

# Matthew's and Paul's inclusive tendencies: A comparison<sup>1</sup>

In-Cheol Shin & Andries van Aarde  
Department of New Testament Studies  
University of Pretoria

## Abstract

*This article compares the inclusive tendencies of Matthew and Paul by evaluating the inclusive structure of their respective communities. The article mainly investigates two issues: Matthew's and Paul's practice of the Law and their perspectives on the Gentiles. The community that strictly keeps the Law is a more exclusive community. The Law is used to reject unclean and lower class people from the Israelite community. Secondly, Matthew's perspective on the Gentiles and that of Paul are investigated to determine tendencies of inclusivity in their respective thinking. It is observed that the Law-free Gentile community is more inclusive than the Law-observant Gentile community. The approach adopted by this article is one of cross-cultural interpretation.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the last half of this century, the issues concerning the relationship between Matthew and Paul have never really been dominant in any proper study of Matthew's Gospel. Five decades ago Brandon ([1951] 1957) argued that the Gospel of Matthew was an anti-Pauline text. Brandon's (1957:232, 236-237) view is that Matthew elevated Peter as the "rock of the church" (Mt 16:17-19). Accordingly, Peter's role was to function as a response to the growing influence of Paul. In concurrence with this view, the First Evangelist, according to SeGl (1991:9), focused more on ecclesiastical concerns as can be seen in Matthew 13:53-18:35. This passage includes three important episodes regarding Peter: his walking on water (Mt 14:28-31), his confession of Jesus as the Son of the living God and the question about paying the temple tax (Mt 17:24-27). These activities of Peter indicate that Peter was the role model and hero of the Matthean community. Secondly, Brandon claimed

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on In-Cheol Shin's PhD dissertation, entitled "Matthew's inclusive community: A narratological and social scientific reading". The dissertation was prepared under the supervision of Prof Dr Andries G van Aarde, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria (2004).

### ***Matthew's and Paul's inclusive tendencies: A comparison***

that Matthew adopted a polemical interpretation of the Law, as opposed to Paul (Mt 5:17-19). Finally, it is argued that “the hostile man in the parable of the Tares (Mt 13:24-30) has shed some further light in reference to Paul” (Sim 2002:769). However, these arguments of Brandon have not generally been supported by Matthean scholars.

On the contrary, many Matthean commentators have suggested that Matthew actually stood close to the theological tradition of Paul. According to Davies ([1963] 1966:325-332), Matthew shares similarities with Paul, owing to the fact that he held a positive view regarding the Gentiles and particularly with regard to his mission towards them. Peter did not evidence any opposition to Paul. As a result, Peter was elevated by Matthew, which implied that this disciple was important in the early church (Davies 1966:336-340). Moreover, Davies (1966:334-346) has also confirmed that Mt 5:17-19 rendered no evidence supporting the anti-Pauline polemic. Two decades ago, Goulder (1974:154-155, 170) suggested that Matthew knew the Pauline letters and that he accordingly used them, and he also stressed the fact that the First Evangelist was more conservative than Paul on the issue of observing the Law. Later, Meier (1983:12-86) claimed that Matthew belonged to a middle position in the early church, having been between Paul and James, the brother of Jesus. Matthew was not quite identical to Paul, as he was much more conservative regarding issues pertaining to the Law.

Nevertheless, we can conclude that Matthew was theologically close to Paul: they were not in opposition to one another. This hypothesis forms the point of departure in this article. Matthew is not much different from Paul when compared with him, even though there are some differences pertaining to their respective theological perspectives in the Gospel and Paul's letters. Their theological core seems to be the same, even though they might have stressed and emphasized certain issues in different ways.

This study deals with a cross-cultural interpretation of Matthew and Paul's inclusive tendencies.<sup>2</sup> New Testament interpretation is unavoidably cross-cultural in nature. However, exegetes should be aware of the “hermeneutical fallacy” of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism maintains that beliefs and practices in another culture should, or cannot but, be interpreted according to the standards of one's own culture. The obverse, cultural relativism, maintains that such beliefs and practices should be evaluated relative to the culture of which they are part (Craffert 1996:449; see Lett 1987:11; Winthrop 1991:235-237). This means that an ethnocentric interpretation judges all people in the whole world in terms of one's own

---

<sup>2</sup> However, this cross-cultural interpretation avoids comparing western modern culture to the ancient culture of the Bible.

cultural perspective. The presumption is that, since “we” are by nature human, if anyone else is human then they should and must be just as we are (Malina 1986:29; Osiek 1992:5-6). However, Saler (1993:9) notes that “some amount of ethnocentrism is probably inevitable as a cognitive starting point in the search for trans-cultural understanding.” Ethnocentrism implies “judgments based on irrational preferences incapable of rational validation” (Bidney 1968:546). Therefore, a degree of “actual” ethnocentrism is found in all societies and cultures; both conscious and unconscious preferences for inherited practices and beliefs are facts of socialisation.

Hence, in this article I would like to compare Matthew and Paul’s respective inclusive tendencies with regard to cross-cultural interpretation. First of all we will compare the statements of Matthew regarding the Law to those of Paul in his letters. The way in which the Law passages relate to each other is important in understanding the social culture statements of both communities. Such an investigation should clarify which community tended culturally to view the Law as more inclusive of all kinds of people. Secondly, we will consider the respective perspectives towards Gentiles in both communities, since Matthew and Paul’s communities included Gentiles. Matthew and Paul both have a positive Gentile mission in mind (Meier 1983:62-63). However, we would like to establish the difference between their respective perspectives concerning the Gentiles in terms of a cross-cultural interpretation.

## **2. CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS OF MATTHEW’S AND PAUL’S COMMUNITIES**

The cultural backgrounds of Matthew’s and Paul’s communities were different. The Matthean community was part of the Israelite tradition in the eastern Mediterranean world. On the other hand, Paul’s community was not so much influenced by Israelite tradition as by the western Mediterranean world. More than in Matthew’s case, Paul’s community was a mixed culture, which included both the Israelite tradition and Hellenism. Let’s us consider their different cultural backgrounds.

