

## Matthean Allusions and Echoes in the Catholic Epistle of James

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**ABSTRACT.** The present article aims to examine the theology of the Epistle of James through the lens of the Gospel according to Matthew. James is a unique text in the New Testament deeply rooted in the tradition of Hellenistic Judaism. The writing presents theological ideas in the form of sayings or sentences, closely resembling the wisdom literature of the Old Testament and the Synoptic Gospels. The practical nature, rare doctrinal fragments, and the presence of recurring themes make it challenging to establish a clear division of the five chapters. They can be best grouped around eight homiletic-didactic discourses, mostly built around a macarism or aphorism, adapted by the author to a specific theme. Most allusions and echoes can be linked to the Sermon on the Mount, but not exclusively. Even though some texts resonate strongly with the Matthean text, especially thematically, and the phenomenon of intertextuality is impressive, it would still be quite bold to assert that James had a copy of Matthew in front of him when writing his Epistle. This is confirmed by the lack of exact quotations. It is very likely a catechetical or didactic tradition already present in the first-century Christian teaching at the confluence of the Jewish and Hellenistic environment, strongly influenced by Matthew, whose popularity is beyond doubt. The hypothesis is supported by the presence of similar themes in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, literature highly esteemed in early Christian communities. It is therefore very possible that James was familiar with the Matthean Gospel through his cultic reading, justifying the theological depth evident in the treatment of common themes.

**Keywords:** *macarism*, aphorism, wisdom, wealth, poverty, good deeds

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## Introduction

The Catholic Epistle of St James represents, from many perspectives, a unique text in the New Testament canon, especially due to its practical and moralizing character, as well as at the stylistic and lexicological levels. Specifically, it is one of the most interesting and suggestive New Testament ethical texts, with a very rich and cultivated vocabulary<sup>1</sup> – a sort of pastoral encouragement addressed by the author to the Churches in the Jewish diaspora. Deeply rooted in the tradition of Hellenistic Judaism, the writing presents theological ideas in the form of sayings or sentences, closely resembling the wisdom literature of the Old Testament (*e.g.*, Proverbs, Sirach, Ecclesiastes, etc.) as well as the Synoptic Gospels. James' aphorisms are rendered in an expressive and concise form that moves easily between orality and textuality. From this perspective, the Epistle is usually viewed as a diatribe or a moral parenesis. The author of the Epistle is, therefore, a cultured member of the church, familiar with both Judeo-Christian teaching methods and Hellenistic ones. He offers sincere exhortations, avoiding boasting of his knowledge through frequent quotations resulting from his readings. However, his text contains many allusions or echoes of expressions and ideas that suggest various associations and relationships. Formal quotations from the Holy Scripture are few (*cf.* Jas 2:8, 11, 23; 4:5-6), and one of them (*cf.* Jas 4:5) is apocryphal, sparking debates among commentators, both regarding its source and its meaning.

Even though it is highly likely that the author is familiar with Jewish sapiential writings, we cannot accept the opinion of some modern exegetes who argue that the Epistle was originally a Jewish composition to which certain Christian elements were later added. Firstly, the two references to Jesus Christ, through the theonym *κύριος* (*cf.* Jas 1:1; 2:1), are found in all manuscripts and biblical lectionaries. We are dealing with two of the most important Christological confessions in the New Testament (*cf.* Jn 20:29; Lk 24:26). Secondly, as mentioned earlier, we can identify numerous similarities between our text and the evangelical tradition, even though there is no direct quotation of Jesus' sayings. In other words, James is saturated with Christ's teachings and breathes a Christian spirit. Most likely, St James employs an already existing oral tradition within Judeo-Christian circles, especially in Jerusalem<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The text contains 63 hapax legomena, including 12 absolute hapax legomena, 6 biblical hapax legomena, and 45 neotestamentary hapax legomena.

<sup>2</sup> Simion Todoran, *Epistola Sfântului Iacov. Introducere, Traducere și Comentariu* (București, 1997), 24.

From the literary genre perspective, the writing presents itself as an encyclical (*cf.* Ecumenius: “*catolicae vocantur, id est encyclicae*”), meaning a circular letter addressed to the universal Church, sent by St James, “a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, o the twelve tribes who are dispersed” (Jas 1:1). It is a letter of comfort, written not sentimentally but with a focus on sound teaching. The designation of the recipients is undoubtedly metaphorical, encompassing all Christians, following the model of the twelve tribes of Israel, dispersed in the ideological, economic, and social universe of the Roman Empire. Throughout the writing, the same recipients will also be called “brothers” or “beloved brothers” (*cf.* Jas 1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 10, 12, 19).

