

Which Sex Killed Jesus?

Bernadette Barton and Ric N. Caric
Morehead State University

1. Introduction

In this religiously conservative time, when the radical Christian right is making a shameless grab for converts, and Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ* grossed \$370 million in 2004, and fear of terrorism, hurricanes, rising gas prices, and gay marriage fuel a rising cultural hysteria, let us explore a question that emerged again in the public discourse with the press and popularity of the *Passion of the Christ*: Who killed Jesus?

Rather than the reactionary Anti-Semitic response that "the Jews" killed Jesus, we will demonstrate in this paper that there is a much more visible group to whom we might intellectually and morally assign the blame for the death of Jesus. Indeed it was while watching the *Passion* itself on video, and fast-forwarding through the goriest scenes, that a more empirically plausible answer to the question of Christ-killing forcibly struck us.

Men killed Jesus.

A male betrayed him (Judas), a man sentenced him (Pontius Pilate), men tortured him (the Temple and Roman soldiers), the men among his followers denied him (Peter), and men executed him (Roman soldiers). It was all men, all the time when it came to the brutal torture and murder of Jesus. The question then is rather men as a sex had a general interest in killing Jesus that would have been part of the motivation for the actions of those men involved in the arrest and execution.

Drawing on a combination of biblical and historical references, and feminist theory, we will explore the role men played in the death of Jesus and argue that, in doing so, Jewish men, Roman men, rulers, soldiers, religious leaders, farmers and fishermen all participated in suppressing the anti-

masculine orientation toward self-sacrifice promoted by Jesus. The ministry of Jesus challenged the patriarchal super structure of the time, assaulting male and class identity and privilege. Thus, it is logical that Jesus made enemies of those men whose privileges he condemned as opposing the kingdom of God. This includes the fathers of his disciples he recruited away from family enterprises, men who possessed wealth and property, all those men who sought to uphold male honor through the ethic of revenge, the Pharisees and Scribes who enforced the religious laws, the high priests who managed the financial enterprises of the Temple, and the Roman authorities who counted on their subjects to pursue their self-interest. Among the disciples, only Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus to the authorities, but the rest betrayed Jesus in their own ways by denying Jesus (Peter) or refusing to bear witness to either the message or the divine status of Jesus. Thus, they too were indirectly implicated in the murder. Perhaps the men who killed Jesus did so in the name of all men.

To understand the potential for tension between Jesus and men, the following questions are most salient. Was there anything about the person, bearing, message, or actions of Jesus that would provoke men in general? Conversely, what psychological qualities, customs, interests, education, and sexuality of the period might encourage men to be hostile to the message of Jesus and therefore predisposed to kill Jesus or a figure like Jesus? Stated more simply, “What is it about men that would make them Christ-killers?”

2. The Pharisees and Religious Authority

Jesus did not explicitly critique patriarchy. He did, however, radically devalue aspects of material life that bolstered the interests and values of males on several levels. In Luke 7:36-50, for example, there is an account of a visit by Jesus to the house of a Pharisee named Simon. As Jesus sat down to his meal, a woman “which was a sinner” came into the house with a box of expensive alabaster ointment, stood behind Jesus weeping, “and began to wash his feet with tears.” Then, the woman

(identified as Mary Magdalene in John) wiped the feet of Jesus with her hair before kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. According to Luke, the Pharisee thought to himself that Jesus should have known that the woman who touched him in this way was a sinner. Recognizing Simon's thoughts, Jesus compared the Pharisee unfavorably to the woman.

Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.¹

In this gentle rebuke, Jesus indicates that he valued almost everything about this woman's behavior over Simon the Pharisee and his prerogatives. Perhaps most importantly, Jesus valued her sinning over the Pharisee's piety. Because of the weight of her many sins and her corresponding need for forgiveness, the woman "loved much" and showed that love through her service of washing Jesus' feet with her tears, wiping his feet with her hair, and then kissing and anointing his feet. For Jesus, love showed itself most forcefully in a willingness to subordinate oneself to God and others. Desperately in need of forgiveness and animated by a faith that Jesus could provide that forgiveness, the woman eagerly subordinated herself to caring for Jesus' feet. The woman's love for Jesus recalls several of the important themes of the four narratives of Jesus' life. The abjectness of the woman's behavior and her overpowering need for forgiveness recall the first of the blessings in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew: "blessed are the poor in spirit." In much the same way, the menial character of the woman's care for Jesus' feet and her "tainted" reputation as a sinner correspond with the Jesus' dictum that the "last shall come first and the first shall come last." Finally, the woman's washing of Jesus feet was the model that Jesus himself adapted when showing his own love in John's account of the Last Supper by

