

TANGAZA COLLEGE

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

AN EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 15, 21-28

**The Role of the Gentile Woman in Matt 15, 21-28: Faith as a
Paradigm for Healing**

BY

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Paradigm for Healing**

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A Long Essay in Biblical Theology Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Ecclesiastical Degree of Baccalaureate in Theology

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ecclesiastical Degree of Baccalaureate in theology. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work especially to my late grandmother Leah, to my younger brother Lawrence, and to my family for their constant support and concern they have rendered me in my theological studies.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In this topic I intend to explore the text from Matt 15, 21-28 and investigate the role the Gentile woman plays in this pericope. I have been motivated by Jesus' praise of the faith of this Gentile woman. As a result my main objective in this project is to establish the meaning of this text for Matthew's community and also for contemporary Christians.

In order to achieve this objective I will employ certain scientific biblical methods. For this reason I have divided my topic into three chapters. In the first chapter I will give a biblical background of the term 'Gentile'. I will show what this term means and what relationship there is in scripture between Gentiles and the people of Israel. In the Old Testament I will single out the Canaanites who will act as a representative group for all peoples known as Gentiles. Then in the New Testament I will establish the understanding of Gentiles with special emphasis on Matthew's Gospel. My aim in the first chapter will be to find out what was the relationship between the Israelites and the Gentiles in scripture. The findings then will help me to have a clearer understanding of Jesus' encounter with the Gentile woman in Matthew from where my working-text comes.

In the second chapter I will do an exegetical investigation in which I will analyze Matt 15, 21-28 in order to expose its original meaning. Since this chapter holds a central position in my thesis I hope to bring to the surface the theology of Matthew with regard to the above-mentioned text and answer some of the questions it raises. My findings in this chapter will, therefore, be very important for my third and last chapter in which I will argue both theologically and pastorally that faith is necessary

for healing, for effective intercessory prayer, and for incorporation into the Christian community.

Finally I will, in the third chapter, harmonize the message of Matt 15, 21-28 for contemporary Christians with some reflections on the same text in the context of today's suffering masses. I will answer the questions: How can this text give meaning to some Christians of today who have faith and yet continue to suffer from HIV/AIDS or the ravages of war? And how can it inspire today's church to reach out to such suffering people?

Each of the three chapters will have its own introduction and conclusion in which the main ideas and assumptions will be introduced and summarized respectively. Lastly, the general conclusion will expose the main ideas and assumptions of the whole topic in a carefully synthesized and summarized way.

CHAPTER I

The Understanding of Gentiles in the Scripture

1. Introduction

In this background chapter we will lay the biblical foundation of the term *Gentile* starting with the Old Testament through the New Testament. Since our working-text (Matt 15, 21-28) mentions the Gentile woman as *Canaanite* we will take the Canaanites from the Old Testament as a representative group of Gentiles. We will then analyze the understanding of Gentiles in the New Testament with special emphasis on Matthew's Gospel from where our pericope is derived. The whole of this chapter is to be considered a stepping-stone to the better understanding of chapter two where Jesus praises a Gentile woman in Matthew's Gospel and describes her faith as 'great'. In order to come to this understanding we will, in this chapter, find out who the Gentiles are in scripture and what their relationship with the people of Israel is.

2. Old Testament Understanding of Gentiles

In the Old Testament the word *Gentiles*¹ "was the term most commonly used for peoples or nations other than the chosen people."² The attitude of the *Israelites*³ in this regard "was determined by religious rather than racial considerations. Social and political contacts with Gentiles always involved the danger of religious contamination, and since the Israelites were the sole champions of pure moral

¹ In the Old Testament the word 'Gentiles' renders the Hebrew גוֹיִם, and refers mostly to non-Jewish peoples, or nations, or pagans (cf Ex 12, 38; Is 9, 1). It is also used for Israel as rebuke or in a slighting way (cf Gen 12, 2; Josh 3, 17; Is 1, 4).

² A. VAN SELMS "Gentile", *ISBE* II, 443-444, ed., G.W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids 1982), 443.

³ The names 'Hebrews', 'Israelites', and 'Jews' are used in particular different times of the history of the people of Israel (e.g. Hebrews – in Egypt, Israelites – in the desert, Jews – in the Promised Land).

monotheism, this was a consideration of prime importance.”⁴ The Old Testament narrates the story of how Israel was chosen by God at the expense of all other peoples but eventually opened up to non-Israelites. Israel was to live by God’s commandments and covenant. All the non-Jewish peoples fall under the category of Gentiles. Those often mentioned in the Old Testament include the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Syrians, the Philistines, and some small states across the Jordan such as Amorite, Edom, Moab, and Ammon. The non-Semitic peoples mentioned in the Old Testament include the Hittites, the Persians, and the Greeks. The Old Testament mentions other non-Jewish people but here we will focus our attention only on the Canaanites since this is alluded to in our working-text.

The land in which the ancestors of the Hebrews lived and which their descendants consequently inherited is usually called Canaan in the Old Testament. It derived this name “from the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, from whom the Hebrews wrestled it.”⁵ The name *Canaanite* means “trader in the Semitic language.”⁶ The following is a brief account of how the Israelites came to possess the land of Canaan through the events following the Exodus from slavery in Egypt.

The Exodus event depicts Yahweh’s intervention “on behalf of a helpless band of slaves...through a succession of suspense-filled episodes...against Pharaoh.”⁷ The God of Israel consequently won the battle against Pharaoh. This triumph sparked off the Exodus journey of the Hebrews from the land of slavery to the Promised Land, *a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey*, as Exodus 3, 8 calls it.

⁴ A. VAN SELMS “Gentile”. *ISBE* II, 443.

⁵ P. HEINISCH, *History of the Old Testament*, (Collegeville 1952), 41.

⁶ L. BOADT, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction*, (New York 1984), 213.

⁷ B.W. ANDERSON, *The Living World of the Old Testament*, (Englewood Cliff 1975⁴), 18.

In the desert Israel was called to be a *holy nation* (Ex 19, 6). It meant Israel belonged to God. “Before the organization and structure of a nation-state worked out under the monarchy, the confederacy of Israelite tribes had a unity derived from their common relationship to Yahweh.”⁸ This meant that they owed “their existence not to their own achievements but the action and purpose of Yahweh.”⁹ In this sense they were the elect people whose relationship with Yahweh was expressed in a covenant. As such, the worship of Yahweh became Israel’s national religion. The covenant idea expressed “a relationship in which the element of obligation was present.”¹⁰ God would take Israel *for my people, and I will be your God* (Ex 6, 7). On its part, Israel should observe all the commandments of God as expressed in Exodus 20, 1-17.

Thus the people of Israel were fully aware that they were God’s chosen people called to serve and worship God through the strict observation of his commandments as they settled in the Promised Land. Canaan was an attractive land and offered many challenges to the covenant people. “The material culture of the Canaanites was evident to the Israelites.... The strong walled cities and impressive buildings made them fearful (Num 13, 28).”¹¹ It is no wonder then that the Bible recalls, “how forcefully the simple, relatively poor tribes of Israel were struck by the wealth they saw among the Canaanites. But along with the glittering and prosperous material achievements came religious beliefs, beliefs that clashed almost entirely with Israel’s stark faith in one God, who was ruler, patriarch, warrior, and protective

⁸ G. W. ANDERSON, *The History and Religion of Israel*, (Oxford 1966), 35.

⁹ *Ibid.* 35.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 35.

¹¹ L. BOADT, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction*, 214.

mother all in one and who declared that no other gods nor their images were to be before him (Ex 20, 2-3).”¹²

The book of Joshua gives an account of how Israel invaded Canaan and established itself there. What happened between Israel and the inhabitants of the land of Canaan? The book of Genesis “reports no barrier between the Patriarchs and their Canaanite surroundings.”¹³ Though Isaac and Jacob avoided marrying Canaanite women¹⁴ some of Jacob’s sons, however, married the daughters of the Canaanites.¹⁵

It is true that “the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites saw some instances of complete massacres of the indigenous population, but this was not the case in Gibeon and the neighbouring towns, nor in those towns that remained Canaanite until the time of the first kings of Israel (Judges 1, 27-36).”¹⁶ Another good example is what happened in Jerusalem during the time of King David. After the “conquest of Jerusalem by David the non-Israelite Araunah lived there in full possession of his ancestral domain (2Sam 24, 16-24).”¹⁷ Despite Exodus 34, 16 that forbade intermarriage, no one objected to marrying women from neighbouring nations or conquered in war (Deut 21, 10-14).¹⁸

A systematic “opposition to marriages with non-Jewish women appeared only after the Exile.”¹⁹ This opposition is reflected in such texts as Ezra 9, 1-2 and Nehemiah 13, 23-30. This “did not mean, however, that foreign-born people were

¹² *Ibid.* 214.

¹³ A. VAN SELMS, “Genesis”, *ISBE* II, 443.

¹⁴ Cf Gen 24, 2-4; 28, 1-2.

¹⁵ E.g. Judah married Tamar (cf Gen 38, 1-2); Simoen too had a Canaanite wife (cf Gen 46, 10).

¹⁶ A. VAN SELMS, “Genesis”, *ISBE* II, 443.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 443.

¹⁸ E.g. David married Uriah’s wife Bathsheba (cf 2Sam 11, 26-27).

