

FORUM

THOMPSON'S MODES OF OPERATION OF
 IDEOLOGY AND DEPTH HERMENEUTICS AS
 HERMENEUTICAL TOOLS: IDEOLOGY AND
 THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT
 (MATTHEW 4:23-7:29)

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ABSTRACT

This article will first provide a synopsis of Thompson's understanding of ideology and then apply it to two selected verses (Mt. 5:3 & 4) from the Sermon on the Mount. An attempt will be made to reveal the existence of an ideology in the text, determine its symbolic form and construction, and confirm the suitability of Thompson's modes of operation of ideology and depth hermeneutics as tools of interpretation to be applied to the text. This methodology will disclose how one could control the masses with an ideology that claimed to benefit them; how the text can be presenting an opposing ideology to the prevailing ideologies and finally show that the text also reveals an asymmetrical relation of power and dominion between God and the hearers of the text that ultimately will benefit them. Reading the text in its particular social-historical setting this article will endeavour to disclose and draw attention to symbolic phenomena that serve and sustain relations (domination being one aspect of this association) between God and his people who are the oppressed and persecuted.

1. INTRODUCTION

Christianity is a religion where values are demanding to be actualised and thus I believe that the Sermon on the Mount can be seen as an ideological intervention in the context of an existing social practice. According to Thompson's² definition of ideology every ideology has a binary structure. There exists an element of recognition and one of non-recognition. The truth is revealed and hidden at the same time. There exists a relation within a relation.

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This article will first provide a synopsis of Thompson's understanding of ideology and then apply it to two selected verses (Mt. 5:3 & 4) from the Sermon on the Mount. The argument is not that the selected text reflects an asymmetrical relation in power in a negative or positive manner or understanding. Rather, this article will attempt to reveal the existence of an ideology in the text, determine its symbolic form and construction, and confirm the suitability of Thompson's modes of operation of ideology and depth hermeneutics as tools of interpretation to be applied to the text. What is more accurate to claim is that the text is a reaction or inducement or alternative ideology to established ideologies that reflect established relations of power that are ordered and regulated asymmetrically in Biblical New Testament times. Institutions, organisations, and groups of agents were endowed with power in a durable way that excluded, and to a significant degree remained inaccessible to other individuals or groupings.

I will argue from different perspectives. Sometimes I might use the text in a "Marxist fashion" i.e. showing how one could control the masses with an ideology that claimed to benefit them. Marx experienced ideology and specifically Christianity as a system of representations that served to sustain existing class relations of domination. This was done by the orientation of individuals towards the past rather than the future, or towards ideals that conceal class relations and detract from the collective pursuit of equitable social change. Other times I will show how the text becomes an opposing ideology to the prevailing ideologies. And, then I hope to show that the text also reveals an asymmetrical relation of power and dominion between God and the hearers of the text that ultimately will benefit them.

2. A SYNOPSIS OF THOMPSON'S ASSYMETRICAL RELATIONSHIPS OF POWER AND DOMINATION

Thompson (1990:53) distinguishes between two general types of conception of ideology. This distinction enables him to classify the various conceptions of ideology into two basic categories and serves as a springboard for the development of an alternative view. One general type is what he calls "neutral conceptions of ideology":

Neutral conceptions are those which purport to characterise phenomena as ideology or ideological without implying that these phenomena are necessarily misleading, illusory or aligned with the interests of any particular group. Ideology, according to the neutral conceptions, is one aspect of social life (or form of social inquiry)

among others, and is no more nor any less attractive or problematic than any other.

We can distinguish neutral conceptions of ideology from a second general type, which Thompson describes as "critical conceptions of ideology" (1990: 53). Critical conceptions are those which convey a negative, critical or irreverent sense. He argues that the concept of ideology can be used to refer to the ways in which meaning serves, in particular circumstances, to establish and sustain relations of power which are systematically asymmetrical — "relations of domination" (1990:7). I will provide a brief summary of his perspective.

Ideology, broadly speaking, is meaning in the service of power. The study of ideology obligates one to examine the ways in which meaning is fabricated and transferred by symbolic forms of various kinds, from everyday linguistic utterances to complex images and texts. It is important to investigate the social contexts within which symbolic forms are employed and deployed; and to ask whether, and if so how the meaning mobilised by symbolic forms serves, in specific contexts, to establish and sustain relations of domination. The nature and distinctiveness of the study of ideology lies in the latter question. Does the meaning constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms serve, or does not serve, to maintain systematically asymmetrical relations of power? It is important to study symbolic forms "*in a certain light*": in the light of the structured social relations that their deployment may serve, in specific circumstances, to create, nourish, support and reproduce.

