

# **Jesus and human development: An interrogation of the gospel tradition**

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## **Abstract**

The paper is an analysis of Jesus and human development in the gospel tradition. It argues that while human development is a modern term, Jesus' life and work, death and resurrection represented an embodiment of the term in all its totality. Through conscientisation Jesus was able to both make the poor conscious of the human propensity to do wrong and influence masses and individuals to adopt new ways of looking at themselves and others. This transformed the circumstances of both the poor and the rich. Through this analysis the paper contributes to the body of knowledge on the relevance of Jesus' message to human development.

**Key words:** gospel tradition, Jesus, human development, conscientisation

## **Introduction**

One of the recurrent motifs in the gospel tradition is Jesus' preoccupation with the *oi ochloi*, the crowds. These crowds were largely comprised of the *ptochos*, the poor of the land. This therefore suggests that the poor not only constituted Jesus' critical audience, but were also the primary recipients of his *euangelion*, the good news (Mk 3: 7-19; Lk 4: 18; Mt 10: 35-37; 11: 4-6; Jn 7: 12). The above understanding raises three important questions for a critical understanding of Jesus' commitment to human development. These questions are: a) What was the meaning of the word "*euangelion*" to Jesus' audience? b) What implications did the meaning of "*euangelion*" have on the audience's understanding of reality? c) How is the meaning of "*euangelion*" related to the modern notion of human development? Admittedly, the use of the whole gospel tradition to answer these three questions is not without its difficulties. This is because, as Thomas Soding (2013: 139) observes, while

the gospels are the only closest resources for the reconstruction of the life of Jesus, a comparison of the gospels' individual portrayal of Jesus presents difficulties in constructing a unified picture of this historic personage. This observation is supported by Howard Kee and Franklin Young (1973) who point out that the action oriented Jesus of the synoptic gospels presents a striking contrast to the meditative and solemn picture of Jesus in the fourth gospel. However, in spite of these observations, it can also be demonstrated that at the bottom of these diverse pictures of Jesus are recurrent motifs that determine the basic commonalities among the gospels. These common motifs help to reveal that the differences among the gospels are largely due to contextual factors in the faith communities that gave rise to them. It is therefore on the basis of these common motifs that the possibility of constructing a unified picture of Jesus' life from the gospel tradition becomes possible.

This paper argues that Jesus' life and work represented an embodiment of human development through conscientisation. This commitment is evident in the way Jesus not only helped to alleviate human misery, but also made the poor masses realise the root of human suffering. Such a conscientisation agenda went beyond mere social gospel or political theology as it represented a grassroot humanization project which had both spiritual and social consequences. Through this analysis, the paper provides a holistic theological basis for a Judeo-Christian theory of human development through conscientisation. Methodologically, the paper takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the gospels. It analyses the gospel tradition through both an historical and textual approach understood within the context of Jesus' commitment to human development.

The paper has four sections. The first section discusses the meaning of "*euangelion*", good news, and the poor in Greco-Roman and Jewish context. The second section discusses the relationship between human development and conscientisation and its convergence with Jesus' work among the poor. The third section discusses Jesus and human development in the gospel tradition. The fourth part presents implications and concluding thoughts.

### **The *euangelion* and the poor in Jewish context**

In an attempt to establish Jesus' commitment to human development it is imperative to clarify the critical content of Jesus' message and the audience to which it was directed. This would help in understanding Jesus' attitude to human development and the way(s) in which he made this apparent in his life and work. Historically, the nature and content of Jesus' message has been a subject of debate. Divergent views have ranged from eschatology to the kingdom of God (Kummel, 1957: 19) or the good news to the poor, as the central content of Jesus' message. However, statistically, the phrase *euangelion*, good news, appears 75 times in the New Testament (Marshall, Millard, Packer and Wiseman, 1996: 426). This demonstrates the centrality of the phrase and its overarching significance in the mission of Jesus and that of the early church. However, while forming the core content of Jesus' message, this good news was understood within the larger framework of both eschatology (the end times) and the kingdom of God (Van Wyk, 2001: 191). In relation to the gospel's immediate audience, all the four gospels concur that the "*ptochos*," the *poor* who largely constituted the "*oi ochloi*," crowds (Mk 3: 7-19; Lk 4.18; Mat 10: 35-37; 11: 4-6; Jn 7: 12), were the primary recipients of Jesus' *euangelion*. The reason for the primacy of the poor as recipients of the *euangelion* will become apparent as we discuss the nature of poverty and its meaning in both the Greco-Roman world and in the Jewish setting.

