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The Matthean community within a Jewish religious society

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It is argued that the Matthean Gospel partially reflects the unstable political and religious situation in which this document originated. Broad outlines are postulated of this probable religious situation. This article presents an investigation of the developments within the broader Jewish society during the time of the New Testament. This implies the investigation of developments within Judaism, which entails some fragmentation of Judaism and a development towards Formative Judaism. The 'Jesus movement' (church) and eventually the Matthean community evolved among these developments.

Introduction

Quite some research has been done on the Jewish society of the late second temple period (e.g. Brown 1997; Cohen 2006; Saldarini 1994; Stanton 1992; Wright 2013). This research provides a useful overview of the political, social, religious, economic and philosophical worlds of the New Testament times. Obviously these depictions of the situation are constructed based on available sources from those times.[1] From these sources a general idea of this situation can be constructed, though the more localised situation of the first Gospel[2] is more difficult to determine. Indeed, very little is directly known about the community in which the first Gospel was written,[3] though most scholars have agreed that the narrative of Jesus and his disciples reflects, yet partly, the experience of the Matthean community.

My assumption is that the first Gospel partially reflects the unstable political and religious situation in which this document originated.[4] In this article I intend to postulate broad outlines of the probable religious situation in which the first Gospel originated. This article presents an investigation of the developments within the broader Jewish society during the time of the New Testament and the first Gospel. This entails the investigation of developments within Judaism, and how the 'Jesus movement' (church[5]) and eventually the Matthean community[6] were involved in these developments.

When considering the setting or community involved in the Gospel, one should do this with great caution. The implied audience may not fully overlap with its historical audience. What is more, the internal evidence does not tell us whether we are dealing with the views of the author, the addressees, or both. Though it is usually assumed, we are not sure whether the author lived among the addressees.

1.When reading literature in which different groups are described, one has to realise that it is not clear to what extent these groups were constructed by the authors who promote their own groups or criticise their opponents and how much their description meets reality.

2.This commonly used term, first Gospel, refers to the position of the Gospel in canonical order, not as chronological.

3.Most commentaries on Matthew have brief sections about some aspects of the Matthean community such as the relationship between the community and Judaism, the nationality of its members (Jewish, non-Jewish or both) and its geographical location. However, these constructions are mainly based on internal evidence of the text itself.

4.To my view, the strict distinction between Judaism as a religion of the Law and Christianity as religion of love is inaccurate. The first Gospel deals extensively with the importance of adhering to the Law, but as interpreted by Jesus. The double-love commandment (Mt. 22:34–40) describes love as the essence of the Law.

5.The translation of ἐκκλησία as 'church' somehow is problematic, as this translation is usually interpreted with anachronistic overtones of an institutionalised group, sharply differentiated from Judaism, with a technical Christian meaning as used by Paul and subsequent Christian literature. However, from the Gospel it seems that the Matthean 'church' was less institutionalised. The group probably met for worship in house-based groups and Jesus would be present even when only two or three are gathered in his name (Mt. 18:20). Nevertheless this 'church' was somewhat institutionalised: it exercised discipline in God's name by handling the keys of heaven (Mt. 16:19 and 18:15–18), it claimed permanence as Jesus built it and promised that the gates of Hades would not overcome it (Mt. 16:18).

6.Most studies on Matthew refer to the 'Matthean community'. However, this designation needs closer clarification. A community usually implies a sense of identity and a common set of values and perceptions, which result in a supportive group. As is argued in this study, the Matthean group was still in a process of establishing its own identity as deviant Judaistic group. When using the term 'community' for the Matthean group, one should keep in mind that its identity probably was still in a forming process (cf. Saldarini 1994:85–87).

Developments within Judaism

It seems that a variety of Judaist groups existed in New Testament times, but a movement towards formative Judaism developed specifically after the destruction of the temple.

In this part I firstly describe what I assume this fragmentation looked like, and secondly the dynamics that the movement towards formative Judaism introduced.

Fragmentation of Judaism

From the post-exilic period onwards Israel was intruded on by Roman and Seleucid leaders, respectively, and often maltreated by Hasmonean rulers. The people of Israel became volatile as a result of uprisings and the eventual destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. This led to fragmentation of the society into competing rabbinic, apocalyptic, revolutionary and Christian-Jewish movements (Saldarini 1994:111; Viljoen 2012:258).

