

1 Matthew. A Log Cabin Publican? Good News for Sex Workers!

Structure: Narrative + Five Discourses (cf. the Pentateuch)

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1. Introduction: "anti-Semitic" Judaism? Just as Mark probably "signed" his Gospel with the scene of a young man who fled naked (Mark 14:50-51), Matthew apparently paints a self-portrait when he writes:

"Every scribe who has become a disciple for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure first what is new [Jesus' Good News] and then what is old [Moses' Law/the Torah]" (Matthew 13:52).

Since those who identified with Jesus' "way" continued to be a sect within Judaism during the first century AD, it would be anachronistic to think of Matthew as a Jew who became a "Christian." Consequently, we should understand his harsh expressions against certain "Jews" not as an expression of anti-Judaism (much less modern racially based anti-Semitism), but as a prophetic denunciation against other sectors within Judaism, especially the Pharisees.¹

According to early patristic tradition, Matthew was written by the toll collector, Matthew/Levi, whom Jesus called to discipleship (Matt. 9:9), who then immediately threw a banquet to introduce Jesus to other toll collectors (despised collaborators with the Roman Empire who worked in the customhouses), including in the invitation even sex-workers, their equally marginalized friends (9:10-13 // Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32; cf. Matt. 5:46; 11:19; 18:17; 21:31-32).

The name Matthew (Mattiyah in Hebrew) means “gift of Yah[weh]/God,” but in Greek Matthaios sounds similar to “disciples” (Greek: mathetai), those who “become/make disciples” (Greek: matheteo), a key word in the Gospel (see “disciple all nations,” 28:19). Matthew probably was written for a mixed church (Jewish-Gentile) in Syrian Antioch (4:24; Acts 13:1) at a time of much persecution (Matt. 5:10-12). The Antiochene church, founded by Hellenistic Jews, had a long tradition (since Paul’s ministry, 46-65 AD), of reaching out to Gentiles.

The memoirs of the former publican (toll collector--perhaps the “scribe” of 13:52 in his later years) may have been edited in final form by another Jewish Christian (scribe, 13:52?). Whatever the process, Matthew has both a markedly Jewish and emphatically Christian character: in 13:52 the new, unexpectedly, has priority over the old. Matthew uses Mark (written c. 69 AD), as well as our earliest source “Q” (from the German Quelle, written c. 60 AD). Q consisted of the teachings that Matthew has in common with Luke (e.g., the sermon of Matthew 5--7 // Luke 6; Luke ca. 80). In addition to Mark and Q, Matthew contains much of its own and unique material, commonly indicated by “M”. The date for Matthew’s final editing and publication may be ca. 85 AD, after news about the destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD) became widely disseminated (21:41; 22:7; 24:15-16).

Most modern scholars find it difficult to accept as author of the Gospel, Levi, the toll collector, especially because they cannot imagine that a disciple and eye-witness of Jesus’ ministry would have taken over so much from Mark (a secondary source). However, according to patristic tradition, Mark represents the eye-witness testimony of Peter, who plays a uniquely large role in Matthew (see below). Moreover, literary habits of ancient authors and scribes regarding use of earlier documents differed from our modern capitalistic norms that emphasize originality and respect for copyrights to protect authors’ economic interests in the market.² Consequently, even if our present Matthew does not proceed directly from the pen of the tax collector Levi, the Gospel still may preserve memoirs/traditions from this disciple, which formed the basis of

the patristic tradition of Matthew as author. The Gospel's originality is evident in the author's remarkably creative theological and homiletic use of earlier documents (Q and Mark), as well as in the materials peculiar to Matthew (M).

Whoever the author, the emphatically Jewish character of Matthew is undeniable. Matthew so respects Jewish sensibilities that he prefers to speak of the "Kingdom of Heaven" (not "of God") and changes the reference to two men in a bed (Luke 17:34 = Q; KJV) to two men in a field (Matt. 24:30; cf. the "beloved slave" of Luke 7:2, but "son/slave" [Greek: pais] in Matt. 8:6). In addition, Matthew:

- begins with a genealogy (1:1-17, "Abraham" and "David");
- emphasizes the Law/Torah (5:17-20; 23:1-3)
- cites 14 Hebrew Scripture texts as prophecies Jesus fulfilled (2:5b-6, 15b, 17-18, 23b; 3:3; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:14-15, 35; 21:4-5; 25:56 [cf. 26:54]; 27:9-10);
- refers to specifically Jewish acts of piety (bring gifts to the Temple altar, 5:23-24).

Matthew presents Jesus as the son of Abraham and of David (1:1, 17), the new Moses who ascends a mountain to receive and communicate divine revelation (5:1-2; 7:28-29) and collects Jesus' teaching into five great sermons, parallel to the five books of Moses. Matthew alternates Jesus' five great discourses with five narrations. The ten miracles in Matthew 8-9 (mainly healings) contrast impressively with the ten plagues of the Exodus). At the same time, however, Matthew is also emphatically "Christian," emphasizing Jesus as the Christ/Messiah, Son of God and Son of Man and (in texts taken over from Mark) underscores titles of divinity and even worship offered to Jesus.

