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THE PLACE OF FAMILY IN CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

submitted as a Thesis to the University of Durham
for the degree of MA

January, 1998

by Meta Dunn

- 1 DEC 1998

ABSTRACT.

'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sister, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple' (LK. 14.26).

Such words sum up a dilemma which has been at the heart of Christianity since its beginnings and which remains today for all who call themselves Christian disciples. The tension between family and discipleship is a constant reality for Christians. How can the ties of family and the demands of discipleship be reconciled? This study, having clarified what the words, 'family' and 'discipleship' mean, goes on to consider why tension has arisen so that one is regarded as antithetical to the other; whether there is, in fact, a real tension; and how that apparent tension might be resolved. By this means, it is hoped to show the inextricable link between family and discipleship and to build a case for a more positive relationship between them than that suggested, at first sight, by the text above.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

'State previous knowledge of the subject' said the application form for an M.A. in Theology. 'Family life and osmosis' (through a theologian husband) although an apparent flippant response did, in fact, seem, both then and now, an accurate description of my qualifications. Given this, I am grateful to those in the Theology Department who have been prepared to take the risk of allowing someone without formal theological qualifications to embark on this study, not certain whether I had the capacity for it. They amongst others must judge whether the risk has been justified.

If it has been justified, this is in no small measure, due to these same people in the Theology Department. The writings of my initial supervisor, Dr. Stephen Barton, and the seminars which he organised on the Family, have proved invaluable. The frequent flow of 'cuttings' from all sorts of sources passed on by my continuing supervisor, Professor Ann Loades, have made me aware of many differing viewpoints on the subject of this study, and her reiteration, at every meeting with her, that I could do this, continually restored my confidence and enabled me to plough on.

I acknowledge, too, with gratitude, the many others who from their own similar experiences have empathised with me, and encouraged me. Four very special people, however, supplied the 'raw material' and the necessary 'previous knowledge' for this thesis. Three continually said, 'Mum, you <u>can</u> do it' and the fourth - well, the fourth filled in the many gaps in my knowledge, saved me from theological gaffes, advised on so many things, consoled, reassured and, above all, listened and listened - (a fact which will amaze him, considering the frequency of my cry, 'You never listen!). It gives me enormous pleasure, therefore, to return the many compliments to me over the years in the prefaces to <u>his</u> books by acknowledging my debt to Jimmy in the completion of this thesis.

No part of the material presented in this thesis has been previously submitted to this or any other university for the award of a degree.

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PART ONE.

The Family

CHAPTER ONE. Introduction.

'Today the family is an ubiquitous topic . . . a veritable research industry. There is no end in sight. Given this smörgasbord, those concerned with the family find themselves over whelmed with an indigestible flood of data, hypotheses, prophecies and panaceas'[1]. Personal experience attests the truth of this statement. There appears to be a continuous, seemingly unstoppable, interest in 'family' from all quarters. Politicians, educationalists, sociologists and theologians have all jumped on this band-wagon. However, let it not be thought that this springs, entirely, from a desire to be in a fashionable area of research, to be in touch with and knowledgeable about a burning issue of the moment. Although there may be some who think thus, for the most part, interest in the family is a recognition of the importance of this 'institution' to people individually and to society at large. Since, then, the family is a group which, for better or worse, affects and impacts upon all our lives, it is little wonder that there is a continuing interest in it.

What almost all of this smörgasbord tries to incorporate is some definition of the family. All acknowledge the difficulties of so doing. Some acknowledge any definition is inadequate, some maintain it is unnecessary and many would say a definition is impossible. That a whole thesis might be written purely on the subject of the definition of family is a real possibility. Indeed, <u>this</u> thesis was originally on just such a topic[2]. 'It has often been observed that human beings have difficulty defining the subjects that are closest to them. One does not need to define what one takes for granted every day . . . the family is most taken for granted and therefore rarely defined'[3]. But one can also observe that we

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[1]Elshtain, 5.
[2]Dunn, M., 'Defining'.
[3]Berger, B. & P., 59.

human beings also feel we all 'know' what family is, what family means. When asked, 'How's the family?' or 'Tell me about the family' or 'Have you a family?' we can respond. Most of us are not uncertain or beset by difficulty in understanding what we are being asked nor in knowing how to respond. Most of us usually find it is simple and easy to talk about 'MY' family and to recognise the family of friends and neighbours. It is almost as if we 'instinctively' know what family is and, although it is true that an instinctive understanding of family may not entirely be a secure base for analytical work on the family, it is, nevertheless, not something which can be ignored. Indeed, instinct is a power to be reckoned with in any discussion of the family and, therefore, should not be ignored when it comes to the defining of family.

Christian theologians are not immune from this difficulty, not least because, while many of their fundamental beliefs appear to supply a clear definition, the reality of family in their own lives and in the lives of those around them suggest differing but valid definitions. For Christians, however, there is another difficulty, one created by their very self-definition as Christians. Being a Christian means being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Being a disciple, according to Scripture could be taken to mean 'leaving all' (Mk. 1.16-20), 'hating father and mother' (Lk.14.26), down-grading familial bonds (Mk. 3.31-34). This seems to suggest family and discipleship cannot be bed-fellows. Certainly, both have been in tension since the beginning of Christianity and remain so for many still today. As one young clergy wife put it, in personal conversation, 'It would be easier to fight for my husband's time and attention against a mistress or an employer than against the God who is his reason for not being with the family. I can't take on God!'

Given, then, the multitude of possibilities for study provided by 'the family', where will this particular study concentrate? Firstly, some

attempt is made to define what is meant by 'being family', in terms of familial characteristics, in order to be clear what group or relationship is under consideration when the term 'family' is used throughout the rest of the study. Secondly, this thesis is, primarily, a theological, rather than sociological, study; that is to say, its emphasis is on what Christianity said and says about the family. Finally, the major part of the study tackles the question (problem?) of the tension and/or relationship between family and discipleship from the beginnings of Christianity, with particular attention being given to Scripture and to historical practices and beliefs.

The reasons for choosing to study the family from this particular stand-point have been hinted at already. Firstly, given the great interest in and concern about families, about who or what constitutes 'family', about the ramifications of the apparent breakdown of family life, about the recognised importance of families to the good-ordering of society at large, it surely behoves theologians and, indeed, all Christians, to add their thoughts and deliberations to the whole debate. In this post-modern age, have not Christians an equal right with others to put forward their ideas about this topical issue? Indeed, it could even be said that Christians are obliged as part of their discipleship, to let their voices be heard, to make public their theological beliefs about families and to indicate the place of the divine and spiritual in family life.

