

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

MISSIOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE COMPASSIONATE  
ACT OF FEEDING THE HUNGRY AND DESOLATE  
IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: Implications for the Current  
Mission Paradigm and Practice in Africa

BY  
ROBIN TAABU MULUNDA

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master  
of Theology (Missions)

JULY 2007

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**Student's Declaration**

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IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CURRENT MISSION PARADIGM  
AND PRACTICE IN AFRICA

I declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other  
College or University for academic credit

The views presented in this work are not necessarily those of the Nairobi  
Evangelical Graduate School of Theology or the Examiners

(Signed)



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July, 2007

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the missiological impact of the compassionate act of feeding the hungry and desolate in the New Testament Scriptures, and subsequently establishes the implications of this impact to the current mission enterprise among Evangelical churches in the African context. It therefore establishes the biblical findings, the current African situation, and the way forward in the current Christian mission paradigm in Africa, which is guided by development and practice of a balanced evangelical theology of mission.

Thus, the study ascertains the biblical teaching on compassionate work of feeding the hungry and desolate and assesses the resulting missiological impacts. It further determines the significance of the compassionate act of food sharing in African context, and proposes a relevant contextualized mission theology and practice in the current mission paradigm in Africa.

Exegesis of the selected biblical texts (Matthew 15: 29- 39; Matthew 26: 31- 46; John 6: 1- 12; Acts 2: 42- 47; Acts 6: 1-7; Romans 12:20; James 2: 14- 17 and 1Timothy 5: 3- 8), show that feeding the hungry and other works of compassion is a core teaching and practice in the New Testament. Though food is not given to entice the hungry and desolate to conversion, the results of every feeding event show clear missiological implications. Concern for the hungry and desolate also stands at the center of the African philosophy of communion and sharing.

The findings indicate the need for Christian mission in Africa today to be guided by a theology of solidarity, totality and participation rather than exclusiveness and separation. All people without exception need to be shown compassion irrespective of whether or not this will lead to conversion. Mission needs to be as inclusive as possible so as to address both the spiritual and physical needs. Feeding the hungry is ministering to Jesus and comes with benefits for both the recipient and the giver. The emotive nature of issues of food cannot be neglected in any mission context if the message has to be gladly embraced. The current socio-economic and political situation in Africa, more than any other time in the history of Christian mission in the continent, demands a holistic approach to missions, proclaiming the two facets of the kingdom of God- the 'yet to come' and the 'here and now'.

In view of the findings it is recommended that the evangelical church redefines its mission mandate so that works of compassion are part and parcel of the mission and not a mere extra activity. Where necessary and whenever possible, the church needs to seek for partnerships and alliances with reputable relief agencies that are seeking to combat the challenge of hunger in Africa. But every missionary attempt should be founded on a contextualized biblical theology that gives careful consideration and appreciation to scriptures and the missionary context.

To

My beloved children

Tuzo, Tumaini (deceased), Faraja, and Fadhili



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## ABBREVIATIONS

- AEA – Association of Evangelicals of Africa
- FAO - Food and Agricultural Organization
- IcFEM – Interchristian Fellowships' Evangelical Mission
- NEGST- Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology
- NGOs- Non Governmental Organizations
- NIV- New International Version
- WESO – Western Outreach
- WFP – World Food Program
- WHO – World Health Organization

## EPIGRAPH

A hungry stomach has no ears

A Rwandese proverb

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that one of the key terms in both mission and theology is 'the kingdom of God'. Given the frequency that missiologists and theologians refer to and expound the kingdom it can easily be assumed that everything about the kingdom has been fully established. However, this cannot be true, based on the fact that only some aspects of the kingdom have been given preference in both missiology and theology.

A consideration of the New Testament scriptures and the earthly ministry of Jesus show an inseparable relationship between the kingdom of God and the preaching of the gospel. However, the manner in which missions have been viewed and undertaken in most current approaches reveal a deficient consideration of and propagation of the kingdom of God in missions. In most cases the 'kingdom passages' have been used in mission with overemphasis on the concept of conversion (being saved), but with very minimal consideration of the more inclusiveness of the kingdom. Consequently, in many cases the spiritual concerns have been given the sole precedence as though the physical concerns are non-issues in mission.

It is irrefutable that 'the New Testament church's reinterpretation of the kingdom emphasizes the evangelistic mandate's priority in its mission' (Pomerville 1985, 150). However, it is also evident that beyond the salvation and healing themes in



the New Testament church and mission, there is a very clear concern about the physical needs of the people. One such concern is feeding of the hungry and the destitute.

The book of Acts gives clear evidence on the equal concern the apostles had concerning the ministry of tables, to the extent that those who were chosen to preside over food issues were highly qualified people (Acts 6). Similarly, when the church in Jerusalem faced hunger, Paul the missionary theologian saw it worthy to implore the churches in Asia Minor to give towards the alleviation of the endemic lack of supplies. In Paul's view, this gesture was part of the Christians' mission to fellow believers (2 Corinthians 8). Thus, mission is not only about the promise of the glorious future but also about the concern of the present physical needs of the gospel recipients. It has been argued that 'Christ and his message can only be relevant if he practically speaks to suffering conditions of the African people, whether in the urban centers or villages (Njuru 2001, 15).

The presentation of the kingdom as a present reality that speaks to people's physical needs is deeply enshrined in the proclamation of Christ and the apostles. Christ was affirming the kingdom at work among his audience when he proclaimed: "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-30 NIV). In pursuance of salvation of souls, Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

Nevertheless, it is clearly evident that Christ was not just concerned about souls, but also had compassion on the crowds, 'because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd' (Matthew 9:35-36 NIV). Jesus did not promise healing and compassion at a future time, but he delivered it to those in need, thus making the kingdom a truly present reality to those who believed. It is fundamental that when people around him were hungry he did not send them away to eat and then come back to his crusade, but he provided something for them to eat (John 6: 1-12).

Christian mission is not merely a proclamation but a wholesome effort to let the gospel recipients experience the presence and fulfillment of the kingdom of God. Indeed Jesus 'gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age' (Galatians 1:4). Consequently the kingdom blessings are not exclusively in the future but have become objects of the present time. We can experience a new power in this evil age (Ladd 1959, 41)<sup>1</sup>. It is only through present experience of the kingdom through works of compassion that mission will break the dichotomy that is seen to exist between people's souls and their bodies (Yamamori 1987, 131). It is indisputable that the primary task in mission is to point people to the second coming of Christ and the glorious life in heaven. Yet, 'the logic of evangelization breaks down if the Gospel fails to enable the prospective converts to have life, and have it abundantly' (Mugambi 1989, 9).

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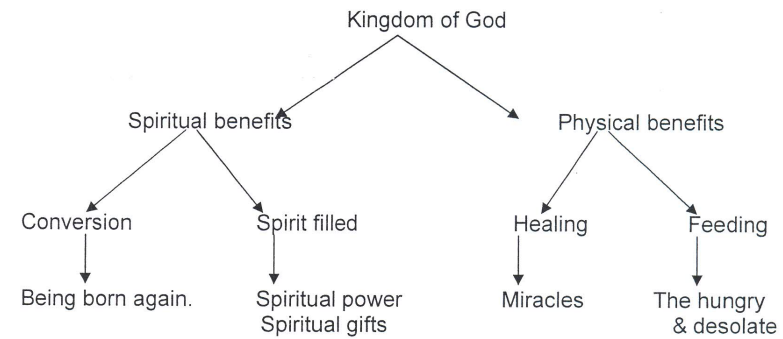
<sup>1</sup> Ladd comprehensively relates the kingdom of God and mission. He asserts that the message about the kingdom of God was the central theme in the mission of Jesus Christ on earth and that some measure of kingdom blessings can be enjoyed today. Kingdom life springs from the genuine knowledge about Christ and demands a genuine love motivated by righteous living and action.

Thus the task of the missionary is not only to reveal the glorious future but also to present the certainty about God's reign in the universe today. In view of Mathew 12:28, 29, the kingdom is advancing on the battleground. Jesus has bound the strongman and is plundering his kingdom. Thus the kingdom is not just a future hope, it is also a present reality. The coming of the kingdom is linked to the presence of the king, evangelism and to signs and wonders (Love 2000, 45). Moreover, the gospel of the kingdom is not merely about truth, but also about power encounter. It must speak to the current oppression that people face in daily life (Ibid., 86). To the hungry and desolate, a compassionate provision of food may speak louder than a perfectly prepared homily or manifestations of power encounter.

However, there is need to establish the missiological implications of every act done in missions. This consideration should be biblically based and relevant to the current situation, so that whatever is proposed or done is not only biblical but applicable to the current mission paradigm.

### Research Motivation

A consideration of the central mission theme in the New Testament (the kingdom of God) creates a clear impression that the New Testament mission practice dealt with a diversity of issues. Though it emerges that Christian mission was essentially an invitation into the kingdom of God, the kingdom did not only deal with the spiritual needs of people but also their physical needs. Thus, the kingdom can be illustrated as below:



In view of the above structure of the kingdom of God, authentic mission need to be holistic- addressing both the spiritual and physical needs of the gospel recipients. Conversion, Spirit filling, miracles, and feeding the hungry and desolate (such as widows, orphans and strangers) are all key aspects in the fulfillment of the gospel message of the kingdom of God. Though the kingdom message is primarily salvation from sin through Christ, the aspects of power and social justice are part and parcel of this kingdom (Shaw 2006, 352).

The fact that none of these is neglected in the New Testament attests to the importance of each one of them to the desirable biblical mission practice. This is clearly exemplified by Jesus Christ in the gospels; where he did not only teach people, but also healed the sick and fed those who were tired and hungry.

However, over the years and till now most emphasis in mission has seemed to zero in on the spiritual aspects, especially on conversion. The emphasis on the in filling of the Holy Spirit has also gained precedence in Pentecostal and charismatic movements. The physical aspects have received scanty attention by



many missionary agencies. And where these physical aspects have received consideration, much of it has been on the component of healing (miraculous healings). The physical component of feeding the hungry and desolate has been rare to come by in most evangelical missionary endeavors.

Personal experience in mission show that many able African missionaries today seem not to see any problem going to a hunger stricken person or community, gladly declare the message of salvation and healing and only encourage the person to trust in God for his physical provisions. It is apparent that for most African missionaries, the kingdom of God is literally 'not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Romans 14:17). Thus, the issue of feeding the hungry and desolate is not quite prominent in the current mission paradigm in Africa. Consequently, feeding programs in hunger stricken areas and among desolate people groups are almost exclusively left to international organizations like the Red Cross and Food for the Hungry, and to Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

Experiential evidence in practical mission work in Kenya through the years reveal that as much as the approach to mission is supposed to be holistic, there is still an apparent antagonism of evangelism and works of physical relief in evangelical cycles. In an attempt to have a more 'spiritual' approach to missions compared to the 20<sup>th</sup> century western missionaries, most evangelical churches in Africa have not been keen on works of compassion among the communities that they target for evangelism. In some cases mission agencies that have sought to integrate evangelism with material support have been regarded as being carnal or non-

spiritual, or tersely warned to be aware of the inherent dangers of mixing the spiritual and physical issues. This is exemplified in the engaging discussions and position articulated by evangelicals in Africa concerning the issue of compassion and welfare (what they refer to as development)

Though different evangelical churches may vary in perspective in the distinctiveness of compassion and welfare, the articulation of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA, formerly AEAM) is a worthwhile foundation in determining the current evangelical thought on the subject of compassion in general and feeding in particular. Thus, the views expressed in the AEA second consultation on 'the role of Evangelical fellowship and organizations in relief and development in Africa'<sup>2</sup> can safely be considered as the position and practice of evangelicals on issues of compassion.

The evangelicals have made several conclusions; key among them being that 'the dimension of relief is not foreign to the Bible and Christian practice' (Adeyemo 1987, 4). They however affirm that as evangelicals seek to recapture their original strength in the area of social justice, a lot of theologizing has to be done as the contemporary climate of reflection seems to be dominated by those that adopt the urgency of the human needs as their first agenda (Ayee and Bruijne 1987, 2).

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<sup>2</sup> In the consultation held in Nairobi in 1987, the evangelicals in Africa (among other objectives), sought to:

- (a) Analyze involvement of Evangelicals in relief and development.
- (b) Study structural and practical implications of relief and development work.
- (c) Build partnership relations between international donor-agencies in Africa. (Ayee and Bruijne 1987, 2).

In light of this outlook Middelmann (1987) gives a prescription of 'an evangelical theology of relief and development'. He firmly asserts that evangelicals 'are in need of relief and development, but must be based on Bible truth. The biblical view, according to Middelmann, should shape the Evangelical theological perspective on relief and development. 'Neither should evangelism and social work be regarded as two slices... but a celebration of God (Middelmann 1987, 9). This view ensures that evangelical mission combines evangelism with social action while taking care to prevent relief work in missions becoming mere social work.

Consequently the evangelical theology on compassion and welfare matters points to a holistic view of man; concerned with both the spiritual, social, economic and physical needs. God is an interventionist, who transforms people and situations. Hence 'evangelism should be explanatory' and avoid centering our evangelicalism on a 'privatized experience of Christ' (Middelmann 1987, 11-12). This evangelical theology must be based on a 'biblical world view' for it to be effectively expressed in a broken society against the hurts, the pain and the many ugly faces of death, so as to enable evangelical believers 'stand as witness of a different authority' (p, 8).

However, as much as evangelicals have shown the need for pursuing compassion and welfare components in mission, it is not without fears. This reservation is clearly expressed by the Nairobi consultation, which affirmed that 'considering the role of Evangelical Fellowships in relief and development we are all aware that the power of money may cause conflicts with our objectives of building fellowship'

(Ayee and Bruijne 1987, 2). Though there is every justification to be aware of the inherent threat in addressing physical issues in mission, it has become evident that the warning has been taken too far and has become a real hindrance, to wholehearted involvement in physical acts of compassion such as feeding the hungry and desolate by most mission agencies.

Yet we affirm what has been said by those involved in feeding the hungry around the globe that 'Hunger is not an issue of charity. It is an issue of justice' (FAO Director General- quoted by world hunger.org). This is affirmed in evangelical theological cycles by consideration of feeding the multitudes in the Bible as being 'mighty acts of justice' (Wood 2003, cap 16, 293). According to Wood, God's intention from creation was to establish a just social shape that manifests the character of God and a society that does not only walk with its maker but also cares for the world.

#### Relevance of this Concern

The key question that we ask is how relevant is this concern to current mission paradigm in Africa. This lends us to consider the current situation on the African continent in as far as food/hunger situation is concerned, and the increasing problem of desolate people.

Statistics from the World Food Program (2006) paint a very worrying situation about the developing world, and Africa in particular. Generally, 'one child dies in every five seconds from hunger and related courses, while '800 million people know what it is like to go to bed hungry'. It is estimated that 16% of the total

population in the developing world is undernourished. But a further scrutiny of the 'hunger map' shows a rather depressing picture of the African continent, especially sub-Saharan Africa. This map shows that 39% of the population in Southern Africa, 40% in Eastern Africa, and a whopping 55% in Central Africa is undernourished.

It has currently been asserted by the United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) that more than half of Africa (precisely 27 sub-Saharan countries) need urgent food assistance (Plaut 2006). According to Plaut (Africa analyst with the British Broadcasting Corporation), 'Africa's hunger is a systematic crisis' and can no longer be viewed as isolated disasters brought about by drought or conflict in countries like Kenya, Malawi, or Sudan and Somalia.

In a survey 'World hunger facts 2006' the World Hunger (2006) indicate that as much as the world produces enough food to feed everyone, the progress in reducing the number of hungry people has been very slow. The report establishes that the target set at the 1996 world food summit was to halve the number of the undernourished people by 2015; from the 1990- 92 figure (824 million). However, by 2000- 03 the number had just declined to 815 million, which showed only some progress in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. The report does not apparently mention any change in Africa. The director General of FAO agrees that this goal can now only be attained if efforts will be doubled and have such efforts focused in locations and actions that will make concrete and significant differences in relatively short periods (Diouf 2006).

Recent instances of hunger in Africa indicate that the situation is getting worse on the continent. For example, the Washington Post of Monday, March 2006 reported that '3.5 million people [which is more than 10% of the total population], mostly nomadic herders, are facing food shortage in Kenya'. But this was in fact an underestimation, since the ministry for special program in Kenya put it at about 6 million people (about 20% of the total population).

It is apparent that the problem of hunger will linger around for quite a while, if it will ever be resolved. The hunger crisis is a new dimension since 'at independence the African continent was more than self sufficient in food' (Plaut 2006). Thus, one of the key features that every missionary has to contend with in the current missionary paradigm in Africa is the question of dealing with the hungry and desolate. These are the majority target and recipients of the gospel message.

Apart from the hunger crisis, there is also the issue of growing number of refugees, orphans and widows arising from the ever increasing internal conflicts and the H.I.V/Aids scourge. According to the statistics released by the United Nations Agency on Aids on November 21, 2005, the Aids situation is not relenting in its impact on Africa, especially the sub-Saharan Africa. A section of this report quoted by the World Bank shows that:

Sub-Saharan Africa has just over 10% of the world's population, but is home to more than 60% of all people living with HIV—25.8 million. In 2005, an estimated 3.2 million people were infected with HIV. Declines in adult national HIV prevalence appear to be underway in Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe. But each of those countries remains saddled with a large, potentially ruinous epidemic. HIV prevalence remains exceptionally high in southern Africa and the epidemic continues to expand, notably in Mozambique and Swaziland. Very high HIV prevalence—often exceeding 30% among pregnant women—is still being recorded in Botswana, Lesotho,



Namibia and Swaziland and there is no clear evidence of a decline in HIV prevalence ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org))

Given the high poverty levels and the HIV-Aids pandemic in Africa today, the need for physical ministry to the hungry and desolate remains indispensable. For example based on the recent demographic reports in Kenya, about 55% of the population lives below the poverty line<sup>3</sup>, with some areas in Coast and Nyanza provinces experiencing poverty levels of over 80% (Government of Kenya 2005). This situation is definitely worse in many African countries given that Kenya is not among the poorest African countries.

Thus, the current mission field in the African context is not only a field ripe with multitudes of sinners who need salvation, but is also a multitude of hungry and desolate masses, who need something to eat.

### **Problem Statement**

This research seeks to ascertain the missiological impact of the compassionate act of feeding the hungry and desolate in the New Testament scriptures, and subsequently establish the implications of this impact to the current Christian mission enterprise among the Evangelical churches in the African context.

The blatant neglect of the hungry and desolate in most African mission activities today give credence to the adage that many 'Christians are too heavenly minded but of no earthly good'. This is particularly true of many mission agencies and

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<sup>3</sup> Living on less than a dollar per day (average of 61.50 Kenya shillings).

permeates through many Evangelical churches that rarely have a social aspect to their mission practice.

This scenario raises the question as to whether there is enough biblical evidence that can inform and necessitate the development and practice of a balanced evangelical theology of mission, which addresses both the spiritual and physical human needs in mission practice. And if there is sufficient biblical evidence, how can this be practiced sufficiently so as to make the Christian mission a real gateway of experiencing the kingdom of God by the hungry and desolate in the current mission context in a continent wallowing in civil strifes, hunger and poverty.

In view of this, we have done a survey of selected New Testament biblical texts to establish the missiological impact of feeding the hungry and destitute. Then based on the biblical findings and with respect to African worldview, especially concerning matters of sharing and food, we suggest the way forward for doing effective Christian missions in the current African context that is exemplified by hunger and chronic poverty.

### **Significance of the Study**

The research sought to determine the missiological impact of biblical works of compassion to the hungry and desolate and establish the implications of such impact to current missions in the African context. It is anticipated that the findings of this research will spur a more holistic approach to mission work in the current mission practice in Africa, without plunging into the common striving in evangelical



circles between the 'pure gospel' versus 'social gospel'. In fact the findings will go a long way in diffusing this unnecessary tension by providing clear biblical evidence and how this can be made practical without compromising on the biblical truth and holistic demands of the gospel message.

Consequently, the outcome of this research will lead to a more desirable approach to mission by addressing the people's spiritual needs without necessarily neglecting their physical needs. In this way the mission enterprise will become a true image of invitation into the kingdom of God, which speaks to both the spiritual and physical needs of gospel recipients in every context.

Our twin consideration of both the biblical texts and of the African worldview is crucial in ensuring that the current missionary remains both theologically right and contextually relevant. Without the right theology and relevance, the missionary enterprise, however extensive or intensive, will not produce desirable results.

Given the challenging conditions in most African countries that have left a majority of people in desolation, this research provides a clear roadmap in developing a practical approach to missions and Christian living to challenge the adage that 'Christians are too heavenly minded but of no earthly good'. When put in practice, the roadmap will make the gospel real good news to the hungry and desolate not only now but also in generations to come.

### **Research Objectives**

This research seeks to:

1. Ascertain the biblical teaching on compassionate work of feeding the hungry and desolate.
2. Assess the missiological impact arising from the biblical compassionate work of feeding the hungry and desolate.
3. Determine the significance of the compassionate act of food sharing in African worldview.
4. Contextualize the New Testament biblical teaching on feeding the hungry and desolate in the current mission practice in the African context.

### **Research Questions**

This study has endeavored to address the following research questions:

1. Does the New Testament clearly advocate for the compassionate act of feeding the hungry and the desolate?
2. What missiological results arise from compassionate work of feeding the hungry and desolate in the New Testament scriptures?
3. What is the significance of the ministry of feeding the hungry and desolate to the current missionary era in Africa?

