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Jesus, Social Reform and Virtuoso Religion:  
A Study of Jesus' Practice and Teaching Concerning Wealth and Poverty on the  
Basis of Selected Gospel Passages and Social-Scientific Approaches

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

This study demonstrates, by the application of a selection of social science models on a selection of gospel passages, the usefulness of those models for better understanding the teachings of the Jesus movement on wealth and poverty and what Jesus hoped to achieve by these teachings. It shows that sociological models are generally useful for approaching the gospels because they facilitate understanding by formulating new questions about ancient material and highlighting perhaps previously unnoticed themes or concerns. It further offers the opinion that the Virtuoso Religion model is the most useful for doing this and as such will be the most useful for providing an understanding of what Jesus envisioned for the future of society in anticipation of the imminent Kingdom. The model supports Jesus' preaching on wealth and day-to-day expressions of those opinions as methods by which he might influence the attitudes of others, especially the rich and powerful, adjusting their focus from love of wealth to love for God and neighbour.

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## **Introduction**

In this study I will attempt to demonstrate, by the application of a selection of social science models on a selection of gospel passages, the usefulness of those models for better understanding the teachings of the Jesus movement on wealth and poverty and what Jesus hoped to achieve by these teachings. The social models are Agrarian Society (Lenski), Commercialisation in Agrarian Society, Wandering Charismatics (Theissen) and Virtuoso Religion. The gospel sections I have chosen are The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16), The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13), Jesus' encounter with the Rich Man (Mark 10:17-31 par.), Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple (Mt. 21:12-17; Mk. 11:12-21; Lk. 19:45-48; Jn. 2:13-22, and associated sayings) and the Call Narratives (Mt. 4:18-22; 9:9-13; Mk. 1:16-20; 2:14; Lk. 5:1-11, 27; Jn. 1:35-42, 43-51 and associated sayings). I hope to show that sociological models are generally useful for approaching the gospels because they facilitate understanding by formulating new questions about ancient material and highlighting perhaps previously unnoticed themes or concerns. I further hope to show that the Virtuoso Religion model is the most useful for doing this and as such will be the most useful for providing an understanding of what Jesus envisioned for the future of society in anticipation of the imminent Kingdom.

The first section of this study begins with a discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the employment of sociological models. I hope to show that the potential pitfalls of using models have been taken into consideration but at the same time that careful use of models which avoids ethnocentrism, over-simplification, excessive rigidity and the imposition of inappropriate ideas can be extremely valuable for drawing out the key features of the texts. I have provided a description of each of the selected social models, their development as well as their strengths and weaknesses. The first two are relatively broad economic models and the final two focus more closely on the structure and activity of the Jesus movement.

Following on from this, before looking at each biblical passage in turn, I will discuss authenticity briefly, although I believe the prevalence of the wealth/poverty theme running throughout my examples and the gospels generally negates the requirement to consider the authenticity of each individual passage. Every single biblical text chosen pertains in some way to issues of wealth and poverty and the social and religious impact of having too much or too little money, or not knowing how most wisely to use what money one has got. The fact that all five examples, which cover parables, sayings, and other episodes from Jesus' itinerant

life, have something to do with money at their heart suggests that this was a primary concern of Jesus' ministry overall. Some of what Jesus says about money is quite shocking and dramatic and there are times when he appears to be making quite strong demands on people concerning their own (e.g. Mt. 6:19-24; Mk.6:8-11; 10:25; Lk.12:13-21). This begs the question: why? What did Jesus hope to achieve? Did he seek reform in society to make it fairer? Models like Lenski's Agrarian Society, for example, explain how great stratification between the rich and powerful and the poor and weak in society caused extreme sustained oppression through methods like taxation and debt. Jesus preached that everyone is equally entitled to the basics of survival (e.g. Mt. 6:11; 20:1-16). How could this be achieved without some level of reform to the agrarian economic system?

What I believe will come of examining social models, especially Virtuoso Religion, is that a complete overhaul of the agrarian economy is impossible for anyone to achieve, let alone someone not in a position of power within the political establishment. That Jesus had some sort of idealistic hope for this is not impossible but there is not much evidence to support it. However, the notion that he envisioned an improvement to the economic system through attitude changes in those with an attachment to their wealth and a desire to maintain their wealthy status by continuing to oppress others is definitely there in the text (e.g. Mk. 10:17-31; Mt. 6:24; Lk. 12:13-21). So the subtle difference here is that instead of wishing to be a social reformer in the sense of creating some sort of egalitarian society with no divisions of wealth or power at all, he sought the reform of people's attitude to their own economic status and what that status allowed them to do. This is consistent with his apparent critique of patron-client relations and the culture of reciprocity in first century Palestine (see, for example, his promotion of kindness and hospitality for its own charitable sake rather than reward in Luke 14:12-14, and the apparent transcending of the idea of reward proportionate to work in the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, Matt. 20:1-16). Money was clearly necessary he realised. In these two examples, money would have been essential for throwing a banquet but it seems Jesus saw much better value for money in throwing a banquet for the poor, crippled, lame and blind than for one's rich friends. Similarly money is necessary for paying one's workers but all workers deserve at least enough to feed themselves at the end of the day so no one, even someone who worked fewer hours, should be paid less than this.

I believe it is the Virtuoso Religion model that most accurately shows how Jesus could criticise the injustices of extreme wealth and poverty and yet still see money as a practical necessity. He and the disciples relied on the hospitality of wealthy supporters, for example, but were able to demonstrate a better way of managing one's attachment to wealth by sharing resources and caring for the poor. By setting an example to the world by this specialised kind of practice, the influence he hoped to have on the ruling classes, to my mind, forms the basis of a subtle social reform of attitudes.



## Social Science Models

### *The Strengths and Weaknesses of Social Science Models*

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a critical assessment of model usage, discussing both the strengths and weaknesses of models and briefly noting the possible merits of alternative approaches. I also wish to offer an explanation for my choice to use modelling as a method of approach in this study of Jesus and to discuss why I selected the particular models I did. Before beginning, it is essential to grasp one fundamentally important truth: a model that provides the key to unlocking all the mysteries of the historical figure of Jesus, explaining what happened and why, does not and never will exist. It is not the aim of this study to seek such a model. It is the aim of this study to do what I believe models are most useful for: to see if they can raise new questions by shining light from new angles at ancient information. If they can, then from this we may be able to illuminate something that went previously unnoticed. This can take the form of highlighting patterns and connections which may not provide historical certainty about specific events in the gospels but is crucial when attempting to make statements about what was typical in the daily life and teachings of Jesus. I believe this especially relevant to the frequency with which the issues of wealth and poverty are raised within the gospels since the repetition itself leaves a large amount of material that could be more easily approached and organised by the use of models.

I would like to begin by addressing some of the common criticisms aimed at model usage. One of the models' harshest critics is Marianne Sawicki whose 2000 work *Crossing Galilee: Architectures of Contact in the Occupied Land of Jesus* dedicates a whole chapter to 'The Trouble with Models'<sup>1</sup>. Her concerns about the use of models often refer to the inability of models to extract new information from the old data and point to the danger of using cross-cultural models to "fill in the blanks" where knowledge is lacking about Jesus' society with information from societies that are similar<sup>2</sup>. She believes that comparative data, albeit potentially very useful for enhancing our understanding of the material conditions of life, economic organisation and cultural practices of first century Galilee, should be used cautiously<sup>3</sup>. Others also advise caution with comparative data, identifying pitfalls such as overgeneralisation and ethnocentrism as well. Sociological models' attempts to identify what

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<sup>1</sup> Sawicki, M. (2000) *Crossing Galilee: Architectures of Contact in the Occupied Land of Jesus*. Harrisburg, PA. Trinity Press Intl.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.63-67.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.63.

is ‘typical’ in a society may be considered an over-simplification<sup>4</sup> but the logical answer to this would be to point out that sociology’s quests for the typical is not necessarily a rejection of the distinctive<sup>5</sup>. All it means is that cross-cultural models should be used with a certain amount of care and intelligence. It is foolish to expect a promising looking cross-cultural model to “fit” the data perfectly and it is the scholar’s duty to accept and account for when it doesn’t. This is especially true when developing models from contexts that are significantly distant from the time and place one is studying. Here the danger of over-generalisation is increased<sup>6</sup>. It is important to justify the selection of a cross-cultural model with evidence and avoid assuming its compatibility with the data<sup>7</sup>. Ethnocentrism, that is the tendency to view alien cultures from the perspectives of one’s own, is also something to be avoided where possible. To an extent we are inevitably going to judge passages in the gospels by our own modern sensibilities without realising but we must avoid actively framing a methodology around such thoughts. Using comparative models may be an effective way of structuring one’s approach to the gospel material, thereby avoiding ethnocentrism, but it cannot allow us the ability to view the past in a pure and objective sense. This is impossible for all historians.

As much as I agree that ‘filling the gaps’ is not preferable when using cross-cultural models, where gaps exist we may have little alternative but to guess (and state explicitly that we are guessing) that the commonalities already identified between the model and the data may be extended to explain the gaps until new data can be found. The criticism that cross-cultural models may be generalised may also be an advantage since it is broad patterns of human thought and action<sup>8</sup> that are being sought in the particular case of this study. To seek what is typical is not to disregard the unique. To seek what might be typical of the life and teachings of Jesus using models is also, obviously, not an attempt to find exactly what happened with indisputable historical accuracy. It is very difficult to ‘prove’ a model but most models do not seek to be proven. Models, unlike an historical argument which seeks to prove links between events, “offer a ready-made matrix of possible meanings in light of which the fragmentary

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<sup>4</sup> Horrell, D. G. (1996) *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence: Interests and Ideology From 1 Corinthians to 1 Clement*. Edinburgh. T & T Clark. p.13, 22.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.22-23.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.13.

<sup>7</sup> Craffert, Pieter F. ‘An Exercise in the Critical Use of Models: The “Goodness of Fit” of Wilson’s Sect Model’ in Pilch, John J. ed. (2001) *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible: Essays by the Context group in Honour of Bruce J Malina*. Leiden. Brill. p.23.

<sup>8</sup> Delamarter, S. ‘Sociological Models for Understanding the Scribal Practices in the Dead Sea Scrolls’ in Grossman, M. L. ed. (2010) *Rediscovering the Dead Sea Scrolls: An Assessment of Old and New Approaches and Methods*. Grand Rapids/ Cambridge. Eerdmans. p.185.

artefact from antiquity is illuminated. The model “works” when the artefact “comes to life”...”<sup>9</sup>

Sawicki raises another issue, closely related to the problems of cross-cultural modelling, which is the problematic assumption that human society has a systematic character and that anthropological conclusions about specific societies can be drawn from broader empirical data. She has the work of Lenski, Karl Kautsky and John Kautsky in mind<sup>10</sup> whose work has formed a popular economic model for approaching the society of Jesus and has been chosen for particular attention as part of this study. She is right to state that a model constructed from multi-sourced data should not become accepted as a fixed set of laws for describing one particular society, and is right to stress the importance of testing models against the information provided by the gospel texts and other available data. It is, of course, the duty of the scholar to see if the data provides evidence that matches the societal structure proposed by the model, not simply to assume that it does as if the model itself is providing new data. Where the evidence is not quite in sync with the model, the scholar must avoid any kind of manipulation to force a better ‘fit’. As valid as these concerns are, it is strange to think of a scholar actually looking at the work on agrarian society by Lenski, for instance, and confidently stating that first century Palestine must have been exactly the same. It is acceptable, however, to work from the hypothesis that Lenski’s model and first century Palestine are similar on the basis of comparable levels of economic development, then refer to the data to see if features of agrarian society can be identified in the society of Jesus, and then ask whether this directly affected the kind of life he chose to lead and the kind of teachings he emphasised. The worry that modelling which is cross-cultural and constructed from empirical data might be used to formulate widely applicable laws of human behaviour is answered again by the reminder that patterns are what we seek but it does not necessarily follow that idiosyncrasies of individual societies will be ignored.

On a general level, the imposition of modern or cross-cultural patterns on first century data may be a negative thing, especially if it skews our view of reality. On a more specific level, which perhaps is over-critical, Sawicki describes a phase of model application which involves labelling states, functions and processes in the society under examination according to categories already identified in other societies. For example, labels such as food

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.186.

<sup>10</sup> Sawicki, M. (2000) p.63-64.

production, education, defence, government, inheritance, kinship etc. may be applied to features of one society because they resemble features of other societies already known by these names<sup>11</sup>. The way these features interact with each other may form a recognisable societal pattern that may also be labelled accordingly e.g. market economy, agrarian empire, feudal state, and so forth.<sup>12</sup> The issue being raised here is the danger of imposing structures from outside onto a society where the functions and processes may have been very different to our modern understanding or to the version known from other historical examples. To use categories like ‘economy’ or ‘government’ may be to assume that the way wealth was distributed and the way authorities made and implemented decisions was basically the same as it is in other societies. Caution in using such terms may be necessary, even if they cannot be completely avoided. An example of such caution can be seen in Oakes’ article examining the use of economic evidence in the interpretation of early Christian texts<sup>13</sup> where he reminds himself that economies were embedded, and therefore difficult to study in isolation, by referring to the study of economic activity as ‘the study of the allocation of scarce resources’. He also looks at the economic models derived from Alföldy, Lenski and Ekkehard & Stegemann, then points out that the way they have differentiated economic groups may be inconsistent with other divisions within society or be too generalised.<sup>14</sup> For example, Oakes sees too little differentiation of the non-elite groups which makes it difficult to calculate what counts as poverty, although some data about wage levels amongst the poor can be seen in the gospels (e.g. Matt. 20: 1-16) and related to the model. He states that an economic model must be derived from economic data only and that, for instance, Alföldy’s comparisons with the Roman status divisions, *ordines*, are not an appropriate short cut.

Being cautious about such issues and being aware that an embedded economy will always be difficult to discuss in isolation from other aspects of society like politics and class, is not to say that it cannot be discussed with some confidence when economic data is available. As Oakes points out, the aim is not a perfect economic model of society but something that functions well for handling the text.<sup>15</sup> This may incorporate comparative data from elsewhere. This must mean that categories and labels from outside must also be permitted

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.65.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Oakes, P. ‘Methodological Issues in Using Economic Evidence in Interpretation of Early Christian Texts’ in Longenecker, B. W. & Liebengood, K. D. eds. (2009) *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception*. Grand Rapids, MI. Cambridge, UK. Eerdmans.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp.27-29.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p.31.

albeit cautiously. We need to use words like ‘economy’ with a constant reminder in our heads that one society’s system is not necessary like another’s, but that it may be used as a general term from practicality’s sake.<sup>16</sup> The same goes for any function or system in society which may be labelled according to modern patterns. We may need to describe features of society in terms that did not even exist at the time, which is a concern to the likes of Sawicki, but what alternative is there? She herself adopts terms from outside for describing features of Galilean society because it is useful for understanding the economic and social relations of people about whom there is limited data but familiar features. She uses the word “caste” as “anthropological shorthand for the transgenerational assignment of a ranked social identity” derived from how the Mishnah, compiled around 200CE, reflects life in Jesus’ time. Although she acknowledges this is a borrowed term, the very fact that it is not ‘indigenous’ to Galilee means she is also imposing foreign labels. Is it not simply a matter of excusing each other when using these slightly inappropriate terms brought in from outside when there is nothing better? Are we not capable of understanding that the use of a term like ‘government’ is not an assumption that first century Palestine was being run exactly like modern Britain but merely a word that generally describes the way authorities organise and run things? If using modern labels to describe ancient phenomena invites some of the same criticism of using models, and using such terms is to an extent inevitable, then everyone is using modelling in one form or another. Modern perceptions being imposed on ancient texts is almost unavoidable. It is the responsibility of the scholar to be cautious of the implications of the modern terminology they use. As Esler more eloquently summarises, “...we all use models in our work; the only question is whether or not we acknowledge them and bring them out into the open for critical scrutiny. Whenever New Testament critics discuss textual features in terms such as ‘family’, ‘class’, ‘politics’, ‘power’, ‘religion’, ‘personality’, ‘conscience’, or ‘boundary-markers’ they are employing models, although usually implicit and unrecognised

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<sup>16</sup> “While it is true abstract thinking on economics as we know it today is a product of the industrial revolution, this does not mean that ‘rational’ economic thinking never occurred in pre-industrial societies. There is enough evidence ranging from fifth century B.C.E. Athens to fourth century C.E. Egypt to indicate that there was a general awareness of issues such as the maximising of resources, the need to keep productions costs low and the possibility of manipulating market demand in order to achieve higher prices.” Freyne, S. ‘Herodian Economics in Galilee: Searching for a Suitable Model’ in Esler, P. F. (1995) *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context*. London/ New York. Routledge.

ones deriving from modern experience quite remote from biblical culture, with the inevitable risk of ethnocentric and anachronistic readings.”<sup>17</sup>

The concept of inevitability is something that many scholars pick up on when discussing models. Once again, the natural human tendency to identify patterns is at work alongside our inability to detach ourselves from our own cultures. The best defence against this uncontrollable tendency to employ modelling is to declare one’s awareness of it at the very least or preferably make it an explicit part of one’s methodology. “The explicit use of models brings the interpreter’s values and perspectives out into the open. It also allows him or her to judge whether those values and perspectives are appropriate to the data or whether, as is often the case, they are a reflection of a late-twentieth-century worldview.”<sup>18</sup> This is an essential point in favour of using models which also addresses the question over what alternative there is to approaching the distant/poorly-documented past without a particular viewing lens. There is no way of looking at the available information and simply knowing intuitively what is meaningful, true or false. One’s chosen model, or models in general, may not provide the perfect safeguard against assumed intuitive knowledge but they may be used alongside what can be gleaned from empirical data to make an even stronger case for one’s conclusions.<sup>19</sup> It is fundamentally important to constantly remind ourselves in this debate that models do not purport to show what is historically true or false and so therefore cannot be judged on their own truth or validity. They can only be judged on their usefulness when measured against the evidence.<sup>20</sup> This does mean that models must be selected carefully. Whilst this process will always have a subjective dimension, it is perhaps pointing out the obvious to warn against just picking a model by some random method and hoping it will tell you something about first century Palestine without having first examined the texts and thought about what kind of models might be helpful to you. Having said this, it shows that the process of model selection needs to have an element of presumption about it. Even a glance at the text will give one a sense of what sort of things one will expect to find when employing a model. This begins to demonstrate how interwoven the process of conscious model usage and any kind of supposedly model-free interpretation can be and it emphasises the importance of always

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<sup>17</sup> Esler, P. F. ‘Introduction: Models, Context and Kerygma in New Testament Interpretation’ in Esler, P. F. (1995) *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context*. London/ New York. Routledge. p.4.

<sup>18</sup> Esler, P. F. (1994) *The First Christians in Their Social Worlds: Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation*. London/ New York. Routledge. pp.12-13.

<sup>19</sup> Horrell, D. G. (1996) p.14.

<sup>20</sup> Esler, P. F. (1994) p.13; Esler, P. F. (1995) p.4.

going back to the text for evidence to support any claims. One is forced to always be looking back and forth between the model and the data and being as aware as possible of where the model fulfils one's expectations and where it falls short.

A certain level of self-awareness and self-criticism will not only keep one from any unrealistic expectations about what a model might reveal but will help prevent the introduction of ethnocentric questions that did not grow from the text themselves. Whilst one's modern perceptions cannot easily be filtered from one's interpretation of the text, they can be acknowledged as alien. As Craffert rightly points out, "If one's expectation is that models should be useful in showing up questions and possibilities not asked before, then most (ethnocentric and anachronistic) models will pass the test."<sup>21</sup> There is absolutely no point in deliberately using an ethnocentric model because, of course, it will raise previously unasked questions but these questions will not be focused on trying to gain an understanding of the true meaning of the text, but will be there for their own sake. Careful selection of models involves the cautious anticipation of raising appropriately relevant questions. Employing those models with caution involves self-criticism and the acknowledgement that refinements and updates may be needed<sup>22</sup> so long as it doesn't stray into the territory of manipulation. Adaptability is not about the desire to twist a model to fit the data, but rather an acknowledgment that a rigid scientific approach to data that is typically unpredictable because of human nature will not always be possible. Unwillingness to adapt a model or accept when it may be only partially useful is a danger when using scientific methods for non-scientific data. The gospels are good examples of the type of data that cannot be handled to fit a very structured methodology. The nature of their content is often symbolic, conceptual, and sometimes inconsistent and vague. They are open to interpretation and it is a model's job to help guide that interpretation. The Lenski model, for example, may guide our interpretations of gospel material that deals with socio-economic themes but it will be able to give very little help in interpretations of a theological nature. Since both types of information sit side by side in the gospels, we have to make peace with this model's shortcomings from the start and realise that this doesn't add up to a failure of the model but a status of partial usefulness. Sawicki is wrong to criticise it for overlooking practices of kinship, gender and inheritance<sup>23</sup>. It is not the model's fault for failing to reveal those kinds of aspects in the text

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<sup>21</sup> Craffert, Pieter F. (2001) p.24.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Sawicki, M. (2000) p.68.

if it did not set out to do so. Misusing the model to infer that kind of information would be a mistake on the part of the scholar.

Sawicki is very concerned about the imposed rigidity of models, claiming “There is no room for discretion or surprise”<sup>24</sup> but I do not believe this is true. A scholar who expects the patterns of human behaviour to always follow a fixed path is deluded. Adaptability is about retaining an open mind about one’s methodology. This may also take the form of using two or more partially useful models side by side. In the case of the Lenski model, which has a very broad scope, it would be more than possible to apply it alongside another that was perhaps more narrowly focused on the New Testament world. The point is that deciding to use one particular model is not to reject the significance of other information or block off new avenues of discussion but to focus study on certain themes. If new data that challenges the model arises, it is the model that should adapt to accommodate it, not vice versa. Something that Sawicki rightly emphasises is the point that models are incapable of and should not be used for providing new data.<sup>25</sup> For example, Sawicki looks at J. D. Crossan’s use of the Lenski model and points out that while it seems appropriate to assume that Lenski’s proposed figure of five per cent for the proportion of people belonging to the artisan class in agrarian societies would apply to Jesus’ society as well, it really should not be stated as such without support from textual or archaeological evidence.<sup>26</sup> The model must not be used to provide data. “The model is merely suggestive; it piques the imagination. It bears fruit in Crossan’s profound and compelling portraiture of Jesus as a Galilean who worked for a living and who hated religious power-brokering. But such portraits, no matter how religiously satisfying they may be, do not excuse us from the scientific duty to inquire and thereby to confirm or correct them.”<sup>27</sup> The question this raises is about the usefulness of a model that cannot be officially confirmed as providing an accurate template of economic divisions but does provide information that corresponds with gospel material more broadly, thereby illuminating the life of Jesus in a new way and confirming the importance of certain recurring themes in the gospels. Perhaps it is unfair to downplay the significance of something merely ‘religiously satisfying’. All too frequently, scholars can hope for little more.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p.6.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.67.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p.66.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



Reading some of Sawicki's criticisms can give the false impression that she suspects all model-users of imposing inappropriate models at random to provide new data but she is willing to acknowledge the possibility of intelligent, cautious use of models that will produce pleasing results. She praises Crossan for using the Lenski model to prove that certain claims should be "removed from the realm of taken-for-granted necessity, and placed in the realm of hypotheses that need to be confirmed or cancelled through examination of evidence."<sup>28</sup> She admits that careful, comparative, heuristic application of models may be appropriate for raising questions but not necessarily answering them. "When similarities are observed between contemporary societies around the Mediterranean and the society of Jesus, then we are justified in formulating a hypothesis that the similarities might extend into behaviour in the ancient world that have not yet been found in any sort of evidence."<sup>29</sup> This is a fair point. It is a fair point that most scholars who employ models would most probably agree with. It is also a point that most scholars who employ models would make in defence of the method, in fact. The formulation of hypotheses and posing of new questions is an aim that can be agreed on, surely? It would be very unexpected for someone to set out to find new data in a model or to expect great revelations from the application of a thoughtlessly chosen ethnocentric model, would it not? Although some scholars may be guilty of not being as careful with their use of models as they could have been, how often does one see the application of models that are wildly inappropriate? This concern has been noted by Elliot to be unfounded. "Some scholars worry that conceptual models could be morphed from lenses viewing the evidence into evidence itself. While this is conceivable, not one example of such inappropriate procedure has ever been cited and none is known to me. The fear is a bogeyman."<sup>30</sup>

There seems to be a general agreement that a model can be considered 'good' if its construction arises from the study of the data in question or relevant comparative data, if it is

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p.67.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. pp.79-80.

<sup>30</sup> Elliot, John H. (2008) 'From Social Description to Social-Scientific Criticism. The History of a Society of Biblical Literature Section 1973-2005'. *Biblical Theological Bulletin*. 38. p.31. Relating to this point but on the topic of another worry, Elliot is also unable to cite uses of social-scientific criticism that leave no room for theological considerations. This is relevant to all scholarship including this thesis since I would argue that it is almost impossible to approach Jesus whilst ignoring theological concerns of the gospels. Freyne agrees that the sociological and theological aspects cannot be divorced from one another: "What should not be forgotten, however, is that Jesus was a social reformer, no matter how embedded religion was in the social structures. One must therefore hope that, irrespective of the model chosen, consideration of the symbolic universe as well as the social world of Jesus will not be excluded from the discussion." Freyne, S. 'Archaeology and the Historical Jesus' in Charlesworth, J. H. (2006) *Jesus and Archaeology*. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. p.83.

used comparatively and heuristically with the aim of raising questions and illuminating the texts anew, if it is tested against the relevant data carefully, and if it is modified where necessary or acknowledged to be unfitting where necessary. As far as the construction of models goes, although they are abstract in themselves, their construction cannot come from thin air. Even if they are to be used cross-culturally, they must have originated from empirical study. In many cases they originate from detailed study of the gospels and a clear understanding of what models may be employed. The need to have some prior knowledge of the field of study might contradict the need to avoid empiricism but really the need is for some sort of compromise between the two in which “we clarify the theoretical perspectives and commitments upon which particular models are based”<sup>31</sup> so as to be fully aware of which concepts are being imported by the model and which grew directly from the data. It may also be that the discussion bears more fruit, as it were, if it allows for greater interaction between data and model. “Simply to adapt a model of an agrarian society such as Lenski’s and then test how it fits ancient Judea would not serve to illuminate ancient history so much as to provide yet another test of the model. More helpful in the long run, I believe, will be to work back and forth dialectically between our sources for ancient Judea and Galilee (critically considered) on the one hand, and comprehensive comparative studies such as Lenski’s and Kautsky’s on the other.”<sup>32</sup> Hopefully this reminder can, to an extent, be taken for granted since back and forth discussion will be occurring naturally anyway, but this will only be because of the way any approach changes the nature of the subject matter. The aim to use models heuristically may be endangered if we do not accept the inevitability of them shaping the text to which they are applied. “... ‘each model reveals and orders reality from a particular perspective’. We cannot therefore be adequately satisfied with the conclusion that

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<sup>31</sup> Horrell, D. G. (1996) pp.15-16.

<sup>32</sup> Horsley, R. A. (1995) *Galilee: History, Politics, People*. Valley Forge, PA. Trinity. p.9. Freyne quotes this same passage and adds that he believes both Horsley and Crossan are guilty of not properly allowing for this back and forth discussion and being aware of how (archaeological) counterevidence affects their choice of models. “The point is that neither pays sufficient attention to the counterevidence to their own positions, which, one suspects, were virtually predetermined by the choice of model and the manner of its application.” Freyne, S. ‘Archaeology and the Historical Jesus’ in Charlesworth, J. H. (2006) *Jesus and Archaeology*. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. p.72. See also the articles in which Horrell and Esler respond to each other over the use of models. Horrell argues that Esler has not successfully employed models heuristically as he set out to do whereas Esler denies that he is guilty of presupposing certain outcomes but does admit that ethnocentrism is sometimes problematic. Horrell, D. G. (2000) ‘Models and Methods in Social-Scientific Interpretation: A Response To Philip Esler’. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*. 22. pp.83-105; Esler, P. F. (2000) ‘Models in New Testament Interpretation: A reply to David Horrell’. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*. 22. pp.107-113.

the evidence appears to fit the model: we must also ask how the model has *shaped*, prioritised and interpreted the evidence.”<sup>33</sup>

For sure, there is a lot to bear in mind when applying models but ultimately the aim to apply them heuristically is not only, I believe, possible but admirable as well. Esler defends the use of models by explaining that they are not representations of empirical reality but explicit simplifications and accentuations of empirical reality used for organisational and heuristic purposes<sup>34</sup>. He clarifies his understanding of the ‘historically plausible’ results that may be revealed as “...results that a reasonable number of experienced readers might regard as a possible or even probable account...”<sup>35</sup> As is so often the case with this kind of scholarship, it is questions rather than answers that are most valuable; in this case they are ‘What If?’ questions which might never have come to light without the input of models.<sup>36</sup> They provide a buffer between the ancient texts and us in our modern world which is desperately necessary given our complete inability to immerse ourselves in the past or view it with objectivity.<sup>37</sup> They also help correspond to something Esler also makes a point of defending which is the generally predictable nature of human behaviour, that is to say that humans are frequently governed by social convention and the desire to conform rather than to transform the way of doing things generation to generation.<sup>38</sup> Methodologically, this use of models to help determine what is typical or predictable in human behaviour is problematic for Horrell who, like Sawicki, is concerned that the generalisations created by models will develop into laws that will be applied universally.<sup>39</sup> This, however, never seems to be the aim of the model-user’s methodology. It links with the worry that models will impose outside patterns inappropriately. Horrell criticises the way Esler seems to judge Paul in Galatians by a model of standard Mediterranean male behaviour rather than by the evidence in the text, which suggests that this adherence to convention is the only motivation for action.<sup>40</sup> Esler defends his method of using challenge-riposte as a model by reminding us that most people are likely to follow social convention, by pointing out that his model revealed new ways of looking at the text previously unnoticed, and by suggesting that interpretations that do not take concerns

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<sup>33</sup> Horrell, D. G. (1996) pp.15-16.

<sup>34</sup> Esler, P. F. (2000) p.108.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p.109.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p.110.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p.107-8.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p.110.

<sup>39</sup> Horrell, D. G. (2000) ‘Models and Methods in Social-Scientific Interpretation: A Response To Philip Esler’. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*. 22. pp.84-87.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p.92.

of typical Mediterranean culture into account are ethnocentric.<sup>41</sup> Although I agree that one must always be careful when trying to describe or measure human behaviour using scientific methods, it is unfair to suggest it is pointless to pursue the question of what can be considered ‘typical’ or not. Humans do obey conventions and conform to what is ‘normal’ in society for the most part, but it is particularly in relation to the words and deeds of Jesus that the questions is most relevant because if we can understand how unusual something he said or did would have been, it allows us to judge its significance. We often deal with a mixture of the typical and the atypical with Jesus, such as in his use of familiar agricultural imagery in parables to teach something that ultimately would have sounded odd to his listeners.

The other significant thing that model users would allow for is the lack of a social-scientific model to necessarily provide a scientific sort of conclusion. The scientific nature of the application of models has more to do with organising one’s methodology than actually expecting a conclusive set of results. If models are being used heuristically, then the conclusion will likely have more to do with overall usefulness for opening up avenues of discussion rather than fixed answers about the New Testament world. Indeed, as Sawicki may remind us, it would be wrong if they did attempt to provide new data. Esler has mentioned ‘usefulness’ being a better measure of models than ‘validity’ or ‘truth’<sup>42</sup>. Craffert also points out how little ‘goodness of fit’ is considered, which basically comes down to how comparable the model is to the biblical data.<sup>43</sup> Once again, it seems we come back to an understanding of models that requires a back and forth relationship between model and data comprised of postulating, testing, modifying to avoid superficiality and inaccuracy, and acknowledging that they may not be scientifically proven correct but may be judged as useful or not useful.<sup>44</sup>

Having discussed some of the main criticisms and responses to using social-scientific models, it is clear that scholars who champion their usefulness are quick to admit the need for caution, explicitness and openness to change when the evidence demands it. For the most part the evidence being dealt with is textual but modern scholars are increasingly advocating the need to incorporate other historical data from the archaeological record. Since this type of evidence

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<sup>41</sup> Esler, P. F. (2000) pp.111-113.

<sup>42</sup> Esler, P. F. (1994) p.13; Esler, P. F. (1995) p.4.

<sup>43</sup> Craffert, Pieter F. (2001) p.22.

<sup>44</sup> Malina, B. J. (1993) *The New Testament World: Insight from Cultural Anthropology*. Louisville, KY. Westminster/John Knox Press. p.19.

is more concrete than the abstract subjective content of the gospels, it is believed it can reveal more about the real lives of first century people. There is a difficulty for the biblical scholar who is not familiar with archaeology as a discipline and this may lead to reluctance to investigate its findings as deeply as possible. It may also be less relevant to delve very far into archaeology where biblical interpretation not historical investigation is the primary aim. Having said this, of course it would be wrong to neglect archaeological evidence which may help better understand the words and deeds of Jesus and it would be completely nonsensical to reject archaeological evidence on the basis that it contradicted the particular model one happened to be using at the time. The current debate about models includes a view that archaeological evidence reduces the need for them<sup>45</sup> but it is my (and others') opinion that one will not simply trump the other. Both will surely play their part and may even be complimentary but non-experts in one field should be cautious of using the other.<sup>46</sup> In some cases, using archaeological evidence may actually be accompanied by some of the same problems as models. If not used in conjunction with other evidence, for example, then the picture it paints of first century life may be as skewed as if one only used an inappropriate ethnocentric model. In an example given by Jensen, archaeological evidence and sociological models can be employed to reveal different sets of results.<sup>47</sup> He observes that Herod Antipas is usually either depicted as a picture of harmony, a buffer against Roman rule who helped develop trade and urban/rural relations or as a picture of conflict, a tyrant who increased taxes leading to more debt and tenancy. Jensen argues that archaeological evidence supports the picture of harmony whereas the use of sociological models supports the picture of conflict.<sup>48</sup> After closer examination of some scholar's use of models to look at Antipas and Galilee he even concludes that their picture of conflict is not very well substantiated. Although it is not the priority here to make any conclusions about what type of ruler Antipas was, especially if it involves detailed study of archaeological evidence for which I am unqualified, it is relevant to discussions about Jesus since gospel evidence seems to suggest his movement was in part a response to the economic and political tensions of his day. If, as Jensen suggests, models point towards a picture of Antipas that better explains the roots of the Jesus movement, some of Jesus' most influential teachings and his lifestyle choices, then their value is hard to

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<sup>45</sup> Sawicki, M. (2000) pp.5-6.

<sup>46</sup> Freyne, S. (2006) p.68.

<sup>47</sup> Jensen, M. H. (2010) *Herod Antipas in Galilee: The Literary and Archaeological Sources on the Reign of Herod Antipas and Its Socio-Economic Impact on Galilee*. Tübingen. Mohr Siebeck. See also, Jensen, M. H. (2007) 'Herod Antipas in Galilee: Friend or Foe of the Historical Jesus?' *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*. 5. pp.7-32.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 9, 16.

question. Jensen's main problems with models though come down to how one goes about selecting them and how to relate them to the data since they so often seem to produce different results and whether using cross-cultural models is appropriate at all because of their tendency to predetermine results.<sup>49</sup> He basically agrees with the view that models can really only be selected on the basis of textual analysis first and at a glance it seems that the picture of Antipas painted by the gospels also does not support the picture of conflict.<sup>50</sup> This is in contradiction to the conclusions reached by several model users.<sup>51</sup> So, if it is the better course to only rely on information derived directly from the texts or from archaeological evidence, how does one proceed when the conclusions from one method contradict those of another? How can the questions raised by the sociological model be ignored if they identify patterns that the textual/archaeological evidence does not highlight? Is this not the point of the models in the first place? Is it not bringing us back round to the conclusion that models must be used in conjunction with other evidence? In the particular case of Antipas, his impact on Galilee and influence on the Jesus movement, it may be that a compromise between the picture of conflict and the picture of harmony is appropriate. Even though Jensen sees little evidence for the picture of Antipas as a tyrant in the archaeological record and in some models, the way Jesus repeatedly makes reference to the injustices of accumulated wealth and severe poverty and shuns certain conventions of the economic/political system by living an itinerant detached lifestyle does suggest a climate of *tension* at least if not actual conflict. Models that are able to highlight these patterns in his words and behaviour are essential for understanding his motivations and aims and help construct a better-rounded picture of reality than just textual/archaeological evidence alone.

It is essential to reiterate that, although this is meant to be a defence of models, it is not for me to suggest that archaeological evidence or any other kind of information is not relevant or useful to our discussion or potentially compatible with social-scientific approaches including models. In the past it seems that the aims of archaeologists and biblical scholars have been too different but more recently both have realised the potential for greater insight into the New Testament world by combining forces. Moxnes points to Freyne's observation that the Third Quest broadened its scope to include geographical, political, social, economic and

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. pp.30-34.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. pp.124-5.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. pp.16-26. Jensen looks at model usage by Sean Freyne, J. D. Crossan, M. Moreland, R. A. Horsley and William E Arnal "whose arguments will be evaluated as representatives of the picture of Early Roman Galilee that stresses conflict, hostility and a spiral or slide of increasing debt and tenancy."

archaeological factors as well as religious and literary factors in the context within which the historical Jesus might be better understood. This has put a greater focus on Galilee in particular and at the same time archaeological activity has increased there and changed to a more intriguing form. “Focus has shifted from collections of artefacts of a religious or artistic nature and major architectural work towards everyday structures, village houses, farms, shops, etc., as well as means of production and industry. Examples of the latter are wine presses and farming innovations like the form of terracing and water systems. The result is studies of daily life and culture, which imply an intriguing possibility of co-ordinating literary and archaeological texts.”<sup>52</sup> It has also been noted that whereas once archaeology avoided drawing inferences about human beliefs, ethics and rites, it is now considered a more respectable aspect of the discipline and this wider focus that includes social systems, cultural change and even ideology may be very valuable to New Testament scholars because it will shed more light on the social make-up and religious climate of the ancient world.<sup>53</sup> If a move within both archaeology and biblical scholarship towards each other or at least with greater consideration for each other’s findings is already happening, this reinforces the view of many that increased cross-referencing of the disciplines should be encouraged. This may even be taken one step further to say that the findings from both areas could be better understood through the lens of a model. “Both may soon realise that any evidence must be interpreted in the context of the dominant historical political-economic system in ancient Roman Palestine, for which comparative sociological analyses of traditional agrarian societies (such as those of Lenski [1966] and Kautsky [1982, with appropriate adaptations]) are more appropriate than early modern market models.”<sup>54</sup>

Having been led to a point in the discussion where it seems archaeological evidence and social-scientific approaches including models may be compatible, we come to the crux of the matter especially in terms of what lies at the heart of Sawicki’s criticisms of models and her preferred course of action. So far, her criticisms of models being too imposing, ethnocentric, over-simple, over-rigid and so on have been fair albeit unconvincing enough to refute their usefulness entirely to my mind. She has made these criticisms mainly with regard to

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<sup>52</sup> Moxnes, H. (2001) ‘The Construction of Galilee as a Place for the Historical Jesus – Part II’. *Biblical Theological Bulletin*. 31. p.65. He cites Freyne, S. ‘Herodian Economics in Galilee: Searching for a Suitable Model’ in Esler, P. F. (1995) *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context*. London/ New York. Routledge.

<sup>53</sup> Hayes, J. H. ed. (2004) *Methods of Biblical Interpretation*. Nashville. Abingdon Press. p.10.

<sup>54</sup> Horsley, R. A. (1995) ‘Archaeology and the Villages of Upper Galilee: A Dialogue with Archaeologists’. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*. No. 297. p.14.

economic-conflict models, which have the most relevance here, as well as gender-ideology models and honour-shame models. The flaw in these model types, according to her, is their inability to reflect “how human beings, including Jesus of Nazareth, were able to exert individual and collective agency by means of their common built environment, through competent and creative use of their common spaces.”<sup>55</sup> Her insistence that models must not attempt to pose new data but can only be drawn from the data itself includes archaeological as well as textual information. The approach she poses makes use of archaeology combined with Biblical and Mishnaic data to create an “indigenous model”, that is, “an archaeology of Galilean mind”.<sup>56</sup> “Our premise is that, as indicated by both their kinship practices and their indigenous architecture, Galileans conceived status in terms of circulation. Which is to say: what we call a “place” in the physical or social sense was understood by them as directionality or even gravitation. The holiness of the land of Israel depended on having things travel across it in the right direction: produce, labour, brides, cattle, words and so forth.”<sup>57</sup> For Sawicki, her spatial reading of Galilee or the Galilean mind-set helps disclose the logic of kinship, circulation and grounding and exposes the strategies of adaptive resistance to imperial action whereas the Lenski-Kautsky model cannot because of its overlooking of kinship, gender and inheritance.<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately, there is not the space here to give a full assessment of Sawicki’s techniques and conclusions but her explanation of her preferred approach raises some interesting issues regarding the debate about modelling. Firstly, there is clearly an issue regarding the difference between what archaeology-based models and economic models can help reveal. Archaeology seems to favour a more cultural angle, especially in its ability to provide context on the Jewish features at various sites and the impact of increasing Hellenisation. It can also give a sense of the changing socio-economic conditions under Herod Antipas but potentially relying on archaeological data alone may not give enough attention to social, economic and political perspectives.<sup>59</sup> As important as it is to try to understand Galilee from a cultural angle, it is unclear how an economic model could not also be helpful in attempting to understand the spatial Galilean mind-set. Once again, there is a strong argument in favour of using both archaeological and economic models to create a more balanced approach.

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<sup>55</sup> Sawicki, M. (2000) p.61-2.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p.37.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p.68.

<sup>59</sup> Freyne, S. (2004) *Jesus, A Jewish Galilean*. London/New York. T & T Clark. p.14; Moxnes, H. (2001) p.70.



The main issue raised by Sawicki's proposed approach is that, despite her dedicating an entire chapter to 'The Trouble with Models', it is undoubtedly also a model. Not only this, but it appears to be as vulnerable as any other model of falling into the same dangers that she highlights in this chapter. Already we noticed her adoption of terms such as 'caste' from outside settings being slightly contradictory to her warnings about cross-cultural impositions. She points out her need to avoid imposing new data on the text and to maintain an heuristic approach just as other model-users have cautioned in relation to their own methods. For all her criticisms of models, she faces many of the same ones herself. It is particularly worrying that she feels able to repeatedly use the word 'indigenous' and suggest that her approach will allow her to best get an insider's view of first century Galilee via the "one basic cross-cultural universal", the human body which has left its traces in the landscape and architecture.<sup>60</sup> She treads on thin ice by claiming her ability to gain such an authentic picture of the Jewish response to Roman colonisation and Jesus' response within that via the archaeology of gender and caste, but then still admits the need for such work to supplement the social reconstructions deduced from universal sociological and ideological models.<sup>61</sup> So it is not that Sawicki is favouring archaeological approaches over others but is agreeing that a balanced approach is more favourable for building up a rounded picture of Galilee within which we might better understand the aims of the early Jesus movement. Her spatial interpretation of Galilee could easily accommodate an economic model to help facilitate understanding of the archaeological evidence, either as an overall analytical framework, as help gathering economic evidence or as a resource for interpretation. Economic models may not always be the most appropriate choice in every case but when the primary evidence is already suggesting the importance of economic themes or when economic conclusions are expected or sought, then they can be very valuable. Sawicki's focus on the circulation of people and things through their environment includes economic features such as resources and labour which, of course, might be better understood or organised through the lens of model. This defence of economic models is a reiteration of the compatibility of approaches mentioned so far as well as a reminder that this study of the gospel material has already pointed out the prevalence of economically relevant material throughout the life and teachings of Jesus. Indeed the Lenski model (which, notably, has been so frequently referenced by others in their own assessment of the usefulness of models) has been paid particular attention in this study and will later be judged on its ability to aid understanding of

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<sup>60</sup> Sawicki, M. (2000) p.63.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p.198.

a selection of biblical passages. Even those which are not explicitly economic models have an economic element to them or at least leave room for economic considerations.

Sawicki's description of her aims and approach does explain to an extent why she doesn't favour models because of their tendency to over-simplify. It is true that the many and varied aspects of any society will be difficult to grasp all at once by using models. This, however, is precisely the point. The thing that makes model use so valuable is its ability to focus one's attention on one aspect of the data and see what themes it brings to the surface. The examples chosen for closer inspection in this study also demonstrate the breadth of scope available. In the case of the Lenski model, agrarian society as a whole provides an economic framework by which certain features in the gospels might be understood. Its prevalence amongst users of social science models has made it quite influential to the point where its exclusion from this study would be strange. The Commercialisation model, also economic, has a closer focus on the Galilean context which allows for more detail. Theissen's Wandering Charismatics model and the Virtuoso Religion model both focus much more tightly on the life of Jesus, his disciples and their other supporters and followers. These are not economic models in the same sense as before although economic themes are still central. In each case, it seems that most of the major pitfalls possible with modelling have been avoided since all of them appear to be at least partially useful. There is an extent to which all of them, I am sure, are guilty of imposing some ethnocentric elements in the language for example but this is almost unavoidable as we have seen. None make any conscious attempt at imposing inappropriate cross-cultural data and none are too rigid that material inconsistent with the model's expectations must be ignored. I am not suggesting that any one of these models will be the key to unravelling the many mysteries of the gospels but I am suggesting that they may be helpful in determining the meaning of some major features of Jesus' lifestyle and teachings. I think they may be very helpful in making sense of the vast amount of gospel material pertaining to wealth and poverty in particular. This can then be taken a step further in asking what Jesus was trying to achieve, what changes he expected to see in society if any.

## Agrarian Society

Gerhard Lenski's *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* contains a detailed description of agrarian society but his evidence is drawn more often from European or Chinese sources than ones like the Bible. It has been the task of biblical scholars to apply this model in such a way that will be relevant for this study. Indeed plenty of them have allowed Lenski's work to form the basis for their own socio-economic explorations of Jesus' life and teachings. The lack of specific reference in his study to the very religious social world of the gospels reminds us to be cautious in applying a model that may not account for atypical agrarian features there<sup>62</sup>.

Lenski identifies two sociological traditions: the conservative 'functionalist' theory which recognises the inevitability of inequality in a society, and the more radical 'conflict' theory which categorises inequality as needless and immoral. He seeks a synthesis between the two theories in an attempt to address the question of distribution. The result is a pattern showing societies with increased *technology* producing more *surplus* which increases *distribution*. Primitive societies distribute by need; advanced societies distribute according to power. This pattern highlights how stratification i.e. an unequal balance of power and privilege, is basically a function of technology. Lenski sets his general theory against examinations of various types of social systems: hunting and gathering societies, simple and advanced horticultural societies, agrarian societies and industrial societies. Obviously, the quantity of variables present in any given society means a theory of distribution cannot escape being somewhat over-generalised, as this one is, but it is noteworthy that Lenski does take into account certain variables present in industrial societies, such as the massive surplus, political democracy and even the ideology of individual powerful figures, which results in a reversal of the trend. Interesting for our purposes then is his finding that stratification is at its most extreme in agrarian societies.

Certain characteristic features of agrarian societies, such as new and improved tools, skills and crafts, better military technology, larger populations, more urban communities, use of money and writing, increased trade and commerce and so on marked them out as more advanced than Hunter/Gatherer, Simple Horticultural and Advanced Horticultural societies. It

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<sup>62</sup> Ling, T. J. M (2006) *The Judaean Poor and the Fourth Gospel*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 136. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p.92.

is these as well as features like war and conquest, an inclination towards monarchical government, greater levels of specialisation and division of labour, debt, the relationship between state and religion, and the relationship between the tiny urban and vast rural populations that Lenski identifies as contributing to the cause and increase of stratification. Situations like war naturally favour those with money and power. Measures taken to control the poor by the powerful, that they both may remain so, include for example extending debts and money-lending. It is “the fact of *marked social inequality*”<sup>63</sup> that Lenski sees as the most striking of agrarian society’s features and the one for which the institutions of government are the main source. This means that the *upper* layers of agrarian societies are responsible for creating and maintaining divisions of power, privilege and honour. Thus far, the theory seems not to contradict gospel evidence; we know issues such as inequality concerned Jesus (e.g.Mt.5:3; Mt20:1-16).

The pattern of division consists basically of an upper (elite) and lower (non-elite) layer, the latter, which is mostly made up by peasants, being many times bigger than the former. Lenski presents this visually in his chapter on agrarian society as a graph<sup>64</sup>; this shows the model in its simplest form. It shows power and privilege far outweighing the numbers of the Rulers and Governing Class (rarely more than 2%)<sup>65</sup>. This group consisted of the highest officers of state, appointed either by the ruler or by inheritance. Besides what their positions paid, landownership was a major source of income. There is no middle class to speak of but the role of the Retainer Class could sometimes be to mediate between the elite and non-elite classes (though skills and duties varied and the lines on all sides were blurred) especially when effecting the transfer of economic surplus could mean dealing with hostility aimed at the elites. The fortunes of members of the Merchant Class, whose independence and ability to move around made them difficult to supervise, could vary too depending on their level of skill, their merchandise quality, their customers’ social status, their geographical range and so on. A similar situation faced those in the Priestly Class, that is, any full-time religious leader, whose status depended on which class they served/originated from. They were more likely to be literate and therefore useful in administrative roles and sometimes they enjoyed great political favour which could lead to personal gain as well as the spread of their religion. In terms of status, the Peasant Class is slightly easier to define in that it consisted mainly of poor farmers. Their fortunes rested largely on the quality of their harvest, which natural

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<sup>63</sup> Lenski, G. (1966) *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*. New York. McGraw-Hill. p.210.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* p.284.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p.219, 245.

phenomena could easily alter, and their ability to afford the taxes that supported the state and upper classes, imposed by said elites, who could demand up to two thirds of their income/crop. Sometimes worse off than a peasant could be a member of the Artisan Class. Their income could be less reliable but some with particular skills or high demand for their labours could prosper. Amongst the Unclean and Degraded Lenski includes groups considered inferior because of ethnicity, profession and even just offensive characteristics. Those with undesirable jobs like prostitution or the “untouchables” of Hindu society are classic examples. Finally, Lenski places those members of a society which produces more people than there is labour for in the group of the Expendables. Unable to be supported without diminishing the privileges of the rich, this group included beggars, outlaws, the unemployed and the sick who had to survive often by charity or by crime. Worth noting here, as Lenski does, is the fact that these divisions are largely economic and groups in agrarian society were often divided along religious or ethnic lines (being of the same religion as the ruler, for example, could be advantageous) and legal divisions existed too (e.g. nobility, serfdom and slavery). The vertical axis of the graph cannot really take these into account. All of the above could affect one’s personal status and freedom.

