



Do not worry in Kinywang'anga: Reading Matthew 6:25–34 in a Tanzanian village

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One of the presumptions of this article is that most of the people in the nascent 'Christian' communities were ordinary people struggling with questions of living under harsh conditions in a country that was occupied by an enemy force. Another presumption is that the history of these ordinary people from antiquity needs to be heard. The article aimed, with the help of archaeology, cultural anthropology, social history of antiquity, literature of the time as well as other disciplines, to create a social context of Jesus and his disciples. The article approached the Gospels in the New Testament from the poor, the majority of people living in the 1st century Roman Empire. It gives a brief analysis of one of the poverty texts, namely Matthew 6:25–34. By means of interviews, stories of villagers in Tanzania, as well as their interpretations of the Gospel texts, have been documented. The people of Kinywang'anga serve as a test case for reading the 'do not worry' exhortation in the Matthean passage.

Reading the text with the poor

'Almost half the world – over three billion people – live on less than \$2.50 a day' (Poverty facts and stats; Shah 2009).

'Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear' (Mt 6:25).

The New Testament was written during a time when poverty was a reality for almost everyone. Even now, after 2000 years, poverty is still present as one of the world's biggest problems. However, biblical scholarship today is done, more often than not, by those privileged with varying degrees of wealth, who do not themselves belong to any of the poorest classes of people. This fact leads to the questions: Do we understand the life of the poor enough to comprehend, for example, how they would hear the words of Jesus when he asked them not to worry about tomorrow? How did the audience, who heard this proclamation, whether in Galilee or later, elsewhere in Roman Empire, react to these words? How does a village community consisting of poor people react to these words?

Traditionally, biblical studies have concentrated on the texts. These texts were written by the literate elite and represent the view of the privileged few. Most certainly the authors of the Gospels had some education and held positions of some status in their communities, which gave them the time and the skills to be able to write these texts. The history of the early Jesus movement, that later developed into the religion called Christianity, is usually written based on these texts composed by the elite.

As a biblical scholar I, too, was taught to always keep the textual evidence at the forefront. 'Exegetes work with texts', it was said. Theories were not considered as important as the texts were. Within scholarly circles it became almost standard to analyse the texts in short pericopes, 'single units' as the smallest ones were called. This kind of working model was especially favoured in historical Jesus studies, where scholars tried to draw a believable and understandable figure of Jesus of Nazareth by ascribing these single units to Jesus or by simply leaving them out if they seemed too problematic or were clearly later than Jesus.

However, I quickly learned three important things. Firstly, there is no text without context. The single units have never been 'single units' except for the scholars working with these texts. They were not delivered as short sayings and anecdotes by anyone or to anyone. Therefore it is not possible to understand any of these sayings, anecdotes, or short stories except by reading them within their original context. Linguistic analysis of single words and their etymologies are of no value if you do not know the context. The text always belongs to a context. Besides, the results of such investigation are not very trustworthy even if one could, with convincing argumentation,

present a collection of authentic words of Jesus (which is not the case).¹ Nobody's message, programme or thinking can be persuasively represented just by collecting various words and anecdotes and then using them to sum up the whole:

No matter what criteria for testing the sayings are used, scholars still need to move beyond the sayings themselves to a broader context than a summary of their contents if they are to address historical questions about Jesus.

(Sanders 1985:17)

Harsh criticism of the way many Jesus scholars investigate the single sayings of Jesus is given by Richard Horsley (2008:131–145), who bases his critique on the examination of the memory and the gospels as 'social memory' rather than 'containers of data'. Every text and every moment of oral proclamation and performance makes best sense within its context. Overman (1996) writes:

The whole story of Matthew is a crucial context and, in fact, an absolute necessity for understanding smaller parts or units of the Gospel. The story itself, written by the author as best we can reconstruct it, is the first place a sensible reader will look for clues and for a context that will help supply meaning to words, instruction, and stories in the Gospel. And there is little doubt that cross-cultural analogies, and stories and events from our own time, can indeed help to shed more light on the Gospel texts, their meanings, and their application.

(Overman 1996:1–2)

Secondly, I learned that it is much easier to know the context of Jesus than Jesus himself. We know a great deal about the Roman Empire in 1st century Palestine. We have trustworthy information about the cultural context that Jesus and his disciples lived in. With the help of archaeology, cultural anthropology, social history of antiquity, literature of the time as well as other disciplines, we can create the social context of Jesus and his disciples. It is much more difficult to place the figure of Jesus into that context.

