

THE CHARACTERISATION OF HEROD AND THE INFANT JESUS  
AS MASCULINE AUTHORITY FIGURES IN THE GOSPEL  
ACCORDING TO MATTHEW 1 AND 2

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(New Testament) at the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University



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## Abstract

In the first chapter, the research background and motivation for the study is explained as well as the focus on power and authority in Matthew 1-2 in regard to Jesus and Herod. Thereafter the research questions and the aim of the research is outlined. The research methodology as well as the two methods, narrative criticism and modern hegemonic masculinity studies, are also briefly explained before the study is outlined.

In chapter 2 narrative criticism as methodology is defined before it is applied to Matthew 1-2. The methodology of narrative criticism is introduced and explained in terms of its focus on story and discourse, point of view, narration, symbols and irony and narrative patterns. Key elements of narrative criticism like events, settings, characters, and plot are also explained and applied to Matthew 1-2.

The focus of chapter 3 is on the characterisation of Jesus. It analyses how the infant Jesus, as a passive character in Matthew 1-2, does not speak or act. He is instead primarily characterised by his extensive genealogy, the numerous titles used by Matthew to indicate that he is the Messiah sent by God to rule as his king, and the care Jesus received from God through the use of intermediaries. It is argued that the genealogy of Jesus provides an indication of his ascribed honour and that it indicates that he, and not Herod, was the legitimate Davidic king. It, furthermore, indicates through the inclusion of four gentile women, that Jesus would not only be the king of the Jews but also of all gentiles who worship the true God. The analysis of the numerous titles Matthew uses indicates that he is, according to Matthew, the Son of Abraham, the Son of David, the Son of Man, Emmanuel, the King of the Jews, and a Nazarene. Even as an infant Jesus possessed unique ascribed honour. While Jesus as an infant is passive in Matthew 1-2, his honour is enhanced in how he was cared for by God through his father and angels as messengers.

Chapter 4 investigates the characterisation of King Herod as a masculine character in the narrative of Matthew 1-2 by noting how Matthew described his response to the birth of Jesus, used titles for Herod and described the actions and death of Herod.

Chapter 5 focuses on the second research question and uses a different reader-response approach than the previous three chapters. The shift in focus is explained first, where after hegemonic masculinity is defined, after which Matthew 1-2 is read from this perspective. The

reading undertaken is a radical reader-response analysis of the family of Jesus and of Herod as masculine characters. Thereafter Matthew's depictions of Herod and Jesus as male characters are compared to each other in terms of hegemonic masculinity. It is argued that the manner in which Herod abused his power as king in Matthew 1-2 to the detriment of women and children in order to safeguard his oppressive power, stands in contrast to the manner in which Jesus is described in Matthew 1-2. It is a text-book example of what contemporary gender studies have characterised as hegemonic masculinity.

In chapter 5 it is argued that before reading Matthew 1-2 from a hegemonic masculinity perspective in Nigeria (a radical reader-response reading that elicits an "unexpected" meaning from the text), it is important to first read it from a conservative reader-response perspective that produces a more expected reading from the text. The reason for this two-step approach, which is reflected in the two research questions of the study, is that in order for Biblical studies to meaningfully engage with the Nigerian context, it needs to ensure that it cannot simply be dismissed as imposing a feminist Western perspective on the text and its contemporary readers. The manner in which this can be done in practice is outlined in chapter 6.

## **Keywords**

Power, authority, hegemonic masculinity, Herod, Matthew, narrative criticism.

## Opsomming

In die eerste hoofstuk word die navorsingsagtergrond en motivering vir die studie uiteengesit, asook die rede vir die fokus op mag en gesag in Matteus 1-2 met betrekking tot Jesus en Herodes. Daarna word die navorsingsvrae en die doel van die navorsing uiteengesit. Die navorsingsmetodologie, sowel as die twee metodes, narratiewe kritiek en moderne hegemoniese manlikheidstudies, word ook kortliks verduidelik voordat die verloop van die studie uiteengesit word.

In hoofstuk 2, word narratiewe kritiek as metodologie omskryf voordat dit op Matteus 1-2 toegepas word. Die metode van narratiewe kritiek word bekend gestel en verduidelik in terme van die fokus op storie en diskoers, standpunt, vertelling, simbole en ironie, en vertelpatrone. Sleutel-elemente van narratiewe kritiek soos gebeure, instellings, karakters en intrige word ook verduidelik en toegepas op Matteus 1-2.

Die fokus van hoofstuk 3 is op die karakterisering van Jesus. Dit ontleed hoe die kind Jesus, as passiewe karakter in Matteus 1-2, nie praat of optree nie. Hy word eerder omskryf deur sy uitgebreide genealogie, die talle titels wat deur Matteus gebruik is om aan te dui dat hy die Messias is wat deur God gestuur is om te regeer as koning, en die sorg wat Jesus deur middel van tussengangers van God ontvang het. Daar word aangevoer dat die geslagsregister van Jesus 'n aanduiding gee van sy toegeskryfde eer en dat dit aandui dat hy, en nie Herodes nie, die wettige koning as nasaat van Dawid was. Daarbenewens dui die insluiting van vier heidense vroue daarop dat Jesus nie net die Koning van die Jode sou wees nie, maar ook van alle nie-Jode wat die ware God aanbid. Die ontleding van die talle titels wat Matteus gebruik, dui daarop dat hy volgens hom die Seun van Abraham, die Seun van Dawid, die Seun van die mens, Emmanuel, die Koning van die Jode en 'n Nasarener was. Selfs as 'n baba het Jesus dus 'n unieke toegeskryfde eer gehad. Terwyl Jesus as 'n baba passief in Matteus 1-2 is, word sy eer versterk in hoe hy deur God deur sy vader en engele versorg is.

Hoofstuk 4 ondersoek die karakterisering van koning Herodes as manlike karakter in die verhaal van Matteus 1-2 deur te let op hoe die Evangelie van Matteus Herodes se reaksie op die geboorte van Jesus beskryf, titels vir Herodes gebruik en die optrede en dood van Herodes beskryf.

Hoofstuk 5 fokus op die tweede navorsingsvrae en gebruik 'n ander leser-respons-benadering as die vorige drie hoofstukke. Die verskuiwing in fokus word eers verduidelik, waarna hegemoniese manlikheid gedefinieer word, waarna Matteus 1-2 vanuit hierdie perspektief gelees word. Die lesing wat onderneem word, is 'n radikale leser-respons-analise van die familie van Jesus en van Herodes as 'n manlike karakter. Daarna word Matteus se uitbeelding van Herodes en Jesus as manlike karakters met mekaar vergelyk in terme van hegemoniese manlikheid. Daar word geargumenteer dat die manier waarop Herodes sy mag as koning in Matteus 1-2 ten koste van vroue en kinders gebruik het ten einde sy mag te beskerm, in teenstelling staan met die manier waarop Jesus in Matteus 1-2 beskryf word. Dit is 'n teksboekvoorbeeld van wat kontemporêre geslagstudies beskryf as hegemoniese manlikheid.

In hoofstuk 5 word aangevoer dat voor Matteus 1-2 uit 'n hegemoniese manlikheidsperspektief in Nigerië gelees word ('n radikale leser-respons-lesing wat 'n "onverwagte" betekenis uit die teks ontlok) is dit belangrik dat dit eers uit 'n konserwatiewe leser-respons-perspektief gelees word, wat 'n meer verwagte lees van die teks na vore bring. Die rede vir hierdie twee-stap-benadering, wat in die twee navorsingsvrae van die studie weerspieël word, is dat dit sinvol is vir die studie van die Bybel in die Nigeriese konteks. So word verseker dat dit nie net afgemaak kan word as 'n feministiese, Westerse perspektief op die teks nie. Hoofstuk 6 sit uiteen hoe dit in die praktyk gedoen kan word.

## **Trefwoorde**

Mag, gesag, hegemoniese manlikheid, Herodes, Matteus, narratiewe kritiek.

## Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work that is in this project is my own original work, that I am the author. I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining a qualification.

Signature -----

Date: December 2018

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to the vulnerable people in the tripartite institution who are disempowered by the construct of hegemonic masculinity that is operational in government institutions, religious institutions, and family institutions with ungodly impact on their gender, health, and theological way of thinking.

## List of Abbreviations

Chron. Chronicles

JCB Complete Jewish Bible

Cor. Corinthians

Dan. Daniel

Deut. Deuteronomy

Eph. Ephesians

Est. Esther

Ex. Exodus

Ezek. Ezekiel

Gal. Galatians

Gen. Genesis

Heb. Hebrews

Hos. Hosea

Isa. Isaiah

Jer. Jeremiah

Jn. John

Jos. Joshua

Jud. Jude

Kgs. Kings

K.J.V. Kings James Version

Lev. Leviticus

Lk. Luke

Mal. Malachi

Matt. Matthew

Mk. Mark

NIV New International Version

Num. Numbers

Pet. Peter

Ps. Psalms

Rev. Revelation

Rom. Romans

Ru. Ruth

Sam. Samuel

Thess. Thessalonians

**Table of Content**

Abstract.....	ii
Opsomming.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	vii
Dedication.....	x
List of Abbreviations.....	xi
Table of Content.....	xiii
CHAPTER 1.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Background.....	1
1.3 Power and authority in the Gospel according to Matthew.....	3
1.4 Research questions.....	4
1.5 Aim of Research.....	4
1.6 Research methodology.....	5
1.6.1 Narrative criticism.....	5
1.6.2 Hegemonic masculinity hermeneutics.....	9
1.7 Outline of study.....	10
1.8 Conclusion.....	10
CHAPTER 2.....	12
A NARRATIVE CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MATTHEW 1-2.....	12
2.1 Introduction.....	12
2.2 Narrative criticism as a method.....	12
2.2.1 Story and discourse.....	15
2.2.2 Point of view.....	16

2.2.3 Narration .....	16
2.2.4 Symbols and irony .....	17
2.2.5 Narrative patterns .....	19
2.3 Key elements of narrative criticism .....	20
2.3.1 Events.....	20
2.3.2 Settings.....	21
2.3.3 Characters .....	22
2.3.4 Plot .....	26
2.4 Conclusion .....	27
CHAPTER 3.....	29
THE CHARACTERISATION OF JESUS IN MATTHEW 1-2 .....	29
3.1 Introduction .....	29
3.2 The characterisation of Jesus through his genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17).....	29
3.3 The characterisation of Jesus through the use of titles in Matthew 1-2.....	32
3.3.1 Son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1).....	33
3.3.2 Son of David (Matt. 1:1).....	34
3.3.3 Son of Man (1:1, 16, 17, 18; 2:4) .....	35
3.3.4 A son and child (Matt. 1:21, 23, 25; 2:8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 20, 21).....	36
3.3.5 Emmanuel (Matt. 1:23) .....	36
3.3.6 The King of the Jews (Matt. 2:2).....	37
3.3.7 A Nazarene (Matt. 2:23).....	38
3.4 The characterisation of Jesus as a vulnerable infant.....	38
3.5 Conclusion .....	40
CHAPTER 4.....	42
THE CHARACTERISATION OF HEROD IN MATTHEW 1-2.....	42
4.1 Introduction .....	42

4.2 The description of Herod's response to the birth of Jesus (Matt. 2:3, 16).....	42
4.3 The titles of Herod (Matt. 2:1-12).....	43
4.4 The actions of Herod (Matt. 2:16).....	44
4.5 The death of Herod (Matt. 2:19) .....	47
4.6 Conclusion .....	48
CHAPTER 5.....	50
A MASCULINITY HERMENEUTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERISATION OF JESUS AND HEROD AS MALE CHARACTERS IN MATTHEW 1-2.....	50
5.1 Introduction .....	50
5.2 Hegemonic masculinity .....	50
5.3 The link between hegemony and masculinity .....	51
5.3.1 Reading Matthew 1-2 from the perspective of hegemonic masculinity .....	53
5.3.2 Radical reader-response studies and the use of a masculinity hermeneutic .....	54
5.4 Analysis of Jesus and Herod as masculinity characters in Matthew 1-2.....	59
5.4.1 An analysis of the family of the infant Jesus Christ – the King of the Jews .....	59
5.4.2 Analysis of Herod as a masculine character .....	61
5.5 Comparison between the infant Jesus and Herod.....	64
5.6 Conclusion .....	65
CHAPTER 6.....	67
CONCLUSION.....	67
6.1 Introduction .....	67
6.2 Addressing hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria .....	67
6.2.1 Applicability to the Nigerian context .....	68
6.2.2 Hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria.....	69
6.2.3 The role of the church.....	71
6.3 The contribution of Biblical studies .....	72

6.4 Addressing the abuse of power in the Nigerian context.....	73
6.5 Overview of study.....	74
6.6 Conclusion .....	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	78

# *CHAPTER 1*

## *INTRODUCTION*

### **1.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the research background of the study will be explained (1.2) and the focus on power and authority in Matthew 1-2 defined (1.3). Thereafter the two research questions (1.4) which will guide the research, as well as the aim of the research (1.5), will be discussed. The research methodology, as well as the two methods that will be used, will be explained briefly (1.6) before an outline of the study will be given (1.7). The two methods that will be used, narrative criticism (1.6.1) and modern hegemonic masculinity studies (1.6.2) will be explained more fully in chapters 2 and 5.

### **1.2 Background**

In Nigeria Christians in positions of leadership often claim that their authority and power come from God according to Genesis 1:28. It is therefore important to reflect theologically on how power is understood and used in contemporary societies. In this regard, Awojobi (2003:54-55) defines power as the capacity to influence others to do what is for the benefit of all people in a society, group, or community. Kajom (2015:109) asserts that while power itself is neutral, the attitudes and motivations of those who wield it, determine if its effect is benign or destructive.

Regarding the different uses of power, Sakenfeld (2009:783) warns that power is not given to individuals by God to dominate others through violence. Violence, according to Sakenfeld (2009:783), may take the form of explicit physical force resulting in bodily harm or psychological trauma, or it may be systematic and structural violence which oppresses others, as in racism which discriminates against others or an ethnocentric social order which considers another culture as inferior, the institution of slavery which denies freedom, a patriarchal society where males are considered superior to women. Violence

occurs in almost every society in the world (Kajom, 2015:13) and is often linked to the abuse of power in a structural manner. Carter (2017:285) describes four forms of structural violation namely

- (1) Regulatory and coercive political power.
- (2) Military power.
- (3) Economic power through the control of products, distribution, exchange, and consumption of resources.
- (4) Ideological and/or religious power that sanctions societal norms or shared understanding of social interaction.

Carter furthermore identifies three spheres of domination: Material domination, status domination (which humiliates and assaults human dignity), and ideological domination (which has to do with the exploitation of the masses).

Unfortunately, some men<sup>1</sup> in the E.C.W.A. Kasuwan Magani DCC and the Marmara Damishi<sup>2</sup> community in Nigeria in which I minister, abuse their power by dominating others by using violence. In line with the MTh Gender, Health and Theology programme sponsored by the Church of Sweden,<sup>3</sup> the motivation for this study is therefore to discuss their abuse of power over women, children, and other vulnerable people. This will be done by undertaking a critical study of chapters 1 and 2 of the Gospel according to Matthew to see how Herod the Great and the infant Jesus were characterisations of male authority

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<sup>1</sup> This phrase “some men” suggest that not all men in the E.C.W.A. Kasuwan Magani D.C.C. and in Marmara Damishi community abuse their power.

<sup>2</sup> The community of Marmara Damishi Kaduna in Nigeria is a big community that worships in different churches and denominations including the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), two Baptists churches, Deeper Life Church, and the Cherubim and Seraphim Church (C & S). The surrounding community includes Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist churches.

<sup>3</sup> The focus of the MTh Gender, Health and Theology programme sponsored by the Church of Sweden is “the reduction of maternal and infant mortality and strengthening of partner churches in their role as change agents promoting SRHR (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights).”

figures in the first-century world. These characteristics will then be critically examined from a gender-critical perspective by using the insights from recent masculinity studies. This will enable the researcher to critically engage with contemporary Christian males who justify their abuse of women and others with an appeal to the Bible to sanction their hegemonic patriarchal worldview.

### **1.3 Power and authority in the Gospel according to Matthew**

Douglas (1986:108) states that the Greek word ἐξουσία in the New Testament means “the power to act, or to possess, or to control, or disposition someone or something” unlike the Greek word δύναμις which simply means physical power. While ἐξουσία signifies power that is in some sense rightful or lawful, δύναμις simply signifies power that is used forcefully. However, both ἐξουσία and δύναμις can be used to harm others as in the case of King Herod who had the legal power, ἐξουσία, to command his soldiers, but who morally abused it by killing innocent infants. In this regard, Vine (1997:868-869) states that the word ἐξουσία denotes freedom of action or an unrestricted right to act. These two terms, “power” and “authority”, are sometimes used interchangeably to refer to the ability to do something or command someone to do it. Kajom (2015:107-108) is of the opinion that in contemporary societies the words “power” and “physical force” can be used synonymously. However, when power is abused and misused, justice, peace, human rights, and trust are replaced by fear which threatens the dignity of all.

Since Judea and Galilee were both occupied territories of the Roman Empire, its power, and authority was operational in the socio-historical context of Matthew’s narrative of Jesus’s birth, life, and ministry. Dunn (1993:29-30) points out that the Empire’s power in the context of Jesus’s ministry should have been used to empower subjects, but that it was instead improperly exercised by some government leaders and religious authority figures, such as the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin, who had been entrusted with a wide range of legislative and executive responsibilities by the Roman authorities. For example, at the time of the birth of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, Herod the Great exercised ultimate localised power and authority invested in him by the Roman authorities.

