

Chapter 3

Gender & Class in the Teaching of Jesus

Certain scholars explain the presence of women followers in Jesus' retinue on the basis of his teaching of the Kingdom of God: Jesus' message would have been clearly understood as an explicit challenge to the patriarchal bias of his culture. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza calls this aspect of his message a "critical feminist impulse that came to the fore in the vision and ministry of Jesus."¹ Both John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg see Jesus' message of the Kingdom similarly and cite his "radical egalitarianism" in the midst of a culture that devalued both women and the poor peasant underclass.² Yet little in the sayings generally considered authentic merits such elaborate claims insofar as women are concerned. Although his teaching demonstrates a clear awareness of poverty and a critique of class inequity in ancient Palestine, it does not show an equivalent critique of patriarchy, nor a similar interest in gender concerns. Thus, although there is reason to describe aspects of his message concerning the Kingdom of God as "egalitarian," this egalitarianism does not extend to the concerns of women, nor was it aimed at a clear social program geared towards major social change for women.

Women in the Parables of Jesus

The parables of Jesus have long vexed New Testament scholars. Only recently freed from centuries of misleading allegorical interpretations, the parables continue to attract the attention of many serious commentators, and books on the subject have become legion.³ Most scholars now agree that the parables were not intended to be complex allegories containing several points of reference, but are stories that create their own

narrative world.⁴ The allegorization of Jesus' parables began early in Christian tradition, a tendency that can be seen in Mark's version of the parable of the Sower (Mark 4:3–20) or Matthew's version of the parable of the Banquet (Matt 22:1–14). Other parables went through a process of alteration either in oral retelling or in written redaction. In spite of this, the parables remain the bedrock of historical information concerning Jesus, as well as the defining center of his proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

Since the parables use images drawn from everyday Palestinian life, women and women's activities occasionally figure as the point of comparison to the Kingdom of God. This leads certain scholars to posit an anti-patriarchal or egalitarian ethic for Jesus' teachings overall. Upon closer analysis, however, the images and roles of women in Jesus' parables are unexceptional. Stories involving women simply reflect the presence of women in Jesus' social environment; they are told to make points about the Kingdom of God, not the status of women. Activities such as kneading bread, carrying grain jars, sweeping floors, and grinding meal not only reflect traditional roles of women in ancient society, but their juxtaposition in the gospels over against typical male roles such as planting seeds, shepherding sheep, parenting sons, and reclining on couches for meals reinforces gender roles rather than challenges them.⁵ This arrangement of parables in gendered pairs is arguably secondary to the tradition and reflects either the legal interests of a document like Q⁶ or simply the tendency in that social environment towards a gendered division of labor among peasants and the lower classes.⁷ Such images reflect everyday situations from ancient Palestine and force the hearer to active thought concerning either the Kingdom of God or the situation described in the story itself.

Recent feminist analysis has drawn attention to the feminine imagery of Jesus' parables, which can be viewed in either a positive or negative light.⁸ However, in spite of the tendency among certain feminist scholars to characterize Jesus' overall teaching as anti-patriarchal, the evidence of the parables reveals that Jesus was part of the patriarchal society in which he lived and that he evinced similar patriarchal biases. For example, as Nicola Slee has pointed out, among Jesus' parables and sayings in the Synoptic gospels, of the 104 in Matthew, 47 involve human actors, with 85 characters in all. Of the 85, 73 are men and 12 are women – 5 of whom are foolish

maidens. In the 94 parables and sayings in Luke, 51 concern human actors, with 108 characters. Of those 108, 99 are men and 9 are women. Slee is right to caution that the predominance of male characters in Jesus' parables and sayings by itself suggests that Jesus, like other speakers and writers of his day, was by nature predisposed to re-imagine in his narratives a world dominated by men and their concerns and shows little interest for women and women's concerns.⁹ There are in fact only five parables now arguably considered authentic which utilize images of women: the Leaven (Matt 13:3/Luke 13:20–21/Thomas 96), the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8–9), the Empty Jar (Thomas 97), the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:2–8) and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32). And of these only four focus upon actions of women, since in the last case women are mentioned only briefly as the prostitutes (πόρναι) upon whom the Prodigal Son squanders his money (Luke 15:30). Indeed, the Empty Jar from the Gospel of Thomas has only recently been considered in these discussions – a fact which reflects the increasing tendency to include evidence for Jesus' teachings from Thomas as equally significant for reconstructions of the historical Jesus.

In spite of the presence of images of women in these parables, it is difficult to argue that the first three demonstrate any subversion of gender roles. Rather, the parables of the Leaven, the Lost Coin and the Empty Jar underscore common gendered roles from antiquity by creating images of women engaged in everyday activities. Further, the feminine activities described in these parables are not themselves referents for the Kingdom of God.

The parable of the Leaven is assuredly an authentic parable of Jesus.¹⁰ Since Thomas has introduced a contrast of the small amount of the leaven with the large size of the leavened loaves (Thomas 96),¹¹ the version found in Luke 13:20–21/Matt 13:33 (Q) is arguably the earliest. The original parable thus compares the Kingdom of God (or Heaven) to leaven (ζύμη) which a woman (γυνή) takes and hides (ἐκρύπτω) in a very large amount of flour until the leaven spreads throughout. The use of "to hide" is surprising in combination with leaven. The verb φυράω ("to knead") is more to be expected (cf. Hos 7:4, LXX). Scholars have suggested various interpretations of the parable by emphasizing the smallness of the beginnings of the Kingdom in contrast to its later size,¹² the mysterious nature of the Kingdom's growth,¹³ the reversal of expecta-

tions of the nature of the God's reign,¹⁴ the culmination of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' ministry,¹⁵ or the domestic work of women as an example of the activity of God.¹⁶ In any case, however, the parable clearly highlights the images of the heaven and the meal as the point of comparison for the reign of God, rather than the woman herself. Thus, even though the image is one of women's domestic work, the focus is still the leavening, not the woman. Since heaven was regarded in Judaism as a symbol of corruption (Exod 12:15; Mark 8:15; 1 Cor 5:7), Jesus' comparison of leaven to God's Kingdom is very provocative.¹⁷ Indeed he quite reverses the expectations of his hearers. What appears to be the activity of corruption – the overproduction of leavened bread¹⁸ – is essential and characteristic of divine activity, the reign of God. Thus, the parable turns not on the fact that this is a woman's activity, but rather on the unexpected comparison of leaven to God's activity – a possible allusion to the presence of lower classes and outcasts in Jesus' close circle of followers.¹⁹

