

## I. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

### THE FIVE CONTROVERSIES IN JERUSALEM: ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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**ABSTRACT.** This study deals exegetically with five passages from the Gospel of Matthew (21:23-27; 22:15-22; 22:23-33; 22:34-40; 22:41-46). They describe the Saviour's confrontations with the Jewish leaders in the last week of His earthly life. The topics discussed throughout these polemics reflect the theological concerns of Jesus' interlocutors, especially the issues of authority, resurrection, law, and messiahship. These controversies eloquently express Jesus' teaching quality. The Saviour's presence and impact are given on the one hand by the content of his answers and his impeccable rhetoric. Besides the intrinsic theological value of these dialogues, they are also important from an ecclesiological and spiritual point of view.

**Keywords:** Gospel of Matthew, controversy, the divinity of Christ, resurrection, messianism, New Testament, Matthew 21-22.

The ancient world was - by its very fibre - a world of polemics. Whether in the Greek world (from Socrates onwards, at least) or the Jewish world, this world excelled in ideological duels on the most diverse - and sometimes bizarre - subjects. The rules of such confrontations were usually unwritten, but the opponents always complied. "Those silenced by a speaker's wisdom were publicly shamed and had to be cautious before engaging again, with the same speaker, in a public verbal dispute. When in the literature of the time, the astonishment of some listeners at the wisdom of a speaker (usually the main hero of the episode) was recorded, the intention was that readers would also appreciate the wisdom of the protagonist."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament* (Oradea: Casa Cărtii, 2018) 114.

Nor was the Saviour spared such confrontations, especially in the last week of His earthly life. While in Jerusalem - the city of the arrogant elite who were resistant to His message - He was often questioned on various subjects. Nevertheless, it is not only Jerusalem, but the Temple itself, or rather the court of nations, that is a place of great controversy. The Saviour enters - literally and figuratively - the territory of his adversaries, in a gesture of the utmost boldness, at a time when plans for his elimination had already been perfected.<sup>3</sup>

The Evangelist Matthew brings these controversies together in a single textual unit (ch. 21-22). If we follow the chiasmic view of the Gospel, proposed by C. H. Lohr<sup>4</sup>, then Matthew 21-22 must be mirrored by Matthew 8-9. In both sequences, we have - in narrative form - the same idea: authority and invitation. On the one hand, the Saviour asserts His divine authority (through miracle and wisdom); on the other hand, He utters His invitation with equal generosity (through words and gestures). In fact, in these two chapters - 21 and 22 - Christ the Lord confronts the whole of Jewish theology in the heart of the nation of Israel (Jerusalem), standing with dignity and brilliance before its principal representatives.

The five controversies in which the Savior is involved are preceded, in turn, by three significant acts: the entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11), the expulsion of the Temple sellers (21:12-17), and the cursing of the unruly fig tree (21:18-22). "The three symbolic actions all carry the same message. The king of Israel has come to call his people to repent."<sup>5</sup> as did the Old Testament prophets. But this call was met with the arrogance of Israel's elite, who were completely unprepared for their own repentance.

Of the three moments, undoubtedly the most striking was the cleansing of the Temple (21:12-17). We are justified in thinking that this is, in fact, the Temple courtyard, which "had been used as a shortcut for the delivery of goods from one side of Jerusalem to the other. Jesus' operation must have created an immediate stir. Not a few have wondered, therefore, why the ubiquitous Temple police or the Roman garrison in the fortress overlooking the courtyard did not intervene. Were they afraid that armed intervention might spark a riot? Or did they intervene? Some authors have floated the bizarre idea that Jesus

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<sup>3</sup> For contextual and hermeneutical details of the five controversies, see John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew. Christ, Church and Morality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978) 147-166.

<sup>4</sup> C. H. Lohr, "Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew", *CQB* 23 (1961) 403-435. According to S. McKnight, Lohr's theory "has several important features. In addition to recognizing the structural alternation between narrative and discourse, the hypothesis repeats the connections between the various sections of Matthew as well as the varied themes developed by Matthew." (S. McKnight, „Evanghelia după Matei”, in Daniel G. Reid (ed.), *Dicționarul Noului Testament*, trad. Lucian Ciupe și Timotei Manta (Oradea: Casa Cărții, 2008) 950.)

<sup>5</sup> Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew 14-28* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2008) 888.

and his disciples engaged the Temple police and perhaps even the Roman garrison in battle, and that for a time Jesus resisted them by maintaining control of the Temple. This is historically impossible, not only because it does not fit with what Jesus had done up to that point, nor with subsequent events, but also because it would surely have been recorded in the annals of the Jewish historian Josephus Flavius as an event of considerable political and military importance. [The Temple police may have intervened] but only for the purpose of maintaining order until the priests and scholars could come to negotiate a peaceful solution. In other words, Jesus did not oppose the police, nor did he insist that the merchants and moneychangers be allowed to return.”<sup>6</sup>

These polemics “reflect the standard methods in ancient debate; questions and answers; deft retorts and attempts to trap opponents in their own words. The Temple Courts, the most frequented place in the city, was a popular place for learning and debate.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, “the victory of a hero’s wisdom in the face of a test with difficult questions was an ancient theme.”<sup>8</sup> It showcased the most brilliant argumentation and lucid persuasion. And, as we shall see, each had a subject of its own, with its theoretical and practical stakes, but also with its own flavour of argument.

## 1. The problem of AUTHORITY (21,23-27)

This first controversy takes place “while [the Saviour] was teaching” in the Temple. The Evangelist Matthew uses the verb διδάσκω, which refers to “to give instruction in a formal or informal setting.”<sup>9</sup> Here we have the consistency with which - according to all the Gospels - Jesus continues untiringly as a teacher until the last days of his earthly life. While He was carrying out this task, the “chief priests and elders of the people” (ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι τοῦ λαοῦ) intervene. Two categories of leaders are suggested: ἀρχιερεύς and πρεσβύτερος, both nouns being plural. By ἀρχιερεύς reference is made to a chief priest, holder of this position by belonging to a priestly family.”<sup>10</sup> These archpriests, “mostly from the Sadducees, also made up the political cream - less popular than the

<sup>6</sup> Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992) 126-127.

