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## Mistaken Identities but Model Faith: Rereading the Centurion, the Chap, and the Christ in Matthew 8:5-13

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In the history of modern Matthean scholarship, interpretations of Matt 8:5-13 have generally been straightforward. The Roman centurion demonstrates his "great faith" with his "impressive" analogy of Jesus' identity and authority; as a result, the centurion receives from Jesus a healing for his beloved "servant." The significance of this episode has to do with, among other things, another demonstration of Jesus' authority (7:28-29), as well as another foreshadowing of either the incorporation of the Gentiles or the replacement of the Jews by Gentiles in God's kin-dom (8:11-12). The dominance of this interpretation can be seen in its implementation on the part of critics otherwise separated by various kinds of "divides," such as race/ethnicity, gender, ideology, theology, and/or methodology.<sup>1</sup>

In this article, we contend that the dominant interpretation of Matt 8:5-13 is built on two mistakes or mistaken identities.<sup>2</sup> The first mistake has to do with the identity of the person on whose behalf the centurion approaches Jesus. The second has to do with the centurion's understanding (based on his own self-identification) of the identity of Jesus. In the process of clarifying these two mistakes or (mis)understandings, we will consider how our alternative interpretation of this episode would correspond to other aspects of the Gospel of Matthew as well as what it would connote for future Matthean research.

### I. More than a Servant, Other than a Son

Our first task is to demonstrate the plausibility of reading the centurion's παῖς as his "boy-love" within a pederastic relationship. We first consider the semantic field within which Matthew deploys the word παῖς. We will then turn to examine the use of παῖς in Greco-Roman culture, especially Roman military culture, to designate the "beloved" in a pederastic relationship.

The dominance of identifying the centurion's παῖς as "servant" can also be seen not only in its "popularity"

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 157-59; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (trans. David E. Green; Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 211-16; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 140-47; Richard A. Edwards, *Matthew's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 26-27; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 63, 151; Daniel Patte, *The Gospel according to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 113-15; Elaine Wainwright, *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel according to Matthew* (BZNW 60; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 113, 232 n. 44, 243; David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel* (Reading the New Testament; New York: Crossroad, 1993), 94-97; Janice Capel Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web: Over, and Over, and Over Again* (JSNTSup 91; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 184; Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (CSHJ; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 70-72, 171, 196; Mark Allan Powell, *God With Us: A Pastoral Theology of Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 36; Emily Cheney, *She Can Read: Feminist Reading Strategies for Biblical Narrative* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 77-78, 85-86, 115; J. Andrew Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel according to Matthew* (New Testament in

Context; Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 113-19; Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 136-37; Donald Senior, *Matthew* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 98-99; Grace Imathiu, *Matthew's Message: Good News for the New Millennium* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 58-59; Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 200-204; and Musa Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), 131, 136.

<sup>2</sup> Mistaken identities form part of the plot in many Hellenistic novels; see Robert Alter, *Canon and Creativity: Modern Writing and the Authority of Scripture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 93.

among diverse interpreters but also in practically all “major” English versions of the NT (KJV, RSV, NAB, NASB, NIV, NJB, NRSV, REB), in which this translation is adopted without even a single hint or footnote that alternative understandings may be available.<sup>3</sup> As Raymond

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Williams insightfully points out, however, dominance is hardly ever complete; residual and emergent elements often coexist with whatever is dominant and dominating at the moment.<sup>4</sup> Julian Sheffield follows the dominant interpretation but wonders aloud about the specific relations between the centurion and his “servant” that would cause the former, a Roman imperial army officer, to seek help from a colonized Jew.<sup>5</sup> Amy-Jill Levine and Ulrich Luz argue explicitly that the centurion comes to Jesus on behalf of his “son” rather than his “servant.”<sup>6</sup> Three main considerations support this argument:

- (1) Matthew has the centurion use the word παῖς to refer to his loved one, but uses a different word, δοῦλος, to refer to his servant or slave in v. 9;
- (2) Matthew uses the word παῖς elsewhere (2:16; 17:18) to refer to a child rather than a servant; and
- (3) 8:5-13 seems to parallel three other healing stories in Matthew that involve an unnamed parent coming to Jesus on behalf of a child (9:18-26; 15:21-28; 17:14-20).

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Levine and Luz have given some good reasons for suspecting the validity of translating/interpreting the centurion’s παῖς as his “servant.” For servants or slaves, Matthew’s overwhelming tendency is to use the word δοῦλος (8:9; 10:24, 25; 13:27, 28; 18:23, 26, 27, 28 [twice], 29, 31, 32, 33; 20:27; 21:34, 35, 36; 22:3, 4, 6, 8, 10; 24:45, 46, 48, 49, 50; 25:14, 19, 21, 23, 26, 30; 26:51), although she<sup>7</sup> does use the word διάκονος a couple of times to talk about the ironic relationship between greatness and service (20:26; 23:11). In contrast to these references to servants or slaves by means of δοῦλος, Matthew uses the word παῖς and its diminutive, παιδίον, at least twenty-six times (2:8, 9, 11, 13 [twice], 14, 16, 20 [twice], 21; 8:6, 8, 13; 11:16; 12:18; 14:2, 21; 15:38; 17:18; 18:2, 3, 4, 5; 19:13, 14; 21:15). Out of these twenty-six times, if we may bracket its three occurrences in the passage under consideration, ten of them (all in ch. 2) are used to refer to or used in connection with Jesus as a young boy, and eleven of them are used generically to refer to a child or a group of children. We will return to the two questionable cases (12:18; 14:2) later, but it is so far clear that παῖς and δοῦλος are not synonymous for Matthew. It is particularly important for our purposes to note that Matthew is rather comfortable with using παῖς or δοῦλος repeatedly within a short span (for example, ten appearances of παῖς in 2:9-21, and nine appearances of δοῦλος in 18:23-33). Her use of both words in 8:5-13 must be

<sup>3</sup> The only exception to this, as far as we know, is the NEB, which has the centurion coming to Jesus on behalf of “a boy of mine” (8:6). This translation of the NEB has, of course, now been revised to “my servant” of the REB, although the REB does retain the NEB translation of “the boy” in 8:13. The “translator’s handbook” put out by the United Bible Societies, after a brief discussion of the Greek παῖς, recommends the translation “my servant” or “the man who serves me” (Barclay M. Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew* [New York: United Bible Societies, 1988], 233-34). Translators/interpreters who are favorably disposed toward redaction criticism (particularly the existence of Q) tend to bring into their discussion of this episode the alternative wordings of Luke 7:1-10, where παῖς (7:7) and δοῦλος (7:2, 3, 10) are used interchangeably to refer to the object of the centurion’s care and affection. Many of these same critics suggest, however, that the Matthean version of this tradition is closer to the original.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,” in *The Raymond Williams Reader* (ed. John Higgins; Malden: Blackwell, 2001), 158-78. This “identity question” is certainly not the only one that is being raised concerning the dominant interpretation of Matt 8:5-13. For the sake of illustration, a dissenting voice has also emerged from W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., regarding the focus on Jewish-Gentile relations that tends to result from the dominant interpretation. For Davies and Allison, Matt 8:11-12 has to do with less privileged and more privileged Jews, or Jews who live beyond vis-a-vis those who live within the geographical boundary of Israel (*Commentary on Matthew VIII-XVIII* [vol. 2 of *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991], 24-30). When it comes to the two “mistaken identities” that we want to focus on in this paper, Davies and Allison are in complete agreement with the dominant interpretation.

<sup>5</sup> Julian Sheffield, “The Father in the Gospel of Matthew,” in *A Feminist Companion to Matthew* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 64.

<sup>6</sup> See Amy-Jill Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Social History: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles...”* (Matt. 10:5b) (Lewis-ton: Edwin Mellen, 1988), 108, 119; and Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary* (trans. James E. Crouch; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 8, 10 n. 17. Levine seems to be backing off a bit from this interpretation in her more recent work on Matthew. Instead of clearly articulating and arguing for a father-son relationship between the centurion and his παῖς, she either leaves the question aside (“Discharging Responsi-

bility: Matthean Jesus, Biblical Law, and Hemorrhaging Woman,” in *Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies* (ed. David R. Bauer and Mark Allan Powell; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 381, 394-95) or simply identifies both “servant” and “son” as equally viable alternatives for the latter’s identity (“Matthew,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; exp. ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998], 343; eadem, “Matthew’s Advice to a Divided Readership,” in *The Gospel of Matthew in Current Study: Studies in Memory of William G. Thompson, S.J.* (ed. David Aune; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 29).

<sup>7</sup> The disjunction between the feminine pronoun and the masculine name (Matthew) is our way of reminding ourselves and others that writers of this and other canonical Gospels are anonymous (as were most women in the first century C.E.) rather than famous personalities. See Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *The Insurrection of the Crucified: The “Gospel of Mark” as Theological Manifesto* (Chicago: Exploration, 2003), 2-3.

explained in terms other than synonymy or stylistic variation.<sup>8</sup>

The understanding of παῖς as “son,” however, entails its own share of questions and problems. While “son” (like “servant”) is a lexical possibility for the word παῖς, it is well known among classicists that, around 13 B.C.E., Augustus had legally banned soldiers below the ranks of senatorial and equestrian officers from marrying, and that this ban was lifted either temporarily or permanently by Septimius Severus around 197 C.E.<sup>9</sup> Legal prescriptions or proscriptions tend to

<sup>8</sup> Insisting on translating/interpreting παῖς as “servant” in 8:5-13, Gundry comes up with a couple of rather farfetched explanations for Matthew’s distinctive use of these two words within this short passage (*Matthew*, 142-44). He suggests that the distinction is necessary because the centurion addresses Jesus as “Lord” (κύριε, 8:6, 8), so a distinction must be made between whether the “servant” under consideration is one of the centurion’s servants or one of Jesus’. However, not only does the centurion himself use δοῦλος to refer to *his own* “servant” in 8:9; he also qualifies his use of παῖς with a clear genitive of possession, “my” (ὁ παῖς μου in both 8:6 and 8:8). As if grasping for the last straw, Gundry argues that παῖς in this pericope refers to the paralyzed “servant,” while δοῦλος in 8:9 refers to one who can move about to carry out the centurion’s orders.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Peter Garnsey, “Septimius Severus and the Marriage of Soldiers,” *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 3 (1970): 45-53; J. Brian Campbell, “The Marriage of Soldiers under the Empire,” *JRS* 68 (1978): 153-66; Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 44, 64; and David Cherry, “Soldiers’ Marriages and Recruitment in Upper Germany and Numidia,” *Ancient History Bulletin* 3 (1989): 128-30. It does seem clear, judging from writings by Roman jurists, that this ban was a thing of the past by the third century C.E. . Although we do not actually *have* any extant literary record that refers directly to when and by whom such a ban was issued, we do *have* references to some kind of a marriage prohibition for Roman soldiers in the first and the second century C.E. (Dio Cassius 60.24.3 [that Claudius provided a temporary lifting of the ban in 44 C.E.]; Libanius, *Or.* 2.39-40 [that soldiers of the fourth century C.E., unlike those of earlier times, *have* become weakened by wives and children]), as well as a reference to its cancellation by Severus (Herodian 3.8.5). The existence of such a ban is also well reflected in various Greek papyri from Roman Egypt of the second century C.E. (like the Cattaoui Papyrus, or BGU 140 from Hadrian to Rammius, a prefect of Egypt). The legal illegitimacy of soldiers’ marriages is simply assumed in these papyri; thus we find in them many court disputes regarding the (in)ability of “wives” to (re)claim their “dowries” upon the soldier’s death or separation, or the (in)eligibility of “sons” for Roman citizenship and/or intestate inheritance. To our knowledge, the latest and most complete discussion of this subject can be found in Sara Elise Phang, *The Marriage of Roman Soldiers (13 B.C.–A.D. 235): Law and Family in the Imperial Army* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). For a cross-cultural and cross-temporal discussion of the practice (ancient Roman and twentieth-century C.E. Dutch), see Carol van Driel-Murray, “Gender in Question,” in *Theoretical Roman Archaeology: Second Conference Proceedings* (ed. Peter Rush; Brookfield: Avebury, 1995), 12-16. For general discussions of the roles and reward of centurions, see J. Brian Campbell, *The Roman Army, 31 BC–AD 337: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 48-56; and Lawrence J. Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1998), 170-83.

