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The Dignity Code of Jesus and the Reformation

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Abstract

The Reformers, through their renewed and inspired reading of Scripture, rediscovered and applied, to their time, the teaching and practice of Jesus, including Jesus's own code of dignity. Not that they declared that they recognised such a code or even gave it a name—rather it was a case of what Thomas à Kempis called 'the imitation of Christ' (1418–1427)—doing what Jesus did.

Following the Gospel accounts, Jesus expressed his respect for the worthiness (Gk. worth ἄξιος) of all people in both his teaching and his practice, and it informed his vision of the Reign of God. This deep awareness of what we today term 'human dignity' enabled Jesus to challenge the hegemonic[2] code of honour and shame. which dominated the first-century Roman world, including the Jewish colonies of Judaea and Galilee. A millennium and a half later, as the Reformers filled their minds with Scripture (*sola scriptura*) and meditated upon the praxis of Jesus, they bore fruit which led *inter alia*

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[1] The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

[2] See Bates 1975 for a full discussion of the term hegemony.

to the education of ordinary children (created *in imago deo*) and a re-evaluation of Christian forms of leadership (priesthood of all believers). But it was the inherent idea of human worthiness (dignity), which remains to this day one of the great gifts of the Reformation, and ultimately, I will argue, harks back, at least in part, to Jesus' personal dignity code.

1. Introduction

In the Gospel of Matthew there is a wonderful parable about the Lord of the Vineyard (Matt 20:1–15). The story is deceptively simple, and one may easily overlook the great truth found here – namely, the sense of affirmation of the individual workers. The chapter begins by connecting the parable with the Kingdom of God (v. 1). Jesus describes the lord (κύριος)[3] of the vineyard going out to find 'day-labourers' to assist with the work—presumably the harvesting of the grapes. Making his way into the marketplace early in the morning (about 6 a.m.) the landowner found a group of workers, and after negotiating terms and wages (one denarius—the usual day's wages), he took the labourers to work in the vineyard (v. 2). At 9 a.m., he went back to the marketplace and hired more workers, but without negotiating terms, and again, three hours later. The pattern was repeated at 3 p.m. (v. 3). An hour before sunset (about 5 p.m.) and the usual end of the day, the landowner made a final visit to the marketplace, and meeting some labourers, who had been standing there the whole day, for lack of work, he employed them also (vs. 6–7).

[3] A title frequently applied to God in the LXX and both God and Jesus in the New Testament, especially in the post-resurrection narratives (John 20:28 and 21:7) and throughout the letters of Paul.

After the working day ended, the lord called his overseer to pay the workers their wages, starting with the last group (v. 8). Each group, in turn received one denarius (v. 9), but it was only when the 6 a.m. group received their wages that a protest was raised about the length of time and heat of day during which they had worked (vs. 10–12). The Lord reminded the workers of their initial agreement and of his right to be generous with his own money (vs. 13–15). At its simplest level, the parable is about a generous farmer who paid all the workers that day the same wage regardless of the number of hours worked. While some commentators (e.g. Albright and Mann, 1971: 236–238) relate the parable to the debate about God's election of the Jews, I question whether that would have been a concern of the historical Jesus. Rather, I suggest this parable is about Jesus' understanding of worthiness (ἄξιος) as in his statement— 'the labourer is worthy of his/her wages' (Matt 10:10; Luke 10:7 in the sending out of the apostles). The parable is part of Jesus' reaction against the prevailing values of his time,[4] and specifically the honour code of Greco-Roman culture, and is one of the clearest statements on the individual worth of all people—what I would like to call 'The Dignity Code of Jesus'.

While the later secular philosophy of Humanism[5] championed the elevation of human worth, specifically the human mind, Christ's dignity code had a far more radical end in view, namely the cause of the

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[4] Oakman (2012:43) writes 'The political aims of Jesus were deeply influenced by a concern about agrarian taxation leveraged by commerce, and the social situation developing in Herodian Galilee around the turn of the years, and must, rather, be seen within this maelstrom of social change and distorted traditional peasant values'.