2. Literary Genre. Even in conservative and evangelical circles, Robert H. Gundry's erudite commentary (1982/94) has provoked questions and discussions concerning the literary genre and historicity of the traditions Matthew preserves. Against the great majority of contemporary scholars, Gundry defends the tradition of Matthew as author and an early date (ca. 60-62).³ Gundry concludes, however, that, in addition to historical traditions taken primarily from Mark and the source Q, Matthew also includes elements of "midrash" (homiletical and theological creativity that do not reflect historical data—see Jesus' parables).⁴ Another evangelical, Donald A. Hagner, defends the fundamental historicity of all that Matthew includes without claiming that he wrote with the technical precision of a modern historian.⁵

Since 1985 the famous Jesus Seminar, a self-selected American group (74 reputable scholars, but mainly of radical bent) has managed to utilize the mass media to disseminate their conclusion that very little in the four Gospels has any historical basis (the Seminar has voted that less than 20% of sayings the Gospels attribute to Jesus are authentic). Mainline and conservative critics point out that the conclusions of this self-appointed group do not represent the scholarly consensus.⁶ However, literature (such as Jesus' parables) may be inspired and a source of divine wisdom, even when not pretending to measure up to modern expectations of scientific historiography. Whether Matthew includes much, little or no "midrash," the historical basis of Jesus' life is solidly grounded in the other Gospels, as well as in the historical elements Matthew shares with them.

3. From "the Poor in Spirit" to "The Least of These My Brothers." Careful readers have observed that in Luke's Gospel, Jesus addresses his first beatitude to his disciples as "you poor" (Luke 6:20), while in Matthew he speaks of "the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3). Luke includes Jesus' discourse in which he cites Isaiah to specify that his mission is to proclaim Good News to the poor and liberation for the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2 + 58:6)--a fundamental text for Latin American liberation theologians. At first glance, Matthew thus makes Jesus' option for the poor less offensive and thus appears more "conservative" than Luke.

A more careful reading, however, reveals that Matthew also is quite radical. "Spirit" in the Bible is not immaterial but is God's force, often invisible like the wind, a hurricane, fire, lightning or the cause of earthquakes. Matthew, who addressed a sect including a few affluent members, clarifies that God's blessing is promised not only for the poor but also for those who manifest solidarity with them in times of persecution, since such solidarity involves putting your life at risk (see Matthew's two Joseph paradigms: Mary's husband, 1:18-2:23; and Joseph of Arimathea, 27:57-61--an example of structural inclusion).

Throughout his entire Gospel Matthew develops the sense of "poor in spirit" whenever he speaks of solidarity and justice in the new community--but above all when he describes the Final Judgment with his unique criterion of separation: solidarity with the poor, the needy, and the persecuted (structural inclusion: Jesus' first and last teaching). In Jesus' original teaching, transmitted orally, the needy "brothers and sisters" (Matt. 25:31-46) probably referred to any human in need. However, when Matthew included Jesus' parable in his Gospel, his own linguistic usage and emphasis on the church resulted in a more concrete nuance of a

“Christian brother” in need. Such a specific application was especially appropriate because of the oppression and persecution that the church in Antioch was suffering when Matthew wrote. This concrete application to Christian “brothers” (persecuted, missionaries?; see Acts 8:1-4), however, is not exclusive or preferential, but should be understood as paradigmatic for any humans in need (see God’s Exodus liberation of Israel; Luke’s parable of the Good Samaritan; Galatians 6:10).

Many liberation theologians thus recognize in Matthew 25:31-46 a text even more radical than Luke 4:18-19. In this parable Jesus insists that at the Final Judgment “correct ideas” or proper theology (believing that God is one, or triune, or that Jesus is God incarnate) will not matter. The Judge inquires only about the works of loving solidarity done for humans in need. Religious people commonly devote immense energy, even resorting to “holy wars,” to defend their “orthodoxy.” Jesus, however, insists that in the Final Judgment all that will matter is their “orthopraxis”—sacrificial solidarity with humans in need (“take up your cross”). This revolutionary parable of Jesus, preserved only in Matthew (“M”), subverts all human ideologies and religions.⁷

Dennis Duling⁸ summarizes well the vocabulary that describes the numerous types of poor in Matthew:

- 1) forced laborers, 5:27 (implied)
- 2) day laborers (ergates): 20:1, 2, 8, perhaps 9:37-38; 10:10
- 3) slaves/servants (doulos): 8:9; 10:24-25; 13:27-28; 18:23, 26-28, 32; 20:27; 21:34, 36; 2:3-4, 6, 8, 10; 24:45-46, 48, 50; 25:14, 19, 21, 23 (2x), 30; 26:51;
slave/son (pais, adopted?): 8:6, 8, 13; 12:18 (Isaiah 42:1); 14:2; 17:18; 21:15?
- 4) peasants, urban poor, and destitute:
 - crowd(s) (ochlos): 50 references!, including women, slaves, peasants, sick and physically challenged, eunuchs
 - tenant farmers (georgos): 21:33
 - poor (ptochos): literal in 11:5; 19:21; 26:9-11; cf. 5:3 “in spirit” (allies)
 - receivers of alms (eleemosune): 6:1-6; 19:21

Also, only Matthew indicates that the meek will inherit the earth (5:5), a reference to the year of jubilee (Leviticus 25) as an image of the Kingdom (Matt. 6:12; 18:21-35; Luke 4:18-19).⁹

