the conviction that the prophets prophesied the coming of Jesus, the Christian Old Testament places the prophets last so that they come immediately before the Gospels, which tell of Jesus, their fulfillment.

The New Testament, then, follows a fourfold structure. The Gospels come first because they tell directly of Jesus, the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and the Gospel of Matthew comes first among them because (among other things) it is a Gospel of fulfillment. Acts then tells the story of the earliest Church, founded by Jesus, as it expands into the ancient Roman world to embrace the nations. The letters come next, being written by those who have their stories told in the Gospels and Acts. Revelation forms a fitting conclusion, as the Church founded by Jesus whose story is told in Acts without end anticipates the return of the Lord and the consummation of creation.⁵

This story of continuity—from creation and fall to redemption through Israel, Jesus and the Church, culminating in glory—forms the basis for perceiving unity in the Christian canon. This means that unity is not a matter of systematizing the superficial meanings of the various versified parts. Rather, the unity of the canon is found in this narrative structure. Indeed, this is not a novel concept: the patristic rule of faith has a similar story structure which issues forth in the historic creeds of the Church, especially the Nicene Creed and Apostles' Creed. And so St. Irenaeus and other early Fathers provided a rule of faith in story form that would provide the "hypothesis," the narrative key for organizing the mosaic of the Scriptures.⁶

5 On the rhetorical structure of the New Testament canon, see George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, Studies in Religion (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 97–98, at 97: "First come the Gospels, which proclaim the message; then the narrative of Acts, which describes its reception; then the epistles, which may be viewed as arguing out an interpretation of the message; and finally the Apocalypse, as a dramatic epilogue."

6 See Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* [Against Heresies], 1.9–10.

And it is precisely the conviction that the same God superintends the salvific story from creation to consummation that guaranteed the continuity of the Christian story of salvation history. That conviction in turn required the appropriation of allegory (which in the West looked much like what today is called typology, although the word was not in use until the mid-nineteenth century) as the tool for understanding the Old Testament rightly. Thus certain words of St. Augustine become the celebrated phrase, *Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet, Vetus in Novo patet* (The New Testament is latent in the Old, the Old is made patent in the New).⁷

But the story of salvation is not only ideal but also historical. Whatever genres the sacred authors employed and however they and tradents before them shaped their material, the story of salvation continues in the real history of the Church, even today. Allegory culminates in mystagogy in a threefold movement, as the events foreshadowed in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New Testament and then made real in the present in the Church's sacramental mysteries. For instance, the Passover becomes a type of Christ's sacrifice and supper which are in turn celebrated in the Church's celebration of the Eucharist.⁸

Biblical interpretation, then, is ultimately not academic but liturgical. For the Catholic, the Bible is realized in the Mass,⁹ where elements of creation become the agents of our redemption necessitated by the fall while with them we anticipate the consummation. Creation, fall, redemption, and glory are all found there.

II. Matthew and the Fourfold Gospel Canon

The Gospels are central to the Liturgy of the Word: Catholics (and other liturgical Christians) sit for the Old Testament reading, the Psalm, and the Epistle, but stand for the reading of the Gospel. The Gospels are central to the Liturgy of the Word because they are central to Scripture, and they are central to Scripture because they tell directly of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who by the incarnation is the immediate and ultimate revelation of God himself to humanity, in the very flesh.

If the Gospels are the theological center of the Canon, then the Gospel of Matthew stands at the forefront of the fourfold Gospel canon as the most im-

7 See St. Augustine, *Quaest. Hept.* [Questions on the Heptateuch], 73. Augustine actually says, *Loquere tu nobis, et non loquatur ad nos Deus, ne quando moriamur* [Exod. 20:19]. *Multum et solide significatur, ad Vetus Testamentum timorem potius pertinere, sicut ad Novum dilectionem: quamquam et in Vetere Novum lateat, et in Novo Vetus pateat* ("You speak to us, and do not let God speak to us, that we might not die" [Exod. 20:19]. It is noted very firmly that fear pertains to the Old Testament, just as joy to the New, even though the New lies hidden in the Old, and the Old in the New).

8 On allegory, mystagogy, and liturgy, see Leroy A. Huizenga, "The Tradition of Christian Allegory Yesterday and Today," *Letter & Spirit* 8 (2013): 77–99.

9 See Scott Hahn, *Letter and Spirit: From Written Text to Living Word in the Liturgy* (New York: Image, 2005).

portant Gospel. Calling the Gospel of Matthew the “First Gospel” need not be merely a clever way to duck questions of authorship but a way of recognizing its preeminence, for it has been regarded not only as first among equals but even more as that Gospel which regulates readings of the others.