Thirdly, the Gospels, as we have them today, are not in their original form. Originally, they were distributed in both oral and written forms, with several different forms of each, depending on the context. The Gospels also differ from other contemporary literature because of the fact that, although authored by the elite, they do contain some traditions that have been produced by ordinary people, even poor people. This seems to me to be especially true in the Sayings Gospel Q and the Gospel of Mark and on some occasions the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Thomas. Even the theologically constructed Gospel of John contains some traditions that might have been born in rural peasant circles and the Gospel of Luke based his admittedly elite Gospel on earlier traditions found in Q and Mark. Thus, as Horsley (2008:31) writes, the Gospels 'are some of those rare historical cases of literature that represents the view from below'.

Most of the people in the nascent 'Christian' communities were ordinary people struggling with questions of living

1.The work of the Jesus Seminar resulted in the publication of Funk, Hoover and the Jesus Seminar 1993. Not even this work, even though born from the co-operation of numerous biblical scholars, represents the final truth on what the historical Jesus once said. The debate still goes on.

under harsh conditions in a country that was occupied by an enemy force. Their history needs to be written. Horsley (2008:21–24) makes an interesting distinction between 'standard history' and 'people's history' and applies this distinction to New Testament studies. To use his terms, my study would be a 'people's history'.

In this article the focus is not on theological concepts or the rise of Christian beliefs. The focus is rather on the poor, the majority of people living in the 1st century Roman Empire. In choosing this focus I have approached the gospels from the viewpoint of the poor.

What follows is a necessarily brief analysis of one of the poverty texts that I chose for the interviews amongst people living in poverty today. A more detailed study will be forthcoming in my book on the same subject. In these interviews, I listened to the stories of the villagers as well as their interpretations of the Gospel texts and documented them on a voice recorder. Findings from this field research amongst the poor living in villages in Tanzania in the spring of 2010 will be studied further and then compared to current biblical scholarly investigations concerning the poverty texts. One example text, Matthew 6:25–34, will be presented here from a contextual standpoint, that is, from the perspective of the materially poor.

The field research in Tanzanian villages

One contemporary setting to read the poverty texts within the context of poverty is Tanzania. In many places in Africa, especially in rural areas, people still live in a pre-industrial, agrarian society. In many villages, there is no electricity and virtually no motor vehicles or telephones. Some tribes still live in a gatherer society whilst some tribes are nomadic. But most of the rural people are peasants who make their living from agriculture. They have tiny fields and a small number of cattle that affords them, in normal times, a modest living for themselves and their families. Most people do not produce anything for sale and almost nobody gets a salary. Also, in recent times HIV and AIDS has struck the African continent, especially sub-Saharan Africa, more heavily than any other part of the world, making, at worst, one in every four adults HIV-positive (UNAIDS 2008).²

I chose to focus on the villages in the Iringa district in the middle of Tanzania because of my earlier contacts in the area and the support of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society as well as Tumaini University. Their familiarity with village life in the district was very useful when arranging visits to local villages where people speak mainly Swahili and their own tribal languages, like Hehe, Bena or Kinga.³

2.According to the 2007 estimations of UNAIDS (a joint United Nations and World Health Organization program on HIV and AIDS) in the southern parts of Africa of the adult population (15–49) 25% – 28% were infected by HIV. In the Tanzanian area I visited, the estimation was the worst in the country, 15.7% of the adult population.

3.I am very grateful to Tumaini University for assigning two assistants, Rev. Aleck Mhanga and Rev. Yekonia Koko to me as well as for the use of a car during my stay in mid-Tanzania.



The focus during the visits to the villages was twofold. Firstly, I wanted to become familiar with the social structure of the village. I asked the village chief or executive secretary the following kinds of questions:

- How many people live in the village?
- Do all villagers belong to the same tribe or kin?
- What do villagers do for a living? What professions or occupations do they have?
- How many villagers work outside of the village?
- How and why, do villagers keep contact with neighbouring villages and towns?
- What are the major problems in the village?⁴

In light of the issues regarding land ownership in the gospels it was especially interesting to learn that in Tanzania, the land was appropriated by the state in the 1960s. The older generation still remembers the time when the land was either owned by a tribe or by kin, or was free to anyone. Nowadays people pay rent for the land they want to cultivate. This data works not only as a necessary context for reading the poverty texts with the villagers, but offers a comparison to the hypothesis regarding the origins of Q, namely that it was supposed to have originated in the Galilean villages where loss of land was prevalent.