washing the feet of his disciples. Of all the figures, Jesus encountered in his ministry, this sinning woman was the one that he embodied most in his own conduct.²

To the contrary, Pharisees like Simon, as strict observers of the Law, apparently did not sin very much. However, there was much in Simon's conduct that was contrary to Jesus and his doctrine. Not feeling the weight of sin and not being in need of forgiveness, Simon had little love for Jesus and offered him nothing in the way of loving service that Jesus so highly valued. Instead, Simon was very concerned about reputation. Because the woman had a reputation as a sinner, Simon seemed to believe that she should not be allowed into the presence of a holy man like Jesus. Simon's concern for reputation extended to Jesus himself. He thought that Jesus, "if he were a prophet, would have known what manner this woman is that toucheth him" and, presumably, would have sent her away in shame." From the perspective of Jesus, this kind of concern for reputation revealed the observation of the Law by Simon, and all the Pharisees, as a kind of public display rather than a manifestation of sincere piety. "But all their works they do for to be seen by men; they . . . love the uppermost rooms at feasts and the chief seats in the synagogues and greetings in the markets, and to be called Rabbi, Rabbi." Carrying the four books of the Torah, tithing, observing dietary restrictions, and efforts to ensure that the rest of the Jewish observed those restrictions were all ways that the Pharisees built up a capital of social respectability. For Jesus, however, the general respect with which the Pharisees were held in ancient Judea was a form of "fullness" that was condemnable ("Woe unto you that are full, for you shall hunger") seemingly because it prevented people from having the kind of love that characterized the woman with the alabaster ointment. Indeed, where Jesus forgave the woman with the alabaster ointment her many sins, he did not forgive Simon the Pharisee his concern for reputation or lack of love.³

The Pharisees were a faction that advocated the extension of Mosaic dietary restrictions from the priests to the Jewish people as a whole. Being a Pharisee was also a status that was denoted by carrying

a phylactery and wearing special robes. Being a Pharisee was also a privilege of masculinity in that it was one of the many kinds of religious status among the Jewish people that were reserved for males and from which women were excluded. Being a Pharisee, Sadducee, scribe, or chief priest was an indication of a religious avocation that differentiated men like Simon from the Jewish population. Having this kind of religious avocation was also one of the ways in which men as a sex differentiated themselves from women as a sex which was excluded from this avocation. Although Jesus did not criticize the gender supremacy component of the Pharisees, he was condemning one dimension of male privilege when he condemned the Pharisees.

The opposition between Jesus and the Pharisees began early in his ministry. In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, Jesus mentioned the Pharisees by name in claiming that none could enter into heaven without exceeding “the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees,” but seemed also to criticize the Pharisees when he denounced the “hypocrites” who made a public show of giving alms and saying prayers. At the same time, Jesus was suspect to the Pharisees. From an early point in his ministry, they questioned his claims to heal from God, legitimately ignore the traditional proscriptions on the Sabbath and washing hands, forgive sins, and finally, that he was the Christ. From the point of view of the Pharisees, Jesus was committing blasphemy and they sought in their unofficial capacities as organizers of popular religion to punish him violently from an early date. Well before Jesus made his move toward Jerusalem, John cited the Pharisees as persecuting and trying to kill Jesus because he had cured a man on the Sabbath Day and referred to God as his father. Likewise, Matthew 12 characterized the Pharisees as holding counsels to plot “how they might destroy him” after Jesus and his followers had blithely ignored the Sabbath injunctions by gathering food and healing the sick. In his own way, Jesus was just as violent in his threats to see the Pharisees to damnation and “greater damnation.” For Jesus, the Pharisees shut up the kingdom of heaven for themselves through the various ways that they exalted

themselves over the rest of the people. The whole web of sanctity that the Pharisees created by wearing distinct clothing, answering to the title of rabbi, and cultivating reputations for piety was contrary to the ethic of service and humility that Jesus cultivated. In Matthew 23, Jesus indicates that the common denominator of the Pharisee's approach to religion is the money they demand in tithes and gifts rather than "the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith."⁴

