

01. Gospel according to Matthew

Introduction



The Inspiration of Saint Matthew
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A u d i o C D ' s H o m i l i e s A r t i c l e s

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George Viredaz from an icon of Christ and Saint John in the Formation Abbey, Jerusalem

Religious Experience

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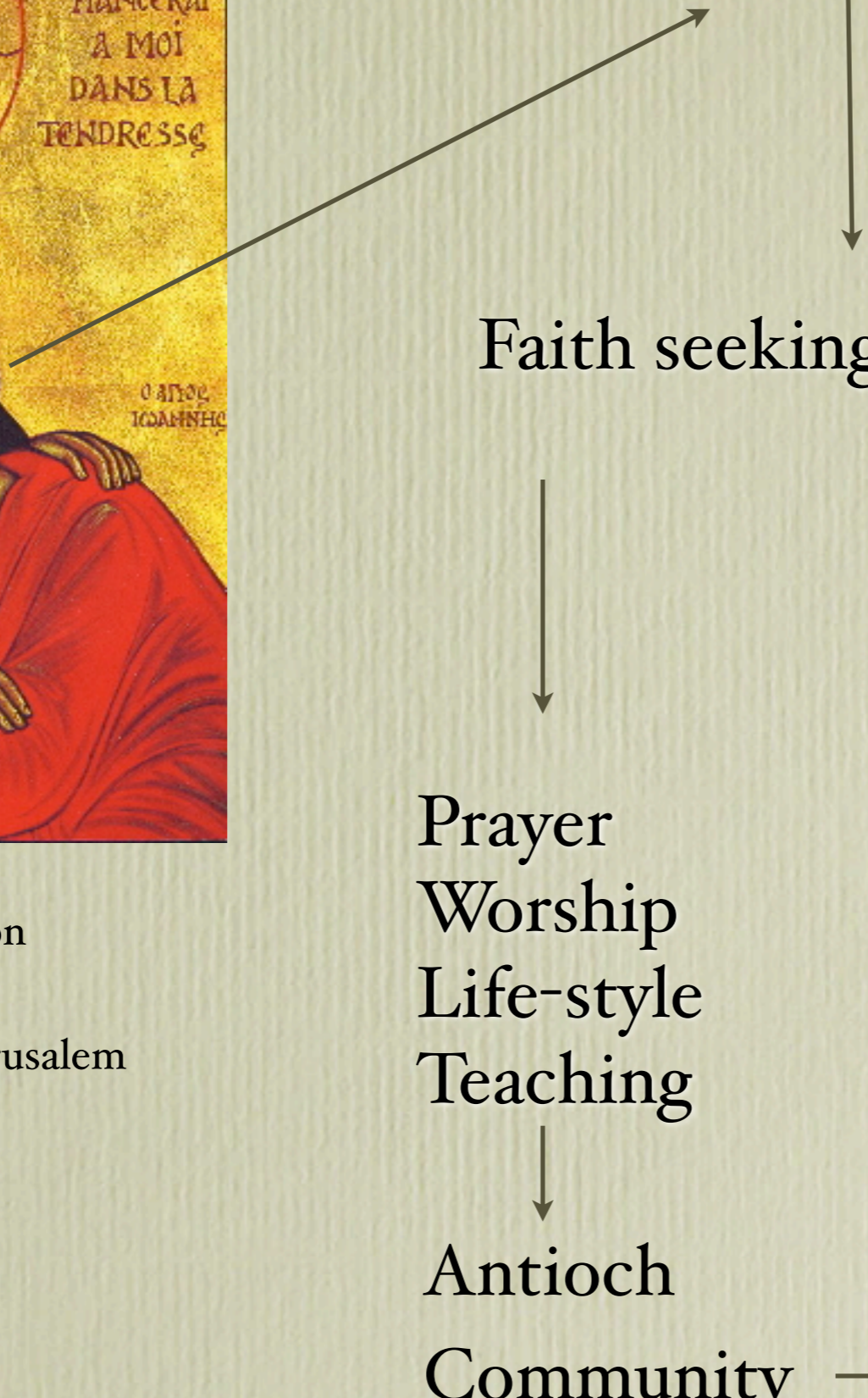
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Matthew's Gospel



Pontifical Biblical Commission 1984

Theological Interpretations in the Gospel Traditions

Scripture and Christology (2.2.2.2 b)

‘The Gospel traditions were gathered and gradually committed to writing in the light of Easter, until at length they took a fixed form in four booklets. These booklets do not simply contain things ‘that Jesus began to do and teach’(Acts 1:1); they also present **theological interpretations of such things**. In these booklets, then, one must learn to look for the Christology of each evangelist ... Authors whose writings are preserved in the New Testament have interpreted the deeds and sayings of Jesus in diverse ways.’