[5] Interestingly, as opposed to the later secular form, Christian Humanism of the time of the Reformation was all about the actual text of Scripture, rejecting the Latin Vulgate in favour of the original Greek and Hebrew (McGraw 2013:86, 115). Secular humanism owes its origin to George Voigt who in 1856 applied it to the Renaissance movement that flourished in Italy at that time.

marginalised and the dispossessed. What Waetjen (1989) would describe as ‘a reordering of power’.

2. Values of the Reformation

The Reformation, among other interests, focused attention on the reading of Scripture (summed up in the phrase *sola scriptura*) and the doctrine of grace as personal salvation (as personified in the dual notion of creation—*in imago deo* and the abundance of God’s grace).

Yet the reformation was more than a revision of Church doctrine. McGraw writes that ‘The Reformation movement was complex and heterogeneous and its agenda went far beyond the reform of the doctrine of the church’ (2011:44). He adds, ‘It addressed fundamental social, political and economic issues’ (2011:44), but he chooses not to elaborate. In this article, I suggest one of the treasures of the Reformation lies in the rediscovery of the worth and dignity of ordinary people through reflection on the life and teaching of Christ. The Reformers, through their renewed and inspired reading of scripture (*sola scriptura*), rediscovered and applied, to their time, the idea of human dignity (Schweitzer 2016:1–2). I suggest that, more specifically, they drew inspiration from the teaching and practice of Jesus, including Jesus’ own code of dignity. Not that they gave this code a name—rather it was a case of what Thomas à Kempis, just a century before, called ‘the imitation of Christ’ (1418–1427)—simply doing what Jesus did. It meant ‘having the mind of Christ’ (The Imitation of Christ 1:2) and seeing people as Jesus did. He describes two ways of looking at people, one outward and the other inward:

> We demand how much a man has done; but from how much virtue he acted, is not so narrowly considered. We ask if he be strong, rich,

> handsome, clever, whether he is a good writer, good singer, good workman; but how poor he may be in spirit, how patient and gentle, how devout and meditative, on these things many are silent. *Nature looks upon the outward appearance of a man, grace turns its thought to the heart.* The former frequently judges amiss; the latter trusts in God, that it may not be deceived. (The Imitation of Christ 31:5 [italics mine]).

In contemporary responses to Reformation 500, the idea of human dignity is mentioned several times, especially in connection with the general education of children (Schweitzer 2016) and the place of women in Church leadership (Green 1979). However, we should note that while some Reformation voices take central stage, these two aspects are only present as voices from the margins. This was not the mainstream thrust of the Reformation teaching, but the significance of these two areas, for church and society today, is only now being appreciated.

3. The Education of Children

One of the goals of the Reformation was to enable ordinary Christians to read the Scriptures in their own language. This fuelled both the printing press and a host of Biblical translations. In addition, it created the need for schools, where young people could be trained to read. All of this is well known, but what is not so well known is the link the reformers saw between Scripture and human dignity. Schweitzer writes(2016:1):

> In recent times in Germany where I am working, the Protestant Church has strongly emphasised the Christian roots of human dignity as a human right, even viewing the Christian understanding

> of human dignity as the core of the Protestant contribution not only to German society but also to basic European values on the whole.

Schweitzer (2016:2) draws our attention to ‘a minority tradition that has made the likeness of God the basis of education’ referring to Melanchthon and Comenius among others. For Schweitzer, ‘dignity is the special gift from God who created the humans as special beings in God’s own likeness’ (2016:2). While most reformers considered education as a necessary part of the combatting of the Fall of Adam and Eve, Melanchthon saw a connection with creation (Gen 1:26; 1989:81 quoted by Schweitzer 2016:3), and ‘adds a different perspective to his educational thinking by making the likeness of God an ultimate guideline for education’ (1989:81 quoted by Schweitzer 2016:3).

Johann Amos Comenius (17th century) is another example, adduced by Schweitzer (2016:3–4), who made creation in the likeness of God ‘the starting point for his whole understanding of education’ (2016:3), as is clear from his writings in the Pampaedia (only published in 1965). Education, then, was a critical part of God’s creative plan (1965:24) and this was irrespective of social levels. ‘In brief, where God did not discriminate (*discrimen non posuit*), no one should discriminate’ (Comenius 1965:30, quoted by Schweitzer 2016:3) As Schweitzer (2016:3) makes clear, ‘education should include each and everyone (*omnes*) – this is the pedagogical creed of all of Comenius’ writings’.

