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According to Matthew

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The Abbot of Downside

ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

THE Catholic Church traces its history back to Palestine, the homeland and sacred land of Israel, and to the times of the Roman emperor Tiberius, about forty years before the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem by the future emperor Titus. As its founder it claims Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee, of the seed of Abraham. About a hundred years after its origin it was invited by one of its own members, Marcion, to repudiate its connection with, and debt to, the old Israel by accepting his theory that Jesus, the Son of God, was not an Israelite by birth, but a heavenly visitor to earth with no roots in the past history of Israel, or indeed of mankind, and that the faith and worship of Israel had not been revealed by the true God, the Father of Jesus Christ. This invitation was rejected and Marcion left the Church and became the founder of a heretical body. The Catholic creed still affirms that Jesus was the son of an Israelite maiden and that the divine Spirit which He poured out upon His Church was that Spirit which of old had spoken by the prophets. The greatest of our medieval theologians, Thomas Aquinas, is true to the age-long tradition of the Church in affirming that the faithful members of the ancient Israel, the chosen people of God, were already before the coming of Christ members of the Catholic Church, and in implying that the Church is this chosen people, this sacred community, refounded by Jesus.¹

1. *In 4 Sent.* d. 27, q. 3, a. 1. qa. 3: "Just as the ancients and the moderns [that is, those of the Old and those of the New Covenant] share one faith, so they share one Church; hence those who in the days of the Synagogue served God belonged to the unity of that Church in which we serve Him"; St. Thomas then refers to Jer 3, Ez 16, Os 2, "where the espousing [to God] of the Synagogue is explicitly mentioned; hence she was [to God] not like a concubine but like a wife." Similarly *Sum. Theol.* III, q. 8, a. 4: "While the ancient fathers observed the sacraments of the Law, they were borne up to Christ by the same faith and love by which we are borne up to Him. Thus the ancient fathers belonged to the same body of the Church to which we belong." Cf. A. D. Sertillanges, *The Church* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1922), pp. 248-249: "The true and universal religion is Judaeo-

Modern liberal and independent criticism at one time tended, in two ways, to sever the link uniting the faith of the Church to the Israel of old. On the one hand, it was urged that Jesus taught, essentially, little more than a pure ethical monotheism that owed nothing intrinsically to Israel's faith and worship. On the other hand, most of the features that distinguish the Catholic faith from philosophic theism—its sacraments, its quality of belonging to a society divinely guaranteed and distinct from the non-Catholic world, its belief that Jesus is really God's unique Son and the Lord of creation—were held to be infiltrations from pagan religious traditions or otherwise corruptions of the gospel preached by Jesus.

But as scholarship and criticism have progressed, and as they have become more docile to the historical evidences, the profoundly biblical nature of Catholic belief and also of the gospel of Jesus has become more and more recognized. A great English Protestant scholar, Dr. C. H. Dodd, has recently published a set of lectures entitled *According to the Scriptures*, in which he maintains that at the earliest stage to which our investigations into the primitive history of the Church can carry us back with security, and probably in the teaching of Jesus Himself, the events which are the contents of the Church's gospel are viewed as significant inasmuch as they realize, make actual, the hopes and promises enshrined in the Israelite Scriptures.² Thus the risen Jesus is described by St. Luke as saying to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus: "Too slow of wit, too dull of heart, to believe all those sayings of the prophets! Was it not to be expected that the Christ should undergo these sufferings, and enter so into His glory? Then, going back to Moses and the whole line of the prophets, He began to interpret the words used of Himself by all the Scriptures" (Lk 24:25-27). Thus, in affirming His own claims, the Founder of the Church reaffirms the validity of the claims made for God's Covenant with His people of old.

AN ISRAELITE GOSPEL

MY PURPOSE is to take the teaching attributed to Jesus in the Gospel according to St. Matthew and to see how this teaching relates itself to Christianity. It goes back through God and through the Christ He promised to the beginning of history. The germ of its social form is found in the Synagogue. It expands in its integrity into the Apostolic and Roman Church."

2. C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Substructure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1953).

the hope of the old Israel, with its Scriptures, its conviction that Israel is the chosen people of God, the one God "who spoke and the world came into being," and its expectation, based on prophecy, that God would visit and redeem this chosen people.

It is generally recognized that there is a strong Israelitic interest in St. Matthew's Gospel. The American Protestant scholar J. H. Ropes wrote as follows: "There is abundant reason to believe that the author . . . was a born Jew. His whole Gospel is pervaded by Jewish color . . . and he is strongly interested in the relation of Jesus, both positively and negatively, to the Jews and to Jewish ideas. . . . No one can doubt that the roots of the Gospel of Matthew strike deep into the knowledge and tradition and thoughts of the primitive Jewish believers of the Church of Jerusalem."³ Similarly, a Catholic scholar has said: "Even a cursory comparison of the first Gospel with the others shows that it was intended for Jews—not proselytes, nor Hellenists, but Jews of Palestine. It begins with a genealogy tracing our Lord from the tribe of Judah and from King David and through all the kings of Judah, and showing him to be born of a virgin to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah. He is born in Bethlehem, the city of David, and adored as King of the Jews by wise men of the Gentiles. . . . We shall find that most of the matter peculiar to Matthew is concerned with the Jews or the fulfillment of prophecy."⁴