Secondly, the continuing dilemma for Christians of the relationship between their discipleship and their family life (as described by the young woman above) is a constant, almost daily, reality. Where does prime loyalty lie? What does it mean to 'leave all' to be a follower of Jesus? How can the ties of family and the demands of discipleship be reconciled? These are the very practical questions which constantly face Christians - and, perhaps, Christian women, in particular, since they are more likely to bear daily responsibility for family life. Although these were live issues

in the past (1Cor. 7), they are just as alive today, as has been clearly evident from many personal conversations about this study. Time after time, this tension has been acknowledged as a constant and continuing difficulty in Christian living. Consideration of this tension and of the relationship between family and Christian discipleship seems, therefore, a relevant, topical, important and necessary study.

How, then, will this study be tackled? The first task will be to tease out what 'being a family' is, in order to be clear about what relationships are under discussion and what are not. The problem of definition per se is recognised, as is the particular problem of defining 'family'. Broadly speaking, family may be defined according to structure, function or characteristics. Although it is inevitable that the purpose of the family will be referred to, this functional aspect is too large an area of study and limits must, therefore, be set. For similar reasons, consideration of structural definitions - the 'biological' family, the 'conjugal' family, the 'traditional' family - have had to be discarded[4]. It would seem, however, that concentration on the characteristics of family makes it more possible to answer the most basic question, 'What does it mean to be family? rather than 'What is the family for?' or 'What form does the family take?'

We would want to maintain that such a definition, that is, by characteristics, more accurately reflects the most basic nature of family. Furthermore, such a definition, freed from any specific structural form and, thus, from any particular cultural or historical setting, allows for comparison with Christian discipleship while the specific consideration of the characteristics of Christian marriage and family life facilitates discussion of the link between family and discipleship which lies at the heart of this thesis (see pp. 51-2 & p. 98)

[4]Dunn, M. 'Defining'.

The **second** task, therefore, is the consideration of Christian marriage and family life - that is to say, does such an entity exist and what is meant by it? Is 'Christian' marriage of a different order from 'secular' marriage and if so, how is it different? Although quite brief, this is a key discussion, providing as it does a foundation on which to build the whole case for the positive rather than negative place of family within Christian discipleship. Moreover, the conclusions to be drawn from this discussion, inevitably lead to the **third** task, namely that of defining what is meant by discipleship, using, for the same reasons as before, a similar modus operandi, that is defining by characteristics. It should be noted that, at this point, little is, or needs to be, said about the family per se. Inevitably, it is Scripture, and, particularly the New Testament, which provides the material for defining discipleship. It is within the New Testament that there is the clearest record, not only of Jesus' teaching about discipleship but also his practical example of its outworking. Thus, 'for the Christian and/or would-be disciple of Jesus, it is essential to scrutinize the records of the original discipleship of Jesus, in order to gain insight into the spirit and character of that discipleship'[5]. However, quite a substantial space is given, also, to a discussion of the primary characteristic of discipleship, namely love, since this has a bearing on the case being made later for the primacy of familial love.

Having, hopefully, defined the terms, made clear what is under discussion, the next, (**fourth and final**) task, is to see how family and discipleship relate to each other and fit together. This involves, firstly, looking at how and why they have been - and, at times, still are - considered in opposition to one another. It means examining both how strong, how weak, how valid or invalid, are the grounds for the argument

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[5]Dunn, J.D.G., Jesus' Call 3.

that they are in conflict with one another. By means of what is described as an historical 'gallop through' the Christian centuries, from New Testament times to the present day, the apparently strong claims of discipleship to have priority over family are set out. The grounds for these claims are then challenged with alternative explanations suggested for the apparently anti-family teaching. Material is then produced which shows, not only the existence of conflict in this area of family vis-a-vis discipleship from the beginning of Christianity but which also shows how very positive, pro-family attitudes throughout this same period were endorsed and encouraged.

Secondly, the case is made for the impossibility of separation of family and discipleship. Given that family plays such a significant part in the lives of everyone, including Christian disciples, and given that discipleship has to be 'earthed' in the real world, it is clear that discipleship cannot be divorced from family life.

Thirdly, and in the light of that conclusion, the place of family within discipleship has to be examined. By means of several metaphors, the relationship of family and discipleship to each other is, hopefully, clarified. As a result, it is concluded that family has to be considered a valid form of discipleship and discipleship has to be considered as both a challenge to, support for and even, creator of helpful, healthful and positive family life.

CHAPTER TWO. Defining the Family.

The first task in this study is to tease out the meaning of the first of the two terms in the title, namely, family.

Problems of Definition per se.

It should be said straightaway that defining anything is a difficult task but is, however, a necessary one, not least because it is an aid to understanding and communication. Unless there is understanding of what is meant by the words we are using, we do not communicate and may find ourselves at cross-purposes. The primary purpose of any definition is, surely, 'to establish what is under discussion and to make sure that there is understanding of what is under discussion'[1].

However, the O.E.D. highlights further important aspects of defining which are useful to keep in mind. For example, it states that defining is 'creating a norm'. For a surveyor, a norm is a yardstick, a benchmark for measuring against. It is not the final word but merely a general level against which other things can be measured. 'It is not a law without exceptions but a concept we need, to understand the given facts'[2]. As such, it allows for change, is less precise and fixed. A norm, 'is the definition of the usual but not the only'[3]. It means the general, the widespread and the conventional but not, as is often implied, the ideal, such an implication causing trouble for those who do not match the norm. For families, especially, this assumption can cause great problems in many areas of life. (Social Security benefits, for example, may only be made payable to those families which conform to the 'norm'). On the whole, however, this is a positive and useful aspect of defining.

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1 'Definition' in OED 385.
2 Oppenheimer, Marriage 14.
3 OED 384.

But defining also, inevitably, involves selecting - distinguishing by some particular, special mark or characteristic one thing from another - and, as a consequence, limiting or excluding. It is this very limiting, boundary-setting and excluding which makes for anxiety about defining. For where should limits be set, for what purpose are they or should they be set, why are particular exclusions made and perhaps, most importantly, who decides where the limit should come and who or what should be excluded? There needs always to be an awareness of from whom and from where any definition is coming. This is particularly important in any definition of family. The particular viewpoints of, for example, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists or theologians may each emphasise, play down, perhaps distort or skew (consciously and deliberately or sub-consciously and unintentionally) the definition, to fit their own theory or to define from their own experience or ideological belief. That is not to say that such definitions are 'wrong' but they are likely to be limited. 'We doe too narrowly define the power of God' (or family or anything else) 'restraining it to our capacities' (or our beliefs and theories)[4].