An understanding of the meaning of "*euangelion*" in its Greco-Roman and Jewish setting helps in deciphering the meaning of the term to Jesus' audience and its impact on their self-understanding. In Hellenistic literature, the Greek noun *euangelion* (neuter-singular), referred to either a reward for a message of victory (Marshall et al., 1996:426) or messenger's reward (Burrows, 1925:1). The Jewish equivalent of the word "*euangelion*" was "*basar*" which had the double sense of flesh, as in meat, and good news (Brueggemann, 1988: 31). Therefore, *euangelion* became the Greek rendering of the word *basar* in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament) in which it denoted various meanings, from news of victory to the glad tidings of Messianic restoration and glory (Burrows, 1925: 1). However, Andrew Kirk (1999: 63) argues that in a typical Jewish setting, the rendering of the word "*basar*" as "*euangelion*" was mostly associated with the announcement of "*shalom*", peace, "which itself had a number of variations in meaning." He goes on to say that the root meaning of *shalom* denoted completeness in the sense of

possessing a fullness of welfare, health, security and prosperity for the whole community. While concurring with Kirk, David Deywood (2014) also adds that at another level, *shalom* was also associated with the word “*yasha*”, to deliver or save, whose root meaning underlined release from cramping confinement into a more spacious environment or creating a spaciousness or room to live. Finally, Donald Gowan (2002) adds that, equivalent to “*shalom*” and appearing 90 times in the Greek New Testament is the word “*eirene*”, peace, which, apart from being used as a form of greeting whose basis was the heart to bless, “*eirene*” was also used to denote good news of victory over enemies.

From the above discussion, it is evident that the various renderings of the word “*euangelion*”, namely “*basar*”, “*yasha*”, “*shalom*” and “*eirene*” have varying but closely related meanings. Undergirding all the renderings is the idea of freedom from supposedly appalling situations. This suggests that to Jesus’ poor Jewish audience, the word “*euangelion*” must have provoked nostalgic memories of historic and salvific divine events like Exodus and Babylon where God rescued his people from constrained and unflourishing lives (Kirk, 1999: 63). In Jesus’ teachings, healings, exorcism and the food miracles, the people may have seen a vivid re-enactment of those old divine life-changing acts. The crowds are recorded to have been, “amazed” (Mt 7: 28; Mk 1: 22; Lk 4: 32, 36; Jn 7: 15) at Jesus’ teaching and deeds. Such amazements were possible connectors, in the people’s mind, between the *euangelion* and the presence of God experienced in Jesus’ teaching and work. Understood this way, the meaning of “*euangelion*”, in its Jewish context, represented some significant pointers to Jesus’ conscientisation projects in which God’s presence was made apparent among the people.

In addition, it can also be noted that the notion of need or lack is highly implied behind each of the different shades of meaning of the word “*euangelion*”. The association of *euangelion* with victory over difficult situations suggests that *shalom*/ gospel/ salvation of and from God was often decisively exercised in situations of adverse lack or misery associated with being poor. While the nature and meaning of the word poverty remains contested, a few notable scholars have provided helpful insights into the understanding of poverty. Gustavo Gutierrez (1974: 164) presents three levels in the meaning of poverty as understood within a Jewish context. He indicates