<sup>7</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 108.

<sup>8</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 111.

<sup>9</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*, second edition, vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989) 412. The same word describes the teaching of Jesus as a whole (Mk 12:38), but also that of the Holy Apostles assumed by the faithful (Rom 15,14).

<sup>10</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 543.

Pharisees - who had to balance the interests of both the people and the Roman authorities. They belonged to an elite with hereditary privileges, whose power was backed by Rome; usually such groups despised popular teachers like Jesus as demagogues. At the same time, aristocratic priests had to take account of the opinion of the masses when making decisions that could stir popular discontent.”<sup>11</sup> By πρεσβύτερος, somewhat antithetically, reference is made to “a person with responsibility and authority in matters of socio-religious interest.”<sup>12</sup> Always closer to the heart of the people than the former, these elders enjoyed unique respect in the Jewish mind of the time, being somewhat the natural emanation of the mob and the faithful defenders of its interests.

The forefathers of Jesus, therefore, represent - to a large extent - the entire ruling class of the Jewish people, united in both its sacerdotal (“high priests”) and popular (“elders”) categories: the former in functional dependence on the Temple, i.e., the Written Law; the latter in equally functional dependence on the synagogue, i.e., the Oral Law. Now, if these two socio-religious factions join hands in questioning Jesus, it means that his popularity has reached its peak. The Saviour had literally become “a case”, a visible challenge to the Jewish upper class. Hence the question they ask: “By what power do you do these things? And who gave You this power?” (v. 23b).

Here we have two questions in tandem: ‘by what? (authority)’ and ‘from whom? (You have authority)’. “The first question challenges His right to teach and work miracles in the Temple; how can He act as rabbi and prophet? Their purpose was to draw Him into a trap, for if He had answered, ‘human authority, He would have contradicted His actions, and if He had answered, ‘divine authority, He would have been guilty of blasphemy. The second question assumes that His authority cannot be from God, a possibility long rejected by leaders. They challenge Jesus to incriminate Himself by His answer.”<sup>13</sup>

Both uses of “power” use - in the original version - the same word: ἐξουσία. It simply indicates ‘the power to do something, with or without an additional [delegated or externally conferred] authority’.<sup>14</sup> It is intrinsic authority, which one possesses by oneself, whether one exercises it or not. It is the type of power associated in the ancient world with gods or supernatural beings, but it could also be applied to human beings.

<sup>11</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 109.

<sup>12</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 541. As is well known, the notion (and the office) was also taken up in first-century Christianity, being an important part of ecclesiology, especially in predominantly Jewish communities.

<sup>13</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matei: comentariu exegetic pe Noul Testament*, trad. Octavian Verlan (Timișoara: Noua Speranță, 2019) 828.

<sup>14</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 680.

In fact, the Jewish leaders are interested in *the source of Jesus' power*, the energy that sets things in motion. They were too well versed not to realize that such mighty deeds must have something special behind them, an authority not found in everyone. In the Jewish custom, Jesus answers with another question: "Where did John's baptism come from? From heaven or from men?" (v. 25a). Unexpected and subtle, this question prompted the interlocutors to what the text calls "self-contemplation". In Greek, we have *διαλογίζομαι*, which means "to think or reason with thoroughness and completeness."<sup>15</sup> They are visibly embarrassed because - they thought - if they had said that John's baptism came from heaven, Jesus would have accused them of not receiving it; if they had said it came from men, people would have lynched them. Either way, they answered was, in a way, risky.

In the end, they chose to respond with "We don't know!" to which the Savior adds, "Neither do I tell you by what power they do these" (v. 27). "Hence the story does not state what Jesus' authority was, but implies that it came from God, like John's, and that the Jewish leaders were wrong to oppose them."<sup>16</sup>

Appealing to logic, the Saviour leads the whole debate to this conclusion: "His authority and John's derive from the same source - from heaven (a Hebrew way of saying from God). This answer corresponds to the Jewish principle that a messenger with a particular commission, acts with the full authority of the one who sent him. The rest of the discussion conforms to the standard debate procedure of the time."<sup>17</sup>

The parable of the two sons (vv. 28-32), spoken immediately after the dialogue, is considered by some commentators to be an integral part of the controversy. According to Ulrich Luz, the two fragments "constitute a single pericope. On the one hand, the controversy does not have a stylistically appropriate ending since there is no closing word from Jesus. On the other hand, the parable has no narrative exposition. Instead, it begins with an immediate question from Jesus to his opponents (v. 28). This takes the place of *the logion* that usually ends a dispute. For its part, the controversy provides the narrative exposition for the parable. Thus, vv. 23-32 must be considered as a single pericope."<sup>18</sup> If this is the case, then the favourable but ultimately disobedient son (for example) is a metaphor for Israel's attitude toward God. The investigation the leaders do is not honest, and their encounter with Jesus does not change them as one might expect.

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<sup>15</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 350.

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Davies, *Matthew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009) 169.

<sup>17</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 109.

<sup>18</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005) 26.

## 2. The problem of TAX (22,15-22)

In the case of this questioning, the protagonists are no longer the priests and elders but the Pharisees, who “took counsel to catch him in his word” (συμβούλιον ἔλαβον ὅπως αὐτὸν παγιδεύσωσιν ἐν λόγῳ). A Pharisee (Φαρισαῖος) was, in fact, “a member of an important Jewish religious and political party in the time of Jesus and the apostles. The Pharisees constituted a significantly larger group than the Sadducees and had contradictions with them on certain doctrines and patterns of behaviour. The Pharisees were strict and zealous adherents of the Old Testament laws and many additional traditions.”<sup>19</sup> These are associated with two keywords, both of which are important for understanding the episode. On the one hand, we have the notion of ‘counsel/ council’, rendered in the text as συμβούλιον. The root of the word - συμβουλος - indicates the action of “engaging in joint planning, planning, often with a harmful or malicious purpose.”<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, we have the verb παγιδεύω, used here in the figurative but taken from the hunting register, designating the action of hunting, trapping (proper form absent from the New Testament). Thus, in this case, it is “to obtain information about an error or mistake, with the aim of causing damage or trouble.”<sup>21</sup> The combined action of the Pharisees is also due to the involvement of their disciples, sent to Jesus. Another category is added, that of the Herodians (Ἡρωδῖανοί), who were “political followers of Herod the Great and his family”.<sup>22</sup> Their presence somewhat tilts the odds in favour of paying taxes, given that Herod came to the throne with the direct support of Rome. Be that as it may, they question Jesus with much tact and apparent sympathy. Trying to win his goodwill, after calling him “Teacher”, they say, “We know that you are a man of truth, and in truth you teach the way of God, and you care for no one, because you do not seek the face of men” (v. 16b).