### **2.1 Matthew’s cultural background**

The Gospel of Matthew does not provide explicit information regarding the actual location where the Gospel was written, but there is general agreement among scholars that the Gospel was written in the eastern part of the ancient Mediterranean, or in Palestine. The most interesting argument favours

### ***Matthew's and Paul's inclusive tendencies: A comparison***

Antioch<sup>3</sup>, the capital of Syria, as the place of the composition of the Gospel of Matthew (Meier 1983:22-27; Luz 1985:73-74; Sim 1998:53-61). The surroundings of Antioch included ordinary people who spoke Greek, a large population from the Israelite Diaspora, and the city possessed one of the earliest Christian communities outside of Palestine and a church founded by an Israelite Christian, around 30 AD (Longenecker 1985:8-21). The Gospel of Matthew reflects the world of Judaism.

Judaism refers to a religious tradition and cultural grouping existing from post-exilic times, historically connected with the land of Palestine. The Israelites traditionally regarded themselves as the people of the Law. The function of the Mosaic Law was to codify the authoritative power of God for the Israelites, and it was central to their whole life in a moral, civil or cultic manner (Hong 1993:147). They had to obey the Law. Israelites had to therefore observe practical laws such as circumcision, food, and the Sabbath laws. The function of the Mosaic Law was to create and maintain the social stratification within the Israelite society. According to Malina (1993:159-166; see Duling 2002:534), the people of Israel were classified in terms of degrees of purity, deriving from their proximity to the Jerusalem Temple. It can be assumed that the cultural background of the Matthean community was part of this Israelite religious tradition.

## **2.2 Paul's cultural background**

Hellenistic culture was derived from the Greek empire, in which government, economics, and culture were syncretized into a new kind of civilization that was to be adapted later by the Romans and was to remain the dominant culture in the eastern Mediterranean world in the first century. Paul was irrevocably committed to the Hellenistic world. He was a Diasporic Israelite and, according to Acts 9:11, grew up in Tarsus, a Greek-Hellenistic city in the eastern part of Asia Minor. His parents sent Paul to Jerusalem in his youth, perhaps in order to immunize him against the infection of the Hellenistic world (cf Becker 1993:51-52). In Jerusalem, Paul was instructed in scripture and tradition by Gamaliel, who was influential in the Pharisaic movement (Ac 22:3). However, when Paul returned from Jerusalem, he situated himself within his Hellenistic context, probably in order to take a step back from conceptual comparisons to consider the broader question of the social matrix in which both the Israelite and Hellenistic tradition existed (Den Heyer 2000:26-27). The Israelites in the Diaspora lived in a world dominated by pagan ideas and notions, and probably an individual person or group was

---

<sup>3</sup> The classic statement that Matthew's community was located at Antioch came from Streeter (1924:500-523).

hellenized in language, religion, education, and culture. As a Hellenistic Israelite, Paul had already become acquainted with Hellenistic-Israelite practice in the form of various writings, which he then reshaped as a Christian (the catalogue of vices in Rm 1; Gl 5). Moreover, Paul describes his apostolic existence with the aid of metaphor of competition in a Greek stadium (1 Cor 9:24-27). The statement regarding Paul's baptism is dependent on the language of the Hellenistic mystery religions (Rm 6:1-11). This reflects his Hellenistic, urban socialization, which made the traditions of popular philosophy familiar to him.

It is possible that Hellenistic Israelites had their synagogues in Antioch, in which the scriptures were read and worship was conducted in Greek (cf Osiek 1992:16). Paul preached in synagogues, and Gentiles frequented synagogues throughout the Greco-Roman world (Ac14:1, 17:1), which explains Paul's intention to include both Israelites and Gentiles in the Christian congregations. According to Duncan (1941:123; see Longenecker 1990:156), the distinction between Israelite and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female indicates that the society of Paul's day was stratified according to cultural roles and statutes. Longenecker's (1990:156) interpretation of Galatians 3:26-29 ("there is neither Jew or Greek, slave nor free, male nor female") is that old divisions and stratification have come to an end and that a new relationship has been established by faith in Christ, which implies that members of Pauline communities were no longer stratified under the Law. They were mainly comprised of an agrarian society, with a gap between those who belonged to the elite (classes with authority) and those who had little or no access to any authority. Hence, the Hellenists and the Pauline group did not require strict Torah observance.

To summarize, the cultural background of the Matthean community was part of the Israelite tradition, which indicates that one of the functions of the Law was to codify stratification in the Israelite society in the eastern Mediterranean world. In contrast, the cultural background of the Pauline community was that of a Hellenistic tradition resembling the western Mediterranean world. Of course, Paul also related to Israelite cultural tradition but not much more than Matthew did.

### **3. LAW**

In the early Christian era, the Mosaic Law was the authoritative power of God's will for Israelites and followers of Jesus from an Israelite background. It was central to their whole life: It formed the norms for their behaviour and they were required to obey it. Despite Jesus' and Paul's critique, the Law remained to have an influence on the life of the early Christian communities. In the light

### ***Matthew's and Paul's inclusive tendencies: A comparison***

of this perspective, some scholars, such as Sim (2002:767-783; cf Balch 1991:68-86; Mohrlang 1984) recently have reflected on the relationship between Paul and Matthew, regarding their respective understandings of the Law. Both Paul and Matthew were known for their openness towards the Gentiles. It seems that their relationship to the Law supported the inclusive tendencies in their writings.

