

# A case of tribal defilement in a Kenyan rural village: A narratological and socio-rhetorical function of the motifs of 'hearing and understanding' and 'contrast' in Matthew 15:10–11 *vis-à-vis* Leviticus 11:1–4

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This article employed a case study to explore the theme of defilement as experienced in a Kenyan village. To provide a basis for the theological reflection on this case study, the article investigated two motifs in Matthew 15:10–11. 'Hearing and understanding' and 'contrast' [οὐάλλα, 'not...but'] was examined in respect of Leviticus 11:1–8 to determine the extent to which Matthew 15:10–11 depicts Jesus as 'relativising' the Mosaic law (Lv 11:1–8). This approach provided a basis to argue that defilement in Matthew 15:10–11 is not only a matter of external or ritual perspective, but of moral disposition. A methodology that combines both socio-rhetorical (Socio-rhetorical criticism is a methodology that derives value and meaning as an outcome of an active reading process that occurs within specific cultural contexts. In this case, the examiner produced the meaning of given texts by participating in a complex of socially constructed practices' [Growler n.d., <http://userwww.Service.emory.edu/~dgowler/chapter.htm>]) and narratological (Narratological criticism is the study of narratives that involves a kind of 'structure and practice that illuminates temporality and human beings as temporal beings'. Using classifications such as plot, narrator and narratee, narratology becomes a useful instrument for the description, classification and interpretation of literary narratives [see <http://www.hum.aau.dk/~yding/storytelling/narratology%20revisited.pdf>]) approaches were engaged as the most appropriate to address the concerns of this article. These two methodologies greatly helped this article to explain the meaning and significance of defilement in Leviticus 11 with respect to the theological understanding of the Leviticus code of purity. This code presents a temporal view of defilement intended to reflect on the holiness and sovereignty of Yahweh, over and against idols of the surrounding nations. In addition, this kind of methodology facilitated an interpretation of the motif of 'contrast' [οὐάλλα, 'not but'] in Matthew 15:11 as the evangelist's intentional attempt to depict Jesus intensifying the Leviticus code of ritual purity within an ethical frame work.

The village case study was surveyed, exegesis done on Matthew 15:10–11 with respect to Leviticus 11:1–8, the perception of defilement for 1st century Jews assessed and a brief comparative study of the findings from Matthew 15:10–11 engaged with a Kenyan village-case study for ethical reflections. This case study pointed out that cultural difference prompted a major tribe (Wataita) to consider a minor tribe (Wasanye) to be defiled, albeit the minor tribe did not describe the major tribe in the same derogatory term.

## Introduction

### A village case study

Kajire is small village in Kishamba sublocation, Taita-Taveta District, in the coast province of Kenya. This village has a population of about 2300 people, hosting mainly two tribes. A larger tribe (Wataita) and a small tribe (Wasanye) forming about 90% and 10% of the population respectively. These two tribes have different cultures and language and the smaller tribe (Wasanye) moved in to join the Wataita tribe in the 1940s. In both of these tribes there are Christians and non-Christians, that is, African Traditional Religion (ATR) believers.

As I was planning to write this article I desired to find out why the large tribe (Wataita) at times looked down upon the minority tribe (Wasanye). In May 2008 I gathered information at random from a sample of 17 villagers (6 Wasanye and 11 Wataita) aged between 46 and 75. Of these, 11 were Christians and 6 ATR believers.

From this sampling and survey I gathered the following information, underscoring the following four issues.

Firstly, the difference in child birth place, occupational and marital preference provided grounds for the Wataita to judge the Wasanye as people whose lifestyle is of a lower status. Thus, the Wataita tribe considered the Wasanye tribe to be defiled because:

- when the Wasanye first came to Kajire they lived in the bushes and not houses, because they were hunters
- at that time the Wasanye women gave birth in the bushes
- the Wasanye could marry close relatives (uncle's or aunt's children).

Take note that the Wasanye tribe culturally differed with the Wataita tribe in that the Wataita:

- were living in houses, not bushes, when the Wasanye joined them
- women from the Wataita gave birth in the houses where they lived or in hospitals
- Wataita do not allow marriage amongst close relatives (uncle's or aunt's children), but considered this practice incestuous.

Therefore, these cultural differences prompted the Wataita to consider the Wasanye to be defiled people, albeit the Wasanye did not describe the Wataita in the same derogatory term. From these observations, it seems that the main cause of the problem between these two groups is the differences in cultural and religious practices found amongst these two communities.

Secondly, cultural heritage has a role in all this. When the Wasanye arrived at this village (Kajire, Voi, Kenya) in the 1940s, the Wataita community, with a renowned traditional medicine man, had to ritually cleanse the Wasanye community for two reasons:

- to prohibit the perceived defilement from the Wasanye from spreading across the land
- to assuage the Wataita's fears and permit the Wasanye to settle in the village.

Thus, although this ritual was meant to be an initiation rite to integrate the Wasanye into the larger Wataita community and not the other way round, its efficacy seem to have been short lived for that generation.