Reflecting on the Gospel narratives, we are reminded of several instances of children in the ministry of Jesus. For example, Jesus’ disciples were urged to emulate children, since the path to honour, in the eyes of God, was that instinctively taken by a child (Matt 18:3). In his response to the shame and honour culture of his time, Jesus chose to challenge his disciples by placing a child in the middle of the group (Mark 9:33–37; Matt 18:1–5 and Luke 9:40–48). The three Synoptic

Gospels each give the incident a slightly different flavour, but clearly shades of honour/shame form a backdrop to each account. I will consider each account in turn.

In Mark 9, at the end of the journey from the Mount of the Transfiguration to Capernaum, Jesus asked what the disciples were arguing about on the road (v. 33). The disciples were too embarrassed to admit that they had been discussing which of them was the greatest (in the sense of most honourable) and did not reply (v. 34). Jesus sat down (the typical posture for teaching) and addressed the twelve disciples saying, 'Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all (v. 35)'. Then, he took a child παιδίος (v. 36), placed his arms around him (a detail peculiar to Mark), and told the disciples that welcoming children in his name was the same as welcoming Jesus and God (the one who sent him) (v.37).

In Matthew 18, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?' (v. 1). Jesus responded by calling a child and making him stand in front of them (v. 2). He then assured his disciples that they needed to change and to become like children to enter the Kingdom (v. 3). In answer to their question (in v.1), Jesus added 'The greatest in the Kingdom of heaven is the one who is humble[6] and becomes like this child' (v.4). The pericope ends with Jesus saying, 'Whoever welcomes in my name one such child as this, welcomes me' (v. 5).

In Luke 9, there was an argument among the disciples as to which of them was the greatest (v. 46). Jesus knowing what was happening took a child and stood him by his side (v. 47). He spoke about receiving a

[6] The Greek text uses the form 'humbles himself', addressing the male-centred honour game, but its sense is beyond the masculine domain.

child in his name and so receiving also the one who sent him [Jesus] (v. 48a) and then added 'for the one who is least among you all is the greatest'[7] (v. 48b).

In all three accounts, Jesus' words reminded the disciples that their attachment to the prevailing code of honour and shame, was intrinsically incompatible with God's standards for the kingdom of God. In giving honour to young children, Jesus challenged the male-centred honour system practised in the Roman world.

Jesus valued children and their faith at the highest level. Following on Matthew's account mentioned above, Jesus stated that, 'If anyone causes one of these little ones (ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων) to lose their faith (Gk. σκανδαλίσῃ) it would be better [than meeting the justice of God] if they were tied to a millstone and drowned in the sea' (Matt 18:6), which for Jewish people meant they would be denied eternal life, since they would lack a proper burial. On another occasion, Jesus welcomed and blessed little children (παιδία), castigating the male disciples who had refused the mothers access to him (Mark 10:13–16; Matt 19:13–15 and Luke 18:15–17). On this occasion, following Mark's version, Jesus stated that 'The Kingdom of God belongs to such as these (v. 14)' and 'I assure you that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child (ὡς παιδίον) will never enter it' (v. 15). He then placed his hands on the children and blessed them (v. 16). In giving dignity to children, Jesus gave dignity to all society.

4. Women in Church Leadership

One of the great emphases of the Reformation was based on 1 Peter 2:9, which describes the followers of Christ as γένος ἐκλεκτόν, βασίλειον

[7] The idea of greatness is resonant with overtones of honour, power and prestige.

ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, translated as 'a chosen generation (or kin); a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a purchased people'.[8] What captured the imagination of the Reformers, in the context of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church of the time, was the phrase 'royal priesthood'. In time, this would become known as the doctrine of the 'priesthood of all believers'. In 1520, Martin Luther challenged the medieval understanding of Christians as either 'secular' or 'spiritual' in a work known as 'To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation'.[9] Here he argued for a single category in which all baptised Christians were to be considered as priests and so spiritual in the eyes of God. The actual interpretation of this phrase was less radical than its literal translation would suggest. However, Luther challenged the claims of some priests to be 'more spiritual' and deserving of salvation than the ordinary followers of Christ to be found in the congregations.[10] However, the Reformers, in their zeal to promote the reading of Scripture, did encourage the education of children, including girl children and this, in turn, impacted the history of the Reformation.

