

The Gospel of Matthew and the Challenge of Antisemitism

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Abstract: The relationship of the development of antisemitism to the New Testament text has been regarded most frequently either as a response of a largely Gentile Christian movement to its Jewish origins or as a post-biblical development beginning with the Church Fathers. The Gospel of Matthew, central to the polity and ethics of the Believers' Church, often has been regarded as the greatest contributor to the development of antisemitism, particularly the blood libel charge of Matthew 27:25. This paper argues that a sectarian reading of the first Gospel more adequately accounts for the use of the first Gospel in the development of antisemitism, defined as "hatred of or prejudice against Jews." Particular attention is given to the use of Torah in the first Gospel and the treatment of the trial narratives. Recognition of its sectarian origins is necessary to assist the Believers' Churches in coming to terms with their own use of the biblical text in an antisemitic manner.

The Gospel of Matthew poses interesting problems for those who claim to be adherents of the Believers' Church.¹ My experience with that tradition is in the Mennonite Church among persons who claim to be part of a tradition that "accept the Scriptures as the Word of God and as the fully reliable and trustworthy standard for Christian faith and life."² What have been claimed as distinctive marks of the tradition such as the refusal to take the oath and to bear arms are rooted particularly in the form in which these injunctions are developed in the Sermon on the Mount as they are found in the Gospel of Matthew. The character of the first Gospel as a moral exhortation (*paraenesis*), at least as it has been understood within these traditions, has been influential in shaping the ethic of these churches, particularly at the formal level, and frequently their collective

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1. In this case defined as those who fit into the trajectory of church traditions described in Donald Durnbaugh's classic work of that title—Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

2. *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1995), 21.

character as well.³ The injunctions of the gospel of Matthew have been understood to be a guide to the peaceable kingdom.⁴

In contrast to this portrayal it is quite easy to demonstrate that Matthew is the most violent of the synoptic Gospels in its symbolism and its rhetoric. In this claim I am employing a fairly simple definition of violence such as that advanced by Glenn Stassen and Michael Westmoreland-White: "We define 'violence,' whether systemic and structural or individual, direct or indirect, as 'destruction to a victim or victims by means that overpower the victim's consent.'"⁵ A similar emphasis is apparent in a study of violence in the synoptic Gospels by John Kloppenborg, as when he writes, "I wish to focus on metaphors and representations of violence in parables of Jesus where God is represented as the agent of violence or where Jesus is depicted as one who acts with overpowering force."⁶ In his examination of the first Gospel, Kloppenborg notes that "Matthew's editing of Mark's stories and his creation of new episodes intensified the level of lethal force attributed to the divine or agents of the divine."⁷ A similar case is made by Anders Runesson, justifying his decision to focus exclusively on Matthew in his study on divine wrath:

The reason for this limitation is that Matthew's Gospel differs significantly from the other Gospels, not only in its fierce emphasis on divine wrath and judgment, unmatched by any other New Testament text with the possible exception of Revelation, but also in

3. E.g., Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2006), 65-69; Thomas Yoder Neufeld, *Killing Enmity: Violence in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2011), 18-35. Instructive is the debate between Richard Horsley and Walter Wink in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox), 72-136. See also Clarence Bauman, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Modern Quest for its Meaning* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer), 1985; *The Sermon on the Mount Through the Centuries*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spencer (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2007).

4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Macmillan, 1961); John W. Miller, *The Christian Way: A Guide to the Christian Life based on the Sermon on the Mount* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1969).

5. Glenn H. Stassen and Michael L. Westmoreland-White, "Defining Violence and Non-Violence," in *Teaching Peace: Non-Violence and the Liberal Arts*, ed. J. Denny Weaver and Gerald Biesecker-Mast (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 17-36, see 21.

6. John S. Kloppenborg, "The Representation of Violence in the Synoptic Parables," in *Mark and Matthew I. Comparative Readings. Understanding the Earliest Gospels in Their First Century Settings*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker and Anders Runesson (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 323-351, see 325. The problems attendant to the definition of violence are also discussed by Yoder Neufeld, *Killing Enmity*, 1-8. See also John Kampen, "Wisdom, Poverty, and Non-Violence in Instruction," in *The War Scroll, Violence, War and Peace in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature: Essays in Honour of Martin G. Abegg on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Kipp Davis et al., (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 215-236, see 215-218.

7. Kloppenborg, "Representation of Violence," 343.

its coherent, almost systematic treatment of this theme throughout the narrative.⁸

The forceful portrayal of divine wrath is accompanied by descriptions of some of the most vigorous denunciations found in the New Testament of the Jewish groups that opposed Jesus and his followers, most notably the Pharisees. Of particular note is the diatribe of Matthew 23, with the concluding accusations of murder and resultant judgment (23:29-39).⁹ When viewed from a Jewish perspective, Matthew contains some of the most important statements that have played a significant role in the historic anti-Semitic portrayals of Jews and Judaism in the Christian societies of the Western world. Certainly the curses of Matthew 23 have set the tone for the portrayal of Jewish rabbis throughout Christian history: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," and even "Woe to you, blind guides." The Gospel of John rivals Matthew for the dubious distinction of making the greatest contribution to the collection of texts that were used to undergird antisemitism.¹⁰

The most important verse in the Christian anti-Semitic treatment of Jews and Judaism is well-known—the blood curse of Matthew 27:25. According to Matthew, in response to Pilate washing his hands of the matter and his declaration of innocence, "All the people replied, 'His blood be on us and on our children.'"¹¹ In his ground-breaking work on the study of the Gospels and the development of antisemitism, Jules Isaac concludes his collection of statements on this verse from the Christian tradition in the following manner: "Real competition to see who will make the Jews more odious. As varied, rich, and moving as the writer of the fourth Gospel is, the honors go to Matthew—or at least to the writer of verse 25 in chapter 27; he shot the poisoned arrow, permanently

8. Anders Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew: The Narrative World of the First Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), xiv.

9. An attempt to reconcile these two aspects of Matthew, particularly in the service of modern theological and ethical perspectives, is found in Barbara E. Reid, "Violent Endings in Matthew's Parables and Christian Nonviolence," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 66 (2004), 237-255.

10. Adele Reinhartz, "The Gospel of John: How 'The Jews' Became Part of the Plot," in *Jesus, Judaism and Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament After the Holocaust*, ed. Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 99-116.

