THE PAULIST BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

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Father's will that Jesus will supremely fulfill his role to be Savior (1:21) for his people and the world.

By tagging the various geographical moves made by the family of Jesus to three scriptural texts, Matthew shows how the story has all been foreseen in Scripture and fulfills God's saving plan. Herod, in fact, becomes a tool of the divine purpose. The sojourn in Egypt (2:13–15) allows Jesus to relive the story of his people by fulfilling the words of the prophet Hosea, speaking in God's name, "Out of Egypt I have called my son" (2:15; cf. Hos 11:1). Awareness of his origins (Matt 1:18–21), however, allows us to understand that he is "called (God's) Son" in a far more personal way than was ever the case with Israel.

The story reaches its darkest note when the fate from which the child has so narrowly escaped is made clear through the report of Herod's murder, based on careful calculation (2:7), of all male children in Bethlehem and the vicinity up to two years old (2:16–18). A quotation from Jer 31:15 shows that this too has at least been foreseen by God. The world in which Matthew locates the Savior is the real world in which the lamentation of women for lost children and their refusal to be comforted "because they are no more" is all too familiar. Nothing could portray more poignantly the need for the coming of a ruler who would "shepherd" rather than ravage the flock of Israel. In the face of Herod's brutal rule, the Messiah for the time being can only "withdraw" (2:14; 2:22). Later, he too, like these little ones, will be put to death. But Scripture (Jer 31:15) shows that their deaths, like his and those of all innocent victims of tyranny, are "precious in the sight of the LORD" (Ps 116:15). They too have their place in the wider scheme of salvation.

The third quotation (2:23) bears upon the location where Joseph brings his family to rest: Nazareth in Galilee. Obedient once more to a divine warning, Joseph has brought "the child and his mother" back to Israel (vv. 19–22). There a final divine warning resolves his fear of settling in Judea, where Herod's son Archelaus currently reigns. His "withdrawal" to Galilee and settling in Nazareth (v. 23) then fulfills "what had been spoken through the prophets...'He will be called a Nazorean.'" In fact, no such OT quotation exists in either the Hebrew or the Greek. The plural "prophets" may point to a "quotation" made up from one or more texts (e.g., Isa 4:3: "[he] will be called holy," with *Nazaraios* ["Nazirite"] substituted for "holy" on the basis that Nazarite designated a member of an ascetic group, set apart as holy [see Judg 13:5–7]).

What is significant for Matthew is the fact that, in the face of opposition from Jewish authorities, Jesus has "withdrawn" to Galilee, a region later described as "Galilee of the Gentiles" (4:15c). The Messiah, originally—and appropriately—born in David's city of Bethlehem in Judea, has become, through a strange combination of hostility from Jewish authorities and divine guidance, a resident of Galilee. Here, in a locale where Gentiles will more readily have access to him, he is well placed to become the Messiah in whose "name the Gentiles will hope" (12:21).

We read the account of the diverse reception given to the infant Savior—welcome from Gentiles; hostility from Jewish authorities—conscious of how soon a reverse pattern set in where Jews experienced violence from Christians. Interpretation and preaching sensitive to this development will seek to transcend the confines of the original Matthean setting and see in Herod and his associates not so much Jewish authorities of a particular time and place but symbols of that hostile "kingdom" that in so many times and places and in such a variety of forms (political, economic, social) retains an oppressive hold upon human life. Seeking to reclaim the world for the rule of God, the divine saving presence ("Emmanuel"), operative in all kinds of ministries and works, will always be in conflict with latter-day Herods, often compelled, like Jesus, to "withdraw" before them. The infancy story suggests that such moments are not aberrations but instances of fidelity to an ongoing pattern of salvation.

Prelude to Jesus' Public Ministry (3:1—4:11)

Without warning, Matthew transports us from the time of Jesus' childhood to the period just prior to the beginning of his adult public ministry. This time of preparation has three stages:

1. The preaching and witness of John the Baptist (3:1–12)
2. Jesus' baptism and acknowledgment by the Father (3:13–17)
3. The testing of God's Son (4:1–11).

The Preaching and Witness of John the Baptist (3:1–12)

Without any time marker (as in Luke 3:1–2), Matthew speaks simply of the appearance of John the Baptist in the wilderness of Judea (3:1). John's diet and apparel (v. 4) suggest that he is playing the role of the prophet Elijah, whose return before the great day of judgment was expected based on texts such as Mal 4:5 and Sir 48:10. His appearance and his message fulfills the statement in Isa 40:3, about a "voice of

one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord'" (Matt 3:3). The "way" to be prepared is no longer, as in (Second) Isaiah, the physical route for the exiles returning from Babylon but the way of repentant human hearts in view of the coming judgment. Hence John's stark message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (v. 2).

John's reference to "the kingdom of heaven" introduces a motif central to the theology of Matthew and indeed the entire Gospel tradition. For a full discussion of its meaning and usage in the Gospel see the introduction. Here we may recall that "kingdom" (Greek *basileia*) is better translated "rule," since the reference is not to a political or social institution but rather to a divine intervention reclaiming the world from the regime of the demonic (Satan) that currently prevails.

The climax of this reassertion of God's rule would be the institution of a great judgment in which the oppressive spiritual forces and the human agents who had been their accomplices would be cast down. The righteous, meanwhile, whom they had oppressed and shamed would be vindicated and welcomed into full enjoyment of the blessings of salvation—the blessings that the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1–12; Luke 6:20–23) specifically list. This impending judgment is the context of John's summons to repentance in view of the onset of the kingdom. The acceptance of baptism at his hands would then be the outward expression of the required inward conversion of heart.

Matthew describes a vast movement of people approaching John for baptism in the river Jordan, "confessing their sins" (vv. 5–6). There is no suggestion (contrast Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3) that this rite brought forgiveness; it is simply a preparation for the forgiveness that only a coming Savior could effect and declare (1:21; 9:5). John severely denounces the "many Pharisees and Sadducees" that he sees coming to him for baptism (3:7). Descent from Abraham (belonging to God's people) is no insurance against the wrath to come. God can (and, with the eventual openness to the Gentiles, will) raise up children to Abraham "from these stones." The only thing that will count at the judgment will be "bear[ing] fruit worthy of repentance," that is, good deeds issuing from a genuinely converted heart (vv. 8–10). The targeting of Pharisees and Sadducees—an unlikely combination during the ministry of John and Jesus—reflects the polemics of Matthew's time rather than that of John himself. However, as also later in the Gospel (see 23:1–36), the evangelist doubtless wants Christian leaders to hear John's prophetic warning.