Lenski concludes his chapter on agrarian society by discussing vertical mobility and with a note on distributive justice. Downward mobility, he says, was very common given that more people usually existed than there were positions for in society, and the surplus from every level was driven down toward the expendable class. Upward mobility did exist, usually when a position created or left vacant meant someone of lower status was granted a promotion but extreme tales of ‘rags to riches’ were rare. Lenski notes the difficulty of measuring the rate of mobility in either direction since between any two particular classes “*there is no single rate and none which can safely be used as an indicator of all the others*”<sup>66</sup>. Too many other factors, including those affecting birth and mortality, those affecting trade and commerce, war and conquest, natural disaster or even just the character of the ruler could increase or decrease upward or downward mobility on a frequent basis. This leads on to what Lenski says about distributive justice at the end of the chapter. The level of downward mobility caused by a high birth rate meant distributive injustice was partly inevitable. If production levels stayed the same over any given period, the level of surplus could always change because of how the dominant classes decided to distribute it. Many would be left without enough to survive. Lenski concludes by defending the upper classes. Although the

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p.294.

relationship between the elite and non-elite classes was often “exploitative and parasitic”<sup>67</sup> the elites in these societies generally managed to maintain “a fair degree of *law and order*”<sup>68</sup>. The culture of reciprocity and patron-client relations in Jesus’ time meant order was maintained by mutual dependence and obligation but herein could also lay tension.

Without applying the model laid out in Lenski’s description of agrarian society to biblical texts we cannot yet thoroughly criticise it. Caution is essential, however, since Lenski’s examples of data, many as they are, come largely from areas such as Europe and China and less so from the Middle East, although he identifies the region’s fertile river valleys as those from which agrarian societies originate. On a positive note, no obstacle to an application of Lenski’s model to the gospels has emerged. Indeed, other scholars have made great use of it in their biblical investigations.

Fiensy<sup>69</sup> adapts his own model from Lenski with input from Alföldy<sup>70</sup> who generally agrees with Lenski on the shape taken by agrarian societies, e.g. that elites were more likely to be urban and comprised about 1% of the population and that the mainly rural non-elites greatly outweighed them. Alföldy’s divisions, based on Roman society, are more simply arranged into the upper and lower strata which emphasises the lack of a definable middle class but fails to appreciate the massive overlap that exists between certain groups, as pointed out in Lenski’s class descriptions. Stegemann and Stegemann<sup>71</sup>, who understand Jesus’ society based on Alföldy’s and Lenski’s structuring (using it as background, not as a model), speak of lower and upper stratum *groups* and criteria for belonging to them (such as wealth, power, responsibility and birth) in order to acknowledge the gradations that exist within the upper stratum and lower stratum without undermining the two-strata framework. Fiensy focuses more on the effect a person’s role, functions, possessions and geographical setting (urban or rural) in society dictate their fortune and status. He pays particular attention to the effect of land possession comparing the fortunes of land owners to tenant farmers, landless peasants and slaves. Increased population i.e. more people needing their own farming plots, and decreased availability of land due to it being bought by the aristocracy or even confiscated by

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p.296.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Fiensy, D. A. (1991) *The Social History of Palestine in the Herodian Period: The Land Is Mine*. Lewistone, NY. The Edwin Mellen Press. Fiensy, D. A. ‘Jesus’ Socio-Economic Background’ in Johns, L. L. & Charlesworth, J. H. eds. (1997) *Hillel and Jesus: Comparative Studies of Two Major Religious Leaders*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press.

<sup>70</sup> Alföldy, G. (1984) *The Social History of Rome*. London. Croom Helm.

<sup>71</sup> Stegemann, E. W. & Stegemann, W. (1999) *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*. Edinburgh. T & T Clark.

Herod (Josephus. *Ant.*17.305, 307) are among the reasons for increased tenancy and landlessness, says Fiensy<sup>72</sup>. He also considers this evidence that the Jubilee law (Lev.25:8-55) which allowed for the restitution of land and the release of slaves every fifty years was not being observed<sup>73</sup>. This suspicion is neither confirmed nor denied explicitly in the gospels although the parables of Jesus, which are so often concerned with agricultural life, paint a picture of strained relationships between landowners, stewards, farmers and day labourers (e.g. Matthew 20:1-16, Luke 16:1-13). A certain level of familiarity, perhaps because of his own social status, must have existed for Jesus to be aware of such troubles and for the stories to have been relatable for his audience. The issues may not have affected his everyday life (he was not a farmer) but his continued use of rural imagery and agricultural business concerns demonstrates the extent of the problem for him.

Fiensy sets about asking where Jesus fits into the agrarian society model by examining Jesus' geographical and socio-economic place within the structure of his Galilean background. Understood to be a τέκτων or carpenter as asserted by Mark 6:3 ("Is not this the carpenter...?") and supported by Matthew 13:55 ("Is this not the carpenter's son?"), Jesus comes from the artisan class which Fiensy identifies as being a group of mixed fortunes depending on how in-demand an individual's skills and services were. Status-wise they seem to have received less respect from Greeks or Romans than from Palestinian Jews<sup>74</sup> e.g. Josephus *Ant.*3.200, 8.76. The job itself would have involved making any number of different products with various tools and techniques and Fiensy asks whether Jesus was a village artisan making, for example, agricultural equipment (ploughs, yokes etc.) for local farmers or whether he was involved in large-scale projects in the cities near Nazareth. The (re)construction of urban centres like Sepphoris and Tiberias may have provided lucrative and sustained periods of employment for the likes of Jesus and his family. Fiensy ventures the possibility that they may have even travelled as far as Jerusalem to work on the Temple, perhaps explaining Jesus' familiarity with people in Jerusalem<sup>75</sup> and his ability to comment on the fortunes of both rich and poor in his teachings. Indeed the gospels show Jesus mixing with figures from the upper classes (e.g. Mk.14:3; 15:43; Lk.19:1-10) and using examples of great wealth and businesses in his parables (Mt.18:23-35; 25:14-30; Lk.16:1-9) which some

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<sup>72</sup> Fiensy, D. A. (1991), pp.77-78.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* pp.6-9.

<sup>74</sup> Fiensy, D. A. (1997) pp.239-40.

<sup>75</sup> Fiensy, D. A. (1997), p.250, citing Oakman, D. E. (1986) *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, Lewiston, NY. Edwin Mellen Press. pp.185-93.

would argue was proof of his own good fortune<sup>76</sup>. Fiensy thinks that if Jesus did indeed work as a travelling artisan his participation in large projects in cities for the upper classes could account for his more developed social experience, that is, his ability to deal with the great cultural gap between urban and rural. It doesn't confirm his place amongst the elites<sup>77</sup>. On the other hand, Jesus seems not to have been destitute.

Examinations such as Fiensy's clearly demonstrate that Lenski's agrarian model is useful for examining Jesus' society. Lenski's comments on distribution show agrarian societies to be quite advanced in that they distribute according to power rather than need and this is certainly the case in the first century. The Galilean elite consisted of a few mainly urban-based wealthy families including, of course, the Herods and the large rural peasantry made up most of the population and generated most of the wealth that supported the minute elite. Agriculture forms the basis for many of Jesus' parables suggesting great frequency of large estates with absentee landlords who employed stewards, tenant farmers, day labourers etc. who lived in varying degrees of poverty<sup>78</sup>. The number of references in Jesus' teachings concerning the poor, his healings and exorcisms and contact with undesirable members of society (e.g. "tax collectors and sinners" Mk.2:15-17) seem to confirm the agrarian model's description of a vast amount of the population experiencing downward mobility, living near or below subsistence level and possibly coming from the unclean/degraded and expendable classes. As for Jesus himself, it is simple enough to place him within the artisan class but not so simple to discuss his exact quality of life. The gospels, whilst not recording his early working days, do not rule out the possibility that he helped satisfy the demand for skilled artisans in some of Herod Antipas' building projects because of his appearance in and reference to both urban and rural settings. This model, set out by Lenski and put to the test by the likes of Fiensy, is shown by them to be a helpful way of discuss Jesus, his teaching and his socioeconomic background. In due course its effectiveness for discussing particular passages and Jesus' social intentions will be discussed.

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<sup>76</sup> Buchanan, G. W. (1964) 'Jesus and the Upper Class'. *Novum Testamentum*. Vol.7. pp.195-209.

<sup>77</sup> Fiensy, D. A. (1997), p.252.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* p.231-37.



## Commercialisation in Agrarian Society

This approach is more targeted than the model for agrarian society discussed above because it concerns a particular aspect of agrarian society in the time of Jesus. It consists generally of the socio-economic categories set out by Lenski, applied to Jesus' setting and the additional evidence of socio-economic change within that setting. That is, it approaches the life and teachings of Jesus through the social, political and economic changes that were happening where and when he grew up and preached. Recent scholarship has focused greatly on investigating the Galilean social situation as context for the life and teachings of Jesus. Approaching Jesus from the specific goings on of his home region (as opposed to agrarian societies in general) may affect the research outcome. If certain features of agrarian society in Galilee can be isolated to form a separate useful model for approaching Jesus then we can begin to ask what the impact of this was and if that impact, whether positive or negative (or both), can be identified in the Gospels.

Carney's study of antiquity<sup>79</sup> describes economic stagnation in society that resulted from a very powerful minority elite interested only in literary, military and administrative goals for itself, not commerce or industry beneficial to the whole community. Even ideas were allowed to stagnate since only a tiny proportion of the population would be educated. He describes these selfish values as 'anti-technological' and 'anti-economic'<sup>80</sup>. Any society this advanced must include a certain amount of economic activity, however, if only in the distribution of basic resources like food. Freyne<sup>81</sup> describes a Galilee that enjoyed the benefits of certain naturally occurring features such as its situation near to trade routes via Tyre and Sidon, and the Sea of Galilee. The gospels document a thriving fishing industry in places like Bethsaida, Capernaum and Taricheae. Jesus, of course, called fishermen disciples away from their businesses (e.g. Mark 1:16-20). So far this paints a positive economic picture of Galilean life. Freyne even notes how Mark's gospel, at least, seems not to reflect a large proportion of people living in grinding poverty. Most important for a reply to the points being made by Carney is the information regarding development happening in Galilee under the reign of Herod Antipas. As noted in the previous section, the impact of the ruler in Galilee was felt greatly by his construction work in Sepphoris (just 6km from Jesus' hometown, Nazareth) and the founding of Tiberias near the shores of the lake (especially if craftsmen like Jesus and

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<sup>79</sup> Carney, T. F. (1975) *The Shape of the Past: Models and Antiquity*. Lawrence, Kansas. Coronado Press.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. pp.106-7.

<sup>81</sup> Freyne, S. (1988) *Galilee, Jesus and the Gospels: Literary Approaches and Historical Investigations*. Philadelphia. Fortress Press.

his family were given employment for these projects). Antipas, carrying on the work of his father Herod the Great, dedicated these works to the Roman rulers of the time (Augustus and Tiberius respectively), demonstrating the 'Romanisation' process<sup>82</sup> and massive Roman influence in Galilee at the time.

As well as large-scale politically motivated construction projects, small-scale changes like merchant activity and interdependency of peasant communes were impacting on the wider economy. Evidence for such things suggests that Galilee may have been an exception to Carney's observation about economic stagnation within ancient agrarian economies. Kautsky notes that private landowners were able to make large amounts of profit from peasant labour. Although the majority of communities in the Roman Empire were self-sufficient, any surplus produced could be traded with nearby communities which naturally favoured those closer to them.<sup>83</sup> Those with better connections and less far to transport goods could develop better business relations with merchants (who became wealthier and more numerous) and could therefore become powerful landowners gaining more surplus than the craftsmen or peasant masses<sup>84</sup>. This snowballing effect threw out of balance the self-sufficiency of peasant communes who developed only as far as their production output would allow because relationships with merchants brought in otherwise unavailable goods and trade favoured craftsmen<sup>85</sup>. Since commerce and transportation went hand in hand, merchants were not often settled and they provided a link between rural peasant areas and urban settlements where the markets were<sup>86</sup>. Control lay in the hands of the large landowners still and they utilised the exploitative tactics of slavery and usury (cf. Mt. 18:23-35) to increase the agricultural surplus for the betterment of themselves, not those who had produced it<sup>87</sup>. Whilst the subjects of agriculture, landownership and the related issues are frequently addressed in the Gospels (e.g. Mt. 20:1-16), Kautsky notes the existence of industry in the time of Jesus was on a petty scale only as was trade and commerce. "Hence the concentration of wealth in a few hands did not by any means signify increased productivity of labour, let alone a basis for the productive process and so for social existence. Instead of constituting a development of the productive forces, it meant nothing more than accumulation of the means of pleasure in such quantity

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<sup>82</sup> Freyne, S. (2008) 'Galilee, Jesus and the Contribution of Archaeology'. *The Expository Times*. 119. pp.573-581.

<sup>83</sup> Kautsky, K. (2008) *Foundations of Christianity*. London. IMG Publications. p.21-22.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* p.42.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* p.44.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* p.41.

that the individual was simply unable to consume them all himself, and had no alternative to sharing them with others.”<sup>88</sup>

It seems then that any stimulation to the economy through commercialisation that had any chance of benefitting the common man was not deliberate but merely a side-effect of an avaricious few squeezing more from the peasants than they could use themselves. The same may be said of the features of Galilean history already mentioned such as the Antipas’ development and building projects. These were not undertaken to create employment opportunities for craftsmen and merchants but this was certainly a by-product. Other features like the fishing industry were naturally aided by the position and size of the lake and uncontrollable variables like the weather.

All this points to the difficulty of summing up the model for commercialisation in agrarian society since the stagnation spoken of by Carney is generally apparent even if it may be more accurate to say that society was intellectually more ‘a-economic’ than anti-economic. We find ourselves defining commercialisation in *Galilean* agrarian society much more easily because of its unique historical and political context. Its geographical location and natural resources favoured trade and industry in addition to the dominant agricultural industry and may account for Freyne’s observation that Mark’s gospel records less severe poverty. The matter, however, is not simply that Galilee was an agrarian society with slightly more commercial activity and fewer problems. The parables in particular reflect the strongly agricultural setting (e.g. Mt.13:24-30), the division and tensions between rich and poor (particularly in e.g. Luke 16:19-31), and Josephus records a certain amount of rural/urban tension in Galilee (e.g. *Life*, 390-2).

Herod Antipas seems to have posed less of a political threat to Jesus than the Jerusalem authorities<sup>89</sup> but he does seem to avoid the Galilean urban centres and the gospels are not without mention of the danger. Luke, for example, does this (13:31) even without the wider context of the beheading of John the Baptist (cf. Mark 6:14-29). Such acknowledgements broaden out the subject of Jesus’ Galilean context beyond the economic issue(s) but may also help to inform it by answering the question of whether commercialisation in Galilee, if it can be identified, is a positive or negative thing. It will certainly be interesting to bear in mind the question and also ask what Jesus’ response to increased commercialisation might have been.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p.176.

<sup>89</sup> Freyne, S. (1988) p.220.

His criticisms of accumulated wealth in general would suggest that any business arrangements designed purely for profit should also be criticised.

## Wandering Charismatics

Gerd Theissen's approach to Jesus as leader of an itinerant group of charismatic preachers is an attempt to describe the chosen lifestyle of Jesus and his disciples, and explain the relationship between this and some of their teachings and more radical ethics by way of reference to the social context. For Theissen, 'charisma' refers to the authority (ἐξουσία) attributed to Jesus, evident in his teachings and miracles (e.g. Mark 1:21f.), and developing in the relationships with his family, teachers, disciples and opponents. It has the advantage of being independent from but not incompatible with other Christological titles.<sup>90</sup> The definition is sociological in nature, emphasising the importance of interactions.

When looking at Theissen's description of what conditions are necessary for discipleship, it would be natural to question the features that seem to encourage keeping interactions to a minimum. Homelessness (e.g. Mt.8:20), renunciation of family (e.g. Lk.14:26) and the criticism of wealth and possessions (e.g. Mk.10:25; Mt.6:25f.) seem to create distance, not relationships between people. To this, Theissen would answer by outlining his thesis: "It is only in this context that the ethical precepts which match this way of life can be passed on without being unconvincing"<sup>91</sup>. That is to say, they practice what they preach so that their sayings cannot easily be reinterpreted or reduced to allegory. Separation from home and family meant separation from the traditional support network in favour of an alternative, one that consisted not only of the other wandering charismatics but also of those members of society who were sympathetic to the group but remained settled in their homes<sup>92</sup> and who might fulfil the role of host to the wanderers if necessary (Mt.10:11-15). Without these supportive interactions the itinerant lifestyle would have been unsustainable. Theissen favours the Christological title 'the Son of Man', deeming this the most appropriate because it "expresses the internal perspective of the Jesus movement and is particularly closely connected with it"<sup>93</sup>. It also, apparently, most closely reflects the way the disciples deal with their changing sociological role, including issues such as their newfound authority within small groups of believers and persecution from outsiders (Mk.2:10; 2:23-28; 9:31; Mt.11:18f.; 8:20; 10:21-23; 19:28).

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<sup>90</sup> Theissen, G. & Merz, A.(1998) *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*. London. SCM Press Ltd.pp.185-6.

<sup>91</sup> Theissen, G. (1993) *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics, and the World of the New Testament*. Edinburgh. T&T Clark. p.40.

<sup>92</sup> Theissen, G. (1978) *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*. Philadelphia. Fortress Press. p.17f.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* p.25.

Theissen takes a little time to compare the features of the Jesus movement with groups that may have shared a common sociological background. He notes certain similarities of lifestyle with itinerant Cynic philosophers (Lk.9:3; 10:4)<sup>94</sup>, as well as the Qumran community (Mt.10:9f.; Mk.10:17f.; Lk.6:20f.) and suggests that these common features may have attracted the same kind of people<sup>95</sup>. People may have been attracted to the Jesus movement, for the same reasons Theissen suggests they may have been attracted to other renewal movements within Judaism such as the Qumran community, resistance fighters and prophetic movements. The ‘social rootlessness’ of these movements could also be found amongst emigrants, new settlers, beggars and robbers<sup>96</sup>. Movement into a group like the Jesus movement, then, is just moving from one form of rootlessness to another. This pattern of rootlessness was quite widespread then, at least amongst certain groups, and was the result of socio-economic changes such as natural disaster (Mk.13:8), over-population (*War* 3.3.2; *Life* 45), concentration of possessions (*Ant.*17.11.2; Luke 19.26), and struggle for the distribution of goods (Mt.5:25f.; 18:23f.; Lk.16:1f.)<sup>97</sup>. As we know from examining the work of Lenski, for example, poverty affected a large proportion of the population in societies such as this and Theissen is aware of its prevalence, but he thinks the causes of social uprooting do not necessarily originate with those already included in the lowest classes. He includes the disciples of Jesus, who were part of a class that included farmers and fishermen (e.g.Mk.1:16), in a marginal middle class “which reacted with peculiar sensitivity to the upward and downward trends within society”<sup>98</sup>. So it is the *threat* of poverty as much as poverty itself that explains movement into a state of social rootlessness. Many people in this position would be attracted towards the structure, stability and teachings of groups like the Jesus movement because they not only grew out of but offered solutions to society's social problems.

Their stance on wealth and possessions was mixed to the extent that they were critical of riches (Mk.10:25; Lk.6:24) but also tolerant (Mk.15:43; Lk.7:36-38; 8:3; Lk.19:1-10) which Theissen attributes to the needs of their itinerant lifestyle. Wealthy people evidently sometimes formed an important part of the settled community. They were able to provide support for the wandering charismatics who in turn were able to maintain a credible

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<sup>94</sup> Theissen, G. (1993), pp.46-7. This study explores the Cynic comparison more thoroughly elsewhere.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* p.76.

<sup>96</sup> Theissen, G. (1978), pp.33-37.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* p.40.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* p.46.

condemnation of wealth and possessions. For them the system was complimentary, not contradictory<sup>99</sup>. From an outward perspective, the contradictory elements of the teachings on riches remain. To whom did they apply? The implication is that renunciation of riches was not essential for salvation but that still leaves a question hanging over whether this makes hypocrites out of the itinerants, ever-ready to criticise the wealth that helped keep them alive. Theissen notes the ambivalence of the teaching but is unconcerned. The group practiced what they preached, creating continuity between their lifestyle and their teachings. Most importantly these were the lifestyle and teachings maintained by Jesus himself which meant continuity between him and the disciples through the missionary charge (Lk.10:16; Mt.10:40). To take this principle one more step is to question the continuity between Jesus and his words as they were transmitted by the disciples, by the writers of the gospels, and by the developing Church. "If by the Church we understand local congregations and their institutions, then there is no sociological continuity between Jesus and Christianity in its early form. But it was different in the case of the wandering charismatics. Here Jesus' social situation and the social situation of one branch of early Christianity are comparable: Jesus was the first wandering charismatic."<sup>100</sup> Not everyone can be, let alone was, a wandering charismatic, however. As early Christianity developed, Theissen attributed its survival to the social form love patriarchy which made it "a practicable form of living for men and women in general"<sup>101</sup>.

The movement's early days, however, were marred by much tension both from particular opponents like the Pharisees and from society in general. Tension led to various forms of aggression which the Jesus movement countered with the commandment to love. For more radical forms of tension and aggression a more radical form of the love commandment was necessary, the command to "love your enemies" (Mt.5:44)<sup>102</sup>. This technique could be manipulated for almost any purpose. Aggression towards the Jesus movement could be transferred elsewhere, for example onto demons which would then be exorcised. It could be projected forward, in eschatological hope of judgement against the aggressors. Also, it could be reversed directly against the aggressor but in the form of a moral reproach or appeal as well as the call to repentance and the intensification of norms (Lk.13:1f.)<sup>103</sup>. The

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p.38.

<sup>100</sup> Theissen, G. (1993), p. 45.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. pp.58-59.

<sup>102</sup> Theissen, G. (1978), p.99.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. pp.100-103.

intensification of certain laws such as those against killing and adultery expected more than was humanly possible (Mt.5:22, 28) but Theissen identifies that this radicalisation of Torah law lead one naturally to the proclamation of the grace of God (Mk.10:27)<sup>104</sup>. Theissen's look at the socio-political background of the love commandment shows it had success due to the fact that non-violent efforts had proved effective against the Romans previously, but he adds that effectiveness was not the expectation and the commandment's strength lay in its adaptability to any time or situation<sup>105</sup>. The Jesus movement took its radicalisation ethic to its extreme end, by turning the usual tension reducing tactic of blaming a scapegoat against itself, in the crucifixion of Jesus (Mk.10:45; 14:24; 1 Cor.15:3)<sup>106</sup>.

Before concluding it is worth briefly drawing attention to some of the criticisms brought against Theissen's argument by Horsley in *Sociology and the Jesus Movement*<sup>107</sup>. Focusing on the work *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, his criticisms are based both on the way in which Theissen's investigation is carried out and the thesis itself ranging from the general to the specific. Generally he takes issue with Theissen's use of the functionalist method saying it has lead him into the dangers of neglecting to deal adequately with history, social change and the seriousness of conflict, and being too abstract with regard to describing social systems. He has also not given adequate definitions of certain terms, including a *social* definition of religion, and has made vague use of conceptual apparatus and analytical categories. Horsley's other grievances include leaving Jewish Palestine separate from the wider context of the Hellenistic world and the Roman Empire, a problem exacerbated by use of functionalist theory. With regard to the wandering charismatics themselves, he finds information is too scarce to speak as Theissen does about the role of the sympathising settled community and finds no evidence to support the movement's relationship with the eschatological role of the Son of Man. It is the lack of evidence in general that underpins his criticism and much of what evidence there is he does not think has always been appropriately used. It cannot support, for example, the understanding that ancient Jewish society included a 'middle class' and that people like fishermen belonged to it. His procedure of using categories has meant the effect of phenomena like natural disaster and taxation on the lives of the common people has not been properly examined, and how the Jesus movement dealt with such effects like hunger and debt. Therefore there is a gap between the concrete suffering of

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid. pp.105-6.

<sup>105</sup> Theissen, G. (1993) p.154.

<sup>106</sup> Theissen, G. (1978) p.109.

<sup>107</sup> Horsley, R. A. (1994) *Sociology and the Jesus Movement*. New York Continuum. pp.30-64.



the people and the Jesus movement, which is not consistent with the picture of the movement present in the gospels. Horsley is not convinced by the connection made with itinerant Cynic philosophers since their itinerancy served a different purpose to that of Jesus and the disciples.

Horsley raises a number of critical issues, the key to which seems to be the questions raised about the theory's social background. A theory about the way Jesus lived and conducted his ministry that is not firmly grounded in the social, economic, political and cultural background is not a useful one and the extent of this problem will be tested in due course. For now it is only useful to point out the interesting way Theissen relates the lifestyle of the Jesus movement to its teachings, by portraying them as living out the very things they preached in order to justify them. Theissen defines 'charisma' as depending heavily on relationships and interactions which is evident in the way he describes the threefold structure of the movement (Jesus, the disciples, and the settled sympathisers), despite the initial feeling of contradiction with the wandering rootless lifestyle. He sees the teachings on wealth and the commandment to love one's enemies as answers to the socio-economic 'tensions' of the day as well as also being essential to the radical itinerant ethos. Most interestingly of all perhaps is the way in which he creates structural continuity between the Jesus movement, its eschatological preaching through Jesus' Son of Man role, and its development into early Christianity. It will be fascinating to see how (and indeed, if) this theory stands up to critical application through exegesis of scriptural examples.

## Virtuoso Religion

Formulating a model of Virtuoso Religion that may be applied to the Jesus movement relies on Lenski's description of agrarian society and the various works that have also done so for approaching the society, lifestyle, teachings and person of Jesus whilst acknowledging Lenski's lack of specific reference to the structures of first century Palestine. As one may expect scholars have had to build upon the foundation of the Agrarian model by considering the religious structures that may undermine the typical agrarian pattern. This is particularly relevant for virtuoso religion which, as we shall see, exhibits features incompatible with the traditional political, economic or even religious hierarchies<sup>108</sup>. This is not to deny the usefulness of the agrarian model for demonstrating, for example, economic stratification since this helps explain Jesus' stance on wealth which may in turn support claims that he was a virtuoso. Before being able to address such a claim, the model must be traced through its development in order to understand a definition.

Max Weber identified that religious stratification exists not only between those in positions of organisational authority and those not, but also between virtuosi whose intense upholding of a tradition's values earns them an elevated religious status and those Weber calls "religiously 'unmusical'"<sup>109</sup>. This naturally presents multiple opportunities for conflict where the institution wishes to impose values on the masses approved as an official path to salvation and the virtuoso follows an autonomous path more spiritual and individualistic in nature. A key feature of virtuoso religion noted by Weber was asceticism, which pursues perfection in such a way as to generate great public esteem for the virtuoso. Whether simply by setting a positive example or by direct participation in the spiritual lives of the wider congregation, virtuosi exercise quite a powerful influence which may challenge or appear to challenge the authority of the hierarchy. Tension between these two types of elite is to be expected as their religious outlook and interactions with the community contrast. Important for this study is the way Weber says virtuoso religion saw itself in relation to the world. He identified that when virtuoso religion is contemplative or ecstatic in character it distances itself from the everyday life of laymen and is too abstract to bear any relation to the economic life of the community. Ascetic sects, he says, display feelings of disenchantment with the world but see deliberate

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<sup>108</sup> Ling, T. J. M. (2006) *The Judaean Poor and the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p.92.

<sup>109</sup> Weber, M. 'The Social Psychology of the World Religions' in Gerth, H. H. & Wright Mills, C. eds. (2009) *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. London. Routledge. p.287.

separation from the world as an obstacle to salvation. They seek to mould life, to “rationalise the world ethically in accordance with God’s commandments”.<sup>110</sup>

This positioning of virtuoso religion in relation to the tradition from which it originates, as well as its place within the sociological context, is included in the main focus of work by Michael Hill. He built upon Weber’s distinctions by differentiating charismatic religion as well as virtuoso and mass religion saying that whilst virtuoso and charismatic religion seem indistinguishable because of their empirical similarities they are analytically different.

Virtuosi seek to interpret the normative obligations of their tradition rigorously and perfectly whereas charismatics seek to dismantle normative obligations and preach new ones.

“Charismatics proclaim a message: virtuosi proclaim a method.”<sup>111</sup> Hill requires sects to be distinguished from religious orders to stress their liminal position whereas Weber put sects in the virtuoso category. He calls the religious order a “sect within a church”<sup>112</sup> which, unlike the sect, doesn’t set itself apart from both the church and the rest of humanity. Remaining embedded within the church, however, implies a tension that is ever-present but doesn’t necessarily boil over into conflict. The exemplary practice of virtuosi means the main body of the church often grant them special honour and endorsement, without expecting the whole congregation to follow their lead. Hill gives celibacy in Christianity as an example, a state that typifies the virtuoso’s perfection ideal, that has sometimes been essential for the clergy but deemed unnecessary and impractical for the wider population<sup>113</sup>. This demonstrates the potential for disagreement whilst showing that virtuosi can manage their liminal position by respecting both the authority of the order and the wider church.

Discussion of the complex relationship between church and virtuosi is further developed by Silber who agrees with Hill’s distinction of mass, virtuoso and charismatic religion. She lists six features of virtuoso religion:

- Virtuoso religion is a matter of individual choice;
- Virtuoso religion involves an intensification of personal commitment over normal compulsory religious routine norms and behaviour;

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p.289-291

<sup>111</sup> Hill, M. (1973) *The Religious Order*. London. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. p.2

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. p.12.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. p.50-51.

- Virtuoso religion involves the seeking of perfection, an extreme urge to go beyond everyday life and average religious achievement;
- The seeking of perfection involved in virtuoso religion is sustained in a disciplined, systematic fashion, a defined rule or method;
- Virtuoso religion implies a normative double standard; its rigor is not only not necessary for all, but also impossible for all;
- Virtuoso religion is based in achievement and non-ascriptive criteria, and is in principle an option for all, although in practice only achieved by an 'heroic' minority.<sup>114</sup>

She acknowledges that some of the features may be present in charismatic religion but not all. The closeness and even fluidity that exists between charisma and virtuosity is not consistent enough to prevent virtuoso religion from being categorised as a distinctive sociological type. It is not anti-institutional like charisma which is resistant to rational planning and discipline but it experiences friction against the institution because of its strict, ideological, alternative approach to the tradition.<sup>115</sup> In theory virtuosity is open to all members of the community, though that would be redundant and impossible in practice, and so is charisma but that openness would fundamentally contradict the character of charisma as a spontaneous personal gift. This explains why the normative double standard Silber describes above need not apply to charisma.<sup>116</sup> These different types of elitism, where charisma (which is a gift) implies greater superiority than virtuosity (which can be taught), affect their relationship with the wider community since virtuosity is more self-sufficient and relies less on external recognition. Silber does point out the difference between occasional localised instances of virtuoso religion and times when it is institutionally sustained and reinforced to the point of forming monasticism, which hints at the many ways virtuosity can develop and interact with society. Virtuosity's perfection ideal, achievement-based membership and respected status can encourage a separation and differentiation from society which both parties are responsible for but at the same time, says Silber, segregation can be counterbalanced by the on-going material and symbolic exchange. Maintenance of an open relationship and optional

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<sup>114</sup> Silber, I. F. (1995) *Virtuosity, Charisma, and Social Order: A Comparative Sociological Study of Monasticism in Theravada Buddhism and Medieval Catholicism*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p.190-1

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. p.191.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. p.192.

participation prevents full institutionalisation and leaves the virtuoso-society complex in a precarious position.<sup>117</sup>

Weber included sects in the category of virtuosity when discussing its position in society whereas Hill and Silber, more convincingly, differentiate sects from virtuoso and mass religion. Ling agrees and praises Silber<sup>118</sup> for her treatment of how problematic virtuosity's liminality can be both for defining and distinguishing itself whilst also integrating with the wider social community and perfectly representing traditional values. Ling adopts Silber's use of the term 'anti-structure'.<sup>119</sup> "Anti-structure usually refers to temporary, transitory, and liminal conditions or situations in social life which are conducive to solidary, non-hierarchical modes of fellowship. Within virtuoso religion, this anti-structure is not a passing phase but rather becomes a structure in itself, which eventually may become part of the wider social structure."<sup>120</sup> He then, accounting for necessary adjustments to the agrarian model, focuses this on the socio-political context of first century Judea which includes a hierarchical political structure often at odds with the ideology of the Temple-centric religion, and pressures from Roman 'patronage'. He sees the resultant elite/non-elite dichotomy as a typical backdrop to the emergence of virtuoso religion which addresses their inability to uphold shared values equally. "Such anti-structure provides a locus for mediating the cultural contradictions within the social world. Virtuoso religion generates a set of counter values within which both elite and non-elite may honourably participate."<sup>121</sup> This can occur in the sense of active participation in the group or by simply supporting the group from outside it, both of which could be socially and economically beneficial. Elite patrons would utilise their power without compromising themselves politically or morally and non-elite support would help them assert and empower themselves. Ling appears to be saying that virtuosity, by providing an alternative structure which includes elite and non-elite in alternative roles, transcends them both. He is certainly saying not only that the context of asymmetrical power relations and belief in the perfectibility of the individual *could* allow virtuoso religion to appear and flourish, but that in first century Judea it did. The Essenes and similar 'pietists'

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. p.194-7.

<sup>118</sup> Ling, T. J. M. (2006) *The Judaean Poor and the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p.72-4.

<sup>119</sup> Silber adopted this term from Turner, V. (1974) *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca, NY. Cornell University Press.

<sup>120</sup> Ling, T. J. M. (2006) p.73.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. p.76.

responded morally and passively to the dominant order, using their chosen ascetic lifestyle to demonstrate an alternative to Temple hierarchy thereby undermining its validity.<sup>122</sup>

Looking more closely at the Essenes as a real example of virtuoso practice in Judea is Capper. He sees some features of the general context and specific features of their teachings and practice that are consistent with virtuoso religion, saying that Essenism grew up in the second century B.C.E. in reaction to the pressures imposed by Greek and Roman powers. Their greed prompted a focus on the virtue of personal poverty and intense devotion to God as the real provider. For Essenes this manifested itself in the form of celibacy, renunciation of personal property and community sharing.<sup>123</sup> This upholding of opposite values to the political elite served as a protest in itself and elevated their status in terms of holiness and honour. This is consistent with the differentiation seen so far between the two types of elite. Essene documents in the Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g. the *Rule of the Community*) depict them as strict adherents to rules and method, providing more support to Capper's recognition of them as virtuosi.<sup>124</sup> He has argued statistically for a wider distribution of marrying Essenes throughout Judea based on numbers of celibate males given by Josephus and Philo.<sup>125</sup> If Essenes were just a small sect detached from the wider community at Qumran, they could not be considered virtuosi but if Capper's calculations are accepted, an assessment can be made of Essene impact on society from a liminal position. Josephus refers to behaviour including making temple offerings, receiving patronage from Herod the Great, and assisting the needy<sup>126</sup> which Capper observes shows a respect for the Temple establishment, a positive relationship with the political authorities, and a desire to serve the wider community.<sup>127</sup> This social integration balanced with features that distinguish Essenes from the wider community and earn them special honour is suggestive of virtuoso liminality.

John the Baptist appears to have upheld similar values (see Luke 3:7-14 on sharing property), though he was probably not an Essene himself. His connection to Jesus and his group of

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid. p.96.

<sup>123</sup> Capper, B. J. (2011) 'How Did Jesus Help the Poor? Virtuoso Religion as Stimulus to Economic Sharing in the Jesus Movement.' *The Qumran Chronicle*. Vol. 19, No. 3-4. pp.97-139. See Josephus on celibacy, renunciation and sharing (JW 2.8.2-3).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. p.7

<sup>125</sup> Capper, B. J. 'The New Covenant in Southern Palestine at the Arrest of Jesus' in James R. Davila ed. (2003) *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity*. Leiden/Boston. Brill. pp.90-116.

<sup>126</sup> Josephus, *JW* 18.1.5; *Ant.* 15.10.4-5; *JW* 2.8.6.

<sup>127</sup> Capper, B. J. 'John, Qumran and Virtuoso Religion' in Coloe, M. L. and Thatcher, T. eds. (2011) *John, Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Sixty Years of Discovery and Debate*. Atlanta. Society of Biblical Literature. p.102.

disciples is well attested (Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3:1-22; John 1:19-43) and they seemed to share similar itinerant lifestyles and similar theological, soteriological and sociological ideas.<sup>128</sup> We know Jesus objected to the economic injustices and religious hypocrisy amongst the ruling authorities, whilst still respecting and remaining part of their structures but championing proper devotion to God above all things (e.g. Mark 12:13-17). Even if one does not accept Capper's calculations for the extent of Essenism in Judea, the similarities that exist between Essenes, John the Baptist and Jesus may support the idea that he was influenced by these Judea-based concepts and took them back with him to Galilee where he began gathering disciples. Capper argues that these first century virtuosi may have inherited the model from a long history of developments going back to the Old Testament prophets who regularly opposed the religious and political elites of their day and held a liminal position in society.<sup>129</sup> A close familiarity with scripture allowed Jesus and John the Baptist to closely emulate the activities and lifestyles of Elijah and Elisha.<sup>130</sup> Jesus' call to his disciples is strikingly similar to Elijah's call of Elisha (e.g. Mark 1:16-20 cf. 1 Kings 19:19-21), including its voluntariness to an itinerant career. They also travelled and seem to have relied on the support of patrons rather than on their own wealth (1 Kings 17:8-24; 2 Kings 4:8-37). Jesus did not imitate the prophets' virtuosity perfectly; he lays greater emphasis on renunciation of property and community of goods, living out an ideal alternative in protest to elite society's greed. "These differences show the *adaptation of the scriptural model to Jesus' own purposes* and to the needs of the age, and the prominence of the problems of poverty and wealth amongst those needs."<sup>131</sup>

Jesus and the disciples appear to have had a structure in place for ensuring their own financial security, but only in the sense of having *just enough*. Jesus frequently advocated living according to need rather than desire (see e.g. the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, Matthew 20:1-16; 'Give us each day our daily bread', Luke 11:3/Matthew 6:11). The group received support from wealthy patrons, often figures who had been helped directly by them (Luke 8:1-3), and held money under the supervision of Judas, one of the twelve (John 12:6). From this common purse it appears the needs of the group were paid for as well as donations made to the poor (Matthew 26:8-9; Mark 14:4-5; John 13:29). It is mainly John who mentions these practices, which may reflect links between the Johannine tradition and forms

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<sup>128</sup> Capper, B. J. (2011) 'How Did Jesus Help the Poor? Virtuoso Religion as Stimulus to Economic Sharing in the Jesus Movement.' *The Qumran Chronicle*. Vol. 19, No. 3-4. pp.97-139.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. (My italics.) Allowing for Jesus' adaptability prevents accusations of cross-cultural contamination.

of virtuoso religion. Capper argues for an Essene presence at the locations of the sayings John 12:6 and 13:29 (that is, at Bethany and the Upper Room in southwest Jerusalem), which implies that John is acknowledging the similarities of practices between the Essenes and Jesus.<sup>132</sup> If this was the case then Capper's vision of Jesus taking back to Galilee the virtuoso concepts he learned from Essene connections and John the Baptist, gathering and teaching a group of disciples, then bringing them back to Judea to reconnect with what may have been a well-established Essene community in Jerusalem may be accurate.

Jesus taught his disciples to live according to rules closely resembling those of the travelling celibate male Essenes (e.g. Josephus *Jewish War* 2.8.4 cf. Mt.10:9-10; Mk. 6:8-9; Lk. 9:3; 10:4; 22:35). The restrictions he placed on their own personal belongings reflects the example he wanted to set as a virtuoso to the rest of the community and served as a critique of the avaricious elite, on top of the many and varied sayings and parables condemning wealth (e.g. Matt. 13:22; Mark 10:25). It is perhaps surprising then that he did not demand renunciation of property of all his settled followers, except that it does reflect the complicated virtuoso/society relationship, including the blurred lines that distinguish the virtuoso, their liminal position and the voluntariness of the membership. Also consistent with the features identified so far is the tension felt between Jesus and the religious authorities. On more than one occasion is Jesus seen to be clashing with Pharisees and Sadducees. Virtuoso religion risks its alternative take on values being rejected by the establishment since the balance between simply being exceptionally pious and actually altering or reversing the traditional teachings is quite fine (e.g. Matt. 12:1-14). In the case of Jesus his take on the tradition was considered quite threatening and lead to complete rejection but he had ensured the future of his movement through strong instillation of his values in his disciples and other followers. Capper suggests that the foot-washing incident in John 13:1-17 depicts Jesus symbolising a servant role and thus setting an example of the servant role the disciples should play for each other (vv.14-16). This plus his emphasis at the Last Supper on mutual love (13:33-34; 15:12-15) may indicate the initiation of the disciples into an established virtuoso form that included sharing property and serving each other but of which Jesus would not be a part (13:33).<sup>133</sup> There is evidence in Acts of the continuation of the virtuoso property sharing practice which may have been a new community but may have been incorporated into an existing Essene

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<sup>132</sup> Capper, B. J. 'John, Qumran and Virtuoso Religion' in Coloe, M. L. and Thatcher, T. eds. (2011) *John, Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Sixty Years of Discovery and Debate*. Atlanta. Society of Biblical Literature. p.108-12.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. p.115.



group which occupied that area of Jerusalem.<sup>134</sup> That Jesus' authority was still at the heart of these practices as they were continued in the early Church is important as it was he who established them and set about building a foundation using the disciples as cornerstones of the new religious virtuoso community which may have continued in this form for a long time after Pentecost (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35).<sup>135</sup>

The model of virtuoso religion applied to Judea by Ling and to Jesus by Capper is consistent with the general picture of virtuosity one gets from reading Silber's adaptations of Hill and Weber. The list of features by Silber is useful for identifying Jesus as a virtuoso not only because those features are recognisable in the way he ran his community of disciples but because the list allows flexibility to accommodate adjustments Jesus made to fit his specific situation and purpose. The Jesus movement also occupies a position of precariously balanced liminality that is a key implication of Silber's list. For the virtuoso it is significant because they must maintain their own internal structure alongside managing a relationship with the external structures of society and religion. Ling highlighted how anti-structure can be difficult to maintain but if done so successfully, can begin to transcend the contrasting values and lifestyles of elite and non-elite. Jesus demonstrated his desire for this in his teachings on shared property and mutual love. Capper described how the alternative values taught by Jesus were part of a long history of virtuoso religion evolved by its members, in this case the likes of Elijah and Elisha, the Essenes, the group lead by John the Baptist and perhaps the Johannine community too. From the fact that none of these groups are identical, originate from identical circumstances or deal with identical societal issues comes the reminder that no model of virtuoso religion can be rigid in its specific day to day features, even if all the attributes listed by Silber apply. Caution for the differentiation between categories of virtuoso, religious order, sect and so on should be taken since the early sociology of religion features inconsistent use of the closely related terms and scholars like Weber acknowledge possible transitions from one type to another. This is particularly pertinent for groups like the Essenes.<sup>136</sup> Hill is right to differentiate sects from the virtuoso category where Weber placed them; later applications to groups like Jesus' show it could not be categorised as a sect whereas perhaps the celibate Qumran Essenes could. Hill's distinguishing of virtuosi and charismatics may prove confusing for interpretations of Jesus, however, since he has been firmly categorised as a charismatic by the likes of Theissen. Therefore, it is vital that clear

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid. p.116.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. p.98.

definitions of all social and religious categories are understood before proceeding whilst also accounting for the breadth of application terms like 'virtuoso' can have, especially when examining them against the backdrop of generalised models like Lenski's. Ling is cautious in these ways and presents a convincing picture of Judea that shaped the right conditions for virtuoso religion to flourish and Capper too places Jesus within that context and in the broader context of scripture.

## Exegeses of Selected Gospel Passages

### Authenticity

It is perhaps most important to begin a note on authenticity by stating my lack of intention to discuss it in detail for every single biblical passage I have chosen to look at. It is not the aim of this study to determine the likelihood that Jesus uttered particular words or performed particular deeds but to build up a picture of what he *probably* thought about certain issues. In this case, attitude to wealth and poverty is the key theme repeated throughout the gospels generally and throughout the following examples specifically that suggest it is appropriate to state that the historical Jesus was critical of accumulated wealth and supportive of those threatened by poverty. Evidence for this appears in all four gospels in various forms (parables, sayings, descriptions of Jesus' lifestyle choices and so on) and is consistent with the five episodes chosen for closer attention here. If doubt over the likely authenticity of any or indeed all of these episodes exists, it is not relevant enough to this study to spend a significant amount of time allowing that doubt to raise questions about the overall outcome. No single one of the passages can be completely ruled out as authentic. They all *might* have happened; this is enough.

It should be clarified before continuing that by 'authenticity' I mean something that can be defined as something actually said or done by the real historical Jesus<sup>137</sup>. One major problem faced by the scholar seeking such information is the lack of a solid starting point from which other data might be judged. If historical surety is technically in doubt for all the material, what is to stop the scholar abandoning the quest for authenticity and declaring the whole thing a fiction? To what historically accurate information can other data be anchored and measured against so that the scholar is not left scrabbling around in the dark or creating arguments that are only circular? How is the gospel figure of Jesus set firmly in his Jewish context in such a way as to give a rounded depiction of his character and explain the formation of the early Church? Sanders points out that the many years of scholarly attention

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<sup>137</sup> Stein, R. H. 'The "Criteria" for Authenticity' in France, R. T. & Wenham, D. eds. (1980) *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels. Vol. 1*. Sheffield. JSOT Press. pp.225-263; Calvert, D. G. A. 'An Examination of the Criteria for Distinguishing the Authentic Words of Jesus' in Evans, C. A. ed. (2004) *The Historical Jesus: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies. Vol. 1. The History of the Quest: Classical Studies and Critical Questions*. London/New York. Routledge. It is worth noting that there is a difference between questioning the authenticity of material in terms of whether Jesus really said/did it and in terms of its value or authority as scripture. One should not in theory affect the other.

paid to this subject has yet to reveal a consensus. He says that avoiding circular arguments is essential and the simplest way to avoid them is to found study on a bedrock of tradition. He points to eight “almost indisputable facts” that form this bedrock: 1) Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist, 2) Jesus was a Galilean preacher and healer, 3) He called (12) disciples, 4) His activity was confined to Israel, 5) He engaged in a controversy about the Temple, 6) He was crucified outside Jerusalem by the Roman authorities, 7) His followers continued afterwards as an identifiable movement, and 8) The new movement experienced persecution by the Jews.<sup>138</sup> These ‘facts’ form what appears to be a safe general starting point but only go so far in helping accurately determine the authenticity of individual occurrences in the life of Jesus. Of the passages chosen for close study here, some can already be considered fairly likely to have happened, such as the call of the disciples or the demonstration in the Temple. The two parables chosen and the encounter with the rich man are harder to tie to concrete historical events and must be judged by more detailed methods.

Scholars are sometimes critical of the criteria available<sup>139</sup> largely because they are unable to determine authenticity with a satisfactory level of accuracy, especially when used on their own. Nor are they able to bring a consensus of opinion, even when multiple criteria applied to one passage point to authenticity, because it is impossible to rule out all doubt. This criticism is balanced by an acknowledgement that we may have “nothing better in the scholarly toolshed”<sup>140</sup> and that so long as we do not assume knowledge of authenticity and do not employ criteria negatively or arbitrarily, they may at least act as a guide towards the truth. Historical objectivity may be impossible but application of criteria can aid consistency and steer our subjectivity<sup>141</sup>.

Some attention must be given to assessing the usefulness of some of the most commonly used criteria so that we may at least be able to bear them in mind when studying individual passages of scripture, even if it is not my intention to apply them systematically. It seems

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<sup>138</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1985) *Jesus and Judaism*. London. SCM Press Ltd. pp.5-12. Sanders chooses to use the demonstration in the Temple as a starting point because it offers a good entry for studying Jesus’ intention, relationship to his contemporaries, his historical setting as well as relating to the question of the Kingdom.

<sup>139</sup> E.g. Allison, D. (1998) *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. pp.6-7; Hooker, M. D. ‘On Using the Wrong Tool’ in Evans, C. A. ed. (2004) *The Historical Jesus: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies. Vol. 1. The History of the Quest: Classical Studies and Critical Questions*. London/New York. Routledge. pp.439, 448-9.

<sup>140</sup> Allison, D. (1998) p.6.

