

- **Did All the First Christians Have to Leave Their Parents?**
 - *Mussten alle frühen Christen ihre Eltern verlassen?*
 - *Les premiers Chrétiens devaient-ils tous quitter leurs parents?*
- Peter Balla, Hungary**

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Als charakteristisch für ein christliches Leben sind auch die ethischen Anweisungen für die Familien anzusehen. Dabei vermitteln einige Abschnitte im Neuen Testament den Eindruck, daß Jesus und seine ersten Nachfolger ein Ethos vertreten haben, das sich für den Familienzusammenhalt eher zerstörerisch auswirken mußte. Solche Texte erfordern deshalb eine sorgfältige Analyse. Die hier vertretene Exegese versucht, sie vor dem Hintergrund des Familienethos verschiedener Umweltvölker Israels z.Zt. des Neuen Testaments zu verstehen. Dieses ist durch ein zunehmendes Interesse an soziologischen Fragen bei der Erforschung des Altertums heute erfreulicherweise recht gut bekannt.

Die Erörterung beginnt mit dem außerbiblischen Material. Dazu werden eingangs die Erwartungen an Kindern bezüglich ihrer Eltern aufgelistet, wie sie sich in den Jahrhunderten um die Zeitenwende aus heidnischen wie jüdischen Quellen darstellen. Danach wurde es als vorrangig angesehen, daß Kinder ihre Eltern achten und ehren sollten. Besonders zwei Pflichten finden in den Texten Erwähnung: die Versorgung der Eltern im Alter und die Verantwortung für ihre Beerdigung.

Die radikalen Worte Jesu zur Eltern-Kind-Beziehung in den Evangelientexten lassen sich in drei Kategorien aufteilen. Eine erste Gruppe hat es zu tun mit Aussagen der Herausforderung zur Nachfolge, wobei eine Pflichtverletzung der Familie gegenüber als Konsequenz der Loyalität zu und Hingabe an Jesus anzusehen ist. Hierbei handelt es sich weniger darum, daß Jesus die Familienbeziehung als solche ablehnt, als daß die Familien sich ihrerseits ihm gegenüber feindlich verhalten. Einige Texte beziehen sich zweitens auf besondere Einzelfälle und nicht auf die allgemeine Jüngerschaft. Eine dritte Gruppe von Abschnitten ist vor einem apokalyptischen Hintergrund zu verstehen, sie beziehen sich entweder auf die Endzeit oder auf die Dringlichkeit, heute zu entscheiden, welchen Prioritäten man folgen will. Zusammenfassend läßt sich sagen, daß sich in keiner der drei Textgruppen eine Anweisung zu einem generellen Verhalten für alle Jünger findet. Vielmehr bestätigt Jesus die generelle Gültigkeit des Gebots, die Eltern zu ehren, seine radikalen Worte zeigen dabei die Ausnahme von der Regel, wobei eine 'Distanzierung' von den Eltern von einzelnen Jüngern erwartet wurde wegen der Dringlichkeit des Auftrags, in der gegenwärtigen Zeit das Kommen des Reiches Gottes zu bereiten.

RÉSUMÉ

L'éthique familiale tient une place importante dans le christianisme. Il y a cependant plusieurs textes du Nouveau Testament qui sembleraient montrer que Jésus et ses disciples avaient une attitude hostile par rapport à la famille. Ces passages appellent une analyse soignée. Notre exégèse peut s'appuyer sur la connaissance que nous avons de l'éthique des différentes sociétés de l'époque du Nouveau Testament. Nous avons à ce sujet aujourd'hui beaucoup plus d'informations en raison d'un intérêt toujours grandissant pour la vie sociale de l'antiquité.

L'article commence en exploitant les sources extra-bibliques et montre quelles étaient les attentes principales à l'égard des enfants dans leurs relations avec leurs parents d'après la littérature ancienne, aussi bien païenne que juive, dans les deux ou trois siècles qui forment le contexte du Nouveau Testament. On y rencontre d'abord partout le devoir de vénérer les parents. Deux implications ressortent comme les plus importantes dans nos sources: l'obligation de pourvoir aux besoins des parents dans leur vieillesse et celle d'assurer leur obsèques. Abordant ensuite les textes de l'Évangile, nous