To distinguish among the contents of the canon of Scripture in this way is not to affirm some sort of “canon within a canon” determined by a priori confessional commitments with the effect of tossing wide swaths of sacred Scripture overboard, but rather to recognize Scripture as a coherent story in which every word plays its role, a mosaic in which every tessera matters and contributes to the picture of the whole. And for the historic Church, all roads lead to the Gospel of Matthew.¹⁰

Why has the Gospel of Matthew achieved such preeminence in Christian history, not only among Catholics but also among Christians of the radical Reformation?¹¹

First, the Gospel of Matthew has proven itself in liturgy and life. It has been found practical and relatively easy to preach. The reason for this concerns in turn the breadth, depth, and clarity of its comprehensive content. Stories teaching what became fundamental Christian doctrine are found therein, such as the Virgin Birth, the sacrificial crucifixion and Eucharist, and the resurrection and ascension, while Jesus issues plenty of direct and applicable teaching in his five great discourses (especially the beloved Sermon on the Mount) and teaches by example in the narrative sections.

Second, until relatively recently in Christian and academic history, the Gospel of Matthew was thought to be not only the first written but also an eyewit-

10 And thus not to Romans. Here we find a major difference concerning construals of sacred Scripture between the Catholic perspective, which, reflecting historic Christian tradition, has regarded the Gospels as preeminent among the Scriptures and Matthew as preeminent among the Gospels, and the magisterial Protestant perspective (that is, Lutherans and the Reformed tradition), which has privileged Romans above all else. In his *Preface* to Romans, Martin Luther wrote, “This epistle is in truth the most important document in the New Testament, the gospel in its purest expression...in essence, it is a brilliant light, almost enough to illumine the whole Bible.” Similarly, in the dedication of his commentary on Romans, John Calvin wrote, “For when anyone understands this Epistle, he has a passage opened to him to the understanding of the whole Scripture.” In our own day, the Anglican Evangelical J.I. Packer has written, “All roads in the Bible lead to Romans, and all views afforded by the Bible are seen most clearly from Romans, and when the message of Romans gets into a person’s heart there is no telling what may happen” (*Knowing God* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973], 230). Whatever its merits and however well Protestant interpreters read Paul, the claim that Romans is central to the canon of Scripture is a *novum* of the sixteenth century departing from longstanding liturgical, theological, and hermeneutical tradition. Christians of the radical Reformation (for example, Mennonites and Hutterites), however, maintain the Gospel of Matthew in pride of place thanks largely to the Sermon on the Mount.

11 As regards the Gospels, the magisterial Reformation has preferred the Gospel of John, given its emphasis on faith, while the Gospel of Mark began to receive renewed and deserved attention among Lutheran exegetes and theologians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, given its radical focus on the cross.

ness account.¹² The Gospel of Mark was thought to be a summary of the Gospel of Matthew, the Lukan prologue admits its account is derivative,¹³ and John was thought to have written a spiritual, theological Gospel complementing the three prior Gospels.¹⁴ And thus the fourfold Gospel canon received its canonical order for deep theological and historical reasons. In the canonical order, one also sees movement from the particularity of the Gospel of Matthew, situated as it is within the orbit of conservative normative and Pharisaic Judaism, to the universality of the Gospels of Luke and John, in which Gentile inclusion in the people of God is clear throughout.

A third, if subtle, reason for the Gospel of Matthew's preeminence and position in the canon and Christian history as the first Gospel concerns that very particular nature. Salvation history culminates in Jesus the Jew, as salvation is from the Jews;¹⁵ the gospel is for the Jew first, then the Gentile.¹⁶ The Gospel of Matthew is concerned with fulfillment. All is fulfilled in the Matthean Jesus—the Scriptures, righteousness, obedience, the various Old Testament types Jesus completes. And so the Gospel of Matthew shows most clearly the culmination of salvation history in Jesus the Jew sent to Israel¹⁷ and then commands his disciples to take him and his teaching to the nations.¹⁸

The story of salvation history begins with the parents of the universal human race, but narrows as it goes on, running through the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the Jews. But with the coming of Jesus Christ it begins to open up again, as it were, as the promises to Abraham concerning not just Israel or the Jews but indeed the whole human race are fulfilled. Part of God's original promises to Abraham was that in him "all the families of the earth shall be blessed,"¹⁹ a promise with universal import that the prophets reaffirmed in their own oracles.²⁰

Now the Gospel of Matthew is sometimes colloquially called a "Jewish" Gospel. This is misleading because all the New Testament documents are funda-

12 While most scholars nowadays hold that the Gospel of Matthew is a derivative account dependent on the Gospel of Mark, Q, and perhaps "special M" whose empirical author is lost to us, good reasons remain for affirming Matthean priority and possibly Matthean authorship. One wonders if the freshets of academic skepticism that have called the Q hypothesis into serious question will one day soon be leveled at Markan priority, given that both the hypothesis of Q and the hypothesis of Markan priority trade on similar formal assumptions and methodologies.

13 See Luke 1:1–4.

14 See St. Augustine, *De cons. ev.* [On the Harmony of the Gospels], 1.4; St. Clement of Alexandria, *Quis div.* [Salvation of the Rich], 42.1; and Origen, *Comm. Jo.* [Commentary on John], 10.4.6.

