

TANGAZA COLLEGE
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

CHARLES ONYEKACHUKWU UZOETO SDB

JESUS' INCLUSIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE GENTILES
IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW:
A CHALLENGE TO THE OSU CAST SYSTEM IN IGBOLAND,
NIGERIA

MODERATOR

SR. CARMEL POWELL FMM

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Dedication

To,

Mrs Roseline Uzoeto, my mum, whose love and concern has enabled me to be what I am today, as well as my brothers and sisters for their moral support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many people whose good will and sacrifice made this work a success. It would be ingratitude if I failed to acknowledge them. Therefore, in my praise and gratitude to God who has helped me with his blessings and love, I also ask for her blessings upon my brothers and sisters who greatly contributed in different ways in order to realise this great work.

I am greatly thankful to my moderator Sr. Carmel Powell. In the midst of her heavy programs, she willingly, carefully and earnestly invested time and energy to allow this paper to take a beautiful shape.

I am particularly grateful to the youth of Don Bosco Ondo who helped to put this work in the computer. I must thank Deacon Pawel who has been very kind to me in setting the logistics needed for this long essay.

I am equally indebted to all my beloved confreres in Don Bosco Utume, especially my beloved brother Chuks Akubueze whose encouragement carried me through.

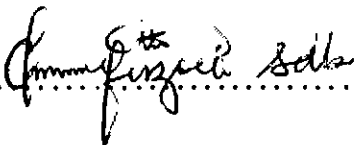
I wish to express my heartfelt greetings to my mum, Mrs Roseline Uzoeto and my parish priest, Fr. Hyginus Obia for their prayer and support

Apart from human assistance, I wish to recognise the enormous assistance of the electronic program "Bible Works 5.0" for helping me with Greek and Hebrew translations. It has certainly been of much help to me.

Finally, a vote of thanks goes to the Tangaza College staff, students and friends for having giving me ample atmosphere of love, concern and prayer.

Student's Declaration

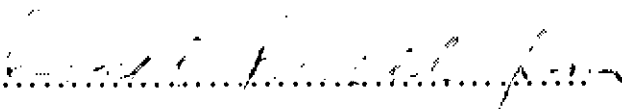
I hereby declare that the material used for this essay has not been submitted for any academic credit to any institution. All sources have been dully cited.

Signed... 

Charles Onyekachukwu Uzoeto sdb

Date:

This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed:..... 

Sr. Carmel Powell fmm

Date: 12 12 01

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Having journeyed with Matthew in his Gospel, I was greatly fascinated by how this text presents Jesus as the Messiah for the Jews and the Gentiles right from his birth, during his earthly ministry and consummated after his resurrection. It is clear, as we shall see in chapter one, that Matthew's Gospel is more Jewish than the other synoptic gospels. Notwithstanding that fact, Matthew includes 'Gentiles' as one of his main themes and presents Jesus as one who welcomes the Gentiles into the plan of salvation.

The particular approach of Jesus invokes in me a consciousness of the reality of the Osu Caste System (which is like the Gentiles of today) in Igbo Land of Nigeria where I was born and brought up. The approach of Jesus to the Gentiles of his time poses a great challenge to the Catholic Christians of Igbo land.

There are many texts in Matthew's Gospel that speak about the Gentiles, but I have decided to choose some particular ones which portray Jesus' inclusive attitude towards those who came to him with great faith. In these texts Jesus marvelled at and praised the faith of these two Gentiles.

The passages chosen pose a great challenge to the Osu Caste System. Just as Jesus welcomed the Gentiles to his community, the Catholics of Igbo land are called

to do the same to the Osu people because they are of one faith in Christ. Any attempt to ostracize them is to go against the mind of Christ.

Looking at Jesus' attitude towards the Gentiles, I begin to ask myself whether the Catholic Christians of Igbo land, who ostracize their fellow Christians, are truly followers of Christ or not. The Osu Caste System per se, will be treated in great detail in Chapter three.

This work is a topical biblical research on the texts in which Jesus welcomes the Gentiles who manifested faith in him. It is not a textual exegetical paper as such, however, there are elements of exegesis present in the work.

It is an attempt to find the theological implication of Jesus' inclusive attitude towards the Gentiles due to their faith, which is the main aim of this work. Moreover, it is not an attempt to solve all the problems caused by the Osu Caste System, but rather, to create awareness among the Catholic Christians of the Igbo ethnic group, on what the following of Christ entails.

This work has three Chapters with an introduction and a conclusion to each of them. Chapter one explores the status of the Gentiles in Matthew's community, with an Old Testament background. It begins with God's original plan for humanity. Chapter two tries to do a little exegetical/theological analysis on the texts that portray Jesus' inclusive attitude towards the Gentiles, taking the genealogy and the Magi as the background texts. However, it deals in detail with the texts of the Gentile centurion and the Canaanite woman because of their similar character as well as their challenge to the Osu caste system. Other Gentile themes are not treated in detail but form the background of the work. In Chapter three, the Osu Caste System is treated in greater detail. This Chapter tries to show how the message of

Jesus' inclusion of the Gentiles challenges the Osu Caste System. The Conclusion endeavours to give the mind of Jesus and the Church on this topic.

Chapter One

The Status of the Gentiles in Matthew's Community

1. Introduction

The status of the Gentiles in the community of Matthew cannot be understood without putting one's foundation in the Old Testament. In fact, he presents his gospel as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies.

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to explore God's original plan for the entire human race, as well as what brought division into the holistic salvation history ordained by God for the whole of humanity. We shall make an effort to see the reason as to why God chose a particular people for his plan. We shall endeavor to see the moment in time when the Israelites began to see themselves as a unique nation, as well as the purpose of God in making them unique and different from the other nations. Mention will be made as to why the 'nations'- 'גוֹי or ἔθνη', or later "Gentiles," became a pejorative term.

In the same chapter, we shall see the good relationship between the Jews and the so-called גוֹי, and how this rapport later turned to a perpetual hatred during the period of the Old Testament up to the New Testament. We shall explore what the

prophets say concerning the nations/Gentiles and the general Old Testament outlook on them.

In this chapter, we shall also explore how the Matthean community inherited and assimilated this culture of separateness. This community, which was a community in transition, found itself in a struggle with the authorities, and the inclusion of the Gentiles in their community and in their missionary project. The conclusion will give the result of an enriching exploration.

2. The Gentiles-Jewish Relationships in the Old Testament

In Genesis: 1-2, God's love for the entire humanity was manifested. However, God who is always in touch with our world, could not extend his blessings except through what he created – in this case, Abraham [and Sarah]. God chose Abraham [and Sarah] as the instrument. He called Abraham [and Sarah] not only to bring blessings upon himself and his family, but upon “all the families of the nations” (Genesis 12:3). This expresses God's original plan for the whole of humanity. The entire people of Israel became the progeny of this family, and as such, ought to be the instrument of blessing for humanity. God intervened through one man, Moses, who was saved, ironically, by the daughter of the tyrant, when Pharaoh subjected the people of Israel to a cruel situation with the intention to turn them towards himself.

After their escape from Egypt, Moses restated God's plan to the Israelites in these words: through obedience to God's will Israel is to become God's own possession (no one can think of claiming Israel but Yahweh), a kingdom of priests,

(that is, a society of mediators, they are to be links between Yahweh and the entire humanity), a holy nation, exemplary before the other nations (Exod 19:5-6).

The Jews are called to be mediators through whom Gentiles would come to God. They are called to live a good and exemplary life so that when other nations see them they will say: “Which kind of God do these people worship that makes them so different?” With that, the Gentiles will turn to the God of Israel. The prophet Isaiah says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (Isa 49: 6).

The original plan was that Israel would be as a light to the nations, but the reality was that, “the relationship of Jews to Gentiles, however, was sensitive and at times volatile.”¹ There is evidence that Jews integrated themselves into the way of the Gentiles so that the Jewish religious ideas would be more comfortable in Gentile lands. For instance, Judaism of the second temple period is known for: (1) its stress on monotheistic universalism (that God is truly one and God of all; of Sirach 13:15; 18:13); (2) its friendliness to Gentiles and its apparent permission for Gentiles to participate at various levels (e.g. synagogue attendance) in Judaism; (3) its participation in Hellenistic education; and (4) its continual intermarriage. At times, this assimilation resulted in overt apostasy.² However, there are instances of resistance to Gentile ways. For example, we observe that Jews were intent on separation from Gentiles and paganism because of Gentile sinfulness; for example, there were exclusive table fellowship customs in Judaism: the food laws functioned

¹ J.B. GREEN, - S. MCKNIGHT, “Gentiles” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 255.

² Cf. J.B. GREEN, - S. MCKNIGHT, “Gentiles” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 255.

as a means to define boundaries between the Jewish community and the rest of the world.³

In spite of these negative comments, a persistent feature of Judaism is a positive attitude toward a proselyte who would forsake paganism and become a Jew, both spiritually and nationally. A notable aspect of Jewish attitudes toward proselytism is that there would be a massive conversion of Gentiles on the last day (Tobit 13:11; Sirach 36:11-17; Enoch 48:4; 2 Baruch 68:5). This conversion is frequently portrayed in terms of Jewish missionaries' reaching out to Gentiles (Isaiah 19:23; Zechariah 8:21; Jeremiah 3:17).⁴

In order to deepen the understanding of the relationship of Jews with Gentiles, let us try to understand who Gentiles are:

The Gentiles, from the Hebrew concept, denote 'nation', or 'people'. The Hebrew word, גוי, the nation, usually implies a non-Israelite people. The Greek ἔθνος used as a translation for גוי, indicates 'nation,' and as such, the word appears mostly in the Revised Standard Version, though in the King James Version the word 'Gentile' was more common. This word 'Gentile' was attributed to all non-Israelites who were considered to be 'outside the mercy of God of Israel'.⁵

The Gentile (from Latin, **gens**, "nation"), is a non-Jew. The distinction has its foundations in the Old Testament in the seven nations (Hebrew – גוים) not driven completely from the land (Joshua 24:11). These nations are the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites (Deut 7:1; Josh 3:10; 24:11).⁶

³ Cf. J.B. GREEN, -S. MCKNIGHT, "Gentiles", 255.

⁴ Cf. J.B. GREEN, -S. MCKNIGHT, "Gentiles", 255.

⁵ R. BROWNRIGG, *Who's who in the New Testament*, 127.

