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# *Social Conflict Theory and Matthew's Polemic against the Pharisees*<sup>1</sup>

## **Matthew and Social Conflict Theory**

In his landmark study on the function of conflict for forming social identity, Louis Coser explores a seeming paradox: Conflict within groups fosters reconciliation amid hostility and promotes unity amid division.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, however, not all social conflict strengthens the internal bonds within a group. While even substantial disagreements can be tolerated, those that question the central tenets of the group's identity threaten its integrity. All social structures have breaking points at which they can no longer withstand conflict. As a conflict intensifies and existing structures break down further, hostility multiplies exponentially. The accumulated grievances which were previously suppressed are given fresh expression, threatening the "very root of the relationship" upon which the community was formed.<sup>3</sup> When the structural limits are exceeded, the group fractures. Further conflict results in the creation and maintenance of boundaries between the groups by reinforcing whatever issues precipitated the fracturing.<sup>4</sup> At this point, the animosity between the two groups suggests an otherness which belies their previous unity. What Fredrik Barth refers to as the shared "cultural stuff" no longer suffices to unite the factions.<sup>5</sup> As the new groups seek to define themselves, similarities are minimized and distinctions accentuated in the process of articulating an identity over and against the other.

The Gospel of Matthew reflects such a scenario. Sociologically attuned exegetes have previously examined Christian origins using Coser's model. Much of the credit for this belongs to John Gager's analysis of social conflict in the early Church, both the internal conflict which defined "orthodox" and "heretical" theologies and the external conflict which distinguished Christians from pagans and Jews.<sup>6</sup> Applying Coser's models to the Gospel of Matthew, Graham Stanton drew parallels between Matthew's relationship with the Pharisees and the Dead Sea sectarians' relationship with other non-sectarian Jewish groups.<sup>7</sup> Though Stanton brought Coser's model into dialogue with Matthean studies, he neglected the specifics of the conflict which precipitated these divisions, speaking only in generalities regarding the Matthean exodus from the larger Jewish movement.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the specifics of this social conflict as evidenced in Matthew's gospel. It is important to notice that despite the fact that Matthew's gospel ultimately

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<sup>1</sup> The following is a revision of my presented paper "Rethinking Matthew's Polemic against the Pharisees as the Murderers of Jesus." My thanks to Harold Drake for his insightful response and to the members of Boston College Biblical Studies seminar for their feedback. All biblical, rabbinic, and classical citations follow the abbreviations and formatting found in Patrick H. Alexander et al., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis A. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1956). Coser's work is largely dependent upon the work of the German sociologist Georg Simmel, whom Coser and Kurt Wolff largely introduced to the English speaking world. See David Frisby, *Georg Simmel* (Rev. ed.; London: Routledge, 2002), 148–50.

<sup>3</sup> Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, 152.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>5</sup> Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (ed. Fredrik Barth; Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 9-38.

<sup>6</sup> John G. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 79–87.

<sup>7</sup> Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Knoxville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 98–104.

gained authoritative status among Christians, the heart of the gospel is actually quite Jewish, proclaiming the arrival the Jewish Messiah as foretold by the Jewish scriptures. Indeed, when Matthew was composed (c. 80-95 C.E.), there were no “Christians” as such, but rather a complex set of socially fluid relationships between Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus. While Matthew extols the virtues of several positive Gentile figures, he tends to reflect a fundamentally Jewish theological perspective. Therefore, this paper assumes an *intra-muros* conflict, in which Matthew’s gospel is one side of an intra-Jewish debate between “Matthean Jews” (the followers of Jesus who belonged to the Matthean community)<sup>8</sup> and “Pharisaic Jews” (other Jews whose religious belief and practices were rooted in the teachings of the Pharisees).<sup>9</sup>

This paper has three major sections. First, in response to critics who see the various groups who opposed of Jesus as interchangeable, I outline Matthew’s specific concern for the Pharisees. Second, I argue that the primary schism between Matthew and his opponents lay not in a dispute over Pharisaic halakah (how one ought to observe the Torah) or theological doctrine in general, but in the Pharisees’ rejection of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, the key distinguishing feature of Matthean Judaism. Third, I suggest that Matthew’s narrative constructs an identity for his community by characterizing the Pharisees as “other,” and thus demonizes them for rejecting Jesus and attempting to conceal his resurrection. Matthew’s response to this social conflict erects a boundary between his community and his Pharisaic opponents which highlights these negative characteristics of the Matthean opponents and obscures the “cultural stuff” shared by his group and theirs.

### Matthew’s Special Concern for the Pharisees

Scholars have long recognized that the Pharisees have a distinct role in the Gospel of Matthew, especially when Matthew is compared to the other synoptic gospels. Despite this observation, literary critical approaches have lumped the Pharisees into the larger, nebulous group of “Jewish leaders.” The argument that Matthew amalgamates the opponents of Jesus with each other largely originates from Sjef van Tilborg’s study on the Jewish leaders in Matthew’s gospel.<sup>10</sup> Noting the frequency and variety with which Matthew combines discrete groups, Tilborg concludes:

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<sup>8</sup> The terminology used for Matthew’s group is a thorny issue for scholars. Commonly used terms like “Jewish Christianity” or “Christian Judaism” have some descriptive value, but each presents its own difficulties as well, since “Christianity” and “Judaism” are imprecise terms in the first-century. In this paper, I will refer to “Matthean Judaism” and “Matthean Jews” as terms which indicate a connection both to the Gospel of Matthew and also to the diversity of first-century Judaism. For alternative positions, see Donald A. Hagner, “Matthew: Christian Judaism or Jewish Christianity?,” in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research* (ed. Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 263–83; Daniel Boyarin, “Rethinking Jewish Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category,” *JQR* 99 (2009): 7–36.

