

III. THEOLOGY OF NT IN ITS UNITY AND DIVERSITY: BOOKS, CORPUS AND BEYOND

1. THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS: WHICH THEOLOGY(IES)?

The gospels of Mt, Mk and Lk have been called "synoptic gospels" because they share several elements (stories, themes, a certain order, etc.). For this reason, the question that concerns us is the following: Is it possible to extract theological features that are more or less common to them? Although it is not easy, we are setting ourselves this task. We will begin by recalling the essential theological lines of each book before seeing if there is a link between them that can facilitate further connections. This means that we will be attentive to the degree of extensibility of each theme, observing, for example, the cross-references and remembering everything that revolves around the synoptic fact (synoptic problem) and considering the contexts of each text, section, book, corpus....

A. Characteristics and theological lines of Matthew

1°. Particularism and universalism

A double movement can be discerned in the first gospel. In the first place, its Jewish particularism. -Mt. is a connoisseur of the Judaism of his time. For example, he is well acquainted with the scribes and Pharisees, whom he says "are seated on the flesh of Moses" (23:2). -The mathematical Jesus is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition: as we know, he did not come to abolish one iota of the Law (5:17ff); he paid the Temple tax (17:24-27); he sent his disciples only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:4-5; cf. 15:24), meaning he came specifically for the Hebrew race and not for any other race. Paradoxically, however, this profound Jewish particularism coexists with a universalism resolutely polemical in tone: The Magi (three wise men) from distant lands (the East) are the first to come to prostrate themselves before the child Jesus, whereas Herod wants to kill him and the scribes of Jerusalem are not interested (2:1-12); and when the newborn Jesus is chased by King Herod, God told Joseph to escape with the child to Egypt, a foreign country. Jesus heals the servant of

the Roman centurion and emphasizes that he has never seen such great faith in Israel (8:5-13); the daughter of the Canaanite woman is healed after much resistance, underlining the difficulty for Jesus and the disciples to admit this openness to the Gentiles (15:2-28). Finally, after Easter, Jesus himself extends the proclamation of the Good News to all the peoples of the earth (28,16-20).

2°. Christology

The Christology of Mt. is essentially found in the narrative. Mt is much more interested than Mc in the ministry and content of the teaching of the earthly Jesus (*didascal* Christology). Mt does not understand Jesus as a person from a past history, but he wants to attest to the total identity between the earthly Jesus and the Risen One (who is/will always be) present alongside his own. The story of the historical Jesus is therefore always in harmony with the challenge of the Risen One to his disciples in the following generations. The matthean narrative thus functions as an appropriation and actualization of the story of Jesus and his teaching in the life of the community.

For Mt, Jesus of Nazareth is the *Messiah* of Israel. This manifests itself in three ways:

- Jesus is presented twice as the one sent or sending the disciples to the house of Israel (10,5-6; 15,24);
- through the fulfillment quotations, we discover that Jesus is the expected and announced envoy: those who receive him therefore remain faithful to the tradition of the Fathers;
- Jesus bears the Christological titles borrowed from the Old Testament (Son of David, Messiah, Son of Man). This Jesus Messiah is redefined as the living presence of God in the midst of his people, and more broadly in the midst of the world (Christology of *Emmanuel*). Although Jewish messianism is radicalized, it is also reinterpreted in depth, with the classical themes of Judaism (the Law, the question of election, the community question, the relationship to the pagans, etc.). The identification of Jesus with the "little ones" (10:42) is a reframing of certain titles that puts him in parallel with great elders such as Moses.

Matthew's Portrait of Jesus (Felix Just, SJ)

The Gospel according to Matthew accepts and uses the main Christological titles found already in his main narrative source (Mark's Gospel), including Christ/Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, Rabbi, and Teacher. But in contrast to Mark, Matthew adds several new titles and emphasizes certain aspects of Jesus' identity differently from Mark. Matthew's Gospel begins by identifying Jesus as "the **son of David**, the **son of Abraham**" (1:1), thus indicating Jesus' Davidic/royal and Abrahamic/Jewish heritage, respectively. Throughout Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is also presented as "the **New Moses**" for the people of Israel, and is given a variety of other titles, including **Emmanuel**, **Savior**, **Prophet**, and **King of the Jews**.