### **Delimitation of the Study**

The main focus of this study is on the act of feeding the hungry and desolate. This research fully acknowledges the great expanse of the works of compassion in the Bible. We fully appreciate that not all works of compassion can be effectively

handled in this study. Hence this research is limited to works that address physical situations that bring suffering or hopelessness particularly to the hungry and destitute. Other acts of compassion particularly to the desolate may be mentioned or alluded to, but such acts will only be considered if they directly encompass the act of feeding.

Though we have found it appropriate to allude to some Old Testament texts, the biblical exegesis is limited to the New Testament passages. The passages that have been examined are: Matthew 15: 29- 39; Matthew 26: 31- 46; John 6: 1- 12; Acts 2: 42- 47; Acts 6: 1-7; Romans 12:20; James 2: 14- 17; 1Timothy 5: 3- 8. An extensive analysis has been done on a few of the above texts, while others have only been applied as proof texts.

## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### Research Methodology

This is a literary research. Hence, the source of data for this study is mainly written literature interspersed with interviews. The primary data in this research was drawn from the biblical passages addressing the acts of feeding in the New Testament. These texts have been explicitly analyzed, with special emphasis on the missiological consequences/results arising from the said acts of feeding.

We have adopted the redemptive- historical hermeneutical approach in the analysis of the selected passages. Central in this contextual approach is exegesis that puts due weight to both the ancient context and the modern reader's context (Padilla 1981, 18). Thus, we have sought to ascertain the meaning of the biblical text, consciously submit to its authority, and apply that meaning to the current situation (Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989, 202). We have then suggested an integration of the findings in the overall biblical and theological contexts with the current mission context in Africa.

#### Exegetical Analysis of Selected Texts

Ideally, exegetical studies must of necessity consider some key fundamental issues about the texts under consideration. Such issues include authorship, audience, time and genre. This is quite critical for understanding of biblical texts

and taking care of different interpretations on the views that exist regarding such issues.

However, in this missiological study, which is anthropological in nature, we have adapted the structural approach<sup>1</sup> to the selected biblical texts. This choice does not seek to evade the extensive analysis of the selected texts but is the best suited for this kind of research, which seeks to survey a range of texts in the New Testament.

Consequently our approach here is based on very specific questions that are formulated to help us discover the biblical teaching and results of the act of feeding the hungry and desolate. Other questions have been raised for some of the texts under consideration, but our focus is based on these key questions:

Firstly, in what context does this act of feeding occur?

Secondly, who are the primary recipients?

Thirdly, what is the motivation of the said act?

Fourthly, what is the outcome (or intended outcome) of the feeding act?

Essentially, the aim is to establish the context, recipients, motive and (missiological) result. These four components are central to our area of research and also ensure justice to the biblical text, though they may not be able to answer all questions of criticism about the texts under consideration.

<sup>1</sup> Structuralists are interested only in the final form of the text (synchronic analyses) ... they have no interests in inquiring into the pre-history of the text ... or trying to identify parts of the text that might be later interpolations or the work of later redactors or editors'. Thus, this view holds a temporal or timeless view of biblical texts. Greater concern to this approach is 'questions about the text's underlying assumptions, universal concerns, and its present function in the reader – text relationship' (Hayes and Holladay 1987, 110- 113).

## Data Collection and Analysis

This being a literary research, the data was collected from literature based in theological libraries and other public libraries around Nairobi. The primary libraries were those based at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST), Nairobi International School of Theology, Catholic University of East Africa, Daystar University and the University of Nairobi.

A synthesis of ideas was derived from the collated materials, which were objectively sifted, matched, and analyzed in search of clear patterns, insights and relationships.

Based on the findings, we have herein drawn interpretations and conclusions guided by our research problem: to establish the missiological impact of the compassionate act of feeding the hungry and desolate in the New Testament and ascertain its implications in the current Christian mission enterprise in the African context among the Evangelical churches.

## Definition of Terms

### **Compassion**

Generally compassion is viewed as that disposition that fuels acts of kindness and mercy. It often produces action to alleviate the suffering and it is not an exclusively Christian response to suffering. The Greek word *splanchnisomai*<sup>2</sup> translated as compassion also bear a broader meaning as 'to show concern for', and 'to show mercy' (Engelhart 1996, 109). In the Mediterranean biblical society (New

<sup>2</sup> All references to Greek in this definition section are from the Vine's expository dictionary of biblical words. 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Testament culture) compassion is a kinship rooted value to be shown to real or fictive kin, and ought to characterize powerful people's dealings with underlings. For Christians, compassion is rooted in love and modeled in Christ (Pilch 2000, 32).

Thus, being compassionate in this study refers to the human characteristic of kindness that propels one to take action that alleviates the hunger and suffering to the hungry and desolate, irrespective of their relationship to them. It is a show of mercy and concern that leads to deliberate action that is not limited to kinship relations. It is not simply showing sympathy but a show of kindness, by beneficence, or assistance (*e/leeo*).

### ***Desolate***

We have used this term here in two senses: First, it refers to being left alone or deserted as derived from the Greek verb *monoo* meaning 'to leave alone'.

Secondly, it refers to a situation of hopelessness resulting from a lack of would be providers for daily needs like food, as may be derived from the Greek adjective *orphanos* which is translated to 'orphan' in English. However, it is used here to refer to other vulnerable people like widows or any other person that may need deliberate protection and provision to survive or gain the necessary comfort

### ***Feeding***

The regular reference of feeding in church practice usually gives prominence to feeding of the flock from the Word of God, while only considering other aspects like material assistance of individuals as being only incidental in comparison with

the provision of God's word. However, we use feeding here as being primarily the provision of food as may be derived from the Greek word *chortazo*, meaning to fill or satisfy with food and from *psomizo* indicating supplying people with food.

### ***Hungry***

In day-to-day general terms, being hungry simply denotes a feeling of hunger, which can then be easily dispensed off with having a meal. But in this research we refer to people who are not simply having a feeling of hunger but literally need somebody to provide food for them to deal with their hunger.

### ***Kingdom of God***

The reign of God as revealed to his people in various realms, including the current age and the age after the second coming of Christ. It confronts humanity with a decision about humanity but also offers an enjoyment of life here on earth. Hence the kingdom of God is used in this research to refer to the wholesomeness of life in the presence of God, now and the hereafter. In other words, it is a reign that goes beyond the consideration of personal righteousness and holiness of the church to all issues that affect human life.

### ***Mission***

The meaning of the word 'Mission' is almost as varied as the range of churches and agencies that exist. Ultimately, mission remains vague and it should never be restricted in the narrow confines of our preferences. The most we can hope for is to formulate some *approximations* of what mission is all about (Bosch 1989, 9).



Practically, the term “mission” presupposes a sender, a messenger sent by the sender, the recipients of the message, and an assignment.

In most cases, mission and evangelism are wrongfully used interchangeably. Evangelism is defined as ‘the proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in him; calling them to repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sins, and inviting them to become living members of Christ’s earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit’ (Bosch 1989, 10-11). Therefore in this respect, evangelization is mission, but mission is not merely evangelization.

In light of the above truth, we consider mission in this study as the total task that God has set for the church for the salvation of the world. Though this is always related to a specific context of evil, despair, and oppression, it is also considered to embrace all activities that serve to liberate men from bondage and usher them to the true experience of the kingdom of God. Hence mission is the church sent into the world, to love, to serve, to preach, to teach, to heal, and to liberate (Bosch 1991, 412).

Mission embodies the total impact of the church on the world: its influence, its involvement with the social, political and moral life of the community and nation where it is placed, its succor of bleeding humanity in every possible way (Green 1990, 9). It is a call for a monistic proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, making disciples and relating to the whole need of mankind.

For purposes of this research the use of ‘mission’ (singular) refers to the inclusiveness of the missionary activity in relating to all aspects of humanity. The use of ‘missions’ (plural) denotes a plurality of any one given missionary aspect like evangelization or more than one missionary aspects like say evangelism and social action.

### ***Mission Station Approach***

A mission practice that restricts material benefits almost exclusively to those who accept the Christian faith and leave out those who do not confess the faith.

### ***Worldview***

The underlying assumptions about the world that motivates or influences people’s thought patterns, values and decisions in daily life. Thus, they are practical assumptions expressed in material aspects of life than mere ideas.

It is the framework within which a people group acts among themselves and to outsiders.

### CHAPTER 3

#### BACKGROUND STUDIES AND PRACTICE OF COMPASSION AND FEEDING THE HUNGRY AND DESOLATE

This chapter covers an overview of background studies on issues relating to the subject of compassion in general and in particular on feeding the hungry and desolate. This is based on previous research and a case study of current mission activities relating to welfare of the needy in general and feeding of the hungry and desolate in particular.

We have further considered the belief and practice of compassion to the hungry and desolate in the African worldview. This has been specifically considered based on the concepts of communion and solidarity in African traditional communities. The consideration of the African practice of compassion is important to us, since this research seeks to draw implications for missions in the current African context from the biblical teaching on feeding the hungry.

Studies specifically focusing on compassionate works to the hungry and desolate in mission are notably rare, both in mission and theological cycles. However, various studies do exist on related topics such as social justice (Wood 2003), social revolution (Stott 1999), social gospel and relief and welfare or development (Middelmann 1987). Although all these areas relate to the subject of feeding the hungry and desolate, the relief and welfare aspect is, in our view, closer than the rest.

This is especially true when we consider relief as being any assistance to the poor or persons in special danger or need or difficulty, which may consist of, among others, finances, food, clothing and medical supplies (Adeyemo 1987, 4). On the other hand, welfare points to the expected end result (benefits) of relief activities and may also refer to activities of gathering resources from different sources and assisting the needy (Esler 1987, 193), as a way of reducing situations that demand relief work. Hence the line between welfare and relief is quite thin and thus the terms can be used interchangeably. But it is relief that points to a more critical need for intervention. In this respect, we can consider all the feeding of the hungry as relief acts.

Consequently a review of relief activities is necessary in assessing the utilization of both human and material resources in missionary work in Africa. This is particularly important where such activities practically touch on the day-to-day multiple challenges that every missionary has to deal with in doing mission work in the continent. This kind of understanding and approach is essential in realigning the local mission activities with the global missionary strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century based on biblical foundations. This is also central for mission considering that Africa continues to grow into being the center of Christianity, while on the other hand it is the greatest recipient of world relief.

#### **Biblical Foundation of Welfare and Relief Activities**

A faithful consideration of the scriptures reveals a multiplicity of events in both the Old Testament and the New Testament that would be considered as relief or welfare activities. However the word welfare only appears three times in the Bible

(New International Version), two in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament. But the term relief appears twenty times, all of them except one in the Old Testament.

#### Welfare and Relief in the Old Testament

One of the greatest unequalled acts in the Old Testament is the unique show of concern by God to the fallen man in the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve sinned and realized that they were naked, God punished them but gave them relief from their nakedness: "Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21 NIV). Thus, the history of man and the involvement of God in alleviating mankind's suffering begin right with the first man. In this sense we can assertively say that God is the author of relief work. And this he did not because of man's goodness but in spite of man's sinfulness.

Ministering to the needy thus becomes more of a duty than a choice in the Old Testament. Failure to provide relief for those in need was considered a great injustice and iniquity:

Is not your wickedness great, and your iniquity without end? .... You have not given the weary water to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry. But the mighty man possessed the land, and the honorable man dwelt in it. You have sent widows away empty, and the strength of the fatherless was crushed (Job 22:5-9 NIV)

The relief and welfare motif is clearly evident in the writings of the prophets. For instance Ezekiel 18 show justice not just as a holy personal life, but also as touching to several ethical domains including the social and economic domains. Thus, a 'righteous person is actively generous' (Wright 2001, 194). In Isaiah it becomes clear that concern for the needy is a show of true worship and assurance for God's restoration and prosperity:

Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' "If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry And satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in (Isaiah 58:6-12 NIV).

There is no doubt that Yahweh chooses and considers the worship that is pleasing to him as the work of liberation- to remove every yoke that binds human beings to any form of servitude or slavery to the growing pain of an empty stomach, the misery of homelessness and exclusion from the community, or the living shame of being dressed in rags (Achtemeier 1982, 55). Consequently, the religious practice of fasting, 'is not simply to go without food on the set fast days, but to adopt a lifestyle in which self indulgence and greed are totally given up and replaced by generosity toward the poor....' (Webb 1996, 226).

Thus, in the Old Testament the liberating acts like provision of food, clothing, and shelter, were considered as the practical way of demonstrating true righteousness. Hence Israel was challenged to care for the needy and the oppressed instead of pointing fingers at them, which was regarded as a gesture of contempt and hence condemned (Wolf 1985, 230- 231). The rescue of the oppressed is to be followed by positive actions: the provision of food, shelter and clothing to those in need



(Whybray 1975, 215). It is this same spirit that closes the Old Testament and ushers in the New Testament.

#### Welfare and Relief in the New Testament

Several passages in the New Testament deal with the issue of welfare and relief in general and specifically on the act of feeding the hungry and desolate. Hence, it is true as scholars argue that the dimension of relief is not foreign to the New Testament and the entire Christian practice, as is seen in the case of the believers in Antioch who clearly exhibited a ministry of relief by supporting the famine stricken believers in Judea (Adeyemo 1987, 4).

In consideration of Acts 11: 25 following, (when the church in Antioch gave towards the relief of the hunger stricken Jerusalem church), Adeyemo rightfully draws the following profound insights. One, the whole relief enterprise is spiritual. Two, all believers in Antioch were involved, each giving to his ability. Three, the gifts were sent by the hand of the spirit—filled leaders: Barnabas and Saul (Paul), which shows responsible stewardship. Four, the receiving churches were taken into partnership; gifts were taken to the elders, the proven opinion leaders. Five, accountability was evident in the sense that Barnabas and Paul went back to report to the sending church (or donor) at the end of the mission (Adeyemo 1987, 4).

The spiritual reality of relief is apparent since the prophets who spoke by the Spirit spurred this work and the same Spirit moved the people into action. Thus the New Testament shows no dichotomy between preaching and practice. The appreciation of the fact that each person gave 'according to his ability' is a

profound insight that indeed relief is not merely the rich helping the poor, but rather people getting involved in whichever way they are able to. This is contrary to Esler (1987) who views relief in the light of a challenge to the rich to help the poor. According to Esler:

It is reasonable to connect Luke's' idealization of the social welfare arrangements in the early Christian community in Jerusalem with need in his own congregation for the rich members to help the poor.... Luke presents the early Church as successfully implementing the injunction to give alms, which Jesus had laid upon the rich (Ibid., 86).

Thus to Esler, 'the human Gospel imposes on the rich an indispensable requirement... to provide the destitute with food and the other necessities of life in this world (Ibid.,199).

In echo of Acts chapter 6 where the deacons were equally spirit filled like the apostles who committed themselves to prayer and preaching, the handling of relief in Acts 11, clearly show that relief matters need equally spiritual people as the ministry of preaching and prayer. The fact that an apostle like Paul and his partner Barnabas would consider handling relief gifts is evident to how important they considered this matter to be; otherwise they would simply have picked some church members to do this, so they could concentrate on evangelization.

This is also evident in the fact that they handed over the relief gifts to elders in Judea. Adeyemo argues that this was to ensure order in terms of distribution to curb against inequalities and perhaps rout the handout expectations by individuals (Adeyemo 1987, 4). But we hasten to add that the involvement of the apostles and elders in this matter was to clearly show that relief was as important as any other matter in the church and mission.



Practically, as is the case in Acts, the disciples considered ministry to the vulnerable people, like widows as part of the church ministry. The appointment of a special team (the seven deacons) was an indication that offering relief supplies were to be part of the church routine, not just an occasional event. And more fundamental here is the fact that the requirements for the relief handlers were as high as for any other minister.

The importance of relief seemed to have been widely cultivated and appreciated by most early Christian congregations. For instance it emerges that when one church was in distress, other believers were ready to help. When Jerusalem was besieged with starvation, 'it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who were in Jerusalem' (Rom 15:25-27 NIV). It is apparent that this became part of the Christian life and church practice, which the believers could simply be reminded or ordered to fulfill as was the case with Paul's command to the church in Corinth:

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-3 NIV).

The apostle Paul saw the readiness for the believers to participate in relief as a work propelled by God himself, and a work that all churches needed to emulate. He thus urges the believers in Corinth to seek to operate in this very grace of giving; in the same way they were to pursue faith, knowledge diligence, love for the saints. According to the apostle, those who operated in this grace of giving (like the Macedonians), were first of all committed to God, then to the saints, and

were more propelled by their willingness than ability to assist others. And in urging the Corinthians to join in this grace he gave a principle that needs to be followed in this task. That some people should not be burdened while others are eased but all should be done by equality, in the sense that one's abundance supplies another's lack (2 Corinthians 8:1-15).

This essence of relief is not only evident in Pauline writings but also in other epistles. In fact, while Paul encourages this practice, the other New Testament writer like John and James make it plainly clear that if one avoids these relief activities, then he cannot even claim to be a believer. James emphatically says 'pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:17 NIV). On the other hand John portrays this as a true show of God's love:

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 John 3:16-17 NIV).

Essentially, this whole practice in the early church finds its roots in the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. This is particularly true if we see welfare and relief in a broader sense as Adeyemo (1987, 4) asserts, 'evangelical involvement in relief and development should encompass another perspective of relief that is evident in scripture: that of 'freedom from harassment and fears'. In this sense, the very first public pronouncement of Christ was not only concerned with the spiritual deliverance, but also with the physical liberty:

The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed (Luke 4:18 NIV).

Thus, a clear examination of the New Testament reveals a deep concern for welfare and relief activities. This is particularly common in Luke and Acts in which the concern for the poor was quite central. It is therefore fair as Esler (1987, 183) does conclude, that 'the Lucan Jesus promises to alleviate the extreme physical deprivation suffered by the beggars, the blind, the lame, the imprisoned and so forth, without however, ignoring the spiritual aspects of salvation'.

Thus, the really cutting edge of Luke's theology of property is based on the fact that the elimination of injustice, the alleviation of the sufferings of the poor and the destitute, is not merely an 'eschatological reality, but is a vital constituent of Christianity in this world, here and now' (Ibid., 193). Whether his theology led to the 'correct Christian attitude to riches and poverty' may be subject to discussion. But there is no denying the fact that Luke provides unusual compassion for the poor members of his community and society generally. He also depicts passionate belief that the gospel was not gospel unless it offered such people immediate relief for their physical miseries and perhaps for the first time provides them with a sense of their own dignity (Ibid., 199).

Christ was not only interested in restoring the relationship between mankind and God, by faith, but was equally concerned with ministering to other human needs. It is for this reason that he healed the sick, set the captives free and fed the hungry. When he fed the four thousand people, he was primarily quickened by compassion and not the need to show God's power to multiply food (Matthews 15:32-37).

Relief and welfare in the New Testament is not just limited to the early church (apostolic era) but is clearly evident in the entire New Testament. And this is made more dramatic by the fact that aspects of relief and welfare are given as desirable attributes for eternal benefits that shall be apportioned on the day Judgment.

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me' (Matt 25:31-36 NIV).

There is therefore adequate biblical evidence to hold that relief and welfare is not a mere missionary invention but has full biblical basis. According to Adeyemo (1987, 5- 7), relief and development [welfare] is based on: one, the goodness of God " he who causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:43-48). In this sense, 'any form of good work that we do by way of relief and development identifies with the initial creative act of God' and the just acts of God's revelation history. Two, the compassion of Christ our savior who depicts this Godlike compassion as exemplified in the Biblical story of the 'Good Samaritan'. It is the active thoughtfulness of love, which soothes the wounds with wine, and oil, conveys the patient to an inn, and bears the cost of all charges (Luke. 10:29-37)'. Three, The command of Jesus Christ our Lord "Love your neighbor as yourself". Four, the compelling love of Christ in us, such as what made Paul become all things to all men in his sacrificial service (2 Corinthians 5:14).

In this respect, it is valid to assert that the biblical goals of relief and welfare are for the believers, who are 'God's workmanship created in Jesus Christ to do good works', to demonstrate the glory of God. Thus, these acts should have the transformation of man and his environment as the end. The involvement in relief must therefore be understood as part of God's appointed good works and must be done holistically in the name of Christ for God's glory- to bring both the inward and outward environment under the lordship of Christ (Adeyemo 1987, 7).

### **Scope of Welfare Activities in the Current Missionary Era**

Today, relief and welfare is common in the third world countries in terms of response to effects of droughts, starvation and internal conflicts. The common aspect in Kenya has been distribution of relief food in parts of eastern and northeastern provinces that have been experiencing persistent droughts. There are also widespread efforts by NGOs and other organizations to address diverse needs of the poor, orphans and other vulnerable groups like the girl child among traditional communities like the Maasai.

### **Current Evangelical Theological Perspective of Welfare and Relief**

The theological perspective of relief issues in the current missionary era is widely exemplified by the articulation of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA, formerly AEAM). It is affirmed that 'the dimension of relief is not foreign to the Bible and Christian practice' (Adeyemo 1987, 4). However, it is appreciated that as evangelicals seek to recapture their original strength in the area of social justice, a lot of theologizing has to be done as the contemporary climate of reflection seems to be dominated by those that adopt the urgency of the human

needs as their first agenda (Ayee and Bruijne 1987, 2). Thus, 'evangelism and social work can be regarded as two slices' of the same bread and a 'celebration of God' (Middelmann 1987, 9).

Consequently, the evangelical theology of relief and development [welfare] points to a holistic view of man; concerned with both the spiritual, social, economic and physical needs. And Middelmann rightly holds that God is an interventionist, who transforms people and situations. Hence 'evangelism should be explanational' and avoid centering our evangelicalism on a 'privatized experience of Christ' (Ibid., 11-12). This evangelical theology must be based on a 'biblical world view' for it to be effectively expressed in a broken society against the hurts, the pain and the many ugly faces of death, so as to enable evangelical believers 'stand as witness of a different authority' (Ibid., 8). A consideration of some cases shows that the mission outcome of mixing the word with action is quite amazing and desirable.