It is important, therefore, that a 'hermeneutic of suspicion'[5] is continually exercised with regard to any definition. Yet this limit-setting may not necessarily be a bad thing insofar as it clarifies the area of discussion. However, there is a grave danger of so fixing the limit that there is no room for or a recognition of the inevitable 'blurring' at the edges of any definition. Definitions are not necessarily 'definitive'. They are, as Case Law shows, only the most authoritative to date and, therefore, must not be seen as the last word, the complete, the full or only meaning. Definitions not only set limits but are in themselves always limited. All

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[4] OED 383.
[5] Barton, Crucible (1993).

definitions, then, must be considered flexible, able to cope with change and difference in different places and ages.

Problems of defining 'family'.

Having been alerted to the problem of definition per se, another problem immediately presents itself, as the following quotations clearly show.

'undoubtedly one of the most traditional of institutions'[6]

'a major obstacle to liberation'[7]

'a necessary component of creation'[8]

'a subversive organisation'[9]

'the best thing ever devised - a sacred institution'[10]

'an inhuman, corrupt, commercial arrangement'[11]

'the most powerful and venerable institution in the land'[12]

'a source of trouble'[13]

'that dear octopus from whose dear tentacles we can never escape'[14]

These statements represent just a very small sample of definitions of family and make very clear the difficulties of defining it. Yet some attempt at a definition is necessary, if only to clarify what is under discussion and to limit the area of that discussion. There will inevitably be a host of definitions of family, each being used by a variety of people for a host of differing purposes. Family means different things to different

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6 Berger, B. & P., 6.
7 Ibid 25.
8 Anderson, 15.
9 Mount, 1.
10 Halsey, Guardian Newspaper (23.2.93).
11 Mount, 30.
12 Bottomley. V., Health Secretary, Guardian Newspaper (5.5.93).
13 Mount, 3.
14 Leach, E., 'A Runaway World', BBC Reith Lectures 1967

people at different times in history, to different national and ethnic groups and to different religious traditions. For our purposes, family could be defined in three ways, namely, in terms of structure, function or characteristics.

The first two are probably the most common and are very much intertwined. They are, however, more prone to the dangers of all definitions; that is, of over-preciseness, idealism (this or that is the ideal family) and discrimination (that or that is not family) It is clear, also, that family structure can, will and does change . Life's circumstances - social and economic pressures, cultural norms, historical events like wars and famines, accidents and death, all alter family structures. The composition of the family group will, therefore, vary considerably from time to time and age to age. Characteristics, on the other hand are, less prone to change. Obligation, commitment, altruism, blood ties have all been and, apparently continue to be identity markers of families. Historical and anthropological material bears witness to the presence of these characteristics in the understanding of family in times gone by and in many differing cultures. These characteristics remain remarkably constant, even while, or although, the structure changes. For example, parents continue to care for, to love, to support their children when they are grown adults; many separated couples (despite difficulties) retain responsibilities for their shared children; most sons and daughters accept responsibility for and obligation to parents throughout life, even if the only bond is the blood bond. Those who cast off or deny blood links may well be in the minority. Therefore, it is the contention of this thesis that defining family by its characteristics is a more useful exercise since it allows for broadness and openness, acknowledges the variety of family structures and recognises the 'essence' of family. Moreover, defining family by characteristics allows for the consideration of the family as a

focal point for Christian discipleship without becoming bogged down in debates about how or why one particular structure is more 'family' than another[15].

Family Characteristics.

Defining by characteristics, it may be said then, takes account of the variety and changeability of family structure, takes account, also, of the problems caused by the gap between any so-called 'ideal' structure, allows for affirmation, rather than discrimination, towards families which do not fit the norm or the conventional. This model of definition by characteristics is used by Maurice Casey to identify what is a Jew but it may equally be used in the defining of any group, including family. Casey's 'identity markers' are those 'which are in harmony with the perceptions of other primary sources' (we might say, 'in harmony with other disciplines') and those 'where the individual's perception and others' perception of these as identity markers are in harmony'[16].

It has been said that 'the only real defining characteristic of families is their variability'[17]. This may well be so, in terms of structure, but, since most people appear able to respond appropriately and without too much difficulty to questions about their 'family', regardless of its structure, does this not suggest that there are things, other than a structure, which give meaning to the word 'family'? What are these things which make possible easy responses to questions about the family? What is it that is 'familial', that defines the essence of family, that explains what 'being a family' means? What are the characteristics of family which bring understanding and enable communication about it? Can we, in other

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[15] In an as yet unpublished paper on 'Defining Family' I take up these issues.

[16] Casey, 11-12.

[17] Gittins, ix.

words, find identity markers, as Casey understands them, which meet his criteria of 'harmony'?

The characteristics of family that would fit this formula are likely to include some of the following - blood ties, (actual or fictive), limited in number (selective), commitment, obligation, altruistic love. Most nuclear families could be defined by all these characteristics but at the ends of the spectrum will be groups who, for a variety of reasons (life-cycle, medical developments) may lack one or other of these identity markers, even what would seem the most basic, that is, blood ties. Yet, the individuals in the group and those outside it perceive it as family. Thus, lesbian couples with children are 'family', but also unrelated single women with no living blood relations, elderly religious etc. might all be considered by themselves and their firm friends as having 'family' relationships. Some of these characteristics may appear so obvious as to require little elaboration while others will need fuller comment.

Blood ties.

There are, probably, few who would want to deny that perhaps the most basic identity marker of family is the blood tie - consanguinity. Yet few also would want to deny that the picture is becoming increasingly more complicated through the rapid medical developments in the area of reproduction. Adoptions, remarriages, surrogacy, A.I.D, all create families where biological links are unstraightforward, unclear and even muddled. Many families also, consist of 'as if', fictive families where non-genetically linked individuals come to be regarded 'as if' consanguinally linked, that is to say where ' biology serves as no more than a metaphor or a model for framing social ties'[18]. Consanguinity need not be a literal blood relationship in a genetic sense. Indeed, Malinowski went so far as to say

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18 DCCA 151.

that 'consanguinity is not the physiological bond of common blood. It is the social acknowledgement and interpretation of it'[19]. We may not want to go so far as to deny all physiological content to consanguinity but it is clear that society can and does construct quasi consanguinal relationships and acknowledges such constructions. Thus, although consanguinity does undoubtedly, refer to a genetic blood link between people, consanguinity may also be 'putative', 'fictive', 'metaphorical' but, as such, equally 'real'.

