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An Analysis of Family Structures as Depicted in the Synoptic Gospels

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0. Introduction

An Explanation of the Choice of Topic

An initial interest in the notion of healthy interpersonal relationships, particularly among families, prompted me to ask whether it is possible to draw hermeneutical conclusions for the modern family from the New Testament.

My interest in this topic began while I was an exchange student at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. My New Testament professor Arthur Carter taught about the ancient Greek concept of *oikos* [οἶκος, household] and how Jesus' proclamation, especially its depiction in the Gospel of Matthew, starts to transform the Roman Empire from the grassroots by challenging imperial views of the *oikos*, which was an important building block of the Roman Empire; the Empire itself functioned symbolically as a large *oikos*.¹

It was at this time that I first learned about Imago Relationship Therapy, which is a form of couples and relationship therapy co-developed by Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt. Although secular and gender neutral in its nature, Imago Relationship Therapy has connections to Christian theology, as both of its founders are rooted in Christian theology, ministry, and academic training.² Still, it transcends the boundaries of its religious origins and does not make a distinction between people of different faiths. The aim of Hendrix's and Hunt's therapy is to create a "relationship revolution."³ Believing that "healthy homes lead to healthy families,"⁴ the authors, therapists, and practitioners of IRT strive to change communities and the world by healing families by changing how partners interact and communicate with each other.

All in all, I saw parallels in these two concepts and that led me to phrase the topic of research at hand.

¹ Arthur F. Carter, Jr., Lecture *REL 204: New Testament and the Origins of Christianity* (notes), 85142, The University of North Carolina, Greensboro: October 3, 2016.

² "About," Harvilleandhelen.com, accessed April 30, 2018, <http://harvilleandhelen.com/about/>.

³ Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt, *Making Marriage Simple: 10 Truths for Changing the Relationship You Have into the One You Want* (New York: Harmony Books, 2013): 136.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

Research Topic

This thesis is an analysis of family structures as depicted in the Synoptic Gospels. It addresses the following question: how can Synoptic portrayals of Jesus' life, actions, attitude, and teachings concerning family inform and help establish guidelines for a modern healthy family?

In order to achieve this objective, I first observe values and structures that governed the first-century Mediterranean family, ask about differences between family today and in antiquity, and sketch an image of different family types and relations. Then, against the backdrop of that information, I examine select passages from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke to query the hermeneutical value these texts hold for a contemporary or modern-day family in the West.

Such questions become important as: do the Synoptics portray Jesus in line with or divergent from the ancient Mediterranean norms and values concerning family? Is there a common thread in the Synoptic Gospels concerning this topic? If the Synoptics, indeed, depict him as countercultural, how do his teachings differ from the conventional values? If his following was the manifestation of an alternative family, what can be said about it? What values governed the early Church and how did they differ from the traditional values?

An Explanation of the Language

The main reason why am I writing my thesis in English, and not in Estonian, is this: as I have been consulting with my New Testament professor from UNCG, Arthur Carter (in addition to my advisor Ain Riistan), it seemed to be the most reasonable to write it in English, so he could give me feedback and make corrections as I am progressing in my work.

Method

This paper employs a social-scientific method that draws on anthropological research, cross-cultural studies, and social sciences – a sub-discipline, belonging to historic-critical biblical studies. It is forerun by the Context Group, which is a collaborative group of biblical scholars with similar methodological background. They emphasize the importance of understanding

the social context of biblical documents to avoid interpreting the Bible anachronistically. The scholars say that as reading is a social activity, the meaning of the written texts derive from the social system that they were composed in. Miscommunication, or at worst misunderstanding, occurs if the social systems of the reader and writer are alien to one another. And this is the case for a twenty-first century Western reader who is moved from the first-century Mediterranean context by time, space, and cultural social systems. This realization requires the modern reader to seek the understanding of the context of the people that lived at the time when the Synoptic Gospels were written by entering into their social system.⁵

What makes the understanding even more complicated is what the anthropologists call the difference between “emic” and “etic” perspectives – the native’s point of view and analytical explanations of the researcher, respectively. This dichotomy occurs when a researcher tries to adequately “reproduce reality the way it is perceived by the informants,” but their result can never be an exact emic description. This does not imply that natives are “right” or that the scientists’ depictions are “wrong,” nor does it always mean that emic concepts are “concrete” or that etic concepts are “abstract.”⁶

For this reason, it is important to point out that social-scientific method uses etic notions (e.g., honor/shame, family-centeredness, kinship), while the Mediterranean people, in the passages in view, used emic terms (e.g. *oikos*), and, in addition, the reader of this paper has their own emic perspectives (e.g. for the meaning of word “family”). Therefore, the etic terms that are used in this research, mainly “family” and “household,” would function as bridges between these two separate worlds of experiences.

As Louw’s and Nida’s Greek-English lexicon shows, there is a plethora of terms that were used in the ancient Greek for buildings, body parts, people, kinship, groups, and classes, and gives insights to them, explaining them emically. The notions used in ancient times had a diverse use and often entailed different semantic meanings.⁷ The term *oikos* could have meant a number of things: in terms of buildings, it most commonly stood for “a building consisting of one or more rooms and normally serving as a dwelling place” or “house, home, dwelling, residence.”⁸ Referring to people, it would have been understood differently: “the family consisting of those related by blood and marriage, as well as slaves and servants, living in the

⁵ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels: Second Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 13.

⁶ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology: Second Edition* (London and Sterling: Pluto Press, 2001), 36-7.

⁷ Johannes P. Louw, Eugene A. Nida, Rondal B. Smith, and Karen A. Munson, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains: Second Edition: Volume I: Introduction and Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 81-136.

⁸ Louw, Nida, Smith, and Munson, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 81.

same house or homestead – ‘family, household.’”⁹ Thus, the ancient understanding of “family” (or “household”) included more than just blood-relatives and its meaning was more fluctuating compared to the modern understanding of “the nuclear family.”

Another complicating factor is that writings have what is called the “unwritten” part – that is, the part that an author assumes for their audience to know and therefore does not mention it but leaves it unsaid, but what is essential in understanding the meaning.¹⁰ For there to be effective communication, a writer expects the reader to fill in the gaps from their own resources of the general cultural knowledge, because texts, although they can say the most important, cannot convey everything.¹¹

This becomes even clearer with the society in view: the first-century Mediterranean world, as it is a “high-context” society, not a “low-context” society like the U.S. or northern Europe. A high-context society is one that presumes “a broadly shared, well-understood knowledge of the context of anything referred to in conversation or in writing.”¹² In this way, the biblical authors encode a lot of information in stereotypical sayings and leave no explanations for the references that all of the readers are expected to pick up.¹³

On the contrary, the documents that the authors of “low-context” societies create are extremely detailed, leaving little to the reader’s imagination. The writers are the ones who are expected to supply the needed background information, especially when talking about something specific or uncommon. The reason for that is that there is little that is culturally shared by everyone as the life in the modern world has become far more complex compared to antiquity.¹⁴ Malina and Rohrbaugh note: “There are small worlds of experience in every corner of our society that the rest of us know nothing about.” However, this was not the case in the peasant societies, as most of the people shared “the common experience of farming the land and dealing with landlords, traders, merchants, and tax collectors.” The gaps between people’s knowledge and expertise were not as wide, for they had much more in common.¹⁵

This creates an obvious problem for a contemporary reader living in a low-context society seeking to understand the Bible: it is mistaken to be a low-context text and thus expected that the writer has already supplied the necessary context for understanding its meanings.¹⁶ But if one wants to have a successful communication with the writer, one has to

⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁰ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

become a considerate reader by entering into the world that the authors expected their readers to understand.¹⁷

The History of Research and an Overview of the Sources Used

Emerging from the Society of Biblical Literature and Catholic Biblical Association in the end of 1980s, the Context Group has been the pioneering force in using social sciences in biblical interpretation.¹⁸ Since then, numerable scholars have joined the group and published various writings, thus introducing the approach for a wider audience and interpreting the Bible through its lens. There are multiple social-scientific commentaries published covering almost all of the New Testament works, including the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John, the Acts of the Apostles, the letters of Paul, and Revelation. Also, some theological works have been published by the Context Group, including Diane Jacobs-Malina's "Beyond Patriarchy: The Images of the Family in Jesus" in 1993.¹⁹ Although this particular work is focused on the same topic as I am and I have read it through, I have not used it in this work, as I have based my analysis of the biblical texts on social-scientific (and other Bible) commentaries and information gathered from the works concerning the social-scientific method.

Most of the sources used in this paper are books that have given me insights into the method I am employing and they have been valuable resources for understanding the Mediterranean world. They include works such as: Pilch's and Malina's "Handbook of Biblical Social Values,"²⁰ Malina's "The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology: Third Edition, Revised and Expanded,"²¹ and "The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels,"²² Osiek's, MacDonald's, and Tulloch's "A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity,"²³ and Carter's "The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide."²⁴

Three main commentaries that I have consulted with, in examining the passages, are: Malina's and Rohrbaugh's "Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels," Aymer's,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁸ "Home Page," Contextgroup.org, accessed April 27, 2018, <http://www.contextgroup.org>.

¹⁹ Diane Jacobs-Malina, *Beyond Patriarchy: The Images of the Family in Jesus* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1993).

²⁰ John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, eds., *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998).

²¹ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology: Third Edition, Revised and Expanded Edition* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

²² Bruce J. Malina, *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

²³ Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, with Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

²⁴ Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006).

Kittredge's, and Sánchez's "Fortress Commentary of the Bible: The New Testament,"²⁵ and Harrelson's "The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha."²⁶ The first is a simplified social-scientific commentary that focuses on the sociocultural information, not a complete literary and historical commentary.²⁷ The two other commentaries on the Synoptic Gospels include different authors, such as Warren Carter, Raquel S. Lettsome, Robert L. Brawley, Mary Ann Tolbert, and Joel B. Green, offering different perspectives to the texts.

Structure

The work is structured as follows: the first part is concerned with the Mediterranean values, family types and relations, and how these values affect the Mediterranean families in the first century. It lays a foundation for the following two chapters in which I look at ten passages and analyze them: the first six passages deal more with the questions concerning the cultural aspects and the other four ask questions about the values that govern Jesus' newly established following. The last part makes some theological conclusions for the modern situation.

²⁵ Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A. Sánchez, eds., *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

²⁶ Walter J. Harrelson, ed., *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003).

²⁷ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 15.

1. An Overview of the Mediterranean Social Values Concerning Family

The meaning of family has a cultural meaning and is inseparable of a broader social context. “In order to understand the function and the place of the family, we must have a grasp of the larger social pattern of which it is a part.”²⁸ Thus, in order to explain how the Mediterranean family operated in the biblical times (and still does now), I analyze the central values that shaped the life of a family. By doing this I outline a generic overview of how was family understood and defined in antiquity and paint a picture of what it might have looked like in terms of different family structures and concrete family relations.

An Overview of the Core Values

First, to understand anything about how both society and family function in a particular setting, there has to be an understanding of the core values that govern the minds of the people and thus shape the society. Malina says: “What is typical of this region is kinship as the focal social institution and concern for honor and shame within a gender-based division of labor.”²⁹ In addition to the values he mentions – kinship, honor/shame and gender-basedness – it is important to point out that the society is not based on individuality, but it is centered on a strongly codependent group.

Honor/Shame

The first and foremost set of values – that every other value is subdued to – is honor/shame. They can be defined as follows: “Honor is a claim to worth that is publicly acknowledged. . . . Shame, as the opposite of honor, is a claim to worth that is publicly denied and repudiated. To “be shamed” is always negative; it means to be denied or to be diminished in honor. On the other hand to “have shame” is always positive; it means to be concerned about one’s honor. All human beings seek to have shame, no human being cares to be shamed.”³⁰

²⁸ Halvor Moxnes, “What Is Family? Problems in Constructing Early Christian Families,” in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 15.

