

Shift the Issue and Win the Fight?

Rhetorical Strategies of Dealing With Conflicts in the Gospels of Matthew and John

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1. Introduction: Matthew and Judaism

The late and great Graham Stanton imagined the Gospel of Matthew was written for a group or cluster of communities which because of their Christian beliefs had more or less recently parted ways with Judaism.¹ Nowadays, the majority of scholars seem to think that such a parting of the ways had not yet taken place, but was perhaps imminent, perhaps inevitable. Part of this parting of the ways was the claim of Matthew's gospel to a position of leadership within Judaism after the disastrous destruction of the temple. Evidence for such a claim on behalf of Matthew's communities would include the controversies over the Law between the Matthean Jesus and his opponents. These controversies are usually interpreted as being adapted and redacted with a particular interest in such discussions between the Matthean communities and their Jewish contemporaries.² However, if

- 1 See *G. N. Stanton, The Communities of Matthew: Int 46* (1992), 379–391; *G. N. Stanton, Revisiting Matthew's Communities: SBLSP 33* (1994), 376–394. Both articles are reprinted in *G. Stanton, Studies in Matthew and Early Christianity, WUNT 309* (Berlin 2013). More recently, the idea of reconstructing the social reality of communities behind New Testament writings has come under renewed attack. I do not think that one necessarily has to abandon entirely the idea of reconstructing communities, as some like *R. Bauckham, Jesus and the Eyewitnesses. The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids 2006) suggest. Yet one does well to keep in mind that »the idea that the early communities were creative groups and that the narrative pieces were mostly invented for practical and legitimizing purposes certainly represents a presupposition rather than a safe historical assumption « (*J. Frey, From Text to Community: Methodological Problems of Reconstructing Communities Behind Texts: Y. Furstenberg* [Hg.], *Jewish and Christian Communal Identities in the Roman World* [Leiden 2016] 170); see also the brilliant study of *J. M. G. Barclay, Mirror-reading a Polemical Letter. Galatians as a Test Case: JSNT 31* (1987), 73–93. Frey's study is a masterpiece in pointing out the pitfalls in the reconstruction of communities behind early Christian writings. Stanton preempted such difficulties and took a very careful approach in speaking of various communities behind and before the gospel; more recently it has been taken up by, e. g., *M. Konradt, Israel, Kirche und die Völker im Matthäusevangelium, WUNT 215* (Tübingen 2007), who suggests an association of like-minded communities.
- 2 While there have been previous attempts to view Matthew's gospel as an essentially Jewish writing, this thesis gained wider support when *J. A. Overman, Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism. The Social World of the Matthean Community*, (Minneapolis 1990), was able to fit the Matthean vision into the social and cultural diversity of Judaism in the 1st century CE. Overman did this by identifying the Matthean group as a sect within Judaism. While the sectarian terminology has not really found a groundswell of support the idea of the Matthean

the Matthean groups ever reached out to claim leadership of the Jewish people, such an ambition had to be abandoned very quickly. Instead, the gospel became part of the mainstream gentile Christian movements, witnessed by the gospel's rapid reception among gentile church writings and its abandonment by more conservative Jewish-Christian circles.³

groups as one among many others within Judaism has subsequently been taken up by, among others, *A. J. Saldarini*, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago 1994); *D. C. Sim*, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, SNTSup 88 (Cambridge 1996); *D. C. Sim*, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community*, SNTW (Edinburgh 1998); *B. Repschinski*, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew. Their Redaction, Form, and Relevance for the Relationship Between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism*, FRLANT 189 (Göttingen 2000); *A. von Dobbeler*, *Die Restitution Israels und die Bekehrung der Heiden. Das Verhältnis von Mt 10, 5b. 6 und Mt 28, 18–20 unter dem Aspekt der Komplementarität. Erwägungen zum Standort des Matthäusevangeliums*: ZNW 91 (2000), 18–44; *S. von Dobbeler*, *Auf der Grenze. Ethos und Identität der matthäischen Gemeinde nach Mt 15,1–20*: BZ 45 (2001), 55–78; *M. Vahrenhorst*, »Ihr sollt überhaupt nicht schwören«: Matthäus im halachischen Diskurs, WMANT 95 (Neukirchen-Vluyn 2002); an overview over the development towards viewing Matthew's group as a Jewish community of believers in Jesus can be found in *F. J. Murphy*, *The Jewishness of Matthew: Another Look*: *A. J. Avery-Peck – D. Harrington – J. Neusner* (Hg.), *When Judaism and Christianity Began. Essays in Memory of Anthony J. Saldarini* (Leiden 2004), 377–403; *J. Boxall*, *Discovering Matthew: Content, Interpretation, Reception*, *Discovering Biblical Texts* (Grand Rapids 2014), 61–75. Recent commentaries mirror this development, with *P. Fiedler*, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, THKNT 1 (Stuttgart 2006) and *M. Konradt*, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, NTD 1 (Göttingen 2015) exploring the thesis most thoroughly. Opponents of the consensus are *R. Deines*, *Die Gerechtigkeit der Tora im Reich des Messias*: Mt 5,13–20 als Schlüsseltext der matthäischen Theologie, WUNT 177 (Tübingen 2004); *P. Foster*, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, WUNT 177 (Tübingen 2004); *J. Schmidt*, *Gesetzesfreie Heilsverkündigung im Evangelium nach Matthäus. Das Apostelkonzil (Apg 15) als historischer und theologischer Bezugspunkt für die Theologie des Matthäusevangeliums*, FzB 113 (Würzburg 2007). While Schmidt is perhaps the least convincing of these in his attempt to connect Matthew's gospel to the apostles' decree in Acts 15, Deines and Foster point out rightly that the attempts to relate Matthew's communities to various forms of Judaism seems to downplay the importance of the Christology of the gospel. For a history of the research on Matthew see *G. N. Stanton*, *The Origin and Purpose of Matthew's Gospel. Matthean Scholarship from 1945 to 1980: Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der Neueren Forschung II.25.3* (1985), 1889–1951; *Repschinski*, *Controversy Stories*, 13–61, with a particular emphasis on Matthew's relationship with Judaism; for the period since 1980 see *D. C. Sim*, *Matthew. The Current State of Research*: *E.-M. Becker – A. Runesson* (Hg.), *Mark and Matthew I* (Tübingen 2011), 33–51. Representative is the statement of *U. Luz*, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, EKK (Neukirchen-Vluyn 1985–2002), I:70: »Der Versuch, [die Gemeinde] innerhalb des jüdischen Synagogenverbandes anzusiedeln, muß inzwischen als gescheitert gelten.«

3 The classic statement of Matthew's reception history in the early church is *E. Massaux*, *Influence de l'Évangile de Saint Matthieu sur la littérature chrétienne avant Saint Irénée*, BETL 75 (Leuven 1986). Still worthwhile reading are also *H. Köster*, *Synoptische Überlieferung bei den apostolischen Vätern*, TU 65 (Berlin 1957) und *W.-D. Köhler*, *Die Rezeption des Matthäusevangeliums in der Zeit vor Irenäus*, WUNT 24 (Tübingen 1987). For a comprehensive reception history of Matthew see *S. P. Kealy*, *Matthew's Gospel and the History of Biblical Interpretation* (2 vols.), Mellen Biblical Press Series 55 (Lewiston 1997).

While the debate over the question whether Matthew's gospel is *intra* or *extra muros* of Judaism is extremely complicated,⁴ Stanton drew attention to the role Christology might have played in this process: »At first sight, in sharp contrast to John's gospel, Matthew's Christology seems to have little to do with ›the parting of the ways‹.«⁵ Stanton went on to suggest that such a first impression is misleading. He restricts his observations to the Christological controversy stories and interprets them as signs of a separation between Jews and Christians preceding the writing of the gospel. Yet even if one does not assume a final separation between the Matthean communities and their contemporary Jewish counterparts, it seems to me that Stanton strikes at the root of the conflict. The Matthean discussions about Law observance and a more or less strict interpretation of the Torah, so the thesis of this paper, deliberately obfuscate the central issue at stake: in the end, it is not the Law that sets Jewish leaders and Matthean Christians apart, it is the claim made for the person of Jesus as the normative and divine interpreter of this Law. With Stanton as our point of departure we will examine how Matthew's gospel tries to keep Law and Christology together for the Matthean communities while separating them in the controversies with the opponents, before offering a contrasting model in some brief observations about John's gospel.