Secondly and most importantly, I discussed the poverty texts with the villagers. I call this discussion a 'reading' but the texts were not read from a book with leather covers, but rather performed in narrative style. In Tanzania the oral culture and narrative tradition is still alive and well. By telling the stories from memory I tended to get their first reactions, which may have been different had I simply read to them from the Bible. Some of the villagers were non-Christians, so they were not too closely acquainted with the stories beforehand. Even the Christians heard the stories differently compared to the way they heard them from pastors and evangelists or even in liturgical sermons. I had hoped to have a lively discussion of the poverty stories in the Gospels and that I most certainly did. Often the religious authorities (a pastor, an evangelist or some other religious leader) were present, but I politely asked them not to take part in the discussions, given that they are professionals and I wanted to hear the voices of ordinary people. They agreed to my request and were politely quiet, but I usually had to visit their home afterwards so that they did not feel left out. I also asked the people gathered at the meeting place to set aside their understanding of the story if they had already heard it and to listen as if they were hearing it for the first time in their lives. At each meeting, there were 20–50 people present from both genders and all ages and approximately 10–15 of them took part in any given discussion.

At this point, there are some things that I ask the reader to keep in mind before reading the following field report section. As a foreigner in mid-Tanzania, with a different way of life, I come from a completely different world than the one they inhabit. Some of them had never seen a White person before.

4.The data I acquired in the field has been tabulated, but is not presented here for practical reasons.

I did not speak their language and had to rely on a translator, who belonged to one of their own tribes. As an outsider I was treated politely and perhaps regarded with some authority given that, in every situation, I was given the seat of honour directly beside the village chief or some other authorities. There is a big difference when an outsider arrives in a village and leads a discussion compared to someone that they know doing the same thing. I had to ask many questions in order to gain an understanding of village life; an understanding that I am sure was quite different from their own lived reality. An outsider usually sees things more from an overall viewpoint than insiders do.

Village life in Kinywang'anga

The village of Kinywang'anga was one of my first sites. I had initially chosen to perform the story of *The Rich Man and Lazarus*, Luke 16:19–31, but after discussing with the village 'executive secretary',⁵ the text seemed inappropriate to village life. Even in terms of the Bible the story is located in a more urban setting. In Kinywang'anga, nobody had luxurious clothes and it would have been hard for them to imagine that there were any such people who could have eaten so well as the rich man in the story. The village was one of the poorest in the area. It consisted of approximately 1000 inhabitants who all made a living from their own little farms of generally 0.5–4 hectares. Almost all of them would be considered peasant farmers, which is how they saw themselves as well. There is one primary school with five teachers. Although the teachers received government pay, each also had a small farm with some cattle. In addition to the teachers there were two religious leaders in the village, one a Lutheran evangelist and the other an Anglican priest; each of them also had farms. There were no other professions amongst the inhabitants of the village and no one goes to work outside of the village.

People from three different tribes, the Hehe, Bena and Kinga, live in Kinywang'anga. These tribal names are also the names of the languages spoken in the village. There are no cars in the village. There is only one tractor and a few bicycles. Despite the lack of transportation, people make weekly visits to neighbouring villages to meet with relatives and friends and sometimes to try and find medical treatment. Health care poses serious problems as there is no transportation and the distance to the nearest health centre or hospital is extensive.

People in Kinywang'anga are totally dependent on the products of the earth. If there is no rain, there is no crop and they are in danger of starvation; the last time this happened was in 2000. Other catastrophes might destroy the crop as well. There were no barns or other store houses in the village

5.Kinywang'anga's village chief was not present. I was told that he might join us later (or perhaps he had something else to do). I did not meet him at all. Instead, the executive secretary gave me all the information I needed and I noticed that he also had some authority in the village and was considered to be one of the wealthiest men in the village with his herd of 25 cows. In my opinion, the 'executive secretary' in every Tanzanian village is the modern equivalent of the 'scribes' in Galilean villages. Both the executive secretaries and the Galilean scribes (and later rabbis) were responsible for the village archives and official documents. See Hanson and Oakman (2008:166–167).

which may have enabled them to keep surpluses to use during hard times or to sell as a way of providing additional income. However, the village grows sunflowers, which are pressed for their oil and sometimes sold to people travelling the main road that goes 3 kilometres out from the village. Two years ago a water pipe system was built for them, so now they have a place from which to fetch water. There is no electricity in the village.