²⁹ Malina, *The Social World*, 98.

³⁰ Joseph Plevnik, “Honor/Shame,” in *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, eds. John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 106-7.

The husband and wife are the individuals who are responsible for gaining and maintaining the family honor and social standing in the society. Males represent honor and females embody shame,³¹ as honor and shame are gender-specific.³²

As the Mediterranean society was an agricultural society, everything depended on the fertility and productivity of the land, which meant that everything had to be earned with hard work. Consequently, no matter how much one had, it never felt like enough. That is why there was and still is a concept of limited good that does not apply only to material possessions but also to the core values of honor and shame. Thus, neither was honor an unlimited possession, but it had to be gained at the expense of others.³³

Dyadism and Group Orientation

The individual living in the biblical times had a dyadic personality. It means that one's self-image was divided in two, being first centered on others and then oneself. The opinion of others is the first concern of a dyadic individual.³⁴ That is, of course, a byproduct of honor/shame, because dyadism "is a means value by which one's honor can be continually checked, affirmed, or challenged."³⁵ For this reason, group orientation is such a central value in the Mediterranean. People identify themselves first as a member of a group.³⁶ It is the group that "communicates what is expected and proper, and individuals respond accordingly."³⁷

A person concerned with honor would never reveal their unique individuality. One's inabilities and struggles, needs and weaknesses, aspirations and hopes are just not the business of others. Mediterraneans are taught to keep their inner self in secret.³⁸ Such group oriented world is strictly and clearly ordered and its members understand the system by which it works, because they are brought up in it from early childhood.³⁹

Kinship and Family-Centeredness

Peasant societies, like the one in view, had two focal social institutions: the first was kinship and the second was politics, or in other terms, the house and the city⁴⁰ – a division that

³¹ Mark McVann, "Family-Centeredness," in *Handbook*, 76.

³² Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology: Third Edition, Revised and Expanded Edition* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 49-50.

³³ Ain Riistan, Lecture *Vahemere sotsiaalsed väärtused II* (notes), USUS.04.065, University of Tartu: March 23, 2017.

³⁴ Ain Riistan, Lecture *Vahemere sotsiaalsed väärtused I* (notes), USUS.04.065, University of Tartu: March 9, 2017.

³⁵ Jerome H. Neyrey, "Dyadism," in *Handbook*, 54.

³⁶ Riistan. March 23, 2017.

³⁷ Jerome H. Neyrey, "Group Orientation," in *Handbook*, 95.

³⁸ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 59.

³⁹ Neyrey, "Group Orientation," 94.

⁴⁰ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 82.

becomes evident in also how spaces are divided by gender. As mentioned in “A Woman’s Place” by Osiek and MacDonald, Philo, in accordance with the mainstream philosophical understanding that the household is the miniature model of the state, says: “there are two kinds of *polis*, or social entity: the greater one is the city, managed by men (*politeia*), the lesser one the household, managed by women (*oikonomia*).”⁴¹

Kinship or family loyalty is the underlying value and the most important social bond for the Mediterranean people, because “their main aim in life is to maintain and strengthen kinship group and its honor.”⁴² Malina puts it this way: “Such family commitment implies boundless and unconditional loyalty to fellow family members. . . . [Familial particularism] assumes that the family is a unit by and of itself, a self-sufficient and absolute unity, with every other family as its legitimate victim and object of raiding and plunder.”⁴³

Family-centeredness “is an aspect of kinship and is perhaps the main pillar of the culture reflected in the Bible” as “the well-being of the collective is of paramount importance. The autonomy of an individual, a development of the modern West, is entirely absent from the societies and cultures reflected in the Bible or those known to its authors. Hence, family-centeredness should be understood in a directly literal sense: the family *is* the *center*.”⁴⁴

There are three different aspects that family-centeredness is based on that are closely linked together: honor/shame, tradition, and land.⁴⁵

As it has been already pointed out, honor/shame is a value-set that governs the whole society and therefore the family-structure. Parents expect and demand utter respect and obedience from their children and because of this, challenges on family honor are “a serious offense and likely to result in acts of vengeance or strong censure.”⁴⁶

The reason children have to honor their parents (and thus be obedient to them) is not only because they have given them life, but because they are the bearers of tradition – which is “the handing down of established and time-tested communal wisdom.”⁴⁷ The reason why tradition is held in such a high regard is that tradition is seen as equal to parents, meaning that it gives life. If one is outside the tradition, or removed from it, they are “cut off from life, i.e., from meaning, since meaning is conceived of as belonging to the chosen people and having

⁴¹ Philo, *Special Laws*, 3.170, **quoted in** Osiek, MacDonald, and Tulloch, *A Woman’s Place*, 151.

⁴² Malina, *The Social World*, 109.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴⁴ McVann, “Family-Centeredness,” 75.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

some standing among them (honor/shame).” That is why in light of family-centeredness it is extremely important to be obedient to tradition.⁴⁸

The last component, from which family-centeredness derives from, is the land. It is the land that binds together the two previous components: honor/shame and tradition. It is seen as sacred because it is given freely by God. To control and maintain it from other people and nations, who are considered outsiders because of their uncleanness, is to defend honor/shame and preserve the tradition.⁴⁹

In- and Out-Group

For the first-century Mediterranean person, the world is divided into two groups, and there is a fundamental distinction between insiders and outsiders. In-group is usually made up of one’s household, extended family and friends and loyalty is expected of the in-group members. Going to great lengths in helping one’s in-group member is customary but rarely anything to be done to a person from an out-group.⁵⁰ In case of an argument, one takes the side of their in-group member, right or wrong.⁵¹

Compared to current norms, “the dealings of ancient Mediterranean types with out-group persons appear indifferent, even hostile. Strangers can never be in-group members. Should they take the initiative in the direction of “friendly” relations, only the social ritual of hospitality (being “received” or “welcomed”) extended by in-group member can transform them into “friends” of the group.”⁵²

Codependence and Love

Another value that derives from the central role of kinship, the importance the family group has over other groups, and the gender division of labor is codependence. As already mentioned – the main goal for families in gender-based societies is to acquire and defend honor. The reason for such dependence on honor and shame is “the need to deal with recurring trouble, problems or difficulties.”⁵³ Codependence has been defined as “an emotional, psychological, and behavioral pattern of coping that develops as a result of an individual’s prolonged exposure to, and practice of, a set of oppressive rules.”⁵⁴ As already noted above, the world in which dyadic people live is controlled by a set of rules that prevent them to show their feelings directly and discuss issues openly.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 373.

⁵¹ Bruce J. Malina, *Windows on the World of Jesus: Time Travel to Ancient Judea* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 110.

⁵² Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 374.

⁵³ Malina, *The Social World*, 112.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

One more value that is part of group orientation and attachment is love. Love can include feelings of affection, but it does not imply them necessarily – the most important aspect of it is that it bonds people together. As group attachment is the “social glue that keeps groups together,” it is the bonding that is superior to the feelings – therefore, “to love someone is to be attached and bonded to the person.”⁵⁵

Gender

As already stated above, the gender roles in the Mediterranean are divided within the frame of honor/shame values. Honor is maintained by women and defended by men, because “honor is a value embodied by the adult males, while (positive) shame [which means to know and behave accordingly one’s social standing] is a value embodied by adult females.”⁵⁶

For a male, “to lose honor” is “to be shamed” and therefore to lose worth in the eyes of others – that is why he has to defend it. But a female cannot either claim or win honor, it is already presupposed and the expected behavior from her is one of privacy, reserve, sexual integrity, and purity.⁵⁷

Such gender division stems from male fears of the female, not only because they perceive females as different, but potentially dangerous, fundamentally sinful and deprived. In their book “Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts” Hanson and Oakman quote Philo who says that it takes only one look for a man to be ensnared by a woman⁵⁸ and the cultural understanding was that daughter’s chastity is the most vulnerable part of the family honor. Such negative perceptions go along with positive views about mothers and wives who deserved to be honored by their children.⁵⁹

Patrons and Clients

Patronage is a value that describes the relationships between patrons and clients. It is “a social, institutional arrangement by means of which economic, political, or religious institutional relationships are outfitted with an overarching quality of kinship or family feeling. The word “patron” derives from the Greek and Latin word for father, *patēr*.”⁶⁰ This

⁵⁵ Bruce J. Malina, “Love,” in *Handbook*, 127.

⁵⁶ Plevnik, “Honor/Shame,” 106-7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Philo, *On the Virtues*, 38-40, **quoted in** K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 24.

⁵⁹ K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 24-5.

⁶⁰ Bruce J. Malina, “Patronage,” in *Handbook*, 151.

illustrates the relationship between them that is one like a father-children connection: a patron is like a father who provides for his thankful children, that is, clients.⁶¹

As the Mediterranean society, along with its institutionalized relationships, was extremely exploitive between people of unequal standing, patronage appeared as a reciprocal solution to that problem: “clients had their needs met, especially in fortuitous and irregular situations, while patrons received grants of honor and the accolades of benefaction. Patrons were to treat clients as family members might, with both having special concern for each other’s welfare, even though separated sometimes by vast differences in status and power.”⁶²

Family Today *versus* in Antiquity

As pointed out in the method section, the way family was understood in antiquity differs from the modern understanding. As neither Latin nor Greek languages have the terminology that means “family” in the common modern meaning as “the nuclear family” (husband and wife with one or more children), it is crucial that when family language is used in ancient writings, one would not project their own cultural meaning onto them, but rather try to verify what kind of a social group is in view.⁶³ Likewise, such word about “family” cannot be found in the Synoptic Gospels, instead one encounters “households” that are made up of a greater number of members⁶⁴ with its emphasis on “the family as a co-resident group that performs various tasks: production, distribution, transmission, reproduction, and that serves as the primary group of identification.”⁶⁵

It is also important to mention that the families one meets in the Gospel writings are not “emotional units,” but instead groups that cohabit and work together “within the context of socio-economic inter-relations.”⁶⁶ Therefore, what is essential, is that *oikos* was rather a unit of economic support than just a collection of family relations based on emotional affection.⁶⁷

While a household consisted of more than just the core family members, then “family” could be defined rather on the basis of blood relations and actual proximity of blood, being more focused on affective qualities of the relations. In other words, although “both

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Moxnes, “What Is Family?,” 20-1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

households and families are culturally defined, the former are task-oriented residence units and the latter are conceived of as kinship groupings that need not be localized.”⁶⁸

Another problem a modern reader should be aware of is that such terminology found in ancient texts (*oikos, domus, familia*) is mainly addressing wealthy people who owned well-off households along with servants and slaves. So, “we are left with a terminology that identifies only some households, in particular, the prosperous ones. We know much less about the family life and structure of poor people.”⁶⁹

Although the terms “family” and “household” have a slight difference from one another in the modern usage, then “in the picture of Galilee in the Synoptic Gospels “family” is described primarily as “household” in terms of a social, caring unit where resources are shared”⁷⁰ and for this reason, I do not distinguish between the use of words “family” and “household” in this research.

Different Family Types in First-Century Galilee

Aiming to understand adequately the alien culture and people of the New Testament, one has to realize what were the people most concerned with. I have mentioned that it was honor revealed in their family and therefore the question they asked in order to get to know another person was: “What family do you come from?” What the other person answered, gave them an understanding of their honor status, vocation, economic standard of living, etc.⁷¹

So, I am sketching a picture of different families that were present in antiquity in order to explain “family” and “home” not in the notions of the modern context, or the distorted elite picture that is painted in the ancient texts, as the poor, the “silent majority,” was illiterate.⁷² By combining literary and archaeological evidence, scholars have constructed a picture of four family types, differentiated “by the type of houses they inhabited, the number of members comprising the basic family unit, the capability of mutual support and solidarity, the amount of land they possessed and the social group they belonged to”⁷³ (see Table 1.1 in the Appendix).

