

GOAT AND SHEEP: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF MATTHEW 25:31-46

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A Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts,
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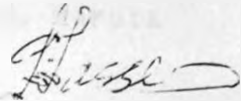


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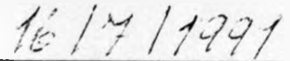
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DECLARATIONS

This is to certify that this thesis is my original work, and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.



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ABSTRACT

The interpretation of the Scriptures has played an important role in influencing the Christian way of living, faith and practice. As the thoughts of the people are always influenced by the historical situations of the time and place, the interpretation of the Scriptures also has been nourished by the historical occurrences in different periods and places. Due to this influence, the truth of the Scriptures has been sometimes ignored by some Christian interpreters.

One of the crucial areas where the Scriptures have had influence in Christian faith and action is the teaching of the last judgement provided in Matthew 26:31-44. According to this Biblical text, there will be separation of Goats from Sheep in the last judgement.

Our primary objective in conducting this research was to find out how the Scriptures influence belief and practice in Christianity. Therefore, a study on the selected text was done through employing the various methods of Biblical criticism and interpretation.

We found that the so called Goats and Sheep are among the peoples of all nations which will be gathered on the day of judgement and be judged, condemned or rewarded respectively in accordance with their good or bad deeds done to their fellow mankind.

In the implications of the study for Africa, we reached the conclusion that for Christianity to have any relevance, it must correctly interpret the Scriptures. That is, Scriptures must be interpreted in a way which can, not only deal with Spiritual matter, but also with social, economic and political issues affecting most African people who are victims of poverty, oppression and injustice.

Chapter one introduces the proceedings of the study. Chapter two, after presenting the methods of the interpretation of the Scriptures and the conditions of Israel's people in the time of Jesus Christ's life and ministry, deals with the interpretation of the selected text. Chapter three presents the theological implication of the study in general and in the African context in particular. Chapter four discusses the study in its relation to the theology of liberation or Christians' duty in the liberation of the oppressed.

We conclude our study with recommendations. The major recommendation derived from this study is: in the African Continent, in order to be relevant and attractive to people, the Christian Church must give up the western and the colonial way of preaching, teaching, and evangelizing aimed only at saving the souls and ~~enslaving the bodies~~, and take changes in cultural and social life into account in her language, her services, her activities, her life and organization.

The Christian Church in Africa must obey Jesus' command only, the teaching of the Scriptures, and the rule of the Holy Spirit as the only guide for her life and work, in order to understand the meaning of Jesus' preaching, teaching, and his social work; to know and live the truth, and function as a liberating power for the salvation of the African Continent.

CHAPTER ONE

I. INTRODUCTION

I.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The belief in the coming of the Kingdom of God, accompanied by the power of natural phenomena, such as fire, clouds, earthquake, storm, thunder, as a manifestation of God's presence (cf.24:11-18); or of the Son of Man in his heavenly glory to set up his Kingdom, to judge the wicked and reward the righteous according to their deeds, plays an extraordinary role in the history and faith of the people of Israel.

This belief is the foundation of Israel's faith. Without it there would be no faith in one God: the Creator of the world. It is as important for the people of God under the guidance of the Old Testament as under the guidance of the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the earlier traditions and the prophetic literature speak about the coming of God or the day of the Lord to judge the world because of its wickedness.

In the New Testament, Jesus and his Apostles continue to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God in the figure of the Son of Man to separate the righteous (the sheep) from the wicked (the goats), and to punish the wicked and reward the righteous both according to their bad deeds and good deeds. As prophet Habakkuk says,

You come out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot (3:13).

The Prophet Isaiah prophesies that the Lord is coming in might to rule with His right arm, with recompense and reward, and to tend His flock like a shepherd gathers his lambs in his arms and leads them home:

Here is the Lord Yahweh coming with power, his arm subduing all things to him. The prize of his victory is with him, his trophies all go before him. He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his breast and leading to their rest the mother ewes (40:10-11).

And the Prophet Daniel saw one like a son of man coming on the clouds of heaven to establish his great Kingdom on earth:

I gazed into the vision of the night. And I saw, coming on the clouds of heaven, one like a son of man. He came to one of great age and was led into his presence. On him was conferred sovereignty, glory and Kingdom, and men of all peoples, nations and languages became his servants. His sovereignty is an eternal sovereignty which shall never pass away, nor will his empire ever be destroyed (7:13-14).

In the New Testament, the belief in the second coming of Christ or the Son of Man is found mainly in the Gospels and in the letters of Paul (cf. Mat. 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 25:31-46; Thess. 2:19; 3: 13; II Thess. 2:1, 8, 9). It is also an issue which is further studied, discussed and commented on by many scholars and preachers of different times.

Due to the fact that Jesus Christ, in his teaching and preaching, used metaphorical, symbolic and paraborical language, particularly in his references to the future Kingdom of God, the modern man finds this kind of thinking and teaching very difficult to understand. So, many questions, arguments and interpretations have been raised. It is important to find out and establish the significance of this teaching in our lives and social relationships. To what extent does the teaching of Jesus determine the expectation of our future and of the whole of mankind?

The expectation of the second coming of Jesus Christ or the coming of the Son of Man in the New Testament constitutes a complexity of eschatological beliefs which embrace the resurrection of the dead, the reign of God on earth and the last judgement. It is linked also with millenarian ideas which view a messianic reign of Jesus Christ on earth with his saints for a period of a thousand years. All these beliefs and ideas show the need for an indepth study and interpretation because these beliefs continue to influence the lives of millions of Christians throughout history.

This reality imposes an important conclusion on the Christian communities of today: the Christian communities can grow and renew their Christian life and faith in God if their lives and faith are built on the knowledge of God and in doing His will as taught by His Son Jesus Christ their Lord. It is from this perspective that one finds it very important to establish the following: How did the people of Israel understand the coming of God or the Son of Man in their history and religious life? What was in Jesus' mind when he spoke about the coming of the Son of Man? Who are referred to as the goats and the sheep?

1.1.2 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

There is need today to understand and establish the contents of beliefs which underlie Christian practice. Many people today are no longer very interested in spiritual matters which do not help them solve their present problems. So, they are asking whether God is only interested in their spiritual life and not in the physical one. For what purpose has God brought man into this world? These questions call us to re-read and analyse the

Scriptures, especially in Africa where the proclamation of the Good News was mixed with the colonial expansion. The sermon preached to black people by Father Antonio Vieira in 1633 is an apt example:

When you serve your Lords, do not serve them as if you serve men but as if you serve God because then, you do not serve as captives but as free, neither obey them as slaves but as sons¹.
(Translation mine)

Analysing this sermon takes us to the conclusion that Father Vieira invites and encourages slaves and the oppressed to sacrifice themselves in the hands of their masters as a way of serving God for the purpose of the well-being of their spiritual life.

This study is therefore aimed at examining and analysing the selected text of the Scriptures in order to establish how Jesus Christ expressed the relationship between the spiritual and physical aspects of human life and the basis of Christians responsibility for their fellow human beings.

1.1.3 HYPOTHESIS

The interpretation of the Scriptures has been an essential aspect of the Christian faith and practice. As the minds of the people are always influenced by the historical situations of the time and place, the interpretation of the Scriptures also has been nourished by the historical occurrences in different periods. In the 15th century, for instance, the Scriptures were used as an instrument to open the way for domination of some peoples by others. Thus, the Kingdom of God was identified with the expansion of colonialism, civilization and domination.

Rioland Azzi tells us that the Portuguese expansion was intertwined with political, economic, civilization and religious matters.

The Portuguese expansion in the 15th century involved at the same time, political fidelity, economic and religious aspects. In the political aspect, it was to deal with the Arabs till they overcome them; in the religious aspect, the expansion meant dilation of the Christian civilization².
(Translation mine)

The dominated, oppressed and exploited peoples were taught to despise the present life with its material wealth and seek only the future spiritual Kingdom through their obedience to their masters. These masters were the representatives of God on earth, whose governments were established by God to rule His people in the present life. Thus, even slaves were encouraged to sacrifice themselves in the hands of their masters as a way of serving God with the purpose of the well-being of their spiritual life in heaven as we see in Vieira's sermon. The sermon was an interpretation of the Scriptures based mainly on the letters of Apostle Paul (Eph. 6:5-8; Heb. 13:17).

In the time of struggle for liberation, the same Scriptures were used by the colonized and oppressed people to claim their freedom from their masters. They said that God had seen their miserable state, had heard their appeal to be free from their colonizers and oppressors, and was aware of their suffering. So, God came to deliver them and was demanding that the colonizers end the domination of His people and let them go. This claim was based on the book of Exodus chapters 3-5. These instances show us that the Biblical interpretation has both positive and negative impact on Christian faith and practice which is influenced mainly by historical situations of different times and places.

To-day, the Christian involvement in physical needs of others is positively based on the teaching of Jesus Christ. This, is

very clear in his ministry from the beginning to the end. His teaching was always followed by practical deeds to the physical needs. For instance, Matthew tells us that after the temptations in the wilderness and the call of the first disciples, Jesus began to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom and, at the same time, to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness:

He went round the whole of Galilee teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and sickness among the people. His fame spread throughout Syria, and those who were suffering from diseases and painful complaints of one kind or another, the possessed, epileptics, the paralysed, were all brought to him, and he cured them. Large crowds followed him, from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and Transjordan (4:23-25).

Mark also confirms that Jesus Christ not only cured people but also fed them. He never sent away the hungry. Rather he found a way to feed them even in the places where there were no markets to buy food.

And now once again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat. So he called his disciples to him and said to them. I feel sorry for these people; they have been with me for three days now and have nothing to eat. If I send them off home hungry they will collapse on the way; some have a great distance. His disciples replied, where could anyone get bread to feed these people in a deserted place like this? He asked them, How many loaves have you? Seven they said. Then he instructed the crowd to sit down on the ground, and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and handed them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them among the crowd. They had a few small fish as well, and over these he said a blessing and ordered them to be distributed also (3:1-7).

The central hypothesis of this study therefore is that Biblical interpretation, in this case the selected text of Matthew 25:31-46 has a significant role in influencing believers

to respond to the prevailing conditions of their existence.

1.1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In spite of the insistence and efforts of some theologians to put the Church on the right path of Jesus' teaching about the relationship between man and man, the gap between the poor and the rich among the Christian communities continues to widen. The Christian Church is more and more abandoning or distorting the meaning of the teaching of Jesus Christ - mainly in the text of Matthew 25:31-46 - in order to fit well in the careless attitude of the Church or in the selfishness of its members - especially the rich.

The study therefore will try to establish:

I. What really Jesus Christ wanted to say in the selected text of Matthew 25:31-46,

II. How the implications of this teaching on the Christian faith can help us to-day and

III. An attempt will be made to apply the text to the contemporary situation in Africa particularly the involvement of Christians in the physical needs of the people.

1.1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Christian Church is a community of believers comprising both the righteous and the wicked³. Besides, this Christian community is also a part of all the societies of the world, in which the righteous and the wicked are living together as members of the society. Therefore, it is from all the nations dwelling in the world that God will separate the sheep from the goats on the day of the judgement not only according to their faith in Christ but also according to their obedience to God as manifested in doing what Jesus Christ commands them to do.

This means that the Christians who do wrong and who do not identify God or His Son Jesus Christ through the hungry, the thirsty, naked, the sick, the imprisoned, the strangers, and the oppressed, will not escape the judgement and punishment because they have faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Jesus clearly says that there are many who say "Lord, Lord", who will not enter the Kingdom of God because they are not doing the will of God (cf. Mat 7:21; Lk.6:46). The pagans and even the prostitutes will precede them in the Kingdom of God. In other words, the sheep are not the Christians only, and the goats are also not the pagans or non-Christians only. The sheep will be separated from both Christians and non-Christians who will represent their nations on the day of judgement. It is within this theoretical framework of judgement of all men and women that the present study finds its focus and trust..

1.1.6 METHODOLOGY

The study will rely on the commentaries, concordances and other literature helpful in the exegetical analysis of the selected text. Standard exegetical methodology will be used to provide an exhaustive interpretation of the text and its implications for to-day. Field research and the gathering of data through questionnaires has not been employed as that was found unnecessary for this study.

The characterization of the last judgement as the separation between goats and sheep will be analysed to establish its meaning and implications for the Christians' involvement in service of others in their present life.

The centrality of the selected passage will be highlighted

by establishing it as the basis for Christian discipleship and what discipleship entails.

1.1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

The expectation of the second coming of Jesus Christ or the Son of Man to establish the Kingdom of God and to perform the judgement has been understood and interpreted in different ways by many scholars. Bultmann, for instance, understands the bible as largely mythological and sees the subject of eschatology as an impossible subject for a modern reader to understand because it is bound with the culture of the first century. So, the only way to understand eschatology is to demythologize it and to clarify the eschatological belief related to the expectation of the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven in order to get the real meaning of the teaching.⁴ Bultmann observes:

The mythical imagery of the world is not specifically a Christian reality but an imagery of the world formulated in the past and not yet elaborated by scientific thinking. Furthermore for modern man, the mythological concept of the world, the eschatological representations of redeemer and redemption are overshoot and overcome. We can no longer look for the return of the son of Man on the clouds of heaven or hope that the faithful will meet him in the air.

In Bultmann's view, the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgement took place with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁶

An idea which, according to him, is seen in the Gospel of John, who, after Paul, radically demythologized eschatology, saying that in the coming of Jesus Christ the expected judgement of the world took place and cancelled any future judgement in the traditional sense.⁷

For Moltmann, whose ideas is based on the belief that conceptions are formed out of experience, we have not experienced the messianic presence of Jesus Christ in glory and so we cannot conceive his messianic presence in glory. Furthermore, we can only tell of what is past, but not about the future events. Therefore, the messianic future in glory and the end of the world can only be expected and anticipated through the hope that Christ's suffering over this world cries out for the new creation in righteousness.⁸

The identification of Christ with the poor and his brotherhood with the very least belong, according to Matthew 25, within the framework of the coming judgement. The Judge who is to come actualizes his presence in the least of his brethren, realizing through the judgement what was done to him. Without this orientation the least of the brethren lose their eschatological dignity as brethren of the universal judge. Without his anticipatory incarnation in them the universal judge loses his present significance⁹.

In Moltmann's view, the expected Son of Man is already present in the least of his brethren and already judging the world but his work will be completed in future¹⁰. Therefore, the eschatological thinking is based on the judgement that the Son of Man has started but is not concluded yet.

Libanio and Bigemer see the second glorious coming of the Lord as an event which is always happening at the time of our death:

Parousia is the resurrenction which touches history: the history of all men and all times. It is always happening. It penetrates our history and takes it to its fulfillment. This end is near to each man. The Lord is always coming. And his coming puts each of us before the option in which all other

decisions have sense and organize themselves. This Lord's parousia in every day of our existence acquires in death the splendour of transience¹¹. (Translation mine).

With this argument, Libanio and Bingemer reject the coming of the Lord in future to judge all men in the world and put the parousia and the judgement as present at the end of the present life of each person.

Gustavo Gutierrez sees the second coming of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God as inevitable historical, temporal, earthly, social and material realities. According to him, the coming Kingdom of God is aimed at establishing peace, defending the righteous, punishing the oppressors and bring enslaved by others¹².

These different ideas among theologians show that the problem of the meaning of the coming of the Son of Man to establish the Kingdom of God, to judge the wicked and to reward the righteous through entering in the Kingdom of God is not solved yet. It is within these contradictory ideas that these questions are raised: Where will the Kingdom of God be established? When does it come? Who will benefit from it? Who will not enter it?

This study is a contribution in the attempt to answer these questions which have been asked by mankind in its concern about human destiny.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.2.1 ESCHATOLOGICAL THEMES

Eschatology, Apocalypse, Kingdom of God, Judgement, the coming of God or the Day of the Lord, which can be extracted from the selected text of Matthew 25:31-46 are themes which call the attention of many scholars who seek to understand the meaning of this teaching and its relationship to life and the destiny of

mankind. These themes are interwoven in such a manner that we cannot even discuss one without mentioning others. It is for this reason that we shall look at various discussions and views of different scholars and the Old Testament, in particular, the earlier traditions, prophetic literature, and apocalyptic literature related to this teaching.

G. Von Rad, in his study about eschatology of the prophets, argues that it is difficult for the exegete of today to understand correctly the eschatological message or teaching than the exegete of the past who thought that Israel shared her concept of time with the West. But to-day we have discovered that Israel lived and thought differently from the Western concept of time¹³.

The West understands time as a line in which all the past and future events are established, and in which the center of that line marks the present, the behind edge marks the past, and the front edge marks the future time¹⁴.

In Israel, the concept of absolute time, existent before all events, and destined to be filled by data was not known¹⁵. Israel understood time only through determined events¹⁶. Therefore, according to Von Rad, the exegete of to-day must totally abandon the Western concept of time if he wants to understand the eschatological message. The Western concept to time, which was not even known in the ancient Greek world,¹⁷ obscures its meaning.

To justify his argument, Von Rad quotes one of the ancient writers, Herodotus, who presents the law of the time in which the events are submitted as a cyclical periodic turning round always to itself. This is not comparable to a stream and therefore it is not an eschatological concept¹⁸.

With this argument, Von Rad arrives at the conclusion that the teaching of the Day of the Lord is not eschatological because Israel had no determined concept of time in her history. The prophets knew it in all its details through Yahwist tradition¹⁹.

Like Von Rad, G.R. Beasley-Murray also points out that the Hebrews understood time in terms of a content, not of a duration²⁰. Time was not fixed in a calendar but was a "day" in which the Lord would act in history. "It has its analogies in such Old Testament expressions as the day of battle (I Sam.13:22), the day of snow (2 Sam. 23:20), the day of harvest (Prov. 25:13), or more significantly the day of Midia (Isa. 9:3), which was the occasion of Midia's defeat by Gideon and his men (Jdg. 7:19ff)"²¹.

Formulating his Parousia of Christ, Dale Moody affirms that the Day of the Lord in Hosea (I:11) seems to have its analogy in the Day of Atonement in Leviticus which speaks about a time of purification in the future for those who rebel against the Lord²².

Before the Babylon Exile, the Day of the Lord was understood as the Day in which the Lord would come to punish Israel because of her wickedness. But after the Exile, the Day of the Lord became the day in which the enemies of Israel and their oppressors would be punished. The first concept was more prophetic and historical. The second was characterized by the beginning of apocalyptic visions in which the universal, cosmic events point to an age to come²³.

Thus, according to Moody, the teaching about the Day of the Son of Man by Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul in the New Testament is an interpretation of the Day of the Lord from the Old Testament²⁴. Therefore,

The preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus may be compared to the prophecies of Amos and Hosea in the eighth century B.C. Amos and John saw the Day of the Lord more in terms of wrath, while Hosea and Jesus had more good news. In the source Q, found in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark, John the Baptist warned the people of the terrible Day of wrath that was to come (Luke 3:7,9,17). Jesus prefaced all this woe with the promise of weal in the age to come (Luke 6:20-26)²⁵.

Millard J. Erickson, in his study of the Last Things, points out that the final judgement will take place in the future,²⁶ after the second coming of Jesus Christ²⁷. The judgement will be for all mankind. But the sins of the believers will be excluded because they have been justified. Thus the believers' sins will be revealed as pardoned²⁸.

The people who will be judged are those who reject Jesus Christ and his words. But even those who have heard the law will be judged²⁹. As it is written, "all who sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who sinned under the law will be judged by the law(Rom.2:12)"³⁰.

In his study of the Parousia of the Son of Man, G.R. Beasley-Murray argues that Jesus Christ, like others Jews, emphasizes the duty of showing love to others through action. This idea is based on the first commandment which embraces both God and man³¹.

This according to Beasley-Murray, is seen throughout the teaching of Jesus. He gives as instances Jesus' commands to give alms, to give food and drink, to show pity to the sick and the exploited, to care for the orphans to lend freely to those who cannot repay, to show love to enemies and, in general, to glorify God by doing good deeds³².

However, this does not mean that Jesus' teaching to show love by doing good works is based on the obedience to the law,

nor does it suppose that the judgement will be made according to the obedience of the law³³. The main point is that Jesus Christ extracts from the law the central issue which is mercy. Mercy is what he demands of all people³⁴. In his own life and ministry Jesus was guided by mercy and this finally led him to the cross³⁵.

In Beasley-Murray's view it does not matter if we confess Jesus or not. The people will be judged according to how they walk in the way of the Son of Man:

The saying concerning the sheep and the goats declares that whoever shows mercy to the needy thereby shows it to the Son of Man, whose mercy would embrace all. Both those who confess Jesus and those who do not know him are tested by the extent to which they walk in the way of the Son of Man³⁶.

According to Preiss, quoted by Beasley-Murray, the scene of the judgement reveals that the Son of Man has been present in the misery of his brethren³⁷.

The Son of Man freely identifies himself with each of the wretched ones by an act of substitution and identification, which is a juridical substitution, an effectual reality (not simply as if!), a substitution which massively includes what the Church will later call incarnation³⁸.

Beasley-Murray, however, rejects the idea of pre-existence in this context, which he says should not be included. He also rejects the assumption that identification and substitution are synonymous because this is misleading³⁹. Instead he suggests:

"It would be more in keeping with the representative nature of the concept of the Son of Man to speak in terms of his solidarity with mankind, expressed in self-identification with the needy evident of ways throughout the ministry of Jesus"⁴⁰.

This is solidarity which continues to the end and will be revealed in the judgement of mankind⁴¹.

In this study on the Message of the Parousia of Jesus, Joachim Jeremias argues that the brethren in Matthew 25:31-46 do not refer to the disciples of Jesus but to all the afflicted and needy⁴². To him guilt does not lie in the committing gross sins, but in not doing good deeds⁴³. Thus, the pagans will be justified by their deeds to the needy who are brethren of Jesus Christ. Therefore, whoever has shown love to these brethren has shown it not to them, but to Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the poor⁴⁴.

The pagans will be justified and will enter the Kingdom of God by their acts of love which they have shown to Jesus Christ through the afflicted⁴⁵.

But the deepest secret of this love which characterizes realized discipleship is that they have learnt how to forgive. They extend to others the divine forgiveness which they have experienced, a forgiveness which pass all understanding⁴⁶.

Although God has extended His gift to the Christians in the Gospel through the offering of forgiveness, if they do not show this forgiveness to others God will remove it from them⁴⁷.

In his introduction to the study of the parable, Osmund Afonso Miranda argues that the idea that the Kingdom of God will come to the end of the world or history is mistaken because this would make the Kingdom of God an appendix only, something which will happen after everything was over⁴⁸. Miranda also rejects the coming of the Kingdom of God as a new age because this suggests that God's work was a failure and, consequently, He decided to begin all over again⁴⁹. Therefore, according to him, the eschatological manifestation of the coming Kingdom of God should be considered as the beginning of the new age, but as a

realization of God's purpose. So, instead of saying that the Kingdom of God will come at the end of history we should say that the Kingdom of God is the end or comes to put an end to what is not according to the will of God. It is God's final manifestation in which He renews and transforms His work in a definitive and perfect manner⁵⁰.

In the text of Matthew 25:31-46, which is Mirand argues that if Jeremias' idea that the parable was the answer to the question about how the people who do not know the Gospel will be saved, then the text is not from Jesus' teaching because such theological speculation did not exist in Jesus' time. Rather, it was the Church that speculated thus. So, the text was used in Matthew's Church⁵¹. Further, the text is an interpretation of the Old Testament Apocalyptic sayings before Jesus Christ was born⁵².

1.2.2 THE OLD TESTAMENT VIEW

Christians believe that Christianity did not come into existence from only the preaching and teaching of Jesus Christ like Islam which began with the prophecy and teaching of its found Mohamed. According to Islamic doctrine, Mohamed received revelation from God through Archangel Jibril (Gabriel)⁵³.

Christianity is a religion which has a strong connection with the traditions and prophecy of Israel's people. In fact, we may even say that it is the development of the Judaic faith in one God who according to Jewish faith offered Himself to be the guide of life and history of Israel's people. For this reason it is appropriate to devote a few pages to what the Old Testament says about the coming of God to judge the wicked and reward the righteous.

A) THE COMING OF GOD IN THE EARLY TRADITION

In the earlier traditions of Israel, the coming of God is more associated with the Phenomena of the power of nature such as: fire, cloud, smoke, volcano, earthquake, storm and thunder as manifestation of God's coming or His presence (see for instance, Exodus 13:21-22;19:18;24:17).

Another manifestation of God's coming was the presence of His messenger, the Angel (mal'ak) of Yahweh⁵⁴ (Gen. 16:7-12; Judg. 2:1-5;13:aff), where the figure appeared in the form of a human being and sometimes as God Himself (Gen.18; 19:1-19). On another occasions, God's appearance was also associated with cultic ceremonies. For example, the preparatory consecration and purification, the sounding of the trumpet, and the presence of fire and smoke. At other occasions, God was believed to have appeared to individual people (Gen. 28:10-22; Exodus 3:1-6).