‘Seeing that, in sacred Scripture, God speaks through people in human fashion, it follows that the interpreter of sacred Scripture, if he is to ascertain what God has wished to communicate to us, should carefully search out the meaning which the sacred writers really had in mind’ (Vatican II DV 12).

We are privileged to have the portrait of Jesus given us by Paul

This is enriched by the portraits we find in the Four Gospels. Each Gospel presents its own , necessarily limited, portrait of Jesus, and its own interpretive commentary. Each Gospel aims to communicate the significance of the real Jesus to the communities for which it was composed.

The fact that the four Gospels were treasured, copied, and read in the Christian assemblies in the East, in Egypt, in Asia Minor, in Greece and in Rome, is the source of our confidence that in each of the Gospels and in the four together we are seeing and hearing the real Jesus.

Most scholars favour the opinion that the Gospel of Matthew was composed by a Greek-speaking Christian Jew from a Semitic milieu, probably Syria (Antioch), and was composed after the outbreak of the Roman-Jewish war (66AD). Matthew's community no longer saw itself as part of the Jewish synagogue and favoured the inclusion of Gentiles.

The author draws especially on two written sources.

1. Q (from the German Quelle, meaning source): 'Sayings of Jesus'

Luke, too, drew on this material.

Did the Apostle **Matthew** contribute to this?

2. The Gospel according to Mark (composed in the 60's, probably in the Roman community). Matthew follows Mark's Narrative order, fitting Jesus' Sayings in where appropriate.

1 John 1:1-3



‘We declare to you what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us.

We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you may have communion with us;

and truly our communion is with the Father and with his Son Jesus the Messiah.’

Matthew's Gospel provides a **WINDOW** into Jesus ministry in the First Century and into the Christian community in Syria.

Matthew's Gospel offers us a **MIRROR** in which we see ourselves and our times.

Athanasius (295-373) Letter to Marcellinus on the Psalms

‘It seems to me that these words become like a MIRROR to the person singing them, so that he might perceive himself and the emotions of his soul, and thus affected he might recite them. For in fact he who hears the one reading receives the song that is being recited as being about him, and either, when he is convicted by his conscience, being pierced he will repent, or hearing of the hope that resides in God, and of the help available to believers – how this kind of grace exists for him – he exults and begins to give thanks to God’^(n. 12).

God is inviting us into communion with his Son.

‘God reveals himself ... to invite and receive into his own company’(Vatican II DV 2).

‘In the sacred books the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children and talks with them ... The Word of God is strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life’(Vatican II DV 21).



John 3:34

‘He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.’

Romans 5:5

‘God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.’

From the earliest centuries, this gospel is referred to as being 'according to Matthew', thus linking it with the name of the disciple who was called by Jesus while sitting at the tax booth (Matthew 9:9).

Matthew is mentioned in all the lists of the apostles (Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13).

However, the precise relationship between the apostle Matthew and the gospel associated with his name is, unfortunately, still not clear in spite of over a hundred years of intense scholarly research. Were the 'Sayings' (Q) connected with him?

Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor early in the second century, has this to say about Matthew:

‘Matthew made an ordered arrangement of the oracles (Q?) in the Hebrew language’ (Eusebius HC III.39.6). [or ‘Matthew arranged the traditions in a Jewish manner’]. The text from Eusebius continues: ‘Each (Mark and Matthew?) interpreted the traditions as he was able’ (Ulrich Luz Commentary Volume I, page 46; Fortress Press 2007)

Irenaeus, writing about 180AD, says:

‘Matthew produced a gospel in written form among the Hebrews in their own language at the time when Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel and founding the church in Rome’ (AH III.1.1, quoted Eusebius HC V.8.2).

Origen, early in the third century, adds some details:

‘The first gospel to be written was that according to Matthew, once a tax collector but later an apostle of Jesus Christ; he published it for those who had come to faith from Judaism, and it was composed in Hebrew.’

(quoted by Eusebius in his History of the Church VI,25,4).

Jerome, late fourth century, writes (Of Illustrious Men, 3).

‘Matthew, who is also called Levi, a former tax collector, then an apostle, first composed a gospel of Christ in Judea, for the sake of those who had come to faith from the circumcision, in Hebrew letters and words. It is not known with certainty who subsequently translated it into Greek. The Hebrew text itself is still preserved to this day in the library at Caesarea’(Not extant).

The focus throughout the gospel of Matthew is on Jesus, and Matthew's most persistent theme is that Jesus is the fulfilment of the hopes and the spirituality of Judaism.





Matthew 11:28-30

‘Come to me,
all you that are weary and
are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you,
and learn from me;
for I am gentle
and humble in heart,
and you will find rest
for your souls.’

The most likely hypothesis is that the author was a Jewish Christian who saw being a disciple of Jesus as the only way to be faithful to his Jewish tradition.

He had to face the fact that Jesus had been rejected by the religious leaders of Judaism, and that only a minority of Jews had joined the community of Jesus' disciples.

We find in Matthew similar tensions to those which we find in Paul, who confronts his brother and sister Jews while passionately longing for them to accept Jesus. We also find a similar commitment to the universality of the church, reaching out to embrace all peoples.

A likely setting for the gospel is Antioch in Syria (see Matthew 4:24). Here, as the Acts of the Apostles tells us, ‘the disciples were first called Christians’ (Acts 11:26) – probably because the coming together of Jews and non-Jews into the one community made it obvious to outsiders that they were not a Jewish sect.



John-Paul II

The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church (Pontifical Biblical Commission, 1993, page 19-20)

‘To arrive at a completely valid interpretation of words inspired by the Holy Spirit, one must first be guided by the Holy Spirit and it is necessary to pray for that, to pray much, to ask in prayer for the interior light of the Spirit and docilely accept that light, to ask for the love that alone enables one to understand the language of God who is love. While engaged in the work of interpretation, one must remain in the presence of God as much as possible.’

Raymond Brown (Theological Studies 1981)

‘The Bible is the literary objectification of a faith that is a response to revelation’(page 9).

He goes on to define Scripture as: ‘divine revelation to which human beings have given expression in words’(page 13).

Schmaus, Dogma I, 188

‘What we encounter in the Sacred Scriptures is first of all the objectivization of the belief in and understanding of Christ which was possessed by the Church or the local congregation.

In other words it is the answer to the revelation of God. In this answer, however, the word of God itself is expressed, for this word has entered into the answer of the Church and is effective in it. On the other hand we must not forget that God’s word, which enters into our human answer of faith, nevertheless always transcends it.’

St Ephrem, 4th century, commenting on the Diatessaron, I,18-19
Harmony of 4 Gospels by Tatian c.150)

‘Lord, who can grasp all the wealth of just one of your words? What we understand is much less than what we leave behind, like thirsty people who drink from a fountain. For your word, Lord, has many shades of meaning, just as those who study it have many different points of view. The Lord has coloured his words with many hues so that each person who studies it can see in it what he or she loves. The Lord has hidden many treasures in his word so that each of us is enriched as we meditate on it ... Coming into contact with some share of its treasure, you should not think that the only thing contained in the word is what you yourself have found ... Because you could not exhaust it, you should give thanks for its riches. Be glad that you were overcome and do not be sad that it proved too much for you...

St Ephrem, Syrian, 4th century continued

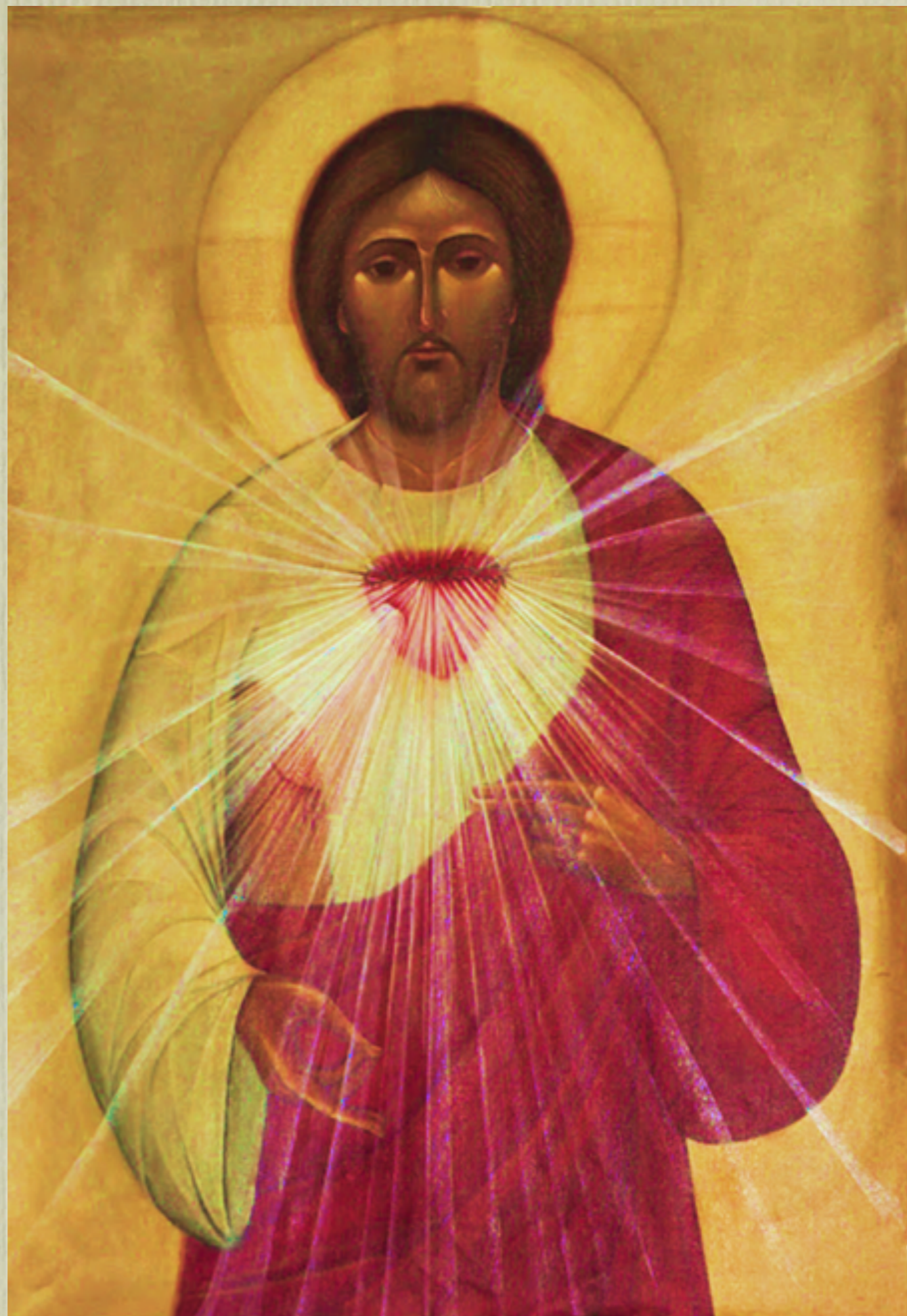
‘Rather let the fountain quench your thirst than have your thirst quench the fountain. Because, if your thirst is quenched and the fountain is not exhausted, you can drink from it again whenever you are thirsty. But if when your thirst is quenched the fountain also is dried up, your victory will bode evil for you. Be grateful for what you have received and do not grumble about the abundance left behind. What you have received and what you have reached is your share; what remains is your heritage. What at one time you are unable to receive because of your weakness, you will be able to receive at other times if you persevere. Do not have the presumption to try to take in one draught what cannot be taken in one draught, and do not abandon out of laziness what you may consume only little by little.’

Athanasius (295-373)

(De Incarnatione n. 57).

‘In addition to study and real knowledge of the Scriptures, integrity of life, purity of soul and Christ-like virtue are required ...

Whoever wishes to understand the mind of the sacred authors must first cleanse and purify himself by holiness of life, and imitate the saints by behaviour similar to theirs.’



Our main interest will be to see how Matthew and his community saw Jesus. Matthew's focus is also pastoral. Besides the painful tensions experienced by Jewish Christians in their relations with Judaism, there are tensions in the Christian community itself. Matthew is attempting to reflect on Jesus' life and teaching in a way that will guide him and the community in resolving these differences and living the life of love shown them by Jesus.

This pastoral interest makes it a very human and a relevant document for any community struggling with the paradoxes of the human condition while learning to live a life of faith as disciples of Jesus.