

**WILLIAM HERZOG II. JESUS JUSTICE AND THE REIGN OF GOD.**

(KENTUCKY, WESTMINSTER JOHN KNOX PRESS, 2000)

Jesus explains to villagers that their oppressive situation not God's will but violation of covenant. He acts as a 'popular prophet' (not having ear of the King and so having to win hearing from the people) Contemporary 'popular prophets' knew that they were powerless against Rome so made symbolic appeals to God's power to act. Jesus then emerges from traditional village life and has to win his way from within the people.

**Jesus and Village Covenant tradition:** "Jesus was a peasant prophet who interpreted the Torah not as a representative of the great tradition emanating from Jerusalem but as one who embodied the little tradition found in the villages and countryside of Galilee...villagers of Galilee, who were increasingly separated from their land and traditions by an alien network of Roman domination, Herodian exploitation, and temple control." page 70:

Judaea: ruling class (1-2%) were high-priestly families and lay aristocrats/elders.

Galilee: ruling class (1-2%) were largely Herodians dependent on Antipas.

City was centre for tax control: land tax & poll tax. (Rome owned land & body)

With Tiberias built, a tax city within one day's walk of every village of lower Galilee!

"The presence of two cities [T & Sepphoris] dominated by an alien aristocracy without ties to the land except through the extractive efforts of a bureaucratic apparatus was a recipe for increasing social tension and escalating political trouble." (page 97)

Elites used their retainers (from the villages but no longer of them) Levites, stewards, clerks, body guards, scribes. Codified sacred books, schools for these text, total world view ideology. The Torah was used in the way by the Pharisees.

**Pharisees'** laicisation of 'great tradition' Torah so as to be binding on all.

"The far-reaching extent of the debates suggests that, by the first century, the Torah was providing a totalizing worldview and orientation. Seen in this context, Jesus' debates about the Torah are more than quibbles over details; they define a struggle over whose worldview will prevail." H page 98:

**Jesus:**

Technon: peasant artisan, odd-job man, respected in villages but not valued in city.

Debt was used to subjugate. *Prosbul* ordained by Hillel to get round Jubilee restitution. Rich saw debt as useful weapon of power – Jesus saw it as opportunity for forgiveness – a daily matter not a sabbatical provision.

**Jesus against the Temple. Part III.**

In south the elite High Priests needed pilgrimage of people to the Temple. Temple traditions helped to press peasants to produce more than subsistence. but at festivals Temple acted as magnate for prophecies of rebellion too!

Only priests allowed to sacrifice (elitism decreed by God) and lavish decoration signified that Temple was the distributor of blessings.

Hierarchies of holiness – of place, of seasons of time, of persons. The Sanhedrin met in the temple. Peasants were in debt, therefore unclean, and vulnerable to drought which required sacrifice in Temple. It is the place where sins can be forgiven.

People's sense of debt could only be relieved in Temple. So by healing the paralytic in forgiving sin Jesus "has hurled an honor challenge at the temple and its system of sacrifices." p129 – honour being crucial in shame culture.

Torah served as the Constitution of the Temple.

Temple also acted as a bank for aristocracy and state exchequer. (66AD revolt – first act was burning of debt records) Messiah was expected to 'cleanse the Temple' by ousting Gentiles but Jesus quotes: "prayer for all nations". The moneychangers were front line of the system of sacrifice and tax – Cleansing was a demolition of the Temple!

Jesus taught in houses because synagogues were meetings not places. (archaeological evidence (including Capernaum) are later than first century).

Pharisees probably table-fellowship sect instructing Temple/Torah purity for all.