If modern critical scholarship has failed to exploit or fully to explore this Israelitic element in St. Matthew's Gospel, the reason is that so many scholars have allowed themselves to become convinced that this Gospel is in literary dependence, as regards a great part of its contents, upon the far more "Gentile" Gospel of St. Mark and upon a supposed "sayings source" represented by some of the least "Israelitic" or Palestinian elements in St. Matthew's Gospel. And since St. Mark's Gospel tends now to be dated about A.D. 67, it seems doubtful to many how far we can use the data of St. Matthew's Gospel to discover the Palestinian, the Israelite, character of the teaching of Jesus, from which it is separated by a period of forty years or more, and by the use of documents like St. Mark's Gospel and the "sayings source," whose date is either late or at least uncertain. Thus, although Dr. Dodd has argued recently for the great primitivity of some elements in this Gospel,⁵

3. James Hardy Ropes, *The Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934), pp. 39, 58.

4. John Chapman, *The Four Gospels* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1944), pp. 6-8.

5. Dodd, *New Testament Studies* (Manchester: University Press, 1953).

Dr. Kilpatrick on the other hand has tried to make it seem probable that the special Jewish coloring of St. Matthew's Gospel represents the mind not of Jesus but of a Jewish-Christian community of about A.D. 95, in controversy with the restored Judaism of the period following the destruction of the Temple.⁶

The theory of the thoroughgoing dependence of St. Matthew's Gospel on St. Mark's has been criticized in more than one quarter recently.⁷ It rests partly on a false inference from the agreements and disagreements between the synoptic Gospels and partly on arguments which are not decisive. And it fails to do justice to the abundant and convincing indications that in fact St. Mark's Gospel depends on St. Matthew's or possibly on something of the nature of a lost "first edition" of St. Matthew's Gospel. I must not enter into the detail of these arguments here, but I ask the reader to accept provisionally the view that St. Matthew's Gospel gives us an earlier version of primitive Christian oral tradition and memories of Christ than does St. Mark's; that it is a more or less close Greek translation of an Aramaic original; finally, that it is to be dated before A.D. 51-52 (that is, before the composition of St. Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians⁸) and probably before the outbreak of the great dispute in the early Church provoked by St. Paul's admission of large numbers of uncircumcised Gentiles to Christian baptism (see Gal 2 and Ac 15). This view is supported by the internal evidence of St. Matthew's Gospel, by the general trend of its agreements and disagreements with St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospels, by the evidence of other New Testament writings, and (for what it is worth) by the tradition on the subject, which is unquestioned in early Christian literature. If it is correct, we have in St. Matthew's Gospel historical data separated by not more than about twenty years from the public ministry of Jesus, a source of information that can be reasonably attributed to the authorship of Matthew the publican (9:9; 10:3), a member of the body of twelve disciples whom Jesus associated particularly closely with Himself.

6. G. D. Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946).

7. B. C. Butler, *The Originality of St. Matthew* (Cambridge: University Press, 1951); Pierson Parker, *The Gospel Before Mark* (Chicago: University Press, 1953); L. Vaganay, *Le Problème synoptique, Une Hypothèse de travail* (Tournai: Desclée, 1954).

8. J. B. Orchard, "Thessalonians and the Synoptic Gospels," *Biblica*, XIX (1938), pp. 19-42.

This document is a carefully composed literary work. It opens with the genealogy and an account of the birth and early childhood of Jesus; and ends with a long account of the tragic conflict between Him and the national authorities at Jerusalem, His crucifixion after sentence by the Roman governor, His resurrection, and the commissioning of the leaders He had chosen for His Church. Between this beginning and this ending it is divided into five parts, in each of which a section of narrative is followed by a section of discourse or teaching; each of these five sections of discourse ends with a variant of the formula: "And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings . . ." The author strikes me as a man of prosaic, methodical temperament, painstaking, sober, and unimaginative. M. Vaganay (whose theory of the composition of this Gospel is more elaborate than mine) writes of the author: "One would describe him as lacking in imagination. At least he is too respectful of his materials to allow himself to give rein to fancy."⁹ In strong contrast are the lyric splendor, the creative thought, and the prophetic oratory of the personality that discloses itself in the substance of the five discourse sections. It is to the latter that we must look to discover the mind and teaching of Jesus Himself, and especially His attitude to the traditions and hopes of the old Israel.

THE BELIEFS OF THE EVANGELIST

BUT first a word or two about the beliefs of the author of the book, whom I propose to call Matthew, as does tradition, and who may be thought of as a representative member of the primitive Church of Jerusalem in the days before the conversion of many Gentiles in the eastern half of the Mediterranean basin. For him, Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, the expected Son of David (1:1);¹⁰ in Him, and in His word and work, was realized the messianic hope of Israel. Hence Matthew is fond of finding and pointing out fulfillments of detailed prophecies in the events of Jesus' life. Being the Messiah, Jesus is endowed with supreme power "in heaven and on earth" (28:18); and it is in virtue of this supreme universal authority that after His resurrec-

9. *Op. cit.*, p. 243.