While the Jerusalem temple was still standing, it functioned as the main institution of the society (Wright 2013:310). Those in control of the temple established policies for the daily practices of Jews, but not all Jews accepted them willingly (Brown 1997:75). During the latter part of the Second Temple period the broader society increasingly was suspicious of persons in influential religious and political positions (Wright 2013:310). Though our knowledge is limited, it seems that several groups[7] such as Zealots and various apocalyptic groups formed, which separated themselves from the temple leadership (Blenkinsopp 1981:25; Cohen 2006:5; Stanton 1992:386). As is typical of deviant groups, they sectioned themselves off from the influence and hostility of the temple leadership as dominant group (Saldarini 1994:112). These groups regarded the religious leaders as fraudulent, as they turned from God and betrayed their own people.

Disputes developed over different interpretations of the Law, and deviant groups sought to establish their own rules to govern their practices (Wright 2013:310). This resulted in a reinterpretation or even rejection of temple rules. The Essenes, the rabbis and the early Christian communities left behind literature in which these reinterpretations were noted.

The Jewish historian, Josephus, depicted the Jewish society during the Maccabean struggle under Jonathan (ca. 145 BCE): 'At that time there were three parties [heresies] (αἵρεσεις) among the Jews which held different opinions about human affairs: the first of them were called the Pharisees, the second the Sadducees and the third Essenes' (Jewish War, 2.8.2). In a setting of 6 CE, Josephus reported: 'From most ancient times there were among the Jews three philosophies pertaining to ancestral tradition, that of the Essenes, that of the Sadducees, and the third system called the Pharisees' (Ant. 18.1.2). Josephus mentions only three groups, probably the most prominent of those times. However, more groups existed.

The Essenes is a clear example of such a deviant group with sectarian sentiments. During the 2nd century BCE this community developed from an opposition against developments in the temple. They despised the temple as they regarded the presiding priests as wicked (Brown 1997:76). Awaiting an immanent messianic coming during which God would destroy all iniquity, they separated themselves from the Jewish establishment because they regarded the temple and established community as unrighteous. They formed a new secluded community in the desert where the ancient Israelites were purified in the time of Moses. Based on the ranking of holiness, they organised themselves under the leadership of the 'Teacher of righteousness'. In their documents they justify their separation and strongly criticise the apostasy of the mainstream of Israel and its religious leadership (cf. the Community Rule, 1QS 9, 11) (Vermes 1975:88–93; Viljoen 2012:258).

The Pharisees became critical of and eventually split from the Hasmonean descendants of the Maccabees, as the Hasmoneans became increasingly secularised (Brown 1997:77). The Pharisees were less strict and more innovative than the Essenes in their interpretation of the Law. Besides the written Law of Moses, they also adhered to an oral Law, which they claimed also derived from Moses. This resulted in them being labelled as the Judaism of the Dual *Torah*. Furthermore, they believed in the resurrection of the body and the existence of angels – a belief also reflected in the Jesus movement.

At times the relations between the different Judaist groups turned vicious (Brown 1997:78). 1QpHab 11:2–8 describes how an unnamed high priest in the late 2nd century BCE sought to kill the Essene Teacher of Righteousness on the Day of Atonement according to the Essene calendar.[8] Josephus described how Alexander Jannaeus early in the 1st century BCE massacred 6000 Jews at the Feast of Tabernacles because they (probably Pharisees) challenged his qualifications to hold the priestly office (War, 1.4.3; Ant. 13.13.5). Between 135 and 67 BCE the Pharisees incited hatred among the masses against the high priests John Hycranus (Ant. 13.10.5–6) and Alexander Jannaeus (Ant. 13.5.5). Bickerman (1947:103) has remarked: 'Early Pharisaism was a belligerent movement that knew how to hate'. Sanders (1990:87–88) lists several accounts of even strong intra-Pharisee disputes. Writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QpNah 3–4.1.6–7) criticise 'the furious young lion [the high priest Alexander Jannaeus] … who carries out revenge on seekers of smooth things [Pharisees] and who hangs people alive'. All these incidents took place before the Roman prefecture in Judea. Roman rulers would later supress such internal religious violence, which in its turn enticed political tension between the Jews and the Romans (Brown 1997:78).

7. Most of these 'deviant groups' were 'sectarian' in nature. Scholars usually refer to these groups as Jewish sects, including the 'Jesus movement' as one of these sects. Sects are religious groups that reject the social environment in which they exist (Saldarini 1994:109). Wilson (1973:21) has described the typical trait of deviant sects as 'concern with transcendence over evil and the search for salvation and consequent rejection of prevailing cultural values, goals, and norms, and whatever facilities are culturally provided for man's salvation'.

