5. SELF-COMPLACENT ATTITUDE TO SPIRITUALITY
(A Negative Perspective)

5.0. Introduction

Spirituality in its negative perspective is intended to be dealt with in this chapter, projecting the self complacent attitude of the proud leaders and elders of the Jewish community, like the Pharisees, the Saducees and the like. Their pride of traditional legalism and self righteousness made them very exclusive from the rest in the society. The spirit of exclusiveness, that is opposite to the spirit of openness prevented them from making responsible use of their human freedom and from manifesting their spirituality to be inclusive of the social obligations. Their hypocritical attitude and the buried notion of their spirituality could not prove to be productive in their social milieu, instead led them to further exclusiveness; thus they were bound to their own natural selves not freely existing (in the sense of 'going out of the given state') in more than their natural selves as the gospel spirituality expects of its believers.

While delineating the original seed metaphor, the first recorded parable in the Gospels it is learnt that the seed sown by Jesus for the new way (growth) of life could not find a fertile soil in the hearts of the various elitistic groups in the Jewish religious community. They did not look at Jesus’ words and works honestly in the spirit of openness, instead they viewed at them from their own traditional perspective of God belonging exclusively to them and their religion, inspite of their faith in One God and One Humanity. Whereas, because of the same faith, Jesus sought understanding of and identifying with the whole of
human living conditions, which needed quite a new movement encompassing the weak (sinners), the poor (the oppressed), the lost (the enemies) and the other non-entities in the society. Thus the despised lot in the society experienced the person Jesus and his message to be redeeming, 'freeing themselves' to the true and new awareness of the human identity and dignity, even in the fallen state of humanity.

The self correctional attitude of the humble and the ordinary people and the self complacent attitude of the proud and elitistic groups made all the difference in their verdict on Jesus and his mission. Frederick Langbridges' metaphor helps us know the difference. He says, "two men look out through the same bars / one sees the mud, and the one stars".\(^1\) The one, the tall one who could only see the mud while looking out through the bars symbolizes the Jewish Pharisees, Saducees and the elders of the community who due to their own pride (tallness) of self righteousness and religious tradition chose to remain spiritually 'blind' unable to see the guiding 'star' as they refused to believe Jesus to be the man of God. Their closed selves and taking protection under the shadow of their own judgment, that was devoid of the human face; and their self complacent spirituality that was devoid of social dimension, made them miss the true meaning of Jesus' mission and his vision of one humanity. It could be inferred from their concerted efforts they took to accuse Jesus of being the Hell's agent, after his cure of the blind man on the Sabbath. It is evident of their dehumanizing spirit and an attempt to sinning against the Holy spirit of God. Besides their blind adherence to the rules and laws did not enable them to appreciate and acquire

the new awareness that the new movement of Jesus was striving to inculcate in the minds of the people. The blind adherence to rules is explicit from their reaction to Jesus, after he had healed a man born blind. Some Pharisees said "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath" (Jn 9:16), thus respecting the letter of the law, not the need of the fellow needy-person. They even went to the extent of making Jesus a sinner. But on the other hand, to the humble man, cured of his blindness on his show of faith in the Son of Man, Jesus revealed himself saying "it is he who speaks to you" (Jn 9:37), similar to his personal revelation to the believing humble Samaritan woman in the well saying "I who speak to you am he" (Jn 4:26). The humble Samaritan woman and the blind man could be compared to the one (small) in the metaphor, who looks out through the same bars, the star.

Another narrative of the encounter of Nicodemus with Jesus has poetic excellence signifying the reality of the situation and the quality of Jesus’ message. Though Nicodemus coming to Jesus 'by night' indicates both his fear for the fellow leaders of the community and the 'darkened' faith he had on Jesus - for Jesus asked him "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet do not understand this?" (Jn 3:10), he represents the darkened minds of the Pharisees and the Scribes and their inability to 'see' the spirit behind all the laws and the prophets. It is also echoed in the Pharisees telling the man cured of his blindness that they were the disciples of Moses but as for Jesus "we do not know where he comes from" (Jn 9:29). Curiously enough Nicodemus too who could see into the true origin of Jesus - for he regarded Jesus as having "come from God", could not progress to comprehend the descending and ascending Messiah in Jesus as the ordinary Samaritan woman progressed
in her encounter with Jesus in the well 'at midday', contrary to Nicodemus' 'by night'. On the other hand, the character of the blind man who could not see Jesus but whom Jesus heals is instructive, because he persists in saying that the one who healed him "comes from God" (Jn 3:2), thereby risking ex-communication in accordance with the decision of the Pharisees that "If anyone should confess him [Jesus] to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue" (Jn 9:22). Nicodemus was probably afraid to take the risk.

