

(Draft—not for publication or citation)

His Preference of the Periphery: The Faith of the Foreigners (Little Ones) and the Failure of the Former Followers in Matthew¹

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1. Introduction

There is a paradigm shift in Matthew. In 8:11-12 we read: “‘I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects (*mine: descendants huioi*) of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures?’ The stone² the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes? ‘Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.’”(21:42-43) ‘I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you’(21:31).

The parable of the two sons, (21:28-32), the parable of the wicked tenants, (21:33-46), the parable of the wedding feast, 22:1-14, are all about the Jewish leaders’ rejection of Jesus.³ The man began with the last workers as he started to pay the salary (20:8), because the last will be the first, and the first will be the last (20:12, 14, 16, Mk 10:31, Lk 13:30). So, His preference of the periphery after the failure of the former followers can be seen as the mystery of the arrival of the kingdom. To be part of the kingdom one had to be in the circle of the Pharisees or the zealots. But according to Jesus’ new paradigm, association with tax collectors and sinners means membership in the kingdom.⁴

This paper tries to focus on the periphery from two main perspectives: from the Ethiopian perspective on the basis of the analysis of the periphery and the center by Oyvind Eide, with a special reference to the Holistic Theology of Rev Gudina Tumsa,

¹ I like to make my readers aware that I used a different form of transliteration of the Greek and Hebrew words. For the long vowels both in Greek and Hebrew, I preferred the doubling of the vowel letters, following the spellings in Afaan Oromoo. Bible quotations are from the NIV unless mentioned otherwise.

² There is a play on word here: Both Hebrew and Aramaic have ‘*eben*’ for stone, which is similar to the Hebrew word *ben* ‘son’ in 21:37. The Hebrew for the Greek *ton huion autou* is one word *benoo*- His Son. In Ps 118 the stone that was rejected by builders applied to Israel, in Matthew 21 it applied to Jesus, the Son, whom the Jewish leaders rejected. Contexts change the meanings of texts. Foulkes, *Matthew*, 191. We have many other similar situations in Matthew where the new context changes the meaning of the text in the older context (cf. 2:15 and Hos 11:1) Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 147.

³ Foulkes, *Matthew*, 192.

⁴ Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 98-99.

and the periphery from biblical perspective, with emphasis on the periphery in Matthew. Both in the biblical and Ethiopian context, the periphery are people without security and protection, and they are the ones who continue to look forward for the salvation and protection of God.

The salvific work of God revealed through the word of God, the Gospel, makes the periphery, who hear the word and believe in God, powerful peripheries that can endure persecution, and they can even become the center. But those who resist the message of the Gospel become worse persecutors than before. So the Gospel has a transformative⁵ power both in the life of the individual and the society. So according to the parables in Matthew 21, 22, etc, the apocalyptic end has now come, and there is polarization, so it is accept or fight,⁶ and no neutrality.

As soon as He came, Jesus confronted the ruler of this world (4:8-10, 12:28f, 2 Cor 4:4)⁷ and overcame him. So people cannot be neutral, either they hear the word of Jesus and follow Him, or they will be part of the united satanic alliance and begin to persecute Jesus and His followers. So very early we see the conflict in Matthew that culminated in the cross. Persecution is one of the signs of the arrival of the apocalyptic end and it is one of the focuses in Matthew (11:12).⁸

One can still think of peripheries from the other perspectives. I, perhaps like to focus on the spiritual and social peripheries. Gudina Tumsa's holistic theology says that the spiritual, the physical, the social, the political, etc. should be addressed, if we are to serve the periphery.

There are peripheries who are thirsty for righteousness, who are poor in the spirit. They are the persecuted ones, etc (Mt 5:2ff). These are the little ones, not only in the society, even among the characters of the Gospel of Matthew. Both in Matthew and in

⁵ The apocalyptic kingdom that is revealed through the person and mission is like a leaven that has the power to transform. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 96f.

⁶ In the case of the hormone adrenaline, it is 'fight or flight', but in Matthew, those who will not be with Jesus, will be with Satan, so 'accept or fight'. Perhaps this is due to the polarization in the end time war in apocalyptic writings though the genre of Matthew may not be totally apocalyptic.

⁷ "The present world order is ruled by the wealthy and the oppressors." who are directly or indirectly under the control of Satan, because of their love of money/ mammon that is controlled by Satan (Matt 4: 8-10). That is why it is said: "You cannot serve both God and Money." (6:24). C. Rene Padilla "Interpreting the Beatitudes in Latin America Today" in Foulkes, Francis, *SPCK International Study Guide 37: A Guide to St. Matthew's Gospel*. London: SPCK, 2001 , 272

⁸ Gundry, *Matthew*, 210. But I did not accept NIV's: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.", which seems to have been influenced by Lk 16:16. I think Luke's emphasis was on evangelism (Acts 1:8), so he used the middle voice of the verb *biazetai* where as Matthew focused on both persecution and evangelism, and used the passive voice of *biazetai*.

Gudina's holistic theology, for the periphery, salvation is not only spiritual, it is material and physical as well. So the Gospel of the kingdom is primarily for them.

For salvation to be holistic it should include both the temporal and the eternal, the material (physical) and the spiritual. Those who have the one without the other are at the periphery.

So both in OT and NT understanding the Gentiles are believed to be far away from the promise of God, even when they are well to do materially, and are not part of the people of God. So they are seen as the late comers into the banquet of the king (Mt 22: 8-10, Eph 2:11-13).

