

Engaging the powers part 4, Jesus and the Reign of God

The Orthodox teaching on the doctrine of original sin is different to that of the Latin rite Church. They say we are born into an environment where it is easy to do evil and hard to do good, easy to hurt others and hard to heal them. Human beings made in the image of the Trinitarian God, are interdependent. No one is an island, we are connected to one another. So any action performed by any member of the human race, inevitably affects all other members even though we are not in the strict sense guilty of the sins of others, yet we are somehow always involved.

Equality, Healing, Non-Violence and Sacrifice

It was vital that Jesus would be killed, without the real reasons being known to the public. If people knew the real reasons then, or now, they would rise up and overthrow the illusionary system that kept them pacified in ignorance.

The powers act and control in secret. The strength of the powers to control the population is at its greatest when it is hidden and invisible. Jesus was a threat to the secrecy and was uncovering and making visible the corrupt system of domination that existed in society and still does.

The powers executed Jesus under direction of the domination system itself.

They had to kill him. Jesus and his disciples rejected the system of values, the institutions that supported and controlled them.

He challenged the very fabric of Jewish and Roman society. He challenged the laws of purity, including the rules against the sick and the deformed who were regarded as unclean, and so forbidden access to the temple for worship. Jesus showed that his touching the unclean did not contaminate him, but healed them. He challenged the laws on Kosher food, the class system, Temple Worship, the social norms that belittled women and children, and the use of ethnic distinction and violence.

Holiness is not something to be protected from the outcast and marginalised, rather Holiness heals and transforms them into wholesome people.

The gospel of Jesus dismisses the purity laws across the board.

The gospel as preached by Jesus was a context specific cure for the evils and sins of the domination system.

For example of how Jesus rejected Domination. Lk.22:24-27 He condemns the rivalry of the Disciples.

He is not rejecting ambition or aspiration but the values that are normally connected to them. Matt.5:3-12, Lk.6:20-23, and Lk 12:37, the master serves the servants. Lk 14:7-11.

Jesus was seen as an egalitarian prophet, that threatened the very basic norms of domination. The right of some to lord it over others through wealth, strength, social status, and shaming, or titles. In the beatitudes, in his table fellowship, he sides with the outcast, sinners and the poor, to show that God has a special concern for such as these.

He teaches that God sides with them not because they are more virtuous and good, but because they are sinned against and suffering. He declares the poor blessed, not because poverty is holy, rather that poverty gives a perspective to see wealth and power in the way Jesus does, and why he condemns it. Those who weep are blessed, not because suffering and loss builds character, but because it opens their eyes to the evil in the system that causes them to weep.

Jesus rejected the titles people tried to put on him. The title Prophet, Priest and King. Matt.4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13, Jn. 6:15. Nor are his disciples to take on titles of power or domination, Matt.23:8-10.

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Jn. 15:15, they are to maintain a domination free relationship with each other, between servants and women. Not that of master and student or slave, but friends, equal peers.

Jesus makes a ridiculous spectacle riding on a borrowed ass, a foal of a donkey when he enters Jerusalem. Perhaps in reference to Zechariah 9:9-10 and the image of a triumphant humble king that will remove domination, oppression and violence from the land.

The early church made significant efforts to reinforce this teaching and it can be seen in the nativity stories where the reversal of the norms of power are portrayed, in the letter of Paul,

[Phil. 2:5-11. 2:5 - 11](#) In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus:

His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are; and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross.

But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

[James 2:5](#) Listen, my dear brothers: it was those who are poor according to the world that God chose, to be rich in faith and to be the heirs to the kingdom which he promised to those who love him.

There was an attempt by some in the early church to put Jesus back into the domination system by the use of hierarchical titles and in the use of obsequious devotions.

Economics are the base on which the domination system is founded. Rank, class, and the accumulation of power, is control of wealth.

The promise of trickle down economy, the promise to the poor to be able to rise in social class by working hard to become rich, is the myth that fools the poor into supporting the system, by competing with others and looking after number one.

[James 5:2-6](#) Now an answer for the rich. Start crying, weep for the miseries that are coming to you.

Your wealth is all rotting, your clothes are all eaten up by moths.

All your gold and your silver are corroding away, and the same corrosion will be your own sentence, and eat into your body. It was a burning fire that you stored up as your treasure for the last days. Labourers mowed your fields, and you cheated them - listen to the wages that you kept back, calling out; realise that the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

On earth you have had a life of comfort and luxury; in the time of slaughter you went on eating to your heart's content. It was you who condemned the innocent and killed them; they offered you no resistance.

To attempt to overcome the Domination System means a break with the commonly accepted economic rules by exploitation of the many by the few.