10. "Book of the generation of Jesus Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham." Cf. Gen 5:1: "This is the book of the generation of Adam." Did Matthew imitate this scriptural passage in order to emphasize that human history moves between two poles, descent from Adam and ascent to Him who named Himself "the Son of Man"?

tion He commissions His twelve disciples (or rather eleven, since one of them, Judas Iscariot, had proved unfaithful) to carry His revelation to others. Matthew, of course, takes it for granted that it is of Israel that Jesus is the Messiah and Redeemer. It is true that he holds that the good tidings of Jesus, that is to say the faith and way of patriarchs and prophets brought to a perfection transcending its past nature, is to be carried to all the nations of the world (28:19). But this universalism is hardly wider than what can be found in the Book of Jonah or in chapters 40-56 of Isaiah.¹¹ It is by no means a universalism that dispenses with the idea of the chosen people; on the contrary, actual redemption for the Gentiles will result from or involve their incorporation into the people of God.¹²

In the belief of Matthew, Jesus is the messianic Son of David. But, being that, He is also something more. There is a strand of messianic doctrine in the Scriptures of Israel that expects redemption through the direct intervention of God Himself in the history of the chosen people:

*Strengthen ye the drooping hands,
And make firm the tottering knees;
Say ye to the faint-hearted:
Take courage, fear not!
Behold, your God is about to avenge,
God's requital has come,
He Himself has come to save you!*

*O that thou wouldst cleave the heavens and come down,
That the mountains may tremble before thee.*

*Get thee up on a high mountain,
O Sion, bearer of glad tidings!
Lift up thy voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, bearer of glad tidings!*

11. For a recent study of this section of the Book of Isaiah see Ulrich Simon, *A Theology of Salvation* (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1953).

12. The Greek word *ekklēsia*, which we translate "church," is used in the Septuagint to translate *ḳahal*. The *ḳahal*, or assembly, of the Lord is Israel in its sacred aspect, i.e. practically "the people of God." It has been suggested that in Matthew the word *ekklēsia* translates the Aramaic *kenushta'*, which often means "synagogue" and is used in the Syriac Sinaitic codex to translate both *sunagōgē* and *ekklēsia*; see Karl Schmidt, *The Church* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1950), translated from his article in Kittel's *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (1938) by J. R. Coates.

*Lift it up, fear not!
 Say unto the cities of Judah:
 Behold your God!
 Behold, the Lord Yahweh
 Shall come as a strong one,
 And His arm shall rule for Him;
 Behold, His reward shall be with Him,
 And His recompense before Him;
 Even as a shepherd that tends his flock,
 With his arm gathers them,
 The lambs he carries in his bosom,
 The suckling ewes he gently leads.*

(Is 35:3-4; 64:1; 40:9-11) ¹³

It is in harmony with this prophetic doctrine that God Himself will come to redeem (a doctrine which perhaps transposes into terms of messianic hope the belief that it was the Lord Himself who had redeemed His people in the days of Moses and led them out of bondage in Egypt) that Matthew quotes, in connection with the birth of Jesus, the Isaianic prophecy: "They shall call His name Emmanuel," which, as the translator of Matthew correctly explains, means "God with us" (Mt 1:23; Is 7:14). It is similarly in harmony with Is 35:4 that, in a dream, the angel says to Joseph, the future foster-father of Jesus: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins"—Jesus, Joshua, that is, "Yahweh saves" (1:21). And it may be that this idea of "God with us as our Saviour," occurring thus in the opening paragraphs of the book, is repeated in its closing verse, where the risen Jesus says to the eleven disciples: "And behold, I am with you all the days till the end of the age." If this fusion of the notion of a Messiah of Davidic descent with the idea of a direct divine intervention in history seems to go beyond any clear indications in Israel's Scriptures, it must, I think, be conceded that all the *ingredients* of Matthew's beliefs are rooted in the inspired wisdom of the Israel of old.

THE REIGN OF THE HEAVENS

TURNING now from the beliefs of Matthew himself to the teaching of Jesus as represented in this Gospel, we may first note two points about

13. Translation by Edward J. Kissane in *The Book of Isaiah* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1943).

the form of the teaching. The distinguished Hebrew and Old Testament scholar C. F. Burney pointed out that "considerable portions of our Lord's recorded sayings and discourses are cast in the characteristic forms of Hebrew poetry";¹⁴ this is true, for instance, of the prayer "Our Father," of which Burney offers a translation into rhythmical Galilean Aramaic, and of the commission to Peter (16:17-19), similarly translated by Burney, but it is also true of many other passages in Matthew's record of the sayings of Jesus. Jesus' use of parables can be closely paralleled by the *mesbalim* of the rabbis. None of the rabbinic *mesbalim* can be proved to be as ancient as the first half of the first Christian century, since the talmudic literature, from which we derive most of our knowledge of early rabbinism, hardly begins before A.D. 70. But it cannot easily be supposed that the rabbinic use of *mesbalim* is an imitation of their use by Jesus, and we can therefore infer that this literary (or rather oral) form was already current in Palestine when Jesus taught, and that He adapted it to His own purposes. More generally it may be said that not only the style but the mental processes disclosed in the teaching of Jesus are those not of Hellenism but of the traditional culture of Israel; they reflect the Israelite way of looking out upon the world and of looking up to its Creator. Jesus cannot be regarded as a Greek philosopher; He is much more like an Israelite prophet, not a dialectician but One who proclaims the word and way of the Lord.

