



# Andries van Aarde's Matthew Interpretation

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This article focused on Andries van Aarde's interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew. It argues that Van Aarde has changed his approach to Matthew in the course of time. At the beginning of his career he focused on structural analysis and even made a contribution to the *Gattung* problem from a structural perspective. Then his attention shifted to narrative criticism and social-scientific criticism. Van Aarde's consistent narratological interpretation of Matthew enabled him to identify Matthew's ideology and to determine the way in which it took shape on the surface structure. This narratological investigation also shed new light on, amongst others, the parables, the characters and the problem of direct and indirect discourse. To conclude the article, some critical statements with regard to the historical understanding of the Gospel of Matthew were formulated.

## Introduction

According to Andries Van Aarde, the Gospel of Matthew was the product of the scribe Matthew. Matthew belonged to a village somewhere in northern Galilee and southern Syria, where people struggled to digest the disaster of the Jewish-Roman war and the destruction of Jerusalem as well as the temple in 70 CE. The villagers struggled to come to grips with the effect of that war in their daily lives and Matthew's gospel was an attempt to rebuild his post-70 village community and to address the problem of God's presence. There was no temple anymore and people asked about the presence of God. Matthew had an answer, which he formulated by using Mark, Q and other important texts.

In what follows, this answer is described by emphasising the many facets of Van Aarde's Matthew interpretation. Van Aarde is an important South African New Testament scholar and his work on Matthew offers interesting new perspectives (see also Van Eck 1992:213–250). It is therefore worthwhile to pay attention to his interpretation of Matthew because, firstly, it is *truly South African*. It reflects the way that South African New Testament scholars have engaged the text over the past few decades (cf. Combrink 1994:169–193). Secondly, it is an *individual* and *independent* interpretation of the Matthean text. Van Aarde has internalised diverse opinions and only then formulated his own opinion. This opinion is learned, scholarly, scientifically-founded and well-considered, making a study of his Matthew work all the more essential. Thirdly, it wants to serve *preaching* and the church in a particular way (Van Eck 1992:229–231). Van Aarde is also a minister and knows just how difficult it is to convert science into a sermon. His interpretation of the text may very well help those who have to convey Matthew to the congregation.

My aim with this article then, is to identify Van Aarde's thinking about Matthew, which is spread over his entire work, hidden in and amongst a plethora of names and opinions and sometimes takes shape in the words and expressions of others. Once that is done, his thinking will systematically be arranged and described. Firstly, Van Aarde's hermeneutics, which forms an essential part of all his scholarly work, will be highlighted and then some aspects of his Matthew interpretation discussed. It is important to note a certain growth or deepening in Van Aarde's hermeneutics of Matthew. There is a 'hermeneutical line' stretching from his views about historical criticism to Paul Ricoeur, Gérard Genette and others, which always opened up into a new understanding of the Gospel of Matthew.

## Listen and suspect

In a recent article (with Yolanda Dreyer as co-author), Andries van Aarde stated that 'Matthew studies are at a crossroads' (Van Aarde & Dreyer 2010:7). A kind of paradigm shift is hoped for, that would use the same insights and results as before but rearrange them; a scientific revolution that would put the data in a different intellectual framework and establish a new system of relations between them (see Van Aarde 1994b:584–585). This all 'means putting on a different kind of thinking cap'. Each intellectual change is important, because it changes our way of understanding: 'Hence each evolutionary niche of development understands the world

differently, but never independently of its predecessors' (Kopfensteiner 1992:47, 57, as quoted by Van Aarde & Dreyer 2010:7).

This quotation highlights Van Aarde's own understanding of the Gospel of Matthew. By appropriating the long history of Matthew research as well as present-day insights into language, history and philosophy, Van Aarde wanted to rearrange knowledge, move data around and establish new relations amongst them. This can only be accomplished by 'a willingness to suspect and a willingness to listen' (Ricoeur 1970:27). These words of Paul Ricoeur imply a 'hermeneutic of suspicion'. A suspicion with regard to existing methods and approaches as well as outdated values in the text, but also a willingness to listen 'to unarticulated voices that remain hidden because of the ideologies that render them inaudible' (Van Aarde & Dreyer 2010:1).

Examples of Van Aarde's suspicion can be found in his hermeneutical reflection and his willingness to listen to suppressed voices about women in Matthew. Positioned 'in front of' Matthew's text and viewing the text from a gender-sensitive perspective – one cannot but see how women and women's roles were usurped by male control and the androcentric self-interest of the authors and interpreters of the texts behind and within Matthew's gospel (Van Aarde & Dreyer 2010:5). In the Matthean community women were thus not seen as equal.

The male followers of Jesus were called to be disciples, but the female followers had to serve. Matthew's gospel does indeed include women in the faith community and they also shared in the love and grace of God, but in the end they played a supportive role and never became community leaders (Mt 1–2; 9:18–26; 15:21–28). Although women had free access to God and also experienced the love of God, they never became leaders in the community and were not expected to transmit that love to others, in fact. Even their sexuality was viewed with prejudice and a full and authentic life was only possible when sanctioned by men (Mt 20:20–23; 27:38; 27:56) (Van Aarde & Dreyer 2010:8).

Compared to Mark, Matthew's androcentric views become more obvious. Put differently, Matthew changed Mark to such an extent that the Matthean bias against women became clear. According to Mark, the male followers of Jesus failed to comprehend their calling and mission. Mark then used women 'to fill the gap' and to illustrate that they understood Jesus' message and came close to fulfilling his ideals. Matthew, on the other hand, stated that the male followers did indeed understand his message but failed to realise it in their lives. By changing Mark, 'Matthew changes the roles of both the disciples and the women in order to be more acceptable in his Israelite-Palestinian context' (Van Aarde & Dreyer 2010:6). Matthew's views were therefore, in all probability, determined by his context. In his small Jewish world it was impossible to give women the same important position as depicted in Mark. Matthew did not want his readers to break

completely with their Israelite culture and therefore opted for a compromise: women are indeed included in God's love but they remained subordinate to men (Van Aarde & Dreyer 2010:8).

