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“First Be Reconciled with Your Brother” (Matt 5:24): Reconciliation as the Foundation of Dialogue in the Gospel of Matthew

Abstract

This article offers an exegetical and theological analysis of Matt 5:23-24, arguing that Matthew places reconciliation at the heart of Christian discipleship. Through close examination of the Sermon on the Mount and related Matthean pericopes, the study shows how reconciliation grounds authentic worship, shapes community life, and reflects the Father’s merciful character revealed in Emmanuel. By integrating literary analysis with theological interpretation, the article demonstrates that reconciliation forms the foundation for interpersonal, social, and interreligious dialogue and is essential for credible evangelization in contemporary contexts.

Keywords: Gospel of Matthew, reconciliation, Sermon on the Mount, forgiveness, dialogue.

„Najpierw idź i pojednaj się z bratem swoim” (Mt 5,24). Pojednanie jako podstawa dialogu w Ewangelii Mateusza

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia egzegetyczną i teologiczną analizę Mt 5,23-24, ukazując, że Mateusz umieszcza pojednanie w centrum chrześcijańskiego uczniostwa. Poprzez wnikliwe odczytanie Kazania na górze oraz pokrewnych perykop Mateuszowych autor pokazuje, że pojednanie stanowi fundament autentycznego kultu, kształtuje życie wspólnotowe i odzwierciedla miłosierny charakter Ojca objawiony w Emmanuelu. Łącząc analizę literacką z interpretacją teologiczną, artykuł dowodzi, że pojednanie jest podstawą dialogu interpersonalnego, społecznego i międzyreligijnego oraz warunkiem wiarygodnej ewangelizacji we współczesnym świecie.

Słowa kluczowe: Ewangelia Mateusza, pojednanie, Kazanie na górze, przebaczenie, dialog.

Within the Gospel of Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7) functions as both the theological center and the ethical charter of the Matthean community¹.

¹ Hans D. Betz. 1995. *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3 – 7:27 and Luke 6:20–49)*. Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 10; Ulrich Luz. 2007. *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 391–394; Donald A. Hagner. 1993. *Matthew 1–13*. Dallas, TX: Word Books, 82; William D. Davies,

By reconfiguring Torah observance, Jesus reveals not the abolition of the Law but its fulfillment through the disclosure of God's deepest intention². Among the antitheses (Matt 5:21–48), the reinterpretation of the commandment against murder (5:21–26) shifts moral responsibility from external act to interior disposition and relational orientation. In this context, the demand of Matt 5:23–24 – to interrupt sacrificial worship in order to seek reconciliation – stands as one of the Gospel's most radical ethical imperatives. It decisively prioritizes restored communion over ritual correctness and presupposes a theological anthropology grounded in God's merciful initiative and in the abiding presence of Emmanuel (Matt 1:23; 28:20).

Methodologically, this article employs close literary and linguistic analysis of the Matthean text, situating Matt 5:23–24 within the Gospel's broader narrative and ethical patterns, while integrating theological interpretation attentive to Matthew's Christological and ecclesial horizons. This exegetical-theological approach honors historical-critical rigor yet foregrounds the coherence of Matthew's theological vision.

The article argues that Matthew presents reconciliation not as an optional moral refinement but as an essential dimension of discipleship. Rooted in the Father's character and realized in Christ's presence, reconciliation becomes the foundation for interpersonal, social, and interreligious dialogue. Through an examination of Matt 5:23–24, related ethical pericopes, and the Gospel's theological architecture, the study shows that reconciliation shapes the Church's witness and is constitutive of authentic evangelization.

1. Exegesis of Matt 5:23–24: Reconciliation Before Sacrifice

The teaching of Matt 5:23–24 stands at the rhetorical and theological summit of the first Matthean antithesis. While 5:21–22 exposes the generative roots of violence – anger (ὀργή), contemptuous speech (ῥακά), and character-assassinating

Dale C. Allison. 2000. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*. Vol. 1. London – New York: T & T Clark, 565. For the structure of the Sermon on the Mount itself, see Dale C. Allison, Jr. 1987. "The Structure of the Sermon on the Mount". *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (3): 423–445.

