

THE PARABLE OF THE TARES AND MATTHEW'S STRATEGY VIS-À-VIS EXTREME SECTARIAN IMPULSES FROM WITHIN HIS COMMUNITY

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Opinions on the sociohistorical location of the author of the first Gospel and its intended readers with respect to Judaism are many and varying. A classical way to develop a taxonomy of these diverse opinions is to divide them into three categories:¹

1. Matthew was written for a Gentile community that had ceased debating with Judaism;
2. It was written for a Jewish-Christian community that had recently severed ties with the synagogue and was dialectically debating with Judaism;
3. It was written between 70 and 85 C.E. for a Jewish-Christian audience that still considered themselves a part of Judaism.

Although none of the above solutions overcomes all the raised difficulties, I favor in this article an understanding of the Matthean community as still dealing with fundamental questions of Jewish identity. As Anthony Saldarini writes:

the [first] gospel is in a real sense a Jewish document, written within what the author and his opponents understood as Judaism. They were debating the shape of Judaism and forging competing identities in contrast to one another. But they did this within the Jewish tradition, in Jewish categories, concerning Jewish questions.²

¹Richard E. Menninger, *Israel and the Church in the Gospel of Matthew*, American University Studies 7, Theology and Religion 162 (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 24-62.

²Anthony Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 110. Cf. Wayne A. Meeks, "Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity's Separation from the Jewish Communities," in *To See Ourselves As Others See Us: Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner and E. S. Frerichs (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 93-115; Günther Bornkamm, "End-Expectation and Church in Matthew," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, New Testament Library, ed. Günther Bornkamm et al. (London: SCM, 1963), 15-51; Michel de Goedt, "L'explication de la parabole de l'ivraie (Mt. XIII : 36-43)," *RB* 66 (1959): 32-54; Kenzo Tagawa, "People and Community in the Gospel of Matthew," *NTS* 16 (1970): 149-162; Robert R. Hann, "Judaism and Jewish Christianity in Antioch: Charisma and Conflict in the First Century," *JRH* 14 (1987): 341-360; Donald A. Hagner, "Matthew: Apostate, Reformer, Revolutionary?" *NTS* 49/2 (2003): 193-209. Others, while acknowledging Matthew's Jewish origin and character, allow for a more substantial differentiation between the Matthean community and formative Judaism:

Thus the working hypothesis, for this article is that the Matthean community was a Christian-Jewish group—probably living in Syrian Antioch—and that the redactor of the first Gospel was striving to (a) keep his fellows from creating too wide a gap with the leaders of Formative Judaism, and (b) show that the solution to his congregation's crisis and uncertainties was not to be found either in a hysterical attempt to constitute a holy assembly or in refraining from any contact with the "others."

We will proceed as follows. After a quick look at Antiochene Judaism contemporary to Matthew, we will underline the internal tensions between the contrasting statements and attitudes found in his Gospel. We will attempt to understand Matthew's strategy vis-à-vis his own community using the parable of the Tares and its explanation (Matt 13:24-30; 36-43) as a case in point.

Antiochene Judaism(s)

According to Josephus (*B.J.* 7.44), a Jewish community existed in Antioch since the second century B.C.E. It seems fair to assume that between the middle of the second century B.C.E. and the end of the first century C.E., Antiochene Judaism was quite fragmented—as elsewhere in Palestine or the Diaspora—exhibiting a broad range of movements and sects.³ Formative Judaism can be reconstructed in the light of writings such as (a) *1 Enoch*; *Psalms of Solomon*; *4 Ezra*; *2 Baruch*; (b) descriptions given by Josephus and the Pharisees; and (c) documents such as those stemming from Qumran. All of these writings were produced by different sects that considered themselves to be the righteous minority.

Andrew J. Overman notes that

[those sects] would have been primarily at odds with the religio-political powers in their setting. These powers could have been the priests in the temple in Jerusalem or the local *boulē*, or authorities who exercised power because they enjoyed the favour of a ruler or Roman client.⁴

Robert R. Hann warned that any attempt to obtain an objective picture of Judaism from such writings is a difficult task for they were all produced by passionate partisans and composed in the context of conflict. Nevertheless, we can still attempt a generic reconstruction of the *Sitz im Leben* of Antiochene Jews living around the end of the first century C.E. According to David C. Sim, data seems to indicate a certain level of anti-Semitic violence in

David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 182, 203; Graham N. Stanton, "The Gospel of Matthew and Judaism," *BRL* 66 (1984): 264-284; Andrew J. Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: A Study of the Social World of the Matthean Community* (Boston: University of Boston Press, 1989).

³Overman, 8-16; Hann, 343; Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1983), 12.

⁴Overman, 15-16.

Antioch during and after the first Jewish War (66-70 C.E.).⁵ Logic implies that Matthean Christian-Jews suffered persecution in the same manner as other Jews. Moreover, Jewish minority sects were exposed as well to another form of persecution—or at least pressure—from their own kindred. Following William D. Davies, Sim argued that

After the war the economic conditions of Palestine were extremely difficult and many Jews emigrated to Syria in general and to the capital Antioch in particular in the hope of a better life. It is quite probable that certain Pharisees and their supporters were involved in this migration and that they became influential in the Jewish communities at Antioch.⁶

One might wonder if Antiochian Jews were influenced by the coalition of Pharisees and Scribes who were reorganizing and consolidating Judaism after the destruction of the Temple. Davies argued that Matthew's Christian scribes were a response to Yavneh's rabbis.⁷ Revitalizing Ulrich Luz's thesis, Donald A. Hagner more recently claimed that there was no relationship at all between the Matthean community and Yavneh.⁸ Perhaps more wisely, Wayne A. Meeks urged caution, recalling the scarcity of elements we possess to draw this or that conclusion.⁹

Regardless, Matthean Christian-Jews and other Diaspora Jews, along with other Jews coming from Palestine (among whom there might have been some Pharisees), were all living side by side in the same city, generating the unavoidable conflictual situations that played an important role in the redaction of the Gospel of Matthew.¹⁰

An Attempt to Describe Matthew's Community

Given the scarcity of information regarding Antiochene Judaism at the end of the first century C.E., it is not surprising to hear a most prominent Matthean scholar affirm that

nothing is certainly and directly known about the group within which and for which the Gospel of Matthew was written—not its size, nor the

⁵Sim, 205.

⁶Ibid., 191-192; William D. Davies, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 295-296.

⁷William D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 315.

⁸Hagner, 198; Ulrich Luz and Wilhelm C. Linss, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 88.

⁹Meeks, 110.

¹⁰R. Stark, "Antioch as the Social Situation for Matthew's Gospel," in *Social History of the Matthean Community*, ed. D. L. Balch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 192-193.

background of its members, not its organization and internal relations, nor its social relations with other groups, not even its place or date of origin.¹¹

Saldarini also acknowledges the fact that such a group can be only known “from its imperfect reflection in Matthew’s narrative,” and that therefore “no clear and unambiguous categorization of it can be made.”¹² However, such a quest is inevitable and we must at least make an attempt.

