

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN ACCORDING TO MATTHEW 13:10-17

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Abstract

This article is a socio-rhetorical interpretation of Jesus' disclosure in Matt 13:10-17 that he had revealed the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven exclusively to his disciples.¹ It utilises the methodology of socio-rhetorical criticism to systematically analyse the inner, inter and ideological textures of Matt 13:10-17, in order to understand how Matthew used the symbolic media of privileged knowledge to aid his community's development from a Jewish faction, in the time of Jesus, into a distinct Jewish sect after his death. In Matthew, the exclusive revelation of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven to the followers of Jesus separates them from outsiders, emphasises the importance of understanding as a gracious gift from God, and attests to the inversion of honour brought about by God.

1. Introduction

In the Gospel of Matthew, God is depicted as a patron, and Jesus as a broker² who has revealed an abundance (cf. the use of *περισσευθήσεται* in

1 The changing of Jesus' audience from the crowd in 13:2 to the disciples in 13:10, and the new subject matter of 13:18, designate 13:10-17 as a separate pericope.

2 Jesus' exclusive knowledge of God enabled him to act as a patron (acting as a broker) who gave privileged access to God and his benefactions to his disciples in Matthew (deSilva 1999, 41; 2000, 133-141; Neyrey 2004, 62). In Matt 11:20-27 Jesus, for example, responded to the growing opposition to his ministry by thanking God for his role as the exclusive revelator of the Father (the object of *ἀποκαλύψαι* in 11:27). The data of benefaction that Jesus bestows on others throughout the Gospel of Matthew can be described in terms of the general symbolic media of power, commitment, inducement and influence (Neyrey 2004, 55-64). According to this generalisation, esoteric knowledge, secrets and revelations are examples of the general symbolic media of influence. Specific examples in Matthew are: knowledge and secrets revealed (11:25-27; 13:10-17; 16:17; 24:36); dreams (1:18-25; 2:12, 13, 19; 27:19); stars (2:1-9); the hidden prophetic meaning

13:12) of previously hidden knowledge about the kingdom of heaven exclusively to his disciples through his parables (deSilva 1999, 41; 2000, 133-141; Neyrey 2004, 9, 62). Jesus' switch from plain to parabolic teaching (13:3) represents a major turning point in his ministry in Matthew (Kingsbury 1969, 31),³ that prompted his disciples to ask why he had started to teach the crowds only through parables (13:10). The question of the disciples suggests that the term *παραβολή* (which occurs for the first time in 13:3 in Matthew) signified a figure of speech for them whose meaning was not readily obvious.⁴ Their question to Jesus was thus why he had started to speak in riddles instead of plainly, as he had in the past (cf. 4:17, 23; 9:35; 11:1).

In order to understand Jesus' reason for speaking in riddles, this study will undertake a socio-rhetorical critical interpretation of Matt 13:10-17. Socio-rhetorical criticism studies texts as richly textured tapestries made up of different "textures" (inner, inter, ideological, social, cultural and sacred) that are each comprised of various sub-textures that can be individually analysed with a number of different interpretive methodologies (Robbins 1996a, 20). As no interpreter can practically use all the different interpretive resources available for reading the various textures of a text, this study will focus on a selection of sub-textures of the inner, inter, and ideological textures of Matt 13:10-17 (Robbins 1996b, 2).

2. Inner Texture

Inner texture refers to the different ways in which a text employs language in order to communicate. It includes various types of linguistic patterns within a text (progressive and repetitive textures), as well as its structural elements (narrational and opening-middle-closing textures). It also refers to the specific manner in which a text attempts to persuade its reader

of Scripture (1:22-23; 2:6, 17, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:18-21; 13:14, 35; 21:4-5; 27:9) and parables (13:3-9, 31-32, 33, 44-50) (Neyrey 2004, 61).

3 The abruptness of the transition should not be overstated, as Jesus had previously used parabolic imagery (cf. 7:24-27; 9:15-17; 11:16-19; 12:29, 33, 43-45), and continued at times to speak plainly to outsiders (cf. 15:3-7; 16:2-4; 19:4-9, 17-22) according to Matthew (Turner 2008, 339).

4 The understanding of parables as riddles also occurs in Psalm 77:2 (LXX) where the terms *παραβολή* and *πρόβλημα* ("problems" or "riddles") are placed in synonymous parallelism, signifying equivalence (Hultgren 2000, 456).