The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8–10) contains what may be a similar story of domestic incompetence followed by the surprising joy of rediscovery.²⁰ A woman loses (ἀπώλλυμι) one drachma of the ten she has, searches for it, and upon its rediscovery rejoices with her women neighbors. This parable is coupled in Luke with the parable of the Lost Sheep and followed by the parable of the Prodigal Son. In Luke the parable concerns the joy in heaven over human repentance, an interpretation that is widely considered secondary.²¹ The image is again unexpected. A woman searches diligently for something that on the face of it is of limited intrinsic value. A drachma was a Greek silver coin equal in worth to a denarius, which was a day's pay for a male fieldhand.²² Of course the drachma may be worth considerably more to her, since women workers made barely half as much as men for the same amount of manual labor. The single drachma is thus enough for roughly two days of subsistence level support for one person.²³ Some interpreters have proposed that the money was part of the woman's dowry, but nothing in the text suggests this.²⁴ And given Luke's context and interpretation, it is difficult to consider the woman a feminine image for God or Jesus. As Dominic Crossan has said, there is no tradition comparable to John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd," declaring "I am the good housewife."²⁵ Still, such a reading remains popular, essentially following

the Lukan interpretation in which the shepherd, the woman and the father all represent images of insistent divine activity.²⁶ Apart from its Lukan context, however, this parable further associates the reign of God with the unexpected. What appears to be of little value is highly prized, and the kingdom is again associated with the poor, and one might add, the incompetent.²⁷

The parable of the Empty Jar contains yet another image of womanly inattention or incompetence (Thomas 97).²⁸ The Kingdom of "the Father" is compared to a woman carrying a full jar of meal:

Jesus said: The [father's] kingdom is like a woman (21ME) who was carrying a [jar] full of meal (90EET). While she was walking along [a] distant road, the handle of the jar broke and the meal spilled behind her [along] the road. She did not know it; she had not noticed a problem. When she reached her house, she put the jar down and discovered that it was empty (90YEET).²⁹

In the gospel of Thomas, the Empty Jar is set between the parables of the Leaven (Thomas 96) and the Assassin (Thomas 98). The image of the woman is also one of domesticity and failure. Although hardly a clear image of uncleanness simply due to her femaleness,³⁰ the woman does not notice when her jar is broken and thus loses all of her grain, the basic means of subsistence for the poor in antiquity.³¹ The tension inherent in this story is underscored by a well known parallel in the Hebrew Bible, the story of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:8–16).³² In a time of famine Elijah is told to go to the widow of Zarephath who has been commanded to feed him. When Elijah finds her, she tells him that she has nothing prepared and only a small amount of meal and oil. Miraculously, the grain in her jar does not run out and she, her child and Elijah subsist on cakes baked from her supplies for many days. Thus, the Empty Jar parable reverses the story of the Elijah and the widow Zarephath. No prophet comes to the woman's aid; her jar remains empty. Once again, expectations for the reign of God are reversed.³³ The images of women in these three parables are hardly complimentary. One loses a coin worth two days sustenance, another spills her grain without noticing it, another overproduces bread; the point of the parable is made at each woman's expense.

The final authentic parable which employs the image of a woman is usually called the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:2–8).³⁴ Although

occasionally named after the widow in the story, the main character in the story is the man.³⁵ In this engaging story, a woman receives justice at court not because her cause is just, nor because the judge she approaches is just, but because she is persistent to the point of threatening the judge with a black eye ("she will wear me out," lit. "give me a black eye" or "bruise" [σπρωπιάζω]). The image is striking to the point of being humorous. The contrast between the social and economic circumstances of the two characters in the story is stark: the judge would be a member of the urban elite, the woman of the urban poor.³⁶ Further, in a long history of Jewish tradition, widows belonged to a category of persons who needed special protection from God: "widows, orphans and foreigners." Israelites were commanded to protect these classes. Just as God protected the Israelites while they were in bondage in Egypt, so he is the patron of the most needy of the Israelite community.³⁷ Indeed, the treatment of widows, orphans and foreigners amounted to a gauge for determining the faithfulness of the Jewish people.³⁸

Many commentators see the parable in terms of an analogy between the judge and God: if a widow can get justice from an unjust judge, how much more likely will God respond to persistent prayer? Luke's appended interpretation encourages this reading (Luke 18:6-8),³⁹ but is probably secondary.⁴⁰ Read without this Lukan interpretation, the parable takes on a quite different meaning. The emphasis falls upon the woman's unflagging insistence for vindication, not upon the action of the judge whose motive is self interest. The parable thus portrays a disadvantaged widow gaining justice by her own means, without reliance upon God.⁴¹ It might fittingly be likened to Luke's parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-8), in that the overwhelmingly aggressive and even insubordinate behavior the widow achieves her intended result. Her actions border upon harassment. Jesus' description of this woman, although hardly complimentary, is in marked contrast to the images of domestic failure in the parables of the Leaven, the Lost Coin, and the Empty Jar. Such a story surely reinforces shrewd, calculated and resistant behavior on the part of the oppressed and is not merely a metaphor for the continuation of the kingdom.⁴² Still, since the internal monologue is that of the judge, the story reflects not the the woman's perspective, but the man's.

Open Commensality and the Parable of the Feast

Insofar as gender issues and women are concerned, the above parables do not substantiate modern feminist claims for Jesus. Rather, they suggest a male-centered outlook that tends to portray women characters in less than complimentary ways. Nor do these parables focus on the acceptance of women as women into the kingdom, but rather on their status as members of a larger class of outcasts whose acceptability as God's children underscores the unexpected nature of the reign of God. One parable, however, when read in conjunction with the tradition that Jesus welcomed "tax collectors and sinners" to his table does seem to suggest the invitation of women to the Kingdom of God, and that is the parable of the Feast (Matt 22:2-13; Luke 14:16-24). Here the theme of the unexpected nature of the Kingdom of God has its clearest expression. In this parable Jesus overturns ancient social paradigms of honor and wealth in a depiction of a Feast for the lowly and the derelict, rather than one for the customary guests of rank and privilege. Borg, Crossan, and Schüssler Fiorenza all focus on the message of the parable of the Feast and Jesus' table practice as a sign of his egalitarian ethic.⁴³ Both Borg and Schüssler Fiorenza see Jesus as opening up the banquet of the Kingdom to the unclean: Jesus overturns purity regulations by eating with women.⁴⁴ Dominic Crossan and Luise Schottroff see Jesus' egalitarianism as reflective of a peasant mentality or a consequence of impoverishment. Jesus' parable of the Feast thus portrays the Kingdom of God as a large inclusive meal to which are invited people from all levels of society, including women (Luke 14:16-24; Matt 22:1-14; Thom 64:1-12).⁴⁵