lag behind historical developments and are hence more often than not different from actual practices, especially if there is a significant divergence between legal and social legitimacy.<sup>10</sup> Even if many Roman soldiers did end up having unofficial “marriage” relations with women and fathering (legally) illegitimate children, Levine and Luz still have to answer the same critique that they make of those who mistake the παῖς as “servant.” If παῖς should not be understood as “servant” because Matthew uses a different word for “servant” in 8:5-13, one must not fail to observe that Matthew also uses a different word for “son(s)” in this episode. As part of his response to the centurion’s suggestion for a “remote control” healing, Matthew’s Jesus uses the word υἱοί rather than a form of παῖς or παιδίον to talk about the “sons of the kingdom” (8:12). Again, if Levine and Luz are correct that one must look at Matthew’s use of the words παῖς and δοῦλος in other parts of the Gospel to decide if those two words are interchangeable, then one must do the same with the words παῖς and υἱός.

If Matthew’s παῖς more often than not means a boy or a child (rather than, say, a servant), does it mean the same thing as υἱός (in the sense of a son)? Mark Golden, a classics scholar, has suggested from his survey of ancient Greek literature that παῖς, even when used to refer to a boy or a child by descent, tends to

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be more generic and aloof; that is, it does not contain the emotional attachment and investment of the word τέκνον.<sup>11</sup> James Barr is correct in his warning against the assumption that biblical writers deploy unique(ly) theological understanding(s) of an otherwise ordinary word;<sup>12</sup> at the same time, one must not fail to pay particular attention to how a specific author uses specific words. Without meaning to imply for a minute that Matthew is a “wooden” writer who knows nothing of ambiguities and synonyms, we do find her to be one who chooses and uses her words rather carefully—at least when it comes to παῖς, δοῦλος, and υἱός. Υἱός appears in Matthew at least ninety times (1:1 [twice], 20, 21, 23, 25; 2:15; 3:17; 4:3,6; 5:9, 45; 7:9; 8:12, 20, 29; 9:6, 15, 27; 10:23, 37; 11:19, 27 [thrice]; 12:8, 23, 27, 32, 40; 13:37, 38 [twice], 41, 55;

<sup>10</sup> For example, we have in Pliny the Younger a centurion petitioning for Roman citizenship for a child who he claims is his biological child (*Ep.* 10.106-7). Many readers may remember at this point that the historical Jesus himself had been rumored to be an illegitimate son of a Roman soldier.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Golden, “PAIS, ‘Child’ and ‘Slave’,” *L’Antiquité Classique* 54 (1985): 95-97.

<sup>12</sup> James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

14:33; 15:22; 16:13, 16, 27, 28; 17:5, 9, 12, 15, 22, 25, 26; 19:28; 20:18, 20 [twice], 21, 28, 30, 31; 21:5, 9, 15, 37 [twice], 38; 22:2, 42 [twice], 45; 23:15, 31, 35; 24:27, 30 [twice], 36, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:2, 24 [twice], 37, 45, 63, 64; 27:9, 40, 43, 54, 56; 28:19); each time the word seems to denote a lineage or relationship of descent (biological or metaphorical) that is absent from Matthew's use of παῖς.<sup>13</sup> A good example is the way Matthew uses υἱός to refer to Jesus in reference to Mary (1:25), but παῖς to refer to Jesus in relationship to Joseph (2:13 [twice], 14, 20 [twice], 21) and the magi (2:8, 9, 11). This difference in connotation— between an emphasis on descent and an emphasis on age— also explains why Matthew switches from putting υἱός in the mouth of the unnamed father (17:15) to using παῖς in the narration of the narrator (17:18).<sup>14</sup> Otherwise, in a way consistent with her use of παῖς and δοῦλος, Matthew has no problem with using υἱός repeatedly within a relatively short span (e.g., seven appearances in 20:18-31 as well as in 24:27-44).

If Matthew's use of παῖς indicates neither "servant" nor "son," what may it mean? There is another meaning of παῖς that is not found in many "standard" lexicons,<sup>15</sup> but it is one that is familiar to most classics scholars. Παις (or παιδικά) is one of the words that is often used to refer to the "beloved," or the

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passive member (usually though not necessarily an adolescent boy) of a same-sex relationship.<sup>16</sup> For instance,

<sup>13</sup> Matthew seems to use τέκνον in the way she uses υἱός rather than in the way she uses παῖς. The word τέκνον appears fourteen times (2:18; 3:9; 7:11; 9:2; 10:21 [twice]; 15:26; 18:25; 19:29; 21:28 [twice]; 22:24; 23:37; 27:25), and it appears consistently to connote descent or kinship rather than to describe a biological or chronological stage in life. Even those who question its use in 9:2, where Jesus addresses the paralytic as τέκνον, must take into consideration how Matthew may hint at lineage by identifying the location of this encounter as Jesus' "own city" (τὴν πόλιν αὐτοῦ, 9: 1).

<sup>14</sup> Matthew does the same with females. To connote , she uses the word θυγάτηρ ("daughter," 9:18, 22; 10:35, 37; 14:6; 15:22, 28; 21:5). To describe a female in terms of age, Matthew uses the word κοράσιον ("girl," 9:24, 25; 14:11). Because of this difference, one will find Matthew using both words in a single episode (9:18-26).

<sup>15</sup> E.g., BADG, 750-51; and LSJ (with rev. suppl., 1996), 1289.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 16-17; Golden, "PAIS," 97 n. 18; and Luc Brisson, *Sexual Ambivalence: Androgyny and Hermaphroditism in Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (trans. Janet Lloyd; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 65. Another word that carries the same meaning or implication is ἐρώμενος (often translated as "beloved"). The suppression of this alternative interpretation is understandable, since studies of same-sex relations, even within the classics, have been given increasing academic legitimacy only within the last twenty years. To our knowledge (at least for publications in English), Tom Horner is the first one who made this suggestion for interpreting Matt 8:5-13 (*Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978], 122), although he does not make any extensive

Marilyn B. Skinner describes the "conventional" παῖς καλός (a "fair" or "lovely boy") as "the toast of the gymnasium, acclaimed by suitors who thronged his doors and decked his house with garlands."<sup>17</sup> Correspondingly, David Fredrick suggests that Callimachus (the chief

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librarian of the library at Alexandria [third century B.C.E.]) not only writes about the παῖς as an object of desire, but presents the παῖς as the embodiment of "desired poetic qualities."<sup>18</sup> We can see this meaning of παῖς from Callimachus's *Epigrams* (an example that will also partly illustrate Skinner's and Fredrick's claims): "Fill the cup and say again 'to Diocles!' And Achelous knows not of his sacred cups. Fair is the boy, O Achelous, and very fair

argument to substantiate that suggestion. The same is true of Michael Gray-Fow, "Pederasty, the Scantian Law, and the Roman Army," *Journal of Psychohistory* 13 (1986): 457; Gerd Theissen, *The Shadow of the Galilean: The Quest of the Historical Jesus in Narrative Form* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 106; and John J. McNeill, *Freedom, Glorious Freedom: The Spiritual Journey to the Fullness of Life for Gays, Lesbians, and Everybody Else* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), 132-36. Donald Madar argues extensively for this identification, but he does so by way of source or traditional criticism of Luke and Q ("The *Entimos Pais* of Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7: 1-10," in *Homosexuality and Religion and Philosophy* (ed. Wayne R. Dynes and Stephen Donaldson; New York: Garland, 1992), 223-35). Most recently, Revelation E. Velunta ("The *Ho Pais Mou* of Matthew 8:5-13: Contesting the Interpretations in the Name of Present-Day *Paides*," *Bulletin for Contextual Theology* 7 [2000]: 25-32) and Thomas D. Hanks (*The Subversive Gospel: A New Testament Commentary of Liberation* (trans. John P. Doner; Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000), 14) make the same claim, referring to Madar. In contrast, we will argue for this identification in Matthew by "study[ing] Matthew in terms of Matthew" (William G. Thompson, "Reflections on the Composition of Mt. 8:1-9:34," *CBQ* 33 [1971]: 366). For publications in other languages that either assert or argue for this interpretation of the παῖς in Matt 8:5-13, see Madar, "*Entimos Pais*," 232 n. 6. For a more detailed discussion of some of this research, see Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *The Man Jesus Loved: Homosexual Narratives from the New Testament* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2003), 131-44. We are indebted also to Ken Stone, our colleague at Chicago Theological Seminary, as well as to an anonymous referee of *JBL* for pointing us to a couple of the references above. Note also that there are various viewpoints among classicists regarding the age of such boy-loves. For instance, Eva Cantarella suggests the general range of twelve to seventeen or eighteen, with the narrower range of fourteen to eighteen as being capable of "choice" (*Bisexuality in the Ancient World* [trans. Cormac Ó. Cuilleain; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992], 36-44). In contrast, A. W. Price argues for the range of fourteen to twenty-one ("Plato, Zeno, and the Object of Love," in *The Sleep of Reason: Erotic Experience and Sexual Ethics in Ancient Greece and Rome* (ed. Martha C. Nussbaum and Juha Sihvola; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 92 n. 1), and Martha C. Nussbaum proposes "the age of a modern college undergraduate" ("Platonic Love and Colorado Law: The Relevance of Ancient Greek Norms to Modern Sexual Controversies," *Virginia Law Review* 80 [1994]: 1551).

<sup>17</sup> Marilyn B. Skinner, "*Ego Mulier*: The Construction of Male Sexuality in Catullus," in *Roman Sexualities* (ed. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 136.