⁶ P.J. ACHTENMEIER, ed., *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 339

In accordance with several traditions, the Israelites were enjoined to maintain strict separation from them in matters of religion, marriage and politics (Exod 23:28-33; Deut 7:1-5; Josh 23:4-13), although historically speaking, the amount of interchange between Israel and the peoples of the land seems to have been considerable. Only in post-biblical Hebrew did it become possible to speak of an individual “Gentiles” (גוים) as, after Ezra, the Jewish community began to close ranks in the wake of the Exile.⁷

The distinction between Jew and Gentile is related to a tension between universalism and particularism. The Isaiah tradition spoke of Israel as “a light to the nations” (Isa 42:6; cf. 60:3). In the latter days, the nations would flow to Jerusalem to learn Torah (Isa 2:2-4) or to participate in the coming reign of God (45:22-24; 51:4-5). There was an effort to establish a separation between Jews and Gentiles. More so, Ezra and Nehemiah commanded Jews in Jerusalem to divorce their non-Jewish wives, not just those of the seven nations (Ezra 9-10; Neh.10:30; 13:23-31). However, “Ruth and Jonah seem to be parables written to protest this action in the name of a more universal understanding of God’s care for his creation.”⁸

The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha give evidence of a wall being erected between Jews and Gentiles (cf. 2 Macc 14:38), although expressions of universalism are still found. Their claim was that the world was created for Israel alone (2Esdra 6:56 contrasts 1Enoch 10:21). Ecclesiasticus 11:34 warns against receiving a stranger into the household, lest your way of life become alienated. Schurer testified that,

⁷ Cf. P.J. ACHTENEIER, ed., *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, 339.

⁸ P.J. ACHTENEIER, ed., *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, 339.

Gentiles' possessions had to be purified before they were used by Jews; many food items were forbidden to Jews if they came from Gentiles. As a result, Israelites travelling in Gentile countries were in a very difficult position. If they wished to obey the Law strictly, they had to confine themselves to eating raw vegetables and fruits.⁹

Such a situation could not have encouraged Jewish missionary work among the Gentiles. The distinction which Jews made between themselves and the Gentiles arose after the exile and seems to have emerged from a confirmation of several factors. One was the union of people and religion. The subjection of the Jews to imperial foreign powers, which were often oppressive, bred hatred and resentment. The Jews were sometimes called the Gentiles, not idolaters, but demon-worshippers, since the demons were identified with the gods of the Gentiles. "They were denied credit for any sound moral instincts and no vices were beneath them."¹⁰ They were identified with the devil. In this way, "they stood in profound contrast with the people of the revealed Law."¹¹ Bousset stresses, "that there were two judgments of the Gentiles by the Jews. One, which was denied from second Isaiah, asserted that the gods of the Gentiles were nothing and that Israel had a mission to bring the worship of the true God to the Gentiles."¹² The other fastened upon the consciousness of Israel as a chosen nation, and treated the Gentiles as probated by God and condemned to the worship of false gods.¹³

In the Hebrew Bible there is a pattern of statement in which two "covenants" of God are related to one another: "the first with all humans and animals, and the

⁹ E. SCHÜRER, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, III, 83-84.

¹⁰ J.L. MCKENZIE, "Gentile" *Dictionary of the Bible*, 303.

¹¹ J.L. MCKENZIE, "Gentile" *Dictionary of the Bible*, 303.

¹² J.L. MCKENZIE, "Gentile" *Dictionary of the Bible*, 303.

¹³ Cf. J.L. MCKENZIE, "Gentile" *Dictionary of the Bible*, 303.

second with Israel alone.”¹⁴ The two ‘covenants’ are “the ‘covenant with Noah’ (Gen 9:1-17) and the ‘covenant with Abraham’ (Gen 17:1-22).”¹⁵

For Isaiah, “God is the lord of all nations, not merely of Israel. And all nations, including Israel, are subject to his judgment”.¹⁶ In Isaiah 66:23, it says, “all mankind shall come to worship before me, says the lord”. This is the universal salvation of all humanity. This struggle in trying to understand the universal salvific plan of God to humanity enters also in the community of Matthew. We shall explore how Matthew struggled with this situation.

3. The Struggles in Relationship between the Christian Jew and Christian Gentile

The development of Christianity, which began as a Jewish movement, was profoundly affected by the success of the Gentile mission undertaken by the apostle Paul and others. The Matthean community obviously experienced this situation.¹⁷

The struggles in Matthew’s community “cannot be accurately understood apart from formative Judaism.”¹⁸ A brief consideration of social conflict, identity,

¹⁴ N LOHFINK, E. ZENGER, *The God of Israel and the Nations*, 33.

¹⁵ N. LOHFINK, E. ZENGER, *The God of Israel and the Nations*, 33. However, even in the covenant God made with Abraham, “he made it so that all the families of the earth will be blessed in him (Exodus 12:3). The Jews are to be the priestly people, the mediators through whom the Gentiles must come back to the true God of Israel. The original plan of God for the election of Israel is clear in Exodus 19:5-6. These verses give us a key definition of God’s people, for they were to be his people; they were to be a particular people of a particular God with a particular mission. That mission was to be ‘a kingdom of priests,’ to bear the knowledge of God to all other nations, and ‘a holy nation,’ to provide a glimpse of their own God to other nations by their total submission to him and by reflecting God’s presence in their lives..

¹⁶ W.A. VANGERMEEREN, ed., *The Theology of Exodus*, 727-728.

¹⁷ Cf. P.J. ACHTMER, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, 339

¹⁸ J. A. OVI-ERMAN, *Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism*, 5. Formative Judaism was a precursor of the eventually dominant authorities within Judaism in late antiquity as well as

and deviance in the light of Matthew, will lay the foundation for understanding the nature of Matthew's group.

Matthew's community "would view itself as bringing order to a disordered universe and to a needy Israel."¹⁹ In contrast, "the leaders of Israel presumably viewed Matthew's group of believers-in-Jesus as a threat to divinely mandated holiness, righteousness and order."²⁰

The question of mission to the Gentiles, their admission into the Church, and the condition under which they were to be admitted, constituted a thorny issue in early Christianity, especially expressed in the other gospels, Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline letters. But "none of the gospels presents this problem in such sharp and poignant terms as Matthew."²¹

The poignancy of the problem of the Gentile mission in Matthew arises from the fact that "it is only in this particular gospel that there is a record of Jesus, during his earthly ministry, specifically instructing the disciples not to proclaim the gospel in Gentile or Samaritan territory (Matt 10:1-6)."²² He instructed his disciples to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (v.5). "This could have been a formulation of the evangelist himself or he could have found it in his special source."²³ There are some statements of Jesus, which seem to put the Gentiles down: as people concerned only with their material needs (Matthew 6:32); their benevolence extends to their compatriots (Matt.5: 47); and their prayer is a vain

one of several movements struggling to gain more influence and control in the post-70 period.

¹⁹ A.J. SALDARINI, *Matthew's Christian Jewish Community*, 76-79.

²⁰ A.J. SALDARINI, *Matthew's Christian Jewish Community*, 76-79.

²¹ J.S. UKONG, "The Problem of the Gentile Mission in Matthew's Gospel", 437-448.

²² J.S. UKONG, "The Problem of the Gentile", 437-448.

²³ J.S. UKONG, "The Problem of the Gentile", 437-448.

repetition (Matt.6: 7). These statements might sound abusive to the ears of the common person but Jesus' message was directed to his apostles as a warning to their behaviour.

Matthew's audience was probably small in number, "a minority community within the larger dominant society".²⁴ Several images in the Gospel affirm smallness as a constituent part of the experience of living as followers of Jesus. Assuming Mark's gospel as a major source for Matthew's gospel, "Matthew retains from Mark the term, 'little ones' (18:6//Mark 9:42) as a term for disciples."²⁵ But Matthew intensifies its use. He adds it both in the beginning: "see that you do not despise one of these 'little ones'" (18:10); and at the end: "so it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these 'little ones' should perish" (18:14). The Q parable about the ninety-nine sheep (cf. Luke 15:3-7) also suggests the same idea.²⁶ Matthew employs terms such as, "few", "little ones", "infants", and "children" (*as cited above*). These images denote small size, vulnerability and powerlessness, but also 'specialness' in God's purpose.²⁷

Matthew's community consisted of Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles,²⁸ a community that was immersed in Greek culture and most probably speaking Greek. Matthew was writing to his Church that was in a very critical situation. To reconcile the two quite opposite groups is very difficult for Matthew. This community was more of the poor than the rich. Unlike Luke 6:20 "Blessed are you poor..."

²⁴ W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 27-30.

²⁵ W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 27-30.

²⁶ Cf. W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 27-30.

²⁷ Such images are consonant with the Jewish understanding of election by God, that the Jews were chosen precisely because they were the fewest of all peoples (Deuteronomy 7:7-8)

²⁸ Some commentators (as we shall see in the later) suggest that the community of Matthew was predominantly Jews.

(Matthew) says. “Blessed are those who are poor in spirit...” (Mt 5:3), so as include everyone. The Matthean audience included affluent Christian households as well as merchants and shipping agents. As regards affluence, Matthew’s atmosphere is quite distinct from that in Luke. For example, Jesus is not born in humble surroundings and visited by poor shepherds. Instead, “the Magi visit the child Jesus in a house, open their treasure chests and share their wealth with expensive gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matthew 2:11).”²⁹ The setting appears to be urban. This is reflected by the use of the term, “city”, πόλις, twenty-six times in the gospel, as compared to the word village, κώμη, which is used three times.³⁰ Sociologically, the community was “a fragile minority still identified with the Jewish community by others and still thinking of itself as Jewish”.³¹

Matthew’s gospel in this way has as its “*sitz in leben* (italics mine), the crisis of a Church in transition, seeking to preserve what is viable in its Jewish past as it moves into the uncharted waters of a predominantly Gentile future in the Greco-Roman world.”³²

Scholars like Barth, Davis, and Hummel have often noted that Matthew’s gospel is a very “Jewish” gospel. They identify the highly “Jewish” material, such as the exhortation to accept the teaching authority of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:2-3).³³ Barclay states that Matthew is the gospel that was written for the Jews. One of the great objects of Matthew, according to him, is to demonstrate that all the

²⁹ J. A. GRASSI, “Matthew’s Gospel of Justice”. 234.

³⁰ Cf. F.W. BEARE, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 10.

³¹ A.J. SALDARINI, “*The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict*” in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approach*, ed., by D.L., BALCII, 38.

³² D.N. FREEDMAN, ed., “*The Fellowship*.” *ABD VI*, 625

³³ Cf. D.N. FREEDMAN, ed., “*The Fellowship*.” *ABD VI*, 625.

prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus, and that, therefore, he must be the Messiah. It has one phrase which runs through it like an ever-recurring theme: "This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet."³⁴ They have stressed, for example, the frequent Hebrew Bible citations of Jesus' interpretations of the tradition; the Jewish practices (such as almsgiving, prayer and fasting in 6:1-18); the genealogy, which assumes detailed knowledge of the biblical traditions; and the references to the key Jewish figures like Solomon (6:29; 12:42), Jonah (12:39-41) and David (12:23; 22:42-46). The gospel does not need to give any proof of the authority and importance of such materials. The author assumes that the predominantly Jewish audience values this tradition.³⁵

One would imagine the extent to which the Christian Gentiles in this community would not feel at home. Surely, to establish a relationship between the Christian Jews (who took the Law as their omega point) and the Christian Gentiles (who were taken to be a less lawful set of creatures) would be rather sensitive.³⁶ It is only faith that can overcome the barrier put by strict observance of the law.