8. Difference between the Temple and Essene calendars caused considerable tension (Wright 2013:317).

The Pharisees were probably the most influential during the time of Jesus' public ministry. Josephus (War. 2.8.14; Ant. 18.1.3) described the Pharisees as the leading 'heresy' and extremely influential in the towns and villages. This explains the many confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees in the Gospels.[9] The picture that the Gospel presents was probably influenced by the post-70 CE conflicts between Christians[10] and the emerging rabbinic teachers (who were closely related to the Pharisees), but it most probably also does reflect a historical conflict in Jesus' lifetime (Brown 1997:79).

As the deviant groups felt themselves exploited by groups in power, they established identities of their own, while criticizing the establishments that controlled them. They competed among each other while developing systems to define and justify their own inner group values. They usually regarded themselves as the righteous few of Israel being threatened by others. They used 'the righteous' as a technical designation to set their group apart from their opponents (Saldarini 1994:26). The 'normative' Judaism was thus largely replaced by 'sectarian' Judaism (Harlow 2012:392; Van Aarde 2011:48).

These groups would frequently criticise outsiders. The author of 1 Enoch, for example, writes that those in power are fraudulent, while he regards his own community as righteous (cf. 1 En. 94–104). Similarly, the Psalms of Solomon accuses the falseness of people in authoritative positions, while his own community will eventually receive the supremacy to pass judgement on those sinners (cf. Ps. of Sol. 1:3–8). 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch reflect the same attitudes. 4 Ezra compares the lawless majority with the small number of its own community who does keep the Law. The few are regarded as the righteous who will inherit the world to come (4 Ezra 3–8). 2 Baruch denounces the many that did not adhere to the *Torah*, and appraises his community, who did (2 Bar. 15–18) (Viljoen 2012:259).

Deviant groups repeatedly used stereotypical terms as 'buzzwords' to justify themselves (e.g. 'the righteous ones') and to accuse outsider groups (e.g. 'the lawless ones') (Viljoen 2012:258). Such terms were often used to differentiate the insiders as a minority group from the outsiders who contended with them (Overman 1990:17):

> The righteous should inherit these things, but that the ungodly should perish (4 Ezra 7:17)
> The ungodly shall be punished, and … the righteous shall be saved (4 Ezra 9:13–15)
> … the works of those who wrought unrighteousness … (2 Bar. 14–15)
> The paths of righteousness are worthy of acceptation, But the paths of unrighteousness shall suddenly be destroyed and vanish (1 Enoch 94:1)
> I am full of righteousness (Ps. Sol. 1:1–2)
> You have rendered to the sinners according to their deeds, Yes according to their sins, which were very wicked (Ps. Sol. 2:16).

These documents reflect sentiments that existed in the time of Matthew. 4 Ezra dates back to the late 1st century CE, 2 Baruch to the early 2nd century CE, 1 Enoch to the late 1st century CE, while the Psalms of Solomon dates back to the late second or early 1st century BCE (Vriezen & Van der Woude 2005:596, 611). Similar denouncing terms are found in Matthew too. Matthew frequently refers to the righteousness[11] of his group (e.g. Mt. 1:19; 3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33; and 10:41), while denouncing this lawless generation (e.g. Mt. 7:23; 12:39–45; 13:41; 16:4; 17:17 and 24:12) and the Pharisees and teachers of the Law as hypocrites (e.g. Mt 23) (Viljoen 2012:258).

Josephus provides a positive picture of the Pharisees as they 'seem to interpret the laws more accurately' (Ant. 13.5.9). Matthew differs. He regards the Pharisees as hypocrites, with Jesus as the proper interpreter of the *Torah*. Jesus is described as the supreme expositor of the Law (Davies 1966:102). Jesus' relation to the *Torah* is presented in the Sermon on the Mount, explicitly in Matthew 5:17–48.

The keys of the temple became a symbol to indicate whether leaders were trustworthy for religious duties (Viljoen 2009:658). 4 Baruch 4:4 articulates this sentiment: 'Take the keys of the temple … because we were not worthy of keeping them, for we were false stewards' (cf. also 2 Baruch 10:18 and 'Avot de-Rabbi Nathan').[12] Other persons, who are reliable to perform those duties, would arise to handle these keys. The Testament of Levi reached its final form in the 2nd century CE (Vriezen & Van der Woude 2005:652), and according to the Test. Levi 10:3 the shameful behaviour of the priests would be exposed with the tearing of the temple veil. The priests abrogated the Law and disregarded the words of the Prophets (Test. Levi 14:4–6). The Testament of Levi furthermore describes the wickedness of the priests as they defiled the altars, mistreated righteous people and took innocent blood on their heads (Test. Levi 16:2–4). Matthew describes how the priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to take responsibility for the innocent blood of Jesus (Mt 27:25) and that the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 16:19)[13] will be handed over to the church. This implies that authority is taken away from the Jewish religious leaders and that a great degree of authority is assigned to Peter and the church instead (Saldarini 1994:1).

