Whither the Studies of Family in Early Christianity?:

A Critical Review and Search for the Reconstruction of the Lukan Household

in a Postcolonial Perspective

Gil-dong Hong (소속기관과직위를영문으로정확히표기해주세요.)

I. Introduction

In the early Gospel literature, family refers to those related by blood, adoption, or marriage and also to those related to one another within the Christian community. There exists tension, however, between the two configurations. In Hellenistic Jewish and Greco-Roman society, one's home served as a center for education and piety. As distinct from it, however, the Christian movement shifted its loyalty from 'hearth' to 'extra-familial' relationships.[1] Hence, when read at face value, the "hard sayings" on the family attributed to Jesus (Luke 8:19-21; 14:26; Matt 10:37) suggest that the ties of blood are lesser important than the other ties—that is, the ties of communion. Jesus declares those who do the will of God as "my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:33-35; Matt 12:46-50; Luke 2:48-49; 8:19-21). As such, Jesus' followers give no more than second place to even the closest family ties (Matt 19:29; Luke 14:26).

In this regard, the question arises whether Jesus created a substitute family. This question has been widely discussed in the studies of Christian family and household. In *Jesus and the Victory of God*, N. T. Wright argues that Jesus created a fictive kinship group among his disciples—that is, a "surrogate" family of disciples who forsook their natural families to follow Jesus.[2] The creation of the fictive family is directly related to Jesus' task as an eschatological prophet who believes that the kingdom is imminent and being ushered in by his own activity.[3] In this eschatological framework, loyalty to Jesus takes precedence over loyalty to one's own family.

Similarly, John Pryor points out Jesus' understanding of the urgency of his task.[4] According to Pryor, the gravity of the kingdom of God relativizes the demands and obligations of the family.[5] Further, Dale Allison states that Jesus' demands for the renunciation of family correspond to the approach to the family among the millenarian prophetic movements.[6] For Allison, the Jesus movement, like other millenarian prophetic movements, replaces traditional familial and social bonds with fictive kinship. Indeed, the Jesus movement demands intense commitment and unconditional loyalty. However, it promises redemption

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[1] Daniel Patte (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 409.

[2] N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and The Question of God. v. 2, Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

[3] *Ibid*., 78-85.

[4] John W. Pryor, "Jesus and Family — a Test Case," *Australian Biblical Review* 45 (1997): 56-69.

[5] *Ibid*., 62-65.

[6] Dale Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998).

through a reversal of the "given" circumstances.[7]

By contrast, other scholars have argued that the formation of the fictive kinship group did not take place prior to the crucifixion. For example, Arland Jacobson argues that the fictive kinship is a later development.[8] It is not even clear that there was a decisive break between the disciples and their own families while Jesus was alive.[9] Bruce Malina also suggests the later formation of fictive kinship.[10] According to Malina, Jesus created a political faction rather than a fictive family group. In the wake of the resurrection, however, the political faction transformed itself into a domestic, fictive kin-group.[11]

While these recent studies present either the earlier or the later formation of the fictive kinship, their attempts equally point to the gravity of kinship within the Mediterranean world at large and the Roman Palestine in particular. Jesus visits house after house, since they are the places where the problems of society become condensed (cf. Luke 15:1; 19:1-10). The household Jesus endorses creates the communion, a table fellowship, among the people of God including sinners as well as tax collectors (cf. Luke 15:1). Its socio-political, economic aftermath cannot be left "inert" or "neutral" to the believers. For this reason, a discussion of kinship in the Jesus tradition cannot be made fruitfully without regard to the "world" as constructed. Hence, the questions inevitably arise: What are the early church's views or practices of the family as a cultural, social, political, and economic group? To what extent and in what way is the concept of fictive kinship applied to the Christian community under the Roman Empire?

This essay attempts to discover the formation of kinship for the people of God and its interrelated socio-political, economic dimensions in the Roman Empire. The purpose is not to discover a particular historical situation, but rather to reconstruct a pattern of the early Christian's way of living and interacting in the reality of empire.[12] For this purpose, this essay calls attention to a hitherto unrecognized or unappreciated construction of household in the Gospel of Luke. Luke's Jesus not only calls his disciples to abandon their families, but also initiates a reordering of the household that is simultaneously social, political, economic, and theological.