By the time Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, he and the Pharisees, scribes, and priests were like two enemy armies warily stalking each other as they gather for a major battle. Jesus was not only calling on men to follow him instead of the religious authorities, he was advocating a radical model of sanctity in which "he that is greatest among you shall be your servant and whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." Jesus was thus demanding that the Pharisees and other religious authorities give up the claims to sanctity by which they exalted themselves as pious men over other men and as men in general over women. Instead, Jesus called on the religious authorities to adapt the model of painful humility and service best exemplified by the woman with the alabaster ointment and better manifested by women in general than by males. The bitter vengeance that the Pharisees and other religious authorities enacted for the attack of Jesus on their sanctity was the leading element in the suffering and martyrdom that Jesus was pointing himself towards. As will be seen, however, the religious authorities were representing many categories of men when they launched their final and deadly attack.⁵

3. The Attack on Wealth.

Although Jesus conducted himself mildly toward Simon, much of his ministry was taken up with aggressive attacks on key areas of male privilege: the accumulation of wealth, families and the father's role as head of the family as well as the exercise of popular religious authority. The critique of wealth by Jesus is well known. However, Jesus thought that many of the things that were wrong with wealth

were even more wrong with family connections. In turn, the attacks of Jesus on the pursuit of wealth and power of family connections were focused on the males who monopolized property and held the most authority in families. Indeed, in some ways, the ministry of Jesus can be understood as both a psychologically and physically violent assault on the ties of men to their properties and their families. One of the stronger currents in the doctrine of Jesus was an underlying conviction that everything that men devoted to their property and their families was taken from God and that God revenged himself on men by condemning them to the fires of hell. At the same time, the violence of Jesus' assault on male privilege precipitated a violent counter-reaction that led various categories of men to pursue Jesus and eventually have him executed. In this sense, men killed Jesus to avenge the assaults of Jesus on male privilege.

Jesus did not raise objections to wealth *per se*. He apparently did not believe that the pursuit of wealth necessarily involved selfish or unethical behavior. Jesus did not disapprove of profit and he did not seem to believe that the wealthy were necessarily animated by vices like greed, or that the rich exploited their fellow men, lacked consideration for the poor or laborers, or despoiled the earth. Instead, Jesus criticized wealth for the ways that the accumulation and possession of wealth shaped a man's posture toward God. There were three principles involved in Jesus' critique of wealth: 1. the accumulation and possession of wealth competed with God for men's loyalties; 2. the labor involved in gaining wealth was a form of self-reliance that took men away from dependence on God; 3. the enjoyment of wealth (and the prestige associated with wealth) was contrary to the model of suffering that Jesus sought to promote. Indeed, these problems were so severe that Jesus reacted more harshly to the possession of wealth than he did to sins against the commandments like adultery.

In Luke 12, Jesus posed most of these criticisms in relation to a parable beginning with an account of a man and his barn. Talking with a company of men, Jesus warned a man who asked him to

intervene in an inheritance dispute about “covetousness” and launched a parable about a man who planned to enlarge his barn as a way to expand on the point.

The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said. This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is nor rich toward God.”⁶

The rich man seemed to have been proposing a kind of semi-retirement for himself. He was the owner of the land that provided him with his wealth, had been accumulating goods for years, and was now intent on enjoying his possessions. Having so big a harvest, the rich man couldn’t keep his surplus in his current barns. So, he proposed to build larger barns for his “fruits and goods” and to live on those goods—“to take his ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” In many ways, the rich man’s sense of self-satisfaction was peculiarly male. Of course, owning agricultural property was a male privilege during the Biblical period. So, the rich man was enjoying the fruits of a planning, supervision, and accumulation that only men could enjoy. The rich man’s sense of self-sufficiency was enhanced by the fact that he would have had a freedom to which women did not have access. Where the rich man was head of his household and only subject to the laws of the Roman state and god, even wealthy women were subject to the authority of their fathers or husbands. The rich man’s wife could not make decisions regarding the construction of new barns. She could not “eat, drink, and be merry” without her husband’s consent. The rich man’s daughters could not marry without his consent. In many ways, the rich man was planning on enjoying his success as a man.

