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THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT *OR* CULTURAL RELIGION: MINISTRY PRACTICE AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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Abstract
The Sermon on the Mount is a profound critique of first-century Judaism's accommodation of culture. Cultural imperatives are turned on their head on two fronts. (1) Honour and shame: shame becomes the new honour in a series of antitheses that expose the external focus of Jewish religion. (2) Covenant: as far as the Jews were concerned, the Abrahamic covenant appeared to be compatible with culture. It was easy to equate cultural honour – i.e., status deriving from wealth or position – with the blessing of God. That theology is largely reinterpreted, if not denied, by Jesus. The greatest blessing that the righteous can receive is persecution and shaming by cultural religionists. Jesus draws his covenant theology from Isaiah, Lamentations, wisdom literature, and the experience of the prophets. He understands that all who speak against cultural religion will be persecuted. From an honour-shame cultural standpoint, this is an enormously confronting teaching. In view of that, the implications of a counter-cultural Jesus for Christianity in Papua New Guinea are examined. Since I am a New Testament scholar, and not a missiologist, parts of the second half of this essay are anecdotal and based on what I learned teaching biblical languages and studies during a lengthy sojourn in Papua New Guinea.

Keywords
Sermon on the Mount, cheek, culture, identity, missiological, counter-cultural, big man, ministry, theological education

SOCIAL IDENTITY IN THE GRAECO-ROMAN WORLD

People in the ancient world did not understand themselves to be individuals with autonomous personalities like modern human beings. For that reason, as Kloppenborg observes, much North-Atlantic biblical interpretation

> has been riddled with ethnocentric and anachronistic readings and translations of texts which routinely miss basic Mediterranean values (e.g., honour, shame, hospitality, and purity), social and economic structures, and the mechanisms of exchange (e.g., patronage, euergetism, and reciprocity). Such interpretations imagine social and economic exchange to occur in much the same way and for the same reasons as social exchange in post-Industrial Revolution cultures. The result both misconstrues certain details of the text, and misses others.[1]

According to Malina, ancient Mediterranean identity was collectivist, "group-embedded, group-oriented." First-century people did not think of themselves as individuals who acted alone regardless of what others thought and did. A meaningful human existence depended on a person's full awareness of what others thought and felt about them, and "on their living up to that awareness." Identity was derived from relationships with others and a person's place in the various groups/networks of relationships in which they participated (family, village, ethnic group, artisan guild, or political body). Instead of deriving from individual psychological awareness, motivations and attitudes sprang from "culturally-shared stereotypes, from generalities perceived to inhere" in the various groups/relationship networks. These stereotypes, too, arose not from individualistic self-examination, but "from obvious and apparent group traits and behaviour."[2] Ancient Mediterranean people tended

[1] J. Kloppenborg, "Pastoralism, Papyri and the Parable of the Shepherd," in *Light from the East: Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament. Akten des internationalen Symposions vom Dezember 3-4, 2009, am Fachbereich Bibelwissenschaft und Kirchengeschichte de Universität Salzburg* (ed. P. Arzt-Grabner and C.M. Kreinecker; Philippika-Marburger alterskundliche Abhandlungen 39; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 48 (47-69). The accuracy of this statement as regards scholarship on the Sermon on the Mount is confirmed by a reading of the "History of Interpretation" section in W.S. Kissinger, *The Sermon on the Mount: a History of Interpretation and Bibliography* (ATLA Bibliography Series 3; Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1975), 1-125.

[2] B.J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (3rd ed.; Atlanta: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 58, 75. See also, for example: J.J. Pilch, ed., *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible: Essays by the Context Group in Honour of Bruce J. Malina* (Biblical Interpretation 53; Leiden: Brill, 2001); W. Stegemann, B.J. Malina, and G. Theissen, eds., *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002). For more works by members of the Context Group see <http://www.contextgroup.org/MemberBibliographies.html>.

> to believe and presume that human character as specified in unique and distinct groups and their individual components … [was] fixed and unchanging. Every family, tribe, village, city, and ethnic group would be quite predictable, and so would the individuals who were embedded in and shared the qualities of some family, tribe, village, city, or ethnic group.[3]

Thus, collectivist personality was characterised by conformity, a desire to act in accordance with outwardly-observable expectations, and subordination to one's social superiors in terms of wealth or status. Such conformity militated against introspection or self-revelation.[4] The honourable person "would never expose his or her distinct individuality." Instead, s/he was "adept at keeping their innermost self concealed with a veil of conventionality and formality, ever alert … to anything that would not tally with the socially-expected and defined forms of behaviour that … [had] entitled them and their family to respect."[5]

ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN HONOUR-SHAME CULTURE

The primary concern, therefore, of first-century Mediterranean people was their honour rating "within [their] significant groups," and the assessment of that rating relative to other groups.[6] Concern for honour

[3] Malina, *New Testament World*, 64. Because unpredictability could not be traced to predictable human beings, it made "no cultural sense at all" to look for "uniquely personal, individualistic motives or introspectively generated explanations for human behaviour."

[4] The admittedly broad generalisations drawn by those using cross-cultural models to understand the NT have attracted some criticism. See, most notably for current purposes, L.J. Lawrence, *An Ethnography of the Gospel of Matthew* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 165; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), and the negative review of her book by Z.A. Crook, "Methods and Models in New Testament Interpretation: a Critical Engagement with Louise Lawrence's Literary Ethnography," *Religious Studies Review* 32 (2006): 87-97. For more recent discussion of the issues see S.R. Nebreda, *Christ Identity: A Social-scientific Reading of Philippians 2:5-11* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2011), 88-117.

[5] Malina, *New Testament World*, 59.