II. Reviewing the Family, Home, and HouseholdStudies

Unlike the modern individualistic culture, ancient Israel had a strong 'group' orientation. The Hebrew terms such as 'mishpacha' and 'beth' designated the single household unit, the wider circle of consanguinity (Gen. 24:38), the clan, the tribe, and the nation.[13] Thus, a person was not an autonomous

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[7]*Ibid*., 66-69.

[8] Arland Jacobson, "Jesus against the Family: The Dissolution of Family Ties in the Gospel Tradition," in *From Quest to Q*, ed. James M. Robinson (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), 189-218.

[9]*Ibid*., 201-210.

[10] Bruce Malina, *The Social Gospel of Jesus: The Kingdom of God in Mediterranean Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

[11]*Ibid*., 66-75.

[12] Dong-Young Kim, "A Human Need for Relationship and Religious Experience," *Theological Forum*77(2014), 329-361.

[13] In ancient Israel, tribe was the primary unit of social and territorial organization. The tribes bore the names of the twelve sons of Jacob/Israel, with Joseph divided into Manasseh and Ephraim. On the other hand, clan signifies

entity, but someone's father, mother, daughter, son, grandparent, and so forth. This kind of concentric usage suggests the role of the basic family in shaping the larger community.[14]

Hence, the affairs of a household took on a public character, with the integration of private and public spheres. The formation of corporate family identity through the subscription to a larger social identity provided meaning and security that the household unit alone could not achieve. As such, ancient Israel emerged from a social system based on kinship groups, without referring to the centralized, elite power. The household affairs were mediated by the socio-religious life of the village community.

The ancient Mediterranean world also had a strong 'group' orientation. One's identity was shaped with regard to the groups, among which most important was the family.[15] The household in the Roman Empire signified the family, but extended beyond those related by blood lines to embrace slaves, servants, stewards, hired hands, property, house, animals, and furnishings.[16]

Recent studies have offered a wealth of valuable scholarship on the nature and function of the family in the Greco-Roman period. For example, Richard Saller points out that the virtue of *pietas* as "dutiful respect" shaped the central ideal for those members of the household.[17] According to Saller, the family was not merely a private refuge, but a powerful locus of relationships and human loyalties thriving at the heart of public life. The husbands were also the fathers and the masters. They must bring their wives, children and slaves into submission. For their duty is to preserve the social order as such.[18]

Also, in their article, "Fathers and Householders in the Jesus Movement," Destro and Pesce point out that the life and function of the household should be viewed as the match of the politics, revolved on the polis. For them, the connection between *oikos* and *polis* exists by way of patronage system.[19] Thus, the focus on the household pertains not only to the primary kinship but also to the community that binds kin and non-kin people together. Mary Rose D'Angelo also explores the effect of the Roman ideology of kinship on Jewish and Early Christian writings. She finds that the kinship values in the Pastoral Letters symbolize an accommodation to Roman values, while the writings encourage resistance towards the Romans.[20]

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something smaller than a tribe but larger than a family—precisely its intermediate role in Israel. See David F. Wright, "family" in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. Edited by Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 223.

[14] The basis of the family is a covenant between the husband and wife (Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14), yet it also extends to other relatives such as grandparents, grandchildren, siblings as well as slaves, servants, and resident foreigners (Gen 17:23; 46:5-7, 26-27; Exod. 20:10; Judg. 9:1). In particular, the "father's house" was an extended family, comprising all the descendants of a single living ancestor in a single lineage, excluding married daughters, male and female slaves and their families, resident laborers, and sometimes resident Levites. It provides the strongest sense of inclusion, identity, protection, and responsibility. On the death of the head of the household, his sons in the next generation would become heads of their own houses, either dividing the patrimony, or possibly in some cases choosing to live on it together (cf. Deut 25:5).