The most important question of God's coming is the purpose of His coming. Why does God come? What is the purpose of His coming? Does He come in order to be known by His creatures only as their unique God and the creator of the world? The Book of Genesis offers a good answer to these questions.

According to Genesis, God comes when there is disorder on earth to put an end to it, to judge and punish its authors, to reward the righteous for their kindness, and to re-establish the order in which the will of God will rule. That is, God comes when the world is being ruled by the will of the Devil in order to put it this rule to an end.

Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that the thoughts in his heart fashioned nothing but wickedness all day long. Yahweh regretted having made man on the earth, and his heart

grieved. I will rid the earth's face of man,
my own creation, Yahweh said and of animals
also, reptiles too, and the birds of heaven;
for I regret having made them (Gen.6:5-7).

When the rule of the Devil is in its climax that even the animals, reptiles, birds of heaven, and the proper earth are affected for having opened their mouths to drink the blood of the innocents (Gen. 4:11-12), God comes to end it. But this end is not the end of the world or history. It is the end of the evil rule and the beginning of the new life in a renewed world guided by the Spirit of God. So, the judgement is not the judgement of the souls but of the living beings. It is for this reason that the righteous enter into a renewed earth as their reward for their righteousness and to begin a new life under God's rule (Gen.7:1).

There is an important point to note here. Noah was not left in order to preserve mankind. Unclean animals maybe were left to preserve their species. Genesis is very clear in its story of God's judgement. Noah was accepted to enter into a renewed earth to begin a new life under the new order because he was found good among the wicked people of his time.

Yahweh said to Noah, Go abroad the ark, you
and all your household, for you alone among
this generation do I see as a good man in my
judgement (Gen.7:1)

Noah was allowed to enter into a renewed earth because he "was a good man, a man of integrity among his contemporaries, and he walked with God" (Gen.6:9). And, to walk with God does not mean to be a believer and to worship God - as we find no evidence here which shows that Noah worshiped God before the flood - but it is possible to live according to the will of God, even without knowing that you are doing so. Noah's behaviour in his

behaviour in his relationship with other members of the society made him walk with God without being aware that he was doing so.

Noah walked with God because he was not corrupt in a world full of corruption; he was nonviolent in a world full of violence; and just in a world full of justice. Thus he was found to be right before God's judgement and like a sheep among goats, he was separated from the wicked of his time.

It was after the judgement that Noah began to worship God and he built an altar to offer sacrifice as gratefulness to God. So, to be righteous is to be right with God and with the members of the society to which one belongs.

Therefore, Barnhouse's idea or argument that Noah was not a just man and that he was justified by God through grace in Jesus Christ is misleading.

There was no justice in Noah. This means that Noah was a justified man. Through rose-colored glasses everything has a rosy hue. Through blue glasses everything looks blue. God looks at the sinner through Jesus Christ and he takes on the hue of the holiness of Christ. God was looking at Noah through the Lord Jesus Christ, for he found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Grace can never be any place else. No man is just in the sight of God, for by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight (Rom. 3:20).⁵⁵

and again,

The word "perfect" does not mean that he had righteousness in himself, but that God was looking at him through Christ.⁵⁶

This interpretation serves only to defend the doctrine of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone. So instead of leaving the Scriptures to speak for themselves Barnhouse on their behalf thus distorting the meaning of the story of God's judgement as well as the Christian teaching. First at the time of Noah the law was not yet given to guide the lives of the people.

The law was given later to the people of Israel after their liberation from Egypt. Therefore Noah did not follow any law in his life, but he did only what made him good before God's judgement. Jesus' mission is not to choose some and leave others to perish, but to save the whole world. Thirdly, God as father, creator, and love does not choose anybody. This should be an injustice to God who is just. God loves all His creatures. Man is the only one who is free to choose to love and obey God through doing His will or to reject Him. Furthermore, God as an absolute being does not need to use someone's favour to take His decision.

Since the fall of the first man, we always see a God who is busy calling man to come back to Him. Firstly through Himself. Secondly through the prophets. Thirdly through His Son Jesus Christ. And now through the voice of the Church and the Holy Spirit. But the man who always wants to be independent continues to run away from God's rule. Therefore, he will be judged punished or saved according to his own evil deeds or good deeds as a sign of his coming back to God (Mat. 25:14-30, 31-46).

The event of the flood marked the first judgement in the history of mankind in which God as the judge, separated the dandel from the wheat to be burnt and kept the wheat in His barn (cf. 13:30, see also the selected text in Matthew 25:31-46).

Furthermore, Genesis tells us that at another time God came to Sodom and Gomorah when He received the great outcry against the two cities of the people's evil deeds to their fellows.

Like the people of Noah's time, the people of Sodom and Gomorah were also living under their own will guided by the rule of Satan. When God came to judge them because of their evil deeds and behaviour, once again Lot alone was found a good man before God's judgement on a multitude of the evil people.

According to Genesis, Lot did not get saved because he found favour through Jesus Christ or through his uncle Abraham, but because he was a man of hospitality (Gen. 19:1-3). On the contrary, the will of his uncle Abraham was like the mission of Jesus Christ, to save not only Lot but all the people. Lot's salvation was due to his own deeds and his relationship with other human beings. He always welcomed the strangers in his home, gave them food and drink, and room to rest. (cf. Gen.19:1-3; Mat. 25:35).

Some people think that the coming of God was aimed at revealing Himself to mankind as the unique God and Creator of the world. But Genesis testifies that God was not an unknown being. The first children of Adam, Cain and Abel offered to God the products of their work. (Gen.3:4).

Lamech the last of the first Patriarchs before the flood prophesied about the future of his new born son Noah, saying he would give his people in the midst of their toil and the labour of their hands a consolation derived from the ground that Yahweh had cursed (cf.Gen.5:28-29). And in Chapter 6:1-4 Genesis speaks about the marriage between the Sons and the daughters of men.

These earlier traditions give evidence that the existence of God was known. What the people lacked was God's will and His plan for mankind and the whole world. As a result, man and the whole world lived under the rule of the evil one. Consequently,

violence, corruption and injustice multiplied in the world.

This made God to take His own decision against the Kingdom of Satan and its collaborators in order to bring its end.

God comes on earth and among men when there is an outcry due to violence, injustice, selfishness and corruption which are the main causes of the suffering of all His creatures: men, animals, plants, birds, reptiles and fish. We are experiencing the same to-day in Mozambique, Angola, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Africa, Liberia and the recent destruction of the life in the Gulf. Thus, the coming of God with His Judgement marks not the end of history but the end of terrors and the beginning of joy for the righteous and the least who are victims of the evil rule. (cf. Ps 96:10-13; Joel 4:18).

According to the earlier traditions, it was the climax of the world's sins which gave origin to the eschatological plan of God to renew it, with the aim of eliminating the evil deeds and beginning a new era with new life guided by the will of God.

These stories of the earlier traditions make up the foundation of Israel's faith. This faith was developed in the time of the prophets who, from these traditions understood or knew God as the One who came in the past to judge the wicked and to deliver the righteous from the hands of the wicked and who in future, will also come to do the same. This in turn, marked the beginning of hope in Israel's faith that God would not forget His love for His suffering people.

B) THE COMING OF GOD AND HIS JUDGEMENT IN THE
PROPHETIC LITERATURE

In the period between the Exile and the death of King Solomon⁵⁷ the people of Israel experienced a period of successive unrest from within and from external forces. For instance, the division of the Kingdom; the everlasting hostilities between Rehoboam and Jeroboam which resulted in the practice of worship of bulls at Dan and Bethel in rivalry to the worship of God at Jerusalem;⁵⁸ the development of the Assyrian empire which threatened the weak Kingdom of Ahab and moved him to seek protection from the strong Kingdom of Syria; "the great battle between a coalition of Western countries (including Israel and Syria) and Shalmaneser III of Assyria"⁵⁹ and the battle between Israel and Nebuchadnezzar which ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 and the deportation of Israelite people to Babylon.

During the Exile, although there were some faithful worshipers of Yahweh (Jer. 41:4-5; Dan. 6:10-11), the people of Israel including those who were left in the home-land, adopted the life and cults of the Canaanites and Babylonians, and worshiped idols, (Ezek. 8:3,14; Isa. 57:3-8; 65:3-5; 66:3,17)

In the Post-Exile, there was the problem of how to restore the community of Israel - which was affected by foreign cults and which not only besides worshipped idols but also sacrificed human beings - into a renewal community "purified from evil in which the Lord will once again dwell"⁶⁰.

Therefore in prophetic literature, to the prophets, facing the problems of Pre-Exile, Exile and Post-Exile periods, the coming of God became the Day of the Lord. The important question now is: does this day have the same meaning as the coming of God in the earlier traditions? Is it a fixed day in the future, in which the world or history of mankind will have its end? Who would be judged? Would it be the Gentiles only?

The Prophet Isaiah answers these questions. According to him, the Day of the Lord is the day in which the Lord will come to root out the sinners from the earth; to punish the whole world for its evil doing; to destroy the wicked for their crimes; and to put an end to the pride of arrogant men (see Chapter 13)

The Prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Amos answer the above questions in a detailed manner. In their view, the Day of the Lord would be a Day of judgement for Israel (the believers) because of her idolatry or social misconduct (Jer.7:21-34; 8:1-3; Ezek. 7:1-4; Am.2:6-16; 4:11-12; 6:8-14; 8:4-10) Universally, it would be a Day of the nations' judgement because of their attitude towards the people of God which the tantamount to rising against the Lord (cf. Joel 4:1-3; 15-17)

Beasley-Murray's words express succinctly what the Prophets said above:

It denotes a day on which the Lord acts, bringing disaster on the subjects of his wrath. This is an important datum for it indicates that the Day of the Lord is an occasion (1) that involves God acting in the historical sphere, (2) that entails

judgement for those for whom the day comes,
 (3) that occurs at such time as is determined
 by the Lord (not necessarily at the end of
 history⁶¹).

An important point to note in the prophetic literature is that although the Prophets claimed that they were receiving their message directly from God, they used the earlier traditions to interpret that message to their audience. They always warned their audience about what the Lord would come to do. If the people would not repent their sins, the repercussions would be like what He had done in the past.

Against religious hypocrisy, wrong doing, injustice and oppression in Israel, the Prophet Isaiah probably at the occasion of the siege of Jerusalem in 735, compared the people of his time with the people of Sodom and Gomorah. This was the way to show them that their sins were not as less serious than the sins which made the people of Sodom and Gomorrah be judged.

Hear the word of Yahweh, you rulers of Sodom;
 listen to the command of our God, you people
 of Gomorah.

Take your wrong doing out of my sight. Cease
 to do evil. Learn to do good, search for
 justice, help the oppressed, be just to the
 orphan, plead for the widow (Isaiah 1:10,17).

In his message against foreign oppressors Prophet Jeremiah prophesied that like Sodom and Gomorah which were destroyed with their neighbours, the inhabitants of Babylon would be exterminated with their neighbours. Their place would be taken up by the wild cats, jackals and ostriches (Jer. 50:39-40; see also Isaiah 13)

For the Prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah, to worship God hypocritically, that is, to worship Him while doing wrong deeds, practicing injustice and oppressing others, provokes the Lord to renew His Day to execute His duty against the authors of evil deeds as He did in the past.

This leads to the conclusion that the coming of God in the prophetic literature only changed its language in order to be understood by the new generation or to be more relevant to it. Otherwise it continued to have the same meaning and purpose. It did not lose its three fold objective which are the Day of judgement, the salvation of the righteous and the beginning of a new era in history which is guided by the will of God.

In short, it is the end of the terror and the beginning of the joy. As Beasley-Murray puts it,

This day of judgement upon evil men is viewed as the day of the Lord's coming, of his appearing, the day when he draws near for judgement. The Day of the Lord is the day of the coming of God⁶².

and again,

This conjunction of thought is common in the Prophets. The Day of the Lord, the coming of the Lord, and the action of the Lord are not only related concepts but are at times actually interchangeable⁶³.

What is characteristic in the prophetic literature is that, besides portraying the Lord as a coming Judge who uses water, fire, and other kinds of calamities, they emphasize that the Lord is the coming mighty Warrior whose victory is undisputed.

Furthermore, the Prophets always adjusted their mind and language in order to follow their time, to fit in the environment and to make their message relevant to their audience.

But the Day of the Lord continued to be the day of the coming of God to judge the wicked, to save the righteous and to renew the earth. As Isaiah says,

For now I create new heavens and a new earth, and the past will not be remembered, and will come no more to men's minds. Be glad and rejoice for ever and ever for what I am creating, because I now creating Jerusalem joy and her people gladness. I shall rejoice over Jerusalem and exult in my people. No more will the sound of weeping or the sound of cries be heard in her; in her, no more will be found the infant living a few days only, or the old man not living to the end of his days. To die at the age of hundred will be dying young; not to live to be a hundred will be the sign of a curse (Sa.65:1/-20).

C) THE COMING OF GOD IN THE APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

Although some scholars consider the apocalyptic literature as a development from the prophetic literature,⁶⁴ the style and language of apocalypse is more more akin to earlier traditions than to the prophetic literature. The authors of apocalyptic literature evidently used and interpreted the earlier traditions. This is for instance, true of the first book of Enoch in reference to the stories of the flood and the marriage between the Sons of God and the daughters of men (I Enoch 6:1-6; 7:1-6 = Gen. 6:1-4, 5-18).

The God of the apocalyptic authors comes more in the

figure of a judge than the Warrior of the prophetic authors. And as in the earlier traditions, the coming of God is associated with the power of nature.

Turning now to the theme of the coming of God in apocalyptic literature, we see that most of the apocalyptic writing is full of announcements of the coming of God or of the Day of the Lord in which He will come to execute judgement in the earth. How did the apocalyptic authors understand God's judgement? According to Enoch, the judgement would be for all men (I Enoch 1:7c). There would be the separation of the righteous from the unrighteous, then the secrets of the shall be revealed and the sinners will be judged (I Enoch 38:3; 5:4-5). Possessions shall be taken from their possessors, the kingdoms from their kings, and given to the righteous and the holy (I Enoch 38:4-5; 48:8). The judgement would be carried out by God's Elect One, the Son of Man, who shall sit on his throne of glory and judge all people according to their own works. Then the righteous will live with the Elect One in a transformed and blessed earth, but the sinners will be destroyed from the face of the earth (I Enoch 45:3-6). Violence, transgression and all the deeds of unrighteousness would be consumed or cut off from their roots (I Enoch 91:7-8).

The author of the second book of the apocalypse of Baruch, points out that the time will come in which the change of times shall be manifested to every man because the men

polluted themselves by practicing oppression, walking in their own works, and forgetting the law of the Mighty One. The fire will consume their thoughts and the meditations of their reins will be tried (II Baruch 48:38-39). The time will be of the consummation of what is corruptible and the beginning of what is not corruptible (II Baruch 74:2). Therefore, all men's hidden works, secret thoughts, and all that are laid up in the secret chambers of all the members of mankind will be examined and manifested in the presence of all (II Baruch 83:2-3).

According to the apocalypse of Ezra IV the final judgement comes after the general resurrection, there will be a general judgement in which the truth shall stand. The righteous will be recompensed and rewarded according to their deeds of righteousness. But for the unrighteous the furnace of Gehenna shall be manifested and there will be the pit of torment for them. (IV Ezra 7:33-36)

The authors of the apocalyptic writings agreed that the judgement will be for all men and not the pagans or unbelievers only. Everyone will be judged according to his or her good deeds or bad deeds which will be revealed by the Righteous One. The judgement will not take place at the end of the history or the world. With the exception of IV Ezra who sees the judgement as something which will happen outside of the history and after the general resurrection - it will happen in the here and now. Therefore, the righteous will be recompensed and rewarded by possessing the land and the Kingdom of God as a fruit of their deeds of righteousness. The unrighteous will be punished and be consumed by fire as their punishment because

fruit of their deeds of righteousness. The unrighteous will be rooted out and be consumed by fire as their punishment because of their bad deeds which will represent their disobedience to the command of God.

The problem of understanding the meaning of the Scriptures, mainly in the teaching of Jesus Christ, will be solved by studying or examining the Scriptures from outside the cultural context of those who received the word of God or by failing to consider the eschatological thinking of the time. Myths for instance, are not to be regarded as false stories but as a first phase of scientific interpretation of the revelation of God which helped the ancient people to communicate and to understand the word of God and their own world.

In the past God worked through His Holy Spirit. Today He continues to work through the same Spirit and His Son Jesus Christ in the heart of everyone. This work is always manifested by the fruit of good deeds to anyone who is being used by the Holy Spirit to offer his or her participation in the building of the eschatological Kingdom of God and give to many people who are suffering in the present Kingdom of violence, injustice, aggression and destruction of life which is created by God. Therefore, it is erroneous and misleading to think that the coming judgement of God aimed at judging the pagans or non-Christians only because the Christians have been justified by their faith in Jesus Christ, even without doing what their

Saviour Jesus Christ demands them to do. We must remember that Jesus Christ said to the believers that the pagans and even the prostitutes will precede the believers in entering the Kingdom of God.

Today, it is clear that the very powerful, exploiters and the aggressive are the so-called Christian countries. Who will pay for the lives of many poor people who are dying of famine because of being exploited by the Christian countries? Who will pay for the blood of many people who are dying in the wars created and financed by the Christian countries who want their guns to be bought and the continual exploitation of the poor countries? Is this criminal offence to the just God justified by faith in Jesus Christ only?

Through His prophets, God condemned both the believers and unbelievers because of their aggression, violence, crime, and their religious and social ills. And during his earthly ministry, Jesus Christ condemned the pharises because of their hypocritical worship and their teaching what they were not doing in practice.

1.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The selected text of Matthew 25:31-46 is a text which provides many teachings regarding the Parousia, the Apocalypse, the Eschatology, the judgement and the kingdom of God which can not be exhausted in the present research. Therefore, although some of these teachings were studied and we will discuss them in the following chapters in order to obtain more

information to enrich our study, we will concentrate on the judgement and the coming kingdom of God. This choice is prompted by four main reasons. Firstly, some scholars and mainly the preachers see the judgement as coming at the end of history after the general resurrection of the dead. They conceive it as being the judgement not of the living but of their souls. Secondly, there is a problem about who will be judged. Some argue that it will be only for non-Christians because of their hostile attitude towards the faithful disciples and followers of Jesus Christ.⁶⁵ They argue that good works are not acceptable if they are not done in the name of Jesus Christ.⁶⁶ Thirdly, inspite of many efforts by some theologians to reconcile faith with deeds, there is still a widespread tendency to separate work from faith.

Fourthly there are those who understand salvation as the grace of God through Jesus Christ only without seeing any relevance of righteousness and obedience to God's demand.⁶⁷ According to this view, the work of the Holy Spirit in the non-Christians who perform good works even without knowing that they are doing so is forgotten.

1.4 IMPORTANT THEMES OF THE STUDY

1.4.1 ESCHATOLOGY

The term "Eschatology" comes from the Greek word eschaton meaning explanation of what will happen at the end of history. It is employed in reference to the last things, the last

judgement, heaven and hell.⁶⁸ According to A New Dictionary of Christian Theology, the word was used for the first time in 1844 since in the traditional teaching of Jesus Christ it is not clearly stated as eschatology. But only as a description of what is yet to happen at the end of human history.⁶⁹ The term therefore belong to the traditional Christian theology which hold the belief that Jesus Christ had divine foreknowledge of all future events based on his prophetic sayings. Instance such prediction about the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:31), the coming of the Son of Man (Mark 9:1) are cited as key prophetic teachings of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. The classical Christian doctrine of Eschatology was developed from the images and metaphors from the Bible and connected to the myths and legends from the extra-biblical sources. For example, the development of the idea of the Devil by Origen and Augustine was based more on the ancient myths of the near Eastern legends than the patristic exposition of the Bible.⁷⁰

In the Mediaeval time, influenced by the social problems of Europe, the apocalyptic vision became a driving force in the expectation of the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus Christ.⁷¹ In contemporary time, Albert Schweitzer argues that the critical scholarship must put the eschatological teaching of Jesus Christ as a central point of his teaching and as a key to right understanding of his life because he came to proclaim the approaching eschatology climax.⁷²

Dodd argue that the Kingdom of God was already present with Jesus Christ. Hence the whole complex of events comprising Jesus' ministry, teaching, death and resurrection constituted the coming of the kingdom of God. Therefore there is no future eschatology but what he called "realized eschatology".⁷³

The idea is defended by Glasson and Robison who maintain that Jesus Christ did not expect an immediate and supernatural return from heaven after his death.⁷⁴

This study therefore intends to offer its contribution in finding out how the eschatological teaching can help the Christians of our time especially the African Christians, to understand the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and how this can strengthen their faith to-day.

1.4.2 THE KINGDOM OF GOD

There is an agreement especially in the Synoptic Gospels, that the central point of Jesus' preaching is the arrival of the Kingdom of God. This is the reality that gives sense to all activity and is the best historical key to understanding the central meaning of Jesus' preaching.

The idea of the Kingdom of God is two fold. Firstly, Jesus is not the center of his own preaching. His preaching was not about himself but about the Kingdom of God which was at hand. (cf. 1:15) Secondly, Jesus Christ did not proclaim the coming of God but God's Kingdom. This means that historically, we can only know Jesus of Nazareth through his

preaching of the coming Kingdom of God. This background is very important in helping us to understand the meaning of the Kingdom of God preached and taught by Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry.

The preaching of the coming Kingdom of God in Israel did not begin with Jesus. It was not a new count. Many prophets, including the precursor of Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, had also preached about it. (cf. Mat.3:1-2) Therefore Jesus is regarded by some theologians as a religious reformer who preached the better traditions of Israel. They were waiting for the salvation from Yahweh whom they understood Him as the One who possessed dominion upon Israel and her history⁷⁵.

It was within that reflection that they were led into understanding of God as exclusively theirs but as of all nations. (cf. Jer. 10:7) Therefore, in order to understand the meaning of the coming Kingdom of God in Jesus' preaching and teaching, we must first of all seek to understand that the origin of Israel's hope for that Kingdom was influenced by the suffering of her people in the hands of their enemies. Particularly during the destruction of Israel and Judah followed by, the Babylonian captivity and the painful experience in the period of Persian exile.

It was from that bitter experience interpreted from the light of their faith in God that gave rise to the eschatological hope of a renewed situation and the expectation of the Messiah

who would come to fulfil their hope here and now.

In the inter-testamental period, the hope that God would establish His rule on earth was developed. This is seen more clearly in the later apocalyptic literature (cf. Rev. 19:1-7; 21:1-14), in which the event would include judgement of the wicked and the restoration of the righteous to enjoy life in the new and the Kingdom of God. In the New Testament period, the expectation of the coming Kingdom of God dominates almost all its literature. (cf. John 3:3,5; Mat. 13:41-43; 16:28; Mark 9:1; 10:37; Mat. 20:21; 25:31-46; Romans 13-17; I Cor.4:20)

Traditionally, the Roman Catholic Church identifies the Kingdom of God with the Church. This was influenced by the teaching of Augustine who taught that the organized Church is actually the Kingdom of God on earth and the sovereignty of Christ will be finally demonstrated to the world through the mediation of the saints⁷⁶.

Kant, Schleiermacher, and Ritschl define the Kingdom of God as the realm of ideal human relation on earth and therefore an ideal Christian society⁷⁷. This is the idea that made the teaching of the coming Kingdom of God to be understood in terms of progress, development, evolution and material prosperity which dominated the liberal theology from 1850's⁷⁸. Johannes Weiss disagreed with this idea and defined the Kingdom of God as a force which would burst into history, transforming the world and bringing both renewal and judgement⁷⁹.

each generation⁸⁵.

John S. Pobee points out that the Bible presents Jesus Christ and the experience of a living encounter with him who is the eternal hope and a challenge to human beings to change. This must be experienced by each individual and the community in the community in their context conditioned by time and situation. If we understand Pobee's view well, he defines theology as the interpretation of the word of God in the Scriptures and our encounter with Jesus Christ as experienced by the individual or community in their life situation. That is, determined by the historical events.

Gustavo Gutierrez considers theology as a critical reflection and as such, it fulfils a liberative function for human beings and the Christian community, protecting them from fetishism, idolatry, as well as from a pernicious self-centeredness⁸⁷. In this view, theology becomes an instrument of liberation from every form of religious alienation⁸⁸. Pablo adds that this does not mean that theology as liberation rejects the supernatural and the transcendental character of faith. On the contrary, it affirms it categorically. It defines details of faith within a political praxis of liberation, a praxis which seeks to understand and to transform the contradictory realities of unjust and inhuman capitalist system⁸⁹.