Blenkinsopp (1981:1) has discussed the forces at work between the group in power and those who separated from it by using the image of a parent body and siblings. While the

9. Mark records many references to Pharisees and confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees (e.g. Mk. 2:15–17; 2:18–21; 2:23–28; 3:1–6; 7:1–23; 8:11–15; 10:2 and 12:13), but only one with the Sadducees (Mk. 12:18). Essenes are never mentioned in the New Testament.

10. The use of the word 'Christian' for the believers of the first Gospel needs specification. During the 1st century the believers in Jesus should not be seen as a group completely separated from Judaism. Complex overlapping relationships between varieties of Jewish groups, including the Jesus-followers, existed.

11. Unlike the authors of the many Jewish writings, Matthew does not use the substantive 'the righteous' as technical designation for his group.

12. It should be considered that 'Avot de-Rabbi Nathan is a Jewish *haggadic* work probably only compiled in the Geonic era (ca. 700–900 CE). One should be very cautious when using Jewish material in New Testament research, as many of them were written thereafter. However, some traditions in these works probably reflect earlier Jewish though and practices.

13. Matthew 16:19: 'I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; whatever you bind on earth will (but rather: have been) be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will (but rather: have been) be loosed in heaven'.

siblings often criticized the parent body, conflict among siblings became intense. It seems that the closer the relationship between groups, the more severe the strife between them (Coser 1998:67; Viljoen 2012:261). In their self-definition, one group competed with related groups and drew lines between them.

From this brief discussion, it is plausible to assume that normative Judaism did not exist in the time of Jesus, as several deviant groups developed that competed with one another for self-affirmation.

Development towards formative Judaism

The Jewish revolt of 66–70 CE and the destruction of the temple changed the dynamics of the religious groups (Brown 1997:81). Revolutionary groups such as the Zealots and Sicarii were eliminated and the Essene settlement destroyed. The termination of temple sacrifices weakened the influence of the Sadducees. A need for a new religio-cultural formation evolved (Saldarini 1994:13; Van Aarde 2011:48). A process of self-definition and consolidation of the fragmented society started to develop. This led to self-definition and social construction within Jewish communities. In this development several groups competed to gain position (Viljoen 2012:263).

Groups legitimated themselves as they claimed that their beliefs and practices were based on ancient traditions. Faithfulness to the traditions of the fathers lent credibility to their views (Baumgarten 1987:77; Overman 1990:160; Van Aarde 2011:41).

The rabbinic movement[14] gradually won recognition as a guide for the people (Brown 1997:81). Within this formative movement, the rabbis emerged as leaders. This developed to fuller manifestation in the later rabbinic Judaism (Cohen 2006:207; Shanks 1963:344). Christian writings in the post-70 period increasingly referred to the emerging rabbinic Judaism when they spoke of Judaism.

According to tradition a council took place in Jamnia (Yavneh)[15] on the Palestinian coast around 90 CE with rabbi Gamaliel II[16] presiding. The aim of this council was to unite the different Jewish factions and to recreate their religious and social life (Overman 1990:38). Synagogues[17] became identifiable places for the gathering and worship of the rabbinic movement (Kee 1990:20).

A noteworthy part of the collective self-definition of the rabbinic movement was the adaption of measures to expel those who did not adhere to their value system. Such a procedure is described in the *Birkat ha-Minim,* a 'Blessing on the heretics' (actually a curse), which went through a process of development to be completed probably only by the beginning of the 2nd century[18]:

> For apostates let there be no hope.
> The dominion of arrogance do thou speedily root out in our days.
> And let the *Nazareans* and the *Minim* perish in a moment.
> Let them be blotted out of the book of the living.
> And let them not be written with the righteous.

Reference to the *Minim* (heretics) testifies to a variety in Judaism. This 'blessing' denounced all kinds of movements that the rabbinic movement considered to be heretic. This included Christians. It seems that in later years this 'blessing' was specifically aimed at Christians (Brown 1997:82). It sparked tension between Judaism and Christianity.

One should, however, keep in mind that in the time of Matthew, Judaism was still not a fixed coherent community. A variety of traditions and developments still existed. A comprehensive, unified and stable Talmudic system would only develop over time (Saldarini 1994:15). Jewish communities spread over the Roman Empire varied from one another and adapted to different local conditions.

