

IMPERIALISM, CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND MASCULINITY: POST-COLONIAL INTERPRETATION OF JESUS' ARREST AND TRIAL IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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Abstract

The influence of the great Roman Empire on almost every facet of life in the first century Mediterranean world can hardly be ignored. It comes as no surprise therefore that the gospels, which took shape within this context, reflect the machinations of the empire which guarded, jealously, any attempt to oppose or subvert the military, economic, political and ideological imperium it enjoyed over its colonies. The presence of the governor, military and the Sanhedrin, in the gospel of Matthew, all connive to expose the pervasiveness of the empire under the dual aspects of materiality and ideology. Applying the optics of post-colonial, imperialist hermeneutics on the Matthean unit of Jesus' arrest and trial, this article seeks to show how 1) the imperial machinations of the first Mediterranean world shaped the collective memory of the Matthean Christians; 2) how this collective memory interfaces with the manner in which the same imperium – no matter how hybridised it may be – is kept alive in our day; 3) how the potent mix of the pervasiveness of the Roman Empire and masculinity within which it is entrenched, are prolonged in the modern day Christian society.

Key Words: Post-colonial; Imperium; Masculinity; Mimetics; Roman Empire

Introduction

The influence of the Roman Imperial system on the New Testament books has not gone unnoticed. A sizeable number of New Testament scholars agree that the Roman Imperial system pervades every facet of life of the first century Mediterranean world within which the New Testament writings were born (Carter, 2006; Garland, 1993; Horsley, 2003; Dube, 2000; Winter, 1994; Crossan, 2007; Punt, 2012). They hold that the entire New Testament body of writings reflects the various machinations of the empire in its structural, ideological and religious aspects. As seen by Carter (2006:1), the New Testament's claims regarding "language, structures, personnel and scenes" can only be understood properly within the "ever-present political, economic, societal and religious framework" of the Roman Empire.

At the helm of this imperial structure, which was both hierarchical and masculine, was the emperor. Central to its functioning was the so-called retainer carder, consisting of the military, which used 'coercive diplomacy' (Carter, 2006:5) to exact submission from all and sundry throughout the empire. The ability of the emperor to manipulate with stealth and extreme tact the different components of the structure and to deal with utter ruthlessness – when the situation warranted – any semblance of threat and subversion to his divine powers, were added advantages.

This thesis though is not without its critics. In his article, "Empire and New Testament texts: Theorising the imperial, in subversion and attraction" Jeremy Punt (2012) discusses

reservations that some of these critics have regarding the influence and impact of “Empire on New Testament Texts”. His conclusion, which is quite compelling, is that the perimeters for the discussion on the empire and how it relates to the New Testament texts should be broadened. These arguments and counter-arguments notwithstanding, there is, indeed, a relationship between the empire and the New Testament, which remains unaffected.

The Gospel of Matthew, like the rest of gospel corpus, has been caught up in the web of the *imperium*. Indeed the Gospel of Matthew, in its various parts, reveals, in covert and overt ways, the realities of the empire. With the scholarly scales tilting in the direction of Antioch as its possible place of provenance, the dominance and presence of Roman influence on all those who fell within its purview can hardly be doubted. In the words of Esler (2005:12), the empire was omnipresent in this city at the time that the Gospel was composed. For purposes of this article, it remains convenient to assume the modern scholarly position which attributes authorship of the gospel of Matthew to an anonymous Jewish Christian who worked on and adapted several sources available to him in telling his story. The traditional position which attributes authorship of the gospel to Matthew is implausible given both internal and external evidence¹ (Holladay, 2005:186-187; Elwell & Yarbrough, 2005:78; Nickle, 1981:121).

This article seeks to follow part of the Matthean story that runs the gamut from the arrest of Jesus to his trial. It employs post-colonial imperialist lenses to interpret this section of the story. Though the term post-colony as applied here does not imply the chronology during the period under consideration, the sense of finding space for alternative identities – especially that of Jesus and his group of followers – in spite of the Roman Empire’s effort to exert control over them, politically, economically and ideologically, will be sought (Esler, 2005:11). As it does that it will identify the symbols, the language, the structures and the manipulations of the empire to acquire power, honour and alliances, while underlining its masculine face. Jesus, the central figure, who too is masculine, will be roped in to either corroborate or subvert the dominant masculinity in the world of Matthew.

Encounters, Swords, Kisses and Flights (Matthew 26:47-56)

The setting of this section of the Gospel is the garden of Gethsemane, to where Jesus and his disciples had briefly retreated. It also becomes the setting for Jesus’ various encounters with Judas and a great crowd and of his eventual arrest. Jesus had on three occasions, begged his disciples to watch with him as he went out to pray (Mt. 26:38-45). On all these occasions his disciples could not resist the temptation and gave in to sleep. The Gethsemane prayer episode concludes with an imperative that summons the disciples to rise and go. Gundry (1994:535) is correct that this command to rise and go serves as a transition that connects the approaching hour of the betrayal of the Son of man into the hands of sinners and the coming of Judas which interrupts Jesus’ address to his disciples (Mt. 26:47).

The mention of Judas and the fact that he is one of the twelve, sent by the chief priests and the leaders, reminds us of an earlier encounter with the chief priests in Matthew 26:14-16. The use of the term *παραδίδομαι* (Mt. 26:15, 16, 45, 48), in its different forms, in these

¹ Some of the reasons advanced in support of the implausibility of Matthew as author are the following:

- 1) Matthew nowhere claims to be the author.
- 2) The gospel reflects a later period in church history.
- 3) The gospel uses [mentions?] Mark who was a non-apostle.
- 4) The gospel lacks the feel of an eyewitness.

All of the above, taken together seem to discount Matthew as the author of the gospel.

cases suggests that Judas is going to play a critical role in the hour of Jesus. Various reasons have been advanced to account for the meaning of Judas' act of betrayal. Machingura (2012:213-216) discusses at length the plethora of questions and opinion around Judas' action. While the debates that ensue excite very interesting insights, it is beyond the scope of this article to pursue them. Suffice to say that history has succeeded to paint Judas as, predominantly, the "most odious of traitors" (Guardini, 1954:348) after whom no child can be named. For purposes of this article, the interest is on the place and meaning of Judas' act of betrayal from a post-colonial context, particularly the traces of mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity as post-colonial features and their consequences in the ensuing relationship between Jesus' circle of disciples and the reigning Roman Empire.

Judas' introduction as one of the twelve puts him within an inner circle of Jesus' movement which grew out of an urban – rural relationship that was necessitated and shaped by the imperial and economic dynamics of the time (Crossley, 2006:73). His mention alongside a great crowd with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people is suggestive of his association with this group, clearly aligned to Rome. This association further renders conspicuous an earlier reference to an unidentified betrayer, who is clearly Judas, in Matthew 26:46. Matthew's mention of Judas as both betrayer and one of the twelve, places him in an ambiguous position. He becomes a *tertium quid* or in post-colonial language, a hybrid, thus becoming an embodiment of both attraction and repulsion.