The definitions above show that it is true that there is no common definition of theology because definitions vary from

time to time and from place to place, influenced by the historical factors of those times and situations.

This study is a contribution to the study of Biblical theology. It seeks to understand the Biblical teaching on the coming of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus Christ and based on the selected text of Matthew 25:31-46 and relating it to African life and historical reality of our time.

1.4.4. EXEGESIS

The term "Exegesis" is a transliteration of a Greek noun "Exegesis" which means narration, exposition, explanation and commentary⁹⁰. The term does not occur in the New Testament only but also in Septuagint, where it is used to mean commentary or exposition of Scriptures⁹¹. The Greek verbal form is Exegeomai which means to direct, to expound or to interpret⁹². According to Kaiser, in the Septuagint, the verb Exegeomai translates from a Hebrew which means to recount, to tell or to declare⁹³. Generally, exegesis is understood as a process of bringing out the meaning of a text; the work of textual interpretation or the praxis of interpretation of texts⁹⁴. The exegies differs from hermeneutics, which refer to the theory of interpretation of the text and from Greek term which means Eisegesis which means process of bringing in,⁹⁵ that is, the reader instead of seeking the meaning of the text, puts his own point of view upon the text.

Hayes and Hallady define exegesis as a normal activity in

which all of us engage in our daily discourses⁹⁶. Thus, every time we are seeking to understand an oral or a written statement we are doing exegesis because we are always communication with other people. We question what is being spoken to us and we also analyse the words which are spoken.

In the process of seeking to understand, the context and occasion in which the communication takes place must be considered⁹⁷. So, in case of seeking to understand a Biblical text in its context, the exegete must be familiar with the literary and historical worlds within which each of the Biblical books arose⁹⁸. Thus, a comparative study of Biblical books and ancient religious literature are important. Since the books of the Bible were not written as historical documents only, an appreciation of the social, economic, political and religious history of the time and place in which any Biblical book was written is an essential factor in interpretation⁹⁹. For instance, the history Religion School of Biblical Interpretation helped to clarify the meaning of the Scriptures by comparing their content with contemporary religious ritual, ideology and literature. F.C. Baur of the Tubingen School advises that if the book is to be understood, it must be interpreted within its historical context:

By examining a text within its proper historical and literary context, exegesis seeks to clarify what the author of a biblical text intended to say to his particular audience. It seeks to elucidate his vision and his message.

The historical-critical method of exegesis thus arises from the so-called romantic hermeneutics. It seeks to understand what the text meant at the time and in the circumstances in which it was written¹⁰⁰.

This study is an attempt to find out the meaning of Matthew 25:31-46 and the social, economic, political and religious historical context and the circumstances which influenced the teaching of Jesus Christ provided in the above text.

1.4.5 CONCLUSION

The Kingdom of God is understood as an eschatological event: Firstly it is a fact that no one knows when it will be fulfilled. The Prophets, Angels and even the Son of God did not know the day (Mat. 24:35-36). It can be tomorrow, next month, next year or after one or fifty centuries. The word "Will or Shall", which show that something or an act will be realized in future, marks the hidden day of the coming Kingdom of God as an eschatological event. Secondly, the fact that the day is taking time to come maybe because the people to whom the Kingdom of God was presented (Mak. 1:15; Mat.12:28) are not contributing or doing anything to drive out the demons which continue to cause the suffering of the least and brethren of the Son of Man. Thus, for these least and brethren of the Son of Man, the Kingdom of God became a hope and that God of Justice and Love will not abandon them completely. One day He will come to fulfill His promise of liberating them and of redeeming the world.

Jesus Christ as a Jew, followed the prophecy of his forefathers in thinking that the Kingdom of God will come from God in heaven to earth for the benefit of the righteous and the doers of the will of God (see for instance Matthew 6:9-13). He did not teach about a Kingdom which is concentrated in heaven ready to be entered by the souls of the dead, but about the Kingdom which came with him from heaven like the mustard seed to be planted on the earth for the benefit of the living people.

The Church inverted this teaching. Thus, the Kingdom of God, instead of coming from heaven to earth, became something which is concentrated only in heaven awaiting the souls of the Christian believers to enter into it.

God is Life because life began with Him. Without God we would have no life. On the other hand, without life we would have no existence of God. Life gives evidence to the existence of God. This means that where there is no life, God does not exist and where there is no God, life also does not exist. Therefore, it is not meaningful to speak about God outside life as well as speaking about life outside God. If God did not create life, He would never exist because none could speak about Him.

According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, theology is the study of God and God's relationship with man by studying the origin and development of a particular religion. Therefore, a theology which speaks about God outside man's life does not speak about God. Similarly, as a theology which speaks

about man's life outside God does not speak about man's life. It is a theology of death or of the nonexistence of both God and man. In short, it is not theology at all.

The life of man is image of God and God's existence. On the other hand, God is the image of man's life. This correlation is very important for those who want to speak about the existence of God or to do theology honestly.

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CHAPTER TWOMATTHEW 25:31-46: AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS2.1 INTRODUCTION

The word of God has always been revealed and interpreted by human beings through historical events. That is, it has been interpreted in accordance with political, social, economic and even natural events in man's history. For instance, famines, plagues, floods and storms are seen as God's wrath and punishment. In political expansion, it is interpreted as God's will in using the superpower to subordinate other nations. Those who are subjected interpret their subjugation as God's punishment for their disobedience.

For the reason just stated, man never comes to the knowledge of God's will and plan beyond his own history or outside his daily life. It is through his social relationships with others and the world, as maker of human history and observer of natural events that the human being can communicate with his Creator.

From Genesis we learn that the wrath of God was revealed for the first time to condemn the first man's social crime and to punish him. This condemnation was inclusive of the ground, for its collaboration in the crime of opening its mouth and drinking the blood of the innocent. (Gen.4:10-14). We also learn that social disorder, brought about by corruption in the society indeed caused the wrath of God that made Him take action against man and the entire world (cf. Gen.6:5-8).

The Prophets, during their ministry, revealed the wrath and will of God to their fellows through interpretation of political, social and natural events in history. These and many other examples, made human history one of the channels of revealing God, His acts, and His will to His creatures on earth. Therefore the above selected text is going to be interpreted through the historical method.

The choice is based on the idea that the above mentioned method provides the political, social, economic and religious conditions of the time and place in which the teaching of the text was pronounced or written. That helps us to find out and to understand the factors which contributed or influenced the author of the text to teach it. At the same time it helps us to find out the purpose of teaching, the relevant audience and whether the factors were political, social, economic or religious. In short, the method allows investigation into the author's motive of teaching, reasons for its preservation, development and transmission. Before interpreting the selected text therefore, it is appropriate to describe briefly the methods of interpretation of the scriptures.

2.2 METHODS OF EXEGETICAL STUDY

Chronologically, the word of God came to us through its oral transmission from generation to generation, before it was put into writing by various writers in different languages such as; Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Afterwards translated it into other ancient languages, including, Latin, Syriac, Ethiopic, Coptic,

Gothic and Armenian¹. The Biblical literature presents variations of words, additions, omissions, alterations, and even grammatical errors in the same passages or texts of different translations or versions.

The Biblical message does not only tell about the existence and acts of God in the history of mankind. It also records the life and deeds of the ancient people, their struggle to solve their social, economic, cultural, political problems and even their natural misfortune. This shows that the ancient man heard the word of God and tried to understand and to interpret it through historical circumstances and natural events. Thus, the authors of the Holy Scriptures did not write as though they were writing dictation, but they used their own means of communication, thought, reflection, skill and experience to understand and to interpret the revealed word. They experienced God's action in their history. The New Testament especially the Gospels, tells about the life of the Son of God who was born of a virgin woman, lived, taught, acted, died and resurrected from the dead. The Pentateuch tells also about a God who offered Himself to liberate, to protect, guide the lives of a people, and to judge and punish the enemies of the very people.

In seeking to understand a biblical text or passage, several factors can create problems. These factors include, the contribution or influence of historical events in transmitting the word of God, the participation of man through the use of

human means of communication, the rewriting of the Scriptures by many authors in different languages, the variation of words of the same passage or text. Some of the problems are in regard to, time and place of their authorship and the events which prompted their writing.

Other problems are related to the language of the text, its rhetorical style, its literary type, the various stages of its literary developments upto the final form or composition of the passage, its theology and the universal ideas and events in the text. These considerations are of great importance in the technical study of critical methods.

2.2.1 TEXTUAL CRITICISM

This is also as Lower Criticisms in relation to the so-called Higher or Literary Criticism², an idea which is criticised by George E. Ladd. According to Ladd, the distinction is not meaningful because there is nothing lower or higher about either method of studying the Bible³. W. David Stacey regards Higher and Lower Criticisms as old fashioned terms⁴, applied in the study of variations among manuscripts in the original languages, variations between ancient manuscripts in the original languages and manuscripts of the early translation, variations among manuscripts in early translations and variant quotations in early Jewish and Christian writing⁵.

Textual criticism can also be used to determine the process through which the text has suffered before it came into actual form, to establish its original words, and to

determine its best form and words.

Using this method of critical study, the student is not only able to understand how the ancient writings were originally composed but also how they were copied, preserved, translated and quoted⁶.

The use of textual method of criticism has resulted in the discovery of the existence of two types of errors in a text. The first type is constituted by the misunderstanding of the text through hearing, reading and seeing and the inclusion of the margin notes or glosses of the early text into later ones by the new copyists. The second type are errors caused by correction of spelling or grammar and the rearrangement of words with the intention of producing a more coherent or more logical sequential account or even to satisfy their theological or doctrinal interests⁷.

2.2.2 HISTORICAL CRITICISM

Historical Criticism is one of the critical methods which study the historical events of a text. It seeks to determine the political, social and religious conditions of the time in which the text was written. It is concerned with time and place in order to find if the events referred to by the document really took place. Its main aim is to discover which factors influenced the author of the text to produce it: be political, social or religious factors.

This method is a wide complex critical study because it can

be used with other methods to explain texts, to determine their background and to evaluate their historical reliability.⁸ Historical criticism is also employed to determine the authorship of a Biblical text with the aim of discovering its history. It aids in answering questions such as how the text came into existence, for what purpose it was written, when and where it was written, who wrote it, to whom it was written, why it was preserved, developed, translated and which factors influenced or affected its origin.

To study the New Testament text, it is recommended to have knowledge of the religious environment of the first century Judaism and the Hellenistic world⁹ in which the Christian faith was developed. For this reason, the study of Israel's history, the early Christianity, cultural and social literature are required as useful sources.

2.2.3. GRAMMATICAL OR LINGUISTIC CRITICISM

This is also known as "Grammatico-Historical Method of Exegesis".¹⁰ It is concerned more with the language used by the author to produce the text. It seeks to understand the sense of the Biblical text through its language in which the word of God was revealed.

The main aim in the use of grammatico-historical method of criticism is to try to discover the historical nature of the words in which the revelation of the event was written and

its interpretation. That is, to find out if the nature of character of those words are linguistically and literary divine or merely human words. Furthermore, its study and analysis also show the combination of those which form phrases and sentences in order to determine the grammatical sense and historical data of the message.

The question put by the grammatico-historical method are:

What is the historical nature of the words in which the reveal event is recorded and the reveal interpretation expressed? Are these words linguistic and literary character divine words, or are they human words which are historically conditioned and which therefore be interpreted grammatically and historically? ¹¹

The distinction of the New Testament language from the classical Greek of the fifth and fourth centuries before Christ¹² was seen by some scholars of the seventeenth century¹³ as the result of the Hebrew influence and for others, as a special idiom of revelation.¹⁴ The linguistic critical debate among scholars was clarified, thanks to the work of the first archaeologists who discovered papyrus rolls containing records of the popular language of the first century in which the account embraces both social and religious life.¹⁵ So, the grammatico-historical method is important for the exegetical study of the scriptures.

2.2. 4 LITERARY CRITICISM

The books of the Bible are famous for such features as

exceptional structure, style, symbol, dramatic language
 Literary Criticism know alternatively as Higher Criticism,
 concerns itself with all the factors involved in reading and
 understanding both the Biblical or nonbiblical books. It deals
 with such factors as their compositional structure and character,
 their technical style, use of images and symbols aesthetic and
 dramatic effects.¹⁶

Biblical scholars ask many questions which seek to discover
 who the author of the text or of the book is when and where
 it was written, to whom it was written and so on. So, the task
 of the Literary Criticism is to study these questions and try
 to find satisfactory answers. Furthermore, literary Criticism
 finds out the historical setting and various aspects of the
 language and content of the book.¹⁷ Thus, Literary Criticism
 is a wide method of critical study for it is applicable in
 different senses.¹⁸ In nonbiblical literature, it can be
 used to judge the value of a new book by the literary experts.¹⁹
 In Biblical study it concerns the thought of the author of the
 book or of the text.

2.2.5 HISTORICAL FORM CRITICISM

Although the Bible is the revealed word of God, it contains
 records which represent the social, political, cultural and
 economic life of the people who received the word. For instance
 we find that the same word was transmitted in the form of myths,

songs, war cries,²⁰ and other devices used in particular occasions in the life of the people,²¹ and transformed, in due course to permanent cultural and religious elements.

Historical Form Criticism concerns the study of those elements. It seeks to identify and classify the literary types of documents and to determine the conditions or situations which influenced the formation of each literary type. Besides, it seeks to find out the principles which led to their persistence in history from one generation to another.²²

Historical Form Criticism was applied for the first time in the study of the Bible by Hermann Gunkel. He used the method to study the stories told in the books of Genesis and Psalms.²³ In the New Testament, especially in the Gospels, the method was used by Martin Debelius and Rudolf Bultmann²⁴ to explain the origin of the tradition about Jesus Christ and to clarify the intention and real interest of the earliest tradition.²⁵

The application of the Historical Form Criticism in the study of the Scriptures is important in determining the original form of a piece of narrative,²⁶ in which the student learns to distinguish forms and secondary additions, which lead to the important results for the history of the tradition.²⁷

One of the characteristics of Historical Form Criticism is the study of historical units passed orally as a series of

disconnected pericopes such as: anecdotes, stories, teachings and parables²⁸ where the teaching of Jesus Christ was remembered and prescribed in order to attend to the necessity of the circumstances that the early Church was facing.²⁹ These historical units are the so-called historical context, existential context, existential situation in the life of the Christian Church of A.D. 60-90,³⁰ that is, setting in life, life situation or Sitz im Leben.

2.2.6. TRADITION CRITICISM

In the Gospels for instance, we find that there are divergences in the way the same stories with the same were narrated. Thus, making the readers doubt whether the stories were told by Jesus Christ or if the events really happened during his ministry.

Tradition Criticism also known as Traditio -Historical Criticism, tries to explain those differences, changes and doubts through studying and analysing groups of materials, and relating them to their social and religious context. It seeks to understand the nature of Biblical traditions transmitted from one generation to another through stories, saying, songs, poems, confessions, creeds, etc.³¹ and their employment and transformation in the history of the community. Furthermore, Tradition Criticism does not only concern oral traditions but also the written traditions. Therefore, in the written traditions its task is to find out how those traditions were developed and

for what purpose were they developed.

The primary aim for using this method is to discover the final form of the written text through examining aspects of faith and life of the people of Isreal and the Christian community and to discover how Israel and the Christian Church have participated in the process of transmission. ³²

2.2.7. REDACTION CRITICISM

Like the construction of a building which comprises the foundation, of the walls and roof over, Redaction Criticism serves as the roof of a building built by the Historical Form Criticism and Traditio-Historical Criticism. Historical Form Criticism is concerned with the study of the literary. Analyses of the Gospel through units and sub-units of each Gospel ³³ individually. Traditio-Historical Criticism finds out the history of those units, sub-units or pericopes.

Redaction Criticism analyses the single parts of the Gospel and seeks to understand them in the light of the whole. It concerns the study of the final text itself and compare it with an an earlier text from which the later was produced or interpreted, or with other Biblical texts of the same story, with the aim of producing a complete and clear message.

It penetrates deeper into the thought world of the author of the text or of the community in which the author was one of the members and seeks to understand the meaning of the sections of the Gospel and the meaning of the whole Gospel in those situations. A.W. David Stacey has put it

clearly:

Redaction Criticism concentrates on the final editing of the units into the complete Gospel. Redaction is the process whereby the final editor selects, adjusts and links together his sources. Redaction Criticism studies the process and tries to explain what the editor's motives were.³⁴

2.2.8 STRUCTURALIST CRITICISM

Although the books of the Bible today are presented with their respective authors, there is still a problem of authorship, because the readers find that the book attributed to the same author present different grammatical structure, style and language.

The Structuralist Criticism is one of the historical methods of Biblical study which seeks to find out who the original author of the book or of a text was and what the original audience was, what historical conditions and circumstances were experienced by the author and his audience at the time when the original manuscripts were produced.

The term Structuralist Criticism comes applies to a methodology developed to analyse any kind of human and social phenomena or activities.³⁵ Thus, the method has been used not only in the study of Biblical matter but also in the study of various fields such as: anthropology, linguistics and literature.³⁶

The Structuralist study is based on the belief that all social activities are governed by abstract conventions,

convictions and rules,³⁷ which form the foundation of structures of all the cultural systems which manifest themselves in all forms of human social activity.³⁸

2.2.9 SOURCES CRITICISM

One of the most debated Biblical problems by scholars hitherto unsolved is the Synoptic problem, which concerns the original source or sources used by the authors of the first three Gospels. In the books of Matthew, Mark and Luke, we find that there is similarity of passage in the narration of some events or stories about life and deeds of Jesus Christ. We find that some events and stories are narrated by all of them or by two of them only while some events are unique to one of them.

Sources Criticism therefore, concerns the original sources used by the final author to produce his own book or text. In the case of relating the same events or stories, it seeks to discover who was the first to record the events and who used others as his source.

Some of the Biblical books present different style, language, vocabulary and background in their chapters. In these cases, the Sources Criticism uses those differences as its tools to find out the original sources used by the author of a book. Therefore, Sources Criticism is defined as "the study of books in the Bible to discover what sources, if any, the author used".³⁹

2.3 VIEWS ABOUT THE LAST JUDGEMENT

The last judgement is an issue which presents many views, mainly on who the goats and sheep are and who the least brethren of Jesus Christ are. In spite of that, most of the scholars of the New Testament are of the opinion that there will be no judgement for the Christian believers, as they are already justified by their faith in Jesus Christ.

The New Revised Bible Commentary is not certain as to whether there was a specific group in the mind of Jesus Christ when he spoke about the least of his brethren. Therefore it could be that he was referring to his disciples in general⁴⁰.

Matthew's teaching is that the believers must be responsible in their use of God's gifts in His work in the absence of His Son Jesus Christ (Mat. 25:14-30). So, "the reward of faithfulness and responsible service to others is further responsibility. The punishment for abuse of power in the Church seems to be irrevocable"⁴¹.

The two servants in Matthew 25:14-30 were found good and faithful because they did their best for the sake of their master, but the third did nothing. As a result he was condemned as wicked⁴². The separation of sheep from the goats seems to mean that the judgement shall be individual but it will be universal. The righteous will not be justified for what they did, but because they show that they are faithful through their good deeds which the others ignored. The separation shows who will inherit the Kingdom of God and who will go to external fire⁴³.

The questions in this commentary are: if the righteous will not be justified by what they did to the least brethren of Jesus Christ which, according to Jesus was done to him, why is it that the others who neglected these deeds will be sent to external fire? Why won't they be justified by their faith if this weighs more than deeds? The external punishment is the sign that faith without doing what God has asked us to do for the sake of His Kingdom is a dead faith. Then in order to be alive and complete one must have faith as well as a sense of duty in doing God's work of the building of His Kingdom here and now.

William Hendriksen, in his Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, points out that those who will be gathered before the throne on the day of judgement are persons, individuals, without any regard to their nationality. The judgement will be in accordance with their lives in harmony with the commands and examples of Jesus Christ. It is on this basis that the Judge will separate the sheep from the goats⁴⁴.

According to Matthew Henry's Commentary, Jesus Christ will judge the world in accordance with the law of his government. Thus, the people who will be rewarded are those who have been obedient to his law. Nevertheless this obedience is only one of the qualifications of each person. Those who obey God's law also receive the promised gift.

The good works addressed here are works of charity to the poor and they show that faith working by love is one and the

same thing in Christianity. These good works imply three things which must be found in all who are saved: self-denial and contempt for the world and being kind to the poor; love for the brethren which must be shown through the readiness to do good to them and treating them well. The good works which are done in the name of the Lord Jesus shall then be accepted.

Works of charity and beneficence are necessary to salvation because they show love and professed commitment to the gospel of Christ. Those who show no mercy shall face judgement without mercy⁴⁵.

This interpretation provides many positive points but there are also negative points. For instance, the contempt for the world and the love of poverty. I find it difficult to reconcile this idea with the God who promised to give his people the land full of milk and honey. How can we despise something which is part of our lives? Did God create a poor man or a rich man? (cf. Gen.2:7-15) Poverty is the fruit of selfishness and social injustice which cannot be accepted by man and by the God of promise.

Another point is about good works which can only be accepted if done in the name of Jesus Christ. What about the action of the Holy Spirit in man? We must know that God does not act in the world through the Son only but also through the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that we have God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit who is only One God acting in different ways in history. Therefore, the good non-

Christians are not of themselves good, as there is no human being who is good, but they are good because they are being used by the Holy Spirit to love and do good deeds to others.

W. Robertson Nicoll in his Exposition of the Bible argues that showing kindness to the poor is not the ground for judgement. It is the manifestation of devotion to God revealed in Christ, which provides the real ground of acceptance by God or condemnation⁴⁶.

Although Nicoll seems to suggest that those who will be condemned in the last judgement are non-believers only, he accepts that there will be room also for those who might have no means to know Christ, but show their kindness through their good deeds to their fellows as the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in them⁴⁷. Nevertheless this idea seems to contradict the first one. If the manifestation of devotion to God revealed in Christ forms the only real ground of acceptance and the only real ground of condemnation, how can he say that there will be room also for the pagans who will only depend on their good deeds to their fellows?

According to Pfeiffer and Harrison, the nations mentioned to be gathered on the day of the judgement, are the people who will be living in the world at the time when Jesus Christ will return to perform the judgement. Those people will be judged individually and not as groups⁴⁸.

The brethren of Jesus Christ are clearly distinct from the goats and the sheep. The brethren are the faithful Jewish remnants who will proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God all over the

world. The nations are the Gentiles who after conversion must show their faith by the deeds of kindness to brethren of Christ. "Their visiting those in prison suggests that danger will be involved in man's public acknowledgement of Christ and His emissaries during that period"⁴⁹.

This interpretation exclude the Jewish nation from other nations in the last judgement and presents the Gentiles as the only representatives of their nations which shall be judged in accordance with their badness or kindness to the Jewish remnants, the brethren of Jesus Christ. This means that those who will face the judgement are the converted Gentile Christians who will accept the message of the coming Kingdom of God and demonstrate their conversion through good deeds as the emissaries of Christ and the pagans or non-Christians who will not accept the message of Christ's emissaries. If it is so, then this view contradicts the doctrine of justification by faith only and the universal judgement of all nations as long as the Jewish nation is excluded from other nations on the day of the judgement. Furthermore, what about the Jews who will continue to refuse the Christian faith, as it is still the case today that there are those who do not accept it?

Reinhold Niebur in his survey of the Nature And Destiny of Man in Christian Interpretation argues that according to logical accord of the whole Biblical conception of Life and history, in which there is not partial and particular character

of human existence which is evil, but only the self-love by which the human being disrupts the harmony of creation, as it would be if all creatures were obeying the will of their Creator, the judgement is only upon sin and not finiteness.⁵⁰

Therefore there is no living human being who is justified before God's judgement. This is proved by the proper righteous people before the last judgement but believing that they are righteous. Thus, it is only the divine mercy and the forgiveness of sin which can solve the problem of judgement. Outside these, there is no solution.⁵¹ As he put it clearly:

There is no achievement or partial realization in history, no fulfilment of meaning or achievement of virtue by which man can escape the final judgement. The idea of a "last" judgement expresses Christianity's refutation of all conception of history, according to which it is its own redemer and is able by its process of growth and development to emancipate man from the guilt and sin of his existence, and to free him from judgement.⁵²

The problem in Niebuhr's argument is: if none can be found good or justified by faith before God's judgement, even those who did the will of God in accordance with the preaching and teaching of His Son Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, then none will enter into the Kingdom of God or none will be judged, as both will receive mercy and forgiveness from God. But the question is: What about God's justice and His promise to punish the wicked?

The Scriptures teach that Noah and Lot were found good before God's judgement and as a result were separated from the

wicked, who because of their wickedness were punished by floods and fire. (cf. 6:5-12;7:1;19:1-16) Abraham became the father of the nation because he was found good before God and was justified by his deeds when he accepted to offer his only son as a burnt offering to God. (cf. Gen.22:1-18) Therefore, God in his justice and love is giving us time to change our attitudes against His will. But on the day of the judgement He will use only justice, not mercy or forgiveness, to judge the wicked who refused to do what God demands them to do and to reward those who are offering their contribution in the building of God's Kingdom on earth through their good deeds done to all those who are distressed.