Graham N. Stanton suggests that Matthew’s pages emanate a mix of apocalyptic fervor, concerns about internal discipline, and a “keen interest in and ‘scholarly’ approach to the re-interpretation of Scripture for the new circumstances in which the community believed itself to be living.”¹³ He also recognized that although Jesus’ story and his significance are Matthew’s first concern, “yet since he interprets that story in the light of the needs of his own community it is possible to try to understand the concerns and the fears of that community.”¹⁴ We essentially accept Stanton’s analysis here, with the addition that in Matthew’s Gospel it is also possible to perceive the redactor’s strategy as he deals with an ongoing conflict within the community itself.

Before attempting to portray the basic traits of Matthew’s community, however, we must briefly address an objection raised by Richard Bauckham, who challenged the widely accepted paradigm that the Gospels were addressed to specific communities, and argued instead that they were originally written for a more widespread audience than generally admitted.¹⁵ Against this view, we still find convincing the arguments presented by Richard S. Ascough,¹⁶ whose conclusion is summarized here:

In the case of Christianity, the “translocal” link among a number of the various congregations is Paul. However, Paul had trouble enough maintaining the unity of his local congregations (especially Corinth and Galatia) and there is little evidence that there were ties between different locales, with the exception of the missionaries themselves. At least during its formative stage Christianity seems to have been comprised of local groups with only very loose translocal connections—much the same as some of the voluntary associations.¹⁷

¹¹Saldarini, 84.

¹²Ibid., 121.

¹³Stanton, 283.

¹⁴Ibid., 284.

¹⁵Richard Bauckham, “For Whom Were the Gospels Written?” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. R. Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eedermans, 1998), 30.

¹⁶Richard S. Ascough, “Translocal Relationships Among Voluntary Associations and Early Christianity,” *J ECS* 5/2 (1997): 223-241.

¹⁷Richard S. Ascough, “Voluntary Associations and the Formation of Pauline

Further, even Bauckham concedes that “it may be argued that *the community in which a Gospel was written is likely to have influenced the writing of the Gospel* even though it is not addressed by the Gospel.”¹⁸

Tensions in Matthew's Gospel

Any attempt to depict Matthew's community must take into consideration the *tensions* found in the first Gospel. These tensions might point to an ongoing conflict between different ideologies coexisting in the same community. We will now provide a glimpse of these tensions by surveying what Matthew's Gospel has to say about the Pharisees, the Law, the Gentiles, and the Discipline.

The Pharisees

As Douglas R. A. Hare remarked, in Matthew “there is no attempt to distinguish between good and bad Pharisees. The scribe who in Mark receives approbation is altered by Matthew into an enemy who ‘tests’ Jesus in an effort to gain evidence to be used against him (Mk 12:38-24, Mt 22:34-40).”¹⁹ Moreover, passages such as Matt 15:3-9 (“You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you. . . ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines’”; cf. 15:14—“blind guides of the blind,” and 16:6, 11—“beware of the yeast of the Pharisees”) leave little room for a conciliatory attitude toward the Pharisees.²⁰

But along with this strong anti-Pharisee position, we also find in Matthew more accommodating statements. Hare notices that Matt 5:38-48 (a softening of the “eye for eye” and the instruction to love your enemies) points to a passive resistance against and shunning of hatred for the persecutors (among whom there might have been some Pharisees) in favor of a more positive attitude. The Sect of Qumran seemed to espouse a less indulgent attitude towards its “enemies” (cf. 1QS 1:9-11: “He [the Instructor] is to teach them [the members of the community] both to love all the Children of Light—each commensurate with his rightful place in the council of God—and to

Christian Communities: Overcoming the Objections,” in *Vereine, Synagogen un Gemeinden im kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien*, ed. Andreas Gutsfeld und Dietrich-Alex Koch (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 177.

¹⁸Bauckham, 44, emphasis supplied.

¹⁹Douglas R. A. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Society for the New Testament 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 162.

²⁰“[T]he rejection of the Jewish leadership during this period within Judaism was widespread among these sectarian communities” (Overman, 23). Cf. Sim, 184-185.

hate all the Children of Darkness, each commensurate with his guilt and the vengeance due him from God.”²¹

William G. Thompson, too, discerns an attempt by the redactor to cushion the clash between his community and the Pharisees. According to Thompson, Matthew was facing a “concrete pastoral situation”:

Matthew included advice about paying the half-shekel (17:24-27) because the Jewish members of his community were concerned about their relationship to the religious center at Jamnia, and wondered whether they should support the new High Council. The emphatic statement about the sons of the king (v. 26b) reaffirmed their radical freedom due to their union with Jesus and their relation to the Father. But the practical instructions (v. 27) urged them to pay the half-shekel rather than risk creating an unnecessary gap between themselves and their fellow-Jews.²²

Although one cannot be sure about the relationship between Matthew’s community (and the Antiochene Jewish community at large) and Yavneh, Thompson was probably correct in that Matthew was trying to bridge the gap between his community and (local?) Jewish authorities (represented in his Gospel by the already destroyed Temple). According to Matt 23:2-3, what is condemned is not the Pharisees’ authority or teaching, but “the discrepancy between what they teach and what they do, their hypocrisy (23:4ff.; 6:1ff.)”²³

The Law

Scholars mostly agree in depicting Matthew’s community as holding fast to the Law.²⁴ Nevertheless, some Matthean statements beg for explanation. Günther Bornkamm, referring to Matt 5:21-48 (“You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you”), argued that Matthew is simply being inconsistent because of his allegiance to Jesus’ own words. To Bornkamm, Matthew was unable to deal with the tension between the understanding of the Law in the “Judaistic Jewish-Christian tradition” and his new interpretation in light of Jesus’ authoritative words.²⁵

Contrarily, we believe that Matthew was fully aware of what he was doing: he was simply opening the way to a certain degree of “tolerance for halakic

²¹Michael Wise, Martin Abegg Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 127.

²²William G. Thompson, *Matthew’s Advice to a Divided Community: Mt 17:22-18:35*, *Analecta Biblica* 44 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), 259.

²³Bornkamm, 24.

²⁴See, e.g., Overman, 89-90, 157; Sim, 190, 209, 214-215; Saldarini, 49; L. Michael White, “Crisis Management and Boundary Maintenance: The Social Location of the Matthean Community,” in *Social History of the Matthean Community*, ed. D. L. Balch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 241-242.

²⁵Bornkamm, 25.

non-conformity”:²⁶ Matthew 5:19 is all about being the least or greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and not about being excluded from it. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly found three attitudes toward the OT in the Gospel of Matthew: the rigorist, the liberal, and the moderate.²⁷ Matthew could hold the moderate view without necessarily resolving the conflict. Whether or not this thesis completely stands in all its components, it shows that in Matthew there is a convergence of two or more different attitudes toward the Law.