Such arguments require some nuance. First, the argument that Jesus here challenges purity regulations is unlikely since, as was noted earlier, Jews may not have been overly concerned with purity outside of the Temple, and because Rabbinic sources emphasizing purity issues post-date the New Testament. Recent reconstructions of the Qumran community suggest that even the purity-conscious sectarians at Qumran could have allowed women to join certain ritual meals. Thus concern over Jesus' table practice is more likely to have

been a matter of propriety than purity.⁴⁶ Second, the point of the parable of the Feast does not hinge on the issue of gender, but on that of class or rank. Any application of the parable to the situation of women would therefore have been strictly secondary. One could argue that women are invited as those among the poor, the sick, and the street people, but the point of the parable is not to invite *women* to the feast, but the underclasses. Jesus here does not defend the right of women to join him at table. Given the strong likelihood that Greco-Roman culture pervaded Palestine, and with it the customary presence of women at meals with men, it seems more plausible that inclusion of women at Jesus' meals reflects progressive (although controversial) cultural practices found throughout Greco-Roman society and in Hellenistic Judaism, rather than a peasant egalitarian ideology or Sophia – inspired prophetic vision.

In fact, later gospel portrayals of Jesus at meals do not show him taking a particularly radical stance. For example, in the story of his meal with Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42), Jesus does encourage Mary, who is seated at his feet. However, although such a position does indicate that Mary is receiving instruction, her posture reflects a more conservative, matronly role, and she remains silent throughout the scene. The more radical stance would have been to invite Mary to recline with him like an equal on a banquet couch, as Jesus does with Salome in the Gospel of Thomas (Thomas 61). In these Lukan stories Jesus does not appear radical in his relationships with women; it is the women who are bold, not Jesus.

In order to derive from the Feast parable an egalitarian meaning, it must be read in conjunction with one other piece of evidence from the Jesus tradition, the accusation that Jesus dined with "tax collectors and sinners" (Mark 2:15; Q 7:34). This accusation, as we have seen, reflects typical characterizations of those known for banqueting with tax collectors, pimps and prostitutes. The very imagery of disreputable banquet behavior calls to mind the presence of lewd women, slaves, and courtesans – the kind of women present in a typical Hellenistic banquet scene. This accusation should thus be seen as a standard charge of Hellenistic rhetoric, and not necessarily indicative of the occupations or morals of Jesus' actual table companions. Both Mark and Q imply that Jesus is eating with women, and thus a participant in the social progressivism of his day.⁴⁷ Again, however, the force of this tradition maintains between Jesus and his

dining companions a distinction that remains one of class, not necessarily sex-differentiation. Jesus is here accused of dining with those who are beneath his station. Dennis E. Smith writes:

The strongest evidence for the open commensality theme in the Jesus tradition is the theme that Jesus dined with tax collectors and sinners. Yet, this theme only works best if Jesus is not of the same social level with tax collectors and sinners. If all parties involved, including Jesus, are peasants, then the motif fails, for there is no experience of social stratification at table.⁴⁸

If Jesus or all of his followers are of the same low social class, then the force of the insult leveled against him is lost. Smith argues that John Dominic Crossan, although having made a good case for an egalitarian table ethic in Jesus' movement undercuts his proposition by turning Jesus into a peasant.⁴⁹ Still, it is possible to maintain a lower social location for Jesus as long as it is recognized that there would have been those even beneath his social station in ancient Palestine, particularly slaves.⁵⁰ The Feast parable would then reflect Jesus' resistance to authority on behalf of those beneath his station, including perhaps women of the lower classes, even though they are not the focus of the Feast parable proper.

That said, it is still possible to identify one tradition considered by some scholars both early and authentic, that suggests Jesus himself defended the presence of women among his followers by deflecting slander leveled against them. Probably going back in some form to Q⁵¹ is the statement of Jesus that links women to both his movement and to John the Baptist's:

Truly I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him; and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him (Matt 21:31b–32; RSV).

Here Jesus calls the women entering the Kingdom of God "whores." As I have suggested, taken as a repeated form of slander leveled against Jesus and his table companions, rather than as a social description of some of his followers, this would indicate that he was well aware of the controversial nature of his group, including the presence of women. He accepted the label of the women around

him as "whores," possibly in bitter jest, even as the basis of a bitingly sarcastic riposte. His opponents accused him of consorting with "tax collectors and whores," but those so labeled will enter the Kingdom of God first. To claim an insult robs it of its power. Of course, Jesus' use of snide humor implies discomfort as well as acceptance. By using the gender stereotypical label of "whores" for the women in his group, Jesus identifies the underlying cause of the tension aroused by the presence of women among his followers – their difference. So employed, humor seeks to relieve tension through laughter, while at the same time serving to incorporate women in a predominantly male group.⁵² In sum, this saying does not identify the women in Jesus' group as actual prostitutes, but merely repeats a slander leveled against women whose bad reputations are due either to their socially progressive behavior, or to their low social status.⁵³ That Jesus could have expressed his discomfort with the presence of women in his company by means of snide humor suggests either the resistant attitude of lower class peasants, or a wit informed by the currents of Greco-Roman philosophy present in first century Palestine, or both.⁵⁴

Thus, the parable of the Feast in combination with the typical characterization of his dining companions as "tax collectors, sinners and whores," suggests that Jesus' teaching on open commensality was inclusive of women and those beneath Jesus' station, such as domestic servants and slaves. Yet the critique of Greco-Roman ideals of rank and privilege (and by extension the system of slavery) remains central to the Feast parable and this theme can be shown to be far more significant than gender within Jesus' overall message.

Slavery, Ethics and the Kingdom of God

Although obscured in most translations due to the use of terms like "servant" and "steward," slave imagery abounds within the parables and sayings of Jesus far more than feminine imagery. For example, Jesus' parables use terms like δούλος, "slave" (Matt 18:23; Luke 14:17; Matt 21:34/Luke 20:10; cf. Thomas 65; Luke 19:13/Matt 25:14), οἰκονόμος, "steward" (Luke 16:1), as well as ἀμπελονργός, "vine-dresser" (Luke 13:7), γεωργός, "tenant" (Matt 21:34/Luke 20:10; cf. Thomas 65), ἐργάτης, "worker" (Matt 20:1), and μίσθιος, "hired laborer" (Luke 15:17).⁵⁵ Josephus makes clear

references to servants who are real slaves, not simply hired laborers, and he does not distinguish between Jewish slaves and non-Jewish slaves – both are δούλοι.⁵⁶ Although not as crucial to the economy as elsewhere in the Roman empire, the presence of slaves as workers, especially as domestic workers or even debt slaves should be assumed for first century Palestine. The use of tenant farmers and sharecroppers was more common, but slaves were used in both agricultural contexts and in the trades.⁵⁷ The so-called "Servant" parables of Jesus and several of his sayings are thus better understood within the context of the institution of Greco-Roman slavery.⁵⁸ As Crossan has pointed out, a total of nine parables from the gospels have servants as central characters and involve a "master-servant relationship and a moment of critical reckoning therein."⁵⁹ Two parables usually considered authentic illustrate Jesus' attitude toward slaves and the servant/master relationship: the parable of the Dishonest Steward (Luke 16:1–8) and the Unmerciful Slave (Matt 18:23–24).⁶⁰