John goes on to point to a coming of a "more powerful" one from whose status and role he radically distinguishes himself (vv. 11–12). Where he (John) offers water baptism as an outward sign of repentance, this more powerful figure will "baptize...with the Holy Spirit and with fire." The reference is not to Christian baptism; "baptize" here has the biblical metaphorical meaning of undergoing (as if through raging waters) a severe ordeal (see Mark 10:38–39; Luke 12:50); "fire," likewise, is regularly associated with judgment in the biblical tradition. In view is a testing ordeal of judgment instituted by one authorized by the Spirit.

The vivid imagery (baptize, fire, winnowing fork, chaff, etc.) makes clear that John is pointing to the coming one's role as eschatological judge. This reflects a development within apocalyptic Judaism where the end-time judgment is not exercised directly by God but "delegated," so to speak, to an agent, who will exercise it on God's behalf. In some Jewish texts this agent of judgment is an angelic figure or, if depicted in human form, one whose origins are heavenly rather than merely human. Daniel 7:13 accords this role to "one like a son of man" (that is, a human being; au. trans.), something that gave rise to widespread expectation of a heavenly Son of Man who would come with the clouds of heaven with authority to execute judgment. In the early Gospel tradition, the more worldly role of the Davidic Messiah and the more transcendent nature and role of this Son of Man figure appear to have coalesced around the person of Jesus as risen Lord. He was expected to return shortly as Son of Man to institute the judgment preparatory to the full realization of God's rule.

The role of eschatological judge that John so strikingly alludes to here is not necessarily one to which Jesus will totally conform. His ministry will involve not only a summons to repentance (4:17) but also an authoritative assurance of forgiveness (e.g., 9:2–9), something which John could never give. The "embassy" that John later sends from prison, asking, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" (11:3), suggests that Jesus is not exactly playing the messianic role that John had anticipated and described. Nonetheless, as the perspective turns more to the future in the last weeks of Jesus' life, his role as eschatological judge comes to the fore, giving ultimate validity to John's depiction. The "slackers" in Matthew's community could hear John's message as something applicable to themselves as well as to the Judean crowds.

We are less comfortable today with the idea of an end-time judgment that is so much part of the "eschatological package" that early Christianity inherited from apocalyptic Judaism. However, the judgment was something to be executed *on behalf of* the righteous—part of their liberation—rather than a threat hanging

over them. God will institute judgment, not to sort out everyone with grim impartiality, but to vindicate and free those who have been oppressed. On the part of both John the Baptist and Jesus, the looming judgment is indeed an element of the proclamation of the kingdom, an element that Matthew is by no means disinclined to play down. However, we should see it in its place within the overall perspective.

Jesus' Baptism and Acknowledgment by the Father (3:13–17)

The one whose role as eschatological judge John has just sketched in such formidable terms simply emerges from the mass of repentant Israelites approaching for baptism (v. 13). Recognizing him, John understandably demurs, protesting that a reversal of process would be more appropriate (v. 14). But Jesus, in his first words in the Gospel, insists that this is how it is to be for "now," and adds a reason: "for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness" (v. 15).

One of Matthew's distinctive concepts, "righteousness" (*dikaiosynē*) in the biblical tradition denotes behavior in accordance with the requirements of a relationship. In Israel, it applied particularly to the covenant relationship with God and to the Torah as the practical expression of God's will: what God wants. The core dispute between Jesus and those who become his principal adversaries as the narrative unfolds will bear upon this point. Jesus will appeal to a foundational sense of "what God wants" to make clear what "righteous" fulfillment of the Torah in the messianic age should mean (see the appeal to Hos 6:6 in Matt 9:13 and 12:7).

"What God wants" of Jesus here and now as he stands before John is to submit to baptism along with the rest of repentant Israel. His baptism in this sense anticipates his subsequent submission to suffering and death because that too will be "what God wants" (see 26:39, 42, 44): an entrance into even deeper solidarity with sinful humankind to save them from their sins (1:21; see 20:28; 26:28).

The "righteous" action of Jesus in submitting to baptism triggers a divine response that is a defining moment in the narrative of the Gospel (vv. 16–17). The "opening of the heavens" (see Isa 64:1, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down") signals an end to the "drought" of communication from heaven that has so long prevailed. The descent of the Spirit in the form of a dove recalls the opening moment of creation where the Spirit "hovered" (as a dove hovers) over the face of the deep (Gen 1:2). The Spirit is empowering Jesus for a ministry so profound as to amount to a new creation.

The highpoint comes when a voice (that of the Father) from heaven declares, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17b). The public declaration (contrast Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22) confirms what we as readers already know from the infancy story (1:18–25; 2:15): Messiah Jesus is also and uniquely the Son of God. In the remaining elements of the address, "Beloved" evokes the description in Gen 22:2 of Abraham's son Isaac, whose obedient submission to the sacrificial death that appeared to be God's will for him became a celebrated theme in the postbiblical Jewish tradition. The final clause, "with whom I am well pleased," echoes the opening of the First Servant Song of Isaiah (Isa 42:1–4), introducing the motif, central to Matthew, that Christ will replay the role of the Servant (see Matt 12:18–21; 20:28; 26:28). Though not explicitly quoted here, the following line of the Song reads, "I have put my spirit upon him" (Isa 42:1c). According to Matt 3:17, this is exactly what God has just done: empowered the Son with the Spirit to carry out the Servant's mission.

Without imposing upon the Matthean text the more systematic formulations of succeeding centuries, we can nonetheless note the trinitarian shape of the scene: Son, Spirit, (voice of the) Father. There is a sense here in which the communion of love that is the Trinity publicly opens its arms on earth to embrace and draw Israel once more into that love through the ministry of the Son. The Gospel will end with the disciples missioned by the risen Lord to extend that embrace to the nations of the world. Baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (28:19c), each believer should feel themselves addressed by the Father, "You are my beloved son/daughter, with whom I am well pleased."