⁶⁸ Robert McC. Netting, R. R. Wilk, and E. J. Arnould, “Introduction,” in Robert McC. Netting, R. R. Wilk and E. J. Arnould *Households, Comparative and Historical Studies of the Domestic Group* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xx, **quoted in** Moxnes, “What Is Family?,” 17.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷¹ Santiago Guisjarro, “The Family in First-Century Galilee,” in *Constructing Early*, 62.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 57.

The first family type is “large families” that were made up of the elite, the most powerful and prosperous, which was about one percent of the whole population. Such families lived in big houses and included “the father, the mother, the unmarried children, and other family members, to whom we have to add the servants and the slaves.” Their income and social standing were directly related to the great portions of land they owned that was a result of exploiting their power. Nevertheless, they acted as patrons to lower-income persons. Such family type was a notable mutual support system to its family members.⁷⁴

A second family structure, “multiple families,” was a more common family type to which a larger portion of the population – but still not more than 10 percent – belonged. Such families “consisted of two or more conjugal families that were related to each other (usually two or more brothers), with independent living quarters but sharing other areas of the same house,” which is known as a “courtyard house.” People living in the same house had strong ties and they showed significant solidarity to each other. Families inhabiting courtyard houses had relative access to resources, but far less than the wealthiest one percent and they were usually owned by people with occupations such as tax collectors, soldiers, businessmen, and well-to-do fishermen.⁷⁵

The overwhelming number of people living in the Mediterranean – as high as 75 percent of the total population – were part of “nucleated families” (not to be confused with modern “nuclear” individualistic families) “described as a nuclear collectivistic family which has been forced to loosen its ties with other relatives because of external factors, but that still keeps some of those ties, especially with the closer relatives.”⁷⁶ Such poor peasant and craftsmen families usually lived in single room houses, accommodating around four to six people, at its best. The shortage of resources resulted in undernourishment, unhygienic living conditions, illnesses, and frequent deaths. This was the everyday of the majority of the people living in those times, which kept the families compact and left them with little-to-none support from relatives. For those reasons, peasants were the ones who were the most affected by social and economic changes.⁷⁷

The last group was made up of people who were regarded as the last in the social standing: “the slaves, the sick, beggars, thieves, bandits, impoverished widows, orphans, the disinherited,” most of who did not have a family or own a house, having absolutely no

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 60-1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

support from their family members. Such a group consisted about 15 to 20 percent of the population.⁷⁸

Although such an overview is just a hypothetical reconstruction and not a precise picture of the diverse real life, it does highlight the most important aspects concerning families living in the first-century Galilee.⁷⁹

Specific Family Relations – A Dysfunctional Family

In addition to studying family types, another way to analyze family is to look at it in terms of a system of relations. This way, it is possible to differentiate between several types of relationships: between spouses, parents and children, and siblings.⁸⁰

As shown, family relations are the highest priority for a Mediterranean person and the family members' sole mission is to protect its honor and not let it be shamed. The identities of the family members, along with their social roles and relationships toward each other, are defined by the way gender is divided. In order to gain a better understanding of what a Mediterranean family looked like and how the above-mentioned values concretely shaped its functioning, I am painting a more concrete picture of some specific and the most important family relations.

Husbands and Wives – Authoritarianism and Submissiveness

Opposite to the modern romantic view of marriage based on mutual love between two individuals, in the Mediterranean world, it was an arrangement between two households that functioned as a social contract and was more concerned with the effects on both families' honor status and economical management, rather than the relationship between spouses.⁸¹

This makes it clear that the relationships between husbands and wives, and thus also their roles, were shaped by honor/shame. The honorable man was “the strong man who knew how to maintain and perhaps increase his honor rating along with that of his group” and woman who was “devoted to her husband and family, who knew how to safeguard the family's honor and teach her children accordingly.”⁸²

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Moxnes, “What Is Family?,” 31.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁸² Malina, *The New Testament World*, 58.

Malina shows what this gender-based world looks like. He says that, first, at an abstract level there is a set of values that could be divided in two: ends values and means values.⁸³ He goes on to say that in a gender-based society, males are living by the ends values and women by the means values,⁸⁴ but on a more concrete level these values have an especially important role on the functioning of the focal institution of kinship.

“Since males represent the family to the outside, while women maintain the inside, we find that male values look outward while female values look inward.”⁸⁵ Therefore, the woman’s concern is one for the inside of the family, “its internal goodness, honesty, trustworthiness and the alike. In this sense, the woman is the focus and the bearer of the kinship group’s shame, i.e., its concern for its own honor, its own self-respectability, and worth.”⁸⁶ Females are seen inferior to males, more vulnerable, and in charge of the inside of the family, which makes them in need of the protection of males.⁸⁷

The features that characterize the Mediterranean male are the following: his honor can increase or decrease; he is emotionally, physically, and sexually aggressive and authoritative; he has a role to defend family’s honor, concern for prestige and precedence, he is daring and bold. Female characteristics are just the opposite: her shame, once lost, cannot be regained; she is sexually exclusive, submissive to authority, unwilling to risk, shy, passive, timid, and restraint because her role is to be concerned for the maintenance of the family’s shame.⁸⁸

Household chores are the job of the wife, not of the husband,⁸⁹ and she is expected to make the home function well. They are doers, working from sunrise to sunset. “When faced with a problem, wives (and women) are expected to do something about it, while husbands (and males) sit around contemplating the difficulty.”⁹⁰

What is the most important about the gender differences is that the husband’s proper behavior is authoritarian and the wife’s submissive, as she is a property that belongs to her husband.⁹¹

Parents and Children – Parenting and Pain

Parenting is a secondary value “by which adults socialize their offspring in the core value of family, a kinship reality.” It is, too, as most of the values, closely tied to the core values of

⁸³ Malina, *The Social World*, 105.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 105-6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁸⁷ Malina, *Windows*, 72-3.

⁸⁸ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 49-50.

⁸⁹ Malina, *Windows*, 76.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁹¹ Malina, *The Social World*, 116.

honor and shame, “since kinship honor consists in loyalty to the family.” Parenting’s aim is to raise children in the understanding of and obedience to the appropriate positive values in order to strengthen group and family codependence.⁹²

One may tend to assume that the most important social relationship was that of a husband and a wife, but that is not the case with the people living in antiquity where other family relations – e.g., both father-son and mother-son relationships, although very different – outweighed their bond. Contrarily, for a daughter to have a strong connection with her mother or father is something rare to be seen.⁹³

Children

As parents are viewed as gender specific,⁹⁴ so are children.⁹⁵ Mediterranean mothers do not give birth to “children,” but to “boys” and “girls.” Boys, especially the eldest sons, are favored and considered superior to girls just because they are men.⁹⁶ Girls are seen as less important because in antiquity women are considered to be imperfect men.⁹⁷ It is the social pressure that causes mothers to spoil their sons but treat daughters sternly. As it is socially expected of sons to provide for their parents when they are old and girls to marry out, boys’ lives are preserved and guarded with more effort than girls’.⁹⁸ As the bond between the children and the mother is strong – and stays that way even long after they are married – they play a very important role, “often promoting competitiveness and sibling rivalry that proves to be an enduring source of conflict and division.”⁹⁹ In spite of that, the strongest bond between members of the same generation is between brothers.¹⁰⁰

First-century Palestinian mothers have an extremely defensive attitude toward their children, especially sons, regardless of their age,¹⁰¹ because of the inherited and acquired status of their parents, ancestors, and tradition that is attached to them. That is why they, especially mothers, are very proud of their children, as the achievements and success of their children reflect the parents’ investments, worth, and honor.¹⁰² This explains the importance of honoring and submission to one’s parents.

⁹² John J. Pilch, “Parenting,” in *Handbook*, 145.

⁹³ Moxnes, “What Is Family?,” 31.

⁹⁴ Malina, *The Social World*, 104.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁹⁶ Malina, *Windows*, 72.

⁹⁷ Benjamin H. Dunning, *Specters of Paul: Sexual Difference in Early Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 17-8.

⁹⁸ Thomas Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 5-48, **quoted in** Malina, *The Social World*, 106.

⁹⁹ Pilch, “Parenting,” 147.

¹⁰⁰ Moxnes, “What Is Family?,” 31.

¹⁰¹ Malina, *Windows*, 87.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 79.

Mothers and Children

Until puberty, boys are pampered from birth at every opportunity by all of the women in the household, they are breast-fed twice as long as girls are and when boys are spoiled, girls are prepared for womanhood. They are viewed “as posing a life-long headache” and brought up from early on in a way that they would “adopt their life-long female role: to be subordinate, to recognize that a woman is of a little value, and to remain always subservient to men. Indeed, the destiny of women in general, and particularly of those in the family circle, is to serve the men and obey them.”¹⁰³

The closest and strongest bond in the Mediterranean is one between a mother and a son. It is the closest equivalent to what a person living in the Western world would consider as “love” in an intimate relationship and it is a direct result of the childrearing practices.¹⁰⁴ A woman is not regarded as a complete person without a son and this is why their attachment is so strong.¹⁰⁵ Still, the reality is not as “idealistic” as it sounds. The boy senses her as dominant, controlling, and in charge of the home¹⁰⁶ and develops a strong sexual urge toward her, which is even more strongly suppressed.¹⁰⁷

The closeness between mothers and sons comes from the reality that the son remains embedded in mother as long as she lives and “she finds wholeness and a full life in the exploits of her son(s).”¹⁰⁸ They need their sons for their social status and, in fact, the honor of the family is strongly dependent on the achievements of the sons. This is why it is crucial for a mother to raise a wise and not a foolish son for which painful discipline (or in some cases even capital punishment!) could have been used.¹⁰⁹

One way for the son to become independent is when such a bond to breaks if the son is forced to move away from his home place. Daughter who marries out and so becomes a member of the husband’s family usually assists her mother with the chores and once married, helps their mother-in-law.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ Pilch, “Parenting,” 146-47.

¹⁰⁴ Malina, *The Social World*, 110.

¹⁰⁵ Malina, *Windows*, 84.

¹⁰⁶ David D. Gilmore, “Introduction: The Shame of Dishonor,” in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (Special Publication of the American Anthropological Association #22), ed. David D. Gilmore (Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1987), 14-5, **quoted in** Malina, *The Social World*, 111.

¹⁰⁷ Michael P. Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 55, **quoted in** Malina, *The Social World*, 107-8.