[6] Malina, *New Testament World*, 75. In these terms, conscience "refers to a person's sensitive self-awareness to one's public ego-image along with the purpose of striving to align one's behaviour and self-assessment with that publicly-perceived image … Conscience is a sort of internalisation of what others say, do, and think about oneself, since these others play the role of witness and judge. Their verdicts supply a person with grants of honour necessary for a meaningful, humane existence" (58-59).

> permeated every aspect of public life in the Mediterranean world … [It was] the fundamental value, the core, the heart, the soul … Philo speaks of "wealth, fame, official posts, honours, and everything of that sort with which the majority of mankind are busy" (*Det.* 122) … Simply stated, honour is public recognition. It is name or place. It is one's status or standing in the village *together with the public recognition of it.* Public recognition is all-important: "Honour is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society" … To hang on to what honour one has is essential to life itself … [It] is a claim to excel over others, to be superior, to demand *rights* on the basis of social precedence. Honour is likewise a limited good – related to control of scarce resources including land, crops, livestock, political clout, and female sexuality. Thus, honor gained is honor taken from another.[7]

As a result, first-century people engaged in a constant round of social evaluation of their own conduct and that of others. If anyone stepped out of the bounds of what was considered acceptable or moral behaviour, gossip and shaming were the informal and formal means respectively of bringing them back into line, of maintaining social control.[8] Because honour could be acquired or lost, Mediterranean males (since gender roles were clearly differentiated) also engaged in a continual round of challenge and response. *Ascribed* honour, the honour derived from birth (the status of one's family) or endowment by "persons of power,"[9] was relatively static. But honour could also be *acquired* through benefaction, the acquisition of position or office, the exercise of courage or strength, or by proving one's superiority in the constant round of challenge and response. Challenge and response were a

[7] R.L. Rohrbaugh, *The New Testament in Cross-cultural Perspective* (Matrix: The Bible in Mediterranean Context; Eugene: Cascade, 2006), 31-32. Unless otherwise indicated, what follows is drawn from Rohrbaugh's excellent summary (31-34). For a more detailed discussion of the subject see B.J. Malina and J.H. Neyrey, "Honour and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. J.H. Neyrey; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 25-65.

[8] On gossip as a means of maintaining/enforcing group values and boundaries see R.L. Rohrbaugh, "Gossip in the New Testament," in *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible: Essays by the Context Group in Honour of Bruce J. Malina* (ed. J.J. Pilch; Biblical Interpretation 53; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 239-59; E. van Eck, "Invitations and Excuses that Are Not Invitations and Excuses: Gossip in Luke 14:18-20," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 68.1 (2012), Art. #1243, 10 pages, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v68i1.1243>, accessed 17 March 2015.

[9] Malina and Neyrey, "Honour and Shame in Luke-Acts," 27-28.

feature "of every waking, public moment … [and] in every case an honour challenge must be met … To ignore a challenge … [was] to have no shame. To run from a challenge … [was] a coward's disgrace."[10] That is, honour could also be lost as a result of inappropriate behaviour that brought shame and/or shaming.

1. Turning the Other Cheek (Matt 5:38-39)

In his book *Honour and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, Neyrey interprets the six antitheses ("you have heard that it was said, but I say to you …") of Matthew 5:21-48 in terms of the "village and its face-to-face dynamics." The focus is *achieved* rather than *ascribed* honour, how a man (men are clearly the implied subject) can acquire honour by aggressive behaviour, "such as physical or verbal abuse and sexual exploits, the typical ways in which Mediterranean males achieve and express their manhood." He goes on to interpret the antitheses in their cultural setting as consisting of four elements:

> (1) claim to worth or status, (2) challenge, (3) riposte [or response], and (4) public verdict. There were specific, recognisable ways to challenge someone: physical affront (kill, strike), verbal abuse (name-calling, lying), and sexual seduction of another's wife. When honour is impugned, the man challenged should seek satisfaction, either requiring an eye for an eye or seeking revenge from his challenger … Jesus proscribes all of these games: his disciples may not honour or challenge others for it or give a riposte if challenged. And if they have themselves challenged others, they must undo the challenge. In short, they may not play the game at all.[11]

While there is no doubt that the antitheses should be interpreted through the prism of ancient Mediterranean honour-shame culture, male aggression in a village setting cannot account adequately for Jesus' internalization of the law and his correction of prevailing ideas about it. The lustful look as a

[10] Rohrbaugh, *Cross-cultural Perspective*, 34. The honour challenge could be met "in a variety of ways. An equal gift or compliment can be returned and a relationship has regained its equilibrium. Or a comparable insult can be offered and the playing field is level once again. Sometimes a challenge is met by a greater challenge, a slightly more expensive gift, or deeper insult, and a game of one-upmanship ensues. Challenges may be answered, brushed aside with the scorn allowed a superior, or responded to in kind, but they are never, ever, under any circumstances, to be run from or ignored."

[11] J.H. Neyrey, *Honour and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 190.

weapon of aggression against another man's honour, in the form of the chastity of his wife and/or the women related to him, is not the sole point being made in Matthew 5:27-30. Jesus is challenging the *external* focus of Jewish religion, a focus that was entirely commensurate with the lack of introspection and behavioural orientation of first-century collectivist culture/s. Not only is the act of adultery sin, to look at a woman with lust is to transgress the law internally in one's heart. Unless the offending eye is "plucked out," a shameful and humiliating prospect, the even greater shame of banishment to Gehenna ("the *Valley of the Sons of Hinnom*, a ravine south of Jerusalem"[12]) looms. In other words, Jesus demands "radical sacrifice for the purpose of avoiding occasions to sin … The lustful eye is not to be mutilated but brought into custody."[13]

The challenge to external religion is more overt in vv. 43-45a: "You have heard that it was said, 'You will love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those persecuting you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."[14] The first part, "you will love your neighbour," cites Leviticus 19:18 (cf. with the addition of "as yourself" in Matt 19:19 and 22:39). But the injunction to "hate your enemy" is not found in the Old Testament.[15] Rather, it was a cultural norm that was allowed or permitted by the behavioural focus of Jewish religion.[16] Again Jesus internalises the law: the perfection that God requires is the exact

[12] BDAG (W. Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [trans. W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrinch, rev. F.W. Danker; 3rd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000]), s.v. γ• εννα. On Gehenna see K. Papaioannou, *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus: Gehenna, Hades, the Abyss, the Outer Darkness Where There is Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2013).