Duling Illustration¹⁰

To what extent does Matthew reflect the dominant biblical perspective that views oppression as the fundamental cause of poverty?¹¹ Granted, the more obvious technical vocabulary for oppression is not

common in Matthew (see “unjust/oppressors,” 5:45; “injustice, wrong, harm,” 20:13). However, when we recognize that persecution constitutes a religiously -motivated expression of oppression in Matthew, his affinity with the Exodus paradigm becomes clear, since being persecuted for practicing liberating justice (5:10-12) forms the inclusion linking the final beatitude with the first on those who show solidarity with the poor (5:3), while promise to the meek who are to inherit land (5:5) relates to the mourning of those who have lost their land due to exile and other mechanisms of oppression (5:4). Matthew is well aware of judicial mechanisms of oppression (see the more powerful “legal opponent, oppressor,” 5:25). His narrative of Herod’s violent oppression (2:16-20) shows his awareness of the social-political realities under Roman rule (2:16-20; see 5:40-41, 43-46). Matthew’s denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees refers to mechanisms of oppression with metaphor (“burdens,” 23:4) and synonyms (“robbery,” 23:25; “lawlessness,” 23:28) and concludes with indignant denunciations of violence (25:29-30). Violent oppressors are denounced as “serpents, offspring of vipers” (23:33; see 3:7, 10). Like --> Mark, Matthew makes clear the link between the oppression and violence characteristic of the local Temple -based political-religious oligarchy (23:38) and the destruction of the Temple (24:15-28) and cosmic judgment (24:29--25:46; see oppression synonyms in 24:9, 12, 21, 29, 48-49; cf. the poor, oppressed and weak in 25:35-39). As in James (5:1-9), so in Matthew, Jesus’ decisive final intervention constitutes liberating justice for the poor and all the oppressed, including the Gentile nations (Matt. 12:15-21).

4. The Kingdom of Heaven as God’s Liberating Justice. As John P. Meier points out, Matthew lacks the word that corresponds to the terms “morals” or “ethics,” both categories of Greek philosophy. For Matthew the equivalent general category is that of “justice” (commonly misleadingly rendered “righteousness” in English versions).¹² However, justice in Matthew (and the Bible as a whole) normally refers to the kind of liberating justice with which God acted to liberate the Hebrew slaves in the Exodus, which serves as the fundamental paradigm in Biblical theology (3:15; 5:6; 6:33; cf. human justice in 5:10, 20; 6:1; 21:32; especially 25:31-46).¹³ Such liberating justice represents “God’s will” (12:46-50), revealed to the disciples in Jesus’ five discourses in Matthew, and is the fundamental characteristic of the Kingdom of God (6:33; see also “Kingdom of God” in 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43; Matthew, of course, prefers the synonym, the “Kingdom of Heaven,” used 33 times). Because he presents liberating justice as the fundamental

characteristic of God's promised New Order, Matthew's Good News of the Kingdom (4:23; 9:35; 24:14; cf. 26:13) is similar to Luke's "Good News to the poor" (4:18).

Careful examination of Matthew, where justice terminology (dik-words) is common (28 uses: 26 positively + two times negatively [with the alpha privative, to signify "oppress," or "injustice"]), actually supports the picture from Q and --> Mark, where dik-words are virtually absent. Thus, while in Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount/Plain (Q), Jesus says "Blessed are YOU who hunger now, for YOU will be satisfied" (Luke 6:21a), in Matthew's version Jesus says "Blessed are THOSE who hunger and thirst for liberating justice [dikaïos̄hen], for THEY will be filled" (Matt. 5:6). The changes from "you" to "they" and the addition of "for liberating justice" are best explained as Matthew's own editorial additions that adapted Jesus' original teaching (Q) to later communities that included prosperous members who needed to learn to practice solidarity with the poor. Similarly, Luke reports Jesus as saying simply "Seek God's kingdom and these things will be given to you as well" (Luke 12:31), but in Matthew's better-known version Jesus says "Seek FIRST God's kingdom AND LIBERATING JUSTICE [dikaïos̄hen] and ALL these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33). Again, while theoretically Jesus might well have made both statements verbatim, meticulous scholarship supports the conclusion that such additions probably represent the Gospel writers' interpretations and adaptations to their later contexts.

Matthew's context, like Paul's in Galatians and Romans, clearly reflects acute conflict with persecuting elements within Judaism (Matthew 23), and this would explain this Evangelist's more pro-active linguistic strategy to recapture the dik-words and use such justice language polemically against the persecutors, but with the Hebrew Bible meaning to reflect the Exodus paradigm and signify God's liberating justice for the poor and oppressed. Perhaps the best key to Matthew's pro-active linguistic strategy and his intended meaning for the dik terminology is his unique and climactic parable of the separation of the sheep and goats (Matt. 25:31-46). In this parable, which also is the hermeneutical key to his theology as a whole, the "just/righteous" (dikaioi; 37, 46) are those more comfortable and affluent who put their lives at risk during a time of persecution to demonstrate loving solidarity with the hungry, thirsty, homeless, naked, sick and imprisoned. Like the liberator-God of the Exodus, they function as salt and light to manifest God's liberating justice to the weak and oppressed.