15 John 4:22.

16 Rom. 1:16.

17 Matt. 10:5–6, 15:24.

18 Matt. 28:16–20.

19 Gen. 12:3b (RSVCE alt.).

20 See, for instance, Isa. 56:6–8.

mentally Jewish, since early Christianity was a Jewish phenomenon, firmly rooted in the practice and belief of normative common Judaism even as it expanded beyond the bounds of the holy land and incorporated Gentiles.²¹ Basic Christian beliefs like monotheism, election, God as lawgiver, and the eschaton are Jewish and in no way pagan. The pagan gods neither choose a people nor give them a way to live out of love nor judge the world at the end of time. But the misnomer is meant to convey a truth. The Gospel of Matthew is concerned with the concerns of conservative common Judaism: how to interpret the law, what makes for righteousness, what does it mean to be a child of Abraham, how Scripture is fulfilled. The Matthean Jesus looks very much like his Pharisaic opponents (a conservative Jew of the holy land concerned for the right interpretation of the law while affirming the law's enduring relevance²²) and a large part of the reason for their mutual hostility²³ lies in their common convictions. In any event one observes that the Matthean genealogy begins not with Adam (as in the Gospel of Luke, which does so to signal the universal relevance of the gospel message) but Abraham (thus signaling concern for intramural Jewish issues), and the Matthean Jesus himself evinces little interest in Gentiles until his resurrection,²⁴ going so far as to declare his mission restricted to Israel on two occasions.²⁵

Given this ethos, it makes canonical sense for the Gospel of Matthew to be situated at the beginning of the fourfold Gospel canon, for salvation history has not yet widened out again, as it were, to the universal embrace of the nations, something which happens at the very end of the Gospel of Matthew. The Gospel of Matthew marks the shift from particular to universal in its own narrative, as the Gospel most concerned with fulfillment shows in the unfolding of its story that God's purposes and prophecies are being fulfilled not only for Jews but also for Gentiles.

III. The Matthean Story

The Gospel of Matthew understands itself as a universal, authoritative document persisting for all time and its community as the universal Church perduring to the end of time. It understands itself and the Church in this way because it believes Jesus Christ the Jew, the divine Son of God in whom resides all authority, to be the final fulfillment of God's promises not only for Jews but also Gentiles, inaugurating the final period of God's plan, until the end of the age should come, and that

21 Christianity remains so today, which is why the novelist, essayist, and Catholic convert Walker Percy spoke of "that Jewish sect, the Catholic Church," and why Pius XI said in the face of the rise of Nazi power, "Spiritually, we are Semites."

22 See Matt. 5:17–18 and 23:23.

23 See Matt. 23.

24 See Matt. 28:16–20.

25 Matt. 10:5–6 and 15:24.

Jesus Christ has commanded that which the Gospel of Matthew records to be taught to disciples in the age of the Church until the end.

Reading the Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew presents itself as such through its narrative, through the form of a story. Reading the Gospel of Matthew, then, requires significant attention to its narrative dynamics. Redaction criticism fails to take account of narrative dynamics and ironically goes beyond and behind an evangelist's intention. The evangelists did not intend their Gospels to be read in the way redaction critics read, with such scrupulous attention to presumed prior sources (in the case of the Gospel of Mark) and utterly hypothetical, non-extant sources (in the case of Q). The Gospels draw attention to the Old Testament through the rhetorical devices of allusion and quotation but they do not quote material from other Gospels directly. Above all, the Gospels read well as stories, as narratives, for that is what they are, as the evangelists composed wholes and intended them to be read as such. Moreover, when one reads the Gospels using redaction criticism, they become surreptitious stories about crises in hypothetical communities when they in fact present themselves openly as stories about Jesus. Finally, in canonical perspective, the Gospel of Matthew's primary position in the fourfold Gospel canon suggests it is to be read before the other Gospels.

For these reasons, I will read the Gospel of Matthew as the narrative it purports to be and speak of the "Model Reader," a concept developed by the Italian theorist Umberto Eco,²⁶ much like the more familiar "ideal reader," a regulative concept used to determine what sense should be made of the text itself apart from any consideration of the empirical author or real readers. Speaking of the Model Reader instead of what the empirical author may have intended permits the entirety of the text of the Gospel of Matthew to be taken into account (unlike redaction criticism, which focuses on that small percentage of a Gospel's text that constitutes additions, omissions, and changes) and its narrative dynamics.

When one examines the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew, one finds the Gospel pushing not backward but forward. Its final words are oriented not to its own original community in some sort of self-referential way but to the future. True, it draws deeply on the past; it is a Gospel of radical continuity with the tradition of the Scriptures of Israel and their community of Israel. Yet that continuity is neither repristination nor nostalgia. It draws on that tradition as a resource for mission in the perpetual present, as the tips of leaves draw on roots.