¹⁰⁸ Malina, *Windows*, 85.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 82-3.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

Fathers and Children

As the father is the cornerstone of the patriarchal family, children are taught from the early childhood to submit their personal interests to his authority.¹¹¹ To reach such submission and obedience, frequent and severe physical punishment is used. Only adolescent boys are subject to such harsh discipline.¹¹² When the mother is viewed as loving and compassionate, there is little to no feelings of affirmation toward the father who is viewed as authoritarian and strict. Therefore, the mother is affectionately loved by the children, but the father is to be respected and feared.¹¹³

It is unmanly for a male to stay too long in the house in the company of his wife and children, for “the good father will not act other than formally and distantly with his children; he will stay psychologically remote from his children.” This kind of behavior results in a “father-ineffective family,” where women have all the control in the house and the fathers have little or nothing to do with the management of the household and childrearing.¹¹⁴ When the boy is sent into the adult male world, he is expected to act “like a man,” something he did not have much chance to learn, as he was rarely exposed to it.¹¹⁵ Their feminine behavior is constantly picked on.¹¹⁶ Such family structure “with boys staying nearly exclusively with women ‘until they are old enough,’”¹¹⁷ has strong effects on the psychology and gender identity of teenage boys, something they will be forever uncertain of. Thus, Mediterranean people are unable to construct a clear picture of the opposite sex.¹¹⁸

Such factors contribute to the characteristic Mediterranean phenomenon called *machismo* complex: “a male-centered ideology that encourages men to be sexually aggressive, to brag about their sexual prowess and their genital attributes, and to dominate women sexually. It leads to a view of the ideal man as being a man totally under the control of his testicles.”¹¹⁹

There is little to say about the relations between fathers and daughters, as they live in different, absolutely isolated world. She stays with him for a short time of her life, as from the earliest marriageable age teenage girls become the family members of their husbands’ kin through marriage, hence seldom having an opportunity to connect with their father.¹²⁰

¹¹¹ Pilch, “Parenting,” 145.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 146.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹¹⁴ Malina, *The Social World*, 107.

¹¹⁵ Malina, *Windows*, 71.

¹¹⁶ Malina, *The Social World*, 108.

¹¹⁷ Carroll, *The Cult*, **quoted in** 107.

¹¹⁸ Malina, *The Social World*, 108.

¹¹⁹ Carroll, *The Cult*, **quoted in** 108.

¹²⁰ Malina, *The Social World*, 111.

This kind of parenting affects individuals to develop compensatory mechanisms: inferiority complex in men that results in sadism and, on the contrary, superiority complex in women, revealing itself in masochism. It is explained well by Nawal El Saadawi in the following excerpt cited in Malina's book "The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels":

The tendency to exaggerate a boy's feelings for his own ego and masculinity will usually end in an inferiority complex, since he will always feel that he is unable to rise up to the image expected of him. On the other hand, a tendency to exaggerate the need for a girl to withdraw, and to shrink into an attitude of passivity (under the guise of femininity and refinement) tends to build up in her a form of superiority complex which results from the feeling of being better than the image that has been created for her. A superiority complex creates masochistic tendencies in women, and an inferiority complex breeds sadistic and aggressive tendencies in men. Both of these are compensatory mechanisms and are the two faces of the same coin.¹²¹

Men will be prone to aggression, willingly afflicting pain on not only their enemies but also wives and children in order to get their way, as sadism is underlined as a male virtue. Girls, on the other hand, are raised in the mentality that bearing pain and suffering is their rightful part of being born as a woman and are praised for their submissiveness, however simultaneously having a sense of self-worth that is never gratified.¹²²

Authoritarianism and Pain

As already shown above, the boy is pampered until puberty, but is then moved from the loving and safe maternal sphere into "the harsh and hierarchical world of the men." Although strongly shocked adolescent boys want to escape back to the warmth of the women's side, they are sent back to the men's side of the house. The regular and often physical punishments and authoritarian ways of the father leave a strong mark on the young boy, who is punished routinely just to get him used to physical pain. Because of this, the endurance of pain is highly praised in the Mediterranean.¹²³

"'Authority' refers to the socially recognized and approved ability to control the behavior of others. For example, parents have authority over their minor children" and force is used as a sanction. Authoritarianism is not just a single value, but rather a set of following values: total submissiveness and obedience to authority, the use of power for its own interest and benefit, the use of physical force, and high respect to a person who is patient (meaning, able to endure pain). The previous force-related values are in a close relation to these aspects: extreme conventionalism, individual's orientation and great sensitivity to group pressure, anti-

¹²¹ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1982), 81, **quoted in** Malina, *The Social World*, 111-12.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Pilch, "Parenting," 147.

introspective personality, a tendency to think in terms of either/or, a preference to shift responsibility from the individual onto outside forces, to project one's unacceptable impulses onto others, and a tendency to have a very stereotypical thinking.¹²⁴

In short: "the ability to wield force, to inflict pain, and to endure it are part of the value cluster called authoritarianism"¹²⁵ and the people who live in an authoritarian world are highly controlled personality types who are suspicious and fearful of those who do not belong to their groups.¹²⁶

Although physical pain is inflicted by the father, the mother's own unmet needs are another source of great pain and trauma. As it is highly likely for the Mediterranean female and mother that she has never had her needs met when she was a child, it is a common behavior from her that in order to survive she "would use others in an unhealthy and inappropriate way to get those needs met." Anyone – including her infant and helpless child – in their closest reach is unconsciously used for her own gain, which happened often in many dysfunctional and unhealthy families. The mother placing needs above her child's is an outcome of a society that "premises a girl's adulthood on marriage and male offspring,"¹²⁷ as women are seen in terms of gender roles, not basic human needs.¹²⁸

As already said codependence and group orientation favors the repression of one's own feelings and encourages focusing entirely on the needs of others, because "it is the group's needs and vision that override the individual's at every step." For this reason, "one begins to neglect one's own needs, and thus stifles normal individual psychological development." That happens because everyone has their own "feelings, especially of hurt, and they are quick to learn to repress and deny those feelings." It is normal that Mediterraneans learn at a rather early age to cope with psychological and emotional pain, which results in becoming numb to the pain and makes them unable to sympathize with the pain of others and grieve over everyday losses. That is why they themselves are willing to abuse others for their own good in the same way: physically, emotionally, and spiritually – even if it is their own children. Through such compulsive behavior people get to release their tension, but if that behavior "is destructive to oneself or one's group, one feels shame and resulting lowering of self-esteem. At this point one begins to feel more and more out of control and one attempts to

¹²⁴ Bruce J. Malina, "Authoritarianism," in *Handbook*, 12-3.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹²⁷ Malina, *The Social World*, 113.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

compensate by the need to control even more. The result is a sense of delusion and hurt and often a projection of pain onto others (attacking, blaming and rejecting).”¹²⁹

Conclusion

To conclude, the first-century Mediterranean society was a peasant society built on slavery. It represented different family types whilst the majority of the population consisted of peasants living in nucleated families and thus very poor conditions while the richest one percent owned the majority of the land. Families were mainly understood in terms of households as economic units including more than just emotional units consisting of parents and one or two children. What is important to note, though, is that most of the accounts concerning families are written by the literate elite, whose families were larger compared to the illiterate and smaller peasant families.

This ancient world was gender-based and group-oriented, strongly family-centered and extremely codependent. An individual rejected one’s own feelings and visions in order to obey the group and strengthen its honor. It was an authoritarian world in which force and inflection of pain were used in order to instill loyalty and obedience, even – or to be precise, especially – in parenting. Troubled and dysfunctional families were held together by social tension and oppressive rules. Honor and shame were the core values that governed every other value and to defend group’s honor was the main goal in the life of every individual.

These foretold values led to tension that resulted in stress-related illnesses, extreme mood swings, inability to sympathize with the pain of others, difficulty with intimate relationships, and constant unhappiness. Because this was so, it was widely believed in the Mediterranean that “they live in a ‘vale of tears,’ that ‘all life is suffering,’ and ‘it is only human to have a difficult life,’ and this during the periods when there is no war, it is probably codependence that puts them in that vale of tears.”¹³⁰

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

2. An Observation of Specific Texts – The Countercultural Nature of Jesus’ Mission

The reasons why I chose the Synoptic Gospels as the textual foundation for this research are the following. First, the gospel genre in general is a form of ancient biography “to describe the life, deeds, teachings, and death of a significant person” and more particularly, the Gospels concerning Jesus’ life aim “to shape the identity of communities of Jesus’ followers and to guide their way of life.”¹³¹ As the aim is to learn “how can Synoptic portrayals of Jesus’ life, actions, attitude, and teachings concerning family inform and help establish guidelines for a modern healthy family,” it is clear that the Gospels provide a source for just that.

Further, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are the most logical works to turn to in the New Testament, because “of the great antiquity and the breadth of dispersion of the Synoptic traditions . . . , there is a broad scholarly consensus that we can best find access to the historical Jesus through the Synoptic tradition.”¹³²

Another reason why the Gospel of John is left out, is due to its vast difference from the other Gospels, but as the Synoptics have a lot of overlapping material (due to being based on mutual oral and written tradition and being dependent on one another literarily)¹³³ they can be viewed as a coherent tradition in consideration of this research. The similarities and differences are pointed out in the upcoming passages in light of the question whether there is a central theme that unfolds itself in all of the Synoptic Gospels and (whether there are) specific nuances of Matthew, Mark or Luke that reveal themselves in these texts.

The following passages¹³⁴ are categorized accordingly: first three passages concerned with the topic of division are viewed together. The second set is made up of passages in which Jesus’ disciples’ different responses to his call are displayed. The overarching questions to keep in mind are: is Jesus portrayed as conventional or countercultural in these texts and what conclusions can be made for seeking guidelines for a healthy family?

¹³¹ Warren Carter, “Matthew,” in *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, ed. Walter J. Harrelson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1745.

¹³² Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 25.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ The translation used for the passages is New Revised Standard Version.

1. Passages about Division (3 passages)

1) Jesus' Family Mk 3:31-35 (and par. Mt 12:46-50; Lk 8:19-21)

31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." 33 And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" 34 And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

One of the encounters with Jesus' own family is found in Mark 3:31-35, Matthew 12:46-50, and Luke 8:19-21. There are insignificant differences in the Synoptic Gospels concerning this passage, the only aspect differing in Luke is that he mentions "hearing" in addition to "doing" (Lk 8:21) while others only say "doing" (Mk 3:35; Mt 12:50). This is distinctive to his Gospel in which the importance on both hearing and doing is emphasized (e.g., Lk 6:46-49; 8:15; 11:28). In addition, instead of using the phrase "the will of God" (Mk 3:35, Mt 12:50), he says "the word of God" (Lk 8:21).

Malina and Rohrbaugh point out in their "Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels" that this text is extremely characteristic and "almost programmic" for all of the three Gospel writers, who see "the good news creating a new household of those accepting Jesus' proclamation and thus becoming loyal to the Father. It is a sharp move away from the Temple and the biological family as well as from the social networks on which they depended." They conclude that this is, in fact, "one of the most radical things in the Gospels."¹³⁵

The radicalism of Jesus' statement becomes clear against the backdrop of the Mediterranean core values discussed previously. The potential disciple becomes Jesus' "brother and sister and mother" by doing "the will of God" (Mk 3:35) implying that one would find their affirmation rather from Jesus' newly established "family" than original kin-group governed by societal norms.¹³⁶ Consequently, by "leaving behind one's primary group affiliation (usually the family or kinship group) and solely identifying with Jesus and his gospel"¹³⁷ one actually denies the very core of oneself, because the identity of a Mediterranean person is always embedded in their group. Thus, such breaking off from one's kinship group resulted in losing one's honor and being shamed – not only for Jesus himself

¹³⁵ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 159.

¹³⁶ Raquel S. Lettsome, "Mark," in *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The New Testament*, eds. Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A. Sánchez (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 197.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

but also for the people who chose to follow him. This way he provided an example for what his followers were about to do by leaving their families.

It is also interesting to notice that although Jesus' family comes to him, they stay outside, which clearly separates them as outsiders in the story.¹³⁸ The ones that were considered as insiders for Jesus, his family, become outsiders and people who were not part of his in-group, become part of it. Thus, insiders become outsiders and outsiders insiders because for Jesus, biological kinship and blood relations do not have superiority over the crowd that does "the will of God." It is clear that "Jesus' kinship derives not from human ancestry but from God."¹³⁹ This kind of statement is outrageous for Jesus' audience knowing that one's kinship and ancestry meant literally everything in the first-century Mediterranean.