11. Translation of the *Common English Bible* (CEB). Unless noted otherwise, translations of biblical texts are from the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV). On this verse see Anders Runesson, "Judging the Theological Tree by its Fruit: The Use of the Gospels of Mark and Matthew in Official Church Documents on Jewish-Christian Relations," in *Mark and Matthew II. Comparative Readings: Reception History, Cultural Hermeneutics, and Theology*, ed. Eva-Marie Becker and Anders Runesson (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 189-228; idem, *Divine Wrath*, xv.

embedded, with a sure hand.”¹² Already in Origen (185-254) we see that the blood of Jesus will come “also over all the later generations of the Jews until the end.” He sees the destruction of Jerusalem to be the result of Jewish guilt.¹³ Reflecting his clear dependence upon Origen, Jerome observes:

This imprecation upon the Jews continues until the present day. The Lord’s blood will not be removed from them. This is why it says through Isaiah, “If you wash your hands before me, I will not listen; for your hands are full of blood.” The Jews have left the best heritage to their children, saying: “His blood be upon us and on our children.”¹⁴

In his commentary on Isaiah 1:15 he comments: “He shows the reason why God turns away his eyes from them and does not listen to their lengthy prayers [cf. Isa. 1:15a-b]: because they shed the *blood* of the just one, and wicked tenants have killed the heir sent to them [cf. Mt. 21:38].”¹⁵ Later in that same commentary he is even harsher: “For an eternal curse remains on those who say, ‘His blood be upon us and upon our sons’ [Mt. 27:25]; and God does not *rule* over them, nor is *his name invoked* upon them, so long as they are not called the people of God.”¹⁶ No longer does God claim the Jewish people as Israel. No other patristic writer cites Matthew 27:25 as often as Jerome, thereby leaving a permanent mark on Christian teaching throughout known history.¹⁷

In subsequent Christian interpretation the low reputation of the Jews, the continual abuse to which they are subjected everywhere they live, and

12. Jules Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, ed. Claire Huchet Bishop, trans. Sally Gran (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 328-338, quote from 338.

13. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2.8, as found in John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Towards Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 165-167, see 166 for quote. For a collection of this material on the interpretation of Mt. 27:25, see Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 506-508.

14. Jerome, *Commentariorum in Matthaew libri IV*, on 27:25. — *Saint Jerome: Commentary on Matthew*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 313. This passage is remarkably similar to Origen’s commentary on this verse: Origenes, *Der Kommentar zum Evangelium nach Matthäus*, trans. and ed. Hermann J. Vogt (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersmann, 1993), 324.

15. St. Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (New York: Newman Press, 2015), 1.20, p. 84 (italics and parentheses are those of the translator).

16. Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 17.32, p. 812 (italics and parentheses are those of the translator).

17. Rainer Kampling, *Das Blut Christi und die Juden: Mt 27,25 bei den lateinischsprachigen christlichen Autoren bis zu Leo dem Grossen* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1984), 225-273. The influence of his interpretation of this passage is then documented in Kampling, *Blut Christi*, 174-238.

their scattering throughout the world are all the result of this guilt.¹⁸ Pope Innocent III apparently cited this verse in his suggestion to a nobleman that he treat Jews harshly.¹⁹ We have examples of the slaughter of Jews that are justified by the citation of Matthew 27:25.²⁰ Citing 1,500 years of misery under which Jews have lived, Luther explained that this will be followed by eternal damnation.²¹ They have lost the promise to Abraham to become a "multitude of nations" but are rather to be compared to a mob of brigands living without law or hermits, nationless and without a leader.²² In his exegesis of Psalms 78:57, Luther claimed that the Jews were the bow itself that killed Jesus, having no arrows since they relied on false testimony before the presiding officer. So they became the bow that kills and personally take responsibility for the death, as attested in Matthew 27:25.²³ In his exegesis of Psalms 109:17, Luther cited Matthew 27:25 and then added, "I am of the opinion that this is a curse which is still bearing down hard upon them."²⁴

The belief in the idea of Jewish guilt and the legitimation of the negative consequences of that viewpoint continue to be found in scholarship up to the present day.²⁵ We then have the historical evidence of the real consequences of these viewpoints culminating in the Holocaust.

18. Martin of Laon, in Heinz Schreckenber, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte* (11.-13. Jh.): *Mit einer Ikonographie des Judenthemas bis zum 4. Laterankonzil* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988), 281.

19. Kampling, *Blut Christi*, 233.

20. *Ibid.*, 223, n. 22; 232.

21. Luz, *Matthew* 21-28, 507 (citing "Passio," WA 52:791).

22. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, from *Luther's Works*, vol. 3, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1961), 113 on Gen. 17:3-6.

23. Martin Luther, *First Lectures on the Psalms II*, from *Luther's Works*, vol. 11, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1976), 42 on Ps. 78:9.

24. *Selected Psalms III*, from *Luther's Works*, vol. 14, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1958), 267 on Psalms 109:17.

25. For a survey of earlier twentieth-century German scholarship, see Charlotte Klein, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology*, trans. Edward Quinn (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 92-126. The significance of her work is that it covers the period in which German scholarship was at the forefront of the developments first in form criticism and then in redaction criticism. An appended chapter on Anglo-American scholarship is less profound. A few of the works which cover the field include: Samuel Sandmel, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity; Volume 1: Paul and the Gospels*, ed. Peter Richardson with David Granskou (Waterloo: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion/Wilfred Laurier Press, 1986); *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity; Volume 2: Separation and Polemic*, ed. Stephen G. Wilson (Waterloo: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion/Wilfred Laurier Press, 1986); Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987); *Jews, Judaism and Christian Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament After the Holocaust*, ed. Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhart (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002); Michael J. Cook, *Modern Jews Engage the New Testament: Enhancing Jewish Well-Being in a Christian Environment* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2008). A more recent defense of Matthew

The treatment of this problem in the study and use of Matthew by New Testament scholars has tended towards two poles.²⁶ On the one hand are those who consider the Matthean community to be *extra muros* (outside of Jewish society). The decisive break with Judaism has already occurred and this work is an attempt to define for its largely Gentile membership the relationship of the *ekklēsia* (church), its practices, and its beliefs, to its Jewish past.²⁷

Another group of scholars has argued for an *intra muros* (within Jewish society) position for the Matthean community. They regard the Gospel of Matthew to be addressed to a group of followers of Jesus who were still part of the Jewish community of the time. Many of these scholars consider the first Gospel to be the product of what they would label as Jewish Christians. In some cases, they were invested particularly in the social science approach to biblical studies and were engaged in or at least influenced by the changing evaluation of major issues in Jewish history of the Greco-Roman period based upon archaeological work carried out primarily in Galilee, but throughout modern day Israel and Palestine.²⁸

is laid out by John Nolland, "The Gospel of Matthew and Anti-Semitism," in *Built Upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), 154-169. This list does not mention the related literature concerning antisemitism in antiquity. The most recent comprehensive work on that topic is by Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

26. This distinction has also been advanced by Anders Runesson, "Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intragroup Conflict," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127 (2008), 95-132, see 96-98.

27. Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 113-281; Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew* (Louisville: John Knox, 1993); Donald A. Hagner, "The Sitz im Leben of the Gospel of Matthew," in *Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies*, ed. David R. Bauer and Mark Allen Powell (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 27-68; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 52-56; For his later statements, see idem, "Matthew: Apostate, Reformer, Revolutionary?" *New Testament Studies* 49 (2003), 193-209; idem, "Matthew: Christian Judaism or Jewish Christianity?" in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, ed. Scott McKnight and G. R. Osborne (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 263-282; Paul Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); Robert Gundry, "Matthew: Jewish-Christian or Christian-Jewish? At an Intersection of Sociology and Theology," in *The Old is Better: New Testament Essays in Support of Traditional Interpretations*, ed. R. Gundry (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 111-119; Roland Deines, "Not the Law but the Messiah: Law and Righteousness in the Gospel of Matthew," in Gurtner and Nolland, *Built upon the Rock*, 53-84.

28. J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990); Alan F. Segal, "Matthew's Jewish Voice," in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches*, ed. David L. Balch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 3-37; Anthony J. Saldarini, "The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict," in Balch, *Social History*, 38-61; Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); J. Andrew Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity International, 1996); David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The*

Approaches to the question of the first Gospel and antisemitism vary in part dependent upon the analyst's understanding of this issue.

Prior to addressing this issue it is necessary to recall the broader perspectives on antisemitism in the New Testament that impact this discussion. In Rosemary Radford Ruether's groundbreaking *Faith and Fratricide*, she identified with great precision and detail the *adversus Judaeos* tradition in the Church Fathers.²⁹ This would have had minimal impact on biblical studies had she not also demonstrated the manner in which elements of this tradition had their origin within the texts of the New Testament. Burton Mack advanced a different argument to get at the same problem. Placing responsibility on the Gospel of Mark, Mack argued that the Cynic Jesus was replaced by the Christian Messiah, thereby creating a worldview that leads to violence, imperialism, and colonial oppression: "This sorry plot [of the Gospel of Mark] lies at the very foundations of the long, ugly history of the Christian attitudes and actions towards the Jews and Judaism."³⁰ Of course, for Mack, Matthew is an immediate successor to that infamous story. The *adversus Judaeus* arguments, the Crusades, and the Holocaust all develop from this basis.

Shortly after the publication of Ruether's and Mack's influential work, John Dominic Crossan advanced the case in a book titled *Who Killed Jesus?* For Crossan, blaming anti-Judaism on misinterpretation is not ethically acceptable: "It is not just a question of how the passion narratives were misused or misread but of what they were in the first place."³¹ These narratives were, and remain, for Crossan fundamentally complicit in the

History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); Boris Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: Their Redaction, Form and Relevance for the Relationship Between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); Aaron M. Gale, *Redefining Ancient Boundaries: The Jewish Scribal Framework of Matthew's Gospel* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005); Runesson, "Rethinking"; idem, "Behind the Gospel of Matthew: Radical Pharisees in Post-War Galilee?" *Currents in Theology and Mission* 37, no. 6 (2010), 460-471; David C. Sim, "Matthew: The Current State of Research," in *Mark and Matthew. Comparative Readings I: Understanding the Earliest Gospels in their First-Century Settings*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker and Anders Runesson (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 33-51; Matthias Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Kathleen Ess (Waco, Texas: Baylor University, 2013); Runesson, *Divine Wrath*.

29. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Anti-Judaism is the Left Hand of Christology," in *Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Robert Heyer (New York: Paulist, 1974), 1-9; eadem, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974), 65; eadem, "The Faith and Fratricide Discussion: Old Problems and New Dimension," in *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, ed. Alan T. Davies (New York: Paulist, 1979), 230-256; eadem, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 31-43.

30. Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 375.

31. John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 36.

genocidal ideology that emerged in their name—these stories sent people out to kill and they must be confronted directly and forthrightly. Within the trajectory of this argument certain scholars such as Michael Cook and Herbert Bassler regard the authorship of Matthew to be Gentile with a composition addressed to fundamentally a Gentile church making an argument against crucial Jewish elements in its own heritage and arguing against any ongoing connection to Judaism.³²

On the other hand, there also is a significant strand of Matthean scholarship arguing that the composition is not fundamentally anti-Semitic. In recent years that has sometimes been identified with scholars who hold to the *intra muros* tradition identified above, even though not exclusively. Anders Runesson is a recent advocate of such a view, arguing that Matthew represents one wing in a break within the Pharisaic movement.³³ Also significant has been the work of Anthony Saldarini, who suggested that Matthew was a composition composed within the Jewish community by a group of Torah-observant Jews who believed in Jesus.³⁴ This was a deviant group within the Jewish community who engaged in bitter and vitriolic debate with other portions of that same group. It is a sophisticated investigation of the social dynamics of the Jewish community at the end of the first century with the consequential argument that this vitriolic material gets a different and more sinister interpretation in the second and third centuries, which results in the devastating results evident in subsequent historical development. A similar argument is advanced, perhaps for more confessional reasons, in the volume of Craig Evans and Donald Hagner explicitly treating the issues of antisemitism in the early Christian texts from an evangelical perspective.³⁵ Richard Gardner's treatment of Matthew in the Believers Church Bible Commentary series reflects the same arguments as those advanced in the Evans and Hagner volume—namely, that the fundamental argument is that the composition cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic if it constitutes a debate within the Jewish community.³⁶ The New

32. Michael J. Cook, "Interpreting 'Pro-Jewish' Passages in Matthew," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 54 (1983), 135-146; idem, *Modern Jews*, 192-209; Herbert W. Bassler, *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Traditions: A Relevance-Based Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 19-21. A similar point of view, even though not specifically rooted in a gentile reading of the first Gospel, is the argument of Amy-Jill Levine, "Jesus Talks Back," in *A Legacy of Learning: Essays in Honor of Jacob Neusner*, ed. Alan J. Avery-Peck, Bruce Chilton, William Scott Green, and Gary G. Porton (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 282-298.

33. Runesson, "Rethinking."

34. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*.

35. *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Donald A. Hagner (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993).

36. Richard B. Gardner, *Matthew*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1991), 417-418.

Testament writings, here Matthew, are off the hook with regard to responsibility for what happens in later Christian history. The direction Christianity took is an aberration, not evident in these materials that reflect its origins.

A SECTARIAN READING

I find both of these approaches inadequate for addressing the issue of the origins of Christian antisemitism. While this is an issue that could be addressed more broadly to other works in the New Testament, the examination of the specific literary evidence and rhetorical structure necessitates an investigation of each composition. The evidence cited above indicates that Matthew's vigorous argumentation and its important function in Western Christian history makes it a significant candidate for such an examination. In particular, I suggest that the first Gospel is best identified as a product of the sectarian impulses evident in Jewish literature from the latter half of the Second Temple era, now understood much more clearly from the Dead Sea Scrolls. This argument builds on the work of Saldarini and others, who brought a sociological analysis to the study of these texts and asked questions from the standpoint of social history.³⁷ I would further suggest that it is in the sectarian rhetoric of the first Gospel that the anti-Semitic impulses have their origins, the impact of which poses the major challenge for ongoing treatment of the problem of antisemitism as it relates to the use of the biblical text.³⁸ Donaldson has pointed to the difference between the argumentation found in the critiques of Israel by the Hebrew prophets and the sectarian rhetoric of the Dead Sea Scrolls.³⁹ While the former addressed what they understood to be instances of corruption, faithlessness, and apostasy with the goal of correction, the latter considered themselves to be the sole recipients of special revelation making them the exclusive bearers of the name of Israel. The group that was the recipient of this revelation had its own social structure that distinguished it from the remainder of Israel. The argument in this article is that the Matthean community also is a sectarian Jewish group with a rhetoric similar to that of the sectarian Dead Sea Scrolls. It is in that rhetoric that an anti-Semitic reading of the story of Jesus finds its origins.