[15] Bruce Malina, *The Social Gospel of Jesus*, 78-85.

[16] *Ibid*.

[17] Richard Saller, *Patriarchy, Property, and Death in the Roman Family* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[18] The Bible also exhorts subordinate members to submit to their superiors. See especially "household codes" (Eph 5:22-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Pet 2:18-3:7; 1 Tim 2:8-15; Titus 2:1-10).

[19] Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, "Fathers and Householders in the Jesus Movement," Biblical Interpretation 11 (2, 2003), 211-238.

[20] Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Eusebeia: Roman imperial family values and the sexual politics of 4 Maccabees and the

On the other hand, one influential line of interpretation espoused by John Dominic Crossan and Gerd Theissen states that the group of disciples in the earliest Jesus movement formed an 'egalitarian' community over and against the patriarchal households.[21] Reversal to the patriarchal structures mounted, until the Christian groups were institutionalized. This sort of interpretation, however, was challenged by John H. Elliott, since 'egalitarianism' is the modern idea of equality and thereby runs the risk of anachronism.[22] According to Elliott, the categories of "equal" and "egalitarian" were not defined or even discussed in antiquity.

Nonetheless, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza claims that Jesus' aim was to undermine and subvert the patriarchal society and to supplant it with the "discipleship of equals."[23] The radical demands for renunciation, coupled with the institution of a new fictive family group, constituted an attack on the 'kyriarchal' system, which shaped social and familial structures.[24] Jesus intended to establish an egalitarian community—that is, a discipleship community "without fathers." In a four-page subsection entitled "Against the Patriarchal Family," John Dominic Crossan also argues that Jesus' primary agenda was to overthrow patriarchal and hierarchical, social structures and institute radical social egalitarianism in their stead.[25] According to Crossan, the unsettled nature of itinerancy in the Jesus movement represents such "unbrokered egalitarianism."[26]

In *The Historical Jesus*, Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz have approached the subject matter from a slightly different perspective.[27] They argue that in Mark's Gospel and in Mark 3:31–35 in particular, Jesus repudiates paternal, and also parental, power and changes the status of each member of the household. This is most apparent in the changes of expression from "mother and brothers" to "brothers and sisters and mother" (Mark 3:33-34).[28] The term "mother" is moved from the position of primacy to the final position and thus suggests the displacement of the mother's positional authority.

Interestingly, John W. Pryor opposes the claims that Jesus' main goal was to overturn the patriarchal family and institute radical egalitarianism in its place.[29] He points out that Jesus used the 'father-son' terminology and other familial languages to speak of his relationship with the Father and the Kingdom of God. With regard to the 'hard sayings' (Luke 8:19-21; 14:26; Matt 10:37), Pryor argues that those 'radical'

Pastorals," *Biblical Interpretation* 11 (2, 2003), 139-165.

[21] John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994) ; Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Edingburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983).

[22] John H. Elliot, "The Jesus Movement was not Egalitarian but Family Oriented," *Biblical Interpretation* 11 (2, 2003): 173-210.

[23] See Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

[24]*Ibid.*, 7. In the colonial Mediterranean culture, a father has both power and responsibility for his children. His role as a father includes instruction, discipline, and punishment. This role of the father as paterfamilias should be understood in regard to a colonial environment. The household system is one of the building blocks for ensuring the hegemonic influence of the Empire. The mainstay of the imperial order is the kyriarchal pattern.

[25] John D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

[26]*Ibid.*

[27] Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide.* trans. by John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

[28]*Ibid.*, 78-89.

[29] John W. Pryor, "Jesus and Family — a Test Case," *Australian Biblical Review* 45 (1997): 56-69.

statements were not motivated by anti-familial, anti-patriarchal, or anti-hierarchical sentiments, but by a belief that the call of God should take precedence over the family obligations.[30] The priority of the natural family should be de-emphasized only in terms of the higher priority of the call from God. In this regard, Jesus subordinated the 'kinship' to the 'discipleship' (cf. Luke 14:26; Matt 10:37).

