

COURSE TITLE: GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW **COURSE CODE:** TH 312

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QUESTION: DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF MATTHEW

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INTRODUCTION

The Gospel according to Matthew, canonically, is the first of the four New Testament Gospel narratives that recount the life, ministerial work and death of Jesus Christ. Matthew writes to a Jewish Christian community, and in doing this he presents Jesus as a teacher whose Jewish background and identity is beyond doubt; hence the genealogy (cf. Matt. 1:1-17). His account of the Gospel covers, to a large extent, the discourses of Jesus, alongside birth stories, calling or vocation stories, miracle stories, parables, passion stories, and resurrection stories. Putting all these into consideration, this work is concerned with the discourse of the distinctive features of the Gospel according to Matthew.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

Our discussion on the distinctive features of the Gospel according to Matthew cuts across the literary features, theological features, the tone of the Gospel and other distinctive features in the Gospel narrative.

LITERARY FEATURES

The distinctive Literary features of the Gospel of Matthew include: **Narration, Rhetoric** and **Argumentation**. As a **narrative analysis**, one approaches the Gospel of Matthew as a unified narrative where action, characters, and story-line are organized by means of a coherent plot. As a **rhetorical book**, Matthew carefully arranged the different parts of his narrative with details and proofs to inform, educate and facilitate easy understanding of the text. He also includes the feature of **argumentation**, which, was not part of his intention. However, the message he puts forth is in such contradiction with what many people—original or contemporary—would hold true or believe, that it for many becomes an argument.

THEOLOGICAL FEATURES

The distinctive theological features of the Gospel of Matthew include: Christology, Ecclesial and Israel contrast, Eschatology and Mission.

Christology: Christology, according to the Roman Catholic Theology, refers to the “inquiry and reflection that are concerned with Jesus in his messianic character.” Matthew presents to his audience the message that Jesus is the Son of God (27:43), the messiah, son of David, Son of Abraham (1:1) the Emmanuel (1:23), Saviour, and King of the Jews (27:42).

Ecclesial and Israel Contrast: The emphasis on church appears about twice in Matthew (16:13-20, 18:15-20). In the former, Peter is seen as the rock upon which his church will be built (*ekklesi mou*). In the latter the *ekklesia* will be the final arbiter of justice. The Church and Israel thus stand in obviously painful tension in Matthew. Also reflecting this tension are the references to “their synagogues” (4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54), “your synagogues” (23:34), “their scribes” (7:29), and “the Jews to this day”

(28:15)-most references unique to Matthew and the last comparable to the well-known derogatory use of “the Jews” in the Fourth Gospel.

Eschatology: Eschatology refers to the doctrine that pertains to the last things, or end of time. In the Gospel of Matthew, we see the parables of the Ten Virgins and the Talents (25: 1-30) which speak about the end of time, and teach Christians to be prepared and ready for this unknown time.

Mission: Matthew speaks of the mission of Christ, who is the promised Messiah (1:22-23), as well as the mission of the Church, through the disciples, with the same plan of salvation (10:1-42).

TONE OF THE GOSPEL

Tone of Universalism: The Gospel of Matthew appeals to the whole world; for humanity and not for Jews alone. Thus, e.g., there is emphasis on gentile response to the gospel in the genealogy of Christ, which contains gentile names (Ruth and Rahab; 1:5) and people of unpleasant stories; the Canaanite woman (15:21-28); the parable of the marriage feast (22:1-10); and the Roman soldiers' confession (27:54). What is implicit earlier becomes explicit in 24:14, where Jesus says, “And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come”; and, of course, most impressively in the commission of 28: 19: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Tone of Particularism: Matthew is the only Gospel that records Jesus' startling words that restrict his and his disciples' immediate ministry to Israel. According to 10:5-6 (cf. 10:23, “all the towns of Israel”), when Jesus sends the twelve out on their mission, he begins with a stern prohibition: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Later in the narrative (15:24), when Jesus himself is entreated by a gentile woman, he not only ignores her request (initially) but responds by saying: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” So contradictory is this attitude to that of the evangelist's day, when the gentile mission was an undeniable reality, that these passages excellently satisfy the criterion of dissimilarity (so far as the early Church is concerned, but not, of course, so far as Judaism is concerned), and hence most scholars accept these sayings as authentic. Again, from the genealogy, it still appeals to the Jews as he traces Jesus ancestry to Abraham, the Father of Jews (1:1-25).

OTHER DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

Miracles and their Lesson: Matthew is known for its brevity as regards the narration of Miracles. He passes the message to the effect that miracles are not important for their sake but by reason of the faith that it generates or accompanies it.

Prophecy and Fulfilment and Allusions to Old Testament: This feature is so peculiar and unique to the Gospel of Matthew. In the Gospel of Matthew, we see the usage of prophecies from the Old Testament, as well as the fulfilment of the same prophecies. In Matthew 1:23, 2:15, 27:9, 2:23, the prophecies of Prophets Isaiah, Hosea and Jeremiah were fulfilled and they somewhat relate to Christ.

Typology: Jesus was presented as new Israel: 2:15/Hosea 1:1, Mt.4:1-11 in contrast to 40 years journey in the wilderness. The temptation of Matt 4:3-4 in contrast to Deut 8:3; Matt 4:5-7 to Deut 6:16; and Matt 4:8-19 to Deut 6:13.

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