

# **“Your Father Knows that You Need All of This”: Divine Fatherhood as Socio-Ethical Impetus in Q’s Formative Stratum**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The observation that the Q people understood themselves as a new symbolic family, with God as Father, is certainly not new in Q studies. Likewise, it is not uncommon for an interpreter to mention during her analysis of an individual Q text that the instruction in question is motivated by *imitatio Dei* rhetoric. However, the pervasiveness of this link between Q’s theology of divine fatherhood and its socio-ethical programme has not received enough attention in Q scholarship. In an attempt to redress this deficiency, the current article argues that the idea of divine fatherhood is the primary paradigm that informs, determines and motivates the alternative socio-ethical programme of Q’s formative stratum. More than being just an interesting observation in relation to some Q texts, divine fatherhood and *imitatio Dei* rhetoric are central to the radical socio-ethical programme of Q’s formative stratum. After an overview of Q’s self-perception as God’s symbolic family, the article will turn to the analysis of specific texts in Q’s formative stratum, first considering the theme of divine fatherhood, and then considering its socio-ethical relevance.

## **Introduction**

Over the last seventy years, there have been numerous attempts at solving the question of how the Sayings Gospel Q developed into the final form that was ultimately used by Matthew and Luke (e.g. Lührmann 1969; Sato 1988; Jacobson 1992; Ra 2016; see Howes 2015a:48-52, 102-106). Despite these efforts, only one redactional solution for the literary evolution of Q has stood the test of time, and that is the stratigraphical model espoused in 1987 by John S. Kloppenborg (see Howes 2015a:61-89, esp. 61-62). According to this model, the Sayings Gospel Q consists of three redactional layers, namely the “formative stratum” (or Q<sup>1</sup>), the “main redaction” (or Q<sup>2</sup>), and the “final recension” (or Q<sup>3</sup>). The current study considers *only* the first redactional layer of Q, namely the formative stratum, or Q<sup>1</sup>.

Due to its geographical and chronological proximity to the historical Jesus, the Sayings Gospel Q is one of the most important sources for reconstructing an image of this elusive human being (Horsley 2012:103, 117, 154; Kloppenborg 2001:152, 171; Robinson 1991:192; 1993:9; 2001a:14; 2007:vii, viii; 2011:470; Vaage 2001:479; cf. Jacobson 1992:20; Levine 1999:153). Kloppenborg is cautious not to draw tradition-historical conclusions from his redactional model (cf. Crossan 2001:119; Dunn 2013:81; Tuckett 1996:68; 2001:383, 388; Vaage 1995:75; see Allison 2010:120-125; Freyne 2000:227-228). In fact, Kloppenborg (1987:99, 244-245; 2000:150-151) warns against equating the redactional development of Q directly with the tradition history of Jesus material, or with the historical prominence of the traditions that make up these strata. In other words, Kloppenborg warns that the formative stratum is not

necessarily closer to the historical Jesus than the main redaction, and that the main redaction is not necessarily further away from the historical Jesus than the formative stratum. Yet, most historical Jesus and Q scholars who accept Kloppenborg's model seem to agree that the traditions in the formative stratum are overwhelmingly authentic, while the traditions in the main redaction are overwhelmingly inauthentic (e.g. Mack 1993:36-37; Borg 1994:15 n. 13; Robinson 1995:260; 2001b:27, 47; 2011:471; Patterson 1998:171-172; 2001:72, 73; Järvinen 2001:516-517; Howes 2015a:286-287). Thus, it stands to reason that the formative stratum of Q is about as close as one can get to the historical Jesus.

The observation that the Q people understood themselves as a new symbolic family, with God as Father, is certainly not new in Q studies. Likewise, it is not uncommon for an interpreter to mention during her analysis of an individual Q text that the instruction in question is motivated by *imitatio Dei* rhetoric. However, the pervasiveness of this link between Q's theology of divine fatherhood and its socio-ethical programme has not received enough attention in Q scholarship. In an attempt to redress this deficiency, the current article argues that the idea of divine fatherhood is the primary paradigm that informs, determines and motivates the alternative socio-ethical programme of Q's formative stratum. More than being just an interesting observation in relation to some Q texts, divine fatherhood and *imitatio Dei* rhetoric are central to the radical socio-ethical programme of Q's formative stratum. After an overview of Q's self-perception as God's symbolic family, the article will turn to the analysis of specific texts in Q's formative stratum, first considering the theme of divine fatherhood, and then considering its socio-ethical relevance. Throughout this article, I use masculine pronouns to refer to God, not because I see him/her/it as male, but because the metaphor used in Q for God is that of a Father. The article also follows the Q text as it has been reconstructed by the International Q Project in the *Critical Edition of Q* (Robinson, Hoffmann and Kloppenborg 2000; 2002).

## **Q's symbolic family<sup>1</sup>**

In antiquity, the establishment and configuration of *fictive* families was a well-known feature of village life, usually occurring during times of economic hardship as a direct reaction to pressures from above (see Oakman 2008:252-253). Fictive families were sanctioned by strong religious beliefs, and emerged in both villages and coalitions as attempts to reclaim some form of power in the face of oppression. Such fictitious families historically tended to emphasise new social orders, where domestic economics would replace political economics. It seems likely that the Q people substituted patriarchal families with fictive families, although they might at times have utilised existing kinship structures. Thus, by the time Q was written, the Q people probably already constituted a settled group, operating as a "new family" on a household system (cf. Levine 1999:155-156; Park 2014:7-8). Family division is evident from the content of Q's formative stratum. Although it might not have been the intention of the Q people to divide families (cf. Q 10:5-7), families were indeed divided (cf. Batten 1994:49; Jacobson 1995:366-367; Robinson 2011:468; cf. Q 9:58, 59- 60; 12:51, 53; 14:26; 16:18). This rift seems to have occurred mostly between young adults and their parents, or children-in-law and parents-in-law (cf. Q 12:53; see Destro & Pesce 2003:217-222; cf. Batten 1994:49; Levine 1999:159; Cromhout 2015:4). Most of these young recruits were probably married