(argumentative texture) and the way the language thereof evokes emotions, or senses, that are located in different parts of the body (sensory-aesthetic texture) (Robbins 1996b, 3-5).

This study will specifically analyse the progressive-repetitive (2.1), argumentative (2.2) and narrational textures (2.3) of the inner texture of Matt 13:10-17.

2.1 Progressive-repetitive texture

The progressive-repetitive texture⁵ of Matt 13:10-17 comprises of a brief introduction that provides the occasion and setting for the question of the disciples about Jesus' parabolic teaching (13:10), followed by his answer consisting of two antithetical parallelisms (13:11-12), an intertextual recontextualisation of Isa 6:9-10 in the form of a synonymous parallelism (13:13), a chiasmic citation of the same Isaiah text (13:14-15), and a beatitude that is in the form of a synonymous parallelism (13:16-17).

Question about the purpose of parables by the disciples

¹⁰ Καὶ προσελθόντες οἱ μαθηταὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ· διὰ τί ἐν παραβολαῖς λαλεῖς αὐτοῖς;

The answer of Jesus (*antithetical parallelism*)

¹¹ ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· ὅτι ὑμῖν δέδοται (A¹) γνῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἐκείνοις δὲ οὐ δέδοται (A²).

Statement of principle (*antithetical parallelism*)

¹² ὅστις γὰρ ἔχει, δοθήσεται αὐτῇ καὶ περισσευθήσεται ὅστις (E¹) δὲ οὐκ ἔχει, καὶ ὃ ἔχει ἀρθήσεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ (E²).

Reason for Jesus speaking in parables (*synonymous parallelism*)

¹³ διὰ τοῦτο ἐν παραβολαῖς αὐτοῖς λαλῶ, ὅτι βλέποντες (C¹) οὐ βλέπουσιν (C²) καὶ ἀκούοντες (B¹) οὐκ ἀκούουσιν (B²) οὐδὲ σύνιουσιν,

5 Repetitive texture is a sub-texture of inner texture that resides in the multiple occurrences of words and phrases in a pericope, while progressive texture resides in sequences (progressions) of words and phrases throughout a pericope (Robbins 1996b, 8-10).

Citation (synonymous parallelism)

¹⁴ καὶ ἀναπληροῦνται αὐτοῖς ἡ προφητεία Ἡσαΐου ἡ λέγουσα·
ἀκοῆ. (B³) ἀκούσατε (B⁴) καὶ οὐ μὴ συνῆτε,
καὶ βλέποντες (C³) βλέπετε (C⁴) καὶ οὐ μὴ ἴδητε.

(chiasm)

¹⁵ ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδιά τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου, (D¹)
καὶ τοῖς ὠσίν βαρέως ἤκουσαν (B⁵)
καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν ἐκάμμυσαν, (C⁵)
μήποτε ἴδωσιν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς (C⁶)
καὶ τοῖς ὠσίν ἀκούσωσιν (B⁶)
καὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ συνῶσιν καὶ ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς. (D²)

Beatitude (synonymous parallelism)

¹⁶ ὑμῶν δὲ μακάριοι οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ὅτι βλέπουσιν (C⁷) καὶ τὰ ὦτα ὑμῶν ὅτι
ἀκούουσιν (B⁷). ¹⁷ ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι πολλοὶ προφήται καὶ δίκαιοι
ἐπεθύμησαν ἰδεῖν ἃ βλέπετε καὶ οὐκ εἶδαν (C⁸), καὶ ἀκούσαι ἃ ἀκούετε καὶ
οὐκ ἤκουσαν (B⁸).

The two antithetical parallelisms (A¹A² and E¹E²) highlight the contrast between the disciples and the crowd (Cousland 2001, 252-253; Ewherido 2006, 114; contra Evans 1989, 109), while the parallel verbs (βλέπουσιν, ἀκούουσιν and συνίσουσιν) of the second synonymous parallelism (B³B⁴ - C³C⁴), that give the primary reason for Jesus speaking in parables, link it to the citation of Isa 6:9-10. The citation, which functions as scriptural support for Jesus' justification for speaking in parables, has a chiasmic structure (D¹B⁵C⁵ - C⁶B⁶D²), which emphasises that the crowds did not see because they had shut their eyes (C⁵ - C⁶).