At the outset of His ministry Jesus is described as preaching: "The kingdom [or rather, "the reign," since the underlying Semitic word means "sovereign dominion"] of the heavens is at hand" (4:17). Here we note the reverential substitution, common in Palestinian Israelite circles at that time, of "the heavens" for "God." The actual words here used may well be a précis of Jesus' teaching, and therefore may be attributed to Matthew rather than to Jesus Himself. But in chapter 10 we are told that, when sending the Twelve out on a missionary journey (to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel"), Jesus said: "Preach, as you go, telling them, The reign of the heavens is at hand" (10:7). And in 24:14 He says: "This good news of the reign shall be proclaimed in all the inhabited world." The noun *euaggelion*, here and

14. C. F. Burney, *The Poetry of Our Lord* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 15.

elsewhere translated "good news," reminds us of the verb "to announce good news" found in Is 40, quoted above, and in Is 61:1: "The Lord has sent me to proclaim good news to the meek," which itself is alluded to by Jesus in Mt 11:5: "The poor have the good news announced to them." Thus Jesus presents Himself as fulfilling these prophecies.

The idea of the messianic reign of God hardly needs illustration from the Scriptures of Israel. It comes into prominence in Isaiah, chapters 40-55, the Book of Israel's—and, of course, of all the world's—Consolation, and especially in Daniel.¹⁵ It would appear that Jesus took up this messianic expectation, affirmed that it was on the point of realization, and called on His hearers to prepare for it by "repentance" (4:17), by conversion, by a full turning of heart and of works to God; just as Amos had bidden his contemporaries to "prepare to meet their God," since the "day of the Lord" was coming (4:12; 5:18). Jesus thus presents Himself, at the very least, as heralding an imminent and epoch-making act, an intervention of the Holy One of Israel in Israel's history.¹⁶

15. In the vision of Daniel 7 "one like unto a son of man" receives an everlasting and universal royal dominion, which later in the same chapter appears to be identified with the dominion of God. In Matthew also we read often of the reign of God, but sometimes (as in 13:41) of the reign of the Son of Man, the latter culminating in the Great Assize (25:31-46), whence those "on the right hand" pass into the possession of the "kingdom of their Father" (see 25:34, cf. 13:43).

16. The coming of God's reign has always remained a Jewish hope. It is kept alive, for instance, in the *'Alenu*, a prayer commonly dated as of the third century A.D. and, since the fourteenth century, used by most congregations to close their daily services. Having asked that all idolatry be destroyed and that all the children of flesh invoke the true God, it continues: "Let all the inhabitants of the world perceive and know that unto thee every knee must bow, every tongue must swear allegiance. Before thee, O Lord our God, let them bow and worship; and unto thy glorious Name let them give honor; let them all accept the yoke of thy kingdom, and do thou reign over them speedily, and for ever and ever. For the kingdom is thine, and to all eternity thou wilt reign in glory; as it is written in thy Torah, The Lord shall reign for ever and ever. And it is said, And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall the Lord be One, and His Name One" (see *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, trans. and ed. J. H. Hertz, New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1952, p. 211). In its traditional Jewish interpretation, "acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom" implies faith and obedience, believing in the one God and adhering to the Torah and all its commandments. Jesus too speaks of the yoke of the kingdom, or, rather, of His yoke: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is gentle, and my burden light" (Mt 11:29-30). This, then, is His message: the reign of God is here whenever men accept all that He is and all that He brings.

THE GOOD NEWS AND THE TORAH

WE MAY now examine the teaching in the first of Matthew's five great sections of discourse, the Sermon on the Mount. I take this as the incomplete record of an actual sermon of Jesus, with some editorial additions in the shape of authentic sayings of Jesus uttered on other occasions but conveniently recorded here by Matthew. It is a statement, much of it in highly poetical and oratorical form, of the towering moral and spiritual goals which should inspire the repentance of Jesus' hearers, because these are the principles that will inspire, and be required by, the reign of God. It depicts an ideal; it does not lay down a code. This is not to say that the morality of the Sermon on the Mount is impractical and unrealistic; the ideal it sets up is not to be dreamt about but to be striven for, a perfection to be aimed at. Here is a new spirit leading to new deeds, a revelation of God's will for His children in face of which they will indeed always have to confess that "they are unprofitable servants" (Lk 17:10), but which will continually spur them to new efforts. Yet this new pattern of perfection, set forth in the first eight Beatitudes (with which the record of the Sermon opens), derives its language and ideas, practically its whole material content, from the Scriptures of the old Israel. We might say that it is the product of a profound rereading of the Scriptures by One who taught, and thought, "with authority."

At first sight the Sermon on the Mount may seem to be more akin to the morality of the prophets than to the prescriptions of the Torah of Moses; hence this new-old teaching inevitably raises the question of its relation to the Mosaic Torah. The revelation of Mount Sinai had given the chosen people precise and definite rules of life: Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness. This new revelation, given on another mountain, proclaims: Blessed are the patient, blessed are they that mourn, blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice—that is, that justness which is God's gift, and no less that final manifestation of His justice when He shall reward His friends who have waited for Him, the poor and the clean of heart. And blessed are they that suffer persecution in the cause of justice, the new justice which is His Way. Did this new Teacher deny the divine origin and the authority of the Torah? Did He propose to abrogate it?

