

# The presence of religious virtuosi and non-virtuosi in the Matthean community

NGTT DEEL 55, NR 3 & 4, 2014

Nel, MJ  
Stellenbosch University

## ABSTRACT

This article analyses the Gospel according to Matthew in the light of Max Weber's social-scientific model of virtuoso religion. It attempts to determine if the Matthean community reflected in the Gospel had a two-tier social structure comprised of followers who strictly obeyed the demanding commands of Jesus to renounce both their families and their possessions (virtuosi) and more temperate members who did not (non-virtuosi). The article firstly attempts to clarify what is understood by the Matthean community, before giving a brief overview of Weber's understanding of virtuoso religion that is then utilised to analyse the Gospel according to Matthew. The article comes to the conclusion that the Matthean community was comprised of both virtuosi and non-virtuosi followers of Jesus.

## KEY WORDS

*Matthew, Matthean Community, Max Weber, Ilana Silber, Religious Virtuosi*

## TREFWOORDE

*Matteus, Matteusgemeenskap, Max Weber, Ilana Silber, Religieuse virtuose*

## CONTACT DETAILS

MJ Nel  
Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University  
Privaatsak X1, Matieland, Suid-Afrika, 7602  
mjnel@sun.ac.za



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recently Timothy Ling (2006) and Brian Capper (2009) have used Max Weber's (1968) social-scientific model of virtuoso religion, as it has been refined by Michael Hill (1973) and Ilana Silber (1995), to describe the economic ethics of specific New Testament texts and the social dynamics of the respective communities presupposed by them.<sup>1</sup> This article will apply the same social-scientific model to the Gospel according to Matthew in order to determine if it reflects a two-tier community. Two-tier in that it included members who can be described as religious virtuosi due to their uncompromising commitment to the teaching of Jesus (e.g. in regards to the use of possessions) in contrast to a non-virtuosi group who expressed their faith in a less strict manner (cf Capper, 2009:36, 64). The focus of the article is thus not on the question if Matthew sought to differentiate his community for outsiders,<sup>2</sup> but rather if his community differentiated between the commitment levels of insiders.

Since models, as devices for interpreting social structures, bridging cultural and temporal differences, and integrating and connecting data into a coherent pattern, can easily force data into artificial patterns (Carter, 1994:46) it is important to use them in an explicit manner so that others may engage critically with the results obtained by their use. After clarifying what is understood by the Matthean community (§2), a brief overview of Weber's understanding of virtuoso religion will therefore be given (§3) before it is used to analyse the Gospel according to Matthew (§4). After summarising the results of the analysis a number of questions in need of further study will be identified (§5).

## 2. THE MATTHEAN COMMUNITY

In this section the notion of a Matthean community will be clarified (§2.1) before its possible two-tier composition (§2.2) and position within Early Christianity (§2.3) will be considered.

- 
- 1 Capper studied references to Jesus' renunciation of property in the Gospels and the community of goods practised by the first post-Easter believers in Jerusalem in Acts. Ling focussed primarily on the Judean poor according to the Fourth Gospel. Ling's monograph *The Judean Poor and The Gospel of John* (2006), is based on his PhD thesis, submitted to the University of Kent in 2003 where he was a PhD research student of Dr BJ Capper. As can be expected the approach of Ling and Capper are thus very similar.
  - 2 See Nel (2014:93-112) for the relation between insiders and outsiders in the Gospel according to Matthew.

## 2.1 Defining the Matthean community

Since Matthew presents the life of Jesus as a transparency for the situation of the post-Easter church (cf 18:15-20 which presupposes the existence of the church as a community of brothers with the risen Jesus in their midst) the assumption is commonly made in Matthean scholarship that his Gospel reflects the situation of his target audience (Luz, 2001:245; Overman, 1996:2-5). While reconstructions of Matthew's intended audience continue to be made (Viljoen, 2006:242-262) the notion of limiting this audience to a specific community has become increasingly problematic since Richard Bauckham (1998:949) challenged the assumption that the Gospels were each written for a specific community that had little or no contact with other Christian communities. A more plausible scenario for him is that the author of Matthew may have lived in several different, and even geographically distant, Christian communities while compiling his Gospel (Bauckham, 1998:36). If Bauckham is correct,<sup>3</sup> it would mean that Matthew was not only addressing the relationship between his own isolated community and outsiders in their specific context, but rather that of a number of Christian communities within the broader Roman world. In this regard Ulrich (2007:76-77) has argued that the evidence of conflict between the Matthean community and Formative Judaism,<sup>4</sup> does not need to be interpreted as indicting a conflict that was limited to a specific geographical locale. The author of Matthew could have been aware of similar conflict between the followers of Jesus and the diaspora Jews in multiple cities.<sup>5</sup> While it is impossible to ascertain if the thesis of Ulrich is correct the similar picture that emerges from Acts does give some validity to his suggestion (Burrige, 2007:195).