Jesus' pronouncement through a third synonymous parallelism (C⁷B⁷ - C⁸B⁸) that the disciples, in contrast with the crowds, are blessed because they did see and hear (i.e. understand) is the rhetorical climax of his argument (cf. Mack 1990, 38-40; Neyrey 1998, 165-166). It is in keeping with Matthew's portrayal of the disciples as models of understanding in contrast with their portrayal in the Gospel of Mark⁶ (Ewherido 2006, 111).

6 Matthew for example, removed the references in Mark 6:52 and 8:17-18 to the hardened hearts of the disciples by Jesus (Evans 1989, 112-113). Unlike in Mark, the disciples are

The reply of Jesus (13:11) and the answer of the disciples in 13:51, for example, reveal that unlike the crowds, the disciples had understood the teaching of Jesus, even though they themselves, at times, struggled to do so (15:16; 16:9, 11; 16:23), and needed to ask for an explanation (13:36; 15:15). Understanding the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven is thus not a natural endowment of the disciples in Matthew, but rather the result of their privileged instruction by Jesus (France 1989, 273).

2.2 *Argumentative texture*

Argumentative texture refers to the reasoning a text employs to persuade its reader. The reasoning may be logical, where assertions are supported by syllogistic reasoning, or qualitative, where the reader is led to accept an assertion or portrayal as true because of the quality of its support (Robbins 1996b, 21-22).

The rhetorical strength of Matthew's presentation of Jesus' argument in 13:10-17, that the disciples are more favoured by God than Israel because they understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, is that its rhetorical proofs⁷ are taken from the oral-scribal (3.1) and cultural (3.2) intertextures of his Jewish opponents. They could thus not be dismissed out of hand by them (cf. Mack & Robbins 1989, 155). According to Matthew, Jesus used these common proofs specifically in order to challenge the dominant Jewish culture as is evident in the rhetorical syllogism underlying the enthymeme in 13:16. The enthymeme itself can be constructed as follows:

Major premise (not stated): Those who understand (i.e. who have ears that hear and eyes that see) the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are favoured by God (i.e. are blessed by God).

Minor premise (13:16b): The disciples have understood the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

Conclusion (13:16a): Therefore the disciples are favoured by God.⁸

thus not so much threatened by a lack of understanding in Matthew, as by a lack of trust which they can only overcome with their Lord's help (Gnilka 1986, 482; Baltz 1993, 307).

7 The nontechnical proofs are two proverbs (13:12-13), a citation of prophecy (13:14-15) and a favorable comparison of the disciples with the prophets and righteous of the past (13:17).

8 From the cultural perspective of honour and shame, μακάριος can be translated as "honourable" or "favoured" (Neyrey 1998, 166; deSilva 1999, 60-61).

By arguing that the disciples (and not the Jewish crowd or their religious leaders) were favoured by God because they had truly understood who he was, Jesus inverted the dominant Jewish culture's definition of who was honourable, and reinforced the distinction between his followers as insiders and the crowd as outsiders (Malina & Neyrey 1988, 121; deSilva 1999, 60-61).

The inversion of honour through the gift of revealed knowledge is a recurring theme in the Gospel of Matthew. In an earlier prayer (11:25) Jesus had thanked his Father because he had revealed his secrets to those who are "childlike" and not to the elite who had rejected him (the "wise and the learned"—σοφῶν καὶ συντετῶν). Only those who are humbly dependant on God, as infants are on their parents (νηπίοις is used metaphorically with the meaning of "simple" or "childlike" in 11:25), are receptive enough, according to Jesus, to receive God's disclosure of the mysteries of heaven (France 2007, 444, 515).⁹

For those who do not respond with faith, God encrypts his revelation of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven through Jesus in riddles (παραβολαῖς) so that they remain hidden from them (Krämer 1991, 447; Hagner 1993, 372). Receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven is thus not simply a matter of cognitive comprehension, but also of faith and humility (Hultgren 2000, 463). In Matt 21:45-46 the Jewish leaders for example "knew" (ἔγνωσαν) that the parables were about them, but they did not respond with faith or humility (Luz 2001, 245).

