



CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE
DIOCESE OF SALE

Teaching and Learning About Scripture

Diocese of Sale: Matthew

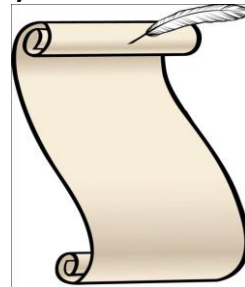
The Gospel of Matthew





Who was Matthew?

- As with all the gospel authors, we really don't know who Matthew was.
- None of the gospels was signed by their author; none had a handy biography on the back cover.
- So, to solve the question of authorship and to give the work a title, the Church went in search of who might have written it.



The anonymity of writers in the ancient world was common. Works were not signed; their authority rested on what they said, not on who wrote it. As the Church sought to give credibility to the works, they found people who could have written them.



Who was Matthew?

- After looking at a range of people mentioned in the gospels, in Acts of the Apostles and in the writing of Paul, the Church proposed that Levi/Matthew, the tax collector, whom Jesus meets and invites to become a disciple might have been the writer. (Mt 9:9-13) It was this belief that caused the gospel of Matthew to be placed first in the collection of gospels found in the Bible.
- However, most modern scholars are not sure if the writer of this gospel could have been Levi/Matthew the tax collector.

In some accounts the tax collector is called Levi, in others, Matthew. Compare Matthew's account of the calling of the tax collector with the original found in The Gospel of Mark, Mk 2:13-17

When the Church fathers put the collection of books together into the work we call the Bible, they believed that Matthew was written first and that Mark had copied it but left some parts out (eg the Lord's Prayer and the sermon on the Mount). Contemporary scholarship argues that this is unlikely. More likely is that Matthew used and adapted Mark's work, adding both stories from his own sources and interpretation which suited his thematic interests.



Who was Matthew?

- One of the reasons they think that Levi/Matthew could not have written the gospel is that he seems to focus on issues that did not exist during the lifetime of Jesus.
- Historians tell us that a nasty argument between the community of Jesus and the community of Judaism developed at the end of the 1st century. The argument was over whether Jesus was, or was not, the messiah that the Jewish community had been waiting for.



Hostility between the emerging Christian movement and Judaism is recorded in historical writing. It would appear that those in Matthew's community are wondering if they have done the right thing in believing that Jesus was the messiah and they are considering returning to Judaism. Matthew writes to show they are right; Jesus was the messiah, they should be faithful to his teaching.



Who was Matthew?

- Matthew's gospel is very clear: Jesus is the messiah.
- Matthew shows that Jesus is the one the Jews had been waiting for by quoting passages from the First Testament (Old Testament) which talk about what will happen, and then by showing how Jesus fulfils or achieves these things.

Matthew's writing indicates that the author of this gospel is well educated and deeply interested in Jewish law and custom. Some of the evidence for this is provided in his extensive use of Hebrew scriptures (for example in the Infancy Narrative) and his focus on the Messiah's missionary role to Israel. (Mt 10:5-6)



Who was Matthew?

- Matthew is also very critical of the Jewish leaders: he uses some of the strongest language to criticise them. We need to be aware of this when we read Matthew's gospel otherwise we could think that all Jews were against Jesus, and they definitely were not.
- Matthew's knowledge of the Old Testament, as well as his hostility toward the Jewish leaders, makes us think he was a Jew who converted to what we call Christianity.



The level of extreme dislike of the Jewish authorities, particularly during the last week of Jesus' life, found in Matthew's gospel is not found in the other gospels. It can be explained as a response to his community's own experience of Jewish leadership and not to the historical situation of Jesus.



Who was Matthew?

- We also think he was writing for a community which were Jewish also.
- Rather than a tax collector, we think that he was more likely to have been a scribe – a professional copyist (sort of like a living photocopier!)





Who was Matthew?