St Theophylact of Bulgaria, at the same time, speaks of the practical nature of the Epistle: “James himself, writing this epistle to those scattered among the twelve tribes who have believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, writes it as a teaching, instructing them about the distinction of temptations, which come from God Himself and which come from the hearts of men. He teaches that not only words but also deeds should demonstrate faith, and that it is not the hearers of the Law but the doers of the Law who are justified. As for the rich, he commands that they should not be honoured in the churches more than the poor, but rather they should be rebuked and confronted for their pride. Toward the end, he comforts the unjust, urging them to endure patiently until the coming of the Judge. Teaching them about patience and showing them the benefit of endurance from the example of Job, he commands that the priests of the Church be called to the sick and that they be diligent in turning the erring and deceived back to the truth. For the one who does this will receive from the Lord the forgiveness of sins. Thus ends the epistle”<sup>3</sup>.

Considering the practical nature of the writing, the relatively rare doctrinal passages, and the presence of recurring themes (*e.g.*, perfection, wisdom, faith and good works, wealth and poverty, etc.), it is quite challenging to establish a clear division of the 108 verses. However, the five chapters of the Epistle of James can be best grouped around eight homiletic-didactic discourses, a true “moral code” corresponding to authentic Christian living. Thus, each discourse can be attributed to a main theme, although it is later developed either through a series of secondary topics or through a list of relevant examples. This reading key of the Epistle highlights, in a positive way, the inspired use of word connections (*i.e.*, concatenation)<sup>4</sup>, as well as thematic recapitulations that

<sup>3</sup> Sf. Teofilact al Bulgariei, *Tâlcuire cu de-amănuntul la Epistolele sobornicești*, ed. Ștefan Voronca, trans. by the monks Gherontie and Grigorie (Dascălul) (Iași: Doxologia, 2015), 15.

<sup>4</sup> The Rhetorical form by which one idea leads to another through the correspondence of words in adjacent verses, constructed on the same root, is known as ‘concatenation’.

link multiple sections, forming a cohesive whole. In this way, the various sources the author resorts to (whether oral or written) are consciously adapted to fit his style and purpose.

The main discourses or sections of the writing can be summarized as follows<sup>5</sup>:

1. Enduring trials with patience (Jas 1:2-18);
2. Reverence and action (Jas 1:19-27);
3. Love of neighbor (Jas 2:1-13);
4. Faith and good works (Jas 2:14-26);
5. Controlled speech and slander (Jas 3:1-12);
6. Wisdom and division (Jas 3:13-4:12);
7. Two curses: Woe to you, the rich! (Jas 4:13-5:6);
8. Long-suffering (Jas 5:7-20).

Most of these sections are built around a certain macarism or aphorism, adapted by the author to a specific theme. However, even though each of the eight identified discourses contains evident parallels with the Gospel according to Matthew, there are no precise quotations. Most allusions and echoes can be connected to the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), but not only. While the author's use of the Synoptic Gospels is considered problematic, and direct dependence cannot be asserted, most commentators identify numerous thematic parallels, especially with Matthew, and to a lesser extent, with the Gospel according to Luke. E. J. Goodspeed goes even further than most scholars, stating that "it may be that James knew the Gospel of Matthew"<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, we will attempt an analysis of these Matthean allusions and echoes in the Catholic Epistle of James, as well as how the text itself reflects such influence from well-known Gospel motifs. We will analyze them one by one.

### **Enduring trials with patience (Jas 1:2-18)**

Following the epistolary prescription (cf. Jas 1:1), St James immediately sets forth a series of brief exhortations (cf. Jas 1:2-4), which will constitute the first part of his message, connected through verbal connections (*i.e.*, concatenation) rather than through specific themes, but introducing certain arguments that will be developed later in the text. Then, the author transitions to another essential aspect of Christian living: how prayer should be made to receive God's wisdom (cf. Jas 1:5-8). He does not speak of wisdom (*σοφία*) in

<sup>5</sup> Massey H. Shepherd, Jr, "The Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew," *JBL* 1 (1956): 42-44.

<sup>6</sup> Edgar J. Goodspeed, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 291.

the abstract, in philosophical terms. Still, he contemplates the “gift of wisdom from above” within the context of fidelity to God, from which arises a new way of understanding ourselves and others. If this new *modus vivendi* that transforms the believer weakens, it must be sought again as a gift from God, without any doubt and with a pure soul<sup>7</sup>.

As the first bishop of the Christian community in Jerusalem, which was not very wealthy (cf. Rom 15:26, 31; Acts 6:1), St James is concerned with the theme of social justice, the ongoing balance between the rich and the poor, as an essential dimension of authentic religious commitment (cf. 1 Cor 11:18; 1 Tm 6:17; 1 Jn 3:17). This is the moment when the author expresses the “option of God for the poor.”<sup>8</sup> The main theological issue is not wealth itself, but the relationship to it, both wealthy and those who mediate for them. It is, in fact, a concern that includes the condemnation of oppression and indifference towards the poor and ensures the eschatological overturning of their situation.