<sup>141</sup> Rodriguez, Rafael. (2009) ‘Authenticating Criteria: The Use and Misuse of a Critical Method.’ *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*. 7. pp.152-167.

logical to begin with the criteria of Coherence (otherwise known as the criteria of Consistency). This criterion states that material deemed to be in agreement with that already considered authentic must also be so. To some extent it may have made the most sense to deal with this criterion last since it depends on other criteria, yet to be examined, to provide a benchmark of authenticity. Having not looked at the others yet does not prevent us from seeing that its dependence on pre-authenticated material is a weakness in itself. Having already seen that certain information about the life of Jesus and the early Church can be presented as a firm basis of historical certainty<sup>142</sup>, it is easy to see how this may be used convincingly to argue that certain material is authentic. For instance, since we accept that Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem by the Roman authorities, then a lot of gospel content could be argued to have really happened if it supports this premise either by directly mentioning the event or by indirectly referencing it or anything that led to it. Meier actually distinguishes Jesus' rejection and execution as a criterion independent of the Criterion of Coherence, arguing that controversial words of Jesus that angered the authorities are so important for explaining why they killed him that they are very likely to be real<sup>143</sup>. The historicity of the crucifixion is probably about as sound a starting point any Jesus scholar can hope to find since it is so widely accepted and attested, but it is incapable of guaranteeing the historicity of material surrounding it. If even this cannot be relied upon, it does not bode well for this criterion in general nor any other. The problem is even more apparent when using the criterion to judge material by how well it holds up against other criteria. This is a much more unstable starting point and leads in to the territory of circular arguments. How can we, for instance, judge whether a saying that coheres with known events of Jesus' life and agrees with recognised themes of his teaching was said by Jesus himself or was designed by the early Church to fit the tradition and sound like Jesus?<sup>144</sup>

The limitation regarding what can be used as a starting base is the biggest weakness of this criterion. Unless the criteria on which it relies are without their own problems (which, of course, they are not) then certainty of authenticity is impossible. Having put this sceptical

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<sup>142</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1985) p.11.

<sup>143</sup> Meier, J. P. (1991) *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume 1. The Roots of the Problem and the Person*. New York. Doubleday. p.177.

<sup>144</sup> Walker, W. O. 'The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Discussion of Methodology' in Evans, C. A. ed. (2004) *The Historical Jesus: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies. Vol. 1. The History of the Quest: Classical Studies and Critical Questions*. London/New York. Routledge. p.407; Stein, R. H. 'The "Criteria" for Authenticity' in France, R. T. & Wenham, D. eds. (1980) *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels. Vol. 1*. Sheffield. JSOT Press. p.251.

view across, however, it is important to acknowledge that material that holds up to multiple criteria will look very convincing to any scholar. Nearly all the criteria to be examined here invite the same criticism, that they only have a reasonable effect when used in conjunction with others. This is to say that the Criterion of Coherence should be almost automatically employed alongside any other and that, arguably, it is the most important. If an historically certain base is impossible to establish, at least an historically *probable* one may be achievable. Coherence with what Jesus was known to have said is always going to be hard to establish in terms of individual sayings but themes identified from a broader reading of the gospel may be used to judge other material. This is particularly relevant for this study which identifies a common thread throughout the gospels of criticism of wealth and concern for the poor. It may be impossible to declare for example that Jesus definitely said “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25) but since the sentiment is reminiscent of material elsewhere, it is fair to postulate that Jesus disapproved of accumulated wealth in general. It is almost important to note that lack of verifiable authenticity does not necessarily diminish the authority of a text. If a saying can be proven to have been a later addition by the early Church, the very fact that it coheres with other material suggests it was added because it reflects an established tradition. And maybe this tradition was considered meaningful enough to preserve and maintain because it had roots with the historical Jesus.

Despite its weaknesses, the Criterion of Coherence/Consistency has value. The concept that all criteria rely on each other for support is significant not only because the Coherence criterion seems to uphold this idea in itself but because it is similar to other criteria as well, meaning there is a natural overlap between them. The next criterion that I am going to look at is the Criterion of Multiple Attestation which states that material may be deemed authentic if it appears in more than one independent source. If material falls into this category, it suggests that it may have had a wide circulation early on and was less likely to have been invented by a single writer.<sup>145</sup> What a particular scholar takes to be independent sources may vary according to their take on the synoptic problem<sup>146</sup> but generally it refers to Mark, the Q material and perhaps ‘M’ and ‘L’ too. Of course, the time gap between the crucifixion and the composition of the earliest gospel material leaves opportunity for content to enter various

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<sup>145</sup> Evans, C. A. (2007) *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels*. Inter-Varsity Press. Nottingham. p.48-9.

<sup>146</sup> Eve, Eric. (2005) ‘Meier, Miracle and Multiple Attestation’. *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*. 3.1. p.28.

strands of tradition because it meets the needs of the Church.<sup>147</sup> Words like this may be indistinguishable from the authentic words of Jesus<sup>148</sup> once they have been accepted, repeated and absorbed. It has been observed that all the Criterion of Multiple Attestation can do is show that certain material is older than the multiple sources in which it now appears<sup>149</sup>. “Chronologically most close does not, of course, mean historically most accurate.”<sup>150</sup>

Repetition of stories in many places may also have as much to do with their popularity or usefulness than their grounding in reality.<sup>151</sup> The gospels are of course a reflection of the needs and concerns of the churches from which they grew. Generally, however, this criterion is a convincing one because it is difficult to imagine material being so widespread throughout the tradition that it results in the same story cropping up more than once in the gospels without it at least resembling something Jesus might have said or done. One criticism I do agree with is that Multiple Attestation is more useful for arguing for the authenticity of themes or motifs recurrent in the gospels than individual sayings of Jesus.<sup>152</sup> An individual saying may be reported in more than one gospel but actions and other teachings that are consistent with it in essence may be everywhere. As with the Criterion of Coherence/Consistency, this is relevant to this study because the theme of wealth and poverty is repeatedly referred to throughout all four gospels and beyond. Jesus’ criticism of accumulated wealth is demonstrated through his sayings and parables, actions and general way of life. This picks up on an important element of the Criteria of Multiple Attestation (sometimes referred as a separate criterion) which is the Multiple Attestation of Forms, that is, the appearance of material in more than one literary form. Like before this approach comes under criticism for not necessarily proving that material did not enter the tradition post-Easter but the added level of complexity to how it entered and developed within the tradition is a strong indicator of early reception.<sup>153</sup> Again, the preservation of the material may have been down to popularity or usefulness within the Church but for an idea to take root within the tradition and flourish into various forms suggests it was meaningful enough to deserve revisiting time and again by many people. Both versions of the Multiple Attestation

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<sup>147</sup> Meier, J. P. (1991) p.175.

<sup>148</sup> Allison, D. (1998) p.8.

<sup>149</sup> Eve, Eric (2005) pp.28, 44.

<sup>150</sup> Crossan, J. D. (1991) *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*. Edinburgh. T & T Clark. p.xxxii.

<sup>151</sup> Eve, Eric. (2005) p.29.

<sup>152</sup> McArthur, H. K. ‘Basic Issues, A Survey of Recent Gospel Research’ in McArthur, H. K. ed. (1970) *In Search of the Historical Jesus*. London. SPCK. p.140.

<sup>153</sup> Eve, Eric. (2005) p.31.

Criterion, though undeniably useful, are susceptible to the same criticism of most other criteria that they do not stand alone comfortably. Just because a saying or action of Jesus was not recorded more than once, it does not rule out its possible authenticity. Material attested in only one source but appearing in multiple forms within it may also be historical. The criterion must be considered alongside others to help plead a convincing case.

Another of the main criteria to be examined is the Criterion of Dissimilarity (or Double Dissimilarity). It argues that material can be ruled out as authentic to Jesus if it may have originated in Jewish circles or in early Christian circles. This may be useful for explaining gospel material that survived editorial processes but did not develop into the early Church's theology and practice. It may also explain why some of Jesus' teaching was so different and therefore controversial to his Jewish contemporaries.<sup>154</sup> Being able to identify material that is distinctive to Jesus by this method has convinced some that it can be used as an assured minimum, a base to work from and judge other material.<sup>155</sup> Scholars who apply it are imposing quite harsh conditions on the text because they begin by eliminating a vast amount of material.<sup>156</sup> To do so assumes exhaustive knowledge both of Judaism and Christianity, "but also seems to assume that such knowledge, unlike the portrait of Jesus gained from the Gospels, has come about in some direct and unmediated fashion"<sup>157</sup>. The implication is a complete lack of continuity between the Jewish traditions, the teachings of Jesus and the early church. Did Jesus not base his ideas on the existing laws, scripture and tradition of the religion with which he grew up? And did he not intend for these ideas to endure amongst his followers? First of all, it seems incomprehensible to me that the deviance of Jesus' teachings from the Jewish norm could be considered drastic enough to suggest they came out of thin air. This only serves to detach him from history, not embed him in it. It also suggests that his teachings would have been "unintelligible to practically everyone"<sup>158</sup>. It is more often seen that Jesus takes a well-known concept and tweaks, inverts or adds to it rather than doing

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<sup>154</sup> Evans, C. A. (2007) p.50.

<sup>155</sup> Meier, J. P. (1991) p.172, citing Perrin, N. (1967) pp.39-43; Stein, R. H. (1980) p.244.

<sup>156</sup> E.g. Calvert's description of Bultmann's criteria of authenticity sounds particularly restrictive: "One, the content must be opposed to Jewish morality; two, it must reflect the eschatological temper characteristic of Jesus' teaching; three, it must exhibit no specifically Christian traits." Calvert, D. G. A. 'An Examination of the Criteria for Distinguishing the Authentic Words of Jesus' in Evans, C. A. ed. (2004) *The Historical Jesus: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies. Vol. 1. The History of the Quest: Classical Studies and Critical Questions*. London/New York. Routledge. p.428, citing Bultmann, R. (1968) *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*. Oxford. Basil Blackwell.

<sup>157</sup> Longenecker, R. N. 'Literary Criteria in Life of Jesus Research: An Evaluation and Proposal' in Evans, C. A. ed. (2004) p. 457.

<sup>158</sup> Meier, J. P. (1991) p.172.



away with it entirely<sup>159</sup>. There is every reason to think that Jesus was intimately familiar with the words of scripture and that he could quote the Old Testament directly.<sup>160</sup> To cut Jesus off from his Jewish roots seems nonsensical. It is equally strange to attempt to suggest that the teachings of the early Church did not follow on naturally from those of Jesus. All this criterion does is to isolate what is distinctive about him and declare this material authentic; it dictates its own conclusions.<sup>161</sup> It leaves no room for the idea that unique material from other contributors could have entered the tradition.<sup>162</sup> It also seems to be at odds with the Criterion of Multiple Attestation which emphasises the importance of material that entered the tradition early.<sup>163</sup> It is unconvincing that this method could help establish a minimum core of authentic material from which to work.

The idea that material unique to Jesus and disjointed with the early Church being likely authentic is similar to the idea of material embarrassing to the early Church being likely authentic<sup>164</sup>. The Criterion of Embarrassment states that material conflicting with early Church thought and with the possible power of causing embarrassment is probably authentic because it is retained. The real words of Jesus hold an authority that supersedes any evangelist's scruple. As with the Criterion of Double Dissimilarity, this approach isolates a portion of material that might be authentic to Jesus but is too limited to create a convincing overall picture of him. Explanations for why certain 'embarrassing' material made its way into the final draft of the gospels could come from anywhere; how can the modern scholar know the thought processes of a writer or redactor and how can they presume to know what might have been embarrassing to them?<sup>165</sup> If there is material that does sit awkwardly and looks like something the author would rather have cut out, then as much as this doesn't serve

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<sup>159</sup> Take for example, healing on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:9-14; Mk. 3:1-6; Lk. 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; Jn. 5:1-18) which is controversial for adding a new unexpected dimension to the established Jewish convention of not working on the Sabbath. Making room for the new condition does not render the original rule unrecognisable.

<sup>160</sup> Hooker, M. D. 'On Using the Wrong Tool' in Evans, C. A. ed. (2004) p.447.

<sup>161</sup> Hooker, M. D. 'Christology and Methodology' in Evans, C. A. ed. (2004) p.420.

<sup>162</sup> Allison, D. (1998) p.9.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. p.20.

<sup>164</sup> Porter, S. E. 'A Dead End or a New Beginning? Examining the Criteria for Authenticity in Light of Albert Schweitzer' in Charlesworth, J. H. and Pokorny, P. eds. (2009) *Jesus Research: An International Perspective. The First Princeton-Prague Symposium on Jesus Research*. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. p.28.

<sup>165</sup> Meier, J. P. (1991) pp.168-171. Meier points to a number of examples of 'embarrassing' material in the gospels including Jesus' baptism by his 'inferior' John the Baptist (Mk. 1:4-11) which the other evangelists feel the need to omit or excuse by explanation (Mt. 3:13-17; Lk. 3:19-22; Jn. 1:22-30). It is unclear why this so problematic since John the Baptist's inferiority is explained by his role as Jesus' herald. Meier then also points to the 'embarrassing' ignorance of Jesus begin unable to predict the exact hour of his demise (Mk. 13:32) which is later suppressed by Matthew and Luke and contradicted repeatedly by John (e.g. 13:1-3). Again why could the Church not have invented this reminder of Jesus' human non-omniscient side? These examples demonstrate that 'embarrassing' material may be explained in ways other than the one offered by this criterion.

as proof of authenticity, it may appear more likely if it meets other criteria.

The next criterion I will look at is not always referred to in the same way. It may be called the Criterion of Traces of Aramaic<sup>166</sup> or of Aramaic Linguistic Phenomena<sup>167</sup> or of Semitisms<sup>168</sup> but, as one can probably see, it refers to the likelihood of material that is consistent with the linguistic norms of the Aramaic (or Hebrew) language being authentic. It suggests that the process of translation from the Aramaic that Jesus spoke to the Greek of the gospels will have preserved linguistic features like vocabulary, grammar, syntax, rhythm and rhyme. These clues point to a more primitive version of a story and, as with Multiple Attestation, this early connection is a strong point in the criterion's favour. As before, however, the early entry of material into the tradition does not guarantee its origin with Jesus himself, only its origin within an Aramaic-speaking environment. How does one distinguish a saying "first spoken in Aramaic by Jesus in A.D. 29 from a saying first spoken in Aramaic by a Christian Jew in A.D. 33?"<sup>169</sup>

Coming under much of the same criticism is the Criterion of Palestinian Environment which asserts the likely authenticity of material that reflects the social, political, legal, commercial, agricultural, religious or physical features of the everyday environment. It is once again very difficult to ascertain how early material that fulfils this requirement entered the tradition since these environmental features did not suddenly alter post-Easter. A criterion like this is perhaps most effective when framed negatively, that is to assert that material reflecting features only existing outside of Palestine or only after the death of Jesus must be inauthentic.<sup>170</sup> The scholar's largest problem is determining what does or does not accurately reflect the environment, since background knowledge is lacking. Those features which can confidently be identified as typical are really only judged so by multiple attestation: the frequency of reference to agricultural practices, for example, tells us a lot about local customs but these probably applied to a much wider area than just Palestine.<sup>171</sup> Determining the likelihood of authenticity of specific sayings or deeds of Jesus by this method is always going to be

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid. p.178.

<sup>167</sup> Stein, R. H. (1980) p.233.

<sup>168</sup> Evans, C. A. (2007) p.50-1.

<sup>169</sup> Meier, J. P. (1991) p.178. "The problem is complicated still further by the fact that the Jerusalem church was both Aramaic- and Greek-speaking from its beginning (cf. the Hellenists in Acts 6). The translation of Jesus' sayings into Greek is therefore not something that happened only at a later stage of the tradition." p.178.

<sup>170</sup> Meier, J. P. (1991) p.180.

<sup>171</sup> Stein, R. H. (1980) p.237.

difficult. It can only root the tradition in the environment, which may just as likely be derived from the Old Testament, other Jewish literature or an acquaintance with the area on the part of the writer or editor.<sup>172</sup> The repeated use of farming imagery like sowing and harvest in the sayings and parables of Jesus must be an accurate reflection of agricultural practice not only because of its frequency but because of its need to be relatable to the original audience. As well as this, studies of agrarian society like Gerhard Lenski's<sup>173</sup> show that peasants engaged primarily in farming represent a very large portion of the population. No individual saying can be proven authentic by this criterion but it demonstrates the possibility that imagery familiar and relevant to the listening crowd came from Jesus.

The criteria mentioned above by no means represent the entire catalogue of methods employed for proving authenticity but they include some of the most popular/commonly used. They are also, despite their myriad flaws, quite significant in their usefulness especially when applied together. Other lesser criteria may play their part but I find it too easy to dismiss, for example, the criterion that assumes unnecessary added details and vividness of description in a story must be the result of an eyewitness account; it is an insult on the creativity and skill of the gospel writers for a start.<sup>174</sup> The most impractical approach for employing criteria of authenticity is the negative one. It is very difficult to start by stating: "A saying can be ruled out as authentic if X".<sup>175</sup> Too great is the void of knowledge for such definitive statements to be made with any surety. No-one possesses the ability to say that any of Jesus' words or actions could never be attributed to him, or could never have been paralleled by anyone else. Frustrated scholars are often obliged to describe the historical Jesus in vague and careful terms, which highlights the importance of being able to establish a bedrock of certainty from which to work, based on Sanders' "almost indisputable facts"<sup>176</sup> and a combination of criteria. A consensus of opinion, however, will always be difficult to come by and the limited material upon which a consensus exists may not produce an accurate portrayal of Jesus.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Walker, W. O. 'The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Discussion of Methodology' in Evans, C. A. ed. (2004) p.403.

<sup>173</sup> Lenski, G. E. (1966) *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*. New York. McGraw-Hill.

<sup>174</sup> Meier, J. P. (1991) p.180-1.

<sup>175</sup> Calvert, D. G. A. 'An Examination of the Criteria for Distinguishing the Authentic Words of Jesus' in Evans, C. A. ed. (2004) p.435.

<sup>176</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1985) *Jesus and Judaism*. p.11.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. p.4; Longenecker, R. N. 'Literary Criteria in Life of Jesus Research: An Evaluation and Proposal' in Evans, C. A. ed. (2004) p. 458.

Pressure to create a realistic picture of the historical Jesus is in some ways quite stifling. When the intention is to identify characteristics that allow one to confidently state ‘the sort of thing Jesus said/did’<sup>178</sup> then passages which hold up rather poorly to examination when taken in isolation can become another source of frustration. It is here we must accept that addressing the question of authenticity is important and should be attempted in earnest<sup>179</sup> but, in the case of one-off instances, should not be allowed to ruin an otherwise strong argument. It is upon broader statements about Jesus teaching and lifestyle that we often find the safest ground because they are so easily backed up by criteria like Multiple Attestation and Coherence/Consistency. The main subjects dealt with in this study fall into this category. The reminder by Jesus that attachment to one’s wealth is a mistake appears repeatedly throughout all four gospels in a variety of forms.<sup>180</sup> This idea is reinforced by the way he and his disciples choose to live their lives.<sup>181</sup> It is also possible to make relatively confident statements about Jesus’ aims in even broader terms. For example, it would not be inappropriate to declare Jesus a seeker of social reform because of the multitude of ways he challenges the norms of the political or religious establishment.<sup>182</sup> When one is attempting to draw a picture of the sort of person Jesus was and the sort of ministry he and his disciples conducted, and finding emerging patterns that support broad statements like those above, one can be more dismissive of individual passages that hold up poorly to testing by other criteria of authenticity. This study is not a book about the historical Jesus per se, and it is therefore not my responsibility to make extensive arguments for or against the authenticity of each passage referenced throughout. On the other hand, it would be irresponsible either to give authenticity no thought at all or to target the use of particular criteria at particular passages to suit a particular purpose. The main problem with the Criteria of Authenticity is common to many approaches to studying the gospels; it is a seemingly scientific method that can too easily be manipulated to fit an individual scholar’s purpose and only becomes truly useful when the collective results of many begin to reveal patterns in the data. This is why I feel the criteria of Multiple Attestation, Coherence, and Environment are in many ways the strongest because they seek to identify patterns, harmonies between different sections of the material and between the material and its context of origin. The Criteria of Dissimilarity seems to do the exact opposite by detaching material from its wider context and arguing that its lack of

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<sup>178</sup> Meier, J. P. (1991) p.174.

<sup>179</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1985) p.13.

<sup>180</sup> For example, Mt. 20:1-16; Mk. 10:25; 11:15-19; Lk. 6:20, 24; 16:1-13.

<sup>181</sup> For example, Mt. 9:9-13; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 8:1-3; Jn. 13:29; Acts 2:44-45.

<sup>182</sup> For example, Mt. 12:1-8; Mk. 3:1-6; 11:15-19; Lk. 12:22-23.

agreement with other material makes it more likely authentic. This may be the case in some places but the remaining material leaves one with a distorted picture of Jesus.

The ability to anchor study of the historical Jesus to something that can help identify patterns of his behaviour or themes of his teaching is essential and in many ways inevitable. One cannot help approaching the material without some subconscious preconceptions. We require some kind of starting point, premise or method of approach by which to order the data and to avoid the assumption that we already know everything about Jesus and first century Palestine. Much more preferable to utilising criteria of authenticity, I would argue, is the method of utilising models because these provide the anchor we need, can help determine authenticity, and provide interpretations of what the texts mean<sup>183</sup>. They do this by identifying patterns. They must be used when trying to identify the *sort of thing* Jesus said and did, rather than *precisely* what he said and did. They also may be used to support the broad kinds of statement that underpin the understanding we have of Jesus in this study. If they are unsuccessful in identifying patterns, then they might be deemed rather ineffective. If they, like the Criteria of Dissimilarity, create a unique picture of Jesus which sits awkwardly within the developing tradition, then it may also be questionable albeit not totally inaccurate. The point is that they provide the scholar with a framework or context against which material may be measured. The method has many similarities with criteria usage, although they do not seek to achieve the same thing. Seeking the authentic material, although it has engaged countless scholars for years, is a thankless task. No criterion has appeared yet to unlock the mystery of the gospels and probably never will. The same is true for models, of course, but they at least attempt to extract some meaning from the text beyond authenticity. How interesting, for example, that Lenski's estimate of large numbers of peasants within agrarian society could shed light on Jesus' frequent use of agricultural imagery in his parables. For me, whether or not he really uttered that parable suddenly loses significance.

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<sup>183</sup> Allison, D. (1998) p.36.

## The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard

By the nature of what it is, no parable can escape need of literary-theological comment even when a sociological interpretation is the aim. Thus it is necessary to be warned that while many scholars accept that the character of the landowner in the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) represents God, this can lead to attempts to read the parable as allegory, attaching false meaning to certain characters, places and objects. For example, if the landowner is God, does this mean that his steward represents Jesus? Blomberg rightly observes that the character of the steward or foreman (Mt. 20:8) does not play important enough a role to be identified with Jesus<sup>184</sup>, and it would be unusual for Jesus to appear in his own parable anyway, let alone as a stock character. For some scholars, identifying the characters with particular figures or groups, such as identifying the first hired labourers with the likes of Pharisees<sup>185</sup> and the last hired with tax collectors and sinners<sup>186</sup>, pushes the parable too far in the direction of allegory<sup>187</sup>. As we move through the parable, we shall come to see more examples of allegorical readings which, although interesting, tend to miss the point by ignoring the socioeconomic context.

What is to be made of the opening formula, “For the kingdom of heaven is like...”? Dodd notes the popularity of this formula with Matthew who uses it ten times to introduce parables whereas Mark and Luke each use it only twice. He suspects Matthew may have sometimes used it in places where it was previously absent<sup>188</sup> which reminds us of Matthew’s eschatological focus. The formula introduces a simile, making a teaching of the kingdom relatable through a comparison with a familiar situation, rather than introducing an allegory<sup>189</sup>. If the landowner represents God, then the relationship between the landowner and his workers illustrates God’s relationship with Israel, for which the traditional vineyard imagery is employed (cf. Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 12:10; Mt. 21:33-46). The Greek word used for the owner, οἰκοδεσπότης (*oikodespotēs*), meaning ‘householder’ or ‘master of the house’ is used in parables where the figure seems to also represent God (e.g. Mt.13:24-30; Lk. 13:25).

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<sup>184</sup> Blomberg, C. L. (1990) *Interpreting the Parables*. Leicester. Apollos. p.225.

<sup>185</sup> Jeremias, J. (1958) *The Parables of Jesus*. London. SCM Press Ltd. p.27.

<sup>186</sup> Dodd, C. H. (1961) *The Parables of the Kingdom*. London. Collins. p.92.

<sup>187</sup> Harrington, D. J. (1991) *The Gospel of Matthew*. Collegeville, Minnesota. The Liturgical Press. p.284.

<sup>188</sup> Dodd, C. H. (1961) p.28.

<sup>189</sup> Linnemann, E. (1966) *Parables of Jesus: Introduction and Exposition*. London. SPCK. p.81.

There is sufficient evidence to place the landowner within the elite governing class according to the model of agrarian society by Lenski<sup>190</sup>. A number of factors suggest this such as the fact that he employs a steward (who would perhaps belong to the class of retainers). He was also a landowner who chose to grow a luxury product rather than a subsistence crop. This was good for commerce and an investment also. If the land was not already being used to grow grapes before the landowner bought, took over or inherited it he would have had to be sure of his financial security because vineyards must be maintained for four years before they actually produce any fruit<sup>191</sup>. In spite of this, grapes still were favoured above other ‘everyday’ products like grain. “As more and more land is controlled by elites and, conversely, more and more Palestinians within Judaeon-controlled areas come under tenancy arrangements (and grow what the landlord demands), production no longer reflects what the ordinary person wants or needs. Most want to produce for household consumption, but power relations prevent realisation of this subsistence economy.”<sup>192</sup>

Most peasants would probably find it more honourable to be self-sufficient but this increased take-over of the land by elites who converted it to produce goods with more commercial value meant that these same people ended up working for the landowners instead. Many were forced into such work by the loss of their own land, and indebtedness to landlords and tax collectors<sup>193</sup>. Labour intensive times like planting and harvest required the hiring of day labourers like the ones in our parable. Their unfortunate situation is illustrated most by the labourers left still waiting for employment even at the end of the day (“Because no one has hired us” v.7), at harvest time when work was more plentiful. These men clearly have no land of their own to tend at this busy time<sup>194</sup>. They belonged to a group of people their society did not have the inclination to support. “...agrarian societies usually produced *more people than the dominant classes found it profitable to employ*”<sup>195</sup>. Society could provide for a large population but not without jeopardising the privileges of the upper classes<sup>196</sup>. This highlights the behaviour of the landowner as somewhat atypical. The labourers seem to represent a

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<sup>190</sup> Lenski, G. E. (1966) *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*. New York. McGraw-Hill. p.284.

<sup>191</sup> Herzog II, W. R. (1994) *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*. Louisville. Westminster/John Knox Press. p.85.

<sup>192</sup> Hanson, K. C. and Oakman, D. E. (1998) *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflict*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. p.106.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. p.119.

<sup>194</sup> Malina, B. J. and Rohrbaugh, R. L. (1992) *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. p.124.

<sup>195</sup> Lenski, G. E. (1966) p.281.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. p.82.

category that may have been more recognisable to the audience of the parable, however. Their position in society is both economically and socially weak, especially without the support and security of regular work, or even a family network. Day labourers “were not attached to any group; they were entirely at the mercy of chance employment; they were always living on the semi-starvation line”<sup>197</sup>. They belonged to the class of the expendables, surviving day by day and making up between 5 and 10 per cent of the population, sometimes more<sup>198</sup>.

Because there has been no previous transaction between these labourers and their employer, their relationship does not conform to the typical patterns of business between patrons and their clients. The powerless labourers depend on the owner for work. They do not come to work for him for his sake or to advance themselves as favourites, favouritism being “one of the purposes of dyadic alliances”<sup>199</sup>. There was no ongoing personal relationship to maintain. Whilst it is acceptable to see God’s relationship with the people generally in terms of patron-client relations (as Malina and Rohrbaugh do<sup>200</sup>) since that was an ongoing relationship (e.g. Lk.1:68-75), in this case the landowner and labourers have an unusual association that cannot be a demonstration of patron-client relations. Additionally, Linnemann prefers to draw emphasis away from the fact that it was harvest time, a common eschatological metaphor (Mt.13:39), because readers “would then not understand the generous treatment of the those who came last as an act of goodness, as the parable intends it to be, but as the thanks owed them by the owner of the vineyard because they did not leave him in the lurch in a critical situation”<sup>201</sup>. So here, focusing too much on a patron-client relationship misses the point of the story. Linnemann’s concerns do not seem too serious because the labourers were clearly not working in a desperate attempt to please their patron. Although harvest would have been “a frantic race against time”<sup>202</sup>, these men were working to survive. The first hired labourers get a wage agreement of one denarius a day but those hired at the third, sixth, ninth and eleventh hours do not. Linnemann is right to question those who think this relates to varying levels of trust between clients hired first and those hired later because “if the owner had given them a wage agreement it would have given away the end of the story”<sup>203</sup>.

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<sup>197</sup> Barclay, W. (1975) *The Gospel of Matthew: Vol. 2*. Edinburgh. The Saint Andrew Press. p.223.

<sup>198</sup> Lenski, G. E. (1966) p.283.

<sup>199</sup> Malina, B. J. (1996) *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels*. London. Routledge. p.149.

<sup>200</sup> Malina, B. J. and Rohrbaugh, R. L. (1992) p.125.

<sup>201</sup> Linnemann, E. (1966) p.82.

<sup>202</sup> Barclay, W. (1975) p.222.

<sup>203</sup> Linnemann, E. (1966) p.83.



The wage agreement was for one denarius, a Roman coin made of silver, quadruple the value of a bronze sesterces and a twenty-fifth of the gold aureus<sup>204</sup>. It is generally agreed upon that one denarius was a standard wage for a day of labour. Tobit 5:14 mentions one ‘drachma’, a Greek coin of approximately equal value to the Roman denarius, as a fair daily payment. “It was neither generous nor miserly”<sup>205</sup>. Whilst most scholars agree that the denarius was enough for basic survival, Herzog draws attention to the fact that the likes of day labourers, even if they did receive this fair wage, were not guaranteed to receive it every day because they were not guaranteed employment every day<sup>206</sup>. Jeremias focuses on the generosity of the landowner who decided to pay a full day’s pay, sufficient to sustain life, even to the later hired workers who sat idle most of the day<sup>207</sup>. Malina and Rohrbaugh’s calculations give a very precise picture of what the denarius would provide: “Two denarii (see Luke 10:30-35) would provide 3000 calories for five to seven days or 1800 calories for nine to twelve days for a family with the equivalent of four adults. Two denarii would provide twenty four days of bread ration for a poor itinerant”<sup>208</sup>. This sounds quite generous compared to other scholars’ calculations<sup>209</sup> though not all who considered the denarius a fair daily wage have specified whether it would cover things like rent, taxes, and other daily essentials. There seems no reason to think that it was less than one could survive on; this is pivotal for the purpose of the parable.

After the landowner has agreed with these first workers for a denarius, he travels again to the market place at the third hour. Working days began at dawn when it was cooler at, say, six o’clock and lasted until dusk, so around twelve hours (see Mt. 20:11). The third hour, therefore, was about nine o’clock; the sixth hour was midday and so on. The marketplace (ἀγορά) where the day labourers sought employment was like a labour exchange<sup>210</sup> or a “modern oriental bazaar”<sup>211</sup>. Usually a landowner would calculate the number of labourers needed based on the vineyard size and other such factors before going to hire them but in this case, the key to understanding the parable rests on contrasting the first and last hired workers<sup>212</sup>. Here the reader may notice the impracticality of hiring workers so late in the day,

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<sup>204</sup> Hanson, K. C. and Oakman, D. E. (1998) p.120.

<sup>205</sup> Davies, W. D. and Allison, D. C. (2000) *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew. Vol. III.* Edinburgh. T & T Clark. p.72.

<sup>206</sup> Herzog II, W. R. (1994) p.88.

<sup>207</sup> Jeremias, J. (1958) p.26.

<sup>208</sup> Malina, B. J. and Rohrbaugh, R. L. (1992) p.120.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. Herzog II, W. R. (1994) p.88.

<sup>210</sup> Barclay, W. (1975) p.223.

<sup>211</sup> Davies, W. D. and Allison, D. C. (2000) p.72.

<sup>212</sup> Linnemann, E. (1966) p.82.

a straying away from typical practice, but this foreshadows the atypical events at the end of the day and seems to focus more on the plight of those hired last rather than their usefulness<sup>213</sup>. Similarly there is no need to think the owner has simply miscalculated the necessary workforce.

The landowner returns to the market place four times. Earlier allegorical interpretations of the parable have applied meaning to the successive hours and their corresponding groups of workers. The interpretation that became most popular, upheld by the likes of Irenaeus, linked each new stage of the day with a period of salvation history. “Thus, as we read in the majority of texts, at the early hour of the morning it is Adam who is called to the vineyard, at the third hour of the day it is Noah, at the sixth hour Abraham and at the ninth we meet Moses. The eleventh hour, considered to be the last hour of the day, is nearly always equated with the ἐπιδημία or the παρουσία of the Son of God.”<sup>214</sup>. Other interpretations link the hours with stages of divine revelation that correspond to the five human senses. This was upheld by Hippolytus of Rome and Origen<sup>215</sup>. Origen also presented the allegory which relates the hours to stages in human life, that is, representing the different ages at which people may be called to ‘work in the vineyard’. This means that even those who are called to be a Christian in later life will still receive the rewards of the Kingdom of Heaven<sup>216</sup>. All these interpretations have something theologically useful to say but I agree with Jeremias in saying that this emphasis on the first half of the parable draws attention away from its conclusion and thereby misses the point<sup>217</sup>. Our reading of the parable so far has shown that the workers were not actually ‘called’ to their work as such. They were not responding to an invitation that came out of nowhere; they were waiting to be employed out of necessity.

When the owner finds people still waiting at the later hours the clearly high level of unemployment illustrates the desperation of their situation. Jeremias seeks to emphasise the generosity of the owner by pointing out that he takes pity on the one-hour workers even though they spent all day doing nothing but “sit about in the marketplace gossiping till late

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<sup>213</sup> Huffman, N. A. (1978) ‘Atypical Features in the Parables of Jesus’. *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Vol 97. No2. p.209.

<sup>214</sup> Tevel, J. M. (1992) ‘The Labourers in the Vineyard: The Exegesis of Matthew 20:1-7 in the Early Church’. *Vigiliae Christianae*. Vol. 46. No.4. p.362.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid. p.359.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid. p.360.

<sup>217</sup> Jeremias, J. (1958) p.23.

afternoon” and making excuses about not being hired<sup>218</sup>. Ironically, it is an attitude not dissimilar from that of the first-hired workers who grumble against the landowner when the last-hired are paid as much as them. “All the labourers came as soon as they were called; and of those who came last it is expressly stated that they had no previous opportunity of working”<sup>219</sup>. Besides this, the text describes the later hired workers as ἀργός which probably means ‘idle’ rather than ‘useless’ or ‘lazy’<sup>220</sup>.

It was customary for workers to be paid at the end of the day according to the law in Leviticus 19:13 and Deuteronomy 24:14-15, and because they were probably living hand to mouth. As the workers collect their wages, the landowner instructs his steward to dispense the wages to the last-hired first and go backwards from there. Verse eight certainly recalls the refrain at Matthew 19:30 and points to it at 20:16<sup>221</sup>. Even before the reader has come to the key issue of the equal payment of a denarius in verse nine, they can see something meaningful in this reversal of order. Linnemann asserts that the main reason for this switch is to ensure that the workers hired at the beginning of the day bear witness to the payments, not as an affront to them<sup>222</sup>. Without their objections there is nothing for the owner to respond to. Remember, the later hired groups were not given a wage agreement like the first; the third, sixth and ninth hour groups were promised only “whatever is right” (v.4) and the last group were not promised anything (v.7).

It is natural for the reader to feel sympathy with the first-hired labourers since the landowner’s decision does initially seem unfair<sup>223</sup>. The later-hired have been included amongst those with a business contract; their professional relationship with the landowner is equalised. De Ru is right to observe that the shock comes not from the fact that all are paid equally but that the last are paid so much<sup>224</sup>. One is, of course, supposed to be surprised at the owner’s generosity just as the first-hired labourers were and Jesus’ listeners would have been. This has to be an atypical occurrence in order for the audience(s) to take notice and for the point of the parable to then be revealed. This refutes the explanation for the equal payments

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid. p.26.

<sup>219</sup> Plummer, A. (1928) *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*. London. Robert Scott. p.273.

<sup>220</sup> Davies, W. D. and Allison, D. C. (2000) p.72.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid. p.73.

<sup>222</sup> Linnemann, E. (1966) p.84.

<sup>223</sup> Davies, W. D. and Allison, D. C. (2000) p.74.

<sup>224</sup> De Ru, G. (1966) ‘The Conception of Reward in the Teachings of Jesus’. *Novum Testamentum*. Vol 8. p 206.

by Plummer that the value of labour increased throughout the day because time was running short and “fresh and vigorous workers would be especially valuable”<sup>225</sup>.

To view the payments in this light as nothing more than a business transaction with no extraordinary features deprives the parable of its meaning because it deprives the owner of his generosity. The idea of wages in proportion to labour is difficult to shake off<sup>226</sup>, but ultimately this has meant that the parable has remained surprising and therefore meaningful for modern audiences. “While Christians in the past have unfairly characterised Judaism as dominated by mechanical notions of reward, any religion that makes God a judge will have adherents who imagine the last judgement as a weighing of merits. And it is quite possible that, with this parable about equal payment for equal work, Jesus was countering such thinking”<sup>227</sup>. The denarius is “a metaphorical unit of value that equalises the workers”<sup>228</sup>. This metaphor for God’s grace seems to transcend the concept of reward. “The parable does certainly not kill the idea of reward. It leaves the very idea of wages, reward or remuneration for work performed entirely on one side and in its preaching of the goodness of God soars far above it”<sup>229</sup>. Whilst the pity taken on the workers by the owner is the key to his generosity, it is wrong to think of his generosity as being limitless since only enough for a subsistence level wage is given<sup>230</sup>. Herzog proposes that his generosity is not only limited but non-existent. His theory is based on the premises that the owner does not represent God and that the denarius was not as fair a daily payment as other scholars believe. The elite landowner’s power allowed him to exploit the desperate labourers and to oppress them further by humiliating and degrading them<sup>231</sup>. To give only one denarius was insult enough, let alone a fraction of one. Even without the evidence discussed above that suggests this is not true, weakness in Herzog’s argument is revealed. If a denarius a day was an unfair wage, then emphasis is shifted away from the order of the payments and the fact that all are paid the same. These become irrelevant plot twists and they only encourage the allegorical reading of the owner as God which, Herzog feels, drowns out the voices of the oppressed<sup>232</sup>. If the denarius was unfair, the reaction to this should have come at verse two. Herzog’s reply to this would

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<sup>225</sup> Plummer, A. (1928) p.273.

<sup>226</sup> Shillington, V. G. ‘Saving Life and Keeping Sabbath’ in Shillington, V. G. ed. (1997) *Jesus and His Parables: Interpreting the Parables of Jesus Today*. Edinburgh. T & T Clark. p.92.

<sup>227</sup> Davies, W. D. and Allison, D. C. (2000) p.70.

<sup>228</sup> Shillington, V. G. (1997) p.89.

<sup>229</sup> De Ru, G. (1966) p.210.

<sup>230</sup> Jeremias, J. (1958) p.26.

<sup>231</sup> Herzog II, W. R. (1994) p.92.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid. p.82.

presumably be to emphasise the worker's lack of bargaining power when desperately seeking work in the marketplace. If the landowner was as prosperous as the evidence suggests, then he could have paid his work force much more, but I propose that this would have overshadowed the point of the parable and destroyed what the payment represents. It would imply that expecting more than one deserves, as the first-hired do, is acceptable and that it will be given.

“Those who insisted that God apply the merit based system are represented by the daylong workers who expected to receive more than the one-hour workers; they were operating on the basis of worldly reality”<sup>233</sup>. The reality, however, is that they do receive the agreed upon wage and, besides, more would not normally be paid except in the case of a previous patron client relationship<sup>234</sup>. Of course, the complaints of the first-hired are dismissed and their pay is not increased, but their complaints must be taken seriously because they provide a voice within the parable for any other listeners or readers who react to the unusual actions of the owner. It is their complaining that allows the teaching that God is just and generous to be revealed<sup>235</sup>. With discussion of the role of the complaining workers comes renewed discussion about whether an allegorical reading of the parable is sustainable. For the likes of Herzog, identifying the first-hired labourers with any particular group is impossible because he will not accept the identification of the owner with God. For him, attempts to do this act merely as a way of hiding the owner's corruption. “However pervasive the sense of unfairness at the end of the parable might have been, interpreters ignored the workers' voices so that the action of the owner could be construed as an example of God's gracious, generous goodness”<sup>236</sup>. As previously noted, audiences may initially sympathise with the first-hired workers but what Herzog proposes here sounds more like a conspiracy. Again, rather than carefully stripping back the theology of the parable to reveal hidden truth, he is removing all theological features and leaving behind something that can no longer be described as a parable. He even regards the owner's explanation (v.13-15) as a sarcastic retort designed to dishonour and humiliate them further<sup>237</sup>. The explanation is designed to exonerate the owner but not by degrading the workers, even though the lesson they learn is harsh. For Jeremias and for Linnemann, the complainers represent opponents of Jesus like the Pharisees whose

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<sup>233</sup> Huffman, N. A. (1978) p.209.

<sup>234</sup> Malina, B. J. and Rohrbaugh, R. L. (1992) p.125.

<sup>235</sup> Harrington, D. J. (1991) *The Gospel of Matthew*. Collegeville, Minnesota. The Liturgical Press. p.285.

<sup>236</sup> Herzog II, W. R. (1994) p.82.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid. p.93.

criticism was “unjustified, hateful, loveless and unmerciful”<sup>238</sup>. Blomberg accepts that all the labourers represent all Jews because the vineyard is Israel and would go as far as to identify the last-hired workers with the tax-collectors and sinners but not with the Gentiles<sup>239</sup>. The allegorical readings, as always, seem to present problems. No allegory of this parable is watertight. The owner’s explanation serves as a warning but also as encouragement<sup>240</sup> and these apply to opponents of Jesus but also to his own disciples who must be careful not to regard themselves as elevated above other believers<sup>241</sup>. The events of the parable itself confirm this since the complainers are corrected but not shunned or condemned, although the command to ‘go’ in v.14 suggests it. They still receive the full wage originally agreed upon<sup>242</sup>.

These first-hired are not made to be last as the refrain (“So the last will be first, and the first last”) at v.16 suggests. It seems fair that this saying refers not to “reversal of order but the abandonment of every form of ordering”<sup>243</sup> because “If all have identical rewards, then all numerical positions are interchangeable”<sup>244</sup>. There is room here for theological interpretations that see the various hours worked as symbolic of people who have come to faith in various times of their life or have enjoyed different levels of fortune perhaps<sup>245</sup>, the equal payment therefore symbolising their equality in the eyes of God. In a general sense this sounds convincing but Shillington points out that, for the workers, their religious devotion through Sabbath celebration, which in theory should equalise them with all Jews, did not do so because they lacked work from which to rest and means by which to celebrate: “...the intent of the Sabbath command to equalise the human family is violated by gross inequality of human life in the stratified social situation in agrarian Palestine”<sup>246</sup>. This is a useful interpretation, particularly since it highlights the landowner’s concern for the workers’ spiritual wellbeing, but it may be broadened out to include many other aspects of everyday life in agrarian society, not least of all basic survival.

It is this equal payment of a denarius and the understanding that it is a sufficient daily wage that lies at the heart of this parable. The landowner generously applies this principle to those

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<sup>238</sup> Jeremias, J. (1958) p.27.

<sup>239</sup> Blomberg, C. L. (1990) p.224.

<sup>240</sup> Davies, W. D. and Allison, D. C. (2000) p.76.

<sup>241</sup> Barclay, W. (1975) p.224.

<sup>242</sup> De Ru, G. (1966) p.204.

<sup>243</sup> Blomberg, C. L. (1990) p.222.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid. p.223.

<sup>245</sup> Plummer, A. (1928) p.274.

<sup>246</sup> Shillington, V. G. (1997) p.100.

who have worked shorter hours. “To propose, as Herzog does, that the narrative householder, far from being a good man, takes oppressive advantage of poor labourers thwarts the formal force of the parable”<sup>247</sup>. Herzog refuses to accept that the landowner represents God, painting a picture of a corrupt elite figure who seeks only his own advancement. This was a wealthy man who perhaps could have paid well in excess of one denarius to each worker but his wealth is not a focus of criticism for Jesus in this instance (cf. e.g. Luke 12:16-21; 16:19-31). This parable is about the equal payment at the end. The daily denarius is symbolically equal to the ‘daily bread’ of the Lord’s Prayer (Mt. 6:11; Lk. 11:3).

There are extensive examples throughout the gospels that criticise excessive wealth (e.g. Mk.10:25 par.) but this is not about having too much, it is about having just enough. It is essential to ask whether Jesus sought to reform society’s attitude to wealth to ensure that no-one lived below subsistence level. If we look inside this study at the way Jesus’ lifestyle is portrayed in the models for the Wandering Charismatics and Virtuoso Religion, we see suggestions that voluntary poverty and/or common sharing of money and goods were practices that Jesus and his disciples may have used to ensure sufficient means of survival for themselves and a detachment from personal gain (e.g. Mk.6:8-11/Mt.10:9-12/Lk.9:3-5). If the idea of this was to live by example and promote living modestly and according to one’s basic needs, then this parable is a strong statement in support of that. No-one should ask for more than what is fair but no-one should be given less either.

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid. p.97.

## The Parable of the Unjust Steward

The notorious difficulty of this parable means great caution will need to be taken when exploring interpretations of it and drawing conclusions. We must address certain questions: Who are the main characters? What roles did they fulfil in their society? What motivated the actions of the steward? Why was he called ‘unjust’ and was this a fair label? Why was he praised? It may also help understand Jesus’ social as well as theological concerns and aims of the parable. The boundaries of the parable must be determined; it is crucial to decide where the parable proper ends and the following commentary begins.

To decide this, it must be decided who is speaking in v.8a because some question who ὁ κύριος is, the steward’s master or Jesus himself. Though ὁ κύριος is a common title for Jesus (usually translated as ‘lord’) there is no reason to think it means him here; the steward refers to the rich man as his master throughout (vv.3, 5). It would be unusual for Jesus to interrupt the narrative in this way too (cf. Lk.18:6). Most importantly, the strange behaviour of the steward requires a reaction from the rich man to conclude the story<sup>248</sup>. Verse 8a must be the end of the parable and v.8b onwards is commentary. These verses contextualise the parable within the wider Lucan discourse on wealth and possessions i.e. chapter 16 (and the gospel generally)<sup>249</sup>. Whether v.8a is parable or commentary (and whether Jesus is the speaker) does not really affect what seems to be the final judgement on the steward’s actions, that even though they were fraudulent and dishonest, a positive lesson about prudent and wise use of wealth and possessions can still be drawn<sup>250</sup>.

Having addressed these issues, it is evident that they are not merely formalities of form and redaction criticism but have strong implications for the practical/theological message of the parable and what can be learnt about the characters. This in turn will reveal information about the socio-economic background of the text. The character of the master who, we have decided, does speak those controversial words in v.8a actually shows us plenty of relevant information in our first encounter with him in v.1-2. He is a landowner; this indicates wealth. “An estate was a political, and in Roman law a legal, entity referring to land and product

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<sup>248</sup> Ukpong, J. S. (1996) ‘The Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1-13): An Inculturation Biblical Hermeneutic’. *Semeia* 73. p.200.

<sup>249</sup> Mathewson, D. L. (1995) ‘The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13): A Reexamination of the Traditional View in Light of recent Challenges’. *JETS*. 38/1. p.33.

<sup>250</sup> Ireland, D. J. (1989) ‘A History of Recent Interpretation of the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13)’. *Westminster Theological Journal*. 51. p.295.



controlled by the elite.”<sup>251</sup> We also know that he employs a steward to manage this estate which was common practice amongst landlords who often did not live in the local community but in nearby cities<sup>252</sup>. The parable later reveals that some of the tenants working on the owner’s estate were indebted to him. Excessive demands on peasant resources in the form of taxes, tithes and tolls increased the chance of indebtedness<sup>253</sup>. The circumstances of the parable then reveal that this is a powerful man but this is shown explicitly in v.1 which describes him as πλούσιος (‘rich’), a term which is arguably redundant in the light of all this other information<sup>254</sup>. The word does carry with it, however, other connotations. Luke has used it on a number of occasions where the rich person in question is not cast in a favourable light and is often contrasted with a poor person (e.g. 6:24; 12:16; 14:12; 16:19, 21, 22; 18:23, 25; 19:2 and 21:1). “All those depicted as rich in the text are in one form or another excluded from the redeemed community or disapproved, with the single exception of Zacchaeus, whose salvation comes when he ceases to be notably *plousios*”<sup>255</sup>. This does not reflect Jesus’ view on all rich people as he is connected with rich benefactors elsewhere (e.g. Lk.8:1-3) but the implication of mentioning his wealthy status is that he should be disliked. The general feel of the introduction, the *plousios* man about to dismiss his steward, does suggest he is the villain of the piece. The largely poor listeners could easily have reached the same conclusion<sup>256</sup>.

There is a possibility that the steward was truly guilty of squandering his master’s goods since he makes no attempt to refute the accusation, but the word διεβλήθη, usually referring to false accusations, suggests otherwise. As Beavis observes, the master dismisses the steward on the basis of hearsay (v.2) rather than evidence, perhaps a demonstration of the commonly found hostility between masters and servants in parables<sup>257</sup>. The sympathy of the audience, then, would appear to lie with the steward. Beavis is also convinced the steward’s role in the household is that of a slave, emphasising this translation of the word δοῦλος even

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<sup>251</sup> Hanson, K. C. and Oakman, D. E. (1998) *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflict*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. .117.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid. p.118.

<sup>253</sup> Malina, B. J. and Rohrbaugh, R. L. (1992) *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. p.332.

<sup>254</sup> de Silva, D. A. (1993) ‘The Parable of the Prudent Steward and Its Lucan Context’. *Criswell Theological Review* 6.2. p.257.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Landry, D. and May, B. (2000) ‘Honor Restored: New Light on the Parable of the Prudent Steward (Luke 16:1-8a)’. *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Vol. 119. No. 2. p. 295.

<sup>257</sup> Beavis, M. A. (1992) ‘Ancient Slavery as an Interpretive Context for the New Testament Servant Parables with Special Reference to the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-8)’. *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Vol.111. No.1. p.48.

though he is only ever called οἰκονόμος<sup>258</sup>. It allows her to really emphasise the sympathy of the audience though the steward's fears voiced in v.3 seem enough to do this. In the shortest space of time he has gone from a position of responsibility, to having his ability to bear it doubted, to facing potential loss of all social and economic security, and having to labour, beg or starve. Freed slaves might face similar difficulties, but the steward is dismissed, not freed or sold, suggesting he is an employee, not a slave<sup>259</sup>. Herzog, on the other hand, places him within the class of retainers<sup>260</sup>. This is consistent with Hendrickx who regards him as “an estate manager with considerable legal powers”<sup>261</sup> and Bailey who notes that not only the Greek but the Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac and Arabic words for steward point to that same meaning<sup>262</sup>. This makes sense from a literary point of view to have a main character that is more identifiable for being neither a rich elite nor a poor peasant. One could say he is almost neutral in that he represents nobody and everybody. Oakman suggests that many such “middle people” appear in parables because Jesus saw in them “a key ingredient to changing the situation”<sup>263</sup>. The threat of poverty rather than poverty itself is sometimes a better reflection of the kind of tension with the elite classes that existed for so many in agrarian society. It also creates more drama in this narrative and more empathy for the steward.

As the first two verses of the parable show, it may be that the steward was not up to the high level of responsibility his profession required since he is accused of wasting his master's possessions. What exactly does that mean? Whilst the verb διασκοπίζων can simply mean to ‘scatter’ or ‘disperse’, in this context it refers to ‘wasting’ or ‘squandering’ of property. It is used in the same sense in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:13) which suggests “that the steward had spent money extravagantly on self-indulgence...”<sup>264</sup> Even this, however, is slightly vague. Is extravagance a crime? Several scholars have suggested that it indicates the steward's failure to make enough profit for his master through lack of care or efficiency, or perhaps even through “an innate inability to serve the interests of the rich man”<sup>265</sup>. Neither this nor extravagant spending is explicitly mentioned, so the steward's wastefulness “does not

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid. p.40.

<sup>259</sup> Manson, T. W. (1957) *The Sayings of Jesus*. London. SCM Press Ltd. P.291.

<sup>260</sup> Herzog II, W. R. (1994) *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressive*. Louisville. Westminster/John Knox Press. p.241.

<sup>261</sup> Hendrickx, H. (1986) *The Parables of Jesus*. London. Geoffrey Chapman. p.174.

<sup>262</sup> Bailey, K. E. (1976) *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. p.92.

<sup>263</sup> Oakman, D. E. (1986) *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*. Lewiston. The Edwin Mellen Press. p.213.

<sup>264</sup> Oesterley, W. O. E. (1936) *The Gospel Parables in Light of their Jewish Background*. London. SPCK. p.196.

<sup>265</sup> de Silva, D. A. (1993) p.259.

necessarily involve defrauding his master”<sup>266</sup>. In spite of this, the issue of the master’s honour may be at stake since the rumour about a wasteful or possibly criminal steward is public knowledge<sup>267</sup>. As mentioned, the accusation may have been slanderous. The master does not hesitate in demanding an account of the steward’s management (though he is trusted to do this unsupervised). This is not to verify the accusations or negotiate but simply to take the account books from him; he is already dismissed<sup>268</sup>. Here, ἀπόδοϲ means to ‘turn in’ or ‘surrender’ and Bailey believes that a steward in such circumstances would never be asked to balance the accounts before leaving. “The master knows that the steward has the skill to falsify the accounts and thus they are not examined for evidence of his guilt or innocence.”<sup>269</sup> The steward makes no attempt at protest; it would be pointless against one of much higher social and economic status than him, especially one so determined. But here is his chance. The master is offering (perhaps knowingly?) an opportunity for the steward to secure his future.

Another risk of protesting is the potential for it to look like a confession of guilt. Fitzmyer believes the steward’s silence actually does confirm his guilt<sup>270</sup>, which means the title ἀδικίας (‘unjust’) can be applied to him from the beginning, not only at v.8 in light of his action with the debtors in vv.5-7. If he is capable of these unjust acts, the original charge against him may not be unfounded<sup>271</sup>. Beavis argues for the innocence of the steward as she draws a parallel between the parable and the servant/master relationships portrayed in the Aesopic and Plautine literature<sup>272</sup>, but Greene believes the parallel is weak because Aesop is clearly honest whereas the steward may not be<sup>273</sup>. Beavis is also amongst those who translate *dieblēthē* as ‘falsely accused’ but it is important to note that the term may apply to just accusations as well (e.g. Dan.3:8). If the steward was falsely accused, it means the title ‘unjust’ applies solely to his actions in vv.5-7 which makes the master’s praise in v.8a all the more confusing. Landry and May hold the opinion that the steward was guilty of extravagance rather than a failure to make a profit which is more consistent with the fact that he is later commended for reducing

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<sup>266</sup> Ukpong, J. S. (1996) p.202.

<sup>267</sup> Landry, D. and May, B. (2000) p.293.

<sup>268</sup> Carroll, J. T. and Carroll, J. R. (1996) *Preaching the Hard Sayings of Jesus*. Peabody. Hendrickson. p.110.

<sup>269</sup> Bailey, K. E. (1976) p.97.

<sup>270</sup> Fitzmyer, J. A. (1964) ‘The Story of the Dishonest Manager (Luke 16:1-13)’. *Theological Studies*. 25:1. p.31.

<sup>271</sup> Manson, T. W. (1957) p.291.

<sup>272</sup> Beavis, M. A. (1992) p.48.

<sup>273</sup> Greene, M. D. (1999) ‘The Parable of the Unjust Steward As Question and Challenge’. *The Expository Times*. 111. p.84.

the master's profits<sup>274</sup>. "His crime might best be described as misappropriation of funds, much as a modern executive with a budget at his/her discretion might illicitly spend some of these funds on personal items"<sup>275</sup>. So whilst his act may not have been totally wicked, this act was still potentially damaging to the master's honour and business. As far as the narrative goes, there is an extent to which it makes no difference whether the steward was guilty of his original crime or not. For the story to make any sense, what matters are the facts that he was accused and his master acted on those accusations by dismissing him. As well as the evidence that there is an accusation for which no defence or denial is offered, I am inclined to believe also that the steward's guilt makes sense in the light of the conclusion in v.8a. If we agree that the master gives praise for the steward's prudent use of wealth, it provides an appropriate contrast to his previous use of it. His later prudence outweighs his earlier wastefulness. A false accusation serves no purpose (other than, perhaps, to create sympathy for the steward) whereas this means a lesson can be taught. The problem still remains that both the wasteful act and the prudent act were dishonest but one was punished and the other commended. Our discussion of v.8 will deal with this and the other issues involved.

For now, the steward faces the harsh reality of his dismissal and this, as we previously touched upon, meant a separation<sup>276</sup> from the network that supported him<sup>276</sup>. Herzog envisions a very bleak future for the steward whose only options are the common activities of day labourers, digging and begging<sup>277</sup>. He knows he is unqualified for hard physical labour. Having come from a position of relative privilege, his inability to adapt to his new lifestyle will mean "a death sentence that has nothing to do with his refusal to accept honest work"<sup>278</sup>. He mentions shame in relation to begging but not digging though it might be fair to assume it applies here too. He has to at least consider these options, given the desperate circumstances. Perhaps this ashamedness of begging comes from a feeling of hypocrisy given his previous extravagance, a point which seems speculative until one considers his reduction of the debts in vv.6-7. Perhaps his pride is simply an "attitude problem" he doesn't have time to address, as de Silva puts it<sup>279</sup>. This wording is harsh but I think de Silva is trying to illustrate how unorthodox the steward's chosen plan of action is after considering the more obvious choices. His motives are not based either on maintaining honour or merely surviving. They are based

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<sup>274</sup> Landry, D. and May, B. (2000) p.297.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid. p.298.

<sup>276</sup> Oesterley, W. O. E. (1936) p.194.

<sup>277</sup> Herzog II, W. R. (1994) *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressive*. Louisville. Westminster/John Knox Press. p.241.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid. p.242.

<sup>279</sup> de Silva, D. A. (1993) p.261.

on both because the two are directly related. He explains in v.4 that his aim is to regain a network of friends, which will restore honour and the likelihood of employment. It is a “public relations strategy”<sup>280</sup>. His strategy is to reduce the debts of the tenants, that is, to “act in solidarity with them in the expectation that they would respond in solidarity with him when he is dismissed”<sup>281</sup>. To create this relationship of reciprocity with them means they are then indebted to him. It is an extreme measure, but it is a gamble that will at least ensure solidarity with the farmers even if it does not impress the master<sup>282</sup>. Whilst feelings of guilt may have motivated him to reduce the debts, his primary concern is with self-preservation. “Neither altruistic nor vengeful, he is simply concerned with his own security”<sup>283</sup>.

But who were these people whose debt was being reduced? Most scholars agree that they were tenant farmers who owed land rent to the owner. Malina & Rohrbaugh<sup>284</sup> and Hendrickx<sup>285</sup> agree that their rent was paid from a fixed amount of the crop as opposed to percentage as Herzog believes<sup>286</sup>. He also holds the position, however, that they are not tenants but merchants, employed to sell goods on behalf of the steward for whom the harvest is too large to transport and sell<sup>287</sup>. Jeremias agrees that they are “wholesale merchants, who have given promissory notes for goods received”<sup>288</sup>. This, as well as the fact that they are literate, suggests the debtors are not peasants but to view the debtors as of too high a status takes away from the importance of the debt relief. The parable makes more sense if these are poor tenant farmers. Debt was a method by which the rich ensure they would stay rich by keeping the poor poor. It was a vicious circle that was difficult to break from. “Because of bad harvests or unusual demands for tribute, taxes or tithes, already marginal peasant families would fall into debt. Then failure to pay the debt would lead to one or more family members becoming debt slaves, and finally to loss of land.”<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Ukpong, J. S. (1996) p.205.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Greene, M. D. (1999) p.87.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Malina, B. J. and Rohrbaugh, R. L. (1992) p.375.

<sup>285</sup> Hendrickx, H. (1986) p.176.

<sup>286</sup> Herzog II, W. R. (1994) p.247.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid. p.251.

<sup>288</sup> Jeremias, J. (1958) *The Parables of Jesus*. London. SCM Press Ltd. p.127.

<sup>289</sup> Horsley, R. A. (1993) *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. p.246.

The amounts the steward removed from the debts must have been enough to make a significant difference to these people, so how much exactly was it? Calculations by a number of scholars agree that one hundred measures of oil is equivalent to between eight and nine hundred gallons, and one hundred measures of wheat is equivalent to one thousand bushels. Different Bible translations use either of these. Whilst scholars choose a variety of ways of expressing these measurements, perhaps in terms of the number of olive trees or hectares of land (e.g. Hendrickx<sup>290</sup>), they all come to the conclusion the amount removed from both bills was worth approximately five hundred denarii (e.g. Manson, who consults the Mishnah on the price of wheat<sup>291</sup>). The percentages of the reductions vary (oil by 50% and wheat by 20%) because oil is a more expensive cash crop<sup>292</sup>.

There has been much debate over what the reductions actually consisted of. Was it a portion of the principal debt, part or all of the interest, or was it the steward's own profit? The answer to this affects the reading of the unusual events in v.8a since it affects what financial impact it would have had on the master. Fitzmyer is of the opinion that there was no negative financial impact on the master because the steward only removed what he would have earned from the transactions, in the hope that this personal sacrifice would win favour with the debtors and locals<sup>293</sup>. This may have gone some way towards making amends for his previous wastefulness<sup>294</sup>. Bailey cites the work of Margaret Gibson who suggested that landowners commonly allowed their stewards to take a 'cut' of up to 50%<sup>295</sup>. This implies the master knew about the steward's generous commission which brings an unnecessarily negative element to his character, an argument that Bailey says "will need substantial support"<sup>296</sup>. It over simplifies the story dramatically to understand the steward/master interaction as a 'hero'/'villain' clash, which is what Ukpong seems to impose upon it. He views the reduction, not as a removal of the steward's cut, nor as an attempt to defraud the master but more as an exercise of the steward's legitimate power<sup>297</sup>. The master's only reason, therefore, for calling the steward 'unjust' is that he does not feel the debtors were entitled to the reductions, thus highlighting him as a villainous advocate of an exploitative system<sup>298</sup>.

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<sup>290</sup> Hendrickx, H. (1986) p.176.

<sup>291</sup> Manson, T. W. (1957) p.292.

<sup>292</sup> Jeremias, J. (1958) p.127.

<sup>293</sup> Fitzmyer, J. A. (1964) p.36.

<sup>294</sup> Blomberg, C. L. (1990) *Interpreting the Parables*. Leicester. Apollos. p.244.

<sup>295</sup> Bailey, K. E. (1976) p.89.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid. p.87.

<sup>297</sup> Ukpong, J. S. (1996) p.203.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid. p.204.

Greene is correct in calling the debtors' legal entitlement to reductions "questionable at best" and pointing out the lack of foundation in the text for a master who is an "exploitative power-monger"<sup>299</sup>. There is no sense of revenge in what the steward does to the master which is what Beavis suggests with her comparison with the stories of Aesop. She depicts the steward as a trickster who cleverly turns the tables on his master by "doing exactly what he was fired for: mishandling his master's affairs to the benefit of the debtors"<sup>300</sup>. This disagrees with what the steward appears to have been dismissed for as well as misunderstanding the subsequent events.

The second element that comes out of the point made by Gibson is the size of the 'cut' the steward could take. We know that he reduced the debts by 50% and 20% but it seems unreasonable that a steward would be able to get away with charging so much extra without enraging the debtors and making himself very unwelcome amongst them<sup>301</sup>. Scholars agree that stewards often received additions to contracts that were considered honourable, but these were unofficial token gestures that were not included on the written contracts themselves (e.g. Malina & Rohrbaugh<sup>302</sup>). If this was the case then it is very unlikely that this is what was removed from the contracts, since it would not have appeared on them in the first place. In terms of the steward's motivation, this gesture would be aimed more towards impressing the debtors and the local residents since it would not affect the finances of the master. It may be more likely, then, that the official interest (or part of it) was being removed since this did appear on the contracts and did belong to the master. According to scripture, the charging of interest was forbidden (see Exod. 22:25-27; Lev. 25:36-38; Deut. 15:7-11; 23:19-20 and the Mishnah) but "the pressures created by commercialisation and monetisation changed the nature of the economy of Palestine. Inevitably, the wealthy found ways to charge interest under other guises."<sup>303</sup> So the fact that interest was illegally charged has meant some scholars interpret the reductions on the contracts as an attempt to do what was legally and morally right in the eyes of God. This gives one explanation for praising the steward in v.8 and, as de Silva points out, is consistent with Luke's discourse on wealth in this chapter and with Jesus' teaching on lending elsewhere in the gospel such as 6:34-35<sup>304</sup>. This is not, however, the reason the master gives for praising him and does not appear to be his motivation. He has

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<sup>299</sup> Greene, M. D. (1999) p.85.

<sup>300</sup> Beavis, M. A. (1992) p.50.

<sup>301</sup> Bailley, K. E. (1976) p.90.

<sup>302</sup> Malina, B. J. and Rohrbaugh, R. L. (1992) p.374.

<sup>303</sup> Herzog II, W. R. (1994) p.246.

<sup>304</sup> de Silva, D. A. (1993) p.262.

already expressed his concern for his own future (v.4) so this can only be seen as an act of self-preservation. “The steward’s actions make his master appear generous, charitable, and law-abiding”<sup>305</sup>. Since what the reductions will mean for the steward (and perhaps what they teach about usury) rather than what they actually consist of is the key issue here, it is fair to consider the question redundant. The text itself does not explicitly say whether it is the principle, interest or his commission. It may have been any or all of these but the reaction of the master who then calls the steward ‘unjust’ implies that some of the master’s own money was lost in the transaction. The amounts, that are both to the value of 500 denarii, possibly suggest little thought was put into calculating the correct percentage for each debt. This may only have been an indication of the steward’s haste<sup>306</sup>. Perhaps he chose this number because he deemed it enough to make an impression on the master, the debtors and the locals. Problematically, this also is speculative since the text gives no explicit indication.

There is also an element of speculation involved in interpreting v.8a. This surprising conclusion to the parable proper (v.8b-13 being considered commentary here) is by far the most confusing part. Why was the steward praised by his master whilst being referred to as ἀδικίας (‘unjust’)? To characterise him thus, implies a form of immoral action but it is not certain whether this refers to his dealings with the debtors or to his previous wastefulness of his master’s possessions. It may, of course, refer to both. A number of scholars have touched upon the idea that the master, whilst not condoning the steward’s method, acknowledges the scheme’s cleverness and effectiveness (e.g. Blomberg<sup>307</sup>). For Beavis this supports her comparison with the motif of the slave who outsmarts his master in Mediterranean folklore<sup>308</sup>, which is consistent with the theme despite specific flaws. Manson sums up the point most effectively whilst referring to the discussion of who praises the steward: “Whether it is the employer or Jesus that speaks, we must take the purport of the speech to be: ‘This is a fraud; but it is a most ingenious fraud. The steward is a rascal; but he is a wonderfully clever rascal.’”<sup>309</sup>

In terms of the master’s own interests, he may call the steward unjust because he has given away money that was not his. On the other hand, he is praised, which suggests the master did not suffer a great monetary loss. The reduction may not have included any of the principal

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<sup>305</sup> Landry, D. and May, B. (2000) p.301.

<sup>306</sup> Bailley, K. E. (1976) p.101.

<sup>307</sup> Blomberg, C. L. (1990) p.245.

<sup>308</sup> Beavis, M. A. (1992) p.51.

<sup>309</sup> Manson, T. W. (1957) p.292.



debt, and even if it did, the large numbers involved suggest the master was able to afford these losses anyway. This is to take a less extreme view than Ukpong who thinks the master genuinely considers the debt relief to have been an unjust and illegal use of his money<sup>310</sup>. For Ukpong, the debt relief was a protest about the exploitative system upheld by elite members of society and the master's praise was an acknowledgment of this critique<sup>311</sup>. As interesting as Ukpong's comparison with the economic values of traditional African society is, a reading that glorifies the steward and demonises the master lacks evidence<sup>312</sup>. He is not portrayed as a tyrant but, on the other hand, it is unlikely that he suddenly chooses to praise the steward for bringing their neglect of the usury laws and the plight of the poor to his attention. The steward had personal motives and so did the master. The debt relief is praiseworthy because it reflects positively on the master.

The hearer/reader knows the steward's motive was self-preservation, as he admits in v.4, but the path to his own salvation lies in benefitting the master in some way. The debt relief, which puts the master in a favourable light, is certainly not a selfless gesture by the steward and the notion touched upon by Landry & May that the master was unaware or did not care about the steward's motive is very unlikely<sup>313</sup>. He is praised for his 'prudence', not his kindness. It is fair to deduce that the master did not know the steward's plan until after he had carried it out, but the debtors would probably assume that the steward was making the reductions at the request of his boss. The master is now faced with the options of accepting the reductions and enjoying the honour this brings him or correcting the contracts again and sacrificing that honour as well as his steward. The long term benefit of his new status outweighs his short term monetary loss. His apparent kindness and generosity, however, earn him more than popularity. His steward has initiated a new kind of relationship with him and them, that is, a new kind of indebtedness. The debtors now owe the master and therefore the master owes the steward. "Given the crucial importance of reciprocal obligation in the culture, the desperate manager has indeed won friends for himself."<sup>314</sup> When examining the issues of honour and shame within the text it is important to recognise that they are background issues only. Both Mathewson<sup>315</sup> and Greene criticise the reading of the parable by Kloppenborg who interprets the motivations of the master and steward as being more

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<sup>310</sup> Ukpong, J. S. (1996) p.206.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid. p.207.

<sup>312</sup> Greene, M. D. (1999) p.85.

<sup>313</sup> Landry, D. and May, B. (2000) p.305.

<sup>314</sup> Carroll, J. T. and Carroll, J. R. (1996) p.112.

<sup>315</sup> Mathewson, D. L. (1995) p.32.

honour-based than money or survival-based. “The issue of threatened honour may be on the periphery, but it certainly is not the explicit focus of the stated text.”<sup>316</sup> If it were, the accompanying commentary would focus on it<sup>317</sup>. The lack of explicit mention indicates that these social factors would have been self-evident to Jesus and his hearers and would, therefore, have spoiled the story if spelled out<sup>318</sup>.

It is not explicitly mentioned but we can assume the steward’s position is now safe. Perhaps this, rather than seeking alternative employment (or worse), was his aim all along<sup>319</sup>. He has not only escaped a dangerous situation but has done so in such a way that will ensure long term survival “through his diligent and single-minded attention to the demands of the hour”<sup>320</sup>. His willingness to risk everything (or seem to) has impressed the master. His previous wastefulness with wealth threw his future into uncertainty, whereas his later prudence secured it. “In this interpretation the full eschatological nuance of the adverb *phronimōs* is thus brought out, for the Christian situation is one dominated by a need for decisive action.”<sup>321</sup> So here we see the double meaning coming from the word φρονίμως of ‘prudence’ in the sense of securing one’s future financially and in terms of salvation. An eschatological reading shows that in the impending crisis of the coming Kingdom “Man’s only option is to entrust everything to the unfailing mercy of his generous master who, he can be confident, will accept to pay the price for man’s salvation”<sup>322</sup>. In such a reading the master represents God offering a merciful chance at redemption.

Some advocates of this interpretation (Ireland cites e.g. Loisy/Dodd<sup>323</sup>) have seen the general message of the parable about preparation now for assurance of a place in the Kingdom of God later in vv.1-7 only. As previously argued, v.8a at least must be included in the main body of the parable in order for it to be properly concluded by the master’s (not Jesus’) reaction. The last verses are sometimes considered to be later Lucan additions that refocus interpretation of the parable on the issues of prudent use of wealth. Ireland also cites Jeremias<sup>324</sup> who stresses the eschatological context and content of the parable and believes vv.8b-13 to be later additions about proper use of possessions but does not see this as an

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<sup>316</sup> Greene, M. D. (1999) p.84.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> de Silva, D. A. (1993) p.262.

<sup>319</sup> Herzog II, W. R. (1994) p.256.

<sup>320</sup> de Silva, D. A. (1993) p.264.

<sup>321</sup> Fitzmyer, J. A. (1964) p.37.

<sup>322</sup> Bailley, K. E. (1976) p.107.

<sup>323</sup> Ireland, D. J. (1989) p.300-1.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid. p.301.

introduction of a totally foreign element. I agree that the parable need not be rigidly divided between an eschatological and a monetary reading, and I think Jeremias is correct to say that vv.8b-13 reflects the later Christian community's attempt to apply the eschatological lesson of the parable in a more specific practical way. The resulting message of this connection is that one must ensure one's future in the Kingdom of God by being prudent with what one has in one's worldly environment. Presumably, then, this can be broadened out to promote prudence and wisdom in all aspects of life in preparation for the Kingdom of God. Greene, who takes an existential view on the parable, captures this idea: "The parable, in effect, creates a scenario which need not be tied exclusively to specific cultural boundaries, and which may be read as both question and challenge. That is, in the face of severe crisis, every reader is compelled to decide the type of existence worthy of being preserved."<sup>325</sup>

This story is about a rich man whose honour may be threatened when he hears hostile rumours about his steward. Accused of being wasteful with his master's possessions, the steward is dismissed and asked to surrender his account books. Faced with the prospect of dishonour, destitution and death, the steward seeks a way of securing himself within a new social network of protection. Before anyone has found out he has been stripped of his responsibility as steward, he reduces the amounts on the contracts of some of his master's debtors. The amounts are generous enough to secure friendship with the debtors because of the culture's obligation of reciprocity. They are also enough to cast the steward's master in a very positive light, his monetary loss being compensated by his honourable gain. Despite the steward's devious methods, the master has to accept the successful outcome of the steward's prudence and praises it accordingly.

So we now realise that the steward is not rewarded in spite of being a vicious criminal. The 'Unjust' title seems more to "define the sphere in which the steward has been operating"<sup>326</sup>, a comment that is clarified by noting the use of the same word ἀδικίας for the steward in v.8 and mammon in v.9. It is not the first time Jesus has told a parable that has a confusing outcome with the favourable treatment of someone who appears to have acted wrongly e.g. The Prodigal Son. The wisdom and forethought of the steward is commended by both the monetary and eschatological interpretations. If the parable was making a point about the prudent use of wealth and possessions only, it could have been made in a more concise and effective way. Nonetheless it is the principle aim of the parable, hence the inclusion of

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<sup>325</sup> Greene, M. D. (1999) p.87.

<sup>326</sup> de Silva, D. A. (1993) p.265.

familiar themes relating to the relationship between rich and poor such as debt. The master is described as a rich man, illustrating the contrast between him and his debtors. The steward, occupying a middle position, and in this case playing a Robin Hood-like role, redistributes wealth from rich to poor making the situation better for all including himself<sup>327</sup>.

For those who see vv.8b-13 as later additions that usurp the original meaning, they may be comforted by the reminder that teachings on wealth and possessions are often presented overlapping with or expanding on teachings of the Kingdom. Jesus clearly saw a strong connection between the two since to worship unrighteous mammon was to shun God, but having the right attitude to wealth can gain one a place in the Kingdom. My investigations into the Rich Man (Mk.10:17-31) and the Call Narratives especially explore this and may be explained further with help from social models that deal with Jesus' unorthodox lifestyle.

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<sup>327</sup> Carroll, J. T. and Carroll, J. R. (1996) p.112.

## The Rich Man

In Mark's recording of Jesus' encounter with the rich man (10:17-22) and the subsequent discussion with his disciples (10:23-31) there arises a common question of Jesus' stance on the wealthy and to what extent wealth stood in the way of salvation. Beyond this, the incident raises the question whether Jesus' command to the rich man to renounce all he had and give to the poor should apply to everyone and what impact such a teaching would have on an understanding of Jesus, if appropriate, as a social reformer.

At the outset, little is known about the person encountered in vv.17-22. Whereas Matthew depicts someone 'young' and Luke depicts 'a ruler' approaching Jesus, Mark introduces simply 'a man'. Verse 20 may suggest the man was well past his 'youth'<sup>328</sup>, and since the detail that he was a ruler, perhaps of a local council or court<sup>329</sup>, is absent so nothing is learned of his role within society until later when his great possessions are pointed out (v.22). Clarke (citing Rhoads, Dewey and Michie) observes that this man, in consistency with four other minor Markan characters<sup>330</sup>, runs up to Jesus and genuflects before him and is presented favourably, but later his wealth throws his favourability into question<sup>331</sup>. Verse 17 does at least portray a man of unquestionable faith. He genuinely believes Jesus will have the answer to his question, but does his enthusiastic greeting hide an underhand method of getting his answer? The social conventions of reciprocity and challenge-riposte could mean the flattering address 'Good Teacher' should be understood as a positive challenge requiring a positive response from Jesus in order to maintain the honour of both parties. "In a limited good society, compliments indicate aggression; they implicitly accuse a person of rising above the rest of one's fellows at their expense. Compliments conceal envy, not unlike the evil eye."<sup>332</sup> Before explaining this, Malina and Rohrbaugh already pointed out that the man was not "a hostile questioner"<sup>333</sup> like the Pharisees in 10:2 so his behaviour to Jesus in v.17 cannot be described as 'aggressive', but Jesus seems to respond as if it was. Any challenge posed is warded off with another question and any envy is deflected with the saying "No one is good

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<sup>328</sup> Branscombe, B. H. (1941) *The Gospel of Mark*. London. Hodder & Stoughton. p.181.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> The leper (Mk.1:40), the Gerasene demoniac (5:6), Jairus (5:22) and the Syro-Phoenician woman (7:25).

<sup>331</sup> Clarke, A.D. (2009) 'Do Not Judge Who Is Worthy and Unworthy': Clement's Warning Not to Speculate About the Rich Young Man's Response (Mark 10:17-31).' JSNT. 31. pp.447-67.

<sup>332</sup> Malina, B. J. And Rohrbaugh, R. L. (1992) *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. p.244.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid. p.243.

but God alone” (v.18). This serves to correct the man’s slightly misguided (not aggressive) approach.

As Jesus begins quoting commandments from the Decalogue, he includes a foreshadowing of what is to come. His inclusion of the otherwise absent commandment, ‘Do not defraud’ (which stands out for not being part of the Decalogue) “is our first indication that much more is being discussed in this story than the personal failure of this one man: judgement is being passed upon the wealthy class.”<sup>334</sup> Mark’s inclusion of the extra commandment seems to be authentic since it is absent from the original ten, from Matthew and Luke and because it is particularly appropriate for a passage concerned with wealth. The Greek verb used, ἄποστερέιν, means ‘to defraud’ or ‘to deprive’ used in the LXX and the New Testament in reference particularly to keeping back the wages of a hireling or refusing to return money or goods deposited with another for safekeeping<sup>335</sup>. It is understandable then, how many scholars regard this addition as a variant or replacement of either the eighth, ninth or tenth commandments. Since Jesus includes “Do not steal” and “Do not bear false witness” in his own list it seems fair to side with those who consider this to be in place of the law against covetousness. The implication, however, is that this man has displayed covetous behaviour and gained his wealth by unlawful means. Malina and Rohrbaugh suggest there is no fairer implication about a rich man: “Profit making and the acquisition of wealth were automatically assumed to be the result of exhortation or fraud, and the notion of an honest rich man was a first-century oxymoron.”<sup>336</sup> If this was the case, the way the commandments were quoted was tailored to suit who they were aimed at. They are quoted casually with no “legalistic pedantry”<sup>337</sup> and, as is commonly observed, it is those concerning human relationships that are included. There is no explicit evidence presented that the man had committed any wrong doing. Indeed he claims to have followed the commandments from his youth (v.20). The inclusion of ‘Do not defraud’ still acts as a warning against the temptations that come from wealth and power and anticipates the teaching on earthly wealth that is to come<sup>338</sup>, even to the point of suggesting that a refusal to obey Jesus’ command in v.21 is a

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<sup>334</sup> Myers, C. (2008) *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books. p.273.

<sup>335</sup> E.g. Ex.21:10; Deut.24:14; Ezek.33:15; Mal.3:5 (which suggests such activities were commonplace); 1 Cor.6:7-8.

<sup>336</sup> Malina, B. J. and Rohrbaugh, R. L. (1992) p.251.

<sup>337</sup> Schweizer, E. (1971) *The Good News According to Mark*. London. SPCK. p.211.

<sup>338</sup> McDermott, J. M. (2008) ‘Didn’t Jesus Know He Was God? Mark 10:17-31’. *Irish Theological Quarterly*. 73. pp.307-333.

refusal to obey 'Do not defraud', as though the poor to whom he does not give (his own employees, perhaps) are being defrauded<sup>339</sup>.

Verse 21 does away with any subtlety as Jesus comes to his point. He wants the man to go, sell his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor and follow him, but the apparent simplicity of these commands hides the challenging level of commitment which Jesus demands. Jesus' conversation with the man so far has revealed some potential, but potential limited by the man's attachment to his possessions and the conventional understanding of goodness to which they have bound him<sup>340</sup>. Another interpretation is that wealth and possessions can steal focus from God (Mt.6:24). Is the renunciation of property a requirement for full discipleship then? There is little question over whether this is what Jesus was offering. The command 'follow me' could automatically be understood as a call to permanent discipleship<sup>341</sup>. Discipleship to Jesus involved a drastic change in lifestyle. It meant leaving a fixed abode, which meant leaving the safety of the household, which meant leaving aside certain observances of family piety too (cf. Mt.8:22; 19:12)<sup>342</sup> - yet more challenges to (moral as well as social) convention. It meant this man would be "depriving himself of the resources on which he has come to rely for status, security, interest and enjoyment in life" and replacing them with faith in God as his sole provider<sup>343</sup>. Seeing as this is what the other travelling disciples have done (see v.28) it seems fair to agree that "discipleship to Jesus and sacrificial renunciation inevitably go hand in hand"<sup>344</sup> but it is also fair to agree that "the giving up of one's possessions is not a prerequisite for discipleship"<sup>345</sup> and that 'treasure in heaven' cannot be guaranteed by it. Why else would Jesus bother to remind him of the sole goodness of God and the other commandments? In this man's case, it appears his attachment to his wealth holds him back more than the wealth itself.

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<sup>339</sup> Gundry, R. H. (1993) *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. p.554.

<sup>340</sup> Branscomb, B. H. (1941). pp.183.

<sup>341</sup> Hengel, M. (1981) *The Charismatic Leader and his followers*. Edinburgh. T & T Clark. p.53. Also, Schnackenburg, R. (1965) *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*. London. Burns & Oates. p.43.

<sup>342</sup> Theissen, G. 'The Wandering Radicals: Light Shed by the Sociology of Literature on the Early Transmission of Jesus Sayings' in Horrell, D. G. ed. (1999) *Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation*. Edinburgh. T & T Clark. p.100.

<sup>343</sup> Nineham, D. E. (1963) *Saint Mark*. London SCM Press Ltd. p.271.

<sup>344</sup> Anderson, H. (1976) *The Gospel of Mark*. London. Oliphants. p.249.

<sup>345</sup> Schweitzer, E. (1971) p.212. See also, Capper, B. J. (2001) 'Two Types of Discipleship in Early Christianity.' *Journal of Theological Studies* 52. pp.105-123.

For now, there is little question over that attachment. The man's reaction to Jesus' commands reveals both that and, finally, the size of his fortune. He is shocked, and the end of his exchange with Jesus gives a shock to the audience too, for this enthusiastic, law-abiding man whom Jesus loved, now goes away sorrowful. Nowhere else in Mark is Jesus described a 'loving' someone (cf. John 11:5; 13:23), and here it highlights a poignant contrast as we learn that though Jesus loved the man, the man loved his possessions. Luke's choice of language makes the impact all the more forceful. His man is "περιλυπος" (very sorrowful) rather than merely "λυπουμενος" (sorrowful) because he was "πλουσιος σφοδρα" (extremely wealthy)<sup>346</sup>. Matthew and Mark use a milder adjective "πολλα" (much/many) to describe his possessions, but they include the noun "κτηματα" which can relate specifically to landed property so perhaps the man was also reluctant to leave his great estates. This reluctance is clearly a sign of attachment to his wealth but may also be a sign that "the barb has stuck", leaving hope for potential future repentance<sup>347</sup>. It has to be acknowledged that Jesus does not receive an explicit refusal of his offer. The man goes away perhaps, Clarke claims hopefully, to sell his possessions in readiness of becoming a disciple<sup>348</sup>. In light of the teachings that follow, particularly vv.23-25 which emphasise how much wealth obstructs entry into the Kingdom of God, it makes more sense and is therefore more likely that the man *has* rejected the call.

It looks as though the man, although he was its inspiration, is absent for the following discourse (in Luke 18:23-24 he appears to stay and listen), and misses Jesus lament the difficulty of the rich to enter the Kingdom of God (v.23, 25). Best observes how Mark has arranged the sections of these passages to move from the specific example of one wealthy figure, to a general teaching on rich people, to an even more general teaching on the difficulty of discipleship for all Christians<sup>349</sup>. Jesus seems genuinely sorry at the outcome of this encounter rather than resentful. Pity for the man should not be given on the basis of how hard it is dealing with the temptation of wealth, though<sup>350</sup>. This would be a rather alien concept in the face of Jewish teaching, which has traditionally portrayed wealth as a sign of God's

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<sup>346</sup> Kim, K-J. (1998) *Stewardship and Almsgiving in Luke's Theology*. Sheffield. Sheffield Academic Press. p.191.

<sup>347</sup> Cranfield, C. E. B. (1963). p.331.

<sup>348</sup> Clarke, A. D. (2009). p.462.

<sup>349</sup> Best, E. (1981) *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*. JSNT Supplement Series 4. Sheffield. JSNT Press. p.111-112.

<sup>350</sup> Cf. Cranfield, C. E. (1963) p.331.



bleeding<sup>351</sup>, thus explaining the amazed reaction of the disciples in v.24. Even more shocking is the memorable proverb in v.25 which declares “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God”. All the more memorable and impressive for being a bizarre contrast of the largest animal in Palestine and the smallest imaginable aperture, the camel could have been chosen, Gundry observes, for its reputation as a beast of burden<sup>352</sup>. What better illustration of a person encumbered by their many possessions which prevents their entry to the Kingdom of God? This observation supports the argument against the medieval theory of there being a small gate in Jerusalem’s city wall just big enough to accommodate a laden camel. Attempts to diminish the intended hyperbole of the saying or simply explain it away are usually dismissed. Myers criticises them for robbing the metaphor of its “class-critical power”<sup>353</sup> and this raises the question of whether Jesus intended to state that it is *impossible* for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God or just very very *improbable*.

Witherington reads v.25 as saying that no amount of strenuous human effort can ensure salvation<sup>354</sup>. Verse 27 supports this as does the rest of the passage which, if we agree with Clarke, universalises the teaching on wealth to show how hard it is for everyone to enter the Kingdom of God, not just the rich<sup>355</sup>. Other scholars take a much less forgiving approach to v.25, saying the violent contrast between camel and needle’s eye illustrates unquestionably that salvation for the rich is absurd, impossible and even unthinkable<sup>356</sup>. The conversation with the man has already revealed someone whose wealth holds them back in spite of being otherwise faithful and law-abiding, which Crossley believes is confirmation that “Jesus damned the rich”<sup>357</sup>. It may even be that the rich damn themselves if Horsley’s link between Mk. 10:23, 25 and Mt.6:24/Lk.16:13 is upheld. For him, just being rich means one master, ‘unrighteous mammon’, has been chosen over another, God<sup>358</sup>. If we also agree that the rich

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<sup>351</sup> E.g. Job 1:10; 42:10; Ps. 128:1-2; Isa. 3:10 etc. Cf. Deut. 15:7-11; Prov. 22:22-23 where it is the poor who should be pitied and protected.

<sup>352</sup> Gundry, R. H. (1993) p.556.

<sup>353</sup> Myers, C. (2008). p.275.

<sup>354</sup> Witherington III, B. (2001) *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. p.284.

<sup>355</sup> Clarke, A. D. (2009). p.454.

<sup>356</sup> E.g. Lane, W. L. (1974) *The Gospel of Mark*. London. Marshall, Morgan & Scott. p.369; Gundry, R. H. (1993) p.556; McDermott, J. M. (2008) p.324.

<sup>357</sup> Crossley, J. G. (2005) ‘The Damned Rich (Mark 10:17-31)’. *The Expository Times*. 116. pp.397-401.

<sup>358</sup> Horsley, R. A. (1993) *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. p.248.

always gained their wealth from impoverishing peasant producers<sup>359</sup>, this would make sense of Jesus' inclusion of the commandment, 'Do not defraud'.

Even if Jesus does not speak with the force understood by the likes of Crossley, the amazed reaction of the disciples reflects some potential fear about the way the teaching affects them. Branscomb may be right in identifying a reflection of early church concerns in vv.28-30. "Exclusion from synagogue and civic affairs and separation from members of one's family were common experiences. The saying [vv.29-30] states the reward which all such would receive."<sup>360</sup> The sentiment is the same whether set in the community of Jesus or Mark as Jesus refers to the "persecutions" the disciples may expect, a warning consistent with Mark's portrayal of discipleship in terms of the cross and also serving to remove any sense of straight forward reward for discipleship<sup>361</sup>. Indeed the list of things sacrificed (v.29) shows the disciples have put themselves in the path of genuine danger by leaving behind the things that form the very basis of survival and existence: family, home and lands<sup>362</sup>. Jesus promises, however, that these things will be rewarded back in this life a hundredfold in the form of a new spiritual family, and the hospitality they can hope to receive on mission will also form part of what replaces the list of sacrifices. Myers says: "the social function of the text is to legitimate the practice of *communism*" as he identifies the gender-equal, child-friendly "reconstituted" kinship structure (cf. Mk.3:35)<sup>363</sup>. This description of what is to be expected for followers of Jesus supports those who believe the refrain in v.31 is directed more towards the disciples than the rich<sup>364</sup>. If they move away from real family, home and land and accept the new position within their "reconstituted" spiritual family in the present age, then they are the ones who can expect to become 'first' in an eschatological reversal of fortunes.

It may be worth asking whether those who are to come 'last' are actually excluded from the Kingdom of God entirely (as Crossley believes they are) because 'last to enter' and 'never to enter' sound like very different things. If the 'last' includes those with great wealth, possessions or power then how are figures like Joseph of Arimathea (15:43) to be understood? There is not enough evidence to support Crossley's total damnation of the rich, despite Jesus being generally critical of those with money. The majority of exegetes think he did not ask for the universal renunciation of wealth or believe that money was inherently

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid. p.249.

<sup>360</sup> Branscomb, B. H. (1941) p.184.

<sup>361</sup> Best, E. (1981). p.114.

<sup>362</sup> Witherington III, B. (2001). p.284.

<sup>363</sup> Myers, C. (2008). p.276.

<sup>364</sup> Best, E. (1981), pp.113; Cranfield, (1963), p.334.

evil<sup>365</sup>. “Mark is not making poverty a special virtue.”<sup>366</sup> The gospels generally do not portray Jesus as being destitute; he was often the guest of a well-to-do host and some of his behaviour brought accusations of gluttony (Mt.11:19; Lk.7:34) etc. He placed little emphasis on the importance of possessions (e.g. Mt.5:40/Lk.6:29) but thought everyone was entitled to the minimum basics of survival (e.g. Mt.6:11/Lk.11:3; Mt.20:1-16). Clarke’s examination of Clement of Alexandria’s text ‘Who is the Rich Man that Shall be Saved?’ reveals that Clement saw no point in voluntary poverty when one’s wealth could be put to use helping the needy although he eventually deems the rich man in Mark 10 unworthy because of his inability to answer Jesus’ call<sup>367</sup>. This is consistent with the common view held that the rich man’s case was special in some way if he, but not all rich people, was asked to renounce his wealth. It may have been that the early part of their meeting showed Jesus that the man needed to abandon his reliance on riches and rely solely on God<sup>368</sup>. Or perhaps the addition of the commandment ‘Do not defraud’ and that he may have had great estates (κτηματα) hints at the man’s unlawful acquisition of his wealth meaning it was this, not the wealth itself, that would prevent entry to the Kingdom. He is being held up as an example because “He belongs to the class that benefitted from the present social, economic, political, and religious structures under Roman rule”<sup>369</sup> and therefore he represents those for whom wealth has become a great attachment. It was not important that he give up his possessions as such, but Jesus tested him to see if he could and he failed. The dialogue with the disciples that follows shows that renunciation applies to more than wealth; it applies to families and workplaces; it is a “social renunciation”<sup>370</sup> of all the other aspects of worldly living that can become points of attachment greater than God.

Jesus had been a witness to the danger of this his whole life. Fiensy argues for Jesus’ artisan status (see Mk.6:3) which would have brought him into contact with both urban rich and rural peasantry (though representing neither group specifically), allowing him to build up his social circle before the start of his ministry<sup>371</sup>. Crossley thinks Jesus would have been witness to the urbanisation projects in Galilee (the rebuilding of Sepphoris and the founding of Tiberias)

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<sup>365</sup> E.g. Anderson, H. (1976), p.252.

<sup>366</sup> Schweizer, E. (1971), p.215.

<sup>367</sup> Clarke, A. D. (2009), p.451.

<sup>368</sup> Lane, W. L. (1974), p.367.

<sup>369</sup> Kaylor, R. D. (1994), p.190.

<sup>370</sup> Stegemann, E. W. & Stegemann, W. (1999) *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*. Edinburgh. T & T Clark. p.201.

<sup>371</sup> Fiensy, D. (1999) ‘Leaders of Mass Movements and the Leader of the Jesus Movement’. *JSNT*. Vol.21. pp.3-27.

during his youth and the parasitic relationship between urban and rural environment would have increased pressure on the peasantry, cultivated Jesus' hostility to wealth and ultimately contributed to the emergence of his movement<sup>372</sup>. His teachings on wealth grew out of his appreciation of non-elite experience and generally his strong social vision was grounded in the strong group orientation of his Mediterranean world<sup>373</sup> but did he actually advocate social change? Many scholars, whilst acknowledging Jesus' awareness of his socio-political context, would never characterise him as any kind of social revolutionary<sup>374</sup> because this might detract from his primary religious purpose. As Grant observes there is "no trace of social teaching or doctrine" in the words of Jesus "for there will be no recognisable social structure"<sup>375</sup> in the Kingdom of God. This is unconvincing on two counts. As much as Jesus' teaching was always religiously motivated, he desired to change the way wealth and poverty were thought of (notice the shock of the disciples in vv.24, 26), as well as a desire to promote love for God above love for unrighteous mammon (Mt.6:24; Lk.16:13). As for the Kingdom, a social structure is actually what provides a model for it. It is just one radically different to the one familiar to the followers of Jesus. God will now be the head of the family, everyone else will fulfil the role of brother, sister, child and neighbour. God will act as patron to everyone, overseeing the reciprocal agreement of the covenant. Jesus sought to establish this very thing in the form of fictive kinship<sup>376</sup> and there is evidence of a community of goods in the early Christian Church. It is as if Jesus wanted to make the present world as like the Kingdom of God as possible in advance, in anticipation of its arrival. Realistically, of course, it would be untenable for all people to renounce all they had and live like disciples. This would make Jesus' movement's lifestyle and relationship with the wider community less meaningful. They had to stand out as extreme examples of how one *could* live without strong attachments to possessions etc., although of course they acknowledged the necessity of money for going about one's daily life (Mt.20:1-16; Mk.12:17). Jesus as a reformer in the sense of one who genuinely believes society can be made equal with regard to wealth is neither evident in the gospels nor realistic as an expectation. Reforming attitudes towards wealth and refocusing people's minds on God rather than mammon is much more achievable and I think Jesus may have seen this as a realistic goal. The idea posed by Virtuoso Religion,

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<sup>372</sup> Crossley, J. G. (2005), p.400.

<sup>373</sup> Hanson, K. C. & Oakman, D. E. (1998) *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. p.125.

<sup>374</sup> E.g. Schnackenburg, R. (1965), p.111.

<sup>375</sup> Grant, R. M. (1978) *Early Christianity and Society*. London. Collins. p.98.

<sup>376</sup> Hanson, K. C. & Oakman, D. E. (1998), p. 126.

that *anyone* could live by the ideal standard of a disciple, but not *everyone*, is identifiable here.

## Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple

The strange happening of Mark 11:15-19 par. has been given various titles but it is best described as a 'demonstration'. This choice illustrates how Jesus highlighted his concerns in a deliberate, public, memorable and thought-provoking way. Common alternatives like 'incident' (or similar) are too neutral whereas the traditional 'Cleansing of the Temple' is not neutral enough, leading one towards particular interpretations i.e. with a strong concern for purity. The event is famously difficult to categorise so it is necessary to draw on some outside yet closely related texts such as the destruction sayings (Mt.24:2 par.; Mt. 26:61; Mk. 14:58; Jn. 2:19) and the fig tree story (Mk.11:12-14, 20-21 par.).

In Mark's version (referred to henceforth unless otherwise specified) it is not until the morning after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem that he returns to the Temple precincts having only looked around them the night before. He begins to drive out the people buying and selling, overturning the tables that served as work stations for the money changers and the seats where the dove sellers sat. He disallows vessels to be carried through the court and quotes two scriptural references (Isa. 56:7; Jer. 7:11) to explain his actions. The incident and the positive reaction of the crowds fuel the fears of the High priests and probably set in motion events that lead to Jesus' arrest. All four Gospels include versions of the event with altered details, most notably John, who includes it much earlier in the narrative.