Although "this alternative community or household challenges conventional ties of birth and biological descent, basic means by which the elite perpetrated its wealth and power"¹⁴⁰ and is characterized by doing (and hearing) God's will (or word), it does not mean that Jesus' family has become alienated from him.¹⁴¹ It just shows that the priorities of Jesus' new family have changed from traditional and primary family loyalty to countercultural and radical allegiance to God.

2) **Bringing Division** Mk 8:34-36 (and par. Mt 10:34-39; Lk 12:51-53; 14:25-27, 33; 17:33)

34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?"

This story is located in Mark 8:34-36, Matthew 10:34-39, and Luke 12:51-53; 14:25-27; 17:33 and talks about carrying one's cross, denying oneself, and the division Jesus came to bring.

Both of the authors of the Gospel of Matthew and Luke talk about division, but Mark does not mention it explicitly, his focus is more on the suffering and carrying one's cross. Although the author of Mark does not talk about being against one's family as the other

¹³⁸ Mary Ann Tolbert, "Mark," in *The New Interpreter's*, 1812.

¹³⁹ Robert L. Brawley, "Luke," in *Fortress Commentary*, 235.

¹⁴⁰ Carter, "Matthew," in *The New Interpreter's*, 1769.

¹⁴¹ Joel B. Green, "Luke," in *The New Interpreter's*, 1868.

writers do, the cultural values are nonetheless challenged. Following Jesus requires two things that opposed the conventional norms of the ancient Mediterranean world. The first requirement is to deny oneself (Mk 8:34). As already mentioned in light of the previous passage; to leave one's family was to deny oneself. That is the meaning of the first requirement: to break the ties with one's primary group.¹⁴² What Jesus exemplified in regard to his own family, he now expects of his followers.

The second command is to "take up the cross" (Mk 8:34), a shocking criterion for discipleship that should not be minimized or romanticized; it does not suggest "some little burden or inconvenience,"¹⁴³ because crucifixion was the most painful, shameful, and humiliating death in the Roman Empire, depriving one completely of their honor and social standing. Warren Carter adds: "The cross divided citizen from non-citizen, the accepted from the rejected. To take up the cross is to identify with those who threaten the empire. It is to refuse to be intimidated into compliance. It is to be at cross-purpose with imperial commitments."¹⁴⁴ Thus, the call to follow Jesus was counter to the social norms and thinking of the Mediterranean, which could result in suffering and losing one's honor, family, and even life.¹⁴⁵

As already mentioned above, loyalty is the fundamental virtue in blood relationships and so it is in the surrogate family of Jesus. Malina and Rohrbaugh note that "family members stand together even at the cost of life. But one must decide to which family loyalty will be given."¹⁴⁶

The author of Matthew is focused on division that Jesus brings in terms of family relationships; so that the countercultural nature of Jesus' mission becomes even more evident. Jesus is not the cause of "peace," but of "sword," that is, division, to the Mediterranean families, because "persons engaging in inappropriate social relations risked being cut off from the networks on which their social positions depended."¹⁴⁷ Jesus' proclamation that was running counter to the cultural values was seen just as that. That is why it was perceived with fatal seriousness because being associated with the wrong people would alienate one from their primary connections: family relations.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² Lettsome, "Mark," 197.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Carter, "Matthew," in *The New Interpreter's*, 1765.

¹⁴⁵ Lettsome, "Mark," 197.

¹⁴⁶ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 182.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Families are divided and households disrupted by the radical loyalty to Jesus and his mission.¹⁴⁹ “Family loyalty is subordinate, and families are redefined not by birth (a critique of social hierarchy sustained by lineage and hereditary wealth) but by doing God’s will,” Carter concludes.¹⁵⁰ God’s newly established family becomes an alternative way of life to the imperial systems and governing social values.¹⁵¹

As already noted, Luke and Matthew are more similar to each other, although Luke has scattered these passages across his Gospel, using different settings to stress the importance of table fellowship and, by doing so, to illustrate the changes in social relationships that Jesus was advocating for through scenes of meals. This is especially visible in 14:25-27 and its surrounding passages, as “the primary setting of Luke 14 is a meal.”¹⁵²

Joel B. Green explains in *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible’s* commentary: “The passages preceding, the parable of the great feast (14:15-24), had raised the possibility that one’s possessions and family network might keep one from joining the feast. Both are now listed as impediment to authentic discipleship. Radical allegiance is necessary.”¹⁵³

When Matthew just states that it is important to love Jesus more than one’s family, then Luke takes a step further, saying that it is necessary to “hate” one’s family and life in order to be qualified as Jesus’ disciple. It is important to realize that the people of antiquity did not understand “hate” as the twenty-first century Western world (i.e., “intense hostility and aversion usually deriving from fear, anger, or sense of injury”).¹⁵⁴ “Since first-century Mediterranean persons were anti-introspective, with no concern for individualistic psychology, it follows that words referring to internal states always connote a corresponding external expression as well.” As “love” meant “group attachment” then “hate” would have meant the exact opposite: “dis-attachment” or “non-attachment” from the group.¹⁵⁵ Then, to “hate” is simply to decide between God and family.¹⁵⁶ That is why it should not be mistaken as a command to hate one’s family in the modern sense of the word but simply that family ties, material possessions, and life should not be seen as more important than allegiance to God.

Jesus, by asking his disciples to deny oneself and take up their cross, reverses the priorities from traditional family-centeredness to a new dependence on God’s family.

¹⁴⁹ Warren Carter, “Matthew,” in *Fortress Commentary*, 144.

¹⁵⁰ Carter, “Matthew,” in *The New Interpreter’s*, 1765.

¹⁵¹ Brawley, “Luke,” 245.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 244.

¹⁵³ Green, “Luke,” 1883.

¹⁵⁴ “Hate,” Merriam-Webster.com, accessed April 10, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hate>.

¹⁵⁵ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 65.

¹⁵⁶ Brawley, “Luke,” 245.

3) A House Divided or United? Mk 3:20-27 (and par. Mt 12:22-30; Lk 11:14-23)

20 and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. 21 When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” 22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” 23 And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27 But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

The next passage under consideration is in which question about Jesus’ authority is raised (Mk 3:20-27; Mt 12:22-30; Lk 11:14-23).

The authors of Mark and Matthew locate this text before the incident with Jesus’ family already discussed, although Mark follows it right with the scene concerning Jesus’ kindred, while Matthew puts a few other passages between them. Only Luke situates it a few chapters after this passage. Therefore, the conflict between this text about “a house divided” and Jesus’ own family is the most apparent in the Gospel of Mark, because the two are located right next to each other. This raises a valid question: when Jesus talks about a house that cannot stand if divided (Mk 3:24-25; Mt 12:25), then why does he go seemingly against what he said and does so right in the following passage in Mark 3:31-35?

One of the main differences that stand out between the Synoptic Gospels is that both Matthew and Luke present the situation as an exorcism, but Mark does not, instead he adds something significant that the others leave out. He starts the scene with Jesus’ family approaching him to “restrain” him that implies “strong and forceful action.”¹⁵⁷ The reason behind this is the cultural norm that family members were always concerned with the behavior of one other; because one’s shameful action damaged the honor of the whole family. This is how Jesus’ countercultural activity was perceived by his kin and why they tried to restrict him. It was socially expected in the first-century Mediterranean that people would act in accordance with their socially acknowledged honor, that is, birth status. Individuals who

¹⁵⁷ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 158.

did not do that were labeled as deviant – exactly what his opponents are doing by stating that his power comes from Satan.¹⁵⁸

Again, the passage in Matthew is more similar to Luke, although as already pointed out; they are located differently in relation to the text about the family of Jesus. They both add a phrase to the very end of their periscopes that says: “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters,” (Mt 12:30; Lk 11:23) that emphasizes “the lack of middle ground or neutrality in dealing with Mediterranean persons and the groups around them.”¹⁵⁹ This kind of stark differentiation and division between insiders and outsiders is part of the in- and out-group language, even more emphasizing the need for complete submission to God’s purposes above social norms.

Jesus, this time surprisingly using conventional language, stresses the importance of full surrender to God’s will that is realized through him. “Whoever is not with me,” that is, who thinks that it is Beelzebul or Satan – not God – whose power and will Jesus is manifesting, cannot be part of his soon-to-be established kin.

Still, the question about a divided house and kingdom remains. One meaning could be, in light of the previous episode in Mark that ends with saying that Judas will betray him (Mk 3:19), that Jesus’ own “house” was divided.¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, it could also mean that as Judas’ loyalty was actually divided, he himself found a devastating end. He chose wealth and honor (Mk 14:10-11) instead of faithfulness to the calling of Jesus.

But this comment about a house divided is even more fascinating in relation to the passage about Jesus’ family that follows it immediately in Mark. Could it be that what seems to be a contradiction (Jesus stating that there cannot be division, but then he goes on to do just the opposite in regard to his own family), actually aims to point to the same conclusion? That there cannot be division in a “house” in terms of whom one ultimately submits to: whether to God and to his alternative community or to the social systems (kinship, politics, etc.) governed by traditional values.

Conclusion

As the previous three passages show, Jesus acts counter to the conventional first-century Mediterranean norms and confronts the governing values by breaking from his own kin group (because they fail to recognize that God is acting through him) and encouraging his followers to do the same. He states that loyalty to doing God’s will is the top priority and has to

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁵⁹ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 274.

¹⁶⁰ Tolbert, “Mark,” 1811.

override family loyalty, adding that unity in the new household comes not from cultural values, but from submission to God.

2. Different Responses to Jesus' Call (3 passages)

The second bundle of texts in view displays Jesus calling his first disciples who in result abandon their families, his responses to other would-be followers, and his own burial.

1) The First Disciples Abandoning Their Families Mk 1:16-20 (and par. Mt 4:18-22; Lk 5:1-11)

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

The countercultural essence of Jesus-movement is already clear from the preceding passages and confirmed in this one. The accounts of Jesus calling his first disciples are almost identical in Mark and Matthew, both showing the immediacy that Jesus calls them with and their unhesitant response (Mk 1:18, 20; Mt 4:20, 22). “The first thing Mark shows his community is that the kingdom has both social and economic implications”¹⁶¹ that causes disruption and restoration in the lives of people – and more broadly, in the entire society – affected by it.

Being a fisherman in the ancient Palestine was an entirely different experience compared to the modern fishing industry – not just in terms of equipment but mainly due to the major social, economic, and political differences. As with every other profession in the first-century Mediterranean, so was it also with the fishing industry: it was strictly influenced by family connections and controlled by political power.¹⁶² The urban elite dominated and exploited the poor by making a high profit off their work,¹⁶³ especially the fishermen, who were often left in debt to their patrons, had to form cooperatives to sustain themselves and provide for their families.¹⁶⁴ On the other hand, Guijarro marks that both fishermen and tax

¹⁶¹ Lettsome, “Mark,” 177.

¹⁶² Malina, *Windows*, 149.

¹⁶³ Carter, *The Roman Empire*, 9.