37. Balch, *Social History*; Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*. See also the literature of Overman and Sim identified in n. 28 above.

38. In an earlier stage of research, Rosemary Ruether would seem to have identified this impulse when making her argument that antisemitism is the left hand of Christology (see the literature cited in n. 29 above).

39. Terrence L. Donaldson, *Jews and Anti-Judaism in the New Testament: Decision Points and Divergent Interpretations* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2010), 16-18.

The examination of the role of sectarianism in the Second Temple era has been identified as an important question for the study of Jewish life during that time period. This argument has been advanced by Albert J. Baumgarten, who has proposed a definition of sect that is comprehensive and has a demonstrable basis in the sociological literature: "a voluntary association of protest, which utilizes boundary marking mechanisms—the social means of differentiating between insiders and outsiders—to distinguish between its own members and those otherwise normally regarded as belonging to the same national or religious entity."⁴⁰ This definition, built upon the categories developed by Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge in their study of modern new religious movements, is adapted to an analysis of the social movements of the Second Temple era.⁴¹ Of particular importance in this definition is its reliance solely upon internal data—i.e., the compositions themselves—and not upon material drawn from the "parent group" with which the sectarian body is in conflict. Earlier definitions emphasized dissent from or resistance to a "parent group," an entity whose description has proven very elusive for the late Second Temple era. This is especially the case for the first few decades after the destruction of the temple, the time in which Matthew presumably was composed.

The definition adopted here is useful since it does not permit the majority group's values and ideology to provide the lens through which the sect is studied, a problem identified earlier in sociological studies of the Anabaptist and Mennonite materials.⁴² Rather, the best criteria for studying sectarian literature are based on an evaluation of the tension exhibited in the text with the socio-cultural environment and the extent to which the group exhibits a tendency to view itself as uniquely legitimate or to establish boundaries against another.⁴³ These can be determined on the basis of the sectarian literature itself, rather than observations regarding these groups from the standpoint of the majority body or those groups with primary access to political power and control.

40. Baumgarten, *Flourishing of Jewish Sects*, 7.

41. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); idem, *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987). For their utilization in the study of the materials from Qumran, see in particular Jutta Jokiranta, *Social Identity and Sectarianism in the Qumran Movement* (Leiden: Brill 2013), 17-76; eadem, "Sociological Approaches to Qumran Sectarianism," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 200-231.

42. Calvin Redekop, "A New Look at Sect Development," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 13 (1974), 345-352.

43. Jutta M. Jokiranta, "'Sectarianism' of the Qumran 'sect': Sociological Notes," *Revue de Qumran* 20 (2001), 223-239, see 228-230, 236-239.

The characteristics of this definition can be used to describe the group associated with the text of Matthew. I understand this group to be a body of persons associated with the Jewish community in the area of greater Syria, probably Galilee, who were followers of Jesus.⁴⁴ I take the entire text of the Gospel of Matthew as a statement of a person(s) who is (are) making a case for how these followers should live their Jewish life and the rationale for doing so. I also assume the two-source theory—that the author(s) already had Mark and some version of a Q-type source available at the time of composition. An examination of the text on the basis of such assumptions yields very interesting results.

In order to advance this analysis of Matthew as a sectarian composition we need to focus attention on those portions of the text that are unique to Matthew either in content or literary structure.⁴⁵ Literary and narrative studies of the past few decades have placed a greater emphasis upon the creative role of the author than earlier works, which highlighted the importance of identifying sources to account for variations with synoptic parallels. The Sermon on the Mount, for example, is a Matthean formulation, certainly in its structure and considerable portions of its content. Its placement near the beginning of the composition marks its importance for identifying major emphases integral to the composition as a whole—i.e., it constitutes a major statement of what the author(s) considered important for its Jewish audience to know about the teachings of Jesus. Its sectarian nature will be examined below, particularly in its treatment of Torah. The distinctive treatment of Jesus as wisdom in Matthew 11 also yields a sectarian profile when examined within the context of the development of wisdom traditions in Palestinian Jewish literature of the late Second Temple period.⁴⁶ This sectarian analysis further permits an exploration of concrete communal expectations. This is most apparent in the communal discipline texts of Matthew 18:15-20, a text that can be demonstrated to be in continuity with similar treatments

44. For an earlier attempt to evaluate Matthew and sectarianism, see John Kampen, "The Sectarian Form of the Antitheses Within the Social World of the Matthean Community," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 1 (1994), 338-363. See also, Overman, *Matthew's Gospel*, 159; idem, *Church and Community*, 16-19; Gale, *Redefining Ancient Borders*, 41-63; Runesson, "Rethinking," 106-107.

45. The reading of the text of Matthew advanced below is developed in a forthcoming book, John Kampen, *Matthew Within Sectarian Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

46. John I. Kampen, "Aspects of Wisdom in the Gospel of Matthew in Light of the New Qumran Evidence," in *Sapiential, Liturgical and Poetical Texts from Qumran: Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies*, Oslo 1998, Published in Memory of Maurice Baillet, ed. Daniel K. Falk, F. García Martínez, and Eileen M. Schuller (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 227-239.

found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁴⁷ The extraordinary list of woes against the scribes and Pharisees in chapter 23 also constitutes a particular Matthean formulation, picking up themes already present in the Sermon on the Mount.⁴⁸

An examination of these most distinctive sections suggests a Jewish sectarian group in debate with other Jewish groups. Some of these groups were also sectarian, represented in part by the names we know from Josephus, elsewhere in the New Testament, and early Rabbinic literature, such as Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. The evidence from other Second Temple literature necessitates the recognition that the social structures of the Jewish communities at the time were much more complex than Josephus's description of the three groups would suggest. But contrary to those scholars who viewed Second Temple Jewish life to be composed only of a variety of sectarian groups I accept the caution of E. P. Sanders who noted that these groups were limited in size, and that a knowledge of all of these bodies does not give us an understanding of the first century as it would have been experienced by most Jews.⁴⁹ The population as a whole did not have to make a decision concerning adherence to one of these three groups. Josephus, who tended to exaggerate numbers, claimed more than 6,000 Pharisees at the time of Herod⁵⁰ and 4,000 Essenes in the first century.⁵¹ They, along with the followers of Jesus for whom Matthew is written, should rather be understood within the social and religious context Sanders described as "common Judaism." For Sanders this is defined as "what the priests and the people agreed on,"⁵² with Josephus suggesting more than 20,000 priests.⁵³

It is within this context that the rival groups described in Josephus and other Second Temple literature contested for power and influence in the

47. John I. Kampen, "Communal Discipline in the Social World of the Matthean Community," in *Communal Life in the Early Church: Essays Honoring Graydon F. Snyder*, ed. Julian V. Hills (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998), 158-174.