The Testing of God's Son (4:1–11)

As the final element of his preparation for ministry, Jesus relives the experience of his people by undergoing a period of temptation. The essential background to Matthew's account of this episode—better described as a "testing" rather than temptation—is the forty-year long wandering of Israel (also called "God's son" [Exod 4:22–33; Deut 14:1; Hos 11:1; etc.]) in the wilderness of Sinai. As recounted especially in Deuteronomy 6—8, this was a time when God probed the hearts of the covenant people to see whether they would be faithful, in the long term, to the covenant just made. Israel failed the test by attempting to turn things round and herself test God. Recapitulating Israel's story, Jesus submits to testing after a forty-day sojourn in the wilderness.

In line with the worldview of the time, the agent of the test is "the devil" (Satan), the leader of the

malignant spiritual forces whose rule currently runs in the world to the exclusion of the rule of God. Satan's aim is to nip in the bud the campaign to overthrow his rule by seeking to deflect the chief agent of that overthrow, Jesus, from his preordained path. But, for all his evil intent, Satan, like Herod, cannot escape being in some sense the instrument of the divine purpose. Jesus will emerge from the test, his mission and his union with the Father more clearly set than ever.

As in the case of Israel, the test relates to fundamental trust in God. Each of the three suggestions Satan puts to Jesus flows quite naturally from his just-affirmed status ("If you are the Son of God..." [v. 3; v. 6]). But each also involves repeating Israel's failure: testing God's faithfulness to the relationship, something that must never be in question. In each case Jesus dismisses the suggestion citing words taken from Deuteronomy 6—8.

1. Jesus is hungry after his fast. God provided Israel with food (manna) in the desert (Exodus 16) but is slow in making similar provision for Jesus. Let him use his powers then to force the issue: turn these stones into loaves of bread (Matt 4:3). Jesus rejoins, bread may be the staff of life but whether human beings live or die depends ultimately on the word of God (v. 4, citing Deut 8:3).
2. Put to the test the divine pledge of protection to the Messiah in Psalm 91 by enacting what the psalm seems to propose: a reckless exposure to physical danger in the shape of jumping from the "pinnacle" of the temple (Matt 4:5–6). Taking up the scriptural challenge (v. 7), Jesus trumps the ploy with a further riposte from Deuteronomy: God is not to be put to the test (6:16).
3. Finally, instead of waiting for God to confer upon him the world authority that is rightfully his as Messiah, why not have it right away? Only one condition: worship Satan instead of God (Matt 4:8–9). Jesus dismisses Satan and the suggestion in one stroke: worship and service belong to God alone (v. 10, citing Deut 6:13).

Implicit in this last suggestion is the assumption already noted that the world, including Israel, is currently under the control of the demonic. Those who exercise rule in the world (Herod, the Romans; etc.) do so because they have given themselves over to the one who really pulls the strings, Satan. To hold such authority is to have made a pact with him, in effect to have "worshipped" him, as he bluntly suggests here. The final rebuttal of Satan will come when, having "fulfilled all righteousness" (see 3:15) in his obedient death, Jesus stands on a mountain in Galilee and claims in the glorious freedom of his risen life, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (28:18b; see Phil 2:9–11)—given to him by God, who at this earlier time he had refused to put to the test.

Jesus, then, emerges from the contest with his status as God's "beloved Son" affirmed, the direction of his messianic mission set. A divine gesture confirms such to be the case: angels come and "wait" on him (4:11), providing thereby the food that the devil had urged him to conjure up for himself (v. 3). The "testing" episode thus makes a *theo*logical as well as a christological statement. Jesus will place his cause in the Father's hands right up to the obedience of the cross because the Father whose will he serves is worthy of such trust.

Early Galilean Ministry: Teacher, Healer, Reconciler (4:12—10:42)

Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee (4:12–25)

A "light" shines in Galilee (4:12–17). News of John the Baptist's arrest leads Jesus to withdraw to Galilee (4:12). The movement is not a retreat or flight from danger but a further instance of the recurring "withdrawal" (*anachōreō*) pattern in the Gospel: faced with hostility or threat from ruling authorities, Jesus does not confront them on their own terms but moves on to where greater receptivity to his mission is likely to be found. Bypassing the obscure village of Nazareth where he had grown up, he settles (v. 13) in Capernaum, a sizeable city by the sea of Galilee.

The move to a part of Galilee traditionally associated with the northernmost tribes of Israel, Zebulun, and Naphtali allows Matthew to signal yet again (v. 14) fulfillment of Scripture. Isaiah 8:23—9:1 (cited partially in Matt 4:15–16 in a form variant from both the MT and the LXX) is programmatic for the ministry of Jesus now about to unfold. His appearance in a city by the sea of Galilee fulfills God's will that the Messiah's "light" should shine in the region which the prophet dubs "Galilee of the Gentiles." Jesus' personal mission will be to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24; see 10:5), but the fact that he will conduct this in a region where his light will necessarily fall, according to the prophet, also upon Gentiles (those "who sat in darkness" and "in the region and shadow of death") makes him already the Messiah in whose "name the Gentiles will hope" (12:21; see 8:5–13; 15:27–28; 28:19–20).

The "light" that Jesus now begins to shine is his proclamation of the Gospel: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (4:17). As in the identical

proclamation of the Baptist (3:2), the new reality requiring repentance is the onset of the kingdom—the reclaiming of the world for God's rule, dispossessing the rule of Satan. The outward transformation of the world—the establishment of peace and justice, the abolition of poverty, hunger, disease, and death—will remain a process far from complete, though the miracles of Jesus will anticipate it. But the *essence* of the kingdom, renewed relationship with God, is already on offer for those who respond with repentant hearts. Conversion of life is also required, as the Matthean Jesus will insist (see 7:21–27). But such moral transformation *follows*—it does not condition—the new relationship with God.

Jesus calls the first disciples (4:18–22). The mission of Jesus requires the founding of a community to be the nucleus of a renewed people of God. Accordingly, his first action is to call disciples: two sets of brothers—Simon Peter and Andrew; then the sons of Zebedee, James and John—as he walks along the lakeside. The scene is loaded with symbolism. The four are all fishermen. They hear and respond immediately to the call to leave this occupation to follow Jesus in a new mode of "fishing": "fishing" for people (v. 19). They will go out upon the "sea" of the world, "catching" people for the kingdom by bringing them into the "boat" which is the church.

