

The church: an agent for transformation



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Introduction

With an overwhelming reality with regard to orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in South Africa there is an urgent response needed to assist these children. According to various authors the local church does possess the potential and mandate to be a key role-player and catalyst in creating sustainable livelihoods. Such an involvement could assist in improving the quality of life for the communities and its children in question (Makoko, 2007; Mitchell, 2001; Singletary, 2007).

According to the Bible (Matthew 28: 18, 19; Matthew 22: 37-39), the mission of the church is to declare and demonstrate the gospel to a sinful and a suffering world, with the primary aim to build the Kingdom of God. Perkins (1995: 111) refers to a time when the church was the primary source of care and help for the needy of society and concludes that the church surrendered this role to government agencies and welfare programmes. He makes a profound statement by stating that “ Today, in many ways, the lost world does a better job of caring for the needy than the church does.” (1995: 111)

Within this chapter, a theological perspective and foundation for the church’s mandate to be involved in the community and the lives of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) will be investigated. Secondly the church’s potential and call towards a holistic, integrated missional approach for effective community development will be explored. Thirdly, the church’s methodologies and approaches within their current praxis of community involvement as well as possible shortfalls will be considered.

This investigation will be based on a literature study, primarily using the work of Kysar (1991) which is acknowledged as a relatively old source, but used due to the large extent of his work in both Old and New Testament literature relating to the mandate of the church for social ministry. Other authors such as Kumalo (2001), Liebenberg (1996), Mathole (2005), Myers (2004) and Myers (1999a) will be consulted and reflected in this chapter and used to evaluate Kysar (1991). Due to the limitation of this study, no exegesis will be done. The sources used in this study will be compared in order to identify similarities and contradictions in order to formulate a theological foundation.

a theological perspective and foundation for the church's mandate to be involved in the community and the lives of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC)

The church's involvement in the community has been motivated from various authors' viewpoints (August, 1999; Dreyer, 2004; Hessel, 1992; Kumalo, 2001; Liebenberg, 1996; Mathole, 2005; Myers, 1999b; Myers, 1999a; Mitchell, 2001 Perkins, 1995; Pierce, 2000; and Vilanculo, 1998). Various conclusions have been made, but primarily it has been stated that the church has a responsibility and not merely an option to be involved in the lives of the local community. The focus of this study is not the church as such, and therefore this chapter will be directed towards the role and mandate of the church's involved in the marginalized and poor. The primary purpose of this discussion serves as an understanding of firstly, the revelation of God's concern regarding the poor and marginalized and secondly the mandate and role of the church.

Firstly, we need to explore the biblical imperatives for the involvement of the church in the lives of the poor, suffering people and marginalized of society with the aim to establish a perspective for a theology of development. This will be done by establishing a basic overview for understanding some of the biblical images and attributes of God as well as some of Jesus' teachings in this regard. Secondly, biblical imperatives for the involvement of the church specifically towards orphans and children will be explored.

Due to the limitation of this study, the overview and discussion provided within this section are by no means comprehensive and are primarily focussed on the attributes of God as revealed in both the Old and New Testament as a means to understand the divine concern relating to the reality of the poor (poverty).

Various Old Testament attributes of God

Kysar (1991: 7) calls for phrases such as 'images of God' and 'attributes of God' to be understood as at best, "a human perception of a reality that lies beyond the boundaries of language and conception". To Kysar, all the ways in which God is referred to, represent efforts to understand the absolute unknowable in terms of the known. The images of God in Scripture are mere metaphors as they attempt to speak of the divine reality parallel to the human reality.

For Kysar (1991: 8), Mathole (2005: 70) and Van Til (2004: 444) within the interpretations of the images and characteristics of God, there is a remarkably consistent theme of the biblical God who cares passionately about the total welfare of all human beings. These images of God will be

shortly discussed and evaluated in light of other authors in order to establish a perspective for a theology of development for the individual Christian and the church in general.