It is only after these words are spoken that they throw the subject itself into the discussion: ‘What do you think? Should we give tithes to Caesar or not?’ (v. 17). Both verbs are important here. On the one hand, we have δοκέω which means: “to have an opinion based on appearances that may be significantly different from reality”<sup>23</sup>; on the other hand, we have ἔξεστιν, which has the meaning of “to be obligatory.” For “tithes”, we have the Greek κῆνσος, which refers to “a tax to be paid by every man to the government.” Rephrased, the question

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<sup>19</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 128. For details on the origin, doctrine, and impact of the Pharisees, see Jacob Neusner and Bruce D. Chilton (eds.), *In Quest of the Historical Pharisees* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 358.

<sup>21</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 329.

<sup>22</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 133.

<sup>23</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 369.

might sound like this: “*What is Your opinion? Is it obligatory to pay tribute to Caesar or not?*”

As far as the Jews were concerned, they “had three kinds of taxes: the Temple tax of 17:24-27; indirect taxes such as customs duties, sales taxes, etc.; and direct taxes or per capita tax paid only by those who were not Roman citizens. The tax referred to in the text is the third type and became a kind of tribute paid by all peoples subject to Rome. The amount was one dinar annually for each adult, women, and men. It was a controversial tax and contested by many Jews. Judah the Galilean led a revolt in 6 AD. So, the Pharisees believed that Jesus would get into trouble no matter what answer he gave, either from the Jews if he said yes, or from the Romans if he said no.”<sup>24</sup>

Showing his omniscience, Jesus rebukes his opponents for trying to tempt him. He then resorts to an unusual gesture designed to embarrass them. He asks for a Roman dinar, called in the text νόμισμα, i.e., the common and official currency, to which κῆνσος is added, Matthew attributing to it an exclusively fiscal use (which is incorrect because the dinar was also used in other transactions). Jesus then raises the decisive question, “Whose image is this, and the inscription on it?” - to which the interlocutors reply without hesitation: “Caesar’s!”. For ‘image’ we have the word εἰκών - which refers to ‘image’, and for ‘inscription’ we have the word ἐπιγραφή, which indicates a short note used mainly for identification.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus, “portrayed on the front of the Tiberius denarius that was used in Palestine was the head of the emperor, on the reverse side the imperial mother Livia as a goddess of peace. The inscription reads: “Ti(berius) Caesar Divi Aug(usti) F(ilius) Augustus,” and on the reverse side: “Pontif(ex) Maxim(us).” The opponents confirm this in response to Jesus’ question. It is unlikely that the point of the demonstration is to show that, as Jews who possess coins with human images, they violate the law; in that day almost, all Jews probably used such coins. Nor is the issue that they violate the prohibition against images in the Temple itself; in the forecourt of the Temple, where the booths of the money changers stood, their Tiberius coin will not have been the only one. The point is rather that by using a coin that is invested with political and religious symbols of the power of the Roman emperor they have long since acknowledged his claim to power.”<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, the stakes were much more subtle than simple taxation, which was already a given. “The payment of tax to the representatives of the Roman emperor expressed the subjugation of Israel and could be interpreted

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<sup>24</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matei...*, 862-863.

<sup>25</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 393.

<sup>26</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 66.

as disloyalty to the God of Israel.”<sup>27</sup> Specifically, “Jesus’ opponents try to force him to choose between rebellion - which would have allowed them to blame him before the Romans - and conformity to the Romans - to whom, they believe, he was hostile (because he confronted their leaders in the Temple).”<sup>28</sup>

The Saviour’s verdict is: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (v. 21). It follows - unequivocally - that the payment of tribute to Rome is obligatory (which, in fact, it is). Interestingly, the Saviour does not further justify this obligation but simply sticks to the logical approach proposed above: what bears the image of Caesar must ultimately return to Caesar.<sup>29</sup> Even more interesting is that - without being asked - Jesus adds the other part of the truth: *Give to God what is God’s*. “This challenge thus constitutes the actual surprise of the text for the original hearers and for the first readers. It comes at the end and is thus the goal of the text. It follows that the issue in this text is precisely not a determination of the relationship of Jesus or of his followers to the state. To that degree the most important concern with the text in the history of its interpretation completely misses its intention. The challenge to give God what belongs to him remains brief; it comes across as an isolated text. The readers must supplement it from the biblical and Jewish tradition: God is the one who “casts down nations before himself and overthrows kings” (Isa 41:2). To him belongs “the earth and all that is in it, the world and all who live in it” (Ps 24:1). Everything belongs to God-heaven and earth, all people, and of course, also all empires and all emperors. Thus, the sense of the idle text also becomes clear.”<sup>30</sup>

This being the case, the connecting word καί (relating the two “debts”) is not mere copulative conjunction but should rather be translated as “also”, thus suggesting that what follows is a much higher and perennial truth in relation to what has already been spoken. Therefore, Jesus’ response absolves Him of “the charge of disloyalty to Rome without actually claiming loyalty, [without offering a concrete solution], since it neither defines *the things that are Caesar’s nor the things that are God’s*, nor does it consider the circumstances in which they collide. Even if a coin with Caesar’s image was in some sense Caesar’s, the narrative teaches that the whole world is God’s... Perhaps the statement

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<sup>27</sup> Margaret Davies, *Matthew...*, 173.

<sup>28</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 111.