### **A case study of Interchristian Fellowships Evangelical Mission (IcFEM)**

IcFEM is a mission agency based in the western of Kenya, and seeks to integrate evangelism with community development, relief and welfare. It thus pursues a holistic and innovative approach to community transformation, propelled by a call for holy living and hard work. In order to achieve this, the mission has three integral departments: evangelism, community development, and relief and welfare.

Based on the annual report of 2004 and project assessment report of 2005, the mission is greatly impacting the communities living in Western Kenya and



particularly Bungoma and Mt. Elgon districts. For instance in the years 2003/2004 alone, more than forty thousand people were reached with the gospel through different mission activities, with 8,600 of them being converted.

Given the integrating approach adopted by the mission, it may be difficult to single out one department for having made this superb work possible. However, a review of its relief and welfare activities indicates a major role played by these activities in realizing such great impact in its mission. Among these relief program are: the value added school sponsorship program, the ministry to the elderly, and the relief action to emergencies and perpetual needs (IcFEM 2004).

#### ***Value Added School Sponsorship Program***

This program entails payment of fees for bright students who are orphans but do not have relatives that are able or willing to assist them in their secondary and post-secondary education. Children from very poor families also benefit from this scheme. The beneficiaries of this program range between 40 and 60 annually for secondary school and about 15 for post-secondary training. In most cases the mission partner with the parents and guardians to facilitate this, but in some occasions the mission has had to take up guardianship to most desolate, hence providing for every necessity, including food and clothing.

This program has been quite influential in the salvation of young people who benefit from it. According to the program coordinator, more than half of the sponsored students are taken into the program when they are not born again. But by the time they reach form 3, almost 95% are converted, and a majority of these

hold on the faith even after school and college. Many parents and guardians have also been converted in the end of term meetings held at the mission.

#### ***Bethesda Pool Ministries***

The inspiration for this project came from a study of the initiative of Jesus, who often helped the weak and outcasts in the society as in John 5:1-9, where Jesus met and healed a man at Bethesda pool who had lain there without help for thirty-eight years. The welfare and relief workers from the IcFEM Mission go into the community and identify the needs amongst the disabled members of the community who are often overlooked and ridiculed by the society. The mission recognizes that there are many people in the community who, like the man at Bethesda, have no access to help and due to their inability they often lack primary health care and food (IcFEM 2005).

Hence the aim of involvement with people with disabilities is to identify, assess and prioritize the needs of such people and seek for the best way of assisting them to positively cope with their situations and perhaps even be able to vent for themselves. Thus the mission has set up to:

- 1) Develop and keep a database of all the disabled people in the region.
- 2) Seek lasting alternatives to coping with disability alone.
- 3) Reach the disabled with the message of Christ's love.
- 4) Support the disabled to establish income generating projects, so they can provide for themselves and their families.

Generally, based on the IcFEM findings there is a high level of poverty among the handicapped people and are repeatedly and easily subject to abuse both by the community and by groups who seek to use such people for their own selfish interests. Apart from the poverty, most families of the physically handicapped are also frustrated with the disabled members of their families. On the other hand, the disabled living alone often feel depressed or worthless, by the fact that they are not able to work and feel isolated from their families and other members of society.

Therefore the disabled seem to have no hope for a better life. They are not only broken bodies but often their spirits are broken as well. During the distribution of wheel chairs and eye operations it emerged that the disabled really need the church to show them love and help them overcome their resentment. It was realized that for many of these people, their resentment is not just limited to the community, but also to God. But it is equally rewarding that whenever, they receive a hand of help, they recognize that it is only by God's initiative, which creates a great mission opportunity to these people through relief and welfare.

### ***Ministry to the Elderly***

The concern for the elderly people in the community is driven by the fact that there are many elderly people in the community who have been deserted by their relatives and have no source of income, while others have no shelter. To cater for this group the mission has continued to assist them in different ways (IcFEM 2004). Among the things that have been done is provision of foodstuffs and clothing. Decent houses have been constructed for those without shelter and

basic medication and primary health education given to those in need of medical attention and yet cannot reach the nearest public health facilities.

However, the most essential aspect in this ministry is encouraging relatives and neighbors to become mindful of the elderly and frail in their families and community. It has also been recognized that these people need to hear the word of God and have people praying with them from time to time, since some of them cannot even manage to walk to their churches. Consequently, the mission is challenging Christians to spare some time to share their love and possessions with those who can no longer vent for themselves. As they have found out (IcFEM 2005), when the frail and destitute receive works of compassion, most of them are more than willing to receive the message of compassion. In this way, the gospel gets a fertile and willing soil.

### ***Emergency Relief and Support Activities***

Apart from the ministries to the elderly, the mission undertakes other crisis intervention activities. Among these include rescue for the sick people in the village who cannot afford medical expenses. Some of these people have been taken and treated at the mission hospital for free. Similarly, the mission has given support for the economically weak grand parents and guardians who have been forced to bear the burden of raising many orphans due to the HIV/Aids pandemic. For the latter, the mission has encouraged the 'home based orphan care', in which relatives are given capital support to raise the orphans instead of taking them into orphanages.

The home-based care has led to a more positive living for both the orphans and their relatives. Similarly, more and more orphans are having the privilege of growing up together as one family and also growing up in a more natural environment, as opposed to the artificial 'orphanage' environment that has been adopted by many organizations.

Another key support activity under the relief aspect of the ministry involves the provision of food to the 'very old' and other vulnerable groups, while at the same time helping those who are able to work to effectively till their farms and develop food banks. People who cannot afford to buy farm inputs are assisted to buy, so that they can produce their own food and also contribute to the mission's food reserves, as a return from the capital assistance (IcFEM).

#### ***Impact of the IcFEM Welfare and Relief Activities***

The results from the IcFEM mission relief activities strongly validates the argument that 'relief and development provide some of the most fruitful opportunities for conversions, especially in countries closed to traditional missionary approaches' (Yamamori 1987, 8). It is evident that these activities have made it possible for special groups to hear the gospel and some of them have received conversion.

This has been made possible through the integrated approach to both evangelism and social action.

The provision of food has specifically been singled out as one of the most effective way of reaching out with compassion and the gospel of salvation to vulnerable groups such as the widows, the elderly and refugees (displaced people). Thus

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feeding the hungry and desolate is not simply done as a Christian social responsibility- to do works of charity, but has become a means of propagating the gospel of salvation and the God of compassion.

However, this great impact has to a great extent, been influenced by the people's cultural orientation. The worldview assumptions of the 'person/group' category<sup>1</sup> among the Bukusu (who are the majority inhabitants in Bungoma) provide a strong foundation for great impact of relief and welfare activities in mission. In view of the Bukusu, the wealthy are not given status of their own, but based on their roles and service to the community. Hence, somebody concerned with the social needs including provision of food is given more respect and listened to more than even a millionaire who does not share his possessions with the community. Hence, any missionary effort accompanied by works of relief is assured of both an amazing response and lasting results.

Involvement in relief has made it possible for the otherwise neglected (marginal groups) – the elderly and the physically handicapped to be effectively evangelized. The elderly have been assisted and encouraged to appreciate the need for them to forgive their children who have abandoned them, and resist any attempts to curse them. They have also been helped to realize how beneficial it is for them to live right with both God and men in their last days on earth (IcFEM 2005).

Those who felt discriminated against by the society have experienced real love both in word (gospel message) and in deed (relief and welfare activities). This has changed the community's view about evangelical Christianity. The community that

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<sup>1</sup> This category refers to how people perceive themselves and others (Kraft 2000)

otherwise perceived evangelicals as only interested with the heart/soul and not the physical needs has now experienced God in action.

Generally, the gospel is now being appreciated as being relevant to the Bukusu community because it has touched the core presuppositions of the community. In the worldview of the Bukusu, a situation of need is not an individual problem but a concern for the entire community, or family. So even the old people that have received ministry from the mission have come to acknowledge that indeed it is true God loves them and is concerned with every aspect of their lives (Wakwabubi 2005). This change of attitude among the old generation has led to less opposition to evangelization in the community. This change of attitude has not resulted from how powerful the gospel has been preached, but is much more a result of how the gospel message has been put in to action, to change people's physical situations.

Thus, through the relief and welfare activities of IcFEM in the region the words in Isaiah have come true to multitudes in Bungoma: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined" (Isaiah 9:2 NIV). According to Matthew this was fulfilled when Christ began to call for repentance and declaring the arrival of the kingdom of God; and at the same time healing all kinds of disease among the people (Matthew 4:12-25). This kind of response also gives credence to the apostle Paul's view that considered the readiness for the believers to participate in relief as a work propelled by God himself, and a work that all churches needed to emulate (2 Corinthians 8).

### **Compassion for the Hungry and Desolate in African Worldview and Practice**

The philosophies of life and practical living in the African context indicate a strong affinity to the concept of compassion in general and in particular feeding of people and ministering to the destitute in the community. This is enshrined in the ever present practice of communion and solidarity in African traditional communities and specifically in food sharing and other acts of hospitality.

#### African Philosophy of Compassion and Sharing

Concern for people in need is one of the central ethical demands in traditional African life. This demand is not only limited to friends, colleagues and relatives, but extends to even strangers, who are considered as a blessing, since they are perceived as possible representation of ancestors, angels or messengers of God in disguise (Mugambi 1989, 138- 9).

Empirical evidence shows that sharing of food with the needy is one of the primary values in most African communities. In this regard, every African community has very deep philosophies concerning compassion and sharing. But of great interest is the fact that food forms the foundation of compassion and sharing in almost every African society. In other words, compassion begins with the readiness to feed that person that is hungry and in depressing condition. This is clearly exhibited by the way some of these communities highly value the sharing of food, to the extent that the practice permeates every ceremony including funerals and initiation rites.

This is quite evident in the way that some of the communities even relate to such ceremonies. For example among the Tachoni of western Kenya; a circumcision ceremony is referred to as *eating the knife*, while a wedding ceremony is referred to as *eating a wedding*. Such references are common to other Luhya sub-tribes such as the Bukusu and Banyala (Wekesa 2005).

The implication here is that such important transitions cannot take place without sharing of food. This is what exactly happens when such occasions come. For example it has been noted (in survey done by the IcFEM mission in 2004) that a circumcision ceremony for a single boy among the Bukusu costs about fifty thousand Kenya shillings, seventy five percent of which goes into feeding those who come to witness the ceremony.

It can thus be validly concluded that the issue of sharing of food stands as one of the core practices in most African communities. Though the sharing of food spurns through all occasions, there is an underlying assumption that you should not expect hungry people to perform or get involved in any fruitful venture. So whether you need people just to participate in a ceremony or undertake a serious task, you must ensure that they are fed.

#### ***Sayings on Food***

Though there are many ways of excavating African philosophies on food and sharing, we single out how this philosophy is deeply enshrined in African sayings from selected Bantu communities in East and Central African region. Here we consider sayings from among the Bukusu (in Kenya), the Lobola (of the

Democratic Republic of Congo), the Rwandese (of Rwanda) and the island dwellers of Madagascar.

In each of these communities, there exist several sayings in relation to this issue, but we have chosen what in our view, is the most outstanding one from each community.

#### The Bukusu

The Bukusu say '*He who offers you food wishes you well and wants you to live longer*'. This saying is forthright in the declaration of both the value of food and the communication that one makes or receives when he gives or receives food.

Essentially, giving food shows that you want the person to live while denying one food means you want the person to die (Wekesa 2005).

In this regard, feeding people is seen as primary to any other task that you may want them to do. This is exemplified in a related saying that: '*That which is in the stomach carries the load on your head*'. This clearly states that one should never burden somebody with any task without first ensuring that that person *has a full stomach* (has been fed). Consequently, as Wepukhulu (2005) confirms, sharing of food among the Bukusu is common both in the family set up, in ceremonies and in reconciliation endeavors between warring people or clans.

In the family set up, most important instructions, disciplines and decisions are carried out after meals. For instance according to Nekesa (2005), where folk songs and stories were used to communicate important values by the old folk to

the young generation, this was almost exclusively done after evening family meals. It was assumed that a person with an empty stomach cannot effectively receive such deep learning.

Similarly, from the researcher's personal experience as a Bukusu, important family decisions, including disciplinary measures were communicated to family members after eating together. In other words, even an offender in the family set up was not denied food because of his folly, except in situations where such a person had refused to work. Thus, the wisdom held was that even an offender deserves life before you seek to align that life to the family or communal values.

But perhaps more interesting is the act of eating together to cement relationships. In situations of conflict resolution, reconciliation is not seen to be genuine if it is not accompanied with sharing of food. Here, the food is not merely used to satisfy those taking the important decisions to reconcile but also stands out as an expression of life to the reconciling parties. In this regard, according to Wepukhulu, anybody that denies people food, especially those that are destitute, is regarded as a murderer.

#### The Malagasy

The most outstanding sayings concerning food among the Malagasy is the common declaration that '*one food one life*'. According to Razafinjatonari (2005), this common declaration essentially directs life and especially hospitality among the Malagasy people. In their view, you cannot separate life and food. So you



cannot wish somebody life yet at the same time deny him food. Tersely put, it may go like: 'Do you want someone to live? Then give him something to eat'.

Thus, sharing of food is seen as a binding bond to the people in the community and thus signifies people's concern not for their own lives but also for the lives of others. People only consider to have had fellowship with one another after sharing some food together. As it were, no serious talk and bond is acceptable before sharing of food, however little it might be.

Essentially, it is assumed that one will always be willing to share food with people that he values and those that he wishes to win over to his side. Denying other people food (though unimagined in this community), is considered as declaration that you do not wish to share life with the person you are denying food or any other act of hospitality.

#### The Lobola

Among the Lobola it is said '*eating and drinking together is the strength of community life*'. A bond of unity and belonging in the community is built through sharing of food. Food is both a bond building agency and a source of strength for the survival of the community and her members. Thus, even in situations of death and mourning, people are encouraged to come and eat together as a celebration of life. In fact sharing of food is perceived as a declaration of one's desire to partake in the events of the community and celebrate the gift of life as given and preserved by God (Bolobo 2005).

Food is primarily seen to consist life and also considered to be a preserver of that very life. It is because of this that the bereaved members in the community are fed by other family members and neighbors. This act of feeding is extended to any community member who is in any situation of weakness. According to Bolobo, people in such circumstances are first of all encouraged to eat or are fed, before being given words of encouragement relating to their spiritual and emotional needs.

A summation of the Lobola philosophy as relating to food sharing is in essence almost a demand: '*Give me something to eat, and then I will be strong enough to talk*'. With such a mind set, it is difficult to imagine any serious response to the preaching of the gospel by a hungry Lobola. This may be particularly so if the missionary seem not to be concerned by the people's anguish arising from hunger.

#### The Rwandese

In a more spectacular sense, the Rwandese say: '*An empty stomach has no ears*'. What this means is that one cannot expect a hungry guy to listen or comprehend whatever he may be hearing. Put in a dramatic manner, this is simply saying: do not expect somebody with an empty stomach to productively engage his ears, since ears cannot hear as long as the stomach is empty. As Musekura (2006, 321) notes, in ministering to destitute groups like refugees, the African church must begin by meeting their immediate needs for security, love, food. In her view, without such ministry the people will never hear the gospel.

This outlook fully resonates with the physiological demands of any human being. However, it does also communicate not only the basic need for food, but also the foundational demand for consideration of every need those people that one seeks to relate with and communicate and important message such as the gospel of salvation.

In summary, it is evident that in many African traditional communities, food is synonymous with life. Whoever gives food gives life, or provides an opportunity of celebrating that life. In this regard Jesus Christ, who is life, can not be divorced from the need for food by hungry community that is being reached with the gospel message of salvation. Thus, a concern for the people that is only limited to receiving eternal life yet not interested in the people's need for food will be seen as a contradiction and essentially something not worthy to be considered and embraced. We can say the African community is an eating community, a sharing community and a listening community. A holistic gospel needs to speak to all these aspects.

#### Communion and Solidarity in African Traditional Communities

As we have noted above, the African people do not only value food but also the aspect of communion and solidarity<sup>2</sup>, which is expressed through sharing of food. This practice of sharing apparently permeates through the entire African continent as can be singled out in selected communities.

<sup>2</sup> Solidarity in this study is used to imply a sense of unity, harmony or cohesion. On the other hand I examine the concept of communion in the same sense that the Greek term *koinonia* has been defined by Walter Bauer (The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature, 1979)<sup>1</sup>. In his view *koinonia*, refers to: association, fellowship, close relationship; generosity, fellow-feeling, altruism; proof of brotherly unity, even gift, contribution; participation and sharing in something.

For example, traditional societies like the Chewa, there exists a basic egalitarianism in which nobody is supposed to want to have more than his fellows. 'If a person displays more drive and ambition than the other members of the group, he is suspected of wanting to be successful at other peoples' expense' (Van Breugel 2001, 261). Solidarity and sharing with other community members especially in times of bereavement is one of the most sacred duties for every Chewa. And this is done both to comfort the bereaved and to maintain peace. Thus, people in need do not stand alone, but have the entire community standing with them, and if need be are ministered to in accordance to their need.

It is observed that the sense of cohesion and community in African traditional society has its foundation on the traditional African family (Kinoti 1985, 3). She observes that before the destruction of the African culture the family gave the individual an identity, a sense of belonging and security. The significant thing about the African family was not so much the size as the sense of belonging it gave the members.

Expensive occasions like marriages saw family members 'affirm their identity by making contributions towards hospitality and dowry. Even in the event of calamities, like where one member has been fined for killing or injuring somebody, clansmen contributed towards the number of goats or sheep required by customary law and the culprit may be required to provide only one animal (among the kikuyu). According to Kinoti, this basic attitude carried with it mutual obligations and responsibilities which sprung from beyond the mere call of duty or politeness; they were essentially religious.

Indeed, the family provides the most basic context of communion and sharing. It also develops right virtues among family members.

It is also realistic that this sense is religious especially given that it was deeply enshrined in individuals that they need one another in all situations. Similarly the desirable virtues were communicated as being core to the very existence of all family members. This is a perfect example of demand for righteousness and concerns for one another, the African style.

African sharing was founded on African hospitality and propelled by generosity. It was also not discriminatory in any way. The sharing went across gender, age, ethnic or religious affiliation. Sharing among traditional African societies also provided a form of insurance against total impoverishment, which could be occasioned by loss of a given household's entire herd of cattle due to raids, disease or drought (Munene 2001, 2). In reference to the Agikuyu of Kenya, Munene observes that sharing among Africans is spontaneous and it was an activity, in which both the giver and the recipient derived pleasure and joy.

Consequently, in Africa, participation and sharing is closely linked with the sacred, and is deeply connected with life and power. The individual participates in the lot of the community and the community shares in his condition. Such sense of communion can be seen where 'divine life is shared equally and totally among the divine persons, who are as a consequence, one and identical in life, nature and power (Nyamiti n.d, 58- 59). It can thus be argued that there exists an African traditional communal ideology, which propels the African spirit that is always crying for the well being of the whole human family. The African community holds

together because efforts are made to accord each individual the attention of the whole community at certain crucial periods of their lives (Oduyoye 1983, 113). Indeed as Kaunda (1978, 135) observes, the African traditional community was a mutual society, an accepting society, and an inclusive society.

It has been observed that the best way to present religion to Africans is to present it as 'a sharing of life'- present the life of the trinity as shared and lived by us Christians here and now (Mwoleka 1978). Sharing of life as is the case in the African traditional community, which involves going through tough times together, may make some theological realities better understood. This is not far fetched since 'religious ideas can [and do often] find expression in the social institutions that exist within a given community' (Osabutey-Aquedze 1990, 192)

In the African religious thought, the right of personal ownership is situated within the context of joint or public right of access to the basic resources necessary for life. An individual's well-being can only be assured within the context of the entire community. The arrangement of African community's goods indicates an interest in the common humanity of all people and in the principles of solidarity and reciprocity. Resources are to be used to effect communion through 'complementarity and mutuality' (Magesa 1997, 241- 247). Fundamentally, an individual can say 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am' (Mbiti 1969, 108).

This contention is one of the most fundamental assertions in Mbiti's analysis of African religions and philosophy. This is one aspect in African traditional living that is difficult to refute in every African community. Indeed, the whole subject of



communion and solidarity in traditional African societies is strongly hinged on this principle- which demands belonging and sharing. Acts of active communion within the African traditional community are manifested through material goods, such as the sharing of food, and gifts. Even the spirit of brotherhood, as enshrined in kinship relationships only finds its consummation when community members share material goods. This philosophy is particularly common in rural and minority communities.

Thus, there is a presence of a strong sense of brotherhood among African traditional communities that propels the spirit of sharing. As much as it may be termed as love for 'tribal brothers', this practice perfectly fits the biblical command to love our brothers, especially those of the household of faith. Such a virtue provides the foundation on which the so called tribal people can effectively practice Christian charity based on Christian brotherhood. It is evident that even among tribal communities there are admirable moral obligations that every evangelist can effectively utilize in the communication of the gospel message. It may be a great oversight if such virtues are neglected or seen as inferior or unrelated to similar biblical virtues. If such virtues are placed in the biblical context, they are bound to greatly impact missions in the African context.

#### African Communion and Solidarity in the Current Global Era

There is no doubt that within the 21<sup>st</sup> century the entire world is being turned into a global village. The rate of urbanization and in effect cultural change has enormously increased. Yet, in spite of this rapid urbanization and globalization most of these features cannot be simply seen as functions of a disappearing

social system, since they are more habitual than compulsion behavior. As O'Neil (2006) observes, 'habit and integration of culture traits' are among the processes that result in the resistance to change. These virtues may therefore remain a fundamental part of the African's psychology and practical living for quite some time or generations. This is particularly given that these virtues are closely linked with ethnocentrism, the 'we versus them' competitive feelings and the ingroup-outgroup dynamics, which also lead to resistance to change.