Most discussions about the family in early Christianity point to the gravity of kinship within the Mediterranean world at large. In this regard, one must reconstruct kinship and its interrelated socio-political, economic dimensions in the Roman Empire. In order to explore the reconfiguration of family for the people of God, I now turn to the re(de)construction of the household in the Gospel of Luke.

III. Searching for the Reconstruction of the Lukan Household

Most discussions in the New Testament studies present the believers as God's own family. In this regard, David A. deSilva argues that the formation of the fictive kinship takes a Christ-centered focus and relates to the descendents of Abraham:

> It is now attachment to this Jesus that determines whether or not a person is in the family, rather than the person's bloodline or natural lineage. Discussions in the New Testament of the formation of this family focus on determining "the true descendants of Abraham" as well as adoption into God's own family.[31]

A person's relationship to the deity was a function of the deity's connection to his or her family. This was also the case with ancient Israel. The ancestral narratives of Genesis repeatedly use the language of family in reference to God. For example, the Song of Miriam and Moses praises the God of their lineage: "This is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him" (Exod 15:2). Jacob also invokes the God of his lineage, "the God of Abraham and of Isaac" (e.g., Gen 31:5, 42, 53; 32:9; 46:1-2).

However, the Lukan configuration of kinship is unique in that its genealogy extends beyond the ancestors. The genealogy in Luke pushes past Abraham and goes up to Adam and, ultimately, to God (Luke 3:23-38).[32] Most of the persons in the list up to David are unknown, and the persons such as David and Abraham in the genealogy are not underlined (cf. Matt. 1:6, 17). In this regard, the genealogy in Luke stands drastically different, especially from the one in the Gospel of Matthew, and provides a unique guide for social interaction (cf. Matt. 1:1-17).

As such, Luke confirms Jesus in the line of Adam and extends his genealogy to all humankind. The most striking aspect of the genealogy is that it creates a household which consists of the divine and

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[30]*Ibid.*, 57-60.

[31] David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

[32] Since kin was reckoned unilaterally through the male, the mother's relatives were not counted genealogically as kin, nor given differentiated generic names. Roger M. Keesing, *Kin Groups and Social Structure* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), 3-31.

humanity together.[33] Thus, the divine kinship which is simultaneously political, economic, social, and religious precedes and transcends the institutions of the empire.[34] The household of God provides now a norm (*nomos*), whereby the self and the other(s) may live together in a manner that is both just and sustainable (cf. Luke 11:2-4, "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts...).[35]

While recognizing and unveiling the empire's overall system of relations, Luke frees people from it or otherwise challenges it, integrating extraneous bits and pieces into a unified whole of "household." As such, Luke's creation of kinship becomes more associated with various cultural, moral, and socio-political expressions and inspires liberation today for all people.

For the people of God, this is a new constitution and a new covenant. Luke's genealogy, which serves as an audacious metaphor against the empire, informs and reforms the construction of 'life' and 'life-together'.[36] This vision can be drawn into two broad categories: 1) divided vs. communal, 2) hierarchical vs. egalitarian.

1. Divided vs. Communal

The family is necessarily linked to the eucharistic community and thus becomes sacramental.[37] One's life is not just given, but also gives to the other who receives it. Shared values of cooperation and mutual assistance are typically inculcated and perpetuated through the life of community. In this respect, Luke's genealogy reinstates the human beings in community. God creates the human beings as in community. This does not point to the mode of reciprocity (e.g., *homo reciprocans*), nor the self-gratification (e.g., *homo oeconomicus*).[38] It rather points to the (comm)union (e.g., *homo communitas*). A human being must be recognized as such.[39]

In this regard, the Parable of the Prodigal in Luke 15:11-32 provides a great example. The household in the first-century Mediterranean world was strictly patriarchal, with the paterfamilias wielding

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[33] The most common Greek term οἰκία is the ordinary word for family. See David F. Wright, "Family," 224.

[34] See David Balch and John L. Stambaugh, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment. Library of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 63-81.

