

# 'FOXES' HOLES AND BIRDS' NESTS' (Mt 8:20): A POSTCOLONIAL READING FOR SOUTH AFRICANS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MATTHEW'S ANTI-SOCIETAL LANGUAGE

**Author:**Andries G. van Aarde<sup>1</sup>**Affiliation:**

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Theology,  
University of Pretoria,  
South Africa

**Correspondence to:**

Andries G. van Aarde

**e-mail:**

andries.vanaarde@up.ac.za

**Postal address:**

Faculty of Theology,  
University of Pretoria,  
Lynnwood Road, 0083  
Hatfield, South Africa

**Keywords:**

Gospel of Matthew;  
postcolonial hermeneutics;  
Roman imperialism;  
anti-societal language;  
Mt 8:20

**Dates:**

Received: 12 Jan. 2009  
Accepted: 08 July 2009  
Published: 11 Nov. 2009

**How to cite this article:**

Van Aarde, A.G., 2009, "Foxes' holes and birds' nests" (Mt 8:20): A postcolonial reading for South Africans from the perspective of Matthew's anti-societal language', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 65(1), Art. #318, 10 pages.  
DOI: 10.4102/hts.v65i1.318

**This article is available at:**<http://www.hts.org.za>**Note:**

This article was originally presented as a paper at the Matthew Section of the Society of Biblical Literature Meeting, Boston, 21–25 November 2008

© 2009. The Authors.  
Licensee: OpenJournals Publishing. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

**ABSTRACT**

South Africa is experiencing an exceptionally high crime rate and many people, across the various ethnic groups, are beset by poverty. The question is whether the prevalence of violence in South Africa is the result of neocolonialism or postcolonialism, among other complicated sociological factors. The current article suggests how postcolonial hermeneutics can provide access to the diverse complexities of Africa. Postcolonial consciousness means that the experience of the Other is taken seriously from their own perspective. From the perspective of anti-societal language in the Gospel of Matthew, postcolonial theory is presented as a tool for biblical interpretation that assists in identifying colonial intentions that informed and influenced the South African context. Such theory calls for a constructive reading of concerns relating to justice. The article focuses on the Jesus saying, as influenced by Roman imperial policy. It deals with the comparison between the fate of beasts and that of the son of man, who has nowhere to lay his head (Mt 8:20).

**INTRODUCTION:****CRIMINALITY AND POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The history of democracy in South Africa is short, with democracy itself being a fragile concept. In little over a decade, the country has already had four State Presidents. In his first Address to the Nation, on 28 September 2008,<sup>1</sup> the newly appointed president, Kgalema Motlanthe, explicitly referred to the challenge of breaking the spiral of criminality in South Africa and to the need to lessen the burden of poverty. In the modern-day tricontinental world criminality and poverty go hand in hand. Statistics for violent crimes for the period April to September 2007 present an alarming picture of crime in one of South Africa's more eminent regions, namely Gauteng, a province that is virtually under a state of emergency (see Van Aarde 2008a). During the above-mentioned period the police reacted to more than 134 000 calls from households reporting real crime assault in Gauteng alone. Sexually motivated misconduct reported to the police increased in the province by 15.5%, compared to the national increase of 4.8%. There is a need to consider whether a biblically inspired way of living might break the spiral of violence.

In his Nelson Mandela commemorative lecture in 2006, previous South African President Thabo Mbeki (2006) expressed a relative lack of confidence in institutional religion's ability to contribute to the establishment of constructive cohesion in the country by breaking the spiral. Violent crimes in South Africa form an integral part of the culture of poverty, which, though a global phenomenon, is most widely prevalent in post-colonial and neocolonial Africa. According to Jeffrey Sachs (2005:20), UN statistics indicate that, on average, 20 000 people die of extreme poverty each day (cited in Loader 2008b). The various efforts to explain such a phenomenon are so overwhelming that one does not know where to start a reflection on the topic. Perhaps one should start with the actual or implicit violence, or perhaps with that violence which is harmful on a physical, psychological, emotional, mental or spiritual level, or even, perhaps, with the religious, political, ethnocentric, economic, sexual and gender connotations of such violence.

For a South African biblical scholar to address such a problem in an academic paper before an international audience requires not only the ability to understand the nature of the post-colonial dynamics<sup>2</sup> of the culture of poverty,<sup>3</sup> but also the sound social scientific hermeneutical skill to apply data from the age-old Bible to a modern-day economic and political context.

In Mediterranean antiquity 'being poor' denoted a broad phenomenon, which transcended a state of merely lacking physical and material goods. Poverty encompassed a deprived condition, in which aspects of life that created a sense of well-being in its fullest sense, including health and wealth, as well as an individual's political belonging, which assumed socio-economic home care within a specific family, tribe and nation, were lacking. Such expression of familism (Malina 1989:131) and kinship implied peace with the gods and freedom from demonic influences. In precolonial sub-Saharan Africa, at which stage world imperial powers determined the well-being of people, the condition of the native inhabitants did not differ all that much from Mediterranean antiquity. When dealing with the question of who the poor and the rich were in biblical times (Malina 1986b; Hollenbach 1987), cognisance should be taken of a subtle variation in the meaning of words in the Bible.<sup>4</sup> The term 'disreputable poor' refers

1. At the time when the current article was presented as a paper in Boston in November 2008, Kgalema Motlanthe was the third president of South Africa (see SABC News 28 Sept., 2008, Motlanthe reiterates government plan to reduce poverty, <http://www.sabcnews.com/politics/government>). By the time of the publication of the current article, Jacob Zuma had become South Africa's fourth State President, into which position he was inaugurated in April 2009.

2. See especially Musa W. Dube's (2000) *Postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible* (cf. Rukundwa, Lazare S. & Van Aarde, Andries G. 2007).

3. See Lewis, O. (1966); cf. Sarbin, T.R. (1970).

to the 'destitute among the poor'. In Greek, a distinction is made between those who are 'poor but taken care of' (*pénēs*) and those who are 'poor but not taken care of' (*ptōchós*) (see Corley 2002:41; Crossan 1998:320–322; Hammel 1990:169–170, 195; Hollenbach 1987; Malina 1986b, 1987; Stegemann & Stegemann 1995:90–92; Van Aarde 1988).<sup>5</sup>

The modern social distinction between the 'respectable poor' and the 'disreputable poor' (Van Aarde 1996:952; Sarbin 1970:30) can be seen as appropriate social scientific categories for understanding the characteristics of poverty in an advanced agrarian context of peasantry (Oakman 2008) and in the first-century Mediterranean world shaped by ancient urbanisation (Rohrbaugh 1991; Kloppenborg 2000:234–242).

However, in addressing the overwhelming issue of violent crime and poverty in post-colonial South Africa, social scientific exegetes should avoid the hermeneutical fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Data about alienation from resources, as well as textual references to exclusion from common privileges, uncovered in preindustrial biblical documents, should thus not be applied to post-colonial and neo-colonial contexts in an ethnocentric fashion. Therefore, a post-colonial reading strategy (Sugirtharajah 2003:13–36) can benefit from taking social scientific criticism into account in order to avoid misplaced concreteness. In other words, during the process of revealing cross-cultural similarities between the first-century Mediterranean world of the Scriptures and the present-day context of readers and believers, the exegete should be culturally sensitive and should not neglect the differences in social behaviour and thinking, including those relating to cosmology, ideology and mythology.

## POST- AND NEOCOLONIALISM

In the 1930s both the colonies and the former colonies of European countries constituted some 84.6% of the world (Fieldhouse 1989:373). From the late 1950s to the 1960s African nations gained their political independence. Zimbabwe, Namibia and Mozambique followed during the 1980s and 1990s. In 1994, South Africa became a democracy.<sup>6</sup> The new politics of modernisation redesigned the African landscape into various democracies – although fragile – that brought an end to the politics of divisive tribes and languages that previously had formed the bases of positions of power, from which the common people had been manipulated and exploited (Birmingham 1995).<sup>7</sup> However, since independence, some African states have turned into predatory states, by either becoming one-party states or by having parasitic leaders who are using the new states as large private farms for their own enrichment. Coups and counter-coups followed such usurping of power (Hofmeyr 2004:1307). Civil wars ensued, leading to the collapse of economies. The abuse of human rights and of the environment ensued, along with corruption and poverty. Modern imperial nations of the world have since become involved in Africa and

'freedom at last' has not materialised.<sup>8</sup> Actually, the situation in post-colonial Africa has become worse than what it was under colonialism.