So, Jesus as He began His ministry, He went to those who were far away, to the spiritual and the social periphery, to those who were under the shadow darkness, to all the others at the periphery, to Galilee of the Gentiles (Matt 4:15-16). He also came to the periphery in Ethiopia through the message of the Gospel by the Missionaries. Because of God's/Jesus' coming the periphery become the center, and vice versa.

So, I am going to discuss below, the Periphery and the Center in Eide, the Periphery in OT, the Periphery in Matthew, and Conclusion.

Methodology

Due to the page limit of this paper, I did not follow a very detailed exegetical procedure, although I am not guilty of violating the meaning of the original texts. I do not claim either that I have read Eide from cover to cover. I focused on the text of the Bible, secondary literature, and mainly on the book of Eide.

To do theology, as Hans George Gadamer taught us, we need to focus on the two horizons: the horizon of the text of the Bible (or any other text the reader reads), and the horizon of the reader/ interpreter of the Bible or the given text (the issues the reader faces as he reads text). The melting of the two horizons *Horizonverschmelzung* is what gives us our theology. I wanted to see the problem of the periphery, especially that of the Oromos of East Africa in connection with texts mentioned in the light of Gudina Tumsa's theology. I leave the decision to the reader whether the melting together is in the right proportion. I will be there mainly to learn from you.

2. The Periphery and the Center in Eide: the Periphery and the Persecution

Oyvind Eide was a missionary from Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS), who was working with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). He wrote a PhD thesis, which is now published, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia, 1974-1985*.⁹ Eide is now a professor at the School of Mission and Theology in Stavanger, Norway. Eide's book is a historical analysis of the dynamic contradictory relationship between the

⁹ Oyvind Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia, 1974-1985*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2000.

center and the periphery in the Ethiopian political, religious, and ethnic set up.¹⁰ So, the thesis of the book is the relationship between the dominating Amhara-Orthodox-Christian centre and the dominated peripheral peoples, of which a growing number are Evangelical Christians.¹¹ Part three of this book deals with the persecution of the Christians in Ethiopia during the time of Marxist government of Ethiopia. Eide gives a very good description of the lives and ministries of two of the most prominent leaders of EECMY:¹² Emmanuel Abraham, the president of EECMY for twenty two years and Gudina Tumsa, who was an ordained minister and the General Secretary of EECMY. The book is dedicated to Gudina Tumsa and to all who suffered during the time of the persecution. Gudina was killed by the Marxist government during the time of the persecution July, 1979. Gudina was born in 1929 in Boojjii in Western Oromia, in Western Ethiopia. He was from the family that was from the lowly class in the rural area of Western Oromia.

We can, at least, see two similarities between the first century Matthean community and the EECMY members in Wallaggaa during 1974-1985: they were the periphery, and they were the minority in their relation to the centre. So both of them became vulnerable to persecution. As Eide says that ‘the most savage level of the persecution’¹³ during the time of the Marxist government of Ethiopia was in Wallaggaa. As the place, where the pioneers of Evangelical faith first worked in Ethiopia, even today some Ethiopians that support Abyssinianization¹⁴ hate Christians from Wallaggaa.

Abyssinianization, as in Hellenization or any other imperial political situation, is a concept where the political, cultural and religious values of one social group is imposed on the subjects or the periphery. Ethiopia as we know it today is a recent creation by Minilik II (1889-1913).¹⁵ The concept of Abyssinianization has three components: 1) the

¹⁰ Eide, *Revolution*, 85.

¹¹ Eide, *Revolution*, 8

¹² Eide, *Revolution*, 58ff.

¹³ Eide, *Revolution*, 3.

¹⁴ Abssynia is the ancient name for the Northern part of Ethiopia. The regions of Amhara and Tigiray are the parts known as Abssynia. The word comes from the Arabic word Habashet. After the time of the formation of the Ethiopian Empire by Minilik II, emperor of Ethiopia, the name Abyssinia was replaced by Ethiopia. The word Ethioipa comes from two Greek words: *aithoo* burn, *oopsis*–face. So *Aithioopsis* is the man with burnt face. It is apparently the equivalent of the Arabic word *Sudan*, which also means ‘black’. In the Bible the word was first used by the LXX translators as they translated the Hebrew word *Kuush*. Kuush is one of the sons of Ham, the brother of *Mitsiraim*, Egypt, but not the Arabs in today’s Egypt (Gen 10:1ff). So the name Ethiopia is more appropriate for the Cushitic Ethiopians: the Afars, the Somalis, and the people of the South West : the Kambatas, Sidamas, Oromos, etc. So, some one from the Cushites could say that the Habashas took both our land and our name during their imperial expansion to the south through the leadership of Minilik II.

¹⁵ Eide, *Revolution*, 15.

land tenure system, 2) the spread of the language of the ruling ethnic group: Amharic, 3) the expansion of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC).¹⁶ So, the EOC, unlike the EECMY members and the other Evangelicals that were without the protection of the power of the center, was getting both the political and material support from the government, because it is considered as the state Church. A priest of EOC is given a piece of land. The clergy were even in a position to collect taxes. EOC uses the political and economic power of the state as its means of expansion though they had public resistance from time to time.¹⁷ “The emperor depended on the patriarch, the patriarch depended on the emperor.”¹⁸ Although the origin of Christianity is from Palestine, EOC considers itself, as the only indigenous national church, where as the other churches are aliens, Amharic *mattewoch*. Even today all the other Christians are not called Christians by the EOC people.

