

“Matthew” by Warren Carter

Review by E. Elizabeth Johnson, Columbia Theological Seminary

We have come to expect perceptive readings of Matthew from Warren Carter, and his contribution to the *Fortress Commentary on the Bible* does not disappoint. His essay paints a picture of the Gospel as “narrative pastoral theology” that both interprets the experience of Matthew’s post-70 Syrian church and encourages it in the midst of its oppression from the Roman Empire and its consequent conflicts with non-believing Jews.

Carter helpfully sets the context for Matthew with a vivid picture of the Jewish rebellion and its aftermath, sensitively explores the horizontal violence that grows out of it, and thoughtfully reflects on the Gospel’s portrayal of Jesus as in part the product of conflict and competition, making the book remarkably accessible to a twenty-first-century audience for whom some of Matthew’s language about Jews who do not believe in Jesus is difficult to hear.

As he has before, Carter keeps the Roman Empire in the front of our imaginations as we read Matthew, watching Jesus’ life and ministry unfold as signs of the empire of the heavens that contests and displaces the values of Rome. He helps us hear not only the evangelist’s quotations of Scripture but also echoes of its narratives in the Gospel, teaching us to listen for the story of God and God’s people as it informs and interprets the story of Jesus. Throughout, Carter underscores the communal shape of Matthew’s vision. Matthew is forming communities, not simply individual disciples, a welcome word in a time when younger readers in particular are looking for authentic Christian community and Christian faith of substance.

Warren Carter does a welcome service to students and church people with this condensed but comprehensive reading of the First Gospel. His essay will invite further reading not only of Matthew but also of the secondary literature with which he interacts.