According to extra-Biblical sources, Herod was entrusted with the power to rule over his subjects by the Romans because he had helped Julius Caesar to defeat his rival Pompey in Jerusalem (see Vermes 2014:45-53, Richardson 1996:xvi, and Richardson, 1973:2).

The evangelist's focus on Herod the Great in the Gospel of Matthew is unique in the New Testament. It provides an opportunity for evaluating how Jesus and Herod, as rival kings and thus ultimate authority figures, were characterised by Matthew. Within Judaism, a king was given the task of protecting his subjects while punishing evildoers. However, as Richardson (1973:101) observes, this power can be misused by fallible rulers. It is thus a question of how these two rival kings (Jesus and Herod) exercised their power and authority in relation to their subjects according to Matthew 1-2.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

The primary research questions of this study are:

- (a) How are Jesus and Herod characterised as male authority figures in the narrative of Matthew 1-2? This question will be addressed in chapters 3 and 4 respectively.
- (b) How can this characterisation of Jesus and Herod as authority figures inform the gender debate about power within contemporary Nigerian society from the perspective of contemporary masculinity studies? This question will be addressed in chapter 6.

#### **1.5 Aim of Research**

The aim of this study is to use a modern masculine hermeneutic to critically evaluate the insights gained by a narrative critical study of the characterisation of Jesus and Herod as male authority figures in Matthew 1-2 (chapters 3 and 4), and to determine how this contributes to the discussion of the use of power in Modern hegemonic masculinity studies in (chapter 5) and gender relations in the Nigerian context (chapter 6).

## 1.6 Research methodology

This study will use more than one method to investigate the respective research questions in that it will specifically use both narrative criticism (chapter 2-4) and masculinity studies that focus on hegemonic masculinity (chapter 5).

The two approaches will not be done in a manner which *conflates* the two different methods, but instead (a) to enable a *comparison* between the characterisation of Herod on the one hand and the infant Jesus on the other as revealed by a narrative critical reading of Matthew 1-2; and (b) to reflect on the meaning of Matthew's depiction of Herod and Jesus in Matthew 1-2 for contemporary Nigerian society by using the insights of modern masculinity studies. Narrative criticism will, in other words, be used as an exegetical method while masculinity studies will be used as a hermeneutic with which to apply the results of the exegetical study to the contemporary Nigerian context. While scholars such as Thatcher (2011), Conway (2008), Foucault (1980), Gramsci (2011), and Corry (1999) focus on how masculinity was constructed in the ancient world the focus of this study is how contemporary masculinity theory can be used as a hermeneutical lens for a critical evaluating how Herod and Jesus were characterized in Matthew 1-2.

### 1.6.1 Narrative criticism

Narrative criticism will be used to analyse chapters 1-2 of the narrative of Matthew to understand how the author of Matthew characterises both Jesus and Herod as ultimate male authority figures (i.e. kings). In undertaking a narrative critical analysis of Matthew, the narrative critical method developed by Carter (1996), Powell (2001, 2009), Chatman (1987) and Kingsbury (1986) will be used to analyse the events, settings, characters, and plot in Matthew 1-2.

Regarding the advantages of narrative criticism, Powell (1990:85-91, 99) states that, despite all the objections from critics, narrative criticism remains helpful for the meaningful study of a text for a number of reasons.

- (1) It focuses on the biblical text itself. It is “text centered,” meaning that it seeks to understand the Bible on its own terms rather than making it refer to something else.
- (2) It gives insight into a biblical text when historical data is uncertain.
- (3) It serves as a control to other inter-disciplinary methods or approaches.
- (4) It joins biblical scholars and non-scholars together in understanding the biblical text;
- (5) It helps to interpret the text for a believing community for better living;
- (6) It has the potential of bringing a believing community together in their understanding of the biblical texts;
- (7) It offers a fresh way of interpreting biblical texts by enabling the biblical stories to speak on their own terms while inviting readers to take a side in their context today;
- (8) It offers an invitation to read the biblical stories of the text for personal and social transformation.

Narrative criticism, however, also has a number of critics.

Firstly, its preoccupation with obscure theories has often been criticised. On this point, Tremper (1987:47-50) believes that the proliferation of technical phrases complicates the interpretive process. For him, the deconstruction of literature is like learning a foreign language with many contradicting theories to be mastered. It often seems that everyone is trying to create new innovative terms and approaches. Osborne (2006:215), however, states, “there is nothing wrong with having innovative ideas. It is just like trying new things to find the best that works for you.” He believes that a technique that unifies the disparate theories is far better than the “bewildering array of technical approaches.”

Secondly, Powell (1990:99) asserts that some scholars criticise it because of its reductionist approach, which reduces the meaning of the text to intertextual factors like plot or setting. While critics of historical criticism are of the view that interpreters

need to be reminded of the meaning that exists in the text as a unity and not in isolated sections, historical critics have argued that no matter what is done, one can never figure out the original author's intended meaning of a text. It can, however, be argued that exegetical research and a close reading of a text are not an “either/or” choice but rather a “both and”, depending on how these approaches are applied.

Thirdly, narrative criticism has been criticised because of its imposition of contemporary literary approaches on an ancient historical genre. Aune (1987:215), however, argues that in the use of the narrative critical method, the use of the narrative art of ancient cultures in viewing historical reality cannot be excluded. This implies that fictive genres or imagery was often used in the ancient world, as today, to depict actual events, as in the case of the gospels.

In view of these objections of narrative criticism and its underlying understanding of where meaning resides in the interpretive process, it is important to note that narrative criticism cannot be used in a simplistic manner along with other methods, since it has a de-historicising tendency that denies or negates the historical element of the text. Narrative criticism, for example, ignores the real author<sup>4</sup> and the historical framework in which the gospel was written as well as the insights gained by historical-critical methods of the historical background to the text, real author, and reader by reading it primarily as an open-ended story which modern readers construct according to their interpretation and context. According to Rhoads and Michie (1982:3-4), a narrative is a “literary creation with an autonomous integrity” that creates a “closed and self-sufficient world, and its portrayals, rather than being a representation of historical events, that refers to people, places, and events in the story.” Thus, the narrative meaning of a text should not be searched for in the events behind a text but instead in a close reading of the text itself (Osborne 1991:164).

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<sup>4</sup> Real author refers to the author who initiates the imaginative thinking in writing or filming.

Sternberg (1985:23-24), however, argues that in interpreting a biblical narrative, the historical events behind the narratives and other background material help the reader to elucidate the intended meaning of the text and should thus not be neglected totally.

The second characteristic of narrative criticism is its acceptance that a text becomes autonomous from its author as soon as it is written down. This implies that the meaning of the text is delineated from the present reader rather than from the actual author or text. In this regard, Thiselton (1985:215) states that questions about the meaning of the text or its author are reduced entirely to the language of the contemporary world. Narrative criticism's denial of the text's intended or referential meaning<sup>5</sup> indicates that the implied author replaces the real author behind the text, fiction replaces history and that the words, as well as the text, become autonomous from their original reference or meaning in narrative criticism.

In using a narrative approach to the text of Matthew, Rhoads and Syreeni (1999:108) assert that it is important to take note of the "binary distinction between 'text' and 'reality'". Keegan (1985:35) in this regard argues that the narratives of the gospels, like all narratives, do not show the characters as they are in the real world, as the characters in the narratives are just signs. While the narrative world of the gospels bears some relationship to the real world, it is not the real world. It is a referential fallacy to think that the Pharisees of the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew refer to the Pharisees of the time of the historical Jesus. According to synchronic approaches like structuralism and reader-response criticism, the narrative world of a story is an artificial one created by its real-world author in which the story plays out (Keegan 1985:35-36). The narrative world often has a resemblance to the real world, which not only helps the reader to understand the world created by the story but also the narrative of the real world. While the socio-historical background of a text thus influences the formation of the narrative world thereof,

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<sup>5</sup> Crossley (2010:12) in describing storytelling known as "Haggadah" asserts that "one significant difference between the ancient world and the contemporary academic world involves the question of history".

it should, however, be kept in mind that it is not a direct representation of the historical context (Carter 1994:39).

### ***1.6.2 Hegemonic masculinity hermeneutics***

This hegemonic masculinity hermeneutical approach has been developed to discuss the patriarchal domination of men over women, children, the vulnerable, and marginalised. It tries to undertake a comprehensive re-examination of the conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmitt, 2005:830). The study will use the contributions of scholars such as Connell (1995), Thatcher (2011), Gramsci (2011) and others to understand how to use power in a transformative way that will enrich the lives of all of humanity. Masculinity in regard to the New Testament can be studied according to either a focus on how it was constructed at the time the New Testament or according to how contemporary reflections on gender influence our reading of the text. In this study the focus is on the latter since it attempts to engage with modern hegemonic masculinity hermeneutics in Nigeria.

Connell (1995:77) asserts that the concept of hegemonic masculinity comes from the work of Antonio Gramsci, who explains that the name “hegemonic” is a term for the contemporary contest or struggle for power and political leadership that is either public or private. However, when power or leadership is achieved either in the political, religious, or family institutions, it brings changes that drastically affect the families or sexuality. Thatcher’s (2011:26) contribution will be used in discussing gender and power. He states that “‘power’ is another key concept crucial to the study of sexuality and gender. There is a common contradictory meaning associated with power.” If someone “empowers” another person, that person, with his consent, acts freely, without constraint, which is good. However, if someone exercises “power over” someone, it forces or oppresses him or her to do what the person with power wants him or her to do.

Furthermore, there are three levels of operational power, of which two are unhealthy because they abuse power:

The first level is part of the husband and wife relationship and has to do with power relationships concerning gender. According to this view, power is abused in that patriarchal domination is based on violence, or the threat of violence to sustain it.

The second level is social institutions and individuals' interactions with each other. In these interactions, the abuse of power appears as a pervasive social power that can affect the family (Thatcher 2011:26).

The third level is on the transformational level of power in mutual relationships. This is known as the "power with" level. It is clear in the selfless service of the self and others. It is thus a question of whether any trace of the abuse of power on these levels can be discerned in Matthew's depiction of Jesus and Herod in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 1-2).

Finally, I will use these scholars' contributions to show how masculinity should be used by institutional leaders, religious leaders, and family leaders for the common good of all.

## **1.7 Outline of study**

Chapter 2 will define narrative criticism as methodology before it is applied to Matthew 1-2. Chapter 3 will be used to investigate the characterisation of the infant Jesus through his genealogy and titles as a male masculine character in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 1-2). Chapter 4 will investigate the characterisation of Herod as a masculine character in the narrative of Matthew (Matt. 2). Chapter 5 will compare Herod and Jesus in the light of contemporary modern hegemonic masculinity hermeneutical studies. Chapter 6 will present the conclusion of this study and will apply these findings to the Nigerian context.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the research background of the study was explained (1.2) and the focus on power and authority in the Gospels defined (1.3). Thereafter the research questions

(1.4) and the aim of the research (1.5) were outlined. The research methodology as well as the two methods, narrative criticism (1.6.1) and modern hegemonic masculinity studies (1.6.2), were briefly explained before the structure of the study was outlined (1.7). In the following chapter, narrative criticism will be introduced as an exegetical method before it will be used to analyse Matthew 1-2.

## CHAPTER 2

### *A NARRATIVE CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MATTHEW 1-2*

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, narrative criticism as a methodology will be introduced (2.2-3) before the characterisation of Jesus (chapter 3) and Herod (chapter 4) in the narrative of Matthew 1-2 will specifically be analysed in line with the first research question of this study (see 1.4).

#### **2.2 Narrative criticism as a method**

Powell (2011:19) states that narrative criticism was initially more a description of how to study the gospels than an exegetical method itself. It has, however, over time developed into an exegetical method that can be distinguished from historical criticism due to the pioneering work of scholars such as Rhoads and Michie (1982), Culpepper (1983), Kingsbury (1988) and Tannehill (1990). These scholars based their narrative critical work on the theory and methods developed by secular literary critics, especially Russian, French, and American scholars from the New Criticism movement (Powell 2011:20). Since narrative criticism was designed specifically for the interpretation of biblical literature, there is no parallel discipline called “narrative criticism” within the field of secular literary studies (“narratology” perhaps comes closest).

Within Biblical studies, narrative criticism was first simply called “a text-oriented approach” in line with the designation used in secular studies. While in secular studies this usually describes formalism, structuralism, and New Criticism, in biblical studies it was mainly used to distinguish narrative criticism from the “author-oriented approach” of traditional historical studies by asserting that the meaning of the text could be determined by paying attention to the form, structure, and rhetorical dynamics of the work itself, without

reference to background information regarding what the author may or may not have intended (Powell 1990:4-6).

According to Powell (2011:21-22), the earliest narrative critics succeeded in their aim of weaning historically minded biblical scholars from the exclusively author-oriented vision of traditional text-oriented approaches towards a more reader-oriented approach. For Powell (1990:19-21, 23) narrative criticism is a text-oriented method that can be distinguished from both author- and reader-oriented modes of criticism which focus on the real reader or author of a text respectively.

While the first judgment of many scholars was that narrative criticism and reader-response are indistinguishable from each other, by the late 1990s some<sup>6</sup> used the name “narrative criticism” for a different approach. This sparked a debate as to what constitutes genuine narrative criticism. While this debate often confused exegesis and hermeneutics, narrative criticism came to be described as “a reading strategy” or “method.” Therefore, Powell (2011:22-23) states that “the principles and procedures of narrative criticism are designed to answer one important question: How is the implied reader expected to respond to the text?”<sup>7</sup> In answering this question, critics use either an author-oriented, text-oriented, or reader-oriented hermeneutic. Because of this, they ended up with three distinct approaches to biblical texts which all called themselves “narrative criticism” but neglected the different operating assumptions and ends of these approaches.

In attempting to clarify the focus of narrative criticism in this study, it is important to note the argument of Scholes and Kellogg (1968:82, 83) that narrative criticism has to do with the relationship between two worlds in an “apprehensible universe.” Rhoads and Syreeni (2004:108, 194) in agreement assert that narrative critics and literary critics make a distinction between the world of the text and that of reality. These two worlds are not

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<sup>6</sup> Scholars mentioned by Iverson (2011:21) are: Edward Gibbons, Jane Austen, Henry James, James Joyce, Chatman, Joseph Conrad, Gustave Flaubert, and Ernest Hemingway; Samuel Beckett, John Bunyan, Henry Fielding, Sir Walter Scott, and William Thackeray.

<sup>7</sup> Anderson (1994:26) asserts that critics of narrative criticism have seen the gospel texts as a means of “communication between author and audience”, understanding the text as the communication between an implied author and reader.

identical or aligned with each other, but the world known to the reader enables him or her to enter the world created by the narrative.<sup>8</sup> The problem of the alignment of the “real” world and the imaginative world can be solved by the interpreter seeking to understand the literary world of the narrative story or fiction and the worlds of the author and the reader, in order to align them as much as possible. The interpreter must, however, be aware of the confrontation that exists between these worlds in order to act as the “ultimate mediator between” them. In this process of mediation, imagination plays a vital role in connecting the world of reality and that of the text. Without imagination, the two worlds cannot be connected to form a narrative story<sup>9</sup> that the reader can understand.

While there is a difference between a historical narrative and fiction, there is nothing inherently anti-historical about taking a “fiction” approach to biblical narratives, since they both use the same methods of telling a story through elements such as plot, characters, dialogue, and dramatic tension. Ryken (1984:12, 131) thus argues that a literary approach is a supplement to traditional disciplines rather than their replacement (see also Berlin and Malbon 1993:13) while Collins (1982:47-48), however, stresses that a “story” is not “history.” It is essentially fiction, material that in some measure has been invented. Narrative criticism is, therefore, a unique approach to the biblical text. According to Osborne (1991:153, 154), it is a technique that greatly aids in the close reading of a text by taking note of features such as the plot and character tension, point of view, dialogue, narrative time, and settings, all of which enable the reader to detect the flow of the text. It is therefore important to take note of these different aspects.

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<sup>8</sup> In this regard Krieger (1964:3-70) raises the crucial point that while historical criticism sees the text as a “window” into the historical world behind the text, and literary criticism sees it a “mirror” which reflects the reader, they are in fact interdependent on each other in literary analysis. In agreement with this assertion, Pratt (1983:3, 4, 158-59) and Osborne (1991:420) also argue that the historical background of a text is an important aspect of literary interpretation. Guelich (1982:117-25), however, asserts that seeing the biblical text as a portrait is more correct since it gives a picture of what happened in the past for the reader to understand and respond appropriately in her or his own situation.

<sup>9</sup> Powell (1990:23) defines a narrative as any literary work that tells a story. The four gospels and Acts in the New Testament are thus all examples of narratives.

In the following section, the manner will be outlined in which narrative criticism focuses on how the implied author guides the implied reader to understand the story through his or her discourse (2.2.1) by using information such as a point of view that is consistent in the narrative (2.2.2), the narration itself (2.2.3), the symbols and irony in the story (2.2.4), and the narrative patterns of the story in the narratives (2.2.5).