Thirdly, intermarriage between these two tribes could not be allowed by the Wataita (although the Wasanye were willing to intermarry with Wataita) until after a cleansing ceremony. Sarcastically, it was said that only Wasanye women were expected to be married to Wataita men and not the other way round. However, for such a marriage to take place, the woman had to be ritually cleansed. This ritual cleansing was administered by a medicine man using undigested food from the large intestine of a sheep, which was then sprinkled on the 'unclean' Msanye (singular) woman. However, although this kind of cultural ritual created the possibility for intermarriage, from the 1940s to the 1990s only two such intermarriages between these two tribes had taken place. The Wasanye whom I interviewed complained that although the current generation of Wataita young men from this village were willing and wanted to marry women from the Wasanye tribe, Wataita parents adamantly discourage their boys from

doing so, fearing to bring into their homestead one who is defiled.

From the foregoing case, it is deduced that the Wataita regard the Wasanye as defiled people, mainly for the reasons of cultural difference. Exegesis of Matthew 15:10–11 in relation to Leviticus 11:1–8 will guide us to a Biblical view of religious defilement. This provides some basis for theological reflection, which shall be considered towards the end of this article.

### Exegesis of Matthew 15:10–11

Two issues in the literary structure of Matthew 15:10–11 can be observed.<sup>1</sup> Firstly, the literary structure shows that verses 10, 11 and 20 form the 'hinge' to Matthew 15:10–20, because they indicate how Matthew softens Mark's (7:1–23) language to underscore his intention. Therefore, they are crucial pointers to Matthew's own implied meaning regarding Jesus' teaching. Secondly, the immediate literary context of Matthew 15:10–20 shows that verses 10–11 serve as Jesus' attack on the tradition of the Pharisees on defilement. The remaining section of exegesis seeks to articulate that Jesus' emphasis on holiness is a continuation of the Old Testament call to be holy (compare Lv 19:1–2, 'And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy"'). Note that in the New Testament Jesus introduces the Kingdom of God, in which one of the requirements for belonging to it is holiness (Mt 5:1–43). Therefore, Jesus seems, in some way, to continue the Old Testament tradition of ritual purity into the New Testament, rather than cancelling it all together.

### Matthew 15:10

Καὶ<sup>2</sup> προκαλεσάμενος τὸν ὄχλον εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Ἐκούσατε<sup>3</sup> καὶ συνίετε. [Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, 'Listen and understand' (NRSV)].

Note that this verse has two key words that would help us to understand Matthew's intentions as one narrating the story of Jesus; a conjunction and participle. Καὶ is a conjunction, translated 'the' at the beginning of this verse, connects

1. Understanding Matthew's immediate literary context gives a wider picture of his approach to Jesus' ministry in Israel, within which the question of Jesus' view of defilement is articulated. Matthew 15:10–11 seems to reflect back on the seven parables in Matthew 13, which, like 15:10, lays more emphasis on hearing and understanding ... 'He who has ears, let him hear' (English Standard Version, v.9). The characteristics of these parables portray the unveiling of the advent of God's kingdom by Jesus Christ. Thus, Matthew depicts Jesus employing, 'hear and understand' (ESV, 15:10) as introducing his response (15:10–20) to the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem asking, 'Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread' (15:2). France asserts that Matthew 15:1, 11 and 20 provide the climax to this episode, for three reasons. Firstly, verse 1 marks the confrontation of Jesus, not with local Galileans scribes, but with a delegation 'from Jerusalem'. This provides a foretaste of the confrontation to come. Secondly, verse 11 gives Jesus' own radical pronouncement on a matter of scribal concern, which seems to undermine the Mosaic Law. Thirdly, these three verses depict Jesus dealing with the traditions of the Pharisees, who represent established Judaism for Matthew's listeners (France 2002:575; Hagner 1995:428). In this case, Matthew 15:10–20 marks the continuation of Matthew's story of the increasing opposition to Jesus, the Pharisees being his principal opponents (Morris 1992:387). After this harsh dialogue, as portrayed by Matthew, the breach between Jesus and Jewish religious leadership advanced beyond repair (France 2002:575).

2. Then (New Revised Standard Version).

3. Listen (NRSV).

what precedes it to its result (BDAG, 495), that is, it is an organic tie (Reed 1999:32–33). Προσκαλεσάμενος is attendant circumstantial participle (Black 1998:123; Young 1994:154)<sup>4</sup> emphasises the circumstances in which Jesus addresses the crowd: 'Having called the crowd ...' Whilst some translations put more emphasis on its circumstantial aspect, for example, 'And he called the multitude, and said unto them' (King James Version and New English Translation), other translations stress the temporal aspect, for example, 'And after He called the multitude to Him, He said to them' (New American Standard Bible). What matters is that this verse marks a turning point of Jesus' addresses. Jesus, in addition to speaking to his disciples, now turns to address the *oclon*, multitude.

Jesus' words are introduced here as a response to the question of the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem in 15:2, 'Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat'.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the use of 'hear and understand', which resonates with the language of the parable of the Sower in 13:13–15, implies that the reader is being encouraged to think of the crowd as that of Matthew 13 (Nolland 2005:619), a crowd probably from Gerasenes (Mt 8.28; 13.2), opposite Galilee (Lk 8.26). According to Hagner, given that in this verse Jesus summons and addresses the crowd, he makes a vital revolutionary pronouncement that goes far beyond the issue of washed or unwashed hands (1995:432).

In addition, given that εἶπεν, 'he said', (Mt 15.10) is a constative aorist, it lays emphasis on the whole action (Wallace 1996:557; Black 1998:105). Note that the two imperatives, ἀκούσατε and συνίετε (Black 1998:100), are joined by καί a marker of connection (BDAG 495), so that they work as a unity. It seems that the motif of 'hear and understand'<sup>6</sup>, bears a special function in Matthew's view of defilement.

