
The social location of the Matthean community

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Abstract

Individuals or societies are always pursuing their own interests. Interests are identified in terms of domination and the retention of the status quo against subordination and the pursuit of change. The conflict between the first-century (after AD 70) Pharisees and the Matthean community is identified as a conflict of interests. The Pharisees functioned as to retain the Roman rulers and maintain the status quo, and attempted to reconcile the Jewish community. The Matthean community predominantly comprised the urban non-elites and rural peasants, thus the marginalized in agrarian society. They pursued a new identity and challenged the values of the Jewish leaders. The mere fact of its existence as a community in the process of departing from the Jewish mainstream was a threat to the authority of the Pharisees. The fact that the community was still very close to Judaism was cause for intense conflict.

1. INTRODUCTION

The most dominant motivational force of any action is the pursuit of self-interest (cf Collins 1975:60; Rex 1981:7; Bieder 1988:70; Malina 1988b:9; Fisher 1990:103). The conflict-sociologist, Ralf Dahrendorf (1959:126; 1988:28) places emphasis on interests in the context of classes. Basically, there are only two basic interests: the rulers (who have authority) want to retain the status quo and those without authority want to change the structure of society (cf Dahrendorf 1959:126; 1988:28). The interest of the one group is to defend and the other is to attack. Furthermore, Dahrendorf (1959:168, 237; see also Rohrbaugh 1984:534) emphasizes *authority* as a sociological term, indicating some sort of relationship between domination and sub-ordination¹.

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The aim of this article will be to locate the Matthean community in terms of whether Matthew wrote his Gospel in a so-called *intra muros* or *extra muros* situation (cf Carson 1982:161-163; Van Aarde 1989:223-225; Dunn 1991:141, 156; Stanton 1992a:113-145, 1992b:382, 390). I also wish to establish the social location² of the Matthean community and its conflict in terms of the debate of so-called formative Judaism (cf Overman 1990; Stanton 1992a, 1992b:380).

2. SOCIAL LOCATION OF THE MATTHEAN COMMUNITY

2.1 The environment

The question posed here is whether Matthew's gospel has an urban setting. If so, which cities are involved? What are the implications of this (geographical) setting?

A widely accepted consensus was that Antioch in Syria was the place of origin of the Gospel of Matthew (cf Luz 1985:73-74 for a literature list and arguments to substantiate this view; see also Stambauch & Balch 1986:145; Meier 1982:22-27; Meeks 1983:38; Kingsbury 1988:155; Stark 1991:189; Duling & Perrin 1994:333). Part of this view is that Matthew addressed a community that existed in Antioch (cf Meier 1982:22-27, and Stark 1991:189-210 in particular).

However, a critical remark by Kingsbury (1991:261) referring to the work of Stark (1991:198) illustrates that most arguments in favour of Antioch as place of origin, are not all that conclusive³. Could all the arguments in favour of Antioch not be made about almost any ancient city with both an Hellenistic and a Jewish population? Why should it be Antioch in particular? Thus he says: 'Indeed, Stark simply presupposes, without demonstrating on the basis of an analysis of the Matthean text, that Matthew's Gospel originated in an urban area in general and in Antioch in particular' (Kingsbury 1991:261). Luz (1985:73-74) accepts the possibility of a Syrian environment (*Raum*) and accepts Antioch as 'not the worst hypothesis', but it is no more than a hypothesis (cf Luz 1985:75).

There is therefore a trend to challenge this previous consensus that Antioch was the place of origin of the Gospel (cf Overman 1990:158-159; Segal 1991:19,26-29; Kingsbury 1991:263-264; Saldarini 1992:661; Stanton 1992a:86; 1992b:380; Garland 1993:3).

Segal (1991:26; see also Harrington 1991:10) argues that both Galilee and Syria should be considered a single geographical area. This should not be considered from every perspective but '... at least from the point of view of the development of Jewish and Christian hostility'. In this relation Segal (1991:26) continues:

In the history of earliest Jewish Christianity, the relationship between Galilee and Syria is quite obvious. The Jewish Christian heartland, settled by Jewish Christian refugees from Jerusalem, *was an arc of settlement that included both Galilee, Jesus' home, and Pella, the destination of the Jerusalem refugees, and then arched into Syria through Antioch and Edessa.* (My emphasis.)