The struggle for self-definition was all the harder for the Matthean community, since it was caught up in a tension between particularity and universality. In what way were they part of Judaism and in what way were they from among the Gentiles? Part of the community's tradition made it clear that the mission of Jesus and his first disciples had been intended only for Israel (2:6; 9:36; 10:5-6, 23; 19:28). Twice, however, a strange phrase is used to express this. For instance, Jesus tells the twelve whom he sends out, "to go nowhere among the Gentiles... but

³⁴ W. BARCLAY, *The Daily Study Bible. The Gospel of Matthew*, 1-11, 5-6.

³⁵ Cf. W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 30. Even though there were many Gentiles in the Community of Matthew, but Jewish members were more than the Gentiles in population.

³⁶ The Analysis is mine.

go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (10:5-6) and tells the Canaanite woman that “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24). Such remarks show the tension of particularism and universalism in Matthew’s community.

There are some sayings in this gospel where Jesus tries to teach his disciples a great lesson: he teaches them to imitate God in the understanding of power (20:25), hospitality (5:47), and prayer (6:7). He tells them that the Gentiles do not follow God’s ways, not because they do not want to, but because they have failed in their responsibility. They are supposed to teach the Gentiles through their lives. They are to be a light to them. Jesus instructed them to be like him: as he himself bears witness to the Gentiles (20:19), they also must do the same.

Perhaps the most revealing instance of how this community appropriated to itself the symbolic structure of Judaism is this remark concerning a community troublemaker: “if he refuses to listen to the Church, let him be to you as a Gentile ...” (18:17).³⁷ The first impression is that the man or woman must be abandoned as hopeless and irreclaimable, but that is precisely what Jesus cannot have meant. Barclay realised “that Jesus never set limits to human forgiveness.”³⁸ and, looking into how Jesus deals with the sinners with sympathy and gentleness asserts thus: “When you have given the sinner every chance, and when he or she remains stubborn and obdurate, you may think that he or she is to be ostracised but they can be won over with love that can touch even the hardest heart.”³⁹ This manifests the struggle in relationship between the Christian Jews and Gentiles in the Matthean

³⁷ Cf. L. T. JOHNSON, *The Writings of the New Testament. An Interpretation*, 204-205.

³⁸ W. BARCLAY, *The Daily Study Bible*, 189.

³⁹ Cf. W. BARCLAY, *The Daily Study Bible*, 189.

community. The only means of breaking this barrier is faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is a gift which God gives freely. God gives it to everyone so that everyone can have access to him. It is only God who can bring his people to himself. Faith is the vehicle that can lead anyone to God.

4. Conclusion

The first chapter showed the purpose of God from the beginning: to bring the entire humanity to himself. He chose one nation as mediator of the all human race. They (Israel) could not realize God's plan, keeping themselves separate and regarding other people who are not Jews as "condemned". Matthew's community was to be a light to lead the Gentiles to the true God. The challenge posed by particularism and universalism was evident. Finally, it becomes evident that it is faith in Christ that can bring the Gentiles to God.

In later chapters, we shall see how Matthew tries to see the Gentiles as a part of the project of God from all eternity through faith in Christ.

Chapter Two

Exegetical /Theological Analysis on the Texts that portray Jesus' Inclusive Attitude towards the Gentiles

1. Introduction

This chapter, which is the nucleus of this work, explores the inclusive attitude of Jesus towards the Gentiles. The context and location will also be examined. This work will dwell on the passages where the Gentile theme occurs, but will lay more emphasis on the centurion and the Canaanite woman. These two Gentiles are particularly chosen because their stories have common elements.

Moreover, both of them are Gentiles who came to Jesus for a similar concern. The healing of their children took place from a distance,⁴⁰ and Jesus himself

⁴⁰ Jesus was not in immediate proximity with those healed - his word healed 'from a distance'- he did not see or touch! This can also indicate or highlight the cultural and religious gap between the Jews and the Gentiles.

was amazed by their tremendous faith. The two are included in the people saved not by ethnic group, but by faith in Jesus (cf. 1:21).⁴¹

The two are chosen because they portray the topic of the essay very vividly, and they stand out as the shining example of faith to Matthew's community, both of them having faith as the gateway to Jesus, and thus, to the kingdom of God.

In this chapter, a comparison will be made with the gospels of Mark and Luke, in order to appreciate the particularity of Matthew's interpretation.⁴²

2. Context and Location of the Topic from the Beginning of the Gospel to its End

Matthew asserts a universalistic vision as early as the genealogy (1:1, 2-6a) and as late as the instructions given to the eleven to spread the good news of the kingdom to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (28: 19)⁴³. It shows that the kingdom is for Israel and the Gentiles without losing the first privilege to Israel, and portrays Jesus as the universal messiah from the beginning. Matthew makes this evident by mentioning "Abraham as the Father of many nations (1:1-17) in his genealogy and the inclusion of several Gentile women as well."⁴⁴ It is not only that they are Gentiles, but they are also women. Looking closely at the kind of women mentioned in the genealogy, we see that all except Mary can be considered outsiders or Gentiles either by birth or by affinity. Gundry suggests that "Rahab was a Canaanite who was celebrated by the Jewish rabbis as a Gentile proselyte; Rahab joins Tamar in prefiguring the influx of

⁴¹ Cf. S. LOVE, "Jesus, Healer of the Canaanite Woman's Daughter", 17.

⁴² Cf. F. MARTIN, "St. Matthew's Spiritual Understanding", 161.

⁴³ Cf. S. LOVE, "Jesus, Healer of the Canaanite Woman's Daughter", 15.

⁴⁴ J.B. GREEN -S.MCKNIGHT, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospel*, 261.

Gentiles into the Matthean Church".⁴⁵ The "mention of Ruth as the mother of Obed has no counterpart in Luke or I Chronicles. But in Ruth 4:9-22, where a parallel genealogy appears, we discover an association of Ruth and Tamar".⁴⁶ According to Gundry, "Matthew inserts Ruth after having mentioned Tamar in order to conform to that association and to portray Ruth, too, as a Gentile coming into the Matthean Church."⁴⁷ Bathsheba is yet another woman (1Chronicles 3:5). However, "Matthew omits her name and switches from the Chronicler's descriptive phrase, "the daughter of Ammiel," to "the (wife) of Uriah" (see 2 Sam. 11:26; 12:10,15). The modification "calls attention to her taking on the status of Gentile through marriage to Uriah, repeatedly designated a Hittite."⁴⁸ The focus falls not so much on Uriah's wife, in contrast with 2 Samuel, but Matthew leaves out "wife" and puts stress on Uriah himself. Thus, again "the genealogy foreshadows the place of Gentiles in the Church."⁴⁹

Obviously, "these anomalous women whose insertion into the patriarchal familial system as "irregular," are, nevertheless, the instruments through which the divine order, imaged as absolutely male-centred, reaches its completion or fulfilment."⁵⁰ God who has created everyone into his image has no preference. All are his own. It seems that the inclusion of these women already show the openness of God's kingdom to all the marginalized. Gundry confirms that, "the women stand for the inclusion of the marginal and excluded, the community's welcome to all

⁴⁵ R. H. GUNDRY, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook*, 14-15.

⁴⁶ R. H. GUNDRY, *Matthew: A Commentary*, 14-15.

⁴⁷ R. H. GUNDRY, *Matthew: A Commentary*, 14-15.

⁴⁸ R. H. GUNDRY, *Matthew: A Commentary*, 15.

⁴⁹ R. H. GUNDRY, *Matthew: A Commentary*, 15.

⁵⁰ E. M. WAINWRIGHT, *Shall We Look For Another? A Feminist Re-reading of the Matthean Jesus*, 56.

denied status or privileged by members of elite groups, to all whose higher righteousness is undervalued by structures of hierarchy”.⁵¹

Matthew finds it insufficient to include only Gentiles in his genealogy but inserts the magi from the east as ‘pagans’ who recognized Christ as the kingly Messiah, which the Jewish people failed to recognize. They respond positively to God’s actions with Jesus while some other Gentiles do not (6:7; 8:34; 18:17; 27:27-31). The Gentile magi, “seeing the child born fell down and worshipped him, and opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”⁵² Their very gesture “recalls scenarios of Gentiles journeying to Jerusalem to worship wither the king as representative of God’s justice (Psalm 72: 10-11) or God (Micah 4: 1-2, so 2:5-6; Isaiah 2:2:1-4; 60).”⁵³ The Gentiles have gained the kingdom of God by faith, which the Jews have not yet realised.

The episode indicates that Jesus has come to fulfil the aspiration of both the Jews and the Gentiles. Faith in Christ himself is the ultimate fulfilment of Torah because Jesus is the fulfilment of Torah.⁵⁴ The inclusion of the Magi is for theological rather than historical reasons. Theologically, “it has continued to assert God’s first step and intervention. It shows that God’s new creation is under way.”⁵⁵

There are many passages in Matthew which deal with the Gentiles: 4:12-17, 5:47, 6:7,37; 10:5, 10:18, 12:18, 12:21; 18:17; 20:19, 20:25; 21:43, 24:14; and

⁵¹ W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 61-62.

⁵² W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 61.

⁵³ W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 61.

⁵⁴ Cf. L. E. KECK, - al., ed., *The New Interpreter’s Bible* Matthew, Mark, 132.

⁵⁵ W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 82.

28:19.⁵⁶ These passages form the background of Gentile inclusion. However, I will give great attention to the episodes of 8:5-13 and 15:21-28, because of their similarity. They stress the marvels worked by Jesus in favour of the Gentiles because of their faith. Jesus' word heals the sick Gentiles from a distance. This distance highlights the wonderful faith of these Gentiles even when Jesus is not close to the incidents.

These episodes may be post-resurrectional, but still they highlight the fullness of God's plan of Salvation. The two stories bring the Gentiles into contact with Jesus, which was possible because of their tremendous faith. They became the model of faith in Matthew's community. Even though the great commission of Jesus to his disciples in 28: 19 seems to be directed to the Gentiles, the qualities present in the story of the Gentile centurion and the Canaanite woman are unique, especially in the area of physical contact and faith,⁵⁷ expressing a practical confidence in the power of Jesus.

However, the commission of Jesus in 28:19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." is referred to the Gentiles and Jews as well. If it does refer only to Gentiles, the question will be whether the mission to Israel is concluded. Or, does a text such as 21:43, where the Matthean Jesus speaks about care of the vineyard being taken from its current unfaithful tenants and given "to a nation" (ἔθνεσιν) which will produce its fruits, refer to a similar decisive transition from a

⁵⁶ All the passages mentioned above form the background encounter of Jesus with the Gentiles, which will later be consummated in Gentile Centurion and Canaanite woman. This shows a clear picture of the struggles of Gentile inclusion in Matthew's Community. The passages treated in detail posed a great challenge to the Osu Caste System.