Pro Marxist Regime Persecution

The book of Dr Eide focuses on the persecution of the Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia, especially on the persecution of those in Wallaggaa from 1974- 1985. But there were persecutions of Evangelical Christians even before 1974. The main agent of persecution in Ethiopia was the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) even before 1974. During the time of King Yohanese of Tigray region, who was the contemporary of Minilik II, EOC persecuted the Roman catholic Christians, who came together with the Portuguese soldiers, who came to assist Ethiopia during the war with Ahmed Gragne, the ruler of Harar, Eastern Ethiopia. Both EOC and Yohanese said that Abyssinia/ Northern Ethiopia was already a Christian country and no other preaching of the Gospel was needed there, but they said that it was possible to preach the Gospel among those whom they called the ‘pagans’ of the Southern Ethiopia.¹⁹ But later on when the Missionaries and nationals such as Oneesimos, Daniel Dabalaa, and others came and began to preach the Gospel, EOC continued its persecution. Oneesimos Nasib, an Oromo who was among the pioneers and a leader of the Evangelical movement, faced persecution from EOC. Rev Tasgaraa Hirphoo describes the situation thus: “Those who began to spoil the work of Oneesimos by accusing him while he was at Najjoo became sleepless in order to pursue their evil plan. They invited their friends who were far away.... Priests had come all the way from Debre Bizen near Asmara... in order to oppose Oneesimos. The coming of those priests from such a long distance in order to persecute Oneesimos indicates that the work he had started was a great one that could liberate the people. When the Abyssinian kings desired that education work be started in the areas they conquered, their intention was only the type of education that strengthens their religion and government be given... Therefore, Oneesimos was accused and summoned to go to Finfinnee (Addis

¹⁶ Eide, *Revolution*, 9.

¹⁷ Eide, *Revolution*, 46.

¹⁸ Eide, *Revolution*, 16.

¹⁹ Takile-Tsadiq Makuria, *Atse Yohanis ina Ye Ethiopia Andinat*, Kuraz Printing Press, 1982/1990, 82-86.

Ababa). However, Oneesimos was convinced that teaching the ways of God in the Oromo language to the Oromo people was the will of God,... he continued his work.”²⁰ So the Evangelical believers of Oromia, and Southern Ethiopia, and the true believers in the Gospel of Matthew have persecution as a common experience, where EOC leaders are like the Jewish authorities. “True disciples are suffering with endurance. Some of them have had to flee for their lives (10:23). [T]hey ...Preach the gospel publicly- despite the persecution that comes on them from Jewish authorities (5:13-16).”²¹

2.1 Are the Oromos the Periphery?

The word periphery means: 1) an area near the boundary and far away from the center, 2) the figurative meaning is the social, intellectual, or political position far away from the center.²² For those who do not know the location of Oromia in Ethiopia in East Africa, it is the land that extends from the southern Kenya border to the Sudan in the western border. The capital city Addis Ababa (the Oromos call her ‘Finfinnee’) is in the center of Oromia. There are Oromos even in Northern Kenya. The Oromos belong to the Cushitic ethnic groups and are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. So meaning number one given above for the word periphery is ruled out.

But meaning number two for the word periphery is applicable to the Oromos, mainly due to the internal contradictions within the Oromos themselves. Two of these contradictions we see in Eide’s book: 1) The officers of the government of Ethiopia at that time said that the leaders of EECMY including Rev Gudina were oppressors of the poor.²³ It was a critical time when the government officials there at Boojjii together with the leadership of MEISON(one of the political organizations at that time that represented the Oromos) in Oromia and the Church leaders (though both of them were Oromos) were striving for ‘self-definition’ in their relationship with the central government in Addis Ababa, and also in their identification with the revolution of the poor (the periphery) in Ethiopia. So, like the two Jewish groups: the formative Judaism of post-70 AD and the Jewish Christians in Matthew,²⁴ the two Oromo groups had to express their standpoints within the dynamic contradictory relationship between the center and the periphery. Self-

²⁰ Tasgaraa, *Abbaa Gammachiis*, 73-75.

²¹ Gundry, *Matthew*, 6.

²² Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English: Fourth Edition. Editor: A. P. Cowie. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989/93, 920

²³ One government officer at that time said to Rev Tasgaraa Hirphoo, who was the President of the Western Synod of EECMY: “ You are oppressing your workers. You are the people of Qes (Rev) Guddinaa. We know how he is making people enemies of the revolution.” Another officer said: “The people in charge of the Synod don’t count as human beings, they pass by driving their Land Rovers throwing dust all over the place... to eat without working is wrong. But the Synod is wicked...” Eide, *Revolution*, 140f.

²⁴Overman, *Matthew’s Gospel*, 3-5.

definition is the way the group understands and expresses itself.²⁵ MEISON wanted to take over the moral leadership of the people in the western periphery of Ethiopia, because of the fear that the members of EECMY had substantial backing in the farmers association.²⁶ Despite this attempt MEISON became out of the political game before long.