By reformulating the concept of ideology in this way the analysis of ideology is brought into a domain of conceptual and methodological issues, which is of more general scope and significance. Thompson says that the analysis of ideology can be regarded as an integral part of a broader concern with the characteristics of action and interaction, the forms of power and dominion, the nature of social structure, social reproduction and social change, the features of symbolic forms and their roles in social life (1990:7).

Thompson says: "To study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination" (1990:56). To study ideology is to study or analyse the relationship between symbolic forms of society and relations of power. An ideology is the way meaning is mobilised in the social world and supports and sustains those in positions of power. This takes place in particular social-historical circumstances and thus to determine whether symbolic phenomena serve to establish and sustain relations of domination it is essential to examine the ways in which symbolic forms are employed, circulated, and understood by individuals

situated in structured social-historical contexts (the interplay of meaning and power in particular circumstances) (1990:56).

The meaning of symbolic forms (a broad range of utterances, actions, images, texts, etc.) is always embedded in socially structured contexts and processes. In studying the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination, the meaning with which one is concerned is the meaning of symbolic forms that are embedded in social contexts and circulating in the social world. By “symbolic forms” one must understand a broad range of actions and utterances, images and texts, which are produced by subjects and recognised by them and others as meaningful constructs. Linguistic utterances and expressions, whether spoken or inscribed, are crucial in this regard, but symbolic forms can also be non-linguistic or quasi-linguistic in nature (e.g. a visual image, or a construct that combines images and words). Thompson says:

The social location of individuals, and the entitlements associated with their positions in a social field or institution, endow them with varying degrees of “power”, understood at this level as a socially or institutionally endowed capacity which enables or empowers some individuals to make decisions, pursue ends or realise interests. We can speak of “domination” when established relations of power are “systematically asymmetrical”, that is, when particular agents or groups of agents are endowed with power in a durable way which excludes, and to some significant degree remains inaccessible to; other agents or groups of agents, irrespective of the basis upon which such exclusion is carried out (1990:59).

There are many ways in which meaning may serve, in particular social-historical conditions, to maintain relations of domination, and thus it is essential to attend carefully to the interplay of meaning and power in the actual circumstances of social life.

2.1 Thompson’s modes of operation of ideology

Thompson (1990:60) distinguishes five general modes through which ideology can operate: “legitimation”, “dissimulation”, “unification”, “fragmentation” and “reification”. Table I indicates some of the ways in which these modes can be linked with various strategies of symbolic construction. He does not claim that these five modes are the only ways in which ideology operates, or that they always operate independently of one another. These modes may overlap and reinforce one another, and ideology may, in particular circumstances, operate in other ways. When he associates certain modes of operation with certain strategies of symbolic construction, he does not maintain that these strategies are uniquely associated with these modes, or

that the strategies mentioned are the only relevant ones. What he says is that certain strategies are typically associated with certain modes.

Table 1

<i>General modes</i>	<i>Typical strategies of symbolic construction</i>
Legitimation	Rationalisation Universalisation, Narrativisation
Dissimulation	Displacement Euphemisation Trope (e.g. synecdoche, metonymy, metaphor)
Unification	Standardisation, Symbolisation of unity
Fragmentation	Differentiation Expurgation of the other
Reification	Naturalisation, Externalisation Nominalisation/passivisation

2.1.1 Legitimation

Relations of dominion may be established and sustained by being represented as legitimate, just, and worthy of support. The representation of relations of domination as legitimate may be regarded as a claim to legitimacy that is based on certain grounds, expressed in certain symbolic forms and which may, in given circumstances, be more or less effective. Legitimacy may be based on rational grounds (appealing to the legality of enacted rules), traditional grounds (appealing to the sanctity of immemorial traditions) and charismatic grounds (appealing to the exceptional character of an individual person who exercises authority). Claims based on such grounds may be expressed in symbolic forms by means of certain typical strategies of symbolic construction.

Rationalisation is one typical strategy, whereby the producer of a symbolic form constructs a chain of reasoning which seeks to defend or justify a set of social relations or institutions, and thereby to persuade an audience that it is worthy of support.