<sup>18</sup> David Fredrick, "Reading Broken Skin: Violence in Roman Elegy," in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Hallett and Skinner, 174-75.

(καλὸς ὁ παῖς, Ἀχελῶε, λίην καλός): and if any denies it, may I alone know how fair he is!" (31).<sup>19</sup> Similar word forms— with or without expressions of beauty and/or desire— are used by Thucydides to refer to the (former) boy-love or boy-favorite of the Spartan king Pausanias (παιδικά ποτε, 1.132.5), as well as by Xenophon to talk about the reason behind many "battles" of and among Greek soldiers ("a handsome boy... that he [a soldier] had set his heart upon" [παιδὸς ἐπιθυμήσας... τῶν εὐπρεπῶν, *Anab.* 4.1.14]; "his son, who was just coming into the prime of youth... Episthenes, however, fell in love with the boy" [τοῦ υἱοῦ ἄρτι ἠβάσκοντος... Ἐπισθένης δὲ ἠράσθη τοῦ παιδός, *Anab.* 4.6.1-3]; "Was it in a fight over a boy?" [ἀλλὰ περὶ παιδικῶν μαχόμενος, *Anab.* 5.8.4-5; "Episthenes... was a lover of boys, and upon seeing a handsome boy, just in the bloom of youth and carrying a light shield... threw his arms around the boy and said: 'It is time, Seuthes, for you to fight it out with me for the boy'" [Ἐπισθένης... παιδεραστής, ὅς ἰδὼν παῖδα καλὸν ἠβάσκοντα ἄρτι πέλιτον ἔχοντα... περιλαβὼν τὸν παῖδα εἶπεν· ὦ Σεύθη, περὶ τοῦδέ μοι διαμάχεσθαι, *Anab.* 7.4.7-11]; "there was a boy of Oreus, an extremely fine lad too" [τινος τῶν Ὀραιτῶν παιδός... μάλα καλοῦ τε κάγαθοῦ, *Hell.* 5.4.57]; "he [Agesilaus] loved Megabates, the handsome son of Spithridates" [Μεγαβάτου τοῦ Σπιθριδάτου παιδὸς ἔρασθέντα, ὥσπερ ἂν τοῦ καλλίστου, *Ages.* 5.4-5]).

For our purposes, Xenophon's example leads us to the important recognition that the kind of pederastic relationship that this use of παῖς implies is, at least discursively, well attested concerning Greco-Roman military in general and Roman centurions in particular.<sup>20</sup> The most well known example from the Greek military traditions is the so-called sacred band (ἱερός λόχος) of the fourth century B.C.E., which allegedly was entirely made up of "lovers and beloveds" (ἔραστοι καὶ ἐρώμενοι [Polyaenus 2.5.1]; ἔραστῶν καὶ ἐρωμένων [Plutarch, *Pel.* 18.1]).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all English translations of Greco-Roman texts are taken from the Loeb Classical Library. English translations of Matthew are our own.

<sup>20</sup> When it comes to ancient Greek pederasty, the conventional scholarly trail tends to focus on its relationship with philosophy and pedagogy; see, e.g., Price, "Plato"; and William Armstrong Percy, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> David Leitao has recently questioned the factuality concerning both the entirely pederastic makeup and the military successes of the "sacred band" ("The Legend of the Sacred Band," in *Sleep of Reason*, ed. Nussbaum and Sihvola, 143-69). We are indebted to Leitao for providing helpful references regarding the pervasive presence (at least discursively speaking) of pederasty within the ancient Greek military. In his mythic epic about the manifest destiny of the Romans (out of the ashes of the Trojans), Virgil includes references to pederastic relationships among both Trojan (Nisus and Euryalus) and Roman warriors (Cupavo and Phaethon; Cydon and Clytius). For a help-

Romans are, of course, known for a "priapic" masculinity that is

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typified by Priapus's sexual aggression.<sup>22</sup> Since the Roman military supposedly embodies the ideal of Roman masculinity,<sup>23</sup> it is no surprise that Roman soldiers are (discursively and/or factually) known for what they do to their captives.<sup>24</sup> Tacitus, for example, describes the sack of Cremona (69 C.E.) with these words:

Forty thousand armed men burst into the town; the number of camp-followers and servants was even greater, and they were more ready to indulge in lust and cruelty. Neither rank nor years protected anyone; their assailants debauched and killed without distinction. Aged men and women near the end of life, though despised as booty, were dragged off to be the soldiers' sport. Whenever a young woman or a handsome youth fell into their hands, they were torn to pieces by the violent struggles of those who tried to secure them, and this in the end drove the despoilers to kill one another. (*Hist.* 3.33; see also Sallust, *Bell. Cat.* 51.9; Cicero, *Phil.* 3.31; Livy 26.13.15; and Plautus, *Mil. Glor.* 1102-14)

ful discussion of these relationships in the *Aeneid*, see Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 116-19. See also Plutarch, *Cat. Maj.* 17, where we find a reference to a boy-favorite of long and influential standing within the Roman military.

<sup>22</sup> Amy Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor* (rev. ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> See Paul Veyne, "Homosexuality in Ancient Rome," in *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Time* (ed. Philippe Ariès and André Béjin; trans. Anthony Forster; New York: Blackwell, 1985), 31; Cantarella, *Bisexuality*, 218; Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 130; and Phang, *Marriage of Roman Soldiers*, 292-93.

<sup>24</sup> Since sex and power are often linked in the Greco-Roman world, the linkage between sex and the military (and by extension, between rape and colonial conquest) is often found. According to Suetonius, a soldier called Cassius Chaerea joined the conspiracy and became the first to strike a blow at the emperor Caligula to prove his manhood, because the emperor used to make fun of the soldier's effeminate tendency (*Cal.* 58). Likewise, while Dover discusses how the fifth-century B.C.E. Athenian poet Eupolis equates in a comedy a dishonorable soldier to an androgyne (*Greek Homosexuality*, 144-45), Leslie Cahoon scrutinizes the linkages between "bed" and "battlefield" in Ovid ("The Bed as Battlefield: Erotic Conquest and Military Metaphor in Ovid's *Amores*," *TAPA* 118 [1988]: 293-307). In addition, when Ovid puts into Sappho's mouth the words that even Mars (the Roman god of war) would go for her boy-love if Mars ever saw him (*Her.* 15.92), he seems to suggest that men who go after boys are the most masculine. In a similar train of thought, Tibullus (first century B.C.E.) has a man seeking advice from Priapus on boy chasing (1.4). For a clear and concise discussion of how Roman males and females related sexually, see Holt N. Parker, "The Teratogenic Grid," in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Hallett and Skinner, 47-59.

In addition to the sexual aggression that Roman soldiers exercised toward both males and females, Tacitus's passage also implies the practice of enslaving young boys and maidens not for menial but for sexual services.<sup>25</sup> This becomes more explicit in another passage from Tacitus:

At the orders of Vitellus a levy of the young Batavians was now being made. This burden, which is naturally grievous, was made the heavier by the greed and licence of those in charge of the levy: they hunted out the old and the weak that they might get a price for letting them off; again they dragged away the children to satisfy their lust, choosing the handsomest—and the Batavian children are generally tall beyond their years. (*Hist.* 4.14)

While we have evidence that forced pederastic relations among Roman citizens within the army were subjected to military discipline (Polybius 6.37.9) or even justified the murder of the penetrator by the penetrated (Valerius Maximus 6.1.12; Plutarch, *Mor.* 202b-c; Plutarch, *Mar.* 14; Quintilian, *Inst.* 3.11.12-14), such relations between a Roman soldier and a youth who was *not* a Roman citizen were both legally permissible and socially prevalent.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> For a more specific discussion about how Roman males related to male and female slaves, see Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 30-38. Besides slaves and captives, prostitutes formed the third group of socially and legally legitimate sexual objects for Roman soldiers. Livy, talking about the well-known "house-cleaning" of the Roman troops at Numantia by Scipio Aemilianus (134 B.C.E.), adds that two thousand prostitutes were thrown out of the military camps (*Per.* 57).

<sup>26</sup> Here lies the main difference between ancient Greek and ancient Roman pederasty. While Greek lovers were permitted to pursue freeborn respectable boys, Roman lovers, in contrast, were supposed to avoid freeborn Roman citizen boys. See, e.g., Gray-Fow, "Pederasty," 449-60; Phang, *Marriage of Roman Soldiers*, 264, 278; and Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, 220-26. The Roman paradigm for pederasty (between a Roman man and a non-Roman boy), according to Williams, explains Ganymede's subsequent appearance from Greek traditions to become the Roman archetype of a sexually desirable youth precisely because Ganymede was a "foreigner" abducted into slavery (*Roman Homosexuality*, 56-59). In an interesting article, Jonathan Walters, after suggesting that this firm boundary was constructed upon the Roman equation between manhood and corporeal inviolability, ponders the dilemma this equation posed for Roman soldiers. On the one hand, they were supposed to embody Roman manhood; on the other hand, they were placed in situations where they were susceptible to both physical discipline by a superior and wounds by an enemy. Walters concludes that Romans ended up dealing with this dilemma by limiting military discipline to beatings with a vine staff and by classifying war scars as a unique kind of bodily mark that signified manhood ("Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought," in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Hallett and Skinner, 40). Despite this Roman ideal, we do have literary references to Roman soldiers who are sexually penetrated. See, e.g., Phaedrus, *App.* 10.1, where a sexually passive man is reported in Pompey's army; and Suetonius, *Dom.* 10, where Domitian pardons a senatorial tribune and a centurion from the charge of attempting mutiny because both sol-

For instance, the military coup against the Roman general Sertorius was supposedly hastened because the plan of the coup was leaked out as a consequence of the

competition of various mutineers for the love of a desirable youth (Plutarch, *Sert.* 26). Furthermore, while Plautus (third century B.C.E.) actually has two characters in one of his comedies teasing a slave of a Roman soldier that his duties include sexual performance (*Pseud.* 1180-81; see also Seneca the Elder, *Contr.* 4.10; Martial, *Epig.* 13.26), Valerius Maximus (first century C.E.) talks about a centurion, C. Cornelius, who, when accused of molesting a young soldier under his command, defends himself by claiming that the boy is in fact a prostitute (6.1.10).