He continues, '... we cannot exclude the idea that Pharisees wandered further than Galilee proper' (Segal 1991:27). Segal (1991:27) says further: 'The itinerant nature of the disciples that Jesus commissioned in Matthew 10 and 28 *makes unnecessary a strict choice between Galilee or Syria.* These disciples were constantly travelling and were used to being refugees' (my emphasis). Thus both those in support of Antioch and those in support of Galilee as the location of the community of Matthew are in a sense correct. 'Galilee and Antioch were merely two fixed points in a rather loosely confederated group of congregations, united by missionaries who were more or less constantly on the move at first' (Segal 1991:27). The conclusion Segal (1991:29) eventually comes to is:

Thus, the Matthean community lived in precisely the area that Jesus, while preaching in Capernaum, had called the land of promise. Clearly, this enlarged Galilee, from which Syrian cities like Antioch and Edessa can be considered proselytized satellites, was the centre of Matthew's attention.

Because of the way in which Christian apostles travelled, the Matthean community could have considered Galilee to include virtually everything from the present-day Galilee through to Antioch.

We can accept the (new) widely acclaimed consensus that Matthew originated in an urban environment although, as we have seen, there is a difference in viewpoint as to which city or cities were involved (cf Luz 1985:74; Edwards 1988:171; Overman 1990:159; Stark 1991:189; White 1991:240; Kingsbury 1991:264; Saldarini 1992:661; Stanton 1992a:50). This could also mean that Matthew addressed a predominantly urban community, comprising predominantly urban non-elite. We do not suspect that there were many members belonging to the community that were part of the governing and retainer classes, although this could not be ruled out entirely. As Stanton (1992b:382) notes, the conflict of Jesus and his followers (as transparency for the Matthean community; cf Luz 1971:152-154; 1985:67; Van Aarde 1994:83) with the Jewish leaders is a central theme of Matthew's gospel.

2.1.1 The composition of the community

Although it was predominantly an urban environment, the enlarged geographical location suggested by Segal (1991:26-29; see above) opens up the possibility that the community could also comprise other non-elite classes like the rural peasants, the unclean and the expendables. In this regard White (1991:241) says that the Matthean community clearly looks to the Galilean ministry of Jesus for its roots, but Lower Galilee represents a distant place. 'It would appear, then, that the Matthean community looked to the mixed environment — mixed both as Jew-Gentile population and *village-urban society* — of the Syro-Phoenician region as a symbol of its own situation' (White 1991:241; my emphasis). Furthermore there always existed a strong reciprocity between urban and rural environments in ancient societies (cf Edwards 1988:169, 171, 176). The so-called 'spatial organization' of ancient cities may support the suggestion that the Matthean community could have comprised both rural peasants and urban non-elites. Says Rohrbaugh (1991:72): 'The elite ... lived at the centre near the temple and the palace, while the poor lived on the periphery. Outcasts lived outside the city along with others whose presence in the city during the day was necessary or tolerated (tanners, prostitutes, beggars, traders), but who were unneeded and unwelcome at night'. We thus conclude that Matthew wished to *revitalize* not only the ancient urban inhabitants, as Stark (1991:190) argues, but also other under-privileged classes. We regard it as possible that the community of Matthew comprised members in and around the city including urban non-elite and the rural peasantry. Thus Matthew was consisting predominantly non-elite. We have to take note of the remark of White (1991:240): 'While none of the major free cities of Lower Galilee are ever mentioned, an urban location for the Matthean community in the outlying regions is not precluded. *What is more at issue in Matthew is the growing tension felt by the community over the intrusion of Pharisaic authority into their region so that they were being marginalized*' (my emphasis). This community was standing in opposition to the Jewish leaders. The leaders consisted predominantly of the retainer classes.

The suggestion that the Matthean community consisted predominantly of the urban non-elite and rural peasants must not be taken too rigidly as meaning that no members of the upper classes could have been part of that community. The mere fact that Matthew eventually became a written document which was to be read (in public), indicates that, at least in as far as the author himself was concerned, he should have been from the retainer class (possibly as a scribe). How could the community ever understand the Gospel if there were not at least a few members from the upper or retainer classes present, who were able to read the Gospel to the congregation⁴?

2.1.1.1 Involuntary marginality

There could have been members of the upper classes as well. In fact, Matthew should have been from the retainer class himself. But, how can these points be joined together? The article by Duling (1993), *Matthew and marginality*, gives us valuable information in this regard.

Duling (1993:664) states that, at a descriptive level, '... one can observe certain phenomena typical of urban ecological environments: segregated shantytowns, squatter settlements, poor working conditions, a low standard of living, and the exclusion of such groups from the decision making process that affects their lives' (my emphasis). Germani's (1980:49) definition of marginality is cited by Duling (1993:645) as follows: '... we may define marginality as the lack of participation [exercise of roles] of individuals and groups in those spheres in which, according to determined criteria, they might be expected to participate'. By 'lack of participation' is meant the inability of persons to conform to expected social roles with respect to sex, age, civil life, occupation, and social life in relation to status in a social system. The marginalized person no longer participates in the 'normative scheme' — that is, '... the set of values and norms which define the categories (status), the legitimate, expected, or tolerated areas of participation and the assignment mechanisms of individuals to each category' (Germani 1980:50, cited by Duling 1993:645). The usual 'objective resources', both material and non-material — education, jobs, purchasing power, housing — are not unavailable to marginalized persons. But the 'personal conditions' needed to exercise their social roles are not present (cf Duling 1993:645). This is all particularly true of the unclean, the degraded and the expendables in an advanced agrarian society⁵. Duling calls this *involuntary marginality*. In short this means:

... individuals and groups who for reasons of race, ethnicity, sex, 'underdevelopment,' and the like are not able to participate in normative social statuses, roles, and offices and their obligations and duties. *They fail to share in both material and non-material resources available to other members at the centre of society, and thus experience themselves as personally alienated.*

(Duling 1993:648; my emphasis)

2.1.1.2 Voluntary marginality

Voluntary marginality is summarized by Duling (1993:648) as:

... individuals or groups who consciously and by choice live outside the normative statuses, roles, and offices of society because they reject hierarchical social structures, though there will be attempts to perpetuate this spontaneity by social control or in-conventicles within the normative social system. *Though freely chosen, they will eventually share in some of the same conditions as involuntary marginals.* (My emphasis.)

The lower classes (strata) or involuntary marginalized are seen as the interest group of the community of Matthew. Thus we regard the majority of the community as involuntarily marginalized. But those in the community that could have been from the higher strata (or classes) of society, whose direct interests does not really lie in the community of the involuntarily marginalized, could still identify with the community as *voluntarily marginalized* and, through this, share the identity of the community with the other marginalized. In this way it is also possible for the author of Matthew, as a 'marginal man', to identify with the community (cf Duling 1993:662). The *marginal man* is defined as '... individuals and groups who, because of birth, migration, conquest, and the like are 'doomed' to live in two different, antagonistic cultures without fully belonging to either' (Duling 1993:648). The author identifies with the marginalized, and thus, as a member of the retainers, he stands between the two cultures.

2.2 Early 'Christian'-Jewish relationships

2.2.1 Matthew in terms of the debate: *intra muros* or *extra muros*

Was the community of Matthew still within or did they stand outside first-century Judaism? The works of Carson (1982:161-163), Van Aarde (1989:223-225) and Stanton (1992a:113-142) give us meaningful access to these issues. No consensus has yet been reached on the issue of the nature of the tension between Matthew's community and Judaism since Carson's article in 1982, as the work of Stanton (1992a) indicates a decade later. Stanton (1992a:114-139) discusses four groups of scholars, but we will concentrate on only two.

There are the scholars who see the Gospel of Matthew as representative of some sort of congregation that sees itself as still *within* the context of Judaism: the struggle with Judaism took place *intra muros* (cf Carson 1982:161; Stanton 1992a:118-124). The Gospel of Matthew came into being in an essentially Jewish-Christian community, where the edification of the church, independently of Judaism, was in progress. Matthew's community had not yet broken its links with Judaism; they were still attached to the Jews (cf Stanton's 1992a:120 summary; see also Van Aarde 1989:223). Of sig-

nificant importance is the view of Davies (1966:290, 332; see also Stanton 1992a:121) that a reconstruction of Judaism took place at Jamnia following the fall of Jerusalem in A D 70. The so-called Jamnian period, A D 70-100, is to be seen as a many-sided response to the need for unity and an adaptation to changed conditions (cf Stanton 1992a:121). Jamnian Judaism was confronting Christianity and, as a response, Matthew may be seen as the Christian answer to Jamnia. However, Stanton (1992a:122-124) rejects the notion that the struggle of Matthew's community was with 'the synagogue across the street', thus *intra muros*.

This brings us to a group of scholars who judge Matthew's Gospel to be representative of a form of Jewish-Christianity that had broken away from Judaism, but were still defining themselves over against Judaism. The struggle was therefore *extra muros* (cf Carson 1982:161-162; Stanton 1992a:124-131). Stanton (1992a:124) himself prefers a 'mediating position' between the *intra muros* view and the view that Matthew himself should have been a Gentile: his community had no link with 'the synagogue across the street'.

