

The Pagans and the Tax Collector of the Gospel According to Matthew

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ABSTRACT. The attitudinal complex existing among the groups of people mentioned by St. Matthew the Evangelist is strikingly similar to the situation existing in the Church before the Gentiles shared and inherited the Gospel. The clear distinction between “gentiles” and “publican” is not justified in the second part of the apostolic age, when the Gentiles were the majority in the Church. The belief that the Aramaic version of the Gospel of Matthew was written before the Apostolic Council is based on these everyday realities of the Jewish Christian world, revolving around the Temple, religious parties, rabbis, etc. Dating the writing after 70 AD, as presented in most modern commentaries, does not justify several verses mentioned only in the first canonical Gospel, including Mt 18:15-17. The erring brother may ultimately end up as a pagan and a publican. For the disciples, as for the Jewish Jerusalemite Christians, the Saviour's command was actual, something not at all necessary for later majority Jewish Christians. It would also justify taking the fragment from other Matthean sources or the hypothetical Q if it were to be found in other evangelists. It is just that it is the proper place of the Gospel of Matthew. That is why we consider the Gospel of Matthew to be the first writing of the New Testament in its Aramaic form, intended for Jewish Christians, constantly concerned with preserving ethnic purity and the Abrahamic heritage.

Keywords: Pagans, Tax Collector, Jesus, Gentiles, Church, Matthew

Introduction

The attention that the Evangelist Matthew gives to the tax collectors and pagans is only justified if he wrote the Gospel before the Apostolic Council and

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if he addressed the Palestinian Christian community. The text called “fraternal correction” corresponds to a set of rules of conduct of the Christian community in which pagans had not entered but resented the tax collectors.

In a chapter on forgiveness, Jesus teaches his disciples how to deal with one who does wrong: “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican” (Mt 18:15-17) ¹.

There is a clear difference between a personal, forgivable mistake² and a mistake that can only be forgiven by a radical change in the person who persists in the mistake³.

The addition is also influenced by Peter's question about forgiving the brother who has wronged him: while the first mistake can only make him after three attempts to forgive the brother as “a heathen and a publican”, the second, personal mistake must be forgiven “seventy times seven”. Thus, “the two consecutive fragments have nothing in common but the theme of forgiveness.”⁴

After Judas Iscariot, the New Testament records many mistakes and condemnations of the brothers who erred: Ananias and Sapphira, Simon Magus, the incestuous man of Corinth, but none of them became to the brothers in the Church like a pagan and a publican. Besides, Christians beyond the borders of pre-Apostolic Judaism did not notice the negative charge of the terms “pagan” and “publican”. We therefore set out to find out what the speakers of Matthew's Gospel meant by “heathen” and “tax collector”, and to show that this text is a clear argument in favour of the traditional dating of Matthew's Gospel in 44 AD.

St. Matthew, between pagans and tax collectors

Biblical Jews learned to remain united around moral and religious values, through constant disassociation from people and customs that could lead them away from God and His commandments. In Matthew's Gospel, there

¹ “Matthew 18:15-17 represents perhaps the most familiar and foundational passage concerning discipline in the New Testament.” David L. Burggraff, “Principles of Discipline in Matthew 18:15-17,” *Calvary Baptist Theological Journal* 4 (1988): 4.

² The addition “he has wronged you” can only be justified by assuming the text of Luke 17:3-4.

³ Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 93-102.

⁴ Marie-Joseph Lagrange, *Évangile selon saint Matthieu*, Vol. 1 (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1923), 353.

are several categories of people whom the Saviour's contemporaries avoided and condemned because of their idolatrous religion, heavy sins and injustices done to the people. Of these, the pagans and tax collectors "benefited" from the fiercest hatred that the Jews of Matthew's Gospel share among themselves, as a common heritage, handed down with sanctity from generation to generation, until the names of the wicked become a memory⁵.