#### **3.1 Matthew**

Matthew's community was in the process of separating from Judaism as its parent-body (see Van Aarde 1989:230). The community can therefore be called a sect. The term "sect" does not refer to a minority as such, and it is not only characterized by opposition to norms accepted by the parent-body, but also claims in a more or less exclusive way to be what the parent-body claims to be. Stanton (1992:94) also believes that Matthew's community was a sectarian community. The First Evangelist and his community parted company with Judaism in the first century and they were threatened with persecution from their parent-body (see Mt 5:10-12; 21:41-45; 23:31-35). It seems that Matthew's community had no further extended relationship with its parent-body, even though it still adhered to some of the Israelite traditions (see Sim 2001:274). When Matthew's community cut off all ties with its parent-body as a result of the conflict, they needed to create a new identity. Nevertheless, Matthew's community still continued to represent various aspects of its Israelite tradition. In this section, I will consider some important issues in Matthew's thought regarding the Law, as it applies to the nature of the inclusive community, which the First Evangelist enhanced and to whom he communicated. According to some texts in Matthew, it is clear that the Law was still valid within the community.

Matthew 5:17-19 comprises the main evidence with regard to our understanding of the Law within the Gospel. It has been discussed in detail a number of times by various scholars (Blair 1960:117; Meier 1976:46-124; Mohrlang 1984:8-9; see Balch 1991:68-86; Sim 2002:774-776). This passage is our primary evidence for the validity of the Torah in the Matthean community (Walaskay 2002:417-420). According to Sim's (2002:775) interpretation of Matthew 5:17-19, the community was expected to obey the Law in all respects, and this also applied to the Gentiles as much as to the Israelites. Moreover, Sim's view is that Matthew 5:17-19 includes the observance of the whole Torah, such as circumcision and the other ritual requirements of the Law. These indications signal that the Matthean community represented a stratified structured society similar to its Israelite environment, because of its emphasis on the observance of the Law.

Matthew's perspective in relation to the Law is twofold. On the one hand, Matthew retains the "old" Law of Moses, and on the other hand he chooses to abide by the "new" Law of love, in accordance with Jesus' interpretation of the Law. This means that Matthew evidences both a positive and a negative perspective in relation to the Law. Matthew expressed a dual concern regarding the community. We have seen that Matthew's community represented, to a certain extent, a mixed state. As an Israelite community, it shared a dual "citizenship", in which it could not have conceived denying either the validity of the Law or the basic authority of and need for scribal interpretation. As a community of Jesus' followers, its members recognized that Jesus' interpretation of the Law was for them supremely authoritative (Mohrlang 1984:22). Henceforth, some tension existed within the local community. Matthew reflected on both the validity of the Law and on certain anti-Law situations (the new interpretation of the Law according to Jesus). For this reason, Matthew portrayed Jesus as a new Lawmaker, having constituted the Sermon on the Mount (in line with Matthew's theology) as a new Law (see Bacon 1930:168, 342; Perrin 1974:174). This view was tied to the First Evangelist's intention to have the structure of the five discourses in his Gospel aligned to the five books of the Pentateuch. Moreover, Jesus was considered to have been a "second Moses" (Allison 1993:267; cf Davies ([1963] 1966:83, 86, 92, 107).

However, the teaching of Jesus did not constitute a new Law; it merely formulated a new interpretation of the existing Law. His teaching enhanced the authoritative interpretation of the old Law, as it revealed the true nature of the will of God (Davies [1963] 1966:107). Jesus' interpretation of the Law did not focus on the letter of the Law like that of the Pharisees, who interpreted the Law in a strictly legalistic way, rather, he proffered the idea that the central commandment, to love, was the key principle of a proper interpretation of the Law (Mohrlang 1984:25). In Matthew, the Law was still considered to have been the Law of Moses, while the teaching of Jesus was perceived as some kind of "evangelistic Law" (Meier 1976:169). According to Matthew, Jesus was considered to have been the authoritative interpreter of the Torah. Kilpatrick (1946:108), therefore, interprets Matthew's emphasis on Jesus within the confines of the Law. Henceforth, the lives of the disciples were not merely interesting because of their submission to the Law, but also because of their personal submission to Jesus himself, as Lord (Davies [1963] 1966:422).

According to the above discussion, it seems that the Law was at least binding in Matthew's community. SeGl (1991:7) stated that Jesus and the disciples did not abolish the Mosaic Law, but that they only corrected the Pharisaic interpretation of the Law. This is a possible perspective, owing to

### ***Matthew's and Paul's inclusive tendencies: A comparison***

the fact that Matthew mentioned that Jesus broke the Sabbath law, as he allowed his disciples to pick some heads of grain and eat them (Mt 12:1-8), together with the argument regarding the healing on the Sabbath day (Mt 12:9-14). According to Matthew, it seems that the disciples were hungry and that this explained the disciples' actions and that of David's followers (1 Sam 21:1-6). In contrast to Mark (2:23-27), "the issue is only that David is just as guilty as Jesus, but not that both were upholding the Law" (SeGl 1991:6). Yet Matthew mentioned that priests who profaned the Sabbath were guiltless. To a certain extent, therefore, Matthew made some allowance with reference to the personal authority of Jesus regarding the interpretation of the Law. This scene most probably relates to the possibility of some conflict between Matthew's community and the people at the synagogue in Antioch (Carter 2002:262). In the second pericope of the healing on the Sabbath day (Mt 12:9-14), the story might emphasize the importance of showing mercy, rather than of strictly abiding by the customs of the Law, as it was yet lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Mt 12:12). To love, to feed the hungry, and heal the sick was all in accordance with God's will as having pertained to the Sabbath – according to the personal interpretation of Jesus (see Carter 2002:268). From this discussion, it seems likely that Matthew expected that his community would maintain the general Sabbatical law, even though not in the same strict and rigid sense as that which was adhered to by Pharisaic Judaism (Mohrlang 1984:11; Kilpatrick 1946:116; Barth 1963:81, 91).

