

# **THE CONCEPTION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE BOOK OF MARK AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH OF CONGO( MBCC).**

**Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the degree of Master of  
Theology in the School of Theology, University of Natal.**

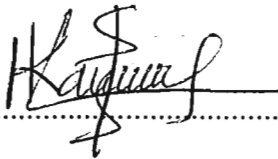
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Pietermaritzburg

April 2000

## DECLARATION

As required, I hereby state that the whole dissertation, except where specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work.



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## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the social and political dimensions of the “kingdom of God” as it is depicted in Mark’s narrative. Simultaneously the author assesses the implications for The Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo (BCC) which may be attained from such research. The first chapter, consists of 1) an introduction to the motivation for the study, 2) the research methodology used, 3) chapter outlines, the limits of the research, and definitions of fundamental concepts. In the first chapter, I try to read Mark’s narrative with the presuppositions of the struggle over power and authority between classes in Roman-occupied Palestine. The story world of Mark depicts a society divided into two classes: the propertied class and the non propertied class which formed the majority of the population. I make use of the narrative approach in my exegesis of the text of Mark, while taking the sociol- political context of the text or the “world of the text” more seriously.

The second chapter investigates the social and political context of Roman-occupied Palestine. The picture attained from this section reveals that Palestine in general, and Galilee in particular, had endured severe political and economic pressure from the Roman authorities and the Jewish local aristocracy. The relationship between the governing class and the majority of the population formed by peasants was of dispossession, oppression and exploitation at the social, economic and political levels. The third chapter focuses on Mark’s presentation of Jesus and thus initiates the core theme of the thesis. We deduce there that Mark is using many titles to present Jesus: Son of God, Son of man, Christ, king and servant. Mark does not seem to base Jesus’ title on Davidic lineage. In Mark, Jesus seems to get his legitimacy from the God himself and from the people. He is a popular king who is not a member of the Davidic dynasty.

The fourth chapter, forms the basis of my argument. Here, I attempt to reveal the social and

political dimensions of the “kingdom of God” as depicted in Mark’s narrative. The social and political nature of the “kingdom of God” is confirmed by Jesus’ proclamation which reordered power and authority in Jewish Palestine. This is expressed by Jesus’ conflict with the established authorities, Jesus’ challenge to two basic institutions: the Temple and the Tribute to Caesar.

Mark’s gospel always shows how the kingdom of God meant liberation of the people and their welfare. The “kingdom of God” was a manifestation of power which found expressions in incidents of healing, exorcisms, casting out of demons, feeding of the hungry and revelations of Jesus’ power over the forces of nature such as storm and water. The kingdom of God as a social and political reality is preached in a language accessible to the oppressed and reorders social relations among the people by making them egalitarian, non exploitative and non-authoritarian.

The last chapter applies the results of my investigations in chapter four to the Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo. After a section on the social, economic and political context of both The Congo and the BCC, and an overview of the Anabaptist theology and ecclesiology, I have deduced the following challenges for the BCC in the light of Mark’s narrative: a re-conceptualization of power and authority which is the cause of conflicts in the church; the need for a relationship of partnership and not of patriarchal power between the leadership and the people constituting the grassroots in the BCC; a good management and use of the material and financial resources of the church out to contribute to the welfare of the people; a balanced vision on the church-state relations and development which rejects a dualistic church-society division. Equilibrium between social and spiritual ministries is advocated so as to contribute ultimately to the well-being of the people.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AMBM	American Mennonite Brethren Mission
CPS	Civilian Public Service
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
MBCC	Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo
MBMS	Mennonite Brethren Mission and Service
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee

**MAPS**

Palestine in New Testament Time.....117

Palestine under the Herods..... 118

Galilee..... 119

Countries on the African Continent..... 121

Major Centers with Mennonites Brethren Churches..... 120



**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Declaration ii

Abstract iii

Acknowledgements v

Abbreviations vi

Maps viii

**CHAPTER ONE**

**1. INTRODUCTION..... 1**

**1.1 Motivation..... 1**

**1.2 Chapter Outline..... 3**

**1.3 Research Methodology..... 3**

**1.4 Basic Terminology..... 10**

1

**1.5 Limits of the Research..... 13**

**CHAPTER TWO**

**2. THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF ROMAN -OCCUPIED**

**PALESTINE ..... 14**

**2.1 Introduction..... 14**

**2.2 The Roman Policy in Palestine..... 14**

**2.3 Galilee..... 19**

*2.3.1 The Political Situation in Galilee..... 21*

*2.3.2 Social and Economic Situation of Galilee..... 22*

<b>2.4 Society and class in Roman - Occupied Palestine.....</b>	<b>24</b>
---	-----------

<b>2.5 Summary.....</b>	<b>28</b>
-------------------------	-----------

### **CHAPTER THREE**

<b>3. MARK'S PRESENTATION OF JESUS.....</b>	<b>30</b>
---	-----------

<b>3.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>30</b>
------------------------------	-----------

<b>3.2 Mark's Presentation of Jesus.....</b>	<b>33</b>
--	-----------

<i>3.2.1 Introduction.....</i>	<i>33</i>
--------------------------------	-----------

<i>3.2.2 Jesus , the Son of God.....</i>	<i>35</i>
--	-----------

<i>3.2.3 Jesus , the Son of Man.....</i>	<i>38</i>
--	-----------

<i>3.2.4 Jesus , the Christ.....</i>	<i>41</i>
--------------------------------------	-----------

<i>3.2.5 Jesus , the King and the Servant.....</i>	<i>42</i>
--	-----------

<b>3.3 Summary.....</b>	<b>44</b>
-------------------------	-----------

### **CHAPTER FOUR**

<b>4. THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN MARK.....</b>	<b>45</b>
--	-----------

<b>4.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>45</b>
------------------------------	-----------

<b>4.2 The Proclamation of the Kingdom.....</b>	<b>48</b>
---	-----------

<b>4.3 The Kingdom of God and the Guardians of the Society.....</b>	<b>52</b>
---	-----------

<b>4.4 The Temple System and The Tribute to Caesar.....</b>	<b>61</b>
---	-----------

<i>4.4.1 Jesus' Attitude towards the Temple.....</i>	<i>62</i>
--	-----------

<i>4.4.2 Attitude towards the tribute to Caesar.....</i>	<i>64</i>
--	-----------

<i>4.4.2.1 The Parables of the Tenants.....</i>	<i>65</i>
---	-----------

4.4.2.2 The Representation of the Roman Coin in Palestine.....	67
4.4.2.3 The Things of God and the Things of Caesar.....	68
4.4.2.4 Implications of Jesus' Attitude towards the Tribute to Caesar.....	69
<b>4.5 The Kingdom of God as a Manifestation of Power.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>4.6 The Kingdom of God and the Renewal of Local Communities.....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>4.7 The Kingdom of God Preached in the Language accessible to the oppressed .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>4.8 The Kingdom of God implies Egalitarian, Non- Exploitative and Non - Authoritarian Social Relations.....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>4.9 Summary.....</b>	<b>85</b>
 <b>CHAPTER FIVE</b>	
 <b>5. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH OF CONGO (MBCC).....</b>	
<b>5.1 General Context of the Democratic Republic of Congo ( DRC) and the MBCC.....</b>	<b>87</b>
5.1.1 <i>The Democratic Republic of Congo</i> .....	87
5.1.2 <i>The Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo</i> .....	91
5.1.2.1 Brief History.....	91
5.1.2.2 Social and Economic Situation.....	92
<b>5.2 What Mennonites Believe.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>5.3 The Kingdom of God in the Book of Mark , a Challenge for the MBCC.....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>5.4 Summary.....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>6. CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>7. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>122</b>

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Motivation

The idea of writing on the Kingdom of God is the fruit of two courses I took in my first year of Masters study at the School of Theology in 1998. The first course was taught by Prof. N. Richardson and K. Nürnberger on *The Making of a Redemptive community*. The second course was taught by B. Meyer on *The Historical Jesus and his community*. In the first course K. Nürnberger gave me a new comprehension of the concepts of *Redemption* and *Salvation*. He insisted on the fact that God's redemption reaches us as a response to the needs of human beings. For him God's redemptive concern does not remain in the clouds of abstract concepts such as salvation, or humanity or the whole world. The message of God's creative authority, God's redemptive love and God's comprehensive vision reaches us as a response to a particular situation of need. Nürnberger thus sees a correlation between the concept *shalom* in Hebrew and *soteria* in Greek. He understands them as concrete concepts (1998:10-5).

This point of view has challenged my past perspective of redemption as a spiritual reality only. I have reached the conclusion that God's redemption takes into account the whole reality of the human being. It is an holistic reality related to the socio-political and economic context in which one lives. God's salvation is synonymous, when understood against the background of the Old Testament, to the expression "kingdom of God." The meaning of the expression "Kingdom of God" began to lead

me to reflect more and more on the situation of my own community.

Several questions came to my mind when I looked at the context of my own community. Some of these questions are: What is the social and political impact of a new reading and comprehensive conception of the Kingdom of God for the Anabaptist-Mennonite theology? What is the role and mission of the church if the Kingdom of God is understood as a social reality and not simply a spiritual goal? How can we reconcile the theoretical conception of an eschatological and spiritual Kingdom of God and the reality of suffering, poverty, injustice, alienation and exploitation of human beings in my community?

The course on the historical Jesus helped me a lot because it has given me a new understanding of Jesus. From a largely spiritual comprehension of Jesus I have arrived at the idea that Jesus can be understood very well when set against his Jewish- Palestinian context. Jesus must be related to his culture before we understand his life and ministry.

The two courses mentioned above make me think of the situation of my own community in which most of the people are poor, illiterate and peasant. I have seen a paradox between what is biblical teaching on salvation and the life of the people in the Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo (MBCC). When we look at the preaching, the liturgy, the hymnology and, the theology of the MBCC, we reach the conclusion that for this church, salvation is mostly understood in terms of spiritual or eschatological reality. Salvation is not related to the physical, material, economic or socio-political context of the people. The MBCC has accepted the missionaries' "spiritualised" kingdom of God. Such a theology is disempowering and undermines the possibility of a Christian contribution to

nation-building and development. This work tries to derive from a comprehensive reading of the book of Mark, a holistic and positive understanding of the concept “Kingdom of God.”

The research attempts to examine whether a changed biblical perspective can help the MBCC to achieve a positive and holistic comprehension of the concept of “ Kingdom of God” so as to attain the well being of the people within this church.

## **1.2 Chapter outline**

This research will be organized into five chapters of which the first one will function as an introduction to the motivation of the work, the research methodology, the chapter outline, the basic terminology, and the limits of the work (Chapter one).

Chapter two attempts to consider the social and political contexts of Roman-occupied Palestine. Chapter three aims to describe and analyse the background of the concept kingdom of God in the Old Testament and Mark’s presentation of Jesus. Chapter four deals with the central theme of the thesis by looking at the political and social dimensions of kingdom of God in selected texts in the book of Mark. The fifth chapter looks at the implications of what we have discovered from our exegesis of Mark for the Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo ( MBCC ).

## **1.3 Research Methodology**

As part of this research, I looked for text in Mark’s gospel which proved to be relevant to the issue of the “ kingdom of God ” concept. My central argument is that the “kingdom of God” in the book

of Mark has social and political dimensions. The research applies the theoretical position of Richard Horsley who understands the “kingdom of God” in the teachings of Jesus as a social and political reality. His book, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence* (1993), is very useful for our purposes. Horsley’s position with Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan can be classified among the *non eschatological school*, a school located in the so called “third quest” of the historical Jesus. The views of Borg(1984,1987) and Crossan can be identified in their respective books, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*(1994), and *The Historical Jesus: the Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (1991).

I have looked at the scholarly discussion on the “kingdom of God” in Jesus’ teaching and have discovered that most of them emphasize the traditional understanding of the Kingdom as something more eschatological. I identify in most of the scholars the temporal or eschatological dimension: what one might call the “time element”.

This is visible in the interpretation of Ritschl (in Weiss 1971:7-8), Schweitzer(1965:90) and Bultmann (1958:23) who think that the “kingdom of God” is a future reality. Jeremias in Perrin(1963:88), and Culmann (1951:83) see a tension between the present and the future in Jesus’s teaching. For Dodd (1935:50), the “kingdom of God” in the teachings of Jesus is a present spiritual reality. Despite their differences, all of them see the concept of “kingdom” in its relation to time present, time future or a combination of the two. None of them see the kingdom as a political term and one which relates to fundamental issues of power relations.

First Century Jewish Palestine was a conflicted society, divided into two main classes: the higher

class formed by the Roman authorities and the Jewish elite together with the retainer class who took benefit from the Roman system; and secondly, the lower class represented by the poor, the peasantry, craftsmen, fishermen etc. In terms of class structure, most of the scholars argue that there was no “middle class” in the Ancient Greco-Roman world. A middle class of course, plays a dominant role in Marxist theory. See Lenski (1984); Afoldy(1985:147); Szesnat( 1992).

Most recent research into the historical Jesus recognizes the special position and history of Galilee (Horsley 1995, Freyne 1980). Galilee was ambivalent about Jerusalem, the temple, the priestly aristocracy, temples dues, etc. For most of the period after the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom, Galilee had been under a separate administration from Judea. Tremendous economic pressure was on the peasantry. The latter were exploited by the aristocracy, who loaned out money to desperate peasants and eventually obtained their land and their person in debt-slavery(Draper1994:35-41). In this kind of society, struggle over power and authority was the rule. Some peasants were obliged to contract debts and their land was confiscated by the land lord.

In a situation of socio-political deprivation, alienation , oppression and exploitation, Jesus’ proclamation of the “kingdom of God” can be seen as an attempt to redistribute power and a real challenge to the main characters of Mark’s narrative: The Roman authorities, the Jewish elite, and the disciples.

I consider conflict theory( Horsley 1994:157) as an alternative approach to interpreting both the Jesus



movement and Mark's narrative in particular. The possibilities of a narrative reading of Mark in the works of D. Rhoads & D. Michie, *Mark as a Story* (1982), Herman Waetjen (1989), *A Reordering of Power. A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel*, have given me grounds with which to understand conflict and the distribution of power in First Century Jewish Palestine as being central to any valid understanding of Mark. My central argument is that the "kingdom of God" in the book of Mark is a social and political reality, and that it can thus be conveniently related to the situation in the MBCC.

Three other works which can help us to approach conflict and struggle over power in First Century Jewish Palestine in general and in Mark's narrative in particular, are those of James Scott, Peter Berger, and John and Jean Comaroff.

James Scott (1990: xii) talks of an "official transcript", or a "public transcript," which is held in place by the power of the dominant elite, but which is continually negotiated and challenged by the "hidden transcript" of the oppressed. In Mark's narrative, the public transcript is represented by what was accepted and taught in public by the Roman authorities and the Jewish elite. The hidden transcript on the other hand is seen in the lower class attempt to resist the domination of the powerful. The Jesus movement was, in a sense, a resistance movement of peasants against the Roman system and the Jewish elite. James Scott explains transcripts from both the powerful and the subordinate group:

Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a hidden transcript that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant. The powerful, for their part, also develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and the claims of their

rule that cannot be openly avoided. A comparison of the hidden transcript of the weak with that of the powerful and both hidden transcripts to the public transcript of power relations offers a substantially new way of understanding resistance to domination (Scott 1990: xii).

Scott's theory also helps one to understand some of the dynamics of colonial relations in Jewish Palestine between the Roman authorities and the Jewish aristocracy on one hand and the majority of the population formed by the lower class. It can be applied to the situation of both the Congo and the MBCC in which the people are oppressed and are not empowered to recover their human dignity.

In their book, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1976:121), Berger and Luckmann explain what they call "universe maintenance."

A major occasion for the development of universe maintaining conceptualization arises when a society is confronted with another society having a greatly different history...The alternative universe presented by the other society must be met with the best possible reasons for the superiority of one's own... The appearance of an alternative symbolic universe poses a threat because its very existence demonstrates empirically that one's own universe is less than inevitable...

Berger and Luckmann (1976:27) also show that the confrontation of alternative symbolic universes implies the problem of power- which of the conflicting definitions of reality will be 'made of stick' in the society. Two societies confronting each other with conflicting universes will both develop conceptual machineries designed to maintain their respective universes, but they argue that, in the end, the conflict will be sentenced by power(1976:109).

Berger and Luckmann's theory helps us to understand how the confrontation of two social universes: the Roman, and the Jewish, inevitably results in conflictual relations power relations between the two worlds. This is because there are a very different constructions of social reality in either universes. The theory can be utilized as a tool in our interpretation of Mark's narrative by looking at the interaction and the distribution of power between major characters of the narrative. The two worlds for example have different understandings of the concept of "kingdom of God." Berger and Luckmann also provide a helpful model for understanding the division between the Western colonial society and the indigenous people of Congo during the colonial experience.

The work of John and Jean Comaroff provides another model of understanding the above notion, by referring to the related concepts of hegemony, ideology and "gaps"( which occurs when two cultures confront each other). John and Jean Comaroff stress the " taken for granted" nature of culture in exercising hegemony unconsciously on the individual and the community. Where two cultures come into contact and conflict, *this hegemonic control breaks down and produces ideology, the attempt to legitimate and maintain what was previously taken for granted.* ( 1991:314).

The particularity of John and Jean Comaroff's work is that they explore how the confrontation between two different cultures has an impact on both cultures. Both parties are transformed by their contact with each other, although the change may be more obvious in the one case than the other. This helps us to understand that there was a "play experiment" which occurred between European missionaries and Africans when the Western and the African cultures confronted one another. As J. Draper put it, "There is, however, general agreement that the work of the Comaroffs marks a

significant new step in understanding and appreciating the complicated interaction of missionaries and African people which developed in ways never anticipated by the missionaries and which has not yet ended” (1998:3).

I have focused on selected texts in Mark against the background of the confrontation between the established system in Roman-occupied Palestine and Jesus. I have then attempted to understand how Jesus’ proclamation of the “kingdom of God,” questions the social and political construction of reality of his time and tries to reorder the equilibrium of power and authority in First Century Jewish Palestine( Waetjen 1989).

I make use of the narrative approach in my exegesis of the text of Mark, but take the socio-political context of the text or the “world of the text” more seriously. Mark Allan Powell argues that “ in narrative criticism, it is in the encounter between the text and the reader that “meaning” arises. Problems of interpretation, therefore, are construed primarily, though not exclusively, in literary terms”( 1997:65). I will argue that questions of power operate not only within the narrative world of the text, but also between the text and the reader and between different communities of readers( eg. Missionaries and colonized peoples).

I am reading the text of Mark not from a redaction criticism perspective but from the narrative approach. This idea is defended by Norman Petersen who discovered that, “the preshaped materials that have been incorporated into the gospel of Mark are provided with rhetorical consistency through the imposition of a consonant point of view: the perspective of the seemingly omniscient narrator whose voice guides the reader’s interpretation ( Powell 1997:65).

To sum up, my methodological section takes into account the need to develop a concept of class struggle against power and authority in order to understand the social, economic and political context of Roman-occupied Palestine as depicted in Mark's narrative.

#### **1.4 Basic Terminology**

Clarification of the basic terminology used in this thesis is crucial for an understanding of my arguments. Some of these terms will be clarified in the appropriate chapter. Firstly, the expression "kingdom of God" must be considered. The exegetical analysis of Mark is in this case, very helpful. The basic hypothesis is that the "kingdom of God" in the Gospel of Mark is a social and political reality. It is God's project to build his society on earth. The "kingdom of God" is depicted as God's vision of his world and his intended plan of action.

I agree with Professor K. Nürnberger's definition of kingdom of God: "This vision is the comprehensive well-being of the whole human being and of all his people in the context of their entire social and natural environment (Nürnberger 1998, notes). In this work, I will use both the expressions "kingdom of God" and "rule of God" to express the same reality.

Secondly, the terms *Anabaptist*, *Mennonite*, and *Anabaptist theology* need to be defined. There will be in depth more discussions concerning this concept in the last chapter of this thesis which explores the implications of the conception of the kingdom of God for the MBCC.

*The World Christian Encyclopaedia* describes “Anabaptist” (Greek: rebaptized), as various groups in Continental Europe in the 16th century, collectively termed the left-wing reformation, who refused to allow their children to be baptized and reinstituted the baptism of adult believers. Anabaptists today include Mennonites and Hutterites (Barrett 1982: 816). According to William R Estep, Anabaptism was born on January 21, 1525 in Switzerland by three dissidents of the official Church namely, Felix Manz, Grebel and Blaurock who rebaptized themselves as adults and by this act rejected their former infant baptism (1975:10-11).

For Estep and Barrett, Mennonites represent a Protestant tradition dating back to 16th century Anabaptism and the left-wing or radical reformation. Global membership: (1970) 91 denominations with 5,499 congregations and 522,000 adult members. Total community (1970) 947,500, (1980) 1,011,500 (1982: 833).

According to C Wenger, a Mennonite historian, “what is known as the Mennonite Church was the first free church of modern church history, (the term “free church” refers to those churches that are not a part of a state-church system, such as the Roman Catholic Church of the middle ages). The free church idea arose in Zurich, Switzerland, as the left-wing of the Zwinglian Reformation”(1990:26).

C Wenger, a Mennonite historian, retraces the origin of the expression “Mennonites”:

Mennonites take their name from the Anabaptist reformer, Menno Simons, who united with the peaceful Obbenites in 1536. Menno Simons was born at Witmarsum in Friesland ( a part of the Netherlands) late in 1496 or early in 1497. Nothing is known about his childhood, youth or education. He was ordained a priest in the Catholic church in the spring of 1524. For seven years he served in Pingjum parish a few miles from his birth place. He then accepted promotion to the Witmarsum parish

in 1531. He served here until he renounced Catholicism on Sunday, January 30, 1536 (Wenger 1990:45).

Concerning Menno's theological background and doctrines Wenger states that,

Menno was a theologian of the New Testament. He taught the important reformation doctrines of Salvation by grace through faith, and life. He rejected church tradition as the basis of authority. He also taught and defended such Anabaptist doctrines as the free church, believers' baptism, Christlike love and non resistance, a brotherhood-type church, and faithful obedience to Christ (1990:48).

The expression Anabaptist-Mennonite theology is a basic terminology which shows the link between the Anabaptist movement of the 16th century and one of the branches of this movement that is the Mennonite church. The concept Anabaptist-Mennonite places the Mennonite church into its historical roots as an inheritance of the left-wing of the reformation movement in the 16th century. The two terms, Anabaptist and Mennonite are inseparable historically and theologically speaking. One cannot comprehend the meaning of one of these terms without relating it to the other. We will give further information about these two expressions in the last chapter of this work. Let us simply attest to the fact that without its pair "Anabaptist", the term "Mennonite" loses its historical and doctrinal shape.

This study will not talk about Anabaptist-Mennonite theology globally. Rather it focuses on the Anabaptist theology but incorporates an emphasis on the Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo, my community. This provides the study with an African perspective and places it in an appropriate social and political context. of Congo.

## 1.5 Limits of the Research

This study would have been completed with field work in the Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo but the situation of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo since August 1998 did not allow such an opportunity. It would be helpful for the success of this work to talk to people in the Democratic Republic of Congo, to make questionnaires and interviews, to hear from the membership of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo, to learn about the missionaries' teachings and understanding of kingdom. A biblical study with different groups of people on the Kingdom of God would have been a consistent tool for this research project. Because of the civil war in the Congo, this thesis was forced to be based solely on library and academic research. Hopefully, in the future I will be empowered with the means to undertake field work in order to explore the conflict over "kingdom" concepts in post-colonial Congo, but this has not been possible within the limits of this thesis.

It should be noted that study is not focussing on the higher criticism of the Gospel of Mark. Questions related to the generalities of the Gospel of Mark such as the author, dates, redaction, composition, sources will not be of primary importance.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF ROMAN- OCCUPIED PALESTINE**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to look at the social and political context of Roman-occupied Palestine. It serves as a setting to our central argument that the concept “kingdom of God” has a clear political and social dimension in the book of Mark. For a better understanding of the issue of the “kingdom of God” concept in Mark’s Gospel, one needs to focus on the social and political contexts of Roman-occupied Palestine. It is only by doing this that one can reach basic argument that the “kingdom of God” is indeed a social and political reality. Because both religious and the economic aspects are related, I include them in this chapter. The chapter is conveniently divided into 3 subsections: The Roman policy in Palestine, the context of Galilee, society and classes in Roman- occupied Palestine.

#### **2.2 The Roman Policy in Palestine**

The domination of the Roman empire over the peoples and countries it occupied had political, economical and cultural effects on these people. The province of Palestine was one them. Wengst mentions Aelius Aristides, who in a verdict said that, before the rule of the Romans ‘the dregs came to the surface and everything happened through blind chance; but since the appearance of the Romans, confusion and revolt have come to an end. Order has returned everywhere and in everyday life and in the state there is clear light of day. Laws have come into being, and faith has been found

at the altars of the gods”( Wengst1987:9).

Rome was seen as the prime architect of this paradise and presented itself as the bringer of peace through the *Pax Romana*( Roman Peace).

The *Pax Romana* was connected to the centre of power which was the *imperium Romanum*. This easily gives a false impression that the Roman system brought real peace and was sought the well being of the people living in the occupied countries. However, the contrary is true: the *Pax Romana* was a peace established by military victories and by force. “It is no coincidence that the Emperor is spoken of as General in connection with one the earliest mentions of the concept of the Pax Romana. The military aspect of this peace takes pride of place”(Ibid 1987:11).

It is important to note that The *Pax Romana* was a peace established as a political goal of the Roman emperor and his most senior officials. It was ironically brought about and secured by military action through the success of the Emperor’s legions. Whether they wanted it or not, the colonized people were obliged to submit themselves to the Roman system. In other words, the *Pax Romana* was a superficial peace made of sword and blood. Rome wanted to maintain its own security and concord and his domination through the *Pax Romana*.

There was no freedom in the occupied countries as people owed allegiance solely to Rome. Thus, Rome tried to collaborate with the indigenous upper classes and installed a friendly monarchy to rule the occupied province for the sake of its own security, rather than for genuine peace reasons.

The *Pax Romana* also had an economic aspect. Occupied provinces were obliged to contribute

economically to the maintenance of the Roman system. This contribution was visible in the building of roads, the payment of taxes (as a source of income for the Romans), the collection of produce from the provinces to be sent to Rome, and the imposition of Roman laws on the occupied people.

The relationship between Rome and Palestine was one of oppressor versus oppressed. The colonial regime established domination by military force but it maintained this domination by economic and cultural means. Thus the relationship between Rome and Palestine was well perceived in terms of economic, political, and cultural areas. Marcus Borg states the role of Palestine for the Romans: “It was a land bridge to Egypt, the bread-basket of the empire; and it was a buffer against the Parthian empire to the east, Rome’s only serious rival in that part of the world”( Borg1994:45).It is important to understand that Palestine also paid tribute to Rome. Richard Horsley recalls the economic contribution of Palestine to Rome:

During the periods of conquest and client-kingship, the Romans reestablished the fundamental tributary political-economic system traditional in the ancient Near East, with Rome now as the ultimate beneficiary. As under previous empires, this meant at least a double level of rule and taxation for greater Judea. Ultimate political control belonged to Rome, with local order maintained by the client-rulers. Rome claimed its tribute, but taxation also provided a handsome level of revenue for the client-rulers. In the initial Roman incursion, Pompey had “laid both the countryside and Jerusalem under tribute ( Horsley 1995:11).

Roman Policy in Jewish Palestine aimed to use the local aristocracy and the Jewish elite as their puppets so that they could maintain full control of the Jewish people. It was the Romans who granted the last Hasmonean rulers and the Herodian client kings the right to govern Palestine. The other strategy of Rome was to leave the Temple system intact. Thus, profit gained from Temple taxes was

used both by the Roman authorities as well as the Jewish aristocracy.

Because the Romans ruled Palestine by military force, tension between the dominant and the dominated led to a perpetual conflict and struggle over power between the colonizer and the colonised. We can conclude that the Roman policy brought always tension and put the Jewish society in a state of crisis. This resulted in different forms of rebellion and resistance between the Roman authorities and the Jewish elite on the one hand and the peasants on the other hand. Horsley points out three major conflicts in late second Temple and New Testament times as a manifestation of tensions and conflicts between imperial domination and subjugated Judean society: “ In the Maccabean revolt, beginning in 168-167 B.C.E.,the Judeans successfully rebelled against the Hellenistic empire of the Seleucid regime in Syria and against their own assimilationist, “Westernizing” aristocracy”(1993:4).

The dominating influence of the Roman empire upon Palestine did not only have a religious and political repercussions but social and economic ones too. As Horsley rightly suggests, it is important to consider all these dimensions and their interrelationships rather than focussing only on cultural-religious phenomena as is the tendency in biblical studies(1993:6).Three individuals are depicted appears in the story world of the Book of Mark, whose characters inform an understanding of Roman policy towards Palestine. These are: Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate and the High Priest.

Herod Antipas was the Son of Herod the Great. A client King of Rome and Regent of Galilee and Perea, he maintained his father’s policy of legitimating his claim to the ownership of virtually all the

land over which he ruled, including the sea of Galilee, on the basis of the proprietary rights of kingship( Waetjen1989:7). Under this policy peasant farmers, fishermen and others who were working in his land were obliged to pay high rents and taxes. This resulted in the dispossession and marginalization of the peasants and the lower class who formed the majority of the population. Mark's narrative world illuminates one's understanding of this socioeconomic context under which Jesus ministered.

The Gospel tradition recalls that it was under the rule of Herod Antipas that Jesus and John the Baptist performed their ministry. Antipas was informed about Jesus' activity and thought that Jesus was John the Baptist(Mk6:14-16).

Mark(6:14-16 )talks about the imprisonment and execution of John the Baptist by Herod Antipas which occurred as a consequence of John's challenge to his marriage with Herodias, his brother's wife. It is said of Herod Antipas that he was "astute, ambitious and lover of luxury" just like his father Herod the Great( Schürer 1974:341). "As a client-king, but without the title, Antipas was under constraint by Rome to maintain order and ensure that the tribute was paid annually. In the execution of these tasks, he needed to have the support of the local leaders who acted in the role of a provincial aristocracy" (Freyne1988:142).

Pontius Pilate represents the supreme rule of the Roman emperor, and was responsible for administering the imperial province of Judea(15:1-15). Josephus reports that Pontius Pilate was involved in many cases of abuse of power regarding both Roman and Jewish laws. His aim was self-aggrandizement of his power and authority and a policy of expediency towards the Jewish aristocracy

as revealed by the crucifixion account in Mk15:15 ( Waetjen1989:7).

The High Priest was, after the procurator, the most powerful person in Roman-occupied Palestine. In Mark , he is not named(14:53-64).He was a collaborator of Rome and subject to the patriarchal authority exercised by his father- in-law and predecessor in office, Annas or Ananus I, who dominated domestic politics by controlling the governing consistory of the temple, the “chief priest,” and the high council of the Sanhedrin which he had reorganized during his term of office ( Ibid1989:8). It will be revealed later in this study,( in the section concerning the Temple administration) how the religious system was the epicentre of social and economic exploitation of the peasant and other members of the lower class.

## 2.3 Galilee

One cannot understand the social and political context of Roman- occupied Palestine without taking into account the situation in Galilee where Jesus originated and performed the most important part of his ministry. “The particularity of Jesus’ Galilean career is both historically important and theologically relevant”( Freyne1988:3). Galilee and Galileans are not well known from history because Greek and Romans writers focussed only on the political history of Rome and Judean client-rulers and other prominent Judeans and emphasis was made on Jerusalem. According to Horsley,

Under the Hasmoneans and Herod, Jerusalem was the dominant political-economic-religious center of affairs. Until mid-first century C.E., the Romans always controlled Galilee through client-rulers based in Jerusalem or Sepphoris or Tiberias. Direct Roman rule did not play a role in Galilee until the death of Agrippa I in 44 C.E. Even

then, Rome's relations with Palestine or "Judea" focussed on Jerusalem. Galilee was either remote from the main arena of affairs further south, or was the first principal stop for Roman troops on a mission of retaliatory reconquests(1995:111).

Recent research which explores the historical Jesus recognises the importance of Galilee's particular history. "Galilee was ambivalent about Jerusalem, the Temple, the priestly aristocracy, temple dues etc. For most of the period after the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom, Galilee had been under a separate administration from Judea"( Draper 1994:36). Tremendous economic pressure was placed by the aristocracy on the peasantry.

There were many popular resistance movements in Galilee against the Roman system and the Jewish aristocracy. The Jesus movement can be considered as one of them. "The Jesus movement came into being as a renewal movement among Galilean peasantry in response to economic disintegration and threatened landlessness. It was aimed at bringing renewal to local communities in Galilee" ( Ibid 1994:35-41).

In order for one to understand the social and political context of Galilee, one must attempt to answer the following questions: how was life controlled politically in Galilee; what was the economic situation of Galilee; who owned the resources and what effect did this have on the life of the inhabitants of Galilee; what effect did Hellenistic culture have upon Galilee.? We must keep in mind that all these aspects were interrelated and that therefore it is frequently difficult to separate them from one another.

### ***2.3.1 The Political Situation of Galilee***

Roman domination of Galilee comports three important aspects: the period of consolidation of Roman control, the domination through the client-rulers; and the establishment of Roman direct rule in Palestine (Horsley 1995:112). Roman control of Palestine in general and Galilee in particular brought perpetual fighting and struggle over power among different Roman generals and armies. Military campaigns were repeatedly successful and Galilee became the major battle field where thousands of people were massacred and made slaves. This occurred especially in the south, at Tabor, and at Tarichaeae, along the Sea of Galilee. This brought Roman depredations and anti-Roman sentiments among the people( Ibid 1995:115)

The Roman empire also opposed all kinds of resistance from the people they colonized. This implied a policy of terror and submission of the occupied territories. Roman armies oppressed people through devastation of the land and towns, slaughter and enslavement of the people, crucifixion of people along the roadways or in public places( Ibid 1995:116).

The domination which was implemented via the use of the client-rulers was another dimension of Roman policy in Galilee. The client-rulers served as the representatives of Roman interest and benefit among the subjected people. They also tried to protect they own power and security and worked according to Roman will. “The basic arrangement of client-rulership developed on the basis of patron-client relations in Rome itself, in which the patron offered *beneficia* in return for “services” performed by the client”(Horsley 1995:117). This does not mean that Rome left all the authority and power in the hands of the client-ruler. The presence of the Romans was visible together with control



of the livelihood and economy of the region.

A few words ought to be said about the relationship between Galilee and Jerusalem. I have mentioned that Galilee was ambivalent about Jerusalem and the Temple. Jerusalem, as the political and economic-religious centre, seemed to collaborate with the oppressor. The Temple system was, according to the peasants and the majority of people living in the countryside, a place of economic exploitation of the people by the priestly aristocracy. The people were forced to pay temple dues and tithes. As the majority of the people were poor, the double payment of taxes to Rome and to Jerusalem was a heavy burden upon their already scarce resources.

Herman Waetjen argues that “the temple, therefore, was the central institution in Judaism that controlled the Jewish “tributary mode of production,” the system that extracted the economic surplus from its primary producers, the peasant cultivators and shepherds, and redistributed it among the upper class, specially to the members of the ruling aristocracy, the priesthood and the administrative apparatus of the government”( 1989:8).

### ***2.3.2 Social and Economic Situation of Galilee***

It is important to notice that Galilee was geographically distant far from Jerusalem and the majority of its population was constituted of peasants. There had also been previous political and economic exploitation of Galilee by Jerusalem under the Maccabees for about a hundred years. Prior to that Galilee had been ruled from elsewhere. “For most of the period after the Assyrian conquest of the

northern kingdom, Galilee had been under a separate administration from Judea. Under the rule of Herod, Galilee was expected not only to pay the Temple tithes and taxes, the Roman taxes, but also to support a herodian aristocratic administration”( Draper1994:37). There was thus considerable economic pressure on the peasantry , in addition to exploitation of the peasantry by the aristocracy who placed the latter in land deprivation and debt by obtaining their person in debt-slavery. All these factors placed Galilee in a situation of political, economic and social situations of unrest. To survive peasants resorted to banditry, popular resistance and anti-Roman and anti-Jewish aristocracy sentiments. It is in this context that one can situate the Jesus movement.

One of the most important aspects of the client-rulers policy in Galilee was their building projects which demanded the physical , material and financial contribution of the peasantry. The construction of the cities of Sepporis and Tiberias in Galilee by Herod Antipas must have used the peasants' surpluses via a heavy taxation system.

Galilee was an agrarian society based on agriculture, and the primary source of wealth and power was therefore the land. Unfortunately, this land was not controlled by the people themselves. On the contrary, it was controlled by the Roman authorities and the Jewish elite who determined the distribution of the agricultural surplus produced by the peasantry. Thus, the peasantry were economic hostages of the ruling class.

Culturally, Galilee was also under pressure from expanding Hellenistic cities like Sepporis and Tiberias newly built by Herod Antipas to have control of the whole area. We can assume that there

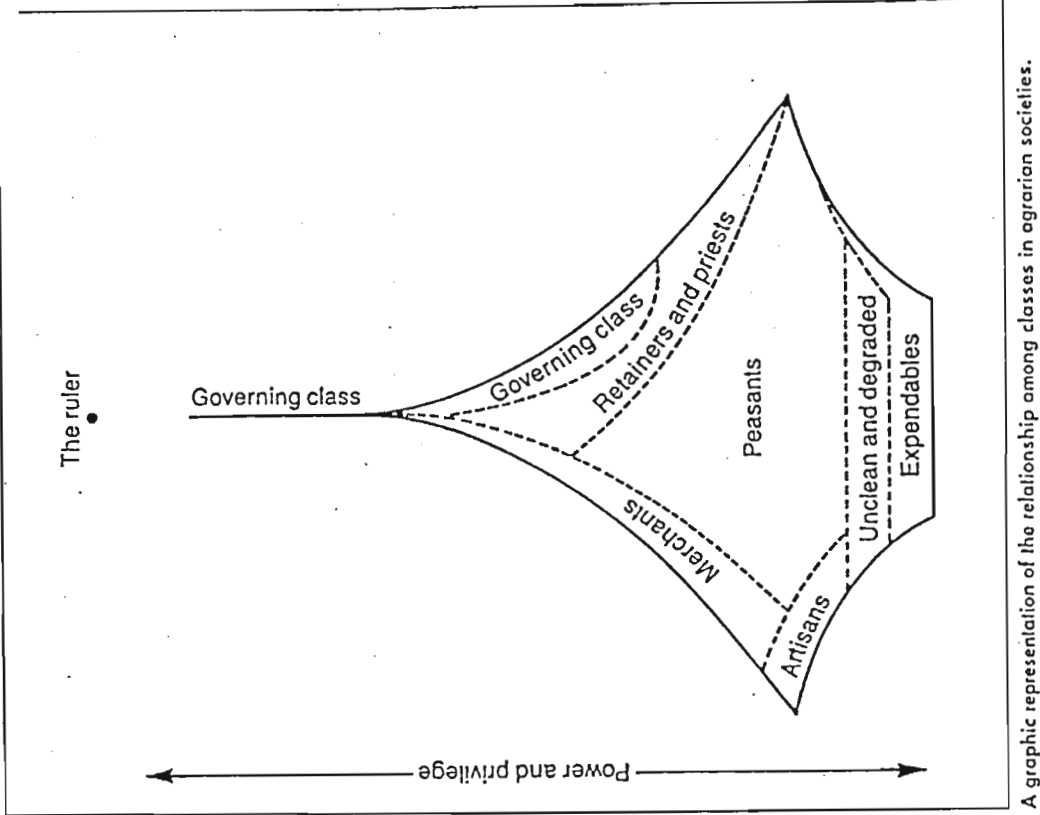
was a Hellenistic influence on the province of Galilee. “The cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias depended on a control of the countryside and peasants surrounding them for their financial support. Thus they provided another source of economic exploitation and debt. It was in these cities that the local aristocracy lived and utilized the peasant surplus”(Draper1994:36).

## **2.4 Society and class in Roman-Occupied Palestine**

Although I have dealt with some aspects related to the social context of Roman-occupied Palestine in the previous section, I want to focus here on the stratification of classes. A graphic representation of different classes helps one to understand the hierarchical structure and the social life of Roman-occupied Palestine. It is an indispensable fact that societal and class divisions in first century Palestine, were a mirror of the society of the early Roman Empire. As I have mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, most scholars argue that, in terms of class structure, there was no “middle class” in the Ancient Greco-Roman World, a concept which plays a dominant role in Marxist theory (Lenski1984; Alfody 1985; Szenat1992).

Roman society was highly diversified. It was characterized by two principal extremes: the propertied class, (a very small group of the population which held the overwhelming majority of wealth) and the non- propertied class( which formed the majority of the population: peasants, artisans, small traders, day labourers, slaves, etc)( Szenat 1992:42-45). It is obvious that distribution of power was pyramidic rather than horizontal. The same situation appeared in Roman-occupied Palestine. At the top of the society one finds the governing class(Roman authorities and the Jewish Aristocracy), which

constituted the propertied class, and underneath them are the non-propertied class which was made up of the majority. The following figure by Lenski (1966:284), represents the relationship among classes in agrarian societies.



The Roman-occupied Palestine of the first century was a peasant society. Lenski(1966) describes a peasant society as a “pre-industrial agrarian society”. Peasant societies seem to have common features around the world. This is confirmed by the work of Sjoberg(1960), Lenski(1966) and Wolf(1966). Thus, these general features can be comparable with the Jewish peasantry of first century Palestine. According to Wolf, a peasant society is created as a result of the unequal redistribution of wealth and power in a society in which the ruling class appropriates the surplus

produced by the peasants. He then defines peasants as, “Rural cultivators whose surpluses are transferred to a dominant group of rulers that uses the surpluses both to underwrite its own standard of living and to distribute the remainder to groups in society that do not farm but must be fed for their specific goods and services in turn”(Wolf 1966:3-4).

This picture given by Wolf of a peasant society is reminiscent of the social life in first century Jewish Palestine. Firstly, one sees that there was a confrontation at a cultural level occurring between the Greco-Roman(Hellenistic) culture and the Jewish culture. Secondly, the majority did not benefit from their own labour. The surplus went into the hands of the Roman authorities and the Jewish aristocracy. Thirdly, the land was regarded as the property of the governing class who owned it and redistributed it to the peasants. Fourthly, the heavy burden of taxation on the peasants made life unsupportable for the latter.

Waetjen recalls the situation of the peasantry in Roman-occupied society when he says: “The peasantry constituted the largest class of agrarian society. Living in the rural countryside, they worked the land under a tributary or redistribution system of exchange, and because they were dispossessed by exorbitant rent funds, different kinds of taxes, and compulsory amounting to up to four-fifths of their total agricultural produce, they were usually subjected to a life of abject poverty” (1989:10).

Roman-occupied Jewish Palestine was a society in which the majority were poor. It was a society of oppression and exploitation of the peasants and other members of the non-propertied class. It was a society of permanent social and economic unrest and turmoil, a society in which power and wealth

was in the hands of a few group of people, while the other group was exposed to all sorts of social and economic problems such as hunger, disease, poverty, malnutrition.

The story world of Mark clearly depicts some of the political and religious individuals who concentrated power and privilege in their own hands in Roman occupied Palestine : Herod Antipas (6:14-16), the procurator Pontius Pilate(15:1-15), the High Priest(14:53-64), the “chief priest” and the seventy members of the Sanhedrin(14:64), the scribes, elders and pharisees (14:53;15:1). The Herodians, Pharisees and local scribes were employed by the governing class and enjoyed a standard of living superior to that of the majority. They tended to identify with the ruling class and their interests. Waetjen includes in this “retainer” group household servants, tax collectors, professional soldiers, and other kinds of officials. Levi, the tax collector, and the guards or other petty officials of the Sanhedrin were also included in this group(Waetjen1989:7-9).

The other group was constituted of peasants: Simon Peter and his brother Andrew(1:16), Simon the Cyrenian who was forced to carry the transverse beam of Jesus’ cross to Golgotha(15:21), artisans and crafts people. In Mark’s narrative, Jesus was a carpenter before his baptism by John(6:3). According to Waetjen, the lowest ranks of the agrarian society was formed by the degraded and expendables:

The former consisted of “defiled” and unskilled laborers-tanners, shepherds, prostitutes, porters, burden bearers, miners, and others-who were engaged in offensive and ritually unclean work or sold their body or animal energy. The latter segment occupied the very bottom of the societal ladder and formed a large mass of unemployed or nonproductive people: beggars, vagrants, thieves, outlaws, lepers, and others. Of these two groups the expendables were the more deprived and

dehumanized, subject to continuous malnutrition and disease (Ibid 1989:10-11).

It is quite interesting to observe that Mark's first readers or hearers( in a predominantly oral tradition) seem to have been familiar with the social and political and economic situation portrayed in the narrative. The recipients themselves were familiar with exactly the same reality of agrarian society and would have understood the language of Mark because they too lived similar circumstances. Mark's story world portrays a world predominantly engaged in class struggle between the governing class versus the majority of the people. This struggle brought immense exploitation and dispossession of the lower classes by the Roman authorities and the Jewish elites. In this context, then, the Jesus movement can be understood as a renewal and resistance movement among the peasantry, with the goal of re-ordering relations of power and authority in a conflictual society. It is in this socio-economic and political context that we can understand Jesus' proclamation and teachings on the "kingdom of God" as pertaining to a social and political reality and not merely eschatological.

## **2.5 Summary**

In this chapter, I have attempted to look at the social and political context of Roman-occupied Palestine. The picture I have drawn is that Palestine in general, and Galilee in particular, have endured severe political and economic pressure from the Roman authorities and the Jewish local aristocracy. This occurred by means of military violence, terror, taxation and oppression. I have tried to overview the situation in Galilee because of the importance of its history and its role in the study of Jesus' ministry. Here again I have deduced that similarly to the entire Palestine region, Galilee too was a

disadvantaged region living under the system of exploitation and dispossession which emanated from the capital: Jerusalem. This put Galilee in an ambivalent position against Jerusalem and the Temple system, tithes and taxes. In Palestine and Galilee in particular, there were many popular resistance movements together with the existence of factors which epitomised the sentiments of the oppressed. and banditry and revolt as a response to this anti-Roman and anti- Jewish aristocracy sentiments. The last section of this chapter was concerned with society and class in Roman-occupied Palestine. I pointed out that Roman-occupied Palestine was an unequal society modelled like the early Roman empire in which society was divided into two classes: The propertied class and the non-propertied class formed by the majority of the population. I then tried to understand the Jesus' teaching on the "kingdom of God" (as portrayed in Mark) as a response to an unequal and conflictual society based on exploitation and dispossession.