The call of two sets of *brothers*, accentuated in Matthew's account, brings out the aspect of family. The disciples leave not only their livelihood but also their natural family, including their father in the case of the sons of Zebedee (v. 22). They gain a new "family," the community of the kingdom, and a new father, the Father in heaven (5:16, 45, 48; 6:1–18; 23:9; etc.).

A summary statement as setting for the Sermon (4:23–25). Following the call of the disciples, the Gospel provides a summary of the early ministry of Jesus (v. 23) and then a description of the enthusiastic response it evokes across a wide geographical area (vv. 24–25). Jesus is first and foremost a teacher and proclaimer of the "good news" of the kingdom. Alongside this and characteristic of Matthew stands his role as healer: he goes about "curing every disease and every sickness among the people" (v. 23). The summary is programmatic: following the Sermon in which he appears as teacher (chs. 5—7) a collection of episodes will show him above all as healer (chs. 8—9).

The labored description (4:24–25) of the masses who bring their sick and tormented to Jesus for healing provides the setting for the sermon (a feature that the chapter division unfortunately obscures). Though they "follow" Jesus, the crowds attracted from many regions are not disciples. They constitute the burdened mass of humanity, the sight of whom prompts the instruction given to the disciples in the Sermon that follows: "When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain" (5:1a).

Teacher and Interpreter of the Torah: The Sermon on the Mount (5:1—7:29)

The great Sermon making up chapters 5—7 of the Gospel is central to Matthew's presentation of Jesus. It is, in effect, the Torah for the renewed people of God. It is so not in the sense that it abolishes or supersedes the Mosaic Torah. Rather, it is that same Torah reinterpreted and "fulfilled" (5:17) by the Son in light of God's will for the kingdom.

Introduction to the Sermon (5:1–2). As already indicated, the chapter division can mask the fact that it is the vision of afflicted humanity described in 4:23–25 that prompts Jesus to begin the long instruction to the disciples contained in the Sermon. Jesus does not ascend the mountain (5:1a) to escape from the crowds. The ascent is symbolic; in the biblical tradition mountains are the setting for revelation.

The ascent may also evoke Moses' ascending Mount Sinai to receive the Torah (Exod 19:3, 20; 24:12–18; 31:18; 34:1–5, 29). But Jesus is far more than a "new Moses." Moses simply *received* the Torah on Sinai and then promulgated it to Israel. Jesus, with the unparalleled authority that belongs to him as God's Son, *imparts* a new and definitive *interpretation* of the Torah. In addition, then, to roles the Gospel has already accorded him (Messiah, Son of God, Emmanuel) he now appears as authoritative interpreter of the Torah.

Jesus sits down—the gesture of one who is to impart teaching—and his disciples come to him for instruction (5:1b). The approach of the disciples tells us that it is they, rather than the mass of people, who are the primary audience of the Sermon. At the end, we learn that "the crowds were astounded at his teaching" (7:28). This does not mean that they have been the intended audience all along. Rather, they permitted to "overhear" the instruction Jesus is giving to the disciples, an instruction that has much to do with who the disciples are to be and how they are to live in order that they may be of some benefit to the afflicted of the world: "salt of the earth" (5:13); "light of the world" (5:14).

This means that the Sermon does not teach human values that are universally and perennially binding—at least in the sense of immediate application. It is indeed meant to have an impact upon the world, to be part of a divine project to humanize/divinize the world. But this impact is to come about through a community

prepared to pay the cost of living by a distinctive vision in a world that in large measure either opposes or remains indifferent to that way of life. In this sense, the Sermon is an integral part of Jesus' mission to break the grip of alienating, dehumanizing forces upon the world and reclaim human beings for the rule of God.

Moreover, everything Jesus commends or requires in the Sermon stems from an overarching *theological* vision. The instructions make sense only to those who acknowledge the character of God as revealed by Jesus, a God who is faithful and supremely caring of creation, a God who is now intervening in the world to save it from destruction. The various ways of acting in regard to fellow human beings that the Sermon commends, some requiring generosity in a high degree, make sense only because, as Jesus points out, this is the way God acts. When Jesus says, "Be perfect...as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48)—that is, display faithfulness as your heavenly Father shows faithfulness—the key term is the little conjunction "as": the measure of "perfection" is the character and action of God.

Aside from the introduction (4:23—5:2) and conclusion (7:28–29), the Sermon falls into three major sections:

A community blessed and set before the world (5:3–16)
Fulfilling the Torah in true righteousness (5:17—7:12)
Eschatological warnings: action required (7:13–27).

Within this large central section, Matthew's predilection for arranging things in threes appears in the six illustrations of "exceeding righteousness" (5:21–48) and the three areas of righteousness in acts directed to God (almsgiving [6:2–4]; prayer [6:5–15]; fasting [6:16–18]). Within this arrangement, the Lord's Prayer (6:9–13) is located—perhaps intentionally—at the heart of the Sermon.

The Beatitudes (5:3–12). Prior to placing before the disciples the demanding way of life to be set out in the Sermon, Jesus communicates a strong sense that those who do embrace such a way of life are "blessed," are in the very best place to be. They are in such a "place" because God has chosen them and associated them with Jesus and the coming rule of God, which, though it suffers "violence" (11:12), will triumph in the end. The Beatitudes are not then, even in Matthew's formulation, primarily prescriptive in an ethical sense. Jesus is commending the attitudes and way of life enshrined in them, not as a stark moral demand but in light of a vision of God that he shares with those called to be the community of the kingdom.

As featured especially in the wisdom tradition of Israel (see, e.g., Psalm 1), the "beatitude" form, "Blessed is the one who...," is a declaration or recognition that individuals or classes of people are in a happy circumstance; the basic idea is not too far away from "Congratulations!" In a more religious sense, beatitudes are spoken in respect to those seen to be "blessed" by God. Usually, that is the case because the good state of the person is already apparent. The Beatitudes attributed to Jesus, however, have taken on an eschatological note reflective of the prophetic tradition. They presuppose a distinction between the present state of affairs, which is one of suffering and trial, and what will be the case when the kingdom is fully in place. Jesus declares certain kinds of people "blessed," not because of their *present* situation, which, in fact, is quite disadvantaged, but in view of their *future* situation that will come about through the power and faithfulness of God.

