

“Matthew” by Warren Carter

Review by Matthew L. Skinner, Luther Seminary

Warren Carter’s commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew in the *Fortress Commentary on the Bible* gives a terrific overview of the Gospel while also demonstrating Matthew’s ability to fuel ongoing theological discourse. No other compact treatment of Matthew does such a thorough and integrated job of explaining the Gospel’s historical setting, tending to its rhetoric and symbolism, and exploring how it has led Christians past and present to reflect on the nature of God, humanity, and the good news declared through Jesus Christ.

Drawing heavily from Ulrich Luz’s commentaries in the Hermeneia series (Fortress Press, 1989–2005) and his own substantial commentary, *Matthew and the Margins* (Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), Carter leads readers through Matthew, passage by passage. He briskly yet carefully explains the Gospel’s ability to shape ancient audiences as an interpretation of the story of Jesus meant “to secure the distinct and differentiated identity of the community of Jesus-followers, to discredit other groups, and to envision practices and a societal vision that constitute a way ahead.” The Gospel spoke these messages in a context in which Jesus’ followers had to negotiate ways of expressing their beliefs amid assertions of Roman imperial strength and prerogatives.

Anyone unfamiliar with Carter’s scholarship and writings will find here a clear and accessible expression of the sociopolitical interpretations that have made Carter such a gripping and influential figure in Matthean studies. His coherent, informed, and cogent analysis displays the depth of his learning and his skills as a guide into Matthew’s literary and theological world. Anyone who already knows his work will recognize much in the commentary’s discussion of the Gospel in its ancient setting; but these readers also will learn new things. Benefiting everyone, no matter what level of knowledge someone brings to the commentary: Carter’s regular focus on Matthew’s theological significance in longstanding Christian traditions and in ongoing interpretive discussions allows him to make a case for why this Gospel continues to be worth reading, and contending with, in communities of faith.

As one would expect from Carter, the commentary shuns sentimentality, and its theological reflections resist temptations to resolve problems in simplistic, prepackaged ways. The difficulties and potential inconsistencies in Matthew’s Gospel frequently lead Carter to raise questions that might provoke churches and theologians to consider whether the contemporary church too easily dismisses this Gospel’s vision of discipleship. He notes specific places where Matthew has provoked and excused Christian supersessionism throughout history, and he advances a compelling interpretation of the Gospel that sees Jesus as criticizing members of the Jerusalem aristocracy, not condemning all Judaism.

Don’t be deceived by the brevity required for a contribution to a one-volume commentary on the whole New Testament; Carter has not written a “for dummies” introduction to Matthew. His treatment assumes some basic familiarity with terminology, the ancient context, other biblical material, and figures and debates within Christian interpretive

history. Most seminarians, all seminary graduates, and many other church leaders will find it understandable—which is a good thing, for it is a great resource for instructing, equipping, reminding, and inspiring precisely these kinds of readers as they engage the Gospel according to Matthew.