No study of Matthew can ever neglect these voices. Each exegete must show a willingness to take these voices seriously and to listen carefully. Each study of the Gospel of Matthew must bring to light this isolation and silencing of Jesus' first women followers. Scholarly work must highlight Matthew's male dominated characterisation of women, explore the social dynamics that caused it and depict it as a form of injustice.

It is, however, Van Aarde's 'hermeneutical suspicion' that will be focused on in the next paragraphs. Typical of Van Aarde is his unrest to understand Matthew more clearly, to refine his approach and to draw this 1st century gospel from northern Galilee closer to our times. Something he has done by means of constant hermeneutical reflection and revision.

## Historical criticism

### A double sidedness

We begin our story with historical criticism. The choice for or against historical criticism was typical of our Biblical Science context many years ago. Everyone had to make that choice; otherwise, Biblical Science could hardly be practiced in a credible way. Fellow scholars had to hear one's choice clearly and see it in one's scientific work. Van Aarde, too, had to make that choice. He does so in a more credible way than many others. On the one hand, he clearly states: 'I find myself very critical of historical criticism' (Van Aarde 1994a:181) However, we also read: 'Without historical criticism we would have been much the poorer' (Van Aarde 1994a:183).

Van Aarde has sincerely endeavoured to emphasise the constructive aspects of historical criticism. In fact, his commentary on Matthew shows tremendous respect for this approach and the insights thus gained. For many generations, many scholars have researched Matthew's gospel from a historical-critical perspective and Van Aarde's work reflects their names, insights and contributions abundantly. But he struggles with this manner of research or he resists himself against the way in which historical criticism was often used.

It is a South African habit to question and reject historical criticism (its methods, results, insights) outright. The worst is that we have never felt the cutting edge of this approach here. Furthermore, theologically, we haven't been ruined or scarred by it. Briefly, historical criticism hasn't really arrived here (see Le Roux 1994a:198–202). South African scholars can therefore pass judgment about it much easier. It is also more of an intellectual exercise than being an existential struggle with critical methodology, results and insights.

In this Van Aarde is different. Without hesitation, he has mentioned the positives arising from historical criticism: it



has created the necessary distance between text and reader, it has disciplined the reader to not move too easily between the text and his or her own context and it has yielded historical information of great importance about the text. In addition, it does not undermine faith, but if anything, it clarifies it. (Van Aarde 1994a:180–189).

What is really unacceptable in Van Aarde's view is historical criticism's text *theoretical foundation* (1988:51–52). Therefore, he is opposed to many aspects of the historical-critical portrayal of Matthew. His own Matthew image, consequently, is not at all shaped by historical criticism. In fact, his entire Matthew inquiry is (*inter alia*) an attempt to free Matthean research from its confined historical-critical straightjacket. He wanted to radically disengage the Matthean declaration from the grip of traditional *Literarkritik*, *Formgeschichte*, *Traditionsgeschichte* and *Redaktionsgeschichte* (cf. Van Aarde 1994a:151–179, 229–247).

However, Van Aarde does not reject outright *the results* and *insights* of these four clearly distinct exegetical methods (Van Aarde 1994a:184). He would continuously refer to the enormous contributions that each 'method' made (Van Aarde 1994a:1–26) and would even try to improve on it (Van Aarde 1994a:151–179). Still, Van Aarde would weigh every one of them and would find all of them wanting. Not even the *Redaktionsgeschichte* passed the test (Van Aarde 1994a:198–203). Although this 'method' respects the final form of the text and emphasises the evangelist as author, it was not enough for Van Aarde. According to some New Testament scholars there might even be a discontinuity between *Redaktionsgeschichte* and *Formgeschichte* or *Traditionsgeschichte*, the latter being diachronic and the former synchronic in nature. This Van Aarde rejects, for all three share the same positivist text theory: the evangelists are not really creative authors, they merely reflect the congregation's context, everything has been predisposed in a deterministic way by the *Sitz im Leben* and so forth. Briefly, *Redaktionsgeschichte* simply cannot be contemplated without the results of *Literarkritik* and *Formgeschichte* (Van Aarde 1994a:10). Therefore: *Redaktionsgeschichte*, too, is rejected.

But what is it about historical criticism that irritates Van Aarde to such an extent? At least five reasons can be given:

- The text theory, already mentioned.
- The method of exegesis. According to this method, knowledge about the origin and development of an object equals the understanding thereof. Therefore, something can be understood if its origin and development are known. This also applies to the historical-critical interpretation of texts: once Matthew's origin has been researched and the different stages of its clearly described, we also understand the text. Van Aarde refers to it as a positivist theory of literature (1994a:189–191). All literature is the result of a particular cause. The deterministic link between a piece of literature and a specific social context is emphasised: certain events in the early church inevitably gave rise to a certain type of

literature. In this way, the Gospel of Matthew was almost objectified into a product of socio-political events.

