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Vledder's objective in undertaking this study is to throw new light on the miracle stories of Matthew 8 and 9 by analysing them heuristically by means of the methods and tools of sociology. Earlier similar approaches to these texts are acknowledged, but social-scientific interpretation has advanced in self-correction; and it is "the 'newer' social-scientific approach" that is utilised here. Models, in spite of their limitations, not only reduce the problem of anachronism but also heuristically disclose realities that texts from other cultures conceal. The Christological and ecclesiological interpretations of these miracle stories are reviewed, critiqued and judged to be "inadequately explained". Interpreters who have recognised conflict and to one extent or another employed conflict theory are also scrutinised and evaluated according to the adequacy of their understanding of the process of conflict. Vledder, in contrast, employs a "model/theory" at a "high level of abstraction" and, although it was developed for industrial society, its high level of abstraction legitimates its application to the class and conflict realities of agrarian society. Structural functionalism is unable to account for conflict and change, particularly in terms of their character as positive dynamics in the world of social stratification. Vledder devotes a major section of his book, 57 pages, to an explication and qualification of the causes of conflict and the model/theory he will employ in his interpretation of Matthew 8 and 9.

His analysis of social stratification in Matthew's Gospel identifies the characters who inhabit this narrative world as the urban elite, retainers in the employ of the ruling class, the urban degraded and expendables, and finally the peasantry. The conflict between Jesus and the ruling elite in the Gospel mirrors the

realities of the spiralling conflict between emerging Pharisaic Judaism and the Matthean community. The former is represented by Pharisees and rabbis who belong to the retainer class and are in the process of consolidating Judaism on the basis of their own exclusive, legalistic heritage. Matthew's church, according to Vledder, was "a mixed community of not only Jews and Gentiles, but also of urban non-elites and rural peasantry" engaged in the process of separating itself from Judaism.

Vledder's book culminates in his interpretation of the miracle stories of Matthew 8 and 9 in accordance with the model/theory of conflict that he unfolded earlier. These stories, he contends, have been arranged to create conflict, in terms of both improvement and deterioration of relationships among the characters. The plot and the expectations which it arouses culminate in "a manifest outburst in the reaction of the Pharisees in Matthew 9:34." "The narrative has both a 'happy' and a 'tragic' end."

Undoubtedly Vledder succeeds in opening new perspectives in his analysis of Matthew 8 and 9. But his model/theory has not enabled him to make a correct identification of the social class of Matthew's addressees. The introductory genealogy with its inclusion of the entire Davidic dynasty, the distinctly Matthean parables of Jesus and texts such as 5:3 and 6:19-21 indicate that these people belonged to the upper class. They were primarily land owners and businessmen. Accordingly, what kind of conflict would emerge if Matthew's community consisted of an urban elite instead of the urban non-elite and peasants that Vledder argues for?

The literary structure of a shattered Pentateuch and the paradox of Jesus' origin as expressed in the genealogy and the following story of 1:18-25 already intimate conflict as they convey an identification of Jesus and his community – for the benefit of Matthew's church – as the New Israel commissioned as God's surrogate to establish and expand the new moral order of God's rule. Eschatology, therefore, also plays a vital role in these miracle stories of Matthew 8 and 9.

The Moses typology comes into the foreground in 5:1-2, the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, but it begins to be shattered already in the so-called six antitheses of 5:17-48. Correspondingly, the ten mighty works of 8-9 continue that subversion, for Jesus' mighty works are deeds of healing and restoration and not plagues of destruction. At the same time they are reversals of the legislation that was being developed by the Pharisees in their oral tradition.

While Vledder has performed an important service in defining an advanced model/theory of conflict and has elucidated the conflict character of the traditions of Matthew 8 and 9, his employment of that model/theory is an illustration of a hermeneutical undertaking that reveals but also conceals. Methodologically, therefore, his book is also a useful illustration of the limitations of the historical-critical method and its value-free ideology, even when it is expanded by social-scientific criticism.