There were emerging contradictions within the Oromos in EECMY themselves. This is true even for the two prominent leaders of EECMY. Both of them are Oromos. But they had two contradictory views on the question of nationalism. Emmanuel Abraham has no place for the question of nationalism. He said that he knew Ethiopia as Ethiopia. But for Gudina the issue of nationalism and Christians' involvement in politics and other social affairs is at the center of his holistic theology.²⁷ So, before and after the outbreak of the persecution, and even today, there were/ are rival views within the Oromos themselves, more or less like the periphery or the minor characters in Matthew, and like the audience of the Gospel of Matthew, perhaps Jewish Christians, who were minority struggling with the parent group, the formative Judaism,²⁸ because there were some Oromos in the government office, who competed with EECMY to get more acceptance from the broad mass. However, when it is seen from the perspective of the Habasha dominated politics of Ethiopia, both the Oromos who are government officers and EECMY leaders are at the periphery. We need more enlightenment, more education and more grace of the Lord to step out of being rivals in order to be able to help out the Oromos from their status as the periphery. The grace of the Lord will make us humble (Matt 11:29), and the humble will inherit the earth/ the land (Matt 5:5), and they will be the center.

2.2 The Holistic Ministry among the Western Periphery: Proclamation of the Gospel, Education and Other Development Works

Holistic ministry is EECMY's approach to ministry. It was developed by Rev Gudina Tumsa. EECMY has the motto of serving the spiritual and physical needs of the individual and the society. This approach encourages the Christians' involvement in social issues, unlike the traditional dualistic two- kingdom view of Lutheran Pietism, which Gudina was against. He is against the position of some evangelicals, who are pacifist²⁹ in their relation to secular government. But peace is the fruit of justice. "Justice will dwell in the desert and righteousness live in the fertile field.

²⁵ Overman, *Matthew's Gospel*, 9f.

²⁶ Eide, *Revolution*, 138, 142.

²⁷ Eide, *Revolution*, 59.

²⁸ Overman, *Matthew's Gospel*, 154.

²⁹ Pacifism is "a belief that all war is morally wrong and that disputes should be settled by peaceful means." *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 887.

“The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.” (Isa 32:16f). “To be a peacemaker is not to be passive in the face of evil, indifferent with regard to the abuse of power, or silent in the midst of conflict. The peacemakers act on behalf of peace. The peace they struggle for is not merely the absence of armed conflict, but shalom- well being, health, abundant life- which results from harmony with God, with neighbor, and with creation.”³⁰

Jesus’ ministry in the Gospel of Matthew was holistic. He primarily came to die for the periphery, who were under the bondage of sin, Satan, and sickness (Mt 8:17, Isa 53:4). His words and deeds relate in one way or another to the dawning of the kingdom. His deeds manifest the kingdom, His words define it. So the Gospel/the good news is about the arrival of the kingdom (4: 23, 9:35, 24:14).³¹ He healed their sicknesses. He cast out demons and liberated their victims. He taught them, and He forgave them.

The ministry of the Missionaries in the Western Oromia was also holistic. They taught the Gospel of the kingdom, about the forgiveness of sin, and about the ethics of the kingdom. They helped most of the believers to read and write. They established schools for the children of the people in the surrounding. They built many clinics and two hospitals, and other training centers.

The result was the development of the people from periphery to the center. The Gospel message and theological education at Luther Seminary in USA made Gudina look at the situation in Ethiopia during the time of Emperor Haile Silassie more critically. He had a prominent role in the realization of the land reform in Ethiopia. Later he also became critical of the Marxist regime. He sided with the oppressed and the exploited.³² He remained loyal to the needs and desires of the periphery to the end.³³

In connection with the land reform, he was against Haile Silassie’s land policy. This was what Gudina once did during Sunday service: Let me quote Rev Paul E. Hoffman at length concerning the relevance of Rom 13:1-7 to the ministry of Rev Gudina Tumsa: “The old Amharic liturgy, which Qes Badima of the prestigious Addis Ababa Mekane Yesus congregation at Sidst (sic) Kilo... used, had (as part of the General Prayer to be read on Sundays and Feast Days) a passage, as I have been told, calling upon God to protect the Emperor and the Imperial House. On a given Sunday (I am not sure of the date, but it must have been about the time of the Yirgalem Assembly), Gudina had been asked to conduct the service and preach in Addis Ababa Mekane Yesus Church (sic), the congregation of which he was a member. (Unfortunately, we do not have a copy of

³⁰ Padilla, “Latin America”, 273.

³¹ Donald A. Hagner, “Synoptic Gospels” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Edited by Desmond Alexander et al Leicester: Inter-varsity Press, 2000, 127.

³² Eide, *Revolution*, 60ff.

³³ Eide, *Revolution*, 61.

that sermon of his.) After the sermon, when he read the General Prayer, he chose simply to leave out the prescribed paragraph which referred to the Emperor. This caused not only a stir, but raised a scandal. Afterwards, Gudina was called to task by the elders and pillars. His response—as I have been told, but correct me if I am wrong- that had he prayed for the Emperor and the Imperial House he would have had to publicly call for their repentance, which would have caused an even greater stir and scandal. The issue was liturgical, pastoral, and political: How to pray publicly, politically, and to the point? This is an ongoing problem- and in Gudina’s understanding, a continuing responsibility of the church in any society, any time. Also today!”³⁴

The Yirgalem Assembly mentioned here is the 1973 General Assembly of EECMY, and one of the issues raised in this meeting was the issue of the Land Reform. The resolution of the Assembly was calling upon the government to speed up land reform in the Ethiopian parliament. Rev Gudina was the driving force behind this resolution.³⁵