- Diachrony preceded synchrony. The occupation with the historical (dating, authorship, its ontogeny) was such that the text itself got lost. It didn't do justice to the immanent text. In brief, the literary nature of the New Testament was undermined. Historical critics failed to understand that Matthew's content is literary and not historical in nature; Matthew did not in the first instance want to convey historical information.
- The chasm between then and now is not bridged: it was important to create distance between text and reader, but historical criticism's inability to bridge this gap eventually became clear (Van Aarde 1994a:185).
- The role of historical criticism has been exhausted. This is the overwhelming impression Van Aarde's Matthew research reflects. Other interpretation needs have arisen, which a historical-critical approach could not satisfy (Van Aarde 1994a:13–26).

In other words, the Matthean inquiry came up against a particular positivist text theory and exegetical method and alternatives had to be found.

## Not history but structure

During the 1970s and 1980s, the formative forces that had shaped our Biblical Sciences honed Van Aarde into a New Testament scholar. His work on Matthew is also a reflection of what was happening during those times (see Le Roux 1994b:1–9).

First of all, there was the *discrediting of historical criticism* mentioned previously. The text as a complete, independent and self-sufficient aesthetic phenomenon became very important to the Biblical scientists of those times. For this very reason, historical criticism became suspect. It was then collectively decided that the historical-critical method had lost sight of the 'ultimate importance' of the text. Too much emphasis was placed on the origin of the text, whilst the text's intention was lost in the process. Van Aarde elaborates in detail on historical criticism's negative impact on the interpretation of Matthew (1994a:1–26). It called for a change in method. As he puts it (my paraphrase): an exegete is not merely someone who has to get into the skin of an ancient person, merely occupying him or herself with the origin of a text. Biblical scholars must escape from a ghetto existence to learn from other sciences (Van Aarde 1994a:26).

A second formative force that determined Van Aarde's Matthew image is that of *linguistics*. He puts it as follows: the technique (*sic!*) he uses was developed in the context of the South African New Testament scholarship under the leadership of Jannie Louw (see Van Aarde 1994a:154, 156). His internalisation of this approach influenced his interpretation of the New Testament fundamentally. De Saussure's linguistic insights were extensively explored (Van Aarde 1994a:153, 154) and terms like 'synchrony' and 'diachrony' form an integral part of his vocabulary. Furthermore, the immanent structure of the Matthean text is



emphasised. Of particular significance is the division of the text in a surface structure and a deep structure. The surface structure pertains to that which can be seen: the words, the sentences and mutual relations and so forth. Below this surface lies something deeper: the actual meaning, and this is called the deep structure. Thus, there is no place for 'history' in the historical-critical sense of the word in this structure. Methodologically, historical questions may be asked, but only at a certain juncture. Historical investigation would no longer be the focus of the exegetical undertaking. Briefly, synchrony precedes diachrony.

## Method, conviction, self-confidence

Van Aarde displays a great degree of *optimism*. At times it is almost contagious. It is based on the conviction that his method can expose something new. He is like an artisan who has confidence in his tools and knows what can be achieved with them. For example, he tackles traditional *Formgeschichte* and endeavours to 'indicate the flaws ... even more clearly'. Almost at the end of his *Gattung* study he makes the following statement: 'Jeremias's finding ... in certain instances bears a striking resemblance to my own results' (Van Aarde 1994a:175). In brief, in at least his early scientific endeavour, Van Aarde demonstrates a great measure of conviction and self-confidence; he feels as if he has achieved something. The reason for this must be found in his optimism about his particular method, with which he could surmount a host of scientific problems. With this he could tackle the major problems pertaining to the interpretation of Matthew, achieving a scientific interpretation. Let us now look into more detail into one aspect of his determination of *Gattung*.

Only once a group of literary units or pericopes demonstrate typical and similar traits can it be termed a *Gattung*. Such a *Gattung*, or group, comprises at least two independent literary units that are structurally and content-wise related. Pericope demarcation and semantic structural analysis are essential in determining a *Gattung* (Van Aarde 1994a:153–159, 164–169). By applying fixed criteria, the pericope can be demarcated or determined. That is the external or the outward form. This form again is controlled or determined by an analysis of the internal form, or the pericope's structure. The internal form is determined by means of structural analysis (Van Aarde 1994a:153).

Van Aarde's difference with the German Old Testament scholar, Wolfgang Richter, is of importance. The latter held that content was not of such importance in determining *Gattung*. According to Van Aarde (1994a:155), form and content may under no circumstances be separated in *Gattungsforschung* (1994a:155). *Gattung* is determined by both form and content. His justification for this is to be found in the distinction between the deep and the surface structure. Form can be equated to the surface structure and content to the deep structure. In view hereof Van Aarde states: 'Both constitute meaning and (therefore) the aspects *form* and *content* cannot be separated in the comparison of these units which belong to a typical group' (1994a:158).

Van Aarde's *Gattung* determination is in yet another respect a radical rejection of traditional *Formgeschichte*: synchrony and diachrony remain (as was the case at Chalcedon) unmixed, undivided, yet inseparable. They belong together, yet each should know its own place. Thus, Van Aarde's *Sitz im Leben* has a different look to it. It is not a fixed historical given that can be precisely dated and described (cf. Van Aarde 1994a:195–197). We can only talk about *Sitz im Leben* in vague terms and can merely indicate historical periods (Van Aarde 1994a:173, 174). Van Aarde obviously has his reservations about any premature or unnecessary diachronic or historic 'intervention' in the process of determining *Gattung*. In all circumstances, diachrony has to follow synchrony. Questions pertaining to authorship, origin and context are important, but these questions should know their place in the exegetical process. Moreover, diachronic information must always be controlled and contained by synchronic considerations. Even worse, synchronic investigations provide the framework for and protection against any attempt to lapse into diachronism (Van Aarde 1994a:160).