Was He, in other words, to be judged by His Israelite hearers to be a skeptic or a religious revolutionary? Some commentators have thought that in this sermon Jesus does in fact abrogate the Torah. But to my mind this is a mistake in exegesis, and is historically most improbable. What could have been more damaging to the credit of Jesus' mission than such public disloyalty to the faith and traditions of Israel? As a matter of fact, as if to answer our question, Jesus explicitly says: "Do not think that I have come to destroy the Torah [the Law] and the Prophets. I have not come to destroy but to fulfill" (5:17). Judging by the context, the word "fulfill" here means "to reaffirm in a new and higher synthesis."¹⁷ And so Jesus goes on to take various moral precepts from the Mosaic Torah and to teach that to observe the letter of these precepts is not sufficient—the moral or spiritual principle underlying the precept is to command one's full interior allegiance. Thus: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, Thou shalt do no murder; if a man commits murder, he must answer for it before the court of justice. But I tell you that any man who is angry with his brother must answer for it before the court of justice, and any man who says Raca to his brother must answer for it before the Council; and any man who says to his brother, Thou fool, must answer for it in hell fire" (5:21–22). Obviously this is no abrogation of the precept against murder. On the contrary, it is implied that anger is or may be the spring of murder, and that it is not enough to eschew the worst effects of anger but that we must master the evil passion itself and thus eschew all its effects. It should be observed that the whole tone of the passage suggests not formal legislation but oratorical hyperbole.

It may be argued indeed that in one case Jesus does appear to contradict the Torah: "You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you that you should not offer resistance to injury . . ." (5:38–39). At first sight the contradiction here may seem to be formal. But it should be remembered that the motive of the legal prescription in question was to restrict immoderate private revenge, by insisting that the compensation exacted should not exceed the wrong suffered.¹⁸ When Jesus recommends to His hearers that they surrender all claim to compensation, it is a step forward in the same

17. See the note on 5:17 in M.-J. Lagrange, *Evangile selon saint Matthieu* (Paris: Gabalda, 1927).

18. Ex 21:24. We may suppose that the motive of this law was in fact twofold: to satisfy the claims of justice, and to restrict the impulse of revenge.

line. Once again, the recommendation should be taken as the oratorical expression of a principle of magnanimous forgiveness, not as a legal prescription. I should therefore argue that Jesus showed Himself to accept and to be in harmony with not only the messianic hope of the old Israel but the divinely sanctioned Torah itself.

In the same way He takes three practices characteristic of the pious Israelite—almsgiving, prayer, and fasting—and, while giving each of them implicit approval, warns His hearers against the danger of ostentation, of performing these practices with outward show in order to obtain a reputation for piety (6:1-18). Here again, as in the case of the moral principles underlying the Torah, the emphasis is on the interior motives and the "interior life": "When thou art praying, go into thy inner room and shut the door upon thyself, and so pray to thy Father in secret. . . . At thy times of fasting, anoint thy head and wash thy face, so that thy fast may not be known to men, but to thy Father who dwells in secret" (6:6, 17-18). Thus it appears that the morality of the Sermon on the Mount differs from that of the rabbinical schools not because it substitutes a new code for the Torah, but because, unlike the rabbis and the Catholic moral theologians, it does not apply the code to particular cases but seeks to bring to light the spirit of the code and to develop its latent tendency. Hence, when Jesus sums up duty toward one's fellow-men in the Golden Rule ("Do to other men all that you would have them do to you"), He does not offer this as an alternative to the Torah, but says: "This *is* the Torah and the prophets"—this is the meaning of the inspired moral teaching of the Scriptures (7:12).

The Sermon, it has been suggested, reaffirms the Torah in a new and higher synthesis. The same attitude to the sacred traditions and institutions of Israel, to prophecy, to the wisdom of which Solomon's was the accepted prototype, and to the Temple itself, underlies three similar sayings:

Something more than Jonah [the prophet] is here (12:41).

Something more than Solomon is here (12:42).

Something greater than the Temple is here (12:6).

That an astounding claim is implicit in these sayings is obvious. But it is also plain that the claim begins by allowing the reality of divine authority latent in Israelite institutions.

THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

AFTER what has been said, it is hardly necessary to labor the point that Jesus accepts the doctrine of the divine election of Israel. The Twelve, in the instructions they receive for their first missionary journey, are bidden to go "not on the way of the Gentiles nor into a city of the Samaritans" but, as has already been mentioned, to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:5-6). It is true that, upon evidence of the faith of a Roman centurion, Jesus says that "many will come from the east and the west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the reign of the heavens," while the "sons of the reign" will be cast into outer darkness (8:11-12). But the reference to the three patriarchs and the very phrase "sons of the reign" imply the special privileges hitherto accorded to Israel, whereas the admission of Gentiles to the sacred fellowship is presented as a paradox. When a Canaanite woman seeks a cure for her demoniac daughter, Jesus replies: "I was not sent save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). We shall see that the extension of the good news to the non-Israelite world was eventually fully authorized by Jesus Himself, but its purpose was not to establish an entirely new society of believers, rather to incorporate Gentile converts into the age-old people of God, refashioned and renewed by the work of redemption.