W.G. Kummel finds it difficult to understand if the last judgement will include the Christians, whole mankind, or only the non-Christian nations and whether the least brethren means all people in distress or only the members of the Christian community⁵³. Even though, he points out that it is true that all people will be judged because, according to Matthew 25:34 and 37, it could be a mistake to think that the Christians will not be included in the last judgement. It would also be an improbable assumption that the Judge of the world will ask about the behaviour of the non believers and not the Christians. Furthermore, it would mean that Matthew had also forgotten completely the expectation in 24:14 that the end will not come before the Good News of the Kingdom of God was proclaimed all over the world. If not, then he had in mind the question that

the last judgement will be about the behaviour of all those who have been reached by the message the Gospel towards all sufferers and not for non-Christians to the Christians. And according to Jesus Christ, in the duty of helping every sufferer (Luk.10:30ff), the brethren are not a specific people.

For this reason, the so-called the least of brethren "is not specifically religious designation , but describes, correspondence with the good deeds mentioned, such as those persons who are hungry, thirsty, naked, strangers, in prison, and therefore in need to help"⁵⁴. Kummel goes on to say that if his exegesis is correct, then it is not the behaviour of the Non-Christians which will be the standard for the last judgement⁵⁵.

Although Kummel seems to be uncertain in his interpretation, his exegesis is acceptable, as what he says is not what he thinks that it should be, but exactly what the Scriptures tell us. He does not use the Scriptures to justify what he thinks or speaks on their behalf as others do, but he interprets what the Scriptures teach us about what will happen on the last judgement.

Emil Brunner sees the last judgement as a manifestation of what is hidden in man's heart. Therefore we cannot decide as to who will be judged and who will not because this is the exclusive prerogative of the divine Judge of the world. It is for that reason that even those who will be saved and those who will be condemned will wonder how that could happen to them⁵⁶.

Indeed, God is the only One who can reveal those who walked in accordance with His will as taught by His Son Jesus Christ to

his followers, and the work of the Holy Spirit through non-Christians. It is not for the Christians to put themselves in the place of the Judge and decide who will be judged and who will not, because as Jesus Christ says, there are many Christians who are saying "Lord, Lord", but without doing what that Lord is demanding them to do. These Christians according to Jesus Christ, are worse than prostitutes as the latter can even go ahead of them in entering the Kingdom of God.

Furthermore, the Apostle Paul's teachings which are always being misused by the Pietists, say that it is not the Christian's business to act as judges to those who are outside the Christian Church because the only person who can judge them is God. The duty of the Christians according to the Apostle Paul, is to judge those who are inside the Christian Church and who must stop doing evil deeds. (cf. I Cor. 5:13)

According to George Eldon Ladd, all people will be judged not according to their evil or good deeds but in accordance with their careless words spoken spontaneously, which reveal the true character of man's heart. But even then, the Christians will not be condemned, as there will be a twofold issue on the day of the judgement: justification or condemnation. All men will appear before judgement to be justified or to be justified or to be condemned.⁵⁷ Therefore the sins and iniquities of the Christians will only take them to judgement, but they will not be condemned because they have an intercessor,

in the person of Jesus Christ. So, no one can condemn them.⁵⁸

For George Ladd,

Justification is not a subjective ethical quality. It is an objective relationship in which God decreed that the believer stands in a right relationship to the Judge of all men. Relationships are real objective facts. This is reflected even in our modern concepts of legal justice. A man is accused of a crime. His case is tried before a court. The verdict is either guilty or acquitted. The basic question is: What evidence can be provided on the basis of which a decision may be made? If he is pronounced acquitted he goes free, even though he has actually committed the crime. It matters not how he or anyone feels about it. The question is: What is the verdict of the court?⁵⁹

Therefore, according to Ladd, the eschatological judgement will not decide whether the believers are saved or not but only to confirm their salvation in accordance with their good works done in this life⁶⁰ (even if those works were done hypocritically).

The reward spoken about by the Apostle Paul is not the reward of salvation or justification, as this is not reward but a gift. It is a matter of fruitless speculation. Although some Christians have built their structures on a worthless foundation, which therefore will be consumed by the fire, but since they built it on the name of Jesus Christ, they will be saved, but only through fire. Ladd goes on calling our attention to understand that the passage does not apply directly to the ordinary Christian life, but to Christian leaders.⁶¹ There will be a special ground for the judgement of Christian leaders.⁶²

In Ladd's view, if we interpret it literally, it means that the faithless disciple will lose his salvation, but it was a radical method of Jesus' illustration in his teaching. The right meaning is that, the disciple who does not do anything is a contradiction in terms. But if a professed disciple has done completely nothing in the mission, it does not matter still Christ has done it on his behalf.⁶³

The brethren are the Jews who will be converted during the Great Tribulation and will take the mission of proclaiming the imminent coming of Christ's millennial kingdom to Gentile nations. Therefore the sheep are the Gentile nations who will treat Jesus' Jewish brethren kindly. The goats are those who will abuse them.⁶⁴ This means the Gentiles who never see or hear Jesus Christ personally, by welcoming his emissaries, giving them food and drink, taking care of them when they are flogged or imprisoned, Jesus will regard these activities as having been done to him. Those who will expel them from their towns or even see them flogged and imprisoned and not offer any help to them will be considered as those who rejected Jesus⁶⁵. So, for Ladd, "there is no other exegetical support for interpreting Jesus' brethren as all the unfortunate people"⁶⁶.

It is greatly misleading, dangerous and untheological for a scholar to compare the judgement and justice of man which in reality is not justice at all, with the justice of God. God is Justice and Love and as such He will not follow the

standards of the human law on the day of the judgement to judge the wicked. God's judgement is far from man's judgement. Man judges others by practising lies, hatred and injustice. God judges human beings by four measures: truth, deeds, justice and love. This is the only standard of God's law of judgement.

All nations including Israel, will be judged and condemned in accordance with their evil or good deeds and obedience or disobedience to God's demand. No hypocritical confession of those who are singing "Lord, Lord", while on the other hand are against the will of that Lord will be justified by their faith only.

God based on His own justice, judged Adam and Eve severely and punished them by throwing them out of the garden to a place where there was suffering all because of their disobeying to follow His commands. If the judgement was conducted in accordance with the human law, they would not be condemned as they did not do it voluntarily but were deceived by the serpent. Furthermore, they defended themselves by trying to explain and to justify the origin of their disobedience, but God judged and punished them with the serpent in accordance with His justice and not according to the philosophy of human law. God also judged and punished Cain severely for his criminal act against his brother Abel and expelled him from His presence.

How many people are being killed today by the Christian nations, only because they decided to trace and follow their own policy which defends the well being of their people and refused the exploitation of other countries? Some of the great

spies for those nations are the missionaries who come in the name and mission of Jesus Christ. Will these people be justified because they are spying, killing and exploiting in the name of Jesus Christ?

Jesus Christ did not bring faith to man as that was not man's problem, but the Good News of the coming of Kingdom of God to liberate men from distress. Therefore he did not teach how to have faith in him so that he can stand and do everything on man's behalf, but he taught him how to build the Kingdom of God which he brought and gave to man to build.

We are deceiving ourselves if we think that Jesus will defend us in spite of our sins and disobedience to his teaching only because we say that he is our Lord and our Saviour. He is indeed our Lord and Saviour because he came to show us the way and to lead us in doing what is fundamental for our freedom and the fulfillment of God's design, but not as a defender of our sins and disobedience to God. How can Jesus Christ, who will return as a Judge come to justify people who did not obey his teachings or the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

Israel lost her title of a Holy nation and her relationship to God because the Jews rejected the will and plan of God revealed to them through His Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Therefore Israel will not escape on the day of the judgement of the Son of Man as she is no longer favourite among nations .

Ladd also compares the Great White Throne judgement of Revelation with the judgement of the Son of Man in Matthew which

according to him are the same. Therefore they should not be interpreted differently,⁶⁷ because eternal punishment and eternal life do not mean a temporal earthly Kingdom but the state of final, everlasting punishment and reward⁶⁸.

There is a great difference between the two teachings. The Great White Throne speaks about the judgement which will take place at the end of human history if that end will really come after the general resurrection of human beings, that is, the judgement which will not take place in this life but beyond this world in the sky. Matthew speaks about the judgement of the Son of Man who will come back to this world to judge the world, the living people of all nations on earth in the present life and to establish the Kingdom of God for those who will inherit the earth as their reward. The Spirit of God will rule His people in accordance with God's will, as planned from the beginning before the rise of Satan against His plan.

Other papers on the subject of the Lord's coming argue that there will be no judgement at all. Jesus Christ has taken on our behalf the cup of God's wrath and judgement. By doing so he placed us on the new ground of resurrection where the judgement will never by any possibility be applied⁶⁹. To accept the idea of the judgement is to deny the very foundation truth of Christianity and a contradiction to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ which declare that all who believe in him shall not be judged⁷⁰. Therefore,

If the great question of our title to heaven has to be settled at the day of judgement, then clearly it was not settled on the cross; and if it was not settled on the cross, then most surely we shall be damned; for if we are to be judged at all, it must be according to our works, and the only possible issue of such a judgement is the lake of fire. Our Lord Jesus Christ has declared, in that believers (shall not come into judgement). This is enough. The believer was judged over eighteen hundred years ago in the person of his Head; and to bring him into judgement again would be to ignore completely the cross of Christ in its atoning efficacy⁷¹.

According to these papers, the duty of the believers is only to await new life beyond the present life after the general resurrection of mankind.

Regarding Matthew 25:31-46, the papers point out that it is a very different kind of judgement. It will be the judgement not of the Christian nations but of the Gentile nations. In that judgement Israel will not take part because if Israel is to be included, then Matthew 25 would have a problem to reconcile with the book of Numbers 23 which affirms that the people of Israel shall dwell alone⁷². Thus, if Israel is to be excluded from the judgement, then the idea of a general judgement must be abandoned⁷³. Furthermore, the Church of God is not also included in the judgement of Matthew 25 because at the time of judgement the Church would have already been taken away from among the nations.⁷⁴

Further, we have to remark that the Church of God is not included in the judgement of Matthew 25, nor is this statement based merely upon

the fact which has been already past, of the Church's necessary exemption from judgement; but also upon the great truth that the Church is taken from among the nations as Peter declared in the Council at Jerusalem. (God did visit the gentiles to take out of them a people for His name). If then the Church is taken out of the nations, it cannot be reckoned among them; and thus we have additional evidence against the theory of a general judgement in Matthew 25. The Jew is not there; the Church is not there; and therefore the idea of a general judgement must be abandoned as something wholly untenable.⁷⁵

Then, they summarize their argument by affirming that:

"In short, in Matthew 25, we have the judgement of (the quick); and in Revelation 20, the judgement of (the dead)".⁷⁶

Furthermore, according to the referred papers, Matthew 25 presents three groups which will be present in the day of judgement namely: the goats, the sheep and the least of Jesus brethren.⁷⁷ If these three different groups will be present, then there is no possibility of a general judgement, as long as Christ's brethren are not included either in the sheep or in the goats.⁷⁸

Like Ladd, the papers affirm that, according to Scripture's after the Church has left the earth there will be testimonies which will go to all nations to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. These testimonies are the Jewish messengers, the so-called least of Jesus' brethren. The sheep are those nations which shall receive the messengers and treat them kindly and the goats are those which will not receive them. As they

put it clearly:

Scripture teaches us that after the Church has left the earth, a testimony will go forth to the nations; the gospel of the kingdom shall be born, by Jewish messengers, far and wide, over the earth, into those regions which are wrapped in heathen darkness. These nations which shall receive the messengers and treat them kindly will be found on the king's right hand. Those on the contrary, who shall reject them and treat the unkindly will be found on His left. (These my brethren) are Jews, the brethren of the Messiah.⁷⁹

Jesus Christ clearly taught his disciples that the cross is not a place where they will hide or cover their evil deeds, but it is a duty of each follower of Jesus to carry the cross and continue as a builder of the kingdom of Jesus Christ and to carry on with the work which finally took him to the cross. Therefore the Christians' duty is not only to worship him or to have faith in him, but to carry the cross of their Lord Jesus Christ, who is no longer here to carry it himself. This can be done by continuing with his mission of casting out the demons which are oppressing his brethren, curing the sick, feeding the hungry and comforting the mourners. It is for this reason that Jesus Christ said to his disciples that the expelling of the demons means that the kingdom of God is at their hands. What is necessary for them to do is to build it by their own hands. God sent the tools they used: Jesus Christ the teacher of the truth, the Holy Spirit and the power.

For God the only Creator and Father of mankind, there is no

chosen nation and no chosen people. All nations belong to Him. Therefore the demand is for all God's children to do the will of their Father. So, the disobedient and the wicked children will face the judgement and punishment. The righteous and obedient ones will be rewarded and they will inherit the earth.

The message of the kingdom of God is being proclaimed by many non-Jewish people all over the world. They are even taking the message to the Jewish people who even today continue to reject it. Therefore when the remnants of the Jewish people begin their work, they will find that the message of the kingdom of God has been proclaimed all over the world. They will not find any pagan nation.

According to William E. Cox in his *Biblical Studies of the final things*, the judgement will be universal and individual as all nations will be gathered before the judge. The wicked and the righteous will be found among those nations and separated from each other.⁸⁰ But he points out that the judgement will be only for the souls after the general resurrection of the dead.⁸¹

Like Ladd, William Cox also contrast the last judgement of the Son of Man in Matthew 25 with the judgement of the resuscitated people in Revelation 20 (see above on page 77).

The final judgement will not take place in heaven but on earth. The separation of sheep from goats marks the end

of the evil Kingdom and the beginning of the kingdom of God on earth as the fulfillment of the divine promise.

If the kingdom of God will be formed in the sky, then the design of God to see the world and His creatures living in harmony under His leadership will be a failure and at the same time, a great victory for satan the enemy of God's plan; an event which will contradict the belief that God is the almighty One who cannot be defeated and stopped from doing what he intend to do by any power.

G.E. Beasley-Murray in his Jesus and the Kingdom of God emphasizes that it is the duty of each human being to show love in action to one's neighbour as the right way to glorify God by doing good deeds.⁸² Thus, he further notes that this idea is found in many passages of the Synoptic gospels where Jesus Christ demands his followers to give alms, to give food and drink, to show pity to the sick and exploited, to care for the orp orphans, to lend freely to those who cannot repay, and to even show love to their enemies.⁸³

Therefore the teaching concerning the sheep and the goats teaches that whoever shows mercy to the needy is not only showing it ot those people but to Jesus Christ whose mercy would embrace all.⁸⁴ Thus, all Christians and non-Christians will be judged in accordance with the extent to which they walked in the way of the Son of Man.⁸⁵

Beasley-Murray's perspective on this issue is probably

correct. The design and goal of our Creator is to see His world and his creatures living in harmony and solidarity. This is the reason for which He sent His Son Jesus Christ to earth to teach men and women that their relationship with God depended on their relationship with other human beings. Therefore whoever knows God and believes in His Son Jesus Christ is not the one who sings 'Lord, Lord!', but the one who lives in harmony and solidarity with others or who is struggling for the existence of that harmony.

Jesus Christ did not come to teach people how to go to heaven, but how to build the Kingdom full of joy, harmony, solidarity and love among human beings. As God is invisible such that we cannot see Him directly, Jesus Christ teaches us that the only way to see and to know God is to look at man and woman who are the image of the invisible God on earth. If human beings came to realize that God is seen and known through the faces of His images and if they lived in harmony, solidarity and brotherhood love, then God would totally dwell in men and women and His kingdom on earth would be fulfilled as per His design.

The next section examines the political, social economic and religious conditions of the world in which Jesus Christ was born, lived in and took up his messianic mission.

2.1 THE HISTORICAL SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

2.4 THE HISTORICAL SITUATION IN THE TIME OF JESUS LIFE AND MINISTRY

2.4.1. THE POLITICAL SITUATION

The campaign of Pompey's political expansion to possess more territories for the Roman empire had destroyed the reality of freedom and sovereignty of the States in East. Thus, while subordinating Syria in 64 B.C., Pompey took the advantage of dissensions between Hasmonean Princes, Hircanus II and his brother Aristobulus II who were quarreling over power. Pompey sent one of his envoys to collect information and as a result, in the Spring of 63 B.C., he received three Palestinian delegates: one from Aristobulus, the other from his brother Hircanus and the third from the Jewish people. Then taking the advantage of the Jewish disunity, Pompey attacked Jerusalem and conquered her after three months of fighting. Rome then annexed Judea and considered her Kings and priests as its Vassals. Nevertheless after the death of Herod the Great, however, Rome assumed direct administration of the territory until the last revolt in 135 A.C. This was because Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great was so incompetent that Rome dismissed him from office.⁸⁶

During his reign, Herod the Great devoted himself to great constructions. He built temples in honour of Augustus restored Samaria and named her Sebaste which in Greek means Augustus rebuilt the tower of Estract and named it Caesarea built

Herod Palace in Jerusalem and provided a theatre. He also built gymnasiums, theatres and stadiums all over the country. Lastly, to please the Jewish people he rebuilt the Temple.

The last years of Herod's reign were marked by domestic murders and public cruelty.⁸⁷ During this period of his government, there were many executions, life imprisonments and strangulations. For instance, he ordered the execution of his own wife, Mariamne the Hasmonean; his mother-in-law was accused of plotting against him and condemned to life imprisonment; his two sons with Mariamne were strangled, and some days before his death he ordered to execute his son Antipater.⁸⁸

Herod's son Archelaus faced disorder in Jerusalem. In order to stop it, he defeated the first rebellion by massacring people. He went to Rome to defend himself for his attitude,⁸⁹ but a Jewish delegate also went there to oppose him (cf. Luke 19:14). Augustus sent Sabinus to govern the territory, but he too abused his authority and provoked a revolt, which was severely crushed by Varus the legate of Syria.⁹⁰

Henceforth Judea was governed by Procurators sent by the Roman emperor, but these were dependent on the governor of Syria. Generally, the procurators were unpopular due to their interference in the affairs of the priests. They reached a point where they named their own candidates to contest the priest's seat.

Pontius Pilate, the most remembered procurator for his participation in the judgement and death of Jesus Christ, offended the Jewish people for his insistence on allowing his troops to take the standard with the image of the emperor to the city of Jerusalem⁹¹. His government was marked by corruption, insolence, robbery, outrage, threat, murder, intolerance and cruelty⁹².

During the Roman dominion and until the beginning of the Jewish war in 66 A.C., there were constant intrigues between Roman functionaries and the Jewish people which caused frequent eruptions of fighting. As a result, the Procurators had to maintain vigilance and had even to oppress people to maintain order. This increased people's hatred further, causing frequent fighting between Jewish outlaws and Roman legionaries.

This political situation in Palestine of the time of Jesus' life and ministry nourished the traditional prophecy of the Kingdom of God and the eschatological hope that one day God will send to the people of Israel a messianic leader who would come to put end to the Roman domination and rule them not as their King, but as a representative and servant of the divine King. We hear Jesus Christ confirming what had been prophesied by the Prophet Isaiah (chapter 61):

The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me,
for he has anointed me. He has sent me to
bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim
liberty to captives and to the blind new sight,
to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the
Lord's year of favour (Luke 4:18-19)

This message can be spiritualized by the interpreters of the Scriptures but its origin is not spiritual. Rather, it was a completely political message to the people who were suffering colonial domination and hoping for the divine liberator.

2.4.2 THE SOCIAL SITUATION

The social formation of Israel in the time of Jesus' life and ministry presents a very complex social system constituted by a system of social classes typical of the kind of tributary production.

A) THE SOCIAL CLASSES SYSTEM

The relationship between social classes in accordance with economic system resulted in the formation of a structure which according to Houtart, was a "double triangular"⁹³. In the first pole was found the first class of bourgeoisie, constituted by the great proprietors of land and cattle; in the second pole was found the second class composed by the great businessmen who were controlling both internal and external business and in the third pole was found the third class formed the functionaries of State and Religion. This third pole was divided into two groups: Herod's families and Priests who belonged to the status of high clergy, administrators of the Temple and the Treasury.

Around each of the above mentioned classes was the exploited class whose survival depended on the high classes. This exploited class was constituted by the workers of the land slaves, workers for the businessmen and workers of the court and of the Temple.

Besides those classes and separated from them, there was also another intermediary class formed by the small peasants dependent on the great rural bourgeoisie, the small artisans and traders, and the small state and religious bourgeoisie constituted by the royal and the Temple's functionaries.

Lastly, there existed also a social group made up of people marginalized by the process of production: the unemployed, the beggars, those possessed by different kind of diseases, etc. who were living fundamentally by alms and misery⁹⁴.

For this last social group there was no hope. Its members were completely in despair. There is no doubt why Jesus, in his sermon of the Mount said that his message brought also hope to those who were poor in spirit, and to those who were hungry and thirsty for what was right (Mat.5:3,b). So for those people there was no life, no god but only death. It was in reference to this kind of people that Jesus taught about the least of his brethren.

B) THE SOCIAL STRATIFICATION SYSTEM

Besides the social system of classes, there was also, in the time of Jesus' life and ministry, the social stratification system linked to the economic system and in which was revealed the survival characteristic elements of an ancient kind of tribal production. In accordance with origin, the diverse Israelite social groups were divided in accordance with genuine members of families affected by light infamy and members of illegitimate families affected by grave infamy.⁹⁵

The first class constituted a part of Israelite pure population. As such, its members had the right to marry the Priests, linking in this way to the Davidic lineage. This was the only class which was capable of guaranteeing the purity of the Jewish blood⁹⁶. The second part constituted a series of sub-groups, structured in accordance with their purity or impurity order: the illegitimate descendants of Priests and workers of the contemptible jobs, Jewish slaves, proselyte pagans converted to Judaism, pagans freed slaves and unfreed pagan slaves converted to Judaism.

The members of this social class had the right to marry the Levite and the Jews of legitimate origin, which constituted a mechanism of social promotion.⁹⁷ The third part was composed of Jews with grave infamy: the eunuchs, slaves of the Temple, children of unknown parents, bastards, pagan slaves and Samaritans. This social class was totally despised, without any right.⁹⁸

Besides those three social groups there was also the taboo of religious origin composed by law breakers, thereby considered as sinners. That kind of qualification was generally transitory, so it was a kind of religious legalist punishment. Also considered impure people were those who had certain diseases, especially the mentally ill and lepers.⁹⁹

C) THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM

In the time of Jesus' life and ministry, the Jewish productive system was based on two important economic activities. One

was agroculture and cattle breeding (including fishing). The other was the artisan production. The level of development of the productive power in the two sectors was low. They used ploughs without wheels, very primitive fishing and artisan methods.

In the agricultural sector, the greater part of the population was constituted by the small proprietors. So the division of labour was not very developed and the proprietors were paying heavy taxes. Besides that class there were the great proprietors who were employing the daily workers and slaves (cf. Mat. 20: 1- 16. This kind of proprietors were living in cities and were many in Judea. They used to lend their money to the small proprietors and to mortgage the properties of those who could not repay their debts. This system (resulted in) the accumulation of great wealth in some families and the increasing of poverty to majority of families. The third agricultural sector was constituted peasants without land but who were working all their lives for the proprietors who were renting to them portions of land. Besides those peasants, there were also in that sector, the small farmers similar to the Roman colonist. These were receiving from the proprietors of land, seeds and other instruments of production.

In the artisan sector, the producers were autonomous.

So all of them possessed their own means of production and their products were sold directly to consumers. This sector was based on the family production. Therefore the secret of art was transmitted from fathers to children.

Besides family activities, there were small unities of artisans who were giving jobs to the large numbers of workers. Beside them, there were also slaves, divided in two categories: Jewish slaves and those who were called Canaanite slaves or strangers.

The slaves were covering a wide sector of productive activities. Alongside these there were preceptors and teachers, hairdressers', slaves, singers and dancers. There could be men and women slaves working as hardressers, makers of necklaces, carvers of stones and woods, masons and butchers.

Among the productive sectors men mentioned above there was the third fundamental sector of economic activity. This was society's pole of development, the city and as its propeller, the sector of the great proprietors.

All trading activities, including importation and exportation, were controlled by a system of taxation which in Herod's time became more and more insupportable. It was also during that time that the name "publican" became synonymous with thief and sinners. (cf. Mat. 5:46; 9:11-13; 18:17; Luke 18:10-14; 3:12-13) In the time of the Roman Procurators, the taxation system became heavier that the Jewish people could endure any longer. It is for that reason that they used it as a trap for Jesus. (Mat. 22:15-22)

The State had a great influence upon the Jewish economy. The political center of the economic activities of the state. The State became the biggest in its construction of the Temple, Palaces, monuments, aqueducts, walls, etc; thus, forming relationship between the State and the Temple became an economic necessity.