¹⁹ A. VAN SELMS, “Genesis”, *ISBE* II, 444.

excluded from Israel. There were many living as protected strangers in Israel. In any case a stranger was supposed to conform to the Hebrew way of life as stipulated by Exodus 12, 43-49.”²⁰ With regard to the temple in Jerusalem Gentiles were allowed to visit the outer precinct of the temple, up to the low wall (1Kings 8, 41-43). However, with regard to Herod’s temple (started in 20 BCE), inscriptions in Greek “forbade any foreigner to go further than the low wall, under pain of death.”²¹ Sacrifices and prayers “were offered for the pagan Persian kings and their Greek and Roman successors (Ezra 6, 10; 1Mac 7, 33).”²²

Despite this relationship with Gentile nations and peoples, Israel was sternly warned against following or copying any Gentile religious practices (Ex 34, 11-15). However, Israel failed to uphold the covenant and instead allowed itself to succumb to Canaanite religious practices by serving the Baals and Ashtaroths (Judges 2, 12-13). The lure of Canaanite religion was visible to Israel’s prophets who were quick to condemn it as well as Israel’s religious practices that borrowed heavily from it. Some of the most severe prophetic charges are found in Hosea 4:12-13; Micah 1, 7; Jer 2, 7-8; Ezek 6, 3-6.

The prophets saw that the Canaanite religious beliefs and those of the surrounding neighbours were in conflict with Israel’s stark faith in one God who was creator and ruler of everything. Generally, there was antagonism against the Gentiles in the Old Testament. Despite this antagonism, Israel as a chosen people of God with moral obligations of the covenant was supposed to lead the Gentile nations to Yahweh, the only true God and creator of everything (Zech 8, 22-23). The

²⁰ *Ibid.* 444.

²¹ W. WHISTON, Trans. *The Works of Josephus*, (Peabody 1987), 425.

²² A. VAN SELMS, “Genesis”, *ISBE* II, 444.

relationship that Israel had with God was important, then, not only for Israel alone but also for the Gentile nations. This relationship was supposed to be extended to other nations as well so that through Israel these nations could come to know God as the only true God. This was a new development, which came as a result of prophetic reflection after the Exile (539 BCE). Prophets came to see that one of Israel's divine tasks was to lead other nations to God through its mediation (Is 55, 3-5; Micah 7, 11-12). They saw that when Yahweh established his covenant with Israel, he declared it to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19, 6). The prophets saw in this an indication of Israel's mediatorial, spiritual role among the peoples of the world. However, these Gentile nations would only start a pilgrimage to Israel's God when Israel showed a good and attractive quality of its life. Many prophets testified to this call and task, and exhorted Israel to give true divine witness to Gentile nations (Is 49, 6-7).

For example, the Prophet Isaiah announced that the true worship of God by Israel would attract other nations to come to Israel and belong there for ever (Is 45, 14-17, 22-25); the Prophet Zechariah also prophesied that all nations would be attracted by the privilege and favour of Israel as God's chosen people (Zech 8, 20-23). As a result, these nations would use all opportunity to implore the favour of the Lord and seek him in Jerusalem. Every Gentile would grab a Jew by the garment in order to be led to the city of the true God; the Psalmist too explained how the people of Tyre would come with gifts to seek Israel's favour (Ps 45, 13).

Unfortunately, Israel failed to live up to this call and task, and instead, allowed itself to be corrupted by other nations' unsound religious practices. However, God's offer of salvation to Gentile nations still remained intact in spite of Israel's failure to

lead by good example. It was because of this failure that Israel's subsequent prophets envisioned a messianic figure who would fulfill what Israel failed to do. The Prophet Isaiah portrayed the coming of the messianic kingdom as one in which Israel and other nations would live together peacefully (Is 2, 1-4). The prophet Micah too described the coming messianic figure as one who would pasture the flock of Yahweh in peace and his greatness would reach to the ends of the earth (Micah 5, 1-14).

These messianic prophecies would be realized in the figure of Jesus Christ, the real personification of Israel and everything Israel stood for. It would be he who would bring Israel and all the Gentile nations into one fold.

3. New Testament Understanding of Gentiles

In spite of all the Old Testament prophecies in favour of the Gentiles, antagonism against the Gentiles was far more present in the New Testament times than in the Old. In the New Testament the term *Gentiles*²³ is the name "given to non-Jews by the Jews, then to non-Christians by the Christians."²⁴ From the point of view of the Christians this name attempted to describe the nations in their non-Christian religious dimension.²⁵

Even though in the New Testament times too, some pious Jewish women married Gentile husbands²⁶ "the general tendency, however, was one of increasing hostility towards them."²⁷ Then Jesus appeared on the scene to proclaim "the joyful

²³ In the New Testament the word 'Gentiles' renders the Greek ἔθνη and refers either to non-Jews, or to non-Christians (cf Matt 10, 18; Acts 21, 21).

²⁴ X. LEON-DUFOUR, *Dictionary of the New Testament*, (San Francisco 1980), 207.

²⁵ Cf Matt 10, 18; Acts 21, 21; 26, 17.

²⁶ For example the mother of Timothy married a Gentile: see Acts 16, 1.

²⁷ A. VAN SELMS, "Genesis", *ISBE* II, 444.

news of the coming of God's kingdom and the consequent need for all Israel to repent."²⁸ His coming presumed the truth that "God has always been king of Israel and of the universe..."²⁹ For many New Testament authors Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah's vision of the messianic kingdom in which *the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it...*(Is 2, 2). Even though the Gospels do not show too explicitly Jesus' saving mission as including also all Gentiles they, however, show that he did not avoid all contact with these groups and was willing at times to perform exorcisms or miracles for them (cf Mark 5, 1-20; Matt 15, 21-28; Luke 17, 11-19). Also concerning the Gentiles Jesus claimed that the fate of Gentiles on the Day of Judgment would compare favourably with that of unbelieving Israel (cf Matt 21, 43). Furthermore, at the end of all things "Gentiles would be included in the eschatological banquet with the patriarchs, while unbelieving Israelites would be shut out (Luke 13, 28-30)."³⁰

From this we can deduce that Jesus' ministry, though restricted to Israel in the Gospels (Matt 15, 24), had a wider scope. As the new Israel, Jesus came to restore what the old Israel had destroyed, namely sound relationship with the loving and merciful God. Also as the new Israel, Jesus would attract Gentile nations to God, unlike the old Israel that had failed to do this. Thus Jesus would fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah concerning the universal salvation of all nations through Israel (Zech 8, 20-23).

²⁸ J.P. MEIER, "Jesus", *NJBC*, ed., R.E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer, R.E. Murphy, (New York 1990), 1320.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 1320.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 1322.

It was not an easy task to allow the Gentile converts to Christianity in the New Testament. Some elements in the oldest Christian community shared the common Jewish aversion to Gentiles. The Apostle Peter was the first to break through the barrier when he baptized the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10, 44-48), though at a later moment he withdrew because of the *Judaizers*³¹ (Gal 2, 11-14). The incident involving Peter and Cornelius raised a storm of indignation in Jerusalem (Acts 11, 1-3). The Christian community at Jerusalem was not “fundamentally opposed to the admission of Gentiles into Christianity; according to Acts 11 they had only objected to Gentiles being freed from the obligation to be circumcised and to keep the law.”

Much of the New Testament understanding of the Gentiles is accredited to the Apostle Paul who after his own conversion to Christianity spent all his energy preaching to them. For Paul “it is God who has sovereignty over salvation and perdition; and God has in fact chosen for himself the Gentiles and a remnant of Israel (Rom 9, 30).”³² So we can conclude that the New Testament understanding of Gentiles as people included in God’s initial plan of salvation was gradual. It became clearer as the early Christians reflected on the nature of God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who *will guide you into all the truth* (John 16, 13).

4. Matthean Community Understanding of Gentiles

The focus of attention in this section will be the understanding of Gentiles by Matthew’s community. If we take up arguments offered by such scripture scholars as Anthony Saldarini, Daniel Harrington, and David Sim we can situate the

³¹ Judaizers were Christians of Jewish origin who stressed more the Mosaic Law (cf Rev 2, 9).

³² J. MÜNCK, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, (Atlanta 1959), 42.

composition of Matthew's Gospel around the period 80 – 90 CE. The date prior to 100 CE has been suggested because of "the overwhelming probability that Ignatius of Antioch, who died c. 107, knew the Gospel in written form."³³ Ignatius wrote epistles that "contain a number of clear references to the Matthean Gospel."³⁴ After establishing the date of composition of the Gospel of Matthew, we now turn to the question of how the Matthean community perceived the Gentile world. The best place to begin the discussion is with Matthew's treatment of the Gentiles in his Gospel narrative.

It has long been thought that the Gospel of Matthew, though thoroughly Jewish in character, has a very positive view of the Gentiles. This is true as far as we look at the many texts that portray the Gentiles positively (cf Matt 2, 1-2; 8, 10-11; 21, 43). However, this positive position is strongly challenged by some negative views such as found in Matt 10, 5-6 and 15, 24 respectively. With regard to the first text, Jesus warns his disciples not to go among the Gentiles, *and enter no town of the Samaritans but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Matt 10, 5-6). In the second text the Matthean Jesus states that he himself has been sent *only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. The task now is how to reconcile these negative views with the affirmative statement that Matthew's Gospel is inclusive!

Here we will support the view expressed by some recent scholars that the Gospel "addresses an originally Jewish congregation that has begun to incorporate Gentile members."³⁵ For this reason "the Gospel portrays Jesus as having limited his earthly

³³ D.C. SIM, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, (Edinburgh 1998), 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 31.

³⁵ A. -J. LEVINE, "Matthew", *WBC*, 252-262, ed., C.A. Newman – S.H. Ringe, (Louisville 1992), 252.

mission to Jews; following the resurrection, the mission is extended to all.”³⁶ So, though largely Jewish, “the Matthean community seems to have been open to non-Jews and probably took the ‘great commission’ of Matt 28, 19 as a stimulus to even greater effort in carrying out the Gentile mission.”³⁷ Raymond Brown expresses the same view when he says: “A firm memory that during his own lifetime Jesus dealt only with Israel and not with Gentiles (Matt 10, 5-6) is combined with a gradually gained understanding that the apostolate to which the risen Jesus committed his followers included all nations (Matt 28, 19).”³⁸ For this reason the two commands to the disciples, *Go nowhere among the Gentiles* (10, 5) and *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations* (28, 19), “probably represent the history of Matthew’s community: it came into being through a mission to Jews and then opened to Gentiles.”³⁹ This new development, then, meant that the “Jewish Christians of Matthew’s community must learn to live at one with the Gentile Christians without envy”⁴⁰ and any other prejudices such as the Mosaic Law and Jewish traditions. However, this was not a common consensus as it is more likely that some Jewish members were not for the idea of Gentile incorporation (cf Matt 10, 5-6; 15, 24).