## CHAPTER THREE : MARK'S PRESENTATION OF JESUS

### 3.1 Introduction

The Old Testament presents two eschatological visions in which can be found the background to the concept of the “kingdom of God.” The first vision relates to the expression “ son of David/ Messiah.” This vision, which is in essence messianic, began with the major prophets and continued until the post-exilic time. While this first vision relates to justice and purity, it is linked specifically to the Davidic dynasty( Is7: 14, 9:6, Jer23:5-6, Ez34:23-24, Zech1-8).

The second eschatological vision finds its roots in Jewish apocalypticism. It is here that one finds expressions such as son of man and kingdom of God. This vision is made apparent in Is.56-66, Zech9-14, Is.24-27, Dan2 & 7. I Enoch1-36 .The difference between these eschatological visions is that the first one tends to be more related to a dynastic understanding of kingship, and is concerned specifically with Israel, while the second vision is more universal. In the second vision the kingdom of God and the son of man or, as Waetjen translates it, the “New Human Being”(1989:195) are related. Although the debate concerning the relationship between the son of man and the kingdom of God is not settled, the book of Mark seems to follow the second eschatological vision.

Any attempt to comprehend the two visions is complicated by the difficulty brought about by scholarly definitions of the concepts: apocalyptic and eschatology: expressions which are not easy

to define. *The Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Development*, raises the problem of the relationship between the two words, attesting that “ both are such loaded terms that is difficult to use them with any precision; both are, in the delightful phrase used by the Expository Times, “slippery words” which are frequently used interchangeably to refer to the “last things” or the things that will happen in the future. In particular the word apocalyptic has been so problematic that there have been serious calls for the abandonment of it altogether as a term of any value or meaning” (Martin& Davids 1997:56).

The important issue however is to understand whether the expression “kingdom of God” as found in the Mark’s narrative is related to these two eschatological visions in the Old Testament of Messiah/son of God and son of man or whether it has an independent origin. Scholars do not have the same view on this issue. Some scholars think that the concept of apocalypticism is a contemporary scholarly creation (Horsley 1994 ). Marcus Borg for example, does not relate the “coming son of man” sayings and the eschatological Jesus. He points out three important elements: First, he sees no element of imminence in the kingdom of God sayings. Second, without the “coming Son of man” sayings, there is no reason to think of the kingdom as the imminent end of the world. Third, the notion that the kingdom of God is the imminent eschatological kingdom is without foundation in the kingdom texts. The element of imminence has to be imported from the “coming son of man” sayings ( 1994:54-55).

On the other hand, while one may reject an apocalyptic interpretation of the Jesus movement, it seems impossible to reject the idea that there is an eschatological element in Jesus’ understanding

of the “kingdom of God”. Eschatology refers to the conviction or promise that the present world order is not the final one, is not the last word, but is certain to be replaced by a coming world order in accordance with the justice of God. This element cannot be removed from Jesus’ teaching with evidence.

As I mentioned in the introduction, certain scholars such as Weiss, Schweitzer, Bultmann, Jeremias and Culmann have indicated the eschatological dimension of Jesus’ teaching about the “kingdom of God.” The problem with these scholars is that they have emphasize too much the “time element” in their comprehension on the “kingdom of God” concept. In my opinion Jesus was pointing to the future but simultaneously was concerned with the social and political situation of his people in Jewish Palestine. The book of Mark attempts to highlight this political and social dimension of the “kingdom of God.”

Another way of viewing the social and political dimension of the kingdom of God in Mark’s narrative, is to maintain that in Mark’s Gospel God is not exercising power on people but rather the people themselves exercising God’s power. People are thus empowered to act on God’s behalf through the Holy Spirit.

These two eschatological visions can be illustrated by a pyramid and by a square or a cube.

In the son of David/ messiah vision the relationship between God and his people seems vertical. God is on top, then come the priest and the people:

God-Patron

Priests-Brokers

People-clients

The people experience top-down oppression from God by means of the priests. There is a socio-economic pyramid.

In the second eschatological vision, which seems to match Mark's view, the relationship between Jesus and the disciples is not pyramidal but cubic. Jesus reverses the pyramid and gives equal power and authority to his disciples. The disciples can bless, forgive sin, cast demons and perform miracles as does Jesus (Mark 16:17-18). This is a challenging vision. It reorders power and authority in the society (Waetjen 1975:26). It places the ordinary people, the poor, beggars, prostitutes and peasants in a primary position and rejects the old order established by the Roman authorities and the Jewish Elite. Having provided a brief background to the concept of the "kingdom of God," I will thus in the following section, move on to a closer reading of Mark's narrative.

### **3.2 Mark's Presentation of Jesus**

#### ***3.2.1 Introduction***

In the introduction of his book, *A Reordering of Power. A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* (1989), Herman Waetjen states that "The Gospel according to Mark is a story world artistically constructed by an immensely creative and powerful storyteller. It is an integrated narrative in which all of its content is coherently related to itself and constitutes an independent, self-contained, and systemic universe with its own structures of time and space" (1989:1). In this

section I attempt to understand Mark's presentation of Jesus because this is an important issue which can enlighten the conception of the "kingdom of God" and Jesus' work and ministry.

I have chosen some titles which illustrate Mark's presentation of Jesus' titles such as "Son of God," "Son of man", "Christ", "King" and "Servant." It is not easy to summarize in one section this big topic. However one must understand that for Mark, Jesus is the major character of the narrative.

In Mark there is always a plot in which the role and the identity of Jesus is hidden until it is revealed progressively by Jesus himself or the other characters and finally it is openly revealed by the end of the narrative. As Kingsbury put it,

What these diverse views of Jesus' identity reveal is the sharp cleavage one finds in Mark's story between the way supernatural beings and Mark as narrator perceive him. On the one hand, Mark as a narrator and supernatural beings such as God, Satan, and know exactly who Jesus is: the Son of God. On the other hand, humans experience Jesus not only as an extraordinary figure but also as an immensely controversial one. They regard him in numerous, conflicting ways that run the gamut from abject repudiation as agent of Satan to acclamation as the Son of God (1989:6).

In order for one to understand Mark's presentation of Jesus, it is necessary to understand that expressions such as "Messiah", "Son of man" and "Son of God", "Son of David," do not have the same theological meaning in Mark as in the Old Testament. R. Horsley has heralded that the understanding of the expression "Messiah", for example, is heavily influenced by Western christological doctrine: "The term Christ originated simply as the Greek translation of Hebrew messiah, which means anointed. What later became the orthodox early Christian understanding of "Christ" was a creative synthesis of several different strands of Jewish expectation and Greek philosophical concepts"(1985:89).

Horsley further states that the future Davidic king did not necessarily have to be a son of David. For him, although the expression “Son of David” is always related to the Davidic covenant in 2Sam.7:16, this does not mean that for the common people the official ideology of kingship was accepted. Horsley then concludes that the Jesus movement must be understood in the context of the revival of the tradition of popular kingship in Israel(1985:92).

### ***3.2.2 Jesus The Son of God***

The title “son of God” is used by Jesus himself as well as the believers in the New Testament. In the New Testament times this terminology had its counterpart both in the Old Testament and in Hellenistic religious usage. In the Old Testament “son of God” has several meanings, it describes angels (Gen.6:2; Job1:6,33:7), as well as the righteous, the true Israel (Sir.4:10, Psalms of Solomon 13:8, 12:30 and 18:4)( Taylor1953:52-53).

The expression “son of God” occurs 5 times in the book of Mark. It is found in the title(1:1), the cries of demoniacs(3:11), the high priest’s question(14:61), and at the crucifixion(15:39). The references in 13:32, 1:11,9:7 show implicitly Jesus’ divine sonship. Mark begins his book by attesting to the divinity of Jesus. This was risky in a Jewish context in which no one could share the nature of God. In Mk14:61-65, and Jesus is thus condemned to death because of alleged blasphemy. How then could Mark make such a declaration? Is it not clear that the one who inaugurates the “kingdom of God” should at the same time be the “Son of God”? Perhaps Mark is trying to point out that the son of a human being has established the kingdom of Caesar, whereas Jesus, who is the son of God introduces a new era. According to Mulholland (1999:22), “The Gospel originates in

God(1.14); Jesus Christ is the son of God. This is affirmed several times, in ways and places that underscore its importance. Mark does not present the birth of Jesus( as do Matthew and Luke), for he purposes to show that Jesus is the son of God.” In several of Jesus’ declarations( 8:38; 12:6; 14:36,62) and in the high priest’s inquiry(14:61), Jesus’ divine sonship is implicit. Jesus silences evil spirits when they declare his divinity(3:11;5:7). This does not mean that Mark emphasizes only the divinity of Jesus. No other Gospel emphasizes the humanity of Jesus as does Mark. The question one must ask then is, what are the implications of Mark’s declaration of Jesus’ divine sonship for the central argument in this thesis that the “kingdom of God” has both social and political dimensions. Two important arguments can be deduced from this declaration: Firstly, the declaration aroused conflict with the established authorities. Secondly, Jesus is depicted as emanating from God and thus the power he exercised was from God.

It is known that the religious authorities in Jesus’ time could not accept his divine sonship. As a result there was immense tension between Jesus and the Jewish Elite. In Judaism religion no one can make himself equal to God or share the nature of God. As I mentioned earlier, the reason Jesus was condemned to death was due to alleged blasphemy of claiming to be the son of God. Mark does not hesitate to point out at the beginning of his Gospel that Jesus is the son of God.

For the Roman authorities, Mark’s declaration that Jesus is the son of God was a challenge. The Emperor was supposed to be the “son of God” and was worshipped as God. In brief, the title son of God addressed to Jesus is a double challenge to both the Roman authorities and the Jewish Elite. It can be illustrated by some examples in Mark’s narrative: Mk 3:20-27 recalls the allegations of

the scribes that Jesus has Beelzebub, to oppose the idea that Jesus is inspired by God or is the son of God. They classify Jesus' action and ministry as from Satan. The Pharisees in Mk 8;11-13 seek a sign from heaven. They want a sign from God, a proof which can confirm that Jesus' ministry is legitimated by God. The authority and the Power of Jesus are rejected by the chief priests and the scribes. This is attested by their question in Mk11:27-33: " By what authority do you do these things? Or who gave you this authority that you do these things?" Implicitly it means that the religious authorities saw no legitimation of Jesus authority.

Jesus is depicted as the "son of God" not because he came from Davidic lineage but rather because he was chosen by God and claimed his royal authority from God. This reminds one of Psalm 2 and 110 where it is shown that the kingship belongs to God. God can designate any one as the king not automatically a son of David. Thus, it is possible to understand Jesus' kingship within the context of popular kingship in Israel(Horsley 1995:114-115). Jesus did not fit the traditional criteria of kingship as a "Son of David" but he was rather a new agent, chosen by God. He represents the struggle of the little people against the Temple system and Rome.

Jesus questioned the old understanding of kingship which was inseparable from the Davidic heritage and lineage. Three important features confirm Jesus' kingship in Mark : Firstly, at his baptism, Jesus is declared "Son of God." This was a very different way of designating a king or a chosen one by God( Mk1:11). Secondly, the people declared Jesus Messiah(Mk8:29). Jesus was not anointed by an human being (prophet or another king), rather his authority was recognized by the people themselves. Thirdly, Jesus opposed his kingship to that of David's. He suggested that, in fact, he



was, ultimately superior to David(Mk12:35-37). In Mark12:35-37, Jesus (referring to Psalm110) raises the question, “how can the scribes say that the Messiah is the Son of David?” Jesus’s question challenges the scribal interpretation and throws light on the core the messianic secret.

According to Jesus’s logic, David who is the father, cannot call his son Lord. David was referring to someone different to his own descendants. The question of this “David’s Lord” remains unresolved. Waetjen relates David’s Lord to the “New Human Being” whom Jesus embodies and manifests. For him, “ If there is any messianic secret that is to be disclosed to the disciples inside as well as outside the narrative world of the Gospel, it is the identity of Jesus the Messiah, Jesus Christ, as the “New Human Being” who, because he is David’s Lord, cannot be David’s son”(1989:195).

### ***3.2.3 Jesus, The Son of Man***

The title “Son of man” occurs 14 times in Mark. Only three times does the expression appear in sayings referring to Jesus’s future role( 8:38; 13:26; 14:62). It is found predominantly in sayings that speak of his earthly activity or anticipated suffering, death and resurrection(Hare1990:183). The argumentation of Hare can be justified when one simply replaces the expression “son of man” with that of “Jesus” in Mark’s narrative: Jesus had authority to forgive sins( 2:10). Jesus was lord of the Sabbath(2:28). Jesus would suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days be resurrected(8:31). Jesus would be ashamed of whoever was ashamed of him and his word.( 8:38). The disciples would report to no one what they had seen until Jesus had risen from the dead( 9:9). It is written concerning Jesus, that he should suffer many things and be rejected(9:12). Jesus was delivered up into the hands of men, and they

would kill him, and having been killed, after three days he would rise( 9:31). Jesus would be delivered up to the chief priests and scribes and they will condemn him to death...(10:33f). For Jesus came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many( 10:45). And then they would see Jesus coming in the clouds with great power and glory(13:26). Jesus went as it was written about him, but woe to that man through whom the Jesus is delivered up...(14:21). The hour has come; see Jesus is being delivered up into the hands of sinners(14:41). I am and you will see the son of man (Jesus) seated at the right hand of the power and coming with the clouds of heaven(14:62). Thus, the title “Son of man”, when replaced by the noun “Jesus” indicates that Mark’s use of this title emphasizes very much the earthly activity of Jesus.

The expression “Son of man” has provoked much debate among scholars. The first group of scholars sees a theological connotation to the expression. Others think that the expression consists of a self presentation of Jesus for himself and points to the humanity of Jesus. I concur with Fredrich, Gerhard that “the flow of discussion on the “Son of man” in the Gospels since 1971 has shown little sign of abating ( 1974:622). Similarly Vincent Taylor posits that the question of the origin and meaning of the title son of man is still eagerly discussed and cannot by any means be regarded as settled (1953:25).

In the Gospels, the expression “Son of man” is found 70 times. Leon Dufour -Xavier suggests that the fact that this expression appears only on the lips of Jesus suggests that it was retained as one of his typical expressions, while the post-paschal faith preferred to designate him by other titles. He concludes that it is possible that Jesus had chosen the expression because of its ambiguity

susceptible as it was of a common-place meaning( “the man that I am”). It contained also a clear allusion to the Jewish apocalyptic(1973:565).

My understanding of the expression “Son of man” is that this term does not have the same meaning in the Old Testament as it does in Mark’s narrative. In the latter, the expression fully expresses the humanity of Jesus or, as Waetjen put it, means “ The New Human Being whom Jesus embodies and manifests”(1989:195). The story world of Mark is full of allusions to Jesus as the one who becomes human so as to give others power and assist in fulfilling their basic needs. “Jesus is the Lord who has need of a donkey on whom no one ever sat in order to ride to his unusual coronation in Jerusalem. He is the New Human being who is “Lord of the Sabbath.” He is the one who exercise divine authority over the demons and unclean spirits and therefore is addressed as “Lord” by the syrophoenician woman. He is the co-bearer of the divine epithet because he is “seated on the right hand of power”(Waetjen1989:195).

Jesus is the “Son of man” anointed by God to inaugurate and establish the “kingdom of God.” In Mark’s narrative Jesus is always at work and is concerned with the spiritual, physical and material needs of the people: he calls twelve disciples (not an angel) to work with him; he has a mother and brothers; he feeds the people; he was angry and felt tired; he recognized the weakness of human beings and forgave their sins; he experienced rejection, betrayal and death; he had compassion for the children, women, prostitutes and beggars; he shared meals and banquets with the people ; he took a position in favour of the weak and the marginalised.

### 3.2.4 Jesus, The Christ

The term *χριστός* occurs 7 times in the Gospel of Mark, 17 times in Matthew, 10 times in Luke and 19 times in John( Nida pp.1916-1917). Vincent Taylor states that *χριστός* is the verbal adjective in the LXX to translate the Hebrew *mashiah*, ‘anointed’, which was used in different forms in the Old Testament of the appointment of kings, the patriarchs, the people, and above all, of the expected Scion of David through whom, it was believed, God would deliver and rule his people( 1953:18).

Mark does not use the name “Christ” much for Jesus. He begins by stating that the Gospel or the good news belongs to Christ(1:1). He then reports to the reader two sayings of Jesus to his disciples about the false information about Christ(13:21), and the reward one will get because of the service he has offered to the disciples(9:41). In the remaining examples, Peter applies the name to Jesus(13:29), the question of Caiaphas(14:61), and the question of the chief priests in mockery during the crucifixion(15:32). It is interesting to observe that there is no case in Mark in which Jesus applies the title to himself.

I have found two reasons for this fact: Firstly, Mark is prudent because he is writing to a gentile audience to whom an emphasis on Jesus as the Christ did not make sense. Secondly, Jesus as “Christ” would be more related to a Jewish kingship rather than to a universal vision in which the “kingdom of God” was understood as inclusive. and gives power to the people. As Vincent Taylor put it, “In the Gentile world the term “Messiah” was meaningless, unless explained, and when explained was felt to be strange”( 1953:22).

In Mark's narrative, the messianic secret is disclosed by Peter(8:27-30). Jesus is not the Messiah in the Davidic model. When the blind man Bartimaeus calls him "son of David", Jesus heals him but he does not made any comment about the title used by the blind man(10:46:53). He is a peasant and an outsider. He does not take his power from a Roman palace or the Jewish Temple. He is from the periphery not the centre of power in Roman Palestine. Jesus challenges both the Roman and Jewish system of being the "Annointed one." He was designated by God himself and represents the opinion of the poor , the exploited and the rejected. Many times in Mark, Jesus is associated with women, beggars, outcastes and prostitutes. Jesus's messianic authority is legitimated by the people not by the Roman authority or the Jewish elite. It is as Horsley put it to be understood as "popular" not Davidic as the tradition assumed.(1985:88-94).

### ***3.2.5 Jesus, The King and The Servant***

Although those titles are not very explicit, Mark does sometimes present Jesus as king and servant. Mark's Jesus is not depicted in the same way as is the king in the Old Testament. On the contrary Jesus is the king of the suffering servant passages of Isaiah who must suffer for the sake of his people ( Is53:1-12) and be exalted at his death and resurrection. The king is not served but rather serves his people. He is humiliated, suffers but is expected to ultimately rise in power and reign for ever. The king does not exercise power over the people. He gives them power and they perform miracles, forgive sins and do wonders through the Holy spirit. The relationship between Jesus and the disciples in Mark's narrative is not pyramidic but is cubic. Jesus is with the people, serves them, helps them and fulfills their different needs while enabling them to recover their dignity. In Mark, Jesus, as popular king and servant, reorders power and renews the community for the well being of

his people. But this does not mean that there is no future judgement. Mark states that Jesus will judge the world and reign for ever. Some examples can illustrate the kingship and the servanthood of Jesus in Mark's narrative. In Mark the title "king" appears six times, each case in terms of contempt and derision.

Thus it is used by Pilate in the question, "Are you the king of the Jews?"(15:2), in the alternative put before the crowd, "Will you that I release unto you the king of the Jews!"(15:9), and in the further question, "What then shall I do unto him whom you call the king of the Jews?(15:12). It is also used in mockery by the soldiers, "Hail, king of the Jews!"(15:18), in the inscription of the cross, "the king of the Jews"(16:26), and in the taunt of the chief priests, "Let the Christ, the king of Israel, now come down from the cross, that we may see and believe"(15:32). The title "king" is used in Mark in terms of contempt and derision. Contempt, because Jesus is not "son of David" but popular king, designated by God himself. In Mark, this title has behind it a powerful meaning, disclosed fully only after the exaltation and the glorification of Jesus.

Although the title "servant" is not used by Jesus, there is an influence of the servant-conception, as distinct from the use of it as a title. It is seen in the words of the divine voice in Mark 1:1 and in the passion sayings of Mk 8:31; 9:31; 10:33f., 45. Mark presents Jesus as a servant and shows him in the service of God and of other people. Jesus did not come to serve himself but to serve others and to give up his life to save many(Mk 10:45).

### 3.2.6 Summary

This chapter explores the complex background to the concept “kingdom of God” and Mark’s presentation of Jesus. I have tried to explain two eschatological visions in the Old Testament which give one the roots of the concept of the “kingdom of God.” The problem of the meaning of concepts like eschatology and apocalyptic and of the eschatological Jesus and non eschatological Jesus are not resolved. However, I related the concept of the “kingdom of God” to Jewish eschatology and found it to be related to Israelites’s ideas of popular kingship rather than or even in great opposition to Davidic kingship. On the aspect of Mark’s presentation of Jesus, I stated that Jesus’ identity is controversial in Mark and is revealed progressively in a plot until the end of narrative. I also mentioned that in Mark, Jesus is always at work, ready to fulfill the basic needs of humankind. Mark emphasizes the earthly ministry of Jesus. I studied the following titles used in Mark’s presentation of Jesus: Son of God, Son of man, Christ, king and Servant. Mark’s Presentation of Jesus prepares one to understand the social and political dimension of the “kingdom of God” concept which Jesus inaugurated and established.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN MARK**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In chapters Two and Three, I presented the social and political context of Roman-occupied Palestine and Mark's presentation of Jesus. This chapter, which constitutes the central argument of the thesis, depicts the social and political dimensions of the "kingdom of God" in Mark. It is important to notice first that many scholars agree that the central message in the teaching of Jesus is the "kingdom of God." Before showing the social and political dimensions of the kingdom of God in Mark we need to be fixed on our understanding of the concept of "the kingdom of God."

Jesus' proclamation of the "kingdom" was not located in a vacuum. In Mark it appears clearly that the proclamation of the kingdom was meant to restore hope to the people because of the exploitation and dispossession they were facing as a consequence of the Roman authorities and the Jewish aristocracy's behaviour. The story world of Mark shows how Jesus tried to reorder power and authority in an unequal and unjust Roman-occupied Palestine. This was a society in which the majority of the population constituted a non-propertied class (or peasant mode of production) and a few group in the governing class were appropriating the whole surplus of the produce of the people. Thus, for Jesus there was an urgent need to readjust the socioeconomic and politic inequality brought about by the Roman system. This did not mean that Jesus wanted to overthrow the Roman



system and become a political leader. On the contrary Mark shows that Jesus wanted to give to human beings their dignity and power by his teaching and action. His kingdom was “from God” and the people, while the kingdom of the authorities was not from God and was oppressing and exploiting the people.

