

Jesus Was Not an Egalitarian. A Critique of an Anachronistic and Idealist Theory

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Abstract

The currently-advanced theory that Jesus was an egalitarian who founded a “community of equals” is devoid of social and political plausibility and, more importantly, of textual and historical evidence. Moreover, it distorts the actual historical and social nature of the nascent Jesus movement and constitutes a graphic example of an “idealist fallacy.” The biblical texts to which proponents of the egalitarian theory appeal show Jesus and his followers engaged not in social revolution, democratic institutions, equality, and the eradication of the traditional family, but in establishing a form of community modelled on the family as redefined by Jesus and united by familial values, norms, and modes of conduct.

I dedicate this study to the memory of Leland J. White, visionary co-editor of this journal since 1984. The topic of the essay involves the intersection of issues (historical, social, cultural, and theological) dear to his heart. I offer these rather un-PC remarks as homage to an esteemed friend and scrupulously honest colleague.

The Declaration of Independence adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776 contained the revolutionary concept that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” Across the Atlantic in the same period, a revolution in France likewise was fueled by a call for *liberté, égalité, et fraternité*. While the notion of equality or egalitarianism eventually required further clarification and specification, especially in respect to the question of whether the term “men” included slaves and women, for example, this conviction concerning human equality eventually was to animate and shape the governmental policies of all states and the social policies of all institutions of the modern world. The quest for equality eventually also was felt in religious bodies resulting not only in the restructuring of admission and leadership policies but also in religious movements supportive of the abolition of slavery, the affirmation of women’s suffrage, and the active support of civil rights movements attempting to make the equality of all persons a reality in the ecclesiastical as well as the civil sphere.

One interesting feature of some recent studies on the historical Jesus and the Jesus movement is the claim that already two thousand years ago Jesus was an “egalitarian” and that the group affiliated with the social reformer from Nazareth put into practice a “discipleship of equals.” This is a view argued forcefully by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, John Dominic Crossan, Gerd Theissen, and Theissen and Merz; for others see those listed by Kathleen Corely (1998:291, notes 3, 4). Proponents of this theory regard various New Testament texts as illustrative of Jesus’ egalitarian stance. Jesus’s injunctions to his followers to leave home, family, possessions, and protection are interpreted as an implied critique and rejection of the conventional patriarchal family and its hierarchical, male-dominated kinship structure. This supposed critique of the conventional patriarchal family structure, in turn, is then assumed by some to have involved a repudiation of the family as a model for the organization for the group associated with Jesus during his lifetime because the conventional family

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was patriarchal and hierarchical in structure and hence constituted a social form diametrically opposed to the egalitarianism that Jesus intended to establish. Those who accept as authentic Jesus' adoption and adaptation of the family model in his speaking of a new "family of God" (Mark 3:31–35 par.) maintain that this new family was organized not on patriarchal but rather on egalitarian lines. Matt 23:8–10 is interpreted as indicating an elimination of patriarchalism ("call no man father"). The purported egalitarian structure of the new family is claimed to be similar to the alleged egalitarian structure of voluntary associations of the time. After Jesus' death and prior to Paul, certain egalitarian theorist claim, this egalitarian and anti-patriarchal structure of the Jesus movement is attested in the pre-Pauline tradition expressed in Gal 3:28. With Paul, however, Schüssler Fiorenza in particular argues, this initial abandonment of patriarchy slackened, the egalitarian vision and reality was lost and there began a regrettable reversion to oppressive traditional patriarchal hierarchical family structures within the believing community. The more expansive adoption of the family and the household and household management tradition by post-Pauline New Testament authors is presented as evidence of this drastic loss of egalitarian vision and program and as a fateful return to patriarchal structures, structures which then set the organizational framework for the Church in subsequent centuries. This historical stage of the egalitarian theory is the focus of two forthcoming articles (Elliott 2002a, 2002b) and will be commented on here only in passing.

The present study presents a critical examination of this theory as it concerns the words and actions of Jesus, the premises that the theory appears to entail, the interpretation of the New Testament evidence used to support it, the sociological plausibility of such a theory, and evidence of the historical and social practice of equality by Jesus and his followers.

Definitions of "Egalitarian," "Equal," and "Equality"

Since an understanding of the terms "egalitarian," "equal," "equality" is basic to any egalitarian argument, it will be best to commence with some definitions, so as to clarify these key terms at the outset. Such a procedure, of course, is self-evident, but surprisingly is not to be found in any of the writings of the egalitarian theorists.

"Egalitarian" is defined in THE RANDOM HOUSE DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (1987, s.v.) as "1. asserting, resulting from, or characterized by belief in the equality of all people, esp. in political, economic, or social

life." As a noun it denotes "a person who adheres to egalitarian beliefs," a use first attested in 1880–85. The English term derives from the French *égalitaire*, *égalité*, which in turn derive from the Latin *aequalis* (from *aequare*, "to make level or equal") or from *aequus*, meaning "even," "equal" (WEBSTER'S NEW COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY, s.v.). For the term "equal" RHDEL gives as the first four meanings "1. as great as; the same as . . . 2. like or alike in quantity, degree, value etc.; of the same rank, ability, merit, etc. 3. evenly proportioned or balanced . . . 4. uniform in operation or effect." WNCD gives as meanings "exactly the same in measure, quantity, number or degree"; or "like in value, quality, status, or position"; or "characterized by justice, fair"; or "level," or "evenly balanced or proportioned"; or "having competent power, abilities, or means." "Equal" denotes "one having the same or a similar age, rank, station, talents, strength etc." The noun "equality" (from the Latin, *aequalitas*) is defined as the "character or condition of being equal" (WNCD) as well as "correspondence in quality, degree, value, rank, or ability" (RHDEL). The related, but distinguishable term "equity" (from Old French *équité* and ultimately the Latin, *aequus*, *aequalitas*) is defined in WNCD as "1. The state or quality of being equal or fair; fairness in dealing; 2. That which is equitable or fair."

Sociological dictionaries add salient sociological considerations. "Equality" is defined as "similarity of social status, rights, responsibilities, opportunities; an ideal principle realizable so far as social structure is concerned but conflicting with the results of the principles of liberty and competition, which lead to social selection, gradation, inequality. There is equal opportunity to become equal. Equality is a goal of social capillarity; the élite are not interested." (Fairchild, s.v.). "Egalitarianism," in turn is defined here as "The doctrine that all so-called social classes contain approximately the same relative proportions of genius, talent, mediocrity and defectiveness." (Fairchild, s.v.).

One thing that these definitions make clear is that "equal" and "equality" can, according to context, denote either exact sameness, on the one hand, or similarity, on the other. Second, "equal" can also have the sense of "fair," a quality determined not by mathematical exactness or even similarity, but by some other social or cultural standard of measurement. In this case, "equal" has the sense of "equitable." Third, "equality" has meaning with reference to some quality such as age, talents, strength, social rank or station, economic class, political or legal status, or rights, responsibilities or opportunity. Finally, social scientific discussion of equality notes that the conception of equality as a possibility for all human society did not arise until the 18th century with its altered economic, social and political

conditions and its secular optimism concerning the possibility of social transformation. The process of such transformation led from a notion of “the basic equality of membership in a society” in the eighteenth century “to include political rights in the nineteenth century and certain social rights in the twentieth century.” (Halsey 1989: 261–62). On “equality” and “egalitarianism” (criteria and instances) see also Tawney 1931; Oppenheim and Kristol (1968: 102–11).

With this clarification of the terms “equal,” “equality,” and “egalitarian” in mind, let us now turn to an examination of the theory that Jesus was an “egalitarian” who founded a “discipleship of equals.”

No Ancient “Egalitarian” Societies or Movements

As a preliminary observation, it is necessary to note that if there is New Testament evidence of egalitarianism and social equality within the Jesus movement, this would constitute a unique development in the ancient world. The concept of equality, while a motor of modern political and social movements, played no such role in the ancient world. The notion that all persons are created equal and endowed with certain inalienable rights is a construct of the modern Enlightenment and thoroughly alien to the thinking of the ancient world. There the prevailing notion was rather that humans were by nature born unequal and that this unalterable inequality was evident physically (dominant males vs. inferior females) socially (superior parents vs. inferior children; freeborn vs. slaves; natives vs. aliens), and ethnically (Greeks vs. barbarians; Romans vs. *nationes*; Israelites vs. *goïim*). The notion that unequal social statuses and roles were allotted by nature and the gods or God made these allotments permanent and unalterable.