According to Fernando Segovia, post-colonial studies broadly reflect

*on the discourse and practice of imperialism and colonialism from the vantage point of a situation where imperialism and colonialism have come – by and large but by no means altogether so – to a formal end but remain very much at work in practice, as neoimperialism and neocolonialism.*

(Segovia 1998:51 note 3)

In the context of African religiosity, such post-colonial neo-colonialism has resulted in churches engaging in the spiritual life performed in the public space. Although institutional religion has lost its authority, churches have become important benefactors within civil society, as the judiciary and the role of traditional rulers have either been compromised or have declined. Against such a background, the relevancy of hermeneutics for the social recovery process within a post-colonial era is crucial, yet complicated. In the 'post-colonial nation-state' (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1995:186), the former colonial powers still exercise power through the global economy, as well as by means of their military and cultural superiority.

Subsequently, the term 'postcolonialism' appeared in the works of literary critics until the 1990s.<sup>9</sup> The hyphenated spelling of 'post-colonial' could indicate the naiveté of assuming the break between colonialism and the 'new' politics/economy to be total. The unhyphenated term 'postcolonial' might refer to the

*complex relations of domination and submission, dependence and independence, desire and revulsion, resistance and collusion that can characterize the exchanges between colonizer and colonized during colonial occupation and after official decolonization.*

(Moore 2000:182)

As an 'alternative hermeneutics', postcolonialism interprets texts by identifying 'gaps, absences and ellipses, the silences and closures' in documents and 'read[s] them from our own specific locations' (Sugirtharajah 2003:16, 18). Post-colonial analysis thus focuses on both the positive and negative changes that have taken place in transforming the copy to something completely new. Change is seen in terms of better or worse. Postcolonialism explores strategies of interpreting texts from the situation of people who are accommodated in a new 'liberated' context, but who, nevertheless, find themselves both included, and excluded, from it. Their 'identity' is not simply a matter of a double consciousness, as though the natives do not know who they are. Their situation is rather one of permanent dislocation. Though colonised people cannot return to their previous position, they are never fully integrated into the new situation. They find themselves in a culture that accommodates them, while simultaneously looking down on those who have been accommodated. Such is a matter of occupying an identity of sameness and difference, of belonging and not belonging.

Postcolonial hermeneutics is concerned with linguistic, cultural and geographical transfer. Therefore, there is a link between translation and postcolonialism (Young 2003:138). Translation means 'to carry across'. A colony begins as a 'translation', with the original being carried across the globe to another place. The far-distant reproduction differs from the original, so that the concept 'colony' resembles a metaphor, in the sense that the original is displaced by the image.

4. See Stegemann ([1981] 1984:14). In ancient Greek literature *pénēs* is the term most frequently used. In the New Testament, the word appears in 2 Cor 9:9 in a quote from the Old Testament. A semantically related word, *penechrós*, is used in Lk 21:2. Josephus preferred *aporos*. In Ac 4:34 the word *endeēs* is used. A variety of other expressions is used in a metaphorical way in the New Testament, for example *asthenēs* in Gl 4:9, meaning 'weak' or 'sick'. The word *ptōchós*, according to Wolfgang Stegemann ([1981] 1984:14), refers to the 'desperately poor, wretched creatures who are fighting for their survival'.

5. William Loader (2008b) questions whether such a distinctive connotation can be ascribed to the Greek word *ptōchós*: 'This ignores, however, its broader use in the LXX and the Hebrew semantic ranges reflected there.' However, in the writer's opinion, Loader's (2008a) discussion of the 'ranges' of the Semitic equivalents of the Greek word *ptōchós* does not cast doubt on the important distinction between 'being poor' and 'being disreputably poor', with the latter applying to being destitute. The 'ranges' vary from 'without property, so dependent on others; poor, wretched, in a needy condition' to 'the poor devoted to God as in the Psalms' (cf. Loader 2008a notes 4 and 5).

6. See David Birmingham (1995).

7. For an explanation of the concept 'neo-colonialism', see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neocolonialism>.

8. 'Freedom at last' is the famous saying of Nelson Mandela, on his release after more than 27 years of captivity (see his autobiography, *Long walk to freedom* (Mandela 1994, 1996)).

9. See, for example, the works of Robert J.C. Young (1987, 1990, 1995, 1996, 2001, 2003) of Oxford University, who is a leading international theorist in the fields of literature, history and social anthropology.

Translating from one language into another completely transforms material form. When colonialism subordinated the indigenous culture to the culture of the colonial power, a transformation of all aspects of the original culture took place. However, simultaneously, certain aspects of the original culture could not be translated. Translation is never a completely neutral form of symmetrical intercultural communication. Power relations and, therefore also political issues, are always involved. One party does the translating, while the other is in the passive position of being translated or transformed. Such is the position of the colonised. The colonial copy is deemed better than the original. That which was wrong in the original is assumed to be improved in the copy. The colonial language, therefore, comes to be regarded more powerful than the native language. Early on in the process of colonisation, the oral texts of the native languages were translated and transformed into fixed written texts. Translation, thus, became a way of gaining control over the language, the culture and the people being translated. Not only were territories taken from the indigenous peoples, but they were also renamed, reallocated and restructured (Young 2003:140).

In the light of postcolonialism's emphasis on the reordering of power structures, Halliday's (1978:164–182; cf. 1976) notion of 'antilanguages' provides an applicable 'translational' apparatus for interpreting aspects of a 'postcolonial' society, no matter whether it be a present-day or ancient one:

*The second life is a reconstruction of the individual and society. It provides an alternative social structure, with its systems of values, of sanctions, of rewards and punishments; and this becomes the source of an alternative identity for its members, through the patterns of acceptance and gratification. In other words, the second life is an alternative reality.*

(Halliday 1978:168)

### ANTI-SOCIETAL LANGUAGE

The language of everyday discourse is inadequate for expressing an alternative to a conventionally ordered society. The reordering of socio-ethical values needs another kind of language, namely an anti-societal language. Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh (1998:1–16) developed a social scientific model in respect of anti-language to be used in the interpretation of the Gospel of John. This kind of 'wording' can also be applied to the Gospel of Matthew.

Wording is generally accepted as the linguistic way in which humans express meaning. However, it has long been known that meaning is not a matter of 'wording' alone, but that words and their meaning actually derive from a social system (cf. Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:3). For the purpose of analysis for the sake of better understanding, languages can be said to comprise three linguistic modes of meaning: the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual (Halliday 1978:8–36, 69, 125–126; Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:6). The ideational refers to what is being said or described; the interpersonal considers the personal qualities of the communicating partners; and the textual pertains to the linguistic units of meaning at a level higher than the sentence, for example, the cohesion of paragraphs into a section of an essay. Thus, what one says is ideational, with whom one speaks is interpersonal, and how one speaks is textual.

In the re-enacting of anti-societal language by the followers of Jesus at the time when the Gospels were written, one finds tendencies of 'relexicalisation' and 'overlexicalisation' (Halliday 1978:165–166). The first refers to the practice of using new words to describe a reality not ordinarily referred to by such words:

*Typically this relexicalization is partial, not total: not all words in the language have their equivalents in the antilanguage ... The principle is that of same grammar, different vocabulary; but different vocabulary only in certain areas, typically those that are central to the activities of the subculture and that set it off most sharply from the established society.*

(Halliday 1978:165)

Within institutional Christian religion, an example of relexicalisation is the reference to 'bread' as 'the body of Christ' or to 'wine' as the 'blood of Christ'.<sup>10</sup> 'Relexicalisation' points to items and objects affecting areas of central concern to the group. 'Overlexicalisation' refers to a situation where there is a multiplicity of words for the central area of concern. This is indicated by a set of words that has the same denotation, but has a different connotation based on the attitude and commitment that the set of words entails in an interpersonal context.<sup>11</sup> The consistent 'relexicalisation' and 'overlexicalisation' – along with a focus on the interpersonal and modal aspect of language – point to what Halliday has referred to as 'antilanguage' (cf. Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:7). Anti-language is the language of an 'anti-society', which is

*a society that is set up within another society as a conscious alternative to it. It is a mode of resistance, resistance which may take the form either of passive symbiosis or of active hostility and even destruction.*

(Halliday 1978:171)

As a rule, anti-societies have a negative relation to the traditional conventions of society. They are not outside society, but in opposition to the established norms within society. Anti-language thus arises when the alternative reality is counter-reality, in opposition to the establishment (see Halliday 1978:171; Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:9). In other words, an anti-language is a language deriving from, and generated by, an anti-social group. An anti-societal group is a social collectivity that is set up within a larger society as a conscious alternative to it (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:9–11).

Anti-language exists solely in the social context of resocialisation. Like any other language, it is a means of realising meanings from the social system of the society in question. It is a means of expressing perceptions of reality, as interpreted by persons socialised in that social system. Socially, the use of language actively creates and maintains the prevailing interpretations of reality. However, unlike ordinary language, anti-language creates and expresses an interpretation of reality that is inherently an alternative reality, one that emerges precisely in order to function as an alternative to society at large.