Judas' original identification with Jesus' inner circle of disciples places him closer to, if not inside the economic and political trappings of the Roman Empire. If, as it would seem, he belonged to a non-elite class of mendicant disciples who made a living from their occasional fishing expeditions, he was a peasant and therefore a member of the majority in terms of numbers and the minority in terms of benefits that accrue from the work done on the land (Carter, 2006:3). Judas was, like the rest of peasantry, destined to the seamy underside of an oppressive and exploitative system and therefore vulnerable to the machinations of patronage and beneficence. He, and others of his group, did not return imperial support in kind but through loyalty and change of allegiances. It does not come as a surprise that he fell prey to the common pecuniary snares of the *imperium*. It will be recalled that Judas had earlier in Matthew 26:14-15 offered to hand over Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. The chief priests had paid Judas the thirty pieces of silver and it is now time for Judas to fulfill his part of deal.

Sent from the chief priests and the elders, Judas arrives, accompanied by a great crowd with swords and clubs (Mt. 26:47-48). Saldarini (1988:160-161) suggests that in the Gospel of Matthew, the chief priests and elders are often identified with Jewish leadership working in cahoots with the retainer class who carried out dirty tasks on their behalf. Neyrey (2003:55) concurs that the retainer class served the governing elite who had both power and wealth. In fact the mention of the term *μαχαίρων* (swords), as Brown (1994:247) observes, leads the reader to think of a military or paramilitary presence. Clearly, and in keeping with the gender stereotypes of the time, one would expect the chief priests, the elders and the crowd holding swords and clubs, to be men as women would hardly be expected to show boldness and aggressiveness in defending societal interests. It did not belong to them to do so. In fact, weapons and harvesting tools belonged to the male world (Malina, 1981:32). The above observations betray the masculine orientation of the show of force, aggression and violence characteristic of the imperial machinations.

The arrival of the cohort led by Judas for Jesus' arrest is punctuated by the seemingly important gesture of a kiss which, as the text suggests, was a prearranged sign for the identification of the culprit. What do we make of this sign? A lot has been proposed

regarding the meaning of Judas' sign of a kiss and his manner of greeting Jesus. For some, it shows the falsity of Judas' commitment to Jesus and his deliberate choice to side with Jesus' enemies (Gundry, 1994:537). For others the link between words χαῖρε, ῥαββί and gesture (*kiss*) points to a pejorative meaning (Stock, 1994:407). These important observations notwithstanding, one cannot fail to underline the possibility of a conspiracy of misrepresentation which is commonplace in interactions between those who dominate and their subordinates (Scott, 1990:2). Judas' familiar greeting which conjures up some normalcy and friendship, but in a hostile environment, points to a cluttered meaning which serves to underscore his (Judas) continual fluctuation between being a disciple and an enemy. It is a relationship that is both mimetic and ambivalent which forces people to have both a double vision and a forked tongue (Bhabha, 1994:88). In the words of the book of Revelation (3:15-16) he is neither cold nor hot and therefore unacceptable within the circle of true disciples. The latter position fits well into the Matthean dualistic schema which, according to Sim (2005:93) "involves a strict division in the cosmic order between the forces of good and evil." In keeping with this schema, Judas' attempt to maintain neutrality renders his schemes untenable and unconvincing for the one who claims to belong to the kingdom of God. You are either on God's side or on Satan's side. Judas' identification as a betrayer (Mt. 26:48) is a clear indication that he has chosen to side with the enemy, namely the empire. He has not only disregarded Jesus' call to watchfulness and vigilance (Mt. 24-25), he has allowed himself to be led astray and thus deserving of eternal punishment that awaits those who have broken from the ranks of the righteous (Mt. 25:46). In what Girard (1979:145) terms a 'mimetic desire' Judas is caught up in the web of desiring the object after the model of the rival. The desirability of what the empire offers – as compared to what God's Kingdom offers in Judas' mind – has become so irresistible that Judas can only go after something he lacks which his rival seems to possess (Girard, 1979:146).

The combination of two expressions, ἐπέβαλον τὰς χεῖρας (laid hands upon him) and ἐκράτησαν αὐτόν (seized him) (Mt. 26:50) suggests that this could not have been a friendly encounter implied by Judas' address to Jesus as ῥαββί and the corresponding address to Judas as friend. Jesus' rhetorical question, "why are you here?" lays bare the intentions of Judas and further exposes his pretence of friendship to Jesus and the kingdom he represents. The laying of hands upon and seizing Jesus are a further indication of the show of force that is common of the soldiers and those allied with them "who carry out their brutal work with extreme arrogance and cruelty" (Sim, 1993:404). The reaction of one of those with Jesus – who drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear – is a further indication of the hostile confrontation that ensued in Jesus' arrest.

Arrest is an expression of coercion that leads to prison. It plays a part in achieving docility through some form of violence and to discourage participation in acts of resistance. Prison has been defined by Foucault (1977:232) as a form of punishment that seeks to produce docile and capable bodies by coercion. Both prison and its verbal expression, to arrest, connive to achieve the aims of the coloniser. By arresting Jesus through the use of one of his own, the *imperium* seeks to produce docile bodies that would occupy their proper place in the arena of power relations. However, Jesus' reaction to a show of force by one of those who were with him, points not only to Jesus' attitude and principle of non-retaliation (Mt. 5:38-42), but it also achieves what one would describe as transforming a body into a site of power from which to confront the power of authority.

Jesus' imperative to the man with a sword, to put his sword back into its place, is consonant with Jesus' attitude of non-violence captured well in his words, "do not resist one who is evil." (Mt. 5:39). The interpretation proposed by Wink (2003:10-11) seems to fit

well within the context of Matthew's series of teachings on a number of issues (Mt. 5:17-6:18) where Jesus proposes a new and different way of doing things. Wink suggests that the proper translation of Jesus' words in Matthew 5:39 should be "do not strike back at one who has done you evil" (Wink, 2003:11). The term ἀντιστῆναι (resist not) here has the sense of not retaliating. Through the adoption of this non-violent attitude Jesus subverts the common tendency of the time; that of meeting fire with fire. He throws evil back to the opponent and thus forces the oppressor to see him in a new light (Wink, 2003:32). In this way Matthew passes judgment on the empire and all those who collaborate with it. Jesus represents God's kingdom which operates with a different set of standards. He successfully resists the empire's attempt to colonise him personally and ideologically. But for the empire and its local allies Jesus must have been a thorn in the flesh as he led a group whose identity and ideological leanings were clearly not consonant with those of the empire.