Anthony Saldarini summarizes that “Israel, its destiny and Jesus’ mission to reform Israel and instruct it in God’s will is central to the Matthean narrative and to

³⁶ *Ibid.* 252.

³⁷ D.J. HARRINGTON, ed., *The Gospel of Matthew*, SacP 1, (Collegeville 1991), 9.

³⁸ R.E. BROWN, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, (New York 1984), 126.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 129.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 130.

Matthew's world view. However, Gentiles are to be brought into Israel through faith in Jesus and obedience to his teaching."⁴¹

5. Conclusion

In this background chapter of our thesis we have analyzed the vocation of the chosen people of God, Israel, in relation to all other peoples known from scripture as Gentiles. From the Old Testament we have seen that although Israel was the only chosen nation, God did not however leave other nations without any hope of salvation. Israel was chosen not only for its own sake but for the sake of other nations too. Therefore the relationship that Israel had with Gentile nations was an important one in God's plan of salvation because the former was supposed to lead the latter to God by an exemplary religious life as prophesied by many Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah and Zechariah. However, Israel failed to achieve this vocation and instead was influenced by pagan religious practices.

We then analyzed Jesus' ministry in the New Testament and found out that though he was sent to redeem Israel, his vocation too had a wider scope. We showed that the Apostle Paul mainly realized this wider scope. Finally, we argued from the Gospel of Matthew that the Matthean community, though Jewish in scope, gradually started to gain some understanding that Gentiles too were invited to be part and parcel of the church founded by the Risen Jesus. However, this understanding was not so easy to come by, as some Jewish members seem to have been opposed to Gentile incorporation.

⁴¹ A.J. SALDARINI, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, (Chicago 1994), 83.

CHAPTER II

Exegesis of Matt 15, 21-28

1. Introduction

Having established, in chapter one, the general understanding of Gentiles in the scripture and their relationship with the people of Israel, we will now, in this chapter, concentrate on the exegesis of our working-text from Matt 15, 21-28. We will analyze Jesus' encounter with the Gentile woman in the text and see, first of all, what theological concept it addresses; and secondly, whether it agrees with the findings of the first chapter.

We have divided our exegesis into two parts. In the first part we will concentrate on preliminary exegesis of Matt 15, 21-28. We expect this preliminary exegesis to help us situate our text in context by establishing its *terminus a quo*⁴² and *terminus ad quem*⁴³, textual criticism⁴⁴, remote and immediate contexts⁴⁵, parallel texts, and form and structure.

This will then be followed by an exegetical analysis, verse by verse, in which we shall pay particular attention to the 'faith' of the Gentile woman in our text. We do not, however, intend to exhaust all that the exegetes have commented on this text, for such an intention would require an enormous scientific research beyond the scope of our project.

⁴² The place from which one starts: cf S. C. WOODHOUSE, *Latin-English and English-Latin Dictionary*, (London 1913), 184.

⁴³ The end at which one aims: *Ibid.* 184.

⁴⁴ The science which, from the various manuscript recensions, tries to establish the original texts: cf X. LEON-DUFOUR, *Dictionary of the New Testament*, 401.

⁴⁵ By remote and immediate contexts we mean the position within which our pericope is found in Matthew's Gospel. The knowledge about this helps to discover how such a pericope functions in the entire Gospel or contributes to its theology.

2. Delimitation of the Text

2.1 *Terminus a Quo*

We have established that our text begins with verse 21 because of the following key factors. In the first place verse 21 introduces a change of place and movement from Gennesaret to the district of Tyre and Sidon. In 14, 34 Jesus and his disciples arrive at Gennesaret from the sea. In 15, 21 Jesus withdraws to the Gentile territory of Tyre and Sidon following his debate about tradition with the Pharisees and Scribes. “In this episode we are in a new location, the region of Tyre and Sidon (15, 21) – outside Israel.”⁴⁶ Καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἐκεῖθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ... (And Jesus went away from there...) prepares a shift from the topic about Jewish ritual traditions to the topic concerning the healing of the Gentile’s daughter. Secondly, in the preceding part (15, 1-20) the topic centred on “what is it that defiles whereas in this section (15, 21-28) it centres on the relationship between Jews and Gentiles.”⁴⁷

Thirdly, there is a change of characters. In 15, 1-20 the conversation is between Jesus on the one hand, and the Pharisees and Scribes on the other. Instead in 15, 21-28 it is between Jesus and the Canaanite woman. All these factors support our establishment that verse 21 is the beginning of our text. So this is the place where we will begin exegesis.

2.2 *Terminus ad Quem*

The text ends with verse 28 because of the following factors. Καὶ ἰάθη ἡ θυγάτηρ αὐτῆς ἀπὸ τῆς ὥρας ἐκείνης (And her daughter was healed from that hour) concludes the whole healing story. Verse 29 is not part of this healing story

⁴⁶ D. PATTE, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, (Valley Forge 1987), 220.

⁴⁷ J.C. FENTON, *The Gospel of St. Matthew*, Pelican Gospel Commentaries, (Baltimore 1963), 254.

because it introduces a different setting. Καὶ μεταβὰς ἐκεῖθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἦλθεν (And Jesus went on from there...) of verse 29 “is a characteristic Matthean introduction to a paragraph.”⁴⁸ It also indicates the change of place “from Tyre and Sidon (15, 21) in the north, to the Sea of Galilee.”⁴⁹

The story following verse 29 centres on Jesus’ healing of many people. The Canaanite woman is never mentioned in this section. So verse 29 is not part of the miracle story involving the Canaanite woman. This means then that verse 28 is the terminus ad quem of our text. This is where we shall end our exegesis.

3. Textual Criticism

It is a fact that “no New Testament writing is preserved in the original. What we possess are only more or less accurate copies and extracts by early Christian writers. The task of textual criticism is therefore to restore from these copies and extracts the original text of the New Testament...”⁵⁰ The text of modern editions is based upon the following: “Greek manuscripts, early versions, and New Testament quotations of the Church Fathers.”⁵¹

We accept here the assertion that Mark was the first Gospel to be written and that Matthew used Mark as his principal source. It was “the tradition of the early Church that Matthew composed his Gospel in Hebrew (at least the sayings of Jesus), that is, in the Aramaic dialect spoken by the Jews of Syria and Palestine at his time.”⁵² Since neither MSS nor citations of this Aramaic Gospel survive, we hold with other commentators the position that Matthew was originally written in

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 257. See also Matt 12, 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 256.

⁵⁰ W.G. KUMMEL, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (Norwich 1966), 360.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 360.

⁵² A. WIKENHAUSER, *New Testament Introduction*, (New York 1958), 191.

Greek.⁵³ This is mainly because “comparison of the synoptics with one another shows that the principal sources of the Gospel of Matthew were two Greek works which were already in existence, namely the Gospel of St. Mark and a collection of sayings of our Lord (Q)...”⁵⁴

From the above data we assert that our text (Matt 15, 21-28) was therefore composed in Greek. Both the internal and external evidence in various texts affirm that this text has been a part of the Gospel.⁵⁵ It has never been circulated apart from the Gospel as it is in its present form. For example, the use of ἐλέησόν με, ...υἱὸς Δαυίδ in Matt 15, 22 is an expression typical to the Matthean healing stories (cf 9, 27; 20, 30-31).⁵⁶ There are no major textual variants in this text except for one notable variation in verse 26. Matthew has ἔστιν καλὸν whereas Mark has ἐστὶν καλὸν (cf Mark 7, 27). Evidence from ancient versions and Church Fathers is conflicting. The fifth century Georgian version has καλὸν ἐστὶν whereas Origen and Chrysostom give witness to ἔστιν καλόν; Tertullian and Eusebius support ἔστιν whereas the second century Diatessaron of Tatian has ἐξεστὶν.⁵⁷ There is a considerable degree of doubt whether ἔστιν καλόν contains the superior reading.⁵⁸ It is more likely that the Markan ἐστὶν καλὸν may have been the original reading. This seems so especially when we consider the Markan priority. It is probable then that the above variants are corrupt transmissions.

⁵³ See D.J. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 3-4.

⁵⁴ A. WIKENHAI SER, *New Testament Introduction*, 194.

⁵⁵ See the textual apparatus given in the Greek New Testament: K. ALAND – al., *The Greek New Testament*, (Stuttgart 1983³), 58-59.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 58.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 59.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 59.

4. Context of the Text

4.1 Remote Context

The remote context of our pericope is the narrative block of the Gospel that begins at Matt 13, 53 and ends at 16, 12. As a unity on its own, “it concentrates on the subject of ‘Acceptance and Rejection of Jesus’.”⁵⁹ The rejection of Jesus comes about because of lack of faith whereas his acceptance is due to faith in him by the people involved. This theme of faith runs throughout this section. Our pericope fits well in this context because it contrasts the Canaanite’s great faith with the lack of faith in the Jews at Nazareth (13, 53-58). It also “contrasts her great faith with the little faith of Peter (14, 31) and of the disciples (16, 8).”⁶⁰ So the remote context of our text shows the development of the theme of faith as it recurs in Jesus’ acceptance or rejection by the people.