Through taxation, the Temple was recovering for the State a good part of its revenue from the people. So besides Pilgrimages, which were influencing the development of trading activities around the Temple, the animals for sacrifice and the offering system were also influencing a complex of trading activities. Therefore the Temple's Treasure, administrated by superior Priests with an ample bureaucracy, was infact the Treasure of the State. So it belonged to public finances, from which the Priests acquired not only regular rent, but also the source of prestige and political power.

Furthermore, the Temple was also playing a part of a great employer for qualified workers, mainly in the artisan sector. Therefore, according to Houtart, the Temple was the most powerful instrument of the State which was exercising a centralized function of power and domination upon people. Such central part of the Temple aim ideological and economic instrument, was revealing one of the aspects of tributary system of production¹⁰⁰.

It was within this political, social, economic and religious conditions that Jesus Christ was born, brought up, worked as one of the artisans with his father Joseph and carried out his

messianic mission. Therefore the meaning of his teaching in Matthew 25 and other parts of the Gospels might not be found beyond these historical conditions of his time. Jesus Christ grew up as a member of Jewish family and one of the workers. He experienced from the familiar social life the suffering of the discriminated and oppressed people of his time. These can be the real factors which nourished and developed in Jesus' mind the prophetic and apocalyptic traditions about the day of the Lord, the coming of the Kingdom of God to human history and the last judgement of all nations. (including Israel) Thus Jesus Christ must have seen from these historical conditions the meaning of the Kingdom of God, the day of the Lord and the last Judgement, as God's action upon man's history in order to put an end to the system of oppression and to begin a new era which would be ruled by peace, harmony, solidarity and true love among human beings.

Failure to include these historical factors in our search for the meaning of Matthew 25:31-46, will only mix up exegetical interpretation with the doctrinal teachings, which are far from the real teaching of Jesus Christ.

2.5 THE PERIOD OF THE APOSTLES' MISSION

Why then was the teaching of Jesus Christ preserved, developed and transmitted? It is important to note that Jesus did not take his mission to the gentile people. (cf. Mark 7:25-28) He preached and taught only to his own people. Matthew himself did not address his Gospel to the Gentile people but rather

to his own people, the Jews. Therefore the religious ideas employed by Matthew contain the prophetic traditions of Israel. These ideas are, however, in order to absorb the new situation of his time.

At the beginning of the Apostolic ministry and the Christian Church, the political conditions of Palestine prevailed. Furthermore, the young Christian Church faced new problems. For instance, the non-Christian Jews became more and more hostile. They expelled the Apostles from the Temple and from the Synagogues. Besides, the followers of Christ were also persecuted by both the Jews and the State. (cf. Acts 4:1-4; 5:17-21; 6:8-14; 7:55-60; 12:1-5)

In the prevailing situation and new problems, the Apostles were forced to remember and to check the teaching of their Lord besides their preaching the resurrected Christ, which was their main theme. This made them to live in the imminent expectation for a manifest vindication of Jesus Christ, whose return would be to fulfil his mission of setting up the Kingdom of his Father. As we see in Matthew 10:22-23.

You will be hated by all men on account of my name; but the man who stands firm to the end will be saved. If they persecute you in one town, take refuge in the next: and if they persecute you in that, take refuge in another. I tell you solemnly, you will not have gone the round of the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

See also Mark 13:26+27,30; Luke 21:27-28,32; 9:27,9:27.

This teaching of Jesus Christ was preserved, developed, and transmitted to encourage the new political and religious situations

which were disturbing people's life and the young Christian Church.

It was therefore not at all necessary that one should have died in order to enter the Kingdom of God. It is possible for the living to apprehend the coming of the Kingdom, which was conceived as a Kingdom in which both those who were alive at the time, as well as those resurrected from the dead would enjoy life in a full bodily sense (cf. Thess. 4:13-18)

The Apostles expected that the Messiah would return within a short time to solve the problems of the world once and for all, although the day was not revealed to them, neither to the Son nor to the Angels.

2.6 THE GOATS AND THE SHEEP

Who are referred to as the goats and the sheep in Matthew 25? In order to answer this question it is necessary first to consider what the mission of Jesus Christ and its purpose was.

In our historical survey we have discussed the political, social, economic and religious conditions of the people of Israel in Palestine during the time of Jesus Christ. It is within that situation where Jesus, having received the Holy Spirit after his baptism, announced his mission and the purpose of that mission.

Exegeting the text of the Prophet Isaiah 61:1-4, Jesus explained the goal of his mission through interpreting Isaiah's text in accordance with the historical situation of Palestine.

He based his point on this text to proclaim that the Holy Spirit had been given to him by God sent him to announce the Good News to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and new sight to the blind, to set the downtrodden free and to proclaim the Lord's year of favour to them. (Luke 4:18-19 Isaiah 61:1-4) Therefore those who are poor in spirit because they lost their hope must be happy because they shall inherit the Kingdom of God. The gentle shall inherit the earth; comfort is near to those who are mourning; those who are hungry shall be satisfied; the merciful shall receive mercy; the pure in their heart shall see God; the peacemakers shall be called sons of God; and those who are persecuted in the cause of doing what is right, theirs is the Kingdom of God. This, for Jesus was the aim of his mission.

If we do not understand correctly why Jesus read the text of the Prophet Isaiah 61:1-4 and the meaning of his sermon on the Mount, we will never understand who are referred to as the goats, sheep and the least brethren of Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46 which, I believe, is the conclusion of his mission. Furthermore, it will be difficult also to understand the meaning of his preaching and teaching about the coming Kingdom of God, which is the central theme of his preaching.

One of the important points to keep in mind, in our search to understand Matthew 25:31-46, is that Jesus Christ whose teachings are presented in Matthew and Matthew who wrote the text, were not teaching and writing to unbelievers but to the believers. Therefore to think and conclude that the goats

refer to unbelievers and the sheep refers to believers while the least brethren of Jesus are the remnant Jews who will proclaim the message of the Kingdom of God in future is to mislead those who seek to understand the truth.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus Christ discovered that some of the believers of his time were not true believers. They were hypocrites. This was revealed mainly in their acts and behaviour in their relationship with others, which were not in accordance with their faith (cf. Mat. 6:2-6, 16-18; 7:5; 23:28; Mark 7:6-9; Luke 6:42; 11:39-44). These words of Christ were not addressed to the pagans. They were addressed to the believers whose bad deeds and behaviour were contradicting their faith.

Before Jesus Christ began his ministry, John the Baptist had called the Jews "Brood of vipers" and warned them not to deceive themselves by thinking that they would be justified by their faith or by being descendants of Abraham on the day of God's wrath. God according to John the Baptist, is capable to raise His people from the stone. (cf. Mat. 3:7-10); Luke 3:7-9) Who are those people referred to by John the Baptist who can be raised from the stones by God? Was John referring the real stones? John may have referred to the unbelievers who instead of saying that they are born again, are glorifying God by their good deeds to their fellows and their good relationship with others. So John the Baptist told the people who asked him what they should do in

order to escape the judgement and condemnation in the day of God's judgement that they might share their clothes and food with those who had none, not to exploit others and not to ask for bribery or to intimidate others. (cf. Luke 3:10-14)

The so called goats in Matthew 25 are both non-Christians and Christians who are serving the Kingdom of Satan by their evil deeds, behaviour, bad relationship with other human beings and disobedient to God's commands. The sheep are also both Christians and non-Christians who through their good behaviour, good relationship with others, good deeds and obedience to God's command are glorifying Him and making Him be glorified by many. That is, they are building the Kingdom of God given to them by Jesus Christ. (cf. Mat. 12:28; Luke 11:20)

Jesus Christ has warned his followers that empty profession of faith without doing what God is demanding them to do is worthless. (cf. Mat. 7:21-23) According to Jesus Christ, it is not only accepting his words, believing him, regarding him as a personal Saviour and telling everyone on the street that you are born again, but also to listen to his words and began to act on them for the sake of God's Kingdom. (cf. Matthew 7:24)

The goats and the sheep are found among people of all nations (including Israel) Christians and non-Christians, who will be gathered in the day of judgement and be judged, condemned or rewarded respectively in accordance with their good or bad deeds. (cf. Mat. 11:22-24) It is for this reason that there will be separation of the wicked from the righteous. (cf. Mat. 13:49-50)

Therefore the judgement will be for everyone from all nations. That is to say, the whole world will be judged as it was in the time of Noah. And as Ladd points out (pp.61-62) the judgement will be done in accordance with what each person has done, which will be considered as a sign of obedience or as an offence to God (cf. Mat.13:40-43) and not in accordance with the evidence that can be provided on the basis of which decision may be made.

The Apostle Paul, who is always misunderstood and misused by the Pietists and Puritans (who emphasize devotional periods, solitary Biblical reading, conversion, emotionalism, certainty of salvation, perfection and so on), confirms that it is true that none will be a favourity before God's judgement, as the believers and unbelievers are doing the same things.

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgement on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgement do the same things. Now we know that God's judgement against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgement on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgement?
(Romans 2:1-3)

In Apostle Paul's view, the riches of God's kindness tolerance and patience lead the believers towards repentance from doing evil deeds (v.4) not only their justification or forgiveness. Therefore both the Jews and other nations will be saved or condemned in accordance with their good or evil deeds which they have done (vv.6-11) Paul goes on to say that it is wrong for the Christians to judge others because they are not given that right.

This is also why you should never pass judgement on a brother or treat him with contempt, as some of you have done. We shall all have to stand before judgement seat of God. (Romans 14:10)

God is the only One who can light up all that is hidden and reveal the secret intentions of men's hearts (I Cor.4:5)

Therefore it is only God who knows if non-Christians will be judged or not, but not the Christians to decide that they will be judged because of their lack of faith. (I Cor.5:13)

For all the truth about us will be brought out in the law court of Christ, and each of us will get what he deserves for the things he did in the body, good or bad (II Cor.5:10)

Hence, on the day of the judgement there will be no favour for those who sin inside the Church. Those who sin within the Christian faith, will be judged within the Christian faith and those who sin outside the Christian faith will be judged apart from the Christian faith.

For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them). This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. (Romans 2:13-16)

On this point, the Apostle Paul explains very clearly that none knows the secret of who is right before God and how the judgement will be conducted except God alone. Indeed, God is the

only one who can reveal what is hidden in the hearts of men. It is for this reason that even those who would expect to be judged and condemned will wonder how they could be found righteous before God's judgement (Mat. 25:37-39). On the other hand those who would expect to be justified by their faith alone shall also be surprised by the decision of the Judge (Mat. 25:44).

But if the goats and the sheep are the non-Christians who will be saved or condemned in accordance with their good or bad deeds, who are then the least brethren of Jesus Christ? If we follow the path of doctrinal or dogmatic interpretation, then the answer for this question will be that the least brethren of Jesus Christ are his disciples or the faithful Jewish remnants who will proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God all over the world in future. As Pfeiffer and Ladd point out, (see above on pages 57 and 62) if we follow the path of historical events of the time and place where the lesson was taught, the answer will be different.

At the inauguration of his mission in the Synagogue in Nazareth and in the sermon of the Mount, Jesus stated clearly that his mission is aimed at giving hope to those who are hopeless because of their life conditions which are more and more worse; giving land to the gentiles; comforting those who are mourning; satisfying those who are hungry and thirsty; bringing mercy to those who are merciful and bringing the

kingdom of God to those who are persecuted in the cause of doing what is right (Mat. 5:3-10).

He was sent by God to bring Good News to the poor, liberty to the captives, new sight to the blind, freedom to the downtrodden and that their time of joy has come them (Luke 4:18-19). This is not doctrinal or dogmatic teaching but teaching which was motivated by political and social conditions. Therefore to doctrinalize or spiritualize it, is to mislead those seeking to know the truth from this teaching. Thus, the answer for the above question is that the least of the brethren of Jesus Christ are all those who are victims of injustice.

The Scriptures say that God has revealed Himself to men not only in empty words, but in acts, in deeds and in historical events. Thus, history became one of the channels of divine self-revelation. So, out of a complex confusion of historical events and into the agonizing pressures of daily life, God's message came and confronted men.

The sermon of the Mount and the interpretation of Isaiah's text was linked with the political, social and economic conditions of the time of Jesus' life and ministry in Palestine. It is for this reason that during his earthly, Jesus never preached about what heaven is or what he thought, but he always preached what he saw. This was the root of the suffering of the people and the enemy of the coming Kingdom of God. He always sought to show the concern and design of God in eliminating

the action of the evil kingdom on earth and the inauguration of God's kingdom.

As he was chosen to be a leader in the struggle against evil and in the process of building the Kingdom of God on earth, Jesus Christ identifies himself with the faces of the victims of injustice. Not only as a Saviour, but as the one who must be saved by those who decided to join with him in his struggle for the elimination of the evil kingdom. Hence the cross must not be seen as a hidden place, but as one which reminds the followers of Jesus Christ that he became one of the victims of the unjust world. Thus, the Christians realize that their duty is not only profession of faith, but mainly an effort to liberate Jesus Christ in today's crucified victims of unjust societies of the present world dominated by the rule of satan. In this perspective the Christians Church as the Body of Christ on earth will be seen, not as an instrument or an ally of the oppressors and exploiters of the downtrodden, but as an expected Messiah by those who are crucified on the cross of the unjust world.

Jesus' identification with the hungry, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned, means that he will judge the believers and non-believers who did not care for the people who are victims of the evil. On the day of judgement he will say that he was crucified among the victims of unjust societies

and the righteous liberated him but the wicked did nothing to liberate him. Therefore the least brethren of Jesus Christ are not his followers or the converted remnants, but the victims who are crucified on the cross of injustice today. Through these brethren Jesus Christ is still crucified on the cross and therefore needs us to liberate him.

2.7 THE ISSUES RAISED IN MATTHEW 25: 34-36

In these verses Jesus Christ speaks about the Kingdom which is being inherited by those who were blessed by his Father, not just because they found grace through Jesus Christ or they were justified by their faith, but because they fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, invited the strangers, clothed the naked, took care of the sick and visited the prisoners. What does this teaching mean? What kind of hunger, thirst, stranger, sickness, nakedness, and imprisonment is referred to by Jesus Christ? Why does he identify himself with such segments of humanity?

The tendency of many Christians is that the world has hunger for spiritual food. So, when they speak about hunger, they refer to spiritual than material hunger. Thus, the Good News becomes a spiritual message to those who have not yet received the Christian faith. Is this what concerned Jesus Christ in this teaching? Although we do not reject that the people have spiritual hunger also what moved Jesus to raise this issue and what concerns many people more mainly the needy,

is material hunger.

As God and a human being, Jesus Christ understood that beings need material bread and spiritual bread (cf. Luke 4:4; Mat. 4:4). Through this experience Jesus discovered that hunger is the enemy of faith and hope as it can even weaken the spiritual life of those who are its victims. That is why when he began his earthly ministry he proclaimed the end of hunger to those who are victims of it. (Mat. 5:6; Luke 6:21)

Like food, water is an important element in the lives of human beings and other living beings. The Matswa, one of the Mozambican tribes, consider water as the nucleus of life. Thus, according to Matswa, where there is no water there is no life, because even with food people can die if they have no water, but with water only, they can survive until they get food. Therefore, the Matswa have no problem in understanding when they are told that Jesus Christ came to give the living water (cf. Jo. 4:13). They believe that if Jesus can give the living water, then he is real Saviour of the world, because thirst is the enemy of life.

Sickness is the sign of the presence of death. Death is the the enemy of life and therefore God's enemy since He is against death. It is for this reason that, during his earthly ministry Jesus Christ devoted himself to healing the sick, cleansing the lepers and raising the dead. He understood that these elements are incompatible with the coming kingdom of God whose

aim is to redeem the world from death and to restore life.

The misunderstanding between governments and political, conflicts between nations and civil wars contribute a lot in the existence of many refugees in the world. The majority of the prisoners today are not thieves and criminals but the persecuted because of their persistence in denouncing social injustice. If we really believe that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the World and restorer of life, these people who have no country, no home, no food, no water, no clothes constitute a big challenge to the Christian believers and the Church as the living Body of Christ.

Jesus Christ is called the Saviour because he came to restore life to the people who are threatened by death; give hope to those who have no home; no food, no water, no clothes and liberty to the prisoners for the sake of justice. Thus he identifies himself with such segments of humanity because the center of the Good News announced by him is the coming kingdom of God brings about the total salvation of men and women: physical and spiritual; and the total transformation of the world in order that all people have the same rights and duties.

Hunger, sickness, nakedness, thirst, homelessness and detention without trial are the manifestations of the presence of injustice and death which are incompatible with the kingdom of God as proclaimed by His Son Jesus Christ through words and works of salvation.

Here we see that Jesus Christ compares the world with the field and the harvest with the big work which must be done in the world by those who have decided to be his followers. This means that those who are being called or converted into Christian faith and decided to be followers of Jesus Christ are not called to be mere followers and listeners of Jesus' words but to believe him and to await their days to go to heaven, but to go into the world to work together with Jesus in his mission of liberating the world from the control of the evil rule.

There is a very important point to be seen attentively in the meaning of the Christian work. Some Christians, if not many, think that the work of the followers of Jesus Christ is the work of charity.¹ Nevertheless, in my view, the work of charity does not liberate the world and even the distressed people. Instead, it perpetuates their suffering. Furthermore, charity mainly for the benefit of those who are doing this work because it gives them jobs. Let us see, for instance, in the African situation today. The so-called developed countries come to exploit the African countries and make them poorer. When the African people die of hunger, those countries send donations to them. The aim of those donations is not to put an end to the calamity caused or to help the Africans to develop their countries, but to maintain them alive so that they will continue to work for them. On the other hand, they create civil wars which, in turn, bring about camps of refugees concentration. In order to keep those people alive but dying slowly, they founded organizations and sent their people to :

the Holy Spirit, and accepts Jesus Christ as his or her personal Saviour. As such, he or she becomes a new person. Hence, the world and those who are outside the Christian faith are all sinners and are lost. Therefore, in order to avoid contamination, the saved person must run away or withdraw from them and live as if he or she is already in heaven. That is, to take care only of his spiritual life to guarantee his place in heaven. But if we follow the teaching of the Scriptures, the saved person is the one who seeks the good of many, so that all may be saved. So according to Scriptures, we are advised:

Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jew, Greeks or Church of God - even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. (1 Cor.10:32-33).

The Apostle Paul goes on to describe the saved person as he who is a servant of God and who involves himself in every way of world's life.

...as servants of God we command ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience kindness; in the Holy Spirit and sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and the left; through glory and dishonour, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything. (II Cor.6:4-10)

A saved person, in accordance with the Scriptures, is not the one who withdraw himself from the world and social life, but the

one involves in it and even to suffer the consequences of that involvement for the sake of God's glory through the well being of others. As Jesus Christ says, the one who is saved has no fear of being contaminated by the darkness and go into hiding as he is the one who must be feared by the darkness because he is the light of the world.

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Mat.5:13-16)

The saved person is a testimony of the liberating work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in the world aimed at saving men and women in history. A co-worker of Jesus Christ in his endeavour to liberate men and women from the evil rule and to redeem the whole world. A self-giving with unlimited love. Open and ready to challenge the problems of the world which mainly oppress the least of Jesus' brethren.

Samuel Kobia observes that:

As messengers of freedom who are being saved by the resurrected Christ, we must have attitudes of self-giving love and concern for others. We must have love which is disciplined by discernment and knowledge which enables us to put aside our preconceived ideas and opens us to understand the situation of other people. It must free us to be concerned about our neighbour who does not have enough to eat and our neighbour who cannot afford to cloth himself.²

Samuel Kobia goes on to add that:

We are bearers of hope when we show to our fellow human beings the same reference and respect as we show to Christ. As we read in Romans 15:7, we shall be bearers of hope by welcoming one another as Christ welcomes us. Salvation, the liberation that the resurrected Christ offers, has a good result. We are saved, freed for the future of common life together in the unveiled presence of God. With out hope steadily before us, we are given the power to forget what is behind us and press on to our high calling in Christ. Our hope, our plans, our work are all of God. Human aspirations and strategies and efforts for a true brotherhood of all Kenyan and all of God. Human aspirations and strategies and efforts for a true brotherhood of all Kenyan and all human kind must be turned through their source - God, whose structure is the servant Christ for us.³

In this way, the person is saved from doing bad work, selfishness, self-love and from indifference to the problems of the world and of other human beings. Therefore, the saved person who fears and withdraws from the social life is not yet saved, as the saved one has no fear because he received power from Jesus Christ - the Saviour of the world - and from the Holy Spirit, in order to stand firmly against the evil.

4.1.3 THE GOOD NEWS

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is known as the Good News of the coming Kingdom of God in history. It receives this name because it announces the recovering of life where there is only death; it brings happiness where there is only sadness; it brings hope where there is no hope; and it announces liberation where there is slavery. It is for this reason that the message of Jesus Christ

appears as the renewal of God's message through the mouth of the Prophets. (cf. Luke 4:18-19 and Isaiah 61:1-4)

The African Continent has been a slave of the political and economic systems, slave of dictatorships which refuse the participation of the people in the 'decisions of their countries' political life. As a consequence, many African people live as strangers in their own countries because they have no land, no homes and no jobs. Many are dying of hunger. The prisons are full of the innocent people. There are no hospitals and schools and where there are, they are only meant for the rich because the poor cannot afford the very expensive payments. Therefore, as Odilon Chaves observes:

The evangelization that these people need is not for the salvation of their souls only, taking them to the conformism with the actual world or with inhuman standards and oppressions of the present life. Salvation must be that which recover in them the image and likeness of God, distorted for all kinds of the society's sin..... They need Good News which brings liberation, justice, dignity and which makes them capable to participate in the affairs of their society, which awaken their conscience in order to become agents of their history. A total salvation expresses in peace (shalom), which includes security, health, well being community, justice, integrity, lastly, the harmony of man with God, with men, with nature, and with the whole universe. ⁴
(Translation mine)

Indeed, a message which, instead of announcing the liberation of the oppressed and the end of the suffering of men and women, announces the world full of sin, the running of God from it, and the endurance of the oppressed in the hands of their

oppressors as a way to win a good life in heaven is very suspicious, irrelevant and questionable, especially from the perspective of those who are victims of the unjust society. Instead of being Good News, it becomes bad news, as it contains no hope, no promise and no liberty. It further brings the defeat of God by death instead of God's victory upon death. So the Acts of the Apostles tell us that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was God's victory upon death:

Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold to him (2:22-24).

Yes, it is true Jesus Christ himself proclaimed at the beginning of his earthly ministry to free the people from the agony of death, the end of oppression, blindness, poverty, imprisonment and the nearness of the acceptable year of the Lord's favour - the kingdom of God:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Luke 4:18 - 19).

For those who seek to understand the meaning of Jesus'

preaching and his teaching. Luke 4:18-19 stands as an introduction. The Sermon of the Mount on Matthew 5:3-12 and on Luke 6:20-26 comes in this context. And Matthew 25:31-46 serves as conclusion of Jesus' preaching and teaching. So there is a great affinity in these three synoptic texts and, therefore, it is very difficult to separate their message from one another. It is from this correlation that makes Matthew 25:31-46 an instrument or a motto in the struggle for the liberation of the victims of the unjust societies. Samuel Kobia considers Matthew 25:31-46 as the answers to the question about how we can apply the present situation in contemporary Kenya.⁵ And, for Mugambi, Matthew 25: 31-46 illustrates the variety of dehumanizing situations to which Christians are challenged to respond positively and practically.⁶

4.2 THE CHURCH FROM THE ESCHATOLOGICAL VIEWPOINT

The Western Church of the Christendom, on the African Continent, accompanied trade and the colonization of the African countries, transformed, on the one hand, the Christian Church and her mission into cultural civilization of the African people. On the other hand, the slogan of "Winning souls for Christ" divided human being into two parts: the soul which belongs to God and the body belonging to the masters of the kingdom of earth and, therefore, subject to the oppression as sacrifice for the well being of its soul in heaven. Furthermore, it separated also the Church and her mission from the world and from social

life of her members. Thus, the Church ceased to be the continual voice of Christ in proclaiming the eschatological kingdom of God and a community of the participants in Christ's mission of the world's redemption and the salvation of man, soul and body.

From the alliance of the Church with the colonial system, the Church instead of being militant in the salvation of men and women and in the transformation of the world for the sake of the kingdom of God and the fulfillment of the promise, became an instrument for the salvation of the souls only. In this perspective, the living servant Body of Christ ended up into a mere mere bridge upon the gap between earth and heaven.