[13] W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison Jr, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988-1997), 1:523.

[14] All translations from the Greek text of the New Testament are my own. Translations of passages from the Old Testament are taken from the Revised Standard Version.

[15] Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:549. "The closest parallels to 'hate your enemy' belong to the Dead Sea Scrolls." The injunctions to destroy utterly the nations need not be predicated on hatred (see Deut 7:2; 20:16; cf. 23:4, 7; 30:7).

[16] The injunction should be regarded as "a part of general folk wisdom": W. Klassen, "Some Reflections on the Current Status of Research," in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament* (ed. W.M. Swartley; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 12 (1-31).

opposite of the cultural response. It involves loving and praying for one's enemies (Matt 5:44).

One of the key pieces of evidence for a counter-cultural Jesus is the fifth antithesis. An "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (5:38) is based on the *lex talionis*, the principle of controlled retaliation as expressed in Exodus 21:23-24, Leviticus 24:19-20, and Deuteronomy 19:21.[17] This was the norm for obtaining honour satisfaction when a person was injured, assaulted, or insulted. It could involve the infliction of an equivalent injury or payment of proportionate compensation (Ex 21:19, 22, 30, 32, 34). Thus, the *lex talionis* legitimised defending one's honour and seeking honour satisfaction for shame, indignity, or insult. Although Jesus does not overturn it, because God is the judge, who will repay in kind at the *eschaton*,[18] he nevertheless disallows its use entirely. "But I say to you, 'Do not resist the evil person. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him also the other'" (Matt 5:39; cf. Luke 6:29). There are two probable reasons for this: (1) Like the certificate of divorce that Moses permitted because of men's hardness of heart (Matt 19:8), controlled retaliation was a concession to ancient Mediterranean culture. (2) Controlled retaliation does not work because in practice angry human beings lack control.[19]

Jesus rules out payback completely; but this is only the surface reading. To turn the other cheek is to reject both of the two *defining principles* of collectivist honour-shame cultures—the defence and/or pursuit of honour and the avoidance of shame. The significance of the right cheek should not be missed. A slap was "regarded as an expression of hate and an insult,"[20] even

[17] Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:540-1.

[18] Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:540-1. On the false idea that the antitheses prove that Jesus was opposed to the Torah (antinomistic) see B. Schaller, "The Character and Function of the Antitheses in Matt 5:21-48 in Light of Rabbinical Exegetic Disputes," in *The Sermon on the Mount in its Jewish Setting* (ed. H.-J. Becker and S. Ruzer; Cahiers de la Revue Biblique 60; Paris: Gabalda, 2005), 7-88.

[19] The *lex talionis* obligated the judicial leaders of the community to repay an evil deed with punishment in kind (see Deut 19:15-21). Jesus now gives his disciples the power to respond individually to acts of evil. See D.J. Weaver, "Transforming Non-resistance: From *Lex Talionis* to 'Do Not Resist the Evil One,'" in Swartley, *Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation*, 32-71, esp. 56-57.

[20] U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7* (trans. J.E. Crouch; Hermeneia; rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 272.

more so when delivered with the left hand, the unclean toilet hand.[21] Along the same lines, a back-handed slap delivered with the right hand smacks of intentional insult or challenge, perhaps this is why the Mishnah required a double penalty to satisfy honour (*m. Baba Qamma* 8.6). Both scenarios represent "a challenge in the most insulting form possible."[22] In response, disciples are to offer the other cheek which, in cultural terms, is a very shameful thing for a man to do. In this one saying Jesus formulates *two new principles* which are to replace the two defining principles of collectivist honour-shame culture/s: (1) the defence (and pursuit: see below) of honour, whether via retaliation or compensation, is to be completely renounced; and (2) shame is not to be avoided at any cost but to be passively received and, indeed, embraced.

Davies and Allison point to a number of "intriguing parallels" between Matthew 5:38-42 par. and Isaiah 50:4-11 (the third "servant song"), including shared vocabulary.[23] In vv. 5-6 the servant describes his response to the shaming and rejection that he received at the hands of his fellows. "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting."[24] Thus, the servant (vv. 10-11) is identified as a prophet (vv. 4-9) whose challenging message is rejected in emphatic cultural terms.[25] That was also the case with Jeremiah whose book contains a number of confessions (or laments) about the reception his words

[21] Neyrey, *Honour and Shame*, 205.

[22] Neyrey, *Honour and Shame*, 205.

[23] Both "Matt 5:38-42 and Isa 50:4-11 depict the unjust treatment of an innocent individual and use the terminology of the law court": D.C. Allison Jr, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* Companions to the New Testament; New York: Crossroad, 1999), 21. The vocabulary common to Matthew and the LXX are: *anthistēmi* (Isa 50:8; Matt 5:39); *didōmi* (Isa 50:4, 6; Matt 5:42); *siagōn* (Isa 50:6; Matt 5:39); *rhapizō* (Isa 50:6; Matt 5:30); *apostrephō* (Isa 50:6; Matt 5:42); *krinō* (Isa 50:8; Matt 5:40); *himation* (Isa 50:9; Matt 5:40), Davies, and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.544. Two of these words "appear again in the passion narrative – 'strike' (*rhapizō*, 26:67), and 'cloak/clothes' (27:31, 35)" (Allison, *Sermon on the Mount*, 21).

