

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

In this study, we have argued that the Matthean community was an inclusive one, but that it was not a society with an egalitarian structure. In other words, the Matthean community was an inclusive society within a hierarchical structure. In Chapter Six, the findings from each chapter have been summarized. Also the assessment has been made on whether the problem statements and the research gaps are addressed in methodologically appropriate ways in this investigation to support my arguments regarding Matthew's inclusive community, despite the fact that his community operated in a hierarchical structure.

6.2 Mapping the road traveled

Some scholars have argued that the historical Jesus was an egalitarian person. As a result, his instructions helped to produce a "community of equality". In a certain sense, one can argue that Jesus' egalitarian teaching seems to have influenced the currently frequently advanced theory of equality, as seen in the social and political arena in modern society. However, the present egalitarian perspective distorts the actual historical and social nature of Jesus' movement and his way of teaching (Elliott 2003:75). Several people who propound an egalitarian theory appeal to Biblical texts and argue that Jesus and his followers engaged in an egalitarian movement. In addition, they use the same Biblical texts to promote social revolution, democratic institutions, and the eradication of the traditional family. But Jesus' teaching was not intent on establishing an egalitarian community; rather that he redefined familial values, norms and modes of conduct (Elliott 2003:75).

Current Matthean scholarship has also argued that the Matthean community was an egalitarian society. Several scholars have argued vehemently that Matthew 18:15-17 provides evidence of the equality of the members of the community. Matthew 23:4-12 is also one of the "proofs" which are used to support the notion that the Matthean community was an egalitarian society. Several other passages also mention certain aspects, which suggest an egalitarian community, namely the idea of

“leader as Servant” (Mt 18:1, 4), an implication of egalitarianism or a rejection of the family (Mt 10:34-37), a warning against the recognition of human authority (Mt 23:8-10), and “the new family of God.”

Some of the Matthean scholars, such as Krentz (1977:334-366; see White 1986:75; Sim 1998:139; Saldarini 1994:48; Stanton 1992:104) believe that Jesus’ followers were not called leaders in the same way that Jesus was. The community had only one teacher, who was Jesus and God; all the other members of the community were equal, and as such, they regarded themselves as brothers and sisters. The “true family of God”, implied that the members of the community were equal within their community (cf Schüssler Fiorenza 1983:149-151).

According to this perspective, the Matthean community was a sectarian group (see chapter 1) who did not establish a hierarchically structured leadership role. In other words, the new sectarian movement of the Matthean community rejected a hierarchical structure and presented itself as a group with an egalitarian structure, as opposed to the hierarchies of the parent body of the Israelite community (see Sim 1998:139-140). It is evident, in terms of these arguments, that the Matthean community was a society with an egalitarian structure.

However, I propose that the Matthean community was neither an egalitarian community, nor a hierarchically structured society. The term “egalitarian” cannot be applied to an ancient agrarian society, because the word “egalitarian” is derived from a modern western political and philosophical context that emerged after the French Revolution. The modern term “egalitarian” includes age, talents, strength, social rank and station, economic class, political or legal status, responsibilities or opportunity (see Elliott 2002:76). It is obvious that the ancient agrarian societies of two thousand years ago were not like those of the modern western society. These agrarian societies maintained a gap between those who belonged to the ruling class and those who had little or no access to the ruling class. This implies that the Matthean community was not a group operating within an egalitarian structure, but were members of a hierarchically structured advanced ancient agrarian society. An ancient agrarian society was unequal because native members were divided into dominant males versus inferior females. Parents were socially superior to their children. The freeborn were superior to slaves; while the natives were superior to aliens. These examples are

sufficient evidence to argue that the context in which the Matthean group lived was hierarchically structured. This community consisted of a mixed population of both Israelite and Gentile members.

Some of the historical Jesus scholars (Schüssler Fiorenza 1994; Crossan 1994:71-74; Theissen and Merz 1998:219-225) believed that the historical Jesus' religious movement was egalitarian as his "discipleship of equality." Jesus' invitation to discipleship involved a call of abandonment of one's biological family and its patriarchal structure. However, Jesus' teaching declares the biological family to be of secondary significance and Jesus' disciples had to leave their family temporarily in order to accompany him. Moreover, Jesus did not denounce the family or its patriarchal structure but it was a prioritizing of their loyalty to God (Elliott 2002:79).

Many Christian feminists and female scholars also assume the egalitarian nature of the Jesus religion movement (see Corley 1998:291-325; D'Angelo 1992:199-218; Grant 1989:184). These scholars focus on Jesus and his special attitude to women's equality with men. Women were closely related with Jesus' religious movement. The female roles are significant in the Gospel of Matthew and early Christian tradition. However, Israelite women were systematically excluded from both the religious and public life of the social world. Therefore the Israelite women and men were not politically and socially equal.

