

Introduction

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Matthew's favored place in the tradition calls out for contextual readings. Its stories are familiar and its pages well worn, but it can benefit from fresh perspectives. Matthew's place in the canon is privileged, but its traditional readings need not be. It is often called the church's book, but Matthew is read both by wildly diverse Christian traditions and by those outside the church. Matthew ends with instructions to teach the nations, yet the many nations of the world have much to say about it. And so, sixteen essays have been gathered from a variety of cultures and perspectives around the world to have a conversation that takes seriously both the ancient text and its many contemporary contexts.

These conversations between text and context take different forms. Four scholars highlight conversations with ordinary readers, listening to others read the text such as the Palestinian protestors, the Deaf community, day laborers, and child-care workers. Six authors read with and advocate for their own cultures, religious traditions, or perspectives (African American, Latina/o, Croatian, Oceanian, Mennonite, and those with disabilities). Five contributors read in dialogue with their cultures and religious traditions but push back to challenge them (readers from South Africa, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, and the American evangelical tradition). And one interpreter reads from outside the culture but invites those within the culture to read Matthew and curb the absence of the culture's interpretations. As can be seen already, the primary context is often culture, sometimes religious traditions, and many times a combination of the two. But other contexts come to the foreground as well, such as work conditions, disabilities, ecological trauma, nonviolent resistance movements, post-Communism and globalization, single mothers and preacher's kids, womanism and masculinity studies.

The sixteen chapters not only provide wonderfully diverse readings but also, perhaps surprisingly, connect well with each other around specific themes, texts, and cultures. While the hope is that readers of this volume will make these many connections, for the sake of organization, this volume has gathered the essays into five groupings: community and beginnings, children and family, disability and culture, laborers and empire, and community and borders.

Two essays begin at the opening of the Gospel. Lidija Novakovic, from Croatia, reads Matthew's genealogy in light of post-Communist Croatia in order to explore the theme of community identity. As Croatian leaders after the wars in the 1990s reinterpreted their Communist past in order to create a new, democratic, national identity, so also Novakovic explores how Matthew's genealogy provides clues to the way the Matthean community remembered its Jewish past to shape its new identity. Jonathan Draper, a white South African, reads Matthew's genealogy in conversation with the Zulu people and diverse members of the Anglican Church to explore community identity in African cultures in the postapartheid era. As Matthew's genealogy both affirms the traditions of Israel and opens up the promises of the Abrahamic covenant to all the nations of the earth, so Draper explores how indigenous African cultures might be affirmed amid a colonized past and yet also open up to an inclusive transcultural identity in the future.

Five scholars take an interest in the topic of parents and children; the first four focus on mothers and the last one on fathers. Sharon Betsworth met with other Euro-American women who work with children's ministries in the state of Oklahoma (a state that ranks low in the United States regarding childhood health and well-being) to discuss Jesus as a child in Matthew 1-2 and Jesus' teaching with and about children in Matt. 18:1-5. She argues that Jesus begins as a vulnerable and threatened child yet is protected by his parents and God, a situation familiar to the women interpreting this passage. Jesus then becomes an adult who cares for vulnerable and threatened children, only later to again become vulnerable and dependent on God.

Both Febbie Dickerson and Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder interpret the story of the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:22-28) as African American women. Dickerson is single and without children and stands in solidarity with single, African American mothers raising children in the African American church tradition. The Canaanite woman is marginalized as single mothers are marginalized in the African American church. Dickerson provides a liberative reading of the account of the Canaanite woman in order to critique the dominant image of family as the patriarchal family and to welcome a variety of family models. As Matthew suggests that family includes those beyond biological kin, so Dickerson suggests the family model does the same.

While Dickerson connects the Canaanite woman with single mothers and the view of family, Crowder reads the Canaanite woman as a working mom. She explores a variety of vibrant images of black working mothers and their place in society as women and ethnic minorities. Crowder identifies her own grappling with working while mothering her children. The Canaanite woman

is a mother who goes to work outside the home on behalf of her sick daughter and who also challenges racial and gender boundaries in the larger society. The story of the Canaanite women, interpreted from a womanist, maternal, theological approach, raises questions about intersections of family and career, class issues between black women, and child-care issues.

Tsui-yuk Louise Liu also addresses working mothers, but in the context of the international city of Hong Kong. She explores the unique uses of mother in Matthew in light of the disenfranchisement of mother-child intimacy in the Hong Kong church and larger society. In Hong Kong, the fertility rate is low, the demand for women in the labor force and for foreign domestic helpers is increasing, and breastfeeding rates are low. Matthew also exhibits the disenfranchisement of mother-child intimacy with the massacre of the boys in Bethlehem and the death of Mary's son, but the book also shows the intimacy and protection that mothers provide for their children.

Switching from mothers to fathers, Sung Uk Lim examines Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane from the perspective of the emotional suffering of a pastor's kid in a patriarchal Christian family in Korea. Drawing from the structural semiotic model of A. J. Greimas and from the Korean concepts of *han* ("suffering") and *jeong* ("power of healing or reconciliation"), Lim explores how a reader might come to understand Jesus' transformation from the feeling of sorrow to his decision to obey his father's will and the realization of his father's love. So also a pastor's kid in Korea might see how his own *han* is transformed into reconciliation with his father (the pastor) through the discovery of his father's *jeong*.