[24] M.D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1974), 293-94, argues that Matt 5:39 is "a development of Isa 50:6 [LXX]."

[25] J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 19A; Garden City: Doubleday, 2002), 118-20, 317-23; cf. L.-S. Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion: the Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40-55* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 139; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 311-29, esp. 317, 323-27.

had garnered (11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-13; 20:14-18).[26]

Regardless of whether Lamentations can be attributed to Jeremiah or not,[27] it encapsulates the reception that the prophets experienced, and the passive response that God required of them.

> He drove into my heart the arrows of his quiver; I have become a laughing-stock of all peoples, the burden of their songs all day long … But this I call to mind and therefore I have hope … The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he bears the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone in silence when he has laid it on him; let him put his mouth in the dust – there may yet be hope; let him give his cheek [*siagona*] to the smiter, and be filled with insults (Lam 3:13-14, 21, 25-30).[28]

The parallel in v. 30 was first noted by Origen in his response to Celsus (*Contra Celsus* 7.25). The same ***silent*** embrace of shaming and ostracism, the same passive reception of persecution, is found in the fourth servant song of Isaiah 52:13-53:1, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a sheep that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth" (Isa 53:7).

As far as Jesus is concerned, when a personal challenge comes (institutions are not addressed here[29]), there can be no riposte. Instead of

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[26] See A.R. Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context: Scenes of Prophetic Drama* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Suppl. 45; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987). Part of the fifth confession reads, "O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughing-stock all the day; every one mocks me. For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, 'Violence and destruction?' For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all the day long" (Jer 20:7-8).

[27] See J.H. Hayes, "The Songs of Israel: Psalms and Lamentations," in *The Hebrew Bible Today: An Introduction to Critical Issues* (ed. S.L. McKenzie and M.P. Graham; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 167-68 (153-72). Cf. H.A. Thomas, "A Survey of Research on Lamentations (2002-2012)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 12 (2012): 10-13 (8-38).

[28] Cf. "He has torn me in his wrath, and hated me … Men have gaped at me with their mouth, they struck me insolently upon the cheek [*siagona*], they mass themselves together against me" (Job 16:9-10; cf. 16:7-8, 11; 17:2, 6). On the use of Lam 3 elsewhere in Matthew see D.M. Moffitt, "Righteous Bloodshed, Matthew's Passion Narrative, and the Temple's Destruction: Lamentations as a Matthean Intertext," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125 (2006): 299-320.

[29] Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:542.

defending honour in order to assuage shame, his followers are to embrace shame and dishonour, even if it means losing one's clothes and dignity (Matt 5:40; cf. Luke 6:29b). This is a new standard that requires nothing less than the renunciation of cultural manhood. Jesus is a cultural revolutionary who issues an extraordinary challenge.[30] He grew up in a collectivist honour-shame culture and would have been expected to conform. But he refused to do so because the two defining principles of honour-shame culture/s are not principles of the kingdom of heaven.[31]

2. Correcting the Cultural Covenant

The Jewish religious leaders seem to have joined culture onto religion, as though the two were compatible. If one had no ascribed honour via birth or endowment, one might seek to acquire honour or status via religious office.[32] The scribes and Pharisees "do all their deeds to be seen by people … and they love the place of honour at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by people" (Matt 23:5a, 6-7; cf. Mark 12:38-39; Luke 20:46). According to Luke, even after the disciples had spent some years with Jesus, the undercurrent at the Last Supper was one of jostling for the pre-eminent position (22:24-27; cf. Mark 10:41-45; Matt 20:24-28). Apparently, that was also the reason for the foot

[30] See S.S. Bartchy, "The Historical Jesus and Reversal of Honour at Table," in Stegemann, *Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, 175-84. On comparable sayings in Jewish sources see G.M. Zerbe, *Non-retaliation in Early Jewish and New Testament Texts: Ethical Themes in Social Context* (Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Suppl. 13; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 39-44. While he notes that the "general exhortation to suffer injustice, without retaliating, is widespread in antiquity," Luz also observes that the demands of vv. 39b-41 contain "an element of intentional provocation … They alienate, they shock, they protest symbolically against the standard use of force … They are an expression against dehumanising spirals of violence and of the hope for a different kind of behaviour than what can be experienced in everyday life. They do stop there, however, because they demand active behaviour, in which there is both an element of protest and an element of provocative contrast against the force used to rule the world" (*Matthew*, 273-74).

[31] "There is no direct reference to the kingdom of God" in vv. 39a-41, nevertheless "the contrast between the kingdom of God and the world" emerges from them (Luz, *Matthew*, 274).

[32] Honour "is tied to the symbols of power, sexual status, gender, and religion": K.C. Hanson, "How Honourable! How Shameful! A Cultural Analysis of Matthew's Makarisms and Reproaches," in *Honour and Shame in the World of the Bible* (ed. V.H. Matthews and D.C. Benjamin; *Semeia* 68; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1996), 83 (81-111).

washing in which Jesus takes on the persona and performs the task of a house slave (John 13:4-5, 12-17). The message that Jesus was trying to convey was that pride and self-exaltation, which are at the heart of the honour principle, are to be renounced.

That Jesus could not get this through to his disciples after a considerable period of constant association speaks volumes about the love of honour, power of conformity, and lack of introspection in collectivist culture/s. That is why the cross was needed. It represents an entire renunciation (of the pursuit) of honour and embracing of shame.[33] The two new principles of the kingdom required Jesus to take everything that was done to him in silence and without fleshly retaliation (see Mark 14:53-65). If he had conformed to culture by defending his honour – that is, if he had been a cultural Jew – then he himself would need a Saviour. This point must be made in unequivocal terms or missiology will serve culture instead of God.