For the most part the question of whether the temple demonstration really took place is answered with acknowledgement that it was at least plausible. Most arguments against this usually ask why such an outburst by Jesus would not have prompted immediate arrest by the authorities. Such a question is worth asking regardless of one's position on historicity but for some the idea that the incident was met with no active response is impossible. Snodgrass, in response to this typical objection, points out the fear of the crowd felt by the Jewish authorities (Mk.11:18) which may have inhibited their initial reaction to the popular Jesus<sup>377</sup>. So it was not that the outburst was ignored or unnoticed, but that it was not necessarily treated as one may have expected. Snodgrass also suggests the lack of response from the Romans may have been because they were not threatened by Jesus as a figure inciting revolution or riot. Historical deniers appear to sometimes overemphasise the scale of the

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<sup>377</sup> Snodgrass, Klyne R. 'The Temple Incident' in Bock, Darrell L. & Webb, Robert L. eds. (2009) *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. p.454.

event but Snodgrass is right to say it is important not to respond by underemphasising it either as a mere undetected symbolic gesture. It was a bold risky move that got noticed.<sup>378</sup> De Jonge, as well as questioning the lack of arrest, asks why the demonstration was not cited in the trial of Jesus<sup>379</sup>. We could suggest that bringing it up was unnecessary since the Synoptic gospels position it so closely, as if part of the build-up, to the arrest and crucifixion anyway, and because v.18 in Mark shows the decision to kill Jesus had already been made. Additionally Gundry points out that the questioning of Jesus' authority in vv. 27-33 only leads to the embarrassment of the Jewish authorities and the trial itself is overshadowed by talk of the claim about destruction and rebuilding of the temple (14:57-58),<sup>380</sup> giving the sense the topic had been dealt with or was not as important. For now we must be content with the sentiment of Snodgrass who reminds us that "Our inability to explain an event fully does not make the event less real."<sup>381</sup>

There is more to explore in support of the historical plausibility of the event when we consider why, if the event did not really take place, would the account be created by the Church? Snodgrass asks this question and wonders what gain the Church may have sought in forming the story since one would expect a clear theological agenda. There appears to be no gain in writing a story that is ambiguous in its aim and runs the risk of having Jesus appear seditious. There appears to be no reflection of a negative feeling for the Temple in the early Church since the gospel accounts do not attack the Temple itself (just perhaps those who run it).<sup>382</sup> If there is no discernible reason for the early Church inserting the story, it is logical to conclude it did not invent it. It would make little sense given the kind of concerns and tensions reflected in the texts regarding the authorities. Evans detects a priesthood-critical tone to the saying in v.17 which is to be found reflected elsewhere.<sup>383</sup> He disagrees with Sanders' assertion that v.17 is an addition and that priestly corruption is not a concern.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid. p.454.

<sup>379</sup> de Jonge, H. J. 'The Cleansing of the Temple in Mark 11:15 and Zechariah 14:21' in Tuckett, C. (2003) *The Book of Zechariah and Its Influence*. Burlington. Ashgate Publishing Ltd. p.92.

<sup>380</sup> Gundry, R. H. (2000) *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. p.646.

<sup>381</sup> Snodgrass, K. R. (2009) p.439.

<sup>382</sup> Snodgrass, Klyne R. 'The Temple Incident' in Bock, Darrell L. & Webb, Robert L. eds. (2009) *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. p.431-434.

<sup>383</sup> Evans, C. A. ed. (2008) *Encyclopaedia of the Historical Jesus*. New York. Routledge. p.635. He lists a number of texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls on various priest-critical themes i.e. the wicked priest (1Qp. Hab 1:13; 8:9; 9:9; 11:4), robbing the poor (8:12; 9:5; 10:1; 12:10), amassing wealth (8:8-12; 9:4-5) and defiling the 'Sanctuary of God' (12:8-9).

<sup>384</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1985) *Jesus and Judaism*. London. SCM Press Ltd. p.66.

The last thing to consider on the question of historicity is the Gospel of John. The main obstacle to overcome with John is his altered chronology. His version of the demonstration in the Temple takes place in his second chapter on Jesus' first of three trips to Jerusalem (as opposed to his last and only trip in the Synoptics) right at the beginning of his ministry. The removal of the event from the time of the arrest, trial and crucifixion is arguably enough to doubt the accuracy of John's timing if one believes these things belong together.<sup>385</sup> John does, however, link the event to Jesus' death and resurrection with a reinterpreted version of the saying about the destruction and rebuilding of the temple (Jn.2:19-22 cf. Mk.14:57-58; Mt.26:61). That John's timing of the event is actually more likely is supported by the reminder that John's longer ministry of three years gave him the option of putting the event where it actually belonged, at the first of three Jerusalem visits, rather than being forced to place it in the single Jerusalem visit of the Synoptics. Furthermore, the mention of the Temple construction taking forty six years in Jn.2:20, based on the understanding that construction of Herod's temple began around 20/19 B.C.E. puts the completion date around 27/28 C.E., the time Jesus' ministry is thought to have begun.<sup>386</sup> So, as is often the case, the fact that John does not agree with the other three accounts is not reason enough to dismiss his version. The issues raised here about early Church concerns and redactional discrepancies are important for interpreting the demonstration but do little so far to disprove its *plausibility*.

A broad approach to the question takes us via the main authenticity criteria and relies predominantly on the criteria of Multiple Attestation and Embarrassment. All four gospels include this event, despite variations in detail and chronology. Its significance is clearly recognised even if its actual meaning is unclear. There is great potential within this episode for Jesus as an individual or the Church in general to be viewed negatively or to be misconstrued in their meaning so there would have been an element of risk for the Church to invent it. As ambiguous as the outburst was, it seems to contain some features that are consistent with some of Jesus' other teaching tendencies such as criticism of an unjust economic system, criticism of religious hypocrisy and a strong eschatological focus. The criterion of Coherence has some relevance as well therefore. It is interesting that this episode has invited the most discussion of its authenticity. Perhaps this is because of the significance it plays in the build-up to the crucifixion or perhaps simply because it is so complex and

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<sup>385</sup> Brown, R. E. (1966) *The Gospel According to John I-XII*. New Haven. Yale University Press. p.117.

<sup>386</sup> McGrath, J. F. "‘Destroy this Temple’: Issues of History in John 2:13-22" in Anderson, P. N., Just, F., S.J., & Thatcher, T. eds. (2009) *John, Jesus and History, Vol 2. Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel*. Atlanta. Society of Biblical Literature. p.40.



intriguing. In any case, we know at least that the Temple setting was real and as such we can begin to imagine the context within which the event took place.

The gospels give little sense of the event's scale in relation to the area or crowd size. We must envision the scene as he entered the temple precincts. It took place in the vast outer court of the temple measuring roughly 300 by 450 metres<sup>387</sup> which would have been crowded, busy and loud. The area of the whole temple grounds had actually been extended by Herod to around 150,000 square metres thus creating a spacious outer court later given the modern designation 'Court of the Gentiles' since non-Jews and other 'impure' had access to this area<sup>388</sup>. It is wrong to envision a huge court full of animals and people bustling about their business being suddenly stopped in their tracks by the words and actions of one man acting alone (the participation of the disciples is not mentioned). This activity may have only affected a limited section of a large area. It is not totally clear whether the buyers and sellers only 'began' to be or were entirely removed (Mk.11:15 cf. Mt.21:12) and whether their exclusion and the prevention of activity continued until the evening when Jesus withdrew (Mk.11:19)<sup>389</sup>. If disruption had been far more extensive and control by Jesus and his group had been maintained for any length of time, Borg observes it would have taken "a paramilitary or mob action involving scores of followers (possibly more) using force" and even in such circumstances "the non-intervention of the Roman troops and the Temple police is incomprehensible"<sup>390</sup>. Whilst this did not occur, the incident did not go unnoticed by Temple authorities (11:18; 11:27-28) and, as Evans' stress on the fact that it was a 'demonstration' not a 'takeover' suggests<sup>391</sup>, perhaps the display was never meant permanently to overhaul Temple business but perhaps it was meant to be detected.

In Mark, Jesus turns up at the Temple the night before the demonstration on his entry into Jerusalem and 'looks around'. Myers notes that the term περιβλεψάμενος is to be found elsewhere before other significant events or sayings of Jesus (e.g. Mk.3:5; 3:34; 5:32; 9:8;

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<sup>387</sup> Keener, C.S. (2009) *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. p.245 and Edwards, J. R. (2002) *The Gospel According to Mark*. Leicester. Apollos. p.341. See Josephus Ant. 15.391-425.

<sup>388</sup> Snodgrass, Klyne R. 'The Temple Incident' in Bock, Darrell L. & Webb, Robert L. eds. (2009) *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. p.448-9.

<sup>389</sup> Hiers, R. H. (1971) 'Purification of the Temple: Preparation for the Kingdom of God'. *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Vol.90. No.1. p.84.

<sup>390</sup> Borg, M. J. (1998) *Conflict Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*. Harrisburg, PA. Trinity Press International. p.182.

<sup>391</sup> Evans, C. A. ed. (2008) *Encyclopaedia of the Historical Jesus*. New York. Routledge. p.634.

10:23)<sup>392</sup> suggesting the word should be viewed as a marker of something important about to happen. So what scene actually greeted Jesus upon entering the court the next morning? Firstly, it would most certainly have been full of activity. Mark 11:18 mentions a crowd (ὄχλος) being present to witness the event and the temple would have been undergoing preparations for Passover. There is some safety in assuming what Jesus saw was typical of that time simply because the demonstration is presented by the evangelists as being atypical. If what Jesus did was so exceptional, the contrasting context must represent what was normal business in order for the action's impact to be felt. Certain features of the story reveal the date. "According to the Mishnah (*Šeqalim* 1:3) the tables of the moneychangers were set up in the temple three weeks before Passover (on 25 Adar), and presumably remained there for a week, until 1 Nisan, the date by which payment was supposed to be made (cf. *m. Šeqalim* 3:1-3)."<sup>393</sup> Money changers were needed because the tax was required to be paid in a particular coinage, as described in Exodus 30:11-16. Pilgrims came from many miles away with money from their own regions which needed changing for the tax but also to purchase their sacrifices. Great numbers of sacrifices were made, especially at times of celebration like Passover: Josephus gives an example of 256,500 sacrifices being made during one year's festival (War 6.422-27). The animals themselves had to be of a particular standard of 'unblemished' purity to be granted use as a sacrifice so it was common for pre-approved animals to be obtained directly from the Temple. "A charge was made in Jerusalem for the service, but this was doubtless to be preferred to the alternative: bringing one's own dove from somewhere as far as Galilee and running the risk of having it found blemished after the trip. The charge for inspection would be made in any case."<sup>394</sup> This demonstrates how closely tied in with religious rituals and Temple purity the business of the buyers, sellers and money changers was.

As far as the forbidding of carrying through the court goes, the word σκεῦος is translated most commonly as 'vessel', 'merchandise' or 'thing', each having different implications. The first concern that springs to mind is that Jesus objected to people using the temple court as a short-cut to the other side of town thus not respecting its holy function. A Mishnah text (*m. Berakot* 9:5) may support this interpretation but Bauckham finds it unconvincing<sup>395</sup>, whereas

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<sup>392</sup> Myers, C. (2008) *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books. p.299.

<sup>393</sup> Bauckham, R. 'Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple' in Lindars, B. ed. (1988) *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity*. Cambridge. James Clarke and Co. p.75.

<sup>394</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1985) *Jesus and Judaism*. London. SCM Press Ltd. p.64.

<sup>395</sup> Bauckham, R. (1988) p.77.

Gundry finds this and similar texts (*b. Ber.* 54a; 62b.) credible<sup>396</sup>. Bauckham is more inclined to believe the carrying referred to materials being brought inside to the Temple, not from one side of the grounds to the other. "Flour, oil and wine were bought by the temple treasury, which sold them at a profit to people making offerings of them (*m. Seqalim* 4:3; 5:4; cf. 4:8). It seems that, as with the sale of doves, the temple operated a monopoly and fixed the price (*m. Seqalim* 5:4; 4:9). Thus, Jesus was protesting against the way in which the temple treasury had turned the sacrificial system into a profit-making business."<sup>397</sup> This would suggest 'merchandise' is the best translation of *skeuos*. A concern for keeping commerce-related items from the temple is evident.<sup>398</sup> There initially appears to be no logical reason for Jesus to reject objects necessary for sacrifice, in the same way he did for the money changers and merchants, unless he objected to the practice itself. A desire to keep certain objects from the temple implies a purity concern and this is correct to an extent as well.

Understanding who the groups mentioned in Mark 11:15 were and what they were doing in the Temple court raises the question of what exactly Jesus was objecting to when he turned them out and disrupted their work stations. Sanders emphasises that the demonstration, at first glance, makes little sense because the trade being stopped was essential for the running of the sacrificial system<sup>399</sup>. The whole Temple was "fundamentally an economic institution"<sup>400</sup>, a centre for finance and commerce. Why did these activities upset Jesus, then, if they were a normal part of daily proceedings? It is not clear, for example, if charges were exceptionally high.<sup>401</sup> Keener notes that the money changers themselves were respected citizens and that temple commerce did not directly benefit the aristocracy<sup>402</sup>. Was the trade itself being attacked or something the trade represented? Betz, whilst acknowledging that it is not the sole reason for the attack, does think the trade is objectionable simply for being where it does not belong. The noise and mess created as well as the disturbance of worship undermined the temple's purpose and compromised its purity<sup>403</sup>. This point is reflected in the idea expressed by Oakman that the demonstration is an enactment of the saying 'You cannot

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<sup>396</sup> Gundry, R. H. (2000) *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. p.643.

<sup>397</sup> Bauckham, R. (1988) p.78.

<sup>398</sup> Snodgrass, K. R. (2009). p.462

<sup>399</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1985) *Jesus and Judaism*. London. SCM Press Ltd. p.66.

<sup>400</sup> Myers, C. (2008) *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books. p.300. (His emphasis.)

<sup>401</sup> Hooker, M. D. (1991) *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. London. A & C Black. p.263.

<sup>402</sup> Keener, C.S. (2009) *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. p.293.

<sup>403</sup> Betz, H. D. (1997) 'Jesus and the Purity of the Temple (Mark 11:15-18): A Comparative Religion Approach'. *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Vol 116. No.3. p.462.

serve God and Mammon' (Lk.16:13/Mt.6:24), literally that making money and worshipping God simply do not go together. The point seems perfectly acceptable but it does not address whether corruption was involved, a suspicion implied even before reading v.17. There is a possibility that Jesus, by attacking the dove sellers, was showing displeasure with the conduct of business with people only able to afford small sacrifices. Very rarely did a poor person sacrifice anything larger than a dove<sup>404</sup>. Doves were also the standard sacrifice for certain unclean members of society (e.g. Lev. 12:6-8; 14:22). Sacrifice in itself is not necessarily the problem, but a sacrificial system that burdens poor people financially is<sup>405</sup>. I think there is an irony being pointed out that obligations of a holy nature seem only to benefit those who make money from it, not those who make the effort to be pious. This links naturally to what Myers says, that it is those who run the temple economy that Jesus is angered by. He sees the individuals disturbed in the court as representatives of the unseen powers who are in charge. The overturned tables and chairs "represented the concrete mechanisms of oppression within a political economy that doubly exploited the poor and unclean. Not only were they considered second-class citizens, but the cult obligated them to make reparation, through sacrifices, for their inferior status - from which the marketers profited."<sup>406</sup> Such a view agrees with what Bauckham argues about the system of taxation, that voluntary tax giving (Mk.12:41-4) is acceptable but that tax should not become a burden, should not support an oppressive government and should not be demanded inappropriately in God's name<sup>407</sup>. This viewpoint, continues Myers, is consistent with Jesus' efforts to discredit the social systems that discriminated against weaker members of society and sinners (2:17). Indeed, Jesus is well known for his concerns on the subject of wealth throughout the gospels (e.g. Mk. 10:25; Lk.16:13) so to recognise elements of this in the demonstration in the temple is completely acceptable, especially if we agree with Myers that the tables represented the oppressive system and also with Oakman that they represented accumulated wealth, tax-collection and debt.<sup>408</sup> This reading, however, is by no means satisfactory in isolation.

A first glance reading of Mark 11:15 certainly suggests some concern for ritual purity was being demonstrated through the disruption, removal or forbidding of particular persons,

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<sup>404</sup> Bauckham, R. 'Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple' in Lindars, B. ed. (1988) *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity*. Cambridge. James Clarke and Co. p.76.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid. p.77.

<sup>406</sup> Myers, C. (2008) p.301.

<sup>407</sup> Bauckham, R.. (1988) p.73-76.

<sup>408</sup> Oakman, D. E. 'Batteries of Power: Coinage in the Judean Temple System' in Hagedorn, A. C., Crook, Z. A., Stewart, E. eds. (2007) *In Other Words: Essays on Social Science Methods and the New Testament in Honour of Jerome H. Neyrey*. Sheffield. Sheffield Phoenix Press. p.182.

activities, or objects. The strong sense that Jesus objected to certain things being inappropriately situated in the precincts of the temple is part of what has resulted in the title 'the Cleansing of the Temple'. The limiting nature of this designation means it is rejected by many scholars but the purity concern is not dismissed entirely. In his examination of the Johannine account, for example, von Wahlde highlights the attention given to improper location of the activity and suggests that Jesus had to deal with animals like oxen being in the temple precincts because Passover demand had caused a lapse in usual purity restrictions.<sup>409</sup> Others think Jesus had barely any concern for ritual purity, citing Mark 7:1-8 where Jesus challenges the Pharisees and teachers of the law,<sup>410</sup> but this cannot undo what Jesus apparently did. He wants certain things not brought into or done in the temple but he does not perform a ritual action himself. Perhaps Betz is right to think that Jesus' stance on purity is not ritually based at all, is internally driven and is demonstrated symbolically.<sup>411</sup> This speaks more of what we might call a social-moral purity that is present in people's hearts and focused on the future, God and the person of Jesus, which would be consistent with passages like Mk.7:1-8.

If we are to understand vv.15-16 more fully, where better to look than to the explanation Jesus himself provides in v.17: "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?' But you have made it a den of robbers." 'A house of prayer for all nations' is a quotation from Isa.56:7 and is sometimes taken as supporting Jesus' anti-sacrifice demonstration, but this not the case. Though Jesus appears to want to disrupt or stop proceedings in the temple, that he opposes sacrifice generally is not explicit, especially since there are plentiful opportunities to say so elsewhere in discussions with opponents and so on<sup>412</sup>. It is refuted entirely if one reads the full Isaiah passage: "Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations". Here prayer and sacrifice are connected activities; indeed, it reads as though 'prayer' refers to worship generally of which 'sacrifice' is one type. The phrase 'for all nations' is not included in Matthew or Luke (in John, Jesus quotes different passages entirely) which answers whether Jesus' sole concern was for the inclusion of gentiles in the negative. It would undoubtedly be wrong to see this one phrase as the key to interpreting the whole event

<sup>409</sup> von Wahlde, Urban C. (2010) *The Gospel and Letters of John. Vol. 2.* Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. p.100.

<sup>410</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1985) *Jesus and Judaism.* London. SCM Press Ltd. p.67.

<sup>411</sup> Betz, H. D. (1997) 'Jesus and the Purity of the Temple (Mark 11:15-18): A Comparative Religion Approach'. *Journal of Biblical Literature.* Vol 116. No.3. pp.459-460, 470-72.

<sup>412</sup> Snodgrass, Klyne R. 'The Temple Incident' in Bock, Darrell L. & Webb, Robert L. eds. (2009) *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence.* Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eerdmans. p.467.

anyway, but that Jesus was advocating inclusiveness in the temple is widely agreed upon. 1 Kings 8:41-43 talks of welcoming foreigners to worship. Borg claims that the merchants and moneychangers did not prevent gentile worship but were representative of the strengthening theme of separation expressed by the Temple ideology<sup>413</sup>. Those in charge are more often considered the real target of the accusatory "you" in v.17 as it was they who distorted the temple's purpose by denying access to salvation to all peoples through arbitrary purity concerns<sup>414</sup>. Finally, on the Isaiah passage, it is worth noting that it refers to something in the future and therefore, asserts Lohmeyer, contains "eschatological promises". But if it refers to something yet to happen, why is the present temple attacked? "The existing sacrifices and prayers, services and blessings of the Temple are perhaps directed towards that ultimate end indicated by God (more frequently they diverge from it) but the eschatological reality, in terms of which this place would become the place for the worship of God, is not yet there."<sup>415</sup> Consequently Jesus "makes preparation for it by removing everything which militates against that eschatological holiness."<sup>416</sup> In short, the quotation was aimed at the present authorities as a message that their attempts to fulfil Isaiah were not being made properly.

When it comes to the second part of v.17, the reference is to Jer.7:11. The immediate response to the phrase 'den of robbers' is to assume it is another accusation of economic misuse on the part of the merchants and moneychangers or the temple authorities. Betz sees 'robbers' as referring to the inappropriate financial activity surrounding sacrificial practice which has been contrasted with the reference to 'prayer'. He does not think Jesus is critiquing sacrifice itself, just that sacrifice is costly while prayer is free<sup>417</sup>. Similarly for Myers, Mark portrays the temple as an "apparatus of economic stratification" which itself is the 'robber' of the poor<sup>418</sup>. However, if one looks at the Greek term translated as 'robbers' it does not refer to thieves but to 'violent ones', 'brigands', 'bandits' or even 'revolutionaries' (see Josephus Ant.14.415f.; 15.345-8; cf. War 1.304-11). These are not terms applicable to economically dishonest merchants. The wider context of Jeremiah 7 describes an abuse of the temple as a place of refuge for criminals. "Because of their confidence in the invulnerability of the temple

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<sup>413</sup>Borg, M. J. (1998) *Conflict Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*. Harrisburg, PA. Trinity Press International. p.188.

<sup>414</sup> Edwards, J. R. (2002) *The Gospel According to Mark*. Leicester. Apollos. p.344.

<sup>415</sup> Lohmeyer, E. (1961) *Lord of the Temple: A Study of the Relation Between Cult and Gospel*. Edinburgh. Oliver & Boyd. p.38.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid. p.38-9.

<sup>417</sup> Betz, H. D. (1997) 'Jesus and the Purity of the Temple (Mark 11:15-18): A Comparative Religion Approach'. *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Vol 116. No.3. p.468.

<sup>418</sup> Myers, C. (2008) *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books. p.302-3.

(7:4), they think they can commit crimes with impunity, like brigands who after every raid can resort to the safety of their caves."<sup>419</sup> This suggests that it is not the economic activity itself (whether it be exploitative or not) which is criminal but the way various misuses of the space are disguised in full view as correct fulfilment of holy obligations. The saying is regularly linked with the alleged prediction of the temple destruction (Mark 14:58) since Jeremiah's indictment of the temple, which displays concerns not dissimilar to Jesus', also includes a threat to destroy it (vv.12-15). It is partly because of this as well as links with the fig tree incident in Mark and the often recognised theme of judgement running through the whole story that many scholars are able to accept authenticity of the saying.<sup>420</sup>

Similar ideas seem to be expressed in the Johannine version but the quotations used are different. Instead of Isaiah and Jeremiah, he references Psalm 69:9 and Zechariah 14:21. For Brown this attests the independence of John<sup>421</sup> and therefore the historicity of the incident though of course it means the exact wording of this saying is not verifiable. The two versions of the saying probably reflect the practical and theological concerns of their respective Churches. The Zechariah reference echoes the feeling that commerce is inappropriately situated within the temple precincts but it does so with a focus on the eschatological future ("on that day")<sup>422</sup>, that is, it includes two themes present in the synoptic saying. Its character is decidedly Johannine, however, if one looks at the Christological implication of the phrase "my Father's house" and the typical foreshadowing of the crucifixion in the Psalm quotation "Zeal for your house will consume me" (69:9). The application to the crucifixion means that Jesus' death will be holy and noble because it was born of dedication and loyalty to God.<sup>423</sup> John's account therefore opens up a whole new dimension of interpretation which links the temple action with these Old Testament references, with the destruction saying, with the question of authority and with the question of Jesus' nature and role. This is to bring a more strongly Christological element which ties together already closely interlinked sayings and actions.

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<sup>419</sup> Bauckham, R. 'Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple' in Lindars, B. ed. (1988) *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity*. Cambridge. James Clarke and Co. p.84.

<sup>420</sup> Borg, M. J. (1994) *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*. Valley Forge, PA. Trinity press International. p.115 and Evans, C. A. (1993) 'Jesus and the "Cave of Robbers": Toward a Jewish Context for the Temple Action'. *Bulletin for Biblical Research*. 3. pp.107-8. Evans also points out that no other uses of Jer.7:11 are recorded in the early Church apart from the Synoptic telling of the Temple Demonstration and indicates evidence from other Jewish sources of criticism of Temple corruption.

<sup>421</sup> Brown, R. E. (1966) *The Gospel According to John I-XII*. New Haven. Yale University Press. p.119.

<sup>422</sup> von Wahlde, Urban C. (2010) *The Gospel and Letters of John. Vol. 2*. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. p.101

<sup>423</sup> Neyrey, J. H. (2007) *The Gospel of John*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p.70-1.

The destruction saying has repeatedly been mentioned so far but is yet to be explored fully. It appears in three different forms. Firstly, in Mark, there is no threat to destroy the temple by Jesus, but an accusation by figures at the trial (14:58). In Matthew there is also an accusation but this time Jesus is quoted as saying "I am able to" (rather than "I will") destroy (26:61). In Luke there is no threat by Jesus or an accuser, only the prophecy (also present in the other Synoptics) that Jesus utters in response to the disciples' amazement at the size and splendour of the temple buildings: "the time will come when not one stone will be left on another" (21:6). Finally in John, the saying is worded not as a threat but a command from Jesus to destroy and a statement that he will raise the temple again in three days (2.19). This overview strongly suggests the impropriety of the word 'threat' since the words "I will destroy" are never on the lips of Jesus. There seems no reason why Jesus would need to make such a threat but the accusations in Mark and Matthew show some people interpreted him this way. Equally, the evangelists have little reason to portray Jesus so controversially and it makes sense that a saying devised post-70 C.E. would more accurately reflect the real destruction of the temple<sup>424</sup>. Wright points out that the textual examples linking the demonstration to the destruction of the temple and the theme of judgement cannot all be retrojections and reflect a more Jewish than Christian tradition anyway<sup>425</sup>. Clearly a 'prediction' not a threat is being discussed, though perhaps agreeing with Sanders' assumption that Jesus "*threateningly predicted*" the Temple's destruction<sup>426</sup> is also acceptable. Although tradition includes reference to temple destruction, there is no precedent for linking it with the expected role of the messiah.<sup>427</sup> Jesus' actions and allusions to Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zechariah are all part of a destruction prediction but not destruction by *his* hand. He is not merely hinting at some vague intention but at something he believes will happen by God's doing in the eschatological future. Sanders' emphasis of this fact is accompanied by the explanation that it was Jesus' feared prophetic nature that lead to his arrest rather than his threat to destroy the temple.<sup>428</sup> Quickly it has become clear how understanding the theme of destruction in this episode is not much informed by the destruction sayings in the Synoptics alone. The entire episode and all related passages together inform the destruction theme and it is possible for this alone to be

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<sup>424</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1993) *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. London. Penguin. p.257

<sup>425</sup> Wright, N. T. (1996) *Jesus and the Victory of God*. London. SPCK. p.416. The references he gave were Mk.11:12-14/Mt.21:18-19, cf. Lk.13:6-9; 19:41-44; Jn.2:19; Mk.14:58/Mt.26:61; Mk.15:29/Mt.27:40; Acts 6:14; Thom.71.

<sup>426</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1993) p.258.

<sup>427</sup> Snodgrass, Klyne R. 'The Temple Incident' in Bock, Darrell L. & Webb, Robert L. eds. (2009) *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*. Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eerdmans. p.465.

<sup>428</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1993) *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. London. Penguin. p.259-60.



one interpretation of the event. Indeed it is central to Sanders' argument. He asserts the position that Jesus' demonstration *symbolised destruction*.<sup>429</sup> Its symbolic nature is the key to Sanders' (and others') interpretation. For example, was the overturning of the moneychangers' tables a suitable symbol of destruction? Myers agrees it was, mentioning briefly that *κατέστρεψεν* ('overturned') could also refer to destruction,<sup>430</sup> but the word is clearly not being used in this sense and he is thinking of the disruption of the moneychangers who represent oppression not the destruction of the temple building. Wright believes Jesus' actions, including overturning the tables, symbolise his eschatological message both generally and specifically for the temple<sup>431</sup> but this idea requires expansion since overturning a moneychanger's table is not an obvious indicator of the coming kingdom in itself. Even Sanders, who believes it is, acknowledges the possibility that the broken pot of Jer.19:10 might have been a more effective symbol.<sup>432</sup>

Arguably, the symbol *was* made in a more self-evident way, if we agree that the cursing of the fig tree represented a condemnation by God as a result of not 'bearing fruit'. Mark embeds the temple demonstration in the story of the fig tree so the latter acts as an explanatory aid to the former. Wright cites Jer. 8:11-13 to support the understanding that withering the fig tree stands for enacting judgement upon the Temple. The demonstration itself, however, is a symbolic action hence Wright calling the fig tree action "an acted parable of an acted parable".<sup>433</sup> Even this can be taken in multiple directions, though, as Edwards shows by using the fig tree episode to reject purity-focused interpretations (cleansing a dead tree is useless) and accepting that Jesus was 'taking an axe to the root of the problem' of commerce.<sup>434</sup> I think Edwards has taken the metaphor too literally here and applied it where it doesn't belong; the notion of 'fruitlessness' has nothing to do with commercialism. It does seem to fit well as an 'acted parable' of judgement and destruction and it is surprising to find it lacking in Sanders' argument.

Explanation for this, however, may be found in Sanders' belief that Jesus expected not only the destruction of the temple but the provision of a new one. The fig tree story doesn't look beyond the point of destruction and Sanders thinks destruction of the God-ordained temple

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<sup>429</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1985) *Jesus and Judaism*. London. SCM Press Ltd. p.70.

<sup>430</sup> Myers, C. (2008) *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books. p.301.

<sup>431</sup> Wright, N. T. (1996) *Jesus and the Victory of God*. London. SPCK. p.424.

<sup>432</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1985) p.70.

<sup>433</sup> Wright, N. T. (1996) p.421.

<sup>434</sup> Edwards, J. R. (2002) *The Gospel According to Mark*. Leicester. Apollos. p.344-5.

makes no sense without restoration.<sup>435</sup> He believes God will provide a new and perfect temple building, an idea consistent with eschatological expectations mentioned in the Old Testament and elsewhere<sup>436</sup> but alluded to in the Synoptics only in the accusation of Mk.14:58. However, Bauckham notices that this apparently familiar prediction of a renewed temple would not arouse the anger of Jewish authorities and prompt Jesus' arrest. The restoration theory does not deal properly with the concept that there was something deeply wrong with the temple that Jesus was protesting against and trying to get rid of. Bauckham sees the demonstration as pointing to *judgement*, not mere removal of the temple.<sup>437</sup> The entire episode certainly has a tone of warning about it. Sanders' understanding of the new temple presents another problem, even for some of those who accept the restoration theme, in that it was too literal. Keener acknowledges the tradition of restoration expectation but notices that New Testament passages more often indicate the restoration of a non-physical temple.<sup>438</sup> The references he cites speak of a new metaphorical temple founded on Jesus himself or his followers. Wright makes the same observation adding that in Jesus' words and actions, which did not deny the temple was good, God-given and to be respected, "there was an assertion that the time had come for the institution to be transcended" and "the institution was currently operating in a way that was destructive".<sup>439</sup> (Again there is a judgemental tone.) Importantly, at this point the destruction saying in the Gospel of John can be examined since it is placed directly in line with the temple demonstration and is accompanied by an explanation (2:19-22) which expands on the idea of a new temple based on Jesus. For John, Jesus will be the new focus of communication with God, not the temple and not the act of sacrifice. For John, Jesus is the new sacrifice who will be destroyed and rebuilt in the crucifixion and resurrection.<sup>440</sup> Thus begins a theme of replacement that runs throughout John. This instance does suggest Jesus' objection was to the sacrificial system and points to Jesus as a focus for a realised eschatology. Theissen and Merz talk of the institution of the Eucharist as the replacement of the temple cult and the sacrifice of Jesus as the replacement

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<sup>435</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1985) p.75.

<sup>436</sup> E.g. Ezek.37:26ff.; Tobit 14:5ff.; Jubilees 1:28f.; I Enoch 90:28f. (as noted in Hiers, R. H. (1971) 'Purification of the Temple: Preparation for the Kingdom of God'. *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Vol.90. No.1. p.86).

<sup>437</sup> Bauckham, R. 'Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple' in Lindars, B. ed. (1988) *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity*. Cambridge. James Clarke and Co. p.87.

<sup>438</sup> Keener, C.S. (2009) *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. p.294. See e.g. Ps.118:22; Mk.12:10-11; 1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Pet. 2:5.

<sup>439</sup> Wright, N. T. (1996) *Jesus and the Victory of God*. London. SPCK. p.432.

<sup>440</sup> Bredin, Mark R. (2003) 'John's Account of Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple: Violent or Non-Violent?' *Biblical Theological Bulletin*. Vol.33. No.2 p.49.

of the temple sacrifice<sup>441</sup> but Dunn notes that early Christians may have misunderstood this intention since he believes they continued to use the temple and offer sacrifices.<sup>442</sup>

John therefore appears less judgemental than the Synoptics (although his version of the destruction saying subtly condemns those commanded to “destroy this temple” who miss the intended irony<sup>443</sup>). The judgemental element generally, however, is ill-defined and difficult to conclude on but otherwise undeniably present, at least in the sense that it was associated with the expectance of God’s Kingdom. For Snodgrass, the demonstration foreshadows the kingdom by enacting the reform that is to come.<sup>444</sup> This focus on the future begs the question, what did Jesus’ demonstration say about his expectations of the people? The dramatic, attention grabbing nature of the display suggests urgency but perhaps does not so explicitly demand repentance<sup>445</sup> since no kind of specific instruction or command is given by Jesus at the time. I am inclined to be cautious of Sanders’ focus on the inevitability of the temple’s destruction if it means it could not be prevented by reform. At the very least it must be correct to say that Jesus’ protest, if not providing practical instructions for changes to be made in the Temple, points out the things that are most in need of appraisal or renewal.

There is no explicit call to repent but surely Jesus thought there was time to prevent people sharing the fate of the fig tree. He was first and foremost a teacher, one who sought to show people they could improve society. Arguably this episode raises more questions about the nature of Jesus than about his audience but it is worth asking if the audience group most associated with the Temple, the priesthood, were the targets of this attack. Possibly it was the authority figures being accused of misusing the temple rather than the merchants, moneychangers or general worshippers. There is much priest-critical evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, Old and New Testament<sup>446</sup> including, says Evans, comments by Jesus himself on economic oppression (Mk.12:38-40; 41-44). Very little, however, is put in explicit terms from Jesus’ time to suggest priestly corruption though there are multiple examples

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<sup>441</sup> Theissen, G. & Merz, A. (1998) *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*. London. SCM Press Ltd. p.434.

<sup>442</sup> Dunn, J. D. G. (2003) *Jesus Remembered*. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. p.796.

<sup>443</sup> Neyrey, J. H. (2007) *The Gospel of John*. Cambridge. C.U.P.

<sup>444</sup> Snodgrass, Klyne R. 'The Temple Incident' in Bock, Darrell L. & Webb, Robert L. eds. (2009) *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*. Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eerdmans. p.473.

<sup>445</sup> Meyer believes the incident urgently addressed all Israel, challenging its “obstinate confidence in its status”, echoing the call of Mark 1:15 and pointing ahead to imminent judgement and restoration. Meyer, B. F. (1979) *The Aims of Jesus*. London. SCM Press Ltd. pp.197-9.

<sup>446</sup> Hooker, M. D. (1991) *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. London. A & C Black. p.264, and Evans, C. A. ed. (2008) *Encyclopaedia of the Historical Jesus*. New York. Routledge. p.635.

from texts such as those listed above.<sup>447</sup> That corruption was a motivating factor for the demonstration itself is not clear either but we might agree with Snodgrass that to attack the commercial activity was to attack the High priest's most vulnerable point<sup>448</sup> (and add that it was probably safer than a direct attack). A stronger assertion would be to say that Jesus was protesting against the priesthood's misconduct which consisted of taxation and commerce taking place in God's name and thus obscuring His true relationship with Israel<sup>449</sup>. For Sanders, however, this lack of direct action against the priests (apart from Mk.11:17 which he deems inauthentic) suggests that they were not the target and that Jesus could not have intended a reform of practices. He sees the disruption of normal necessary business rather than proposing an alternative to the current system as poor evidence for stating that Jesus opposed the priests or sacrificial practice and rightly points out that the action would not have been offensive to one group only.<sup>450</sup> An isolated attack on one group like, say, the Sadducees would be inappropriate if the demonstration was going to be seen, heard about and responded to negatively by so many. It may be that differentiating between targets (e.g. the priests, the commercial activity, sacrifice etc.) is not preferable to examining a combination or saying that one thing was targeted to affect another. It may also be that the perceived target and the actual target were different which is relevant to the question of how or why this event led to Jesus' arrest.

It is easy to speculate why he was not arrested at the scene. "By the time the attention of the troops was aroused, Jesus would have done what he intended to do, and would have been holding forth to an excited audience while the money-changers scabbled for their coins and the traders attempting frantically to regain control of their fluttering or stampeding charges."<sup>451</sup> That the demonstration did factor in his eventual arrest is very plausible, especially since the destruction saying is connected to the trial by Mark 14:58. Although described as a false accusation in Mark and maybe understood eschatologically elsewhere (Mk.13:2 par.; Jn.2:19), if the witnesses to the demonstration took it to be threatening or

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<sup>447</sup> Snodgrass, K. R. 'The Temple Incident' in Bock, Darrell L. & Webb, Robert L. eds. (2009) *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*. Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eerdmans. p.456, 460.

<sup>448</sup> Snodgrass, K. R. 'The Temple Incident' in Bock, Darrell L. & Webb, Robert L. eds. (2009) *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*. Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eerdmans. p.471.

<sup>449</sup> Bauckham, R. 'Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple' in Lindars, B. ed. (1988) *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity*. Cambridge. James Clarke and Co. p.81.

<sup>450</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1985) *Jesus and Judaism*. London. SCM Press Ltd. p.66. and Sanders, E. P. (1993) *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. London. Penguin. pp.255-6.

<sup>451</sup> Wright, N. T. (1996) *Jesus and the Victory of God*. London. SPCK. p.425.

critical towards the Temple itself it may have been enough to warrant arrest. Perhaps more confidently we can speak of the threat to the priest's authority being their real fear (Mk.11:18, 11:27-33 par.), being better attested in the text and also being applicable to other things Jesus said or did e.g. the triumphal entry (Mk.11:1-11 par.)<sup>452</sup>. This brings us round again to the issue of what this event said about Jesus himself. The wariness of Jesus felt by the authorities may have grown from other incidents that raised questions about his identity (e.g. Mt.21:46 par.) and created an awestruck following that added political force to his movement<sup>453</sup>. His reputation as teacher and healer, however, was one thing but the temple incident was a turning point that showed him to be a revolutionary, an agent of social change and a real threat to authority. "It is the temple action that provides the vital historical link between Jesus the teacher and miracle worker on the one hand, and Jesus the crucified criminal, on the other."<sup>454</sup> One major theological result of this is the answer it provides to the question of why the demonstration happened at all: it was a necessary step towards Jesus fulfilling his purpose as temple replacement. As Keener puts it, "Before Jesus could become the chief cornerstone, however, he had to be rejected by the builders..."<sup>455</sup>

What exactly, then, does Jesus' action reveal about his role and purpose, and to what extent does this correlate with Jewish expectation? With varying degrees of certainty scholars detect a messianic authority behind the temple action. For Wright, Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, his prediction of destruction and judgement, and the surrounding hints at restoration can be construed as messianic fulfilments of passages in Zechariah 9:9, 14:1-5 and 6:12.<sup>456</sup> As Meyer puts it, "The entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple constituted a messianic demonstration, a messianic critique, a messianic fulfilment event, and a sign of the messianic restoration of Israel."<sup>457</sup> Similarly, however, the dramatic physical demonstration, its eschatological focus, its authoritative style and so on may support a view of Jesus that is prophetic rather than kingly. Wright parallels Jesus' symbolic action with that of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel<sup>458</sup> and von Wahlde adds that against the backdrop of a Jewish hope for a renewed purified temple, the driving out action was a claim to the status of eschatological

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<sup>452</sup> Bauckham, R. (1988) p.88.

<sup>453</sup> Gundry, R. H. (2000) *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. p.646.

<sup>454</sup> Evans, C. A. (1993) 'Jesus and the "Cave of Robbers": Toward a Jewish Context for the Temple Action'. *Bulletin for Biblical Research*. 3. pp.98-9.

<sup>455</sup> Keener, C.S. (2009) *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. p.294.

<sup>456</sup> Wright, N. T. (1996) *Jesus and the Victory of God*. London. SPCK. p.422.

<sup>457</sup> Meyer, B. F. (1979) *The Aims of Jesus*. London. SCM Press Ltd. p.199.

<sup>458</sup> Wright, N. T. (1996) p.415.

prophet<sup>459</sup>. This process enacted the expectation for reform, expressed authority, highlighted temple problems and forced people to reorder how they thought of the temple.<sup>460</sup> Importantly, choosing *either* a messianic *or* prophetic interpretation is unnecessary since thinking in terms of one does not negate the other. Brown identifies both “a protest like that of the prophets of old against the profanation of God’s house and a sign that the messianic purification of the temple was at hand” in all four gospels.<sup>461</sup> Having seen how many themes concerning the person and purpose of Jesus come together in this incident, it is clear none are definitive and none should be ignored. This passage has raised the most Christological and eschatological questions so far and it is important to ask how these are understood within a social-science reading of the text. There is no reason for concern because Jesus’ protests and predictions, as well as having prophetic or messianic implications, also reflect practical concerns within the everyday lives of those worshipping at and running the Temple. If the Temple’s destruction and restoration is imminent, then the way it functions now should begin to more closely reflect the eschatological ideal, even if this only translates to fairer treatment of poor worshippers and greater respect for the worship based function of the space.

The incident seems to present a person deeply concerned with society’s greatest failings being played out in the worst place imaginable and attempting to highlight and reverse this wrong. It is partly this that allows belief in the historicity of the event (or a similar outburst) since multiple issues raised appear elsewhere in the gospels. Problems such as why Jesus was not arrested, the suggestion of a later-Church addition and the discrepancy in John’s chronology are not enough to deny the possibility that it happened. It would have been a rather bizarre happening for sure, bizarre enough to get noticed despite being the efforts of only one man in a huge busy court. The normal daily activity of the merchants selling doves for sacrifice, the moneychangers providing shekels for the temple tax and those bringing in items in preparation for Passover was disrupted or stopped altogether. A first glance does not explain why Jesus was attacking the necessary business of the Temple but a closer look suggests his objection may have more to do with commercial activity being out of place (Lk.16:13) and being a disruption to worship and purity rituals. The attack on the dove-sellers points out the burden that sacrifice and taxation have on the poor and the overturning of the tables condemns those rich and powerful enough to maintain this oppressive system. The

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<sup>459</sup> von Wahlde, Urban C. (2010) *The Gospel and Letters of John. Vol. 2.* Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. p.99.

<sup>460</sup> Snodgrass, K. R. 'The Temple Incident' in Bock, Darrell L. & Webb, Robert L. eds. (2009) *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence.* Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eerdmans. pp.471-75.

<sup>461</sup> Brown, R. E. (1966) *The Gospel According to John I-XII.* New Haven. Yale University Press. p.121.

emphasis on purity is not strong enough to justify the title ‘the Cleansing of the temple’ but the importance of keeping the Temple environment holy is surely being demonstrated in the driving out of the inappropriate mercantile activity. The suggestion that Jesus wanted to disrupt and express disapproval of sacrificial practice itself surrounds his demonstration and the words he utters in explanation, but a full reading of the quoted Isaiah 56:7 soon refutes this. The latter part of the quotation supports the inclusion of Gentiles and has an accusatory tone probably pointed at the temple authorities for neglecting to fulfil Isaiah. The accusatory tone continues with the quotation from Jeremiah 7:11 which likens the temple to a refuge for violent bandits and brigands hiding behind their piety which ties it in firmly with the themes of judgement and destruction. This helps verify authenticity even though the equivalent saying in John quotes different passages. Zechariah 14:21 and Psalm 69:9 reflect concerns present throughout the text, including the misplaced commercial activity and the authority of Jesus, albeit with a more Johannine eschatological and Christological twist. All four gospels share the forward facing focus that surrounds the temple demonstration and explains the prediction that the temple will be destroyed by God. Jesus may be symbolising (not threatening) this by overturning the tables but the story of the fig tree demonstrates the point more aptly by visualising the concept of judgement on those who do not bear fruit. The fig tree, however, does not adequately deal with the theme of restoration that Sanders centres on. His picture of a new temple seems less likely than the idea of a symbolic restoration in the form of God’s kingdom or possibly even the person of Jesus himself, which further suggests that the theme of judgement running throughout this scene does not necessarily rule out the possibility of reform. Whilst sacrifice itself appears not to be the problem and there is no explicit mention of priestly corruption, the priesthood, as the authority behind the commercial activity, do seem to be the targets of the attack. It is surely this that causes the fear and anger that leads ultimately to the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. Thus, the demonstration can also be put in its Christological place, as instrumental in the revelation and fulfilment of Jesus’ messianic and prophetic identity.

Overall, though, it puts Jesus more in the role of someone aiming to “upturn” the social order that allows not only general oppression of the poor in a widely stratified agrarian society but allows it to take place in the temple, of all places, in the name of purity and piety. Jesus’ concern that society was not kind to those in the lowliest categories because of the activities of those in the grandest is brought to a head as he enters this holy centre and witnesses the same injustices playing out. It is as if that court is a microcosm of the wider society’s

oppressive nature but with the added insult of being the one place where everyone *in theory* should be equal as worshippers. I think it is to this that he wishes to draw attention with his protest. He knows that money-changers, sellers and so on have a practical role to fulfil the needs of Passover rituals but these are not being viewed as services that help facilitate convenient worship but as commercial opportunities. The notion that the Temple should be a house of prayer for all nations might be extended to be inclusive of people of all social and economic statuses as well. If such a Temple where all people could worship affordably and without any hypocritical agenda could exist, if it could 'bear fruit' unlike the fig tree, then it would be a fitting preparation for the coming eschatological renewal. The discussion about true faith in God which follows the discovery of the withered fig tree (Mk. 11:22-24) adds a hopeful conclusion to the episode. I think, ultimately, what Jesus is hoping for is a Temple that sets the best possible example, since it is a holy centre to which people look up, so that the rest of Jerusalem and the entire extended region can follow and become better prepared for the imminent eschaton. He is essentially pointing out what he goes on to say explicitly in Mark's next chapter, to love God and love your neighbour (12:28-31). Whereas Sanders doesn't see the demonstration as an attempt at reform, but only a symbolic gesture that threateningly predicts destruction, and although Jesus does not set out any explicit demands for change, I think the prediction does at least hint very strongly toward what the Temple has the potential to be and it expresses hope that something of that ideal is achievable in this life.

For this reason, I think the social models which look closely at the Jesus movement will be relevant for helping understand Jesus' hopes for the Temple and the wider society. The rather extreme choice of lifestyle he and the disciples follow is like an exaggerated example of how fair, mutually respectful and God-focused society could be. The Temple as a holy centre should be doing the same, facilitating and demonstrating those commandments to love. The broader economic models will help contextualise the commercial nature of the scene which greets Jesus as he enters. When examined closely, this strange episode does seem to reveal themes and concerns that are actually typical of Jesus in many ways which is a comfort given how atypical his approach is. Jesus' teachings usually came in a spoken form or just from the example of his lifestyle so this demonstration, one of the most dramatic episodes in the gospels, will always be hard to grasp at first glance. It is, as Wright described it, an "acted parable"<sup>462</sup> but more besides. It incorporates action, scriptural references and parabolic imagery. It is a multi-faceted operation that looks at the application of Jesus' major teachings

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<sup>462</sup> Wright, N. T. (1996) *Jesus and the Victory of God*. London. SPCK. p.421.



in the Temple and the wider society. It stands out in all four gospels as being so interpretively ambiguous that it prevents us from forcing it into one category or another. As part of this study, this is particularly tricky since the theological and sociological elements of the story are so interwoven. Since it brings together a multitude of Jesus' key aims and teachings, however, I believe it to be central to understanding his ministry and his martyrdom.

## The Call Narratives

Jesus' call narratives and associated sayings point directly at some of his key socio-economic concerns. As with the case of the Rich Man (Mark 10:17-31), the invitation to a strict itinerant lifestyle and the response reveal much about the caller and the called. There was nothing new in the arrangement of a group of followers surrounding one teacher but in the rabbinic tradition, for example, the pupil sought the teacher to 'learn Torah' and the language of 'calling' and 'following' seen in the Gospels was unfamiliar.<sup>463</sup> For the teacher to choose the pupil was atypical. The decision of those called to follow Jesus may have had more to do with the powerful nature of his call than his reputation as a teacher (cf. John 1:35-42).

Looking initially at the Gospel of John highlights some differences with the Synoptic accounts but also shows John's emphasis on the early establishment of a strong group bond between the teacher and his new students. Whereas the Synoptics depict Jesus calling disciples from the shores of the Sea of Galilee, John sets the scene near Bethany and depicts Jesus calling at least two disciples from amongst John the Baptist's group (1:35).

Interestingly it is more on the initiative of John the Baptist and the men themselves that they begin to follow Jesus and identify him instantly as teacher (vv.36-39) and very quickly as Messiah (v.41). They ask him where he is staying which suggests they are expecting more than a fleeting encounter; the word μένω (remain/abide) suggests long term loyal attachment<sup>464</sup>. The commitment is not one-sided though. Jesus takes a more active role when Simon arrives by renaming him (v.42). It is not stated that Simon was one of John's disciples, like his brother Andrew, but his new name seems to mark a transition to Jesus' group where he will become an integral figure. Malina and Rohrbaugh see this forming of close bonds as typical of 'anti-societies', semi-independent groups in conflict with society but still a part of it, often made up of socially displaced individuals. They also identify the exchange between John and Jesus' group as a type of social networking.<sup>465</sup> This suggests John's group was also an 'anti-society' and, more importantly, is compatible with the concept of anti-structure encountered in virtuoso religion. According to that model, virtuosos also adopt a liminal position in society and rely on each other for support, e.g. by sharing a common purse (12:6). Perhaps this encounter is the beginning of such a group.

