

## Criteria at the Last Judgment from Matthew 25:14-46

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**ABSTRACT.** This study analyses the criteria for judgment presented in the Parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14-30) and the Parable of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) in the Gospel of Matthew. It explores whether these parables refer to the criteria for judgment of Christians and non-Christians, respectively. After providing background on eschatology and judgment in Scripture, the study examines the usage of key Greek words like “ethnos” (nation) and “adelphos” (brother) to support the interpretation that the Last Judgment passage refers to non-Christians. It highlights exegetical difficulties in viewing this as a judgment of “unconscious Christians” and proposes that non-Christians are judged based on acts of mercy towards Christ’s disciples. In contrast, the Talents parable is presented as outlining the criteria for judgment of Christians – namely, their use of God-given gifts and abilities to serve others. So, while non-Christians are judged by how they care for Christ’s followers, Christians face judgment for how well they use their unique gifts. Together these parables present a complex picture of the diverse criteria, for both Christians and non-Christians, at the final judgment.

**Keywords:** Eschatology, Judgment, Parable of the Talents, Parable of the Last Judgment, Christians, Non-Christians, exegesis, ethnos, criteria

### Preliminaries

The Last Judgment is an event which, together with the Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection of the Body, the End of the World and its Transformation and Eternal Life, but in conjunction with the entire history of mankind, forms

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what is received in theology as Eschatology<sup>1</sup>. It is certain that “those from the beginning (πρωτολογία), and the whole history of salvation cannot be understood without their ultimate fulfilment (τὰ ἔσχατα)”<sup>2</sup>, so that neo-patristic ecclesiologies within Orthodox Christianity have oscillated between understanding the Church either eschatologically or protologically<sup>3</sup>.

Given that in newtestamental eschatology “there are both things that have already been fulfilled and things that have not yet been fulfilled from the promise made,” and that “there is a realized aspect and a future aspect” some theologians have spoken of an “inaugurated eschatology”<sup>4</sup>. In this context, we can ask ourselves whether, when it comes to judgement, we can speak of a present judgement, but also of a future judgement, a judgement that has begun and a final judgment. Drawing on texts such as Jn 8:50; Rom 1:18, 22, 26, 28; Rev. 18:8, it has been stated that “as in the Old Testament, God’s judgments are not limited to the future, but are already at work in the life of man in the present time ... therefore, the judgment of men is already at work, because they show by their evil deeds that they *love darkness and not light* (Jn 3:19)<sup>5</sup>”. At the end of the ages there will be universal judgment and one of its criteria “will be the practice or non-practice of the love of man, which has its firm foundation in the vision of God through man, in his rootedness in God, in the understanding of his fellow man as the image of God<sup>6</sup>”. The one who will judge will be Christ Himself,

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<sup>1</sup> Father Brie points out that “eschatology should not be confused with the end of the world, nor should it be limited to the description of the events that accompany the second coming of Christ: the resurrection of the dead, judgment, heaven and hell. Eschatology refers to a new order of existence, an ultimate state of transfiguration, beyond history, which is the object of Christian prayer and hope: Thy kingdom come (Mt 6:10), but which is already present here and now, and which confronts present history: the kingdom of God is among you (Lk 17:21)”. See Ioan Brie, *Dicționar de Teologie Ortodoxă* (București: IBMO, 1994), 155.

<sup>2</sup> Marian Vild, *Eshatologia Paulină* (București: Ed. Universității, 2017), 27.

<sup>3</sup> For a broader overview see Ioan I. Ică jr, *Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole* (Sibiu: Deisis/Stavropoleos, 2008), 51-3. Metropolitan Ioannis Zizioulas argues that “the Church begins at Pentecost, understood as the eschatological event of the gathering of the new People of God by the Holy Spirit around the Risen Christ, the Son of the Father, surrounded by apostles as the icon of the future Kingdom”, while Professor Ioannis Karmiris writes of the Church “protologically as a divine-angelic-human, universally pre-existent organism with the divine Creator Logos as its Head”. Professor Nikos Matsoukas goes further and combines the two views saying, “as a mystery, the Church cannot be defined, but only described; it is not a mere institution but has the dimensions of creation and an eschatological dynamism, it is a theoanthropocosmic organism”.

<sup>4</sup> R.J. Bauckham, “Eshatologie,” in *Dicționar Biblic*, trans. Liviu Pup and John Tipei, ed. J.D. Douglas (Oradea: Cartea Creștină, 1995), 405.

<sup>5</sup> B.A. Milne, “Judecată,” in *Dicționar Biblic*, trans. by Liviu Pup și John Tipei, ed. J.D. Douglas (Oradea: Cartea Creștină, 1995), 720.

<sup>6</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 3 (București: IBMO, 1997), 288.

for “the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son” (Jn 5:22), so that “the one who will judge will be everything: and witness and proof and Judge. He knows them all well that *all are empty and uncovered before His eyes* (Heb 4:13)<sup>7</sup>”.

If we were to limit ourselves only to the Gospel of Matthew, apocalyptic eschatology is a complex worldview in which the focus is on the final judgment and its consequences, all developing within a framework of dualism and determinism<sup>8</sup>, so that the Parousia and Judgement were seen as the culminating points of Matthean eschatology<sup>9</sup>.

### **The general context of the two parables in Mt 25:14-46 and their connection to eschatology**

The disciples in the vicinity of the temple in Jerusalem are impressed by its walls and draw the Savior's attention to their greatness Mt 24:1. In this context He predicts the destruction of the temple (Mt 24:2), and the disciples associate this event with the second coming and the end of the age (Mt 24:3)<sup>10</sup>. Thus, Jesus must not only strengthen them but also come up with some clarifications/signs about what will happen after his passion, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven and until he comes again (Mt 24:4-31). The disciples are urged to recognize the signs that foreshadow his return (Mt 24:32-5), but also warned of the imminence of his second coming (Mt 24:36), using various parables to this end, urging them to be prepared and awake (Mt 24:37-25:13).