### **2.2.1 Story and discourse**

According to Chatman (1987:19), a narrative text has two components: the “story” (history) and the content, or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called “existents” (characters, items of the settings), and a “discourse,” that is, how the content is communicated. Stated differently, the story is what is depicted in the narrative while the discourse is how it is depicted (see also Small 2014:25). For Powell (1990:23, 24, 36) the discourse is rhetorical in nature. It reveals how a story is told. It shows how the same basic elements of a story such as events, characters, and setting can be used in a way that produces stories with different narratives (e.g. the story of Jesus is told in different narratives in the four New Testament gospels). Kingsbury (1998:3) states that the specific story of Matthew’s narrative is about Jesus’s life from conception to resurrection. The story is made up of events, characters, and settings, which create a world in which the plot of the narrative takes place (see 2.2).

In analysing the story and discourse of Matthew 1-2, it is furthermore important to take note of the distinction between story time and discourse time. Storytime refers to the order in which the events are conceived to have occurred by the implied author in creating the world of the story. Discourse time refers to the order in which the events are described for the reader by the narrator. They are thus not the same since the narrator can jump ahead of time to tell the reader what is going to happen before it happens. An example of this is the murder of John the Baptist, which is mentioned in Matthew (14:1-2) before it happens in the story (14:3-12). In the Gospel of Matthew, Herod the Great’s death was also revealed (2:13-15) before it took place in the narrative (2:19-20).

### **2.2.2 Point of view**

Scholes and Kellogg (1968:240) state that in any lyric, drama or story, there is something unique (a point of view) that the author wants to communicate to the audience. Anderson (1994:53-54, 55, 67, 68) states that point of view can be defined as the perspective or perspectives from which the narrative is presented, while Osborne (1991:156) says that it simply means the implied author has something specific in mind to communicate with his or her reader, therefore he considers it to be the driving force that is particularly important to the narrative story. It guides the reader to understand fully the truth that the implied author has in mind for him or her to understand.

Scholars have identified five areas in which point of view functions:

- (1) The psychological point of view, which gives “inside” information on the thoughts and feelings of the characters.
- (2) The evaluative or ideological point of view, which denotes what is right or wrong in the narrative story;
- (3) The spatial perspective, which expresses the author’s ability to move freely from one place to another in telling his or her story.
- (4) The temporal perspective, which is closely related to the spatial.
- (5) The phraseological point of view, which has to do with the dialogue and speeches in the narrative story. The reader is, for example, able to listen to a dialogue he or she would never hear in the normal world. An example is a personal conversation between Haman, his wife, and a friend (Est. 5:12-14) and other private dialogues that occur in the narrative story.

### **2.2.3 Narration**

In commenting on narration, Barrett (1974:73) opinions that the art of narration itself is what holds the story together because it describes an action that is taking place, it introduces the time the event is happening, it changes scenes that occur in different

settings or locations, and it describes the scenes and the people. Therefore, narration functions in diverse ways.

Powell (1990:25) explains that the implied author of the Gospel of Matthew directs and guides his audience by telling the story. In this process of telling the story, the implied author uses a narrator to make an implicit connection between him and his readers or audience. Barrett (1974:73, 74, 75) argues that the narrator must make the narration exciting, real, and alive to his or her audience and in this way, trick the audience into being interested in it.

There are several types of narrations which each have a different purpose. When they are mastered the narrator can draw upon them as tools to create as many different moods as he or she wishes. These different narrations are first-person narration, second person narration, and third-person narration. The third person narration is easier to use than any other kind of narration. In this kind of narration, the storyteller and his audience discuss a third person. The second person narration is more intimate than the third person narration. It adds tension and dramatic value to the narration as in the case of the narrative of Matthew. In this kind of narration, the audience or reader are invited to involve themselves in the story. The first-person narration is the most intimate type of narration – the storyteller is not reporting someone else’s story – he or she has first-hand information in that he or she is living the story. It is also more introspective in the sense that it describes emotions as well as actions. The first-person storyteller furthermore invites the audience to reflect not only on his or her actions but in some stories, also on his or her thoughts.

#### ***2.2.4 Symbols and irony***

In explaining the irony and symbols in the Gospel of Matthew, Powell (1990:27-28) describes a symbol as a useful rhetoric device which cannot be taken literally and is used to carry out a certain purpose in the readers’ or hearers’ mind. For example, the

description of Jesus's sweat as a drop of blood should not be understood literally. The expression that his sweat became "like a great drop of blood" is instead a simile.<sup>10</sup>

In reference to symbols, Culpepper (1983:165), drawing on the work of Wheelwright (1962:99-110), suggests four categories of symbols and meaning that shed light on the understanding of the Gospel of Matthew:

- (1) Archetypal symbols, meaning a symbol that is universal (e.g. the basic composition of light and darkness).
- (2) Symbols of ancestral vitality meaning symbols or images drawn from the Old Testament such as the wilderness as a place of testing, the number 12 as a suggestion of Israel, and so on;
- (3) Symbols created by the implied author which can only be understood based on context such as a fig tree (Mk. 11:12-24) as a symbol of the obsolete temple cult of Israel.
- (4) Cultural symbols meaning symbols that derive their meaning from the social and historical context of the real author and his or her community (see Powell 1990:29).

With reference to irony, Powell (1990:30) states that irony can be defined as the "non-occurrence' of the point of view as revealed through speech, actions, motives, or belief." Many scholars distinguish between verbal irony and situational irony. Verbal irony refers to intentionally speaking of something but meaning a different thing, while situational irony refers to speaking ironically without being aware thereof, e.g. Caiaphas declaring that Jesus will die for the entire people (Jn. 11:49-52). Irony and symbols are important rhetoric devices in narrative criticism that both encourage the re-reading of the narrative of the story (Powell, 1990:31, 32).

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<sup>10</sup> In another non-literary figure of speech Jesus compares himself to a mother hen (Lk 13:34).

### **2.2.5 Narrative patterns**

In respect to narrative patterns, Powell (1990:32-33) agrees with Bauer who modifies the proposal of Traina and Kuist that there are fifteen categories of composition which are relational in biblical narratives:

- (1) Repetition or reoccurrences of identical elements.
- (2) Contrasting of things that are the opposite of each other.
- (3) Comparison of things that are alike;
- (4) Causation and substantiation, that is the ordering of the narrative through relationships of cause and effect (causation is the movement from cause to effect and substantiation is the movement from effect to cause).
- (5) Climax as the movement of things from a lesser to a greater degree in intensity.
- (6) Pivot as the change of direction of things or material from a positive to a negative direction or vice versa.
- (7) Particularisation and generalisation, that is making explicative text either more specific or more comprehensive.
- (8) Statements of purpose which structure the narrative story.
- (9) Preparation in the narrative story which serves primarily to prepare the reader or hearer of the text for what is still to come, for example, the narration in Matthew about Jesus's birth and Herod the Great's antagonistic spirit in Matthew 1-2.
- (10) Summarisation is the abridgment of material that is treated more fully elsewhere.
- (11) Interrogation, as the name implies, is the employment of questions to challenge what is accepted as the norm and is at times followed by an answer or solution to the question.
- (12) Inclusion is the repetition of features at the beginning or at the end of a unit.
- (13) Interchange in the narrative story is the pattern of using elements interchangeably, for example, there is a narrative alternate between nativity stories dealing with John the Baptist and ones dealing with Jesus in Matthew's introduction.

(14) Chiasm is the repetition of elements in an inverted order, for example, the elements of evil/good/righteousness/unrighteousness in Matthew 5:45.

(15) Intercalation is the insertion of a literary unit in the middle of another.

Powell (1990:33) states that all these compositional patterns are important in a story because they reveal what the implied author had in mind.

### **2.3 Key elements of narrative criticism**

In applying narrative criticism to a specific narrative it is important to note the events (2.3.2.1), settings (2.3.2), characters (2.3.3) and plot of the story (2.3.4). Powell (1990:69) states that events are like verbs in the story, characters like the nouns of the action in the story, and character traits like the adjectives describing the characters in the story while “Settings are the adverbs of literary structure: they designate when, where, and how the action occurs.” Chatman (1987:19) agrees that a story is incomplete without the above-mentioned elements in it.

#### **2.3.1 Events**

Rhoads and Michie (1982:65, 73) assert that events have to do with all the incidents that happen in the journey of the story from the start, to the middle, to the end of it. Therefore, some of the events of a story or plot constitute the actions in the foreground of the story while some form the background or context of the story.

In outlining the different events that took place in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 1-2), Carter (1996:127) states that the following events occur in the following settings (see 2.3.2):

- (1) In Bethlehem the infant Jesus was conceived and born from Mary (Matt. 1:18-25; 2:9-13).
- (2) In Jerusalem the plot begins in Herod’s palace (Matt. 2:1-8, 16-18).
- (3) In Egypt whence Jesus escaped and stayed for a while (Matt. 2:14-15, 19-21).
- (4) In Ramah of Bethlehem and its vicinity the massacre of children under the age of

two took place (Matt. 2:16-18).

(5) In Nazareth the infant Jesus returned and grew to adulthood (Matt. 2:23).

### **2.3.2 Settings**

In explaining the settings of the narrative, Carter (1996:176, 177) asserts that events do not occur in a vacuum but happen at a location known as its setting. In the case of the Gospel of Matthew, it is thus important to show where, when and at what times an event took place in the story since the author placed them in various settings which should be taken into consideration for the narrative to be understood. Abrams (1981:175) defines setting as relating the location, time, and the social circumstances of a story.

For Powell (1990:70, 72-74, 75) the spatial setting has to do with the location or space which is the physical environment in which the characters live in the story.<sup>11</sup> The temporal setting refers to at least two types of settings: the chronological temporal setting and the typological setting. The chronological temporal setting has to do with the point in time in which an action takes place. This implies time and duration (does it e.g. occur over a year or a month?). The typological setting, on the other hand, means the general time when the action happens, for example, in the morning or at night or in the afternoon or in winter, summer, or raining time. The social setting has to do with the social circumstances in which the event happens. These include the political institutions, class structure, economic systems, social customs, and the general cultural context assumed to be operative in the work.

Osborne (1991:160) agrees that “the setting of the story can be geographical, temporal, social, or historical; which provides the basic context within which plot and characters develop.” Rhoads and Michie (1982:63) add that settings generate an atmosphere in a

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<sup>11</sup> Carter (1996:176-177) points out that some stories lack a physical setting. The Gospel of Matthew is an example of a narrative with events happening without describing their settings. But since one cannot read a narrative story without a setting, one can assume that the audience of Matthew knew the setting of episodes like Matthew 1:18 was Galilee and not Jerusalem.

narrative story and often give the reason for conflict which the characters must resolve. The way in which they resolve it reveals their character traits. Thus, the setting helps the reader to understand the dimension in which the character is acting. While connecting one event with other ones, they form the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew.

Chatman (1987:138-45) asserts that the setting in a narrative can function in diverse ways such as providing a minimally necessary backdrop against which the character(s) act actively or passively. In terms of the narrative Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 1-2), the evangelist as the narrator placed Jesus spatially, temporally, and ideologically through the heading and genealogy. However, while the infant Jesus was born in the setting of Bethlehem of Judea as an ascribed King of the Jews (Matt. 1:18-25, 2:5-6, 8), Herod was in Jerusalem as an acquired ruler appointed by the Roman authorities (Matt. 2:1, 3, 7-8). In the setting of Jerusalem, Herod ordered the killing of children under two years (Matt. 2:16-18). Jesus and his parents had already changed their setting from Bethlehem to Egypt before Herod's orders were carried out in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:13-15). They remained in the setting of Egypt until Herod died (Matt. 2:19) after which they returned to a town known as Nazareth (Matt. 2:19b-21, 22b-23). Wright (2002:14) states that while Jesus was born in a peaceful environment (Matt. 1:18-24) there was "trouble, tension, violence, and fear" later on and God delivered him to Egypt for his safety until Herod – the troublemaker – was dead (Matt. 2).

### **2.3.3 Characters**

Small (2014:36) states that based on the "study of narratological theory," a character is the construction of character traits or attributes which belong to a person or non-human figure in each story in a given time. Secondly, a character is a literary figure that appears as the focus of character traits or attributes in each story, for example, Moses was the main character in the book of Exodus.

A character in a narrative story or fiction can be a constructed or invented character. This construction may be done, according to Price (1983:62), in reference to persons as we know them in the world outside the text. It is thus important to remember that characters in a narrative are not automatically the same as figures in history they refer to. The Herod

in Matthew's narrative is thus not automatically the same character as the historical Herod. Even though they are not necessarily identical, Small (2014:38) says that the character of a literary figure can be reconstructed just as a real person's character can be reconstructed in terms of how they are characterised in a narrative. For Merenlahti and Hakola (1999:49-51) this characterisation has to do with the presentation of individuals, like in the Gospel of Matthew, in terms of their character traits: how they act as characters in the narrative story and discourse. Small (2014:84, 98) states that in real life situations the character of a person is made known by the choices he or she makes, that is, what a person chooses to do or to avoid in circumstances where the choice is not obvious. Hence, any action or speech, which does not convey choice, does not reveal character. If a person makes an excellent choice, the person is "good" (see Aristotle, *Poetics* 6.24; 15:2). Thus, to Aristotle, a person reveals his or her character "through minor words and actions as through great speeches and deeds."

The description of a person's character can be in terms of her or his social identity (gender, marital status, nationality, occupation, etc.), physical or personality traits, emotional state, habits of speech and mannerisms, settings associated with the character, names, labels or illusions, past, thoughts or actions in specific situations, interactions with other characters and the responses evoked, his or her attitude toward himself or herself, and the use of foils. The reader must thus understand the point of view of the implied author on a specific character. Is he or she from the government, religious, or family institution? Is he or she an individual or a group of people? What are his or her character traits in the narrative?

In narratives like Matthew, the implied author often tells the implied reader or shows him or her what a character does within the story. Telling has to do with the voice of the narrator while showing has to do with the picture he or she paints. In the narrative of Matthew, the narrator used both showing and telling in his characterisation. For example, Matthew referred to Joseph as a "just" man in his narrative story as his reason for not shaming Mary (Matt. 1:19), while in terms of showing in the narrative, the implied author showed that Joseph was just by narrating his faithfulness to God when instructed by angels (Matt. 1:19, 20, 24). This is important since even if Matthew 1:18-2:23 can be

called 'the Infancy Gospel of Jesus,' with Matthew 1:17-2:23 giving the major framework for Matthew's story. The function of the birth stories of Jesus was not primarily to tell about the birth of Jesus, but rather to show that Joseph was a righteous man to whom God spoke through his angel (Matt. 1:19), who obeyed God's message to accept the divine origin of a child named Jesus, as he did other orders he received from God through a dream after the child was born (Matt. 2:5, 15, 17, 23). Since the character of Joseph was that of a righteous man, the infant Jesus as his son likewise shared the same ascribed righteousness (Neyrey 1998:5-6, 35-68).

Powell (1990:53) identifies four points of view about the characters that the reader should be aware of:

- (1) The "spatial-temporary plane", which refers to characterisation, which has only to do with "actions."
- (2) The "phraseological plane" of characterisation, which has only to do with "speech."
- (3) The "psychological plane" of characterisation, which has to do with the characters' "thoughts."
- (4) The "ideological plane", which has to do with their "beliefs and values."

By focusing on these points of view, the implied reader can know which type of character is used by the implied author. For instance, Herod is characterised on the phraseological plane as one who pretends to want to go and worship Jesus (Matt. 2:8) but on the spatial-temporal plane, his plans were to kill him (Matt. 2:16). This shows that deeds are often more revealing than words in a narrative (cf. Matt. 7:21; 23:2-3).

Gowler (1991:49) holds the view that there are two basic types of characters: flat and round characters. In his distinction between these two types of characters, Forster (1972:68-69) affirms that "flat characters are constructed around a single idea or quality. They can easily be described in one sentence and are easily recognised and remembered by readers. This implies that flat characters are predictable. Round characters, on the

other hand, are more complex because they have more than one character trait, therefore, they are subject to change.” However, according to Malbon (1992:29), any major characters do not change, but minor characters do change. He asserts further that: “Both flat and round characters can be negative or positive.” This is clear in the Gospel of Matthew in that most of the religious leaders, as well as some other male characters of the ruling elite, fall in the category of flat characters because of their consistent character traits. They do not love but rather are hypocrites, self-centered, and self-righteous. On the other hand, Jesus, and his disciples, the vulnerable, as well as a few of the ruling elite, are round characters because they are humble, self-denying, loyal, and loving. Powell (1990:55) argues that “The difference is that Jesus, despite his range of diverse character traits, consistently espouses the evaluative point of view of God. The disciples are not only inconsistent with the traits that they evince but also in their allegiance to God’s point of view.”

Rhoads (1982:122-123) states that in terms of characterisation, the narrative of Matthew divided the disciples into two groups: There were some Jesus identified as belonging to his inner circle such as Peter, John, and James, and those who did not. The disciples as a group are, however, a “round” character since they often have conflicts with Jesus because of their unbelief as a trait, while at other times they respond appropriately to the message of Jesus. The narrator of the gospel also characterised the disciples differently from the Roman imperial authorities and the Jewish religious leaders who were Jesus’s antagonists.

Culpepper (1983:161), however, challenges the idea that “flat characters are those who have only one character trait while “round” characters are those with many character traits. Osborne (1991:421) agrees with him that there is a “clearer distinction” made by Powell (1990:55), Berlin and Malbon (1993:23-24) between a “type” or static character with a single character trait, an “agent”, who is a mere functionary without any character traits at all, and a “fully fledged” character, whose realistic actions can go against his personage, seems a clearer distinction. Powell (2009:49, 69) goes further to differentiate between dynamic characters who undergo development or change their point of view in contrast to static characters who do not change.