In his teaching the teacher of Israel, Nicodemus, Jesus bore testimony to the fact that "God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him ... And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light" (Jn 3:17, 19). It is also echoed in Jesus finally telling, "the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders, who had come out against him" in the mount of Olives "this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Lk 22: 52-53). But in the Gospels, this power of darkness of the Pharisees and the like do declare the Glory of the light of Jesus at least by negation.

5.1. Free self versus Jewish legalism

The opponents of Jesus noticed his good deeds of love and compassion for the people who were hanging on his words, but then they despised him for his intimate association and table-fellowship with sinners, publicans and non-observers of law. The reason was that such associations and fellowship on their part demanded their human selves to get freed from the pride of their self righteous egos and abandon or dilute the rules and laws for the sake of their unwanted and despised
lot. Jesus should have been closely observing this attitude of the opponents from the beginning of his ministry, and probably even earlier in his thirty years of pre-public life. A clue to this observation of Jesus could be inferred from his parabolic story (Matt. 25: 14-30) that hints at a pious pharisee seeking his own security in the meticulous observance of the law of God. The pharisees took protection under the shadow of a cautious and calculative life but had nothing to offer the simple folk, the publican, the sinner and the gentile by behaving like the one who having "received the one talent, went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money" (v.18). The one talent that is God's capital of having made the Jewish race his chosen people, had been deprived of even yielding the 'interest'. By failing to earn the interest, the capital became virtually a 'dead' investment, significant in the Third Servant in the story having 'buried' the one talent for such "a long time" (v.19).

Moreover, the one talent that the servant hid for such a long time has proved to be unproductive, since without the risk of investment any capital remains barren. Likewise for the opponents of Jesus to abandon pharisaism was a great risk, as Nicodemus thought, because they found the old wine to be good. Did not Jesus risk his whole life - from incarnation (divinity-risked) to crucifixion (humanity-risked) in order to be greatly productive? The prelude story to Jesus' birth, the birth of John the Baptist for the 'old' parents Zaccharia and Elizabeth who was thought to be barren but delivered the "greatest born of woman", must be looked at from this perspective as "the law and the prophets were until John" (Lk 16:16), but conversely the pharisaic community continued to remain barren and unproductive in every way to society that proves their human selves to be bound, not free to be creative. It amounts to
defrauding God who gave them the one talent of having been specially chosen by God to carry on His mission to humanity. By misusing the freedom of choice, they were irresponsible by not using the talent at all, which became virtually non-existent. It is thus a breach of trust that the Pharisees, the Scribes and the Saducees were manifesting even when Jesus appeared on the scene.

If the breach of trust on the chosen people is perpetuated, Matthew warns them that they will have to face the 'threat' in the Last Judgment that logically follows to parable of Talents in the Evangelist's accounts. The last judgment makes us thus understand and respond to the trust that God has placed on us.

Such a fundamental option of trust on Jesus and his priorities in life is heavenly and rejecting them is worldly. It is the fundamental ethos embedded in the Gospel's genuine spirituality. The absence of which in Nicodemus makes his questions and answers to Jesus to be very earthly, not heavenly; because his Jewish religion was very legalistic that stressed great significance on the external observance of the laws. How much did they bother to be meticulous in the external or outside of the human personality more than the 'inside' or spirit part of it can be understood if two separate incidents in the Gospels which incidentally illustrate the nexus between Jesus and his opponents, are considered in juxtaposition. The inside or spirit part refers to the responsible use of freedom by the human self, while outside or external observance points to the Jewish legalism, that is symbolized in the 'white-washed tombs', signifying the non-existent inside.
The first account (Lk 7:36-50) is regarding a Pharisee on the one hand inviting Jesus to eat with him; and on the other a woman sinner washing Jesus' feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair; kissing his feet and anointing them with ointment. Jesus told his host Pharisee that the love of the woman sinner was greater than the love that the host showed to Jesus. When this account is seen in comparison with another event that Luke (Lk 11:37-41) narrates later, the intended preaching of Jesus becomes clearer and deeper. In the second event the Pharisee was astonished to see that Jesus did not first wash before dinner. And the Lord said to him "Now you pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of extortion and wickedness ... give for alms [offerings] those things which are within; and behold, everything is clean for you" (vs.39, 41).