Plautus's later compatriot Martial (first century C.E.) also refers to pederastic relations within the Roman military (*Epig.* 3.91; 9.56). Some of these references involve also a centurion, Aulus Pudens, and his slave boy-lover, Encolpus:

These locks, all he has from crown down, does Encolpus, the darling of his master the centurion, vow to you, Phoebus, when Pudens shall attain the rank of Chief Centurion which he wants and deserves. Cut the long tresses as soon as may be, Phoebus, while no down darkens his soft cheeks and flowing locks grace his milk-white neck. And so that master and lad may long enjoy your bounty, make him soon shorn, but late a man. (*Epig.* 1.31; see also 5.48)

It makes sense that centurions might have servants or slaves and "use" them for sexual as well as other types of service, since centurions were better paid and lived in larger quarters than ordinary soldiers. That is not to say, however, that a centurion's boy-favorite must be a servant or slave. As the previous examples indicate, a boy-favorite could be a prostitute; and despite legal prohibition, he could also be another Roman soldier or citizen.<sup>27</sup> Although we are primarily interested in the discursive link between the Roman military and pederasty, a recent archaeological study of a first-century Roman military site (Vindolanda) offers additional evidence. The number of boys' footwear found at the site results in a comment— despite the archaeologist's own acknowledged preference for an alternative interpretation— that

diers are able to prove their sexual "passivity," and thus their lack of influence within the military.

<sup>27</sup> One should remember, again, that practice and prohibition do not always coincide. For instance, the first-century B.C.E. Roman poet Catullus seems comfortable in writing about his freeborn Roman boy-love called Juventius (48, 81, 99).

some of the rooms “look... more like a male brothel than anything else.”<sup>28</sup>

We have already seen that Matthew’s semantic field does not warrant identifying the παῖς as merely “servant” or “son.” Given the way the word is used to refer to boy-love or boy-favorite in the broader Greco-Roman semantic field (with which Matthew at least partially overlaps), as well as the way the broader Greco-Roman discursive field links the military with pederasty, Matthean scholars should be open to the possibility that the παῖς was the cen-

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turion’s “boy-love” or “boy-favorite” and to inquiring how this interpretation could make sense within 8:5-13 and the rest of Matthew. Not only might this interpretation of παῖς explain the urgency of the centurion’s plea (8:5-6); it also— as we shall see— may clarify the centurion’s reluctance to have Jesus come to his house (8:8).

## II. When Lover and Client Become One

A test of the plausibility of our thesis concerning the identity of the παῖς is the ability of this hypothesis to make sense of other aspects of this narrative. Our discussion first attends to the grammatical issue of whether Jesus’ words in 8:7 are to be understood as a question. We then turn to the assumptions concerning Matthew’s attitude toward Gentiles. This prepares the way for us to consider the bearing Greco-Roman patronage may have on the clarification of this episode.

Many critics have found the interaction between Jesus and the centurion in 8:7-8 puzzling. If Jesus himself volunteers to make a trip to the centurion’s house to heal his παῖς (8:7), why is the centurion resisting Jesus’ suggestion and coming up with a counter-suggestion of a “long-distance” healing instead (8:8)? Is the centurion not running the risk of offending the very person from whom he seeks help? This is especially puzzling since Jesus has already expressed his willingness to perform the healing that the centurion so desperately desires. Several critics argue that the centurion’s response in 8:8 is not a counter-proposal to Jesus’ initiative but rather one that is necessitated by [what they take to be] Jesus’ initial reluctance to answer his plea in 8:7.<sup>29</sup> For these critics, the centurion’s response in 8:8 along with Jesus’ use of the emphatic “I” (ἐγώ) to begin his words in 8:7 indicate that Jesus is asking a question (“Shall I [a Jew] come [to your house] and heal him?”) rather than mak-

ing a statement (“I will come and heal him”). This interpretation of 8:7 will supposedly also result in a more consistent portrayal of Jesus in Matthew, since Matthew will have another Gentile of “great faith,” the Canaanite woman in 15:21-28, overcome Jesus’ reluctance to answer her plea for healing.

The suggestion that Jesus’ emphatic “I” signifies a question is suspect, since Matthew also has the centurion use an emphatic “I” in 8:9 to make a case rather than pose a question. There are only two occasions in Matthew where an emphatic “I” is linked with the asking of a question (26:22, 25). In contrast, Matthew has various characters using the emphatic “I” numerous other times

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(3:11, 14b; 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39,44; 10:16; 11:10; 12:27a, 28; 14:27; 20:15, 22; 21:27, 30; 22:32; 23:34; 24:5; 25:27; 26:33, 39; 28:20), yet none of those usages has been interpreted as a question concerning the speaker’s own identity or action.<sup>30</sup> In fact, Matthew seems to prefer grammatical markers that are distinct from an emphatic use of a personal pronoun in order to signify a question. These include: (1) some variations of τί or τίς (“who/which/what/why/whose,” 3:7; 5:13, 46b, 47b; 6:27, 28a, 31; 7:3, 9-10; 8:26, 29; 9:4, 5, 11, 14; 11:7, 8, 9, 16a; 12:11, 27, 48; 13:10; 14:31; 15:2, 3; 16:8, 15, 26; 17:10, 19, 25; 18:1, 12a; 19:7, 16, 17, 20, 25, 27; 20:6, 21a-b, 32; 21:10, 16a-b, 23c, 25c-g, 28a, 31a, 40; 22:18, 20, 28, 42; 23:17, 19; 24:3, 45; 26:8, 10, 15, 65, 66a, 68; 27:4, 17, 21, 22, 23, 46); (2) some variations of πόσος or πότε (“how/when/what,” 7:4; 8:27; 12:26, 29, 34; 13:27c, 54, 56b; 15:33, 34a; 16:11a; 17:17; 18:21; 19:18a-b; 21:20, 23a-b, 25a-b; 22:12, 36, 43, 45; 23:33, 37; 24:3; 25:37, 38, 39, 44; 26:17, 54); and (3) some variations of a negative (οὐ or μή) to indicate surprise or the expectation of an affirmative answer (5:46c, 47c; 6:25e, 26c, 30; 7:16b, 22; 10:29; 11:23; 12:3-4, 5, 23; 13:27b, 55, 56a; 15:17; 16:3, 9-10; 17:24; 18:12b-c, 33; 19:4; 20:13, 15; 21:16c-e, 42; 22:17, 31; 24:2a-b; 26:22, 25, 62).<sup>31</sup> Even in those rare exceptions where these dominant “markers” are not present, Matthew has put in other obvious indicators, such as a preceding verb “question” (ἐπηρώτησαν, 12:10; 27:11), a follow-up reply (with “no”/οὐ, 13:28-29; “yes”/ναί, 13:51; or an echo of “we are able”/δυνάμεθα

<sup>28</sup> Van Driel-Murray, “Gender in Question,” 19.

<sup>29</sup> E.g., Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 111-13; Wainwright, *Feminist Critical Reading*, 11:3; and Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 201-2.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 3:14; 12:27; and 20:15,22 do involve questions, but in all four cases, the questions have to do with someone else’s rather than the speaker’s own actions.

<sup>31</sup> For examples of Matthew constructing a question with a variation of τί/τίς along with an emphatic personal pronoun, see 9:14 and 17:19 (both with “we”/ἡμεῖς) as well as 15:3 and 16:15 (both with “you”/ὕμεῖς). For examples where she does so with a variation of a negative, see 26:22, 25 (both with “I”/ἐγώ) and 11:23 (with “you”/σύ).

to “are you able”/δύνασθε in 20:22), or an interrogative particle “if” (ἢ, 11:3 and 26:53; εἰ, 19:3).<sup>32</sup>

This is another indication of Matthew’s care as a writer. We have already seen her exact execution of vocabulary in our earlier discussion of the identity of the παῖς. Now we are suggesting that she brings the same care and precision in identifying “questions” (an understandable concern for any writer in the absence of punctuation). This should not come as a surprise to us, since Matthew has Jesus warn against “every careless word” (πᾶν ῥῆμα ἄργόν) and

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make “words” (λόγων) a basis for the final judgment (12:36-37). The idea that Matthew would construct a question solely on an emphatic “I” is simply not consistent with her own semantic and syntactic habitus, particularly given the vast repertoire that she has demonstrated to be at her disposal.<sup>33</sup>

The other prop for interpreting 8:7 as a question has to do with the Matthean Jesus’ alleged attitudes toward Gentiles. As we have indicated earlier, part of the dominant interpretation of Matt 8:5-13 is to read it (particularly because of 8:10-12) as a foreshadowing of the shift that will take place from Jesus’ limited mission to Israel in Matt 10 to Jesus’ “Great Commission” to “all the nations” in ch. 28. While many scholars have spent much energy and ink arguing whether Matthew is enlarging the mission or endangering Jews, we see the issue as yet another case of mistaken or misplaced emphasis. After all, Matthew begins her “book” (1:1) with a genealogy of Jesus that contains several Gentiles (Rahab, Ruth, and Uriah, 1:5-6), as well as with a character who is notorious for his ethnic ambiguity (Herod the Great, 2:1-23).<sup>34</sup> Since the episode of the centurion occurs at Capernaum,

it is important to remember that Matthew initially identifies the city not only as Jesus’ adopted “hometown” (after Nazareth and Bethlehem) but also as part of the “Galilee of the Gentiles” and as Jesus’ first ministerial headquarters (4:12-17).<sup>35</sup> Yet in 11:20-24, Capernaum is, along with Chorazin and Bethsaida, “reproached” by Jesus and set in contrast to the other (more?) Gentile cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. Let it suffice for us at this point to suggest that Matthew seems to be more interested in playing with the fluidity between Jews and Gentiles in order to instill a sense of instability than in promoting any kind of ethnic partition, priority, or proxy.<sup>36</sup> The phrase “weeping and grinding of teeth” (8:12), which Jesus uses as part of his response to the centurion’s puzzling request and rationale (8:8-9), appears

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five more times in Matthew (13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). What is consistent in these six uses of the phrase in Matthew is not the contrast between Gentiles and Jews but the contrast between those who are “in” in reality and those who are “in” only in appearance. Matthew’s rhetoric about Gentiles and Jews is but one way to underscore her concern that one’s “name” and one’s “nature” be consistent (or better yet, as we will see, that what one does not lag behind what one says).<sup>37</sup> When

<sup>35</sup> It is well known that this description, “Galilee of the Gentiles,” has been challenged by sociohistorical studies. See, e.g., Sean Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.: A Study of Second Temple Judaism* (Studies in Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity 5; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980).

<sup>36</sup> Though the volume has to do with Paul rather than Matthew, see *Paul beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) for a deconstruction of the “Judaism/Hellenism divide” in the first century C.E. In that volume, see especially Dale B. Martin, “Paul and the Judaism/Hellenism Dichotomy: Toward a Social History of the Question” (pp. 29-61); and Philip S. Alexander, “Hellenism and Hellenization as Problematic Historical-Categorical Categories” (pp. 63-80).