If we consider only the Parable of the Talents Mt 25:14-30, we can also see in its elements of judgment: *συναίρει μετ' αὐτῶν* / “has dealt with them”

<sup>7</sup> Sf. Ioan Gura de Aur, *Omilii la Matei*, in *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 23, trans. Dumitru Fecioru (București: IBMO, 1994), 654.

<sup>8</sup> Apocalyptic eschatology can be broadly defined as a comprehensive worldview which emphasises the final judgement and its aftermath within a dualistic and deterministic framework. This distinctive and often vengeful vision of reality was vigorously adopted by Matthew and dominates his gospel. David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge: University Press, 1996), in introduction.

<sup>9</sup> Rudolf Schanckenburg in his commentary identifies several highlights within the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 16:13-20; 28:16-20). Likewise, when he analyses the end times he speaks of two climaxes: the first the Second Coming (Mt 24:29-31) and the second the Last Judgement (Mt 25:31-46). Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Matthäusevangelium 16,21-28,20* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1987), 248.

<sup>10</sup> St. John Chrysostom says that the disciples “eagerly desired to know the day of his coming, for they longed to see that glory which was the cause of many good things.” Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii la Matei*, 848.

(v. 19)<sup>11</sup>; ἄρατε / “take” and δότε / “give” (v. 28); ἐκβάλετε / “throw away” (v. 30)<sup>12</sup>. Commentators have pointed out that “Matthew 25:31-46 is not the only Matthean pericope which offers a description of the judgement”, so that in addition to the dialogue between the Son of Man as Judge and the wicked in general, we can also find the dialogue between Jesus as Judge and the false Christian prophets (Mt 7:21-23), as well as the fact that the disciples, “in the restoration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory... shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt 19:28). Even if it is unlikely that Saint Matthew sought a theological systematization of the judgment, the question may be raised as to whether in his “envisage one judgement for the church (7:21-3) and another for the gentiles (25:31-46) over both of which the Son of Man presides, and a third judgement of Israel by the disciples (19:28)?”<sup>13</sup>

Both the parables of the Talents (Mt 25:14-30) and of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) spoken in the context of the judgment at the end of the ages<sup>14</sup>, can be interpreted eschatologically even if they “do not focus on the event of Jesus' return, but on the use of the time before his return”. Given that the two parables follow one after the other, and that an analysis of the second raises serious exegetical questions about who is being judged, it has been argued that in the first parable, “it is only the disciples” and in the second “only the non-disciples”, so that in the first “the disciples are held accountable” and in the second “those who have done good to the disciples are rewarded”<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Referring to this expression some commentators say “this is obviously a figure for the eschatological judgment” Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, vol. 33b (Dallas, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1995), 735. Gerhard Maier after the introductory excerpt in which he clarifies to whom the judgment in the two parables is addressed says referring to these words “Christians also must give an account”. Gerhard Maier, *Evanghelia după Matei*, vol. 1-2 (Krontal: Lumina Lumii, 2000), 860.

<sup>12</sup> The imperative forms themselves betray a decision of a judge. Commentators have argued that “der zurückkehrende Mann ist Christus bei seiner Parusie. Ähnlich wie in Jungfrauengleichnis werden bestimmte Metaphern und Motive aufgenommen: der in die Ferne reisende Mann, das Auftraggeben, das Rechenschaf-Ablegen, Lohn und Strafe, Freundemahl und Finsternis der Hölle”. Schnackenburg, *Matthäusevangelium*, 245-6.

<sup>13</sup> Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, 126-7. On the other hand, it was pointed out that “will be two judgments in the End-time: that which The Man will execute upon the continuing community, the Church, which is properly The Man's Kingdom, and is in Matthew conceived of as temporary, and the judgment which the Father will execute upon all men, accepting The Man's judgment upon his own Kingdom.” W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *Matthew* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1971), C.

<sup>14</sup> If we are to relate to this event exegetes have pointed out that “the judgement by Jesus the Son of Man is one of the most important elements in Matthew's gospel”. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, 110.

<sup>15</sup> Maier, *Evanghelia după Matei*, 857.

### **Arguments in favour of interpreting the parable of the talents as a criterion of judgment**

The existence of a judgment of God on all men at the end of the ages is an undeniable reality for Christians and is closely related to other eschatological events<sup>16</sup>. In the Old Testament God appears to us as “the Judge of all the earth” (Acts 18:25); as the One who “knows works and thoughts” and who “will gather all nations and languages” (Is 66:18); as “the One who does not look for gifts in the face and does not receive them” so that when he judges he “does justice to the stranger and the fatherless and the widow” (Dt 10:18); as the One who “will pronounce judgments against” those whose way does not lead to purity and holiness (Jer 4:11-12).

In the New Testament God appears to us as the “Judge of all” (Heb 12:23), therefore “we will all stand before the judgment seat of God/Christ” (Rom 14:10) “that each one may receive the things done through the body according to what he has practised, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10). Since God “the Father judge anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son” (Jn 5:22) at the final judgment “all the nations will be gathered before Him” (Mt 25:32). The expressions “days of the Son of Man” (Lk 17:22 f.s.), “Day of the Lord” (2 Pt 3:10; 1 Thes 5:2; 2 Thes 2:2), “day of Christ” (Phil 1,10) or “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:8; 2 Cor 1:14; 5:2) only reinforce Who it is That will do the judging and what its effect is “the unrighteous under punishment for day of judgment” (2 Pt 2:9), and the righteous “no one shall snatch them out of My hand” (Acts 10:28).

Even though so far we have emphasized that there is a day of future judgment, it should not be neglected that “like the Kingdom of God, it is already present, but not fully, somehow the latter judgment is already present through God's care<sup>17</sup>”. John the Baptist testifies about the One who comes after Him that He will execute judgment because “the winnowing fan is in His hand, And He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing floor and will gather His wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn up whit unquenchable fire” (Mt 3:11-2).