The Matthean community could thus have been comprised of a number of small groups meeting in different locales that were experiencing similar challenges (e.g. conflict with Formative Judaism and a growing influx of Gentiles) that were in

---

3 The argument by Bauckham that the Gospels were written for a broad audience has been challenged by a number of scholars. Sim (2001:9, 16) has, for example, objected to his neglect of internal evidence, while Carter (2000:560) has argued that he "seems to confuse [the Gospels'] subsequent effect with their initial focus."

4 For example the Gospel's polemical characterizations of Israel's leaders and its pointed contrasts between "their synagogues" and "my assembly" (4:23; 6:2,5; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54; 16:18; 23:6, 34) (Ulrich, 2007:76).

5 The promise that Jesus will be present "where two or three are gathered" in his name (18:20) implies according to Ulrich (2007:76-77) that the Matthean assembly in any given location could be small. The adverb οὗ ("where") allows for a movement meeting in many different locations and thus could envision a movement similar to, and in competition with, the synagogues that were present in every Greco-Roman city.

contact with each other. These groups may also have shared in the creation of the Gospel according to Matthew as a foundational text which would then have been repeatedly read in order to interpret the teaching of Jesus (Nolland, 2005:20-22). This article thus envisages the Matthean community to encompass more than one group living in different towns and cities (possibly concentrated in a city like Antioch) that functioned autonomously from each other (e.g. where two or three are gathered they could still make binding decisions – 18:19-20) with a group of followers of Jesus moving freely between them, that shared a common understanding of the preaching of Jesus as is articulated by the Gospel according to Matthew.

## **2.2 The two-tier ethic of the Matthean community**

The question if Matthew's community had a two-tier ethic arises due to the difficulty of integrating the ethics of his Gospel into a coherent tradition that was adhered to by all members thereof. Theissen (1978:18-20), for example, has tried to explain the juxtapositions of radical and more moderate norms (e.g. 5:17-20 versus 5:21-48) in terms of the difference between wandering charismatics and settled communities of supporters that were part of the early Jesus movement (Horsley 1989, 17). Nolland (2005:446), while acknowledging that there are features of the Matthean tradition which are hard to reconcile with each other, remains unconvinced by sociological reconstructions of early Christianity such as Theissen's, that identify a two-tier pattern of Christian discipleship of which one tier is comprised of wandering messengers of the Christian faith and the second of local sympathisers who had not expressed their faith in such a radical form. Instead, Nolland (2005, 446) argues, Matthew combined a radically demanding version of authentic Christian discipleship with a pastoral approach towards those who are barely inside the Christian fold. There is thus by implication for him only one form of authentic Christian discipleship, expressed in the renouncement of all family ties and possessions, for which all followers of Christ must gradually be prepared for. Similarly, France (2007:734-736) notes that almost all recent commentators view a two-tier understanding of discipleship as alien to Matthew since the command to be perfect (5:48) is expected of all followers of Jesus. Luz (1995:111) also argues that it was the intent of Matthew that his whole community should practice the renunciation of possessions as much as they are able to, since it is the "superior righteousness" or "perfection" towards which they should all strive.

## **2.3 The composition of the Matthean community and Early Christianity**

Understanding the composition of the Matthean community is important for reconstructing the transition from the ministry of Jesus to that of the Early Church.

In this regard, Gerd Theissen (1978:8-23), in describing the sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity, has argued that the historical Jesus did not primarily establish local communities, but rather called into being a movement of wandering charismatics who moved from one place to another relying on small groups of sympathisers to support them in their mission. For Theissen (1978:7) the latter, although providing an indispensable aid to the wandering charismatics, were only sympathisers and not true members of the new Jesus movement as they remained within the framework of Judaism.

The depiction of the followers of Jesus as wandering charismatics by Theissen has been critiqued on the basis of both its limited empirical base (there is little to no evidence of wandering charismatics in Early Christianity) and its problematic underlying sociological methodology (Draper, 1998:541-542; Horsley, 1989:30-64). It is thus to be questioned if Theissen is correct in depicting the Jesus movement as being comprised of a wandering group of apostles, prophets and disciples who had all renounced their possessions and who interacted with Jewish sympathisers that had not renounced their property and who were therefore not insiders of the Jesus movement.

The question therefore arises if the literary data for Early Christianity cannot be interpreted differently if a sociological theory other than that of Theissen is used to interpret it? Capper (2009) and Ling (2006) has, for instance, used the sociological theory of Weber that differentiates between charismatics, virtuosi and non-virtuosi, and not only between charismatics and sympathisers, in order to study specific New Testament texts. To ascertain if this approach supports a different understanding of the Matthean community the theory of Weber will firstly be introduced (§3) before it is applied to the Gospel of Matthew (§4).