This sense of togetherness is (consciously or unconsciously) evident in the African day to day living, even among those living in big cities. A case in point is where most upcountry people that have settled in Nairobi and other Kenyan urban centers have, as a matter of habit and integration formed 'tribal' associations, which they passionately guard. For instance there is an association for each of the seventeen Luhya sub-tribes in Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Eldoret and Kisumu. This trend is particularly strong and almost religiously embraced among the low income earners, though it seems to be quickly catching up with the rest.

And if the frequency of the so called 'cultural nites' (celebration of culture through overnight traditional music and sharing of traditional food) is anything to go by, then this trend has got up with almost every Kenyan tribe. Even more significant is the revelation in a recent documentary 'Living abroad' on Kenya Television Network (October 2006) that relayed some of these trends being a common practice among Kenyans who have settled in western cities like London and Paris.

In addition to this, it is worthy noting that urbanization especially in the African countries does not necessarily eliminate the problem of poverty and in particular

food insecurity. According to the United Nations Human Settlements Program (HABITAT 2006), in what is referred to as the arrival of the “urban millennium”, for the first time in history the majority of people will be living in urban centers by mid 2007. But the same report predicts that this development will increase the number of slum dwellers to 1 billion, and that by 2050, one third of the entire world population will still be living in rural areas.

Consequently, globalization may have dawned on the African continent, but as long as urban poverty will increase and substantial populations still dwell in the rural areas, the philosophy of communalism will continue to thrive. To date, even among the urban population, there are deliberate efforts that accord each individual the attention of the whole community at certain crucial transitions in their lives such as weddings and funerals.

It is doubtful that even strong religious dynamics will completely shift the African people’s worldview, particularly on values relating to communion and solidarity. It has been observed (Mugambi 1989, 106-107) that while African Christians may accept the basic Christian teachings almost without debate, they do not necessarily abandon their basic traditional values and ideas. They may publicly detach themselves from traditional rituals and practices, but the positive values and ideas embodied in those expressions remain part of the African Christian experience. Thus, the acculturation process in African Christianity leads to a new way of life, distinct from but also related to both the old and the new cultural backgrounds.

The continuity with the past cultural values and practices has been observed to hold very strongly even among urban Christians. Such resilience has been identified among the Maragoli (a sub tribe of Luhya of western Kenya), Quaker Christians resident in Nairobi. It has been found (Shisanya 2004, 71- 72) that though the missionaries discouraged various cultural practices, such as eating communal ritual meals, payment of bride wealth, dancing parties and other practices that were seen to be oppressive and discriminatory to women. The latter two were effectively eliminated but the rest remain even today.

Empirical evidence indicates that even full members of the Quaker church (in Nairobi) have not completely abandoned such practices, though they practice them in privacy (Gichinga 2005, 61). These findings indicate that though modifications have been done on the various aspects of the Maragoli culture at certain levels of cultural expression, there is no indication of a total abandonment of the significant cultural aspects for over a hundred years of Christianity and many decades of urbanization (Ibid., 85).

Hence, there is no doubt that the African worldview and cultural orientations and practices will be affected by the socio-political, economic and religious dynamism. However, the core values and beliefs that are at the center of African life may never be completely altered irrespective of its encounter with a diversity of change agents. Like any other culture, the African culture will remain dynamic and subject to change, but like in any other cultural change it will resist change and show resilience in some of its foundational aspects like communion and sharing. In fact some of these aspects may flourish in authentic African Christianity, since they are closely linked to biblical values such as brotherly love and love for a neighbor.

### Feeding at the Mountainside (Matthew 15: 29 -39)

One thing that clearly stands out here is the way in which Jesus compassionately undertook his ministry. He mixed both the healing miracles with another miracle that nobody primarily demanded- feeding the congregation. Though the people were hungry, they did not demand for food, yet Jesus goes ahead to minister to their empty stomachs- driven by compassion:

Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way." His disciples answered, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?" "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied, "and a few small fish." He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. They all ate and were satisfied. Afterwards the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was four thousand, besides women and children. After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan (Matthew 15: 29- 39 NIV).

In modern Bible versions such as the New International Version, and in most commentaries in which texts are given headings, this text is commonly entitled 'Jesus feeds the four thousand'- on the basis of verse 38. Based on this heading, the number of people that were fed, without any exception, clearly stands out. Influenced by this view of numbers, it is definite that in considering this text one will definitely sense the great magnitude of the miracle, which in exclusively missiological terms, could be considered as a great power encounter effort.

## CHAPTER 4

### FEEDING THE HUNGRY IN THE GOSPELS

Though there are several cases of feeding the hungry and desolate in the gospels our exegetical biblical analysis is limited to Matthew 15: 29- 39 and John 6: 1- 12.

However, we refer to several other passages that deal with this act of feeding in the gospels. We further consider Matthew 25: 31- 46 with special reference to eschatological implications of feeding the hungry.

Considering the nature of the study- missiological research and hence anthropological, we have adopted the structural exegetical approach to the selected texts. Through this approach we are able to consider several biblical texts by only focusing on specific aspects of the chosen texts. The approach is applied to all other considerations of the texts in this study.

Consequently our exegesis is focused on very specific questions that are formulated to help us discover the biblical teaching and results of Jesus' practice of feeding the hungry and desolate. Basically our focus is on the missiological effect of the feeding acts. These effects are enshrined in the results or the expected outcome of the feeding act. However, we also consider the context, the recipients, and the motivation of feeding the people, all of which, in our view, are relevant to our topic. This is much so based on the fact that these later aspects fundamentally affect the outcome of the feeding deeds in all circumstances.



However, we have chosen to give it this title (Feeding at the mountainside) to designate our focus on the place and the nature of the people that received the miracle. This in our view qualifies the motive of the act and the implied missiological significance, without negating its magnitude, which is the main focus of common commendation.

We therefore consider this passage, not just as another miracle in the missionary exploits of Christ, but mainly in view of the fact that it was motivated by compassion and possesses bountiful missiological consequences. It is considered that the primary concern that quickened this miracle would still have been present even if the numbers were less. Thus, the impact was not so much because of numbers but with the concern and the outcome. Whether this result was intended by Jesus or was simply an upshot of the miracle does not delimit its impact.

#### Context

The context of this passage is closely linked with that of the preceding situations verses 1- 29. Jesus had just had a dispute with the Pharisees and teachers of the law (15: 1-9), who questioned Jesus why his disciples were breaking the tradition of the elders, by eating without washing their hands. Thus, Jesus is being accused of defilement (Green 2000, 172). First, Jesus and his disciples are thought to be defiled because they do not keep Jewish food or hand washing laws. Secondly, Jesus may have been considered defiled by interacting with the Canaanite woman, whose daughter was healed when she knelt before Jesus and pleaded with him (15: 21- 28).

In political terms, at this point in time, Jesus has clearly become a rebel. It is at a time when it would be libelous for anyone to associate himself with him, as far as the traditions of the elders and the powers of the day were concerned. Apparently, Jesus saw much more in these issues of eating, with or without the washing of hands.

It is interesting to note that though the debate is on the issue of food and defilement, Jesus summons the crowd to himself (v. 10) and calls upon them to "listen and understand". In physical terms, there was nothing to listen and understand about whether people ought to wash their hands before eating. But in Christ's view there was much more at stake and people needed to understand rather than simply seeing food and the physical cleanness and satisfaction.

Jesus consolidates this outlook when he uses the image of food in reference to the gospel message and its benefits, in his encounter with the Canaanite woman, when he later withdraws to the region of Tyre and Sidon (15: 21-28). At this point in time, matters of food have become quite identical with matters of the gospel message. Amazingly when people are thinking food, Jesus is thinking the gospel, and when people are thinking purely gospel, Jesus looks at it in terms of food. And to make it dramatic, he puts in such a way that depicts the difficulties that one would have to contend with in sharing food with those who may be regarded as outsiders, strangers or out casts.

Hence, we see a situation arising from people eating with unclean hands and an encounter from the Pharisees and teachers of the law being brought to the public. Having called the crowds to himself (15:10) and performing the healing miracle to

the Canaanite woman's daughter it is not surprising that when he comes down from Tyre and Sidon, the crowds came to him. To the teachers of the law and the elders, this may possibly have appeared like a public show of influence and might on the part Jesus. Yet the situation clearly shows a person (Jesus), who is well focused on his obligations that he does not give in to any manner of distraction. In other words, the proceedings are not determined or influenced by the Pharisees but by Jesus' own missionary activities.

Thus, the immediate context within which the events of (15:29-39) occur has been greatly influenced by the events of the previous chapters. For instance Jesus had only a while ago fed five thousand people in Matthew 14: 13 -21. In this episode, Jesus had made it clear that the crowds who had come to listen to him 'did not need to go away but rather needed to be given something to eat' (Matt. 14:16). It is therefore valid to conclude that Jesus had made it his practice not to release his congregation hungry.

There is absolutely no doubt that though the story is about feeding, the primary setting here v. 29 is not an eating ceremony. In fact, there is no mention that people had come, so they could eat bread and fish from Jesus. Instead, it is apparent that it was purely what one could call (in our 21<sup>st</sup> century missionary language) a 'gospel explosion meeting'- people bringing the sick to be healed. In return they were amazed and praised God. It does not even indicate that part of their expectations when they came to Jesus was to be fed.

Fundamentally important to this context is the fact that this gathering continued for quite long (precisely three days). It is difficult not to agree that 'Jesus' preaching and

miracles so captivated the people...that they refused to leave him till [and] he hesitated to dismiss them, fearing that many of them would collapse for hunger on their way home' (Carson 1991, 358).

Whether it is true as observed by Carson or simply people had no otherwise than remain there for that long, the case presents a situation of a hungry lot. In addition to the hunger, the crowd is also desolate- by virtue of the remote location they are in (vs. 32-33). It is therefore a case of a combination of hunger and desolation.

#### Recipients

Succinctly put, the beneficiaries of this mighty act are a desolate hungry crowd. Primarily the people who were fed were the crowds who came to Jesus when he went along the Sea of Galilee (into the hill), as in verse 29. Hence it is possible that these four thousand (who 'all ate and were satisfied'- v. 37) included the following:

1. Those who (just) came to him to hear him after they had heard the debate he had earlier had with the Pharisees and teachers of the law.
2. Those who brought the sick to him.
3. The lame, the blind, the crippled, the dumb and many other sick people who were brought to him for the healing miracle.
4. The disciples

Irrespective of the category in which one belonged, it is clear that, all of them found a common ground in hunger and desolation. At this point it did not seem to matter who the person was and where he came from. What mattered was the fact

that they were hungry and far a way from home and they needed strength to move on. Doing this just after coming down from Tyre and Sidon, it is possible that among the crowds that came to him were from that region, especially given that he had just performed a great miracle there. This therefore makes a case of Christ crossing over the traditional barriers and ministering to both Jews and Gentiles.

For this reason, it is valid to conclude that the recipients of food here are not only Galileans but also Canaanites. This is exemplified at the end of Matthew 15:31, which makes of a situation where non Jewish people are praising the God of Israel. Such a consideration makes most sense in the Gentiles praising Yahweh, specifically as the "God of Israel", since all other references from the Gospels refer to the Jews simply as 'glorifying God'; he is simply called "God" (Blomberg 1992, 245). For example when he did the great miracle of healing a paralytic among his own people, it simply reckoned that 'they gave praise to God' (Luke 5:26; 'they praised God' (Mark 2: 12; Matthew 9:8 NIV).

Though this feeding act clearly 'points to the blessing of the Gentiles, who together with Israel will also be the recipients of eschatological blessing through the provision of Jesus' (Hagner 1995, 452), the primary effect here is both present and eschatological. It is more a case in which everyone is ministered to in accordance to his need.

#### Motivation

Did Jesus feed the four thousand people, just to show his might- that he was not only able to heal but also do other miracles like multiplication of food? A simplistic view would definitely come to such an end. However, it is clear here that the

multiplication of food was not the primary issue at hand. The multiplication may only have become necessary because there was very little, yet the Lord wanted all to eat and be satisfied.

Christ's motivation therefore lies in the fact that:

1. He had compassion for the people; and
2. He did not want to send the people away hungry
3. They could have collapsed along the way if send a way hungry.

Thus, the feeding of the people here is primarily a work of compassion and the need to meet both the spiritual and physical needs of the people who came to Christ's hillside mission. It is a clear portrayal of Christ being concerned with both the spiritual and physical needs of the people.

Given the events of verses 30-31, one could say the people had received great blessings and needed nothing more from Jesus- 'the dumb were speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind were seeing' (v- 31). But Jesus is moved by compassion to see the need of dealing with their hunger. And the reason why the hungry needed to be fed is 'so that they may not collapse along the way' (NIV).

Perhaps in Christ's estimation, if the people were not fed, they would not have been able to go back to their villages' and tell and show of the great wonders that had happened at this great mission encounter. If this were to happen, the great wonders that God had done would have been, practically speaking, nullified if those who had received the healing did not reach their homes due to hunger.



The fear that the people might faint on the road is unique to this passage. Christ's compassion is clearly explicit in the fact that he takes the initiative to the crowd's need of food (as is also in John 6:5), noting that the crowds have nothing to eat and that he does not want to send them on the road with such hunger. This is unlike in the feeding of the five thousand (in Matthew 14), where it is the disciples who take the initiative and approach Jesus concerning the need of the people, suggesting that Jesus dismiss the crowds so they can obtain food. Then Jesus says "you give them something to eat" (Hagner 1995, 450). Thus, in the earlier incidence Christ is responding to both the disciples' concerns and the people's need. But in this case, it is primarily his concern for the people- that they may have something to eat.

The initiative taken by Christ deflates any thoughts that may either have ascribed the concern to the disciples, or portrayed a sort of beggar mentality where the people ask Jesus for food. The act is therefore based on the situation, the need and the possible outcome. This outcome is not only the impact the feeding had but may also refer to the consequences if Christ had actually send the people a way hungry.

#### Missiological Results

After the feast two things happen (v- 38):

1. Jesus sends the crowd away.
2. Jesus takes the boat and goes to another place (the coast of Magadan).

The context does not explicitly show the missiological significance or result of this act. However, though the text does not say anything about how this feeding act

was significant in missiological terms, we can safely infer what message Christ wanted to communicate.

One, Jesus was not merely concerned with the spiritual aspect of the people and the need of healing and deliverance, but was equally concerned with their need of food. It is for this reason that he was keen that they have food to eat, even after delivering to them what they had come to seek from him.

Two, Christ considered acts of compassion as part of his mandate to the gospel recipients and that healing and deliverance cannot substitute the need for food. Essentially he was in a way saying 'you do not need to let the people ask for what you already know that they require'. It is this aspect of God's character that Paul writes about in Ephesians 3: 20: '...him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power within us...' It is an alignment to a holistic mission approach, where one seeks to address the whole person.

Three, the fact that he wanted to send them away satisfied may show how keen he was to ensure that the results of his mission encounter went beyond the mission field. What significance could it have been if the people had been healed and never arrived at home at all because of hunger? As simple as it may have appeared, the fact is that though he went his own way, those who had been healed were able to reach back to their villages. The effect of this ending is quite evident as the text declares: 'the God of Israel was glorified' (v. 31).

Thus we can infer that the source of praise was clearly the healing that had occurred, but that praise and testimony needed to go beyond the mountain side- in to the villages. But this could not have been possible had the people not been

fed so that they could be enabled to actually get back home. In terms of enablement, they needed the power and Spirit of God to be healed, but required the power of food to get strong and reach their destination. Both were important in ensuring the realization and testimony of Christ's mission exploits.

But perhaps the most significant missiological significance here is the extension of the Lord's works of compassion to the Gentiles. As Hagner (1995, 453) observes:

Both the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand are clearly stories of messianic provision foreshadowing blessings of the eschaton, and this one, especially in retrospect, intimates the extension of messianic blessing even to the Gentiles.... The universalism implicit here is important to the evangelists understanding of the meaning and significance of Jesus' messianic mission.

The purpose of the story obviously points to the outreach of the gospel beyond Judaism as a hint to the Gentile mission (Green 2000, 172). It is a manifestation of the fact that works of compassion know no barriers or cultural boundaries.

The ethic in this text clearly communicate that all people that we encounter deserve our compassion. We cannot neglect their hunger and purport to minister to their spiritual needs alone. Moreover, there should be no discrimination on who should benefit from our social activities in missions. It is a call to universal transmission of the transforming power of the gospel message. This is a mission enterprise beyond the 'mission station' philosophy that was common in the mission practice of early western missionaries in Africa. It is a call for a paradigm shift in the church's implementation of social action endeavors or church sponsored development programs.

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Finally, the fact that Christ decides to feed the multitudes amid the tension with the Pharisees on issues of cleanliness, is clearly a declaration by Christ that the hungry need food to deal with their hunger and not theological debates. Essentially he implicitly suggests that there is nothing that can deal with a person's hunger, but food. Thus, the trend that flows out of this is that every need in the mission field deserves to be ministered to appropriately. The sinners need forgiveness for their sins, the sick need to be healed, and the hungry need to be fed.

### Feeding Intrusive Crowds (John 6: 1 -15)

This situation presents a rather interesting sort of people. Here is a group of people that one would want to quickly dismiss and concentrate on more serious business or minister to 'genuine' people. It is a crowd that is not only enthusiastic but intrusive based on the reason they are following Jesus:

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Feast was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted". So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely, this is the prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself (John 6:1-15 NIV).

## Context

Prior to this miracle of feeding the five thousand people Jesus has just had an encounter with the Jews for healing and forgiving sins on the Sabbath (Chapter 5: 1-30). The encounter was so intense that the Jews persecuted him and tried to kill him (5: 16-18). In response Jesus reaffirms who he is (one greater than John) and that he has come in the name of the Father, hence does not even accept praise from men. (5:36-42).

Essentially he states that whatever he does is part of his mission which he has been sent to accomplish. Hence whatever happens is for God's own glory and praise and not for him.

This miracle is also recorded in Matthew 14, Mark 6 and Luke 9. However, the location of the event is similar to the feeding of the four thousand in Matthew 15 - the setting of this feeding is on a mountain side along the Sea of Galilee. But unlike in Matthew 15, where the crowds brought the sick to be healed, here the crowds simply followed Jesus because they saw the miraculous signs he had done upon the sick (6:2). Thus, the picture we get is that of 'Jesus doing, the crowd seeing, and then the crowd following' (Ngewa 2003, 100).

The situation is therefore quite fascinating, especially given its mirror image of our own current 21<sup>st</sup> century context of crowds following miracle working preachers or exorcists. Such crowds are not necessarily believers but more of busy bodies or cheer people who can desert their mission or hero at any opportunity if it so desires or when it becomes apparent that their cheering is not being entertained.

## Recipients

There is no doubt that the crowd here was purely Jewish. This arises from the fact that Jesus was within the Jewish region, and does not go out to Tyre or Sidon as in Matthew 15. This is further affirmed by the fact that this was during the time of the Passover (v. 4), which was a wholly Jewish ceremony.

The composition of the people who came to him is a people who had witnessed his miraculous healings more prominently the invalid person at Bethesda (5: 1-8). It is possible that most of them were eye witnesses to what the Lord had done. They were not simply following Christ out of fable insinuation of the miracle working evangelist, but they did follow him because they had seen with their own eyes the wonders of the miracle working Christ.

However, it is evident that these people followed him not to fully identify with him but perhaps just curiously to see whether he was going to perform more miraculous signs. Nevertheless, it is remarkable to note that as much as there were Jews who persecuted Jesus and wanted to kill him (John 5: 16-18), there were other Jews in thousands, who wanted to follow him-even up the mountainside, even though it was not a committed following.

## Motivation

The motivation of the crowds in following Jesus is clear: 'because they had seen the miraculous signs' (v.2). It is based on this that we have referred to them as 'intrusive'. It is quite apparent that 'their motivation was not as good as if they were following Jesus out of love, but nevertheless they longed to be with him' (Ngewa 2003, 100).



However, Christ's motivation of feeding these crowds is not explicit in this episode. But it is absolutely clear that this was not an after thought or simply arising from the disciples' probing. This can be deduced from the fact that Jesus purposed to minister to their need for food, even before anybody thought about it: 'for he already had in mind what he was going to do' (v. 6). Thus, Jesus was not simply responding to an emergency situation but to a normal mission activity in an area where people were generally wretched and would come from far to listen to him or watch him perform miracles.

Though there is no mention of the word hungry in this text, it is evident that these people were hungry and needed to be fed. That the event was an act of compassion on the part of Jesus is not mentioned by John, which Mark 8: 2-3 does mention, but may have been assumed (Beasley- Murray 1999, 80). Indeed, it has been observed that assuming that these people followed Jesus by foot from Capernaum to where this event took place; they may have walked a minimum of fourteen and a half kilometers (Ngewa 2003, 99).

In view of the distance covered to the place of Christ's meeting, there is no doubt that this was a truly tired, hungry and desolate crowd. In this respect it is valid to assume that Christ was being driven by compassion and his resolve to minister accordingly to each emerging need, irrespective of the reason for the people coming to him. Hence, the sick were healed and the hungry satisfied.

It may also appear that the reason Jesus fed these people was in preparation of the very hard teaching that, he wanted to declare of himself being the 'bread of life' (v.25ff). However, the context seems to suggest that his teaching about him being the bread of life was just to deal with their delusions in following Christ.