[35] Normally, the genealogy drawn from the concept of "shared blood" serves to secure trust and assure willingness to engage in mutual aid.

[36] The genealogies in the Old Testament weave a comprehensive fabric of kin relationships for the family households. People tend to think of themselves as kin, or use kinship language to characterize their commonality. However, the genealogy in Luke provides a different guide for social interaction. Cf. Matt 1:1-17.

[37] For example, the Passover, which is Israel's foundational ritual, was a family celebration (Exod. 12:2-4, 26-27).

[38] With regard to *Homo Oeconomicus*, neoclassical economics has long grounded economy as a rational choice between the alternative uses of limited means. In the market system, individuals—essentially homo oeconomicus—respond only if the proffered benefits are attractive. Because of material "scarcity," they pursue the maximization of utility, measuring the benefits and costs of each means. With regard to *Homo Reciprocans*, Rather than placing economy in a separate and distinct social sphere, scholars such as Karl Polanyi assert that human economy is embedded in the various social institutions. Economic exchange takes place within, and is regulated by, society rather than being located in a social vacuum. The human subject is placed in relations of production, exchange, and consumption, while also equally embedded in the networks of social relationships and cultural influences. For Polanyi, by denying the role of social relations in economic life, modern economies are at risk of failure and crisis.

[39] On this point, see Franz J. Hinkelammert, *Weapons of Death* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986).

enormous power(*patria potestas*) over his children.[40] Its governing ethic would not approve rights—such as the right of the younger son to ask for premature inheritance and to return home as he is still 'prodigal.'[41] However, the father in the parable does not show any interest in maneuvering possessions and maximizing profits. He is not ungenerous. He himself wastes riches for his younger son, holding a celebration and putting himself in his older son's portion of the estate.

As such, the text of Luke does not give a chance to exploit people with a sense of indebtedness, inequality, or immorality. The father's declaration, "Son, you are always with me, all that is mine is yours," establishes the rationale for the household, which guarantees mutual commitment and liberation.[42] Henceforth, both the shameful and the honorable are invited to participate in the celebration as the significant members of the family. The parable fosters the communion between and beyond the self and the other(s).

The family in the Gospel of Luke is not divided or discriminatory, going far beyond individual relations and exclusive motivations. The parable as such presents an alternative kinship that builds mutual commitment and creates pervasive interdependence from within and without. The reconstruction of kinship in Luke is driven by the mutual commitment under the mercy and grace of God who levels all the boundaries: "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth" (3:5).

2. Hierarchical vs. Egalitarian

In ancient Israel, the authority of the father provided the strongest cohesive power. He arranged marriages for his children, generally within the clan (Gen 24:1-9; Deut 7:3; Neh 13:23-25).[43] Children were subject to the authority of parents, often under severe penalty. They counted legally as part of the father's property. The obligation of children to honor their parents was deeply enshrined in the Decalogue and repeated with emphasis in the wisdom books (e.g., Sir. 3:1-16).

Much in the same way, the family served as a key institution in the hierarchical, patriarchal society of the Roman Empire. Strikingly, however, Jesus' anti-familial demands in Luke challenge the very foundation of society as such. For example, the Parable of the Great Dinner (Luke 14:15-23) presents the household in which the patron-client relationship comes to an end. In the beginning of the story, one of

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[40] Since Caesar, the title of Pater Patriae was consistently conferred on the emperors, although Tiberius never accepted this title. This eloquent title was suggestive of protective but coercive authority of the paterfamilias. See the entry of Pater Patriae in Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (eds.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 1121.

[41] The household system was one of the building blocks for ensuring the hegemonic influence of the empire. Indeed, the mainstay of the imperial order was the kyriarchal pattern.

[42] Apparently, society widely recognized certain privileges in inheritance for the firstborn son, but those privileges were not immutable. The existence of such a custom would reduce tensions within the family unit by providing a standard rule of primogeniture. Squabbling could be ended by parents who chose to invoke traditional inheritance principles. Sons alone have a right to the inheritance. Among the sons, the eldest had a privileged position and received a double share of his father's goods (Deut 21:17; cf. 2 Kng 2:9).