Let the juxtaposed events be analyzed briefly. The sinful woman washing Jesus' feet with her tears is a clear indication of cleansing her inside and offering Jesus what was from her within; the greatest offerings could be tears to show human love. Did not Jesus weep for the dead Lazarus that manifested his human love, though he was confident of raising him up? If tears could break barriers between human beings, what wonder could they not do with the most compassionate God. The Pharisees who were mostly mindful of only external observances, like cleaning the outside of cup and dish, could take notice of the simple woman sinner only by the 'externally' attractive perfume that came out from the alabaster she opened but then thought foully of her, and also of Jesus who told of her love being more than his own Pharisee host. Thus it is made clear that the emphasis on the external factors in life by the legalistic Jews could not make them transparent (freeselves) to
see rather the more important inside or spirit part of everything in human life and society.

The Jews of Jerusalem treated tax-collectors, sinners and shepherds as outcasts and kept them away, and considered women and children as non-entities. Hence, when Jesus closely associated himself with these people, the Jewish elders developed a fierce hostility towards him. On the political front, though the Jews were all together expecting the Messiah to come and establish a homely rule as their Roman rulers were considered gentiles, four different kinds of attitude were experienced by the rulers: one group escaped into the desert; another, called Zealots organized themselves to overthrow the Romans by violence; the third group of Pharisees was neither co-operative with the rulers nor involved themselves in the religion of Jesus; the fourth group known as Sadducees were co-operative with the rulers in order to have influence with the ruling class and to curry favour. The tragic part of this divided judean society was that these divisions were not only justified but also were held sacred by their religion. Thus they were exclusive not only from the non-Jews but also from the other groups of their own Jewish community, having developed closed or bound selves.

5.1.1. The Absence of Human face

God is always ready to forgive those who humbly admit that they are sinners and need His forgiveness. Such a dramatic transformation is witnessed in several characters in the Gospels. But those who are too proud to confess their sins are the ones who are always anxious to condemn others. Did not the elder brother condemn the younger brother who humbly admitted his sinfulness to their father? It is also witnessed
in an episode (Jn 8: 1-11) where "the Scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery" and in order to test Jesus asked him "... what do you say about her?" The attitude of the elder brother in the parable and of the Pharisees in the episode reveals the absence of human face in them.

In the parable of a pharisee and a publican praying at the temple Jesus tells about "some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others". It is said the pharisee prayed thus 'with himself'; "God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers or even like this tax collector", thereby alienating and disowning all other children of God, and that too before His presence in the temple. It pictures only the elder brother 'disowning' his own younger in the presence of their own father, and the younger is comparable to the humbly praying publican. Whereas the pharisee, like the elder brother is a typical case of pride and presumption, as both felt inwardly 'for themselves' and boasted themselves to be models 'for others'. Such self-aggrandizement leads to despising others even to the extent of accusing them of so many things as the pharisee did in his prayer within the temple and as the elder brother accused his younger brother of "living with harlots".

The spirituality exhibited by the Pharisee inside the temple itself is an evidence to show how the spirituality could never have been realized in the society by such people. It makes us reasonably assume how much could they have exhibited enmity towards other people in their social milieu. What the single pharisee did in words in the temple while praying, the group of Pharisees and Scribes indeed tried to do
in deed to the woman sinner caught in adultery and she was taken to Jesus who was teaching in the temple. As Jesus did not justify the Pharisee’s prayer, so also he made the fault finding Pharisees "go away, one by one, beginning with the eldest" (Jn 8:9) making them realize the absence of human face in them in their attitude towards the woman sinner. A further analysis of this episode is felt befitting the concluding chapter.

Jesus condemned the Pharisees and Scribes for all their misdeeds for they did not practise what they preached (Matt. 23:3). They were showing off as Rabbis, exploiting rich widows and frightening men by foolishly binding them on oaths. For their external cleanliness, Jesus called them whitewashed tombs, thus making their inside a dead and non-existent one. Such condemnation as these could have greatly infuriated them who wanted to convict him somehow, though they would say regarding the killing of the prophets "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets" (Matt. 23:30), but later became witnesses against themselves. This sort of intellectual pride on their part made them miss the divine truth. Having missed the truth, they could not make their selves free. Consequently they failed to recognize the time of divine revelation in Jesus. This agony is shown in Jesus’ words: "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not" (Matt. 23:37).

This unpreparedness and extreme self-complacency of the community is symbolized in the five foolish maidens’ critical condition at the appearance of the Bridegroom. The ‘Ten maidens’ parable emphasizes
the folly of unpreparedness and the wisdom of preparedness for the imminent developments. The parable bears an eschatological sense too, as later on the Church which considers herself the new chosen community in the place of Israelites, adopted this to "enforce the final world crisis", warning the modern Pharisees of their self-complacent attitude to life and their unpreparedness.

