

## Reading Matthew from the Perspective of Marginality

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### 1. Introduction

When we see the history of God's salvation, God has made marginalized people play a transformational role in the world. In the time of the OT, Israel was not the central nation of the world but a marginal one which had been oppressed by powerful nations. God, however, chose Israel in order to show his will to redeem the sinful world. God's way of salvation is not the same as that of the world. God's salvific revelation climaxed in sending his son, Jesus Christ, into the world; however, Jesus did not come as a centralized person, but a marginalized one. Jesus identified himself with the marginalized people (Mat 18:1-14; 25:31-45) and ministered to them. "Jesus both embraced the marginalized and experienced marginality alongside the marginalized",<sup>1)</sup> and so he became the prototype of marginalized people. Therefore, marginality should be "the content of the Christian faith",<sup>2)</sup> because Christianity comes from Jesus, the marginalized one. Moreover, in our multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society, the characteristics of marginality itself can provide us with "common ground"<sup>3)</sup> for the unification which the Gospel seeks. After all, marginality can be both the

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1) Paul Hertig, "The Multi-ethnic Journeys of Jesus in Matthew: Margin-Center Dynamics", *Missiology* 26 (1998), 28.

2) Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: the Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 4.

3) *Ibid.*, 4-5.

content and the praxis of the Gospel.

The author of the Gospel of Matthew himself was depicted as a marginalized person. According to Paul Hertig, in Matthew 9:9-11, Matthew was rejected and isolated from his brethren the Jewish people: (1) He was despised as a betrayer by the Jews because he was employed as a tax collector on behalf of the Roman government; (2) At that time, tax collectors were generally disdained due to their greed for money, especially because they charged excessive taxes to their brethren, and Matthew was not an exception; (3) As a Galilean Jew, he might have experienced discrimination from Jerusalem Jews: “Jews were known to frown upon Galilean Jews for their lack of strict orthodoxy and their Gentile association”.<sup>4)</sup> Jesus called Matthew as his disciple and into his ministry, and so Matthew experienced the acceptance of Jesus. Hertig argues that “Matthew’s own marginality is an underlying theme in the Gospel” and “it is no surprise that Matthew emphasizes Jesus’ acceptance of the unacceptable in the story of his own calling”.<sup>5)</sup> Therefore, Matthew who lived as a marginalized person might have a deep concern for the marginalized peoples and so reflect his compassion for them in his writing of the Gospel of Matthew.

In this paper, my study largely consists of three parts, presenting three dimensions of marginality: conceptual, geographical, and social. First, in a conceptual dimension, I will examine two passages, Matthew 11:25-30 and 18:1-14 which show the meanings and characteristics of marginality in the Gospel of Matthew. The former passage tells us that the marginalized (the infants, 11:25) are regarded as the recipients of God’s revelation and as the blessed people who can own the eschatological blessing. The latter teaches us that Jesus identifies himself with the marginalized (the little child, 18:2-5; the little ones, 18:6, 10, 14) and that they are those who need to be cared for. Second, in a geographical dimension, I will shed light on Matthew’s unique characteristic in relation to its geographical description. Only Matthew narrates the fulfillment of the Old Testament (OT) prophecy through geographical description (2:23; 4:14-16). Matthew depicts Jesus as marginalized in his life and ministry through the geographical portrait of marginality. Finally, in a social dimension, I will study marginal groups in the Gospel of Matthew: the sick, the

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4) Paul Hertig, “The Multi-ethnic Journeys of Jesus in Matthew: Margin-Center Dynamics”, 28.

5) Ibid.

poor, women, orphans, tax-collectors, the Gentiles and so on. Their lifestyle and spirituality demonstrate the characteristics of marginality. However, marginality does not mean a miserable state, but the qualification of becoming people of God. Jesus' concern and love for marginal people proves this. Among the many kinds of marginalized people in the Gospel of Matthew, I will focus on three groups in terms of gender, ethnicity, social status: women, the Gentiles, and the poor.<sup>6)</sup>

## 2. Conceptual Dimension: The Characteristics of Marginality in Matthew's Gospel

### 2.1. Infants as the Recipients of God's Revelation (11:25-30)

Chapters 11-13 in the Gospel of Matthew deal with the rejection of Jesus and his words. In the middle of the rejection, Jesus' sayings (11:25-30) which contain the revelation concerning Jesus and his Father and the kinds of people who receive his words are highlighted.<sup>7)</sup> Matthew's purpose in including them here is to show that "despite the growing opposition to Jesus discipleship remains the only alternative that satisfies the deepest of human longings".<sup>8)</sup>

The passage (11:25-30) consists of three parts: (1) vv. 25-26; (2) v. 27; and (3) vv. 28-30.<sup>9)</sup> The first two parts (vv. 25-27) are paralleled in Luke 10:21-22.<sup>10)</sup>

6) When Paul says about oneness of all people in Christ Jesus, he presents the breakdown of barriers between different kinds of people in three dimensions in Gal 3:28: ethnicity (Jew vs. Greek), social status (slave vs. free), gender (male and female). Following Paul's distinctions, I also suggest three groups that are regarded as the marginalized.

7) Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 168.

8) Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 192.

9) Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 316. In view of marginal people or community according to Warren Carter, this passage can be divided as Jesus' acknowledgement of God's revelation not to the intelligent but to the marginal (11:25-26), his role as revealer and liberator (11:27), and his invitation of those who are laboring and bearing burdens to find salvation (11:28-30). See Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: a Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, JSNTSup 204 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 256.

10) Donald Senior, *Matthew*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 131.

However, the third part (vv. 28-30) has no parallel in Luke, so we can assume that these verses come from the special tradition of Matthew.<sup>11)</sup>

The first part (vv. 25-27) is “thanksgiving to God.”<sup>12)</sup> This thanksgiving prayer has typical Jewish style and its pattern was prevalent in the other Jewish writings at that time and appeared in the Qumran Thanksgiving Hymns.<sup>13)</sup> This general thanksgiving pattern is well applied to vv. 25-26 and there are two reasons for thanksgiving to God: (a) hiding these things from the wise, and (b) revealing them to infants (νήπιος).