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<sup>16</sup> Father Stăniloae says: “The universal judgment is placed by Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers in close connection with the end or renewal of the world and the resurrection of the dead, which are also simultaneous with the coming of Christ, or caused by it”. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică*, 286.

<sup>17</sup> Vild, *Eshatologia Paulina*, 233. Rev. Professor Stelian Tofană writes in the same vein “each generation of people is imminently living the realities of eschatological time, not yet fulfilled, but on the way to its fullness. From this point of view, every human being is contemporary with the finality of eschatological time, in its fullness”. Stelian Tofană, *Evanghelia lui Iisus – Misiunea cuvântului* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, <sup>2</sup>2018), 352.

The Saviour warns those who listen to Him that “he who believes into Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe has been condemned already” (Jn 3:18), He “judges as He hears” from the Father (Jn 5:30) and with Him (Jn 8:16), He is giving Him “authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of Man” (Jn 5:27). That the judgment is not only a distant event, but also a present one, the Saviour Himself testifies: “now is the judgment of this world; now shall the ruler of this world be cast out” (Jn 12: 31), and the Holy Spirit, until the end of time, has the mission “to convict the world... concerning judgment” (Jn 16, 8) so that not only the ruler of the world has been judged, but also the world that has placed itself at his disposal<sup>18</sup>.

Based on the reality of the judgments, but also on the words that “the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thes 4:16) and the context in which they were spoken, it can easily be said that there is a resurrection of those who have fallen asleep in Christ<sup>19</sup>, before the resurrection of sinners and those who have<sup>20</sup>. Once they were resurrected and “meet the Lord in the air, and thus we will be always with the Lord” (1 Thes 4:17), so “when the Son of Man comes in His glory” (Mt 25:31) their judgment was fulfilled, and they will “judge the world” (1 Cor 6:2) together with Him whom they served while they lived in the body.

In the context of the above, but also in an attempt to overcome the exegetical difficulties raised by the text of Mt 25:31-46, there have been biblical scholars who affirm that the parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14-30) refers to the judgment of Christians, therefore the way we handle the gift received, together with the practice of love, will be a criterion of judgment, and the text identified

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<sup>18</sup> In this context “Jesus is not talking about the Last Judgment. He is talking about the process of judgment that the cross represents. That is where this world is judged. What does that mean? By Jesus hanging on the cross, the guilt of all men is revealed ... He Himself thus undergoes judgment and dies an atoning death in our place”. Gerhard Maier, *Evanghelia după Ioan*, vol. 6-7 (Korntal: Lumina lumii, 1999), 547-8.

<sup>19</sup> “The apostle refers here, however, only to those who have fallen asleep in Jesus (4:14), or in Christ (4:16), that is, only to Christians”. Vild, *Eshatologia Paulina*, 113.

<sup>20</sup> Saint Theophylact of Bulgaria in his explanation says bluntly that first, the “faithful and righteous Christians will rise, since they will be caught up by the clouds on high to go to meet the King of Christ ... unbelievers and sinners will rise after them”. Sf. Teofilact al Bulgariei, *Tâlcuirea Epistolelor către Tesaloniceni, Timotei, Tit și Filimon*, trans. Florin Stuparu (București: Sophia, 2019), 55-6. We find the same idea in Saint John Chrysostom's interpretation of this verse “when a king enters a city triumphantly, the righteous come out to meet him, and the condemned wait for the judge inside. In the same way, when a loving parent arrives home, his children and those worthy to be his children are carried out in a chariot to see and kiss him, and those of the family members who have upset him remain inside.” Sf. Ioan Gura de Aur, *Comentariu la Epistola întâi către Tesaloniceni*, trans. Izabela Grigoraș (București: IBMO, 2022), 181.

as the last judgment to the judgment of non-Christians<sup>21</sup>. Considering that inerrancy in both parables, whether Christian or non-Christian, leads to eschatological punishments<sup>22</sup>, even the loving action of Christians, weighed using gifts, or non-Christians will have eternal reward.

### **Textual and exegetical arguments for understanding the text of Mt 25:31-46<sup>23</sup> as a judgment of non-Christians**

That it is about the final judgment in this parable is something accepted by all commentators, but not so when it comes to the importance and how we should relate to its teachings<sup>24</sup>, or on the interpretation of words *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* that can refer to 1) all human beings; 2) all Christians; 3) all non-Christians and non-Jews; 4) all non-Christians; 5) all non-Jews<sup>25</sup>, or *τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν*

<sup>21</sup> In this regard see Milne, "Judecată," 721-2; Maier, *Evangelhia după Matei*, 857, 870, 874. He draws attention to the fact that "occasionally it is said that here (Mt 25:31-46) it is about the judgment of the Gentiles". In Orthodox circles, we find the interpretation that after Christ's ascension to heaven He "will entrust to Christians certain goods and gifts, which they are to administer by careful work for the benefit of their neighbour and to the glory of God". Serafim Papacostas, *Parabolele Domnului*, trans. Teodosia Zorica Lațcu and Serafim Popescu (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2022), 439. Therefore, if we integrate the parable in the context of the universal judgement, then Christians are judged within it. Rev. Professor Stelian Tofană, having in mind this parable, suggests for reflection the idea that "the judgment will be according to the same criterion" of measure "the Lord ... gives us His wealth". Tofană, *Evangelhia lui Iisus*, 87.

<sup>22</sup> "Once again Matthew not only makes the overall point that actions within the community incur eschatological punishments, but he stresses as well that these sanctions will be the same as those which non-community members will receive (cf. 8:12; 22:13)." Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, 238.

<sup>23</sup> The difficulty of interpretation is also because "the passage is unique to Matthew, being drawn from the evangelist's special source. The only partial parallels are to its opening and close". Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 740.