Certainly, this is an identity marker which most families, to a greater or lesser extent, do possess; but can it be held to be the sine qua non? Are biological ties essential to the definition of family or are other characteristics equally valid? It is increasingly clear that there are groups biologically defined as family who show no other familial characteristics and conversely, there are groups with no biological ties which show many other familial characteristics. It has been, rightly said, for example, that 'blood ties do not seem in themselves to guarantee love and respect'[20]. Therefore, it may well be foolish to regard biological ties as the main or essential requirement in any definition of family.

However, blood ties do have a special significance and their strength must be recognised. As Woodhead points out, the act of procreation itself, along with the fact that children bear the marks of their parents, not only in their appearance but also in their genetic make-up, highlight the bodily identification of family members with each other. They are recognised as almost literally part of oneself, one's flesh and blood. Moreover, it is this blood bond which can, more often than not, serve as (although not guarantee) a sound basis for loving relationships. Indeed, 'the strength of love between those who are bound by the blood tie

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[19] Ibid.153.
[20] Woodhead, Concilium 47.

flows directly from the nature of that tie'[21]. Blood ties, then, by providing both the foundation for that 'special' love and the opportunity to express it, can, surely, claim to be a very fundamental part of any definition of family.

Size.

It is clear that the family is always a group, never an individual but that group is inevitably limited in size. Whom each individual recognises and selects as family will depend on a number of factors - the closeness of relationship, geographical distance and personal choice, for example. For most people, family is likely to consist of parents, siblings and grandparents, although some will include aunts, uncles and cousins (or a selection of them). However, even in what might be considered large families, many of which are so and remain so because of the geographical proximity of its members, limits are set and only a few are considered close. A person can behave 'familially' to only a few others. There has to be a limit to intimacy and obligations, both of which, as we shall see are prime identity markers, just as there have to be limits in charitable giving or service. In other words, there are limits to the number of people we can realistically 'love' (Ch.11) and for whom we can bear practical responsibility. Since we are forced to put restrictions on the number of people we can practically consider 'family', it follows that smallness in size, 'an intimate domestic group'[22], (although not necessarily continuously residing in the same household) may be regarded as a valid identity marker of family.

Obligation.

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[21] Ibid 45.
[22] Borrowdale, Reconstructing 40.

'The essence of social living is obligations'[23]. Since the family is widely acknowledged as the most basic unit of social living, obligations and duties may well be regarded as characteristics of family life. There is a distinction to be made between the family biologically created (male, female and child) and the family socially-constructed (father, mother and child) where roles as well as bonds are created. However, it is usual for the biological family to take on the socially-constructed pattern of roles and become 'familially' bonded. It is not our purpose to discuss familial <u>roles</u> which inevitably vary culturally and historically. What is of concern, here, is the effect of family <u>bonds</u> on <u>behaviour</u>, in terms of obligations, responsibilities and, later, in terms of altruism. The subject is important to this thesis and necessitates a more detailed treatment than can be provided here.

To start with, putting a much larger discussion in brief[24], it should be observed that the terms, 'obligations/duties and rights', when applied to family relationships, primarily refer to the moral rather than the legal realm; they imply that family relationships are a serious bond; they imply that particular behaviour patterns are appropriate.

There seems little doubt that obligations and responsibilities are characteristic of family life. There seems little doubt either that perhaps the primary reason for this lies in society's expectations, in 'patterned kin behaviour'[25]. Social pressure continually re-enforces the obligations. Women, in particular and especially with regard to family, find that society causes what has been called 'hardening of the oughteries'[26]. Because of the role society has given women, because of the expectations society has of them, they tend to feel more obligations to the family.

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[23] Stephens, 7.
[24] See Fortes, Midgley, Morgan.
[25] Stephens, 82.
[26] Hughes, 37.

Hence, for example, it is usually women who not only care for their own parents but for their parents-in-law also.

But any society's rules, expectations and demands with regard to family obligations are likely to be based on or to have sprung from some underlying philosophy or religious belief from which have evolved specific moral codes of behaviour.

Within Judaism, for example, much of Rabbinic law is taken up with the obligations of children to parents. The most obvious example and the one 'demonstrated' (as) 'foundational to a considerable body of parent and progeny material in both legal and wisdom collections'[27] is that of the fifth commandment (Exodus 20.12) - 'Honour your father and mother . . . ' This is the command which marks the transition point in the commandments. From this point, the commands are concerned with how God's people ought to relate to one another. Putting a family relationship - and such a close one at that - first, suggests its importance. Moreover, this seriousness within Judaism about the duties owed to family, appears to remain today. Even although most modern Jewish families are smaller and there is increasing 'marrying out' or agnosticism about the tenets of the faith among many Jews, family obligations remain important, strong and honoured.

Similarly, the New Testament, particularly in the Household Codes, also places obligations and responsibilities at the heart of family life. A study of many other religions, philosophies and ideologies would be likely to show a similar pattern, even those which originally had an anti-family bias - and here, Christianity might well be included. But this anti-family attitude, as Mount points out, is characteristic of the evolution of any ideology[28]. However, the main concern here is not any particular

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[27] Durham, 291.
[28] Mount, 3.

ideology's original anti-family bias but merely to note that the behaviour of family members towards one another, in terms of obligations, sooner or later becomes fundamental to a particular ideological viewpoint which underlies a society's or group's expectations.

Perhaps the primary reason for family obligations, however, lies in the nature of the bond itself. It is noteworthy that a variety of researchers, anthropological, historical, theological and philosophical, have provided ample evidence from differing religions and ideologies, cultures and historical periods of a unanimity of belief in obligations and responsibilities to one's family, however family is defined and however culturally and historically contextualised the practices which fulfil the obligations. This belief is well summed up by Meyers Fortes in describing the Ashanti and Tallensi peoples but is equally valid for the modern closest kin relationship - spouses and children/the nuclear/traditional family. He says, 'Kinship creates inescapable moral claims and obligations. Kinsfolk have irresistible claims on one another's support and consideration in contra-distinction to "non-kinsfolk", <u>simply by reason of the fact that they are kin</u>'[29] (my emphasis). In other words, the bond itself <u>creates</u> the obligations. But there is more to it than the <u>creation</u> of the obligations.

Let us consider for a moment the meaning of obligation. Obligation and duty are often seen to be interchangeable. It is difficult to ignore the fact that obligation is at times not just 'binding' but 'a bind' in a more colloquial sense, implying an irritation, an annoyance. Duty is not always pleasure. This is often obvious when considering obligations to the State - the paying of taxes, for example. We do it because we are legally bound to do so. We are contracted to do so and fear the consequences of

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[29] Fortes, 242 & 238.

not doing so, but we do not always like it. Honesty with ourselves tells us that we have a similar attitude on occasions with regard to family obligations. We feel morally contracted to do our duty by the family, fear social censure or experience a nagging conscience if we fail to do it, but again do not always take pleasure in doing it. There may well be more likelihood, however, of the duty becoming pleasure, the 'nuisance factor' being mitigated, by two other factors. One is commitment and the other is altruism both of which must and will be considered as defining characteristics of family.