² John P. Meier. 2009. *A Marginal Jew: Vol. 4: Law and Love*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 41–43. See Dale C. Allison, Jr. 1993. *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 172–194; Clarence Baumann. 1985. *The Sermon on the Mount: The Modern Quest for its Meaning*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 383–396; Evans Craig A. 2012. *Matthew*. Cambridge, U.K. – New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 120; Ulrich Luz. 1995. *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 49.

mockery (μωρός)³ – vv. 23–24 shift abruptly from interior affect to embodied praxis⁴. Matthew refuses to let discipleship remain a matter of internal sentiment. Through a vivid, hyperbolic cultic scenario, Jesus forces the disciple out of introspection and into the vulnerable terrain of interpersonal repair⁵. This literary movement from interiority to action reflects Matthew’s moral vision: righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) is measured not by emotional piety but by the willingness to restore what anger has damaged⁶.

The wording is strikingly concrete. A worshipper is already in the act of offering a gift (δῶρον) at the altar – an ongoing ritual, not a preparatory step. At that decisive moment he “remembers” (μνησθῆς, aorist passive), signaling an unbidden intrusion of moral awareness. The grammar underscores that conscience interrupts liturgy: the recollection erupts into the sacred sequence and demands attention. For Matthew, divine presence does not shield the disciple from relational truth; it exposes it⁷.

Four imperatives intensify the drama. “Leave [your gift there]” – expressed by ἀφες – is an aorist command with the force of immediate, decisive abandonment. In turn, the second imperative “go” – ὑπάγε – reorders religious priorities by placing reconciliation at the head of the sequence. The adverb πρῶτον (“first”) is hermeneutically determinative: reconciliation – expressed by the third imperative διαλλάγηθι (aorist passive – “be reconciled”) – is not an optional prelude but

³ See Michal Bar-Asher Siegal. 2017. “The Insult ‘Fool’ and the Interpretation of the Law in Christian and Rabbinic Sources”. *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 234 (1): 5–23. All translations from Greek in the present article are my own.

⁴ Verses 23–24 present no significant textual variants affecting their interpretation; cf. Reuben J. Swanson. 1995. *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Variant Readings Arranged in Horizontal Lines against Codex Vaticanus. Matthew*. Sheffield – Pasadena, CA: Sheffield Academic Press, 37. In his commentary, B. Metzger does not take Matt vv. 23–24 into account; cf. Bruce M. Metzger. 1994². *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Second Edition. A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (Fourth Revised Edition)*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 11.

⁵ J.P. Meier characterizes vv. 23–24 as “a parable-like story (...) carried on by a number of imperatives”; John P. Meier. 1976. *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel: A Redactional Study of Mt. 5:17–48*. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 130.

⁶ Benno Przybylski. 1980. *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought*. Cambridge – London – New York: Cambridge University Press, 87; Luz. 2007. *Matthew 1–7*, 221–222.

⁷ Note the verbal and thematic connection between vv. 21–22 and 23–24, indicated by the repetition of “brother” (ἀδελφός) in vv. 22 and 23. On Matt 5:23–24 in connection with 5:21–22, see Matthew Goldstone. 2017. “Murder, Anger, and Altars: The First Matthean Antithesis in Light of Exodus 21:14 and its Early Rabbinic Interpretation”. *Novum Testamentum* 59: 339–354; Adam Kubiś. 2018. “Morderczy gniew: Intertekstualna lektura Mt 5,21–22”. *Verbum Vitae* 34: 249–287. The closing verses – 25–26 – of the 5:21–26 pericope depict the urgent need for reconciliation between disciples at odds; cf. Robert H. Gundry. 1994². *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 86.

the necessary precondition for acceptable worship⁸. The subsequent adverb τότε (“then”), on the one hand, refers back to πρῶτον and, on the other hand, introduces the fourth imperative ἐλθὼν πρόσφερε (“come and offer [your gift]), thereby clearly underscoring the sequence of actions: reconciliation prior to the offering of the sacrifice. No Second Temple text commands the interruption of sacrifice for interpersonal reconciliation. Even the prophetic critiques of empty ritual (Isa 1; Amos 5; Hos 6) never imagine halting an offering mid-act. Matthew thus advances a radical theological claim: ritual divorced from restored communion becomes incoherent because it contradicts the identity of the God who seeks mercy rather than sacrifice (cf. Matt 9:13; 12:7)⁹.