See the Appendix 11 for brief work on the other passages.

⁵⁷ Cf. A.J. SALDARINI, *Matthew's Christian - Jewish Community*, 79-81.

Jewish mission to a Gentile mission? Most scholars⁵⁸ who maintain that Matthew is still within the orbit of Judaism, interpret these texts as signifying not the end of the mission to Israel but only its extension to Gentiles.⁵⁹ The “people” or “nation” referred to in 21:43, for example, would not be Gentiles as opposed to Jews but “those who are responsive to Jesus, whether they are Jewish or Gentile, and thus form a ‘new people’”.⁶⁰ The episodes of these two Gentiles are good examples of the openness of God’s kingdom to everyone.

3. Detailed Analysis of the Relevant Texts

3.1 *The Gentile Centurion (8: 5-13)*⁶¹

This story brings together two empires, two people and different ethnicity.⁶² The centurion stands as the symbol of the Roman Empire. He is in charge of Capernaum with troops to represent imperial control, enforces public order, and collects taxes from fisher people.⁶³

For us, this centurion is an unlikely candidate for faith. It would have been normal if a Jew had expressed this faith. However, the centurion is the first Gentile of great faith to appear in Matthew’s story (after the magi of the birth narrative), and he is an army officer, part of the oppressive establishment.⁶⁴ This story demonstrates

⁵⁸ BARCLAY, CARTER AND SENIOR

⁵⁹ Cf. D. SENIOR, “Between Two Worlds”, 7-16.

⁶⁰ Cf. D. SENIOR, “Between Two Worlds”, 7-16.

⁶¹ The Greek and the English texts are at the appendix 1

⁶² Cf. W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margin*, 200.

⁶³ Cf. W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margin*, 200.

⁶⁴ Cf. L. E. KECK, - al., ed., *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, 226-227.

the place of Gentiles with the Jews in God's plan of salvation (cf. the women in 1:1-17).⁶⁵

The Gentile centurion describes the painful suffering which is beyond his capability: 'my servant (or child, or son) is lying at home paralysed, in terrible distress.' He represents the world which claims to have the capacity to live without any help from God, but in the face of great difficulty he submits himself to Jesus' authority. He manifests this by his address to Jesus as Lord (see 8:2,6), and also in his appeal, which names the limits of his own power and points to Jesus' much greater power: "I am not worthy to have you come under my roof" (8.8). He recognises Jesus' power without needing to come into direct contact with the needy person. Whatever the case, the centurion realises that only Jesus' power can break the political and ethnic barriers.⁶⁶ This centurion recognizes that the possibility of salvation is rooted in God's righteousness and love now offered to all human beings through faith in Christ Jesus. He believes that Jesus needs only to speak the word, and his servant will be healed (see 8:3).⁶⁷

However, Jesus finds in this Gentile the "faith" that has not been found in Israel (God's covenant people): "In no-one in Israel have I found such faith" (8:10). His faith is an extraordinary one. For Matthew, the point of this incident is "the contrast between the faith of the Gentile centurion and the disbelief of Israel."⁶⁸ It

⁶⁵ Cf. W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 201.

⁶⁶ Cf. W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 202

⁶⁷ W. BARCLAY, *The Daily Study Bible*, 303. The Centurion's belief in the word of Jesus alone won him the favour he asked from Jesus. However, there was a problem. He was a Gentile and Jesus was a Jew, and, according to the Jewish law, a Jew could not enter the house of a Gentile, for all Gentile dwelling-places were clean. The Mishnah lays it down: The dwelling-places of Gentiles are unclean.

⁶⁸ R.C. FULLER, - L. JOHNSON, C. KEARNS, ed., *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, 918.

does not mean that no-one from Israel will manifest faith or that Israel is excluded from God's purpose. Some Jews do believe (4:18-22; disciples, 9:2). Matthew 8:11-12 indicates that God's future purposes include Jews and Gentiles. This Gentile demonstrates his discipleship by his recognition of Jesus' authority and his reliance on Jesus' power.⁶⁹ It is a fact that, "faith which [he demonstrated] is the means of encountering God's saving power in miracles (8:13; 9:2; 22, 28, 29; 15:28; 17; 20; 21:21; 27:42)." ⁷⁰

Faith constitutes the identity and lifestyle of the community of disciples. The faith of the centurion "anticipates the participation of Gentiles and Diaspora Jews in the kingdom of God."⁷¹ Through faith, cultural nobodies are included in God's plans. In Matthew 8:13, Jesus stresses the faith of the centurion and consequently he healed his servant.⁷² The fact that faith is a theological virtue means that it is a gift from God. If a Gentile has it, it indicates that God's gift is universal.

3.2 Comparison between Matthew's Account and Luke's Account

In both Matthew's and Luke's version of the story, religious antithesis exists between Jesus and the centurion. That Jesus is a Jew and the centurion a Gentile provides one of the essential features of the action: "It is at the behest of a Gentile that Jesus does not enter a Gentile house!"⁷³ Luke makes this antithesis through the motif of the two groups of emissaries: the elders of the Jews and the friends of the

⁶⁹ Cf. W. BARCLAY, *The Daily Study Bible*, 303.

⁷⁰ W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 203.

⁷¹ W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 203.

⁷² Cf. W. BARCLAY, *The Daily Study Bible*, 304.

⁷³ W. STENGER, *Introduction to New Testament Exegesis*, 104.

centurion. The sending of two different messengers illustrates distance between Jesus and the centurion. This distance in religion and culture of the centurion shows the amount of faith this Gentile has. He is found worthy by the elders of the Jews (Luke 7:4), but he finds himself unworthy, saying: "I am not worthy to have you come under my roof" (7:6c). His self-appraisal thus becomes an example of humility. The fact that he sends messengers also serves this purpose, since he does not presume to come to Jesus himself.

In Matthew, the centurion did go to Jesus by himself but did not allow Jesus to come to his house; his justification is like that of Luke (7:6c). The centurion exhibits humility here also, but this humility functions only to anticipate Jesus' statement about faith (v.10). Though the statement about faith occurs in Luke 7:9, that Jesus does not, in fact, enter the centurion's house is amplified in Luke. Only the messengers, not the centurion's self-appraisal and his appraisal by others, focus the Lukan story on the centurion's 'virtues.' "His humility is presented alongside his faith."⁷⁴

The Lukan stress on the centurion's 'virtues' is also fortified by the statement made by the Jewish elders: they characterized the centurion as a 'God-fearer'.⁷⁵ His sympathy and generosity were shown by this statement: "for he loves our people and it is he who built our synagogue for us" (Luke 7:5). Luke's remark that the slave was dear to him further enhances his good character (7:2b). Roman

⁷⁴ M. B. H. H. ROWLEY, ed., *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, 787.

⁷⁵ A Gentile who is attracted by the Jewish understanding of God and by Jewish ethical thinking but who has not taken the final step of becoming a "proselyte," a circumcised Gentile convert to Judaism obligated to keep the whole mosaic law.

law normally considered a slave to be *res*, a thing. But here, “the master’s attitudes transcend the prevailing social norm.”⁷⁶

If Luke includes the two groups of emissaries and stresses the virtue of the centurion, then it is easier to know why Luke speaks of a “slave” (δοῦλος), whereas Matthew speaks of a “child” or “servant” (παῖς). For redactional intentions, Luke alters his source to make the relationship more evident, that of master and slave, while Matthew has been faithful to the tradition at this point. It is self-evident that a person will be more concerned for his sick child, than for the health of a slave. The virtue of the master is stressed by Luke.

The speciality of the story “is its force on the particular sort of faith displayed by the centurion, that is, faith in the efficacy of Jesus’ words despite his physical absence.”⁷⁷ The centurion’s faith prompts Jesus to do what normally only the observers of his miracles do: Jesus’ astonishment at the centurion’s faith “shifts the miracles story’s customary choral conclusion from the astonished crowd to Jesus himself and the real miracle in the story is not the healing but the centurion’s faith.”⁷⁸ Jesus was amazed at the centurion’s faith because he did not expect this from Gentiles. Certainly, Matthew makes faith a gateway to meet God, for the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

⁷⁶ W. STENGER, *Introduction to New Testament Exegesis*, 105.

⁷⁷ W. STENGER, *Introduction to New Testament Exegesis*, 106

⁷⁸ W. STENGER, *Introduction to New Testament Exegesis*, 107.

3.3 *The Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:21-28)*⁷⁹

The story of the Canaanite woman sets a precedent within the ministry of Jesus for including Gentiles, even women Gentiles, in Church meals and is set between the feeding of the five and the four thousand.⁸⁰

Matthew probably adds “and Sidon” to the Markan “Tyre” (v. 21b), the “districts” which Jesus’ “withdraws into”. Matthew seems to say that Jesus actually enters Gentile territory, unlike Mark.⁸¹ The verb ἀναχωρέω with εἰς seems to suggest Jesus entrance into the Gentile territory, but εἰς also means “towards.” Whether Jesus entered or not, the truth is that, “the boundaries of the reign of God have been constructed not from within according to the vision of Jesus, but from the margins. Jesus has encountered an ‘outsider’ who brings him, through response to that encounter, to the new vision that is in accord with God’s desiring of right relationship.”⁸²

The way in which Matthew refers to ‘Tyre and Sidon’ recalls even more stereotypical language concerning sinful cities worthy of God’s judgment in Jewish biblical tradition. This woman is called a Canaanite, rather than ‘Syro-phoenician,’ (Mark 7:26). This is an outdated identification, since there were no ‘Canaanites’ by the first century. Nonetheless, Matthew clearly chooses it. Corley suggests that:

The Canaanite woman recalls at least two of the women accused of harlotry in Matthew’s genealogy, Tamar and Rahab, both Canaanites. Moreover, given Israel’s struggle with temple prostitution assimilated from Canaanite religious ritual,

⁷⁹ The Greek and the English Texts are at the Appendix I

⁸⁰ E. CORLEY, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 165.

⁸¹ Scholars like R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 301, SCHWEITZER argue that the Greek ἀναχωρέω with εἰς could also indicate that Jesus went towards the direction of Gentile territory (Matt, 330)

⁸² E.M. WAINWRIGHT, *Shall We Look for Another?* 89.