However, there is also a sense in which duty and obligation differ, a sense which is particularly relevant to family relationships. 'Obligations involve special relations and presuppose voluntary actions such as making promises or contracts'[30]. What bearing has this on family obligations? A man and woman who voluntarily choose to make a bond with one another, who agree to enter a 'special relationship' (marriage, for example,) automatically take on obligations. Similarly in voluntarily choosing to have a child - or at least not taking measures to prevent conception - a couple in an established relationship take on other obligations. Their agreement is 'to play the spouse (or parent) role'[31] and to assume the obligations associated with that role. These bonds between spouses and between parents and children may be sealed by a promise or a vow either privately or publicly made, in marriage or baptismal vows for instance. 'A promise is a self-imposed obligation'. By such promises, 'what was morally optional, discretionary or neutral is transformed into an obligation'[32] What has been made by the promise is a commitment to the obligations of the relationship. It is this commitment which separates

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[30] Childress, 'Obligation' 429.
[31] Stephens, 6.
[32] Childress, 'Promise' 505.

obligation from duty with its seemingly greater overtones of displeasure at having to fulfil it.

It seems clear, then, that obligations and responsibilities are widely acknowledged as integral to family relationships. The above discussion may well make it possible to maintain that, not only are obligations and responsibilities created by the bond but, indeed, they represent the very meaning of the family bond itself. 'Being family' means having obligations and responsibilities towards other family members. The obligations define the bond in the sense of 'giving meaning to it'. They are a defining characteristic of family. It is probably worth noting that the obligations of family members to one another, their commitment and responsibility to one another, do not end or disappear as relationships change. Mount makes the point in discussing 'the Dilution of Fraternity'[33]. The parent/child relationship may change and completely reverse as the child moves from helpless infant to responsible adult and the parent reverts to helplessness in old age, but the obligation remains because of the family bond. It is also worthwhile remembering that the bond need not necessarily be a blood bond, although for most people it has been and is so. But a group of persons to whom an individual feels a prime obligation and responsibility, whether biologically related or not, can be, and is likely to be, regarded as family by that individual. Part of the very nature of family, then, is obligation and responsibility, as surely a part of its nature as rationality and emotion, for example, are part of human nature.

Commitment.

We have just noted that commitment is one of the ingredients which takes the sting out of duty, making it more pleasurable. Moreover,

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[33] Mount, Chapter 11, especially 180-181.

it is the commitment to one another which gives husbands and wives, parents and children the right to make claims and exact obligations. One of the outcomes of commitment, which inevitably flows from it and is, indeed, part of it, is a prime responsibility for those to whom one has committed oneself. Commitment is a word which will occur frequently throughout this study since it is such a fundamental element in discipleship, marriage and family. Given this fact, it seems appropriate to give it fuller consideration here, when discussing what it means to be family and trying to identify specific markers of family.

There are, of course, different kinds of commitments - to people, to institutions, to causes, to particular plans of actions, to values, moral codes and principles. There are also different levels of commitments. Commitments may be short or long-term, even life-long; 'conditional' or 'unconditional'; 'partial' or 'total'; 'relative' or 'absolute'[34]. However, the commitment which is most relevant to our point is independent of conditions, expected (or at least intended) to be life-long, and may be regarded as a 'total' commitment since it 'somehow involves the whole person'[35]. It may be useful, briefly, to consider a few aspects of this total commitment which have most bearing on marriage and family.

Firstly, it should be recognised that certain commitments between people are more than mere 'contracts' since they affect the parties involved at a very deep, personal level. Although one may speak of marriage as a 'contract', yet it is clear that such a 'contract' between men and women is not in the same class as, for example, a 'contract' between house buyers and sellers. The marriage contract is not a cold impersonal agreement but a commitment which implies some kind of identification

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[34] For a longer discussion of this and the whole matter of commitment, see Farley, M., in Scott & Warren (eds), 110-122.
[35] Ibid 119.

with the object of the commitment and a bond so tight to a particular thing or person that it affects, even at times subconsciously, all actions and thoughts.

Secondly, although the bond is tight and deeply personal, it is not something forced upon people from any outside agency. Commitment is a voluntary action, a freely-made decision. Although there may be pressures and demands from various sources to make a particular commitment, at the end of the day, it is 'I' who decides to throw in my lot with this cause or that person and who willingly consents to be bound.

Thirdly, commitment is likely to involve a promise, the giving of one's word 'in a particular way'[36]. This is no idle, off-hand promise of the 'I promise I'll ring you next week' variety. It means, 'putting one's heart into it'[37]. The promise of total commitment is solemn and serious, more in the nature of a vow, 'the solemn engagement, understanding or resolve to achieve something or act in a certain way'[38]. Although abnormal or changing circumstances may make the vow unfulfillable, what makes the promise, under normal circumstances, serious and binding, is the intention behind it. And what is that intention but a determination to remain permanently committed. This means, in the case of inter-personal commitments, that the intention is for permanence in the committed relationship.

Here a problem raises its head, one considered in detail by Margaret Farley. Briefly, her point is, that, in commitment, one is both 'attempting to influence' and 'limiting' the future of oneself and of those to whom one is committed[39]. Thus, there is a sense in which commitment is

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[36] Oppenheimer, Marriage 16.
[37] Ibid 16.
[38] Shorter OED.
[39] Farley, M.,110, 114.

made with a kind of blind faith. It is commitment to an unknown future or, rather, regardless of what the future may bring. We shall see, when discussing Christian marriage, that future possibilities are spelt out in the Marriage Service and the promises are made in the clear knowledge of these possibilities. However, this apparent 'problem' emphasises the seriousness of any commitment which is made despite the unknownness of the future and with the recognition of the personal limitations likely to result from it.

Commitment, then, whether to a principle, to a cause, to a person or a group is no casual affair. It involves both identification with the object of commitment, a nailing of colours to the mast, a standing alongside but also a 'willingness to do something for or about whatever it is we are committed to'[40]. Where commitment is to a person, a new relationship is established with the one to whom the commitment is made. Within that relationship, the individuals are bound to a particular way of behaving. That particular way of behaving is an expression of the commitment.

