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THE DOUBLE CALL FOR JOY, “REJOICE AND BE GLAD” (MATT. 5:12), AS CONCLUSION OF THE MATTHEAN *MACARISMS*

QUASI TRISTES, SEMPTER AUTEM GAUDENTES — VIDETUR NON ESSE GAUDIUM

ABSTRACT

In contrast to Luke, for whom joy and rejoicing are major motifs, Matthew rarely writes about them. This may reflect the antagonistic environment in which the Matthean community functioned. However, a few texts refer to joy: Matthew 2:10, 13:44 and, in particular, 5:12. This article explores the call for joy in Matthew 5:12 which takes up and interprets *makarioi* of the above beatitudes. Matthew 5:12 begins with a double call for joy: “Rejoice and be glad”, eliciting a liturgical response, such as “Hallelujah” or similar exclamations, and a life of faith from the audience or readers. This double call raises some questions. What is the relation between these two imperatives — are they more than mere duplication? What is the relation between this double call and the beatitude (*macarism*) of v. 11 and other beatitudes? Should vv. 11 and 12 be read as two beatitudes? How did beatitudes in general function as literary genre? What is the *Sitz im Leben* of Matthew’s beatitudes and what kind of response is required from the audience or readers? Does the response in Matthew reflect actual liturgical practice or is it merely a literary device? How can this call be applied to our present situation?

1. INTRODUCTION

“As a musical masterpiece begins with an *introitus*, the Sermon on the Mount opens with an extraordinary sequence of statements, the so-called beatitudes” (Betz 1995:92). This set of beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12¹ describes the way

1 The set of beatitudes with which Matthew begins the Sermon on the Mount, differs significantly from those recorded by Luke. Luke only mentions four beatitudes and balances them with four woe sayings. The Matthean beatitudes probably form a collection of sayings by Jesus (not necessarily as the *ipsissima verba Jesu*). Jesus might have pronounced blessings combined with curses as found in Old Testament

of life of the faithful disciples of Jesus, thus constituting the *exordium* of the Sermon on the Mount.² The Sermon begins with a series of blessings (Matt. 5: 1-12) and ends with a series of warnings (Matt. 7:1, 15, 21 and 26-27). This pattern is similar to the Book of the Law (Deuteronomy) which suggests a parallel between Jesus and Moses, as mediators of the commandments of God (Domeris 1990:67).

This article explores the double call for joy "Rejoice and be glad" (Matt. 5:12). This call raises the following questions: How did beatitudes in general function as literary genre? How should Matthew's beatitudes be distinguished from one another? Should vv. 11 and 12 be read as separate beatitudes? What is the relation between the two imperatives in verse 12 — are they more than mere duplication? What is the relation between this double call and the beatitude (*macarism*) of verse 11 and the other beatitudes? Is there a symbolic numerical order in the list of beatitudes? What is the *Sitz im Leben* of Matthew's beatitudes and what kind of response is required from the audience or readers? Does the response in Matthew reflect liturgical practice or is it merely a literary device? How do the beatitudes function? How can this call be applied to our present situation?

2. FUNCTION AND LITERARY GENRE OF THE BEATITUDES

(Matthew's) Jesus makes use of a specific *Gattung*, the beatitude series. The word "beatitude" (derived from the Latin *beatitudo* which was used in the Vulgate) corresponds to the Greek μακαρισμός (and μακάριος). The fact that the substantive ὁ μακαρισμός is used for sayings which have formal characteristics in common indicates that this was a set form of pronouncement. This label was probably used as such even in New Testament times (cf. Gal. 4:15; Rom. 4:6, 9). The term designates a specific literary *Gattung* from ancient writings. Various scholars have indicated that the beatitudes were common pronouncements in the Greek language (cf. Van Aarde 1994:163). Some *formgeschichtliche* and *gattungsgeschichtliche* studies have been conducted on the beatitudes. Koch (1974:21-23) is a prominent exponent who argues for a *gattungsgeschichtliche* past behind the series of beatitudes.³

parallels (Gen. 27:27-29, 39-40; Deut. 28). In an attempt to explain the difference between the Matthean and Lukan versions of the beatitudes, Van Bruggen (1990:85) suggests that "Beide evangelisten hebben echter uit de stellig langere bergrede hun eigen keuze gemaakt". This argument, however, does not explain the difference in wording between Luke and Matthew's version of obviously the same beatitudes.