4.2.1 THE CHURCH AS AN INSTRUMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

What is the true Christian Church? Is it the one which saves the soul from the sinner's body? Is it an institution whose work is to receive and separate the converted from the world and their social life? The Scriptures tell us that after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Church understood that her mission is not centralized in the Temple under the rule of a fixed body of doctrine as she became a living Body of Christ on earth (cf. ,Mat. 28: 18 - 20). Hence, the Church of Jesus Christ, as representative of his Body, is centered on the world of the command "Go" and act in the power of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as Williams Colin points:

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with his mission in the world until it is totally liberated and transformed into a renewed one free from the rule of world's forces. John Stott says that from the view point of the club model of the Church, it is necessary to recover the double identity of the Church. In which the Church lives as the holy people of God, at the same time as a worldly people because they were sent into the world as witnesses and servants.⁹

Gustaf Aulen observes that the Church militant is struggling for the total dominion of God upon the world motivated by the creative activity of the Holy Spirit in the circumstances of life on earth. It functions as the principle point of the expected Kingdom of God by faith and as one of the forces in conflict totally connected with the circumstances of earthly life. So, faith as the center and the power of the Church is demanded to work for the complete God's perfect dominion as being affected by an act of God's eternal power which involves a radical transformation and re-creation of things as they are.¹⁰

The Church is the product of faith and hope based on the promise expected by mankind to be fulfilled here and now. Therefore, as Jurgen Moltmann points, "the Church is at the same time the object of faith and the object of experience. It is at the same time an eschatological and a historical power".¹¹

4.2.2. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

What then is the mission of the Church as the living Body of Christ? A movement across time and space or an event in history? As a militant in the struggle for the total dominion

of God upon the world or as an eschatological and as a historical power? The Scriptures tell us that due to the work of the evil forces, the world is living in darkness and hopelessness. As a result, the people living in it are walking in the shadow of death. Thus, in order to save the world the people God sent the light.(cf. Isa.9:2-6) Then, those who received the light became also the light and the salt of the world. (cf.Mat. 5:13-16) Hence, the mission of the Church as representative of the living Body of Christ (the light of the world) is to light the world and to salt the earth. Williams Colin has observed that:

When Jesus called his disciples to let their light shine before men he was summoning the Church to witness to him, not just through the words that directed the world's attention to him, but by a life that showed to the world the working out of God's purpose ...The Church first points away from itself to Jesus Christ as Lord. Nevertheless, it knows that the world, hearing the claim that the Church has brought to the world a life of the community. There it should expect to see the evidence of that life: disciples who are servants for Christ's sake and a community where the new way is throwing light onto the dark spots of the world's trouble.¹²

But the question is how can the Church carry her mission of lighting and salting the world? In what way is the Church called to accomplish her mission? Is there a specific way of lighting and salting the world? Many Christians think that the mission of the Church is to carry out the work of evangelization aimed at winning souls for Christ and the spreading of the so-called civilized or way of living. Does this redeem the world and fulfill God's promise to His people of bringing a new earth? Williams Colin sees the mission of the Church in a different way. According to him,

The Church is called to work as salt within the institutions so that they can serve God's purpose by keeping order, peace, justice, health, and by using all their possibilities for enhancing human existence. By preserving institutions from decay they are enabled to fulfill their positive roles; by bringing out their true flavour it better enables them to satisfy the hunger and need of those they serve.¹³

The work of the evil one brought disorder, chaos, injustice and death in the world. The presence of these elements made the world dark and hopeless. God's plan is to recover harmony, peace, justice and full life.

The word of God became flesh because it could not redeem the world and save mankind as a word. The word only announces God's plan, teaches and orientates how that plan must be carried out by the people who received the word and the power of the Holy Spirit. So, the word only cannot save and transform the world. Hence, there is a necessity of man's work, as Lucien Deiss points:

Mission is not primarily a matter of activities, undertakings, sermons, and the spread of the Gospel by word of mouth and in writing. It is a matter first and foremost of bearing witness to Christ. Or to put it more accurately, all the other activities are valuable to the extent that they bear witness to God's presence in our lives and to his salvation¹⁴...In other words, the real proclamation of Jesus' resurrection takes shape in men who lives as though they were truly risen from the dead. Then, witnessing this new kind of life, the world will ask itself: What makes these Christians live this way? What is the secret of their peace and joy which nothing in this world can lessen? See how they love one another! How ready they are to die for one another! And Christians will be able to answer: Christ is our Life. (cf. Col.3:4) But Christ is risen, and therefore his spirit of love is dwelling in our hearts to help us.¹⁵

Indeed, the risen Christ must be incarnated in the living

community of the believers, so that Christ can continue to exercise his work of redeeming the world and saving mankind through his Church. Therefore, the work of the Christian Church is to witness that God is at work in the world liberating it from the evil rule and renewing it. So, the mission of the Church must not be limited to a mere evangelization through words only, but must also include all activities towards the liberation of man from his slavery. This slavery embraces the political, economic, social, cultural and spiritual life of the people.

The life of the Church and the faith of the believers must be in harmony with the message proclaimed by them. Therefore the Church must be open to attend all activities aimed at eliminating all kinds of manifestations of the evil rule in the world, instead of being closed and living a life separated from the problems of the world and the social life as if it is already in heaven. So it is in relation to the world that the Church can understand her role and its function, her mission and its meaning.

John Stott observes that:

It is not a matter of getting individuals into heaven but of transforming the life on earth into the harmony of heaven. Again, the essential purpose of Christianity is to transform human society into the Kingdom of God by regenerating all human relationship.¹⁶

John Stott goes on saying that:

Considering all together, the data suggest a portrait of the religious - minded as a person having a self-centered preoccupation with saving his own soul, an other-world orientation, coupled with an indifference toward or even a tacit endorsement of a social system that would perpetuate social inequality and injustice.¹⁷

distribute food, drugs, old clothes, etc. thus, at the same time, creating jobs for their people. But those who are suffering continue to suffer, as they were not liberated but only maintained in the same situations. Furthermore, when they send their donations, they at the same time send their guns to destroy all infrastructures, in order to keep the African countries always backward. Hence, the work of charity does not solve the problems of the world and man's suffering. It perpetuate the situation.

Christian's work is not the work of liberating people from the demons of injustice and send them home (cf. Mat.8:28-32); to make the people walk by themselves (cf. Acts 3:1-10) so that they can be free and take care of themselves; to give sight to the blind (cf. Mark 10:46-52; 8:22-26) who are asking, not for charity, but for mercy; to raise those who are dying (cf. John 11:38-44; Mat. 9:18-19); to cleanse the lepers (cf. Mat. 8:1-4); to make the dumb speak; and many other deeds related to the total salvation of men and women. It is for this reason that when Jesus Christ concluded his teaching left that recommendation to his followers, so that they cannot forget their duty of liberating those who are victims of all kind of oppression. Those who will forget or disobey will be condemned on the last day of the judgement (Mat. 25:31-46).

4.1.2 THE SAVED MAN

Who then is the saved person? If we follow the doctrinal teaching of some Christians, the save person is the one who accepted the Christian faith, received baptism of water and of

The lesson of Matthew 25:34 - 36 teaches us that the proclamation of the eschatological kingdom of God by Jesus' followers must become a reality in the life of the people and mainly those who are victims of unjust societies. Salvation through Jesus Christ must be total, that is, physical and spiritual.

Therefore the meaning of the eschatological judgement is based on how the people have lived in relation to those in need and not only in their relation to Jesus Christ in His Church. Jesus Christ is not mainly concerned about how people worship him but on how people follow his teaching, preaching and example (cf. Luke 9:23 - 24) so that they can know the will of God, their Creator.

The issue of the service done to others for the sake of the kingdom of God does not mean that it is done in order to have credit or recognition. If it is done in that perspective, then it is not done as a sign of obedience and love to God but as a personal interest. The work must be done as obedience and response to God's demand, love to other human beings and for the sake of the coming kingdom of God which must be built by our hands for the benefit of all men and women here and now.

The issues raised in Matthew 25:34-36 mean that the judge - the Son of man - is already judging us through the leat of his brethren who are always claiming for an end of their suffering. Our indifference in responding to this claim

separates us from the righteous and therefore also from God. Thus, the last day will be the day of reward for the righteous, condemnation for the wicked and the beginning of the new era in history.

The presence of the Son of Man as a Judge on the last day is within the framework that, as he is the one who is already judging men and women today, those denying and rejecting his call for mercy, he must stand as a testimony in order to complete his judgement on the day of separation, reward and final condemnation. (cf. Mark 8:38; Mat. 16:27-28; Lk. 9:26-27)

If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.

Many Christians today are ashamed of being given names or called politicians, Marxists and Communists for defending the poor, the exploited and the oppressed. They fear to denounce social injustice, to call for an end to detention without trial and to visit those who are imprisoned for defending the voiceless and their call for an end of social injustice. They don't want to be suspected that they are associated with those who fight injustice.

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CHAPTER THREETHEOLOGICAL IMPLICATION IN THE TEACHING OF MATTHEW 25:31-463.1 THE BEGINNING OF ESCHATOLOGICAL CONCEPT IN BIBLICAL HISTORY

Does the eschatological concept begin with the teaching of Christ? Erickson asks a series of pertinent questions: "It is expected that the promise of God will largely come to pass upon this earth in a fundamental continuity with life as we now experience it, or is it expected that there will be a deliverance from the present scene and that his promise will be fulfilled in heaven or some place or situation radically different from what we now experience? Does the particulat view speak of hope for the Church alone or for the human race in general? Do the benefits anticipated accrue only to those who are believers, or is the promise for all? Does the eschatological hold that we will come into the benefits of the new age individually, or that their bestowal will be cosmic in character?"¹ To answer these questions it is necessary to review the encounter of Abraham with the God of the promise.

In response to Abraham's great concern because of famine in Haran and his childlessness God appeared to him and promised that He would give him a son. Through this son Abraham would become the father of a nation among nations. God would also give Abraham a land full of milk and honey. This was real Good News, because as in African culture, for Abraham to be childless was to be like a passing cloud, never to be remembered.

The encounter with the God of the promise marked the beginning of faith and an eschatological hope. In spite of his wife's advanced age, Abraham believed that the God who came to him with the promise to give him a son, would not fail to fulfil it. (cf. Gen. 12-17)

Within the agony of slavery in Egypt and solitude in exile, God appeared to Moses with Good News of the liberation of the descendants of Abraham from Pharaoh's hands and of leading them to the promised land of their forefather. This historical event renewed the faith and hope of Abraham in his descendants. In spite of not him having seen the promised land, also believed in God's ability to liberate them and lead them to the promised land.

Sometimes the language of the Scripture presents a dramatic and a miraculous picture of the action of God against the enemies of His people. This was Israel's way of showing the powerful army of the Almighty God against their enemies. It does not mean that in the event of the struggle for their liberation there was no participation of human action against enemies. For instance, Moses and Aaron were not merely God's spokesmen. They were also leaders of the struggle for the liberation of their people.

When they arrived in the promised land, the people of Israel did not await the miraculous action of God to conquer the land for them. They asked only for the power of the Almighty God to help them in their endeavour to conquer the land from the Canaanites.

Within a maze of expatriation from the promised land to Exile in Babylon and consecutive colonization, God appeared through the message of the Prophets (cf. Isaiah 51:4-5;66:18-24) and at last, in the image of His Son Jesus Christ with the promise to judge the wicked of all nations, to reward the righteous and to mark the beginning of a new age in history. This was an age in which harmony, solidarity and brotherhood love among human beings will prevail on earth. "It is sometimes easy to forget that the eschatological truths in God's word, like the rest of his revelation, are intended to comfort and assure us"² that the historical problems which mostly afflict mankind will be solved here and now (not in heaven) for the benefit of all men and women when all will be made new (cf. Mat.19:28)

Abraham began to worship God when He came to him with the promise not about acquiring heavenly internal life (as God never came to promise him a future life beyond history) but about the Good News of possessing a land and having a son, both of which constituted Abraham's major concern and affliction in his life (cf. Gen.15:1-5) His worship was a thanksgiving to God (Gen. 12:7).

"He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (I John5:12). Abraham has an everlasting life because he was given a physical son through whom he became the father of all nations of the world. If he was promised only to be with God in heaven after his earthly

life as a reward or as a consolation prize, Abraham would never have been traced in the history of mankind and be known as he was known in the past. We know him today and he will still be known in future otherwise human history as we know it today would not be the same.

3.1.2 GOD'S PROMISE REQUIRES FAITH AND OBEDIENCE IN ACTION

It is noteworthy that in his hopelessness and spiritual poverty when Abraham received the Good News, this produced faith. In turn faith gave birth to love and action. He showed his obedience to God not only through glorifying Him but also through his actions. His faith did not produce selfishness and indifference to the problems of this world a portion of which he was promised. Rather, his faith created in him more concern with the life of others. (cf. Gen 18:22-33) He did not even await for God to create conditions towards the realization of the promise, but he himself began to act in faith and hope in order to transform the promise into a reality in history.

For instance, he did not await to be taken miraculously by God from Haran to Canaan. He himself created conditions to get there. When there was famine in Canaan he took refuge in Egypt. If he had awaited God to provide food for him he would have died and the promise would not have been fulfilled. Wherever he found problems, instead of praying for them, asking God to solve them or to fight on his behalf, he asked God to give him power to overcome his problems or his enemies.

He even fought not only in his own defence but also to liberate the weak people who were oppressed, robbed of their properties and taken as slaves by the strong ones. (cf. Gen. Chapter 14) Instead of praying at home for the liberation of the people of Sodom and Gomorah who were taken captives with their properties following the defeat of their weak kings, Abraham went on to fight and liberate them by his own forces and with the help of the Almighty.

By faith, hope and the help of the Holy Spirit, Abraham felt strong enough to rise alone against four kings who had defeated five kings. This is the live, active and creative faith as opposed to a dead or tranquilizer faith which makes a person become fearful, cowardly, quiet and to put his hope only on the miraculous action of God.

When Abraham defeated the enemies of the people of Sodom and Gomorah, Melchizedek then king of Salem praised the Lord and asked Him to bless Abraham because his faith in God made him a brave person capable of challenging the strong Kings and defeat them. Melchizedek's gesture shows that the faith that is manifested more in deeds than in empty words makes God who comes to us in promise to be known and glorified by others. Thus, Abraham's action was not only an action of faith but also an action of liberation action. So Abraham made God and His work be known by those who were not aware about Him and His power manifested in men's and women's actions. Therefore as Moltmann says:

Faith is called to life by promise and is therefore essentially hope, confidence, trust in the God who will not lie but will remain faithful to his promise³... A promise is a declaration which announces the coming of a reality that does not yet exist. Thus promise sets man's heart on a future history in which the fulfilling of the promise is to be expected⁴.

Many theologians and preachers who misinterpret Paul's struggle against the introduction of cultural elements (not against the law as others say) which were oppressing and creating disharmony between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in the young Christian Church, something which continues to create problems between Western Christians and African Christians today because of mixing faith with culture, think that Abraham was justified by faith alone and not by his deeds. This doctrine enters into contradiction with the teaching of Jesus Christ who always insisted that we should not praise God by empty words but by doing His will. (cf. Mat. 7:21; 5:16; 25:14-30; 25:35-46)

Edward J. Gratsch points that:

...the fact that God calls human beings to fellowship with Him and eternal happiness implies that they have the capacity to respond to the divine invitation. Aquinas stated that adults achieve the possession of God through good works, that is, through a life of charity. This is also the clear teaching of Sacred Scriptures and the Church. In the comprehensive sense it is correct to say that God's call to man is a call to a life of charity. Hence, there is a need of good works if men and women are to achieve their happiness. These good works are human actions⁵

Faith is an individual gift which develops within each person who receives the word of God, but this faith bears fruits which show that the whole person has been transformed. (cf. Mat.3:7-8) and that he or she reflects the real image of God in the world. (cf. John 3:1-3; Luke 18:18-22) The answer of Jesus Christ to the two believers of his time shows clearly that unless a believer is completely transformed and completely free from selfishness and indifference, faith alone based on following our doctrinal instructions is worthless.

Faith demands the changing of the whole person so that he or she can firmly assert that it is not him or her who is living but Jesus Christ in him or her. That is, a complete change, a transformation of old character and behaviour into a new one acceptable to God and to other human beings with whom we are obliged to live with in solidarity. That is why Jesus Christ died, not because of his own guilt but because of ours. It is in doing the will of God that our faith will save us before God's judgement. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer observes:

It is evident that the only appropriate conduct of men before God is doing His will. The sermon on the mount is there for the purpose of being done (Matt.7:24ff). Only in doing can there be submission to the will of God. In doing God's will man renounces every right and every justification of his own; he delivers himself humbly into the hands of the merciful Judge. If the Holy Scripture insists with such great urgency on doing, that is because it wishes to take away from man every possibility of self-justification before God on the basis of his own knowledge of good and evil. The Bible

does not wish man's own deed to be set side with the deed of God, even as a thank-offering or sacrifice, but it sets man entirely with the action of God and subordinates human action to God's action. The error of the Pharisees, therefore, did not lie in their extremely strict insistence on the necessity for action, but rather in their failure to act.⁶

Hearing is followed by a response . This is a sign that we hear and understand what is being spoken to us. Dietrich Bonhoeffer advices that what is heard must be put into practice because if it is not, then it will be forgotten and the hearer of the word who is not also the doer of the word can easily fall victim to self-deception.⁷ Therefore the hearing and doing the word must go hand in hand;

For just as hearing must not be made independent of doing, so, too, doing must not make itself independent of hearing. The beatification of the doer includes his hearing. One thing is needful: not to hear or to do, but to do both in one, in other words to be and to continue in unity with Jesus Christ, to be directed towards Him, to receive word and deed from Him, and not, on the basis either of hearing or of doing, to become the accuser and judge of one's brother or even, like Martha, to become the accuser of Jesus Christ, but in hearing and in doing to entrust everything to the decision of Jesus Christ and to live through Him, by His grace and by His merciful judgement which He will deliver in His own time. There is a false doing and a false hearing. We cannot ourselves examine either our hearing and our doing are true or false; indeed this will depend precisely on whether or not we entrust this examination entirely to the knowledge and the judgement of Jesus.⁸

The eschatological Good News promised by God do not come to transform the hearers into selfishness, cowardice, quietness and indifference to the problems of the world which afflict human beings. On the contrary, it awakens them to put their faith, hope and love into creative or active activities. "The Good News are always preceded by something penultimate, some action, suffering, movement, volition, defeat, uprising, entreaty or hope, that is to say, in a quite genuine sense by a span of time, at the end of which it stands. Only he can be justified who has already become the object of an accusation in time".⁹

If the promised Good News results into faith without hope, love, action and awakens those who receive it, then it could become bad news, a tranquilizer or the so-called opium of the people. Faith is an active element which awakens people and creates in them vivacity, movement and work which opens the way to the fulfilment of God's promise and not laziness, hopelessness, inactivity or making people live in awaiting only for good life in heaven, as some Christians mislead others. So one claims that:

The right wing Christian workers - white and nationals, have misled our youth by making them believe that they live in heaven. In fact, though saved, the youth are still needy, unemployed, sick, hungry, cold and less educated. They are spiritually indoctrinated by our national Christian workers who are there to please their paymasters. The youth believers are told not to worry

about their socio-economic and other material needs because Jesus Christ will be coming soon. Some saved youth have dropped out of school, deserted jobs, lost interest in marriage, property, etc under the pretext that all they needed was to go to heaven although they can't tell when they will get there. Many Christian fundamentalists do not consider socio-economic, cultural and political activities as an integral part of contemporary evangelism. The so-called evangelistic ministry of many fundamentalists is concentrated on winning souls. This is against the teaching of Jesus Christ. The Biblical and true evangelism is intended for total liberation. In other words, a saved person would never enjoy his salvation when he is denied his human rights, is hungry, cold, unhoused, sick, oppressed and exploited - all against God's plan for salvation¹⁰.

It is very sad indeed to hear this kind of tranquilizing evangelization in the Christian Church. And what is very interesting is that: all those people who are engaged in teaching this kind of tranquilizant doctrine in Jesus' name are rich with all the necessities for their present life, and they come from rich countries to preach the gospel of poverty which makes the African countries backward and more and more poor so that they can continue to be exploited by the rich Christian countries. If it is good for others to give up all material things for the sake of heaven, why do they have luxurious houses, cars, furniture, etc? Why can't they also wait to have these things in heaven?

True faith which leads the believers to heaven is discovered and developed through the participation of the believers in the transformation of their present world given to them by God into a better one acceptable to all. So as Jurgen Moltmann points out:

Activity and political commitment for the liberation of the oppressed are not a panacea against feebleness of the personality and lazy thinking. It is only the person who finds himself who can give himself. It is only the one who has become free that can free others without taking away their capacity for ideological free decision¹¹...This way of life is created by the Spirit where people, personally, discover their life and the history of their lives in the comprehensive history of Christ, and participate in the history of God's dealings with the world¹².

The eschatological promise of the coming Kingdom of God on earth besides producing faith, hope and action, awakens people and give them power to expel demons and to cure all kinds of sicknesses. (cf. Mark 6:7-13; Acts 3:1-10) in order to bring total salvation to men and women in the whole world according to God's plan.

In this way, Jesus Christ who brings the Good News to us, might not be seen or interpreted as one who only comes to take the believers to heaven; a personal Saviour or as the Saviour of only individuals, but as he who comes to save the world which needs to be liberated from evil. So "he does not want my redemption and yours; he wants the redemption of the whole world. He wants to put an end to evil altogether. He wants to make the whole world, in its utter godlessness, free"¹³. This is the meaning of the eschatological message of God and the root of hope in history: to liberate the world from the hand of the evil rule and set up the promised Kingdom here and now for the benefit of all men and women.

So, the believers are not called to fulfill the promise or the plan of God but to show their obedience to God through their participation in opening the way (cf. Mat. 3:3) for the realization of God's plan and the fulfillment of His promise in history. So as Dietrich Bonhoeffer says:

There is no obedience to God which does not have to prove itself in the concrete situation of meeting one's neighbour, as Luke (10:29-37), probably unhistorically but with the right of correct understanding the illustration narrative of the Good Samaritan with Jesus' discussion of the greatest commandment...¹⁴ The example of the merciful Samaritan shows that a man can know and must know what he has to do when he sees his neighbour in need of his help.¹⁵

3.1.3 RENEWAL AND DEVELOPMENT OF ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE

The promise to Abraham that his descendants would possess the land full of milk and honey was fulfilled. But God's promise that He will dwell among His people in order to rule them Himself was not fulfilled as the total victory of God upon evil and the establishment of His Kingdom was not yet gained. Evil continued to rule the lives of God's people. They possessed the land but they also disobeyed God's commandment. So they lived under the law of the evil world. They took others and even their own brothers as slaves, exploited and oppressed the poor, widows and orphans. Thus we see that "in part, Israel's own perversity and unfaithfulness frustrated the divine purpose, but evil empires also opposed the establishment and success of

the Jewish theocracy which was to mirror and exemplify God's reign in Jerusalem. Thwarting circumstances entered into the picture, and turned the Israelite ideal of one nation under God into a broken dream.¹⁶

As a result, there was more poverty, more misery, more diseases, etc., in a land full of milk and honey. This situation separated them from the God who promised to dwell among them and rule them as their King. This brought about the prophetic message of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., which announced the imminent destruction of a world which was ready to be judged and the rising of the new one which according to Walther Eichrodt, "the more drastically as a result of this new vision of God were the traditional statements of faith about the divine transformed and filled with new content".¹⁷

The so-called new heaven and new earth was not thought of in a fantastic magical world beyond history. It was intended to be a consummation of revelation of God in history; sovereignty of God upon Israel and all nations. That is to say, an absolute subordination to the cosmic purpose of God. Thus, the eschatological Creator God does not come as an enemy to destroy what He did and loved so much, but as perfecter of the first creation.¹⁸ Hence, as Walther Eichrodt puts his point :

According to Israel's belief both matter and form proceed from God's creative power, both must be good, that is, both must correspond to his purpose. That the predicate good **is to be**

understood in this sense, and is not meant to denote a state of unlimited perfection, follows from the way in which elsewhere it is held to be self-evident that good and evil, light and darkness, are both to be ascribed to Yahweh, and therefore that any idea of an alien power in the universe is to be re-elected¹⁹.

Indeed, to say that something is good does not mean that it is perfect. To be good means to have a quality which is acceptable and to be useful. The iron for instance, is good because it is useful, but not because of its perfectness, as after a certain time it can change its appearance or can be rusty, and therefore need to be renewed in order to recover its appearance. But the gold does not rust. It continues always to show its original colour. So, it is perfect. All God's creatures were pronounced good. This means that God accepted His creatures to be useful but this does not mean that they are perfect. Man for instance, was so easy to be deceived and corrupted. It is for this reason that God regarded him as His image and not a small god or at least His son. Jesus Christ is called the Son of God because he is perfect. So during his earthly life he never sinned as he knew what is good and what is bad. He did what was good for God and for the people. He did not need someone to tell or to teach him like Adam and Eve who were taught by the serpent. Although they were good, they were not perfect and capable of knowing what was good or bad like Jesus Christ.