2.3 Narrational texture

Matthew's recontextualisation of Mark 4:10-12 in an extended discourse of parables about the kingdom of heaven provides an important key for their interpretation. It indicates that the parables in Matt 13 reveal knowledge of the mystery of the present, veiled existence of the kingdom of heaven in a threefold fashion. Firstly they show that it emerges suddenly and inexplicably in the world by God's will, as is shown by the parables of growth (the mustard seed and the leaven—13:31-33). Secondly the kingdom

9 Specifically, according to Jesus in 11:25, God has revealed (ἀπεκάλυψας) to them, as a privileged group of insiders, how his deeds and words ("these things"—ταῦτα) disclose that the kingdom of heaven is already present in him (Hagner 1993, 318). The content of God's revelation in 11:25 is the same as the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven in 13:11 (Davies & Allison 1991, 227).

of heaven demands a decision for or against it according to Matthew, as is expressed by the parables of decision (the pearl and the treasure—13:44-46). Finally, it involves judgment. Depending on one's choice, there is reward or punishment, as is conveyed by the parables of judgment (the weeds amongst the crop and the net with the fish—13:24-30, 47-50). The Parable of the Sower is programmatic in that it combines all three elements of growth, decision, and judgment (13:3-9).

3. Intertexture

Intertexture is a text's representation of, reference to, and use of, phenomena that lie outside the text that is being interpreted. It includes other texts (oral-scribal intertexture), cultures (cultural intertexture), social roles, institutions, codes and relationships (social intertexture) as well as historical events or places (historical intertexture) (Robbins 1996b, 3).

This study will focus on the oral-scribal (3.1) and cultural intertexture (3.2) of Matt 13:10-17.

3.1 *Oral-scribal intertexture*

Oral-scribal intertexture involves a text's use of other texts. According to socio-rhetorical criticism, there are five basic ways (recitation, recontextualisation, reconfiguration, narrative amplification and thematic elaboration) in which a text can use the language existing in other texts (Robbins 1996b, 40-41). The primary oral-scribal intertexture of Matt 13:10-17, that this study will focus on, is Mark 4:10-12 and Isa 6:9-10.

3.1.1 *Mark 4:10-12*

Matthew's account of Jesus' justification of his parabolic teaching is a significantly altered version of Mark 4:10-12.

In the first instance, Matthew changed Mark's οἱ περὶ αὐτὸν σὺν τοῖς δώδεκα, to simply οἱ μαθηταί (13:10). The recipients of the privileged revelation of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are thus restricted to a smaller group of insiders (only the disciples) in Matthew than in Mark.

The question of the disciples (διὰ τί ἐν παραβολαῖς λαλεῖς αὐτοῖς) in Matthew is also more general in nature than in Mark. Whereas the disciples' question in Mark (ἡρώτων αὐτὸν οἱ περὶ αὐτὸν σὺν) could be about the nature of the parables, or about the meaning of a specific parable (the

Parable of the Sower), in Matthew it is a general question about pedagogy (Hultgren 2000, 462).

The statement of Jesus (13:11a) also differs from Mark's account in that Matthew has added the aorist infinitive γνῶναι (that emphasises that the disciples had understood God's revelation), has τὰ μυστήρια in the plural and refers to βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν and not βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ (Evans 1989, 109; Ewherido 2006, 104). Matthew, furthermore, emphasises the overflowing abundance of the knowledge that God had benevolently bestowed on the disciples by adding the verb περισσευθήσεται in 13:12.

Matt 13:11b also does not specifically state (as Mark 4:11b does) that the parables are for outsiders. It simply says that the secrets of the kingdom of heaven are not given to "them" (i.e. the crowd). Matthew however does add a saying of Jesus (13:12),¹⁰ taken from Mark 4:25, in order to give a different reason for Jesus speaking in parables than Mark does. Matthew also uses the causal conjunction ὅτι ("because") in 13:13b instead of the conjunction ἵνα ("in order that") which introduces a purpose clause in Mark 4:12. *For Matthew, Jesus speaks in parables because people do not understand, and not as in Mark in order that they should not understand* (Davies & Allison 1991, 392; Hultgren 2000, 462; Ewherido 2006, 105; Turner 2008, 339-330). For Matthew the effect of Jesus' parables depends on the disposition of the hearer, in that like begets like—knowledge is rewarded with knowledge, ignorance with ignorance (Davies & Allison 1991, 390). Jesus thus does not speak to the uncomprehending crowds in parables to lead them to understanding, but rather to withhold knowledge from them in order to complete the hardening of their hearts (Bornkamm 1967, 817). In this regard Matthew has inserted συνήμι (which occurs six times in chapter 13) into Mark's account of the Parable of the Sower, so that it is the one who hears but does not understand that has the word taken away