The second part (v. 27) shows the unique relationship as an “innate, exclusive and mutual knowledge”<sup>14)</sup> between the Father and the Son. We can divide this verse into three: (a) the Son’s authority to be given all things by the Father (v. 27a), (b) the exclusive and mutual knowledge between the Father and the Son (v. 27b), and (c) the Son’s ability to reveal the Father to those whom the Son chooses (27c). This division provides a chiasmic structure: A — the Son’s qualification for reception (v. 27a); B — the relationship between the Son and the Father (v. 27b); A’ — the Son’s qualification for revelation (v. 27c).

The third part (vv. 28-30) is Jesus’ invitation to those who are weary and burdened and implies a calling to discipleship.<sup>15)</sup> From the aspect of formal composition, this passage is distinctly divided into two. The first section (vv. 28-29a) is the invitation to come and follow Jesus in discipleship. The second (vv. 29b-30) is the basis (Jesus’ character of meekness and humility as a savior) and the reason (the advantage of easy yoke and light burden given by Jesus) for following Jesus. Both sections promise rest: the first rest is

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11) Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 168. Hans D. Betz explains the arguments whether Mat 11:28-30 was pertained to Q material or not. See Hans D. Betz, “The Logion of the Easy Yoke and of Rest (Matt 11:28-30)”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967), 10-20.

12) Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 316.

13) Cf. 2Sa 22:50; Dan 2:19-23; Sir 51:1; 1QH passim; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew, A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 216; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 169. Thanksgiving prayer generally has three steps: first, there is a first person announcement (“I give you thanks”), then a direct address to God (“Father, Lord of heaven and earth”), and finally the reason for the thanksgiving (“because you have…”).

14) George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 164-166. According to Ladd, Mat 11:25-27 has been diversely understood such as a penetration by a “mythological” idea (Dibelius) or “a late product of Hellenistic Christianity” in German scholarship.

15) Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 322.

emphasized through Jesus' granting and the second rest is found through self-discovery in one's soul.

As we see so far, each part has unique and distinctive characteristics in form. The first part (vv. 25-26) is a "public confession of praise and thanks to God", the second (v. 27) is a "declaration by Jesus about his special relation with his Father", and the third (vv. 28-30) is an "invitation" to discipleship.<sup>16)</sup> The whole passage, however, is unified in respect of "revelation sayings".<sup>17)</sup> In the first passage (vv. 25-26), the Son gives thanks to the Father because he reveals these things not to the wise but to infants. In the second passage (vv. 27), explicit and mutual knowledge exists between the Son and the Father by revelation and the Son's ability is to reveal the Father to those whom he chooses. In the third passage (vv. 28-30), the Son reveals himself to invite "the marginalized" who may take part in his discipleship. According to Daniel J. Harrington, there is a chiasm in the passage as a whole and the structure is as follows: A — recipients of revelation (vv. 25-26: the infants); B — revelation itself (v. 27: Jesus); A' — recipients of revelation (vv. 28-30: the margins).<sup>18)</sup> All things considered, this passage (Mat 11:25-30) is well organized in structure in spite of consisting in three different forms, and it is unified in theme through "revelation sayings".

Matthew expresses his intention through "revelation sayings", and so the revelation plays an important role in this passage. Revelation is closely related to the knowledge (or wisdom<sup>19)</sup>) and the relationship between the Son and the Father as especially denoted in v. 27. The fact that Matthew emphasizes the verb "to know" is evident through the usage of somewhat different verbs between the two parallels. In Matthew, the verb ἐπιγινώσκει ("to know") is written twice (v. 27), but in the parallel passage of Luke the verb γινώσκει ("to know") is written only once (Luk 10:22). Matthew uses the verb ἐπιγινώσκει, which has the intensive meaning in comparison with the verb γινώσκει of Luke, in order to emphasize the knowledge.<sup>20)</sup> The prefix ἐπι intensifies the meaning of the verb. Therefore the verb ἐπιγινώσκει can be interpreted as "fully knows"<sup>21)</sup> and we

16) Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 169.

17) *Ibid.*, 168.

18) A chiasmic pattern is shown in words: A — "burdened" (28a), B — "refresh" (28b), C — "my yoke" (29ab), B' — "rest" (29c), A' — "burden" (30); *Ibid.*, 169.

19) Senior argues that this passage takes the "wisdom motif". Donald Senior, *Matthew*, 131-134.

20) Hagner assumes that "the verb ἐπιγινώσκει with the prepositional ἐπι here probably is deliberately intensive." See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 320.

21) *Ibid.*, 316.

can catch how Matthew takes this knowledge seriously.

According to Archibald M. Hunter, this passage contains “perhaps the most important verses in the Synoptic Gospels”.<sup>22)</sup> In the thanksgiving section, Jesus praises God because of his good election. God’s “gracious elective will”<sup>23)</sup> of hiding and revealing means “the good news of the presence of the kingdom of heaven that required humble eyes of faith”.<sup>24)</sup> “These things”<sup>25)</sup> (Mat 11:25) are disclosed to the “infants” and concealed from “the wise and intelligent”. The fact that God’s revelation is provided to the infants rather than the wise has a certain novelty because “wisdom was viewed as God’s endowment on the wise rather than the foolish”.<sup>26)</sup> Therefore, it is important to know the character of the infants who are the receivers of God’s revelation and the elected by his good pleasure. The “infants” are persons who are disregarded and poor and childlike, and so at this point we can find two characteristics in them: they are “dependent” and “innocently receptive”. These characteristics make them depend on God and easily receive his revelation. The infant metaphor, therefore, implies “the lowly and teachable” and shows both “receptiveness to God’s revelation and the marginal and vulnerable social locations in which the desperate live”.<sup>27)</sup> This is the reason that God elects the “infants” rather than the wise who are arrogant and have no need of God.<sup>28)</sup>

The revelation is given to those whom Jesus chose (v. 27), but the invitation is opened to “all” (πάντες; v. 28). The invitation is directly connected to discipleship

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22) Archibald M. Hunter, “Crux Criticorum-Matt 11:25-30: A Re-appraisal”, *New Testament Studies* 8 (1962), 241. Though the significance is seen in the many arguments over the origin and source of this passage, the most important issue is that it forms unique and intertwined Matthean theology: election, revelation, christology, discipleship, and eschatology.