It takes but a moment's thought to recognise the link between commitment, as it has just been described, and family. Marriage, especially, is a supreme example of such commitment. Marriage is an affective, ontological contract, (in Christian terminology, 'one-flesh-ness'); it is (and, more often than not has been) freely chosen; it is based on a vow or promise the intention of which is a permanent commitment; it leads to particular ways of behaving and acting. Family relationships may, to some extent, be similarly described, although for children, 'chosenness' would, perhaps, need to be replaced by 'givenness' (Ch.11) Thus, marriage and family are surely examples, par excellence, of commitment.

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[40] Ibid 113.

But can it not also be maintained that commitment such as this actually defines marriage and family, constitutes an essential part of the meaning of family? 'To be family' is to be committed in this way. 'Being family' means being bound to particular others so closely, that it is as if part of ourselves has been placed in the other, has been 'entrusted' or 'consigned' to another[41]. 'Commitment' says Farley, ' entails a relation of binding and being bound, giving and being claimed'[42]. What is this but a definition of marriage and family life. Therefore, it is surely valid to consider commitment as a very fundamental identity marker of family.

Altruism.

Altruism and Obligation have much in common. Kinship obligations meant, 'the subordination of individual interests to the good of the group'[43]. 'Transactions' (between kin/family) 'should be carried out in a spirit of non-reciprocal giving'[44]. The main difference, however, lies in the motive for behaviour and the stimulus for response. To summarise Blum, the difference between obligations and altruism lies in the emotional response. Behaving altruistically, 'acting out of concern', requires feelings - for example, of hope, sympathy, joy, love, anger, despair - about a person or a situation; whereas fulfilling obligations, 'acting out of duty', need not necessarily engage the emotions. (In practice, as Blum recognises, emotions nevertheless do usually come into acts of duty)[45]. Both altruism and obligation, however, are concerned with particular behaviour towards others which stems, both from social living and from specific, committed relationships. Kinship obligations have the potential for altruism.

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[41] Ibid 115.
[42] Ibid 115.
[43] Gottlieb, 199.
[44] Fortes, 249.
[45] Blum, 120-123.

It has just been noted that family obligations rest more often than not on a commitment, publicly or privately sealed by a promise or vow. Why is this commitment made? Why do a couple enter a commitment like marriage or parenthood? At least part of the answer to these questions lies in the realm of feelings and emotions. Although a number of reasons, economic, social and political can be given for marriage and parenthood both in the past and still today, there seems little doubt that love and affection are, and from antiquity have been, prime reasons for commitment[46]. But this love is not merely a general feeling of beneficence towards the people to whom one is committed. It is a very particular and specific kind of love. It is an altruistic love. But what is meant by altruism and altruistic love?

'Conduct aimed at the good of other persons'[47].

'An act or desire to give gratuitously to another'[48].

'A willingness to act in the consideration of the interests of others without ulterior motives[49]. These quotations (with my emphases) taken together bring out the essence of altruism and the elements bound up in altruistic love.

Altruism is, firstly, 'other-directed'. Although, as Wispe, points out, biology and behavioural scientists differ on their use of the term altruism, all agree that what is at issue in this debate, the common ground, is 'the welfare of others'[50]. The object of altruism is another, someone or something outside oneself.

Secondly, altruism implies 'giving freely (cf. 'gratuitously' in the second quotation above). There is no charge to the recipient of an

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[46] Dunn, M., 'Defining'.
[47] Macquarrie, 'Altruism' 19.
[48] Wispe, 81.
[49] Nagel, 79.
[50] Wispe, 304.

altruistic act or feeling. The recipient is neither expected to give nor to do something in return. He is not under obligation to the giver, is not 'obliged' to the giver. The altruistic 'actor' gives free of charge, with no expectation of return or reward. He is not motivated by the thought of reward, neither material nor psychological reward. As Cohen acknowledges, this idea of 'gratuitousness' is both 'controversial' and difficult to demonstrate'[51]. Yet a few examples give grounds for supporting this idea. One does not expect an apple or a book for helping a shop assistant to pick up goods that have fallen in the greengrocers or the bookshop. Those who help the elderly or blind across the road or on to the bus do not expect a tip. Some would say that in the latter example, particularly, although there is unlikely to be a material reward, there is likely to be psychological reward, in that the actor will 'feel good'. This 'feel good' factor is what philosophers call the 'hedonistic paradox . . . where even the most unselfish act may produce a psychological reward'[52]. There is probably little doubt that taking an elderly person across the road will indeed lead to a good feeling for the actor. However the good feeling is coincidental to the action, a bonus for the actor. It was neither the expectation of the actor nor the motive for the action. 'These benefits would be unintended consequences, not the ultimate goal'[53].

Thirdly, with the word 'motive', we have touched on another element of altruism, that is, 'altruism is a willingness to act . . . without ulterior motives'. Not only does altruism expect no returns, altruism does not calculate returns. There have been in the past and are now those who try to maintain that a person, even if subconsciously, acts for self-gain, acts in hope of reciprocation or profit, an 'I'll help him if he helps

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[51] Cohen, 81.
[52] Ibid 83.
[53] Bateson & Olsen, 'Altruism' 199.

me' attitude. Even risking one's life for another, some argue, is motivated either by a desire for acclaim (Aristotle) or by fear (Hobbes) or to ensure that A.N. Other does the same for me (E. Wilson)[54]. However, it is clear that, daily, many deeds and actions are performed where it is extremely difficult to find any evidence of calculation; for example, we dance, sing, play games, watch T.V., walk in the country, make love, etc. as well as giving time, money and energy to charitable concerns very often without calculating what our own material or psychological profit will be. Certainly, pleasure, relaxation, 'feeling good', salving conscience, etc. may and often do result. There may even be times when we do or need to calculate what we will get out of the action, that is, weighing up priorities is necessary. (In modern days, this may be increasingly a factor; for example, where there is an opportunity to stop a crime, calculation of risk becomes a factor). In most altruistic actions, however, calculation has a much lower profile and is likely to be a very deeply sub-conscious motive. As Midgley points out, 'we are far too lazy-minded to do so much calculation. Mostly we do either what we have to do or what we feel like doing'[55].

In other words, it is not profit but desire which is the prime motivation. Acting altruistically and loving altruistically is what we want not what we are obliged to do, nor what is calculated as advantageous to ourselves. The individual's objective is unselfish. The objective is the actual well-being of the other not the satisfaction of the individual's desire for the other's well-being - a point made very long ago, in 1726, by Joseph Butler throughout his Sermon XI, 'Upon the Love of Neighbour'[56].