In doing narrative criticism, it is especially important to remember that characterisations are often not reliable because the characters in the narrative are not real, in the sense that the implied author constructed their points of view. For instance, Powell (1990:52) asserts that the religious leaders in the narrative of Matthew characterise Jesus as one who performs miracles with the power of the prince of demons, “Beelzebub,” but the readers of the narrative are guided by the narrator to see that their appraisal is incorrect. Instead, their comment reveals the type of religious leaders they are (Matt. 12:22-37) in that in the Gospel of Matthew, the Jewish religious leaders function as a group of characters who neglect the weightier matters of the law which they profess to teach (Matt. 23:23). Thus, the religious leaders of Israel are depicted to represent evil in Matthew’s story. This is not a realistic representation of them outside the world of the story, but in the story, they pervert what is good and right before God and the people (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16). The chief priests and the teachers of the law are for example depicted as informants of Herod (Matt. 1:18-2:22).

#### **2.3.4 Plot**

Regarding the plot of the story, Carter (1996:151, 152) points out that it is particularly important to know what the plot of a narrative is all about. Scholes and Kellogg (1968:107) define plot as the dynamic of events happening in a sequential order in narrative literature. A story must have a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning and the end of the plot cannot happen at the same time. The end is particularly important and necessary, but the beginning and the middle must also follow in a sequential order. Chatman (1987:43, 44, 47) nevertheless asserts that traditionally, events in stories are what constitute the plot.

Since characters and other elements of a narrative are dynamic, they together form part of the plot. The relationship between them is, however, often disputed. Scholes and Kellogg (1968:207, 208), for example, disagree vehemently with Aristotle for giving supremacy to characters over the plot. Instead, they argue that characters and the plot are both important in the sense that they are indispensable to each other in keeping the story attractive. A character is nothing without the plot, and the plot cannot be constructed

without characters. The ancient writer Aristotle also considered the distinction between the character and the plot and stated that the plot is the conflict that emanates from the tragedy of the character which are his experiences.

A critical analysis of the plot of the Gospel of Matthew makes it clear that it revolves around the conflict between the kingdom of God and humans who oppose it. Boring (2010:356-357) states that this conflict exists between the rule of God “manifesting in the life of Jesus” against the rule of “worldly rulers.” According to Carter (2001:1), the Roman kingdom was ruled by a human king while Jesus rules the kingdom of God. Hatina (2006:35) states that the Jews religious leaders who were lured to the side of the Roman authorities were the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, and the elders. Their kingdom was characterised by all forms of wickedness: abuse of power, power-over, subjugation, and all other forms of oppression of its subjects. By contrast, Matthew describes God’s expected kingdom that those who follow Jesus will inherit, which will triumph over this worldly, evil, kingdom. The plot of Matthew thus has to do with “the tension and resolution” related to the two opposing groups in the narrative (Combrink 1983:74). In Matthew 1-2, the side opposing God is represented by Herod and his followers, and the side of God is represented by Jesus, the protagonist, and his family. Although the conflict and tension between these two groups become clearer in the later kernels of Matthew, it is already present in Matthew 1-2.<sup>12</sup>

## 2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the methodology of narrative criticism was introduced (2.1) and explained in terms of its focus on story and discourse (2.2.1), the point of view (2.2.2), narration (2.2.3), symbols and irony (2.2.4) and narrative patterns (2.2.5). Key elements of narrative criticism like events (2.3.1), settings (2.3.2), characters (2.3.3), and plot (2.3.4) were also explained and applied to Matthew 1-2.

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<sup>12</sup> Regarding the time and date of the narrative Gospel of Matthew, Carter (2001:1) is of the view that the book was written in Antioch of Syria around the year 85.

The following chapters will use the methodology explained in the chapter to analyse the characterisation of Jesus (chapter 3) and Herod (chapter 4).

## CHAPTER 3

### *THE CHARACTERISATION OF JESUS IN MATTHEW 1-2*

#### **3.1 Introduction**

At the beginning of his narrative, Matthew 1-2 introduces both Jesus, the protagonist, and the religious authorities, Jesus's antagonists (Matt. 2:1, 13-23; 11:2-16:20; 27:20-25). In this chapter, the focus will be on how Jesus as an infant is characterised in Matthew 1-2 in terms of his genealogy (3.2), titles (3.3), and the care he receives from God through the use of intermediaries (3.4).

#### **3.2 The characterisation of Jesus through his genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17)**

Combrink (1983:66) states that in the narrative of Matthew, the narrator called attention to the importance of the character of Jesus as a protagonist by providing his genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17) and not that of Herod, the king of the Jews. This makes it clear that in his understanding of the history of Israel from Abraham to David, Jesus and not Herod, was the central figure. This focus could simply be because Herod died early in Mathew's story (Matt. 2:20) while Jesus continued to live and appear in every chapter of the narrative (Matt. 1-28). It is, however, plausible that the narrator wanted to show that Jesus and not Herod was the true king standing in for God on earth. Therefore, he said nothing about the genealogy of Herod, or his achievements, because from his point of view Herod was not the king appointed by God.

The genealogy of Jesus gives an overview of his ascribed honor (Malina 1991:34-38; Neyrey 1998:5-6, 37-40). In the first instance, it emphasises Jesus's Davidic roots (Hagner 1993:xiv). It also, surprisingly, contains the names of a few women. Not only are their inclusion surprising due to their gender, but also in regard to how they were considered in first century Judaism. In first-century Judaism Tamar was considered a seducer and an adulterous woman (Gen. 38), Rahab a harlot (Jos. 2:1-7), and Ruth an

Ammonite (Ru. 1:4) of whom the law said, “An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter the congregation of the Lord forever” (Deut. 23:3). It is therefore surprising that Ruth is included. Furthermore, Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah who was seduced by David (2 Sam. 11 and 12). David’s story was a shameful act in which he forcefully took Uriah the Hittite’s wife and had him killed in battle to have his wife Bathsheba. It is, therefore, necessary to consider the role of these women in Jesus’s genealogy carefully.

Tamar, whose name appears in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 1:3), is known from the Old Testament (Gen. 38; Ru. 4:12, 18-22). Her story reveals that she was a harlot who because of her wisdom, which some see as deception, succeeded in marrying Judah. She later gave birth to the twins Perez and Zerah (Gen. 38:29-30), who became part of the lineage of Jesus. That is why Jesus’s lineage was traced to Abraham, the father of all nations, to David, the king of the kingdom of Israel, which comes from the line of Perez.

Rahab was the wife of a Jewish man, Salmon, who gave birth to Boaz. According to Harrington (1991:28), Rahab must have been the harlot of Jericho described in Joshua 2. However, some scholars such as Patton (1981:225-28, 63) and Brown (1982:79-80) argue that this is not attested in the Old Testament. Harrington (1991:28), however, argues that there must have been a rabbinic tradition that connects Rahab with Ruth and Tamar. It is also possible that the gentile women’s inclusion in Jesus’s lineage in the gospel shows that his mission is all inclusive of both Jews and Gentiles. Olivares (2016:18) argues to the contrary by referring to the story of the Canaanite woman, who was compared to a dog, to show that Jesus’s ministry was not to evangelise the gentile nations. Anderson (1994:50, 51), however, counters that the inclusion of women in the genealogy does point to the foreshadowing of Jesus’s intention to include sinners and gentiles in his salvation programme since four of these women were regarded as both sinners and foreigners in the Old Testament.

Wainwright (2017:5) writes that while phrases such as “male/father gave birth to male/son”, in the Jewish traditional scripture reflects a male-centric dominant narrative (Matt. 1:2-16), the naming of Tamar (Matt. 1:3), Rahab (Matt. 1:5), Ruth (Matt. 1:5) and

Bathsheba, Uriah's wife who David married (Matt. 1:6), and Mary who gave birth to Jesus (Matt. 1:16), show that there is a close association of gender, power, and authority in the genealogy of Matthew. They are also indications that the narrator considered both Jews and Gentiles to be part of the lineage line of Jesus in that only the fifth couple, Joseph, and Mary, were both Jews.<sup>13</sup> According to Harrington (1991:28, 29), Boaz and Ruth were the parents of Obed, the father of Jesse, who was, in turn, the father of David. Boaz was a Jewish man who married a Moabite woman named Ruth.<sup>14</sup> She, therefore, became part of the people of Israel through her mother-in-law Naomi. David, the son of Jesse, is given the title 'the king' by Matthew (1:6) which deviates from the pattern of the other Jewish males mentioned. It underlines David's royal status which divides Israel's history and points toward Jesus as the real king of the Jews known as the Messiah who would be a descendant of David.

Gundry (1994:19-20) argues that the aim of Matthew 1-2 is to explain how Jesus came to have the legal status of a Son of David even though Joseph was not his biological father. It indicates that Joseph was not responsible for Jesus' conception because He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. However, Joseph being a just man and a son of David (Matt. 1:18-25) made Jesus his adopted son by taking Mary to be his wife before Jesus was born and given his name. Without this explicit action, the genealogy of Jesus is pointless (Matt. 1:16). In the narrative of Matthew, Jesus as the Son of David is thus depicted as God's elected ruler born from the royal family of David in contrast to King Herod, who was not, even though the emperor Julius Caesar appointed him to rule over Judea.

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<sup>13</sup> While Uriah was a gentile, it is not clear whether Bathsheba was a Jewish or gentile woman (Harrington 1991:29). The four women and Mary share two things in common: (a) while they have an irregular union with their husbands, they (b) played a vital role in God's plan.

<sup>14</sup> The genealogy of David that concludes the book seems to have provided the model for the Matthean genealogy of Jesus. But note that the Old Testament list (Ru. 4:18-22) does not mention Ruth.

### 3.3 The characterisation of Jesus through the use of titles in Matthew 1-2

Small (2014:159, 159, 178) goes further to asserts that, in the characterisation of Jesus, the evangelist started with names or titles that were a common means of revealing character in Greek, Roman, and Judean society in which orators praise people by referring to their titles or the offices they held. Thus, a name or title reveals the qualities of a person or character in a story. Moreover, names or titles are “deictic, that is, pointing, marked out as a definite, ‘(de-)finite’ or without infinity, hypothesised, and catalogued (be it ever so minimally).”

Neyrey (1998:55, 56) agrees that titles or names in a narrative define a person’s character or actions. For instance, a person who prophesises is regarded as a prophet. His or her title or name defines the role he or she plays. He goes further to point out four things that a name or title does to define one’s character:

(1) A person’s name or title can derive meaning from his father’s name just as the meaning of Jesus’s titles derived from God;<sup>15</sup>

(2) A person’s name or title characterises his physical distinction;

(3) A person’s name or title indicates his occupation, origin, or affiliation. In fact, both Joseph and Jesus are characterised later in the narrative of Matthew in terms of their shared occupation. Joseph is characterised as the carpenter and Jesus as the son of a carpenter (Matt. 13:55). In some cases, personalities are called by the name of their group and not individual names. Therefore, their names depend on place, occupation, and affiliations;

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<sup>15</sup> Neyrey (1998:56) notes that in the ancient history of Israel, personal names were “theophoric names” in that they are related to a deity. For example, the name Zachariah means “Yahweh has remembered” and “Gamaliel” “Recompense of God”. The name “Jesus” was a common name in the first century Mediterranean world meaning “The salvation of/from the Lord” without any reference to social status. Thus, Joshua’s personal name, “Jesus”, describes the role that he will play in mediating God’s benefaction to his people.

(4) Some titles or names are known as “patri-filial names.” These kinds of names or titles “stand out as the most important” in the narratives. This is because they directly indicate the ascribed honor, which an individual enjoys as deriving from some family, clan, and tribe. When this is applied to Jesus, it yields an important result in that God ascribed him his personal name, “Jesus” (Matt. 1:21). Although this name does not formally link him with his kinship group, meaning that he would automatically enjoy honour from that association, it describes in a general way his honourable role and status, which is to be the saviour of his people.

In the narrative of Matthew great honour is thus ascribed to Jesus by virtue of his personal name in the context of the gospel where His name not only shows favour from God but also the significant role and status ascribed to him by God, namely Saviour of his people. Frei (1974:96) furthermore says that Jesus’s titles also prefigure his actions as an adult. According to Combrink (1983:75), “the opening sentence of the narrative of Matthew (Matt. 1:1) shows that the name ‘Jesus’ was linked with titles such as Son of Abraham (3.3.1); Son of David (3.3.2); Son of Man (3.3.3); A Son or Child (3.3.4); Emmanuel (3.3.5); King of the Jews (3.3.6) and Nazarene (3.3.7) which identify him as the Messiah, God’s agent who carried out God’s task”. These titles will therefore be considered in the following section. The characterisation of Jesus as a vulnerable infant will also be considered (3.4).

### **3.3.1 Son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1)**

Regarding the son of Abraham, Adeyemo (2006:1108) asserts that in the narrative of Matthew, the evangelist started with Abraham in his characterisation of Jesus as the Son of Abraham (Matt. 1:2). The characterisation of Jesus as the Son of Abraham shows that he is the heir of God’s blessing upon Abraham and that he would be a blessing to the entire world. Edwards (1985:9) argues that the reference to Jesus as the Son of Abraham does not mean that he was his physical son. He was instead his “real spiritual son.” Hill (1972:74, 75), however, accepts that the phrase “Son of Abraham” is a Messianic title

showing that Jesus is the descendant of Abraham (Lev. 8:15) through the ancestral royal family of David and Solomon.

Bauer (1988:76, 77) points out that many commentators believe that by depicting the infant Jesus as the Son of Abraham, Matthew shows the universality of the gospel. This implies that since it was said to Abraham that he would be a source of blessing to the entire world, so Jesus will be a blessing to the entire world. The universality of the infant Jesus as he is depicted as “Son of Abraham” is seen in the gentile nations who come and worship Him (Matt. 2:11).

Brown (2014:54) asserts that by quoting the name of Abraham, who was an Old Testament personage, Matthew gave him a prominent and influential position in his narrative story (Matt. 1:1, 2). The choice of Abraham’s name as the starting point of Jesus’s genealogy serves as a reminder of the covenantal framework for the narrative story of Jesus. By mentioning the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matt. 1:2), Matthew thus underlies the covenantal association that is of primary importance in the Gospel of Matthew. Abraham himself was important since he was the ancestral father of many nations (Gen. 17:4-5).

### **3.3.2 Son of David (Matt. 1:1)**

In the narrative of Matthew, the birth of Jesus indicates that the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Davidic Messiah were fulfilled in him. Although the genealogy connects Jesus to David through Joseph, the evangelist did not identify him as a son of Joseph (Matt 1:18). Instead, as Ladd (1977:160, 161, 63) argues that the Davidic king is appointed as the Son of God (2 Sam. 7:14). Hill (1972:74, 75) asserts that the characterisation of Jesus as Son of David means that “The royal dignity acquired by David, and lost by his descendants in exile, was regained in Jesus the Messiah.” Since he is divinely anointed to set up the kingdom of God in power, Luz (1989:108, 109) points out that Jesus’s lineage through the descendant of David is easier to grasp. He is the true “Messiah of Israel” and thus the king of Israel. Jesus is, therefore, a counterpart of earthly rulers. Combrink (1983:78) states that the quotation of the evangelist (Matt. 2:6) informs

the reader that Jesus was the Son of David in that he was to be a Davidic ruler and shepherd. David was set apart as king of Israel to shepherd God's people (Matt. 2:6) and in Jesus God fulfilled the promise He made through the prophet Hosea. The infant Jesus was prophesied to grow up and become the Davidic king who would care for his people. Weren (2014:2, 3) in agreement asserts that most of the Jews start their stories with their ancestral father but in the first-century world only a few kings could trace their descent from David, the ancestral king. This is because not all the kings and queens who existed or ruled for 200 years before the conception of Jesus were from the royal family of King David. Regarding this title "Son of David," Bauer (1988:76) asserts that in depicting Jesus as the Son of David, the evangelist was emphasising the fact that the Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of King David.

### **3.3.3 Son of Man (1:1, 16, 17, 18; 2:4)**

In Matthew's narrative the title "Son of Man" is often used to refer to Jesus (Matt. 16:13). The precise Jewish background of the phrase ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is unclear. A divine apocalyptic figure called the "Son of Man" appears in 1 Enoch and 4 Ezra and influenced the Jewish expectation of the coming Messiah before the time of Jesus. Matthew's frequent use of the phrase "Son of Man" (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) to describe Jesus and his earthly ministry could imply that Matthew knew this concept of the Messiah from 1 Enoch and 4 Ezra. The phrase "Son of Man" can, however, also come from Daniel 7:13-14 which reads that "one like a Son of Man" comes "with the clouds of heaven" to rapture his true disciples.

The manner in which Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man in Matthew and the other gospels is, however, not uniform. Ladd (1977:149-51, 158) argues that references to the "Son of Man" as the Messiah can be divided into distinct categories such as "Son of Man" on earth, the serving "Son of Man" in suffering and death, and "Son of Man" in eschatological glory. Thus, the title Son of Man was often used for Jesus by Matthew to link him to the themes of suffering, enthronement, and authority that appear in the narrative of Daniel's vision. There are thus four general ways in which Jesus as character

uses the phrase “Son of Man” in the language of the evangelist in the Gospel of Matthew. It is used (1) in reference Jesus; (2) in describing his authority and earthly ministry; (3) in predicting his suffering and death; and (4) in predicting his future exaltation and glory.