In order to understand the phenomenon of anti-society, one has to understand the larger society to which it is opposed. Anti-society makes no sense in the absence of the society against which it stands. Like language itself, anti-language is the bearer of social reality, but of an alternative social reality that runs counter to the social reality of society at large. Thus, an anti-language serves to maintain an inner solidarity in the face of pressure from the wider society (from which group members stem, and in which they, to a large extent, are still embedded). Furthermore, for individuals to maintain solidarity with their fellow anti-social members and to avoid falling back into the margins of the groups they have left or from which they have been expelled, some kind of alternative ideology and emotional anchorage in the new collectivity are necessary. This necessity is best served by demonstrations of mutual care and concern on the part of those in the anti-social group. Language is crucial to the social interpretation of reality and to the socialisation of new members into that social interpretation. So, too, is anti-language crucial to the social reinterpretation of an alternative reality and to the resocialisation of newcomers into that alternative society.

10. In the history of Christian theology, the 'patristic theologian' who is perhaps best-known for religious 'relexicalisation' in Latin, due to his coining of 'new terms', was Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (c. 160 – c. 220 CE), anglicised as Tertullian. Terms such as *vetus testamentum* ('old testament') and *novum testamentum* ('new testament'), *trinitas* ('Trinity'), *treis Personae* (for the koine Greek *treis hypostases*) and *una Substantia* (for *homoousios*) originated with Tertullian (cf. also F. Bethune-Baker 1903).

11. Relexicalisation includes all the 'I am...' statements of Jesus, for example 'bread' (Jn 6:35) and 'door' (Jn 10:9). The words have the same denotation in the context in which they are employed, as they refer to real-world objects. However, when identified with Jesus in an 'I am...' proposition, each word takes on some interpersonal dimension. For example, Jesus is not bread, but he is like bread for those who stay attached to him; he is not a door, but he is like a door to God for those who believe in him (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:5–6).

One could generalise by stating that metaphorical modes of expression are the 'normal' way by means of which anti-language is articulated (cf. Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:13–14). Relating such 'modes of expression' to an apocalyptic type of language, such as Martin Hengel ([1969] 1974:210–218) does, links 'Jewish apocalypticism' to 'counter-cultural language'. Employing postcolonial notions in explicit reference to South Africa, John Riches (2005:136) states: 'this counter-cultural language also becomes the language of the disempowered and the subaltern, opposed to the language of the rulers.'

As a South African, and in light of my own reading of Matthew's gospel as a narrative, the plot of which unfolds against the background of a particular process in history and a particular mindset, I consider the insights of Hengel and Riches to be rather appropriate. The process referred to, in this instance, was that of the separation between the 'synagogue' and the 'church', which received an extra impetus after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70CE. The mindset was that of an apocalypticism that Matthew adopted from Mark (and a later version of Q). Like the other Synoptic Gospels, Matthew presents his understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus in the light of this apocalyptic mindset. The apocalyptic expectation in Matthew was that this world would be transformed into the final kingdom of God (see Van Aarde 2008b). Towards the end of his book, *Matthew and Empire* (2001), Warren Carter (2001) states the following with regard to language:

*By far the dominant way of talking about God's purposes in Matthew is "the reign/kingdom of the heavens." As I have explained, the language denotes "reign" and "empire." It designates structures of domination, control, violence, hierarchy, patriarchy, elitism. Some have thought alternative expressions that shift the image from the imperial world to that of households and relationships. One option is "kin-dom." This term helpfully highlights alternative communities and relationships, but it fails to express the larger cosmic dimensions of God's purposes.*

(Carter 2001:177)

According to Carter, Matthew's gospel paradoxically criticises imperialism on the one hand, despite foreseeing God's coming triumph in the language of his own 'imperialist hopes' – meaning that 'God's coming triumph concerns the violent means by which God's empire is imposed.' Carter here refers to the 'eschatological' dimensions in Matthew's language. Such a 'violent imposition is at odds with the way in which the Gospel conceives the empire to be at work in the present in communities of service, inclusion, healing, relieving need, mercy'. Carter does not want 'violence to be the final word in imposing God's empire', because '[t]hat would make God nothing other than a copy of any emperor' (Carter 2001:178). His solution is to eliminate this type of language: 'Without an imperial mindset there can be reconciliation and transformation' (Carter 2001:179).

Carter's identification of a dichotomy between the present peaceable presence and the violent future imposition, which can be found in Matthew's thinking (see Carter 2003:467–487) represents a praiseworthy hermeneutics of suspicion. Such an approach tries to neutralise violence by means of 'nonimperial terms such as "reconciliation" and "transformation" in the establishment of "God's just world", because such terms are "more consistent with the Gospel's vision of God's work in the present"' (Carter 2001:178). Such an interpretation is endorsed by acknowledging Matthew's anti-societal language.

Anti-language appears in Matthew's gospel also in instances where the evangelist employs the 'imperialist' notion of kingdom. Realising this, one should recognise that Matthew's 'king-dom' language lacks violent imposition. The aim of my article is to illustrate just such a point. In means of this aim, I apply a 'postcolonial' reading strategy by interpreting Matthew's gospel against the background of South Africa's present-day culture of violence and poverty.

## MATTHEW'S 'POSTCOLONIAL' SETTING

In my opinion, Matthew did not originate in Antioch,<sup>12</sup> but somewhere in northern Galilee and southern Syria after 70CE (*Galiläa tön ethnôn* – Mt 4:15). There was conflict in this region between the 'scribe' (*grammateus*) 'Matthew'<sup>13</sup> and the other village scribes, who were in the process of establishing the first phase of a Pharisaic rabbinate.<sup>14</sup>

The Gospel of Matthew could, therefore, be seen as similar to Richard Horsley's (1996:145–146, 193–194) understanding of Galilee, as the social location of Q, as a product of scribal activity within the context of the revitalisation of villages, after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (contra to Nolland 2005:16). The communities struggled to come to terms with the loss of Jerusalem and the temple. Since the city of God no longer existed, they had to find God's presence in a 'conflictual' environment of village communities (cf. Freyne 2004:137).

The Jesus movement in Galilee and the work of early post-70CE rabbis, called the 'earlier scribes and sages' by Horsley (1996:181–184), can be seen as a 'revitalization of village communities'. After the temple was destroyed, the Pharisaic scribes and sages reorganised themselves in places such as Jamnia (in Judea), Galilee and Syria. There they tried to duplicate the old value systems, especially those regulations concerning hierarchy in society and the purity ideology of the Jerusalem temple, in the households of the villages. A similar attempt at revitalising the village communities was found among the Jesus groups. The value system that they implemented was based on Jesus' alternative understanding of the Torah. The difference in value systems and interests led to conflict between the Pharisaic scribes and the scribes among the followers of Jesus. Amid Roman exploitation,<sup>15</sup> the scribes could be seen to be engaged in village restoration.

Seán Freyne (2004:137–138) places greater emphasis on the 'various other strands of Jewish thinking' than does Richard Horsley. According to Freyne (2004:149), Jesus' kingdom message was 'not merely a judgment on all earthly kingdoms and their oppressive regimes', but rather called 'for the emergence of a new and different household which Jesus and his community of alternative values were in the process of re-assembling'. There was conflict in the villages between the two groups of scribes: the followers of Jesus, who acknowledged him as Messiah, and those Israelites who upheld a Messianic view. The conflict centred around the interpretation of the Torah: Jesus could either be seen as the new Moses who fulfilled the Torah, or in terms of the traditional Mosaic view, as it was regulated by the temple cult.

Conceding the differences among scholars as to the 'Jewish setting' of first-century Galilee, and subtle variations regarding even the most minute details, especially with respect to the Galileans' affiliation to the Jerusalem temple, I concur with John Kloppenborg's<sup>16</sup> 'reading of Q in the Galilee' and apply

12. Concurring with R.T. France (2007:15), but contra to, among others, W.D. Davies & D.C. Allison ([1988] 2004:138–147). According to Ulrich Luz (1985:74), 'ist Antiochien nicht die schlechteste Hypothese' (= 'is Antioch not the worst choice').

13. Although the tradition that the 'First Gospel' should be attributed to the character 'Matthew', referred to in Mt 9:9 and 10:3, originated early on (during the 2nd century CE), the name of its author remains unknown till this day (Luz 1985:76). Robert Gundry (2005) maintains the reliability of such a tradition. However, such a thesis was once again recently successfully questioned by David Sim (2007).

14. See also Adolf Schlatter ([1933] 1963), who is of the opinion that Matthew was probably an 'ethical rigorist' and a representative of the earliest 'Christian rabbinate' (cf. Ernst von Dobschütz 1928); however, contra Luz [1985:76–77]).

15. Dorothy Jean Weaver (2005:114) describes Roman exploitation as follows: 'Accordingly, while the emperor himself is not an "onstage" actor within Matthew's narrative, it is evident that his impact on the lives of the occupied populace extends both to the most mundane aspects of daily life and to the most terrifying of human catastrophes.'