So the Church equipped the periphery with the Gospel message and the tools necessary to understand the structural aspects of the oppression. And that laid the foundation for political opposition, especially in connection with the land reform.³⁶

Writing about the role religion had in Ethiopian political situation, Eide says, “the so-called Ethiopian revival- at least in part- should be seen as a critical response to political and religious domination from the national centre ... social, ethnic, and religious inequalities found a powerful expression through Evangelical Christianity, even before the 1974 onwards.”³⁷

So evangelism and the modern education started by Missionaries contributed much in changing the status of the periphery to the center by liberating them from spiritual and political oppression. So it is said that “Protestant Christianity was probably experienced as a liberation and a lifting up from an inferior position. People were given a sense of self-esteem and pride. And it became an opening to the modern world.”³⁸ Another example is taken from Uganda. “Literacy in the vernacular language has a great impact on the development of the national feeling among the population and on its ability to perceive and express oneself.”³⁹ The Sidamas of South Ethiopia said that the Gospel

³⁴ Paul E. Hoffman, “His Spirituality & Leadership” in Gudina Tumsa Foundation: The Life and Ministry of Gudina Tumsa: Lectures and Discussions: Missiological Seminar 2001. WDL-Publishers, Hamburg, 2007, 20 (emphasis mine)

³⁵ Hoffman, “His Spirituality & Leadership”, 19.

³⁶ Eide, *Revolution*, , 61.

³⁷ Eide, *Revolution*, 2.

³⁸ Ronne in Eide, *Revolution*, 13.

³⁹ Eide, *Revolution*, 11.

was the power that liberated them from the demons and from the Amhara landlords.⁴⁰ So, through the proclamation of the Gospel and modern education that were begun by the Western Missionaries most of the periphery are in the process of becoming part of the center, moreover, they have members of the kingdom of God that is revealed through the Gospel.

3. The Periphery in OT

The people of God were the periphery both in OT and NT. In the OT, the people of Israel were the minority until the time of the kings. Most of the stories of OT that are about God's works of salvation took place during the time when Israel was the periphery. The coming of the Lord was meant for the salvation of the periphery and for the judgment of the oppressors, and it is the central message of both OT and NT. So the Bible is the text for the periphery, though at times it can be used as the reflection of the position of the center, where deconstruction becomes a requirement. Therefore, hermeneutics is the central issue, because both the oppressed and the oppressor can equally use the Bible.

3.1 The Law about the Periphery

In the OT the words such as 'foreigner', 'alien', 'sojourner', and 'stranger' are almost synonyms and are used interchangeably.⁴¹ Therefore, the non Israelite Gentiles from the lower class and the Israelites from the lower class almost always come together in a list. So we read in Dt 10:17-19: "For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt."

The stranger *zaar* from the root *zuur* means to turn aside or to depart. One of the women who came to Solomon said that there was no stranger in the house but two of them (1 Kgs 3:18). Strangers *zaarim* are those who do not belong to the nation (Isa 1:7). When the Israelites left Yahweh and served foreign *neeker* gods, God made them serve strangers *zaarim* (Jer 5:19). God told the Israelites not to get intermarried with people from other nations (Dt 7:1-6).

The sojourner *geer* is one whose permanent residence is in a foreign land unlike a foreigner who stays in a foreign land only temporarily. The Israelites themselves were sojourners in Egypt (Gen 15:3, Ex 22:21, Dt 10:19, 23:7). The experience of the Israelites as sojourners is to govern the attitude of the Israelites towards the sojourners. Therefore, Gen 15:3 reads "If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien *geer* or a temporary resident, so he

⁴⁰ Eide, *Revolution*, 11

⁴¹ H.M. Carson, "Foreigner" in *New Bible Dictionary*. Second Edition. Edited by J.D. Douglas, et al. Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1962/87, 389.

can continue to live among you.” God said to the Israelites: “Do not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you lived as an alien *geer* in his country. (Dt 23:7). One of the reasons for the observance of the Sabbath was the refreshment of the sojourner (Dt 23:12). During the reaping of the harvest, the gleanings should be left for the poor and the sojourner (Lev 23:22). The law says that the man who withholds justice from the alien *geer*, the fatherless or the widow is cursed (Dt 27:19).

However, later in the history of the nation, the Israelites became so exclusive that they kept their distance from the other nations. Ezra’s emphasis in Ez 9-10 was perverted by the later Judaizers in the early Church and that made a hindrance to the free access of Gentile converts.⁴²

God’s preference of the periphery is always there. God defends the sojourner and judges his oppressor (Pss 94:6, 146:9, Jer 7:6, Ezk 22:7, 29, Zech 7:10, Mal 3:5). The portrait of Israel of the OT narratives is that of a periphery and a foreigner. The patriarchs were foreigners who went from countries to countries and God was on their side: “When they were but few in number, few indeed, and strangers, *gaarim*, in it, they wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another. He allowed no one to oppress them; for their sake he rebuked kings: ‘Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm.’” (Ps 105: 12-14, 1 Chronicles 16: 19-22). Throughout Genesis they used to be oppressed as foreigners by the native people. The patriarchs did not have the picture of the Jews in Palestine today, but that of the Palestinians, who continue to be oppressed by the Israeli soldiers. So the Palestinians are periphery of today like the patriarchs then. Israel in OT was accepted because it is a small nation: “The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the **fewest** *me‘at* of all peoples.” (Dt 7:7). So, the Lord was on the side of the oppressed few, the periphery.