### **3.3.4 A son and child (Matt. 1:21, 23, 25; 2:8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 20, 21)**

Weren (2014:4, 6, 42, 43, 44) comments that children represent the most vulnerable group in a community. Matthew refers nine times to Jesus as a child or son (Matt. 1:21, 25; 2:8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 20, 21). This is to show that the infant Jesus was born weak, feeble, and helpless to do anything for himself. In regard to the infant Jesus’s title as “son” Donald Senior (1983:57), however, argues that the term son in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 2:11, 13-14, 20-21) points to “Jesus’s divine Sonship.” While he is thus a vulnerable child, Jesus is also the true Son of God.

### **3.3.5 Emmanuel (Matt. 1:23)**

The name “Emmanuel” meaning “God with us”, which occurs in Matthew 1:23, is a citation that agrees with the LXX Greek word for “virgin” (παρθένοϛ), while in the Hebrew Bible the Hebrew *נַעֲמָן* simply means “a young woman” who is either married or not. The Hebrew Bible, therefore, does not necessarily refer to the Jewish expectation of a messianic virgin birth because a young woman could be one who had lost her virginity (Gen. 34:3). This is, however, not implied by the Hebrew noun. What Isaiah 7:14 instead meant was the impending deliverance of Israel will take place through a young woman’s child. The child to whom she would give birth would be an ideal king. For this reason, the name “Emmanuel” is an active tribute to God’s presence amongst his people. The fact that Jesus as a character in Matthew is called Emmanuel signifies his role in the narrative and in him, God’s presence amidst his people to deliver them. Thieliicke and Lazareth (1969:240) rightly state that the main idea here is that God came down to be with his people in Jesus Christ.

Regarding the name Emmanuel, Wright (2002:8) points out that while it was mentioned by the prophetic voice of Isaiah (Isa. 7:14 and 8:8), it was not given to Jesus by his parents since it would be presumptuous for any parent to give this name to a child. The evangelist, however, makes it clear that the name Emmanuel is appropriate for Jesus since God is with his people in him (Matt. 1:23). The name “Emmanuel” links with the statement by Jesus after his resurrection when he commissions the disciples saying, “I am with to you to the end of the age” in the narrative of Matthew (Matt. 28:20). Combrink (1983:77) also asserts that in the closing remarks, the evangelist relates (Matt. 1:1-17 and Matt. 1:18-22) to Genesis, which starts with the phrase “in the beginning.” In the Old Testament (Gen.1:1), the phrase “in the beginning” refers to the action of God. In the Gospel of Matthew, the evangelist marked his beginning with a reference to God as “Emmanuel, God with us” meaning that Jesus had come as a “saviour of his people.” The repetition of the phrase “with us/you” is furthermore a formula in the Gospel of Matthew (cf. 18:20 and 28:20).

### **3.3.6 The King of the Jews (Matt. 2:2)**

About the King of the Jews, Combrink (1983:77) asserts that the first speech from human beings in Matthew’s narrative that affirms that Jesus is the King of the Jews comes from the gentile Magi who came from the east to worship Jesus as God’s agent. This shows that Jesus was truly the King of the Jews and of the gentiles even before his task to his own Jewish people began. Jesus was honored and worshipped as a king (Matt. 2:1, 13) even an infant in that the Gentiles magi presented gifts worthy of a king to him. Powell (1995:57) argues that the infant Jesus was worshipped to prove to the world that he is indeed God’s incarnated king ruling the world. Nowhere in the narrative of Matthew is Herod worshipped in an equivalent way. This implies that for Matthew, Herod the Great was an illegitimate king while Jesus was the legitimate king. Moreover, Jesus was King of Bethlehem of Judea as Matthew states that the Magi came from the east to Jerusalem to ask where the king was who had been born in Bethlehem of Judea and not in Jerusalem (Matt. 1:1-3). This is further evidence that Jesus was from a royal family linked to Bethlehem. According to Lenski (1943:59), the narrator declared that Jesus was born in

Bethlehem in Judea not just to distinguish it from Bethlehem in Galilee, but also to draw attention to the fact that Jesus is a descendant of Judah. Jesus is from the tribe of Judah and therefore he was born in the area that was allotted to the tribe of Judah.

### **3.3.7 A Nazarene (Matt. 2:23)**

In Matthew 2:23 the evangelist suggested that Jesus was a Nazarene in character because he was taken to a town called Nazareth where He grew up. It was also, where he and his parents lived. In this manner, the prophecy that Jesus would be called a Nazarene was fulfilled. In the narrative of Matthew, “The messianic title” of being characterised as a “Nazarene” is used. It could either refer to “the branch,” which is “nevsar” in Hebrew (cf. Isa. 11:1), or “Nazarite” (cf. Jud. 13:7), which was God’s consecrated or anointed one. In Matthew, the term does not, however, have any connotation to the word “Nazarite” (Num. 6). The term is also not a quotation from an Old Testament prophecy; so, it is an indefinite way to introduce someone. It is just an indication that the person is an inhabitant of Nazareth (Davidson 1962:776). Williams (1997:373), who agrees with the evangelist’s assertion that Nazareth was the hometown of Jesus for thirty years, states that it was common amongst the Jews to describe the character of a person by referring to his or her hometown or place of origin.

### **3.4 The characterisation of Jesus as a vulnerable infant**

In the Gospel of Matthew, the evangelist characterised the infant Jesus as a vulnerable child who needed protection and guidance from God. This protection was enacted by God through his earthly parents when his life was endangered by Herod.

In the narrative, Jesus was cared for by Joseph who adopted him as his son<sup>16</sup> after his birth. The adoption, signaled by Joseph’s naming of Jesus, placed the infant under the care and protection of Joseph. Having adopted Jesus as his son in obedience to the voice

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph was Jesus’ adopted father because he was not the one that impregnated Mary. Her conception, according to Matthew, was by the Holy Spirit.

of God in a dream, he again in total obedience to God after being warned in another dream, took the child and his mother, Mary, to Egypt (Matt. 2:14). Joseph, who never speaks in Matthew's narrative, is thus depicted as a righteous man who lived in full obedience to God's guidance. Since a son's ascribed honor was determined by that of his father, Joseph's honorable actions to save his son and family increased his own honor but also increased that of his infant son.

In line with the comment by Beare (1981:69) that God does not communicate with his people directly in Matthew like in the ancient times, but instead uses intermediaries such as angels. Therefore, God sent his angel to reveal the intentions of Herod to Joseph and the Magi in a dream (Matt. 1:20; 2:12, 13, 19). Malbon (2009:75, 76) rightly mentions that God does not appear directly in the first two chapters of the Gospel of Matthew as other characters do. Despite the apparent absence of God in the sense that he acts through intermediaries, Kingsbury (1986:9) is correct in his assessment that in the Gospel of Matthew the narrator clearly indicates that there is a "conflict between God and the machinations of his enemies" who attempt to disrupt his redemptive plan for the salvation of humanity through the infant Jesus. In this sense, God is thus active in the entire narrative of Matthew. Because God cares so much for man's salvation, he saves Jesus in Matthew 1-2 to carry out his purpose of sending him into the world of chaos, oppression, discrimination, marginalisation, and violation of human rights.

Kupp (1996:53-54, 55, 64) rightly asserts that God's presence amongst his people in Matthew is different from how he was present in the past in that he is now also present in the person of the infant Jesus. This was clearly stated by the narrator when he says that the infant Jesus is to be called "Emmanuel" meaning that God is with his people again. Therefore, in every situation in which Jesus is present in the Gospel of Matthew, God is also present. In Matthew 1-2 God is thus both present in Jesus, the vulnerable infant, and as his heavenly father who exposes the plans of the wicked and cares for Jesus. In Matthew 1-2, this theocentric control of the story is very clear in the manner in which everything in the narrative is determined by the acts of God in defending Jesus and his family from Herod and his supporters and caring for them. The narrator also resolved all

possible tensions and misunderstandings in his narrative by a chain of God's divine interventions.

### 3.5 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was on the characterisation of Jesus. The infant Jesus, who as such does not act as an independent agent in Matthew 1-2, is primarily characterised by his genealogy (3.2), the titles used by Matthew that indicate that he is the Messiah sent by God to rule as his king (3.3), and the care Jesus received from God through the use of intermediaries (3.4).

The genealogy of Jesus (3.2) provides an indication of his ascribed honor. It indicates that he, and not Herod, is the legitimate king from the house of David. It furthermore indicates that Jesus is not only the King of the Jews but that he would also be the king of all gentiles who worship the true God.

Through the extensive use of titles, Matthew describes Jesus as the Son of Abraham (3.3.1), the Son of David (3.3.2), the Son of Man (3.3.3), Emmanuel (3.3.4), the King of the Jews (3.3.5), and a Nazarene (3.3.6). It is noteworthy that while some of these titles were attributed to other characters in the past, Jesus is unique in terms of the fact that not all of them were ever attributed to one specific individual.

As an infant, Jesus's character is not being shown in Matthew 1-2 by relating how he acts. What the narrator did, however, show is that Jesus as an infant was cared for by God through his father (3.4). While God the father is not directly present as a character in Matthew 1-2, he acts through his intermediaries, the angels, in order to convey his will to characters who are directly present in the narrative of Matthew like the Magi and Joseph.

Anderson (1994:79) asserts that in the characterisation of Jesus, his identity cannot be fully grasped through his names and titles but that his mission (actions and words) must be taken into consideration because the evangelist categorically said that "He will save his people" meaning he will be the Saviour of the people.

According to Focant (1993:263), Jesus's origin is told to describe Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God whose God-given mission is to save his people from their sins and the unhealthy craving for power, honour, and status that was the norm (Matt. 1:18-25; 3:13-17). These names or titles such as Christ (meaning the Messiah) or Son of Man, Son of David, Son of Abraham, Emmanuel, and many others show that Jesus will save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:1, 21).

## CHAPTER 4

### *THE CHARACTERISATION OF HEROD IN MATTHEW 1-2*

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the characterisation of Herod will be undertaken by noting how his response to the birth of Jesus is described (4.2), the titles used for Herod (4.3), the actions of Herod (4.4) and how his death is described (4.5).

#### **4.2 The description of Herod's response to the birth of Jesus (Matt. 2:3, 16)**

In the narrative of Matthew, King Herod is twice said to be “disturbed” (meaning worried) about Jesus's birth (Matt. 2:3). Weren (2014:3) says that what really disturbed Herod, and “Jerusalem's” ruling elite, was hearing the political statement of the Magi. In response to this potential political threat, Herod is depicted as a murderous king who massacred children and left adults weeping and mourning in Ramah and its environments without any comfort (Matt. 2:3, 16, 18). Ramah was a town belonging to Benjamin (Jos. 18:25), a territory north of Jerusalem where Herod ruled as king. Rachel, who cried for the loss of her children, is a figurative character because the historical Rachel died years before in the Old Testament.<sup>17</sup> She is used here in Matthew's narrative to represent the kind of agony the entire community of Bethlehem faced (Matt. 2:18). Davidson (1997:775) opinions that based on the timing of King Herod's command to kill infant boys the visit of the Magi was two years after the birth of Jesus.

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<sup>17</sup> Rachel was one of the wives of Jacob and the mother of Benjamin. She stood as a symbol for all the Benjamite mothers who lost sons.

### 4.3 The titles of Herod (Matt. 2:1-12)

As in the case of Jesus, the narrator also attributed a title to Herod to characterise him. It is, however, noteworthy that the title “king” was only attached to Herod three times by the narrator (Matt. 2:1, 3, 9), while he referred to him as just “Herod” five times during his lifetime (Matt. 2:7, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16) and twice more after his death (Matt. 2:19, 22). The narrator thus did not always acknowledge the status of Herod as king. As already mentioned the narrator also did not provide a justification (like a genealogy) for his kingship. There is also no mention of how Herod came to power. Regarding the historical record of how Herod came to power, Richardson (1996:20, 100) asserts that he came to power through his victory in a war he fought on behalf of Julius Caesar. He was first appointed as procurator of Judea before being publicly declared ruler of Galilee. His kingship was thus an acquired honor.

It is also noteworthy that the narrator was silent about the many accomplishments of Herod. In 40 B.C.E., the Romans were not ready to take up responsibility for Judea so they allowed Herod to be the king of Judea. From 37 B.C.E. onward he established his kingdom in Jerusalem (Richardson 1973:2). According to Richardson (1996:2, 18), Herod’s list of achievements includes:

(1) He was the architect of several Romans buildings; (2) He constructed a magnificent temple in Jerusalem where he placed his god sculpture in front of the temple gate. This “golden eagle” was Herod’s god sculpture.<sup>18</sup> The Jews could not see the “golden eagle” from inside the temple but they could not avoid seeing it from the outside when entering through another gate.

(3) He constructed a sizable project in a constrained urban site.

(4) He built pedestrian overpasses to relieve the pressure of many visitors to Jerusalem from Rome and other places during major pilgrimages.

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<sup>18</sup> It was said to be a “decorated Cherubim” (1 Kgs. 6:23-29) but Josephus asserted that it was Herod’s “golden eagles” (see Richardson, 1996:2, 15, 225).

(5) He used precious stones and gold in building holy temples and a terminus which was one of the greatest religious buildings in the Roman territory.

(6) He also built magnificent buildings for the goddess of Roman and imperial cults in colonised cities such as Caesarea, Sebastes, and other cities in the province of Puntis. He dedicated two of the towns to his great mother Livia and another to Marcus Agrippa;

(7) He was appointed to rule Judea as king by Julius Caesar when he was about 25, three years before Caesar was murdered.

(8) It was said that the gods of Rome smiled after choosing Herod to be the king of Judea.

Richardson (1996:2), however, concluded that some Judeans opposed his appointment, saying that the Romans were not wise in appointing Herod as their king, but their objection was not accepted because Herod was a key figure who helped Rome to conquer and occupy Jerusalem at the time when Pompey the Great was ruling.

#### **4.4 The actions of Herod (Matt. 2:16)**

Actions reveal a character's real nature in a narrative and therefore it is important to look at how Matthew depicted Herod's actions. According to Richardson (1996:288), Herod is depicted as a troubled king in Matthew's narrative as he is described as making inquiries (Matt. 2:1-7) after about one to two years after Jesus was born when he was around 70 years old. According to the narrative of Matthew, his actions were triggered by the question and statement from the Magi "Where is the King of the Jews? We have seen his star and have come to worship him." The question "Where is the new-born King of the Jews?" and the statement "We have to worship him!" challenged Herod's authority as king of the Jews.

In fact, when Herod heard this, he was not pleased. Combrink (1983:77-78) states that Herod's violent reaction to the news of the birth of Jesus signals the beginning of the

opposition to Jesus in Matthew's gospel. Lenski (1943:57-58, 59) asserts that in the Gospel of Matthew, the evangelist selected two highly contrasting and significant characters in the incident, namely the gentiles who adore the new King of the Jews and the current king of Jerusalem<sup>19</sup> who tries to murder him, to signify the different responses to Jesus.<sup>20</sup> The gentiles in Matthew's narrative make it clear that these characters and many others such as the Magi, the centurion, and the Canaanite woman will come to believe in Jesus Christ.

According to Green (1995:279), it is important to note that God gave King Herod "power" to care for his subjects but that he did not do so. In discussing Herod's myopic thinking, Awojobi (2003:56) asserts that "The person who possesses information also has power. Individuals or groups who control information about a matter, an event and plans have enormous power to influence others." King Herod was, however, described by the narrator as not having any information about Jesus. He did not know where he was born or where his family lived. Herod had to deduce the information of where the new-born would have been born according to prophecy. From a narrative critical perspective, the character of Herod was thus not knowledgeable of the birthplace of the Jesus; he was characterised as lacking the wisdom to act quickly according to the narrative of Matthew.

Bethlehem of Judea was a fair distance from Jerusalem. Lenski (1943:61) asserts that the Magi did not go directly to King Herod, but that he summoned them and asked them about Jesus because the news of their search was publicly known in the whole city (Matt. 2:7). According to this interpretation, the Magi did not respect Herod as king by informing him of a possible usurper and therefore he was troubled upon eventually hearing of Jesus's birth.

It is important to understand why Herod and Jerusalem are disturbed in Matthew's narrative. In most places, when a boy was born, it was a cause for celebrations from the day of birth to the day when he was named and circumcised. Why then were they

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<sup>19</sup> Richardson (1996:135) asserts that Judea was a key region of Jerusalem and the administrative capital of all Jews everywhere.

<sup>20</sup> No other gospel speaks more directly of the church as that of Matthew (see Matt. 16:18; 18:17).

disturbed? Were they disturbed because the Jews were not the ones who first brought news of the newborn child but rather gentile Magi from the distant East who came to worship the infant Jesus? Or were they worried because their king was worried about a challenge to his rule and they feared Herod's anger? The precise reason for their concern is unclear. Combrink (1983:61, 78) asserts that in addition to Herod the worrying of the whole of Jerusalem, Matthew may have referred to the reaction of the leaders of the city, thereby foreshadowing their later rejection of Jesus.