Therefore, in this first section of the Epistle, the author combines several of his favourite topics, connecting them with a macarism whose core is likely built around the formula: “Blessed are those who endure evil, for they will receive good things” (*μακάριοι οἱ ὑπομένουσι κακίας/πονηρίας ὅτι αὐτοὶ λήμψονται ἀγαθά*). This is evident, especially in the beatitude in Jas 1:12<sup>9</sup>, which resonates with the one concerning the reward that “those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness” will receive in Mt 5:10-12 (cf. Lk 6:22-23).

Viewed from another perspective, this section could be considered a commentary on the last request of the Lord’s Prayer: “And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil.” (Mt 6:13; cf. Lk 11:4), or even on the Savior’s general statement about prayer: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Mt 7:7; cf. Lk 11:9). However, the emphasis on prayer with faith and without doubting in Jas 1:6<sup>10</sup> has a close parallel only in the Gospel according to Matthew: “Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it will happen.” (Mt 21:21; cf. Mk 11:23). Similarly, the teaching that all good gifts come from God in Jas 1:17 is closer to the version in Mt 7:11, “So if you, despite

<sup>7</sup> Louis Simon, *Une Ethique de La Sagesse. Commentaire l’Epître de Jacques* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1966), 34–38.

<sup>8</sup> David Hutchinson Edgar, *Has God Not Chosen the Poor?: The Social Setting of the Epistle of James* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 31.

<sup>9</sup> “Blessed (*μακάριος*) is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” (Jas 1:12).

<sup>10</sup> “But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.” (Jas 1:6).

being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”, rather than to the parallel form in Lk 11:13, where “good gifts” are replaced with the “Holy Spirit.” This significantly indicates that where there is a common material in the Gospel traditions, St James is generally closer to Matthew’s theology<sup>11</sup>.

### Reverence and action (Jas 1:19-27)

After conveying a series of teachings, presenting some fundamental aspects of the Christian faith, St James returns to exhortations, relying on various motifs from the wisdom literature of the Old Testament (*e.g.*, Prv 10:19; 13:3; Sir 5:11-13; 4:29; 1QH 1:34-37). Biblical texts explicitly use the language of beneficence to describe God. The common Greek term for “benefactor” is *εὐεργέτης* (from *εὖ* = “good” and *ἔργον* = “work”). In the Septuagint, out of the 22 occurrences of the word family based on the root *εὐεργ-*, in connection with goodwill, 14 refer to God and are found in the Old Testament wisdom literature. In the New Testament, St Luke presents God the Father as the ultimate Benefactor, who persists in actions contrary to human inclinations, such as caring for those in distress<sup>12</sup>.

The first topic addressed by St James in this section concerns “anger” (*ὀργή*; cf. Jas 1:19-20). St Matthew speaks on several occasions about the “anger of God” (*ira Dei*), not only in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt 5:22 ff.), but also addressing the issue of anger in human relationships and emphasizing that an angry person falls under God’s judgment. What is stated in Jas 1:20, “for a man’s anger does not bring about the righteousness of God,” fully resonates with the Matthean perspective. Moreover, the beatitude in the second section is undoubtedly the one in Jas 1:25: “But one who has looked intently at the perfect law, the law of freedom, and has continued in it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an active doer, this person will be blessed (*μακάριος*) in what he does.”

However, one could assert that behind this entire second section of the Epistle lies the evangelical principle articulated by Jesus Christ in Mt 7:21, 26: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter [...] And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.” (cf. Lk 6:46, 49). St James also places a similar emphasis on the necessity, not only of hearing but also of

<sup>11</sup> Mihai Ciurea, “Dumnezeu Tatăl (*ὁ Πατήρ*) în Epistola Sobornicească a Sfântului Iacob,” *ST* 2 (2019): 18–19.

<sup>12</sup> Alicia Batten, “God in the Letter of James: Patron or Benefactor?,” *NTS* 2 (2004): 257–72.

putting into practice the teachings of Jesus: “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror.” (Jas 1:23). Additionally, it can be observed that the author's definition in the Epistle of true piety in terms of acts of mercy (cf. Jas 1:27<sup>13</sup>) recalls the judgment scenario in Mt 25:31-46<sup>14</sup>.

### Love of neighbor (Jas 2:1-13)

Returning to the issue of wealth and poverty, St James argues that a new reality should become essential in the minds and hearts of his readers and, consequently, all Christians. This reality opposes arrogant wealth, the biased system of patronage (*clientela*)<sup>15</sup>, and generally all inappropriate behaviours that encourage the commission of such wicked deeds or sins. However, our author is not the only ancient writer who opposes distinctions of status based on wealth versus poverty. We encounter the same principles in the prophetic and wisdom writings of the Old Testament and partially in the Synoptic Gospels. Moreover, some Greek moralists, at least theoretically, have disapproved of this constant, even obsessive, concern for a privileged socio-economic position in the community to which one belongs<sup>16</sup>. Although the aphoristic basis of the third section may be problematic, it can be captured either in Jas 2:5<sup>17</sup> or Jas 2:10<sup>18</sup>. In essence, we could argue that the Beatitudes regarding “the poor” and “the merciful” from the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt 5:3, 7) are reflected throughout this entire section.