<sup>37</sup> Matthew’s “play” with the fluidity of Jews and Gentiles is dependent on the fluidity of these terms among their many geographical, sociological, or theological senses. One should also remember that in an ethnic or sociological sense, Jews and Gentiles were generally not visibly identifiable in the time Matthew was written. There is a passage from Epictetus (first century C.E.) that adequately illustrates the fluidity and complexity of these terms as well as the concern to match “name” and “nature”: Why, then, do you [though a student of Epicurus] call yourself a Stoic, why do you deceive the multitude, why do you act the part of a Jew, when you are a Greek? Do you not see in what sense men are severally called Jew, Syrian, or Egyptian? For example, whenever we see a man halting between two faiths, we are in the habit of saying, “He is not a Jew, he is only acting the part.” But when he adopts the attitude of mind of the man who has been baptized and has made his choice, then he both is a Jew in fact and is also called one. So we also are counterfeit “baptists,” ostensibly Jews, but in reality something else, not in sympathy with our own reason, far from applying the principles which we profess, yet priding ourselves upon them as being men who knew them. (*Diatr.* 2.9.19-21). The fluidity or uncertainty of Jewish identity is particularly pertinent to

<sup>32</sup> Matthew 27:11 is an example of a question with a preceding verb “question” along with an emphatic use of “you”/σὺ; 11:3 is a question with the interrogative particle ἢ along with an emphatic use of “you”/σὺ; and 15:16 may be another case where Matthew signifies a question with something alongside an emphatic personal pronoun (“you”/ὤμεῖς), although we are less inclined to interpret the verse as a question. If one takes 15:16 as a question, the clear signifying marker will be the fact that this verse is immediately followed by another question constructed with a negative οὐ (15:17).

<sup>33</sup> For the same reasons, we tend not to see 15:12 and 26:55 as questions, despite the fact that most translations present them as such. In any case, nothing of substance seems to depend on whether or not these two verses are read as questions.

<sup>34</sup> We do not include Tamar here because there have been some debates among Matthean scholars regarding the ethnic identity of Tamar. While most seem to view Tamar as a Gentile (e.g., Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 58; Gundry, *Matthew*, 14; and Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 17-19), Levine maintains consistently that Tamar’s ethnicity is ambiguous (*Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 74-75,81; “Matthew,” 340).



statements are made that Jesus' mission is to Israel and Israel alone (10:5-6; 15:21-24), those references to Israel seem best understood in geographical rather than socio-logical or theological terms.<sup>38</sup> Not only does Matthew's Jesus have no trouble associating with Gentiles; his statement that scribes and Pharisees would "travel about the sea and the land to make one proselyte" and then mislead the proselyte (23:15) indicates that there is little apprehension in Matthew's narrative world about the interaction between ethnic Jews and ethnic Gentiles.<sup>39</sup>

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The weaknesses of these two supporting arguments for interpreting 8:7 as a question expose the dire necessity and the disappointing inability on the part of Matthean scholars to come to an understanding of the bewildering

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another Matthean episode that is set in Capernaum (17:24-27). Collectors of the temple tax (whether this is the tax before or after the first Jewish-Roman war makes no difference at this point) had to ask rather than simply demand the tax from Peter and Jesus because it was usually up to the individual to own up to or keep secret his or her Jewish identity. If ethnic identity, like sexual practice, is for the most part not visibly identifiable, then the conventional assumption by many scholars (Matthean or otherwise) that Jews and Gentiles were rigidly separable in the Greco-Roman period becomes problematic. For a helpful resource on this topic, see Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 13-68, which includes a discussion of the ethnic ambiguity of Herod the Great. This lesson about ethnic identity from the past underscores the contemporary view of some scholars that race, being visibly identifiable, should never be collapsed into or confused with ethnicity; see, e.g., Michael Omi and Howard A. Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (2nd ed.; New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> See Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 69-106.

<sup>39</sup> Martin Goodman, in his attempt to argue against any impulse among Jews to proselytize Gentiles actively before 100 C.E., suggests that the "proselyte" in Matt 23:15 is not a Gentile who converts to Judaism but a Jew joining or following the Pharisaic halakah (*Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1994], 69-74). One does not have to embrace that interpretation to appreciate Goodman's differentiations among (1) rigidly isolating from Gentiles, (2) somewhat relaxingly interacting with them, and (3) actively proselytizing them. At any rate, Jesus' statement here in Matthew about Pharisees "traveling" to proselytize might well be a rhetorical exaggeration, since the point is really about the negative result of that "conversion" rather than the process of "converting" (the painstaking process serves only to compound the ironic and disastrous result). It is also important to point out that, if anything, Goodman's overall thesis strengthens our argument, since Goodman not only holds that Jews became more critical of paganism only after 100 C.E. (that is, after Matthew's conventional date of composition), but he also emphasizes the coexistence of various viewpoints among Jews in different periods of antiquity. The (mis)reading that Matthew's Jesus has to overcome resistance against contact with Gentiles may be influenced by the Lukan account of Peter's engagement with another centurion, Cornelius (Acts 10:28). This, along with the tendency for translators/interpreters to collapse the object of the centurion's affection in Matt 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10, betray a deep-rooted tendency to read Matthew in terms of Luke rather than in terms of Matthew.

exchange between Jesus and the centurion in 8:7-8.<sup>40</sup> The key to the puzzle, we propose, lies in the identity of the παῖς as the centurion's beloved or boy-love.

In order to see how this is so, we need to consider the bearing of patron-client relations on our interpretation. Ellen Oliensis begins her article on Roman sexualities by imagining the momentary coming together of lovers and clients around daybreak, when the former return home after a night at their beloveds' and the latter leave home for the morning reception of their patrons.<sup>41</sup> If one is willing to accept tentatively our interpretation of the centurion as a pederast or the lover of his παῖς, one will find in Matthew's centurion an episodic coming together of the two roles discussed by Oliensis.<sup>42</sup> When the

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centurion comes to Jesus on behalf of his beloved, the centurion is, assuming the patronage system of the Greco-Roman world, in effect becoming a client of Jesus. Matthew indicates this not only by telling us that the centurion comes "pleading" or "begging" (παρακαλῶν, 8:5); Matthew further shows us this by having the centurion address Jesus as "lord" or "master" (κύριε, 8:6, 8).

With the example of Tibullus, who senses the obligation to accompany his patron on military campaigns as well as the obligation to keep his beloved company (1.1.53-58), Oliensis points out the dilemma when a lover and a client become one.<sup>43</sup> Such a person may find himself caught in a triangle of contradictory impulses: the desire/need to please his beloved and the desire/need to please his patron. Arguably the most difficult— and, for

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<sup>40</sup> As Levine acknowledges, "Reading 8:7 as a question not only foreshadows the conversation with the Canaanite, it also provides the motive for the centurion's protestation in 8:8-9" ("Matthew's Advice," 30). However, interpreting 8:7 on the sole basis of 15:21-28 is highly problematic, as Levine herself points out in her earlier work (*Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 119). If Anderson (*Matthew's Narrative Web*) is correct— and we think she is— that Matthew's narrative is a web spun with interlocking threads, then no single episode or single aspect within an episode can have a monopoly on the interpretation of another. If one suggests that Jesus' response to the centurion must parallel his initially reluctant response to the Canaanite woman because both supplicants are Gentile, why is it not equally valid to argue that Jesus' response to the centurion must parallel his immediately receptive response to the paralytic's friends in 9:1-7 because both sufferers are paralyzed? Jesus' statement in 8:7 must be interpreted by something other than, or at least something in addition to, any single parallel episode.

<sup>41</sup> Ellen Oliensis, "The Erotics of *Amicitia*: Readings in Tibullus, Propertius, and Horace," in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Hallett and Skinner, 151-71.

<sup>42</sup> Oliensis herself proceeds to talk about how the role of the lover and that of the client come together in the person of the Roman elegiac poet. We are deeply indebted to Oliensis for triggering our thoughts in this section as well as for pointing us to several pertinent references in ancient Roman literature.

<sup>43</sup> Oliensis, "Erotics," 155.

our purposes, the most relevant— dilemma faced by such a person is the potential meeting or coming together of his patron and his beloved. Again, Oliensis points to the example of Tibullus:

Hither shall come my own Messalla [Tibullus's patron].  
From chosen trees shall Delia [Tibullus's beloved] pull  
him down sweet fruit. In homage to his greatness she  
shall give him zealous tendance, and prepare and carry  
him the repast, herself *his* waiting-maid. (1.5.31-34;  
emphasis added)

Although in Tibullus's case, his beloved is a maiden rather than a boy, the dilemma, or the fear, is the same regardless of the sex of one's beloved. In fact, Oliensis describes this dilemma as an "all-too-familiar triangle, drawn straight from the elegiac repertoire."<sup>44</sup> The dilemma or the fear is that upon meeting, given the triangular structure that is in place as well as the parallel between sexual and power relations, the lover/client may end up competing with his own beloved to be the choice client of the patron, as well as competing with his own patron to be the lone lover of the beloved. In light of the hierarchical structure of most patron-client relationships, this double competition is likely to result in one's own beloved becoming the beloved of one's own patron. Is the Roman elegist Propertius's (first century B.C.E.) "advice" to his "patron," Gallus, on how to keep a boy-love (1.20) predicated on the fact that Propertius has previously lost his own beloved (Cynthia) to his "patron" (1.5, 1.13)?<sup>45</sup> The centurion's rhetoric about not being "worthy" of a house visit by Jesus (8:8) may be

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the centurion's way of avoiding an anticipated "usurpation" of his current boy-love on the part of his new patron.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>45</sup> We are putting "patron" in quotation marks because the precise identity of this "Gallus" is unknown. Many classics scholars, including Oliensis ("Erotics," 157-62), suspect that this is a reference to Gaius Cornelius Gallus, the purported father of Roman elegy (first century B.C.E.). If so, Propertius, as an elegist, can certainly be understood as Gallus's client.

<sup>46</sup> This may be a good place to (re)visit two other places where *παῖς* or *παῖσι* is used in Matthew, but conventionally taken to mean "servant(s)" by Matthew's translators/interpreters. The first is Matt 12:18, a "citation" of Isa 42:1-4. Although the term *παῖς* is often used to refer to a member or a dependent of a household in the LXX, it is intriguing how Matthew deviates from the LXX here. Matthew's dependence (or rather apparent lack of dependence) on the LXX is a subject of considerable discussion and need not detain us here. What we want to note for our purposes is that the term *παῖς* seems to be paralleled in the LXX with *ὁ ἐκλεκτός μου* ("my chosen"), whereas in Matthew one finds the alternative parallel of *ὁ ἀγαπητός μου* ("my beloved"). Moreover, in Matthew, the soul of the speaker (God) is "well pleased" (*εὐδόκησεν*), while a more distant "accepted" (*προσδέξατο*)

Having explored the identity of the *παῖς* as the centurion's "boy-love," we turn to the mistaken identity that the centurion ascribes to Jesus.