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<sup>1</sup> This section constitutes a slightly abbreviated version of the content that appears in Howes 2015a:144-150.

with children (Jacobson 2000:194; see Destro & Pesce 2003:217-222). Q 9:59-60 clearly preaches against the Decalogue's commandment to honour thy father and mother (Jacobson 1995:361-362; 2000:191; Schottroff 1995:354; see Cromhout 2015:13-14; cf. Ac 5:6, 7-10; 8:2). The saying probably *advocates* the forsaking (ἀφίημι) of one's family, which is described as being "dead" (νεκρός), so that one can join the Q movement (ἀκολουθήσωσσι) (see Moxnes 2003:54-55; cf. Levine 1999:157, 159). Q 14:26 is even more in your face, advocating hatred (μισέω)<sup>2</sup> between children and parents (Jacobson 2000:193; Robinson 2001a:17; 2001b:51; cf. Levine 1999:157, 159). Both of these sayings (Q 9:59-60 & Q 14:26) would have been entirely insensitive and extremely offensive to ancient Jewish ears (Batten 1994:49; cf. Kloppenborg 2011:266; see Jacobson 1995:361-364; Allison 2001:417-418).

Besides the division between children and parents, it is not unlikely that at least some older people were attracted to the movement as well (cf. Luke's version of Q 12:51-53). Q 16:18 seems to betray a situation of division between husbands and wives, ultimately ending in divorce (see Jacobson 1995:371-373; Schottroff 1995:354-355). Q members who had divorced as a result of joining the movement were not allowed to remarry (Jacobson 2000:197). Whether in the form of divorce or a break-up along generational lines, individuals from *both* genders appear to have left their families in exchange for Q membership (Jacobson 1995:363; Robinson 2001a:9; Destro & Pesce 2003:220; see Freyne 2000:271-272, 282-283; cf. Q 12:53; 14:26; 16:18). Q 9:58-60 suggests that many of the Q people were homeless, and, even worse, without a family, mainly because of their abandonment of the patriarchal family (cf. Levine 1999:158; Jacobson 2000:191). Since individual ancient Mediterranean households were the nucleus and source of all social, economic, religious and cultural identity and activity, such schisms must have had a tremendous impact on the Q people (see Destro & Pesce 2003:212-213; cf. Brenner 1985:93; Horsley 1995a:195-196; 1999:297; Jacobson 1995:378-379; Bork 2014:5; Van Aarde 2014:4-5). Fidelity towards the Jesus movement was regarded by insiders to be more important than belonging to a patriarchal family (Jacobson 1995:364; Arnal 2001:175; see Mack 1993:136, 139-141). Abandoning one's family invariably meant abandoning the larger groups that were constituted by networks of families, resulting in an honour-shame ripple effect (Jacobson 2000:191; see Destro & Pesce 2003:212-213; cf. Douglas 1995:123; Moxnes 2003:52). With the parent-child relationship severed, the traditional source of honour and identity is broken, and the young individual is left honourless (Moxnes 2003:95-96; cf. Batten 1994:49; Cromhout 2015:4). Joining the Q community would have left women husbandless and children fatherless, placing them in a particularly vulnerable socio-economic position (cf. Levine 1999:158, 159; Jacobson 2000:195; Bork 2014:4; Cromhout 2015:3). Since economy at the lower levels of society was primarily a family endeavour, Q 16:13 might effectively represent a choice between family support and membership in the kingdom of God, the latter of which was practically achieved through Q membership (cf. Jacobson 1995:369; Park 2014:7-8). Joining the Q movement meant being shamed, rejected and ostracised by the larger community (cf. Levine 1999:159; Piper 2000:264; Moxnes 2003:61, 114). For most of the individual Q members, self-definition was no longer to be found from the most important group that traditionally served to provide a

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<sup>2</sup> The word "hate" (μισέω) refers here not to a feeling or emotion such as "dislike intensely," but to an orientation or action such as not to "recognise one's responsibility toward someone" (Jacobson 1995:364; 2000:194), which is the direct opposite of "love" or "honour" (τιμᾶ) in the Septuagint's version of Exodus 20:12 and "honour" (כָּבֵד) in the Masoretic Text's version of that verse. In terms of group orientation and responsibility, the word denotes the abandonment of, distancing from, separation from, alienation from or forsaking of the group in question; in this case, the traditional family (cf. Batten 1994:49; Moxnes 2003:58). See also Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 6.255, 324; 7.254.

sense of self (cf. Moxnes 2003:43, 48-49). Abandoning one's family must have been very unsettling, representing separation from the most important, perhaps the only, location where personal identity was traditionally found (Bork 2014:5; cf. Brenner 1985:93; Horsley 1995a:195-196; Jacobson 2000:191; Moxnes 2003:68, 151).