2. Law and Christology in Matthew for Insiders

If Matthew's gospel is reflective of a Jewish-Christian approach, within such theological narrative different emphases are still possible. Some scholars have argued for an almost exclusively Jewish Matthean group,⁶ others see it as inclusive of gentiles as well.⁷ The narratives about the women of gentile origin in the genealogy (Mt 1:1–17), the centurion in Capernaum (Mt 8:5–13), the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21–28), and the confession of the gentile soldiers (Mt 27:54) seem to prepare for the explicit mission to

- 4 I like the observation of *B. C. Dennert*, *John the Baptist and the Jewish Setting of Matthew*, WUNT II 403 (Tübingen 2015), 7, that the complexity of the discussion illustrates not whether the Matthean groups were Jewish or not but rather what kind of Judaism they stood for since there were no clear boundary markers between Jews and Gentiles at the date of Matthew's composition. It meshes well with Boyarin's suggestion that the relations between Jews and Christians lasted, at least on a local level, much longer than usually assumed; see *D. Boyarin*, *Border Lines. The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, (Philadelphia, Pa. 2007).
- 5 *G. N. Stanton*, *A Gospel for a New People. Studies in Matthew* (London 1992), 169.
- 6 See e. g. *D. C. Sim*, *The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles*: JSNT 57 (1995), 19–48.
- 7 E.g. *G. Jackson*, ›Have mercy on me‹. The Story of the Canaanite Woman in Matthew 15.21–28, JSNT.SS 228 (Sheffield 2002); *B. Byrne*, *Lifting the Burden: Reading Matthew's Gospel in the Church Today*, (Collegeville 2004); *Konradt*, *Israel*; *B. Repschinski*, *Matthew and Luke: B. Repschinski – D. Sim* (Hg.), *Matthew and his Christian Contemporaries* (London 2008), 50–65.

all the nations (Mt 28:16–20), a mission already anticipated in the missionary (Mt 10) and eschatological discourses (Mt 24–25). Thus, it seems likely that the Matthean communities reckon with a gentile presence in their midst. As a consequence, there is one pressing question that has beset Matthean scholarship for years: Does the gospel enjoin the observance of the Jewish Law on its Jewish and Gentile members, or does it not?⁸

Much of the discussion surrounding Torah observance in Matthew hinges on the interpretation of Mt 5:17 and Jesus' programmatic statement⁹ that he has come not to abolish the Law and the prophets but to fulfill them. In looking at this statement a little more closely it is to be observed that the saying is part of the Sermon on the Mount, the first Matthean discourse of Jesus. It is addressed to the disciples of Jesus (Mt 5:2) and only after the sermon is finished it becomes clear that not only the disciples but also the crowds had listened to Jesus (Mt 7:28–29). The Sermon on the Mount is a discourse directed to those friendly to Jesus,¹⁰ as are in fact all the discourses in the gospel.¹¹ As much as the Sermon on the Mount gives Jesus' view on the Law, it is a view disclosed to insiders.

Yet what would Matthew want to express in the saying about fulfilling the Law? The precise meaning of *πληρῶσαι* is far from obvious. John

- 8 A smaller issue that nevertheless highlights the problem is the question whether the Matthean groups would ask their gentile male members to undergo circumcision. A review of the scholarly debate on this issue is given by *I. W. Oliver*, *Torah Praxis After 70 CE: Reading Matthew and Luke-Acts as Jewish Texts*, WUNT II 355 (Tübingen 2013), 403–410. It is perhaps telling that the gospel never mentions the issue at all; furthermore, the Jewish texts dealing with gentile conversions, listed by *S. McKnight*, *A Light Among the Gentiles. Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period*, (Minneapolis 1991), 47, do not talk about the necessity of circumcision. When Josephus tells the story of king Izates of Adiabene undergoing circumcision, he is advised by Ananias that circumcision is not necessary, while Eleazar advises to undergo the rite (*ant.* XX). It is possible to read the story as Josephus' endorsement of circumcision for proselyte gentiles; *N. E. Livesey*, *Circumcision as a Malleable Symbol*, WUNT 2/295 (Tübingen 2010), 40. However, the story also shows that within Judaism different positions on the issue were held by religious leaders.
- 9 »The Christian tradition never had any doubt about the programmatic character of vs. 17«: *H. D. Betz*, *The Sermon On The Mount: A Commentary on The Sermon On The Mount, Including The Sermon On The Plain (Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20–49)*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis 1995), 173.
- 10 And this includes the readers of the gospel: *J. K. Brown*, *Direct Engagement of the Reader in Matthew's Discourses: Rhetorical Techniques and Scholarly Consensus*: NTS 51 (2005), 19–35. Thus, it can rightly be assumed that the Sermon wishes to give directions for Christian living not just to Jesus' disciples during his ministry but to the disciples throughout history; see *ZNW* 62 (1971), 141–171.
- 11 *U. Luz*, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, *New Testament Theology* (Cambridge, New York 1995). An exception needs to be made for Mt 23, if indeed that is to be counted among the Matthean discourses; for this discussion see *J. Hood*, *Matthew 23–25: The Extent of Jesus' Fifth Discourse*: JBL 128 (2009), 527–543 who summarizes the discussions before drawing Mt 23 and Mt 24–25 together as one discourse, a conclusion that does not convince me.

P. Meier has argued that the word occurs most frequently in Matthew's use of prophetic allusions and quotations; the fulfillment of these prophetic quotations happens in what Jesus does and suffers between the cradle and the grave. With Jesus, what has been prophesied now comes into being. Therefore, according to Meier, Mt 5:17 has to be interpreted as a prophetic fulfillment of the Torah, not as an actual doing of the Law. In this sense, the Law comes to an end with Jesus.¹² While this view sounds plausible at first, it also has to be remembered that the programmatic statement about fulfilling the Law is followed by the so-called antitheses which cite the Torah and supplement it with Jesus' own exhortations.¹³ This may well suggest a slightly different meaning of fulfillment. Furthermore, the fulfillment of prophetic quotations is always phrased in the passive voice and as a narrator's comment on the events unfolding in the gospel,¹⁴ while in 5:17 Jesus claims in the active voice that he has come to fulfill not just the prophetic predictions, but the law and the prophets as a whole.

But another observation undermines Meier's explanation even further. The claim concerning the fulfillment of the Law is part of a programmatic statement about the enduring importance of the Law (5:17–20) which is then fleshed out in the antitheses that follow. This statement however breathes the air of controversy and conflict. It begins with the admonition not to believe (Μὴ νομίσητε) that Jesus has come to abolish the Law. Jesus' fulfillment of the Law is contrasted with a mistaken belief that he might abolish the Law. This contrast between abolishing and fulfilling the Law is examined further in 5:18–19, where even the smallest stroke of the

12 J. P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew. Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel*, Theological Inquiries (New York 1979), 63: »prophetic fulfillment, indeed, eschatological consummation.«

13 Some scholars suggest that Matthew is not supplementing the Torah itself but attacking a different interpretation of Torah: C. Burchard, *Versuch, das Thema der Bergpredigt zu finden*: C. Burchard (Hg.), *Studien zur Theologie, Sprache und Umwelt des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen 1975), 27–50; C. Dietzfelbinger, *Die Antithesen der Bergpredigt im Verständnis des Matthäus*: *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 70 (1979), 12–14; J. D. Charles, *Garnishing with the »Greater Righteousness«: The Disciple's Relationship to the Law (Matthew 5:17–20)*: *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12 (2002), 1–15; M. Konrad, *Die vollkommene Erfüllung der Tora und der Konflikt mit den Pharisäern im Matthäusevangelium*: M. Konrad – D. Sänger (Hg.), *Das Gesetz im frühen Judentum und im Neuen Testament* [FS für Chr. Burchard, Göttingen 2006], 129–152. Others view the antitheses as a Matthean commentary on the Torah itself: I. Broer, *Freiheit vom Gesetz und Radikalisierung des Gesetzes. Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des Evangelisten Matthäus*, SBS (Stuttgart 1980); Luz, *Matthäus*, I, 330; Sim, *Christian Judaism*, 129 H.-J. Eckstein, *Die »bessere Gerechtigkeit«: Zur Ethik Jesu nach dem Matthäusevangelium*: H.-J. Eckstein (Hg.), *Der aus Glauben Gerechte wird leben. Beiträge zur Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Münster 2001), 122–142; B. Repschinski, *Die bessere Gerechtigkeit. Gesetz, Nachfolge und Ethik im Matthäusevangelium*: ZKT 136 (2014), 423–441.