The church among rivalling groups

The 'Jesus movement' (church)[19] developed within these complex group relations (cf. Davies 1966:286; Wright 2013:311) and was involved in this rivalry among Jewish religious groups. The Matthean community formed part of this greater 'Jesus movement'.

In this section I firstly describe how I assume the church developed among these Jewish movements, and secondly where the Matthean community fits into this picture.

The church among Judaism

Hummel (1966:55) has described the relationship of the church with Judaism as part of a larger 'family conflict' or a rival among *feindliche Brüder*. It was not so much a conflict with the Christian community as an outsider group, but strife within Judaism. The church was not the rebellious child of a stable normative Jewish parent religion. As a

14.Much of the Pharisees fed into the rabbinic movement, though it is not clear how it has happened (Brown 1997:83). While the Pharisees were in confrontation with other Jewish groups, the rabbinic movement was more inclusive. Though legal disputes occurred among them, it did not lead to violence.

15.I intentionally mention that the council of Jamnia in 90 CE took place 'according to tradition', as no conclusive evidence exists to prove this (Saldarini 1994:14). The tradition suggests that after the Romans crushed the First Jewish Revolt, an academy of scholars gathered at Jamnia on the Palestinian coast. They were close to Pharisaic thought and were honoured as rabbis. This group would emerge as an influential force (Brown 1997:214). According to Saldarini (1994:14) the meetings of rabbis in Jamnia were probably informal and sporadic, while their decisions were applied to voluntary association.

16.Gamaliel II was the son of Gamaliel, the famous interpreter of the Law (Brown 1997:82).

17.Jewish assemblies in villages and towns probably took place in large houses, or multi-purpose buildings or public squares. According to Saldarini (1994:101) buildings that were dedicated synagogues only emerged in the third of 4th century CE.

18.Scholars traditionally dated the *Birkath ha Minim* ca. 85 CE (e.g. France 1998:85; Horbury 1982:19–61): This date, however, is dubious. The *Birkath ha Minim* developed over a period of time while synagogues at different locations and times increasingly did not tolerate the presence of other deviant groups and Christians (Saldarini 1994:14, 19). It is also not clear how widespread the *Birkath ha Minim* has been used.

19.It is improbable the 'Jesus movement' initially formed as a cohesive entity. As Christians were scattered over the Roman Empire, their identity developed over time in a variety of ways at different situations and at different locations.

result of the fragmentation of the Jewish society, a stable parent group no longer existed. The church can rather be considered as one of the many Judaist deviant groups. The conflict between Judaism and the church should therefore not be defined as a parent-child conflict, but rather as a rivalry among siblings, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, Sicarii, Samaritans, Therapeutae, and others (cf. Cohen 2006:216).

The *Birkat ha-Minim*, though later formalised as mentioned before, reflects a tension that was building up between opposing religious views. Initially this 'blessing' was addressed to all 'heretic' movements and 'sects' that would not form part if the rabbinic movement. This included the Christian community. The Christian community found itself in a process of increasing hostility and alienation from its Judaist (especially as in the rabbinic movement) roots.

This conflict within Judaism was associated with 'rival claims to exclusive truth within the same religious symbol system' (Radford Ruether 1974:30). Charges of heresy and sectarianism were used to establish own groups and to discredit opponents.

The Jewish Christians defined themselves as Jesus-followers different from the other Judaist movements of the time (Saldarini 1991:49). Their self-definition is expressed in various writings collected in the New Testament documents. At the beginning of the 2nd century the demarcation between Jews and Christians were clearly drawn, although that demarcation developed over a period of several decades. Just as non-Christian Judaism was not yet a cohesive community in the time of Matthew, the same applies to different Christian communities. The 'Jesus movement' probably had not yet formed a clear cut identity separate from Judaism either. While some Christian communities separated themselves totally from Judaism, others were still strongly attached to their Jewish roots (Saldarini 1994:25).

The Matthean church and the Judaism of the broader society

The Matthean community originated in this unstable and transitional period in Israel's political and religious history.[20] As a partially transparent document, Matthew's Gospel reflects some concerns and underlying conflicts (Foster 2004:3; Saldarini 1994:12; Stanton 1993:26) that fit into the history of the multifaceted Jewish-Christian relations of the 1st century (Harlow 2012:391).

