RESONANCE AND RECEPTION:

Interpreting Mt 17:24-27 in context *

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Abstract

This paper comprises two sections.

The first is a literary-theoretical discussion of the concept resonance in terms of the narratological notion 'frequency', and the reception-ethical concept 'vacancy'.

In the second part it is shown how the discourse about Jesus' paying of the Temple tax resounds not only with other temple pericopes in Matthew's narrative, but also with extra-textual artifacts.

> A text can only be understood if it is compared extensively with the culture, or more precisely with the behavior of the people contemporary with it; and their behavior can likewise only be made sense of if it is juxtaposed with a large number of texts.
>
> (Lotman and Uspenski, in Danow 1987:352).

An interesting feature is perceivable in modern semeio-structurally oriented exegesis as it emerges in the work of many scholars. This is the recognition of the indispensable role that the historical context plays in the interpretation of texts. Theoretical and hypothetical obstacles in this regard, however, tend to prevent Biblical scholars from taking proper cognisance of the historical context.

Another aspect which appears in more than one semeio-structural approach, is the way in which resonance in texts contributes to the sense-making activity of readers; the phenomenon of resonance is, however, referred to by different names.

The aim of this paper is to bring together these two aspects - namely, resonance and context - in order to find a proper, methodical and simple means of escaping the web of structuralism. Mt 17:24-27, the only passage which records Peter's payment of the Temple tax on behalf of Jesus and himself, serves as a case study. In particular, the comments of Daniel Patte on this passage are discussed to illustrate how scholars are becoming increasingly aware of resonance as well as the role that context fulfils in the communication process. The scholars' unwillingness, however, to bring these two aspects together can also be seen in Platte's analysis of Mt 17:24-27.

This paper comprises two sections. The first is a literary-theoretical discussion of the concept of resonance (Lyons) or redundancy (Suleiman) or echo effect (Tannehill), in terms of frequency (Genette) as a narrative technique. Resonance is further explored with reference to Wolfgang Iser's 'reception-aesthetical' concept *Leerstelle*: 'blanks', 'vacancies' or 'negations'. The second part of the paper will show how the passage about Jesus' payment of the Temple tax in Mt 17:24-27 resounds not only with other temple-pericopes in Matthew's narrative, but also with other 'texts'. The inference drawn from this resonance is that Mt 17:24-27 should be interpreted in the context of the clash between the church and the synagogue. Tensions awakened by the clash form the background 'knowledge' of the reader in the Matthean community. From this perspective, the reader is submitted to the viewpoint of the writer of the Gospel of Matthew.

Resonance and reception

The act of reading a narrative discourse is a sense-making activity, consisting of the organisation of a story's speech activities. But narrative exegesis need not disregard a text's extratextual world. Texts are in some way or another the products of real flesh-and-blood writers, and are intended to be read or listened to by real flesh-and-blood readers and/or listeners. A writer communicates with the reader/listener by making an appeal to ideas and ideals that he/she expects the reader to share.

The text's system of codes is expected to agree largely with that of its reader/listener, otherwise effective communication could not take place.

Every text, therefore, reflects the 'culture' from which it has been written. 'Culture' can be seen as the mechanism generating texts. No single text, however, accurately mirrors the specific 'culture' in its entirety. As a meaningful fragment, it reflects the greater content of which it is a part, in an imagined form. In a certain way 'culture' ought to be seen as an indirect rather than the direct mechanism behind the generation of texts. It is people who are directly responsible for the production of texts.

In the process of communication between writer and the reader there are consequently intratextual and extratextual components. There are directive and non-directive guidelines from an implied author to an implied reader, enabling communication between the extratextual writer and reader to take place. And, in the communication process, there is that aspect that depends on a knowledge of other

texts, of social and cultural codes, and of the socio-cultural context of both the extra-textual writer and the extra-textual reader.

The construction of the context of a specific text never occurs without the text itself being read. Where the writer does not explicitly indicate a reader/listener (as in the case of the Gospel of Matthew, or as in the case of the Luke-Acts, where the writer names Theophilus as the intended reader and says nothing more regarding Theophilus' context), the construction of the text's context is much more of a problem. In the case of such texts, the exegete acquires more substantial material by focusing on aspects from other 'texts'.