The ethical asymmetry of the condition – “your brother has something against you” – is equally significant. Jesus does not envision personal offense but the disciple as the source of grievance. The grammar centers the other’s claim – ἔχει τι κατὰ σοῦ – not one’s own sense of injustice. Moral responsibility is thereby displaced from self-vindication toward proactive accountability. The disciple must ask not “Am I right?” but “Have I harmed?” This inversion undermines defensive righteousness and anchors reconciliation in an ethic of other-oriented responsibility¹⁰.

The command presupposes existential risk. To leave the sanctuary and seek the aggrieved brother is to risk refusal, humiliation, or conflict. The geographical movement away from the altar is also a psychological descent from religious security into the precarious space of relational woundedness. Matthew thereby frames reconciliation not as a procedural task but as a costly, embodied act that exposes the ego and invites conversion.

Literarily, the pericope resonates with Matthew’s wider narrative architecture¹¹. Within the Sermon on the Mount, it embodies the kingdom’s eschatological sociality: a community marked by purity of heart, mercy, and peacemaking (5:8-9). Later passages reinforce this relational priority: the fraternal correction process (18:15-17), the demand for boundless forgiveness (18:21-35), and the summary commandment linking love of God and neighbor (22:37-40). Matt 5:23-24 thus expresses the

⁸ Dale C. Allison, Jr. 1999. *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*. New York: Herder & Herder, 62; Betz. 1995. *The Sermon on the Mount*, 224.

⁹ Matthew underscores the priority of mercy over sacrificial offerings, among other things, through the double citation of the words of the prophet Hosea 6:6; cf. Antoni Paciork. 2005. *Ewangelia według świętego Mateusza. Vol. 1: Rozdziały 1–13*. Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła, 241.

¹⁰ Davies and Allison. 2000. *Matthew*, 1:517.

¹¹ Wayne Baxter. 2004. “The Narrative Setting of the Sermon on the Mount”. *Trinity Journal* 25 (1): 27–37.

deep structure of Matthew’s ecclesiology: true worship and restored relationship are inseparable¹².

The passage also anticipates later Christian liturgical logic. Although pre-Eucharistic, its moral grammar naturally evolves into the Church’s insistence on reconciliation before Communion. Patristic sources treat this pericope as foundational for eucharistic integrity; liturgical traditions embed prayers of peace before the breaking of the bread. Matthew thus reveals the early interface of moral and liturgical theology: the communion table presupposes communal peace¹³.

Finally, the narrative imagery juxtaposes two presences: the presence of God at the altar and the presence of God reflected in the wounded brother. The disciple stands at the threshold of divine encounter yet is told to step away because God’s claim is mediated through the brother’s grievance. The theological reversal is decisive: the God of Matthew is not honored by gifts offered over the fracture of communion, but by the costly work of repairing it. Worship without reconciliation becomes a liturgical falsehood; reconciliation becomes the true sacrifice that reveals the kingdom’s character¹⁴.

In this concise yet radical directive, Matthew discloses a theological principle that reverberates through Christian tradition: to approach God while avoiding the brother is to deny the God who reconciles. To seek the brother – at real cost – is to offer God the worship He desires¹⁵.

2. Reconciliation Across Matthew’s Ethical Vision

The theme of reconciliation, introduced programmatically in Matt 5:23-24, unfolds across the Gospel of Matthew as a coherent ethical and theological thread that shapes the very identity of the community Jesus forms¹⁶. The beatitudes at the

¹² Joachim Gnllka. 1986. *Das Matthäusevangelium: Vol. 1: Kommentar zu Kap. 1,1 – 13,58*. Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 157–159.