The earlier part of Jesus' public life was an appeal to the members of the chosen people to recognize that the moment of crisis had come, to repent and believe, and so to qualify for the blessings involved in the advent of the reign of God. The appeal consisted in a proclamation of the good news, confirmed by miracles, just as, in the scriptural narrative, the mission of Moses had been confirmed by miracles. Externally the appeal seems to have had a good deal of success, as we may infer from the sending forth of the Twelve to extend the area from which converts were being drawn. "The harvest is great but the harvesters are few" (9:37). But it seems clear that Jesus was, or became, profoundly dissatisfied with the real response to His message. Not only did Pharisees suspect and criticize His behavior, some going so far as to suggest that His exorcisms were the effect of the exercise of diabolic power (12:24); the response of the masses was also inadequate, as we learn from the important passage:

Woe to thee Chorazain, woe to thee Bethsaida
For if in Tyre and Sidon had been done the miraculous
works that have been done in you
They would long ago have repented in sackcloth and
ashes;
But I say unto you, Tyre and Sidon will fare better
in the day of judgment than you.
And thou, Capharnaum, shalt thou be exalted to the sky?
Thou shalt descend even as far as Sheol;
For if in Sodom had been done the miraculous works
that have been done in thee,
She would have survived until today.
But I say to you, the land of Sodom will fare better
in the day of judgment than thou.

(11:21-24)

The story was to reach its climax a little later in Jerusalem when Jesus met the officials face to face. But already in the Galilean period chapter 13 shows that Jesus had recognized that a mass conversion was not going to take place. This recognition is marked by a change in His public preaching, consisting in the substitution of parables for plain statement. He explains to His disciples that the reason for this change is that the crowds, by their inadequate response, have shown that they lack the spiritual insight needed for a fuller apprehension of the mysteries of the reign of God. This insight is, however, not entirely lacking in the disciples, that (comparatively small) circle of those who have accepted Jesus not just as the fashionable "craze" of the moment but as their master and instructor in revealed truth.¹⁹ To them He points out (in this same chapter) that they are actually witnessing the fulfillment of the messianic hope: "But blessed are your eyes, for they have sight; blessed are your ears, for they have hearing. And, believe me, there have been many prophets and just men who have longed to see what you see, and never saw it, to hear what you hear, and never heard it" (13:16-17). And in succeeding chapters we see Jesus devoting Himself especially to teaching and training this little group (as Isaiah had taught the little flock of his own disciples) to fulfill their predestined role as the kernel of the Israel of the messianic remnant. They are to be not a mere number of individual believers but

¹⁹. They are the "little ones" to whom the Father of Jesus has "revealed these things" (11:25).

a society hierarchically organized, in which leadership will be exercised by the Twelve under the presidency of Simon bar-Jonah, the Rock of Jesus' messianic "assembly," the major-domo or viceregent in His kingdom (16:18, 19).

There is something extraordinarily pathetic, as well as sublime, in this audacious identification of the true Israel with a little group of more or less illiterate and mainly Galilean men, whose only claim to distinction was that they had seen and accepted the messianic truth revealed to them, and not revealed to "the wise men" of Israel, by Him whom Jesus did not shrink from calling His heavenly Father (11:25). That the identification was deliberate cannot be doubted. At the last meal eaten by Jesus with His disciples He describes His blood as the blood of the Covenant poured out for many for the remission of sins (26:28); and this, in the circumstances, can only mean that God's Covenant is henceforward with the little society of Jesus' followers. And to this little band, in the persons of the Eleven, Jesus, after His resurrection, entrusts the mission to all mankind that was the reason of the divine vocation of the people of God, as set forth in the great central section of the Book of Isaiah.

THE MESSIAH

WHAT place does Jesus assign to Himself in this fully conscious and creative messianism? It is obvious, in the first place, that He stands forth as the disciple of no man. No rabbi could claim Jesus as his pupil or mouthpiece. He taught "with authority and not as the scribes" says Matthew (7:29), and this is the impression conveyed especially by the repeated formula of the Sermon on the Mount: "It was said to the men of old . . . but I say unto you." Nor would Jesus admit dependence on John the Baptist, since He explicitly states that though John be "greatest among the sons of woman," yet he that is least in the reign of the heavens is greater than John (11:11); while on the other hand He clearly claims that where He, Jesus, acts, there the reign of the heavens is already, though perhaps mysteriously, present and in operation: "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the reign of God has come upon you" (12:28).

Only rarely, in the Matthaean record, does Jesus accept for Himself the actual title "Messiah." When Simon bar-Jonah, speaking for the

group of disciples, confesses Him to be "the Messiah, the Son of the living God," Jesus "bade the disciples tell no one that He was the Messiah" (16:20). And when the High Priest at the trial adjures Jesus to say whether He is "the Messiah, the Son of God," He replies: "The suggestion is yours; but I say to you, henceforth you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming upon the clouds of heaven" (26:64). On the other hand, He clearly claims, in His reply to the messengers of John the Baptist, to be "He that should come," the expected messianic redeemer of Israel (11:2-6). It seems possible that the actual title "Messiah" had, in the popular mind, political associations that Jesus wished to avoid.²⁰

In contrast with this reserve in respect of the title "Messiah," the title "the Son of Man" is frequently used by Jesus but never by Matthew writing in his own person. As designating a particular individual, this title is at first sight as strange, whether read in Greek or translated back into Aramaic, as it would be to speak in English about "the Human Being."²¹ The fact is that it identifies Jesus with the "one like unto a son of man" who, in the vision of the seventh chapter of Daniel, is brought before "the Ancient of Days," invested with royalty and its

20. It is noteworthy that one of the Twelve was "Simon the Cananaean" (10:4), i.e., probably "the zealous" or "the Zealot," as Lk 6:15 interprets the appellation (probably a transliteration of the Aramaic *qana'na'*; see *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, London and New York: Nelson, 1953, *ad loc.*). If this disciple (and possibly others in the entourage of Jesus) had formerly belonged to the Zealots, the dangerous nationalist party, we can well understand the need for caution in the presentation of the messianic claim.