Other 'texts' could be other fragments in the co-text that have occurred previously or will occur later on. They could also be references to pre-texts, for example quotations from and allusions to other texts, or the use of sources. Seen thus, each text is part of a constellation of texts. Every text presupposes an earlier one. Besides the other fragments in the co-text and the reference to pre-texts, intertextuality involves any human situation which, as a result of the essential denotative function of language, encroaches upon a text (cf van Tilborg 1987). The notion 'extra-textuality' seems to fall away. The maxim of Jacques Derrida (1977:163) in this regard is particularly well-known: 'there is nothing outside the text'.

The narrative act is one of the most natural means of illustrating something in the lives of people of a certain time and place. From this viewpoint Juri Lotman (in Danow 1987:355-356) sees a tangency between the 'plot' as the determining factor in the structuring of narrations, and the 'need to choose a behavior strategy in extra-literary activity'. What Lotman is attempting to say here is that what is largely an unstructured and seemingly unfulfilled aspect of human existence - namely the need to arrange life according to defined principles - finds concrete expression in the generation of texts, and in narrative discourse in particular.

A text cannot be a narrative if the events it deals with do not constitute a linear, chronological series forming a story. Only when the events, 'imaginatively' selected from the lives of people of a certain time and place, are combined in a causal fashion into a series to develop a plot, has the story become a narrative discourse. According to Gerard Genette (1980) there are three levels at which the structure of a narrative record falls apart: these are the implied author who lets a narrator relate (the narrating process) what he/she or a character sees (the story) that character or other characters doing in a particular structure of time and space (the narrative discourse).

The arrangement of both events and sequences of events takes place, according to Roman Jakobson (see Petersen 1978:116) in terms of the principle he calls 'equivalence', which consists of repetition and parallelism. In the relationship between 'story' and 'narrative discourse' (the conversion of the former into the latter, or the abstraction of the former from the latter) one should be concerned with the identification of the 'repetitions' and 'parallelisms', with a view to the unravelling of the narrative's communicative direction.

We can summarise by saying that a narrative discourse consists of the recital of events and sequences that are evaluatively selected, arranged and presented from the perspective of a flesh-and-blood writer. Sternberg (1985:130) speaks of a 'system of perspectival relations'. He pointed out that narrative communication contains at least four basic perspectives: the writer who compiles the story, the narrator who tells the story, the reader who receives the story, and the characters who have a part in the story. However, the context of the story needs to be attached to this outline.

Wolfgang Iser's 'reception-aesthetical' theory takes the co-text (i e intra-text) as well as in the context (i e inter-text) into consideration. The first can be regarded as the reading activity on the syntagmatic axis and the latter as the reading activity on the paradigmatic axis. This distinction is due to the fact that Iser concurs in this regard with Roman Ingarden's (1973) concept of *Unbestimmtheit*. For Iser, *Unbestimmtheit* is applicable to the communication process between text and reader. He subdivides the concept into 'intra-textual' and 'extra-textual' components. The latter refers to what he calls repertory elements. Iser takes these to include all the elements in a text that depends on a knowledge of other texts, of social and cultural norms and the socio-cultural context (cf Koopman-Thurlings 1984:404).

By a process of 'consistency building' and an 'image-making' activity, the reader communicates with the 'story' in a narrative discourse. Indeterminancies in the linear chronological relationships of perspectives are syntagmatically filled by relating 'suspended connectabilities' and 'non-thematic segments' within the 'referential field' of the reader. Indeterminancies caused by apparently unconnectable aspects are called blanks, and those caused by apparently non-thematic segments are referred to as vacancies. The act of reading is defined by Iser (1971; 1980) as essentially a sense-making activity, which consists of the complementary activities of selection and organisation, anticipation and retrospection, and the formulation and modification of expectations in the course of the reading process. Indeterminancies, however, do not occur only on the syntagmatic axis, but also on the paradigmatic axis. These gaps are called negations. In regard to the latter, Iser mainly attempts to take into account those results of the reading process that encounter the norms of the reader's social system. Be that as it may, 'negations' are indeterminancies that deal with the context of the reader. The 'reader' here is the exegete. But the nature of the exegete's concern with and influence on the reception of the text is closely connected with his/her conscious or unconscious construction of the context of the codal system, shared by the writer and the intended historical reader/listener. In other words, reception on the paradigmatic axis of the act of reading concerns the 'fusion of horizons' - to use the new hermeneutical language.

