CHAPTER IV

THE SOCIAL LOCATION OF THE MATTHEAN COMMUNITY

4.1 Introduction

Most scholars agree that the Gospel of Matthew was written between 70 CE and 90 CE either in Antioch or in Galilee.[252] The aim of this chapter is to locate the Matthean text into a context from which it emerges. Scholars such as Meier (1983:11-86), Luz (1990:93), Overman (1990, 1996:16-19), Saldarini (1991:39), Duling & Perrin (1994:329-333), Sim (1998:31-40), and Carter (2000:16; 2001:36-37) have argued that Matthew is a post-70 CE

[252] The place of origin of Matthew is a matter of debate among scholars since the author does not precisely indicate the place of origin, except where it is indicated that "News about him spread all over Syria" and that large crowds from Galilee, Jerusalem and the Transjordan region followed him (Mt 4:24-25). Although Luz (1989:92) has no objection to a Syrian location where Greek was spoken, he does state that "the Gospel of Matthew does not betray its place of origin". Scholars such as Tenney (1982:150-151), Kingsbury (1988:149), Luz (1989:90-92), Overman (1990:158-161; 1996:16-19), Duling & Perrin (1994:329-333), Sim (1998:31-40), Stark (1991:189-210), Segal (1991:1-37), and Carter (2000:15-16) to name but a few, have explored the Matthean origin. Those who hold the traditional view of it being Antioch say that: (i) Matthew addressed a congregation that existed in Antioch which was predominantly Greek speaking and a mission setting that was circumcision-free; (ii) Matthew reflects an intermingling society of Jews and Gentiles; (iii) Matthew's origin was an urban community; (iv) It is in Antioch where Paul directly opposed Peter. More recently, Overman (1990:158-161; 1996:16-19) taking up the views of W Trilling, F Manns and S Miller, has challenged the widely accepted consensus of a Syrian origin. Overman says that taking the conflict within the formation of Judaism, a Palestinian location would be preferred as the origin of Matthew. Within Palestine, "Galilee is attractive" because of its role in the rabbinic Judaism. Overman puts forward some reasons as to why a Galilean location could be the origin of the Gospel. (i) Matthew rather strikingly did not allow Jesus to leave Galilee; (ii) Rabbinic Judaism took shape in the Galilee. This movement's early heroes, Yohanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Judah the Prince, were basically Galileans; (iii) The cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias were important in the first century. They were centers of trade, had courts of law; were home to numerous officials and imperial personnel (both Gentiles and Judeans), and they were large enough to contain sizable but diverse forms of Judaism. According to Stambaugh & Balch (1986:92), Sepphoris was established during the Hellenistic period and consolidated later by the Herods. It became famous and was inhabited by wealthy Judean landowners and the priestly class who favored and collaborated with Roman imperialism. Tiberias, on the other hand, was founded between 17 and 20 CE by Herod Antipas. It was an open city that welcomed all people without any distinction between poor and rich, Gentile and Judean. Segal (1991:26) brings both views together (Antioch and Galilee) in a single geographical setting. He argues that Galilee and Syria should be considered as a single geographical area. His emphasis is based on the nature of errant populations across borders due to the influx of refugees and displacements during the Jewish revolts and war. Moreover, the closeness of locations was conducive to easier communication between Syria and Galilee. He also refers to the itinerant nature of Jesus' disciples after the commissions (Mt 10 and 28) which obviates a "strict choice between Galilee and Antioch". Van Aarde (2002b:133; 2004b:424) locates the origin of Matthew neither in Antioch nor in Galilee *per se*, but somewhere in-between region "South-Syria/North-Galilee".

text[253] – in other words a postwar text. If so, the social location of Matthean community could be investigated from a postcolonial perspective.

Aspects such as marginality, gender role and community formations (in both the Matthean and Formative Judaism contexts) are important in order to understand the Matthean location. Some historical facts that contributed to the revolt and to the eventual destruction of both Jerusalem and the temple and the dispossession of the land, which were the main social, political and religious symbols of identity of the Judeans,[254] are worth mentioning.

The aim of this chapter is to shed light on the social, economic and political contexts from which Matthew's Gospel emerges. Matthew wrote to an audience that was familiar to his context. However, it becomes difficult for readers in the 21st century to have appreciation for the full meaning of the Matthean text. It therefore, becomes imperative to understand the locus of Matthew in order to see how he interacted with his fellow countrymen, with Roman colonization and its local agents in Palestine.

The argument here is that the Gospel of Matthew, to a large extent, was influenced and shaped by social, economic, political and religious factors that led to Matthew's introduction of Jesus as a religious and political figure whose mission it is to proclaim

[253] However, Tenney (1982:150-151; see Sim 1998:31-32) is of the opinion that it was written at an earlier time, between 50 CE and 70 CE.

[254] It has been a tradition for theologians to use the term "Jew" when referring to a Judean or an Israelite in the New Testament. But such term does not exist in original biblical manuscripts. Why do theologians translate *Ioudaion* (Mt 2:2; 27:11, 29, 37; 28:15) with "Jews"? In dealing with this issue, J J Pilch (1997:119-125) lists three important periods from which Jewish terminology might have emerged. (i) First temple period (950 BCE-586 BCE). The temple was built by King Solomon and was destroyed under King Zedekiah by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. At this stage, the country was called "Israel" (see Gn 32:24-28); the people were called "Israelites or people of Israel"; and their religion was called "Israelite religion". (ii) Second temple period (520 BCE-70 CE). The temple was rehabilitated under Ezra and Nehemiah, but again destroyed by Roman General Titus. During this period, the country is referred to as "Judea" and its people as "Judeans", while their religion is called "Judean or Judaic religion." (iii) Post-70 CE period, also known as the "period of Rabbinic Judaism." From the beginning of the gathering of the Council of Jamnia around 90 CE to the present day, the religion of this period has been referred to as "normative Judaism." It is derived from "Pharisaic scribalism" which is at the origin of contemporary Jewish belief and practice. The people are referred to as "Jews" and their religion as "Judaism". Although in the contemporary world, the terms "Jewish religion, Jewish beliefs" are mainly used, they "cannot and should not be retrojected into the Bible." Having noted such anachronism, this study prefers to use Judean and Israelite in the Matthean context, where possible. However, where the term "Jew" appears in direct quotations, the researcher will retain its usage.

salvation (independence), not only to Judeans, but also to the nations that had been oppressed. It is also assumed that the Gospel is a result of internal and external conflict based on religious and political misinterpretation of the law, which eventually forced the Matthean community to look like a marginalized group.

4.2 Life in Palestine under Roman empire

4.2.1 Introduction

Klausner (1964, 1977), Theissen (1978, 1992), Freyne (1980), Oakman (1986), Wengst (1987), Horsley (1988, 1989, 1993), Stambaugh & Balch (1989), Balch (ed) (1991), Carter (2001), among others, provide an account of Roman imperial socio-economic and political experience in Palestine. Horsley (1993:3) introduces his work by saying that the "Jews of Jesus' day were a subject people." From the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 587 BCE to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, Palestine went through successive foreign military invasions and occupations. Therefore, both Formative Judaism and Christianity emerged from a colonial context, which greatly affected the Gospel of Matthew. Cycles of oppression and subjugation created three major popular revolts against foreign military occupations. The Maccabean revolt (168-167 BCE) against the Hellenistic empire; the revolts of 66-70 and 132-135CE against the Roman empire and its local puppets who were mainly from the priestly aristocracy before they could be acquiesced in *pax Romana* (Wengst 1987; Horsley 1989:30-32; cf Horsley 1989:3-5; Carter 2000:38-39).

4.2.2 Socio-economic conditions

Using Matthew's contemporary narratives such as the Gospel of Mark (10:28), the issue of the dispossession of the disciples, a question that was pertinently put to Jesus, is prominent. While Matthew, on the one hand, encouraged people not to worry about what to eat and to wear (Mt 6:25-34), it bears testimony to a very difficult situation vis-à-vis the economic situation, not only that of the disciples, but of many in Palestine during the first century.

As an agrarian society, Klausner (1964:174-184) notes that the Judeans in Palestine were hard working people. They possessed agricultural, fishing, handicraft and business skills. Unlike the merchants and the other wealthy businessmen a small percentage of the population, the class of smallholders was largely constituted by peasants. According to Klausner (1964:179), the entire family (parents and children) lived solely off the labor of their hands. Their produce depended on seasons, but they were reserved for household use with the rest being sold to procure other basic necessities.

However, such a peasantry life could not permit one to acquire any wealth. Consecutive bad seasons and/or weak health of the peasant would be enough to deprive him of his property and to reduce him to a status of a hireling. Oakman (1986:72-73) explains that if smallholders (peasants) fell into arrears, vis-à-vis any of various obligations – be that because of taxes, rents, dues and household, and replacement requirements, there was not enough for subsistence, leaving the peasant with no choice but to borrow to meet the deficit. This exercise "required something as surety," part of the peasant's property, his piece of land, or even himself or a member of the family. It must be noted that debt, land and agrarian problems (Fiensy 1999:6-8; cf Moore 1966:479)[255] often played a role in Greco-Roman historical development which fuelled peasant revolution movements.

Taxation was heavy and highly problematic. Although it is difficult to establish when excessive taxes were introduced, Klausner (1964:187-188) observes that such heavy taxation was not recorded during the Maccabean period. However, Seleucids did collect various taxes from Judeans. These included poll-tax, salt tax, crown tax,[256] land tax, cattle tax, fruit tree tax, water tax, city tax and house tax. During Herod's reign the burden of

[255] According to Fiensy (1999:6-8), "peasant mass movements" in themselves do not make a rebellion. There must be a leadership behind the mass. Fiensy argues that from a sociological perspective, when a peasants' protest turns into rebellion, usually the movement is led by someone from outside the peasantry and without such leadership the rebellion can almost never succeed in becoming a successful revolution. Such leaders usually come from among discontented intellectuals or politicians, dissident landed aristocracy, priests, and other religious leaders, artisans, teachers and village leaders. Leaders from outside peasantry circles may offer two services to their followers. They articulate "grievances and organize for action", which have consequences beyond the peasants' immediate problems. Without outside influence peasants' goals in rebellion remain very limited.

[256] Tax for crowns of the bride and bridegroom.

taxes and tributes increased beyond the peasants' endurance. It is suggested that it was at this time that the tax collectors, publicans became associated with robbers.

The idea of excise originated from religious legislation more so than it did from political obligation. Sanders (1992:147) describes it as "financial support of the priests and Levites" but also to the poor (Nm 18; Dt 14:29; 18:1-8). In the post-exilic period, Nehemiah also urged people to give their tithes in order to support the Levites (Neh 12:44). Tithes (Sanders 1992:157) meant the tenth of every form of production ranging from animals to first fruits and money which was to be offered to the Lord. Sacrifices, tithes and offerings were brought. Food was distributed to the priests and the Levites, and some of it was allocated to the poor as charity. Horsley (1989:74) adds that the act of paying dues to the temple and the high priests was "supposedly positive", because they were an obligation to God as indicated by the Torah. But this was different from the dues to Roman colonial rule.

During the different periods of foreign occupation, including the Roman occupation, the payment of taxes and dues was reinforced. Sanders (1992:157-158) quotes Applebaum describing how the Judean peasantry was affected by having to pay heavy taxes. In this regard, he mentioned that the peasant was crushed by merciless exactions under Pompey and his successors and no less under Herod. During regimes that followed, they indeed had to bear "the double yoke" of Roman tribute and the taxation required to finance Herod's ambitious projects of internal public works and "aid to Greek cities outside his kingdom". Between 37 and 4 BCE, "the combination of Roman tribute and Herodian taxation, with religious dues", would have been extremely oppressive.

Wengst (1987:58-61) and Volschenk & Van Aarde (2002:811-837) distinguish between two types of taxation: direct and indirect tax. Direct tax was levied on the land or was raised per capita. This type of tax included all toll fees, customs and excise, market takes, estate duties (Klausner 1964:186-188), "all of which drew money away from the agrarian and commercial sectors" (Volschenk & Van Aarde 2002:833). By means of this taxation, the Romans had grabbed almost all the farming land as their private property. After 70 CE Judea, originally farmed by Judeans only, came to be regarded as "a property of the Roman

state". Under the Seleucid regime (Volschenk & Van Aarde 2002:834), the land tax (*tributum soli*) amounted to a third of the grain harvest and half of the fruit yield.

On the other hand, indirect tax (Volschenk & Van Aarde 2002:835), which even forced children to work, could be regarded as "the *tributum capitis*. In Syria every man between the age of 14 and 65 and every woman between the age of 12 and 65 had to pay this tax." The rich paid up to "1% of their movable assets", while the poor paid this tax on the body (which also belonged to the state).

For instance in Lenski's (1966:267-271; cf Oakman 1986:72; Fiensy 1991:99-105; Hanson & Oakman 1998:113-125; Carter 2001:135) estimation of taxes, up to two-thirds of a peasant's income was paid in rent, tolls and taxes. Lenski also mentions that political interests played a role. Therefore, the Roman empire had initially lowered its taxes to ten percent (10%) in the provinces of Sicily and Asia "to win support" in newly conquered countries, in order to solidify their economic and political base.

Carter (2001:135) adds that the high taxation of peasants is because the "peasants had no say" in decision making about tax levels, while Saldarini (1988:37; see Vledder 1997:129) describes the peasantry class as most exploited by the rest of the rulers and it supplied the tax-income of the privileged. The aristocratic class made more demands on the peasants, while they themselves had "surplus funds to invest or lend to others." Lenski (1966:217-219) notes "the exercise of proprietary rights" through collections of taxes, tribute, rents, and services became the main sources of income for most agrarian rulers. The threat of military punishment and further loss of land and production by increased tributes and taxes forced compliance.

Moreover, as Lenski (1966:268; cf Vledder 1997:129) observes, "another heavy burden laid on peasants in most agrarian societies was corvée (a forced labor)." This involved both time and energy. Peasants were required to work in their masters' land "from one to seven days a week for a whole year." It is from peasantry taxes that the Roman empire survival

was ensured, thus "nonpayment of taxes would mean the collapse of the lifestyle of the elite, both local and Roman" (Carter 2001:13-14).

Tilborg (1986:28) refers to the economic hardship under the Roman empire that befell the people. Taxes and tributes were also paid for "peace," "security" and "freedom" as benefits of Rome. Carter (2001:15) quotes Tacitus who had the Roman general Cerialis inform the Treviri and Longones in Trier after suppressing their revolt:

> Although often provoked by you, the only use we have made of our rights as victors have been to impose on you the necessary costs of maintaining peace; you cannot secure tranquility among nations without armies, nor maintain armies without pay, nor provide pay without taxes (*Hist* 4.73-74; Cicero, *Quint fratr* 1.1.34).