Jews did not accompany them on journeys, conversations and even more so at meals. At the same time, financial collaboration becomes an attitudinal standard: whoever opens his purse to help the Jews is "righteous" (Acts 10:22) and "son of Abraham" (Lk 19:9-10), otherwise the tax collectors are accused of injustice (cf. Mt 20:13; Lk 16:8,10; 18:6; Acts 1:18; 8:23). The pagans, strangers to the chosen people and therefore to their religion, are Roman soldiers and rulers, the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon, the Canaanites, then the Samaritans and the Idumeans. The disciples of the Saviour also cultivated this attitude towards the Gentiles until around 50 AD: "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and any city of the Samaritans enter ye not" (Mt 10:5)⁶.

The Gentiles inflict suffering on the Jews: "And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles" (Mt 10:18). The Saviour Himself suffered at their hands: "and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again" (Mt 20:19). The authority of the "Gentiles" over the Christians (cf. 1 Cor 6:1) will be seen especially in the governmental and imperial tribunals in which the disciples are to be judged after the Saviour Himself has been judged by the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate⁷.

Most of the pagans and tax collectors of Matthew's Gospel become mere "sinners" in the parallel places in Luke: "for if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?" (Mt 5:46) while Luke writes "For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again" (Lk 6:32-34). The speakers of Luke's Gospel were not so much interested in the Jewish tax collectors as in sinners.

⁵ In the 1st century the association between the pagans and the pagans is unanimously accepted. Joachim Jeremias, C.H. Cave, F.H. Cave, *Jerusalem in the time of Jesus: an investigation into economic and social conditions during the New Testament period* (London: Blackwell, 1969), 310-22; Perrin, *Rediscovering*, 93-4.

⁶ Thus, the disciples will use routes other than those practised by the pagans, or those that lead to the cities of the pagans, so as not to expose themselves to danger. Lagrange, *Gospels*, 196.

⁷ Lagrange, *Gospel*, 203.

If the pagans could be avoided, the customs officers, employed by the Romans to tax the Jews⁸, are much better known and condemned by them. From the meals Matthew, Levi and Zacchaeus organized, we understand that they were of great material status, ate and drank much, and consorted with sinners (themselves unreservedly called sinners), pagans and harlots (cf. Mt 21:32)⁹. Their wealth was very great, yet at most one-eighth of Zacchaeus' wealth came from unrighteousness (Lk 19:8)¹⁰.

The Saviour is accused of having sat at the table with the tax collectors, of being their friend and of adopting a diet like theirs: "Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" (Mt 9:11), "a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." (Mt 11:19)¹¹ The diet of the tax collectors and their friends involved eating and drinking wine in a different way from that of the other Jews, i.e. they were greedy and drunkards¹². In the same way they are also associated with harlots, encouraged by the immorality and money of the sinful tax collectors¹³.

The history of taxation for the Empire begins in 67 BC, when the Jewish aristocracy, Jewish priests and representatives of the Sanhedrin were collecting taxes.¹⁴ In the time of Herod the Idumean, this task was performed by slaves, with the status of royal officials.¹⁵ Certainly, the tax system was so unbearable that after Herod the Great's death, the people demanded the abolition of taxes

⁸ Customs officials remain mere tax collectors, in Romans: "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour" (Rom 13:7). Whether hostile to Christians or not, customs officials are representatives of God's will: " (the rulers) are God's servants, continuing in this service unceasingly" (Rom 13:6).

⁹ The term *publicans*, from the Greek *τελώνης*, may be the imperfect Aramaic translation of *telane* (from the verb, *telal*, "to play, sport"; cf. *tul*, "to walk about, to be at leisure, to enjoy one's self"). Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Bibli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, vol. 1 (New York: Pardes, 1950), 538, cf. 537, 523. This was not a tax collector, but a lover of sport with a sinful life: "the contemporary term, *playboys* might be a fairly close equivalent". Wm. Walker, "Jesus and the Tax Collectors," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97. 2 (1978): 237.