**THE GREAT TRADITION**

The Great Tradition was weakened by: 1. Rulers were fighting over its control  
2. It was centred in Jerusalem but Antipas' Galilee was separate and looked to Tiberias and Sepphoris. These cities inculcating Hellenistic Jewish style – which his peasants likewise hated. 3. The Torah contained its own critique – Priestly and

Deuteronomic – so peasants could find within it pro-poor legislation. 4. Tiberius and Sepphoris were foreign to the indigenous peasants. 5. The villages had strong traditions and structures. 6. Villagers’ ‘shadow or lesser tradition’ used figures like Elijah who called powerful to account. When Jesus eats with sinners in direct contravention of Phisees’ purity meals he is following similar model of prophetic activity and attacking their reading of Great Tradition.

“The High Priests needed to retain the loyalty of Galilean villagers to the temple, and they attempted to keep ties strong by encouraging pilgrimage, those ritual contacts with the center meant to cement ties and build loyalty, and by sending agents to the villages and towns of Galilee. This is the role played by the scribal Pharisees in the Gospels.” p154 Pacification of the villages by insisting on proper interpretation of Torah. The Galileans did not rate tithes etc but did do Temple pilgrimage because temple brought fruitfulness. (Freyne) When they got there they found elitists and so festivals were volatile.

### **DEBT & PURITY CODES**

You shall be holy as I am holy. Debt codes mainly J & E, purity codes in P. Debt codes derived from God’s giving of *the Land* to all and for sharing (Jubilee etc) not to be bought and sold in perpetuity. Leviticus 25:23.

P says **poverty** is result of uncleanness. Debt codes say poverty is result of covetous greed. All belongs to God (rather than Caesar) so to put one into debt is to place oneself as God – coveting.

So Rich Young Ruler reads Decalogue as demand for purity, but can be read in light of the Debt Code and result in opposite response.

Pharisees utilise Exodus, Lev, Numbers Deut, |Their power is to define who is pure Jesus uses Genesis and Prophets.; , Power of covenantal God is to restore and create. He does not claim power but acts as God’s broker in symbolic laying on of hands.

Note that peasants will identify with Land when Jesus speaks or acts:

Jesus only identifies self with David when D is a fugitive needing bread.

Naboth’s vineyard is sort of prophetic act Jesus was espousing. The Land produces of itself for free distribution, not greed – but others swoop down and devour it! (cf Parable of the Sower!) “Blessed are the humble for they shall inherit the Land”.

Series of interpretations of Parables and images of Reign of God here follows.

Jesus goes from village to village encouraging them to see the Torah through the eyes of their lesser tradition and so see in the Kingdom.

TAXES: Half-shekel Poll tax tribute guaranteed harvest, mimicked *tributum capitis*. and showed that ones stuff belonged to Rome/Temple – for peasant, one’s body.

The denarius called Caesar God and High Priest, so violating Torah. Jesus makes it a question of Lordship! Adam and Eve are minted in God’s image – give the coin to Caesar but land and people to God.

The Tithes and Offerings mimicked *tributum soli* (soil tax).

Weapons of the poor are: “foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage and so forth.” (Scott: Weapons of the Weak. 1985)

CRUCIFIXION: Emperor appointed Procurator, Procurator appointed High Priest, High Priest convened Privy Council. – essentially a Roman matter. It was not a trial. Dogs and crows attacked the crucified bodies. Women stayed to keep them off.

Jesus’ God is Father rather than King

Note also Stephen’s speech against the Temple – indicates this teaching is early.

But Jesus’ teaching on justice fades as concern for his person waxes.

**Against the ‘great tradition’:** “The shadow society develops and lives out a set of values in contradiction with the great tradition. Hegemony engenders its opposite, and “every great tradition institution may find its ‘counterpoint’ or ‘shadow’ institution within the folk culture.” Often these values are expressed in millennial dreams that mirror “existing social inequalities and privations” or the emergence of various deviant actors and festivals, “popular theatre, folktales, folk-sayings, myths, poetry, jokes and songs.” 20-21” [quoting James.C.Scott, “Protest and Profanation, Parts I & II.” *Theory and Society* 4 (1977): pp 1-38, 211-46)] H page 152: