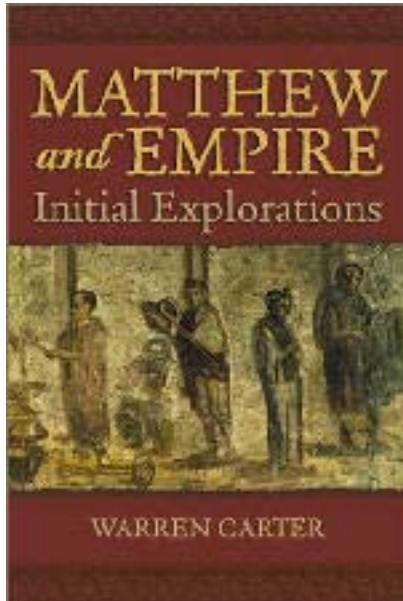


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Carter, Warren

Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations

Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2001.
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Walter M. Dunnett
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
Glen Ellyn, IL 60137

Matthew Carter, professor of New Testament at St. Paul School of Theology, has already distinguished himself in Matthean studies, publishing two books and fourteen articles since 1992 (plus a joint volume with John Paul Heil in 1998).

He has now added another volume, an insightful and thought-provoking book on Matthew's use of the concept of empire in describing two conflicting powers: Rome and God. As he notes, the "central irony" of this Gospel is that in describing God's rule and claims, Matthew uses the *imperium* of the Roman Empire.

The content of the volume is subsumed under three main headings: "The Roman Imperial System"; "Jesus, Agent of God's Salvific Purposes"; and "Counternarratives." The first covers the Roman imperial system, its theology, and its empire as related to Matthew's Gospel and the city of Antioch (Syria). The second includes Matthew's presentation of Jesus and Matthew's salvation as sovereignty (Matt 1:21). The third is a study of five key texts: Matt 1:23 and 4:15–16; 11:28–30; 17:24–27; and 24:11–26.

The author's method I would describe as historical and exegetical. He draws from many sources (primary and secondary) to describe and evaluate the existing Roman Empire of the first-century world. Lines are drawn between the character of the Roman Empire,

particularly the elite who rule, and the teachings of Jesus and his call to a discipleship that will distinguish his followers from their world. He spends much time exegeting the text of Matthew's Gospel, including extensive word studies in critical texts.

His perspective is of one familiar with both the first-century world of Rome (and its provinces) and the literature written to comment on that scene. Along with forty pages of notes, there is a bibliography of twenty-one pages. If number of entries is significant, then Rufus J. Fears, Jack Dean Kingsbury, and Walter Wink are his key entrants.

There appears to be a historical-political-cultural perspective that dominates Carter's interpretation of this Gospel. One example must suffice. In his study of Matt 11:28–30 the language is linked primarily to the domination of the minds and bodies of people in that world. While many writers, for example, understand "labor and heavy laden" to link primarily to the result of the oppressive teaching of the Pharisees (see esp. Matt 23:4), Carter sees it as "a desperate attempt to stay alive because of Rome's oppressive policies" (116). I have had the sense while reading this book that "Rome" is often being imposed on the language, rather than the more local (and especially Jewish) culture of the Near East.

With this brief caveat notwithstanding, I highly commend Warren Carter for his continuing and stimulating work in Matthew's Gospel. Readers of the book will be in his debt as they pore over the pages and continue to seek to plumb the depths of Jesus' life and teaching and its application to the church past and present.