¹⁰ If we accept that "the number of those who were afflicted by Zacchaeus was very great". Vasile Mihoc, *Predici exegetice la duminicile de peste an* (Sibiu: Teofania, 2001):224, it means that Zacchaeus' wealth was truly colossal.

¹¹ It is difficult to appreciate the view that the tax collectors were Jews who willingly gave up their ancestral lineage and faith to become pagans. If they had apostatized, they would have been neither impressed by Christ nor so closely watched by the Pharisees. John Donahue, "Tax Collectors and Sinners: An Attempt at Identification," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (1971): 40.

¹² Walker, "Jesus," 226.

¹³ Walker, "Jesus," 229.

¹⁴ Donahue, "Tax Collectors," 44.

¹⁵ Josephus Flavius, *Antiquities*, 17, 307.

levied on purchases and sales of goods¹⁶. Depending on the political situation in the regions of Palestine, taxation was supervised by the empire's representatives in the territory. Under these circumstances, the tax collectors were not pagans, as in Judea, but Jews from the entourage of the ruling Jewish kings Antipas, Agrippa I and Agrippa II¹⁷. The Jews' hatred of the tax collectors was therefore increased by their betrayal of the national cause, of those who had the power to throw off Roman oppression¹⁸. The hatred of the tax collectors was also increased by their greed, but also by the regular violation of the customs of the elders by bringing sinful foreigners close to the Jews: "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles" (Gal 2:15). The "unrighteous" tax collectors in need of repentance are associated with the "sick" sinners who are described as "sick" and in need of a doctor. Yet Jesus eats with them at the table¹⁹, without fear of becoming sick or contaminated by their impurity²⁰.

The spiritual frontier of Jewish Christians

Can pagans be equated with sinners? Sinners are pagans: "Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Mt 26:45). The association of tax collectors with sinners in Matthew's tax collector's house is clear: "and it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples." (Mt 9:10). The Pharisees' accusation is obvious, but not virulent: "And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (9:11-13). The accusation of this kind of life, which includes eating and drinking wine, will hang

¹⁶ Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 124-6.

¹⁷ Donahue, "Tax Collectors," 45.

¹⁸ There is no greater hatred than that between zealots and customs officers. The former were the defenders of the national cause, while the customs officers were the traitors to that cause. However, in the group of disciples, these two types of people meet without hating each other. Oscar Cullmann, *The State in the New Testament* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1956), 22.

¹⁹ We consider unjust any theory that denies the authenticity of the dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees over the meal served in Matthew's house as an "artificial composition". Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 47 or as a late Church explanation of the Saviour's words.

²⁰ In a similar way, Jesus sits at a table with the tax collectors in the guesthouse of Zacchaeus, whose name translates as "the righteous one" or "the pure one," which contrasts strikingly with his designation as a "sinner" and one of the "lost." Walker, "Jesus," 234.

over Jesus, but will not be the subject of the accusations at the end of his earthly life: “The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children” (Mt 11:19).

The Christians to whom St. Matthew addresses the Evangelist have a wealth of knowledge about the Jewish environment, about the active honouring of the temple, and especially about how the Jews kept themselves at a distance from the unclean world around them. The author groups the Savior's words thematically, so identifying the place and time in the Savior's life in which He speaks these words is almost impossible.

The Apostles, like the Christians of the Apostolic Age, are particularly interested in the relationship they should have with those outside their group, which defines the boundary of the spiritual realm. The “chosen”, “separated”, “consecrated” status of which most Jews were aware.

One of the most famous Pharisees will mention God's command to separate the elect from all that is evil: which the Pharisees had crystallized around the command “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:17). Such a commandment must have caused the Pharisees to *separate* themselves even from their Jewish brethren who did not keep the Law, whom they would consider cursed: “But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed” (Jn 7:49).

Under these circumstances, we can speak of a veritable spiritual boundary between *saints* and *pagans* which the Jews strictly guarded, even if they allowed the pagans to approach them as proselytes, even in the temple courts of Jerusalem.