With reference to the education of girl students, Green (1979:101) writes,

> Women's education had always taken place, even at times when it was available only for a select few and given only by private tutors to daughters of the nobility or the wealthy. After the Reformation, however, schooling for girls became more and more widely diffused, until at length it was placed within the grasp of most females in the west. In the transition which took place, one may detect a gradual evolution in concepts concerning the role of

[8] My own translation. A similar idea may be found in Revelation 5:10 'priests and kings'.

[9] Martin Luther, *Weimar Ausgabe*, vol. 6, p. 407, lines 19–25.

[10] Martin Luther, *Weimar Ausgabe*, vol. 6, p. 407, lines 19–25.

women in society and of the education or training appropriate to their social position.

Michael Wiltshire (2015) draws attention to several key women of the Reformation era whom he believed responded to Luther's doctrine of the 'priesthood of all believers' insofar as their respective denominations allowed. Preaching, writing books and pamphlets and the advocacy of Protestantism were just some of the roles taken on by Christian women. The list of such women includes Katherine Schutz Zell (1497–1562 writing prophetically from 1524–1558). She saw herself in the line of Mary Magdalene, who 'with no thought of being an apostle, came to tell the disciples that she had encountered the risen Lord (Pierce et al. 2005:34). Argula von Stauff (1492–1554) rose to the defence of Martin Luther in 1523 at the Diet of Nürnberg, and in response in a personal letter he described her as a singular instrument of Christ' (Matheson 2008). St Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) is well known today as one of the great mystics of the Church, who was canonised in 1622 and later given the title of 'Doctor of the Church' by Pope John Paul VI. In addition, we should include also Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549), Marie Dentière (c.1495–1561), Argula von Grumbach (1492–c.1554), Olympia Morata (1526–1555) and Jeanne d'Albret (1528–1572). The contribution of these women has been significant, and as Katherine Schutz Zell makes clear, they modelled themselves on the women of the Bible, not least those like Mary Magdalene, who followed Jesus.

Ben Witherington III completed his doctorate under the late Professor Kingsley Barrett at Durham University (UK) looking at Jesus and his interaction with women (Witherington 1984). He subsequently extended his work to include Paul and the early church (Witherington 1988), and linked the two earlier works in a study on 'Women and the

Genesis of Christianity' (1990). Witherington shows convincingly that the historical Jesus affirmed women as disciples and followers, reaching out even across the borders of Judaism to minister to gentiles, even widows in distress, (as had Elijah and Elisha before him – a point which Jesus makes in his sermon at Nazareth–Luke 3:25–27). When Mary chose to listen to his teaching prior to supper, he defends her choice to Martha with the words, 'One thing is needed and Mary has chosen this better thing and it will not be taken from her' (Luke 10:42; see Witherington 1990:99–102). Rarely does one read such a spirited defence of the rights of women to learn, and given rabbinic condemnation of such practice, this would have raised many an eyebrow at that time. Yet, I believe, this is part-and-parcel of Jesus' code of human dignity, even though it meant pushing against the culture of the time. In his interaction with women, even those who were quite spirited (Mark 7:24–30; see Hatton, 2015), the gospel records indicate that Jesus accorded each of them the full dignity they deserved.

5. Shame and Honour and the Teaching of Jesus

Shame and Honour found place within the ancient Near East, forming the principle values of the peoples who inhabited that region, not least of the peoples of Israel and Judah. The teaching of scripture, especially within the Wisdom material[11] like Proverbs and Psalms, appeals time and again to the pursuit of honour and the avoidance of shame. The same is true of the New Testament world[12] where the study of honour and shame in the Mediterranean region, both present and in antiquity is

[11] See for example DeSilva, 2008: 287–300.