Certainly, these virtues are important for the New Testament author, but he goes further, stating a fundamental Christian principle: all the evils created by artificial distinctions imposed by society cannot be healed through human efforts but through a radical reordering of human reality by God. In this entirely new perspective, honesty, faithfulness, and submission are always maintained

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<sup>13</sup> “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” (Jas 1:27).

<sup>14</sup> F. Charles Fensham, “Faith, Works, and the Christian Religion in James 2:14-26,” *JNES* 2 (1962): 129-39.

<sup>15</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation and Commentary Garden* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 277.

<sup>16</sup> M. O'Rourke Boyle, “The Stoic Paradox in James 2:10,” *NTS* 31 (1985): 611-17.

<sup>17</sup> “Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters: did God not choose the poor [fn]of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (Jas 2:5 – similar ending to Jas 1:12).

<sup>18</sup> “For whoever keeps the whole Law, yet stumbles in one point, has become guilty of all.” (Jas 2:10).

about God. Only by resisting this sinful and unjust world, by denouncing it and its manipulative institutions, can one embrace the new reality to which the holy author calls us, that of friendship with God. Therefore, the author does not limit himself to emphasizing the importance of charity but goes further, boldly challenging the schema of influence-based relationships based on status differences. This system was omnipresent in the ancient world, supported by the patronage institution and defined as an exchange of goods and services between unequal individuals. Unfortunately, due to this obvious disproportion, it could lead to abuses, the most common being the exploitation of the weak. It is precisely against this unjust and oppressive system that his direct attack is directed. The rich are not condemned for their wealth and influence, but because they oppress the poor and blaspheme the name of Christ God.

A particular significance in this section is the interpretation of the Law in Jas 2:8-12, which closely resembles the well-known statement of Christ in Mt 5:17-19<sup>19</sup>. Both in the Epistle of St James and the Gospel of Matthew, the same illustration of the principle is used by referring to the commandments against adultery and murder.

There is also another parallel with Matthew in this section, often overlooked by commentators. In the account of the Rich Young Man presented in all three Synoptic Gospels (cf. Mt 19:16-22; Mk 10:17-22; Lk 18:19-23), it is crucial to observe once again Matthew's specific additions. For example, only Mt 19:17b contains the injunction: "But if you want to enter life, keep the commandments," which fully corresponds to the words of St James in this section. Similarly, in Jesus' words about the commandments to the Rich Young Man, Matthew provides a longer list, including the great commandment of love (cf. Jas 2:8<sup>20</sup>). But also, James, like Matthew, closely ties the same golden commandment to the disapproval of adultery and murder (cf. Jas 2:11<sup>21</sup>).

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<sup>19</sup> "Do not presume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter shall pass from the Law, until all is accomplished! Therefore, whoever nullifies one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Mt 5:17-19).

<sup>20</sup> "If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,' you are doing well." (Jas 2:8).

<sup>21</sup> "For He who said, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,' also said, 'DO NOT MURDER.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but do murder, you have become a violator of the Law." (Jas 2:11).

### Faith and good works (Jas 2:14-26)

The term “faith” (*πίστις*) is one of the most natural words in the New Testament, an essential expression of the “fruit of the Holy Spirit,” the last among them (cf. Gal 5:22), upon which the entire Christian devotion is built. The necessity of living out an authentic faith, fulfilling the Scripture’s word, having a pure devotion that bears fruit in good deeds, overcoming sin, anger, and indifference, and working out love and mercy – all these form the background of the teaching in our Epistle and have been addressed, even if not systematically, from the beginning. The section from Jas 2:14-26, on the other hand, is unique precisely because of its unified and relatively extensive development that directly addresses a single theme: faith without good works cannot save. We are right at the central point of the writing, where we find the theoretical foundation of practical exhortations.

Unlike the Pauline Epistles, which primarily deal with matters of faith, the Catholic Epistles specifically address issues of social morality. This aspect is generally explained by the fact that issues related to religious practice, especially the observance of the Law and Jewish customs (*i.e.*, the works of the Law) by Gentile Christians, were resolved at the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem (49-50 AD). Therefore, it is crucial to understand that St James speaks about “faith” and “works” (*erga*), so the works of the Law are not the subject of his Epistle<sup>22</sup>. Instead, he addresses the nature of faith itself and its concrete manifestation in good deeds, as a synergistic work continually present in the Christian’s life. In this sense, the two key statements are found in Jas 2:2<sup>23</sup>, and in Jas 2:26<sup>24</sup>.