Consequently, Christ did not use his compassionate act of feeding the people as bait for his declaration of the message of conversion.

#### Missiological Results

The results of this feeding episodes are both immediate and thereafter. Within the immediate context there is great awe and praise (vs. 14 -15)

1. They acknowledged Jesus as the Prophet.
2. They wanted to make Jesus King.

As much as this was not the intension of Jesus, (for Jesus is more than a prophet), this acknowledgement is important to the extend that the people realized that they were not just dealing with an ordinary miracle worker, but someone enabled by God. It is no wonder that they want to make him king. Although the people had killed the prophets before Christ, but the acknowledgement of Christ as a prophet was of great missiological significance, especially in how the people would view his message.

But what happens in the later context is more fundamental. After experiencing this out pouring of food, and having eaten to their full, the people went searching for Jesus even after he had withdrawn to Capernaum (6:23-24). As much as Jesus confronts the people on their motive (v. 26), it is interesting to see the zeal that was shown by the people to find, Jesus. They had not only seen and heard him speak but they had experienced him with their physical appetites.

They may have failed to recognize the true sign in the miracle (who Jesus was, and the move from the physical to the concrete reality of revelation), but it is

certain that the people certainly saw the miracle, and in fact, 'their stomachs digested it' (Borchert 1996, 261 -262). The people truly missed the point 'because they were intent on continually filling their stomachs' but as Borchert (Ibid., 264) further observes, it was within this misunderstanding that Christ declares the first of the "I am" discourses in this section of the dialogue.

The search for Jesus –the bread giver, created an opportunity for Christ to declare the gospel truth about himself as the bread of life (6: 25 – 59). In deed, this was a hard teaching as the people so acknowledged (v. 60), but the fact that they had eaten bread provided by Jesus, made it possible for them to bear such a hard sermon. John records that 'many of the disciples deserted Jesus after this teaching (v.66). As Keener (2003, 664) observes 'it is not those who begin to follow Jesus, but those who persevere who remain his disciples' (6:60 -71).

There are two significant points emerging from this scenario. One, Jesus did not seek to first sort out who were truly following him before giving them food to eat. Two, it is evident that not all who were following him turned back after declaring to them who he truly was- the bread of life.

Of great interest to us here is to see that Jesus was equally concerned with the need of a crowd which appeared to be more of spectators or a nuisance than a people eager to listen to and embrace his teachings. He seems to communicate that as much as some may not necessarily add value to the ministry, but if they are hungry they need to be fed before we can think of how many of them are genuine. But it is also a reminder that as 'we pursue our Christian calling it is wonderful to 'realize that God loves us so much that he keeps driving us beyond

the material to the spiritual, so that we will partake of him, eat of his flesh and drink of his blood' (Hughes 1999, 183) .

However, the most dramatic result is the rejection of Christ and or his message. It is beyond normal expectations that a great miracle episode like this one ends with rejection (many disciples turned back). This clearly indicates that physical food did not lead to spiritual transformation and acceptance of the gospel message. Their stomachs may have truly experienced the miracle, but their hearts and minds needed more than fish and bread to fully comprehend who Jesus was and what he represented.

Thus, a mere feeding program or event to a hungry people does not guarantee their conversion. Food can only be used as a link to the people (and even then not as a bait), but not as a saving transformation agent. It can never replace the gospel message that is in God's enduring word. This is reflected in the sense in which Jesus considers the eschatological implications of such acts in Matthew 25.

#### **Feeding the Hungry for Eschatological Benefit (Matthew 25: 31- 46)**

In addition to situations where people are physically fed, the evangelist here presents an eschatological situation arising from showing compassion to the needy people, among them the hungry and desolate. Unlike the foregoing instances where Jesus actually feeds people, this particular situation declares the place of compassionate acts like feeding the hungry in the event of the day of Christ's second coming.

The act of feeding the hungry is therefore lifted from being merely a social action endeavor to an eternal investment for the giver of food and other works of compassion. It is clear in this 'teaching couched in the apocalyptic imagery... that hospitality will be the mark of identification for those who will be welcomed into the eternal kingdom' (Choge 1997, iii).

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" (Matt 25:31-46 NIV).

#### Context

Unlike the previous scenarios of feeding, this particular one is not a real situation, but rather a teaching and dramatic view of the events of the Day of Judgment. The apocalyptic element here may not necessarily be limited to the fact that the 'teaching was given in the context of hardships and persecutions' (Choge 1997, iii). It shows the real challenges that people have to face as they await the second

coming of the Lord, and the need for people not to neglect the hungry and desolate before the day of glorification.

However, there is no indication whatsoever that may suggest that extending works of compassion to the destitute leads to their conversion. Neither does involvement in works of compassion by a believer guarantee the benevolent believer an express entry into heaven. In other words, these acts of compassion such as feeding the hungry are neither a means to salvation nor a means to eternal inheritance. These deeds are simply a sharing of Christ that make him felt in whichever situation through relief.

Primarily, Jesus gives this teaching in the rubric of teaching about the kingdom of God, which marks his last teaching ministry that begins on his 'triumphal entry into Jerusalem' (Matthew 21). This is a few days before his death and resurrection. Hence it is a perfect situation for him to talk about both the present and the future realities of the kingdom.

The greatest demands that Christ lays upon the children of the kingdom, in this context (especially in chapters 24 and 25) are 'watchfulness' (24: 42; 25: 13) and 'faithfulness' (24: 45; 25: 21). It is in this light that the call to compassion is demanded. Indeed, the 5 parables which Matthew gives in this context show believers what Jesus expects of them in the time between his first coming and his last. 'He looks for his servants to be watchful, holy, ready to meet him at any time, faithful in the use of their gifts and opportunities, and above all full to overflowing with his self- forgetful, self-sacrificing love' (Green, P. 265). This context embeds compassion to faithfulness to God's people.



### Recipients

Since there was no food given in this situation, our recipients here refer to the people that Christ referred to as the 'least of these brothers' (v.40). Who are these people that Jesus had in mind, that deserve to receive compassion, such as food, drink and visitation?

The reference to "all Nations" when the son of man comes can refer to:

1. All human beings.
2. All Christians.
3. All non Christians and Jews.
4. All non Christians
5. All non Jews.

Some scholars however, see the recipients here limited to just a given category of people. For instance Via (1987) holds that the call for the act of feeding and the other mentioned acts could have been a traditional list of deeds of mercy and charitable action or could be a list of hardships such as those experienced by missionaries. In his view, the 'least of these brothers' is the disciples of Christ and missionaries who have suffered the mentioned needs, such as nakedness, imprisonment and lack of food. Incidentally this was the majority view in the history of the church.

In our view all people on the face of the earth are in view in this context. It is thus right as most of the commentators do, to relate 'these' with the call in Isaiah 58:7: "... share food with the hungry... [and] provide the poor wanderer with shelter..." (Carson 1991, 521). Indeed, as Hagner (1995, 742) observes, there is no indicator in this text that any group was to be excluded, since the command was quite clear- 'to preach the gospel to all nations'.

It is doubtful that Christ could limit such acts of mercy to be granted only to his disciples or missionaries. Blomberg (1992, 378)<sup>1</sup> observes that though a wider meaning of 'these brothers' was 'the minority view throughout church history'. It is probably the majority view today, especially in churches with a healthy social ethic. The reference to 'brothers' apply to 'any needy people in the world', especially those within our reach. We consider this view in our current study, not because of its apparent popularity today, but because it seems to be a better rendering of Christ's intention. This is strengthened by virtue of the fact that till then, Christ himself had ministered to the hungry people in diverse situations, without any discrimination. It would hence be a contradiction for him to expect his disciples to show partiality in their ministry of compassion.

Consequently, the recipients ("the least of these brothers") is herein rendered to mean 'everyone in need- whether Christian or not'. This suggestion remains the best reading of the text based on the fact that:

- It is in consistent with the command to ignore dysfunctions between insiders and outsiders and with Jesus' injunction to love even our enemies.
- There is nothing in 25: 31 – 46, taken by itself that suggests that the needy are exclusively Christians.
- The least of these most probably 'refers back to the immediately preceding narrative, not remarks on "little ones" (referring to his disciples) in earlier chapters (Allison 2004, 457 – 458).

### Missiological Significance

The primary purpose for mission is to lead people to follow Christ and enter eternity through faith. But here is given an indication on how one can grow that faith to impact lives before his final entry into the coming kingdom of God (v.36).

<sup>1</sup> Schweizer (1983) and Grassi (1981) also hold a similar view.

Thus, the feeding acts do not only become a witness of God's love that attracts people to Christ but also an affirmation of Christ-like believers. They are not only an identity of good people, but those who are in Christ, are ready to minister to Christ, and hence prepared to give an account of every ministry opportunity that came their way, and hence enter into the eternal kingdom.

It thus reveals a wider dimension and demand in missions- that the missionary has to maintain ministry to the Lord, which is among the key attribute of those who desire to enter into the eternal kingdom. But as it were, the declaration is revolutionary in the sense that the Lord is ministered to through acts of compassion to the needy such as the hungry. It is a declaration of his 'divine compassion and the infinite sympathy shown in his life on earth- the son of man has come to feel the sorrows and affliction of the children of man as though they were his own. He can therefore, in a very real sense refer to suffering men and women as his brethren' (Tasker 1961, 238).

Therefore whether "these brothers" are seen as 'active believers of any era, who face hunger, thirst and suffering for His sake' (Richards 2002, 627), or as all the needy people the result is not subject to diverse interpretations. It is certain that 'by feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming strangers into their homes, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and visiting the outcasts in prison, the righteous have all unwittingly been rendering service to their Lord' (Tasker 1961, 238). If not well interpreted the passage can easily (and has often done), lead to the reduction of 'the gospel to social action' especially as it gives the impression that to serve the poor is necessarily to serve Christ in them. Similarly it

may appear 'like justification by works, the very antithesis of Paul, Augustine and Luther' (Green 2000, 262 -263).

However, the acts of compassion here are not simply social actions but missiological and having benefits for both the giver and the recipients of the acts. The hungry gets his hunger dealt with as the giver positions himself for eternal residence in the presence of Christ- the master savior and giver of compassion. It can thus be inferred that 'those who are welcomed by God for 'inviting them in' do so not simply from a humanistic concern, but because they choose to take a stand with the outcasts who represent Christ' (Richards 2002, 627). Although Christ does not need our food and drinks, he shares in this ministry in the sense that he hunger with the hungry masses on earth and feels with whoever that is destitute. Hence we note, as Green (2000, 263) concludes, that 'the heart of Christianity [and Christian mission] is relationship with Jesus himself, which shows itself in loving, sacrificial care for others in particular the poor and needy'.

Therefore the call to feed the hungry and attend to every needy situation is a clear call to a holistic view and practice of the gospel. This can be advanced in three ways. Firstly, that there is need to reach out to both the spiritual and the physical needs of the people. Secondly, there is need for the missionary to be concerned with the eternity of those who are in the world and his own eternity after completion of the earthly ministry to both believers and non believers. Thirdly, Christian mission ought to be both Christ centered and people centered, by doing what Christ would have done in dealing with every emerging felt need such as hunger.

## Setting

The context of Acts 2 and 6 is the infant church that had just been born on the day of Pentecost. It is action within a new community of believers, eager to live out their lives in a way that is beneficial to fellow believers. Hence the feeding act here is primarily a concern for fellow believers, which they did with devotion that every person's need was met. The fact that 'they gave to anyone as he had need' is at the centre of a new community (of believers) committed to sharing and true fellowship and compassion, touching on the very basic act of sharing food.

Consequently, this practice became common and was essentially part of the Christian fellowship. This was a new way that most probably did not exist or was not as common before the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This is based on the fact that the Greek word used here *koinonia*, with the root idea being commonness or commonality, is not even found in the gospels. The way it is used here as is elsewhere in the new testament, denotes some kind of giving and sharing, either sharing something with someone (for instance in 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13 where it means an offering, collection or contribution), or sharing something which someone else is experiencing (Hughes 1996,48).

According to Hughes (Ibid., 50), 'the breaking of bread refers to the regular observance of the Lord's Supper because the reference comes between two religiously- loaded terms in verse 42 – fellowship and prayers. Bruce (1998, 73) also observes that 'the "breaking of bread" probably denotes more than the regular taking of food: the regular observance of what has come to be called the Lord's supper seems to be in view'.

## CHAPTER 5

## FEEDING THE HUNGRY IN ACTS AND THE EPISTLES

The acts of feeding the hungry, whether through miraculous provisions or through normal provisions does not cease with the ministry of Jesus and the twelve disciples. This practice permeates the missionary explosions in the book of Acts and the apostolic commendations in the epistles.

## Food Sharing as Christian Witness (Acts 2: 42 -47)

The early Christian community gave witness of their life in Christ in various ways. From the day of Pentecost onward the apostles and early Christian community as a whole lived a unique kind of life, different from those who were outside the church. Several practices were evident such as meeting together in the temple courts and in their houses. But of concern to us here is the common practice of sharing food (Acts 2), and the special attention that was given to food matters by the appointment of spiritual men to deal with issues of food for the desolate (Acts 6).

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:41-47 NIV).



Nevertheless, we observe that as much as the emphasis is on the Lord's Supper, this practice was being done in settings of sharing an ordinary meal together and based on the principle of sharing and giving to fellow believers in accordance with their needs. Practically, 'the apostles' fellowship and breaking of bread was a sharing of possessions to meet needs and of lives in common meals' (Larkin 1995, 61). If this sharing was exclusively limited to the Lord's Supper, we suppose that the sharing of the cup would most likely have been mentioned. This is therefore a setting in which the believers are not only committed to the sacramental requirements but also to the people's need of satisfaction.

#### Recipients

The recipients of the feeding acts here are exclusively believers. It was a purely in house thing- for the household of faith. There is no indication whatsoever that the believers extended this gesture to non-believers. Perhaps it is this sense of believer orientation that makes it hard for many scholars to see anything more than the Lord's Supper in this context.

But we see a communal responsibility targeting the family of believers, which was to be the mirror of the Christian faith and a witness to the outsiders about the love of Christ. It is perhaps of their exemplary character as a household of faith that contributed to them 'having favor with all people'.

#### Motivation

Though it is not clearly declared the motivation of sharing food and property in this context is the desire to minister to people's need and in a sense create a

community where an individual's need becomes a community need. As Hughes (1996, 71-72) rightly puts it, 'the overall atmosphere was one of care for one another'. Thus, 'the richer members made provision for the poorer and for a time no one had any need to complain of hunger or want' (Bruce 1988, 100 -101). Yet, it was not a show of might or affluence but a simple urge to share with those who would have been destitute in the Christian community.

The church was concerned with the whole person's need. 'When Christians sincerely care for one another's material needs, they want to minister to spiritual needs as well as bearing one another' (Hughes 1996, 71-72). The spiritual needs were met through teaching and prayer, while the physical ones were met through fellowship and especially the sharing of material resources such as food. It is essential to note that they did these with gladness and sincere hearts. They were hence not motivated by any short-term personal benefits but did all they did in sincerity.

#### Missiological Result

Luke records the outcome of this action as: 'Everyone was filled with awe', and 'many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles' (v.42). He further notes that they were enjoying the favor of all the people and 'the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (v. 47).

It is hard to separate which act led to these results but it is realistic to affirm that 'everyone was filled with awe not just because many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles', but because everything [including the sharing of food] worked together to bring a profound sense of God (Hughes 1996, 50). This is the same case in later situations like Acts 4:32- 35, where it is quite clear that

money was collected, they shared everything they had, and that resources were distributed to everyone as they had need. Thus, the people did not just have a sense of togetherness but they practically belonged and shared with one another.

In missiological terms, the caring and sharing fellowship becomes and continues being a witnessing fellowship- bears witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The witness to the outsiders cannot be over emphasized. It has been proven through the ages that 'when people see resurrection life in the church they come to believe the gospel. And when the church is like this, there is great care as its people expand their lives to help one another' (Hughes 1996, 73). This kind of life, though it may be inward as it was here, will definitely bear witness about the transforming power of the gospel.

There is not denying that 'the activity of God's grace was seen not merely in the preaching, but also in the way in which the members of the church were freed from material need' (Bruce 1988, 109). Therefore it is right to see the results from this mission context, as not only because of power (Larkin 1995,82). Other aspects beyond power greatly contribute to this exponential outcome in the expansion of the Kingdom of God. These include the new life of the believing community (Longenecker 1981, 311) and the spirit of generosity (Stott 1990, 106) exhibited by the community of believers.

It is only this kind of view that would generate such a highly spiritual approach to matters of food and dealing with the desolate in the church as is the case in Acts 6. If what mattered was the power, the apostles would have cared little with the laments about discrimination in food distribution. They would have simply pursued

the ministry of the word and prayer, without caring what was happening at the food tables. There is no doubt that what seemed like a simple social lament would become a critical feature in the church through the ages, till this day.

### **Administration of Food Tables in the Early Church (Acts 6: 1-7)**

Our focus here is basically the concern that the apostles showed in dealing with issues of food in this early Christian community that sought to remain a witnessing community.

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:1-7 NIV).

### **Setting**

The situation of this text is a dynamic spiritual church that is faced with a purely social challenge. The church is growing rapidly and it seems the twelve can no longer effectively handle all matters within the community of believers. The lamentation by the Grecian Jews about the treatment of their widows is based on the neglect in distribution of food. It is a context in which the very core of love and sharing in the household of faith is at risk of collapsing.

This neglect was due to the twelve embracing hands off approach on daily distribution of food or due to the deliberate action of those who were manning the tables to discriminate against the Grecian Jews. Whichever may have been the case; the situation was threatening and needed response. This is confirmed by the immediate response by the twelve, and by the fact that they involved the whole assembly in resolving the matter.

#### Recipients

At the center of this lament are a twin vulnerable group that was being discriminated against: one they were widows (destitute) and two, they were Grecian Jews (a minority group). The daily distribution was intended for the entire assembly of those who needed the daily food supply, but at the center of this saga is a minority group of widows in the greater assembly. Thus the decision taken here is mainly to address the concerns of the minority group

It is inevitable that if this issue had not been expeditiously handled it would have created a terrible precedence in dealing with the destitute and the minority or alien groups in the church that was soon breaking into the Gentile world.

#### Motivation

The motive of the apostles to act promptly in resolving the issue of daily distribution of food may have been two fold. It was the recognition that their primary responsibility to deal with the twin ministry of prayer and the word; hence, their resolve and pronouncement not to 'neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables'. However, they did recognize the importance of the

responsibility of serving tables and hence their determination to have this ministry discharged expeditiously by wise spiritual men.

By choosing to turn over this responsibility, the twelve were not minimizing the ministry of food distribution but were simply choosing to delegate one of the key components of church leadership. It was a worthy task that needed equally spiritual men and consensus in their selection. The consensus aspect is particularly unique in the New Testament context- all the believers were called together and given the task of choosing the managers of their issues.

There is absolutely no doubt that this is a matter that affected the entire assembly. However, one can only but guess why the twelve decided to involve the entire congregation in choosing the seven men that they needed to take over this responsibility. But it is credible to note that the qualifications were clear- 'full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom'.

#### Missiological Result

The outcome of this episode clearly stands out in verse 7: 'So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith' (Acts 6:1-7). Many scholars hold to a limited view that consider the result to have been exclusively based on the fact that the apostles now had enough time to pray and preach the word of God.

For instance Stott (1990, 123- 134) argues that this outcome was a 'direct result of the action of the apostles in delegating the social work, in order to concentrate on



their pastoral priority'. He further holds that 'the squabbling from the widows was a strategy of the enemy to distract the church leadership from prayer and preaching, and so expose the church to error and evil' (Ibid., 124).

As much as this is true, we cannot neglect the fact that the people who were chosen to handle these 'social work' had similar qualifications with those who were to do the 'pastoral work'- 'choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom' (v.3). We therefore hold that the resulting expansion of the church from this incidence was not exclusively because of the concentration of preaching and prayer by the apostles. But it is more sensible to conclude that this result was also enhanced by the fact that there were no more murmurings in the congregation about food issues, which created genuine unity and community that became a witness to the outside world.

It is unlikely that this result would have been possible with powerful preaching bathed with much prayers and fasting, if the squabbles and lack of proper administration to the matters of food and widows had persisted. Thus, the proper administration of these matters was significant in the growth of the church, though the preaching of the word and prayer by the apostles was the primary course. Both the primary and the secondary courses are valuable in consideration of the results given that these squabbles were strong enough to have split the church at this early stage, had they not been aptly dealt with.

### Feeding Enemies (Romans 12: 20)

The experiences at the infancy of the church (in Acts) show the establishment of a distinct ministry of feeding the hungry and desolate on a daily basis. Though one can not stop to think about the challenges of handling such a task, it is more comforting and bearable based on the fact that in the context of Acts, the ministry is essentially directed at the household of faith. It was therefore more of a family or community affair. There is no evidence that this duty extended beyond the household of faith, which the apostles were overseeing.

But there is an interesting twist as we come to Romans. The demand to feed the hungry goes beyond fellow believers or friends to include even enemies. Though the impact of this endeavor to the enemy is an equally tough reality for the enemy, the call for the believer to feed his enemy is fundamentally radical in view of what it really takes to share food with somebody outside the family boundaries. By all means this is not an easy or enjoyable call:

Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: *"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head"* (Rom 12:16-20 NIV) - italics mine.

#### Context

Romans 12: 20 finds its meaning in the wider context of the preceding verses of chapter 12 (especially from verse 9), which is basically a demand for love from transformed believers as they relate with other people in the community. It is basically love going out to others that is in view here. It is love going out to

whoever that needs it, irrespective of relationship with the giver. This is a perfect representation of Paul- the persecutor of Christians but now a missionary Christian; and a Pharisee of Pharisees but now an apostle to the Gentiles.