## From structure to story

At a certain juncture, Van Aarde apparently shifted from a structural approach to narratology. Perhaps we should formulate it differently: At a specific stage, Van Aarde's focus shifted from structures to narrations. When it happened cannot be gauged from his Matthew commentary. Be that as it may, for the most part his commentary is written from this viewpoint and it represents the second layer of his Matthean interpretation. The latest is the social-scientific criticism that only surfaces in the last chapter of his commentary on Matthew (Van Aarde 1994a:261–276).

How exactly the *narratological interpretative layer* should be described is difficult to grasp. As already indicated, these chapters are the most complex and it is rather difficult to get a firm grip on Van Aarde's thinking. Perhaps he is saying too little because he is assuming too much. There is, however, some help: in two instances he uses exactly the same citation from Norman Petersen's work (Van Aarde 1994a:31, 142). According to Petersen, the acceptance of a work's form is the origin of all literary investigation. Therefore, Matthew's narratological form has to be taken seriously. In *this* narration the reader enters the imaginary world of the text. This happens when someone shares in the structure of the work. In other words: when readers surrender themselves to the text and allow the text immanent narrator to talk to them. *That* is the first step. Then, step by step, readers are taken deeper into the world of the text. Actually, the narrator tempts readers to enter the wonderful world of the text. That is where they see, hear and experience wonderful things. When that happens, they become part of the text. The technique in terms of how this is achieved is the point of view from where all of this is narrated (Petersen 1980a:36–38).

## Narrative structure of Matthew

Matthew's genre is a narrative one. More specifically, it is a retelling of Mark. The latter has been retold from the



Matthean author's viewpoint, in a specific manner and for a specific reason (Van Aarde 1994a:34). In order to understand Matthew, we have to read it as a narrative and develop an eye for the text's 'narrative mechanics'. Thus seen, it solves many of the old and existing problems in Matthean research and it creates new insights. We shall explain this by referring to Van Aarde's parable interpretation (Van Aarde 1994a:229–247).

According to Van Aarde, not enough attention was given to the narrative nature of the parables until 1985. With this viewpoint, he then attempts to interpret the parables differently, also criticising some aspects of the interpretation of parables since Jülicher (Van Aarde 1994a:229–240). He criticises in particular the 'misplacement' of parables. Too often parables are removed from their holistic macro texts to be studied in isolation. As a result, the narrative nature of the particular parable is disregarded (Van Aarde 1994a:235).

When the redactor-narrator of the Matthean story collected, selected and arranged his material he was led by an overall or holistic view. Each parable fits neatly into its *macro story*. It can be postulated as follows: the redactor-narrator assimilated the tradition in his story and changed, shaped and refined it at will and in accordance with his intention; within this macro text (the gospel) each micro text (such as a parable) thus has a place and function (Van Aarde 1994a:244).

Therefore, when dealing with the parables, each one's place needs to be considered within the totality of the text. Van Aarde illustrates his view by referring to Matthew's (Mt 22:1–10) and Luke's (Lk 14:15–24) 'use' of the parable of the *wedding feast*. It is wrong to regard the Matthean version as an allegory and the Lukan one as a true parable. All that needs to be done is to highlight each one's place within the macro text (the gospel). In Luke this parable forms part of a travel account describing Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Luke's wedding feast story should never be seen outside the macro text as a travel story and as a gospel. Within this macro context, the invited guests' refusal is actually an excuse to arrive late: in Jesus, God offers salvation to Israel and the one who does not respond immediately but invents excuses is excluded from the real Israel. In Matthew this parable functions in a different way, because it is placed in a different place altogether in the macro text: in this instance the parable follows upon Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem and *inter alia* illustrates the attitude of the Jewish leaders towards Jesus (Van Aarde 1994a:240–247).

## New words, phrases and terminology

At a certain point in his research, Van Aarde introduced us to new terminology. We can illustrate this by referring to Paul Ricoeur's notion of a 'hermeneutical arc' which consists of prefiguration, configuration and refiguration. *Prefiguration* is an attempt to reach 'behind' the text. *Configuration* is the understanding of the meaning 'within' the text and *refiguration* is the creation of one's own existential story. Refiguration takes place after appropriation and can only

happen when the unacceptable and irrelevant values in the text are identified and rejected (Van Aarde & Dreyer 2010:1). In what follows, one of these features, prefiguration, will be briefly discussed.

Prefiguration refers to the historical dimension, to the voices of the sources or secondary sources that the authors have used. One can also refer to it as the 'encyclopaedia of the document', the database from which the author tapped his ideas and views. The following are examples:

- Matthew's description of Jesus' birth, which echoes the birth of Moses in Josephus' 'Antiquitates' (210–211, 215–216) and Pseudo-Philo's 'Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum' (9:1–10) written between 70 and 100 CE.
- The expression to 'liberate Israel', which refers to Miriam's words that her mother would give birth to Israel's saviour (Moses).
- The wordplay in Psalm 118:25 between 'moshia' (Moses) and 'messiah' (son of David), which is translated into Greek as 'hoshiah na' and quoted in Matthew 21:9, 'Hosanna to the son of David'.
- Jesus and the storm in Matthew 8:18–27, which resonates with the Ancient Near Eastern view of the sea as symbolising evil powers and standing in opposition to God (cf. Ps 107:23–30).
- Jesus's power over the sea, which resounds Psalm 74:13–14 and 89:10–12.
- The healing of the daughter of an important man (Mt 9:18–26), which reflects the 'old' Israel's exclusivism as well as the inclusivism of the 'new' Israel of the Matthean community (Van Aarde 2009b:287).