23) Hagner says the noun, εὐδοκία (good pleasure), refers to God’s “gracious elective will” following the opinion of Schweizer. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 319.

24) Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 421.

25) R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 198. In v. 25, the noun, ταῦτα (“these things”), which is the object of hiding and revealing, may directly indicate Jesus’ deeds in previous passages (11:2, 19) that form the answer to the question of John the Baptist, and show the whole significance of Jesus’ mission.

26) Senior refers to Dan 2:20-21 and 4Ez 12:35-38 to show God’s endowment of “wisdom” to the wise rather than the foolish. See Donald Senior, *Matthew*, 132.

27) Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 257-258.

28) The wise and intelligent, here, do not refer to the persons who have academic abilities and intellectual powers.

in following Jesus, and the promise of rest is provided by him. Jesus' calling to discipleship requires that one takes the yoke which he provides and learns from him. The yoke metaphor implies the "overwhelming nomism of the Pharisees", namely, the burden of religious regulation from Pharisaism rather than the law itself.<sup>29)</sup> The yoke also symbolizes "Israel's subjection to foreign oppression" in the background of the OT (Lam 5:5; Lev 26:13; cf. Exo 6:6-8).<sup>30)</sup>

There are two reasons people should take Jesus' yoke and learn from him: the first is due to the character of Jesus himself (Mat 11:29) and the second is the distinctive quality of Jesus' yoke (v. 30). Jesus declares himself to be "meek", and "humble in heart". Jesus says that the "meek" are blessed in Matthew 5:5 and instructs that whoever humbles himself like a little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (18:4).<sup>31)</sup> Jesus himself is the person who is blessed and the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, so he invites people to the blessing and to the kingdom of heaven. Jesus demands people to take his yoke and learn from him, but he explains the reason of his request that his yoke is easy and light. Jesus' yoke, however, has more demands than that of the Pharisees because his discipleship requires total commitment and self-denial. Only the coming of the new era of grace by Jesus and his Spirit make the easy and light yoke possible.<sup>32)</sup>

Jesus calls people who suffer from laboring and bearing burdens in their physical and spiritual lives and he promises rest to those who respond to his invitation to discipleship. The word κοπιῶντες (wearied/labor: 11:28) means "beatings, weariness, physical tiredness from work or heat or battle."<sup>33)</sup> Therefore, this word means the human destiny under the "oppressive labor and sorrow" that can be cured by God.<sup>34)</sup> In the OT the rest that God promised (Jer

29) Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 324. The law is described as joy for the pious Israelite (cf. Psa 119).

30) Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 423.

31) Donald Senior, *Matthew*, 134.

32) Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 325; Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 425.

33) Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 259. The verb, κοπιᾶω, has two meanings "to become weary/tired" and "to exert oneself physically, mentally, or spiritually to work hard, toil, strive, struggle". W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*, Frederick William Danker ed., 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 558.

34) F. Hauck, "κόπος, κοπιᾶω", G. W. Bromiley, trans., G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 827-829.

6:16) Jesus now promises and this rest means a “deep existential peace, a *shalom*, or sense of ultimate well-being with regard to one’s relationship to God and his commandment.”<sup>35)</sup> Therefore, the marginal people expressed as infants are considered as the recipients of God’s revelation and can possess “eschatological blessings” which are realized in the present through Jesus’ mission while participating in his discipleship.<sup>36)</sup>

## 2.2. The Little Ones Who Need to Be Cared For (18:1-14)

The term “little ones” appears in Matthew 10:40-42; 18:1-14; and 25:31-46. The little ones in these passages primarily refer to the disciples in church, but also may generally indicate all lowly people, because Jesus’ teaching consequently applies to those who are in need. In his discussion on 25:31-46, Leon Morris correctly notes as follows:

Two ways of understanding *the least of these my brothers* have won wide acceptance. One is to bear in mind that elsewhere Jesus’ brothers are his disciples (12:48-49; 28:10); Jesus may be asserting that the test will be the way people have reacted toward his lowly followers ... This accords with such teachings as that on giving a cup of water to the “little ones” (10:42; cf. also 18:6, 10, 14) ... The other is to say that brothers include anyone in need; in this case the test is the way they behaved toward lowly people in general ... The former is probably the way we should understand the words, but that does not give the follower of Jesus license to do good deeds to fellow Christians but none to outsiders. Such an attitude is foreign to the teachings of Jesus. Everyone in need is to be the object of Christian benevolence.<sup>37)</sup>

In particular, we can know the social state of the little ones especially in this passage. The parable of the sheep and the goats shows that the criteria of the final judgment depend on whether to give or not something to eat to the one of the least when he was hungry, something to drink when he was thirsty, to invite him in when he was a stranger, to clothe him when he needed clothes, to look

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35) Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 324.

36) *Ibid.*, 325.

37) Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1992), 639.

after him when he was sick, and to visit him when he was in prison. The little ones, therefore, are those who were suffering from social, economic, cultural, and physical hardship.

Among these three passages, I choose 18:1-14 to explain the meaning of “little ones” because this passage includes not only “little ones” but also “child” which I previously hold up as an example of presenting the concept of marginality in Matthew’s narrative. Chapter 18, the fourth major discourse in Matthew, deals with “the theme of churchly brotherhood”<sup>38)</sup> and is divided into two parts: “concerns for ‘little ones’” (18:1-14); and “brotherliness of forgiving sins” (18:15-35). The first section of this chapter shows the movement of the word from “child” (παἰδίον: vv. 2-5) to “little ones” (μικροί: vv. 6, 10, 14).<sup>39)</sup> According to Harrington, “the realistic use of the term ‘child’ in 18:2 soon yields to metaphorical applications as the text proceeds.”<sup>40)</sup> This section consists of two units: “the greatest is humble like a child in the kingdom of heaven” (18:1-5); and “caring for the ‘little ones’” (18:6-14).

The discourse in this chapter originates from the disciples’ question: “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” The query does not indicate “greatness among Jesus’ disciples”, but “greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>41)</sup> According to Harrington, the Essene community at Qumran is helpful to understand this passage:

The disciples’ question about greatness in the kingdom of heaven (18:1) is appropriate for a community in which social status was taken seriously. The Qumran community was highly structured; at ceremonies (1QS 2:19-25) and assemblies (6:8-13) a hierarchical order of priests, Levites, and the “many” was strictly observed: ‘And no man shall go down from the place he must occupy, nor raise himself above the place to which his lot assigns him’ (1QS 2:23). The appendix to the Community Rule (1QSa) suggests that the hierarchical order observed at the community’s meal was understood to be an anticipation or prefigurement of what would happen with the coming of God’s kingdom.<sup>42)</sup>

Jesus responds to the issue that the qualification for entering the kingdom of

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38) Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew*, 358.

39) Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 265.

40) Ibid.

41) Ibid., 266.

42) Ibid.

heaven is to become childlike and this means humility. Those who show humbleness like little children are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Mat 18:3, 4). His reply is a challenging one to the cultural and social conventions of first century Judaism. The child is here used as a metaphor to express social insignificance rather than sinlessness.<sup>43)</sup> Humility as the characteristic of the child is understood in the aspect of “the child’s weakness, defenseless, and vulnerability.”<sup>44)</sup> In verse 4, the verb ταπεινόςω (“to humble”) which characterizes children may also refer to “the smallness of children” because the root ταπεινο- primarily means “low.”<sup>45)</sup> So the little children as symbol are those who are low, insignificant, powerless, and suffer in their poverty.<sup>46)</sup> At that time, children were regarded as follows:

It is important to remember here the negative social situation of children in antiquity. Children were not full human beings with their own integrity but incomplete (νήπιοι) beings who needed to be trained ... That, as is well known, the word and παῖς and παιδίον can also mean “slave,” says a great deal about the legal standing of children, who were subject to the unlimited authority of their fathers. The point of comparison for our logion is thus first of all children’s physical size, then also their powerlessness and their social standing.<sup>47)</sup>

According to Ulrich Luz, the lowliness of children, therefore, not only means an “internal attitude” of humility, but also indicates “external conditions” of low social status.<sup>48)</sup> In v. 5, Jesus identifies himself with a little child in saying that those who welcome a little child in his name are to welcome him. In this manner, Jesus endows the insignificant persons in the community with their importance regardless of social status.<sup>49)</sup>

A little child as symbol is shifted to the “little ones” (v. 6).<sup>50)</sup> The transition is

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43) Ibid., 265.

44) Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 613.

45) Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, James E. Crouch, trans, Helmut Koester, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 428.

46) Ibid.

47) Ibid.

48) Ibid., 429.

49) R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 679

50) Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 266.

intentional because it shows that a little child who is welcomed is none other than a Christian who is regarded as nobody in the church.<sup>51)</sup> The phrase “who believe in me”, which modifies “these little ones”, implies that these little ones are disciples,<sup>52)</sup> i.e., “Christians in the church.”<sup>53)</sup> The little ones are, therefore, those who need the concern and care of the community.

Jesus warns against causing one of little ones to stumble (v. 6). R. T. France argues that the translation of the verb σκανδαλίζω as “cause to sin” is too specific and better translation may be “cause to stumble”; “cause to lose their faith” is also good one.<sup>54)</sup> Causing a person to sin is one means of causing him to stumble.<sup>55)</sup> In a broad meaning, leading persons to stumble is to obstruct the growth of faith by losing their heart through disregard, or by unfair treatment due to their social status, or by indifference of pastoral care.<sup>56)</sup> Therefore, in order not to build stumbling blocks to little ones, it is required for one to take “belittling action”.<sup>57)</sup> The gravity of warnings against those who cause a little one to stumble is expressed by employing the word οὐαί (woe).<sup>58)</sup>

In verse 10, the little ones should not be looked down on because their angels in heaven are always in front of God in heaven. This shows how much the little ones are important to God.<sup>59)</sup> According to C. C. Rowland, the little ones have the “particular privilege” that their angels stand close and have immediate access to God, just as infants in 11:25 have a special capacity to receive God’s revelation which is hidden from the wise and learned.<sup>60)</sup> The significance and preciousness of the little ones are shown in the parable of the lost sheep (vv. 10-14). This

51) Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 520.

52) “The phrase ‘one of these little ones’ has been used at 10:42 in a related way... In 10:42, the phrase is modified by ‘as a disciple’ (εἰς ὄνομα μαθητοῦ), here by ‘who believes in me’. In both cases, a disciple whose discipleship operates at a modest level is in view; and in both cases there is explicit or implicit contrast with more substantial ‘representatives of the kingdom’”. See John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 735.

53) Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 520.

54) R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 681.

55) *Ibid.*, 681-682.

56) *Ibid.*, 682.

57) Rollin G. Grams, “Not ‘Leaders’ but ‘Little Ones’ in the Father’s Kingdom: The Character of discipleship in Matthew’s Gospel”, *Transformation* 21 (2004), 117-118.

58) Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 522.

59) R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 685.

60) Christopher C. Rowland, “Apocalyptic, the Poor, and the Gospel of Matthew”, *Journal of Theological Studies* 45 (1994), 511.

parable provides the example of pastoral care for the little ones in two aspects: “the certainty of the shepherd searching if one of his sheep becomes lost” (v. 12) and “the shepherd’s greater joy over finding the one lost sheep than over the rest of the flock that is safe” (v. 13).<sup>61)</sup> In verse 14, the expression that “it is not the will before your Father” (οὐκ ἔστιν θέλημα ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν) is a respectful way of indicating what God does.<sup>62)</sup> This parable shows that God’s pastoral care is not to lose any of these little ones.<sup>63)</sup> As Harrington says, this whole passage (18:1-14) depicts “pastoral zeal especially for the marginal (‘little ones’) and the ‘strays’, according to the example of God the Shepherd”.<sup>64)</sup>

### **3. Regional Dimension: Matthew’s Geographical Description Presenting Marginality**

Hertig notes that “Mathew’s preoccupation with geography is a preoccupation with missiological issues of marginality in the context of Jesus’ mission”.<sup>65)</sup> Matthew portrays Jesus’ life against the background of marginal regions. Jesus was born in Bethlehem near Jerusalem (2:1) but grew up in a small town called Nazareth, in Galilee (2:22-23). In the period of Jesus, Nazareth was regarded as “an insignificant village in the hills of Lower Galilee” and was never mentioned “in the OT, Josephus, Philo, or early literature of the rabbis or the OT pseudepigrapha”.<sup>66)</sup> Craig L. Blomberg explains the usage of term “the people of Nazareth” as follows: “‘Nazarene’ was a slang or idiomatic term for an individual from a very remote or obscure place”.<sup>67)</sup> In Acts 24:5, “Nazarene

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61) David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 440.

62) Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 466.

63) Gundry says that there exist the escalation of “little” (10:42; 18:6, 10, 14) to “least” (25:40, 45) which intensifies the emphasis. In the passage 25:31-45, the fact that the least of these brothers are identified with the king implies that “even the least brother in the church represents Christ.” Therefore, caring insignificant people in the church is eventually to minister to Christ himself. See Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew*, 514-515.

64) Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 267.

65) Paul Hertig, “The Multi-ethnic Journeys of Jesus in Matthew: Margin-Center Dynamics”, 24.

66) John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 268.

67) Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 70.

sect” is a scornful way of speech, and in John 1:46, Nathaniel’s question that “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” implies that Nazareth was a place for the disregarded and rejected.<sup>68)</sup> The change of place from Jerusalem to Nazareth is due to the persecutions by the authorities, indicating that the meaning flows from the center to the margin.<sup>69)</sup> God’s salvific works started from the marginal place. In addition, John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by baptizing the people at the Jordan River and preaching the Gospel in the wilderness of Judea. These places are geographically marginalized.<sup>70)</sup>

After Jesus was baptized by John, he publicly started ministering in Galilee. Galilee historically was the site of the Assyrian invasion which deported the Jews from Galilee and opened the way for “a large influx of foreigners, in particular, Canaanites and Sidonians”.<sup>71)</sup> Because many pagan immigrants resided in Galilee after the Assyrian occupation, it was called “Galilee of the nations” or “Gentiles” (Isa 9:1; Mat 4:13, 15-16).<sup>72)</sup> Therefore, there existed diverse ethnic groups in Galilee.<sup>73)</sup> Galileans had an independent spirit due to “periodic invasions, intrusions, and even robberies along its routes”, and they were recognized as warlike people.<sup>74)</sup> As Arthur M. Ross says, “Galilee’s debasement made some of its people feel their need for the Savior”.<sup>75)</sup> Only the Gospel of Matthew depicts the fulfillment of the OT prophecy through geographical explanations: “So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: ‘He will be called a Nazarene’” (2:23); “to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, … Galilee of the Gentiles — the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (4:14-16). The reason for referring to these regions, Nazareth and Galilee, in justifying the fulfillment of the OT prophecy, is that Matthew describes Jesus as the one who lives among the marginalized and will save them from their suffering.<sup>76)</sup>

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68) Paul Hertig, “The Multi-ethnic Journeys of Jesus in Matthew: Margin-Center Dynamics”, 24.

69) Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 89.

70) *Ibid.*, 92.

71) Paul Hertig, “The Multi-ethnic Journeys of Jesus in Matthew: Margin-Center Dynamics”, 25.

72) Arthur M. Ross, “Galilee”, Merrill C. Tenney and J. D. Douglas, et al., eds., *New International Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 368.

73) Paul Hertig, “The Multi-ethnic Journeys of Jesus in Matthew: Margin-Center Dynamics”, 25.

74) *Ibid.*

75) Arthur M. Ross, “Galilee”, 368

76) Paul Hertig, “The Multi-ethnic Journeys of Jesus in Matthew: Margin-Center Dynamics”, 25.

## 4. Social Dimension: Portrayal of Marginal Groups in Matthew's Narrative

### 4.1. Women

In the words of Jane Kopas, when we read the Gospel of Matthew, we can discover that “Matthew struggles to incorporate women moving from the periphery to greater public involvement and from being victims and survivors to being disciples and leaders”.<sup>77)</sup> Like men, women also remained and shared in the Jewish tradition, but their public status was low and insignificant in a Jewish community and society.<sup>78)</sup> Women were not treated with importance and so they were marginalized. Though they were “insiders” in that they held Jewish heritage in common, they were “outsiders” in that they were marginalized in their community: women are, therefore, “inside outsiders”.<sup>79)</sup> The Gospel of Matthew shows that women who are regarded as peripheral play an important role to manifest and spread the good new of Jesus.

In the beginning of the Gospel, the genealogy of Jesus is recorded. Matthew denotes Jesus as the son of David and Abraham (1:1) and shows the royal line of the genealogy (1:2-17). However, in the lineage, five women are introduced and these records are “both unnecessary and unusual” in Jewish genealogies.<sup>80)</sup> Four of them (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba), except Mary the mother of Jesus, are believed to have had extramarital relations and illegitimate children.<sup>81)</sup> If so, why did the author unnecessarily insert the names of four women who might degrade the dignity of Jesus' genealogy? Blomberg explains it from their marginality as follows: “Jesus is presented as the one who will ignore human labels of legitimacy and illegitimacy to offer his gospel of salvation to all, including the most despised and outcast of society. A question for the church to ask itself in any age is how well it is visibly representing this commitment to

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77) Jane Kopas, “Jesus and Women in Matthew”, *Theology Today* 47 (1990), 13.

78) *Ibid.*, 13-14.

79) *Ibid.* Kopas argues that “Matthew's Gospel shows the way that ‘outside’ insiders begin to make a contribution to the future of the church”.

80) Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 55.

81) Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: a Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 33.

reach out to the oppressed and marginalized of society with the good news of salvation in Christ”.<sup>82)</sup> These women are also described as survivors or as the participants in “salvation of others”.<sup>83)</sup> The illegal pregnancy of Tamar by her father-in-law means the reclamation of her rights from the irresponsibility of her father-in-law (Gen 38); Rahab saves her family in front of a brutal battle (Jos 2); Ruth accomplishes her vision in seeking out Boaz (Rut 1); and Bathsheba became the mother of David’s successor in spite of her husband’s death by the order of David (2Sa 11).<sup>84)</sup> Moreover, Matthew locates Mary in a significant place in the genealogy. While Luke finds Jesus’ lineage from Joseph, Matthew discovers it from Mary. Matthew describes Mary as “a key figure in the process of salvation”.<sup>85)</sup>

However, many of the stories of Matthew’s Gospel are full of violence, from Jesus’ birth to his death<sup>86)</sup> and women became the center of sorrow and sufferings. Rachel’s weeping for her children (Mat 2:18) in the beginning of the Gospel, and the prediction of woe for the pregnant and nursing mothers (24:19-22) at the end, create a tone of grief for the entire Gospel.<sup>87)</sup> In these circumstances, women exerted themselves to overcome violence and persecutions and their faith made it possible. According to Marla J. Selvidge, three women are highly praised in the Gospel for their faith: the hemorrhaging woman (9:18-26), the Canaanite woman (15:21-28), and the anointing woman (26:6-13).<sup>88)</sup> The dynamic faith of the hemorrhaging woman was communicated to Jesus, and she received his power. The persistent faith of the Canaanite woman who was a Gentile was praised by Jesus: “How great is your faith” (15:28). The sincere faith of the anointing woman made it possible to foresee the passion of Jesus and to prepare for his death. Though women who were vulnerable and weak at that time had to experience violence, persecutions, ignorance, and inhospitality in society, they did not remain themselves under these social irregularities and oppressions. Their faith broke through adversities and they received the power

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82) Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 56.

83) Jane Kopas, “Jesus and Women in Matthew”, 14.

84) *Ibid.*

85) *Ibid.*, 15.

86) Marla J. Selvidge, “Violence, Woman, and the Future of the Matthean Community: A Redactional Critical Essay”, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 39 (1984), 213-217.

87) *Ibid.*, 214.

88) *Ibid.*, 215.

from Jesus to solve their problems. In the Gospel of Matthew, women become the positive models of how sincere faith should be.

In Jesus' teaching, women are not regarded as valueless or neglected ones. Jesus' attitude to divorce and adultery (5:27-32) implies that the dignity and rights of women should be protected and improved: even the lustful mind commits adultery, and a man's divorce of his wife is not legitimated except on the grounds of sexual immorality.<sup>89)</sup> When Jesus speaks about the resurrection (22:23-33), "sexual prejudice is dissolved in light of an ultimate equality"<sup>90)</sup>: "At the resurrection, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven" (22:30). From the viewpoint of the Kingdom of God, women who are marginalized in this world do not need to find their identity from submission to men anymore,<sup>91)</sup> but rather establish themselves as independent subjects to respond Jesus' commands and discipleship.

#### 4.2. Gentiles

Matthew's Gospel describes the Gentiles in both positive and negative aspects. For the favorable references, the Gospel begins by including the Gentile women in the opening genealogy (1:1-17)<sup>92)</sup> and finishes by commanding the mission to Gentiles (28:18-20). The first visitors and worshipers of infant Jesus were none other than Gentiles, namely the magi from the east (2:1-12). Their faithfulness and eagerness to see new-born king was highlighted in contrast with the insincere attitudes of Jewish leaders: while the Gentile magi have traveled from a long distance to find Jesus in following a faint sign, the Jewish leaders do not show any endeavor to go the five miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to meet the infant king despite having important sources about the place where the Christ would be born.<sup>93)</sup>

In two miracles, Jesus highly praised the faith of Gentiles. First, the centurion

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89) Jane Kopas, "Jesus and Women in Matthew", 13.

90) Ibid., 16

91) Ibid.

92) Rahab and Ruth had the Gentile status in no doubt, and Tamar was regarded as a Gentile in later Jewish tradition, but Bathsheba was not explicitly identified as a Gentile. See David C. Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 57 (1995), 22.

93) Gene R. Smillie, "'Even the Dogs': Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 (2002), 85.

who was an officer of the Roman army showed his obedient and desperate faith in Jesus (8:5-13) for healing his servant. Jesus spoke to his followers about the centurion's faith (v. 10) and it seems that Matthew intended the readers of the Gospel to have this faith in mind.<sup>94)</sup> The insertion of verses 11-12 in the story — “many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness” — indicates the severe warning against the Jews<sup>95)</sup> and implies that “the true sons of the kingdom are now those who respond to the proclamation of Jesus”.<sup>96)</sup> It proves that Gentiles could become the sons and daughters of God in response to their faith in Jesus' calling.

Secondly, the request of the Canaanite woman for the exorcism of her daughter (15:21-28) was accepted by Jesus because of her persistent faith. She, as a Canaanite, was the cursed and marginalized one in the Israel's worldview.<sup>97)</sup> Israelites considered themselves to be the elected and unique people who would receive God's blessings, and so it was impossible for them to think that a Canaanite woman could receive God's gifts. She, however, resisted this distorted, biased, and excluding ideology and forcefully, yet through submission to Jesus, demanded to be included in God's blessing.<sup>98)</sup> Though Jesus, at first, rejected her request with sardonic language, he saw her faith and then healed her daughter's illness with the commendation that her faith was great (15:28). The Gentiles, who were considered isolated from God's blessings, became the blessed persons who can receive the Kingdom of God.

However, there are also unfavorable references to the Gentiles in Matthew's Gospel. Gentile religious practice of praying in babbling (6:7) was condemned by Jesus and persecutions occurred at the hands of the Gentiles (10:18). Those who refused to listen to the church were treated as Gentiles (18:17) and Jesus rejected the hierarchical nature of Gentile society (20:25). The author of the Gospel of Matthew did not accept the value systems of the Gentile society and disallowed their religious practices.<sup>99)</sup>

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94) Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press 1993), 91.