essayons de montrer que les propos radicaux de Jésus sur les relations entre parents et enfants peuvent être classés en trois catégories. Premièrement, certains textes indiquent que ce que dit Jésus vient en réponse à une provocation, ou que la rupture avec la famille est une conséquence de l'engagement du disciple envers Jésus. Ce n'est pas que Jésus soit hostile à la famille en tant que telle, mais c'est la famille qui se montre hostile à son égard. Deuxièmement, certains textes peuvent être considérés comme se rapportant à des cas exceptionnels, c'est à dire qu'ils ne s'appliquent pas à tous les disciples. Troisièmement, plusieurs textes doivent être compris en fonction de perspectives apocalyptiques: soit ils se rapportent à la fin des temps, soit ils soulignent l'urgence d'une décision quant aux priorités à adopter dans le présent. En aucun cas ils ne prescrivent le comportement requis de tous les disciples de Jésus. Jésus a affirmé la validité du commandement d'honorer ses parents. Ses propos radicaux portent sur des exceptions à la règle. Il n'a été demandé de « quitter leurs parents » qu'à certains disciples, à cause du besoin urgent de leur ministère pour préparer le Royaume à venir, dans le temps présent.

In recent decades there has emerged an increasing interest in family relationships in antiquity. Monographs and collections of essays deal with aspects of the Roman family. Publications of papyri and inscriptions allow an insight into the life of Greek and Jewish families. Classical philologists, sociologists and biblical scholars alike turn their attention to the sociological dimensions of ancient family life.¹ The present short paper is devoted to the discussion of one particular aspect of the family life of Jesus' first disciples, that of the child-parent relationship. Within this area we focus our inquiry upon the question set in our title, Did All the First Christians Have to Leave Their

Parents? The issue that has captured my attention and has initiated this paper is the tension between Jesus' acceptance of the commandment, 'Honour your father and mother' (see e.g. Mk. 7,9ff. in relation to the *Corban*; and Mk. 10,17ff. par: the passage concerning the 'rich young ruler'), and his sayings concerning 'leaving' one's parents (see e.g. Mt. 19,29 and parallels: Mk. 10,29; Lk. 18,29—in the passage after the rich young ruler; cf. also the extremely radical saying in Lk. 14,26 about 'hating' one's father and mother). I shall focus here on the Gospel tradition only; accordingly, 'first Christians' in the title refers to the first disciples of Jesus.

It is appropriate to affirm at the begin-

ning that whenever I mention 'children', I use the term to express a relationship, and I do not refer to the age of children, unless it is specifically needed in a given context. It will be seen that the duties of children to their parents applied to them even when they were grown-ups. Accordingly, I shall use the term 'children' to refer to children in their relationship to their parents. Children, in this sense, remain 'children' to their parents as long as their parents are alive; and even longer: when they venerate the memory of their deceased parents. I note that the Greek term *teknon* can refer to the child-parent relationship irrespective of the age of the 'child'.

In this paper I shall focus on non-biblical material to establish the background against which our question has to be discussed, I shall list the major expectations towards children in relation to their parents in ancient literature originating from the two to three centuries around the time of the New Testament. We shall also meet some examples of conflicts between children and parents. Then I shall point to some New Testament texts for which this background seems to be relevant. It is needless to say that I can refer only to some examples both from the background and from the New Testament. By concentrating on a few examples I hope to stimulate fresh interest in this wide field of study.

A. Children's duties towards their parents in the environment of the New Testament

1. Non-Jewish sources

The first duty to be mentioned is the general expectation that a child would revere his or her parents. We can find a high appreciation of a mother—and, indeed, of both parents—expressed in a letter addressed to the brother of the letter-writer:² '... for we ought to revere our mother as a goddess, especially one so good as ours. This I have written to you, brother, because I know how sweet a possession our revered parents are.' In ancient sources parents and gods were

often referred to in the same context. Here we note that a mother deserves the same reverence as a goddess. This may be the personal feeling of the son who writes this letter, but it is also possible that it is a concrete expression of a more general rule.

We can find lists to whom honour is due. For example, Diogenes Laertius writes about the Stoics:³ 'The Stoics approve also of honouring parents and brothers in the second place next after the gods. They further maintain that parental affection for children is natural to the good, but not to the bad'. We can find further examples in the writings of Hierocles.⁴ The titles given by him to the various sections of his work imply a certain ranking: he first discusses conduct towards the gods then that towards one's country.⁵ Then he writes:⁶ 'After considering the gods and our country, what person deserves to be mentioned more than, or prior to our parents? . . . No mistake, therefore, will be made by him who says that they are as it were secondary or terrestrial divinities'.⁷

It may be argued that most if not all of children's duties towards their parents can be derived from the primary duty of honouring one's parent. For the sake of brevity, let me simply list the duties I have found in ancient pagan writings:

—children owe a 'debt' to be 'repaid' to their parents when they grow old: children should provide for their old or ill parents (just as their parents provided for them when they were little children); this duty is related to the more general duty of 'gratitude';

—children should 'imitate their predecessors', i.e. learn from them; this includes the learning of a skill or trade;

—children should not disagree with their parents;

—children have to obey what their parents say ('obedience' had also as its consequence that parents could decide whom their daughter should marry); obedience included submission to parents' wills; this willingness to obey one's parents is sometimes connected to the virtue of *pietas*;

- children are expected to be respectful in speech to their parents;
- children have to provide a decent funeral for their parents;
- parents are to be venerated even after their deaths; this includes practising certain rites.

From this list we may point to two duties in particular which surface in most of our sources: the duty of providing for one's aging parents; and of burying them when they die. Before we turn to some Jewish sources, let me quote one beautiful expression of these duties in a letter of a son to his father.⁸ Before the son urges his father to come to him and spend at least a season with them, he addresses his father in this way: 'Nothing truly will be dearer to me than to protect you for the rest of your life in a manner worthy of you and of myself, and if the fate of mankind befalls you, to see that you enjoy all due honours; this will be my chief desire, honourably to protect you both while you live and when you have departed to the gods.' Writing a personal letter, Philonides, the son, expresses in a roundabout way—but nevertheless clearly—his intention to provide for a burial that shall express due honour to his father.

2. Jewish sources

From our Jewish sources we could put together a very similar list of duties. However, let it suffice to quote the remark of the editor of a recent collection of essays on Jewish family life in antiquity who summarises their results in this way:⁹ 'The striking conclusion that emerges from all four papers . . . is that the Jewish family in antiquity seems not to have been distinctive by the power of its Jewishness; rather, its structure, ideals, and dynamics seem to have been virtually identical with those of its ambient culture(s). Instead of going into detail concerning all the duties of children, let us see some examples of the above-mentioned two main duties.

a. Provision in old age

This duty is expressed, for example, in the Book of Sirach. This is significant,

because due to the history of the book, it was probably known in Palestine as well as in the Diaspora.¹⁰ In Sirach 3,12 we read: 'O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives'.

The Sibylline Oracles may attest this duty for Phrygia. In the second book, line 245 provides the context for a longer passage when it says that the impious will be destroyed. A little later, lines 273–275 list the following among the impious: ' . . . as many as abandoned their parents in old age, not making return at all, not providing nourishment to their parents in turn'.

A fragment found in Qumran attests this duty for Judaea. In 4Q Sapiential Work A^b (4Q416), frag.2, col.iii, line 17 we find the term 'serve' in relation to parents: 'just as they have dominion over you and form the spirit, so you must serve them'. This may refer simply to the general principle that children serve their parents by being under their authority. However, I would like to raise the possibility that this service includes looking after them in their old age.

With due caution, we may argue in a similar way concerning another verse in Sirach. Here again, the text may refer to a general expression of obedience: 'he will serve his parents as his masters' (3,7). However, in the light of other literature, we may see a reference to the duty of provision for old age included in the term 'serve'.

Philo of Alexandria uses the example of storks to say something about the child-parent relationship. With a reference to the old storks Philo affirms that children gather 'provision for the needs of their parents' (*Dec.* 116).

To mention but one more example, Tobit 4,3 reads: 'My son, when I die, bury me, and do not neglect your mother. Honour her all the days of your life' The order not to neglect the mother after her husband's death may be seen as a call for providing for her when need arises, in terms of food, and also by everyday help in general. We note that this duty is valid for one's whole life.¹¹

b. Providing for a funeral

From the time of the patriarchs on, a decent funeral was significant in the eyes of the Jewish people. It is a matter of course that people other than one's children could provide for a funeral, but it was also regarded as the duty of a child. In the era of our focus, we find the request for a burial, for example, in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (T. Gad 8,3):¹² 'My children, obey your father, and bury me near to my fathers'. At the end of the individual Testaments the burial of the testator, carried out by his children, is also recorded. For example, in T. Reuben 7,1-2 we read: 'And Reuben died, having given these commands to his sons. And they placed him in a coffin, until they brought him up from Egypt and buried him in Hebron in the double cave, where his fathers were'.¹³

In Tobit 4,3-4 we read that Tobit called his son Tobias, and said: 'My son, when I die, bury me, and do not neglect your mother. Honour her all the days of your life; do what is pleasing to her, and do not grieve her. Remember, my son, that she faced many dangers for you while you were yet unborn. When she dies bury her beside me in the same grave'. Here we note the distinct mentioning of both father and mother as the recipients of their children's duty of burying them.

As regards funerals, Josephus is not so explicit as the above sources. He simply states that the 'funeral ceremony is to be undertaken by the nearest relatives' (C. Ap. 2.205). However, the context suggests that children are meant first of all, as the next section speaks of children's duty of honouring their parents (2.206). In *Bell* 5.545 we find that Josephus' mother expected that her son would bury her.¹⁴

Let these few examples suffice. Let us turn to some examples in Jewish sources, where the Torah, the temple, and conversion to 'Judaism' may cause tensions and conflicts within a family. In some of the sources no tension is involved; rather, there is a willingness to sacrifice or subordinate family ties in view of a higher cause.

c. Family ties sacrificed for a higher cause

First, we should mention stories about the willingness to die for the Mosaic laws, or for the temple. In these stories we often find the motif that family ties are ranked second after the Torah; and fidelity to the Torah and to the temple might involve readiness to suffer martyrdom.

For example, in connection with the Maccabean revolt, Jewish people's attitude is described in the following words in 2Maccabees 15,18: 'Their concern for wives and children, and also for brethren and relatives, lay upon them less heavily; their greatest and first fear was for the consecrated sanctuary'.¹⁵ Although this sentence is written from the perspective of the soldiers, we may assume that it describes the views of the families in general.¹⁶

4Maccabees puts a strong emphasis on martyrdom. Perhaps a more general passage can be viewed against this background as well. In 4Macc. 2,9b-13 we read:

In all . . . matters we can recognize that reason rules the emotions. For the law prevails even over affection for parents, so that virtue is not abandoned for their sakes. It is superior to love for one's wife, so that one rebukes her when she breaks the law. It takes precedence over love for children, so that one punishes them for misdeeds. It is sovereign over the relationship of friends, so that one rebukes friends when they act wickedly.

Once again, we note that the text does not discuss family relationship from the perspective of the child. Nevertheless, the subordination of 'family ties' in general is worth mentioning. As a passing remark, we may contrast these texts to passages in the Jesus tradition as well as in the household codes in the New Testament where family relationships are not only viewed from the perspective of the parents, but also from that of the child.

We may mention Josephus as an example in connection with limits to duties within a family. He emphasises the openness of the Jewish community to those

who want to observe the Mosaic laws (*C. Ap.* 2.210). In this context he formulates a limit to duties required by family ties: 'To all who desire to come and live under the same laws with us, he [i.e. "our legislator"] gives a gracious welcome, holding that it is not family ties alone which constitute relationship, but agreement in the principles of conduct'.

d. Conflicts within the family

In Jewish apocalyptic literature, enmity within a family is seen as a sign of the last days when God's judgment will be executed. For example, in *1 Enoch* 100,1–2 we read: 'In those days, . . . a man shall not be able to withhold his hands from his sons nor from (his) sons' sons in order to kill them. Nor is it possible for the sinner to withhold his hands from his honored brother. From dawn until the sun sets, they shall slay each other'. Verse 4 shows us the context clearly: 'And the Most High will arise on that day of judgment in order to execute a great judgment upon all the sinners'. Although we do not find here a reciprocity between father and son, the second pair—sinner and his brother—shows that this enmity within the family is something negative; it is a sin which nevertheless cannot be prevented.¹⁷

Stephen Barton has pointed out that many Jewish writings narrate cases where a distancing from one's family is something worthy of praise.¹⁸

For example, in *Jubilees* 11,16 concerning Abram we read:¹⁹ ' . . . was two weeks of years old. And he separated from his father so that he might not worship the idols with him'.

In the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, chapters 1–8 narrate the story of Abraham's youth. At the end of this long narrative concerning the futility of the gods of his father, we read Abraham's words (8,1–6): 'And it came to pass as I was thinking things like these with regard to my father Terah in the court of my house, the voice of the Mighty One came down from the heavens in a stream of fire, saying . . . "Go out from Terah, your father, and go out of the house, that you too may not be slain in the sins of your father's house". And I

went out'. Verse 6 tells us that his father and his house were burnt by a thunderbolt.

In *Joseph and Aseneth* we learn Aseneth's thoughts which she said in her heart (11,4): 'All people have come to hate me, and on top of those my father and my mother, because I, too, have come to hate their gods and have destroyed them . . .' The passage does not say that Aseneth hated her parents, but her new prospects to come into Joseph's family resulted in her hating the pagan gods of her former family.

Although these latter examples refer back to the times of the patriarchs, they were probably intended by their authors to serve as encouragements for prospective converts to Judaism at the time of their writing. These examples, then, can be seen as limits to children's duties: for the sake of the God of the people of Israel one has to be prepared to leave his or her pagan background, including family house and parents.

Keeping this background in mind, let us turn to some New Testament passages in order to see whether Jesus and the first Christians left their parents or not.