When people could not choose to be prepared or decisive like the Pharisees in the time of Jesus, they were compared to sulky children who would not join in whatever games their playmates in the street suggested. They would choose to stand aloof when a merry game was being played, and refuse to act when a mournful play was performed, thus refused to identify themselves with any human living condition. They did not accept Jesus and his message and called him glutton for his cheerful life and a friend of publicans and sinners, nor had they accepted John the Baptist earlier. On rejecting John’s ascetic life and his counsel, they should in fact have turned to Jesus with well-disposed mind after seeing his words and wisdom, and the great crowd of people following him, but they began to deride him more and more, thus failing to show a human face in their dealings with the society.

Any law cannot be allowed to dehumanize people, even temporarily hence Jesus declares that Sabbath is for man. In the cure of the paralytic, there are two encounters with Jesus: one by men carrying the pallet, the other by Pharisees who showed negative reaction and were polemic. Jesus asking them whether to do good or evil, to kill or to save on the Sabbath appears basically too much and seems irrelevant but it is

---

2 Dodd p 130.
the attitude of the Pharisees that is stressed much in such question as he did elsewhere when he compared anger to murder. In similar vein, Jesus stresses the rigidity of the Pharisees amounting to killing not saving, doing evil instead of good to the paralytic in question.

When Jesus said that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath, it rankled in their minds as they were leaders of the people, who were not supposed to flout any rule of the Sabbath. But many cures narrated in the Gospels were performed by Jesus on the Sabbath in the midst of the hostile group. They were not prepared to answer any of Jesus' questions as to why a cure could not be effected on a Sabbath, when he asked them whether the person in need of healing does not deserve as much concern and urgency as they would show to a son or an ox that had fallen into a pit. Jesus taught them that mercy was better than sacrifice. It is fitting what Professor Felix Wilfred has observed, "all man-made laws cease before the crying need of the suffering human person. The sabbath is for man and not man for sabbath is the foundational principle for any genuine spirituality to present the human face.

5.1.2. Modern or Unconscious Pharisaism

"One thing is needful" (Lk 10:42) was Jesus' reply to Martha's complaint about her sister Mary's indifference towards the details of hospitality. The 'one thing' is the interpersonal communion that Mary choose, who "sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching", whereas Martha was "anxious and troubled about many things", unmindful of the "good portion". It is enlightening that this episode follows immediately

\footnote{Felix Wilfred "The Secular is something very Sacred" The New Leader (Madras: Catholic Centre, July 1-15, 1995) p 15.}
after the most famous parable of the Good Samaritan. Like Martha, the Priest and the Levite in the parable were anxious about other things, perhaps minding their duty to serve in the Temple. Though they were also necessary like Martha's preparation of dishes, what Jesus tells Martha "one thing is needful" is also applicable to the Priest and the Levite who lacked that 'one thing', that is the 'one care' to the man-victim on the road. Thus the attitude of Martha, and that of the Priest and the Levite in the parable, who were very conscious of doing very good things, symbolize the unconscious pharisaism in us all.

The very thought of having goodness in oneself is sickness of self-righteousness. Did not Jesus retort to the one who called him "good teacher", by saying "why do you call me good?" Mere observance of the laws outwardly will only develop bias against any change in them. The whole of the law depends on the love of God and of the neighbour, hence the spirit of love corrects and completes the letter of the law. Therefore Jesus preached for the new way, a change not a supplement to the Jewish religion that was clinging to the old. That was why, even though for Jesus and the Jews the centre of life was religion, Jesus was constantly a threat to them. They were not essentially bad, but were 'blind' being too legalistic and self-righteous as the whole episode of Jesus curing the man born blind tries to reveal, when Jesus said to the Pharisees, "that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind ... but now that you say, 'we see', your guilt remains" (Jn 9:39, 41).

The Pharisees and the like expected the Messiah only in their wishful thinking or in imagination, but never expected to deal with him.
socially. Their legality was a crushing Judaism that lost sight of God as a person. It was a great obstacle for repentance and real transformation. This attitude of the leaders of the people made Jesus adopt a different kind of ministry and training to his disciples, not in line with one of the Rabbis, nor even with that of John the Baptist. The Pharisees’ hostile attitude and lack of good will to Jesus made them blind to the changing reality from the old order of existence. People who are in fact ethically superior cannot condemn the moral landslide of the moment and the milieu, but the Jews were condemning the morally weak people of their times. Not only could they not change this attitude of narrow formalism and scorn for the ordinary mass, but also they became instruments of the greatest irony in religious history to the extent of leading the one who befriended the masses to crucifixion. Thus if the modern person’s spirituality or the love of God is not realized socially, but only in their wishful thinking, they only enact the modern Pharisaism.

