

# Preface

The Gospel of Matthew consists of a story featuring Jesus from his birth to death. As the meaning of the name Jesus (1:21) prophetically foresees, his life is geared for a specific goal to achieve God's saving will for his people. It is the Gospel's testimony that God's will is to save his people through his Son, Jesus, and this is the *raison d'être* of the story. God wills to gather and save his people who are like lost sheep without a shepherd (9:36; 10:6; 15:24) and Jesus, the Son of God, carries out this divinely willed salvation as the shepherd of the people (18:12; 25:32f; 26:31). God not only wills human salvation but also has a specific will concerning the way it is achieved. For this reason, Jesus describes his passion as the "cup" (26:39) associated with the saving will of God (26:42, 53–56) which only the Son of God can "drink."

The climax of Jesus' story is found in the Matthean passion narrative (26:1–27:66), where the entire narrative of the Gospel finally reaches fulfillment. The Matthean passion narrative encapsulates the central themes of the Gospel: Jesus, the Christ Savior, gives his life as a ransom for many (20:28; 26:28) and he accomplishes the divinely-willed salvation through his innocent suffering and death, which the Gospel's implied author emphatically equates with the "innocent blood" of Jesus (27:4, 19, 24). As the innocence of Jesus and the penalty of the cross which he bears are in binary opposition, the way in which God's salvation is achieved through the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus-the-innocent is ironic.

The implied author of the Matthean passion narrative assumes the role of an ironist and reports the circumstances involving in Jesus' death and its theological significance through the kaleidoscopic lens of irony. Nevertheless, the Gospel author's dexterous use of irony as his rhetorical device has not yet received full scholarly appreciation. Therefore, this book focuses on the ways in which the Matthean passion narrative uses irony in its narration and employs it to communicate the significance of the meaning of the death of Jesus.

Irony operates using the phenomenon of a dualistic story. The ironist carefully presents the two worlds of the story in dynamic juxtaposition. In contrast to the lower level of story, which is inferior and false, the upper level of story is superior and true. There is more than meets the eye. This situation creates an irreconcilable incongruity between these two worlds—what appears to be versus what really is—which produces the conflict to be resolved. The

greater the incompatibility of appearance and substance, the more critically revealing the irony that is present.

The Matthean passion narrative is the very seat of revelatory irony within the Gospel of Matthew because the ironic dimension of the Matthean passion narrative reaches its greatest depth in Jesus' death on the cross. The Son of God saves his people by shedding his innocent blood. There exists a profoundly inescapable contrast between the nature of Jesus, as the Christ and the Son of God, and the nature of the cross, known as slavish punishment and dejection (*supplicium servile*), which he bore. Since the *locus* of divine salvation is the very *locus* of humiliation—the most unlikely place for divine activity—the Matthean passion narrative demands that the reader take an ironic view of the cross in order to perceive the salutary impacts of Jesus' death unfolded through it.

Irony is inherent in the nature of the cross that is not only incompatible with but also repellent to the profoundly majestic figure of Jesus Christ. Given the fact that the Christian faith tradition is built upon the Christ-event, irony becomes a way of looking into the heart of Christianity which not only feeds on the saving effect of the innocent blood of Jesus (26:28) but also proclaims it (26:13).