The parable of the Dishonest Steward continues to puzzle commentators. In this story the manager of a rich man's estate is dismissed for supposed financial mismanagement. Following his dismissal, the steward calls in his master's debtors and reduces the amount of their debts to his employer with the understanding that in return they will care for him in his time of need. He is subsequently praised by his master for his shrewdness. The original parable probably ended at this point (16:8a), as the κύριος here easily refers back to the δ κύριος in vv. 3 and 5.⁶¹ The three appended explanations to the parable in Luke demonstrate the difficulties of its interpretation even in antiquity.⁶² In past years many scholars saw the meaning of the parable centered on the prudent behavior of the steward during a time of crisis, a course of action analogous to the appropriate response to the preaching of the Kingdom.⁶³ More recent scholars have questioned an apocalyptic interpretation,⁶⁴ and rightly refocus upon the social word evoked in the parable itself.⁶⁵ The audience of the parable would have assumed that the steward (οἰκονόμος) was a slave or freedman.⁶⁶ The steward is dismissed from his post, and faces the prospect of hard manual labor (Luke 16:3). In quick response, the steward acts to protect his own interests. The difficulty of interpretation lies in the master's praise for a servant, who has in effect twice defrauded him of large amounts of money.

Marv Ann Beavis has proposed that the best context in which

to understand the steward is in his resemblance to Aesop the crafty, trickster slave of the *Life of Aesop*. In episode after episode, this Greco-Roman picaresque hero⁶⁷ finds himself in similar crises, in trouble with his master or mistress, takes quick action to protect himself – usually by means of his quick wit, and subsequently gets the better of his superiors. Seen against this backdrop, the story of the Dishonest Steward would be both funny and familiar. The steward is in trouble with his master, he acts to remedy the situation behind his master's back, and then succeeds and receives the praise of his master for doing so. The charges leveled against the steward may be exaggerated, as a character like Aesop is often quickly punished on the basis of false accusations without the opportunity to defend himself.⁶⁸ In any case, the sympathy of the hearers of this parable, especially those from the lower classes, would have been with the steward and the other debtors, not the master.⁶⁹ The story thus has a subversive function, in that it praises the self-interested, resistant actions of a slave or freedman steward, whose actions help him survive in economically threatening circumstances. Neither the institution of slavery nor economic exploitation is directly challenged; rather the survivalist actions of the steward are praised.⁷⁰

The parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matt 18:23–35) is found only in Matthew's gospel where it concludes the discourse on community discipline. As Matthew presents it, the parable concerns the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven, the mutual forgiveness required in the community, and the subsequent judgment in light of moral failure. Interpreters have generally argued that the connective δὲ αὐτοῦ (therefore) and introductory formula "the kingdom of Heaven is like" (v. 23a) are Matthean, as is the final reference to judgment at the end of the parable proper (v. 35).⁷¹

The story hinges on the intricate relationships between patrons and their clients among the upper classes.⁷² The servant in this case is clearly a slave (δούλος, v. 23) as is demonstrated by the king's ability to sell not only the servant, but his wife and children (v. 25). His entire family is owned by the king, although this particular slave has obviously risen to a high level within the court bureaucracy. The forgiveness of the slave's unimaginably large debt by the king is the most surprising feature of the story (v. 27), as one would expect the king to keep the debt in place as a means to exert control over his

well-placed underling. For this reason Herzog's suggestion that the king's action is meant to recall the messianic jubilee has merit.⁷³ However, it is clear from the story that the actions of a king are not sufficient to initiate the jubilee; persons within each level of the bureaucracy must also be willing to forgive the debts owed to them. As Jeremias has suggested, the story is thus a negative example of discipleship⁷⁴ and its message comports with Jesus' exhortation to pray for mutual forgiveness of debts (Matt 6:12; Luke 11:4a–b). High levels of indebtedness led inexorably to increased enslavements of the lower classes, who could be forced to sell themselves or their children in order to meet the terms of outstanding loans.⁷⁵ The parable of the Unmerciful Servant thus suggests to Jesus' hearers the surprising solution of the forgiveness of debts, even those among the lower classes, who should not merely wait for a coming messianic jubilee.

Since other servant parables attributed to Jesus are less unsettling in their implications, gospel traditions that attempt to reverse the implications of these parables by picturing slaves behaving in expected and obedient ways are thus rendered historically suspect. In later traditions slaves watch eagerly for their returning master (Mark 13:34–37),⁷⁶ are punished accordingly for good or bad behavior (by dismemberment [διχοτομέω] Matt 24:45–51/Luke 12:42–46),⁷⁷ and should not expect their master to wait upon them upon his return (Luke 17:7–10).⁷⁸ Moreover, it must be explicitly stated at a later point that slaves are not above their masters (Matt 10:24; John 13:16).⁷⁹ This trajectory in the gospel tradition suggests that the gospel writers needed to temper Jesus' authentic teachings in order to deflect the controversial nature of earlier traditions concerning slavery and slave/master relations.

In light of Jesus' interest in his parables to challenge his hearers to consider slave/master relations, I would like to introduce into this discussion two traditions that have gone unnoticed for their probable significance for Jesus' social interests: the welcoming of "children" into the Kingdom of God (Mark 10:14/Matt 19:14/Luke 9:18:16) and the cryptic reference to those who make themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom (Matt 19:12). Both suggest Jesus maintained a subversive attitude towards slavery. In Mark 10:14–15 Jesus says,⁸⁰

Let the children (*παῖδια*) come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child (*παιδίον*) will not enter it.