10 It is a proverb (cf. Prov 9:9; 11:24; 15:6) that originally complained that the rich always get richer while the poor always get poorer (Luz 2001, 246). According to Chenoweth (2005, 68-71) the extended verbal repetition of Matt 13:12 in 25:29 connects the Parable of the Talents with Jesus' reply in 13:11-12. As in Matt 13, where Jesus entrusts the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven to the disciples, the master in the Parable of the Talents for example also entrusts various talents to his servants. He therefore argues that the talents that are given in different measures to the servants refer to the fact that Jesus had entrusted more of the secrets of the mysteries of kingdom of heaven to some, and less to others according to their abilities. The Parable of the Talents therefore serves as a warning that the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, that have been entrusted to the followers of Jesus, have to be put to good use.

(13:19), and the one who hears and understands who will yield fruit (13:23) (Baltz 1993, 307; Johnson 1999, 196).

3.1.2 *Isaiah 6:9-10*

Matt 13:10-17 contains both an oral-scribal recitation and a recontextualisation¹¹ of Isa 6:9-10 (LXX), whereas Mark only has the recontextualisation. The recontextualisation (13:13:b), which omits a number of words so that it has the force of a proverb, makes no reference to Isa 6:9-10. The citation (13:14b-17), however, which is in verbatim agreement with Isa 6:9-10 in the LXX (except for the omission of αὐτῶν in 13:15), is specifically introduced by Matthew as a prophecy by Isaiah that had been fulfilled by Jesus. The compound verb ἀναπληροῦται (13:14a) has the meaning of “the completion of a hitherto partial fulfilment”, which would imply that the prophecy of Isaiah, which had been partially fulfilled in his own time, was now being brought to its final fulfilment by Jesus (Maier 1983, 455; Hagner 1993, 373; Cousland 2001:255; France 2007, 514).

Unlike other fulfilment formulas in the Gospel of Matthew, Isa 6:9-10 is presented as Jesus’ own words and not as a redactional comment (Gundry 1982, 257; Hultgren 2000, 462). *It emphasises that the phenomenon of the disciples having privileged insight into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, while others do not, is itself a secret that has been revealed.* The crowds and religious leaders however failed to heed the warning of Isa 6:9-10, as they did not realise that it was a warning addressed to them about their unbelief.¹²

3.2 *Cultural intertexture*

Cultural intertexture is the reference, allusion, or echo of cultural knowledge that is known only by people who grew up within a particular culture, or by people who have learned about the culture through some kind of interaction

11 An oral-scribal intertextual recitation is the transmission of speech or narratives from either oral or written tradition (Robbins 1996b, 41). Recontextualisation, in contrast to recitation, presents wording from another text without mentioning that these words are written somewhere else (Robbins 1996a, 107).

12 Isa 6:9-10 is a critical text in early Christianity’s explanation (cf. Acts 28:25-27; John 12:39-41; Rom 11:8) of the failure of Israel to accept Jesus as Messiah (Gnilka 1986, 483).

with it. This knowledge includes the values, scripts, codes and systems of a culture (Robbins 1996b, 58).

Jesus' reference to the mysteries of heaven could be an allusion to a predominantly Greco-Roman, or Jewish, cultural intertexture.

The Greek word μυστήριον was initially used as a technical term to denote the initiation rites of the various Greco-Roman mystery-religions, which had appeared in the Greek-speaking world in the seventh century B.C. (Harvey 1980, 320). In these rites members of various groups (e.g. of Eleusis and Isis) were initiated into the secrets and destinies of the gods, the cosmos and life (Carter 2000, 283).