<sup>9</sup> How long the Pharisees as a group continued to exist after the destruction of the temple is contested, but Matthew’s opponents follow Pharisaic teachings (as best as can be reconstructed). See Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (2nd ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 218–19. The work of Jacob Neusner, in particular, has demonstrated that assuming an end to Jewish sectarianism immediately after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE presents an anachronistic reconstruction of Formative Judaism. The Tannaic corpus preserves various strata of Jewish history, while Josephus presents the Pharisees as an active part of current Jewish life in both *Jewish War* (~75 CE) and in *Antiquities of the Jews* (~95 CE). For this paper, I am assuming that Matthew’s opponents are Pharisaic Jews, rather than Pharisees themselves, though much of this distinction is terminological. Jacob Neusner, “The Formation of Rabbinic Judaism: Yavneh (Jamnia) from AD 70 to 100,” *ANWR* 19.2 (1979): 3–42.

<sup>10</sup> Sjef van Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders in Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

It seems evident that Matthew did not wish to create any distinction between the various groups. He prefers a combination-formula. In view of the interchangeability of one group for the other, all the texts must be put together if one wishes to get some idea of what Matthew wishes to make clear to his readers about the representatives of Israel.<sup>11</sup>

He suggests that while the evangelist might prefer certain combinations (scribes and Pharisees, Pharisees and Sadducees, the Chief Priests and the elders of the people, etc.) the characteristics of each named group are assumed to be unimportant, since the combinations do not display a coherent Matthean perspective. After asserting that the opponents have a single composite character, Tilborg explores the defining attributes of the “Jewish leaders” in Matthew: hypocrisy, evil, and murderousness.<sup>12</sup>

Taking up Tilborg’s analysis, Kingsbury proposes that from a literary perspective, the opponents are a “monolithic front opposed to Jesus” and that “they can narrative-critically be treated as a single character.”<sup>13</sup> Despite both historical and literary distinctions, Kingsbury suggests that Matthew himself ignores these differences, only occasionally presenting any distinguishable characteristics that differ between the groups. He points to Matt 26:59, in which the “chief priests and the elders” are the constituent parts of the Sanhedrin. Here, he claims, Matthew is referring to *all* of the previously identified groupings found within the gospel: Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, the chief priests, the elders, and perhaps the Herodians. Warren Carter takes a similar tack, asserting that Matthew took a “mix and match” approach to creating opponents for Jesus to debate.<sup>14</sup> This approach concludes that, “In Matthew’s narrative the leaders form a united front against Jesus and need not be precisely distinguished from one another in themselves or by specific function in the community.”<sup>15</sup> Such analysis pervades Matthean scholarship, and more recent commentaries have adopted its conclusions.<sup>16</sup>

Tilborg’s approach to interpreting the Jewish leadership is flawed on several levels. Matthew presents different groups that are opposed to Jesus, but they are not a single cohesive unit. Even though Matthew sometimes denounces the “Pharisees and Sadducees” as a unit (3:7-9; 16:16), the gospel provides no indication that these groups are acting in concert with one another on a continual basis. In fact, the exact opposite is presented in chapter 22, when Jesus is tested by each group independently and with an idiosyncratic concern for their peculiar theological beliefs. Thus the Herodians approach Jesus on political grounds (Matt 22:15-22), the Sadducees attempt to trap Jesus in a debate concerning resurrection (Matt 22:23-33), and the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>12</sup> Without accusing Tilborg of anti-Jewish sentiments, it is worth noting that his reconstruction posits a gospel message which took root in fertile anti-Jewish soil, written by a non-Jew to encourage others to reject the Jewish leadership. This would partially explain a historical indifference of the various Jewish groups which could lead Matthew to amalgamate them together, but the central Jewish nature of the gospel is now more widely accepted by biblical scholars than it was forty years ago. Ibid., 7, 171–72.

<sup>13</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, “The Developing Conflict between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew’s Gospel: A Literary-Critical Study,” *CBQ* 49 (1987): 57–73, 58.

<sup>14</sup> Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), 229–41. Carter argues that the evangelist was Jewish, but evidentially chose to keep the hodgepodge of characters intact. Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*, 20–24.

<sup>15</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach* (Repr. ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 158.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Ulrich Luz agrees with this analysis, even though its influence on his commentary is minimal. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (trans. James E. Crouch; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 1:137, 3:148.

Pharisees question Jesus on the interpretation of the Law and the relative importance of the commandments (Matt 22:34-40).<sup>17</sup> As this debate ends, Jesus dismisses all of his opponents because each group has in its own way emphasized its own distinctive concerns and yet has failed to understand the relationship between the Messiah and God (22:41-45). Each individual group is a composite character, meaning that references to the Pharisees in chapter 9 affect the interpretation of the Pharisees in subsequent chapters, but there is no amalgamated character of “Jewish leaders.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, the Pharisees are distinct from other Jewish opponents of Jesus.

Tilborg’s composite hypothesis also disregards Matthew’s work as a redactor. A cursory analysis indicates that Matthew repeatedly alters the opponents of Jesus as presented in Mark.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Matthew consistently isolates the Pharisees or makes them Jesus’ primary opponents (see table below).

<b>Synoptic Parallel</b>	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Matthew</b>
Call of Levi Mt 9:9-13 // Mt 12:7 = Mk 2:13-17	The Scribes of the Pharisees	The Pharisees
Healing the Withered Hand Mt 12:9-14 = Mk 3:1-6	The Pharisees take counsel to destroy him with the Herodians	The Pharisees alone take counsel to destroy him
On Collusion with Satan Mt 12:22-30 = Mk 3:22-27	The Scribes from Jerusalem	The Pharisees
Parable of the Wicked Husbandman Mt 21:33-46 = Mk 12:1-12	The Chief Priests, the Scribes, and the Elders (cf. 11:27)	The Chief Priests and the Pharisees
On Paying Tribute to Caesar Mt 22:15-22 = Mk 12:13-17	Some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians come together	The Pharisees send their disciples and the Herodians
The Great Commandment Matt 22:34-40 = Mark 12:28-34	One of the Scribes	The Pharisees
The Question about David’s Son Matt 22:41-46 = Mk 2:35-37a	The Scribes	The Pharisees

Without attempting to unpack each of these passages here, it is evident that Matthew makes frequent modifications to Mark by inserting the Pharisees, which suggests that Matthew sees the Pharisees playing a particular role in the opposition to Jesus. Furthermore, Matthew never removes a reference to the Pharisees from Mark and replaces them with another group, and only once does he insert a second group into a uniquely Pharisaic controversy story (Matt 12:38, cf. Mark 8:11).<sup>20</sup> There is clearly a consistency and intentionality to Matthew’s use of Mark on this point. While one could make an interesting argument regarding the redaction of Matthew, it is

<sup>17</sup> If Matthew himself was ethnically Jewish, then the proposed haphazard combination of literary characters becomes all the more puzzling. Just as one would not expect a Muslim author to conflate Sunni and Shiite figures, one should not expect Matthew to conflate the Pharisees with the Sadducees or other groups within first century Judaism.