This is reminiscent of the controversial Roman *imperium* tax mentioned in Matthew (22:15-21) as tax to Caesar.[257] According to Wengst (1987:58), the rise of the Zealot movement was linked to the introduction of Roman taxation. Consequently, the Palestine of Jesus' time (Klausner 1964:189) had produced unequal social classes, one comprising the very poor, destitute, unemployed and landless people, and another comprising the very wealthy farmers, land and estate owners and rich bankers.

4.2.3 Political and religious conditions

It is clear that the writing of the Gospel of Matthew emerged from an imperial world (Carter 2002:260-261) in which religion was interwoven with economic, political and social structures. Horsley (1993:31) notes that Roman repression was merciless in its successful attempt to retake Palestine during the popular revolt of 66-70 CE, of which

[257] See chapter five.

Josephus gives an account as an eyewitness.[258] As Freyne (1980:182-183, 194-200), Horsley (1989:30-31; 1993:5-8) and Carter (2000:38-40; 2001:9-34) observe, the relationship between the Roman empire and the Judeans is one of power and exploitation. Domination was maintained and enforced through military, economic, cultural and religious means.

Carter (2001:20-30; 2002:260-261; cf Wengst 1987:46-51) illustrates how the Roman emperors were very much attached to their gods. One of the basic principles of imperial theology is that Rome rules its empire because "the gods have willed Rome to rule" the world. To honor the gods, religious rituals were used by emperors and their officials, as well as by loyal supporters throughout the Roman empire, at home and in provinces to evoke "a picture of the relationship between the emperor and the gods." Roman emperors were representatives of gods and at the same time particular gods "claimed to have a special relationship with emperors" for protection and other blessings. For example, Domitian is said to have enjoyed the protection of the warrior goddess Minerva, who watched over soldiers' safety in battles. Nero and Vespasian enjoyed the protection of Jupiter. Vespasian and Titus portrayed themselves "as bearers of Jupiter's blessing and power". As they celebrated the military conquest of Jerusalem and Judea in 70 CE, they happily "invoked the *Pax Augusta*" (Carter 2001:26-27).

Wengst (1987:48-49) shows how the Roman poets exalted their emperors. Augustus was seen as "the father and guardian of the human race", and as a parallel to Jupiter who reigns in heavens, while Augustus reigned on earth, "god on earth". In his discussion of the Byzantine emperor, Meyer (2003:466) explains how the imperial authority was conceived as having emanated from divine rule. The emperor represented the divinity on earth and emulated "the power and virtues of God."

[258] See *Josephus, Thrones of Blood: A History of the Times of Jesus 37 B.C. to A.D. 70*, Uhrichsville: Barbour Publishing, Inc, 1988. The book is a paraphrased version of William Whiston's classic translation, taken from *The Antiquities of the Jewish and The Jewish War*.

Judean religious tradition was profoundly theocratic. Following Wengst (1987:7-51) and Woolf (1993:185-189), Carter (2001:32) took a critical view with regard to the subject of Roman peace:

> Claims of "peace", then, are propaganda claims …The cry of "peace" masks the strategies and structures of the empire… It disguises the fundamental inequities in the Roman system that exists for economic benefit of the elite. It lays veneer over the bloodshed and human misery experienced by the vast majority of the empire's subjects, those whose economic activity sustains the luxurious lifestyle of the elite. It claims divine origin and sanction for a way of life marked by domination and exploitation.

Therefore, the *pax Romana* is to be seen from political, military, socio-economic and religious perspectives, which influenced Matthean redaction. Certain passages in Matthew explicitly deal with imperial rule, for example the encounter with Herod[259] (Mt 2; 14:1-12), temple tax and Caesar (*imperium*) taxes (Mt 17:24-27; 22:15-22), as well as the crucifixion of Jesus (Mt 26-27). Matthew also deals with extensive accounts of Jesus' conflict with religious leaders, which is not only cultural or religious in nature, but also political (Mt 12:6-13; 25-29; 21:12-16, 23-27; 23; 28:11-15). Other passages are directly linked to socio-economic hardship under Roman rule (Mt 5:3, 5-6; 6:1-4, 16-34; 12:1-2; 13; 14:13-21; 15:29-39; 20:1-16; 21:18-21, 33-41; 25:14-46).

[259] Herod is known for his ruthless massacre of children (Mt 2:16-18), the beheading of John the Baptist (Mt 14:1-12) and many other bad things, especially his collaboration with the Roman empire. Herod is known to have been a good developer. During the period of famine in 23-22 BCE, which affected both Judea and Syria, Josephus (Barbour 1988:26-27) recorded Herod's philanthropic activities to alleviate human suffering. Unable to collect taxes from the starving citizens, Herod "plundered his castle of its gold and silver, then sent his wealth to Petronius, the prefect of Egypt, who provided wheat in return." Herod distributed the food in a "generous and equitable manner to all Judea. He also provided winter clothing for those who needed it, since most of the livestock had died or been consumed and there was no wool available. Once his own subjects were taken care of, Herod provided seed and farm workers to his neighbors, the Syrians. With their fruitful soil, the Syrians were then able to grow enough food to feed both countries". However, Herod might have used this for his political gain.

Stambaugh & Balch (1989:91) explain the social disorder that followed Pompey's destruction of the Maccabean state, leading to the first Jewish revolt against Roman imperialism. When the Roman officer separated the Greek cities of Samaria and Transjordan from Judea, a considerable number of Jewish peasants were left landless. As a result, some fled and became refugees (Theissen 1992:69-70) in the Diaspora (see 1 Macc 15:16-24), others became internally displaced persons. The involuntary separation of families in crisis, the loss of loved ones and properties during the eviction amid fighting, contributed to serious stress and depression.

Again the massacre of children (Mt 2:16) turned parents, relatives and surviving children who were fleeing their land, into refugees. Josephus (Barbour 1988:43-44) also records the massacre of students and their teachers who pulled down the golden eagle statue at the gate of the temple (see Horsley 1993:110); the killing of Judean leaders gathered at the hippodrome during Herod's poor health. Herod instructed his aides to kill one member of each family in the kingdom. Because, the mourning such a massacre would also serve as a mourning time for Herod, something his death by itself would certainly not have caused among the Judeans.

Horsley (1989:70-73) further explains the refugees' situation both in 4 BCE and from 66-70 CE. Taking the account of the birth of Jesus recorded in Matthew 2 and in Luke 1, he argues from Lucan context that Joseph and Mary had to travel back to their ancestral town to register (during the census), because they had been somewhat displaced and forced to live in another place. The displacement from their ancestral land may have been a result of debt, famine, political unrest and war[260] (the flight to Egypt is a good example). As a consequence, Joseph and Mary have come to represent an untold number of rootless and landless people in the ancient Judean Palestine. They were disconnected from their ancestral land and villages by the Roman conquest or by indebtedness resulting from the "intensive economic exploitation" that was compounded by obligations for temple dues and Roman tribute.

[260] But a voluntary relocation and/or a relocation because of work must not be ruled out either (see Elliott 1981:31).

The outcome of military force of Roman troops, with or without the collaboration of their local puppet kings, was always disastrous. Elliott (1981:21) views the first Epistle of Peter as an address to the "homeless strangers". It refers to aliens or refugees dispersed around the region of Asia Minor, "who are currently suffering from various types of hostility". Death and crucifixion[261] of resisters, destruction of properties and goods were used as a means of terrorism and intimidation against the subjected people.

Besides, the high cost of living forced peasants who had owned some plots of land to sell it in order to pay debts (incurred from loans), taxes, levies and tributes to the imperial government and also tax to the temple (see Freyne 1980:183-194, 275-285). According to Oakman (1986:37; cf Riches 1990:24-26; see Lenski 1966:214-216; Freyne 1980:156-170; Wainwright 1998: 39 note 19), land was a precious and primary factor in agrarian societies. Access to land was crucial for survival. From the elite's perspective, land tenure was usually expressed in "territorial or legal terms" while for a peasant it was expressed in terms of "customary right" and in relationship of kinship.

For the elite, the appropriation of land was an added income. On the other hand, the peasants were attached to their plots of land that was considered as the absolute family heritage and acknowledged as such within the local setting. Outsiders who took or grabbed the land upon which peasants resided were viewed as usurpers who wrongly demanded an underserved share of the land's produce from the peasants (Oakman 1986:38). Freyne (1980:181) adds that the toll fees were an obligation in the case of the transportation of goods from one district to another. Thus peasants had to live a life of marginal security heavily dependent upon outside persons and forces (Vincent 1991:278) who were wealthy and owned estates. Matthew (Mt 9:9) (according to Mk 2:14 and Lk 5:27, "Levi"), who was a tax collector, might have served at one of checkpoints in Galilee.

[261] See Barbour (1988:50-51) for the killings and crucifixion of 2000 people in a revolt during the Pentecost feast.

4.2.4 Humanitarian disaster

Many scholars, among them Vincent (1991:273-290), the edited work of Levine (1992), Horsley (1995) provide an overview of living conditions in Galilean cities, while Stark exposes life in Antioch (Stark 1991:189-210). Diseases, as result of poor health care, either in camps or in densely populated townships and cities, led to high mortality rates. Stark (1991:194-195) demonstrates how life was being threatened. Women's lives were at risk because of chronic infections resulting from childbirth and abortion. According to Stark, the majority of city dwellers (in Greco-Roman cities) "must have suffered from chronic health conditions" causing disabilities and the death of many people. Medication, if it existed, would hardly have been affordable. It was thus understandable "that healing was such a central aspect of both paganism and Christianity." Moreover, people in Palestine had to deal with the foreign occupation, slavery, insecurity, forced labor under excessive use of force from foreign soldiers (cf Carter 2001:37).

People had to endure consequences of natural disasters, such as droughts, floods (Mt 7:24-27), famine and earthquakes (Mt 24:7) (cf Klausner 1977:194-195; Theissen 1978:40; Barbour 1988:26; Overman 1990:197-198; Stark 1991:197). Theissen (1992:70) notes that poverty and material conditions in Palestine caused an influx of many people into neighboring countries. Using Antioch as example, Stark (1991:198) summarizes the serious catastrophes that befell the city:

> Antioch probably suffered from literally hundreds of significant earthquakes during these six centuries [six hundred years of Roman rule], but eight were so severe that nearly everything was destroyed and huge numbers died. Two earthquakes may have been nearly this serious. At least three killer epidemics struck the city-with mortality rates probably running above 25 percent in each. Finally there were at least five really serious famines. That comes to forty-one natural and social catastrophes, or an average of one every fifteen years.

Antioch was a cosmopolitan city that attracted newcomers from tribal and cultural diversities. During the days of Roman rule from 64 BCE, the city saw an influx of many nationalities. Some were brought as slaves, others as soldiers, while others came to the city as businessmen. Segal (1991:27; see Theissen 1992:69-70) adds that others came as displaced persons or as refugees. Tension, revolts and violence marked the period under Roman occupation. In a passionate language, Klausner (1977:197-198) sketches how violence also spread throughout the land:

> The unending succession of war, revolt and destruction also undermined relatively prosperous Judean economy, and reduced many of the country's inhabitants to poverty… [L]ife and property became increasingly insecure; each day further swelled the ranks of the unemployed and the rebellious; and the country was driven to the brink of economic ruin.

The poor were numerous in numbers and their conditions were pitiful (Tenney 1982:49). Natural and social disasters were commonplace and cities were vulnerable to attacks, fires, earthquakes, famines, epidemics, and devastating mob riots (Stark 1991:197). Stark (1991:198) continues to portray what Antioch was like in the early days. The Antioch in New Testament times was a city filled "with misery, danger, fear, despair, and hatred." It was a city where the average family lived a nasty depressing life in cramped quarters, where at least "half of the children died at birth or during infancy and where most of the children who lived lost at least one parent before reaching maturity." Furthermore, being a cosmopolitan city, Antioch was expected to have a constant stream of strangers (refugees, traders) coming to the city, which exacerbated ethnic antagonism. The situation in the city was so volatile that even a small incident could prompt violence.

Galilee on the other hand, was divided in upper (countryside) and lower (urban) geographical regions. Edwards (1992:53-73) explains the socio-economic inequalities that existed between lower and upper Galilee. This inequality, oppressive taxation and land grabbing by lower

Galilee dwellers (Roman government agents and local religious leaders) exacerbated the revolt in the land.

4.3 The Matthean community and resistance to imperial rule

4.3.1 Political and economic factors

The ruling elite "values hierarchy, verticality, vast inequality, domination, exclusion, and coerced compliance" (Carter 2001:10). At the top of this class was the Emperor who ensured that political power reinforced social gender inequality, as he exercised enormous power. The Emperor shared his benefits and rewards of power with a small ruling class. These included those who inherited wealth, land and social status, officials appointed by the emperor, bureaucrats, military leaders, and religious officials. This minority ruling class comprised 1 to 2% of the population (Carter 2001:11) and in this ruling class the power, influence and status were actually gained and exercised through a network of patron-client relationships, friendship and kinship (Carter 2001:11).

As was established earlier, the Romans enjoyed power and privilege, and they had control over the land, cities, and the whole economy. This frustrated the Judeans, who became foreigners in their own land, to no end. Carter (2001:9-10) observed that with control of primary resources of land and its production, the Roman colonizers exercised their political influence, which helped them to exploit the country. Through its military force, it made all people comply with the payment of tributes and taxes (cf Mt 17:24-27; 22:15-22).

At the same time, the Roman empire used the elite class in the land to suppress and exploit ordinary people. Collaboration between the governing class in Judean society and the Roman emperor led to an increase of wealth, power and status from its patronage. As Carter (2001:11) observes, the emperor had rights to grant or confiscate; to conquer land and estates, or to appoint political official of his choice. Such unjustly acquired privileges meant the governing class in Rome and in the conquered territories (provinces) also competed with one another for a maximum share of the taxes and services rendered by peasants and artisans.

The emperor controlled the army and it was used to control internal security. The military power was used to subjugate land and in the conquest of estates. Carter (2001:12-13) explains how the Roman army played a key role in coercing and maintaining submission. The army was also used "to intimidate and repress would-be opponents." It was known for its ruthless resolve and terror. Horsley (1993:9-11) argues that the Roman imperial system worked with the local elite to keep its domination over the people. The position and role of the Judean priestly aristocracy or of the Herodian client kings was a typical characteristic of the Roman colonization.

The Roman imperial system controlled its colony through the rule of the young opportunist Judean Herodian family which established a repressive regime in 37-4 BCE in Palestine with the help of Roman troops. Moreover, after the death of Herod, domestic Jewish affairs were entrusted to the priestly aristocracy. And as Tenney (1982:47) explains, only families of the priesthood and the leading rabbis benefited from it. This prolonged political crisis (Horsley 1993:11) came in addition to the imperial economic exploitation which broke down "the traditional socio-economic infrastructure on which the society was based". Horsley continues to note that crises mounted especially due to the economic pressure that was brought on the peasantry for taxes, tributes and "participation in an increasingly monetarized economic life. Rising indebtedness of the peasants led to the loss of their land that was the base of their economic subsistence and for their place in the traditional social structure" (Horsley 1993:11).