The four Beatitudes (and corresponding Woes) in Luke's version of the Sermon (6:20–26) declare "blessed" those who are in the situations described (poor, hungry, weeping, hated) not through any choice on their part but simply because that is the condition they find themselves in. By contrast, the parallel and notably expanded set of nine in Matthew features an element of *choice* and so moves in the direction of a spirituality. Disciples not initially in the situations of disadvantage and vulnerability described can choose to adopt such values and actions in imitation of Jesus and in light of the image of God that he proposes. (The Lukan version, at least in the case of the first three Beatitudes, probably stands closer in this respect to the original voice of Jesus, while the Matthean set reflects expansion—with considerable input from the Psalms—in the early church tradition.)

The Matthean Beatitudes, some of which overlap in content, cohere around the idea of living in a nongrasping, sympathetic way. To be "poor in spirit," either in the sense of being humble or, more specifically, being ready to embrace actual poverty (v. 3a); to "mourn" because the righteous suffer while, for the present at least, the wicked prosper (v. 4a); to be "meek" in the sense of being noncompetitive rather than on the make (v. 5a); to have a passionate commitment ("hunger and thirst") to the will of God for human beings and the world ("righteousness") (v. 6a; see also 6:10, 33); to exercise "mercy" rather than taking advantage of those in an inferior position (v. 7a; see also 9:13; 12:7; 23:23); to live with integrity between inner disposition ("pure of heart") and outward action (v. 8a); to be "peacemakers," actively promoting reconciliation and living in harmony with all, including the hostile (v. 9a; see also 5:23–24, 43–47); to endure

persecution and calumny for the sake of a right way of life ("righteousness") and allegiance to Christ (vv. 10–12): all these things make one vulnerable here and now, entailing much loss.

The second clause in each Beatitude states the reason, from an eschatological perspective, that those enduring such loss are, nonetheless "blessed" even now. The string of passive formulations ("will be comforted," "will be filled," etc.) indicates the action of God. To live according to the Beatitudes may indeed involve vulnerability and loss. But if God truly is as Jesus reveals God to be, it is hardheaded commonsense. Given the hope for the kingdom, whose values the Beatitudes enshrine, disciples who adopt this way of life are to be "congratulated"; they are already "blessed."

Salt of the earth; light of the world (5:13–16). The images of "salt of the earth" (v. 13) and "light of the world" (vv. 14–16) flow immediately from the Beatitudes in the sense that by living in the way commended the disciples themselves will be a "blessing" for the world, especially as represented by the afflicted masses who "overhear" and provide the context for the Sermon (4:23–25). People who are prepared to live in the vulnerable, nongrasping way pronounced "blessed" in the Beatitudes are the ones who can really humanize the world, providing a "beachhead" of the kingdom in anticipation of its full arrival.

Salt has value in so far as it serves to savor or preserve some other quantity (v. 13). It cannot literally "lose its taste," but it can become so admixed with impurities of various kinds as to become useless for these purposes beyond itself. The moral for the disciples vis-à-vis the world is obvious.

Likewise, people do not light lamps and then place them under cover (lit. under a vessel used to measure a bushel); they place them on a lampstand to give light to all in the house (v. 15). Jerusalem, the archetypal "city built on a hill" (v. 14b), appeared when lit up (as during the annual Feast of Tabernacles; see John 7—9) to be "the light of the world." Just so God has placed the community of disciples in the world to be, through their pattern of life, its clearly visible light. Their good works will then lead outsiders to the knowledge and praise of the God, described here for the first time as "your Father in heaven" (v. 16). The community that receives and puts into practice the Torah as Jesus is now to interpret it will reclaim the vocation of Israel to be "light to the nations" (Isa 42:6; 49:6; 51:4; 60:3).

Jesus fulfills the law and the prophets (5:17–20). The defensive tone of this section ("Do not think..." [v. 17]) suggests that here the evangelist or the community behind the Gospel is putting on the lips of Jesus a strong rebuttal of a criticism from the synagogue that it has abandoned the Torah, something that in Jewish understanding would undercut any claim to belong to the people of God. Jesus insists that he has come not to abolish the law or the prophets but to fulfill them. In this Gospel, "fulfill" has to do with determining and carrying out "what God wants" —wants, that is, in the messianic time before "heaven and earth pass away" (v. 18). As God's Son, Jesus has unique authority to declare and implement an interpretation of the Torah that is according to God's will. The addition "and the prophets" makes clear that the divine will for the messianic age is to be found not only in the Torah strictly so called (the Pentateuch) but also in "the prophets," notably the key text Hos 6:6 (au. trans.), "What I want is mercy, not sacrifice," twice cited explicitly by the Jesus in the Gospel (Matt 9:13; 12:7). All specific prescriptions of the Torah, and, a fortiori, all that represent human tradition must be strained through the criterion of mercy and tested against the "greatest commandment" of the law, the one combining love of God and love of neighbor (22:36–40). Jesus may *appear* to sweep aside the Torah. In fact, he is authoritatively declaring and fulfilling what he will later call its "weightier matters": "justice and mercy and faith" (23:23).

To live out the Torah interpreted in this way is to practice a righteousness "exceeding" that of critics, here portrayed as "the scribes and Pharisees" (5:20). From a legalist perspective, such a fulfillment may seem a less exacting option. In fact, as the following six illustrations of such righteousness (5:21–48) will show, it is very demanding. The crucial thing is that the demand comes from following the example of God (5:45), giving priority in human relations to generosity and trust. Such is the "perfection" (5:48) required in the community of the kingdom.

Six illustrations (antitheses) of "exceeding righteousness" (5:21–48). The six pronouncements that Jesus makes as authoritative interpreter of the Torah are frequently called "antitheses" because that is the form they take. Jesus cites a ruling from the Torah and then radicalizes or extends it in some direction. The form, "But I say to you..." shows his complete authority vis-à-vis the Torah, Moses, and the Pharisaic oral tradition. A very high Christology emerges.