This use of secondary sources by Matthew became an important aid to Van Aarde to hear the voices of these texts in the gospel. Gérard Genette's terminology enabled him to refine his understanding of Matthew even more. Examples of Genette's terminology are intertext, paratext, hypertext, hypotext and architext. Mark, as well as the additions from Q, served as *metatext* (or general framework) for Matthew. The question must then be posed whether Mark is a *hypotext* (or *Grundtext*) and Matthew a *hypertext* (a commentary on Mark)? If Matthew is a hypertext, it entails a lesser degree of independence from Mark and therefore we must rather say that Matthew is a *metatext*, which must be distinguished from Mark as a hypotext (or *Grundschrift*) and Q as an intertext used by Matthew as a hypotext. By using Mark as his hypotext and Q as an intertext, Matthew (as Mark's metatext) retold the Jesus narrative against a specific hypertext or background, the Joshua narrative. Matthew's narrative focused on God who sent Jesus to save Israel and the *hypertext* that Matthew had in mind was that of Joshua. Just as Joshua came as Moses' successor, so Jesus came to save Israel (Van Aarde 2003:453–467). Matthew's *architext* or genre is also of great importance. Van Aarde called it 'a discursive biographical gospel type' emphasising the importance of the narrative and the argumentative structure of the gospel (Van Aarde & Dreyer 2010:4). Van Aarde shared the view that *intertextuality* referred to a work's 'participation in the discursive space of culture' (Culler 2001:103 as quoted by

Van Aarde 2009b:290). This discursive space of culture forms a kind of 'encyclopaedia' that allows Van Aarde to study, for instance, 'sozo' [to save] in Matthew. This view of intertextuality also opens the way to understand the echoes of Matthew's encyclopaedia of voices more clearly (Van Aarde 2009b:258–294; Van Aarde & Dreyer 2010:1–10).

It would be interesting to see how Van Aarde would elaborate these insights to deepen his scholarly understanding of Matthew's gospel. This section, on the hermeneutics of Van Aarde's Matthew interpretation, is concluded with his postcolonial understanding of the gospel.

## A postcolonial reading

Van Aarde is sensitive to the socio-political context of South African and wants his scholarly work to have some bearing on our society. In a paper on a postcolonial reading of Matthew at a SBL meeting in Boston he was very much aware of events in his own country:

At the time when the current article was presented as a paper in Boston in November 2008, Kgalema Motlanthe was the third president of South Africa ... Motlanthe reiterates government plan to reduce poverty ... By the time of the publication of the current article, Jacob Zuma had become South Africa's fourth State President, into which position he was inaugurated in April 2009.

(Van Aarde 2009a:1)

Scholarly work must thus be embedded in the social reality of the scholar. Van Aarde therefore applied 'a "postcolonial" reading strategy by interpreting Matthew's gospel against the background of South Africa's present-day culture of violence and poverty' (2009a:2–6). This, of course, does not imply a direct relationship between text and context for 'scientific exegetes should avoid the hermeneutical fallacy of misplaced concreteness' (Van Aarde 2009a:2). There are enormous differences between pre-industrial biblical documents and postcolonial contexts.

A postcolonial reading of Matthew implies the existence of anti-societies and anti-societal language. An anti-society is situated within an existing society, but presents itself as an alternative. It is critical of the traditional values of the society, rejects the established norms within society and wants to create a counter reality. Anti-society, however, needs a language that can be called an anti-language. Antilanguage formulates the ideals of an anti-societal group. It expresses a kind of reality which is an alternative reality and functions as a vehicle for the anti-society. Antilanguage is:

the bearer of social reality, but of an alternative social reality that runs counter to the social reality of society at large. Thus, an anti-language serves to maintain an inner solidarity in the face of pressure from the wider society.

(Van Aarde 2009a:3)

Matthew was also part of an anti-societal group and also created an anti-language. In his village he had experienced tension with scribes who rejected his views of Jesus as the new Moses. He created a different social reality and an anti-language by re-enacting Jesus' antisocietal language. This can

be seen in the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, where the views of the scribes of the Israelite crowd were challenged and the anti-language created an alternative reality for the Matthean group. We can still hear the echoes of this anti-language in the following:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven ... If one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also ... Your Father who is in heaven makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good ... Our Father who art in heaven let thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven ... Consider the lilies of the field; even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these ... Not every one who says to me: 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven.

(Mtt 5:3; 5:39b; 5:45b; 6:9–10; 6:28b–29; 7:21a)

According to Van Aarde, Matthew's anti-societal language 'should be seen as a re-enactment of Jesus' subversive ethics within a context similar to what we could call a 'postcolonial' setting' (2009a:5).

This non-violent anti-language is the proper Christian option for present-day South Africa. It is a never ending task that has to be continued despite the powerplay of the all-powerful leaders of the day. It is a never ending struggle to establish Jesus' and Matthews' non-violent anti-societal language (Van Aarde 2009a:8).

## Matthew's *Mitte*

Whoever reads Van Aarde's work is struck by one recurring central idea that forms the ideology of the author's deep structure and that he uses in such a manner in his surface structure that it highlights his interpretation of the Matthean narration. Based on his ideology, he steers the Matthean story in a specific direction and he tries to resolve certain exegetical problems. In what follows, some features of Van Aarde's 'ideology' are discussed.

The understanding of Matthew is closely linked to the notion of *apocalypticism*, which Van Aarde explains by using the concepts of 'experienced time' and 'imagined time'. Both concepts stress the feeling of disillusionment and disappointment when the experienced is not what was expected. As we have already said, Matthew lived in a scribal village somewhere in northern Galilee and southern Syria and in a scribal context where the scribes endeavoured to come to grips with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Amidst Roman abuse and ill treatment, these scribes continued to restore their villages and to reflect on God's presence. There were, however, two factions amongst the scribes: those who acknowledged Jesus as the messiah who fulfilled the Torah and those who interpreted him in a very narrow Jewish way. Both factions or groups experienced a certain cognitive dissonance with regard to 'experienced time': the godless were not punished and the believers not victorious and the 'perfect world' or 'divine utopia' era of God's control was projected into 'imaginary time' (Van Aarde 2010: forthcoming).