Consequently, the peasantry (natives) became dispossessed of their land, there was a destruction of traditional economic structures upon which families and communities relied to make a living. A number of passages and parables in which issues of land, tenants, debts feature appear in Matthew (Mt 5:5; 6:12; 18:21-35; 20:1-16; 21:33-42; 25:14-30; cf Lk 16:1-7). Freyne (1980:182) also argues that political and economic fluctuations, especially in the postwar period, "were naturally felt most keenly at the bottom of the social scale."

The Roman empire had a strong influence on the local population and through its local agents, religious ruling class developed a close collaboration with political rulers. Riches (1990:27) notes that influential families that wished to hold positions of power and influence, willingly seized and enhanced opportunities that opened up to them if they joined the service of their foreign masters. Carter (2001:17; cf Heard 1989:42; Newport 1995:114) states that when Matthew referred to the alliance of chief priests, the Sadducees,[262] leading Pharisees[263] and scribes with whom Jesus was in conflict, he meant Judean officials who exercised religious roles while being part of the ruling aristocracy class. With such complicity between foreign and local elites, the socio-economic gap between them and the rest of the community widened. The people of the land became and felt increasingly marginalized.

4.3.2 Means of resistance

4.3.2.1 A non-violence approach

The people in Palestine lived in apocalyptic times as do millions of people across tricontinental countries today. Many in Palestine were left homeless due to injustice, the yoke of taxes, debts and the confiscation of land weighing them down; the insecurity and idolatry that were imposed by foreigners made them yearn for freedom. According to Sanders (1992:278), "it is doubtful that even the chief priests and the 'powerful', the

[262] In Judaism, the Sadducees appear to have more power, wealth and influence than the Pharisaic movement. The time of their origin is not fully known. It ranges from at least the time of John Hyrcanus down to 70 CE. They played an important role in Judea and belonged to the class of wealthy and political powers (see Heard 1989:31). Due to personal interests, they closely collaborated with foreign rulers who exploited their land. Again, their religious belief was somewhat different from that of the Pharisees and other groups of their times. They did not believe in the oral tradition or in the resurrection of the dead (Mt 22:23); they rejected the belief in angels and spirit (Ac 23:8; Mk 12:18-23). The Sadducees accepted the Pentateuch authority and were influential because many members of the Sanhedrin came from this Sadducean group (cf Walton & Wenham 2001:39-40).

[263] The Pharisees were a very prominent religious group during Jesus' earthly ministry and even in the post-temple period. According to Heard (1989:32-33; see Neusner 1991; Saldarini 1998; Overman 1990; Sanders 1992:380-451), the origin of the pharisaic movement can be traced back to the exilic period in Babylon, when in the absence of temple, the study of Scriptures became central to Israelite life. In the post-exilic period, the movement continued to exist and still exercised public and religious influence. Their movement is also seen supporting the Maccabean revolt in 164 BCE and contested John Hyrcanus as a king and high priest (see Heard 1989:33). They resisted foreign powers and their puppets in Palestine. From a social stratification point of view, the Pharisees, according to Saldarini (1988:35-45 cf Vledder 1997:123), are seen as political retainers in a traditional agrarian society. They served as educators, religious functionaries and administrators. After the destruction of Jerusalem, the Pharisees initiated the establishment of Jewish religion in the post-temple era (see Riches 1990:90-94; Heard 1998 32-33).

principal beneficiaries of direct Roman rule in Judea, truly liked having to answer to Rome." Even Herod who enjoyed autonomy in internal affairs, may, at some point, have wished that "Rome did not look over his shoulders." Those who weren't in favor of violence preferred the option of praying to God that he would somehow change the course of history and that the Romans would be fair and decent.

Engaging the social and political context of Matthew, a critical synoptic interdependence, in terms of which Matthew and Luke forge a common front, is unavoidable. For the purpose of this case study, the works of Horsley (1989), Overman (1996:29-51), Carter (2000:53-89; 2001:75-90) and Ukpong (2002:59-70) are quite enlightening with regard to the infancy story (Mt 1-2 and Lk 1-2). The infancy narratives, together with the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) and the Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6:17-49) represent means of non-violent resistance to Rome and its local agents in Palestine. Horsley (1989:74-77; see also 1993:33-43) outlines the forms of protest and resistance that were used. Still on this topic Reid (2004:237-255) regards the Sermon on the Mount and the parables in Matthew as nonviolent teachings.

As Horsley (1989:74) observes, popular resistance were rooted in the memory and expectation of the Messiah. Unlike other people subjected to Roman domination of the *pax Romana*, the Judeans were neither "docile nor passive". They did not simply accept their situation under Roman, Herodian, and high-priestly rule. The news of the birth of a new king of the Judeans (Mt 2; cf Lk 1) was good news in the Judean countryside of Bethlehem, around Jerusalem and probably in the other Galilean villages around Sepphoris. According to Theissen (1978:59), no matter how the significance of the arrival of the kingdom of God is construed or moderated, "this rule of God meant the end of all other rule", including the rule of the Romans and religious leaders.

According to Ukpong (2002:68-67), the birth of Jesus in Palestine represented a political threat to the oppressive Roman regime. Matthew (2:6) cited Micah (5:2) in presenting Jesus as the governor of Bethlehem, who would be the shepherd of "my people Israel." It informed the Judeans under the yoke of oppression that God had come to intervene on

behalf of the poor and the oppressed, the marginalized and all people unjustly treated (cf Is 61:1-4).

In the ancient Near East traditions, the king was the agent of peace and justice. Hammurabi once ventured to say "I am Hammurabi … chosen shepherd … to demonstrate justice within the land, to destroy evil and wickedness, to stop the mighty exploiting the weak … to improve the welfare of my people … The deliverer of his people from affliction" (Richardson 2000:29, 31, 35). In his epilogue, Hammurabi said "It is the great gods that have nominated me so that I am the shepherd who brings peace… so that disputes may be settled in the land, so that decisions may be made in the land, so that the oppressed may be treated properly" (Richardson 2000:121). Therefore, the news of the newborn king is to be understood in the context of Judean resistance against the Roman imposed "peace", which was seen as exploitive.

It must also be understood that although taxes, offerings and tithes to the temple were a divine obligation, it had become cumbersome. The payment of temple tax – the half shekel (Mt 17:24-25) - had become an issue of contention. The reluctance in paying tax was a form of resisting subjugation and economic exploitation. Somehow, the people had lost faith in the priesthood that collaborated with the colonizer. Secondly, the temple no longer existed and therefore, the payment of the half shekel was no longer required. Another argument was that this tax towards temple upkeep was not required by the Torah. Moreover, since sons were exempted from this tax, Jesus' disciples as "brothers" (Mt 12:49; 25:40; 28:10), were "sons" of the Father. Those who support these views with regard to the peasants' resistance are, among others, Horbury (1984:282-85), Bauckham (1986:219-252), Horsley (1989:75), Chilton (1990:269-282), Garland (1987:205; 1993:186-187; 1996:69-91) and Carter (2001:132-144).[264]

The connection of the Matthean text and the citations from the Old Testament must not be ignored as a means of resistance. Furthermore, memories of the past liberation inspired the

[264] Contra Freyne (1980:281-287).

people of the land for future (divine) deliverance. "[F]ormative history" within the nativity narratives as Horsley (1989:75-76; cf 1993:33-35) argues, recapitulates events of Israelite liberation from the Egyptian enslavement (Ex 2: 23-25; 5:22; 6:1-12; 12-15) – Passover – which is celebrated each year. Matthew is also aware of political alliance that was created during the Exodus period. For this reason, the presence of Rahab (Jos 2; Mt 1:5) cannot be construed as anything else but a political alliance for the survival of Israelites.

The involvement of the wise men from the East (Mt 2:1-12) is another sign of political allegiance in fighting an oppressive regime (Saldarini 1994:69-70; Overman 1996:43; Carter 2004:273).[265] The interest shown in a king other than Herod and their veneration rather than protestation, before the child and not before Herod, were subversive in nature. At the same time, the political influence of Herod (Laurentin 1981:390-391) dominates the scene. He mobilizes all the high priests and teachers of the law (Mt 2:4) who in turn inform him of the infant's prophecy (Mt 2:5-6). Unlike Jerusalem and the religious leaders (Mt 2:3-4), the Magi remain uncooperative to Herod's political scheme and "*se soustrairont à son influence pour entrer dans l'orbite du dessein céleste"* (Laurentin 1981:391).[266] However, for the rest of the Judean population, the expectation of a deliverer, an anointed king to liberate the people from foreign oppression and domestic rule was a constant yearning.

More importantly, the connection of the angel of the Lord and the shepherds (Lk 2:8-20) is also important to mention. Shepherds should not be seen in the literal meaning of the word 'shepherd'; they were warriors who cared for their herds. Moses was initiated to shepherding during his flight from Pharaoh (Ex 2:16-19); David (1 Sm 16:11; 17:28-51) used his experience as a shepherd to liberate Israel from the Philistines. The Gospel of

[265] According to Overman (1996:43), the Magi are not so much astrologers as political emissaries. "They are representatives from an eastern kingdom to bring gifts and signs of friendship and cooperation to the new king." They are part of a royal delegation carrying with them "the message of detente and stronger relations" between the two countries. Their visit can easily be viewed as a statement on Matthew's (and other's) critique about the Roman empire and its local agents' poor administration and socio-political tension that colonization has brought to Palestine and to the region at large.

[266] [A]bscond themselves from his influence to enter the sphere of celestial design.

John also refers to the shepherd as a warrior/protector (Jn 10:10-13).[267] Therefore, the peace announced in the song to the shepherds (Lk 2:13-14) is a form of defiance to the *pax Romana*.

The songs of liberation (Horsley 1989:107-120) recorded in Luke 1-2, associated with Matthew 1-2, could be reminiscent of Moses and Miriam's songs of liberation (Ex 15) while the songs of resistance that remembered Zion at the rivers of Babylon (Ps 137:1-2; 32:7) are nothing but a political expression against slavery and captivity. The songs sung during the anti-colonial struggles[268] in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and the Congolese Kimbanguist songs are similar expressions. It is also true of the African-American Christianized songs sung in North America (Connor 1996:107-128) in protest to racism. For example, one of the "Negro spirituals" sings of "All God's children (who) got wings"[269] like angels.

The involvement of the unnamed angel of the Lord in Matthew (Mt 1:20; 2:13, 19), in Luke the presence of Gabriel (1:19, 26), is also striking. Horsley (1989:77) is of the opinion that these angelic visions "encouraged people to persist in their traditional covenantal commitment" and resist their oppressors because God, the warrior, was going to vindicate them and bring an end to their domination (Is 7; 9; 40-55; 62:2; Jr 23:1-6).

What is also striking is to note how Jesus rebuked one of the companions (Mt 26:51-53) who had drawn a sword[270] to defend Jesus. Instead, Jesus told them about the twelve

[267] From a pastorist's experience of the Masai community in Kenya, the Karamajonge community in Uganda or the Banyamulenge community in the DRC (see chapter three), to be a shepherd means to be a leader, but also a warrior. They are trained to protect their flocks/herds from any predators that would endanger their lives.

[268] See chapter two above section 2.5.2.

[269] According to Connor (1996:108), the Negro spiritual song "calls for human freedom to create in a new setting that provided the Bible as a spiritual resource and demonstrates the human ability to create that had long been part of the singers' African cultural tradition." Furthermore, the heaven to which the singers aimed was recognized as a place of justice, "where the twisted talents of slaveholders who manipulated theological discourse – who talked about heaven in exclusively colonial terms – would not be displayed."

[270] Sim (2000b:84-104; cf Garland 1993:118).) constructs an interesting argument on the use of the sword in Matthew (10:34). His thesis is that Matthew uses the sword symbolically to the "apocalyptic-eschatological traditions of his day" and that it would be hard to believe that the sword symbolized a call to armed conflict

legions of angels that were on standby and would intervene whenever he wished them to do so. In those years a legion (Carter 2000:514) comprised about six thousand soldiers. In other words, twelve legions of angels would amount to about seventy-two thousand heavenly combatants[271] who were ready to raid the Roman soldiers and the crowd that had come to arrest Jesus. In this way, the angel of the Lord becomes an important defender of justice.

Brueggemann (2002:42) does not take for granted the role of the angel Gabriel in Luke. According to him, "the birth announcement is the assertion that God was powerfully at work for those who cannot fight their own battles." The Biblical tradition of heavenly armies was not a new phenomenon (Js 5:13-15;1 Ki 22:19; 2 Macc 5:1-4; *War* 6.298-99) and Matthew was aware of it (Mt 26:51-53). Visionaries and prophets were looking forward to "a great war, one in which God, either directly or by proxy," would play a important role, but in which they too would take part and bear arms (Sanders 1992:285).

Sanders (1992:285) quotes from the *Psalms of Solomon* and Qumran's *War Rule* some of the visions of a bright future where the Davidic Messiah will enter the city of Jerusalem, "banish the Gentiles and also Jewish sinners … , and establish the new Israel, with the tribes reassembled … According to Qumran's *War Rule*, the sectarians – who will have become a full true Israel, with all twelve tribes represented – will first destroy the sinful Israelites and then the Gentiles, with God himself striking the decisive blows." The Qumran community, a pious society, expected God to be on their side in their struggles.

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against an oppressor. Whereas I would agree with Sim as far as his contention that Matthew taught the non-violent option is concerned, I still challenge the latter on the ground that Matthew formulated his teaching based on the reality of his days. The sword was literally killing families, priests and prophets; it had destroyed the temple and Jerusalem. Matthew has not relinquished the option of political resistance. He may have changed tactics after the defeat of the Zealots, but he had not withdrawn from the battlefield, because Roman imperialism was still with them (see Carter 2000:242).

[271] Sim (1999:693-718) discusses angelic eschatological role within Judean and Christian apocalyptic traditions and in the Gospel of Matthew. According to Sim (1999:716), the Matthean community, like other apocalyptic groups, was facing a crisis. Therefore, the Matthean use of angelic intervention was an effort "to help his community come to terms with these dire circumstances which enhanced group solidarity."

John the Baptist[272] (Mt 3:1-12) was among many voices (Riches 1990:100-101) of his time who proclaimed the imminent coming of the "stronger one" who will bring judgment and salvation upon the earth.