However, most often, the attention given to this well-known section of the Epistle of St James and its almost natural association with Pauline theology is so pronounced that the somewhat close connection with the Sermon on the Mount is often overlooked. Not only are the words from Mt 7:21, 26, already mentioned above (cf. “Reverence and action”), applicable here, but there is also a significant echo in St James’ teaching of the “Parable of the Two Sons” (cf. Mt 21:28-32), not to mention once again the “works of mercy” suggested by the judgment scene in Mt 25:31-46.

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<sup>22</sup> Mihai Ciurea, “Credința și faptele bune după Epistola Sobornicească a Sfântului Iacob,” *MO* 9-12 (2020): 125–34.

<sup>23</sup> “But are you willing to acknowledge, you foolish person, that faith without works is useless?” (Jas 2:20).

<sup>24</sup> “For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.” (Jas 2:26).

### **Controlled speech and slander (Jas 3:1-12)**

The third chapter of the Epistle represents a more elaborate critique of speech but also praises wisdom. The author begins by stating that not many in the community should become teachers because they will be judged more severely. The danger comes from the fact that the one instructing others in virtue may fall into the sin of vainglory, giving in to the cunning use of speech for manipulation, a concern also evident in the Pastoral Epistles. By directly addressing this admonition, St James suggests that there was a certain problem in this regard in the early Church. Jewish sages also warned about false teachings, admitting that teachers would be harshly judged for leading others astray. It seems that some aspiring to become teachers of wisdom were instructing others in the kind of “wisdom” adopted by Jewish revolutionaries that inevitably led to violence<sup>25</sup>.

The entire diatribe of St James regarding “speech” can be considered a homiletic illustration of Jesus’ words in Mt 12:36<sup>26</sup>: “But I tell you that for every careless word that people speak, they will give an account of it on the day of judgment.” Another parallel, with less weight, is the saying in Mt 15:11: “It is not what enters the mouth that defiles the person, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles the person.” (cf. Mk 7:15), which can be related to Jas 3:10: “From the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way.”

Also in this fifth section, we can identify a macarism in Jas 3:2 (like the beginning of the blessing in Jas 1:12), where the author replaced the term “blessed” with “perfect”: “For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect (*τέλειος*) man, able to rein in the whole body as well.”

### **Wisdom and division (Jas 3:13-4:12)**

The structure of this narrative unit is quite clearly defined and reintroduces, first (cf. Jas 3:13-18), the theme of authentic wisdom through a challenge addressed to all members of the community, consisting of the “wise and understanding.” Gentleness and humility are attributes of wisdom and good conduct. Wisdom knows what is good and how to accomplish it, so Christians are advised to manifest their true wisdom practically. Then, in the second part of the discourse (cf. Jas 4:1-12), the author revisits the theme of inner rupture,

<sup>25</sup> Dale C. Allison Jr, “Blessing God and Cursing People: James 3:9-10,” *JBL* 2 (2011): 397–405.

<sup>26</sup> With the additions about the “tree” and “its fruit” from Mt 12:33 and Mt 7:16-20 (cf. Lk 6:43-45).

the division within the depths of humanity where desire is born and nourished. St James thus directly accuses hedonism as the source of violence and, ultimately, spiritual and physical death. This philosophical doctrine (from the Greek ἡδονή), quite prevalent in the author's time, argued that the primary purpose of human existence is the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of suffering. Thus, the hedonist hoped to possess what can never be possessed, that which always eludes us, namely the "object" capable of satisfying that fundamental spiritual lack of man or, in other words, filling that inner void manifested in frustration and instinctual needs. In vain, he exhausts himself trying to chase after an entirely illusory goal<sup>27</sup>.

The aphorism in the sixth section is found in Jas 4:4 and is introduced by the stereotypical formula *οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι*: "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." The second part of the statement, about friendship with the world and enmity with God, may have a counterpart in the text from Mt 6:24 (cf. Lk 16:13), which speaks of the impossibility of serving two masters: "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." In the Gospels, the two masters are "God and money," or "wealth", while in James, they are "God and the devil" (cf. Jas 4:7-8).

Similarly, the saying about prayer from Mt 7:7 ("Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you;" cf. Lk 11:9) is brought to the forefront again in Jas 4:3a: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, so that you may spend what you request on your pleasures."

The recapitulation of themes in the conclusion of this section of the Epistle (cf. Jas 4:11-12<sup>28</sup>) certainly reminds us of the admonition not to judge anyone, regardless of the circumstances, from Mt 7:1-5<sup>29</sup> (cf. Lk 6:37-42).

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<sup>27</sup> Ehud M. Garcia, *The Wisdom of James: Word and Deed for the Diaspora* (Xulon Press, 2018), 117-19.