In the narrative of Matthew, the evangelist wrote that the Magi said, "We saw his star when it rose," but Herod was not aware of where the infant was born because he could not see the star. However, it was Jesus's star that led the Magi to the place where Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:10-12). Minear (1982:35) agrees that the star guided the Magi to Jerusalem, but that they then became dependent on Herod's direction. On receiving their request, Herod consulted the Jewish religious leaders, the scribes, and priests. Even though they told him the right place according to the scriptures, he ironically took no action to seek Jesus (Combrink 1983:78). The infant Jesus thus survived because the Magi ignored Herod's instructions to report his location and took a different route home (Matt.2:12). When Herod realised that the Magi had outwitted him, he became furious and ordered the killing of all boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years and under according to the time of birth reported by the Magi. Luz (2007:44) comments<sup>21</sup> that Herod was not too worried about the Magi's actions, but instead focused on how to get rid of the one who was said to be the King of the Jews. In the narrative of Matthew fear, hatred, and jealousy took hold of Herod's heart and he took steps to kill male children who were potential rivals.

Herod's opposition to Jesus thus becomes explicit in 2:13-23 in Matthew's narrative when his plan to kill Jesus fails. According to Matthew, the slaughter in Ramah of Bethlehem fulfills the prophecy of the prophet Jeremiah (Cf. Jer. 31:15; Matt. 2:17, 18). While

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<sup>21</sup> "Then Herod, seeing" – The same kind of construction introduces Herod's action in Matthew 2:7. The verb *enepaichthe* (deceived) conveys the idea of ridicule or being made to look foolish. It appears again in the passion story with regard to the mockery of Jesus as king (see Matthew 27:29, 31, 41).

Adeyemo (2006:1112) asserts that Herod's command to massacre the male children<sup>22</sup> is in line with the way the historical Herod abused his power over his subjects, the narrator did not refer to these abuses. He instead recalled similar incidents from the Old Testament by connecting it to how Pharaoh tried to kill Moses and all other male Hebrew children in Egypt (Ex. 1-2). The narrator<sup>23</sup> thus showed Herod as a rash and perverse king, one who would kill children as the worst of Israel's enemies had done in the past.

#### 4.5 The death of Herod (Matt. 2:19)

In the narrative of Matthew, the narrator does not give full details of Herod's death but simply says that "After Herod died, an angel of the Lord" was sent to make the first announcement to Joseph in Egypt through a dream (Matt. 2:19). Hale and Thorson (2007:141) assert that while Herod tried to prolong his reign by killing Jesus, his reign and his life ended shortly thereafter in Matthew's narrative. Herod's death is affirmed by an angel in the narrative who says to Joseph "those who sought the child's life are dead" (Matt. 2:19-20).

Even though when Herod was dead, the time of his death is not mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew. The narrator just asserted that after the death of Herod Joseph received instructions from an angel to return to Nazareth in Galilee. Richardson (1996:18) asserts that Herod died in 4 B.C.E.<sup>24</sup> in the winter in his palace in Jericho from a painful disease,

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<sup>22</sup> While Matthew does not report the number of children killed, Richardson (1996:288) estimates that it could have been up to 300, a shocking crime.

<sup>23</sup> Jefford (2017:1, 12) rightly concludes that in reading this incident, the reader tends to understand the narrator's tone or voice in following the text. When the reader for example comes to these narrative texts, he or she must adopt the same feelings of fear and anxiety. This makes the reader come to terms with not only the voice but the feelings of what is happening. So, when Herod the Great says, "Go and search for the infant Jesus and when you find him return to me of his where about that I may also go and worship him" the voice in the reader's head will tend to change its pitch, knowing that somethings terrible is going to happen. These feelings of fear and anxiety culminate when Herod the Great gives orders for the killing of infant boys two years and under in Ramah and its vicinity.

<sup>24</sup> The dating is problematic as Richardson (1996:18) states that Josephus mentioned that Herod died 37 years from the time that he was appointed king by the Romans, and

syphilis, and sickness which included fever, itching, pain in the colon, swollen feet, and inflammation of the abdomen, gangrene of the lung, disease, convulsions, and eye problems.

Hill (1972:86) asserts that the evangelist hereafter styled his narrative on the Old Testament (Ex. 4:19) by quoting the narrative story of Moses that “All the men who were seeking your life are dead.” Therefore, as Moses returned from Midian to Egypt and saved the children of Israel, so also Jesus returned from Egypt after the death of Herod the Great to save humankind from the hands of human domination and sin.

In the narrative of Matthew, the evangelist asserted that when King Herod died, his son Herod Archelaus succeeded his reign in Judea (Matt. 2:22).<sup>25</sup> This made Joseph and his family fearful of returning to Judea, so instead of returning to Bethlehem in Judea from Egypt, Joseph, his wife Mary and their child, Jesus, moved to Nazareth in Galilee (Matt. 2:21-23a).

#### 4.6 Conclusion

It is clear from the characterisation of Herod in Matthew 1-2 that the narrator considered him an illegitimate and dangerous ruler. Not only is he not always called by his royal title but is neither his genealogy nor history given in contrast to that of Jesus. Herod is also

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34 years after he took Jerusalem. This would indicate that the date of his death was 2 B.C.E. Josephus may, however, have counted the reigns of the kings of Judea by the accession year method, as was done with the kings of the line of David. If Herod was appointed king by Rome, his first regnal year could have run from Nisan of 39 to Nisan of 38 B.C.E.; similarly, if counted from his capture of Jerusalem in 37 (or 36) B.C.E., his first regnal year could have started in Nisan 36 (or 35) B.C.E. So, if, as Josephus says, Herod died 37 years after his appointment by Rome and 34 years after his capture of Jerusalem, and if those years are counted in each case according to the regnal year, his death could even have been in 1 B.C.E.

<sup>25</sup> Richardson (1973:3) states that Archelaus received the title of the king of Judea in 4–6 B.C.E. but he was too weak to keep the law and order the Romans needed; they disposed him in 6 C.E., bringing Judea under direct Roman rule for the first time and brought about a patron and client relationship.

depicted as being ignorant of where the Messiah would be born, and unable to make the Magi obey his commands.

For Matthew, Herod was ultimately a troubled ruler (Matt. 2:3) who was willing to kill his own subjects in order to remain in power (Matt. 2:8). In the end, his death was not elaborated on by Matthew. It is simply mentioned as a reason for Joseph and his family's return to Israel. Richardson (1996) titles his publication "Herod: King of the Jews and friend of the Romans" implying that Herod was king of the Jews and a friend of the Romans. This was, however, not Matthew's view. For him, Jesus is the true king of the Jews, while Herod was a compromised puppet of the Romans.

## CHAPTER 5

# *A MASCULINITY HERMENEUTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERISATION OF JESUS AND HEROD AS MALE CHARACTERS IN MATTHEW 1-2*

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the focus will shift to answering the second research question identified in 1.3.<sup>26</sup> This shift necessitates a change in the methodology followed in this chapter. Whereas chapters 2-4 primarily used narrative criticism as a method, this chapter will use a masculinity hermeneutic to read Matthew 1-2. It also defines and explains the phrase hegemonic masculinity (5.2) and the link between hegemony and masculinity (5.3). This chapter uses a different reader-response approach than the previous three chapters. In it, Matthew 1-2 will be read from the perspective of hegemonic masculinity (5.3.1) and a radical reader-response approach (5.3.2) in order to provide an analysis of Jesus and Herod as masculinity characters in Matthew 1-2 (5.4). An analysis of the family of Jesus (5.4.1) and Herod (5.4.2) as masculine characters will be undertaken after Matthew's depiction of Herod and Jesus as male characters has been analysed. The findings will then be compared to each other in terms of hegemonic masculinity (5.5) before coming to a conclusion on how Herod and Jesus must be understood in terms of Matthew's narrative (5.6).

### **5.2 Hegemonic masculinity**

In defining hegemonic masculinity, Allison (2007:75) asserts that it is the construction of institutional norms that entrench the superiority of men over women (and others over

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<sup>26</sup> The second research question is: "How can this characterisation of Jesus and Herod as authority figures inform the gender debate about power within contemporary Nigerian society from the perspective of contemporary masculinity studies?"

whom they have authority). It implies that men in positions of power and authority abusively control, oppress, dominate, and marginalise their vulnerable subjects by violating their human rights. In agreement with this description, Thatcher (2011:146) asserts that the term itself comes from the Greek word “hegemon,” meaning “leader.” The Greeks used it to refer to a leader who used his positional power to control his subjects. Thus, hegemony occurs when a person or a group in power exercise control over another group. Howson (2006:ii, 3, 76, 116, 127, 154) states that hegemonic masculinity is the radical domination of other genders in the social order in a strategic way. It is nothing less than an exclusive, anxiety-provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal, and violent act against the vulnerable.

Hegemonic masculinity is not something, which all men exercise or practice, but it is practiced by those who view themselves as superior to others. Donaldson (1993:643-657) defines hegemonic masculinity in practice as a system of patriarchy which favours males over females, the strong over the weak, and the rich over the poor. While it empowers some, at the same time it depowers others intentionally. It is thus a cultural construction of those in a position of power that enables them to dominate their subjects by depicting them as inferior even if they are not.

Stated differently, it is the enforcement of power through the subordination and marginalisation of a certain group of people or entities. It can thus also be defined as a dominating ideal type of masculinity.

### **5.3 The link between hegemony and masculinity**

The link between hegemony and masculinity is not coincidental. According to Connell (1995:232-234) and Howson (2006: 5, 7, 60, 61), drawing from Gramsci's theory of hegemonic masculinity, hegemony can only emanate from masculinity and only be expressed through masculinity. For them, hegemonic masculinity is exclusionary in nature in that it does not involve all genders or persons in its operations. The implication is that it considers those it excludes as being inferior or less valuable.

Women are, for example, in most cases, seen as the property of men while some men are like “women” due to their perceived inferiority. Combes (1998:22) supports Gramsci’s argument by saying that this kind of construction of masculinity or status or power ultimately gives the owner the strength to think of the other as “property,” which provides them with unlimited rights to exploit and enslave others who are given only the flimsiest of rights as humans to safeguard them against abuse.

Crossley (2010:40) asserts that Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) developed the theory of hegemonic masculinity in terms of power in the way he described how the selfish elite’s ideology permeates their entire society so that they can keep their power over their subjects. He points out that this power functions in a tripartite institution comprised of government, religious, and family institutions. In this tripartite institution, “men” construct themselves as having more power and authority than others have. Due to this kind of construction of hegemonic masculinity in the tripartite institution, those who are supposed to protect their subjects and subordinates – the masses -- are those who turn into oppressors, discriminators, relegators, marginalisers, and violators of human rights. The laws that are supposed to safeguard society are broken by them. In government institutions, some leaders misuse their power over their subjects. In religious institutions, some religious leaders misuse their power over members. In the family institution, some husbands misuse their power over their wives or children.

What links all these institutions is the use of power. While some leaders in these institutions use their power appropriately, others misuse it. There are different ways of understanding how power can be used or abused. Some leaders use power to transform, while others use power to deform; some leaders use power over while some use power with; some leaders use power to kill life while others use power to give life. As Thatcher (2011:26) asserts, there is power over which depowers, and power with which transforms lives. In agreement concerning the tripartite institutions in which power is used according to Gramsci, Connell (1995:77-86) also asserts that power abuse occurs in government, religious and family relationships when leaders power over their subjects. This domination of others by hegemonic constructs of masculinity in terms of power over their subjects and especially over women is morally wrong.

Where power is used wrongly, it should be resisted, according to Thatcher (2011:27). Jones (2000:79-93), lamenting on the situation of the misuse of power in general, notes that the oppression of human dignity, worthiness, violation of rights and sense of respect as human beings manifest in five identifiable ways:

- (1) Oppression as exploitation.
- (2) Oppression as marginalisation.
- (3) Oppression as violence.
- (4) Powerlessness.
- (5) And cultural imperialism.

These five ways are unfortunately an accurate description of the dire situation of societies around the globe with hegemonic masculinity often directly contributing to it. In Nigeria, all five have contributed directly to the abuse of the powerless by those who are either in power or who enjoy their patronage.

### ***5.3.1 Reading Matthew 1-2 from the perspective of hegemonic masculinity***

When Matthew 1-2 is read from a narrative critical point of view it can, on the one hand, warn against the danger of the toxic nature of hegemonic masculinity as is evident in the conduct of Herod. There is no doubt that he was depicted as a cruel, illegitimate ruler by Matthew. There is, however, also a danger that a narrative critical reading of Matthew 1-2 in line with the worldview of the implied reader thereof can contribute to the entrenchment of hegemonic masculinity in contemporary societies like Nigeria.

In the narrative of Matthew 1-2, it is depicted and accepted with no comment that in line with hegemonic masculinity Joseph is the one who makes all the decisions – on whether he and Mary should marry or not, what the name of the child should be, and where they should reside. Mary is simply informed of his decisions. The narrative also accepts that the angels only speak to Joseph. In this manner, the narrative not only reflects a patriarchal world but also contributes to it being entrenched in contemporary societies.

Evaluating a narrative critical reading of Matthew 1-2 from a gender perspective has the

value of sensitising contemporary readers to the (often unintended) outcome of the conservative reader-response reading of a text.

A gender critical reading reminds the contemporary reader to:

- (a) Recognise the entrenched patriarchal worldview in biblical texts.
- (b) Focus on the redemptive role of women in the text (e.g. the different women in the genealogy who should not be conflated to a specific “type” like a gentile woman with dubious sexual morals).
- (c) Emphasise the different gender perspectives in the biblical witness (e.g. the manner Mary is depicted in the birth narrative of Luke in contrast to how she is depicted in Matthew).

A gender critical reading of the biblical text must remind contemporary readers that while the text reflects the patriarchal worldview in which it was created, this does not mean that this worldview is normative. In this regard, Hasina (2006:39) asserts that the truth of biblical revelation is not found in “a cultural essence distilled from patriarchal texts but are given in those texts and interpretive models which transcend and criticise their patriarchal culture and religion.”

It is important to realise, according to Connell (1987:185,187), that hegemonic masculinity is a cultural construction. It is not God-given. Howson (2006:67) states that it must be challenged and exposed for denying all people the right of living as humans (see Greer 1999:5). According to Howson, both hegemonic masculinity and its hegemonic system must be broken down to meet the holistic needs of the world of hegemony and social justice. It is therefore important for this study to understand how the narrative of Matthew can support or challenge the construction of hegemonic masculinity and its system, which is practiced by those who oppress, discriminate, marginalise, and violate the rights of others in the tripartite institutions.

### ***5.3.2 Radical reader-response studies and the use of a masculinity hermeneutic***

According to Hong (2013: 535-535), there are two ways of undertaking a reader-response reading of a text, a radical and a conservative way. Narrative criticism is generally a

conservative approach in that it attempts to read the final text in line with the implied author's intent. Masculinity hermeneutical readings, like the one attempted in this chapter, is a more radical approach. This distinction between "conservative" and "radical" reader-response approaches is very important, and it is, therefore, necessary to quote Hong (2013:535-536) in full.

"Reader-response criticism is generally divided into two categories: conservative and radical approaches. First, conservative reader-response readings, perhaps best exemplified by Wolfgang Iser, side more with the axis of text, insofar as their readings follow the response of the reader that is practically a textual construct –the "implied reader." For Iser, the implied reader is a textual construct necessary for observing the "aesthetic reception" of the reader. Therefore, conservative reader-response readings address mainly the final-t level with more emphasis on the axis of the reader, out of which the meaning of the text and the intention of the implied author are reconstructed. In biblical scholarship, then, most narrative critics would belong in the same area.

"Second, slightly different are radical reader-response readings that attend to the post-t level with a more aggressive focus given to the axis of the reader. The particular reader whom these readings follow is not the implied reader reconstructed out of the text. It is the ideological post-t reader, whether it be a feminist reader, a deconstructionist reader, a postcolonial reader, or any reader whose engagement in meaning production is not only acknowledged but also actively pursued. Fundamentally, the text that these readers read is not the same text as was read by the original readers. Though the two are identical in their physical value, they are different texts in that the post-text is essentially defined, shaped, and channeled through the decisive act of reading by the post-t reader, whose ideology, in turn, is dictated by the interpretive community to which he or she belongs."

The distinction Hong makes between the two types of reader-response approaches is important since chapters 2-4 of this study focused on Matthew 1-2 from what Hong describes as a "conservative" reader-response perspective. The methodology used was

narrative criticism and can be considered “conservative” in that the focus was on how the implied (or even intended) reader of Matthew would understand the characterisation of Jesus and Herod as male authority figures. In this chapter, the presupposed reader of Matthew 1-2 is, however, not the implied reader that one can construct from Matthew’s narrative. To paraphrase Hong, it is instead a reader whose engagement in meaning production through a masculinity hermeneutic is not only acknowledged but also actively pursued. The reading by this “radical” reader, whose ideology is dictated by the interpretive community to which he or she belongs, thus differs from that of the implied or intended reader of the Gospel of Matthew.