The position in which this call is made is one that goes beyond basic and comfortable expression of Christianity. Sharing food with a fellow believer or a friend may be hard to achieve but is not by itself a hard saying. But a call to feed an enemy creates an entirely new scenario.

This revolutionary view is amplified in the headings given to this section by various commentators. Dunn (1988, 705) entitles Romans 12: 1 -15, as 'The outworking of the Gospel for the redefined people of God in everyday terms'. Stott (1994, 317) addresses the same text as 'The will of God for change to relationships', while (Mounce 1995, 229), gallantly puts it as 'how righteousness manifests itself'.

The central reality in this context is the demand for a highly redefined way of responding to people's situations driven by God's righteousness. It is a situation that demands believers to show that they have truly been transformed through faith in Christ. This transformation requires that the believers show compassion to all who are in need. It is a perfect reflection of who the believers were before conversion (God's enemies), yet God still loved them, and redeemed them. It is perfectly fitting to conclude as Dunn (Ibid., 705-6) observes, that the ethic of Romans 12: 9-21 reflects the wisdom of the Israelites set within the context of Jesus' call for love, which knows no barriers, which is reinforced by the imminence of final salvation (13: 11 – 14), and where the teaching and the character of Jesus is clearly the key to eschatological life.

Thus the context of Romans 12: 20 rightly fit in the framework of a demand for 'love as the norm for social relationships' (Dunn 1988, 736). This does not just demand love for our friends, relatives or fellow church members. The concern and love demanded here spurns all comfortable spheres of associations into love for those who may be enemies. It is therefore a transformational state that does not only demand action but also a change in paradigm.

#### Recipients

The primary recipients as it were are the believers in the church at Rome that would experience great persecutions. It is a congregation of believers that were not just going to interact with their fellow believers but even their persecutors. These are saints that were to face vanquished enemies in need of food and drink, and who would, in natural terms think of nothing but revenge. Yet they are reminded that they are a transformed community that needs to have a very different view of situations. As it were, the recipients here are not carnal but highly spiritual, that they can see beyond the person and consider them as though they had not wronged them.

On a wider context, this would resonate quite well with all believers, particularly those facing persecution and resistance in their confession and profession of faith. To such believers the question of an enemy would be quite common, whether from within or from without.

Logically, a man's thinking against any enemy is revenge. Yet, here the believer is commanded not just to leave him to God, but also serve the same enemy: "if your

enemy is hungry feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink" (v-20).

Such a message can only make sense to people who though suffering persecution, are sound enough to extend mercy to their tormentors. Therefore, the recipients of this message are not sympathy seekers but people who know their position in the God of mercy and grace. Based on this, the recipients could be the entire church in the ancient Roman world and beyond, particularly where persecution was common. This call could have been quite relevant in later years in the church, such as during the widespread persecution of the believers in early centuries of Christianity.

Amid the widespread of conflicts and open residence to Christianity in the current dispensation, the message of Romans still speaks to the current Christian generation. For example in a country like Rwanda where there has been genocide, and northern Nigeria, where there are always tensions and killings between Christians and Muslims. In such cases it is likely that Christians will frequently encounter a hungry neighbor that is from an enemy tribe, or even meet a vanquished Muslim fundamentalist who may have been involved in annihilation of a Christian household.

This can be likened to the current situation in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where believers come face to face with vanquished instigators of the genocide and civil war that wiped a way their families. As they struggle with very basic issues such as whether to even shake their hands, it is only the message of Romans 12: 20 that can effectively challenge them to act with compassion even to the point of feeding them.

Generally, every believer has had a few enemies and may encounter many more on this journey of faith. It is this kind of call that can keep one focused and ensures that one does not derail off the track and act as carnal person would-revenge. It is a message to all Christians that wish to remain on the cutting edge-always acting instead of always reacting.

In every sense all believers, without exception are recipients of this radical demand. It resonates with the encounter of Christ with those who crucified him and later with Stephen and those who stoned him. There is no doubt that if Christ had survived the crucifixion, he would not have had a second thought on whether he would show compassion to any of those men who mocked and flogged him. He would give them something to eat and drink.

#### Motivation

The motivation for this call to feed the enemy rests in the commands given here-both the negative and positive commands: negatively, the believer is commanded:

1. 'not to curse',
2. 'not to revenge' and
3. 'Not to be overcome by evil'.

In contrast to the negative commands, the believer is positively commanded to:

1. 'bless those who persecute him',
2. 'do what is right in the eyes of everybody',
3. 'live at peace with everyone', and
4. 'Overcome evil with good'.



In both respects (the positive and negative), what is required of the believer is not something to consider or think about. It is not a matter of choice or preference but a must do. Without these imperatives it will not make much sense to call upon the believer to provide food and drink to the hungry and thirsty enemy. It is these essential demands that provide the foundation for feeding enemies.

Though the motive sounds strange, it is within Pauline theology and mission practice. As Stott (1994, 317) well observes, one of the notable features of Paul's teaching is his regular combination of 'doctrine with duty, belief with behavior... creed and conduct, insisting both on the practical implications of his theology and on the theological foundations of his ethic'. He therefore pushes the Christian to the point of looking at people with an attitude of what can I do for the person, rather than what can the person do for me.

Thus, the motivation in feeding the adversary is to show love to him, and not hold a grudge against him. Even though Paul declares that such benevolence will 'heap burning coals on his head', this condition is more of a result of the act than a motivation as it may be interpreted in some quarters.

Naturally speaking, almost everyone can easily be over taken by the urge to revenge when one encounters his enemy who is in need. It is perhaps of this realization that the Christians in Rome are reminded about God's commitment to avenge on their behalf. And since God was to deal with that, then apparently the *believer is left with no excuse or reason to hold anything against the enemy that would prevent him from extending compassion to the said enemy.*

In most African communities sharing of food with people who had disagreed was not expected until reconciliation or cleansing ceremony was done. This was particularly a must where there had been a shedding of blood. Strangers are more appreciated and ministered to than known enemies. In this respect it would have been quite strange to a typical African to easily comprehend such a command: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink'. And it is safe to assume that nobody will be able to take this unless he has been bathed in God's love and compassion.

#### Missiological Result

Paul leaves no doubt about the possible result of feeding an enemy. Romans 12: 20 first gives the command "feed him" then the result "you will heap burning coals on his head." The radical nature of this call to feed the enemy goes beyond the difficulty of accomplishing the command to the expected results.

By feeding the enemy the believer "heaps burning coals upon the enemy's head" which makes him feel "a burning sense of shame" (Mounce 1995, 241). But given God's love upon the world, these coals are 'intended to heal not to hurt, to win, not to alienate, in fact to shame him into repentance' (Stott 1994, 337). Thus this is a positive response to hostility by act of kindness which in turn wins the person over (Dunn 1988, 751). Such an act of kindness makes the enemy "ashamed and lead to his repentance" (Bruce 1985, 218). Thus, feeding the hungry enemy can lead to his conversion and transformation.

However, there is a possibility that giving of food and water to the enemy can become a means by which the enemy's guilt before the Lord will be increased, leading in turn to an increase in the severity of his or her judgment (if such actions do not lead to repentance). As Moo (1996, 788) observes 'Paul would mean that we are to act kindly towards our enemy with the purpose of making judgment more severe or that our good actions can have these results'.

The result to repentance or severe judgment is well grounded as opposed to the purpose leading to judgment. The result of severe judgment basically arises from the failure of the recipient to embrace and respond to the love given rather than from the intension of the person who shows compassion. Therefore, the result, whether repentance or increased guilt or severe judgment, is not determined by the giver of food but by the response of the recipient.

Thus, feeding an enemy that is hungry results into the enemy repenting and being won over. Being won over may lead to the said enemy accepting not only the person who has fed him but also his message. What this means is that acts of compassion extended to those around us, who may even be our enemies, are not merely materialistic but a patent message that can lead to inner change.

#### **Authenticating Faith Through Feeding the Hungry (James 2:14 –20)**

Generally, the day to day interpretation of Christian faith is usually put in highly coded and intellectual terms. Hence, to any common believer, Bible student, theologian or missionary, feeding of the hungry would perhaps not feature at all in the list of things that would be considered to validate a believer's faith. Perhaps on

the top of the list would be such big terms as soul winning, evangelism, righteousness and may be giving tithes and offerings.

Yet James brings a unique dimension here in as far as authentication of one's faith is concerned:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? (James 2:13-20 NIV).

#### **Context**

James points to a situation where believers are ready to share faith but not their physical endowments such as food and clothes. Being a general epistle James speaks to all believers of his time. It gives a picture of a community of believers, in which apparently some believed that all that one needed as a Christian is faith and nothing more. To such people then, distress of the poor who lacked even daily food or clothes was not an issue worthy their concern.

What concerns the author here is the easiness at which people in need are casually dismissed, as though their need in a non issue in the assembly of the saints. The preceding passage (James 2: 1 –13) shows the disdain for the poor seen both in the community disgrace treatment of their rights, while the passage under consideration shows 'the case of the individual community member who seek to justify this attitude by an insistence that 'faith alone' is all that matters'

(Martin 1988, 79). "Go in peace, get warm, and be filled with foods. This is the response that some in the church are making to other church members (and possibly to non members, if those are in view) who are obviously in need" (Ibid., 84).

It is common that 'when faced with human need there is a remedy, which restricts itself to kindly hopes and good advice: off you go now; try not to worry. Do keep warm and eat plenty... This, to James speaks not of a half faith or a sort of faith or a limited faith: it is dead' (Motyer 1985, 110). Though 'go in peace' may sound kind in our ears today, in the Jewish context as Moo (1985, 102) observes, "Go in peace" is a familiar Jewish form of dismissal. In other words, the situation is such that if you would mention or express your need of primary necessities like food in the assembly of brethren, you would be quickly dismissed. Perhaps the believers considered their time to be too precious to be wasted on simple material issues.

As much as the text refers to 'a brother or sister' or a friend (Living Bible), the demand to feed those who lack food is not limited to real siblings. Similarly, 'the context of the encounter is not limited to a particular assembly of Christians' (Richardson 2002, 130). Hence it is not an issue that perhaps just sought to address a one time problem in a single congregation. It is a call to all believers and permeates denominational, generational and geographical boundaries.

The believers' attempt to pursue faith and faith alone has apparently surfaced time and again since the early church to the 21<sup>st</sup> century church. This is particularly common where there is an emphasis on the life hereafter than on what one does with and in the current life here on earth. The context of James is thus not merely

an ancient early church situation, but rather a common scene in the church of Christ through the ages. It is particularly relevant in the current generation that is mired in deep individualistic tendencies that portray an attitude of 'everyone for himself and God for us all'.

#### Motivation

The motive of asking believers to be concerned with those who cannot afford food lies in the very declaration "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" The Living Translation puts it: 'Dear brothers, what's the use of saying that you have faith and are Christians if you aren't proving it by helping others? Will that kind of faith save anyone?' (v.14). Accordingly, the call here is both outward and inward, especially if the account of v. 13 is given due consideration. This verse declares that 'judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!'

This can hence to be taken as a call to feed those who are hungry and in desolation so as to preserve one's own faith since these acts of mercy will be handy at judgment time. Essentially it is a call for practical faith, leading to true religion. Simply put, it is a way of one preserving ones own soul through serving others; and especially showing compassion to them in their desolation, such as hunger and nakedness.

Hence it is a perfect case and call for the theological unity of faith and deeds. This is a clear declaration that the purity and perfection of faith is not in our confession but much more in our profession. It is a call for the believer to live his confession



through alleviation of suffering to those in need. James has thus far advocated for: maintaining faith in the midst of trials, putting faith into practice by being doers of the word and “an example of practicing ones faith: impartiality (Stulac 1993, 107). Certainly, this text can be held as the climax of James’ plea for a “pure religion” that vindicates itself in action (Moo 1985, 99).

Certainly James does not intend to contradict the justification by faith alone (a popular theology in Pauline writings) in leading people to Christ. Indeed, ‘the contrast is not between faith and works, but between a faith that has works and a faith that does not have works’ (Motyer 1985, 104). Essentially, ‘the key here is how he juxtaposes faith and work for a purpose of showing that deeds (or works) demonstrate the genuineness of faith’ (Richardson 2002, 42). James basically lifts faith from a mere religious abstraction into a concrete reality of Christian profession and practice.

This is an affirmation that genuine faith should be demonstrated through concrete deeds such as feeding the hungry and ministering to every state of desolation, such as nakedness. But this is not just a religious duty but a practical venture that closely connects ‘mercy (pity) and helpful actions for the poor’ (Richardson 2002, 130). Deeds of compassion such as feeding the hungry or dressing the destitute makes one’s faith beneficial to others and become a true witness.

The expectation put on those who have been justified – to give daily food and clothes to those who are in need of such provisions is more of a validation of one’s faith, and not a way of gaining faith or salvation. It is a call to those who have already gained entry into the realm of mercy by faith and not a prescription to

those who want to become believers. Thus, ‘Paul says works cannot bring us to Christ. James says after we come to Christ deeds are imperative’ (Hughes (1991, 108). Certainly, James expects that faith will surely lead to actions to meet others’ material needs (Stulac 1993, 109). The two do not therefore contradict one another but rather one emerges from the other. Faith is foundational but can only benefit the needy through works of compassion.

The needs that James refers to- clothes and daily food’ v.15 is quite close to how Jesus taught his disciples to pray in the Lord’s Prayer- Give us today our daily bread (Matt 6:11). Therefore it resonates well to assume that true faith is to bring daily benefits not only to those who believe but also to those in their surroundings, especially fellow believers. This is particularly so, as the context in James seems to refer to fellow believers.

A hungry brother or sister needs much more than just powerful, encouraging or comforting word. Some food for his stomach and clothes for his body will make him truly experience the power of faith. Precisely, as Stulac (1993, 111) concludes: ‘James’ illustration calls for the active giving of material help for people lacking clothing and food. The deeds James especially has in mind for a life of faith, then, are not the keeping of religious ritual but the acts of love commanded in “Christ’s royal law”- love your neighbor as yourself’. As it has been candidly put by Richardson (2002, 130 -131): “A word of blessing without an act of blessing is like the promise of salvation without the saving act of God in Christ”.

## Missiological Results

The fact that James declares that one's faith is dead if he does not do such foundational acts like feeding the hungry in their midst, makes ministering to the poor a mission to oneself. This is because such works of compassion authenticate one's faith and thus justify the believer, in respect to giving attention to all human needs. The justification comes by the fact that people will not only hear and see one's confession of faith, but they will physically experience the fruit of that confession. Consequently, their faith will not die but continue to be alive through practical effect in people's lives. In this light, feeding the hungry and provision of shelter (clothes) forms the core of the ministry of compassion.

Justification of the believer who feeds the hungry and clothes the naked is a fascinating result. Feeding the hungry goes beyond a mere social action of feeling empty stomachs with food. It is both a testimony to the world and also provides a foundation for one's own right standing before God. Rightly put in whichever context, if believers don't feed the hungry in their midst then they essentially declare the death of their faith. As a result they can no longer be able to please God and their religious confessions become ineffective in changing lives.

Put in positive terms, responding to the needs of the hungry does not just make things right between the giver and the recipient but also with the Lord, who is the author and finisher of our faith. This is based on the fact that such action ensures that faith lives on and sustains life. Though this does not preclude other faith building ventures such as prayer and fasting, the declaration here results into a faith that is consumable by others and a faith that preserves other people's physical lives.

## Providing for Widowed Relatives (1 Timothy 5: 3 -8)

The declaration in this text demystifies even further, the views that have persisted in some church and theological circles that James and Paul held divergent views on the subject of works in relation to faith and justification. The person that fails to feed the destitute widow that is supposed to be under his care is declared to be not a Christian at all. The pronouncement here resonates with the common adage- 'charity begins at home'. Paul declares:

Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. Give the people these instructions, too, so that no-one may be open to blame. *If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever* (1 Timothy 5: 3-8 NIV)-Italics mine.

The apostle declares not only the responsibility to the widows, but also qualifications or conditions of those widows who must be assisted. As Stott (1996, 131) notes: 'There are both material and spiritual conditions of eligibility for the churches maintenance of widows. The material condition is destitution and the spiritual godliness'. Destitution is critical in view of the call for compassion to the hungry and destitute.

Our focus here is on the responsibility to widows rather than the qualification and character of the widows. Paul is categorical that widows who have children and grandchildren deserve to be supported by them. Though he does not outline which kind of help, it is certain that such help consisted of the daily requirements for one to live, primarily food shelter and protection. There is no doubt that as it is in the African context, widowhood in the New Testament times automatically created a

situation of hopelessness due to lack of sufficient daily needs such as food.

Therefore the call to believers here is to ensure that the widows in their midst were fed and clothed.

It is noteworthy that Paul gives a command to Timothy: 'give these instructions to people- so that they may not be open to blame' (v. 7). Definitely these were not instructions to merely confess faith, but a call to practically care for the desolate (widows) in their midst. The consequence of failing to do this as contained in verse 8 is the focus of our consideration- 'if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever'.

As in the previous contexts, the responsibility of assisting the desolate here is not an option but a requirement. It is even raised a notch higher and made to stand as an indicator of who true believers are. Those who do not care for their families, 'especially their immediate families, have denied their Christianity and do not even measure up to the socially accepted norms of familial responsibility' (Mounce 2000, 284). Essentially, the Christian is reminded that such acts of compassion to the desolate are not even exclusively Christian but rather a family responsibility. In other words, it is a duty that even non believers are aware of and do undertake.

Failure to feed a relative that is a widow tarnishes both the individual and corporate faith. As Mounce (2000, 286) further observes the faith here can have both a personal and a corporate sense. For this reason those who do not accept familial responsibilities have disowned their own personal faith, and they have also disowned the Christian faith in that they have brought reproach upon it- to the

extend that the Christian is compared with an infidel. It is thus the corporate sense of faith that is in focus in this call to minister to widows both in the church and family set up.

The neglect of providing for the desolate especially in the family is a clear denial of the faith and makes even a pagan better than such a believer who fails in that noble responsibility. It makes much sense to consider 'the failure of Christians to care for their own loved ones as a more flagrant fault than the same trait would be in an unbeliever' (Lea & Griffin 1992, 148). The pagan can be considered to be better in two senses. One, it is possible that even people who are not believers care for their desolate members of the family. Two, even if the pagan would fail to do so, he would be much better because he has not received the light that is enshrined in the Christian faith, which all believers have experienced.

#### Motivation

Paul's purpose in writing these instructions may be portrayed in diverse ways. Some scholars see his purpose being 'to reprimand those families who neglected their own widows' (Lea & Griffin 1992, 148). Others like Stott (1996, 131) see this as Paul's pronouncement of a 'biblical warrant for a life assurance policy, which is only a self imposed savings plan for the benefit of our dependants'.

But clearly standing out is the declaration of the believer's fundamental obligation to extend works of compassion to their kinsmen. This may not necessarily be driven by the eternal reward of doing that, but much more as a requirement for authentic faith- it is religion in practice in ones immediate sphere of influence, the family.



In actual fact, the expectation here is for the believers to take the lead in ministering compassion to those in need. It is a contradiction of sorts for anyone to claim to be a believer yet not be able to even just live up to standards of decency and familial responsibilities common even to non believers. The solemn call is that believers have a clear responsibility to minister to those people who are right within their family influence. Such an action is not only an expression of faith but also a sign of gratitude and primarily a familial responsibility.

#### Missiological Results

Though not openly stated, the result of these benevolence acts is clearly embedded in the reason and consequence of doing this. There is a two fold result in extending compassion to widows within the family context.

Primarily, Paul declares that ministering to widows is practical religion and is pleasing to God. This is similar to James' edict in James 1:27: 'Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to after orphans and widows in their distress....' In this respect, caring for this vulnerable group will result in to practical Christianity. That people will not only hear about how God has loved us but will experience this very love from us as we minister to their needy situations. *And more fundamentally is the fact that when this happens, it is not only the recipients that will be happy, but even God will be pleased. We can envision many more benefits and results, embedded on God being pleased with men.*

A secondary result of acting right in relation to the widows is the fact that believers will not be open to blame. As a matter of fact, everything that happens in Christian

households and extended families is always on the spotlight of the public eye. This is why in our own present age one is often likely to hear non believers declining to come to faith because in their view they are better than those who 'claim to be Christians'; or perhaps some will plainly say *'if Christianity means being like so and so, then I would rather remain as I am'*. Thus, when believers act compassionately in very basic matters of benevolence in their own families, it leads to blamelessness. Irrespective of the situation or generation, the gospel message will be easy to propagate and more acceptable when those who have embraced it are free of blame. In this respect the trend is: those who show compassion to widows within their families will be blameless, since God will be pleased with their action.

What this means is that acting right in relating to such matters of providing for the desolate in our families will affirm ones faith in the God of compassion. A commitment to faith by believers becomes a strong witness to those outside. The outsider can observe the power and benefits of faith and draw a clear distinction between believers and unbelievers.

#### Summary of Feeding the Hungry in the New Testament

The teaching and practice of feeding the hungry and destitute spans the entire New Testament. These instances stand at the very center and at the climax of Christ's teaching in the gospels; they are at the turning point of the infant early church in Acts; and clearly stand out in the imperatives of both the Pauline and general epistles. Therefore, matters of food, faith and Christian witness are not substitutes but complements in Christian living and witness.

A summary review of the acts of feeding the hungry in the New Testament clearly points to the diverse categories of the recipients, and the underlying assumptions in the demand for believers to undertake this work of compassion to those who are in need of food and drink.

#### Categories of Those Fed in the New Testament

Though the common denominators in all the recipients of food are hunger and desolation, the feeding acts are not restricted to just a particular kind of people. Indeed, almost every instance of feeding and a command to feed provides a unique kind of group, be it in size, condition or location.