<sup>24</sup> On the one hand it has been stated that the text is a parable and not a direct biblical teaching and therefore in interpreting it we are not allowed to reach "conclusions in clear contradiction with many other clear sections of the Bible in general and the teachings of Jesus in particular". Milne, "Judecată," 721. On the other hand, it was said that "this narrative is based not on a fictitious story but on the description of a very real, though future, event. Despite some clear parabolic elements, the passage with its future tense forms is more properly categorized as an apocalyptic revelation discourse". Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 740.

<sup>25</sup> Hagner lists these concerning S.W. Gray who has analysed them in detail, grouping the last three as referring to pagans and showing that there is no place where any group is excluded. The second interpretation is based on the difficulty of understanding the judgment of non-Christians by standards they do not know, and the first has the advantage of being consistent with Mt 28:19. For more details see Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 742.

ἐλαχίστων which may concern 1) anyone belonging to mankind; 2) all Christians; 3) Christian missionaries; 4) Christian Jews<sup>26</sup>.

Since the same word ἔθνος<sup>27</sup> can refer to different realities we will try to group the meanings of this word in the New Testament (it is used 162 times):

In several texts in the Gospels (Lk 7:5; 23:2; Jn 11:48, 50; 18:35), as well as in Acts (Acts 10:22), the word ἔθνος is used to refer to the people of Israel. Only in one text in Acts 26:23 used the same time the word λαός for the people of Israel and the word ἔθνος for the Gentiles. In other texts the word ἔθνος refers to Gentiles (Mt 4:15; 20:25; Lk 21:24; FA 4:25; 7:7; 13:19; Rom 1:5; Gal 3:8; Rev 10:11; 14:8; 15:3).

This word can be found in about 100 places in opposition to either Jews or Christians (Mt 6:32; Lk 12:30). However, we have one exception where it is used, in the same verse, to designate both Christians and non-Christians Mt 24:7 ἐγερθήσεται γὰρ ἔθνος ἐπὶ ἔθνος / "for nation will rise up against nation".

In several texts, the word ἔθνος is used for gentiles and appears in antithesis with that of Jews (Rom 3:29; Rev 15:3; Gal 2:15; Eph 4:17), so that τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τὸν θεόν / "the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thes 4:5) and therefore ὅτε ἔθνη ἦτε πρὸς τὰ εἰδῶλα τὰ ἄφωνα / "when you are Gentiles, you were always being led away to dumb idols" (1 Cor 12:2). The distinction

<sup>26</sup> Hagner comments on Gray's choices as follows: the fourth takes the word brethren too literally and therefore limits it only to those who are Jews by birth; the difference between the second and third is small, specifying that nothing in the text can argue that religious leaders are meant; it is almost certainly not meant to refer to human beings in general, but rather to brothers and sisters in the Christian community. For more details see Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 744.

<sup>27</sup> This word can be interpreted as "the largest unit into which the people of the world are divided based on their constituting a socio-political community – nation, people. FA 13, 19 *καὶ καθελῶν ἔθνη ἐπὶ ἐν γῆ Χαναναῖν* "he destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan. In several languages, the term meaning *tribe* has been extended in meaning to identify nations. In other instances, different nations are spoken of simply as different peoples. In certain cases, distinct nations are classified primarily in terms of their diverse languages." Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, word ἔθνος. In another dictionary we find the following meanings: 1. *a multitude* (whether of men or of beasts) *associated or living together; a company, troop, swarm*; 2. *a multitude of individuals of the same nature or genus, the human race*, Acts 17:26 *ἐποίησέν τε ἐξ ἐνός πάν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων*; 3. *race, nation*: Mt 21:43; Acts 10:35 *ἀλλ' ἐν παντί ἔθνε ἀπό καὶ δοθήσεται ἔθνε* Mt 24:7 *ἐγερθήσεται γὰρ ἔθνος ἐπὶ ἔθνε* used (in the singular) of the Jewish people, Lk 7:5; 23:2; Jn 11:48, 50-53; 18:35; Acts 10:22; 24:2 (3), 10; 26:4; 28:19. 4. In the O.T., *foreign nations not worshipping the true God, pagans, Gentiles*: Mt. 4:15 (*Γαλιλαία τῶν ἐθνῶν*), 6:32, and very often; in plain contradistinction to the Jews: Rom 3:29; 9:24; Gal 2:8, etc.; ὁ λαός τοῦ Θεοῦ Ἰωσ. καὶ τὰ ἔθνη, Lk 2:32; Acts 26:17,23; Rom 15:10; 5. Saint Paul uses τὰ ἔθνη even of Gentile Christians: Rom 11:13; 15:27; 16:4; Gal 2:12 (opposite Gal 2:13 to οἱ Ἰουδαί/οί, i.e. Jewish Christians), Gal 2:14; Eph 3:1, cf. Eph 4:17. Joseph Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Coded with Strong's Concordance Numbers*, word ἔθνος

between the people of Israel and the other Gentiles is clear *ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔθνων ἀμαρτωλοί* / “we are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles” (Gal 2:15). Yet even though they do not know the law of God *ἔθνη τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα φύσει τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῶσιν* / “when Gentiles, who have no law, do by nature the things of the law” (Rom 2:14). When speaking of the denial of the Cross we find both Jews and Gentiles together *ἡμεῖς δὲ κηρύσσομεν Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον, Ἰουδαίοις μὲν σκάνδαλον, ἔθνεσιν δὲ μαρτίαν* “we preach Christ crucified, for Jews a stumbling block, for Gentile’s foolishness” (1 Cor 1:23).