### **3.2 Paul**

Paul's perspective regarding the basic demand of the Law was that a Christian should live and act in God's power and love (Nürnberg 2002:241). Lamp (1999:39) has commented that Paul made both positive and negative statements with regard to the possibility that the Israelites adhered to the Law. The consideration that the Law would be the basis of judgment for those who sin under it (Rm 2:12-13) has been regarded as negative. In a positive way, the Law, to a certain extent, could have, and had been obeyed by those who did not yet possess it (Rm 2:14-15). This implies that Paul did not regard the Law as an important yardstick for the general Christian life. The terminology Paul used regarding the Law was confusing. The major difficulty concerns Paul's statements within the context of the gospel. On the one hand, Paul stated: "Christ is the end of the Law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rm 4:10). On the other hand, "we uphold the Law" (Rm 3:31; cf Rm 7:12), causing one to ask: "is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not" (Gl 3:21).



Apart from all of the Pauline texts, this question remains. These texts have recently been subjected to varying interpretations. My discussion addresses Paul's perspective in two ways: the first is Paul's view regarding Christ as the end of the Law and the second, Paul's ethical perspective with regard to the moral function of the Law.

"Christ is the end of the Law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rm 10:4). This statement implies that salvation, or a way to God, does not merely come about through obedience to the Law. This topic is a central issue in every study of Pauline theology. Paul was convinced that Christians do not need to obey the Law to obtain salvation, but to have faith in Christ (Rm 3:21, 28, 30; 4:16; 10:4, 9; Gl 2:16; 3:6, 8, 11, 18, 22, 25) (Mohrlang 1984:27; see Hagner 1997:25). All of these above-mentioned verses inform us that the Christian life is to be lived by faith, as well as indicating that the Law no longer carried any authority towards salvation (Gl 2:19). Paul's gospel was disclosed apart from the Law (Hagner 1997:25). His perspective was that righteousness is no longer obtained through obedience to the Law, but that whosoever believes, will receive this freely from God. "Christ himself was now considered to have been the believer's righteousness" (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21) (Mohrlang 1984:27). Paul's perspective regarding the Law was that the Christian life should, in a completely altering way, be changed from a life under the Law, to a life submitted to and controlled by the Spirit. We can thus conclude that "all who rely on observing the Law are under a curse, for it is written: Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the Law. Clearly no one is justified before God by the Law, because the righteous will live by faith" (Gl 3:10-11).

One may ask what it is that Paul told his readers about his life prior to his conversion. He had an Israelite background, was "circumcised on the eighth day", he was "of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews". Moreover, with reference to the Law, he was a Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for legalistic righteousness, faultless (see Phlp 3:5-6). The background of Paul was that he called himself a former Pharisee (Ac 23:6; 26:5). Paul probably belonged to the liberal followers of Hillel or perhaps to the more conservative school of Shammai (Lührmann 1995:35). Snodgrass (1988:158) suggested that this background reveals to us that Paul never rejected the Hebrew Scriptures. One could therefore ask: if Paul's mind regarding the Law was not negative, which function has the Law then fulfilled in his letters? Obviously Paul also made certain distinctions on some basic issues, so that he expected the Law to be lived by Christians, except for (amongst other, practices) circumcision. We do not know how Paul

### ***Matthew's and Paul's inclusive tendencies: A comparison***

arrived at these exceptions as to how he expected the Law to be lived (Sanders 1983:93-122). Therefore, Paul's perspective on the Law was not negative, as he considered the Law to have been an important tool to enable the followers of Christ to live a life pleasing to God. The Law did not contain power within itself (Rm 8:3); it could be taken over and used by sin or it could have its rightful use in the sphere of Christ, the Spirit, and faith, if or whenever the believer would be willing to submit the complete control of his life to God through Christ in the Spirit.

We now return to our reasoning regarding the interpretation of Romans 10:4. Probably the Greek word *τέλος* did not refer to the cessation of the Law (Snodgrass 1988:173). The Law still fulfills an important function in the sphere of Christianity, even though this might have been stated in a different way, for "Christ is the goal of the Law for righteousness to everyone believing" (Snodgrass 1988:173). In Paul's letters, in a number of statements, he mentioned the apparent existence of some kind of distinction in his mind between the ritual and moral aspects of the Law (Bruce 1975:266; Knox 1961:99; Banks 1975:109). The ritual law was, for Gentile believers, clearly abrogated, even though the various moral aspects of the Law were still valid for Christianity (Mohrlang 1984:34; see Martin 1989:129-134, 140-141). For instance, according to 1 Corinthians 7:19, "circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing". Keeping God's commandments is what counts. This commandment of God did not relate to the ritual demands of the Law, but it primarily referred to the moral aspects of the Law (Gulin 1958:121). Hence, Paul's statement about the Law was that the Law is (and will always be) holy, as well as that the commandments are holy, righteous and good (Rm 7:12), having been the moral aspects of the Law (Mohrlang 1984:34; Campenhausen 1972:29). Paul's mind regarding the Law had a moral implication; the Law remained (and yet remains) an authoritative revelation of God's will for the Christian community. The Law functioned as a system of criteria in terms of which a certain (Christian) ethical behaviour could be defined (Mohrlang 1984:34).

According to the above discussion, the function of the Law to substantiate Pauline ethics has been confirmed. It seems evident that Paul's ethics were motivated by the divine Law (cf 1 Cr 3:17; 14:38; 16:22; Gl 1:9; Rm 2:12; 2 Cr 9:6). On the contrary, Sanders (1975:48) suggested that the ethical motivation of the divine Law formed merely one side of Paul's ethical statement. This statement is both arbitrary and absolute, as was usually the case with his imperatives. What then becomes of the sense of obligation that underlies ethics? According to Knox (1961:97), Paul's perspective on the Law did not in any sense formulate an ethical obligation, due to the fact that "Paul

denied the continuing validity and the absolute indispensability of the law itself” (Knox 1961:89, 110). However, it is my personal conviction that Knox misunderstood certain issues, for Paul did not reject the Law in all respects. Paul’s perspective was that moral obligations formed the basis grounds other than the Law (Mohrlang 1984:41). The scriptures continued, in an ethical sense, to be regarded as the authoritative expression of the Law and fulfilled a secondary and not a primary function in the structure of Paul’s ethics. The Law did not have the function of salvation for the Christian community, even though it was supportive of the Christian life. Paul believed that the ethical law was based upon faith in Christ alone (Sim 1998:200).