Jesus models how to live a God-honouring life in an honour-shame culture. The general Jewish focus on externals is very evident in the plethora of halakhic laws concerning Sabbath observance and ritual purity.[34] Jesus violates scribal and Pharisaic tradition again and again by healing on the Sabbath,[35] associating with prostitutes and tax collectors, and touching the unclean. But his greatest sin was more cultural than legal. In a collectivist culture, in which authority (in this case, religious authority) is accepted and

[33] For a discussion of the cross in relation to honour and shame see J.H. Neyrey, "Despising the Shame of the Cross: Honour and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative," in Matthews and Benjamin, *Honour and Shame*, 113-37. "In the evangelist's eyes, Jesus' shame and humiliation is truly the account of his glory: 'Ought not the Christ suffer, and so enter into his glory?' (Luke 24:26; see Acts 14:22; Heb 2:10). Indeed, in the fourth gospel, his death is regularly described as glory and glorification (John 7:39; 12:28; 17:5; see 21:19). Or, to paraphrase Paul, foolishness, weakness, and shame in human eyes are wisdom, strength, and honour in God's eyes (1 Cor 1:20, 25)" (118-19).

[34] On the former see L. Doering, "Sabbath and Festivals," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (ed. C. Hezser; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 566-86. On the latter see J. Klawans, "Moral and Ritual Purity," in *The Historical Jesus in Context* (ed. A.-J. Levine, D.C. Allison Jr, and J.D. Crossan; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 265-84.

[35] See L. Doering, "Much Ado about Nothing?: Jesus' Sabbath Healings and their Halakhic Implications Revisited," in *Judaistik und Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft: Standorte – Grenzen – Beziehungen* (ed. L. Doering, H.-G. Waubke, and F. Wilk; Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 226; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2008), 213-41.

there is reluctance to disagree with one's superiors, to disregard and even reprove[36] the Jewish religious leaders was completely unacceptable.[37] Because shame is be avoided at all costs, there can be no reproof of sins in a collectivist setting. In six-and-a-half years in Papua New Guinea, every sermon that I heard, with only one exception, conformed to this cultural imperative. But, again, Jesus refuses to conform and in doing so models incarnational ministry.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew's Jesus understands where honouring God will lead. "Blessed are you whenever they would revile and persecute you [plural] and would speak every evil thing against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt 5:11-12). This was the experience of the prophets who, in their time, reproved the sins of the children of Israel.[38] The form of this ninth beatitude is different to the eight which precede it because it acts as a bridge to vv. 13-16 and the antitheses which are followed by an admonition to love one's enemies in vv. 43-48. In other words, the "enemies" to be loved are the very ones persecuting God's servants because of *their* righteousness (5:10; cf. 23:34-35; 1 Pet 3:14).[39] Remarkably, this is the greatest blessing that God can bestow: participation in the life of Christ through the experience of persecution at the hands of God's professed people. Such persecution is to be received as Jesus admonishes, by turning the other cheek and not resisting evil.

[36] See, e.g., Matt 21:1-36; cf. 1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 2:1-5; Titus 2:15; Rev 3:19.

[37] That is why, *contra* Doering ("Much Ado about Nothing?", 228), Mark 3:6 is historically plausible. The Jewish religious leaders had to defend their honour in the face of Jesus' repeated refusals to submit to their authority.

[38] See D.R.A. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to Matthew* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 6; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 137-141. Cf. "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, saying 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' Thus you witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets" (Matt 23:29-31).

[39] As Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 1:459-60) point out, "'righteousness' here can only be something people have, namely, their obedient, righteous conduct; 'justification' and 'vindication' are both excluded. So in 5.10 'righteousness' has demonstrably to do with God's demand, not God's gift."

The Abrahamic covenant in its various reiterations declares no blessing for the persecuted. Instead, it was conducive to a cultural interpretation. Job was honoured in cultural terms, like a Melanesian "big man," as one blessed of God (see Job 29:2-3, 7-11, 24-25). When the blessings were removed and he was humbled by God, his emboldened comforters accused him of iniquity. Only if he were sinful, could his humiliation be explained. He responded by defending his moral integrity, but could not understand why God had rewarded his righteous conduct with shaming. In other words, Job had the same idea about the covenant as his accusers, that righteous conduct would be rewarded with covenant blessings in the form of possessions, wealth, and honour.[40] As a result, he could not understand why God had abandoned him (see Job 16:7-11, 20; 17:2, 6). The book of Job is an examination of the idea that covenant obedience results in cultural honour and its accoutrements, wealth, material possessions, and status. Therefore, it may well have been another source of Jesus' philosophy of turning the other cheek.[41]

Jesus turns the cultural interpretation of the covenant on its head.[42] It is not the wealthy and honoured, but the poor (in spirit) and those who hunger (for righteousness) – i.e., those of low status and public standing – who are blessed (Luke 6:20-21; cf. Matt 5:3, 6).[43] In this context, as Neyrey observes, the blessing (*makarios*) takes on the cultural meaning of "esteemed" or "honoured." Thus, the four makarisms or blessings that might be traceable to the hypothetical sayings source Q (Luke 6:20-22; cf. Matt 5:3, 4, 6, 11)

[40] Cf. A.M. Mbuvi, "The Ancient Mediterranean Values of 'Honour and Shame' as a Hermeneutical Lens of Reading the Book of Job," *Old Testament Essays* 23 (2010): 752-68, esp. 765, 767.

[41] See Job 16:9-10 cited in n. 28.