The view that the separation of Matthew's community from Judaism was complete and that they had already totally withdrawn themselves from the Jewish assembly is confirmed by a number of scholars — apart from Moule, Stendahl and Schweizer, whom Stanton (1992a:125-126) mentions (cf Doyle 1986:18; Kingsbury 1988:155; Saldarini 1991:41). Five arguments are presented in support of the *extra muros* view:

- * The Jewish religious leaders and groups — in particular the scribes and the Pharisees — are consistently placed in a negative light. They are always at odds with Jesus and his disciples, so a 'ruler of the synagogue' cannot be a 'man of faith', and a scribe cannot be a true disciple (cf Stanton 1992a:128).
- * Matthew explicitly associates scribes and Pharisees with synagogues. There is a wedge between Jesus and his disciples on the one hand, and the synagogue on the other (cf Stanton 1992a:128-129).
- * 'Over against συναγωγή stands the ἐκκλησία, founded by Jesus himself and promised divine protection (16.18)' (Stanton 1992a:129; see also Duling & Perrin 1994:337). The structures of Matthew's communities are developing quite independently from the synagogue. As Stanton (1992a:130-131) says: 'The ἐκκλησία founded by Jesus continues to have a firm commitment to torah, but it has accepted Gentiles and developed its own patterns of worship and of community life. Its self-understanding is quite distinct from that of the synagogue'.

- * There are passages which speak about the 'transference' of the kingdom to a new people who will include the Gentiles. Says Stanton (1992a:131): 'At 8.5-13 Matthew links two Q traditions (Luke 7.1-10 and 13.28-9) in order to state starkly that those born to the kingdom will be replaced by Gentiles (including the Roman centurion whose faith is commended) who sit with the faithful (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven'⁶.
- * 'At the climax of his story at 28:15 the evangelist addresses his readers directly and refers explicitly to the relationship between synagogue and church in his own day' (Stanton 1992a:131).

With the argument summarized Stanton (1992a) substantiates the *extra muros* view. Stanton (1992a:138) is to my mind correct in his comment that ferocious conflict is often a hallmark of a close 'family-like' relationship.

What this summary also indicates is that a clear picture does not exist, and it remains difficult to choose between either an *intra* or an *extra muros* view (cf Stanton 1992a:139). My own view is thus that I doubt that the separation between the community of Matthew and Judaism was complete when Matthew wrote his Gospel. We should see the tension as somewhere between the *intra* and the *extra muros* views. The community is still within Judaism and yet they are also out, or at least *on their way out*.

The community of Matthew was still *very close* to Pharisaic Judaism. This could account for the *intensity* of the conflict. We assume that the closer a relationship is, the more likely it is that the conflict will become very intense and passionate (cf Coser 1956:69-71)⁷.

However, although still within Judaism and in furious conflict with the leaders, the community was at the same on its way out. I see this as part of a process not yet complete. They were *intra muros*, but on their way to become *extra muros*. They were in the *process of developing* their own identity, which could explain the numerous anti-Jewish passages in the gospel. Matthew, especially, developed his own interpretation of the law which was opposite to the Pharisaic interpretation (cf Segal 1991:31). As Segal (1991:32) says, 'Rather the Matthean rejection of Pharisaic Judaism reflects a *growing* social rift between them and the waxing rabbinic leadership' (my emphasis). Therefore I can go along with Stanton's (1992a:157) proposal for the setting of the community of Matthew. I however want to rephrase his view slightly in favour of my own. As explanation for the intense anti-Jewish polemics, Stanton (1992a:156) states that the community had recently parted company with Judaism. I would rather say that, because they were *still parting* from the Jews, the polemic was real indeed. The

evangelist is indeed coming to terms with the trauma of the painful, still ongoing, process of separation from Judaism, and with the continuing threat of hostility and even persecution. Matthew's anti-Jewish polemic could be seen as part of the self-definition of the Christian group which was acutely aware of the possible rejection and hostility of its 'mother', Judaism (this is my paraphrase of Stanton's 1992a:157 view). Rather than say that the Matthean community was alienated from Judaism (cf Stanton 1992a:166), I would suggest that they (the community) were *still alienating* (as a process) themselves from Judaism.

2.2.2 The Matthean community in relationship to formative Judaism

We have to take note of the debate with regard to so-called *formative Judaism* (see the work of Neusner 1982, who coined this term). It is especially the work of Overman (1990) that explicitly relates the community of Matthew to *formative Judaism*. Overman (1990:2) views so-called formative Judaism as one of the most profound influences in the development of Matthew's community. Formative Judaism was, like the community of Matthew, involved in a process of social construction and definition. They were, like the Matthean community, in the process of *becoming*. Formative Judaism was one of several movements struggling to gain more influence and control in the period A D 70. Both were emerging movements, involved in a process of self-definition.

There were attempts at consolidation and legitimation in formative Judaism (cf Overman 1990:8, 19, 23, 151; see also Cohen 1984:29; Elliott 1990:1-2; Stanton 1992a:90). As Overman (1990:35) says, 'A new religio-cultural synthesis was now required if Judaism was to survive. This synthesis and the process of its construction and emergence in the post-70 period are referred to as *formative Judaism*'. It was a process in which Judaism, after A D 70, became more and more 'normative' (cf Wild 1985:123; Kee 1990:15), although it was still not 'normative'. It was a long process that took several hundred years (cf Overman 1990:37). This process was in all probability set in motion by the so-called council of Yavneh (Jamnia). It was a process in which the Pharisees, as the main opponents of Matthew's gospel, played a significant role.