Unfortunately, the disciples have fallen prey to the temptation of the values by which the empire operates. Not only have they slept (Mt. 26:40-45), they have also followed Jesus from afar (Mt. 26:58), displayed utter temerity (Mt. 26:69), lied (Mt. 26:70), and cursed (Mt. 26:74). All of these have to be read against the commitment that Peter made earlier in Matthew 26:33-35. Peter's word of commitment made publicly in the preceding verses should be equated with oath making. His failure, therefore, to be faithful to the oath made publicly is a dishonour on the part of Peter. In the game of challenge and riposte Peter, and by extension the disciples, have been called upon to respond to the commitment they made freely. Within the context of the contest of challenge and riposte, public opinion would judge them as dishonourable for failing to submit to an oath made (Malina, 1981:37).

The flight of all the disciples in Matthew 26:56, which seems to be a culmination of their failure to stand by Jesus, closes the curtain on them and declares them as defectors, who have chosen to submit to the values of the empire as opposed to the standards of God. In this representation God cannot be a copy of the emperor. On the contrary, it is the empire that should be converted to God's ways. The Matthean church is therefore warned and urged to remain steadfast to the determinations of God's kingdom. Jesus' intention from the word go has been to gather a group of disciples around him in order to entrench his new way of being and behaving which would facilitate an emergence of a new identity in a different empire. It would be a group expected to depart materially and ideologically from the Roman Empire's expectations. Instead they submitted to the demands of the empire. As it is often the case where colonisers meet the colonised, ambiguity and ambivalence are usually to be expected as a result of the reciprocal influence that usually occurs. It is therefore not surprising that, under such circumstances, signs of hybridity emerge.

Power, Mimetics, Alliances and Rome: Empire's Instruments or God's?

The empire has succeeded to pit the disciples against the master. The leaders of the people had long conspired to have Jesus destroyed (Mt. 12:14). Jesus' disciples on the other hand have been called upon to remain steadfast and committed to his cause (Mt. 26:36-46). Unfortunately, their performance has not been commendable. Their flight becomes the climax of the series of failures on their part. From the point of view of honour and shame, they have not managed to live up to the public demands of honour required of males to aggressively defend and protect their reputation and that of their group of disciples (Malina, 1981:42-43). In the process they have become ambivalent subjects who are split between their earlier appearance as original and authoritative representatives of God's kingdom and their articulation as repetition of the empire embodied in those who came to arrest Jesus

(Samuel, 2002:50). This situation begs a question: Are they God's instruments or the empire's?

Jesus' arrest, which has landed him into the high priest's chambers, is a step in the direction of Jesus' sentencing. According to Neyrey (1996:119-120), the arrest constitutes the first element in the formal forensic process. While this may not have been a Roman trial in the strict sense of the word, alliances between members of the Sanhedrin and Rome underlines the pervasiveness of the imperial power even in juridical matters. Peter's following of Jesus at a distance is put side by side with the session of the Sanhedrin as if to remind us of an earlier declaration in Matthew 26:32-35. The Peter that we now see is a shadow of the Peter we have met earlier in the chapter. He chose to sit among the guards, who were the officials of the empire as if to say, "I am better off and at home among the imperial officials than with the master." Peter was an impulsive character (Mt. 16:16), always the first in self-committing but he is the first to break down among Jesus' most trusted disciples. He is seemingly given more responsibility (Mt. 16:19). They were a group with clear boundaries regarding rituals and traditions. Peter had made commitments to the cause of what this group stood for in word and deed (Mt. 26:35). His failure, however, to stay within the boundaries of discipleship seems to suggest that the mimetic desire for the empire – in Peter's reckoning – prevails over what God's Kingdom promises at this stage. This is what Anderson (1991:91) calls 'mental miscegenation' resulting from the intercourse between God's Kingdom and the imperial world view.

Matthew 26:57 not only introduces new characters namely, Caiaphas, the high priest as well as the scribes and the elders, it also connects this episode (Mt. 26:57-68) to the preceding one. Note the use of the adversative $\delta\epsilon$. This newly introduced group is identified later on (v. 59) as the Sanhedrin. Jeremias (1969:74) describes the Sanhedrin as the highest authority and the highest Jewish court of Law in the whole of Judaea. Intuitively, a contemporary reader would want to interrogate an association between the alleged criminal and the high priest. With the Judaeian occupation by the Romans, the Sanhedrin became the latter's political agent with their interests well secured in it. The mention of Caiaphas as the high priest to whom Jesus was led underlines the balance of power tilting in the direction of Rome. It will be recalled that Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas who was appointed high priest by the Roman governor (Fitzmyer, 1970:458). He was therefore an ally of the governor. The distant emperor extended his authority and power through alliances made with the Roman elite. With Caiaphas, as Annas' son-in-law, being one among those who succeeded Annas, associations and alliances with the empire cannot be missed. The implied author, through these associations, would like us to keep the empire within our purview as we read the text. Brown (1994:434) says about the Sanhedrin:

In a Sanhedrin where the high priests (present and past) were Roman appointees, and these were combined with aristocrats and scribes, there was surely an admixture of insincerity, self-protective cunning, honest religious devotion, conscientious soul-searching, and fanaticism.

With Jesus hauled before the Sanhedrin one can therefore expect a drama of connivance of people and ideologies. The trial becomes an occasion for a public challenge to honour as well as a snare for Jesus to overstep the boundaries of his gender, status and ideological representation. The charges that are brought against Jesus are not so much about what he said and its meaning alone but also about who he is and represents. This becomes a tug of war between the faces of the empire and its pervasiveness on one side and Jesus, his followers and what they represent, on the other. It is also a contest of two males squaring up against each other in a challenge – riposte contest.