[12] Malina and Rohrbaugh, 1998 offer a detailed study of shame and honour in the Gospel of John.

a well-researched area.[13] Both Jesus and Paul lived under the power of the Roman Empire (what post-colonial scholarship has termed the 'push-and-pull of Empire').[14] At times, Paul accepted cultural constructs, like praying for civic leaders in recognition of their role in society and at other times he fights back, as in his frequent use of imperial titles for Jesus, like Lord (κύριος) and his deliberate characterisation of Jesus as the slave of God, who empties himself (Phil 2:7–11)—a reversal of the conventional honour values[15] so prized by Jew and Greek alike in the first century AD. Jesus, like Paul, responded to the push-and-pull of Empire, both embracing certain values and challenging others. Several times, Jesus explicitly rejected the pursuit of honour, offering instead the notion of 'servanthood', by describing his own mission as one who came to serve (διακονέω) (Mark 10:45) and to be the servant (δοῦλος) of all (Mark 10:44). Unlike the gentiles who love to 'lord' it over their subjects, the disciples are invited to assume the position of servants (Matt 20:25–27).

As we read Jesus in the context of Empire, as some postcolonial studies do today,[16] we would be led to take note of the manner in which he reacted against the 'pull' of the empire, by 'pushing' back in his own life and teaching. One of the ways in which Jesus did this was in his critique of contemporary culture—the hegemonic value system of the Empire. Jesus targeted the prevailing shame/honour culture by 'pushing' against the power of the empire and its puppet rulers (Herod and the Sadducees). He did this as much by what he said as by what he did.

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[13] See for example Busatta, 2006:75–78.

[14] See Segovia and Sugirtharajah 2009 for a detailed application of the Post-Colonial methodology to the books of the New Testament.

[15] See Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998:305.

[16] See the various articles in Winn (2016) which focuses on the theme of Empire and New Testament responses,

I have already mentioned how Jesus challenged the desire for honour found among his disciples, using a child to epitomise entrance into God's Kingdom (Matt 18:1–5). In addition, when Jesus witnessed the competition for honour displayed at a banquet, he offered a striking alternative to the order of the time (Luke 14:7–11). He challenged his disciples for seeking positions of honour among themselves (Mark 9:33–37). By his very life-style, Jesus epitomised a way of living which pushed back[17] against the Roman Empire's glorification of honour. This mode of living is part-and-parcel of what Horsley (2016) describes as Jesus' 'renewal of the covenant community' in defiance of the pull of the Empire.[18] Horsley (2016:65–67) speaks of the 'Jesus-in-Movement'. In essence, Jesus gave form and presence to, what I have come to understand as, a revolutionary 'Dignity Code'.

6. Worthy of Dignity

In a singular article on Human Dignity in the Bible, Vogt (2010) notes that while the term dignity is not found in the Bible, the sense of human dignity, lost and found, is a constantly recurring idea. He views dignity as God's original intention for humankind, as described in the garden of Eden, and expressed in the first couple's unique relationship with God (Vogt 2010:422). The path back into that relationship, and the full experience of dignity for oneself and in one's community, is first spelled out in the decalogue and reinforced by the prophets (Vogt 2010:422). The social vision of the Hebrew Bible, as spelled out by Pleins (2001), would point to the ultimate restoration of the Reign of God, heralded by Jesus (Goldingay 2003). I would add 'and to the

[17] On the push and pull of empire, see the various articles in Winn (2016).

[18] See Anderson (1998) for a social archaeological spelling out of the impact of Empire on the regions of Judaea and Galilee.

restoration of human dignity' within the context of that Reign. For the Reformers, creation in the image of God was the ultimate expression of such human dignity. I believe that, for Jesus, his code of human dignity was drawn from the pages of the Hebrew Bible. The code informed his response to the culture of shame and honour as imposed on the people of Palestine by the Roman Imperial forces. To fully comprehend the code of Jesus, in relation to honour and shame, we need to take a brief journey into the values of the modern USA.

In his contemporary study of the values of various states in the United States of America, the social psychologist Ryan P Brown, (*Honor Bound* 2016), discusses in detail the ways in which shame and honour impact the lives of millions of Americans. In his concluding pages (2016:180–189), he considers the questions of options to shame and honour, namely what he calls the dignity code. He had been challenged to find an alternative to the prevailing codes of shame and honour, and was unable to do so for some time. Eventually he found the solution in what he now terms 'the dignity code' (2016:184). Where shame and honour demanded constant defence and maintenance, the code of dignity, as defined by Brown simply affirmed the worth of all human beings regardless of their social status. Where the honour code demands constant defence and maintenance on the part of the individual, a dignity code assumes a certain intrinsic value for each individual (2016:184).