B. Some New Testament Passages

In the following, I shall argue tentatively that the radical sayings of Jesus concerning the child-parent relationship can be classified in three groups. Firstly, some of the texts indicate that Jesus' saying is an answer to a challenge, or that the separation within a family is a consequence of the disciples' commitment to Jesus; in other words: it is not Jesus and his disciples who initiate the separation, they rather suffer it as a consequence of other people's unbelief. Secondly, some texts may be regarded as referring to exceptional cases, i.e. they do not apply to all disciples. Here I follow J.C. O'Neill's thesis, who has suggested that Jesus may have had two kinds of disciples, on the analogy of the Essene community: some were expected to be ready to live in a celibate community, while others did not have to renounce family life. O'Neill also argues that some 'hard sayings about

discipleship—sayings about taking up the cross, about leaving all, about not loving father or mother more than him— . . . are only for the few who are called to rule' as ministers.²⁰ Thirdly, some texts are to be seen in an apocalyptic setting. They either refer to the end time, or to the urgency of deciding upon priorities in the present; in neither case do they prescribe the behaviour of all the disciples of Jesus for the present age. As a general remark, I would add that some of the texts do not exclude the continuation of children honouring their parents. Let us briefly consider but a few examples.

1. *Lk. 2,48ff*

First we have to ask whether Jesus himself abandoned his parents. Here we face the problem that, apart from the birth narratives, his parents are seldom mentioned. From the childhood of Jesus, we have only the story of the twelve year old Jesus. As the story is narrated only by Luke, and even he brings it at the end of the birth narrative, there are scholars who doubt the historicity of this story.²¹ Without attempting to solve this problem, I simply note that on the surface of the story we find a contradiction in Jesus' behaviour. On the one hand, he causes worry for his parents by staying behind in Jerusalem without any notice (*Lk. 2,48*). On the other hand, at the end of the story he joins his parents and returns with them to Nazareth. The text even stresses his obedience (*2,51*).

However, there is no real contradiction here. Jesus simply follows the general rule we have seen expressed in lists of those to whom honour is due: God comes always before parents in those lists. Accordingly, Jesus' answer to his parents indicates that he has his heavenly father in mind; so the RSV inserts the term 'house' into its translation (*2,49*): 'How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' Whether this story has to be labelled as a legend (or anecdote) or not, we note that according to this story Jesus grew up in his parents' home.

2. *Mk. 3,31ff.par*

There is no disagreement among scholars as regards the historicity of the next passage to be discussed: *Mk. 3,31ff.par*—at least in some reconstructed form—is generally regarded to be authentic. We note that the two other synoptic Gospels bring this scene in another context (see *Mt. 12,46ff*; *Lk. 8,19ff*). It is significant that only Mark refers to the intention of the relatives of Jesus (*3,21*): 'And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for people were saying, "He is beside himself."' We note that this translation has an insertion: 'people'; in the Greek the subject of *elegon* is not specified. This ambiguous expression may have referred to Jesus' relatives themselves. It is, of course, possible to argue that *Mk. 3,20–21* is redactional. However, if we accept that there is traditional material in it, then Jesus' identification of his true family was not meant as abandoning his blood relations. It can be seen as an answer to the intended action of his non-understanding—may we say, 'non-believing'—parents (cf. *Mk. 6,1–6*, where Jesus' distancing from his fatherland is also a reaction to their 'unbelief'; see especially v.4: 'A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house'). We should not underestimate these passages: they do speak about a 'new family' of Jesus. However, they do not imply that Jesus would have denied provision for his old parents, or indeed, a burial for them when they die.

This latter point leads us over to one of the most striking sayings of Jesus, in the conversation with would-be followers of Jesus.

3. *Lk. 9,59–60; par: Mt. 8,21–22*

First we have to note a point in which the Lukan version of this text seems to be nearer to the original. Matthew says that it is a 'disciple' who asks Jesus' permission first to bury his father. It is more likely that Luke is right in referring to an unspecified 'other' person who has the chance to become a disciple when meeting Jesus.²² We should not try to weaken the

striking character of Jesus' saying (Lk. 9,60): 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead'.²³ However, let us make a few exegetical observations. Firstly, it is not relevant to emphasise that it was a great shame to be left unburied in antiquity. Jesus does not require that the dead should not be buried.