As it is recorded in Acts (5:36-41; 21:38), certain figures, such as Theudas (between 44 CE and 46 CE), a Samaritan (in 35 CE) and an Egyptian (between 52 CE and 60 CE) all expected a supernatural act in some form or the other that would usher in the end of the world (cf Riches 1990:101; Theissen 1978:60-61; 1992:85; Hengel 1981:20-25; Horsley 1989:77-80; Barbour 1988:113-118). The death of John the Baptist (Mt 14:1-12) occurred amid such expectations (cf Barbour 1988:65). According to Josephus (see Barbour 1988:61; cf Carter 2001:145,148), it was during the time of Pilate (26-37 CE) that the Judean leaders conspired with the Roman regime to have Jesus killed[273] (Mt 27; Mk 15; Lk 23; Jn 19) because of his popularity (see Fiensy 1999:14-26) among Judeans and Gentiles.

Yet Jesus never regretted any of this. Because his death and blood are evidence of his determination, not only to resist oppressive political and religious powers, but also to make them change (Mt 27:51-54). Moreover, Jesus' victorious resurrection became a scandal to the ruling systems as soldiers were manipulated to falsify evidence of resurrection (Mt 28:11-15). The resurrection story exposed the limit (Carter 2004:276) of political and

[272] According to Josephus (in Barbour 1988:64-65), John the Baptist was killed as a political figure who King Herod feared would stage a rebellion against him. Josephus says that John the Baptist had been a good man, commanding the Judeans to be virtuous to one another and pious before God. He urged them all to be baptized for a remission of their sins and the purification of their bodies and souls. The crowds that gathered around him were moved by his words. But Herod saw John as a political threat and thought it best to kill him, rather than risk any rebellion he might incite. He had "John taken as a prisoner to the castle at Macherus" and was eventually killed as a result of Herodias' conspiracy (Mt 14:8).

[273] According to Josephus (in Barbour 1988:60-61), Jesus' crucifixion took place during a riot of Judeans against Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea (26 CE-36 CE) who wanted to use temple money to build a water project for the city. While people insisted that Pilate abandon the project, some in the crowd openly challenged, reproached and talked against Pilate. In turn, Pilate ordered his soldiers to attack the crowd "more viciously than Pilate had ordered, killing many of the peaceful as well as the unruly. It was about the same time that "a wise man named Jesus", a doer "of wonderful works – a teacher of the type of men who enjoy hearing the truth. He drew many of the Judeans and Gentiles to him; he was the Christ. When Pilate, at a suggestion of the Judean leaders, condemned him to the cross, those who loved him at first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold, along with many other wonderful things concerning him". But this view has been challenged by pro Josephus scholars who believe that this is a post-Christian interpretation and not necessarily from Josephus (see Klausner, 1964:55-60).

religious powers (Mt 28:18-20). The oppressive system could torture and kill, but it could not stop the will of God to establish his kingdom of justice and righteousness.

4.3.2.2 Militant movements

The leaders of the Judean community had been blamed for the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem because they had rejected God's laws and covenant (Overman 1990:30; cf Riches 1990:87-103). Nevertheless, the Romans weren't the only ones responsible for atrocities, as unruly Judean groups (Horsley 1988:184-191), bandits, brigands, and those pretending to be prophets also robbed and killed people in cities and in the temple without any care of committing an act of sacrilege, as Josephus (in Barbour 1988:118, 170-172, 176-177) explains:

> [T]his seems to be the reason why God rejected Jerusalem and its impure temple and brought the Romans upon the Jews, purging the city with fire and sending the Jews into slavery as a lesson to them … [R]obbers encouraged the people to disobey the Romans; those who would not comply with them had their villages burned and plundered … Jerusalem filled with impiety. Deceivers and false prophets arose, leading the Jews into the wilderness in search of signs and wonders from God.

As Sanders (1992:280-288) recounts the events as recorded by Josephus, others hoped for the future through their own self expression, all be it often in the form of negative expression through "complaints, protests, insurrections." This expression was initiated by the "fourth philosophy" or "the prophetic-charismatic movement" (Hengel 1981:20-24), founded by Judas the Galilean and Saddok the Pharisee in 6 CE, to which the Zealots and Sicarii groups may probably belonged. Saddok made a statement for freedom by refusing to pay any tax to the Roman regime or to call any man a king. Only God could be King (Freyne 1980:217; Sanders 1992:280). The Idumeans (Barbour 188:173-174; Freyne 1980:231) was another group which had religious motivation to defend the temple of God from external and internal enemies.

The "fourth philosophy" was developed alongside the preaching of the kingdom of heaven by Jesus of Nazareth, the advent of which he proclaimed to the Galilean crowds.[274] Horsley (1993:78-79; see Freyne 1980:208-211) locates the proper movement of the Zealots between 67 CE and 68 CE. Riches (1990:98) is convinced that historical evidence indicates that different groups in Palestine were expecting some divine military intervention on God's part, whether it would be in the form of raising some powerful military leader – a messiah, or perhaps in the form of angelic intervention, is not well determined.

According to Horsley (1993:42-43), the Sicarii movement[275] was not necessarily a "revolutionary group leading a revolt". The movement could rather be described as a small group without a broader base in villages and towns. However, their "surreptitious assassinations" constituted more of harassment than a revolutionary threat to the religious rulers and Roman imperialism. This observation also applied to the Zealots. In other words, until 66-70 CE there is no evidence for any well organized and structured "nationalist" movement (Horsley 1988:184). These groups were, however, capable enough to instigate a spiral of violence against Roman repression. It can be said, as Horsley (1993:117) notes, that the Judeans' popular resistance (except the popular rebellion that followed the death of Herod in 4 BCE, and the civil war of 66-70 CE that led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple), to Roman imperialism and its local agents, particularly the priestly aristocracy, arguably was "fundamentally non-violent".

The open violent resistance which escalated into war between 66-70 CE, had disastrous consequences. During this period, the Zealots' movement became a prominent and radical force, motivated by a fanatical zeal for the Law, it advocated and used violence, and waged a messianic holy war (see Hengel 1981:18-24) against Roman imperialism. It excluded any collaboration attempts with the Romans (Horsley 1993:149; see Tenney 1982:42). Those

[274] Among Jesus' followers was Simon the Zealot (Mt 10:4; cf Mk 3:18; Lk 6:15; Ac 1:13).

[275] Horsley 1988:183-199) discerns between prophetic liberation movements, messianic movements and banditry that operated during the Roman period.

Judeans who were found to be collaborating with the Romans in government, local administration, including temple affairs, fell prey to the Zealots. Within this confusing situation, no particular event can be singled out as the cause of the 66 CE-70 CE revolt (Barbour 1988; Horsley 1993:54-58).

The revolt is, however, deeply rooted in the accumulated spiral of violation of human dignity, violence, oppression, resistance, and repression. Josephus (Barbour 1988:123-25; Horsley 1993:54) is inclined to implicate the unruly governor Florus[276] (64-66 CE). His repression and killings exacerbated the violence and the war took its full course. Horsley indicates that while the war raged, ordinary peasants (insurgents) "burned the archives to destroy debts records." As the war intensified, Josephus (in Barbour 1988:129-32, 145-147, 170, 176-177; see Freyne 1980:209-210) claims that it had divided the Judeans into two groups, those who fought against Roman colonization, and those who supported it (in favor of peace).

Horsley (1988:186-192, 194) is of the opinion that those who supported Roman colonization (especially in Galilean cities) did it out of political and economic interest. Roman influence was, however, unavoidable in Galilean cities (Overman 1988:160-168), due to the political and cultural impact within those cities. Of even greater consequence was the fact that the anti-imperialism faction was further divided into different, undisciplined and merciless factions, which no longer respected the temple and God. They looted the city and killed innocent people whom they "envied or hated". This was

[276] According to Josephus (in Barbour 1988:124-125), Florus was corrupt and allowed robbers to operate in Jerusalem while they shared their profits with him. The revolt started at a Caesarean synagogue built on a piece of land owned by a Cesarean Greek. The Judeans had offered to buy it, but the owner refused. Instead, he started building on the land. The Judean leaders and a man called John, the publican, bribed Florus in order to stop the work. Florus accepted the bribe but did nothing. The Greek owner of the land insulted the Judeans by sacrificing a bird on an earthen vessel, which was a Judean ritual of cleansing a leper. Therefore, he insulted them as leprous people. When Florus was consulted for help, he instead jailed Judean emissaries. This was followed by Florus' removal of seventeen talents from the sacred treasure in Jerusalem. People in Jerusalem despised him and staged a march to publicly embarrass him. But he knew about the plan and thwarted it by sending troops to disperse the crowd. He called priests and leaders ordering them to surrender those who had insulted him. The Judean leaders "apologized for the crowd's actions." He nevertheless, sent soldiers to kill everyone whom they came across on the way and in the marketplace. Up to 3,600 innocent women, children and men were thus massacred. He ordered Judeans serving in the civil service, who were legal Roman citizens, to be whipped and crucified, an act prohibited by Roman law.

confirmed by the message of which, those who had escaped the violence was spreading, namely that “there was no justice in Jerusalem and its citizens were no better than slaves” (in Barbour 1988:177).

During the revolt, all other nationals turned against the Judeans along lines of these divisions. Hatred and anti-Judean sentiment (see Carter 2004:265) mounted and massacres multiplied. For instance, Josephus (in Barbour 1988:132) records the following incident:

> In addition to Scythopolis, other cities turned against their Jewish citizens. Twenty-five hundred were killed in Askelon. The city of Ptolemais killed thousand and enslaved many. Tyre killed a great number, imprisoning even more. Hippos, Gadara, and other Syrian cities killed the boldest of the Jews living there and imprisoned the rest. Only the Antiochians, Sidonians, and Apamians spared the local Jews and refused to imprison them, perhaps because the Jewish population was small in those cities. More than likely, they saw no reason to kill peaceful citizens. The Garasens also spared their Jews, escorting those who wished to leave safely to their borders.

In the end, Jerusalem and the temple were ruined and became desolate. People living in such circumstances must have often despaired. Life became even more difficult for those peasants who had survived. The marginalized, the homeless, orphans, unaccompanied children, widows, war casualties (cripples, traumatized), the destitute, the sick, the degraded and expendable people became more and more numerous in the wretched cities. They must have longed for relief, for hope, for salvation, for a sense of belonging. This is the context from which the Matthean Gospel emerges.

4.4 The "Temple" community in postwar context

4.4.1 Introduction

In the history of Israelite tradition, the temple signified a place of worship (1 Ki 6; 2 Chr 2-7; Is 56:7). It carried the significance of God's presence among his people (Ex 25:1-9; 35-36). The temple also replaced remote sacrificial (altars) places in the desert and on mountains (Ex 25:8; 1Ki 6:13). Throughout the history of Israel, it played a central role in every aspect of the nation's life. It provided a sanctuary, a holy place for worship and for healing (1 Ki 8:22-46; Mt 21:10-14; cf Mk 11:15-18).

The temple served as a meeting place for all Jewish festivals and a center for political leadership (Garland 1993:211), since the high priest played a leading role in the community. As Heard (1989:41) observes, its explicit function was to draw Israel's attention upon their God. This centralized cult not only unified Israel and focused on Israel worship, but it also provided an opportunity for the Israelites to express their loyalty in a tangible way, notably, in their offerings and sacrifices.

Therefore, the destruction of the temple by foreign armies, first by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, and then by the Romans in 70 CE was a major blow to all aspects of the community's life. The devastation of the temple meant that the center of Jewish life was destroyed. Sacrifices ceased, the priesthood was abolished, and the sacred temple to the God of Israel became a pile of rubble. How did Judeans survive in the post-70 era without the temple and Jerusalem?

4.4.2 Matthean community and Formative Judaism

The Matthean community[277] and Formative Judaism[278] (Overman 1990:3; Sim 1998:113-116) were two of the emerging movements within Israelite society in the post-70 period (Riches 1990:90-94; Heard 1998 32-33; Walton & Wenham 2001:39). The two movements, among many apocalyptic movements,[279] were trying to define, consolidate and give direction to their wretched and divided society under Roman imperialism, affected by war and the consequences of war. According to Overman (1990:2-3; 35), Matthean Judaism and Formative Judaism "were in the process of *becoming*." In other words, they were in the process of consolidating, organizing and acquiring a structure to ensure their systems of survival.

These movements were involved in a process of reconstruction and redefinition of what their society should be in the absence of the temple. It must be remembered that during this period neither Formative Judaism nor Matthean Judaism had their traditional leadership. The destruction of both Jerusalem and the temple "was not only a political set back for the people of Israel. It meant also the destruction of cultural and religious center for the people" (Overman 1990:35).

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[277] The community, being a sociological concept, "concerns a particularly constituted set of social relationships based on something which the participants have in common – usually a common sense of identity" (*Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, 1998). Saldarini (1994:86) defines community as "a group characterized by natural relationship and by common values and feeling of belonging to one another" – communion. Whereas group is defined as "a number of individuals gathered in some way or perceived as having common characteristics." The Matthean community takes on board the world of the neglected, "people of the land" (*am ha ares*), ordinary Judeans, urban and rural peasants, artisans, Samaritans, proselytes and Gentiles; women and children, degraded, unclean and expandable classes (cf Heard 1989:35-38); Vledder 1997:118-148; Carter 2001:17). This is the community that Jesus identified with and for whose justice and righteousness he campaigned. Although these people belonged to different social classes, they had certain things in common: they were considered socially, religiously and politically inferior, the poor were largely members of the Matthean community, but people from elite and wealthy classes were part of the community too.

[278] Formative Judaism (Overman 1990:35) is described as an institution of Jewish religious leaders. The term "emphasizes the fluid nature of Judaism in this period, as well as the fact that for some time Judaism was in the process of becoming", that is, of consolidating, organizing, and shaping a structure for its survival.

[279] According to Overman (1990:3) in the post-70 period, there were many apocalyptic movements in Judean communities (see *2 Baruch*; *4 Ezra* and *Apocalypse of Abraham).*

Insurrections and the war had killed most of priests, scribes and teacher of the law and judges (Barbour 1988:43-44, 176-177). Some were in displacement in different villages and cities, while others became refugees in neighboring countries. Matthew refers to John the Baptist and Jesus (Witherington 1998:225-244) who had been killed (Barbour 1988:60-61, 64-65) and many of their followers might have been displaced and might have become refugees (Segal 1991:26-27). This situation indicates a possible reason for the loss of records, namely of having been destroyed or burnt[280] (Horsley 1993:54). It is not surprising that the Pharisees kept using the traditions of the fathers (Mt 15:2), the *Paradosis* (Overman 1990:62-67) a practice the Sadducees opposed (cf Heard 1989:31-33) and which Josephus criticized (Overman 1990:64). These traditions are also explained by Paul, a former Pharisee, in his letter to the Galatians (1:14).[281]

Exegetes have been tempted to explore this period by means of labeling and ascribing concepts to different groups in Judaism, for example the "Matthean community". This is because of the fluid context from which these "Judaisms" emerged. Overman (1990:8) uses the concept of "sectarian" and "Jewish Christian". On the other hand, Stanton (1992:50-51; see Heard 1989:34) identifies the Matthean community as if it copied social and religious patterns from the Qumran community. Saldarini (1994:85-86) uses the concept of community and egalitarian structure for the Matthean context. This is also the case with Duling (1995:164), but he instead uses a fictive kinship of brotherhood.