3.2 The Prophets and the Periphery

The prophets spoke against the injustices done in the society by the powerful against the periphery. Amos is a good example. “This is what the LORD says: “For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back *my wrath*. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals.

They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name.” (Am 2:6-7). “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, “Bring us some drinks!”” (Am 4:1, Also see 5:11f, 8:4).

Nathan, the prophet spoke against the injustice done to Uriah by David (2 Sam 12:1ff). Uriah was a Hittite (2 Sam 12:9). So he was twice a periphery: he was from the lower class, compared to David; he was a foreigner.

⁴²Carson, “Foreigner”, 389.

Elijah spoke against the injustice done to Naboth the Jezreelite by Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 21:1ff).

3.2.1 Prophetic Universalism as a Precursor of the Inclusion of the Periphery

Prophetic universalism is about the inclusion of the aliens in God's plan of salvation. The inclusion of the Foreigners / the Gentiles *gooyim* is the main subject in the prophetic books especially in Isaiah. Isa 2:2-4 reads: "In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.

Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. We will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore."

Concerning the eschatological hope for the periphery and for the true Israel, the Lord says: "From beyond the rivers of Cush *Aithiopias* my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings. On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill. But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the LORD. The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid. Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing" (Zeph 3:10-17).

However, Israel that was represented by Jonah, the prophet opposed to this plan of God in the person of Jonah just as the elder brother that represented the Pharisees opposed to his brother's coming home.⁴³ Although the prophet is the son of the truth according to the meaning of his name (2 kings 14:25)⁴⁴, in reality he was not, because in Jonah 4:2 he said that God was gracious and compassionate, but he was arguing that Ninevites should not escape the wrath of God, and was waiting to see what would happen to them (4:5). The Hebrew name of the prophet Jonah is *Yoonaah*, which means 'dove', which is a metaphor for Israel (Hos 7:11, 11:11). So the name of the prophet stands for Israel. In Gen 8:11, it was the dove that brought the good news of the subsiding of the

⁴³ Fretheim, *Jonah*, 63.

⁴⁴The Hebrew word *emet* means 'true'. *Ben Amitay* mean 'son of the truth'.

water. The people of God should bring good news to the poor, to the periphery. The people of God should not side with the corrupt center. Abraham was chosen for the sake of the blessing of the nations (Gen 12:2). So was the nation of Israel (Ex 19:6).

One of the main themes of the other minor prophets is about the coming of the Day of the Lord, which is revealed both in the salvation of the oppressed periphery and the condemnation of the wicked oppressors. Therefore, the Day of the Lord has both promise and warning. As a promise, it is the Day when the Lord will pour His Spirit upon all flesh and he who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved from the wrath to come. As a warning it is the Day of deep darkness and clouds. It is the Day of fire (Joel 2:28ff). Amos 5: 18-20 reads: “Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light-- pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?”

Malachi 3:1-5 reads: “‘See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the LORD you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,’ says the LORD Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years. ‘So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress *the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice*, but do not fear me,’ says the LORD Almighty.”

The Lord that suddenly comes to his temple is Jesus, and the messenger that goes before Him as Elijah was John the Baptist as we read in Matthew 3: 1-4 “In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: ‘A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’ John’s clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.”

4. The Periphery in NT: Matthew

In the NT, the Church was a minority until the time of the Middle Ages, and suffered persecution. The early Church relied more on God than any other political power. The narratives of the NT that are filled with the miracles of salvation come from the time when the Church was a minority.

4.1 The Social Context of the Community of Matthew

Overman says that the event of the destruction of the temple in 70 AD shaped both the formative Judaism and the Matthean community; and they were twin fraternal

brothers struggling to establish order, and define their life and beliefs.⁴⁵ On the basis of the Hegelian dialectical pattern: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, Baur and Tubingen school also said that the Gospel of Matthew was the earliest judaizing document as the thesis, the Gospel of Luke that represented the teaching of Paul was the antithesis, and that the Gospel of Mark was the latest of the three as the synthesis. However, nowadays, most of modern scholars believe Markan priority⁴⁶ and that Matthew's Gospel comes from anti-Jewish Gentile environment⁴⁷

4.2 The Periphery in Matthew

The kingdom came in person and ministry of Jesus and it was meant for all, both the center and the periphery. In Matthew, the Gentiles are already in view in the Magi of 2:1-12, the Centurion of 8:5-13, the Canaanite woman of 15:21-28. The limitation was only temporary as the statements in 24:14 and 28:19 indicate.”⁴⁸

The first three Gospels of the NT have been called the synoptics, because three of them see from the same or similar perspectives, and therefore, they have the following similar theological perspectives: 1) the coming of the kingdom, 2) Fulfillment of OT Promises, 3) Future Eschatology, 4) Centrality of the Passion, 5) Christology, 6) the Importance of Faith, 7) Salvation to the Gentiles.⁴⁹ The inclusion of the Gentiles in God's plan of salvation is one of the main theological themes in Matthew. The Gentiles can be seen as those who are at the periphery from spiritual/ soteriological point of view. The writer of Ephesians says: “Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (that done in the body by the hands of men)-- remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:11-13).

The four Gentile women in the genealogy: Tamar, Ruth, Rahab, and the wife of Uriah (1:3-6) bring the universalistic perspective of Matt 28:18-20: all nations. So Matthew 28:18-20 is the theological and hermeneutical key to understand the Gospel.⁵⁰

⁴⁵Overman, *Matthew*, 72.