The villagers live in traditional African clay houses with grass roofs and they are very poorly dressed. Many people had no shoes. However, the women were dressed in colourful textiles for the meeting with me, carrying babies tied on their backs. Approximately 50% of the population comprises children.⁶ According to the standards of the World Bank, the people in Kinywang'anga live in absolute poverty, that is, under \$1.25 a day (The World Bank Group 2010).

Do not worry in Kinywang'anga (Mt 6:25–34)

After learning all of this background information, I decided to change the Gospel passage to be performed to Matthew 6:25–34, the *Do Not Worry* passage.⁷ I thought it was a very challenging story in the context of life in Kinywang'anga, where people sometimes have no food at all, clothing is meager and they have enjoyed the 'pure'⁸ water from the pipes for only a couple of years now. Most years they have enough food, but it is quite simple and not very nutritious. Most probably the situation in 1st century Galilee (or in any rural environment in the Roman Empire) would not have been any better, but it certainly could not have been much worse. In Kinywang'anga the context for this gospel passage is totally different compared to my own country of Finland as well as most Western countries and perhaps closer to the conditions experienced by those living in 1st century Galilean villages.

The meeting took place in an outside area in the shade. During the time of year that we met, the 'flowers of the field' were very beautiful and everything was green; the 'birds of the air' flew over us and sang (Mt 6:26, 28).

A lively discussion followed the performance of the text. The discussion was opened by an elderly man who said that, *'Maybe Jesus spoke these words, because he found that the people had very little faith. He wanted to teach them about faith'*. I suppose that what the man meant by 'faith', was, *trust in God's care*, but I am not sure. Another man said, *'Jesus found people so keen on material things, that they forgot the spiritual things and God. They were concerned about food, clothes and other things, but not God'*. A woman said that if someone came to say such words to her, she would think that this person has something dishonest in mind.

6.The office of the village chief was quite stark. It had a table and a chair, a wooden bench and a tiny shelf, that seemed to hold some papers and a huge cardboard box containing condoms!

7.The saying is originally from Q and thus is also in Luke 12:22–34. Parts of the text can be found also in P. Oxy p. 655, which contains saying 36 of the Gospel of Thomas.

8.Visitors and foreigners in Tanzania are advised not to drink the water that comes out of these pipes.

'It would be better if somebody would tell me a better way how I could manage my life in order to get things and not to say "Do not worry"'.

Another continued and said that such a person would be considered 'mentally disabled' by the villagers. The Lutheran evangelist interjected, saying that:

'Some worry is understandable, because we need many things, but one should not worry about things that are beyond one's ability to influence or control, for example weather. It is, however, good to plan your future'.

When I asked if they knew anyone who did not worry about tomorrow, they strongly denied knowing such a person. The same elderly man who started the discussion, said: *'Jesus knew the people and their problems and needs, so he wanted to give them a change, a new perspective, a new way of thinking'*. I asked, what would happen, if they stopped worrying about daily food and drink and clothing and just trusted in God? Someone said that then life would be very bad. Another said that it is a matter of faith. If the people believed what Jesus said and stopped working they would have thought everything comes automatically, without human involvement, if they just believed. A young woman with a baby said:

'The speech of Jesus must have divided the people in two groups: others had faith and thought that "this is true, why worry", whilst the others thought "this is not possible". Faith is the main topic of Jesus' speech'.

One man said that if you trust God, you will have everything you need.

In further discussion over sodas, we found a solution together for this problematic text. If a person is worried, they soon become depressed and are not a joy to their friends and relatives. It is therefore better not to worry too much about worldly things that you cannot do anything about, but instead to rejoice with family and friends for all the good we have.

Most of the scholarly commentators of the *Do Not Worry* text do not discuss it in the context of the poor, although some features in the saying refer to this issue.⁹ For example, Jesus speaks of the grass of the field that is thrown into an oven. The poor often used grass as a fuel in the oven to cook bread, because wood was so scarce (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:51). Also, the figure of Gentiles as 'striving for all these things' is understandable in a context where Gentiles usually represent the rich who have better and easier lifestyles than local villagers.¹⁰

It is important to note that the religious and cultural memory of the people in Kinywang'anga is not identical with the social memory of the 1st century Galilean villagers. Key terms in the passage such as 'heavenly Father', 'Solomon in all his splendor', 'Gentiles', 'strive first for his kingdom and

9.For example, Meier (2001:517) takes for granted that Jesus is warning about the dangers of wealth, as if the people worrying about their daily life would seek wealth. This seemed not to have been the situation amongst the villagers in Kinywang'anga. Nolland (2005:305–316) speaks about 'hard work to earn enough to purchase the cloth' and 'Jesus can assume that his hearers will share his aesthetic judgment that natural beauty outshines the most artful of human productions'.