[43] The family provided one of the most commonly used analogies for the relationship between Israel and God as father (Exod. 4:11; Ps. 103:13; Prov. 3:12; Jer 31:9; Hos 11:1-14). See David F. Wright, "Family," 223.

the Pharisees stands as a host to the meal. From the title *archōn* (14:1) as well as from the list of guests (14:12), it seems obvious that the host is rich and prominent in the village. Similarly, the man of the parable who is located at the very top sends out invitations. For the people at the margin of society, those invitations disclose the borders, created and justified through the norms which represent the way in which people organize the human relations.

Surprisingly, however, the people who are invited refuse those invitations because of the conflicts with their own "family" business: "The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it…' Another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out…' Another said, 'I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come" (Luke 14:18-20). In so doing, they reveal the lack of capability. This is ironically combined with the description of the poor and other physically, socially, and economically disadvantaged groups who are able to come to the banquet: the crippled, the blind, the lame and the outcasts (Luke 14:21). For the people of God, this should come as a corrective (Luke 1:47-56; 10:23, "Blessed are the eyes that see…!"). Within a "hierarchy of love", all members, including those who are outside the system of patronage, share an equality of persons, while having distinctive roles around the table.[44] The renewed vision of solidarity as such becomes most evident in the egalitarian household (cf. John 4.53; Acts 11.14; 16.15, 31-34).[45] Hence, the story challenges the pattern of hierarchical relations and its categorical borderlines that create and legitimate insufficiency in a zero-sum colonial society.[46]

IV. Renewing the Vision of the Family in a Postcolonial Perspective

In the Roman Palestine, there is a forced movement—"a movement from the colonizer to the colonized, from the center to the periphery, from the powerful to the powerless."[47] However, Luke's representation of genealogy like an "umbilical cord" carries human subjects into the (re)union with God. In so doing, it not only signifies that there is more than one direction, but also condemns the demands from the top to the bottom: "In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be taxed" (Luke 2:1).

Henceforth, Luke's formation of household enables the marginalized to engage in vigorous acts of imagination and challenges the foundation of the present livelihood in a dynamic, creative way. This helps to explain the Lukan construction of the relations within the household, including masters and slaves (cf. Philem 15-16). The Parable of the Shrewd Steward (Luke 16:1-9) in particular unveils the Lukan construct as such. The parable presents a steward who, faced with the loss of his employment and

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[44] Most early Christian congregations were family or house churches, meeting in domestic buildings and led by the householders, including women and husband-and-wife joint leaders (Acts 2.46; Rom. 16.3-5; 1 Cor. 16.15, 19; Philem. 1-2). See David F. Wright, "Family," 223.

[45] This also helps to explain the relations between the individuals, including masters and slaves (cf. Philem 15-16).

[46] Paul Y. Chang, "Listening to the Listeners: A Study of the Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Mark 12:1-12)," *Theological Forum* 66(2011), 181-201.

[47] F. F. Segovia, "Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Toward a Postcolonial Optic," in R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *The Postcolonial Bible*, The Bible and Postcolonialism 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 49-65. See also Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies* (2000): 119-144.

eventually his death (16:3, "Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord takes away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.")

However, the steward in the parable places himself among the villagers and their creditor, that is, their landlord. Because of colonial exploitation, typical peasants become gradually landless tenants and debtors. Poverty is not a virtue, but a concrete reality. In this concrete "material" reality, the steward reenters into relationship with his master's debtors, while he wastes his master's assets in order to rectify the "injustice of usury".

If wealth is not shared with the needy, it not only perpetuates injustice and evil, but also inflicts evil on others. The steward represents a complicated position in terms of production and distribution, as formally based on utility and scarcity. In a very real way, the steward participates in the economic problems of the first-century Roman Palestine. In Luke's Gospel, however, the natural and material relationship the steward represents turns to the tradition of debt cancellation and slave release (cf. Lev 25, Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:16).