However, Jesus poses God as interjecting himself into this reverie to punish the rich man for his self-complacency. God seems so visibly affronted by the man’s sense of self-satisfaction that he speaks to him directly. From the point of view of Jesus, the rich man’s extensive possessions and his self-

satisfaction mirrored each other as forms of the “fullness” that Jesus had condemned earlier in Luke (“But woe unto you that are rich! For ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! For ye shall hunger.” At the same time, it was clear that Jesus would have viewed the rich man as devoting himself to cultivating his land, calculating his investments in farm implements, animals, and seed, and supervising his laborers rather than devoting himself to God. The wealth of the man was condemnable because it demonstrated that the rich man had been serving mammon in contempt of God. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” By devoting himself to mammon enough to accumulate such wealth, the rich man showed that he despised God. At the same time, Jesus condemns the rich man for denying to God the kind of wealth that was rightfully God’s. For Jesus, the treasure that was owed to God was that of complete love and devotion. Because the rich man was serving himself rather than being devoted to God, God obtained revenge by killing the man, stripping him of his possessions, and forcing him to contemplate other men owning his wealth. “[T]hen whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”⁷

Jesus then immediately radicalizes his stance against wealth by announcing an invocation against labor. “Therefore he said unto his disciples. Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.” Given that God provides food for the raven, decoration for the lilies of the field, and clothing for the grass, Jesus asks why men should not count on God to provide these things without their having to labor. “Seek ye the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you.” Here Jesus criticizes labor because it involves a self-reliance that is in opposition to the complete ideal of human dependence on God. This is a universalization of Jesus’ condemnation of wealth. Not only should men not take the devotion that is due God for the sake of accumulating wealth,

they should not take away from God even the attention that is required to attain a subsistence. Jesus demanded that men should count on God for food, clothing, and shelter rather than their own efforts. As Jesus continued to comment on the parable of the rich man and the barn, he called on men to “sell that ye have and give alms.” Instead of accumulating wealth or laboring for themselves at all, Jesus called on men to be “yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding . . . and will come forth and serve him.” Instead of enjoying what *they* produce, Jesus wants men to be waiting anxiously for God to come to them so that they can **serve** God. “And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.” This was the only way that men could give God all the devotion that was due him and avoid God’s eternal punishments.⁸

In many ways, what Jesus was seeking from his disciples with the parable of the rich man and his barn was the same kind of loving expectant service from men that he received from the woman with the alabaster ointment. In the case of the woman, that service was washing and anointing the feet of Jesus. In the case of the apostles, that service was the waiting up for God to come to them for their assistance. For Jesus, this submission and service was specifically feminine. God was the “bridegroom” and men and women were collectively “the bride.” Ultimately, Jesus condemned the possession of property that allowed men to command the labor of other men and women, the property that allowed men to claim that they had abundance here on earth rather than heaven, and the labor that allowed men to depend on themselves rather than God. For males to be in the position of the human bride to God’s bridegroom, they needed to stop superintending their wealth, give their possessions away, and stop working for their basic needs. As long as men tried to be a “bridegroom” themselves, they were lost and damned. It was only by giving up specifically male ambitions that they could hope to love God as completely as God demanded and thereby avoid the violence of God’s judgment.⁹