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[54] Midgley, Beast 126.
[55] Ibid 119.
[56] Butler, 164-183

One may well wonder what this all has to do with a study of the family. However, family and altruism are inextricably linked, firstly, because family is the catalyst for the development of altruism and, secondly, because altruism is a characteristic, a component part of family itself. How is this so?

It is an obvious fact that every individual may be either 'under-developed' or 'overdeveloped' in some way; for example, physical growth may be stunted, mental and creative capacities lie dormant, emotional and social behaviour remain immature or be skewed. Who has not at least seen if not experienced this in others and, hopefully, recognised it in oneself? Why is this so? The factors that determine development are many. Both biological and behavioural scientists would suggest human needs and social environment as primary factors. If research were to 'prove' the existence of a specific gene, for example, for crime, for alcoholism, for homosexuality or for altruism, that would give no automatic guarantee that this gene would lead to that actual behaviour. That would be to maintain that behaviour can be attributed to a single cause, an idea which bears little credibility. There needs to be a catalyst to allow the gene to develop, 'something to get it started'[57], as Midgley says. In the case of altruism, it may be said that the family sparks off altruism since it is the main area for the development of inter-personal relations'[58].

There can be little doubt that it is within the family, however it is structured (nuclear, single parent, extended), that all developmental aspects, not just the inter-personal relationships, of an individual are awakened. Sociologists, psychologists, health professionals and educationalists all agree that the major part of human development takes

[57] Midgley, Beast, 135.
[58] Wispe 321.

place before the age of five. (Hence the importance of these early years for the optimum growth of a person and the need for early intervention where necessary to stimulate that development). Thus, family will also be important in the developing and encouraging, in the bringing to fruition of the seed of altruism which lies within human nature[59]. And this the family does, par excellence, since it provides, from birth and throughout life, experience and examples of it, encouragement to practise it and also, at times, evidence of the dangers and distresses caused by ignoring it. Three particular 'life experiences' encourage the development of altruism in human nature - childhood, marriage and parenthood. Let us consider each of them in turn.

Altruism may be said to be taken in with mother's milk since it is from birth that an individual first experiences and then comes to understand, (a) what 'self' is - a being, both separate from and yet dependent on, others; (b) what 'love' is - hopefully not something smothering but liberating; and (c) what 'altruistic love' is - the giving of self to another, purely for the benefit of the other[60]. Where love, affection, trust, sociability are all experienced early in life, altruism will also have the opportunity to develop. Indeed, as Mary Midgley says, 'all the creatures that it makes sense to suppose could develop altruism are already caring for their young (because) the development of sociability proceeds, . . . by the extension to other adults, of behaviour first developed between parents and young'[61].

Moreover, throughout childhood, there is, increasingly, a move away from selfishness and individualism towards a consideration of others. From the self-centred world of the young child, a person, given

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59 Biologists and geneticists, e.g Dawkins, Rutter, Bateson and Midgley, see a case for the possibility of altruism as, genetically, part of human nature.
60 Ekstein, 170 for sources.
61 Midgley, Beast 136.

encouraging and supportive circumstances, will become more 'other-directed' and more independent. This independence, however, may work against altruism, particularly in early adult years. What parent has not heard the child/adult say, 'I'm independent now. I can do what I want. I can please myself'? However, there is for adults a catalyst to ignite or rather re-ignite the altruism learnt in childhood and that catalyst is marriage. The decision to marry forces on a couple the need to consider another as much as or even before oneself. Marriage liturgies, marriage guidance and counselling stress the importance of mutual self-giving. The very nature of marriage is altruistic, for 'there is in marriage an other-regarding concern for the well-being, protection and care of the person connected with oneself in sexual relations'[62]. Therefore, in marrying, individuals commit themselves to altruism, to a way of life which is other-directed, which means in some measure relinquishing selfishness. In other words, marriage shows those characteristics of altruism already considered. It shows how a strong emotion, rationally understood leads to a 'drastic' action. An individual, passionately loving, becomes committed to another, recognising and understanding that this will mean sacrificing something of self. Indeed, 'development of the distinctive gifts of each partner . . . cannot happen unless (there is) a willingness to sacrifice or modify individual expectations for the sake of the other'[63]. What is this but altruism? Thus, marriage can be said to promote and encourage the flourishing of altruism.

An even more powerful catalyst for altruism than marriage, however, is parenthood. 'By far the commonest and most familiar acts of altruism are directed by parents, especially mothers, towards their

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62 Fletcher 237.
63 Anderson, 51.

children'[64]. Certainly, in marriage, there is a need for self-giving but for the sake of each partner's individual development, there needs to be a mutual self-giving. It is not a one-sided enterprise where one only gives and the other only takes. But parenthood brings a face to face encounter with a totally dependent individual whose needs can only be met by the sacrificial self-giving of another. Moreover, the child for a considerable time will not be consciously giving anything back. (Of course, to the parent/s, the child's growth, acquisition of new skills, smiles and hugs are sufficient return). Thus, parenting demands what might be considered a very 'pure' altruism - action driven by rational emotion which expects and demands no reward.

Marriage, parenthood and childhood, then, can clearly be seen as catalysts for altruism. And what are marriage parenthood and children but family? But is family merely the spark which fans the flame of altruism in human nature or is there more to it? Is altruism not part of the very nature of family, a basic characteristic, an identity marker of family? Is it not the case that 'being family' means 'being altruistic'? Cardinal Hume writing in The Tablet (27.8.94) states, 'taking family responsibilities seriously leads people away from regarding themselves as the centre of their world and to accept the claims made by partner, children, parents. The family is radically anti-individualistic'. Anthropological studies suggest that an individual's personal identity and a group's identity is actually defined by altruism. Sharing and helping are the identity markers of a group and of an individual's sense of belonging to that group. Therefore, a person can say,' I am a member of such and such a group - (Why?) - 'because we look after each other'[65]. This 'looking after each other' is surely an indispensable part of what it means

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64 Dawkins, OCAB 14.
65 Cohen 84.

to be family. Indeed, to continue Fletcher's point, the nature of marriage is not just 'other-regarding' towards the sexual partner but 'to those persons arising out of it' - that is, children, in-laws, the family unit.

To sum up. Our purpose was to highlight altruism as a defining characteristic, an identity marker of family. Discussion of the meaning of altruism, although not in great detail here, has led to the conclusion that altruism is a trait of human nature, an inevitable behavioural pattern of a rational, emotional and social species. To be human is to be altruistic. Further consideration of childhood, marriage and parenthood has led to the conclusion that these are primary catalysts for the development of this innate altruism. Finally, altruism would seem to be so inextricably linked to family that one may, quite validly, conclude that 'to be family' means to be altruistic. Altruism, then, can surely be added to that list of characteristics which define the meaning of family.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to attempt to understand what is meant by family. It was recognised that this was a difficult, perhaps impossible, task, since any definition will reflect to some extent the views and experience of the definer or may be propounded for a specific purpose. Yet some kind of clarification of meaning seemed necessary so that the subject under discussion was quite plain and obvious.