<sup>18</sup> John A. Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts* (FF; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Pr, 1992), 93–95.

<sup>19</sup> In addition to these edits of Mark, one might be able to infer a Matthean redaction of Q which highlights the Pharisees. Robinson, Hoffmann, and Kloppenborg suggest that Matthew has replaced “the crowds” of Q 3:7 (preserved in Luke 3:7) with “Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matt 3:7). James McConkey Robinson et al., eds., *The Critical Edition of Q: A Synopsis Including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas With English, German and French Translations of Q and Thomas* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). Given the complexities of Q redaction, however, this may not be accurate, as Luke (not Matthew) might be modifying Q to insert the crowds (cf. Matt 12:23; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:14).

<sup>20</sup> Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees*, 164. Here, Matthew adds the scribes to the Pharisees of Mark 8:11.

sufficient for now to show that he was, in fact, concerned enough with the differences between the various leadership groups to modify Mark's narrative.

Rather than the monolithic construct which has been proposed, the gospel portrays a *universal* but not *united* opposition to Jesus. Kingsbury is correct that the opposition to Jesus drives the narrative of Matthew, but it is possible to distinguish between the various groups that oppose Jesus. Within this more nuanced framework, Matthew's conflict with his Pharisaic opponent is thrown into stark relief, as the specifics of their debate come to the fore. When the conflicts between Matthew and his opponents are examined, it becomes clear that the debate between them does not represent diametrically opposed groups. Rather, the gospel reflects two groups which share a plethora of halakic and theological ideals, yet disagree on the core issue of the Messiahship of Jesus.

### **Matthew and Pharisees: Agreement and Conflict**

Given both the vitriol and the frequency with which Matthew attacks the Pharisees, it is initially hard to see the previous unity between the Matthean community and other Jews. Many thoughtful scholars coupled this antagonism with the mission to the *ethnē* (Gentiles/nations) in Matt 28:19, the Matthean omission of Aramaic words (*Abba*, *talitha kourai*),<sup>21</sup> and a seeming ignorance of Judaism,<sup>22</sup> leading them to conclude that the evangelist Matthew was an anti-Jewish Gentile scribe.<sup>23</sup> Each of these "Gentile" aspects, however, is more complicated than initially stated and can be accounted for even if the evangelist were a Jew. Correspondingly, the more current scholarly consensus is that Matthew was an ethnically Jewish follower of Jesus.<sup>24</sup>

This new paradigm emphasizes the Jewish nature of Matthew's gospel. Matthew agrees with other Jews on the primary symbols and practices of Judaism: The centrality of Torah (5:17-20), the Prophets (11:14; 17:9-13), prayer (6:5-13), fasting (6:16-18), dietary laws (15:1-20), tithing (23:33), feasts (Passover), Sabbath (12:1-14; 24:20), and cultic activity (12:3-5).<sup>25</sup> Indeed, it is increasingly clear that Matthew existed within the normative boundaries of what E. P. Sanders termed "Common Judaism." On the interpretation of these core principles, Matthew largely endorses Pharisaic halakah and doctrine with minor exceptions. Anders Runesson has recently suggested that Matthew is more embedded within Pharisaic circles than has been

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<sup>21</sup> See the discussion in W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 17–21. Importantly, Matthew does retain several Aramaic words, such as *Golgotha* and *santanai*.

<sup>22</sup> Luz collects the apparent Matthean misunderstandings and then demonstrates that the "ignorance" is overstated by critics. Luz, *Matthew*, 1:46–47, n. 188.

<sup>23</sup> Davies and Allison provide a sympathetic critique of these scholarly efforts, though they ultimately conclude that Matthew was Jewish. Luz is less sympathetic, quickly dismissing such scholarship. W. D. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:7–58; Luz, *Matthew*, 1:45–48.

<sup>24</sup> For a chronological listing of these arguments, see the table in W. D. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:10–11.

<sup>25</sup> Anders Runesson, "Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intragroup Conflict," *JBL* 127 (2008): 102–4. The primary Jewish theological tenet absent from Matthew's gospel is circumcision, which may or may not have been practiced by Matthew's community. One would suspect that were it rejected, Matthew would have clarified this point (though, interestingly, only Luke dramatizes Jesus' circumcision, Luke 2:21). Runesson's accounting of symbols and practices is a fusion of E. P. Sanders' "Common Judaism" and Jacob Neusner's depiction of pre-Rabbinic Judaism. E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE-66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992); Neusner, "Formation of Rabbinic Judaism." Against the Matthean adoption of Jewish religious and social norms, see Douglas R. A. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (SNTSMS 6; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 3–7.

previously recognized. He detects within Matthew pre-70 Pharisaic traditions, which after the temple's destruction led his community to profess the Messiahship of Jesus. It was only when these Jesus-Pharisees attempted to convince their non-Jesus-following peers that Jesus was the Messiah that conflict developed between Matthew's group and his intra-Pharisaic rivals.<sup>26</sup>

In order to demonstrate the applicability of Coser's social conflict theory, it is important to note both the similarities and the differences between Matthew and his opponents. To this end, a brief sketch is warranted of both the shared practices and beliefs between Matthean Judaism and Pharisaic Judaism and also of the disputed claim that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah.

