Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus

Volume 4

Individual Studies

Edited by

Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter

BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2011

DID JESUS BREAK THE FIFTH (FOURTH) COMMANDMENT?

PETER BALLA

1. *Introduction*

My thesis in this essay is to show that the "general rule" in early Christianity is a kind of child-parent relationship which can be seen in the pagan and Jewish environment of the New Testament: honouring one's parents is strongly expected from children.[1] It is argued here that the radicalism of Jesus' own way of life (and that of the wandering charismatics in the early church) does not deny the validity of that rule; it only sets certain limits to it inasmuch as Jesus and the Kingdom he preached require that he and the kingdom receive final priority. It will be further argued that Jesus' claim of a special relationship to God implied that ultimately it was God's will that the disciples obeyed when they followed Jesus. If so, then even the "limits" set to the general expectation of honour toward parents were not a unique element in the Jesus movement; rather, the main reason for the limits, to which we can find parallels in the socio-historical environment, was applied to Jesus: God comes before parents. This overall thesis requires to be substantiated by close examination of a host of New Testament texts. In this paper we can only discuss a few of them.[2] I propose that the texts are best interpreted in the light of the expectations (and limits) found in the environment. That is why, before turning to the gospel material, we shall collect some relevant views from the pagan and Jewish background of the New Testament.

---

[1] I thank the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for enabling me to carry out research on this theme at the University of Heidelberg during twelve months in 1999–2000, and to return there for a short research visit in July 2004. I thank my *Gastgeberprofessor*, Prof. Dr. Gerd Theissen, for commenting on the manuscript that has become my *Habilitationsschrift* (see note 2). The present essay is based on that research, and on some chapters of that book.

[2] For more detailed argumentation concerning these texts, and for a discussion of further New Testament passages, see the following monograph: Peter Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and Its Environment*, WUNT 155 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), ch. 4, 114–156.

2. *Some Examples from the Environment*[3]

Diogenes Laertius writes (7.120; in the section on Zeno): "The Stoics approve also of honouring parents and brothers in the second place next after the gods." The very connection expressed by the phrase "next after the gods" shows that among human beings parents are to be honoured before all others; however, the "gods" have a priority over parents. We can find further examples in the writings of Hierocles.[4] The titles given by him to the sections imply a certain ranking: he discusses conduct first towards the gods, then towards one's country.[5] Then he writes: "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."[6] Although between the gods and parents there is mention of the fatherland, it is nevertheless clear that among human beings parents are to be placed first. The text implies honour as a duty, and parents are ranked very close to the gods in the list of those to whom honour is due.

Cicero has a similar sequence of the triad gods—country—parents in *Off.* 1.45.160: "even in the social relations themselves there are gradations of duty (*gradus officiorum*) so well defined that it can easily be seen which duty takes precedence over any other: our first duty is to the immortal gods; our second, to country; our third, to parents; and so on, in a descending scale, to the rest." Cicero can also refer to the "fatherland" (*patria*) and parents without mentioning the gods (*Off.* 1.17.58): "Now, if a contrast and comparison were to be made to find out where most of our moral obligation is due, country would come first, and parents; for their services have laid us under the heaviest obligation; next come children and the whole family, who look to us alone for support and have no other protection...".

---

[3] See chs. 2 and 3 in Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship*, 41–111.

[4] Karl Praechter has marshalled arguments in favour of his thesis that the fragments of Hierocles preserved by Stobaeus are best understood as the work of a Stoic; Praechter, *Hierokles der Stoiker* (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlags-Buchhandlung, 1901). I quote the texts in David R. Fideler's translation; Fideler, ed., *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library: An Anthology of Ancient Writings Which Relate to Pythagoras and Pythagorean Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1987), 275–279.

[5] Ibid., 275–77.

[6] Ibid., 277; Greek text in Praechter, *Hierokles*, 45.

We note the argument that parents support and protect their children; this implies that children owe them a return. Once again, we observe that parents are accorded the first place among human relationships.

Seneca writes: "not to love one's parents is to be unfilial" (*parentes suos non amare impietas est; Ben.* 3.1.5). Thus love and *pietas* are inseparable. Seneca also says that children "owe" their parents the provision of care. In *Ben.* 6.23.5 he writes: "We owe filial duty to our parents" (*debemus parentibus nostris pietatem*). In this latter context he refers to the gods as well as to nature as providing for us; inasmuch as they give life to children through their parents, the gods and nature can be seen as the ground for saying that children owe their parents provision in return.

Having seen some pagan sources, let us refer to a few Jewish examples. One of our main sources is Philo of Alexandria. Philo has numerous short remarks on the relationship between children and parents. In her essay entitled "Parents and Children: A Philonic Perspective," Adele Reinhartz affirms that comments related to the parent-child relationship appear "in every extant treatise of the *Exposition.*"[7] Philo has also longer sections where he discusses the Fifth Commandment.[8] A few quotations may suffice here.

In his treatise *On the Decalogue*, Philo treats the Fifth Commandment twice: first as it comes at its own place in the line of the Ten Commandments (*Decal.* 106–120); and then on the occasion of a summary towards the end of the treatise (165–167). Philo introduces his discussion of the Fifth Commandment in *Decal.* 106–120 with the following summary (106): "After dealing with the seventh day, He gives the fifth commandment on the honour due to parents." We note that Philo summarizes the reference to "father and mother" in the Fifth Commandment as "parents". He divides the Ten Commandments into two sets of five. Concerning the Fifth Commandment, he affirms (106): "This commandment He placed on the borderline between the two sets of five; it is the last of the first set in which the most sacred injunctions are given and it adjoins the second set which contains the duties of man

[7] Adele Reinhartz, "Parents and Children: A Philonic Perspective," in *The Jewish Family in Antiquity*, ed. S. J. D. Cohen (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 61–88, at 62.

[8] Although the commandments are not numbered in the Old Testament, Philo numbers them. I adopt his numbering which coincides with the numbering in my native church, the Reformed Church in Hungary, and in the Reformed churches in general. The Lutheran and Catholic churches refer to the commandment to honour father and mother as the Fourth Commandment.

to man." This implies a very high view of parents, since the duty toward them is placed as the conclusion of the list of duties toward God. Inasmuch as the Old Testament does not tell us how the commandments are divided on the two tables of stone, Philo goes beyond the Old Testament when distinguishing the Fifth Commandment from other commandments concerning duties towards fellow human beings, and placing it on the "border-line between the mortal and the immortal side of existence" (*Decal.* 107).[9] Philo argues by referring to the procreative function of parents (107): They belong not only to the mortal, but also to "...the immortal [side of existence] because the act of generation assimilates them to God, the generator of the All."