Brown writes of the dignity culture, 'Social worth is assumed by default. People in a dignity culture are more likely to grant respect to others simply by virtue of their being human' (2016:184). The term 'dignity' itself comes from the Latin *'dignitas'* carrying the sense of dignity, worth and status (Cassels 1966:190). Although related to the notion of honour (which is common in both Greek and Hebrew literature), and

allowing for a certain overlap of meaning, the two terms (dignity and honour) are not identical. In Brown's understanding based on his contemporary studies of the USA, the code of honour is quite different to the code of dignity (2016:184).

Dignity is not a Biblical term, although the concept is familiar (see Vogt 2010), so I prefer to use the Greek term for worth (ἄξιος) used in the Greek New Testament (see Foerster 1961:379–380): in the Gospels (e.g. Matt 10:10 and Luke 10:7 [worker worthy of wage]) and by Paul (e.g. Rom 16:2 [worthy of the saints] and Phil 1:27 [worthy of the Gospel]). Jesus' dignity code, I believe, would have been expressed in the Greek form as 'human worth'. This notion may be vividly illustrated from the texts of the four Gospels. Jesus affirmed the simple worthiness (dignity) of human individuals, beyond the status conferred upon them by the levels of shame and honour.

Jesus consistently interacted with people who would have been considered dishonourable in his time, In each of these interactions, regardless of the gospel writer, Jesus comes across as granting dignity to the person. He recognised their human needs and responded to them as human beings deserving of the bequest of human dignity. For example, as a host or principal guest, Jesus was seen to eat with people of all ranks (Luke 5:29, 7:34). including tax-collectors, women of dubious reputation, and foreigners. He revelled in the comments of his opponents, taking upon himself their insulting descriptions (Matt 11:18–19), but not letting this interfere with his granting of dignity to the marginalised of his society. He openly welcomed the idea that he 'was the friend of tax-collectors and sinners' (Matt 11:19).

In his practice, Jesus reached out to widows, regardless of race, commended their faith (Mark 7:25–30), and healed their children (Luke 7:12–15). He affirmed the faith and love of women, including some of

dubious reputation (Luke 7:36–50; John 4, and see Witherington 1984 and 1990 for more examples). He welcomed people who were ritually unclean (the woman with the bleeding disorder—Mark 5:25–34 and similar instances), and even touched the lepers (Matt 8:3)—what greater affirmation of dignity could there be. He counted among his followers several women, who used their personal wealth to pay for his food (Luke 8:1–3).

In Jesus' teaching, he consistently advocated human worth. The classic parable is that of the workers (Matt 20:1–16 discussed above) and in addition there are the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1–12). Reading contextually the first four beatitudes, we find that Jesus gives dignity to those who are poor, and broken in spirit (Matt 5:3);[19] those who mourn, like the relatives of the people massacred in Sephoris[20] (Matt 5:4); those who have been oppressed and lost their land[21] (Matt 5:5 and see Evans 2012:106) and those who hunger and thirst for justice[22] in a world[23]

[19] See Luz 2007:185-189, who in contrast to many other commentaries on Matthew (e.g. Betz and Collins 1995) takes poverty and other tribulations in the Beatitudes literally and not just spiritually. The underlying Hebrew of Ps 37:11 uses the root ענה which may be rendered either as humble or poor. See Wegner 2007 and Domeris 2007 for different understandings of its semantic domain.

[20] A city very close to Nazareth, which was destroyed by the Romans in 6AD and many of its inhabitants crucified. This was just one example of Roman violence in the time of Jesus (see further, Horsley 1987 and 1995).