¹³ *Didache* 14.1–2; Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 65–67; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat.* 5.3; *Myst. Cat.* 5.2–3; Augustine, *Serm.* 227; *Enarr. in Ps.* 33.1.10. On the liturgical reception of this logic, see also *Apostolic Tradition* 21–23. Patristic sources consistently interpret Matt 5:23-24 within a eucharistic and communal framework, linking reconciliation with the integrity of the sacrificial meal.

¹⁴ Paciorek. 2005. *Ewangelia według świętego Mateusza*, 241.

¹⁵ John T. Fitzgerald. 2007. “Anger, Reconciliation, and Friendship in Matthew 5:21-26”. In *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal*. Ed. by David B. Capes, Larry W. Hurtado, Alan F. Segal, 359–370. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 369; Rudolf Schnackenburg. 1985. *Matthäusevangelium: Vol. 1: 1,1–16,20*. Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 54.

¹⁶ Luz. 1995. *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 55–56.

opening of the Sermon on the Mount (5:3-12) set this trajectory in motion by declaring the peacemakers (οἱ εἰρηνοποιοί) to be “children of God” (5:9). This expression is not merely honorific but ontological: those who actively cultivate peace participate in God’s own mode of being. The semantics of εἰρηνοποιέω emphasize not passive peacefulness but the strenuous, initiative-taking work of remediating conflict, repairing social rupture, and creating conditions for communion¹⁷. The Matthean Jesus thus begins his great discourse by framing reconciliation not as an optional virtue but as the hallmark of divine kinship. To be a peacemaker is to mirror the very character of the Father who seeks Israel’s restoration and whose salvific action in Jesus is fundamentally reconciling¹⁸.

This identity is deepened and expanded in the Sermon’s climactic ethical command: the love of enemies in Matt 5:44¹⁹. Matthew intensifies the call to reconciliation by extending it beyond familiar or communal relationships to those marked by hostility, persecution, and asymmetrical power dynamics. The imperative to love and to pray is grounded not in sentiment but in realism about God’s own impartial benevolence, for God “makes his sun rise on the evil and the good” (5:45)²⁰. Through this appeal to the natural order, Matthew presents reconciliation as the ethical expression of imitating divine generosity. Jesus’ disciples are commanded to do more than avoid retaliation; they are to manifest a reconciling posture that reflects the Father’s universal benevolence. By embedding this command within the contrast between human reciprocity and divine impartiality, Matthew underscores that reconciliation is not merely a social strategy but an eschatological sign of belonging to the family of God. Love of enemies thus reveals reconciliation at its most paradoxical and transformative: the overcoming of hostility through participation in God’s creative love²¹.

¹⁷ Johannes P. Louw, Eugene A. Nida. 1988. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains: Vol. 1: Introduction & Domains*. New York: United Bible Societies, 502–503; Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry S. Jones. 1996. *A Greek-English Lexicon. 9th ed. with a Revised Supplement*. Oxford: Clarendon, 490; Davies and Allison. 2000. *Matthew*, 1:457.

¹⁸ Cf. Rom 5:10–11; 2 Cor 5:18–20; Augustine, *De Sermon. Dom. in Mont.* 1.2.9; Gregory of Nyssa, *De Beat.* 7.

¹⁹ Cf. Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60; Rom 12:14, 17–20; 1 Cor 4:12–13; 1 Th 5:15; 1 Pet 3:9; Luz. 2007. *Matthew 1–7*, 285. U. Luz rightly notes that “for Matthew love is the foremost commandment, and hence the guiding precept by which Jesus’ other commandments are to be interpreted”; Luz. 1995. *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 52.

²⁰ Luz. 2007. *Matthew 1–7*, 287. As W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison aptly observe, “love is not being required because it will set the world right. Instead one’s motivation to love arises out of a desire to be like God: *imitatio Dei*”; Davies and Allison. 2000. *Matthew* 1:556. Note the parallel between 5:45a and 5:9 – “so that you may be children of your Father in heaven” vs. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”.