The Gospel of Matthew tells an ironic story of reversal that is one of both tragedy and triumph. Ironic, because the initial expectations the Gospel raises for

26 See Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Advances in Semiotics (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979). For Eco's applicability to biblical studies, see Leroy Huizenga, *The New Isaac: Tradition and Intertextuality in the Gospel of Matthew*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 131 (Leiden: Brill, 2009; repr. 2012), 21–74.

the Model Reader are ultimately reversed, and tragic, for Israel qua Israel loses its status as the privileged community of mission, but triumphal in that God's purposes for the world are not thwarted in spite of the human race's rejection of the Christ. Indeed, as the Matthean Jesus is the embodiment of Israel and the fulfillment of its promises and mission, in Jesus' vindication and exaltation Israel is vindicated and exalted and Israel's mission to be a "light to the nations"²⁷ commences anew.

Initial Expectations: How Will He Save His People, and Who Are They?

The first chapter of the Gospel sets the Model Reader deeply in the world of traditional, conservative first-century Palestinian Judaism. The first verse suggests that Jesus Christ is to be understood in terms of two fundamental Christological categories, Messiah (=son of David) and sacrifice like Isaac (=son of Abraham).²⁸ The genealogy begins with Abraham, the Father of faith.²⁹ And then the Model Reader confronts the story of the Virgin Birth, identifying Jesus Christ with God³⁰ and thus investing him with divine personhood and authority. Most interesting is the explanation of Jesus' name: "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."³¹ The explanation raises two implicit questions for the Model Reader: Who are his people, and how will he save them from their sins?³²

In reading, the human mind confronts and answers questions raised by such nodes (Eco's term) of the text automatically again and again in a subconscious fashion. But here it is helpful to engage in some conscious hypothesizing: the intratextual constitution of the text here raises these questions for the Model Reader, and drawing on encyclopedic, intertextual knowledge, the Model Reader first hazards that "his people" are the Jews and he will save them from their sins by killing for them. For while there were indeed diverse messianic understandings in antiquity, that is what the Davidic Messiah was generally expected to do. The people are under the oppression of Roman rule (however indirectly, it is true that there was not an Italian centurion on every street corner in Jerusalem) because of their sins, and forgiveness of sins means violent liberation from oppression so that the Jews once more might have something even more than what the Hasmoneans achieved. They might have a new, eschatological United Monarchy ruled by a new David.³³

27 See Isa. 49:6.

28 See Huizenga, *New Isaac*, 139–143.

29 See Matt. 1:2–17.

30 Matt. 1:23.

31 Matt. 1:21.

32 See Mark Allan Powell, "The Plot and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 38 (1992): 196.

33 See Warren Carter, "Evoking Isaiah: Matthean Soteriology and an Intertextual Reading of Isaiah 7–9 and Matthew 1:23 and 4:15–16," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119 (2000): 503–520;

So far, then, the Model Reader expects a story of violent conquest in which Israel's liberation will be achieved in the time of the eschaton. But for the Model Reader those initial assumptions are almost immediately thrown into question with the story of the Magi in Matthew chapter two. The Magi, pagan astrologers from the East, arrive searching for the "King of the Jews," a title already bequeathed to Herod the Great by the Roman Senate roughly forty years prior, a fact known to the Model Reader by virtue of encyclopedic knowledge. Herod is "troubled" and "all Jerusalem with him,"³⁴ not pleased, not overjoyed, by news that some are seeking a new king. Unless one is in Narnia, there can be only one king (or queen). And so Herod tries to kill baby Jesus. Herod wants to destroy him.³⁵ Being warned about this in a dream, Joseph takes mother and child and flees to Egypt. Then follows the formula citation of Hosea 11:1b in Matthew 2:15: "Out of Egypt have I called my son," which functions to present Jesus as the embodiment of Israel, as Israel/Jacob is the son of Hosea 11. Further, the formula quotation occurs immediately after the Holy Family travels to Egypt and they do not return from Egypt to Galilee until Matthew 2:19–21. The Gospel of Matthew thus subtly describes the infant Jesus' contemporary Israel as Egypt, and therefore inverts Egypt and Israel. Moreover, it is Herod, the king of Israel, who seeks to destroy Jesus, whereas the Magi, Gentile foreigners, are paying Jesus the homage he deserves. Finally, Hosea provides no heroic recollection of the Exodus. Rather, God's love for Israel is contrasted with Israel's abject failure, detailed in Hosea 11:2: "The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and burning incense to idols." The episode is thus an early instance of the significant Matthean theme of Jesus' conflict with Jewish leadership leading to Gentile inclusion.