The Gentiles

Sim noticed that it is possible to find *pro*-Gentile, *contra*-Gentile, and *anti*-Gentile statements in Matthew.²⁸ The first group includes statements found in Matt 4:15-16; 8:5-13, 24-34; 12:18-19; 15:21-39, 22-28 and 28:19. Second, a degree of diffidence toward some non-Jewish characters (*contra*-Gentile) is present in Matt 8:34 (rejection of Jesus in Gadara), in 27:27-37 (Pilate), and probably also in 27:54 (the Centurion's confession at the cross), for fear appears to motivate the confession (27:51b-53). Finally, a strong *anti*-Gentile feeling is apparent in Matt 5:46-47 (// Luke 6:32-33), 6:31-32 (// Luke 12:29-30)—both from Q, 6:7-8—and 18:15-17. Sim emphasized the last group of verses when depicting the Matthean community. We perceive here a more complicated picture, where the redactor simultaneously accounts for drastically different attitudes.

Discipline

Matthew 18:8-9 seems to be a reformulation of Mark 9:43-47 in the following terms:

Matthew has transformed a passage that initially appears to have been a word about the disciples loosing themselves from worldly encumbrances into a word of caution and protection for the community against corrupting influences and people.²⁹

To use Thompson's words, Matthew “sharpened the practical advice about avoiding scandalous conduct (Mt 18,8-9 = Mk 9,43-48) because such radical action was necessary when many were actually stumbling and falling away (24,10).”³⁰ Other texts, such as Matt 7:15, 21 and 10:17, clearly evidence a strong suspicion against the “men” and “false [Christian] prophets,” who, from outside, constitute a threat to the Matthean community. In addition,

²⁶Hare, 141.

²⁷Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, “Attitudes to the Law in Matthew's Gospel: A Discussion of Matthew 5.18,” *BR 17* (1972): 19-32.

²⁸Sim, 201-203, 218-219; cf. Stanton, 277.

²⁹Overman, 102-103.

³⁰Thompson, 262.

Matt 12:49 is especially addressed to the members of his own community, rather than to people in general as in Mark 3:33 and Luke 8:21.³¹

More striking is the omission of the exorcism found in its source (Mark 9:38 // Luke 9:49) performed by an “outsider,” and the rephrasing of Mark 9:40 (// Luke 9:50) in Matt 12:30. Apparently, Matthew made no acknowledgement of outsider Christians. To say it with Overman:

The form and definition of the Matthean community were not vague or amorphous. Matthew had a clear understanding of who was in and who was out of the community. . . . The verse regards allegiance to a particular group or community and not simply or generally to Jesus and his work.³²

However, the strong group identity is not paired with an adequate sharpness in dealing with those who, for one reason or another, disqualify themselves from membership in the community.

Matthew surrounded his disciplinary instructions (Matt 18:15-18) with the parable of the Lost Sheep (Matt 18:12-14, pointing to an ulterior effort toward the lost), an injunction about unlimited forgiveness (Matt 18:21-22), and the parable of the Unmerciful Steward (Matt 18:23-35, underlining the reason for extended forgiveness). In doing so, Matthew was strongly mitigating the attempt of the community to hysterically purge itself.³³ Thompson underscores the fact that Matthew

distinguished between the sheep going astray and one that was lost (Mt 18,12-14 = Lk 15,4-7) and separated the sayings about fraternal correction and unlimited forgiveness in order to expand and develop each theme (Mt 18,15a.21-22 = Lk 17,3-4).³⁴

In the same chapter, we find also an appeal to the disciples (i.e., community’s members) to become like children (v. 3), to humble themselves (vv. 3-4), and to receive others in the name of Jesus (v. 5). At the same time, the community was exhorted to avoid despising or causing a “little one” to stumble (vv. 6, 10), even though he might be considered lost (v. 11). If the Matthean community was struggling to maintain internal order, expelling some members would have been an inevitable choice in some instances.³⁵

But, as Overman argued, Matthew “may have included this disciplinary process reluctantly,”³⁶ while inviting the community to exert forgiveness and

³¹Overman, 111, 126-130.

³²Ibid., 110.

³³See also Bornkamm, 20; Overman, 101; Hare, 48-51.

³⁴Thompson, 262.

³⁵Ibid., 259.

³⁶Overman, 103, 113.

to “if at all possible, hold off until the *eschaton* or, big time, when all will be judged, gathered, or destroyed.”³⁷

It could even be postulated that Matthew used apocalyptic eschatology as a means to preserve internal harmony and social control: “[S]ince anger and bitterness between community members can have a detrimental effect on the whole group, social harmony must be preserved at all costs, even by threat of eschatological damnation.”³⁸ According to Matt 5:22 (“if you are angry with a brother or sister . . . if you insult a brother or sister”) and Matt 25:1-13, 14-30 (the parables of the Virgins and the Talents), punishment is the wage of the unfaithful insiders. Interestingly enough, Matt 25:31-46 (Son of Man Judging all Nations) does not differentiate between this or that group, but between those who have or have not followed the will of God revealed in Christ:³⁹ by adopting this position, Matthew shook the very foundation of the bold sectarian attitude he perceived within his community.

Matthew's Evolving Community

We will now attempt to reconcile the different themes that characterize the Gospel of Matthew. The Matthean community might have started under the influence of Christian-Jewish missionaries coming from (rural) Palestine. After a couple of decades, the group evolved into an urban, economically stable community. It has already been noted that the parables of Enoch (*1 En.* 37–71) and the epistle of Enoch (*1 En.* 91–108) describe economic oppression, whereas the Matthean community seemed to be comparatively wealthy.⁴⁰ Hann remarks that οἱ πτωχοί (poor) and οἱ πεινῶντες νῦν (now hungry) of Luke 6:20-21 are changed into οἱ πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην (“those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”) in Matt 5:6; and the injunction Πωλήσατε τὰ ὑπάρχοντα ὑμῶν (“sell your possessions!”) of Luke 12:33 becomes Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth”) in Matt 6:19.⁴¹

The Matthean group probably experienced change and growth the passing of time. The letter of Ignatius appears to indicate that the Matthean community was exposed to the dual influence of the Pharisees fleeing

³⁷Andrew J. Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew*, The New Testament in Context (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity International, 1996), 199.

³⁸Sim, 237. See also Matt 18:23-35 and 24:45-51.

³⁹Bornkamm, 23-24.

⁴⁰Sim, 181; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew*, Proclamation Commentaries (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 152-153; Michael Crosby, *House of Disciples: Church, Economics and Justice in Matthew* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988): 39-43.

⁴¹Hann, 349.

Palestine and to a new generation of Gentile Christian leaders.⁴² On the one hand, there were internal conflicts as Gentiles joined the ranks, and a rural mindset clashed with a more urban one; on the other hand, there were external frictions with other Jewish communities in the surrounding areas. Meeks notes that “the Matthean community went through several stages of interaction with the Jewish communities close to it, and that these stages have left fossils in the strata of tradition and redaction.”⁴³

Matthew, to counteract sectarian impulses coming from within his community, accounted for different (and often incompatible) ideologies and attitudes, reorganizing them in the more comprehensive picture given by Jesus’ historical teaching and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. What Matthew wrote is not a monolithic theological tractate,⁴⁴ but something that has more the character of a catechism.⁴⁵ In so doing, Matthew’s purpose was to facilitate a difficult, though vital and necessary, transition.