Jesus did not offer the kind of direct rebukes to the wealthy that he gave to the Pharisees, nor did he interfere very often with property. However, the specter of violence against Jesus did arise on those occasions when Jesus did intercede against property. In the incident of the Gadarene swines, there is an implication of violence when “the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought [Jesus] to depart from them.” The second time Jesus attacked property was when he chased the money changers out of the Temple almost immediately upon entering Jerusalem. Angry that merchants, money changers, and others had set up business, Jesus upset their tables and drove them out before beginning to preach in the Temple on a daily basis. The attack of Jesus on the money-changers was part of his over-all critique of the association of money with religiosity among the Jews. As already mentioned, Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of giving tithes rather than being pious (Matthew 23: 23), taking money from widows (Matthew 23: 14), and encouraging the Hebrews to worship the gold of the temple and the gifts on the altar. Thus, when the chief priests and the scribes began to renew their plotting against Jesus’ life after the incident with the money-changers, they were plotting revenge on Jesus in the name of the commitment to wealth among the whole religious establishment. Indeed, the priests and scribes can be said to have been plotting revenge in the name of any male head of family who had accumulated any kind of property through either their own labor or superintending the labor of others.¹⁰

4. The Family.

Strong as the attack of Jesus on wealth was, it was not nearly as powerful as his assault on the ties within families. According to the four narratives of his life, Jesus viewed the affective bond among families as a much greater threat to a person’s devotion to God than wealth. Likewise, the family bond that Jesus attacked most strongly was the bond between sons and their fathers. As a result, Jesus continually reminded his followers and potential followers of the overriding need to abandon their

families to follow him. Those who were working for their fathers were called away from their father's enterprises. If a potential follower were preparing for his father's funeral or wanted to say good-bye to their families, Jesus demanded that they forget any debt of affection to their families and follow him. In fact, he demanded that he followers complete the break with their families by hating them. At the same time, Jesus expected the families of his followers to seek revenge on their children for leaving, and on Jesus for taking them away. Indeed, the violence that Jesus expected families to exercise in retaliation for the abandonment of their sons and daughters was an important element in shaping Jesus' idea of his own suffering and ultimate execution. In this sense, the revenge of the fathers would serve as a model for the revenge of the mankind as a whole.

Jesus signaled his attitude toward family bonds at the beginning of his ministry when he called James and John from their father Zebedee's fishing boat where they were mending nets with Zebedee. James and John had been under their father's authority in the family fishing enterprise and their labor was most likely an important part of the father's success. One or both of them would have been heir to their father's property as well. In calling the men away, Jesus indicated that they were under an imperative to separate themselves from their family and that neither their father's authority nor any affective ties between the sons and the father should have any weight on their conscience compared to Jesus. It could be argued that the Gospels pose James and John as leaving their father because they immediately recognized his divinity, but a basic characteristic of Jesus' divinity emerges in the account. For Jesus, obligation and love were zero-sum games. If the men felt obligated to follow Jesus, they had to leave Zebedee and leave him "immediately" as if Zebedee had no legitimate claim on them. It was either Jesus or Zebedee with no compromise that might allow James and John to help out their father at all. The same is implied with love. If the men were to love Jesus, they had to withdraw their love from their father, giving Zebedee no notice and making no departing gesture of any kind, let alone the "kiss"

that Jesus had rebuked Simon the Pharisee for not giving. It seemed that Jesus was demanding a monopoly on the love of James and John.¹¹

The family ties of his followers and potential followers posed two kinds of problems for Jesus. First, family connections were similar to property in the sense that they were a form of attachment that prevented men and women from fully devoting themselves to God. Family connections were also like the property of the wealthy and the prestige of the Pharisees in that they could serve as a form of capital (or wealth) that people could store up in this world rather than becoming wealthy toward God through loving service. Second, families involved forms of love that competed with the love demanded by Jesus. Where Jesus thought of a proper love toward God as emerging from a sense of bereftness and pointing toward martyrdom, the Gospels portrayed the love of family as a complex web of mutually reinforcing blood ties, the care of the sick, fraternal love, cooperation in the household, and loyalties along hierarchical lines. For Jesus, family was not just an alternative to God as a target of one's attachment; it was an alternative principle of love that had to be rejected.

In Matthew 10: 34, Jesus proclaims that:

I came not to send peace but a sword, for I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."