Where equality did occasionally come under discussion, types of equality were distinguished. On the one hand, there was quantitative/mathematical equality or exact sameness and, on the other, proportional/geometric equality where persons would be treated in proportion to their respective social rank and status. This latter notion of equality concerns “equity” or fairness and in discussions of human, social relations was far more the topic of discussion than was quantitative equality. On proportional equality or equity see Plato, *Gorg.* 508a (regarding gods and humans) and Aristotle, *Pol.* 1301 33b (according to [1] age in respect to reckoning of shame/blame; [2] wealth, in respect to taxes; [3] social and economic position, in respect to political influence). See also Aristotle, *Eth. nic.*, Book 5 on justice where “equality” is discussed in connection with justice and proportionality (5.3; 1131a). Here

“equality” has the sense of “equity,” with awards being distributed proportionally “according to merit” (with merit understood differently, “democrats identify[ing] it with the status of freemen, supporters of oligarchy with wealth [or with noble birth], and supporters of aristocracy with excellence” [*Eth. nic.* 5.3; 1131a]). Regarding equality in acts of justice, Aristotle states, “what is equal in the primary sense is that which is in proportion to merit [= equity], while quantitative equality is secondary, but in friendship quantitative equality is primary and proportion to merit is secondary” (*Eth. nic.* 8.7, 1158b). In regard to equity (*to epieikes*, *Eth. nic.* 5.10, 1137a–38a) he notes that equity is a superior form of justice, which goes beyond the universality of the law to take into account particular cases. “And this is the nature of the equitable, a correction of law where it is defective owing to its universality” (*Eth. nic.* 10., 1137b). For Aristotle, equality can be found in some types of friendship; the true friend is also *isos* and *homoios* (*Pol.* 3.16, 1287b ; *Eth. nic.* 8.6, 1158b). He also, however, knows of friendships involving inequalities between parties (e.g., father and son, elder and younger, husband and wife, ruler and ruled) (*Eth. nic.* 8.7, 1158b). For equality as equity see also Philo (*Leg. All.* 1.87, cf. 65; *Vit. Mos.* 2.9; *QG* 4,102, 125; *Spec. Leg.* 4.230; *Quis rer. div. her.* 141–206; *Prob.* 12); *Col* 4:1; *Clem. Alex., Paed.* 3.74.2 and *Stählin*: 354–55. For relevant studies see Harvey and von Leyden. On equality in the ancient world in general see Herzog and Thraede. On equality terminology in the Bible see *Stählin*.

Democracy, which would presume some degree of equality between free, propertied males was considered by Plato and Aristotle as inferior to either monarchy or aristocracy. In discussing the three basic kinds of political constitution (monarchy, aristocracy, and timocracy) and their respective perversions (tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy), Aristotle records the prevailing notion among elites that “the best of these is monarchy, the worst timocracy” (*Eth. nic.* 8.10, 1160a–b). Democracy and its perversion, timocracy, are both characterized by the rule of the majority, and all who have the property qualification count as equals (*Eth. nic.* 8.10, 1160b). Democracy, he notes, “is found chiefly in masterless dwellings (for here every one is on an equality), and in those in which the ruler is weak and everyone has license to do as one pleases” (*Eth. nic.* 8.10, 1161a). In contrast to modern political thought, democracy in antiquity, according to one of its most influential spokesmen, thus involved an equality limited strictly to free, propertied males and was associated with disorder, weak rule, and the license for self-serving. It is quite appropriate, therefore, that Dennis Duling warns that “the term [egalitarian] should be used with caution when

describing a movement or group in antiquity," noting that "Ancient society was not 'egalitarian' in the modern Enlightenment, individualist, political-philosophical sense in which equality is a self-evident human right and/or social goal for everyone" (1997:126). One advocate of the egalitarian theory, Schüssler Fiorenza (1993:213–19; 1995: 14–18), expressly acknowledges that representatives of the prevailing view of the ancient world such as Aristotle and Plato were hardly advocates of the egalitarianism which she claims for the Jesus movement so even their views of equity serve only as a negative foil in her argument concerning the egalitarianism of the Jesus movement. Her claim that voluntary associations (*koina, collegia, thiasoi*) were egalitarian in their structure and composition is refuted by other scholars (e.g. Schmeller). Crossan (1991: 263–64) claims egalitarian visions are typical of peasant societies in general and hence a priori plausible for the peasant Palestinian society of Jesus in particular. Peasant ideological visions of equality are one thing, however, and concrete social structures embodying equality are another. Crossan and colleagues fail to show that visions and ideas of equality actually were translated into new social realities.

Accordingly, there is nothing in the Greco-Roman world and ancient peasant societies that would have served as an analogue or impetus for eliminating prevailing patriarchal structures and social inequity and for establishing any kind of community of equals. If such a social revolution were inaugurated by Jesus and his followers, this would have been a social novelty without parallel in the ancient world. Does the alleged New Testament evidence show this to have been the case? Let us see.

Egalitarianism in the New Testament? Greek Terms for "Equal," "Equality," "Equitable," "Equity" in the New Testament

The first interesting observation to make is that none of the New Testament texts involving the Greek family of terms for "equal," "equitable," "equality" or "equity" is cited by proponents of the egalitarian theory as support for their position, aside from Matt 20:12 (on the irrelevancy of this text see below). This implicit judgment I consider to be correct. Where the Greek terms appear, the contexts make clear that the terms have the sense not of mathematical equality but rather the sense of "proportional equality," i.e. "equity" or "sameness." For *isos*, see Matt 20:12; Mark 14:46, 59; Luke 6:34; John 5:18; Acts 11:17; Phil 2:6; Rev 21:16; for *isotês*, see 1 Cor 8:13, 14; Col 4:1; for *isotimos*, see 2 Pet 1:1; for *isopsychos*, see Phil 2:20).

Thus the explicit vocabulary of equality is irrelevant

or non-probative for the case that our theorists intend to make. Accordingly, we may ignore these texts and move to others that are regarded as illustrative of Jesus' egalitarian program. These involve, first, tradition concerning the teaching of Jesus and, secondly, tradition concerning Jesus's actions.

The Words/Teaching of Jesus Allegedly Advocating Equality or a Discipleship of Equals

The texts relevant to Jesus raise the issue of authenticity and criteria of authenticity. I will accept that the texts cited by egalitarian theorists and listed below reflect authentic teaching of Jesus and not material retrojected by the Evangelists.

(1) Jesus' invitation to discipleship involved a call for an abandonment of ties with, and obligations toward, one's biological family; an abandonment of one's property, possessions, and occupations; and a renunciation of protection and physical and material security. For abandonment of biological family see Mark 1:16–20 par.; Mark 10:29–30 par.; Luke 9:59/Matt 8:21–22; Luke 24:26/Matt 10:37; Luke 9:60/Matt 8:22; Luke 14:26/Matt 10:37; Luke 14:26/Matt 10:37; cf. Luke 5:11; *GosThom* 55, 101a [but contrast 101b]. For the renunciation of property, possessions, occupations, and protection see Mark 1:16–20/Matt 4:18–22; Mark 2:13–17/Matt 9:9–13/Luke 5:27–32; Mark 6:7–13/Matt 10:1–15/Luke 9:1–6; Mark 10:17–31/Matt 19:16–30/Luke 18:18–30; Mark 14:5/Matt 26:8–9/John 12:4–6; Luke 6:29–30/Matt 5:39–42; Luke 12:33–34/Matt 6:19–21; *GosThom* 95, 110; *Did.* 1:4–5; cf. Luke 5:11. On the issue of renunciation and abandonment see Theissen 1978, 1992: 60–93. On the forms and history of tradition and questions of authenticity see Guijarro Oporto 2001.

Egalitarian theorists construe these passages calling for abandonment and renunciation as implying Jesus' egalitarianism and as evidence of his rejection of the institution of the family and its patriarchal structure. However, the abandoning of one's biological family, property, possessions, occupations, and protection says nothing about the the institution of the family as such. "Conversion, which requires welcoming the coming Kingdom of God," Guijarro Oporto (2001: 237), appropriately observes, "does not seek to abolish the family as such, but rather to transform the relationships which exist within it." The renunciation for which Jesus called involved a re-ordering of all conventional priorities. In these sayings Jesus issues no condemnation of the family as such. He only declares the biological family to be of secondary significance or indifference in the light of the imminent commencement

of God's reign.

Whereas Matthew (10:37) speaks of "hating" (i.e. being indifferent to) one's family, the more likely original formulation of Luke (14:26) speaks not of "hating" one's family but of loving Jesus "more than" one's family members. Priority of loyalty was thus the original point of this saying, not elimination of loyalty to one's biological family altogether. A temporary leaving of family, occupations and possessions in order to accompany Jesus did not entail or even imply a permanent condition or a lasting desertion of family, let alone a wholesale transformation of social structures. Some disciples who had left their occupations are latter reported as having returned to their homes and families (Peter, Mark 1:29; Levi, Mark 2:15; perhaps also James and John, Matt 20:20). Jesus' call, moreover, was directed to a select group who as itinerants could accompany Jesus. The support and success of their efforts, as Theissen (1978) has shown, were dependent on the hospitality offered by "sympathizers" located in stable, conventional households. Thus not all members of the Jesus faction were itinerant missionaries. Many, if not most, did not renounce their homes, property, and possessions, but rather put them at the disposal of those on the move. The fact that some followers abandoned their homes and households whereas others did not is evidence not of a general equality among Jesus followers but of continuing social and economic disparity in the Jesus faction.