21. "A son of man" in Hebrew or Aramaic means "a member of the human race," just as "a son of the prophets" means "a member of one of the prophetic guilds." Frequently the expression is no more than an idiomatic equivalent of "I" or "myself." But uttered by Jesus it acquires a certain mysteriousness, alluding to the wonder He is; it intimates His messianic office and at the same time humbly hides His greatness. The rabbis have, of course, commented on the phrase as found in Ezekiel. One of their speculative interpretations is this: "Man" is an expression of love (being created in the image of God), of brotherliness (all men having but one father), and of friendship. Hence, when God said to Ezekiel: O son of man, He meant: son of pious, of just parents; son of those who do the works of love; or son of those who, throughout their lives, let themselves be humbled for the glory of the All-Present and the glory of Israel (see Lev. R. 2:8; cf. *Midrash Rabbah*, ed. H. Freedman and M. Simon, London: Soncino Press, 1939, IV, 25). There are also rabbinical passages which understand "son of man" as referring to the Messiah. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi (ca. A.D. 250), contrasting Daniel's "son of man," who comes with the clouds of heaven, and Zechariah's "king," who comes lowly and riding upon an ass, used to say: If the Israelites are worthy, the Messiah will come with the clouds of heaven; if not, He will come lowly and riding upon an ass (see Sanh. 98a; cf. *The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. I. Epstein, London: Soncino Press, 1935-48, *Sanhedrin*, pp. 663-664).

insignia, and given "an everlasting kingship." This vision is as it were presupposed in the scene of the Great Assize in chapter 25 of Matthew's Gospel, where the Son of Man is depicted as coming, endowed with majesty and the title of king, accompanied by "all the angels"—like the Ancient of Days in Daniel, attended by "thousands of thousands, ten thousand times a hundred thousand"—and Himself taking His seat upon the throne of His glory.

All this is in the future. But the same title is used of Himself by Jesus in a variety of contexts of His earthly life and mission. The Son of Man, we are told, has nowhere to lay His head for a night's repose. He is judged to be a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, because He does not imitate the outward austerities of a John the Baptist. He will be "in the heart of the earth" three nights and days, like Jonah in the belly of the sea-monster. His treatment by men will be like that which caused the death of John the Baptist. He will be handed over, by the treachery of one of His own chosen disciples, into the hands of men who will kill Him; but He will be raised from the dead. If any explanation can be given of this strangely humiliating career and this ignominious death, it is that "the Son of Man came not to be ministered to but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (20:28).

What has happened in these passages to the glorious Danielic figure of one like unto a son of man? The answer, apparently, is that, by an astonishing stroke of creative imagination and profound spiritual insight, this figure has been synthesized with the Isaianic figure of the Servant of the Lord, in whom was no beauty nor comeliness, who was despised and the most abject of men, who has borne our infirmities and was bruised for our sins, who shall lay down his life for sin, and by his knowledge will give righteousness to many; who has delivered his soul unto death, and borne the sins of many, but who, by reason of his utter self-sacrifice on behalf of sinners, will divide the spoils with the strong (Is 52:13-53:12). It is in this wonderful prophecy that the meditations of the old Israel on the problems of sin, suffering, and justice reach their climax. And the fusion, in the teaching of Jesus, of these two figures—the Son of Man and the Servant of the Lord—seems to turn the extreme humiliation of the one into the glory of the other, which it anticipates, while it makes the supreme glory of the other more sublime by reason of the humiliation which preceded it. It means also, we may infer, that the universal reign of the one like a son of man,

foretold in the Book of Daniel (Chap. 7), is not to be the reign of Israelite dominion over unwilling Gentile subjects, but the result of that spiritual enlightenment of the Gentiles which is the prophesied work of the Servant of the Lord, the "Light of the Gentiles" (Is 42:6). The point of fusion of the two figures may be said to be the anticipated resurrection of Jesus; and the fact of His resurrection confirmed the truth of his teaching. Just as the glory of the reign of God, reserved as regards its full and final manifestation to the post-historic age, is anticipated in God's reign mysteriously present, to the eyes of the disciples, in the historic mission of Jesus and entrusted thereafter to the stewardship of "the Rock," so the majesty of the Redeemer and divine Lord of Israel is veiled beneath the humble semblances of the Servant of the Lord in whom God Himself is saving His chosen people. And those who, with eyes enlightened by the heavenly Father of Jesus, pierce the veil and see what many prophets have desired to see and yet have not seen, are called to follow Him to His post-historic glory by the way of suffering and apparent failure—the way He Himself has pioneered (16:24-27).