Philo discusses the Fifth Commandment again in his treatise entitled *On the Special Laws* (2.224–241). We found in Greek and Latin writings that parents appeared in certain "rankings." Philo also "ranks" parents; they come immediately after God (*Spec.* 2.235): "Honour therefore, he says, next to God thy father and thy mother, who are crowned with a laurel of the second rank assigned to them by nature, the arbitress of the contest". It is interesting to observe here that even in a passage where Philo refers to the commandment itself, he expounds it with his own interpretation by referring to "nature."

The *Letter of Aristeas* refers to the duty that is required by God's commandment. The letter has a long section which relates how during the seven days of a banquet the Egyptian king put questions to each of the translators of the Septuagint (*Let. Arist.* 187–294). In *Let. Arist.* 228 we read that the king "asked the sixth guest to answer. His question was, 'To whom must one show favour?' The answer was, 'To his parents, always, for God's very great commandment concerns the honour due to parents. Next (and closely connected) he reckons the honour due to friends, calling the friend an equal of one's own self. You do well if you bring all men into friendship with yourself.'" Here we observe the priority of parents over all other human beings.

The *Sibylline Oracles* has a passage with a certain "ranking" as well. In the third book, lines 573–574 provide the context for our relevant passage: "There will again be a sacred race of pious men who attend to the counsels and intention of the Most High." Then in lines 593–594 we read: "and they honour only the Immortal who always rules, and

[9] I owe this point to Professor Eduard Schweizer (see Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship*, 87 n. 16).

then their parents." We note that in these examples the appearance of the duty right after the duty of honouring God can be seen as a "limit" in one's duty toward parents: God has a priority over parents.

Pseudo-Phocylides provides further evidence that we may call a "ranking". Line 8 reads: "Honour God foremost, and afterward your parents". Pseudo-Phocylides is a significant source in the realm of ethical conduct in the household, on which he has a long passage (lines 175–227), which is of significance as regards formal parallels to the Household Codes in Colossians and Ephesians.

Jubilees mentions parents and neighbours as those to whom honour is due; once again, neighbours come only after the parents. In *Jub.* 7.20 we read: "And in the twenty-eighth jubilee Noah began to command his grandsons with ordinances and commandments and all the judgments which he knew. And he bore witness to his sons so that they might do justice and cover the shame of their flesh and bless the one who created them and honour father and mother, and each one love his neighbour and preserve themselves from fornication and pollution and from all injustice." Though *Jubilees* refers to Noah here, it seems likely that the Fifth Commandment and the commandment to love one's neighbour from Leviticus can be supposed to be in the background. We observe the significant order: 1. to bless the creator; 2. to honour father and mother; 3. to love one's neighbour.

Fragments from Qumran also confirm the presence of the duty of honouring one's parents in Palestine, not long before the time of Jesus. In 4Q416, frag. 2, col. III, lines 14–19a we read:[10]

> *14*...Study the mystery that is to come, And understand all the ways of Truth, And all the roots of iniquity *15* thou shalt contemplate. Then thou shalt know what is bitter for a man, And what is sweet for a *person.* Honour thy father in thy poverty, *16* And thy mother in thy *low estate.* For as God (*scarcely* 'the Father') is to a man, so is his own father; And as *the Lord* is to a person, so is his mother; For *17* they are 'the *womb* that was pregnant with thee'; And just as He has set them in authority over thee And *fashioned (thee)* according to the Spirit, So serve thou them, And as *18 they* have uncovered thy ear to the mystery that is to come, Honour thou them for the sake of thine own honour And *with* [*reverence*] *venerate* their *persons, 19* For the sake of thy life and of the length of thy days. *vacat.*

[10] Text in Emanuel Tov ed., *Qumran Cave 4, XXIV: Sapiential Texts, Part 2*, DJD 34 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 113. In another fragment we find the same text: 4Q418 9–10. Tov's translation is based on a composite text (his italics).

These examples may suffice to show that both the Greek and Latin pagan authors and the contemporary Jewish sources attest the duty of honouring one's parents, and—not surprisingly—the Jewish sources even confirm the validity of the Fifth Commandment at the time of Jesus. Let us turn to texts in which Jesus can be seen as one fitting into this "environment."

3. *Jesus Observing the Fifth Commandment*

There are two passages in the synoptic gospels where the Fifth Commandment, "Honour your father and your mother" (RSV), is quoted in a context where it is implied that the Ten Commandments are to be observed; they are seen by Jesus and his first followers as the primary Old Testament texts that direct their behaviour. There are also passages where the Fifth Commandment is not referred to, but sayings or actions of people imply its validity. These texts affirm that Jesus and his disciples shared the norm of their environment: parents are to be honoured; they are to be obeyed and, when they grow old, they are to be cared for.

The first occurrence of the Fifth Commandment in Mark is at 7:10, in the *Korban* pericope (7:9–13). This passage has a parallel only in Matthew (15:1–9), where it is located in the same context: the preceding and following pericopes correspond to those that surround the Markan passage. As regards the whole of the pericope, Matthew's version is shorter than that of Mark. In the verse containing the Fifth Commandment, there are differences as well as agreements. The major agreement is that both Mark and Matthew have a double quotation: after Exod 20:12a (or Deut 5:16a) they also quote Exod 21:16 (LXX; in MT 21:17; cf. also Lev 20:9, which has a similar content). In the second quotation, they agree verbatim with one another, and they both differ slightly from the Septuagint version of Exod 21:16.

I think we can maintain the authenticity of this Old Testament quotation on Jesus' lips.[11] As a Jew, Jesus most probably acknowledged the validity of the Ten Commandments. He shared with his Jewish and pagan environment the expectation that parents have to be honoured. It is significant that in this passage, reporting on a dispute with

[11] For a different view, see Harry Jungbauer, *"Ehre Vater und Mutter": Der Weg des Elterngebots in der biblischen Tradition*, WUNT 2.146 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 266.

"Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem," the Fifth Commandment is reported to have been quoted by Jesus himself both in Mark's and in Matthew's version. The early church probably held that this attitude was an important element of the picture they had of Jesus.