Jesus' Perspective and God's Perspective on the Extent of Jesus' Mission

The Matthean Jesus, however, does not know that his mission extends to the Gentiles. He sends his disciples only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel³⁶ and refuses, at first, to aid a Canaanite woman's daughter because he believes himself to have been sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.³⁷ In the instance of the healing of the centurion's servant the Matthean Jesus does voice the conviction that "many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness,"³⁸ but otherwise seeks out no Gentiles and says nothing

and Warren Carter, "Matthew and the Gentiles: Individual Conversion and/or Systemic Transformation?" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (2004): 259–282.

34 Matt. 2:3.

35 Matt. 2:13; see 12:14 and 27:20.

36 Matt. 10:5–6.

37 Matt. 15:21–28.

38 Matt. 8:11–12.

positive about them until the after the resurrection.³⁹ Given that the healing of the centurion's servant appears before Jesus' declaration of the restriction of his mission to the house of Israel, it is likely that the Matthean Jesus is thinking not of a mission to the Gentiles in history, in the time of Israel or the Church, but the eschatological coming of the Gentiles to Zion.⁴⁰ The centurion comes to him; Jesus does not go to the centurion.

The divine perspective is different, however. The narrator shows in the story of the Magi and tells through explicit prophecy that God's promises to the Gentiles will be realized in Jesus through the quotation of Isaiah 9 in Matthew 4 and above all of Isaiah 42 in Matthew 12: "He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles...and in his name will the Gentiles hope."⁴¹ The transformation of Jesus' perspective that his mission is restricted to Israel is achieved only after the resurrection and only then reconciled with the Model Reader's knowledge that God intends Jesus' mission to extend to Gentiles.

But if the God of Israel who prophesied through Isaiah knew all along that Gentiles would receive their promised blessings through Jesus, their inclusion requires Jewish rejection of Jesus on a human level, a pattern seen throughout the New Testament.⁴² Herod, the King of the Jews, had tried to kill little baby Jesus, and John the Baptist excoriates those who will become Jesus' foremost opponents even before his baptism of the latter. Indeed, in an oft-overlooked instance of Matthean parallelism, the Gospel presents both John and Jesus facing mortal threats that lead to Jesus' withdrawal and then a quotation from Isaiah promising Gentile inclusion. In Matthew 4:12 Jesus hears that John is arrested and withdraws (*ἀνεχώρησεν*) from there to Capernaum, near Zebulun and Naphtali, occasioning a quote from Isaiah 9:1–2 promising good things to pagans:

The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea,
across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat
in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the
region and shadow of death light has dawned (Matt. 4:15–16).

In Matthew 12:14–21, Jesus encounters the threat of the Pharisees' murderous conspiracy and aware of it "withdrew" (*ἀνεχώρησεν*) from there, upon which the narrator supplies another quote from Isaiah promising good things to pagans, this time from Isaiah 42: "He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles...and in his name will the Gentiles hope."⁴³

39 Matt. 28:16–20.

40 See Isa. 2:2, 5:26, 49:6b.

41 Matt. 12:18, 21.

42 See Acts 28:28; Rom. 9–11.

43 Matt. 12:18, 21.

The Eucharistic Mission of the Matthean Church

In Matthew 16, then, after rising opposition, Jesus founds a Church, a remnant community formed to continue Israel's mission of redemption of the world as Israel's leadership refuses to let Jesus lead.⁴⁴ But here Gentiles are not yet in view. In the prior chapter Jesus had ignored the Canaanite woman⁴⁵ and refused her request for a remote exorcism of her daughter, claiming again that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.⁴⁶ Too often popular piety protects Jesus in this passage, claiming that Jesus is trying to tease faith out of the woman but really wants to help her all along. A better reading, more faithful to the cultural and literary context of the passage, sees the Matthean Jesus here as a conservative male Jew who has little time for either women or pagans.

So the Church in Matthew 16 should not yet be envisioned to include Gentiles. The Church appears implicitly in the Parable of the Wicked Tenants.⁴⁷ Jesus tells the parable against "the chief priests and the elders of the people,"⁴⁸ telling them fatefully, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation (*ἔθνη*) producing the fruits of it."⁴⁹ "Nation" here is singular, not plural; we do not have here—nor do we find elsewhere in the Gospel of Matthew—ethnic Israel replaced by a Gentile Church. Rather, given the flow of the narrative, at this point the singular "nation" is likely the Church, but the Church is as of yet regarded as exclusively Jewish, a remnant body from within Israel continuing Israel's redeeming work in the world.

But it will continue that redeeming work apart from the mainstream body of Israel's institutions, such as rabbinate ("rabbi" is never a positive word in the Gospel of Matthew⁵⁰) and Temple (as Jesus predicts its destruction⁵¹). By this point in the narrative, the Model Reader is considering a different answer to the question, "Who are his people?" The initial and justified assumption is that his people are Israel, the Jews. But now the Model Reader is starting to see that "his people" is the Church. And as that body breaks from the parent body, the Model Reader finds Jesus erecting himself and his sacrifice as replacements for the rabbinate and the Temple. Jesus says, "But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher"—

44 Crucial reading on this difficult point is Matthias Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Kathleen Ess, Baylor-Mohr Siebeck Studies in Early Christianity (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), who, against readings of the Gospel of Matthew that present a Gentile Church replacing a forfeit, forsaken Israel, argues that Jesus' mission fulfills God's promises to Israel while opening up salvation to all in the Church.