- 2 Though it is known as the Sermon on the Mount, many scholars view Matthew 5-7 rather as a series of speeches grouped together by Matthew (cf. Domeris 1990:67).
- 3 Koch believes that the beatitudes did not originate as a series, but as single aphorisms that were collected at a later stage.

When investigating the semantic structures of *macarisms* in the New Testament, it becomes apparent that they form a typical group. Van Aarde (1994:164) compares the different forms in which the *macarisms* are presented in the New Testament text, contrasting the substantive (e.g., Rom. 4:6, 9; Gal. 4:15), verbal (e.g., Luke 1:48; Jam. 5:11) and adjectival forms (e.g., Matthew 6:3-12; Acts 26:2; 1 Tim. 1:11; 6:15; Tit. 2:13). The adjective form can be divided into predicative and attributive use. In view of this comparison it is clear that expressions containing the predicative adjective μακάριος, -ια, -ιον present a fixed syntactical aphoristic form. In the construction where the adjective μακάριος is used predicatively, it always functions as the starting-point of the saying and has a fixed form whereas what follows displays syntactical and grammatical variations. The adjective is always in the nominative and its gender is determined by the substantive. In some cases the subject is not disclosed. The subject is often expanded by means of a participial phrase and the copulative verb is often omitted. In most cases the matrix sentence is expanded by means of a motivating clause introduced by ὅτι, γάρ or ἵνα or a relative or temporal subordinate clause. The *macarisms* of Matthew 5:3-12 fall under this grammatical form.

Characteristic of a *macarism* is its use of the word μακάριος. This word and its cognate derivatives are used 55 times in 38 pericopes in the New Testament (Nida & Taber 1974:37). In all these cases they serve as prophecies of blessing. The word expresses a qualitative condition as well as a process. With the exception of Acts 26:2 and Galatians 4:15 (in which case reference is made to non-religious joy), μακάριος refers to a religious prophecy of salvation regarding some joy or blessing that implies eschatological participation. It conveys the meaning that it will ultimately go well with those who first seek God's kingdom (e.g., Matthew 6:33). This style of blessing may be called "an indirect exhortation", which elicits a particular pattern of ethical behaviour (Domeris 1990:68). God will comfort these people at the final restoration (Keener 1999:166). μακάριος designates not only a subjective state of humans,⁴ but also an objective judgement made by Jesus about his people (Stott 1978:33).

Scholars have identified parallels of New Testament *macarisms* in other ancient literature. Assmann (1979:12-72) researched the frequent use of *macarisms* in Egyptian literature. He recognised the typical two-line beatitudes in which the second line gives the reason for the *macarism* in the first line. The term played an important role in the Osiris cult where it refers to the state of being of a deceased person who has been declared innocent in the court of the gods of the

4 Ligon (1961) interprets this happiness from a subjective state of mental health. He views the beatitudes as "a series of eight fundamental emotional attitudes. If a man reacts to his environment in the spirit of them, his life will be a happy one" (1961:27) for he will have discovered the basic "formula for mental health" (1961:91).

netherworld. Such a person is truly blessed and has been approved to enter the paradise of Osiris (Betz 1995:93).

In the Greek religion of Demeter the term ὄλβιος is a synonym for μακάριος referring to the *post-mortem* state of those who have been initiated into the mysteries of Demeter. “Blessedness” is assumed to be related to “imperishability”. The benefits of blessedness are not only future but also immediate (Betz 1995:93, 105).

Although the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount (and of the Sermon on the Plain) show significant parallels with the *macarisms* of Egyptian Osiris and of the Greek mystery cults, they developed from a Jewish milieu (Koch 1974: 23). There are at least 46 examples in the LXX that could be classified as *macarisms* (Van Aarde 1994:177). Keener (1999:165) proposes that Jesus used a standard Old Testament literary form to express the point of the beatitudes, as in Ps. 1:1: “Blessed is the man who ...” and other Jewish literature.⁵ The Old Testament and rabbinic literature contain numerous beatitudes with a wide variety of forms and functions. Very similar wording to the *macarism* of Matthew 5:12 is found in Tobit 13:15-16 LXX): Χάρηθι καὶ ἀγαλλίασαι ἐπὶ τοῖς υἱοῖς τῶν δικαίων, ὅτι συναχθήσονται καὶ εὐλογήσουσιν τὸν κύριον τῶν δικαίων (“Be glad and rejoice for the sons of the righteous, for they will be gathered together and they will praise the Lord of the righteous”).⁶

Investigating the use of beatitudes in Jewish literature, Betz (1995:93) draws the following conclusions:

- The original situation and function (*Sitz im Leben der alten Kirche*) of the beatitudes is in the ritual;
- Their nature is that of declarative statements;
- Their future orientation is eschatological as well as this-worldly, and
- They are connected to ethics and morality.