### **3. VIRTUOSI RELIGION ACCORDING TO WEBER**

In Weber's (1963:162-165) work "virtuoso religiosity" is primarily defined in opposition to mass religiosity. According to him, human beings vary in their abilities to attain the highest religious end (sanctification) resulting in a status stratification developing in society with regards to religious practice with only the most qualified constituting a spiritual aristocracy (Weber, 1968:539). This select group devote themselves to the subjugation of their natural drives by keeping to a rigid discipline that differentiates them from the masses' more complacent religious lifestyle (Silber,

1995:25; Weber, 1968:542). It is through this rigorous process that they become to be regarded as religious virtuosi by their wider communities.<sup>6</sup>

Examples of religious virtuosi given by Weber (1963:162) are the Pharisees in Judaism, who stood in contrast to ordinary Jews (*am haarez*), and some early Christians, who according to the earliest Christian sources, represented a distinct category from others in their community. Barton (1994:40) has also identified the Essenes and the Therapeutae as religious virtuosi while Horsley (1989:47) has referred to Cynic virtuosi who were called to be individual paradigms of virtue for other individuals who might emulate their examples. Runesson (2008:128) describes the Matthean community as a group of religious virtuosi with regard to the Pharisees in the pre-70 period, after which they had separated from them to form a group that can be described as an Pharisaic sect.

### 3.1 Virtuoso, mass and charismatic religion

In order to clarify the core features of virtuoso religion Hill (1973:2) has argued that it should not only be differentiated from “mass religion”, but also from “charismatic religion”. This is important as charismatics and virtuosi share a number of important characteristics. They both, for instance, in contrast to practitioners of mass religion, display a privileged and single-minded connection to the realm of ultimate goals and values that are antithetical to the socially “normal” and “ordinary” (Silber, 1995:190). Virtuosi may develop into charismatic figures (as a rule they however tend not to) and charismatic types may give rise to new forms of virtuosity (Silber, 1995:191). Although there is a fluidity between virtuoso and charismatic figures they are, however, not identical. Firstly, while virtuoso religion rigorously restates an existing tradition, charismatics religion provides a new basis for normative obligation (Ling, 2006:70). Secondly, personal charisma has a subversive, anti-institutional potential. Religious virtuosi, in contrast, are not typically anti-institutional per se. Established religious authorities do, however, at times stand at odds with the elitism of religious virtuosi as they tend to lower the ethical requirements for salvation (Silber, 1995:25), thereby endangering salvation itself according to the virtuosi (Weber, 1968:542). A Third difference is that virtuosity entails a normative double standard, whereas charisma does not. The virtuosi’s rigor is considered neither possible nor necessary for all. In contrast charisma has a more demanding, total relation. It calls for total devotion and commitment, and for deep personal identification with the charismatic

---

6 The virtuosi need the support of these wider communities in order to survive and this often leads to various compromises and concessions by the virtuosi towards them in order to maintain their mass patronage (Silber, 1995:25-26).

figure by his or her followers. A final difference is that virtuosity has a disciplined, methodical character in contrast with genuine charisma that is resistant to rational planning and discipline. Virtuosity can be learned, unlike charisma which functions as a spontaneous, extraordinary personal gift (Silber, 1995:192). Virtuosity is therefore also predisposed to formulation and organisation.

### 3.2 The Matthean community as religious virtuosi according to outsiders

There are also indications that the entire Matthean community would have been perceived by outsiders as religious virtuosi with regard to others in their broader social context.

In the first instance, virtuoso groups have the ability to create permanent anti-structures, such as egalitarianism and status levelling, that is not common in the world outside the group (Silber, 1995:40). In this regard Matthew stresses that followers of Jesus who want to be leaders should be willing to become servants (20:26-27) and that they should live as a community of brothers in which no one seeks to sit in places of honour (23:6) or calls another "rabbi" (23:7-11), and wherein the greatest are those who serve others (23:11-12).

Virtuoso groups, secondly, are distinct from sectarian groups by virtue of their ability to function as a permanent alternative community within society (Ling 2006, 69). They do not need to withdraw entirely from society (Capper, 2009:64)<sup>7</sup> as virtuoso religion occupies a liminal social position and thus retains a connection with the wider religious community even though it has a distinctive inner life. In this regard it does not appear as if Jesus, according to Matthew, called on his disciples to lead an ascetic life since they publically eat and drink with those considered being sinners and undesirable by their wider society (11:18-19).<sup>8</sup>

7 Virtuosi do, however, also have a tendency to dissociate from society. This dissociation can take the form of radical individualism or the collective withdrawal from normal patterns of social relationship (Silber, 1995:193). There are, for instance, a few examples of virtuosity becoming institutionalised in monasteries (Silber, 1995:195). Silber (1995:33) notes that Weber paid no attention to more radical forms of religious virtuosity that withdrew entirely from their societies, but only to groups that withdrew from normal social relations in their single-minded pursuit of religious ends. It is, however, important to note that not all virtuosi are ascetics (Capper, 2009:63).