16. Kloppenborg (2000:261) concludes: 'Subject to steady pressures from urbanization and the monetization of the economy and in a situation where older forms of rural patronage were threatened by the presence of a new urban elite, small-holders were in an increasingly fragile state. One bad harvest or one serious misfortune might mean the loss of everything, since the new patronal class, already viewed



his reading scenario to my contextual reading of Matthew (emphasised insertions added):

*These scribes also resisted any efforts to impose a southern, hierocratically-defined vision of Israel [contra Seán Freyne 1981:104] in which human affairs are centered on a central sanctuary and its priestly officers. This is not opposition to the Temple; but it is also not an endorsement of the hierocratic worldview of either the priestly aristocracy or the Pharisees, both of whom come in for serious criticism. Q [= Matthew] is thus [sic] engaged in a struggle on two fronts: in support of town and village culture against the encroachments of the cities, and in support of local forms of Israelite religion in the face of pressures from the hierocratic worldview of Judaea.*

(Kloppenborg 2000:261)

Due to Matthew's social location in northern Galilee and southern Syria after 70CE, scribes in the synagogues found it difficult to accept Matthew's re-enactment of Jesus as Israel's new Moses.<sup>17</sup> During the period of formative Judaism, the scribe who was responsible for the Gospel of Matthew seems to have been in conflict with some scribes of the Galilean/Syrian village administration, whose allegiance was given to the elite ex-Jerusalem scribes (cf. Orton 1989:49). As a 'scribe' (*grammateus*) who became a 'disciple' of the 'kingdom of heaven' (Mt 13:52), the author of the 'First Gospel' could have had his roots in Jerusalem (see Käsemann [1960] 1969:88; Hengel 1995:155, 158, 167). The 'newness' – actually the aspect of cognitive dissonance that hindered a reaching of consensus – was Jesus' anti-societal language re-enacted by Matthew.

Anti-societal language is to be found in almost in every line in Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' authority – and language – were presented as remarkably different to that of the scribes of the Israelite crowds (Mt 7:28):

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;
- If salt has lost its taste ... it hasn't any power more;
- If one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also;
- Your Father who is in heaven makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good;
- Our Father who art in heaven let thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;
- Consider the lilies of the field; even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these;

(footnote 16 continues...)

with distrust (Q 7:24–26 [= Mt 11:7–9]; 14:16–24 [= Mt 22:1–14]; 16:13 [= Mt 6:24]; 19:12–26 [= Mt 25:14a–29]), could not be depended upon for help. In reaction to this, the Sayings Gospel [= the Gospel of Matthew] and the scribes who framed it proposed a model of local cooperation based on strategies of tension reduction, debt release, and forgiveness, and appealing to an image of God as a generous patron and parent who could be depended upon for sustenance' (emphasised insertions added).

17. However, the debate between Jesus' teaching and that of the Pharisees in the gospel tradition (such as Q and Matthew's use of Q as a source (cf. Kloppenborg 2000:200–202) should not be anachronistically seen as two established institutes, a 'church' and a 'synagogue', in conflict with each other. Instead, the conflicting interests came about as the result of a process of institutionalisation that took two directions in the village communities. The gospel reports of Jesus' teaching in the synagogues in Galilee mention that he was challenged by Pharisaic scribes (see Mk 1:21, 27; 2:1, 6). Horsley (1996:184) puts it as follows: 'It seems likely that the tradition of Jesus' teaching behind such literature as Mark, Q, and the Didache would have been cultivated in Galilean communities.' The context of this early scribal activity among Jesus' followers and the Pharisees was that of the *bet-midrash* (formative Judaism) rather than that of the *bene ha-knesset* (normative Judaism). From the second century onwards, the synagogue began functioning separately from the village administration (see Cohen 1992:157–173; Levine 1992:201–222). However, Graham Stanton argues that in Matthean studies we should abandon concepts such as the 'true Israel', and even the 'new Israel'. According to Graham Stanton (1992:11), Matthew prefers to speak of a 'new people' (Mt 21:43) – 'in effect a "third race" (*tertium genus*) over against both Jews and Gentiles'. In contrast to Stanton, Anthony J Saldarini (1994) considers the 'Matthean group' as 'a fragile minority still thinking of themselves as Jews and still identified with the Jewish community by others'. Therefore, speaking of the 'Matthean community', Saldarini uses the term 'Christian-Jewish' rather than 'Jewish-Christian'. Paul Hertig (1998) suggests that Matthew sought to firmly plant Jewish-Christianity in the soil of Judaism for the sake of the Jews, while simultaneously exhibiting the universal nature of Jewish Christianity for the sake of the Gentiles.

- Not every one who says to me: 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew's anti-societal language should be seen as a re-enactment of Jesus' subversive ethics within a context similar to what we could call a 'postcolonial' setting. The 'translational' process of relexicalisation in some cases – such as calling Jesus a Davidic Moses-Messiah Saviour figure (see Van Aarde 2005a) – and overlexicalisation in other cases – such as in the case of the 'disreputable poor' in the Matthean community and the response to coercive violence – went through phases from 'remembering Jesus' as codified in the Q-tradition and in Mark's gospel, to Matthew's re-enactment.

As far as Jesus' context is concerned, Rudolf Bultmann – decades before the present new quest for the historical Jesus – expressed the opinion that we know enough of Jesus' message to be able to draw a coherent picture. In what is to my knowledge the most condensed summary of Bultmann's reconstruction, he mentions the exorcisms, the breach with the Sabbath laws, the abandonment of regulations relating to purity, the anti-legalism, involvement with outcasts, alliance with women and children, social fellowship, and an inclusive gender companionship.<sup>18</sup>

However, such a view on Jesus' ethics can be amended. Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter<sup>19</sup> (1997) describe Bultmann's view in terms of 'conclusion and fulfillment' (i.e., the 'conquering') of Israelite legalism. Their amendment considers Jesus' ethics as corresponding to aspects of Israelite tradition, but not as wholly in agreement with all groups of Jesus' followers. In the current article, the 'group of Jesus followers' that I have in mind is that of Matthew and the community for whom he wrote. For the purpose of the present paper, I would restrict Jesus' ethics to his understanding of the 'kingdom of God' – or, in Matthean terms, the 'kingdom of the heavens'.

Despite the discontinuity between them, I wish to contextualise the ethics of both Jesus and Matthew, as embedded within the context of 'ethical eschatology', which is also referred to as social apocalypticism (see Crossan 1998:273–292). Such ethics can be described as the re-enactment of Jesus' anti-societal language. Through Jesus' 'ethical' behaviour (in terms of the interaction of his words and deeds), he subverted the systemic violence that was forced upon the marginalised peasants in Israel by the powers of the day in Rome, Sepphoris, Tiberias and Jerusalem – the centres of the emperor, the Herodian family, and the priestly (Zadokite) elite, respectively.

The continuity–discontinuity between Jesus and Matthew can be explained in terms of the notions of 'telling' and 'showing'.<sup>20</sup> The expression 'telling' is used to refer to a probable act of Jesus (the intertwining of words and deeds), while 'showing' refers to an act of faith by believers of later faith communities who 'retold' Jesus. Telling thus refers to both sayings and deeds, as they go hand-in-hand, even if one or the other is not directly reported as such. Showing relates to the 'enactment' or 'recounting', which could be based on something that is either authentic or inauthentic. Irrespective of the historicity of the case, the faith assertion expressed by the enactment or retelling is so overwhelming that authenticity is overshadowed and difficult to discern. Telling is, thus, not without showing and vice versa. Yet telling and showing must never be confused, although, in principle, they

18. See Bultmann, R ([1960] 1965:11): 'Mit einiger Vorsicht also wird man über das Wirken Jesu Folgendes sagen können. Charakteristisch für ihn sind Exorzismen, der Bruch des Sabbatgebotes, die Verletzung von Reinheitsvorschriften, die Polemik gegen die jüdische Gesetzlichkeit, die Gemeinschaft mit deklassierten Personen wie Zöllnern und Dirnen, die Zuneigung zu Frauen und Kindern; auch ist zu erkennen, daß Jesus nicht wie Johannes der Täufer ein Asket war, sondern gerne aß und ein Glas Wein trank. Vielleicht darf man noch hinzufügen, daß er zur Nachfolge aufrief und eine kleine Schar von Anhängern – Männern und Frauen – um sich sammelte.'

19. cf. Part II of Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter (1997).

20. The terms are used somewhat differently by Robert W. Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998:27–28). For them, 'showing' comes first, in reference to 'enactment', while 'telling' is the same as 'recounting'.

should be distinguished from each other, notwithstanding the fact that they are dialectically intertwined.<sup>21</sup>

Though the Galilean world of Jesus differs from the Matthean, both worlds share the same Graeco-Roman context. Comparing Matthew with Jesus requires, on the one hand, asking about the similarities and differences between Jesus' subversiveness of conventional Israelite legalism and conventional Graeco-Roman legalism, and, on the other hand, the re-enactment of his subversive words and deeds by scribes among the Matthean Jesus group, also embedded in an Israelite and Graeco-Roman context.