By Saint Paul the Christians from among the Gentiles are called *ἔθνη* so that Cephas *τῶν ἐθνῶν συνήσθιεν* / continually ate with the Gentiles (Gal 2:12), and he is *ὁ δέσμιος τοῦ Χριστοῦ [Ἰησοῦ] ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν τῶν ἐθνῶν* “the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you, the Gentiles” (Eph. 3:1). At the same time, it is also used in contrast to those who are not Christians (1 Cor 5:1; 12:2). Even though Jews and Gentiles have a different salvation history one can see how God's mercy transcends these differences. The Holy Apostle Peter by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit observes *ἀλλ’ ἐν παντὶ ἔθνει ὁ φοβούμενος αὐτὸν καὶ ἐργαζόμενος δικαιοσύνην δεκτὸς αὐτῷ ἐστιν* “in every nation he who fears Him and works righteousness is acceptable to Him” (Acts 10:35). In the same direction are the texts of Acts 10:45; 11:1,8. On the other hand, St. Paul is aware of his mission to *ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν* / “announce Him as the gospel among the Gentiles” (Gal 1:16; 2:9 see also Rom 1:5; Eph 3:1-13) as *ἐθνῶν ἀπόστολος* / “apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom 11:13). It should be noted that Saint Paul warns *ὑμῖν ἦν ἀναγκαῖον πρῶτον λαληθῆναι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ· ἐπειδὴ ἀπωθεῖσθε αὐτὸν καὶ οὐκ ἀξίους κρίνετε ἑαυτοὺς τῆς αἰωνίου ζωῆς, ἰδοὺ στρεφόμεθα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη* “it was necessary for the word of God to be spoken to you first. Since you thrust it away and do not judge yourselves worthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46 also 18:6; 19:9). Not least from the book of Revelation we learn that people were redeemed *ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους* “of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev 5:9), so there will be a lot *ἐκ παντὸς ἔθνους καὶ φυλῶν καὶ λαῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν* “of every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues” (Apoc 7:9). In this broad context of Revelation, which considers all nations, the word *ἔθνος* appears in the context of He who shepherds with a rod of iron (Rev 12:5); He who conquers against the evil one (Rev 2:26); He who has a sharp sword in His mouth (Rev 19:15); of the two witnesses (Rev 11:2, 9); of the Beast that is warring (Rev 13:7); of the preaching of the Gospel to all nations (Rev 14:6); of the fall of Babylon (Rev 14:8; 16:19; 18:3, 23); of the binding and casting down of Satan (Rev 20:3), but also of his deliverance (Rev 20:8); of the new city (Rev 21:24)<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> In approaching this part, we have followed the structure and meanings identified by Hans Bittenhard in the article *ἔθνος* synthesising ideas where possible. See for more details Hans

Given this wide range of interpretations, the natural question arises as to which of the meanings the words πάντα τὰ ἔθνη<sup>29</sup> refers to in the Gospel according to Matthew 25:32. The word ἔθνος occurs 11 times in the plural, 4 times in the nominative form τὰ ἔθνη (Mt 6:32; 12:21; 25:32; 28:19), 4 times in the genitive τῶν ἐθνῶν (Mt 4:15; 10:5; 20:25; 24:9) and 4 times in the dative τῶν ἐθνῶν (Mt 10:18; 12:18; 20:19; 24:14). A contextual analysis of the verses makes it clear that in almost all cases the author is referring to Gentiles, those who are of a different race from the Jews. If we consider only the eschatological context, we see that the disciples<sup>30</sup>, being warned τότε παραδώσουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς θλίψιν καὶ ἀποκτενοῦσιν ὑμᾶς, καὶ ἔσθε μισούμενοι ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου ~ “then they will deliver you up to tribulation and will kill you, and you will be hated by all the nations because of My name” (Mt 24:9). In this context it is about the attitude of those who do not believe, towards those who believe. In the second text, we are told that καὶ κηρυχθήσεται τοῦτο τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ εἰς μαρτύριον πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ~ “and this Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole inhabited earth for a testimony to all the nations” (Mt 24:14). This verse refers to those to whom the Gospel was preached, and they did not believe it<sup>31</sup>. In this case, it is the Gentiles who either resist the Gospel or those to whom the Gospel has been preached and have not believed in it.

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Bitenhard, “ἔθνος,” in *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament*, Band III (Wuppertal: Theologischer Verlag Rolf Brockhaus, 31972), 1318-20.

<sup>29</sup> The importance of interpreting this word in the parable is also stressed by Ulrich Luz „ the meaning of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη is the second fundamental question for the interpretation of our text”. See Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Bradford Robinson (Cambridge: University Press, 1998), 130. Robert Gundry draws attention to two aspects: on the one hand “we can hardly restrict *all the nations* to professing disciples among all the nations. Such a restriction would violate Matthew’s use of the expression elsewhere”, on the other hand, “we can hardly suppose that he implies at least a formal conversion of all the nations – i.e., of everybody in the world – by the time the Son of man comes”. Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 511. By this term “probably included, therefore, are the gentile nations, Israel, and the corpus mixtum of the Christian church – i.e., the reference is universal ... there are no clear markers in the text to indicate that any group is excluded (cf. 24:30), and, moreover, there are earlier indications in the Gospel that point to the future judgment of Christians (e.g. 7:21: 16:27).” Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 742.

<sup>30</sup> Saint John Chrysostom says that after the announcement of the woes that would befall the Jews “at the proper time he also spoke of the tribulations that would come upon the disciples”. See Sf. Ioan Gura de Aur, *Omilii la Matei*, 850-1.

<sup>31</sup> The words “to the witness of all nations” have been interpreted thus: “The gospel has been preached everywhere but has not been believed everywhere.... those who have believed will bear witness against those who have not believed and will condemn them”. Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii la Matei*, 852.

Given what has been said above about the meanings of the word *ἔθνος* in the New Testament, but also its plural meaning in Matthew's Gospel, in conjunction with the fact that "the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thes 4:16) and with the reality that "the saints will judge the world" (1 Cor 6:2), we would not force the interpretation if we were to maintain that the text of Mt 25:32 refers only to pagans and not to pagans and Christians together<sup>32</sup>.