As Horsley argues, the kingdom of God was not, for Jesus, an expectation of something to come. For him “The kingdom of God was already a socio - political reality. Jesus’ miracles and exorcisms manifested an already present kingdom. The kingdom was God’s society here on earth. It meant renewal, vindication and judgement. For people to enter the kingdom, repentance was necessary as was a strict obedience to the will of God and the teaching of Jesus. The kingdom would also require egalitarian, non-authoritarian social relations” (1993:181,192).

Horsley goes further in his challenge of the traditional understanding of the “kingdom of God” as an eschatological concept. He questions the old picture of the “kingdom of God” by arguing that, for centuries, Church leaders and biblical scholars have speculated and argued about the meaning of the phrase: “The time is fulfilled; the kingdom is at hand”( Mark1:15). He attests that even today, many ecclesiastic traditions suggest that the “kingdom of God” refers either to the blessed, heavenly state of all who accept Jesus as a personal saviour, or to the sacred domain of the true church as it stands holy and eternal in an otherwise wicked world (1997:53).

For Horsley and Silberman, one cannot comprehend the “kingdom of God” concept in Jesus’s sayings unless one appreciates the connection between ancient religions and politics: “The world

of John the Baptist, Jesus, the apostle Paul and the earliest Christians was not only a spiritual battleground but also a landscape of far reaching economic dislocation, cultural conflict, and political change”(1997:2).

According to Horsley and Silberman, a good reading of the book of Mark as a coherent narrative, written with the specific historical context of the Roman repression in Judea, can reveal how the author of the book insisted that the “kingdom of God” was precisely what Jesus preached it to be: a movement of community renewal and liberation among the towns and villages of southern Syria and Galilee ( Ibid 1997:216).

Focusing on the socio-political reality of oppression and exploitation in which Galilean peasants lived in a context of land dispossession and the system of taxation, Horsley and Silberman conclude:

An earthly kingdom ruled only by God, without violence or economic inequality might have seemed to many a chimerical ideal. But it also could have served as an impetus to action for discouraged and indebted peasants who had lost control of their land. The kingdom of God was indeed at hand if they believed it not a dream, not a vision of heaven, not a spiritual state, but a transformation here and now in the very fields they plowed and the very villages they lived in, if they rejected injustice and heeded the commandments of God(1997:56).

In his book, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement*(1994), Horsley does not tire of reminding one again and again that the kingdom meant renewal and social order for the communities of the Jesus movement: “ The communities of the Jesus movement thought of themselves as a new social order, this was variously symbolized as ‘the kingdom of God, or as an alternative new temple’, but one not made with hands, of which Jesus was the foundational cornerstone”(1994:122).

One thing which can mislead an understanding of the kingdom of God is, according to Horsley, the concept of the end or *eschaton*: “ ‘The kingdom of God’ and related symbols do not refer to ‘the last’, ‘final’ ‘eschatological’ and ‘all-transforming’ ‘act’ of God. Especially misleading in this context is the reified concept of end and *eschaton*. The Divine activity of the “kingdom of God” is focused on the needs and desires of people”( 1993:168,169).

Another important input of Horsley on the topic is that he sees a correlation between the expressions salvation and kingdom of God. He states that, “In Jesus’s preaching and action the kingdom clearly includes the socio-political substance of human relations as willed by God. It is ironic that we reach for the term ‘salvation’ in order to express this substantiative social aspect of the kingdom. The “kingdom of God” is Jesus’ comprehensive term for the blessings of salvation. The social-political dimensions are inseparable from the religious”( 1993:170).

Having reached a tentative understanding of the concept of the “kingdom of God” (which is quite relevant for Mark and his addressees) it is now necessary to go to the narrative itself and demonstrate how the “kingdom of God” concept is a social and political reality.

#### **4.2 The Proclamation of the kingdom**

In Mark1:15, Mark reports Jesus’ declaration that “ The right time has been fulfilled, and the “kingdom of God” has approached.” Scholars have been debating the meaning of this phrase. They wanted to know whether the expression meant that the kingdom of God would be realized in the

future or whether it was a present reality. This is particularly evident in the way some scholars translate *ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ*. C.H Dodd, the champion of “realized eschatology”, sees no difference between *ἔγγιζειν* which is sometimes used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew verb *nagà* and the Aramaic verb *m'ta* both of which mean “to reach” “to arrive”. Dodd then proposes that the expression can be translated as : the kingdom of God has come( 1935:44). Waetjen translates the expression as “ The rule of God has approached” (1989:28). For Bultmann, on the other hand the question of time is not primordial. He insists that the kingdom is proclaimed by Jesus as imminent in the future, as indeed already dawning but not yet actually present. However, Bultmann sees Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom as a summons to man to take a decision before the crisis brought on by Jesus’ message( 1956:86,90).

Waetjen’s translation seems convincing to me because the verb *ἔγγικεν* is in the indicative, perfect active which can be translated : “ to approach, to come near, to approximate”( Louw& Nida 1989:632). In Mark’s narrative, “the kingdom of God” is near(1:14-20), and it is then actualized in the midst of the activity of Jesus. Mark 1:15 can be understood as the official announcement of the dawning of the kingdom of God.

The proclamation of “the kingdom of God” by Jesus has its setting in rural Galilee(1:14), rather than Jerusalem. It was revealed in the study of the social and political context of Roman-occupied Palestine that Galilee was ambivalent to Jerusalem, the Temple system and taxes. As Draper has argued, Galilee was an ambivalent region which supported some of the political and religious

movements which resisted the Roman system. Many of the peasants were in debt-slavery and their land was dispossessed since they could not afford to pay back their debts( 1994:35-41).

The “kingdom of God” is proclaimed not by a Roman noble, neither by a member of the Jewish Aristocracy but by a peasant, an outsider. Someone not from the center of power in Roman-occupied Palestine but an outsider, someone from the periphery and who was not classified in the Davidic lineage. As Herzog argues, “ Jesus of Nazareth was a rural artisan, in an agrarian peasant society, whose public activity was largely confined to the countryside and villages of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, including at least one pilgrimage to Jerusalem”( 1994:17). This made Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God suspicious for both the Roman authorities and the Jewish elite.

It is important to notice that for the peasants, the non-propertied class and Mark’s addressees, such a proclamation was bringing a certain hope and renewal to the local communities. The proclamation of the kingdom of God as a social and political reality inevitably leads to conflict and struggle over authority between Jesus and the “guardians of the society.” The expression “ guardians of society” is borrowed from Waetjen(1989:86) and designates the authorities in Roman-occupied Palestine. Mark reports earlier in the beginning of the narrative that, “ Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus” (3:6). Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God can be understood in the same line as other popular movements of his time, which were waiting for the kingdom of God. The difference was that the Jesus movement saw the kingdom of God as urgent and imminent. Pixley points out that, “ the fact that the Jesus group preached the coming of

God's kingdom hardly distinguished them from several other groups in first-century Palestine. This was a time of turmoil, and the prophetic preaching of a kingdom of justice and peace fired Jewish imagination"( Pixley1983:384). The Jesus movement can be classified as a result of popular kingship movements in the Jewish Palestine of the first century( Horsley 1995:114-115).

At the beginning of the narrative, Mark includes the story of the calling of four fishermen and associates them in Jesus' ministry.( 1:14-20). By calling a group of fishermen and other marginal peasants to assist him in his task of establishing the kingdom of God, Jesus identified himself with the oppressed group of his time by trying to help them understand the social, political and economic situation in which they were living and by inspiring them to liberate themselves from such an unjust and unequal system. Waetjen shows the social and economic situation of exploitation of the peasantry when referring to the situation of Simon Peter and Andrew (1:16), "They were dispossessed by exorbitant rent funds, different kinds of taxes, and compulsory labor amounting to up to four-fifths of their agricultural produce, they were usually subjected to a life of abject poverty. Peter and Andrew had also to pay a large percentage of their catch as a rent fund to the tax collectors of Herod Antipas"( Waetjen 1989: 10).

Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God brought him into a situation of conflict with the whole Roman system through the client-rulers because the latter thought of conserving their power and interests to please their patron; Rome. They could not accept or hear about another kingdom, except for that of Caesar. Thus, Jesus' proclamation of the "kingdom of God." was not a vague idea. It suggests conflict and struggle to reorder power and authority between Jesus and the guardians of the

society in Roman-occupied Palestine.

#### **4.3 The Kingdom of God and Guardians of the Society**

The “guardians of the society” represented primarily the political and the religious authorities in Roman-occupied Palestine. They were, namely, the client-rulers and the Jewish aristocracy. The kingdom of God being a social and a political reality resulted in concerted opposition among the governing class. The authorities are major characters in Mark’s narrative second only to Jesus and the disciples. In the story world of Mark they are represented by Herod Antipas ( 6:14), the son of Herod the Great, a client ruler of Rome, the procurator Pontius Pilate, one of Herod’s contemporaries who was representing the supreme rule of the Roman emperor. He administered the imperial province of Judea(15:15). The religious authorities are the High Priest, who was after the procurator, the most powerful personality in Roman -occupied Palestine(14:53-64). Other religious authorities were the chief priests, the seventy members of the Sanhedrin, or high council( 14:53; 15:1). Herodians , pharisees and local scribes can be considered in the group of the authorities ( Waetjen 1989:8-11). Three important things needs to be mentioned concerning the authorities: Firstly, Jesus did not confront the Roman authorities directly. Mark mentions two cases which must taken into account about the Roman authorities: the execution of John the Baptist and Jesus by Herod Antipas and Pontius Pilate respectively(6:14-29; 15:15). The religious authorities were the ones to offer concerted opposition to Jesus’ action and ministry. This was normal when considering the Roman Policy of ruling through the local aristocracy. Horsley rightly stated that

Control of a subject society has often been exercised through an already-existing

indigenous ruling class or dominant aristocracy. The imperial regime compromised members of such a class by giving them a serious economic stake in the imperial system of domination. Often such nominally “indirect” systems of government involved as much control over and manipulation of, ‘the traditional’ authorities ... as any system of ‘ direct rule’( Horsley 1993:9).

Secondly, Jesus would encounter more opposition in Jerusalem, as opposed to the country side where he began his ministry. This can be justified by the fact that the peasants in the towns and villages of Galilee found his message favorable to their cause and accepted it. The message was a message of hope for those confronted by poverty, hunger, unemployment, disease, and powerlessness. According to Freyne, the narratives of the Gospel do not show Jesus meeting with any political opposition in villages: “Opposition came from religious not secular opponents, and attempts to discredit Jesus by suggesting that he was in league with evil forces, at least suggests that on religious issues there was a greater freedom of movement and access to people away from the seats of power”( 1988:141).

It is important to note that in the ancient world, and especially in Jesus’ society, the modern separation between religion and politics was not applicable. The religious leaders in Jewish Palestine were playing both political and religious roles. The two aspects were inseparable.

The question one may be inclined to ask is why the religious leaders were so harassed by Jesus’ teachings and work ? It is important to notice that when Jesus proclaims the “kingdom of God,” the religious authorities fear losing the legitimacy of their leadership and power, since they also claim to rule in God’s name. The problem which Jesus encountered with the religious authorities was over



the contested territory of who was the legitimate authority. The religious authorities claimed to be the only authority chosen by God to rule Israel. They found their teachings concerning tradition as authoritative and normative. They saw any opposition to them as an opposition to God. Jesus seemed to be a threat to the legitimacy of their leadership and to the well being of the people. There were thus two separate constructions of social and political realities in existence at that time. The conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities was evident because Jesus reversed the official trend of power and brought a new view of God, the world and the people. According to Rhoads and Michie, “what the opponents have in common is that they are in positions of power and leadership. Because Jesus threatens their authority, they oppose him from the beginning”(1982:117).

In Mark, two important elements constitute the cause of the conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities: the interpretation of the Mosaic law and the tradition of the elders and legitimacy of Jesus's authority. The following texts illuminate the continuation of conflict between Jesus and the authorities.

In 2:15-17, the source of the conflict is Jesus' declaration of forgiveness to a paralytic whom he heals. Some teachers of the law take Jesus' attitude as blasphemy because, in their understanding of the Mosaic law, no one can take God's prerogatives of forgiving sin. The attitude of the teachers of law shows their blindness to the fact that Jesus is the son of God (1:1); he is fulfilling the mission assigned to him since his baptism(1:11), and has the right to forgive the sins of people. According to Waetjen, by forgiving and healing the paralytic, “A new aspect of Jesus' ministry is manifest here: a negation of sacred tradition, a reordering of the world, a restructuring of reality in which the verticality or transcendence of the reality of God begins to express itself horizontally in and through

the activity of a human being, a New Human Being”( 1989:87). This clash between Jesus and the religious authorities showed that the latter were only concerned with their religiosity and tradition. They did not care too much about the physical and spiritual needs of the paralytic. Jesus’ attitude revealed that the comprehensive well being of the whole human being is a priority for him and not the emphasis on the routine of tradition. This indeed is what the kingdom of God is all about: a re-understanding of human being’s welfare and liberation as the center of God’s redemptive action.

Jesus equated the condition of paralysis with sins, and privileged forgiveness, which was a proof that the past was over for the paralytic, a new future had opened before him. As Waetjen recalls, “what is needed is a total cancellation of the past that will remove the destructive effects of the action and reaction cycle of sin. That kind of renewal is God’s work, and the effective power that is required to penetrate into the depths of the human psyche in order to restore its freedom and autonomy can come only from God”( 1989:87).

Mark 2:18-20 does not describe the religious authorities as the ones questioning Jesus’ disciples’ behaviour towards fasting. The text implies that the question came from “some people”. One can thus assume that the pharisees might have been the ones who sent the people to stir up a reaction from Jesus concerning his disciples’ negligence of an important religious rule : fasting. Here again one knows that fasting was not a new thing in religious circles in first century Palestine. Jesus himself was fasting(1:12) and he was often recommending to his disciples to do so. Jesus showed that the “kingdom of God” opened a new style of life. “ Every new situation or circumstance constitutes an opportunity for a new response. Arbitrary continuity determined by tradition not only

enslaves; it obliterates the possibility of living creatively and responding in a fresh way to the experience of God's coming in each new moment of the present"( Waetjen1989:92). The arrival of the kingdom of God breaks all the boundaries and ties made by the tradition. The response of Jesus to the controversy about fasting shows the supremacy of the new era he brought over the old era. Jesus makes his response clear when he says: " No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse"(2:21).

The conflict in 2:23-27 is raised not by Jesus but by his disciples, who, according to the pharisees, have no respect for the Sabbath. Like the preceding conflicts this one concerned the respect or lack there of for the Sabbathday. In his defense, Jesus again recalled the priority of human beings' needs over and above the Mosaic law. He took freedom in the interpretation of the Mosaic law and tradition. He gave liberty to his followers to decide when and how the Sabbath was to be observed. Genuine human needs always have priority over regulations and institutions. The Sabbath was not established for its own sake but for the benefit of human beings. Jesus, who proclaims and establishes the "kingdom of God" is lord of the Sabbath. The "kingdom of God", as a social and political reality, does not make people slaves of tradition but liberates them from the ties of religious regulations and rules.

In Mark 3:1-6, Jesus himself puts into practice what he said in the controversy of 2:23-27 about the Sabbath. He healed a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath. He challenged the religious authorities by showing them how important an human life was over a singular religious rule. He asked the religious authorities: "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save

life or to kill?”(3:4).

Mark reports that they remained silent thus revealing a guilty conscience. The conflict would ultimately end in a plot to kill Jesus. Jesus’ response to the pharisees suspended the unique status regarded to the Sabbath. It was not different from other days of the week. There was a negation of its sacred character. The most important thing for Jesus was that the “kingdom of God” had been manifested: a human being recovered his whole well being and entered into a fuller and rich life.

The controversy in 3:20-30 was an attempt by the teachers of the law to discredit Jesus’ power and authority. They claimed that Jesus was possessed by Beelzebub, the prince of demons. The narrator states how ironically and logically Jesus’s response to his opponents appears. First, exorcisms and the casting out of demons cannot be done by Satan’s agent, because the latter does not work for the well being of the people but for evil. Thus Jesus’ action and ministry cannot be placed on the side of Beelzebub but on the side of God. The religious authorities cannot see the wonders of the “kingdom of God” because they are the very opposite of what the “kingdom of God” is all about. Secondly, the very sin of blasphemy, of which they accuse Jesus( 2:7), is theirs, and them who, ironically, will not be forgiven.

The confrontation between Jesus and the religious authorities ( pharisees and scribes) in 7:1-13 came from the disciples’s lack of ritual observance: they eat food with unclean hands. According to Jesus’ opponents the disciples manifested disrespect for the tradition of the elders. The disciples’ behaviour could lead to the loss of their Jewish identity because the narrator specified that, “The pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition

of the elders”(7:3). Jesus attacked the pharisees and the scribes for taking the observance of tradition and using it as a pretext to abandon God’s will as revealed in the Mosaic law. In order to confirm his accusation to them, he takes the example of the vow of “corban” which is a pure creation of the pharisees and the scribes, to avoid assisting needy parents as required by God. “This means children are obligated to care financially for needy parents. But this notwithstanding, should anyone desire to evade this obligation, the pharisees and the scribes will allow that person to take the vow of corban: one can declare the money that should properly go to one’s parents as a gift or offering dedicated to God. The result is that one retains this money for one’s own use”( Kingsbury 1989:74).

Jesus’ response clearly showed that the pharisees and the scribes used the tradition and the Mosaic law as a pretext to avoid assisting the needy. Their excessive emphasis on a literal observance of the tradition avoided any possibility for egalitarian social relationship. Thus, they used their authority for their own interest and devices; it was a selfish authority not coming from God. They were the very opposite of the reality of “the kingdom of God” in which human needs are the first priority rather than ritual observances. Waetjen captures it thus:

Participation in God’s rule is not based on the religious observances of any kind, for they have no effect on the realities engendered by the human heart: evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, greed, wickedness, deceit, debauchery, an evil eye, blasphemy, arrogance, foolishness. All these evil things came out from within and defile the human being. Therefore, obligedness to any process of redemption that fosters an indebtedness to forms of piety and righteousness, erected and controlled by a religious hierarchy, in order to maintain a relationship with God is effectively canceled. The divine objective is to expunge the impurities of the heart in order to restore individual wholeness and social integration and transform the world of binary oppositions-constituted by pollution systems- into a new creation of the one and the many( 1989:133).

Jesus' own authority became the cause of controversy in 8:11-13. The pharisees wanted a sign from heaven from Jesus. Jesus refused to satisfy their claim. A sign could not be given to this generation he declared. The kingdom of God he had proclaimed was already established; the deeds and words of Jesus were indeed a big sign to the pharisees. He knew that the religious authorities would not believe in him even if he gave them a sign from heaven. Giving them a sign would mean obeying them and acknowledging their authority. Because the pharisees began questioning Jesus' own authority, Jesus was led to warn the disciples that they must be on their guard against the evil intention of the pharisees and Herod(8:15).

Mark has a negative depiction of the religious authorities. In the story world of the book, the authorities do not seem people to be trusted because, by opposing Jesus, they also oppose the values and the norms of the kingdom of God. They are unfaithful to their task to protect and rule the people. Mark also depicted the illusion the authorities have by claiming to be the guardians of God's law while they are in fact God's opponents and enemies. The authorities use their social status and authority not to rule people in order to effect their well-being but for a blind legalism, so that they behave contrary to the kingdom of God. " They are self-serving, preoccupied with their own importance, afraid to lose their status and power, and willing to destroy to keep them"( Rhoads & Michie 1982:117).

The authorities did not notice the presence of the "kingdom of God." They could not see the mystery of the "kingdom of God" by accepting that God's works was behind Jesus' action and ministry. They had lost their primary role of protecting the people.

They used the power they had been given for their own advantage. This was expressed in the parable of the Tenants(12:1-12), where it appears that the authorities do not bear fruits for others, nor do they seem to be too concerned about rendering to God the results of the fruits of the vineyard. “The authorities save their own lives: the essence of the depiction of the opponents lies in that they are self-serving. That is, they are preoccupied with preserving their power, their importance, their wealth, and their lives (Ibid 1982:121).

Mark thus shows that a new era came with Jesus’ proclamation and establishment of the “kingdom of God”. The political and socio-economic order was radically readjusted by Jesus. The “kingdom of God” gave to the people their dignity and power which had been confiscated by the Roman authorities and the Jewish aristocracy. Jesus’s announcement of the “kingdom” became Good news for the oppressed and the poor. As Horsley argued, the “kingdom of God” can thus be understood as a comprehensive term for the blessings of salvation(1993:170).

The religious authorities are, in Mark, Lords of the people and not servants of the latter. Mark clearly showed that Jesus was the very opposite of what the authorities were. He came to serve and not to be served by the people(10:45). In the “kingdom of God” power and authority are opposite to the power and authority of the world, in which leaders are “lord over the people”(10:42). He preached with authority and unlike the scribes ( 1:22). By forgiving sins he acted on God’s behalf to close the past and open doors to a new future which bring about a social change(2:10). His power and authority were manifested by the calming of the storm, healing, exorcisms and the resurrection of Jairus’s daughter (4:35-42; 6:45-52;5:21-42; 9:14-29).

In sum, because Jesus reordered social, economic and political power in Roman-occupied Palestine, the guardians of the society were challenged and their system questioned. They thus opposed him vigorously. Mark's narrative shows their illusion and blindness to the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus. The "kingdom" was present in Jesus' acts of exorcisms, healing and pardon. For Mark a new era has come. Jesus is the one to trust because he does the things of God. The authorities are using their power and social status not to serve the people but to oppress and dispossess them. Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God empowers the people and responds to their needs. People reach salvation. "The kingdom of God has come upon and is among the people, available to be recognized, received, and entered"( Horsley 1993:178).

#### **4.4 The Temple System and The Tribute to Caesar**

This section does not aim to do a full study on the Temple and taxes in Roman-occupied Palestine. However, I understand Jesus' attitude towards the Temple(11:15-18), and the tribute to Caesar(12:13-17), as a response to the very system which embodied the social, political and economic exploitation of the non-propertied class in first century Palestine. Jesus' conflict with the religious authorities in the Temple and his rejection of the tribute to Caesar were a challenge to the foundation of power and authority in Roman-occupied Palestine. This was proof that with the establishment of the "kingdom of God" the pillars of the Roman system would of necessity have to fall. A reordering of power was present. The unequal and unjust society of exploitation of the majority of the population has to stop. A new social, political and economic order has come.



#### *4.4.1 Jesus' Attitude towards the Temple*

In Mark 14:58 and 15:29-30, Jesus is presented as a threat to the Temple. Jesus was accused of declaring that he would destroy the Temple and build another one. In this section, I want to state that the Temple was an integral institution of imperial order, in which the religious, political and economic aspects were inseparable. The Temple itself was the symbol and the cosmological center of the Jewish universe. It was understood as the place where God was living. It is important to notice that, although Jesus prophesied the destruction of the Temple as a building, his objection was not against the edifice itself but rather against the Temple system which exploited the poor and made it in essence a house of robbers(11:17).

According to Borg, apart from being a religious center, the temple was also the economic and political center of the social world of first century Palestine(Borg 1994:43).

