

SECTION 1

1.1 BACKGROUND

The South African Christian Religious milieu is a very interesting and challenging environment. There is a plethora of ministries, denominations and churches which are strewn across the entire South African religious landscape whose intended mission is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Of course, each one of those proclaims, in one way or another, that they are the true followers of the mission of Jesus Christ. Various theologies, doctrines, creeds and religious practises have emerged, which characterize this religious landscape. What is interesting though, are the nuanced interpretations or the hermeneutics that are at play in this environment, which have resulted in a variant array of theological and doctrinal stances that manifest in this environment and characterize the practice of Christianity in South Africa.

I believe that, one of the prime interest and intentions of these churches and ministries is, of course, to bring the people of South Africa to the Lord. Notwithstanding the claims of authenticity and appropriateness by each

one of these institutions in practising the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ as presented in many, if not all these religious institutions, I maintain that it is not my prerogative to pronounce on what is right or wrong in their various Christian religious practices. The fact of the matter is that, they practice Christian religion differently and in many instances, cling tenaciously to what they think is correct and true in their practice of Christianity. Personally, I do not think, as I indicated earlier, that I qualify to pronounce on the right or wrong of their Christian practice. These variations in understanding and practice I, maintain, is a classic case of hermeneutical difficulties. A common denominator though, seems to be that, they all, however, yearn to bring salvation to the people of South Africa.

Indeed, the urgency of receiving salvation is, however, not immediately evident in quite a number of people. Many are of the view that it can be postponed for a later date. The truth is, nothing dramatic has to happen in one's life for salvation to be necessary. It is always necessary for us to think about salvation, especially for those individuals who are concerned with the afterlife. Many think that to go through the process of salvation is, somewhat, of a hindrance in one's normal and smooth running life. It is an inconvenience to many that needs to be avoided when and if it is possible. One would say that, to some, it is like a patch of humps on an otherwise smooth running or cruising journey in one's life the better for us. The sooner we all realize that salvation is as necessary, as breathing is in one's life. Breathing is necessary for one to sustain one's life.

The question of salvation in various denominations is very crucial. The intention and interest of the leadership of the church, as indicated earlier, is to point the congregation, especially seekers of the face of the Lord, to Jesus, who is our Lord and saviour. In this treatise we shall make an effort to revisit the process of salvation in order to bring new understandings to this process. It is our view that this process needs to be re-visited and new understandings should be brought forward. We

also know and acknowledge that more entrenched notions are in place in various churches and denominations, on the basis of which salvation practises are executed. In some instances, these notions are, of course, well entrenched and fossilised in the psyche of practitioners and are there to stay in these various environments. " It is not our intention though, to precipitate a revolution in this process, rather we want to give ourselves a chance to relook at this process and begin to re-examine our hermeneutics with respect to salvation as a process. We also acknowledge historical developments (theological, doctrinal and general Christian practices), albeit in a limited and cursory manner, since the beginning of the first century when Christianity set in. We do not have the time and space to delve deep into church history. When we do mention historical events, it will be for heuristic and illustrative purposes only. These developments in the Christian environment, I maintain, have shaped these denominational salvation understandings and practices throughout the ages. In our discussions we shall incorporate the historical influences that have been brought to bear on our present understandings.

1.2 Understanding Salvation (Revisited and re-assessed)

1.2.1 Introduction

There is a popular expression which says: "Procrastination is the thief of time." Indeed, in many instances people are in the habit of postponing the most important things in their life. We delay and fail to be decisive about crucial matters of our life. The tendency is to think that there is still time and that we will do it sooner than later. In the case of one of the most important decisions that one can ever make, which is to be saved, prospective believers seem to be reluctant to turn to the Lord. The problem is, one can never predict as to what the right time is to be saved. People tend to think

that by taking that decision and accepting Jesus as their Lord and saviour is a way of enslaving themselves to a difficult life that is so unbearable in most cases. The unpredictability of one losing one's life (having to die) is a real challenge to all, especially to those who think that they still have time to do their own things and never turn to the Lord. Salvation is not, and never shall be a way of harnessing one and preventing one from living a meaningful life and experiencing a life of fulfilment after having been saved. Naturally, it is somewhat of a challenge to move from one's comfort zone and the habitual and enter into a new and different lifestyle. Change has always been a challenge to many of us. However, no one has ever said or promised that it will be easy to move into the "salvation" space. In this instance, moving to the Lord will never leave you to regret the move. You will receive your complete healing or deliverance. The Scriptures in **Matthew 6:33** implore us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and the rest will follow.

³³ "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"

I believe that one would not be presumptuous not to think that, among others, of the things we shall be given is, healing, deliverance and true salvation. It is made perfectly clear, as the Scriptures assert that, once we have sought the kingdom of heaven first, as stated in the Scriptures, His unmerited grace and mercy will surely follow in our life:

⁸ "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."