<sup>29</sup> Note that - in Jesus’ words - there is no reference to the divine origin of imperial authority, as we find in Romans 13:1. The fact is not to be interpreted antagonistically but merely observed. “He simply means: since you already have the tax coin, pay the tax and do not ask such underhanded questions. Since Jesus was no Zealot, he would have agreed with his opponents that the tax coins owed the emperor are to be paid, but that is not what is decisive here. For this reason, he does not offer a theological rationale for the command to pay taxes; he merely calls attention to the *tax coin*.” (Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 66)

<sup>30</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 66-67.



discourages open rebellion against Rome, sparked by a refusal to pay taxes. However, the teaching in the rest of the narrative encourages dedication to God even in martyrdom circumstances.”<sup>31</sup>

Ulrich Luz<sup>32</sup> is of the opinion that the pericope - in its stakes and emphases - is less important than the passage in Romans 13:1-7. In the Pauline text, the dogmatic and pastoral attitude is much more clearly defined, establishing to some extent the Christian’s attitude towards the king. However, judged on the level of the Gospels, the text provides the Saviour’s perspective on the matter, and this fact cannot be overlooked. As a brief review, it should also be noted that “primary exegesis emphasizes the fundamental character of obedience to God [“give to God what is God’s”]. Discussions of the relationship with the state do not become important until the modern period. The text plays an important role in the Reformation tradition. For Reformed interpreters, in particular, submission to the state is drawn as naturally as possible from the Gospel text. He is of the opinion that the pericope - in its stakes and emphases - is less important than the passage in Romans 13:1-7. In the Pauline text, the dogmatic and pastoral attitude is much more clearly defined, establishing to some extent the Christian’s attitude towards the king. However, judged on the level of the Gospels, the text provides the Saviour’s perspective on the matter, and this fact cannot be overlooked. As a brief review, it should also be noted that “primary exegesis emphasizes the fundamental character of obedience to God [“give to God what is God’s”]. Discussions of the relationship with the state do not become important until the modern period. The text plays an important role in the Reformation tradition. For Reformed interpreters, in particular, submission to the state is drawn as naturally as possible from the Gospel text.”<sup>33</sup> This is how - depending on the era and the political configuration - the Saviour’s statement received different emphases. What remains unchanged, however, is precisely the emphasis placed by Jesus - and later by the apostles - on the believer’s dedication to God as a primary condition in relation to all his obligations to the secular power.

### 3. The problem of RESURRECTION (22,23-33)

This controversy takes place on the same day as the previous one, and its protagonists are the Sadducees.<sup>34</sup> The term Σαδδουκαῖος (always plural in

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<sup>31</sup> Margaret Davies, *Matthew...*, 174.

<sup>32</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 63.

<sup>33</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 63.

<sup>34</sup> The situation is partly similar to the first controversy (21:23-27), where the presence of the Sadducees is decisive (except that, in this case, they are called “high priests”, alluding - probably - to the ruling class of the Jewish priesthood).

the New Testament) indicates “a member of a politically influential Jewish party in Jerusalem. The Sadducees were a smaller group than the Pharisees (see 11:49), but often held control of important political and religious positions. Denial of the resurrection of the dead and acceptance of only the first five books of the Old Testament are important elements.”<sup>35</sup> in terms of their profile.<sup>36</sup>

The periscope is divided into two equal fragments (the question - vv. 24-28; the answer - vv. 29-32), where “both the question and the answer contain quotations from Scripture. In the Sadducees’ question, Scripture appears first and is the starting point for their cunning argument. In Jesus’ answer, it comes at the end and forms the core of his conclusive answer. The theme of the controversy is given by the word “resurrection” (ἀνάστασις), which occurs four times (vv. 23, 28, 30-31).”<sup>37</sup> The Evangelist Matthew, in an editorial note, characterizes the Sadducees as “those who say there is no resurrection” (λέγοντες μὴ εἶναι ἀνάστασιν). This is the premise of the question he formulates, “Teacher, Moses said: If anyone dies childless, let his brother take the widow to wife and raise up offspring to his brother. So, there were seven brothers among us; and the first married and died, and had no offspring, and left his wife to his brother. Likewise, the second and the third, down to the seventh. After all of them the woman also died. At the resurrection, then, which of the seven will be the woman? For they all had her to wife” (vs. 24-28).

The species raised by the Sadducees “refers to the law of levirate marriage, a custom practiced in many cultures both in antiquity and today (see Deut 25:5). The custom conferred economic and social protection on widows in some Eastern societies for the protection of the family, where women could earn an adequate income. In Jesus’ time and even afterwards, scholars studying the law continued to give various interpretations to this Old Testament principle, although the rabbinic rules were different in some respects from the Old Testament.” Note the concern of Jewish theology with life after death, even though - somewhat paradoxically - the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead.<sup>38</sup> It is known that “one of the subjects of constant contention between the Pharisees and the Sadducees was that the latter did not believe in a future

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<sup>35</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 128.

<sup>36</sup> An eloquent compendium of Sadducee (and other Jewish religious parties) doctrine is: Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 68.

<sup>38</sup> For contextual details on death, burial and resurrection in Judaism, see: A. P. Bender, “Beliefs, Rites and Customs of the Jews, Connected with Death, Burial and Morning”, in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, nr. 2, Vol. 6, 1884, pp. 317-347; M. T. Finney, “Afterlives of the Afterlife: The Development of Hell in its Jewish and Christian Contexts”, in J. C. Exum and D. J. A. Clines (eds.), *Biblical Reception* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013) 150-171.

resurrection of the dead.”<sup>39</sup> In this questioning of the Saviour, we have, rather, the moving of the Pharisee-Sadducee dispute into a neutral space, it being clear that Jesus belonged to neither of these categories. For a moment, in an entirely spontaneous way, the Saviour becomes a kind of judge in a sensitive issue that at that time dated back several centuries.