⁴⁶ Nixon, *Matthew*, 813. Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 146.

⁴⁷ Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 3; France, *Matthew*, 21.

⁴⁸ Donald A. Hagner, “Synoptic Gospels” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Edited by Desmond Alexander et al Leicester: Inter-varsity Press, 2000, 127.

⁴⁹ Hagner, “Synoptic Gospels”, 129.

⁵⁰ Schnelle, *Theology*, 230.

By turning the local Jewish shepherds of Luke 2:8-20 into Gentile worshippers (2:1-12) foreigners, Matthew has shown his interest in foreigners.⁵¹

The Blessed Periphery (5:3) in Matthew are the poor whose deprivations led them to cry out for deliverance from the oppression (Ps 37:14, 40: 17 (18), 69:29-30 (28-29), Isa 61:1, 66:2 etc.⁵²

In Matthew 8: 1-13 two of the periphery show up: 1-4: a social outcast with a skin disease (but not leprosy) and the Gentile: the Roman centurion: 5- 13. By cleansing the leper, He shows His authority, and by sending the leper to the priest, He shows that he is the one who fulfills the Law of Moses, because the law does not only prohibit against the touching of the leper, but also provides the means of cleansing (Lev 5:3, 13:1ff), and as we see in Matthew 5-7, He is the one greater than Moses.⁵³ In Matthew 8:5-13 we read about the inclusion of the Gentiles to eat at the banquet with the patriarchs while the children of the kingdom (the unbelieving Jewish people) are left out , because they rejected Jesus, and are different from the ‘sons of the kingdom’ who are believers in Jesus in 13:38. Similar figurative use of the banquet and theological message as in 8:5-13 is also in Matthew 22:1ff.⁵⁴

There seems to be similarity between two of the sick people whom Jesus healed: Peter’s mother-in-law and the paralytic (8:14, 9:2). They were both thrown to bed. In the case of the former, she was only thrown *bebleemeneen*, though the latter was thrown on bed *bebleemenon epi klinees*. They both did not request healing from Jesus. Others brought the latter to Jesus, but in the case of the former, it was only Jesus who went to her and healed her. God takes the initiative to save the periphery. He took the initiative to come to this world. He is the Lord who comes to save the oppressed and to judge the oppressor. Jesus is on the side of the periphery. Satan is on the side of the oppressor.

Then we see Jesus coming against the oppressor in Matthew 8:28-34. He comes to torment *basanizoo* them (Rev 9:5, 14:11) Unlike Mark, Matthew does not mention the number of the pigs, because the focus is on the dying of the demons, not the pigs.⁵⁵

In 9:9-13, Jesus ate with the periphery, and was criticized for that. But His response to them was that sinners needed the savior and that was why He came (9:12).⁵⁶

⁵¹ Gundry, *Matthew*, 26.

⁵² Gundry, *Matthew*, 67.

⁵³Gundry, *Matthew*, 140.

⁵⁴ Gundry, *Matthew*, 146

⁵⁵ So they (the demons) came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and **they died** *apethanon* (the demons) in the water. The Greek word *agelee*- herd is singular and requires a singular verb , where as *apethanon* is Aorist Active 3rd person plural, and refers to the demons. Gundry, *Matthew*, 160

The word ‘sinners’ here refers to Gentiles and to Jews who are careless about the fine points of OT law as interpreted by the rabbis.⁵⁷ God’s priority is with sinners, though the righteous are also not excluded.⁵⁸

The good news is preached to the poor (11:5). Literally, it means, ‘the poor are preached’ *ptochoi euangelizontai*. The verb *euangelizomai* is used only here in Matthew. “The poor were important to Jesus, and they feature prominently in the Gospels. They were downtrodden and counted for little in the eyes of the general community. But to Jesus they mattered, and he draws John’s attention to this reversal of generally accepted values. It was something new that to such people good news was preached.”⁵⁹

In the parable of the wedding feast in 22:1-14, the present imperative *poreuesthe* ‘go’ in 22:9 is said to be similar to the present participle form from the same verb in 28:19, and therefore stands for the great commission of the Church among all the nations (28: 18-20)⁶⁰ However, Adolf Julicher has taught us that the parables teach one point, and that we should not pay much attention to the detail things in the parables as if they were allegories.⁶¹ But still the road intersections diexodous seem to be the place where the poor are available. “Poor people at the road junctions are unlikely to refuse such an invitation.”⁶²

In the parable of the sheep and the goats in 25: 31-46, the two groups are judged on the basis of the service they gave to the little ones (Jas 2:14-26, 1 Jn 3:14-17, Gal 5:6). It is said that believers are saved by grace, but are judged according to their works.⁶³ So, we are responsible for the people in need, especially for believers, who are in need and experience persecution. These are Christ Himself in disguise.

The Causes of the Paradigm Shift: The Failure of the Former Followers

Starting with Adam and Eve, the history of humanity with God was that of failure (Gen 3). Even after the punishment with the flood, God did not succeed, because the wickedness humankind was still there. So He said, “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And

⁵⁶ Foulkes, *A Guide to Matthew*, 81.

⁵⁷ Gundry, *Matthew*, 167.

⁵⁸ Morris, *Matthew*, 223, n.36.

⁵⁹ Morris, *Matthew*, 276.

⁶⁰ Gundry, *Matthew*, 437f.

⁶¹ Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 90, 94.

⁶² Morris, *Matthew*, 550.