Having said this, it is to be acknowledged that our very passage also claims that the norm was not universally followed. Mark uses the Hebrew and Aramaic term *korban*, a gift offered to the temple, and its correct Greek equivalent, *dōron*, whereas Matthew uses only the latter, when they present the opponents of Jesus as finding an excuse not to fulfil the commandment. In Mark's version we read (7:11–13): "but you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is Corban' (that is, given to God) then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition which you hand on." In v. 12, the idea of "doing" something for parents probably means caring for them when they are old. The parallel version, Matt 15:5, clearly claims that helping one's parents equals honouring them: "But you say, If any one tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is given to God, he need not honour his father."

Both Mark and Matthew (and/or the communities they represent) held that the Fifth Commandment was valid and should be observed without looking for reasons for exceptions. We observe that the Fifth Commandment is used here as an example of differentiating between the commandment of God and human tradition (cf. 7:8,13). It is significant that the child-parent relationship is taken as an example; this shows that this area has a special place in God's will. In our pericope the verb "to honour" (*timan*) points to this connection: God is honoured with the lips alone (v. 6); this lip-service becomes evident from the fact that parents are not honoured (vv. 10–13).[12]

The other occurrence of the Fifth Commandment in Mark is at 10:19. The pericope of the "Rich Man," often referred to as the "rich young ruler", is transmitted by all three synoptic gospels (Mark 10:17–27; par. Matt 19:16–26 and Luke 18:18–27). The commandment to honour one's father and mother is quoted by Jesus in all three versions.[13] It appears in a list of those elements of the Ten Commandments which concern

[12] I owe this observation to Professor Gerd Theissen, Heidelberg (letter dated 6.1.2001).

[13] I note that according to Harry Jungbauer the citation of the commandment does not go back to Jesus, but is an addition of an early Christian "compiler" of this "catechetical piece" ("*Ehre Vater und Mutter*," 282–283).

fellow human beings—sometimes referred to as the second of the two tables of stones. The three versions are not exactly identical in content and order (and there are even variant readings within the individual gospel traditions), but they all agree in putting the commandment to honour father and mother at the end of the list.[14] We remember that Philo argued that this commandment is deliberately put at the boundary between obligations toward God and those toward fellow human beings. We may add that the position at the end of the list in the synoptic gospels can also be regarded as an emphasis. I agree with Joachim Gnilka who affirms that this position implies that the Fifth (or in his numbering the "Fourth") Commandment is to be understood against the background of social duties toward parents.[15] The text does not say anything about the parents of the man who approached Jesus, but if he was indeed "rich" and "young" (as a conflation of the various synoptic accounts implies), then the social duties expressed by the commandments quoted may have been intended to have a special appeal to him: he probably did not kill anybody, but what about fair treatment of the poor and provision for his own parents?

We observe that the man claims that he has fulfilled these commandments, and Jesus does not challenge this claim (Mark 10:20–21). This raises the question how this pericope relates to the following one (in each of the synoptic gospels), which is about the disciples leaving everything behind. This latter pericope will be discussed later in this essay (section 5). It is appropriate to remark at this point that there are two possible interpretations. It may be argued that the latter pericope throws light upon the former, i.e. the rich man was also asked to leave his family when he was to sell everything. I would argue that the first pericope throws light on the second: observing the Fifth Commandment is expected, and the disciples' leaving everything behind has to be seen against this background. In Matthew's version, after the last part of the list from the Ten Commandment, that is, after the commandment to honour father and mother, Lev 19:18 is also added: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." Thus, at least for Matthew (and/or his

[14] For a clear summary of views of scholars on the differences of content in the lists, see Joel F. Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel*, JSNTSup 102 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 144 n. 2.

[15] Joachim Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, EKKNT 2.2 (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1979), 87.

community) these commandments belonged together, and they were both valid.

At the end of this section we discuss briefly two further pericopes that support the picture gained in the exegesis of the previous passages. Each of them is special material of the gospel in which it is preserved: one from Luke and one from the Fourth Gospel. In Luke 2:41–52, the story of the twelve-year-old Jesus is narrated only by Luke, and even he brings it in only at the end of the birth narrative. There are scholars who doubt the historicity of this story.[16] 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 (Luke 2:48), though it has to be emphasized that it is not indicated either by the parents of Jesus or by the evangelist that Jesus was disobedient. On the other hand, at the end of the story Jesus joins his parents and returns with them to Nazareth. The text even stresses his obedience (2:51). There is no real contradiction here. Jesus simply follows the general rule we have seen in the environment (expressed in lists of those to whom honour is due): God always comes before parents. Accordingly, Jesus' answer to his parents indicates that he has his heavenly father in mind;[17] 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 is to be labeled a legend (or anecdote) or not, we note that according to this story Jesus grew up in his parents' home, and it was presupposed in a natural way that he obeyed them. The early church must have thought that Jesus observed the Fifth Commandment; otherwise this story would not emphasize his obedience to his parents.

---

[16] François Bovon calls it an "anecdote", *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, EKKNT 3.1,2 (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1989–1996), 1:154. According to him, Luke took it over from the tradition and reworked it.

[17] We note that if God is called "father", this implies that honour is due to fathers in general. For a discussion of the fatherhood of God in Jesus' sayings, see Dieter Zeller, "God as Father in the Proclamation and in the Prayer of Jesus," in *Standing Before God: Studies on Prayer in Scriptures and in Tradition with Essays*, ed. A. Finkel and L. Frizzell (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1981), 117–129. He argues that Jesus did not speak "to his Father exclusively" (124). Rather, Jesus used the term "father" as it was known to his listeners from the "Old Testament" (118–120). Zeller concludes that (125): "The Father, whom Jesus brings close to his listeners, remains the faithful God of Israel."

We conclude this section by briefly mentioning a passage from the end of Jesus' earthly life: Jesus' conversation from the cross with his mother and with the beloved disciple, as narrated in John 19:25–27. In vv. 26–27 we read: "When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' (27) Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home." This little scene is often said to be editorial work designed to provide a basis for the Johannine congregation.[18] Jean Zumstein has argued that, together with the scene of the first sign at Cana in John 2, it forms an *inclusio*.[19] Zumstein lists four points of contact between the two stories: (1) the expression "mother [of Jesus]", without giving her name; (2) the address "woman" in the vocative (*gynai*); (3) mention of the "hour"; (4) closeness and intimacy between mother and son in both scenes. Irrespective of one's view regarding the historicity of the scene at the cross, it is clear that the author of the Fourth Gospel (and/or his circle) did not see any problem in "relating the fact that the dying Jesus provided for the care of his mother after his death."[20] This can be seen as a special way of fulfilling the expectation that children had to pro-vide for their aged parents. It is plausible to maintain that the early church (or at least some part of it) thought that Jesus fulfilled the general expectation we have also met in the environment of the New Testament.