Under the Roman occupation, the borders that demarcated the territories inhabited by the Jews had no power to separate the “chosen ones” from the nations of the earth, but they could quantify the movement of people *to* and *from* the holy places on the great feasts of Judaism. The only territorial boundary, relevant to the separation of Jews from Gentiles, was the inscription placed between the 'court of the Gentiles' and the 'court of the Jews' in the Temple.

But the real boundary between Jews and Gentiles was attitudinal, the latter “benefiting” from a consciously assumed contempt from the Jews like that which the Pharisees provided to the other Jews for their poor observance of the prescriptions of the Law.

Thus, they avoided the nearness of pagans, tax collectors, harlots, sinners, the wounded and the dead, to keep themselves clean and pleasing to God.

The book of *Acts* gives us clear information about how the early Christians, exclusively Jews, kept the border between Judaism and Gentiles holy. The Jerusalemite Christians were strikingly like those who received the Matthean version of the Gospel: they were very familiar with the Law and the Temple, strictly observed all the commandments, including the rabbinic ones, but at the same time lived in communion and breaking of bread. For all these Christians, “tax collectors” and “pagans” were everyday realities, as was the collective Jewish attitude (whether the Jews were Christians or not) towards these repugnant people.

The salvation of pagans and tax collectors

The Gospel of Matthew allows us to believe that tax collectors together with Gentiles can inherit the kingdom of heaven. The Centurion of Capernaum, whom St Luke tells us built the synagogue of the Jews in that city, whose servant was healed by word alone, and the Canaanite woman, whose daughter Jesus healed as he spoke to her, are eloquent examples of the fact that God's love is not exclusively within the borders of the Jewish world. The faith of the Centurion and the faith of the Canaanite woman are praised by the Saviour in comparative assessments which did not do credit to those who considered themselves children of God: “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (Mt 8:10), and “O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt” (Mt 15:28)²¹.

In the case of these pagans who have been saved by the Lord, we see a previous preparation and an assumption of their condition as pagans, with humility. The family context in which the families of the Gentiles know their need of God is also compared to Abraham's family, in which his children sit at a separate table from the Gentiles, or at most the Gentiles (like dogs) feed on the crumbs that fall from their masters' table (Mt 15:27).

Therefore, even if they have partaken of God's mercy, these exemplary pagans do not sit at a table with the Jews and cannot be considered heirs of the kingdom of heaven: “many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 8:11-12)²².

²¹ This woman could be compared to the Moabitess Ruth, who became a Jewess known for her faith and determination to devote herself exclusively to her mother-in-law.

²² The Gentiles are not the lost sheep of the house of Israel, for whom Christ became incarnate, but are the people to whom he will turn his face only after a persistent request from the Apostles, as representatives of the Church. Glenna Jackson, “Enemies of Israel: Ruth and the Canaanite woman,” *HTS: Theological Studies* 59.3 (2003): 789.

This prophecy has not been fulfilled. The Gentiles do not sit at a table with the Jews even after they become Christians, and the former's adoption will be conditional on faith. The systematization of the teaching about the reception of Gentiles into the Christian Church, which was composed exclusively of Jews, was done in the middle of the apostolic age, based on the most familiar definitions of the chosen people.

Ethnic exclusivism, based on Abrahamic filiation, entitles Jews to inherit the Kingdom. The Apostle Paul demonstrates that Abraham had other sons promised by God, who are his descendants, true sons because they have faith, like their father: "They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son." (Rom 9:8-9).

The children of the flesh, though born in his house, to the extent that they do not become Christians, are not his true sons, because they do not have faith like their father. So, Christians, though not Jews and circumcised, are true sons of Abraham: "that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph 3:6).

In this context, it can be seen that the most sensitive point in the coexistence of Jews and non-Jews is the meal. A Jew can easily be defined by "what he eats", but also by "with whom he sits at the table."²³ The two categories of people could share the same faith if they could keep the unity of the meal.