5.1.3. Absence of Free Self Perpetuates Barriers

There are many instances in the Gospels to show the hostile attitude of the Jews towards the rest. The golden rule of loving the enemies, as neighbourly relations are quite often greatly strained and inimical, refers to the factuality present now as then among the Jews and Samaritans, Jews and Romans, Jews and Gentiles. An incident of Jesus curing ten lepers depicts this well. Ten lepers, as being lepers they were despised and ostracized by society, were together in approaching and appealing to Jesus for their cure (Lk 17:11-19). Jesus said to them "Go and show yourselves to the priests" (v.14). And as they went they were cleansed. But we find only one of the ten returned to Jesus "... giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan" (v.16). From the way Jesus reacted
asking, "was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" (v.18), it can be presumed that the other nine, being Jews and having been cured, did not find the one Samaritan, a foreigner and an outcast, deserving to be associated with them, when as lepers ostracized, they, nine of them, found this single Samaritan a good and proper associate. Or else as Jesus had instructed them to do they wanted to be very scrupulous in the observance of the law by showing themselves to the priests.

This incident clearly exposes the way the barriers get perpetuated. As ostracized and suffering persons, the nine Jewish lepers were not proud and exclusive but exercised their freedom of selves to become inclusive in their attitude towards the despised Samaritan. They thought and took the Samaritan as their associate willingly and emotionally, breaking all barriers. But then, restoration to normalcy brought back the normal barriers get re-erected or perpetuated, by either considering their exclusiveness to be holy or their scrupulous observance of the law to be predominant, or perhaps both. Incidents analogical to this are abundant in any given social and political milieu. Even today for many legalistic or worldly wise persons similar transitory rules, regulations and rites are considered to be greater than basic human or the gospel values. Jews were indeed careful in observing their traditional rites like washing the hands before eating. Jesus took this observance to tell them that food that goes in could not defile a person, but that which comes from 'within', like evil thought, fornication, malice, envy, pride, and which are the manifestations of the irresponsible human self misusing the human freedom. These from within oneself could defile the person and thereby perpetuate the existing barriers in society. There are many modern
pharisees among us who get horrified at the breach of etiquette or convention but smile at the violation of good moral laws, thereby erecting psychological barriers between them and others in the society.

5.2. Materialism imprisons the human self

Images struggling successfully to express God's infinite mercy and his incredible generosity, which are beyond logic and the materialistic tendencies of the world, permeate the preaching of Jesus. The labourers who worked one hour in the vineyard were paid the same wage as those who worked the whole day. At the outset it appears unacceptable as illogical and against wage or work-ethic. But the master's generosity in treating all in the same manner exposes the real materialistic attitude of the people towards their fellowbeings, of the early goers towards the latecomers in the parable. The attitude of the labourers who came 'earlier' to the Vineyard ('elders' in work) towards the 'latecomers' and their consequent questioning the master's generosity portray allegorically the attitude of the Pharisees and the Scribes who were not happy with Jesus' godly generous association and concern for the weak, the despised and the deprived ones in society like sinners, publicans, and Samaritans. In the same vein, do we meet the elder son who got angry with his father's generosity towards his younger brother, the wastrel son who enjoyed in effect a rather better treatment (like 'latecomers') that he (like 'elders') himself did not enjoy.

The Parable of the prodigal or 'radical' son, being the climactic point to two other parables of the 'lost sheep' and the 'lost silver' urges us to reflect genuinely on the despicable attitude of the 'elder brother', who symbolizes the elders of the Jewish community: could not the elder
brother have rejoiced, like the shepherd, and celebrated the occasion if he were the one who found one of his hundred sheep after he had lost it for sometime?; Or, could he not, like the woman, have rejoiced on finding one of his valuable ten silver coins? He could have certainly rejoiced because they added to his materialism. The parable amounts to Jesus asking the Pharisees direct "will you not when your son or your oxen, fall into a pit, take it away on a Sabbath." Son and oxen stand for self and materialism. The point in the parable of the Labourers is the selfish and materialistic tendencies of the ‘early goers’, when the generosity of the master towards the latecomers to the vineyard was not appreciated by them; similarly it reveals the selfish and materialistic tendency of the elder brother when the generosity of the father towards the younger brother was found fault with by him. It was the materialism that erected barriers between the two groups of labourers and two brothers in the respective parables.