95) Ibid.

96) Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 206.

97) Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 321.

98) Ibid.

99) Ibid., 86.

From both the positive and negative viewpoint of the Gentiles, we can conclude that they are the object of mission. Though the evil structure of society and the sinful practice of religions in the Gentile world must be denied, the Gentiles themselves should not be excluded from the Kingdom of God. The Israelites isolated the Gentiles from God's blessing, but the Israelites' egoistic faith inversely isolated them from God's salvific purpose for the world. The Gentiles who were marginalized from the Israelites' worldview became true people of God through faith in the Kingdom of God. As Smillie says, "the Jewish Messiah extends the benefits of the kingdom to those whom one normally thinks to be utterly outside its purview, even Gentiles, if only they have faith in him".<sup>100)</sup>

### 4.3. The Poor

In the OT, the poor were the object of protection against exploitation, and the law and prophets required the Israelites to give assistance to them.<sup>101)</sup> The poor were the persons who suffer from economic hardship. However, in many psalms,<sup>102)</sup> the expression "Hear me God, because I'm poor and needy" does not indicate economic destitution, but refers to oppression by the wicked, suffering from illness, guilty feelings due to past sins or a humble mind before God.<sup>103)</sup> The poor, in this case, are the persons who seek out and trust in God.

In Jesus' days, poverty can be understood in three different dimensions – "material, social, and spiritual."<sup>104)</sup> In first century Palestine, the economy was based on agriculture and material poverty might come from natural disaster, external invasion, landowners' extortion, and so on.<sup>105)</sup> The poor were trapped in a vulnerable social position in which they were treated unfairly and exploited severely by others.<sup>106)</sup> Because the poor were powerless to overcome their

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100) Gene R. Smillie, "'Even the Dogs': Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew", 96.

101) Hans Kvalbein, "Jesus and the Poor: Two Texts and a Tentative Conclusion", *Themelios* 12 (1987), 81.

102) "I am poor and needy" (Psa 40:17; 70:5; 81:6; 109:22): James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, Christianity in the Making vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 519.

103) Hans Kvalbein, "Jesus and the Poor", 81.

104) James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 517.

105) *Ibid.*

106) *Ibid.*

situations, they spiritually longed for God’s help and depended on his power.<sup>107)</sup>

According to James D. G. Dunn, Matthew seems to have centered on the Jewish tradition concerning the poor—“the poor as those who, having nothing in their own possession on which to rely, trust only in God”.<sup>108)</sup> Matthew, unlike Luke, connects poverty with spirituality in the beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit … (Mat 5:3)”; “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst<sup>109)</sup> for righteousness … (5:6)”.<sup>110)</sup> The poor will be filled and theirs is the kingdom of heaven. They, therefore, are “the receivers the gospel or kingdom”.<sup>111)</sup> When John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus in order to ask him whether he was the one to come or not, Jesus answered like this: “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (11:5).<sup>112)</sup> These miracles imply that Jesus is the fulfiller of the OT, and the Messianic era has come through his ministry for the weak in society.<sup>113)</sup> The fact that the good news is preached to the poor, not the rich, indicates that the poor are the powerful receiver of the Gospel.

In addition, when Jesus was tempted by Satan to change the stones to bread, Jesus responded against Satan’s request through the full quotation of Deuteronomy 8:3, “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mat 4:4), whereas Luke cited just the first part of this clause, “Man does not live by bread alone” (Luk 4:4). Matthew suggests that satisfaction cannot be found in the secular value system of materialism, but in the word of God.<sup>114)</sup> Matthew shows an understanding of the poor within “the traditional Jewish law and spirituality of poverty.”<sup>115)</sup>

Matthew, however, does not simply understand poverty as a spiritual ideology. When a rich young man came up to Jesus in order to ask what good thing he must do to get eternal life, Jesus answered him to keep the law (Mat

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107) Ibid.

108) Ibid., 524-525: Luke concentrates more on material impoverishment rather than spiritual meaning of poverty.

109) “Those who hunger and thirst” can be regarded as the poor.

110) James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 525.

111) Hans Kvalbein, “Jesus and the Poor”, 80.

112) Matthew quoted Isa 61:1 and 35:5-6 to prove that Jesus is the one to come, the Messiah.

113) Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 300-301.

114) James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 525.

115) Ibid.

19:16-22). The young man said that he has kept all commandments. Jesus replied, “If you want to be perfect, you should sell your property and give it to the poor and follow me.” This is the actual “challenges to renunciation of goods”<sup>116)</sup> in order to help the poor. Despite the warning against serving both God and Money (6:24), the young man could not give up his possessions.<sup>117)</sup> With the warning against wealth, this story tells us that true discipleship is realized in the actual renunciation of possessions in order to serve the poor.

The poor were described with the terms “the least” and “little ones”.<sup>118)</sup> In the parable of the sheep and the goats (25:31-46), “the least”<sup>119)</sup> of these brothers (25:40, 45) refers to the marginalized people in the discipleship community and implies their situation of social and economic marginality: they were the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, strangers, prisoners, and those who needed clothes.<sup>120)</sup> Jesus identified himself with the lower classes (25:40) and helped them in order to restore their dignity as human beings created by God. Matthew, however, did not describe them just as miserable ones, but as the potential people who can receive the Gospel and the Kingdom of God.<sup>121)</sup> According to Francis Orborji, “the kinds of poverty and the mechanism of impoverishment which are operative in Jesus’ time and which he condemns have neither human nor religious values.”<sup>122)</sup> Under unequal social structures, poverty always exists because it is the source of wealth for the rich.<sup>123)</sup> Though the poor are the receivers of the

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116) Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 281.

117) Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 389.

118) Schuyler Brown, “Faith, the Poor and the Gentiles: A Tradition-Historical Reflection on Matthew 25:31-46”, *Toronto Journal of Theology* 6 (1990), 177.