Secondly, it is difficult to decide who are the dead who should bury their dead. U. Luz holds that it is not the spiritually dead. In his opinion, Jesus' sentence is an *oxymoron*, i.e. a witty, paradoxical saying.²⁴ Luz paraphrases it this way: 'let the dead mutually bury one another'. I myself—following the majority of commentators—incline to the view that it is the spiritually dead who should bury the dead, i.e. those who have not responded to Jesus' call. To be sure, in both cases the person is asked to leave his dead father. Here I would argue that the emphasis of Jesus' radical saying lies in an urgency in time and a priority to be given to Jesus' call.

Both Matthew and Luke express this priority in some way. In Matthew, Jesus first says, 'Follow me', and then utters the radical saying. In Luke this expression is not necessary, because it is the would-be disciple who addresses Jesus and offers to follow him. Rather, in Luke, Jesus' radical saying is followed by another sentence: 'but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God'. Both evangelists clearly indicate that it is the discipleship of Jesus—Jesus' call to proclaim the Kingdom—which has to be given precedence even over against family ties. Luke's reference to the Kingdom may be redactional, but he may be right in reporting that in the original scene it was Jesus who took the initiative to address a would-be disciple (unlike in Matthew's version).²⁵ The call uttered by Jesus is put in a way that should not be generalised. The saying is radical, but it does not imply that Jesus would not let any of his disciples fulfil their duty as children to their parents. Discipleship, *Nachfolge*, has to have precedence, but this does not lead to abandoning one's family in the case of each individual

disciple. Perhaps, it was only expected from some of them.

4. Texts about 'leaving'

In a way similar to the case of the last passage, I would emphasise the context of other radical sayings of Jesus as significant for a correct understanding. As I indicated in the introduction above, Jesus' sayings concerning 'leaving' one's parents' (Mt. 19,29; Mk. 10,29; Lk. 18,29) are reported in the passage after the 'rich young ruler' in each of the Synoptics. The context thus clearly indicates what is at stake here: the discipleship of Jesus. Each of the Synoptics indicate that the 'leaving' occurs for the sake of the discipleship of Jesus: for Jesus' name's sake (Mt.); for Jesus' and the gospel's sake (Mk.); for the sake of the Kingdom of God (Lk.). Perhaps these sayings concern, again, priorities; they may be addressed to some of the disciples and not to all of them. As regards the calling of the first disciples, first we note that one pair of brothers, James and John, were working in the same trade as their father: they were fishing together (Mk. 1,19f.par). Although it is not stated explicitly, we may presume that the same was true for the other pair of brothers, for Simon (Peter) and Andrew. We must note that there is no enmity among children and parents implied in the calling narratives. As regards James and John, they continued to be called the sons of Zebedee after their father even after they became disciples of Jesus (Mt. 10,2; 20,20; 26,37; cf. also 27,36; see their Marcan parallels, and also Lk. 5,10; Jn. 21,2). Nothing compels us to presuppose that they would not have provided for their father later if any need would have arisen. As regards Peter, we have only some 'random' and 'circumstantial' evidence which only permits some hypothetical suggestions.

On the one hand, may I point to the scene which presupposes that Peter—even when he was a follower of Jesus—cared for the mother of Peter's wife. According to all the three synoptic Gospels, Peter's (Simon's) mother-in-law is in Peter's house (Mk. 1,29ff; Mt. 8,14f; Lk. 4,38f; Mt. and Lk. have 'Simon'

instead of Peter). Without going into exegetical details, we simply note that the evangelists held that Peter (and his wife?) cared for his wife's mother when she needed help.

On the other hand, Peter was prepared to return to his fishing business after Jesus' death. Irrespective of the question of the authenticity of this scene reported only by the Fourth Gospel (Jn. 21,3), it makes best sense if we presuppose that the author of the Fourth Gospel did not think that there was any enmity between Peter and his family (although once again it has to be emphasised that we do not hear anything about the parents of Peter in the Gospels).

5. *Texts about enmity between children and parents*

I would argue that most of the passages where Jesus speaks of an enmity between children and parents refer either to the consequences of discipleship (which are not intended by the disciples, but have to be suffered unavoidably), or to the apocalyptic circumstances of the last days.

Mt. 10,21f stand in the context of the sending out of the disciples. It is significant that their parallel in Mk. can be found in ch. 13, i.e. the 'little apocalypse' (Mk. 13,12f). We may add that even in Mt., it has an apocalyptic tone because of the reference to the 'enduring to the end' (10,21f).

Mt. 10,34–36 (par in Lk. 12,51–53, so it is often assigned by scholars to 'Q') is difficult to assess as regards authenticity. If it comes from 'Q', then in the case of these verses Matthew's and Luke's Q-versions were different.²⁶ The reminiscence of Micah 7,6 raises the possibility that the text was produced by the early Christian community. However, U. Luz argues that Micah 7,6 played a role also in Judaism in connection with the end-times, so one can presuppose Jesus-logia in these verses.