Therefore the Prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. expected that God as Creator would recreate His creation

in order to make it reach the real stage of perfection. This according to them, should be a new heaven and a new earth and the beginning of a new era. Moltmann's points out that:

The prophet expects from the future Yahweh's final and decisive victory: his enthronement, his final rule without opposition and without end; and with it the dawn of the new era, the era of salvation. Before the coming rule of God the one eschatological messenger of joy appear, proclaiming the royal rule of God and the final liberation of his people. As he announces the rule of God and the final liberation of his people. As he announces the rule of God and the liberation of man, and with them the eschatological era, his joyful message puts this era into effect and is, like the word of creation at the beginning, the word that creates the era of salvation. The new era begins for the world of the nations as well. The rule of Yahweh is proclaimed and the wonders of his liberation are praised among the Gentiles. The vision of the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion (Isa.60:6) and the glorifying of Yahweh by the Gentiles shows the universality of hope in the one who brings good tidings in the last day²⁰.

The Prophets in their concept of the new heaven and new earth were not dreaming with a new and comfortable life in the sky or a Kingdom of their souls in heaven. They expected to see a transformed old world presiously disfigured by the work of the evil rule, the beginning of a new era in history and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God which would rule not only Israel but all nations of the world with its headquarter in Sion - the new Jerusalem. This, for the Prophets, should be the fulfillment of their hope and God's promise. So as Moltmann states:

Hope is nothing else than the expectation of those things which faith believed to have been truly promised by God. Thus, faith believes that to be true, hope awaits the time when this truth shall be manifested; faith believes that He is our Father, hope anticipates that he will ever show himself to be a Father towards us; faith believes that eternal life has been given to us, hope anticipates that it will some time be revealed; faith is the foundation upon which hope rest, hope nourished and sustains faith²¹.

And

In its eyes the world is full of all kind of possibilities, namely all the possibilities of the God of hope. It sees reality and making in the hand of him whose voice calls into history from its end, saying, Behold, I make all things new, and from hearing this word of promise it acquires the freedom to renew life here and to change the face of the world²².

In Moltmann's view, the God of Exodus and of the resurrection is not only the God of eternal presence but the one who promises His presence and nearness to those who follow the way towards a future. The God who first of all promised His presence and the coming of His Kingdom and who creates conditions for their fulfillment in future. He is also a God of promise and one who leaves the present to face the future. He is the source of the new things that are to come²³. Hence, the teaching of the Scripture about the returning of Jesus Christ or the coming of the Son of Man to set up the Kingdom of God, to judge the wicked and to reward the righteous does not take us out of history or bring history to its end. He opens the path for the time and puts the history in action in order to anticipate the promise and hope of new era here and now. Therefore "the Christian hope is directed towards a novum ultimum, towards a new creation of all things by

the God of the resurrection in Jesus Christ"²⁴.

Christian hope cannot cling rigidly to the past or ally itself with the utopia of the status quo. Rather, it is itself summoned and empowered to creative transformation of reality, for it has hope for the whole of reality. Finally, the believing hope will itself provide inexhaustible resources for the creative, inventive imagination of love. It constantly provokes and produces thinking of an anticipatory kind in love to man and the world, in order to give shape to the newly dawning possibilities in the light of the promised future, in order as far as is possible to create here the best that is possible, because what is promised is within the bounds of possibility²⁵.

The message of the promise does not come to announce what will happen in the time to come where there is something going wrong and as a result provoking outcry. It is an answer to the world which is suffering and claiming for an end to its suffering. But the putting of that end of world's suffering is not something which comes suddenly at the wink of an eye. It is a process which begins with the signs of what is coming (Mat. 11:2-5) to make sure that what is promised in the future (Mat. 5:3-10) is true and will be a reality when God defeats the power of the evil Kingdom completely and judges the wicked and begins a new age with the righteous.

Thus, the activities which begin with the announcement of the message of the promise give courage, faith and hope to await in active anticipation for the fulfillment of the promise in history. Hence, as Gustavo Gutierrez puts his points:

The Promise illuminates and fructifies the future of humanity and leads it through incipient realizations towards its fullness. Both the present and future aspects are indispensable for tracing the relationship between Promise and history²⁶...The full significance of God's action in history is understood only when it is put in its eschatological perspective; similarly, the revelation of the final meaning of history gives value to the present. The self-communication of God points towards the future, and at the same time this Promise and Good News reveal humanity to itself and widens the perspective of its historical commitment here and now²⁷.

In Gutierrez's view, to hope is to be ready to receive the promise as a gift manifested in refusing the acts of injustice, in the protest against violation of human rights and in the struggle for peace and fellowship. In this way, hope exercises a liberating function in history.²⁸

According to Dale Moody, historical revelation and historical salvation work together in a manner that one cannot have historical revelation without historical salvation. In this way, eschatology becomes the center of historical revelation related to all creation.²⁹ Thus, the prophetic eschatology saw the coming Day of the Lord in history as the Day of reward for the righteous and of punishment for the wicked.³⁰ This was developed after the destruction of the first Temple by the apocalyptic eschatology which saw the Day of the Lord as the beginning of a new age in history which would involve the whole creation³¹.

In the teaching of Jesus Christ the prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology were once again amplified by the concept that the eschatological promise can be anticipated not as its fulfillment

but as the beginning of the process towards its fulfilment in the time to come. Thus, as Beasley-Murray points out:

Naturally the nature of the pictures employed suggests that the presence of the time of salvation in Jesus' ministry anticipates the revelation of its fullness in the future, when the glory of God will manifest itself not simply in the humble deeds of grace performed by Jesus, but in the transfigured humanity of the new world.³²

3.2 THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS HISTORICAL ESCHATOLOGY

Does the teaching of Jesus Christ about the coming Kingdom of God reject or despise the present life, attaching value only to the hereafter life? Is his teaching against the action of man in history? Is it against bringing about the Kingdom of God in reality here and now?

The prophecy, which we believe is the foundation of the teaching of the teaching of Jesus Christ and his social action (Mat.11:5-Isa.35:4-7; Luke4:18-19- Isa.61:1-4) tells us about a true King, wise and honest, who would be raised by God to save his people in history. For instance Jeremiah 23:5-6 has this to say,

See, the days are coming - it is Yahweh who speaks - when I will raise a virtuous Branch for David, who will reign as true King and be wise, practising honesty and integrity in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel dwell in confidence. And this is the name he will called: Yahwe-our-integrity.

The announcement of the coming Kingdom of God in the prophecy does refer to the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God beyond this life. It is an announcement of the day of salvation to those who are suffering oppression here and now. The Kingdom of God is

coming to confront the forces of disorder and chaos in favour of the oppressed.

In this prophetic view therefore "the most obvious function of the King was to sustain the authority of God's Divine power in the conflict with the forces of chaos, particularized in the political enemies of Israel", as it is expressed in Psalms 2 and 110.³³

The teaching of Jesus in this issue is consistent with prophecy? (cf. Isa. 61:1-4 = Luke 4:18-19) The difference appears only because Jesus Christ emphasizes the universal Kingdom of God in comparison to the Prophets who saw it as a restoration of David's Kingdom. Thus, as John Gray says:

What Jesus proclaimed and authenticated, by what He did and by what He was, was the irruption into history of the effective order of the Divine Kingdom with its power to transform the situation to release new energies, as in the healing works of our Lord, to break the domination of forces which held men bodily and spiritually in thrall, as the casting out of devils, the implication of which was so pointedly stated in Jesus' declaration on the strong man despoiled in the famous Beelzebub controversy. (Mk. 3:23ff, cf. Mt. 12:25ff., Lk. 11:17ff.)³⁴

Beyond his universal emphasis on the coming Kingdom of God, the most notable in Jesus' teaching in his emphasis of the true faith through obedience to God's word, good relationship among men and the work of the Holy Spirit in history through men and women. In this way, Jesus Christ shows that through faith and the work of the Holy Spirit, human beings can also contribute to the creation of the new earth and therefore opening the way for the coming Kingdom of God in history.

This means that the new creation announced by the prophets and the promise of the coming Kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus Christ can be anticipated by faith and the work of the Holy Spirit in creating brotherhood love, harmony, solidarity among men and the liberation of the distressed in history.

Moltmann asserts that:

The Kingdom of God is present in faith and new obedience, in new fellowship and the powers of the Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit is to be understood as the earnest and beginning of the new creation of all things in the Kingdom of God. God rules through word and faith, promise and hope, commandment and obedience, power and spirit...The Spirit of God makes the impossible; he creates faith where there is nothing else to believe in; he creates love where there is nothing lovable; he creates hope where there is nothing to hope for. The Spirit of God works in history as the creator of a new future and as the new creator of what is transient for this future³⁵.

Therefore, according to Moltmann, the co-operation between Christians in their endeavours to free the world from misery, violence and despair might not be seen as a pure fortuitous and without theological meaning. Both show the work of the Holy Spirit whose purpose is to provide life and not death. This makes the Kingdom of God be present in history through the leadership of God manifested in work and faith, obedience and fellowship, in potentialities grasped and in free co-operation of believers in the world.³⁶

To resist against the power or against the spirit of selfishness is an important part of anticipating the coming

new order. The person who shrinks to himself in self-love has a future, as all he accepts is the prevailing of the present situation in future.³⁷ "It follows from this that individual anticipations of what is to come can only prove themselves as such through intervention and self-giving for the future of others. True hope is lived in the giving of oneself to the future of the hopeless. Anticipated liberty is practised in the liberation of the oppressed. Faith is manifested in love for those in need".³⁸

The teaching of Jesus Christ does not point to the Kingdom which will be fulfilled beyond history because it would seem to be God's failure to redeem the world, neither does it reject nor despise the present life or against the action of men and women in order to anticipate the promised Kingdom of God in history. On the contrary, Jesus Christ demands his disciples to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to cleanse the lepers and to cast out the devils in their mission of evangelization as a sign that the coming Kingdom of God is near. (cf. Mat. 10:7) John Gray points out that this act of healing in Jesus' ministry as a sign of the coming divine Kingdom, is not a new experience for the people of Israel as it is found in the Enthronement Psalms and Deutero-Isaiah.³⁹ Therefore, the traditional themes of rehabilitation find their variation in the healing works of Jesus, the renewal of the physical, mental and indeed spiritual faculties of man. The imposition of God's government in

society was effected in the vindication (justification) of His people, now the faithful remnant in the true prophetic and best apocalyptic tradition and the condemnation of the rest. Response to the challenge of the Kingdom in the mission of Jesus, conditioned blessing or condemnation in His lifetime, as in the detail of the final destruction of the tares sown in the wheat (Mat.13:24-30,36-43), and of the useless fish caught in a dragnet (Mat.13:47-50), is likened to the Kingdom of God, where the details in Mat. 13:39-43 and 49 are Post-Dominical elaboration⁴⁰.

The Sermon of the Mount, which John Gray considers as a rehabilitation of the underprivileged and the oppressed which reflects the reversal of fortunes in Psalms 37 and re-echoes the phraseology of this Psalm, the righteous and the satisfaction of the good man in time of famine⁴¹ is one of the many examples which show that in Jesus' teaching, the Kingdom of God is a liberating force for the benefit of those who are in need and those who are persecuted because of righteousness here and now.

The prophecy emphasized the Kingdom of peace because there was no peace among Israelites and between them and other nations. We cannot have peace where there is no justice and righteousness at all. Peace is a fruit of justice and righteousness which brings everlasting quietness and confidence. (cf. Isa.32:17) Justice, in order to bring the everlasting peace, must function as a defender of the rights of the poor and a punisher of the oppressors. In this way, justice can complete its function of a peacemaking. Peace is a life of sharing among men and nations.

One cannot expect to have and enjoy peace while others are suffering. Therefore peace, justice, love and freedom are not spiritual elements but social realities which must be experienced here and now.

The Kingdom of God is aimed at bringing about the end of evil, the elimination of injustice, poverty, misery, exploitation and oppression of the weak. This becomes a reality when men and women have right to build houses for their own use and plant vineyards to eat their fruits, instead of building and planting for others. But the elimination of these evil elements will not happen automatically. The forces to eliminate them must come from the deliberate acts of the people who accept to be used by faith and the Holy Spirit to participate in God's struggle to put an end to the Kingdom of the evil rule. In this way, even though the Kingdom of God comes to us as a gift from God,⁴² as Edward Gratsch says it demands a personal and social responsibility. It is for this reason that the teachings and works of Jesus Christ became to proclaim the coming divine Kingdom:

The words and the works of Jesus were pointers to the coming Kingdom of God. His words were called the gospel of the Kingdom. (cf. Isaiah 40:9;41:27;52:7; 61:1), and his words were signs of the Kingdom that is to come (cf. Isaiah 35: 1-10; Matt.11:1-5)⁴³...The powers of the Kingdom are already present, yet not as a force that changes the world but as the strength that radiates from One, who is familiar with it and mediates it. What He makes men see in the form of healing or of encouragement, of criticism and of criticism and of promise, is not the Kingdom but the signs of this Kingdom⁴⁴.

If Jesus' work was to proclaim the salvation of the souls only and the Kingdom which would be inaugurated in heaven for the benefit of those souls, then he would not have wasted his time preaching the Good News of the well being of the Kingdom by healing and feeding the sick and the hungry. But his works showed that the plan and the promise of God for deliverance in the time to come had began its process towards its process towards its fulfillment in future here and now. Thus, as Beasley-Murray contributes in this issue,

...the emancipating power of God at work in Christ shows that the divine sovereignty that is destined to bring deliverance in the future is operative for that purpose in the present...The Kingdom promised for the world is the divine sovereignty that delivers and transforms humanity in the entirety of its relations, extending to cosmic transfiguration⁴⁵.

The task of the disciples of Jesus Christ or Christian missionaries therefore is not to indoctrinate or to teach the converted to give up the material things which constitute an important part of their present life and live as if they are already in heaven. Their work is to liberate them from oppression, exploitation, injustice, selfishness and indifference to the problems of the world which incorporate the Legion of our time. (cf. Mat. 5:2-10). Furthermore, to encourage them to struggle for the total liberation of the whole world from the evil rule. So as Gunther Bornkamm views:

The content of the missionary task of the disciples is to announce the nearness of the Kingdom of God and to carry out the signs of it by healing the sick, raising

the dead, and casting out demons (Matt.10.7f). They journey in the light of the imminent coming of the Son of Man (10.23) and on the judgement of the world and the miseries that preceded it.⁴⁶

3.3 THE ESCHATOLOGICAL MESSAGE OF MATTHEW

25:31-46 IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

What does the eschatological message of Matthew 25:31-46 offer to the people of Africa today? Are there in Africa people who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick and imprisoned and who can be considered as the least of Jesus' brethren? What does the announced divine Kingdom mean to the African people today? These questions will be easy to answer when we first of all take a look into the socio-political, economic, cultural and religious situation of Africa today.

3.3.1 THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION IN AFRICA TODAY

In our survey of political, social, economic, cultural and religious situation in Africa we found that African countries in spite of having their own flags and local leadership they are still politically, economically, culturally and religiously colonized and oppressed by the forces from outside in collaboration with the local leadership.

Thus, politically we can even assert that Africa has not yet won her political freedom, as she cannot choose her own political line. This is clearly manifested in the extremely financed civil wars, aggressions between neighbours, economic, cultural and religious dependence. So the African States which after the struggle for independence decided to have total freedom, to be

orientated by their own political line without any interference from outside, for the development of their countries and the well being of their people. They have problems of financed civil wars created by the superpower countries which demand the African States to follow politics which allow political dictation from outside, prevailing exploitation of the people and Natural resources, social injustice, and economic, cultural and religious dependence. The magazine has observed that:

The superpower-financed wars of destabilisation have cost the Southern African region \$60 billion during the last decade while 1.5 million lives, mainly of the Youth have been lost.

Those States which accepted to develop their countries and to lead their people under orientation of their former colonizers in agreement with the superpowers have no problem of civil wars, as they are well protected. But they are suffering unemployment, lack of land, poverty and misery as a consequence of foreign exploitation, the grabbing and selling of fertile land to foreigners by the local leaders, who are eagerly seeking their protection and accumulation of wealth.

Economically, Africa is totally dependent as she cannot even decide the prices of her own products. Hence the buyer has become the owner and controller of the products, the producer and seller became a mere worker of the buyer. A Special Report observes:

The crisis of identity of Africa's Youth is compounded by the continent's debilitating socio-economic and political problems. The basic source of this crisis is the dependent nature of the African economy and culture occasioned by the foreign contact. Colonial

nature of the African economy and culture occasioned by the foreign contact. Colonialism reduced African countries to mere growers of raw materials over whose pricing they have no control. Not surprisingly, Africa lost \$80 billion through the fall of commodity prices between 1982 and 1989.⁴⁸

Furthermore, instead of being paid the exploitation of the African people and their Natural resources, massacres and slavery suffered during 500 years of the colonial regimes, Africa is yet forced to pay external debt, which is a way to make the African countries more and more poor so that they can continue to be dependent and exploited by the so-called developed countries. So in 1986 and 87 the International Monetary Fund received from Africa \$2 billion in loan repayments.⁴⁹ Therefore, as the Special Report goes on:

African crisis is to be traced from the unequal international system that is by and large exploitative and undemocratic. It is a system that has for the last 500 years sustained itself on the enslavement, extermination, suppression and exploitation of the African people⁵⁰.

Culturally and religiously, the African people are forced to abandon their own culture because it is said to be too primitive and to give up all material things and to despise their own life because they are told that both material things and the present life belong to this world which in turn belongs to satan. Hence, they must raise their eyes towards heaven only and await in prayer for Jesus Christ who is coming soon to take them to heaven (see above on page 121).

This world which is said to belong to Satan must be left alone with its material things. Thus, immorality and corruption are left to increase as they belong to this world. Social injustice is left to prevail because the only responsibility we have is to protect our faith and our personal morality. Hunger, poverty, misery, oppression, dehumanization, exploitation, hatred, dictatorship, injustice and many other social ills are to be considered political matters incompatible with the Christian faith.⁵¹

As a result of all the above mentioned, there are in Africa today more people starving and dying of famine, more nakedness, more sickness, more prisoners and it is said that 50 per cent of the world's refugees belong to the African continent.⁵² In short, Africa seems condemned to extermination, and the body of Jesus Christ on the African continent is totally disfigured.⁵³ Samuel Kobia has observed correctly that:

In Africa, one encounters many whose dignity is trampled underfoot by injustice, poverty, exploitation, hunger, violence and corruption. From a Christian perspective, we can say that in these suffering human beings we encounter Christ who is hungry, thirsty, naked, sick and imprisoned.⁵⁴

And

The present condition of man is an affront to all those who regard an individual as a unique creature of the Living God. If we believe that man was created in the image of God, we must endorse the sentiment of Nyerere when he says: (I refuse to imagine a God who is poor (destitute), ignorant

superstitious, fearful, oppressed, wretched - which is the lot of the majority of those he created in his own image.⁵⁵

Indeed, a God without love, without mercy, without compassion, without power is not a God at all but an idol which demands only to be worshiped without taking care of its worshippers.

3.3.2 THE CRY OF AFRICA

Within the prevailing situation in Africa there is a voice crying. Like Rachel (cf. Jeremias 31:15), our Mother Africa is crying. The question is, Why is she crying? Is she crying because Jesus has delayed his return to take her to heaven? Is she crying because her faith is poor? The answer comes from many children of Africa.

Different groups of African youth who write the All Africa Conference of Churches say that our Mother Africa is crying for help to those inside and outside the Church governmental and non-governmental institutions to rescue her children from political, social, economic and cultural situations so that they can live an abundant life as their Creator intended it to be.⁵⁶ They claim that as the children of Africa live in a socio-political and cultural environment, they cannot therefore, as Christians afford to live, eat, sell and buy from the market without pondering about that environment. Neither should they neglect their socio-political activities. Hence they need to balance their struggle for the transformation of the present world.⁵⁷

They see the prevailing African problems as something which will never be solved by the various slogans formulated every year by the Western world such as: the slave trade, racism,

colonialism, exploitation of Natural resources, international trade and other lopsided international systems, destabilisation-civil strife, agri-business and abuse of genetic engineering, economic stress, structural adjustment and now life for all by the year 2000.⁵⁸

They ask how long will the African people continue to be exploited, to be slaves of the rich, to be under the white man who came in the pretext of Christianity to exploit Africa and send false information home? How can people whose countries have homosexuals, lesbians, drug addicts parading on the streets see Africa as the only dark continent which needs to be saved from sin?⁵⁹ Hence, they see the African crisis as a matter which cannot be solved independently of the basic crisis of exploitation and oppression of the African people since the enslavement of their ancestors up to now.⁶⁰

The problem of oppression and a total dependence has caused outcry and a major concern to our Mother Africa. As a result, in some African countries an attempt has been made, and is still being made to either ease or eliminate completely oppression and economic dependence. Hence, some religious and State leaders have been in the fore front of combating oppression, apartheid and dependence in its political, social, economic, cultural and religious aspects. For instance, the former President of Tanzania Julius Nyerere appealed to the Christians to assume an active role in development of third world.⁶¹ One of the prominent African leaders of the Church, Bishop Desmond Tutu, appeals also to the

Christian Church to produce a relevant theology which speaks to the present hopelessness and despondency. It should declare that God is the Lord of history and that the world belongs to Him despite all appearance to the contrary, that He is a God of justice and who cares about the oppressed and exploited about deaths in detention, about squatters' shacks, about unemployment and about the powerless.

Bishop Tutu goes on to describe the enjoying of good food glorious music, beautiful girls and lovely men, attractive scenery, noble literature, refreshing recreation as a part of human life.⁶³ Hence true Christian worship can never let people be indifferent to the needs of others, to the cries of the hungry, of the naked and the homeless, of the sick and the prisoners, of the oppressed and the disadvantaged.⁶⁴ All these appeals and cries are aimed at ending oppression, dependence, racism and exploitation which are roots of the suffering of the majority of African people and the cause of the crying of our Mother Africa.

3.3.3 THE AWAITED MESSAGE

What kind of message, in this prevailing situation, is our Mother Africa waiting for? Is she just awaiting for a message about the future of her children's life in heaven? Certainly not. Mother Africa is waiting for the face of God and His image to appear here and now with the message of the eschatological promise, which will give her faith and hope that, although her children are being massacred, starving, oppressed and exploited, there will be survivors and justice shall be done to their enemies

when the Son of Man comes to judge the wicked, reward the righteous, put an end to the rule of evil Kingdom and set up the Kingdom of God.

The wolf shall live with the sheep, and the leopard lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall grow up together, and a little child shall lead them; the cow and the bear shall be friends, and their young shall lie down together. The lion shall eat straw like cattle; the infant shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the young child dance over the vipers's nest. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for as the water fill the sea, so shall the land be filled with the knowledge of the Lord (Isaiah 11:4-9)

Is this an eschatological message about future life in heaven? If your answer is yes, ask yourself, do the cows, lions, bears, cobras, vipers, etc. have souls which will be taken together with the souls of human beings to heaven? In our view, this message is the so-called Good News announced by Jesus Christ in Luke 4:18-19 and in his Sermon of the Mount.