It is for these reasons that fictive kinship patterns were created (cf. Freyne 2000:206; see Jacobson 1995:374-376). That the Q movement did not just advocate abandoning one's family, but also constituted new fictive families, is clear from Q 11:11, where it is taken for granted that the men in the audience (τίς ἐστὶν ἐξ ὑμῶν ἄνθρωπος) would have children (ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ) in need of support (cf. Arnal 2001:174). Since all ancient life and self-identity was rooted in and determined by the group, Moxnes (2003:57-58) is probably correct in claiming that the saying in Q 17:33 reflects the abandonment of the patriarchal family for the Q movement. In order to effectively replace the patriarchal family as the primary locus of identity, the Q movement had to establish a new social structure and support such a structure ideologically by means of a substitutive symbolic universe (cf. Moxnes 2003:91). An alternative symbolic universe was created by projecting a new kind of family, with God acting as Father,<sup>3</sup> Q members acting as children,<sup>4</sup> and fellow Q members acting as siblings<sup>5</sup> (Park 2014:9). For the Q people, God replaced the traditional patriarch as the source of protection, identity, sustenance and honour (cf. Levine 1999:159; Piper 2000:264; see Moxnes 2003:115-121, 152; cf. esp. Q 11:11-13).

Apart from those who had left their families behind in order to join the Q movement, there were probably also others who joined the Q movement because they were already without family and/or land (cf. Piper 2000:251; see Freyne 2000:284-286). In the first half of the first century CE, some families and individuals were forced off their lands, giving rise to a growing "landless class," which constituted beggars, bandits, prostitutes and others (Freyne 2000:205; Arnal 2001:139-140, 146; Oakman 2008:21, 25, 224; cf. Horsley 1995a:60, 215-216, 219; 1995b:43; Moxnes 2003:150).<sup>6</sup> The rise of brigandage and popular rebellions indicates not only that males left their families behind, but also that many men lost their lives, both of which must have had an impact on women, either by widowing them prematurely, or by depriving them of opportunities for marriage (Horsley 1995a:219-220; 1996:36, 123; Oakman 2008:13, 20-21, 224). Seeing as marriage was the primary means through which women were able to ensure economic stability and future sustenance, a sizable group of desperate, poor and marginalised women must have lived in Palestine. The economic inability of many families to provide for all their members must have motivated a number of individuals, especially young males, to leave their homes. For divorced or widowed women and young adult males, the Q movement must indeed have seemed like an attractive alternative to patriarchal family life (see Freyne 2000:285-286; Moxnes 2003:42-43). The Q movement offered a social network similar to, but different from, patriarchal families, that could fill the social vacuum created when these individuals left homes or lost their husbands. The "new family" represented by the Q movement promised to elevate and accept the marginalised and honourless, particularly women and children, as well as men who were perceived as weak by

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Q 6:36; 11:2- 3, 13; 10:21- 22; 12:22- 31.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Q 6:35.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Q 6:41- 42; 17:3.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Q 19:12- 26; Mark 12:1- 11; Luke 12:16- 20; 16:1- 17; Matthew 6:12; 18:23- 34; 20:1- 15; *Gospel of Thomas* 21; Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.427; *Jewish Antiquities* 17.271.

the greater community (cf. Piper 2000:251; Moxnes 2003:94-95). The parable in Q 13:18-19, about the impure mustard seed sown illegally into a house garden, suggests that the Q movement was mostly made up of marginalised, impure and “displaced” people (Moxnes 2003:112; cf. Vaage 2001:486). The “new family” was not simply an emulation or imitation of traditional families, but crossed its borders, discarded its hierarchy and comprised a different compositional and social structure (Moxnes 2003:105).

## Divine Fatherhood

In Q 6:35, God is pertinently described as “your Father” (τοῦ πατρός ὑμῶν), and depicted as treating all people on earth equally (Joseph 2014:224). Such theology is expressed through an appeal to nature, claiming that God is responsible for the sunshine and rain that is experienced equally by both good and bad people. This claim goes against the very foundation of traditional wisdom, according to which God rewards the good behaviour of the righteous and punishes the bad behaviour of sinners (see Catchpole 1993:105). The claim that God treats all people the same functions in the Sayings Gospel to buttress the preceding directive to love one’s enemies (see Kirk 1998:161-162). It logically follows that the supporting logion is not just about equal treatment, but also about love. The argument is that people should love their enemies because God loves everyone, good and bad, righteous and sinful. Hence, Q 6:35 embraces an image of God as a Father who not only loves his children, but also loves and treats all his children equally, regardless of whether they are naughty or nice. Apparently, the heavenly Father does not play favourites. This depiction of God has more in common with the ideal parent of modern-day parenting manuals than it does with ancient childrearing praxis.

Q 6:36 tells us that God is merciful, and refers to God specifically as “your Father” (ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν) (Joseph 2014:224). The Greek adjective translated here as “merciful” (οἰκτίρων) relates to the showing of mercy or compassion, and in some languages this idea is expressed idiomatically by referencing a parent’s loving treatment of his or her child (Louw & Nida 1993:751, domain 88.81). Hence, God’s love for his children finds expression specifically in his compassion and mercy. This characterisation of God is commensurate with depictions of God in the Old Testament as a loving Father (cf. e.g. Isa 47:1-7; see Dille 2004:74-101, 175; cf. Joseph 2014:213). Interestingly, it is also commensurate with depictions of God elsewhere in the Old Testament as a compassionate mother (cf. Hos 2:21; Isa 42:14; 46:3-4; 49:14-15; 66:13; see Abbey 2001:143; Dille 2004:128-151, 176).

Such compassionate love is both a cause and a result of the fact that God knows his children intimately. After referring specifically to God as “your Father” (τοῦ πατρός ὑμῶν) in the preceding verse, Q 12:7 claims that God knows his children so well that he has numbered the hairs on their head. In this comment, the hair represents the totality of the person’s being, implying that God knows his children inside-out, including the totality of their physical, emotional and psychological make-up. To number something is not the same as counting it. The former merely entails determining the amount of hair, whereas the latter entails differentiating between each individual strain of hair, thereby being able to distinguish between them. This would surely be an impossible task for any human parent. The comment that God has numbered his children’s hair is therefore hyperbolic, expressing not only God’s supernatural abilities, but also his affection for his children. This is indicated expressly when

the author of this logion says that God's children "are worth more than many sparrows" (πολλῶν στρουθίων διαφέρετε ὑμεῖς). The latter assertion claims that God loves human beings more than the rest of his creation.