That Jesus was seized and led to Caiaphas points to the clear intention to humiliate and degrade him. This particularly Jewish leadership dimension of the empire, the Sanhedrin, is characterised by deceptiveness and spuriousness. The high priest, working in cahoots with the Sanhedrin, is bringing false testimony against Jesus. (Mt. 26:59, 60). Jesus, on the other side, is presented as having no further energy to expend on the belaboured issues, particularly the false and malicious charges. The stakes are very high on both sides of the challenge and riposte contest. Jesus' performance, in the face of the trial that was meant to humiliate and degrade him, seems to surpass that of his accusers who, from the flow of the text, can only be remembered for their concocted testimonies. His silence in the face of questions that were directed against him functions to tilt the scales in his favour in the contest between him and the Sanhedrin. In a contest of challenge and riposte which seems to undergird the exchange between Jesus and the high priest, the latter is hurling questions that were meant to destroy Jesus' reputation and eventually to dishonour him. Jesus' ability to be silent and to respond at will, even under oath, suggests that he is in control of the situation and therefore more powerful than his accuser. This becomes a clear reflection of his possession of honour deserving therefore of the title the Christ, the Son of God. According to the gender stereotypes of the time, this type of honour which was taking place in a public-civic sphere was tied to masculinity so valued as to be won and kept (Gilmore, 1990:224). The humiliating acts (spitting in his face, striking and slapping him) meted out against Jesus by his opponents were meant to bully him into submission and eventually take away honour from him. The endurance of all this functions to position Jesus at the most honourable of places, and that is at the right hand of power. His silence and endurance belong to the virtue of men who had to display courage in enduring what must be endured. Neyrey (1996:2) has this to say on the above:

For among the warrior elite, at least, the endurance of pain and suffering were marks of *andreia* or manly courage (e.g. Hercules' labours; Paul's hardship catalogues: e.g. 2 Cor. 6:3-10; 11:23-33). Silence by the victim during torture was a mark of honour (see Isa 53:7; Cicero, *In Verrem*, 2.5.162; Josephus, *War* 6.304). Mockery, loss of respect, and humiliation were the bitter parts; the loss of honour, the worst fate. Although the gospels record in varying degrees the physical torture of Jesus, they focus on the various attempts to dishonour him by spitting on him (Mark 14:65//Mt. 26:67; see Mark 10:33-34), striking him in the face and head (Mark 14:65//Mt. 26:67), ridiculing him (*empaizō*: Mark 15:20, 31; Mt. 27:29, 31, 41), heaping insults upon him (*oneidizō*: Mark 15:32, 34; Mt. 27:44), and treating him as though he were nothing (*exouthenein*, Luke 23:11; see Acts 4:11).

By his attitude and actions or non-actions Jesus manages to subvert the popular imperial attitude of the time. He stubbornly refuses to be colonised by and into the ideologies of the empire. He remains fixed within the boundaries of the kingdom of God. Indeed, the kingdom that he represents does not subscribe to the aggression, brutality and show of force that was typical of the Roman Empire. Jesus has conducted himself well in this first part in the series of forensic proceedings. Regarding his identity, he is unambiguous in his answer to the Jewish leaders. It remains to be seen whether or not Peter, who vowed not to deny Jesus, will conduct himself equally well.

Peter, Maids, Denials and Cock

Peter's trial is sandwiched between the two scenes of Jesus' trial before the leaders as if to say that whatever he does should be measured against what takes place in the two bracketing scenes. What should be recalled about Peter, from the preceding episode, is that

he had been following Jesus from a distance until inside the courtyard of the high priest where he camped with the guards. One would do well also to recall that Peter is the one who confessed Jesus as the Messiah (Mt. 16:16), who also promised not to deny Jesus (Mt. 26:35), who followed Jesus from a distance (Mt. 26:58) and who simply disappears into thin air inside the courtyard as Jesus conducts himself with the magnanimity of a true masculine man before the Roman allies (Mt. 26:59-68). Will Peter, this time around, conduct himself any better? Will he be man enough? Will he resist the temptation of the mimetic desire or will he succumb to it?

The scene begins with the adversative $\delta\epsilon$ as if to contrast the performance of Jesus inside the *aule* of the high priest and that of Peter who is depicted as sitting outside. Peter's first encounter is with a maid, who confronts him with a statement about his belonging to a group of those who were with Jesus. The obvious meaning of the maid's words is that Peter was in the company of Jesus. The hidden meaning, which becomes apparent in the light of Peter's second denial which is accompanied by an oath, paints Peter as one who infringes upon God's majesty. Peter's refusal of the statement made by the second witness labels him as someone who cannot be trusted (Stock, 1994:413). The fact that this was the second witness whose statement Peter denies casts doubt on his reliability as a disciple of Jesus. The maid's statements, to the effect that Peter was with Jesus, demands to ascertain whether or not Peter knows Jesus (Mt. 15:19-20; 7:21), does the will of his Father or learns from Jesus (Mt. 13:51; 15:10; 15:16). Peter's responses and denials of association with Jesus or the kingdom cast doubt on his reliability and are a pointer to his betrayal of the cause of discipleship. He has failed to give account of himself as a disciple of Jesus to represent the kingdom to which he belongs. First it was Judas who sold out, then *all* the disciples who forsook him and fled (Mt. 26:56) and now Peter – who despite promises of never falling away (Mt. 26:33) – is terrorised by the maids into denying Jesus.

Usage of the verb, $\pi\rho\sigma\eta\lambda\theta\epsilon\nu$ (Mt. 26:69) is quite common in Matthew to underline people's movement toward Jesus (Brown, 1994:598). The first maid's movement to Peter, as if to Jesus, heightens the reader's expectation of a figure that is supposed to be honest, after the example of Jesus, but who unfortunately performs below par. The gender implications of these confrontations and of Peter's conduct and how they connive to underline the intensity of Peter's failure, should not be missed. Peter's third and last denial of Jesus, which is accompanied by the invocation of a curse upon himself and swearing (Mt. 26:74a) makes more sense if it is read against Matthew 26:33 where Peter made a declaration of never falling away. The immediate cockcrow in Matthew 26:74b following upon Peter's last denial, harks back to Matthew 26:34 where Jesus prophesied about the cockcrow and denial. It serves to remind Peter of the prophecy of Jesus which was put side by side with his commitment to the cause of Jesus and of God's kingdom (Mt. 26:33-35). Jesus' prediction and not that of Peter has proved to be true (Brown, 1994:608). This explains Peter's reaction of going out and weeping bitterly. He could not face up to the prophecy of Jesus about what they (disciples) undertook to do (Mt. 26:35) and of his (Peter) stern and oath-like promises made to Jesus (Mt. 26:33-34).

The tantalising presence of the empire seems to overshadow the promises of the kingdom. Its intimidating nature has, as Dube (2000:50) puts it, instigated internal strife within and among the colonised who are gradually falling away as Jesus remains on his own to confront the empire. Peter, too, has overstepped the boundaries of true discipleship and has in the process become a *tertium quid*, a hybrid. Being the most vocal and the most daring of the group (Mt. 26:33-35), Peter has failed to live up to the honour that goes with the demands of the status that he appropriated to himself, when it was critical for him to do

so. While Jesus remained true to his reputation and the Kingdom which he represents, Peter on the other hand seems to be caught up within the web of the imperial stealth and power. He has chosen to become ambiguous when it mattered most. Peter conceals his identity (Samuel 2002:238). He has sided with the empire against Jesus.