²¹ Allison, Jr. 1999. *The Sermon on the Mount*, 100–101.

This reconciling identity takes a more institutional and pastoral form in the community discourse of Matt 18:15–17. Here, the Matthean Jesus provides a concrete process for addressing internal conflict, one that is both realistic about the inevitability of wrongdoing and hopeful about the possibility of restoration. The progression from private confrontation to mediated dialogue to communal involvement reflects a pedagogy of reconciliation grounded in patience, discretion, and a refusal to abandon the offending brother prematurely. The structure of the passage illustrates a carefully tiered approach in which the gravity of intervention increases only when lesser measures fail. Matthew thereby reveals a pastoral concern for maintaining the dignity of the offender, the integrity of the relationship, and the unity of the community²². Even the final stage – treating the unrepentant individual “as a Gentile and a tax collector” (v. 17) – must be interpreted through Matthew’s narrative portrayal of Jesus’ posture toward such individuals: not disdain but missionary outreach. The underlying goal of this communal process is always restoration, not exclusion; the community exists not to eliminate the difficult but to labor persistently for their reconciliation²³.

The discourse on reconciliation reaches its most radical depth in Peter’s question about the limits of forgiveness (Matt 18:21–22). Peter, likely reflecting common moral intuition, offers a generous number – “seven times” – as a possible upper boundary for tolerable forgiveness. Jesus dismantles the quantifying mindset with the symbolic “seventy-seven times”, which evokes the biblical echo of Gen 4:24 while reversing its trajectory. Where Lamech’s seventy-sevenfold vengeance once epitomized escalating violence, Jesus’ seventy-sevenfold forgiveness becomes a manifesto of inexhaustible mercy²⁴. Matthew thus presents reconciliation as a participation in divine abundance: forgiveness is not a moral calculation but a way of being grounded in the infinite compassion of God²⁵. The subsequent parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:23–35), although not the focus of this section, reinforces the same truth by portraying the moral contradiction inherent in accepting divine mercy while refusing to extend it to others. For Matthew, forgiveness ceases to be an episodic requirement and becomes instead the habitual orientation of those who have encountered the immeasurable mercy of the king²⁶.

²² Richard T. France. 2007. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 692–693.

²³ Luz. 1995. *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 107.

²⁴ Thomas W. Buckley. 1991. *Seventy Times Seven: Sin, Judgment, and Forgiveness in Matthew*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 14–16.

²⁵ William D. Davies, Dale C. Allison. 2001. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*. Vol. 2. London – New York: T & T Clark, 791.

²⁶ Ulrich Luz. 2001. *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 479.

When read together, these textual moments reveal a coherent ethical vision. Matthew presents reconciliation as both a divine gift and a communal responsibility that shapes the identity and life of Jesus' followers. Rooted in God's character and modeled by Jesus, it is sustained through communal participation in divine mercy. This ethic is not merely pragmatic conflict management but the grammar of discipleship itself: a way of life that manifests Emmanuel's healing presence. The Matthean community thus appears as an eschatological sign, whose reconciled relationships give credibility to the peace it proclaims.

3. Theological Foundations of Reconciliation in Matthew

Matthew's ethics of reconciliation cannot be understood apart from his theological vision of God, humanity, and the nature of the community gathered around Jesus. For Matthew, ethical imperatives are never autonomous moral prescriptions; they flow from a revelation of who God is and from the transformative relationship God establishes with His people. The demand for reconciliation is therefore rooted not in sociological necessity or pragmatic coexistence, but in the very character of the God who is revealed as Father, as Emmanuel, and as the One whose mercy generates the new covenant community.

The Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13), placed at the center of the Sermon on the Mount, offers the clearest synthesis of Matthew's theological anthropology and his understanding of divine-human reciprocity. The petition "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (v. 12) binds divine forgiveness and human forgiveness in a relationship of covenantal mirroring. This is not a simplistic conditionality as though God mechanically imitates human behavior; rather, it expresses a deeper theological truth: participation in God's forgiveness necessarily transforms the forgiven person into a conduit of that same mercy²⁷. The subsequent clarifying statement (6:14-15) reinforces the point: refusal to forgive is a refusal to inhabit the divine life. Matthew thus articulates a vision in which reconciliation is not merely required by God but made possible by God through a transformative relationship of grace.