Tension is quite foregrounded in the Matthean Gospel. Sim (1999) has remarked that the tension of the Matthean community with other Jewish groups was born from closeness rather than distance:

> Polemical and stereotypical language such as we find in Matthew does not reflect distance between the parties. On the contrary, it reflects both physical and ideological proximity between the disputing groups, since its very purpose is to distance one party from the other. (p. 186)

The first Gospel reflects a struggle to deal with this hostility. Matthew's response to this estrangement can be seen in the Gospel's apologetics and polemics.[21]

Bornkamm (1963a:55) has argued that this unstable environment is reflected in the Matthean narrative of the stilling of the storm (Mt 8:23–27). According to him the little boat in the stormy sea represents the church in Matthew's redaction. With this narrative Matthew articulates his concern that his community was threatened and struggled to survive. However, by trusting Jesus, they would be able to survive and establish their own identity. The conflict should rather be regarded as inner-Jewish (Bornkamm 1963b:22).

This inner-Jewish conflict is related to the rivalry between parties within this movement towards Formative Judaism (Ascough 2001:102; Keener 1999:45; Overman 1990:2). As the Matthean community had a specific locality, the question remains with which parties they competed.

Bornkamm's view (1963b:22) that the Matthean community experienced and *intra muros* struggle within the synagogue and rabbinic environment was shared by several scholars (cf. Barth 1963:65; Davies 1966:276; Hummel 1966:159; Saldarini 1994:3). Saldarini (1994:21) has remarked: 'The author of Matthew … is most probably a Jew who, though expelled from the assembly in his city, still identifies himself as a member of the Jewish community'. Saldarini (1994:20–25) has described the Matthean community as a *Torah*-obedient deviant group within 1st century Judaism. They were dislodged from their local synagogues in Syria. They defended and justified their way of life against opposition from rabbinic Judaism. They sought to establish a firm identity of their own.

However, some other scholars hold an *extra muros* viewpoint (e.g. Schweizer 1963:405; Stanton 1993:102; Stendahl 1968:xiii). According to them the Matthean community no longer formed part of the synagogue, as they had been expelled or withdrew themselves. This separation is reflected in Matthew's references to the synagogue (Viljoen 2012:261). Matthew uses the phrase 'their synagogue' five times (Mt 4:23, 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54) and 'your synagogue'

20.Though it is difficult and arguments on the dating of the Gospels are not precise (cf. Hagner 1993:lxxiii–lxxv), I concur with the majority view that Matthew was written sometime after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. The reference in Matthew 22:7 to the king burning the city probably reflects the destruction of Jerusalem. The triadic formula in Matthew 28:19 and the abiding presence of Jesus in Matthew 28:20 reveals a theological development related to the late New Testament period. The controversies with the Pharisees and the condemnation of the free use of the title 'rabbi' (Mt. 23:7–8), which is unique to Matthew, fit well into the early rabbinic period after 70 CE. If one further considers the dependence of Matthew on Mark – a Gospel commonly dated between 68 and 73 CE, it is quite plausible that Matthew was written between 80 and 90 CE (Brown 1997:217; Van Aarde 2011:46).

21.Several passages in the Gospel reflect Matthean polemics and apologetics, e.g. the charge that followers of Jesus are breaking the Law, is rejected in Matthew 5, the legitimacy of the Jewish leadership is attacked in Matthew 23, and the charge that the disciples stole Jesus' body (Mt 27:62–66) is answered in Matthew 28:11–15.

once (Mt. 23:34) to emphasise the distance between Jesus and the synagogue (Carter 2000:31).

Weren (2014:251–265) distinguishes three phases in the development of the Matthean community. During the first phase (prior to 70 CE) this Christian group regarded themselves to be full members of the Jewish community (Weren 2014:254–255). During the second phase (70–80 CE) they became a minority within the Jewish community (Weren 2014:255–259). This was a time of growing conflict with the Pharisees, who were trying to redefine Judaism. During the last phase (80–90 CE) the Jewish Christians gradually detached them from the Jewish community (Weren 2014: 260–264).

Hare (1967:125) has spoken of 'social ostracism and mutual hostility' between these two groups. Within this 'family conflict' the 'parent group'[22] felt that their values were disregarded, while the separating group struggled to understand their new distinct status. According to Hare, this struggle is reflected in the intensity of conflict in the Matthean Gospel with the 'parent body'. Boundaries were drawn to exclude outsiders,[23] but also to define the convictions of the insiders[24] (Viljoen 2012:261).

However, as has previously been argued, Matthew's polemics are not aimed against a uniform established Jewish group, but against other 'siblings' who rejected the Matthean community. The break between the Jewish and Christian groups was not a clean break, as the conflicts between them varied according to time and place.

The identity and nature of these 'siblings' ask for further consideration. After 70 CE deviant groups such as the Zealots, Sicarii and Essenes were eliminated and the influence of the Sadducees weakened. Minor groups were marginalised and later on faded away. The Pharisees emerged as the dominant group (Brown 1997:78).