The New Testament usage of μυστήριον, however, has been influenced more by the Jewish background of the word than by its Greek cultural intertexture (cf. Harvey 1980, 329, 332-336). It first appeared in Judaism in the later books of the Septuagint as a translation of the Persian loanword *ṭr*, which functioned as an almost technical term for “the secrets of God” in the sense of God’s ultimate purpose, which had been revealed only to a privileged seer or people (Bornkamm 1967, 813-815; Harvey 1980, 326). In Dan 2:18, 27-28, for example, it indicates the veiled disclosure of future events in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream that only God could reveal through one inspired by him (Harvey 1980, 327; Krämer 1991, 448). The idea that secrets hidden since the foundation of the earth (cf. 13:35; Ps 77:2 LXX) would be revealed with the coming of the Messiah, was not only prevalent in Jewish apocalyptic literature like Dan 2:27-28, but also in the Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g. 1 En 103:1-4; 1QS 9:17; 4 Ezra 14:5-6; 2 Bar 81:1-4) (Davies & Allison 1991, 277, 389).

The Jewish understanding of the cultural intertexture of μυστήριον in 13:11 as God’s ultimate purpose, which is only revealed to a privileged group, is supported by Matthew’s redactional comment in 13:34-35 that Jesus spoke to the crowds by means of parables in order to fulfil a specific Jewish text (Ps 77:1-2 LXX). The final objective phrase in 13:35 (κεκρυμμένα ἀπὸ καταβολῆς [κόσμου]) reflects the belief of Matthew that the mission of Jesus was the working out of the plan of salvation that God had from the beginning of time, and which he had announced through his prophets in the OT (Hagner 1993, 390; Hultgren 2000, 463).

The occurrence of μυστήρια in Matt 13:11 must therefore be read as an intertextual cultural allusion¹³ to apocalyptic texts like Dan 2:27-28, 44. It signifies eschatological mysteries, which are hidden from human reason, and that will only be revealed by God himself at the end of time (Harvey 1980, 333; Hultgren 2000, 454-455; Nolland 2005, 533). Insight into these mysteries have, however, according to Matthew, already been granted by God (δέδοται is a divine passive) to the disciples through Jesus' parabolic teachings about the kingdom of heaven. The parables of the kingdom in Matthew reveal that its presence, which can be discerned in the person, words, and works of Jesus (2.3), calls for repentance and conversion by all.

4. Ideological Texture

Ideological texture is concerned with the particular alliances and conflicts nurtured and evoked by the language of a text, as well as the way the interpreters of the text position themselves in relation to other individuals and groups (Robbins 1996b, 95-96). This study of the ideological texture of Matt 13:10-17 will specifically focus on the relationship of the Matthean community with formative Judaism.

In terms of the ideological texture of the Gospel according to Matthew, the Matthean community is best described as a self-conscious Jewish sect within post-war formative Judaism that was in the process of defining its sectarian nature vis-à-vis its parent body (Sim 1996, 198). Before it took on the character of a Jewish sect, the Matthean community operated as a Jewish faction interacting with other Jewish coalitions (e.g. the Herodians and Sadducees) and factions (e.g. the John the Baptist faction) during the lifetime of Jesus (Elliott 1995, 77-78). Only following the death of Jesus and under changing social conditions did it gradually begin to adopt the features and strategies of a Jewish sect by dissociating from its Jewish parent body (Elliott 1995, 76).¹⁴

13 An allusion is a statement that presupposes a tradition that exists in a textual form, but that does not recite it. With allusion, the text interacts with phrases, concepts, and traditions that are cultural possessions which anyone who knows a particular culture may use (Robbins 1996b, 58-59).

14 As a faction, the group, associated with Jesus during his earthly ministry, constituted a person-centred coalition in that the members of the group were personally recruited by Jesus, who assumed the role of a patron or a broker providing access to desired goods, services or goals (Elliott 1995, 78). A sect can be defined as a small "deviant" reference-

The Gospel of Matthew aided this dissociation, by presenting the life of Jesus as a transparency for the situation of the post-Easter Matthean community (cf. Overman 1996, 2-5; Luz 2001, 245).¹⁵ For the Matthean community the deepening division between Jesus and Israel, and the escalating conflict with its leadership, that had resulted in Jesus making a clear distinction between those who followed him—his new fictive kin group or family—and those who had rejected him during his lifetime (12:46-50), also addressed their own conflict as a community with formative Judaism. A number of salient features of the ideological texture of Matt 13:10-17 specifically attest to the Matthean community's development from a Jewish faction in the time of Jesus into a Jewish sect after his death.