8 While the Matthean community can be understood as a competing holiness or renewal movement within Second Temple piety it differed from rival Jewish groups in that it was much more sensitive to non-Jewish outsiders. It did not withdraw (Essenes), collaborate (Herodians) or shun (Pharisees) them, but rather had an active mission to reach and include them in the Matthean community. The Matthean community thus

The claim to articulate a virtuosi form of religion can, thirdly, also lead to conflict with other groups within a society with a similar claim. It is, therefore, not surprising that the virtuoso group of the twelve in Matthew find themselves with Jesus, in conflict with the Jewish elite who held the *de jure* institutional power within Judaism while the twelve represented the *de facto* authority since they had achieved the highest social values (Capper, 2009:62).

It thus appears as if the Matthean community could have been considered by outsiders to be a group of virtuosi, even though they did not share their confession or practices, due the manner in which they organised their community. The question that this article, however, is attempting to answer is if the Matthean community itself made a distinction between virtuosi and non-virtuosi followers of Jesus amongst themselves. In order to answer this question virtuosi religion needs to be further defined.

#### 4. VIRTUOSI AND NON-VIRTUOSI IN MATTHEW

In this section (§4.1-5) the description of Ilena Silber (1995:190-192) of virtuosi religion will be utilised in order to ascertain if the Gospel according to Matthew refers to both virtuoso and non-virtuoso<sup>9</sup> followers of Jesus. According to Silber virtuoso religion can be described as exhibiting five key characteristics.

Virtuosi religion is a matter of individual choice. It implies an intense personal choice in contrast with the compulsory and routine norms and expectations of common religious behaviour.

1. It involves the seeking of perfection, an extreme urge to go beyond everyday life and average religious achievement. This attitude of straining towards perfection is the primary feature of religious virtuosity. This may involve the withdrawal from social and psychological ties with the family, possession of worldly goods and from economic, artistic or erotic activities (Weber, 1968:52).
2. The seeking of perfection involved in virtuoso religion is sustained in a disciplined, systematic fashion, through a defined rule or method.

---

seek to occupy a liminal position. This liminality of a virtuoso anti-structure, such as is evident in Matthew can be problematic to maintain. Not only must the degree of interaction with the wider social environment be defined and controlled, but must the potential problems of corruption, laxity, decline or even radicalism be confronted (Ling, 2006:73).

- 9 Weber does not use the term "non-virtuosi" himself but implies that those of a specific faith community who are not virtuosi can be considered to be non-virtuosi.



3. It implies a normative double standard; its rigor is not only necessary for all, but it is also impossible for all.
4. It is based on achievement and non-ascriptive criteria, and is in principle an option for all, although in practice only achieved by a "heroic" minority.

#### 4.1 The calling of individuals to a higher level of commitment

Matthew presents the choice to follow Jesus, and to participate in his mission, as a matter of individual choice through his description of the calling of two sets of brothers, a tax collector and a rich young man. The brothers are described as leaving everything (4:18-22), and Matthew his tollbooth (9:9-13), in order to follow Jesus. Unlike the disciples in Rabbinic Judaism the disciples of Jesus did not reside in the stable environment of a house of study but had to renounce their possessions and abandon their family obligations (8:19-22)<sup>10</sup> in order to join Jesus' group<sup>11</sup> that was dependant on the hospitality of others (10:1-15) (Capper 2009, 69). Matthew also tells of a rich young man (19:16-30) who did not sell his possessions and follow Jesus when commanded by him to do so. It seems that not all who were called by Jesus in Matthew were thus willing to adhere to his stringent conditions for discipleship. Those who did can be described as religious virtuosi as they had responded faithfully to an exceedingly demanding personal call by him.

It should, however, be noted that Matthew does at times relativize the severity of Jesus' call. While the renunciation of property is more prominent in the travelling party of Jesus than in the scriptural presentation of similar practices of the early Israelite prophetic groups (Capper, 2009:71), it appears as if Matthew did not envisage the complete physical and geographical withdrawal of the Matthean community or the once and for all renouncement of all their possessions (Carter 2000, 48). Those who are depicted as leaving all in order to follow Jesus, still have a dynamic and interactive relationship with their families and possessions. Despite leaving their family and economic support in order to follow Jesus (4:21-22), James and John continue to be defined in terms of their relationship to their parents (10:2; 20:20).

---

10 A number of others, a teacher of the law and a nameless disciple are also instructed by Jesus to abandon their homes and family, but Matthew does not explicitly state if they did so (8:19-22).

11 Matthew 10:1–11:1 relates the purposeful strategy of Jesus for his disciples since rather than aimlessly wandering from one place to another they are specifically sent by him (Draper, 1995:187-207; 1998:542). They are thus not called to radical itinerancy as Theissen (1978) claims. It is, however, to be noted that other than Mark, Matthew does not mention their return. Their return is, however, implied.

Similarly, Peter has both a house and a family (8:14) despite claiming to have left all to follow Jesus (4:18-20; 19:27-29).<sup>12</sup> Even Jesus has access to a house (9:10, 28; 13:1, 36; 17:25). Furthermore, the instruction to render to Caesar what is his (22:15-22) implies participation in the broader socio-political and economic world (Carter, 1994:48-49). The picture that emerges of the followers of Jesus is thus rather that of virtuosi, than of charismatics, since the latter generally has an uncompromising stance (cf §3.1).

#### 4.2 Seeking perfection and going beyond everyday faith

In Matthew, Jesus instructs his disciples that they must aspire to a greater righteousness than that of the experts of the law and the Pharisees (5:20), seek to become perfect (5:48), follow the intensified interpretation of the Torah by Jesus (5:17-6:18), not be caught up in the concerns of everyday life (6:19-34) and be satisfied with average religious achievement since they are to seek the reward of God and not men (6:1-4). In contrast to those living according to the routine norms and expectations of Judaism, they were not to live like the rulers of this world (20:25-28), or pray and give alms and practice their piety like the heathen or Jewish hypocrites (6:1-8, 15:1-20). They are rather to seek the higher righteousness of God (6:33). Matthew therefore depicts Jesus as instructing his followers to seek perfection and to go further than the everyday practice of their faith as it is done by the masses. In short, they are to strive to be religious virtuosi even though this is not easily attained. Obtaining the kingdom of heaven, or becoming perfect, could even entail selling all one has like the rich young man is instructed to do by Jesus (19:21) (Luz, 1995:109).

#### 4.3 The instruction of a select few in a disciplined, systematic fashion

The conduct that characterise virtuoso religion, is in Matthew articulated in a systematic fashion through the teaching of Jesus. He is portrayed as the sole authoritative teacher who can correctly interpret the Torah for his community (23:8, 10). It is, therefore, his interpretation of the Torah in five extended discourses (5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44) that is definite and his teaching that will not pass away (24:35). The description of Jesus' teaching ministry in relation to his disciples is noteworthy since instruction and study are commonly associated with religious virtuosi. In this regard Matthew clearly distinguishes between non-virtuosi and virtuosi since he carefully

---

12 It could be that Peter left his home, family and possessions only for a set period of time in order to share in the itinerant ministry of Jesus and that he subsequently returned to his family and possessions since there is no mention of him or the other disciples selling their property (France, 2007:742).

restricts the circle of these who are personally instructed by Jesus. Except for Mary, his mother (2:11), and toll-collectors and sinners (9:11) it is only Peter (26:69, 71), an unnamed follower of Jesus (26:52), the two sons of Zebedee, and the disciples who share in Jesus' company (Kingsbury, 1988:131). Unlike the crowds, who would only be privy to part of Jesus instruction, the disciples are instructed in a common prayer (6:5-15) and had Jesus' teaching of the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven (13:11), explained to them. Not all followers of Jesus are thus part of the inner circle of disciples who are specifically called by Jesus so that he could train them for a specialist (virtuoso) religious task of performing the works of power (10:8) that characterised his own ministry (Capper, 2009:68). In order to be trained for this task the disciples, as virtuosi, had to be separated from secular work, renounce their property, and abandon their families and give Jesus their total allegiance (4:18-20, 21-22).

#### 4.4 The application of an implied normative double standard

It appears as if the Matthean community applied a normative double standard. On the one hand the Gospel presupposes a group who, like Jesus, became homeless (8:20), travelled from town to town (10:5-15), suffered persecution (10:23) and were rejected in a number of locales (10:40-42). A group, in other words, who were willing to take up their cross and follow Jesus. On the other hand fully complying with the command of Jesus to renounce both property and family appears neither possible, nor necessary for all. In 5:37-39, Matthew articulates the uncompromising call by Jesus to break with all family ties and to follow him, even though it could lead to suffering similar to his, in order to be worthy of him (10:38 – *καὶ ὃς οὐ λαμβάνει τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκολουθεῖ ὀπίσω μου, οὐκ ἔστιν μου ἄξιος*). The following passage (5:40-42), however, also addresses those who would receive one of the wandering Christian prophets, or one of the little ones, stating that by the act of receiving them they would receive the same reward as the prophet. *There thus appears to be different roles and levels of commitment for followers of Jesus, but the same reward.* The same thought is articulated in the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16) since all – those who had been hired first, and those who had been hired at the end of the day - are rewarded equally by the owner thereof.