### **Agreement: Halakah and Doctrine**

Pharisaic halakah is generally assumed to be valid, save for those points which Matthew contests. This point is most easily seen in Matt 23:2-3, in which Jesus at once supports the Pharisees' teachings as legitimate while undercutting their actual practices because of their hypocrisy.<sup>27</sup> Admittedly, Matt 23:2-3 presents one of the more enigmatic passages in the gospel, particularly for scholars who emphasize the schism between Matthew and his Pharisaic opponents. Mark Allan Powell outlined eleven proposed solutions to Matt 23:2-3, each of which takes Matthew at less than face value and posits some rhetorical flourish which explains away Matthew's pro-Pharisaic saying.<sup>28</sup> But the most coherent reading of the passage, and of the gospel on the whole, assumes that Matthew genuinely wishes his followers to adhere to the teachings of Pharisees even if they themselves do not practice what they preach. Elsewhere, Matthew upholds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees as the minimum threshold his followers must exceed to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven (5:20). The rhetorical force of this exhortation only works if the Pharisees' righteousness is held in high esteem. Were the Pharisees' halakah suspect, then the directive to exceed their righteousness would lack meaning.<sup>29</sup> The bar is set high, not low. Even in what would appear to be a rejection of Jewish practices, the Antitheses (5:21-48), Matthew's teachings fall within the norms of Pharisaic Judaism. Matthew's prohibition on unrestricted divorce (5:31-32) is paralleled in Rabbi Shammai's interpretation of Deut 24:1-2 (*b. Git.* 90a).<sup>30</sup> In other words, Matthew's halakah falls within the normative boundaries of Pharisaic teachings.

To be sure, Matthew does present specific halakic disagreements with the Pharisees, such as the stricter legislation of oaths (5:33-37), but general agreement on halakah is assumed. Even the method of disagreement falls within the bounds of Pharisaic discourse (at least as remembered by the Rabbis).<sup>31</sup> Some seeming contradictions instead indicate Matthew's

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<sup>26</sup> Runesson, "Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations."

<sup>27</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, "Delegitimation of Leaders in Matthew 23," *CBQ* 54 (1992): 659-80. Presumably, the hypocrites of Matt 6:1-8 are the same scribes and Pharisees.

<sup>28</sup> Mark Allan Powell, "Do and Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2-7)," *JBL* 114 (1995): 419-35.

<sup>29</sup> It could be that Matthew is playing off a popular perception of the Pharisees' righteousness but does not himself see the Pharisees as righteous. This is possible, but one would expect a subsequent indication that Pharisaic halakah is unrighteous, rather than the affirmation of Pharisaic halakah in 23:2-3. Again, Matthew does not undermine Pharisaic halakah, but rather the Pharisees' hypocritical failure to walk according to their teachings.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew does not follow any single Rabbi's teachings exclusively, as evidenced by his agreement with Shammai on the grounds for divorce and with Hillel on purity laws. *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1994), 140, 145, 150. For the Pharisaic adoption of Hillel and Shammai, see Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees*, 204-6.

<sup>31</sup> There is an amazing congruence between the practices and teachings of the Pharisees as depicted in the gospels and as attested in the Tannaic sources. That is not to say that Matthew's account is free from bias, but it is striking

participation in the practice of distinguishing between “light” and “weighty” commands.<sup>32</sup> All commandments are to be followed, but some take precedence over others. Thus the debate over ritual purity and the traditions of the Fathers (15:1-20) suggests that Matthew critiqued those who violated the weightier matters (here, the Decalogue) in their pursuit of the traditions of the Fathers (extra-Torah ritual purity). Similarly, the critique of tithing in 23:23 does not imply that the Pharisaic halakah is invalid, but rather than the Pharisees have improperly prioritized their practices. Tithing is a secondary concern when compared to the weightier things of the law: justice, mercy, and faith. The problem rests not with tithing *per se*, but with the Pharisees’ giving tithing greater weight than it is due.

Likewise, Matthean theology largely coheres with Pharisaic doctrine as reconstructed through Josephus and the salient data from the New Testament. In both *Jewish War* and *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus lays out the doctrines of the Jewish “schools” in the manner of Greco-Roman philosophies.<sup>33</sup> Assuming Josephus’ description is accurate,<sup>34</sup> Matthew broadly agrees with the Pharisees regarding doctrine. Both affirm resurrection and a system of heavenly rewards for the righteous and eternal punishments for the wicked (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43; Matt 22:23-32).<sup>35</sup> Both hold deterministic views of divine activity and guidance in human affairs.<sup>36</sup> Acts 23 provides yet another theological tenet held in common by the Pharisees and Matthew, the belief in angelic beings (Acts 23:6-10; cf. Matt 1:24).<sup>37</sup>

Given both the specific agreement on halakic matters and the general agreement on doctrine, the theological debate between Matthew and his Pharisaic rivals seems to consist of isolated points of contention, rather than ubiquitous hostility. Furthermore, internal conflict among the Pharisees was the norm, not the exception. The two great schools of Rabbinic

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that the details he provides corroborate much of the Rabbinic memories of the Pharisees. Ellis Rivkin, *Hidden Revolution: The Pharisee’s Search for the Kingdom Within* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 271–72.

<sup>32</sup> Luz, *Matthew*, 1:219, 3:82, 3:123–24. Hans Dieter Betz suggests that this was one of the “hermeneutical principles” behind the Sermon on the Mount. Hans Dieter Betz, “The Hermeneutical Principles of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:17-20),” in *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount* (trans. L. L. Welborn; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 49. On the use of “light” and “weighty” commandments in Rabbinic literature, see Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: Beck, 1922), 1.901–5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ant.* 18:14; *J.W.* 2:162-163.

<sup>34</sup> It is important to remember that Josephus was describing the variant sects and parties of Judaism to a Gentile audience. As such, there is an inherent blurriness in his use of Greek philosophical categories to describe Jewish theological doctrines. George W. Nickelsburg and Michael E. Stone, “Sects and Parties,” in *Faith and Piety in Early Judaism: Texts and Documents* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 24–25.

<sup>35</sup> According to Josephus, the Pharisees believed that “although every soul is imperishable, only that of the good passes over to a different body, whereas those of the vile are punished by eternal retribution.” The doctrine of resurrection was most likely described in Hellenistic terms for Josephus’s Gentile audience. Josephus, *Judean War: Translation and Commentary* (trans. Steve Mason; J.W.; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 2:162–163. The Pharisees’ belief in resurrection is corroborated by Mark 12:18 and Acts 4:2; 23:6-10.