The Parable of the Tares and Its Explanation

To support our hypothesis, we move now to the study of the parable of the Tares among the Wheat that acknowledges the tension between the parable and its explanation (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43).⁴⁶

Other than the parable of the Sower (Matt 13:1-9 // Mark 4:1-9 // Luke 8:4-15), the parable of the Tares among the Wheat is the only parable in the Synoptic Gospels with a developed explanation or interpretation (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43). Both parables are allegorized, and in both cases the explanation follows a question posed by the disciples. Though all three Synoptic Gospels record the parable of the Sower and its explanation, only the Gospel of Matthew contains the parable of the Tares and its explanation. Traditionally, commentators have proposed three scenarios to explain the origin of this parable and its explanation:⁴⁷

1. both the parable and its explanation originated with the historical Jesus: this is the thesis defended by, among others, E. Lohmeyer and W. Michaelis;

⁴²Ibid., 352-353.

⁴³Meeks, 110.

⁴⁴Tagawa, 149-162.

⁴⁵Bornkamm, 17, who draws a parallelism with *Did.* 1-6, 8.

⁴⁶For a more detailed discussion on the narrative structure of the parable of the Tares and its explanation, see Luca Marulli, “The Parable of the Tares and Its Explanation (Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43): A Narrative Criticism Study,” *Rivista Teologica Adventus* 18 (2008): 55-64.

⁴⁷De Goedt, 32.

2. the parable is original, while the explanation is a Matthean creation: V. Taylor, C. H. Dodd, J. Jeremias, and W. G. Kümmel, among other scholars, that adhere to this hypothesis;
3. both the parable and its explanation are a product of the Matthean genius: this is the opinion of A. Jülicher, T. W. Manson, R. Bultmann, and and others belonging to their school of thought.

The last position seems to be gaining more proponents. In fact, many modern commentators dedicate only a few lines of commentary (or none at all) to the parable of the Tares.⁴⁸ The Jesus Seminar⁴⁹ considers the parable to be useful in determining Jesus' ideas, but certainly not as his utterance. We hold that the parable is original,⁵⁰ but this paper's argumentation gains only from answering the following question: Why did Matthew include this parable *and* its explanation in his Gospel?

Tension between the Parable and Its Explanation

Many arguments support the thesis that the explanation of the parable is, in its redactional form, a secondary addition.⁵¹ Matthew 13:40 (the explanation), which claims to reveal the true meaning of the parable (ὡσπερ οὖν – οὕτως, “therefore, just a . . . so”), omits the exhortation to patience and tolerance that characterizes the parable (cf. Matt 13:30: “Let both of them grow together”). The explanation emphasizes the destiny of the tares: v. 36b (“Explain to us the parable of *the tares of the field*,” emphasis supplied) clearly betrays a change of perspective. From a narrative point of view, the climax of the parable occurs in the interaction between the servants and their master. The master utterly rejects the servants' proposal (anticipated collection of the tares). The master's order is an invitation to consider the present exercise of tolerance as *necessary* and *useful* for the resolution of the problem:⁵² “Let both of them

⁴⁸E.g., see Eta Linnemann, *Jesus of the Parables: Introduction and Exposition* (London: SPCK, 1966); John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); Bernard Brendon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).

⁴⁹Robert W. Funk, Bernard Brendon Scott, and James R. Butts, *The Parables of Jesus: Red Letter Edition: A Report of the Jesus Seminar* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1988), 65.

⁵⁰Luca Marulli, “The Parable of the Tares (Mt 13:26-30): A Quest for its Original Formulation and Its Role in the Preaching of the Historical Jesus” (unpublished article, 2008).

⁵¹Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *Les paraboles de Jésus*, Livre de vie 85-86 (Le Puy, France: Xavier Mappus, 1962), 88-90.

⁵²As John Pilch and Bruce J. Malina remark, in the ancient Mediterranean world “patience bears so close a resemblance to resignation that distinctions between them virtually collapse” (*Handbook of Biblical Social Values* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993], 148; cf. Job 1:21-22; 2:9-10; 7:1 and Eccl 1:12-18); and “Resignation in Mediterranean culture

grow together” refers to the present time, while maintaining validity in the future. Although the future’s resolution does not belong to the servants, it is naturally rendered possible by their “patience” and their required attitude to “let [it] grow.” Notice that both the actions of the sower and the enemy in the parable are performed only once, and they are limited to the past.⁵³

In the explanation, however, we witness a change in perspective: the sower, now identified as the Son of Man (v. 37), is the “sowing one” (v. 37, ὁ σπείρων—which gives to his action a status of mixed prolepses), while the enemy (the Devil now) is the one who “sowed” (v. 39, ὁ σπείρας). The enemy/Devil’s action is situated in the past (analepsis), but is by now revealed. The most interesting shift between the point the parable is trying to make and the perspective of its explanation occurs in the second part of the explanation: here the parable’s emphasis on the servants’ action (the passive action of letting the seeds grow—mixed prolepses) is totally ignored, and instead replaced by a long description of what will happen at the end of the time (external prolepsis). In other words, the temporal elements found in the parable (analepsis, mixed prolepses, and external prolepses) are resumed in the explanation, but with a displaced accent:

Parable	Explication
v. 24b-25 <i>Analepsis</i> (Sower who had sown / Enemy who had sown)	v. 39a <i>Analepsis</i> (Devil who had sown)

should not be mistaken for either pessimism or despair. On the contrary, resignation, understood as patience, indicates acceptance of status and condition of the individuals and/or family or tribe, and nation as a whole, together with the cause of events which affect them all, as ordered by God” (cf. Matt 5:45); “unlike human patience (=resignation), God’s patience is identified with compassion, generosity, and generativity (Ps 62; 103:8-13; 106; Is 43:22-44:5; 55; Jer 33:2-26; Sir 18:6-22)” (ibid., 149-150).

⁵³A. J. Kerr notes that in the Digest (D.9.2.27.14, published in 533 C.E. in the Justinian’s *Corpus Iuris Civilis*) that “Celsus asks, if you sow tares [*lolium*] or wild oats in another man’s crops and spoil them, not only can the owner bring the interdiction against damage caused secretly or by force, but he can proceed in factum under the *lex Aquilia*.” Celsus was consul in 129 C.E. Kerr also notes that in D.1.3.4 Celsus says: “Out of those matters whose occurrences in one kind of case is a bare possibility, rules of law do not develop,” and in D.1.3.5 he continues: “For the law ought rather to be adapted to the kinds of things which happen frequently and easily, than to those which happen very seldom” (“Matthew 13:25: Sowing Zizania Among Another’s Wheat: Realistic or Artificial?” *JTS* 48 [1997]: 108). Accordingly, one can argue that, during the second century C.E., spoiling a man’s crop by sowing tares was not a rare event (cf. Giuseppe Ricciotti, *Vita di Gesù Cristo*, Religioni, Oscar Saggi Mondadori 385 [Cles, Italy: Mondadori, 2000; 1941], 408-409).

v. 30a <i>Mixed Prolepsis</i> ("Let both of them grow together," coexistence of the plants until the harvest)	v. 37 <i>Mixed Prolepsis</i> (Son of Man "sowing," accent upon the sons of the Devil until the Judgment)
v. 30bcd <i>External Prolepsis</i> (Harvest, fire, barn)	vv. 40-43a <i>External Prolepsis</i> (End of time, Kingdom of the Son of Man coming as Judge, Judgment, punishment, reward)

The center of the narrative structure in the parable is identified by mixed prolepses. The explanation, however, drops the exhortation to be patient and accentuates only one aspect of the wheat-tares coexistence: in the lengthy and detailed "Little apocalypse" (vv. 41-43), most of the narrative focuses on the bad seed/sons of the Devil. This phase of the redaction clearly creates a shift in interest and accent.