Canaanite women have a strong connection with prostitution and sexual sin in the Jewish biblical tradition. Matthew sets the scene more nationally out in the open, which might heighten the impropriety of the woman's actions. In this way, even more clearly in Matthew than in Mark, Jesus is portrayed as ministering to a woman associated with harlotry, a 'sinner'.⁸³

Matthew turns Mark's Syro-phoenician woman into a Canaanite for another proposed reason, but most modern exegetes have supposed that the change to 'Canaanites' was made because of its Old Testament associations: it is easy for one to think of Israel's enemies which evoked deeply engrained fear of and revulsion toward Gentiles ways, which in turn allows one to see in Jesus, one who destroys the shackles of fear.⁸⁴

The woman begins her pleading for mercy by calling Jesus by the Messianic title, "Son of David" (15:22). This "title is reserved in Matthew for healing miracles."⁸⁵ In putting "Son of David" with the title "Lord" (κύριος),

the Canaanite woman makes an act of confession of faith ever before Jesus grants her request. Her faith in Jesus as the Messiah is contrasted with the lack of belief among many Jews, particularly the Pharisees featured at the beginning of chapter 15. The association of the woman with harlotry allows her to be easily compared to the πόρναι (prostitutes) who also "believe" and enter the messianic kingdom before the Pharisees (Matt.21: 31-32)⁸⁶

Firstly, the woman acknowledges Jesus as Lord and Messiah; she begs Jesus to free her daughter of the torment of a devil. Jesus seems to simply ignore the

⁸³ K.E. CORLEY, *Private Women, Public Meals* 166.

⁸⁴ Cf. W. PARCLAY, *The Daily Study Bible*, 121; W.D. DAVIES, D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 547; D. SENIOR, *Commentary on Matthew*, 180-181.

⁸⁵ K. E. CORLEY, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 166.

⁸⁶ K. E. CORLEY, *Private Women, Public Meals* 166-167; A Peruse of the Hebrew Prophets would easily support this. Commentators mention the distinction between Jews and Canaanites in the Hebrew Bible, but miss the relevance of that distinction with regard to Canaanite women. See for example comments by GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 310; SCHWEITZER, *Matthew*, 330.

woman and speaks only to his disciples, who told him to “send her away” (15:23). This does not simply mean that they want him to grant her request, but they want Jesus to send her away from their presence.⁸⁷ The fact that she was a woman means she has no legal and religious authority to speak with the rabbi in public. The Jewish woman cannot do so, much worse, the Gentile woman. She is a triple outcast (a woman, a Gentile and a mother of one demon-possessed). Jesus’ lack of direct response to the woman makes his first reaction to her seem ever ruder than it is portrayed in Mark flat refusal: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24). This refusal alludes to Matthew 10:5-6, where Jesus limits his ministry to Jews. In spite of his refusal, the woman persists, kneeling in worship before Jesus, again calling him “Lord” (15:25). Jesus’ next reply (still spoken to the disciples, not to the woman) does not ever refer to the sequential priority of the Jews (who are to be fed “first” in the Markan version 7:27), which would imply that the Gentiles might at least be “fed” second. Only the repulsive remark remains: “It is not good to take the children’s bread and give it to the dogs” (13:26). The woman and her child are the little dogs. In Mark’s Community, “the term ‘dogs’ is unquestionably a derogatory designation for Gentiles but in Matthew’s, it may have a broad reference.”⁸⁸ The woman is identified as a dog because, according to Isaiah 56:10, those who are blind and without knowledge are likened to ‘dumb dogs.’ One who is in ignorance of Torah is looked upon as a dog. It was later that it was applied to the Gentiles and the “poor of the land”.⁸⁹ The woman is not worthy to receive the

⁸⁷ K. E. CORLEY, *Private Wamen, Public Meals*, 167.

⁸⁸ E. SCHIUSSLER FIORENZA, *Searching the Scriptures* 672.

⁸⁹ E. SCHIUSSLER FIORENZA, *Searching the Scriptures* 672.

bread of the chosen people, not only because of her Gentile status but also because of her lack of access to the Torah which came as a result of her being a woman.⁹⁰

The “children” (so Mark) have been replaced with “master”, which relates the table in question to the “Lord’s” (i.e. Jesus’). The woman affirms the inclusion of her and her daughter within the household of the new movement, even though Jesus’ ministry was to be only on behalf of the “household” of Israel. By requesting the healing of her daughter, the woman requests “scraps of bread” from a table, a phrase which alludes to the “scraps” collected after the miraculous feedings, which are in turn symbolic of the Eucharistic banquet held by the new “household,” the Church.⁹¹ Jesus was forced to relent because of her great faith, which persists in spite of his rudeness and repeated refusals: “O woman, great is your faith!” (15:28).” Certainly, it is only faith and persistence that obtained for her what she requested from Jesus. This woman demonstrates that faith can breakdown any barrier to the kingdom of God.

Matthew’s intensifying of Jesus’ refusal subsequently intensifies the great faith of the woman. “It is the faith which justifies the extension of the Matthean mission to the Gentiles and their inclusion in the meals of the Church. The “great faith” of this woman is held up as an example for members of the Matthean community, many of whom have “little faith” (ὀλιγόπιστε).”⁹² “It should be pointed out that this is the only time in the entire story that the faith of the suppliant is qualified and exulted in this way.”⁹³

⁹⁰ Cf. E. SCHUSSLER FIORENZA, *Searching the Scriptures* 672.

⁹¹ K. E. CORLEY, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 168.

⁹² E. Wainwright in E. SCHUSSLER FIORENZA, *Searching the Scriptures*, 672.

⁹³ E. SCHUSSLER FIORENZA, *Searching the Scriptures*, 672.

This woman, in spite of being a Gentile, boldly claims for herself the right to receive the benefits of the kingdom that Jesus preached, directly from him and not secondarily from those who claimed the sole right to these benefits. As a woman within the Christian Community, she claims the right over the knowledge of scriptures and teachings of Jesus, as benefit not for the male members of the community alone, but available to all who approaches Jesus with faith.⁹⁴ The Canaanite woman,

was determined to take the bread from the table of those who displaced her, knowing that in a household where even the dogs get to eat what the masters waste, there must be some extra bread for the neighbours – precisely those neighbours whom the masters have dispossessed. She crosses the border not to worship the dispossessor as such, but subtly to demand restitution.⁹⁵

It is clear that the Canaanite woman demands to be considered as a human being, and breaks into the kingdom. She cannot and does not respect any man-made restrictions that go against the human value of life. She shatters all the ethnic, imperial, gender or cultural restrictions and intervenes on behalf of her daughter.⁹⁶ She presents to Jesus the pains of those who are oppressed.⁹⁷

The initial silence of Jesus in response to the Canaanite woman's plea may function as an inherent difficulty in the inclusion of women and Gentiles in the liturgical life of the community.⁹⁸ We could reasonably assume that women were involved in this struggle, especially if the future of their participation was at stake. The Canaanite woman may well have been symbolic of their struggle.

⁹⁴ Cf. E. SCHUSSLER FIORENZA, *Searching the Scriptures*, 672.

⁹⁵ L.A. GUARDIOLA SAENZ, "Reading the Bible as Women", 78-79.

⁹⁶ Cf. L.A. GUARDIOLA SAENZ, "Reading the Bible as Women", 78

⁹⁷ Cf. L.A. GUARDIOLA SAENZ, "Reading the Bible as Women", 78-79.

⁹⁸ Cf. W.D. DAVIES, · D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 542

Her two requests closely resemble the petition of Psalm 108:26: “Help me, lord my God, save me according to your mercy”. “This psalm is the cry of an oppressed person in the face of severe adversities. It is remarkable, therefore, that it is the same cry for “help” and “mercy” that is given to the woman who calls out to Jesus from a position of exclusion and oppression.”⁹⁹

3.3.1 Comparison between Matthew’s Account and Mark’s Account

Matthew’s text is quite different from Mark 7:24-30 in certain detail.¹⁰⁰ It is evident that “Matthew 15:21-28 is more Jewish than its Markan parallel (note especially v. 24b ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’); it is more potentially offensive to non-Jews (Mark’s ‘let the children first be fed’ is missing), and it contains Semitism that is not in Mark 7:24-30.”¹⁰¹ Matthew seems to have deliberately set out to show that the pre-Easter mission was confined in Israel. The redactors may have added a lot of material to the Markan narrative with a view to explain how it was that Christ, in spite of such a saying as 10:5-6 should have extended his mercy to a pagan woman.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ W.D. DAVIES, D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 542-543.

¹⁰⁰ F.M. BEARE, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 340. (140 words in Matthew and 130 in Mark; fewer than forty are held in common).

¹⁰¹ W.D. DAVIES, D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*. 542

¹⁰² W.D. DAVIES, D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*. 559.

3.3.2 Parallelism between the Canaanite Woman and the Gentile Centurion

The parallelism between the Gentile centurion and the Canaanite woman is truly striking. Both pericopae are about Jesus encountering a despised Gentile. In both, a gentile comes to Jesus and asks for the healing of his or her child.

In both, the supplicant calls Jesus ‘Lord.’ The focus in both is not on the healing itself but on the preceding conversation, which in each instance contains a general statement by Jesus about Israel. In addition, both passages record initial hesitation on the part of Jesus; both relate that the Gentile wins Jesus over by surprising words which demonstrates great faith, and both recount that the healings, accomplished from a distance, transpired ‘that very moment.’

There are also a few verbal parallels

Matt. 15:28	Mark 8:13
“Be it done for you as you desire”v.28b	“Be it done for you as you have believed”v.13b
“And her daughter was healed instantly” v.28c	“And the servant was healed at that very moment”v.13c

How are all these similarities to be explained? According to Bultmann, “the two stories are variants and there is the possibility that, in the oral tradition, the two stories, because of their similar subjects, were to some extent assimilated to one another.”¹⁰³ Matthew focuses on two themes: ‘faith, and the place of Israel’. The

¹⁰³ W.D. DAVIES, D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 559

reason is not difficult to detect as this is only the gospel in which Jesus openly and clearly helps Gentiles: 8:5-13 and 15:21-28.¹⁰⁴

4. The theological Intent of the Author.

Given Matthew's understanding of salvation history, he can not let this exceptional episode go by without making it perfectly clear that when Gentiles are granted salvation, it is solely on the basis of their faith. Matthew cannot permit Jesus to extend a hand to the Gentiles without letting the reader know (a) about Israel's special election (15:24, 26), and (b) about Israel's failure to live up to her election (8:10-12).

Matthew 8:5-13 and 15:21-28 are alike because they tell similar stories which moved Matthew in each case to reflect upon the same theme.¹⁰⁵ In the case of the Canaanite woman, the evangelist shows Jesus' yielding to the genuine faith of the woman, and thereby counselled his Christian Jewish community that a mission to the Gentiles was included in the economy of salvation and is compatible with reverence for Israel's historic privilege, a divine plan that would will become reality in the post-resurrection experience of the community.¹⁰⁶

The story of the Canaanite woman and the Gentile Centurion show that, in spite of the priority of Israel, faith can command Jesus to share messianic blessing with Gentiles.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Cf W.D. DAVIES, · D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 559

¹⁰⁵ W. D. DAVIES, · D. C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 559.

¹⁰⁶ D. SENIOR, *Matthew*, 182.

¹⁰⁷ W. D. DAVIES, · D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 542.