### III. What (Kind of) Authority? Whose Identity (Crisis)?

The centurion's anxiety over being a client of Jesus is further suggested in his explanation of why Jesus need not come to his house to heal his *παῖς* (8:9). As he describes his understanding of authority as a hierarchical type of relationship, he also discloses that he occupies but a middle rung of this ladder. While many Matthean scholars interpret his phrase "I am also a person under authority (*ὑπὸ ἐξουσίαν*)" (8:9) as solely a tribute to Caesar,<sup>47</sup> one should not lose

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sight of the immediate context of his coming to solicit Jesus' assistance, which, as we explained, would effectively place him as a client under the authority of Jesus' patronage. His fear of losing his beloved to Jesus and

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is used in the LXX. In other words, even in this "citation" of Isaiah, Matthew's use of the term *παῖς* seems to echo certain (homo)erotic attachments. Matthew 14:2 states that Herod relates his supposition that Jesus is the risen John the Baptizer to his *παῖσι*. It is clear in its literary context that this relating or "telling" on Herod's part is one mixed with both guilt and fear. For, according to Matthew, Herod commands the beheading of John with "grief" (*λυπηθεῖς*, 14:9), and the thought that John, who had a significant following among the people (14:5), has returned from the grave cannot be either good or neutral news to his "executioner." Those to whom Herod tells, relates, or confides his guilt and fear are most unlikely to be his mere "servants," but some trusted or "intimate" attendants who are privy to his inner thoughts and feelings. While a hint of pederasty cannot be absolutely excluded, the plural as well as the apparent lack of any particular motivation for such a suggestion on the part of the narrator make this more difficult.

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., Schweizer, *Good News*, 213-14; Overman, *Church and Community*, 119; and Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 10. Under the empire, the Roman army was to a very significant degree the personal army of the emperor. Soldiers took a personal oath of loyalty to the emperor (Campbell, *Roman Army*, 68-69), who, in turn, was their chief benefactor. The donatives, which exceeded the value of the regular pay of the soldier, were paid out of the personal funds of the emperor beginning with Augustus. In addition, the emperor, starting around 69 C.E., made direct payments out of the imperial treasury to the centurions to compensate for the money previously exacted from ordinary soldiers for their furloughs (Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.46). While tribunes and other higher officers had their own estates and so a certain degree of economic independence, the centurions were dependent in very direct ways on the emperor and often responded with impressive dedication (Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.59; 2.60: in both cases, the rebel Vitellius orders the execution of a number of centurions who had been loyal to the emperor). When emperors looked for military personnel to entrust with important or delicate missions, it was regularly to the centurions that they looked. Thus we hear of a number of episodes in which centurions were deputized by emperors to carry out executions or assassinations of political rivals (Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.59; 16.9, 15). One centurion, Casperius, was even entrusted with delicate negotiations with the head of the rival Parthian empire (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.5).

hence his reluctance to have Jesus enter his house are entirely understandable in the context of his own understanding of authority. For the centurion, authority is unidirectional, top down, and top over bottom.<sup>48</sup> The centurion's new patron (Jesus) has the authority to tell him, as a client, what to do, and to order the centurion's subordinates (including his beloved) to come to Jesus and abandon the centurion.

In contrast to scholars who (mis)read the centurion's "chain-of-command" analogy as a correct identification of Jesus' identity, we would argue that the centurion's view reflects more accurately his own understanding of authority and his own self-identification as a Roman military officer rather than the self-understanding of the Matthean Jesus.<sup>49</sup> The problem of the centurion's analogy becomes evident in light of a couple of parallels—one verbal and another conceptual—Matthew draws between this healing and the last healing that Jesus performs in ch. 9 (vv. 32-34).<sup>50</sup> While the centurion's "chain-of-command" comment about authority leads to Jesus' amazement (ἐθαύμασεν) and statement about "not hav[ing] found anyone with such great faith in Israel," and subsequently to a healing miracle in ch. 8 (vv. 9-10, 13), one finds in ch. 9 a healing miracle that leads first to the crowds saying in amazement (ἐθαύμασαν) that "nothing has ever happened like this in Israel," and then to the Pharisees saying that Jesus is "casting out demons by the ruler of the demons" (9:32-34). What is stunning is that both the centurion and the Pharisees are basically

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embracing the same assumptions: authority works only *within* chains of command. Just as a centurion can order the coming and going of soldiers and servants under his

command, the ruler of demons can cast out demons under its rule. What then is the centurion implying about Jesus' identity? He believes that Jesus can order the coming and going of the demon that has been "torturing" his boy-love with paralysis, because he believes that Jesus is the commander or the ruler of that and other demons.<sup>51</sup> In other words, not only are the centurion and the Pharisees in agreement about how authority operates; they further concur on the identity of Jesus as a commanding officer in the chain of demonic beings.

We will find later in Matthew that Jesus explicitly disidentifies with such an identity. After healing a demoniac who is mute in 9:32-34, Jesus heals another demoniac who is both mute and blind in 12:22-23. Again, the crowds were "surprised" or amazed by the miracle (ἐξίσταντο, 12:23). In response to the question of the crowds, the Pharisees affirm again that Jesus is casting out demons by the ruler of the demons, Beelzebul (12:24). This time Jesus retorts with an analogy of his own, that of the divided kingdom, city, or household (12:25-29). What Jesus' analogy makes clear is that he is not an average or even above-average commander in a demonic chain of command; instead, he is an authoritative competitor or challenger to that chain of command.

If Matthew's Jesus does not explicitly reject the centurion's identification, Matthew's narrator does explicitly describe Jesus' response with the word "amazed" (ἐθαύμασεν, 8:10). Most critics, however, (mis)read this verb as indicating something positive, while Matthew's use of this term is far more ambiguous. The same term, for example, is used of the disciples' response to Jesus' cursing of the fig tree in 21:20. The fact that this "amazement" on the part of the disciples involves an element of disbelief is indicated not only by the question that they ask (21:20) but also by Jesus' answer about their need for an undoubting faith (21:21-22). The same term is used again in 22:22 to describe the Pharisees' response to Jesus' ability to maneuver his way out of the catch-22 question about paying taxes to Caesar. Again, there are several indications that this "amazement" is less than perfectly positive. Not only do the Pharisees come

<sup>48</sup> This is consistent with the presentation of centurions as notorious disciplinarians in Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.17-35), where a centurion uses one vine staff after another to beat his subordinates, leading to resentment and revenge on the part of the soldiers. This portrayal of centurions by Tacitus, at least when it comes to their excessive extraction of supplies from underlings for their own use (*Ann.* 1.17), is supported by *P. Gen. Lat.* 1 (first century C.E., cited by Phang, *Marriage or Roman Soldiers*, 182).

<sup>49</sup> That logic can be extended to readers of Matthew, and scholars who affirm the centurion's analogy and understanding may well be doing so out of their own understanding and identification rather than those of Matthew. It is easy for readers, like the centurion, to tum Matthew's Jesus into a mirror image of themselves.

<sup>50</sup> It has by now become customary within Matthean studies to see chs. 8-9 as a unit. Not only do these two chapters come between two long discourses by Jesus (chs. 5-7; ch. 10); they also contain a series of miracles demonstrating the authority that is first indicated by the narrator at the end of ch. 7 (vv. 28-29). For a survey of past scholarship that takes these two chapters as a unit, see Elaine Wainwright, "The Matthean Jesus and the Healing of Women," in *Gospel of Matthew in Current Study*, ed. Aune, 75-79.

<sup>51</sup> Unlike in the case of the dumb demoniac of 9:32-34, no specific reference is made to demon possession in the paralysis suffered by the centurion's boy-love. Matthew, however, seems to indicate with the purpose clause in 10:1 that casting out unclean spirits or demons is necessary for the cure of "every disease and every illness." If one follows Wainwright's tripartite division of Matt 8-9 ("Matthean Jesus," 82), the importance of demons and their exorcism for these two chapters of miracles and healings becomes evident. With the summary statements and references to discipleship in 8:16-22 and 9:9-17 functioning as division markers, a demoniac occupies or appears at the very center (8:28-34) and the very end (9:32-34) of this unit within Matthew's Gospel.

back with another question to “test” (πειράζων, 22:35) Jesus after a break (22:22, 34-36) when they are not able to answer Jesus’ counter-question; the

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narrator tells us that they become, in a sense, passive-aggressive. They want to question or challenge Jesus, but dare not because they are afraid of what Jesus may ask them in return (22:46). As if Matthew means to dispel any romantic notion of the Pharisees’ “amazement,” she immediately has Jesus begin his famous diatribe against the scribes and Pharisees in 23:1-39. Finally, the same term is used to describe Pilate’s response to Jesus’ silence. The problematic nature of Pilate’s “great amazement” (θαυμάζειν λίαν, 27:14) is perhaps best seen by the way Pilate ends up “whipping” Jesus before he surrenders Jesus to the “envy” of Jesus’ enemies (27:18, 26). The statement that Jesus is “amazed” by the centurion’s request and rationale does not necessarily imply, within Matthew’s semantic field, Jesus’ wholehearted affirmation of everything that the centurion has to say.<sup>52</sup>

If Jesus does not situate himself within a demonic chain of command as the centurion and the Pharisees suggest, does he at least embrace an authoritative or authoritarian chain of his own? In other words, if the centurion is confused over Jesus’ identity, is he at least correct in his awareness of Jesus’ authority as one that operates hierarchically? Is that why Jesus, despite his “amazement” over the centurion’s identification of him as a demonic commander of demons, praises the centurion and accepts the centurion’s proposal for a “long-distance” healing? Without arguing for a purely nonhierarchical understanding and practice on the part of Matthew’s Jesus,<sup>53</sup> we do at least find strong hints that Jesus is not entirely at home with a “chain-of-command” type of authority. Given the repeated references to Roman colonization in

Matthew (Roman taxation in 22:15-22, Pilate in 27:11-27, and another centurion in 27:54), Jesus’ denunciation of “Gentile rulers” (οἱ ἄρχοντες τῶν ἐθνῶν, 20:24-28) may be read as a rejection not only of Roman rule but also of the Roman—including the centurion’s—approach to authority. This is particularly so since the two words that Jesus uses to describe and denounce the hierarchical

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assumption of Roman authority (“lord over” [κατακυριεύουσιν] and “exercise authority” [κατεξουσιάζουσιν], 20:25) echo the centurion’s own (“lord” [κύριε] and “authority” [ἐξουσίαν], 8:8-9). Within that denunciation, Matthew’s Jesus proceeds to upset further the centurion’s chain-of-command by presenting the slave as primary (πρώτος, 20:26-27) rather than pressuring the slave to perform (ποιήσον/ποιεῖ, 8:9i-j).