While some followers of Jesus renounced their possessions, others were apparently allowed to keep their money since they had to be generous in almsgiving, willing to lend freely to those who asked (5:42; 6:2-4), and to provide hospitality to itinerant messengers (10:11). If followers of Jesus had renounced their property and possessions this would have been impossible. It thus appears as if the enforced segregation between virtuosi and society (non-virtuosi), that is counterbalanced by a

network of material and symbolic exchange between them, which Silber (1995:195) refers to, occurs in Matthew since the non-virtuosi provide hospitality and food for the disciples of Jesus. In return they as virtuosi provide intangible, symbolic resources (e.g. healing their sick and forgiving their sins – cf 10:7-8) to their host.

It is important to note that Matthew does not explicitly criticise his readers who apparently led a more sedentary life, but rather provides them with guidelines for their settled lives. Matthew 19 – 20, for instance, discusses the four standard elements of everyday household management: the relationship between husband and wife (19:3-12), children (19:13-15), wealth (19:16-30) and slaves (20:17-28) (Carter, 1994:192). Matthew also directly addresses a group of readers who appear to be engaged in the continuation of their settled existence. In 24:15-28 he refers to when the abomination of desolation (τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως) will stand in the holy place (24:15) and specifically addresses his readers (24:15 – ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοεῖτω) to warn those who could be on the roof of their houses, working in their fields or nursing their babies, to flee to the mountains (24:15-19). The readers that Matthew directly addresses thus appear to belong to a group reluctant to leave their houses, fields or families even in a time of unprecedented crisis (Theissen 1978, 18). They are thus not a band of wandering charismatics with no family or property. The coming tribulation is, furthermore, not depicted as the specific judgement on their reluctance to renounce their property or family.

#### 4.5 Perfection as only achieved by a minority

Matthew has a number of references to a select few who achieve the goal set for them by Jesus (cf 7:13). After discussing divorce (19:1-9), Jesus makes it clear that the ability to remain unmarried is only given to a select few (19:11-12). It thus seems as if not all commands of Jesus were considered to be applicable to all his followers. Allowing for a two-tier ethic should, however, not be taken as an invitation to respond to the call of Jesus by doing the minimum required by him. Even those who act as virtuosi by performing deeds of power could end up being renounced by Jesus if they were not fully committed to him (7:21-23). The disciples should thus keep in mind that according to Matthew many are called, but only a few are chosen (22:14). The challenging commands of Jesus are more than hypothetical options for Matthew since, according to him, a few followers did adhere to them.<sup>13</sup> After the rich young

13 The parable of the talents (25:14-30) suggest that those who had been entrusted with different amounts of talents are rewarded by their master in accordance to what had been entrusted to them. The parable also makes it clear that not all disciples would be rewarded by Jesus.

man had declined Jesus' invitation to follow him, his disciples ask in alarm who will then be saved since it is, in the words of Jesus, easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God (19:23-26). Peter then claims that he and the other disciples had done what Jesus commanded the rich young man to do (19:27-30). Jesus does not refute his claim, but rather promises the disciples that they would sit on twelve thrones and judge over Israel when the Son of Man returns (19:28). The few who adhere to the strict commands of Jesus will according to Matthew be richly rewarded. Those who renounce their possessions and left their families would receive a hundred times as much in return (19:29) and those who welcome missionaries will be rewarded as if they themselves were missionaries (10:40-42).

## 5. CONCLUSION

In light of the argumentation presented above it appears that if a socio-scientific model, that allows for a two-tier level of commitment, is applied to the Gospel of Matthew it exhibits a number of characteristics that support the claim that the Matthean community was comprised of a bipartite group similar to that of the Essenes (Horsley, 1989:18).<sup>14</sup> It also seems as if Matthew considered the different levels of commitment to be authentic expressions of discipleship since he addresses both the household concerns of settled followers of Christ, and the basic needs of his itinerant messengers, promising both the same reward. The bond between the different followers of Jesus was apparently such that Matthew could refer to both indiscriminately (Luz, 1995:110).