45 Matt. 15:21–28.

46 Matt. 15:24.

47 Matt. 21:33–46.

48 Matt. 21:23.

49 Matt. 21:43.

50 See Matt. 23:7, 26:25, and 26:49.

51 Matt. 24:2.

presumably Jesus himself—"and you are all brethren."⁵² Jesus "cleanses" the temple and not so subtly prophesies its destruction not only by turning over tables but also by alluding to Jeremiah 7 in Matthew 21:13b, an allusion to Jeremiah's prophecy of the destruction of the first Temple which then functions as Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of the second Temple, a prophecy made explicit to his disciples and the Model Reader in Matthew 24:2. And most notably in Matthew 26:26–29 Jesus institutes the Eucharist in the context of the Passover meal. Here Jesus sets himself up as a new Passover, something well understood in early Christianity.⁵³ He takes the Passover ritual but transforms it into his own rite. In particular, Jesus claims the chalice is "my blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." His blood is "poured out," or "shed," *ἐκχυννόμενον*, from *ἐκχύνω*, a technical word with sacrificial denotations and connotations in the LXX.⁵⁴ The answer to the second question, "How will he save his people from their sins?" is thus unexpected: He will save his people not by killing for them but by dying for them, offering himself as a sacrifice in crucifixion and chalice.

Jesus' Mission to the Gentiles

By this point in the narrative, then, the Messiah has fulfilled the promises to Israel and ushered in the inbreaking of the Kingdom. But having encountered opposition, he founds the Church as a remnant community to carry forth Israel's work of redemption in the world, a community with its teacher in Jesus, its leaders in the Twelve, and its sacrifice in the Eucharist.

When, then, do Gentiles enter Jesus' plans? After the Israel contemporary with Jesus rejects him utterly. Jesus Christ is before Pilate, along with Jesus Barabbas.⁵⁵ Pilate attempts to release Jesus Christ, whom the Model Reader knows is the true Son of the Father,⁵⁶ but the crowd demands his crucifixion and the release of the imposter son of the Father, Barabbas. The craven Pilate washes his hands of the matter and declares he is innocent of Jesus' blood.⁵⁷ And then "all the people" cry out some of the most horrifying and consequential words in human history: "His blood be on us and on our children!"⁵⁸ The phrase "All the people"

⁵² Matt. 23:8.

⁵³ See 1 Cor. 5:7.

⁵⁴ See, for instance, Exod. 29:12 and Lev. 4:7, 12, 25, 30, 8:15, 9:9.

⁵⁵ Craig Evans contends that one should read "Jesus Barabbas" (*Ἰησοῦν Βαραββάν*) in Matt. 27:16–17, finding it more likely that a scribe would eliminate "Jesus" for reasons of reverence rather than add it for reasons of parallelism. See Evans, *Matthew*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 453.

⁵⁶ See here the "Johannine thunderbolt" of Matt. 11:27, "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

⁵⁷ Matt. 27:24.

⁵⁸ Matt. 27:25.

recalls for the Model Reader “all Jerusalem” being troubled along with Herod at the rumors of the birth of a new King of the Jews,⁵⁹ and here what is adumbrated in the story of the Magi is fulfilled: the ultimate rejection of Jesus not just by Jewish leadership, parties, and sects, but indeed “all the people.”

It is crucial at this point to understand several things: First, Gentiles are not yet in Jesus’ picture; ethnic Israel is not being replaced by a Church of Gentiles. Second, Jesus remains Jewish, and his original disciples remain Jewish, and remain so past the time of the Gospel into the period of the Church and indeed the eschaton. Third, “His blood be on us and on our children” need not imply a perpetual curse upon ethnic Jews. Rather, in the world of the Matthean story, any “curse” here lasts two generations: upon the generation calling for Jesus’ crucifixion, and then their children, the generation which endures the horrors of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem and its temple predicted by Jesus himself.

But again, on a human level, this Jewish rejection of Jesus precipitates Gentile inclusion. Only after—but soon after—“all the people” utter these terrifying words does Jesus utter a definitive positive mention of a Gentile mission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”⁶⁰ Here, now, for the first time, Jesus clearly and directly encourages mission to Gentiles. The direction is important: Jesus sends the Church to them. In the story of the Gospel itself, Jesus never goes to Gentiles; they come to him, whether the Magi,⁶¹ the centurion in Capernaum⁶² (though Jesus is willing to go with him, the centurion comes first to him, and Jesus ultimately does not go with him), or the Canaanite woman.⁶³ Here, then, at the end of the Gospel, is something new: deliberate mission to the Gentiles.