Virtually all commentators assume that Jesus here refers to children, and refer at some length to the low familial and social status of children in antiquity.⁸¹ Children are those last who shall be first (Matt 20:16; cf. Mark 10:31; Matt 19:30; Luke 13:30; Thomas 4). However, children were not the lowest in prestige in ancient society unless they were slaves. Further, free children were not marginalized in antiquity, and were involved in many rites and festivals of public and private life.⁸² Indeed, in Mark servitude is the model for discipleship, not childhood. Mark clearly identifies the "last" in prestige as slaves or servants. Whoever would be first (*πρῶτος*) must become the slave (*δοῦλος*) of all (Mark 10:44);⁸³ whoever would be first (*πρῶτος*) must be last and servant (*δούλος*) of all (Mark 9:35).⁸⁴ In light of these observations, the saying probably has a quite different meaning, especially in Mark. The cognates *παῖς* and *παιδίον* have another meaning that goes unnoticed here. Both can mean slave or young slave, and can include boys, girls and handsome young men. This meaning is well attested in both Hellenistic literature, including Josephus and Philo,⁸⁵ and in papyri contemporary with the New Testament.⁸⁶ It is eminently reasonable, then, to propose that Jesus' hearers are told to identify themselves with the enslaved or those in positions of servitude. In fact, the reign of God belongs especially to them. Given that according to Mark Jesus is scolded by his disciples for blessing *παῖδια* brought to him (Mark 10:13), Jesus' saying makes more sense if it refers to slaves, not children. Surely the statement that young slaves were of God's kingdom would have been met with surprise or even shock by his hearers, especially the free, even if they were poor.⁸⁷ Any who had been forced to sell children into servitude, however, would have appreciated Jesus' subversive speech.

The Eunuch saying carries this admonition to an even further extreme (Matt 19:12a). One of the most difficult of Jesus' sayings, it is probably authentic.⁸⁸ Since it can be easily detached from its Matthean setting, it probably circulated separately from the discussion concerning divorce (Matt 19:4–10). It is usually assumed that

the reference here is to a celibate lifestyle, a recommendation which would have been hard to accept.⁸⁹ However, eunuchs were not necessarily celibate, merely sterile. In fact, eunuchs were often castrated as young boys in order to maintain their appeal as sex objects. Hence, I would like to suggest an alternative interpretation. Not only were eunuchs in a category segregated and devalued in Jewish life⁹⁰ but virtually all eunuchs were slaves or freedmen, having been cruelly emasculated before puberty. Although like all slaves eunuchs could rise within estate and royal bureaucracies, they were still the objects of derision and scorn.⁹¹ Thus in a clear use of hyperbole, Jesus declares that some will "castrate (*ἐκτονχεῖν*) themselves for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 19:12) – i.e., they will become like slaves. What could this mean? I would like to suggest that it be understood in light of the kind of self-sacrifice recommended in 1 Clement:

We know that many among ourselves have given themselves to bondage (*εἰς δερμά*) that they might ransom others. Many have delivered themselves to slavery (*εἰς δουλείαν*), and provided food for others with the price they received for themselves.⁹²

This would place this saying well within the context of other ethical statements of Jesus found in other well known sayings: lend without interest (Thom 95:1–2/ Matt 5:42b; Luke 6:34–35),⁹³ always give to beggars (Matt 5:42/Luke 6:30),⁹⁴ offer the other cheek, give the shirt off your back, walk that extra mile (Matt 5:39–41)⁹⁵ and sell all you have and give to the poor (Mark 10:21).⁹⁶ The first shall be last and the last shall be first (Matt 20:16; cf. Mark 10:31; Matt 19:30; Luke 13:30; Thom 4);⁹⁷ whoever would be first (*πρῶτος*) must become the slave (*δοῦλος*) of all (Mark 10:44);⁹⁸ whoever would be first (*πρῶτος*) must be last and servant (*δούλος*) of all (Mark 9:35).⁹⁹ Jesus' could be espousing either a radical Hebrew ideal of charity¹⁰⁰ or a Hellenistic philosophical ethic.¹⁰¹ The social environment of Palestine and the Galilee allows for both.¹⁰² Thus, both the Eunuch and the Young Slave sayings are highlighted by a saturnalian inversion of rank, and encourage this behavior as an ongoing altruistic ethic in the Kingdom of God. Mark interprets Jesus' ideal of service in terms of his suffering and death, an ideal which the Markan community should emulate during times of persecution (Mark 10:45) and in positions of leadership (Mark 10:35–45). John

portrays Jesus as actually performing the service of a slave by washing the disciples' feet at a meal (John 13:1–20).

Conflicts in the Family

Such teachings inevitably created social conflicts, their nature and intensity depending in considerable part on the social class of the hearers. Contemporary dissension over Jesus' teachings has certainly left its mark on the gospel record in the form of an anti-familial theme and an emphasis on the primacy of a heavenly Father, not an earthly one. Jesus' true relatives are not his real family, but those who do the will of the Father (Matt 12:48–50/Thomas 99; cf. Mark 3:33–35/Luke 8:21);¹⁰³ one must be ready to hate one's own family for the kingdom (Luke 14:26; cf. Thomas 55; Matt 10:37/Thomas 101),¹⁰⁴ and in Luke those who come after Jesus must revoke "father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters" (Luke 14:25–27).¹⁰⁵ Certain scholars have argued that Jesus' remarks concerning both the family and God's true fatherhood reflect an anti-patriarchal ethic in his teachings.¹⁰⁶

However, it is highly unlikely that family disruption caused by Jesus' movement can be explained on the basis of a direct challenge to the inequality between men and women in the family. Peasant families and marital relationships are characterized by their gendered division of labor.¹⁰⁷ Further, the family conflict described in the two following passages derived from Q is clearly generational, not gendered:

"For henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against her mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. (Q 12:52–53).¹⁰⁸

And again:

Whoever loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Matt 10:37)¹⁰⁹

Thomas' version of the first saying, which is no doubt an earlier form, omits the reference to women altogether, and keeps the

conflict strictly between father and son (Thomas 16).¹¹⁰ Further, conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law is customary in extended families, since the daughter-in-law is not tied to her new family by blood, and mothers-in-law generally rule over their daughters-in-law sternly.¹¹¹ This underscores the secondary nature of Q 12:52–53 and makes it more likely that someone unfamiliar with women's intimate relationships – a scribe, perhaps – has expanded the saying on the basis of Mic 7:5–6.¹¹² The Lukan counterpart of Matt 10:37 has likewise expanded the familial conflicts to include those between men and women, as well as those between parents and children: one must "hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters" (Luke 14:25–27 RSV).¹¹³ The Lukan version, omitting the reference to wives and children and requiring hatred of the family, is probably more authentic.

This anti-familial theme in the gospel record suggests that women and men did leave their families to follow Jesus; their usual household concerns became secondary to their commitment to his vision. This caused dissension, divisions, and probably separations. The potential for family crisis is clear from the fact that for members of the working classes and the peasantry, survival depended on close interdependence between husband and wife.¹¹⁴ Jesus' teachings on marriage show sensitivity to this reality of lower class life. Thus, although Jesus acknowledged the family dissension and divisions caused by his message, he seems to have upheld the marriage and family bond between men and women by restricting divorce and remarriage.