This short analysis thus identifies three main points:

1. The explanation of the parable is clearly tendentious: once the reader is informed of the importance of this private revelation (13:11, 17, 36; cf. v. 51), he is invited to ignore the useful and necessary attitude required by the master of his servants. The explanation also shifts the parable's climax: v. 40 induces the reader to view the main teaching of the parable as the gathering and destruction of the tares.
2. The redundant repetition of the verb συλλέγω (28b, 29a, 30c, 40, 41b) in describing the collection of the bad seed is a clear attempt to capture and redirect the reader's attention. The *ambiguous situation* in which the servants find themselves in the parable (they had good intentions, but were fated to destroy the wheat!), and therefore the reader's engagement in a process of self-questioning, is totally erased. In the explanation, the dualism is more radical, since the servants disappear from the picture, leaving room only for the two kinds of seeds.
3. The master's words regarding the destiny of the two plants (v. 30) seem to evince a calm and balanced attitude. In the explanation, on the contrary, we feel a kind of excessive fierceness toward the tares: the entirety of vv. 40-42 is consecrated to describing their gloomy demise.

Finally, note that the explanation (vv. 41-43a) introduces an apocalyptic element totally absent in the parable. In this "little apocalypse," what might be a source of stupefaction is the fact that the lawless (τοὺς ποιοῦντας τὴν ἀνομίαν) are found *within* the Kingdom of the Son of Man: the Kingdom of the Son of Man is therefore described as a *corpus mixtum*. The final *logion* (v. 43b) is an appeal to comprehend the meaning of the explanation.

Corpus Mixtum, Soteriological Security,
and the Matthean Community

In his doctoral dissertation, Daniel Marguerat argued that two opposite ways to deal with apostasy coexisted within the same community: tolerance and excommunication.⁵⁴ The latter approach is, of course, the one described in Matt 18:15-17 (“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault. . . if he will not listen, take one or two others along, . . . If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector”).

Marguerat argued that the eschatological foundation of the church’s authority (excommunication equals deprivation of salvation: 18:18; cf. 16:19b) is also found in the Qumran sect. In Matthew, there is no hierarchy of who exerts the power, but it is the community as a whole who is in charge of it.⁵⁵

We believe that Marguerat is right in discerning at least “deux ecclésiologies parfaitement incompatibles”⁵⁶ in Matthew’s Gospel: the redactor of the first Gospel did not censor his sources, but reorganized them to convey a more accurate and complete legacy of the historical Jesus. Matthew wanted his community to read the parable of the Tares as

une appréciation correcte du temps de l’Eglise: le présent doit être accepté comme le temps de la coexistence (συναξάνεσθαι, 30a), et la communauté comme un cercle ambigu où voisinent le bien et le mal, sans que la souveraineté du maître soit en cause. . . . Notre parabole met en question toute tentative de réduire l’hétérogénéité de la communauté au moyen de mesures disciplinaires: ce serait usurper la prérogative du Dieu-Juge et faire main basse sur le salut.⁵⁷

In other words, Matthew uses the same argument of those who want to enforce a strict discipline within the community (viz. Matt 18:18) with a twist in favor of Jesus’ own view. The eschatological element, which for some justifies excommunication, becomes for Matthew the very reason for which the community members should not be so quick in purging and condemning (cf. Matt 13:41: “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and *they* shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity”).

Concluding his analysis, Marguerat describes Matthew’s own vision in the following terms:

L’Eglise n’est pas le conventicule des élus, punissant à sa guise ses membres réfractaires par la privation du salut. Si la procédure disciplinaire (18,15-18) est ratifiée, elle trouve son sens et sa légitimité dans un effort inlassable en

⁵⁴Daniel Marguerat, *Le jugement dans l’évangile de Matthieu*, Le Monde de la Bible 6, 2d augmented ed. (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1995), 425.

⁵⁵1QS 2:25–3:12; 6:24–7:25; 8:16–9:2; CD 9:2-4, 16-23; 19:32–20:13. Marguerat, 427.

⁵⁶Marguerat, 430.

⁵⁷Ibid., 429-430.

faveur du frère égaré et dans la réalité du pardon partagé. La séparation des 'bons et des mauvais' reste l'apanage du Juge eschatologique : l'anticiper dans le présent ne contrevient pas seulement à la nécessité du pardon (18,21-35) ; l'Eglise s'avère inapte à extirper le mal sans porter du même coup atteinte à la vérité (13 :29). [...] Matthieu a cherché ainsi sa voie, entre la vérité et l'amour, dénonçant explicitement le mal qui ronge le cercle des croyants, mais déniait à quiconque le droit de s'intituler 'juste' avant que retentisse le verdict de Dieu (13,43). Lieu d'affrontements théologiques cinglants, l'Eglise est également appelée par Matthieu à reconnaître son ambiguïté comme une réalité constitutive de son existence dans le monde. *Ainsi, la question du salut est placée sous la réserve eschatologique du jugement. La séparation finale traversera l'Eglise, et cette perspective emporte avec elle tout sécurité sotériologique dont pourraient s'entourer les croyants.*⁵⁸

Matthew presents the parable of the Tares according to his inspired theological and ecclesiological perspective as expressed in the entire chapter 18 of his Gospel. In other words, those who are going astray need, first, to be accepted as *still* being a part of the community; second, to be forgiven; third, to be looked after and patiently rescued and encouraged; and only as a last and drastic measure to be disciplined.

Matthew reshapes the Greek wording of the inherited Aramaic parable of the Tares to highlight that: (a) the tares are found in the midst (*ἀνὰ μέσον*) of the wheat and that the bad seed had been sowed *upon and among* the good seed;⁵⁹ (b) the servants are surprised by the presence of the tares in the field;⁶⁰

⁵⁸Marguerat, 446-447, emphasis original.