When one can appreciate a shepherd going after a lost sheep probably a weak and foolish one in the fold, and on his finding it, can respond to his invitation to join him in his rejoicing and celebration how could one refuse to appreciate Jesus who showed God’s mercy and love towards the weak ones and sinners. How could one reject Jesus’ invitation to realize the kingdom of God that encompasses one and all. A clear image of where the Pharisees and the Scribes, as ‘elders’ of the people stood refusing to participate in the joyous mission of Jesus is pictured from the attitude of the elder son, whose participation (or non-participation) in the homely celebration is left dramatically uncertain (a meaningful open ending indeed), as we do not come across in the parable any overruling the conduct of the elder brother who “was angry
and refused to go in" (Lk 15:28), perhaps expecting their father to come but and entreat him also as he did to his younger brother. The father did so (vs.28-32). How long could he have been angry without heeding the father’s entreatment?

A close scrutiny of Zacchaeus’ episode too would reveal the fact that when Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus’ house and when Zacchaeus "received him joyfully", it necessitated on the part of Zacchaeus to part with the major portion of his materialistic wealth. A similar sacrifice would surely have been necessitated, had the Jewish elders opted for Jesus’ priorities in their living conditions. Therefore it was possible that their materialistic attitude also made them miss their Messiah, and Zacchaeus, a publican was an embodiment of the responsibility of rich individuals towards their riches.

5.3. Spirituality divorced from Social dimension

On opposing Jesus, the different groups of the Jewish community joined together for different reasons: the Pharisees on the religious ground who perhaps expected a religious police state, the absence of social dimension and the Saducees on material and political ground, the absence of spiritual dimension. Though their Rabbis were known for their sapiential teachings, Jesus refused to get recognized with them, for unlike the Rabbis, the personal and social relationship of God, as between father and son, was realized by Jesus. This spiritual realization made everyone socially relevant at all times. This new way of conception of Jesus, having increasing influence on the humble people, naturally developed a jealous opposition in the minds of the proud group of the Pharisees and the Saducees, who, as leaders of the people wanted to trap Jesus.
in government or social matters like paying taxes. They asked him, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, ... Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s" (Matt. 22: 17, 18 and 21).

Caesar’s coin with his image is for Caesar only. Caesar, a symbol or the spirit of the world Government points to the social obligation. Jesus tells about the rule of God in our hearts, that must get manifested in our authentic social actions. As the image of Caesar in the coins expects one to pay tax to the government, a social obligation, the human beings who are in the image of God should wholly belong to Him and to His ‘living images’ with the responsibly related spirit of neighbourly love. Thus the human spirituality should not be divorced from the human obligations to society. They are equal partners to realize the human unity and creativity.

Moreover as the image of God is in every person and consequently as we are expected to bear witness to the image within us, the dichotomy between the rulers and the ruled, the hierarchy in one humanity as the powerful and the powerless must be done away with for realizing Jesus’ vision of God’s reign on earth. It is implied in the simple answer that Jesus gave to the question of paying taxes. Though this question on tax-paying was aimed at trapping Jesus for diagnosing his mind, Jesus made use of this occasion to go to the very source of it, as he did for the question of divorce, and thus insisted that no disparity could be thought of among the images of God in His Kingdom, which is the main objective of the gospel summons.
5.3.1. A critique on self righteousness

God, out of His infinite mercy wills that all people should save their souls, hence speaking against the spirit of it reveals the hardened heart of the persons who are proud of their self righteousness, and are boastful of the exclusiveness of their selves without the condescending attitude towards others around them. Jesus pointed out to the teachers of law that it was the humility of David that made him call the 'Son of David' his Lord, whereas the teachers of law out of pride and never bothering to set themselves right, went to the extent of attributing the good deeds of Jesus to be the work of the evil spirit, and calling him the Hell's Agent. It is the evidence which is supposed to control hypothesis, not the vice versa. As the leaders of the Jews did not understand this, Jesus warned them very severely that their thought would be a sin against the spirit of God (Lk 12:10). It is a 'spiritual suicide' worse than that committed by Judas Iscariot, to deliberately attribute darkness to the works of light, for even in the corrupt political arena, it is expected to seldom happen as the opposition parties in a healthy politics appreciate the works of light and goodness on the part of their opponents, the rulers, whereas it showed the extreme helpless and proud attitude of Jesus' opponents, who attributed the agency of satan to the works of the Holy spirit.