Such an anthropocentric theology might be partly responsible for humanity's destruction of planet earth, including the unforgiving cruel treatment of our wildlife. I suggest that this saying should not be understood as an expression of anthropocentric principles, but rather as an expression of God's unique and extraordinary love for his children. Such love does not include or justify damaging or destroying the rest of the natural world. In fact, it advocates the exact opposite: just like God the Father loves and cares for his children, his children should love and care for the rest of creation. Through her unique love for me and her example of compassion towards all living things, my own mother instilled in me the same compassion for all forms of life. In the same way, God's compassion, mercy and love for his children should bring forth compassionate, merciful and loving children.

The comment that God has numbered his children's hair is made as part of an attempt to comfort the audience in the face of severe, life-threatening persecution (Bock 1996:1130; Fleddermann 2005:587; Kloppenborg 1987:207; Robinson 2002:15; see Piper 1989:52-55). The image is created of a heavenly Father who comforts his children against external dangers in an attempt to ease their anxiety. My mind goes to the scene in the academy-award-winning feature film, *Crash*, in which a father gives his daughter an imaginary invisible cloak that is impenetrable in order to alleviate her fear of gunshots outside the house. I also cannot help but think of another academy-award-winning feature film, *Life Is Beautiful*, in which a Jewish father shields his son against the atrocities and emotional anguish of a Nazi concentration camp by pretending that the whole experience is an elaborate game, and that the prize is a real army tank. Finally, I cannot help but recall the scene in the feature film, *The Pursuit of Happyness* (deliberately spelt incorrectly), where a father shields his son from the truth of their homelessness by pretending that the subway station is a prehistoric land with dinosaurs, and that the public toilet where they spend the night is a prehistoric cave. Maybe God, like these cinematic fathers, would lie about having numbered his children's hair just to alleviate their anxiety and elevate their emotional wellbeing. Whatever the case, God is depicted here as a heavenly Father who knows his children intimately, who nurtures and comforts his children, who protects his children from the outside world, and who tries desperately to lessen their fears and anxieties (cf. Paterson Corrington 1989:393-420; Dille 2004:74-101, 128-151, 176; Kirk-Duggan 2009:102).

Anxiety is also a central theme of Q 12:22-31, where God is once again deliberately referred to as "your Father" (ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν). According to this passage, people should not be anxious about securing foodstuff and clothing, because God will provide for his children like he does for plants and animals (Robinson 2001a; 2002:15; 2003:35; Joseph 2014:198; cf. Dille 2004:128-151, 176; Pypier 2011:309-332). It is worth noting that this passage does not teach against physical or other labour as a means to provide for one's bare necessities, but rather against any anxiety related to work and survival (Piper 2000:247; Howes 2015a:118). Be that as it may, the passage portrays God as a Father who provides for his children and their basic needs. As we saw, Q 12:7 claims that God knows his children inside-out. Q 12:22-31 now elaborates on the theme of God's knowledge, claiming that such knowledge includes not only the personalities and characteristics of his individual children, but also their needs. This claim

is made explicitly in verse 30: “...your Father knows that you need all of this” (ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὅτι χρῆζετε τούτων ἀπάντων).

The same themes are explored further in Q 11:9-13, which refers to God as our “heavenly Father” (ὁ πατήρ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ) (cf. Batten 1994:48). The references to “bread” (ἄρτος) and “fish” (ἰχθῦς) indicate that we are once again here dealing with the provision of food and other necessities. By means of a *qal wahomer* argument, this pericope reasons that if earthly fathers know how to provide good things to their children, the heavenly Father would be even better at this. Like the previous text, Q 11:9-13 claims that God knows exactly what his children needs. Moreover, the references in the opening verses to activities like “asking” (αἰτέω), “searching” (ζητέω) and “knocking” (κρούω) may suggest begging and scavenging for whatever food and hospitality was available (see Howes 2016b). The passage would then seem to indicate that God ultimately stands behind the feeding of the homeless and helpless in society (cf. Howes 2016a). Whenever a beggar is given a piece of bread, it is as if God is extending his hand from heaven to feed one of his hungry children. These are also the people who would tend to be more anxious about daily survival, so that the original addressees of both Q 11:9-13 and Q 12:22-31 were in all likelihood the poorest members of society. This passage brings hope by proclaiming that God is also *their* Father, and cares about their overall wellbeing. In fact, we see in Q 6:20 and Q 10:21 that God is particularly considerate of the poor and least important members of society (cf. Johnson-Debaufre 2005:167). One might compare this to the additional care, support and attention that an earthly father might extend to his special needs child. Such extra attention does not mean that the father loves his other children any less. What it does mean is that the father is sensitive to the different needs of his individual children.

The foregoing passage is directly preceded in Q by the Lord’s Prayer (Q 11:2-4), which begins by addressing God directly in the vocative mood as Father (cf. Joseph 2014:224). The family metaphor of Q was bolstered by the idea that God could be approached directly as one would an earthly father. This revolutionary idea of unmediated and “brokerless” access to God is one of the key features of the ministry of the historical Jesus (see e.g. Crossan 1991:227-353). Be that as it may, Q promotes the idea of an approachable God, to whom you may speak about your fears and desires. Considered as a whole, the Lord’s Prayer depicts God as a Father who listens to his children, and takes their needs seriously. Like the passages discussed above, the Lord’s Prayer deals with the issue of daily subsistence, encouraging the children of God to ask him directly for one’s daily bread. But the prayer goes further than the short-term solution of daily bread, addressing the systemic and societal reasons that underlie shortages of daily sustenance.