⁶³ Foulkes, *A Guide to Matthew*, 223.

never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done .Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done” (Gen 8:21).

God chose Abraham, and then Israel for the sake of nations (Gen 12:2, Ex 19:6). However Israel, both as an individual and a nation was striving with God, but it was God who overcame him (Gen 32: 28, Hos 12:3f). Israel as family went to Egypt because of famine. God rescued them from Egypt and made a covenant with them at Sinai to worship only Yahweh, and to love their neighbors according to the words/the Decalogue.

The reign of Ahab, Son of Omri was the time of Baal worship, which Elijah was speaking against. Even Jeroboam II, the son of Jehu, the opponent of Baal worship was himself a worshipper, and was criticized by Hosea the prophet.

From Christian point of view, three events are important in salvation history, and each of them had their own causes of failures: the exodus, the exile, and the coming of Jesus. During the exodus the people tested God in the wilderness (Num 11:1-3, 33f, 12:10ff) and could not enter the promised land. Only their children entered (Dt 1:39). When the exile came due to injustice (Amos) and idolatry (Hosea), God said that only the remnants would be saved (Isa 1:9, 7:3, 11:16, Rom 9:27, 11:5,etc).

Although the people had failed to keep the Law, they attempted to keep the law strengthened eagerness. So for the Rabbinic Judaism, the kingdom is not going to come in the future or in any other means, it is there in the Law/ the Torah.⁶⁴ So the prohibitions in the ritual and moral law were attempted with greater precision until the coming of Jesus. As a result of these attempts all the non-Israelites and the ritually unclean were excluded from the Jewish society.

The coming of Jesus reversed this approach. Jesus had an association with sinners and Gentiles, and ate and drank with them (9:10ff). He referred to Himself as the fulfillment of the law (5:17f). He did not tell people to come to God through the law, but he told them to come to Him and get rest (11:28). He forgave sins (9:1ff). As a result such practices which seemed unacceptable by the Jewish people, and according to God’s plan of salvation came the paradigm shift. Then the supposed former followers failed, and He preferred to call those at the periphery.

5. Conclusion

According to the paradigm shift in Matthew and in Ethiopia, and elsewhere in the world, the person and mission of Jesus that can empower and transform their lives is brought to them by means of the Gospel message. We, as people in the *ekklesia* (16:18, 18:17) are to bring this message to all people (28:18-20).

⁶⁴ Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament, 59.

As people in the *ekkeesia*, like the disciples, we are between the two big powers: Jesus who brought the kingdom and overcame Satan (12:28f), and the united satanic alliances: Satan, demons, Unbelieving leaders, etc. we need to pray and overcome the temptation (4: 1-10). So persecution/ conflict is to be expected. We need to watch and pray (26:41ff).

I think that our discussion above about the periphery support our sociological approach to doing theologies of liberation: Feminist, Black, Holistic, etc. We need to remember the periphery in the society.

The Oromos of East Africa could not have been the periphery, though they are now in fact the periphery. Although this is due to the tireless hard work of the Habashas, internal contradictions within the Oromo leaders (e.g., Emmanuel Abraham and Gudina Tumsa) themselves, however, have a major, or perhaps the highest contribution to decide the fate of this great African nation. So the Oromos themselves have to settle the matter. Matthew has this to say to the Oromos: “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to *the judge*, and *the judge* may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.” (Mt 5:25). The Judge? So, let them forgive each other as brothers and sisters from the same father and mother.

The prophetic voice of the Church should be heard on behalf of the voiceless, on behalf of the social and political peripheries (2 Sam 12:1ff, 1 Kings 21:1ff). I could be mistaken, but I did not hear any voice against the recent Israeli massacre in Gaza from the Evangelical Churches in the West other than the voice of the Roman Catholic Church. If we are Evangelicals, where is the *Euangelion* ‘Gospel’ that was meant for the poor, for the periphery? The periphery around the worlds today ask the Church this question: Is it you or shall we wait for another to hear the good news from? The pioneer Missionaries obeyed Jesus (Matt 28:18-20) and came to Ethiopia and trained the nationals like Onesimos Nasib, Gudina Tumsa, and others. Gudina sided with the periphery and gave his life as a sacrifice following the steps of Jesus, Stephen, Bonoeffer, and others. As Lutherans we should not forget our Theology of the Cross. Being on the side of the periphery can be carrying the Cross. Faith should go together with praxis.⁶⁵ (Jas 1:27, 1 Jn 3:17f). one of our praxis should be teaching, because education changes the individual and his audience. Jesus said: Go and teach them *matheeteusate* (28:19). Especially in Africa, we need more PhD’s in Biblical studies to see significant changes both in the society and the Church. Many young EECMY members at the periphery need to have their eyes opened through higher theological educations so that they could lead us as good Lutherans. There is no single PhD in Systematic Theology in order to lead EECMY as a Lutheran Church. So education is part of Evangelism according to Matthew.

⁶⁵ “[T]he so-called hermeneutical problem of theology was not really a problem of the relationship between systematic and historical theology or between dogma and history, but rather a problem of the relationship between *theory and praxis* or *between the understanding of faith and social praxis*.” Betz in C. Wigglesworth “Political Theology” in *New Dictionary of Theology*. Editors: Sinclair B. Ferguson et al. Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1988, 521(emphasis mine).

If we have the heart and the Spirit of Jesus, we need to be on the side of the periphery. We have the good news for them.

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