God the Creator

Kysar (1991: 8), Myers (1999a: 25) and Van Til (2004: 444) refer to Genesis 1 and 2 that endorse the image of the Creator God who forms reality through the power of divine word or act, or as explained by Myers (1999a: 25) “making something out of nothing.” God is depicted as the Creator of this materialistic matter (creation) and included in it, is the human being that is created to the image of God (Befus & Bauman, 2004; Gordon & Evans, 2002: 17; Kysar, 1991: 8; Myers, 1999a: 25, Van Til, 2004: 444). Both Kysar and Myers (1999a: 26) confirm the origin of the human reality as revealed in Genesis 1 and 2, as from the craftsmanship of God. They further consider the creation stories as honouring and celebrating the physical realm as a result of such a divine creative act. To them, the image of God portrayed in these stories of creation is that of a Creator who is in a continuing relationship with creation. Within this creation, human beings are placed in a system of relationships: with God, with self, community and the environment. God defines the physical dimension of life and existence for people in the calling to be fruitful and productive stewards of God’s creation (Myers, 1999a: 25). God is presented as one who is concerned for the full range of human life including the physical welfare of all people (Kysar, 1991: 8; Myers, 1999a: 26).

According to Kumalo (2001: 133) at the centre of a theology for development lies “the truth that every human being is made in the image of God”. This

promotes the task of a theology of development to restore and recover God's image in humanity by helping each other to reflect 'human wholeness' or 'image of God'. For him, this 'human wholeness' implies a concern for life that includes all aspects of human existence, the spiritual and physical dimensions.

Kumalo (2001: 134) defines a theology of development as the 'comprehensive progression' and well-being of individual humans as well as of the whole of creation, to include the 'immanent needs' for human survival and well-being, the 'transcendent needs' of human beings (the right to existence and empowerment in order to find meaning in one's life); and a personal relationship with God. This is within the understanding that salvation presupposes human needs. With a holistic understanding of salvation it implies that the well-being of creation is central to a theology of development (Kumalo, 2001: 134).

God of the Exodus

Both Kysar (1991: 10) and Myers (1999a: 31) refer to the course of history as altered by the intervention of God through the prophetic agent Moses. For Kysar, the ultimate revelation of the God of Israel is a historical one and it means that God attends to the historical conditions for humans. These historical realities of human existence are precisely where humans encounter God – the material reality of time and space becomes the medium through which an encounter with God is experienced. According to Myers (1999a: 30), the divine revelation experienced by Israel in the exodus is typical of the way in which God works in human life. To him, the exodus is more than a past event; it portrays a model for how God always and

everywhere acts for human well-being on a multiple level. Firstly, on a spiritual level, God is revealing himself and demonstrating his power in order for Israel to have faith and be faithful. Secondly on a socio-political level, it is the “ moving from slavery to freedom, from injustice to a just society, from dependence to independence”. Thirdly on an economic level, moving from land owned by somebody else, to freedom in their own land and fourthly on a psychological level it is about self understanding as enslaved people and discovering the inner understanding that with God’s help, they could be free people and become a nation (Myers, 1999a: 31).

With the understanding of the role of the church as an agent for change and transformation, a theology of development includes the church that understands and fulfils the realities of human existence. This would imply the active role of the church within the understanding that human well-being is enhanced through God’s involvement on a multiple level (spiritual, socio-political, economic and psychological level), through the dynamics of the church’s involvement.

The Passionate God

According to Kysar (1991: 12) and Myers (1999a: 31), Moses is called to the task of being the human agent in God’s liberation and the words and language of God. Kysar refers to Exodus 3: 7 – 12 and 6: 2 – 8 where we find attributes of God in human perception and emotions which portray an important image of the divine God. The verbs used are filled with sensitivity to the conditions of the people: ‘ observed’, ‘ heard’, ‘ known’ and ‘ come down’ and the implications of these verbs reveal a God that is moved by the plight of the people. To him these verbs also suggest God’s attentiveness to

human welfare, and that God is moved by the physical, (social, economic and political) conditions of the people.

Kysar (1991: 12) refers to the Hebrew verb *yadah* used and interpreted as ‘know’ in this text that means more than knowing in the sense of a cognitive perception. The Hebrew verb means to know in the sense of sharing in the reality of the known. In ‘knowing’ the suffering of the people, God is quickened to declare that the divine reality participates in their life conditions. The image of God is not portrayed as a passive figure but of a God who is moved by the plight of people and He declares the intention to act on behalf of the people (Myers, 1999a: 31; Kysar, 1991: 12). The act of God to free Israel is designed with one purpose in mind, namely to change the conditions of the people. The mode of this action is through human agency when Moses is sent to execute God’s plan of action. The passionate God acts through humans who are commissioned to represent the divine will (Myers, 1999a: 31; Kysar, 1991: 12).

With the understanding of the role of Moses as a human agent in God’s liberation, it affirms the vital role to which humans are enlisted for the liberation cause to assist others for the sake of their own liberation. A theology of development includes the awareness of God’s understanding of the plight of people and his declaration and intent to act on behalf of the people through humans who are commissioned to represent the divine will.