10.This came to me when I was visiting the villages. As a foreigner, I was viewed by them as being 'rich'.

his righteousness', would have resonated with 1st century Jewish listeners differently from the Tanzanian poor, who would be without an important context for understanding the passage.

In Kinywang'anga it became clear to me that the *Do Not Worry* passage makes no sense at all in a village where people are living in ongoing poverty. The villagers tried to find a spiritual message in the saying, maybe because it was not reasonable to live a careless life, as Jesus seemed to be advising. They interpreted the saying in the light of the Kingdom of God (v. 33), which they seemed to have understood within a spiritual context.

But what about people who have already lost the basic necessities that were needed for living: the sources of food and drink (field, cattle), access to water supply (such as a well) and the possibility of making or purchasing adequate clothing? In Kinywang'anga I met one person who fit this description; he was a young man behaving strangely, dressed even more poorly than the villagers and seemingly suffering from one or more severe illness. According to the locals he was mentally ill.

During the spring of 2010 I also visited the Palestinian territories in the West Bank. Although I did not read this particular passage with the Palestinians, I discussed the Kingdom of God with them. As Muslims their understanding was also spiritual, but compared to the people in Kinywang'anga, their understanding was much more concrete. The Kingdom of God for them was 'doing God's will' and therefore not only a spiritual entity. Quite the contrary, the Palestinians, who suffered from injustice by the Israelites, understood the Kingdom of God as a movement of oppressed people who have God as their shelter when they do God's will. The Kingdom of God was equivalent to the intifada.

William R. Herzog II (2010) has written:

In the hierarchy of rural life, then, there are two thresholds at which peasants may lose their previous status, and it is at these moments that they will resist their decline most fiercely.

(Herzog II 2010:51–52)

Quoting James C. Scott (1976), he concludes that:

When threatened with the loss of their land and the security of their village, they will form movements and perhaps even rebel. The same is true when peasants reach the second, more desperate threshold, 'when the subsistence guarantees within dependency collapse', and the relative stability of tenancy gives way to the perilous life of a day laborer.

(James C. Scott 1976:39–40)

This had obviously not happened in Kinywang'anga, where most people still had the security offered by village life and their small farms. In the Palestinian territories, in contrast, the people had suffered from injustice and loss of land. The life of many Palestinians had become very difficult. In that context it is much easier to imagine how they would react to the exhortation 'Do Not Worry'. Especially young men would

eagerly join any movement resisting the unjust oppressor. They could stop worrying about the questions of daily life and strive for the movement that they believed brings justice, peace and welfare.¹¹

The context of *do not worry* in the gospels

Landless peasants

In the Gospels we can find three groups where Jesus' words on not worrying about daily life could have been understood and maybe even hailed as good news. The first one is the group of landless peasants, who had quite recently lost all their property to some rich landowners, probably absentee landlords, as a result of debts they were not able to pay. Such people would have quickly fallen under the sustenance level and their future was either to become slaves, beggars, criminals, bandits or some other social outcast. These are just the kind of people who might form movements for resistance.

If the group believed that their plight triggered an eschatological turn in the immediate future, some kind of a collapse of the normal system of social stratification leading to the possibility of shared goods, they could have heard the words of Jesus as a proclamation of power. However, in the literal context of Matthew's gospel there are no clear indications that the words should be understood this way. The *Do Not Worry* passage is a part of the Sermon on the Mount and although the Gospel of Matthew also contains an apocalypse later in chapter 24, it would be a stretch to read the chapter 6 passage in light of this. Rather, the verbal context of Matthew leads one to think about one's relation to property rather than to the end times. Preceding Matthew 6:25–34 the evangelist talks about almsgiving (6:1–4), prayer, including central petitions concerning daily living (6:5–15), fasting (6:16–18),¹² storing property or treasures (6:19–21), envy, or the evil eye (6:22–23)¹³ and the impossibility of serving both God and Mammon (6:24). In chapter 7, the themes change from property to one's relationships with other people.