### **3.3 A comparison between Matthew and Paul**

It is clear that Matthew and Paul had a common Israelite background. There is a certain level of similarity between the two on fundamental issues. Both of them discussed the Law and regarded it as the expression of God’s will for the Christian community. However, both Matthew and Paul departed from certain elements of the traditional understanding and practice of the Law. It is especially Matthew’s perspective on the Law which points to different ways of interpreting the traditional perspective of the Law. This was the case with Paul as well. Here, there is definitely a difference with regard to the interpretation of the Law and its customs, which relates not only to Matthew and Paul, but also to the Pharisees. Matthew’s community consisted of both Christians and Israelites who closely observed the Law, while the community to whom Paul ministered, was very much related to the Law.

It is probable that both had a different understanding regarding the personal perspective of Jesus concerning the Law. This was reflected in their writings, together with the function which the Law fulfilled in the life of the church (Kilpatrick 1966:1299). In the case of Matthew, it was most probable that Matthew’s community predominantly originated from an Israelite background and that they were still under the Mosaic Law (they separated from the Israelite people, but still kept the same Israelite tradition). Matthew maintains a more positive view of the function of Law. It is certain that the Matthean community was to continue the observance of at least certain elements of Israelite ritual law<sup>4</sup> (Mt 5:19). Matthew did not refer to circumcision (Mohrlang 1984:44-45). It may be that Matthew’s community had granted this Israelite ritual law a continued validity. Matthew said that the yoke of Jesus was easy and that his burden was light (Mt 11:28), even though Matthew continually regarded any adherence to the Christian life as still submitting to

---

<sup>4</sup> Matthew believed that Jesus had affirmed and validated all aspects of the Torah, but Paul believed that the coming of the Christ meant that the ritual law could be abandoned.

### ***Matthew's and Paul's inclusive tendencies: A comparison***

the demands of the Law. The Law still remained authoritative for the Christian life within Matthew's community. Hence, Matthew believed that faith in Christ was only possible within the context of the Israelite cultural tradition. This Law observant community therefore could not include all kinds of people. The Law legitimated the Israelite society as an institution with a hierarchical structure. The identity of the people of Israel was not defined by individual personalities but by being part of a unified Israel (Rowlett 1997:375). This suggests that the people of Israel were hierarchically structured according to patriarchal authority and the Law. Vledder (1997:127-128; cf Duling 1995:358-387) described Matthew's community as an agrarian society, of which unclean, degraded and expendable people were part. It constituted several types of people such as the man with leprosy (Mt 8:2), a sick woman (Peter's mother-in-law) (Mt 8:14), and a paralytic (Mt 4:24). All of them were low class people according to the Law.

In contrast, the Pauline Christian community did not at all function on the basis of having been ordered around (managed and governed) by the Law. Paul's perspective on the Law was not so much focused on the background as on the underlying theological structure (Mohrlang 1984:42). The fulfillment of the demands of the Law was hopeless. To him, the Law was not the key to a life of proper moral standards. Paul stated that this Law only aroused and stimulated the very sin it forbade. Hence, Paul sharply contrasted the complete system of Law with grace and faith in Christ (Mohrlang 1984:43). We could therefore assume that for the Pauline Christian community it was not important to live a life restricted by/under the Law. The Law was no longer controlling the Christian life. The Law was merely functional in terms of its relevance to and its practical usefulness within the ministry of the evangelist (1 Cor 9:20-21; Ac 21:20-26). Paul believed the coming of Christ had led to the abandonment of the ritual law. Paul knew the problems that the commandments of the Torah - circumcision, Sabbath, eating clean and unclean food – could pose for Israelites and non-Israelites who were interested in Israelite religion in a Greek-Hellenistic city within the Roman empire.

It is clear that for Matthew's community, the observance of the Law within their own parameters was important. On the other hand, the Pauline Christian community was not a ritual observing community, as this would not have benefited them in the sense of their obedience, having experienced some continued power in their Christian lives. Hence, Matthew's community was involved in a traditional Law-observing situation (see Sim 1998:200). According to Israelite tradition, men and women were not in the same state. This situation confirms the insight that Matthew's community was indeed part

of a society laid out by stratification. Nevertheless, Matthew's community represented an inclusive community despite the fact that the observance of the Law was an obstacle in the inclusion of all people in their community. The Pauline community, was not in a state of Law observance, due to the fact that the Law merely fulfilled an ethical function in the Christian life. Paul's community was therefore more inclusive of all people. From this background I will consider the missionary perspective of both of these communities below.

#### **4. MATTHEW'S AND PAUL'S PERSPECTIVES ON GENTILES**

We have thus far argued that Matthew's community was indeed a Law-observing community, while the Pauline community was a Law-free community. Matthew's community was related to its Israelite background and this most probably influenced the perspective towards Gentiles in his community. The Pauline community on the other hand was a Law-free community and this perspective also influenced Paul's attitude towards the Gentiles.

Goulder (1974:170; see Sim 1998:199, 2002:771) argued that the First Evangelist was far more conservative than the Law-free Pauline Christian community. Meier (1983:12-86) also suggested that Matthew stood on the Law in a much more conservative way than Paul. We will in this section consider the particular perspectives on Gentiles in both communities. We will first of all deal with the Matthean perspective on Gentiles (keeping Matthew's Gentile mission in mind). We will then consider Paul's perspective on Gentiles (Law-free mission).