Within the Matthean dualistic framework there is always a strict separation between two opposing forces engaged in a fierce battle for supremacy (Sim, 2005:93). In this schema humans have no choice but to identify with either good or evil; righteous or unrighteous; faithful or unfaithful; God's or the devil's. If Peter has clearly and publicly denounced Jesus, he has no doubt, identified with Satan. He stood trial and according to Matthew's perspective, did not acquit himself well. Instead he has allowed himself to be colonised by the enemy. He has denounced Jesus personally and ideologically. While Jesus has been vindicated, Peter has been condemned by the cock (Samuel, 2002:239). In fact the mockery of Jesus in the Jewish court revolves around his messianic and prophetic identity (Mt. 26:68). The cockcrow, concerning Peter, serves to remove any doubts regarding Jesus' identity as the Messiah and his ability to prophesy while exposing the inability of Peter to stand the test regarding his identity as well as standing by his word. Though Peter's bitter crying has been interpreted, in certain circles (Brown, 1994:608; Stock, 1994:414), as a sign of despair resulting from total failure on his part, Matthew 12:32 has forewarned us that not all is lost as the possibility of forgiveness exists even for speaking against the Son of Man (Brown, 1994:608). From this episode Peter has emerged scathed. He is neither a disciple of Jesus nor is he fully part of the empire. He fits neither of the structures. He is a Black skin and a white mask. As Fanon (1967:xiii) would have put it, the disciple has come into contact with the empire and thus defined his discipleship in relation to the empire. He/she has internalised his/her inferiority. Their ego has collapsed and their self-esteem has evaporated.

Jesus, the Empire and God's Kingdom

It is not over yet with Jesus. Following upon the mocking episode and the decision to put Jesus to death, the Jewish aristocracy did three things: bound him, led him away and delivered him to Pilate. The binding of Jesus is obviously meant to create an impression that Jesus is not only a criminal but a dangerous one (Brown, 1994:634). Only Matthew adds the qualifier, ἡγεμόνι (governor) to Pilate, a term that is used a number of other times in the gospel (Mt. 27:11, 15, 27; 28:14). Judas has delivered Jesus (Mt. 26:48) to the chief priests who in turn deliver Jesus to Pilate (27:2) for obvious reasons that Pilate, as the governor, has the authority to sentence somebody to death. All of this had been prophesied by Jesus (Mt. 10:17-18) in the ongoing tug of war between God's kingdom and the empire before whom they will be dragged. With this prophecy in mind the stage is set for a tussle between the two rulers of the two contrasting empires (Carter, 2001:159).

Pilate is the Roman governor responsible for the province of Palestine. Governors were appointees of Rome, as per its strategy, to ensure that its interests are secured and loyalty by its subjects is assured. As mentioned earlier, the appointment of chief priests by Rome, as was the case with Caiaphas, was part of its strategy for social control and consolidation of their grip on power (Carter, 2001:148-149). The bringing together of these two cadres, chief priests and elders, (Mt. 27:1-2) is meant to evoke the presence and the power of the empire and of the consolidation of its social, economic and juridical power base in the province of Palestine. The Roman Empire considered it as part of its divine mission to conquer and to impose its will and laws on the conquered territories. Pilate and Caiaphas as its appointees, respectively, were bound to each other to ensure that their interests and those of

the empire were secured (Carter, 2006:38). Part of the Jewish religious body, the Pharisees, has been all out to eliminate Jesus (Mt. 12:14; 22:15). Their enlisting of the services of the Herodians (Mt. 22:16-17) in entangling him, is a strategic alliance. The Pharisees are creating a common enemy which they will have no choice except to gang up against in achieving what they want. These, as Dube (2000:50) observes, are “elites and leaders whose positions of power make them vulnerable to collaboration”. The net effect of this collaboration is the internal strife which they have managed to sow within Jesus’ circle of discipleship in order to tear it apart. Now through one of their own, Judas, they have entered, or penetrated the group with the aim of doing away with their leader and taking control of the entire group.

In the ensuing trial, the alliance between the Jewish leaders, who are now handing over Jesus, and Pilate is assumed. One can already sense that what Carter (2001:145) calls “Roman Justice all washed up” is in the offing. The Religious leaders have concocted accusations against Jesus in order to put him to death. Only Pilate – within the provincial structure of Palestine – has the legal prerogative to sentence somebody to death (Carter, 2006:38). Because this is what the Religious leaders demanded, and only Pilate had the powers to give what they demanded, the nature of their relationship with Pilate was critical. The nature of the alliance between the Jewish leaders and Pilate which ensures that Jesus is guilty before proven guilty is played out well by interpolating Judas’ death scene (Mt. 27:3-10) between Jesus being handed over to Pilate (Mt. 27:1-2) and the beginning of the trial before Pilate (Mt. 27:11). Judas, who is presented as ‘the hander-over’, seems to have made up his mind that Jesus is already condemned even before he could appear before the governor. The alliance between the two parties, serving the interests of the empire, is thicker than justice. One can already conclude, on the basis of the narrative flow, that Jesus’ death is as good as sealed not because he is guilty but because ‘their interests’ are served by his death.

Judas, by accepting the pieces of silver in exchange for Jesus, which he now brings back, has fallen prey to the colonising tendencies of the empire. The money that was used had on it the symbol of Caesar and to use the monetary symbol meant acknowledgement of the empire’s sovereignty. Judas, as it were, has bowed down to the pressures of the empire and has begun to mimic the empire in its operations. Now in both Peter and Judas the boundaries are blurred. They are both materially and ideologically ambiguous. Their attraction to the imperial exploits has given rise to a Peter and Judas who are neither fully in the Jesus’ circle nor in the imperial fold. In fact the rejection of the pieces of silver brought back by Judas and the words, *ὁ ἑαυτοῦ* “See to it yourself”, is a clear reflection of Judas’ ambiguity. As it is common with all imperial operations, Judas has been made to serve the purpose for which he was wanted. Now, both Judas and the money which was paid to him, have played their role and they cannot, anymore, be part of the empire. They are associated with strangeness and foreignness, and foreignness has features of ambiguity and ambivalence. The pieces of silver do not anymore enjoy participation in the treasury because they are now the ‘other’ and the different. Judas, too, has become the ‘other’ in which the empire can look at itself as in a mirror and say “this is what my victims look like when they have fallen prey to my power and might.”

While Pilate and his allies appear to be having the upper hand in the case and in the eventual conviction of Jesus, the reader knows that this is a trial between two empires. Against voices that depoliticise Pilate’s first question to Jesus (Mt. 27:11), my contention is that this is a politically charged question. The reader knows that Jesus, given the words of the Wise men from the East, has already been suspected of a claim to Herod’s throne (Mt.