In a sense, the steward of the parable is the person who refines his way to the "eternal homes" (16:9). The imperial slave *oikonomos* as the chief household slave takes a position of control over his master's property, yet he remains a slave. If he fails to carry out his duties carefully, he might be beaten or even killed. The ambiguity the steward represents and the shrewdness he exhibits may emerge into the theme of life and death in Luke's narrative. The steward develops his own agency to survive together, rather than succumb solely to the immediate afflictions and devastation. It should be striking that Luke's Jesus compares the *oikonomia* of God with such a character, being able to satisfy the ends he has reason to value.

The steward does raise his life to the end of the household management that creates through the narrative the discussions of the instrumental role of human beings in bringing about social, economic changes. To this degree, the steward's freedom-based capability offers invaluable insights for the consideration of the household management. The Lukan vision and dream which is attributed to the people of God are now charged to colonial subject. Luke's household narrative contests the power and authority of the "mammon" (Luke 16:11) and puts forth a living hope for all and for a just society.

V. Conclusion

The family has served as a key institution in the patriarchal society of the Roman Empire. However, Jesus not only calls his disciples to abandon their families, but also creates kinship, reordering the household that is simultaneously social, political, economic, and theological. With the strong overtones as such, the Gospel of Luke presents an alternative way of living and interacting under the reality of empire. The divine household the Gospel introduces conveys not an "incrementalist", but a "maximalist" agenda (Luke 3:6, "and all flesh shall see the salvation of God"), revealing a radically new vision of life and a

living hope for the people of God.[48]

Hence, Luke's construct of the household does not simply function as an exclusive institution, as in most of the Greco-Roman world. When the family continues its usual role serving as a basis for life in Roman colonial and imperial society, Luke's formation of fictive kinship challenges the very foundation of the society and inspires liberation for all. While recognizing and unveiling the empire's overall system of relations, Luke frees people from it and transcends the existing institutions of the empire. The Lukan vision and dream, which is attributed to the people of God and ascribed to colonial subjects, further empowers them to engage in vigorous acts of imagination in the present context.

As such, by way of retelling Jesus and the Jesus traditions, Luke relates to the project of life and life-together. Luke's re(de)construction of the family points to the Christian community's ortho-praxis and builds a divine canopy for the otherwise uprooted, "homeless," human subjects. Thus, the readings of the issues of family in the Gospel cannot skirt the tensions, inherent in the reality of the empire.

Abstract

In the early Gospel literature, family refers to those related by blood, adoption, or marriage and also to those related to one another within the Christian community. There exists tension, however, between these two configurations. In Hellenistic Jewish and Greco-Roman society, one's home served as a center for education and piety. Distinct from it, however, the Christian movement shifted its loyalty from 'hearth' to 'extra-familial' relationships. Hence, when read at face value, the "hard sayings" on the family attributed to Jesus (Luke 8:19-21; 14:26; Matt 10:37) suggest that the ties of blood are lesser important than the other ties—thatis, the ties of Communion. Jesus declares those who do the will of God as "my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:33-35; Matt 12:46-50; Luke 2:48-49; 8:19-21). For example, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus not only calls his disciples to abandon their families, but also initiates a reordering of the family that is simultaneously social, political, economic, and theological. While retelling Jesus and the Jesus traditions in its own time, Luke's narrator exposes an alternative kinship and writes its effects into the present context. When the family continues its usual role serving as a basis for life in Roman colonial and imperial society, the Lukan construction of household as a project of life and for life informs and reforms the Christian community's orthopraxis and erects a divine canopy for the otherwise uprooted, "homeless," people. This essay attempts to discover the formation of kinship for the people of God and its interrelated socio-political, economic dimensions in the Roman Empire. The purpose is not to discover a particular historical situation, but rather to reconstruct a pattern of the early Christian's way of living and interacting in the reality of empire. For this purpose, this essay calls attention to a hitherto unrecognized or unappreciated reconstruction of the household in the Gospel of Luke.

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[48] This view continues to find support through history and culture. James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

Key Words: Family, Fictive Kinship, Household, Roman Empire, Luke's Gospel.

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