In first-century Palestine, significant percentages of agricultural goods were taken from the peasantry through various kinds of taxes, tithes, rents and loan repayments, and were then redistributed among the rich to use as they saw fit (Herzog 1994:161; Van Eck 2011:5, 7; Park 2014:85, 86). If a peasant was unable to meet existing obligations, that peasant was forced to borrow from wealthier individuals (Oakman 1986:72; 2008:24; Horsley 1995a:215, 219; Van Eck 2011:7). Such borrowing initiated a patron-client relationship between the two parties, which was skewed in favour of the patron, and often resulted in foreclosure on land due to the client’s inability to pay off debts (Herzog 1994:161). In other words, peasants were often forced into a state of indebtedness, which initiated a downward spiral that included being

controlled by creditors, losing their land, starving, and becoming day-labourers, slaves, beggars and bandits (Horsley 1995a:60, 215-216, 219; 1995b:43; Freyne 2000:205; Arnal 2001:139-140, 146; Moxnes 2003:150; Oakman 2008:21, 25, 224).

The Lord's Prayer in Q addresses this situation directly by asking God to cancel the debts of his children. In other words, God is understood not only as a provider of necessities on a daily basis, but also as a provider of enduring livelihood and dietary sustainability. By the same token, God is portrayed as an opponent of economic exploitation and systemic injustice. The God of Q cares about the subsistence, longevity and health of his children, as well as their fair and humane treatment (cf. Dille 2004:128-151, 176). And it seems that the forgiveness of debts might include more than just economic debts. With the use of psychostasia<sup>7</sup> imagery, the text also implies the divine forgiveness of sins and transgressions (cf. Howes 2015a:281), like a loving father would forgive a naughty child.

As in the Lord's Prayer, God is also in Q 10:21 addressed directly in the vocative mood, but this time as "Father, Lord of heaven and earth" (πάτερ, κύριε τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς) (Joseph 2014:224). The word "Father" (ὁ πατήρ) is also repeated towards the end of the logion. The saying praises God for hiding "these things" (ταῦτα), meaning the wisdom of Q's Jesus, from "sages" (σοφοί) and "the educated" (συνετοί), and for revealing it to "children" (νήπιοι). As a result of deliberate wordplay, the noun "children" functions in a number of different ways in this logion. In traditional wisdom, and in the ancient world generally, children are typically instructed and educated by their parents (McKinlay 1996:101; Murphy 1998:69; Kirk-Duggan 2009:102; cf. D'Ambra 2007:88, 109-110; Aymer 2009:190-191; Jacobs 2009:82; cf. e.g. Prov 1:8; 6:20; 31:26).<sup>8</sup> In this interchange, the parent is the knowledgeable sage, who transmits God's wisdom to the next generation, while the child is the ignorant receiver of wisdom and knowledge. Our saying turns this conventional scenario on its head, depicting the child as the receiver of divine wisdom, and the sage as the ignorant bystander, who is not only bypassed by God, but also deliberately kept in the dark. As we saw in the Lord's Prayer, which was written from the perspective of God's children, access to God the Father was understood as being unmediated. The current logion is written from God's perspective, and indicates that the wisdom and gifts that come from God the Father are similarly unmediated. God blesses and teaches his children directly. In God's symbolic family, one has direct access to the wisdom of God, without any need of patriarchal or parental instruction. As the foregoing sentences reveal, the word "children" functions not only in reference to the recipients of parental instruction, but also to the members of God's family.

The word is thirdly used to connote the underlings of society. In verses 23-24, these children are further contrasted to the prophets and kings of old. In other words, the children are contrasted to the intellectual (sages), religious (prophets) and political-economic (kings) elite of ancient Israel. The children are socially, intellectually, religiously, economically and politically insignificant. Yet, God chose to reveal his wisdom to these insignificant children,

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<sup>7</sup> Psychostasia is the widespread ancient conviction that one's post-mortem fate would be determined through a divine process of weighing one's soul and/or deeds on actual scales (Brandon 1969:91; cf. Pearson 1976:249; Howes 2015a:260).

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting that Proverbs differs from the sapiential instructions of Egypt and other surrounding regions in as far as it includes mothers as the teachers of children (McKinlay 1996:101). Roman women were also transmitters of wisdom to their children (D'Ambra 2007:88, 109-110).



thereby bypassing the customary mediators to God. In short, God the Father is depicted in this logion as cutting out the elitist middleman, and revealing himself directly to his insignificant children. As such, God the Father is depicted as educating his children without arbitration, facilitation or mediation.

In his masterful monograph, *Fatherless in Galilee*, Van Aarde (2001) argues that Joseph, the biological father of Jesus according to the canonical Gospels, is a legendary figure, and that the historical Jesus grew up without a father (cf. Mbuvi 2009:131-133). In addressing this empty hole in his life, Jesus substituted his absent earthly father with an ever-present heavenly Father. Considering the likelihood that Jesus grew up without a father under the care of a single mother, it would have been natural for him to emphasise the caring, nurturing and compassionate side of his heavenly Father. Conversely, growing up without a father might explain to some extent why Jesus fails to describe God the Father with some of the other attributes commonly associated with fatherhood and masculinity in antiquity, like authority, domination, heroism, bravery and control. Jesus saw the potential in sharing his image of God the Father with others. In his ministry, Jesus focused much of his energy on other people who also lived without a patriarch, especially fatherless children and husbandless women. These developments in the psyche and ministry of Jesus might plausibly have constituted the beginnings of his social programme that ultimately attempted to change society at large into a symbolic family of sorts. In all likelihood, this symbolic family explains at least partly what Jesus referred to in some of his logia and parables as “the kingdom of God” (cf. Joseph 2014:197-204).