119) “The least” are the same with “little ones” who means the disciples in 10:42 and this word is an intensive form of “little ones.” “The least” in this parable especially indicate “the marginalized community of disciples”. See Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 496. In the phrase of “one of the least of these brothers of mine” in 25:40, it is important to know who “these brothers” are. According to Wilkins, five options are suggested: “(1) *All needy persons in humanity*; (2) *All Christians*; (3) *Christian missionaries*; (4) *Jewish Christians*; (5) *Tribulation martyrs*.” Among them, Wilkins argues the second option is most probable and “the least” refers to needy disciples who are “often the ones who are excluded from care – attention is often wrongfully diverted to prominent members of the discipleship community”. See Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 810-811.

120) Schuyler Brown, “Faith, the Poor and the Gentiles”, 177.

121) Hans Kvalbein, “Jesus and the Poor: Two Texts and a Tentative Conclusion”, 80.

122) Francis A. Orborji, “Poverty and the Mission-Charity Trend: a Perspective from Matthew”, *International Review of Mission* 91 (2002), 89.

123) Francis A. Orborji, “Poverty and the Mission-Charity Trend”, 91.

Gospel, they should not remain in their unjust state. In this story of the final judgment in the eschatological discourse (25:31-46), the criteria of judgment are “concrete acts of compassion to those in particular need.”<sup>124)</sup> The motif of reward according to what one has done in the will of God (16:27) is manifested “in terms of the way people have responded to the human needs of ‘these my smallest brothers and sisters.’”<sup>125)</sup> This story gives us a strong admonition to concretely aid the poor in our lives and informs us that this is the basis of judgment in doing the will of God.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has examined how the Gospel of Matthew delivers the meaning of marginality in terms of “infants” and “little ones” and discloses the traits of marginality through geographical portraits. In addition, three marginalized groups, namely women, the Gentiles, and the poor, are presented in order to demonstrate how the marginalized are understood in the Gospel of Matthew and are accepted as the people of the kingdom of God.

The marginalized are not only the receivers of God’s revelation and but also the recipients of the eschatological blessing of God. The reason is that the image of the marginalized which is expressed as “the infants” (or little children) shows that they are dependent and receptive (11:25-27). Jesus calls the marginalized to discipleship and requires that they take his yoke and learn from him, and at the same time he promises that they will receive the rest which is given to people in the coming of the new era of grace (11:28-30). The marginalized expressed as “little ones” are also those who need special care because of their lower status and circumstantial hardship (18:1-14; 25:31-46). As Jesus identifies himself with one of the least, pastoral care for the marginalized is to lower oneself to the same status as the marginalized.

Matthew describes Jesus as marginalized in his life and ministry through the marginality of geographical settings. The OT prophecy is fulfilled through geographical explanations, especially Nazareth and Galilee (2:23; 4:14-16).

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124) John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 735.

125) R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 959.

Therefore, geographical marginality presents that the Messiah will come as a marginalized person, live with them, minister to them, and save them.

Though women as one of the marginal groups were insignificant in society in Jesus' day, Matthew describes women as an example of faith. Women's sincere and strong faith appears in the Gospel of Matthew and they overcome the difficulties with their faith. They also play an important role in the spreading of the good news of Jesus as witnesses. The Gentiles who are regarded as marginalized from God's blessings now participate in his blessings and become his people through faith. Matthew understood the poor in the Jewish tradition and spiritual aspect. In 11:5, the good news is given to the poor according to the promise of the OT and this means that the Messiah will come in order to minister to the marginal poor. However, the obligation to help the poor is a strong requirement for the Christians in the parable of the sheep and the goats which describes the final judgment.

The Gospel of Matthew has a deep concern for the marginalized and requires that we live as the marginalized in humbleness and to serve them as we serve Jesus. Martin Walton properly said as follows: "Attributing priority to the margins is the manner in which the church seeks its own unity and the unity of humanity. The location and vocation of the church in the world is thus similarly defined in terms of its attention to the margins."<sup>126</sup>)

<Keywords>

Matthew, marginality, infants, little ones, marginal region, marginal groups.

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126) Martin Walton, *Marginal Communities: the Ethical Enterprise of the Followers of Jesus* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Pub. House, 1994), 242.

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<Abstract>

## **Reading Matthew from the Perspective of Marginality**

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The purpose of this paper is to suggest how to read the Gospel of Matthew from the perspective of marginality. Though this Gospel generally tends to be read and studied with a focus on the themes of kingship and kingdom compared with those of David, Matthew narrates that God's salvific works to deliver and rule over the world are performed by revealing his will to marginalized people and giving them a mission to preach the gospel. Marginality is deeply rooted and characterized in this Gospel and the Kingdom of God and his sovereign power are exposed to the world on the basis of marginality. Looking at the history of God's salvation, it is clear that God has given marginalized people a role in transforming the world. In the time of the Old Testament, Israel was not a central nation of the world, but rather a marginal one that had been oppressed by powerful nations. God, however, chose Israel in order to show his will to redeem the sinful world. God's way of salvation is not the same as the world's. God's salvific revelation climaxed in sending his son, Jesus Christ, to the world. Jesus, however, did not come as a central figure. He came as a marginal one. Jesus identified himself with the marginalized, worked for them, and died on their behalf. Therefore, we need to discover the nature and traits of marginality in the Matthew's Gospel and to know how he portrays the marginal circumstances and the marginalized people in his narrative.

For this study, I investigate marginality in three dimensions: conceptual, regional, and social. First, in a conceptual dimension, the meaning and characteristics of marginality can be explained in the two passages (Mat 11:25-30 and 18:1-14) in terms of God's revelation to marginalized people and Jesus' identification with those who need to be cared for. Second, in a regional dimension, Matthew's unique description of geography presents marginality in relation to regional discrimination. Only Matthew notes the fulfillment of the OT prophecy through geographical explanations, especially Nazareth and Galilee (2:23; 4:14-16), which tell us that the Messiah comes from a marginal

region as a marginalized person who live with them, minister to them, and save them. Finally, in a social dimension, Matthew shows deep concerns for groups of marginalized people such as women, the Gentiles, and the poor. Christianity comes from marginality and its identity is based on marginality. Reading Matthew's Gospel from the perspective of marginality will help us to understand the origin and nature of Christianity.