Universalisation is another typical strategy. By means of this strategy, institutional arrangements which serve the interests of some individuals are represented as serving the interests of all, and these arrangements are regarded as being open in principle to anyone who has the ability and the inclination to succeed within them. Claims to legitimacy may also be expressed by means of the strategy of narrativisation: claims are embedded in

stories that recount the past and treat the present as part of a timeless and cherished tradition. Indeed traditions are sometimes invented in order to create a sense of belonging to a community.

2.1.2 Dissimulation

Relations of domination may be established and sustained by being concealed, denied or obscured, or by being represented in a way which deflects attention from or glosses over existing relations or processes. Ideological dissimulation may be expressed in symbolic forms by means of a variety of different strategies. One such strategy is:

Displacement: a term used to refer to one object or individual is now used to refer to another; thereby the positive or negative connotations of the term are transferred to the other object or individual.

Euphemisation: actions, institutions or social relations are described or re-described in terms that evoke a positive valuation. Examples of this process are: the violent suppression of protest is described as the restoration of order"; a concentration camp is described as a "rehabilitation centre"; institutionalised inequalities based on ethnic divisions are described as "separate development"; foreign labourers deprived of citizenship rights are described as "guest workers".

Trope: the figurative use of language or symbolic forms. *Synecdoche* is using a term standing for a part of something in order to refer to the whole or *vice versa*. One can dissimulate social relations by confusing or inverting the social relations between for example particular groups and broader social and/or political groups (the "Irish" can refer to a government or a rugby team). *Metonymy* is the substitution of an attribute or other suggestive word for the name of the thing meant. Here the referent is implied without always being explicitly stated. *Metaphor* is the application of a term or action to an action or object that is not literally applicable. An example of "the iron lady" referring to Mrs. Thatcher, endows her with characteristics she does not literally possess.

2.1.3 Unification

Relations of domination or maintained by constructing at the symbolic level a form of unity that unites individuals in a collective identity despite differences that separate them.

Standardisation: In South Africa using English as standardised national language creates collective identity.

Symbolisation of unity are flags, anthems, etc. Narratives often accompany symbols to unite a group.

2.1.4 Fragmentation

Fragmenting/dividing is done to groups or individuals that can threaten dominant groups.

Differentiation: an emphasis on the characteristics (distinctions, differences) that disunite.

Expurgation of the other: the construction of an enemy portrayed as evil and harmful and individuals are called on to unite and resist (e.g. Hitler calls upon people to resist the Jews).

2.1.5 Reification

This is done by representing a transitory, historical state of affairs as if it were permanent and natural state of affairs (outside time). This involves the suppression, elimination, or obfuscation of social and historical nature of any event or process.

Naturalisation: The socially instituted division of labour between men and women is represented as a natural event, the inevitable outcome of natural characteristics (physiological differences in sexes).

Externalisation: customs and traditions that are norms for all times; they are unchanging due to their a-historical nature.

Nominalisation and *passivisation*: grammatical and syntactic devices. Nominalisation occurs when descriptions of actions and the persons involved in them, parts of sentences or sentences, are turned into nouns. For example, "The King has decided to ban imports" becomes "the banning of imports". Passivisation occurs when verbs are rendered in the passive form. For example, instead of saying "The police are investigating the suspect" we say "The suspect is being investigated". In these two processes the attention of the hearer or reader is focused on certain themes at the expense of others. They try to delete actors and agency and represent processes as things or events that take place in the absence of a subject who produces them.

3. THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

There are clear systematic asymmetrical relations of power and domination in the Biblical New Testament times. Individuals and groups had exclusive power in a durable way that excluded others. This article will attempt to

briefly investigate and highlight the various ways meaning is constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms in the specific social-historical context of the readers of the text examined. Then, I will show how symbolic forms mobilised meaning to establish, support and sustain relations of dominance.

Thompson has a depth hermeneutic as a process comprising of three phases as his framework of a methodology of interpretation. It can be called an interpretation of an interpretation. It comprises:

- Firstly, an analysis of the social-historical conditions of the production, circulation and reception of symbolic forms. This provides a broad framework.
- Then there is a discursive analysis that reveals the construction of symbolic forms and the modes and meanings of the language used and claimed. (This was highlighted earlier.)
- Finally there is an interpretation or re-interpretation and criticism — this reveals intentions.