48. Anthony J. Saldarini, "Delegitimation of Leaders in Matthew 23," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54 (1992), 659-680.

49. Sanders, *Judaism*, 402.

50. *A.J.* 17.42.

51. *A.J.* 18.20; cf. Philo, *Prob.*, 75.

52. Sanders, *Judaism*, 47 (see also 11-12 in the "Introduction"). He develops his understanding of what this entailed in *Judaism*, 47-303. He is already referring to "a common, underlying feature" of Judaism in the Second Temple period in *Jewish Law*, 359-360, n. 6.

53. *C. Ap.* 2.108. The organization into four tribes in this description appears to reflect Ezra 2:36 and Neh. 7:39, however elsewhere he refers to the twenty-four priestly courses (*A.J.* 7.363-67), which coincides with the descriptions outlined in rabbinic literature. Josephus bases this on the descriptions in 1 Chr. 23-24, in which the author lists thirty-eight thousand Levites.

Jewish communities in which they resided. It is in this same context that some Jews opted for a sectarian option, represented in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Gospel of Matthew.

TORAH AS A CASE STUDY

The treatment of Torah in the Sermon on the Mount provides a good case study for understanding Matthew's sectarian identity. The case is established at the beginning of this section in the Beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-12). David Flusser and others have demonstrated the manner in which the descriptors of the Matthew group such as the poor in spirit, the meek, and the merciful were also used in the sectarian compositions of the Dead Sea Scrolls to describe the sectarians, particularly in the Thanksgiving Hymns.⁵⁴ Among the wisdom compositions of the scrolls from Qumran that became available after 1991 is 4Q525 (Beatitudes). Among the many macarisms—or exemplars of texts in the Hebrew Bible⁵⁵ and other Second Temple literature that are similar in form to the Beatitudes⁵⁶—this is the closest parallel available in the extant Jewish literature to those that begin the Sermon on the Mount. In the following translation of this text the feminine pronoun refers to both wisdom and Torah, since both are feminine in Hebrew. By 80-100 CE, wisdom and Torah were often correlated. The earliest and most well-known example of this is in Sirach 24:23-34, a composition whose original Hebrew version is dated to the first half of the second century BCE.⁵⁷

[Blessed is he who seeks her] with a pure heart, he does not slander with his tongue.

Blessed are those who hold fast to her statutes, they do not hold fast to the ways of injustice.

54. Flusser, David. "Blessed are the Poor in Spirit . . .," in *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1988), 102-114; idem, "Some Notes to the Beatitudes," *Judaism*, 115-125; Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 103-106.

55. The name Hebrew Bible is used to designate the books of the Old Testament. Scholars have a preference for this title since it is seen to carry less of a Christian bias for a collection of books considered sacred by both Jews and Christians.

56. This is the technical name used for texts that are similar in form to the Beatitudes, derived from the Greek *makarios* (blessed).

57. I accept the critique that in an earlier publication I had spoken of the "identification" of Torah with wisdom. I now prefer to use the suggested term "correlation." —Greg Schmidt Goering, "Creation, Torah, and Revealed Wisdom in some Second Temple Sapiential Texts (Sirach, 4QInstruction, 4Q185, and 4Q525): A Response to John Kampen," in *Canonicity, Setting, Wisdom in the Deuterocanonicals: Papers of the Jubilee Meeting of the International Conference on Deuterocanonical Books*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits, József Zsengellér, and Xavér Szabó (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 121-144, see 124-125.

Bles[sed] are those who rejoice in her, they do not spout forth the ways of folly.

Blessed are those who seek her with pure hands, they do not search for her with a deceitful heart.

Blessed is the man who has obtained wisdom. He walks in the law of the Most High and prepares his heart for her ways. He conducts himself according to her discipline and in her corrections he delights daily. He does not leave her unheeded during the afflictions of his distress, in the time of hardship he does not abandon her, he does not forget her in the days of dread, and in the affliction of his soul he does not abhor her. For on her he meditates daily and in his distress he considers [her . . . and throughout] his living through her [he gains insight and he places her] before his eyes so as not to walk in the ways of [injustice . . .] together and he makes his heart perfect toward her [. . . A crown of pure g]old [she places upon] his [hea]d and with kings she se[ats him . . . with] his [sc]epter over [. . .] brothers he shall separ[ate . . .]⁵⁸

The similarity of this composition to the Beatitudes is immediately apparent. While Matthew 5 has a structure of eight macarisms plus one extended conclusion, the extant fragments of 4Q525 suggest a structure of four macaraisms followed by an extended conclusion.⁵⁹ For comparative purposes the extended conclusion in each of the two compositions is significant. In 4Q525 this conclusion begins, "Blessed is the man who has obtained wisdom. He walks in the law of the Most High and prepares his heart for her ways." The person who has obtained wisdom walks in the law of the Most High. In Matthew 5:11-12 it can be seen in the phrase "on my account" that the Torah has been replaced by Jesus as the center of this wisdom tradition. We then can see that the addressees of the two

58. John Kampen, *Wisdom Literature*, Eerdmans Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011), 317. Note that this work is not considered to be one of the compositions that emerges from the sectarian communities associated with the Qumran texts—Kampen, *Wisdom Literature*, 308. It is to be regarded as one of the compositions that exemplifies the use of Torah in Second Temple literature, thus providing a basis for the comparison that follows. A good deal of the wisdom literature from the non-biblical compositions of the Qumran corpus are not considered sectarian compositions, but wisdom also appears as a significant aspect of the sectarian Rules texts—Kampen, "Wisdom in the Deuterocanonical."

59. On this comparison, see George J. Brooke, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 217-34. Note also Émile Puech, "4Q525 et les péricopes des Béatitudes en Ben Sira et Matthieu," *RB* 138 (1991), 90-106; idem, "The Collection of Beatitudes in Hebrew and in Greek in 4Q525 1-4 and MT 5:3-12," in *Early Christianity in Context*, ed. Frédéric Manns (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1993), 353-368; James H. Charlesworth, "The Qumran Beatitudes (4Q525) and the New Testament (MT 5:3-11; LK 6:20-26)," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* (2000), 13-35.

compositions share a similar fate. In 4Q525, "He does not leave her unheeded during the afflictions of his distress, in the time of hardship he does not abandon her, he does not forget her in the days of dread and in the affliction of his soul he does not abhor her." In Matthew 5:12, "Blessed are you when people revile you, and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you (falsely)⁶⁰ on my account." In both instances those who have received and by implication accepted the proffered wisdom share similar hardships and obstacles. In both texts we also find that the rewards are highlighted. In the case of Matthew, the blessed ones—that is, the adherents of the Jewish sect who are following Jesus—are blessed even when reviled and persecuted on account of their voluntary decision to join this group and this group alone. It is the adherents of this particular sectarian group who will get such a reward.