that first, the poor person was the *ebyon*, the one who desires, the beggar, the weak one and the frail one. Second, the poor person was the *ani*, the bent over, the one labouring under great weight, the one not in possession of his whole strength or vigour and or the humiliated one. Third, from a spiritual perspective, the poor person was the *anaw*, the humble before God. For Gutierrez, the last meaning of poverty can be traced through the Old Testament in which through repeated infidelity to the covenant by people of Israel, the prophets were led to elaborate the theme of the remnant made up of those who remained faithful to Yahweh. He argues that by the time of Zephaniah those who wanted the liberating power of the Messiah were the *anaw*, the spiritually poor. However, Verlyn Verbragge (2000: 1116), while agreeing with Gutierrez's analysis, explains the development of the idea of the *anaw* from the change in the Israeli economy with the emergence and development of the monarchy in Israel. He argues that during this time when business men controlled the economy, the poor came to mean those who suffered injustice and therefore turned helpless and humble to God in prayer, aware that ultimately it is a question of God's glory. Evident in the above analysis of poverty is a development in both the expression and meaning of poverty from its more tangible forms to a more subtle appearance beyond the material. In the New Testament the rendering of the word "*ptochos*" literally translates into the poor. However, even in the New Testament, this fluid understanding of the meaning of poverty is also evident in Matthew's and Luke's (Lk 6: 20; Mt 5: 3) apparent variations of "*makarioi oi ptchoi*" "blessed are the poor" – with Luke's addition of "*to pneumato*," in the spirit. Interestingly, it is also this group of the poor that made up the crowds that formed Jesus' audience (Mt 10: 35-38). Therefore to the multitudes of Jesus' followers, who were largely poor, Jesus' announcement of the *euangelion* in both word and deed, affirmed his commitment to their spiritual and social development, representative of old divine-salvific acts. To them Jesus' declarations of *euangelion*, represented a *kairos*, a decisive moment in history when God intervenes and radically alters the status quo in favour of the poor. Such realization was critical to the people's perception of reality. It created the awareness of the possibility of positive change in their situation and the possibility of a more fruitful life that this might create for them.

## **Human Development as Conscientisation**

To relate Jesus to human development assumes some convergence between his work and the term human development. But, what is human development, and how is it related to both conscientisation and Jesus' work? To begin with, the term human development is a complex term. However, as Akbar Khodabakhshi (2011: 2) points out, at its simplest level human development is the enlargement of people's freedoms and opportunities and the improvement of their well-being. According to him, there are different ways through which human freedoms, opportunities and well-being are concretely measured. The most basic measure is the criteria of long and healthy life, access to knowledge and wisdom and good living. This is best summarized as per capita income, education and health (Bhalla, Chipeta, Taye and Mkandawire, 2000: 15). These three aspects of human development are intricately related. Basic literacy is foundational to individual and societal development and plays an important role in poverty reduction (Japan Official Development Assistance, 2005). In addition, literacy provides an individual with a nuanced perspective on their life situation which includes, among other things, a person's ability to live a healthy life and, therefore, meaningfully contribute to the social and economic development of his/her community.

It is common knowledge that individual access to a good economic life, education and health is a product of complex factors in which good governance plays a critical role. As Thomas Bernauer and Vally Koubi (2013: 162) indicate, governments have traditionally held the absolute responsibility of ensuring that their citizenry have access to these basic goods. At the same time, according to Edward Janak (2006: 66), citizens have the right to demand these basic rights from their governments within the context of their responsibilities. Janak further argues that awareness of their right to these basic necessities and the ability to demand them has historically remained a significant challenge to a number of citizens. Janak's observation is largely true for the poor masses. This lack of awareness to their basic rights is always largely due to the fact that political systems often take advantage of mass ignorance and thereby abuse public right to social goods. All this suggests that critical to the governed-governing relationship is the citizenry's awareness of their rights and the ability to demand the same. For Abul Barkat et al (2007), the only remedy to address this scenario is by empowering the poor, distressed, deprived, destitute and marginalized people in all fronts. Barkat's

suggestion implies that through empowerment individuals are helped to take charge of their own situation. The importance of empowerment is that it not only localizes and contextualizes change, but also that the resulting change becomes both enduring and sustainable.

One method of empowering the poor and improving their self-awareness is conscientisation. Mejai Avoseh (2013: 3) defines conscientisation as a process of growing and developing people's awareness so that they can undertake a rational and rigorous critique of their social, political and economic situation. He further argues that conscientisation helps individuals and communities to know and transform their reality and begin to take steps towards transforming the hideous elements of their existential situation. This, according to him is done in two steps. First, it empowers the poor to understand their world and their present position. Second, it makes them to undertake efforts to change their adverse social, economic and political situation. Similarly, Paul Freire (2000: 65) argues that the basic assumption of conscientisation is that to have faith in men means not just being content that they are human persons while doing nothing concrete so that they may exist as such. Freire's assessment of the basic criteria for commitment to human development through conscientisation provides a framework for understanding Jesus' commitment to human development. As already noted previously, Jesus' teaching and healing constantly elicited amazement among the crowds (Mt 7: 29; Mk 1: 22; Lk 5: 15). Such amazement was a result of the people's ability to perceive Jesus as different from their "teachers of the law" (Mt 7: 29; Mk 1: 22). The people's ability to perceive Jesus as a sharp contrast of his contemporary Rabbis points to the new possibilities that Jesus' ministry allowed the masses to see not just themselves differently, but to also see differently those around them, including the whole reality of their life. Jose Pagola (2011: 243) argues that this conscientising approach to reaching the masses represented a subversive edge that challenged conventional religion. In keeping with Pagola's assertion, the approach not only challenged conventional religion but also set Jesus on a collision course with the established religious and political structures. It is this battle for the mind of the masses that formed the basis of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion as the succeeding sections will show.