The other clue to Matthew's subversive linguistic intentions in using dik-words is his literary device of inclusion whereby he introduces and closes his narrative with references to a Joseph who practices this kind of liberating justice: Joseph siding with Mary when accused of sexual immorality (1:19, the first dik-word in Matthew) and Joseph of Arimathea (27:57-60), who risked his social status to ask Pilate for Jesus' crucified body. Mark only says that Joseph of Arimathea was "honorable," but Luke specifies that he was "good and just" (Luke 24:51). Matthew implies the wealthy Joseph's surpassing justice by honoring him with the name of "disciple" (27:57; see 5:20).

Other uses of dik-words in Matthew include 3:15 (Jesus submits to John's baptism "to fulfill all justice"), 5:10 ("Blessed are those who are persecuted for practicing liberating justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"), 5:20 ("the justice of the scribes and Pharisees"--ironic, as in --> Mark 2:17), 6:1 ("Be careful not to do your acts of piety/ justice publically"), and 21:32, to Jewish religious-political authorities in the Temple ("For John came to you to show you the way of liberating justice").

5. The Weak, Sick, and Physically Challenged. In his narrative portions between Jesus' five great discourses, Matthew continually shows us Jesus' compassion and solidarity (especially by touch) with the weak, the sick, the unclean, and the physically challenged. In his descriptions of Jesus' praxis, Matthew shows how Jesus' solidarity leads to miraculous healings:

- 4:23-24, "curing every disease (nûson) and every sickness (malakian)...they brought to him all...afflicted (kakos) with various diseases (nûsois) and pains (bas-nois), demon-afflicted, moon-afflicted ["lunatics" = epileptics?], and paralytics, and he cured them."

- 8:16, "spirits...sick (kakos)."

- 9:35, "curing every disease (nûson) and every sickness (malakian)."

- 14:14, "sick ('arrûstous),"

- 14:35, "sick (kakos)."

Duling¹⁴ also summarizes the specific kinds of those "involuntarily marginalized":

- 1) blind (typhlos): 9:27, 28 (two men); 11:5; 12:22; 15:14 (4x); 15:30-31; 20:30 (two men); 21:14
- 2) mutes (kophos): 12:22 (2x; "blind and"); 9:32-33; 15:30-31
- 3) lame (cholos): 11:5; 15:30-31; 18:8; 21:14
- 4) deaf (kophos): 11:5

- 5) deformed (kyllos): 15:30-31
- 6) paralytics (paralytikos): 4:24; 8:6; 9:2 (2x), 6
- 7) demoniacs (daimonizomenos): 4:24; 8:16, 28-34; 15:21-38
- 8) epileptic (seleniazomenos): 4:24 (Greek, lit., “lunatic,” crazed by the moon)
- 9) lepers (lepros, unclean): 8:2; 10:8; 11:5; 26:6
- 10) woman with hemorrhage (unclean): 9:20-22

Furthermore, Matthew tells us how Jesus touched the body (unclean) of Jairus’ daughter and raised her (9:25).

In the Bible an illness represents the invasion of death’s power, which is not unrelated to illnesses. Duling indicates that, in Matthew, Jesus is invoked as “Son of David” principally in the cases of healing (see Isaiah 35).¹⁵

Traditional studies of the Gospels question or defend the historicity of the events (did it really happen?, did it occur precisely in this way? or was it a trick, a coincidence, or only a psychosomatic healing?)-- or impose on the text philosophical (deistic) categories and questions (was it really “supernatural”?). Commonly ignored is the hermeneutical key (Matt. 25:31-46) of Jesus’ praxis in solidarity with the physically challenged. Consequently, today few church buildings are accessible for them, and few worship services are signed for the deaf, or make available texts in Braille for the blind.¹⁶ In addition, few church members avoid the common negative labels and words that injure.

6. Women and Sexual Minorities. Matthew emphasizes God’s liberating justice, perhaps especially because he was a despised toll collector who celebrated his acceptance as Jesus’ disciple with a banquet for other marginalized friends: publicans and prostitutes (9:9-13). Only Matthew informs us that women shared the table with Jesus--women of bad reputation.¹⁷ Since toll collectors were despised and marginalized by the other Jews, these “apostate traitors,” not surprisingly, developed an intimate relationship with the local sex-workers. Near the end of his Gospel, in a denouncement of the hypocritical leaders, Matthew allows his euphemism (“sinners”) to become quite explicit (21:31-32):

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and prostitutes are going into the Kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you God’s way of liberating justice and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and sex-workers believed him.”

We must ask why Matthew, a young Jew and well instructed in the Scriptures, ever would have chosen the despised profession of toll collector in Capernaum? If, however, he realized that he was attracted to persons of the same sex (in modern psychological terms, had a “homosexual orientation”), how a young pious Jew ends up marginalized as a toll collector is quite understandable. Since Jewish priests were expected to marry, the priesthood did not offer itself as a convenient closet for pious priestly descendants of homosexual orientation. The relationship with the local sex-workers, then, would not have been due to heterosexual attraction but because both groups were marginalized targets of society’s contempt. All this, of course, is a hypothesis, but alternative hypotheses (that Matthew was 100% heterosexual, but just never found the right woman?) all look considerably less likely. At any rate, Matthew, who emphasizes the law and liberating justice, also highlights Jesus’ choice to include among his disciples and friends toll collectors and sex-workers, both disgustingly “unclean/dirty” in his society.