What puts son against father, daughter against mother, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law was the conviction that a person's coming to love for Jesus would require the withdrawal of love from families. Jesus announces that he sends a sword rather than peace to families because he has concluded that any love directed toward him would have to be taken from families. In Matthew, the opposition between Jesus and families was relative to the extent that he demands that men love him

more than their fathers, mothers, sons, or daughters. However, Matthew also implies an absolute priority for Jesus when he suggests that love for Jesus would be such a shock on families that “a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.” The same message is proclaimed in Luke 9 when Jesus encounters a man who wants to follow him but also wants to return home to bid farewell to those at his house. Jesus replies that “no man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is it fit for the kingdom of God.” In Luke 14, Jesus gives the priority of commitment to God over commitment to family a particularly harsh twist.

“if any man come to me and hate not his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.”¹²

Jesus not only demands that men withdraw themselves from their families, but makes hatred of their families the standard by which he judges the legitimacy of their commitment to him. Jesus expresses a similar belief that families would seek revenge on his followers in Luke 21 when he tells his followers that “ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake.”¹³

It is the absoluteness of this withdrawal of love that turns the closest relatives of the followers of Jesus into enemies. This expectation of mutual hatred can be understood in terms of exchange and debt. In Matthew 10: 34-38, love is portrayed as a mutual relationship in which the parties adapt several roles and exchange many kinds of things. A man can be simultaneously a son who loves a father, a husband who loves a wife, and a father who loves a son. Indeed, Jesus portrays families as webs of different kinds of love in which a wide variety of mutual services, gestures, tokens of affection, and rituals are exchanged and in which a wide variety of meaningful events are shared (weddings, funerals, births, coming of age ceremonies, etc.). When a man or woman comes to love Jesus, the new follower takes

him or herself out of the web of family involvement. Therefore, the new followers were not giving their relatives the love that family members thought was owed them. The new followers were no longer giving family members what was due them as their fathers, mothers, sisters, or brothers. Perhaps more important, the new followers stopped receiving the acts of love that had allowed their relatives to function and experience themselves as “fathers,” “mothers,” “brothers,” and “sisters.” Jesus himself emphasized that he no longer considered his mother Mary to be his mother or his brother to be “brethren.” His viewed his “family” only in terms of those involved with him in his ministry. Thus, family members became the enemies of Jesus followers out of vengeance for the sense of rage and bereftness they felt over no longer being able to be father, mother, brother, or sister.

Unlike religious authority and wealth, men did not have a monopoly over family affections. Consequently, fathers, husbands, and brothers would not have been the only people who had reason to despise Jesus for breaking up their families. Sisters, mothers, aunts, and daughters-in-law would have had reason to hate Jesus as well. Nevertheless, the New Testament provides several reasons to conclude that Jesus focused his attack on families on fathers in particular and males in general. First, Jesus singles out fathers for scorn in calling on a young man to follow him. When the young man asked to attend his father’s burial before setting off, Jesus coldly replied “let the dead bury their dead: **but go thou and preach the kingdom of God**” (Luke 9: 60). Here, Jesus not only expressed a casual contempt for the unconverted (and therefore “the dead”), but a thorough-going derision of any loyalties, respect, reverence, or attachment—in other words, love-- that the young man would have had for his father.¹⁴

Second, Jesus banned many of the behaviors by which males sought to defend their family’s interest and honor. When Jesus spoke out against the ethic of revenge in the Sermon on the Mount by demanding that men “resist not evil,” he was banning a large portion of the behaviors through which men defended families and themselves. In traditional societies like ancient Judea, the “honor” of a male

head of household was the honor of his family. Upholding a family's "honor" meant avenging insults and assaults on the family just as much as it meant maintaining and increasing a family's property and social standing. By insisting that men "bless them that curse you," Jesus implicitly condemned those who avenged insults against their own and their family's honor. By insisting that men "turn the other cheek," Jesus implicitly condemned any kind of revenge on those who attacked either them or other members of their families. By insisting that men give those who sued them more than is asked, Jesus implicitly condemned any effort by heads of households (who would have been the only ones to have the right to sue) to defend their families economic interests as well. In the Sermon on the Mount, the condemnation of revenge is part of Jesus' effort to urge men to stop judging others and broaden their sympathies from merely loving their "neighbors" to loving their "enemies" as well. The same applies to the strongest attachment of men—their families. As part of his effort to detach men from their families, Jesus insisted that men treat their enemies and the enemies of their families with at least as much consideration as they treated their wives, sons, daughters, mothers, and fathers. Otherwise, they were traveling the broad way that "leadeth to destruction." In this sense, the imprecations of Jesus against families applied especially to the men who had the right, duty, and privilege to defend the interests and honor of families. As a result, Jesus would reasonably have expected the vengeance of families on his followers to come primarily from the men.¹⁵