5 Keener (1999:165) identifies the following beatitudes in the Old Testament: Ps. 2:12; 32:1-2; 40:4; 41:1; 65:4; 84:4-5, 12; 94:12; 112:1; 119:1-2; 128:1; Prov. 8:34; Is. 56:2; Jer. 17:7; Dan. 12:12.

6 Other examples from the Apocrypha are:

Blessed are you, Aseneth, because the ineffable mysteries of God have been revealed to you, and blessed are those who attach themselves to the Lord in repentance, because they eat from the (honey-comb) (Jos. Asen. 16:7-8)

Blessed are they who saw you and died in love, for also we shall live (Sir. 48:11).

More examples are to be found in Mar. 4:4; Sr. 25:8-9; Ps. Sol. 4:23; 5:16; 6:1; 10:1; Jos. and Asen. 16:14/7; 1 Enoch 99:10; 2 Enoch 42:6-14; 44:5.

Some aspects of these conclusions need to be considered. While the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount primarily have a didactic function, they presuppose some form of cultic and ritual experience of which the recipients are reminded.⁷ As declarative statements the *macarisms* express theological dogma⁸ with regard to the eschatological distinctive religious joy of the righteous who are sharing in the salvation of the Kingdom of God (Lioy 2004:120). The *macarisms* also imply the judgement of God as supreme Judge, anticipating his eschatological verdicts. The ultimate mercy of God will be revealed on the day of the judgement (Keener 1999:166). As a Jewish teacher, Jesus⁹ must have been familiar with Jewish thought of divine justice and God's verdict in the last judgement. As principles of eschatological future divine justice, the *macarisms* also have an impact on the present. "Divine justice not only is above time and space but also reaches into time and space" (Betz 1995:96). As revelation of a principle, the beatitude opens a way of life which puts that principle into practice. The recipient of this principle must respond with an appropriate conduct of life. By revealing this new way of life, the *macarisms* affect moral behaviour. The addressees must respond with adequate attitudes, actions and thoughts that are exceptional to conventional ways of behaviour. These attitudes do not earn salvation, but are the fruits of insight into God's ways¹⁰ (Luz 1990:221).

Although the entitlement in the beatitudes in the light of Matthew's overall message should be interpreted as a gift of God through grace, the history of

7 Braumann (1960:259) has proposed baptism as the cultic setting, but such a specific cultic reference seems uncertain.

8 In this way the *macarisms* are traditional of the Jewish Wisdom Literature: wisdom is based on the divine justice and righteousness as revealed in the *Torah* (Betz 1995:94).

9 Some scholars argue that the *macarisms* do not come from the historical Jesus. Luz (1990:226ff.) attempted to reconstruct the redactional history of the beatitudes from the historical Jesus to Matthew's Gospel. According to Luz, the first three beatitudes of Q (extant in Luke 6:20b-21) are by Jesus himself. Q expanded these to four (extant in Matthew 5:11-12). Between Q and Matthew another four were added. Matthew presumably found seven beatitudes in sources and then added the eighth (5:10). Obviously such a reconstruction is highly speculative depending on the investigator's methodological presuppositions. As Matthew puts the beatitudes firmly in the mouth of Jesus as speaker, I shall not investigate this matter further in this article. The latter *macarisms* could have had their origin with Jesus, but maybe from other occasions, probably later in his ministry.

10 These attitudes are comparable with what Paul labels the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22) but should be distinguished from the "works of the law". Stott (1978:31) remarks:

Just as the ninefold fruit of the Spirit which Paul lists is to ripen in every Christian character, so the eight beatitudes which Christ speaks describe his ideal for every citizen of God's Kingdom.

interpretation reveals that some Christians have interpreted them conditionally.¹¹ The most forthright exponent of this view is Hans Windisch who emphasises "historical exegesis" and rejects what he calls "Paulinizing exegesis". He writes: "From the standpoint of Paul, Luther and Calvin the soteriology of the Sermon on the Mount is irredeemably heretical" (1929:6) and "[T]here is a gulf here between Jesus and Paul that no art of theological exegesis can bridge" (1929:107).¹² Windisch (1929:96) even speculates that Matthew deliberately composed the Sermon on the Mount as a kind of anti-Pauline tract!¹³