In this article I will be applying this method of depth hermeneutics - albeit not always in a systematic fashion or the depth required due to the length of this article. I want to highlight the meaning, production, and the transmitting of symbolic forms. To do this I will look at the internal structure of the two verses and note how they were heard and received. There are inherent meanings in Matthew's writing (i.e. his intention) and this with active interpretation of the original hearer and me as the modern reader will highlight the process of appropriation of meaning.

In the Sermon on the Mount one has to define which and whose interests are taken into account in any given text. The text itself leaves this question open and I am of the opinion that the author Matthew is protecting the interests of the poorest section of the population. Why do I say this? Well it seems obvious from Thompson's definition that ideology has a material existence. Practices are tied to rituals within the material existence of ideological apparatus. All human beings are associated to or dissociated from a variety of institutions. In them people find their identity because they (the institutions) create people's subjectivity. The material existence of ideologies (institutions functioning with and through an ideology) does not always articulate the intended interests of the ideology directly but indirectly in an "imaginary" relation to the productive relationships.

In the ancient society of Biblical New Testament times the ideological apparatus consisted of the religion of the Jews — the Temple organisation, Pharisees, Sadducees, the *beth midrashim* and the Torah. There were various

professional organisations, the occupying Romans, and various religious influences and festivities. People of this time were bonded in a variety of ways.

The text of the Sermon on the Mount gets its meaning against this backdrop of existing organisations and varied ideologies. In a very real way the Sermon on the Mount is a text that is in conflict with these organisations and ideologies. The ruling ideology is the ideology of the ruling class in a society where the class distinctions are based on oppression and domination. The ideology of the oppressed is not absent but has fewer possibilities to find full development and expression without the necessary political, social, and economical support.

The whole of Jesus' history is set against the background of Israel's liberation in which the exodus, the exile and the messianic liberation by David's son are used as "Leitmotiv" in order to overcome the evil of the experienced violence. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" and "Blessed are those who mourn because they will be comforted" are the words which Matthew makes Jesus say in his first major address. And all initial events of Jesus' life are brought together. Israel's mothers and fathers were left inconsolable, but now that is over and done with. That their lamentations have been heard by God is the content of Jesus' words, making them part of the long series of people who have been victimised by the brute force of the powerful throughout the history of Israel. Jesus is, for Matthew, someone who knows whereof he speaks, because he stands with them as a fugitive and exile himself. All his life Jesus experienced the misery of brutal force in his own person and his own family.

Via the Jesus-movement people got a voice which otherwise would have remained unheard. The text of the Sermon on the Mount is part of this. Its opposition to the ruling ideology comes through most forcefully. Certain categories of Thompson's strategies of symbolic construction can easily be applied to the text, namely "legitimation", "dissimulation", "unification", "fragmentation" and "reification":

- in the text dealing with persecution and oppression.
- in the abuses that characterise the opponents: that they are hypocrites, pagans, publicans and false prophets.
- in the metaphorical comparisons, which have negative overtones: the evil eye, the dog, the swine, the wolves, the bramble bushes and thistles, the house-built on sand.
- in the way position is taken in the legal texts:

Your justice must be greater than that of the Pharisees and the scribes; you have heard how it was said to your forefathers ... but I say to you; do not practise justice to obtain a reward; go away from me, breakers of the Law.

An opposing ideology can prove itself only if its opposition is expressed in the context of the ruling ideology. The latter's self-evidence is the constant point of friction, and this has its influence. New rituals, practices and organisations are grafted onto existing forms and are in opposition to them:

- the new Law is based on the traditional Law and does not want to abolish it;
- the new forms of charity, praying and fasting are connected to the existing practices;
- the new economic order reacts to the economic structures of ancient times where the reality of hoarding, land possession and trade are rational from an ideological point of view;
- the new relationships of power connect with the old.

4. APPLICATION OF THOMPSON'S MODES OF OPERATION OF IDEOLOGY TO MATTHEW 5:3 & 4

The ideology of the Sermon on the Mount resists the ruling ideology by trying to create the assumptions that will make new productive relations possible (in a different social organisation). To determine whether a given strategy of symbolic construction is ideological depends on how the symbolic form constructed by means of this strategy is used and understood in particular circumstances and social/historical context. It depends on whether the symbolic form so constructed is serving, in these circumstances, to sustain or subvert, to establish or undermine, relations of domination.

Examining typical strategies of symbolic construction can alert us to some of the ways in which meaning may be mobilised in the social world. It can also circumscribe a range of possibilities for the operation of ideology, but it cannot take the place of a careful analysis of the ways in which symbolic forms intersect with relations of domination in particular, concrete circumstances.