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<sup>463</sup> Hengel, M. (1981) *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*. Edinburgh. T&T Clark. p.50-1. cf. Sir.51:23

<sup>464</sup> Malina, B. J. & Rohrbaugh, R. L. (1998) *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. p.55.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid. pp.55-59.

Supported more so by John than any other Gospel is the suspicion that the disciples may have had prior knowledge of Jesus, directly or by reputation, and that this influenced their decision to follow him. Luke (5:1-11) places the call against the backdrop of a miracle which proved rather persuasive but the disciples in Matthew and Mark follow Jesus without any apparent convincing. The forceful, non-negotiable nature of the call is frequently noted and attributed to a sense of urgency driven by belief in the imminent arrival of the Kingdom. Jesus' motives are understandable, much more so than the response of the men he speaks to. The two brothers, Simon and Andrew, stop immediately what they are doing, leaving their fishing nets, and follow Jesus (Mt. 4:20; Mk. 1:18). The fishing nets cast but never pulled back in symbolise the lifestyle and possessions being left behind; the call causes complete disruption. Although Jesus does not preach the closeness of the Kingdom nor explain what the call will entail for them, there is a sense that they instinctively understand what is being asked of them and why. "A radical announcement requires a radical and total response. All prior claims on a person lose their urgency."<sup>466</sup>

According to Meier, the very nature of the call is what constitutes real discipleship. "As presented in the Gospels, discipleship involves not just an individualistic relation of a single pupil to his teacher but the formation of a group around the teacher who has called the group into existence."<sup>467</sup> Jesus' call was unlike other examples from the prophetic and rabbinic traditions. Elijah's call of Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21) is probably the closest though its occurrence is less dramatic and its conditions less harsh, though no less significant. The rabbinic tradition not only saw students choosing their teacher but 'following' them in a sense less theologically loaded. Jesus was not running a school where students came, listened and graduated to equal status as the teacher; he was calling them to learn but also actively participate with total commitment in the imminent Kingdom and become something beyond the traditional understanding of discipleship.<sup>468</sup> Though it cannot be certain his approach was unique, the sense that discipleship was being redefined supports Meier's idea that it was being defined by the call itself. The very word translated as 'follow' in the Gospels, ἀκολουθέω, refers specifically to following *as a disciple*, i.e. 'being with' Jesus not merely

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<sup>466</sup> Witherington III, B. (2001) *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. p.86.

<sup>467</sup> Meier, J. P. (2008) *A Marginal Jew. Vol. 3*. New Haven. Yale University Press. p.52

<sup>468</sup> Ibid. p.52-55.

travelling behind him, imitating and learning from him, as it did in Rabbinic tradition<sup>469</sup>. The extent to which the men being called knew to what they were being called is unclear but their response implies an understanding of its importance and urgency. Jesus made no explanation of his cause or even questioned the piety or moral fibre of these candidates<sup>470</sup> so it is difficult to assess what brought follower and followed together especially in Matthew and Mark where the fishermen appear not to know Jesus or anything about him. If this is the case, the implication must be that his words “Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17 par.) convey enough meaning to make them do as instructed. For Hengel the words convey the imminence of the Kingdom and that it is God’s will, not the person or authority of Jesus that motivates their action.<sup>471</sup>

The arguable continuity between the disciples’ old and new occupations suggests their fishing expertise was to be *redirected*, not completely discarded. The fact they are fishermen is not used purely for imagery’s sake; fishing was an essential trade around the Sea of Galilee and to understand it is to appreciate what was being left behind. The examination of commercialisation in agrarian society revealed Galilee’s dependence on the fishing industry for keeping it from the harshest levels of poverty<sup>472</sup>. The trade was lucrative enough to assume the fishermen lived in relative comfort and Mark’s mention that James and John had both a boat and hired servant support this. Accordingly Davies and Allison place the fishermen in the “(lower) middle class”<sup>473</sup> though a classification more compatible with Lenski’s agrarian society diagram would be the peasant class. The description suggestive of successful business and comfortable lifestyle may emphasise the contrast the call places before them. Nolland thinks Matthew’s account (4:21-22) better illustrates this radical choice by omitting mention of the hired men whose presence in Mark reassures the reader that Zebedee, the father of James and John, will not be left destitute without them.<sup>474</sup> Even mentioning that they were fishing at all is to contrast their lives before and after the call, a

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<sup>469</sup> Hengel, M. (1981) *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*. Edinburgh. T&T Clark. p.53.

<sup>470</sup> Gates, E. (1909) ‘Growth of Discipleship in the Company of Jesus’. *The Biblical World*. Vol.33. No.5. p.315.

<sup>471</sup> Hengel, M. (1981) p.62.

<sup>472</sup> Freyne, S. (1988) *Galilee, Jesus and the Gospels: Literary Approaches and Historical Investigations*. Philadelphia. Fortress Press.

<sup>473</sup> Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., D. C. (1988) *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. Vol. 1. Edinburgh. T & T Clark. p.397.

<sup>474</sup> Nolland, J. (2005) *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans/ Bletchley, Paternoster Press. p.181.

pattern that has been identified in the case of other calls.<sup>475</sup> They were about to separate themselves from family businesses with relatively secure incomes and become men with no traditional social, familial or economic security. In ‘following’ Jesus they are also breaking with their responsibility to their families and communities, a dramatic contrast to the normal masculine social role.<sup>476</sup> Alternatively, Spencer sees the men working a very harsh, grimy, undesirable, highly-taxed profession, controlled by Herod Antipas, until Jesus appears saying “You’re working for me now, not Antipas; you’re fishing for the kingdom of God, not the Roman-Galilean empire.”<sup>477</sup> The wording of the Gospels, however, is not one that paints an unfavourable picture of the fishing industry from which the pairs of brothers were rescued. Nor is an unnatural idyllic scene portrayed from which they are unfairly wrenched. The activity they are engaged in is mentioned to underline that they are to be engaged in it no longer. The new activity is fishing of a completely redefined sort, not ‘better’ or ‘worse’ but very different.

What does it mean to become ‘fishers of men’ (Mark 1:17 par.)? Is the phrase merely describing part of the disciples’ new mission in terms they understand? From the context this would seem likely. Jesus used the familiar fishing imagery to express what ‘catching’ men for the Kingdom would be like. Luke’s miracle of the fish (5:1-11) highlights the humility (v.8) and strong faith (v.5) of the fishermen and rewards them with a metaphorical glimpse of what awaits them in their future mission.<sup>478</sup> The fishing net is an effective visualisation of the gathering together of people in large numbers. Any confusion caused by the imagery is cancelled by the events of preaching and healing immediately following the calls (Matt. 4:23; Mark 1:21-28; Luke. 5:12-13; cf. Mark 3:14), thus demonstrating the kinds of activities in which they will necessarily be involved<sup>479</sup>. Arguably the popular metaphor of the shepherd is better for its connotations of responsibility and care<sup>480</sup> which are lacking in the fishing image. Fishing ultimately results in the death of the fish after trapping them, so how does this

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<sup>475</sup> Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., D. C. (1988) p.397. See Judges 6:11-12; 1 Sam. 11:5; 1 Kings 19:19-21; Amos 7:14-15; Mark 2:14.

<sup>476</sup> Moxnes, H. ‘Where is ‘Following Jesus’? Masculinity and Place in Luke’s Gospel’ in Hagedorn, A. C., Crook, Z. A. & Stewart, E. eds. (2007) *In Other Words: Essays on Social Science Matters and the New Testament in Honor of Jerome H. Neyrey*. Sheffield. Sheffield Phoenix Press.

<sup>477</sup> Spencer, F. S. (2005) “‘Follow Me’: The Imperious Call of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels’. *Interpretation*. Vol.59. No.2. pp.144-5.

<sup>478</sup> du Plessis, Isak. (1995) ‘Discipleship According to Luke’s Gospel’. *Religion and Theology*. Vol.2. No.1. p.59.

<sup>479</sup> Hooker, M. D. (1991) *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. London. A & C Black. p.60; Nolland, J. (2005) *Matthew*. p.179.

<sup>480</sup> Best, Ernest. (1981) *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*. Sheffield. JSNT Press. p.171-2

effectively represent a disciple's role of preaching and healing? Old Testament use of the metaphor sometimes describes being easily trapped in a net of evil whilst aimlessly existing in watery chaos (Ecc. 9:12; Hab. 1.14-17) or being caught for judgement (Ps. 74:13; Jer. 16:16; Ezek. 29:4-6; Am. 4:1-2). Which, if any, of these connotations was Jesus alluding to for his new disciples? Are the 'fish' to be condemned or converted? That Jesus was making use of this scriptural image to gather helpers in judgement of others suggests hopelessness for sinners, which is contradictory to Jesus' teachings on forgiveness (Mt. 7:1; Lk.6:37). He continually gives people the opportunity to repent (Mk. 1:14; 2:17) though not everyone handles the drastic changes involved well (10:21-22). In light of this the fishing image doesn't describe destruction caused by being wrenched from the only environment in which one can survive but being removed from one's comfort zone and taught to live in a completely new unfamiliar environment, like the disciples themselves. Davies and Allison talk of the disciples as heralds and point to Matt. 9:37-8 in which Jesus needs labourers for the harvest<sup>481</sup>. Both this and the fisher metaphor suggest a state of ripeness in the world of which the disciples must take advantage.

For some of the men, the moment of dropping and leaving what they are doing directly follows the fisher saying (Mt. 4:20; Mk.1:18; Lk.5:11) which pinpoints the moment they accept the call. Obviously they would no longer be supported financially by their business income or socially by their family networks. They did not even say goodbye (cf. 1 Kings 19:19-21) or bring in their nets because the effect of the call was instantaneous. The moment the call is answered demonstrates the understanding of the need for an attitude change as well as sacrificing certain everyday privileges. Only men who have totally committed can happily declare themselves homeless. Gates questions whether the men appreciated the permanence of their new position rightly,<sup>482</sup> perhaps, since they seem to have so blindly agreed to follow a stranger and since other reports show men misunderstanding the level of sacrifice required (Mt. 8:21; Lk. 9:59,61). On the other hand, those unable to accept the call do not become disciples and those who willingly make the necessary sacrifices and accept it do. There is no other criterion, examination process or trial period for potential followers.<sup>483</sup> The call is the test. Confirming sympathies for Jesus' religious message were not even necessary. The many

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<sup>481</sup> Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., D. C. (1988) *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. Vol. 1. Edinburgh. T & T Clark. p.398. Matt.9:36 juxtaposes the shepherd image with the harvest (and fisher) image.

<sup>482</sup> Gates, E. (1909) 'Growth of Discipleship in the Company of Jesus'. *The Biblical World*. Vol.33. No.5. p.316.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.* p.318.

specific changes to their lives were to be picked up along the way, gradually learning from Jesus a new view of the world. du Plessis points to Luke's Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20-49) as a major teaching that summarises Jesus' mission and made witnesses of the disciples who would be continuing his work after his death.<sup>484</sup> Similarly Witherington sees Mark's feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:30-44) as Jesus' demonstration of the necessary level of generosity to others, whether it be tiring, expensive or even seemingly impossible.<sup>485</sup> In verse 37 the disciples concern for the cost of the food is basically ignored as Jesus proceeds with the miracle, and elsewhere he more explicitly states that they must shun thoughts of personal advancement and be focused only on service (Mk. 10:45). The financial implication of becoming disciples is given a nod by Jesus in the opening line of the sermon on the mount/plain (Mt.5:3; Lk. 6:20), almost like an acknowledgement of the sacrifices made by the disciples so far. Jesus did not require all his supporters to renounce all wealth but he did preach against attachment to and selfish accumulation of wealth. These things would have made discipleship impossible since they would cloud one's relationship with God and the imminent Kingdom and would prevent one taking up the role of servant (Mt.6:24; Lk.16:13). What is less clear at the point of the call is that the servant role would include sacrifice not only of home, possessions, family and individual wants but potentially of life as well (Mk.10:29-30). Jesus' increasingly controversial reputation put the lives of him and the disciples in danger (e.g. Mk.8:31f). To follow him was to accept the possibility of persecution, suffering and death.<sup>486</sup>

Several sayings stand out as examples that illustrate the kinds of sacrifices Jesus required of followers, though some are rather confusing. Notably these sayings are attached to failed calls. A man who offers to follow Jesus is apparently warned off with a reminder about the harsh demands of an itinerant lifestyle (Mt. 8:19-20; Lk. 9:57-8). The comparison to foxes and birds is suggestive more of displacement in society rather than literal homelessness and makes more sense in context of Jesus' other warnings about acquiring outsider status amongst family, the public and the authorities (Mt.10:14-42).<sup>487</sup> Even foxes and birds have their rightful place in the world; to join with Jesus is to be dislocated from civilisation and

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<sup>484</sup> du Plessis, I. (1995) p.60.

<sup>485</sup> Witherington III, B. (2001) *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. p.427.

<sup>486</sup> Gates, E. (1909) p.317.

<sup>487</sup> Nolland, J. (2005) *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans/ Bletchley, Paternoster Press. p.366.

from the whole natural order.<sup>488</sup> The encounter that follows in both Gospels (Mt.8:21-22; Lk.9:59-60) sees another man dismissed with another odd saying after asking to bury his father before accompanying Jesus. One is immediately reminded of the contrasting passage 1 Kings 19:19-21 where Elisha is permitted to say goodbye to his family before following Elijah. Clearly Jesus sees even this deeply important act of filial piety as unworthy of taking priority over the call. Attempts to decipher the strange saying about the dead burying their own dead symbolically boil down to a simple statement of urgency: ‘That business can resolve itself; your attention is vitally needed elsewhere.’ Luke’s version includes the instruction to go and preach the Kingdom (9:60), an action Moxnes believes would have been difficult to qualify socially compared with carrying out the burial rites of one’s father. To abandon this action would have been dishonourable in the eyes of the family, the community and the law, especially in favour of redefining one’s male role outside of the family instead of as the new head of it.<sup>489</sup> Just as he did not require renunciation of wealth by everyone, Jesus did not require everyone to abandon sacred rituals, but calls to follow require unwavering responses. This instance, probably more so than the call of the fishermen, demonstrates how many aspects of normal life must now take a back seat to the call. Other sayings, less confusing but often harshly worded, reiterate this need for disciples to deprioritise self-preservation (Mt. 10:39; Mk. 8:35; Lk. 17:33; Jn. 12:25) and family relationships (Mt. 10:37; Lk. 14:26) because the priority is now the mission and the family is now redefined to go beyond blood. Harshest of all are the sayings that confirm a need for disciples to willingly sacrifice their own safety. The demand to ‘take up their cross’ (Mt. 10:38; 16:24; Mk. 8:34; Lk. 9:23; 14:27) is suggestive of suffering in general but obviously points to potential martyrdom. The reference specifically to execution suggests persecution and hostility from outside groups but the command that it should be they who take up their own crosses implies the need to go happily to their doom for the good of the cause.

The criteria for following Jesus, though they are shockingly strict in ways mentioned above, are shockingly lenient in others. Jesus calls Levi, a tax collector, in a call not dissimilar to that of the fishermen. As with them, the description of Levi leaving his usual business of

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<sup>488</sup> Moxnes, H. ‘Where is ‘Following Jesus’? Masculinity and Place in Luke’s Gospel’ in Hagedorn, A. C., Crook, Z. A. & Stewart, E. eds. (2007) *In Other Words: Essays on Social Science Matters and the New Testament in Honor of Jerome H. Neyrey*. Sheffield. Sheffield Phoenix Press. pp.162-3.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid. p.163.



sitting at the tax booth to follow emphasises the force of the call.<sup>490</sup> It would appear that one's eligibility for discipleship is determined by one's willingness to drop everything immediately, accept the harsh conditions and dedicate one's whole being to Jesus, not by personal piety and sinlessness. Jesus is perfectly willing to accept a man whose participation in the burdensome tax system imposed by Jewish and Roman authorities loaded him with prejudice and suspicion (Mk. 2:16 par.). That someone usually so despised could be accepted by Jesus indicates the importance of forgiveness especially in light of the preceding story of the paralysed man (Mk. 2:1-12 par.).<sup>491</sup> It also suggests that an attitude of repentance was required, although Jesus does not explicitly demand this from Levi or the other disciples. In Luke, Peter's consciousness of his own sin (5:8) shows he recognises it as an obstacle to discipleship without being prompted. Jesus and his group's association with John the Baptist emphasises the link between repentance and the imminent Kingdom (e.g. Mt.3:1-12) as well as with discipleship through baptism. Jesus' forgiveness extended to women also including some "who had been healed of evil spirits" (Lk.8:2) like Mary Magdalene. To have women followers at all, however, sinners or not, was somewhat controversial. The women supporting Jesus would have broken with their traditional domestic role<sup>492</sup> even leaving behind their husbands in some cases (like Joanna, Luke 8:3), thus risking their honour. Although they were not formally called like Levi and the Twelve, many women underwent healing or exorcism which formed a bridge to their new disciple-like life<sup>493</sup>. Their well-defined roles of domestic service, hospitality and financial support appear to have been essential for Jesus to maintain his movement. Overall, Jesus' inclusion of women and sinners and his attitude of forgiveness for the repentant sits happily within the Virtuoso Religion model which describes theoretical openness of the group to everyone despite strict criteria that put massive practical obstacles in the way.

This explains why not all followers of Jesus were or could be disciples. The crowd clearly played a significant role as followers though they were not called to 'follow' in the more theological sense. The disciples who were called formed a core of the movement, a

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<sup>490</sup> Gundry, R. H. (2000) *Mark: A Commentary on his Apology for the Cross*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. pp.123-4.

<sup>491</sup> Hooker, M. D. (1991) *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. London. A & C Black. p.94.

<sup>492</sup> du Plessis, Isak. (1995) 'Discipleship According to Luke's Gospel'. *Religion and Theology*. Vol.2. No.1. p.64.

<sup>493</sup> Moxnes, H. 'Where is 'Following Jesus'? Masculinity and Place in Luke's Gospel' in Hagedorn, A. C., Crook, Z. A. & Stewart, E. eds. (2007) *In Other Words: Essays on Social Science Matters and the New Testament in Honor of Jerome H. Neyrey*. Sheffield. Sheffield Phoenix Press. p.161.

foundation on which Jesus could build his teachings. His calling them together and naming them in the synoptic gospels (Mt. 10:1-4; Mk. 3:13-19; Lk.6:12-16) identifies and solidifies them as a group which, together with the commission to preach and heal (e.g. Mk. 3:14-15), suggests they are being prepared for when Jesus is no longer there.<sup>494</sup> The number twelve unites them as well, usually understood as a symbol of the reunification of the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 35:22f.; 49; Num. 1; 26.). McKnight identifies both an eschatological and ecclesial understanding for this, the twelve being a symbol of the promised reunion of the nation in the end times, a symbolic union of a new nation or perhaps a combination of both, a new fulfilment of the old Israel.<sup>495</sup> Though the eschatological understanding is very popular, McKnight sees the number of disciples and the references in Isaiah and Ezekiel as insufficient support for it, preferring to see the twelve as a political choice, a critique of the establishment that symbolised the nation reunited under new leadership.<sup>496</sup> Undoubtedly the number of disciples chosen was a recognisable symbol at the time. For the modern audience the lack of explicit reference to the restoration of the twelve tribes hides one major implication about the group but highlights the fact that they could have fulfilled their role for Jesus had they numbered eleven or thirteen. That a figure like Levi was called but not included on the list of disciples (Mt. 10:1-4; Mk. 3:13-19; Lk.6:12-16 cf. Mt. 9:9-13), and that an original member on the list betrayed Jesus weakens the symbol of the twelve though there is no reason to doubt the historical number.

When the disciples are grouped and act almost as one, the number of individuals seems irrelevant, and their collective role is invaluable for facilitating Jesus' mission. On the one hand they are portrayed as bewildered at some of his teachings (e.g. Mt.15:15) which emphasises his wisdom and authority when he comes to explain, but on the other hand they are bestowed with authority to share mission duties (e.g. Mt.10:1) and live day to day as equals. They were his companions, roommates, family, his most immediate contact with the community and humanity in general. His redefinition of family (Mt. 12:46-50; Mk. 3:31-35; Lk. 8:19-21) was not a denial of the need for a social support network.<sup>497</sup> Their authority to

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<sup>494</sup> Myers, Ched. (2008) *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books. p.163.

<sup>495</sup> McKnight, Scot. 'Jesus and the Twelve' in Bock, D. L. & Webb, R L. eds. (2009) *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. pp.190-1.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid. pp.196-208.

<sup>497</sup> Witherington III, B. (2001) *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. p.151.

preach and heal meant his presence could reach further.<sup>498</sup> They were trusted with enormous responsibility despite being men of ordinary background with no special religious qualifications. Witherington suggests this lack of outstanding attributes may be the very reason they were chosen<sup>499</sup> which strengthens the idea that they must hold a unique position in relation to Jesus whilst representing everyone. Their individual characters are, apart from Peter and Judas Iscariot, rarely differentiated. The point about their group role is equally applicable to their theological portrayal as witnesses to the gradual revelation and final confirmation of Jesus' identity (e.g. Lk. 24:45-49).

Nothing identical to this arrangement exists elsewhere. The teacher-disciple relationships and daily life of the rabbinic tradition, Qumran or the Cynics for example do not match up. The closest biblical equivalent was probably Elijah and Elisha. The call itself (1 Kings 19:19-21) has structural similarities to the calls of the disciples including the impression that the two parties have never met before, the everyday tasks of the called party being described, and the process of leaving those tasks and family members behind.<sup>500</sup> Capper makes an extensive parallel between the calls and builds upon this to examine how Jesus adapted the model of Elijah and Elisha's lifestyle (with influence from his contemporaries) to devise a type of virtuoso practice to suit his purposes<sup>501</sup>. The model provided for the relationship between caller and called is established, setting a precedent for what it means to 'follow' i.e. "unconditional *sharing of the master's destiny*"<sup>502</sup>. There are, of course, differences between the calls and functions of Elisha and the disciples but these may be just as significant as the similarities. Jesus' purpose and the nature of his person developed the relationship he had with the disciples. That the call came from Jesus rather than from God, as in the prophetic pattern, reflects a theological development as do the demands on the disciples to take on a more active role in the approach of the Kingdom. The increased urgency of the situation was reflected in radical sayings like Mt.8:21f. which showed how much more drastic the disciples' sacrifices of home and family were compared to Elisha's (cf.1 Kings 19:20). In this sense Jesus transcends Elijah by offering a unique call to his followers which adapts to the unique needs of the time and the specific qualities of the men (Mk.1:17 par.).<sup>503</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> Ibid. p.424.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid. p.428.

<sup>500</sup> Gnilka, J. (1997) *Jesus of Nazareth: Message and History*. Peabody, MA. Hendrickson. pp.161-2.

<sup>501</sup> Capper, B. J. (2011) 'How Did Jesus Help the Poor? Virtuoso Religion as Stimulus to Economic Sharing in the Jesus Movement.' *The Qumran Chronicle*. Vol. 19, No. 3-4. pp.97-139.

<sup>502</sup> Hengel, M. (1981) *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*. Edinburgh. T&T Clark. p.72. His italics.

<sup>503</sup> Gnilka, J. (1997) p.163.

The very nature by which Jesus called his disciples set a precedent for the sort of relationship they were going to enjoy and the kind of demands and sacrifices their new lifestyle would involve. In turn these represent Jesus himself as well as his deepest socio-economic and theological concerns. The call of the fishermen reveals an urgent eschatological concern, the failed calls and associated sayings (e.g. ‘foxes have holes...’, ‘let the dead bury the dead’, ‘take up your cross...’ etc.) all describe specific features of discipleship, the inclusion of ‘sinners’ and women highlights the ethical concerns of forgiveness, the number twelve symbolises political critique of current authority structures and the group as a whole are an extension of Jesus himself in his mission duties and act as witnesses to his personal revelation. The call narratives are, therefore, extremely useful episodes to focus on. The models have broad application here in one way or another. Lenski’s model and the Commercialisation model give the usual perspective to the economic context, for example Galilee’s fishing industry, thus highlighting the contrast with a lifestyle focused away from money-making. Theissen’s definition of ‘charisma’ is relevant to the question of what motivated an affirmative answer to the call and his understanding that the group’s itinerant lifestyle forms a basis for Jesus’ ethical stance is utterly compatible with what was just said about the call narratives epitomising Jesus’ whole purpose. The Virtuoso Religion model was again very useful for visualising the liminal position of Jesus’ group within society. The feature of virtuoso religion identified by Silber most relevant to the call narratives was the implication of a normative double standard which means that while theoretically everyone and anyone may be a disciple, not everyone practically should or could, as this exegesis has demonstrated.

### **Assessing the Usefulness of Selected Social Science Models**

This section of the study looks at each of the scriptural passages in turn and attempts to apply our examples of models to them, an exercise designed to get a sense of these models working in practice and assessing whether they provide a useful or at least interesting lens through which to view the material. I hypothesise that each of the biblical passages may look slightly different depending on which model is being applied, that different models may be more useful for some passages than others, and that no one model will necessarily provide a 'perfect fit' at any stage. Given the prevalence of the wealth/poverty theme, however, I would expect, as we move through the analyses, certain patterns to become evident that we might begin to build a picture of Jesus' general thoughts on the economic system of his day, how it affected the people around him, how it affected himself and followers and how he would ideally prefer it to affect them all in the future. The broader economic models are most helpful for highlighting what relationship between richer or poorer figures might have been like both in 'fictionalised' examples like parables or in 'real life' situations. It is particularly relevant to keep in mind the basic features of agrarian society if only to remind the modern scholar not to make ethnocentric assumptions. Lenski's agrarian model has been greatly influential in social science research that it seems more than appropriate to hypothesise that it will be immensely useful in the analysis of our chosen passages and beyond. As far as the more narrowly focused models go, my hope is that they will provide not only background information that will help make sense of the features of the gospels that deal with wealth and poverty but will go further to help bring to the surface themes in Jesus' own thought about these things. My prediction is that the Virtuoso religion model will be the best at doing this. If so I think it will provide the best means of moving tentatively forwards in the discussion of Jesus' role as an active social reformer of issues that troubled him. It is my general feeling that the term 'social reformer' is beginning to look slightly inappropriate in terms of what it suggests about Jesus' action plan for change. It will have to do in the absence of something better but I predict that the type of change Jesus wished to see was not meant to be brought about by actively making great alterations to the way society was structured and managed but by more subtle forms of teaching, protest and example-setting. I believe all the models have the potential to support this to varying degrees.

## Social Models and the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard

Let us briefly summarise Matthew 20:1-16. The key to understanding this parable is the second half where the vineyard owner gives one denarius, a sufficient daily wage for covering basic needs<sup>504</sup>, to those who have worked the entire day and those who have only worked one hour. The accompanying explanation (vv. 13-15) emphasises the generosity of the owner not only in giving to the one-hour workers but to those who worked all day as well. They may have felt hard done by (v. 12) but he reminds them that they have no reason to begrudge his generosity. They were paid according to the agreement he made with them at the beginning of the day (v. 2) and they have been reminded that generosity in this sense refers not to being given more than one has agreed on or that one feels one deserves but what one *needs*. Despite the complex levels of this story which suggest an allegorical message about eschatology, on the surface the players and the drama itself are very simple and reflect certain norms of society that would have been highly recognisable to listeners. For the modern audience, however, models may help to facilitate greater understanding.

Firstly, one of the key features essential for understanding this parable is the common practice of paying day labourers at the end of their working day. This is mentioned explicitly in the Old Testament in reference to the moral obligation of ensuring the welfare of workers. For example, “You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brethren or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns; you shall give him his hire on the day he earns it, before the sun goes down (for he is poor, and sets his heart upon it); lest he cry against you to the Lord, and it be sin in you.” (Deut. 24:14-15)<sup>505</sup>. Secondly, our examination of the parable revealed another key understanding that the denarius was typically considered a fair wage for one day’s work. If so, then presumably, the labourer’s day would end with the collection of that wage and spending it immediately on that day’s food etc. The mention of sunset probably refers to the normal working hours of the day from (roughly) dawn until dusk and would be particularly relevant on the Sabbath which began at sun down on Friday evening, for which food may have needed to be purchased in advance.

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<sup>504</sup> Davies, W. D. and Allison, D. C. (2000) *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew. Vol. III*. Edinburgh. T & T Clark. p.72.

<sup>505</sup> See also, Leviticus 19:13: “You shall not oppress your neighbour or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning.”

## Agrarian Society

The economic situation of these day labourers is so central to understanding the meaning of this parable that a social model like the one proposed for agrarian society by Gerhard Lenski has a very strong chance of being useful for explaining it better. Indeed one of the most striking characteristics he identifies is “the fact of *marked social inequality*”<sup>506</sup> which is more than evident in the parable. He talks about the maintenance of this stratification by the governing classes in the form of debt extension and other types of financial manipulation, that favour those already rich and powerful<sup>507</sup>. Burdens such as taxation were known to be common economic issues that regularly put pressure on the poor in Jesus’ time and although the parable gives no indication of why the men were waiting in the ἀγορά for day work rather than working regular hours or even owning their own land, it might be assumed that they fell in that category of poor people whose place on the economic spectrum was dictated by their inability to remove themselves from the stagnation of living hand to mouth without the opportunity to make savings or from the burden of debt.

Based on what we know about them and their current lifestyle, it is possible to estimate where on Lenski’s graph<sup>508</sup> (the visual representation he gives of agrarian society) the day labourers might belong. There appear to be two possibilities. The Peasant Class is where Lenski would expect to find the majority of farmers<sup>509</sup>. This meant that large numbers of people working in the agricultural business would have lacked stability because of their dependence on favourable environmental conditions. Drought or other forms of severe weather could cause crops to fail resulting in famine. Work was obviously seasonally dependent, with times of planting and harvest being particularly busy. The presence of the day labourers in the parable might suggest that it was set at harvest time when extra labour was required and may also demonstrate the desperation of their situation that there were still men waiting for the chance of employment late in the day (v. 7).<sup>510</sup> It is this, however, that suggests the labourers may have been more likely to fit within the category on his graph Lenski calls the Expendables. Within this group he includes underemployed individuals who relied on begging, crime or seasonal work for survival. It was a category he identified in any society which produces more people than there is labour for and estimated their numbers at

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<sup>506</sup> Lenski, G. (1966) *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*. New York. McGraw-Hill. p.210.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid. p.284.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid. pp.266-8.

<sup>510</sup> Malina, B. J. and Rohrbaugh, R. L. (1992) *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. p.124.

around 5-10% of the population<sup>511</sup>. Others have also described day labourers as having a very precarious existence, only just being able to keep their heads above water, “always living on the semi-starvation line.”<sup>512</sup> Not only does the evidence support this conclusion but it makes better sense of the result of the parable. The payment of one denarius becomes particularly meaningful if the reader acknowledges how essential it was that these men received it. It could easily have been the difference between having food to eat that day or not. It is understandable that the twelve-hour workers might have hoped for a little more.

The fact that there were so many labourers still hoping to be employed even late in the day is supportive of Lenski’s observations about downward mobility, that societies with more people than labour would produce a surplus from the upper layers of the economic spectrum.<sup>513</sup> It is only possible to speculate about the rate of downward mobility because so many contributing factors could affect it<sup>514</sup> so it is difficult to assess the reason for the day labourers being in the position they were. The inevitability of distributive injustice is also something Lenski draws attention to, saying that the poor were dependent not only on levels of production but also on the decisions of the powerful on how to distribute resources. The rich wanted to maintain their status but also had it in their best interests to prevent anarchy and suffering.<sup>515</sup> Given what this says about the power of the elite classes to control the poor, and what the gospels have sometimes said in criticism of the rich (e.g. Mk.10:25), it is all the more significant that the rich landowner of the parable chooses to distribute resources equally, not in relation to the number of hours worked or the quality of the work done or with any apparent concern that he is depleting his own precious resources. He understands the necessity of that denarius. The parable seems to create an idealised picture of the workplace where distributive injustice does not exist. It is as if Jesus is picturing this as a possible reality in which no one is made to go without the basics for survival. Notably, the characters in this parable still fulfil the roles of a wealthier land owner employing poorer labourers (the system proposed is practically the same as in real life) but the most negative aspects of that relationship (unfairness and exploitation) have been removed to leave a rich man with a healthier level of attachment to his wealth and a group of poor men with enough money to pay for their daily bread.

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<sup>511</sup> Lenski, G. (1966) pp.281-4.

<sup>512</sup> Barclay, W. (1975) *The Gospel of Matthew: Vol. 2*. Edinburgh. The Saint Andrew Press. p.223.

<sup>513</sup> Lenski, G. (1966) p.290.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid. p.294.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid. pp.295-6.



The way Fiensy applies the Lenski model to Palestine in the Herodian period is extremely useful because, of course, Lenski is describing a generic pattern for agrarian societies and does not have a particular one in mind, taking almost no examples from this part of history. Fiensy notices that the issue of landlessness was a strong influence on the lives of poor agricultural workers because elites bought up more and more land (or it was confiscated by Herod, Josephus *Ant.* 17.305, 307), increasing the numbers of tenant farmers and day labourers.<sup>516</sup> Again although the specific reasons for the day labourers of the parable not having their own land or fixed farming employment are not obvious, their numbers support Fiensy's observations. The mention of tenant farmers elsewhere also suggests widespread landlessness (The Parable of the Tenants, Mk. 12:1-12). Tension and conflict is evident throughout the parables between servants and their masters (e.g. Lk.16:1-13) but that is not the relationship demonstrated here. Even though it would be fair to think of the landowner as part of the Governing Class in Lenski's model as his good fortune is demonstrated by his production of grapes, a luxury product, rather than a subsistence crop like grain<sup>517</sup>, his behaviour is not representative of what this implies for the poor, that their needs are not being met by the local producers. Again, it points to an idealised future in which land owning employers can carry on as before but with a greater appreciation for the basic requirements of their staff.

The model presented by Lenski and developed by Fiensy (and others<sup>518</sup>) is extremely useful for explaining the probable background of its main characters and the likely socio-economic dynamic of their lives. By being able to understand socio-economic divisions, the relationships between rich and poor, and some of the typical features of agrarian agriculture, the reader is helped to differentiate which parts of the parable represent the norm and which represent the extraordinary. Jesus told several parables where the outcome was unexpected (e.g. Lk.15:11-32; 16:1-13). His continued concern for the issues of wealth and poverty that this study highlights is manifested in an interesting way in this parable. The rich figure, unlike many others (e.g. Lk.12:13-21; 16:19-31), is not the focus of criticism but instead sets an example to all employers and it is his equal treatment of the workers that is key because it

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<sup>516</sup> Fiensy, D. A. (1991) *The Social History of Palestine in the Herodian Period: The Land Is Mine*. Lewistone, NY. The Edwin Mellen Press. pp.77-8.

<sup>517</sup> Hanson, K. C. and Oakman, D. E. (1998) *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflict*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. p.106.

<sup>518</sup> E.g. Stegemann, E. W. & Stegemann, W. (1999) *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*. Edinburgh. T & T Clark.

applies the principle that all are equally entitled to the basic requirements of life, just as the Lord's Prayer suggests<sup>519</sup>.

### Commercialisation in Agrarian Society

The model for Commercialisation in Agrarian Society has its basis in the same principles described by Lenski's model which means that to that extent it is useful, but our investigation was focused much more on the commercialisation of Galilee, where the specific features of the landscape, politics and so on had a particular influence on the economic culture. It is without question that Jesus was influenced in his teachings by the Galilean context from which he originated. His largely rural surroundings, no doubt, account for the frequent use of agricultural settings and themes in his sayings and parables. It is not stated whether the parable was meant to be set in one particular place or not. Jesus was actually in Judea on his way to Jerusalem, not in Galilee at the time it is recorded in Matthew. Having said that, it seems the agricultural setting of the parable was designed so that it might be relatable to a wide audience, not just a Galilean one. Besides, how drastically different would a Galilean vineyard be to a Judean one anyway? The point of this parable certainly does not exclude a non-Galilean audience but it does have some relevance to the issues raised by the Commercialisation model since it centres round a businessman and his workers in the harvest of grapes for wine production. Although not without its limitations, I believe this model brings to the surface some interesting issues in this parable regarding appropriate use of wealth.

One significant point about this parable is the still very apparent stratification between rich landowners and poor day labourers. The vineyard owner produced a luxury crop that would have not been for the benefit of the likes of the labourers but might have presented good commercial opportunities, to the benefit of him and local members of the merchant class.<sup>520</sup> An issue raised by the model is the question of the extent to which the area Jesus lived and worked in was typical of the economic stagnation identified in agrarian societies.<sup>521</sup> I suggested that maybe it is not so much that society was against an economy based on commerce etc. (more familiar to a modern reader) but that it simply was not possible. The common man did not have expendable income for instance, and society did not have an

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<sup>519</sup> "Give us this day our daily bread", Matt. 6:11; Luke 11:3.

<sup>520</sup> Lenski, G. (1966) pp.248-55. Also, Kautsky, K. (2008) *Foundations of Christianity*. London. IMG Publications. p.41.

<sup>521</sup> Carney, T. F. (1975) *The Shape of the Past: Models and Antiquity*. Lawrence, Kansas. Coronado Press. pp.106-7.

infrastructure that could cope with commerce and trade on a large scale, and there was no large-scale industry. The economy was not even close to resembling what it is like today. For a landowner like the one in the parable, any surplus generated from his business would normally only be of direct benefit to himself, merchants he might trade with and any authorities to whom he owed taxes etc. That is to say, any extra money generated stayed with the rich. Poor labourers would not even have been able to afford to drink the wine. This may explain why Jesus felt the need to tell a parable that saw the poor workers actually directly benefitting from the good fortune of their employer for a change. This wealthy man bucks the trend by redistributing a portion of his surplus to the workers. Does this then mean that he is trying to encourage a more modern looking economy? No. The labourers are only given enough to cover basic needs and not given a surplus themselves from which spending could stimulate the economy in other ways. That would defeat the object of the parable and be inconsistent with Jesus' other comments on wealth in society. His itinerant lifestyle with the disciples seems to be naturally disapproving of individuals having more than they really need and using their personal surplus to gain even more. Therefore it would probably be fair to say he would disapprove of communities generating a surplus to be traded in the same way, rather than producing only what is necessary and remaining self-sufficient.

### Wandering Charismatics

Theissen's model of Wandering Charismatics describes the choice of itinerant lifestyle as the only means by which Jesus and his disciples could preach principles such as detaching oneself from the importance of wealth. They had to live by their own ethical precepts.<sup>522</sup> What is particularly interesting about this model is the discussion about social rootlessness. Theissen identifies widespread social rootlessness in groups similar to Jesus', such as the Qumran community, resistance fighters and prophetic movements, as well as amongst other members of the expendable classes<sup>523</sup>. The attraction to these types of movement came as a result of socio-economic changes such as natural disaster (Mk.13:8), over-population (Josephus *War* 3.3.2; *Life* 45), concentration of possessions (*Ant.*17.11.2; Luke 19.26), and struggle for the distribution of goods (Mt.5:25f.; 18:23f.; Lk.16:1f.)<sup>524</sup>. It might be fair to understand the decision to join such groups as a method of prevention against downward mobility since Theissen sees social uprooting as something not exclusive to those already

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<sup>522</sup> Theissen, G. (1993) *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics, and the World of the New Testament*. Edinburgh. T&T Clark. p.40.

<sup>523</sup> Theissen, G. (1978) *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*. Philadelphia. Fortress Press. pp.33-37.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.* p.40.

suffering poverty.<sup>525</sup> The threat of poverty was quite obviously hanging over the heads of the day labourers. They might be exactly the type of impoverished and disillusioned individuals attracted to the relative safety of a self-sufficient group of outsiders to avoid the humiliating daily wait for employment and the harsh working conditions when it is available. The parable presents an idealised reality in which the vineyard owner does seem to appreciate this. He particularly recognises the lack of fairness in the distribution of wealth amongst the very poor and pays every worker the same accordingly. This teaching about fairness reflects a level of continuity with the itinerant lifestyle of the Jesus movement in which members shared equal status and had their basic needs tended to by each other and from support by wealthier patrons. In this feature the model and the parable are in agreement in their lack of condemnation of the rich.

Unlike many other rich figures in the gospels, the vineyard owner is portrayed as generous and without so strong an attachment to his wealth that he could not pay all the workers a sufficient daily wage. The social rootlessness described in Theissen's model that displayed a critique of wealth and possessions is balanced by a tolerance of wealthy people who do not favour their wealth above God (Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13) and a dependence on their support and hospitality as members of the settled Christian community<sup>526</sup>. The model highlights the feeling in the parable that employment/patronage need not go hand in hand with exploitation of employees/clients. The model's focus on continuity is once again supported by the consistency between the parable's teaching and the Jesus movement's actual practices. Both demonstrate criticism of accumulated wealth but actually agree that wealth itself, when used unselfishly, is not a bad thing. This particular model seems to apply relatively neatly to this parable, agreeing with and confirming its most significant points. Beyond this, however, it seems that is all the model can do. It merely confirms things we already know without really bringing to the surface new ways of looking at the material that weren't immediately evident. This is not a criticism as such on the model's usefulness but it does show off its limitations.

### Virtuoso Religion

I believe the Virtuoso Religion model is capable to an extent of picking up where the Wandering Charismatics left off. In many ways to apply the Virtuoso model here would be to repeat what we just learned about preaching the virtues of equal access to basic requirements

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<sup>525</sup> Ibid. p.46.

<sup>526</sup> Theissen, G. (1978) p.38.

and generous and fair use of surplus wealth. What this model is capable of adding is a more developed explanation of how the Jesus movement's lifestyle reflected its teachings and its relationship with society, particularly the authorities. The stress on the liminal position of the virtuoso religious movement is very significant because it addresses the tension that inevitably exists between rich and poor in a dramatically stratified agrarian society. The point of the Virtuoso group is that they can differentiate themselves from the political-economic and religious authorities without complete separation and disrespect for them. In fact the elite members of society can be appreciative of the virtuoso's rigorous upholding of rules to the point that the divisions between them are transcended.<sup>527</sup> Not only does this bridge the divide between their group and the authorities that they are apparently critical of (in a more elegant way than the Wandering Charismatics model declares) but the way they conduct their daily lives transcends the divisions of rich and poor. In the parable this ideal is reflected not by eliminating divisions explicitly but by showing that groups can fulfil their roles without the extremes of wealth and poverty being allowed to exacerbate inequality and exploitation. The rich landowner is still rich at the end and the poor day labourers are still poor but the employer has not abused his privileged position thereby condemning himself and the employees have not been taken advantage of and left to starve. The relationship has changed to something mutually beneficial and fair without having practically altered. The status of the elite party has not been questioned. This is, therefore, not a threatening parable for the authorities to hear, even though it may sound initially surprising.

Capper is strongly convinced that the practice of community of goods formed a central element of virtuoso group practice for the likes of the Essenes and the early Jesus movement<sup>528</sup>. Evidence suggests they held a common purse (John 12:6) from which group essentials like food were paid for as well as donations made to the poor (Matt. 26:8-9; Mark 14:4-5; John 13:29). As mentioned already, this is deeply relevant to the message of equality in the parable. The equal payment of a denarius transcends the notion of wages proportionate to the amount of work. It is theologically linked to the idea that the final eschatological judgement should not be a weighing of merits.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Hill, M. (1973) *The Religious Order*. London. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. p.50-1. Also, Ling, T. J. M. (2006) *The Judaean Poor and the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p.76.

<sup>528</sup> Capper, B. J. 'John, Qumran and Virtuoso Religion' in Coloe, M. L. and Thatcher, T. eds. (2011) *John, Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Sixty Years of Discovery and Debate*. Atlanta. Society of Biblical Literature. p.115-6.

<sup>529</sup> Davies, W. D. and Allison, D. C. (2000) *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew. Vol. III*. Edinburgh. T & T Clark. p.70. Also, De Ru, G. (1966) 'The Conception of Reward in

The models for Theissen's Wandering Charismatics and Virtuoso Religion have huge similarities but the Virtuoso model irons out many of Theissen's difficulties, particularly the issues of tension between rich and poor and between the elite authorities and the authority of the Jesus movement. Hill observes that the way Charismatics and Virtuosi choose to differentiate themselves from the establishment authority and how they understand their own authority has different results.<sup>530</sup> It seems that the liminal position of the virtuosi is less precarious. This model also seems to highlight the message of equality better which is essential for examining the parable.

Economic models and the Jesus-specific models are both useful for gaining a sound understanding of this parable. The economic models provide guidance for the modern reader regarding the norms of agricultural practices and, most importantly, they explain the significance for the labourers of one denarius each. The Commercialisation model provides insight into the alternative choice of the employer to use his surplus wealth to create yet more for the upper classes which, again, reinforces the significance of his choice to redistribute it to the poor. The Wandering Charismatics model explains how the ethos of the Jesus movement is reflected in the parable's concern for equality but the Virtuoso does this and more. It provides a better understanding of how Jesus actually portrays the elite figure positively therefore dissipating some tension with the real life authorities, and it offers a better explanation of the significance of the daily denarius in its description of the group's practice of communal sharing.

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the Teachings of Jesus'. *Novum Testamentum*. Vol 8. p 210. Also, Shillington, V. G. 'Saving Life and Keeping Sabbath' in Shillington, V. G. ed. (1997) *Jesus and His Parables: Interpreting the Parables of Jesus Today*. Edinburgh. T & T Clark. p.89.

<sup>530</sup> Hill, M. (1973) *The Religious Order*. London. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. p.2

## Social Models and the Parable of the Unjust Steward

Since this is another parable, it is acceptable to assume the possibility of similar conclusions coming from our testing of the social models as we found with the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard. Those models that deal directly with the lifestyle of Jesus and his disciples may not be as explicitly represented because the parable is not about them but it may be consistent with what the models say about the Jesus' movement's strongest concerns. I expect to see these concerns indicated and exaggerated in a scenario that resembles real life but includes certain surprising deviations from the norm.

### Agrarian Society

We can be relatively confident that the Agrarian model will be useful in putting the characters of the parable in their proper socio-economic context and explaining their actions. Straight away the parable introduces a rich (*plousios*) man who employs a steward. Of some of the other places where Luke describes somebody as *plousios*, they are not only being portrayed negatively but are being done so within the context of a teaching about the pitfalls of wealth (e.g. Lk. 12:16; 16:19, 21, 22; 18:23, 25; 21:1). This evidence alone supports the assumption that this rich man belonged to the Governing Class which would put him in the top 2% of the population<sup>531</sup>. The circumstances of the parable, his steward and his debtors also suggest he was a landowner; he probably had employees or slaves besides the steward to work his land which would have been a major source of income. The steward himself would probably have been a member of the Retainer Class. Lenski notes there was no real 'middle class' to speak of but the position held by high status servants could be the closest thing. This particular retainer appears to have had a relatively large amount of responsibility since he is accused of mishandling his master's wealth so he appears to have occupied quite a privileged position. His dealings with the master's debtors suggests he may have been familiar with them (perhaps he deals with them on a regular basis), since it was sometimes the role of the retainer to mediate between their master and members of the lower classes.<sup>532</sup> There could sometimes be hostility and resentment that it would be the role of the retainer to deflect, though in the case of this parable, the steward actually ends up taking this to a new extreme for the sake of his own interests.

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<sup>531</sup> Lenski, G. (1966) *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*. New York. McGraw-Hill. p.219, 245.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid. p.246.

Lenski's model offers real insight into the fears of the steward voiced in v.3. As far as he can see, the options that await him in the event of his dismissal are the hard physical labour of digging or the humiliating alternative of begging. If he was forced into a job that society considered dangerous or undesirable he may have entered the Unclean/Degraded Class<sup>533</sup>. However, it is more likely that he would have become a member of the Expendables since it included those forced to beg or rely on crime or sporadic work opportunities e.g. day labour. The Expendables are also categorised as the result of a society with more people than there was labour for<sup>534</sup>, probably because the birth rate was high and landlessness or other issues caused by the monopoly of the Governing Classes forced people out of work or off their land. Lenski finds it hard to give a measurement for the rate of downward mobility since it is affected by so many contributing factors but he acknowledges that downward was much more frequent than upward mobility<sup>535</sup>. Verse three shows us that the steward's actions are motivated by self-preservation, here.

The fact that the master had debtors is another point in favour of categorising him as an elite figure since debt and money-lending were tools of the trade in keeping members of the lower classes under control<sup>536</sup>. Lenski also notes that peasants would rarely have seen money; it was not used in everyday business like it is in industrial societies<sup>537</sup>. So this may explain why the debts that were reduced were not monetary sums but measures of oil and wheat. It is also suggestive of the master's skills in trade and commerce, though it is hard to be sure if the debtors were merchants who help sell the master's goods. That they were able to reduce their own debt record suggests they were literate. For the sake of the parable's ultimate meaning, however, it is probably better to conclude that they were poor tenant farmers owing a debt of a fixed amount or percentage of their own crop. This draws greater attention to the contrast between the rich and poor. The fact that the debts of these struggling farmers were reduced needs to be seen as a generous act, one that would ultimately change the fortunes of the steward and his master. The reaction of the master on hearing that the steward has relieved some of the debt owed to him, is once again a strong indicator of his wealth. There is no suggestion that he would not be able to afford the reduction.