John the Baptist shows a beginning (Lk.3:11) of how to change attitudes. Jesus pokes fun at those who wear soft clothes and live in palaces, Matt. 11:7-11. Lk. 7:24-27.

The disciples must not worship wealth, Lk. 12:13-21. Lk. 16:19-31 The rich man and Lazarus. Seek the reign of God and God's justice and all will be provided.

The imagery Jesus used in his parables are mostly women's work, cooking, farming etc. showing that the change needed is not going to come down from on high but from the ground up. Gently, almost unseen like a seed sprouting. The imagery is feminine.

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While many in Israel were hoping for the nation to become like a mighty Lebanon Cedar, to take revenge and dominate the surrounding nations, Jesus likens the coming Kingdom of God to a mustard seed. A weed that is found in the hedges that becomes a shrub.

Race/ethnic discrimination

I do not like to use the word race. There is only one human race. The word Ethnicity is more accurate when talking about distinctions between people of different physical attributes of colour, of facial features or geographical origins. Jesus developed a blindness to these differences and as his disciples, so should we.

He healed the Centurion's boy and the Syro/Phoenician woman's child, he spent time talking to the Samaritan woman. He cast out the demons from the man from the Decapolis. He fed the 4 thousand in gentile lands.

Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, paved the way to a new understanding that God can even save the pagans. The letter to the Ephesians, Christ has made one new humanity out of many. Creating a new self in the image of God. The reconciliation of peoples into God is the precursor of true human partnership among the nations.

The Family

It is in the family that the most painful of examples of domination can be seen. It is in the family that most abuse of women and children take place and most domestic murders.

In a great many cultures, men are regarded as having the power to beat, rape and abuse their wives, even today. And society at large is just an amplification of that thought.

In some cultures where the new wife is taken to the home of the Husbands family, the mother in law can be most abusive to the young woman. This will often continue until she becomes a mother in law herself and then able to take revenge on the young bride of her son. And so the cycle continues. Obedience to one's parents is mandated by Moses.

But Jesus changes that. Lk.14:26, Matt. 10:37, Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

Lk.12:51-53, Division among the family members will be the result of breaking the system of domination. Mk. 13:12. One's own kin may betray to death in order to maintain societies values of domination.

Jesus, may have had Davidic, royal descent according to Jewish adoption laws but he refused the title son of David and preferred the use of Son of Man.

Mk.3;21-34 who are the family of Jesus. His blood kin thought him out of his mind. Only those who do the will of God are true kin.

The family is not intrinsically evil, it was like every power created by God. But it is fallen. And can be redeemed. We need a family structure, but one that can nourish and cherish the members. There is need to transcend the patriarchal structures in families as in the community to enable true democratic structures to emerge. Jesus' new image of family, his disciples. Take a look at 1Corinthians 7:1-6 and following on what Paul is suggesting is the freeing of some women from the structures of marriage. To have to bear an unlimited number of Children and be confined to the home. Women are to be given the freedom to worship and pray.

The church initially developed this idea but softened the call for equality with men until eventually abandoned it.

The Law

Jewish boys were taught the law at home. But officially the girls were only taught the negative aspects of the law regarding women and uncleanness. The Torah promotes justice, love of neighbour, concern and care of widows and orphans, cancellation of debts and the liberation of slaves.

Violation of the Sabbath was punishable by death, but among the scholars of the time there was much debate at just what that meant. Jesus went out of his way to flaunt the perceived meaning of

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the Law, as did most peasants on his time. Clearly he was teaching that the Law was intended to protect people and that acts of compassion and healing are not only appropriate on the Sabbath, but that the Sabbath is for people not the other way around. So the question is, Just what is the purpose of the Sabbath?

Paul in the letter to the Romans, writes the most impressive reasons about superseding the Torah.

John's Gospel replaces the whole Torah with the commandment of Love.

The Law of Moses had been the most successful tools against the domination system. The law regulated the violent and powerful. And could curb excessive brutality and the desire for escalating revenge.

However, the law can be and was corrupted in its use by the powerful. What was intended to protect became a weapon to beat into submission and control the weak and illiterate. Rom.7:7-13

Sacrifice

The slaughter of endless animals as sacrifices demanded by the Priests of the temple.

Israel's first sacrifice was not to Yahweh, but to the golden calf.

It seems that the sacrifices that Israel adopted was from the practice of the surrounding nations in their worship of Moloch and Raphan and the heavenly hosts.

The temple was not to be a permanent building, but the human person. The Temple of Soloman was a means of controlling the population and their worship of God through the intervention of the priestly cast. 1Cor.6:19-20. And Paul goes on the say that the new Temple is the body of Christ. That when he was killed and rose again he freed humanity from sin, making Temple worship superfluous. God desires Mercy not sacrifice.