⁵⁹Matthew and *Gosp. Thom.* 57 disagree in their respective description of the way the enemy spreads his seeds. *Gosp. Thom.* 57 tells that the tare is sowed "upon the seed which was good" (ε.χ.η.π.ε.θρο[θ] ε]-τ.να.νο.γ.φ), while Matthew refers to a bad seed which is thrown "in the midst" (*ἀνὰ μέσον*, 13:25) of the wheat. Matthew emphasizes the cohabitation of the two seeds until the angels will take the scandalous and the evildoers "out of his Kingdom" (ἐκ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ, v. 41). The Greek wording of Matt 13:25 might very well be a Matthean redactional trait, too, since Matthew does not feel it necessary to use the same concept (bad seed "in the midst" of the good one) in the parable of the Sower (13:5, where he reads ἐπί, "upon"), while Mark 4:7, 8 and Luke 8:8 both use εἰς followed by an accusative.

⁶⁰The question "from whence then has it tares?" (Matt 13:27b) seems to be superfluous since the presence of the undesirable plant was anything but surprising in Palestinian fields (E. Levesque, "Ivraie," in *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, ed. F. Vigouroux, Fascicule XVI, 2^e partie: G. Gazer (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1899), 1047. However, the first question, "Master, didn't you sow good seed in your field?" (v. 27a) points to the fact that the servants' astonishment is provoked by the presence of the tares in a field that was supposed to have only good plants. The "absurd" astonishment is perhaps a feature introduced by Matthew to captivate the attention of the reader and introduce a metaphorical understanding of the situation. The absurd astonishment of the servants is totally foreign to the parable as recorded in *Gosp. Thom.* 57. Clearly, the Matthean parable gives the master, called κύριος at this point, a chance

(c) the “fruit” (symbol of deeds) will indicate the difference between the two plants;⁶¹ (d) the danger is pulling up the good plants along with the tares because of their intermingled roots;⁶² (e) the master asks the servants to wait (ἀφήμι), a word which can be also translated as *to forgive* or *to permit*.⁶³

to explain to his servants the truth about the presence of tares in the field.

⁶¹According to Matt 13:26, the difference between the tares and the wheat was clear “when the grass sprouted and made fruit.” Apparently, (1) the tares are noticeable well before they bear their fruit (De Goedt, 52; Gustaf Dalman, *Die Worte Jesu mit Berücksichtigung des nachkanonischen Jüdischen Schrifttums und der Aramäischen Sprache erörtert* [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1930], 325), and (2) “bearing fruit” in Matthew is often a question of doing “good deeds.” The Greek term καρπός is found in the first Gospel 19 times. The expression καρπὸν ποιεῖν (“to make, bring forth fruit”) in Matthew is always used in the context of an appeal to the “deeds” (Matt 7:16-20 [// Mark 4:8 and Luke 8:8]; 12:33 [// Luke 6:43-44]; 3:8, 10 [// Luke 3:8, 9]; 21:19, 34 [// Mark 11:14; 12:2; and Luke 20:10]). Matthew is the only Gospel that includes, at the end of the parable of the Vineyard (Matt 21:33-41 [// Mark 12:1-2 and Luke 20:9-19), the following verse: “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it” (v. 43, NAS). In the parable of the Tares, it is exactly when the grass bears fruit that the tares are manifested (Matt 13:26), therefore the fruit is the proof of the quality of the plant (cf. Matt 12:33). The metaphorical dimension of the word “fruit” shines in the parable of the Tares in all its splendor.

⁶²Gosp. Thom. 57: “(For) on the day of the harvest the weeds will appear forth (ΝΑ ΟΥΩΝΜΖ ΕΒΟΛ).” Matthew uses the verb φαίνω, which indicates a clear and incontestable manifestation in its aorist form, to describe the manifestation of the tares well before the time of the harvest (v. 26) (See, e.g., F. Schenkl and F. Brunetti, “φαίνω,” *Dizionario Greco-Italiano / Italiano-Greco* [Genova: Polaris, 1990], 918), while Gosp. Thom. 57 employs its Coptic equivalent—in the future tense—to refer to the harvest time. Logically, the tares are visible and recognizable well before the harvest: even the Gosp. Thom. 57 seems to postulate this. Otherwise, how can the interdiction to go and eradicate the tares be explained? Why then should Gosp. Thom. 57 underscore that the tares will appear at the harvest time? Probably Gosp. Thom. 57 meant that “the tares will be manifested at the harvest time without the possibility of being mistaken for the wheat.” In this case, according to Gosp. Thom. 57, the danger of eradicating the tares before the harvest time lies in the possibility of eradicating the wheat along with the tares because of their similar appearance (this would already be an interpretation of Gosp. Thom. 57 since the first part of his version of the parable shares the same concern of the Matthean version: the tares are easily spotted before the harvest time). Matthew, on the other hand, did not see any possibility of confusion between the two kinds of seeds. Matthew then could have felt the need of anticipating in the parable the use of the verb φαίνω to show that the interdiction to eradicate the tares is not motivated by the fear to extirpate the wheat believing that it was tares, but was motivated instead by the risk of eradicating the wheat along with the tares (13: 29b ἅμα αὐτοῖς: “with them,” and not “instead of them”) because of entanglement between their roots (Levesque, 1899:1046).

⁶³ἄφετε (Matt 13:30), the imperative form of ἀφήμι, means “leave, permit, leave in

If to those redactional traits we add the fact that the word οἰκοδεσπότης (“master of the house”) may refer to Jesus as well as to the Christians,⁶⁴ it is natural to conclude that the redactor’s intention was to underline that Jesus’ parable was, in fact, encouraging the community to accept and deal with its status of *corpus mixtum*. The “servants” in the parable do not receive any allegorical counterpart in the explanation. Matthew does not censure the radical dualism that sees the “children of God” as opposed to the “children of the Evil one,” but reframes it into the correct original context: the Kingdom of the Son of Man (13:41). In the *little apocalypse* (Matt 13:40-43),⁶⁵ following the *lexicon* (vv. 37-39), the Kingdom of the Son of Man is inhabited by the righteous (who will eventually enter into the Kingdom of the Father) as well as by the scandalous and the unrighteous. The difficulty of the text lies in the understanding of the nature of the Kingdom of the Son of Man (13:41).⁶⁶

place,” but also “forgive” (e.g., Matt 6:14; Schenkl and Brunetti, “ἄφιμι,” 145-146).

⁶⁴In Matthew, the word οἰκοδεσπότης is used as referred to Jesus (10:25), God (20:1, 11; 22:33), and every Christian (13:52; 24:43). It is unlikely that Jesus used the word οἰκοδεσπότης to identify himself in a technical way: in Mark the word is used only once (Mark 14:14 // Luke 22:11; missing in Matthew) and it refers to neither Jesus nor a disciple. In the context of our parable, the “master of the house” could designate a small independent farmer or, less likely, a “local rich resident favored by the government” to receive a portion of the government estate (Zeev Safrai, *The Economy of Roman Palestine* [New York: Routledge, 1994], 322). It is also possible that the οἰκοδεσπότης is here a title for a tenant farmer (sharecropper), who is using slave labour (Safrai, 335).