2:2-6). Given the jealousy with which Rome guarded against any imperial or royal pretensions there was no way Pilate could not have felt threatened by Jesus' manner of response to his question. If he felt no threat to his power base, at least he had to be careful how Rome would interpret it. As Carter (2006:39) puts it, "to claim to be 'king of the Jews' without Rome's assent is to pose a political threat and to be guilty of treason." Josephus (Ant. 17.273-276) bears testimony to the ruthlessness with which Rome dealt with whoever they perceived to be a threat to their superiority.

Unlike his disciples who displayed all manner of ambivalence regarding their identity, Jesus is unfazed and quite resolute in his answers despite the violence that they provoke. This show of character on the side of Jesus portrays him as honourable, honest and conscientious. Pilate on the other side appears to be a cunning and seasoned schemer who uses Barabbas as bait to test the strength of Jesus' support. The governor has lamented the dearth of facts and underlined the envy-driven intentions for Jesus' death. With the crowds demanding the release of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus, Pilate seems to have skilfully placed the entire blame on the crowds. The narrator wittingly brings in Pilate's wife who asserts Jesus' righteousness and firm commitment to God's kingdom while further exposing Pilate's shrewdness. When at the end Pilate releases Barabbas and hands Jesus over to be executed, the reader knows well enough that his judgment is cooked up and that the Roman justice he represents "is administered by the elite for the elite's benefit" (Carter, 2001:167). As one of the military's tactics used to counter the adversary's operations (Letwoski, 2012:5) stealth permeated the entire empire structures which depended on the army for its survival. It expresses itself in different ways in the above episode. Roman Empire's prerogative to appoint governors and later on Chief priests was a strategy to rule by proxy in order to exert control and influence over subjects. Enlisting the Herodians to support the cause of the Sanhedrin was a common strategy and snare employed among competitors. Using bribe, as it was the case with Judas, to infiltrate the enemy for purposes of dividing and conquering, was common with the Roman Empire (Posner *et al.*, 2009:1).

Jesus further represents a kingdom that is diametrically opposed to Pilate's. It is a kingdom characterised by non-violence (Mt. 5:38-41), advocating the sharing of resources (Mt. 5:42). It proffers service to all indiscriminately (Mt. 20:28) and wins the hearts of others through deferential and modest ways (Mt. 11:28-30; 21:5). The Roman Empire, on the other hand, is characterised by unjust and inequitable distribution of resources almost always extorted from the oppressed peasants (Mt. 17:25). It is notorious for lording it over others (Mt. 20:25-26) and dominating through military subjugation.

There is obviously a collision of perspectives regarding the nature of the empires, their operations as well as the identity of their representatives. I concur with Carter (2001:160) that Jesus presents "claims that not only differ profoundly from those of Rome, the dominant power, but claims that contest and challenge Rome's declarations." The imperial reading of the scene of Jesus' arrest and trial has not only exposed the pervasiveness and the workings of the empire, it has also displayed the gender bias towards males common in the Gospel of Matthew. Anderson and Moore (2003:71) state in no uncertain terms – with which I concur – that Matthew's gospel is clearly andro-centric. Throughout the scene of Jesus' arrest and trial there are more men acting out their masculinity against each other. While, within Jesus' circle, Judas and Peter fail to imitate Jesus and therefore lose the honour they acquired through associating with Jesus, Jesus stays on course and becomes a male *par excellence* who subverts the gender stereotype of the time by setting the new standard of non-violence, meekness and humility to characterise masculinity. Unlike the Jewish leaders, and their ally Pilate, who have sought to live up to the demands of their

empire through stealth and deceit, Jesus has sought honour by making claims of a higher order and defending them. By standing the entire trial in its rigors and agonies, Jesus willingly submitted himself to public scrutiny and conducted his defence with impeccable honour and dignity.

Potent Mix of Imperialism, Christian Identity and Masculinity in Modern Day Society

Though the text of Matthew was written some two thousand years ago it carries the same – perhaps with much nuanced rancour – imperialist and masculine trait which has implications for the contemporary Christian Church of our day. Jesus’ coming onto the stage during the time of the Roman Empire was an occasion for disquiet to an entity that tolerated no competition whatsoever. His organisation of a mendicant group around him was a source of great discomfort for both the Jewish leaders, who sought to consolidate people’s belief in the One God, as well as the Roman Empire which jealously guarded against any opposition to the empire’s superiority and hegemony. The latter’s right to have power over the entire world was viewed as divinely ordained (Carter, 2006:2). It therefore fell within the purview of its divine responsibility to brutally protect and defend the empire and all its subjects against any semblance of opposition to its claims. Jesus on the other hand claimed entitlement to a Kingdom whose author was God.

Issues gleaned from our post-colonial imperialist reading of Jesus’ arrest and trial above, are identified and related to the Christian churches’ journeys of engagement with itself and the modern empires. Firstly the issue of the two empires and their varied operations and ideological orientations, raised in our discussion above, has pertinence to the most vexing and perennial problem of Church – State relations that continues to irk the minds of ministers of religion, politicians and academics (Namwera *et al.*, 1990; Katongole & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2009). Secondly, identity politics remain central to discussions on social, religious and gender politics today. It would be remiss of us if we were to miss such a glaring issue in both Peter’s and Jesus trials. Thirdly, Jesus’ subversion of masculinities that were tied to the operations of the empire and its allies has a bearing on issues around gender in general and hegemonic masculinities in particular which continue to dominate debates in churches, politics and the academia.

Two Empires and Church – State Dynamic

The interaction between the two empires has engendered a historical dynamic which, shaped by circumstances of time and place, has led to two main trajectories on church – state relationship in our modern world. The first sees both the church and state as separate entities, always in tension against each other. Churches associated with this trajectory tend to dissociate themselves from state politics or anything that is associated with governance. The extreme form of this trajectory has seen the church detached from the trappings of everyday life and adopting the literal interpretation of the beatitudes where people resign themselves to the world to do with them as it pleases with the hope of being rewarded in the next world (Kasomo & Naila, 2013). The second trajectory sees both church and state as two expressions of God in action in the world, with each playing its role while collaborating in development and reconstruction initiatives. This model of church-state relations has been popularised as a prophetic model or critical engagement. Kretzchmar (2012:139) describes it as churches’ “active interaction with state without losing their independence of mind or action.” The thrust of this trajectory lies in the Biblical prophetic tradition with its

concern against injustice, oppression and dehumanisation of the most vulnerable in society (Leshota, 2017:214).

While the debates regarding the political or apolitical nature of Jesus' ministry will continue to divide the Christian churches, what cannot be contested is that Jewish leaders' accusations against Jesus – trumped-up or not – are of a political nature. He was condemned to death not because he represented a Kingdom that had absolutely nothing to do with the empire but because he represented a Kingdom that was seen to be posing a threat of a political nature to the empire. Pilate's question to Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" encapsulates challenge, threat and conflict (Carter, 2001:161). Its answer in the positive, explicitly and implicitly, borders on sedition which is a political crime.