This covenantal logic is framed by the Gospel's theological inclusion with the Emmanuel motif (1:23; 28:20). Matthew begins by announcing Jesus as "God with us", and ends with the risen Christ's promise, "I am with you always"²⁸. This pres-

²⁷ John Nolland. 2005. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 290-291.

²⁸ Commenting on the final verses of the First Gospel, D.D. Kupp rightly notes that identifying Matt 28:20b as Matthew's own redaction intensifies its significance as the Gospel's conclusion and

ence is not passive accompaniment but dynamic participation: God’s nearness empowers the kind of reconciled relationships that the Sermon prescribes. If reconciliation is possible at all, it is because God has first drawn near to humanity in the incarnate Son, overcoming estrangement and establishing communion. The Emmanuel theme therefore functions as a theological foundation for reconciliation: the community reconciles because it lives within the sphere of God’s reconciling presence. In this light, reconciliation is not a human achievement but a divine initiative into which disciples are invited to participate.

Matthew’s theological anthropology further clarifies this dynamic. Human beings are portrayed not as isolated moral agents but as relationally and communally constituted. Sin in Matthew is rarely described in abstract terms; it manifests as broken relationships, fractured communities, and failures of mercy²⁹. Conversely, salvation is depicted as restored communion – between individuals, within the community, and ultimately between humanity and God. The demands of reconciliation thus arise from the deepest truth about the human person: created in the image of a relational God, human beings flourish only when they live in right relationship with others. Ethical imperatives, therefore, are not external burdens imposed upon human nature, but expressions of the divine life shared with humanity through Christ³⁰.

This theological insight gains sharper clarity when placed within Matthew’s probable *Sitz im Leben*. The Matthean community – likely composed of Jewish Christians grappling with emerging distinctions from the synagogue, navigating internal diversity, and integrating Gentile believers – was marked by real tensions. Conflicts over leadership, authority, identity, and practice threatened its cohesion. In such a context, Matthew’s insistence on reconciliation becomes more than a timeless moral ideal: it becomes the theological key to communal survival and faithful mission. A community that cannot reconcile cannot endure; a community that refuses mercy cannot proclaim the Gospel³¹.

as the fulfillment of the motif of divine presence introduced in the infancy narrative. The intentional framing between Matt 1:23 and 28:20 highlights Matthew’s theological design: the Gospel begins with Jesus named Emmanuel and ends with his promise to remain with his followers, presenting the Messiah as the abiding presence of God.; cf. David A. Kupp. 1996. *Matthew’s Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God’s People in the First Gospel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 218–219.

²⁹ See the chapter “Sin in the Gospel of Matthew” in Jeffrey S. Siker. 2020. *Sin in the New Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 51–67.

³⁰ Luz. 1995. *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 54–55.

³¹ On Matthean community, see Paul Foster. 2004. *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 22–79; Donald Senior. 1999. “Two Worlds: Gentiles and Jewish Christians in Matthew’s Gospel”. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (1): 1–23; David C. Sim. 1998.

Moreover, the missional dimension of Matthew's theology intensifies the necessity of reconciliation. The Church is commissioned to "make disciples of all nations" (28:19), a task that presupposes communities whose life visibly reflects the reconciling presence of Christ. The credibility of the Christian mission depends on the authenticity of the Christian community³². Thus, Matthew's theology of reconciliation is not only ecclesial but also evangelizing: the Church becomes a sign of God's reign precisely through the quality of its relationships. Reconciliation is therefore not a secondary ethical task but a constitutive dimension of the Church's identity and mission, grounded in the presence of Emmanuel and shaped by the Father's boundless mercy.