## Jesus and the Human Development Project

The framework for understanding Jesus' commitment to human development is his recognition that human suffering is largely rooted in the inherent human failure to do what is right (Bowen, 1913: 27), which is technically referred to as sin. Bruce Milne (1982: 136) argues that for Jesus, this human failure is both individual and collective, and manifests itself either as narcissistic self-idealisation or neurotic self-denigration. From Milne's observation it is evident that human failure to do right is the reason individuals and peoples undermine the authentic existence of others, keep others ignorant or are themselves kept ignorant of the need to extricate themselves from obstructive and oppressive lifestyles which inflict pain, either on they themselves or others. However, Joachim Jeremias (1971: 113) has shown that in a Jewish context the term "sinner" generally referred both to those who notoriously failed to observe the commandments of God and at whom all fingers pointed, and those who engaged in despicable trades such as gamblers with dice, usurers, tax collectors, publicans, money changers and herdsmen. According to him, the first group represented the general populace who because of their basic life style could not maintain expected Jewish ritual purity. From the above classification of sinners, it becomes evident that, apart from the "self-proclaimed holiness of the religious authorities", there were very few sinless people in the land. However, for Jesus, given the individual and collective nature of sin, whose effect was also glaringly evident in the social and political condition of the land, everyone, including the religious leaders was a sinner.

As Christ Bowen (1913: 27) indicates, in order to deal with the problem of human suffering Jesus invited the individual to a personal social righteousness, a righteousness premised on the assumption that when all individuals live and do right, a better world would be created. This suggests that authentic human existence can be achieved only if the individual committed themselves to doing things differently. However, for Jesus, personal righteousness was not attained through ritual purity as demanded by official Judaism, nor by mere abandonment of despicable trades, but through repentance (Mk 1: 15; Mt 3: 2; Mt 4: 17) whose Greek rendering, *metanoēō* denoted "a change of one's mind." Therefore, for Jesus, reconfiguration of mindset was a prelude to the development of a new spiritual and social perspective. However, the uniqueness of Jesus vision of a new world is that

the possibility for repentance is made freely available even to the masses deemed unfit to keep the religious statutes and, therefore, far from the pale of divine favour (Mt 11: 28). Such inclusive understanding of repentance and forgiveness demonstrated Jesus' supposed indictment of the religious status quo and the announcement of *shalom* to the masses condemned to be perpetually at the bottom of the spiritual and social pyramid.

There are three ways in which Jesus' inclusion and acceptance of the poor demonstrated his commitment to human development. These were table-fellowship with the poor (Jeremias, 1971: 110), life-changing encounters with individuals, and finally his death and resurrection. These represented the outworking of his commitment to human development through conscientisation. First of all, Jesus' table-fellowship with those whom the religious establishment would not be associated with (Mt 9: 10-17; Mk 2: 15-22 Lk 15: 1-2; Jn 2: 1-11), not only separated him from his contemporary teachers, but also set the masses on a new trajectory of self-understanding. The gospel tradition confirms that not only did Jesus visit and dine with individual sinners in their houses (Lk 5: 27-32; 15: 2; Mt 9: 11) but went further and "threw parties" both with and for poor masses in the open grounds (Mt 14: 13-21; Mk 6: 30; Jn 6: 1-14). Given the situation of the peasantry in the Greco-Roman world, which was as deplorable as that of today's poor, such banquets had significant implications on the people's understanding of a new religious and social reality Jesus represented. Jose Pagola (2011: 61) has shown that in Jesus' time the peasant had two main concerns: survival and honour. The first meant subsisting after paying all taxes and fees, without falling into a spiral of debts and blackmail. The second one involved being able to feed the family and to keep the seed back for the next season. This therefore meant, as Joachim Jeremias (1971: 115) indicates, that to invite an individual to a meal was an honour and an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood and forgiveness, and a sharing of life. In view of the situation of the masses, Chris Sudgen's (1999: 240) claim that Jesus' table fellowships represented his ingenious overturning of designation stigma associated with being poor making significant sense. Sudgen further argues that through the table-fellowships, Jesus underscored the fact that the poor are no longer sinners to be hated and driven away but are lost people who need to be found and rejoiced over. In all this, according to Judith Simmer-Brown (1996: 105),