14 The formula in 1:22 may serve as an example: ἵνα πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν ... διὰ τοῦ προφήτου; similarly 2:15.23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54.56; 27:9.

Law endures until heaven and earth pass away. The consequences of teaching lawlessness are dire: Such people will be the least in the kingdom. All this suggests that Matthew really intends to go beyond a mere prophetic fulfillment of the Law towards an actual observance.

Yet even if the Law does not come to an end in its fulfillment through Jesus, Meier's argument still carries some weight: Fulfillment cannot and should not be reduced to doing or keeping the Torah.¹⁵ Fulfillment of the Law also means that it is being actualized and comes into its fullness with Jesus, who does not just extend his fulfillment to the Law but applies it to Law and Prophets together.¹⁶

The contrast between abolishing and fulfilling has another implication. The formulation *μη νομίσητε* implies a possible misapprehension that Jesus preached lawlessness. It seems Matthew wishes to suggest that some people accused Jesus of such.¹⁷ This however places the saying about the Law in the context of a conflict that becomes more tangible in Mt 5:20 as Pharisees and scribes are set in opposition to the addressees of the Sermon on the Mount. Here the disciples are told that their righteousness (*δικαιοσύνη*) has to be greater than that of scribes and Pharisees. Righteousness is, therefore, measurable and comparable and probably refers to good works (see Mt 5:16.47).¹⁸ Finally, a competition and conflict is in the open, and it revolves around fulfilling the Law. And indeed, the controversy stories of the gospel show that conflict over the Law between Jesus and his followers and the scribes and Pharisees is an ongoing one that extends beyond the narrated time of Jesus and his contemporaries to the time of the Matthean communities and its contemporaries.¹⁹

But behind a righteous interpretation of the Law there looms another issue. The discussion of the Law becomes a vehicle for the assertion of claims related to the figure of Jesus himself. Firstly, the fulfillment of the Law is related to Jesus in Mt 5:17, and in 5:20 it leads to the consequence of the better righteousness of the disciples. Secondly the programmatic statement of Mt 5:17–20 is then fleshed out in the antitheses of Mt 5:21–48. These antitheses bind the Law and its fulfillment even further to the person of Jesus by connecting its observance to Jesus' teaching.

15 R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids 2007), 182.

16 See the still very useful study of A. Sand, *Das Gesetz und die Propheten*, (Regensburg 1974), who sees the prophets as the major hermeneutical tool in Jesus' interpretation of the Law.

17 Betz, *Sermon*, 174–176; J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids 2005), 181–182.

18 B. Paschke, *Particularism and Universalism in the Sermon on the Mount. A Narrative-Critical Analysis of Matthew 5–7 in the Light of Matthew's View on Mission*, NTAbh 56 (Münster 2012), 59–116, is quite persuasive on this issue.

19 This is the main thesis behind Repschinski, *Controversy Stories*.

The recurring form of the antitheses with ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις – ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν opens up a number of questions.²⁰ Some scholars hold them to be a commentary on a particular tradition of interpreting Torah signaled by the expression ἠκούσατε ὅτι. Such interpretations are often associated with the Pharisees mentioned in Mt 5:20.²¹ Others view them as a direct commentary on the Torah,²² where ἐρρέθη ought to be understood as a divine passive.²³ While both positions have good arguments in their favor it must be noted that the introduction of the antitheses in Mt 5:17–20 does not deal with the accusation that Jesus interprets the Torah incorrectly, but that he supposedly abolishes it altogether. This context suggests that indeed the Matthean Jesus wishes to comment on the Torah directly in the light of prophetic fulfillment. The contrast between the Aorist of ἠκούσατε and the Present of λέγω, complemented with the references to ἀρχαίοις and ὑμῖν, underscores that Matthew tries to set past and present into relation. The narrative setting of the Sermon underscores this: Matthew relates the pronouncements of Jesus on the Galilean mountain to the Torah of old, given by God on Mount Sinai.

This relationship is not one of opposition but of contrast. None of the antitheses does in fact abolish any Law – which would be strange indeed in the light of Mt 5:17–20, and if ἐρρέθη is indeed to be understood as a divine passive. The first two antitheses do not cancel out the commandments but intensify them. The following antitheses do not criticize the Law as such but rules of implementation. The Law does not prescribe divorce,

- 20 *Betz*, Sermon, 205–106, points out how singular this formulation is in the literature of antiquity, even if he finds some similar antitheses in the conventions of Hellenistic family ethics.
- 21 E.g. *B. Gerhardsson*, Memory and Manuscript. Oral Tradition and Written Transmission In Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity, Nytestamentliga Seminar Acta (Uppsala 1961), 327; *Broer*, Freiheit vom Gesetz und Radikalisierung des Gesetzes. Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des Evangelisten Matthäus, 75–81; *Luz*, Matthäus, 1:530; *W. D. Davies – D. C. Allison*, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, ICC (Edinburgh 1988–1997), 1:565; *Sim*, Christian Judaism, 129; *Eckstein*, Bessere Gerechtigkeit. This interpretation can argue with the odd ways the individual commandments are quoted, sometimes in full, sometimes in part, sometimes in paraphrases.
- 22 E.g. *Burchard*, Versuch, das Thema der Bergpredigt zu finden, 40–44; *Dietzfelbinger*, Die Antithesen der Bergpredigt im Verständnis des Matthäus, 12–14; *K. Müller*, Gesetz und Gesetzeserfüllung im Frühjudentum; *K. Kertelge* (Hg.), Das Gesetz im Neuen Testament (Freiburg 1986), 11–27; *Charles*, Garnishing with the »Greater Righteousness«, 8; *Konradt*, Die vollkommene Erfüllung der Tora; *B. Repschinski*, »Nicht aufzulösen, sondern zu erfüllen.« Das jüdische Gesetz in den synoptischen Jesuserzählungen, FzB 120 (Würzburg 2009), 91–94. Arguments for this hypothesis are that the Torah is actually quoted whereas possible interpreters of the Torah are not mentioned at all; *Nolland*, Matthew, 229, does not make up his mind: On the one hand he talks about an intention »to create distance to the past«, on the other hand about a connotation »of a chain of transmission.« If the latter were really true, it would be very hard to pin down the agents of such a chain of transmission.
- 23 It occurs elsewhere in the New Testament as a regular expression to denote divine communication through the scriptures: Rom 9:12.26; Rev 6:11; 9:4.

oaths, or retaliation; it merely regulates their implementation. The controversy in Mt 22:22–33 illustrates the abstruse consequences such rules of implementations can produce. Whoever keeps the advice of Jesus does not transgress the Law.²⁴ Similarly, the antitheses are not a form of Christian radicalization of the Torah but instead draw on well-known Jewish traditions.²⁵ While the first two antitheses might support such a view, the latter seem to be only marginally related to the commandments quoted.

Now if the antitheses are not a radicalization of Torah, and if they are not some form of critique of a perhaps Pharisaic form of Torah interpretation, it seems most likely that they are concrete illustrations of the greater righteousness demanded of the disciples of Jesus in Mt 5:20. They take their point of departure from Torah and do not call the old commandments into question. But they move far beyond Torah to show the kind of righteousness Jesus is demanding of his disciples.²⁶

An example can illustrate the Matthean strategy. The first antithesis (Mt 5:21–26) begins with the general prohibition to kill (cf. Ex 20:13; Dtn 5:17) before the comments of Jesus seem to narrow down towards a situation within a community of brothers and sisters (πᾶς ὁ ὀργιζόμενος τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ, Mt 5:22) in which one member of the community has a conflict with another in the context of offering gifts at the altar. Both the terminology and the situation anticipate what is one of the main themes in the community discourse (see Mt 18:15–20). Thus, Matthew takes a commandment from the Torah and goes from there to shape an ethic that expresses itself in the concreteness of mercy and forgiveness exercised within the community. Similar strategies can be observed in the other antitheses as well so that the antitheses, just like the rules of piety in Mt 6, develop an ethic for the Matthean groups. A similarly meandering argument can be observed with regard to the *lex talionis* (Mt 5:38–42). The commandment about the right measure of retaliation is quoted only incompletely (see Ex 21:24). Jesus' first comment on this commandment still relates to some form of violence in the advice to turn the other cheek. Yet from there Jesus then goes on to judicial proceedings about a coat via the request to go a mile with someone to finally talking about supporting those in financial need.²⁷

In summary, Matthew's gospel wants its communities to understand that Jesus in no way abolishes the Law, but that he fulfills it. He does so

24 *Davies – Allison, Matthew*, III:506.