There were clear rules about cleansing, for unforeseen situations of excessive closeness to those of another nation: "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (Acts 10:28), through ritual cleansings, washings specific to the Coshier laws. But the prohibition against dining with Gentiles is clear and imputable. Thus, St. Ap. Peter, after having baptized the Suzanna Cornelius in Caesarea Palestine, was rebuked by the brethren simply for having eaten with pagans: "And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them" (Acts 11:2-3)²⁴.

²³ Peter Tomson, "Jewish food laws in early Christian community discourse," *Semeia-Missoula* (1999): 193.

²⁴ The testimony about the pagans was radically changed through food. When a hungry Peter prayed to God, he received in a vision a tablecloth with animals he considered unclean, a symbol of the pagan Gentiles who used these foods. Peter's opposition "for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth" (Acts 11:8) receives the divine command not to consider unclean the food *and people* God has cleansed. Tomson, "Jewish food," 207.

While approaching Gentiles is permitted and recommended, if it is of material benefit to the Jews (whether they are Christians or not), sitting at a table with the “uncircumcised” is strictly forbidden.

The same Apostle, by the name of Kefas, made himself a servant in Antioch of Syria and separated himself from those who sat at Paul's table, when “some from James” came. Thus, the concern to preserve Jewish ethnicity, in the context of the threat of imminent pagan contamination at the Eucharistic table, causes a separation of Christian worship into two altars: that at which Paul serves, on the one hand, and that at which those of James serve.

This is the first challenge to which the Church had to respond: either decide that all Christians should be circumcised, thus becoming true Jews, or reconsider the situation of Judaism and welcome the uncircumcised to the Christian Liturgy without reservation.

In the Gospels, tax collectors are depicted in pejorative colours. For example, the greatest of the tax collectors in Capernaum, named Zacchaeus²⁵, is perched on a sycamore tree, perhaps just at the time of fruit ripening. The customs officer, Levi, sits at the customs house and won't let anyone through without paying the fee. So, we identify the tax collectors as those who collected taxes for the empire, as direct imperial taxes, or for Herod's family²⁶.

Other tax collectors are not as stigmatised. For example, those who collect the money needed for the relief of the famine-stricken people, for cultural activities, the newly instituted taxes (corban) and the temple offering: “And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?” (Mt 17:24).

The humblest publican we know is St. Matthew. He declares himself a tax collector, assuming the status of traitor to the national cause by collecting taxes.

The conversion of the tax collector Matthew is the moment when the fundamental difference between the mass of Jews, in communion with one another, strictly separated from any mixture with pagans, including tax collectors, is observed. “And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his

²⁵ Jesus sits at a table with the tax collectors in the guesthouse of Zacchaeus, whose name translates as “the righteous one” or “the pure one,” which contrasts strikingly with his designation as a “sinner” and one of the “lost.” Walker, “Jesus,” 234.

²⁶ Taxing the fishing on the Sea of Tiberias was to benefit Herod's family. The Mediterranean Sea brought income to the king. K.C. Hanson, “The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 27 (1997): 100.

disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mt 9:9-13).

So, the salvation of the tax collectors and pagans is possible. The meal, as a sign of the communion of the chosen people, but also the foundation of the unity of the Church, in a Eucharistic context, is only possible for the Jews before Pentecost. For the Gentiles as well as for the Jews, Baptism is the Mystery that opens the way to salvation.

Church discipline

From the very beginning, the Church has made clear rules for maintaining order in the early Christian community. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 4), the incestuous man of Corinth, are some clear cases in which ecclesial authority was shown to restore discipline.

The Saviour's command to restore fellowship with the erring brother is surprising (cf. Mt 18:15-17)²⁷. We note that Matthean ecclesial discipline is pre-synodal. Any condemnation of sinners by the Church in the Acts is much more radical and omits the two means of reconciliation (between you and your brother, then with two or three witnesses).