The first feature is the claim of the Matthean faction that it was the subject of a reversal of social status because it had received special honour from God (2.2). According to Matthew, the privileged knowledge that his community had received from God through Jesus' revelation of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven had radically redefined their identity. Contrary to the claims of their Jewish opponents that they were without honour because they were followers of a dangerous deviant (c.f. their labelling of Jesus in 27:63-64 as "that deceiver"), whose ways led to disgrace since his teachings were contrary to the will of God, Matthew claims that Jesus was the only one who truly knew God's will.¹⁶ As the only true revealer of God's will, Jesus had declared his disciples more honourable than the Jewish elite in the eyes of God. They were also more favoured than all the prophets and righteous believers of the past who did not share in their honour of receiving insight into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven through him (13:17).

group in which an individual seeks status and privilege and that provides, apart from its parent body, an exclusive and all-embracing environment for its members (Elliott 1995, 75, 89-90).

15 Matt 18:15-20 for example presupposes the existence of the church as a community of brothers with the risen Lord in their midst. The presentation of Jesus' understanding in Matthew of the need for sacrifice (5:24; 8:1-4; 9:13), the relevance of the temple (12:6; 21:12-17; 26:61; 27:40), and the shift of the focus of his mission from Israel to the Gentiles (10:5; 15:24; 28:19) also testify to a community that was in the process of separating from its Jewish roots (Nel 2002, 266-276).

16 The verb ἐπιγινώσκειν, with the prepositional prefix ἐπί (11:27) which functions as an intensifier, has the meaning of "know exactly, completely, through and through" (Nolland 2005, 472).

The inversion of honour through the gift of revealed knowledge (as already stated in 2.2) is a recurring theme in the Gospel of Matthew. For Matthew, God revealed his secrets to those who are “childlike” and not to the elite who had rejected him (11:20-27). As in 13:11, the privilege of being granted insight into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven by Jesus in 11:25-27 was due to the gracious will of God as expressed by the noun εὐδοκία (11:26), which refers to God’s “pleasure”, “goodwill”, or “favour” (France 1989, 272; Turner 2008, 303). Its meaning combines the notions of decision, and approval, and affirms God as the prime mover of the unfolding events (Nolland 2005, 471-471).

A second feature is the establishment of clear social and ideological boundaries between the Matthean sect and the other Jewish factions. Following one of the basic and abiding social distinctions made amongst first-century Mediterraneans between in-group and out-group persons, Matthew metaphorically classifies people in terms of their relationship with Jesus as either good or bad fish, wheat or chaff, wise or foolish maidens, sheep or goats, good or bad trees. For him there is no ambiguity—people are either for or against Jesus (12:30), and are thus either insiders, who understood the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, or outsiders who did not (13:11).

In this division, the parables function as an insider language that reinforced the clear boundary between those to whom the parables were explained in private, and outsiders (the crowd) to whom they had deliberately not been explained (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992, 102; Overman 1996, 196). While Matthew often depicts Jesus teaching in the synagogues and to the crowds following him, the five discourses, which form the core of Jesus’ teaching in the gospel, are addressed primarily, and in most cases exclusively, to his disciples (cf. 10:1; 18:1 and 24:1).¹⁷ Although Jesus addresses the parables in chapter 13 to the crowds (13:1-3), it is ironical in relation to this public discourse that the privileged situation of the disciples is most evident, in that the explanations of two of the parables (13:18-23, 36-43) are given only to the disciples (France 1989, 270-271).

A third feature of the ideological texture of Matt 13:10-17 is its appeal to ancient scripture, eschatological fulfilment and superiority to the ancient

17 In the first discourse of Jesus (the Sermon of the Mount), the disciples are the specific target audience of Jesus as they came to him when he sat down to teach (5:1-2). The crowd however also overheard Jesus’ teaching (7:28-8:1) (France 1989, 270).

prophets in the reception of Christ and the gospel (Elliott 1995, 85-87). For Matthew, Jesus did not only give his disciples insight into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven through parables—he also did it by citing and applying scripture. In citing Isa 6:9-10, Jesus for example provided the Matthean community with an explanation as to why the Jews had rejected Jesus (their hearts were hardened), and revealed to them how this prophecy of Isaiah had been completely fulfilled in their time by the unbelief of Israel. In doing so, Jesus, according to Matthew assured them of their continuity with the revelation of God's will in the past through the prophets, and affirmed their privileged access to new knowledge of God's plans regarding the coming of his kingdom through the parables and teachings of Jesus. The citation of Isa 6:9-10 is thus an example of the heavenly benefaction of influence, that is, the gift of esoteric knowledge of the secret plan of God (Neyrey 2004, 62-64).¹⁸