Advocate of Justice

Kysar (1991: 18), Donahue (2006: 1) and Van Til (2004: 449) refer to the justice of God for human welfare as being evident in many ways in the Old

Testament legal materials, but state that it is nowhere more radically portrayed than in the provision of the sabbatical and jubilee years. The sabbatical and jubilee years are related traditions in the Hebrew Scriptures to be found within the covenant code in Exodus 21 – 23 and in the Deuteronomic code (Deuteronomy 15). To Kysar, Donahue and Van Til, within the Sabbath year God is pictured as the monarch of the people and as their social liberator. There are a number of provisions within the legislation for the seventh year. Slaves are to be released along with their families (Exodus 21: 2 – 6). The land is to be given a sabbatical rest by leaving the fields fallow and any spontaneous produce during this year could be harvested by the stranger or the poor as in Exodus 23: 10 – 11. Within the Deuteronomic code there is provision for the care of the poor (Deuteronomy 15: 1 – 18) which includes the cancellation of all debts, lending to the poor and the freeing of Hebrew slaves (Kysar, 1991: 18; Van Til, 2004: 449).

Van Til (2004: 449) reflects on the covenant code and the laws, and concludes that “ one senses a special concern for those who experience the greatest need – the widow, the orphan and the alien” – as a number of laws are enacted to provide for them. He refers to Deuteronomy 15: 4 – 5 as evidence that if the commandments concerning the provision for the poor were kept, the absence of poverty would result. He also relates this as the mandate that God’s people “ must serve the neediest among them by keeping the laws” that relate to the covenant legislations of the Pentateuch. These were provided as laws, and not as options for compassion. He also refer to Thethe keeping of these and other covenant stipulations that would result in blessings for the whole nation of Israel, including material prosperity

and the failure to keep them would result in a series of curses (2004: 452). While the means for these principles and responsibilities differ from society to society, they are still valid and ongoing as they demonstrate the just and merciful character of God (Van Til, 2004: 452).

The God of the law that stands in solidarity with the poor and insists on their rights and dignity is portrayed through the legislations of the Old Testament law (Van Til, 2004: 452). God speaks in this legislation as one who identifies himself with the poor, the enslaved, and the dispossessed, as well as one who is concerned for the welfare of the natural environment. It can be interpreted as God's way of indicating indebtedness and responsibility towards the poor and assistance that needs to be provided by the church to free them from poverty or to liberate (Kumalo, 2001: 134).

Within this understanding of God's attribute, a theology of development should be people-centred, based on their needs and dependent on human resources. Within God's concern for social justice, a responsibility and bias is implied towards the suffering, the marginalized and the poor; with the coexistent task of restoring their 'human wholeness'. For Kumalo it is imperative to have a focus and bias towards the poor within a people-centred theology of development (2001: 314).

God of the Prophets

Kysar (1991: 20) and Donahue (2006: 3) refer to the classical prophets' concurrence through their insistence that God's rule of Israel encompasses the social life of the people. Demands for the just treatment of the needy, the obligations of the leaders of the nation for justice, the interrelatedness of

worship and social morality, and the inclusiveness of God's care for humans are among the prominent themes of the prophets. According to Kysar and Donahue, the prophets offer us an image of a God whose rule extends to the social realm. They further refer to the importance of this social rule of God that the prophets are forthright in declaring that the violation of that rule can only result in the punishment of the people. Hence, the prophets of the eighth and sixth centuries understood that the exiles of both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah are the direct consequences of social injustice (Amos 3: 1 – 2). To them, the violation of God's will for social relationships is a matter of utmost significance. Its punishment arises from the very nature of God, for whom societal structures are of paramount concern.

Kumalo (2001: 135) emphasizes the role of the church as the voice of the poor and to speak on their behalf to government and society. He relates this to the role of the prophets, and it means that the church might at times be unpopular within the wider society or powerful, but it should not discourage, as a theology of development includes the voices of the poor to be echoed in public policy for justice and the responsibilities of government towards the poor and marginalized.

God of the psalmists and Proverbs

The social concern of the God of the Hebrew Scriptures is further confirmed by the informative nature of the wisdom literature, where it is clear that it is in worship that people give clearest expression to their image of God (Kyser 1991: 23) How worship is done tells us something vital about people's understanding of the one to whom worship is addressed (1991: 23). For him,

within the variety of themes and moods depicted in the Psalms there is a consistency in the portrayal of God, which in turn fits the pattern of the images mentioned above.