To open his Gospel, however, Matthew first dons gray pinstripe and tie to reassure readers of his conservative credentials with what at first appears to be a rather boring genealogy (1:1-17)--undoubtedly quite comforting to the original Jewish readers. Just as the reader is nodding off, however, Matthew starts slipping a series of four women’s names into what had come to be an exclusive male club. Even more shockingly, our toll collector lacks the taste to choose only mothers with a good reputation (Sarah, Abraham’s wife?), but seems fixated on scandalous women: (1) Tamar, who pretended to be a harlot in order to produce a son with her father-in-law Judah (Genesis 38); (2) Rahab, the Gentile sex-worker of Jericho (Joshua 2); (3) Ruth, the Moabite, unclean Gentile, who seduced the pious Boaz, in accord with the tradition of levirate marriage (book of Ruth); and (4) Bathsheba, Uriah’s wife who, after David’s adultery and Uriah’s (arranged) death, became the King’s eighth wife (2 Samuel 11).

Does all this properly prepare the reader for Jesus’ birth--“illegitimate,” a “bastard” son as his contemporaries believed--a sexual minority excluded from Hebrew worship (Deuteronomy 23:2)? Joseph marries Mary, already pregnant, although he knows the child is not his own, and with his gesture of solidarity and liberating justice, frees them from the worst shame and punishment (Deuteronomy 22:20-24 prescribes the death penalty). In ancient times shepherds were not known as paragons of sexual purity and virtue, but Luke’s angels announced Jesus’ birth to them first--an obvious faux pas. Not to be outdone, Matthew similarly celebrates Jesus’ royal birth, by summoning pagan astrologers --a profession of even more dubious

sexual reputation. All (three?) apparently were unmarried and had traveled for two years claiming to be guided by a star. In the New Testament only Matthew explicitly refers to Jesus as conceived and born of a virgin (see under Luke), but questions regarding the possibly midrashic genre of this portion of Matthew leave even some defenders of Biblical inerrancy with questions (see above, genre).

The strange circumstances of Jesus' birth, however interpreted, left him and Mary vulnerable to abusive language (John 8:41; Mark 6:3). That would explain Jesus' strong prohibition of abusive language in the Sermon on the Mount, which Warren Johannson concludes refers to the contemptuous language commonly directed against sexual minorities: "But I say to you, if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you call your brother "faggot" (Greek: rak; Aramaic: reyqa), you will be liable to the council (Sanhedrin)" (Matt. 5:22).¹⁸ Abusive expressions like faggot or sissy, so common in patriarchal societies, continue to contribute to suicides, especially of young lesbians and gays (see chapter on James, the tongue).

Immediately after the Sermon on the Mount (5--7), Matthew narrates ten miracles (8--9), mainly healings (cp. the ten plagues of the Exodus). The first tells how Jesus "cleansed" a leper, and in the second Jesus responds to an unclean Roman military officer whose beloved slave had become paralyzed (8:5-13 // Luke 7:1-10 = Q). Jesus offered to accompany the centurion to his home, but he declined the offer. Such Roman military officers, having chosen a career abroad that involved leaving potential wives in Italy (convenient cover for those who didn't want a wife anyway), commonly took a young male slave as a lover¹⁹ (--> Luke).

Significantly, Jesus does not pry into the privacy of the relationship nor even dispatch them to a priest for a bit of "ex-gay torture," but simply heals the youth with a word from a distance. By blessing the Capernaum centurion's relationship with his beloved slave, Jesus flaunted the common prejudices of his countrymen and furthered his reputation as a "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11:19). Luke informs us that this centurion had sponsored the construction of the synagogue in Capernaum (Luke 7:5), and in 1968 archaeologists discovered that the north side of Simon Peter's large house was below the balcony of the synagogue).²⁰

Matthew basically follows Mark in showing how Jesus sought to protect women with a prohibition against divorce (19:1-9 // Mark 10:1-12), but Matthew establishes an exception in cases of "porneia",

irresponsible sexual conduct. Then, only in Matthew, Jesus expounds his version of the “science of eunuchology” (Matt. 19:11-12). Perhaps the purpose of the Law of Moses that prohibited the participation of eunuchs in worship (Deuteronomy 23:1) was to eliminate the pagan practice of this type of “sacrifice.” After the exile, when many male Israelites suffered castration as prisoners of war, Third Isaiah proclaimed that God accepts eunuchs (Isaiah 56:1-8). The good reputation of Nehemiah, probably a eunuch as indicated by his court function in Persia, may have helped produce Third Isaiah’s radical new message of inclusion. Jesus, however, takes us a step further, pointing out the existence of three types of eunuchs: those who suffer castration, those born thus and those who choose not to marry for the sake of God’s kingdom. These diverse “eunuchs” should not be despised but accepted as the new model in God’s kingdom—and they included unmarried leaders like Jesus and Paul who took the place of Israel’s married priests. As in modern India, “eunuch” in the Bible may well be a euphemism, a generic term for various types of sexual minorities, especially those who do not procreate.