## The motif of Hearing and Understanding

What did Matthew want to communicate using these two imperatives – 'hear' and 'understand'?

Hagner (1995:432) observes that Jesus employs these two imperatives to explain to his disciples the deeper meaning of the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:23:

But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding and hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

(Mt 13:23, New International Version)

Jeanine K. Brown (2008) locates and discusses the verbs ἀκούσατε and συνίετε within the *shema* in the Isaiah call narratives. She specifically correlates ἀκούσατε and συνίετε to *shema* and, *biyin*, respectively, in Isaiah 1:2–3. She observes that in Matthew 15:8–9 ('This people honours me with their

4. See also Wallace (1996:642) for the five criteria for determining circumstantial aspects of a Greek participle.

5. English Standard Version.

6. These two verbs ἀκούσατε and συνίετε, are both imperatives of command that express Jesus' demand upon his hearers (Black 1998:100).

lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men', ESV), Jesus invokes Isaiah 29:13 ('And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men"', ESV), to condemn the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes.

Therefore, seeing Jesus as following the citation from Isaiah with the words 'listen and understand' to the crowds (15:10), Brown concludes that, 'Matthew seems to evoke this wider Isaianic context in his shaping of 15:10–20. In Jesus, the potential for restored hearing (and understanding) has arrived' (2008:262). Further exploring the motif of 'hearing or not hearing', she makes a brief review of this theme in the whole book of Isaiah. She begins by observing how, at the very beginning of Isaiah 1:2 *shema*, denotes that 'heavens and earth are called to listen to God's complaint against his people and the people are called to hear God's complaint themselves'; 1:10). Moreover, the theme of Israel's hearing is tied up with the ability to understand, signified by, *biyin*; 'The Ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not understand' (1:3). In addition, Brown sketches out the theme of the 'Israelites' inability to hear' in Isaiah's call narrative (6:1–13), which is reiterated across Isaiah. For example, in Isaiah 30, where Israel is not only described as rebellious children who 'will not be willing to hear the law (or will or instructions) of the LORD' (30:9) but as being actively opposed to hearing from God by telling the prophets, '... let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel' (30:11, ESV).

Therefore, going by Brown's interpretation, the motif of 'hearing and understanding' in Matthew 15:10 points us back to Isaiah 1:2–3. This means that 'hearing' in Matthew 15:10 functions as a rhetorical device that invites the reader into active hearing in order to understand and obey Jesus and his teaching.<sup>7</sup> However, this conclusion leads to the question; why did Matthew have to demand this kind of hearing concerning what Jesus says? Investigating the call to 'listen and hear' within the discourse of the restoration of the covenant in Isaiah, discloses the fact that the hidden discourse in Matthew 15:10–11 has the intention of calling Israel to the restoration of the covenant with God. This restoration now takes place through Jesus Christ.

## Matthew 15:11

οὐ τό εἰσερχόμενον εἰς τὸ στόμα κοινῶν τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦτο κοινῶν τὸν ἄνθρωπον.<sup>8</sup>

Herschel H. Hobbs (1965), commenting on how this verse portrays Jesus as the King, who posed a great challenge to Judaism, contends that:

7. If Matthew (15:10) depicts Jesus as continuing Yahweh's call, narrated in Isaiah 1:2–3, as witnessed by the use of *shema* and *beyin* that correlates listen and understand in Matthew 15:10, then this correlation indicates that the Isaiah call narratives are a typology of Jesus Christ. In him Israel's inability to listen and obey the word of Yahweh is restored for both Israel and all nations. Listening to and obeying Jesus' message was akin to receiving a message in which Yahweh fulfills the promise he had made to Israel through his prophet, Isaiah.

8. It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person' (ESV). Note that ESV regards this verse as a continuation of verse 10, thus, it has no opening, but only closing inverted commas.

to his [Jesus'] immediate hearers it [Mt 15:11] was one of the most revolutionary things that Jesus ever spoke, for it cuts across the whole system of Judaism. Thus the King threw down the gauntlet to those who posed as teachers of religion in His day.

(Hobbs 1965:198)

Furthermore, he thinks that the point of disagreement Jesus was handling with this verse was 'formal traditionalism as over against spiritual religion' (Hobbs 1965:198).

Thus, according to Hobbs, Jesus' response (15:10–11) to the question by the Jewish leadership (15:2) directly challenged Jewish religious heritage and its custodians (the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem). For further understanding of this verse comments from various scholars with regard to the motif of contrast, not...but, have to be examined before we analyse the syntax of this verse.

### The motif of contrast: 'not ... but'

Robert H. Gundry sees a number of literary changes that Matthew makes to Mark (7:14–15) in order to emphasise his point.<sup>9</sup> He thinks that by using a new literary device, 'not', in conjunction with the strong adversative, 'but', Matthew is now able 'to contrast keeping the dietary taboos (Lv 11:1–8) and speaking evil' (Gundry 1982:306). Gundry concludes that by this new change Matthew does not revoke the ritual law:

But intensifies it by transmuting the dietary taboos into prohibition against evil speech, just as the so called antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount [Mat 5:27–28] did not destroy the law, but fulfilled it.