##### **4.1 Matthew's Gentile perspective**

The Israelite Christian community did not carry out any Gentile missionary project and did not have much contact with the Gentile world. It does, however, seem apparent that at least some people with a non-Israelite background belonged to the Matthean community. Kvalbein (2000:55) mentioned that at the end of the Gospel, Matthew's community held a positive attitude towards the Gentiles. The Gentiles as such were portrayed positively in Matthew's narrative, as, for example, with the centurion of Capernaum (Mt 8:5-13), the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28), as well as everybody else included in the universal mission (Mt 28:19). Nevertheless, there is a problem with this latent presence of some Gentiles, together with a certain anti-Gentile perspective in Matthew's Gospel (cf Mt 18:17).

Matthew's community represented a mixed state, comprising of both Gentiles and Israelites, having endured much conflict in their midst (see

### ***Matthew's and Paul's inclusive tendencies: A comparison***

Kvalbein 2000:46). Sim's (1998:248, 301) definition of the Gentiles in Matthew's community referred to those who had been converted to Christianity and had also accepted submission to the Israelite notion of salvation. However, the First Evangelist's depiction of the Gentiles was that they were not equal to the Israelite members. For example, the Gentile and Israelite women who accompanied Jesus were not equal in terms of their rights, owing to the fact that the Law-observing Matthean community did not accept all people. The sectarian group ranked their members hierarchically, putting proselytizing first, in order to meet the basic requirement for admission (Sim 1998:254).

Matthew's community thus practised the exclusion of some people – those wicked members (cf Mt 18:17). According to Sim (1998:205), Matthew mentioned that the wicked in his community were “doers of lawlessness”. Matthew's Israelite Christian community was Law-observing in nature. Hence, we can accept that Matthew's community was not Law-free, unlike the Pauline Christian movement. The First Evangelist's perspective regarding the observance of the Law was such that he could not have equated lawlessness with failure to uphold the Law. The “lawlessness” of the Scribes and Pharisees had no validity in Christ (cf Mt 23:23). Moreover, Matthew's perspective regarding the observance of the Law was that there was no difference between willful rejection of the Law and willful misapplication of the Law (Sim 1998:206).

We will now consider the distinction of the First Evangelist between the Law-observant and the Law-free Christian movement in Matthew 13:36-43. This parable referred to 13:24-30: while everyone was asleep, their slumbers enabled the enemy to sow the seeds of the weeds (lawlessness) (Brandon 1951:234-236; Sim 1998:206). According to Gundry (1994:263), evidence identifies these sleeping men as the disciples. Sim agreed with Gundry on this basic perspective and suggested that this discipleship was inclusive of both Israelite and Gentile Christianity. This interpretation addressed the issue that the First Evangelist was still blamed for having preached a Law-free gospel, like Paul and the Hellenists (Sim 1998:206).

We have argued that the Matthean community had a close and open relationship with the Gentiles and the world of the Gentiles. But we have also realized that Matthew's community was confined to a Law-observing perspective towards the Gentiles.

#### **4.2 Paul's Gentile perspective**

Paul thought of himself as an apostle to the Gentiles, and the purpose of his ministry was to bring about a very positive perspective towards all Gentiles

(Rm 1:5; cf 1:13). Of course, this does not imply that Paul's ministry was only directed towards the Gentiles. Paul's ministry looked upon "the Gentiles" in terms of a "priestly duty" of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rm 15:16) (Stettler 2000:193). The mission of Paul was indeed Law-free (see Martin 1989:308). During his ministry, Paul travelled in all directions in Greece and Asia Minor. He visited many Gentile countries and his mission encountered various Christian Israelite groups (Sim 1998:211).

This mission activity brought about conflict between Israelites and Gentiles. The Law-free mission of Paul seems to have been the major stumbling block for the Jerusalem community: the Israelite Christian groups were expected to be part of the Law-observing communities, like Matthew's community (Sim 1998:211). SeGl (1995:20; see Watson 1986:28) suggested, on account of Paul's letter to the Galatians, that Paul's perspective regarding the Gentiles was accepted in the Christian community without the requirement of circumcision (Gl 5:1-4), while Sanders (1997:67-83; cf Talbert 2001:2) indicated that Paul was caught in the middle between the Israelites and the Gentiles in Corinth. Paul's mission was also double-minded relating to both Israel and the Gentile nations: "he forged a Christianity that was Israelite to the degree that it forbade idolatry and extra-marital sex and was Gentile to the degree that it forbade circumcision, observance of the Sabbath, and dietary laws" (Sanders 1997:83).

Sanders provided certain explanations for Paul's opposition to the works of the Law, in two distinctive ways: First of all, Paul's criticism was that salvation was and yet remains in Christ alone, for none can be saved through the Law (Sanders 1983:27). The works of the Law were signs of Israelite privilege and this brought about the national exclusiveness of the Israelites (Sanders 1991:122). Paul's focus in these two criticisms was fixed on "the lack of faith in Christ and the lack of equality for the Gentiles" (Sanders 1983:154-155). Hence, Dunn (1982-1983:95-122) stated that Paul's references to the works of the Law, like circumcision, Sabbath observance and dietary laws, which distinguished the Israelites from the Gentiles, functioned as ethnic boundary markers. According to Paul, this opinion regarding the Law was against Israel's exclusiveness regarding the Gentiles (Talbert 2001:13). Paul's Law-free mission favoured a certain universalism.

Paul preached the gospel to every nation, including the Israelites (1 Cor 9:20-21): "to the Jews I become like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the Law I became like one under the Law (though I myself am not under the Law), so as to win those under the Law. To those not having the Law I

### ***Matthew's and Paul's inclusive tendencies: A comparison***

became like one not having the Law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the Law."