Therefore, it seems to me that, at least in its Matthean context, Jesus' words would not have made sense as an eschatological proclamation. In the context of Q this might have been possible, but the sequence of Q (its different phases and the social context of Q) are still debated so much that it is not possible to enter into that discussion in this article.

Itinerant charismatics

The second possible group for whom Jesus' *Do Not Worry* saying would have been understandable was in a group

11. There were also some Muslims attending the discussion in Kinywang'anga, but they did not differ from the other villagers in terms of their attitude to work or worrying.

12. From a poor person's perspective, fasting is a very interesting phenomenon. If people were already poor and were enduring what amounted to forced fasting, Jesus' advice to put oil on their heads and to wash their faces must have sounded very strange indeed. The saying is more suited to an urban environment and possibly in a society whose members are not suffering from poverty.

13. The concept of the 'evil eye' referred to envy (Malina 2001:108–133).



made up of 'itinerant charismatic preachers'. The earliest followers of Jesus were supposedly people living in Galilean villages where Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God was welcomed and understood as a liberating action that would soon free them from subjugation to the Roman Empire. Heavy taxation, wars, punishments and other consequences of the occupation were a tremendous burden on the peasant population. The message of the Kingdom of God was spread from village to village by Jesus' disciples, who had left their earlier lives (whether voluntarily or under pressure) and lived solely on the support of villagers who accepted the movement's message. These are the people that were sent to proclaim the Kingdom of God without carrying a purse, a bag or sandals (Lk 10:1–12).¹⁴

Itinerant, wandering charismatic preachers did not need to work for their living. They did not have to worry about their living in the same way that peasants who were dependent on their crops did. They adopted a lifestyle, which made them free from worries concerning agricultural production. Therefore, they were like the birds in the sky. They trusted the benevolence of the people in the villages that they visited, some of whom might have been their relatives or friends (the most popular reason for going to nearby villages and towns for Tanzanian villagers is to visit relatives and friends). However, this interpretation also fits much better in the rural context of Q and not so well into the more urban context of the Gospel of Matthew.¹⁵ Also, Matthew places the Q material concerning the itinerant preachers elsewhere in the Gospel, not in the Sermon on the Mount.

It is still important to know that Matthew, when including material from Q into his Gospel, took these texts as a larger entity of texts dealing with property and poverty and placed them in Jesus' longest speech in chapters 5–7.

Marginalised people

The third group of people for whom the *Do Not Worry* saying makes sense can be found in the immediate context of the speech. The geographical context was naturally the city where the Gospel of Matthew was written. The majority of modern scholars locate the gospel geographically to Syria¹⁶ and suggest that it was written in Antioch, the third largest city of the Roman Empire at the time (e.g. Meier 1982:22–27; Luz 1985:73–74; Stambauch & Balch 1986:145; Stark 1996:147–162; Brown 1997:212–13; Carter 2008:21).¹⁷

14. The synoptic sayings source Q was probably composed and used by Galilean villagers from several villages that formed a network consisting of twofold followers of Jesus: itinerant missionaries and settled disciples of Jesus (e.g. Hoffmann 1972:329–333; Sato 1988:379–380). For other scholars promoting the wandering (charismatic) missionaries and their localised allies (or leaders?), see Kloppenborg Verbin (2000:179–184; deviating claims: 184–196).

15. The gospel was most probably written for a community living in an urban environment. Urban locale may be suggested by 26 uses in the Gospel of 'city' compared to four of 'village' (Brown 1997:212).

16. Syria is added in Matthew 4:24 to Mark's description of Jesus' activity. Also, the early Jewish Gospel of the Nazarenes, which is related to Matthew, circulated in Syria. In Syria, the Jesus-believing Jews were called 'Nazoraioi', the Greek term used in Matthew 2:23 (Luz 1985:74; Brown 1997:212).