2.2.3 Yavneh and its symbolic role

The so-called council of Yavneh is viewed by Overman (1990:38) as the most significant event in the institutional development of Judaism in the period after A D 70. The reason might be that there was devastation after the destruction of the temple in A D 70, and that some sort of consolidation among the Jews was needed. As Cohen (1984:45) indicates, the temple lost its prime focal point of Jewish sectarianism after its

destruction. The temple and its priesthood and institutions no longer existed as the 'parent body' against which most of the sectarian movements protested. 'A sect needs an evil reality against which to protest, rail and define itself' (Cohen 1984:46). Therefore, Yavneh had as its aim the forging of some unified coalition within Judaism. To Cohen (1984:28) it was an attempt to end Jewish sectarianism. Whether this attempt was successful remains debatable. That Jamnia had a strong symbolic meaning as legendary symbol of the *beginning* of the task of social reconstruction in the wake of the destruction of Jerusalem is probable (cf Overman 1990:41). I agree with Overman (1990:43) in what follows:

For now the most we can say about Yavneh is that it symbolizes the beginning of the end of sectarianism, and the initial efforts at forging a new coalition to perpetuate and reshape Judaism in the wake of the tragedy of 70. At the level of myth the symbolic import of Yavneh, as retold by successive rabbis, confirms them as the carriers of authority and legitimates them as the institution which would provide for learning and atonement henceforth.

It is likely that Matthew and his community knew of this symbolic meaning attached to Jamnia, but that they challenged its legitimacy, and that this, among everything else, was at the base of the conflict with the Pharisees. They challenged the interests of this group (still from within the Jewish ranks — see above) that tried to establish some unity among the Jews. Although there are no direct indications as to whether there was a link between the Jamnian rabbis and the Pharisees, it is likely to have been the case. They emerged as the most dominant group (cf Neusner 1987:280; see also Saldarini 1988a:114, 119; Pantle-Schieber 1989:153).

This brings me to a logical assumption, along with Overman (1990:35), that the Pharisees were well positioned for the events of AD 70 and thereafter, especially within formative Judaism and in the conflict with the community of Matthew.

2.2.4 The Pharisees as part of the retainer class in the period of *formative Judaism*

In the period after AD 70 the Pharisees established themselves as a growing and rising power. As the Romans took over the destroyed country, they found the Pharisees relatively untouched by the revolt, probably because the Pharisees, in the pre-70 period had withdrawn from politics (cf Neusner 1973; Wild 1985:107; Segal 1991:27; Van Aarde

1993:539-540). After AD 70, however, their role changed remarkably. They had never been enthusiastic about the revolution, and had therefore managed to survive the devastation. The Pharisees were determined to take political leadership and, as Wild (1985:108) says when he cites Neusner (1973:146-147), '... to strike an agreement with the Romans: "The Pharisaic party would keep the country peaceful, and the Romans would leave internal matters in the hands of the party"'. The Pharisees were the ideal candidates to take over the role of the retainers of the Roman Empire (the ruler and governing classes) in Galilee and beyond to Syria (cf Segal 1991:27). The role of the Pharisees as retainers is confirmed by Saldarini (1988a:39-40; 1988b:200; see also White 1991:221) when he says: 'The Pharisees fit best into the retainer class as a religious group and a *political force which interacted with the governing class*, often influenced society and sometimes gained power' (my emphasis). As such, they did not have direct political power, but acted as a political interest group protecting the interests of the rulers, and, by influencing people, they gained importance (cf Saldarini 1988a:106; see also 1988b:203).

In short, we make the assumption that the Pharisees emerged as the most dominant and leading faction within first-century Judaism, *acting as retainers of the Roman Empire*. This view is confirmed by Josephus (cf Rivkin 1978:31-75; Saldarini 1988a:133; Dunn 1988:269; Overman 1990:14).