25 For the antitheses as a Christian radicalization of the Law see e.g. *France, Matthew*, 197–198, who cites others. On the other hand, *Davies – Allison, Matthew*, I:331, and *Fiedler, Matthäusevangelium*, 120, show how much traditional Jewish thought is contained in the pronouncements of Jesus.

26 *Davies – Allison, Matthew*, III:508–509.

27 For more details see *Repschinski, Bessere Gerechtigkeit*, 431–433.

by relating his own commandments to the Torah. The Torah is the source from which Jesus' commandments flow and therefore remains valid (see also Mt 23:2–7).²⁸ The antitheses show this, and the setting of the Sermon on the Mount supports this interpretation. Just as the Torah was spoken by God on Mount Sinai to Moses who related it finally to the people of Israel, so now Jesus speaks a new Law that grows out of the old.²⁹ He speaks it to the disciples, who in their turn will be asked to teach all nations »to observe all that I have commanded you« (Mt 28:20) – again on a mountain in Galilee.³⁰

This has strong Christological implications. Just as God gave a Law on Sinai, Matthew claims that Jesus gives a new Law on a mountain in Galilee. This new Law is the fulfillment of the old. Just as God gave a covenant on Sinai, Jesus will establish a covenant in his blood (Mt 26:28). And just as the angel prophesies to Joseph that Jesus will be called Immanuel, God with us (Mt 1:25), so he promises his disciples that he is with them until the end of time (Mt 28:20). Matthew's treatment of the Law can be viewed as part of a pattern that establishes the divinity of Jesus. This however means that the right interpretation and of the Law remains tightly bound to a right understanding of the person of Jesus himself. Yet while such an argument might work for insiders of the Matthean communities, it holds rather limited persuasiveness for outsiders or opponents. This observation leads us to the story of the rich young man.

3. Law and Christology in Matthew for Possibles

The story of the rich young man called to follow Jesus (Mt 19:16–21) is a typical call narrative.³¹ It shares a number of features in common with the call of the disciples in Mt 4:18–22, the call of Matthew in Mt 9:9, and the call stories in Mt 8:21–22. The call narratives are distinguished by an ex-

28 *M. A. Powell*, Do and Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2–7): JBL 114 (1995), 419–435, and against *Davies – Allison*, Matthew, 1:508–509, who submit that the Matthean antitheses are an argument of Jesus' teaching of mercy against casuistic legalism.

29 As *T. L. Donaldson*, Moses Typology and the Sectarian Nature of Early Christian Anti-Judaism: A Study in Acts 7: JSNT 34 (1981), 27–52; *D. C. Allison*, The New Moses. A Matthean Typology (Minneapolis 1993); *J. Lierman*, The New Testament Moses: Christian Perceptions of Moses and Israel in the Setting of Jewish Religion, WUNT 173 (Tübingen 2004), observe, a strong Moses typology runs through the gospel of Matthew. Yet in the antitheses Matthew goes beyond such a typology in relating Jesus' commandments to God's revelation to Moses.

30 See *Davies – Allison*, Matthew, III:686: »V. 20 interprets Jesus as the authoritative bringer of revelation: he brings the *nova lex* which embraces the *antiqua lex*.«

31 For the common characteristics of Matthean call narratives see *C. Landmesser*, Jüngerberufung und Zuwendung zu Gott. Ein exegetischer Beitrag zum Konzept der mathäischen Soteriologie im Anschluss an Mt 9,9–13, WUNT 133 (Tübingen 2001).

PLICIT call to follow³² combined with an explicit mention of something that needs to be relinquished, be it the nets and the boat where the father sits, a dead relative and his funeral, or the tax collector's table. When a scribe wishes to follow Jesus without being able to give up the comforts of life, discipleship fails (Mt 8:19–20).³³

The story of the rich young man combines the invitation to discipleship with the demand to leave wealth and thus qualifies as a call narrative. The young man does not accept the invitation and leaves the story »sadly and silently«³⁴ while the disciples continue to discuss with Jesus their reward for having left everything (Mt 19:23–30). This emphasizes that the story of the rich young man is not just a sad reminiscence about a failed would-be follower, but carries weight in the discussions of the Matthean communities with regard to discipleship.

Consequently, Matthew has invested a certain amount of redactional work into a story inherited from Mark 10:17–22.³⁵ Among the more prominent features of the redaction is the enlargement of the dialog between the young man and Jesus. While in Mark's version Jesus merely mentions some commandments to the man, in Matthew Jesus commands general adherence to the commandments, with the young man asking for a specification of which commandments Jesus has in mind. Jesus then lists the commandments found also in Mark and extends these with the command to love one's neighbor.³⁶ While teaching the young man which commandments are important Jesus also corrects his misunderstanding of Torah in general. The young man seems to consider the keeping of the Law as an instrument or a means to achieve and possess (σχω, Mt 19:16) eternal life. Jesus corrects him in speaking about a way leading to life (εἰσελθεῖν, Mt 19:17), perhaps in view of the man being a νεανισκός whose way of life is not yet determined.³⁷

32 Here in Mt 19:21 it is δεῦρο ἀκολούθει μοι; variations of this occur in 4:19 (δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου) and 8:22; 9:9 (ἀκολούθει μοι).

33 The story contains other differences as well: the scribe is not called but offers to follow, and he calls Jesus διδάσκαλε, a usually negatively connoted term in Matthew's gospel. See B. Repschinski, *Taking on the Elite: The Matthean Controversy Stories*: (Hg.), SBL.SP (Atlanta 1999), 1–20; France, *Matthew*, 325. This is why the relation between »teacher« and »scribe« drawn by C. Deutsch, *Lady Wisdom, Jesus, and the Sages. Metaphor and Social Context in Matthew's Gospel* (Valley Forge 1996), 43–45, cannot convince.

34 Davies – Allison, *Matthew*, III:50.

35 The details of the Matthean redaction can be found in Luz, *Matthäus*, IV:120.

36 Nolland, *Matthew*, 788, n. 82, suggests a chiasmic structure of the story which would place the commandments in the center of the story. The chiasm would consist of προσέλθων – ἀπῆλθεν (16a–22b); ἵνα σχῶ ζωὴν αἰώνιον – ἔξεις θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανοῖς (16b–21b); εἰ δὲ θέλεις – εἰ θέλεις (17c–21a); λέγει αὐτῷ (18a–20a). The arrangement is certainly noteworthy, even if no remains sceptical about the supposed chiasm.

37 Imaginatively F. D. Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary – Volume 2: The Churchbook*, *Matthew 13–28*, (Grand Rapids 2007), 701. It is to be noted that only in Matthew is the man a youth.

The commandments designed to help the young man on his way to life are taken from the second half of the Decalog (Ex 20:13–16a; Dtn 5:17–20a) in the LXX version but in a different order. These are then amplified through the Matthean addition of the command to neighborly love (Lev 19:18). The emphasis is clearly on social relations as is also visible in the discussion of the great commandment in Mt 22:39. Whether as a boast³⁸ or not,³⁹ the young man asserts that he keeps the commandments, yet he also realizes that something is missing (Mt 19:20). Jesus' answer is remarkable in interpreting the young man's realization of something missing as a wish to be perfect (τέλειος). With this term, Matthew harks back to the conclusion of the antitheses in Mt 5:48 and Jesus' command to his disciples to be perfect as their Father in the heavens. The young man is invited to become part of those who are addressed in the Sermon on the Mount, the disciples. The perfection is tied to the giving up of wealth and following Jesus. Even though the young man is not ready to be perfect, his sadness reveals that he is at least implicitly acknowledging the truth of Jesus' demands. His attachment to his wealth makes following Jesus impossible.