While not exclusively so, macarisms as literary constructions tend to be equated with wisdom literature and ideas. Thus the equation of Jesus with exclusive wisdom within this literary structure does not come as a surprise. Evidence that Matthew is interested in the portrayal of Jesus as wisdom can be demonstrated throughout the composition, most notably in chapter 11. The sectarian understanding of Jesus as wisdom is evident in 11:27: "All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." In other words, the injunction in the first century is: if you wish to acquire wisdom you need to join this sect. It is the only place where you will learn about the will of God for the Jewish people, and for the world.

Now such an argument was not unprecedented in first-century Judaism. From what was a type of wisdom based in observation and experience, attested to in the book of Proverbs, wisdom acquired an increasingly revelatory characteristic during the Second Temple period, evident in works such as 1 Enoch and Instruction.⁶¹ In the further development of this wisdom tradition we then find that in compositions such as multiple versions of the Community Rule and the Damascus Document, knowledge and truth are pre-eminent. However, they are only available to those who join the sect.⁶² Wisdom is by no means universal

60. The Greek term *pseudomenoi* is omitted in some of the early manuscripts of the Greek text.

61. *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism*, ed. Benjamin G. Wright III and Lawrence M. Wills (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2005); Grant Macaskill, *Revealed Wisdom and Inaugurated Eschatology in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Kampen, *Wisdom Literature*, 12-28. There is now an extensive literature on this question.

62. John I. Kampen, "The Puzzle of Torah and the Qumran Wisdom Texts," in *HĀ-ʾĪSH MŌSHE: Studies in Scriptural Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature in Honor*

and it certainly is not based on human observation and experience. The revelation is available only to those who join the sect and submit to its discipline. Within the text of Matthew the claim that wisdom rests exclusively with the figure of Jesus should be understood to be a development within that same tradition.

The text within Matthew that has provoked the most discussion about the relationship of the Jesus sect to the law is 5:17-20, which begins, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." Here again the history of Second Temple Jewish literature is of significance. Ample representatives of a type of literature that has been titled "Rewritten Scripture" has been identified among the finds from Qumran.⁶³ Within that literature are texts such as the Temple Scroll and the Book of Jubilees that are written in the style of biblical law including claims for their own authoritative status. They both make the claim that they are law revealed on Mount Sinai. But they cover topics not mentioned in the Pentateuch and mandate legislation that sometimes even contradicts the biblical texts, at least how we read them. Furthermore, the biblical texts themselves are much more diverse than had been understood to be the case prior to the publication of the biblical texts from Qumran. As a result, the overlap between biblical texts and rewritten texts has in some instances become somewhat murky. We also know already from Ezra-Nehemiah that topics that were claimed to be Torah actually are not covered in Pentateuchal legislation.⁶⁴ This becomes interesting in sectarian texts such as the Community Rule in which the initiates need to swear to return to the *Tôrât Môšeh*; however in taking that oath, they are committing themselves to observe the rules of the sect.⁶⁵ Thus in Matthew 5:17-20, this crucial section of the introduction to the antitheses, the argument is that the law of Moses to be observed is the one that is taught by Jesus. Elsewhere I have argued that the "righteousness" that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 5:20) is the

of Moshe J. Bernstein, ed. Binyamin Y. Goldstein, Michael Segal, and George J. Brooke (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 190-209; idem, "Wisdom in Deuterocanonical."

63. There is an extensive literature on this subject. The most recent overview is by Molly M. Zahn, "Rewritten Scripture," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 323-336. Other recent and significant works include: Daniel K. Falk, *The Parabiblical Texts. Strategies for Extending the Scriptures in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: T & T Clark, 2007); Sidnie White Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008); *Changes in Scripture: Rewriting and Interpreting Authoritative Traditions in the Second Temple*, ed. Hanne von Weissenberg, Juha Pakkala, and Marko Marttila (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011); *Rewritten Bible After Fifty Years: Texts, Terms, or Techniques?: A Last Dialogue with Geza Vermes*, ed. József Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

64. Hindy J. Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 33-36.

65. Kampen, "Puzzle of Torah."

understanding of the Jewish way of life as taught and lived in the sect of the followers of Jesus.⁶⁶ Nowhere else in the New Testament is the term "righteousness" used in this manner; in fact, it is rare in the remainder of the corpus except for the letters of Paul, where it has a very different meaning and purpose. Within the sectarian parameters of this composition Matthew does not have Jesus cite a counter-verse in his response to the initial incorrect statement in the antitheses (Mt. 5:21-48). There is no hermeneutical justification provided for the counterargument to what the author regards as an incorrect teaching. It is rather the authoritative response of the sect: "But I say to you." That claim for authority suggests knowledge that is the result of revelation rather than observation or argumentation. This is the manner in which its members are to acquire the wisdom and knowledge necessary to live the life God desires of the Jewish people. From the standpoint of this sectarian composition, it is the only way of gaining this knowledge. Given these observations about both the Qumran sectarian literature and the Sermon on the Mount, the claims made by Matthew for Jesus as the exclusive authoritative representative of the will of God were an innovation in the Jewish community only to the extent that they rested on Jesus. Jews were to adopt the viewpoints of the sect if they wished to be privy to knowledge concerning the will of God, if they wished to be part of the kingdom of God.

IMPLICATIONS FOR READING THE ENTIRE COMPOSITION

In the criteria they developed for the study of new religious movements, Stark and Bainbridge were interested in understanding the "level of tension exerted by groups on their surrounding environment. Stark and Bainbridge's understanding of sect formation as a type of subcultural deviance consists of three elements: difference, antagonism, and separation.⁶⁷ Difference indicates the extent to which the behaviors and practices of the group vary from the average members of the population or from the standards of the powerful members of the society. In other words, sectarians follow deviant norms of behavior. Within Matthew, the teachings and practices of the Sermon on the Mount establish the nature of the deviant behaviors the group is to engage in and provide the rationale for these behaviors. The second characteristic, separation, concerns the extent to which the groups restricts social

66. John I. Kampen, "'Righteousness' in Matthew and the Legal Texts from Qumran," in *Legal Texts and Legal Issues. Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the IOQS Cambridge 1995. Studies Presented in Honour of J. Baumgarten*, ed. Moshe Bernstein, Florentino García Martínez, and John Kampen (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 461-488.