A basic question that the scribes (and Matthew) grappled with dealt with the *presence* (or rather *absence*) of God. Since



the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, the visual evidence of God's presence was completely destroyed and something else, so to speak, had to take its place. Matthew's answer was his ideology of 'God-with-us': God was now present in Jesus. He became present in Jesus, the Messiah who was 'greater than the temple' (Mt 12:6) and whose mission had the purpose of forgiving the sins of all people.

To understand the notion of an ideology, Van Aarde used the insights of Boris Uspensky (1973), although he doesn't feature nearly as much as the names of Kingsbury, Luz, Petersen, Richter, Theissen and others. His view of ideology, encompassing the network of ideas and themes in a narrative that contribute towards determining a story's ideological perspective had far-reaching consequences for Van Aarde's Matthean interpretation (Van Aarde 1994a:45). This ideological level is the most basic level.

We can also explain this by using the concepts of *deep structure* and *surface structure*. The deep structure lies at the base of a story. All the ideas that shape the story are found compressed at this level, almost like a generator. The surface structure takes shape from this basis (Van Aarde 1994a:35). Through characterisation, name-giving and various other narrative techniques, the surface structure is shaped according to a specific ideology. We can also put it as follows: the narrator exercises all his or her options at the surface level. This is the level where, in a manner of speaking, the job is being done; it is at this level that authors try their utmost to give shape to their ideology (Van Aarde 1994a:90).

The Matthean story, too, has such an ideology: *God-is-with-us*. As Matthew is a religious text, we prefer to refer to it as a theological perspective (Van Aarde 1994a:45). This ideology or theology of 'God-with-us' dominates the entire gospel and it is from here that the evangelist narrates his story. With this ideology, the evangelist understands Jesus and describes his work. It determines how he would have read Mark and how he used it to elaborate his own version of the gospel (Van Aarde 1994a:35). In brief, the surface structure of Matthew's story was shaped by its deep structure's ideology or theology.

Matthew's ideology primarily took shape in a name, 'God-with-us' (Van Aarde 1994a:46), that encompasses everything. The name is also explicitly used at the beginning of the gospel (Mt 1:23), in the middle (Mt 18:19ff) and at the end (Mt 28:18ff). With this the author wants to make a certain point about God's presence, that he is always God-with-us (Van Aarde 2010:forthcoming). God came to the earth but did not decide to live in the temple in Jerusalem, which was the symbol of God's presence in customary thinking, but came in the form of Jesus. In other words, in Jesus God shows that he is with us (Van Aarde 1994a:130).

Matthew's ideology or theology comprises two periods: the pre-Easter mission of Jesus and the post-Easter mission of the disciples. The God-with-us ideology materialises in both periods.

*The pre-Easter (or pre-paschal) era* extends to the crucifixion and resurrection. During this time Jesus was 'God-with-us'

by teaching people, forgiving their sins and healing them (Van Aarde 2010: forthcoming).

There is also a *Wende der Zeit* [turn of the times], that occurred when the Jesus era came to an end with the crucifixion and resurrection. According to Matthew 27:51–53, powerful things happened at the time of the crucifixion: the veil in the temple was torn in two, there was an earthquake and many were raised from death. All of these were eschatological signs. The 'veil' indicates the end of the old dispensation, the 'earthquake' a re-arrangement of the world order and the resurrection a new era. To summarise, with the crucifixion, death and resurrection the old dispensation is destroyed and the new era of the church, or the sending of the disciples begins (Van Aarde 1994a:136).

The disciples played a crucial role during the *post-Easter (or post-paschal)* era (Van Aarde 2010:forthcoming). Matthew has an open ending. It is not a finished story, but extends into the future. This is what distinguishes Matthew from Mark, for example. The latter is written from the expectation of an imminent second coming of Jesus. Matthew is different. He takes into account the possibility of a delayed second coming and therefore this gospel presents an interim solution: the conversion of nations. In order to handle the quandary of a delayed second coming, the redactor or narrator 'imports' yet another era, that of the post-Easter disciples (Van Aarde 1994a:128).

There actually is a *third era*, which Matthew refers to as 'life' or 'eternal life'. This only happens at the time of the second coming, or with death. In light of the fact that Matthew merely refers to it (particularly in the parables) it is not elaborated upon (Van Aarde 1994a:119, 128).

The first two eras should not be seen in isolation. Van Aarde mentions *continuity*, *analogy* and *transparency* (2010:forthcoming). In other words, there is a continuity of the one era into the next and what happens in the one era serves as analogy, as a type or model for what has to happen in the next one. The one era becomes transparent for the next; what happens in the pre-Easter era must become transparent in the post-Easter era (Van Aarde 1994a:249–250). It is vitally important that this transparency should also continuously become transparent in the life of Matthew's readers (cf. Van Aarde 1994a:120, 122), for there is a continuity, a correlative analogy between Jesus' pre-Easter mission and the disciples' post-Easter mission (Van Aarde 1994a:32). In Jesus' pre-Easter actions he concretised the notion of God-with-us. Similarly, the disciples should execute their mission in such a way that it would be a continuation of Jesus' pre-Easter presence (Van Aarde 1994a:34). Jesus' lasting presence as God-with-us thus depends on the disciples' post-Easter work (Van Aarde 1994a:46).