Jesus' position on the abandoning of familial ties must be understood, Theissen (1978, 1992) has aptly noted, as a response to worsening conditions of social tension and anomie in first century Palestine. It must also be understood within a larger pattern of his call for repentance and a radical reorientation of priorities which included the severing of former alliances and allegiances so as to be free for new loyalties and new commitments. These renunciation sayings illustrate Jesus' call for exclusive allegiance to and unconditional trust in God and a prioritizing of commitments given the urgency of the time and of Jesus' mission. They involve no explicit critique of the family as such. Jesus' saying about his true family (Mark 3:31–35 par.), which we shall consider shortly, clearly indicates that he was not against the family as such but in fact embraced the family as a model of both commitment to God and life in community. This surrogate family which Jesus established, as Bruce Malina has pointed out (114), would have been absolutely necessary in this collectivist, group-oriented culture where "survival in society after the negation of family integrity would require that a person move into some other actual or fictive kin group." In Matt 10:37 Crossan (1994b: 159) detects a polemic "against familial hierarchies." However, Jesus' claim of ultimate or exclusive

allegiance is not the same as criticizing familial hierarchies in the name of some egalitarian principle. Priority of loyalty is Jesus' point here, as in other sayings, and not inequities of family structure. Crossan's comment is an inference unsupported by the text.

(2) Sayings seen by the egalitarian theorists as related to the renunciation sayings are those where Jesus anticipated conflict and division within biological families (Mark 13:12/Matt 10:21/Luke 21:16; Luke 12:51–53/Matt 10:34–36; *GosThom* 16). An implication of egalitarianism or a rejection of the family as such, however, is difficult to detect. These sayings indicate only that Jesus anticipated that his call for exclusive allegiance to God would bring about internal family conflict. They contain no explicit critique of the family or its patriarchal structure. In these sayings Jesus is not calling for a disbanding of the family or a termination of family loyalty, but rather is calling for a loyalty to himself beyond that of loyalty toward members of the biological family. This is not a renunciation of all thought of family and family loyalty, but rather a prioritizing of objects of loyalty, with God and Jesus commanding first-order loyalty.

(3) Crossan (1994b: 148) finds a further hint of Jesus' egalitarianism in Jesus' saying about the homelessness of the Son of Man/Human One (Matt 8:20/Luke 9:58; *GosThom* 86; cf. Theissen 1978: 10–11). Homelessness (having no privileged "place") and radical itineracy, Crossan claims, "symbolized the egalitarian message of the Kingdom. Where all are equal, and no place is dominant—and neither is any person, family, or village." This claim, however, is another instance of pure inference. The homelessness of the Son of Man/Human One established his solidarity with his homeless disciples and those to whom he ministered. Crossan's conclusion involves an unacceptable leap from having no geographical place to call home to an inferred equality of persons, families, or villages.

(4) In Jesus' saying about divorce as given by Luke (Luke 16:18), Crossan (1994b: 150) finds an implication that women were made equal to men. "What Jesus asserts," he claims, "is that women have exactly the same rights as men have in marriage. Adultery can be committed against the wife's rights just as well as against a husband's." However, an egalitarian sense of the saying (even in Luke's version) is disputable and indeed highly unlikely. With this saying (even in Luke's later version) Jesus is not asserting equal rights to divorce but prohibiting an action (divorce and remarriage) that blocks reconciliation. Divorcing and then marrying another (or divorcing in order to marry another) makes any reconciliation impossible and inevitably would lead to family feuding between the spouses' families. On this point see the discussion in

Malina–Rohrbaugh: 121–22, 240–41. Luke’s version, like that of Mark (10:11–12), moreover, is a secondary expansion of the saying given in Matthew 19:9. Whereas the shorter Matthean version (which speaks only of the husband’s action) reflects more directly the Palestinian context of Jesus, the longer Lukan and Markan are conformed to a Hellenistic rather than a Palestinian context. Finally, even in the Greco-Roman world, the legal right of wives as well as husbands to divorce was never taken as indicating a general equality of husbands and wives. Here, as in Palestinian Israel, husbands were superordinate and wives subordinate; see Elliott 2000: 550–99. Finally, prohibiting divorce protected not only the wives from social shame and exposure to hardship; it also protected the two originating families of the spouses from inter-family conflict and social shame, thus maintaining inter-family integrity, domestic harmony, and the honor of both families.

(5) Regarding the saying of Matt 18:1, 4 (“Leader as Servant”), Crossan (1994b:166) remarks: “Consistent with Jesus’ egalitarian vision and program for the Kingdom of God, any leadership roles within it must be completely antithetical to modes of rule, command, and leadership in the Roman Empire or any other standard kingdom of earth.” Schüssler Fiorenza adds to this text all further passages mentioning a reversal of status: “children, least-great” (Mark 9:35–37/Matt 18:1–5/Luke 9:46–48; cf. Mark 10:13–15/Luke 18:15–17; cf. Matt 19:13–15, 18:3); Matt 18:4; “great–slave” (Mark 10:42–45/Matt 20:25–28/Luke 22:24–27); “first–last” (Mark 10:31/Matt 19:30; Matt 20:16; Luke 13:30; *GosThom* 4); “called–chosen” (Matt 22:14); “exalted–humbled” (Luke 14:11/Matt 23:12; Luke 18:14; Matt 18:4); see also cf. also Mark 12:41–45 par. (widow’s pence as paradigm); Luke 1:52 (“mighty–lowly”); Luke 16:19–31 (rich man–Lazarus). She speaks of “the sevenfold transmission of a Jesus-saying in the synoptic tradition, which states that the first and the leaders should be last and slaves, indicating that Jesus was remembered as having radically questioned social and religious hierarchical and patriarchal relationships” (1993:176, citing Mark 9:35; 10:41–45; Matt 18:4; 20:25–28; 23:11; Luke 9:48; 22:24–27). “The lordship of Christ,” she claims, “categorically rules out any relationship of dominance within the Christian community (Matt. 23:7–12). According to the gospel traditions Jesus radically rejected all relationships of dependence and domination.” (1993: 176).

With these comments of Schüssler Fiorenza, it becomes clear that for her patriarchy is equivalent to domination; for her view of patriarchy see 1993: 213–18. Accordingly, in her various writings she assumes the following syllogism:

A. Jesus and his first followers radically rejected forms of dominance within the believing community.

B. Patriarchy (and the hierarchical structures it involved) was domination

C. Therefore, Jesus and his earliest followers rejected patriarchy and the hierarchical structures patriarchy involved. Since Jesus and his followers rejected patriarchy, she reasons, they must be considered egalitarian in their social and political orientation. Three questions immediately come to mind: (1) Can patriarchy be more specifically defined? (2) Are reversals of status synonymous with eliminations of status, as Schüssler Fiorenza seems to think. (3) How valid is this syllogism?

Regarding “patriarchy,” the anthropologist Charlotte Seymour-Smith makes the following comments in her *MACMILLAN DICTIONARY OF ANTHROPOLOGY* (217–18).

In its original and more restrictive sense, this term [patriarchy] refers to a type of social system dominated by the principle of ‘father-right’ or the sole control of domestic and public-political authority by senior males within the group” [217].

There is no generally accepted or rigorous definition of patriarchy, however, and in particular there is some confusion as to the domestic and the public or political aspects of male dominance which are necessarily present in order for a type of society to be called ‘patriarchal’. Thus ‘father-right’ may be viewed as the absolute authority of the male in the domestic domain, extending in extreme cases to the power of life or death over the women and children within the domestic unit, or more commonly the unilateral right to dispose of their property, the right to take decisions on behalf of the whole domestic group, and so on. Patriarchy may also be viewed however from the perspective of a male monopoly on public social discourse, political and economic decisions, and so on. Societies which are ‘patriarchal’ in the first sense are usually so in the second sense, since the attribution of absolute authority to the male in the domestic domain implies that the female is classed as a ‘minor’ or incompetent person in the public domain too [as in the Greco-Roman and Israelite world—217].

But societies that are ‘patriarchal’ in the second sense may not be so in the first, as women may possess some domestic authority and autonomy within societies whose political systems are nonetheless dominated by men. In any case, it is necessary to recognize that ‘patriarchy’ is not a unitary concept or conglomerate of features which will always coexist. Rather we should distinguish between elements or expressions of patriarchy which may coexist with expressions of matriarchy and/or of gender complementarity or equality” [218].