(Gundry 1982:306)

The essence of Gundry's argument is that, despite Matthew's redaction in this verse, the 'not...but' are rhetorical devices employed to internalise the agenda of the Mosaic law in the new dispensation wrought by Jesus Christ.

Bruner (1990:92) argues that *koinoi* in Matthew 15:11 (translated *defiles* in NRSV) indicates that the question raised for Jesus to answer (v. 2) is 'what breaks a right relation with God?' He thinks that Jesus herein teaches 'what comes up out of the mouth defiles and so ruins relation'. Citing Strack-Billerbeck, Bruner (1990) contends that the problem that Jesus is tackling is:

the long and devoutly developed tradition of the people of God, protected and passed on by the serious [Pharisees and scribes] ... dietary laws of the OT clearly taught, on the contrary, that also what goes down into the mouth defiles.

(Bruner 1990:92)

Therefore, Bruner sees the motif of contrast, 'not...but', as a rhetorical device employed by Matthew to depict Jesus

9.Gundry takes note of how Jesus' teaching in Mark (Mk 7:15) commences with an awkward note; 'Nothing [οὐδέν], is outside a man, entering into him, which is able to defile him'. Matthew changes this ambiguous 'nothing' to 'not', and then alters an adverbial participle, *eisporeuomenos*, 'entering' to a substantive participle, *eiserchomenos*, 'what goes'. To this he adds the definite Greek article *to*, making it function in this sentence as a subject of the verb *koinoi*. Another change by Matthew in this verse is *eis auton*, 'into him', to *eis to stoma*, 'into the mouth.' Gundry suggests that these two changes not only characterises Matthew's way of advancing Mark's editorial comment that Jesus was 'cleansing all foods', but also that the phrase *eis to stoma* enables him (Matthew) to emphasises the importance of speech (p. 306).

cancelling or 'at least radically' revising 'a whole segment of Hebrew scripture-its kosher laws'.<sup>10</sup>

Here, on the one hand, is the strength of Bruner's argument, which develops Gundry's interpretation by presenting the nuance of the motif of contrast 'οὐάλλα' [not...but] and seeing it as a reference to the authority of Jesus on both the scripture and in the church. On the other hand, whilst contradicting Gundry, Bruner contends that by the 'not...but' motif, Matthew presents Jesus as introducing new ethic that does not internalise, but cancel the Mosaic ritual law (Lv 11:1–8).

Davies and Allison view Matthew 15:11 as 'rhetoric injunctions to upright behaviour', employed like Hosea 6:6 ('for I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings,' King James Version), which was used rhetorically by the prophets to emphasise and not set aside Mosaic commandment (1991:529). They suggest that the 'οὐάλλα' [not...but], in Matthew 15:11 amounts to a 'Semitic idiom of relative negation', whose 'emphasis lies on the second limb of the saying' used by Jesus to address Jews, not early Christians. Davies and Allison maintain that although Jesus' usage of the 'not...but,' in Matthew 15:11 'relativizes the ritual law, [it] does not necessarily set it aside' (1991:530), but it rather emphasises that what matters to God is the heart.<sup>11</sup> To this end, Davies and Allison (2004:249) conclude two things:

- 'Without rejecting the cult, the lesson that purity of the heart matters above all else, is clearly taught'
- 'while the cultic commands remained valid, they are translated into ethics: one becomes unclean only through a deliberate choice to disobey God's declared will (Scripture)'.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst Davies and Allison, like Gundry, contradict Bruner's interpretation that 'not...but' implies that Jesus cancelled the Mosaic ritual laws, they also clarify Gundry's argument. They do so by emphasising that this motif of contrast, points to Jesus' situation ethics, because 'not...but' relativises Mosaic ritual law to the internal condition of the heart. That means one's actions should not be judged on account of the Mosaic law of ritual purity only but in relation to the motives that come from the heart.

Conversely, understanding 'not' as negating all the rules of defilement to which Jews had been accustomed all their lives,

10.F.D. Bruner explains that 'Mark [the Gospel] comes right out in the middle of Jesus' parables, in fact, and boldly comments on Jesus' remarks: "Thus he [Jesus] declared all foods clean" (Mk 7.19 NEB; Matthew does not repeat Mark's radical sentence). The effect of this teaching, according to Bruner, is that 'the serious believers of the ancient people of God were *offended* by Jesus' parable of the mouth; serious Christians should at least be *surprised* by it. For Jesus just gave the principle (15:1–9) that Scriptures rules as Queen in the church', that is, 'Jesus' interpretation of the Scripture-Jesus' tradition!-has the final word in Scripture and so in the Church' (1990:92).

11.Davies and Allison, to illustrate their point, cite two Jewish parallels. Firstly, 2 Chronicles 30:18–20, which shows that many of the Jews ate the Passover without first having cleansed themselves ritually; and secondly Numbers Rabbah 19.18, where Johanan ben Zakkai's direct speech indicates that defilement was understood in terms 'of scriptural decree and dependent on the intention of the heart' (1991:530).

12.Davies and Allison (1991:529) combine the two aspects of the use the *κοινῶν* in this verse. In the first half of 15:11 *κοινῶν* is thought to refer to cultic defilement and the second half to ethical defilement. Davies and Allison makes the above combination because they think 'it is preferable ... to adopt a different interpretation, one which assigns to the verb *koinow* the same meaning in both lines' because they think in verse 11 the cultic has been translated into the ethical.