Rereading the Gospel of Matthew as Christian Scripture

Now many interpreters of Scripture operate with a hermeneutics of the gap, thinking that the idea is to bridge a chasm between the Bible in the ancient world and their situation in the modern world. But reading with a sense of continuity in which we stand in the time of the Church, anticipating the eschaton, helps us to read the Gospel of Matthew as Christian Scripture. For the Gospel of Matthew, it is the time of the Church from resurrection to eschaton.

A particular phrase from Jesus’ Great Commission, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you,”⁶⁴ functions to make the Gospel of Matthew

59 Matt. 2:3.

60 Matt. 28:19–20a.

61 Matt. 2:1–12.

62 Matt. 8:5–13.

63 Matt. 15:21–28.

64 Matt. 28:20a.

more than a mere Jewish document from antiquity, a textual artifact bearing witness to a long-dead apocalyptic sect within Judaism. Rather, it is a Christian document of perpetual relevance, sacred Scripture. For as many Matthean scholars have recognized, the phrase invites rereading of the Gospel of Matthew with the knowledge that the Model Reader has acquired along the way, as all that Jesus has commanded them and now commands them to teach others among the nations is contained in the prior material of the Gospel itself.⁶⁵

This enables a reading of Matthew that is allegorical (as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, as representatives of the West, would understand it, in a limited sense, rooted in the letter). For instance, in light of Jesus' institution of the Eucharist, references to the altar throughout the Gospel of Matthew may now be understood to refer to the Christian altar of the Eucharist⁶⁶ and not only the altar of the temple, as in Matthew 5:23–24: "So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go." In this way does material that Jesus' predictions of the destruction of the temple would seem to render more or less pointless after the fact find perpetual relevance. Put simply, why would the Jesus of the Gospel of Matthew spend so much time on the concerns of Judaism in the shadow of the temple when he knows it will not long endure? If on a first reading the Gospel of Matthew presents a Jesus who would lead Israel into and in the new age as her Messiah and savior, on a second reading the Gospel of Matthew presents a Jesus who would lead the Church into and in the new age as her Messiah and savior.

One might say that there are thus two Gospels of Matthew the Model Reader encounters, as "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" puts the Model Reader on a cyclical loop into that future "to the close of the age,"⁶⁷ making the Gospel of Matthew a document of perpetual relevance for the Church. And in either of these Gospels—the one the Model Reader encounters on a first reading, or the one the Model Reader encounters on a second reading—it is a time of fulfillment.

65 See, for example, Dale C. Allison, "Foreshadowing the Passion," in *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 218–219; R. W. L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 189–191; Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5–6; Ulrich Luz, "Matthean Christology Outlined in Theses," in *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 83.

66 Early Christians were indeed speaking in terms of an altar, as Hebrews, another document from the orbit of early Jewish Christianity, and perhaps roughly the time of the production of the Gospel of Matthew, makes plain: "We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat" (Heb. 13:10). See also 1 Cor. 10, which presents significant parallels between the Jewish altar and the Christian Eucharist.

67 Matt. 28:20.

The theme of “fulfillment” in the Gospel of Matthew has occasioned much discussion, particularly in light of the “lure” of the formula quotations, which have drawn attention away from other ways in which the Gospel of Matthew appropriates Scripture (for example, allusion) by their formal prominence.⁶⁸ Perhaps one of the best but neglected pieces on the issue belongs to J. R. Daniel Kirk, “Conceptualizing Fulfillment in Matthew.”⁶⁹ Avoiding the “lure,” Kirk proposes a “narrative typology” that avoids collecting isolated typological resonances and instead “see[s] that [Jesus’] life takes the shape of Israel’s story.”⁷⁰ Kirk’s approach makes sense of the structure of the Christian Scriptures, which situates the Gospel of Matthew in the canonical center as the First Gospel, and it makes sense of the Gospel of Matthew itself. The Gospel of Matthew comes first precisely because it is a Gospel of fulfillment, the canon suggesting to Christians that Jesus is indeed the fulfillment of the prophets’ words, which come last in the Christian Old Testament. Further, in and of itself, the Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as a new Israel, as the embodiment of Israel. The formula citation of Hosea 11:1b in Matthew 2:15 (“out of Egypt I called my son”) functions to present Jesus as the embodiment of Israel.⁷¹ So too does the Testing narrative⁷² concern the testing of Jesus as the embodiment of Israel.

There is some question, however, as to whether Jesus will be faithful, for Israel’s history contains instances of gross failure and disobedience by corporate Israel and otherwise heroic individuals therein.⁷³ Hosea 11 itself recounts the disobedience of Israel. The Testing narrative answers this question affirmatively and definitively.⁷⁴ Jesus is tested; Israel was tested in the wilderness.⁷⁵ Jesus is in

68 Donald Senior’s phrase, from his piece “The Lure of the Formula Quotations: Re-Assessing Matthew as A Test Case,” in *The Scriptures in the Gospels*, ed. C. M. Tuckett, *Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium* 131 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 89–115.