Is this an argument for the late writing of the Gospel of Matthew, influenced by the opening of the Church to the Gentiles in the early second century? On the contrary, we believe that this kind of discipline, in which members of the Church are punished in a similar way to tax collectors and pagans, only fits the exclusively Jewish Christian community, possible only before 44 AD. Also, given Luke's frequent use of "sinners" in places where "tax collectors" or "Gentiles" appear in Matthew, it demonstrates that the Lucan version is posthumous to the Matthean: "The problem of the chronological and literary relationship between Matthew and Luke cannot here be treated, but, on the face of it, it seems more likely that the later tradition would have substituted *sinners* for *tax collectors* and *Gentiles* than vice versa."²⁸

What kind of sin is targeted here? Sin does not directly concern the brother who oversees, but another brother (cf. I Cor. 6:1), the Saviour's words are addressed to those who have the power to establish justice among the brethren. Trying to identify the sins that the "brother" does to be considered a pagan and a

²⁷ Ἐὰν δὲ ἁμαρτήσῃ [εἰς σὲ].

²⁸ Walker, "Jesus," 225.

fornicator, we can find in the writing of another Jewish hagiographer,²⁹ the following references to the sin of fornication and not only: “these, dreaming, defile the body, despise the lordship and blaspheme (heavenly) greatness” (Jdg. 8), “they despise what they do not know, and what they know by nature, like the beasts of the earth, they find their destruction in” (Jn 10).

Sin is the cause of separation from the other brothers, which is especially noticeable at family meals: “in relation to his countrymen, for whom the preservation of purity/separation from sin, and especially the separation from idolatry and its decadent temptations, had proved to be truly a *stumbling block*, Moses showed not only steadfastness in faith, but also much zeal and effort to acquire a greater closeness to God.”³⁰

One issue that has not been thoroughly researched is the association between “a pagan and a tax collector” which becomes the attitudinal model for the lost brother. Was it not enough to be like a pagan, or like a tax collector? Why did he have to become like a heathen and a publican? The answer can be given by the conjunction *καί*, which can have an associative, explanatory or hierarchical role. To delineate the worst in the association of the two categories of people, a “brother” could thus end up without the chance of recovery, remaining lost forever (cf. Mt 18:15).

Conclusions

“Jesus and the life of the Matthean community are in continuity with the traditions and promises of Israel's history. Indeed, as a result of this distinctive use of Scripture by Matthew, Jesus - and through him the Matthean community - is depicted as the fulfillment of that very history and tradition. This constitutes both a defense of Matthew's community and a challenge to the opposition.”³¹

Even though St. Matthew offers the prospect of salvation for the Gentiles, they are not overlooked for their great sins, the greatest of which is crucifying the Savior Christ.

The greatest mistake ever committed by anyone, in the view of Christians on the eve of Pentecost, is condemning the Savior Christ to death, being handed over to sinful men to be crucified. The Saviour's prophecy is thus rendered by

²⁹ The author of the Jude “is a Jew, since in ancient literature and inscriptions the name never appears as that of a pagan”. Mihai Ciurea, *Epistola sobornicească a Sfântului Iuda. Introducere, traducere, comentariu și teologie* (Craiova: Mitropolia Olteniei, 2018): 26.

³⁰ Ion Reșceanu, „Fasting in the Old Testament: a means of Penitence for restoring man's relationship with God,” *Orthodox Theology in Dialogue* (2021): 156.

³¹ J.A. Overman, *Matthew's gospel and formative Judaism: The social world of the Matthean community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990): 78.

Matthew: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again." (Mt 20:18-19). In the Acts we find that Peter rebukes the Jews for crucifying Jesus: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:23-24).

So, the blame for the death of the Saviour is shifted almost exclusively after Pentecost to the Jewish authority, Pilate remaining "washed" of sin, as are the soldiers and all those who laid hands on Christ, of course without piety³².

Thus, the appreciative condemnation of the lost brother as a "heathen and a publican" has no correspondence in the Christian Church of the second half of the apostolic age and refers to the common faults of the two categories of people, towards whom the entire contempt of the Palestinian Jewish community is directed.

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³² The brother's fault is not compatible with anger "That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." (Mt 5:22).

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