In another study, I referred to the 'world of Jesus' and the 'world' of the later scribes as the 'little tradition' over against the 'great tradition' (see Van Aarde 2004). In this regard, insights into the domestic, social, political, economic, agricultural, urban and religious structures of the various environments – those of the Galilean-Judean and those of the Graeco-Roman – will assist in distinguishing the 'little tradition' of Jesus from Matthew's 'great tradition'.<sup>22</sup> Both 'traditions' represent the 'Jewish world' of Roman imperialist hybridity and exploitation, which burdened the culture of poverty among the common folk. Both 'traditions' produced anti-societal language, which expressed alternative values.

Calling Jesus the 'son of man' allows for the portrayal of both the impact of Roman imperialist hybridity and the increasing culture of poverty among Israelite peasants as its consequence, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the meaning of anti-language in both Jesus' and Matthew's 'Jewish world'. The shift in meaning of the expression 'son of man' between the 'little tradition' and the 'great tradition' demonstrates Theissen's notion of *Inter-Rollen-Konflikt* between an imperial connotation of an oppressive emperor's kingdom and a familial connotation of an empowering kingdom (of a divine father-like king and his heavenly-ascended son). It demonstrates also the value system of those who have benefited from this 'conflictual triumph' and have begun to belong to and participate in the collaboration process of this 'kingdom of heavens' as an 'already-presence' (see Crossan 2007:126–127).

### 'FOXES' HOLES AND BIRDS' NESTS' (MT 8:20)

When Jesus and the peasantry of Galilee spoke of God, their anti-language formed part of the 'little tradition'. According to David Fiensy (1991:2), the little tradition consists of 'low culture, folk culture, or popular tradition which is passed on among the unlettered of the village community.' In other words, Jesus did not speak about the 'kingdom of God' in terms of monarchical structures, that is, in the imperial terms of the 'great tradition'. However, Matthew (like the other Gospels) does not reveal the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus' deconstructing-imperial language, since the early little Jesus tradition developed into a great tradition. Theissen (1999:98) calls such a transition a 'selective adaptation to the power structures of the world'. There are two facets to this transition, the one being that Jesus' kingdom message was received as empowering, and the other being that Jesus' anti-language accorded with the value systems of the people. The transition should be understood against an agrarian background of dispossession and redistribution of land by the imperial powers and the breaking up of the extended family. The disruption of land and family severely affected the lives of peasants. In other words, Jesus' kingdom message originated

orally as part and parcel of the 'little tradition' in the context of peasant culture. His followers reconceptualised Jesus' message in terms of the 'great tradition'.

During Jesus' lifetime and also in the period of the Jesus movements after his death, the peasantry (also in Herodian Palestine) experienced and perceived kings and kingdoms in a negative way. The same also held true for the Matthean community. This is the reason, as we indicated earlier in the article, for Warren Carter's (2001) particular interpretation. According to Carter, the present-day Christian community has internalised a 'nonimperial' mindset in order to collaborate in the process that Jesus began. Such an internalisation takes care of – among other destitute people – the marginalised poor to whom, according to Jesus, the 'kingdom of heavens' belongs (e.g. Mt 5:3).

When such a demand is considered, the ambivalence with regard to 'empire theology' is conspicuous. A hermeneutics of suspicion, as well as an accompanying cultural-critical reading of Matthew's violent eschatological imposition could, therefore, be regarded as the preferable exegetical approach to Matthew's (and other Christian theologians') 'empire talk'. Although I am an active practitioner of the hermeneutics of suspicion and cultural-critical theology (see Andries van Aarde 2005b), in my opinion, Matthew's re-enactment of Jesus' 'kingdom message', should not be considered negatively at all, when it is seen as being framed in an anti-societal language. However, such a consideration does not remove its ambivalence. Joerg Rieger refers to the 'ambivalence' as follows:

*Throughout its history, theology has often been employed in the support of empire and sometimes in the critique of it, and often there is only a thin line between the two. Nevertheless, the existence of ambivalence is itself a witness to the limits of empire. Post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha notes how this ambivalence is disturbing to colonial discourse and how it "poses an immanent [sic] threat to both "normalized" knowledge and disciplinary powers."<sup>23</sup> The challenge, he argues, is a "double" vision, which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority."<sup>24</sup> Ambivalence is thus a welcome companion in the resistance against empire.*

(Rieger 2007:8)

There are numerous reasons for the negative perception of kings and kingdoms. One such contributing factor was the fact that the succession of kings or kingdoms, in most instances, led to the changing of boundaries which, in turn, was often followed by the dispossession of land (see Fiensy 1991:21–73). Jesus' aphorism in Q (Lk 9:58//Mt 8:20)<sup>25</sup> about the comparison between the fate of beasts and that of the son of man, who has nowhere to lay his head,<sup>26</sup> is an example that illustrates not only the 'translation' between Jesus' and Matthew's anti-societal language, but also the ambivalence in their 'empire theology'. A parallel saying occurs in Plutarch's *Life of Tiberius Graecus*<sup>27</sup> (1995:208).<sup>28</sup> The

23. See Homi Bhabha (1994:86).

24. Homi Bhabha (1994:88).

25. An aphorism with similar content also appears in the Gospel of Thomas (*logion* 86), where it is introduced with the formula: 'Jesus said'. In a later rescission of the Q tradition (in keeping with Luke and Matthew), the saying concludes a short narrative (confirmed by the similarity between Matthew and Luke). The biographical framework found in the Sayings Gospel Q should be seen as a post-Easter addition to the Q tradition. Here, too, is evidence of an earlier Jesus tradition, also indicated by the parallel in the Gospel of Thomas. Multiple independent witnesses confirm the probable authenticity of the Jesus saying, which was later placed within a biographical framework. The uncomplicated introduction to the saying in Thomas 86 indicates an earlier aphoristic form (see Bultmann [1921] 1963).

26. Bultmann (1963:69) discusses the saying under the heading *Logia (Jesus as the Teacher of Wisdom)*. Such sayings belong to the category 'proverbs'.

27. See Boring, Berger and Colpe (1995:208); Bultmann (1963:28); Horsley (1996:240).

28. '(T)he men of wealth and substance, however, were led by their greed to hate the law ... and tried to dissuade the people by alleging that Tiberius was introducing

21. What Bultmann ([1928] 1969:230) discerned with regard to the relationship between Jesus and Paul could also, in the current researcher's opinion, be applied to the relationship between the 'telling' and 'showing' in the ethics of Jesus and Matthew. It is a matter of discontinuity in content ('inhältliche Diskontinuität') and an expansion and deepening as material continuity ('sachliche Relation').

22. In a recent article, titled 'Vom historischen Jesus zum kerygmatischen Gottessohn: Sociologische Rollenanalyse als Beitrag zum Verständnis neutestamentlicher Christologie', Gerd Theissen (2008:293) describes the shift in terms of 'Inter-Rollen-Konflikt'.



quote from Plutarch<sup>29</sup> is an excerpt from a speech about land reform delivered in the Roman Senate in 133 BCE.<sup>30</sup>

The adoption of such a sympathetic attitude towards the poor in Italy might have reached the ears of the 'colonised' peasants in the eastern parts of the Roman Empire, even after the Republican era.<sup>31</sup> Plutarch's ethical rhetoric provided the ideal elements from which anti-societal language, in the oral culture of the Graeco-Roman world, was formed, as well as among the peasants in Galilee during the time of Jesus. It is, of course, not possible to know whether Jesus, when he referred to the son of man who had nowhere to lay his head, had the saying of Tiberius in mind. It is, however, possible that a similar saying of Jesus could have been taken over in the Q tradition, with it only later, when placed in a biographical context, being made to resonate with the saying of Tiberius.<sup>32</sup> Bultmann ([1921] 1963:98) is of the opinion that the Jesus saying reflected a type of folk pessimism, such as is reflected, for example, in Job 3:25–26 and Ec 3:19.<sup>33</sup> Such anti-language subverts the conventional wisdom, as well as cohering with Jesus' vision.<sup>34</sup> In the above-mentioned case, it subverts the conventional societal wisdom of 'Jesus' Jewish world', in terms of which human beings were assigned a higher position than that of animals in the hierarchy, according to the order of creation.