Jesus was, by implication, righting wrongs, correcting inequalities and thereby changing the social order.

In view of the above observations, it is true that this attitude to the poor masses had the potential to increase their self-respect and the discovery of their identity as humans. The realisation of one's identity and worth is a critical component of conscientisation and such realisation is integral to human development. What Jesus was doing to the poor in the table-fellowships could in modern terms be described as *humanization* through conscientisation (Sudgen, 1999: 242). According to Sudgen, the aim of humanization is to restore freedom and dignity to multitudes that have lost their right to dignity through social stratification which found them at the bottom of the social-economic heap. He further argues that in the table fellowships, Jesus symbolically called into question status differentials and gave the poor masses a new identity as children of God in his new people of God, starting with those judged to be of least worth according to the values of the day. It can be further shown that the socio-political effect of the conscientisation endeavour was evident in the people's decision to make Jesus their king (Jn 6: 15). This was because his approach to the poor markedly differentiated him from the official Jewish religious leadership whose disdain of the poor and sinners smacked of a denial of their very humanity and dignity. Thomas Kelly (2013: 6) argues that while the Jewish religious leaders were mainly outsiders who brought in disconnected knowledge of the true God to the poor, through table fellowships, Jesus dialogued with the poor and tried to make connections between their tradition of faith and the reality within which they lived. According to Kirk (1999:69), this participation in the people's lives by implication represented Jesus' announcement of the kingdom of God in which new communities of deep sharing, trust and humility would be built out of the debris of human failures, flaws and frailties. The doctrine of human equality implied in the approach, and one which would be obvious to the masses, had the potential to cause a social upheaval capable of disturbing the religious and political status quo. This, as Samuel Wells (2007: 70) points out, made Jesus more dangerous to the religious and political status quo than the armed revolutionary Barabbas. He further adds that it therefore became axiomatic that when Pilate posed the question of who between Jesus and Barabbas was to be crucified (Mt 27: 21), the system ensured that Jesus was a preferred candidate for crucifixion. From Wells

analysis, Jesus' commitment to the transformation of the masses' perception of reality was too dangerous to the status quo, than Barabbas' armed zealotry which only involved armed attacks on a few Roman officials and their Jewish collaborators. Jesus' influence was too pervasive and was likely to have long term consequences on the social, political and religious superstructure.

The second way through which Jesus demonstrated his commitment to human development was through life-changing encounters in which he gave individuals an opportunity to make efforts to change their circumstances. It can be argued that throughout his itinerant ministry Jesus challenged and reshaped individual and group perceptions of themselves and others and the whole reality around them. He did this by stretching people's imaginations and making them see reality from new perspectives which could potentially open new possibilities for fruitful human relations. The story of the Samaritan woman (Jn 4: 1-54) and Zacchaeus (Lk 19: 1-10) present interesting dimensions of Jesus' commitment to the transformation of individual's perception of reality.

In the Samaritan incident (Jn 4: 1-54), it is evident that both the Samaritan woman and Jesus' disciples who were Jewish brought up to detest each other (v.9). The woman's refusal to give Jesus water and the disciples' surprise at seeing Jesus talk to a Samaritan woman represented entrenched ethnocentrism among Jews and Samaritans. However, the whole incident presents Jesus with an opportunity to challenge entrenched negative perception of human relations. First, Jesus challenged his disciples' imagination by passing through the Samaritan country, which was atypical of a Jew to do, and at mid-day asked them to go and find food in the Samaritan village (v.27). He also stretched the woman's perception of religious reality and its implications on human relations, from fixation with sectarianism, represented by Gerizim and Jerusalem, to true and spiritual worship (v.23) that has no consideration for ethnic background. Through this twist to ordinary Jewish-Samaritan social reality, Jesus moved religious affiliation beyond its divisive traits to a new and uniting function. This demonstrated Jesus' commitment to the demolition of psychological transnational or ethnic boundaries and the creation of global perspectives in human relations. This new perspective had the potential to liberate his disciples and the woman from a closed world of ethnic hatred to the understanding that God loves all humans. This echoes Jesus' revolutionary