At the end of his Gospel, Matthew follows Mark, indicating that the first notice of the resurrection was given to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (Matt. 28:1-10; 27:56, 61; Mark 15:47; 16:1-8 (+9); cf. John 20:1-18). Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons (Luke 8:2), had followed him from Galilee (Mark 15:40-41). She was unmarried, with her own economic resources and an independent life. The fact that Mary traveled in the company of single men and shared their table would have given her a bad reputation in her patriarchal cultural context. According to much later ecclesiastical tradition, Mary Magdalene was a prostitute, a coherent hypothesis, given her lifestyle. At any rate, any mention of husband and children is lacking, and for this reason she appears as a sexual minority in the Gospels. Her privileged relationship with Jesus, as the first witness and apostle of the resurrection, became an important theme in the apocryphal literature. Matthew, by insisting that tax collectors and prostitutes would have priority in entering into the kingdom of God (21:31-32), may thus support the identification of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute. Similarly, when he injects prostitutes into Jesus’ genealogy at the beginning of his Gospel and at the end features Mary of Magdala (a town of ill repute). This literary technique, of repeating or returning to the end of a text the theme of the beginning, quite common in the Bible, is called “inclusion.”

In The Gospel of Mary Magdalene, an apocryphal book written ca. 100-150 AD, Mary Magdalene and Martha argued with Peter and his brother Andrew concerning authority in the church. Later tradition

identified Mary both with the adulteress woman in John (8:1-11) and the prostitute of Luke (7:35-50).

Numerous contemporary feminist studies seek to refute the tradition that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute.²¹

However, would it not be better to follow the example of Jesus and Matthew/Levi and defend the dignity not only of women in general but also that of sex workers?

The “Great Commission” at the end of Matthew (28:16-20), directed only to the male disciples, corresponds to the genealogy at the beginning of the Gospel (1:1-17). The genealogy in 1:17 is a literary genre that, traditionally, includes only men. However, Matthew subverts the genre, injecting four “unclean” women in Jesus’ genealogy. Similarly, when we read the Great Commission in the light of its preceding context, clearly it is not intended to exclude women. On the contrary, Jesus here forgives his repentant male disciples and invites them to work together in the apostolic and missionary proclamation already initiated by the women. Consequently, although the Great Commission is addressed to male “losers,” by no means does it exclude the faithful women.

When Matthew himself (source M) refers to women, they almost always represent sexual minorities (see also his parable of the ten virgins, 25:1-13). The only exception is Pilate’s wife, who affirms Jesus’ innocence (27:19). The “mother of the sons of Zebedee” (20:20) apparently abandoned her husband Zebedee to accompany Jesus (27:55-56; 4:21-22). Matthew incorporates several positive accounts of women from Mark, but his own focus is on the women and men who represent sexual minorities. Feminist studies have done well to emphasize Mary of Magdala’s significant leadership role, but this role may be maintained without prejudice against her sexual minority status, even if this involved the profession of sex-worker (see further under Luke).

7. Peter and Mrs. Peter: Scandals for the Vatican? Matthew’s ill-deserved reputation as a kind of traitorous Log Cabin (Re?)publican stems largely from misunderstanding his teaching about Torah and about Peter as the Rock (legalistic Protestant fundamentalism worldwide and centuries of Vatican bigotries are a lot to blame on any Gospel writer!). Following Mark, Matthew indicates that Peter had a mother-in-law, which has compelled even apologists for Vatican sexual ideology finally to concede that in all probability (miracles being ever possible), Peter must have been married (Matt. 8:14-15 // Mark 1:29-31). Perhaps overwhelmed with his “sexual minority” status within the twelve apostles (as the only married apostle), Peter apparently left this wife for a time to itinerate with Jesus (see Luke 14:20, 26; 18:28-29). Some twenty-five years later,

however, Paul indicates that Peter traveled accompanied by a wife (1 Corinthians 9:5). In the Gospels only Peter's mother-in-law is mentioned; only Paul refers to Peter traveling with a wife, but leaves her nameless (perhaps explaining why the Vatican has long hesitated to name her a saint or ordain women priests).

The multiplication of the loaves and fishes, the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels (Mark 6:31-44 // Matt. 14:13-21 // Luke 9:10-17 // John 6:1-15), is followed by the sign of Jesus walking on the water (Mark 6:45-52 // John 6:16-21). This miracle is omitted by Luke, but Matthew includes it (14:22-27) and then records that Peter tried to imitate Jesus and almost drowned (Matt. 14:28-33). The waters over which Jesus and Peter walked represent the forces of chaos, oppression, persecution, and violence ("the gates of Hades") that threatened the existence of the new community. Peter, the "rock" upon which the church is constructed almost disappears in the tempestuous sea. Peter (the only married apostle, who denied Jesus three times), trying to walk on the sea, may also remind us of his efforts to dominate the tumultuous desires of the heart, at times more effective in destroying lives and communities than the exterior forces of persecution (Matt. 15:19-20).

In addition, only Matthew narrates the miracle concerning the coin that Peter found in the mouth of the fish and that Jesus commanded him to use to pay the temple tax for both of them (17:24-27). This may look like pro-Vatican favoritism on Jesus' part, but fishermen of the period had to pay almost ruinous taxes.²²

Matthew is the only Gospel that speaks explicitly of the "assembly/church" (ekklesia; 16:17-19; 18:17), a mixed community that includes both the good and the bad (13:24-30, 47-50; 22:1-14), and of course, only Matthew includes Jesus' famous words to Peter. After Peter confesses Jesus as the "Christ/Messiah" (following Mark 8:27-30; // Luke 9:18-21), Jesus describes Peter as the "rock," the foundation of the new sect, with authority to bind and to loose (Matt. 16:18-19). In this context Peter's authority refers to norms of behavior in the new community, and in Acts 10-11 Peter accepts the Gentiles who believe in Jesus without obligating them to be circumcised. Later, however, Jesus confers on the entire church a similar authority of binding and loosing, and the norms of conduct thus established imply decisions of including or excluding members (Matt. 18:15-20).