A 'translational process' can thus be traced from Jesus' anti-language, by means of which he referred to humanity in general (Jesus himself included), to the Q tradition, and to Matthew (and Luke)<sup>35</sup>, which identifies the son of man with Jesus. This type of anti-societal language might have been disseminated

(footnote 28 continues...)

a re-distribution of land for the confusion of the body politic, and was stirring up a general revolution. But they accomplished nothing; for Tiberius, striving to support a measure which was honourable and just with an eloquence that would have adorned even a meaner cause, was formidable and invincible, whenever, with the people crowding around the rostra, he took his stand there and pleaded for the poor. "The wild beasts that roam over Italy," he would say, "have every one of them a cave or lair to lurk in; but the men who fight and die for Italy enjoy the common air and light, indeed, but nothing else; houseless and homeless they wander about their wives and children". And it is with lying lips that their imperators exhort the soldiers in their battles to defend sepulchers and shrines from the enemy; for not a man of them has an hereditary altar, not one of all these many Romans an ancestral tomb, but they fight and die to support others in wealth and luxury, and though they are styled masters of the world, they have not a single clod of earth that is their own ..." (the italicised phrase within the quotation not original ( Boring, Berger & Colpe 1995:208; cf. Plutarchus, 'Tiberius et Gaius Gracchus', IX.3–5, edited by K. Ziegler 1969:416–458; cf. Bultmann 1964:164–167).

29. See Stobart, J.C. 1961:80; Stockton, D. 1979:39. According to the speech, the poor (*Plutarchi vitae parallelae*, IX.4) had the right to receive land taken from others. Dispossession of land led to conflict between the peasants and the 'men of wealth and substance' (*Plutarchi vitae parallelae*, IX.3). Tiberius Gracchus' agrarian bill was in an important way revolutionary, 'since it aimed to find land to distribute to the needy by taking it, not from enemies defeated in war or disloyal allies punished for defection, but from rich Roman and allied occupiers' (Stockton 1979:39).

30. The land reform policy was triggered by the will of late King Attalus III of Pergamum (see Hornblower & Spawforth 1996:1385). According to the King's will, his inheritance had to be bequeathed to the Romans (cf. Abbott 1963:94–95). Tiberius Gracchus and his brother, Gaius Gracchus, were of the opinion that Attalus' property should not go the way of the taxes of the 'unfortunate inhabitants of Asia Minor' and 'flow straight into the pockets of Roman capitalists' (Stobart 1961:80).

31. David Stockton (1979:22) wrote that the agrarian policy of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus 'provide[d] the central themes of Roman political issues for the next century' (cf. Sandys, J.E.(ed.) 1910:268).

32. According to Bultmann ([1921] 1963:98) the saying of Tiberius was 'applied to the person of Jesus for the first time, perhaps, in the Greek Church'.

33. Ec 3:19 reads as follows: 'Sons of humanity's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both. As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless' (NIV).

34. According to Adela Yarbo Collins (1996:150), the following wisdom saying from Job 3:25–26 can be regarded as a reflection of the kind of wisdom that could be expected from Jesus: 'What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil' (NIV – my italics). The version of Thomas 86 of this Jesus saying is: 'But the son of man does not have anywhere he can lay down his head (and) rest' (Robinson, Hoffmann & Kloppenborg 2000:152). The version in Q 9:58 ('And Jesus said to him: Foxes have their holes, and birds of the sky have nests; but the son of man does not have anywhere he can lay his head' (Robinson et al. 2000:152) suggests a contrast between the habitation of human beings and that of animals.

35. The tradition was either unknown to Mark, or he chose not to use it.

in circumstances where poverty was the result of, among other things, the dispossession of land, and where the disintegration of families might have been a dire problem.<sup>36</sup>

A comparison might be drawn between the anti-language of Jesus (the 'little tradition' of the peasant culture) and the 'nonimperial' language of Tiberius. In the formative stratum of the Q tradition themes such as poverty, discipleship and Jesus' vision of an alternative kingdom were integrated (see Jacobson 1992:50). John Dominic Crossan (2007), in his book *God and Empire: Jesus against Rome then and now*, explains this collaboration as follows (last-mentioned emphasis added; the other originally by Crossan):

*But there has always been controversy about whether Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom as future-only – even if imminent – or as already-present – even if still to be consummated ... One very strong proof of that [= the already-presence of God's Kingdom as the Great Divine Clean-up of the world] is how the Son of Man is used to interpret the Kingdom of God. Here again, scholarly debate has obscured the most important point. The main discussion has been about whether Jesus spoke of himself as the Son of Man or whether it was placed on his lips by the latter tradition. What I emphasize here is how the title "Son of Man" for Jesus – be it from him or from the evangelists (and I think it was from the evangelists) – reinforces and rephrases the claim that the Kingdom of God is now already in collaborative process.*

(Crossan 2007:126–127).

As Jesus' anti-language became further removed from the 'little tradition' and was increasingly domesticated in the 'great tradition' of school, temple and scribal activity – such as the situation of Matthew – the attribution of titles to Jesus could be expected. This is probably what happened to the saying in the context of conflict in Matthew, written in the Galilean-Syrian region in a more Hellenistic context, after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70CE.

However, the question that still remains to be answered in this article is twofold: (1) what ambivalence is expressed in Matthew's anti-language about 'foxes' holes and birds' nests' (Mt 8:20), seen from a postcolonial theoretical perspective; and (2) of what relevance is such ambivalence to present-day South Africans, who suffer from the increasingly violent crimes that they experience within the context of a culture of poverty. In my opinion, the answer lies in the distinction between the connotations associated with the terms 'disreputable poor' and the 'destitute among the poor', which was made at the beginning of the article; ultimately, the answer to such a question is of critical importance to the answer of who the 'poor in spirit' were whom the Matthean Jesus 'consecrated' by proffering the 'kingdom of heavens' to them (Mt 5:3).

### MATTHEW'S RE-ENACTMENT OF JESUS' ANTI-SOCIETAL LANGUAGE APPLIED TO 'POSTCOLONIAL' SOUTH AFRICA

In reply to the question as to why Matthew 'spiritualises' the Q saying of Jesus by saying that the poor are called blessed, with his addition of 'in spirit' (*tō pneumati*), William Loader (2008a) responds by referring to Warren Carter (2000:131) and to Jimmy Dunn:

*The poor in spirit are people, in poverty, brokenness, and need. Like Luke, Matthew employs the Q tradition ... in the context of human need (Mt 11:5) ... [W]ithin the focus of Jewish understandings of poverty from destitution to helpless dependence on God, Luke focuses on material poverty, whereas Matthew on "the other end of the spectrum. Applied to those who are not poor, it might mean those in solidarity with the poor."*

(Dunn 2003:524–525)

36. Such a tradition might have been transmitted and interpreted in various ways during the development of the tradition. Adela Yarbo Collins (1996:150) formulates the tradition as follows: 'Such folk pessimism could easily be adapted to a philosophically dualistic, apocalyptic or gnostic perspective, in which humanity has no home or rest in this world, but does find such in the heavenly world.'

Loader, however, is rather vague about what the implications of such a 'broadening' of the notion 'poor' might entail. In his conclusion, he states (emphasis added):

*Good news for the poor proves to be a fragile component of Jesus' message. In the Jewish setting of Galilee it belonged to prophetic hope for God's people in a way that addressed the poor and the hungry with hope. It was not narrowed to only the economically poor and the hungry, but addressed poverty in a broad sense, including the situation in which the people found themselves caught in the systems of foreign and locally mediated domination. It was good news for the poor because it was good news for all.*

(Loader 2008a, conclusion)

The core of Loader's intent is that the notion 'poor' should not be restricted to a person who lacks material means. I would like to concur with such an intent, as long as Matthew's 'spiritualisation' is not understood as a reduction of the concreteness of people's experiences of being excluded from resources. By adding 'in spirit', Matthew elaborates on the original by also including other traumatic experiences. Due to the inclusivity of his thinking, his understanding of Jesus' anti-societal language becomes applicable to post- and neocolonial South Africa. Such a finding holds even to his use of the imperialist image of God's already-presence in the 'kingdom of heavens', and to his conceptualization of people's collaboration in the process of making such values real 'on earth as it is in heaven'.

There is no doubt in my mind that Jesus' kingdom message pivots around good news for the poor, just as Matthew articulates Jesus' beatitude of the 'poor in spirit'. Jimmy Dunn (2003:517) in his book, *Jesus remembered*, expresses his understanding of the passage as follows: '[T]he proclamation of the good news to the poor evidently ranked at the forefront of Jesus' conception of his mission'. In terms of what I have referred to as the 'culture of poverty', Dunn (2003:519) writes: 'Jesus would have been aware of tax burden, cycles of debt, and people forced from land and possessions' (cf. Loader 2008a note 38). According to Dunn (2003:517), the poor were 'those lacked of a secure economic base'; they were 'vulnerable to exploitation' (Dunn 2003:518); and they needed to look to God for help (Dunn 2003:518–519).

Matthew's ethical portrayal of the kingdom of heaven being manifested on earth amounts to the restructuring of an anti-society. His portrayal reveals something of Jesus' alternative lifestyle, which Matthew sought to re-enact. Jesus' kingdom message advocated values totally different from those extolled by the Israelite and Graeco-Roman conventional traditions. To be a part of the kingdom of God meant being the opposite to what was expected by being a part of the kingdom of Caesar. The anti-language of Jesus and Matthew, found in their comparison of the status of the 'poor' to having the same status as that of animals, is tantamount to being resocialised into a totally different society, an anti-society. As the notion of an 'anti-society' is also linked to social identity, the distinction between insiders and outsiders, which is a fundamental first-century Mediterranean perspective, is redefined in terms of such a new, alternative society.