The six instances—illustrative rather than exhaustive—all bear upon relations between human beings to the exclusion of other areas. (Relationship with God is in view later in the Sermon [6:1–18].) Whereas in each case the Torah as cited presents a stark command or prohibition of external action, Jesus' instruction builds a "fence" around the law by going to the disposition of the human heart: if that radical source of conduct reflects the generosity and

faithfulness of God then infringement of the command/prohibition in an external sense will simply not arise. Some of the instructions come in the form of "focal instances": specific prescriptions of an exaggerated or totally impractical character (e.g., tearing out one's eye [5:29], cutting off one's hand [5:30]). Such commands are a prophetic stratagem designed to shock hearers into a new way of looking at human behavior by commending something totally at odds with what would appear reasonable.

In the first ruling (vv. 21–26) dealing with hostility between people, the old commandment is simply stated: "You shall not murder" (Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17). Jesus radicalizes the matter by going to the heart and addressing at that level the anger that can lead to insult and injury to others, of which murder would simply be the most extreme instance. The positive antidote is reconciliation with an alienated brother or sister, a duty so important as to warrant postponing the offering of a gift to God in the temple (mercy before sacrifice!). The advice to "settle out of court" (vv. 25–26), at one level a piece of worldly wisdom, reinforces the supreme importance of reconciliation, with overtones, never far from the surface in Matthew, of accountability before the end-time tribunal of God.

Regarding sexual behavior (vv. 27–30), whereas the old commandment simply forbade adultery, Jesus again insists that the problem really begins with perception: with a man's fundamental attitude toward a woman. The extreme advice about what to do with wandering eye and hand (vv. 29–30)— "focal instances" as explained above—reinforce the sense that sexuality has to do with the totality of a person (one's "whole body"), including relationships.

Regarding fidelity in marriage (vv. 31–32), the old dispensation looked at the issue entirely from the male perspective. Deuteronomy 24:1–4, the only clear instance of a legal ruling concerning divorce, simply presumed both its practice in Israel and the custom of the husband's providing his former wife with a "bill of divorce"; the main intent was to ensure that a divorced woman, who has married another, not return to her first husband. Later Jewish tradition, likewise assuming divorce, discussed the grounds upon which it was allowable.

Jesus here, as also later in 19:9, excludes divorce absolutely, save in one specific situation, that of *porneia*. Though other suggestions have been made—especially that this term refers to marriage within degrees of kinship forbidden by the Jewish law (Lev 18:6–18; likely the issue in Acts 15:20, 29)—it seems best to see here a reference to adultery. In this case, Jesus may simply be allowing for something that had been presumed in Judaism all along: that adultery simply caused a marriage to "die," in which case divorce was not simply allowable but mandatory (hence the initial design of Joseph in response to Mary's pregnancy [Matt 1:19]).

The later statement on divorce in 19:3–9, where Jesus appeals to the creation accounts in Gen 1:27 and 2:24 (also Mark 10:2–12), fills out the overarching theological vision behind his exclusion of divorce. The community of the kingdom is called to recapture and live out the original design of the Creator for marriage: a lifelong companionship of equality and fidelity. The Catholic tradition, while holding to this exclusion, has from early times (see already 1 Cor 7:10–16) undergone considerable development in adapting it to changing circumstances of time and place, a process still very much in play.

The exclusion of swearing oaths (Matt 5:33–37) is a classic instance of building a "fence" around the law. Where the law simply forbade swearing falsely in the sense of making vows to the Lord with no intention of carrying them out (see Lev 19:12), Jesus requires refraining from bolstering all commitments, whether to God or human beings, with an oath. Such trust and faithfulness should prevail in the community that, to have their word taken seriously, its members should not have to have recourse to such procedures, all of which risk infringing the majesty of God.

Jesus' reinterpretation of the Torah arrives at its most radical point in the final two rulings, on retaliation (5:38–42) and love of enemies (5:43–48). The old prescription, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Exod 21:24; Deut 19:21; Lev 24:20), was a realistic measure to contain and limit the spiral of violence—to bring "pay back" to a closure that all parties might recognize as fair. In a series of "focal instances" (Matt 5:39b–41) Jesus commends a readiness to disarm violence by going along with double what the perpetrator requires. To act with such generosity in the face even of unreasonable demands should not be impossible for disciples truly conscious of the overwhelming generosity of God (v. 42).

The Torah commanded, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18), adding nothing about enemies. "Hating one's enemy" represents a more general human tendency seen to be characteristic of the old order. Jesus resists it (Matt 5:43–44), once again in the context, now made explicit, of the disposition and action of God, whose "children" the members of the community know themselves to be. The disciples will truly show themselves to be children of God if they reflect the divine action in this radical way (vv. 45–48). "Perfection" consists in being perfect *as* one's heavenly Father is perfect, that is, acting toward others, including one's enemies, as the Creator acts toward all.

Righteousness in acts directed to God (6:1–18). In the central section of the Sermon, Jesus addresses three traditional practices of religious piety: almsgiving (vv. 2–4), prayer (vv. 5–15), and fasting (vv. 16–18). Once again, the appropriate way to act in such matters depends upon a particular vision of God. The opening sentence states the ruling principle: "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven" (v. 1). It deforms such piety to carry out acts of religion in a public and ostentatious way aimed at winning the approval of other human beings (vv. 2, 5, 16). The hidden, private nature of the countermeasures Jesus recommends (vv. 3–4a, 6a–c, 17) reflects belief in a God who is all-seeing but not in a "Big Brother is watching you" way. Disciples practice their piety under the gaze of a "Father in heaven," to whom alone their service is directed within the bounds of what ought to be a warm, filial relationship.

The constant reference to being "rewarded" by the Father (vv. 4b, 6d, 18) may sound like earning "brownie points." In fact, the term harks back to the "present/future" polarity of the Beatitudes. One performs these practices in the sight of a God presently unseen but in the sure hope that the relationship now hidden will one day be revealed in full glory and splendor. That is the essence of any future "reward."