The woman's story recognizes Israel's temporal priority in God's purpose as God's chosen people, which points to the inclusion of the Gentiles. Jesus, a Jew, is the agent of God's blessing for the Gentiles. Jesus is not excluded from the biased mentality of his own people against the Gentiles but God's reign, responsible for wholeness and plenty (4:13-21, 34-36; 15:29-39), breaks it down.

This Gentile woman is geographically on the margins of Israel and is, as a Gentile, marginal in Israel's worldview. As a Canaanite, a member of a cursed people, destined to be subjugated as slaves (Genesis 9:25), she belongs to a people dispossessed by Israel's occupation and possession of the Land. However, she challenges this excluding ideology. Her faith brings the blessing of Israel's God to her.¹⁰⁸

In the case of the Gentile centurion, "it is clear that faith, not ethnicity (cf. 3:9-10), status (membership in the religions or political elite, birth), wealth, or gender, constitutes the identity and life style of the community of disciples."¹⁰⁹ The faith of the Gentile centurion is a remarkable example of all those who will later join Christianity through the preaching of the apostles and their successors. "The centurion believes in the efficacy of Jesus' words even when Jesus himself is not physically present, thus anticipating the situation in which the post-Easter Church found itself."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Cf. W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 321.

¹⁰⁹ W. CARTER, *Matthew*, 203.

¹¹⁰ W. STENGER, *Introduction to New Testament Exegesis*, 107.

5. Conclusion

Having journeyed with Matthew from the beginning of his gospel until the end, it is evident that God has never neglected the Gentiles. Right from Jesus' birth, to his death and resurrection, Gentiles were included. Having gone into detail on the closer relationship Jesus had with them, especially in the case of the Gentile centurion and the Canaanite woman, it becomes very clear that there is only one way that can lead Gentiles to Jesus: faith is the way. This faith is for both Israel and the Gentiles if they are to be in the new reign of God. "Jesus' preaching to his own people first was the precondition; his death for countless hosts rendered the inclusion of the Gentile possible, and his Parousia will bring the people of God of the New Age, as well as the kingdom of God over the whole world."¹¹¹

I have compared Matthew with Luke in the case of the Gentile centurion, and also Mathew with Mark in the case of the Canaanite woman. I agree with Monro, that Matthew beautifully presents the wonderful faith of the two Gentiles as a model to be followed in his community.¹¹² It is evident that through faith, "human traditions of ethnic and gender specificity are overcome."¹¹³

In the last chapter, we shall try to see how Jesus' openness to the Gentiles challenges the Osu caste system among Catholics sharing one faith and one Christ;

¹¹¹ J. JEREMIAS, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, 73.

¹¹² Cf. A. MONRO, "Alterity and the Canaanite Woman", 38

¹¹³ A. MONRO, "Alterity and the Canaanite Woman", 38.

why do some people consider others as outcasts even in Catholic Christian communities?

Chapter three

How does the Message of the Jesus' Inclusion of the Gentiles Challenge the Osu Caste System?

1. Introduction

This Chapter which prompts this particular project, will explore the 'Osu Caste System' and the people who are practising it, as well as its influence on the life of the victims. We will also endeavour to determine how the Osu people are 'Gentiles of today'. The aim is to demonstrate how, from the beginning, the so-called "Osus" were free men and women but later became what they should not be.

The conclusion will try to see how Jesus' inclusive attitude throughout his earthly ministry, and after his death, continues to welcome the Gentiles. If that is so, why are Christians (especially Catholics) very reluctant in welcoming certain Christians who are brothers and sisters in Christ and of one faith?

2. The Osu System in Igboland and its implications.

The Osu caste system is of the Igbo ethnic group, an integral part of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in West Africa, and were known as “Biafrans” before 1973. They occupy “an area of about 15,000 square miles with a population density of about 711 per square mile.”¹⁴

As in many other human groups, the Igbos have always placed the highest value upon the human person. Like the Jews, religion permeates the whole of the people’s life. The Igbos attribute all good things as coming from a Higher Being, hence the need to offer sacrifice, to give thanks for the benefits received, to ask for more, to avert danger and sudden death and to ask for pardon for offences committed both knowingly and unknowingly.

In short, they offer sacrifice in all circumstances. Like the Jews, they expect, in return for the prayers and sacrifices, blessings such as health, prosperity, and especially children, the greatest of blessings. It is in line with this religious belief that the subsequent topic will be understood.

2.1 The Analysis of Osu Caste System in Igbo land, Nigeria

Liberation theology, which started in Latin America in the 1960s, grew out of the religious, social, political and economic circumstances that are peculiar to Latin America and perhaps similar to the marginalized system in Jesus’ time and our situation today. This creates the consciousness of living in a societal structure, which

¹⁴ R. ANOZIE, *Igbo Women in the Church in Igboland*, 15.

kept the majority in misery for the benefit of a handful of individuals living in luxury. At Medellin in 1969, the Conference of Latin American Bishops (CAB) committed the Church “to confront institutionalised violence of the establishment, awaken in individuals and communities a living awareness of justice to defend the rights of the poor and oppressed and to energetically denounce the abuses and unjust consequence of the inequalities between the rich and the poor”¹¹⁵

In the same vein, the Bishops made their famous ‘option for the poor’ which means an exaltation of the eminent worth and dignity of the person of the poor. The new era of transformation in Latin America aims at transformative change in both the individual and society with variation from country to country, and from culture to culture. Such transformative change also empowered the Church in Igboland to start speaking against the evils of the ‘Osu’ Caste System.

The ‘Osu’ System has its origin as far back as the 18th century, at the time of the practice of human sacrifice in Igboland. “‘Osu’ was a person sacrificed to the deity by a community or a group or a family.”¹¹⁶ Occasionally, difficulties arose (wars, epidemic, sickness etc.), and human sacrifice was believed to restore harmony. ‘Osu’ bore a specific connotation and designated a particular group of people who have been stigmatised as social outcasts to the point of dehumanisation. Since the Osu are people whose forebears were dedicated or given to some deities, the deities accepted them as their property. As a result, though human, they were no longer regarded as equals by their fellow humans. This is because they have crossed the boundary from the freeborn into the community of the spirits, and they were

¹¹⁵ E. BREDIN, *Praxis and Praxis*, 126.

¹¹⁶ O. ONWUBIKO, *Facing the Osu Issue in the African Synod*, 25.

regarded as taboo once the ritual of initiation into the spirit community had been performed.¹¹⁷ It is said that,

This custom started by some form of human sacrifice in which an individual was offered or more rarely offered himself to some idol. He was henceforth regarded as prosperity of the god and was supposed to act as its cult slave or even as priest. He was in a way ostracized by the society and regarded with peculiar feeling of awe mixed with abhorrence.¹¹⁸

The most fatal consequence of this custom is the doctrine that this status is permanent, inalienable, transmitted from parents to children and if either of the parents is 'Osu', the children automatically become 'Osu'. Osu existence has structural causes: their bondage is imposed by others just like the poor and the sinners, as also the Gentiles in Jesus' time. Gustavo Gutierrez rightly says, "an unjust situation does not happen by chance, it is not something branded by a fatal destiny, there is human responsibility behind it."¹¹⁹

2.2 Implications/Nemesis

The Osu system has political, religious and social implications. Politically, the Osu did not attend the assembly of the freeborn. They did not and do not take important and great customary titles for honours and recognition, such as 'Ozo,'Nze' and 'Ichie'.¹²⁰ This is because of the stigma attached to their name.

Socially, the Osus are outcasts, living in a particular area of the village, close to the Great Shrine. Wherever they go, they carry with them the mark¹²¹ of their

¹¹⁷ N. EMEGHARA, *The Osu Caste System in Nigeria: A Christian Response*, 30.

¹¹⁸ G. GUTIERREZ, ed., *A Theology of Liberation*, 175.

¹¹⁹ M. UNEGBU, *The Osu/Diala Scandal*, 4.

¹²⁰ These are chieftaincy titles taken by the freeborn.

¹²¹ This mark is psychological and physical. They feel inferior and rejected for life, and they have their ears cut.

forbidden caste, even in the Church. The in-coming of the missionaries called for commonality and oneness of both Osu and freeborn. Following the influx into the Churches by the Osu, the missionaries lost the support of the freeborn, who started to desert the Church when the missionaries refused to expel the Osu from the Catholic community. The remaining few avoided the Osu, refusing to sit on the same pew with them. Some of these later left the Church also. As a result, the Osu became more numerous in Church membership, with very few of the freeborn.¹²²

Later, the freeborn elders of the villages met and decided that they would not sit watching while their land was being polluted by the missionary visitors, so they incited the burning down of churches. This reaction began when the missionaries made the Osu bury the freeborn, as well as burying both freeborn and Osu on the same piece of land.¹²³ The freeborn and Osu cannot marry each other. Anyone interacting with Osu is believed to incur a ritual impurity, which bears consequent social contamination. Osu can be likened to leprosy in the time of Jesus when lepers rang bells and shouted 'unclean' to disperse people. Sexual intercourse between an Osu and a diala (freeborn) automatically makes diala an Osu.¹²⁴

In fact, the offspring of an Osu are more avoided than their parents who were born free. This is because offspring of an Osu were never freeborn. They were born Osu and remained Osu all their life. The institution was abolished in 1956, but some freeborn members of the House of Assembly vehemently opposed it.¹²⁵ Furthermore, the present Nigerian Constitution makes provision for freeborn or Osu to be free

¹²² Personal experience

¹²³ Cf. N. EMEGHARA, 38

¹²⁴ Cf. N. EMEGHARA, 34.

¹²⁵ Cf. G. Nwaiwu, "Osu Caste, Now Against the Law", 16.

from discrimination of all sorts.¹²⁶ However, the enacting of this law does not mean that the practice was altogether stopped. What was stopped is, perhaps, the dedication of new Osu, but the discrimination and fear surrounding Osu still persists even today. It is hard to believe that a wealthy Osu is worth nothing before a poor freeborn in Igbo land today.¹²⁷ The Osu was and is exempted from the traditional rites of passage. The reason is that the Osu only participates in the affairs of the spirits.

The Osu is not to fetch water or bathe in the same stream with the freeborn. No freeborn can dare touch an Osu, for to do so is to defile or even kill the freeborn. The Osu must not participate in the Igbo traditional breaking of Kola or distributing or sharing palm wine in the midst of the freeborn at any social gathering, which they are permitted to attend. The corpse of an Osu was not given a traditional burial, but was carried from the community and thrown away, buried or mingled in an evil forest (ajo ohia). The Osu does not become an ancestor and if buried in the same way as the freeborn, the Osu may carry his or her mischief into the spirit world and prevent the freeborn from attaining ancestral status. In the past, the corpse of an Osu was buried at night.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, Unaegbu reminds us that, “the so-called ‘Osu’ status is purely social stigma and is maintained by those who derive social advantages or personal satisfaction by pretending that some others are their inferior.”¹²⁹ ‘Osu’ not only makes people feel inferior but also contradicts God’s plan by presenting a

¹²⁶ 1979 Federal Government of Nigeria Constitution section 39, Subsection 2, Chapter IV on Fundamental Right.