Horsley recalls the importance of the Temple when he says,

The Temple and high priesthood were central and dominating political-economic institutions of ancient Judea, their religious dimension inseparable from their political-economic function. The Torah served, in effect, as the constitution and law code of Temple-state centered in Jerusalem-the pharisees and other scribes/sages served a mediating political-economic-religious function in that Judean Temple-state(Horsley1995:129).

Firstly, the Temple as a place of worship, was inaccessible to all sectors of society. Special places were reserved for people according to their social and religious status: The high priest, the priests, the gentiles, men and women. These divisions marginalized the lower class and privileged the Jewish aristocracy. Secondly, people were supposed to change Roman coins into Temple-money. This made profit for religious authorities. Thirdly, people were also asked to buy animals in the Temple and to

offer sacrifices. It is known that the lower class was not able to pay the Temple tithes and price of animals. Thus, Jesus' aim was not to purify or to clean the Temple as some scholars claim. Jesus rejected the system of social and economic exploitation which was carried out under the auspices of the Temple. Pixley is right when he says that, "The Jesus movement saw the principal obstacle to the realization of God's kingdom in Palestine to be the Temple and the class structure that it supported" (Pixley 1983:384).

Jesus challenged the Temple-state system because it was a threat to the economic and social life of the majority of the population formed by the peasants. The Temple-state was surviving and expanding at the expense of the peasant produce. There was a big gap between Jerusalem as a political-economic religious center and the rural peasantry whose produce in taxes provided the economic base for the whole of Palestine (Horsley 1995:135). There was, in a sense, a burden for the peasants: they had to pay taxes to the Roman authorities and also to the Jewish aristocracy through the Temple tithes. In Mark's narrative it is revealed that the Temple was not performing its role as a place of worship and similarly failed to represent the interests of those it was intended to protect: ie. the people. Because it was a source of survival for a few elites, the temple as an institution was ultimately against God and his people. Thus it was the opposite of and did not have the prerogatives of the kingdom of God. Draper rightly pointed out that "The Temple would rightly be perceived as a central point of the whole system of unequal power relations which constituted the exploitation of the peasantry, and in the period of economic and social collapse under triple taxation system during Roman domination of Palestine it would be the target of peasant anger" (Draper 1997:264).

It ought to be born in mind that Jesus came from the country side. His attitude towards the Temple came from his own peasant origin, which gave him anti-Roman and anti-Jewish aristocracy sentiments. By challenging the Temple system, Jesus represented the opinion of the majority who were dispossessed and exploited, whose social, economic and political rights were alienated by the guardians of the society and their system.

To sum up. In Mark's narrative, Jerusalem and the Temple constituted the pivotal point where upon opposition against Jesus would climax and find its resolution. The conflict in the temple lead to the death of Jesus. However, the narrative shows that although Jesus is faced intense opposition from his opponents, he was the one who won all the disputes with the religious authorities. The opponents were not capable of convincing Jesus in the conflict. They remained blind until the end of the drama because they did not appear to understand the things of God. They did not recognize the reality of the "kingdom of God".

#### ***4.4.2 Attitude towards the Tribute to Caesar***

In the preceding section, it was revealed that the conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities was based on questions related to the observance of the mosaic law and the tradition of the elders. Mark did not portray Jesus in an situation of open and direct conflict with the Roman authorities. By asking Jesus whether they had to pay taxes or not to the Roman emperor( 12:13-17), Mark brought the spiral of conflict between Jesus and his opponents into one of double dimensions: The conflict did not concern only Jewish tradition but involved also the Imperial power. Mark states clearly that the Herodians and the Pharisees were sent to catch Jesus in his words(12:13). The issue was so risky

that Jesus himself asked his opponents; “Why are you trying to trap me?” (12:15). It is important to notice that the text follows Jesus’ telling of the parable of the tenants in the vineyard (12:1-12), which gives the broader context and helps us to understand Jesus’s response in the narrative world of the text.

In order to understand Jesus’ attitude towards the tribute to Caesar, I will explore four related factors: firstly, I will try to interpret the parable of the tenants of the vineyard. Secondly, the representation of the Roman coin in Palestine will be analyzed. Thirdly, the interpretation of “the things of God” and “the things of Caesar” will come under scrutiny. And, Fourthly, the social, economic and political dimensions of Jesus’ attitude towards the tribute to Caesar will be explored.

#### **4.4.2.1 The Parables of the Tenants**

In the parable of the Tenants this is briefly what transpires: an owner of a vineyard lets it out to tenant farmers in order to have a portion of the crop according ly to the contract. When the owner sends a servant at the harvest time, the tenants seize him, beat him up and send him away empty handed. A second servant is struck on the head and treated shamefully. After many unsuccessful attempts with many servants, the owner finally sends his only son hoping that the Tenants would surely respect him. However, the Tenants murdered the son and seized the vineyard for themselves. After this act of violent land seizure, the owner himself came, drove the Tenants out by force, and gave the vineyard to other tenants. A Marxist analysis would interpret the Tenants act, as a seizure of the land by the poor from the rich as an act of revolutionary justice. The owner of the vineyard was supposed to be representative of the rich who dispossessed the poor and the Tenants on the other hand, representative of the poor who took back the land (Draper1999:19). The parable of the tenants

was interpreted Christologically by early Christians who, on the basis of Psalm 118:22f, related it to the crucifixion of Jesus and the punishment of the Jews (Ibid 1999:19).

It is important to notice that land issue was problematic in first Century Jewish Palestine. The land was unjustly accumulated and distributed by the rich, in the process dispossessing the poor and own it. "Land scarcity, and the accumulation of land in the hands of the rich in first Century Palestine, meant that there was great pressure on the land. There certainly was anger against absentee landlords, often accompanied by violent nationalistic feelings if the absentee owner was a non-Jew" (Dodd 1961:96-102; Jeremias 1972:74-77 in Draper 1999:19).

The case in the parable of the tenants shows that the tenants were not simple peasants, they were rich and powerful men with political influence. They used their powerful position to dispossess the powerless. The Old Testament is full of examples of Land seizure by the rich against the powerless. The story of Naboth's vineyard in 1 King 21:1-29 reminds us that the land was supposed not to be alienated and that any act of taking land by force or fraud was seen as a sin against God (Draper 1999:19).

The background to this parable of the tenants can be located in Isaiah 5:1-10 where it is revealed that God expected justice and righteousness in Judah but instead found bloodshed and cries from the people. In Isaiah it is written that: "God condemn and will judge rich Israelites who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land" (Is 5:8). "The parable of the tenants of the vineyard is a parable of eschatological reversal in which one is told that "He

will come and put the tenants to death and give the vineyard to others”(Mk12:9). The land and its fruit will be returned to the poor”(Draper1999:19). This parable can be understood as Jesus’s attack on the political and religious leaders of first Century Palestine who did not fulfill the role given to them by God to rule Israel justly and righteously but who, on the contrary, exploited and dispossessed the poor. As Horsley argued, the parable was directed at the priestly nobility because of “their exploitation and dispossession of the poor in contradiction to the Covenant”(Horsley 1993:306). The consequences of the governing class’s behaviour is clear, they too will be dispossessed in like manner as they themselves have dispossessed. Jesus does not identify the others to whom the vineyard will be given. Waetjen believes that the “others” of 12:9 can be a reference “to the disenfranchised lower classes to whom and for whom Jesus directed his ministry”(1989:188).

#### **4.4.2.2 The Representation of the Roman Coin in Palestine**

The fact that Jesus’s opponents already possessed a coin to present to Jesus in the debate they were about to engage in confirmed their conspiracy to trap him(12:16). The coin was not a innocent neutral object. It represented imperial power and bearing as it did the image of Caesar. By bearing the image of Caesar, the coin represented a threat to Jewish faith. It was then a subject of controversy in Palestine.

Some scholars think that the coin presented to Jesus by his opponents was minted by the emperor Tiberias( Hart1984:248). Horsley argues that in Jesus’ time, this *denarius* of Tiberias was the most official sign of the embodiment of power and idol worship(1993:309). Waetjen supposes that the coin was minted by Tiberias and bore the accompanying inscription, “Tiberius, Caesar, Augustus, the son of the divine Augustus”( 1989:189). It constituted an offense to Jewish faith because, the

emperor was made equivalent to God and worshiped as such. “The coin represents the heart of the system of unequal power relations by which the wealth of the weak can be syphoned off to support the inflated life-style of the powerful Rome” (Draper1999:20). According to Waetjen, “since the coin bears Caesar’s image and inscription, it represents his political power and economic interests but absolutized by his blasphemy of self-deification. By having the denarius in their possession, they have subjected themselves to its ultimate claims”(1989:190). It is easy to understand that the coin represented the economic and political interests of both the Roman authorities and the Jewish aristocracy, who were living at the expense of the poor. The coin was an offense to Jewish religion and a sign of the submission of the people by their colonizer: Rome.

#### **4.4.2.3 The Things of God and the Things of Caesar**

Jesus’ answer to the Herodians and the Pharisees: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s”(12:7), has occasioned much speculation. Some interpreters have seen in this answer, Jesus’ purpose to accept the tribute to Caesar. Others find in this expression an assertion allowing total submission to political leaders. My argument is that, by asking his opponents to give to Caesar the things of Caesar and to God the things of God, Jesus rejected submission to the imperial rule and rejected the idea of paying tribute to the emperor. Some propositions can justify my position: Firstly, Jesus’ response was an attempt to confront the imperial system and to reject its very foundations. Nothing belonged to Caesar. The world and everything in it belong to God. Israel through the covenant was God’s people and the land was his property. By colonizing Israel, imposing their imperial system, and dispossessing the land, Rome had offended God, who was the first owner of the land in Israel. Thus Jesus’ answer implies that Caesar as an imposter did not have any right in

Israel. He had only to vacate Palestine and return the land to the people. Jesus' response to the Herodians and the Pharisees does not concern the tribute to Caesar only, but also the issue of lordship. Horsley rightly indicates that Jesus' reply to his opponents showed that there was no obligation left to Caesar: For "if 'everything' or 'the whole man belongs to God' and 'that which is God's must not be given to Caesar,'" then Caesar has no "rights or claims, however limited" (Horsley1993:310). Jesus' response to questions about the tribute to Caesar does not legitimate it. On the contrary, his answers to the leaders of his time clearly showed his rejection the system.

#### **4.4.2.4 Implications of Jesus' Attitude towards the Tribute to Caesar**

Jesus' attitude towards the tribute to Caesar had social, political and economic dimensions. The tribute to Caesar, as said above made the people in Roman-occupied Palestine, subject to the Romans. Paying taxes to Caesar would aggravate the condition of the poor whose land was dispossessed and occupied. This would give the impression that Jesus wanted to collaborate with the oppressor: Rome.

Paying taxes to Caesar was an offense to Judaism in which God was the only one to be worshiped and venerated. The coin presented to Jesus by his opponents had an inscription recalling the divinity of the emperor. The taxes to Caesar was thus a direct challenge to the sovereignty of God as ultimate owner of the earth and every thing in it. This implied giving to Caesar the same status as God which was akin to idolatry in Israel.



By challenging the Temple system and the tribute to Caesar, Mark's narrative shows that the two institutions were contrary to the "kingdom of God" which Jesus proclaimed and established. A "kingdom" in which the Temple is not a place of social and economic exploitation of the poor, but a place where God is worshiped, and justice and righteousness was the means. Jesus also rejected, via his attitude towards the Temple and the taxes to the emperor, the authority of the Romans and the Jewish aristocracy. In both these attitudes, Jesus put the needs of human beings as the first priority. Authority and power according to Mark's narrative cannot be used for selfish interest and wealth accumulation but for God its ultimate source and to serve the people.

#### **4.5 The Kingdom of God as a Manifestation of Power**

In Mark's narrative, the "kingdom of God" is not a vague concept, but is the manifestation of God's power for the benefit of the people. The story world of Mark distinguishes between the power of God and the power of "the guardians of the society." While the power of the authorities is concerned with their selfish interest and wealth, the power of God, dwelling with Jesus, reaches the very basic physical, and spiritual needs of the people. God's power is expressed in the healing, exorcisms and the casting out of demons, the calming of the storm and the walking on water which Jesus exercises. In this section, I would like to look at some episodes related to healing, exorcisms and the casting out of demons and attempt to understand their social and political implications in relationship with the kingdom of God brought by Jesus. According to Horsley, "the 'kingdom of God' is manifested as present in the people's experience more dramatically and more explicitly in the exorcisms than in any other aspect of Jesus' practice and preaching"(1993:184).

It is important to note that the belief in Satan and demons was common to Jesus' contemporaries. In Jewish society there was a dualistic view of reality manifested by the struggle between God and Satan. In his understanding of Jesus' conception of the "kingdom of God", Bultmann helps us to understand the cosmological view of Jewish society in Jesus' time:

Jesus' message is connected with the hope which is primarily documented by apocalyptic literature, a hope which awaits salvation not from a miraculous change in historical conditions, but from a cosmic catastrophe which will do away with all conditions of the present world. The presuppositions of this hope is the pessimistic-dualistic view of the Satanic corruption of the total world-complex, which is expressed in the special doctrine of the two aeons into which the world's history is divided: the old aeon is approaching its end, and the new aeon will dawn with terror and tribulation(1952:4-5).

Horsley proposes that the understanding of reality as including the struggle between God and Satan was common amongst ordinary people in Jewish society and shared by Jesus and his contemporaries (1993:185). However, this dualism is not taken up unreservedly by Jesus and should not be used as basis for spiritualizing the "kingdom of God" he preached. When looking at Mark's report on healing and exorcisms three features can be deduced: First, there seems to be a connection between the forgiveness of sins and healing and this goes back to Jesus' practice.(Mk 2:5, Mk 2:1-12). He declared to the paralytic: "Son your sins are forgiven" This shows that Jesus was not only concerned with the physical needs of the person but with the entire well being of the whole human beings. Sin was not only individual but also structural. A physical recovery alone would not help because Jesus knew that his condition was linked to individual and structural sin of his society. So Jesus needed to remove the structural burden placed on the man by society; hence he forgives this sin to remove the paralysis afflicting him. As Waetjen explains "Jesus seems to have perceived that this condition of

paralysis is the consequence of all the injustices, injuries, and wrongs that have been done to and by this individual. Not simply *to or by*, but both *to and by*. The narrator's use of the noun *hamartia* ( "sins" ) is significant in this respect, for it bears the connotation of being flawed by entrapment in the cycle of action and reaction."( 1989:87). There was in Jewish society the understanding that sickness and suffering was caused by sins ( Horsley 1993:185).

Secondly, We must keep in mind that, as in all oppressed and colonized societies, Roman-occupied Palestine presented many diseases, demon possession and depression among the ordinary people caused by dehumanization and submission. The study of Hollenbach on demon possession and exorcisms will prove of use in this analysis. Hollenbach has shown the relationship between demon possession and oppression.(1981:573). Although this cannot be related to the case of demon possession, the situation of the Democratic Republic of Congo shows that in the time of the dictatorial reign of Mobutu, the number of clinical behavioral problems increased significantly among the population: nervous problems, madness, depression, and other mental illnesses. The situation of Roman-occupied Palestine, in which the majority of the population was oppressed, indebted, landless and dispossessed by the governing class, made it normal for cases of disease and possession to be common among the ordinary people. According to Crossan, " excessive taxation could leave poor people physically malnourished or hysterically disabled( Crossan 1991:324).

Thirdly, Jesus' exorcisms must be considered as God's activity in which he restored the people from political and economic oppression by the ruling class. Draper agrees with this idea when he says, "Jesus' " exorcism sets people free from the cycle of helplessness, symbolizing that the power of the

oppressor has been overthrown by God” (Draper 1994:41). It is in this context that one can understand the monumental opposition Jesus encountered from his opponents when exorcizing the people.

To sum up. Healing, exorcisms and the casting out of demons cannot be seen as isolated features in the preaching and action of Jesus. They are an integral part of Jesus’ program of bringing about the “kingdom of God”. They were a challenge to the religious and political leaders and marked the end of the rule of Satan. It showed that a new political and social order was taking place. People were released from the bondage of an unjust and unequal system and recovered their ontological dignity and power.

#### **4.6 The Kingdom of God and the Renewal of local Communities**

Although Jesus’ program of the “kingdom of God” would later include the gentiles, it is important to note that Jesus aimed at the renewal of Israel as the chosen people of God first. The fundamental concern was to restore the people of Israel with the “imagery of the restored Twelve tribes of Israel and the gathering of exiles from afar”(Horsley 1993:194). Isaiah 40-45 recalls the idea of Israel as the basis of justice which would eventually include all peoples. It is essential to understand that Jesus’ primary concern was the restoration of Israel by means of justice. Horsley (1993: 194) notes three themes or set of material in the gospel tradition which indicated that Jesus was practically working for the renewal of Israel. Firstly, the location of his ministry in the villages and towns of Galilee( vs. the cities) and its restriction to “the house of Israel. Secondly, Jesus’ continuity with

John's call for repentance and the threats of judgement Jesus pronounced on whole villages or on "this generation." Thirdly, Jesus' constitution of the twelve disciples as symbolic of the renewal of the people of Israel.

Mark's narrative seems to concur with Horsley's argument. Mark clearly shows that Jesus's ministry was performed mostly in Galilee. Jesus' ministry began in Galilee (1:9, 1:14) and finished in Galilee (16:7). Jesus understood his mission and that of his disciples as directed firstly to the lost sheep of Israel. The story of the Syro-Phoenician woman is a good example (7: 24-30). Mark also linked Jesus' ministry with that of John and placed it in main stream of prophetic themes such as repentance and judgement (1:9-12, 1:14). Finally, Mark mentions the Twelve and centered Jesus' ministry around them (6:7).

The "kingdom of God" as a renewal of Israel is important to my central argument. It places Jesus' ministry in a concrete socio-economic and political context. The renewal of a people, must be understood in concrete terms: "individuals had to decide to change; but they were still members of local villages and towns, the concrete social form in which "Israel" was socially embodied. Jesus was clearly concerned that the people generally, village by village, town by town, respond to the new possibility, the presence of the kingdom" (Horsley 1993:198). The "kingdom of God" was meant to establish a new order in Israel in which justice and the welfare of the people was the first priority.

The kingdom of God was an act of empowerment for the people of Israel whose dignity and well-being was destroyed by an unjust unequal society of exploitation, oppression and dispossession of

the people by the political and religious leaders in Jewish Palestine.

To sum up, in Mark's narrative, the kingdom of God as a renewal for Israel implies that God becomes the saviour of his people to liberate them from the oppressive order maintained by the power of Satan.

This implied also the liberation and the welfare of the people, which led to judgement of the oppressors of the people, and vindication and blessing to those who accept the kingdom of God. By renewing Israel, God manifested the presence and the imminence of the kingdom of God by an historical act of salvation. The renewal of Israel is made concrete and effective by the mention in Mark's narrative of the story of the feeding, of the disciples as the guest of the bridegroom, of the healing and forgiveness of sin by which people experience the liberation and enter a new order: the kingdom of God.

#### **4.7 The Kingdom of God Preached in the language accessible to the Oppressed**

Another dimension which made the "kingdom of God" a social and political reality was that the "kingdom of God" was for the people and was thus preached in a language accessible to the oppressed. Jesus used the parable as a tool to conjur up an image of the social and political conditions in which the people lived. In this section I explore parables in Mark's narrative and attempt to locate their social and political context in first century Jewish Palestine.

Scholarly discussion of the interpretation of Jesus' parables has a long history, and no definitive answer to the problem has been reached. This is quite acceptable because the parables were not pronounced and written primarily for our contemporary audience. They have their own historical setting and message. I do not want to get involved in the scholarly debate on the interpretation of the parables.

However, I recognize the input of A. Jülicher who challenged the traditional allegorical interpretation of parables. He represented a new step forward in interpreting the parables (Jeremias 1972:18-19). The Work of C.H Dodd (1935) and Jeremias (1971) are important, because they take into account the social and political context and culture in which Jesus lived in their interpretation of the parables. However, my understanding of Jesus's parables in Mark relies on the approach of some scholars like W.A Herzog (1994), J.D Crossan (1988), M. Borg (1994) who have raised the subversive and conflictual meaning of Jesus's parables. Waetjen also understands parables as "stories that subvert world" (1989:100).

In his book, *Parables as a subversive speech: Jesus as a pedagogue of the Oppressed* (1994), Herzog emphasizes this new approach to interpreting parables. He points out the subversive, codified and hidden aspect of Jesus' parables. For him, Jesus used a codified language as an instrument to liberate the oppressed of his time. He states that to understand Jesus' parables, one must be able to decode their oppressive reality (1994:29). Crossan states that the parables of Jesus are used to reverse the expectations of his audience. They are close to satire and have in them an element of surprise. They constitute a contradictory way of speaking. He says, "Parables give God room. The parables of Jesus

are not historical allegories telling us how God acts with mankind; neither are they moral example-stories telling us how to act before God and towards one another. They are stories which shatter the deep structure of our accepted world and thereby render clear and evident to us the relativity of the story itself. They remove our defenses and make us vulnerable to God”(1988:100).

In a similar way, Borg understands Jesus’ teaching as subversive and offering an alternative wisdom. For him Jesus’s language was reversal and paradoxical so as to shatter the conventional wisdom of his time. He finds in Jesus’ language impossible and unexpected combinations. He refers here to Jesus’ comparison of the “kingdom of God” with the grain of mustard or Jesus’s statement that the “kingdom” was for those who are children( 1994:29).

In Mark’s narrative, the following parables are mentioned: the parable of the Sower(4:1-20), the parables of the Growing Seed( 4:26-29), the parable of the Mustard Seed(4:30-34) and the parable of the Tenants(12:1-12). It is easy to observe that all these parables deal with issues related to agrarian society and are thus familiar in a peasant context. Thus, the hearers and addressees of Mark must have been familiar with the reality of the peasant and agricultural context. The parable of the sower depicts the “kingdom of God” as an agricultural season. According to Waetjen, Jesus is like the sower broadcasting seed without prejudging the soil in terms of its potentiality. “In his ministry of preaching and teaching, liberation and restoration, God’s rule is being sown”(1989:102). The parable of the sower encourages human beings, especially the oppressed and dispossessed, to have hope and participate in the active “kingdom of God” until the Harvest, which represents the judgement of the oppressor and the vindication of the poor. As Waetjen expresses it,



Parables, therefore, are ambiguous stories and images. They are not simply riddles! For “insiders,” those to whom the mystery of God’s rule has been given, particularly the oppressed and the dispossessed, they are transparent pedagogical devices which mediate greater participation in god’s rule and simultaneously facilitate a brighter illumination of the divine intention for human existence in society. On the other hand, for the “outsiders” they are opaque metaphors that preclude participation, the production of new configurations of meaning and therefore also a new understanding of the self in relation to the world(Waetjen 1989:105).

The parable of the sower provides hope to the peasants in that they are not to be inactive in society. They have to participate in the “kingdom of God” acknowledging that God has the final word, is sovereign and will liberate them from their oppression and sufferings.