In spite of the grammatical form which indicates the aim or goal of the coming of Jesus, I would argue that Mt. 10,34 can nevertheless refer to a consequence here. Whatever the grammatical form would

imply, the argument of U. Luz (seen above concerning the reference to Micah 7,6) would suggest that the Old Testament reference has apocalyptic connotations even in our passage.

We have to mention—at least briefly—the *crux interpretum* of our theme, Lk. 14,26: 'If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple'. We have to note that the reference to the disciples' 'hating' their relatives occurs only here in the canonical Gospels.²⁷ In Luke's Gospel the preceding context (Lk. 14,25) says that Jesus said this saying to the multitude around him. The following saying (Lk. 14,27), however, speaks about the necessity of taking up one's cross. It is interesting to note that a similar saying follows immediately upon Mt. 10,34–36, the passage we have discussed above: 'He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me' (Mt. 10,37f). This suggests to Bovon that in Lk. 14,26–27 we have a parallel to Mt. 10,37–38 (and that the originally two independent sayings were put together in the tradition prior to the time of Mt. and Lk.).²⁸ If this analysis is correct, then neither Mt. nor Lk. can be regarded as reporting the original context of the sayings. In this case, acknowledging the weakness of an argument from silence, I would suggest that the saying in Lk. 14,26 refers to the priority of Jesus' call to one's own family ties. It does not express a general rule, but the urgency of the call to some of Jesus' disciples. This view would be strengthened if we do not take the reference to the cross as some spiritual message to all of the disciples, but rather a readiness for concrete hardships expected by Jesus from some of his disciples, but not from all of them. It is worth noting that the Semitic background of the term 'hate' also suggests that it is about a priority and not about emotions in the modern sense. God places second the one whom he 'hates' as opposed to the one whom he elects (cf. Mal. 1,2–3). Mt. 10,37 is not only a parallel to Lk. 14,26, but we can find in them the same idea expressed

by different idioms: 'loves more' equals 'does not hate'.

6. Epilogue

As we started with a passage suspected by some scholars as regards its historicity—the story of the twelve year old Jesus—, may I conclude by briefly mentioning another 'suspected' passage, this time from the end of Jesus' earthly life. In Jn. 19,25–27, Jesus' conversation from the cross with his mother and with the beloved disciple is suspected by some scholars, because it may be regarded as an *inclusio* together with the scene of the first sign at Cana in ch. 2. Irrespective of our view as regards its historicity, let me conclude by pointing out that the author of the Fourth Gospel did not see any problem in 'relating the fact that the dying Jesus provided for the care of his mother after his death'.²⁹

C. Conclusion

To sum up, I would argue that the radical sayings of Jesus should not be weakened or explained away. However, they are only one aspect of our present theme, because, as we saw in the introduction, Jesus affirmed the validity of the commandment to honour one's parents. His radical sayings represent the exception to the rule. Some disciples are urged to live an ascetic life. Some are warned that their discipleship can evoke enmity from their environment including their own nearest relatives. Disciples are warned that the end times will involve tensions within families (we have seen this view attested for Jewish literature in connection with the final judgment in the example of 1 Enoch 100,1–2). Such enmities can become unavoidable for most of the disciples in the end-times; but they should not be generalised for the present. 'Leaving' one's parents can be expected from some disciples for the sake of the urgency of ministering in the present times to the Kingdom to come. This is the exception to the rule that was valid also for the first disciples of Jesus: 'Honour thy father and thy mother'. Their Jewish environment

expected this from them; their non-Jewish environment expected it also, even if not expressed in the words of the fifth commandment. Jesus subscribed to this expectation; most of his first disciples subscribed to it as well. The exception strengthens the rule.

Notes

- 1 See e.g. Dixon, Suzanne: *The Roman Family*. 1992, Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press; Gardner, Jane F. and Wiedemann, Thomas: *The Roman Household: A Sourcebook*. 1991, London and New York: Routledge; Moxnes, Halvor (ed.): *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as social reality and metaphor*. 1997, London and New York: Routledge; Osiek, Carolyn and Balch, David L.: *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* 1997, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press; Perdue, Leo G. et al. (eds.): *Families in Ancient Israel*. 1997, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press; Rawson, Beryl (ed.): *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*. 1986, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press; Wiedemann, Thomas: *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire*. 1989, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- 2 *Select Papyri*. 3 vols, vol. 1: *Non-literary Papyri: Private Affairs*. 1970, London: William Heinemann Ltd, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; quotation from vol. 1, p. 321; the document is dated to the 2nd century A.D.
- 3 VII.120, in: Diogenes Laertius: *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. 2 vols, vol. 1: 1972, vol. 2: 1970, London: William Heinemann Ltd, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; quotation from vol. 2, p. 225.
- 4 See: Praechter, Karl: *Hierokles der Stoiker*. 1901, Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlags-Buchhandlung, Theodor Weicher.) I quote the texts from Fideler's edition (*The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library: An Anthology of Ancient Writings Which Relate to Pythagoras and Pythagorean Philosophy*. Introduced and edited by David R. Fideler. 1987, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Phanes Press), pp. 275–279.
- 5 Fideler 1987, 275–277.