Since Matthew closes her contrast of Jesus’ leadership style against the Romans with a reference to Jesus’ personal example or model (20:28), let us take a brief look at Jesus’ (inter)action with the centurion. Matthew concludes that episode with the clear declaration that Jesus, despite being “amazed” or appalled by the centurion’s identification of him as a demonic commander within a demonic chain of command, performs the very “long-distance” or “remote-control” healing that the centurion (counter-)proposes (8:13). If one keeps in mind the client-patron relationship that this episode implies as well as the example of “come, go, and do” that the centurion gives to depict the interaction between a superior and a subordinate, what we have here is a client or a subordinate successfully telling a patron or superior to “stay and do.” Not only does Jesus exercise his authority to combat and cast out an opposing demon; he also uses his authority over his own client in a way that is opposite to what the centurion assumes and describes.<sup>54</sup>

Finally we may note that the temptation stories supplied by Matthew (4:1-11) underline this problematization of “command-style” authority by having Jesus renounce styles of authority that would make him an imperial figure. The second temptation, for example, clearly involves the integration of Jesus into a “command form” of authority over the angels (4:6). But the most obvious is the

<sup>52</sup> Thus, the conventional “scholarly” wisdom about the “faith” of the centurion rests upon a (mis)reading of Matthew. This (mis)reading of the centurion’s analogy as a “statement of faith” (Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 95) is regularly repeated without being critically examined, leading ironically to a theologically conservative critic making a comment that sounds far more like the opponents of Jesus in Matthew: “As soldiers obey the authority of the centurion... so demons, who are assumed to be behind severe illness, will submit to the authority of Jesus’ word” (Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 95). Once again, Jesus is identified as the centurion of demons.

<sup>53</sup> For example, his emphasis on the similarities rather than the differences in teacher-student and master-slave relationships is immediately undercut by his own possible self-promotion from being (accused as) Beelzebul’s lieutenant or centurion to being Beelzebul himself (10:25). The same is true when he, in contrast to scribes and Pharisees who crave honor and recognition, places everyone on an equal footing by eliminating the title of “rabbi” and the role of “father” (23:1-9); what follows immediately is his own claim to be the only teacher (23:10). Again, we find residual, dominant, and emergent elements mingling and mixing together (Williams, “Base and Superstructure”).

<sup>54</sup> Is critique of hierarchical power and might at least part of the reason that Matthew’s Jesus comments during his arrest that he could have, but would not, ask for “twelve legions of angels” from heaven to overcome his enemies (26:53)? We should also point out that while many critics do emphasize the nonhierarchical understanding and practice on the part of the Matthean Jesus, these same critics tend not to suspect the centurion’s analogy of command. See, e.g., Warren Carter, *Households and Discipleship: A Study of Matthew 19-20* (JSNTSup 103; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994); and idem, *Matthew and the Margins*, 202-4.

last, where the devil takes him to a very high mountain, shows him all the glorious empires of the world, and says to him, "I will give all these to you, if you will kneel down and pay homage to me" (4:8-9). This temptation is to become a part of a "command-and-control" structure of authority. Within this structure, Jesus would have become precisely as his opponents charge and as the centurion surmises, a more or less elevated part of an imperial system of (demonic) command and control. Jesus' rejection of this temptation indicates his desire to be a different kind of a "lord," one with a different approach to authority.

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#### IV. Mysteries of Matthean Faith

If the centurion mistakes so completely both Jesus' identity and his authority, then why does Jesus praise him for "having such a faith as this" (τοσαύτην πίστιν, 8:10; also 8:13)?<sup>55</sup> As we mentioned, Matthew uses the phrase "there will be weeping and grinding of teeth" five more times after using it first in 8:12 (13:42, 52; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30) to talk about the indeterminacy of inclusion and exclusion as well as the importance of action.

Immediately after the phrase's last appearance (25:30), we find the parable of the final separation, when "all the nations" (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, 25:32) will be assembled and judged (25:31-46). Two things are unmistakable in that parable: (1) the importance of action over words, since both the sheep and the goats begin by calling Jesus "Lord" (25:37, 44); and (2) the importance of action over understanding, since both the just and the unjust express surprise about having ever seen Jesus (25:37-39, 44).<sup>56</sup> Matthean "faith," which is mentioned along with

<sup>55</sup> Some suggest that the greatness of the centurion's faith has to do with his trust that Jesus can heal his παῖς from a distance. Those who make that suggestion often cite the previous healing, in which Jesus touches a leper to effect the healing (8:3). In that episode, however, Jesus is the one who initiates the physical contact; the leper does not ask Jesus to do so. The same is true in Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law (8:14-15) and his healing of the blind man (9:27-31). When physical touch is explicitly specified by the ruler (9:18) or secretly sought by the hemorrhaging woman (9:20-21), Jesus does not respond with any complaint. Instead, he stands to follow the ruler to the ruler's home (9:19) and affirms the hemorrhaging woman's faith (9:22). While the healing of the Gadarene demoniacs (8:28-34), the paralytic (9:1-7), and the dumb demoniac (9:32-34) do not happen from a long distance, these healings also do not seem to involve any physical contact. If our interpretation that the centurion is proposing a long-distance healing out of his mistaken understanding of Jesus' identity and authority is accepted, it is difficult to see distance as the measure of his "great faith."

<sup>56</sup> There are, of course, intense debates about how one should interpret other aspects of this parable. For example, there is much furor around the question of the identity of the "least ones" (τῶν ἐλαχίστων, 25:40, 45); see Ulrich Luz, "The Final Judgment (Matt 25:31-46): An Exercise

"justice and mercy" in 23:23, hinges more on what one does (*ortho-praxy*) than on what one says or knows (*ortho-doxy*). Jesus' statement to the Pharisees in Matthew about "words" as the criterion of judgment (12:36-37) must be interpreted in relation to what he says to his disciples about the criterion of "actions" (16:27). More specifically, judgment hinges on what one does for the needy and those who are weaker than oneself (25:40, 45). While it is damning for one's actions to lag behind one's words or understanding (the problem of Matthew's "scribes and Pharisees," 23:2-3), it is saving or en[h]ancing when what one does for needy and weaker folk actually exceeds what one says or knows.

With this in mind, we may say that the centurion is praised for his faith because his action far exceeds his problematic rhetoric and understanding.

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First, he is willing to make himself a client of a colonized Jew because of the suffering of his boy-love,<sup>57</sup> and second, he is willing to speak up against his new patron's initiative to visit his house— again, in defense of his own relation to the boy-love. Whatever "worth" (ικανός, 8:8) the centurion may or may not attribute to himself, his actions demonstrate that he does not live by these hierarchical views in his relationship with either his boy-love or his (new) patron(s).<sup>58</sup>

in 'History of Influence' Exegesis," in *Treasures New and Old*, ed. Bauer and Powell, 271-310.

<sup>57</sup> One should remember that in Roman practice, one's boy-love may well be one's slave (though one's slave is not necessarily one's boy-love, and hence the inadequacy of simply translating the centurion's παῖς as "servant" or "slave"). If the centurion's παῖς is indeed the centurion's "slave boy-love" or "ex-slave boy-love," what he does and risks on behalf of his παῖς is all the more striking in light of Cato's recommendation that "old" and "sickly" slaves, being "superfluous" and "useless," should simply be sold (*Agr.* 2.7; see also Plutarch, *Cat. Maj.* 4-5.2).

<sup>58</sup> It is well known that the dominant ideology of ancient Greco-Roman sex is an ideology of domination— hence the rigid distinction between the penetrator and the penetrated, the powerful and the powerless, or the active and the passive. The centurion's action, however, upsets this distinction and his own "chain-of-command" analogy in different ways. First, he is coming to seek Jesus' help because his boy-love is "paralyzed" (8:6); in other words, he is dissatisfied with his boy-love's passivity. Second, while his analogy describes his ordering of soldiers and slaves to come, go, or do, in this episode the centurion himself is the one who comes to Jesus, does the pleading, and goes home. Rather than embodying Roman manhood, the centurion in this episode subordinates himself to the need of his boy-love and to the patronage of Jesus. To use the language of Oliensis, he is "doubly unmanned" ("Erotics," 156). While we appreciate Velunta's concern with the silencing and enslaving of ethnic others in an imperialistic context ("*Ho Pais Mou*"), we fear his broadbrush write-off of pederastic relationships as inherently oppressive may itself be a colonizing move (not to mention his tendency to collapse ancient and modern slavery, ancient and modern pederasty, as well as pederasty and prostitution without any critical distinction). This is particularly so given

If we return to the parallel passage where Matthew's Jesus explicitly rejects his identification as Beelzebul's lieutenant (12:22-32), we see that he states that his casting out of demons is a sign of God's kin-dom. This is the case, in fact, whether Jesus is an agent of the chief demon (for then Satan's rule is in

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disarray and is coming to an end, 12:25-26) or an agent of God's spirit (for then God's kin-dom is arriving, 12:28). When Jesus declares that "the one who is not being with me is against me, and the one who is not gathering with me scatters" (12:30), is he not implying that what is ultimately relevant is not one's theory about the authorizing authority for the deliverance but rather one's attitude toward the healing or exorcism? If the centurion's view of Jesus' identity is in many respects identical to that of Jesus' opponents (as a lieutenant of Beelzebub), the difference comes down to the attitude toward healing. While the opponents seek to undermine and oppose the dramatic healing (12:22-24), the centurion seeks healing for another. Instead of opposing and criticizing the healing of another person, he favors and even begs for it.

What the centurion does for his boy-love is even more impressive, since the one he approaches (at least in the centurion's mind) is nothing else but a Jewish wonder-worker.<sup>59</sup> Given what we know of certain Roman atti-

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the way he completely suppresses Mader's concluding thought that pederastic relationships, like any other type of relationship, should be judged by specific practices ("Entimos Pais," 231-32), although Velunta is basically dependent on Mader when it comes to the argument about the identity of the παῖς. The similarities that Oliensis draws between a Roman pederast and a Roman client are also helpful in further nuancing the power dynamics within pederastic relations ("Erotics," 1.52-5.5); the same is true of the process of courtship that Cantarella details for Greek pederasty (*Bisexuality*, 17-27). Note that Oliensis, like Mader, nuances such dynamics without denying the potential hierarchical abuse that the beloved suffers ("Erotics," 159, 161, 168-b9). While Velunta ("*Ho Pais Mou*"), like Dube (*Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*), reads Matthew somewhat onesidedly as a collaborator of Roman imperialism, we wonder what this "double unmaning" on the part of the centurion may also imply about Matthew's attitude toward the Roman military. If we may play on Esther Newton's play on words ("The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman," *Signs* 9 [1984]: 561), the Roman centurion in Matthew (in light of what he cannot do for his boy-love as well as his becoming a client of a colonized Jew) seems to indicate that the "imperial" and "imperious" penis of the Roman is actually somewhat impotent.