4. *Jesus' Call as a Cause for Tension in the Family*

We find a report of Jesus calling his first disciples in all four canonical gospels. Mark 1:16–20 and Matt 4:18–22 are similar enough to be called parallels, but Luke and John have different stories concerning the call (Luke 5:1–11; John 1:35–51). It is explicitly stated about James and John that they "left their father" (Mark 1:20b). Matthew says they left the boat and their father, but he does not mention the hired servants. Luke says in a concluding sentence (5:11) that they left "everything"

[18] So e.g. Udo Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, THKNT 4 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998), 288–289.

[19] Jean Zumstein, "Johannes 19,25–27," *ZTK* 94 (1997) 131–54; references: 150.

[20] So Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John. XIII–XXI*, AB 29A (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1970), 923.

(*panta*; the term "everything," a neuter plural, can include persons as well).[21]

First we note that one pair of brothers, James and John, were working in the same trade as their father: they were fishing together. Although it is not stated explicitly, we may presume that the same was true of the other pair of brothers, Simon (Peter) and Andrew. They are reported to have left the boat, but there is no mention of their father. There is no enmity between children and parents implied in the calling narratives. James and John continued to be called "the sons of Zebedee" even after they became disciples of Jesus (see Mark 10:35 par. Matt 20:20; Matt 26:37; John 21:2), and Peter cared for the ill mother of his wife (Mark 1:29–31 par. Matt 8:14–15 and Luke 4:38–39). Nothing compels us to presuppose that they would not have provided for their father later if any need should have arisen.

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 (John 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. We emphasize again that the scene concerns Jesus calling disciples.

In their primary context, texts about "following" (*Nachfolge*) may be regarded as referring to exceptional cases, i.e. they do not apply to all disciples. David Mealand contends that the group of those who "left behind their home and family... probably exceeded twelve in number," but he adds that "not all Jesus's hearers followed him in the literal sense".[22] In the following, there will be other passages, too, where the key to the interpretation will be the view that Jesus had two kinds of disciples: some who had to follow him, and those who returned to their homes right after they became disciples of Jesus. Thus not every saying applied to all of them.

John C. O'Neill takes this view a step further when he argues that some "hard sayings about discipleship—sayings about taking up the cross, about leaving all, about not loving father or mother more than

---

[21] For an example where the neuter plural *panta* refers to people, see the variant reading at Rom 11:32.

[22] David L. Mealand, *Poverty and Expectation in the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1981 [1980]), 73.

him—...are only for the few who are called to rule" as ministers.[23] Whether or not one makes this further step of speaking about the rulers of the communities, one can agree with the distinction between circles of disciples to whom the individual sayings applied. This is not to deny the radicalism of the call. To some extent, we might see it as a parallel to what we can see in the environment: following the lifestyle of a teacher, as in the case of Josephus who spent some years as a pupil of Bannus, the ascetic (*Vita* 11). David Mealand has argued that in the case of those "who took up the Cynic way of life, it was often financial ruin or exile which made a man turn to philosophy." He also affirms that "Jesus and his first disciples were not thoroughgoing ascetics."[24] Thus the parallels from other movements may "help a little, but do not fully explain the way in which Jesus and his disciples abandoned family, and home, and previous occupation." The question arises as to what kind of a leader Jesus was held to be by his first followers. I hold with Mealand that "the character of Jesus's ministry arose from his conviction that the Reign of God was imminent, and...its coming must be announced throughout the land. It is from this necessity that the itinerant nature of his ministry came about."[25]

Here we cannot discuss views concerning Jesus' understanding of the Kingdom and his messianic consciousness. I simply acknowledge that my working hypothesis is to suppose some kind of a messianic claim on Jesus' side, and a positive response to it already by his first followers. This will be especially relevant in the course of discussing other passages where a call to follow Jesus is involved.

There is a further radical saying of Jesus that is witnessed to by Matthew and Luke (thus being assigned to Q by many scholars):[26] the saying concerning burying the dead. Matthew 8:21–22 and Luke 9:59–60 are not only close parallels in wording, but these verses appear in both gospels as the second part of a sequel with a common theme: Jesus speaking to individuals on the cost of discipleship. Darrell Bock has observed that "Luke 9:59–60 is one of the least doubted statements of Jesus".[27] He notes that the Jesus Seminar "accepts these sayings as

---

[23] John C. O'Neill, *Messiah: Six Lectures on the Ministry of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cochrane Press, 1984), 84.

[24] Mealand, *Poverty*, 76.

[25] Ibid., 75.

[26] E.g. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew*, WBC 33A (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 213.

[27] Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 975.

authentic, printing them in pink type." In Matthew, after Jesus talked to a scribe (8:19–20), we read (vv. 21–22): "Another of the disciples said to him, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' (22) But Jesus said to him, 'Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.'" Unlike Luke, Matthew does not have a third dialogue. He closes the scene with a further reference to "disciples" (8:23): "And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him."

After Jesus' saying concerning the foxes and birds (parallel to Matthew), Luke writes (9:59–60): "To another he said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' (60) But he said to him, 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.'" John O'Neill has argued that Jesus did not speak here about the spiritually dead; he used the term only in a literal sense. O'Neill holds that this hard saying of Jesus "makes the proclaimers of the Kingdom equivalent to those who have taken a Nazirite vow".[28] This suggestion solves the problem of the seemingly hard attack of Jesus on those who do not follow him, but it does leave us with the radical saying of Jesus addressed to a would-be disciple: he should leave his dead father behind without a burial. In the environment of the New Testament, providing for a funeral was among the foremost duties of children. Most scholars emphasize the radicalism of Jesus' saying in the light of the strong expectation in Judaism that a son should provide a funeral for his father.[29] However, it can be argued that in spite of its radicalism, this saying is not a witness to an anti-family attitude of Jesus. The following observations point to the likelihood that this saying does not imply that Jesus failed to fulfil the duty of honouring parents at this crucial point.