The parables of the Growing Seed and the Mustard Seed reveal the narrator’s intention to reveal the power of the powerless. There is a progression from uselessness to fullness, from nothing to a concrete thing, from small to big harvest, from a grain of Mustard seed to the greatest of all shrubs. These parables show that although the “kingdom of God” appears small in comparison to the rule of Rome and the Jewish elite, it is powerful and has overcome the work of Satan and “the guardians of the society” in Roman-occupied Palestine. Thus, the power of those who have entered the “kingdom of God” cannot be minimized. They are empowered by God and recover their self liberation and dignity. Mark used the simple elements of the agricultural world to emphasize the power and the activity of the “kingdom of God.”

The parable of Tenants has been already explained in previous sections. It reminds us how, in the social and political situation of Palestine, the powerful were dispossessing the poor from the land. It reveals God’s judgement of the ruling class of Israel, who did not manage to bring justice and

righteousness among the people by using their power for selfish interests and attainment of personal wealth. The parable concluded that “He will come and put the tenants to death and give the vineyard and its produce to others”(Mk12:9). God will give the land and what he conserves to the poor.

#### **4.8 The Kingdom of God implies Egalitarian, Non-Exploitative and Non-Authoritarian Social Relations**

In Mark’s narrative, it is clear that the “kingdom of God” proclaimed and established by Jesus questions the traditional understanding of social relations in Jewish Palestine. One must bear in mind that Roman- occupied Palestine society was structured into two main class: the propertied class and the non-propertied class formed by the majority of the population( Szenat 1992:42-45). In this society, the governing class was the patron and the lower classes was obliged to be submitted to them. Jesus reverses the social and political order in his preaching and teaching on the “ kingdom of God.” It is, as Waetjen explains, a reordering of power, a redistribution of forces and authority.

Firstly, this is confirmed in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. This relationship is not a pyramidic one in which Jesus imposes his will or pressurizes on the disciples. Jesus’s relationship with his disciples is a horizontal one in which he shares power with the disciples. In his interpretation of Mark 10:35-45 concerning the request of James and John about social position, Waetjen says: “ But there are no privileged positions in God’s rule, no ranks of status, no levels of authority... Jesus proceeds to reinforce this teaching by contrasting the pyramidical vertically of the kingdoms of this world and the kind of human relationships that maintain the horizontality of God’s

rule which he is building”(1989:176).

The “kingdom” then is not God exercising power over the people to oppress them but God’s power shared with the people. It is a new society in which human beings are equal. People are acting on God’s behalf. Mark 6:6-13 shows how Jesus empowered the Twelve, by sending them out. They preached repentance as Jesus did, drove out demons and healed sick people. Jesus became the servant of the people and showed that the new order he established required egalitarian social relations. This can be illustrated in Mark with the text of 10:42-43: “ You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.”

The “kingdom” required also non-patriarchal social relations. This is expressed in Jesus’ attitude towards the Mosaic law on divorce(10:1-12). In Jewish society, the initiative for a divorce process was primarily from the husband. The wife was passive in the process and seemed only to submit to the decision of her husband. Although Jesus did not agree with divorce, he acknowledged the equality of the sexes in the initiation of divorce and the establishment of marriage.

According to Waetjen(1989:166), “A woman, like a man, can institute divorce proceedings against her spouse even as she also can leave her parents and cleave to a husband. But divorce for those already participating in the new Household of God, whether undertaken by one or the other, contradicts the fundamental direction of the divinely appointed movement of the new creation.”

Mark also shows that the necessary disposition for entering the “kingdom of God” and continuing

participation therein was to be like a child(10:13-16). The statement about “receiving the kingdom of God like a child” has been seen generally by some scholars as depicting some of the most important qualities needed to enter the kingdom of God.

According to Vincent Taylor, the expression refers to receiving the “kingdom of God” as a gift and reminds one of the simplicity of children as one of the qualities required in the final established kingdom(1963:423). Edouard Schweitzer refutes the idealization and exaltation of children as depicted in the Gospel of Thomas. He argues that “The children play no active role and cannot defend themselves against the overzealous disciples. But this is the reason they are blessed. Just because they have nothing to show for themselves. They cannot count on any achievements of their own. Their hands are empty like those of the beggars”(1970:206-207).

Rhoads and Michie give an indirect meaning to the expression “receiving the kingdom of God like a child.” They place children in the group of minor characters(little people) in Mark’s narrative. Children are important characters, but are not named and disappear quickly in the narrative. Thus Rhoads and Michie emphasize the aspect of “littleness” to understand the statement. Larry Hurtado rejects the idea of “any supposed innocence or humility or other imaged quality of the children.”He goes back to Jesus’ cultural context where children were totally dependent, without any social or legal weight. He sees dependence on social and religious status as an obstacle to entering the “kingdom of God”(1983:149). Herman Waetjen insists on children’s innocence and openness as authentic humanness characterizing God’s rule. For him, “to receive God’s rule like a child depends on the qualities of vulnerability and trust, transparency and defenselessness, integrity and wholeness,

expectation and humility”(1989:167).

Crossan, on the other hand, tries to understand Jesus’ correlation of the kingdom and children by involving not only the book of Mark but the synoptic tradition and the apocryphal gospel of Thomas. For him, the kingdom is related to children and means a kingdom of nobodies: “To be a child was to be nobody, with the possibility of becoming some body absolutely dependent on parental discretion and standing in the community”( 1991:269-270). Crossan also relates also the expression to the treatment of the undesirables. He argues that the aspect of humility, celibacy and baptism must not be the first understanding(1991:130).

The interpretation of the scholars I have mentioned regarding Jesus’ statement about receiving the “kingdom of God” like a child reveal two major positions. The first deals with the qualities of children in terms of humility, dependence, simplicity, openness etc. while the second position is concerned with the social status of the children in Jesus’ cultural background.

When referred to the social and political context of First century Palestine, the expression signifies a readiness not to oppose or confront the “kingdom of God.” First, in the whole synoptic tradition, and particularly in Mark, children are not among those who oppose Jesus’ ministry. Secondly, to receive “the kingdom of God” like a child is to have no ambition of power and social status. Thirdly, children are minor characters in Mark’s narrative. They are, according to Rhoads and Michie’s terminology, among the little people. (1982:130). They are nothing or no body(Crossan 1991:269). In the social stratification of Roman-occupied Palestine. Children are the very opposite of what the

political and religious leaders are as opponents of the “kingdom of God.”

The “kingdom of God” implies non-exploitative and non-authoritarian social relations. In the previous section, it was revealed how exploitative and authoritarian the ordering of social, political and economic life in Roman-occupied Palestine was. This is not the same in the new order Jesus establishes: the “kingdom of God”. It is an egalitarian familial community in which love is the greatest commandment(12:13). As mentioned previously, Jesus’s struggle with the authorities of his time occurred because of their exploitation and oppression of the poor. This reminds one of the various conflicts and oppositions he encountered which eventually led to his death. Mark’s narrative tries to reveal the new understanding of power and authority in the “kingdom of God.” Power and authority are used primarily for the benefit and the needs of the people and not to oppress and exploit them.

Three texts can remind us that, in the “kingdom of God” social relations are non authoritative and non exploitative: first, the story of the Rich Young Man(10:17-25), second, the Widow’s Offering (12:41-43), and third, the parable of the Tenants(12:1-12). After his debate with the rich young man, Jesus concluded: “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.”(10:23). Some implications can be deduced from Jesus’ assertion towards the rich young man. Firstly, in the context of Roman-occupied Palestine, the young man can be classified among the propertied class.(The group who exploited and dispossessed the majority of the population).

The rich man found it very difficult to change sides. As Horsley states, “ The rich man’s wealth was

almost by definition, gained by unrighteous Mammon... the only way the rich man could inherit eternal life or enter the kingdom would be to change masters, i.e., to follow the will of God by giving back what he had gained by Mammon”(1993:249). By dispossessing and exploiting the poor, the rich excluded themselves from the “kingdom of God” because they lived on the produce and the expenses of the peasant.

Mark’s report on the offering of the widow (12:4-44) is an other example that the kingdom of God which Jesus built was a challenge to the authoritarian and exploitive system of the religious leaders. This text used to be interpreted as if Jesus encouraged the religious attitude of the widow who paid her last two coins to the temple treasury. On the contrary, Jesus’s attitude towards the offering of the widow must be placed in the context of the challenge towards the authorities in Jerusalem. Jesus laments; he does not encourage the widow, but his attitude is against the religious authorities who taught her this pious behaviour. We must bear in mind that for Jesus, human needs were prior to any religious values. This was one of the major points of misunderstanding between Jesus and the religious leaders(2;1-12,23-28; 3;1-6). I agree with Wright when he says that,

The story does not provide a pious contrast to the conduct of the scribes in the preceding section(as is the customary view); rather it provides a further illustration of the ills of official devotion. Jesus’ saying is not a penetrating insight on the measuring of gifts; it is a lament...she had been taught and encouraged by religious leaders to donate as she does, and Jesus condemns the value system that motivates her action, and condemn the people who conditioned her to do it ( Wright 1982:262).

The narrative concerning the widow’s offering is preceded by Jesus’s warning against the scribes: “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the market-places, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor

at banquets. They devour widow's houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely"(Mk12:38-40).

The parable of the Tenants reminds us a system of unequal power relations in which, the accumulation of land in the hands of the rich was a threat to the survival of the poor. It is proof of exploitative and authoritative social relations in first century Jewish Palestine.

#### **4.9 Summary**

My primary task in this chapter consisted of defending my central argument that the "kingdom of God" in Mark's narrative has a social and political dimension. To confirm my central argument, I began by showing the social and political implications of Jesus's proclamation of the kingdom of God. Because the "kingdom of God" built by Jesus, reorders power and authority in Roman-occupied Palestine, Jesus's actions and ministry were confronted by intense opposition from "the guardians of the society": The Roman authorities and the Jewish aristocracy. The Temple and the taxes to the emperor being the very institutions of the socioeconomic exploitation of the people by the governing class, would be challenged by the new order established by Jesus. The "kingdom of God" in Mark's narrative is a manifestation of power visible in the healing, exorcisms, forgiveness of sin and the driving out of demons which Jesus exercised. It is intended to empower the people to recover their dignity by restoring justice and righteousness to the oppressed and the dispossessed.

I also pointed out that the "kingdom of God" was for the people, it was preached and taught in



parables, in a language accessible to the oppressed and the peasant. The “kingdom of God” consisted of the renewal of local communities in Israel by building familial communities in which the members were bound by love and by egalitarian and non-exploitative social relations. Thus the kingdom of God as depicted in Mark’s narrative is good news for the poor, because it is proclaimed in the context of appalling poverty, hunger, unemployment, disease and powerlessness: socio - political situation relevant to Mark’s addressees.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **5. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH OF CONGO (MBCC)**

#### **5.1 General Context of The Democratic Republic of Congo ( DRC) and the MBCC**

##### ***5.1.1 The Democratic Republic of Congo***

As the Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo (MBCC) is working in the Congo, it is necessary to paint a clear picture we of the socio-political and economical environment of the Democratic Republic of Congo before one can draw conclusions about the implications of Jesus's teachings on the "kingdom of God."

The Democratic Republic of Congo, the former Zaire, became a Belgian colony after the division of Africa at the Berlin International Conference in 1885. Over a period of more than 80 years, Belgium exploited Congo economically and politically until Congo achieved independence in 1960. However just after independence, from 1960 to 1965, a civil war occurred instigated by Western power including the U.S.A and Mobutu Sese Seko took over power in 1965. Mobutu's reign was yetanother socio-political and economic exploitation of the people. Urquhart describes Mobutu's regime which was epitomized by corruption and robbery thus:

He would court and win the support of Western leaders, and financial institutions, who saw him as a convenient anti-communist leader. And for three decades he would rob his country blind, taking government revenue for his own pleasure. Whether at his villa in the south of France, palatial home elsewhere in Europe or in his lavish personal plane, Mobutu has not hid his love of luxury. His personal fortune is estimated conservatively at \$ 5 billion ( CNN,10/5/99).

An overview of some important features of the Democratic Republic of Congo, taken from the website *Infoplease.com*, 10/5/99 can help us to understand the general context in which the country is living now :

Area : 905,365 sq. mi. (2,345,410 sq.km).

Population ( 1999 est.) :

50,481,305 ( average annual rate of natural increase :3.14% ); birth rate : 46.4/1000; infant mortality rate : 99.5/1000; density per sq. mi.: 56.

Capital and largest city ( 1994 est. ) : Kinshasa, 4,655,313.

Other large cities: Lubumbashi, 851,381; Mbuji-mayi, 806,475; Kisangani, 417,517; Kolwezi, 417,810.

Languages : French ( official ), English, Bantu dialects, mainly Swahili, Lingala, Tshiluba, and Kikongo.

Ethnicity/rate: over 200 African ethnic groups, the majority are Bantu; the four largest tribes-Mongo, Luba, Kongo ( all Bantu ), and the Magbetu-Azande (Hamitic) make up about 45% of the population.

Religions: Roman Catholic 50%, Protestant 20%, Kimbanguist 10%, Islam 10 %; syncretic and traditional, 10 %. Literacy rate: 72 %.

Economic summary : GDP/ PPP ( 1996 est. ) : \$ 18 billion; \$ 400 per capita. Real growth rate: 1.5 %.

Inflation: n.a. Unemployment : n.a. Arable land : 3%.

Agriculture: coffee, sugar, palm oil, rubber, tea, quinine, cassava (tapioca), bananas, root crops, corn, fruits, wood products. Labor force : 14,51 million (1993 est. ); agriculture 65%, industry 16%, services 19 % ( 1991 est. ). Industry: mining, mineral processing, consumer products, cement, diamonds .Natural resources : copper, cobalt, cadmium, petroleum, industrial and gem diamonds, gold, silver, zinc, manganese, tin, germanium, uranium, radium, bauxite, iron ore, coal, hydro power potential, timber.

Exports: \$1.9 billion (f.o.b., 1996 est. ): diamonds, copper, coffee, cobalt, crude oil.

Imports: \$ 1.1 billion (f. o. b., 1996 est. ): consumer goods, foodstuffs, mining and other machinery, transport equipment, and fuels.

Major trading partners : Belgium, U.S., France, Germany, Italy, U.K., Japan, South Africa.

Geography: Congo, in west central Africa, is bordered by the Congo republic (Brazzaville), the Central African Republic, the Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Zambia, Angola, and the Atlantic Ocean. It is one quarter the size of the

*United States. The principal rivers are the Ubangui and Bomu in the north and the Congo in the west, which flows into the Atlantic. The entire length of Lake Tanganyika lies along the eastern border with Tanzania and Burundi.*

In November 1996, tensions in the east of Congo, because of the genocide in Rwanda, led to an armed conflict. Tutsi rebels backed by Uganda and Rwanda attacked the Congolese army and controlled many strategic towns in the province of Kivu. Laurent Kabila, who had participated in previous rebellions in Congo in 1964 and 1965, and who lived in the neighboring country to the east of Congo, became the chief of the rebels. After eight months the rebels arrived in Kinshasa and Mobutu was forced to leave the country and lived in exile until his death in September 1998.

In May 1997 the new government took power and ended one of the longest dictatorial reigns in the world, 32 years of Mobutu's rule. The current president of the Democratic Republic of Congo is Laurent Desire Kabila who enthroned himself on May 10th 1997. Things were not easy for Kabila. Since August 1998, Rwanda and Uganda are backing some groups of rebels who are fighting to overthrow his government. The rebels have occupied three important provinces of the Congo and the United Nations and the Organization for the Unity of Africa are trying to reconcile the government and the rebels to agree to a cease- fire.

The situation is becoming more and more complicated because more than six countries ( Angola, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Namibia ) are involved in the conflict in the Congo. The conflict has now taken on both regional and International dimensions because of the natural resources and strategic position of the Congo.

In July 1999, a cease-fire agreement was signed by all six of the countries involved,

and after much wrangling, the rival rebel forces signed the agreement. The accord stipulates an immediate cease-fire, the withdrawal of foreign troops, the establishment of international observers, and national meetings between Kabila, the rebels and opposition leaders, a plan that seems highly optimistic given the chaotic muddle of the conflict and the multitude of factions involved ( Infoplease.com, 10/5/99).

Mobutu's regime's misuse of material and financial resources of Congo had led to the destruction of the entire socio-economic infrastructure of the country, " leaving a bankrupt country where salaries are not paid. Where hospital patients have to supply their own anaesthetic, scalpel, surgical thread and gloves before a surgeon can operate" ( CNN, 10/5/99 ). The country has a massive debt incurred by the previous regime from the World Bank and other international financial organizations and cannot afford to pay it .The new government of Congo is struggling because workers cannot be paid. There is unemployment, disease, poverty. Hospitals, schools and roads have been destroyed.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is currently experiencing a situation of general economic crisis. This is incredible for a country which before 1965 had the same living standard as Canada. In 1971 one Zaire was equal to 2 US Dollars. Today 1 US \$ = 130,000 Zaire.

Currently there are no telephone lines in the countryside, no electricity, no clean water and no television. To travel from Kinshasa to Kikwit, a town where the head office of the MBCC is located, we have to spend 3 to 4 days by car to drive a distance of 500 km. Banks, post offices and public administration do not function in a normal way. Most of the workers in Congo become craftsmen, others go to the fields to cultivate so that they can survive. Women and children sell goods at the market so that families can live. Poverty, sickness, unemployment and hunger affect the majority of the people in Congo. Most of the Congolese are fleeing into neighboring countries as refugees because of the war. The situation is becoming more and more difficult because the country is isolated

from other countries and there is a lack of basic infrastructures of transport, communication and education.

This is a brief socio-political and economic context of the Democratic Republic of Congo. This situation has a real impact on the members of the MBCC because most of them are unemployed, poor, and marginalised.

### ***5.1.2 The Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo***

#### **5.1.2.1 Brief History**

The Mennonite Church began in the Belgian Congo in 1911 with the work of the missionaries Aaron and Ernestina Janzens. They began the work in an area located west of the Kasai River about 400 kilometres southeast of Kinshasa ( Dyck 1993 :368 ). It is important to note that there are three principal groups of Mennonite Churches in Congo: The Mennonite Church of Congo, the Evangelical Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo. Since 1983, all these churches have formed a committee to deal with their common interests, the National Inter-Mennonite Committee.

The Mennonite Brethren Church is a non- profit organization created in 1922 and recognized by the colonial authorities since 1945. This church comes from the ministry of Rev. Aaron Janzen, a missionary of the American Brethren Mission (AMBM), which is now called the Mennonite Brethren Mission and Service (MBMS). The international office of the MBMS is at Fresno in the

United States ( Kikweta 1978: 10).

The MBCC is one of the 65 churches which form the Church of Christ in Congo. The head office of the MBCC is in Kikwit, a town situated 500 km from Kinshasa, the capital city of Congo. The MBCC works in Kinshasa and Bandundu provinces of Congo. The church is divided into four ecclesiastic regions: the West province, the South province, the Wamba province and the Kwilu province.

The constitution of the MBCC includes seven goals or purposes of the church: 1. evangelization which is the first priority, 2. secular education, 3. health and community development, 4. women's department, 5. Christian literature, 6. youth department and mission. The hierarchy or the principal structures of the MBCC are: 1. the General Assembly which is the supreme organ of the MBCC, 2. the Central Executive Committee, 3. the Regional Executive Committee, 4. the District Committee and 5. the Parish Committee. The head office or the national office has three permanent members: the general secretary, the national evangelist and the treasurer. I myself have served in the MBCC as the national evangelist from 1993 to 1997. The MBCC has 83,000 members, 245 pastors, 75 ordained pastors, 20 theologians, 475 parishes and 71 districts ( Derksen 1997 : 16 ).

#### **5.1.2.2 Social and Economic situation**

The general situation of the Congo has influenced the life of the members of the MBCC. The majority of the people are poor and unemployed. Many families survive because the women and children go to the fields to look for wood and food.

People have not been paid since 1991 and even teachers, professors and pastors go to cultivate the fields to survive. Many children are unschooled. Prostitution, violence and poverty can be seen everywhere in Congo.

The poverty and suffering of the members of the MBCC leads to a misunderstanding of the role of MBCC leaders on the part of its members. Members think that the church has to help them socially and economically because it receives gifts and financial aid from North America.

The MBCC receives from its partner, the Mennonite Brethren Mission and Service (MBMS) in North America, a contribution to its budget equivalent to \$ US 43,000 per year (Derksen 1997:15).

The Mennonite Brethren Mission and Service (MBMS) has indicated in the last meeting with the MBCC staff in Kinshasa in January 1998 that the subsidies will be reduced and in 1999 it will be discontinued. The MBCC has supported some development projects, but it cannot help to meet the needs of all the members of the MBCC. The MBCC is working in an environment of socio-political and economic crisis, and this crisis has an impact on the life and the leadership of the church.

## **5.2 What Mennonites Believe**

In order for us to study the doctrine and theology of Mennonites, a brief history of the birth of the Anabaptist movement needs to be explained because the terms Anabaptist and Mennonite are historically related.



In his book , *An Introduction to Mennonite History*( 1993:33), Cornelius J. Dyck, recalls the birth of the Anabaptist Movement:

Anabaptism was a sixteenth-century church reform movement with roots in religious, social, economic, and political conditions in most of western Europe. It drew upon the work of the Protestant reformers, biblical studies made possible by humanism, social unrest, exploitation of the masses, anticlericalism, and a deep unfulfilled spiritual longing among the people, most of whom believed that the end of the world was near.

Concerning the date of the birth of Anabaptism, Dyck relates it to the first adult baptism which happened at Zurich, on January 21, 1525. Anabaptism means, semantically, “to be baptized again.” This refers to the first believers who left the Catholic Church and, rejecting their infant baptism, accepted to be baptized again as adults ( 1993 :33 ). Mennonites find their roots in this movement. Their name came from Menno Simons, a Dutch priest who renounced Catholicism and joined the Anabaptist movement on January 30, 1536 ( Wenger 1990 :45 ). The expression “Anabaptist-Mennonite” is always used to emphasize this historical link between Mennonites and the sixteenth century Anabaptist movement.

I wish to point out important elements in the Mennonite doctrine of the church and Christ from Menno Simons, the historical leader of the Mennonite churches. This will help in understanding the implications concerning the “kingdom of God” for the MBCC. Looking at Menno’s Christology it appears that, for him, God’s revelation in Jesus Christ was unique and Christ constituted the foundation and the message of the church. The text of I Corinthians 3 :11 was inscribed on all the publications of Menno. This text states that : *No other foundation can any one lay than that which*

*is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* For Menno, Christ was the unique and indispensable object of faith and a model for a Christian lifestyle. Menno put the New Testament at the center of his teachings. One could not compromise the deity and the incarnation of Christ ( 1984 : 492-493 ). The Christ whom Menno emphasized was the Christ Peter confessed (Matt.16 :16 ) and the Word made flesh of John 1 :14. Menno looked to this Christ to restore the church after the patterns of the New Testament. Christ was also the key for his biblical hermeneutic. Menno joined Luther and other reformers who thought that the revelation of Christ had become incarnate in Jesus, to whom the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testament, bore witness (1984 :498 ).