Reduced to its essence, the Sadducees' dilemma was: *“In the event of the resurrection, is the civil and social order of this world preserved in the next world? And if it is preserved, how is this order restored under the conditions of successive marriage in the case of a long-lived widow?”*. Ancient Judaism confirms that, in interpreting the law, “scholars often debated hypothetical situations. But later rabbinic literature is also full of situations in which questions posed by pagans, apostates or those deemed heretics, such as Sadducees, are mocked.”<sup>40</sup>

The doctrine that in the next world we will be like angels, asexual and without the possibility of marriage, was somewhat old at the time of the controversy. “Such views are expressed in Jewish apocalyptic literature from the 2nd century BC to the 2nd century AD. The resurrected righteous are depicted living in peace forever, their ordinary mortal lives transformed into immortal lives of glory. Two images are commonly used to express this transformation. Daniel 12:2, as well as other texts influenced by this book, compares the eternal life of the righteous to that of the stars: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall arise, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” The stars were corporeal creations believed to continue forever, and as supposed sources of light, they provided an effective image of the resurrected righteous. But other apocalyptic works compare the lives of the resurrected to those of angels. Angels are described as somewhat as human beings, but more glorious (e.g., Dan 3:25; 8:15-17; 9:21; 10:5-6, 12-21), and as created beings who exist eternally, they did not need to give birth to children (e.g. 1Enoh 62,13-16; 2Bar 51,5).”<sup>41</sup>

After rebuking them (“you go astray not knowing neither the Scriptures nor the power of God”), the Saviour states that, at the resurrection, no one marries, but men “are as the angels of God in heaven” (ἀλλ’ ὡς ἄγγελοι ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ εἶσιν). If an angel (ἄγγελος) is “a supernatural being who listens to and serves as a messenger of a supernatural entity”<sup>42</sup>, then it means that the glorified bodies of the resurrected will enter the same register of existence. This new and perfected life will be consummated in “heaven” (οὐρανός), which indicates “the supernatural dwelling place of God and other heavenly beings. The word also contains another spatial component denoting that which is above, but the notion

<sup>39</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 183.

<sup>40</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 113.

<sup>41</sup> Margaret Davies, *Matthew...*, 176-177.

<sup>42</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 143.

of dwelling is more significant than location above the earth.”<sup>43</sup> By what he says, Jesus does nothing but “demonstrate the absurdity of the Sadducees’ question. [The Saviour starts from the premise] that they not only share the belief in a future resurrection, but also, like Him, are of the opinion that the resurrection life is more than a mere continuation of earthly life.”<sup>44</sup> Once this similarity is established, Jesus reaffirms the resurrection of the dead with a quotation from the Old Testament: ‘I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob’ - an excerpt from Exodus 3:6. Here reference is made to ‘one of Israel’s fundamental beliefs. It is the foundation of God’s covenant with the people of Israel; for this reason, God is addressed as such precisely in prayer. Particularly impressive here were the eighteen blessings, the first *berakah* of which is addressed to ‘*Yahweh, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*’, and the second *berakah* praises Yahweh, ‘who makes the dead alive. The God of the patriarchs is for Israel the God of the covenant who accompanies them and will redeem them.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the fact that God would raise the dead was - for the Jew - a belief consistent with his prayers and doctrines.

Jesus’ final statement is most eloquent: “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (v. 32f). There are two hermeneutical perspectives on this phrase. It can be seen as a premise (possibility I) or as a conclusion (possibility II): “In the case of the first possibility, the evidence is logically impeccable: God is (a), as Exodus 3:6 says, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v. 32a). But because he is (b) the God of the living and not of the dead (v. 32b), the patriarchs must be alive. That is, they must have risen from the dead. In the case of the second possibility, the whole stakes fall on Exodus 3:6. In this case, one has to consider the Jewish belief of the time, namely that the patriarchs of Israel are presently living with God and interceding for the people.”<sup>46</sup> So, regardless of the perspective taken, it is clear that Jesus links the life of the patriarchs in the presence of God to the

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<sup>43</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 70-71. “Belief in the future resurrection of the dead is documented as early as the 2nd century BC and was not just a basic belief of the Pharisees who, according to Josephus Flavius, were popular among the common people; it was already part of the common belief system... However, the Jewish texts clearly offer a different point of view: in the next world there is no eating and drinking, no giving birth and multiplying, no trade or traffic, no envy, enmity, or conflict. Instead, the righteous sit there with crowns on their heads and bask in the radiance of God’s glory. The trend underlying the opposite view is clear. Jesus must thus be the initiator of a deeper, more spiritual understanding of the resurrection that contradicts the common Jewish views. This new understanding will then find its logical development in the Pauline understanding of the resurrection as a new creation and the “spiritual body” of 1Cor 15,35-44. While it is true that the resurrection understanding of Matthew 22,23-33 and that of 1Corinthians 15 are closely related, both are rooted in a widespread Jewish belief.” (*idem*)

<sup>45</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 72.

<sup>46</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 72-73.

possibility and chance of the resurrection of the dead. Although again, the life of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the full presence of God is not explicitly stated, it can be implied by association with current Jewish belief. The link between the acceptance of the resurrection of the dead and the “power of God” to which Jesus referred is also possible. Not only were the Scriptures to be known, but the heart was to be involved in the act and outcome of faith.

Here we have yet another plea for resurrection built on the intrinsic character of God. As it is stated, “God would not claim to be the God of the departed; on the contrary, His faithfulness to the covenant means that if He is their God after death, death does not have the last word. Other ancient writers used similar arguments to demonstrate that the patriarchs remain alive. One of the most common Jewish prayers of the period declares God’s faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a living reality for contemporaries.”

The narrator’s conclusion ignores the Sadducees. Their reaction is not mentioned, but rather that of the “multitudes” (ὄχλος). The simple people, without wealth and training, were amazed by His teaching, while the Jewish leaders remain insensitive and refractory. For “astonishment” we have the Greek ἐκπλήσσω, which means “to be so astonished as practically to be overwhelmed.”<sup>47</sup> For “teaching” we have the word διδαχή, which refers to the content (rather than the style) of what is transmitted. This valorization of the multitudes (in relation to the Sadducees) is nothing more than a final irony of the narrator, who wishes to inform us of the much more open character of the simple and redeeming compared to the opaque attitude of the arrogant and refractory.