Some scholars find a polarisation between the Sermon on the Mount and the remainder of the Matthean Gospel (France 1989:163). The broader Matthean *kerygma* of the saving death and resurrection of Christ has apparently been replaced by the doctrine of reward in the Sermon on the Mount. Betz (1985:17ff.) suggests that the Sermon on the Mount is an epitome of the teaching of Jesus as compiled by Jewish Christians in Jerusalem in the middle of the first century, for whom Jesus was only an authoritative teacher of the Law. The saving death of Jesus was not part of their religion. Matthew has incorporated their work despite the fact that it differs significantly from his own viewpoint. However, most scholars reject the view that the Sermon on the Mount lacks a Christology, beyond Jesus as the respected teacher of the Law (cf. France 1998:163).¹⁴ The Sermon on the Mount should be viewed not only as a general discourse on ethics, but also as the distinctive life of those who are under the rule of the Kingdom of heaven. The Sermon should be recognised as a discourse on discipleship rather than a discourse on general ethics. As is the case throughout Matthew's Gospel, those who respond to Jesus come under the rule of God. It is for his sake that they are persecuted (Matt. 5:11). The Sermon on the Mount therefore fits into the development of Matthew's plot, the revelation of Jesus as the Messiah and peoples' response to his message (Viljoen 2006a:151). The entitlement in the beatitudes should be interpreted similarly — not as condition, but as a response and consequence.

These attitudes, actions and thoughts are different to what the Greeks call "virtues" being approximations towards the divine absolute.

11 Luz (1990:218-223) describes such a *Wirkungsgeschichte* of these beatitudes.

12 The relation of Matthew's church to Pauline Christianity has been debated (see Davies 1963:316-366).

13 Barth (1963:159-164) developed the idea that the main aim of the gospel was to combat antinomianism in Matthew's church. While Paul emphasised Christian freedom from the bondage of the Law, Barth was of the opinion that Matthew directed his attack against Hellenistic elements in the church that went much further than Paul. According to Barth, they were libertines who were of the opinion that Christ had abolished the law.

14 The Reformers and Puritans used to summarise the relation between Jesus (as Christ) and the law; the law sends us to Christ to be justified, and Christ sends us back to the law to be sanctified (cf. Stott 1978:36).

3. NUMBER AND ORDER OF THE BEATITUDES

The issue concerning the number of the beatitudes has been discussed widely, ranging from seven to ten. The first seven beatitudes (5:3-9) are easily identified. Verse 10 has also been recognised as the eighth beatitude which forms an *inclusio* with verse 3 as the words “for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven” occurs in both verses. A difference of opinion, however, arises as to whether 5:11-12 should also be regarded as a beatitude, or even as two (Lioy 2004:121). France (1998:160), for example, only recognises the first eight sayings as beatitudes. Indeed, the concluding *macarism(s)* in Matthew 5:11-12 is distinct from the preceding series in several ways. It is much longer, contains imperatives, addresses the readers directly with the second person plural, and does not specify the addressees. The ὄτι sentence goes on to an ὅταν sentence. Yet 5:11-12 should not be excluded from the number of the *macarisms*. Like the first eight beatitudes, verse 11 also begins with μακάριοι, indicating a continuation of the series. There are many examples in Jewish prayer texts and in the Bible (e.g., Isa. 63:10-14; Sir. 47:12-23; 4Q525; Matt. 1:2-17; Luke 6:37-38) where the last unit of a series is longer than the preceding units and where there is an abrupt change from one person to another (Allison 2005:176; Keener 1999:171).

Verse 12 reaches a climax by changing its form. Because of the different beginning of verse 12 scholars usually do not include it among the beatitudes, but label it a “call for joy” (e.g., Lioy 2004:121). However, it appears that v. 12 introduces a new element and could even be considered the tenth beatitude. The change in v. 12a is that it calls for a response from the audience to the message they have received in vv. 3-11. Instead of continuing the initial μακάριοι of vv. 3-11, v. 12 begins with a double call for joy χαίrete καί ἀγαλλιᾶσθε which interprets the meaning and implication of the preceding *macarisms* (Betz 1995: 151).¹⁵ This gladness and joy is not only called for in the eschatological future, but in the present time. The beatitudes in vv. 3-11 along with 12b provide the justification for the call for joy.