4.2 Immediate Context

In the section before Matt 15, 21-28 the question about defilement with regard to food is raised. In 15, 21-28 “the subject is the relation between Jews and Gentiles. The two subjects are connected because the Jews’ belief concerning defilement made them keep themselves separate from the Gentiles.”⁶¹ The Pharisees and Scribes in Matt 15, 1-20 “are presented as an example of ‘unbelief’ and the Canaanite woman as an example of great faith.”⁶² Finally, Jesus concludes by declaring that “the Canaanite woman, a pagan, has ‘great’ faith (15, 28), while he

⁵⁹ A. LESKE, “Matthew”, *IBC*, ed. W.R. Farmer –*al.*, (Collegeville 1998), 1299-1302.

⁶⁰ R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution*, (Grand Rapids 1994), 316.

⁶¹ J.C. FENTON, *The Gospel of St. Matthew*, 254. Albright and Mann also say the same thing: cf W.F. ALBRIGHT · C.S. MANN, *Matthew*, (Garden City 1971), 188.

⁶² D. PATTE, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 220.

had declared that the Pharisees, the Jewish religious authorities, make void the word of God and are hypocrites (15, 6-7).”⁶³

In 15, 1-20 we see that “failure to observe Jewish cultic practices concerning the washing of hands does not exclude people from eating at the Lord’s Table. Here (15, 21-28) we learn that neither does being a Gentile.”⁶⁴ Matt 15, 1-20 is therefore the immediate context of our text.

5. Parallel Texts

5.1 Matt 8, 5-13 (*The Story of the Centurion*)

Our working-text more or less follows the pattern of this miracle story. When we compare the two we see certain traits that can help us see the aim of Matthew in telling these stories. In both stories Jesus encounters Gentiles who seek him out for a healing favour. Both Gentiles are intercessors: in 8, 5-13 the centurion intercedes on behalf of his paralyzed servant; in 15, 21-28 the Canaanite woman intercedes on behalf of her demon-possessed daughter. “In both cases the help of Jesus is given to Gentiles; the healing takes place from a distance and only follows after a somewhat lengthy conversation.”⁶⁵ In both pericopes Jesus praises the faith of the centurion and the Canaanite woman.

It is likely that the scandal that troubled Matthew’s community “was the lack of faith in Jesus as Messiah, which the majority of Israelites showed.”⁶⁶ Matthew’s aim in these two pericopes was therefore to show that through faith many of the

⁶³ *Ibid.* 220.

⁶⁴ M. FALLON, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introductory Commentary*, (Kensington 1997), 223

⁶⁵ G. BORNKAMM – G. BARTH – H.J. HELD, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, (Philadelphia 1963), 193.

⁶⁶ B.T. VIVIANO, “The Gospel According to Matthew”, *NJBC*, ed., R.E. Brown – *al.*, 630-674(42: 54). 648.

Gentiles would inherit the promises made to the patriarchs and finally share their reward (cf Matt 8, 11-12).

5.2 Mark 7, 24-30 (The Story of the Syro-phoenician Woman)

The second parallel to our working-text is Mark 7, 24-30. When we compare these two parallels we will discover that we have in fact one story told in different ways and for different purposes by Mark and Matthew respectively. Both authors refer to the Gentile woman as coming from the district of Tyre and Sidon. In both Matthew and Mark the woman intercedes for her demon-possessed daughter. In both stories she begs Jesus to heal her daughter and in the process acknowledges the priority of the Jews in the divine plan of salvation. The healing of the woman's daughter in both parallels takes place at a distance respectively.⁶⁷

There are also differences in these stories. Mark names the Gentile woman as a Greek, a Syro-phoenician by birth, whereas Matthew calls her a Canaanite.⁶⁸ Matthew's choice of the term 'Canaanite' heightens the contrast between the 'pious' Jews and this foreign woman. In the Old Testament 'Canaanite' symbolizes evil.⁶⁹ Therefore, Canaanites are not people to associate with for they are worshippers of the Baals who are rivals of Yahweh. Matthew's account includes Jesus' conversation with his disciples (Matt 15, 23). The disciples are missing in Mark's account. In Mark Jesus enters a Gentile house where the Gentile woman comes to plead her cause with him, whereas in Matthew she comes out to meet Jesus in an

⁶⁷ Cf Mark 7, 29-30; Matt 15, 28.

⁶⁸ Cf Mark 7, 26; Matt 15, 22.

⁶⁹ Cf Deut 12, 31; 1Kings 14, 23; Ps 106, 37-38: all the evil practices mentioned here were associated with Canaanites.

unnamed place.⁷⁰ Mark's account records no titles for Jesus whereas the woman in Matthew addresses Jesus as 'Son of David' (Matt 15, 22). In Mark 7, 30 the woman's daughter is at home whereas in Matt 15, 28 it is not clear where she is. In Matthew the woman is said to have great faith whereas in Mark faith is not mentioned at all.

Consequently, the goal of Matthew is to show that in spite of the strict Jewish-Christian point of view concerning the mission to the Gentiles, Jesus recognizes "faith as the way of the Gentiles to salvation."⁷¹ As a result, Matthew has done nothing other than interpret the thought expressed by Mark. "The two of them, however, obviously have different addressees in mind. Mark shows the Gentile Christians that precedence must be acknowledged to belong to the Jewish nation (Mark 7, 27). Matthew makes clear to the strict Jewish Christians that faith opens the way for the Gentiles to Jesus."⁷²

6. Form and Structure of Matt 15, 21-28

6.1 Form

Generally speaking the kind of form used in our text is that of a miracle story. Our pericope gives an account of a healing using a form of words. However, this pericope is less concerned with the healing than that of Mark, which clearly shows the marks of a miracle story. In Matthew the characteristics of a miracle story are absent and only brief reference is made to the sickness of the woman's daughter (Matt 15, 22). In his case the dialogue not only stands in the middle of the pericope

⁷⁰ Cf Mark 7, 24-25; Matt 15, 22

⁷¹ G. BORNKAMM · G. BARTH – H.J. HELD, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, 200.

⁷² *Ibid.* 200.

but rather the pericope itself consists exclusively of a dialogue, to the end of which the healing is quite formally attached. In this way the Matthean pericope makes it clear that it is more concerned with teaching on Jesus' "attitude to a disputed question, namely the mission to the Gentiles"⁷³ than on the healing. Nevertheless this pericope can, with a measure of correctness, be called a miracle story "so far as that is possible in the present case of a healing at a distance (Matt 15, 28d)."⁷⁴ We agree with this view, namely that in spite of the extensive dialogue form it exhibits, the Matthean pericope is a miracle story because there is a healing attached to the end of the dialogue.

6.2 Structure

6.2.1 General Structure of Miracle Stories in Matthew

When we look closely at the Matthean miracle stories we will discover that they exhibit the following characteristics: Matthew greatly abbreviates the descriptive parts of the healing miracles as found in Mark or Luke⁷⁵, he also omits non-essential people and actions as compared with either Mark or Luke⁷⁶, conversation is the centre of the miracle stories in Matthew (Matt 8, 5-13; 9, 27-31), and faith has an important role in these stories (Matt 8, 5-13; 15, 21-28).

Hence the general structure of the Matthean miracle stories can be recognized thus:

- (a) There is a formal introduction in which the questioner is briefly introduced.
- (b) The request in direct speech in which faith is expressed.
- (c) The reply of Jesus corresponding to the request.
- (d) A brief formalistic notice that the miracle has taken place.⁷⁷

⁷³ *Ibid.* 199.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 197.

⁷⁵ Cf Mark 10, 46-52; Luke 18, 35-43; Matt 20, 29-34.

⁷⁶ Cf Mark, 5, 21-43; Luke 8, 40-56; Matt 9, 18-26.

⁷⁷ G. BORNKAMM – G. BARTH – H.J. HELD, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, 247.

6.2.2 Structure of Matt 15, 21-28

Our pericope more or less fits in the above general scheme. But its most distinctive structural feature is “the arrangement of the dialogue. It is made up of four dyadic units, each of which consists in turn of words addressed to Jesus followed by his reaction.”⁷⁸ It is, however, divided into the following three main sections:

- (a) Verses 21-22a is the setting.
- (b) Verses 22b-28c is the extended dialogue. This dialogue can be subdivided as follows:
 - (i) Verse 22 – the woman’s request
 - (ii) Verse 23a – Jesus’ response
 - (iii) Verse 23b – the disciples request
 - (iv) Verse 24 – Jesus’ response
 - (v) Verse 25 – the woman’s request
 - (vi) Verse 26 – Jesus’ response
 - (vii) Verse 27 – the woman’s request
 - (viii) Verse 28b – Jesus’ response
- (c) Verse 28d is the conclusion.⁷⁹

We agree with Davies and Allison when they comment thus on the above structure:

It is only in the last verbal exchange that Jesus favours the Gentile woman with her request. In the three preceding exchanges, in which Jesus’ response is consistently introduced with δὲ his words only constitute an obstacle for faith to overcome. It is in this way that the dramatic tension is heightened until the introduction of τότε is eventually made, which brings the conversation to a positive conclusion.⁸⁰

Therefore, both the general structure of the Matthean miracle stories and the structure of Matt 15, 21-28 show the necessity of faith in Jesus’ miraculous work.

7. Exegetical Analysis of Matt 15, 21-28

Verse 21. Καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἐκεῖθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς (And Jesus went away from there).

Matthew starts his version of Mark’s story by replacing δὲ (Mark 7, 24) with καὶ.

“This correlates Jesus’ ministry to a Gentile with the preceding intensification of

⁷⁸ W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, II: Commentary on Matthew VIII – XVIII. ICC, (Edinburgh 1988, 1991). 541.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 541.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 541.

dietary laws that erases the dietary demarcation between Jews and Gentiles”⁸¹ (Matt 15, 1-20).

Καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἐκεῖθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς τὰ μέρη Τύρου καὶ Σιδῶνος (And Jesus went away from there to the district of Tyre and Sidon). This is a revised version of Mark 7, 24a. Matthew “has changed Mark’s sentence so as to obtain a favourite construction (participle + ἀναχώρησεν).”⁸² Daniel Harrington observes that “the reason for Jesus’ departure is not made explicit.”⁸³ Is it because of opposition to “his teaching in Matt 15, 1-20, or the demands of the crowd at Gennesaret (14, 34-36), or the desire for some solitude (14, 13-14)?”⁸⁴ Harrington believes verse 21 does not give sufficient evidence to support any particular reason above. However, we agree with the position of Davies and Allison that following his debate with the Pharisees and Scribes (15, 1-20), Jesus’ motivation for his departure “is escape from danger. This is made probable by the verb ἀναχώρεω”⁸⁵ used in this verse. This verb means to “withdraw, or move away, or return.”⁸⁶ Matthew uses it in situations where danger is inevitable.⁸⁷ Gundry also supports this position when he says that Matthew substitutes ἀνεχώρησεν for Markan ἀπῆλθεν because his verb connotes withdrawal from danger... and enables him to portray Jesus as a model of fleeing persecution.⁸⁸

⁸¹ R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution*, (Grand Rapids 1994²), 310.

⁸² W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 545.

⁸³ D.J. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 234.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 234.

⁸⁵ W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 545.

⁸⁶ J. KREMER, “ἀναχώρεω”. *EDNT I*, ed., H. Balz – G. Schneider, (Grand Rapids 1981), 95.

⁸⁷ Cf Matt 2, 12: the story of the Magi; Matt 4, 12: the arrest of John the Baptist.

⁸⁸ R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 310.

Ἐξέρχομαι is a favourite verb of Matthew “where it occurs 10 times as compared to Mark’s 4 times, and the insertion of ‘Jesus’ is typical, occurring about 80 times in Matthew and only 12 times in Mark.”⁸⁹ The adverb “ἐκεῖθεν either refers to Gennesaret (14, 34) or has no antecedent.”⁹⁰ Whether Jesus actually arrives at Tyre and Sidon is not clear because “although εἰς can mean ‘into’ with the connotation of arrival, as in Matt 16, 13 and Mark 7, 24, the preposition can also mean ‘towards’ or ‘up to’ or ‘near’ as in Matt 17, 27 and 21, 1.”⁹¹ The text is ambiguous because it carries with it all the above connotations.

Τὰ μέρη Τύρου καὶ Σιδῶνος (the districts of Tyre and Sidon). Old Testament prophets “often condemned Tyre and Sidon as typical pagan towns.”⁹² Since the phrase ‘Tyre and Sidon’ refers “negatively to Gentile territory in the biblical tradition, Matthew uses it against the Gentile woman in order to show forth her marvelous act of faith and celebrate her praise the more.”⁹³

Verse 22. γυνὴ Καναναία ἀπὸ τῶν ὀρίων ἐκείνων ἐξεληθοῦσα ἔκραζεν (a Canaanite woman from that region came out and cried...). The major question concerning verse 22a is why has Matthew turned Mark’s Greek woman into a Canaanite? According to some modern exegetes, Matthew opted for the term ‘Canaanite’ because of its Old Testament associations. Davies and Allison say that Canaanites were Israel’s enemies, and Gentiles and hence unclean.⁹⁴ This evokes Israel’s “deeply engrained fear of and revulsion towards Gentiles. This in turn

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 310.

⁹⁰ W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 546.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 546.

⁹² P.C. SCHMITZ, “Sidon”, *ABD* VI, ed., D.N. Freedman - *al.*, (New York 1992), 17-18. See also Is 23; Jer 25, 22; Joel 4, 4; Amos 1, 9-10.

⁹³ W.D. DAVIES - D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 547.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 547.

allows one to see in Jesus the overcoming of such fears and revulsion.”⁹⁵ Francis Beare and Jones too concur with the assumption that Matthew uses the term ‘Canaanite’ to underline the significance of a miracle worked for one who belonged to the hereditary enemies of Israel.⁹⁶ ‘Tyre and Sidon’ and ‘Canaanite’, therefore, “work together to recall traditional prejudices.”⁹⁷

Ἐλέησόν με, κύριε υἱὸς Δαυίδ (Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David). This “has no parallel in Mark and is very strange that it is spoken by a non-Jew.”⁹⁸ Κύριος “in the New Testament is seen to be a proper term for the comprehensive lordship of Jesus. In him God acts as the *kyrios* does in the Old Testament.”⁹⁹ In the Old Testament the term *κύριος* in LXX or *Adonai* in MT “is used in place of Yahweh and states in practice who God is, what he means for us as the one whose personal will intervenes with all the force that is the distinctive mark of the name Yahweh.”¹⁰⁰ Its use in this text may imply “the woman is acknowledging Jesus’ universal dominion even though the title ‘Son of David’ anticipates the limitation of his ministry to Israel (cf verses 24, 26).”¹⁰¹

Verse 23. ὁ δὲ οὐκ ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῇ λόγον (But he did not answer her a word). Davies and Allison suggest that the reason why Jesus does not reply to the woman’s plea for her child is because he is “either turning her down or trying her faith.”¹⁰² Viviano, on the other hand, observes that Jesus’ “strange silence is explained in the

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 547.

⁹⁶ Cf F.W. BEARE, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, (London 1981), 341; A. JONES, “The Gospel of Christ According to St. Matthew”, *CCIS*, ed. D.B. Orchard - R.C. Fuller, (New York 1953), 880.

⁹⁷ W.D. DAVIES - D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 547.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 548.

⁹⁹ W. FOERSTER, “*kyrios*”, *TDNT*, Abridged in one volume, ed., G. Kittel - G. Friedrich, (Grand Rapids 1985), 493.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 489.

¹⁰¹ R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 311.

¹⁰² W.D. DAVIES - D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 549.

next verse: he did not wish to exceed his divine mission.”¹⁰³ We agree with Viviano’s observation since it seems more consistent with verse 24.

Ἀπολυσον αὐτήν (Dismiss her). Harrington observes that the disciples’ advice to dismiss the woman is ambiguous.¹⁰⁴ Harrington explains that this statement “could mean that Jesus should comply with the woman’s request (to rid her daughter of a demon as stated in verse 22) and get rid of her in that way. Or it could mean that Jesus should simply get rid of her to avoid the trouble that she is causing.”¹⁰⁵ Daniel Patte suggests that Jesus does not understand the disciples to mean that he should merely dismiss the woman without granting her request; otherwise his response in verse 24 that he *was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel* would be meaningless.¹⁰⁶ Rather “the disciples’ words need to be understood as a request that Jesus dismiss the woman by granting her what she wants.”¹⁰⁷ The translation of the Jerusalem Bible suggests this too.¹⁰⁸ Jones holds this position as well when he says that verse 24 hints that the only way to get rid of the woman is to dismiss her with the request granted.¹⁰⁹ However other exegetes disagree with this position. They argue that ἀπολυσον αὐτήν here means to send the woman without granting her request because “Matthew never uses ἀπόλυω (the verb to dismiss) with the implication of relenting.”¹¹⁰ We support this supposition for it fits the Matthean redaction.

¹⁰³ B.T. VIVIANO, “The Gospel According to Matthew”, *NJBC*, 658.

¹⁰⁴ D.J. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 235.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 235.

¹⁰⁶ D. PATTE, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 221.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 221.

¹⁰⁸ The Jerusalem Bible has: “Give her what she wants.” See Matt 15, 23 in JB.

¹⁰⁹ A. JONES, “The Gospel of Christ According to St. Matthew”, *CCHS*, 880.

¹¹⁰ R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 312.

Verse 24. ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν (But he answered). Whether “Jesus is speaking to the woman or to the disciples or to both is unclear.”¹¹¹ Gundry expresses the idea that Jesus here directs his answer to the disciples, and not to the woman, because at this moment the woman is too far behind for her to hear Jesus.¹¹² However, there is no sure indication in the text to support this assumption.

Οὐκ ἀπεστάλην εἰ μὴ εἰς τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραὴλ (I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel). As Harrington rightly observes, this saying is unique to Matthew.¹¹³ What is not clear, though, “is whether the ‘lost sheep’ refers to the lost within Israel or to all Israel considered as lost.”¹¹⁴ Davies and Allison argue that the saying should be interpreted as Matthew’s intention “to characterize the Jewish nation as a whole. It was by and large lost (with the emphasis probably not on sinfulness but lack of leadership).”¹¹⁵

Commenting on verse 24 Sim sees Jesus’ response as an indication that Matthew wants his readers to perceive the Canaanite woman “not in sympathetic terms but as a rude nuisance, and a pagan one at that!”¹¹⁶ Patte concurs with this view.¹¹⁷ Viviano has offered an alternative view by arguing that verse 24 “reflects the normal policy of the historical Jesus, his mission to gather all Israel for the end-time events.”¹¹⁸ Willoughby Allen supports this view when he points out that despite the fact that Matthew’s pericope is more Jewish than its Markan parallel and more

¹¹¹ W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 550.

¹¹² R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 312.

¹¹³ D.J. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 235.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹¹⁵ W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 551.

¹¹⁶ D.C. SIM, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 223.

¹¹⁷ Daniel Patte argues that since Jesus was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel that is the reason why, in Matt 15. 23, he has nothing to say to this Gentile woman even though she acknowledges that he is the Lord, ‘Son of David’, the Jewish Messiah. See D. PATTE, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 221.

¹¹⁸ B.T. VIVIANO, “The Gospel According to Matthew”. *NJBC*, 658.

potentially offensive to non-Jews, “the editor has rewritten Mark’s narrative with a view to explaining how it was that Christ, in spite of such sayings as Matt 10, 5-6 should have extended his compassion to a heathen woman.”¹¹⁹ Here we hold this view against Sim and Patte who argue respectively that verse 24 is Matthew’s own “negative attitude towards the original Gentile inhabitants of the land of Israel.”¹²⁰ We hold that Matthew has deliberately set out to show that the pre-Easter mission of Jesus was confined to Israel but now things have started to change in view of the post-Easter great commission of Matt 28, 18-20.