## To each their own place in the story

In the Matthean story the reader is in many ways manipulated through narrative techniques (Van Aarde 1994a:30). One such



technique is that of the omnipresent narrator. The narrator of the Matthean gospel describes the attitudes and feelings of his characters with great authority and insight. He knows certain things about his characters that they themselves do not know, lets them move in time and space according to his own ideology and manipulates them to think, act and talk as he wants them to. And in the process the reader, too, is manipulated.

*Characterisation* thus plays an important role. In and through his characters, the narrator's ideological perspective manifests itself. The narrator's perspective is expressed in their words, deeds and attitudes. Therefore, by paying attention to characterisation, we can understand the narrator's perspective (Van Aarde 1994a:41). As illustration a few examples will be discussed in the following:

- Van Aarde's figure of *John the Baptist* is tightly interwoven with Matthew's pre-Easter Jesus event and his post-Easter disciple event. This he achieves by calling John the Baptist a 'prophet'. This word spans two eras: that of the prophets of Old Testament times up to Jesus' pre-Easter behaviour, including the times of John the Baptist. Matthew's use of 'prophet', however, extends beyond this point to the post Easter era of the disciples (Van Aarde 1994a:74). What happened to the Baptist is of significance for both eras. The prophets in the Old Testament also endured suffering and by calling John a prophet, his own suffering is emphasised. Moreover, the narrator made him a prototype of both Jesus' and the disciples' suffering. Like the Baptist, Jesus would suffer during the pre-Easter era and the disciples would during the post-Easter era (Van Aarde 1994a:75).
- The Matthean narrator's portrayal of the *disciples* is interesting (Van Aarde 1994a:88–104), as they fulfill an auxiliary role that manifests at two temporal levels, pre- and post-Easter, too. During the first period they are the 'medium' through which Jesus as God-with-us shows his love to the Jewish masses (and gentiles). Post-Easter, they fulfill a direct missionary role in respect of the Jewish masses (and gentiles). During both eras the disciples display a certain ambiguity. They have insight, yet their faith falters at times, as can be seen in Matthew 13:53–17:27, for example. In this micro narration insight and little or no faith alternate (Van Aarde 1994a:93). Sometimes the disciples show great insight, but then little or no faith also features. They show insight with regard to Jesus' role as the obedient 'Son of God', have insight into their own roles as 'sons of God' and they understand the danger formalism and exclusivism poses to the Jewish leaders. Yet, that this attitude of the Jewish leaders in particular means danger to them, they did not grasp. They respond and think like these leaders and neglect the less privileged because they cannot forgive (Mt 18:10; 19:13). It is not limited to the pre-Easter era. During the post-Easter era the disciples often displayed an astonishing lack of faith (Van Aarde 1994a:103).
- One of the most difficult exegetical issues in the Gospel of Matthew pertains to the relationship between and function of the *gentiles* and the *Jews*, in other words, the

issue of Jewish particularism and gentile universalism (Van Aarde 2007:416–424). Many New Testament scholars notice a definite schism here. The Jews were the object of the Jesus mission during the pre-Easter era, whilst the gentile mission belongs to the post-Easter era. When the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus, the gentiles replaced the Jews as the missionary object. This explains the tension between particularism and universalism in the Gospel of Matthew (Van Aarde 1994a:80–82).

- Van Aarde (2004:132–136) describes the roles of the gentiles and Jews differently and his view of '*transparency*' helps him in his effort. Mission to the gentiles was a common phenomenon during the post-Easter era, whilst the impoverished and outcast Jews, 'the flock without a shepherd', 'impure ones' whom Pharisaic purity directives denied access to the temple (and therefore to God's presence) were neglected. This was a sad situation to Matthew and therefore, he did not want to bring to a head the tension between Jewish particularism and gentile universalism. He much rather wanted to present the pre-Easter Jesus mission as a 'transparent model' for the post-Easter disciples. Just as he did not exclude Jews as missionary objects in Galilee where the Jews lived, so too the disciples' gentile mission did not exclude Jews (Van Aarde 1994a:83).

## A different view of the Old Testament

Matthew's use of the Old Testament confirms *the link between these two eras*. The Old Testament does not represent another time frequency (Van Aarde 1994a:127–132), but rather serves the narrator's ideology (Van Aarde 1994a:109–111, 137). The expression, 'law and prophets', is used in a 'strategic way'. With this the narrator wants to lend authority to the pre-Easter Jesus event (Van Aarde 2009b:289–290). That Jesus came, was God-with-us, performed miracles and came for the lost ones of Israel constitutes an authoritative event that took place according to the Old Testament, the law and the prophets. For this reason, Jesus could teach like Moses did and perform miracles like the Son of David. Thus, when he teaches or heals people it carries weight. But more, it becomes the realisation of the 'law and the prophets' (Van Aarde 1994a:139).

Jesus also fulfilled the Old Testament. Van Aarde uses 'fulfilment' in the sense of 'reduction'. When he fulfilled the law and the prophets, the Old Testament becomes reduced to one single event, love for the neighbour. This event of love is the hermeneutical key that reveals the true nature of the law and the prophets. When Jesus shows love for the Jewish masses, he fulfils the entire Old Testament and the law and the prophets, for that matter (Van Aarde 1994a:139).

Because there is an analogy between the first and second eras, the fulfilment of the law and the prophets is also of consequence for the disciples. They, too, *must* fulfil the law and the prophets. In other words, they, too, have to show loving compassion towards the impoverished Jews, the shepherdless ones. Like Jesus had done during the pre-Easter





era, they must do during the post-Easter era and when this happens, the Old Testament manifests in their lives (Van Aarde 1994a:140–141). Thus regarded there is no need for a separate era for the Old Testament and the Matthean gospel, the era of the law and the prophets span both.