Leon Morris asserts that by a strong adversative 'not', Jesus 'is not introducing a comparatively minor modification of the Jewish practice but advocating something radically new' (1992:395). He concludes that by this verse 'Jesus pronounced a dictum, which explicated the matter of defilement: it is their [Pharisees' and scribe's] words more than their hands or food that easily signifies their inner corruption' (1992:395).

In other words, Morris, like Gundry, Bruner and Davies and Allison, believes that by the motif of contrast, 'not...but', Matthew intended to portray Jesus stressing that defilement is not a matter of the external ritual, but the internal morality. He disagrees with Gundry and Davies and Allison (although he agrees with Bruner) by insisting that the motif of contrast is employed by Matthew to depict Jesus as radically negating all the rules of defilement that the Jews had been accustomed to. But it might also be that by this motif of contrast, Jesus also denounces the legalistic approach to religion by 1st century Judaism to indicate that salvation does not come via the adherence to prescribed laws, but by living in a relationship with God, as revealed in the person and works of Jesus Christ. This relationship portrays certain ethics.

John Nolland (2005), explaining the 'not...but', in relation to Mark's Gospel, contends that Matthew 15:11 ought to be understood as an absolute rhetoric with a relative sense. Thus, he argues that:

Matthew probably understood the contrasting statement in a relative and not absolute manner' because 'in Mark [7:15] it is possible to understand the negative statement followed by 'but' with a positive contrasting statement in a relative sense.<sup>13</sup>

(Nolland 2005:620)

In Nolland's view two issues arise from his argument. Firstly, he seems to insist that the 'not...but', as employed by Matthew was not meant to cancel the Jewish ritual law, but to express Jesus' recognition of these ritual laws within the given Mosaic limits. Secondly, the 'not...but' rejected the excesses most probably imposed on the Mosaic ritual law by the Jewish leadership, the Pharisees and scribes. Admittedly, viewed from this perspective, the motif of contrast, 'not...but' functions as 'absolute contrast intended relatively' (Nolland's terms). Whilst it absolutely negates all the extra interpretation from Jewish piety that led to misinterpretation and discriminatory application of the Mosaic Law (Lv 11:1-8), this motif of contrast in Matthew 15:11, 'relativises' obedience to the Mosaic law of ritual purity (Lv 11:1-8) to the disposition of one's heart. Therefore, whilst Nolland's understanding of the 'not...but', in Matthew 15:11 is in consensus with the interpretations by Gundry and Davies and Allison, it holds at bay the views of Bruner, Meier,

13. Nolland illustrates his point by these two examples; in Mark 9:37 ('Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me') and Mark 13:11 ('it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit') (2005:620). Additionally, he observes that similar rhetoric to verse 11 is found in Hosea 6.6 ('For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings', ESV), which was understood 'as an absolute contrast intended relatively' (2005:621). Nolland thinks that this rhetoric was used by Jesus to address his disciples as well as the renewal forces within Pharisaism, because they both 'sought to operate on the cutting edge of contemporary piety' (2005:621); for example, by 'pushing back the boundaries of the realm within which Jewish people typically identified the requirements of their obedience to God' (2005:621).

and Morris. The latter generally seem to contend that by this motif of contrast, Matthew presents Jesus as concerned with cancelling the Kosher Law (Bruner) as he advocated something radically new (Morris).

France understands the 'not...but', as denoting Jesus' key saying, which is mistakenly described as a parable in verse 15. He goes on to argue that Matthew, more than Mark, makes this saying of Jesus clear by indicating that 'both the coming in and the going out are via the mouth – food and words respectively' (2002:583). On the one hand, France (2002) points out that:

not all ritual defilement in the OT was by means of food ... one could also be defiled by disease (especially skin diseases), by one's own bodily secretions or by touching something or some one unclean.

(France 2002:583)

In other words, although according to Jewish custom and law, contact with excretion of bodily fluids (i.e. urine, spit, blood etc.) can cause defilement, because Jesus is talking about things that exit the mouth, he is certainly not referring only to bodily fluids, but specifically to words (which are the expression of thoughts). On the other hand, France (2002) contends that:

the principle of externally contacted defilement is well illustrated by the Levitical food laws (Lev 11; cf. also 17:10-16), and it is this principle which Jesus is here setting aside; no less explicitly in Matthew's rather smoother version than in Mark's.

(France 2002:583)

France thinks that Matthew's Jesus, using 'not...but', in Matthew 15:11, wants to indicate that 'true defilement is not external and ritual but internal and moral' (2002:584).

## Matthew 15:11: Sentence Flow

It is not what goes<sup>14</sup> that defiles a person,  
into<sup>15</sup> the mouth  
but  
it is what comes this<sup>16</sup> defiles<sup>17</sup>  
out of the mouth<sup>18</sup>

Note the parallelism in this verse. The marker of the negative proposition, 'not' (BDAG 733, Young 1994:202), functions together with a substantive participle, *eiserchomenon*, 'what goes into,' to negate the verb *κουνοῖ*, 'defile'. The demonstrative substantive, *τοῦτο* 'this', refers back to that which precedes

14. Note that the Greek *eiserchomenos*, 'what goes into' (NRSV), is a substantive participle, the subject of *koinoi*, 'defiles'.