Verse 25. ἡ δὲ ἐλθούσα προσεκύνη αὐτῷ (But she came and knelt before him). Matthew frequently uses προσεκύνηω (the verb to worship or do homage) “to express the proper attitude of people towards Jesus”¹²¹, (Matt 1, 23; 2, 2.8; 9, 18). In Matthew “προσκυνέω ... expresses the trusting homage of one who sees God reflected in Jesus, and the term thus has the sense of worshipful reverence.”¹²² Despite the obstacles of antagonism the woman’s faith faces in verse 24, she “simply ignores what has been said and, kneeling, again asks for help.”¹²³ It is “very likely that the woman has heard the conversation of verses 23-24 between Jesus and the disciples.”¹²⁴ However, some exegetes have imagined Jesus and the disciples being out of earshot.¹²⁵ For this reason they have proposed that verse 25 is a response not to the words of verse 24 but to the silence of verse 23a. Nevertheless, it is more likely that the woman responds to the conversation of verses 23-24.

¹¹⁹ W.C. ALLEN, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*. ICC. (Edinburgh 1993), 169.

¹²⁰ D.C. SIM, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 223.

¹²¹ D.J. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 235.

¹²² J.M. NITZEL, “προσκυνέω”, *EDNT* III, 174.

¹²³ W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 551.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 552.

¹²⁵ Gundry supports this view. See R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 314.

Κύριε, βοήθει μοι (Lord, help me). Κύριε is a messianic title. It “recalls verse 22 (Have mercy on me, O Lord) and has a biblical tone, (cf Psalm 40, 3; Is 50, 9).”¹²⁶

Verse 26. οὐκ ἔστιν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ βαλεῖν τοῖς κυναρίοις (It is not fair to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs). Davies and Allison agree with Jones when they state that Jesus’ response in verse 26 is a little parable turned into allegory only by the situation.¹²⁷ They suggest that there is a possibility that “Jesus’ words were influenced by a traditional saying.”¹²⁸ Thus the assumption of this saying is that τῶν τέκνων (of children) represents Israel and κυναρία (small dogs or puppies) represents Gentiles.¹²⁹ Jews “used the term ‘dog’ metaphorically of Gentiles, under the idea of ceremonial impurity.”¹³⁰ And “to call anyone a dog...was a grave insult.”¹³¹ Despite its negative connotation, the assumption of verse 26, as Harrington points out, is that by it “Jesus clearly affirms the traditional Jewish approach to salvation history – to the Jews first.”¹³² But this particularism slowly gives way to universalism through Gentile response of faith in Jesus (cf Matt 22, 1-11).

Verse 27. ναὶ, κύριε (Yes, Lord). All the three times the woman addresses Jesus she calls him ‘Lord’ (cf verses 22, 25, 27) – which here lies somewhere between ‘sir’ and the informed Christian confession. This, as Davies and Allison infer, “places her spirited exchange within the confines of faith: she confesses Jesus’

¹²⁶ W.D. DAVIES · D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 552.

¹²⁷ Cf W.D. DAVIES · D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 552; A. JONES, “The Gospel of Christ According to St. Matthew”, *CCHS*, 880.

¹²⁸ W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 554.

¹²⁹ D.J. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 235. See also Ex 4, 22; Deut 14, 1 and 1Sam 17, 43; Prov 26, 11; Is 56, 10-11.

¹³⁰ W.E. VINE, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (Chicago 1940), 332.

¹³¹ W. CORSWANT, *A Dictionary of Life in Bible Times*, (Bungay 1960), 102.

¹³² D.J. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 235.

Lordship even as she argues her case with him.”¹³³ Gundry says the woman’s use of κύριε is here in the full sense ‘Lord’ rather than in the weak sense ‘sir’.¹³⁴ We agree with Gundry since the full sense ‘Lord’ would agree with Matthew’s theme of faith in this pericope rather than ‘sir’. Its Old Testament equivalent is *Adonai*.

Τὰ κυναρία ἐσθίει ἀπὸ τῶν ψυχίων (the dogs eat the crumbs...). Despite “Jesus’ discouraging words in the previous verse, the woman, rather than displaying resentment or becoming sullen, remains insistent and offers a riposte.”¹³⁵ The “implication of her clever reply is that dogs indeed are fed and satisfied. Behind her saying is the idea that Gentiles as well as Jews are fed by God.”¹³⁶

Besides, her answer shows that she is a wise woman because she answers Jesus’ saying with a saying. Wisdom in the Near East shows that a wise person is one who is able to answer sayings, or riddles, or proverbs, or scriptures with their equivalents. This woman is therefore wise because she is quick to pick up the imagery of Jesus’ reply in verse 26 and twist it to her advantage.¹³⁷

Some commentators such as John Chrysostom held the τῶν κυρίων (of masters) to refer to Jews rather than to Jesus because of its plural characteristic.¹³⁸ Davies and Allison, on the other hand, have made it obvious that “one could argue that the word stands in effect only for Jesus, explaining the plural as required by the logic of the preceding parable. The one plural ‘dogs’ demands the other plural ‘masters’.”¹³⁹ Gundry agrees with this.¹⁴⁰ The logic behind the use of ‘dogs’ and ‘masters’ is obvious here. Harrington concludes the exegesis of this verse by stating emphatically that the question of whether both Gentiles and Jews are fed by God

¹³³ W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 555.

¹³⁴ R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 315. See also Matt 1, 21.

¹³⁵ W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 554.

¹³⁶ D.J. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 235.

¹³⁷ A. MUTINDA, *Unpublished Classnotes on the Gospel of Matthew*, Nairobi: Tangaza College 2003.

¹³⁸ Cf J. CHRYSOSTOM, “Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew”, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, X, 321-326, ed., P. Schaff, (New York 1888, 1908²), 323.

¹³⁹ W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 556.

¹⁴⁰ Cf R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 316.

“would naturally have been important in the Matthean community, given its emphasis on the Jewish roots of Jesus and the mission to the Gentiles.”¹⁴¹ Gundry concurs.¹⁴² We too agree with them.

Verse 28. μεγάλη σου ἡ πίστις (great is your faith). This motif is not mentioned in the Markan parallel. In fact only this woman is plainly said to have ‘great faith’ in Matthew. This has led some interpreters to argue that Matthew “is here following a non-Markan source, especially as nowhere else in Matthew does μεγάλη qualify πίστις.”¹⁴³ Nevertheless, it is to be noted against this argument, “that the τοσαύτην πίστιν (such faith) of Matt 8, 10 is the conceptual equivalent of ‘great faith’. The same concept is expressed in Matt 8, 13 and 9, 29. There is thus no reason not to assign verse 28b to Matthean redaction.”¹⁴⁴

Although Jesus’ mission in this pericope “is still only to the lost sheep of Israel, and the priority of Israel in salvation history remains uncontested, he finally gives in to the woman. The reason is not her wit... but rather her great faith – the real miracle of our story – along with her recognition of the divinely ordained division between Jews and Gentiles.”¹⁴⁵ Besides teaching on faith, the story “takes up the rather widespread question of Gentile involvement and participation in a Jewish community, in this case, Matthew’s community.”¹⁴⁶ The fact that “Jesus helps the Canaanite woman because of her faith... also shows that Matthew anticipates Gentile

¹⁴¹ D.J. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 235.

¹⁴² Cf R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 316.

¹⁴³ W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 556.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 556.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 556.

¹⁴⁶ J.A. OVERMAN, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew*, (Valley Forge 1996), 231.

salvation through faith in the same way as the Jews.”¹⁴⁷ This is why he “puts up obstacles against the woman’s pleas so as to play up the greatness of her faith.”¹⁴⁸

So we can say with Patte that:

Having a ‘great faith’ involves acknowledging that Jesus is ‘Lord’ (15, 22, 25, 27), that he has the divine power to help those in need. But ‘great faith’ also involves understanding how Jesus’ vocation can be appropriately carried out in a specific situation. Thus it involves understanding how Jesus’ vocation ‘fits’ a specific situation, in this case the situation of Gentiles in God’s plan of salvation.¹⁴⁹

8. Conclusion

After situating our pericope into its proper context in the preliminary exegesis we proceeded to argue through exegetical analysis that Matthew’s main theological concern was the Gentile question. Did Jesus’ specific vocation as a Jewish Messiah, sent to the lost sheep of Israel, have room for Gentiles? For Matthew it did, provided Gentiles acknowledged God’s offer of salvation and accepted it in faith.

Finally, the results of this chapter agree with those of the previous chapter as far as the relationship between Israel and other nations is concerned¹⁵⁰, as Joachim Jeremias puts it that “wherever the Old Testament is concerned with the redemption of the Gentiles, it guarantees them a share in the revelation vouchsafed to Israel, and inclusion in God’s redeemed community.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ J. MUNCK, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, 262.

¹⁴⁸ R.H. GUNDRY, *Matthew*, 311-312.

¹⁴⁹ D. PATTE, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 221.

¹⁵⁰ See conclusion of chapter one on page 14 above.

¹⁵¹ J. JEREMIAS, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, 60.

CHAPTER III

Theological and Pastoral Message of Matt 15, 21-28

1. Introduction

In chapter two we have analyzed, through exegetical analysis, the theological concept of Matt 15, 21-28. We have established that this pericope “is to be understood in the context of the early church’s struggle to comprehend the Gentile mission and subsequent relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the church and in God’s agenda of salvation.”¹⁵²

In chapter three, our final chapter, we shall develop other possible theological and pastoral implications and conclusions we can draw from our pericope in relation to Matthew’s community and contemporary Christians. We shall also offer some pastoral reflections one can draw from this pericope in the context of the suffering masses today, especially with regard to people living with HIV/AIDS and refugees.