4. Reconciliation as the Foundation of Dialogue Today

Matthew's vision of reconciliation does not remain confined to the intra-ecclesial context of the first century. Its theological momentum propels it outward, shaping Christian engagement with persons, cultures, and religious traditions. In Matthew, reconciliation is not a discrete moral practice but a hermeneutic encounter – a way of seeing and engaging in the world that flows from the reconciling presence of Emmanuel. The ethical imperative of Matt 5:23-24 thus becomes not only a personal exhortation but a structural principle for dialogue and mission alike. Dialogue, evangelization, and witness emerge from the same theological source: participation in God's own movement toward humanity³³.

In the realm of interpersonal dialogue, Matthew places the burden of initiative upon the one who recognizes the rupture, regardless of who is "at fault". This inversion of normal relational logic reflects the divine initiative in reconciliation (cf. Matt 18:12-14). To "go first and be reconciled" requires a posture of humility, a willingness to relinquish self-justification, and an openness to vulnerability. Such a disposition echoes Jesus' relational pedagogy: disciples are called not merely to forgive but to imitate the divine generosity that makes forgiveness possible (5:44-48). Interpersonal dialogue thus becomes an act of discipleship and already participates in evangelization, insofar as reconciled relationships render visible the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus³⁴.

The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

³² See Rollin G. Grams. 2004. "Narrative Dynamics in Isaiah's and Matthew's Mission Theology". *Transformation* 21(4): 238–255.

³³ Francis. 2013. *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*. Vatican: LEV, 178–179.

³⁴ Noting Matthew's emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation in both the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 18, W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison persuasively state that no ancient document

When extended into the social sphere, Matthew’s ethic challenges Christian communities to become agents of healing in cultures marked by fragmentation and polarization. The command to interrupt sacrificial activity in order to seek reconciliation has profound public implications: it suggests that authentic worship and credible witness cannot coexist with social hostility. Evangelization that ignores injustice, exclusion, or contempt loses its moral intelligibility. The beatitude of the peacemakers (5:9) frames peacemaking not as political naïveté but as a manifestation of divine filiation³⁵. By embodying reconciliation in concrete social contexts, the Church offers a counter-cultural sign – an alternative social imagination in which justice is pursued without vengeance and truth without dehumanization. Social dialogue thus becomes a sacramental space in which the reconciling presence of Christ is not only proclaimed but enacted.

The implications of Matthew’s theology of reconciliation also extend to inter-religious dialogue and the universal horizon of mission. Although the Gospel does not articulate a systematic theology of other religions, it embeds within its narrative a broad openness to the nations: Gentile women in the genealogy (1:3–6), the magi as foreign seekers of truth (2:1–12), the faith of the centurion (8:10), and the final commission to “all nations” (28:19). These trajectories reveal that reconciliation is not merely interpersonal or intra-communal but oriented toward the restoration of communion within the whole human family³⁶. Interreligious dialogue, read through a Matthean lens, is not relativism but an expression of the Gospel’s missionary heart: reconciliation as invitation rather than imposition, witness rather than domination.

Within this unified horizon, evangelization appears not primarily as an activity added to dialogue but as a manner of life shaped by reconciliation. The mission entrusted to the disciples presupposes a community whose internal relationships correspond to the message it proclaims³⁷. Anger, contempt, division, and unforgiveness are portrayed in Matthew as incompatible with divine sonship and therefore destructive of mission. A community that embodies reconciliation becomes itself the medium of proclamation, a living hermeneutic of the

known to them “shows more sensitivity to the desperate need for love and peace rather than hate and vengeance than does Matthew”; William D. Davies, Dale C. Allison. 2004. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*. Vol. 3. London – New York: T & T Clark, 702–703.

³⁵ Mark A. Powell. 1996. “Matthew’s Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom”. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58: 474.

³⁶ Foster. 2004. *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*, 248; Sim. 1998. *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 243–244; Luz. 1995. *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 43.

³⁷ Ulrich Luz. 2005. *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 628.

Gospel. Dialogue in its interpersonal, social, and interreligious forms thus converges with evangelization: each is credible only insofar as it is grounded in reconciled relationships.