Seymour-Smith notes that if the term is not to become too general,

we should have to reserve it for those societies in which the expression of male dominance is particularly extreme and systematic, such as those in which the legal right of women and children are totally subject to the authority of the male. For many feminist anthropologists, however, the term patriarchy is synonymous with male dominance in general, and thus refers not to a specific social type but to a general tendency which finds its expression in differential form in each social and historical context [218]

Features generally associated with patriarchy include the following: dominance by senior males over all others (women, children, younger males); patrilocality (a form of family or domestic group centered on the father); patrilineality (descent traced through the male line); patrilineal cross-cousin marriage (as in Israel); patrilocality or virilocality (married couple's establishing residence with or near the husband's family); patronage (diadic ties of patron and client patterned after the dominant position and role of the pater or father in a family); view of the social, physical, intellectual, and moral inferiority of females and superiority of males; sexual division of labor and space (males outside and public; females inside and domestic); females as under tutelage of males; respect for and ritual commemoration of ancestors, esp. male ancestors; male as head of household; fictive kin groups modelled on family dominated by male; marriage as male acquiring and owning a female; marriage rules favoring males and restricting to males the right to divorce; association of males with culture and females with nature; sociological paternity (pater and mater as socially recognized parents as opposed to *genitor* and *genetrix* as physiological parents—cf. the father adopting of children as his own; primogeniture of males; inheritance limited to or dominated by males; cult dominated by males.

What of reversals of status? Reversals of status clearly are not eliminations of status but rather radical inversions of status, of high and low rankings, of first and last positions. These reversal sayings say nothing explicitly or implicitly of the elimination of status differences altogether. To the contrary, their dramatic punch requires the continuation of the reality of high and low, first and last positions in the social order. Patron-client relations, for example, are not eliminated altogether but rather reversed: conventional patrons are reduced to clients and clients, raised to the status of patrons. Similarly, the reciprocal roles and statuses of children and parents are not eliminated altogether but rather reversed: children, more than par-

ents, are the object of God's concern; children, more than parents, illustrate the nature of life in the kingdom of heaven.

The syllogism, finally, with which Schüssler Fiorenza operates, is flawed because it introduces as a minor premise a notion of which Jesus and his followers never speak; namely, patriarchy and its hierarchical structures, or more accurately, its stratification. Indeed the idea of patriarchy, like that of "homosexuality" or "nation" is a modern etic construct nowhere to be found in the New Testament or the ancient world. Equally flawed then is the conclusion that a critique and rejection of domination is prompted by, or proof of, an egalitarian stance on the part of Jesus and his followers and indicative of a program to eliminate all traces of social and economic inequity. If that were the case, the Jesus movement failed miserably from the outset, since throughout Jesus' lifetime and thereafter the Jesus movement and its constituency were marked by clear economic and social inequities. In short, these several passages concerning reversal all speak of status reversal, not elimination of status or the levelling of roles. They constitute no proof of Jesus' egalitarianism, which still remains no more than an unfounded inference.

(6) Jesus' parable of the Vineyard Laborers (Matt 20:1–15), despite its appearance only in Matthew, is accepted by Crossan as an authentic teaching of Jesus. In commenting on this parable he claims (1994b:168) that "in an interactive audience situation this story would have served to start a fierce discussion on, say, peasants and aristocrats, works and owners, equality, generosity, and egalitarianism." Although this parable surely accentuates the exemplary generosity of the owner and the despicable evil-eyed envy of the complaining laborers (cf. Elliott 1992), Crossan says nothing further about how this story would have prompted discussion about "equality" and "egalitarianism." While equality of payment (one denarius to all laborers) clearly prompted resentment (the complaint, "you have made them equal [*isous*] to us," actually concerns unfair treatment), the point of the story can hardly be considered an affirmation of social or economic equality within the Jesus movement or a demonstration of Jesus' egalitarianism.

(7) Jesus' teaching on "the new/true family of God" (Mark 3:31–35/Matt 12:46–50/Luke 8:19–21; *GosThom* 99; *Gos Ebionites* 5; 2 *Clem.* 9:11) is acknowledged as authentic by most, if not all, proponents of the egalitarian theory. But their strained interpretations thereof make only too clear the difficulties this teaching poses for their notion of Jesus' egalitarianism. Crossan (1991: 440) lists it as a unit of the "Double Independent Tradition" of the First Stratum, 30–60 CE. Within the list of Jesus' sayings

considered authentic by Crossan (1991: xiii–xxvi), he also includes on p. xviii an abbreviated form of Mark 3:31–35 (“The disciples said to him, ‘Your brothers and your mother are standing outside.’ He said to them, ‘Those here who do the will of God are my brothers and my mother.’”). In his *THE ESSENTIAL JESUS* (161–62) Crossan says nothing of Jesus’ creation of a new family. He notes only that “Mediterranean kinship and familial structures accepted and perpetuated patriarchal and hierarchical domination and are repeatedly criticized by Jesus as being opposed to the radically egalitarian Kingdom of God.” Theissen and Merz (1999: 218–19) also reckon the saying as authentic because of its wide attestation. But they note that Q contains “only traces of it” (God as ‘Father’ and humans as “brothers”) and stresses “the tension with the natural family.” The *Gospel of Thomas*, which “contains many of the ‘family of God’ traditions (cf. 99; 79)” also includes “criticism of the natural family (cf. 101; 55; 16).”

This saying as it stands, however, expresses no critique of the family as such or of its patriarchal structure. To the contrary, it rather shows Jesus’ positive conception of the family as an institution appropriate for defining life under the reign of God. What the saying expressly affirms is not a restructuring of the family along egalitarian lines, but rather a redefinition of the identity of the family of Jesus and the basis for membership—not blood or marriage but obedience to will of God. In Jesus’ collectivist society this new surrogate family makes available to those who have renounced their natural families a form of community essential to their personal and social existence (Malina 1994). Because this saying explicitly and clearly indicates Jesus’ positive view of the family, albeit redefined as based on faith and obedience rather than blood and marriage, Jesus’ call for severance of ties with biological family and family of marriage cannot be regarded as a critique of the family as such. Nor can it be validly argued that his other sayings discussed above (on marriage, status reversal etc.) imply a rejection of the family as such. What this saying indicates is that Jesus’ call to leave the family of birth and marriage was accompanied by provision of another, surrogate, family, a family that constituted the family of God in which doing the divine Father’s will was the condition of membership. On this text we will have more to say below. Schüssler Fiorenza, on the other hand, seeks to interpret this saying on the true family in the light of Matt 23:8–12, a passage that figures prominently in her argument for Jesus’ egalitarianism.

(8) Matt 23:8–12 concerns a warning against recognition of human authority (vv 8–10) combined with a “greater–least” saying (v 11) and a “humbled–exalted” saying (v 12).

23:8 “You are not to be called ‘rabbi,’ for you have one teacher and you are all brothers.”

23:9 “You are not to call any man ‘father’ on earth, for you have one Father who is in heaven.”

23:10 “Nor are you to be called ‘masters,’ for you have one master, the Christ.”

23:11 “The one who is greatest among you shall be your servant”

23:12 “Whoever exalts oneself will be humbled and whoever humbles oneself will be exalted.”

The dubious authenticity of vv. 8–10 raises an immediate question as to their inclusion in any list of authentic Jesus sayings. Matt 23:8–10 is listed by Crossan (1991: 448), as having Single Attestation and belonging to the 3rd Stratum of Tradition, 80–120 CE. This presumably is the reason for Crossan’s omission of this material from his list of the authentic words of Jesus. Theissen and Merz (219) apparently share this view. They note that “this pericope is formulated with a view to the (post-Easter) community” but also consider it related to Jesus’ concept of the family of God, without clarifying, however, the nature of this connection. By contrast, Schüssler Fiorenza regards Matt 23:8–10 as authentic, perhaps not surprisingly, given the showcase function of this text in her egalitarian argument. Even if we leave aside the authenticity question, it is clear that nothing is said here of equality.

Schüssler Fiorenza (1993: 220) notes on the basis of Mark 3:31–35 that “Those who followed Jesus received instead a new familial community.” However she then assumes that this new surrogate family has none of the structural features of a conventional family and she speaks of a “new ‘kinship’ of equal discipleship” and of a “new ‘family’ where fathers are excluded” (referring to Matt 23:8–11; cf. also 1983:149–51). “Insofar as this new ‘family’ has no room for ‘fathers,’” she observes, “it *implicitly* [emphasis added] rejects their patriarchal power and status, and thereby claims that in its midst all patriarchal structures of domination and subordination are abolished” (1993: 220). In Matt 23:8–11 she finds that “all patriarchal roles and titles are rejected . . . ‘the discipleship of equals rejects teachers’ and ‘does not admit of any ‘father’ because it is sustained by the gracious goodness of God whom alone the disciples of God call ‘father’ (Luke 11:2–4; 12:30; cf. Mark 11:25)” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1993: 221).