What is important to note is that both Formative Judaism and the Matthean community were not only reconstructing norms and beliefs for their communities, but they were also reconstructing their leadership systems. These two movements had many things in common, but they defined and understood them differently. According to Overman (1990:35-71), the Pharisees were reconstructing their social and religious life in light of the

[280] Van Tilborg (1986:37) argues that by reading Josephus the impression might be created that everything was lost in the war, which may not necessarily be correct. He argues that "Israel's national history" did not end in 70 CE. The violence of the Roman regime destroyed centers of Jewish resistance, but it did not subdue the Jewish national consciousness and the desire to live peacefully according to the Torah. The system of worship, jurisdiction and power structures and cultural patterns remained in the minds and practices and life continued under changed circumstances.

[281] "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age, and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (NIV).

Yavneh (Jamnia) council around 90 CE. Since the temple did not exist any more, Judaism needed a new way to survive.

The Pharisees had developed a system "centered on the application of the laws of purity around the home and table. Tithing, Sabbath and Torah were central features of the movement" (Overman 1990:37). The council of Yvneh was one of the evidences of "institutional development of Judaism in the post-70 period" (Overman 1990:38). Cohen (1984:24; cf Overman 1990:41; see Freyne 1980:323-329) believes that the purpose of the council of Yavneh was to establish strategies towards creating unity in a divided society and a fragmented religion in the postwar period. This strategy would eventually end the "sectarianism within Judaism" and forge a strong unified coalition.

However, within this fluid period (Overman 1990:49), various factions scrambled and competed for influence and control. These groups within Judaism were reaching a decisive stage of self-definition and organization as a means of internal protection and clarification of their different beliefs. The *Paradosis* of the Fathers (Baumgarten 1987:70; cf Overman 1990:62-67) was one of problematic issues within Formative Judaism. It is indicative of the fact that both Judaism and Christianity shared traditional roots and the rivalry between them had been about gaining control of the audience by traditionalizing and legitimizing their respective movements. They had to present their own movements as "traditional, acceptable, and legitimate" (Overman 1990:63). Moreover, they shared a socio-political and religious context. Pursuing Overman's (1996:19-26) argument, the crisis between the various groupings within Judaism can be defined in the following manner:

- Leadership and cultural vacuum: The destruction of the city and the temple disarrayed the community and provoked numerous contentions between various groups. Matthew regarded the Pharisees and scribes as rivals and threats to his community's security and way of life and vice versa.

- Legal interpretation of the law: The issue of the right/correct interpretation was a matter of dispute between Formative Judaism and the Matthean community. The

Pharisees held on to the legalism of the Law of Moses and the traditions of the fathers. The Sadducees challenged the authority of the traditions of the fathers. Matthew, on the other hand, defended his innovative interpretation of the law (Mt 5-7).

- Structure and order of the community: The Pharisees reinforced the idea of the temple through local synagogues, while Matthew was busy building a new concept of brotherhood (Mt 18:1-20) and *ekklesia* around his members (Mt 16:18-19). Issues pertaining to discipline, authority, church liturgy and worship are examples of the order that Matthew sought to provide to his community.

- Community identity: The political turmoil and the defeat of the revolt, as well as Roman repression, undoubtedly cast doubt on and raised questions with regard to the fate of all Judeans. More specifically, each group had to find solutions in its own way in its efforts to save all Judeans. The Sermon on the Mount is a response to such a crisis for the Matthean community.

- The future of the community: The actual survival of the community became crucial. Matthew's community had to deal with a number of issues at the same time. On the one hand, there was a political and armed repression from the Romans. On the other hand, the rift within Judaism deepened. By and large, Matthew found his community being marginalized by existing power structures that exercised influence in the social and political setting of his time. Moreover, Matthew had to also deal with dissidents (Mt 18:15-20) and political leadership ambitions (Mt 20:20-28) within the Matthean group. Responding to the immediate crisis of oppression and persecution, Matthew showed that his community was in complete continuity with the history and eschatological destiny of Israel. He believed that what had happened to the great heroes and the faithful people in the history of Israel, was also happening to his community (Mt 23:35-39).

The society was falling apart (Mt 12:25-26). Both Formative Judaism and the Matthean community were making efforts to save it from total collapse in the aftermath of the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. But in so doing, each movement tried to prove itself by offering its best to the society, thereby widening the division among them. According to both Overman (1990:8-9) and Saldarini (1998:109-119), the fragmentation of the community started well before 70 CE through a variety of socio-political and historical circumstances.

The period from around 165 BCE to 100 CE provoked increasing tendencies toward factionalism and sectarianism within the Judean community. Some of the factors which exacerbated divisions among the people who shared a common destiny are: The oppressive subjection of many Israelites by Seleucid rule; foreign occupation and domination (Greco-Roman); the abuse of Hasmonean rulers; the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple; and the emergence of different Jewish schools of thoughts.

Sim (1998:116) recalls that in the wake of the revolt of Jews against Romans and the attempt of Formative Judaism to instill “some uniformity” on the Judeans, those with smaller and less influential movements, such as the Matthean community, came to be categorized as separatists and as deviant. The refusal of the Matthean community to conform in turn led to the development of a certain sectarian propensity. According to Overman’s (1990:35-36) observation, Pharisaic Judaism was well positioned to cope with the events of 70 CE, because they already possessed a “comprehensive program” for their social and religious identity, which had been designed before the destruction of the temple, and in which they were thus well placed to gain influence.

The Pharisees (Overman 1990:35-36) had a well organized system centered around the laws of purity and table fellowship. Tithing, Sabbath observance, and study of the Torah were central features of the Pharisaic movement. They believed in the doctrine of resurrection, retribution, and vindication, which “offered a meaningful form of consolation in the wake of the disaster of 70” (Overman 1990:35-36).Overman (1990:73-76) summarizes the arguments of both groups by saying that the Matthean community, like

Formative Judaism, created its institution based on law and tradition. Formative Judaism presented its traditions and procedures as having their origin in "the *paradosis* of their ancestors". Responding to the Pharisees' argument, Matthew reacts through the same path of fulfillment *(pleroma)* of traditions through Jesus.

For Matthew (Overman 1990:73-76), the usage of Old Testament citations was not aimed at clarifying "'historical events' in the life of Jesus", but were aimed at making the point that these citations emphasized the Matthean community's claim to the very traditions Formative Judaism was claiming as its own. Competition and conflict arose around the traditions and Scriptures, which the religious leaders and Matthew had in common. Matthew's innovative claim that these traditions and promises were exclusively fulfilled in the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth would provoke more tension between these two movements.

Saldarini (1994:122) confirms that at this point the Matthean community was still Judean, as were the other movements, "though sectarian and deviant". The Matthean community had deviated from the parent body by its devotion to Jesus as an apocalyptic figure who was the divinely sent emissary to save the Israel from current subjugation. Matthew's objective therefore, was to bring reform to the collapsing Judean society, and to proclaim the right way in which the community was to live and interpret the will of God.

In this regard Overman (1990:86-100; cf Luz 1990:1214-218) argues that the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) contains the order of the community-forming structure. This structure was based on law (Mt 5:17-20), justice and righteousness (Mt 6:1-7:1-26) and order (Mt 5:21-48). Issues of law became a focal point in a conflict between Matthew and his opponents, because the law contained curricula or educational materials (*halakah*) for every aspect of the community (see Freyne 1980:305-334). Thus, stories and Old Testament citations (Stendahl 1968:195) confirm that Jesus and his followers were doers and not breakers of the law as their opponents claimed (see Van Aarde 1999a:112-113). Matthew presents the historical continuity of God's intervention in the life of his people who are in distress. Thus, Jesus in the form of Emmanuel (Mt 1:23) who is announced in

the infancy narrative, would promote peace, justice and righteousness, elements that were not found in the opponent's camp.

The ordering of life in the community had to be based on justice and righteousness as the core value for Matthew. Luz (1990:214) argues that righteousness of the kingdom of heaven might be called the theme of the Sermon which is to be seen in the Christian praxis. The use of righteousness (*dikaiosyne*) encompasses the notion of behavior and actions (*praxis*) that could be identified with the Matthean community. Scholars have not reached agreement on how righteousness is to be interpreted in Matthew (Overman 1990:92-94). Some believe the concept of righteousness is to be defined as a "gift of God." This is almost applying the Pauline philosophy of the righteousness of God (Rm 3:21-30) to Matthew (see De Villiers 1981:199-200; Reumann 1982:136). However, Matthew's understanding of justice and righteousness (Bornkamm 1971:30-31) is to be defined in terms of behavior and actions in accordance with the will of God, which is to be experienced by the members of the community (Mt 13:49; 16:27). Therefore, the Matthean use of justice and righteousness in the Sermon of the Mount (Mt 5-7) is to be seen in the light of the social, religious and political context in which Matthew survived.

The context of oppression and power, hunger and death, war and peace, poverty and land reform, injustice and justice (Van Tilborg 1986:13) is the reality that Matthew is facing. Matthew, in turn, challenges both the religious leaders and the Roman colonizers who do not practice justice and righteousness. Furthermore, what are known to be stories of conflict (Overman 1990:78-86) in the interpretation of the law vis-à-vis the Sabbath (Mt 12:1-14); purity (Mt 15:1-20); the temple (21:12-17); and love (22:34-40) are based on the principle of doing justice and righteousness as the fulfillment of the law and the prophets – the will of God (Mt 5:17-20; 7:21) to his creation (see Crosby 1988:197-203) under oppression and economic exploitation.

For instance, Carter (2000:356-360; 2001:130-144) and Carter (2003:413-431) refer to the payment of tax (Mt 17:24-27) as a means of challenging the Roman exploitive regime. Beaton (1999:5-22) discusses the concept of justice and the implication of quoting Isaiah

(42:1-4) in Matthew (12:18-21), and Hosea (6:6) in Matthew (9:13) as a challenge to injustice being done to the society. Both citations are evoked in circumstances of conflict where the Matthean Jesus is showing justice and righteousness to the needy. On the other hand, Pharisees are yet to understand the importance and the relationship between the law, mercy and justice and righteousness. According to Beaton (1999:22), the use of the citations is a "temporal element" for the announcement of justice and righteousness witnessed in the ministry of Jesus, and the anticipation of its "future permanent state" at the end of all ages.

Weakened by the consequences of the revolt and the Roman oppression, the Judean society became fragmented. Its Cultural and religious common heritage became a source of division. Overman (1990:72-73) and Saldarini (1994:112) concur that at this crossroads, Matthew is busy recruiting members and developing a coherent worldview and belief system to sustain his community. Jesus' teachings and actions became the foundation of the Matthean community. It can indeed be concluded that the social developments within the Matthean community were responses to the immediate threats from Roman colonization and Formative Judaism.

The Sermon (Mt 5-7) outlines requirements and orders within the community. Most of these requirements are not new per se, but present a reorganization and reorientation of the traditions and the law. Saldarini (1991:50-51) is convinced that Matthew brought "innovations" to the tradition to fit his audience and to make Jesus the focal point of his message. Jesus tells his audience that he did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it (Mt 5:17). The innovations rather than the invention of new rules that Saldarini is referring to, have to take place within the Israelite tradition. Matthew's innovations can be summarized in the following points (using Saldarini's argument):

- *Core symbols*: Jesus is the central authority and symbol, and Torah becomes subordinated to him;
- *Cosmology*: revision of the norms of society;

- *Boundaries*: the vision is to enlarge Matthean community's boundaries and open them up for other groups. He constantly defends the Gentiles' right to faith and salvation through Jesus Christ;
- *Laws*: a re-reading and re-interpreting of the law;
- *Social structure*: all people are equal, fellowship rather than hierarchy keeps the community together.

Matthew is, however, not prepared to embrace everything from the old tradition, as his opponents were prepared to do. But what he wants is for his culture and tradition to be revisited in view of the fact that Jesus was the leader of the community. At the same time, Matthew broadens the scope of his understanding by incorporating other cultures, including marginalized cultures to fit into kingdom requirements. The attribution of the highest honors and citations from the Old Testament leave no doubt that Jesus had to continually face opposition from those who felt threatened by his emerging status, having mobilized the majority of the society (including those who were marginalized: the poor, the hungry, the unclean, the degraded, the sinner, women, children and Gentiles).

4.4.3 Marginality

Duling (1993: 642-671; 1995:159-181; 2002:520-575; 2003:14-15; cf Vledder 1997:137-138; Carter 2000:43-49) has dealt with the concept of marginality[282] that postcolonial theorists call subalternity or hybridity. Marginality refers to "structural inequalities" within

[282] Duling (2002:520-575; 2003:14-15) and Carter 2000:45) use explanations of Turner and Germani to define marginality. In summary, Duling provides four different types of marginality: (i) *structural marginality* which refers to "structural inequities" in the social system which defines people in binary categories of center/periphery, rich/poor, privileged/unprivileged. Those on the periphery "are mainly, but not exclusively, the socially and economically disadvantaged or oppressed, often poorer ethnic populations, whose norms, values, and attitudes contrast with those in the center." Structural marginality is also called "*involuntary marginality"*. (ii) *Social role marginality* " is the product of failure to belong to a [desired] positive reference group." This form of marginality denies individuals from any level of the social class access to services that he or she is expected to receive. (iii) *Ideological marginality*. This is a "desire to affiliate with a non-normative group". It is "desired , visionary marginality, it consists of individuals and groups who consciously and by choice live outside the normative statutes". This type of marginality is also called "*voluntary marginality.*" (iv) *Cultural marginality*. Those who are culturally marginal do not fully assimilate; they are said to be "in-between", they never become part of "the center", but remain on the periphery. This form is also referred to in a more individualistic way as the "*marginal man,*" an individual "who, because of birth, migration or conquest is 'doomed' to live between two or more competing normative schemes."

a social system, which define people in ambivalence or in binary existence, that is center/periphery, rich/poor, privileged/unprivileged. Using the works of Parks (1928) and Stonequist (1937), Carter (2000:43) follows them in defining marginality as the "experience of living simultaneously in two different, antagonistic cultural worlds but not fully belonging to either". According to Lenski (1966:266:283, cf Vledder 1997:127-129), the marginal classes[283] belong to the community, yet they are excluded. In this case, it would include peasants, the poor, destitute, women, children, prostitutes, expendable people, unclean, the sick, maims and Gentiles.