First we note that the Lukan version of this text seems to be nearer to the original in an important aspect:[30] 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

[28] O'Neill, *Messiah*, 87.

[29] See e.g. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1979), 411; C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke*, TPINTC (London: SCM Press, 1990), 441; Hagner, *Matthew*, 217.

[30] So e.g. Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 2nd ed., EKKNT 1.2 (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1990, 1996), 21.

who has the chance to become a disciple when meeting Jesus.[31] Thus the saying is part of a "call" to discipleship; not in the general sense of the word, but in the special sense of the few "itinerant" disciples.[32] Thus it can be argued that the emphasis of Jesus' radical saying depends on an urgency in time and a priority to be given to Jesus' call.[33]

Both Matthew and Luke express this priority in some way. In Matthew, it is the would-be disciple who addresses Jesus and offers to follow him. As an answer Jesus first says, "Follow me," and then utters the radical saying immediately. In Luke, the call to follow Jesus is not uttered together with the saying concerning the dead, because it is Jesus who addressed the would-be disciple with this call at the beginning of the scene. It may also be argued that in the original scene it was Jesus who took the initiative to address a would-be disciple. Matthew may have assimilated the form to the preceding passage: in Matthew's version Jesus is addressed first; his sayings are answers.[34] In Luke, Jesus' radical saying is followed by another sentence: "but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God" (which may be editorial).[35]

Both evangelists clearly indicate that the discipleship of Jesus has to be given precedence even over family ties. Howard Marshall's observation concerning the whole pericope with the three little dialogues in Luke applies to this particular saying as well:[36] Jesus indicates "the stringent nature of discipleship" to three would-be disciples. Darrell Bock points to the significance of the person of Jesus who utters the call: "In fact, the remark may point to Jesus seeing himself as bringing in the new era. The ability to set priorities that go beyond the Ten Commandments may suggest the presence of messianic authority."[37]

As we have seen above, J. C. O'Neill has argued that the would-be disciple is called to become the "equivalent" to those who have taken a Nazirite vow. He points to Num 6:6–8 where it is affirmed that people who have taken the Nazirite vow should not go near a dead

---

[31] So also Peter Kristen, *Familie, Kreuz und Leben: Nachfolge Jesu nach Q und dem Markusevangelium* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1995), 110–112.

[32] See also O'Neill, *Messiah*, 87.

[33] So also Hagner, *Matthew*, 218; Bock, *Luke*, 981.

[34] For the view that "the arrangement in Matthew is probably secondary," see William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 53.

[35] So e.g. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 412; Evans, *Saint Luke*, 441.

[36] Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 408.

[37] Bock, *Luke*, 980.

body, even if it is their father or mother. The Nazirite vow can serve as a background to this saying: people around Jesus knew of that exception to the rule of burying one's parents, so the saying in itself was not scandalous to their ears (as Markus Bockmuehl has argued on the basis of a detailed analysis of the available texts).[38]

To sum up, the call uttered by Jesus is put in a way that should not be generalized. The saying is radical, but it does not imply that Jesus taught that his disciples do not have to fulfil their duty as children to their parents. Discipleship, *Nachfolge*, has to have precedence; people who would have remembered the example of how God has precedence in the case of the Nazirites could understand a radical call to become preachers of God's Kingdom.

5. *Jesus' New Family*

In the synoptic gospels, there is a report of a direct confrontation between Jesus and his mother and brothers (Mark 3:31–35 par. Matt 12:46–50 and Luke 8:19–21). There is no agreement among scholars as regards the historicity of this passage, or to what extent it reflects the situation of the household churches. It can be argued that it presupposes the separation of the Christian community from the synagogue.[39] However, it can also be argued that it is not likely that the early church created a story with such a negative attitude from Jesus' family.[40] The other two synoptic gospels introduce this scene in another context. It is significant that a preparatory comment is only to be found in Mark (3:21): "And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for people were saying, 'He is beside himself.'" In this translation, there are hidden two exegetical problems. First, the Greek text, *hoi par autou* ("those with him"), is not unambiguous: it can refer to the disciples or to the relatives of Jesus. It is more likely that the latter sense is to be applied here, because otherwise the scene reported in 3:31–35 is difficult to understand: why does Jesus refuse his mother and brothers if they had not given any reason for wanting to call him away?

---

[38] Markus Bockmuehl, "'Let the Dead Bury their Dead' (Matt. 8:22/Luke 9:60): Jesus and the Halakhah," *JTS* 49 (1998): 553–581.

[39] So Walter Schmithals, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, ÖTK 2/1 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1979), 212.

[40] So e.g. Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *Der Historische Jesus: Ein Lehrbuch*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 104.

Secondly, "people" is inserted in the translation; in the Greek the subject of *elegon* ("they said") is not specified. This ambiguous expression may have referred to Jesus' relatives as the speakers.[41] Thus, even if Mark 3:20–21 is a Markan addition to an earlier tradition, it is a necessary explanation of the background of the scene. For our understanding of vv. 31–35, the inclusion of vv. 20–21 means that Jesus' identification of his true family was not meant to involve the abandoning of his blood relations. It can be seen as an answer to the intended action of his non-understanding family. Taeseong Roh has rightly pointed to the difference between Jesus' own attitude and that which was expected from the disciples. He argues that whereas Jesus defines his own new family (v. 34: "And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!'"), there is no expectation of any breach with one's family on the side of the listeners.[42] We may add that Jesus was provoked by his "non-believing" family to praise those who were accepting what he taught (for a tradition that Jesus' brethren did not believe in him during his earthly ministry, see also John 7:5). Thus this passage does not address the child-parent relationship in the case of the disciples. In Jesus' case, it was not his own initiative; rather, it was a response to hostile behaviour on the part of his family. He did not follow them when they wanted to hinder him in his teaching ministry. The content of his teaching is not narrated, but from the concluding (perhaps editorial)[43] word we may infer that it was the priority of the will of God, the heavenly Father, *that caused him to be disobedient to his mother and brothers. This text can be explained by seeing in it the priority of God over parents.*

We have already seen that in each of the synoptic gospels the passage on the rich young ruler is followed by a short discussion between the

---

[41] For this view, see Timothy Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder in the Gospel of Mark*, JSNTSup 128 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 106. Matthew and Luke do not have the negative claim made by Jesus' relatives. Perhaps these evangelists did not transmit this tradition because of the later positive role of the relatives of Jesus. Ulrich Luz suggests that Matthew omitted the strong statement in Mark 3:21 (Luz, *Matthäus*, 287).