A fourth feature is the criticism and vilification of the parent body and outsiders as blind leaders (Matt 15:14; 23:16) (Elliott 1995, 86; de Silva 2000, 40-41, 62). In order to enable his readers to resist the attempts of the dominant culture at shaming them back into conformity, Matthew pointed to the Jews' lack of knowledge as outsiders of the will of God (deSilva 1999, 63). The implication of the privileged knowledge that the followers of Jesus possessed, was that they should not be tempted to seek the approval of outsiders for their conduct, as outsiders did not have access to the privileged knowledge that they had received from God.¹⁹ *The previously hidden knowledge that Jesus according to Matthew had revealed to his disciples therefore redefined the court of reputation that determined if their behaviour should be considered honourable or not.*

The use of the symbolic media of secret knowledge by Jesus in order to redefine the court of reputation of his disciples (and thereby the church) also occurs in terms of secret knowledge in 10:26, where Jesus announced twice that the disciples should not fear their persecutors because God will uncover what is covered, and reveal every secret. The disciples should therefore honour God (10:28) and look for his approval, rather than that of outsiders (10:32-33), or even their natural families (10:37-39). Not only would God

18 Matt 11:25 and 16:17 also refer to eschatological knowledge that is a gracious gift from God (Davies & Allison 1991, 390).

19 Jesus, for instance, refused the requests by the scribes, Sadducees and the Pharisees for a sign from heaven (12:38-40; 16:1-4).

(δοθήσεται is a divine passive) give them the appropriate words through the Spirit of their Father (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν) in order to defend their honour (10:19-20), but he would also vindicate them when he finally revealed all secrets (10:26-27).²⁰ Desire for honour in the eternal court, with Jesus as judge, should therefore encourage believers to accept disgrace in human courts in the present (deSilva 1999, 55-56).

In contrast to other factions within Judaism (e.g. the community at Qumran), the Matthean community did not adopt a policy of vicinal isolation (cf. Elliot 1995, 92). *Instead, the Matthean community actively strove to share the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven with others, as Jesus had not instructed his followers to conceal the secrets of heaven forever.* He had rather commanded the disciples, according to Matthew, to publically proclaim in the future what he had taught them in private by using two idioms in 10:27 that acknowledged their privileged position as the first, but not the sole, recipients of the knowledge concerning the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven referred to in 13:10-17 (Nolland 2005, 435-436). Even though during his earthly ministry Jesus' teaching of the disciples had to be done privately by using cryptic language (ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ and εἰς τὸ οὐδὲν), it would be openly spoken of (ἐν τῷ φωτί and ἐπὶ τῶν δωματίων) and even proclaimed before kings and governors through the preaching of the disciples and the Church after his resurrection (10:17-18, 27-28). In this post-Easter period God himself would be the active agent (ἀποκαλυφθήσεται and γνωσθήσεται are divine passive verbs) who would, through his disciples, reveal the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven to all (Hagner 1993, 285; France 2007, 402-403).

5. Conclusion

The inner, inter and ideological textures of Matt 13:10-17 emphasise the theological importance of secret knowledge in the Gospel of Matthew. *In Matthew, the exclusive revelation of the mysteries of heaven separate the followers of Jesus from outsiders, underline the importance of understanding as a gracious gift from God, confirm the continuity of the*

20 Turner (2008, 278) sees this as a promise of an eschatological reversal in that the sins of the persecutors that are hidden in the present will be revealed on the judgement day. Hagner (1993, 285) and France (2007, 403), however, understand it as a reference to the post-resurrection proclamation of the church.

Matthean community with OT prophecy, and attests to the inversion of honour bought about by God.

For Matthew the mysteries of heaven signify eschatological mysteries, which are hidden from human reason, but that have been made accessible by God to the disciples through Jesus' parabolic teachings about the kingdom. The Matthean parables reveal that the kingdom of heaven is at hand and calls for repentance and conversion in order to receive its mysteries. Receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven is furthermore not simply a matter of cognitive comprehension, but also of faith and humility for Matthew.

Theologically the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven played an important role in the development of the Matthean community from a Jewish faction into a sect that understood itself as the elect remnant of its Jewish parent body that possessed special enlightenment because it had received a privileged insight into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

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