That all believers are “brothers” eliminates the rabbi–student distinction, but says nothing about equality since brothers can be quite unequal in terms of position or privilege (as affected by age, birth mother, strength etc.). The concluding verse concerning the reversal of status (v. 11) concerns precisely that—reversal, not elimination of

status. Even more questionable is Schüssler Fiorenza's claim that the warning against calling anyone "father" implied an abolishment of all patriarchal structures of domination and subordination. This is nothing more than an inference deriving not from the specific words of the text but rather from her arbitrary assumption that a rejection of domination is tantamount to a global rejection of patriarchy and hierarchy, and that this implies an affirmation of equality. This anti-patriarchal and egalitarian interpretation consists only of inferences and assumptions, assumptions moreover that do not square with historical reality. Dennis Duling (1997: 134), while allowing that the source of Matt 23:8–10 (Q or other Jesus tradition?) expresses "a limited 'egalitarian' ideology," immediately acknowledges that this egalitarian ideology "was in tension with social reality and that the Matthean gospel on the whole reveals a movement toward 'institutional hierarchy,'" cf. also Duling 1995: 165–66 on Matt 23:8–10).

Indeed, the New Testament evidence indicates that Jesus' followers did not understand Jesus as ever prohibiting respect toward teachers or spiritual fathers or granting them special status; see, e.g., Rom 16:1; 1 Cor 4:1–2, 14–16; 16:15–16; Gal 4:13–14; 1 Thess 5:12–13, 1 Tim 5:17; Titus 2:7–8; Heb 13:7, 17, and 1 Pet 5:5a. Paul the apostle and teacher did not refrain from regarding his relation to Timothy as a father/parent to a son (1 Cor 4:17); cf. also Paul's "father" role toward the Corinthians and the Galatians (1 Cor 4:14–15; Gal 4:19) and Peter as Mark's implied "father" (1 Pet 5:13). This is one of several instances where Schüssler Fiorenza has misread a theological statement (Matt 23:8–9) as a description of a historical social reality. She presents no historical or social evidence demonstrating that these words of Matthew were actually put into practice and she ignores the historical and social evidence that contradicts her contention.

In the same vein but more generally, Schüssler Fiorenza states that "As an inner-Jewish renewal movement the Jesus movement stands in conflict with its dominant patriarchal society and is 'heretical' with respect to its dominant religious community" (1993:176). Its rejection of social and religious exclusivity and its insistence on inclusivity and solidarity, its affirmation of the principle of reversal according to which "the first and the leaders should be last and slaves," and its affirmation of God as Father all indicated, she maintains, "that Jesus was remembered as having radically questioned social and religious hierarchical and patriarchal relationships" and "rejected all relationships of dependence and domination" (1993:176). But here too she offers no evidence of where and how the egalitarian structure which allegedly replaced this patriarchal structure of the family and its relations of dependence and domination

was established and maintained.

From the words of Jesus we turn next to actions of Jesus claimed by egalitarian theorists to indicate and affirm his egalitarian program.

The Actions of Jesus Allegedly Demonstrating Equality or a Discipleship of Equals

(1) Jesus' meal practice and open commensality is offered as one example of Jesus' egalitarianism. Crossan states: "Open commensality is the symbol and embodiment of radical egalitarianism" (1994a: 71; see pp. 71–74 on "radical egalitarianism" and features of peasant movements). Open commensality in itself, however, entails only expanding the circle of those admitted to the meal and offering a table open to more or to all. Among the Gospel meal texts, a levelling of the status of the meal participants is neither directly mentioned nor indirectly implied. The practical necessities of the meal situation remained: someone had to provide a place to eat together and food to consume. Servants/slaves prepared and served the meals and aided the guests in washing before the meal etc. This social reality of superordinate and subordinate persons was the case not only in the setting of Jesus' eating and teaching (see especially Luke 14:7–11), but also in the later experience of his followers. Some like Stephanos, Aquila and Priscilla, Philemon and Apphia were homeowners at whose homes the believers gathered, worshipped and ate. Other participants were of lower economic and social status like Onesimos (Philemon's brother in Christ but also Philemon's slave). The differentiation of statuses that marred the celebration of the Eucharist at Corinth (1 Cor 11:17–34) vividly demonstrate that that this community hardly was, or perceived itself to be, a "community of equals." Paul's response that this meal celebrated the death of Christ and the unity shared by all in the one body of Christ. But he did not insist on the elimination of social and economic differences altogether. In this body, Paul noted, God rather has reversed the statuses, "giving greater glory to the inferior part that there be no discord in the body" (1 Cor 12:24–25). Disparity remained. Social harmony, sharing of food, and a change of mind-set were Paul's concern, not the eradication of differences as such, as his following words about different leadership roles in the community also make clear (1 Cor 12:28–30).

(2) Jesus' inclusive concern for, and aid to, those on the lower rungs of the social ladder or on the social periphery also has been cited as indication of Jesus' egalitarianism. As is also the case with the pre-Pauline formula of Gal 3:28, however, these are examples only of inclusiveness and not of social levelling or abolishment of social and

economic inequity. Inclusion, it apparently needs to be pointed out, is not identical to equalization; on Gal 3:28 see Elliott 2003.

Further Problems with the Egalitarian Theory

Besides the issues of interpretation plaguing every New Testament text marshalled by the egalitarian theorists, a reading of Jesus' teaching and actions along egalitarian lines is beset with additional serious problems.

(1) In none of the texts put forward as evidence for Jesus' egalitarianism is there any explicit mention of equality or use of Greek terms of the *iso-* family (except in the parable of Matt 20:1–15, where *isous* in 20:7 entails no affirmation of the kind of equality of which the egalitarian proponents speak).

(2) In regard to each text put forward, an implication of equality is inferred, while at the same time no comprehensive definition of equality is ever provided. The most that is offered is Crossan's brief comment that radical egalitarianism entails "an absolute equality of people that denies the validity of any discrimination between them and negates the necessity of any hierarchy among them" (1994a: 71).

(3) The domain of equality is rarely, if ever, indicated. At most it is claimed that women were made equal to men. But the precise nature of this equality is never clarified.

(4) The egalitarian theory appears to involve a web of arbitrary assumptions and an inferential house of cards. Among these inferences are the following:

(a) Since Jesus opposed domination of every sort, it is inferred that he opposed patriarchy, which was the major form of domination.

(b) Since patriarchy entailed hierarchical structures, and since Jesus spoke of God's reversing of status, it is inferred that all status reversal sayings were rejections of hierarchy and patriarchy and simultaneous affirmations of equality.

(c) Since Jesus was inclusive in his teaching and actions and practiced open commensality, it is inferred that his message and practice of social inclusivity was evidence of his egalitarianism and rejection of patriarchy.

(d) Since patriarchy was rooted in the institution of the family, it is inferred that Jesus, who allegedly opposed patriarchy, was against the family or at least against the family as conventionally structured (i.e. male-dominated and hierarchically ordered). Accordingly, Jesus' calling of persons to leave their families, homes, possessions, occupations and security in order to follow him is inferred to be a critique and rejection of the family per se, and the patriarchy and domination it embodied. Or it is

inferred, as by Schüssler Fiorenza, that, given Jesus' rejection of patriarchy, this new family cannot have been structured patriarchally and hierarchically as was a conventional family but rather was a community in which all members were equal in some way that is left undefined.

(5) The egalitarian theory fails to take into account the fact that underlying Jesus's teaching were presumptions of social and economic disparity: a disciple is not above (or equal to) her/his master (Luke 6:40/Matt 10:24–25/John 13:16, 15:20); male household owners are superior to and control slaves (Mark 13:34–37; Luke 12:42–48; 16:1–8; 19:11–27 etc.); parents are superior to their children and deserve honor (Mark 7:11–13/Matt 15:4–6; Mark 10:19/Matt 19:19/Luke 18:20); husbands are superior to their wives (the former can divorce their spouses, the latter cannot (Matt 5:31–32; 19:9; contrast the secondary version of Mark 10:12)); older sons are superior in social rank to younger sons (Luke 15:11–32); certain slaves enjoy higher rank than others (Luke 19:12–27). Jesus also presumed differentiated places of honor and status (Luke 14:7–14, 15–24); economic disparity between the healthy and the infirm (hence his healings "for free") and between the wealthy and the poor (Luke 6:20–26; Mark 14:7/Matt 26:11 etc.). Accordingly, he called for generosity (Matt 20:1–15), almsgiving (Matt 6:1–4) and the sharing (not the equalization) of resources (Luke 6:34–36; cf. also Luke 4:18, 7:22–23 etc.) In the kingdom of heaven (and the new family of faith symbolizing the kingdom), there are "lessers" and "greater" (Matt 5:19–20;). Jesus' word about care for "the least of these my brothers" (Matt 25:31–46, esp. 25:45) refers to those of his company possessing the least in personal and social resources, the least in food, clothing and shelter. "Least," however, implies "more" and "most" and thus economic gradations within the movement, a point that applies to all his reversal sayings. When Jesus encountered instances of such social and economic disparities, as in the case, for instance, of slaves and owners (Luke 7:1–10) or the widow in the Temple (Luke 21:1–4), there is no indication that he ever objected to the disparities per se. "The poor," he said, "you always have with you" (Mark 14:7).