• **Did All the First Christians Have to Leave Their Parents?** •

- 6 *Ibid.* 277; Greek text in: Praechter 1901, 45.
- 7 E. Eyben has noted that: 'Like the Stoics, Cicero ranked the *pietas* owed to parents third after the respect owed to the gods and to the fatherland', *Off.* 1,45,160 (*Restless Youth in Ancient Rome*. 1993, London and New York: Routledge, p. 206). It is the more interesting that there is a passage in Cicero where the gods are not mentioned at the beginning of a list, but only one's country and parents (Cicero: *De Officiis* Lib.I. cap. 17, 58).
- 8 The papyrus is dated about 255 B.C., *Select Papyri* I/279.
- 9 Cohen, Shaye J. D. (ed.): *The Jewish Family in Antiquity*. 1993, Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press; the quotation comes from the Introduction, p. 2.
- 10 See: Sauer, Georg: *Jesus Sirach (Ben Sira)*. 1981, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, p. 490.
- 11 See also bT Qidd 31b, towards the end of that section. Here honour includes: to give one's father to eat, to drink, and to clothe him; to lead him in and out. The latter must refer to their state when they are old or weak.
- 12 My quotations are from: Hollander, H. W.-de Jonge, M.: *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary*. 1985, Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- 13 Joseph commands his children that they should bring with them also the bones of Zilpah (T. Joseph 20,3): 'And carry up Zilpah your mother and bury her close to Bilhah, by the Hippodrome, near Rachel'.
- 14 For a Palestinian attestation of this duty see Jub 23,7;36,1f.18.
- 15 See: Habicht, Christian: *2. Makkabäerbuch*. 1976, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn.
- 16 See another example of a similar kind in Josephus, *Bell* 2. 197.
- 17 Cf. also 1 Enoch 56,7; 99,5; Jub 23,16; SyrBar 70,6; Zech 13,4.
- 18 See his dissertation: *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew*. 1994, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, especially pp. 24ff *passim* and 55.
- 19 Unless otherwise stated, I usually quote the Pseudepigrapha from Charlesworth (1983 and 1985); and the apocrypha from the Revised Standard Version.
- 20 O'Neill, John C.: *Messiah: Six lectures on the ministry of Jesus*. 1980, repr. 1984, Cambridge: Cochrane Press, p. 84. Cf. also M. Hengel: *Nachfolge und Charisma*. 1968, Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, pp. 68ff. The fifth section of Hengel's work is entitled as follows: 'Jesu Ruf in die "Nachfolge" gilt nur dem einzelnen Gerufenen' (p. 68).
- 21 F. Bovon calls it an 'anecdote' (in: *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*. EKK III/1, 1989, p. 154). According to him, Luke took it over from the tradition, and re-worked it.
- 22 So also: Kristen, Peter: *Familie, Kreuz und Leben: Nachfolge Jesu nach Q und dem Markusevangelium*. 1995, Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, pp. 110 and 112.
- 23 Concerning Lev 21,11f and Num 6,6, Hengel rightly affirms (1968, 12): 'Das den Hohenpriester und Nasiräer betreffende Gebot wird man daher kaum mit Schniewind zur Motivierung der Antwort Jesu heranziehen dürfen, da Jesus . . . erst recht eine kultisch-rituelle Begründung seiner Forderung fernlag'.
- 24 *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*. EKK I/2, 1990, Zürich: Benziger Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, p. 25.
- 25 I would argue that Matthew assimilated the form to the preceding passage: in Matthew's version Jesus is addressed first; his sayings are answers (*pace* Hengel 1968, 4f).
- 26 So U. Luz, 1990, 134f.
- 27 This saying occurs twice in the Gospel of Thomas, no. 55 and 101. In the latter the need to love one's parents is also expressed. Cf. Jn. 12,25 concerning the necessity of hating one's own life.
- 28 *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* EKK III/2, 1996, p. 527.
- 29 So R. E. Brown: *The Gospel According to John*. XIII-XXI. 1966, p. 923.

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