

Matthias Konradt
Israel, Church, and the Gentiles
in the Gospel of Matthew

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In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus twice dispatches his disciples to go and preach. He first focuses exclusively on Israel and prohibits ministry to Gentiles (Mt 10:5), but the resurrected Jesus sends his disciples to the Gentiles / “nations” (Mt 28:19-20). Konradt joins previous studies in interpreting the two missions as complementary, such that the disciples’ mission to Israel is unending. Therefore, according to Matthew, neither the Gentiles / “nations” nor the church / *ekklēsia* replaces Israel. This point was previously argued by Amy-Jill Levine in *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Social History: “Go Nowhere among the Gentiles” (Matt. 10:5b)* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 14; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1988).

Konradt’s volume makes a number of other perceptive insights. For example, he elucidates the logic behind the title “Son of David,” arguing that because Jesus does not become a king like David, the title must refer to David’s earlier role as shepherd. According to Konradt, Matthew creatively associates Jesus’ healing ministry with the Davidic messiah, since miraculous healings demonstrate Jesus’ care for his people.

Next, Konradt presents an illuminating, thoroughgoing study of the Matthean “crowds” (ὄχλοι). Matthew consistently reworked his sources, Mark and Q, to depict the crowds in a positive light. The crowds sharply contrast with Jesus’ opponents, namely the Pharisees, scribes, and priests. Yet Konradt overstates (p. 143) by differentiating a crowd of Galilean pilgrims lauding Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (Mt 21) from a crowd of Jerusalem’s permanent residents who reject Jesus a few days later (Mt 27). While adroitly demonstrating how the crowds always align closely with Jesus and the disciples, Konradt’s argument could be strengthened by recognizing the presence of this theme elsewhere, for example, in Mt 26:56b, when “all the disciples left [Jesus] and fled.” Despite their failure, the risen Jesus regathers and recommissions the disciples. The theme of rehabilitation could support Konradt’s thesis: the crowd’s culpability in Jesus’ condemnation does not undo their earlier positive reception of Jesus, and the crowd’s rejection of Jesus should not be generalized as all Jews rejecting Jesus.

In Konradt's reading of Matthew, the Jewish authorities are the ones who most forcefully reject Jesus, and the destruction of Jerusalem—especially the temple—in 70 CE is the most significant consequence. Matthew prefigures this outcome by a trilogy of parables in chapters 21–22, but these, Konradt argues, should not be interpreted as generalizing a rejection of Jesus by all Israel.

Matthew never uses the words “Judaism” and “Christianity,” and it is commendable that Konradt focuses on Matthew's terms “Israel” and “church.” Although Konradt argues that in Matthew the church does not supersede Israel, Konradt does read Matthew as replacing the priests and the Pharisees (p. 379). Moreover, according to Konradt's reading of Matthew, Israel can only find salvation inside the church (p. 379). If that be the case, then Matthew may not avoid the charge of supersessionism entirely. Regarding Matthew's purported anti-Judaism, Konradt contends, “Inasmuch as the Pharisees do not represent *Judaism* in Matthew ... it would be historically imprecise to label the Gospel's anti-*Pharisaic* thrust as anti-*Judaism*” (p. 380; emphasis in original).

On the related question of Jesus' Jewish praxis, Konradt rightly points out Jesus' “explicit affirmation of the fundamental validity of *all* commandments” (p. 357, emphasis in original). Yet Konradt reads Matthew in conformity with Galatians 2 and Acts 15, such that the Matthean church most likely included Gentiles who were not required to be circumcised (pp. 320 n. 295; 363). Konradt intentionally demurs from the interpretation of Matthew's church as requiring circumcision in direct opposition to Paul's teaching (e.g., David C. Sim). Conversely, Konradt establishes a mediating position, offering a helpful corrective to interpretations of Matthew whereby Jesus sharply breaks with, or supersedes, Torah (e.g., Donald A. Hagner).

The original German edition appeared in 2007, and this series—edited by Wayne Coppins and Simon Gathercole—translates “works by leading German scholars that represent outstanding contributions in their own right” (p. ix). Konradt's significant work of Matthean scholarship can now have broader influence. Konradt's volume exemplifies meticulous research, astute insights, and measured conclusions. Kathleen Ess's excellent English translation is most welcome, and she has ensured that *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew* will remain relevant to conversations on early Jewish–Christian relations for the foreseeable future.