From the Matthean Gospel, it seems that the Pharisees were regarded as their main opponents. The Matthew's polemic with the Pharisees is particularly severe. Carter (2000:1) labels the first Gospel a 'counter-narrative' against synagogual control[25] by the Pharisees. This heightened conflict against the Pharisees is significant in Matthew's controversy stories. Repschinski (2000:329) comments on Matthew's attack on the Pharisees in these stories: 'Matthew intends the audience of the controversy stories to reflect a group that turns from the fraudulent leadership of the opponents of Jesus towards an acknowledgement of the Matthean community as the rightful leaders of Israel'. The discourse of the woes (Mt. 23) and the parables on the tenants and the wedding banquet (Mt. 21:33–22:14) particularly express this conflict (cf. Saldarini 1994:46). This encounter can also be recognised in Matthew's intensification of the conflict in the narratives he took over from Mark (Repschinski 2000:63ff). The sympathetic scribe in Mark 12:38 asking about the greatest commandment is portrayed as a hostile Pharisee in Matthew 22:35. While Mark once refers to the Pharisees as hypocrites (Mk. 7:6) and Luke not at all, Matthew has fourteen such references, six of which are in the Woe Discourse of Matthew 23 (Mt. 6:2, 5, 16; 15:7; 16:3; 22:18; 23:13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29: 24:51). Unlike in Mark, the synagogue became an almost alien institution in Matthew. In his concluding words Matthew addresses his readers directly by telling them of a misleading account of the resurrection of Jesus 'this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day' (Mt. 28:15). In adding this Matthew emphasises that those who accept the alternative story are sadly misled.

Van Aarde (2011:41–49) has suggested that the conflict in the first Gospel should be credited to a local scenario. He has proposed that Matthew should be regarded as a scribe who was in conflict with other scribes (teachers of the Law) in a village community.[26] The village scribes were in the process of establishing the first phase of a Pharisaic rabbinate. However, it is also possible that the Gospel of Matthew was written as a Christian response to the Judaism that was emerging after 70 CE at Jamnia where the rabbis were honoured as the interpreters of the *Torah* (Davies & Allison 2004:xxi). It rather seems that the Matthean community lived in the shadow of a large Jewish community that resented them (Brown 1997:215). As they shared the same Scriptures, their differences[27] were the subject of dispute.

As the temple no longer existed, the rabbis sought to find God in their own communities. A similar activity was found among the Jesus-followers who tried to find God among

22.As I argued before it is inappropriate to consider Matthew's opponents as a stable 'parent group' as much diversity existed within Judaism.

23.Matthew has a twofold view of the outsider-group. One part is formed by the opponents, who are the scribes, Pharisees and Jewish religious leaders. The other part is formed by those who are open to the gospel of Jesus. The author of Matthew uses the word λαός (people) in its ordinary sense to refer to a social and political entity of the land of Israel, but also as people who need salvation: 'you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save his people from their sins' (Mt 1:21). Matthew uses the term ὄχλος (crowd) most frequently to refer to people who gathered around Jesus. For the most part the crowds are depicted as friendly and good-willed, but are easily misled by Jewish leaders. The chief priests and the elders persuade the crowds to ask for Jesus' death and Barabbas' release (Mt 27:20) (cf. Saldarini 1994:27–43). The fact that Matthew use these terms to identify different groups, suggests that the Matthean groups was forming a new subgroup, which were in conflict with the majority.

24.The formulation of group convictions provided means to discipline unfaithful insiders.

25.Though to a lesser extent, the tension with the Roman Imperial power is also reflected in the characters of Herod (Mt. 2) and Antipas (Mt.. 14) as Roman allies, (footnote 25 continues...) Vespasian (Mt. 17) and Caesar (Mt. 22) are indirectly mentioned in relation to Roman taxes, and Pilate directly in person (Mt. 27) (Carter 2001:35; Viljoen 2012:262).

26.A plausible construction is that the Matthean community originated after 70 CE in northern Galilee and southern Syria, probably in the vicinity of Antioch (Van Aarde 2011:46). Syria is added in Matthew 4:24 to Mark's description of the spread of Jesus' activity. While Van Aarde has suggested a village setting, an urban setting seems more plausible (cf. Brown 1997:212; Foster 2004:9). Matthew uses 'city' (πόλις) 66 times compared to four of 'village' (κώμη). The dominant influence of Matthew in later years, suggests that it was addressed to a major Christian church in an important city. Based on these arguments, Antioch seems to be a strong possibility, though it cannot be proven with certainty.