The Lord's Prayer (6:7–15). Jesus prefaces the prayer that has become known as the "Lord's Prayer" with an example, taken this time from the Gentile world, showing how *not* to pray (v. 7). Pagans heap up empty phrases in their prayers because for them prayer is an attempt to move an ill-disposed or at best neutral deity to a more favorable attitude. How different the situation of the disciples! The Father, knows what they need even before they ask (v. 8) and is only too willing to be generous. The issue is not about moving God to act but about creating in the human heart the disposition that will enable the divine generosity to flow in full measure.

The petitions of the Lord's Prayer proper (vv. 9b–13) follow a sequence designed to promote such a disposition. The prayer begins with an attempt to lift the human mind away from fixation on its own concerns to a broader program, which is that of the "Father in heaven" (v. 9b). This opening invocation, which in all likelihood echoes the distinctive address of Jesus himself to the Father, *Abba* (see Mark 14:36; also, Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6), establishes the context in which the prayer is made: a community of disciples whom Jesus is molding into the "family of God" (Matt 12:48–50) and drawing into the intimacy and trust of his own relationship with the Father.

The three opening petitions (6:9c–10) differ little in content. The first and the third are simply variations in biblical language of the essential prayer for the coming of God's rule ("kingdom"), which is of course the center of Jesus' proclamation (4:17). The extension of God's rule will break the grip of forces currently holding the world captive to evil and lead to the wider "hallowing" of God's name on the part of humanity (see Ezek 36:23).

To pray for the "coming" of God's kingdom implies that its full realization remains an object of hope. The community that prays the petition does so as a kind of beachhead of the kingdom, enjoying its essence in the shape of the filial relationship with God, but still very much aware that, regarding the wider transformation of the world, the arrival of God's liberating rule is far from complete.

The second set of petitions (vv. 11–13) looks more to human need but retains the focus upon the future, reflecting the situation of a "pilgrim" people on the move. The Greek epithet, *epiousion*, attached to the petition for bread (v. 11; also, Luke 11:3), besides the usual translation "daily" (as NRSV), is also open to the meanings "bread needed for survival" or "bread for tomorrow." The latter introduces echoes of the manna upon which the Israelites fed during the years of wandering in the desert (Exodus 16): they had to gather twice as much on the sixth day so as to have "bread for tomorrow," the Sabbath day of rest. In any case, the petition is not just for bread in the literal sense but for all that the community needs for survival on its journey through the "wilderness" of the present situation of the world. Possible also is an allusion to the Eucharist as foretaste of the final banquet of the kingdom.

Because the community has not arrived at the perfection of the kingdom, its members stand in continual need of forgiveness—both from God and mutually from each other (v. 12). The sense is not that God waits to see whether the members forgive one another before bestowing forgiveness. Rather, as the comment following the prayer (vv. 14–15) makes explicit, the flow of the divine forgiveness is blocked if it is not passed on to transform human relationships as well (see 18:21–35).

The final double petition (6:13) could suggest that God actively "brings" people into a situation of severe temptation. The wording reflects a biblical tendency to attribute all occurrences ultimately to God, without distinction between the intentional and merely permissive divine will. The petition stems from a sense that in the looming eschatological showdown the forces of evil may for a time gain the upper hand. The community prays that it will not be exposed at this moment (which the early generations believed to be imminent) to extreme test, masterminded by the "evil

one" (Satan). Believers today may not pray this prayer with the same sense of eschatological urgency. But we can pray it with the same sense of creaturely dependence, familial intimacy, and plea for protection from insidious evil as those who first heard it from Jesus.

"Treasure in heaven" and trust in God (6:19–34). The instructions making up the remainder of chapter 6 find a unity around a proper attitude to the good things of this world. For human beings, preoccupied with the future and whether food, clothing, and lodging, and so forth, will be available in sufficient degree, the conventional way to ensure security is to amass wealth. For Jesus, this desire to have "treasures on earth" (v. 19a), fed by insecurity, can become all-absorbing, in fact, an enslavement (v. 24). Reliance upon earthly treasure is also delusory since its security cannot be guaranteed (v. 19b). The only true security is to amass "treasures in heaven" (v. 20)—the good favor of God—which alone transcends the barrier of death.

Once again, all comes back to the human heart (v. 21), the inner core of a person from which attitudes and behaviors proceed. To "treasure" material wealth and the security it provides is a sure sign that one's heart is set in that direction and not upon God. If, on the contrary, disciples have their heart set upon God, all other concerns find their proper place (see also v. 33).

The statement about the eye being the lamp of the body (vv. 22–23) supports this in the sense that it is all a matter of right perception. On ancient optical theory, the eye is not so much the organ *through* which light enters the body but rather the *source* of light within, enabling vision (hence, the description "the lamp of the body"). The direction of the heart flows from a clear discernment (through a "healthy eye") of who God is: one to whom I can fully entrust my future. This perception fills one's whole being with the light of God's rule (4:15–17) rather than the opposing darkness.

Disciples may have a legitimate concern for material goods. But if that concern, fed by insecurity, amounts to an "enslavement" (*douleueō*) to wealth (literally, "mammon," a Semitic expression for wealth left untranslated in the Greek), they will be in the position of someone bound in slavery to two separate masters and so having to choose ("hate" or "love") one or the other (v. 24). God is the only being one can "serve" (*douleueō*) in the fullest sense and have freedom enhanced rather than restricted.

The instruction in verses 25–34 provides grounds for such freedom by evoking an imaginative vision of God's care. Running through it like a refrain is the motif, "do not worry" (vv. 25, 31, 34; see also vv. 27, 28,), which perhaps could be better translated, "do not be preoccupied with." Two areas of concern for the preservation of life—food and drink, on the one hand; clothing, on the other—are mentioned (v. 25), then taken up in turn (vv. 26–27; vv. 28–30). The instruction rests upon an a fortiori logic common in the NT. If God takes such care to see that the birds of the air are fed and the lilies of the field so splendidly arrayed, how "much more" will the heavenly Father take pains to see that the disciples, vastly more precious than birds or flowers, will not lack such things.

Human beings, of course, have a lot more to be anxious about than birds or lilies. Jesus is employing poetic exaggeration to inculcate an attitude to God. The "Gentiles" —those who do not know God—worry about such things (v. 32). For the disciples, who do truly know the Father revealed by Jesus, such concerns take second place to the kingdom (6:10) and the "righteousness" (v. 33) it requires (5:17–48). Give that priority, and God will see that all other needs are met ("will be given to you").