This 'meeting of the two horizons' is worked out by means of a fresh structural approach in Daniel Patte's (1987) recently published commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. In his theory of structural exegesis, published in 1978, Patte had already employed the 'new hermeneutics' concerning the fusion of the worlds of the writer and the reader. In the introduction to his commentary on Matthew's Gospel, Patte

(1987:5) now states that the author's 'pattern of behavior', his 'system of convictions' give essential coherence to his Gospel.

> Consequently, convictions should not be confused with 'ideas', including theological ideas that believers formulate through logical reasonings, deductions and arguments. Rather, convictions have power over believers ... Convictions have such a power over believers because, through their organization into a *system*, they establish for believers what they spontaneously perceive as their true identity as well as the true character of the world (the human community, the natural world, and their eventual relationship to a supernatural world) in which believers are to implement their identity ... Conversely, when one's convictions are threatened in any way, one will do whatever is necessary to protect them (Patte 1987:4-5; his emphasis).

According to Patte (1987:6) communication that wants to avoid being understood, spontaneously places in position what actually needs to and what should not be said. Therefore, one has to remember 'that Matthew's faith is a *system* of convictions expressed by a series of oppositions. These oppositions are correlated, that is, they complement and interpret each other in that they all follow a similar pattern' (Patte 1987:9). Seen thus, Patte's exegesis is exclusively concerned with the identification of Matthew's system of oppositions, and for him 'it needs to be a *structural exegesis*' (Patte 1987:5; my emphasis).

However, he notes that there are relatively few oppositions in a narrative discourse which makes the story progress and provide the overall organisation for the story (Patte 1987:7,10). These oppositions allow the exegete to identify only the 'main points' of a discourse. The rest of the discourse also reflects these 'main points', but in another way (Patte 1987:10).

Patte (1987:11) stresses that his structural analysis of the Gospel of Matthew 'needs to take seriously the *reader's perspective*' (my emphasis). What we have here is an excellent example of a semeio-structural study, firmly held in the web of structuralism, although the role of the reader is taken into account. For Patte this role is important, and correctly because successful communication is 'presented in terms of what the audience knows (the reader's "old knowledge"), in a vocabulary, with images and symbols that make sense for the audience' (Patte 1987:10).

While the narrative oppositions directly express what the writer wants to convey to his readers, the rest of the Gospel of Matthew expresses the same points, but now in terms of what the writer assumes his readers know. However, Patte points out, in terms of the readers' *old knowledge,* the writer hopes to communicate to his readers something *new* that they do not know. These parts of the Gospel of Matthew necessarily include tensions between the *old* and the *new* knowledge. When we encounter such tensions, 'we can say that Matthew makes a point or conveys a conviction' (Patte 1987:11). These tensions take various forms, such as apparent contradictions, odd statements, or metaphors.

Subsequently, Patte (1987:13) takes into account the historical context of the Gospel 'only in order to identify possible connotations of textual features'. But, he says, one has to remember that Matthew's audience is an 'imagined audience'. This means that we cannot assume that the Gospel directly reflects the situation of the Matthean church, and that the Gospel should be interpreted in terms of a reconstructed view of that church. 'Matthew is not writing to objective readers who could be identified out of what we know about this period (e g, readers who would know the Dead Sea Scrolls and the deliberations at Jamnia ...). This is why the historical context of the Gospel *can only be used* to identify the possible connotations that a term, a figure, a phrase, or a saying might have' (Patte 1987:13; my emphasis).

So far as the notion goes, we can agree that 'extra-textual' factors have exegetic relevance only in so far as they manifest themselves in a specific text. Indeed, we said earlier in this article that the construction (note - not *re*construction) of the historical context of a specific text never occurs without the text itself being read. What actually happens in the reading activity of a naive writer (and even of the less naive reader who is deliberately reading to understand) is that a text is being read against the background of the knowledge of the intended historical reader who shares the context of the writer. The reading process itself does not progress without the (mostly unconscious) construction of an 'imagined context' of the writer and intended reader. We also said earlier that such a construction depends on a knowledge of other texts, and of socio-cultural codes. To make explicit what implicitly occurs in naive reading, a critical researcher should first construct a context - such as a specific 'imagination' of the first century Matthean community - and then read the Gospel of Matthew, or a section thereof, in terms of that historical context.