According to Watson (1986:29-31), this passage implies that Paul, in verse 20, was making a reference to the earliest days of his Christian commitment, as he lived like an Israelite and he also preached the truth to Israelites. In verse 21 it is revealed that Paul himself, as an apostle to the Gentiles, had broken with the Israelite way of life. When Paul was preaching the gospel to the Israelites, he did so as having observed the Law, "for purely pragmatic reasons, while his personal regard as having been free from the Law, should not be taken literally" (Watson 1986:29).

One further positive view of Paul regarding the Law is stated in his own words, "if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?" (Gl 5:11). This passage is a clear indication that Paul was preaching the gospel to Israel during the period prior to his Gentile missionary endeavours. This perspective also indicates to us that Paul was engaged in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Therefore, Paul had a very positive perspective towards including Gentiles in his community: he calls himself the "apostle to the Gentiles" (Rm 11:13) and "Christ's servant to the Gentiles" (Rm 15:16); he perceives the preaching of the gospel as taking place "among the Gentiles" (Gl 2:2).

### **4.3 Comparison between Matthew and Paul**

Matthew expected that his community would preach the gospel to the Israelites, as the gospel pertained to all nations (see Sim 2001:278-279). Matthew's perspective on Gentiles is positive to some extent. They included Gentiles members in their community, although they required the observance of the Law by their converts. The intention in accepting the Gentiles was to allow for change in Matthew's community, where many were not open to all people being able to partake in God's glory. This implies that the Matthean community proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles from a perspective of a "new" understanding of the Law.

The Pauline Christian community supported a Law-free statement to its Gentile members. In Galatians 2:1-3, Paul took Titus, who was uncircumcised, with him to Jerusalem, "even though he was a Greek." This verse indicates that the Pauline Christian community had dispensed with circumcision for Gentiles (Watson 1986:33). The Gentile Christians were exempted from some of the requirements of the Law. Probably this abandonment of sections of the Law of Moses was intended to make it easier for Gentiles to become Christians. Paul's Law-free perspective had successfully included Gentiles from the Gentile world (Watson 1986:35).



## **5. CONCLUSION**

We have identified the inclusive tendencies in the writings of Matthew and Paul by focusing on their perspectives on the Law and on Gentiles through cross-cultural interpretation. The cultural backgrounds of the communities of both Matthew and Paul were not the same. The Matthean community was part of the Israelite cultural tradition. It was most probable that his community predominantly originated in an Israelite background and was still under the Mosaic Law. Matthew maintained a more positive view of the function of the Law. However, the cultural background of the Pauline community was to be found within Hellenism. The maintenance of Hellenism was not regarded as part of Israelite tradition. They spoke Greek and people were commonly educated in Stoicism. Therefore, they possessed different thoughts from those of Israelite tradition. This means that their ethno-centrism is not same. They have their own cultural perspective. Moreover, the Pauline community was situated in the Hellenistic world and preached the gospel more easily to the Gentiles.

It is most likely that Matthew's community continued its observance of at least some elements of the Israelite ritual law (Mt 5:19). According to Mohrlang (1984:44-45), Matthew did not refer to circumcision. It may be that Matthew's community had granted this ritual law a continued validity. Matthew stated that the yoke of Jesus was easy and that his burden was light (Mt 11:28), even though he continually upheld an adherence to Christian life while submitting to the demands of the Law. Matthew also emphasized the love commandment as the most important issue regarding the Law within his community. This view tells us that Matthew's community was a Law-observant society. The Law remained authoritative within Matthew's community. This Law-observant structural community did not include everyone. As members came from different social levels, their individual social standing differed. To the Israelites in the first century, the Law played a leading role in defining their unique identity in relation to the Gentiles (Esler 1998:178). The Law constituted the core underpinning of the Israelites, resulting in the stratification of their community life in accordance with that of other first century Mediterranean peoples. The function of the Law meant that the Law-observing community was less inclusive than Law-free itself.

The Pauline communities were not constituted and managed by the Law in any way. Paul's perspective on the Law was not so much focused on the background as on the underlying theological structure (Mohrlang 1984:42). According to Paul, to receive God's righteousness, the fulfillment of the demands of the Law is futile. Paul's message to his communities was that the Law stimulated the very sin it forbade (Mohrlang 1984:43). We can

### ***Matthew's and Paul's inclusive tendencies: A comparison***

therefore assume that the Pauline communities did not attach paramount importance to living/under the Law: it no longer controlled their Christian life. Therefore, the Pauline communities more easily included Gentile members in their community. The Law was not a stumbling block to Gentiles joining Pauline communities.

The result of cross-culture interpretation tells us that Pauline communities had more inclusive tendencies. It is clear that within Matthew's community, observance of the Law was important, but that the Pauline communities were not in a ritual law-observing situation. Gentiles were included more easily in a Pauline community, without a tradition involving Israelite converts.

### **Works consulted**

- Allison, D C 1993. *The new Moses: A Matthean typology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Bacon, B W 1930. *Studies in Matthew*. London: Constable.
- Balch, D L 1991. The Greek political topos Περί.. νόμων and Matthew 5:17, 19 and 16:19, in Balch, D L (ed), *Social history of the Matthean community: Cross-disciplinary approaches*, 68-86. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Banks, R 1975. *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barth, G 1963. Matthew's understanding of the Law, in Bornkamm, G, Barth, G and Held, H J (eds), *Tradition & interpretation in Matthew*, 58-164. London: SCM Press.
- Becker, J 1993. *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles*, tr by O C Dean. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.
- Bidney, D 1968. sv Cultural relativism. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*.
- Blair, E P 1960. *Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew*. New York: Abingdon.
- Brandon, S G F [1951] 1957. *The fall of Jerusalem and the Christian church*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: SPCK.
- Bruce, F F 1975. Paul and the Law of Moses. *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 57, 259-279.
- Campanhausen, H V 1972. *The formation of the Christian Bible*. London: Adam and Charles Black.
- Carter, W 2002. Resisting and imitating the empire: Imperial paradigms in two Matthean parables. *Interpretation* 56(3), 260-272.
- Craffert, P F 1996. On New Testament interpretation and ethnocentrism, in Brett, M G (ed), *Ethnicity and the Bible*, 449-468. Leiden: E J Brill.
- Davies, W D [1963] 1966. *The setting of the Sermon on the Mount*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Den Heyer, C J 2000. *Paul: A man of two worlds*, tr by J Bowden. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International.
- Duling, D 1995. Matthew and marginality. *HTS* 51, 358-387.