15. Preposition here is *eis* and it marks extension or goal (BDAG 288), toward the mouth. D has inserted *πάν* 'all,' thus softening the reading to 'it is not all what goes into,' weakening the statement (France 2002:575; Nolland 2005:607). Note that *πάν* is omitted in NA.<sup>27</sup>

16. Nolland (2005:606) observes two things, (1) that the disruptive *τοῦτο* 'this' is dropped by 1241 etcetera a aur e ff1 sa, (2) the whole clause, *τοῦτο κουνοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον* 'is omitted from f1 bo manuscript; so it can be understood as implied in the previous verse' (Nolland 2005:606). However NA<sup>27</sup> includes the whole clause. The NRSV does omit this clause and translates *touto* to 'that'.

17. D has *κοινωνεῖ* 'shares,' in both of these places, making no proper sense but causing confusion (Nolland 2005:607) and NA<sup>27</sup> maintains *κουνοῖ* [defile].

18. Note that *ἐκ* + genitive denote a marker of origin, the source of (BDAG 297), or simply a genitive of source of the head noun (Wallace 1996:109), to *ekporeuomenon*, 'what comes'.

it immediately, ἐκπορευόμενον, 'what comes out' (BDAG 740), to emphasise the subject of κοινῶν, defile. It seems that these two, 'not' and 'but', are a crucial guide to a proper understanding of this verse. Moreover, 'not...but' presents an antithetical parallelism between εἰσερχόμενον, 'what goes into' and ἐκπορευόμενον 'what comes out'. Similarly, the two prepositional phrases εἰς 'into' and the accusative τὸ στόμα, 'mouth', denote the extension of defilement, in this case, specifically towards the mouth (BDAG 288). The ἐκ and the genitive τοῦ indicate the direction from which defilement comes (BDAG 296), that is, from, στόμα 'mouth', a genitive that signifies the source (Wallace 1996:125). These two prepositional phrases are balanced by ἀλλά, 'but' sustaining an antithetical parallelism (Fokkelman 2001:61–86).

This syntax, therefore, helps us to understand Matthew's intention for the motif of contrast, 'not...but'. Thus, although I agree with France that Matthew (15:11) makes it clearer than Mark that both food and words come in and out of the mouth, I disagree with France, Brunner and Morris' overall conclusion that by the 'not...but', Matthew wants to characterise Jesus as setting aside the Levitical food Law (Lv 11:1–8). Here, I reserve my disagreement, because if it is accepted that Matthew depicts Jesus as setting aside the Mosaic Law (Lv 11:1–8), then it is agreed, in effect, that Matthew wants to show that by 'not...but' Jesus creates a dichotomy. This dichotomy is between his ministry and Yahweh's calling of Israel to be a holy people to him. I do not think this was Jesus' motive in Matthew 15:10–11. Rather, I think that by this motif of contrast, Matthew portrays Jesus as insisting that although true defilement is both external (ritual) and 'internal', it is its 'moral' perspective that matters more than mere observance of the ritual itself. That is, outward observance of the ritual law of defilement is relative to the internal motivation of the 'heart'. In other words, a narratological study of Leviticus 11 (as an allusion to Mt 15:10–11) will indicate that whilst Jesus maintains some aspects of the Old Testament ritual law (in Mt 15:10–11), at the same time he creates an additional ethical emphasis for the Christian community.

## A narratological reading of Leviticus 11:1–4 as an allusion to Matthew 15:10–11

The principle of Duvall and Hays<sup>19</sup> regarding interpretation will facilitate a better understanding of Leviticus 11:1–4 as part of Israel's theological narrative, the significance of which is based on a time frame within the larger Israel narratives.

According to Duvall and Hays (2005:339–340), in order for the reader to grasp the original meaning of a given text, he must 'grasp the text in their town', by answering the question: 'What did the text mean to the biblical audience?' Leviticus indicates that this law was given to Moses by Yahweh to the Israelites (Lv 11:1–2; 'And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them, "Speak to the people of Israel,

19. Duvall and Hays explain a five-step interpretative journey toward interpreting an Old Testament Law (2005:339–340).

saying, these are the living things that you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth"' (ESV). It is noteworthy to remember that Israelites' obedience symbolised Yahweh's presence in their midst and was meant to resonate the holiness of Yahweh before the nations (Lv 11:44–45). Thus, Moses is pictured as an intermediary between Yahweh and the Israelites (Lv 11:1) and the tabernacle symbolises Yahweh's presence in their midst.

Therefore, to the biblical audience, that is, the Israelites, Leviticus 11:1–8 was ordained, for that particular period, to demonstrate the separateness (holiness) of the Israelites. Its motive was to facilitate the Israelites to focus their attention away from other gods and worship Yahweh exclusively. Leviticus 11:1–8 aided Israel's testimony to the nations around them. Thus, unwavering allegiance to Yahweh's laws was demanded although no clear explanation was given.

The second step of Duvall and Hays in this interpretative journey requires the reader to 'measure the width of the river to cross'. The main question here is: What differences exist between us and the biblical audience? Averbeck (1997), contrasting the function of the tabernacle and that of the church with respect to God's presence, contends that:

there is an important contrast between the OT physical purity laws associated with the physical presence of the Lord in the tabernacle ... as opposed to the NT view of the presence of God in the Church [which is linked 'to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit' (Jn 14:17)].