Jesus's teaching of reversal of status, as already noted, did not constitute an elimination of status differentiation. Rather statuses of first and last, master–slave, rich–poor remained but were inverted. Jesus did not address others as equal to him in status, but as "child," "daughter" (bleeding woman) etc. The issue for Jesus was one of attitude and perception of the relation between self and others. Differences of age, gender, class, and ethnicity were not eliminated but remained as demarcations of identity and status. Within the Jesus movement, children did not in

fact become leaders in the movement, though they were favored by Jesus. Slaves were not in fact liberated and made equal to masters. Women were not put on a social parity with men. The disparity between poor and rich did not cease to exist among those in Jesus group.

Jesus knew the economic and social disparities of his time and urged conduct that would relativise but not eliminate such disparities. Suffering and want caused by inequity were to be alleviated by generosity, almsgiving, and compassion toward one's fellow human beings, but Jesus engaged in no program to eradicate altogether the causes of such disparities.

In terms of ethnic differences, Jesus distinguished between the House of Israel on which he focused his mission and the Gentiles excluded from that mission (Matt 10:6), a view at variance with that of Matt 28:19 and the composer of the Matthean Gospel.

(6) Egalitarian theorists give virtually no attention to the practical matter of how this alleged egalitarianism might have been put into place and made an ongoing historical and social reality. From a sociological point of view, Jesus' creation of an egalitarian community would have required implementation of fundamental and dramatic changes in the manner by which groups were conventionally organized and structured.

To bring into existence a community structured in egalitarian fashion would have required elimination of a vast array of social and economic arrangements: elimination of social and economic stratification and distinctive levels of power and privilege; elimination of redistributive economic relations, of the patrilineal descent system (male line of descent and not equality of male and female descent lines), of patrilocal rule of residence (wife moves to husband's locus versus equality of locus of origin), of embeddedness of females in males, of marriages arranged by male heads of families (not determined by independent sons or daughters who rather are subordinate to the will of their fathers), of male-dominated households; of the valuation of father-son, older brother-younger brother relations; elimination of the practice of primogeniture in inheritance (not equal inheritance of all sons and even more limited inheritance by daughters); elimination of the distinction and separation of male-gendered space (public) and female-gendered (domestic) (with no "equal access" of males to female space or vice versa); elimination of the mutual interdependence within and between families with its focus on social harmony (versus freedom, independence and equality among persons), of patron-client relations (between persons of unequal social status), of units of group-oriented persons defined and controlled by the group versus individuals independent of family or group

control, and of the status of family and blood ties that confer social status (as in the case of James, Jesus' brother, Gal 1:19; Acts 12:17; 15:13). This rearrangement, moreover, would have had to be explained and justified to those members of the movement who were reduced in possessions and status. Jesus' call for abandonment of home and property or his comments on status reversal can hardly be considered adequate explanation and justification. Within occupied Palestine of the first century, moreover, how could these changes possibly have been accomplished?

(7) If such an egalitarian community had been established by Jesus and such monumental changes had been achieved, where is the evidence thereof? And of course that which qualifies as evidence is not alleged ideas of equality, but concrete proof of a radical alteration of social relationships having taken place within the Jesus movement and indicative of an "equality of its members." On this the New Testament is silent as are extra-biblical sources. No historical evidence is to be found in the writings of Josephus, Pliny, Tacitus, Suetonius or any other author outside the New Testament indicating or alluding to a movement in first century Palestine that accomplished a social transformation along the lines required by the egalitarian hypothesis.

(8) The contemporary world also provided no historical analogues of thorough-going egalitarian communities at this time. The Therapeutae described by Philo were no example of the thorough-going egalitarianism of which the theorists speak. The wandering Cynics, even if present in Palestine, are hardly relevant here since they were single agents, not a coherent movement. The voluntary associations (to whom, along with the Therapeutae, Schüssler Fiorenza appeals) relativized certain hierarchical features of community, but were not completely egalitarian in all aspects of their social life and organization; on stratification in the associations see Schmeller 1995.

(9) In regard to a reading of the Jesus tradition, the egalitarian theory not only is unconvincing on interpretive, historical, and sociological grounds. One of its chief flaws is that it also fails to do justice to one essential feature of Jesus' action and teaching; namely the positive attention he gave to the household and family.

Household and Family in the Teaching and Ministry of Jesus

(1) All the Gospels attest that the household/home was the chief locale and focus of Jesus' ministry and teaching, healing and mission. This is hardly surprising given the central role of family and household in antiquity as a chief basis of personal identity, social relations, economic subsis-

tence, emotional attachment, and religious allegiance; see Elliott 1981/1990: 165–200; Elliott 1991a, 1991b; Crosby: 21–32; Love; Guijarro Oporto 1995, 1997, 1998, 2001; Moxnes; Osiek; Osiek & Balch.

The household as the locale of Jesus' teaching and ministry is attested in the triple tradition and Q. For houses/homes as the sites of Jesus' teaching in the Triple Tradition see Mark 2:1–12/Matt 9:1–8/ Luke 5:17–26; Mark 2:13–17/Matt 9:9–13/Luke 5:27–42; Mark 3:31–35/Matt 12:46–50/Luke 8:19–21; Mark 14:3–9/Matt 26:6–13; cf. Luke 7:36–50 and John 12:1–8; Mark 14:12–17/Matt 26:17–20/Luke 22:7–14; Mark 14:22–25/Matt 26:26–29/Luke 22:15–20; in Q, see Luke 10:5–7/Matt 10:12–13.

For homes as the sites of Jesus' healing in the Triple Tradition see (Mark 1:29–31/Matt 8:14–15/ Luke 4:38–39; Mark 2:1–12/Matt 9:1–8/ Luke 5:17–26; Mark 5:21–43/Matt 9:23–30/Luke 8:40–56; in Q, see Matt 8:5–13/Luke 7:1–10; see also Matt 12:43–45/Luke 11:24–26;

For meals and their domestic location in the Triple Tradition see Mark 2:13–17/Matt 9:10–13/Luke 5:29–32; Mark 14:12–25/Matt 26:17–20/Luke 22:3–20.

For Jesus's mission to houses/households in the Triple Tradition see Mark 6:6b–13/Matt 10:1–14/Luke 9:1–6

For households and domestic conduct as a focus of Jesus' teaching in the Triple Tradition see Mark 3:24–26/Matt 12:25–26/Luke 11:17–18; Mark 3:27/Matt 12:29/Luke 11:21–22/Gos.Thom. 35; Mark 4:21/Matt 5:14–16/Luke 8:16; Mark 9:33–37/Matt 18:1–5/Luke 9:46–48; Mark 10:10–12/Matt 19:9/Luke 16:18; Mark 10:29–30/Matt 19:29/Luke 18:29–30; Mark 12:8–27/Matt 22:23–33/Luke 20:27–40; Mark 13:12–13/Matt 10:21–22/Luke 21:16–17; Mark 13:15/Matt 24:17/Luke 17:31. In Q, see Matt 5:32/Luke 16:18; Matt 5:48/Luke 6:36; Matt 7:24–27/Luke 6:47–49; Matt 8:5–13/Luke 7:1–10; Matt 8:21–22/Luke 9:59–61; Matt 10:12–13/Luke 10:7; Matt 10:34–35/Luke 12:51–53/Gos.Thom. 16; Matt 10:37–38/Luke 14:26–27/Gos.Thom. 55, 101; Matt 12:25/Luke 11:17; Matt 12:29/Luke 11:21–22; Matt 12:43–45/Luke 11:24–26; Matt 18:15/Luke 17:3; Matt 24:17–18/Luke 17:31–32; Matt 24:40–41/Luke 17:34–35; Matt 24:43–44/Luke 12:39–40; Matt 24:45–51/Luke 12:42–46; Matt 25:14–30/Luke 19:12–27.

The Evangelists, in fact, built on this earlier tradition of authentic Jesus material by increasing the number of instances where houses and households form the setting of Jesus' teaching and ministry and/or its focus; see Elliott 2002, 2003.