[42] Note that Paul does exactly the same. See, e.g., 1 Cor 4:8-13. See M. Finney, "Conflict and Honour in the Ancient World: Some Thoughts on the Social Problems behind 1 Corinthians," *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 29 (2006): 24-56; D.S. Levasheff, "Jesus of Nazareth, Paul of Tarsus, and the Early Christian Challenge to Traditional Honour and Shame Values" (PhD diss., University of California, 2013), available at <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1cf4r8sd>; cf. J.H. Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honour in Roman Philippi: Carmen Christi as Cursus Pudorum* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 132; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[43] "Although 'poor' has a spiritual meaning in 5:3, it has a more-literal sense elsewhere in Matthew, in 11:5; 19:21; 26:9, 11" (Allison, *Sermon on the Mount*, 45). For the meaning of "rich" and "poor" in the New Testament context see B.J. Malina, "Wealth and Poverty in the New Testament and its World," *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 354-67.

"contain an oxymoron: 'How honourable are those who suffer a loss of honour.' "[44] Neyrey argues that the

> four makarisms describe the composite fate of a disciple who has been ostracised as a "rebellious son" by his family for loyalty to Jesus. This ostracism entails total loss of all economic support from the family (food, clothing, shelter), as well as total loss of honour and status in the eyes of the village (a good name, marriage prospects, etc.). Such persons would be "shameful" in the eyes of the family and village, but Jesus proclaims them "honourable" (*makarioi*).[45]

That may be the reason for the first and second makarisms, the blessings pronounced on the poor, and on those who mourn (Matt 5:4).46

However, once again, the family and village setting, though very culturally apt, does not do complete justice to the wider context of Jesus as the new Moses standing on a mountain[47] and exposing the cultural practice of religion (5:1-2). That is why, in the case of the fourth makarism (5:11), public shaming by cultural religionists is in view. By implication, those who participate in shaming behaviour – an obligation placed on all, when a Melanesian big man or big men declare it to be necessary – are like those who shamed and persecuted the prophets and Jesus himself. In the same way, they will persecute those followers of Christ whose light cannot be hidden, whose righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:13-20). As Jeremias observes, in referring to the backhanded slap to the right cheek,

[44] J.H. Neyrey, "Loss of Wealth, Loss of Family, Loss of Honour: The Cultural Context of the Original Makarisms in Q," in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context* (ed. P.F. Esler; London: Routledge, 1995), 140 (139-58), reproduced as "Honouring the Dishonoured: The Cultural Edge of Jesus' Beatitudes", at <http://www3.nd.edu/~jneyrey1/loss.html>; cf. Hanson, "How Honourable! How Shameful!", 81-111; D.F. Watson, *Honour Among Christians: The Cultural Key to the Messianic Secret* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 63-85.

[45] Neyrey, "Loss of Wealth," 140.

[46] Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 45-47; Neyrey, "Loss of Wealth," 140-44, esp. 143.

[47] See D.C. Allison Jr, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); M.P. Theophilos, *Jesus as New Moses in Matthew 8-9: Jewish Typology in First-century Greek Literature* (Perspectives on Philosophy and Religious Thought 4; Piscataway: Gorgias, 2013).

"Jesus is not speaking of a simple insult. It is much more the case of a quite-specific insulting blow: the blow given to the disciples of Jesus as heretics."[48]

The allusions in the Beatitudes to Isaiah 61:1-3 also give these words an eschatological edge.[49] Jesus is the anointed one, the Messiah, whose ministry brings blessings and divides siblings and parents and children (Matt 10:21). "You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of man comes" (vv. 22-23).[50] Jesus was meek, merciful, and righteous, he mourned and fulfilled all righteousness, and he was reviled and persecuted. "He embodies his own words and thereby becomes the standard or model to be imitated."[51]

JESUS AND MELANESIAN "BIG MAN" CULTURE

In the context of the Last Supper, the author of the Gospel of John picks up a motif that is common to all four gospels, that of the disciple as a *slave*. Jesus "rose from the supper, laid aside his garments (*himatia*; cf. 19:23), and taking a *lention* girded himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the *lention*, with which he was girded" (John 13:4-5). The word *lention* is not used in the Septuagint (LXX) or New Testament. John took it from the Graeco-Roman symposium, and it

[48] J. Jeremias, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Ethel M. Wood Lecture; London: Athlone, 1961), 27. "It is true that this is not specifically stated, but it follows from the observation that in every instance where Jesus speaks of insult, persecution, anathema, dishonour to the disciples, he is concerned with outrages that arise because of the discipleship itself" (27-28).
[49] R.A. Guelich, "The Matthean Beatitudes: 'Entrance Requirements' or Eschatological Blessings?", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976): 415-34, esp. 427-31; Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 15-17; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:466-67, 436-39.
[50] It is important to note how much of the material in Matthew 10 "is concerned with the non-acceptance of the gospel and the hostility with which the missionaries are treated. There is no instruction regarding what is to be done with converts in a successful mission!" (Hare, *Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians*, 98). On the possible *Sitz im Leben* of 10:16-33, see 96-114. While the focus here is the finished text of Matthew, for a useful discussion of redactional criticism in relation to Matt 5-7 see R.A. Guelich, "Interpreting the Sermon on the Mount," *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 117-30.
[51] Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:467.

occurs widely in that context in ancient documents.[52] Slaves wore a *lention* (linen cloth) while serving the guests during the meal. Jesus was making a radical socio-cultural statement that would have been understood by all who were present: the master was assuming the role of a domestic or house slave. Peter's reaction both confirms this and shows that in cultural terms it was completely unacceptable (v. 6).

By this inversion of roles Jesus again teaches something revolutionary.

> So when he had washed their feet, and taken his garments and reclined again, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, you also should do. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave (*doulos*) is not greater than his master; nor is an apostle greater than the one having sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you would do them" (vv. 12-17).