67. Stark and Bainbridge, *Future of Religion*, 49-67.

relations mainly to in-group members. Group norms and activities or simply devotion to the group may restrict the social relations of the members so that contacts and relations to outsiders are reduced.⁶⁸ While this category may not appear to be present in the first Gospel due to the emphasis on mission in chapters 10 and 28, the communal discipline text of 18:15-20 leaves little doubt as to the distinctive make-up of the group within the Jewish community.⁶⁹ The “little ones” and the “lost sheep” of that same chapter are reclaimed for the sect that is composed of the followers of Jesus. Antagonism, the third characteristic, is represented in the attitudes towards other religious groups or society, usually expressed in particularistic beliefs denying the legitimacy of competing groups. This normally results in the sect’s rejection by these other groups, usually understood as ideological differences. Since this particular composition is in the form of a narrative, it is no surprise that the level of antagonism in the story builds toward a climax, in this case the crucifixion.

In my understanding of the first Gospel the crucifixion story begins at 21:1: “When they had come near Jerusalem, and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives”; and concludes at the end of chapter 27, with the story unique to Matthew about the guards at the tomb.⁷⁰ Others wish to isolate the crucifixion account in chapters 26 and 27 as a separate literary unit.⁷¹ In my reading the escalation of the conflict begins with the entry into Jerusalem. It is this account that leads him straight into the conflicts in the temple where all of the various leadership groups of the Jewish community appear, including the chief priests, the elders, the Herodians, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. These conflicts then escalate into the diatribes of chapter 23 with a particular focus on the scribes and Pharisees. Presumably they were the leading opponents, perhaps even the primary leadership group within the Jewish community in which these followers of Jesus were located.⁷² But we do not have sufficient external evidence to

68. Jutta Jokiranta, “Social-Scientific Approaches to the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Rediscovering the Dead Sea Scrolls: An Assessment of Old and New Approaches and Methods*, ed. Maxine L. Grossman (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 246-263, see 250.

69. Kampen, “Communal Discipline.”

70. Evans, *Matthew*, 10.

71. See the discussions in W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 1:58-72; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew*, WBC 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993), 1.1-1.iii.

72. It is necessary to emphasize the word “presumably” with regard to the Pharisees. There is very little that can be established with any level of certainty regarding the history of this group, as is the case with others such as the Sadducees as well. Josephus tells us that the Pharisees were a group with some political clout during the latter Hasmonean era, at least enough that Alexander Jannaeus advises Salome Alexandra to make peace with them because of the power they held (*A.J.* 13.401-415). They appear again at irregular intervals in Josephus’s accounts of the Jewish war with Rome. The New Testament references are limited, those in Rabbinic literature even more so. The hypothesis of a relationship of this

identify with any specificity their role beyond what we find in the text of the first Gospel. For example, were they a direct rival of the Matthean community rather than a prominent leadership group? The Pharisees appear again in the account of the guards at the end of the trial; in other words they have been there all along, as the story is told in Matthew (Mt. 27:62-66). In contrast to the other synoptic accounts where the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the scribes drop out of the story as we approach the trial, Matthew includes the major diatribe of chapter 23 against the scribes and Pharisees. This diatribe concludes with the indictment of the Jerusalem leadership found in the lament over Jerusalem (23:37-39).⁷³ The entire socio-religious leadership of the Jewish community as perceived by the followers of Jesus at the end of the first century after the destruction of the temple are brought into the narrative of the trial. The third characteristic of sectarian identity is evident in this portion of the narrative. The level of antagonism that Matthew demonstrates toward the leadership of the remainder of the Jewish community is evident in the climax of the story.

It is at this point where some of the features of the account of Pilate found only in Matthew find some explanation. Pilate's wife reports on her dream of Jesus' innocence (or righteousness) with some purport of dire consequences (27:19). It is in Matthew where Pilate washes his hands while declaring that he is innocent of this man's blood (27:24). He is here portrayed as a governor backed into a corner, taking the only action he can to avoid a riot (27:23). It is after this buildup that the crowd utters the infamous words, "His blood be on us and on our children" (27:25). We, of course, recall that this is Matthew's portrayal of the death of Jesus; clearly

group to the later Rabbinic movement is based upon limited evidence and remains the subject of continuing debate. Some notable studies on the Pharisees include the following: Jacob Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1973); Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988); Günter Stemberger, *Jewish Contemporaries of Jesus: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Joseph Sievers, "Who Were the Pharisees?" in *Hillel and Jesus: Comparisons of Two Major Religious Leaders*, ed. James H. Charlesworth and Loren L. Johns (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 137-155; Roland Deines, "The Pharisees between 'Judaism' and 'Common Judaism'" in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 443-504; idem., "Pharisees," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 1061-1063; Günter Stemberger, "Dating Rabbinic Traditions," in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Reimund Bieringer (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 79-96; Hayim Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans: The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100-400 CE* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), esp. 46-53.

73. This lament is not found in Mark. In Luke the parallel passage comes much earlier in the narrative (Luke 13:34-35). Only in Matthew does this lament connect the diatribe of Matthew 23 with the forecast of the apocalypse for Jerusalem in Matthew 24. Some of these groups do receive mention in Mark 12, with parallel accounts in Matthew 22.

all historical precedent would suggest much greater, and presumably primary, Roman responsibility for any act of crucifixion.⁷⁴ This shift in responsibility is one of the major areas of discussion when examining the manner in which the New Testament Gospel accounts contribute to anti-Semitic argumentation. As demonstrated here, the Gospel of Matthew makes the clearest case for absolving Pilate of responsibility for the death of Jesus.

This shift in responsibility also finds explanation in the Gospel as a sectarian composition. Returning to Baumgarten's definition, we note that the sect "utilizes boundary marking mechanisms . . . to distinguish between its own members and those otherwise normally regarded as belonging to the same national or religious entity." The Jewish sect is distinguished not by how it differentiates itself from the representatives of Roman imperial rule, but rather from the remainder of the Jewish community. The characteristics of difference, separation, and antagonism are identified against the same socio-religious entity of which it is a part. Not infrequently a sect's major critique of the institutions of its majority context focuses on the leadership of that body, similar to the manner in which apocalyptic compositions such as 1 Enoch focus on the priesthood. While the Roman imperial context can be demonstrated to have a major impact on first-century Jewish life, sectarians are concerned about Jewish life and institutions. From the sectarian perspective of Matthew, it is the leadership that has failed the Jewish community. For Matthew, that failure is apparent in the leadership's plot to kill Jesus. It is apparent when the chief priests and the elders convince the *ochlous* (crowds) to ask for the release of Barabbas (27:19), and then respond repeatedly to Pilate's further entreaties with the cry, "Let him be crucified" (27:23). It is in the escalation of this rhetoric that *pas ho laos* (all the people) utter the words of verse 29. It is clear whom the author of Matthew is implicating in this scheme. Both the innocence of Pilate and the responsibility of the chief priests and elders are amplified by Matthew beyond what is recorded in the Marcan source. In an evaluation of the sectarian identity developed within Matthew, it is in the account of the trial and execution that the characteristic of antagonism reaches its highest level of expression.