Whereas it remains difficult to find much detail regarding the general role of the Pharisees overall as retainers, and thus regarding their administrative and political functions⁸, as far as *Matthew is concerned*, these functions were perceived as acute in the local environment. Although it might be argued that the Pharisees generally may have had a minor political and administrative function, Matthew seems to have experienced these roles as being major. It thus seems possible that the Pharisees filled the political and administrative (retaining) vacuum left by the revolt of A D 66-70. They never (or seldom) had direct political power, but acted on behalf of the rulers and governing classes, and thus served the interests of the rulers. Their function may have been to keep the country peaceful. As a consequence, because they served the interests of the rulers, they thus functioned to retain the *status quo*. The prime function of the retainers, and thus of the Pharisees, was service to the rulers. Their interests and identity was taken up in the upper layers of society. Thus, any form of perceived challenge to their function as retainers, and any form of perceived opposition to change their ideology, as well as any perceived opposition to the *status quo*, could have led to serious conflict. Whether the opposition against them and their function was religious or political, it was a source of conflict. Matthew indeed challenged the Pharisees, and thus awoke their hostility. He served, as a 'marginalized man', the interests of the

involuntarily marginalized as he, himself, was voluntarily marginalized. Through this, both he and the community challenged the interests of the Pharisees (as being part of the upper classes), and challenged them to change their ideologies too (see below). But Matthew also served another interest group, with another growing identity, which heightened the emerging conflict. To this we now turn.

2.3 Group boundaries and self-definition

2.3.1 The conflict from the side of the Jewish leaders

The leaders of the Matthean community, while identifying themselves with Jesus who had done the same as they (presumably) had done, turned to the quasi-group — that is, the lowest classes (with suppressed interests) of society⁹. In doing so, whether they had the intention of forming an interest group or not¹⁰, it was likely that they (or the Jesus of Matthew reflecting their community) would have got into confrontation with the religious leaders who sought authority and privilege from the Roman occupiers of the time. This threatened the leaders' chances of gaining influence from Rome and receiving support from the common people. Their support came from the same quasi-group as the Matthean community. The Jewish leaders sought support in their efforts to gain power. The Matthean community, in following Jesus, supported the interests of the weak and the underprivileged, who were in an extremely bad situation in a typical agrarian society. Both were part of the Jewish community, but the Jewish 'establishment' tried to maintain its position of authority (both religiously and politically) and advance its position with the Roman authorities. The leaders of the Matthean community (and Jesus) took up the interests of the weak and gained influence among the weak and the poor, thus being able to strengthen their own position as well. They had to survive as an interest group of 'Jesus-believers' who supported the interests of the weak.

The Matthean community was the interest group that supported the interests of the 'Jesus-believers' and, because Jesus set an example of turning to the marginalized, they were at the same time the interest group supporting that quasi-group — the lowest classes of the society. In fact, one could say, the community of Matthew was the interest group of the lowest classes in society. This is how they might have seen their own identity. There thus was, together with everything else, a struggle for authority over the common people, the peasantry (see also Saldarini 1991:45). In effect, the conflict was further intensified, for they wished to gain control and support of the peasantry. The ruling classes, in their internal struggles, as Lenski (1966:241) says, often had to turn to the lower classes (the common people) '... as a counterforce with a well-

entrenched and united nobility'. Lenski (1966:241 n 201) uses examples from Aristotle's *Politics* and Plato's *The Republic* to illustrate the tendency of certain rulers to ally themselves with the common people in opposition to the governing classes. Similarly, the Roman emperors often allied themselves with the urban masses in their struggle with the senatorial class. In the interests of the Roman Empire, it would have been to the benefit of the rulers if the Pharisees, while they served the rulers as their retainers, had done the same. The Pharisees (the dominant group among the Jewish leaders in Matthew's view) had to recruit new members (or at least new supporters) to survive (see also Saldarini 1991:54), because they had insufficient power as retainers to remain in power without the support of both the rulers (upwards) and the peasantry (downwards). The community of Matthew also had to recruit new members, and this intensified the conflict with the Pharisees who needed to do the same.

On the issue of recruiting new members (or supporters), I have to make a few remarks. Stark (1986:314) says that the Jews themselves did not convert (others) in substantial numbers. However, we do not wish to rule out this possibility. I have already argued that both Pharisaic Judaism and the Matthean community were to be seen as *formative* groups. I assume that new groups in the process of formation need new members (or at least support). Says Duling (1992:106): 'Thus, like the Pharisees, the Matthew group is not simply a group, but moving towards a corporation'. A corporate group is defined by Malina (1988a:29; see also Duling 1992:104-105) as '... a collection of people forming a corporate body with permanent existence, recruited on recognized principles' (my emphasis). We may therefore assume that an element of recruitment was present, and that the two groups were likely to have 'shot among each other's doves'. The Jews, as far as Stark (1986:314,320) is concerned, were, despite the gentile mission, still the major source of Christian converts until as late as the fourth century. We, however, have to realize that recruitment never was the *source* (or cause) of conflict. It would merely have *intensified* the existing conflict.