<sup>28</sup> "Do not speak against one another, brothers and sisters. The one who speaks against a brother or sister, or judges his brother or sister, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you, judging your neighbor?" (Jas 4:11-12).

<sup>29</sup> "Do not judge, so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and look, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye!" (Mt 7:1-5).

### **Two curses: Woe to you, the rich! (Jas 4:13-5:6)**

The second part of the fourth chapter transitions to another subject and generally addresses rich merchants, traders, or perhaps even affluent individuals in the community who had decided to follow the path of Christ. The author abandons the more logical and methodical mode of address from the previous section and now speaks directly and categorically, reminiscent of the style of the Old Testament prophets (cf. Jas 2:1-13). Therefore, he no longer confines himself to emphasise the importance of cultivating Christian virtues and fulfilling the commandments of the Law but goes further, boldly challenging the schema of influence based on differences in status. Unfortunately, due to this evident disparity, there could be a slide into some abuses, with exploitation of the weaker being the most frequent. It is precisely against this unjust and oppressive system that his direct attack is aimed. Such shortcomings, being “double-minded,” with a divided soul, and being “friends with the world,” can lead the rich and influential to believe that there is no conflict between accumulating treasures for the future and hoping for eternal life.

All the evils created by artificial distinctions imposed by society cannot be healed through human effort but require a radical reordering of human reality by God. In this entirely new perspective, sincerity, fidelity, and submission are always maintained about God. Only through resistance to this sinful and unjust world, by denouncing it and its manipulative institutions, can one embrace the new reality to which the holy author calls us, that of “friendship with God.” The prophetic tone reappears, but this time it is of extreme virulence. Faced with the imminent threat of a potentially tragic end, the only hope for the rich remains sincere repentance and a desire for correction. None of the New Testament authors condemned the sin of those who stole the labour of others, in other words, the exploitation of man by man, so vehemently. Earlier, James emphasized the “ephemerality of the proud and rich” and accused them of oppressing the poor and blaspheming the name of the good Christian. Now, with more vigour, he condemns those who put their hope in wealth and urges them to gather treasures in heaven, following the Savior’s admonition (cf. Mt 6:19-20; Lk 12:33; 19:22; Acts 20:31-33, etc.). In other words, their earthly “comfort” does not last long (cf. Lk 6:24), for true comfort is eternal (cf. Lk 16:25). From the selfish use of goods naturally follows social injustice, concretely manifested in withholding payment from workers<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Arhiep. Dmitri Royster, *Comentariu La Epistola Sfântului Apostol Iacov*, trans. by Camil Marius Dădărlat (București: Basilica, 2021), 170–82.

These condemnations are clearly distinctive in their style and form in the Epistle of James, yet they are entirely in harmony with the author's attitudes and sympathies regarding tensions between the rich and the poor. Although it has been suggested that they can be related to two Lucan parables – the Parable of the Rich Fool (cf. Lk 12:16-21) and the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (cf. Lk 16:19-31) – the parallels are nonetheless superficial. The teaching, however, aligns more closely with Matthew. Initially, the author's attention turns to those who are preoccupied with gaining wealth and making plans for their business tomorrow. This contrasts with the careless rich man in Luke, who had no intention of increasing his profit but rather retiring to comfort and pleasure. The first condemnation in the Epistle (cf. Jas 4:14<sup>31</sup>) is more of an exposition of the Gospel teaching about casting off concern for tomorrow (cf. Mt 6:34).

Similarly, the second condemnation in this section of the Epistle (cf. Jas 5:2-3) reminds us of the teaching in Mt 6:19: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal." Moreover, the concluding sentence in Jas 5:6a ("You have condemned and put to death the righteous person!") finds a remarkable parallel in the judgment that the Savior pronounces on the Pharisees: "But if you had known what this means: 'I desire compassion, rather than sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent." (Mt 12:7).

### **Long-suffering (Jas 5:7-20)**

The exhortation of St James to long-suffering (*makrothymia*) in this pericope is addressed, first and foremost, to the Christians in the community who had become victims of injustice due to their faith. The keyword (verb or noun) is used four times in this passage: patience itself (v. 7a) is first illustrated by a parable (vv. 7b-8a), before being motivated (v. 8b); then, through a digression on judgment, the special way of enduring is made known (v. 9); finally, to strengthen the readers in the virtue of patience, examples from Holy Scripture are given (vv. 10-12). In the pericope from Jas 5:13-18, the author's discourse becomes dense and exhortative. St James returns to the themes of prayer, healing, and repentance. The section begins with three paratactic units, each consisting of two clauses, formulated in an asyndetic rhetoric. The end of the Epistle is somewhat surprising, simply because it ends abruptly, without any conclusive remarks. In other words, instead of "closing" his text, the author leaves it open, linking salvation to reflection on the personal responsibility of