69 See J. R. Daniel Kirk, “Conceptualizing Fulfillment in Matthew,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 59 (2008): 77–98.

70 Kirk, “Conceptualizing Fulfillment,” 77.

71 See also Exod. 4:22–23: “And you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.””

72 Matt. 4:1–11.

73 It is often noted that the genealogy itself indicates this. See Stefan Alkier, “Zeichen der Erinnerung: Die Genealogie in Mt 1 als intertextuelle Disposition” [Signs of Memory: The Genealogy in Matthew 1 as Intertextual Disposition], in *Bekenntnis und Erinnerung* [Confession and Memory], eds. K.–M. Bull and Eckart Reinmuth, *Rostocker Theologische Studien* 16 (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 108–128 for an insightful treatment of its intertextual dynamics.

74 On this, see Birger Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God’s Son (Matt 4:1–11 & Par): An Analysis of an Early Christian Midrash* (Lund: Gleerup, 1966), who argues that this episode is similar to rabbinic exposition of the Shema. The pertinent rabbinic texts are *m. Ber.* 9:5 and *Sipre Deut.* 6:5.

75 Matt. 4:1; Deut. 8:2.

the desert forty days and nights; Israel was in the wilderness forty years.⁷⁶ Jesus is hungry; Israel was hungry.⁷⁷ In this brief story there are three quotations from Deuteronomy.⁷⁸ Indeed, in this section of Deuteronomy Israel is adjured repeatedly to be faithful to the Lord in light of the Exodus and the giving of the Commandments.⁷⁹ As such, Matthew 4:1–11 presents Jesus recapitulating Israel's experience in the desert as detailed in Deuteronomy 6–8.⁸⁰ Jesus obeys perfectly, unlike Israel in the wilderness. On an incarnational reading of "Emmanuel,"⁸¹ then, God himself (who is not the God of the philosophers, but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Israel) in Jesus fulfills Israel's story. All other christological typologies and titles ought to be subordinated to this one. Jesus fulfills not only particular biblical personalities in a typological way but indeed the entirety of the "law and the prophets."⁸²

If the God of Israel fulfills Israel's story in Jesus, then the Model Reader sees more clearly the Matthean emphasis on continuity. It is easy to emphasize discontinuity in the Gospel of Matthew, given the history of Christian anti-Judaism, the Gospel's own historical role in generating that history as it suffers misreading, and the radical claims of newness in the Gospel rooted in the uniqueness of the divine authority of Jesus' person ("for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes"⁸³), the one who is so bold as to issue his own commandments.⁸⁴ Jesus fulfills the line of Israel as son of Abraham (a new Isaac, and thus a sacrifice) and son of David (Messiah)⁸⁵ as God himself come to earth⁸⁶ who is with us always.⁸⁷

Jesus is and remains Jewish. Jesus assumes a Jewish worldview, whatever his particular mindset within Judaism. Jesus does not start from scratch, as docetic and moralistic Enlightenment theology would have it. And the Model Reader perceives that continuity. The story of Israel culminates in Jesus the Jew, but—as

76 Matt. 4:1; Deut. 8:2.

77 Matt. 4:1; Deut. 8:3.

78 Deut. 8:3 in Matt. 4:4; Deut. 6:16 in Matt. 4:7; Deut. 6:13 in Matt. 4:10.

79 Deut. 5.

80 See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988–1997), 1:352.

81 Matt. 1:23.

82 Matt. 5:17.

83 Matt. 7:29.

84 See Matt. 5:19–20, in which the proximal demonstrative pronoun "these" qualifies "commandments," as well as the repeated references to the Kingdom of God which Jesus inaugurates beginning in Matthew 4:17 seem to indicate not that the Law and Prophets *per se* are in view, but Jesus' own commandments which follow in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Gospel as a whole.

85 Matt. 1:1 and 2–17.

86 Matt. 1:18–25.

87 Matt. 1:23; 28:20.

a result both of the divine plan as indicated in the story of the Magi and the quotations of Isaiah 9 and 12 and also human hostility—Jesus founds the Church not to replace Israel in a brute substitution but to continue her work to be the servant proclaiming “justice to the Gentiles.” Jesus himself will lead those Jews (and post-resurrection, Gentiles) who would join him as his disciples as he, God with them,⁸⁸ present in their midst when gathered,⁸⁹ promises to be with them to the end of the age.⁹⁰ The time of the Gospel of Matthew, then, is now: the time of the Eucharistic mission of the Church to all the nations, as the Church is to do what Jesus commands, which chief among many other things is to celebrate the Eucharist.⁹¹ The Gospel of Matthew makes clear that Jesus Christ stands at the center of salvation history and that his presence in the Eucharist stands at the center of our salvation today.

•

hermeneutical gap. Rather, we stand in the time of the Church, like the Matthean community itself, and hear Jesus' words directly as did they as part of the same Church he founded.