To restructure social identity in the way in which Jesus did amounts to overlexicalisation, such as the identification of human beings ('sons of humanity') with beasts. However, by Matthew's identifying Jesus with an 'imperial conqueror' by calling him 'the Son of Man', the evangelist re-enacted anti-societal language by means of relexicalisation. By doing so, Matthew simultaneously provided an empowering model for those Jesus followers who were threatened by opposing parties in both the synagogical and imperial settings of the first-century Galilean Syrian context, on the one hand, as well as, on the other hand, for other marginalised people, such as those in post- and neocolonial South Africa.

Non-violent anti-language is, in brief, the only truly Christioption for present-day South Africa.<sup>37</sup>

37. In this regard, the recent book by Richard Burridge (2007), *Imitating Jesus: An inclusive approach to New Testament ethics*, dedicated to Bishop Desmond Tutu,

Let me, in conclusion, indicate how such a finding resonates with my postcolonial reading of Matthew.

Collaboration with the process of the already-presence of the kingdom of heavens, in South Africa as much as globally, entails continuing to establish Jesus' and Matthew's non-violent anti-societal language, despite ever-increasing domination and exploitation by the powers of the day. Such collaboration is seemingly never ending, for as long as one lives and proclaims that Jesus conquered evil, even when he hung on the cross. As for Matthew, our present experience is that of the *ecclesia pressa*, due to the rift with the synagogue, which was set against the background of Roman imperialism. However, as Matthew (e.g. Mt 27:45–53), leaves his readers in the hands of God, who alone decides the close of the age, so we experience that Jesus is 'God-with-us', because the followers of Jesus, both then and now, have seen the Son of Man come. We humans, who are sometimes worse off than animals, often have no holes or nests for our shelter except within the kingdom of heaven. Such is a far more alternative being than that of which we are aware.

## REFERENCES

- Abbott, F.R., 1963, *A history and description of Roman political institutions*, 3rd edn., Biblio & Tannen, New York.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. & Tiffin, H. (eds.), 1995, *The post-colonial studies reader*, Routledge, London.
- Attridge, D., Bennington, G. & Young, R. (eds.), 1987, *Post-structuralism and the question of history*, Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Bethune-Baker, F., 1903, 'Tertullian's use of substantia, natura, and persona', *Journal of Theological Studies* 4, 440–442.
- Bhabha, H., 1994, *The location of culture*, Routledge, London.
- Birmingham, D., 1995, *The decolonization of Africa*, Ohio University Press, Athens, OH.
- Boring, M. E., Berger, K. & Colpe, C. (eds.), 1995, *Hellenistic commentary to the New Testament*, Abingdon Press, Nashville.
- Bultmann, R., [1921] 1963, *The history of the Synoptic tradition*, rev. edn., transl. J. Marsh, from 5th German edn., Hendrickson, Peabody.
- Bultmann, R., [1960] 1965, *Das Verhältnis der urchristlichen Christusbotschaft zum historischen Jesus*, 4th edn., Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag (SHAW 3), Heidelberg.
- Burridge, R., 2007, *Imitating Jesus: An inclusive approach to New Testament ethics*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Carter, W., 2000, *Matthew and the margins: A sociopolitical and religious reading*, Maryknoll, New York.
- Carter, W., 2001, *Matthew and Empire: Initial explorations*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg.
- Carter, W., 2003, 'Are there imperial texts in the class? Intertextual eagles and Matthean eschatology as "lights out" time for imperial Rome (Matthew 24:27–31)', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122(3), 467–487.
- Cohen, J.D., 1992, 'The place of the rabbi in Jewish society of the second century', in L.I. Levine (ed.), *The Galilee in late antiquity*, pp. 157–173, Jewish Theological Seminary, New York.
- Collins, A.Y., 1996, 'The origin of the designation of Jesus as "Son of Man"', in *Cosmology and eschatology in Jewish and*

(footnote 37 continues...)

as well as to all of Richard's South African friends of the 'rainbow nation', contains a timely imperative. On 30 November 2007 Eerdmans Publishers published the following remarks taken from a review article by S. McDonald, as published in *Library World* (Independence, MO), cited in Amazon Customer Reviews: 'The Bible still matters in many contexts. It certainly matters in South Africa, having shaped their history, both from the side of colonialism and apartheid and from the side of our liberation struggle. The South African context therefore provides an important site for the author's project. Surrounding his South African case study are an in-depth engagement with the full array of scholarship on New Testament ethics and his own careful reading of particular New Testament texts. But it is the South African site that provides the author with an answer to the "so what" question? Vast amounts of biblical scholarship stop short of moving beyond a piling up of ancient detail. The author goes beyond the detail to risk saying something about how and why the detail matters. And while readers in South Africa will derive a special benefit from this study, those in other contexts will also find much that resonates with their own contexts.'