Several distinctive groups of people stand out as recipients to the New Testament instances and demands for feeding the hungry.

#### ***The Crowds***

These were a blend of diverse characters, who would have been subjected to a thorough screening exercise in our day, for them to even just move closer to the savior. The crowds included those who brought the sick to be healed, those who were healed, those who came to listen to Jesus, and those who were simply curious about his miraculous performances.

It is a conglomeration of both the purposeful and aimless, both the sick and the healthy, both the idlers and those who had a particular mission. Not all were interested in receiving the true message of Christ. But when time of feeding came,

they were counted and ministered to, irrespective of their initial motive of following Jesus.

#### ***Desolate Believers in the Church***

This forms the majority of the target recipients of food in Acts of the Apostles and the epistles. In some cases like in Acts 6, it refers to daily ministry of providing food to the needy members of the assembly and especially the widows. Other occurrences, especially in the epistles point to provision of food to fellow believers as need may arise, whether they are widows or not. It is a need based service to members of the household of faith.

In this respect, every member of the church that was in need of food deserved the assistance of fellow believers who were endowed with food and any other material substance. For example James calls for the ministry of food and other material needs to all believers that are within the congregation or neighborhood, particularly those who have made their needs known. No request for food by a fellow believer is too simple to be dismissed.

#### ***Household Members***

The Bible does not in any way spiritualize the issue and need for food. Neither does it move the responsibility of feeding vulnerable and desolate groups like widows from the family to the church. It is quite clear that though the church is called upon to minister to people like widows, it would be much more preferable if the issue was addressed at the family level by the able family members.

Family members have an obligation of supplying food to their relatives who are under privileged. Those in need of food in a family setting deserve to be supplied with food and other necessities as a matter of duty. It is only if the family members cannot be able to provide that such a case can become a church responsibility.

Hence, the call in the New Testament to feed the hungry believers does not provide an excuse for people to neglect needy members of their families or leave them at the benevolence of the church. Under normal circumstances, the family ought to be first line of dealing with hunger and desolation.

### ***Strangers and Enemies***

In what we have considered as the eschatological events relating to feeding the hungry (Matthew 25), one fact that stands out is that some of the people that need this act of compassion may actually be strangers. In this context strangers are possible recipients of food and other forms of hospitality. It is no longer feeding only those who belong to your family, be it the household of faith or the blood relatives. In a candid perspective, the scriptures thus point to the inherent truth that food is not for relatives or brothers in the Lord; food is for the hungry- the known and the unknown.

Though this whole category explicitly points to the need for inclusiveness in showing compassion by feeding those who are hungry, the call in Romans presents perhaps the most interesting and difficult group. Without any exception, the call to give food and drink to ones enemy generates a difficult category to deal with. Under normal circumstances, you do not share food with your enemy. In

purely human perspective, an enemy is better off starved or even dead. Yet the call is 'if he is hungry feed him'. In essence the Bible declares the enemy better off alive than dead, or if he has to die, let it not be due to hunger or desolation but God's own judgment.

### **Salient Assumptions in Biblical Feeding of the Hungry**

In consideration of feeding the hungry in the current mission context, it is worthwhile to note certain hypotheses that stand out in the feeding of the hungry in the New Testament context. The list may not be exhaustive here but the following suffice based on the reviewed texts.

Firstly, though Jesus' feeding encounters are exclusively through miraculous provisions, he does make it clear that the Christian must deliberately choose to share with and feed those who are hungry. Essentially he is not demanding that Christians struggle to get provisions for the crowds but they should simply, as a matter of principle share whatever they have with those in need. Whether there is a miraculous provision or just the normal provisions through the seasons or personal earnings the hungry need to be remembered and be ministered to with food and drink.

Secondly, Jesus does not lay an unbearable burden upon the believer but what is practical and possible for everyone. Even in his intimation of how one's response to matters of food can influence his eternal destiny, the requirement for the believers is nothing more than just the ordinary day to day living in any neighborhood. It is hence not a call to philanthropy as a designated career but



rather demands sharing as a way of life. It is therefore not a call to do missions through provision of food but rather provision of food in mission as one encounters the both the devastation of sin and hunger.

Thirdly, the consequences of not doing this simple act of compassion are too heavy for any serious Christian to ignore. It is quite clear especially in Acts and the epistles that failure to minister to food issues either represents or leads to:

- i) stagnation of the mission work
- ii) denial of faith or defacing religion (Christianity)
- iii) shame/blame to the believers

Essentially, where there is a deliberate neglect to minister to the hungry and desolate, such a people can no longer claim to be missionaries, or even claim to be religious. In other words they have backslidden. As James categorically declares a faith that does not feed the hungry and give a drink to the thirsty, to be dead. Similarly, Paul declared those who neglect this compassionate ministry are worse than unbelievers. As a matter of fact the spot given to those who fail to offer compassion leaves no doubt about God's desire for the hungry and desolate to be fed.

Fourthly, arising from the above consequences, it emerges that giving food to the hungry and desolate is tantamount to directly ministering to the Lord and come with eternal benefits to the giver.

It is dramatic that though the scripture declares "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food- but God will destroy them both..." (1 Corinthians 6: 13 NIV). The act of filling empty stomachs with food points to both missiological and eternal

benefits. More exciting is the fact that anyone can partake of it since the value does not lie in the type of food offered or in the kind of stomach filled but in the very benevolent decision to relieve the recipients' suffering from hunger.

person to extend such benevolence to another person that may not only be a personal enemy but also a foe to the entire community.

## CHAPTER 6

### MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRENT MISSION PRACTICE

It is evident that the situation in Africa now demands for a practical mission paradigm that is founded on the Scriptures and also fully driven by compassion that is truly informed by African perspectives on material matters such as feeding the hungry. No doubt, both the scriptures and the African worldview provide sufficient ground and mandate to fully engage in feeding the hungry and destitute, both in mission and in day to day Christian living, which hold massive missiological impact.

The role of such acts in a continent mired in civil wars and tribal conflicts cannot be over emphasized. In countries that have undergone such conflicts, there are still thousands of internally displaced people and resettled (former) refugees who may have hurt one another during the wars, yet they have now to live and share together.

The missiological impact of what would otherwise be a simple act of giving food to an enemy cannot be under estimated. This is based on the fact that it must begin with forgiveness on the part of the giver and the fact that in the African philosophy, 'food is life'. For instance given the genocide experiences in a country like Rwanda when a Tutsi decides to give food to a desolate Hutu, such an act cannot be taken as just another simple act of food sharing. It takes a truly congenial

### Appreciation of Biblical Teaching

The proper appreciation of the Scriptures is particularly mandatory because it is the foundation upon which every Christian practice and missionary strategy is anchored. It also provides the precedence and demand for compassionate mission particularly to the hungry and destitute. On the other hand, the African worldview marks out the steps towards an acceptable and eventful compassionate mission. The African way of life strongly advocates for concern for the vulnerable people in the community and has definite structures and practices that ensure this is done.

Moreover, pursuance of this approach to mission practice can find sufficient authority in the available evidence that this practice is bearing fruit wherever it is already being practiced. This is beside the overwhelming missiological results in all such events in the scriptures. It is therefore practical and mandatory to allow the scriptures to practically witness to all and sundry in the dusty African villages, through reaching out to the hungry and destitute.

It is clear this far that the very scriptures that give us the mandate to evangelize the nations does at the same time demand that we offer compassion. Hence, seeking to engage in feeding the hungry becomes a true fulfillment of the full gospel. This realization is critical in overcoming the fear among many evangelicals

of getting involved in social action, while at the same time making the gospel relevant in the current African situation.

### **Overcoming Evangelical Fear**

Although it is always recommendable to take precautions in mission practice especially when dealing with matters that can easily derail the gospel message, the evangelical Christians have sufficient ground to overcome fear of falling into the social gospel syndrome or producing bread Christians. Many mission agencies may have failed to balance between proclamation and social action, but this does not justify the church to remain in a permanent state of paralysis. The Bible is explicitly about the place and the impact of getting involved in the compassionate work of ministering to the hungry and those facing similar needs.

There is need to arise to the positive side of the bread story based on a faithful appreciation of biblical teaching. The New Testament candidly show that Jesus did it successfully, the Apostles managed it quite well, the early church comfortably made it a way of life, and other mission agencies have effectively used it in our own current context and produced wonderful results. All these still remained spiritual and did not become irrelevant or ineffective on the spiritual front of the gospel.

### **Jesus and His Disciples**

Jesus successfully mixed works of compassion with the true proclamation of the scriptures. He did it even when the numbers were threatening and even when he was aware that many of them would not necessarily believe the gospel message

even after filling their empty stomachs. He did it not to draw crowds nor show his might but simply as a show of compassion.

The fact that even many of those who ate the food left him when they couldn't stomach his gospel message blurred neither his message nor his mission. The drive and demand for a compassionate mission practice was still at the centre of his teaching of the values of the kingdom of God laid upon those who would believe in him. Apparently Jesus could assume the fact that the believers will preach to the lost but made sure to mention that some of the salient acts that he would consider at his second coming is whether the believers ministered to the hungry and destitute.

### **The Apostles**

When need arose for food in the early apostolic church, the apostles did not spiritualize the issue, but instead sought the necessary material solution. This is exemplified in the ministry of the apostle Paul, whom we see raising funds for the hungry stricken believers in Jerusalem. It did not demean his apostolic status. Neither did it distract him from declaring the powerful saving message of Christ. He did put the grace of giving towards this relief mission at the same level with the endeavor for faith, knowledge, earnest and love (2 Corinthians 8: 7).

The call for excellence in the grace of giving to relief the saints in Jerusalem from hunger cannot be down played especially coming from a missionary of Paul's caliber. In Paul's view, they were not merely doing this to show their eagerness to



help the distressed saints in Jerusalem, but were convinced that such an offering was 'honoring the Lord himself' (2 Corinthians 8: 19).

James affirms that food matters are not that simplistic because they form part of the pointers to whether one's faith is still alive or is dead. In light of the truth in James, the much acclaimed faith status such as apostolic or prophetic faith may come to naught without practical application of faith through offering compassion to the hungry and destitute. In view of this, one becomes a true apostle, prophet, pastor or Christian by attending to matters of compassion. Consequently, one cannot claim to be a missionary or evangelist in this hunger stricken African continent if he fails to pay attention to matters like food sharing.

Essentially feeding the hungry enhances ones faith status and standing before God. Missionaries should therefore yearn for opportunities to minister to the social needs of the people instead of fearing that such activities may turn their mission into mere social action. Such fears should not arise as long as these actions are packaged as part of the missionary obligation and not as an extra task in mission. Any extra activities have possibilities of causing distractions in the main task. And as long as works of compassion like feeding the hungry will be viewed as extra burdens in missions, there will always be fears and excuses as to why 'real missionaries' should not entangle themselves in these 'civilian matters'.

#### The Early Church

Though they did not want to directly get involved in the ministry of serving tables (Acts 6), they still took initiative in how they wanted the ministry of food to be

contacted so that it does not affect the preaching of the gospel. The requirements for those who were appointed as 'food ministers' were equal to those who would later be appointed as deacons: Apart from being filled with the Holy Spirit, they were to be 'full of wisdom' (Acts 6: 3) and able to 'keep hold of the deep truths of the faith' (1 Timothy 3: 9).

The current church in Africa and those who seek to evangelize the African continent have the example of the early church and its founders- the apostles in approaching matters of compassion without any reservations or regrets and especially feeding the hungry and the destitute. Taking the right decision on food matters led to spontaneous growth of the early church. And it is evident that throughout the ages, ministering to the physical needs like hunger has always led to great appreciation of the gospel message.

As we have noted, the resulting expansion of the church after the choosing of the seven to deal with food matters in the early church (Acts 6), was not exclusively because of the concentration of preaching and prayer by the apostles. The growth was also a direct result to the appropriate response to the social challenge that threatened the church. The growth would never have been possible amid continued squabbles and lack of proper administration to the matters of food and ministry to the destitute (widows). Thus, the significance of the proper administration of these social matters in the growth of the church cannot be taken for granted.

### Welfare and Relief in Global Missions Today

Debate on whether there is a 'pure gospel' and a 'social gospel' which unfortunately still persists in many missiological settings should be vanquished. The practice in evangelical mission practice should not at all view evangelism and social action (works of compassion) as two competing opposites. 'Whether or not evangelism is the same as social action, there should never be any 'competition between evangelism and social responsibility' (Perkins 1993, 83).

As a matter of fact, 'the battle over evangelism versus social action in church's mission is both wasteful and unnecessary' (Yamamori 1987, 9). Given the complexities of our day, especially in Africa, presence and actions are essential to the proclamation of the good news of Jesus. Thus, among other things, the message in mission ought to entail wholesome care; provide services, support economic development, and pursue justice (Perkins 1993, 83).

However, if the church has to change the society and leave a lasting impact it has to appreciate and pursue relief and welfare activities as being part and parcel of the current and future global mission. Deliberate effort is required for effective shift in mission practice, since as Ewert (1987, 7) rightly argues, the change process does not only entail knowledge and reflection but must be accompanied with a desirable decision and action.

Nevertheless, involvement in relief and welfare as mission, demands great balance of theology and action. As Perkins observes,

Some people who think about and do Christian community development have made a perfect community their goal, which is a utopian dream. Other Christians take the opposite attitude, the "lifeboat" mentality. The

world is on its way to hell and there is nothing to be done to make it better; we simply have to snatch as many people out of it as we can by preaching (1993, 89).

Without any doubt, this is the challenge that tends to add fuel to the raging debate of the supremacy of evangelism versus social action. It remains true that an attempt of constructing a perfect society here on earth is impossible, but we cannot ignore God's commands to be salt and light to the world and to care for orphans and widows with the resources we have (Ibid., 90). As Perkins further notes (Ibid., 127), sharing of resources is a desirable way of pursuing justice, and should be considered as fundamental to global mission today.

Hence Christians who have been blessed with plenty of resources in this age have a clear obligation of expressing thankfulness to God by building up the weak and needy in God's kingdom and creation. This therefore demands a holistic view and approach to global mission in this century and beyond. But the begging question still remains 'how can we achieve this divine goal?'

It is evident that even with a well articulated theology on relief and development most evangelical churches and fellowships are yet to implement this 'balanced evangelical theology' that addresses both the spiritual and physical human needs. There is therefore an evident need for evangelicals to put their 'evangelical theology on relief and development into meaningful action, within their congregations and into the mission field. In our assessment, so far there is sufficient theology but insufficient practice in some quarters while in other quarters there is insufficient theology hence an accompanying lack of practice.

### **Contextualization: Aligning Biblical Mission Practice with African Perspective**

Based on the survey through the African thought and practice in relation to sharing food, through the African mission field and through the Scriptures, we observe, very clearly that feeding the hungry and desolate has profound missiological implications in the current African mission context. Neglect for the hungry and desolate will have devastating impact both on the gospel message and on the messengers of that gospel.

Like the universal church, the African church 'as the interim eschatological community should be devoid of isolation and selfishness (or independence), but a community that is joined together and glorifies God in all aspects' (Bosch 1991, 166). These aspects need to include both the spiritual and the physiological needs such as the alleviation of hunger.

Africa is on the whole a hungry continent and the need for food in majority households is essentially a priority. But beyond the mere need for food, there is fascinating philosophy in the African thought that draws a very thin line between life and food. As many communities would put it *'food is life'*. Therefore whoever gives food is regarded as a giver or supporter of life- as a related Bukusu saying goes: *'he who gives you food wishes you well and is worthy of true friendship'*. This is the context within which the African mission paradigm must begin progress and end.

A critical evaluation of the African practice of feeding the hungry and desolate reveals a very close perspective to the teaching on the same in the New

Testament. Essentially greater effort towards a contextualized approach is more on how best to be practical in the delivery of the gospel in view of the current African context, than on struggling to find out whether it is biblical. Failure to take to put in practice the biblical teaching on feeding the hungry and desolate will be an indirect way of erecting impediments to the true appreciation of the gospel message.

Feeding the desolate people such as orphans and widows stands at the core of most African communities. This is one of the strongest family values that communicate love and care so that such people can live though their 'hope' may have died when their loved primary providers departed. In this regard any effort to transform the traditional African community through the gospel of Christ must of necessity practice some of this African family values like provision of food to the vulnerable groups in the target communities. This is particularly critical in contexts where whole adult populations have been wiped away by HIV Aids or where the traditional family has broken down due to urbanization.

Primarily the target should be to transform the African family unit. It is inevitable that if families are changed, the whole community will change. It is also inevitable that an African church founded as a family of believers will become stronger than if it is seen as just a group of believers. This African communion found in a traditional African family provides the assurance that compassionate acts like feeding of widows and orphans will be highly appreciated and may lead to proper appreciation of the gospel. But as the call in 1 Timothy, this act of compassion need to begin with individual believers ministering to their own widows and orphans in their households.



Based on the African concept of sharing, the gospel message needs to be preached as something that can be practically shared. This calls for the gospel propagator to show real concern for both the spiritual and the socio-economic needs. The gospel will be more embraced by those who experience it in action and those who may see the gospel message as a sort of insurance against challenges such as hunger and other types of devastations. The call of the missionary to the real African context is therefore not merely sharing the word of God, but also sharing his own life and his possessions.

In consideration of authentic African philosophical practices, it is apparent that a typical African does not separate the socio-political and the economic aspects of life from the religious. For this reason, it is more considerate to encounter the African mission context from a belief point of view, but always target to incorporate the practical aspects, especially relating to the day to day life in the community such as feeding the hungry and desolate. It is clear that perhaps the best way to present the gospel to Africans is to present it as 'a sharing of life'. Thus the gospel message needs to be packaged and presented as life and not a principle to life.

The principles of collectivism and sharing provide a solid foundation of propagating the gospel of the kingdom of God in any African community. The gospel message is all about love and calls upon all men to come together into one body- the church. The collectivism principle as espoused in African traditional religions is thus critical in the understanding of the church as the body of Christ and the truth of the gospel as a sharing of life.

It is therefore important that evangelists closely study all social institutions and practices in the African context, since there are many of them that are fundamental in the expression and understanding religious ideas. For example among the Bukusu a common aspect as food sharing is deeply institutionalized and takes an essential place in most ceremonies. For example, there are occasions when families come together just to eat together, as a way of strengthening their family ties.

Whatever the case may be, propagating the principle of brotherhood and communion among Africans does not make sense in the absence of sharing material goods. In the African philosophical thought and practice, communion cannot be separated from some sort of consummation. Hence missionary attempts to proclaim the community or brotherhood of believers as espoused in the scriptures will be more sensible and appreciated if they will not be merely idealistic, but fully reinforced with practical sharing. And this may go beyond the simple sharing of food to a wider context of relating with their source of livelihood such as livestock issues among pastoralist communities like the Maasai.

As we have observed, one of the fundamentals in the African philosophy of compassion and sharing is the genuine concern for people in need. This is one of the central ethical demands in traditional African life and practice. What makes this significant in relating this thought to the biblical demands of the same, is the fact that in most African communities this ethic is not only limited to friends, colleagues and relatives, but extends to even strangers. We have also noted that sharing of food is one of the primary ways of concern for the needy in the African

context. Thus, compassion begins with the readiness to feed that person that is hungry and in depressing condition.

It is valid by any estimation that sharing of food stands at core of most African communities, which explicitly and implicitly point to an underlying assumption that you should not expect hungry people to perform or get involved in any fruitful venture. The high value in the gospel should therefore be expressed by preparing the hearers to appreciate its importance. This can only happen when the missionary considers matters such as feeding the hungry as part and parcel of the gospel and not as being unnecessary impediments to the missionary work.

#### Practical Examples: the Bukusu, Lobola, Malagasy and Rwandese

Our findings in chapter three on the philosophy of the above communities give a clear indication that feeding the hungry among these communities will lead to positive response. This is irrespective of whether the feeding activity is simply done as a social activity to alleviate hunger or as a mission activity.

In our view, from the Bukusu saying: *'He who offers you food wishes you well and wants you to live longer'*, we can deduce that any attempt that does not consider feeding the hungry will most likely be dismissed by the community. This arises from the fact that giving food to the hungry and destitute is conceived as a gesture for wishing the person life and not death (Wepukhulu 2005). In this respect, the concern for the hungry and the desolate clearly communicates an important principle that is critical in the appreciation of the gospel by the Bukusu and people with a similar orientation.

For this reason, feeding the hungry as part of mission to the Bukusu will resonate well with them and may result to greater response. This is especially so given that decisions and tales imparting moral values are usually shared almost exclusively after the recipients are fed. It is assumed that a person with an empty stomach cannot effectively receive such deep learning. In the event of the people being targeted with the gospel being hungry, they may not give much thought to the gospel especially if the communicator shows no concern to their devastation.

In a similar manner, it may appear an open contradiction for the evangelist to declare Jesus the 'bread of life' to the Malagasy people yet not be interested in sharing food with them. This assumption is so explicit in their common declaration *'one food one life'*. We see this view being their solemn mark of hospitality which permeates every social function and relationship, making it difficult to separate life and food. Thus, attempting to isolate acts of mercy like feeding the hungry from the 'pure' gospel will in effect make the gospel 'impure' in the mind of the Malagasy.

Literally the gospel message that communicates everlasting life must of necessity show concern to a hungry lot among the Malagasy if it has to have maximum impact. This is especially true based on the assumption that one will always be willing to share food with people that he values and those that he wishes to win over to his side. Denying other people food (though unimagined in this community), may be considered as declaration that you do not wish to share life with the person you are denying food or any other act of hospitality.

It is therefore valid for the carriers of the gospel to the Malagasy to have a similar compassion to the people as one that Jesus had over the crowds. They will be more comfortable with Jesus the provider of food and savior, than just the former. Such an expectation is not in any way extra biblical as we have noted from the New Testament teaching which clearly advocates for a concern for the hungry and desolate, both among believers and even non believers, which is one of the practices that confirms ones living faith.

In the same light, applying the practice of feeding the hungry and desolate as advocated for in the New Testament will enhance the appreciation and celebration of the gospel message among the Lobola, where *'eating and drinking together is the strength of community life'*. In this community food is considered as both a bond building agency and a source of strength for the survival of the community members. Consequently, sharing of food is an outright declaration of one's desire to partake in the events of the community and celebrate the gift of life as given and preserved by God.

Getting armed with both the Bible and food in a mission to the Lobola cannot be considered to be superfluous. Concentrating on their spiritual state and neglecting their need for food may not be well received in this community, in a war ravaged country. This is particularly critical given that the compassionate act of feeding in this community is extended to any community member who is in any situation of weakness such as bereavement. The gospel messenger must therefore strongly consider the deeply entrenched philosophy among these people that expect people in a situation of weakness to first of all be fed, before being given words of

encouragement relating to their spiritual and emotional needs. Neglecting this kind of thought may conjure up distressing mission results.

A similar case can be replayed among many other African communities such as the Rwandese where it is said: *'An empty stomach has no ears'*. Simply put, 'do not expect somebody with an empty stomach to productively engage his ears' or ears cannot hear as long as the stomach is empty'. This perfectly fits the psychological demands of the body and perfectly resonates with the compassion that Christ had over the crowd that he did not wish to send them away hungry lest they may faint (Matthew 15). Although Jesus' case was well after the gospel sharing and explosion meetings, it does communicate one very foundational fact- the need for food to remain physically significant.

For the gospel message to extend to all mission frontiers those who are possible witnesses need to be fully nourished- both spiritually and physically. The Jesus who dwelled in the flesh here on earth would find no contradiction in such a view of ministry. He indeed, not only provided for the hungry masses but ensured that his own disciples had something to eat.

In summary, it is clear that in the African thought and practice, food is synonymous with life, and whoever gives food gives life, or provides an opportunity of celebrating that life. In this regard Jesus Christ who is life and the bread of life cannot be divorced from issues of food in the gospel receiving African community. Thus, a concern for the people that is only limited to proclamation of eternal life yet not interested in the people's need for food may be perceived as a



contradiction and essentially something that may not be worthy to be considered and embraced.

In many respects the African community is truly an eating community, a sharing community and a listening community. A holistic gospel needs to speak to all these aspects, for maximum response and results. In reasonable view of the teaching in the New Testament, the context (such as the current African mission state) that puts the demand to the missionaries to package the gospel message with social action such as feeding the hungry is perfectly biblical and practical.

Like any other theological approach, this African thought based practical theology, relating to compassion to the hungry and desolate, only needs proper balance in implementation. In fact in common situations where people have had problems with texts like Romans (feeding an enemy), the African practice provides a closer situation- feeding strangers. Basically the call for solidarity, totality and participation does not contradict the biblical theology and therefore provides a firm foundation for mission practice in Africa today.

#### Results from Current Ministries Engaged in Feeding the Hungry

Though being applied on a limited scale within evangelical churches, feeding of the hungry and destitute in current ministries is quite fruitful. Recent studies (like the one done on the work of ICFEM) and reports indicate that relief and welfare still has a very significant impact especially in rural areas and among the urban poor. The needy people do not only desire to hear about the love of God but also to practically experience it in their situations.

The hungry people are eagerly waiting for the love of God to cause some food to come upon their tables, while the naked ones look forward to the God who cares to avail some clothing. Given this kind of situation an effective missionary is one that shall practically aspire and become feet and hands of Christ to the suffering world and give a personal character to the word that was from the beginning. In this way the hearts of many may be truly touched and transformed. As a common adage goes, 'the way to a man's heart is through the stomach.'

However, no assumption can be taken, that works alone, however compassionate they may be, would lead people to salvation. Every compassionate or relief activity like feeding the hungry and desolate must be accompanied with the faithful preaching of the word of God. Faithfulness should be shown by letting the beneficiaries of any act of compassion to make independent decisions of salvation in response to the gospel. No attempt should be made to attain forced conversions or limiting such works of compassion like provision of food to only those that are already believers.

One of the greatest challenges in using feeding the hungry as a program in missions in Africa is the ever present possibility of the recipients just taking it for granted, since 'it is expected' that if they are hungry you will share whatever you have with them. This has been complicated further by the thousands of Non Governmental Organizations that now dot almost every corner of the continent, many of them specializing in feeding the hungry.

This therefore calls for creativity on the part of every missionary and mission agency undertaking compassionate activities, so as to give them a higher value

and appreciation when compared to similar efforts by relief agencies and community welfare societies. No activity relating to food may deeply impact the African recipient, merely by 'what it is' but much more by how it is asserted. A deliberate effort is required to safeguard this noble missiological effort from becoming a mere social action that simply cools the physical man.

Any attempt to communicate the gospel message to a group that has just benefited from a compassionate act of feeding must, with all fairness and due respect appreciate that such is a special congregation. Organized communal feeding programs may for example create great opportunities of ministry to special groups such as widows, orphans and community leaders like provincial administrators and political leaders, who will always want to be associated with such programs. Special tact is required to affectively preach to these kinds of people and also ensure that the initiative is not mistaken.

Consequently works like feeding the hungry will only have maximum impact if implemented by competent missionaries. It will be a mistake to have work like feeding the hungry in mission situations handled by personnel that cannot confidently evangelize or who cannot adequately comprehend the socio-cultural dynamics of the target community.

Though there will be instant decisions of salvation in work feeding the hungry and desolate, there are situations when the work may only become a seed of trust in God and may take time to germinate and grow to produce the required fruit of faith in Christ. Hence, we should be motivated by compassion to help people overcome their bondage than attempting to use our relief actions as a bet to conversion.

Salvaging a starving sinner's life today may mean giving him another opportunity to hear the gospel, instead of dying in his sin through a situation that can be dealt with through provision of food. Whether a relief recipient comes to faith today or not, the missionary/relief worker should take solace in the fact that an act of compassion inspired by the spirit of God will forever remain a witnessing force even within the hardest of souls and community.

Ministry to the hungry and desolate will have great impact if it involves all the stakeholders in the community. It is these community leaders and the recipients of the food that are the most essential partners towards success and effectiveness in these activities. Perhaps this is the same principle that was applied in Acts 6, where all the seven men chosen to administer food distribution were Grecian Jews- to ensure their own widows and the entire assembly of the needy was well catered for.

External partners may be essential in providing financial support, but this cannot assure the required impact if the community is not fully involved. It is not what we write in our fundraising brochures that will bring about the necessary impact, but what will flow from the beneficiaries of the activities. Such was the impact when Jesus miraculously fed the crowds- the people praised the God of Israel' (Matthew 15: 29- 39).

There is clear evidence from organizations like IcfEM that reaching to the physical needs of the people through programs like feeding the hungry and desolate definitely comes with a great positive impact both in the physical, socio-economic and spiritual aspects of the target groups. People who have been

physically healed have also received spiritual healing by their appreciation of God's intervention in their lives through the relief activities. Essentially this mission approach guarantees changed lives and rejoicing to the recipients, because it results in real burdens being taken away.

For example the approach by the IcFEM mission to integrate evangelism with community development and relief activities has led to the Bukusu community in Bungoma to have a more positive view of evangelical Christianity. In a true sense of the word, they have seen and experienced a God who cares and does not close his eyes to their sufferings. Now the message is clear, that the gospel does not only promise rest in heaven but also offers relief in some of this life's issues. This kind of attitude is bound to give impetus to mission work by other evangelical mission agencies and churches.

Above all however, to keep the focus to the fact that although it is essential to carry out these compassionate work in the context of mission care must be taken, as Middelmann (1987, 9) asserts, to do all these 'on the basis of a sound evangelical theology of relief and development'. No chance should be given to issues of alleviation of hunger and suffering to overshadow the proclamation mandate given to every missionary. Granted, no missionary of his worth should fail to pay attention to the real issues facing the community. Yet, affirm the position like Itioka (1991, 36) that this does not propagate a leaning towards the poor and weak in the society, while neglecting ministry to those who are in upper echelons of community.

## CHAPTER 7

### SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter gives a summary of the findings based on the research questions, conclusions based on the findings, recommendations on the way forward in missions, and suggestions for further research.

#### Summary of Findings

The central task in this research was to ascertain the missiological impact of the compassionate act of feeding the hungry and desolate in the New Testament scriptures, and subsequently establish the implications of this impact to the current mission enterprise in the Africa. Thus we sought to establish whether there is enough biblical evidence that can inform and necessitate the development and practice of a balanced evangelical theology of mission, which addresses both the spiritual and physical human needs in mission practice in the African context so as to make the Christian mission a real gateway of experiencing the kingdom of God by the hungry and desolate in the current mission context in a continent wallowing in civil strives, hunger and poverty.

After a wide and careful study we have found out that:

One, the New Testament Scriptures show various cases of food sharing and clearly advocate for the compassionate act of feeding the hungry and the desolate. This spans the entire ministry of Christ, the early church and the



apostles. The advocacy for this ministry is based threefold; it relieves the hunger stricken, it is a mark of justice that will be required at the second coming of Christ, and it is a service to the Lord.

Two, it is missiologically significant that each case had positive results in terms of Christian witness and church growth. In almost every case of feeding the hungry, the result was not only satisfaction of the people but also an increase in the influence and witness of Christ and the church. Although at some point this practice attracted crowds that were not necessarily converts, it did at no time hinder the spread of the genuine gospel and the increase in true conversions.

Three, in view of the African thought and practice, particularly relating to sharing and community, the ministry of feeding the hungry and desolate is quite significant to the current missionary era in Africa. However, the Bible lays a higher demand on the believer than both the traditional African worldview and the contemporary individualistic way of life. This high demand is exemplified in the call in Romans to feed a hungry enemy.

Four, missionaries and mission agencies in Africa should not fear engaging in compassionate work of feeding the hungry as long as they are ready and able to undertake an authentic contextualization by realigning the biblical mission practice with the African worldview. Where this contextualization is happening there are genuine results and there is no evidence whatsoever that the gospel message has been watered down.

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Essentially, the compassionate act of feeding the hungry and the destitute is absolutely biblical. It should therefore be appreciated as it is crucial in the effective evangelization of the African people. Although conversion does not merely occur by feeding the hungry crowds, the missiological impact arising from the biblical compassionate work of feeding the hungry and desolate in the current mission enterprise in Africa cannot be down played. This impact does not only emanate from a strong biblical command for feeding the hungry and desolate but also from a very compassionate African worldview that deeply embraces benevolent acts such as food sharing. For this reason, the call for contextualizing the New Testament biblical teaching on feeding the hungry in the current mission paradigm in Africa is not an alternative but a requirement.

### Conclusions

Based on the findings in this study, several conclusions can be made:

Firstly, the New Testament does not only advocate for compassionate action but does demand for a mission enterprise beyond the 'mission station' approach. This particularly stands out in Jesus' feeding of the 4000 people. Extending mission benefits such as feeding even to people who may not have seriously wanted to become his disciples, is something radical to common practice of many mission oriented programs. Yet it is within this Jesus-like paradigm that every work of compassion ought to be done, especially in destitution.

Such approaches may seem to be in contradiction to assertions like those of Paul when he urges the believers to 'do good to all people'; especially to those who belong to the family of believers' (Galatians 6:10). However, a more careful

consideration finds no such a contradiction. Although Paul gives priority to the believers, the direction of priority (the brethren) does not exclude those who are not believers. This is particularly given that he first states that whenever they have opportunity, the believers should do good to 'all people'. Thus, the rule here is to 'do good to all', but above all others 'cherish and help the brethren'. Hence, those who are in the family of believers, should receive the first consideration, but the action should not begin and end with them.

Secondly, times may have changed and situations keep on changing, but some trends remain static because they demand the same solutions today as they did twenty centuries ago. The trend that flowed in the days of Jesus the Nazarene and in the early church was to ensure that every need in the mission field was given due consideration and hence ministered to appropriately without discrimination. This trend has not become obsolete and is therefore quite relevant in the current African mission context today. The sinners need forgiveness from their sins, the sick need to be healed, and the hungry need to be fed. This inclusiveness is particularly crucial given the persistent civil and ethnic conflicts in Africa.

Thirdly, seen from the eschatological view point as in Matthew 25, where acts like feeding the hungry are seen as ministry to Jesus himself, the African mission context provides many ready opportunities of serving Christ through our very basic material endowments like food. Whether it is by design or default it is worthy considering that Christ can be widely ministered to in the African mission context.

All other heavenly requirements withstanding, the fact that Christ can be served through humble acts like feeding the hungry, is a crucial opening that no missionary that God gives opportunity to serve in Africa should ever squander. It is gratifying to visualize that one can stride through a rough and dusty African village and meet Christ himself in the form of a malnourished orphan or a hunger stricken widow or family in the semi- arid or flood wrecked situation.

Fourthly, social matters to do with issues of food and other basic needs are highly emotive and cannot be neglected by the church. The results of such neglect would be quite devastating and would definitely have long term effects. It is difficult to imagine what would have become of Paul's fund raising mission to assist the starving saints in Jerusalem, if the lament of the Grecian Jews had not been appropriately handled by the apostles in Acts 6.

In missiological practice, nobody can doubt the power in a practical Christianity, where those who believe are full of compassion to those in need of daily provisions. Though people may always look for scapegoats in why they cannot become believers, it is much less challenging to proclaim the gospel message when part of the blame is not the failure of Christian brothers to extend kindness to even members of their own families.

Fifthly, it is evident that more than any other time in the history of missions, there is more need for a holistic approach to mission in the current missionary era in Africa. Hence mission agencies and churches have little option but to fully arm themselves with both the word of God and resources to minister to the whole man

especially to the war and hunger ravaged masses. Doing this concurrently is bound to lead to greater impact than if the two are administered differently.

Consequently, the current missionary needs to ask the Lord to avail to him not only the anointing and power to boldly preach the gospel to all nations in Africa, but also be sufficiently endowed with the necessary resources to enable him minister to other human needs. We can effectively cast out demons in the name of Jesus, but cannot cast out poverty, unless we boost the person's economic status, neither can we cast out hunger in the name of Jesus, without food.

Sixthly, the African church needs to demystify the common held attitude that relief and welfare or social action activities in Africa are a preserve of international relief agencies like the Red Cross and the Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). In actual fact, these organizations simply stepped in to fill the void when the church and the entire Christian communion stopped their concern for social issues. But time is ripe for evangelical church to recover from what Middelmann (1987, 8) dramatically calls the 'early- mid 20<sup>th</sup> century withdrawal'. The mandate of evangelical mission encompasses these compassionate relief activities.

Ultimately, if the entire church in Africa adopts this holistic approach to mission, most relief agencies, NGOs and some Para church mission agencies will become irrelevant. The church will eventually regain its place as the most respected institution in the suffering world that is the target and recipient of the missionary enterprise. This movement is critical if the gospel message will be fully appreciated and received in all the corners of the continent.

This concern is based on the fact that in some parts of Africa such as the drought and hunger hit regions like Northern part of Kenya, NGOs and international relief agencies like the Red cross and Food for the Hungry are more respected than churches and mission agencies. Even if it wasn't true as a common adage asserts that 'you can only reach the heart of a hungry man through his stomach', mobilizing resources for this ministry to the stomach is a worthy endeavor. This is particularly given the current mission paradigm, in which people have the benefit of comparing the work of the church with that of other agencies in relation to relief work.

Seventhly, for effective evangelization of the African continent, the gospel message needs to be presented in a manner that clearly portrays a true representation of the kingdom of God, which is 'here now' and 'not yet'. A balance of these two aspects of the kingdom is crucial in the effective evangelization in Africa today. The here and now should not only be seen in terms of power healing but also in acts of kindness and relief, such as feeding those who are hungry and desolate.

Hence, rather than stand and point fingers at those who have failed, we need to engage ourselves in how we can make the new testament scriptures relevant in the African church and mission field by pursuing a contextualized strategy. Even if many have failed to balance and have ended up with a social gospel, we can learn from their failures and faithfully engage the biblical truth and the African situation that is available to us. But even if one was to fail, it would be much better failing while pursuing the truth than succeed in doing nothing about a given obligation.



Finally in view of the African life and practice, the current mission context requires a deliberate adoption of a theology of solidarity, totality, and participation. This is essential given that the themes of unity, wholeness and involvement, which go with solidarity, totality and participation, are at the core of the African way of life especially in extending compassion to those in need.

Viewed in isolation, this may appear to be skewed towards materialistic tendencies, but biblical evidences clearly indicate that such an approach does not contradict the sound theology about the kingdom of God. Basically the call for a theology of solidarity, totality and participation in the current mission paradigm in Africa is perfectly resonates with biblical theology that calls for certain imperatives such as love for God and love for the neighbor and mourning with those who mourn. The compassionate act of feeding the hungry and desolate within the African mission context finds total credence in this theology, which is not only compliant with the African worldview and practice but is truly biblical.

### **Recommendations**

In view of our objectives and with the basis of the findings and conclusions in this study, we wish to make the following recommendations:

The church comes to appreciate the fact that the demand for compassionate work or commonly referred to as social action is not an extra burden but a crucial aspect in biblical mission practice. In this respect, the social action facet needs to be part of every church and mission agency. It should not even be referred to as 'mission and social action' but simply mission, because without the social action

mission is incomplete. Mission needs to be rightly viewed- as an activity that embodies the total impact of the church on the world. It is an involvement with the social, political and moral life of the community, lending relief to the bleeding humanity in every possible way.

Two, some concerns like 'nutrition' and 'food security' which have hitherto remained the preserve of health and economic experts, should now become serious mission concerns especially in the African context. This is because the challenge of hunger and malnutrition is almost everywhere and cannot be assumed by anyone that interacts with this massive desolate populace.

Three, where necessary and whenever possible, the church and other mission agencies should seek for partnerships and alliances with reputable relief agencies that are seeking to combat the challenge of hunger in Africa. Such collaborations will enable the church to benefit from the goodwill of such organizations and also ensure the unnecessary re-invention of the wheel. Yet this must be done with a lot of care lest the spiritual mandate of the missionary agency is overshadowed by the corporeal. The main concern is addressing the people's spiritual needs without necessarily neglecting their physical needs.

Four, every missionary attempt should be founded on a strong biblical theology and a careful consideration and appreciation of the missionary context. In this way, missionaries will continue pursuing issues like feeding the hungry because they are fully aware about their biblical mandate in relation to such matters. This will also de-link this God given task from the misunderstandings that such approaches are a preserve of the western missionaries or agencies that are '*not*

*spiritual*'. No past failures in this approach should be allowed to overshadow the beauty and the outstanding missiological results in works of compassion permeating the entire New Testament.

Five, make every attempt to capitalize on the African philosophical view point on communion and sharing that corresponds with the gospel message. Thus, contextualize the New Testament biblical teaching on issues of compassion such as feeding the hungry and desolate in the current mission practice in Africa.

### Proposals for Further Research

In view of the delimitation and extensive findings in this study there are several areas that need further research. This will clarify some of the broad findings and generate other related findings that are relevant in ensuring maximum impact of this research in mission theology and practice.

Areas that need further examination include, but not limited to:

1. An extended study to other acts of compassion in the New Testament such as specific concern for care of destitute groups like orphans and the displaced
2. A field study on the impact of feeding the hungry and desolate in mission among the traditional rural African folk and urban poor.
3. A survey of the philosophy governing the structure and operation of missions and outreach departments among evangelical churches and mission agencies.
4. The effect of the theology of solidarity, totality, and participation in mission practice in the African context.

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## VITA

### Personal Data and Educational Background:

Robin Mulunda is a Kenyan, born in July 1971 in Bungoma district of western province. He is married to Joy Mutonyi and they have three children. He attended Bukirimo primary school-1978 to1985 and Bokoli high school-1986 to1989. He joined the University of Nairobi, graduating with an honors degree in Education, specializing in Kiswahili, Philosophy and Religious studies.

He undertook his theological graduate studies from September 2001 at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST), graduating with a Master of Divinity, in Mission studies in July 2004. Prior to joining NEGST he attended short courses relating to theological education at Daystar University: Introduction to Distance Learning –(1998) and Theological Education by Extension: Concepts and program writing (1997)

### Professional Experience:

He taught as a graduate teacher employed by Kenya's Teachers' Service Commission between May and September 1995. Between September 1995 and June 2001, he worked as the General Secretary of Western Outreach He served as the Liaison Officer of IcFEM mission from July 2004 to September 2005. He has served as a Teaching assistant in the Missions department at NEGST between September 2004 and December 2005; while serving as an adjunct lecturer at International Christian Ministries Seminary.

### Ministry Experience:

An ordained Minister (2001) with the USA based Global Ministries and Relief; Robin served as the campus Christian Union Treasurer and worship Secretary in 1991 to 1993. He was the National chairman of Western Outreach (WESO) from 1993 to 1995. He served as the General Secretary cum Missions' Coordinator of WESO from September 1995 to June 2001. In 2003 to 2004 he served as Chairman of the Students Council at NEGST.

### Consulting Experience:

He has served as a board member of several Christian organizations. He also served as a member of the NEGST senate, and the Campus development committee in the year 2003/2004. He has authored, edited and co-edited several Bible study guides on missions and practical Christian living. His Master of Divinity thesis was on Factors affecting financial support of Para church ministries.

**Vision:** He passionately seeks to influence and train the church for effective mission work and strategic church and community leadership.