Marriage and Divorce

Jesus' teaching on divorce occurs in three separate strands of early Christian tradition: Mark (Mark 10:5–10/Matt 5:32), Q (Luke 16:18/Matt 5:32), and Paul (1 Cor 7:9–11). This triple attestation makes it likely that Jesus made a pronouncement on divorce. Unfortunately, the great discrepancy among the three traditions makes Jesus' actual words irrecoverable.¹¹⁵ Matthew has added the exception clause for cases involving adultery or fornication (*πορνεία*, Matt 5:32, 19:9), an addition that is widely considered Matthean.¹¹⁶ The unqualified moral prohibition found in Mark is probably earlier. Both Mark and Paul assume that either the man or the woman

has the legal right to initiate a divorce; Q assumes that right is only the man's. The significant variations in wording found among the divorce sayings suggest early Christians found Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce difficult. It is best then to conclude that Jesus did prohibit divorce and remarriage.¹¹⁷ The Markan version will be a convenient point of departure, since it is the earliest of the Synoptic versions.

Mark sets Jesus' comments on divorce in the context of a dialogue with Pharisees who have questioned him about divorce. Jesus responds by challenging Mosaic law (Deut 24:1-4), which allows a man to dissolve his marriage by simply presenting his wife with a certificate of divorce. Portrayed here as a point of contention with Jewish authorities on the Law, Jesus' teaching may be viewed in terms of the debate between the schools of the conservative Shammai and more liberal Hillel.¹¹⁸ The use of Genesis to support the security of the marriage bond sounds strikingly similar to discussions found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, which seem to prohibit both polygamy as well as remarriage.¹¹⁹ The dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees ends with an aphorism: "Therefore what God has joined together let no one separate" (Χωρῖς) (Mark 10:9). Such aphorisms are characteristic of Jesus' authentic words. In an aside to his disciples, Jesus categorically prohibits divorce and remarriage (Mark 10:10-12). Here Jesus' views are reminiscent of Mal 2:10-16.¹²⁰ His comments also suggest that both men and women could initiate divorce proceedings, and thus be equally culpable of adultery. Although many scholars argue this saying assumes Roman and not Jewish law, it is clear that some Jewish women did sue for divorce in first century Palestine.¹²¹ It is also the case, however, that Cynic-Stoic philosophical writers were similarly supportive of marriage, and therefore probable that we have here another theme in Jesus' teaching which reflects the multi-cultural environment of first century Palestine.¹²²

One could argue that in his affirmation of the sanctity of marriage Jesus reinforces the main hierarchical relationship between the sexes in ancient society rather than disrupts it. Whether this prohibition of divorce would be restrictive of women dependent on their individual situations. It may have limited some Jewish women, by denying a legal right they enjoyed; others, dependent on their husbands for their equal share in the economic unit of a peasant household, may have welcomed it. Nor should it be forgotten that such a

proscription would have been even more restrictive of men, since first century men enjoyed a high degree of sexual freedom as well as legal access to divorce. The fact that Jesus spoke to the matter at all suggests that divorce and separation were facts of life among his followers.

Jesus' teachings thus contain an anti-familial theme and suggest that family divisions and even marital separations occurred within the families of those who responded to his message. However, there is little evidence that Jesus challenged family solidarity on the grounds that the family was inherently patriarchal or was characterized by the inequality between sexes; rather it seems to have been the case that the radical commitment required by his teachings diminished the relative importance of other matters. The proof of this is twofold: he did not attack marriage, the central hierarchical relationship between a man and a woman in his society, and the divisions caused by his message were primarily between the generations, not the sexes. Finally, Jesus seems to have been critical of the reverence children accord fathers, or even parents. Jesus' ideal family requires husbands and wives, but it does not include fathers: Jesus' true relatives do the will of the Father in heaven (Matt 12:48-50/Thomas 99; cf. Mark 3:33-35/Luke 8:21). Yet even this appears to reflect not an anti-patriarchal theme in Jesus' teaching, but a Hebraic reaffirmation of the fatherhood of God, a faith that had ramifications for relationships between the generations, rather than between women and men.

Call No Man On Earth Father

Few dispute that Jesus addressed God as Father.¹²³ Based on the work of Joachim Jeremias, many Christian scholars have affirmed the special nature of Jesus' relationship to God on the basis of this title and have argued that Jesus' use of the term *abba* set him apart from both Hellenistic Judaism and the early church.¹²⁴ Robert Hammerton-Kelly further asserted the anti-patriarchal nature of Jesus' theology in the wake of feminist critiques of the use of titles like "father" for God.¹²⁵ Certain feminist scholars followed Hammerton-Kelly's example in their reconstructions of the message of Jesus.¹²⁶ Mary Rose D'Angelo has documented this discussion,

and successfully called all aspects of it into question.¹²⁷ Jewish texts in first century Palestine, most notably from Qumran,¹²⁸ give evidence for the use of the term "father" as an address to God both in general declarative statements, and in prayer. Further, linguistic analysis of the use of the Aramaic *abba* does not support a specialized meaning conveying the intimacy between father and child.¹²⁹ Rather, the title "father" evoked the power, divine authority and kingship of the Jewish God in the face of Roman Imperial propaganda.¹³⁰ D' Angelo argues that presupposing as it does the superiority of men within society, it cannot convey an anti-patriarchal meaning. "Father" is the highest title of authority only within a social system in which privileged men have power over women, children, and such lesser males, as slaves, freedmen and clients.¹³¹ Therefore, if Jesus addressed God as his father, he did so within the context of a Hellenistic Judaism that revered its God as king in an empire that demanded fealty to the emperor (cf. Mark 12:17/Luke 20:25/ Matt 22:21; Thomas 100:2-3).