- Christian apocalypticism*, pp. 139–158, (suppl. to the *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 50), Brill, Leiden.
- Corley, K., 2002, *Women & the historical Jesus: Feminist myths of Christian origins*, Polebridge, Santa Rosa.
- Crossan, J.D., 1998, *The birth of Christianity: Discovering what happened in the years immediately after the execution of Jesus*, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco.
- Crossan, J.D., 2007, *God & Empire: Jesus against Rome, then and now*, HarperSanFrancisco, New York.
- Davies, W.D. & Allison, D.C., [1988] 2004, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew*, vol. 1, *Introduction and commentary on Matthew I– VII*, (Continuum Imprint), T & T Clark, London.
- Dube, M.W., 2000, *Postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible*, Chalice Press, St Louis.
- Dunn, J.D.G., 2003, *Jesus remembered: Christianity in the making*, vol. 1, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Fieldhouse, D.K., 1989, *The colonial empires*, Macmillan, London.
- Fiensy, D.A., 1991, *The social history of Palestine in the Herodian period: The land is mine* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 20), Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston.
- France, R.T., 2007, *The Gospel of Matthew (The New International Commentary on the New Testament)*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Freyne, S., 1981, 'Galilean religion of the first century CE against its social background', *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 5, 91–114.
- Freyne, S., 2004, *Jesus, a Jewish Galilean* (Continuum Imprint), T & T Clark International, London.
- Funk, R.W. (and the Jesus Seminar), 1998, *The acts of Jesus: The search for the authentic deeds of Jesus*, Macmillan, New York.
- Gundry, R.H., 2005, 'The apostolically Johannine pre-Papian tradition concerning the Gospels of Mark and Matthew', in R.H. Gundry (ed.), *The old is better: New Testament essays in support of traditional interpretations*, pp. 49–73, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.
- Halliday, M.A.K., 1976, 'Anti-languages', *American Anthropologist* 78, 570–584.
- Halliday, M.A.K., 1978, *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*, Edward Arnold Publishers, London.
- Hammel, G., 1990, *Poverty and charity in Roman Palestine, first three centuries CE*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Hengel, M., [1969] 1974, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their encounter in Palestine during the early Hellenistic period*, vol. 1 and 2, transl. J. Bowden, SCM, London.
- Hengel, M., 1995, 'Sit at my right hand!', in M. Hengel (ed.), *Studies in early Christology*, pp. 119–226, T & T Clark, Edinburgh.
- Hertig, P., 1998, *Matthew's narrative use of Galilee in the multicultural and missiological journeys of Jesus* (Mellen Biblical Press Series 46), Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston.
- Hofmeyr, J.W., 2004, 'Post-independent mainline churches in Africa (1975–2000)', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 60(4), 1307–1332.
- Hollenbach, P., 1987, 'Defining rich and poor: Using social sciences', in K.H. Richard (ed.), *SBL Seminar Papers*, pp. 50–63, Scholars Press, Atlanta.
- Hornblower, S. & Spawforth, S. (eds.), 1996, 'Sempronius Gracchus, Tiberius', *The Oxford classical dictionary*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Horsley, R.A., 1996, *Archeology, history, and society in Galilee: The social context of Jesus and the rabbis*, Trinity Press International, Valley Forge.
- Jacobson, A.D., 1992, *The First Gospel: An introduction to Q* (Foundations and Facets Series), Polebridge, Sonoma.
- Käsemann, E., [1960] 1969, 'The beginnings of Christian theology', in *New Testament questions of today*, pp. 82–107, transl. W.J. Montague, SCM, London.
- Kloppenborg, J.S., 2000, *Excavating Q: The history and setting of the Sayings Gospel*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Levine, L.I., 1992, 'The sages and the synagogue in late antiquity', in L.I. Levine (ed.), *The Galilee in late antiquity*, pp. 201–222, Jewish Theological Seminary, New York.
- Lewis, O., 1966, 'The culture of poverty', *Scientific American* 215, 19–25.
- Loader, W., 2008a, "'Good news for the poor": Could the vision of Jesus survive? Exploring Jesus' hope and its transformation in the New Testament', paper presented at the Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 5 August.
- Loader, W., 2008b, "'Good news for the poor": Its struggle for survival in the New Testament', paper presented at the Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 5 August.
- Luz, U., 1985, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, 1. Teilband: Mt 1–7*, Benziger Verlag (EKK), Zürich.
- Malina, B.J., 1986b, 'Interpreting the Bible with anthropology: The case of the poor and the Rich', *Listening* 21, 148–159.
- Malina, B.J., 1989, 'Dealing with Biblical (Mediterranean) characters: A guide for US Consumers', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 19(4), 127–141.
- Malina, B.J. & Rohrbaugh, R. L., 1998, *Social-science commentary on the Gospel of John*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Mandela, N.R., 1994, *Long walk to freedom*, Randburg Macdonald Purnell, Johannesburg.
- Mandela, N.R., 1996, *The illustrated long walk to freedom: The autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, Little, Brown and Co, London.
- Mbeki, T., 2006, 'The RDP of the soul: Pursuit of personal wealth undermines social cohesion and human solidarity', in *Umrabulo* 26, Aug 2006, viewed 25 August 2009, from <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/pubs/umrabulo/umrabulo26/art4.html>.
- McDonald, S., 2007, *Review of Burrige, R., Imitating Jesus: An inclusive approach to New Testament ethics*, viewed 30 November 2007, from [http://www.amazon.com/review/R21JUT02MWU5DH/ref=cm\\_cr\\_rdp\\_perm](http://www.amazon.com/review/R21JUT02MWU5DH/ref=cm_cr_rdp_perm).
- Moore, S.D., 2000, 'Post-colonialism', in A.K.M. Adam, (ed.), *Handbook of postmodern Biblical interpretation*, pp. 182–188, Chalice Press, St Louis.
- Nolland, J., 2005, *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary), Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Oakman, D.E., 2008, *Jesus and the peasants (Matrix: The Bible in Mediterranean Context)*, Cascade Books, Eugene.
- Orton, D.E., 1989, *The understanding scribe: Matthew and the apocalyptic ideal*, (Journal for the Study of the New Testament, suppl. 25), Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield.
- Plutarch [1921], 'Tiberius and Caius Gracchus', IX.3–5, in E. Capps, T.E. Page & W.H.D. Rouse (eds.), *Plutarch's Lives*, pp. 164–167, 177, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Plutarchus [1969], 'Tiberius et Caius Gracchus', in K. Ziegler (ed.), *Plutarchi vitae parallelae*, vol. 3.1, 4th edn., pp. 416–458, Teubner, Leipzig.
- Riches, J., 2005, 'Matthew's missionary strategy in colonial perspective', in J. Riches & D.C. Sim (eds.), *The Gospel of Matthew in its Roman imperial context*, (Early Christianity in Context, Journal for the Study of the New Testament suppl. series 276), pp. 128–142, T & T Clark International, London.
- Rieger, J., 2007, 'Christian theology and empire', in K. Pui-lan, D.H. Compiler & J. Rieger (eds.), *Empire and the Christian tradition: New readings of classical theologians*, pp. 1–14, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Robinson, J.M., Hoffmann, P. & Kloppenborg, J.S. (eds.), 2000, *The critical edition of Q: Synopsis including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas with English, German, and French translations of Q and Thomas*, (Hermeneia), Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Rohrbaugh, R., 1991, 'The pre-industrial city in Luke-Acts', in J.H. Neyrey (ed.), *Social world of Luke-Acts: Models for interpretation*, pp. 140–146, Hendrickson, Peabody.
- Rukundwa, L.S. & Van Aarde, A.G., 2007, 'The formation of post-colonial theory', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 63(3), 1171–1194.
- Sachs, J., 2005, *The end of poverty: Economic possibilities of our time*, Penguin Books, New York.

- Saldarini, A.J., 1994, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish community*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Sandys, J.E. (ed.), 1910, *A companion to Latin studies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Sarbin, T.R., 1970, 'The culture of poverty, social identity, and cognitive outcomes', in V.L. Allen (ed.), *Psychological factors in poverty*, pp. 29–46 (Institute for Research on Poverty Monograph Series), Academic Press, New York.
- Schlatter, A., [1933] 1963, *Der Evangelist des Matthäus. Seine Sprache, seine Ziel, seine Selbstständigkeit: Eine Kommentar zum ersten Evangelium*, 6th edn., Calwer, Stuttgart.
- Segovia, F.F., 1998, 'Biblical criticism and post-colonial studies: Towards a post-colonial optic', in R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *The post-colonial Bible: Bible and post-colonialism*, vol. I, pp. 49–65, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield.
- Sim, D.C., 2007, 'The Gospel of Matthew, John the elder and the Papias tradition: A response to R.H. Gundry', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 63(1), 283–299.
- South African Broadcasting Corporation News, n.d., Motlanthe reiterates government plan to reduce poverty, viewed 28 September 2008, from <http://www.sabcnews.com/politics/government/0,2172,177526,00.html>.
- Stanton, G.N., 1992, *A Gospel for a new people: Studies in Matthew*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh.
- Stegemann, W., [1981] 1984, *The gospel and the poor*, transl. D. Elliott, Fortress Press, Philadelphia.
- Stegemann, E.W. & Stegemann, W., 1995, *Urchristliche Sozialgeschichte: Die Anfänge im Judentum und die Christuskirchen in der mediterranen Welt*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart.
- Stobart, J.C., 1961, in W.S. Maguiness & H.H. Scullard (eds.), *The grandeur that was Rome*, 4th edn., Sidgwick and Jackson, London.
- Stockton, D., 1979, *The Gracchi*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Sugirtharajah, R.S., 2003, *Post-colonial reconfigurations: An alternative way of reading the Bible and doing theology*, SCM Press, London.
- Theissen, G., 1999, *A theory of primitive Christian religion*, transl. J. Bowden, SCM, London.
- Theissen, G., 2008, 'Vom historischen Jesus zum kerygmatischen Gottessohn: Soziologische Rollenanalyse als Beitrag zum Verständnis neutestamentlicher Christologie', *Evangelische Theologie* 68(4), 285–304.
- Theissen, G. & Winter, D., 1997, *Die Kriterienfrage in der Jesusforschung: Von Differenzkriterium zum Plausibilitätskriterium* (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus), Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.
- Van Aarde, A.G., 1988, 'Jesus and the social outcasts' (original in Afrikaans), *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 44(4), 829–846.
- Van Aarde, A.G., 1996, 'A culture of poverty: The world of the New Testament then and the situation in South Africa today' (original in Afrikaans), *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 52(4), 947–964.
- Van Aarde, A.G., 2004, 'Jesus and the son of man: A shift from the "little tradition" to the "great tradition"', *Ephemerides Lovaniensis Theologicae* 80, 423–438.
- Van Aarde, A.G., 2005a, 'IHSOUS, the Davidic Messiah, as political Saviour in Matthew's history', in J.G. Van der Watt (ed.), *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on soteriology*, pp. 7–31 (suppl. to Novum Testamentum 121), Brill, Leiden.
- Van Aarde, A.G., 2005b, 'Cultural criticism as an imperative for Christians', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 61(3), 683–708.
- Van Aarde, A.G., 2008a, 'The "RDP of the Soul", violence, revenge, tolerance and Paul's appeal for endurance', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 29(3), 708–727.
- Van Aarde, A.G., [2008b] (forthcoming), "'On earth as it is in heaven": Matthew's eschatology as the kingdom of heaven that has come', in J. Frey, & J. Van der Watt (eds.), *Eschatology in the New Testament*, De Gruyter Verlag, Berlin.
- Von Dobschütz, E., 1928, 'Matthäus als Rabbi und Katechet', *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 27, 338–348.
- Weaver, D.J., 2005, "'Thus you will know them by their fruits": The Roman characters of the Gospel of Matthew', in J. Riches & D.C. Sim (eds.), *The Gospel of Matthew in its Roman imperial context*, pp. 107–127 (Early Christianity in Context, Journal for the Study of the New Testament suppl. series 276), T & T Clark International, London.
- Wikipedia, 2008, 'Neocolonialism', viewed 24 August 2009, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neocolonialism>.
- Young, R.J.C., 1990, *White mythologies: Writing history and the West*, Routledge, New York.
- Young, R.J.C., 1995, *Colonial desire: Hybridity in theory, culture and race*, Routledge, London.
- Young, R.J.C., 1996, *Torn halves: Political conflict in literary and cultural theory*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.
- Young, R.J.C., 2001, *Post-colonialism: An historical introduction*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Young, R.J.C., 2003, *Post-colonialism: A very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.