However, having followed Jesus' interactions with people and leaders throughout the Gospel of Matthew, it is clear that Jesus was not interested in contesting or laying claim to the imperial throne. He claimed no political power for himself (Magesa, 1990:78). He represented an empire that confronted and censured the Roman Empire for stealth on exploitation and oppression of the people. Jesus did not shy away from mixing with people from all walks of life and engaging them on issues of a varied nature. In this way Jesus was setting himself both materially, ideologically and in terms of his identity, as a paradigm for his followers to embrace the way of "inclusiveness not elite privilege, mercy not force, service not domination, wholeness not deprivation" (Carter, 2001:161).

I tend to agree with Kasomo and Naila (2013:11) that church and politics are inseparable. It "is not anymore whether the churches should be involved in politics but how and to what extent the church can contribute to democratic politics without losing sight of its mission, vision and credibility." The person to whom the Good news of the Kingdom was/is preached was/is a body/soul entity. Jesus did not feed or attend to people's needs only spiritually but also bodily, emotionally and socially. Similarly, the church is called to minister to the same person who is immersed in social, economic and political contexts (Shongwe, 2018). The church in Africa has to be applauded for making countries better and peaceful places to live in through working with governments in peace-building efforts and pursuing good governance, developmental and democratic programmes. Through their leaders churches have spearheaded a number of commendable projects which eventually turned around the fortunes of their countries. The following examples would suffice to show how the church's involvement mollified volatile political situations: In Togo, Archbishop Kpodzo agreed to serve as a speaker of a transitional parliament, on a temporary basis in 1992; Bishop Diggs of the Lutheran Church of Liberia was named to serve as Vice President on an interim basis in 1990; Archbishop Tutu was named Chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation commission in South Africa; Professor Waliggo was chosen to head the Uganda Human Rights Commission. When, in Matthew's purview, the Kingdom of God has permeated the entire fabric of the society then peace, justice and love reign supreme.

However, in some instances the church has failed to engage states critically in word and deed on issues that fall within its purview either through abdicating its responsibility under the pretext of what is called spiritual realm or fear of defilement or by acting beyond its mandate. The work that the church is called upon to do in the world is not only sensitive, it is also exacting. It is the work that requires discernment as well as reading and re-reading of the signs of times.

Maluleke (2010) cites examples of the South African church being quite involved in its prophetic calling against the evils and injustices of Apartheid. After the 1994 democratic elections the same church officials, who like the prophets of old, were not afraid to speak

with boldness, had now been absorbed into government and were now beginning to prophesy in muddled voices (Maluleke, 2010:154). At the same time the inaction and silence of the church as a result of the benefits accruing from its amorous relationship with government and/or politics, more often than not, rendered the church indifferent to the plight of those who suffered at the hands of state hegemony.

Examples of religious leaders or church leaders acting in this manner abound in Africa. (Chitando & Togarasei, 2010; Kasomo & Naila, 2013; Abbink, 2014; Shongwe, 2017; Leshota, 2017; Makubakube, 2018; Hincks, 2009:587). Their indifference to the plight of the people who suffer because of the dearth of a prophetic voice or their being captured by government machinery conjures up memories of Judas and Peter who found themselves caught up in the operations of the Roman Empire.

Sustainable Christian Identity

The identity miscegenation embodied in Peter's failure to stand up to the maid's identity questions should be a constant reminder to the church and its officials that their identity should be measured up to that of Jesus who remains the paradigm par excellence of a true Christian identity, in word and deed. The Rwandan genocide will forever remain a sad reminder of how not to be a Christian. That stigma will always be associated with a political entity named Rwanda but the fact of the matter is that it is simply a concrete and visible example of what is happening in varied but subtle ways in many countries in Africa and indeed across the entire globe. It is a mirror and an indictment of Christianity in general and how it has been transmitted and embraced particularly in Africa. It was a revelation of ambiguous and fork-tongued discipleship in the rest of Africa. The assertion by one Christian leader in Rwanda that "the blood of tribalism is deeper than the waters of baptism" (Katongole & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2009:22) may sound disturbing particularly when it comes from a religious leader. But the denominational wars in the 16th and 17th century Europe; the War of Independence in Ireland; the bloodshed which engulfed the former Yugoslavia all of which were justified in Christian terms, made it almost impossible for those who identified with these memories and others, to speak the language of forgiveness. But a deeper reflection on all of these experiences will reveal that numerous examples of hardcore tribalism, racism, denominationalism, party politics, classism, able-ism, hegemonic male chauvinism are slowly undermining what Jesus has left us as a lasting commandment of love that surpasses all the '-isms' that characterise our relationships today.

Despite Jesus' commandment of love for one another, Christians have hated to the extent of killing their fellow Christians on account of their different tribe, race, class and party political affiliation. Denominational slandering, in some instances, has been inherited from the missionaries who brought Christianity to Africa and they have been embraced and perfected by the African Christians (Hincks, 2009:240). The best and most faithful churchgoers were also the best executors of religious zealotry. According to Volf (2005), in his conversation with Krista Tippett, these are the nominal Christians who practice 'thin religion' lacking in depth, reducible to a formula or a single gesture and highly manipulable.

Just as Peter disowned Jesus and preferred to identify with the guards, the Christian church through its leaders – in some instances – has located itself within and identified with the dominant stories of the political and economic institutions of our day. In the process it has deprived itself of the latitude to question the dictatorial, corrupt, and oppressive tendencies perpetrated against the marginalised of the African countries. Peter followed

Jesus from a distance and was intimidated by the agents of the empire. His identity became ambiguous. Similarly, the Christian churches and their leaders are often colonised by the operations of the empire. In the process they become hybridised.

The mimetic desire embodied in Judas' subtle temptation to identify with the enticements of the empire are a warning to the increasingly poor African church which has fallen prey to the temptations of the empire masquerading as God's kingdom. The African Church compared to its glorious missionary past is becoming increasingly destitute and dependent on donations from the well-wishers in the West and at home. As a result, its ministers are becoming vulnerable to the enticements dangled by governments and politics to buy their loyalty and to suppress the dictates of the empire that Jesus represents.

Our present governments loathe power and competition and do not take kindly to any criticism coming from inside or outside. Fanon (1967:xi) concurs that civilised society does not like uncomfortable truths and naked honesty. When Archbishop Tutu was a stern critic of the white minority government in South Africa on the basis of gospel principles, the ANC did not mind. When he turned to the ANC government on the basis of the same principles, this drew stinging rebuke from President Mbeki (David Blair, 2004). The same thing happened with Jacob Zuma (Biznews.com, 2011). It happened between Dr Leabua Jonathan and Lesotho church leaders around the 1970s (Hincks, 2009:659). It happened between President Robert Mugabe and Archbishop Pius Ncube (Miller, *TIME*, 2007). It also happened between President Joseph Kabila and the Catholic clergy in the DRC (*News24*, 2018).