¹⁶⁴ Lettsome, “Mark,” 177.

collectors were quite well-off, as they were from the “multiple families” and therefore at least five of Jesus’ disciples could have been quite wealthy.¹⁶⁵ Nonetheless, “quite wealthy” is a matter of perspective and cooperatives were still necessary support systems that made it possible for fishermen to rise above the extreme poverty of peasants and craftsmen. In light of this information, the four men leaving their families and jobs, controlled by the elite, were, indeed, acting scandalously. It affected not only their relationships with their families but also their economical coping,¹⁶⁶ since the Mediterranean households functioned as support systems that were composed of people making a living together.¹⁶⁷ Although Jesus’ invitation turns the lives of Simon, Andrew, James, and John completely upside-down, it also provides them with a new allegiance, an alternative family, and a calling to “fish for people” (Mk 1:17; Mt 4:19).¹⁶⁸ It does not only reveal the countercultural but also the inclusive character of God’s kingdom because fishermen, despised in the ancient society, are accepted into Jesus’ household.¹⁶⁹

Luke’s version is starkly different from Mark’s and Matthew’s; it is a lot longer, more detailed, and with a very different narrative that includes Jesus performing a miracle of an enormous catch. It does not even emphasize the promptitude of followers, and although James and John are mentioned at the end of the passage (in addition to Simon who becomes the main character in Luke’s story), Andrew is not. What is similar, although worded a little differently, is the ending. By leaving their father, nets, boats, and hired men (Mk 1:18-20; Mt 4:20-22), they did, in fact, leave “everything” (Lk 5:11), meaning more than just material goods. Breaking off with one’s social systems (biological family, patrons, neighbors) that resulted from geographical mobility, because of Jesus’ itinerant mission, was “considered seriously deviant behavior and would have been much more traumatic in antiquity than simply leaving behind material wealth.”¹⁷⁰

In Luke, Jesus’ invitation to his first potential followers shows an authentic reaction to his mission. “Simon’s obedience, the declaration of his sinfulness, and even his admonition to Jesus that he *go away from me* contrasts sharply with attempts by the people at Nazareth and Capernaum to keep Jesus for themselves. And these disciples’ decision to leave everything goes far beyond the earlier response of mere “amazement” on the part of the crowds.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ Guijarro, “The Family,” 60, 63.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Moxnes, “What Is Family?,” 23.

¹⁶⁸ Carter, “Matthew,” in *Fortress Commentary*, 138.

¹⁶⁹ Carter, “Matthew,” in *The New Interpreter’s*, 1753.

¹⁷⁰ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 246.

¹⁷¹ Green, “Luke,” 1862.

This passage illustrates Jesus' astounding call and disciples' instant response that damages their already low honor rating even more because they go against the existing imperial and social systems. Regardless, they become part of a fictive family that gives their lives' a new direction.

2) The Would-Be Disciples' Responses Mt 8:18-22 (and par. Lk 9:57-62)

18 Now when Jesus saw great crowds around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. 19 A scribe then approached and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." 20 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." 21 Another of his disciples said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 22 But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

This text occurs both in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke but not in Mark. There are two individuals in Matthew's account who approach Jesus and wish to become his followers but Luke adds a third one.

As the analysis of previous passages has already shown, so is it with "these exchanges about following, that is, assisting, Jesus in his task of proclaiming the forthcoming theocracy for Israel, the issue of breaking with one's biological kin group and the social network in which it is embedded is sharply raised."¹⁷² Jesus' response to the first encounter demonstrates that the disciples' new lifestyle will be detached from family relations and their homes, and thus culturally rebellious, which becomes notably visible in the next interaction.¹⁷³

In the second exchange, "obligations of high importance to biological family are rejected. Proper burial of relatives was considered one's highest moral duty,"¹⁷⁴ as not burying a corpse meant to dishonor it (Dt 28:25-26). Also, the commandment to honor one's parents (Ex 20:12) emphasized the commitment to one's family and loyalty to its responsibilities. These cultural and religious commitments are overruled by Jesus' call to a lifestyle characterized by following him.¹⁷⁵

The third instance that is only recorded in Luke makes the breaking with the family even more difficult, as not even a farewell is permitted. It leaves "no doubt about the radical quality of the break that following Jesus requires, not about Luke's understanding of its

¹⁷² Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 56.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 268.

¹⁷⁵ Carter, "Matthew," in *The New Interpreter's*, 1761.

cost.”¹⁷⁶ It is also interesting to note that Jesus’ harsh saying to the disciples (9:61-62) recalls Elijah’s response to Elisha in 1 Kings 19:20.

I have just analyzed three responses to Jesus’ invitation that are in clear contrast with the immediate obedience of the first disciples, as the would-be disciples hope to be able to pay divided loyalty to both cultural values at work in families and God’s countercultural kingdom, but choose to stay loyal to the societal expectations and customs. Yet again, Jesus’ completely devalues the responsibilities the family members have toward their kin for the sake of faithfulness to God.¹⁷⁷

3) **The Burial of Jesus** Mk 15:42-47; 16:1 (and par. Mt 27:57-61; 28:1; Lk 23:50-56; 24:10)

42 When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. 45 When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. 46 Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James saw where the body was laid.

1 When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.

With the last text under observation, a question arises: who are and who are not responsible for getting Jesus buried and what can be concluded from it? For this purpose, I look at the passages about Jesus’ burial and the obligations following it.

A completely new character enters the scene, Joseph of Arimathea, who takes the initiative to bury Jesus’ body (Mk 15:42; Mt 27:57; Lk 23:50-51). In the Mediterranean, burial of the dead was a lawful duty of one’s family members and friends, that is, one’s kin group. To bury their relatives was of the utmost importance of the in-group members.¹⁷⁸ It is noteworthy that Joseph, and not any of Jesus’ family members, takes up the responsibility,

¹⁷⁶ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 268.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

thereby regarding himself “as a member of Jesus’ surrogate family group.”¹⁷⁹ Unlike Jesus’ blood relatives or the other main male followers, he shows his loyalty and allegiance to him by having him buried. The bravery and greatness of his act becomes explicit in the fact that he was “a respected member of the council” (Mk 15:43), but by associating himself with a crucified criminal – to the point that he announces his involvement with Jesus’ alternative, culturally deviant and shameful household – he most probably ended up losing his honor, status, and position in the council. Additionally, compared to the disciple who wanted to bury this father, the act of Joseph shows commitment to Jesus, not to the social institutions (i.e., family, the political elite).

After the Sabbath has passed, Jesus’ female followers who were also present at the burial (Mk 15:47; Mt 27:61; Lk 23:55), go to the tomb to anoint the body (Mk 16:1; Lk 23:56; 24:1) – which is “a traditional task of women.”¹⁸⁰ Although the women act in a culturally expected way, as anointing the dead is also part of the family’s burial obligations; they, too, display themselves as the faithful members of Jesus’ household.¹⁸¹ The Galilean women who have followed, provided for and served Jesus loyally this far, are the ones who were there when he hung on the cross (Mk 15:41, Mt 27:55, Lk 23:49) and are now devoted to serve him one last time.¹⁸²

Joseph and the women show their courage and faithfulness to Jesus even after his death, contrasting sharply with the previous passage, but do it in a different way: Joseph goes against the cultural norms while the women act in accord with them. Surprisingly, all of the other male disciples are disappeared.

Conclusion

The preceding passages show the twofold reactions to Jesus’ drastic call: on one side, the sudden response of his first disciples, the shameful obedience of Joseph, and the expected action of women. On the other hand, there were those who chose conventional values and family obligations over the inclusion to Jesus’ group and even those who had already accepted the call, but betrayed and left him at his last hour.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 321.

¹⁸⁰ Tolbert, “Mark,” 1843.

¹⁸¹ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 322.

¹⁸² Lettsome “Mark,” 210.

The Conclusion of All of the Six Passages

Countercultural Proclamation

Although there are some little nuances that differ in the passages I have just analyzed, there is a common thread running through all of the Synoptic Gospels: Jesus' action is in clear conflict with the Mediterranean cultural values as he, in establishing a surrogate family, breaks away from his own kin, expects his followers to do the same, and requires allegiance to God's will above all else. Still, this should not be taken as legitimation to act in a hostile manner toward one's family members in the modern context, but as a call to a complete faithfulness to God. Jesus is using culturally unexpected and extreme language by asking people to deny themselves and take up their cross, give up everything they have and adopt a deviant lifestyle, not bury their family members nor say goodbye to their relatives.

As noted in the part about Mediterranean values, the two focal social institutions are kinship and politics, and Jesus challenges both as economics and household management are embedded in kinship and politics. This underlines the fact that God's blessings are available to all, not just the powerful elite.

The Use of Cultural Values

But as already perceived, he is also using socially accepted language to further his mission. For example, when he uses the in- and out-group terms, talks about a "house divided" or "whoever is not for me, is against me" participates in honor/shame challenges, and talks about God as a patron. These instances seem to contradict his culturally deviant mission, therefore raising a question: is Jesus using both countercultural and conventional language to build a countercultural kingdom?

One answer to this question is that in order to create any kind of alternative, one has to use what is already there. To be understandable to his contemporaries, Jesus has to engage with the prevailing values and only then is he able to modify the governing imperial system. Carter states that Jesus, by starting from the foundation of the empire – the household – and by correcting the flawed value system, changes the face of the empire, which is a greater model of the *oikos*.¹⁸³

Another aspect that came up is that Jesus' main concern in itself is not that much about whether the alternative community is countercultural or conventional, but more concerning the ultimate loyalty to doing God's will rather than allegiance to the family. But as kinship is

¹⁸³ Carter, *The Roman Empire*, 32.

governed by the oppressive and dysfunctional cultural values, they have to be confronted and that is why he goes against them.

Fictive Family Language

Although the passages in view were mainly focusing on real family situations (e.g., the scene with Jesus' own family; another one concerned with the brothers Simon and Andrew, James and John; his disciples leaving, and others not being willing to leave their families), all of the authors of the Synoptic Gospels use frequent metaphorical kinship language (when Jesus is forming a fictive family by addressing his disciples as his mother and siblings, but also when he talks about God as a "Father" or forgiving to one's brothers etc.). Therefore, there are both actual family structures depicted in the texts as well as the metaphorical use of that same language – and Jesus is portrayed as using these real-life situations to construct a reality of an alternative community. Hence, he takes the central Mediterranean term "household" and by using fictive kinship language welcomes outsiders as his own.

3. An Observation of Specific Texts – What Does the Jesus-Movement as an Alternative Family Look Like?

I have already shown the countercultural nature of Jesus' fictive family, but taking a step further, I ask: what does it mean when all of a sudden the old kinship system has been denounced and the Jesus-movement has become an alternative for it? What kinds of values govern such family?

Family values include and influence a variety of dimensions of social interaction: “how children are socialized to fit into definitions of societal and individual roles, and a range of values concerning work, the accumulation of goods, sexual behavior, religion, and race.”¹⁸⁴ In redefining the term “household,” Jesus impacts the attitudes and behaviors concerning these areas. The question remains, how does it “shape our behavior and affect our attitudes in terms of ‘family values’”?¹⁸⁵ What are the social, ideological, practical, and theological consequences of stepping away from the existing family structures and advocating for a different type of community? What are the values that come to replace the existing ones? Does it provide a solution for a dysfunctional family structure that existed in the oppressive Mediterranean world – as concluded in the second part of this thesis – and give benchmarks for a healthy family that is not troubled, neither held together by social tension but by something else, something better? If so, then by what?

I am looking for some guidelines from the last bunch of texts on which Jesus' community is built upon. Some values have already been mentioned in the previous passages and displayed in the actions of the disciples (especially the very clear and recurring motif of allegiance to doing God's will). The four passages that caught my attention when I was meditating on these questions are the following: the question about true greatness (Mk 9:33-37; 10:13-16), James' and John's request (Mk 10:35-45), the love commandments (Mk 12:28-34), and the command to love one's enemies (Mt 5:38-48; 7:12).

1) True Greatness Mk 9:33-37; 10:13-16 (and par. Mt 18:1-5; Lk 9:46-48; 22:24-30)

33 Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” 34 But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another

¹⁸⁴ Lawrence Stone, *Family Values in a Historical Perspective*, Tanner Lectures on Human Values, (Harvard University: November 16 and 17, 1994), 70, **quoted in** Lettsome, “Mark,” 184.