The story illustrates what has already been seen in the Sermon on the Mount. Firstly, the Law is shown as valuable. Jesus encourages keeping the Law. For the story of the young man the Law becomes the foundation upon which the possibility of giving up wealth and following Jesus rests. The text suggests a certain ambivalence with regard to the Law. On the one hand, it implies that the Law is a way to life: εἰ δὲ θέλεις εἰς τὴν ζωὴν εἰσελθεῖν, τήρησον τὰς ἐντολάς (Mt 19:17). Yet in going this way, the young man comes to the realization that something is lacking (τί ἔτι ὑστερῶ, Mt 19:20). It seems that Matthew views the Law as the foundation upon which Jesus is able to ask the young man to give up his wealth and enter into discipleship. Similar to what was seen in the discussion of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount, the Law is the foundation on which Jesus makes further demands of his disciples. These further demands lead to perfection: εἰ θέλεις τέλειος εἶναι (Mt 19:21), a Matthean redaction that adds poignancy to the story.⁴⁰ One might even turn this argument on its head: the validity of Jesus' demands, and consequently the validity of discipleship, is to be measured in terms of adherence to and observance of the Law.

Again, as in the Sermon on the Mount, the Law remains the rock upon which the Matthean house of discipleship is built. It is through the Law that the true meaning of Jesus' teaching becomes apparent. It is perfection that the young man experiences as lacking in himself, and it is the

38 *Davies – Allison*, Matthew, III:46.

39 *Luz*, Matthäus, III:323.

40 *Luz*, Matthäus, III:121. Luz also points out how influential this reference to perfection was in the reception history (124–127).

quality that Jesus calls his disciples to pursue as a way to becoming children of the Father in the heavens (Mt 5:48). And the description of God in the text just preceding this call provides a hint of what such perfection should look like.

The last of the antitheses (Mt 5:43–47) has a very specific purpose. The disciples are to become children of their Father in the heavens (Mt 5:45). This father is further described as someone who grants rain or sunshine on the good and the evil, the just and the unjust alike. God is generous in his gifts without regard to worth or merit. The text is a fascinating example of the generous mercy that is God's *proprium*⁴¹ and that is mirrored in the Last Judgment scene as a criterion according to which humankind is judged (Mt 25:31–46). Divine mercy is to become the hallmark that characterizes the conduct of the disciples of Jesus. Such mercy, however, rests on the foundation of the Law, and in the end, fulfills its purpose. This probably explains the Matthean addition of the commandment to love one's neighbor as it relates well to the giving of wealth to the poor.⁴² Those who do not practise the Law in order to show mercy are those who do not practise the Law they teach (see Mt 23:2). Such is the young man who fails to use his wealth as a means to show mercy to the poor.

But beyond the illustration of what the Law means and to which purpose it is supposed to lead, the story exhibits a second emphasis. As already seen in the antitheses, the Law leads not only to mercy but to the person of Jesus as the one to be followed. The young man fails to appreciate that a correct understanding of the Law does not simply lead to merciful actions, but also to discipleship under Jesus.⁴³ The Law is not only the basis for merciful actions, but also for a very personal relationship to Jesus that rests on a call.⁴⁴ Whereas in Mt 5:48 perfection points to the intricate relationship between fulfilling the law and a relationship to God, the rich young man hears the claim that perfection means doing the Law and devoting oneself completely to Jesus.⁴⁵ Yet in the end he decides against following the call of Jesus.

41 See e. g. E. Lohse, »Vollkommen sein«. Zur Ethik des Matthäusevangeliums: E. Lohse (Hg.), Das Neue Testament als Urkunde des Evangeliums (Göttingen 1991), 44–52, yet he argues that at the root of this is a Q-text which originally did not employ τέλειος but οἰκτιρῶν. This, however, seems an unnecessary assumption. Other texts on God's mercy include the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1–17), or, more generally, the address of God as Father; see B. T. Viviano, God in the Gospel According to Matthew: Int 64 (2010), 341–354

42 See France, Matthew, 793.

43 G. Barth, Das Gesetzesverständnis des Evangelisten Matthäus: G. Barth – G. Bornkamm – H. J. Held (Hg.), Überlieferung und Auslegung im Matthäusevangelium (Neukirchen 1960), 89–93.

44 Luz, Matthäus, III:125. It is worthwhile noting here that the Sermon on the Mount is preceded by the call of the first disciples (Mt 4:18–22).

45 J. Gnlika, Das Matthäusevangelium, HthK.NT I,1–2 (Freiburg 1986), II:165.

4. Preliminary Conclusions

At this point we have looked at two different situations in the gospel in order to show the close connection between Matthew's understanding of the Law and the description of the person of Jesus. The first instance, the Sermon on the Mount, describes the argument as presented to the so-called insiders.⁴⁶ The Matthean Jesus speaks to his disciples and takes the opportunity to refute accusations of abolishing the Law. He explains that the true appreciation of the Torah lies in its fulfillment through Jesus. On the one hand this is a fulfillment that explains the intentions of the Law by drawing out exemplary implications. On the other hand, in expanding on this fulfillment through the antitheses, Matthew presents Jesus as a giver of a new Torah in close resemblance to God giving the old Torah on Mount Sinai. The Law and its role within this group is clearly at the service of Christology.

The second situation goes beyond the insiders of the disciples to a situation in which someone outside but interested is presented with the offer of joining the inside group. In a sense the rich young man could function as a case study for the Jewish mission mentioned in Mt 10:5–6. Here the connection between the Law and Christology is much less tangible. Law observance is enjoined, and it leads to the call to follow Jesus. However, Jesus is no longer painted as the divine lawgiver but appears much more like a teacher who collects disciples. As such he is addressed by the young man. It seems safe to say that the high Christology so important in presenting the Law to the disciples is downplayed in the attempt to persuade someone who may or may not be a future disciple.

The difference between the disciples and the rich young man is that the disciples understand the connection between the Law and Jesus and act accordingly, while the rich young man does not. This leads to the question of how the Law is presented to outsiders who prove to be opponents of Jesus and his disciples. With this question in mind we turn to the Sabbath controversies reported Mt 12:1–14.

5. Law and Christology in Matthew for Outsiders

Matthew's gospel devotes a great deal of attention to people who prove themselves to be implacable opponents of Jesus. They appear under vari-

46 The terms insiders and outsiders are used quite loosely here. For a much more nuanced evaluation of these terms and definitions of what constitute such groups see e.g., *L. M. White*, *Grid and Group in Matthew's Community: The Righteousness/Honor Code in the Sermon on the Mount*: Semeia 35 (1986), 61–90; *P. Trebilco*, *Self-designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge 2012).

ous names and constellations, beginning with King Herod who enters into an unlikely alliance with chief priests and scribes (Mt 2:4). Various groups follow: Pharisees, elders, and Sadducees among them. Common among them is the fact that they belong to the elite of the time claiming leadership over the Jewish people. Matthew describes these groups as invariably hostile to Jesus, even going so far as turning a Markan story about a scribe »not far from the kingdom of God« (Mk 12:34) into a controversy story about a Pharisaic lawyer who wishes to tempt Jesus (Mt 22:35), much like Satan is the tempter in the desert. It does not surprise that the story is concerned with the question about the most important commandment in the Law.

This one-dimensional characterization of the opponents has led some to assume Matthew does not really want to distinguish between the various groups. However, this theory has not prevailed, and the opponents Matthew is probably interested in are the Pharisees. It is precisely this group of opponents who seem to be shaped most carefully to fit not only the historical opponents of Jesus. As literary characters, they are also representatives of the kind of opponents the Matthean communities had to deal with.⁴⁷ Especially Mt 23 makes this abundantly clear.

Equally instructive is that the discussions between the mostly Pharisaic opponents and Jesus center around the Law. While there are other issues of debate like blasphemy (Mt 9:2), most of the controversies are connected to discussions of the Law, and even the vitriolic polemic against Pharisees and scribes in Mt 23 is largely based on the accusation that they teach the Law but do not practise it.