command to move from traditional love of only friends to include enemies (Mt 5: 44).<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, the story of Zacchaeus (Lk 19: 1-10) presents another intriguing example of Jesus' commitment to human development through conscientisation. In a Jewish context, as a result of his profession as a tax-collector, Zacchaeus was a typical example of a sinner (v.7). However, when Jesus becomes a guest in his house, Zacchaeus makes two life-changing announcements. First, he announces that he intends to give half of his possession to the poor (v.8). Second, he decides to repay back to those he had defrauded four-fold. Zacchaeus' announcement highlights two important issues. At a general level, it confirms the extortionist and deceitful professional life of tax collectors in New Testament times which involved constant infliction of economic harm to multitudes. At a personal level, it was a statement of intent to renounce his trade as a tax-collector and thereby put a stop to his practice of extortion. However, Zacchaeus' idea of restitution for the damages he had inflicted on others signify a new perspective on his self-image and sense of reality. In Leviticus 6: 2-5, the basic restitution for stolen property that is restored was the stolen property plus 20% of its value. Zacchaeus' voluntary decisions to pay back 400% of the defrauded value goes beyond basic restitution and shows that he had turned from a selfish narcissist to a social transformer able to make a difference in the life of others. How did Jesus help him make far-reaching social-economic changes in his life? The probable answer lies in Jesus' presence which was an indication of acceptance and forgiveness. Jesus' presence, which in this context was the most unusual for a Jewish Rabbi to do, made him aware of the need for new beginnings, especially being a person otherwise closed from harmonious relationship with the rest of the society. And while he had formerly been preoccupied with self-enrichment at the expense of the poor, his encounter with Jesus turned him into a conduit of human development evident in his liberal philanthropy to the poor and those he defrauded.

It can be pointed out that from Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus two implications can be drawn. First, Zacchaeus' behaviour helps to demonstrate

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<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, Jesus also redefined neighbourliness as going across national or ethnic frontiers to include all those who are in need (Lk 10:25-37).

that the rich find their true worth as they contribute to human development. Second, by associating with the rich Zaccheaus, in addition to the average poor, Jesus underscored his endeavour to liberate all classes of people, both poor and rich, from their self-preoccupation and self-denigration, respectively. This makes Jesus way ahead of contemporary theories of development through conscientisation and makes him an archetype of Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed. However, the only major difference between Jesus' conscientisation programme with contemporary human development theories was the starting point of the conscientisation project. For Jesus, spiritual liberation arising out of divine forgiveness and the resulting friendship with him was integral to the realization of a new social perspective. This sets clear boundaries between salvation and human development. While human development is part of Jesus' goal, such a goal is only achieved through repentance and a new friendship with him. Such friendship with Jesus, understood from a purely spiritual dimension, culminates into both a liberating social outlook and its accompanying social ethic. This understanding of reality militates against any understanding of Jesus' message from a purely social perspective.

The third practical way through which Jesus demonstrated his commitment to human development was through his redemptive suffering, death and resurrection as the "suffering servant," who made himself an offering for sin so that those who have fallen into sin are healed and made whole (Isa 53: 5,10) (Simmer-Brown, 196: 107). This act of 'vicarious suffering' became the foundation of good news to the poor and widened Jesus' geographical audience from a mere Palestine to include the whole world. While Jesus' invitation to a social righteousness through repentance had been experienced locally through hearing him teach and perform social functions, after his death, it is now faith in him that becomes the foundation of his relationship with all those who want a new beginning in life, wherever they may be on the globe. The Holy Spirit whom Jesus sends becomes the medium through whom Jesus continues to reach his earth-bound members (Jn 16:13). The blessedness of those who did not see Jesus but still believe in him implies this expanded geographical field of salvation (Jn 20: 29), now mediated by the Holy Spirit.