When Daniel Patte states that Matthew did not write for *objective readers*, but for an *imagined audience* we have no problem with his view. Our problem is that he methodologically understates the role of the context in the interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew. By doing so, he undermines the credibility of his own approach. His structural exegetic theory consists of a sense-making activity, identifying 'tensions' in 'thematic passages', and interpreting these 'tensions' in terms of the 'main narrative oppositions' which are found at strategic points. Concerning the Gospel of Matthew, he properly defines this 'main opposition' as to think the things of God or the things of men (cf Mt 16:23b). The so-called 'thematic passages' are those parts in the Gospel where the 'main opposition ' is not explicitly expressed, but where the reader's knowledge (i e their context) meets the viewpoint of the reader.

If Patte had made his construction of the Matthean community more deliberate, he could have reinforced his definition of the 'main narrative opposition' in the Gospel, because he would have interpreted the so-called 'thematic passages' much more soundly. As far as a case study is concerned, the construction of the context of Mt 17:24-27 could perhaps serve as an indication of this limitation.

The payment of the Temple tax (Mt 17:24-27)

Earlier in this paper we pointed out that Roman Jakobson describes the poetic arrangement of literature on the basis of the concepts of repetition and parallelism. This refers to the phenomenon called redundancy by Suleiman (1980), which is treated by Genette under temporal order and frequency. To counteract the connotation 'superfluous repetition' attached to the term 'redundancy', Hohulin (1984:2) defines it 'as those structures in language which are characterized by the repetition of information. These structures may be identical or similar in surface *form* or they may express *conceptually* similar information or *logically* included information' (my emphasis). We shall later return to these three types of redundancy. John Lyons (1978) compared it to the principle of *resonance* in music. In this connection Tannehill (1984:238) expressed the following truism as a result of Lyons' insights and employed it in his analysis of what he called *echo effect* in Luke-Acts:

> Information theorists note that every channel of communication is subject to 'noise', i e 'disturbances ... which interfere with the faithful transmission of signals' and 'a certain degree of redundancy is essential ... in any communication system in order to counteract the disturbing effects of noise'. In Luke-Acts *one major source of 'noise' is the length of the narrative, offering the reader a large opportunity to forget what has already happened. Redundancy combats the tendency to forget* (citation from Lyons; my emphasis).

It seems that Patte's semeio-structural approach has the same purpose, namely to combat readers' failure to relate recurrent themes to one another. The connection between passages in the Gospel of Matthew is often not perceived, because exegetes forget what has already been narrated. They do not attach the 'imagined knowledge' of the intend historical readers to the act of reading on a coherent basis.

We have alrready mentioned that Iser points out that the reader communicates with the story in a narrative discourse by a process of 'consistency building' and an 'image-making activity'. It is a process of connecting apparently disconnected past and future references. These flashbacks and previews may occur within the framework of the story itself, or can even extend beyond the beginning or end of the story into its context, shared and known by the writer and the reader.

References to the past within the framework of the story and previews are sooner or later forms of repetition - formally, conceptually or logically - referring to an event or episode that has already been narrated. Their apparent disconnectedness leaves deliberate gaps in the story. These gaps can be filled in later in the reading process by relating themes to a consistency-building referential field, such as in the way Patte does in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. The gaps can also be filled in by relating those moments in the story which were not taken into the narrative discourse at all, but were part of the context of the writer and the reader.

In his comments onm Mt 17:24-27, Patte points out that this apparently unlinked passage fits into the main theme of the larger whole of the Gospel of Matthew. For Patte the 'main narrative opposition' in the Gospel is, as we have already said, to

think the things of God or of men. Such a view-point requires self-denial and submission.