Matt 5:11-12 also serves as a transition from 5:3-10 to the sayings about the salt and light in 5:13-16, which also have ἔστε (you are). It should also be borne in mind that many Matthean verses end one section and begin another (cf. Luz 1990:227). Such verses should not be regarded as walls, but as doors (Allison 2005:176). It therefore appears that Matthew 5:3-12 represents a conventional pattern as it contains a series of nine beatitudes with an irregular concluding transitional tenth member. Considering the theme of irregularity in the concluding member, one could also speak of an expanded double ninth beatitude as ending, as Stott (1978:53) argues, though this is less obvious.

15 This call for joy is paralleled in Luke 6:23, also concluding the *macarisms* of the Sermon on the Plain.

Some authors compare the beatitudes in Matthew with the four in Luke 6: 20b-26 and then conclude that Matthew added the others (Betz 1992:105). Scholars such as Lohmeyer (1958:81) have suggested that the beatitudes of Matthew 5:11-12 are redundant. They argue that the evangelist added these verses to total nine, which is the product of 3 x 3,¹⁶ though they do not imply three thematic subdivisions.¹⁷ Numerical arrangements of sayings were common in gnomological literature. Interpretations of the numerical order of the sayings were popular in the early history of the church, but also speculative.

Church Fathers interpreted the beatitudes in terms of Christian Neoplatonism in mysticism. The beatitudes were commonly understood as a mystical ladder¹⁸ arising from the lowest virtue of οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι (5:3) to the highest vision of God (5:8) and “deification” (5:9) (Lioy 2004:122). The path from the first beatitude to the last was associated with the path from repentance to perfection or even the entrance requirements into the Kingdom of God (Luz 1990:230), thus painting a comprehensive picture of Christian life. Though the speculative mystical ladder should be rejected, the idea of ascent is clearly present. While the first line of each beatitude describes the path to paradise, the second line states the rewards for the just.

There is numerical symbolism in the beatitudes, but not in a Platonic sense. It should be considered a literary device as in Jewish wisdom, not a ladder of mystical revelation.

Green (2001:176ff.) examined the relationship between the beatitudes and discovered a complex web of relationships between them.¹⁹ The first beatitude

16 This suggestion has ancient roots according to which the number of the beatitudes is meant to be three times the number of the Trinity. The ancient writer Severianus remarked: Ἰησοῦς δὲ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν δίδωσιν ἑννέα μακαρισμοὺς ἀπὸ τριπλῆς τριάδος τρίπλικον ἐργασάμενονος τῶν μακαρισμῶν τῶν στέφανον (quoted by Allison 2005:175).

17 In Jewish wisdom and Rabbinic literature serial sequences of beatitudes seemingly follow literary methods such as numerical sequence (Betz 1995:102).

18 Gregory of Nyssa viewed the beatitudes as stages in the ascent of the soul. Gregory interpreted the beatitudes as eight steps of the mystical ladder. Following Gregory, Ambrose interpreted them as the stages to reach mystical perfection — a scheme that derived from Neoplatonic mysticism. Augustine combined the beatitudes with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and therefore viewed them as grace and not as virtue. Yet he agreed that they described the ascent of the soul. Thomas of Aquinas also linked the beatitudes to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (Betz 1995:106).

19 The poor in spirit and the meek are variations on the theme of the “*anawim*”. Less directly, those persecuted for righteousness form part of this group. The merciful converses with the poor in spirit and the peacemakers with the meek. The mourners humbling themselves before God express their humility in awareness of their

of the Sermon on the Mount (as in the Sermon on the Plain) heads the list forming the basis. Those that follow develop to reach the ultimate climax in Matthew 5:12. In addition, the same phrase in 3b and 10b (ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) forms an *inclusio* in 5:4-9.²⁰ The second lines of the beatitudes in 5:4-9 state eschatological promises describing successive scenes portraying the destiny of the righteous in heaven. "One may see in these verses a greatly abbreviated apocalyptic vision of the world to come" (Betz 1995: 110). Furthermore the sequence of eight beatitudes is divided into two sections of four, each ending with δικαιοσύνη. After the set of eight descriptive beatitudes, delimited by the *inclusio*, in which the audience is addressed indirectly, the ninth and tenth beatitudes follow as *conclusio* directly addressing the recipients. The climax is reached in 5:12 with the call for joy. The difference between this phrase and the previous beatitudes is that response is demanded from the recipients, thus forming a fitting conclusion to the sequence of beatitudes and a transition to the following theme of being the salt of the earth and light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16).