2.3.2 The conflict from the side of the Matthean community

In the process of the conflict the Jewish leadership emerged as the controlling body in Matthew's setting. Their (the Matthean community's) experience and perception of themselves as a minority group, being the 'underdogs', grew. They felt persecuted and constituted the minority in their competition with formative Judaism. As Overman (1990:147, see also 154, 160) says, 'The strong emotions and the sweeping manner in which the Jewish leadership is attacked and rejected by Matthew suggest a current and hotly contested struggle which the Matthean community seems to be losing. Matthew's accusatory language and name-calling indicate the position of power the Jewish leader-

ship holds as well as the status of the Matthean community as *minority or underdogs* in this struggle' (my emphasis). This view is confirmed by Saldarini (1991:49-50), White (1991:241) and Stanton (1992a:167; 1992b:386). Matthew describes the real and threatening competition they had with this dominant group throughout the Gospel, beginning in chapters 8 and 9 (Mt 9:34), and in chapter 23 particular. These reactions are the response of a community struggling to survive, and is an answer to the competition and the conflict they experienced. They were in response to a threat that the community faced, namely formative Judaism, which was developing and gaining the upper hand in the Matthean setting (see also White 1991:241). The conflict between the community of Matthew and formative Judaism forced the community to redefine their own identity. 'In their competition with one another they were forced to develop and change' (Overman 1990:161). This new emerging (from the parent body) identity is confirmed by the view that social conflict always causes change on a wide variety of levels, especially on the ideological level. The conflict caused the community to accept new values and ideologies.

Because the community experienced itself to be 'marginalized', it could easily identify with the truly 'marginalized'. Through this it could give itself the identity of a group taking up the interests of the underprivileged in order to grow and survive. Its members still identified with Jewish values — in fact, as argued earlier, they still regarded themselves as Jews (and they were Jews). However, they developed new interpretations of their values, because in their community (as in any other community) there remained an urge to legitimize their own position (see below). I agree with Saldarini (1991:57) that, because of the conflict and the resultant differentiation, the members of Matthew's community found their core identity and their 'master status' in being believers-in-Jesus¹¹. 'All other aspects of their Jewish life and world view are filtered through this central commitment which has alienated them from many fellow Jews and coloured all their activities and relationships' (Saldarini 1991:57). All symbols became subordinate to the central symbol of faith: the Christ. The supreme norm for a life well-pleasing to God was no longer the Torah, but Jesus (cf Hare 1967:5).

3. CONCLUSION

The enlarged geographical location suggested by Segal (1991:26) opens up the possibility that the community comprised other (enlarged) non-elite classes. This is confirmed by the concept of *involuntary marginality* put forward by Duling (1993:644). We suggest that the community was a mixed community of not only Jews and Gentiles, but also urban non-elite and rural peasantry (including the unclean, degraded and expendable). There might have been a few members of the upper classes present in the community as well. They are identified as *voluntarily marginalized*.

We prefer a view somewhere between the *intra* and *extra muros* position of the community. The community was still part of Judaism, but it was on its way out. It retained its close ties with Judaism, but these were in the process of going out. The community was in the process of being alienated from the Jews. This explains the intense and passionate conflict.

The major opponents depicted in the Gospel of Matthew were the Pharisees. They emerged as the most dominant group in the post A D 70 period. They filled the administrative and political vacuum left by the war. The Pharisees were likely to be the dominant group within formative Judaism that emerged at Jamnia. This *formative Judaism* had a profound influence on the development of the community of Matthew. There was a deliberate attempt to reconcile and unify the different Jewish sects, which was set in motion by Jamnia, and of which Jamnia was the symbol. Matthew should have known this, but he (or at least his community) challenged the legitimacy of Jamnia. Not that the community wanted to divorce themselves from the Jews. They regarded themselves as still being part of Judaism. But, because of their own marginalized position, they found a new 'master status' — that is, believing in Jesus (who became the symbol of their position). They thus inevitably differed from the 'parent body'.

From the side of the Pharisees this could be viewed as a challenge to the Jewish values. Any challenge to the attempted unification could have given rise to conflict, as we suggest happened in the society in which Matthew originated. In continuation of Jamnia, the Pharisees emerged as the retainers of the ruling Roman Empire. The Pharisees, in the role of retainers, had to maintain the status quo in deference to the Roman rulers. No form of perceived opposition to the rulers could be tolerated; this would have been met with serious opposition and accusations. They would have been threatened in their role as the retainers by the community of Matthew, because the latter challenged their authority.

It seems likely that the Matthean community acted on behalf of the 'marginalized'; they took on the interests of the 'underdogs' and acted as interest group for the lower classes of society. This is likely because they themselves, in their conflict with the Jewish leadership experienced themselves to be the 'underdogs'. They seemed to have lost ground among the leaders and consequently to the Jews in the era of formative Judaism as well. They still very strongly identified with the values of the Jews, but reinterpreted them to lay more emphasis on justice, mercy and forgiveness (cf Mt 9:13). Because these were also the values of the Pharisees, they challenged the leaders for not 'putting their money where their mouths were'. In this process of rearranging and rethinking they were, in fact, in a process of departing from the Jews. Because they were in the *process of departing*, the conflict between them and the Jewish leaders was very intense and the accusations extremely harsh.