⁶⁵Overman, *Matthew's Gospel*, 17-18: “Two terms that are characteristic of these sectarian communities and are regularly found in their writings are ‘lawless’ and ‘righteous,’” referring to 4 *Ezra* 7:17, 51; 9:14ff (community of righteous); 8:48 and 15:23 (wicked ones as opposing the righteous community); 7:51 (many ungodly among a few righteous); 7:48 (future world promised to the righteous); 9:36 and 7:81 (lawlessness); 2 *Baruch* 14 (rewards for the righteous); 1 *En.* 94:1,4; 103:11-12 (righteousness—wickedness); *Pss. Sol.* 1:1; 2:16, 35; 3:11; and 17:23 (sinners); 3:3, 8; 10:3; and 14:1-2 (righteous); 1:8; 2:3, 12; 4:1, 8, 12; and 17:11 (lawless ones); 4 (lawless leaders; cf. 1:4-8).

⁶⁶Sim, 109, states: “That Jesus would be accompanied by angels upon his return was a common notion in early Christianity, but only Matthew (24:4-31) and Revelation depict them as heavenly soldiers and Jesus as their military leader. This myth of the final war which we find in different versions in Matthew and Revelation is likewise found in the Qumran War scroll where it receives its fullest expression. . . . Whereas the Qumran community expected the archangel Michael to lead the heavenly forces, this role now falls to the returning Jesus in Matthew and Revelation. In both these Christian texts and in distinction to other strands of the New Testament, it is emphasized that when Jesus returns he will do so as a saviour figure who relieves the plight of the righteous in their darkest hour. . . . [U]nlike Mark and Q, which both describe Jesus as an advocate at the eschatological judgement, Matthew ascribes the role of judge to Jesus himself in his role as Son of Man. This is made clear in his redaction at 16:27 of Mk 8:38.”

Without claiming exhaustiveness, we will present here the three main interpretations of the Kingdom of the Son of Man:⁶⁷

1. The Kingdom of the Son of Man is the Church as a *corpus mixtum*.
2. The Kingdom of the Son of Man is the world, according to the hermeneutical key given in Matt 28:18-19 and 25:32, which sees in the Son of Man the universal Judge: “Le point de vue de l’explication de la parabole de l’ivraie serait donc universel et strictement éthique: la seule chose qui comptera au jugement est de savoir si l’on a accompli la volonté de Dieu, méritant ainsi d’être appelé ‘juste.’”⁶⁸
3. The Kingdom of the Son of Man is an eschatological reality: “il s’agirait du Royaume qui doit commencer avec l’avènement du Fils de l’homme; les mauvais en seront extirpés, en ce sens qu’ils en sont exclus: ils ne pourront y avoir part.”⁶⁹

Regardless which position one may stand for, it is logical to see the church’s bailiwick in the field/cosmos (Matt 18:24, 38). However, it is more difficult to explain the relationship between this field and the Kingdom of the Son of Man when the latter is an eschatological reality (v. 41) that could affect the whole cosmos, since the Son of Man is also presented as the one who has power and authority in heaven as well as on the earth (Matt 28:18). Moreover, the action of “sowing” performed by the Son of Man, in this post-Easter interpretation, is not limited to his past terrestrial life, but continues in the present time: Matt 13:37 clearly reads a present tense: Ὁ σπείρων τὸ καλὸν σπέρμα ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (“the one *sowing* the good seed is the Son of Man”), whereas the parable reads the aorist σπείραντι (v. 24). The fact that Matthew puts the scandalous and the ποιοῦντας τὴν ἀνομίαν (“those committing lawlessness,” v. 41) within the Kingdom of the Son of Man might be an attack against a form of soteriological security common in contemporary Palestinian Judaism.

The *Psalms of Solomon* witness to the *certitude* that a member belonging to the sectarian community had on finding mercy before God on the Judgment day.⁷⁰ That day was expected to be synonymous with national liberation, and

⁶⁷Jacques Dupont, “Le point de vue de Matthieu dans le chapitre des paraboles,” in *L’Évangile selon Matthieu. Rédaction et Théologie*, BETL XXIX, ed. M. Didier (Gembloux, Belgium: 1972), 224-227. Cf. Robert K. McIver, “The Parables of the Weeds among the Wheat (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43) and the Relationship Between the Kingdom of God and the Church as Portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew,” *JBL* (1995):643-659.

⁶⁸Dupont, 226. Cf. Anton Vöegtle, “Das christologische und ekklesiologische Anliegen von Mt. 28, 18-20,” in *Studia Evangelica*, ed. F. L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964), 2:266-294.

⁶⁹Dupont, 227. Cf. De Goedt, 44.

⁷⁰Daniel Marguerat, “L’Église et le monde en Matthieu 13: 36-43,” *RTbPh* 110/2 (1978): 111-129.

the foregone favor with which God would have looked upon his people filled the Israelites' hearts with optimism (*Pss. Sol.* 11; 17: 8-31; 18). Why such an optimism? Like Matthew, the *Psalms of Solomon* does not employ the word δίκαιος only in its eschatological connotation, but also to refer to the children of Israel *tout court* (*Pss. Sol.* 15:6, 7).⁷¹ God's graciousness toward people is portrayed as unquestionable (*Pss. Sol.* 14:2s, 6; 15:1-2, 8, 15), and the people, because of their election, cannot fail in fulfilling the Law (*Pss. Sol.* 14:1; 15:5-6). It is true that there is an awareness of the presence of transgression, but it is also true that every transgression is expiated by the atoning sufferance endured by the righteous Israelites (*Pss. Sol.* 8:29-32; 10:2-4; 13:5-11; 14:1; 17:5; cf. Heb. 12:4-11). This means that trust in God was coupled with self-confidence of being the chosen people; and certitude of divine mercy toward the righteous, who are, in fact, identified with the suffering people, dialectically corresponds to the appeal to repent. The same optimism is shared in the Syriac apocalypse of Baruch, a contemporary of Matthew.⁷² Matthew acknowledged the infinite mercy of God (Matt 18:23-27), but for him this mercy is an imperative leading to imitation (18:28-35). A possible optimism fostered by the reality of belonging to the chosen nation is annihilated by a fierce self-criticism (Matt 7:1-5) and by questioning the spiritual leaders of the people (15:12-14). On the other hand, the only way to face the Judgment with assurance is provided by an imitation of Christ in his obedience to the Father's will (e.g., 21:43; 15:13; 8:10-12; 21:28-22:14).

The Matthean insistence on "good deeds" is reminiscent of the *Tractate Abot*. However, the difference is striking: *Tractate Abot* preconizes a *quantification* of the good deeds.⁷³ The Judgment is thus seen as a retribution given to men, a salary for their obedience (4:11a; 2:16; 3:11; 6:9b).⁷⁴ Matthew never attempted to quantify good deeds, although he insisted on ethical behavior and faithful practice (cf. Matt 16:27). He knows that quantity is probably not the way to heaven, as the parable of the Workers seems to indicate: "These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day'" (20:12).

Another document akin to Matthew is the *Rule of the Community* found in Qumran, particularly 3:13 to 4:26, where dualism is the undergirding leitmotif. 1QS 3:17-21 reads: "He created man to rule over the world, appointing for them two spirits in which to walk until the time ordained for His visitation. These are the spirit of truth and of falsehood. . . . The authority of the

⁷¹Benno Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 104.