The Greek word *ἀδελφός* with all the possibilities of interpretation from Holy Scripture<sup>33</sup> has been analysed in the footnote, so in what follows I will

<sup>32</sup> It has been said that "Matthew by no means ignores the eschatological fate of the Gentiles. He addresses this subject in his colourful description of the final judgement in 25:31-46. This tradition emphasises the completely universal nature of the judgement of the Son of Man by specifying that all the nations will stand before his throne of glory awaiting the final separation (v. 32). The Gentiles along with everyone else take part in this event." Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, 231-2. Ulrich Luz assumes that the ambiguity of the text is due to the pre-existence of a text that the evangelist used, in which "the traditional text doubtless spoke of the universal judgement pronounced upon non-Christians while the Christian men and women took their places at the side of their great brother, the Judge of the world. Matthew's community was now destined to live among and minister to the Gentiles". Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel*, 131.

<sup>33</sup> 1) The word *ἀδελφός* has the meaning of brother (whether born of the same two parents, or only of the same father or mother): Mt 1:2; 4:18. The expression "brothers of Jesus" in Mt 12:46,47; 13:55ff; Mk 6:3 (in the last two passages and sisters); Luke 8:19 ff.; Jh 2:12; 7:3; Acts 1:14; Gal 1:19; 1 Cor 9:5, maybe Joseph's sons from a previous marriage as reported in the apocryphal Gospels, or cousins, children of Alphaeus or Cleopas and Mary, a sister of Jesus' mother as claimed by the Church Fathers. According to the Greek biblical language by *ἀδελφός* as by the Hebrew *ah* is meant any blood relative or kinsman (Gn 14:16; 1 Sam. 20:29; 2 Kgs 10:13; 1 Chr 23:2). Protestant theology, starting from texts such as Mt 1:25 and Lk 2:7 where the preposition *ἕως* / "until" and the word *πρωτότοκον* / "firstborn" are used, have affirmed that the Virgin Mary would have borne other children after Jesus. Regarding the text of Matthew 1:25 with the preposition *ἕως* / "until", until what, until when it should be noted that it also has the meaning of continuity, perpetuity (see Walter Bauer, *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testament* Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann Verlag, 1963, 662. Example: *καὶ αὐτὴ χήρα ἕως ἑτῶν ὀγδοήκοντα τεσσάρων* / "and a widow until eighty-four years old" – Lk 2:37). Metropolitan Bartholomew in the footnote points out that the verb preceding it "did not know her" rendered by the compound perfect in modern languages is in the original the imperfect durable (see Osty), i.e. it expresses an action that does not end, that has no end. See also texts 2 Sam 6:23; Ps 110:1; Mt 28:20. Regarding the term *πρωτότοκον* / "firstborn", Metropolitan Bartholomew says in his explanation that "in biblical language, the term firstborn does not necessarily imply the existence of younger siblings, but refers exclusively to the prescriptions of the Old Law, which gave the firstborn male a special dignity and special prerogatives, under the very incidence of scarcity (cf. Is 13:2; 13:14)". See also the argument based on the text of Col 1:15 and Rom 8:29.

2) the word *ἀδελφός* according to a Hebrew use of *ah* (Is 2:11; 4:18, etc.), hardly found in secular authors, the word brother refers to all those who have the same national ancestry, belonging to the same people, fellow-countrymen; thus Jews are brothers among themselves Acts 2:29; 3:22; 13; 26; Mt 5:47; Rom 9:3; Heb 7:5.

3) In Lev 19:17 we see how the word *xa* is used interchangeably with *ραα* (but, as Lev 19:16, 18, speaking of Israelites, shows), so also in Christ's sayings, Mt 5:22, 24; 7:3 ff. The word near

focus only on the meaning that interests us here. Certainly not considered are the blood relatives mentioned in several places (Mt 12:47; Mk 6:3; Jn 2:12; Jn 7:3; Acts 1:14, etc.). The Saviour, explicitly, says who his brothers and sisters are: “and stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, Behold, My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in the heavens, he is My brother and sister and mother” (Mt 12:49-50); speaking to the crowds and His disciples says: “but you, do not be called Rabbi, for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers” (Mt 23:8); after the Resurrection speaking to the pious women he says: “go and report to My brothers” (Mt 28:10); and to Maria Magdalena says “got o My brothers and say to them” (Jn 20:17). So given these texts, but also the analysis we have made of the word *ἀδελφός* it can be said that we have in mind His disciples in the broadest sense of the word<sup>34</sup>.

If we consider the expression *τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἐλαχίστων* / “the least of My brothers”<sup>35</sup>, and the context of their utterance and associate it with texts

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is used for *ὁ πλησίον* to designate (as is evident from Lk 10:29 ff.) any seed – as having the same father with the others, that is, God (Heb 2:11), and as being descended from the same first ancestor (Acts 17:26);

4) the word *ἀδελφός* may designate a fellow believer, united with another by affectionate bond; thus, most frequently, of Christians, who are constituted as one family: Mt 23:8; Jn 21:23; Acts 6:3; 9:30; 11:1; Gal 1:2; 1 Cor 5:11; Phil 1:14, etc.; in courteous address, Rom 1:13; 7:1; 1 Cor 1:10; 1 Jn 2:7; however, in John’s phraseology, it refers to the new life to which people are born again through the efficacy of a common Father, even God: 1 Jn 2:9 and 4; 3:10.14.

5) The word *ἀδελφός* can designate an associate in work or office: 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; 2:13; Eph 6:21; Col. 1:1.

6) the word *ἀδελφος* is used for a) all those mentioned in point 1 b) for all men: Mt 25:40; Heb 2:11-12 c) for apostles: Mt 28:10; Jn 20:17 d) for all Christians, as those who are destined to be exalted to the same heavenly greatness he enjoys: Rom 8:29. In presenting these meanings, I based my analysis on Joseph Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Coded with Strong’s Concordance Numbers*, *ἀδελφός* and in places where I did not agree with his view (see item 1) I have also referred to other sources.