Jesus believed that the traditional leaders of the Jewish religion having got intoxicated with the old wine, their age old exclusive selves, had brushed aside the new wine, the new joy of becoming freely inclusive of others and became opponents to Jesus, who firmly said "no one after drinking old wine, desires new; for he says, 'The old is good'" (Lk 5:39). These leaders' final preference of Barabas to Jesus to be the one
to be released by Pilate is also very significant in the sense that Barabas which literally means 'son of abba' is symbolic of their clinging to the 'old wine' (Children of Abraham) rather than to the Son of Man's 'new wine'. But Jesus was ruthless in maintaining that the new faith will obliterate the old. He was cautioning the people against the leaven of the Herodias that was 'worldliness', the absence of spiritual dimension; and the leaven of the Pharisees which was hypocrisy, the absence of social dimension.

When the change of weather is known by signs, the advent of the Messiah is not understood by Jews who were self complacent and were fanatically devoted to all legal minutiae. They failed as Baptist demanded to "show some evidence that they mean[t] to reform" and became psychologically and socially insensitive to the real needs of the people. Hence the Baptist warned them saying, "even now the axe is laid to the root of the tree; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Lk 3:9). It is in this perspective we ought to look at Jesus cursing a fig tree, which was incomprehensible even to his disciples. In the cursing of the fig tree, though it appears at the outset a childish curse on the part of Jesus, it turns out into a challenge of faith, that was greatly lacking among the Jews, who had faith only in themselves and failed to be fruitful to their society. The commentators, struggling for explanations to the fig tree episode, insist on symbolism. It symbolizes the condemnations of promise without fulfilment and "it is a condemnation of profession without practice"\(^4\), and naturally the hungry (angry too) man Jesus thinks and acts on the spiritual hunger unsatiated in his land. This fact is reflected in a master's

\(^4\) McCowen p 171.
anger on those who have, giving some excuse or other, refused to respond to the invitation for the dinner. He angrily said "none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet" (Lk 14:24). This is not to exclude Israelites, but to stress their hard-heartedness, born of self righteousness and the lack of the spirit of openness (free self) needed for the seed to grow and bear fruit.

The hard-heartedness was even observed by the man who was cured of his blindness, when he explained to the Pharisees about his miraculous cure. When he was repeatedly questioned with an ulterior motive by the Pharisees, "He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples?'" (Jn 9:27). What a sarcastic remark it was towards the unrelenting Pharisees! Hence Jesus called them an evil generation because the faith that the queen of Sheba and the people of Nineveh had, was better than that of this evil generation as the former ones believed in the people like Solomon and Jonah who were (not as great as) much less than Jesus, who had reasons to be angry with them for their breach of trust as the chosen generation.

The breach of trust by the chosen people led to God's rejecting them. It is symbolized in the parable of Tenants and the Vineyard (Matt. 21:33-44). It reveals that Jesus' ministry is regarded as the culmination of God's direct dealings with his specially chosan people. The vineyard has always signified the picture of Israel. It is significant in Isaiah using the word 'Vineyard' for Israel seven times and referring to it as many as fifteen times within ten verses. The blessings they had, and the

5 Isa. 5: 1-10.
preachings they had heard are all symbolized in Matthew's details of the householder who not only planted the vineyard but also "set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, let it out to tenants (v.33). When God sent his prophets to find fruit in his chosan people, the prophets were treated like the servants of the householder in the parable were treated. The tenants "took his servants and beat one, killed another and stoned another". According to the notes in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible "This parable is really an allegory in which almost every detail represents something in God's dealings with Israel". The parable presents thus a truth par-excellence as it represents both the moral judgment and the implication, predicting Jesus' death in God's salvific history. It is no mere clairvoyance but a final crisis in God's dealings with them, as the householder had no other alternative but to "let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their season" (v.41). The rest is the world Christian or Church history, the history of modern Israel. Hermeneutically it must point to the expected crisis in future if the functional objective of the christian community of the Churches amounts to the breach of trust, as this community is from every nature, race and culture (a universal milieu) who are united by their obedience to the householder, the Head Jesus Christ who has again "let it out to tenants and went into another country" (v.33) for a long while.

5.4. The Gospels' Universal Milieu, The Catalytic Jewish Elders

There was no doubt that the Jewish expectation of the Messiah was too high to recognize him in Jesus. The Pharisees and the Rabbis saw Jesus only as a charlatan, who was a lord of the silenced and the

Notes RSV of the Bible p 240.
suffering. Jerusalem with its pride of place and tradition had little room for the seed (the word and Jesus) to take root. It is revealed in Jesus judging them rightly even in the beginning of his ministry, when he said "no one puts new wine into old wineskins; ... but new wine must be put into new wineskins" (Lk 5:37-38).