I have already indicated that the inclusion of the diatribe of Matthew 23 in the larger trial narrative serves the purpose of implicating the entire spectrum of religious and intellectual leadership in this climactic denunciation. We do not know the precise structure of the Jewish community in the chaotic period between the destruction of the temple and the Bar Kochba revolt, the time in which the Gospel of Matthew was

74. Ellis Rivkin, *What Crucified Jesus? Messianism, Pharisaism, and the Development of Christianity* (New York: UAH Press, 1997); Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*

composed.⁷⁵ Presumably some of the Jerusalem hierarchy was still in place, or at least the memory of its role was still intact, in those first few decades. Similarly, the extent to which groups such as the Sadducees and the Pharisees continued into these decades is hard to determine, particularly in lower Syria, perhaps Galilee, the likely provenance of the first Gospel. The evidence of Matthew suggests that they are actively playing a role in the Jewish community in which these followers of Jesus are located. We cannot determine whether this was reflective of the "actual" power structure of the community or whether this was a viewpoint limited to Matthew. It is certainly possible and even likely that there were other Jewish sectarian groups or viewpoints present in that community. All we can establish from the composition itself is that the followers of Jesus maintained a certain level of separation from these other Jewish groups of the community and that they displayed a level of antagonism toward leaders and groups that taught a different form of Judaism than the one they understood to come from their teacher and founder, Jesus.

Matthew was composed to provide an outline of a Jewish way of life and a rationale for the identity and self-understanding of these followers of Jesus within the Jewish community. It has been demonstrated that the sectarian body envisioned in the first Gospel is characterized by the sociological features of difference, separation, and antagonism, thereby demonstrating a high level of tension with the majority culture and power structure of the Jewish community. It is this feature of the composition that brings us to the central problem of antisemitism for those employing the Bible as an authoritative text in the manner associated with the Believers' Church tradition. This analysis points to the inadequacy of an approach to the problem of the sustained use of Matthew in support of anti-Semitic developments in Christian theology and Western society centered on the argument that the Gospel's composition reflects, as discussed in the outset of this article, either the viewpoint of a Gentile authorship justifying its origins within Judaism or that the anti-Semitic element was an inappropriate overlay upon an originally Jewish composition. This sectarian analysis, rather, suggests that the source of the problem lies in the sectarian impulses of the original composition.⁷⁶

75. How little can be established with any certainty about the structure of Jewish communities and institutions during this period is made clear in the work of Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E To 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 49-110. See also Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans*, 11-14, 38-52.

76. It is this dynamic that Ruether tries to capture in theological terms by dubbing antisemitism as the left-hand of Christology (see n. 29 above).

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BELIEVERS' CHURCH

Whenever modern interpreters appropriate Matthew as authoritative, they are engaged in a process of adopting the argumentation and the rhetoric that originally was developed to separate the followers of Jesus from other groups and viewpoints within the Jewish community. It is this very argumentation and rhetoric that is considered both authoritative and formative for the Believers' Church. This sectarian rhetoric is written to support "a voluntary association of protest . . . to distinguish between its own members and those otherwise normally regarded as belonging to the same national or religious entity." The purpose of the literary production of such a protest group is to define and promote the tension between it and other Jewish groups and viewpoints as it argues for its own exclusive legitimacy. This is clear in the definition of sect proposed by Shaye Cohen, who "asserts that it alone embodies the ideals of the larger group because it alone understands God's will."⁷⁷ This exclusive claim to be the representative of the will of God for the Jewish people constitutes the heart of the sectarian problem for the modern interpreter within the Believers' Church tradition.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum employs a very basic definition of antisemitism: "Prejudice against or hatred of Jews."⁷⁸ The Anti-Defamation League describes it as "beliefs or behavior hostile to Jews simply because they are Jewish."⁷⁹ Paula Fredriksen speaks to the question of definition within the context of its historical development:

Is anti-Judaism, then, the same as anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism? I do not think so. The first is a theological position; the second, a racist one; the third, a political one. But, without question, the long centuries of anti-Judaism within Christianity soaked into the soil of Western culture, preparing the ground for these more recent avatars.⁸⁰

In other words, the hatred of Jews takes various forms and is expressed in a variety of manners at different times. In his wide-ranging survey of the issue, Robert Chazan observes, "Anti-Judaism was well established with the Church of antiquity." He then notes the ugly turn the arguments took in the medieval period: "These medieval thinkers thus served as the

77. Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 125.

78. <https://www.ushmm.org/confront-antisemitism/antisemitism-the-longest-hatred>.

79. <https://www.adl.org/anti-semitism>.

80. Paula Fredriksen, "The Birth of Christianity and the Origins of Christian Anti-Judaism," in *Jesus, Judaism and Christian Anti-Judaism*, 8-30, see 24.

destructive conduit between the anti-Judaism of antiquity and the anti-Semitism of modernity.”⁸¹

There is a broad consensus among modern interpreters in the Believers' Church tradition that antisemitism is one of the world's evils that Christians should challenge and confront. The urgency of the question became evident in the Holocaust and this issue has haunted the Christian Church since that time. But this challenge is not addressed with a simple appeal to our biblical texts. A literal reading of an authoritative text whose original purpose was to differentiate our ancestors from and create tension with the remainder of the Jewish community does not provide an adequate basis for confronting antisemitism in our modern world. A reexamination of the implications of our sectarian origins is in order.

In the Believers' Church tradition we have not yet charted a different way of approaching our biblical text in a manner that would not be considered anti-Semitic or found ways for approaching the text with a view toward countering antisemitism. The most well-known and widely discussed are the lectures of John Howard Yoder.⁸² While providing a different starting point for a discussion between Anabaptists and Jews, his treatment of the biblical text falls within the tradition of biblical scholarship that views the explicit anti-Judaic developments in Christian theology as a post-biblical phenomenon. This results in what Peter Ochs designates as a different replacement theology.⁸³ I would suggest that this is an instance of the failure to come to terms with the implications of the sectarian argumentation and rhetoric of a significant biblical text. There are very few other identifiable attempts to address this problem from a Believers' Church perspective. This work must begin with the recognition that the sectarian accounts of our origins written to create a high level of tension between our predecessors in the Christian tradition and the remainder of the Jewish community pose a significant obstacle in our own attempts to develop a strategy for countering anti-Semitic beliefs and actions within ourselves, our communities, and our world.

81. Robert Chazan, *From Anti-Judaism to Anti-Semitism: Ancient and Medieval Constructions of Jewish History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 147. In this volume Chazan finds the New Testament material to have a more positive view of the Jewish past and the Jewish future than many of the other students of the subject noted earlier in this article. His earlier and more substantial research on the subject is found in *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

82. John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003). The work of John Howard Yoder within Believers' Church analysis is also compromised due to his pattern of sexual abuse in the 1970s and 1980s.

83. Note the responses of Peter Ochs to each lecture in the volume listed in the previous note. See also Peter Ochs, *The Free Church and Israel's Covenant* (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2009); idem, "Nonviolence and Shabbat," *Conrad Grebel Review* 29, no. 3 (2011), 88-102.

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