<sup>34</sup> “*These littlest brothers* can hardly denote an elite corps of Christian preachers in the church; for all those who do the will of the Father belong to the brotherhood (12:48-50) and *the little ones* refer especially to obscure people in the church, who are easily despised and prone to stray *but whose do the will of his Father* (12:48-50)”. Gundry, *Matthew*, 514.

<sup>35</sup> “It is brought to our attention that we are commonly tempted It is common to take this description in a universal sense, according to which the least of my brethren refers to the poor and needy of the whole world. On this view, the Matthean Jesus identifies with all the deprived persons of the world and will judge people, including those in the church, based on their treatment of them... This interpretation of the phrase, though widespread, must be deemed rather improbable in the light of Matthew’s sectarian outlook. It presumes that the Matthean community is ‘world-open’ when in fact it is closing itself off from the outside world... for Matthew the wider world is a place to be feared and avoided, and it is difficult to accept that he would have given much thought to the needy outside his community. Moreover, it is inherently unlikely that Matthew’s concept of dualism would have tolerated the explicit

in which the Saviour addresses the disciples with the words: “he who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who has sent Me ... and whoever gives to one of these little ones only a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, truly I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward” (Mt 10:40-2); or “for whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name that you are Christ’s, truly I say to you that he shall by no means lose his reward” (Mk 9:41), we are entitled to see in them all disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ<sup>36</sup>. Together these texts lead to the following idea “the response of the people to Jesus’ disciples and their witness becomes their response to Him”<sup>37</sup>, The Saviour identifies Himself with each of those who witness to Him<sup>38</sup>.

### **Exegetical difficulties in interpreting the parable of the Last Judgment**

The astonishment<sup>39</sup> of those on the right following the judgment of the Son of Man and the question they ask “Lord, when have we see You hungry and have fed You? ...” (Mt 25:37-39) may be a starting point that the judgment is not addressed to Christians but to Gentiles. Those certainly being judged, at least

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identification of Jesus with anyone outside his group. A further and perhaps overwhelming problem for this view is that the use of ‘brother’ points to a community setting rather than a general or universal context (cf. 5:22-4, 47; 7:3-5; 12:49-50; 18:15, 21, 35; 23:8; 28:10)”. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, 232-3. If we take these clarifications into account, we would be rather tempted to believe that these words refer either to those who are part of the Matthean community or to those who preach the Gospel. In contradiction to this idea is Ulrich Luck who says “alle Menschen werden zu Brüdern, weil Jesus Christus, der jetzt als Weltenherrscher offenbar wird, sich für viele, d.h. für alle hingegeben hat (26:28)” Luck, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 278. “Jesus thus identified himself fully with his disciples (1 Cor 8:12; 12:27; Acts 9:5)” Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 744.

<sup>36</sup> “He calls either his disciples or the poor too little brethren, for every poor man is a brother of Christ”. Sf. Teofilact al Bulgariei, *Tâlcuirea Sfintei Evanghelii de la Matei* (București: Sophia, 2007), 381.

<sup>37</sup> Milne, “Judecată,” 721.

<sup>38</sup> “Aussagen dieser Art, in denen sich Christus mit bestimmten Menschen identifiziert, sind mehrfach belegt (10:40&2; Mk 9:37)”. Ulrich Luck, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1992), 277. Other commentators go in the same direction “Jesus declares His identity with the suffering”. Albricht and Mann, *Matthew*, 306. Rev. Professor Stelian Tofană has the same interpretation of Christ’s encounter with Paul on the road to Damascus.

<sup>39</sup> “Ihr Erstaunen, das sich in ihrer Rückfrage äußert, erklärt sich aus der unerwarteten Begründung des Richters, für Christen wohl, weil sie den Menschensohn zu kennen glaubten, für Heiden eher, weil sie mit einer solchen Anrechnung ihrer Liebestaten nicht gerechnet haben”. Schnackenburg, *Matthäusevangelium* 16,21 – 28,20, 252.

apparently<sup>40</sup>, do not have the awareness and knowledge that during their earthly life, they met our Lord Jesus Christ. In this context, one may wonder whether this passage “is not about unconscious, latent Christians”<sup>41</sup> or “anonymous Christians”<sup>42</sup>. To approach the text in the sense of “unconscious, latent Christians” would contradict other texts which state that there are no such Christians, indeed the Saviour warns us about the commitment we should show “everyone therefore who will confess in Me before men, I also will confess in him before My Father who is in the heavens” (Mt 10:32); Saint Paul encourages Timothy to confess “do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord” (2 Tim 1:8); and to those in Rome he entrusts salvation only “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:9). The preaching of the Gospel and its acceptance (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15) entails a conscious keeping of the commandments (Mt 28:20), but also a faith that “without its works is useless” (Jas 2:20).

The observation that “these people considered righteous do not say that they have never given to eat, drink, etc. ... but only that I have never seen You (Jesus) hungry, etc.” leads us to believe that in this context it would not even be those Christians “who’s left-hand does not know what the right hand is doing”<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Saint Theophylact says that “out of humility I deny having done anything of what He says”. Sf. Teofilact al Bulgariei, *Tâlcuirea Sfintei Evanghelii de la Matei*, 381. St John Chrysostom says, “does not speak of two or three persons, nor of five, but of the whole world” which is being judged, without going into details, and when he is to identify “the least of My brothers” he says “I speak not only of these monks and those who live in the mountains, but of every believer, even if he is living in the world”. Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilia la Matei*, 895-7.

<sup>41</sup> Maier, *Evanghelia după Matei*, 874.