Furthermore, we have discussed that to critically evaluate a comparison between Matthew and Paul's inclusive tendencies one must use a cross-cultural interpretation. The Matthean community was part of the Israelite tradition and it was also under the influence of the Hellenistic culture. Paul's communities were of a mixed culture, which included both the Israelite and Hellenistic traditions. Hence, the interpretation of the Law was different from Matthew's and the Pauline communities. Matthew's community was a Law-observant community, which was different from the Law-free Pauline communities. The Law legitimated Israelite society as an institution with a hierarchical structure. This implies that a Law-observant community structure did not include everyone, since members were from different social levels, and individual social standings differed. This insight also indicated that the Matthean community was not an egalitarian society, but an inclusively structured society that represented a hierarchical social stratification.

The narrative point of view and social scientific models have been used in this study to analyse

the Matthean inclusive community. The narrative point of view is applied to Jesus' inclusive ministry from Galilee to Jerusalem. This was Matthew's spatial setting for Jesus' missionary travels. The narrator's intention of his inclusive community is depicted through Jesus' ministry. Social scientific models were used in order to determine and decode the text within the social and cultural context of Jesus' inclusive ministry. Hence, the first methodology applied, involved reading the text and applying the social scientific models to a specific social situation.

The discussion of the social location of the Matthean community includes the date, the location, the stratification, the membership and the social situation of the Matthean community in Antioch. This analysis reveals that the Matthean community was an inclusive social structure. The Matthean community probably existed between 80 and 90 CE. It was a mixed community. It was an advanced agrarian society, as well as a highly stratified society. The city of Antioch, the most likely setting, was a mixed state, containing both Israelites and Gentiles within a hierarchical structure. Moreover, the reading shows that the members of the Matthean community were divided. The upper classes fell into the ruling category, while the lower classes were subject to the ruling class. The results of this investigation confirm that there is strong evidence that the Matthean community was not an egalitarian but an inclusively structured society with a social stratification.

The narrative point of view analysis indicated that Jesus' inclusive ministry is designated by the narrator's according to the spatial settings of his geographical movement in the context of his community, which is an inclusively structured society. The narrator informs his readers about Jesus' inclusive ministry from Galilee to Jerusalem. The narrator divides Jesus' inclusive ministry into four sections. Firstly, Jesus prepares for his inclusive ministry in Matthew 2:23-4:11. Secondly, Jesus' inclusive ministry from Galilee in Matthew 4:12-18:35 is discussed. Thirdly, Jesus' journey of inclusive ministry from Galilee to Jerusalem is set out in Matthew 19:1-20:34. Finally, Jesus' inclusive ministry in Jerusalem and its surroundings is presented in Matthew 21:1-28:20.

Jesus was a protagonist as shown in his inclusive ministry (for all kinds of people) as depicted in the narrative of Matthew. This implies that the Matthean community conflicted with the Israelite leaders about the intention of inclusivity. His ministry was in accordance with God's will regarding salvation for his people. The Israelite leaders (the religious leaders) were antagonistic towards

Jesus' inclusive ministry. The function of Jesus' disciples was to be helpers in his inclusive ministry, but sometimes they failed. The target of Jesus' inclusive ministry was the crowd. Hence, Jesus' inclusive ministry came into conflict with the aims of the Israelite leaders. Jesus' ministry included the social and religious outcasts within a stratified society, while the Israelite leaders excluded them. Jesus' inclusive ministry took place within the spatial contexts of the city, houses, synagogues, mountains, boats, and the temple. This inclusive ministry was completed by his death on the cross and it being continued by his disciple's community (Matthew).

A social scientific reading suggests that after Jesus changed his ritual status in the transformation manifested in his baptism, he began his inclusive ministry by preaching the Kingdom of God for the salvation of all kinds of people. Matthew's interpretation of Jesus' inclusive ministry yielded the following results: according to a cultural anthropological perspective, Israelite society was divided along the lines of purity and pollution. The Israelite leaders excluded unclean people, but Jesus included such people from different social levels. Matthew's interpretation of Jesus' inclusive ministry was not limited by time, place, person(s) or things, as the Israelite tradition presupposed it would. Moreover, Jesus was a patron to religious and social outcasts. This reading also clearly indicates that the Matthean community was not an egalitarian structured society.

6.3 Concluding remarks

In this study, Matthew's inclusive community was investigated and interpreted using a narrative point of view and social scientific analysis. The Matthean community was not an egalitarian society. It was an inclusively structured society. The social location of the Matthean community shows that it was a mixed one, which included both Israelites and Gentiles in Antioch around 80 to 90 CE. It has been confirmed that Matthew's community was an advanced agrarian society, with a particular hierarchical and inclusive structure. Matthew's intention of his inclusive community depicted through Jesus' inclusive ministry began in Galilee and moved to Jerusalem, according to the spatial settings described. Jesus' inclusive ministry was aimed at all kinds of people within a hierarchically structured society in the first century Mediterranean world.

The modern term “egalitarian” cannot be applied to the Matthean community as an ancient hierarchically structured society. Hence, the assertion that Jesus was an egalitarian who established “a community of equality” is not an acceptable theory for the Matthean community. We can confirm that the ancient world, even the Matthean community, was not used to assert the equality of all members within a social or economic relationship. This means that the egalitarian theory cannot be demonstrated with reference to the social structure of the Matthean community. The theory of equality raises problems of anachronism if it is applied to the Matthean community in the ancient world.