[42] Taeseong Roh, *Die* familia dei *in den synoptischen Evangelien: Eine redaktions- und sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu einem urchristlichen Bildfeld*, NTOA 37 (Freiburg, CH: Universitätsverlag, 2001), 112.

[43] Roh (*Die* familia dei, 108–110) agrees with Dibelius in regarding Mark 3:35 as a redactional application of the preceding verses to "anyone" who is willing to do the will of God.

disciples and Jesus (Mark 10:28–31 par. Matt 19:27–30 and Luke 18:28–30). It is in this pericope that Jesus speaks about the reward for the disciples leaving everything behind. The synoptics present the scene with a very similar content, but there are also many differences. To point to but a few: only in Matthew do we read Peter's question ("What then shall we have?") added to his statement that the disciples have left everything. Even in the indicative sentence ("Lo, we have left everything and followed you"; Mark 10:28) there are some variations in the manuscripts: in Mark, some manuscripts have the perfect of the verb "followed," some have the aorist; all MSS of Matthew and Luke have the aorist. NA27 prints the perfect in Mark as the main text (and the editors suggest that the aorist is due to the parallels); in this case there is a "minor agreement" between Matthew and Luke.

Matthew and Mark alone conclude the scene with the saying: "But many that are first will be last, and the last first" (Mark 10:31; Matt 19:30). Matthew repeats this saying at the end of his next pericope (his special material), the parable of the workers in the vineyard (20:16). Luke brings it as the conclusion of the saying about those who come from all four winds to sit at table in the Kingdom of God (13:30), with little changes in wording and in a reversed order. One might ask whether the meaning of this saying in Matthew and Mark at the end of our pericope differs from its meaning in the other places. Perhaps here it refers to the disciples who are last in the eyes of their fellow countrymen, because they have no financial security since they left their homes and families. Or perhaps it refers to those who think they are "first" because they keep to the good order of a settled family life—who are in fact the "last" if they do not follow Jesus.

In Mark's version, however, there is another difference from Matthew and Luke: in Jesus' answer, Matthew and Luke recount only the list of those whom the disciples have left, whereas in Mark's version Jesus repeats the list when he assures the disciples of the reward for their following him. These lists are not exactly the same. In Matthew, some manuscripts have "houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands" (NA27 print this as the main text, based primarily on Codex Vaticanus), many manuscripts (including the Byzantine "majority") add "or wife" after "lands," and some (including family 1) have "parents" instead of "father or mother". Some have a variation in order: they give "houses" as the last item in the list. In Luke's version, the codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus (and some other MSS) have "house or wife or brothers or parents or children." Many manuscripts

(including the Byzantine "majority") have the same list but in a reverse order in the middle ("parents or brothers or wife"). Some manuscripts have this reverse order and not only "brothers," but also "sisters." Although there are variations in both lists, it is clear that Matthew and Luke do not have the same list. As we have indicated above, Mark has two lists. In Codex Vaticanus and the Byzantine "majority," Jesus' saying reads as follows (Mark 10:29–30): "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life."

The original "hand" of Codex Sinaiticus does not have the second list; its first corrector adds it with "mother" in the singular, and a second corrector (with some further MSS) adds "father." Codex Bezae incorporates the second list as a new sentence: "whoever left... [list with some changes, e.g. "house" in singular, "sisters and brothers"] ... will receive". It is to be noted that the second list does not have "father" in most of the manuscripts.

Taeseong Roh has rightly pointed out that the sequence "mother and father" is unusual; in view of the leading role of the father in the family in antiquity, one would expect that the father should be mentioned first. He offers the following solution to the manuscript evidence seen above: Matthew has changed it to the "usual order" and Luke has chosen the summarizing term "parents." Roh argues that the Markan order (together with the sequence of Mark 3:35, "brother, and sister, and mother") points to the community of "settled sympathizers" of Jesus. Roh suggests that the omission of "father" in the second list (in Mark 10:30) is due to a view of community which has only God as "father" and which wants to resist the claim of wandering missionaries to become their leaders: they are accepted as brothers and not as fathers.[44]

Roh has taken up and applied to these texts the overall thesis of Gerd Theissen concerning the wandering charismatic character of the earliest stage of the Jesus movement. The present text is one of the significant passages for the thesis of Theissen; however, it has to be seen also

[44] Roh, *Die* familia dei, 127, 128, 136, 132.

in the light of how we understand the other relevant passages.[45] It is important to see that the context of the Jesus saying in Mark 10:29–30 (and par.) indicates what is at stake here in the eyes of the evangelists: the discipleship of Jesus. It is not only the radicalism of Jesus' call to the rich young ruler that is to be emphasized as a context for our pericope. It is equally important to see that the validity of the commandment to honour father and mother is acknowledged by Jesus just before he speaks to his disciples about the reward for following him. Each of the synoptics indicates that the "leaving" occurs for the sake of the discipleship of Jesus: for Jesus' name's sake (Matt 19:29); for Jesus' and the gospel's sake (Mark 10:29); for the sake of the Kingdom of God (Luke 18:29). It may be argued that the disciples' leaving everything is not as radical as Jesus' call to the rich young ruler to sell everything and give the proceeds to the poor. We have already seen that the disciples did have a home to return to even after they followed Jesus. This saying has to be seen in the context of a call to discipleship. It concerns priorities; it is addressed to some of the disciples and not to all of them. This saying does not deny the continuing validity of the Fifth Commandment.