Duling (2003:14-15) makes the point that the Matthean community could easily be classified as a marginal community. Referring to the story of the sheep and the goats (Mt 25:31-46), Duling's (1995:159-161; 2003:15) speculations take Matthew to have been in "voluntary association" with marginalized - a "*voluntary marginal*". Because, Matthew had great concern for and/or was affiliated to the "structurally marginal" group. Carter (2000:45) says that the Matthean community was a marginal community because it exists "'in-both' its larger cultural context of urban-rural." The community belonged to "both worlds", yet finds itself on the edge and peripheral to the dominant power structures. The Matthean community's communal life centered around Jesus and in following him. Moreover, it has chosen "marginality in relation to the larger society". It lives as "participants in the wider society, but in tension with, over against, as an alternative to its dominant values and structures." Thus, voluntary marginality created an egalitarian sense of life in the community.

[283] Lenski (1966:266-284) categorizes marginal groups in various categories, from peasants to the unclean. The *peasantry class* is composed of freeholders, tenants, day laborers and slaves. This was the group most exploited by the rulers and was the group that supplied tax-income to the privileged Roman rulers and their local agents (Saldarini 1988:37; Vledder 1997:129; Carter 2001:13-16; Volschenk and Van Aarde 2003:832). The unclean and untouchable, degraded and expendable groups were poor and underprivileged. They had neither power nor influence in their society. Some of these which Vledder (1997:127) calls the *degraded classes* of an agrarian society, lived outside the city walls. Among them one would find prostitutes, beggars, the poorest day laborers and tanners. Again, those who were regarded as *unclean* were more inferior than the common people. Tax collectors (Mt 9:9-13) because of their relationship with foreign rulers (Mt 21:31-32), foreigners, sick people, lepers, sinners, bandits, demon possessed, maims are also classified in the unclean category. The *expendable class*, according to Lenksi, includes a variety of petty criminals and outlaws, beggars and unemployed itinerant workers who lived entirely on charities (Duling 1993:642-671; Vledder 1997:129).

The other hypothesis is that Matthew might have experienced some "social role marginality." In other words, he had been a (Pharisaic) scribe and had been denied the social role he had expected. If so, he could have regained his status as a leader by affiliating with a marginal group in conflict with an opponent group (Duling 2003:15). Thus, the evangelist is caught up in the politics of torn-halves (Young 1996) in cultural theory or cultural dislocation (Young 2003:138-142; Van Aarde 2004a:1). The community is "in-between" traditions of cultural marginality. He could thus easily be called a cultural hybrid in the making. Matthew was culturally marginal, someone who was somehow negotiating the "in-betweenness" of culturally marginal groups of communities. Matthean hybrid cultural formation as Duling (2003:15) sees it, refers to:

> "betwixt and between" – between the Judean and Graeco-Roman worlds; between homeland and the Diaspora; between Semitic and Greek; between Roman power with its puppet kings and the power of the king of kings; between the old righteousness and the high righteousness; between wealth and poverty; … between "old" constructionists' views of the Torah and "new" interpretation.

What Duling (2003:15), with reference to Matthew (13:52) calls "cultural tensions and ambiguities" in the Gospel, is what makes the Gospel of Matthew a hybrid text. A text that serves as evidence that Matthew is a scribe trained for the sake of the kingdom "bringing out of his storehouse what is old and what is new." In a more defined manner, Duling (2002:521) is convinced that Matthew, as a "*marginal man*", found himself between a binary exercise of distinguishing between elite and the lower illiterate class; between literate scribes and illiterate peasants, between men and women, between Pharisaic groups and his Jesus group; between the Roman occupation and the Judean dispossessed; between Roman army repression and the defeat of Judean militants; between Judean nationalism and his Gentiles' incorporation into the community.

By treating the Matthean community, as "voluntary associations" Duling (1995:160-164) and Carter (2000:43-46), are somewhat implying that the Matthean community is a postwar (post-70 CE) community, a community in its formation when real family groups decline. It is in other words, a community that emerges as a "surrogate" group (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:100-101) or a translated "fictive kinship" group in the aftermath of revolt against Roman colonization. An important point which deserves mentioning in this regard is the fact that the Matthean "voluntary" association was for survival. Duling (1995:162), like Young (1995:1-28; 2001:217-292; 2003:26-31, 142) and Segovia (2000), are convinced that when people are displaced, migrate or are dislocated from their original setting, associations, *mutualités*[284]or *politeuma*[285] assist them in maintaining their cultural traditions and to adapt to new cultural contexts. Some of these associations did, to some degree, turn into revolutionary movements, as was the case of many African associations during the anti-colonial struggle. Often they were reprimanded or banned for being "subversive" (Carter 2000:48).

Although Duling does not make an explicit ruling on the Matthean voluntary association in this regard, by looking at Matthew as a postwar community, one would be tempted to call it a revolutionary association (see Freyne 1980:216-236; Fiensy 1999:14-20; Ukpong 2002:61-62). More precisely, Van Tilborg's (1986) work on the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), points in that direction. The forming of voluntary associations[286] also occurred among the Pharisees, who were classed in the retainers class,[287] and who were constantly seeking

[284] In the DRC, tribal and provincial groups of people working or living in different towns are often formed to keep contact among themselves. These *Mutualités* help people from the same tribes to maintain their cultural identities away from their local setting. They assist in solving problems affecting any member of the group, be those internal or even external problems. *Mutualités* also help newcomers to integrate into a new cultural context and to remain in touch with their homelands. Regular financial contribution is a requirement for members, and the money is used for various cultural functions or for any other matter requiring financing.

[285] Paul (1981:369-380) implies the term, which the Judeans used during the Diaspora to identify and integrate themselves in the local politics and in cities of a foreign environment. At the same time, it kept them connected to affairs in Jerusalem. But the term also referred to cooperation, colony and community. As Paul indicated, this *politeuma* was the most effective way of keeping a homogenous group intact in a foreign land.

[286] The Qumran community would also be seen as a voluntary or sectarian association (see Sim 1998:111-112).

[287] The "Retainer class" (Lenski 1966:243-248) is a small group of about 5% of the population that maintains a task of mediating "relations between the governing class and the common people." These may include

influence and privileges of the ruling class. According to Saldarini (1988:281; see Duling 1995:164), the Pharisaic association "probably functioned as a social movement organization seeking to change society." In this instance, religious and political influence is more obvious than in the case of the Matthean association, as it will be seen in the next section.

The Matthean voluntary association was not only busy to recruit members, but it was also defining its nature and shape. Duling is convinced that the Matthean community was a "brotherhood community" which could be regarded as a Matthean egalitarian[288] community. Unlike Crosby (1988:49-75) and Love (1993:21-31; 1994:52-65) who use the church *(ekklesia)* and the household (family); and Carter (1996) who implies household and discipleship models,[289] in reading Matthew, Duling contends that brotherhood (*adelphotes*) is "a fictive kinship[290] term that comes closer to capturing the overtones of surrogate family language in Graeco-Roman associations" (Duling 1995:164; cf Overman 1990:95; Alison & Davis 1998:512-513), in which Matthean community can be identified.

Of even greater significance is the use of the concept "of the fatherless"[291] (Van Aarde 1999a:97-119; 2001:135-154) and the stigmatization implied by it, as well as the use of

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officials, professional soldiers, household servants and personal retainers (Carter 2001:17). It can also include bureaucrats, bailiffs, scholars, religious leaders, legal experts and lower lay aristocracy (Vledder 1997:123).

[288] The concept of egalitarian social relation (Horsley 1989:209-245) in the Matthean context is a community around Jesus or those who followed him. It includes tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, beggars, cripples, and the poor, wandering charismatic, non-patriarchal and non-hierarchical communities. The emphasis in this flat structure is that all people are equal before their Creator and are the same in ranks. Differences are seen in various functionalities that are carried out by members in fulfilling duties.

[289] See chapter two above.

[290] According to Horsley (1989:87), kinship is to be understood from a blood relationship. But in the case of Jesus and his movement, it is to be understood in a non-patriarchal familiar community, which is being constituted among the followers of Jesus.

[291] Van Tilborg (1986:64 n 90) using *Mishnah* as source, categorizes children without parents who need the care of the community, as follows: (i) *Jatôm* (orphan), a child whose father died; (ii) *Mamzer* (bastard), a child from an invalid marriage and whose father's identity is uncertain. (iii) *Shetuqi* (the silent one), a child whose father is unknown; (iv) *Asufi* (foundling), a child of whom both the father and the mother are unknown; (v) *Natin* (wanderer) a child whose father was a "gebeonite" (Jos 9:27), i.e. probably a slave in the temple. The term generally used in modern day war situations is unaccompanied children – *enfants non accompagnés* (ENA).

little children as metaphor (Carter 1994:90-115) for discipleship. Van Aarde's argument is based on the fact that in first-century Mediterranean cultures, the peasant family "revolved around the father". Parents, primarily the father, provided as sense of social identity and protection to the household and for this reason "fatherlessness led to marginalization". In other words, children who grew up without fathers were without social identity and would be placed in the category of stateless people. Consequently, the argument would lead to the fatherless status of Jesus, although Matthew and Luke build an adoptive alternative through Joseph (Mt 1:1-17; Lk 3:23-38). Does Jesus' social identity[292] justify his close relationship with the outcasts? Or does his adoption in Joseph's family allow him to better understand the meaning of "to belong" and of "not to belong?"

In such a stratified society, ceremonies, rituals, marriages, even temple access were conducted and determined along the lines of social identities. Regarding the issue of marriage for instance, Van Aarde (1999a:110; see Malina 1993:137-138) explains that it was conducted within the concept of purity and towards the continuation of the "holy seed" of "physical children of Abraham". It is not surprising that in the post-exilic second Temple period, Israelites were encouraged to divorce their foreign wives (Ezr 10:9-44; Neh 13:23-30). From that time on, marriage arrangements were set according to the principle of purity. Van Aarde (1999a:110; see Neyrey 1991:279; Funk 1996:202) lists a hierarchal construct of people, ranging from purity to impurity as follows:

1. Priest;
2. Levites;
3. Full-blooded Israelites;
4. Illegal children of priests;
5. Converts (proselytes) from heathendom;
6. Converts from the ranks of those who had previously been slaves, but had been set free;
7. Bustards (born from mixed-marriage unions or through incest or adultery);

[292] Quoting from Burton & Whiting, Van Aarde (1999a:100), defines three kinds of social identity: (i) Attributed identity is a status assigned to a person by other people of his/her society; (ii) Subjective identity refers to a status that a person assigns to him/herself; (iii) Optative identity is a status that a person wishes to occupy but from which he/she is excluded.

8. The fatherless (those who grew up without a father or a substitute father and therefore were not embedded within the honor structures);
9. Foundlings (orphans and wonderers)
10. Castrated men (eunuchs);
11. Men who had been eunuchs from birth;
12. Those with sexual deformities;
13. Hermaphrodites ("bisexual" people);
14. Heathens (non-Israelites).

Based on this stratification (Van Aarde 1999a:110), Israelite society determined who should marry who, and who could have access to the temple. To answer the above mentioned question, Jesus in his historical setting, was automatically stigmatized by his social identity. However, his charisma and vision ensured public recognition. He however, clearly associated with /showed a marked association with the class of the prejudiced: the sinners and the outcasts. Secondly, he had decided to make the God of Israel his father. As Van Aarde (1999a:112) notes that this attitude of Jesus would be judged as subversive by both religious and patriarchal structures.

Fatherless and illegitimate children, like women, Gentiles and other impure categories in Judean society were not allowed to enter the temple. Although Jesus' adoptive identity played a great role in Judean public spheres, his identity, as indeed that of the fatherless, might have been diffused (Van Aarde 1999a:112). It is thus, not surprising to see him closely associated with the stateless people, the fatherless and those with no families of his time. Consequently, he forged a new sense of brotherhood for these rejected categories by making them belong to God – the Father in heaven who cared for the fatherless and homeless (cf Ex 22:22; Dt 14:29; 16:11; 24:17; 26:12; 27:19).

In so doing, the Matthean Jesus constructed a new concept of brotherhood and belongingness for subalterns in the absence of the temple (see Van Aarde 1999a:112). Given such an appellation, none of the marginalized would be better than the others. Because under the concept of brotherhood, patriarchal and wealth privileges are abolished.

Members of this new community are all being equal, and can have equal access to God's worship and provisions.

Although this term "brotherhood" does not explicitly feature in Matthew as is the case in Peters' Epistles (1 Pt 2:17), Duling (1995:165; see Luz 1990:54) argues that after all, the use of the term "brother" *(adelphos)* occurs more frequently in Matthew than it does in Mark and in Luke. At times, Matthew' references can signify actual kin or it can be "a plurisignificant" (Duling 1992:109). Fictive kinship (Duling 1995:165) can be explained by the following seven Matthean passages (Mt 5:21-26; 7:1-5; 12:46-50; 18:15-22, 35; 23:8-10; 25:40; 28:10). These passages, according to Duling (1995:172), conclude that the Matthean metaphorical kinship is narrowed to "eleven representative disciples" to whom the Great Commission was entrusted.

Although Duling's explanation is meaningful, a limitation of the brotherhood to eleven disciples needs to be challenged. If, as Duling (1995:165) contends, Matthean reference found in Mt 12:50 is pivotal, then it should not be confined to a limited number of disciples. Matthew indeed edited his source. He left the crowd out, but included the sisters and mother who belong to the marginal group and pointed to the will of God (Horsley 1989:87). Horsley sees the doing of the will of God as determinant as to who should belong to the kinship. The true family or the community of disciples (see Carter 1994:90-91) now is constituted not by physical kinship, but by whosoever does the will of God – they become my brother, and sister, and mother. In this case, parenthood and fatherhood only apply to God (Mt 23:6).

The term brotherhood as Duling uses it can also be interpreted as sectarian.[293] However, within a postwar context, which is the case in Matthew, brotherhood is postcolonial language, which is sectarian in its outlook, but more inclusive in nature. All those who do the will of God and all those who long for the will of God are members of this unit. Thus, brotherhood

[293] Overman (1990:8-19) explains sectarianism by using a definition of sectarian from Blenkinsopp who defines it as a "group which is, or perceive itself to be, a minority in relation to the group it understands to be the 'parent body'. The sect is a minority in that it is subject to, and usually persecuted by, the group in power." The dissenting group is in opposition to "the parent body and tends to claim more or less to be what the dominant body claims to be" (see Esler 1989:13-17; Saldarini 1994: 92-93, 109-116; Sim 1998:109:117).

for Matthew becomes an avenue where humanity experiences the fullness of God beyond traditional social strata. They all belong where God is both the King and the Father.