After centuries of controversy, most scholars now agree that Jesus does designate Peter-Cephas as the rock (Greek *petra*, Aramaic *cefa*). However, the notion that Peter would have successors (popes) is absent

in the text and the history of the new sect in the first four centuries offers no support for the idea of the popes as successors to Peter.²³ And how could Peter, the only married apostle, become the first for a tradition of popes who are forbidden to marry?

Peter fulfilled his foundational function for the new sect with the keys when he opened the door of the Kingdom, for the Jews on Pentecost (Acts 2) and for the Gentiles with the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10--11). Later, however, both James' authority in Jerusalem (Acts 15) and that of Paul in Antioch (Galatians 2:11-14) appear to be superior to that of Peter. After the death of the apostles, the authorities of the new sect in the first centuries were Christ himself (1 Corinthians 3:11), the apostolic testimony preserved in the New Testament (Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 21:14), the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the prophets (Ephesians 2:20; 4:11), and the entire community of the People of God (the Church), with their elders, teachers, and other leaders (1 Peter 5:1).

8. The Law. Matthew's perspective on Torah is diverse and complex to the point of rigorous dialectic (or blatant contradiction).²⁴ If Matthew really intended simply to attack antinomianism by emphasizing the divine authority of the law in every jot and tittle (Matt. 5:17-20), obviously he would be much more wed to Torah than Paul, who affirmed that the law functioned basically "to empower sin" (Romans 7:5, 13) and that Christians are "free of the law" (Romans 7:6; Galatians 5:1). Matthew, however, is more subtle and subversive, since he presents Jesus as affirming the authority of the law, but himself fulfilling it (5:17-20)--and in the same sermon he also has Jesus radicalize and internalize the Law (5:21-48). Later in Matthew, Jesus details the law's essential elements: love for God and for neighbor (22:34-40; 19:18-19), the Golden Rule (7:12), mercy instead of sacrifice (9:13; 12:7), liberating justice, mercy and faithfulness (23:23).

Jesus' praxis and teaching, in fact, frequently transcend the law: he rejects the law's multiple prescriptions concerning unclean food (15:10-19; cf. Mark 7:19), prohibits vengeance, oaths, and divorce (5:31-39) and insists on the purity of the heart instead of preoccupation with externals (15:1-20; cf. 5:21-30). From his "But I say to you...." (5:21-48) we move through Matthew to Jesus' final words, "everything that I have commanded you" (28:18-20), making clear that Jesus' own words, no longer those of Moses, have become the supreme norm. Both in the five discourses, which replace or reinterpret the Law of Moses, and in

Matthew's narrations Jesus imprints on his disciples' mind "the will of the Parent" that now transcends the five books of Moses' Law and best enables his disciples to "reflect critically" on their praxis.

In his final discourse, however, Jesus again echoes the positive pro-Torah perspective of 5:17-20 (structural inclusion) and surprisingly refers to the authority of the scribes and the Pharisees who sat on "Moses' seat" (23:1-3). Whether that "seat" simply was a metaphor or a real seat in certain synagogues, Jesus probably did not commend their authority to interpret the books of Moses but to their possession of the manuscripts and the social control over the reading of them.²⁵ Before the invention of the printing press, the scarce copies of the manuscripts were expensive. In Matthew 23:1-3 Jesus recognizes that his followers, a poor messianic sect within first century Judaism, had to have recourse to the scribes and the Pharisees to know the content of the books of the Pentateuch. However, throughout Matthew's Gospel, Jesus denounces the distorted interpretations of the Scriptures commonly committed by the scribes and Pharisees.

However, in this final discourse, Jesus' climactic parable is the separation of the goats from the sheep in the final judgment (25:31-46), the decisive "hermeneutical key" to Matthew's theology of Law and Gospel. Jesus here makes clear that when God finally judges, no one will be excluded from the Kingdom for not complying with some cultic detail of Leviticus, but only for the lack of compassion and loving solidarity expressed in a praxis of liberating justice with the poor, the oppressed, the weak, and the needy (see also 28:20).²⁶

NOTES

1. Luke T. Johnson , “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Rhetoric,” Journal of Biblical Literature 108 (1989): 419-41; Scott McKnight, “A Loyal Critic: Matthew’s Polemic with Judaism in Theological Perspective,” in Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity, ed. Craig A. Evans & Donald A. Hagner (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 55-79.

2. Robert H Gundry, Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982/94), 621.

3. Ibid., 599-622.

4. Ibid., xxiii-xxx (1994 edition). Perhaps in part the American conservative evangelical storm over Gundry (including his forced resignation from the inerrantist Evangelical Theological Society) was due to the fact that his interpretation of Matthew as including elements of midrash left open the door for someone to accept the inerrancy of the entire Bible and at the same time conclude that nothing in it represents history, including the tradition of Jesus’ virginal conception and birth, one of the five “fundamentals” for fundamentalists (though hardly such in Biblical theology--see under Luke). Inerrantists thought that with their view of inspiration they had everything of significance to them nailed down, but Gundry’s questions regarding literary genre and midrash in Matthew indicated that with biblical inerrancy alone nothing is nailed down.