Thus, we can explicate the conflict of interests as follows: the Pharisees represented the interest group which bargained to retain the status quo in their own and in the interests of the ruler and governing classes with which they were in coalition. They had the authority, and it was to remain that way. The community of Matthew represented the interests of the lower classes, under constant threat from the Jewish leaders. They bargained for *change* in terms of values and norms. This was a cause of apparent and inevitable conflict. The Pharisees represented the upper — and the Matthean community the lower — classes. They had no authority, but claimed that they had (cf Mt 1:1). This is how their interests clashed.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ By *domination* we understand the possession of authority — that is, the right to issue authoritative commands. By *subordination* or *subjection* we understand the exclusion from authority, that is the duty to obey authoritative commands (cf Dahrendorf 1959:237).
- ² Along with Rohrbaugh (1993a:394, n 1), by the term 'location' we simply mean a position in a social system shared by a group of people.
- ³ Against his own previous assumption (cf Kingsbury 1988:148) he states that the Matthean community was situated in an urban environment — perhaps Galilee or perhaps more towards the north in Syria but, in any case, *not necessarily Antioch*.
- ⁴ See the works of Harris (1988:10,13,231) and Botha (1992:207) on the literacy levels in ancient societies.
- ⁵ See the works of Lenski (1966), Saldarini (1988a, 1988b), Rohrbaugh (1993a, 1993b), Van Aarde (1993), Van Eck (1993) and Vledder (1994) for a discussion on the social stratification of the early first-century Mediterranean world.
- ⁶ I would rather not see, as Stanton (1992a:131) does, the Gentiles as *replacing* 'those born to the kingdom' — that is, Israel: the Jews, but rather see as an *extension* of Israel to include the Gentiles (cf Van Aarde 1990:259).
- ⁷ I am indeed not the first to link Coser's view and the sharpness of the inner Jewish conflict. Both Dunn (1988:275) and Stanton (1992a:101) have done the same. Overman (1990:160) also refers to this phenomenon.
- ⁸ See Neusner (1982:73-74; 1987:250) and Schwartz (1883:170), who doubt that the Pharisees had a political and administrative role. They dismiss it as mere post A D 70 propaganda.

⁹ Dahrendorf postulated two distinct, conflicting orientations of (latent) interests in any 'imperatively coordinated association': those who dominate (have authority) and those who are subordinate (have no authority). He uses the term 'association' in such a way as to imply willingly the coordination of organized aggregates of roles by domination and subjection (cf Dahrendorf 1959:168). 'The aggregates of incumbents with identical role interests are at best a potential group' (Dahrendorf 1959:180). In their position of domination or subordination, they may have latent interests, but are not necessarily organized into groups as yet. They are at best a potential group. This potential group, with certain common latent interests, Dahrendorf calls a *quasi-group*. Not all collectivities or aggregates form groups. Groups are masses of people in regular contact or communication, possessing a recognizable structure. A group needs a feeling of belongingness (consciousness) and a minimum of organization (in order to interact on a regular basis; cf Benkin 1981:151). Ginsberg (cited by Dahrendorf 1959:180) says that there are aggregates or portions of the community which have not recognizable structure, but whose members have certain interests or modes of behaviour in common, which may at any time lead them to form themselves into definite groups. To this category of quasi-groups belong such entities as social classes, which, without being groups, are the recruiting field for groups, and whose members have certain characteristic modes of behaviour in common. Dahrendorf uses the so-called 'peasant class' as an example: by virtue of their situation (being in a subordinate position), their conditions of existence, their way of life and their (latent) interests, they constitute a quasi-group rather than a class, for they have a common identity and interest, but lack the organization to regard themselves as a group. They remain recruiting ground for those *interest groups* who organize themselves among the ranks of these aggregates, on behalf of these aggregates or quasi-groups (cf Dahrendorf 1959:180, 182).

¹⁰ *Interest groups*, says Dahrendorf (1959:180), are groups in the strict sense of the sociological term. They are the real agents of the group conflict. They have a structure, a form of organization, a programme or goal, and a personnel of members. They are in regular contact or in communication, although this is often secondary. The members have contact with each other by virtue of their membership or by way of their elected or appointed representatives.

¹¹ Footnote 58 of Saldarini (1991:57) should by way of explanation also be noted: 'The concept "master status" denotes a primary trait of a person to which all others are subordinate. Though we all occupy multiple social positions, statuses, and roles one may predominate. In a racially stratified society such as the USA, being black is a master status'.

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