4.1 Immediate context: dealing with persecution and oppression

Matthew 5:3-5:16 (NIV translation)

³Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,

⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.

¹¹Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

4.1.1 Verse 3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”

“Blessed” could be called a *euphemism* — to invoke a positive evaluation of one's circumstances. It is a characteristic of the poor in spirit and could also thus be a *differentiation*.

“Poor in spirit” is a condition rather than an attitude. Thus, they are people who find themselves waiting, empty handed, upon God for their hope and deliverance whilst they are abused and rejected by their social and religious context. The Old Testament concept of poor included a dual reference to socio-economic conditions and the religious dimension of resultant dependency upon God for help and vindication. In this text the poor refers to the social and religious outcasts. The modern dynamic equivalent would probably be the “desperate and anxious”, standing without pretence before God, stripped of all self-sufficiency and security.

The term “poor in spirit” is *displacement* — the transfer of positive or negative connotations of a term to another term, group of people or person. Here we can see the suffering people being given a collective title that has been imbued with a positive meaning. They are blessed.

In a real sense it is also *euphemisation* as social relations are described in terms which provoke a positive valuation. There is also *trope* — the figurative use of language as the term “poor” refers to the condition of the peo-

ple. Here we can see *metonymy* as “poor” is a suggestive word for the condition, and, *metaphor* in that not all are poor in the economical sense.

I think that one could also claim that there is *fragmentation* in that there is *differentiation* regarding the distinctions and differences that unite the “poor” and disunite them from others. “Poor in spirit” can also mean poor in economic terms and thus it would be a *euphemism*.

“The kingdom of heaven” is a *metaphor* for the term “kingdom of God” as used in the rest of the New Testament. The term “kingdom” is an Old Testament term equivalent for the realm of God’s sovereign rule over all creation. Thus, “kingdom” is also a *metaphor* for the dynamic aspect of God’s sovereignty. In both these points there will then also be *displacement* in moving from “rule or sovereignty of God” to “kingdom”.

Reification is also present in the term as one could argue that there is a suppression of the social and historical state of affairs and a spiritualising of the issue. Naturally, I think that this whole phrase can be *legitimation* as by *rationalisation* and *universalisation* one justifies a set of social relations. (Both in the Christian and Marxist interpretation.)

In terms of the whole phrase I note what I will call a *metaphoric narrative* in that this phrase informs and warns. It tells a truth of life (at least from the Christian perspective). There is *eternalisation* as this is presented as an eternal a-historical truth. It is not a geographical kingdom. It is a quality of person (the kingly power over against the power of the oppressor). God’s kingly power is possessed by those who have no say and who, even in their very spirit, are unwilling to look for human power. The first position has been taken. The area of the highest and definitive power is taken on from a position of oppression and of powerlessness. This works both ways: the weak are made strong, but also the kingly power of God can only be known in such a humiliating position. It is a support for the numberless millions who cry for justice. It can also serve as a warning and critique on the moment a position of power is taken.

4.1.2 Verse 4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”

Every culture has its own mourning rituals. In the Middle East we find the large gesture, the loud lamentations, torn clothing, ashes on the head. In the context of the text being evaluated as an ideological statement “mourning” can be seen as a *euphemism* for the sense of helplessness and loss. The original reader would have a grief at the disenfranchisement experienced in their community and contrition that results from the recognition of Israel’s

sin and failure before God. Thus, to mourn is a *euphemism* for remorse and grief over ones loss.

It appears that those who mourn are stripped of any recourse and are then totally dependent on God for better or worse. In this we also see *unification* in that those who mourn are united in a collective identity.

“They will be comforted” is an announcement of divine intervention. It is a *rationalisation* — a reasoning that justifies the mourning as a worthy process as the results are that they will be vindicated in the end. In its social/historical context this verse makes a claim that is based on the broader history of Israel — the tradition that God is faithful and the hearers of this phrase will be comforted if they mourn. I feel that the author has used a strategy of *narrativisation*. Divine intervention will remove the cause of mourning. This refers to the story of the coming of the Messiah and the messianic age predicted in the Old Testament.

Whilst mourning generally refers to grief there is a mode of *trope* visible as the term can and does also mean remorse, repentance, return to obedience and faith in God. This means *synecdoche* is used as mourning stands for all that relationship and fellowship with God requires.