#### 4. The problem of LAW (22,34-40)

The context of this controversy is determined by the previous episode. The fragment is rhetorically stable, with an introduction (v. 34) and a conclusion (v. 40). The introduction highlights the competitive relationship between the two religious parties. Thus, “when the Pharisees heard that he had shut the mouths of the Sadducees, they gathered together” (v. 34). Note here the two verbs: “to shut (his mouth)” and “to gather (together)”. For the first, we have φημι, which means “to silence someone”; and for the second we have συνάγω, which means “to make people (and others) gather together.” This Pharisaic gathering is important, especially in the context of the Saviour’s last days. All the evangelists point out that as he was on his way to crucifixion, the Son of God was spending more and more time in the company of the Jewish leaders.

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<sup>47</sup> J. P. Louw & E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 311.

The text suggests that among the Pharisees, a certain “teacher of the law” - for whom the noun νομικός is used<sup>48</sup> - they call on Jesus. In an editorial note, the evangelist is careful to inform us that he, “tempting Jesus, asked him”. For “to tempt” we have the Greek πειράζω, which means “to obtain information to be used against a person, trying to cause someone to make a mistake.” And so, approaching the Saviour, he asks, “Teacher, which commandment is greater in the Law?” (v. 36). We must know that the question was by no means exotic. Jewish discussions about the greatest commandment were very popular at the time. In fact, Jesus’ contemporaries were looking for the one “that could best sum up the whole Law, [among the variants being] honouring one’s parents and loving one’s neighbour as oneself.”<sup>49</sup>

The Pharisee calls Jesus, “Teacher!” (διδάσκαλος), meaning “a person who gives instruction.”<sup>50</sup> Only the Pharisees - or at least some of them - use this term when in dialogue with Jesus. Moreover, “for Matthew, Jesus the Messiah reveals the will of God. In his public ministry, Jesus the Messiah teaches others about God’s will and reveals it, but the act of teaching and the act of preaching are largely ignored or rejected. Although the terms have fallen out of favour with Matthew Gospel scholars, teacher and preacher are important categories for understanding Jesus in Matthew.”<sup>51</sup>

The actual question was, “Which commandment is greater in the law?” (v. 36). Although seemingly innocuous on the surface, the substance is nevertheless malicious (as in a previous dispute - v. 15). The trouble concerning the great commandment is to be sought in the rabbis’ custom of distinguishing between “small” (meaning “light”) and “great” (meaning “heavy”) commandments. Thus, “on the one hand, they divided the commandments and prohibitions of the Torah into 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions but, to emphasize the seriousness of God’s demands, they emphasized that even the “small” commandments were of supreme importance. On the other hand, they had to raise the question of the basic principles of the Torah. They thus had to specify

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<sup>48</sup> A rare term in the New Testament for an expert in Mosaic law. In the case of this occupancy, it should be noted that some manuscripts do not use it, vaguely indicating that the speaker is one of the Pharisees present.

<sup>49</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 114.

<sup>50</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 415. The respect enjoyed by a “teacher” is also indirectly emphasized in another passage in the Gospel of Matthew, where we read that “there is no disciple above his teacher” (10,24).

<sup>51</sup> S. McKnight, „Evanghelia după Matei”, in Daniel G. Reid (ed.), *Dictionarul Noului Testament...*, 955. “Scholars, in their tendency to go beyond the category of “teacher” to describe Jesus, have avoided an important category. What is certain is that in Matthew Jesus is described as a teacher by those who are not disciples (8:19; 9:11; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:16; 22:24), while His disciples never call Him “teacher.” (*idem*)

which commandments cannot be broken even when one faces martyrdom... thus showing what is decisive in the Torah.”<sup>52</sup>

Jesus is therefore exposed to a test on a subject intensely debated in Jewish antiquity. And what follows, in response, is nothing more than a retelling of the commandment in Deut 6:5 (“You shall love the Lord your God from your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength”), where the verb “to love” (in its Hebrew sense) has a very wide spectrum of meanings: from sexual love to family love, to friendship, to various political or Godly loyalties. In the words of Jesus, the great commandment is: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second, like this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. These two commandments contain the whole law and the prophets” (vv. 37-40).

Love is to be directed, first, to “the Lord God” (κύριον τὸν θεόν). Putting together κύριος (“a title for one who exercises supernatural authority over all reality.”<sup>53</sup>) with θεός (“supernatural being perceived as the creator and sustainer of the universe.”<sup>54</sup>), refers to a certain solemnity of the name and the impact it - as an expression of being - has. Towards God, the believer must show constant love, for which we have the verb ἀγαπάω, which means “to have love for someone or something, based on sincere appreciation and utmost consideration.” “In the Jewish interpretation of Deut 6:5 the love of God is expressed first in deeds of obedience, of piety, of faithfulness to the Torah. To love God is to give one’s life for his commandments.”<sup>55</sup>

The elements involved in loving God are - in Jesus’ words - three: ‘the heart’ (καρδία: “a figurative extension of the meaning of καρδιά’ heart’, which does not appear in the NT in a literal sense; the causal source of a person’s psychological life in its various aspects, but with special emphasis on thoughts.”<sup>56</sup>), “soul” (ψυχή: “the essence of life in terms of thought, will and feeling; the inner self, mind, thoughts, feelings, heart, being”<sup>57</sup>) and “the mind” (διάνοια: “the psychological faculty of understanding, reasoning, thinking, and deciding; mind.”<sup>58</sup>). These three component parts - heart, soul, mind - essentially describe the whole human being. Jesus wants to show that the love of his disciple must be so deep that it springs from the deepest realities of being.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 81-82.

<sup>53</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 138.

<sup>54</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 136.

<sup>55</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 82.

<sup>56</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 320.

<sup>57</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 320.

<sup>58</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 323-324.