6. *Some Further "Hard Sayings" of Jesus Concerning the Child-Parent Relationship*

There are several sayings attributed to Jesus which affirm that children will rise against their parents. Some have strong similarities, e.g. Mark 13:12 par. Matt 10:21. The verse in Mark reads (RSV): "And brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death." There is a variant in Matthew which is more likely a grammatical correction: the majority of the witnesses give the verb "rise" in the third person plural, whereas Codex Vaticanus and some other codices bring the more correct third person singular, because the subject, "children" (a neuter

[45] See Gerd Theissen, "'Wir haben alles velassen' (Mc. X 28): Nachfolge und soziale Entwurzelung in der jüdisch-palästinischen Gesellschaft des I. Jahrhunderts n. Ch.," *NovT* 19 (1977): 161–196. In this article Theissen concedes that from a religious point of view the existence of following Jesus ("Nachfolgeexistenz," 161) is a consequence of meeting the Holy One ("Begegnung mit dem Heiligen"), but his own main task is to show from a sociological perspective that this existence is a variant of social uprootedness ("eine Variante sozialer Entwurzelung").

plural in the Greek) would require this. What is striking in this case is that the verse is part of a longer unit which has a parallel in Matthew in a different context: Mark 13:9–13 is part of the "little apocalypse," whereas its parallel, Matt 10:17–22, occurs in Jesus' speech concerning the sending out of the disciples. Luke 21:10–19 is a parallel passage (in a speech of Jesus concerning the last days, as in Mark), but in the very parallel to our verse the reference to children rising up against parents is missing. In all three synoptics, the saying is followed by Jesus' affirmation: "you will be hated by all for my name's sake." In Mark and Matthew, Jesus concludes the little unit, but not the speech, with exactly the same words: "But he who endures to the end will be saved." Luke has a further saying first ("But not a hair of your head will perish"), then the same content as the conclusion in the parallels, but with a different wording: "By your endurance you will gain your lives." One might argue that the unit stood originally in the apocalyptic speech as in Mark (and Luke), and Matthew transferred it into a different context: Jesus' speech when he sends out the disciples.[46]

It is significant that even in Matthew's context there is an apocalyptic tone to the saying, due to the reference to "enduring to the end" (10:22b). Joachim Gnilka observes that the term "the end" (*telos*) in Mark 13:12 probably means the end-time, since it is used with this sense in v. 7 already.[47] He also points to *4 Ezra* 6.25 as a parallel apocalyptic saying: "And it shall be that whoever remains after all that I have foretold to you shall himself be saved and shall see my salvation and the end of my world." Gnilka also raises the possibility that Mic 7:6 may stand behind Mark 13:12 and its Matthean parallel.[48] It is possible that the content of the verse is in the background, but its wording is different. The only real parallel in the text of Micah is the verb "rise," in the third person singular, as it refers to the daughter (in the singular) rising against her mother: "for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house."

The saying in Mark is an extremely hard saying as regards children's behaviour. We have to observe, however, that the context clearly shows

[46] So e.g. Luz, *Matthäus*, 105.
[47] Gnilka, *Markus*, 192.
[48] Ibid., 191.

that the enmity arises against the followers of Jesus: It is because of Jesus' name that they will be persecuted. This persecution is carried out with such emotion that even family members turn against one another. This does not imply that Jesus' own followers would turn against their parents; rather, Jesus warns his disciples that they will be persecuted by their parents or even by their children. Thus when Jesus speaks here of an enmity between children and parents, he refers to the consequences of discipleship, which are not intended by the disciples, but have to be suffered by them unavoidably. This enmity is described with a reference to apocalyptic circumstances, whether the end would come soon in Jesus' opinion (cf. Matt 10:23, the immediately following verse), or at a non-specified time even in the possibly distant future. Thus hatred is the reaction of some people to the message of Jesus, that is, to the main theme of the mission of his disciples. William Davies and Dale Allison explain the reference to Jesus' "name" in this way: it "explains the persecution as arising from the disciples' identification with Jesus and their confession of him (cf. 1 Pet 4:14; Polycarp, *Ep.* 8.2; Justin, *1 Apol.* 4)."[49] The disciples have to be prepared to suffer this even from their family members; it is not implied that they would behave in the same way toward their persecutors.

Matthew 10:34–36 (par. Luke 12:51–53) is often assigned by scholars to Q, though if it comes from Q, then in the case of these verses Matthew's and Luke's Q-versions were different.[50] The reminiscence of Mic 7:6 raises the possibility that the text was produced by the early Christian community which explained its own situation by this Old Testament verse. However, Ulrich Luz argues that Mic 7:6 played a role also in Judaism in connection with the end-times (cf. *m. Sotah* 9:15), and Jesus caused schism in his own immediate family (Mark 3:31–35), so one can presuppose Jesus-logia in these verses.[51]

On the surface, it seems that according to this saying it is Jesus who initiates enmity. Matthew 10:34 reads: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Verse 35 begins with a repetition of the term "I have come," which may be an editorial strengthening of the parallelism.[52] In v. 35–36 we read: "For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter

---

[49] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 187.
[50] So Luz, *Matthäus*, 134.
[51] Luz, *Matthäus*, 135.
[52] So Luz, *Matthäus*, 134 n. 2.

against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; (36) and a man's foes will be those of his own household." It is significant that the Old Testament reference (Mic 7:6) has endtime connotations even in our passage. The immediate context of the quotation, Mic 7:7, refers to looking forward to the God of salvation: "But as for me, I will look to the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me," and the remaining part of the whole of ch. 7 is a consolation with future promises, including a reference to "that day" (Mic 7:12).

The saying concerns the preparation of the disciples for what will happen to them. Although the two chapters, Matt 10 and Luke 12, are not parallels as such (only some parts of them match up), both of them are long collections of sayings concerning discipleship. It can be argued in the case of both that these sayings address the theme of what the disciples have to suffer as a consequence of their decision to follow Jesus. As Darrell Bock has put it: Jesus' remark concerning the division in families "clearly recognizes that people respond differently to the hope he offers."[53] William Davies and Dale Allison also emphasize that *1 En.* 100.1–2 and other Jewish parallels (e.g. *Jub.* 23.16, 19; *4 Ezra* 5.9; 6.24; *2 Bar.* 70.3) show that "the conviction that the great tribulation would turn those of the same household against one another was clearly widespread."[54] It is possible to argue that Jesus' appearance causes the crisis (as Davies and Allison suggest), but it is also possible to see the enmity within the family as an unavoidable element of the end-time crisis. Once again, one should not interpret this passage in isolation. If we regard the larger context (including Matt 10:21–23), it is more likely that the present passage addresses the theme of the disciples' fate: spreading the gospel of Jesus leads to divisions; this has to be suffered even if the disciples only "initiate" it in the sense that they cannot but preach the gospel of Jesus. To sum up in Donald Hagner's words: "'I came to divide,' would ordinarily be taken in the sense of purpose, here it is more a way of describing the effect of the coming of Jesus and the proclamation of the kingdom. Response to the message of Jesus and his disciples will be mixed and hence cause dissension among members of the same household."[55]

---

[53] Bock, *Luke*, 1189.
[54] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 220.
[55] Hagner, *Matthew*, 292.