SON OF MAN, SON OF GOD

I HOPE that this very brief examination of the Gospel of Matthew, and of the teaching therein attributed to Jesus, will show that all the ingredients so far enumerated of this teaching are (as I have already claimed for Matthew's own beliefs) drawn from the Scriptures and traditions of the old Israel. At the moment of decision, the official leaders of the nation rejected Jesus' message and claims. But what they rejected was not a human compound of Israelitic beliefs and pagan ideas or superstitions, such as the Baal-worship against which the prophets had inveighed. Rather was it a highly original, profoundly moral and spiritual, reinterpretation and development of most authentically scriptural elements.

It may indeed be objected that the Danielic figure of "one like a son of man" is identified in the Book of Daniel itself with the "people of the saints of the Most High" (7:18), and that it is therefore unscriptural to interpret it as prefiguring an individual Messiah. But it may be questioned whether the collective interpretation exhausts the meaning of the Danielic passage; for the ancients, as for Thomas

Aquinas,²² the prince—and the Messiah was to be the Prince of His people, the royal Son of David—“personifies” the community he governs. On the other hand, there may be a hint, in the mysterious saying “Inasmuch as you did it to one of these my least brethren you did it unto me” (25:40), of a self-identification of Jesus, the Son of Man, with those who constitute His messianic people or community. In any case, it will not be denied that the expectation of a personal Messiah was authentically scriptural in its essence, and that to take the Danielic figure and reinterpret it in a personal sense was not to go beyond the liberty exercised by the prophets themselves in developing the teachings of their predecessors.

There remains one title applied to Jesus, and one claim made by Him, which we have not yet considered. At His baptism by John the Baptist and again at His transfiguration, we are told that there was a voice from heaven, or “out of the cloud,” saying: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”²³ In the subsequent story of the temptation of Jesus, the first two temptations are prefaced by the words: “If thou art (the) Son of God” (4:3, 6), and in 8:29 two demoniacs address Him with the words: “Why dost thou meddle with us, Jesus, Son of God?” At 14:33, after Peter’s walking on the water, “those in the boat came and said, falling at the feet” of Jesus: “Thou art indeed (the) Son of God.” There is something more deliberate about Peter’s confession: “Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (16:16). At the trial Jesus is adjured to say if He is “the Messiah, the Son of God,” and passers-by at the crucifixion say: “Come down from the cross if thou art (the) Son of God,” and “the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, say: He told us, I am (the) Son of God,” while after Jesus’ death the centurion and his companions say: “No doubt this was (the) Son of God” (27:40, 43, 54). In none of these passages does the title come from the lips of Jesus Himself, though nowhere is He said to have refused the appellation. In 24:36 some manuscripts read: “As for that day and hour, they are known to none, not even to the angels in heaven, nor to the Son; only the Father knows them,” but it is just possible that the words “nor to the Son” are a corrupt reading here, borrowed from the parallel passage in the

22. *Sum. Theol.* I-II, q. 90, a. 3c and ad 2; q. 97, a. 3 ad 3.

23. 3:17 and 17:5. It is probable that in these passages the word “beloved” is equivalent to “unique.”

Gospel of Mark. A clear instance of the use of the title by Jesus of Himself is 11:27: "My Father has entrusted everything into my hands; none knows the Son truly except the Father, and none knows the Father truly except the Son, and those to whom it is the Son's good pleasure to reveal Him." This passage, however, is underlined by the frequent occasions on which Jesus refers to God as "my heavenly Father," or "my Father who is in heaven." True, the disciples are also taught to regard and address God as their Father, but nowhere does Jesus put Himself on a level with them by speaking of "our [that is: your and my] Father"—though He does speak of His disciples as His "brethren" (25:40). It must not be forgotten that the account of the temptations, with the repeated "If thou art the Son of God," must have come to Matthew ultimately from Jesus Himself. And the contrast, in the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, between the rich man's servants and his son ("They will have reverence for my son"—21:37) points to a relationship between Jesus and His heavenly Father different in kind from that between the prophets and their God.

Is it possible to find a scriptural basis for this, the loftiest of the self-appellations of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew? That Israel was the "son" of God, that God was, in a higher sense than Abraham himself, the "father" of the people of His predilection, was a thought dear to the inspired writers of the old Israel (Os 11:1; Deut 32:6; Is 63:16; 64:8). And in the second Psalm the king—is he not the King-Messiah?—is addressed by the Lord: "Thou art my son, this day I am begetting thee." As messianic King and therefore the supreme personification of Israel, Jesus could apply these scriptural passages to Himself. It is doubtful, however, whether He who was "gentle and humble of heart" (11:29) would have done so without precautions against being misunderstood, of which we find no trace in Matthew's record, had not this self-appellation sprung from the consciousness of a unique relationship not derived from His messianic mission but intrinsic to His very being. And it would be in keeping with this consciousness that when, in the last paragraph of this Gospel, He sends his disciples out to seek new members of the new-old Israel in all the world, He bids them baptize them "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (28:19). Here, in this filial consciousness, we have what may be called the essential novelty in the good news. At the same time, this filial consciousness justifies us in regarding

the good news as a genuine reaffirmation and reinterpretation of the revelation given through Moses and the prophets; and over and above this as a further and fuller revelation and self-giving of Him whose merciful promise to Moses had from the first been "I will be with you" (Ex 3:12). "Behold," says the Son, "I am with you always, even unto the consummation of the age" (Mt 28:20).