5. Donald A. Hagner, Matthew 1-13, Word Biblical Commentary 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993), xliii.

6. Raymond E. Brown, An Introduction to the New Testament (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 820-823; Craig L. Blomberg, Jesus and the Gospels (Nashville: Broadman & Holman), 1997), 184-185; Ben Witherington III, The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1995), 42-57; Luke T. Johnson, The Real Jesus (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996); Paul Copan, ed., Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); see also N. T. Wright’s three volumes in our General Bibliography.

7. Xavier Pikaza, Hermanos de Jesús y Servidores de los m-s Pequeños (Mt 25, 31-46) (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1984).

8. Dennis Duling, "Matthew and Marginality," Seminar Papers, Society of Biblical Literature (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 653. See also shepherds (poimenes, cf. Luke), which for Matthew is always a positive metaphor: 9:36; 10:6 ("lost sheep"); 15:24; 25:32; 26:31 (Zechariah 13:7).
9. Marcelo de Barros and JosÈ Luis Caravias, TeologÌa de la Tierra (Madrid: Paulinas, 1988); Roy H. May, Los Pobres de la Tierra (San JosÈ, Costa Rica: DEI, 1986); The Poor of the Land (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991); Sharon H. Ringe, Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Christopher J. H. Wright, "Jubilee, Year of," in The Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:1025-1030.
10. Dennis Duling, "Matthew and Marginality," chart, p. 651. See the modified version in Dennis C. Duling and Norman Perrin, The New Testament: Proclamation and Parenesis. Myth and History (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1994), 56.
11. Thomas D. Hanks, God So Loved the Third World (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1982), 33-39.
12. John P. Meier, "Matthew, Gospel of," in The Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:640.
13. JosÈ P. Miranda's fundamental point has been confirmed in the investigations of Karen Lebacqz, Six Theories of Justice (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986); Justice in an Unjust World (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987).
14. Dennis Duling, "Matthew and Marginality," 653-654.
15. *Ibid.*, 654 n. 48.
16. Nancy L. Eiesland, The Disabled God: Toward a Liberation Theology of Disability (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994); Nancy L. Eiesland and Don E. Saliers, Human Disability and the Service of God: Theological Perspectives on Disability (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998).
17. Dennis Duling, "Matthew and Marginality," 655; cf. Kathleen E. Corley, "Were the Women around Jesus Really Prostitutes? Women in the Context of Greco-Roman Meals," Society of Biblical Literature, Seminar Papers 1989, ed. David J. Lull (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).
18. Warren Johansson, "Whosoever shall Say to his Brother, Racha," in Homosexuality and Religion and Philosophy 12, ed. Wayne R. Dynes and Stephen Donaldson (New York: Garland, 1984), 212-214; reprinted from Dabiron & Gay Books Bulletin 10:2-4, 1992.

19. Michale Gray-Fow, "Pederasty, the Scantian Law and the Roman Army," Journal of Psychohistory 13 (1986): 449-460; Donald Mader, "The Entimos Pais [Beloved Slave] of Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10," in Homosexuality and Religion and Philosophy (New York: Garland, 1992), 223-235; Tom Horner, Jonathan Loved David (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 122; James E. Miller, "The Centurion and His Slave Boy" (paper presented at Society of Biblical Literature, 1997).

20. Virgilio C. Corbo, "Capernaum", in The Anchor Bible Dictionary (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:866-869; for contemporary significance, see under Luke. Only Matthew explicitly links the episode about the centurion and his beloved slave with Peter's house (7:5-13, 14-17; but cf. the Capernaum synagogue and Peter's house in Mark 1:29; Luke 4:38!).

21. Richard Atwood, Mary Magdalene in the New Testament Gospels and Early Tradition (Bern, Germany: Lang: 1993); Esther De Boer, Mary Magdalene: Beyond the Myth (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1996/7); Susan Haskins, Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1993); Carla Ricci, Mary Magdalene and Many Others: Women who followed Jesus (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991/94); Jane Schaberg, "How Mary Magdalene Became a Whore," Bible Review 8/5 (Oct. 1992): 30-37; Mary R. Thompson, Mary of Magdala: Apostle and Leader (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995).

22. K. C. Hanson, unpublished paper cited in Dennis Duling, "Matthew and Marginality," p. 654, note 51.

23. Raymond E. Brown, An Introduction to the New Testament (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 221-222.

24. Craig L. Blomberg, Jesus and the Gospels (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997), 249-251; Raymond E. Brown, Introduction to the New Testament, 179; N. T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), Jesus' "redefinition of Torah" (consistent with his redefinition of nation and family), 287-303, 432; Donald A. Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 102-110, "hyperbole"; Robert H Gundry, Matthew: a Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution, 78-82, a "forceful attack on antinomianism."

25. Mark Allan Powell, "Do and Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2-7)," Journal of Biblical Literature 114/3 (1995): 419-435.

26. Xavier Pikaza, Hermanos de Jes' y Servidores de los m's Peque'os.

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