However, the conscientising effect of a relationship with Jesus would continue to have far flung consequences for the individual who accepts him even in this

new phase of his work. Among such influences is the Holy Spirit's bestowal upon those who believe, of a new anthropology which, according to Milne (1982: 151), involves the acquisition of a new humanity of fellowship which increasingly reaches out to others expressed in humble service to neighbour. This attitude of service would directly emanate from the realization of the inherent value of sacrifice exemplified by Jesus' death (Jn 15: 13). It is instructive, as Wells (2007: 70) puts it, to know that unlike Barabbas, his co-accused, Jesus did not assume that others must die so that many can be free. Jesus recognized that he must die so that others may be free. According to Wells, Jesus' spirit of sacrifice helps to underscore the fact that the world will never be the same if individuals are willing to surrender individual rights for the common good. While the struggle of civilizations lies in the struggle to determine who shall control the surplus of the economic progress, as Shailer Matthews (1913: 292) indicates, in his death, Jesus demonstrated and promised a totally new empire of not being served but of serving, a vastly different manner of ushering in a new regime, not by the horse of war but the donkey of peace (Wells, 2007: 70). This unique mode of transformation based on sacrifice, provides a model for the workings of both global politics and global economics. Therefore those who believe in the salvific value of Jesus' death will, with the help of the Holy Spirit, embody the same character of sacrifice, as Jesus.' However, their service will not arise out of mere altruism but will be a resolve of love arising out of an understanding of Jesus' love and acceptance of them as sinners and its inherent implications for their participation in Jesus' human development projects.

It is also important to note that beyond signifying vicarious suffering and exemplary sacrifice, Jesus' death had an important corollary with significant implications for human development. The whole gospel tradition affirms that death was not the final word for Jesus. In fulfillment of his words, all the gospels confirm that Jesus rose from the dead (Mt 28: 1-20; Mk16: 1-20; 24: 1-35: 20: 1-10). His resurrection symbolized his power over sin and evil in the world, and according to Kenneth Ross (1995: 66) it also presented openness to the future as a vital constituent of the basic dynamic in human life. Ross argues that as an antecedent, Jesus' resurrection became the event of promise, confirming and guaranteeing what is yet to come yet still leaving it in the future. He further points out that in this way, the promise (of the resurrection) contradicts existing reality and hope embraces the vision of a transformed

world. This, according to Ross, provides the impetus for constant dissatisfaction with the status quo and the need to transform human existence towards the eschatological goal of the kingdom of God. In agreement with Ross, it can be argued that it is this present eschatological dimension of the good news that compelled the historical Jesus to rid men and women of those elements in society that negated authentic human existence and prevented them from reaching their highest potential. This dissatisfaction with the present reality was evident in Jesus' attitude to disease and demon possession, including hunger. The retardation to human development that is caused by disease and demon possession and lack of food was very widespread in Jesus' time. It is said that lifespan in the New Testament world was very short. At an average age of 30 and an infant mortality of about 30%, very few people reached the age of 50 or 60 (Pagola, 2011: 61). According to Jose Pagola, this situation was largely due to appalling living conditions and poor nutrition that did not allow for a long, healthy and fruitful life. However, Jesus' commitment to human health is evident in his constant endeavour to "*make whole*" those afflicted by disease and demon possession even at the expense of his relationship with the religious establishment (Mt 9 :2-8; Mk 2: 1-12; Lk 5: 17-26; Jn 9: 1-43). Such healings and exorcisms had both social and economic consequences for its beneficiaries. For instance, the healing of the woman with a twelve-year bleeding ailment (Mark 5: 25-35) extricated her from a life lived in perpetual anxiety about being defiled or ritually defiling others (Wells, 2007: 70). After her healing, she was probably able to save the income which she had perennially spent on doctors (Mk 5: 26). In the healing of the woman with a bent back and those men and women possessed by demons, Jesus was freeing the poor from those elements in the world that held them captive and stopped them from reaching their potential. From a nutritional perspective, Jesus' feeding of the five thousand pointed to the importance he attached to human nutrition as a basic dynamic of human existence. The combination of fish and bread in the miracle portion which Jesus provided (Mt 14: 13-21; Mk 6: 30) to the masses went beyond the normal peasant diet which largely consisted of bread, olives and wine, with occasional salt fish (Pagola, 2011: 61). This shows Jesus' total commitment to the development of the whole person. In all this, Jesus made the poor realize that human suffering is not part of the grand design of human existence, but is external to it and a result of the brokenness of human society. For Jesus, to be really human entailed being able to lead a life free from disease (both physical and spiritual-

psychological), hunger, and being able to realize one's inherent worth and dignity in the sight of God (Mt 5: 16). The relationship between these and the three modern measures of human development become obvious here. However, even in his death and resurrection Jesus remained committed to human development.