## Socio-ethical impetus

Q’s image of God as a loving Father is not only a matter of theology and theory, but also of morality and practice. The children in God’s symbolic family are encouraged through *imitatio Dei* rhetoric to follow their Father’s example and treat each other like they would their biological siblings. The social vision of Q’s formative stratum starts in the inaugural sermon with the directive in Q 6:27 to love one’s enemies. In the ancient world, love was more than just an emotion; it was primarily an expression of group attachment and bonding (see Malina 1998:127-130). The instruction to love one’s enemies therefore means to include them within one’s own social group, and treat them like insiders (cf. Malina 1998:129). The end result of such a process would be that everyone becomes part of God’s extended family through mutual love and caring behaviour. The list of enemies includes also one’s persecutors. The logion continues with the instruction to pray for these persecutors. In Q 6:35, which probably followed Q 6:27-28 in the Sayings Gospel, these counter-intuitive instructions are expressly linked to the nature of God (cf. Joseph 2014:224). The text motivates the directives to love one’s enemies, pray for one’s persecutors and treat all people like insiders by explaining that God brings sunshine and rain to both good and bad people (see Kirk 1998:161-162). As we saw, this idea of God was intrinsically subversive and unconventional. As such, the argument used in support of the instruction to love one’s enemies is an *imitatio Dei* argument, but one that relies on an alternative and unparalleled image of God (Kloppenborg 1987:176; Robinson 2001b:40; 2003:38; Fleddermann 2005:330; cf. Joseph 2014:211, 216). The text goes further to say that if people comply with this command, they “become sons of your Father” (γένησθε υἱοὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν). Notable here is the non-inclusive language when the word “sons” (υἱοί) is used to presumably include both male and female children of God’s symbolic family

(Levine 1999:156). At any rate, the supporting logion claims that those who love their enemies become children of God by following his example (Joseph 2014:216, 225). What is more, the enemies and former outsiders also now become children of God because they are being treated as insiders by God's existing children. Hence, the act of loving one's enemies ultimately leads to the symbolic adoption of outsiders to become part of God's family.

The inaugural sermon continues in Q 6:29-30 (incl. Mat 5:41) with examples of how to love one's enemies in practice:

<sup>29</sup>[[The one who slaps]] you on the cheek, offer [[him]] the other as well; and [[to the person wanting to take you to court and get]] your shirt, [[turn over to him]] the coat as well. <sup>Mat 5:41</sup>[[«And the one who conscripts you for one mile, go with him a second.»]] <sup>30</sup>To the one who asks of you, give; and [[from the one who borrows]], do not [[ask]] back [[«what is»]] yours.

Through clever rhetoric, the inaugural sermon continues to try and convince its audience of the proposed social programme. In Q 6:32, 34, people are encouraged with *imitatio Dei* rhetoric to treat all people the same. Just like God provides rain and sunshine to good and bad people alike, the children of God are expected to love good and bad people the same. This love includes lending to those who are unable to provide any form of repayment. In God's family, people should love each other like siblings, and help each other out like brothers and sisters would do. Such behaviour translates into unconditional and unselfish love; the kind of love that expects nothing in return. This is the type of love that Alanis Morissette sings about in her song *You Owe Me Nothing In Return* (on her album *Under Rug Swept*). It forces you to treat others like you yourself would want to be treated (Q 6:31). The inaugural sermon continues to explain that such love includes mercy and compassion. Once again employing an *imitatio Dei* argument, Q 6:36 encourages the children of God to treat each other with the same mercy, compassion and kindness that God the Father displays towards his children (cf. Joseph 2014:206). The inaugural sermon continues to explain in Q 6:37-38, 41-42 that this kind of love is not in any way judgmental. It accepts others with their all of their sins and mistakes intact.

We saw that the Lord's Prayer (Q 11:2-4) portrays God as a loving Father who forgives his children if they are naughty. The same text compares God's forgiveness to the forgiveness that his children show toward each other. The latter has often been understood as a conditional by commentators, so that God forgives us only to the extent that we forgive each other. Yet, the conditional conjunction "if" (ἐάν) does not feature here. Instead, the text uses the comparative preposition "like" (ὡς) to equate God's forgiveness to the forgiveness demonstrated amongst his children. Rather than advocating some kind of conditional forgiveness, the prayer paints a picture of a loving family in which everyone forgives each other equally and uniformly. This picture is like an *imitatio Dei* argument in reverse, claiming that the heavenly Father forgives his children just like his children can be seen forgiving each other. Q 17:3-4 carries the theme of forgiveness further, advocating repeated forgiveness. Even if your brother acts against you seven times on any given day, you should forgive him each time. The text nonetheless allows the children of God to rebuke each other, but if this sanction is read together with the rest of the formative stratum, it implies that such reproach would always happen in a loving and non-judgmental way. The non-inclusive use of the word

“brother” (ἀδελφός) to presumably include children from both genders is again apparent here.