The disciples were not to copy Jesus by washing each other's feet. They were to follow his example by adopting the persona of slaves; by renouncing any kind of domination of one member of the community over others. Jesus is putting forward a kingdom principle: a community of faith in which there is one Lord and Master. All others, like their master, are slaves of one another. Thus, Jesus completely rejects demonstrations of status, reputation, and position in the church, along with the use of cultural or "big man" authority.53

The same kingdom principle is found in the Gospel of Matthew. The scribes and Pharisees love to be "called rabbi by people. But you are not to be called rabbi, for one of you is the Teacher, but you are all brothers … And do

[52] See A. Destro, and M. Pesce, "The Colour of the Words: The Domestic Slavery in John – from 'Social Death' to Freedom in the Household," in Arzt-Grabner and Kreinecker, ***Light from the East***, 27-46. Destro and Pesce identify the social and relational context/s of slavery in John. The household with its masters and slave, is fundamental to John's understanding of the master-disciple relationship. In washing the disciples' feet, Jesus assumes the role of a slave (*doulos*). The tunic, basin, *lention*, and foot washing were all elements in the Graeco-Roman welcome performed by slaves. So when Jesus adopts the demeanour of a slave, cultural master-disciple roles are inverted. He then invites all of his disciples to take the same servile stance in relation to each other.

[53] The meaning of "meek" (*praus*) in Matt 5:5 is explained by the use of the same word in 11:29. Jesus himself is "meek and lowly in heart." Cf. Danker: "not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance" (BDAG, s.v. πραΰς).

not be called teachers,[54] because one of you is teacher, the Christ. The one who is greatest among you will be your attendant (*diakonos*);[55] and whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (23:5-8, 10-12). The table attendants at the wedding at Cana are called *diakonoi* (John 2:5, 9), as are the members of the king's retinue in Matthew 22:13.

In Matthew 20:25b-28, *diakonos* and *doulos* (slave) are used in parallel.

> You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It will not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you, he will be your *diakonos*, and whoever wants to be first among you, he will be your *doulos*; even as the Son of man came not to be serve but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Unlike a "servant", an anachronistic translation which comes to us from Jacobean and Elizabethan England via the English translation known as the King James Version, a slave in the ancient world was the property of and wholly subject to his/her owner.[56]

The same motif is present in Paul. We are bought with a price (1 Cor 6:19) and belong to God. "For he who was called in the Lord as a *doulos* is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a *doulos* of Christ. You were bought with a price" (7:22-23; cf. Eph 6:6). Thus, in the book of Revelation: God reveals things to his slaves (*douloi*) (22:6); they get his seal on their foreheads (7:3); and they will serve him in the new earth (22:3), where they will see his face and his name will be written on their foreheads (22:4). And finally, coming back to John's gospel, slaves, who love one another in imitation of Jesus' example, are his friends (15:12-16). As far as authenticity is concerned, all of these diverse examples are evidence for a

[54] BDAG, s.v. καθηγητής (*kathēgētēs*).

[55] Danker translates *diakonos* as "attendant, assistant, aide" (BDAG, s.v. διάκονος [*diakonos*]). The "English derivatives 'deacon' and 'deaconess' are technical terms whose meaning varies in ecclesiastical history and are therefore inadequate for rendering New Testament usage" of *diakonos*.

[56] It should be noted, however, that slavery is a complex phenomenon that resists simplistic generalisations: see K. Bradley, "Engaging with Slavery," *Biblical Interpretation* 21 (2013): 533-46. See also the essay responses to Bradley's work on slavery in the same journal by J.A. Glancy, J.A. Harrill, S. Briggs, and S.S. Bartchy). Cf. S.S. Bartchy, "Slave, Slavery," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments* (ed. R.P. Martin and P.H. Davids; Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1997), 1098-102.

teaching that originated with Jesus. In addition, the counter-cultural nature of the teaching points to a divine origin. How else could a man who grew up in an ancient Mediterranean culture, where honour was to be sought with as much concerted effort as shame was to be avoided, teach such a thing?

In view of such instruction, what impression would be conveyed if theological students were intent on seeking the best seat, if they thought that they were better than students doing other degrees? What if they thought that religious office brought with it honour and status? Or that because of such acquired honour they were above the members of their congregations? How then could they draw near to their members and reach their hearts? Sadly, in my experience most will not, because this is how the great majority of theological students think and act.

What impression would be conveyed if theological students and/or pastors were enthralled by "big man" politicians and businessmen, and were often seen in their retinues among those seeking to ingratiate themselves? Would that mean that they aspired to be big men or coveted the status/honour that is given to big men? If so, that would mean that they had put aside the many biblical passages that condemn pride and all demonstrations of it. Could such pastors hold politicians and businessmen to account even while ingratiating themselves? In my experience they could not and will not, simply because this is how many pastors think and act.

Big man culture in the Christian churches of Melanesia misrepresents Jesus. As one conscientious pastor told me, "We are in big trouble." He had gone back out to his village and preached against big man culture in the church. The local church members rejected his message. In this case, and many others, culture is thought to be fully compatible with Jesus. It is a "sacred cow" that cannot be criticised. This is because Melanesian identity is found in collectivist culture. A "big man" pastor once said to me after I had preached against culture, "You left us nowhere to turn." As I later came to realise, that response was rooted in a genuine fear of loss of identity. Where will Melanesians turn, if they must renounce the two defining principles of their culture? That is a hard question and it requires a genuine answer.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Church members in Papua New Guinea are Christians and believe that they now know the truth. Yet the desire to identify with and live according to

tradition is not removed. It simply has a new focus. As a result, the pioneers, the first Christian missionaries to Papua New Guinea, are venerated. They are the sainted founders, infallible and inerrant in teaching and practice. What they taught is now the tradition that is to be passed on. Thus, students tend to come to their theological studies with the feeling that they already know everything they need to know.