<sup>42</sup> This approach of “anonymous” or “implicit” Christians, by which non-Christians are meant, is in flagrant contradiction with the formulation of Saint Cyprian of Carthage “extra ecclesiam nulla salus” and has been problematized by the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner based on the text that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). Those who followed him in this approach brought other arguments such as a greater tolerance and understanding of Christians towards non-Christians, the reality of the existence of a smaller number of believers in Christ than of non-believers, but also a cosmic Christology based on the text “because in Him all things were created in the heavens and on the earth ... all things have been created through Him and unto Him” (Col 1:16). Karl Rahner, *Die anonymen Christen*, in *Karl Rahner, Schriften zur Theologie*, Bd. VI, (Einsiedeln, 1965), 545-554). Ulrich Luz points out that even though in this parable “here the Church anonymous seems to make an appearance. It is my feeling, however, that this fascination rests on a misreading of the text. According to 23:8 and 28:10 the brothers of Jesus, the Judge of the world, can only be Christian missionaries (cf. 18: 4-6, 10), who are travelling without means of support and are thus dependent on the love and hospitality of others (cf. 10:9-14, 40-2)”. Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel*, 129-130.

<sup>43</sup> Maier, *Evanghelia după Matei*, 874.

One of the remaining possible explanations is that non-Christians would be considered and judged by their good deeds done with Christian missionaries<sup>44</sup>, but even this exegesis has its shortcomings, and "if we can interpret this parable in a way that does not imply any fundamental contradiction, but allows us to integrate it harmoniously with the other teachings of Jesus, it is clear that this is the course that should be followed"<sup>45</sup>.

The claim that this parable is aimed at non-Christians, at first glance, contradicts the words of Jesus: "no one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6)<sup>46</sup>, but also the apostles' confession that "and there is salvation in no other" (Acts 4:12)<sup>47</sup>. Ignoring this reality would lead to accepting the salvation of non-Christians based on good works, which would be tantamount to the erroneous conclusion that the Saviour died only for Christians, which is contradicted by the whole parable in which "everything is decided about the Person of Jesus: I was hungry – You gave Me food – when did we see You hungry?"<sup>48</sup>.

Given the context developed by the above verses and the identification of "the least of My brothers" with Jesus' disciples, but also those who were merciful to the disciples<sup>49</sup>, as being merciful to Christ Himself, we can hold the following statements "as Mt 10:40 ff. promises reward to those who do good to the persecuted disciples of Jesus, so this parable comforts the disciples in that it promises salvation at the last judgment to every man who has done good to them – for you have done good to Me. The disciples are the Body of Jesus (Rom 12:4 ff; 1 Cor 12:12 ff). So far does God's mercy go that for Jesus' sake he not only saves those who have become one of the members of the Body of Christ, but also those who have done good to one of the members of the Body of Christ"<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> "Matthew feels, quite self-serving, that the determining factor for the fate of the ethne (nations or Gentiles) in the Last Judgement will be their behaviour toward the Christian missionaries. Indeed, this was previously the case with the Israel mission (10:14-5; 23:34-6)". Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel*, 130.

<sup>45</sup> Milne, "Judecată," 721.

<sup>46</sup> "Jesus is the one mediator of salvation for all men ... That there are different ways of salvation is a misconception ... It brings into Christianity an element of intransigence ... through Jesus – and Jesus alone! – the disciples can go where Jesus is going now". For more details see Maier, *Evanghelia după Ioan*, 612; St. John Chrysostom says "I am the Way is the explanation of the phrase *no one comes to the Father except through Me* ... there is no other way that can lead you to Him". Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Comentar la Evanghelia de la Ioan* (Oradea: Ed. Pelerinul Român, 2005), 396-7.

<sup>47</sup> "The Greek text emphasizes particularly strongly that in no one else is their salvation". Heinz-Werner Neudrfer, *Faptele Apostolilor*, vol. 8-9 (Korntal: Ed. Lumina lumii, 2000), 96.

<sup>48</sup> Maier, *Evanghelia după Matei*, 874.

<sup>49</sup> "It is important to know that the Son of God is not only up in heaven, but also down here on earth, on our street, where we work, on the bus, in the hospital, in the person of every person in need and suffering." Tofană, *Evanghelia lui Iisus*, 353.

<sup>50</sup> Maier, *Evanghelia după Matei*, 875.

This exegetical approach does not for a moment challenge the judgment of Christians “according to the practice or non-practice of the love of man”<sup>51</sup>, but will only emphasize the reality that “God requires of us the works, according to the gifts he has given us and the circumstances he has bestowed upon us, that we should use them”<sup>52</sup>. So if non-Christians will be judged by the way they practiced love for Christ's disciples, Christians will be judged by the way they used the gifts they received<sup>53</sup> in the service of loving their neighbour.

## Conclusions

The universal judgment that will take place after the Savior's second coming is not only one of the highlights of Matthew's Gospel but of Christian teaching in general. While the text of Matthew 25:31-46 has been understood throughout the ages unequivocally as a criterion of judgment, even for non-Christians, few exegetes have seen in the text of Matthew 25:14-30 a judgment of Christians that takes place before the judgment of non-Christians. An analysis of some keywords in the parable of the Last Judgment that clarify who are those who stand in judgment and who are the recipients of acts of mercy can open a new interpretation of the text of the parable of the Talents. If in the first parable, we conclude that non-Christians are judged based on acts of love towards those who confess Christ in the world, we ask the question according to what criteria Christians will be judged and when the judgment took place. In this context, we can say that it took place a little earlier, in the parable of the Talents, based on the same acts of love, but they will give an account of how they put the gifts they received at the service of the love of their neighbour.

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<sup>51</sup> Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică*, 288. Commentators with this in mind said, “it seems, completely unexpectedly, to make the outcome of the Judgment dependent on love of those who suffer rather than on a commitment to Jesus (quite unlike 10:32-3)”. Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel*, 129.

<sup>52</sup> Papacostas, *Parabolele Domnului*, 449.

<sup>53</sup> Here we must point out that Saint Matthew in the words *ἐκάστω κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν δύναμιν* / to each according to his own ability Mt 25:15 “jeder der drei Empfänger den Betrag in Zalenten nach seinen Fähigkeiten erhalten hat” Luck, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 271.

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