<sup>36</sup> “[The Pharisees] attribute everything to Fate and indeed to God: although doing and not [doing] what is right rests mainly with the human beings” (*J.W.* 2:162). Once again, Josephus’s audience likely influenced his choice of words, as the Stoic concept of “fate” does not seem to be indicated so much as the activity of God for determining the outcome of events. That said, Matthew’s citation formula suggests that free choice is given to the human actors, but that their actions were foretold by the Prophets and governed by God’s hand. Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 37–41.

<sup>37</sup> Note, however, Martin Goodman’s hypothesis that historians have misread Luke’s point in Acts 23. Given Luke’s repeated concern for resurrection, we should translate Acts 23:8 as “For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, neither angelic nor spiritual, but the Pharisees affirm both.” Martin Goodman, “The Place of the Sadducees in First-Century Judaism,” in *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities: Essays in Honor of Ed Parish Sanders* (ed. Fabian E Udoh et al.; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 139–52.



thought, the *Bet Hillel* and *Bet Shammai*, differed on interpretations of Law and halakah, but the disputes between these houses were evidently insufficient to cause lasting group fissure.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the minor conflicts between Matthew and his Pharisaic rivals on halakah or doctrine were unlikely to create the rift evidenced by Matthew's polemic. These concerns would fit within the sociological model Coser proposes, an internal conflict which does not threaten the foundational beliefs of the community. But Matthew's Pharisaic opponents reject the central marking of Matthean Jews over and against their neighbors: the Messianic identity of Jesus of Nazareth and his resurrection from the dead.<sup>39</sup> The rejection of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah represents the type of "root marking" dispute which figures into the process of group fracturing in Coser's theory. In other words, the identity of the Matthean Jewish community is negotiated at the breaking point of this intra-Jewish conflict, superseding shared practices and doctrines.

### Conflict: Messiah and Jesus

Evidence that the conflict between Matthew and his opponents was rooted in their rejection of Jesus pervades the gospel. In order to explain the fracturing of the Jewish community, Matthew takes his current conflict with local Pharisaic leaders and refashions it into a conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees a generation earlier. The recasting of the present dispute with Pharisaic Jews as a dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees allows Matthew to adapt and shape the narrative of Jesus' life and death to fit the experiences of his own community.<sup>40</sup> In doing so, Matthew frames the Pharisees' opposition to Jesus as the local Pharisaic leadership's opposition to Matthew. Thus, just as the hostility toward Jesus was baseless (since he was the Messiah), so too the hostility toward Matthew's community is unwarranted (since they are the heirs of Jesus' authority).

This process naturally heightens the rhetorical attacks on his Pharisaic opponents. In addition to his famous charge that the Pharisees are hypocrites (23:2-7; cf. 6:1-8), Matthew depicts the Pharisees as the primary opponents of Jesus, willing to obstruct his divine message by any means necessary. Though the Pharisees are not responsible ultimately for the death of Jesus, Matthew's narrative strongly implies that they would have sanctioned the crucifixion (23:29-36).<sup>41</sup> By creating a narrative in which the Pharisees are seen to be aggressively seeking the death of the Messiah, Matthew can trace his opponents' theological rejection of Jesus' messiahship back to the Pharisees themselves. This argument, that they are the type of people who *would* have killed Jesus, more aggressively describes the identity issues at stake in the context of an intra-Jewish debate. Thus, even though the Pharisees are absent from the Passion Narrative itself, the overarching narrative structure of Matthew's gospel implies the Pharisees' guilt. Matthew further bolsters his argument in the post-Passion burial narrative by presenting the

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<sup>38</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 151.

<sup>39</sup> Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 165-93.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-67, esp. 46.

<sup>41</sup> There is near universal agreement among Historical Jesus scholars that Jesus was put to death by the Romans and not by the Jews. The extent to which Jewish figures would have participated in his condemnation is, naturally, a highly and hotly contested issue. Positing Pharisaic involvement requires yet another level of speculation, as the political authority of the Pharisees is questionable. Josephus attributes to them the love of the people, but to the Sadducees the respect of the aristocracy (*Ant.* 13:298). My own inclination is to distance the Pharisees from the historical crucifixion of Jesus, since even Matthew refrains from directly inserting them into the Passion Narrative. If the Jewish leadership were involved, it likely would have been members of the priestly aristocracy, as independently witnessed by the synoptic and Johannine traditions.

Pharisees' immediate attempts to quash the insistence of Jesus' followers that Jesus was raised from the dead by God. This effectively doubles Matthew's charge: Not only do they violently oppose Jesus, but they attempt to obscure the proclamation of the resurrection from the start.<sup>42</sup>

### **Conflict and the Construction of Matthean Identity**

Having established Matthew's concern for the Pharisees specifically and the closeness of Matthean halakah and doctrine to that of the Pharisees, the conflict which precipitated the fracturing of the group can be reconstructed. First, an explication of the narrative drama of Matthew's gospel demonstrates the Pharisees' violent opposition to Jesus, especially regarding his status as the Messiah. Though the Pharisees are absent from the gospel's account of the arrest, trial, and execution of Jesus, the Pharisees' repeated hostility to Jesus and his followers implies the Pharisees' murderous character. Their immediate response to the death of Jesus, a denial that God will raise him from the dead (Matt 27:62-66), solidifies their pernicious character. Second, the application of Coser's theory regarding social conflict sheds light on how Matthew formed an identity for his group out his conflict with Pharisaic Jews. By basing his definitions of "us" and "other" upon the issue of messiahship, Matthew creates a boundary between his community and his opponents which is constructed upon the foundational theological feature of Matthean Judaism: the Messiahship of Jesus.

### **Conflict between Matthew and his Pharisaic Opponents as Presented in Matthew's Narrative**

The Matthean narrative's repeated emphasis on the conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus is the best evidence for conflict between Pharisaic Jews and the Matthean community. At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, the conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus is rather subdued, but after the issue of messianic identity is raised, as discussed, the conflict becomes the driving narrative force in the gospel.<sup>43</sup> The Pharisees are seen to be the initiators, attacking Jesus and his followers repeatedly. Furthermore, as the drama unfolds, the Pharisees become the predominant opponents of Jesus from chapters 9 to 23.