To illustrate this point it is worthwhile to look at an example in detail. In Mt 12 we find two controversies surrounding the Sabbath (Mt 12:1–8; 9–14). Both stories involve the Pharisees in opposition to Jesus who first defends his disciples from unjust accusations, and then goes on to heal a man with a withered hand in the Synagogue of Capernaum. These two stories are framed by two texts who comment on the person of Jesus. In Mt 11:25–30 Jesus praises his Father for hiding things from the learned while revealing them to mere infants. Then he makes the extraordinary claim that only he as the Son knows the will of the Father, and he can reveal it to whomever he chooses. As a consequence, Jesus goes on to invite his hearers to take up his yoke as an easy one that promises the lightening of

47 J. D. Kingsbury, *The Developing Conflict Between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew's Gospel: A Literary-Critical Study*: CBQ 49 (1987), 57–73 saw the opponents as one literary character with differing names. Repschinski, *Controversy Stories*, 322–327, draws attention to the special redactional care given to the Pharisees in the controversy stories. See also M. Gielen, *Der Konflikt Jesu mit den religiösen und politischen Autoritäten seines Volkes im Spiegel der matthäischen Jesusgeschichte*, (Bodenheim 1998).

burdens,⁴⁸ a marked contrast to the Pharisees and scribes who go out of their way to increase peoples' burdens (23,4). One might ask whether these two parts of Jesus' prayer are not comments on the two following Sabbath controversies. The first has the supposedly learned left behind while Jesus enters their synagogue, the second is an illustration of a burden being lifted from the man with the withered hand.

The closing text of this unit, Mt 12:15–21 is the longest fulfillment quotation of Matthew's gospel, quoting Isa 42:1–4. While the quotation's immediate connection with the preceding material is not obvious,⁴⁹ it can easily be read as a Christological comment on the general activity of Jesus⁵⁰ and perhaps with its reference to the silent suffering and reed that is not broken (Mt 12:19–20) more specifically as a comment on the healing of the injured man and the Pharisaic reaction in plotting to kill Jesus.

Both framing texts clearly highlight Christological issues. Therefore, it comes as somewhat of a surprise that the controversy stories themselves do not take up this emphasis but instead concentrate on the issues at hand, namely the correct interpretation of the Sabbath Law.⁵¹

The first controversy (Mt 12:1–8) concerns the plucking of grain on the Sabbath. It is a story that Matthew has taken over from Mk 2:23–28. But Matthew makes significant changes to it. First, he adds that the motivation for the plucking of grain is the disciples' hunger and not any sort of capricious behavior (Mt 12:1), aligning them more neatly with the following account of David and his hungry men entering the sanctuary and taking from the bread of the Presence that only priests were supposed to eat (Mt 12:3–4). Matthew leaves out the name of the High Priest, most probably because the name given by Mk 2:26 is wrong. The story is odd in a sense that the original as told in 1 Sam 21 does not involve the Sabbath at all but centers around the necessary sexual abstinence of David and his companions. One can speculate why Matthew kept the story at all, since it does nothing to resolve the legal matter at hand.⁵² Yet one thing happens with this story: Matthew creates a strong link not only between the disciples and David's men, but also with the priests who supposedly are the only ones allowed to eat from the bread (Mt 12:4).

With this link established, Matthew proceeds to add an argument of his own, namely the priests who do not keep the Sabbath Law and still

48 *Byrne*, *Lifting the Burden*, makes this passage the key to his view of Matthew's gospel.

49 See *Nolland*, *Matthew*, 492: It »is the longest of the formula quotations and the one with the least obvious and, at least proportionately, least extensive linkage with its immediate context.«

50 See *Konrad*, *Matthäus*, 197.

51 For a current analysis of the Sabbath controversies in Matthew with a lot of material also covering contemporary Jewish practice see *Oliver*, *Torah Praxis*, 80–99, 114–124.

52 *Oliver*, *Torah praxis*, 94, thinks that Matthew wishes to establish a connection between Jesus and David.

remain innocent (Mt 12:5–7). He prefaces it with Jesus' question whether the Pharisees have not read about it in the Law. The Pharisees are shown to be less learned than their accusation of lawlessness against the disciples suggests. He then proceeds to explain that the priests who remain guiltless despite desecrating the Sabbath are the exemplary – and minor – case which should be used to judge the disciples' behavior because »something greater« is present. Matthew presents a *qal-wa-homer* argument in its classic form.⁵³ The Pharisees, however, are not as well versed in the Law and therefore have condemned the innocent (Mt 12:7). That the Pharisees do not understand scripture is further illuminated by the question, »Have you not read/understood«, and the following quotation from Hos 6:6, particularly since Jesus had told the Pharisees earlier to go and read this very passage (Mt 9:13).

Thus, Matthew shows that Jesus argues according to the Law and with the tools of halakhic discourse usual at the time, and he does better than his Pharisaic opponents.⁵⁴ The claim that the Son of Man is Lord over the Sabbath (Mt 12:8) is proven rather than merely stated as in Mk 2:28.

But the story includes a further barb against the opponents. The result of their faulty understanding of the Law leads them to condemn the innocent. Yet the only innocents named in the story are the priests in the temple. The disciples are innocent only by association with these priests. In a situation in which the gospel was probably written after the destruction of the temple the subtext is highly polemical. Matthew accuses the Pharisees and their misapprehension of the Law as one of the reasons why the temple has been destroyed. Their condemnation of the priests could have no other outcome.

But Matthew also offers a solution to the catastrophe in claiming that something greater than the temple is here. This something has been taken to refer various things like the Kingdom of the Heavens, or the mercy mentioned in the Hosea quotation, or the words and deeds of Jesus. It has also been taken to refer to Jesus himself.⁵⁵ While each alternative has reasons to recommend itself it is also noteworthy that Matthew chooses to formulate it in the neuter: *μᾶλλον ἔστιν ὁδε* (Mt 12:6). The legal argument

53 The origin of this kind of argument in Jewish legal debate is obscure; it is already part of the *middot* of Rabbi Hillel in the 1st century C.E.; it might have been taken over from Greek rhetoric during the hellenistic age.

54 See e. g. D. M. Cohn-Sherbok, *An Analysis of Jesus' Arguments Concerning the Plucking of Grain on the Sabbath*: JSNT 1 (1979), 31–41; Davies – Allison, *Matthew*, II:313. It should be noted there is a question whether temple service indeed falls under the Sabbath Laws. Certainly, Jubilees 50:9–11 does not seem to think so. If this would hold, then Matthew's argument is less convincing.

55 *Repschinski*, *Controversy Stories*, 100, gives a discussion of the alternatives. There is no consensus whether *μᾶλλον* is to be taken as referring to the person of Jesus or to something else.

remains strictly focused on the matter at hand and is not obscured by any claims about the person of Jesus. This is somewhat surprising given the frame of the Sabbath controversies. But it seems Matthew does not wish to introduce Christological claims into a legal controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees.

The second Sabbath controversy follows a very similar pattern. It is taken over from Mk 3:1–6, and again the redactional activity is quite visible: Matthew connects the story more closely with the preceding controversy over the plucking of the grain. He neatly separates miracle and controversy over the Law. He emphasizes the latter by considerably abbreviating the miracle. The whole incident is initiated by the Pharisees trying to get an answer from Jesus that might allow them to bring him to court (ἵνα κατηγορήσωσιν αὐτοῦ; Mt 12:11). Right from the outset of the story, Pharisees are painted as people with dishonest motives trying to entrap Jesus. Matthew then inserts the example of the sheep in the pit in order to construct another *qal-wa-homer* argument to show that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. The conclusion is more general. Matthew leaves out Mark's »to save a life«, probably because the condition of the man with the withered hand was not life-threatening. Thus, Matthew extends the Pharisaic question about healing on a Sabbath to Jesus' conclusion that »to do good« is lawful – an obvious allusion to the good deeds that lead those who witness them to praise the Father in the Heavens (5,16). Lastly, Matthew omits Mark's Herodians and reduces the opposition the Pharisees plotting to kill Jesus. Again, Jesus appears as the better interpreter of the Torah. And again, the story avoids any explicit Christological claims. The focus of the story remains clearly on showing that Jesus is the better interpreter of the Law by legal argument. Even the miracle remains an illustration of Jesus' superior argument (τότε, Mt 12:13) and does not lead to the usual astonishment or questions as to who this might be among bystanders and observers.

While the precise Matthean argument concerning the sheep in the pit and the doing good on the Sabbath is much discussed not only by commentators on Matthew but also among the gospel's Jewish contemporaries,⁵⁶ it is quite clear that Matthew does not call Sabbath observance into question even if the Sabbath law is loosened in some aspects. Among Jesus' contemporaries there would probably have been consensus that an animal should be left until after the Sabbath. Such a commandment occurs in 4Q265 and CD 11:13–14 even in the case where the animal's life is threatened. In later times, rabbinic texts make provisions for situations which would allow for an animal's rescue.⁵⁷ But they do little to help interpreting

56 For a detailed summary of the issues and the offered solutions see *Oliver, Torah praxis*, 117–123.

57 For various Jewish positions on the issue see *Oliver, Torah Praxis*, 118–123, who points

Matthew's gospel since the Matthean implication that any kind of doing good is allowed on the Sabbath is foreign even to the rabbis.