They know that when they finish their studies they will preach what has always been preached. If they are shown that what the pioneer missionaries taught about this or that biblical passage is incorrect, they can be very confronted. But even though they may recognise that what they are hearing is true, after they graduate they will join in preaching what has always been preached. Many students have intimated as much to me. They will not risk the censure of their fellow pastors and the shaming that would result from being labelled apostate. What the church community or collective thinks of them is more important than a correct understanding of any particular biblical passage. That is, they do not have the courage to preach anything that is contrary to church tradition.

Students in general receive the Christian message as tradition from their parents or pastors. Almost invariably, they have no basis for their belief except what they have been told by their authoritative elders. At the start of a class on the early Pauline letters, I asked the students to raise their hands, if they had ever read through the Pauline letters and tried to understand them. Not one hand moved. Their belief was not based on a searching of the Bible and a knowledge of the historical evidence. You may say to me, clearly not, since this is not a literate society. I would respond by saying that tertiary students are literate and, therefore, have a greater responsibility. The repercussions are not difficult to understand. As one pastor with considerable field experience told me, "We do not own the gospel. We preach what we have been given by foreign missionaries. Now I see that we must understand and own the gospel for ourselves."

From a soteriological perspective, the situation is even more disturbing. "Christian" lifestyle is often based on church culture/tradition and is not the result of a changed heart. For six years I taught a Gospels class to hundreds of first-year students from many denominations. In the early years when numbers were lower, students would write a journal as one of the assessment tasks. Many told me in their journals that they expected that baptism would change them. I am referring to baptism by immersion which usually occurs in

the teenage years after a series of Bible studies with a pastor. But they rose from the watery grave not into a new life, but to continue their old life with their old sinful habits unrestrained. They had not sought God until they were found by him, they did not encounter Christ in truth, they were not born again. Instead, their "faith" was something that they had received and adhered to as tradition because that was what was expected of them.

Several years ago one of my Gospels students came to tell me about the circumstances in which she had become a Christian. Though baptised six years prior, she confessed that she had only become a Christian during the previous week late at night in the prayer room in the girl's dormitory. As she "wrestled" with God, she experienced what she described as the "breaking within." Her heart was torn open and filled with the indescribable love of God. She was justified and reborn through an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The old heart of stone was replaced with a new heart of flesh through the supernatural working of the all-powerful One.[57] This is what is not understood in Papua New Guinea: (1) the old heart of stone *is* the cultural heart; (2) the cultural heart must be changed; and (3) preachers must have the conviction and courage to say that in no uncertain terms.

But, in actuality, the great majority of clergy are very loath to speak against any aspect of culture, even if it is completely condemned by Jesus. Again, what the collective or Christian community thinks is more important than the teaching and example of Jesus. For example, while it may have been preached, I have never heard a sermon against the cultural rule that a young woman cannot say no when a young man demands sex (the reader can probably deduce which gender made up that rule). Yet Jesus and Paul insist that they must say "no." "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from *porneias* (sexual immorality); that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God" (1 Thess 4:3-5).[58] This is the power

[57] The Sermon on the Mount "is spoken to men who have already received forgiveness, who have found the pearl of great price, who have been invited to the wedding, who through their faith in Jesus belong to the new creation, to the new world of God … [Jesus says], 'I intend to show you, by means of some examples, what the new life is like, and what I show you through these examples, this you must apply to every aspect of life'" (Jeremias, *Sermon on the Mount*, 30-31).

[58] This is one of two translations proferred by Danker in BDAG, s.v. κτάομαι (*ktaomai*), σκευ• ς (*skeuos*).

of culture, the siren song of conformity that very few seem to be able to resist.[59]

I can say these things, but charges of neo-colonialism are easy to make, no matter how cogent the case. What is needed are Melanesian theologians and biblical scholars who are able to both engage with and critique culture, who are willing to ask and provide answers for hard questions. Only then will theological students really listen. What I, as an outsider of European descent, have to say is not important. What the Bible says is slightly more important. But what culture says is most important. That is because identity and its potential loss are at stake. Only Melanesians can forge a new identity in God and scripture.[60] That is where Jesus found his identity.

In my opinion, the best way to bring about such a change is through theological education. How we do theological education is not merely an academic question, it is a soteriological question. We cannot afford to get it wrong. Nothing is more important than salvation, not religious tradition, however hoary with age, and not even culture, no matter how important it may seem to be for identity and place in the world. "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household" (Matt 10:34-39).

CONCLUSION

The teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is revolutionary in the most profound, counter-cultural way. Shame is to be embraced and the honour principle – including the norms of cultural manhood – is to be renounced. Conformity and regard for authority must be subordinated to gospel obedience. The Abrahamic covenant was conducive to a cultural interpretation. When the disciples heard how hard it was for a rich man to enter heaven, they asked, "Who then can be saved?" (Luke 19:25). Jesus turns the cultural covenant on its head. It is not the wealthy and honourable,

[59] Sirens were the female creatures of Greek myth whose almost irresistible song would lure sailors to their deaths on the rocks.

[60] For a good place to start see S.S. Bartchy, "Undermining Ancient Patriarchy: The Apostle Paul's Vision of a Society of Siblings," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 29 (1999): 68-78.

but the poor (in spirit) and hungry (for righteousness) who are blessed (Matt 5:3, 6; cf. Luke 6:20-21).

Jesus' example requires the exposure of cultural religion, with the explicit warning that to do so will bring persecution. Those who are prepared to speak out against cultural sins will be shamed and cast out by family and village and church. But Jesus says "Blessed are you whenever they would revile and persecute you [plural] and would speak every evil thing against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Matt 5:11-12). Paradoxically, shaming and persecution by cultural religionists is a greater blessing than anything that the Abrahamic covenant might provide. Jesus overthrows the two defining principles of honour-shame culture. The greatest blessing of God is not to be honoured with status, position, and wealth, but the honour that he gives to the dishonoured, the honour that he gives to those whom culture would reject and shame.