27.While both communities tried to create clear identities and boundaries, they overlapped one another.

them. This resulted in two sets of teachers of the Law: those like Matthew who followed Jesus and others who upheld the traditional view of the messiah.

I mention a few significant references in the first Gospel which support this viewpoint.

God with us

Finding God within the Matthean community is an important motif in the Gospel. At the beginning of his Gospel Matthew writes about the name of Jesus: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel', which means 'God with us' (Μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ Θεός)' (Mt 1:26). He likewise ends his Gospel with the promise of Jesus: 'And surely I am with you always (ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας), to the very end of the age' (Mt. 28:20). Matthew describes the presence of Jesus in the church by saying 'For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them (οὗ γάρ εἰσιν δύο ἢ τρεῖς συνηγμένοι εἰς τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα, ἐκεῖ εἰμι ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν' (Mt 18:20). These declarations are similar to claims made by the Romans that the Caesar was the agent of Jupiter and the present deity (*deus praesens*) (Statius, *Silvae* 5.2.170). In contrast Matthew calls Jesus the beloved Son of God (Mt 3:17 and 17:5). The beloved Son of God teaches his disciples to speak of and pray for the 'Kingdom' of God (e.g. Mt. 6:10) (Viljoen 2011:331).

Scriptures are fulfilled

Like the movement towards Formative Judaism, the Matthean community was also in a process of establishing their identity. As Formative Judaism endeavoured credibility by claiming that their dealings were based on that of the traditions of their forefathers, Matthew described the life and teachings of Jesus in terms of the fulfilment of Scriptures.[28] While other New Testament writers referred to a few texts as being fulfilled in Jesus, Matthew used this motif extensively (Davies & Allison 2004:211; Menken 2004:3; Versteeg 1992:23). France (1998:167) regards fulfilment as 'the special trademark' of this Gospel. Matthew presents his community to be inheritors to a great movement.

Church and synagogue

While the synagogues became important places of assembly in Judaism, Matthew's Jesus departs from the synagogues and establishes a distinct new community, the ἐκκλησία (church) (Mt 16:18 and 18:17) (Viljoen 2012:263). By using this common LXX translation of קָהָל, the congregation of the people of God (e.g. Dt 31:30), Jesus describes his followers as the restored Israelites. However, συναγωγή (synagogue) was also commonly used as translation of קָהָל (Keener 1999:428). By using this emotive concept from the Jewish Bible and translating it distinctively as ἐκκλησία (church), it seems that Matthew intends to argue that his group – as part of a greater church community - took over the position of the congregation of the people of God and he differentiates them from the synagogues and its leaders. Matthew 8:11–15[29] even speaks of transferral of the kingdom of God to a new people (Viljoen 2007b:705). While the Jewish leaders claimed to lead the synagogue, the church was led by leaders who confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God (Mt. 16:16).

28.Cf. Viljoen 2007a:314–320 for a discussion of the significance of fulfilment quotations in Matthew.

Keys of the kingdom of heaven

The church disciplined those who were disloyal to the values of this community based on the authority of Jesus (Mt. 18:15–17).[30] The formula 'I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; whatever you bind on earth will (but rather: have been, since δεδεμένον is a perfect participle) be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will (but rather: have been, since λελυμένον is a perfect participle) be loosed in heaven' (Mt. 16:19) and 'I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be (but rather: have been, since δεδεμένα is a perfect participle) bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earthy will be (rather: have been, since λελυμένα is a perfect participle) loosed in heaven' (Mt. 18:18) suggest tremendous authority for Peter and the community. While the first statement refers to Peter himself, the second refers the corporate obligation of the church. The authority is exercised by Peter on behalf of the church (Mt 16), as well as by the church corporately (Mt. 18) (Viljoen 2012:264).

Conclusion

The Gospel of Matthew provides some window through which modern readers can picture the community in which the Gospel was created and for whom it was intended. As this picture is a construct mainly based on the internal witness of the first Gospel, which is in turn intended as an internal document to its own community, opponents are presented from a specific perspective. It seems that after the crisis of 70 CE rivalry developed between Jewish factions. While defending their own positions, they denounced their opponents. While Judaism in the villages constructed new societies in the synagogues, the Matthean community was structured as church and based on what Jesus had taught them. Matthew thus comforted his community, who felt insecure as a result of the rejection they experienced from the Judaistic sibling they encountered in their villages.

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29.Matthew 8:11–15: 'I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'.

30.Matthew 18:15–17: 'If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses'. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

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