Prior to the claims that Jesus is the Messiah, the conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees are relatively muted debates. Their first interaction (Matt 9:10-13), a discussion of table fellowship, merely results in Jesus instructing the Pharisees to go and study the words of the prophet Hosea: "I [the Lord] desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Hos 6:6). Conflict is already present, but it has not yet developed violent overtones.<sup>44</sup> A second conflict story follows shortly after this debate over

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<sup>42</sup> It is important to note that the Pharisees might have had legitimate reasons to reject the messiahship of Jesus on the grounds that Jewish messianic fervor often resulted in Jewish national tragedy. The two great revolts against Rome in 66-70 and 132-135 CE each had messianic overtones. Josephus attributed messianic expectations to the foundational causes of the war with Rome that resulted in the temple's destruction (*J.W.* 6.312-13). Similarly, Simon Bar Kosiba's claim to be the Messiah (he took on the messianic moniker "Bar Kokhba" – the Son of the Star, cf. Num 24:17) was a central element of the Bar Kochba revolt in 132-135 CE. This insurrection would result in a second desolation of Jerusalem and the forced exile of Jerusalem's remaining Jewish inhabitants. See John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Ancient Literature* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1995), 195–214.

<sup>43</sup> Kingsbury, "Developing Conflict," 70–72. See also Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (2d. ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

<sup>44</sup> Presumably, Jesus' response would have offended the Pharisees, who were well known for their study of the Torah. Josephus, *J.W.* 2:162-63.

acceptable dinner partners. In the first half of a uniquely Matthean doublet (9:32-34; cf. 12:22-30), the Pharisees take offense at Jesus' successful exorcisms, perhaps out of jealousy for the response he elicits from the crowds. The Pharisees once again refrain from approaching Jesus themselves and confronting him directly; instead, they say that Jesus is in league with Satan. This typically has been interpreted as Pharisaic rumor-mongering, though Matthew leaves that unstated.<sup>45</sup> Another plausible reconstruction entails thinking of the Pharisees' response as an internal statement, parallel to the crowds' response that nothing has been done like this before in Israel. This would partially explain the Matthean doublet. Their first charge that Jesus is in league with Satan is private, while their second is public. Even if the Pharisees' accusation is public, nothing comes of it at this time, and the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees is put aside without further escalation until chapter 12.<sup>46</sup>

In chapter 12, however, the question of Jesus' messianic identity becomes the focal point of the debate. Correspondingly, the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees becomes more heated. The interpretation of Hosea serves as an entry-point to the hostility which comes to dominate the rest of the narrative. In 12:1-8, Jesus condones his disciples' apparent violation of Sabbath law on the grounds of "mercy not sacrifice." Furthermore, Jesus' proclamation that "the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" invokes the messianic debate which dictates Jesus' interactions with the Pharisees. This pericope is immediately followed by a second instantiation of "mercy not sacrifice," when Jesus heals a man's withered hand on the Sabbath in the Pharisees' synagogue (12:9-13).<sup>47</sup> In response, the Pharisees take counsel to kill Jesus.<sup>48</sup> Of course, the injustice of killing the "Lord of the Sabbath" for violating Sabbath laws is both ironic and perverse, which is exactly Matthew's point.

Having rejected Jesus' messiahship, the Pharisees enact their plans to destroy Jesus when they level the charge a second time that Jesus is in league with Satan (12:22-30). This peculiar doubling of Mark 3:21-27 (cf. Luke 11:14-16) reinforces the conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus. In chapter 9, no response is given to the Pharisees' charge. In chapter 12, rather than simply letting their comment pass, Jesus now decides to confront his accusers and their indictment. First, it is impossible for Satan to cast out Satan; a house divided against itself cannot stand (12:25-26). Second, the Pharisees' accusation casts suspicion back upon themselves as they have their own successful exorcists (12:27). If exorcisms are only possible through the aid of Satan, then they condemn themselves and are subject to the penalties they seek to impose on Jesus, which in this case would be death.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> W. D. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:139.

<sup>46</sup> Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 119.

<sup>47</sup> The question of whether or not "their synagogue" represents a fundamental schism between the Matthew and his opponents has been discussed at length. I am inclined to believe that the distinction is not yet fully displayed, since it is not ubiquitous in Matthew, but it is an indication of where things are headed. Luz, *Matthew*, 1:53-54.

<sup>48</sup> The Greek verb *apollumi* is most frequently translated as "to destroy," but there are a wide range of meanings for the word. Most commonly, *apollumi* is used in the context of combat. This often leads translators to use "to kill" instead of destroy. This meaning is what is intended elsewhere in Matthew. Herod orders the killing of the infants in 2:13 and the crowds are encouraged to ask for the killing of Jesus in 27:20. Either choice is within the semantic range, and at times I have favored one over the other. Regardless, a level of violence is assumed. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, eds., "apollumi," *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968). Margaret Davies's conclusion that the Pharisees were attempting to destroy Jesus' popularity rather than Jesus himself is unfounded and lacks any lexical parallels. Margaret Davies, *Matthew* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 95.

<sup>49</sup> *m. Sanh.* 7.4. See Luz, *Matthew*, 2:203. The gravity of this accusation further undercuts Margaret Davies's claim that the Pharisees merely seek to "discredit" Jesus. Margaret Davies, *Matthew*, 95.

Subsequent passages demonstrate that the hypersensitive state of conflict between Jesus and his Pharisaic opponents has not dissipated. Matthew's redaction of the parable of the Wicked Tenants (21:33-45) inserts the Pharisees into the Markan parable, making them one of the parable's allegorical targets (cf. Mark 11:27; 12:1-12). Matthew's spin on the parable results in the Pharisees implicitly sharing in the chief priests' guilt for the murder of God's messengers and God's son.<sup>50</sup> Further indication of their shared guilt comes in 22:15-22, regarding the question of paying taxes to Caesar. Matthew amplifies the responsibility of the Pharisees by adding a sentence to the Markan pericope which presents the Pharisees orchestrating the plot (22:15). Either Jesus accepts the legitimacy of the Roman occupation of Judea (which undercuts his popularity among the crowds) or he advocates insurrection against Rome by challenging the emperor's right to tax the people (which brands him as an insurrectionist). Jesus' response ultimately proves that the Pharisees' question presupposes a false dichotomy, but the lethal consequences of their question implicitly reinforce the Pharisees' murderous character.<sup>51</sup>