There is another passage witnessed to by Matthew and Luke, addressing the issue of the priority of Jesus over against parents. The content is similar but the wording is different in the two gospels. Since the different expressions of the same content will be significant for our exposition, we quote both. Matthew 10:37–38 reads: "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." Luke 14:26–27 contains one of the most striking sayings of Jesus, often understood as a witness to his radical anti-family ethos: "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. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple." Although there are some minor textual variations in these verses, both Luke 14:26 and Matt 10:37 are well attested. There is no attempt to bring the wordings closer in the history of the manuscript tradition.

Luke 14:26 and Matt 10:37 are either witnesses of independent traditions or "Lukan" and "Matthean" versions of a common tradition. The latter view is held by scholars who assign the saying to Q.[56] Craig Evans affirms: Luke's single sentence "may be more original in form" than Matthew's two sentences beginning with a participial construction ("he who . . .").[57]

It is important to see that Luke 14:26 is not in the same context in Luke as its parallel in Matthew. The former is located after the Lukan parallel of Matt 22:1–10 and a connecting Lukan verse (14:25, "Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them . . ."). Thus in Luke's Gospel Jesus spoke this saying to the multitude around him. The Matthean version is part of Jesus' speech at the sending out of the disciples. The saying concerning the cross (following our saying both in Matthew and Luke with some difference in wording) is a variation of a saying that is repeated by all the synoptics after the pericope concerning Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). François Bovon has suggested that in Luke 14:26–27 we have a parallel to Matt 10:37–38, and that two originally independent sayings were put together in the tradition prior to the time

[56] E.g. Luz, *Matthäus*, 134.
[57] Evans, *Saint Luke*, 577.

of Matthew and Luke.[58] If this analysis is correct, then neither Matthew nor Luke can be regarded as reporting the original context of the sayings. Whatever the original context, it is a saying concerning the consequences of discipleship; thus the Matthean context on discipleship can illuminate the meaning even if it was Matthew who organized the material in this way.

I accept that Luke 14:26 and Matt 10:37 are parallels. We can find in them the same idea expressed by different idioms: "loves more" in Matthew equals "does not hate" in Luke. The Semitic background of the term "hate" would suggest that it is about a priority and not about emotions in the modern sense. As Craig Evans has put it: "This may be an example of the Semitic expression of preference by means of antithesis—'I love A and hate B' meaning 'I prefer A to B' (cf. Gen 29:30–32; Deut 21:15; Rom 9:13)—which has been altered, but correctly interpreted, in the Matthaean form (Matt 10:37)."[59] God places second the one whom he "hates" as opposed to the one whom he elects (cf. also Mal 1:2–3). Howard Marshall points to further parallels (2 Sam 19:7; Prov 13:24; Isa 60:15; 1 John 2:9) and translates the term as "to love less". He adds that the Hebrew original also means "to leave aside, abandon": "The thought is, therefore, not of psychological hate, but of renunciation."[60] If a disciple loves Jesus then he should not love his family more than he loves Jesus; he must place his family second after Jesus (in Luke's words: he must "hate" his family).

The close context within Luke 14:26 also supports this understanding. In this verse, it is affirmed at the end of the list that one has to hate even one's own life. This cannot mean real hating; it must mean a willingness to sacrifice even one's own life for the sake of Jesus. As Darrell Bock argues: "The call to 'hate' is not literal but rhetorical.... Otherwise, Jesus' command to love one's neighbor as oneself as a summation of what God desires makes no sense (Luke 10:25–37)."[61] Thus, the saying is about priorities: Jesus must be more important to the disciple than the disciple's own life. As Luke has many Old Testament allusions, he was probably capable of seeing the meaning of "putting to the second place in preferences" also in the case of *miseō*. God hated Esau, but nevertheless he made him a nation as well (though he did

[58] Bovon, *Lukas*, 2:527.
[59] Evans, *Saint Luke*, 577.
[60] Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 592.
[61] Bock, *Luke*, 1284.

punish the nation when it turned against the chosen people) according to the Old Testament tradition (Mal 1:2–3). This tradition was understood as pointing to priorities in election, as Paul witnesses when he cites this passage from Malachi in Rom 9:13.

We have to note that the reference to the disciples' "hating" their relatives occurs only in Luke 14:26 in the canonical gospels. This saying occurs twice in the *Gospel of Thomas*, 55 and 101. In the latter the need to love one's parents is also expressed. John 12:25 uses the term concerning the necessity of hating one's own life, this being another example of deciding upon right priorities.

The following saying in Luke (14:27) speaks about the necessity of taking up one's cross. It is understandable if the early church applied this saying to all Christians in a spiritual sense, but this latter meaning may not have been the original sense of the saying. Rather, it refers to a readiness for concrete hardships expected by Jesus from some of his disciples. To sum up, I argue that Luke 14:26 refers to the priority of Jesus' call over one's own family ties. It expresses the urgency of the call and does not mean a break with the Fifth Commandment.

7. *Conclusion*

I have argued that Jesus' (and his first followers') environment affirmed the duty of children to honour their parents. The environment also held that God's priority does not affect the validity of this duty. If we look at the gospel tradition from this angle, it is striking how many passages either confirm or suppose this view as a natural background for everyday life. It remains true that there are radical sayings in the gospels. It is argued here that these sayings (though they are radical indeed) do not force us to conclude that Jesus failed to fulfil the Fifth Commandment.

The texts that witness to tensions in the child-parent relationship can be classified in three groups. First, 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; rather, they 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. Jesus had two kinds of disciples: some were called to become itinerant followers of Jesus, while others

did not have to renounce family life. However, even itinerant disciples could return to their families: they did not break off all contacts with them. Thirdly (and often in connection with the previous category), some texts are to be seen in an apocalyptic setting. They refer either 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.

To sum up, the gospel material concerning the child-parent relationship allows us to put together a picture of Jesus and his first followers that corresponds to that found in the environment of the New Testament. Jesus and the early church around the evangelists observed the commandment to love father and mother; they did not break this commandment when they gave priority to God even over parents. Rather, in the area of the child-parent relationship, we can find an indirect evidence of Jesus' claim of being divine in some sense (for example, in the sense of being the "Son of God"), because he expected from his followers the same priority for himself as was expected in the environment of the early Christians only for God: only God comes before parents.