In describing the Matthean community as a bipartite group it is not implied that it consisted of two clearly defined groups, but rather that the followers of Jesus can be described as being on a continuum with regard to their adherence to his commands (cf the rich young man, the twelve, other disciples and the crowds). The conflict reflected in Matthew, for instance, appears to be between individuals and not between different groupings or parties within his community (cf 5:22-26;

---

14 In terms of a bipartite community the Essene movement provides a possible analogy since, according to Josephus, it had a bipartite social structure (Capper 2009:72) comprised of groups adhering to a strict ethos, renouncing both possessions and marriage (*BJ* 2.8.2-12, §§119ff.), and groups with a more temperate ethos, in which both marriage (*BJ* 2.8.13, §§160-1) and personal possessions were tolerated. The more temperate lived scattered about in camps and cities (*BJ* 2.8.4, §§124ff). There was apparently regular contact between the different groupings with groups in cities expected to provide hospitality to other members. Both groups were, however, considered to be part of one movement.

18:15-20). In addressing intra-personal conflict Matthew also emphasises that each community member has the obligation to seek reconciliation with those who had transgressed against them (18:15-20). Even though he does envision a specific role for leaders like Peter in the decision making processes of his community (16:17-19) it is not only they, but all members, that have the responsibility to address conflict and facilitate reconciliation.

In terms of Weber's typology Jesus was a *charismatic leader* (Hengel 1981, 44) who gathered a *group of disciples as religious virtuosi* to whom he transferred his authority (cf 16:18; 18:18-20; 28:15-20). The disciples can be described as religious virtuosi, rather than as charismatics since they are depicted as strictly adhering to the instruction of Jesus and as obeying his command to renounce their property and families. According to Weber (1963, 246) the authority of a charismatic leader is unique to him or her and charisma by its very nature is opposed to rules and institutions. Jesus could thus, according to the definition of Weber, not have started a movement of wandering charismatics by providing rules for them to keep after his death (Draper 1998, 555).<sup>15</sup> The routinization of the charisma of Jesus thus, according to Matthew, began with his Jesus and not with the early church as his authority was already being routinized (i.e. traditionalised or rationalised) by the creation of rules and institutions for his disciples during his ministry. This does not necessarily mean that Matthew's community did not include members who lived like the initial virtuosi that Jesus had called in that they too renounced all their possessions. Luz (1995, 110–111), for example, understand 6:25-33 as giving encouragement to itinerant radicals who had abandoned their fields and homes in order to follow Jesus, and that Matthew had added the first proverb in verse 34 to impart it with a more general meaning. Verses of general validity for sedentary Christians (6:19-24, 34) are thus integrated with words of comfort for the itinerant radicals. While this article does not agree with the depiction of the radicals as being itinerant in the sense of wandering aimlessly, it does not disagree with the notion

---

15 If Jesus, according to Matthew, had intended to transfer his persona; charisma to his disciples in order for them to continue his ministry as charismatics one would expect a description of an episode analogous to that between Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2:1-18) in the Gospels (Hengel 1981, 16–18). In Matthew all power and authority remains Jesus' (28:18) and it is he who commands his disciples to go and teach others what he had commanded them. It is thus the teaching and not the charisma of Jesus that is transferred. This does not mean that the ministry of the disciples, as it is described by Matthew, does not exhibit charismatic elements (cf 10:8-14, 19-20). Since there is a fluidity between virtuosi and charismatics this is to be expected. The primary depiction of the disciples is, however, not as charismatics.

that Matthew continued to state the strict commands of Jesus and that some of his community would have attempted to live according to them.

Matthew also addresses a group of readers who are depicted as being *non-virtuosi followers of Jesus*. They belong to the broad Matthean community since although they adhere to a less strict set of rules they are considered to be more than mere sympathisers (cf §4.4). Other than these non-virtuosi Matthew has harsh words to those who refuse to do the work of the Father at all (7:21-23), the wicked tenants (21:33-43), the wedding guest who ignore the king's summons (22:1-14) and the "goats" who do not feed the hungry (25:31-46) for they will all be damned according to Matthew. They constitute a different group that are to be considered as *outsiders* with regard to the Matthean community.

The reconstruction of Matthew's community in terms of Weber's typology raises the question if it should be treated as the description of a static situation or as part of a dynamic, evolutionary process (Draper 1998, 552). If the distinction between virtuosi and non-virtuosi is a *static one* it implies that Jesus never expected all his followers to live like virtuosi. In this vein Capper (2009, 71, 73) has stated that Jesus only expected those he chose for a specific spiritual calling of teaching, healing and wielding authority over the demonic world, that would necessitate intensive instruction and unyielding devotion, to sell their possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. Not all of those who followed Jesus were thus religious virtuosi in terms of adhering to his strictest commands.