The previous passage ends with the narrator's remark that the disciples *were greatly distressed* (Mt 17:23). This expression is *formally echoed* in the parable of the unforgiving servant in Mt 18:23-35 (cf 18:31). In this parable 'the good servants of the king, with whom disciples and readers can identify, are "greatly distressed" by the lack of self-denying compassion displayed by the unmerciful servant' (Patte 1987:246). The disciples' distress (Mt 17:23), on the other hand, is in response to an announcement of the Passion 'which describes Jesus' passive submission and self-denial' (Patte 1987:245). This theme is carried forward in the pericope about Jesus' payment of the Temple tax, 'where Jesus submits himself to the half-shekel (or double drachma) tax' (Patte 1987:245). In the pericope Jesus explains why it is good to submit to such a tax while he and his disciples are not obligated to pay it, but are 'free' (Mt 17:26a). The purpose of their submission is to avoid scandalising others (Mt 17:27a).

This is not the first reference in the Gospel of Matthew to the theme of causing a scandal. After the first Gospel prediction Peter is called a scandal, because he obeys the thoughts of men and not the teachings of God, when he refuses to accept the Son of God's submission to and self-denial on the cross (Mt 16:21-23). In Mt 18:6-9, this key word 'scandalising' appears again. This repetition, as well as the repetition of the expression 'to be greatly distressed', fits into the category to which Hohulin refers as redundancy on the surface form. The repetition of the theme of submission and self-denial can be regarded as conceptual redundancy. And the way in which both the formal and the conceptual redundancies are worked out in Mt 17:24-27, is a good example of redundancy as logically included information.

But why does Jesus want to avoid scandalising the Jewish tax collectors? Earlier, when the disciples had reported to him that the Pharisees were scandalised by his teaching, Jesus had responded with an additional attack against them (Mt 15:12-14). The readers should therefore have been puzzled. A deliberate gap on the syntagmatic axis of the story has to be filled in. How does Patte, as the reader, do it?

> We should not try to supply an answer to this question on the basis of this pericope by itself ... As the miracle of the fish with a shekel (or stater) in the mouth shows, in the case of the children of heaven the money necessary for paying the tax is provided by the king of heaven himself! This is another reason for Jesus and his disciples not to scandalise the tax collectors. The cost of their submission to the tax is covered by God! Thus, ultimately, submitting to the tax - which usually involves denying oneself the use of a sum of money - is no denial at all (Patte 1987:247).

The pericope concerned is regarded by Patte as one of those passages in the Gospel of Matthew where the writer's point of view manipulates the knowledge held by the reader. The reader's context is submitted to the writer's theme.

But Patte does not really make use of the reader's understanding of the monetary value of a drachma, and why a stater could serve as an efficient payment: this is even

more puzzling, since it was at a time when the intended readers in Matthew's community no longer had a temple for which to pay the tax. On the contrary, Patte (1987:258) exfoliates the attempt of a Matthean scholar such as William Thompson who 'extrapolates' - Patte's terminology - from this passage to establish the historical setting of a clash between the Matthean church and the Yamnian synagogue (Thompson 1970:68, 246). Thompson (1970:59) also explained the relevance, to his mind, of Jesus' payment of the Temple tax to a community without a temple. Patte (1987:258), however, replies: 'Such comments, which are not necessarily wrong, have the effect of focusing our attention away from the text and away from the points (convictions) Matthew wants to convey.' On the other hand, this remark is inconsistent in terms of Patte's own exegetical record. If one can show how the passage about Jesus' payment of the Temple tax resounds not only with the other temple pericopes in Matthew's story, but also with the knowledge of the reader in the Matthean community, the points Matthew wants to convey become even more perceivable.

Montefiore (1964/5:62-63) draws our attention to the fact that the shekel served as payment for the Temple tax in the time of the Second Temple (cf also, *inter alia*, Strack & Billerbeck 1926:763-764; Perkins 1984:185-186; Garland 1987). From the Hasmonean period onward (cf Garland 1987:191; Ronen 1987), payment had to be made by a coin struck from a prescribed mould (cf S qalim III.4). For the Jewish inhabitants of Capernaum it was the Tyrian mould. In the Hasmonean era figures of marine deities were pictured on some of these Tyrian coins (cf Thompson 1987:102).