¹²⁷ Cf. N. EMEGHIERE, “The Osu Caste System in Nigeria”, 40.

¹²⁸ Cf. N. EMEGHIERE, “The Osu Caste System in Nigeria”, 35-36.

¹²⁹ M. UNEGBU, *The Osu/Diata*, 5.

picture of a superior class. This is human beings' inhumanity to their fellow human beings.

The Osu system has impeded many young people of Osu families from entering seminaries or religious life. This is because this system has entered Church circles so deeply that its total eradication becomes difficult. Non-Catholic denominations have no problem with the Osu Caste System but it is very serious in the Catholic Church. However, from all recent inquiries, the practice is no longer on the increase. Many people, including the bishops, priests and religious in Igbo land, are now participating in the struggle to stop the discrimination or injustice against Osu. Most of the deities dedicated to the Osu system have been destroyed. Unaegbu called on all Christian communities to examine the possibilities and the means of stamping it out, saying: "The maintenance of such a cruel and unjust system must never be associated with us Christians. Our instinct for justice, our sense of fraternal charity must oblige us all to take our distance and indeed positively to fight against this evil custom."¹³⁰ He reminded the Osu that their freedom as God's children cannot be taken away from them.

2.3 Challenges to the Church of Igbo Land

The plight of the poor and outcasts, especially the Gentiles, has been the core of Jesus' ministry. Dorr states that Jesus, in his ministry, lived poorly, mixed with ordinary folk and shocked the respectable people by eating and conversing with the

¹³⁰ M. UNAGBU, *The Osu/Diala* 7.

social outcasts.¹³¹ Therefore, the Church in Igboland, as well as other places, will never tire of insisting on the dignity of persons, against all slavery, exploitation, and in any manipulation perpetrated to harm people in all fields of life: political, economic, social, cultural and educational fields. Ike and Ogboaja emphasize that it is thus the challenge and mission of the Church to promote and fight for their rights wherever the evil head of human degradation raises its arm.¹³²

3. Osu People as the New Gentiles of Today

Exploring the pains undergone by the Osu people, we easily recall the pains undergone by the Gentile centurion and the Canaanite woman. These two Gentiles were like the Osus of their time. The Jews were the freeborn. The Gentiles have nothing in common with the Jews. Any contact with them incurs purity sacrifice, like the freeborn in Igboland being in contact with the Osus. Just as the Jews see Gentiles as created to serve, so it is with freeborn of Igboland towards the Osu.

Today, the Osu people are looked upon as people who are born to be destroyed. No freeborn can go into the house of the Osu. In fact, the Osu in those days, and even now, was/is to leave the house only towards midday. This is to prevent the freeborn meeting an Osu first thing in the morning. This is because it was/is believed that meeting an Osu first in the morning carried along with it bad luck for the rest of that day.¹³³

¹³¹ Cf. D. DORR, *Spirituality and Justice*, 91.

¹³² Cf. IKE, I. *Human Rights, Human Dignity*, 54.

¹³³ Cf. N. EMEGHARA, 36.

The Jews cannot think of entering the house of the Gentiles.¹³⁴ This is to show the intensity of separation between the Jews and the Gentiles. It happened also in the case of Jesus and the Gentile centurion as well as the Canaanite woman. Jesus healed their children from a distance. It is true that theologically, it means that after Jesus' resurrection all the Gentiles or Jews in the diaspora who were not able to meet Jesus physically during his earthly life, will receive through faith the same blessing of Jesus.

4. Conclusion

It is very evident to us what the Osu Caste System is and the harm it has caused to the victims. We see how it has put class division among Christians created by the one God and among Catholic Christians who uphold the same faith.

The Church in Igboland has been trying to eradicate this stigma. We have learnt that this Caste System came as a result of exploitation by the elite of the society. The most unfortunate fact is that both the freeborn and the Osus are Catholic Christians sharing the same body and blood of Christ. Why division if Christ is one? Jesus struggled in his own time to bring the Gentiles into his Kingdom. Matthew vividly showed the plan of God in Jesus from the beginning of his Gospel till the end. He prohibited his apostles from going to the Gentiles (10:5), so that they themselves may be converted to the kingdom so as to be ready and true light to the Gentiles, which was consummated in and after his Resurrection.

¹³⁴ In John 18:28, when Jesus was brought before Pilate, it was said that the Pharisees and the Chief Priest did not enter the headquarters of Pilate, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. (This is to show that the same problem encountered by the community of Matthew was also encountered by the mixed community of John).

The question is, why division and exclusion among Catholic Christians of Igboland if Jesus' plan is to include all?

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Matthew's gospel has been an inspiring experience for me. I have journeyed with the author and have been greatly touched by the situation of his community. I also discovered the problems which Matthew faced. One of which concerned Gentiles' inclusion.

Having explored this gospel text, I was inspired by the way Matthew presents Jesus as the Messiah for the Jews and the Gentiles, from the beginning of his gospel until its end. He concretised this truth by the healing of the child/servant of the centurion and the daughter of the Canaanite woman, due to the amazing faith of both these Gentiles.

This experience is a challenge to the Osu Caste System practised by Catholic Christians of Igbo Land. Having studied this Osu system and all it involves, it is quite clear that Catholic Christians are involved. Both the Osus and the freeborn are people of one faith, one Christ, and one Catholic Church.

Jesus' approach to the Gentiles inspired me to ask the Igbo Catholics these questions: 'Are we for Christ or for our outdated and humiliating custom? If we are for Christ, why do we still undo what Christ has done for us on the cross? Why do

we live unchristian lives, since Christ's death and resurrection have made us Christians through our baptism? If Jesus did not exclude, why should we do so?'

I support Wadel's assertion that:

God has a dream for the world. It is a dream that should never be destroyed by racism, or prejudice or any other sin of injustice. God's dream is for each of us to grow to fullness of life and well-being through justice and love. God's dream for us is to live together in harmony and peace and benevolence, not injustice, violence, hostility, and conflict. God's love-wish for the world is to bind us together in friendship, care, and mutual affection.¹³⁵

Hauerwas has rightly said that, "if we want to move beyond the sin of racism, marginalization and caste system, whether as individuals, society, or the Church, we must cultivate a moral vision capable of justice. Vision and virtue go together because if we do not see rightly, we cannot act rightly."¹³⁶ Aquinas reasoned that, "God loves every body, even our enemies, sinners as well as saints and fallen ones".¹³⁷ He furthermore said that, "what makes anyone worthy of God's love is their connection to God".¹³⁸ The American Bishops cry out that "the sin of racism and outcast defiles the image of God and degrades the sacred dignity of humankind which has been revealed by the mystery of the incarnation".¹³⁹ The Vatican document, 'The Church in the Modern World,' strongly asserts that: "all men [and women] with rational soul are created in God's image; they have the same nature and origin and, being redeemed by Christ, they enjoy the same divine calling and destiny; there is ...basic equality between every man [and woman] and it must be given greater recognition."¹⁴⁰ According to Matthew, "nationalism ends with Jesus

¹³⁵ P. J. WADDELL, "Confronting the Sin of Racism", 6.

¹³⁶ S. HAUERWAS, *Vision and Virtue*, 30-47.

¹³⁷ T. AQUINAS, ST 11-11, q. 25, a. 6-10.

¹³⁸ T. AQUINAS, ST 11-11, q. 26, a. 1

¹³⁹ "Brothers and Sisters to Us": U. S. Bishop's Pastoral Letter on Racism, 9.

¹⁴⁰ A. FLANNERY, ed., "The Church in the Modern World", 817

(5:43-47; 17:24-27; 22: 15-22); the final judgment then includes all nations and all are brought to the same bar of judgment to face the same requirements (25: 31-46)".¹⁴¹ It is very true that in the eschatological discourse (Matt.24-25), Jesus announces that the good news shall be preached to the whole world before the end of time arrives (24:14). For the fact that Jews and Gentiles inhabit the world, this implies going out on a mission to the Gentiles. For Jesus, the end shall never be until everyone comes back to God, which is the purpose of creation.¹⁴²

In 28:19, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...", is the great commission. Jesus consummated the inclusion of the Gentiles into God's family through his death and resurrection. The universal vocation "applies to all people including their culture, and even Jewish people who are not yet disciples. After the particularism of 10:6 and 15:24, this command has somewhat of a surprise, yet the Gentile mission has been hinted in 2:1-12; 4:15-16, 23-25; 8:5-13; 10:8; 15:21-28; 22:1-10; 24:14; 25:32; 26:13."¹⁴³

In this instance, Jesus commands the disciples to preach the gospel to the nations. "Whether we take the phrase, "to all nations", as referring to all Gentiles, or to all people including Jews and Gentiles,... Gentiles are involved as the object of mission."¹⁴⁴ According to Spitta, Schlatter, Carson and Marshal, "the cited passages

¹⁴¹ J.B. GREEN, ed., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 262.

¹⁴² J.S. UKONG, "The Problem of the Gentile...",439

¹⁴³ B. F. VIVIANO, *NJBC*, 674

¹⁴⁴ R.A.H. DOUGLAS, - D.J. HARRINGTON, "Make Disciples of All Gentiles (Matt. 28:19)" 364-365; J.P. Meier, "Nation or Gentiles in Matt. 28:19?" 97-101; W. Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel*, 4.

are the indications that Jesus was consciously involved in a mission to the Gentiles and may thus be regarded as the first missionary to the Gentiles”¹⁴⁵

As such, the Church, the body of Christ, stresses this saying: “Any forms of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the ground of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God’s plan of Salvation.”¹⁴⁶ It is quite evident that Jesus includes everyone. If Christ has included everyone without exception, who are we (the Igbos) to exclude Osu people from the community of Jesus? Jesus’ prayer is that his own may be one, and made it concrete by teaching us the prayer of ‘Our Father’ as a symbol of what he has in mind for his own. If we have God as our Father, we are therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ. The reality of uniting everyone (the Jews and the Gentiles) to himself was manifested throughout his ministry and finally in his paschal mystery. Who are we then to undo what he has done?

I must conclude this wonderful work with the words of Shea which go thus: “to Jesus every person was a guest. An invitation had gone out from the heart of all life to every hearts within life; for does the rain discriminate or the sun play favourites? His voice was the music of welcome in the ears of rejection...”¹⁴⁷ This expresses that in Jesus there is no discrimination. There is no Gentile or Jew; there is no Osu or freeborn. Everyone is invited in the banquet of God’s kingdom. I concur with Shea’s reflection which so impressed me. He says that what God has brought inside no one can send out. He goes on saying that, if all are in, can anyone be

¹⁴⁵ E. SPIGIA, *Jesus und die Heidenmission*, Giessen, 72-74, 109-112; A. SCHLATTER, *Der Evangelist Matthaus*, 227-228, 339, 701-702; D.A. CARSON, *Matthew, in the Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 202, 248, 596-597; I.H. MARSHALL, *Luke*, 140-141; *Gospel of Luke*, 768, 903-904.