<sup>59</sup> Note the replacement of the notion of “power” (“with all you might”) in Deuteronomy with that of “mind” (“with all your mind”) in Matthew. The Evangelist - most likely - made this change

In the same way and with the same intensity, man must also love his neighbour as himself. This time Jesus quotes from Lev 19:18, where the Lord's command reads: "Thou shalt not avenge thyself with thine own hand, nor bear hatred toward the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." "The context of Lev 19:11-18 is important. It deals with God's fundamental ethical commandments toward the neighbour, also toward one who is socially weak or an opponent in a court of law. Standing parallel to "to love" are not to steal, to deal falsely, to lie, to swear falsely, to defraud, to rob, to curse, to render an unjust judgment, to slander, to hate. Lev 19:34 adds not to violate the rights of the alien. The history of Jewish interpretation points in the same direction. "Love" means practical behaviour and solidarity according to the commandments that God has given the community of Israel."<sup>60</sup> And so, in defiance of the Jewish nationalist understanding, Matthew extends the notion of "near" to every human being, regardless of ethnicity.<sup>61</sup> So we have good reason to believe that "in the tradition of Jesus, the balance between love of self and love of neighbour is disturbed."<sup>62</sup> Restoring this balance was very important, and the Saviour does just that.

From a hermeneutical point of view, "applying Jewish techniques of interpretation, Jesus links the two commandments (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18) based on a common key phrase in Hebrew: *And you shall love*. Jewish ethics repeatedly emphasized love for God and neighbour"<sup>63</sup>, even if there were sometimes contradictions or inconsistencies. Naturally, in a natural logic, the Jews knew in their heart of hearts that love of neighbour confirms the love of God. Being increasingly selective about loving the other was a weakness that needed to be addressed, thus arriving at a holistic understanding of love: God and the other.

Jesus' conclusion is eloquent: "in these two commandments are all the law and the prophets" (v. 40). The two sections - the Law and the Prophets - made up the Holy Scriptures of the Jews in the first century. The writings (the poetic and wisdom books) would be added later, when the Jews - under pressure from Christian adventurism - completed their own canon. The Great Commandment - which sums up the two commandments, in fact - is nothing other than the perfect balance between the vertical and the horizontal of life.

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because of an intellectual impulse added to the love of God, very common in the collective mind of Hellenized Jews.

<sup>60</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 83.

<sup>61</sup> Jesus puts the question of love of neighbour in the same terms as in other earlier passages: Mat 5,43-48; 19,19.

<sup>62</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 84.

<sup>63</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 114. "Other teachers also used these commandments as summaries of the Law, which is also possible because of the contexts in which they appear in the Old Testament." (*idem*)



That's why "Jesus' answer is just the kind of answer with which no Jew would have found fault, and, in the narrative, no further question is put to Him."<sup>64</sup>

## 5. The problem of MESSIANITY (22,41-46)

One of the structural perspectives on the Gospel of Matthew is biographical-theological. "This model, first developed by N. B. Stonehouse and then improved by E. Krentz, has been fully worked out by J. D. Kingsbury and D. R. Bauer. In essence, the model recognizes the essential biographical dimension of the Matthew Gospel drama, but sees it subordinated to a general theological program."<sup>65</sup> The theological program mentioned refers to the messiahship of Jesus, which can be seen as the red thread of the whole Gospel. Thus, the section of Matthew 1:1-4:16 describes the person of the Messiah; Matthew 4:17-16:20 describes the proclamation of the Messiah; and Matthew 16:21-28,20 describes the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. "Jesus's identity as "the Son of David" and God's "Messiah" within the Gospel of Matthew is indisputable. Whereas Mark has three references to Jesus as the "Son of David" (Mark 10:47, 48; 12:35), Matthew includes nine (Matt 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30, 31; 21:9, 15; 22:42). Peter's confession that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of the Living God" is met with Jesus's affirmation of the confession as revealed by the Father from heaven (16:13-17). Jesus is referred to as "King of the Jews" and receives obeisance from foreign dignitaries even as a child (2:1-12). Further, Matthew's opening genealogy redounds with echoes of Davidic kingship as it begins with the words: "the record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (1:1). The Davidic messianic aspect of Jesus's identity is highlighted in the way Matthew structures his genealogy, neatly moving in three periods of fourteen generations—from Abraham to "King David" (1:2-6a), from David and the period of the kings to the Babylonian exile (1:6b-11), and from the Babylonian exile to the birth of Jesus "who is called the Messiah" (1:12-16; cf. 1:16b)."<sup>66</sup>

If the Gospel itself revolves around the messiahship of Jesus, it is to be expected that one of the controversies will remain within the same thematic perimeter. Only this time, the Savior initiates the dialogue while the Pharisees are gathered. The question was, "What do you think of Christ? Whose Son is he?". To which the Pharisees replied, without hesitation, "David's!" (v. 42). It is only at this point, in perfect rhetoric, that the Saviour states the whole point:

<sup>64</sup> Margaret Davies, *Matthew...*, 177-178.

<sup>65</sup> S. McKnight, „Evanghelia după Matei”, in Daniel G. Reid (ed.), *Dicționarul Noului Testament...*, 950.

<sup>66</sup> Joshua W. Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020) 33.

“How then does David, in spirit, call him Lord?”. This question rests on the messiahship of Psalm 2, one of the texts with a Christological impact in the Old Testament. Jesus therefore concludes, “If David therefore calls him Lord, how is he, his son?” (v. 45).

For the phrase “as it seems to you”, we have the Greek δοκέω, which refers to “to regard something as presumably true, but without particular certainty.”<sup>67</sup> Jesus is asking the Pharisees for an opinion. By the way the question is put, the Saviour does not insinuate any conviction in his interlocutors, but rather initiates a calm and friendly dialogue. For the noun “son” (“Whose Son is [the Christ]?”) we have the Greek υἱός, which refers to “a non-immediate male descendant (possibly involving a gap of several generations).” It is the descendant we are talking about, not the direct son of anyone, which poses no difficulty for the questioners. The Messiah has always been perceived as the descendant of David, who will act in the spirit of this great and unrepeatable king of Israel.<sup>68</sup>

Although Christ/One is the royal descendant of David (Is 9:7; 11:1; Ps 2), “people perceive sons as subordinates, a perspective that does not fit Jesus. The one who would reign in the Kingdom of God was David’s “Lord”, not just his descendant; he would thus be greater than the risen David.”<sup>69</sup> It is Jesus’ messiahship that makes Him different from any ordinary lineage. If on the human level, in each generational succession, descendants are better or worse, more capable, or less capable, as far as the Son of God is concerned things are quite different, even unprecedented. He is descended from David, but he is - ontologically speaking - greater than David, however important the Davidic dynasty may have been for Jewish history.