The two imperatives χαίρετε καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε are more than simple duplication. χαίρω denotes personal joy while ἀγαλλιάομαι denotes the outward demonstration of joy and pride and the exultation experienced in public worship (Beyreuther 1976:352). They describe a sequence, first the inner reaction of joy and then its outward expression of exclamation (Betz 1995:151), thus expressing a growing intensity of joy. "The rejoicing turns to God who now in Jesus Christ has inaugurated the eschatological age of salvation and will gloriously complete it on Christ's return" (Beyreuther 1976:353). This double call appeals to the audience or readers for a liturgical response, such as "Hallelujah" or similar exclamations.

The ὅτι clause of 12b provides the immediate reason for the double call for joy. This clause is parallel to similar clauses in 3b-10b. V. 12b sums up what the previous ὅτι clauses presented in more detail. Although 12b has no verb, it appears that the reward already exists in the present. Read in combination with Matthew 6:20 the reward is stored in the heavens, waiting for the righteous (Betz 1995:152). Since the righteous already have the reward, they can respond with joy and jubilation.

While happiness is usually dependant on outward circumstances, blessedness in the beatitudes speaks of joy despite external afflictions. The joy of the

sinfulness. The fasting conveys the negative aspect of the longing for God. The pure in heart forms the climax of the composition.

20 Within the context of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is clearly portrayed as the King of this Kingdom.

beatitudes refers to an internal joy that becomes external, being far more than mere contentment (Lioy 2004:120). It refers to a paradoxical joy typical of a church living “between the times” (Von Balthasar 2004:344).

V. 12c presents the conclusion to v. 12 as well as to all the previous beatitudes in vv. 3-11. The Jewish ancestors’ persecution of the prophets was used as a *topos* of Jewish theology since Old Testament times and was taken over in early Christian thinking (Betz 1995:153). Thus a historical judgement is made whereby the present persecution is compared with the persecution of the prophets of old. The virtues stated in vv. 3-10 lead to the persecution for the sake of righteousness (vs. 10).

4. THE LIFE-SETTING OF THE BEATITUDES

The reference to persecution becomes clearer when considering the life-setting of the beatitudes. In contrast to Luke, for whom joy and rejoicing are major motifs, Matthew rarely writes about them. This may reflect the antagonistic environment in which the Matthean community functioned. When discussing the *Sitz im Leben* of expressions, one should distinguish three successive life-settings: the setting in the historical ministry of Jesus (*Sitz im Leben Jesu*), the setting in the restricted selection of Jesus’ sayings in the Matthean community (*Sitz im Leben der alten Kirche*), and the setting in the Gospel of Matthew (*Sitz im Leben des Evangeliums*). The later is immediately accessible to us. The consolation of the afflicted during the ministry of Jesus (*Sitz im Leben Jesu*) as well as that of the Matthean community (*Sitz im Leben der alten Kirche*) form the context of the distinctive joy of those who share in the salvation of the Kingdom of God (Lioy 2004:120).

The *Sitz im Leben der alten Kirche* of the beatitudes in Matthew should be interpreted in the context of an apology to accusations of Jews against the Matthean community.²¹ The author of the Gospel formed part of an early Christian congregation and he most probably wrote his Gospel with his congregation in mind (cf. Klijn 1968:45). Koch (1974:36) indicates the similarity of these beatitudes with the Old Testament custom of introducing wisdom literature along with blessings. He therefore views the beatitudes in Matthew 5 as the *Ausgangs-*

21 Van Bruggen (1990:9) strongly opposes such consideration of the *Sitz im Leben* of the community in which the Gospel was written: “Deze nieuwe manier van lezen legt echter een masker over dit evangelie: daardoor wordt het onbelemmerde zicht op dit boek sterk gehinderd”. In my opinion such a stance relates to an unacceptable a-historical reading of the Gospel, and to a negation of the organic role of the author in writing the Gospel.