¹⁴⁶ A. FLANNERY, ed., “The Church in the Modern World” 817.

¹⁴⁷ J. SHEA, “Stories of Faith” 171-172

considered out? If all are first, can anyone be considered last? In God, we are all in and first. No one is out or last. Jesus has made God as accessible as a village well for all.¹⁴⁸

It is clear that if God has brought everyone into his kingdom through Jesus' death and resurrection, no-one is able to keep someone out. It is also true that,

the love of God, made flesh in the incarnation, did not consider human beings below his concern. As Jesus did not reject us, we can reject no one. As Jesus shared in our poverty, we are called to share in the poverty of others. In our relationship with others may be found a kind of 'second incarnation' as the Body of Christ comes to the world again and again, loving, sharing, finding the lost and feeding the hungry.¹⁴⁹

With the deep reflections of Shea and Rushman concerning Jesus' inclusion to all, I confidently conclude that in God's kingdom everyone has a place. There is no more Osu or Gentile. Everyone is a free child of God.

¹⁴⁸ J. Shea, *Stories of Faith*, 173

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.rushman.org/incarnation.html>

APPENDIX 1

8:5-13

5 Εἰσελθόντος δὲ αὐτοῦ εἰς
Καφαρναοὶμ προσήλθεν αὐτῷ
ἐκατόνταρχος παρακαλῶν αὐτὸν

6 καὶ λέγων, Κύριε, ὁ παῖς μου
βέβληται ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ παραλυτικός,
δεινῶς βασανιζόμενος.

7 καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ, Ἐγὼ ἔλθω
θεραπεύσω αὐτόν.

8 καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ ἐκατόνταρχος
ἔφη, Κύριε, οὐκ εἰμὶ ἱκανὸς ἵνα μου
ὑπὸ τὴν στέγην εἰσέλθῃς, ἀλλὰ μόνου
εἰπὲ λόγῳ, καὶ ἰαθήσεται ὁ παῖς μου.

9 καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπός εἰμι ὑπὸ
ἐξουσίαν, ἔχων ὑπ' ἐμαυτὸν
στρατιώτας, καὶ λέγω τούτῳ,
Πορεύθητι, καὶ πορεύεται, καὶ ἄλλῳ,
Ἔρχου, καὶ ἔρχεται, καὶ τῷ δούλῳ
μου, Ποίησον τοῦτο, καὶ ποιεῖ.

10 ἀκούσας δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐθαύμασεν
καὶ εἶπεν τοῖς ἀκολουθοῦσιν, Ἀμὴν
λέγω ὑμῖν, παρ' οὐδενὶ τοσαύτην
πίστιν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ εὗρον.

11 λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι πολλοὶ ἀπὸ
ἀνατολῶν καὶ δυσμῶν ἔξουσιν καὶ
ἀνακλιθήσονται μετὰ Ἀβραάμ καὶ
Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν
οὐρανῶν,

12 οἱ δὲ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας
ἐκβληθήσονται εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ
ἐξώτερον· ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ
ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων.

13 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῷ
ἐκατοντάρχη, Ὑπάγε, ὡς ἐπίστευσας
γενηθήτω σοι. καὶ ἰάθη ὁ παῖς
[αὐτοῦ] ἐν τῇ ὥρᾳ ἐκείνῃ.

5 As he entered Capernaum, a
centurion came forward to him,
beseeching him

6 and saying, "Lord, my servant is
lying paralyzed at home, in terrible
distress."

7 And he said to him, "I will come
and heal him."

8 But the centurion answered him,
"Lord, I am not worthy to have you
come under my roof; but only say the
word, and my servant will be healed.

9 For I am a man under authority,
with soldiers under me; and I say to
one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to
another, 'Come,' and he comes, and
to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it."

10 When Jesus heard him, he
marvelled, and said to those who
followed him, "Truly, I say to you, not
even in Israel have I found such faith.

11 I tell you, many will come from
east and west and sit at table with
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the
kingdom of heaven,

12 while the sons of the kingdom will
be thrown into the outer darkness;
there people will weep and gnash
their teeth."

13 And to the centurion Jesus said,
"Go; be it done for you as you have
believed." And the servant was
healed at that very moment.

15:21-28

21 Καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἐκεῖθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς τὰ μέρη Τύρου καὶ Σιδῶνος.

22 καὶ ἰδοὺ γυναῖκα Χαναanaία ἀπὸ τῶν ὀρίων ἐκείνων ἐξελθοῦσα ἔκραζεν λέγουσα, Ἐλέησόν με, κύριε υἱὸς Δαυΐδ· ἡ θυγάτηρ μου κακῶς δαιμονίζεται.

23 ὁ δὲ οὐκ ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῇ λόγον. καὶ προσελθόντες οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ἠρώτουν αὐτὸν λέγοντες, Ἀπόλυσον αὐτήν, ὅτι κράζει ὀπισθεν ἡμῶν.

24 ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν, Οὐκ ἀπεστάλην εἰ μὴ εἰς τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραήλ.

25 ἡ δὲ ἐλθοῦσα προσεκύνει αὐτῷ λέγουσα, Κύριε, βοήθει μοι.

26 ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν, Οὐκ ἔστιν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ βαλεῖν τοῖς κυναρίοις.

27 ἡ δὲ εἶπεν, Ναὶ κύριε, καὶ γὰρ τὰ κυνάρια ἐσθίει ἀπὸ τῶν ψιχίων τῶν πιπτόντων ἀπὸ τῆς τραπέζης τῶν κυρίων αὐτῶν.

28 τότε ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῇ, Ὡ γύναι, μεγάλη σου ἡ πίστις· γενηθήτω σοι ὡς θέλεις. καὶ ἰάθη ἡ θυγάτηρ αὐτῆς ἀπὸ τῆς ὥρας ἐκείνης.

21 And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

22 And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and cried, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon."

23 But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying after us."

24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."

26 And he answered, "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

27 She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

28 Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

APPENDIX 2

Other Texts with Gentile Themes

It is quite evident that the Gospel of Matthew is directed to both the Jews who believe in Jesus as well as to the Gentiles. From the beginning of the gospel, Matthew presents Jesus as the one who has come to unite these and consummated it with the great commission (28:19), which has the nations [Gentiles] as the object.

Jesus started his ministry in Galilee of Gentiles, (4:15-16). Originally, Galilee of the Gentiles means “the circle of the Gentiles”¹⁵⁰. It means that Galilee was surrounded by the Gentiles. It is seems that “Galilee was by Matthew’s day at least half Gentile in population, half pagan in cult.”¹⁵¹ “This might prompt Jesus to open his Gentile mission to the Gentiles of good will.”¹⁵²

In 4:25, “And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan,” Jesus shows a welcoming attitude through his ministry which he extended to the pagan Decapolis. The Gentiles from this pagan city followed him. The command of Jesus to his disciples

¹⁵⁰ B.T. VIVIANO, *NJBC*, 638.

¹⁵¹ B.T. VIVIANO, *NJBC*, 638

¹⁵² B.T. VIVIANO, *NJBC*, 638.

in 10:5b, restricting them from going to the way of the nations, and a town of Samaritans appears contrary to Jesus' inclusive attitude. According to Carter, "the focus on Israel is temporary in that Israel has salvation history in God's purposes, but through resurrection, the disciples' mission will extend to Gentiles (10:18; 28:16-20)."¹⁵³ This is "because the Gentiles can gain what Israel has through the faith rooted in the resurrection of Christ"¹⁵⁴

In 6:32, Jesus gives warning to his disciples over the use of material goods. Jesus cautioned them to be careful on the use of material goods because the extraordinary worries for material goods as the goal of life belongs to the Gentiles, not disciples. Again the distinct practice and identity of disciples are defined over and against a negative portrayal of Gentiles (5:47; 6:7). Jesus seems to be 'sarcastic' towards the Gentiles but in actual fact he was telling his disciples to take God first in everything. The Gentiles have not had the opportunity which they had. If they did, they would have been different. Furthermore, in 10:18, Jesus encourages his disciples to be good witnesses to the Gentiles by their perseverance, even in pains and persecution. Through this means they will win them over to Christ.¹⁵⁵

In 12: 18, "...he will proclaim judgment to the nations". Carter states that, "to announce justice is to proclaim God's purposes and empire (1:21-23; 4:17, 23)."¹⁵⁶ He furthermore asserts that, "the nations are both the Jews and the Gentiles."¹⁵⁷ This shows the universal approach of God towards the whole of humanity. In 12:21, Jesus' mission to the Jews and Gentiles "enacts God's purposes

¹⁵³ . CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 234

¹⁵⁴ W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 234

¹⁵⁵ Personal Reflection

¹⁵⁶ W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 270

¹⁵⁷ W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins*, 270

to bless all the nations of the earth (Gen.12:1-13; Matt. 1:1). On Gentile inclusion see 1:3-6; 2:1; 3:7-10; 4:15-16; 5:13-16; 8:5-13; 15:21-28. For Jesus, all effort should be made, in spite of persecution, to bring the Gentiles into the kingdom.”¹⁵⁸

In 20:19, “the Gentiles are exempted from the blame for the death of Jesus. The centre of attention shifts from that action of the Gentiles to the malevolent purpose of the Jewish leaders in handing Jesus over to them.”¹⁵⁹ More so, in 20: 25, “you know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them...” Here, Jesus cautioned his apostles on the use of authority. He told them that the Gentiles are lording it over their subjects because they (the Gentiles) have not known the mystery of the kingdom, but they (the apostles) are with him but still lives like unbelievers.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ R.H GUNDRY, Matthew: A Commentary, 229

¹⁵⁹ R.H GUNDRY, Matthew: A Commentary, 401

¹⁶⁰ R.H GUNDRY, Matthew: A Commentary, 401

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

OT	Old Testament
Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Josh	Joshua
Judg	Judges
Ezra	Ezra
Job	Job
2 Sam	2 Samuel
1 Kgs	1 Kings
Ps(s)	Psalms
Prov	Proverb
Eccl	Ecclesiastes
Cant	The Song of Songs
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Sir	Ecclesiasticus/Ben-Sira
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Ezek	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniel
Joel	Joel

NEW TESTAMENT

NT	New Testament
Matt	Matthew

Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke
John	John
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Rom	Romans
I Cor	I Corinthians
Gal	Galatians

DICTIONARIES

ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
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BIBLE VERSIONS

KJV	King James Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version

COMMENTARIES

NJBC	New Jerusalem Bible
Commentary	

JOURNALS

BT	BibleToday
BTB	Biblical Theological Bulletin
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly

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