He (1991: 23) refers to the God addressed in the psalms as frequently represented as an advocate for and a rescuer of the poor. He emphasises passages such as God rising up the needy (107: 41) and him being the saviour of the poor (34: 6). Also, the afflicted are defended by God (140: 12); he is present with the needy (109: 31); he reverses the human conditions of want and deprivation (113: 5 – 9) and he rescues the needy (149: 5 – 9).

According to him (1991: 23) the psalmists who address God in these hymns repeatedly portray themselves as poor (9: 9-10; 86: 1 – 2, 7). The Psalms are the petitions of the afflicted (25: 16), the needy (35: 10), the lowly (147: 6), the downtrodden (74: 21), the orphans and widows (68: 6), the children (116: 6), and the barren woman (113: 9). For Kysar, the impression one gains from this overview of the self-identification of the psalmists is that God is one who hear the cries of the needy and the oppressed (1991: 23). Indeed, it is God of the exodus, who declares in Exodus 3: 7 – 8: “ I have observed the misery of my people...and have heard their cry...I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them...” (NLT: 1996).

For Myers (1999a: 33) the literature from the Proverbs and Psalms is also a summary of learnings and wisdom of God’s faithful people concerning “ right and just relationships” and demonstrates these people’s experiences of God’s rule as the absolute. Social relationships reflected as God’s concern, surface throughout the Psalms and Proverbs. It demonstrates God’s interest

in the everyday things of life such as eating, drinking, playing, crying and laughing. The human inability to see God as being active and interested in daily life is referred to by Myers (1999a: 33) as “ a serious weakness, it is as if we believe that God is absent from or disinterested in this part of life”. He further refers to this inability as a cause of a serious blind spot that is often reflected in the church’s practice and interpretation of development.

For Kumalo (2001: 136) a theology of development must generate a spirituality that encompasses the total human existence, which further brings hope, strength and power to the people and marginalized within the understanding that God is involved and interested in the everyday things of life. The attributes of God in the development of spirituality should stress issues such as freedom, love, holiness, dignity, power and creativity; as these elements are all part of human existence and should be the basis of all people’s lives (Kumalo, 2001: 136).

The attributes of God, revealed by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ

According to Kysar (1991: 31), within the New Testament, the dynamics of the Old Testament attributes of God are enhanced by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ whole earthly existence echoed his and his Father’s love and care for the poor and needy, which included children. For Kysar, the attributes of God revealed through Jesus Christ’ teachings and primary concerns, directly relates to God’s concern for humanity. For Kysar, the nature of Jesus’ ministry, further relates to the nature of God’s mission in the world.

Kysar (1991: 32) reflects on the ministry of Jesus, as a revelation of the attributes of God and believes that when seen in its totality, it is a clear expression of God's concern for the whole human existence. Both Kysar and Myers (1999a: 35) reflect on Jesus' actions and words which addressed every aspects of human life, which made it a holistic mission.

Kysar primarily seeks to confirm three aspects within the New Testament. These aspects are firstly the God who cares for the whole person, secondly the God who cares for all persons and thirdly, the God who identifies with suffering humanity. Due to the inter-related nature of these aspects, they will not be separately discussed, but be referred to within an overview of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the attributes of God evident from it.

A concern with humanity's physical welfare

Jesus' concern for the physical welfare of people is considered by Kysar (1991: 32) and Mathole (2005: 92) in light of the numerous healing stories, which dominate the Gospels both in number and strategic locations (Mark 1: 21 – 2: 12). These healings ranged from a fever (Mark 1: 30 – 31) to the raising of the dead (John 11), which according to Kysar suggests that any physical affliction evoked the attention of Jesus.

Further to the healing stories Kysar (1991: 32) considers the accounts of Jesus feeding the multitudes, recorded by all four Gospels (Matthew 14: 13 – 21, Matthew 15: 32 – 37, Mark 6: 30 – 44, Mark 8: 1 – 10, Luke 9: 10 – 17 and John 6: 1 – 13). He acknowledges that these accounts have meaning beyond the satisfying of hunger, but appeals for the primary meaning not be lost and refers to these accounts as demonstrating Jesus' care for the fulfilling of a

basic human need (1991: 33). To both Kysar (1991: 35) and Mathole (2005: 92) this reveals God as centrally concerned with the physical conditions of humans and further reveals God's acting to reverse bodily suffering.