One can note the strategy of *reification* through *naturalisation* and *eternalisation*. Mourning betrays our lack of control, our insufficiency, vulnerability and dependence on God. The only hope lies beyond our own capacities. The term “comfort” is a *euphemism* for the restoration that only God can bring. The natural and inevitable outcome of sin is separation from God, resulting in disenfranchisement and oppression. However, if the people repent (mourn), the guarantee offered is that they will be restored (comforted).

5. EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

In the introduction I stated my objective for this article. I wanted to attempt to reveal the existence of an ideology in the text, determine its symbolic form and construction, and confirm the suitability of Thompson's modes of operation of ideology and depth hermeneutics as tools of interpretation to be applied to the text. Now, I can state that I am satisfied with a conclusion that affirms that my objectives have been met.

These two verses give a different interpretation to the current acceptable interpretation of symbolic forms when we apply the version of Thompson's depth hermeneutics as an analysis of ideology.

As was noted, “the poor in spirit” and “those who mourn” breathe the social/historical reality in Biblical times of the relationship between those

in power and the oppressed powerless. Even a superficial study of New Testament history reveals the brute force and violence of the political and religious rulers experienced by the people of the land. Most of the original hearers of the Sermon on the Mount would have been victims of the oppression and violence of the existing power structure.

For Matthew, Christian and Jew will find each other again in death, in striving for justice. The consolation Matthew gives his readers can be seen in the one sentence Jesus speaks: "Who perseveres till the end, will be saved" (Mt. 10:24 & 22:13). These people will have been touched most deeply by Jesus' sayings. The lack of justice is experienced more strongly when superior force is more manifestly present.

In the conclusions of the text of the two verses examined, a promise is given of a consolation yet to come. We should not understand this in a meek sense. The use of the passive is a hidden indication of God. He guarantees the consolation. He will right the balance of injustice. He will restore all that has been lost through the violence of the oppressive power of the rulers. The eschatological perspective is clearly present in these promises — the actual persecution for the sake of Jesus' name and God's justice. When the Son of Man comes, the elect will be gathered and the just will shine like the sun in the Father's dominion (Mt 13:43 & 24:31).

Thompson's concept of ideology can be used to refer to the ways in which meaning serves, in particular circumstances, to establish and sustain relations of power which are systematically asymmetrical — "relations of domination".

In this article I have attempted to apply his five modes through which ideology can operate to reveal how Matthew has revealed an alternative ideology for his readers that will eventually overthrow the ruling ideologies. In the two texts used to affirm my position on the ideological nature of the Sermon on the Mount I have briefly shown that that one can argue Thompson's position that ideology is meaning in the service of power. Meaning is manufactured and communicated in various kinds of symbolic forms in a social/historical context.

The two verses evaluated reveal the relationship between symbolic forms of a society (the oppressed Jews) and relations of power (the rulers of the land and God's claim on the people).

In one sense it is possible to argue that the Sermon on the Mount is promoting the ideology of God and that it serves to establish and sustain a relation of His dominion over the people. I would argue this and furthermore claim that in terms of the understanding of Thompson's definition of

ideology as asymmetrical relationships of power and domination the Bible presents a case study of this.

As a Christian with a high view on the grace, mercy and love of God, and a belief in the revelation validity and value of Scripture, I would propose that the asymmetrical relationship of dominion and power between God and people is in the interest of people. This is all naturally based on the assumption and belief that God exists as I understand the Bible to reveal. The two verses evaluated with Thompson's modes of ideology reveal a God of omnipotence who has ultimately all the power and whose justice is perfect.

This article does not evaluate the claim that the ideology presented in the text examined is superior or more beneficial to the readers. To do this I need to ask questions on the alternative kinds of justice being practised and that are available. Different interpretations and applications of justice will create different conflicts. A superficial study of history will reveal that whenever the Church became the dominant power (the authority of the day) she herself often became the oppressor. Reading the text in its particular social-historical setting I have attempted to reveal and highlight symbolic phenomena that serve and sustain relations of domination between God and his people who are the oppressed and persecuted.

I have also noted that one can read a counter ideology to the ideology of the rulers of the day. One could equally argue that Matthew developed a counter ideology to the repressive ideologies of the day. Whatever conclusion one reaches it is my opinion that Thompson's "modes of ideology" methodology in doing analysis proves most helpful in evaluating the texts. It helps reveal the ways in which representative forms are engaged, distributed, and understood by people and communities who are situated in structured historical and social contexts.

Keywords

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