Jesus' concept of the kingdom of God goes back to the divine original plan for the human beings as inter-related persons: the persons rich or poor, saint or sinner, christian or non-christian, to be more important than the laws or the ruling. Jesus' reply to the ambitious sons of Zebedee has to be inferred in this light. Their readiness to drink the cup did not guarantee them their coveted places, because the truth of being the first or the great in the kingdom of God is, in Jesus' view, in serving others, not ruling others. The ruling elitistic group could not assimilate this idea of equality. In order to win the Pharisees and the Scribes to his side, Jesus did not change his teachings, rather he denounced the establishment for what they taught and for what they were, and started rocking their boat.

The religious establishment consequently found it so imperative to silence Jesus by all means that they were very obnoxious to report it to Rome. Having publicly and on so many occasions humiliated and insulted the hierarchy, Jesus wrote his own death warrant. Even his disciples could not like this kind of head-on collision with establishment, hence pointed out to Jesus the excellence of the Jerusalem Temple building, a symbol of establishment, "adorned with noble stones and offering", but that proved to be a desperate attempt on the part of the disciples. Jesus said to them "the day will come when there shall not be left here
one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (Matt. 24:2). Though the discourse following this warning is an eschatological one, Jesus told firmly of the destruction of Jerusalem. Even though Jerusalem destruction raises an economic problem, a universal moral problem is solved, for it is said "... Jerusalem will be trodden down by the gentiles, until the time of gentiles are fulfilled" (Lk 21:24), thus facilitating the entry of all into Jerusalem as the explanation to the verse says "Gentiles will take the place of the unbelieving people of Israel". Jesus' answer indicates to his strength of putting the opponents in the establishment into embarrassment, urging them that they must not behave like the tenants of the vineyard in the parable. It is also a general condemnation of the modern predicament in our thinking and making the travesty of trust like the tenants or like the servants or like the Israelites, that God is not here and we seem to be on our own, that is implied in the owner of the vineyard having gone away "into another country for a long while" (Lk 20:9); or as it is also implied in the man "going on a journey" to return only "after a long time" (Matt.25: 14, 19) having entrusted his property to his servants in the parable of Talents.

Thus the hostile climate created by the leaders of the Jews made Jesus firm on his universal mission and realize the 'inculturation' essential for the universal application of his ministry which must be the Church mission today. In this way, the negative or the dark perspective of the Pharisees and the Saducees has helped us understand the glory of the message of Jesus in its true light. Similarly these Jewish elders help us understand the true social dimension of spirituality that was preached and practised by Jesus and his followers, who though mostly lived in

7 Notes RSV of teh Bible p 243.
the Jewish region, grew less and less Jewish. Thus the Jewish elders have been catalysts for the new movement of Jesus to become universal, both in principle and in application.

5.5. Conclusion

The Pharisees, being self-righteous snoopers or snobs, were very exclusive as the word Pharisee literally means 'separated'. When Jesus told one of the Pharisees, Nicodemus "...unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:3), he meant by the 'seeing' of the kingdom, the vision of the human spirit. He further explains "unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5). Hence to 'enter' the kingdom one must necessarily have the qualities of water and spirit. Water (the image of rain that shows 'no disparity' between the just and the unjust) and spirit (the image of wind blowing 'in all directions') contrast with the 'separated' Pharisees, the absence of 'oneness' in the spirit. The nexus between water and spirit is shown in the Bible, "The spirit of God was moving over the face of waters".

The third servant who chose to 'bury' (waterless) the one talent given to him by the master betrays his lack of awareness of the 'spirit' of the talent, that could have yielded its 'interest'. Whereas the first and second servants who had traded on the talents illustrate the fact that the Jewish community as a whole did not stand condemned undeserving of trust, rather the trustworthy ones were promised to "have abundance". Very significantly Matthew places this final parable of the Talents in between the story of "ten maidens" and Christ's final kingly execution.

---

8 Gen. 1: 2.
of the Last Judgment. There is a conspicuous evolution of thought in this. In the 'Ten Maiden' story there were only five maidens, who were foolish enough to miss the chance of welcoming the bridegroom, and the other five proved themselves to be 'wise'. From the fifty percentage of wise persons (maiden story) it goes to seventy percent of 'wise' trading by the servants (Talents parable) culminating finally in the Last Judgment involving not only the Jewish race but also the whole of the human race whether or not they have realized spirituality in the actual social dimensions. Thus Matthew, who mainly wrote his accounts for the Jews, has dramatized a unique and universal climax for the Gospels' universal milieu.