(Averbeck 1997:922)

Additionally, under the old covenant Yahweh ordained the dietary law (Lv 11:1–8) to remind the Israelites of 'God's election grace'. The narrow choice of food reminded them of Yahweh's narrowing his choice of them to be a holy nation (Ross 2002:262). Christians, however, still under the same grace, partake of a new covenant that includes both Jews and Gentiles. Moreover, whilst in Leviticus 11 the presence of God was symbolised by the tabernacle and the Law, things outside of a person, in the New Testament God comes to dwell in and amongst believers through the person of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16–17). Thus, Leviticus 11:1–8 indicates that Israelites' obedience to the external ritual of purity law against defilement was a means, not an end in itself, towards:

- worshiping Yahweh
- demonstrating and differentiating Yahweh's transcendence over and against other idols.<sup>20</sup>

Obedience to external ritual was correlated to the internal motive to imitate Yahweh's holiness (Lv 11:44–45).<sup>21</sup> But a socio-rhetorical study of 1st century Judaism will divulge that because Jews, too, extremely abhorred becoming defiled, they emphasised the eternal observance against the 'internal and moral motive' to safeguard themselves from defilement by Gentiles.

20. For this reason, what was considered as sacred idol by other nations (e.g., a cow by the Egyptians), Leviticus' ritual code defined it as clean and the Israelites were allowed to eat it (Ross 2002:251).

21. Leviticus 11:44–45, 'For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. <sup>45</sup>For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy' (ESV).

## A socio-rhetorical reading of the motifs of 'hearing and understanding' and 'contrast', in Matthew 15:10–11, with respect to the 1st century Jewish view of defilement

M.O. Wise outlines five major attitudes in inter-Testamental Judaism, which gives insights into the Jewish view of defilement:

- the temple was considered to be the dwelling place of God. For example, Ezekiel sees the glory of God depart from the temple (Ezk 8–10), but also says that God will return to live forever in a new Temple (Ezk 43:1–12)
- Jerusalem's temple was considered to be a sign of Israel's election from amongst the nations (2 Sm 24:16; Ps 68:17) and identified with the original location of the Garden of Eden (cf. Ezk 34)
- according to apocalyptic tradition, it was believed that a new temple will descend from heaven on Zion and a theocratic state established; God will once more take up permanent residence (cf. *1 Enoch* 90:28–29)
- the second temple was rejected because the temple built under Haggai and Zachariah was unimpressive compared to that of Solomon. Its cult was also thought to be illegitimate because the priests were not practicing the proper methods for sacrifice
- some Jews rejected the current temple as that of Solomon because it was not built to the specifications as revealed to Moses by God in Exodus 25:9 (Wise 1992:811–817).

To this end, Wise (1992:811–817) contends that 'accordingly, any proper temple would have to be constructed not along the lines of the Davidic or Solomonic model, but according to the plans which God had delivered once for all to all his pre-eminent prophet, Moses'.<sup>22</sup> Herein lay the reasons why some Jewish sectarians in the 1st century AD looked forward to a perfect temple to be built at Jerusalem.

Therefore, Intertestamental Judaism provides the impetus for the 1st century Jewish perception of defilement.<sup>23</sup> In this period some of the Jews, fearing to be defiled, would not accept food from the Gentiles. Thus, Josephus recalls:

by the customs he hath been engaged in, he [the errant member] is not at liberty to take of that food that he meets with elsewhere,

22. Wise (1992:811–817) extensively discusses the Jerusalem temple with respect to its structures, 1st century Judaism's attitude to the temple as documented by temple scrolls, dead sea scrolls and Jewish historian Josephus. Moreover, he adds a discussion on the temple in the Gospels.

23. The desecration of the temple by foreigners had a great impact on Jewish perception of defilement. In 167 BC the Seleucid monarch occupied Jerusalem, setting up a foreign cult that involved the sacrificing of a pig in the sanctuary (Chilton 1992:400). According to 2 Maccabees 24–25, this defiled the temple. 'But Judas Maccabeus, with about nine others, got away to the wilderness, and kept himself and his companions alive in the mountains as wild animals do; they continued to live on what grew wild, so that they might not share in the defilement' (RSV). The Hasidim chose to remain 'faithful to the sacrifice in Jerusalem by an appropriate priesthood' and resist the demands of Antiochus, thus they were referred to as 'the faithful ones'. They were also distinguished as Hasmoneans for they were under the priestly leadership of Mattathias (Judas Maccabeus' father) who introduced 'the most powerful priestly rule Judaism has ever known' (Chilton 1992:401). In this turn of events, most Jews adopted an eschatological approach, unlike the nationalistic approach by the Hasmoneans and the apocalyptic vision of Daniel facilitated the expectation of when the temple would be restored by the miraculous means of the archangel Michael and divine interventions (Chilton 1992:401). The Essenes, however, withdrew from Jerusalem and formed their own communities, either within cities or in isolated sites such as Qumran. They waited for a coming apocalyptic war when they, as 'sons of light' would triumph over the 'sons of darkness', that is, Gentiles and anyone not of their vision. They had a doctrine of two Messiahs, 'one of Israel and one of Aaron' (Chilton 1992:401).

but is forced to eat grass, and to famish his body with hunger till he perish.

(JW 2.8.8)

Likewise, non-members in the Qumran community were considered to be unclean and forbidden:

to share in pure food of the men of holiness [Essenes] for they have not been cleansed ... no-one should associate with him in his work or his possession ... no-one should eat of his possessions, or drink or accept anything from his hands.