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<sup>533</sup> Ibid. p.281.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid. pp. 289-90.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid. p.207. Also, Horsley, R. A. (1993) *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. p.246.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.



The outcome of the parable sees the master praise the steward's prudence. The Steward's reduction of the debts has created a new business relationship between himself and his master, between himself and the debtors, and between the master and the debtors. The steward has won friends for himself<sup>538</sup> by easing the financial burden of the already pressured tenant farmers and made his master appear generous in the eyes of the public. Such a reputation could perhaps have been the window to new commercial ventures and ultimate gain. The steward has truly fulfilled the mediator role that Lenski describes for members of the retainer class, even though it has meant venturing into somewhat 'unjust' territory to achieve his own goals. The message about financial prudence is clearly in criticism of the tendency of the governing classes to accumulate profit for themselves and leave lower members of society wanting. It may be a message that is relevant to all members of society, though, not only those with large amounts of wealth. Ultimately prudence is about what one does with one's money, not how much one has in the first place. Jesus has made a similar point elsewhere with another extreme example where he and the disciples witness a poor widow donating a small amount of money to the temple treasury in the midst of many rich folk donating large amounts: "And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living"." (Mk. 12:41-44). The steward shows the master the potential benefits of bucking the trend when it comes to redistribution of wealth. It is such a simple message: if the rich share some of their money with the poor then everyone will be happier. There is a wonderful irony in the fact that the steward is called 'unjust' when what he is doing is correcting distributive injustice.

### Commercialisation in Agrarian Society

The Commercialisation model builds upon the help the Agrarian model gives us in understanding better the status, roles and actions of the characters in the parable by focusing more closely on the business implications of the debt relief. The setting of the parable depicts a typical situation in which a wealthy landowner employs a steward to manage his business and deal with indebted clients. It is suggestive of the kind of economic stagnation indicated in the model that sees wealth accumulate with the rich and stay there. Even though the model points towards slightly more active trade and commerce in the Galilean region stimulated by

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<sup>538</sup> Carroll, J. T. and Carroll, J. R. (1996) *Preaching the Hard Sayings of Jesus*. Peabody. Hendrickson. p.112.

features such as better trade routes to places like Tyre and Sidon and the abundant Sea of Galilee, a setting like this would have been familiar. It is important not to imagine an idealised version of Galilee where the economy was not troubled by elite domination, debt, taxes and high levels of poverty. That does not mean that we cannot speculate about the extent of the master's business connections with other clients, merchants and other trade connections.<sup>539</sup> We must be careful not to impose ethnocentric judgements about the commercial dealings within this business, however. We must not judge the steward's decision to redistribute some of his master's wealth as a move to stimulate the economy per se, even though his actions may have positively impacted some of the master's future business deals both with the relieved clients and with other partners. The point of the parable is to show that the gesture of redistributing some wealth will actually be beneficial to all parties. It is not about making more money for one's self but circulating profits in an aim to reduce the extremes of wealth and poverty. The outcome is very similar to that of the Labourers in the Vineyard: the actual role of the elite figure is not threatened or changed but the attitude change to the non-elite figures eases their burden without completely taking it away. Only a portion of their debt is removed. We are left with a group of people, linked together by patron-client bonds that have been reset, as it were, back to a point where they needn't be exploitative or parasitic but mutually beneficial. By better fulfilling these roles, master, steward and clients can actually live more as a self-sufficient community rather than as part of a wider commercial enterprise. They have been used as an example that shows even complicated layers of relationships can work to support one another and see basic needs covered, just as it was in the mutually supportive group of the early Jesus movement.

### Wandering Charismatics

Since the Wandering Charismatics model focuses more narrowly on the Jesus movement and because this biblical passage is not about the group directly but a teaching embedded in a fiction, we are able to see both how the model might apply to the events of the parable in terms of if the characters were real life figures and how it might apply in terms of how its message reflected Jesus' aims. Firstly, the general setting of the parable represents the typical kind of relationships that might exist between a wealthy master, his employee and his clients, with the economic disparity between them demonstrated most strongly by the clients' debt. Theissen's model is very conscious of the tension that could exist between rich and poor just

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<sup>539</sup> Kautsky, K. (2008) *Foundations of Christianity*. London. IMG Publications. p.21-22.

because of this kind of financial burden. The pressures this put on some members of society bred a feeling of disillusionment with the authorities and put them in danger of economic ruin. As a result, such individuals were sometimes drawn towards movements like Jesus' which were able to turn their social rootlessness into a way of life.<sup>540</sup> It is, however, the steward not the farmer clients who finds himself in danger of falling off the edge. He is threatened with poverty because his lack of prudence (Lk. 16:1-2) has irked his employer.

Both the steward and the master learn a lesson about the benefit of prudent use of wealth. The result of the parable sees relations between the master, his steward and his business clients improve because of this lesson. It promotes an ideal where rich and poor can live and work harmoniously without the patronage and authority of the elite party being threatened and without the non-elite party being forced into a position of debt from which they can be easily exploited. The Wandering Charismatics model takes into account the necessity of patronage from the wealthy in order that Jesus and his disciples can maintain an itinerant lifestyle. Theissen claims that this relationship is complimentary, not contradictory.<sup>541</sup> It is hard not to think, however, that this promotion of positive rich/poor relations and the importance of interactions implied by the 'Charismatic' title Theissen attributes to Jesus<sup>542</sup> is somewhat contradictory to the movement's voluntary homelessness, renunciation of property and general criticism of riches. Of course, Theissen would have an answer for this - Jesus had to live by what he preached.<sup>543</sup> Distancing themselves from personal wealth to justify criticising it is one thing but the model struggles to make sense of how this explains the way the group maintains its relations with wealthy supporters and with society's elite in general. This limits the model's ability to help understand the parable's conclusion which criticises accumulated wealth successfully without seeming hypocritical when the outcome is happy for the master.

### Virtuoso Religion

Once again, I think the Virtuoso Religion model addresses this issue much more effectively by seeing the Jesus movement in a liminal position that allows for good relations with the established elite. The model's description reiterates the lack of anti-institutional feeling. Jesus regularly mentions the need to respect traditions and laws (e.g. Mk. 12:17) even though many

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<sup>540</sup> Theissen, G. (1978) *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*. Philadelphia. Fortress Press. p.33-46.

<sup>541</sup> Theissen, G. (1978) p.38.

<sup>542</sup> Theissen, G. & Merz, A.(1998) *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*. London. SCM Press Ltd.pp.185-6.

<sup>543</sup> Theissen, G. (1993) *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics, and the World of the New Testament*. Edinburgh. T&T Clark. p.40.

of his teachings seem to advocate rebellious behaviour. An initial reading of the parable suggests that the steward was attempting to take some sort of revenge against his master but it is later revealed to have been the opposite albeit by risky methods. Silber's list<sup>544</sup> mentions the intensification of norms as a key feature of virtuosity which is evident throughout the gospels. The commandment to love one's enemies (Mt. 5:43; Lk. 6:27), for example, is an extreme version of a pre-existing ideal that is meant to be beneficial to both parties even though it sounds counter-intuitive. The same is true of the steward's actions with the master's debtors. An action which could have angered the master and made things worse for his clients and for the steward actually moved to equalise them somewhat. By the end the debtors were under less financial pressure, the steward had avoided a huge downward move in social rank and the master had learned the value of prudence with both his money and his colleagues. The Virtuoso theme of transcending divisions comes from the Jesus movement promoting values that both elite and non-elite can participate in. For them this included accepting hospitality from elite figures who supported the itinerant disciple group without compromising their own political or moral principles<sup>545</sup>. The master is being given the opportunity to fulfil a similar role. The Jesus movement, although it posed an alternative system of living, did not do so with the aim to undermine the current system apart from where injustices were concerned. The parable does not suggest that the master should relieve all the debt owed to him or renounce his wealth. It does not remove the characters from their places within the story. Though the master is still the master, the steward still the steward and the debtors still the debtors, by the end the breadth of division between them is somewhat shortened.

Although Jesus and the disciples practiced an extreme form of itinerancy that involved renouncing possessions, community sharing and so on, there is no reason to think that this was expected of everyone. Silber identifies this as a key feature of virtuoso religion and it is evident in the gospels in wealthy figures who supported Jesus (e.g. Lk. 8:1-3). There is no reason to think that the master in the parable would be expected to renounce everything either and it would be pointless to frame such a teaching within such a complicated parable anyway. Despite being a parable, a non-literal story, Jesus is illustrating quite a realistic sounding scenario in which a business arrangement involving traditional customs of debt and

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<sup>544</sup> Silber, I. F. (1995) *Virtuosity, Charisma, and Social Order: A Comparative Sociological Study of Monasticism in Theravada Buddhism and Medieval Catholicism*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p.190-1

<sup>545</sup> Ling, T. J. M. (2006) *The Judaean Poor and the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p.76.

reciprocity are redefined without damaging the honour or financial status of the master. He could afford to relieve some of those debts and, in the situation that arose, doing so was the best action for all characters in the story. If this could happen in a parable, why could this not happen in real life? The rich could afford to readdress the way they view the process of business so that the poor would not be oppressed without compromising themselves morally or politically. This hints at the type of social reform I believe Jesus was proposing which is totally compatible with the Virtuoso model.

The Virtuoso model is by far the most useful for examining the Parable of the Unjust Steward. It describes the types of social inequality and oppression that inspired the need for an alternative movement which demonstrated renunciation of material wealth and practiced community sharing. It goes on to explain how this could in theory be happily managed alongside the existing system of political and religious authority by promoting values accessible to all. It does this by intensifying certain commitments and rules which can solve but also cause tensions. The parable illustrates how a radical approach to debt and reciprocity that seems at first unfair can actually improve elite/non-elite relationships.

## Social Models and the Rich Man

A conversation with a would-be disciple inspires a teaching that includes one of the most famous sayings and iconic mental images in the Bible: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Mk. 10:25). At a first glance the statement seems pretty damning<sup>546</sup>. Taken in isolation it presents a rather hopeless situation to all persons of wealth but within the context of the whole passage it is somewhat softened by a fuller explanation about the cost of discipleship. The renunciation of home, family and possessions by the disciples is commended but does not confirm that poverty alone ensures salvation and, therefore, that wealth alone prevents it. A negative relationship with wealth or property that prioritizes them above a relationship with God (cf. Mt.6:24; Lk.16:13) is the problem, not the wealth itself. It means it is not impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, just very unlikely! The outcome of the discussion suggests Jesus not only did not totally condemn the rich but that such a teaching would have been inappropriate, unrealistic and unnecessary. Let us hope that viewing this encounter through the lens of our models will help clarify some of the complex issues that underpin this seemingly straight forward condemnation of wealth.

### Agrarian Society

The backstory of the rich man is not explicit. All the text reveals is that he wanted to know how to inherit eternal life (v.17), he claimed to have always kept the commandments (v.20), he had great possessions and was sad at the thought of renouncing them (v.22). We might infer that he was a landowner because κτήματα can refer to land/estates as well as general property. There is even a suggestion that he has mistreated the poor in the past by the conspicuous inclusion of the extra commandment ‘Do not defraud’ on the list Jesus quotes to him. If he were a landowner, then presumably he had staff or owned slaves and had dealings with merchants or clients. The Agrarian model highlights the injustices that could result from elite landownership, increasing numbers of landless peasants and forcing them to become tenant farmers or day labourers<sup>547</sup>. Though the text does not attest to any wrong doing on the

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<sup>546</sup> Crossley takes this harsh view: Crossley, J. G. (2005) ‘The Damned Rich (Mark 10:17-31)’. *The Expository Times*. 116. pp.397-401.

<sup>547</sup> Fiensy, D. A. (1991) *The Social History of Palestine in the Herodian Period: The Land Is Mine*. Lewistone, NY. The Edwin Mellen Press. pp.77-78. Fiensy also notes occurrences of land confiscation by Herod (Josephus. *Ant.*17.305, 307).

part of the man or even give details of his ‘many possessions’, the evidence of his wealth does seem to put him in the top few per cent of the population in the Governing Class.<sup>548</sup>

The outcome of the encounter, for both Jesus and the rich man, is unsatisfactory. The command to renounce his possessions comes as a complete shock to the man who does not appear to be present for Jesus’ subsequent explanation about wealth (v.22). There is no indication that he was familiar with the itinerant practices of Jesus and his group beforehand either so it seems that he departs without really understanding the reasons for the command to renounce everything. On the face of it, the idea of volunteering oneself for a life of poverty is illogical. Even as a figure of wealth and influence, surely this man would have been aware that he was one of a lucky minority and that vast portions of society were living close to or below the poverty line. The number of positions where regular income could be secured were completely disproportionate to the large population, resulting in downward mobility<sup>549</sup>. Unless this rich figure had somehow avoided encountering these phenomena, he must surely have had some sense of his own privilege. Why would someone who knew himself to be one of a lucky few in society with κτήματα πολλά want to give that up? Even he was subject to burdensome taxes and the occasional bad harvest that might disrupt his business and cause financial distress. Downward mobility could have threatened him too<sup>550</sup>. Time and energy spent avoiding such dangers made the prospect of renouncing all he had in one go even more absurd. If the command had been to make a partial donation to the poor then perhaps he would have seen the value of it. Like the master in the Parable of the Unjust Steward he could have taken advantage of the honour it would earn him. But to renounce everything was to renounce power as well as privilege which meant sacrificing the ability to manage relationships with clients and the like. It would have meant truly putting his life in God’s hands. It seems he does not linger to hear Jesus explain that this is exactly the point.

The Agrarian society model is capable here of explaining the type of fortunes probably enjoyed by the rich man and the dangers of downward mobility even he could be threatened with. Rather than have the decision made for him by unfortunate circumstances, which may never arise, this scenario puts him in a position to voluntarily lower his social status and wealth. The man (as far as we know) selects to stay rich whereas Jesus and the disciples have

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<sup>548</sup> Luke’s version of events even describes him as a ἄρχων (ruler). Luke 18:18.

<sup>549</sup> Lenski, G. (1966) *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*. New York. McGraw-Hill. p.290.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid.

opted to live without attachment to worldly possessions. Their system of mutual support is something the man either does not know about or does not understand.

### Commercialisation in Agrarian Society

Contributions from the Commercialisation in Agrarian Society model are only able to expand on this conclusion in the sense of offering more specifically targeted analysis of economic developments in the Galilee area, the main pitfall for us being the lack of information about the rich man's source of income. The implication that he was a landowner of some sort is helpful in that we can further imagine the economic impact his estate may have had on local commerce, relations with local merchants through frequent business transactions, channels of trade developed between urban and rural areas<sup>551</sup>, and employment of local peasants perhaps as tenants or day labourers. We might further speculate that his unwillingness to renounce these things, the power they afforded him and relationships they allowed him to manipulate in his favour was an unwillingness to accept a lifestyle where mutual support within a group meant self-sufficiency, basic needs addressed and no surplus. As we stated in support of the Agrarian Society model, a basic idea of the relationship between rich and poor is a really good start for understanding the impact of the call to renounce property and wealth. The Commercialisation model certainly supports and reinforces this but offers little in addition unless we speculate about the details of the rich man's circumstances. To do so is interesting, perhaps, but it relies on a manipulation of the data or at least exaggeration of certain features thereby limiting the model's usefulness.

### Wandering Charismatics

Our limited knowledge of the rich man makes it difficult to answer questions about his motivations posed by the model. Speculative as it might be, it is fair to assume that his wealthy status afforded him a certain amount of security which he was unwilling to forfeit. This puts him in a different socio-economic category to the type of people who might normally be attracted to socially rootless detached groups.<sup>552</sup> He seems not to empathise with the aims of the inner circle of the Jesus movement, perhaps because he has not suffered the same feelings of disillusionment with the establishment. He is neither poor nor, presumably, under any imminent threat of being poor. He appears to have taken his privilege for granted and now faces a harsh reminder that it will stand in his way. He seemed happy to do whatever

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<sup>551</sup> Kautsky, K. (2008) *Foundations of Christianity*. London. IMG Publications. pp.21-22, 44.

<sup>552</sup> Theissen, G. (1978) *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*. Philadelphia. Fortress Press. pp.33-37.



was necessary to gain salvation, indeed he claims to have been a law-abiding man all his life (Mk. 10:20), but renunciation of his wealth etc. was a commitment he was unable to make and he went away sad (v.22).

In the light of Theissen's picture of the Jesus movement (especially its threefold structure of settled supporters, itinerant disciples and Jesus himself), what was the difference between the rich man who rejected the call and other figures who accepted it gladly? If he did not go away having ruined his chances of salvation, could there still be a place for him within the structure? Perhaps there was still a place as a settled sympathiser, many of which were probably quite wealthy (and not condemned for it)? We know such figures existed and that Jesus was generally not averse to sharing meals with unlikely company or accepting support from those with means<sup>553</sup>. Since the issue, however, is personal attitude to one's wealth rather than the wealth in isolation, we must naturally compare the attitude of the rich man to some of the figures cited in the previous footnote. The willingness of these figures to generously share what they had, and most extremely in the example of Zacchaeus (Lk.19:1-10) to also give half his possessions away to the poor and repay fourfold anyone he has cheated, sets them strongly apart from the rich man in attitude.<sup>554</sup> The text strongly suggests that he rejected Jesus' call to itinerant discipleship outright, albeit regretfully, but it goes no further in describing what kind of long term affect was felt. From the available evidence through the eyes of the Wandering Charismatics model, it appears that the rich man may have alienated himself from the whole movement including those retaining their possessions and leading non-itinerant lives.

The end result is one of tension and one is left feeling rather sorry for the rich man. His inability to renounce his wealth appears to have left him without a place in the structure of the Jesus movement even though he acknowledges that renunciation was unessential for all. It is as if Jesus perhaps anticipated the man's reluctance because the love he shows for him (v.21)<sup>555</sup> sounds like a dare to refuse. It is consistent with the Theissen's observation that tension would often be met with the commandment to love. The rich man is not an enemy or

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<sup>553</sup> See for example, Mark 2:15 (dining with tax collectors and sinners), Luke 7:36 (dining with a Pharisee), 8:3 (support from rich women like Joanna, Susanna and 'many others') and 19:1-10 (dining with Zacchaeus the tax collector to whose house salvation had come).

<sup>554</sup> To support this same point is the story of the Widow's Offering (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4) which depicts a poor woman making an offering to the temple treasury that appeared to be small but, as Jesus pointed out, was huge in proportion to her total wealth and therefore many times more generous than the offerings made by rich contributors. It is not about how much she had overall, but about how she perceived what she could afford.

<sup>555</sup> "ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἐμβλέψας αὐτῷ ἠγάπησεν αὐτὸν" – 'love' here is in the sense of warm fondness and regard (cf. Mt. 5:44).

opponent per se but the mention of the love felt for him increases the awkwardness of the situation and really puts him on the spot. Holding him up as an example serves as an exercise to demonstrate the Jesus movement's intensification of certain norms.<sup>556</sup> Once the rich man has departed in sadness (10:22), what follows is the extremely harsh sounding critique of attachment to wealth characterised by the 'camel through the eye of a needle' saying (v.25). It is intriguing and helpful to recognise the insight the Wandering Charismatics model can provide on a text like this, especially since it describes a failed called to discipleship, that is, a failure to become part of the threefold structure. It is a reminder of the kind of tension that could exist between elite figures and the Jesus movement but with the realistic addition of not simply depicting the rich man as a stereotypical wealthy villain.

### Virtuoso Religion

This model encourages some of the same speculations mentioned above that the man's reluctance to fully give himself to Jesus' cause may have stemmed from the fact that he enjoyed a privileged and well regarded position within society. It is unknown what his job was or how he became so wealthy but both these models highlight the possibility that it was more than just money he would be leaving behind. If he held a position of leadership, for example, then to detach himself from the hierarchical structure of society and embrace anti-structure would have been painful indeed.<sup>557</sup> Might he have been self-conscious that, in a culture of honour and shame, such a rebellious looking move would create a scandal for himself or his family? It is fair to suggest that, having established his strong attachment to his many possessions, this could extend to all the other privileges life has given him like high status, honour, responsibility, family, security and so on. An abundance of such gifts would make it difficult for anyone to feel dissatisfaction or as though the current system was not favouring them. The virtuoso model draws attention to the concept of transcending the divisions of elite and non-elite. Although the rich man must have been aware of the poverty that afflicted masses of people in his community, the notion of transcending all that kept him from joining them was understandably unappealing. Ling highlights the aim of virtuoso religion to promote a set of values in which both elite and non-elite could participate as a response to the divisions between them<sup>558</sup>. The way the rich man was clearly shocked at how drastic Jesus' command was suggests a lack of appreciation of the need to respond to

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<sup>556</sup> Theissen, G. (1978) *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*. Philadelphia. Fortress Press. pp.99-103.

<sup>557</sup> Ling, T. J. M. (2006) *The Judean Poor and the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p.73.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid. p.76.

divisions by countering traditional values. There is no explicit evidence that he had no sympathy for the poor but perhaps his slightly rose-tinted worldview meant he could not see things from their point of view. Ling goes on to speak about elite figures also being welcome amongst the group who utilised their resources for support. As we discussed regarding the Wandering Charismatics model, perhaps this type of involvement with the movement was now no longer an option, either because the man could not bring himself to use his wealth this way or because his rejection of the call had alienated him forever.

The reason it is so useful to discuss the possible motivations of the rich man based on the evidence of his position within society is because the Virtuoso model deals largely with describing the precarious and often tense relationship between the Jesus movement and the authorities of the existing religious and political institutions<sup>559</sup>. With a focus that is more on the overall structure of a movement including its relationship with society, the Virtuoso model differs from Theissen's which seems to focus more on the internal structure of the movement itself. It is therefore more difficult to ask what the rich man might have thought about rich/poor relations with this model. In either case the evidence suggests a man who is not forced to experience the tension between the rich authorities and the poor masses because he is lucky enough to not be on the receiving end of oppressive behaviour. It may also be that he has participated in exploiting clients, employees or slaves of his own (note Jesus' addition of the extra commandment 'Do not defraud' in v.19). For someone who has been favoured by the system, inspiring a desire to move away from that system in the rich man is a tough ask for Jesus. The man lacks any logical reason to do so and in spite of his apparent faithfulness (Mk. 10:17, 20) had no idea that he would be expected to live his life according to the ideologies of the itinerant Jesus and disciples. If we measure him up against the list provided by Silber<sup>560</sup> we can see he is no virtuoso. His rejection shows a lack of commitment to the cause as a whole; his heart was not in it. He was not interested in going beyond basic compulsory religious obligations by intensifying his personal commitment. He certainly does

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<sup>559</sup> Weber, M. 'The Social Psychology of the World Religions' in Gerth, H. H. & Wright Mills, C. eds. (2009) *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. London. Routledge; Hill, M. (1973) *The Religious Order*. London. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd; Silber, I. F. (1995) *Virtuosity, Charisma, and Social Order: A Comparative Sociological Study of Monasticism in Theravada Buddhism and Medieval Catholicism*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press; Ling, T. J. M. (2006) *The Judaean Poor and the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press; Capper, B. J. 'The New Covenant in Southern Palestine at the Arrest of Jesus' in James R. Davila ed. (2003) *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity*. Leiden/Boston. Brill; Capper, B. J. 'John, Qumran and Virtuoso Religion' in Coloe, M. L. and Thatcher, T. eds. (2011) *John, Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Sixty Years of Discovery and Debate*. Atlanta. Society of Biblical Literature.

<sup>560</sup> Silber, I. F. (1995), p.190-1.

not appear interested in attaining a level of perfection which relies on a drive to go beyond everyday life and average religious achievement. This must have been a disappointment for Jesus (v.21) and for the rich man (v.22) because both of them were probably aware of the man's potential to follow the command and apply himself wholeheartedly. That is, of course, the point; the virtuoso model describes that exact phenomenon. Pretty much anyone has the potential to commit with appropriate rigour but it is unnecessary for everyone and impossible as a practical expectation. Silber's list acknowledges the openness of virtuoso religion to everyone on principle but refers to those who actually feel pushed to achieve perfection and succeed in practice as an 'heroic' minority. Even for the most pious of men, this invitation would be hard to accept. It puts in great perspective the extraordinary nature of those calls that were successful (e.g. Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:1-11). The emphasis on voluntariness in the description of this model generally reads in such a positive way but the story of the rich man who simply could not volunteer himself highlights the reality that many may have struggled similarly with relating to movements like this. How many others may have asked how they could be saved and been disappointed by the practical and personal obstacles that stopped them becoming itinerant followers of Jesus? The double standard Silber describes<sup>561</sup> must have contributed to the awkwardness of the virtuoso group's position and the tension that existed not only between followers of the movement and those totally outside it, but also between those virtuosi committed to intensifying norms and living itinerantly and those supporting the movement from home. As we considered regarding Theissen's model, might the rich man have been totally alienated from the Jesus movement or just had to face the harsh fact that he was not cut out for the intense itinerant lifestyle of a disciple? Perhaps he might be categorised as one of Weber's "religiously unmusical"?<sup>562</sup>

Another way in which the rich man highlights this returning issue of tension in the Virtuoso model is where the double standard refers specifically to renunciation of wealth and possessions. Not only was it a blow to hear that he was expected to give up his wealth but if he was also aware that it was a non-universal demand, it must have been twice as painful and confusing. In the discussion of the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Mt. 20:1-16), the Virtuoso model provided an insight into the symbolism of the payment of one denarius

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<sup>561</sup> Ibid.

<sup>562</sup> Weber, M. (2009) p.287.

for all workers. The Virtuoso practices like community sharing<sup>563</sup> seemed consistent with this in transcending the concept of wages as reward and distribution according to power rather than need. These culturally ingrained concepts must have been difficult to contemplate rejecting if they had been working in his favour until now and could continue to do so if he did not accept the call. To adopt a lifestyle that was itself a critique of his previous one would be hard to manage. He ran the risk of being perceived as threatening to the establishment since he would be joining a movement that intensified certain religious values (in a way that could resemble reversal of them: see e.g. Mt. 12:1-14) and tried to transcend values that favoured the elite.

I believe the Virtuoso model is significantly more successful in describing the tension between the structure (or anti-structure) of a virtuoso group and the structure of wider political, economic and religious institutions than the Wandering Charismatics model. For this reason it is incredibly useful for approaching Mark 10:17-31, largely because the figure of the rich man epitomises this tension in an encounter that sees him face the possibility of becoming a disciple. He got an insight into the world of the highly specialised virtuoso and realised it was not for him. This viewpoint from the outside looking in is something the Virtuoso model is perhaps more sympathetic towards than the Wandering Charismatics because Theissen details the inner structure of the Jesus movement more than its relationship with the rest of society. As a result of explaining the strange liminal position of the movement, the Virtuoso model also better achieves a description of attitude to wealth and how that is demonstrated through an itinerant lifestyle. Theissen's term 'social rootlessness' has unfortunate connotations of aimlessness and lack of structure whereas Silber's list includes disciplined, systematic application of a defined rule or method as a key feature.<sup>564</sup> It means that Jesus' movement might not have had strong geographical roots but ideologically, its teachings were grounded solidly in the tradition and its itinerancy was part of a clearly defined method. Jesus specifically charged the rich man with selling his possessions and giving the proceeds to the poor (Mk. 10:21). It was the 'one thing he lacked'; he had ticked all the boxes but one. This is certainly more consistent with a movement described as systematic and with a defined method by the Virtuoso model than with one described as an

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<sup>563</sup> Capper, B. J. 'John, Qumran and Virtuoso Religion' in Coloe, M. L. and Thatcher, T. eds. (2011) *John, Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Sixty Years of Discovery and Debate*. Atlanta. Society of Biblical Literature. p.115-6.

<sup>564</sup> Silber, I. F. (1995), p.190-1.

attractive form of social rootlessness to those dissatisfied with their lot in life by the Wandering Charismatics model.

Overall, it is the Virtuoso model that most adequately highlights the key issues of the encounter with the rich man. It made it easy to imagine an abundance of similar encounters that might have characterised the tension of virtuoso liminality as Jesus moved around. With specific regard to the two key issues of wealth and discipleship, it seems a little repetitive and obvious to go into detail about Jesus' unmet expectations from the rich man but ultimately it boils down to wealth only being an obstacle to salvation when one is more strongly attached to it than God. The lack of necessity for renunciation is emphasised both here and in the Wandering Charismatic model which effectively draws attention to many of the same themes but with less elegance and accuracy. As far as highlighting the issue of wealth goes, the Commercialisation and more particularly the Agrarian model offer more in terms of their simple description of stratification and elite/non-elite tension. The most important thing about the Agrarian model is that it breaks down the story and quite often gets straight to the root issue simply by asking how Lenski would categorise the key players in a scene. The man's wealth is his key attribute and by knowing what that probably says about his lifestyle and his position within the community, one is better able to appreciate the significance of the call. Not only is the Agrarian model beginning to demonstrate its breadth of usefulness but it is also demonstrating its compatibility with other models which only gives it more weight, especially since the Virtuoso model, for instance, actually relies quite heavily upon it.

## Social Models and Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple

This event stands out in the gospels for its complexity and its dramatic impact. It is easy enough to settle on a conclusion that it was at least plausibly historical<sup>565</sup> but it must be noted just how unusual it was for Jesus to use methods other than the spoken word as teaching or his daily life as demonstration of his views. Issues of wealth and commerce sit alongside issues of ritual purity and eschatological judgement which makes the core concerns difficult to isolate on a first reading. Economic models will be naturally limited when it comes to accounting for all these issues together although I feel the more narrowly focused models may fare better in explaining the protest about economic inequality without neglecting the theological elements.

### Agrarian Society

There may be little of significant use that the Agrarian Society model can offer for examining the specifically religious elements of the text. The description by Lenski included no specific references to the Judean or any particular religious culture<sup>566</sup> so much of the more theologically based discussion will require stripping back to look at the basic action, who was there, what they were doing and why, as well as the implications of that action and Jesus' disruption of it. Not all of the symbolic aspects of the demonstration will be neglected, however, since Jesus was also using symbolism to protest against poverty and oppression, issues relevant to the agrarian model and not specific to his agrarian society.<sup>567</sup> It is helpful to have been able to deduce that the scene greeting Jesus as he entered the temple precincts was probably typical of the time since it would otherwise soften the impact of his outburst. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that the Temple in Jerusalem during the build-up to Passover<sup>568</sup> must struggle to represent what is typical in terms of a general agrarian model. For a start, the Temple at this time would have been full of extra people; Mk. 11:18 mentions the crowd (ὄχλος). Other particular groups mentioned are the money changers, dove sellers, chief priests and teachers of the law (v.15, 18), already indicating a great mixture of roles and statuses. This is extremely interesting, however, since few other occasions in the gospels to

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<sup>565</sup> Snodgrass, Klyne R. 'The Temple Incident' in Bock, Darrell L. & Webb, Robert L. eds. (2009) *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. p.439.

<sup>566</sup> Ling, T. J. M (2006) *The Judaean Poor and the Fourth Gospel*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 136. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p.92.

<sup>567</sup> Lenski, G. (1966) *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*. New York. McGraw-Hill. p.210.

<sup>568</sup> Bauckham, R. 'Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple' in Lindars, B. ed. (1988) *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity*. Cambridge. James Clarke and Co. p.75.

which the Agrarian model might apply could actually be said to include figures from almost all the economic categories. Members of the Merchant class were clearly a key group in this incident since they bore the brunt of the attack (v.15). Members of the Priestly class were mostly certainly present as well (v. 18) and may have been the real source of Jesus' frustration. Scribes are also there but apart from that no specific groups get a mention. We can safely assume that the 'crowd' consisted of everyone from Governing elites, to Retainers, to Artisans, to Peasants (although ritually unclean individuals more prevalent in the lowest divisions may have been absent for purity reasons). There would have been both men and women, Jews and Gentiles, city dwellers and rural folk who had travelled far to be present for Passover as well as simply rich and poor. This vast range of people is arguably the very point of the demonstration. It was relevant to all class groups. It has already been suggested that Jesus' fairly middling position within society as a member of the Artisan class gave him plenty of opportunity to mix with figures from all parts of the socio-economic spectrum<sup>569</sup> and inform his opinions on inequality.

Looking first at the central protest against economic injustice for the poorest worshippers, it is worth acknowledging the normalcy of the commercial activity present in the Temple Court<sup>570</sup>. It was necessary for sacrificial practices that animals were of an 'unblemished' quality which discouraged the transportation of sacrifices from far away<sup>571</sup> and taxes had to be provided in the correct coinage (according to the law as written in Exodus 30:11-16) meaning distant visitors had to exchange their own currencies on arrival. As Myers observes, the Temple was a "fundamentally economic institution"<sup>572</sup> and the activities of the various buyers and sellers seem at first like practical essentials<sup>573</sup>. The two most obvious answers to why Jesus objects so strongly to what at first seems like normal everyday Temple business are that it is taking place in an inappropriate sacred location and that it is contributing to stratification in society by oppressing the poorest people. The second of these clearly resonates with the Agrarian model since Lenski noted "marked social inequality"<sup>574</sup> as a key characteristic of agrarian society. This concern may have been demonstrated through the

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<sup>569</sup> Fiensy, D. A. 'Jesus' Socio-Economic Background' in Johns, L. L. & Charlesworth, J. H. eds. (1997) *Hillel and Jesus: Comparative Studies of Two Major Religious Leaders*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press, citing Oakman, D. E. (1986) *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, Lewiston, NY. Edwin Mellen Press. pp.185-93.

<sup>570</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1985) *Jesus and Judaism*. London. SCM Press Ltd. p.66.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid. p.64.

<sup>572</sup> Myers, C. (2008) p.300.

<sup>573</sup> Hooker, M. D. (1991) *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. London. A & C Black. p.263. Also, Keener, C.S. (2009) *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. p.293.

<sup>574</sup> Lenski, G. (1966) p.210.



disruption of the dove sellers who most likely provided the sacrifices to those unable to afford anything bigger<sup>575</sup>. Though sacrifice itself is not the target of Jesus' anger, a sacrificial system that puts financial burden on the poorest is.<sup>576</sup>

Though Jesus has no direct contact with members of the authorities while he is in the Temple, it is mentioned that they are present, aware of his actions and not best pleased with them (Mk. 11:18). The Priestly presence, as well as teachers of the law and presumably any number of figures from the Governing Class, both supports the view that elite members of society were the target of the demonstration in protest of various types of economic or political injustices and that the priesthood in particular was being targeted for allowing the misuse of sacred space<sup>577</sup>. Priests would not have been the only group offended or shocked by the seemingly unprovoked attack<sup>578</sup> since the whole system looks to be targeted but just as sacrifice, for example, was not being attacked for its own sake but because of the way it was used to oppress, so too the Priests et al were not being attacked just because they were rich and powerful but because they abused their power to promote the unfair system.

If the key to the demonstration is the corruption of the sacred Temple space and the inability of worshippers to fulfil their religious obligations by inappropriate commercial activity that is burdensome to the poor, then really the whole protest is actually quite typical of Jesus in the sense that he is often frustrated by the way that economic issues can obstruct the path to a proper relationship with God (e.g. Mk. 10:17-31; Lk. 6:24; 16:1-14; 16:19-31). The comparison of the Temple to a 'den of robbers' (Mk. 11:17, quoted from Jer. 7:11) seems to deal both with the issue of economic injustice and misuse of the Temple. Although the term translated as 'robbers' or 'thieves' may have referred to something closer to a bandit or brigand, the qualification is still a negative, indeed criminal, one. The comparison of the Temple to a bandit's hideout is quite striking; not only has Jesus noticed injustice going unpunished but he has identified people choosing the Temple as a place of refuge from the chance of punishment. It seems to point a finger at the commercial practices that are continued in the name of fulfilment of religious obligation (doves *must* be sold for sacrifice, money *must* be changed etc.) but in reality serve the rich and exasperate the problem of

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<sup>575</sup> Bauckham, R. (1988), p.76.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid. p.77.

<sup>577</sup> Snodgrass, K. R. (2009). p.471; Bauckham, R. (1988) p.81.

<sup>578</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1985) pp.255-6.

stratification<sup>579</sup>. For Bauckham Jesus is referring to the Temple authorities who use their positions to protect themselves from reprisal<sup>580</sup>. Myers agreed that it was the Temple itself that was the ‘robber’, an “apparatus of economic stratification”<sup>581</sup>. For Betz, the ‘robbers’ reference served to contrast with the reference to prayer from the Isaiah quotation, pointing out the misuse of the Temple for financial gain rather than worship<sup>582</sup>. There is a deep level of irony here in the comparison of the Temple to a robber’s cave. Criminal activity like stealing and banditry were often the result of downward mobility caused by extreme poverty and overpopulation. Surplus population was driven down to the Expendable Class. In real life, what chance did members of this group have to afford to properly observe Temple worship? Was Jesus aware of this discrepancy when he quoted Jeremiah?

Many of the same themes and issues that Jesus tackles on a larger scale throughout the Gospels are condensed into the Demonstration in the Temple, like a microcosm of the mission. This means that the Agrarian Society model is able to show the consistency of the economic elements of the demonstration with Jesus’ other teachings on wealth and inequality. On principle, the desire to see less economic stratification is akin to the desire to see less spiritual division, but the Agrarian model is naturally limited regarding the theological elements of this text because it only describes economic categories.

### Commercialisation in Agrarian Society

To emphasises and reiterate that the Temple is “fundamentally an economic institution”<sup>583</sup> is to remind ourselves of the crucial fact, especially in the case of this model, that it was a business. People attended Temple, particularly during religious festivals, with the expectation of spending money on the necessities of worship. If the Commercialisation model points out how increased commerce and trade could aggravate the issues of exploitation and oppression then the Temple on Passover could do the same. Although a business, the Temple was not like some great tourist attraction stimulating the Jerusalem economy; it was yet another tool for squeezing as much as possible from the poor and vulnerable for the benefit of those who could use the Temple’s authority as extra protection (see v. 17). Even the extra commercial

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<sup>579</sup> Looking at the full passage in Jeremiah 7 (vv. 9-11) from which the ‘den of robbers’ reference is taken, it refers to those who think they can break commandments then expect welcome in the Temple. It seems like the equivalent of thinking that regular confession of one’s sins means one can do as one pleases in the meantime.

<sup>580</sup> Bauckham, R. (1988), p.84.

<sup>581</sup> Myers, C. (2008) pp.302-3.

<sup>582</sup> Betz, H. D. (1997) ‘Jesus and the Purity of the Temple (Mark 11:15-18): A Comparative Religion Approach’. *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Vol 116. No.3. p.468.

<sup>583</sup> Myers, C. (2008) p.300.

activity associated with the Passover, the selling of sacrificial animals and so forth, was only going to favour the institution if a surplus was generated.<sup>584</sup>

Many of the visitors would not have been from the immediate Jerusalem region. The gospels make clear travelling from as far as Galilee would not have been unheard of plus the presence of money changers suggests a high demand for converting other region's currencies. The requirements of sacrifice meant animals of an unblemished quality must be sold to those unable to transport their own and offerings of other produce may also been sold<sup>585</sup>. The extra numbers turning up to do so would have meant not only extra money being spent in the Temple itself but presumably throughout the city. It is the commercial activity that attracts the anger of Jesus though. There is no reason to think that he objected on principle to the transactions that made the proper payment of taxes and the proper sacrifice of animals possible.<sup>586</sup> If the commercial practices here, even ones that are supposedly necessary for being a law-abiding Jew, actually end up further oppressing the poor and benefitting the rich and powerful, then the apparently more economically developed Jerusalem, like Galilee, does not show a significantly less exaggerated state of stratification as a result. This method of generating funds has an extra element of pressure about it since people are fulfilling religious obligations by spending their money. They believe their salvation is at stake.

As noted above, the generation of wealth may not have benefitted the poor if the powerful saw fit not to distribute it to them. This may only have happened in the cases when a surplus was created too large for all the elites to consume themselves.<sup>587</sup> Anything that benefits the common man is basically a side-effect of the successful commerce, not a direct result of a planned boost to the economy. Many rural peasant communities were basically self-sufficient, producing only as need dictated and not having any surplus to trade with neighbours nor, indeed, to pay for taxes, sacrifices and journeys to Jerusalem. These obligations put them and their lifestyle under pressure. The model highlights the problems Jesus may have had with the kind of changes going on under Herod Antipas which facilitated greater control of the poor by elites and although his impact was felt most in Galilee, his building activity there was no more a boost to the economy than the commercial activity in the Temple. This model helps provide better understanding of why Jesus objected to this

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<sup>584</sup> Cf. Kautsky, K. (2008) *Foundations of Christianity*. London. IMG Publications. p.176.

<sup>585</sup> Mark 11:16 – Jesus would not allow the carrying of σκευός through the Temple precincts. This most likely refers to 'merchandise', products being sold as offerings. Bauckham, R. (1988) p.78.

<sup>586</sup> Sanders, E. P. (1985) p.66.

<sup>587</sup> Kautsky, K. (2008) p.176.

activity which could be used to further the discussion about what he would like to see reformed but, perhaps even more so than the Agrarian model, its narrow focus leaves little room for dealing with purity, inclusivity, eschatological destruction and renewal and so on. It is not incapable, however, of being compatible with other models that address these things better.

### Wandering Charismatics

The key features of the Jesus movement described by this model include those with clear relevance for the main themes in the Temple demonstration. Itinerancy and renunciation of possessions are obviously central to the discussion since both automatically indicate a problem with the current economic system. Since the protest involves literally stopping the selling and trading from happening, it is as extreme a reflection of this disillusionment. It is not that Jesus is necessarily banning this activity forever but he is using a form of visual hyperbole, just as his itinerant lifestyle is an exaggerated form that allows continuity between his actions and teachings on wealth. Additionally, Theissen raised the point that Jesus commonly responded to differences between his and others' views with moral reproach and the intensification of norms<sup>588</sup>. Another way in which the aggressions of opponents is countered, says Theissen, is by projecting it forwards in the form of eschatological predictions and warnings of judgement. The references to the destruction of the Temple and the story of the fig tree most certainly incorporate these themes. It is interesting to note that he does not set out to reform Temple practices there and then; he proposes no alternative to the system he is attacking. Having said that, the text does not suggest hopelessness. Just as tensions with opponents would often be answered with the commandment to love and the intensification of norms, the Temple demonstration is a reminder of the intended purpose of the Temple (v. 17) and a hope that attitudes could be reformed towards fairer treatment of poor worshippers and more God-centric practices in anticipation of the Kingdom. The Temple should be an idealised example for all.

It is interesting that a point highlighted by the Agrarian model arises here too. The irony that the kind of priestly criminals Jesus sees hiding their mistreatment of the poor behind piety in the Temple (v. 17) bear little resemblance to the real bandits and robbers, driven to such ends by poverty and probably unable to afford to fulfil sacrificial obligations is apparent in

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<sup>588</sup> Theissen, G. (1978), pp.99-103. E.g. Mt.5:44.

Theissen's description of social rootlessness.<sup>589</sup> Such figures, often attracted to movements like Jesus', are clearly going to earn his sympathy. The threefold structure of the Wandering Charismatics raises a question about their interactions with wealthy supporters<sup>590</sup> and whether this contradicts their criticisms of wealth. The acknowledgment that money serves a practical purpose, is not the enemy in isolation and need not be totally renounced by all is carried through in the Temple where selling and trading are not the targets per se but only the kind of sacrificial system that sees society's poorest struggle to afford to celebrate Passover.

When we consider the demonstration, it might also be fair to speculate that Theissen would remind us of his emphasis on the Jesus movement's dedication to practicing what they preach<sup>591</sup>. At first it appears to be a strange way to make a point but in many ways it was the only way Jesus could display his anger at the authorities for turning the Temple into a commercial enterprise. Just as Theissen thinks Jesus had to display his feelings about the economic system by living itinerantly, so he might have thought he had to protest in the Temple to justify so many of his previous teachings on wealth, oppressing the poor, things that obscure the path to God (e.g. Mt. 6:25-34; Lk. 12:22-34), eschatology and so on.

### Virtuoso Religion

The themes highlighted by the Wandering Charismatics model have some substantial overlap with the Virtuoso Religion model, namely wealth of course, especially with regard to the way the Jesus movement expresses its displeasure with the oppressive system both generally and in the Temple. As it has before, however, the Virtuoso model is much more adept at providing a picture of how the Jesus group relates to the wider community and the religious authorities. Again, the key theme is the nature of the tension between them. Much of the discussion up to this point has dealt with the way the Jesus movement functions as a group slightly detached from but still part of society, specifically referring to their itinerant lifestyle and so on. The most interesting part of discussing their liminality here is the fact that the setting of the episode is at a time and place when all Jews should be coming together for a common purpose, to celebrate Passover and carry out the appropriate obligations in the Temple. It is partly for this very reason, I believe, that Jesus responds to what he sees in the Temple court with such anger. The nature of Virtuoso religion is a specialised form of

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<sup>589</sup> Theissen, G. (1978) p.40.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid. p.78.

<sup>591</sup> Theissen, G. (1993) *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics, and the World of the New Testament*. Edinburgh. T&T Clark. p.40.

religion, something that not all people could or would be expected to be able to achieve.<sup>592</sup> It involves an intense level of devotion and personal commitment<sup>593</sup> and seeks perfection using strict method and structure. Even though not all people can live this way and may be described as “religiously unmusical”<sup>594</sup>, and others may belong to the mainstream religious authorities preaching to the masses differently from the virtuosi, all of them should theoretically be equalised by the need to make sacrifices and offerings and any other type of sacred obligation. However, the same divisions that exist for them in everyday life seem to apply here too with members of the lower classes being pressured financially in order to worship lawfully and Temple authorities making money as a result.

This episode is a good example of Weber’s description of two types of elite. It is the result of the Virtuoso group distinguishing itself as a specialised unit and being given respect by the masses. This means both the established priesthood and the Virtuoso group have a certain amount of influence and authority over the masses which leads to inevitable tension. The setting of this episode in the very place these groups are likeliest to meet guarantees some conflict. Indeed the same point applies to the description by Hill of virtuosi as a “sect within a church”<sup>595</sup> which stresses their liminal position (as opposed to a sect which distinguishes itself more thoroughly). What better example could be asked for than an incident that sees the liminal group trying to take part in worship alongside the rest of the community?

Theoretically, because the Virtuoso model describes the group’s respect for the mainstream authorities and continued participation in the religious community, Jesus and the disciples should not be hindered in the celebration of Passover as it is not something from which they have detached themselves. The tension does not come from any disagreement about the worship itself, but how its fulfilment and purpose are clouded by misplaced concerns about financial gain.

It is understandable that the outburst by Jesus should be construed as a threatening attack against Passover or against the Temple. Other teachings tread this fine line between extreme forms of piety and perceived rejection of the rules (e.g. Mt. 12:1-14; Lk. 6:1-11; Lk.14:1-6).

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<sup>592</sup> Silber, I. F. (1995) *Virtuosity, Charisma, and Social Order: A Comparative Sociological Study of Monasticism in Theravada Buddhism and Medieval Catholicism*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p.190-1

<sup>593</sup> Capper, B. J. (2011) ‘How Did Jesus Help the Poor? Virtuoso Religion as Stimulus to Economic Sharing in the Jesus Movement.’ *The Qumran Chronicle*. Vol. 19, No. 3-4. pp.97-139.

<sup>594</sup> Weber, M. ‘The Social Psychology of the World Religions’ in Gerth, H. H. & Wright Mills, C. eds. (2009) *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. London. Routledge. p.287.

<sup>595</sup> Hill, M. (1973) *The Religious Order*. London. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. p.2. (As opposed to a sect which sets itself apart from the church and the wider community.)

As Theissen observed, the intensification of norms is a significant feature of the movement; the same thing is included in Silber's list<sup>596</sup>. In light of this the implication of the demonstration is that Jesus sought to strip away all the distraction from the practice of sacrifice and regain the purity of the Temple space. This is suggested by the way the quotations of Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 contrast the true purpose of the Temple for worship and the current use of it as a business. It was not a protest against Temple or Passover sacrifices, it was a protest *for* them. By ridding the Temple of all that made it a source of income for the authorities and restoring it to a place of worship for all, the divisions of rich and poor would be overcome. The notion of transcending divisions epitomises the Virtuoso's liminality and choice of an itinerant lifestyle. To transcend is not to suggest literal equality since divisions of role are not challenged, but Jesus seems always to have sought equality when it came down to the things that really mattered.

Jesus emphasised the importance of equality most with regard to life's basic needs. The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Mt. 20:1-16) explained how all the workers, no matter how long they had been hired for, were entitled to receive enough wage to sustain them for the day simply because no one should not receive at least that. The point is also highlighted in the Lord's Prayer's petition "Give us this day our daily bread" (Mt.6:11; Lk.11:3). Food, being a basic requirement to sustain life, should not be withheld from anyone; it is not a reward reserved for the most important or the highest achieving. The same could be said for the basic requirements of worship. If all are obliged to make offerings, sacrifices or perform any other kind of service or ritual, then all are entitled to fulfil that obligation regardless of wealth, status or ability. It seems that Jesus is advocating this entitlement in the same way he advocates daily bread or the daily denarius. It should be no easier for the rich to make sacrifices at Passover than for the poor. From the perspective of the Virtuoso model, the idealised form of Temple practice being promoted confirms the intensification of norms as a feature of the virtuoso, but at the same time promoting the opportunity for all to fulfil worship obligations equalises everyone whether they be rich or poor, virtuoso or 'unmusical'. It confirms the idea the transcending divisions is really only possible and indeed necessary when it is about things of fundamental importance; otherwise divisions are to be expected. The point can be extended to include the references to eschatological judgement and destruction; all are equalised in the face of the eschatological future and subject to judgement. It is with this future in mind that Jesus envisions an idealised

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<sup>596</sup> Silber, I. F. (1995) pp.109-1.

version of Temple practice, better focused on fulfilling the commandments to love your neighbour, your enemy and most importantly God.