⁷²Marguerat, "L'église," 127. Cf. 2 *Baruch* 14:2, 12-13; 15:7; 51:1ss; 16:1-17:4; 48:12ss; 75:5ss.

⁷³"With benevolence shall the world be judged, nevertheless all will depend on the quantity of the deeds" (*T. Abot* 3:15).

⁷⁴Marguerat, "L'église", 126.

Prince of Light extends to the governance of all righteous people . . . the authority of the Angel of Darkness embraces the governance of all wicked people.”⁷⁵ This cosmic dualism penetrates the very nature of the human being (1QS 4:23); humanity cannot avoid this conflict (4:15-16) and it must face a choice that leaves no room for compromise (4:18).⁷⁶ Furthermore, God has appointed a time on the eschatological horizon to visit men and to reveal by which spirit they were animated (4:18-26). In spite of undeniable parallelisms with the first Gospel,⁷⁷ Qumranian dualism

vise donc non à élucider une situation de mixité de la communauté, mais— dans la mesure où l’esprit de perversité menace les sectaires (3: 21-24)—à sanctionner l’état de la pureté de la communauté et à justifier la séparation sectaire.⁷⁸

On the other hand, Matthew 13:24-30 (parable of the Tares) and 36-43 (its explanation) refuse any anticipation of the eschatological judgment. Whereas the *Rule of the Community*, 2 *Baruch*, and the *Psalms of Solomon* foster absolute confidence in the members’ immunity against God’s judgment, Matthew makes the Kingdom of the Son of Man the theater of this judgment. By doing so, Matthew follows a tradition already found in Ezek 9:6 (“Begin at my sanctuary”) and 12:2 (cf. also Matt 13:13-16 and Isa 6:9-10): it is precisely the people of God, as Israel, but also as the Kingdom of Christ, that the Judge will sift.⁷⁹ Moreover, while the *Rule of the Community* sees the origin of the evil tendencies in the human heart as somehow related to God’s will, Matthew underscores that any evildoer is originally motivated by an action of the “enemy” and that they are plants not sown by the Father (Matt 13:25, 37, 39; 15:10-20).

The Matthean perspective seems to be the following: the ecclesiological issue of the presence of evildoers within the community is a localized manifestation of a cosmic conflict that awaits its resolution in eschatological times. Matthew addressed his community with the hope that ecclesiastical discipline might be exerted in the context of the cosmic conflict between Jesus and Satan, and God’s untiring efforts to rescue the “lost.” The final Judgment will surely proceed over “His [the Son of Man’s] Kingdom” (Matt 13:41),

⁷⁵Michael Owen Wise, Martin G. Abegg, and Edward M. Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 130-131.

⁷⁶Marguerat, “L’église,” 128.

⁷⁷As in Matthew, Qumranian dualism is expressed by ethical categories: 1QS 4: 2-8 (cf. Matt 14:43; 25:35-40, 46) depicts the deeds of the spirit of truth and the eschatological destiny of the “wise ones”; 1QS 4:9-14 (cf. Matt 13:41; 25:41-46) is a revelation of the deeds of the spirit of perversity and of the punishment reserved to those who are controlled by it (Marguerat, “L’église,” 128).

⁷⁸Ibid., 128-129.

⁷⁹Ibid., 129; idem, *Jugement*, 447.

and this should be reason enough to discourage any illusion of soteriological security and to foster in the community a new self-understanding that would lead its members away from excessive and fierce sectarian attitudes.

Conclusion

In closing, I wish to acknowledge that it is possible to find in Matthew's Gospel a negative vision of the outer world, which is also described as "dominated by the devil (see 4:8) and in need of liberating (see 5:14). [As] . . . a realm of rejection more than acceptance (three quarters of the seed comes to naught, 13:3-9, 18-24)."⁸⁰ But this does not necessarily mean that there is no room in Matthew for reconciliation and cooperation with other leaders of Formative Judaism.⁸¹ We cannot overemphasize the necessity of taking into account the tensions and different perspectives which co-exist in Matthew's Gospel. Therefore, Sim and Stanton are correct in drawing a parallel between the sectarian nature of the Qumran community and the motives found in the first Gospel.⁸²

Saldarini is also correct in stating that

The tension between Matthew's Jewish group of believers-in-Jesus and the majority of the Jewish community does not mean that Matthew's group is Christian in contrast to the Jewish community. Matthew's group is still Jewish, just as the Essenes, revolutionaries, apocalyptic groups, and Baptist groups all remain Jewish, . . . Like many other groups, including the early rabbinic group, Matthew's group seek to reform Jewish society and influence the way it will live and interpret the will of God.⁸³

It is necessary to acknowledge that it is possible to find arguments for both sectarian *and* conciliatory attitudes in the same Gospel: the Gospel of Matthew might not stem from a monolithic community, but from one in which

⁸⁰Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, The Bible and Liberation Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 293. Cf. Overman, *Church*, 199.

⁸¹Contra Overman (*Church*, 416; *Matthew's Gospel*, 153).

⁸²Sim, 182-183, holds that the sect of Qumran "shared the basic outlook of the wider Jewish world—the belief in one God, the importance of the covenant with that God, the observance of the Torah and so on—yet it consciously stood outside 'normative' or majority Judaism in the following ways. . . . The group at Qumran distanced itself, both physically and metaphorically, from the wider Jewish world and derided the leaders who controlled the parent body. Its sectarian nature is emphasized by the fact that it possessed its own rules and regulations and devised its peculiar interpretation of the Torah. It set strict boundaries around itself by the adoption of its own code of practice and also by the adoption of dualistic language which describes the respective natures of the insider and the outsider. . . . [M]any of these sectarian motifs are paralleled in the gospel of Matthew." See also Stanton, 283.

⁸³Saldarini, 121-122.

conflicting views coexisted, although uncomfortably. It is not surprising then to see that Matthew has been well received by “those groups gathered [such as those who originated the Didache, Ezra, and perhaps the Gospel of Peter] around Jesus in the early second century who could not imagine a faithful life outside of Judaism” and by the *Adversus Ioudaios* authors.⁸⁴ In order to grasp the intentions of the first Gospel’s redactor and the circumstances in which he wrote, one needs to concentrate on the tensions between different statements and on how they have been contextualized.

Matthew counters sectarian impulses coming from within his community by undermining soteriological security and discouraging his people from any utopian attempts to constitute themselves into a community free of all impurity. Self-understanding, community discipline, and interrelation with other Jewish groups are all closely intertwined in the first Gospel. Matthew would not have disdained a more positive and proactive relationship between his group and Formative Judaism. This possibility may even be strengthened by Ascough’s claim that urban Christianity (and Matthew was probably writing for an urban group) in the latter part of the first century would have allowed for less exclusivity than generally admitted.⁸⁵

⁸⁴Overman, *Church*, 414.

⁸⁵Ascough, “Voluntary Associations,” 171-176.