## Direct and indirect time

The narrative and direct discourses in the Matthean gospel pose many problems when it comes to the understanding thereof. This *narrative technique* is one of the distinguishing traits of the Matthean gospel's formal structure. Its presence in five Jesus discourses must not lead to the design of a Moses-theology, a Covenant-theology or any other exclusive theology. It should not be seen in isolation either. Every one of the five direct discourses (Mt 4:23–7:29; 9:36–11:1; 13:1–52; 18:1–19:1; 23:1–25:46) must be understood in close relation to the indirect discourses (Mt 1:1–4; 8:1–9:35; 11:2–12:50; 13:53–17:27; 19:2–22:46; 26:1–28:20). The alternation between these eras is significant. In fact, the message of Matthew's gospel strongly depends on the alternation between them (Van Aarde 1994a:112–113).

Van Aarde links the discourses with the two main eras in the Matthean story. The pre-Easter era is more transparent in the *indirect discourses* and the post-Easter era is more transparent in the *direct discourses*. It is, however, not true that the pre-Easter Jesus commission only features in the indirect discourse and the post-Easter era of the disciples mentioned only in the direct discourse. The indirect time is linked in various ways to the direct discourse that supersedes it and which, in turn, paves the way for the following indirect time. In this way, the pre-Easter and post-Easter eras are thoroughly integrated. In other words, through thematic parallelism, cross-referencing, previews, back-flashes and so forth, these two time frequencies become closely linked (Van Aarde 1994a:114). Thus seen, the alternation between direct and indirect discourse constitutes for Van Aarde a very effective method the narrator uses to focus the implied reader's attention on his ideology (Van Aarde 1994a:114–115).

## Some critical remarks

I respect Andries Van Aarde as a great scholar and I am deeply grateful to him for what I have received from him over many years as a person and a scholar. He has enriched my life intellectually through his many groundbreaking views on hermeneutics, the New Testament and theology in general. I have a very high scholarly opinion of Van Aarde's work on Matthew and the historical Jesus and would like to conclude this article by a few critical remarks that might stimulate dialogue between me and my respected colleague:

- Can Matthew's *characters* really step out of the text to become *people of flesh and blood*? Or, do they remain captive in the structures and life world of the text? At most Jesus, John the Baptist and the persons in the Matthean story remain characters in a story. But then Van Aarde refers to F.C. Baur: '(He) should perhaps be read again' (1994a:249)

and: '...let us reconsider F.C. Baur's contribution again' (Van Aarde 1994a:260). What he is referring to is Baur's remark that the miracle of the church's birth must be placed, or accounted for within a historical context (Van Aarde 1994a:248).

- How would Van Aarde like to take Baur's views seriously? To rephrase, how far can we penetrate Matthew's village historically? The tension amongst the scribes seems an interesting starting point, but how can one give content and meaning to that? Which social models can further our understanding about this tension?
- Does such a historical study really fit into our colleague's intellectual framework? Perhaps not in the thinking of the 'early Van Aarde', because he had a very specific theory of literature then: the moment a story is written it is severed from its historical author and context. From that moment on, it functions in a closed-off narrative world and should be handled as a unique design (Van Aarde 1994a:89). In this way, Matthew as a narrative has its own closed narrative world (Van Aarde 1994a:143). It does not find itself in a one on one relationship with the 'actual world', the real events, or real persons. Matthew does not primarily refer to actual events and does not profess to recount such events either. This was the problem with the interpretation of Matthew since the end of the 2nd century until the beginning of the 19th century (Van Aarde 1994a:1). It seems therefore, that in the 'early Van Aarde's' views characters can never live, work and speak in a specific historical context. They remain mere book characters about whom all kinds of stories are told (see Spivak 1976:liv–lxxviii; Magee 1974:43–69; Kearney 1986:290; Van Niekerk 1992:56; Macey 1993:169, 170–171, 194–195).
- Has the 'later Van Aarde' changed his mind on the historical understanding of a text? Van Aarde was never against a historical approach, but was vehemently opposed against certain aspects of historical critical research that impacted negatively on the study of Matthew. In later publications, it seems as if Van Aarde has developed a different view about historical information. He says that 'the so-called scientific objectivity of an "autonomous" text was ... an impossibility'; it is 'not possible to divorce a text from its context of origin'. Linguistic and semiotic structuralism collapsed into post-structuralism: 'culture, history and society engraved themselves on texts'; texts are 'interwoven with culture, history and society' (Van Aarde & Dreyer 2010:1–4). In light of these statements it has become difficult to define a text as an entity in and of itself that can be understood without any information about the author or the background.
- Is it correct to say that Ricoeur's hermeneutical arc serves as a *synthesis* in Van Aarde's thinking? To put it differently, are the thesis (historical criticism) and anti-thesis (reading texts as literature) united into a synthesis where terms like 'behind the text', 'within the text' and 'in front of the text' describe the 'new' approach to Matthew?

## Conclusion

Van Aarde's Gospel of Matthew is a story told from a specific perspective, that of God-with-us. It is a well organised

narrative in which everything fits into two time frequencies: Jesus' pre-Easter mission and the disciples' post-Easter commission. This Matthean story also demonstrates how the redactor-narrator manipulates his characters and events to be shaped and sculpted in accordance with his ideology.

Those who occupy themselves with Van Aarde will grow in their understanding of the New Testament in many ways. Through him they will also share in the development of our 'own' Biblical studies in South Africa and gain insight into the narrative-critical 'layer of understanding' in the Matthean interpretation.

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