text of preaching to the congregation as part of their *Predigtgottesdienst*.²² Jeremias (1963:21) regards the *Sitz im Leben der alten Kirche* of the Sermon on the Mount as a διδαχή to the Christian congregation. It has been recognised that the social context of Matthew is closely related to the author's relationship with Judaism (Keener 1999:45; Sim 1998:150). "Suffering on account of" probably refers to the rejection of the Jewish Christians (Matthean community) by the larger Jewish community. A specific form of "blessedness" was appropriate to martyrs who suffered because of righteousness (Keener 1999: 171). Matthew was writing as a Jew who followed Jesus and therefore experienced increasing tension with official Judaism.²³ While the Matthean community initially tried to maintain good relations with the synagogue, the community was heading towards a break with the contemporary Judaism of the synagogue. Matthew reacted to counter Jewish suspicion against their conviction that Jesus was the Messiah (Loader 1997:167). Following Jesus resulted in the alienation between the Matthean community and the synagogue. To be in conflict with the synagogue was not only a religious matter. It meant estrangement from one's people and community.²⁴ Such conflict could be linked to the introduction of the *birkath ha-minim* in 85 C.E.²⁵ (e.g., Burridge 1994:91). The so called *birkath ha-minim* was introduced into the Jewish synagogue liturgy, referring to a phrase in the Eighteen Benedictions which were supposed to be recited three times daily by all Jews:

Let Nazarenes (Christians) and *minim* (heretics) perish in a moment, let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and let them not be written with the righteous (as quoted by France 1998:85).

It is certain that Matthew's Gospel was composed at the time when this Jewish benediction was first formulated. This must have had a significant impact on Jewish-Christian relations (Horbury 1982:19-61). Matthew's community struggled to make sense of this pain and hostility (Viljoen 2006b:259; Wilson 2004:51). The Gospel was meant to provide a context for making sense of the

22 Such an approach places the *Sitz im Leben Jesu* in the background and regards the Sermon on the Mount mostly as *Gemeindebildung*. While the *Sitz im Leben der alten Kirche* opens a second level of interpretation, it is still liable to regard Jesus as the origin of the beatitudes.

23 This *Sitz im Leben* cannot be fixed to specific date. It should rather be regarded as a specific historical period.

24 Matthew uses the phrase "their synagogue" five times (4:23, 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54) and "your synagogue" once (23:34) to underline the distance between Jesus and the synagogue community (Carter 2000:31).

25 Though the formulation of the *birkath ha-minim* was not finalised when the Matthean Gospel was written, the tension between the synagogue and the Matthean community was obviously a reality at that time.

past and as a direction to shape the presence and the future of the community on the margins of the rest of the Jewish community (Carter 2000:33). The typical *Sitz im Leben der alten Kirche* of the beatitudes can therefore be regarded as an eschatological salvation *kerygma*.

5. FUNCTION OF THE DOUBLE CALL FOR JOY

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew’s) Jesus focused on the nature of the Kingdom of heaven. He taught how a citizen of this Kingdom was supposed to act in the present (Lioy 2004:117; Van der Walt 2006:186). The beatitudes contain commands and thus introduce the moral instruction that is to follow in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount (Luz 1990:215). The beatitudes imply that when followers of Jesus adhere to the moral law as he teaches it, their lives will be filled with joy, purpose and eternal hope. Jesus describes the unique spiritual joy that belongs to the righteous. Preachers and teachers tend to emphasise the “spiritual” meaning of the beatitudes at the expense of the literal intention of these opening proclamations of Jesus’ teaching or the reign of God. The beatitudes are intended as radical challenge to the contemporary religious-political situation (Domeris 1990:67).²⁶

When viewing this beatitude in the historical context of the audience, it becomes clear that (Matthew’s) Jesus also instils hope in the difficult present. Before delivering the imperatives, Jesus first encourages the faithful (Van der Walt 2006:186). Jesus takes up the ethics of non-retaliation (Matt. 5:38-47) to its ultimate. He expects his disciples not only to refuse striking back, but also to rejoice when being persecuted (Keener 1999:171). Such a joy confirms one’s trust in God’s promises of rewards. Jesus summons his disciples to bear suffering for the sake of his name and assures them of the ultimate honour of being part of the Kingdom of heaven. “On the one hand the beatitude is used on the basis of the suffering the addressed person has to endure as a result of ‘enemies’, and on the other it is used in terms of a correct ethical life” (Van Aarde 1994:175).

The set of beatitudes provides a summary of the gospel. Although the Sermon on the Mount does not use the term *εὐαγγέλιον* the blessings and the call for joy of the beatitudes in combination with the entitlements²⁷ provide a description of the gospel (Betz 1995:151). According to Jeremias, the Sermon on the Mount was used as “an early Christian catechism” (1963:24) which

26 Domeris discusses what he calls “upside-down” standards that apply to the Reign of God in contrast to the views of the Sadducees and Pharisees who assumed a repetition of the current social hierarchy in heaven. “The kingdom belongs primarily to those who lack power and prestige” (Domeris 1990:72).

describes the “lived faith” and indicates that “the gift of God precedes his demands” (1963:32).