Two chapters address disability and culture. James Metzger and James Grimshaw, from different perspectives, read several healing stories in Matthew that focus on characters with chronic pain (several of which are in the context of father-son relationships, as Lim discusses). Metzger, who has a rheumatic condition, appreciates Jesus' sensitivity and responsiveness to those characters with aversive chronic pain. He finds troubling, however, the lack of attention given to the experience of the disabled, the portrayal of the impairment as a deficit to be remediated, and the reinforcement of the link between sin and disability. Grimshaw, a male caregiver whose wife has rheumatoid arthritis, perceives an emphasis on hypermasculinity as Jesus and male caregivers take extreme measures to eliminate the disabilities instead of learning to manage them in community. He connects with the caregivers, however, in their concern and tenacity to find relief for those they care for. L. J. Lawrence, a hearing academic who has worked among Deaf groups, interprets the Gospel of Matthew from the perspective of Deaf culture. She first offers a resistant

reading and identifies many aspects of Matthew as audiocentric, which serves to marginalize the Deaf community. But she then turns toward a more sympathetic reading and finds several key features in the Gospel that can affirm Deaf culture: vision and sight, minority culture status, strong collective identity, and storytelling elements.

Readings from South Africa, Hong Kong, and China examine laborers and empire. Gerald West and Sithembiso Zwane read Matt. 20:1-16 with casual workers in South Africa. Taking seriously both the details of the text and their own experiences of the socioeconomic inequalities in their country, they explore two primary readings of the text. One interpretation views the parable as an egalitarian socialist vision. A second interpretation is a critique by Jesus of the arbitrary and discriminating practices of “capitalist” landowners. Instead of favoring one reading over another, they value each reading as it helps them imagine and plan for transformation.

Lung-pun Common Chan recontextualizes the Matthean apocalypse in globalized Hong Kong. In Matthew 24–25, Chan see a critique of the larger, Roman imperial context (for example, the materialistic temple and the exploitation of workers and slaves) and a challenge to prepare for Jesus’ return and the new world. Chan, then, critiques the global economic and political context of Hong Kong and challenges Hong Kong middle-class churches to be a force for social change by responding to the devastating problems of economic globalization (for example, global structural poverty and abuse of foreign domestic helpers).

From the perspective of a Chinese Christian scholar, John Yieh interprets two passages from the Sermon on the Mount in light of China’s growing global economy and accompanying challenges of greed and exploitation. Yieh reads the passages on loving your enemies (5:38–48) and trusting God (6:19–34) in a tug-of-war dialectical process with the original context, historic interpretations, and China’s cultural and socioeconomic contexts. His goal is to see how Jesus’ teaching on these passages may be a helpful resource for confronting the social and economic challenges of China and may likewise challenge those in the Christian West on social ethics and economic justice.

While the first section of the volume acknowledges the importance of beginnings to revive communities, the final section negotiates the borders that threaten communities. The first two authors discuss issues around land and disputed boundaries. Dorothy Jean Weaver, like Yieh, interprets Matt. 5:38–42. As part of the North American Mennonite community, Weaver is interested in questions of violence and nonviolence, and she traveled to the West Bank and Jerusalem to interview Palestinian Christians on their view

of the Matthean Jesus' commands "do not resist the one who is evil" and "love your enemies." These conversations took place in the midst of walls and roadblocks and military checkpoints that separate religious communities. Elaine Wainwright's ecological reading interprets Matt. 4:1-11 in light of the devastating effects of climate change in Oceania, where she lives. Her reading challenges the artificial and unjust boundaries that are often articulated among God, humans, and the earth. For example, "God with us" is God with the earth community, not just the human community. Refocusing the reading process toward the earth can lead to a greater consideration of just interrelationships between God and earth (which includes humanity) and can lead to ethical action.

The final two essays examine strained borders within the Americas. Francisco Lozada explores the process of translation from a Latino/a perspective with a focus on the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9b-13). Between two cultures himself, Lozada examines the complex and often uncomfortable intersection of translation, language, identity, and culture—an intersection that usually involves a hierarchical dynamic. In the act of translation, different sets of borders are crossed. Translation occurs between two cultures and even subcultures, is influenced through history, and involves a complex relationship between translator and text. Jeannine Brown assesses how her own tradition of white, middle-class, evangelicals in the United States interprets Matt. 25:31-46, the parable of the sheep and the goats. She questions the individualistic interpretations of her own tradition of maintaining boundaries and separation between those with power and the "least of these," while other voices, some emerging within her own tradition, emphasize solidarity between us and other.

Over a two-year period, these readings on Matthew emerged through many presentations and discussions at the Society of Biblical Literature meetings. This volume could be used in a variety of ways—and we hope it is. It might be a good conversation starter for the classroom, helping students see how readers from different cultures and perspectives read the same theme or even read the same texts. For example, Novakovic and Draper both read the genealogy. The story of the Canaanite woman is interpreted quite differently by Crowder and Dickerson. Betsworth and Liu interpret the mother-and-child relationship in Matthew 1-2. The same healing stories are read by Metzger and Grimshaw from different life circumstances. And Yieh and Weaver discuss the same passage in the Sermon on the Mount.

The volume can also be used to demonstrate once again that the contexts of interpreters matter. Perhaps this volume provides a small glimpse of how

Matthew, the church's book, has already become the world's book that it seems to have wanted to be.