¹⁸⁵ Lettsome, “Mark,” 184.

who was the greatest. 35 He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” 36 Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 37 “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

13 People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. 14 But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. 15 Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” 16 And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

It is not just Jesus’ family who fails to comprehend the nature of his mission; his own disciples who showed obedience and understanding by following him, still think and operate in the realm of the Mediterranean values – especially honor/shame. They argue about who is the greatest (therefore they are concerned with honor and the status that results from it) and Jesus gives them an unusual response (Mk 9:33-37; 10:13-16 (Mt 18:1-5; Lk 9:46-48; 22:24-30)).

Malina and Rohrbaugh show that this kind of quarrel over honor (Mk 9:34; Lk 9:46, 22:24) is normal among in-groups and point out that this is why Jesus’ response (Mk 9:35-36; Mt 18:2-4 Lk 9:48, 22:26) to the disciples challenges the societal values in a very fundamental way, as children were the most helpless members of society.¹⁸⁶

The vulnerability of children becomes shockingly obvious when compared to the statistics of the death rate suggested by scholars: “30 percent of infants died in their first year,”¹⁸⁷ “50 percent of all children born died before the age of ten,”¹⁸⁸ and “60 percent were gone by age sixteen.”¹⁸⁹ Sickness and death of children were far too common in the Roman antiquity. But that was not the only aspect that made children the least in the social standing. They “were always the first to suffer from famine, war, disease, and dislocation”¹⁹⁰ and “they were excluded from adult male society, powerless, without economic resources, vulnerable, unpredictable, threatening, submissive.”¹⁹¹ As this passage is usually understood in anachronistic terms of children’s innocence and purity, it is important to consider the reality of first-century Mediterranean childhood, which was one of horror.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁶ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 186.

¹⁸⁷ Osiek, MacDonald, and Tulloch, *A Woman's Place*, 65.

¹⁸⁸ Keith Badley, “Images of Childhood,” in *Plutarch's Advice to the Bride and Groom and A Consolation to His Wife*, ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 184, **quoted in** Osiek, MacDonald, and Tulloch, *A Woman's Place*, 78.

¹⁸⁹ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 336.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Carter, “Matthew,” in *The New Interpreter's*, 1778.

¹⁹² Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 336.

Therefore, the defenseless children are used as an example to show how one should enter the kingdom, that is, to delight in God's patronal favors. By saying this, Jesus argues that the vulnerable are the most fitting to receive God's patronage and willing to be God's clients.¹⁹³ This kind of patronage language (and Jesus calling God "Father" (e.g., Mk 11:25-26)) is common to kinship and patron-client relations. God the "Father" is thus God the Patron. This kingdom that Jesus has come to establish is a symbol of the client-patron relationship between God and his children.¹⁹⁴ The emphasis on the reward of eating at Jesus' table (Lk 22:30) underlines "the reward of genuine solidarity, of truly being accepted part of the family of God."¹⁹⁵

Also, Jesus redefines "greatness" by overturning the honor/shame codes and stating that true greatness in his kingdom means becoming the least and serving.¹⁹⁶ As "greatness" measured in honor, wealth, and power was the main concern of a first-century Palestinian person then participation in Jesus' family "means renouncing values of greatness and taking up the humble ways of dangerous children."¹⁹⁷

The redefinition of "greatness" is an invitation to become like children and servants, highlighting the vulnerability and low status of the discipleship-mantle that his new family members are expected to take upon. As childhood was not a time of happiness but of horror, drawing upon those lines could have possibly brought up feelings of hurt, fear, and pain among his audience. But because of this, his followers are all the more so fitting to regard God as their Patron, ready to receive his provision.

2) Servants and Slaves Mk 10:35-45 (and par. Mt 20:20-28)

35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." 36 And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" 39 They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁹⁴ Malina, "Patronage," 151.

¹⁹⁵ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 317.

¹⁹⁶ Lettsome, "Mark," 198.

¹⁹⁷ Carter, "Matthew," in *The New Interpreter's*, 1778.

41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42 So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

The disciples’ wish to be the greatest continues in the passage that is found in Mark and Matthew in which the sons of Zebedee ask for a favor from Jesus, but one of them portrays it as James and John asking the question (Mk 10:35), the other as their mother (Mt 20:20). Serving was pointed out already in the preceding passage (Mk 9:35; Lk 22:26-27) but becomes even more important in this one (Mk 10:43-44; Mt 20:26-27). Jesus explains it with his own example (Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28) as he does already in Luke’s account of the previous passage (Lk 22:27).

Both Mark and Matthew begin with Jesus’ answer that reverses the status hierarchy with an interesting contrast between the non-Israelite rulers and the way things should be in his followers (Mk 10:42; Mt 20:25). In this renewed Israel, the first in status are those who are slaves and the great those who act as servants. “These reversals substitute a generalized reciprocity typical of household relations for the balanced reciprocity common to public affairs.”¹⁹⁸ But in order to understand Jesus’ answer about being a servant (Mk 10:43; Mt 20:26) and a slave (Mk 10:44; Mt 20:27), one has to ask what did these two terms entail in antiquity.

The slave language Jesus uses goes well in connection with the prior passage about children because they were seen to be on the same level as slaves until they reached maturity.¹⁹⁹

In the ancient Mediterranean, as in most of slave-based societies, there was a distinction between sex, “biological differentiation between the male and the female species,” and gender, “the cultural construction of that biological difference,” that became apparent in regard to slaves – who indisputably had a sex but were perceived as with no gender. This meant that a male slave was not a man and, by the same token, a female slave was not a woman. Hence, neither could have had their masculine or feminine traits attributed to them

¹⁹⁸ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 193.

¹⁹⁹ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 336.

and male or female social expectations placed on them. This meant that the social precautions that protected men and, especially women, did not expand to slaves.²⁰⁰

Carter asks where is the good news in being a slave and suggests that one possible explanation for that could be if one's master was a respected person, slavery could have also be seen as honorable. He concludes that being an obedient slave and doing the will of the Lord could carry great privilege.²⁰¹

As it was the women who were expected to be submissive to men and serve others, Jesus, by encouraging his male disciples to adopt these feminine attributes, does, indeed, seek to readjust Mediterranean values.²⁰² What makes this passage even more surprising is that Jesus justifies the reversal of statuses with his own behavior for he came to serve not to be served (Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28), therefore going against the male qualities and virtues that teenage boys had to take upon once sent to the world of men.²⁰³ It is argued by some that Jesus by promoting serving and forgiveness shows that he has no concern for honor. Just the contrary, his actions are in accordance with honor as he claims the need for this kind of "female" behavior.²⁰⁴ Simply put: he is, as a matter of fact, concerned with honor and shame patterns, just in an opposite way, urging his disciples to act in an unexpected way in terms of gender roles.

Although there is a categorical difference between a free woman and a female slave who was not seen as a woman, by calling his disciples to become like servants and slaves, Jesus plays on the similarities of women and slaves: they both were to be ruled and were closely involved with the life of the household.²⁰⁵ For men, on the contrary, to be concerned with its doings is considered unmanly and shameful. Thus, inviting his disciples to become servants and slaves, Jesus is not just asking them to act in accordance with the responsibilities of women and slaves, but of both. This does not make them only as vulnerable as women or slaves but twice as vulnerable, as "females who were slaves, . . . were doubly fit by nature to be ruled and dominated."²⁰⁶

Jesus is concerned with the management of God's *oikos*, an area of concern for women and not of men. It shows that gender division of labor is not determinative in the renewed Israel and that service is a sign of honor and greatness, not shame. By doing this he fills the vast gaps of gender-basedness and hierarchical relations with mutual serving.

²⁰⁰ Osiek, MacDonald, and Tulloch, *A Woman's Place*, 96.

²⁰¹ Carter, "Matthew," in *The New Interpreter's*, 1783.

²⁰² Malina, *Windows*, 78.

²⁰³ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 193.

²⁰⁴ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 51.

²⁰⁵ Osiek, MacDonald, and Tulloch, *A Woman's Place*, 96.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

3) Love as the Complete Attachment Mk 12:28-34 (and par. Mt 22:36-40; Lk 10:25-28)

28 One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” 29 Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 30 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” 32 Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; 33 and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” 34 When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

The next regulation is definitely one of the most well-known scriptures in the Gospels: the love commandments (Mk 12:28-34; Mt 22:36-40; Lk 10:25-28) that Jesus is quoting from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18. The context surrounding it in the Synoptics is a little bit different: in Mark, the scribe who comes to Jesus is not displayed as hostile (Mk 12:28) but the authors of Luke and especially Matthew depict him (although in latter, a Pharisee) that way.

The man’s concern is similar to ours; he is trying to find guidance and general principles for his life that would affect him in an integrated way so that he would know “how to be a morally complete person, pleasing to God and one’s fellow human beings.”²⁰⁷

As shown in the values section, “love” for the peasants living in antiquity, is primarily understood as group attachment and that is why the command to love God with everything one has (Mk 12:30; Mt 22:37; Lk 10:27) means complete attachment and dependence; to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Mk 12:31; Mt 22:39; Lk 10:27) indicates that one is connected to them as one’s own family, because one’s group defines the individual’s identity.²⁰⁸

It is interesting to note that not only does the scribe agree with Jesus, but moreover, he furthers the claim “that practical attachment to one’s neighbor is ‘much more important’ than Temple sacrifice.”²⁰⁹ Jesus responds to him, saying that he is “not far from the kingdom of

²⁰⁷ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 202.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 380.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

God” (Mk 12:34), thus accepting him into his alternative family and affirming the man’s addition that people are to be valued over the religious and cultural systems in place.

In Luke’s story, a lawyer (that is, a scribe) is concerned with inheriting eternal life and it continues with him asking Jesus to define who is a “neighbor” (Lk 10:29). Culturally, “neighbors” were people who interacted positively with each other and were thus considered to be an extension of each other’s in-group. This word points “to a social role with rights and obligations that derive simply from living socially close to others and interacting with them – the same village or neighborhood or party or faction.”²¹⁰

Malina and Rohrbaugh point out many different reasons why both the Samaritan and the victim were “despised persons who would not have elicited initial sympathy from Jesus’ peasant hearers. The sympathy would have gone to the bandits.”²¹¹ As mentioned above, there is a strict differentiation between in- and out-group members: people who are strangers are met with hostility and Jesus by mentioning the Samaritan in a good light is contradicting with his audience’s expectations.

Although the whole house of Israel could have been seen as neighbors, Samaritans would not have been included, therefore by saying that the scorned Samaritan was a prime example of a “neighbor,” Jesus broadens the definition of that term.²¹² This means that the group attachment (i.e., love) is widened to an out-group member, a Samaritan. This new Israel, Jesus-movement breaks down the normal in- and out-group boundaries and welcomes also those who were not even considered to be part of the “neighborhood.”

This passage is packed with meaning. A scribe, seeking guidance to live by, although shown from different angles by the authors, gets the same response: there has to be a complete dependence on God and Mark adds that people are to be valued over the dysfunctional systems, therefore yet again underlining the importance for the utmost allegiance to God. Luke continues the passage with a parable about a Samaritan, broadening the meaning of a “neighbor,” who is to be loved like one’s own kin, by including the outsiders as in-group members. The Samaritan’s help and service reflect the values highlighted in the passage previously discussed.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 373.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 270-71.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 373.

4) **Love for Enemies** Mt 5:38-48; 7:12 (and par. Lk 6:27-36)

38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; 40 and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; 41 and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. 42 Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

12 “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

The very last passage (Mt 5:38-48; 7:12; Lk 6:27-36) under consideration continues on the theme of love, although is actually placed in quite the beginning of Matthew and Luke in the accounts about the Sermon on the Mount and Sermon on the Plain, whereas the love commandments more at the end of all of the Synoptics. It is not only the outsiders who are ought to be loved but “enemies,” too, are included to the group.