The formative stratum of Q also implores its audience to take care of each other like siblings who belong to the same family. This includes most importantly the material, economic and dietary needs of society as a whole. We have already seen that the inaugural sermon expects people to give to others without expecting anything in return. The Lord’s Prayer further expects people to forgive all the economic debts that other people might owe them. In ancient society, especially in rural villages, the usual type of economic exchange was “balanced reciprocity,” which can be defined as barter and other (economic) exchanges that are characterised by expectations and/or obligations of equal return, in the spirit of fairness or justice (Horsley 1995a:204; Oakman 1986:66). Under normal circumstances, the social value of “balanced reciprocity” and the normal practice of barter exchange promoted self-sufficiency, especially at village level (Oakman 1986:66; Horsley 1995a:204). Goods were given to someone else with the implicit expectation of equal return. Conversely, goods were received with the full knowledge that an obligation is owed. Families and neighbours cultivated and maintained reciprocal ties and relations based on mutual needs of nutrition and honour (Freyne 1988:154).

The activities promoted by Q’s formative stratum would effectively replace balanced reciprocity with general reciprocity. “General reciprocity” can be defined as barter and other (economic) exchanges that are characterised by the unilateral giving or receiving of something *without* any expectations and/or obligations of repayment, in the spirit of grace or benefaction (Oakman 1986:151-152; 2008:95, 105, 138; cf. Lk 11:11). General reciprocity typically occurred *only* within the family. In other words, the formative stratum of Q advocates the replacement of normal economic processes with those kinds of economic processes usually reserved for the extended biological family. If applied consistently and exhaustively, such an arrangement would practically entail the application of a domestic economy to society at large, thereby replacing the existing political economy (Oakman 2008:105). Economically speaking, this transformation would turn Israel (and the world) into “one big, happy family” that pulls together to share existing resources for the benefit of all. Texts that might have belonged to the formative stratum before being adapted and adopted by Q’s main redactor seem to advocate that the children of God look after their poor and underprivileged siblings in particular, like a child nurturing her special needs sibling (e.g. Q 12:42-44; 14:16-21, 23; cf. Howes 2015b; 2016a; 2016c).

Finally, the injunctions in Q’s formative stratum to share the good news with other people may be interpreted as sapiential education. We saw that in the family of God children have direct access to his wisdom. God the Father bypasses traditional leaders and mediators to educate his children directly. His children are then called in texts like Q 10:9 and Q 12:2-3 to educate their siblings by spreading the word of God’s care for his children. Q 11:33<sup>9</sup> depicts a family sharing available light, and suggests that wisdom and education are likewise to be shared freely on the principles of “general reciprocity” (see Howes 2013:314-317). In God’s family, everyone is responsible for the education of everyone else, as in the prison on Robbin

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<sup>9</sup> I have argued elsewhere that this logion originally featured in Q’s formative stratum (see Howes 2013).

Island. In the same way, all members of God's family are responsible for the *health* of everyone else, as at the *Gesundheit Institute* of Patch Adams.

As we saw, many of the Q people left their biological families behind when they joined the Q movement, including especially younger people who abandoned their parents. Moreover, the Q movement seems to have attracted people who were already without patriarchal support. Under these conditions, it is justified to assume that some of the Q people fulfilled practical parenting responsibilities towards other Q people. Such "non-biological parenting" would have been an extension of the socio-ethical programme of Q, and the loving behaviour of God the Father would therefore have been the ideal model to apply in these circumstances. The phenomenon of "mutual-mothering" is perhaps a useful category to conceptualise these activities. Nortjé-Meyer (2016) explains the concept as follows:

The concept mutual-mothering refers to non-maternal care by any group member other than the genetic mother. It involves extended parental care and can be undertaken by any woman or man or even children in the group. Therefore the concept mutual-mothering undermines mothering as an essential female attribute. It comprises a wide variety of behaviors including but not limited to provisioning, nursing, protecting, educating, mentoring, touching, and carrying. It is not only characteristic of humans, but it is a widespread phenomenon among mammals and birds, and is particularly common among the primate order.

It is difficult to know the extent to which the socio-ethical programme of Q<sup>1</sup> was reflected in the actual behaviour and lives of those associated with the Sayings Gospel Q. I tend to agree with Batten (1994:47) that the Q people must have made every effort to implement their own ethical imperatives, at least when the movement first started out. Yet, even if the Q people implemented their own socio-ethical programme in practice, it is difficult (if not impossible) to achieve any degree of certitude from the textual evidence about the actual place and treatment of women and children in this "community" (Levine 1999:151, 156, 157, 160, 164). Such uncertainty applies especially to the formative stratum, since Q's direct references to women appear almost exclusively in the main redaction (Levine 1999:154, 155, 156, 162).<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, it seems that the new symbolic family of Q might have done away with earthly patriarchs. Although another androcentric image, that of God as Father, replaced the traditional *paterfamilias*, there are no indications that this new image perpetuated male supremacy (Moxnes 2003:121-122, 152; cf. Park 2014:9). Rather, the providential and protective attributes of God were emphasised, not the authoritarian aspect of his fatherly role. Moreover, God's position as *paterfamilias* was seemingly not transferable to other males in the Q group. As Levine (1999:156) notices, the contents of Q "are replete with egalitarian potential." On the other hand, it would seem that the alternative socio-ethical programme of Q's formative stratum did not include the explicit, deliberate and/or systematic nullification of patriarchy (Batten 1994:49; Levine 1999:159). Some Q<sup>1</sup> texts seem to suggest that the Q people initially at least attempted to be non-hierarchical and non-patriarchal, but the texts are ambiguous and mostly silent about women, so that certainty on this matter remains

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Johnson-DeFaubre (2005:198) admits the following about her gender-focused monograph on Q: "[T]he texts discussed here all come from the Q<sup>2</sup> stratum [of Kloppenborg's stratigraphy]." The depiction of women in the main redaction tend to both recognise (positively) and reinforce (negatively) traditional gender roles (Levine 1999:156, 162, 163). In this regard, the typical male-female pairing in Q should not be overemphasised (see Levine 1999:163-164; cf. Batten 1994:47-49).

impossible (Jacobson 1995:374-375; Levine 1999:158, 160). What is more, Q uses androcentric language to formulate both its vision of divine parenthood and its socio-ethical programme (Levine 1999:156, 164; cf. Johnson-DeFaubre 2005:200).