Modern magisterial teaching affirms and deepens this Matthean hermeneutic. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* insists that “modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers”, emphasizing that the credibility of evangelization depends less on doctrinal precision than on the visible holiness and charity of the community³⁸. Similarly, *Evangelii Gaudium* underscores that proclaiming the Gospel without embodying reconciliation risks turning mission into a sterile moralism or an abstract ideology³⁹. Pope Francis repeatedly stresses that the Church evangelizes by creating “spaces of encounter”, by practicing a “culture of mercy”, and by embodying a pastoral style marked by closeness, tenderness, and the capacity to heal wounds⁴⁰. These magisterial insights echo the Matthean conviction that reconciliation is a theological prerequisite for mission.

A reconciled community becomes, in Matthew’s theological grammar, a luminous sign of the kingdom. This does not mean a community without conflict – Matthew is realistic about human limitations – but one that responds to conflict through practices of forgiveness, truth-telling, accountability, and restored communion. Such a community reflects the Father’s character, who “makes his sun rise on the evil and the good” (5:45), and the Son’s mission, who gathers and restores the lost sheep (18:12–14). Evangelization, then, is not primarily the transmission of information about Christ; it is the manifestation of Christ’s reconciling presence⁴¹. The Church’s missionary identity is compromised when its internal life contradicts the Gospel of peace, but it is strengthened when reconciliation becomes the hallmark of Christian discipleship.

In this sense, reconciliation is not merely an ethical obligation but a constitutive dimension of evangelization itself. It shapes the ethos of the community, grounds its proclamation, and gives visible expression to the salvific reality it announces. When the Church forgives generously, heals wounds patiently, and bridges divisions courageously, it becomes the living exegesis of the Gospel it proclaims. The

³⁸ Paul VI. 1975. *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Vatican: LEV, 41; cf. Paul VI. 1974. *Address to the Members of the Consilium de Laicis* (2 October 1974). AAS 66 : 568; Congregation for the Clergy. 1971. *General Catechetical Directory*. Vatican: LEV, 25.

³⁹ Francis. 2013. *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*, 239–243.

⁴⁰ Francis. 2013. *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*, 24, 88, 164, 270–273; Francis. 2016. *Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia*. Vatican: LEV, 3, 7, 312; Francis. 2015. *Encyclical Laudato Si’*. Vatican: LEV, 231–232.

⁴¹ Paul VI. 1975. *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18–19, 41.

world encounters the truth of Christ not only in doctrinal formulations but in reconciled relationships that reflect the very life of the Triune God⁴².

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Matthew’s command – “first be reconciled with your brother” – expresses a principle that is both theologically weighty and pastorally essential. By subordinating sacrificial offering to restored communion, Jesus reveals that having the right relationship is the necessary condition for authentic worship. Ritual without reconciliation contradicts the nature of the God whom it seeks to honor. Thus, reconciliation functions not as a secondary moral demand but as a defining mark of discipleship.

Across the Gospel, Matthew reinforces this conviction through an integrated ethical vision: peacemakers are named children of God; love of enemies mirrors the Father’s impartial mercy; communal discipline aims at restoration rather than exclusion; and unlimited forgiveness becomes a habitual posture. These teachings are grounded in the character of the Father and sustained by the abiding presence of Emmanuel, who enables what human effort alone cannot accomplish.

For contemporary theology and pastoral practice, Mt 5:23-24 offers a potent framework for addressing interpersonal fractures, social polarization, and interreligious encounter. Christians are called to take the initiative in healing relationships and to embody the restorative mercy that lies at the heart of the Gospel. Such reconciliation is not sentimental but participates in God’s own healing work.

Within this horizon, evangelization becomes credible only when it arises from reconciled communities. Proclamation without communion risks undermining the Gospel it announces, while a community shaped by mercy becomes a living sign of God’s kingdom. Ultimately, reconciliation in Matthew is not an optional ideal but a participation in the reconciling mission of Christ – the Emmanuel whose presence continues to transform worship, community, and human relationships.

⁴² Benedict XVI. 2005. *Encyclical Deus Caritas Est*. Vatican: LEV, 1–2.

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