What would appear to be the final breaking point comes in chapter 23. In his famous anti-Pharisee polemic, Matthew at once supports Pharisaic interpretations of the Law (23:2-3) while launching into one of the most vitriolic diatribes in the New Testament.<sup>52</sup> This invective culminates in the accusation that the scribes and Pharisees are truly the heirs of their murderous fathers (23:29-36). Though they venerate the prophets of old, they "kill and crucify" the prophets, sages, and scribes Jesus is sending to them (23:34) – that is, the Matthean community.<sup>53</sup> The use of "crucify" (*stauraō*) here is intriguing, as it is the only time in Matthew that it or its cognates are used in reference to anyone other than Jesus or the insurrectionists crucified alongside him. Given that the parallel passage from Luke (11:49) lacks the verb crucify, some have suggested that it is a textual gloss from an early copyist of Matthew, despite the lack of any manuscript evidence for such a claim.<sup>54</sup> It is more plausible to assume Matthew intensified the original "kill and persecute" to connect the persecution of Jesus' followers (the Matthean community) to Jesus' martyrdom. Not only does this parallel further entrench in the audience's mind the Pharisees' attempts to kill Jesus, but it connects their persecution of Jesus to the later conflict between Pharisaic Jews and the Matthean community.<sup>55</sup> This implied

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<sup>50</sup>The parable of the Wicked Tenants in Matthew implies that the targets of the parable (the chief priests and Pharisees) bring the destruction of Jerusalem upon themselves for their rejection of Jesus (cf. 22:7). The addition of the Pharisees to the Markan story makes such an identification more complicated, since Matthew's Pharisaic opponents are not destroyed with the temple. Furthermore, when the crowds accept the blood guilt in Matt 27:25 ("All of the people replied, 'His blood be upon us and upon our children'") they are stirred up by the chief priests and the elders, not the Pharisees. I suspect that Matthew hoped his readers would infer the Pharisees' guilt even if he did not include them in the Passion Narrative. Regardless, their intentions, and the guilt thereby implied, are clear in 21:33-45. See Luz, *Matthew*, 3:41; Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 61.

<sup>51</sup>This can be contrasted with the testing by the Sadducees (Matt 22:23-33), who intended to confound Jesus, not to implicate him in a capital crime.

<sup>52</sup>Luke Timothy Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic," *JBL* 108 (1989): 419–41. The interpretation of 23:2-7 is an exegetical snag which has prompted substantial debate. Accepting the general Pharisaic nature of Matthew's teachings, with minor critiques, cuts this Gordian knot. On the various interpretations, see Powell, "Do and Keep What Moses Says."

<sup>53</sup>Matthew's use of *apostellō*, here in the present tense, may be another indication that the mission to Israel is not yet closed. If so, this reinforces the hypothesis that Matthew is engaged in *intra-muros* debate within Judaism.

<sup>54</sup>Hare, *Jewish Persecution of Christians*, 91.

<sup>55</sup>Matthew cannot be suggesting that the Pharisees themselves practiced crucifixion. One might suggest that the verb is used causatively here, and that Matthew is accusing them of handing over the followers of Jesus to the Romans for crucifixion, but the absence of *paradidōmi* precludes this reading. See Hare, *Jewish Persecution of Christians*.

transference of guilt from those who actually crucified Jesus (the Romans) to the Pharisees underlines the culpability of the Pharisees for Jesus' death, even if Matthew never says outright that the Pharisees killed Jesus. Matthew further supports this shift by concluding the diatribe with a denunciation of Jerusalem as the city that kills prophets (Matt 23:32-36 cf. Luke 13:34-35) and transitioning into a discussion of destruction of the temple in chapters 24 and 25.<sup>56</sup>

It must be stressed that the Pharisees are absent from the arrest, trial, and execution of Jesus. But as demonstrated above, Matthew continually uses the Pharisees' opposition to Jesus to advance the narrative. Matthew thus reconfigures the Pharisees' hostility toward Jesus as his Pharisaic opponents' hostility toward his own Jesus-following community. The presentation of the Pharisees as violent opponents of Jesus and the portrayal of their heirs as the violent opponents of the Matthean community are mutually reinforcing. Though the Pharisees did not murder Jesus, in Matthew's view they would not have had any qualms about doing so, as evidenced by their hostility toward Jesus' followers. Similarly, their opposition to Jesus' followers is fully coherent with their previous hostility to Jesus.<sup>57</sup> Through his narrative he implies that the Pharisees share in the guilt for the death of Jesus, but by isolating them from the Passion Narrative itself he accounts for the inconvenient truth that they were likely uninvolved with the events surrounding his crucifixion at the hands of the Romans.

The Pharisees do appear once after the death of Jesus, during the burial narrative (27:57-66). After the crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate to let him bury the body of Jesus as befitting Jewish custom, a detail found in each of the four canonical gospels.<sup>58</sup> Matthew adds a second, anti-Pharisaic scene to this episode. Preemptively attacking the claims of Jesus' followers that Jesus will be raised from the dead, the Pharisees (with the chief priests) request that guards are placed at the tomb (27:62-66). Jesus' body is literally not yet in the ground before the Pharisees reinstate their conflict with Jesus by attacking his followers. In doing so, they unwittingly fulfill Jesus' scathing critique from 23:29, as they stand by while prophets are murdered, only to show great concern for their tombs once they are dead.

Of course, the Matthean community knows that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead and that the Pharisees' guards were powerless to stop God's actions. But the Pharisees' request further exemplifies the rhetorical move seen in chapter 23 concerning the conflict(s) between Jesus and the Pharisees and between Matthew and his Pharisaic opponents. The Matthean addition is at once apologetic, insofar as it defends against the claim that the disciples stole Jesus' body (cf. 28:12-15), and polemical, insofar as it attacks the Pharisees for obstructing the proclamation of the gospel message.<sup>59</sup> Immediately after Jesus' death, the Pharisees are

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<sup>56</sup> Runesson, "Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations," 117.