Yet the evidence that Jesus applied the title "Father" to God is slight. It is limited to Mark 14:36 when Jesus prays to God in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord's Prayer in Q (Luke 11:2b/Matt 6:9), and also from Q the so-called "Johannine Thunderbolt" (Luke 10:21-22/Matt 11:25-27).¹³² But only with great difficulty can one ascribe to Jesus the use of "*abba*" for God in Mark 14:36, given that it occurs in a section of Mark which is undeniably Markan composition. For one thing Jesus is alone; no one can witness to his words. Second, Mark casts Jesus as one in a line of Jewish martyrs.¹³³ Further, since "abba" was used liturgically in the early church (the spirit causes believers to cry out "Abba, father!") [*Ἀββὰ ὁ πατήρ*] [Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15]),¹³⁴ the use of Aramaic does not suggest that here we have Jesus' actual words. Thus, the cry of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane almost certainly does not go back to Jesus. Similarly, Jesus' claim of a special relationship with the Father in Luke 10:21-22/Matt 11:25-27 reflects Q's identification of Jesus with the figure of Wisdom, and is therefore not likely to represent Jesus' understanding of God or himself.¹³⁵ The Lord's Prayer, derived from Q, thus remains the only identification of God as *πατήρ* ("father") that can reasonably be attributed to Jesus himself. Yet there is no compelling reason to assume that the Aramaic "Abba" lies behind this address. No recensions of the Lord's Prayer read "Abba" nor is

there any evidence that the Lord's Prayer was composed in anything but Greek.¹³⁶ Given that "Father" appears as an address in Jewish prayer of the period, D'Angelo is right to conclude that it is not surprising to find Jesus employing in prayer "an address to God that called Caesar's reign into question and made a special claim on God's protection, mercy, and providence."¹³⁷

Still, D' Angelo's discussion accounts neither for the absence of fathers from Jesus' ideal family nor for the generational nature of the dispute fostered by Jesus' message. The context of a Jewish anti-imperial theology does not by itself explain either Jesus' address of God as father, or the incidence of family conflict created by his message.

However, another controversy within Judaism could well explain Jesus' interest in God as the true father. In Judaism, as in other religions of the ancient Mediterranean, there existed a complex of family rituals surrounding the burial of family members; it is commonly referred to as the cult of the dead. This family cult was usually dominated by women, although within Judaism men were also active in mourning rites. Ceremonies included funeral liturgies and feasts, frequent visits to the burial place, and the offering of foodstuffs to the deceased, who was thought to be in need of sustenance following death.¹³⁸ These practices were condemned by a number of Jewish prophets and assailed in other biblical writings. The Deuteronomist, for instance, declared that such practices were in conflict with Yahwism and centralized worship of Yahweh in the Jerusalem Temple. Laceration of the flesh, practiced by the prophets of Jezebel (1 Kgs 18:28), is condemned in Deut 14:1.¹³⁹ Elsewhere we find denunciations of the customs of leaving food in tombs and funerary feasting with the dead.¹⁴⁰ Isaiah denounces the continued invocation of the spirits of the dead, as well as other related customs such as eating with the dead in tombs.¹⁴¹ Neither Jeremiah nor Ezekiel participated in funerals; Ezekiel did not even mourn the death of his wife.¹⁴²

In Jesus' day care of the dead included rites of reburial; after the body of a loved one had decayed, the bones were carefully placed in a bone-box called an ossuary, which was then placed in a niche in the family tomb. Rather than being restricted to a particular group of Jews, such as the Pharisees or the upper classes, such reburials are now considered to have been performed more generally.¹⁴³

Even the High Priest Caiaphas and his family were re-buried in ossuaries.¹⁴⁴ Inscriptional evidence for the naming of children after family members rather than popular biblical figures may reflect Hellenistic influence, but it clearly shows an interest in Jewish ancestral lines among Palestinian Jews of the Second Temple period.¹⁴⁵

The veneration of special prophets and patriarchs was a well established practice in first century Palestine. Extant at the time of Jesus were tombs dedicated to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, Rachel, the Maccabean martyrs, the prophetess Huldā, the prophet Isaiah, the prophet Zechariah ben Judah and a necropolis of kings near Jerusalem.¹⁴⁶ Making pilgrimages to these tombs and monuments¹⁴⁷ is precisely the custom that is being criticized in Q 11:47–51 (Luke 11:47–51/Matt 23:29–36).¹⁴⁸ Several of these special tomb monuments, such as Zechariah's, are still standing in the Kidron valley.¹⁴⁹ In Bethlehem a tomb monument to Rachel still remains.¹⁵⁰ Depictions of these tombs of the special dead can be found as ossuary decorations, further attesting to their popularity during the first century.¹⁵¹ Jewish writers are found debating the efficacy of prayer to prophets and "fathers." Deborah is portrayed in the first century *Biblical Antiquities* as saying right before her death: "Do not hope in your fathers (*patres*)," an exhortation which correctly – if ironically would discourage veneration of her as a dead prophetess and matriarch.¹⁵² In Second Baruch the writer envisions a future in which such prayers to the ancestors and prophets will cease.¹⁵³ John the Baptist warned his contemporaries not to depend on Abraham as their Father (Matt 3:7–10/Luke 3:7–9).

Within this context I would like to place a series of sayings attributed to Jesus which suggest both a generational dispute over burials and disapprobation of practices involving veneration of the dead:

To another (Jesus) said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father." But he said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God (Luke 9:59/Matt 8:21)."¹⁵⁴

Where the corpse is, there the eagles will be gathered together (Luke 17:37/ Matt 24:28).¹⁵⁵

Become passersby (Thomas 42).¹⁵⁶

Woe to you! for you are like unmarked graves, and people who walk over them do not know it (Luke 11:44/Matt 23:27).¹⁵⁷

Woe to you! for you build the tombs of the prophets but it was your fathers that killed them (Luke 11:47/Matt 23:29).¹⁵⁸

Call no man your father on earth (Matt 23:6–11).¹⁵⁹

The saying on the dead burying their dead is usually considered authentic. Since burial rites for parents were a special responsibility, this saying would have been particularly offensive to many. Accordingly, most scholars have interpreted this saying to mean "let the (spiritually) dead bury the (physically) dead."¹⁶⁰ However, Byron McCane has argued persuasively that this saying refers not to initial burial, but to reburial, particularly the practice of reburial in ossuaries. Jesus would then be saying, "let the dead (in the tombs) re-bury their own dead," and thus denouncing special attention to the dead as contrary to his teaching of the Kingdom of God.¹⁶¹ The saying from the Gospel of Thomas can also be read to betray a similar critique of the over attention to graves: "Become passersby" (*γοιτρεῖτε*) may well allude to the phrase "passersby" common in ancient grave epitaphs. The point would be to keep on walking.¹⁶² The saying on eagles and corpses seems to express a similar distaste for burials; vultures were birds of carrion, in the same class with ravens and crows.¹⁶³ This teaching of Jesus is the most likely to foster a family generational dispute, as it denies the legitimacy of burial practices traditionally owed to parents by their children. Excessive concern with tombs, corpses, and burials – to one's "fathers" or ancestors – was regularly censured by biblical writers and prophets as being at odds with true Hebraic monotheism. Jesus' concern was similar.