In terms of the two research questions (1.3), the “conservative” reading undertaken in chapters 2-4 answers the first research question: How are Jesus and Herod characterised as male authority figures in the narrative of Matthew 1-2? This chapter will, however, undertake a “radical” reading of Matthew 1-2 in order to answer the second research question: How can these characterisations of Jesus and Herod as authority figures inform the gender debate about power within contemporary Nigerian society from the perspective of contemporary masculinity studies? The reason for posing both questions is that in Nigeria “radical” readings of a biblical text (to use Hong’s term) like those undertaken by feminists are often simply dismissed out of hand as imposing a meaning on a text from an ideological position. First using narrative criticism to attempt to read the text in line with the implied reader thereof, a “conservative” approach to the text according to Hong, enables the researcher to present the results of his reading of Matthew 1-2 to the ecclesial community he serves. Only after this has been done, can this reading be problematised from a gender perspective by highlighting the hegemonic patriarchal masculinity embedded in the text that is unintentionally endorsed by “conservative” readings of the text.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Chapter 6 will discuss the applicability of hegemonic masculinity studies to Matthew in Nigeria (6.3.1), provide an overview of how it is practiced in Nigeria (6.3.2), and make a number of suggestions on how both Biblical studies (6.3.3) and the church (6.3.4) can contribute to an alternative to hegemonic masculinity.

Stated differently the reason for posing the two research questions is that the first can be answered in terms of what Powell describes the “expected” meaning of a text while the second can only be addressed by an “unexpected” reading thereof. Powell (2009:61-63) asserts that narrative criticism allows for what he calls “polyvalence within perimeters.” By this, he means that diverse interpretations of texts or responses to texts may be classified as “expected” or “unexpected” readings. The expected reading is invited by the text itself, while the unexpected reading is produced when factors extrinsic to the text cause the reader to resist or ignore the text’s signals. For narrative criticism, the expected reading would be compatible with the response of the text’s implied reader, while on the other hand, the unexpected reading could be incompatible with the response of a text’s implied reader. In order to explain the difference between the two readings, Powell (2009:61-63) gives an illustration of four different people reading the same text of Matthew (Matt. 26-27) about the passion of Christ but responding differently as follows:

- (1) Reader 1 is inspired by the story he or she reads because it presents Jesus as a noble who is willing to die for what he believes.
- (2) Reader 2 is traumatised by the story he or she reads because it reveals the depth of human depravity of those who denounced, betrayed, and tortured him as an innocent man.
- (3) Reader 3 is comforted by the story he or she reads because it portrays Jesus’s death on the cross as an atoning sacrifice that was offered for God’s forgiveness and undeserved mercy.
- (4) Reader 4 is delighted by the story he or she reads because it reports Jesus was brutally executed on the cross, which informs every one of the pain they will suffer if they do God’s business.

Reading Matthew 1-2 from a masculinity hermeneutical perspective (a radical reader-response approach) can thus, according to Powell’s terms, result in “unexpected” readings. In order to engage with the churches in Nigeria, this study thus started with an

exegetical process which produced an “expected” reading of Matthew 1-2 before undertaking a reading which can be described as producing “unexpected” results.

These “unexpected” readings based on a masculinity hermeneutical-critical reading of Matthew 1-2 are important since all Christian writings from the first-century Mediterranean world were conditioned and formulated within a culturally patriarchal milieu. The Gospel of Matthew, for example, accepts that men in society enact their male identity in a specific manner in how they speak and teach in public, own land, and occupy positions of power. It can, therefore, be assumed that the Gospel of Matthew also accepts that women should enact their female identities in line with the values of the patriarchal society it was produced in as is evident in how Matthew depicts women. This would imply that women, for example, were expected to be obedient wives fulfilling their domestic roles of giving their husbands sexual fulfillment and taking care of their children (Durber, 2014:19). Or that they are not included in decisions affecting the whole family like Mary was excluded in Matthew 1-2. While some aspects of Matthew’s narrative challenge this patriarchal worldview (for example, the inclusion of women in the genealogy of Jesus), this does not negate the fact that the narrative of Matthew was produced in a patriarchal milieu and that it was therefore shaped by it.

The problem of simply undertaking a conservative narrative critical reading that produces “expected” readings is that a patriarchal text will support patriarchal readings thereof. This will, in turn, engender a patriarchal society. The use of narrative criticism as a conservative reader-response approach to a final text will thus have a very specific outcome in the contemporary Nigerian society, which can be considered negative from a gender justice perspective. The intent of this chapter is, therefore, to use a masculinity hermeneutical approach to read Matthew’s depiction of Herod and the infant Jesus in order to critically engage with how narrative criticism describes Jesus and Herod as male authority figures in Matthew 1-2. The hope is to participate in the debate on gender and power within Nigeria from the perspective of contemporary masculinity studies. It should therefore be noted that the intent is not to analyse how gender was constructed in the time the Gospel of Matthew was written since it is not the intent of this study to perpetuate this ancient hegemonic construction of masculinity. Its intent is instead to

challenge hegemonic masculinities, both ancient and contemporary by using contemporary understandings of how gender should be constructed in a manner that enables human flourishing.

#### **5.4 Analysis of Jesus and Herod as masculinity characters in Matthew 1-2**

According to Alter (1981:80), Jesus and Herod are among the “principal characters” in Matthew 1-2. While Matthew mentions several other characters such as David, Abraham, Judah and Tamar, Salmon and Rahab, Boaz and Ruth, Bathsheba, Joseph, Mary, the Magi, the scribes, and teachers of the law in Matthew 1-2, the focus of this study is on Herod, the incumbent king, and Jesus, the new-born king, as authority figures in the first century world. For Matthew the infant Jesus was, despite his age and dependence on others for his care, already an authority figure in that the Magi worshiped him. Herod, in turn, was an authority figure in the sense that his advisors obeyed him while Jerusalem feared him.

##### ***5.4.1 An analysis of the family of the infant Jesus Christ – the King of the Jews***

In introducing the infant Jesus, the evangelist linked him to other male characters by naming him as their son. He is thus the “Son of Abraham,” “Son of David,” and “Son of Man” (Matt. 1-2). This not only emphasises that Jesus was a male character and not a female one, but also that his ascribed honour was derived from his illustrious male ancestors. The genealogy of Jesus testifies to a view that power and honour are transferred from one male to another. In this sense, it is a description of masculine hegemony. However, even though Jesus is characterised as the honoured son of these patriarchal characters through his genealogy, it is important to recognise that Matthew included a number of women in Jesus’s genealogy even though this was not the Jewish convention.

In 3.2 the reasons for the surprising inclusion of these women with their complex backgrounds was discussed in detail and it was argued that they signal the universal scope of Jesus’s ministry of salvation which would not just be confined to Jews. The four women according to this reading represent a typo – the gentile woman with lax sexual

morals – in the genealogy of Matthew. While the inclusion of the first four women (as a type or typos) does point to the universal scope of Jesus's mission, the gender implications of the evangelist's focus on their role in Israel's history needs to be expanded on.

The genealogy of Jesus does not simply testify to the important, though still minor, the role of women in the history of God's engagement with Israel. It testifies to the key role the five women who are mentioned played with the focus of the entire genealogy clearly being on Mary as the mother of Jesus who gave birth to him through the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18a, 25). In the climax of the genealogy, Joseph becomes the "husband" of Mary through whom Jesus was born (Matt. 1:16). This inverts the usual description of women in terms of their fathers or husbands in patriarchal societies. The following narrative makes clear what the genealogy implies: Jesus was born through the power of the Holy Spirit and not through the agency of a biological father. In the birth narrative of Matthew, the evangelist clearly stated through the angel's pronouncement that Mary would give birth to a son and that he should be called "Jesus" even though Joseph would play no biological part in his conception (Matt. 1:20-22). The role of Mary as the mother of Jesus is thus highlighted.

This emphasis on Mary is also apparent in the way the narrator linked Jesus as an infant with Mary, and not his father (Matt. 2:11, 13, 14, 20, 21). Mary thus clearly occupies a central role in Matthew 1-2 despite her precocious position within a patriarchal society. She is introduced before she was married to Joseph simply as a young woman who is engaged to be married. Keener (2009:87) emphasises that the term παρθένος which the evangelist used indicates that she was a "young woman," but that this did not automatically mean that she was a virgin when Jesus was born. If it did, Matthew would not have needed to state that she and Joseph had not been intimate before the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:25). However, in depicting Mary as pregnant from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit before her marriage, the narrator implied that she was a virgin in that she also had no sexual relations with any other man. Keener (1990:89) states that Joseph did not sleep with her according to the ancient Jewish custom until she had given birth to Jesus

even though they were married. Both Joseph and Mary thus conducted themselves according to the cultural script of the society they were part of.

Regarding Joseph's depiction as a "just man" by Matthew, Beare (1981:68) asserts the term δίκαιος has the connotation of other terms such as "righteous," "justice," "kind" and "merciful." It is thus not unexpected that Joseph is depicted as being merciful to the pregnant Mary and that he did not want to disgrace her in public. This could have led to her death as stoning was permitted as a punishment for getting pregnant without being married in their patriarchal context. Therefore, he secretly planned to leave her and to break their engagement. Only after being instructed by an angel did Joseph marry Mary and adopt her infant boy.

It is thus clear that both the narrator of Matthew depicted Joseph and Mary as acting honourably according to the patriarchal norms of their time. Joseph is depicted as a just man who protects his wife and family and Mary as a loving mother who cares for her baby. They thus perform the stereotypical gender roles prescribed by their context. The only deviation is Joseph's willingness not only to marry a woman who is pregnant but also one who is expecting a child of which he is not the father.

#### ***5.4.2 Analysis of Herod as a masculine character***

It is clear from extra-biblical sources that Herod often abused his power over his subjects.<sup>28</sup> Richardson (1996:298), for example, quotes Josephus who commented that he was "contemptuous of justice," did not temper justice with mercy, and used his power to kill his own wife, his sons, and at least 40 youths as well as some Pharisees. There was thus no doubt in the mind of Josephus that Herod was a cruel and dangerous man. Richardson (1973:1-2) agrees with this assertion by commenting that "If, as Lord Acton said, great men are almost always bad men, Herod was well qualified for the distinction." Emperor Augustus in turn said that he would rather be Herod's son, than his son (Richardson 1973:3). Weren (2014:3), in analysing Herod the Great, asserts that he was

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<sup>28</sup> According to the Testament of Moses 6:2-7, Herod was rash and perverse, one who would kill old and young, showing mercy to none (Richardson 1996:298).

simply “an opportunist military commander” whom the Roman authorities made their puppet ruler in Jerusalem and its surroundings to further their own “Middle Eastern agendas.” It is clear from these extra-biblical sources that the historical Herod was a hegemonic masculine ruler who oppressed his family and subjects.

Matthew in his narrative depicted Herod as a character in line with the estimation of him in extra-biblical sources. He asserted that when the Magi from the east came looking for the new-born King of the Jews, whose star had led them to Jerusalem, Herod responded to this news by ordering the killing of all male children younger than two years in Ramah<sup>29</sup> (Matt. 2:1, 16-18). Herod thus unleashed his regal power against male children who would never have been a threat to him, since he would have been dead by the time they were adults (Henry 1960:1208). For Matthew, this atrocity was Herod’s ultimate transgression that discredited him as king. Not only did he attempt to kill the Messiah, but also he did it in a way that killed countless innocent children. From this perspective, it can thus be argued that Matthew viewed Herod as a hegemonic masculine figure who used his power to instill fear in his subjects so that they were willing to obey even his most evil of commands. In ordering the killing of innocent children, Herod signaled that for him they are of no value and the pain of their families of no concern to him.

Catlin (2011:141), however, is of the view that it should be kept in mind that the use of power by kings like Herod in the ancient world for any purpose they saw fit, was the norm and that his command to kill the boys would even have been considered to be an honourable action. From this perspective, Herod was a powerful king in Matthew because he allowed no one to challenge his position as king. By acting forcefully against Jesus, Herod would have been understood as having increased his ascribed honour. Pitt-River (1977:1) raises the important point that for a person’s worth or honour to be increased, his achievements or claims must be acknowledged by the society in which he lives and one can, therefore, assume that Herod’s claims of honour were accepted by his contemporaries since it increased over his lifetime.

Malina (1991:34-38) and Neyrey (1998:5-6, 15, 35) are of the view that in the first-century Mediterranean world “ascribed honour” was received at birth while “acquired honour” was gained by achievement. In an honour and shame society, honour could be achieved through aggressive competition with others. Examples of this aggressive competition were, according to Neyrey (1998:16), winning a war, becoming a champion at various athletic games, or fighting in an aggressive way. Cohen (1995:61-142) calls this kind of competitive society an “agonistic society,” while Vernant (1988:29-56) states that the first-century society Mediterranean world was filled with this agonistic spirit.

Malina and Neyrey (1998:16) assert that for one to understand the “agonistic society” of the New Testament world, one must take into consideration that:

(1) The Greeks, Romans, and Judean society loved honour. Augustine, for example, in the “City of God” (Matt. 5:12) wrote that “For the glory that the Romans burned to possess, be it noted, is the favourable judgment of men who think well of other men”. This resulted in them striving to rule over others in their society. The elite, for selfish reasons, sought their own glory, praise, and honour at the expense of the masses. Xenophon, for example, described the Athenians as people who were passionate for praise from other people and that the strongest incentive for charitable deeds was to receive the honour (see also Memorabilia 3.3.13).

(2) The Greek, Roman, and Judean societies were limited goods societies, and this included the supply of honour.

(3) Only a select few could thus achieve the honour they sought. The result of this was that Greek, Roman, and Judean societies were characterised by the “phenomenon of envy” arising from others’ success.

(4) Greek, Roman, and Judean societies were competitive societies by nature. According to Neyrey (1998:16), for one to reach the rank of an elite, he had to face numerous challenges and win. The elite engaged in a social competition for an incremental increase in reputation and prestige through the interminable game of push-and-shove called challenge and riposte.

Neyrey (1998:17) asserts that Herod was especially characterised as one who loved honour and always sought to increase it. In this honour and shame society of Roman Palestine, Herod's kingship was an acquired honour. Herod gained the honour of being king of the Jews by fighting for Sextus Caesar. After helping Pompey to win a battle, he was given the honour of being king of Judea by the Romans. Richardson (1996:xvi, xvii) states that Herod was first appointed to be the governor of Judea by Caesar before he was also placed in charge of the affairs of Samaria by Cassius. After some years, he was promoted to puppet king of Judea, Galilee, and Perea by the Roman senate.

Herod thus gained his honour as king of the Jews through aggression and violence. In a world in which honour was limited, Herod could not afford to share his honour with the newborn infant and therefore he ordered the slaughter of all boys younger than two years.

### 5.5 Comparison between the infant Jesus and Herod

When the way in which Matthew 1-2 characterises Jesus and Herod as male authority figures are compared to each other, it becomes clear that Matthew understood their masculinity as being constructed in vastly different ways (Carter 1996:47-48).

#### **Herod the Great**

A half-gentile king

Appointed as king by the Romans

A cruel old man (Matt. 2:16)

Illegitimate king

Killer of his own people (Matt. 2:16)

Deceived by gentiles (Matt. 2:12)

#### **The Infant Jesus**

A direct descendant from Abraham

A Davidic king (Matt. 1:1-17)

A defenseless infant (Matt. 2:13)

Legitimate king (Matt. 1:17)

Future savior of his people (Matt. 1:21)

Honoured by gentiles (Matt. 2:11)

Matthew describes Jesus as being both an infant who is dependent on the care of his parents, and as the true Davidic king who would save his people from their sins. In the following narrative, Matthew narrated how it was precisely in being weak and defenseless and not seeking his own honour that Jesus would save his people through his death on the cross. Neyrey (1998:41) agrees that in the narrative of Matthew, even though some of Jesus's honour was ascribed honour, he also acquired honour for his "personal effort and achievement." Unlike his contemporaries, his path to honour was, however, not an aggressive one.

In numerous ways, the Matthean Jesus would also directly challenge and invert the agonistic values of his socio-cultural world. According to Durber (2014:19), Jesus was born and lived in a time and context in which the Roman imperial high-class elite exercised power over other people in multiple ways. Even though Jesus came to earth for the salvation and liberation of all humanity, he belonged to a people who were subjected to the imperial rule and Romans laws which held sway over the Jews. Greek culture also dominated the Greco-Roman world. The manner in which a text like Matthew depicted Herod as a cruel and illegitimate ruler, was thus both a bold and a dangerous strategy to follow.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the second research question identified in 1.3 and used a different reader-response approach to the previous three chapters. The shift in focus was explained first (5.2), whereafter hegemonic masculinity was defined (5.3), after which Matthew 1-2 was read from this perspective (5.4). The reading undertaken was a radical reader-response analysis of the family of Jesus (5.4.1) and of Herod (5.4.2) as a masculine character. Thereafter Matthew's depictions of Herod and Jesus as male characters were compared to each other (5.5) in terms of hegemonic masculinity. It was argued that the manner in which Herod abused his power as king in Matthew 1-2 to the detriment of women and children in order to safeguard his oppressive power is in contrast

to the way in which Jesus is described in Matthew 1-2, a textbook example of what contemporary gender studies have characterised as hegemonic masculinity.

## *CHAPTER 6*

### *CONCLUSION*

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In this concluding chapter, hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria (6.2) will be addressed. It will first consider the applicability of hegemonic masculinity to the Nigerian context (6.2.1-2). The reason for using two approaches in this study (a narrative critical reading and a radical reading of Matthew 1-2 with a hermeneutic designed to critique hegemonic masculinity) will be explained. Thereafter the role of the Church (6.2.3) will be expanded on as well as the contribution of Biblical studies (6.3) to address the situation of the abuse of power in Nigeria (6.4). The chapter will conclude with an overview of the study undertaken (6.5).