A concern with humanity's emotional welfare

Kysar (1991: 35) relates God's care for the emotionally afflicted to the several acts of forgiveness (Luke 7: 36 – 50). According to him, the forgiveness of sin is addressing the emotional affliction of guilt (1991: 36).

He also considers Jesus' acts of exorcism as emotional healing and interprets these as neurosis or psychosis (1991: 36). He refers to the physical affliction demon possession could have, such as infliction of wounds (Mark 5: 5), the loss of basic skills such as speech and hearing (Matthew 12: 22), seizures and convulsions (Luke 4: 35; 9: 42), and multiple personalities (Mark 5: 9). Due to the limitation of this study, Kysar's interpretation of exorcism and demon possession will not be elaborated, but primarily considered in light of the pain and suffering demon possession entailed both physically and emotionally.

Both Kysar (1991: 36) and Mathole (2005: 92) concludes that through Jesus' acts of exorcism he expressed God's concern for emotional health in the same way as he offered the message of the Kingdom of God to pitiful and hopeless people. It meant healing, forgiveness, acceptance and hope for people that were entrapped by their emotional conditions and societal standards.

A concern with humanity's economic welfare

For Kysar (1991: 37) Jesus' attention to the poor, relates to the expression of God's care for afflictions that resulted from impoverishment. Both Kysar (1991: 37) and Mathole (2005: 75) mention that Jesus spent a lot of time among the common people of Palestine (Luke 6: 17) which was according to Kysar, considered a land with vast numbers of poor residents. Secondly, Kysar considers that Jesus spent much of his time with the poor, as reflected in the way Jesus spoke of poverty through the parables. To him, these parables were very believable as they were realistic pictures of the common life and clearly understood by his audiences. Such parables would include the parable of the tenants (Matthew 21: 33 – 43), the lost coin (Luke 15: 8 – 9) and the figure of Lazarus as a common sight of such a pitiful creature (Luke 16: 19 – 31).

While Kysar (1991: 38) acknowledges other teachings of Jesus that relate to poverty and health, both Donahue (2006: 5) and Kysar emphasise Luke's presentation of Jesus. For them, Luke's account reflects Jesus' extensive attention to questions such as the dangers of wealth (Luke 12: 13 – 21), the proper use of riches (Luke 19: 1 – 10) and the call to surrender possessions for the kingdom of God (Luke 18: 18 -23).

While acknowledging the controversial debate over Jesus' own background of poverty, both Kysar (1991: 38) and Mathole (2005: 74) considers Jesus' shared solidarity with the poor of his time, in light of his ministry as “ a ministry for the poor by the poor.” They relate this to their understanding of Jesus' and his followers lives of poverty during his time of ministry and promote them as a group that depended upon each other for shelter and

sustenance (Luke 8: 1 – 3). Kysar refers to Walter Pilgrim while Mathole refers to Padilla who considered Jesus and his disciples as belonging to a group in society that did not produce their own economic sustenance, but lived from the respect, gratitude and charity of others. Van Til (2004: 452) does not consider Jesus and his disciples amongst the poorest, as he reflects on the fishermen of Galilee as business owners, and Jesus and his disciples giving alms, rather than receiving them. While no clear conclusion in this regard could be drawn, the primary message of all the authors considered, referred to Jesus' total solidarity with the poor. In the work of Carillo (2008: n. p), he relates the ministry of Jesus to the ethos of the way in which Jesus lived his life. Carillo (2008: n. p) considers the poor “ the hallmark of his true identity” as the healing, feeding, preaching to the poor was prophesied by Isaiah as evidence of God's presence.

For Kysar (1991: 39) and Mathole (2005: 91) the message of Jesus had a particular relevance to the poor. To both, the establishment of the Kingdom of God meant transformation and implied a time of prosperity and abundance as the reign of God in the world was believed to bring changes in society. The message of hope related to the poor as a change in their circumstances and was perceived as the ‘ good news’ for the poor (Luke 7: 22). Kysar concludes that the attributes of God reflected in the ministry of Jesus are one who cares for the economic welfare of the people (1991: 39). To Kysar, Mathole and Van Til (2004: 452) the outpourings of God's heart that feels the pain of entrapment of poverty is evident in Jesus' words and deeds.