(1QS 5:13–16) (Martinez 10)

What does Matthew's (15:10–11) motifs of 'hearing and understanding' and 'contrast' convey with respect to the study of Leviticus 11:1–8? Note that Matthew probably wrote his Gospel around 80–90 AD to a church that most likely began strongly as a Jewish church and increasingly became more Gentile in composition (Meier 1979:13–14). Therefore, the motif of contrast, 'not...but' in Matthew 15:11, was probably employed to communicate a basic truth. To repel the biased Jewish oral tradition, that is, the extreme application of Leviticus 11:1–8 by the 1st century Jews (particularly the Essenes and the Pharisees), who emphasised the external aspect of defilement at the expense of its moral perspective.<sup>24</sup> This way, the motifs of 'hearing and understanding' and 'contrast' in Matthew 15:10–11 indicate that Jesus' teaching intensified Levitical ritual law (Lv 11:1–8), portraying a movement from outward-action oriented obedience to obedience that is internally-motivated. This position was expected to apply to both Jews and Gentile Christians (see Rm 14:1–7).

## Conclusion

It has already been noted that whilst God spoke through prophets like Isaiah in the Old Testament, in the New Testament he continues to speak through Jesus Christ and the Scriptures written about him, especially the Gospels as seen in Matthew 15:10–11. It was established how *shema* and *beyin* (Is 1:2–3) and 'hear' and 'understand' (Mt 15:10, compare to the Hebrew text earlier) depict the God of the Old Testament coming to speak directly to mankind in the person of Jesus Christ. This was the only way that Matthew's listeners could understand what the invisible God was saying to them. Today Jesus speaks to us in his written word, the Gospel. Thus, Matthew 15:10–11 reminds us that it is important to give attention to the Gospel because it reveals what God says about defilement. In this instance, from the study of Matthew 15:10–11, the following two issues can be said of the case study in the Kenyan village, Kajire.

Firstly, Wataita's self-aggrandising manner resembles the self-righteous attitude that the Pharisees displayed against the Gentiles, according themselves a righteousness that is out of step with God's truth. Like the Essenes, the Wataita community in Kajire village has also inherited a wrong

24. In addition, whilst respecting the cultic commands (contra France and Brunner) in Leviticus 11:1–8, Matthew translates the external ritual law of purity (Lv 11:1–8) into a Christian ethic, making observance of dietary laws relative to one's disposition of the heart. This position would mostly apply to the Jewish Christians, allowing them to keep the Jewish law (especially that good part of the Law which was not adversely applied against Gentiles, e.g., observing the Sabbath, etc.) as part of their identity whilst insisting that Jewish Christians should be concerned more with right moral disposition than only their Jewish identity.

view of defilement from their ancestors, a view that Jesus vehemently attacked (Mt 15:10–20; Mk 7:1–23). The foregoing article informs us that defilement is no longer a ritual matter only. Therefore, it can neither be contagious nor passed on from one person to another. As a result, neither giving birth in the bush nor in the house or hospital can cause any defilement. However, this does not mean that some people could naturally be immune from being defiled. Matthew 15:10–11 reminds us that defilement is a matter of moral issues, that it has to do with evil thoughts in the heart that can lead to flawed actions and/or speech (Mt 15:18–20). For this reason, both the Wataita and the Wasanye are susceptible to defilement, being equally human. Moreover, given that the Wataita derogatorily describes the Wasanye as defiled, this description betrays evil thoughts originating from their (the Wataita's) hearts. According to Matthew 15:18–20, such defamation thus rather depicts the Wataita, who regard the Wasanye to be naturally defiled, defiling themselves in effect.

Secondly, it would be wrong to argue that the Old Testament promotes a perpetuation of ritual defilement, because as seen in the previous, the Leviticus ritual code was not given with the sole purpose to perpetuate a ritual view of defilement. As part of the narrative theological history of the Israelites, it was meant to echo the holiness of Yahweh in Israel amidst other nations. Thus, the Israelites' lifestyle, characterised by narrow choices and dietary laws (Lv 11:1–8), was meant to symbolise Yahweh's holiness and distinctiveness from the worship of other gods by the surrounding nations. Therefore, as the Israelites were required to be holy (Lv 11:44–45), so too are Christians (Mt 15:10–11), as their response to God's holy presence in their midst. This is true for the Christians at Kajire (both Wasanye and Wataita). They both have an equal responsibility to be in the forefront to manifest the characteristics of a holy life. 'Holy life' in this case means leading a lifestyle that testifies daily to the fact that one's perception of reality is not subject to cultural bias against others of a different culture, but rather is influenced and guided by the teaching of Jesus Christ in the scripture. This means that Kajire Christians, if they are to be defined as true followers of Jesus, must discharge their responsibility to discourage this age-long tribalism against the Wasanye. Both members of the Wataita and the Wasanye who claim to be followers of Jesus have been invested with the same responsibility to actively and boldly speak against the

description of the Wasanye as defiled people and to display a positive attitude towards them with regard to questions of intermarriage, communal leadership and so forth. Otherwise, if Christians in Kajire perpetuate the culture of discrimination against the Wasanye, seeing them as defiled and cursed people, then like the Pharisees and scribes that Jesus tackled, they fittingly depict themselves as *tufloi odehgoi*, 'blind guides', who can only lead those who follow them into a ditch (Mt 15:14).

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