<sup>59</sup> We mentioned earlier that Jews in the Greco-Roman world were generally not visibly identifiable. Some, however, chose to wear tefillin and tzitzit to "out" themselves. Matthew's Jesus, for example, criticizes the scribes and Pharisees for not only wearing these, but for "enlarging" them (23:5). Since Matthew twice uses the same word to refer to the edge of Jesus' garment (9:20; 14:36), it is conceivable that Matthew's Jesus does wear a tzitzit (though one of regular size) in public. For the commonality of exorcism among Jews in the first century, see Josephus, *AI* 8.45-49; and Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 142 ("[t]he

tudes toward Jewish people, this in itself is extraordinary. The centurion risks, at a minimum, ridicule for seeking the services of one who is a powerful practitioner of an alien cult that is— if Tacitus, Juvenal, and others are to be believed— regarded as rather unsavory. Tacitus, for example, remarks: "The Jews regard as profane all that we hold sacred; on the other hand they permit all that we abhor" (*Hist.* 5.4). After describing some of the customs of the Jews he remarks, "the other customs of the Jews are base and abominable and owe their persistence to their depravity" (*Hist.* 5.5). Tacitus even alleges that "the earliest lesson they receive is to despise the gods, to disown their country, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account" (*Hist.* 5.5).<sup>60</sup> Perhaps more important than these views of the Roman elites is the postwar dating of Matthew. With the first Jewish-Roman war— and the Roman propaganda of

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this war as "a victory against atheism on behalf of the gods"— as the backdrop,<sup>61</sup> Matthew's account of the centurion going to a Jewish healer for the healing of his boy-love is indeed a picture of an extraordinary and audacious act of faith. Like Joseph, who is led to pretend that he is the father of Jesus for the sake of the defenseless mother and child (1:18-25), the people whose "faith" is seen by Jesus in their bringing of another sufferer of paralysis to Jesus (9:2), and the Canaanite woman who persists and improvises in the face of humiliation on behalf of another (15:21-27), the centurion takes the risk of acting because of his love for one who is in need and under terrible torture.<sup>62</sup>

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authors of the magical papyri routinely invoke the 'God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob'").

<sup>60</sup> Tacitus's suspicions of what is "foreign" in general and what is associated with "foreign cults" in particular also comes through indirectly in his version of the jurist Gaius Cassius's speech concerning slaves and their punishment:

To our ancestors the temper of their slaves was always suspect, even when they were born on the same estate or under the same roof, and drew in affection for their owners with their earliest breath. But now that our households comprise nations-with customs the reverse of our own, with foreign cults or with none, you will never coerce such a medley of humanity except by terror. (*Ann.* 4.44)

For examples of Juvenal's satirical remarks on Jewish religious practices, see 14.96-106.

<sup>61</sup> Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 44.

<sup>62</sup> In contrast, the disciples, known often as the ones of "little faith" (8:26; 17:20), are shown to be without compassion for little children in 18:2-6. Note also how Matthew's Jesus cites Hos 6:6 twice in his criticism of the Pharisees and, in the process, links his healing, his association with tax collectors and sinners, and his tolerance of picking and eating grain on the Sabbath to "mercy" (9:9-13; 12:1-8). Similarly, "compassion" or "pity" is highlighted in his healing (9:36; 14:14; 20:34), as well as his miraculous feeding of people (15:32). As Mat-

## V. Sexualities and Matthew

So far we have suggested that our rereading of Matt 8:5-13 is consistent with Matthew's understanding of Jesus' identity, with Jesus' emphasis on faith as audacious action on behalf of the needy rather than "correct" words or beliefs, and with Jesus' reservations concerning hierarchical authority. The way Matthew's Jesus seems to affirm the centurion's pederastic relationship with his παῖς, we contend, may also be consistent with Matthew's affirmation of many sexual dissidents in her Gospel.<sup>63</sup> Many have pointed out the sexual innuendo

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surrounding the women in the genealogy of Jesus (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah). It is clear for most critics that Tamar poses as a prostitute and sleeps

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thew's Jesus clearly indicates, love of God and love of neighbor are not separable (22:39).

<sup>63</sup> Our interpretation of this episode directly counteracts that of John J. Pilch (*Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000], 82-84). Pilch argues that Matthew is concerned with restoring "proper" (male) sexual behavior from being penetrated to penetrating by linking Matthew's identification of μάλακιαν as objects of Jesus' healing (4:23; 9:35; 10:1) to effeminacy and (male) sexual passivity. Our interpretation of Matt 8:5-13 shows that, unlike the dominant Greco-Roman tendency to ridicule and condemn (only) the passive partner of any same-sex activity or relation, Jesus proceeds to help the centurion's boy-love. If Matthew were indeed Jewish, this episode concerning the centurion would further indicate that Jews in the first century C.E. had differing views concerning sexual activities. Philo is, of course, well known for his aversion to same-sex activities in general and pederastic relations in particular (*Spec.* 3.37-39; *Contempl.* 59-62). It is rather doubtful, however, that Philo's position is representative of all Jewish views and practices in his time (Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 40); otherwise, we would not find him complaining, for example, against other Alexandrian Jews who, like him, allegorized Scriptures but, unlike him, disregarded the need to observe the literal commandments (*Migr.* 89-92). We do have extant literary works from that period that present pictures different from those of Philo, but those writers were Roman rather than Jewish. For example, Martial attacks a Jewish rival poet for denying a pederastic relationship with a slave boy (*Epig.* 11.94), while Tacitus claims that Jews are prone to all kinds of lusts despite their refusal to marry Gentile women ("although as a race, they are prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women; yet among themselves *nothing* is unlawful" [*Hist.* 5.5; emphasis added]). In any case, given that Matthew's Jesus does not seem to have trouble with the centurion's pederastic relationship, contemporary Christians who condemn same-sex relations may turn out to be following the tactics of many Romans, who dissociate same-sex activities from their own traditions by retrojecting them solely into the past of others (Phaedrus, *Fab.* 4.15-16; Polybius 31.25; Cicero, *Tusc.* 4.33.70-71, 5.20.58). What ought not be forgotten in this discussion of military, racial/ethnic, sexual, and colonial dynamics is what Diana Fuss calls an "epidemiology of sexuality," or how colonial discourse represents colonized areas as breeding grounds for sexual vice and disease (*Identification Papers* [New York: Routledge, 1995] 160). While Fuss focuses on the irony that (European) colonizers were often the ones who introduced diseases into the colonies rather than vice versa, we would like to point out that such representations could also be used as justifications of conquest.

with her father-in-law (Genesis 38), that Rahab is a prostitute (Joshua 2), and that Bathsheba is an adulteress (2 Samuel 11). It is also clear that most critics emphasize, in the case of Ruth, that her union with Boaz is a case of exogamy.<sup>64</sup> What remains questionable is whether Ruth's relationship with Naomi can be seen as one that is both intergenerational and lesbian. The opening genealogy aside, Matthew's Jesus also makes two pronouncements that seem to affirm sexual dissidents. The meaning of his declaration that tax collectors and *prostitutes* will enter God's kin-dom first (21:31) is often glanced over too quickly, as is his statement about being eunuchs for heaven's sake (19:10-12). While the meaning of "prostitutes" may in some sense have been rather consistent since the time of the first century C.E., the meaning of "eunuchs" is an entirely different story. "Eunuch" in the Greco-Roman world does not signify someone who is asexual, but rather one who is both sexually ambiguous and servile. Antony, for example, is compared to "the minion of withered eunuchs" because of his assumed subordination (sexually and otherwise) to Cleopatra (Horace, *Epod.* 9.11-16). In today's terms, "eunuch" would be close to what we might term a human sex toy.<sup>65</sup>

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Prostitutes, adulteresses, sexually aggressive women, sexually penetrated men, eunuchs, slaves, and condemned criminals (like Matthew's Jesus) are all persons of *infames*, or "ill repute," in Roman eyes.<sup>66</sup> In this light, Matthew's affirmations of these people should be read in

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<sup>64</sup> An interesting question in this regard is whether one can view Matthew's opening genealogy as a literary equivalent of a sexually enticing woman, functioning to seduce and allure her readers into the rest of her narrative body or body of narrative. In contrast to Seneca the Elder who features the incompatibility of a priestess and a prostitute by having a lictor move the latter out of the former's way (*Contr.* 1.2.7-8), Matthew uses prostitutes and other "questionable" female figures to pave her way in this so-called church's book.

<sup>65</sup> Carter recognizes this and gives several primary source references (Josephus, *AI* 16.229-40; Josephus, *J.W.* 1.488-91; Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 7.39; Suetonius, *Tit.* 7.1), but this recognition does not seem to have any impact on how he interprets these verses (*Matthew and the Margins*, 383). Since we have been talking about the centurion and the Roman military in this paper, it is interesting to point to a passage where Tacitus condemns a military commander, Fabius Valens, for becoming womanish himself by spending too much time with "his long effeminate train of concubines and eunuchs" (*Hist.* 3.40). In Roman ideology, sexually penetrating women and eunuchs demonstrates one's masculinity, but spending too much time with women and eunuchs would compromise or corrupt one's masculinity.

<sup>66</sup> Catherine Edwards, "Unspeakable Professions: Public Performance and Prostitution in Ancient Rome," in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Hallett and Skinner, 66-76.

connection with her challenge to hierarchical authority and Roman rule.<sup>67</sup>

Particularly in recent years, much has been done in Matthean studies in terms of ethnicity, gender, class, and even colonial politics. What remains to be seen is how questions of sexualities, even abject sexualities, may play a part in these investigations.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> It is well known, for example, that the Roman military was not only highly hierarchical but also highly gendered. It was supposed to embody the ideal of Roman manhood, and this ideal explains at least partly the ban against soldiers getting married (Phang, *Marriage of Roman Soldiers*, 344-83). Whether Matthew's protest against the Romans' hierarchical approach to authority logically leads her to promote alternative views regarding gender and sexuality is a question well worth pondering.

<sup>68</sup> Levine, for example, has suggested that Matthew's problematization of traditional family structure as patriarchal may be related to her depictions of single and independent women in her Gospel ("Matthew," 341, 344; "Matthew's Advice," 27), but Levine has not yet approached the role of sexualities in this Matthean mix. Moreover, one cannot find any foray into sexualities in the 2001 anthology *Gospel of Matthew in Current Study*, ed. Aune. Much intersectional investigation or intercourse surrounding sexualities has been done in the broader world of cultural studies. For examples of anthologies of these investigations, see *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality* (ed. Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (ed. Andrew Parker et al.; New York: Routledge, 1992); *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (ed. David Bell and Gill Valentine; New York: Routledge, 1995); and *Politics of Sexuality* (ed. Terrell Carver and Veronique Mottier; New York: Routledge, 1998). For examples of attempts to use sexualities as a lens to read literary texts, see Jonathan Goldberg, *Sociometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick; Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); and *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Ken Stone; Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2001). Not only does this relatively "new" focus bring about new questions; it also brings new light to old questions. Let us give just two possibilities of exploration here. First, how might Matthew's affirmation of sexual dissidents be connected to her postwar context (the first Jewish-Roman war)? In what ways is her Gospel an identification with powerlessness and/or an articulation of protest? In other words, is this Matthew's true affirmation of the *infames*, or is it just a rhetorical ploy to agitate and attack the Romans? Second, what might Matthew's affirmation of sexual dissidents imply about the traditional view that Matthew is committed to fulfilling the Law, in light of the many prohibitions in the Torah against the very sexualities that Matthew seems to be affirming (Lev 18:22; 19:29; 20:13; Deut 22:5)?