The pessimistic tone of the concluding advice (6:34) may reflect its origin in a folk wisdom saying. The sense seems to be that since God, and only God, has control over the future, leave the worries about the evil it might bring to God.

Righteousness in relation to others (7:1–6, 12). To the teaching on the treatment of other people given earlier (5:21–46), Jesus now adds specific instructions regarding judgment. If one's tendency is to find fault and condemn, one exposes oneself to similar treatment at the final judgment (7:2; see 5:7). As the humorously exaggerated image (focal instance) about the log in the eye (7:3–5) seeks to show, only persons with true self-knowledge are qualified to set about fraternal correction. The warning is notably pertinent to religious groups where a by-product of strong commitment to principle can be an equally strong inclination to faultfinding and severity of judgment.

The mysterious statement in verse 6 seems designed to add some balance. While we should not judge others, it is simply naïve to persist in dealing in a totally nonjudgmental way with people impervious to correction. That would be like throwing one's pearls before swine.

Setting aside the instruction on confidence on prayer (vv. 7–11) that (somewhat intrusively) follows, the instruction to treat others as one would want them to treat oneself (v. 12) offers an apt principle to round off the section. Reducing the "law and the prophets" to this simple maxim may seem banal, especially when later (22:37–40) the same reduction is made in regard to *loving* one's neighbor as oneself. What the maxim actually requires is an exercise of moral imagination in a high degree: to ask, what do I really want from another person—understanding, tolerance, respect,

loyalty, compassion? —and then, to ensure that my action in their regard enacts such qualities. Jesus' appeal to "the law and the prophets" here recalls his earlier insistence that he has not come to abolish but to fulfill them (5:20). Treating others as one would have them treat oneself flows directly from interpreting the Torah in light of "the prophets" (notably Hos 6:6) that Jesus has come to promote (see Matt 5:17).

Confidence in prayer (7:7–11). This instruction, which might more logically have followed the Lord's Prayer (6:9–15), proceeds again from the vision of God that Jesus is commending. The three instructions, "ask," "search," "knock" (7:7) illustrate various aspects of the one act of prayer, which at times will resemble one, at times another, but always with the confidence of gaining a hearing (v. 8). Once again (see 6:25–34), an a fortiori logic is operative. It is unthinkable that human parents ("evil" only in comparison with the overwhelming goodness of God) would act in the nasty way described (7:9–10). How much more unthinkable that the heavenly Parent would not give "good things" to the sons and daughters (of God), who make up the community of the kingdom (v. 11).

Eschatological warnings: Action required (7:13–27). Rather than additional teaching, the third and final part of the Sermon consists of exhortations and warnings designed to bolster adherence to the demanding way of life Jesus has set out. Prominent throughout is Matthew's characteristic emphasis that belief must issue forth in action ("righteousness"), with a specific concern that the value of charismatic experience in the community ("prophecy") be assessed not simply by the fervor of its utterance but by its "fruits" (action).

The image of "two gates" (vv. 13–14) expanded in Matthew (cf. Luke 13:23–24) to include "two roads," is not intended to divide humanity, let alone members of the community, into two groups inevitably set upon divergent paths, one to (eternal) life, one to (eternal) loss. Nor is Jesus making predictions about the likely number of the saved. The image is exhortatory: the way of life set before disciples is difficult and demanding, running counter to that taken by the great majority. But it is the way that leads to entrance into the wedding banquet of the kingdom (Matt 22:1–14).

A series of warnings (7:15–23) couched in various images (sheep/wolves; fruit-bearing trees) shows that charismatic activity of various kinds (prophecy, exorcism, miracle working) can be open to abuse (see also 1 Corinthians 12—14). Despite fervent protestations ("Lord, Lord...") and impressive religious effects, it can be deceptive and an opportunity for those hungry for power ("wolves in sheep's clothing" [Matt 7:15]). The supreme test is the "fruit" produced: "righteousness" in the Matthean sense of doing the will of the Father in heaven (v. 21) as expounded by Jesus and summed up in the twin commandment of love (22:37–40; see 7:12). At the judgment (7:23; see 25:31–46) only love shown in action will count.

Drawing the Sermon to a close, Jesus reinforces the need not merely to hear his words but also to put them into practice with an image taken from house building in Palestine (7:24–27). People building houses during the dry season, when not a drop of rain falls, can foolishly neglect to consider wilder weather to come. Wise builders plant their houses on a firm foundation of rock. To live out the "righteousness" commended in the Sermon is to embark upon a highly demanding and vulnerable way of life. But those who do so are building the "house" of their existence upon a foundation of rock, the power and faithfulness of God.

Concluding comment: The impact of the Sermon (7:28–29). The Sermon concluded, the evangelist records the impression Jesus' words had made upon the crowds who have "overheard" them (4:25—5:1). Unlike the scribes who had to rely upon their own tradition, Jesus has spoken as the authoritative interpreter of the Torah, able to challenge that tradition with an interpretation valid for the time of the kingdom.

Healer and Reconciler (8:1—9:38)

Alongside the portrait of Jesus as teacher and interpreter of the Torah conveyed in the Sermon (chs. 5—7), Matthew now sets a parallel impression of him in a more active mode, chiefly though not exclusively as healer (chs. 8—9). The section closes with a summary of Jesus' ministry, 9:35–36, very similar in content and tone to the summary that set the context for the Sermon in 4:32–35. The resultant "inclusion" conveys the sense that the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus are twin aspects of the one essential ministry to burdened humanity (see also the quotation from Isa 53:4 in 8:17).

Reflecting, again, the evangelist's predilection for presenting material in triads, the chief content of the section consists of a series of nine miracle stories, subdivided into clusters of three:

Cleansing of a man afflicted with leprosy (8:1–4)
Healing of a centurion's servant (8:5–13)
Healing of Peter's mother-in-law (8:14–15)
Rescue from a windstorm at sea (8:23–27)
Exorcism in the country of the Gadarenes (8:28–34)
Reconciliation and cure of a paralyzed man (9:1–8)
Raising of an official's daughter/healing of a woman suffering from hemorrhages (9:18–26)