Reflecting on Menno Simons' understanding of the church, it is apparent that he had a universal conception of the church. Those members who truly believe in Christ, belong to the church. Visible churches must be composed only of committed, baptized disciples. In his reply to Gellius Faber, Menno summarizes the nature of the Universal church:

Although each era has its own ordinance and usage, and although the church is called by different names, as has been said, yet all before, under and after the law, who in sincere, true fear of God, walk and continue to walk according to the word and will of God, hope in Christ, and will do so to the end, these are one community, church, and body, and will always remain so ; for they are all saved by Christ, accepted by God, and enriched with the Spirit of his grace ( 1984 : 735).

Secondly Menno described six marks of the true church which distinguish it from the church of the Antichrist. The first two marks remind one of Luther's idea that the church is where the word is preached and the sacraments are properly observed. However, Menno rejected the sacraments as practised in the Roman Catholic Church and thought they were not biblical. The other four marks of

the true church are, according to Menno, the fellowship of the committed, the separation of church and state, agape or a lifestyle of love in the example of Christ, and the church under the cross. For Menno, persecution was the cost of witness to Christ ( 1984 : 741 ).

This overview of Menno's conception of Christ and the church provides the basis for understanding the Mennonite churches' ecclesiology and Christology. J.C. Wenger summarizes the Mennonite idea of the church when he states : “ Those who respond to the good news by turning from sin toward faith in Jesus love to connect with each other. We call this the church or assembly of God and of Christ. We think of those who belong to God as a body of Christ.” Wenger also insists that “the church is the group of people who follow Jesus' way and not the world's way” (Wenger1991:17).

The term “world” is often heard in Mennonite ecclesiology and leads to a dualistic conception of Christian life according to Christ and the life according to the wider or secular society. I shall explain the implications of this and show why the Mennonites' understanding of the world undermines the development and building of a nation.

One must bear in mind that an ecclesiology and a Christology constructed in the context of the sixteenth-century is difficult to apply to the context of the MBCC today. Some Mennonite scholars like Stephen F. Dintaman have seriously questioned the relevance of *the Anabaptist vision* for Mennonites today, considering it as a myth.

In his article, *The Spiritual Poverty of the Anabaptist Vision*, Dintaman argues that the definition of

Christianity given in the Anabaptist vision is essentially behavioral. He then states three elements in the Anabaptist vision which reduce Christianity to personal ethics: The Christian life as discipleship, the church as community and the practice of nonresistant love ( Dintaman 1992:205)

Dintaman summarizes three critical areas where he believes the Anabaptist vision has impoverished the generation which has been tutored in it: Firstly, he says that the vision gives little insight into human behavior. Secondly, it provides an inadequate awareness of the liberating work of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Thirdly, it impoverishes the spiritual presence and power of the risen Christ. (1992 :206-207 ).

I find Dintaman's observations on the Anabaptist vision pertinent, because the Christian faith cannot be reduced to personal ethics alone. Christ is the peace of the whole world, not only followers of the Mennonites. Mennonites must pay attention to the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit in the world. Discipleship must be related to who God is and what God is doing in the world. Christianity cannot be reduced only to personal spiritual experience; it is more than that. However, this poverty of the Anabaptist vision does not undermine the great heritage Anabaptism has provided for Mennonites particularly and for Christianity in general.

In his article, *The Anabaptist vision and Social Justice*, John Driver points out that sixteenth-century Anabaptism was not only a religious movement but also a social movement. For him, "a concern for social justice was probably more central to the genius of radical Anabaptism of the sixteenth-century than most of the modern heirs of the movement would imagine" ( 1989:102 ).

Cornelius J. Dyck, recalling the impact of the Anabaptist movement in its social and political struggle of the sixteenth-century, reminds one that the Anabaptists were identified by some of their contemporaries as revolutionaries, socialists, salvation-by-works Christians. This is because the Anabaptists tried to change the social and the political milieu in which they lived ( 1993: 430-435).

John Driver (1989:102-110) argues that recent studies have shown common concerns between the religious and social views held by the peasants in their revolt of 1524-25 and the Anabaptists. He mentions seven common concerns which the peasants shared with the Anabaptists: 1)the relevance of the Gospel to social and economic realities, 2)the protest of both groups against the payment of tithes, 3) the rejection of structures that perpetuated class distinctions,4) the call for human freedom: for the peasants' freedom from serfdom, for the Anabaptists' freedom to act and believe according to their own conscience,5)the independence from ecclesiastic control, 6)resistance to established authorities, and 7) the appeal for nonviolent change to fuller social justice and equality.

Driver sees a similarity of concerns between radical Anabaptism and liberation theology. He states that, while liberation theology tends to emphasize almost unilaterally the Exodus paradigm, radical Anabaptism has focused on the relevance of the people-hood motif found in the Abrahamic covenant ( Ibid 1989:110).

It is quite interesting to see a correlation between the Anabaptist ideal of social and political change at their time and Mark's narrative's aim to show Jesus as concerned with the reordering of political, religious and social powers in Roman-occupied Jewish Palestine.

Jesus fought for social justice against the Roman authorities and the Jewish elite. The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century fought against the Catholic and the Reformed Church, the state and lords of their time.

Thomas Müntzer ( c.1489-1525 ), a German radical Anabaptist reformer, tried to build a theocracy on earth. He saw the peasants' rebellion as the beginning of the struggle of the saints in the last days. Menswear was sustained by a belief that the soul needs to be purified by suffering and tribulation before it can receive the holy spirit. After the rebels had been defeated, Menswear was tortured and executed, without recanting his fundamental beliefs (Cross & Livingstone 1997 : 1125).

The question is, why have contemporary Mennonites abandoned this struggle over social and political justice? Why is their primary emphasis now on individual behavior? We will try to answer these questions in the section dealing with the implications of our research for the Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo ( MBCC ).

Other important points in the Anabaptist heritage include the meaning of the cross of Christ, the believing community and non- resistance which leads to love of humankind. The Anabaptists have suffered immense and cruel persecutions since the beginning of the movement. They accepted these sufferings and persecutions as a price of their love and witness to Christ.

The history of Anabaptism shows how they left Europe and fled to America to seek for a place where they could express their faith and build a "Kingdom of God." The Amish , one group of Mennonites,

have tried to fulfill this goal by living a life of simplicity, sharing and community. This reminds one of the community of goods as depicted in Acts (Draper1988 :77-87).The Amish have their own social and educational institutions and use traditional agricultural methods on their farms.

The Mennonites' doctrine of nonresistance and pacifism does not allow them to engage in military service. However, during World War II, "the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 in the USA, assigned conscientious objectors to work of national importance under Civilian Public service ( CPS) ( Dyck 1993 : 413 ). Mennonite churches have been attentive to the material needs of humanity in response to war consequences or natural calamities around the world in the name of Christ. They have also understood the importance of continuing relief and service ministry to sustain their doctrine of love and non-resistance.

Thus, Mennonites are involved around the world in provision of emergency food, clothing and medical aid; agricultural development programs, education, etc. "In 1991, a total of 986 persons were serving through The Mennonite Central Committee ( MCC ) an inter Mennonite organization, with a budget of 31,526,907 dollars" ( Ibid :414 ). But despite all this, many Mennonite groups have not drawn the social and political implications of their tradition for today. The Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo is one of them.

### 5.3 The Kingdom of God in Mark, a Challenge for the MBCC

We have seen in the previous chapter that Jesus did not proclaim the kingdom of God in a vacuum. Jesus' message about the kingdom of God was related to the social and political context in which he lived and ministered. This was a context of Roman occupation and of the oppression of the peasants and the common people by the Roman authorities and the Jewish elite. Horsley is right when he says, "One of the principal points of our agenda is to take seriously the concrete social (i.e, political-economic as well as religious) context of Jesus' ministry and the movement he catalyzed"(1993:202).

As it was shown at the beginning of this chapter, the Democratic Republic of Congo in general and the MBCC in particular, is currently experiencing a living in a social, political and economic situation of exploitation, oppression and dispossession. The people in Congo have no voices, there are no human rights or freedom of the press. Since the 60's Congo did not perform free, fair and democratic elections.

The actual situation of war since August 1998, in which three rebel factions and the government are fighting for power, is making the situation worse. The international community and all the belligerents have signed the Lusaka accord, but there is no political will on either side to respect the cease-fire and stop the war. The situation of Congo is complicated because some countries are backing the rebels and others the government in Kinshasa. Congo is now a country divided into four parts in which Lords' war are attempting to dominate. The people are enduring immense suffering expressed in factors such as: disease, poverty, vast immigrations of the population, terror , hunger and dispossession. It is



important to note that the public service in Congo is not paid. The government takes war as a pretext for no payment of salaries in the public sector while the members of the government and the army are paid. People in the Congo are living in a time of humiliation , oppression and dehumanization. The political parties are prohibited and the parliament is non existent. Corruption and the failing of the culture of learning and teaching is visible in the system of education.

The situation in the MBCC reflects what is happening in the country in general. The majority of the members of the MBCC live in the countryside where contact with urban areas is impossible because of the destruction of roads. The result is that there is a severe lack to of basic needs like food, clothing, medical care etc. The message of the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus in Mark's narrative cannot allow the MBCC to remain as a passive agent in the above context. This section tries to apply the insights gained from Mark's understanding of the kingdom of God and apply it to the social , political and economic situations of the MBCC.

In his book, *Religion and Social Conflicts*(1982:41), Otto Maduro declares,

No religion exists in a vacuum. Every religion, any religion, no matter what we may understand by " religion," is a *situated* reality- situated in a specific human context, concrete and determined geographical space, historical moment, and social milieu. Every religion is, in each concrete case, always the religion of these or those determinate human beings. A religion that would not be the religion of determinate human beings would be nonexistent, purely a phantasm of the imagination.

Maduro then deduces three implications from this previous theory. Firstly, Religion does not work with infinite, limitless "instruments," either in number or in kind. Religion he says, operates with the instruments that are socially available in the context in which that religion is alive. Secondly, religion

always operates in a society already structured in a particular manner. Thirdly, any religion activity is limited and orientated by its social context ( Maduro 1982:42-43).

Maduro's observations on religion can be applied to the church. The church is a social and human reality. The church does not exist in a vacuum. It reflects the historical and political situation of the people within it. The church cannot be understood as a "spiritual" unrelated to things of the world.

Thus, the MBCC is no exception; its reflect the social, political and economic situation of the Congo. Let me point out that the members of the church are citizens of Congo; and thus, have as other citizens of the country, common obligations like voting, paying taxes and in turn common rights such as allowed protection being by the state. The members of the MBCC and other citizens of Congo go to the same market to buy food, the same hospital for medical care and pay the same taxes to the state. It is important that the church takes a position and is informed on all actions of the state. The decisions and actions of the state have an impact not only on the other citizens of the state but also on the members of the church.

The first challenge we gain from Mark's narrative is that the leadership of the MBCC and the members of this church must have a clear understanding of the social, political and economic context in which people are living. This will help them to have a clear view as to what is happening in the global world and the country and within the church itself. Social and political issues must be preached from the pulpit without taking the side of particular political parties. Workshops, conferences and seminars about the social and political situation of Congo must be done with the members of the church. The dualistic paradigm in which the church is seen as concerned only with spiritual things must be

discouraged by the leadership of the church. This implies that the minister must be not only a pastor but also a prophet who warns people and inspires them to rethink the context in which they live.

According to John Driver, the church must be a community of testimony and must understand itself as the bearer of a liberating message( 1989:108). The church will play this prophetic role by being on the side of those who are voiceless and powerless. The local congregation becomes like the Growing seed and the Mustard Seed of the parables whose power and shape cannot be minimized. The church must consider itself strong enough and powerful enough to transform “ the seemingly invincible institutions of society that dominate and dehumanize” people lives ( Waetjen 1989:108).

The minister must help his people and awaken them from the traditional understanding of the “kingdom of God” which was inherited from missionaries. This outdated concept suggests that people must wait for the “kingdom of God in heaven” while suffering now on earth.

John de Gruchy, in his book, *Theology and Ministry in Context and Crisis*(1987:39) says, “ We also have to take account of the extent to which many of the forms and patterns of ministry we have inherited, as described for example by Sundkler in regard to the ministry in Africa, which are often regarded as sacrosanct, are the product of social forces rather than faithfulness to the Gospel.” Maduro points out that religious discourses and practice can contribute to the continued sustenance of the dominators within a society. He declares that “... it is possible to produce religious practices and discourses that will favor a mental reconstruction of the world in such associations, distinctions, and oppositions as will seem to place supernatural forces on the side of the dominators-in favor of their

dominance and alignment against those who struggle against this domination”(1982:128).

For de Gruchy, the ordained minister has to take contextuality seriously together with the vital connection between the ordained ministry and the local community of faith ( Ibid 1987:39). This means that the minister in the MBCC will be trained not only in theology, but in other fields of social sciences e.g sociology, anthropology , philosophy etc. to help him understand the social context in which he is ministering.

Mark’s narrative also reminds the MBCC to question our understanding of power, authority and structure in the church and the society. The Gospel of Mark has shown how Jesus challenged the religious authorities of his time. The latter were using power and authority not to serve the people but to oppress and exploit the people. How is power and authority used in the MBCC? Is it for the benefit or the oppression of the people? What about the structures, are they empowering or disempowering the people? Concerning the government and the rebel’s factions , their use of power and authority is not for the well being of the people, it is for their selfish interest and accumulation of wealth.

The MBCC is living with various internal conflicts which block it from becoming a redemptive community. In such a situation what guidance can we gain from Mark ‘s narrative? The MBCC is a site of struggle over power and authority. This is shown by different conflicts which arise within the church. I have selected three sorts of conflict as the basis of my argument: a) socio-cultural and administrative conflicts; b)theological and doctrinal conflicts; c)financial and material conflicts.

a) Socio-cultural and administrative conflicts:

The majority of the members of the MBCC come from two principal ecclesiastic provinces, the Kwango and the Kwilu provinces. The management and the leadership of the church has become problematic because those who originated from these two provinces are in a perpetual struggle over power and the leadership of the church. This is a big frustration for the people coming from other provinces and tribes because they feel excluded from the structure of the MBCC. Leaders are elected on the whole not because of their competence but because of their tribe and origin.

Structural and administrative conflicts arise from the hierarchy or the structure of the church. Sometimes the decisions are made at the top by the central office, and the parish or the district is not able to respect it. The socio-cultural conflicts are weightened by the differences, the sensibility, the cultural background and style of life of different social groups within the MBCC.

b) Theological and doctrinal conflicts:

Theological and doctrinal conflicts arise from the interpretation of the Bible and its application in Christian faith and life. These conflicts appear mostly between the generation of Christians and pastors who lived during the missionaries' time and the new generation. The former think that the latter do not respect the Bible and the doctrine of the MBCC. For the old generation there must be a strict respect of the doctrine of the church in terms of liturgy, prayer, ordination of the women, etc. The new generation sees this respect for the doctrine as a simple copy of the missionaries' tradition.

c) Material and financial conflicts: These conflicts arise out of the idea maintained by the majority

of the members of the MBCC that the national office and the leaders of the MBCC receive money and donations from the partners of the MBCC in the USA and in Canada. Thus they do not see any need for contributing financially and materially for the development of the church. They always dream of the time when money, food and clothes came in abundance from America.

The misuse of financial and material resources of the MBCC are also one of the causes of financial and material conflicts. The MBCC depends too much on its partner, the Mennonite Brethren Mission and Service ( MBMS), for finances and the wages of its leaders.

Drawing upon all these kinds of conflict, we learn from Mark's narrative that the MBCC must become a community based on egalitarian and non-exploitative social relations. The relationship and interaction within the members of the MBCC must be based not on tribe or social status, but rather it must be founded on Christian love which is the greatest of all the commandments. The leadership of the MBCC must consider the structure and the hierarchy within the MBCC not so much as a tool to exercise their power and authority over the people, but rather as a means to serve them. As Rhoads and Michie say, " God's rule calls people to trust God and renounce themselves so that they are liberated to serve others" ( 1982:138). This must lead the leadership to a good management of financial and material resources of the church. Gifts and money addressed for social ministry as assistance to the poor and the widows must reach their destinations. Otherwise the leaders will become like the scribes who devour widows's houses and for a show make lengthy prayers(Mk12:40).

The structure and the hierarchy of the church is sometimes a cause of conflict in the management and

leadership styles of the MBCC. The leaders of the church seem to emphasize too much the structure and the administration of the church in order to maintain their position of power. We must bear in mind that the church is not a hierarchy and structure but a body comprising God's people. Thus, the relationship between the clergy and the people must not be paternalistic but rather it must be a partnership in which the local church is empowered and considered as the basic place where different gifts of members are used for the well being of the entire community.

Concerning theological and doctrinal conflicts, Mark's narrative reminds us that the church must take the liberation and the welfare of the people as the first priority. The church cannot focus only on doctrinal and theological questions and take them as its priority while the majority of its population are dispossessed, hungry and dehumanized in a context of war. This does not mean that the church must stop preaching the gospel and delivering the sacraments. But what is necessary to complement this is that the church must have a social vision and political position.

The church must understand the social and political implications of its message for the people. It needs to play its prophetic role of salt and light of the world. I think that in the actual situation prevailing in Congo, social and political issues must be addressed, and the traditional Mennonite separation church-state must be revised. The question is however, how will the church handle political issues and address the state? The church must engage in a prophetic theology in which it understands and knows what is happening in the social and political grounds, makes a social analysis of the situation and then interprets what is happening in the light of the gospel( *The Kairos Document* 1986:17).

In Mark's narrative, Jesus not only proclaims the "kingdom of God", he makes it a social and political reality by his challenge of the established order and his taking of human beings needs and welfare as his first priority. I agree with Klaüs Nürnberger who sees among other weaknesses of the church, "a spiritual concept of salvation which neglects social concerns"(1999:371-372). As Gutiérrez points it out, "The message of the kingdom is not simply spiritual and futuristic. As they listen to it, people become conscious of their historical existence, of their liberating potential, of their responsibility to forge here and now a world different from the present one"(in Núñez1985:269).

Mark's narrative has revealed Jesus' challenge to the religious and political system of his time. The MBCC seems to be very timid in terms of its engagements in the cause of social justice. This comes from the doctrine of the separation between the church and the state. The church and the civil community are not opposed, they are both social, the difference is only in witnessing Christ. The MBCC must use its Anabaptist heritage of struggle for social justice in society. Referring to the situation of Apartheid in South Africa, Albert Nolan calls the church a site of struggle. For him, "a site of struggle is a place in society where, in one form or another, the struggle for liberation takes place. The factory, the mine, the school, the university and the community can be called sites of struggle"(1988:214-215).

As I said, in the history of the Anabaptists, there were cases where many lost their lives for the ideal of social justice. The situation in Congo does not allow the MBCC to remain passive. On the contrary it is an opportunity to fight for human rights, freedom and peace in Congo. According to De Gruchy(1987b:127), Dietrich Bonhoeffer sees three possible ways in which the church can act towards



the state:

All this means that there are three possible ways in which the church can act towards the state: in the first place, as has been said, it can ask the state whether its actions are legitimate and in accordance with its character as state, i.e. it can throw the state back on its responsibilities. Secondly, it can aid the victims of state action. The church has an unconditional obligation to the victims of any ordering of society, even if they do not belong to the Christian community. 'Do good to all men.' In both these courses of action. The church serves the free state in its free way, and at times when laws are changed the church may in no way withdraw itself from these two tasks. The third possibility is not just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but to put a spoke in the wheel itself. Such action would be direct political action, and is only possible and required when the church sees the state fail in its function of creating law and order.

*The Kairos Document* propose some actions which the church must undertake in its liberation struggles. I find them quite applicable in the Congolese context: participation in the struggle, transforming church activities, special campaigns, civil disobedience and moral guidance (1986:28-29).

The last aspect I would like to point out as a challenge for the MBCC is a re-understanding of the "little people" and development. By "little people" I mean those members in the MBCC who are voiceless, powerless and excluded. I classify in this group: women, widows, sick people and children. I will in this section emphasize the new role that the women and the children have to play in the MBCC.

Mark's narrative has revealed Jesus' concern with those who were rejected in his society such as beggars, children, women, lepers, blind men, etc. I want to focus on two groups which are neglected

in the MBCC: women and children. Concerning the situation of women, there is a great debate in the MBCC whether they should be ordained into the pastoral ministry or not. I see the African culture and the missionaries' tradition as a big obstacle to the resolution of this problem. To the question of why the MBCC does not ordain women in the pastoral ministry, the answer from some of the ministers is that African culture does not allow women to stand in front of men. In my own culture a lazy man is called *okat*, which means woman. Thus a woman is assimilated to the weak, the powerless, the lazy in my culture. The other claim is that, since the missionaries did not ordain women, why do we have to do so?

The question of culture arises first when it comes to sexual education for children. Here again, African culture does not allow parents to talk about sex with their children. In a time when HIV/ AIDS has become pandemic, there is no official program in the MBCC concerning sexual education. The youth are abandoned. The parents and the church consider sexual matters as taboo. Children and the youth learn about sexuality from their friends or from school. This brings a lot of speculations about sexuality among the children and the youth. Is it right to talk about sexuality with our children or to let them die of AIDS because our culture does not allow us to talk about sexuality with children?

Mark's narrative has a lesson to teach concerning the MBCC attitude towards women and children. We have seen how Mark reports Jesus challenges to the religious authorities in Jewish Palestine because of their emphasis on the Mosaic law and the tradition of the elders. He also teaches respect for women and children ( Mark 10). We must take into account the fact that we are living in a globalized world different from the days of our ancestors and of the missionaries. We must read the

signs of the times and know how to uncultured how message in our social and political context. Human life and dignity are more important than our African culture or the missionaries' tradition. The leadership of the MBCC can become like the scribes and the pharisees of Mark's Gospel to whom Jesus revealed the priority of human needs over that of tradition. This does not mean that every aspect in African culture or the missionaries' tradition is wrong. On the contrary, our culture and the missionaries' tradition must be enlightened by the good news of Jesus Christ who defended the dignity and the welfare of all human beings.

The concept of development is included here because development has always been seen as a way to fulfill the needs of human beings. In Mak's narrative, the "kingdom of God" being a holistic reality can be related to development or the well being of human beings. It is not my ambition to make a study of the theories of development. I would merely like to expose the fact the MBCC needs a new understanding of development. I understand development, not as being concerned only with the physical or material needs of the people. Development is a holistic concept dealing with the whole aspect of human beings needs: physical, spiritual, material etc. Mark's narrative shows how Jesus was concerned with the physical, spiritual and the material needs of the people. Thus I would argue that the "kingdom of God" in Mark's gospel strives to attain a situation in which the holistic development of human needs met.

In his article, *The Local Church and Development* (1987:236), Robert Moffitt defines development as "every biblically based activity of the body of Christ, that assists in bringing human beings toward the place of complete reconciliation with God and complete reconciliation with their fellows and their

environment.” Although some may not agree with Moffitt’s definition, while placed in the context of a Christian church, it presents a holistic view on development.

Since the missionaries’ time, the concept of development in the MBCC focused solely upon physical and material needs. There was a dualistic separation between evangelization which was the first priority and concerned with spiritual needs versus development which was secondary and specially affiliated to the realization of physical and material needs. The MBCC needs to understand development as the mission of the local church. It is the obedient response of the church to both the great commandment and the great commission( Moffitt 1987:237). Thus, development includes all sorts of spiritual, social and physical ministries. Activities like evangelism, discipleship, teaching for literacy, medicine, community health, community development, relief, agriculture, church planting and worship are produce of development (Ibid 1987:236). All these activities contribute in development and none of them can be considered as more important than others.