### **Implications and Concluding Thoughts**

The paper set out to establish the meaning of “*euangelion*” to Jesus’ audience, the implications of its meaning to his audience’s self-understanding, and the relationship between the meaning of “*euangelion*” and human development. It is evident from the above discussion that Jesus was wholly committed to human development through conscientisation. Basic to Jesus’ conscientisation project was his commitment to help the poor to realise that the root of all human suffering was sin. As a remedy to this situation, he invited the individual to a personal social righteousness through repentance, where repentance represented a change of mindset largely in relation to human awareness of the reality of God and its spiritual and social consequences. To actualise this commitment, Jesus went about doing good and in the process changed both the physical and social circumstances of many of those he met. Through his death, the geographical horizon of his reach went further beyond Palestine, and could now be accessed through faith in him. In addition, even in his death and resurrection, Jesus offered continuing dissatisfaction with the present human reality of suffering and the possibilities to take his example for those who love him.

There are two significant implications that arise from Jesus’ commitment to human development. First, Jesus’ sacrificial death demonstrates the value of sacrifice, which is fast becoming a fading virtue in modern society. Jesus’ sacrificial death provides continuing opportunity for contemporary discourse on the place of sacrifice in a human rights saturated culture. While human rights is part of the human development agenda, Jesus’ death illustrates that true humanity is found in personal relations and the ability of individuals to sometimes let go of their personal rights for the improvement of others. This understanding offers a social indictment to the overrated contemporary rights discourse which tends to elevate individual rights above the community. As Howard Taylor (2004: 7) argues, the challenge of overrating rights over responsibilities is a cultural confusion which results in the isolation of

individuals from one another and, in so doing, depersonalising the very humanity we are supposed to protect. Indeed, without a properly balanced perspective, especially in cultures that come from an oppressive history, the rights discourse has a subtle but sedating effect on societal understanding of sacrifice. It presents the moral challenge of aligning individual economic or political rights in relation to how the same would apply to others including the next generation. Jesus' sacrificial death offers the opportunity for the creation of a necessary balance between seeking one's own good and the good of the larger society.

Another implication of Jesus' commitment to human development arises out of his resurrection. Jesus' resurrection and its promise provide a theological possibility for constant dissatisfaction with the present reality and the need for a better future. It therefore encourages the understanding that if God in Christ Jesus is ordering human history towards a glorious eschatological future, then collaboration in God's project becomes an inevitable outcome of all those who follow Jesus and his ideals. This means that those who profess to know Jesus or to worship him can only be seen to be playing a significant role only to the extent that, in the words of Saral Chatterji (1971: 4), they learn to follow their master into the thick of the battle for the humanisation already going on in the world. This, according to Shailer Matthews (1913: 297), has significant implications on the church's understanding of its role in every age, especially with the realization, from the above discussion, that the gospel is impotent, except as it moves men and women to action in accordance with its ideals. If the ideals of the church at any given time are the ideals of Jesus, then the church will constantly be aware that the only evangelization that will save the world is something more than the preaching of an escape from punishment to come; it is rather such a trans-fusion of the forces of civilization with the ideals of the gospel that will bring justice and fraternity into the present economic (Chatterji, 1971: 4) and social order. However, the church's view of reality will always transcend the social dimension of its participation. Beyond immediate social concerns, the church will always look forward to the eschatological consummation of the kingdom of God "at the end of this age" (Mt 28: 20) when there will be no more crying (Rev 21: 4). As Chatterji asserts, this implies that the possibility of God in human history depends on whether the church remains true to its gospel of human development and accompanies man in suffering as Jesus did. Such accompaniment shall involve

the perennial invitation of the individual to a personal social righteousness acquired through a salvific friendship with Jesus. The implications this has for human development cannot be overemphasized.

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