[21] Using Ps 37:11 as the basis of Matthew 5:5: Aside from the complexity of translating the subject (anayim – the oppressed or the humble), there are several other linguistic challenges present in the Hebrew text of Psalm 37:11. The normal verb for inherit is the Hebrew נחל, but in Psalm 37:11 we have the verb ירש (yerash) which means 'to possess', 'to occupy', 'to forcibly dispossess' and by extension 'to inherit' (Lohfink 1990:377). Wright sees the primary meaning of the verb as (1997:547). Yrs I q. 'to take or gain possession of' and in the hiphal 'to drive out, destroy, dispossess'. See further Domeris, 2016:131–149.

[22] The Greek term δικαιοσύνη corresponds to the Hebrew term צדקה (righteousness or justice), which occurs regularly (157 times) in the Hebrew Bible, especially the

where those things have been denied. Luz (2007:189) makes this very point when he writes:

> A part of the salvation promised to the poor, the hungry, and those who mourn is already a reality in Jesus' acceptance of the dispossessed, in his common meals with them, and in the joy over God's love experienced in the present. Jesus' beatitudes are not empty promises of something that will happen in the future; they are 'a language act that makes the coming kingdom of God a present event'.

In terms of Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God, we see further evidence of the dignity code of Jesus in the upside-down valuation of people. Jesus ministered to foreigners (Mark 7:24–30: Luke 7:1–10 and 7:11–15) and commended Samaritans as neighbours (Luke 10:30–37). The dignity offered by God has no boundaries. In Matthew 21:32, Jesus informed the priests and elders, gathered to accuse him in the courts of the Temple, that the tax-collectors and prostitutes chose to believe the message of John the Baptist, but they did not. So indeed, this is a world where the first are last and the last are first (Matt 19:30, 20:16 and Mark 9:35 and 10:31). I suggest that all this was in accord with Jesus' vision

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wisdom section (Psalms, Proverbs) and in the prophets (Isaiah and Ezekiel). Often the forensic element is clearly to the fore (2 Sam 8:15; 1 Kings 10:9; 1 Chron 18:14; 2 Chron 9:8; Job 37:23; Ps 99:4; Isa 9:7[6]; 59:14; Ezek 18:5,19, 21; Ezek 45:9), and 'justice' rather than 'righteousness' is more appropriate. This is especially so in instances where צדקה is the object of the verb to do (עשׂה) (Deut 33:21; Jer 22:15; Isa 56:1; Prov 21:3; Ezek 33:14,19). In such instances, the translation of 'doing justice' seems more in keeping with the sense of the text, and this is particularly so when the wider social context informs the reading. The King James version of Matthew 5:5 (1611) opted for righteousness, whereas the Catholic Douai Rheims (1609) chose justice.

[23] See Freyne 2014, for a detailed understanding of Jesus' social and political context.

of the Reign of God, and his creation of a new community, where ordinary people might find dignity and wholeness.[24]

7. Conclusion

In so many ways, Jesus found reason to affirm the worth and dignity of ordinary people. In pushing back against the prevailing culture of the time, Jesus found place even for the outcasts and those who were considered unclean in terms of the purity rules, but Jesus proclaimed them the 'pure in heart' (Matt 5:8). In placing the honour and faith of the poor and humbled in the foreground,[25] Jesus challenged the pyramid of honour. In inviting women to walk with him and share ministry with him, Jesus challenged the male-based honour hierarchy. In affirming the dignity of children, Jesus affirmed the dignity of the whole of society.

By reading the scriptures, with new eyes, the reformers revelled in the practice of Jesus and through new translations into the language of the people, gave space for these people to find themselves in the deeds and words of Jesus. The Reformation touched the lives of ordinary Christians, and over time, women and children of all classes. Like those of Jesus' ministry, ordinary people found new dignity and new worth as members of the Kingdom of God. I will leave the last word for Thomas à Kempis, who said it better than I could:

> [Jesus'] teaching surpasses all teaching of holy men, and such as have His Spirit find therein the hidden manna. But there are many who, though they frequently hear the Gospel, yet feel but little

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[24] See the insights of Horsley, Jesus-in-Movement, 65-67.

[25] I use the term 'humbled' deliberately to encompass both those who choose the path of humility and those who find themselves oppressed.

longing after it, because they have not the mind of Christ. He, therefore, that will fully and with true wisdom understand the words of Christ, let him strive to conform his whole life to that mind of Christ. (1:2).

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