This new understanding of development must lead the local church to make a balance between the social and the spiritual ministries. The MBCC has always emphasized on the spiritual ministry, and the social ministries were seen as a result of the church’s witness to the world. Both ministries must be taken as equal and as fulfilling the great commission and the great commandment of Christ.

The last thing is that development must contribute to the welfare and liberation of the people. Sometimes what is called “development” in the MBCC does not fit with the welfare of the people. It is important to note that one cannot develop the people. The people must take their spiritual, physical

and social needs into their own hands. They have to develop themselves. Thus development must not come from top it must come from the people, from the bottom. Development must help the people to fulfill God's purpose for them: the well being of the entire human being in his social, spiritual and, economic and political environment. It is in this way that the kingdom of God as Mark recall it will become a social and political reality in people life.

#### **5.4 Summary**

In this chapter, I have attempted to outline the implications of the social and political dimensions of the kingdom of God in Mark for the Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo. I have looked at the general social and political contexts of both the Democratic republic of Congo and the MBCC. I have got a dark picture of social and political violations in the Congo and sufferings and struggle over power in the MBCC. After a study on important aspects of the Anabaptist-Mennonite theology which was a struggle for social justice, I have drawn some challenges of the kingdom of God in Mark for the MBCC. Among these challenges are the re-understanding of power and authority in the church, the fight for social justice, a holistic vision on development and an integrative ministry for children and women.

## 6. CONCLUSION

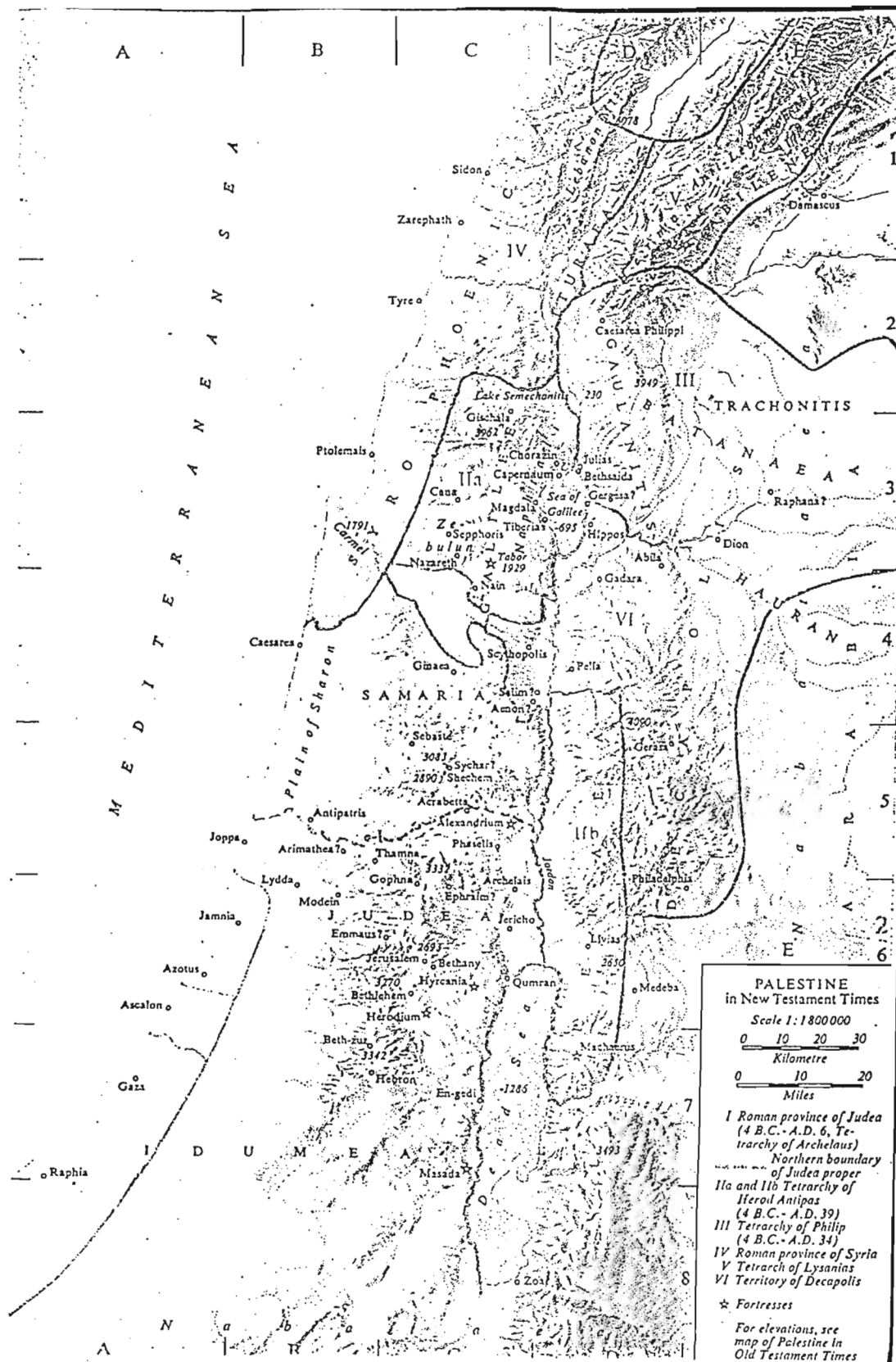
This study was meant to show the social and political dimensions of the concept of “kingdom of God” in Mark’s narrative and apply it to the situation of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo. The first chapter which served as an introduction, has dealt with questions related to the motivation of the study, the chapter outline, the research methodology, basic terminology and the limits of the work. In the methodological section, I have pointed to the importance of reading Mark’s narrative at the light of a concept of class struggle in first century Jewish Palestine. This has helped us to understand the social and economic context of Roman-occupied Palestine.

My central argument in this study is that the “kingdom of God” in the book of Mark is a social and political reality. This argument can be justified in the way Mark presents Jesus’ attitude toward the social and political order of his time .e.g. the temple system, the tribute to Caesar, the healing, exorcisms, forgiveness of sin and deliverance from demon.

The second chapter look at the social and political context of Roman-occupied Palestine. The insight gained here is that first century Palestine was an occupied society frustrated by dispossession, exploitation and oppression of the poor at both social and economic level by both the Roman authorities and the Jewish elite. The third chapter has focused on Mark’s presentation of Jesus. I have deduced from this that in Mark, Jesus’ authority and position does not follow the Davidic lineage. It seems to come from popular movement of kingship in Jewish Palestine.

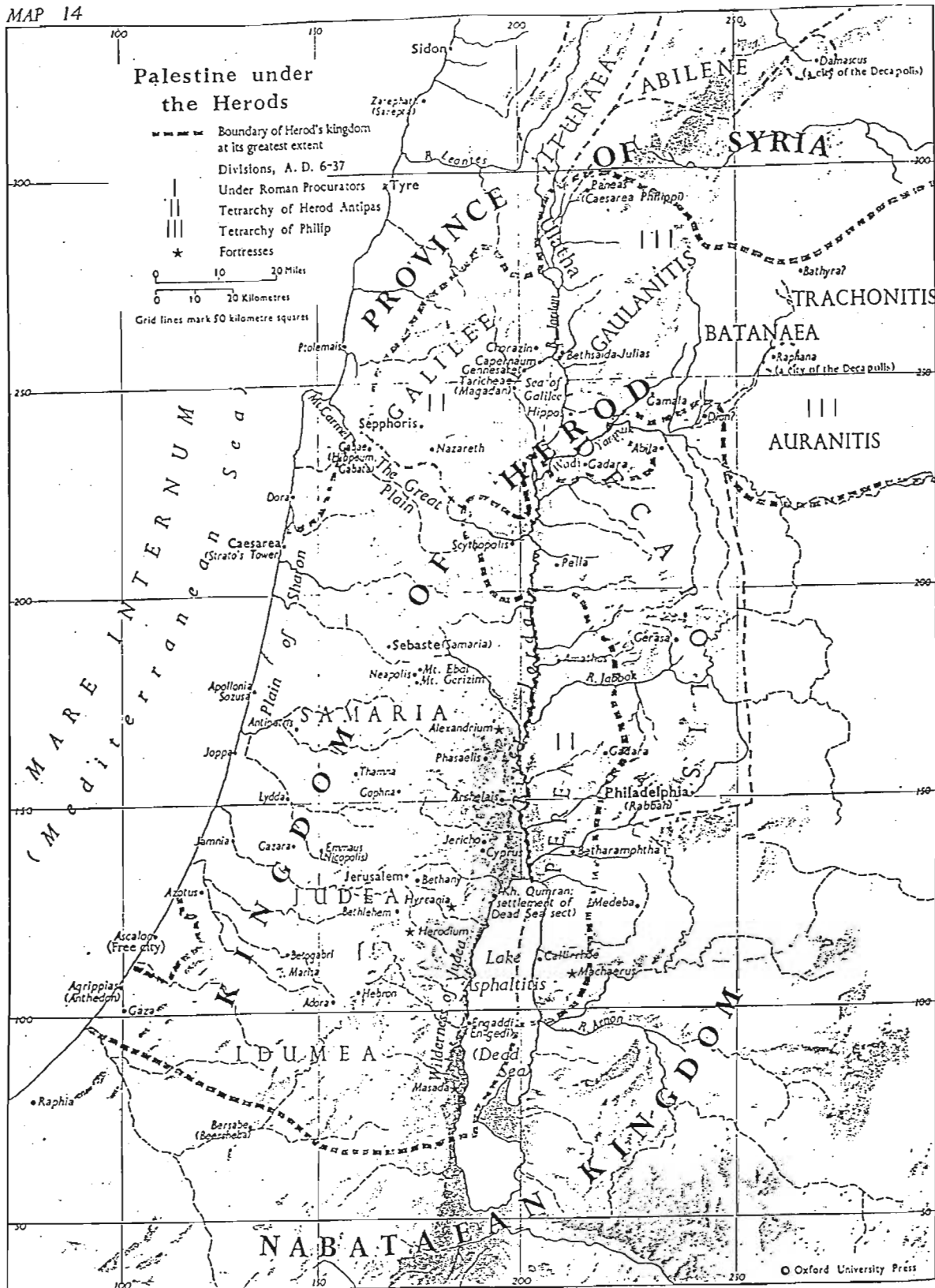
Chapter four deals with the central theme of the thesis by depicting the social and political dimensions of the “kingdom of God” in Mark’s narrative. Both dimensions are expressed by Jesus’ proclamation of the “kingdom of God” which challenged the established authorities, Jesus’ rejection of two principal institutions which embedded dispossession and exploitation of the people: the Temple system and the tribute to Caesar. “The kingdom of God” was a manifestation of power visible in the healing, exorcisms, feeding, power over the forces of the nature e.g. water and storm. The “kingdom of God” was manifested and expressed by the renewal of local communities in Israel by means of the liberation of the people and their welfare. The kingdom was preached in parables, a language accessible to the oppressed. It meant egalitarian, non authoritative and non exploitative social relations.

The last chapter of this study, draws the implications of the social and political dimensions of the kingdom of God in Mark’s narrative for the MBCC. After an overview of the social and political contexts of both the Congo and the MBCC, I have proposed some challenges for the MBCC. Firstly, the MBCC needs to re-understand the questions of power and authority mostly concerning the relationship between the clergy and the people. I have proposed here that the relationship between the two be a partnership rather than one of a paternalistic nature. Secondly, the MBCC needs to fight for social justice in Congo and rejects its dualistic separation church-state. Thirdly, I have proposed an integrative ministry for women and children which does not focus on the African culture and the missionaries’ tradition but on their liberation and welfare. Lastly, I have proposed for the MBCC, a balanced and holistic vision of “development” which takes spiritual and social ministries as equal with the purpose of fulfilling the great commission and the great commandment.

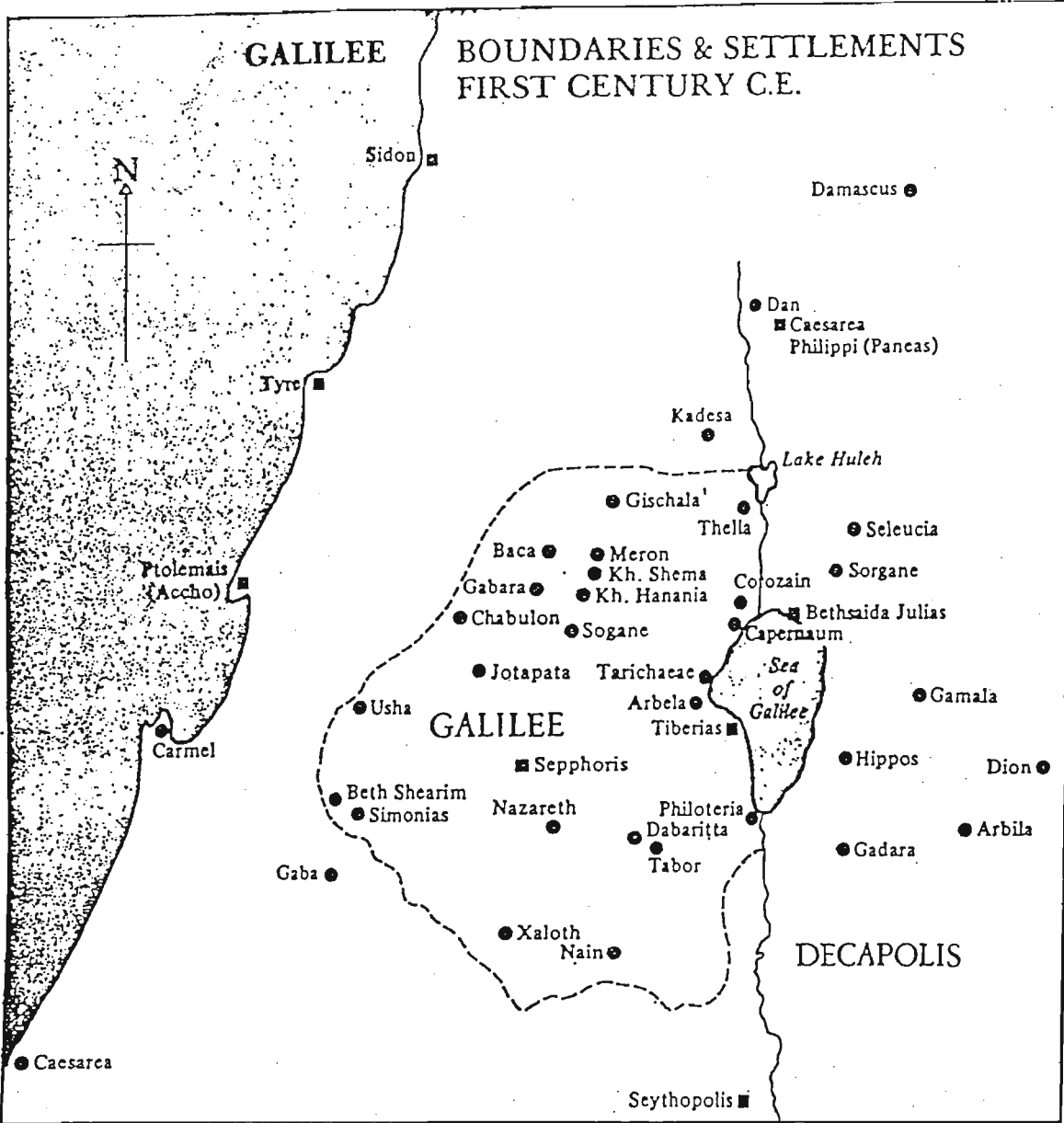


Map 1 from The Greek New Testament(1983).

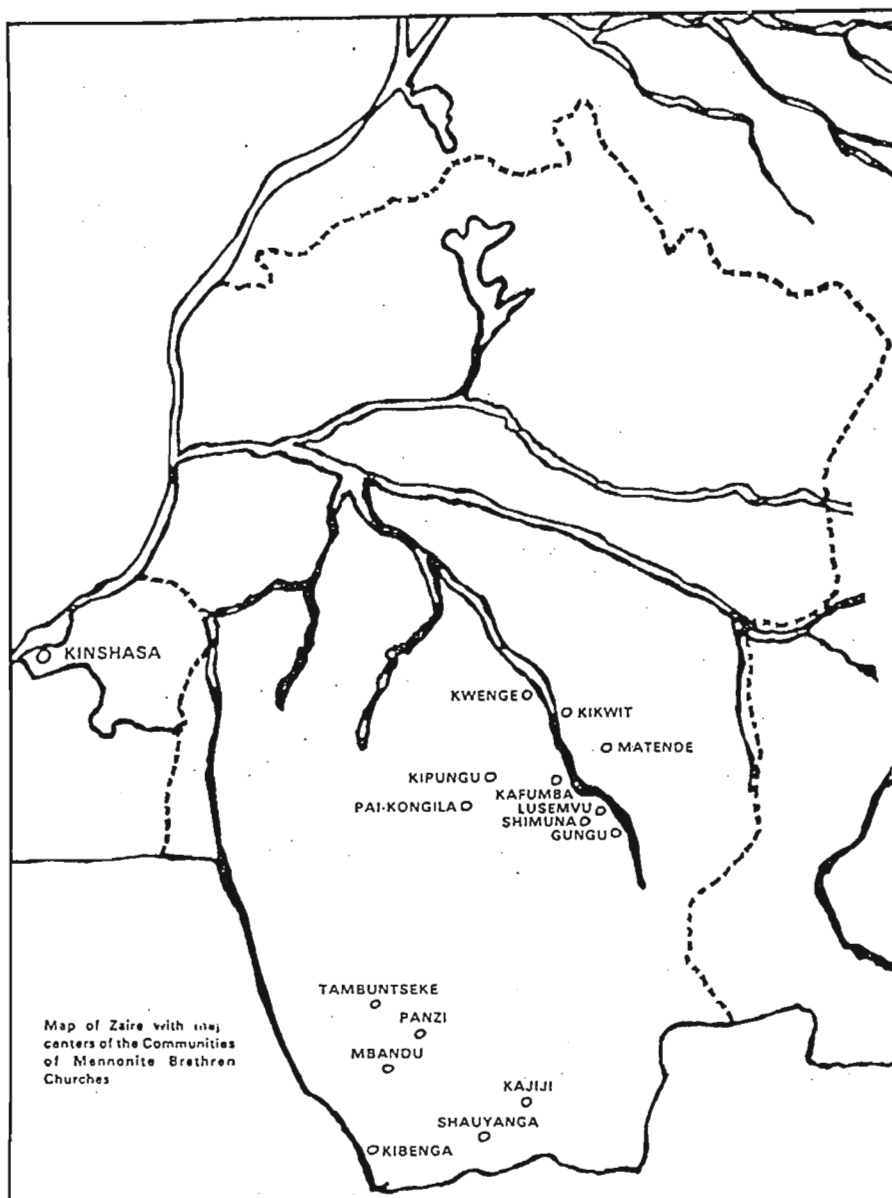




Map 2 from The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible.

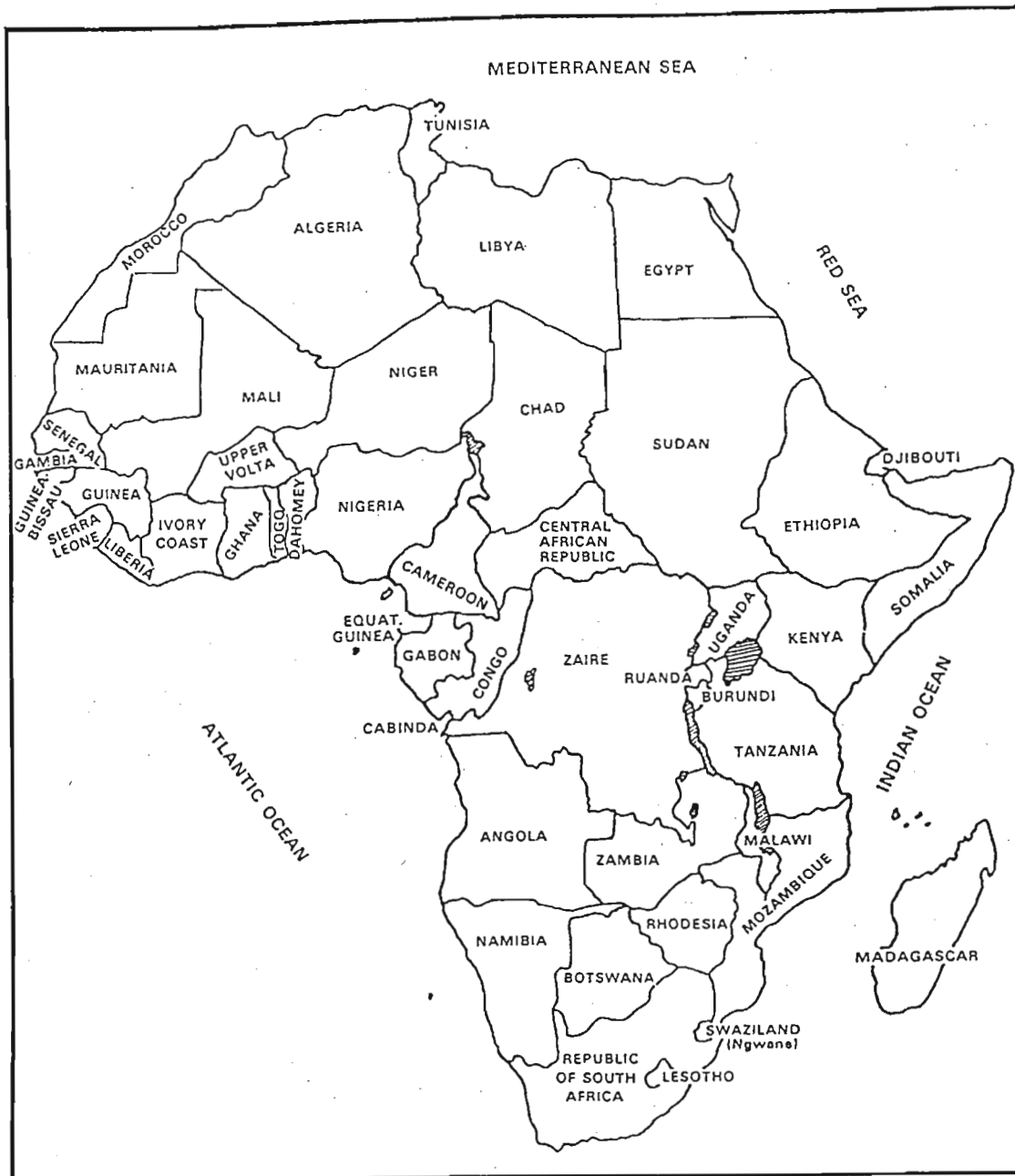


Map 3 from Freyne, S. 1988. Galilee, Jesus and the Gospel: Literary Approaches and Historical Investigations.



Major Centers with Mennonite Brethren Churches

Map 4 from Toews, J.B 1978. The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire.



## Countries on the African Continent

Map 5 from Toews, J.B 1978. The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire.

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