The Virtuoso model is successful at describing the tensions that result from the liminal position of the group and in this case they are actually face to face with the mainstream authorities who respond very negatively to the protest (Mk. 11:18) but also the model shows Jesus was driven to disrupt the buyers and sellers by a desire to overcome what made his group detached and equalise all the worshippers through their common purpose. I have not devoted much time to discussing the application of the model to Jesus' views on wealth and economic injustices in the Temple although there is little need to state the obvious. That the virtuoso group's ability to sustain itself by sharing a common purse (Jn. 12:6) and live according to need rather than desire could be applied to the basic needs of worship shows the model's versatility. It can be adapted to suit even complex episodes like the demonstration just as Jesus adapted the model from Elijah, the Essenes and John the Baptist to suit his needs! This flexibility comes as quite a surprise given the assumption that none of the social models would be applicable to the demonstration in the Temple without neglecting too many elements. So many themes and concerns are addressed in one go and in quite an ambiguous way. It is pleasing to find not only that many of the models pick up on examples from the text and find themselves agreeing with the information there but also that some, especially the Virtuoso model, properly function as models to frame the story in a context that makes better sense of what is happening. It is an achievement for such a multi-faceted event. The Agrarian and Commercialisation models are ill-equipped to deal with much else besides the economic aspects of the protest. They offer little insight into the specifically religious elements but luckily it is the unfair economic system within the Temple that is the focus of the piece, and the breadth of these model makes them compatible alongside the more narrowly focused. They describe a backdrop of dramatic stratification and social injustice in agrarian economies that is apparent throughout the gospels. They also give details about the role played by certain figures within that system which in the case of the priesthood was very relevant here. Both the Wandering Charismatics and Virtuoso model successfully address how the choices of Jesus and the disciples in their lifestyle was directly related to the way Jesus responded in the Temple. For Theissen he would have been unable to react any other way according to the principle of living by his own ideals consistently. This model is less able than the Virtuoso model to relate this to the wider community and the Temple authorities which is ultimately more useful for studying the whole gospel. (For example, if we were to go on to discuss the



subsequent arrest and trial of Jesus and the reasons for them, this would bring the theme of tension to its ultimate conclusion.)

## Social Models and the Call Narratives<sup>597</sup>

The Call Narratives covers quite a wide spectrum of material when failed calls, unresolved calls (e.g. Levi) and sayings that directly or indirectly teach about the nature of discipleship are included. It is necessary to understand the entire process involved in going from a normal member of society to being called, to answering that call, and to learning along the way what discipleship entails. Jesus was gathering a group together to help proclaim a new message and the process of doing so revealed much about his mission and the way he felt about the society he came from. The division of the social models between those that describe society as a whole which offers better understanding of Jesus' response to it and those that describe the nature of the Jesus movement more closely is useful because a combination of wide and narrow views will be necessary. The Agrarian model, for example, will explain the context from which the would-be disciples were being called, whereas the Virtuoso model will explain what sort of lifestyle was to be expected and why it was necessary to be itinerant in order to follow Jesus and conduct the mission. To study the call narratives is to encompass almost the entire teaching of Jesus since he taught to the disciples the rules and values he wanted them to continue to uphold and pass on after his death.

### Agrarian Society

The Agrarian society model has been consistently useful for providing a backdrop to the gospel narrative regarding the economic system from which Jesus originated and began basing his teachings. Here it allows some of the features of the call narratives to be deconstructed and separated from theological symbolism. For example, the fact that the main calls are for the group of fishermen who leave their current professions to become 'fishers of men',<sup>598</sup> may be symbolically linked to the theme of harvest<sup>599</sup> and suggest a state of ripeness or readiness within the world for Jesus to begin his ministry is convincing but there is no need to think that these men could not really have been fishermen, especially since Jesus' presence around the Sea of Galilee means he may have been acquainted with numerous fishermen. The fortunes of a fisherman could be mixed depending on variables beyond their control, much like those of peasant farmers. Unfavourable weather conditions could prevent them from braving the water and could affect the success of the catch; seasonal changes

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<sup>597</sup> This piece includes reference to the call narratives from all the gospels (Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:1-11; Jn. 1:35-51) as well as related passages such as the call of Levi, and teachings on the nature of discipleship.

<sup>598</sup> Mk 1:16-20; Mt. 4:18-22; Lk. 5:1-11.

<sup>599</sup> Mt. 9:35-38; Lk. 10:2.

could prevent all year round reliability. Taxation by Herod Antipas was a problem that all fishermen faced and, of course, the levels of distributive injustice as well as exportation could mean that even the benefits of a productive day/week/season might not be felt by the fishers themselves. The risk of downward mobility was constantly present. Similarities with the agricultural profession suggest it would be appropriate to consider fishermen as members of the Peasant class<sup>600</sup>. Davies and Allison described a “(lower) middle class” position for fishermen<sup>601</sup> but this category is not represented in the Agrarian model and may create a misleading picture of the shape of the economy. The important thing is to acknowledge the amount this group supported and were controlled by the elite classes. High levels of taxation and other fees maintained the exaggerated stratification that so angered Jesus and motivated him to ask these men to leave their work under Herod and be a fisher of men for him instead.

Jesus himself as a member of what was probably the Artisan class<sup>602</sup> which itself could be a precarious profession dependent on the fluctuations in demand, individual skill levels and so on. Obviously there is no explicit evidence describing the type of work or clientele Jesus had; he may have made farm equipment, household items or been involved in large-scale building projects. What is relevant is the possibility that his work brought him into contact with a wide range of people of varying socio-economic standing, thus allowing him to observe how stratified society was and the types of oppression and exploitation that made it so. His desire to live and teach in a way that demonstrated his dissatisfaction with this system and be accompanied by a group who would witness his teachings and be able to continue them was born out of this background. His inclusion of figures like Levi the tax-collector, a figure whose fortunes were probably much better than the average member of the Peasant Class and a contributor to the exploitative economic system, showed that no one was beyond the possibility of repentance and the ability to embrace a life outside the extremely stratified world of the agrarian economy.

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<sup>600</sup> This is consistent if fishermen are being considered the equivalents of farmers of the sea. The extent to which they might have been involved in the selling and distribution of the product might allow for some overlap with the Merchant class. See, Fiensy, D. A. ‘Jesus’ Socio-Economic Background’ in Johns, L. L. & Charlesworth, J. H. eds. (1997) *Hillel and Jesus: Comparative Studies of Two Major Religious Leaders*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. p.238.

<sup>601</sup> Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., D. C. (1988) *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. Vol. 1. Edinburgh. T & T Clark. p.397.

<sup>602</sup> Fiensy, D. A. (1997) p.238-9. See also, Mk. 6:3; Mt. 13:55.

## Commercialisation in Agrarian Society

That the particular economic conditions in Galilee, which initially seem more favourable and developed because of certain stimuli, may actually have provided Jesus with more evidence of oppression and therefore stratification means the Commercialisation model may be useful for describing the motivations behind the formation of Jesus' ideas and the disciple group. The fishing industry and the developments instigated by Herod Antipas were two major examples of features that, in a modern understanding, would be described as 'boosts' to the economy. The control of natural resources by the dominant classes did not guarantee benefit to the likes of fishermen and farmers even if they had been productive. A natural resource like the Sea of Galilee could be a blessing and a curse if the fruit it yields only provides more opportunity for the rich to tax and manipulate fishermen's success for their own gain.<sup>603</sup> It still seems inaccurate to describe the Galilean economy as stagnant<sup>604</sup> but at the same time it cannot be described as highly stimulated. The Sea of Galilee was something that clearly provided work for those who caught, preserved, transported and traded the fish but the benefits of this could be prevented from filtering back down to the peasants and merchants by the elites.

Jesus' familiarity with the area around the Sea of Galilee and possibly from his own personal experience as a carpenter, allowed him to witness first-hand the increased pressure on a community's poorest as a result of 'better' economic development. Places that had more opportunities for trade like Galilee would have fewer communities that were self-sufficient, meaning that more merchants might become wealthier, might have been able to become landowners and begin gleaning even more money from the poor.<sup>605</sup> Increased trade could also increase demand for otherwise unavailable produce from outside the area. One can just imagine the ideas that formed the basis on Jesus' teachings on wealth developing in such an environment. His emphasis on entitlement to basic needs rather than desire for luxury (e.g. Mt. 6:11; Lk. 11:3) is an idea in opposition to the attitude of trade and commerce.

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<sup>603</sup> Kautsky, K. (2008) *Foundations of Christianity*. London. IMG Publications. p.176.

<sup>604</sup> Cf. Carney, T. F. (1975) *The Shape of the Past: Models and Antiquity*. Lawrence, Kansas. Coronado Press. pp.106-7.

<sup>605</sup> Kautsky, K. (2008) pp.21-41.

## Wandering Charismatics

Unsurprisingly, I expect more detailed insight into the nature of reasons for the call to be given by the Wandering Charismatics model. The title itself, from ‘charisma’ meaning authority (ἐξουσία), is particularly relevant to the call. Examining the call narratives reveals much emphasis on the power of the simple instruction to follow. In the case of the successful calls of the fishermen there is no hesitation or request for negotiation or delay; the men appear to literally drop what they are doing and go. It would be easy to take this at theological face value, as it were, seeing as people seem suddenly compelled to act out of character by some unexplained power of a man they just met and since it is also used to exorcise and heal (e.g. Mt. 10:1) but Theissen refers to this authority as sociological in nature; it appears connected to certain key interactions and teachings and is also bestowed upon the disciples that they may continue Jesus’ teaching. The title ‘charismatic’ is somewhat ambiguous in terms of that extent to which it is Christological or sociological. It is useful for describing the forcefulness of the call, however, and also for considering the role of the disciples since it is bestowed upon them also. Theissen mentions that continuity was an important part of the way the early Church developed from Jesus through the disciples and so on. That the disciples became an extension of him and his power was key to the success of the movement.

The lifestyle shared by the itinerant group was at the heart of the mission. Theissen explains that the renunciation of home, family and possessions was essential for Jesus and the disciples because it ensured continuity between their own lives and their teachings<sup>606</sup>. It was not enough merely to teach without living by example as well. For the wider community of Jesus supporters such extreme commitment was unnecessary. This third tier of the movement provided hospitality for the group as they travelled and taught (e.g. Mt. 10:11-15)<sup>607</sup> which demonstrates how special and significant it was to be called to join Jesus as an itinerant member of his group. They were to be given new responsibilities (Mk. 1:17 par.) which could only be fulfilled as disciples and not as men still living within normal society focussing on other obligations of work and family as well.

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<sup>606</sup> Theissen, G. (1993) *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics, and the World of the New Testament*. Edinburgh. T&T Clark. p.40.

<sup>607</sup> Theissen, G. (1978) *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*. Philadelphia. Fortress Press. p.17f.

In terms of what attracts a person to a movement like Jesus and motivates them to drop everything in favour of an itinerant lifestyle, there has to be more than the forceful charisma of the caller. There is nothing to suggest that any of the disciples were coerced into joining or were not making the decision of their own free will. Some may have even had previous knowledge of who Jesus was and may have had some idea of what following him would entail (e.g. Jn. 1:35-42). Theissen acknowledges the likelihood that socio-economic conditions attracted the same people to groups that provided an alternative arrangement such as the Cynics, Qumran community or some other prophetic movements<sup>608</sup>. He identifies 'social rootlessness' as a feature of the lives of those in precarious socio-economic situations (e.g. beggars) but sees it also as part of the appeal of movements like Jesus'.<sup>609</sup> It is perhaps unfair to identify the disciples as individuals who felt so unsupported by the social situation they occupied that they had to abandon it. The fishermen for example were probably not destitute and may even have enjoyed some prosperity when weather was favourable and stock was healthy. Theissen is wrong to refer to them as members of a 'middle class'; this seems rather inconsistent with the model of agrarian society by Lenski. Where Theissen is perhaps more accurate is on the point that social rootlessness was an attractive idea not only to those already experiencing a version of it but to those who were in a position to see the effects of poverty which threatened them sometimes also.<sup>610</sup> If this is accurate then the fishermen were in a position not dissimilar to Jesus himself, neither wealthy nor destitute but positioned somewhere able to view both extremes in society and able to view the downward mobility resulting from distributive injustice. With Jesus proposing a redefinition of their roles (to become 'fishers of men') they were faced with the option of choosing to live according to a new system that promised to support them instead of the one that constantly threatened to uproot them anyway. Making poverty a voluntary choice rather than a feared possibility was just one way of critiquing society's economic injustices and one of the most significant moments of the call narratives. They were faced, however, with the contradictory elements of their new relationship with the wealthy in society which was characterised by criticism of accumulated wealth but was accompanied by the acknowledgment that money was necessary for supporting both themselves and the economy in general.

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<sup>608</sup> Theissen, G. (1993) p.76.

<sup>609</sup> Theissen, G. (1978) p.33-37.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid. p.46.

Theissen deals also with the way Jesus taught the disciples to counter tensions with the commandment to love (Mt. 5:44)<sup>611</sup> which of course could also be the source of tension. He describes it as a method by which judgement could be passed on opponents which links to the theme of judgement occurring in the call narratives; the new designation ‘fishers of men’ may have had judgemental tones. At the very least it shows the disciples being taught an extreme alternative to normal responses and an intensification of norms, something they were expected to get used to if they were to answer the call and follow Jesus. Many examples exist of such intensifications being reacted to with shock or even with potential disciples being unable to make the appropriate sacrifices, such as the rich man’s inability to renounce his wealth (Mk. 10:22) or the apparent dismissal of those who ask to prioritise personal comfort and filial piety above discipleship (Lk.9:57-62). Theissen’s model is useful in highlighting themes that appear in the call narratives and the various teachings on the nature of discipleship. The applicability of his ideas on social rootlessness as both the cause of and answer to a social problem is particularly interesting and could certainly be further developed. He also sheds light on the way the inner structure of the Jesus movement explains the special role of the disciples that is completely different to the role of the settled supporter. Their own responsibilities as teachers etc. (not just as passive students of Jesus) means that, for Theissen, they had to participate in an itinerant lifestyle in order to practice what they preached (e.g. criticism of accumulated wealth). As a result they also had to live with the contradictory relationship with the rich as figures deserving criticism but also necessary to the support of the group and general structure of society. Once again, however, he struggles to properly develop a description of the relationship between the movement as a whole, the wider community and the established authorities to which Jesus poses an alternative. This is such an important subject when considering what motivated the disciples to answer the call and embrace that alternative.

### Virtuoso Religion

I believe that the Virtuoso Religion model is better equipped to describe this relationship and explain why men with relatively secure lifestyles as fishermen would have opted to leave that behind in favour of economic uncertainty and rededication to a new vocation that could bring persecution and death. The important thing to remember about the character of the Jesus movement is that the distinction it made between itself and the rest of society was not an act

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<sup>611</sup> Ibid. p.99.

of rebellion against the established political/religious institutions but a way of demonstrating that the values currently upholding society could be transcended without opposing the authoritative system. That people like the fishermen were so ready to drop everything and join this cause strongly suggests that Jesus was fulfilling a need. Two key themes emphasised by the Virtuoso model are the Jesus movement's provision of an *alternative* and in particular a *specialised* alternative, hence Jesus' teachings often being an intensification of pre-existing ones rather than being completely new. This specialisation brought with it a level of prestige and is characterised by Weber as a second kind of elite. It is easy to think of Jesus and his group of disciples as a wandering band of misfits but the Virtuoso model describes them as an elite order that were highly esteemed by many<sup>612</sup>. The examination of the call narratives and related material revealed examples of extreme expectations regarding devotion to the cause of discipleship such as the command to let the dead bury the dead. It doesn't mean that Jesus regarded funeral rituals as unimportant and unnecessary but it is an example that epitomises the urgency of the call; it must take priority over other obligations. Silber lists as a main feature of virtuosity "intensification of personal commitment over normal compulsory religious routine norms and behaviour" which includes the element of reprioritising<sup>613</sup>. Other extreme examples include the Essene practices of celibacy, renunciation of property and community sharing<sup>614</sup>, all of which seem to have been applicable to Jesus and the disciples as well. Much of this expectation of intense devotion is not revealed to the disciples until sometime after joining Jesus but even the command to follow conveyed some of this expectation. The term may even have been synonymous with discipleship<sup>615</sup>.

The disciples probably had some kind of warning of what they were in for, then, which reminds us that choice was also a feature on Silber's list. When discussing the usefulness of Theissen's work, I questioned the use of the term 'charisma' which is done also by Hill and Silber<sup>616</sup>. Though it is undoubtedly difficult to differentiate them clearly, Silber does identify

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<sup>612</sup> The same may be said of ascetics, monks or nuns, who distinguish themselves as particularly strict devotees but are often more esteemed as a result. See e.g. Capper, B. J. (2011) 'How Did Jesus Help the Poor? Virtuoso Religion as Stimulus to Economic Sharing in the Jesus Movement.' *The Qumran Chronicle*. Vol. 19, No. 3-4. pp.97-139.

<sup>613</sup> Silber, I. F. (1995) *Virtuosity, Charisma, and Social Order: A Comparative Sociological Study of Monasticism in Theravada Buddhism and Medieval Catholicism*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p.190-1.

<sup>614</sup> Capper, B. J. (2011) 'How Did Jesus Help the Poor? Virtuoso Religion as Stimulus to Economic Sharing in the Jesus Movement.' *The Qumran Chronicle*. Vol. 19, No. 3-4. pp.97-139. See Josephus on celibacy, renunciation and sharing (JW 2.8.2-3).

<sup>615</sup> Hengel, M. (1981) *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*. Edinburgh. T&T Clark. p.53.

<sup>616</sup> Hill, M. (1973) *The Religious Order*. London. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. p.2; Silber, I. F. (1995) pp.191-2.



a relevant discrepancy here which is that the nature of charisma that is bestowed upon the disciples as a gift allowing them to perform their new duties is somewhat contradictory to the notion of choice. It also means that the normative double standard applicable to Virtuoso religion, its theoretical but not practical openness to all, cannot also apply to charisma because it cannot be chosen. Generally charismatic and virtuoso religion are similar enough that I do not feel the need to examine the subtle differences too closely but in this case, the difference is particularly relevant to the call and subsequent duties of the disciples. They have chosen to commit to learning their new roles as virtuosi. It is an interpretation that portrays the answer to the call more as an active process, and less as a passive acceptance of a new gift or involuntary response to a forceful charismatic power.

Silber also portrays the virtuoso as less anti-institutional than the charismatic and although Theissen did not portray charismatics as completely detached from the establishment, he also did not properly develop an understanding of the way the Jesus group handled their differences with the established authorities and the resulting tensions. The Virtuoso Religion model paints a much more thorough picture of the movement's liminal position and how this was managed. On a practical level, texts describing the daily life of the itinerant group and examples of similar groups like the Essenes or John the Baptist's, explain how they manage to survive after having abandoned their jobs as fishermen and so on. Sharing a common purse (John 12:6) and relying on the hospitality of settled supporters (Luke 8:1-3) meant their basic needs could be covered without becoming burdensome. Continuing to show respect for legal and religious customs was still possible even when such a lifestyle was based around objections to the socio-economic injustices allowed to endure by the elite powers. The notion of transcending the divisions that exacerbate the problems of stratification and extreme poverty is also achieved through this lifestyle that relies on no wages for work or reciprocal agreements. Jesus lifts the disciples from the world of work and this culture of reward, least of all because it was often unfair. The fishing industry, for example, was often highly taxed. Support received from wealthy supporters showed that it was an alternative system in which even they could actively participate without compromising themselves. If a system is equally open and beneficial to elite and non-elite then it transcends them both<sup>617</sup>. Ling refers to the alternative system Jesus establishes as an 'anti-structure' (adopted from Silber)<sup>618</sup>. When

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<sup>617</sup> Ling, T. J. M. (2006) *The Judaean Poor and the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p.73.

<sup>618</sup> Silber adopted this term from Turner, V. (1974) *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca, NY. Cornell University Press.

looking at the bonds forming between Jesus and his new disciples in the call narratives of John's Gospel (Jn. 1:35-42), Malina and Rohrbaugh had identified this as a typical feature of 'anti-societies' which they described as a group in conflict with but still part of society<sup>619</sup>. Although using slightly different vocabulary, the observations about liminality match the virtuoso model and continue to emphasise the importance of a balanced relationship with the rest of society which allows divisions of social position, financial status and opinion to be transcended.

The need for such a careful balance is of course due to the tensions that exist between the two types of elite. The disciples are made aware of the possibility of persecution (Mk. 8:34-5); it is an inevitable part of the mission that advocates alternative attitudes to certain norms and the willingness of the disciples to accept this immediately is a major requirement of answering the call. The full passage in Mark 8 connects the 'take up your cross' saying to the eventual fate of Jesus (v. 31) so it is clear that Jesus' dangers are the disciples' dangers too.<sup>620</sup> The key feature of intensifying norms in Virtuoso religion can raise many opportunities for causing tension because it can appear as threatening behaviour to the authorities. For example, the command to let the dead bury the dead appears to be saying that funeral rites are unimportant, the redefinition of family seems to attack traditional family values (Mt. 12:46-50; Mk. 3:31-35; Lk. 8:19-21), and refocusing rules such as food purity could be found extremely offensive by the Pharisees (Mt. 15:1-20). The aim in most of these cases is to identify any distraction that could stand in the way of true devotion to God and proper treatment of one's neighbour and respect rules and traditions only when they are not a distraction themselves. The disciples were expected to take this to a great extreme and this typifies the idea that virtuoso religion involved commitments not practical for all. For everyone to suddenly abandon their homes, relatives, possessions and religious duties was not Jesus' objective.

Jesus' attitude to eligibility, which allowed for any repentant and committed individual to become a disciple, was also source of tension. The call of Levi drew criticism from opponents because he was a tax-collector (Mk. 2:13-17; Lk. 5:27-32) which illustrates another key aspect of Virtuoso religion that could cause controversy. It may have seemed contradictory to form an alternative movement that sought to perfect personal commitment to

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<sup>619</sup> Malina, B. J. & Rohrbaugh, R. L. (1998) *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. pp.55-59.

<sup>620</sup> Hengel, M. (1981) *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*. Edinburgh. T&T Clark. p.72.

certain intensified principles when the people called to this type of specialisation included sinners, tax-collectors and women. That is exactly what the Virtuoso model identifies, however, and exactly what Jesus does. He is theoretically open to anyone joining the movement; it is the candidates themselves who have the power to make it happen or not. Jesus sees potential in the rich man, for example, but he is unable to detach himself from his many possessions (Mk. 10:17-31). Virtuosity's intensification of norms and theoretical openness to all are perhaps the best examples of how the model is useful for looking at the Call Narratives and demonstrating the tensions that result from the liminal position of the Jesus movement. The perfection ideal in particular is special because Jesus' version of it forms the backbone of some of his most iconic teachings. For example, he developed his type of itinerancy, which included renunciation of property and community of goods, to critique society's economic injustices (alongside sayings and parables) in a way that was more extreme than earlier virtuosi such as Elijah and Elisha (1Kings 17:8-24; 19:19-21; 2 Kings 4:8-37).<sup>621</sup> This shows Jesus' adaptation of the model to suit his concerns on wealth which would have been impossible without the disciple group.

The Virtuoso model is better equipped to describe the precarious and delicate relationship between the Jesus movement and the wider community. It is interesting that some of the teachings of Jesus that seek to avoid or solve tensions by transcending divisions could also be the cause of tensions by appearing threatening to current laws and customs. The intensified demands of discipleship sometimes take this to an even greater extreme. Although he made pertinent observations about this, Theissen did not push it far enough to describe the liminal position of the Jesus movement whereas the Virtuoso model talks about almost nothing else. Not only is the evidence consistent with the model's conclusions but it helps us understand why certain teachings were developed in the first place. The context of economic injustice and stratification is described by the Agrarian Society model which is completely essential for understanding the development of the disciple group. It also works happily alongside the other models. For a closer look at the Galilean context both generally and for the fishermen disciples, the Commercialisation model goes into a little more detail. Overall, it is only the Virtuoso model that describes the activities of the itinerant group of disciples, the reasons for developing it as a method of socio-economic critique and the way its specialist approach both

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<sup>621</sup> Capper, B. J. (2011) 'How Did Jesus Help the Poor? Virtuoso Religion as Stimulus to Economic Sharing in the Jesus Movement.' *The Qumran Chronicle*. Vol. 19, No. 3-4. pp.97-139.

created a new environment for the disciples that transcended the values of the world they knew and created new tensions and dialogue with those traditions.

## **How Virtuoso Religion Explains Jesus' Teachings on Wealth and Social Reform**

Although the biblical passages selected for close examination in this study are few, chosen to demonstrate a range of different teachings on wealth and poverty, the brief application of our selected social models shows the ability of this method to facilitate better understanding of the text, highlight main features and suggest new insights by raising new questions.

Furthermore, it shows the particular ability of the Virtuoso Religion model to do so by not only providing a description of the structure and activity of the Jesus movement but also providing explanations of how Jesus' method demonstrated an idealised form of his teachings about the correct use of wealth that might promote change in an otherwise dramatically stratified agrarian society. That is, it provides answers to three central questions: what prompted Jesus to begin his movement, what did Jesus teach about wealth, and what did he hope to achieve by these teachings?

The answer to the first question is simple. The deeply stratified agrarian economy of the first century saw society's poorest struggling to survive. Society's wealthy minority was using its riches to further oppress the poor and protect its own assets. As such, Jesus saw their attachment to their money was preventing full devotion to God, often allowing elite figures to hide behind displays of piety. Already our examinations of passages like the Temple Demonstration show Jesus' anger at this kind of hypocrisy. Lenski's description of agrarian society, extremely useful as a model in its own right, is compatible with the Virtuoso model and helps explain that peasants and those living below the poverty line were in the majority and were prevented from upward mobility by elite exploitation. Jesus must have seen this kind of injustice playing out in Galilee where he grew up. His familiarity with poor agricultural workers is displayed in their mention in the parables, for example. The call of local fishermen, perhaps of a similar economic standing to himself, suggests they shared his view of society's extremes and his sympathy for the lower end of that extreme, not to mention their own precarious positions. The group's itinerant lifestyle furthered their ability to observe divisions of wealth, class and honour. Capper observes the difference between the northern and southern regions and notes that the land-locked, less fertile region of Judea where Temple domination meant stratification was perhaps more extreme could actually have been the source of Virtuoso practices that Jesus adopted and introduced to Galilee. He refers to the practices of the Essenes as uniquely Judean responses to the political and economic environment there and later argues for their widespread prominence in Jerusalem and the

connections that Jesus may have had with them there, in the final days of his life especially.<sup>622</sup>

The Agrarian Society model helps us understand patterns of economic distribution and our examination of that model, as well as its widespread popularity amongst biblical scholars, has demonstrated its relevance for understanding the structure of first century Palestine and the levels of poverty Jesus was probably very aware of. That economic injustice was a source of great upset to Jesus is clear but it was not only a straightforward moral issue. What the Virtuoso Religion model allows is for this upset to sit within the appropriate religious context for, of course, Jesus saw attachment to riches as a barrier to salvation. Passages such as the Parable of the Sower create a visual metaphor of thorns to depict life's many distractions, particularly wealth, coming to stifle one's relationship with God (Mt. 13:22; Mk. 4:19; Lk. 8:14). In other cases the explanation that love of wealth is at odds with love of God is put in even more explicit terms: "You cannot serve God and Mammon" (Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13). The prevalence of this theme throughout the gospels suggests Jesus saw people fall frequently into the trap of allowing their wealth to distract them from their religion but perhaps it was even more frustrating to see money manipulated to give the appearance of greater piety in activities such as public almsgiving (Mt. 6:1-4) or with the commercial activity of selling sacrificial animals and demand for taxes in the Temple (Mt. 21:12-17; Mk. 11:15-19; Lk. 19:45-48). If this kind of behaviour prevented people from caring for one another's basic needs, allowing the poor to suffer as well as preventing them from truly focusing on the proper worship of God then it contradicted the central teachings to love God and love your neighbour as yourself (Mt. 22:37-40; Mk. 12:29-31; Lk. 20:27). What the Virtuoso lifestyle provided was a protest against society's inbuilt and ongoing mistreatment of the poor and neglect of appropriate religious devotion plus a method by which to avoid being a part of that system yourself. It required sacrifice and a certain level of separation from pre-established structures but it also created a platform from which to demonstrate by perfect example just how the causes of these wrongs can be transcended. It was not an entirely new concept either. Something that inspired Jesus to form his virtuoso group was the pre-existing model set by the likes of Elijah and Elisha (e.g. 1 Kings 19:19-21) and John the Baptist (Matt. 3; Mark 1;

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<sup>622</sup> Capper, B. J. (2008) 'Holy Community of Life and Property Amongst the Poor: A Response to Steve Walton'. *The Evangelical Quarterly*. 80.2. pp.113-127.

Luke 3:1-22; John 1:19-43). They seemed to share similar itinerant lifestyles and similar theological, soteriological and sociological ideas.<sup>623</sup>

So what of Jesus' teachings on wealth? The second question the Virtuoso Religion model helps answer has been summarised throughout this study. The key issues for society in general include the protection of the very poor from living below the line of subsistence and the promotion of generous and fair distribution of wealth by the rich. For the individual, both rich and poor are expected to renounce attachment to their money and possessions so that concern for these things does not supersede worship of God. Accumulated wealth seems so often to be the target of criticism, as if the more one has, the less prepared one is likely to be to part with it. The way Jesus contrasts the large offerings made by the rich people in the Temple treasury and the two copper coins of the poor widow (Mk. 12:41-44; Lk. 21:1-4) indicates that the intention with which the offering is given, demonstrated by the proportion in this case, is more important than the actual amount. This reflects a trend within teachings about generosity that recognises how counter-intuitive it may seem. The instruction to give to whoever begs or borrows from you is part of the discourse containing the command to love one's enemies (Mt. 5:42-44; Lk. 6:27-31) so, no doubt, it is meant to sound controversial and unexpected, especially since it sits at odds with the traditions of honour, reciprocity and patron-client relations. The twelve-hour workers in the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Mt. 20:1-16) are irked at finding the landowner has been so generous to the one-hour workers. Jesus instructs a rich ruler to extend generous hospitality to the poor and sick in the knowledge they cannot repay him (Lk 14:12-14). When rich figures are spontaneously generous, they are greatly praised for it (e.g. Lk. 19:1-10).

These teachings are both consistent with the model and are demonstrated by the Virtuoso practices of renouncing property, community sharing and care for the poor. This took the form of both caring for the poor and looking after themselves. Capper points to the Johannine references at Bethany and the Last Supper to the common purse held by Judas Iscariot which appears to have included the function of holding donations for the poor (Jn. 12:6; 13:29) as well as their own provisions. "We see in these two incidents and locations an insider perspective on common Judean virtuoso religious practice. Many Judean communities of coreligionists collected their wealth into a common purse and lived frugally together from this fund, also making disbursements to relieve the poor and support other charitable works.

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<sup>623</sup> Capper, B. J. (2011) 'How Did Jesus Help the Poor? Virtuoso Religion as Stimulus to Economic Sharing in the Jesus Movement.' *The Qumran Chronicle*. Vol. 19, No. 3-4. pp.97-139.

Aid for the destitute and close identification with them through frugality and voluntary renunciation of personal property was intrinsic to the life of the Judean religious “virtuoso”.<sup>624</sup> Capper argues for quite strong prevalence of Essene virtuoso practice in Judea influencing Jesus. The gospel evidence certainly supports, at least, the similarities of economic ethos and practice between the two groups. There is much evidence to support the group’s self-sustaining practices with the help of sometimes quite wealthy supporters such as the women followers described in Luke 8:1-3 and hospitality received from various settled sympathisers. Beyond this Capper also thinks the foot-washing incident in John 13:1-20 and the command of mutual love (13:33-35; 15:12-17) was part of Jesus’ establishing of virtuoso-style servant-like care for each other within the group and sharing of resources in preparation for his imminent death.<sup>625</sup> There is evidence in Acts of the continuation of the virtuoso property sharing practice which may have been a new community but may have been incorporated into an existing Essene group which occupied that area of Jerusalem.<sup>626</sup> That Jesus’ authority was still at the heart of these practices as they were continued in the early Church is important as it was he who established them and set about building a foundation using the disciples as cornerstones of the new religious virtuoso community which may have continued in this form for a long time after Pentecost (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35).<sup>627</sup> Judea-centric as these points are, it is consistent with the information highlighted by the Commercialisation model (which was much more Galilee focussed) that a more ‘stimulated’ economy might only lead to greater levels of exploitation by the rich who have a surplus with which to increase commerce. Therefore production should not exceed what is really necessary (i.e. Jesus and the disciples might support their movement with donations and hospitality) but any surplus that is generated should not be traded but redistributed (i.e. resources should be shared and any surplus can be donated to the poor). By living according to these virtuoso religion principles, the Jesus movement is expressing its disapproval of exploitation resulting from extreme stratification, living according to its own teachings about generosity and attachment to wealth, and symbolically transcending economic divisions by living as equals.

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<sup>624</sup> Capper, B. J. ‘John, Qumran and Virtuoso Religion’ in Coloe, M. L. and Thatcher, T. eds. (2011) *John, Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Atlanta. Society of Biblical Literature. pp.111-12.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid. p.115.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid. p.116.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid.



This brings us to our answer to the third question. What did Jesus hope to achieve by his teachings on wealth? There is one level on which this question is very simple to address, which has been heavily implied since the very start but is more than supported by the reading of Jesus as a virtuoso, and that is that he saw great wrong in the extremes of wealth and poverty. No one should be so attached to their great wealth that it clouds their focus on God and their ability to treat their fellow man fairly. No one should be left with so little that they cannot survive. The rich should be encouraged to be generous; the poor should be cared for. Throughout the gospels, references to wealth and poverty support these basic ideas of economic justice. Two things must be added to this, however. One is that I believe Jesus sought wider societal change by challenging people's attitudes to wealth and reiterating the importance of the command to love God and neighbour. It was not simply that the extremes of wealth and poverty were morally unjustifiable but that something should be done to help 'soften the edges'. That is not to say that divisions of wealth would not exist but that the money and power should not be so heavily concentrated at one end of the economic spectrum. The other thing to add is that this change must be aimed, in the hearts and minds of every individual, towards the improvement of society in anticipation of the imminent Kingdom of God. The role of the virtuoso as religious specialist was to uphold and demonstrate this ideal as an example for all. This, for example, explains Jesus' anger in the Temple incident. This holy place should also be upheld as a moral example to all as a foreshadowing of the state of things to come in the Kingdom where divisions of rich and poor would not exist. "...Jerusalem's special place as God's city placed additional ethical demands on its population. Like the prophets before him, Jesus countered the people's complacency with his announcement of God's imminent arrival and the destruction of the Temple."<sup>628</sup>

This idea of 'countering the people's complacency' is absolutely the key point here. Jesus was setting forth a challenge to people's usual perceptions in a vast number of his teachings and in his choice of itinerant lifestyle but in no case was he actually setting forth a practical plan for change in the basic structure or usual practices of society. His disruption of the Temple was not an attack on sacrificial practice but a challenge to those who had prevented that sacred place being an inclusive, fair place of sincere worship, a 'house of prayer' (Isa. 56:7) worthy of the coming Kingdom. The virtuoso model reflects exactly how Jesus and the disciples demonstrated through voluntary poverty etc. their challenge to those who are too

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<sup>628</sup> Bond, H. K. (2012) *The Historical Jesus: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London/New York. T & T Clark.

attached to their wealth and possessions but it was not a method designed to make all society act like them.

The Virtuoso Religion model presents an impossible situation in the normative double standard described by Silber<sup>629</sup>. Theoretically, any person could renounce family, wealth, possessions and the security those things provide in favour of following Jesus in his group who created a new system of support through practicing community of goods (Matthew 26:8-9; Mark 14:4-5; John 13:29) and seeking religious perfection through intensification of norms. In practice, the realistic limitations of leaving the security of work, home, family and possessions are too many for the majority of people. It would also be too much to expect all people to be capable of the level of devotion to religious perfection Silber considers characteristic of the virtuoso. The Virtuoso Religion model is inherently incompatible, therefore, with the ideal that Jesus sought complete and total social revolution. If Jesus wanted everybody to be a virtuoso, it would negate the whole notion of Virtuoso religion. Virtuoso religion, by its very nature, cannot be all society consists of. If it were, it could be safe to say society would not be a very good one. If all people live in the same way as Jesus or at least with the same attitude of detachment from the establishment and the associated tensions therein, the Jesus movement would have nothing from which to differentiate itself. It must occupy that peripheral position within society, balancing independence and integration. It has to present an ideal, an ideal unattainable for all.

This is why he did not preach the renunciation of wealth for all. He was perfectly aware of what the economic structure of society was for. That is why he preached about all workers deserving a wage sufficient for covering basic survival needs (Matt. 20:1-16) and why he seemed to have a certain amount of respect for the tax system (Mt. 22:21; Mk. 12:17; Lk. 20:25). The day to day necessity of money was never the issue which explains why the preaching of total renunciation of wealth for everybody would be ridiculous. He was far more concerned with the accumulation of personal wealth and a relationship with material possessions that was more significant to the individual than God (Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13). As the investigation of the encounter with the rich man (Mk. 10:17-31) shows, it is not the amount one has that prevents salvation but the attachment to it rather than God. Jesus had to put the idea of renunciation before the rich man to see how strong that attachment was. We know

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<sup>629</sup> Silber, I. F. (1995) *Virtuosity, Charisma, and Social Order: A Comparative Sociological Study of Monasticism in Theravada Buddhism and Medieval Catholicism*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. p.190-1

that Jesus had contacts and supporters of some wealth (e.g. Lk. 8:3) so it is as if he is saying it was fine to be rich in practice so long as one uses their wealth wisely (Lk. 16:1-13) and would theoretically be ready to renounce that wealth at any time.

The question of whether Jesus was a social reformer is consistent with this. Social reform in the sense of all people renouncing attachment to wealth and possessions and adopting the virtuoso ideal including those in established positions of economic, political and religious authority is impossible. Breaking down the structure of agrarian society with no difference of wealth and poverty, again, is absurd. That he genuinely envisioned an egalitarian society is to exaggerate his teachings to an unrealistic extreme. Elliot sees the attempts of certain scholars to depict Jesus as an egalitarian as completely unfounded. References to breaking with the family are not about the abandoning of familial structures and hierarchies but about reordering priorities around God.<sup>630</sup> Efforts are encouraged to alleviate the suffering of the poor through generosity and so on but only with the aim to relativize economic and social disparities, not eliminate them.<sup>631</sup> Notice that even though the Labourers in the Vineyard all receive equal pay, the role of wealthy master is not eliminated; it is only modified to allow for fairer treatment of the workers. Not all supporters of Jesus were called to renounce their wealth, no contemporary movements seemed to seek universal equality either, and practically it would have been impossible anyway. Jesus seems to be under no delusion that his efforts will solve society's problems overnight ("For you always have the poor with you..." Mt. 26:11; Mk. 14:7). "If social equality ever was an idea held by the followers of Jesus, it remained only a grandiose ideal or "vision" never translated into social and economic reality."<sup>632</sup>

Similarly there is nothing in the Virtuoso reading of the Jesus movement to suggest that he was, as Horsley proposes, a social revolutionary<sup>633</sup>. His criticisms of the authorities do not constitute a practical rebellion. Up until the temple demonstration at least, Jesus is relatively careful about courting controversy and seems accepting of rules about taxes for example (Mt. 22:21; Mk. 12:17; Lk. 20:25). The point of the Virtuoso formula was to challenge authority

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<sup>630</sup> Elliot, John H. (2002) 'Jesus was Not an Egalitarian: A Critique of an Anachronistic and Idealist Theory.' *Biblical Theology Bulletin*. 32. p.75-91.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid. p.85.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid. p.89.

<sup>633</sup> E.g. Horsley, R. A. (1993) *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine*. Minneapolis. Fortress Press. For summary of Horsley's arguments see, Borg, M. J. (1994) *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*. Valley Forge, PA. Trinity Press International; du Toit, D. S. 'Redefining Jesus: Current Trends in Jesus Research' in Labahn, M. & Schmidt, A. eds. (2001) *Jesus, Mark & Q: The Teaching of Jesus and Its Earliest Records*. JSNT Supplement Series 214. Sheffield. Sheffield Academic Press.

by posing a superior alternative.<sup>634</sup> This was out of respect for the basic hierarchical structures in themselves, maybe even a fear of the consequences for explicit rebellion, even if the methods of this hierarchy included unjust behaviour. It is unfounded that he sought a reform consisting of real practical changes or that the virtuoso movement was intended as the beginnings of such a reform. It was intended as an idealised depiction of what could be.

However, it is not so unthinkable that he sought a reform in *attitudes*. His teachings show a need for subtle changes in the economic system, not total overhaul. Authority is fine as long as positions of power are not abused. Patron-client relations are fine so long as they are mutually beneficial, not exploitative and parasitic. Wealth is fine so long as it is not worshipped, but is used wisely and unselfishly; being poor is even acceptable so long as no one is left without their daily bread. This requires a change in attitude to money itself and mainly a change in attitude to one another. Injustices like avariciousness, uncharitable behaviour, crushing debts, poor treatment of servants and slaves, using religious piety as an excuse for commerce or other types of financial gain, all come down to personal relationships. The Christian commandment to love (Mt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mk. 12:31, 33; Lk. 10:27) is at the centre of it all. Love of neighbour will ultimately result in fair and reasonable financial relations between people.

That people are not necessarily being taught or encouraged to change much about their day to day living and are merely being shown an extreme example of devotion shows the subtlety of the type of reform I believe Jesus sought. He was not prepared to manhandle people into the 'correct' lifestyle, but was putting a picture of it right in front of their noses to be seen. In the case of the rich man, for example, he laid it before him like a challenge to which the man was unable to rise. No person was denied exposure to Jesus' perfect example including tax-collectors, sinners or women, some of which appear to have come to follow it (e.g. Mk. 2:14-16; Lk. 8:1-3). Even in cases where the behaviour of the group raised questions from opponents, and bearing in mind that Jesus seemed unwelcoming to controversy for the sake of it, he also wanted to be noticed as if the observation of his work was the first step in instigating reform. He did not stay in one place and send out teachings via other people; he went out and met people face to face. In this sense the itinerant practices of the group could almost be described as the subtle beginnings of social reform in themselves. If the aim was to create a society which was better prepared for the coming Kingdom, it still had to leave room

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<sup>634</sup> Weber, M. 'The Social Psychology of the World Religions' in Gerth, H. H. & Wright Mills, C. eds. (2009) *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. London. Routledge.

for people to continue living their lives, earning money to live, running the political and religious systems, producing and distributing essential goods and so on. The way Jesus taught about transcending divisions of rich and poor and transcending values of reward does not necessarily involve instigating major changes to the way everyday life is run. In the case of the Unjust Steward, for example, the parable shows the rich master learning that letting go of his attachment to what he is technically owed was actually of benefit to himself as well as his poor debtors. It required the imagination of the steward whose position was threatened to teach this complex lesson; it was not a simple matter of Jesus just blandly stating that debts should be relieved. A set of teachings that seek to alter personal attitudes to things like wealth (which is backed up by the lifestyle of the group) rather than laying down a set of rigid rules, is characteristic of the Virtuoso movement which demonstrates flexibility. Jesus' version of virtuosity is not identical to that of Elijah and Elisha, John the Baptist or the Essenes. He adapted it to fit his specific needs. The way these ideas manage to avoid sounding vague and unfocussed is the consistency of the message throughout the gospel material and the authority with which the Jesus movement is able to convey it. Although subtlety seems to be nowhere in sight in some of Jesus' teachings (e.g. Mk. 10:25; 11:15-17), I believe the lasting effect within the church was probably felt more from how Jesus conducted his mission day to day.

As subtle as the type of reform the Jesus movement advocates through its daily life is, that they do so with an intensified level of dedication with a structured alternative authority, gives weight to their approach. The prestige that accompanies this kind of specialised movement is not dissimilar to that given to monastic orders. They may even have earned some respect from the established authorities for their religious specialisation. Jesus' demonstration by his itinerant lifestyle that family could be redefined and money could be distributed according to need only is more powerful and more credible as a message than one-off public demonstrations could be. (The demonstration in the Temple, for example, almost led to the arrest of Jesus and risked being completely misinterpreted by its ambiguity. His emotional outburst also could have been damaging to the authority and credibility of his movement, even if the actions taken like the overturning of tables etc. were accepted as symbols of social reform. Generally Jesus did not court controversy for its own sake but the Temple demonstration may well have been part of a conscious effort to be noticed publicly on a larger and more dangerous scale, a step up from the usual method of merely winning spoken arguments by justifying slightly controversial sounding teachings.) It was by following a system of internal community care, that allowed all to be treated like family and even for

charitable donations to be made (Jn. 13:29), that Jesus demonstrated his criticism of the current oppressive economic system and posed an extreme example of what could be achieved without it.

Significantly there is evidence to suggest that the practices and ideals he set in motion were continued after his death by the disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 1:13-14; 2:44-45; 4:34-35)<sup>635</sup> which indicates the level of authority Jesus commanded as well as the effectiveness of the system he devised. It shows a realisation in the early church that the lifestyle of Jesus could be continued and that it was in itself a form of preaching. It was not a closed off internal system but one that sought an audience to acknowledge that it worked. It was not an admission that change could not occur<sup>636</sup>. The continuation of virtuoso practices in the early Church implies sustained belief in the need to promote change in advance of the imminent Kingdom.

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<sup>635</sup> Capper, B. J. (2008) p.114.

<sup>636</sup> Cf. Witherington III, Ben. (1995) *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*. Carlisle. Paternoster Press. p.114.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to approach Jesus' teachings about wealth and poverty using a selection of social science models to see if they proved useful for understanding what those teachings consisted of and what they suggested about Jesus' broader hopes for society. The breadth of the Agrarian Society model makes it adaptable and compatible with other models. It also prevents it from imposing foreign categories on specific first century historical and biblical concerns. Its lack of reference to specific religious issues is actually an advantage in this case. By highlighting the economic structural patterns, it provided explanations for the behaviour of certain figures in our biblical passages according to their status and functions. The Commercialisation model was particularly useful for understanding how this agrarian structure worked in the biblical context, especially Galilee. It helped understanding Jesus' criticisms on wealth against the backdrop of a changing economy, suggesting that he viewed commerce for profit as an expression of the opposite values one should put on money. The Wandering Charismatics model offered an understanding of the structure of the Jesus movement as criticism of wealth and as a solution to social rootlessness caused by poverty. It related this more closely to the religious context and explained it was essential for Jesus and the disciples to live an itinerant life characterised by voluntary poverty to provide continuity between their teachings and their practices. It was the Virtuoso Religion model, however, which proved most useful for understanding what Jesus said about wealth and poverty, and how he envisioned these teachings promoting change in the wider society, especially in the minds of the wealthy rulers.

The Virtuoso model, in our close examinations of the biblical passages, proved useful for giving insight into the roles of the characters in the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard as ideals within the concept of employment and reward. The owner's fairness demonstrated the virtuoso concern for the poor and the thought that no one should be without bare essentials, a concern the Jesus movement practiced amongst themselves and via donations to the poor from the common purse. The same idea about shortening the breadth of division between rich and poor was played out in the Parable of the Unjust Steward who showed his master the benefits of being generous with his wealth. This was achieved without compromising his position or honour, something the virtuoso model demonstrated in its description of how established structured could be respected at the same time as being challenged in its ideals. This inclusivity of the rich is also demonstrated by the call of the rich man who refused to renounce his wealth. He was unable to take the choice of volunteering

himself for specialised levels of devotion characteristic of the virtuoso. This hinted at the kind of tension the movement could experience but the Temple demonstration showed this tension coming to a head. Even though it was this very tension that prompted the virtuosi to occupy a liminal position, it was a shock to see that holy place at the special time of Passover not allowing rich and poor to worship God as equals. Jesus' hope for a 'house of prayer for all nations' reflects the virtuoso trait of portraying an idealised vision that might one day become reality and make the Temple properly prepared for the coming Kingdom. The application of the model to the Call Narratives gave the most explicit demonstration of how useful it was. The calls show Jesus putting the choice before the discipleship to enter into a specialised form of devotion to God that required renunciation of wealth, possessions, home and family in favour of itinerancy, dependence on hospitality and community sharing. This allowed the group to protest against the injustices in agrarian society whilst remaining part of the community.

The Virtuoso model also proved applicable to a much wider range of passages from the gospels, reiterating concerns about correct use of wealth. The model's description of the group's liminal position and daily lifestyle characterised by community sharing, care for the poor and intensified levels of devotion to God perfectly demonstrates a type of example by which they might be seen as an idealised version of what society has the theoretical (though not practical) chance to be. It was a type of social reform that relied not on formally proposing changes to the divisions of wealth, power and status that allowed some to rule whilst others farmed, for example. It was a type of social reform that targeted the attitudes of people, especially the rich, and challenged them to reprioritise their concerns so that attachment to their own wealth might not be a barrier to their ability to care for their neighbour or be a distraction from true worship of God.



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