- Matthew's interests revolve around his desire to show that Jesus is the long waited for Jewish messiah.
- He emphasises links to the Old Testament people and events (such as Abraham and Moses) and he quotes from the writing of the prophets who described what the messiah would be like.
- Matthew uses all of the genres we find in other gospels: narratives, miracles, recounts summary stories and parables.



Matthew alone has the journey of the baby Jesus from Bethlehem to Egypt to avoid the killing of the infants. This story, full of dreams, wicked pharaohs and the death of new borns, parallels the story of Moses. It provides strong support for the view that Matthew wanted to show how Jesus is the new Moses...the new leader of God's chosen people.



When did Matthew write his gospel?

- The Gospel of Matthew appears to have been written after the Gospel of Mark (which was written about 70 CE), around about the same time as the Gospel of Luke – in about 80-85 CE.



When was the gospel written?

- Like the other gospels, Matthew's writing would have gone through a process of development in coming to its final form. There were three stages in the development of each of the gospels.

1. Jesus lived with and taught a group of men and women. They became his disciples.	2. His disciples talked about him to their communities after the death and resurrection	3. The evangelists wrote down the stories the community had retained. They adapted them, ordered them and interpreted them to suit the needs of their audience
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The three stage process of writing of the gospels is important to explain. None of the Gospel writers knew Jesus personally – they have all come to faith after hearing about him from others who believe. Writing for an audience with particular concerns and needs they freely adapt and altar stories of Jesus, arrange them to suit their overall plan, and interpret his acts and words. This reality does not change the truth of the accounts, which is held not in the details but in the essence of what is said.



Where did Matthew get his information from?

- Perhaps true to his occupation, Matthew copies most of what is in his gospel.
- The biggest part is a copy of The Gospel of Mark, which was written about 20 years before the Gospel of Matthew.
- Other sections are from another source, 'Q' which Luke has. ('Q' is short for 'quelle', a German word which means 'source').

Matthew also has one story which is his own: a story of the birth of Jesus.



More than an original writer, Matthew is an editor. He changes, adapts and rewrites what he has.



What was Matthew's purpose in writing?

- Matthew wrote to help his community answer the questions that they were asking. One of the important issues for them was whether Jesus really was the messiah, the Son of God.
- Matthew did not want to write a biography of Jesus, nor did he want to write a history book. He wanted to write an account of Jesus which would convince his community that Jesus was the messiah they had been waiting for and that they should persevere in their faith and not return to Judaism.

The genre 'gospel' defines not only its structure but purpose. Matthew, like Mark, Luke and John wrote to persuade people that Jesus was 'good news'. The word 'gospel' comes from the Greek word *evangelion*, from where we get the words evangelist and evangelise. A gospel is not a history book or a biography – it is a piece of persuasive writing, structured like a narrative.



What was Matthew's purpose in writing?

- This is important because we need to know what '**truth**' Matthew was trying to share.
- For Matthew, the truth was that Jesus was the Son of God, the messiah. His community must never forget that – no matter who tried to tell them otherwise.



A word about 'truth'...

- So, if Matthew describes things differently from another gospel writer it is because he thought his audience would understand the message better if it was worded a different way.
- The Church puts it this way: 'Each evangelist chose a method suited to their purpose; they reduced or adapted material, re-ordered and explained others, all determined by what would be useful to their audience.'

Historical Truth of the Gospels 1964



A word about 'truth'...

- Our task is to 'seek out what each evangelist meant in recounting events or sayings in a particular way'. Historical Truth of the Gospels 1964
- That's why you are learning this! If you don't know anything about the Bible, you might get the wrong message from it.



A word about 'truth'...

- But remember! None of this takes away from the important truths about God and about Jesus as the *incarnation* of God that the Gospels contain; 'for the truth of the story is not affected by the fact that the Evangelists relate the words and deeds of the Lord,' differently.^[2]

^[2] No IX, 1964 The Historical Truth of the Gospels

The term incarnation is the term which describes belief that Jesus was God in human form.



A word about 'truth'...

Matthew believed that Jesus was the
Son of God,
the messiah!
So do we!
And that's the truth!