Like the Sanhedrin and the chief priest had each their specific role to play, honestly and without fear or favour, church leaders have openly supported political parties to the extent of undermining noble efforts made by Christian churches in advancing a worthy cause for society and its people. Chitando and Togarasei (2010:151) cite examples of 'party-affiliated' pastors in Zimbabwe who have chosen party politics over gospel dictates. The human rights violations and economic inequalities have become a norm and a way of life in both church and society because the Christian leaders too have embraced what Maluleke (1998:325) calls dispossession ideologies which are not only manufactured but are also sustained within Christianity and within Christian churches. Not only are these violations happening under their watch but they are encouraged and perpetuated by the Christians themselves. Perhaps an honest response to Mugambi's question, "Why is Africa the most religious continent in the world ... whose people remain the most abused of all history?" (1995:33) would point to the colonisation of God's Kingdom and its disciples. Matthew's response is simply to identify with Jesus who's Kingdom subverts the dictates and operations of the Roman Empire.

The Church and Hegemonic Masculinities

Jesus' tenacious subversion of dominant forms of masculinity manifest in both his arrest and trial leaves us with nothing but an excuse for not challenging hegemonic masculinities that pose as tradition and gospel injunction in our Christian churches. The brutality, aggressiveness, stealth and deception through which the Roman Empire, which was predominantly masculine, operated is counteracted in Jesus' proposition of a Kingdom whose trademarks are meekness, humility, non-violence, inclusiveness and kindness. All the above qualities were non-starters in so far as honour in the ancient Mediterranean world was concerned.

The death-dealing masculinities, masquerading as biblical and ancestor-sanctioned, which continue to hurt, infect and harm women and children physically, emotionally and

spiritually, particularly in this era of HIV and Aids (Chitando, 2007:45-56) have not only been challenged by Jesus but they have also been rendered obsolete. Two thousand years down the line since Jesus' overt denunciation of these unbridled manifestations of institutionalised masculinities, we continue to debate as if we doubt the sincerity of God's Kingdom in Jesus. Significant strides have been made in the African church with respect to the promotion of gender justice. Churches which traditionally ordained only men to clerical leadership have begun to appreciate women's gifts as leaders too in the church. Not only this, but a sizeable number of women in Africa have enrolled in institutions of higher learning to do what used to be men's disciplines i.e. Theology and Biblical Studies. A significant number of them are as qualified as their male counterparts and are beginning to teach at universities, seminaries and are making their presence felt in areas of research. Their contributions in the area of theology, Scripture and religion have opened avenues for women's perspectives and voices to be heard (Phiri & Kaunda, 2017:387). Oduyoye, Phiri, Masenya, Dube, Kanyoro, Njoroge, Okure, Nadar and Mombo are but a few of African women scholars who have made an impact in academia. There are also African male scholars who are committed to the gender agenda and have joined their African sisters in working on a more sustained response in the quest for transformative masculinities in Africa. Maluleke, Chitando, Amanze, Mugambi, Gunda and Togarasei, to cite just a few, have written extensively on issues in African theology and religion. They have weathered the storm by confronting issues of gender at times when it was still taboo in church circles. Following in the footsteps of Jesus, the radical preacher and teacher, who challenged and subverted the commonly held and entrenched views on gender at the time, the above male theologians chose the necessary but the hard route to salvation. These positive signs notwithstanding, "much still remains to be done to overcome deeply ingrained sexist attitudes within African societies and churches" (Phiri & Kaunda, 2017:396).

Conclusion

The post-colonial reading of the Matthean story of the arrest and trial of Jesus has made it possible for us to explore the operations of the two contrasting empires on three key issues. Firstly, there is the issue of the relationship between church and state which is a direct derivation from Matthew's two empires. At the level of the interpretation of Matthew the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive but anyone who goes against the operations of God's kingdom as represented by Jesus becomes the agent of the evil one. Secondly, there is the issue of identity which seem to be central to both Jesus' and Peter's cases (26:63, 68, 69, 71, 73). The high priest demands to know whether it is true that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. While Jesus' answer seems to point to the affirmative, which is given out in ways that underline his acumen, Peter's performance is quite disappointing as compared to his oaths and promises made earlier on in the story. He is undecided and his behaviour borders on hybridity. Judas did not only deny Jesus and therefore fail to represent Jesus, he was actually caught up in the Roman Empire's snares and operations. He played the game the empire's way and sold Jesus out. Thirdly there is the element of masculinity which was key to the understanding of the behaviour of the high priest, scribes, elders and soldiers in their challenge to Jesus. From the latter was expected the same masculine response. Instead Jesus responded in ways that totally disarmed his opponents and retained his honour, while at the same time subverting the dominant strand of masculinity which was quite entrenched in both Roman and Jewish cultures.

At the level of the appropriation of the story, the issue of church and state derives directly from the duality of the two empires. It is an issue which the church cannot avoid.

Jesus did not necessarily come down to work against people. He wanted to establish God's kingdom on earth. His intention was not to abrogate to himself the powers that belonged to the emperor. He came so that people could take their position for or against him. In real life that position is lived between what Hastings (1979:262) calls 'Politics and Prayer.' It is a calling filled with tension, but which remains, in Matthew's perspective, the only way aligned to God's kingdom. Just as Jesus remained firm in his commitment to God's calling and thus challenged the ideologies and practices of the empire, the modern church has to cast itself as an institution that exists *in* politics but *above* politics at the same time. In that way it would retain a more independent and critical voice in its relationship with state. Jesus' identity as the Son of God was not softened by the intimidation of the empire and its agents. He transformed his body into a site of power from which to confront the power which worked through violence, stealth, deception, patronage, male hegemony and alliances. He proposed, instead, a kingdom which worked through meekness, justice, peace and love.

The example of Jesus who subjected himself to public scrutiny by others, particularly his enemies, during his trial as well as during the many challenge and riposte contests with the Jewish leaders leaves us a telling example of the church that is well posed to stand the test of time in this era of ambiguities, mimicry, hegemonic masculinities, hybridity and identity miscegenation which continue to pound hard on the church. De Gruchy (1997:1180) puts it well:

When and where have faith communities ever willingly submitted themselves to the scrutiny of the state, the nation, the media, and each other? When and where have they sought to give public account of their role in relation to political struggles for justice and liberation?

Over and above, the Christian church needs to subject itself to constant public scrutiny by the gospel dictates and the Kingdom of God it proposes in the life and person of Jesus, whose commitment to God and the people to whom God had sent him, remained consistent throughout changing times and circumstances.

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