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<sup>31</sup> "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. For you are just a vapor that appears for a little while, and then vanishes away." (Jas 4:14).

his readers. The keywords of this epilogue are encouragement and exhortation. This does not only mean practising “good deeds,” but also the ability to let the “Word of truth” (Jas 1:18) work in their lives and the Church. The form of this concluding exhortation is somewhat peculiar: in its first part, contained in v. 19, St James continues the style of direct address to his readers, a style predominant in the Epistle; in the second part (v. 20), the formulation is in a more general form. Some authors have intuited traces of a specific liturgical form of the early Church behind these two verses<sup>32</sup>. The thematic continuity is, however, evident and resonates with the note of joy at the beginning of the Epistle, even if it addresses the ominous threat of apostasy.

In the final section of the Epistle, the author symmetrically returns to the theme addressed in the first discourse, suggested by the blessedness of those who patiently endure persecution: “We count those blessed (*μακαρίζομεν*) who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.” (Jas 5:11). In both sections, there is the subsidiary theme of prayer and the gifts that prayer brings. However, while the first treatment focused on enduring trials, the last discussion developed the theme of patience in suffering. It is noteworthy that the fourth and eighth sections, though different, are similar in structure using so-called examples taken from the Old Testament tradition but accompanied by illustrations from the life of the contemporary church, that is, situations or events relevant to the church community at that time.

But the final section also introduces a new subsidiary theme, that of oaths. This is because trials and suffering sometimes lead to the loss of patience, which, in turn, manifests itself in oaths. All exegetes note the very close parallel between the words of St James about oaths and those taught by the Savior on this specific topic in the Sermon on the Mount in Mt 5:33-37. Usually, this parallel is considered the strongest argument for James’ dependence on the Gospel, even though James does not quote the Gospel and seems to convey an older tradition than the Gospel. However, one swallow does not make a summer. Therefore, our analysis should not be reduced to a single example, but the entire context of the Epistle should be considered, as seen in all the details described above.

### **Lukan Allusions and Echoes in the Catholic Epistle of James**

The two “woes” in the seventh section (cf. Jas 4:13-5:6) have a form that distinguishes them from the other discourses, being written in the vein of

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<sup>32</sup> Dale C. Allison Jr, “A Liturgical Tradition behind the Ending of James,” *JSNT* 1 (2011): 3–18.

prophetic warnings. However, they contain a saying that we can indirectly connect to the context of our analysis, namely Jas 5:17: "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months." Yet, we cannot say with certainty whether Jas 5:17 is dependent on Lk 4:25 regarding the three and a half years of drought. This is because, in Luke's account, the author intends to reinforce the idea that no prophet is accepted in his hometown, while St James is interested in the drought itself as proof of the power of the fervent prayer of the righteous. The exact chronology could have reached James independently of the Lucan text, through the oral tradition of Judaism or some apocryphal source. More significantly, the reflection of the Beatitudes from the Gospel in the Epistle of St James shows, upon closer analysis, closer affinities with their Lucan form. Of the eight Matthean blessings, Luke retains only four, which are directly addressed to the disciples and, through them, to Christian followers, not necessarily to devout Israelites in general. Therefore, they must be understood as practical and theological qualifications of the disciples, those who followed Jesus and became his family, directly related to everyday reality. Moreover, Luke's blessings are balanced by four "woes," which are essentially just the four blessings expressed in the opposite sense (cf. Lk 6:20-26).

Not all the Beatitudes from the Gospels are reflected in the Epistle of James with the same clarity and certainty. Of the four common to both Matthew and Luke, the blessing of those "hungry and thirsty for righteousness" is not indicated anywhere. Similarly, the blessing of those "persecuted and reviled" does not have an exact equivalent in James, although it is similar in some respects to the already mentioned macarism in Jas 1:12 and Jas 5:11, as central texts in the author's discourse on enduring trials and especially on patience. For St James, the emphasis is not on the sufferings endured because of the Christian status, but rather on the ordinary trials and sufferings of life, particularly those caused by the oppression of the poor by the rich. On the other hand, the blessing of the "poor" is reflected in Jas 2:5 and following, along with other related passages that mention the tension between the rich and the poor (cf. Jas 1:9-11; 5:1 and following). Like in Lk 6:20, here οἱ πτωχοί refers to the literal poor and the woes are pronounced against their opposites, the "rich." St James does not emphasize the theological distinction found in Mt 5:3, which speaks of those who are "poor in spirit."<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the blessing of those who mourn appears in Jas 4:9, not in the form of a macarism but as a woe in Lk 6:25b pronounced against "those who laugh" now.

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<sup>33</sup> Ion Sorin Bora, "Ceî săraci cu duhul din perspectiva lui Wirkungsgeschichte," *MO* 5-8 (2006): 115-20.

