

On this day: St. Matthew

Gerelyn Hollingsworth | Sep. 21, 2011 NCR Today

On this day we celebrate the feast of St. Matthew, Apostle, Evangelist.

Click [here](#) [1] for the Liturgy of the Hours and [here](#) [2] for the Mass.

In [*Meeting St. Matthew Today: Understanding the Man, His Mission, and His Message*](#), [3] Loyola Press, 2010, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., explains why the Gospel ascribed to Matthew is the most Jewish Gospel, and why "for some it is also the most anti-Jewish."

The Gospel of Matthew's "emphasis on Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament and as the authoritative interpreter of the Torah can give the impression to some that the Jewish tradition has been exhausted and is no longer meaningful. It also contains a blistering attack on the scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites in chapter 23, and throughout keeps up a polemic against 'their synagogues.' In 27:25 we are told that in response to Pilate's wavering over whether to have Jesus executed 'the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"' This text has often been used as a theological justification for the persecution of Jews and for the charge that they are a deicide (God-killing) people."

Fr. Harrington concludes Chapter 1, "The Evangelist and His Gospel," with some "concerns that might contribute to a fruitful study of this particular Gospel." One is: "Try to understand why a Jewish reader today might take offense at Matthew's Gospel, and ask yourself whether this concern is justified."

Fr. Harrington also suggests some topics "For Reflection and Discussion." One is: "Do you think that anti-Judaism is a serious problem for Christians today? Why or why not?"

It seems that it is. There are Catholics who claim to be traditional who cling to some of Christianity's ugliest traditions, including anti-Judaism. Saints noted for anti-Judaism have not been removed from the Calendar. Nearly forgotten writers whose work was marred by anti-Judaism have been resuscitated. At the other end of the spectrum, there are Catholics who claim to be progressive who are supporters of people whose goal is the destruction of Israel. They insist that they are not anti-Jewish, just anti-Israel, but they do not explain how Israel can be destroyed without killing Jews.

Michael Sean Winters's blog yesterday was a refreshing contrast to the opinion pieces so often found in the pages and on the web sites of Catholic periodicals. See ["Palestinian Statehood? Not Tall Enough."](#) [4]

Daniel J. Harrington wrote a "full-scale commentary" on [*The Gospel of Matthew*](#). [5] The Liturgical Press, 1991. In Part 1 of the Introduction, "A 'Jewish' Commentary," page 1, and Part 7, "Matthew and Anti-Semitism," page 20, he provides a context for reading the Gospel that may be unfamiliar to some.

"For those concerned with Christian-Jewish relations today the serious study of Matthew's Gospel is necessary. Matthew reminds us of the need for *historical* study in order to appreciate the message of a NT writing. Without

attention to its historical setting Matthew becomes a dangerous text, capable of giving encouragement to anti-Semites. Historical study of Matthew enables us to see the thrust of his historical project of rooting Jesus in the Jewish tradition." Page 22.

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