<sup>57</sup> Margaret Davies's assertion that the characterization of the Pharisees as "murderers" is not instantiated is technically correct, but she fails to recognize that the Pharisees' repeated attacks on Jesus have lethal ramifications. Margaret Davies, "Stereotyping the Other: The 'Pharisees' in the Gospel According to Matthew," in *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies: The Third Sheffield Colloquium* (ed. J. Cheryl Exum and Stephen D. Moore; JSOTSS 266; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 415-32.

<sup>58</sup> The Gospel of Peter (8:28-9:34) also preserves this tradition, though it would appear to be dependent upon Matthew. Raymond E. Brown, *Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1317-49.

<sup>59</sup> When the guards report that the body of Jesus is gone, the story is spread "among the Jews" that the disciples stole Jesus' body. Here, "the Jews" is presumably not meant pejoratively, but as the ethnic group over whom Matthew and his Pharisaic opponents are competing for influence. Interestingly, the guards return only to the chief priest to report the empty tomb, perhaps an indication that Matthew added the Pharisees into a pre-Matthean story which originally contained only the chief priests. W. D. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:362-53. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1284-313, esp. 1289.

reengaged in a debate, but this time with Jesus' followers. This new debate will revolve around the central defining characteristic of Matthean Judaism: a belief that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah whom God raised from the dead.<sup>60</sup>

### Identity and Social Conflict in Matthew

At some point in the past, the Matthean community and their Pharisaic neighbors coexisted within Judaism, sharing the basic principles upon which Second Temple Judaism was founded. It was the conflict over the messianic identity of Jesus that distinguished Matthew from his Pharisaic opponents. Unsurprisingly, it was also the debate which drove a wedge between Matthew and his rivals. Ultimately, despite their shared halakah and theological beliefs, the dispute caused by the rejection of Jesus' messianic identity and resurrection from the dead exceeded the group's tolerance for conflict. As the intra-Jewish conflict between Matthew and his opponents intensified, Matthew's group began the process of leaving the Jewish community, either by choice or by force.<sup>61</sup> Matthew's attacks against the Pharisees suggest that the time of mutual understanding was quickly coming to a close.<sup>62</sup> To apply Coser's terminology, the structural limits for conflict had been exceeded.

Seeking to explain their current situation, Matthew constructs a narrative for his community that explicitly links their suffering to the death of their founder. By anachronistically inserting the Pharisees into his gospel as active opponents of Jesus, Matthew can argue that just as the Pharisees contributed to the warrantless execution of the Messiah, Matthew's Pharisaic opponents are unjustly persecuting the Matthean community. In doing so he constructs an identity for the Pharisees which is centered on their rejection of Jesus. While the Pharisees themselves did not give Jesus over to the Romans, their aggressive stance against Jesus' followers, which is both described in the diatribe of chapter 23 and subsequently demonstrated in their response to Joseph of Arimathea's request to bury Jesus' body, implies that the Pharisees' opposition to Jesus is now realized as opposition to Matthew's community.

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<sup>60</sup> Retrospectively, this debate may help to explain Matt 16:5-12 and Jesus' command to avoid the "teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Exactly which teachings Matthew refers to here is unclear, but given that this episode immediately follows a reference to "the sign of Jonah," used elsewhere to refer to the resurrection of Jesus (12:38-45), the issue in 16:5-12 might also be resurrection. Luz, *Matthew*, 2:217. If so, then Matthew is warning his audience not to trust the Pharisees and Sadducees when they teach that Jesus was not raised from the dead.

<sup>61</sup> The language of throwing one out of the synagogues so prominent in John 9 is absent from Matthew, which makes reconstructing the catalyst of the Matthean community's withdrawal difficult to characterize. Regardless of their choice in the matter, leaving the synagogue was clearly a traumatic event for the Matthean community. That Matthew used *ekklesia* (assembly/church) in Matt 18 suggests that this event is underway, but perhaps not yet complete. Richard S. Ascough has persuasively argued that Matthew's community has finished "forming," but that it has yet to "perform" as a developed community. Richard S. Ascough, "Matthew and Community Formation," in *Gospel of Matthew in Current Study: Studies in Memory of William G. Thompson, S.J.* (ed. David E. Aune; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 96-126.

<sup>62</sup> Establishing the chronology of the "parting of the ways" is a historical task fraught with pitfalls. Following James Dunn, I suspect that the fall of the temple in 70 CE was the catalyst for the split, but that the process was slow and relations between Christians and Jews did not degrade in a linear fashion. Texts like the Gospel of Matthew played an important role in the formation of two separate groups. By the second revolt (132-135 CE), the separation between "Christian" and "Jew" is in place, even if sources both Christian (Chrysostom) and Jewish (*t. Hul.* 2.24) reflect attempts to maintain the boundary more strenuously. James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 230-43.

If it is the creation of boundaries which defines group identity and not just the “cultural stuff” that the boundaries contain, then this analysis of Matthew becomes all the more crucial for understanding the identity of the Matthean community. How the boundaries are erected is as important, if not more so, than the characteristics bounded by these theological and social markers. Thus the shared principles of Pharisaic Judaism and Matthean Judaism become irrelevant once the boundary is established. By defining the Pharisees as the primary antagonists of Jesus and the continued persecutors of the Matthean community, Matthew constructs a boundary which is difficult, if not impossible, to cross. As the intra-Jewish conflict dissolves their shared identity, Matthew establishes a new identity rooted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This identity is formulated against the Pharisees’ repeated opposition to the Messiah and to his followers.

Unfortunately, Matthew’s polemic against the Pharisees was quite successful. As Thomas Sizgorich has reminded us, sacred texts are dangerous tools in the hands of overzealous enforcers of boundary markers.<sup>63</sup> And while Matthew’s polemic does not fully reflect the boundaries we see John Chrysostom defending three centuries later, the foundational roots of Chrysostom’s argument are present in Matthew’s depiction of the Pharisees. Whatever common bonds Matthean Jews shared with their Pharisaic neighbors, the Pharisees sought the death of Jesus and obstructed the proclamation of his resurrection. The boundary Matthew erects between his community and his Pharisaic opponents is polemically reinforced through the use of such heavy bricks. After all, who could side with the opponents of the Messiah?

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

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