Indeed, considering these two significant similarities between James and Luke regarding the Beatitudes, we should not overlook the reflection in James of the Beatitudes from Matthew that are not found in Luke. The clearest case is the blessing of the “merciful,” which has a parallel in Jas 2:13: “For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.” It is also noteworthy to observe that in James’ discourse on hypocrisy, there are references to gentleness (cf. Jas 3:13), peacemakers (cf. Jas 3:18), or purity of heart (cf. Jas 4:8). These connections highlight the complex intertextuality and theological nuances present in the New Testament writings. James, in incorporating elements from both Matthew and Luke, engages with and interprets the teachings of Jesus in a way that addresses the specific concerns and themes of his audience. This underscores the richness and diversity of perspectives within the early Christian community as they sought to understand and apply the teachings of Jesus in various contexts.

If we did not have the Gospel according to Matthew, we could not, of course, reconstruct from the Epistle of James the list of Matthean or Lucan beatitudes. However, with the two gospel versions available, it makes sense to assume that the author of the Epistle was familiar with them, especially with a list of Beatitudes more extensive than those preserved in Luke. In two instances, St James has given them an interpretation closer to the Lucan perspective, and the reason is not hard to intuit. The Lucan Beatitudes were shaped to fit the actual conditions of church life, and St James writes from the perspective of a Christian community living in similar circumstances. Thus, the parallels in James with the Beatitudes from the Gospels do not, in themselves, prove that the author knew Matthew and/or Luke. Rather, they suggest that the author was acquainted with a series of blessings concerning the poor, the mournful, the merciful, and the persecuted, and possibly also blessings concerning the meek, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers. This context indicates, at the very least, a familiarity with the Matthean formulation. However, it can be highlighted even further by examining other Matthean influences on the Catholic Epistle.

## Conclusions

Even though, as we have seen from the detailed analysis above, some texts in the Epistle of James resonate quite strongly with the Matthean text, especially thematically, and the phenomenon of intertextuality is impressive in this regard, it would still be quite bold to assert that St James had a copy of the Gospel of Matthew in front of him when writing his Epistle. This is confirmed by the absence of exact quotations. Most likely, we are dealing with another

phenomenon, equally interesting and important, that occurred in early Christianity. It is about a catechetical or didactic tradition that is already present at the end of the first century in Christian teaching, situated at the confluence of the Jewish and Hellenistic environments, strongly influenced by Matthew, whose popularity is beyond doubt. This reality is confirmed by the presence of similar themes in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, literature that, in turn, enjoyed great appreciation among early Christian communities (*e.g.*, the Epistles of Clement, the Didache, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistles of St Ignatius of Antioch, etc.).

In other words, it is highly possible that the author of the Catholic Epistle was familiar with the Gospel of Matthew through its liturgical and catechetical usage. This justifies the theological depth demonstrated by St James in his treatment of common themes. It seems that we are dealing with the same phenomenon as in the case of the Old Testament citations in the Epistle. The few references the author makes to the Septuagint text are likely rendered from memory, reflecting general Old Testament themes that a Christian teacher, especially a bishop, undoubtedly mastered. We even observe a greater emphasis that St James places on citing the Old Testament when he goes beyond allusions or scriptural echoes (such as the unmistakable use of Is 40:6-7 in Jas 1:10-11 or Gn 22:9 in Jas 2:21), considering that Christian writings were in the process of canonical crystallization. Therefore, while the term "Scripture" exclusively referred to the Old Testament during that period, the Gospel of Matthew held overwhelming importance as part of the living tradition preserved in the Church regarding the life and teachings of the Lord: a Catechism of the early Church.

This reality is also justified by other aspects that, although not contradicting the theology of the Gospel, are not derived from it. Instead, they belong to the general Judeo-Christian character and the Palestinian-Syrian context of the text. For instance, the gathering place for Christians is not referred to as *ἐκκλησία* but rather as *συναγωγή* (a term rarely used in Christian writings but present in St Ignatius Theophorus and the Shepherd of Hermas; cf. Jas 2:2<sup>34</sup>). Additionally, liturgical formulas resembling the *Shema Israel* (*i.e.*, Adonay Ehad; cf. Jas 2:19) or the structure of Jewish blessings (cf. Jas 3:9) are present. Prayer and psalms are also mentioned (cf. Jas 5:13). Furthermore, in Jas 2:7, there is a possible allusion to Christian baptism in the "name of the Lord," as in Acts (2:38; 8:16; 19:5), or to the early practice of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, through the anointing of the sick with oil (cf. Jas 5:14), as in Mk 16:13. This likely indicates a common practice in this regard within the Church in Jerusalem.

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<sup>34</sup> See also the compound term *ἐπισυναγωγή* in Heb 10,25 and 2 Thes 2,1 (here, it rather refers to the Parousia of the Lord).

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