2. Possible Theological Implications of the Role of the Gentile Woman in Matt

2.1 Faith as a Condition for Healing

Matthew’s Gospel narrative shows plainly that “faith is essential if the power of Jesus is to be effective.”¹⁵³ For this reason Matthew states in 13, 58, as we saw in the remote context of Matt 15, 21-28¹⁵⁴ that “Jesus does not work many miracles in Nazareth because the people do not have faith.”¹⁵⁵ In Mark’s account (7, 24-30) “the Gentile woman literally talks Jesus into working a miracle on behalf her

¹⁵²S.H. RINGE, “A Gentile Woman’s Story”, *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 65-72, ed., L.M. Russell, (Louisville 1985), 68.

¹⁵³R.E. OBACH · A. KIRK, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, (New York 1978), 171. See also Matt 8-9.

¹⁵⁴ See page 19 above.

¹⁵⁵ R.E. OBACH · A. Kirk, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, (New York 1978), 171.

daughter. Matthew changes Mark in order to make it clear that it is her faith that makes the healing possible.”¹⁵⁶ This is why the Matthean Jesus exclaims: *O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire* (Matt 15, 28).

In Matthew there is a firm relationship and connection between the notion of faith and miracles. A look at the miracle accounts “shows that here faith does not follow the miracle but precedes it.”¹⁵⁷ This, however, does not mean that Jesus is dependent in his working of miracles on the faith of people, but in any case there exists a material connection between faith and the miracle. The miracle “takes place in accordance with the request of the suppliant.”¹⁵⁸ Here faith is directed solely to the power of Jesus to do the miracle. It does not bring it about by itself, but gains it only through joining itself to Jesus. This means, however, that faith can of itself achieve nothing. For Matthew the role of faith in the healing stories “is in the sense of praying faith.”¹⁵⁹

The story of the Gentile woman in Matt 15, 21-28 teaches, among other things, about this kind of praying faith. Despite the ugly experience the woman goes through, her great faith finally gets Jesus to consider her plea. The scandal that troubled Matthew’s community, as Viviano points out, was the lack of faith in Jesus as Messiah, which the majority of Israelites showed during Jesus’ lifetime.¹⁶⁰ Matthew, therefore, sets out in this pericope to show the importance of faith in Jesus as Messiah and how such faith can be the basis for miraculous healings. In other words Matthew is saying that with faith in Jesus nothing is impossible. If one with

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.* 171.

¹⁵⁷G. BORNKAMM – G. BARTH – H.J. HELD, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, 276. See also Matt 8, 5-13; 9, 27-29.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.* 278.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.* 288

¹⁶⁰See quotation on page 20 in chapter two above.

faith as small as a mustard seed can move mountains (Matt 17, 19-20), what about one with great faith?

It is, therefore, a challenge to the Matthean readers to take up the woman's example in this pericope and apply it to their way of life. Is their faith in Jesus great enough to bring about some miraculous change in society? If not, then they need to imitate this woman whose faith Matthew portrays "as modeling faith in the authority of Jesus."¹⁶¹

2.2 Faith as a Condition for Effective Intercessory Prayer

The second possible theological implication we can draw from our pericope is the relationship between faith and intercessory prayer. In several miracle stories of Matthew, including our pericope, "it is not the faith of the sick persons but that of their relatives or friends to which Jesus replies with his saving help."¹⁶²

The role of intercession is brought out very clearly in our pericope especially in the way Matthew has structured the text. We have already seen in chapter two that Matthew abbreviates the descriptive parts of the healing miracles as found either in Mark or Luke, and that the dialogue is at the centre of these miracle stories.¹⁶³ We have also seen that at times Matthew expands individual miracle stories rather than abbreviating them. The good example of this purposeful expansion is Matt 15, 21-28, which is an expansion of Mark's account (7, 24-30). In the Greek text

¹⁶¹ J.A. OVERMAN, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew*, 230.

¹⁶² G. BORNKAMM · G. BARTH · H.J. HELD, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, 278. See also Matt 8, 5-13; 9, 1-3; 9, 18-26.

¹⁶³ See the general structure of Matthew's miracle stories on page 23 above.

“Matthew’s account has 140 words, whereas Mark’s has 130 words. Fewer than 40 words are held in common.”¹⁶⁴

Matthew’s intention in expanding this pericope is his preoccupation with the theme of faith as we have already pointed out elsewhere.¹⁶⁵ This is why our pericope consists exclusively of a dialogue. This dialogue is arranged in such a way that the role of the Gentile woman is made explicit. At the end of the dialogue Jesus acknowledges the woman’s faith and grants her request. But behind the theme of faith in this pericope is the role of the woman as intercessor. She comes in earnest to Jesus to intercede “on behalf of her daughter who requires parental intercession.”¹⁶⁶ The dialogue of the pericope shows the persistence of her intercession even in the face of obstacles. This is exactly where the relationship between her faith and her intercession comes into play. Her faith in Jesus’ power to heal her child keeps her intercession firm until the request is granted.

Besides teaching on faith that works miracles we have seen, in our opinion, that Matthew’s pericope also teaches about faith as a condition for effective intercessory prayer. Behind the role of this woman is the idea that Matthew’s readers should learn from her the necessity of intercessory prayer in their Christian community. If they have firm faith in Jesus like this woman they can intercede for the members of their Christian family who need help and their request will be granted. However, they should also remember that intercessory prayer calls for persistence both in words and in faith.

¹⁶⁴ W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 542.

¹⁶⁵ See the structure of Matt 15, 21-28 on page 24 above.

¹⁶⁶ C. MEYERS, ed., *Women in Scripture*. (Grand Rapids – Cambridge 2000), 413.

2.3 Faith as a Condition for Incorporation into the Matthean Community

The third possible theological implication we can get from our pericope is the relationship between faith and membership in the Matthean community. Our pericope sheds more light on this theme because, as many scholars have commented, it tries also to deal with Jesus' attitude to a disputed question, namely the mission to the Gentiles.¹⁶⁷

Given the nature of the dialogue in our pericope, the story is to be understood as Matthew's way of trying to settle some community misunderstanding concerning the Gentile mission.¹⁶⁸ When compared to Mark's story "Matthew appears less enthusiastic about Gentile participation, if we may allow for the woman to represent non-Jews, which in this instance seems reasonable."¹⁶⁹ From the dialogue between Jesus and the Gentile woman Matthew makes it very clear that the priority of Jesus' ministry and mission is Israel. Here Jesus is sent to fulfill the Law and the prophets.

This has, in fact, led Sim to argue that rather than being a role model of faith the Gentile woman in our pericope "remains at the end of the Matthean passage a rude pagan Canaanite and a Gentile dog."¹⁷⁰ Sim says this is so because Matthew wants in this section of the passage "to explain to his Jewish readers what motivated Jesus on some occasions to heal Gentiles when he was sent solely to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This means that the faith of the Canaanite woman and the centurion are individual cases."¹⁷¹ Sim then concludes that Matthew, "far from being pro-Gentile, was actually against any Gentile mission."¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ See footnote reference on page 23 above.

¹⁶⁸ See introduction of this chapter on page 35 above.

¹⁶⁹ J.A. OVERMAN, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew*, 231.

¹⁷⁰ D.C. SIM, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 225.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* 224-225.

¹⁷² *Ibid.* 256. See also Matt 10, 5-6.

Taking into account the majority of scholars who do not see things in Sim's perspective, we have also argued against such conclusions elsewhere.¹⁷³ We therefore maintain with other scholars that some conservative Jewish members of the Matthean community may have been opposed to Gentile involvement in the community and, as a result, appealed to the authority of the historical Jesus who *was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. Matthew's aim in our pericope is therefore to make it clear to these strict Jewish Christians that faith opens the way for the Gentiles to Jesus. He also wants to show that through faith "Gentiles too will inherit the promises made to the Jewish patriarchs and finally share their reward."¹⁷⁴

The Canaanite woman "indicates that great faith can be found among the Gentiles."¹⁷⁵ Consequently, what Matthew does in this pericope is to show with clever artistry that "Gentile incorporation and participation can happen within the Matthean community through faith and such people, in fact, can serve as role models for faith and play an important role in the church."¹⁷⁶

3. Pastoral Message of Matt 15, 21-28 for Contemporary Christians

Some contemporary "Christians find this passage distressing, because it seems to present Jesus as responding in an uncompassionate way to the cry for help of a Gentile woman."¹⁷⁷ However, we have demonstrated in chapter two that this passage reflects the normal policy of the historical Jesus whose mission was to

¹⁷³ See exegesis of verse 24 on pages 29-30 above.

¹⁷⁴ Cf Matt 8, 11-12; 20, 1-16.

¹⁷⁵ J.A. OVERMAN, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew*, 231.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 231-232.

¹⁷⁷ D.R. HARE, *Matthew: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Interp 2. (Louisville 1993), 189.

gather all Israel for the end-time events.¹⁷⁸ It cannot be used, therefore, to support the idea that Matthew intended by it to deny Gentiles a share in God's plan of salvation.

It is quite interesting that Matthew, like Mark, places this story immediately after the dispute about food and purity laws (cf Matt 15, 1-20; Mark 7, 1-23). This suggests that "Just as Jesus' subordination of ritual to ethics anticipates the law-free mission to the Gentiles, so the Gentile woman represents the vast numbers of non-Jews who were to become members of the church."¹⁷⁹ And the fact that Matthew calls her a Canaanite, "a representative of the despised indigenous population with which Israel was not supposed to fraternize"¹⁸⁰ shows that her faith is not just something to admire but something to imitate as well. It is mainly because of her faith that Jesus heals her daughter.