His interlocutors had to understand that “Jesus is understood to be the Christ, and the messianic descendant of David (1.1–2.12; 9.27; 12.23; 15.22; 20.30–31; 21.9,15), yet Jesus’ humility made him a better messianic agent of God than David was. Hence it was appropriate for David to call Jesus, the Christ, his successor, ‘lord’.”<sup>70</sup> As the biblical text suggests, “one of the Pharisees were able to respond to Jesus’s question. Nor from that time on did anyone dare to ask

<sup>67</sup> J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 368.

<sup>68</sup> For details on the notion of messiahship, see: Sunghoo Choi, *The Messianic Kingship of Jesus. A Study of Christology and Redemptive History in Matthew’s Gospel with Special Reference to the Royal-Enthronement Psalms* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011); Larry W. Cruch, *Messianic Psalms* (Christian Faith Publishing, 2021); David Rudolph, Joel Willitts, *Introduction to Messianic Judaism. Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2013); Kevin S. Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019); Ruben A. Bühner, *Messianic Hight Christology. New Testament Variants of Second Temple Judaism* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2021); Michael L. Morgan, Steven Weitzman (eds.), *Rethinking the Messianic Idea in Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

<sup>69</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 114.

<sup>70</sup> Margaret Davies, *Matthew...*, 178.

him more questions. The attempt to undermine Jesus's authority as a teacher by asking questions designed to entrap him or to show that he lacks legitimacy has been a failure. Those who fear him will now only intensify their conspiracy to destroy him. Jesus, however, must do what he has been sent to do, which means that he cannot avoid saying and doing what those who plot against him will use to have him killed."<sup>71</sup>

Broadly speaking, "Matthew presents Jesus as God's royal Son who enacts God's rule and saves his people by means of: (1) delivering his people from their sins; (2) authoritatively teaching, interpreting, and obeying God's Torah; (3) enacting merciful and compassionate royal justice through his deeds; and (4) inviting and enabling his disciples to share in his messianic rule and pattern of life. Jesus is the Christ who, as God's final Davidic king, enacts God's kingdom by saving his people from their sins; rightly teaching, interpreting, and embodying God's law; and enacting mercy, compassion, and justice for God's people."<sup>72</sup>

Matthew's editorial note after recounting the five controversies is illuminating. We learn that "no one was able to answer him a word, nor did anyone dare to question him from that day on" (v. 46). We understand that this was the last day of the confrontations, the circumstance in which the Saviour silenced his adversaries. They could neither answer (ἀποκρίνομαι) nor ask (ἐπερωτάω). Their silence betrayed their weakness. Though their hearts remained hardened, though they would still question Jesus, they could not. The risk to themselves was too great since they had been publicly defeated by the Saviour's wise and authoritative answers.

## Conclusion

Unlike the other gospels, Matthew emphasizes in a special way the polemical character of Jesus' final service. This evangelist, "carefully edits his source and makes clear that the issue is not whether the Torah is valid but how it is to be correctly interpreted. There is little doubt that we see here a current halakhic dispute between the pharisaic understanding of the law and the Scriptures and the alternative exegesis of Matthew's community which it traced back to Jesus himself. Each of the opposing in situations therefore has its own authoritative tradition in terms of law observance. It seems clear in view of its prominence in the Gospel that the issue of the Torah and its correct interpretation was one of the contributing factors to the eventual separation of the Matthean community from the Jewish parent body."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006) 194.

<sup>72</sup> Joshua W. Jipp, *The Messianic Theology...*, 34.

<sup>73</sup> David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 190-191.

A comparison between the episode of the Master in the Temple astonishing the teachers of the Law (Luke 2:46-50) and the hypostases just discussed may be illustrative. Albrecht Dürer's famous painting *Jesus among the Doctors* (1506, oil on wood, 64.3 x 80.3 cm, Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid) shows Jesus as a teenager (as he would be shown at that age), surrounded by the elders of the people. This encounter "takes on the character of a dramatic intrusion. The artist himself, who painted this picture during a stay in Venice, declares in a letter to a German friend, dated 23 September 1506, that he has made "a picture such as he has never made before". What is new about it? First, as several important studies have shown, the Gospel narrative is drastically purged in the name of an eminently pictorial *mise-en-scène*... Neither Mary nor Joseph, says the Gospel, understood that Jesus was not really an intruder in the Temple, for he was, so to speak, "at home". By his presence and his words, he proclaims his identity and reverses the intrusive relationship. Suddenly, it is the guardians of the Temple who become the Other. Dürer thus places his young and apollonian Jesus at the centre of the composition and relegates the "doctors" to the periphery. The Son of God is calm, focused, serene. The doctors are troubled, confused. Some protest, others doubt. Jesus is seen facing them, his head slightly bowed. The doctors are represented in various poses, mostly in three-quarter or profile. The Christic frontality seals identity, the Jewish profile - alterity."<sup>74</sup>

By contrast, the benevolent attitude of the time turns, at the end of three years of messianic activity, into open adversity. Then they were amazed by the wisdom of the "teenager", now they are outraged by Christ's words. Then the conversation was friendly and cordial, now it is heated and oppressive. It was not Jesus who had changed in the meantime, but the attitude of the Jewish upper class. As the evidence of his divinity grew, so did the resistance in their hearts. But by some providence, even adversity brought God's wisdom to light. These controversies, born of contempt and contestation, gave Jesus the opportunity for an unprecedented conceptual victory. Somewhat foreshadowing his Passion, the altercations with the leaders showed us an almost unknown face of Christ, that of a fighter for truth and the interests of the heavenly kingdom.

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<sup>74</sup> Victor Ieronim Stoichiță, *Imaginea celuilalt. Negri, evrei, musulmani și țigani în zorii epocii moderne: 1453-1800* (București: Humanitas, 2017) 23-25.