The “new symbolic family” of Q might have liberated women, but it might also have perpetuated patriarchy or even worsened the position of women. It seems likely that all three of these developments happened at the same time, and depended on the situation of individual women before they had joined the Q movement. Women who had no support before Q membership would probably have benefitted from such membership; for women who joined with their husbands (and other family members), membership would probably have entailed business as usual, under the same patriarchal rule; and women who abandoned their biological families would probably have faced worse economic suffering without patriarchal support, although they may have received some support from other members. Although some women who left their husbands to join the Q movement might have been worse off economically (Levine 1999:158, 159), the Q movement might also have offered an opportunity to escape marital and domestic subservience (Batten 1994:49). Under the category of “mutual mothering,” the women of Q might, on the one hand, have taken care of others in the “community,” which would have added to their burdens and responsibilities, but might also, on the other hand, have received support, affection and care from male members.<sup>11</sup> Finally, it is likely that the emphasis on virtues like compassion, mercy and love would have encouraged men to treat women along similar lines. This means that even if the category of “patriarchy” applies in some way to the people behind Q’s formative layer, it would have looked very different from the patriarchy of greater Israel (and beyond).

The formative stratum of Q can be seen as the first practical attempt after the death of Jesus to implement his social programme. The sayings and stories of Jesus were probably compiled to function as a guidebook for behaviour within the symbolic family of God. Unfortunately, the first followers of Jesus abandoned his social programme when their fellow kinsmen refused to accept their message (see esp. Robinson 2001b:38-44; 2005:705-709; cf. Levine 1999:154; Allison 2001:414; Wink 2002:180, 189-190; Luz 2005:154).<sup>12</sup> Instead of loving their enemies and treating them like siblings, they condemned their fellow Jews to eternal damnation (Joseph 2014:225). And so Q’s second layer, the highly polemical main redaction, was born. Ultimately, the designation “Son of God” became a technical term applied exclusively to Jesus as the elevated Second Person in the Trinity, thereby losing its original meaning as a description of the equality between all children in God’s family (see e.g. Funk 1996:279-296). As part of his edgy routine, the stand-up comedian Jimmy Carr often makes the following statement: “If we are all God’s children, what is so special about Jesus?” This aphorism is apposite, since both the historical Jesus and the Jesus of Q’s formative stratum would presumably have answered: “Nothing.” What was special was the message that we are

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<sup>11</sup> This might partly explain the circumstances under which the prohibition against remarriage in Q 16:18 was needed. Such “mutual-mothering” amongst adult members who had abandoned and/or divorced their spouses when joining the Q movement could easily have led to romance. The prohibition might then have functioned to protect the Q movement against negative perceptions from the outside.

<sup>12</sup> In their own minds, the Q people probably believed that they were still remaining faithful to the teachings of Jesus (see Howes 2015a:253-255).

all part of God's family, that God is a loving Father, and that we should treat each other like our Father treats us.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

Q's formative stratum contains sayings of Jesus that reveal a social vision for Jewish society at large based on principles usually reserved for the biological family internally (Howes 2015a:254; 2016a:122-123). In this new social vision, all of Israel (and perhaps the whole known world) is part of a symbolic family, of which God is the Father, and all people are his children. In Q's formative stratum, the ideological construct of divine fatherhood functions as the primary paradigm with which to understand and describe the nature and conduct of God. Accordingly, the divine Father is portrayed as parenting his children by loving them unconditionally, handling them with mercy and compassion, treating them equally, knowing them intimately, protecting and comforting them, providing for them, feeding and clothing them, being approachable and listening to them, nurturing and caring for them, forgiving them, educating them, and giving special attention to those who need it most. In turn, this anthropomorphic image of the divine functions as the primary paradigm with which to buttress and motivate the alternative ethics of Q's first stratum. More specifically, the idea of divine fatherhood is used to encourage people through *imitatio Dei* rhetoric to follow their Father's example, and treat each other like they would their biological siblings. Regarding Q's formative stratum, such *imitatio Dei* rhetoric is applied consistently as the primary means by which both its radical ethics and its alternative social programme are bolstered. Although such masculine language and rhetoric might be seen to support patriarchy, the subversive socio-ethical paradigm of Q had the potential to disrupt, destabilise and even overthrow conventional patriarchy (cf. Levine 1999:156). On the one hand, there are no indications that the masculine conception of God as Father perpetuated male supremacy. On the other hand, it does not seem from the content of Q's formative stratum that the nullification of patriarchy was a priority when the Q movement started out (or thereafter). At the very least, we may say that the socio-ethical programme of Q<sup>1</sup> would have been conducive to the better treatment of women (and children) within the "community."

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph (2014:216-228) is correct that Q contains both *inclusive* "sonship" traditions (applying to all Jesus followers or people in general) and *exclusive* "sonship" traditions (applying only to Jesus). However, it would seem that the exclusive sonship traditions feature only in the main redaction, so that one may speak of a development from inclusive to exclusive sonship.

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<sup>14</sup> The reference to "communit(ies)" in the title to Levine's article, and throughout her work, is problematic. When featuring part of a word between brackets, it should be possible for the rest of that word to feature on its own and still make sense. It is not clear to me what a "communit" might be. A better option would have been "community/ies."

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