Peasants and tenant farmers did not find it easy to comply with the prescribed rules. The produce of the land was a more suitable offering for the temple (cf Freyne 1980:280). For this reason money-changers were necessary and, according to Mishna (Šeqalim VI.1), they were permitted to take sixteen-and-a-half per cent of half a šeqel as commission. In the Spetuaginta the word šeqel was rendered with the Greek word *tò dídrachmon*. Outside the Septuaginta, in Josephus or Philo, for example, *tò dídrachmon* was equivalent to half a šeqel. When the 'receivers of the Temple tax' (Mt 17:24) ask Peter whether Jesus pays *tà dídrachma* (the plural form), then, according to Montefiore, they do not so much have the issue of payment or non-payment - for example, by the Sadducean priests (cf Leszynsky 1912:287; Derrett 1970:250-251), the Dead Sea sectarians (cf Schweizer 1975:356; Vermes 1975:42; Garland 1987:191-192), or the Galileans in general (cf Freyne 1980:281; Mandell 1984:223-232) - in mind (cf Liver 1963:196-197), but rather Jesus' and Peter's participation in Jewish formal custom (cf also van Aarde 1982:30-31).

These customs were attended by a vigorous and profitable money-market as a result of the practice of money-changing at the temple, in which each Jewish male and proselyte of twenty or older (cf Strack and Billerbeck 1926:726) - whether peasant, tenant farmer or artisan - had to take part. Yet some, such as the 'crippled and the blind', the 'women and the children', and the 'gentiles' were excluded from the privileges of the temple (cf van Selms 1969:171; Nielsen 1973:180).

The reference in Mt 17:27 is to a stater found by Peter in the mouth of a fish, that served as payment for both him and Jesus. Because of the miraculous nature of the

story, God's superiority over the deities of the sea pictured on some of the coin is perhaps expressed by Matthew. But the point stressed is rather that Jesus avoided obedience to the formalistic customs. In those days a stater was equivalent to one shekel, that is to say, a Septuagintal drachma. A stater would therefore be adequate as Temple tax for both Peter and Jesus. Because the sum of money was adequate, there was no need for money-changing (cf Strack & Billerbeck 1926:765), and we can assume that the coin was made from a prescribed mould. Peter's and Jesus' conduct may therefore attest to obedience to the cult, with exclusion of its formalism.

> To refuse payment, would seem to deny the whole Jewish form of worship. This Jesus never did. He pointed to its inadequacies: He insisted om the priority of inward worship over outward observance. He stood here within the prophetic tradition; but, unlike the ancient prophets, he never directly attacked the cultus as such, only its abuses. To refuse the Temple tax would be a cause of offence, for it would give the impression that Jesus disapproved of all Temple worship. What the Pharisees demanded as a legal due, Jesus gave as a free-will offering of the heart (Montefiore 1964/5:71).

Against the purport of this knowledge which the intended historical reader of Matthew's Gospel would have, the pericope on the payment of the Temple tax may therefore be described with justification as a preview of the purification of the temple which was to follow (Mt 21:12-17). There Jesus, quoting from the Temple discourse of Jeremiah (Jr 7:11), overturns the tables of the money-changers and heals the 'crippled and the blind' within the temple (Mt 21:14), while the children within the temple (Mt 21:15) laud him as the son of David. In Mt 17:26 Jesus emphasises the 'freedom of the sons of God'. This expression may also be seen as a flashback to Mt 12:6, where Jesus regards himself as the 'real temple' - imitation of his submission to the will of God replaces formalistic temple service (cf also Mt 24:2 and 27:51).

Seen thus, Daniel Patte's comments on Mt 24:27 are reinforced by bringing together the notions of resonance and historical context. I cannot agree with him that such an attempt would have 'the effect of focusing our attention away from the text and away from the points (convictions) Matthew wants to convey'. There is no doubt that the issue which is at stake here is to avoid scandalising others. The question, however, is 'who is in mind' (Garland 1987:190)?

We can assume that the story is based on the life of Jesus himself. In the narrative discourse presented in the Gospel of Matthew it is evaluatively arranged from the point of view of the writer. The points conveyed therefore change. Inferences made from this story and others are that Mt 17:24-27 should be interpreted in terms of the Matthean community, within the context of the clash between the church and the synagogue. But arguments for this conclusion lead us to subsequent research.

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