Using the concept of *basileia*, Van Aarde (2005:19) is convinced that those who belong to the kingdom include people such as the "economically poor with no family support" (Mt 19:21); those who are "socially homeless" and widows (Mt 19:9; 22:24); fatherless children[294] (Mt 19:13-15); those who are discriminated against on ethnical grounds (Mt 15:21-28; 8:5-13; 27:54); the sick and lepers, maims (Mt 4:23-25; 8:1-4, 14-17, 28; 9:1-2, 18-22, 27-33; 21:14); the crowd, the hungry and the needy (Mt 5:1; 14:14-16; 15:29-32; 17:14-16; 25:35-36). Likewise, Overman (1990:123) states that the reference to brotherhood emphasizes the Matthean "ideal of mutuality and deference toward the other."

Therefore, it is important to note that in a desperate (apocalyptic) or revolutionary situation the labeling of terms is quite significant. An example is the Matthean use of "nation" (*ethnos*)[295] in the parable of the tenants (Mt 21:43), which should not be confused with other usage of "nation(s)" in the narrative. As Saldarini (1994:78-81) explains, the Matthean usage of nation in this instance is to distinguish those who "respond faithfully to God and those who do not". Foster (2004:231-232), thinks that the Matthean community is

[294] See Van Aarde (2001:135-154), especially the chapter entitled "Defending the fatherless."

[295] The meaning of *ethnos/ethne* – nation(s) here must be properly understood, and what needs to be established is whether it applied to non-Judeans or whether it in fact was inclusive of Judeans and Gentiles. Duling (2003:6) states that in early ancient Greco-Roman literature "ethnos and *ethne* had multiple meanings. *Ethnos* referred to any group of any size, but *ethne* in the Hellenic period and in its Judean use, could be positive and neutral, but could also take on the negative, ethnocentric valence." Saldarini (1994: 59-61;79-81) and Duling (2003:6-8;17-18) caution that Matthew's use of *ethnos/ethne* has different meanings, depending on the context, particularly with reference to Matthew (21:43). In general, ethnos can mean "ethnic group or tribe" or "a large group", that is a people or a nation with its own cultural, linguistic, geographical, or political unity (Mt 12:18, 21; 24:7, 9, 14, 30; 25:32; 28:19). It can also refer to guilds and trade associations, social classes of people, political associations, rural or urban residents' associations. The term in Matthew can also be restricted to his own group. The ordinary meaning of ethnos that fits Matthew's usage is that of a voluntary organization or a small group. The use of *ethne* in Matthew can have more than one meaning, and that is why "commentators have disagreed about when he means gentiles in contrast to Israel" (Saldarini 1994:78). Saldarini (1994:78-79) mentions four things that have to be borne in mind when using *ethne* in Matthew: (i) *Ethne* is not always a technical term for non-Judeans; (ii) The use of *ethne* is not always "theologically weighted"; (iii) The definition of who was included in and who was excluded from the Judean community "was far less clear in the first century"; (iv) The Pauline distinction between a Judean believer-in-Jesus and a Gentile believer-in-Jesus, which for Paul determined whether or not one was bound to observe the whole biblical law, is not present in the Matthean context.

itself a mixed entity of members called from the margins of society, which include Gentiles.

Furthermore, examples of contemporary concepts from anti-colonial theorists can give further input to the understanding of brotherhood or *abacu.*[296] Examples of Che Guevara's popular slogan of *companiero*[297](comrade) in Latin America; the concept of *Négritude* of Senghor and his company; the slogan of *Harambee*[298] in Kenya; the philosophy of *ujamaa*[299] in Tanzania; the concept of "black consciousness"[300] of Steve Biko in South Africa; "unity and struggle"[301] of Cabral in Guinea-Bissau; or "Orientalism" of Said. It is also important to note how Martin Luther King used the term "brotherhood" in his campaign against racism in the USA. In his prophetic dream, he says "sons of former slaves and sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood" (Peck 1996:74). All these concepts are used metaphorically as a means to forge common ground in defiance to any form of oppression and discrimination. The concepts mentioned above carry a message that "we all belong" or "we all want to belong";

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[296] See chapter three above section 3.8.2. See also how Elliott (1981:24-25) uses the term *oikein* which means "to inhabit, permanently reside, to be at home" in contrast to *paroikos* which denotes "the stranger, the alien, the foreigner, the 'other'". *Paroikos* can refer to displaced, dislocated, translated people, aliens, refugees and strangers in a land that they do not really belong to.

[297] Guevara (1994:430) used to tell his comrades to forget about official ranks, as Benigno says "Che warned us that… we would have to forget status as officials, as men used to leading, and become soldiers…, we resigned our ranks and posts." On guard duty rotation, Che wanted to be like any other soldier and he said "here everyone was equal", that he was the same as everyone else in the camp. This can be defined as "egalitarian comradeship" (see Carter 2000:46). During his sojourn in the Congo, Che Guevara and his team lived in Fizi Territory, not far from my village. From time to time, they used to come for food provisions (milk, cow meat, etc). Their names and ranks were coded and they lived together as equals and the villagers could not distinguish who was who in the company (see Guevara 2000).

[298] The slogan of Harambee in Kenya is widely used in all spheres of life. It means to work together.

[299] The term was used by former President Nyerere (1968) of Tanzania. The term comes from the Swahili word *jamaa* (family).

[300] During the creation of the South African Student Organization (SASO) in 1968 under the leadership of Steve Biko, the use of "black" terminology referred to the oppressed, which included all people classified to mean non-white "colored", "Indian or Asian", as well as "Bantu". According to Wilson (1991:24-25), this new definition of black had "a liberating effect on many, freeing them from the categories defined by apartheid."

[301] According to Cabral (1980:28-31), "unity and struggle" was the moto in the war against colonialism. He believed that regardless of existing differences, people should be one and the struggle must be that of the people, by the people and for their cause.

that we are equally affected by current circumstances and we fight as equals for a better future regardless of our provenance.

As has been argued here above, the Matthean concept of brotherhood is more inclusive and takes gender[302] issues into account, although feminist theologians such as Anderson (1983:4-27), Wire (1991:87-121); Love (1993, 1994); Wainwright (1994:637-638, 1998, 2000:25-47) do not concur with the statement. Their argument is that Matthew is a patriarchal oriented text. According to Anderson (1983:7; see Dewey 1994:470, 508), "there is no doubt that the author of the Gospel of Mathew wrote from an androcentric perspective". Whether the author was male or female, the story embodies patriarchal assumptions. Anderson (1983:7) sees genealogy and birth stories as patrilineal and "patriarchal marriages and inheritance practices" are taken for granted (Mt 1; 5:31-32; 19:1-12; 21:33-43; 22:23-33). At the same time God is depicted as Father[303] (Mt 5:14; 6-9,14; 7:12; 10:20; 13:43; 23:9).

Wire (1991:89, 103), Wainwright (2000:32; 1995:132-153) and Guardiola-Saenz (1997:67-81) criticize the Matthean cultural bias against women and its gender exploitation. Wire argues that despite their commitment, faith and their exemplary roles, "women are not named among Jesus' disciples", and the social organization was patriarchal at all levels. While Jesus' brothers are named in the narrative, his sisters are not (Mt 13:55-56). These and many other Matthean passages make radical feminist reading (Wainwright 1998:10-17) somewhat frustrating to themselves, especially when they end up turning the main discourse (text) into a discursive reading, in which hope for liberation is reduced to defensive argumentation.

While gender reading is to be taken seriously, it must also allow the reader to find meaningful effects in Jesus' struggle against cultural limitations and realities within the text (see Stark 1991:198-205; Carter 2001:50-52). The task of gender reading is not only to

[302] According to Wainwright (1998:11) gender is defined by feminist critical theory as "an either-or distinction that has been socially constructed and has functioned to maintain patriarchal and kyriarchal domination."

[303] However, there are some images of God as a woman (Mt 13:33; 23:37). In the Banyamulenge community, *Imana Rurema* (God the Creator) is genderless. But Ryangombe one of the high priests (the most influential) is represented in the form of a woman. She is the one who gives blessings and procreation (see chapter three).

highlight patriarchal egoism (which Jesus too is fighting), but also to appreciate positive achievement, attributed to the different genders, which is equally competitive in any given context – in this case – the Matthean context (see Anderson 1983:10-21; Love 1993).

The argument here is that Matthew (18:1-4, 15-20; 20:20-28) is busy creating an egalitarian community in the brotherhood of humanity. This takes place within a postwar context whereby sociological, political and economic structures of traditional society no longer exist. Furthermore, the understating of gender role is not necessarily based on the domination of male and the subordination of female. But it must integrate itself in the focus of other binary aspects of the new society, that is child/adult, Gentile/Judean, rural/urban, poor/rich, human/divine, slave/free, colonized/colonizer, etc (see Wainwright 1998:11).

The egalitarian society that Mathew has in mind, basically is a society based on fair judgment and equal treatment of all members of the society, regardless of social strata. In this case, he uses the examples of a child (Mt 18:1-4) and that of slave/servant (Mt 20:26-27) to illustrate the importance of brotherhood in the community. The Matthean Jesus is the architect of the new community in the making where new roles are based on equity, justice and righteousness and not on power competition. Crosby (1988:104-11) sees it as a collegial structure, while Horsley (1993:209-284) refers to this process as “the renewal of local community” where egalitarianism and social-economic cooperation should be the basic qualifications for members (contra Elliott 1981:198; Love 1993:27-28).

Old social structures in which patriarchal figures assumed “power-as-status” (Crossan 1998:163-165) have been affected by a number of factors (Horsley 1993:232-233), and can no longer be regarded as a construct of the new community. One of the factors, which is of relevance to this study, is Roman interference with the “traditional patriarchal authority” at social, political and religious levels in Judean society. Horsley (1993:232-233) argues that as peasant families fell into heavy debt as a result of economic exploitation, taxation and loss of ancestral land, the authority of fathers as the head of their families was affected, because it became increasingly difficult for the heads of families to avoid having a member of family

being taken into debt-slavery and/or to avoid losing the ancestral land that had been the family's inheritance for generations.

Furthermore, "traditional governmental authorities" experienced the same crisis. For example, during Herod's reign, he interfered with and reduced the influence of the Pharisees (Horsley 1993:69). In the time of Jesus in Galilee, the Pharisees and scribes shared influence or competed with Herodian of Antipas' regime. Again, the Pharisees and other representatives of the high-priesthood were subordinated to the powerful political influence of the Roman regime. There was indeed a crisis, "a decay in the traditional patriarchal social-economic-religious infrastructure" of Judean society in Palestine. The Matthean community therefore, emerges from a collapsed socio-economic, political and religious authority.

Amid this confusing and hopeless state in Palestine, Matthew still believed that all hope had not faded. The presence of his charismatic and divinely-sent leader would revitalize the community, by doing justice and righteousness to all. For the Matthean community Jesus' presence meant more than Israelite religious symbols, such as the Sabbath (Mt12:1-14), or the temple (Mt 21:12-16). Although observance of these symbols was of great importance, Matthew gave preference to justice and righteousness and mercy by ministering to the needy of society. According to Matthew, this was the new interpretation of the law, through words, faith and deeds. By so doing, he proclaimed the presence of the kingdom of heaven on earth in which the sick were healed, the hungry were fed, the homeless were given a home and the outcast gained access to worship their God.

4.4.4 The Matthean interpretation of the law

4.4.4.1 Doing good and the Sabbath (Mt 12:1-14)

Jesus confronts two issues that "violate" the Sabbath. According to Carter (2000:262), the scenario in this section is a focal point where a "specific conflict that has much wider implications" to observe. The Pharisees strictly observed the Sabbath as institutionalized by God. Matthew, on the other hand, presents a new Sabbath praxis, namely that, on humanitarian grounds, human needs may be given priority and can be met on this day. The

two scenarios are the feeding of the hungry disciples (Mt 12:1-7) and the healing of a man's shriveled hand (Mt 12:9-14). Here again, Matthew demonstrates that meeting the needs of the weak, is more valuable and it is therefore "lawful to do good on Sabbath" (Mt 12:13).

God's justice and righteousness entails Jesus' compassion and mercy in attending to human needs, which is the way of honoring the Sabbath. This criterion (Carter 2000:262; cf Crosby 1988:197-203; Knight 1998:65-88) evaluates both the Sabbath practice and any system that restricts people's access to basic needs, such as food and health. The Sabbath was instituted by God after the creation (Gn 2:2-31) and throughout history, Israelites were told to observe and celebrate this day as God's reign over all creation (Ex 20:8-11; Dt 5:12-15; Is 1:13). The Sabbath also commemorated and celebrated the liberation of Israel from slavery (Dt 5:12-15). Moreover, the Sabbath (Carter 2000:262-279) is a reminder and a renewal of the call of Israel to God's covenant (Ex 31:16; Jr 17:19-27; Neh 9:13-14).

The sabbatical and jubilee[304] year that is introduced in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, proclaims freedom to all of God's creation. Debts were written of, slaves were to be liberated, orphans, widows, aliens and the poor were to be protected and taken care of, and the land was to lie fallow (Ex 22:16-24; 23:1-9; Lv 25; Dt 15:1-18). Thus, celebration of the Sabbath was not a mere privilege, but it was a communal responsibility. This is rooted in social justice and the alleviation of human suffering and the provision of basic human needs, such as food (Lv 23:22; Dt 24:19-22; Mt 6:25-27; 14:13-21; 15:29-39); clothing (Ex 22:26; Dt 24: 12-13; Mt 6:28-34) and health (Lv 13-14; Nm 21:8-9, Is 53:4-5; Mt 4:23-24; 12:9-14). To deprive men and women of these rights was against God's ordination of fair distribution of resources.

The section dealing with the "hungry disciples" is Matthean, and does not appear in Mark and Luke. Matthew added it to justify his context of meeting human needs, which is more lawful than the legalistic observance of the Sabbath itself. On the other hand, the Pharisees are ready to use the occasion to trap Jesus for defiling the Sabbath (see Minear 1982:79). Unintentional violation of the law was an offence that required a sin offering (cf Lv 4:27-

[304] Van Tilborg (1986:84-85 n18) lists some of the advantages and disadvantages of the jubilee.

35). An intentional violation of the Sabbath was a serious offence (Garland 1993:135; see *Jubilee* 2:25-26) that required an amputation or a death penalty (Ex 31:14; 35:2; Nm 15:32). Trade was not permitted (Neh 13:15-22); the carrying of burdens was prohibited (Jr 17:19-27); fighting with the exception of self-defence (1 Macc. 2:29-41) was prohibited.

Consequently, according to Sanders (1992:208-209), the Sabbath was ill-exploited by Gentiles who "took Jewish to court on holy days in order to outrage their religion – and possibly to tie their hands, since some of them may have refused to appear in court on the Sabbath." Sanders (1992:210) brings another interesting dimension to the fore, namely that the Sabbath was a day of celebration and eating and not of fasting and starvation. All work was prohibited, but eating was part of the event of celebration. Moreover, according to rabbinic literature (see Ford 1980:39-55), some allowances were permitted to assist the needy on the Sabbath. However, the sages disagreed with such allowance.