- Duling, D 2002. Matthew as marginal scribe in an advanced agrarian society. *HTS* 58, 520-575.
- Duncan, G S 1941. *The epistle of Paul to the Galatians*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Dunn, J D G 1982-1983. The new perspective on Paul. *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 65(2), 95-122.
- Esler, P F 1998. *Galatians*. London: Routledge.
- Goulder, M D 1974. *Midrash and lection in Matthew*. London: SPCK.
- Gulin, E G 1958. The positive meaning of the law according to Paul. *Lutheran Quarterly* 10, 115-128.
- Gundry, R H 1994. *Matthew: A commentary on his handbook for a mixed Church under persecution*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Hagner, D A 1997. Balancing the Old and New: The Law of Moses in Matthew and Paul. *Interpretation* 51, 20-30.
- Hong, I 1993. *The Law in Galatians*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press. (JSNTS 81.)
- Kilpatrick, G D 1946. *The origins of the Gospel according to St Matthew*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Knox, J 1961. *The ethic of Jesus in the teaching of the Church*. London: Epworth Press.
- Kvalbein, H 2000. Has Matthew abandoned the Jew?, in Anan, J and Kvalbein, H (eds), *The mission of the early church to Jews and Gentiles*, 45-62. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Lamp, J S 1999. Paul, the law, Jews and Gentiles: A contextual and exegetical reading of Romans 2:12-16. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42(1), 37-51.
- Lett, J 1987. *The human enterprise: A critical introduction to anthropological theory*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Longenecker, R L 1985. Antioch of Syria, in Harrison, R K (ed), *Major cities of the Biblical world*, 8-21. Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Longenecker, R N 1990. *Galatians*. Dallas, TX: WBC. (Word Books.)
- Lührmann, D 1995. Paul and the Pharisaic tradition, in Porter, S E & Evans, C A (eds), *The Pauline writings*, 35-54. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Luz, U 1985. *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*. 2 vols. Zürich: Benziger. (EKKNT 1.2-2.)
- Malina, B J 1986. *Christian origins and cultural anthropology: Practical models for Biblical interpretation*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press.
- Malina, B J 1993. *The New Testament world: Insights from cultural anthropology*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.
- Martin, B L 1989. *Christ and the Law in Paul*. Leiden: EJ Brill.
- Meier, J P 1976. *Law and history in Matthew's gospel*. Rome: Biblical Institute Press.
- Meier, J P 1983. Antioch, in Brown, R E & Meier, J P, *Antioch and Rome*, 12-86. New York: Paulist.
- Mohrlang, R 1984. *Matthew and Paul: A comparison of ethical perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nürnbergger, K 2002. Paul's concept of salvation-culmination of an evolutionary process. *Scriptura* 80, 226-258.

***Matthew's and Paul's inclusive tendencies: A comparison***

- Osiek, C 1992. *What are they saying about the social setting of the New Testament?* New York: Paulist Press.
- Perrin, N 1974. *The New Testament: An introduction*. New York: Harcourt.
- Rowlett, L 1997. Inclusion, exclusion and marginality in the book of Joshua, in Chaalcraft, D J (ed), *Social-scientific Old Testament criticism a Sheffield reader*, 372-380. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Saler, B 1993. *Conceptualizing religion: Immanent anthropologists, transcendent natives, and unbounded categories*. Leiden: E J Brill.
- Sanders, E P 1983. *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish people*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.
- Sanders, E P 1991. *Paul*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sanders, J T 1997. Paul between Jew and Gentiles in Corinth. *JSNT* 67, 67-83.
- Segal, A F 1991. Matthew's Jewish voice, in D L Balch (ed), *Social history of the Matthean community: Cross-disciplinary approaches*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Segal, A F 1995. Universalism in Judaism and Christianity, in Engberg-Pedersen, T (ed), *Paul in his Hellenistic context*, 1-29. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Sim, D C 1998. *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The history and social setting of the Matthean community*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Sim, D C 2001. The social setting of the Matthean community: New paths for an old journey. *HTS* 57, 268-280.
- Sim, D C 2002. Matthew's anti-Paulinism: A neglected feature of Matthean studies. *HTS* 58, 767-783.
- Snodgrass, K 1988. Spheres of influence: A possible solution to the problem of Paul and the law. *JSNT* 32, 93-113.
- Stanton, G N 1992. *A Gospel for a new people: Studies in Matthew*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Stettler, H 2000. Colossians 1:24 in the framework of Paul's mission theology, in Anan, J and Kvalbein, H (eds), *The mission of the early church to Jew and Gentiles*, 185-208. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Streeter, B H 1924. *The Four Gospels: A study of origins*. London: Macmillan.
- Talbert, C H 2001. Paul, Judaism, and the revisionists. *CBQ* 63, 1-22.
- Van Aarde 1989. 'Ἠγέρθη ἀπο τῶν νεκρῶν (Mt 28:7): A textual evidence on the separation of Judaism and Christianity. *Neotestamentica* 23, 219-233.
- Vledder, E J 1997. *Conflict in the miracle stories: A socio-exegetical study of Matthew 8 and 9*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Walaskay, R W 2002. *Matthew 5:17-20. Interpretation* 25(1), 417-420.
- Watson, F 1986. *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Winthrop, R H 1991. sv relativism. *Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology*.