If Matthew's distinction between virtuosi and non-virtuosi is, however, part of a *dynamic evolutionary process* the possibility exists that it reflects the process by which the charismatic ministry of Jesus was further institutionalised and routinized by a second generation of his followers. If so, to what can this adaptation be attributed?<sup>16</sup> Did Syrian Christianity, after the separation of church and synagogue, attempt to reshape the call of Jesus to discipleship into a rule of life resulting in an unresolved tension between radical asceticism as a requirement for all Christians and a compromise of a two-tier ethic as Kretschmar has for example argued (Draper

---

16 Weber's concept of the routinization of charisma, according to which prophetic charisma is institutionalized after the leader's death as the movement adjusts to long-term existence by developing fixed offices and traditions, have in the past been employed in order to study Matthew in terms of its place in the history of the early Christian movement (Carter, 1994:47). Weber's posthumously published study, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (translated as *Economy and Society*), was dependent on the work of von Harnack on the Didache who popularised the notion that charismatic early Christianity developed, or rather degenerated, into the early Christian church (Draper, 1998: 541-545).

1998, 548)? Or does it reflect the process by which the Matthean community had separated from its Pharisaic origins as Runesson (2008, 114–115) has claimed. According to Runesson a dual standard of religiosity, one for “the masses” and one for the virtuosi, is to be found in the pre-70 Matthean tradition (e.g. 19:16-22), but that the denunciation of the Pharisees combined with repeated condemnations resulting in their ultimate exclusion show that a schism had already taken place at the time of Matthew’s final redaction. The post-70 Matthean community would thus have attempted to live according to a common understanding of Jesus’ demands for discipleship.

In order to answer the question if the reconstruction of Matthew’s community in terms of Weber’s typology as being comprised of virtuosi and non-virtuosi describe a static situation or a dynamic evolutionary process the Gospel according to Matthew will have to be studied further in order to ascertain if the distinction was already present in the various traditions underlying the Gospel (i.e. Q and Mark), or if it is an unique adaptation by Matthew. If Matthew accepted or introduced a two-tier commitment the question also has to be answered as to what was the outer boundary of the Matthean community. What was the difference between being excluded (25:31-46) from the kingdom of heaven and doing just enough to be rewarded by God (20:1-16)? When would one depart from the narrow road (7:13) ending up being called, but not elected (22:14)? The presence of non-virtuosi in the Matthean community thus necessitates the further study of Matthew and his community.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barton, Stephen C 1994. *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bauckham, Richard 1998. “For Whom Were Gospels Written?” In *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 9-48.
- Capper, Brian J 2009. “Jesus, Virtuoso Religion, and the Community of Goods.” In *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 60-803.
- Carter, Warren 1994. *Households and Discipleship a Study of Matthew 19-20*. Sheffield, England: JSOT Press.
- 2000. *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-political and Religious Reading*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.



- Draper, Jonathan A 1995. "Wandering Radicalism or Purposeful Activity ? Jesus and the Sending of Messengers in Mark 6:6-56." *Neotestamentica*, 29(2):183-202.
- Draper, Jonathan A 1998. "Weber, Theissen, and 'Wandering Charismatics' in the Didache." *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 6(4):541-76.
- France, RT 2007. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Hengel, Martin 1981. *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*. New York: Crossroad.
- Hill, Michael 1973. *The Religious Order; a Study of Virtuoso Religion and Its Legitimation in the Nineteenth-Century Church of England*. London: Heinemann Educational.
- Horsley, Richard A 1989. *Sociology and the Jesus Movement*. New York: Crossroad.
- Kingsbury, Jack Dean 1988. *Matthew as Story*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Ling, Timothy JM 2006. *The Judaeen Poor and the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Luz, Ulrich. 1995. *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- 2001. *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Nel, Marius Johannes. 2014. "Mission and Ethics: Sensitivity to Outsiders in Matthew." In *Insiders versus Outsiders: Exploring the Dynamic Relationship between Mission and Ethos in the New Testament*. 93-112.
- Nolland, John. 2005. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Overman, J Andrew 1996. *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel according to Matthew*. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International.
- Runesson, Anders 2008. "Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intragroup Conflict." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 127(1):95-132.
- Silber, Ilana 1995. *Virtuosity, Charisma, and Social Order: A Comparative Sociological Study of Monasticism in Theravada Buddhism and Medieval Catholicism*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sim, David C 2001. "The Gospels for All Christians? A Response to Richard Bauckham." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 24(2):3-27.

Theissen, Gerd 1978. *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Ulrich, Daniel W 2007. "The Missional Audience of the Gospel of Matthew." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 69(1):64-83.

Viljoen, FP 2006. "The Matthean Community according to the Beginning of His Gospel." *Acta Theologica*, 26(2):242-62.

Weber, Max 1963. *The Sociology of Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press.

--- 1968. *Economy and Society : An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. New York, NY: Bedminster.