As person’s head and face symbolize his honor²¹³ then “being struck on the right cheek by a backhand slap is an insult, as humiliating as being successfully sued in court,” which called for a man to defend his honor. Because it is so, Jesus’ recommendation to tolerate shame (Mt 5:39; Lk 6:29) meant to give up the counterchallenge that was rightfully his. As the first-century Palestinians were group-oriented, there was little that was done in private. This means that “no one fights in public without others intervening to break it up. . . . The real question raised by the image here is whether an insulted person should seek to defend his own honor or let another person defend him. Allowing others to come to one’s defense enables one to be reconciled later with the one who dishonored and not proceed to demand for satisfaction and feuding.”²¹⁴

By commanding his disciples to turn the other cheek, Jesus is shown to be more concerned with the relationships between people than their status and honor. He encourages

²¹³ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 53.

²¹⁴ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 46.

them to cede their honor in order to not make new enemies but to heal the relationships that were already in need of reconciliation.

This kind of feuding between men was inevitably the everyday of a peasant society due to the perception of limited good, ending in adult males along with their families accumulating plenty of “enemies.” An “enemy” was someone who tried to take or destroy what was lawfully his (honor, land, family, and women).²¹⁵

The understanding to love one’s neighbor but hate one’s enemy reflects the distinction made between in- and out-groups (Mt 5:43). It is notable that in Matthew, Jesus is portrayed to contrast the religious norms with his own interpretation of the Scripture, by using phrases “you have heard” and “but I say to you” (Mt 5:38-39; 43-44), which is not that explicit in Luke but probably implied (Lk 6:27). Not only does Jesus ask his disciples to love their “neighbor” (Mk 12:31; Mt 22:39; Lk 10:27) but he makes it really clear by plainly stating to even love their “enemy.”

The commandment known as the “golden rule” is mentioned in this text in Luke (Lk 6:31) but the author of Matthew who sees this call as the summary of the law and the prophets has placed it in another chapter (Mt 7:12). The social-scientific commentary on Matthew’s passage gives three insights: first, this verse sums up Jesus’ teaching that started in Matthew 5:17 that also highlights “the law and the prophets” and works as parentheses to emphasize doing. That in mind, “in everything” points back to all he has said. Third, this saying underlines the importance of moral behavior and doing that is highlighted in the following verses about “entering through the narrow gate” (Mt 7:13-14), as the word “walking” in Hebrew denotes morality.²¹⁶ It can be well summarized with the commentary on Matthew 7:22-23: “The significance of doing what pleases God outweighs belonging to a Jesus group and having the ability to prophesy, exorcize, and heal as a member of that group.”²¹⁷

Loving acts shown toward one’s enemies, praying for them, and doing good for them will result in receiving a great reward and becoming the children of the Father (Mt 5:44-45; Lk 6:35). Jesus reveals that *this* is the “will of God” explained before that he expects of his new family members to live out, clearly separating themselves from the “Gentiles” (Mt 5:46-47; Lk 6:32-34) as the new Israel that does not pay tribute to the cultural systems and the values governing them but loves (i.e., is fully dependent on) God. Such action and indiscriminate love is the measure of “perfection” (Mt 5:48) and “mercifulness” (Lk 6:36) displayed by the heavenly Father (who loves both good and bad (Mt 5:45)) that should radiate

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

from his earthly children. It is the complete attachment and surrender to him that makes his children perfect and merciful.

Luke follows this call to perfection with other instructions for the lifestyle characteristic to God's children: he encourages them to not judge nor condemn but to forgive and give – which will be followed with an even greater reward (Lk 6:37-38).

In sum, Jesus is displayed to show more interest in people and reconciling their social relationships rather than social standing. The love commandment is expanded from a neighbor to an enemy, moral doing is underscored and such action is valued over just belonging to the alternative community. The love toward the Father, who is the highest example of mercy and perfection, empowers his children to act alike.

The Conclusion of All of the Four Passages

These four passages I have just analyzed have a common theme of status reversal and redefining of known terms that gives a new meaning to “greatness,” “neighbor,” and “enemy.” This happens by Jesus asking his followers to become like children, servants, and slaves who are the most defenseless and therefore should also be the most dependent on God. The shameful, vulnerable, and feminine traits they are expected to pick up are pioneered by Jesus himself. To love God with everything one has means to be fully attached to him. It does not just mean to belong to him but also to act mercifully and perfectly as he does. Doing is emphasized and serving becomes the focal point of the renewed Israel that seeks to heal the feuding social relations, which were the result of honor challenges.

4. Conclusion

There are many other passages that could be analyzed and a lot more that could be said, but due to the capacity of this thesis, I have just sketched some of the most important aspects of Jesus' actions and teachings that redefine the meaning of "family" for his contemporaries.

Keeping in mind the Mediterranean social values, Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God and his new fictive family, is, indeed, highly polemic and opposing to the cultural norms. On the other hand, he does not distance himself from them entirely but also uses the cultural values in the service of his proclamation in order to be more understandable for his audience. It seems that it is not just important to oppose the culture and its prevailing values but to submit completely to doing God's will. But as the oppressive values and systems are at cross-purpose with God's ideals, he confronts them.

The central focus of the alternative community is the love of God embodied in the serving acts of Jesus exemplary to the disciples. The new values of Jesus-movement that stand out are love for one's neighbors and enemies and valuing people over dysfunctional and restrictive systems. The community should be known for the full surrender to the perfect and merciful Father and doing his will. These are the characteristics that make the disciples great.

This revolutionary family, guided by the foretold values, is not held together by social tension or oppressive values but allegiance and complete attachment to God and love for each other, thus contrasting with the highly dysfunctional Mediterranean family and bringing healing to the families, relationships, and the society as a whole. Although surpassing the boundaries of what family meant for the agrarian people, Jesus by no means denounces family relations but makes a case for a kingdom that flows into, affects, and becomes visible in any previous relations one had before. Therefore, it is not just the Church as an institution that should embody such values, but the community of individual yet relational believers who spread and live them out in their everyday lives in relation to all of their relationships, including their family-relations. His focus is not on discounting all social and power relations, but bringing change to them, a change that values people above wealth, honor, and power.

The household of God with its reordered value judgment becomes an example for human society "in contrast to the negative leadership exemplified by the exploitation by the rich elite and the temple."²¹⁸ This kind of *oikos* that is defined mainly by vulnerability and

²¹⁸ John H. Elliott, "The Evil Eye in the First Testament: The Ecology and Culture of a Pervasive Belief," in *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis*, ed. Norman K. Gottwald (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 139–53, **quoted in** Moxnes, "What Is Family?," 24.

service “runs counter to a social structure that advances persons with access to wealth, power, authority, and even purity to the highest levels of the social order” because the majority of the population with no access to these resources stayed stuck at the bottom of the social hierarchy.²¹⁹ The main aim and focus of people’s lives shift from the obsession from honor/shame orientation to a new family with a broadened inclusion and different focal values. Serving and doing God’s will, not the ultimate concern for increasing the family honor, becomes the starting point and the foundation of God’s family.

²¹⁹ Raquel A. St. Clair, *Call and Consequences: A Womanist Reading of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 109-64, **quoted in** Lettsome, “Mark,” 197.

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Resüme

Ma uurin oma lõputöös “Perestruktuuride analüüs sünoptiliste evangeeliumite valgelt” seda, kuidas kujutatakse perekonda sünoptilistes evangeeliumites. Põhjus, miks ma valisin sünoptilised evangeeliumid: kuna need põhinevad paljuski kattuval suulisel ja kirjalikul pärimusel, saab neid vaadelda selle uurimuse kontekstis ühtse traditsioonina. Seeläbi püüan ma vastata küsimusele, mida saame õppida Jeesuse elust, tegevusest, hoiakust ja õpetusest perekonna kohta, et leida juhiseid tänapäevase „terve perekonna“ jaoks. Lisaks uurin, kas Jeesuse kuulutus on oma olemuselt Vahemere kultuuriväärtustega vastavuses või mitte ja kui see on neile vastu, siis kuidas erineb tema õpetus traditsioonilistest väärtustest?

Kasutan selleks sotsiaal-teaduslikku meetodit, mis kuulub ajaloolis-kriitilise piibliuurimise lähenemise juurde, mille järgi tuleneb teksti tähendus kultuuri sotsiaalsetest süsteemidest ja väärtustest, kus see on kirjutatud, ning selleks, et teksti tähendust mõista, tuleb olla teadlik ka neist väärtustest. Seetõttu uuringi ma esimeses peatükis Vahemere kultuurilisi väärtuseid ja struktuure, mis valitsesid ja mõjutasid esimese sajandi perekonda, et mõista piiblitekste nende õiges kontekstis. Seejärel uurin ma nende teadmiste valgelt teises ja kolmandas peatükis kümnet kirjak kohta Matteuse, Markuse ja Luuka evangeeliumites, küsides, kas nende valgelt joonistub välja ühtne pilt sünoptiliste evangeeliumite tunnistusest ja mida on võimalik öelda Jeesuse loodava perekonna kohta ning millised on need väärtused, mis seda juhtima hakkavad. Lisaks, uurin milliseid hermeneutilisi järeldusi saab leitu põhjal teha.

Nendest kirjakohadest joonistub välja üsna terviklik pilt: Jeesuse kontrakultuuriline kuulutus Jumala riigist, mille käigus kutsub ta oma jüngreid üles jätma maha oma perekonnad ja järgima tema poleemilist liikumist, mis moodustab alternatiivse perekonna. Tundub aga, et esmatähtis ei ole lihtsalt olemasolevatele sotsiaalsetele väärtustele vastandumine, vaid täielik allumine Jumala tahtele, et kultuuriväärtused ei oleks eespool Jumalast. Lisaks sellele, et tegu on tugevalt kultuurilistele ja traditsioonilistele Vahemere väärtustele vastanduvad liikumisega, küsin veel täpsemalt, millised saavad siis olema selle uue kogukonna põhiväärtused ning kuidas need väärtused tänapäevaga resoneeruda võiksid. Kõlama jäävad teenimine, ligimese- ja vaenlase-armastamine ning inimese väärtustamine üle düsfunktsionaalsete ja rõhuvate süsteemide.

Appendix

Table 1.1 Family types in first-century Galilee²²⁰

<i>Family type</i>	<i>Large</i>	<i>Multiple</i>	<i>Nucleated</i>	<i>Scattered</i>
House style	Palace; big mansion (<i>domus</i>)	Courtyard house	Insulae? A single room house	Homeless
Components of the basic family group	Father, mother, unmarried children and married sons with their families	Two or more conjugal families	Father, mother, one or two sons and some other relatives	Hard to tell
Support from the kinship group	Mutual support and solidarity; interchange of favours	Support and solidarity in cases of need	Little capability to help because they live on the margin of subsistence	They have neither land nor jobs; many are beggars
Social level	Rulers, high clergy, prominent landowners, business owners	Retainers, priests, military men, modest landowners	Peasants, craftsmen	Unclean and degraded; expendable
Resident in	Big cities	Cities and towns	Country (peasants)	Cities and country
Approximate percentage	1 per cent	9 per cent	70-75 per cent	15-20 per cent
Examples	Herod and the important people in Galilee (Matt 6:21)	Fishermen, tax collectors (Mark 1:16-20; 2:14)	Jesus, farmers and day labourers (Mark 12:1-11; Matt 20:1-16)	Beggars and sick people (Mark 5:25-34; 10:46-52)

²²⁰ Guijarro, "The Family," 58.

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