The double call for joy functions as a transition between the preceding beatitudes and the following theme of being salt and light. While the beatitudes describe the character of the disciples, the metaphors of salt and light describe their influence in the world. By living out the entitlements of the beatitudes, the followers of Jesus will become τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς (salt of the earth) (Matt. 5:13) and τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου (light of the world) (Matt. 5:14). It appears that Matthew draws a direct link between the beatitudes and the blessed ones’ responsibility to witness to the world.

Door aan de eisen daarvan (of the beatitudes) te beantwoorden laat men zijn licht schijnen voor de mensen en gaan zij de hemelse Vader glorie geven (5,16) ... Zij leren ons hoe wij als zout van de aarde niet smakeloos worden en hoe wij ons licht laten schijnen voor de mensen²⁸ (Van Bruggen 1990:85).

The Matthean community’s decision to carry the proclamation of Jesus to the Gentiles caused much tension with the synagogue which tried to maintain Jewish exclusivity (Repschinski 2000:27). Luz (1990:84) proposes that Matthew elected himself as advocate to defend his community’s decision for the Gentile mission.

Matthew draws a parallel between Jesus and Moses as mediators and interpreters of God’s law.²⁹ Jesus demands fulfilment of the law (Matt. 5:17) and righteousness more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). The Sermon on the Mount refers to a “heart-righteousness” (Stott 1978:36; Viljoen 2006a:152) which can be summarised in terms of the epithets of the blessed ones. The promises of blessing should not be understood as making the requirements of living a righteous life unnecessary (Lambrecht 1983:11). “De belofte ... wordt verbonden aan een eigenschap of deugd die men moet tonen in dit leven” (Van Bruggen 1990:85). The difference between the “right” and the “wrong” interpretation of the law is summed up when Jesus, in reaction to Pharisaic objections, refers to the text from Hosea (which is found only in Matthew’s gospel): “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Matt 9:13 and 12:7), a text

27 The entitlement of the blessed ones clearly and significantly echoes the life and attitude of Jesus on earth. Followers of Jesus should demonstrate similar attitudes to those of Jesus.

28 Na de aanwijzingen van de zaligsprekingen is het wel duidelijk wanneer het zout smakeloos en dwaas is geworden: wanneer het volk niet ‘bedelend van geest, rouwdragend, zachtmoedig, enz.’ zijn (Van Bruggen 1990:90).

29 The mere reference to the mountain is significant for the Jewish reader, who would immediately think of Mount Sinai and the revelation of God’s law.

the Pharisees apparently failed to understand (Meier 1979:84). The proper understanding of the law is demonstrated not by limiting the demands of the law, but by applying them correctly.

The Law is to be used in order to establish one's vocation, to discover what one should do in specific circumstances so as to fulfill God's will, that is mercy (Patte 1987:168).

6. CONCLUSION

It is clear that the double call for joy, "Rejoice and be glad", functions as an interpretation, climax and conclusion of the preceding beatitudes, but also as a transition to the following theme of being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. (Matthew's) Jesus uses a typical *Gattung* of *macarisms* which developed from ancient literature, and which relates specifically to their use in Jewish literature. These *macarisms* referred to prophesied eschatological salvation which would instil joy to righteous people under current hostile circumstances. The climax in the sequence of *macarisms* is found in the double call for joy which can be regarded as the tenth *macarism*, though in an elaborated form, thus interpreting the meaning and implications of the preceding *macarisms*. The divergence in structure of this elaborated *macarism* forms a fitting conclusion to the preceding ones. By living out the implications of the *macarisms*, righteous people become living witnesses of the Kingdom of the heavens as light that shines in the world and salt that gives taste to the earth and prevents infection.

The *macarisms* make a strong appeal to their readers. Many thousands of humble sufferers have risen above their troubles and sufferings by remembering the beatitudes of Matthew. They function as a practical theodicy. Although they do not explain the evil or the human suffering, they do put the difficulties of the present in perspective. There should be joy and jubilation in the community amid and beyond suffering. The reason for this joy is the expectation of the reversal of (current) circumstances that are hostile towards those who belong to the Kingdom of the heavens. Such exhibition of joy in hardship is distinctive of Christianity. The beatitudes challenge Christian readers to take seriously the relation between the promise of the Kingdom of heavens and an actively lived Christian life. The double call for joy (Matt. 5:12) is a demand in which not an internal religious experience, but the life of Christians who practise their faith among other people is blessed.

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