However, the text has a further aim. It seeks to show up the Pharisees as bad interpreters of the Law. The suggestion of Mt 12:11 is that the Pharisees actually do lift their sheep out of pits while they would allow the crippled man to suffer. Matthew makes no bones about Jesus' opponents: they are dishonest, and on top of that they are shown to be inadequate interpreters of the Law through a *qal-wa-homer* argument in which Jesus also shows that the Pharisees do not do what they seem to teach: They would leave the man while tending to their own sheep in the pit.⁵⁸ Later in the gospel, the discrepancy between teaching and action becomes the rationale behind a wholesale condemnation of the Pharisees (Mt 23). Three conclusions can be drawn: the Pharisees are evil in their intention, they are irrational in their interpretation of the Law, and they are unmerciful against their fellow humans.

Again, it is a mark of this controversy that the legal argument is much in the foreground. Christological issues are not raised, and even the healing seems to become part of legal discussions when the Pharisees who at the outset wished to accuse Jesus react to the miracle by going out and taking counsel on how to kill Jesus. While Jesus appears to be the superior interpreter of the Law his identity remains hidden. Indeed, the Matthean Jesus exhorts his followers and witnesses to the many healings to remain silent about his identity (Mt 12:16).

6. Conclusion: Jesus, the law, and conflict in Matthew

The Law remains central to the interpretation of Jesus in Matthew's gospel. In this the gospel seems to follow a two-pronged strategy. Arguing with a view towards insiders, Matthew is showing that Jesus does not abolish the Law at all, rather fulfills it. Matthew makes this claim by portraying Jesus not only as a faithful adherent to the Torah but also as the giver of a new Torah that builds on the old one. The fulfilment of the Sinai Torah is unfolded in the way Jesus applies it in the antitheses with a view to mercy

out that there are no contemporary Jewish texts allowing for the lifting of an animal out of a pit on a Sabbath. But of course, later rabbis discussed this issue, and they might well reflect earlier discussions. *P. Tomson*, *If This Be From Heaven: Jesus and the New Testament Authors in their Relationship to Judaism*, (London 2001), 220, points out that Jesus speaks of not of lifting the animal but raising it (ἐγερῆ). Tomson suggests that Matthew uses »the exact halakhic expression that the animal may be *raised up* (Mt 12.11)« [emphasis original]. This reading still has to apply a much later rabbinic reading to the Sabbath law (*b. Shab* 128b).

58 *Konrad*, *Matthäus*, 195: Jesus »stellt ... seine Kontrahenten in einem kurzen halachischen Diskurs bloß.«

and perfection. The fulfillment of the Law, therefore, does not rest on precepts or commandments or rules of behavior. It rests fundamentally on the person of Jesus himself who seals this new covenant with his own blood for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:28).⁵⁹ For this reason, Matthew places the giving of the new Torah of Jesus on a mountain and entrusts it to his disciples who are to teach all nations about it in the presence of the risen Jesus (Mt 28:16–20). The Torah points to Jesus.

The intricate connection between the Law and the person of Jesus is again highlighted in the story of the young man who cannot follow Jesus. In this story of a failed vocation the Law is the sound basis upon which discipleship builds. Discipleship of Jesus requires the Law. The experience of lack on the part of the young man points to the fact that without Jesus the Law is incomplete. What Jesus offers in discipleship is the perfection that is part of God himself.

Arguing with a view to outsiders, and in particular to the opponents, the Christological dimension of the discussion of the Law is hardly noticeable. Jesus does not appear as a Lawgiver, or the source of a new Torah. He is portrayed as someone who is much superior in interpreting Torah, but the portrait of Jesus does not go beyond this. Jesus appears as a teacher, and is addressed as such by his opponents. Tellingly, the opponents of Jesus are the only ones in the whole gospel who address Jesus as a teacher. In the last of the Jerusalem controversies concerning the Son of David (Mt 22:41–46) there is an obvious Christological context since Jesus has been hailed as the Son of David during his entrance into Jerusalem (Mt 21:9) and during his first appearance in the temple (21:15). Yet in the controversy this is not drawn out; the story remains curiously detached.

If this reading of Matthew's strategy behind dealing with the Law is correct, then some conclusions can be drawn. The most obvious is that the Matthean communities are envisaged to be groups where the Law enjoys a high regard and is supposed to be followed as part of a new Torah given by Jesus. Furthermore, the new Torah of Jesus gives some latitude in interpreting the old Torah in terms of mercy and love. The Sabbath controversies in particular bear eloquent witness to this. This feature might also be the key to understanding why Matthew's gospel had such resounding success in later Gentile churches.

But the old Torah also becomes the topic around which discussions with opponents are possible. These discussions revert to traditional Jewish legal debates in their use of statement and counter-argument. They do not enter into the Christological nature of Matthew's approach to the Law. It

59 See *B. Repschinski*, 'For he will save his people from their sins' (Matt 1:21). A Christology for Christian Jews: CBQ 68 (2006), 248–267.

seems that Matthew shifts the focus of the discussion. If the Law points the disciples towards Jesus, Jesus points his opponents towards the Law.

One may well ask whether such a strategy has a purpose, and what it might be. If Jesus is shown to be the superior interpreter of the Law over and over again, it seems to have done little to convince the opponents – be they opponents of Jesus or of Matthean communities. The opponents are never shown to be wavering in their evil purposes or their unflagging persecution of Jesus, even beyond his death. The gospel itself seems to acknowledge that the fight with Pharisees and all they stood for had been lost. Hence, Matthew does not spare the invective against them. But the sheer number of Matthean controversy stories also suggests that while the fight may have been lost, it wasn't over yet. By leaving out the appeal to Jesus' authority in the legal debates Matthew meets the opponents in their own area of expertise and shows them up. At the same time, he assures the followers of Jesus that they are the faithful and sure guardians of the tradition enshrined in the Torah.

History shows that the Matthean communities did not win the fight against their opponents over leadership of the Jewish people after the fall of the temple. But the gospel won another fight: it showed that adherence to Jesus implies a faithfulness to Jewish Law that preserved its origin in Jewish traditions while at the same time making them accessible for appropriation by a gentile audience. Matthew's approach to link Law and Christology shaped some of the early Christian understanding of the continuity between Jewish past and Gentile present.

7. Law and Christology in John

While Matthew tries to obscure the real issues behind the controversies between the Matthean communities and their possible opponents by concentrating on the Law and relegating Christology to the background, other writings in the New Testament take a very different approach to similar conflicts. A comparison with the Gospel of John is particularly instructive, because the Fourth Gospel shares with Matthew the tendency to commingle the experience of the post-Easter communities with the narratives of the pre-Easter Jesus.⁶⁰

One of the striking features of John's gospel is not only the hostility to various groups of Jewish leaders, but also the often-used generalization »the Jews«. Some scholars see in this feature an indication of the devel-

60 *M. Theobald*, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes. Kapitel 1–12*, RNT (Regensburg 2009), 45–46, calls this »Verschmelzung der Horizonte« and states, »[Johannes] schaut viel stärker das *Ineinander* von Vita Jesu und eigener kirchlicher Erfahrung« (45, emphasis original).

opment of a group which grew increasingly hostile first to various other groups within Judaism, and finally to all Jews, following a parting of the ways between Johannine Christians and Judaism.⁶¹ But even if one does not follow such a hypothesis, the gospel's seemingly anti-Jewish bias is striking.⁶²

For our purpose, a closer look at John 9 suggests itself. It shares with the Matthean controversies the setting of an event taking place on the Sabbath. Furthermore, like the Sabbath controversy about the man in the synagogue of Capernaum, John 9 also involves a healing. It shares this feature with the Sabbath healing and the ensuing controversy of John 5. Indeed, the blind man of John 9 seems to be a literary contrast to his evil twin in John 5:1–18 who is lame.⁶³

The story of the blind man in John 9 develops dramatically in six scenes.⁶⁴ The first scene (John 9:1–7) describes the exposition with a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples upon the occasion of meeting a man born blind and the possibility of his being sinful. The scene closes with the healing. In the second scene (John 9:8–12) Jesus is no longer present, while the neighbors discuss with the healed man his identity and the manner of his healing. The scene culminates in the question of Jesus' whereabouts and the admission of the man that he does not know. The third scene (John 9:13–17) describes the first questioning of the man by the Pharisees. Again, the manner of healing is discussed, and the scene ends with the discussion of Jesus' origins, while the man confesses Jesus to be a prophet. The fourth scene (John 9:18–23) describes the questioning of

61 This has long been the chief argument of *U. C. von Wahlde*, *The Jews in the Gospel of John. Fifteen Years of Research*: ETL 76 (2000), 30–55. His magisterial commentary on John's gospel and letters is mainly devoted to reconstructing a history of the Johannine group along this argument: *U. C. von Wahlde*, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (3 Volumes), Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids 2010). See also *R. E. Brown*, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (ed. by Francis Moloney), ABRL (New York 2003); *Theobald*, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes. Kapitel 1–12*.