A. Jesus as the Son of Abraham (and Isaac and Jacob)

- Matthew stresses Jesus' **Jewish heritage** much more directly than Mark's Gospel does; references to "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" focus on the Israelites, the "twelve tribes of Jacob/Israel."
- Yet the mission of Jesus extends beyond the Jews; recall that the name "Abraham" means "the Father of *many* nations" (see Gen 17:5; Rom 4:17-18).
- The very beginning of the Gospel: "An account of **the genealogy of Jesus** the Messiah, the son of David, **the son of Abraham**. / **Abraham was the father of Isaac**, and **Isaac the father of Jacob**, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers..." (Matt 1:1-2)
- In summarizing Jesus' genealogy: "So all the generations **from Abraham** to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations." (Matt 1:17)
- In John the Baptist's preaching to the scribes and Pharisees: "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have **Abraham** as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to **Abraham**." (Matt 3:9)
- When Jesus complements a Roman centurion's faith: "I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with **Abraham and Isaac and Jacob** in the kingdom of heaven, / while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt 8:11-12)
- When Jesus argues with the Sadducees about the resurrection of the dead: "And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, / '**I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob**' ? He is God not of the dead, but of the living." (Matt 22:31-32; citing Exod 3:6; par. Mark

B. Jesus as the Son of David and King of the Jews (and King of Israel)

- Matthew's version of Jesus' genealogy also stresses that he is the royal "Son of David": "An account of **the genealogy of Jesus** the Messiah, **the son of David**, the son of Abraham... / ...and Jesse the father of **King David**. And **David was the father of Solomon** by the wife of Uriah... / So all the generations from Abraham to **David** are fourteen generations; and from **David** to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations." (Matt 1:1, 6, 17; cf. 1:20)
- More subtle references to King David in this genealogy are three mentions of the **number fourteen** (the number of the name "David" in Hebrew gematria, since D=4, V=6, and only consonants are counted; thus D+V+D = 4+6+4 = 14). Moreover, the **deportation to Babylon** is also a subtle reference to the royal line of David, since it was at that time when the descendants of David ceased to rule as Kings of Judea (in contrast to the promises made in 2 Sam 7:11b-13).
- Matthew later frequently stresses that Jesus is the royal "**Son of David**" (Matt 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:1-9; 21:15; 22:42-45).
- In Mark, the title "**King of the Jews**" is only used near the end of the Gospel: during the trial of Jesus before Pilate (Mark 15:2, 9, 12; cf. Matt 27:11), when the soldiers mock the condemned Jesus (Mark 15:18; cf. Matt 27:29), and on the *titulus* on the cross stating the reason why Jesus was crucified (Mark 15:26; cf. Matt 27:37). Before Jesus dies on the cross, some bystanders also mockingly call him "**the King of Israel**" (Mark 15:32; cf. Matt 27:42).
- Already near the beginning of Matthew, the Magi from the East come in search of **the newborn "King of the Jews"** (Matt 2:2); and they seek information from **King** Herod the Great!
- Note that **kings** also appear as characters in *several parables* in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 18:23; 22:2-10; 22:11-13; 25:34-40), much more frequently than in Mark or Luke.

C. Jesus as Emmanuel ("God with Us") and One Who "Saves"

- In Matthew's infancy narrative, an angel tells Joseph in a dream: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,

for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. / She will bear a son, and **you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.**" / All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: / "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and **they shall name him Emmanuel,**" which means, "**God is with us**" (Matt 1:20-23; citing Isaiah 7:14).