A concern with humanity's social welfare

For Kysar (1991: 40) and Mathole (2005: 93), the social implications of sickness and demon possession, and the social integration as a result of Jesus' healings and exorcisms, represented God's concern for the marginalized of society. Both Kysar and Mathole refer to the practice where physically afflicted persons were removed from mainstream society which was due to legislation regarding holiness and cleanliness. Accounts reflecting Jesus' acts of healing that resulted in social integration are the leper (Mark 1: 40 - 44) and the woman with the flow of blood (Mark 5: 25 - 34), to name but two. Both Kysar and Mathole conclude that Jesus' healings besides being physical, also represented God's concern for the marginalized of society and "embodied God's actions to liberate humans" (Mathole, 2005: 92).

Kysar (1991: 40) also considers the implications of Jesus' persistent failure to observe social custom as he generally acted in ways that contradicted the social divisions of his society. Both Kysar and Mathole (2005: 93) emphasise this by referring to accounts such as Jesus touching the leper (Mark 1: 41) by which he violates the social and religious law regarding leprosy. Furthermore they refer to Jesus using a Samaritan as the hero of his parable (Luke 10: 30 - 37) and Jesus' conversation with a Samaritan woman (John 4: - 26) which in essence challenged the hatred of the Jews and Samaritans of one another. To Kysar and Mathole Jesus brought down a social barrier by having dinner with people that were questionable in their religious purity which could endanger Jesus' own purity (Mark 2: 15 - 16), he treated women with dignity, respect and equality and included them among his disciples (Luke 8: 1 - 3).

Kysar (1991: 46), Gordon and Evans (2002: 7) reflect on the inclusive behaviour Jesus revealed by ministering to all and his affiliations with those that are excluded by society due to political, religious and social reasons. Kysar refers to Jesus being called “ a glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners” because of his free associations with social outcasts (Matthew 11: 19; Luke 7: 34). In their understanding of this, Kysar, Gordon and Evans consider accounts that reflect Jesus spent a good deal of his time with the despised class of workers. These included Jesus calling such to take a place among his followers (Matthew 10: 3), he associated himself with those labelled as sinners (Mark 2: 15 – 17, Luke 7: 38; 15: 1) and with the tax collectors which was despised and hated in the first-century Palestine (Matthew 9: 10 – 11; 10: 3). Over and above this, Jesus advocated for a prostitute (Matthew 21: 31) and accepted the love and gratitude of such (Luke 7: 37 – 50).

Kysar (1991: 46) considers Jesus’ advocacy on behalf of women in Luke’s account of Jesus’ rejection of the custom of divorce of his time (Luke 7: 37 – 50) and Jesus’ protest against the inhumane treatment of women in the divorce process (Mark 10: 2 – 9, Matthew 19: 3 – 8). He considers this not just as a mere rejection of the common view of women, but as acts in protest against it.

By no means are these a comprehensive overview, but they are considered sufficient accounts for Kysar (1991: 50), Gordon and Evans (2002: 7) to reveal the inclusive nature of Jesus’ ministry. For Kysar and Mathole (2005: 93), the understanding of the inclusive nature of Jesus’ ministry relates to the nature of God, as a God who is concerned with all persons, regardless of

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their social, moral, religious, economic, or ethical standing. Through these accounts, Jesus demonstrated God's divine solidarity with humanity and which also confirms Kysar's aspect of a God who cares for all human beings.

Kysar (1991: 51) and Mathole (2005: 93) also consider these same accounts as evidence of Jesus' identification with the poor and a demonstration of his solidarity and identification with those he served. For Kysar and Mathole, Jesus illustrated with his own life what is meant by being a servant of others (Mark 10: 42 – 45) which also confirms Kysar's aspect of a God that identifies with the suffering of humanity.

The metaphor 'father' for God as used by Jesus, was according to Kysar (1991: 41) considered as an assault on the authority and role of fathers in the structure of the household. He refers to Jesus' statement in Matthew 23: 9 " And don't address anyone here on earth as ' Father', for only God in heaven is your spiritual Father" (NLT: 1996). For him, the attribute of God invoked by this statement was a direct denying of the absolute authoritative role and power of the father in the basic unit of a family. This held the promise of liberation for women and children and their oppression from an absolute patriarchal figure of their time. Kysar (1991: 51) refers to this same metaphor of ' father' in Jesus' invitation to address God with this intimate term (Luke 11: 2) as an indication of a God who identifies with human needs and therefore also relates to Kysar's aspect of a God who identifies with the suffering of humanity.

Kysar (1991: 41) concludes Jesus' role as social protester with many implications for Chri