(2) In regard to the substance of Jesus' proclamation and teaching two further features require mention. First, as

generally recognized, it focused on the nature and imminence of God's reign symbolized as royal monarchical rule, God as "king" and God's rule as "kingdom"—the opposite of a democratic and egalitarian mode of governance. Secondly, when Jesus explained the nature of this reign and the conduct of members of the kingdom, he referred mainly not to political matters but rather employed examples drawn from the household, family, and domestic life and work. That is, he explained a political metaphor with a domestic metaphor and in other instances referred regularly to household scenes and activities and familial relationships. See Mark 3:22–27/Matt 12:24–30/Luke 11:15–23; Mark 4:1–32 par.; Mark 9:33–37/Matt 18:1–6/Luke 9:46–48; Mark 10:13–16/ Matt 19:13–15/ Luke 18:15–17; Mark 10:17–22/Matt 19:16–22/Luke 18:18–23; Mark 10:23–31/Matt 19:23–30/Luke 18:24–30; Mark 10:35–45/Matt 20:20–28/Luke 22:24–27; Mark 12:1–12/Matt 21:33–46/Luke 20:9–19; Mark 13:28–32/ Matt 24:32–36/Luke 29–33; Mark 13:33–37/Matt 25:14–15/Luke 19:12–13; Mark 9:49–50/Luke 14:34–35; Matt 6:24/Luke 16:18; Matt 6:25–34/Luke 12:22–32; Matt 7:7–11/Luke 11:9–13; Matt 7:24–27/Luke 6:47–49; Matt 10:34–36/Luke 12:49–53; Matt 13:33/Luke 13:20–21/Gos.Thom. 96; Matt 18:12–14/Luke 15:1–7; Matt 22:1–14/Luke 14:15–24; Matt 24:37–44/Luke 17:26–36; Matt 24:45–51/Luke 12:41–46; Matt 25:14–30/Luke 19:11–27; Matt 7:7–12, 9:35–38, 13:24–30, 36–50, 51–52; 18:10–35; Matt 20:1–15; 21:28–32; 22:1–14; 25:1–13; 25:45–51; 25:1–13; 25:14–30; 25:31–46; Luke 12:35–48; 13:18–21, 22–30, 24–30; Luke 14:7–14, 28–30, 15–24; 15:3–7, 8–10, 11–32; 16:1–13, 19–31; 17:7–10; 19:11–27. In this connection Geza Vermes has aptly observed that

Perhaps the most paradoxical aspect of the teaching of the Kingdom of heaven that can safely be accredited to Jesus is that unlike the God of the Bible and of inter-testamental and rabbinic literature, the God of Jesus is not a regal figure, but is modelled on a smaller, hence, more accessible, scale. He is conceived in the form of a man of influence familiar to Jesus and his listeners, the well-to-do landowner and paterfamilias of rural Galilee [146; cf. also p. 180].

(3) These domestic scenarios presumed a patriarchal rather than an egalitarian social structure (e.g. a household controlled by a male paterfamilias with higher status than wives, sons and slaves [also different in status]; and older and younger sons [with implied higher status of the former]). Jesus criticised certain aspects of conventional behavior in the household, but did not challenge the family and household as an institution. In fact, he specifically

adopted the family as a model for explicating life under the reign of God (Mark 3:31–35/Matt 12:46–50/Luke 8:19–21/*GosThom* 99).

(4) The new family of God that Jesus established had as its model the family as it was known to Jesus and his followers. The only type of family that existed in Jesus' milieu was the conventional patriarchal family. Furthermore, as noted above, while Jesus modified the basis of inclusion in this new surrogate family from blood and marriage to trust in God and thereby opened its membership to all persons trusting in God, his teaching involved no explicit condemnation of the patriarchal structure of the family as such.

(5) Consistent with Jesus' establishment of a new family is the manner in which he conceived of his relation to God in familial and patriarchal terms. Jesus spoke of God most frequently as "Father" (Matt 12:50/*Gos.Thom.* 99; cf. Mark 3:35/Luke 8:21; Mark 14:36/Matt 26:39/Luke 22:42; Matt 5:48/Luke 6:36; Matt 6:9/Luke 11:2; Matt 6:32/Luke 12:30; Matt 7:11/Luke 11:13; Matt 11:25–27/Luke 10:21–22/*Gos.Thom.* 61:3. Cf. also Mark 11:25/Matt 6:14; Mark 13:32/Matt 24:36). Jesus prayed to God not as "king" but as "Father" and taught his followers to do likewise (Matt 6:9–13/Luke 11:2–4). He spoke of himself, correlatively, as God's "son" (Matt 11:25–27/Luke 10:21–22/*GosThom* 61:4; cf. John 3:35; 13:3). Those who entrust themselves to God and become followers of Jesus he called "children" (of God) (Mark 2:5/Matt 9:2; cf. Matt 11:19/Luke 7:35; *Gos.Thom.* 3:4) or "sons of God/Highest" (Matt 5:45/Luke 6:35) or "daughter" (Mark 5:34/Matt 9:22/Luke 8:48). In relation to Jesus and each other, these "children of God" were "brothers" and "sisters," (Mark 3:35/Matt 12:50/Luke 8:21; Matt 7:3–5/Luke 6:41–42; Matt 18:15/Luke 17:3), members of God's new surrogate family who live in accord with the Father's will and the distinctive values of this family and thereby honor both the family and the family's heavenly patriarch.

(6) Jesus' moral teaching urged behavior consistent with traditional family values (submission to the Father's will, loyalty, solidarity, respect of parents and superiors, honesty without oaths, generosity to family members without counting the cost, unlimited forgiveness of offenses and debts, protection of wives, women, orphans and the most vulnerable, the integrity of marriage, mutual humility and proscription of ambition, compassion, and in general honorable familial conduct). Nowhere does any of this instruction involve explicit rejection of patriarchy or patriarchal order; see also Malina 1994:114–17.

(7) According to the available evidence, Jesus regularly referred to the family and familial-household roles and relationships as a fundamental symbol of human relationships and a primary model for explicating life under the

reign of God and a heavenly Father's love. Jesus, however, redefined the identity of the family and the basis of family ties. This new family of God was one in which all humans trusted in and relied upon God as their Father and benefactor. It was a family constituted not by ties of blood or marriage but by obedience of the heavenly Father's will. It was a family in which all who trusted in God, as did Jesus, were established and united as brothers and sisters who maintained familial solidarity by a respect for familial order, loyalty, compassion, emotional commitment (love), truthfulness, integrity of word and deed, generosity, hospitality, and mutual aid and support—all qualities typical of the honorable family and kin group. What Jesus encouraged was not a "radical egalitarianism" eradicating the family and its structure of authority. As hallmark of the reign of God he rather proclaimed a "radical inclusivity" that relativized all conventional lines of discrimination and exclusion and a radical familial loyalty to God as Father and to one another as brothers and sisters. The focus of Jesus' social teaching was not the elimination of status but rather the inversion of status; not the condemnation of the family, but rather the redefinition of family. The chief metaphor for human sociality was not a group where all were equal, in whatever sense "equal" might be taken. The chief metaphor for human sociality and for explaining the nature of the reign of God was rather "family," but a family redefined along religious and moral, rather than biological, lines, a new surrogate family entered by repentance, conversion, and voluntary submission to the heavenly Father's will and unswerving trust in that Father's favor and benefaction. The profound impact made by Jesus' formation of a new surrogate family is demonstrated by the eagerness with which that model of communal life was adopted and accentuated in the years after Jesus' death (see Elliott 2002, 2003).

(8) The Jesus faction that constituted the initial phase of this new family of God prior to Jesus' death was not egalitarian in nature or structure, but was marked by various kinds of social and economic disparity. Among the followers of Jesus, the Twelve who were personally called and appointed by Jesus (Mark 3:14–19 par.) outranked others. Status in Jesus's faction was determined by the relation of each follower to Jesus personally (length and degree of association). The Twelve were conferred with a power to exorcize demons and heal that other followers did not possess (Mark 6:8, 13 pars; Matt 10:1, 8; Luke 9:1). Among the Twelve, the first called formed an inner core (Peter, James and John of Zebedee, Mark 1:29/Matt 8:14; Mark 5:37, 40; Luke 8:51; Mark 9:2/Matt 17:1/Luke 9:28; 13:13; Mark 14:33/Matt 26:37), with Peter having highest status among all the disciples (as his focal role in the Gospels

indicates: Mark 24x; Matt 23x, esp. Matt 16:16–19; ; Luke 17x; John 25x). Among the followers, some were wealthier than others (Levi and Zacchaeus as toll collectors [Mark 2:13–14 par.; Luke 19:1–10; wealthy women of Galilee who supported Jesus from their means [Luke 8:1–2]). The rivalry among the Twelve for precedence (Mark 10:35–45 par.) reveals that they had no conception of a “community of equals” and points to disparity rather than parity within the Jesus faction. Women who had immediate personal contact with Jesus had higher status than others (men and women) who had less contact. Both the men and the women praised by Jesus for their trust/faith were superior in status and later presented by evangelists as exemplars for the believers (and hence higher in status). Named persons affiliating with Jesus generally had higher recognition and status than those left anonymous in the Gospels. (On male dominance in the Jesus movement see also Stegemann and Stegemann: 386; contrast Crossan 1991: 261–64).