But this does not fully explain the witty harshness of these sayings, which fit better in a Hellenistic context. Cynic, Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also considered such solicitude for the dead superstitious, and were fond of quoting Theodore the Atheist to Lysimachus who was threatened with death without burial: "What matters it if I rot on the earth or under it?"¹⁶⁴ Socrates, of course, was also notable for his lack of concern for his own burial. When asked how he would like to be buried, he replied, "However you please, if you can catch me."¹⁶⁵ Other philosophers, especially Cynics, expressed a similar lack of concern for the disposal of their remains.¹⁶⁶ Thus, Jesus' saying has a clear Hellenistic flavor to it, although the underlying concern is Hebraic not Greek.

Likely enough, Jesus also rejected the practice of venerating the dead at tombs. The woes against the Pharisees involving graves and the tombs of the prophets should be reconsidered as evidence for the historical Jesus. Many scholars reject these sayings because they betray the influence of a Deuteronomistic view of history and therefore tend to presuppose the situation following Jesus' death.¹⁶⁷ While that is certainly the case for Luke 11:49–51/Matt 23:34–36, there are several reasons to consider the less complex sayings in Luke 11:44, 49/ Matt 23:27, 29 as authentic. First, Q 11:47–48 is not so obviously Deuteronomistic, and is detachable from Q 11:49–51.¹⁶⁸ Second, O. H. Steck has argued that by the first century C.E. two themes in prophetic thought had coalesced: 1) the Deuteronomistic view of history which assumed that God's judgment was precipitated by Israel's disobedience to God's law, and 2) the notion that prophets were habitually killed by Israel (cf. Neh. 9:26). According to Steck this blended theme was an oral tradition, widespread in Palestinian Judaism between 200 B.C.E. and 100 C.E.¹⁶⁹ Hence Jesus' words in Q 11:47–48 do not presuppose his death, and may make good sense for the situation following the death of John the Baptist. It is therefore not necessary to consider the entire section of the woes against the Pharisees in Matt 23:27–36/Luke 11:44–51 inauthentic. Jesus could well be reproaching the Pharisees for participating in a documentable and popular institution from first century Palestine, the veneration of popular prophets and patriarchs at special tombsites. This scenario accords well with the widespread view that Jesus was a prophetic figure who defended a strict view of Hebrew monotheism.

Clearly, Matthew so understood these imprecations. As a precursor to the woes against the Pharisees, he quotes Jesus as saying:

Call no man your Father on earth, for you have one Father who is in heaven (Matt 23:9) (RSV).

This is a Matthean addition to Mark 12:37b–40, the question concerning the greatest commandment, which Matthew connects to one of the Q passages in which Jesus attacks the popular veneration of the prophets (Q 11:47–48). This suggests a concern not for family, marriage, or patriarchy, but for monotheism.¹⁷⁰ Here, emphasizing and expanding on a theme that I suggest was fundamental to

Jesus' own teaching, Matthew reasserts Hebrew monotheism according to classic prophetic style: God sends prophets who preach repentance, but Israel persecutes and subsequently kills them.

Jesus' concern for the veneration of prophets at tombsites readily comports with the saying "let the dead bury their own dead," which criticized the reburial of "fathers" as contrary to the vision of the Kingdom of God. Both would reflect an ongoing concern within Judaism going back to Exilic times. The presence of such a prophetic theme in Jesus' teaching would best explain the repeated characterization of Jesus as a prophet¹⁷¹ without denying the Hellenistic flavor of many of his sayings.¹⁷² Further, according to Q Jesus taught that the judgment would come unnoticed in the midst of everyday activities (Luke 11:26–32/Matt 24:37–39; Luke 17:34–35/Matt 24:40–41).¹⁷³ That is, most would not notice that there was anything amiss. Similarly, burial customs were so much a part of the culture it is easy to imagine that few would have considered them objectionable.

That Jesus repudiated extravagant burial practices for parents and the veneration of patriarchs and special prophets at tombs makes better sense of his omission of fathers from the ideal family (Mark 3:33–35) and the generational nature of family divisions fostered by his message as found in Q (Luke 12:52–53/Matt 10:35–36; Luke 14:25–27; Matt 10:37). Burial customs are essential to the workings of any culture, and Jesus' challenge to traditional practices, even ancient practices considered at odds with Jewish monotheistic tradition, would have been highly offensive and caused deep divisions within households.¹⁷⁴ This theme of Jesus' teachings demonstrates both the Hebrew aspects of his message, and its Hellenistic flavor, reflecting as it does both prophetic monotheistic interests and the often mordant wit of Hellenistic aphorisms expressing a lack of interest in burial. The easy intertwining of these two influences in Jesus' message should warn us against glibly characterizing him as either a prophetic character or a Cynic, but it does allow for his assimilation in the culturally eclectic environment of Palestine and Lower Galilee. Further, this interpretation of Jesus' message does not permit an anti-patriarchal characterization either for Jesus' emphasis on the fatherhood of God or for the absence of fathers in the ideal family. Rather, Jesus' interest was focused on other matters entirely, particularly the fatherhood of the one God within his kingdom.

Gender, Class and Jesus: Some Conclusions

Women obviously joined the Jesus movement, although interest in that presence is largely absent from Jesus' teaching itself. A few women belonged to the Jesus movement just as they were present in small numbers among the Cynics, Epicureans, Pythagoreans, Stoics, Therapeutae, the Zealot group led by Simon son of Gioras, the disciples of John the Baptist and the sectarians at Qumran. So why were women in Jesus' movement? Why did they join? Their presence no doubt reflects the fact that women then, like women now, had diverse interests.¹⁷⁵ It is inappropriate to stereotype first century women in such a way that we cannot imagine the true diversity of their experience. For example, wealthier women could have been attracted by Jesus' challenge to the ancient notion of rank, having experienced the often close relationship between women and their house slaves (Q 14:16-24; Thom 64:1-12). Poor women might have been attracted to Jesus' saying, "Blessed are the poor" (Q 6:20). Both girls sold into debt slavery and their parents might have been attracted to his declaration about the forgiveness of debts (Q 11:2-4; see also Matt 18:23-34). Some working women would have been attracted by the motif of lower class resistance to authority explicit in parables such as the Unjust Judge and the Dishonest Steward. Others may have responded, as did a number of men, to Jesus' criticism of traditional burial practices and his emphasis on God as Father. Although women's particular interests are secondary to such concerns, it can be argued that the social resistance inherent in Jesus' reign of God, and the enactment of that resistance in the context of open commensality and renewed emphasis on the Fatherhood of God must have contributed to women's interest in becoming disciples of Jesus and in joining early Christian communities.