One of the examples given is that of the inhabitants of Jericho who "made breaches in their gardens and orchids to permit the poor to eat the fallen fruits in time of famine" (Ford 1980:53). There is, however, a confusing story in Numbers (15:32-36), which the Pharisees might have used against Jesus: A man is put to death because he was found collecting woods on the Sabbath. If this was still in line with alleviating human needs, then this section poses a problem. It is not explicitly stated whether he collected wood for leisure or for a specific pressing need, such as putting up a shelter or collecting firewood to prepare a meal for his family. The only thing that is emphatically stated is that the man was put to death for having violated the Sabbath.

Jesus' defense (Mt 12:3-8), using the very Scriptures and the law that the Pharisees were using to challenge him, is well documented: (i) David, when he was hungry ate the sacred bread (the bread of the Presence), which he was not supposed to eat in normal circumstances (1Sm 21:1-6; see Minear 1982:79; Overman 1990:175; (ii) The priests work on the Sabbath and do not incur guilt (cf Lv 24:8). This second addition in the Matthean record is not found in Mark and Luke. (iii) The quotation from Hosea (6:6) becomes appropriate, as it is also quoted in the previous healing story (Mt 9:13). God's desire for mercy (Minear 1992:78) by

doing justice and showing righteousness takes priority over the temple offering and the Sabbath.

Jesus wants to teach the Pharisees as well his disciples that there is another meaning to observance of the law (see Snodgrass 1988:536-544; Loader 1997:136-272). For Garland (1993:137), the implication is that the disciples of Jesus are able "to break the Sabbath as the priests do because they are with him and are carrying on a greater work than the priests serving in the temple". My view on "being greater than the temple and the Lord of the Sabbath" (Mt 12:6, 8) in contrast to Mark (2:27), differs slightly from that of Garland here (see Overman 1990:177).

With Matthew 5:17-20 in mind, the importance of the temple and the Sabbath is not diminished, or overlooked; nor is the intention for it to be abolished for any reason. Crosby (1988:2002) prefers to refer to the Sabbath rest being "temporarily lifted in the face of needs" rather than to talk about contravening the law. What Jesus advocates is that by doing a service with compassion, to alleviate human suffering is also celebrating God's presence and fellowship. The Sabbath is a symbol of God's presence and salvation (cf Dt 5:12-15), which is fulfilled in doing justice to his creation. For the purpose of saving lives, work on the Sabbath is justified as an act of mercy, and is not contrary to the meaning of the Sabbath itself.

If the Sabbath was made to celebrate God's relationship with his creation, then it could be argued that it is plausible that meeting human need is part of God's celebration in its fullness. Crosby (1988:2002), followed by Knight (1989:78-80) and Carter (2000:265-266) argues that although God who entrusted rest to men, rested on the Sabbath, but "until all God's creatures have their needs met, alleviating these needs takes precedence over Sabbath rest." Jesus is not against the law and the Sabbath, but he is against the Pharisees' interpretation that overlooks the principle of doing justice and showing mercy to the needy.

The second issue is that of healing on the Sabbath (Mt 12:9-14). The use of the analogy of the sheep in the pit (Mt 12:11) is a Matthean pericope. Its interpretation can be argued from

different view on the observance of Sabbath (Garland 1989:135). Not all the Judean groups in the first century interpreted the law and especially the Sabbath in the same way. According to Sanders (1992:367), the Qumran community was stricter in their observance than the Pharisees. *CD*[305] 10:14-11:18 records several prohibitions, including "picking up food that had fallen in a field …, assisting a beast that was giving birth, lifting a new-born animal out of a pit…, carrying a child, or wearing medicaments… The only exception to the prohibition of work was that they could save human life." The Pharisees were flexible with regard to the laws ruling the Sabbath (cf Sanders 1992:425). Helping animals is recorded in Scripture, but not necessarily on the Sabbath (Ex 23:4-5 ; Dt 22:4; Mt 7:12).

Taking into consideration that Jesus was familiar with rural peasantry whose means of survival were limited, and husbandry being an integral part of the local economy, then the analogy makes sense. Secondly, Jesus refers to a sheep in the pit in this instance, but elsewhere he uses analogies of sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9:36); the lost sheep (Mt 10:6;15:24; 18:10-14); and the sheep and the goats in the parable of rewards (Mt 25:31-46) by which he was referring to the marginalized groups of Israel who were helpless and harassed (see Van Aarde 2005:19).

The "lost sheep" constitutes a group (of the poor, peasants, women, children, the sick, the lame, the homeless, the unclean, expendable people) whose access to basic necessities was limited. Their health is constantly threatened, especially during times of crises, wars, and natural calamities such as earthquakes, droughts, floods and volcanic eruptions. They become even more vulnerable and victims, in most cases they are defenseless and voiceless. Mainly women and children are the mostly affected, with women being raped and being infected with sexually transmitted diseases. Families end up in displaced or refugee camps with no shelter, no food, no health care and with no social status. These people are those that the Roman imperialism and its local agents preferred to exploit but not protect.

[305] Damascus Document.

But Jesus (who carries out salvation in his life, teaching and action) is concerned about the wholeness and well-being (Mt 4:23; 8:3;16-7; 9:12-13; 15:21-28; 20:29-31) of those who live in a society of inequalities. From this perspective, Matthew's concern is to re-order social life (Crosby 1988:198-203) and to teach the Pharisees that "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Mt 12:12) to those among "us who are in need." The healing of the man (Mt 12:13) challenges religious leaders in two ways: (i) Authority over powers of darkness and principalities that infringe upon people's lives. Jesus demonstrates that he is a healer and he gives the authority to heal (Mt 10:8; cf Mk 16:16-18; Lk 10:17). (ii) Lack of concern and mercy towards the suffering and unprivileged people in the society (Mt 12:7; cf Mt 5:20; 25:35).

Beaton (1999:21) sees the Pharisees as being "painted in bad light for having more compassion towards animals than humans," thereby being viewed as being unjust to their fellow humans. They were with this sick man in the synagogue, but no mention is made of any help he received from them. The reference to sheep without a shepherd is to be understood in light of Roman and religious leaders' failure to fulfill the role of leadership by doing justice and righteousness to the needy.

Instead of pleading with Jesus to help the sick man, like the Judean elders who pleaded for the cause of the centurion (Lk 7:4), the Pharisees used this incident as a case for conspiracy (Mt 12:14). According to Carter (2001:148), these religious leaders "do not have an exclusively 'religious' agenda but uphold and impact the economic and societal structures of society." Their teaching and religious practices, such as tithing and taxes, maintain the hierarchy and ensure their own wealth at the expense of the rest of the poor and the weak. The law is fulfilled through compassion and mercy for others.

4.4.4.2 Cleansing the temple (Mt 21:12-17)

In the temple cleansing (Mt 21:12-17) or "temple-ordering" as Crosby refers to it (Crosby 1988:199), a similar attitude of excluding people from experiencing the healing and the fullness of God's presence, is shown by religious leaders. The temple hardly represented an

innocent religious place divorced from reality. Taxes were funneled through it, and it "served as a means of economic redistribution" (Crosby 1988:200).

During the first and second temple eras (cf Carter 2000:418), prophets warned about misgivings and corruption in the temple and in Jerusalem. The Qumran community had withdrawn from the temple (Sanders 1992:53) due to misconduct of the priests in charge and wanted to see it being reformed (see 1 Macc 4:36-59; 1*QM* 2:1-6). Priests supervised economic system in the temple, and in the process, they may well have made some profit at the expense of the poor and of pilgrims who either had to sell or buy animals for sacrifices (cf Crosby 1988:199).

Ford (1980:41) goes even further in showing how corrupt the priesthood was how it had become a business itself within the temple. He states that the sons of priests became treasurers. Pilgrims from the Diaspora coming to Jerusalem created business for bankers and moneychangers to facilitate the procurement of sacrifices. In addition, the half shekel paid by every male Judean over the age of twenty (Freyne 1980:278) could have contributed to the temple's finances. It is not surprising that Herod wanted to use some of the temple money in his social projects (Barbour 1988:60-61). The mechanism of selling and buying in the temple was a form of robbing worshippers (Mt 21:13). Sanders (1992:76-92), however, is hesitant to come to such conclusion.

The abuse of sacrifices in the presence of God by the wicked sons of Eli is an example of what was happening in the temple (1 Sm 2:12-36). Religious leaders were not concerned with the plight of the poor and pilgrims who came to seek God's presence in the temple. No concern was shown towards the lame, the sick and the children who had no access to the temple. Instead, the religious leaders' interest vested in what they could collect from them. Temple leadership had defiled itself (Garland 1993:212) and lost its capacity to raise the hope of the underserved and to invite them to come into communion with their God, as Isaiah (55:1-5) did when he extended the invitation to all of those in need.

As is the case with observing the Sabbath, Jesus was not against the temple, but he was against the misuse of it. The temple had become a den of robbers (Mt 21:13), a situation Isaiah also deplored (Is 1:10-31; 56:7). Under Roman domination, religious leaders collaborated with the Romans (Mt 2:4) and the temple was viewed as "an arm of Roman imperialism. In the eyes of many popular leaders the temple served to support and bolster Roman rule and Roman administration in the land of Israel" (Overman 1990:294). According to Loader (2001:71, 76), Jesus' attitude reflected certain priorities, and in this case, justice and righteousness is the key theme, because "it expresses this total commitment" in doing the will of God which gives preference to people's needs above cultic and ritual requirements.

The leaders of the temple were complicit with Rome's economic exploitation of Palestine and the temple was used to facilitate such business. Jesus was aware of the type of priests who were serving, and the role they played in exploiting and misleading people at the temple. He was well informed of the fact that the temple had come to symbolize corruption and faithlessness, contrary to its divine and social purpose within society (Overman 1990:294). Jesus' action of overturning the tables (Mt 21:12) is a social and spiritual reform whereby, he urged religious leaders to reform their ways and practices (Jr 7:1-8; Am 5:11).

According to Crosby (1988:200), the overturning of the tables "was a symbolic call for them to stop abusing their authority by exploiting pious pilgrims and the poor". It was only after he had cleansed the temple and declared it as "a house of prayer" (Mt 21:13; Lk 19:46) "for all nations" (cf Is 56:7; Mk 11:17), that those with physical, material and spiritual needs, the poor, those who were excluded, the blind and the lame, had access to the temple where they got healed (Mt 21:14; cf Mt 11:28-30). The blind and the lame were among those who had no access to the temple (2 Sm 5:8; Lv 16-24) but remained at the temple entrance (Ac 3:1-10).

Jesus healed many diseases as proof in John the Baptist's enquiry (Mt 11:6). Carter (2000:420) argues that if God is understood to be especially encountered in the temple, "the exclusion of maimed from the city and the temple appears to be an attempt to exclude them

from God's presence." Jesus, on the other hand, manifests a willingness to do God's justice and righteousness to the dispossessed. He includes them in his reign and worship. Children (Van Aarde 2001:135-154; see 1994:261-276) had the opportunity to express their emotions and joy through singing (Mt 21:16; Ps8:2), while Jesus provided warmth in the form of a loving touch to them (Mt 19:13-15). According to Van Aarde (1994:268), Jesus used the parental custom of touching children as a symbol of loving and blessing. This also applies to those whom he extended his touch and fellowship. Jesus' healing mission was inclusive enough for everyone to find his/her place.

Sanders (1992:77-92) objects to the predominant view held by many scholars who are of the opinion that the priesthood abused and misused the temple for their own gain. In his argument, one important remark is well taken, namely that as a human being, failing the required standards, is quite natural. "Dishonesty, greed and corruption are universal human failings and it is simple to say that these were *the* failings of official Judaism" (Sanders 1992:91). He regards the criticism from Judeans and Christians against the temple system as being corrupt and detrimental to the people's welfare, as a competition between two movements.

Failing moral standards is understood, but the culpable must change once he/she recognizes his/her failure or is reprimanded by others (Ezk 18:27-28). Surprisingly, a modification of behavior did not occur in the case of chief priests, teachers of the law and leaders among the people (Lk 19:47). Jesus reprimanded them (Mt 21:12-13; cf Mk 11:17; Lk 19:45), but they remained "indignant" (Mt 21:15), and "plotted to kill [him]" (Mt 12:14; cf Mk 11:18; Lk 19:46). This therefore, offers enough evidence of the Pharisees' unacceptable conduct which is also expressed in the seven woes (Mt 23). The crowd, on the other hand, was receptive to Jesus, believed that he was a prophet (Mt 21:46), accepted his teaching (Mk 11:18), and "hung on his words" (Lk 19:48).

Social, political and religious systems have often prevented the outcasts and the needy from celebrating God's presence and from hearing the good news of hope. They are the ones who

are always on the periphery, even at the temple's courts where they find themselves excluded, until Jesus comes to do justice to them and to include them in the fellowship.

4.5 Summary

The social location of Matthew was discussed from a social, religious and political perspective. The Judeans in Palestine, like any subjected people under colonial rule, looked on and experienced the consternation caused by the destruction of their cultural, political and religious values. Roman imperialist collaborated with local agents and inflicted misery upon people, whose lives entirely depended on the produce of their land. The introduction of excessive taxation in the country placed the peasants in a situation of dependency and indebtedness, while their land was either grabbed or deviously taken as payment in surety. The people in Palestine had to endure the consequences of natural disasters, such as drought, famine and earthquakes, which left the survivors greatly impoverished. Poverty, war and insecurity forced an influx of many people into neighbouring countries where they became refugees, while others were forced into slavery.

Resistance to colonialism was expressed in various forms. Some efforts took the form of well organized militant groups such as the Zealots, others manifested in rather unorganized fashion in the form of sporadic attacks by so-called bandits and brigands. The Messianic movements also formed part of the resistance against the Roman occupation. Peasants, including the Matthean community, were disappointed not only by the behavior of the Roman agents, but particularly by Judean aristocrats who worked alongside the colonizer. The Gospel narratives refer to non-violent resistance which might be termed as the third way (Horsley 1989; Wink 1992a:102-125) of solving the crisis and of ensuring the community's survival.

Matthew, like many of his contemporaries, informs the reader of the crisis that was developing between his community and the parent body of Judaism. This can be attributed to the fact that the administration of justice and righteousness was in jeopardy. The Pharisees had fallen out of God's standards in their interpretation of the law and in showing justice and compassion. On the other hand, Matthew claimed to have got the right interpretation of the

law through Jesus the Messiah. Matthew brings socio-political and religious teaching to strengthen his community and avoid any disintegration based on Pharisaic teaching, contacts with Roman justice, but also to avoid the anger of God.