This situation of social and economic disparity continued to characterize the Jesus movement after Jesus’ death, along with continued differentiation in statuses and roles. At no point in the history of the movement is there any concrete evidence indicating a period or an interval when social and economic equality was put into place among the followers of Jesus.

The abandonment of home and family on the part of some, moreover, was not universal among Jesus’ followers, but was practiced mainly by itinerants, who, in turn, were supported materially by the “community sympathizers,” who maintained their traditional way of life and traditional household structures. These traditional patriarchal household structures, as far as the evidence indicates, remained in place without interruption or substitution. Even the new family constituted by Jesus was patriarchal in structure but new in terms of the basis of its identity and the scope of its boundaries. In this surrogate family of faith, social and economic disparities remained but were relativized by an insistence upon the mutual humility of all fictive family members, mutual forgiveness, mutual aid and mutual respect among superordinates and subordinates. This was also the case for the movement after Jesus’ death.

Subsequent to Jesus’ death, household and family featured as the focus, basis, and locus of the Jesus Groups. Local communities were organized and structured as house churches. Familial values, norms, and scripts were enforced with theological and Christological motives. Familial unity and solidarity in Christ” (Gal 3:28) or as “Christians” (1 Pet 4:16), rather than equality was the focal concern. Household and family likewise provided the chief model for the assertion of collective social identity,

the encouragement of social cohesion, and the urging of commitment to God, Jesus Christ, and one another.

Summary and Conclusions

The theory that Jesus was an egalitarian who established an egalitarian “community of equals” is problematic in several respects and must be rejected as implausible, unsupported and unconvincing.

(1) A comprehensive definition of the key concepts “equality” and “egalitarian” and their domains and full frames of reference is never offered by proponents of the egalitarian theory. Where instances of equality are claimed to exist, the precise nature of this equality and its domain is rarely, if ever, stated. At the most, it is maintained that women were made equal to men. The concepts, as employed by the proponents, are of modern origin and alien to the thought and social reality of the ancient world. If Jesus did indeed establish “an absolute equality of people that denies the validity of any discrimination between them and negates the necessity of hierarchy among them” (Crossan 1994: 71), this absolute social novum must be demonstrated beyond any shadow of a doubt. This the egalitarian theories have not done.

(2) In regard to specific “equality” terminology in the New Testament (the *iso-* family of terms), the words “equal” or “equality” are never used to assert the equality of all believers or to describe the social or economic relations characteristic of the Jesus movement as a whole. On the other hand, in none of the texts cited by the egalitarian proponents is any member of the *iso-* family of terms present. Any egalitarianism attributed to the Jesus movement must be demonstrated by forms of evidence other than the use of equality terminology.

(3) Egalitarian theorists interpret biblical texts anachronistically from a specific ideological perspective reflecting a modern conception and valuation of equality. Equality and egalitarianism are assumed to be implied in the texts cited, but are not demonstrated with reference to the social structure of the Jesus movement as a whole.

(4) The biblical texts alleged to demonstrate Jesus’ egalitarianism are not probative but are open to other and contrary interpretation.

(5) Egalitarian theorists provide no concrete historical or social evidence that a “community of equal” was ever brought into being. Nor do they imagine or attempt to explain precisely how this might have occurred.

(6) The concept of a social and economic “community of equals” is made implausible by the actual social and economic disparity and prevailing inequities within the Jesus movement before and after Jesus’ death. It is likewise

incompatible with what Jesus presumed about patriarchal relations which he did not criticize or alter. Nor does the theory accord with what is indicated in the New Testament concerning the social state of affairs in the movement after Jesus' death. The major text alleged to imply a prevalent egalitarianism prior to Paul and subsequent to Jesus's death, Gal 3:28, concerns the unity of all believers in Christ Jesus, not their equality. It affirms an inclusivity that transcends ethnic, social, and gender boundaries, not the levelling of all social roles and relations (see Elliott 2002).

(7) Arguments for a "community of equals" involve a web of unfounded assumptions and inferences. Biblical texts are interpreted as though they implied statements about equality even though equality receives no explicit mention. This assumed inference of equality is then used to assess texts as "anti-family" and "anti-patriarchal." Schüssler Fiorenza in particular arbitrarily equates patriarchy with all forms of domination so that she sees all texts proscribing domination as proscriptions of patriarchy as a political and social system and as implying egalitarianism. Statements regarding status reversal are mistakenly assumed to imply elimination of social inequalities and stratification altogether—despite the evidence to the contrary. Affirmations of inclusiveness and communal unity likewise are misinterpreted as affirmations of equality.

(8) Egalitarian theorists have succumbed to the "idealist fallacy." Statements by Jesus and his followers are inferred to be affirmations of social and economic equality. This alleged idea of equality, in turn, is then credited as an indication of actual social and economic relations. The inference, however, is undemonstrated and the subsequent line of argumentation, fallacious. On the idealist fallacy see B. Holmberg 1980a: 201–03 and 1980b: 187–200.

(9) Too many questions concerning this putative equality are left unraised and unanswered. How would was this vision of equality have been translated into material and social reality? What concrete social and economic expression would this putative equality have taken in everyday life? How was an actual equality established in the movement between Israelites and Gentiles, owners and slaves, males and females? What new social structure would this egalitarianism have taken and how would it have been enforced? What concrete social and economic changes would have had to be undertaken to make this happen? On these vital questions, egalitarian theorists are silent. We are left only with an idea or idealization that is given no material substance.

(10) The egalitarian theory thus has proved inconsistent with the content of Jesus' teaching, and the social reality of the Jesus faction, implausible on sociological

grounds, and nonprobative on historical grounds. The claim that the Jesus movement was egalitarian involves flawed reasoning and an anachronistic, ethnocentric, and ideologically-driven reading of the New Testament. Feminist scholars including Mary Rose D'Angelo (1992), Amy-Jill Levine (1994), and Kathleen E. Corley (1998), are likewise rejecting the egalitarian theory, objecting, *inter alia*, to its lack of historical support and its isolation of Jesus from his Israelite matrix. The only way in which it is conceivable for interpreters of the New Testament to speak of equality in the early church is in respect to equal access to the grace, forgiveness, and mercy of God effected by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However one might wish that this sense of equality before God had led to an embodiment of equality in reformed social and economic relations, history reveals a different and less sanguine picture. If social equality ever was an idea held by the followers of Jesus, it remained only a grandiose ideal or "vision" never translated into social and economic reality. The evidence within and beyond the New Testament, however, makes it most unlikely that such a modern idea was ever entertained in the first place. It was not an idea of equality that motivated and shaped the Jesus movement, but rather receptance into an inclusive community serving as a surrogate family that admitted all into its ranks on the basis of faith and that was maintained by values of brotherly and sisterly love, loyalty, hospitality and familial solidarity.

(11) The notion of Jesus' establishing a community of equals is something to be challenged, not simply because the notion itself is unsustainable by evidence, but because it obscures what was the actual and primary model of community employed by Jesus and his followers; namely, the household or family. As long as Jesus is imagined as having rejected the family entirely rather than redefining it in religious and moral terms, and as long as he is seen as having substituted for the family a community in which all are supposedly equal, the actual significance of the family in the teaching of Jesus and in the development of the Jesus' movement will never be adequately appreciated. The result will be, as we have already seen, a distorted view according to which in a series of social revolutions without parallel in history the Jesus movement rejected the family in favor of an egalitarian community which in turn is attacked already as early as Paul and eventually replaced by conventional patriarchal familial structures—and all of this within a generation of Jesus' ministry and death. The fact is, however, that it was the family and the household, redefined but retained, which was employed by Jesus and his followers as the fundamental basis and model of Christian sociality, the focus of Christian mission, the locus

of Christian worship, and the chief root metaphor of Christian collective identity, solidarity, loyalty and obligation.

By imputing to the biblical authors a modern concept of equality that is not found in the Bible and the ancient world and by allowing this imputed concept to determine their interpretation of the New Testament, they have produced an interpretation that distorts and obscures the actual content and thrust of these texts. Such an interpretative procedure appears more eisegesis than exegesis and deserves to be rejected as a unhappy example of interpretive method. An anachronistic imputation of modern notions to the biblical authors should be challenged and resisted in the name of historical honesty wherever and however it occurs. To be sure, let us expend every ounce of energy it takes to reform the ills of society and church. But let us do so with historical honesty, respecting the past as past and not trying to recreate it with modern constructs or re-write it with new ideological pens. For what is sauce for the goose (in this case, a well-intentioned longing for equality in the church and society) is also sauce for today's and tomorrow's bigotted ganders.

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