- During a storm at sea, Jesus' disciples cry out, "**Lord, save us**" (Matt 8:25); and when Peter attempts to walk on water, but begins sinking, he similarly cries, "**Lord, save me**" (Matt 14:30).
- Jesus several times teaches, "**Whoever endures to the end will be saved**" (Matt 10:22; 24:13; cf. 24:22).
- When Jesus tell his disciples how hard it is for rich people to enter the Kingdom of heaven, they ask, "**Then who can be saved?**" (Matt 19:25; cf. 16:25)
- While dying on the cross, Jesus is taunted by various groups of people: "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, **save yourself!** If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." (Matt 27:40; cf. 27:42, 49).
- When the risen Jesus speaks to the disciples on a mountain in Galilee, his very last words are, "And remember, **I am with you always**, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:20; cf. 26:29)

D. Jesus as a great Prophet and Teacher, like a new Moses

- The name "**Moses**" is not directly used in a Christological Title, nor can Jesus be called the "Son of Moses," since Jesus belongs to the Tribe of Judah, while Moses belongs to the Tribe of Levi. However, Jesus is *portrayed* as being very **similar to Moses** in several interesting and significant ways:
 - Just as Pharaoh (King of Egypt ca. 1300 BC) *killed all the baby boys* of the Hebrews, and only *Moses is saved* (Exod 1:22–2:10),
 - so also Herod (King of Israel at that time) *kills all the male babies* in Bethlehem, and only *Jesus is saved* (Matt 2:13-18).
 - When Moses' life is in danger, he flees from *Egypt to Israel*, but returns to *Egypt* after many years (Exod 2:15; 7:6-7);
 - when Jesus' life is in danger, he takes the reverse itinerary: from *Israel to Egypt* and later back to *Israel* (Matt 2:13-21).
 - Just as Moses goes up to a *mountain* to receive the *Law* (incl. the Ten Commandments) from God (Exod 19:3),
 - so also Jesus goes up to a *mountain* to give a *new Law* (incl. the Nine Beatitudes) to the people (Matt 5:1).
 - Just as Moses *does not eat or drink for forty days and forty nights* while on the mountain, recording God's Law (Exod 34:28),

- so also Jesus *fasts for forty days and forty nights* in the desert, being tempted by Satan (Matt 4:2).
- Just as Moses was thought to have written the first *five books* of the Hebrew Bible (Gen, Exod, Lev, Num, Deut),
 - so also the teaching of Jesus is contained in *five speeches* or extended "discourses" in Matthew (ch. 5–7, 10, 13, 18, 23–25).
- Overall, Moses was considered the *greatest teacher, prophet and lawgiver* in the Hebrew Bible (and throughout the NT);
 - so also Jesus is portrayed in Matthew's Gospel as a *great teacher, prophet and lawgiver*, equal to or even greater than Moses.
- Moses is explicitly mentioned seven times in Matthew (8:4; 17:3-4; 19:7-8; 22:24; 23:2), most of which have parallels in Mark;
 - the Matthean Jesus also explicitly upholds the law of Moses, rather than abolishing it (5:17-20; 22:35-40; etc.)
- For many more parallels between Moses and Matthew's Jesus, see Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993).

E. Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Law and Prophecies of the Old Testament

- **Quotations:** Matthew's Gospel contains over sixty direct quotations of (or strong allusions to) Hebrew Bible texts.
 - It often says the words or actions of Jesus or other Gospel characters have taken place "to fulfill" the scriptures.
 - The scripture quotations are sometimes introduced by what scholars call a "fulfillment formula."
- **Fulfillment Formulas:** In over a dozen texts, the narrator (Matthew) says, "All this took place *to fulfill* what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet" (or something similar), often followed by a specific OT quotation:
 - Matt 1:22-23; 2:5b-6; 2:15b; 2:17-18; 2:23b; 3:3; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:14-15; 13:35; 21:4-5; 26:56; 27:9-10
 - In most references, the particular "prophet" is not named; but several times Matthew explicitly names *Isaiah* (3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14; 15:7), *Jeremiah* (2:17; 27:9; see also 16:14), and *Daniel* (24:15)
- **Jesus himself** says something very similar in several texts:
 - Matt 5:17 (Sermon on the Mount, speaking to the crowds) - "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; *I have come not*

to abolish but to fulfill.”

- Matt 15:7 (in Galilee, to Pharisees) - “You hypocrites! *Isaiah prophesied rightly* about you when he said...”
- Matt 26:54 (Gethsemane) - “But how then would *the scriptures be fulfilled*, which say it must happen in this way?”
- Matt 26:56a (Gethsemane) - “But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may *be fulfilled*.”

(cf. F. JUST, *Christology: Matthew’s Portrait of Jesus*,

<https://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Matthew-Christology-Discipleship.htm>; 30/12/2020)