As fathers and the heads of households, males also would have been the ones who represented the interests of the family in seeking revenge on Jesus. In John 17, Jesus emphasized that "thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee." In a similar way, human fathers were "in" their wives, sons, daughters, and mothers in the sense that all of their actions reflected on the father as the head of the household. Likewise, wives, sons, daughters, and mothers were "in" male heads of households to the extent that their prominence and social standing derived from the prestige of the father. In this sense, all of the

wounds from the betrayal of the family by the young men and women who followed Jesus would have been gathered in the figure of the father as the head of the household. It would have been the father who would have been responsible for reporting the followers of Jesus to the local religious authorities, betraying them to the Romans, or causing them to be put to death. Mothers, daughters, and sisters would have felt the loss of a brother or son to Jesus, but it would have been the male head of the family who would have been responsible for carrying out the family's vengeance. Because the families were the strongest principle of competition for the love that Jesus sought to direct toward himself, Jesus expected families to be the most implacable agents of revenge on him and those who followed him. Representing those families would have been the men who served as patriarchal heads of household.

Conclusion.

Jesus was killed because he attacked three core areas of male privilege—religious authority, property, and family. Male privilege created a capital of external wealth, social respect, and self-esteem that Jesus viewed as attaching men to the world, preventing men from devoting themselves to god, and creating alternative principles of love. As a result, Jesus offered blistering criticisms of the Pharisees, scribes, priests, and the wealthy. He then generalized the principles behind these criticisms to prescribe other kinds of male behavior like labor, property accumulation, and revenge. Jesus was also implacable in his demands that the men who followed him abandon their families. And to lend the utmost in practical consequences to his warnings, Jesus threatened his targets with the constant specter of hellfire and damnation. As a result, when various descriptions of men—the Pharisees, scribes, temple priests, temple soldiers, Roman authorities, and Roman soldiers—killed Jesus, they did so in the name of all men. Even Jesus' disciples were implicated deeply in the crucifixion. Judas betrayed Jesus to the Roman authorities, Peter denied Jesus three times, and the rest of Jesus twelve closest male followers seemed to abandon him in his hour of need. When faced with the choice of joining Jesus in martyrdom

or adhering to the world of male privilege, the male disciples all chose male privilege and patriarchy. The only followers who stayed with Jesus through his death were women like Mary his mother and Mary Magdalene and indeed it was women who were privileged to receive the first news of the resurrection. Where the male followers ultimately identified with the general male interest in killing Jesus, his female followers were in a better position to grasp the message of resurrection.

¹Luke 7: 44-46, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with Psalms and Proverbs, Commonly known as the Authorized (King James Version)*, National Publishing, 1968. All subsequent New Testament citations from same edition.

²Matthew 5:3; Matthew 23: 11-12; John 13: 4-5.

³Matthew 23: 5-7; Luke 6: 25;

⁴John 5: 16; Matthew 12: 14; Matthew 23: 14, 16-18, 23.

⁵Matthew 23: 11-12.

⁶Luke 12:16-21.

⁷Luke 6: 24-25; Matthew 6: 24;

⁸Luke 12:22; Matthew 6: 25-30; Luke 12:38.

⁹Matthew 9:15.

¹⁰Luke 8: 31-37; Matthew 23: 14, 23.

¹¹Matthew 4:21.

¹²Luke 14:25.

¹³Luke 21: 16-17

¹⁴Luke 9: 60.

¹⁵Matthew 5: 39-44; Matthew 7: 1-2, 13-14.