The Biblical concept, in its prophetic teaching and preaching presents a God who created the world and all creatures on it to live together in harmony and peace. Thus, disharmony, violence, hatred and selfishness is the work of evil, the enemy of God and His creation. Bishop Desmond Tutu has observed that:

...the Bible describes God as creating the universe to be a cosmos and not a chaos, a cosmos in which harmony, unity, order, fellowship, communion, peace and justice would reign and that this divine intention was disturbed by sin. The result was disunity, alienation, disorder, chaos, separation, and in the face of this God then sent His son to restore that primordial harmony to effect reconciliation.⁶⁵

Africa in her crisis, needs to hear a message which promises to bring back life and the resurrected Christ who in turn brings about hope of a new beginning in the history of man. That is to say, one who brings about the acceptable time and year of God's favour to the distressed (cf. Luke 4:19) Not a message which brings good news of the salvation of the souls and the way in which those souls can go to heaven or a message of encouraging and anaesthetizing the oppressed so that they can endure the pain of oppression for the sake of that heaven. So as Mugambi observes:

The spiral of violence generated by prejudice cannot be stopped merely by appealing to the oppressed to succumb to their oppressors because the struggles of the victims of oppression are struggles for survival, for justice and for freedom.⁸⁶

Mugambi goes on to point out that in Jesus' prophetic message quoted from the book of the Prophet Isaiah, shows that poverty, oppression, prejudice, physical illness, and estrangement from God as dehumanizing situations, and he dealt with them during his earthly ministry.⁶⁷

The Apostle Paul asserts that the first man (Adam) brought about death in history, but the second Adam (Jesus Christ) brought back life to man. Therefore the message of Jesus does not bring death to the body and life to soul. It brings life through the resurrected Christ and calls individuals and peoples to freedom through words and action. Laurenti Magesa adds that Jesus does this through continual self-revelation of God in history, as the Christian God is a God of revelation. This is a process in which God gives voice to the voiceless so that the farmers can have right

to decide on the prices of their products; encourages industrial workers, domestic servants and casual labourers to say no to exploitation; gives hope to prostitutes, parking boys, the sick, the lame by assuring them that inspite of their degradation, suffering and handicaps, they are still equal members of the society and God's children with dignity; strenthens the youth so that they may accept the challenge that the future belongs to them and can change the world into a better one for everybody; avails opportunity to the refugees and displaced people to return home.⁶⁸ Thus, as Mugambi views:

Discipleship meant furthering this Good News, in its totality. It would be an unfortunate distortion of the teaching of Jesus to reduce the proclamation of the Gospel merely to preaching about the future Kingdom of God in heaven, and to be concerned only with the salvation of the soul. It is clear, in both deeds and words, that Jesus was concerned with the inauguration of a new era in the totality of human experience, at both the individual and social levels. It would be a mistake also, to reduce the Gospel merely to works of social service, without affirming the theological basic of Christian action.⁶⁹

The message awaited by Africa in her crisis is the Gospel which proclaims the end of disharmony and enmity among God's creature, as we see in Isaiah 11:4-9. The rehabilitation of the underprivileged and the oppressed as Jesus announced in his Sermon of the Mount, brings the signs of the coming divine Kingdom and the presence of the awaited Saviour of the world as Matther tells us (11:2-5) and announces the returning of the Son of Man to perform the last judgement of the wicked, to reward the righteous,

to put an end to the rule of the evil Kingdom and set up the Kingdom of God. (Mat. 25:31-46)

3.3.4 THE CALL FOR ACTION

There should be no distinction between soul and body. This means that the human being is a unity. Therefore, what harms the body harms the soul at the same time and vice-versa. When the body is suffering the soul is also suffering. Thus, salvation must affect both.

The African situation calls the Gospel which announces salvation of souls and demands immediate action for the salvation of the bodies. That is, a total salvation of man as unity. This salvation goes further. It demands also the renewal of the whole world which plays an important role in the life of men and women. Mathematically, we have soul + body + world equals person who needs salvation. God did not love the soul only and as a result, made His plan to save it but He loved the world also and, hence, sent Jesus to save it, not to condemn it or withdraw the souls from it. (cf. John 3:16-17)

The attempt to separate salvation from the whole world is not new. This was the source of enmity between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, who wanted the Jewish State to be saved only, and the reestablishment of David's Kingdom. So when Jesus announced the coming of the divine Kingdom, they all accepted him. But when he started to save the world, they rejected him. (cf. Mat. 8:28-34; 9:1-8; 12:22-24; Mark 3:22; Lk. 11:15-16; Mat. 13:54-57; 19:16-22) This is exactly what some Christians do today. They accept Jesus'

acts of salvation of the souls, but at the same time, are against him because of his acts of salvation of the whole son.

Jesus was sent to redeem the world from sin and to save the whole person from all kinds of oppression both spiritual and physical. Therefore, as Bishop Desmond Tutu points out:

...true Christian worship can never let us be indifferent to the needs of others, to the cries of the hungry, of the naked and the homeless, of the sick and prisoner, of the oppressed and the disadvantaged.⁷⁰

The parabolic teaching of Jesus Christ in Matthew 25:31-40 is not a call for spiritual repentance. Like the parable of the good Samaritan, it is a call for action for the benefit of others and the world's salvation. It is for this perspective that Jesus demands his disciples to carry the cross and follow him. To carry the cross does not mean to sacrifice ourselves in the hands of our oppressors, as the sacrifice was done once and for all by him. It means to join him in his work to save the world. Thus, the calling of disciples was not aimed at helping him to pray. Jesus used to pray alone. The call was not for accompanying him in his solitary self awaiting for the coming Kingdom but help him to work because the field is big and the work is too much for one person. (cf. Mat.9:37-38; Luke 10:2) This work is not based on empty words about the coming divine Kingdom but on action aimed at showing the nearness of the Kingdom of God (cf. Mat.10:1; Luke10:9) and the salvation of the whole world. As Mugambi observes:

In the public ministry of Jesus, there is no clear distinction between preaching, teaching and social services. Thus mission in His ministry is service. Christian mission ought to be understood as total witness for the whole person in a holistic society.⁷¹

Mugambi goes on to observe that the Christian mission is a process in which four essential and complementary elements are included: teaching, preaching, social service and fellowship.⁷² The social service was as important as his teaching and preaching. Very often he proclaimed the Good News through social service such as healing, counselling and reconciliation.⁷³

Laurenti Magesa, in his view about Jesus' social service, explains why we Christians speak of Jesus Christ as our Liberator:

When we speak of Jesus as liberator, then we refer to his assurance of solidarity with us, particularly but not exclusively as Church, in the struggle - His struggle - to diminish poverty among the masses of the people. It is a struggle to prevent the untimely death of millions of children due to malnutrition, poor hygiene and lack of medical care. We refer to Jesus' life example in cultivating a better person and a better world. We refer to His commitment to forming the rule of God by refusing to accept as right sinful structure of religious or civil domination, corruption and tribalism. Christ is Liberator because He is at once the foundation, the inspiration, the basic reason and guarantor of the ultimate success of the struggle for the liberation of the human person, for development and healing - idealistically, through the Church.⁷⁴

Laurenti Magesa goes on to present as instance the situation of the African Continent as a concrete case which needs Christ as a Liberator.

Africa provides a concrete case where there is need for the liberating grace of Christ in this area - that is, the power required to extricate ourselves from the intentional or unintentional falsification of the demands of the Gospel - couldn't be more apparent. That is why the African situation presents a challenge to Christian life and, of course, to theological reflection. The task at hand for African Christianity is to rise up to the challenge of death and resurrection involved in this situation. In the Fall, humanity was provided with the means of Grace, that is, the efficacious medium of salvation through Christ, who is called (the second Adam) in the Scriptures. (cf. Romans 5:12-19; Cor.15:22) African theology must also trust that in such failure of comprehension and commitment lies the seeds of Christian growth. Faith sees in them a positive face. Defects in Christian understanding and commitment are at the same time a call to the followers of Christ not to be complacent. There is work to do.⁷⁵

Christian life is an active life because it is a life of doing. Worship is thanksgiving to God for what we receive daily from Him and a way of glorifying Him. Prayer provides us with energy and power to replace what we are consuming in our deeds. That is why Jesus Christ used to pray mainly when he felt weak, to ask God to supply him with more power so that he could continue to do God's work. Faith helps us to maintain our hope for what Christ promised us to be fulfilled in the time to come. Therefore, although worship, prayer and faith are necessary and indeed very important in the Christian life, it could not be considered as a way of buying our well being in heaven as other Christians think.

What concerns the distressed is not their future or what lies beyond their present life. It is their present and future life here and now. Their questions are: what shall we eat today?

what will they eat tomorrow? As their slum is demolished, where will they live? how will they educate their children? and what kind of future will their children have?

The majority of the people who came to Jesus for instance, their interest was not to learn how to worship or how to pray or even how to be faithful, as the majority of them were not Gentiles or pagans but believers. They came to present many and different social problems which were facing their daily lives in this world. (cf. Mark 1:40:2:3-4;5:6-7,22-24,25-29; Mat.8:5-7; 9:27-29;15:22;17:14-16); and Jesus always helped them and sent them home without telling them to pray or even demanding them to thank him for what he was doing for their benefit. As Bishop Tutu observes:

When Jesus came he found people who were sick or hungry or naked - He did not send them away with a pious (We will pray about). No, He fed the hungry, He healed the sick, He cleansed the lepers, He drove out demons. And in doing all of those things, He was demonstrating the presence of His Father's Kingdom (Luke 11:14-20). When the imprisoned John the Baptist asked whether Jesus was indeed the Messiah, Jesus pointed to the things that He was doing, including physical, material things, here and now, as signs of the Kingdom (Luke 7:18-23). All of these things were thoroughly religious and spiritual but many of them were so physical, so material, so secular, so profane. Jesus applied to Himself words out of the book of the Prophet Isaiah in His first recorded sermon, as words that aptly summed up His mission. (Luke 4).⁷⁶

The doctrine of justification by faith alone emphasizes faith as the only way that can save people and rejects good deeds. Such a doctrine, like that of the Jewish leaders in Jesus' time, contradicts the teaching of Jesus Christ and his demand to his

disciples to act against evil (Mat. 10:1), so that the whole person and the whole world can be saved. Remember that the Jewish leaders were not against Jesus' preaching about the coming divine Kingdom as they were already awaiting it, but they were against Jesus' practical work of world and physical salvation. It was because of his concept of the world and man's total salvation that he was accused of receiving his power not from God but from Beelzebub.

Today Christ is being accused also by some Christians of receiving his power to save the whole world not from God but from Marx. Those remnants of the Pharisees do not understand and even seek to understand from the Scriptures that Marx was the one who received his teaching from the teaching of Jesus Christ and used it as his gun to fight against oppression, exploitation and social injustice. On the other hand, the African Christians do not understand that the Western Christians are using the ideas of one of the Pharisees who; before being converted to Christianity to Christianity was a great persecuter of the Christian faith and teaching; to deceive the Africans so that their countries can exploit freely the African people and their Natural resources for the development of their countries, while Africa continues in misery.

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CHAPTER FOUR

MATTHEW 25:31-46 AS AN INSTRUMENT IN THE LIBERATION OF THE LIBERATION

4.1 THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST

Who are the followers of Jesus Christ? In order to have a good answer to this question, it is important to, first of all, find out the meaning of the word "Follower". The Longman Dictionary of the Contemporary English defines a follower as an admirer or supporter of some person, belief, or cause. This definition takes us to the conclusion that when a person decides to be the follower of another person he is, at the same time, deciding to support his ideas and his work by words and actions. In this perspective therefore, a follower differs from a camp follower, as the latter's aim is not to support the ideas and work of the person who he or she follows, but to obtain a benefit from him for personal gain.

When we turn from the above definition to our issue, we find that when Jesus Christ began his ministry, he called Simon Peter and his brother Andrew; James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John, who were engaged in their own fishing business. According to Scriptures, Jesus Christ did not call them to give up their work of fishing but instead to continue working as fishermen, not for their personal gain, but to work as fishers of men who were drowning in the sea of unjust society (cf. Mat.4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20 Luke 5:1-11).

From that day, they became followers of Jesus Christ

because they accepted his idea and work of saving men. They were no longer hearers of Jesus' words and work, nor were they following him in order to gain something from him or even to catch him as others were (cf. John 6:23-24; Mark 12:13), but as hearers of Jesus' words and doers of his work of saving men's lives (cf. James 1:22-25).

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus Christ refused to be followed by those who wanted to follow him for their personal benefit only and told them that they would gain nothing from him as he, like a soldier, had even no home. Moreover, at the same time, he called those who were ready to leave their personal business for the sake of the Kingdom of God, whose aim is to liberate the world for the benefit of all men and women .(cf. Luke 9:57-62)

Then the followers of Jesus Christ are those who have decided to give up selfishness or self-love and indifference to the problems of the world, and taken the cross together with Jesus to liberate the world and to build the Kingdom of God, for the benefit of all mankind here and now. Therefore, to be a follower of Jesus Christ is to engage in the salvation or a liberation of others. It is to accept the call and to be sent to rescue others. As we learn from Luke that:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, (The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into harvest) (9:1-2)

The Church is a movement - a pilgrim people moving across time and space in participation in the mission of Jesus Christ. It is an event because this participation has to happen, and that happening is not something that is guaranteed in the institutional heritage.⁷

In this perspective, the Church, instead of being introspective is outwardlooking in order to live and to face the forces of the evil in the world. It became a powerful hand of God in His struggle for the redemption of the world and the salvation of mankind. Williams Colin goes on observing that:

The Church is, the event theology suggests, where the people of God are taking servant shape around the needs and hopes of the world - as servants of Christ and therefore as servants of men. Behind this suggestion can be seen the major assumption: that the Church is called to move into the world as Christ still moves in the world. Christ did not come as one dispensing pre-established answers, it is the bringer of a changeless eternal order into our changing temporal order. Jesus came as a full participant in history. He came as a silent child; he grew up at the bosom of the world. He came as the one whose freedom was his complete freedom for the needs of the world, moving out behind the barricades of assumed safety and order to reach the excluded with the community-creating power of servant love. The foolishness of that risk servant love he revealed as the secret clue that opened the way to the true future - a future in which all mankind would finally share in the new creation of the one family of God's love. Beyond its apparent defeat, he revealed the power of this love to create in his disciples the faith and courage to become participants in the servant way. And that participation is the Church - the followers of the way.⁸

Jesus Christ does not call the Church to stay with him. He calls the Church to work with him and, in his absence, to continue

The Christian community or the Church that withdraw itself from the world is already being judged by the world which was expected to be redeemed by the Church as a living Body of Christ - the Saviour of the world. The last judgement will only be her separation from God and her condemnation, because she failed to incarnate God in the world and in the life of mankind, and to maintain the presence of the Redeemer of the world and the Saviour of human beings, Jesus Christ.

Sin before God is not based on being a pagan or non-Christian but on our attitude before the world and before other human beings. Hence, our individualism, selfishness and indifference constitute a big sin before God. So faith in Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, cannot be separated from the world where the believers live as members of the world's societies.

Jurgen Moltmann puts the dilemma of the Church as follows:

In the community of the incarnate God and the exalted man Jesus Christ there can be no division here. The Church will always have to present itself both in the forum of God and in the forum of the world. For it stands for God to the world, and it stands for world before God. It confronts the world in critical liberty and is bound to give it the authentic revelation of the new life. At the same time it stands before God in fellowship and solidarity with all men and is bound to send up to him out of the depths the common cry for life and liberty. The Church is on the move in free solidarity and critical fellowship, together with the world, people and peoples, nations and societies. It is called the wayfaring people of God. Because of that it will present itself and its relationship to the people and the peoples, to Israel and to the nations, in the forum of the future of God and the world. It will comprehend the meaning of its commission in the light of its hope and it will interpret the suffering of the time in the light of the coming Kingdom. It will comprehend the meaning of its divine commission in world history and at the same time will understand the world in the context of God's history.¹⁸

A Church which withdraw itself from the world and from society and refuses to identify itself with the Redeemer and Saviour of mankind cannot be considered as a new creation, a community of the justified, a way of salvation, a Temple of the Holy Spirit and as an example to what is coming with the fulfillment of the promised Kingdom in future.

Lucien Daiss writes:

Mission is God's work, not simply in the sense that he who works at it does so for the sake of God, but in the sense that first and foremost that God himself is the one who is at work carrying out his plan of universal salvation by means of his Church.¹⁹

The mission of the Christian Church is to present God who is at work towards the fulfillment of His promise and to present Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit who also are at work of redeeming the world and liberating mankind from all kinds of slavery, through her involvement in all activities aimed at liberating and saving man in his totality, soul and body. In this way, the Churches' movement have an important role to play in identifying themselves with the suffering victims of the unjust societies of the world.

4.2.3 THE SHORTCOMING OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD TODAY

The membership of the Christian Church today is decreasing. In Europe, some Churches are becoming bars or restaurants because their members are abandoning the Christian Church. In Africa, after independence, in African States, many denominations lost their members who saw the revolutionary movements as the real saviours of human beings. Today, many members of denominations are leaving their Churches to join with the new sects of Islam.

Those who remain are not active. Some of them attend only Church service when there is wedding or a funeral. Why then is this happening in the Christian Church today? The answer is that, they are disappointed with the Christian Church. So they went there to ask but, to their surprise, the Church gave nothing to them; they knocked the door but the Church did not open for them; they went there to seek but found nothing. In short, the exit is due to the Church failing to represent Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the living men and women, who promised that everyone who asks will receive; he who seeks will find; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (cf. Mat.7:8; Luke 11:10) and to present a God who is at work to transform the world.

When we look at the people who are giving up their Christian faith today, we see that the majority of them are hungry, the naked, the sick, the exploited and the oppressed. As a result, the Christian Church today became the Church of the rich and the oppressors. The poor are going to the new sects and to Islam because these are more concerned with the present life of the living men and women.

The shortcoming of the Church today in the world is due to her misunderstanding that her duty is to present a God who is at work in history to renew His world, and to continue with the work of saving mankind, left to her by Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. Instead, the Church presents a sinful world abandoned by its creator, a failure and a run away God who now is only in heaven awaiting for the souls of the dead men and women in the

hand of the evil rule on earth. Furthermore, the Church failed to understand her responsibility and her obligation of being an example in order to attract those who are outside her, and to live as salt and light in the tasteless and dark world. So as Lucien Deiss views:

The Church's most pressing missionary obligation today is to make herself more beautiful, more radiant, more attractive, so that those outside may see her and come asking: (We want to go with you because we have come to realize that God is with you!) When that happens, they will also have recognized Jesus present in the Church. For he is Emmanuel, that is, God-with-us.²⁰

How can a Church without God in her midst, without the Son of God the Saviour - and without the Holy Spirit at work in the world be beautiful, radiant, and attractive to those outside and maintain those who come to her? How can a Church without the message of hope, the message of salvation, and without the message of new life here and now be accepted by the hungry, naked, sick, thirsty, strangers, imprisoned, exploited, and oppressed people who are waiting for the message which brings the Good News of the end of hunger, nakedness, sickness, thirsty, imprisonment, exploitation, oppression, and the beginning of a new era with a new life? The lack of this kind of message and the lack of practical work makes the Church irrelevant and judged today by the world; and will be condemned in the last day for her own dead faith.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

Should the last judgement, referred to in Matthew 25:31-46, be for the pagans or non-Christians only? Should the Christians be justified by faith only in Jesus Christ? Should the sheep refer to the Christians and the goats to the non-Christians? Should the expected God's promise largely come to pass upon this earth in a fundamental continuity with life as we now experience it, or should the deliverance from the present situation be fulfilled only in heaven? Should the particular view speak of hope for the Church alone or for the human race in general? Should the Eschatological teaching speak about our future in heaven or our future in history?

These are the questions which guided this study. The study sought to understand the meaning of the teaching of Jesus Christ in Matthew 25:31-46. It led to the conclusion that the Biblical truth has been ignored, not only by non-Christians, but also by Christians.

The Scriptures put the issue clearly that the last judgement will be for everyone from all nations. That means that the whole world will face the last judgement as it was in the time of Noah. Furthermore, the judgement will not be done in accordance with the evidence that can be provided on the basis of which a decision may be made, but in accordance with whether what each person has done is, or not, considered as an offence to God. Hence, none will be a favourite before the last judgement simply because he or she has faith in Jesus Christ, since believers as well as unbelievers are doing the same things considered as offence to God. (cf. Romans 2:1-3)

Thus, those who sin under the Christian faith will be judged by the Christian faith, on the other hand, those who sin outside the Christian faith will be judged apart from the Christian faith.

The goats are not only those who are not Christians, but all those who accept to be used by Satan to do His work and refuse to obey God's command. And the sheep are also not only those who are Christians, but all those who accept to be used by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to present a God who is at work in history to save His world through their words and deeds. Hence, the goats as well as the sheep are among the peoples of all nations, including Israel, and they will be gathered on the day of judgement and be judged, condemned or rewarded respectively in accordance with their good or bad deeds. (cf. Mat. 11:22-24)

The least brethren of Jesus Christ referred to in Matthew 25 are not the Christians or the converted Jewish remnants, but all those who are victims of the unjust world, crucified on the cross of injustice today. That is, the hungry, the naked, the thirsty, the prisoners, the strangers (the refugees and the orphans), the exploited and the oppressed people. According to Matthew 25, they constitute a big challenge to the followers of Jesus Christ and the Church as the living Body of Christ, the Redeemer of the world and Saviour of all mankind.

Hunger, sickness, nakedness, thirst, homelessness, exploitation of man by man, imprisonment without trial, and oppression are manifestations of the presence of injustice which, in Biblical language, is called and seen as sin before God of the justice.

It is therefore incompatible with the eschatological Kingdom of God, proclaimed by His Son Jesus Christ.

Traditionally, in Israel, the law functioned verbally, practically and institutionally. This threefold function of the law fortified God's covenant with Abraham and directed his descendants to hold to God's way and to live justly and righteously. (cf. Genesis 18:19) Thus, revelation was seen as the peoples guide following the way of God, their Creator. That is to say, to live justly and righteously with God, with the world, and with other human beings here and now.

God's promise about what is to come will not benefit the Church alone, but all human beings in general. This is because the plan of God is to save mankind and to liberate the world from being ruled by the will of the evil one. So, the Church was not called as the chosen one among others, but as an instrument for the liberation of the world and God's creation. Therefore the Church will benefit together with others, if it obeys God's command and does her duty of saving the world and liberating mankind.

The message of the eschatological event proclaimed first, by the Prophets and second, by Jesus Christ does not lie in the end of history. Rather, it lies within the framework that the fulfillment of the coming eschatological event will open the way for the Kingdom of God to become a reality in the history of mankind.

It is from Christ's teaching and deeds, his unlimited love for the world his message of total salvation of men and women, his

defeat of death and the guarantee of life through his resurrection from the dead, that the meaning of the eschatological Kingdom can be understood. It is only from the whole message of Jesus Christ about God and the interpretation of the meaning of his personal work of saving men and women in history, that the meaning of his eschatological message can be fully understood.

The Biblical God reveals Himself through His acts of justice where He liberates the exploited and the oppressed. Therefore, He rejects empty profession of faith and cults, and demands the sacrifice of justice and true love among His people.

In the Biblical concept, in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament, salvation is intimately linked with historical liberation from all that hinders the realization of justice, as a necessary condition for the development of the new man in the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom is characterized originally by the spirit of salvation directed to the rejected, the exploited and the oppressed, and without any tolerance to the social order which establishes the distinction between the rich and the poor.

As Jesus Christ was concluding his earthly ministry, he wanted to show us the fundamental basis of Christians, to announce a total salvation of men and women in their history, which embraces the redemption of the whole world where those men and women live; to bring a Gospel of hope to those who lost their hope and to proclaim the end of the evil Kingdom on earth and the beginning of a new era with God Himself as King in history. This was to be done by words and deeds.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

On the African continent, in order to be relevant and appealing to people, the Christian Church must give up the western and the colonial way of preaching, teaching and the evangelizing which is aimed only at saving the souls and enslaving the bodies. The Church in Africa need to take changes in cultural and social life of the people into account in her language, her services, her activities and her organization.

The Christian Church in Africa must obey only Jesus' command, the teaching of the Scriptures and the rule of the Holy Spirit as the only guide for her life and work. This is necessary in order for her to understand the meaning of Jesus' preaching, teaching, and his social work. Only then can the Church know and live the truth and function as a liberating power for the salvation of the African continent. In this way, the Christian faith and its message will be relevant and appealing to those who are longing for the voice and sign of God in their situations.

Faith and salvation must not continue to be based on a colonial metaphysical God who is far from His world and human beings, but on a God who is at work in a continual creation, transformation, liberation, salvation and renewal of His world. Faith should be based on a God who is very near to His people, existing in the world and who is active in the history of mankind.

The eschatological Kingdom of God must not be conceived as an event which will be fulfilled in heaven, but as a final

achievement of human history, a fullness intermarriage between love and justice, a fullness of the Kingdom of God in the history of men and women, and a fullness of perfection of God's creation. In this way, they have not yet achieved eschatological Kingdom of God must be understood as an event which is in its process towards its fulfillment in the time to come in history. A process which demands the participation of men and women in cleaning the way for its quick fulfillment.

It is true that some Christian movements have been trying to help the needy or the suffering people, but this work is not being taken seriously. Nor is it regarded as important work in saving men and women from all kinds of oppression, as the work of saving the souls is regarded. Up to now, the Christian movements have given more attention and effort on the command in Matthew 28:18-19 than in the teaching of Matthew 25:31-46. An overwhelming number of sermons by Christian preachers and plans of evangelization are based on the command of Matthew 28:18-19 and not on the teaching of Matthew 25:31-46. This hinders Christian believers who could learn from the preachers the teaching of Jesus Christ in Matthew 25 from benefitting from this teaching. Therefore, a re-interpretation of Matthew of Matthew 25:31-46 could have an impact on the Christian involvement in the struggle of the people for a meaningful life on earth. Matthew 25:31-46 must be used in preaching, teaching and conventions so that the believers can be influenced by this important teaching. Believers should be encouraged to put this teaching into practice. The one who

said to and make disciples is also the same one who recommended that disciples be taught to obey everything he had commanded.

(cf. Matthew 28:20)

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