62 *J. Becker*, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (2 Bände) (Gütersloh 1984), I:358, calls John 8:44 it the most anti-Jewish verse in the whole New Testament. Others see it as a polemic in which the author tries to claim true Judaism for Jesus and his community by denying it to the opponents: *E. Puech*, *Le diable, homicide, menteur et père du mensonge en Jean 8, 44*: RB 112 (2005), 215–252.

63 The two stories share a number of features: the unasked healing, the meeting with the opponents of Jesus after the healing, and the final meeting with Jesus, the narration in distinguishable dramatic scenes. However, the man in John 5:1–18 never realizes who Jesus is and ends up betraying him to the Jews. In John 5, the Sabbath features much larger, yet still it is the identity of Jesus that forms the center of the story.

64 *W. Harnisch*, *Der Glaube als Sehen des Herzens. Zur Interpretation von Joh 9*: *S. Maser – W. Schlard* (Hg.), *Text und Geschichte* [FS Dieter Lührmann, Marburg 1999], 37: »Bühnenstück«. Such dramatic scenes are a feature of the Johannine narrative art; see *B. Repschinski*, *Vier Bilder von Jesus. Die Evangelien – alt, doch aktuell*, (Würzburg 2016), 243–246.

the man's parents by the Jews who doubt the identity of the man and his former blindness. A narrator's comment details that the Jews had already decided to exclude from the synagogue anyone confessing Jesus as Messiah. The fifth scene (John 9:24–34) describes a second questioning and intensifies the polemical nature of the conversation between the man and the Jews. While the Jews still ask about the manner of healing, the man drives the discussion towards the identity of Jesus as coming from God. The Jews revert the discussion towards the man as a supposed sinner and expel him. The sixth and final scene (John 9:25–38) returns to the beginning by describing a meeting between Jesus and the man. Jesus reveals his identity to the man, who answers with a confession of faith and worship. Then Jesus turns to the Pharisees and speaks judgement over them on account of their blindness.

Despite the fact that the story reveals several inconsistencies pointing to a literary development,⁶⁵ its construction is remarkably unified.⁶⁶ This impression derives from the dramatic presentation in scenes. Furthermore, the manner of healing is reported three times in detail, first as narrative, then twice by the man himself. And in the fifth scene the opponents return to the question of the manner of healing, while the man ultimately refuses to answer. The manner of healing is important in unifying the whole account. Finally, the question of sin opens the story, returns in the condemnation of the man by the opponents, and in the condemnation of the Pharisees by Jesus.

But beyond the scenic arrangement, the story contains two lines of argument that run in opposite directions. The opponents become harsher and harsher in their condemnation of Jesus; they assert that he is not from God (John 9:16), and that he is a sinner (John 9:24). At the same time, the healed man shows a deeper and deeper understanding of Jesus: from not knowing (John 9:12) he goes on to confess him a prophet (John 9:17) and as the Son of Man (John 9:35–38). The opponents claim to know but don't (John 9:24e.29a.c) while the man knows indeed (John 9:25c.d.30c.31a).

Another striking feature of the story is the dating on a Sabbath. Throughout the whole discussion between the opponents of Jesus and their conversation partners the Sabbath does not seem to be of much importance. It occurs only in the third scene, where it becomes the reason for

65 Among these are: the mention of the Sabbath in 9:14 as an afterthought, the switch from Pharisees to Jews as opponents; the non-Johannine notion that the man was healed on account of the prayer of Jesus (9:31), suggesting that God is the healer and not Jesus; for a detailed list see *M. Rein*, *Die Heilung des Blindgeborenen (Joh 9): Tradition und Redaktion*, WUNT II/73 (Tübingen 1995), 65–79; for the history of research see *M. Labahn*, *Jesus als Lebensspender: Untersuchungen zu einer Geschichte der johanneischen Tradition anhand ihrer Wundergeschichten*, BZNW 98 (Berlin 1999), 305–377.

66 *R. Schnackenburg*, *Das Johannesevangelium I–IV*, HThKNT 4 (Freiburg 1981–1984), II:303: »eine meisterhafte Darstellung«.

some of the Pharisees to claim that Jesus cannot be from God (John 9:16). With regard to healing on the Sabbath, there seems to be less unanimity among the Johannine Pharisees than among the Matthean ones. The opposition becomes much more unified as soon as the question concerns the identity and origin of Jesus.

This becomes most palpable in the fifth scene when the Jews still ask about the manner of healing and the impatient man asks them whether they too want to become Jesus' disciples. The answer of the Jews is clear-cut enough: they are disciples of Moses, the man a disciple of Jesus (John 9:28). The conflict is not about Torah or its interpretation, it is about the relationship with Jesus. Whoever is a disciple, must be thrown out of the synagogue, just as the healed man is. But the exclusion is mutual: while the man born blind worships Jesus, Jesus in turn pronounces that the Pharisees are remaining in their sin. This harks back to the beginning of the story: The man born blind was not sinful but has become the revelation of the works of God (John 9:3), while those who claim to know who God talks with (John 9:29) remain in sin.

8. Conclusion

At the end of his chapter on Matthew's Christology Graham Stanton observed that Matthew and John share some »striking similarities« in their development of a Christology that is at least partly indebted to »Jewish objections to Christian claims about Jesus«. ⁶⁷ While this is certainly true it is just as striking how differently the two gospels deal with the objections.

Matthew's gospel tries to make the Law the focus of the discussions between Pharisees and Jesus, at the expense of Christology. John goes in the opposite direction. He sets Christology firmly at the center of the conflict. It is likely that two very different community situations are envisaged. Matthew might look to communities who still wish to be in conversation with Jewish opponents, no matter how polemical the conversation might be. Therefore, the gospel is looking for the common ground in these discussions. John is intent on emphasizing the differences. He does not seem to care much about the Sabbath and implies that even for at least some Pharisees the Sabbath is not called into question by the behavior of Jesus. It is the identity of Jesus and his origin which causes conflict. The man born blind makes his choice, and it is a choice that leads to separation from the Jews.

Both gospels realize that at the heart of the conflict is the way they are interpreting the person of Jesus. In the controversies with opponents

67 *Stanton, Gospel for a New People*, 191.

Matthew tries to obscure this by showing Jesus to be a superior interpreter of Torah. John shows the issue to be Christological and in the course of this all but forgets the question of Torah.

Zusammenfassung

Das Matthäusevangelium zeigt eine Doppelstrategie im Umgang mit dem jüdischen Gesetz. In den Teilen des Evangeliums, die direkt an Jüngerinnen und Jünger Jesu gerichtet sind, erscheint Jesus als der Offenbarer einer neuen Tora, die auf der alten Tora aufbaut. Die Erzählung lässt Jesus als den göttlichen Gesetzgeber erscheinen. In den Auseinandersetzungen mit den jüdischen Gegnern Jesu tritt die christologische Dimension matthäischer Gesetzesauslegung allerdings in den Hintergrund. Jesus wird hier lediglich als der bessere Gesetzesausleger geschildert. Dies kann mit der Situation der matthäischen Gemeinde inmitten der Auseinandersetzungen innerhalb des formativen Judentums erklärt werden. Ein kurzer Blick auf das Johannesevangelium zeigt im Kontrast, wie sich die Diskussion um die Tora mit den jüdischen Gegnern auf die christologische Dimension reduziert.