What pastoral message can contemporary Christians draw from this story? The passage reminds modern Christians that "it is by grace alone that they have been admitted to the ranks of God's salvation-historical people (cf Rom 11, 1-11), and as such they have no right to demand the help of Israel's Messiah. Like the woman in the story, they should only beg his mercy humbly."¹⁸¹

The story also reminds contemporary Christians that "members of despised or oppressed groups must be bold in seeking relief of their misery."¹⁸² The Canaanite woman in the passage does not give up in spite of obstacles to her request until her persistence, based on faith, is rewarded. Today she stands for anyone who is

¹⁷⁸ See exegesis of verse 24 on page 29 above.

¹⁷⁹ D.R. HARE, *Matthew: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, 178.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 178.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* 179.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* 179.

disliked, hated, or despised. Like Jesus here, today's Christians are invited to manifest in their lives that love is not exclusively for those who are dear to them. Their love is to be all-inclusive and universal. They may not turn away from anyone no matter how much they may dislike the person, and no matter what other persons have done against them.

4. Reflecting on Matt 15, 21-28 in the Context of Today's Suffering Masses

4.1. With Regard to People Living with HIV/AIDS in Kibera, Nairobi

"Kibera is the most densely populated slum situated to the southwest of Nairobi City -- Kenya."¹⁸³ Many people from this slum are among the poorest in the city. The slum is affected by many problems ranging from rampant unemployment to poverty, from illiteracy to disease. HIV/AIDS is one of the current concerns of health workers especially now that "the number of HIV/AIDS cases is increasing daily in Kibera."¹⁸⁴

Like Jesus in Matt 15, 21-18 "the church is a healing community, practising healing in many different ways, but most commonly through a sense of caring..."¹⁸⁵ Jesus' healing message in this passage is a call for the church to play a more comprehensive role as a healing community and to respond effectively to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and make a significant impact on HIV prevention as well.

Today many HIV/AIDS patients are looked upon as outcasts, the 'unclean'. Like the Gentile woman in our passage, they are often seen with an eye of suspicion. Jesus took courage to break down the barriers that used to separate the Jews from the

¹⁸³ A. SHORTER - E. ONYANCHA, *The Church and AIDS in Africa - A Case Study: Nairobi City*, (Nairobi 1998), 15.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 15.

¹⁸⁵ S. FORSYTHE - *al.*, *AIDS in Kenya - Socioeconomic Impact and Policy Implications*, (N.p. 1996), 130.

Gentiles. He proclaimed the Gospel of love to all humankind regardless of their race, status in society, age and so forth.

Today the church acts in the name of Christ. So Jesus Christ invites it to be the channel of his love and care for all. The HIV/AIDS patients of Kibera need such love and care in their trying moment. Many of them feel lonely, discriminated against, and despised. They are often condemned and shunned by society. They are blamed and thought to be in that situation because of their own fault. Some people even think that God is punishing them because they have sinned. It is the duty of the church therefore to restore their dignity and appreciation as human beings created in the image of God. Like the Canaanite woman who interceded for her daughter because she was convinced that her child deserved to be given a chance at living a normal, productive life, the church too is called to act on behalf of such people as HIV/AIDS patients.

All the people affected by this epidemic need hope and purpose for living that the church can offer. This can happen “through looking at the deeper factors contributing to the epidemic such as the breakdown of family structures, sexual activity among youth, unemployment, and poverty...”¹⁸⁶ For this reason HIV/AIDS programmes must involve every Christian especially the church leaders, women group leaders, the youth and young adults. Through such care and love the church can bring the human wholeness and self-appreciation to the sick in Kibera.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 130.

4.2 With Regard to Angolan Refugees in Zambia

“Africa is going through a crucial period of adversity this century. In the past five decades, various forms of man-made disasters have forced millions of people out of their homeland into refuge in other countries. The uprooted are...exposed to life-threatening situations, the consequences of which they are destined to endure. While in refuge, theirs is a desperate struggle for protection and sustenance.”¹⁸⁷ Examples of life-threatening situations are rape and hunger.

What has been described here is true with regard to Angolan refugees who have settled in Zambia due to civil war in their country. In Zambia the Angolan refugees live in Maheba Refugee Camp situated in the North-Western Province of the country. Although some of these refugees have come to terms with their refugee status, others have been so much affected by the crisis of sudden departure from their comforts at home and the inability to legally and safely settle and adjust to life in their new environment. As a result many of them have lost hope in life and in everything else.

Again the church is invited to proclaim the gospel of Christ in this kind of situation. Like Jesus in Matt 15, 21-28 the church is called upon to offer a helping hand to people in desperate situations like some refugees are in Maheba camp. Apart from her faith, the Gentile woman in our pericope demonstrated hope as well. She had hope that her daughter could once again start leading a normal life.

Today the church, through the mission it has received from Jesus Christ, can give hope to refugees in desperate situations. First of all it should address the problems (especially emotional and psychological ones) that frequently affect the

¹⁸⁷ E.Q. BLAVO, *The Problem of Refugees in Africa*, (Aldershot 1999), 1.

refugees in Maheba. This implies that the church is called upon to make sure the personal safety of the refugees is guaranteed in their country of asylum, in this case Zambia, and that they are granted the fundamental freedom to enjoy their legal rights under the Refugee Conventions. Secondly, the church should work with the Zambian Government and the United Nations to make sure there are relief measures in case of drought or any other natural disaster. And finally, the church is invited to increase its help by providing counseling services, education, self-help projects and other related services and spiritual needs. In this way the church in Zambia is invited to take up the role of the Canaanite woman and be the mouth for the desperate Angolan refugees.

5. Conclusion

In our final chapter we have developed some possible theological implications based on Matt 15, 21-28. We have demonstrated that the role of the Gentile woman in this pericope can lead us to point out some implications of her faith. These implications are that faith is: a condition for healing; a condition for effective intercessory prayer; and a condition for incorporation into Matthew's community.

The pastoral message that we drew from our pericope encouraged contemporary Christians to imitate the Canaanite woman in seeking their relief from any form of misery. Finally, the church faces a constant challenge to take up Jesus' attitude in addressing today's problems such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the refugee issue.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Having analyzed broadly the role the Gentile woman in Matt 15, 21-28 plays in Mathew's Gospel we have now come to the general conclusion of our topic in which we have carefully synthesized and summarized the findings of our three chapters.

In the first chapter we laid the background of our topic by going to the root meaning of the term 'Gentile' in the scripture. We then investigated the kind of relationship that existed between Israel and the Canaanites whom we took as a representative group of all the Gentiles in the Promised Land and its neighbourhood. We moved on to demonstrate that Israel, rather than leading other nations to the one true God by good example and faith, failed in its vocation and picked up polytheistic religious practices instead. Seeing Israel's failure, the post-exilic prophets such as Trito-Isaiah and Zechariah envisioned a messianic figure who would appear in the historical future to fulfill what Israel had failed to do.

Furthermore we showed that in spite of Old Testament prophecies in favour of the Gentiles, antagonism against the Gentiles was far more present in the New Testament times than in the Old Testament times. In spite of this Jesus' ministry, though restricted to Israel, had a wider scope. It was the Apostle Paul who mainly realized this wider scope that included the Gentiles in God's plan of salvation. The Matthean community seemed to have been divided over the question of Gentile involvement in the community when some Gentiles started getting access to this Christian community.

In chapter two, through exegesis, we demonstrated that Matthew's main concern in Matt 15, 21-28 was to show that through faith Gentiles too would share in God's salvation. This was why Matthew emphasized the faith of the Gentile woman more

than Mark did. Hence the fact that the Canaanite woman came out to meet Jesus indicated that the Old Testament prophecy was now being realized, namely that through Jesus (the new Israel and the prophesied messianic figure), the Gentiles would come to know Yahweh and thus be saved by their faith.

In chapter three we developed some theological and pastoral implications based on the role of the faith of the Canaanite woman in which we strongly argued that such a faith was very necessary, first of all for healing ministry; secondly, for effective intercessory prayer; and thirdly, for incorporation into the Matthean community. We went on to present the pastoral message of our pericope to contemporary Christians which finally took us to reflect on the church's role in the care of the suffering masses today, especially the HIV/AIDS patients in Kibera, Nairobi, and the Angolan refugees living in Zambia.

In the end we can say with confidence that the whole of this project from chapters one to three has shown vividly the progressive understanding of the role of the Gentiles in God's plan of salvation and what today's Christian church can learn from it.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABD</i>	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<i>al.</i>	<i>alii</i> – other persons
BCE	Before Common Era
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>c.</i>	approximately (from Latin ‘circa’)
<i>CCHS</i>	<i>A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture</i>
CE	Common Era
<i>cf</i>	confer (Latin for ‘compare’)
Deut	Deuteronomy
<i>EBT</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology</i>
<i>ed.</i>	edited by
<i>EDNT</i>	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>e.g.</i>	for example (from Latin ‘exempli gratia’)
Ex	Exodus
Ezek	Ezekiel
Gal	Galatians
Gen	Genesis
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Syndrome
<i>IBC</i>	<i>The International Bible Commentary</i>
<i>Ibid.</i>	<i>Ibidem</i> – in the aforementioned place
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Interp</i>	<i>Interpretation. A Journal of Bible and Theology</i>
Is	Isaiah
<i>ISBE</i>	<i>The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
JB	The Jerusalem Bible
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
Jer	Jeremiah
Josh	Joshua
LXX	Septuagint
Mac	Maccabees
Matt	Matthew
MSS	Manuscripts
MT	Masoretic Texts
N.d.	No date
<i>NJBC</i>	<i>New Jerome Biblical Commentary</i>
N.p.	No place
Num	Numbers
Phil	Philippians
Prov	Proverbs
Ps	Psalms
Q	Quelle (German term for ‘source’)
Rev	Revelation
Rom	Romans
RSV	Revised Standard Version
Sam	Samuel
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
Trans.	Translator
<i>WBC</i>	<i>Women’s Bible Commentary</i>
Zech	Zechariah

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