#### **6.2 Addressing hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria**

It was stated in the discussions of both the background (1.1) and the aim of this research (1.5) that it intended to undertake a study of the characterisation of Herod and the infant Jesus as masculine authority figures in the Gospel according to Matthew 1-2 to address the scourge of hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria. In order to do this, the question will first be asked to what extent the approach followed in this study is applicable to Nigeria (6.3.1), before an overview will be given of hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria (6.3.2), after which a number of suggestions will be made on the contribution of biblical studies (6.3.3) and the church (6.3.4) respectively.

It should be noted that this addressing of hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria is not undertaken to suggest that nothing has ever been done to address its toxic effects. In fact, NGOs such as the World Health Organization, UNICEF, World Bank Organization, UND, USHMM, HHI, and many other NGOs are working tirelessly in fighting the menace in communities all over Nigeria. This study is undertaken with the aim of supporting their endeavours.

### **6.2.1 Applicability to the Nigerian context**

In discussing the different theoretical frameworks for reading the biblical text that focus on the world in the text, behind the text, and front of the text, West (1991:3-4) states that they originated all across the world and not just in the Western world. According to him, they also originate from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The emergence of different theoretical frameworks from different continents should be welcomed as they enrich all efforts to read, understand, and implement the message of the Bible. The fact that a particular way of reading the Bible comes from a different continent or context is no reason to dismiss it, but an opportunity to be enriched by it. The hermeneutic used in chapter 5 to critically engage with the hegemonic masculinities evident in the Biblical text (e.g. Herod's conduct in Matthew 1-2) and its interpretation, was developed initially as part of a so-called "First World Movement" by Christian feminists, but this should not be used as a reason to dismiss it. The question to be asked is rather whether its intent to address hegemonic masculinity that abuses those it considers to be inferior and, in the process, strip the most vulnerable of their rights as humans, should be welcomed or not? It is the position of the researcher that if hegemonic masculinity is a worldwide phenomenon, and not just a Nigerian one, an approach developed outside Nigeria can be used fruitfully.

In describing the task of Biblical scholarship, West (1991:8, 9) points out that the current issues in the hermeneutical debate arise from the reception of the biblical text. Using a schema based on a simplified communication model, which consists of the three fundamental elements (the source, message/text, and receptor), he argues that one focus of Biblical scholarship is on the origin and production of the text (its source or author). The second focus is on the text itself, its composition, and preservation, while the third focus has to do with the reception and interpretation of a text. All three of these foci are important for Biblical scholarship. There has, however, been a shift in focus from the reconstruction of the historical factors related to the origin (the source) of a text to its reception. In this study, the focus was on both the text (the word in the text) of Matthew 1-2 and the reception thereof (the world in front of the text).

In focussing on the narrative of Matthew 1-2 and how it characterised both Jesus as an infant and Herod as an elderly king, and by using a narrative critical approach (chapters

2-4), this study undertook a reading that readers without a specialised knowledge of the socio-historical world in which the text arose, can also engage with. The advantage of using a narrative critical approach or a conservative reader-response approach (see 5.2) to a New Testament text is that its method is based on the insights of literary criticism. Any reader with a high school education in Africa has a basic knowledge of studying literature by using some aspects of literary criticism. It is therefore not difficult to argue that narrative criticism is an appropriate method in Africa where literary rates are continuously improving since an increasing number of readers are familiar with literary criticism.

In determining if the reading of Matthew 1-2 from a radical reader-response perspective in order to critique the occurrence of a hegemonic masculinity worldview in both the text and contemporary Nigerian society is justified, it is important to ask if indeed occurs in the world in and in front of the text. The analysis was undertaken in chapter 5 clearly indicated the world in the text of Matthew 1-2 and the way in which Herod was characterised to reflect a hegemonic masculinity (5.4). Hegemonic masculinity can thus be recognised *in the text* and therefore assumed to be present in *the world behind the text* in which it was composed.

To answer the question if hegemonic masculinity occurs in the world *in front of the text*, the next section will provide a brief overview of Nigerian society.

### **6.2.2 Hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria**

There is no doubt in the mind of the researcher that hegemonic masculinity is the dominant worldview in contemporary Nigerian society and that it contributes directly to the abuse of women and many others who do not have power.

Kolawole and Adeigbe (2016:7071) testify to the fact that discrimination, marginalisation, oppression, and violations of human rights are common in Nigeria. In most communities, women as well as vulnerable girls and boys, are treated unfairly by those who consider themselves superior to others. This mindset underlying these acts is clearly that of hegemonic masculinity, and its effects are numerous. In the Marmara Damishi community of Maraban Rido Kaduna and many other communities' men abuse their power and

authority by beating their wives, abandoning them for younger girls, not helping with farm work, or not providing them with food. Some even rape young girls, thereby negatively affecting their sexual reproductive health and transgressing their rights as humans who are worthy of respect, dignity, and fair treatment. Numerous Nigerian commentators have highlighted these atrocities. Phiri (2001:94) states that all forms of abuse, as well as sexual violations which degrade women, are rampant in Nigeria.<sup>30</sup> Obinna (2013:7) affirms that in Nigeria, the rape and beating of women, the abandoning of wives, and the mistreating of those who lack power, is an irrefutable phenomenon. In terms of acts of gender-based violence in Nigeria, Adeboye, and Kolawole (2012:53, 54, 55) bemoan that in some parts of the country the issue of the violation of human rights is on the increase. The violence against women, which testifies to a hegemonic masculinity, is not just a problem in the broader society. It is also a problem in Christian communities. Elwell and Elwell (1997:20) point out that in Nigeria:

- (1) The church sanctioned the existing social order by favoring the rich and helping them to subjugate the masses.
- (2) The church preached a gospel of contentment to the masses while stealing their meagre resources; while the suffering in the world cried out for justice.
- (3) The church remained aloof from the suffering masses in the church, the leadership bringing them neither hope nor comfort.
- (4) The church abandoned inner-city evangelism and fled to the suburbs where

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<sup>30</sup> Phiri (2002:94-95) refers to physical violence, sexual violence, economic violence, and spiritual violence. In terms of physical violence men often slap, punch, kick, shove, choke, stab and shoot their partner. All types of weapons are used like guns, knives, forks, hammers, and axes. The victims often end up in hospital, sometimes permanently disabled or even dead. In terms of sexual violence rape, degrading jokes, name-calling, and inappropriate touching are the order of the day. Economic abuse includes the use of money to undermine partners. Men often spend their money outside their homes, leaving their families hungry. Emotional violence occurs when men abuse their wives and force them to remain silent. All these forms of abuse devalue women as humans who should be treated with respect and dignity since they have equal value as God's creation.

every pastor wants to live in comfort.

(5) The church discouraged reform movements and criticised those who did the work the church neglected.

(6) The church focused exclusively on the salvation of the individual and showed little concern for the social renewal that ought to follow.

(7) The church preached an otherworldly gospel which did not address the realities of everyday life.

In order to address this dire situation, both biblical studies as an academic discipline and the church must engage the destructive hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria that is often justified by an appeal to biblical texts.

### **6.2.3 The role of the church**

In engaging with hegemonic masculinity, the church has both a public responsibility (6.2.3.1) and an internal responsibility (6.2.3.2).

#### *6.2.3.1 The public responsibility of the church*

Elwell and Elwell (1997:20) assert that the church has a social responsibility, and whether one views the church as a social organism or as an institution, the office of deacon is in itself clear proof that the church has a social responsibility. Therefore, the goal of leaders and the church's social activity must be the furtherance of the kingdom of God, which is both a present and a future reality.

Since there is a connection between the church and the state in the sense that the state as the government makes decisions which impact on the whole nation, including church members, it is the church's duty to engage with the state in a meaningful manner. Thielicke (1969:541, 543), for example, is of the view that the church has the responsibility of resisting any unjust state or government and to help the vulnerable. Often those in

power are also members of a church, and they should be reminded not to use their hegemonic masculinity to rule over their subjects but that they should use their God-given power to empower them. The church should also canvass the state to focus on the health and welfare of all its subjects but especially those who are most venerable. The church can also call on women to seek political office in order to gain a voice for themselves. This can be done by preaching and using texts like Matthew 1-2 which testify to the important role women played in God's redemptive plan for humanity.

#### *6.2.3.2 The internal role of the church*

As stated above, the construction of hegemonic masculinity is not only applicable to the broader Nigerian society or non-Christian communities. It also manifests in some churches and it is often, unfortunately, the church leaders who violate the rights of others. These leaders should be reprimanded, as it is clear from texts like Matthew 1-2 that no one, not even Herod the Great, will escape the judgment of God. Furthermore, all men, even those who have no voice or power, must be called upon to conduct themselves righteously. In this regard, the story of Joseph can serve as a biblical example (5.4.1).

In the church itself, men must be inspired to invest their adulthood in the betterment of everyone in the spheres of government, society, community, religion, and the home. Kings, leaders, elders, husbands, and males should not be allowed to construct their masculinity in a hegemonic manner like Herod the Great did to satisfy his own selfish desires. They must therefore not seek titles or positions like a king, leader, reverend, pastor, chairperson, and secretary just to be honored. They should instead follow the example of Jesus who, while being worthy of great titles according to the Magi, did not seek to be served, but instead served others.

### **6.3 The contribution of Biblical studies**

In 5.3.2 it was argued that a gender-critical reading of the biblical text is of crucial importance since it helps contemporary readers to (a) recognise the entrenched patriarchal worldview in biblical texts; (b) focus on the redemptive role of women in the

text; and (c) emphasise the different gender perspectives in the biblical witness. In Nigeria, it is thus crucial that biblical studies help discern that the truth of biblical revelation is not found in a cultural essence distilled from patriarchal texts but is given in those texts and interpretive models which transcend and criticise their patriarchal culture and religion.

In order to challenge hegemonic masculinity as a cultural construction, it must furthermore be exposed as such. One way of doing this would be to follow the methodology followed in this thesis in that students can in their first year of study be instructed on how to conduct a narrative critical reading of a biblical text. Once they have mastered this conservative reader-response approach, they can be guided to understand the world behind the text and how it was a hegemonic patriarchal world in which the elite exploited the poor and those without power. In the final years of their study, they can then be asked to evaluate critically both the hegemonic masculinity encoded in the biblical text and how it functions in the reception of the text. They can then be challenged to read the biblical text anew from a gender-critical perspective as in chapter 5 of this study; to re-read Matthew 1-2 after it had been analysed from a narrative critical perspective. This will help them recognise how the text both speaks of and reflects hegemonic masculinity. In this interpretive process, it is very important also to indicate how the biblical text proposes an alternative life-affirming way of seeing the world. The study undertaken in this thesis of the manner in which Jesus is characterised as an infant in Matthew 1-2 can serve as an example of how a gender reading of the biblical text is not an attack on men or the Bible. It instead provides a new way of living that allows all to flourish as human beings.

#### **6.4 Addressing the abuse of power in the Nigerian context**

The researcher as a male character living in a Nigeria, where most males power over women, must firstly be aware of this power and how easily he can perpetuate this toxic hegemony. He will therefore have to embody a way of life that shows how all humans should be treated with respect, dignity, honour as beings created to live for God's glory. Only then can he call on leaders in Nigeria to live according to the characterisation of Jesus as a venerable leader.

## 6.5 Overview of study

In the first chapter the research background and motivation for the study was explained (1.1) and the focus on power and authority in Matthew 1-2 in regard to Jesus and Herod defined (1.3). Thereafter the research questions (1.4) and the aim of the research (1.5) was outlined. The research methodology as well as the two methods, narrative criticism (1.6.1) and modern hegemonic masculinity studies (1.6.2), were also briefly explained before the study was outlined (1.7).

Chapter 2 defined narrative criticism as methodology before it was applied to Matthew 1-2. The methodology of narrative criticism was introduced (2.1) and explained in terms of its focus on story and discourse (2.2.1), point of view (2.2.2), narration (2.2.3), symbols and irony (2.2.4) and narrative patterns (2.2.5). Key elements of narrative criticism like events (2.3.1), settings (2.3.2), characters (2.3.3), and plot (2.3.4) were also explained and applied to Matthew 1-2.

The focus of chapter 3 was on the characterisation of Jesus. It analysed how the infant Jesus is a passive character in Matthew 1-2 in that he, as can be expected, does not speak or act. He is therefore primarily characterised by his extensive genealogy (3.2), the numerous titles used by Matthew to indicate that he is the Messiah sent by God to rule as king (3.3), and the care Jesus received from God through the use of intermediaries (3.4). It was argued that the genealogy of Jesus (3.2) provides an indication of his ascribed honour and that it indicates that he, and not Herod, was the legitimate Davidic king. It furthermore indicates through the inclusion of four gentile women that Jesus is not only the King of the Jews but also of all gentiles who worship the true God. The analysis of the numerous titles Matthew used (3.3) indicates that according to him Jesus is the Son of Abraham (3.3.1), the Son of David (3.3.2), the Son of Man (3.3.3), A son and child (3.3.4), Emmanuel (3.3.5), the King of the Jews (3.3.6), and a Nazarene (3.3.7). Even as an infant Jesus thus possessed a unique ascribed honour. While Jesus, as an infant is passive in Matthew 1-2, his honour is enhanced in how he was cared for by God through his father (3.4) and angels as messengers.

Chapter 4 investigated the characterisation of King Herod as a masculine character in the narrative of Matthew 1-2 by noting how Matthew described his response to the birth of Jesus (4.2), used titles for Herod (4.3), and described the actions (4.4) and death of Herod (4.5). It was found, in agreement with Kingsbury (1998:48-49), that Herod was characterised by Matthew in a negative manner as being “spiritually blind”, “fearful”, “conspiratorial”, “guileful”, “mendacious”, and “murderous” (Matt. 2:3, 7, 13, 16).

Chapter 5 focused on the second research question identified in 1.3. It defined and explained hegemonic masculinity (5.2) and discussed the link between hegemony and masculinity (5.3). The reading of Matthew 1-2 from a hegemonic masculinity was then undertaken (5.3.1-2). It also analysed Jesus and Herod as masculinity characters in Matthew 1-2 (5.4). It specifically focussed on the family of Jesus (5.4.1) and Herod (5.4.2) as a masculine character. Thereafter Matthew’s depictions of Herod and Jesus as male characters were compared to each other (5.5) in terms of hegemonic masculinity. It was argued that the manner in which Herod abused his power as king in Matthew 1-2 to the detriment of women, children, and the entire community of Ramah in order to safeguard his oppressive power stands in contrast to the manner in which Jesus is described in Matthew 1-2. It is a textbook example of what contemporary gender studies have characterised as hegemonic masculinity. In chapter 5, Herod and the infant Jesus were compared (5.5).

Chapter 6 addressed hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria (6.2). It investigated its applicability to the Nigerian context (6.2.1) and explained hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria (6.2.2). It also discussed the role of the church (6.2.3) whereby the public responsibility of the church was spelled (6.2.3.1) as well as its responsibility (6.2.3.2).

The reason for this two-step approach, which is reflected in the two research questions of the study, was also briefly explained. If Biblical studies is to a meaningfully engage with the Nigerian context (6.3), it needs to ensure that it cannot simply be dismissed as imposing a feminist Western perspective on the text and its contemporary readers. Therefore the text needs to be read in a manner accessible to most ordinary readers in Nigeria before a more critical hermeneutic can be used.

## 6.6 Conclusion

Since a patriarchal worldview is still prevalent in contemporary societies like Nigeria, biblical scholars should question the patriarchal-theological framework of all readings and discussions of the text. Biblical interpretations that search for meaning in early Christian narratives in a “post-patriarchal society”, the church and even Christian families, must seek to develop a non-sexist tradition from the Bible to prevent it from being used as a tool for oppressing women and as a theological means for justifying the construction of hegemonic masculinity which perpetuates the present gender power status quo in society. This is important since the approach used in this study, narrative criticism, can be used in a manner that supports the continuation of a patriarchal reading of Matthew 1-2.

In terms of the first research question of “How are Jesus and Herod characterised as male authority figures in the narrative of Matthew 1-2?” (1.3.a) chapters 2-4 concluded that the first two chapters of the Gospel of Matthew provide a narrative characterisation of Jesus as an infant and Herod as king of the Jews in the final years of his life and that Herod is characterised at the apex of his kingship, while Jesus as an infant is characterised as a potential authority figure who is already revered by the Magi and feared by Herod. Herod is characterised as an ignorant, fearful and cruel male authority figure. Jesus, in turn, is characterised as the inverse of a hegemonic masculine figure in that he is passive and in need of the care of his mother, father, and god. This inversion of hegemonic masculinity by Jesus is in line with how Matthew narrated his subsequent ministry.

In terms of the second research question of how this characterisation of Jesus and Herod as authority figures informs the gender debate about power within contemporary Nigerian society from the perspective of contemporary masculinity studies, it was concluded that both biblical studies and the church have a role to play. By using a gender-critical approach that alerts the reader of both the hegemonic masculinity embedded in the text and determines the reading of a text, it was made clear that focusing on the characterisation of different characters in the biblical text can make a significant contribution to the ongoing debate on gender in Nigeria.

It is hoped that by using both approaches applied to read the biblical text in this study, a new generation of Bible scholars, readers, and ministers, NGOs can emerge who actively dismantle the hegemonic masculinity poisoning Nigeria. Therefore, interdisciplinary studies should be used along with masculinity studies in fighting injustice, oppression, discrimination, marginalisation, and gender-based violence.

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