17. The main arguments for Antioch are (1) Ignatius of Antioch seems to have known and probably cited the Gospel of Matthew (the citation is not clearly from Matthew, however); (2) The Didache quotes Matthew and is located by most scholars in Antioch; (3) The first two chapters of the Fourth Ezra (later known as the Fifth Ezra) quoted from Matthew; (4) Antioch as a Greek-speaking city that had a relatively

Andries van Aarde (2007) writes:

The Matthean Jesus' exposure of the power of the Roman Empire (and that of the Temple authorities) does not mean that Gentiles are excluded from God's inclusive *basileia* or that the marginalized now included were only Israelite peasants. The 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' pertain to both Israelites and non-Israelites and include people such as:

- the economically poor who are without family support (such as those referred to in Mt 19:21),
- the socially homeless (such as a 'partriarchless' woman divorced by her husband in Mt 19:9 and the children without parents mentioned in Mt 19:13–15),
- and ethnic outcasts (such as the Canaanite mother in Mt 15:21–28 and the Roman centurion in Mt 8:5–13 and Mt 27:54).

Seen from the perspective of Israel as a covenantal family, the above group were marginalized and those were the kind of people who could be among the crowds that followed Jesus 'from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from across the Jordan' (Mt 4:23). They were those who were granted God's goodness because of God's righteousness, the 'last who became the first' (Mt 20:1–15).

(Van Aarde 2007:423)

In light of understanding the Gospel of Matthew as proclaiming the Kingdom of God, not only as anti-Roman, but also inclusive of the marginalised people, both Israelites and non-Israelites, the *Do Not Worry* saying makes sense in its Matthean context and becomes more understandable from the viewpoint of the poor. The poor in the Gospel of Matthew were not ordinary Israelite peasants living in small farms, but people with no family support and no home and even from different ethnic origins. According to Matthew, they formed the audience of the Sermon on the Mount (4:23–25). Jesus says to them that they should first strive for the kingdom of God and his righteousness. When these outcasts are accepted as true members of the family-like community of Jesus' followers, they do not have to worry about their future, because they will be the 'last who became the first'. The community will take care of their material needs.

Conclusion

Choosing Kinywang'anga as a test case for reading the *Do Not Worry* exhortation was challenging: I did not have any idea how the poor peasant farmers in the village would comprehend the passage. I must say that it was first a disappointment that they did not seem to understand it any

(Footnote 17 cont...)

large Jewish population fits well with the conditions mentioned in the Jewish Gospel written to a mixed audience in Greek and; (5) The dominant influence that Matthew's gospel would have in subsequent Christianity suggests that it served as the Gospel of a major Christian church in an important city, such as Antioch. According to Brown (1997:213), the most persuasive evidence stems from the correspondence of the internal evidence. Brown argues quite convincingly that the gospel was addressed to a once strongly Jewish Christian church that had become increasingly Gentile in composition and J.P. Meier has shown how the history of Christianity in Antioch fits that situation. There were probably more Jews in Antioch than in any other place in Syria and their ceremonies attracted many Gentiles (Josephus, *War* 7.3.3). Also, Paul's mission to the Gentiles began in Antioch, but the community there seems to have later been led by more conservative Jews, as Paul lost the battle (described in Gl 2) and departed Antioch in the 50s. Overman (1996:16–17) suggests a Galilean city (perhaps Capernaum or Sepphoris), followed by at least D. Harrington, A.J. Saldarini and A. Segal (who thinks both a Galilean environment and Antioch are possible). Galilee belonged formally to Syria. Tilborg (1972) suggests Alexandria, but Overman (16–17) quite convincingly denies this possibility. Overman also provides other suggestions given by scholars on the location of the Gospel, but thinks them improbable. The earliest references to the Gospel according to Matthew by the Church Fathers imply a Palestinian location.



better than I did. The saying made no sense in their context. However, the test case study helped me to see that most probably it was as difficult to understand in 1st century Galilean villages as in an African village nearly 2000 years later. The poor who first heard these words were not poor peasants still working in their tiny fields and worrying about daily sustenance. However, if these kind of people lose their security as a result of oppression (that is 'persecution' in the New Testament), as has happened in the West Bank, the exhortation becomes empowering for them in uniting them for struggle for their own rights.

With the example of Kinywang'anga I wanted to show the usefulness to biblical scholarship, to say nothing of the necessity, of getting to know people living in poverty and to understand their living conditions. Of course, Tanzania is not 1st century Palestine. It is, however, much closer to it than the Western world where most scholarly work on the Bible is done. For me my visits to the African villages gave me new insights into the Bible and helped me to understand how large the cultural gap is between our world and the New Testament World of the poor. Did I gain a better understanding of the poverty texts? No, quite the contrary. Unfortunately, it is not possible to present more examples here, but it is my hope that the one presented in this article makes it clear how hard it is to understand the words of Jesus or the evangelists, not to speak of applying those words to our own modern lives.

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