For a number of reasons, not least because it lent itself to less exclusiveness, it was decided to seek a definition by consideration of some of the characteristics which appear to identify a group as 'family'. The chapter began by asking a series of questions about what characteristics might define family, might encapsulate what it means to be family. No doubt there are many characteristics which could have been selected but those chosen represent, hopefully, both the more obvious and the most relevant to the fuller thesis. Thus, blood relationships, limited size,

obligations, commitment and altruism have all been considered and recognised as identity markers of family, both by those inside the group and those looking at it from outside. These, it may be said, are part of the very 'nature' of family, are what family 'means'. Sue Walrond-Skinner, herself recognising the limitiations of a structural definition, offers the following. The family is 'an intimate domestic group, in which individuals are committed to one another by ties of blood, law, habitation or emotional bonds or a combination of all four'[66]. My own offering is, perhaps somewhat clumsier but takes up the points touched on in this chapter. Family is that group, small in size, usually biologically related, bound together with an altruistic love, to which individuals have freely committed themselves and towards which they feel prime obligation and responsibility. Although too large a definition, perhaps, for a dictionary, hopefully, it encapsulates those elements at the very heart of family. More importantly, however, it is <u>this</u> understanding of family, rather than a particular structure, which is to be borne in mind when, throughout this thesis, the word 'family' is used.

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66 Walrond-Skinner, 97.

CHAPTER THREE. Christian Marriage and Family Life.

Having completed the frst task of defining the family by characteristics and having clarified how the term family is to be understood in this study, we turn to the second task, namely the consideration of the Christian family. It seems appropriate for this discussion to take place now, not least for the very pragmatic reason that it makes structural sense. That is to say, such a discussion provides a bridge between what has gone before - the defining of family in terms of characteristics rather than structure - and what is to follow - the relationship of family to Christian discipleship. In other words, it is the 'Christian-ness' which is the link between family and discipleship, which makes possible any relationship between them. Therefore, now is the time to give attention to this topic of Christian marriage and family.

At the outset, it must be acknowledged that there will be much more emphasis on Christian marriage than on Christian family life. There are a number of reasons which make this almost inevitable, not least, as will be seen, the testimony of Scripture which plays such a prime part (although not necessarily the only part) in Christian thinking in this area. So, for example, in the Old Testament, marriage and family life are regarded as extremely important as evidenced by the prominence given to genealogies. There is, of course, evidence, too, of polygamy (Gen. 16.1; 25.6; 29.21-30; 1Sam. 18.27; 2Sam. 3.2-5) but, when it is recognised that, according to Old Testament law, the purpose of marriage was 'the begetting of children' and the more children the better since the continuation of one's own life was linked to the continuation of one's family, then polygamy would appear to have some justification, although its problems are also made clear in Scripture (Gen. 21; Jg. 8; 2Sam. 11). However, as Colin Brown says. 'monogamy occupies a central position in

those passages that are important for our understanding of marriage'[1] (Gen.1 26; 2.18-24; Deut. 17.17; 1Kgs. 11.1-11) and, even within polygamous relationships, it is expected that the wife will be loved and taken seriously as a partner (Gen. 2.23; 2.18).

By New Testament times, marriage had become a social institution in both Jewish and Hellenistic culture. As a result, family life presupposes marriage. Indeed, they may even be regarded as in some ways, synonymous or, at the very least, inseparable, since family in structure implied, as a minimum, man (husband), woman (wife) and the children of their union. Thus it was that family was taken for granted, was accepted as a 'given' by New Testament writers and, consequently, their concerns about family life were, firstly, with the appropriate conduct of that life and, secondly, with a theology of and for this institution. As will be seen, much of that theology was based on the Old Testament's view of the divine plan of creation and the place and purpose of men and women in it. The emphasis, then, on this union of man and woman (marriage) and their shared life as, probably, the most fundamental and typical basis of family life, testified to not only in Scripture but also confirmed by modern researches and statistical analysis[2], surely justifies giving a greater proportion of consideration to the subject of Christian <u>marriage</u> rather than to Christian <u>family</u>. We, therefore, turn to the question of Christian marriage.

Straightaway, a rider must be given. Just as there are varied understandings of the meaning of marriage in general, so it is that there are a myriad of views on the meaning of 'Christian' marriage. From the Scriptures, the Church established certain traditional beliefs about

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[1] Brown, C. 'Marriage' 576.
[2] Cf. Gittens, 160; Chester, 150; Elliot, 202; BSR, 1996 (Ch.2) et al. and various HMSO Surveys on Households, Social Trends or Population.

marriage which will be considered in a moment. However, it needs to be said that many Christian beliefs about marriage have changed throughout history and differ between cultures. This, of course, is inevitably so, given that, although we 'must make the distinctions between cultural norms and theological ones, we can never separate the two'[3]. Since both culture and the historical age will affect the interpretation of theological tradition, so there is likely to be (ought to be?) a constant re-examination of Christian marriage in the light of Scripture, new insights and new cultural condtions. Without going into details, two modern examples may be mentioned, namely co-habitation and homosexuality. These are both issues which today are causing a re-examination of the meaning of Christian marriage. Is living together in a committed relationship, but without the blessing of the Church and/or the acknowledgement of the State, marriage? Is a sexual and loving relationship between people of the same sex, marriage? There are Christians who answer these questions in the affirmative while others (a majority still?) who would deny the title of marriage to one or both of these relationships. So the meaning of Christian marriage is as fraught with difficulty as any definition.

However, while recognising the variations in understanding, it is possible to highlight some of the more common ideas about Christian marriage. But first, a most important question must be raised. Is there, in fact, such a thing as Christian marriage, that is to say, a marriage of an entirely different 'kind' from secular marriage? It can hardly be denied that marriage has its roots in the pair-bonding which goes back to the very origins of humanity, long before the appearance of Christianity. Thus, when Christian couples marry, they are not doing some new thing, creating some different institution but rather are entering the relationship,

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[3] Hill, 158.

initiating a union which is as old as humanity itself. Those characteristics, identified as markers of marriage and family life are also likely to be identifiable in any so-called 'Christian' marriage for reasons that will become clearer later. Given also that so many ideas about marriage developed from Christian teaching, is it any wonder that, as Helen Oppenheimer says, any distinction there may be between secular and Christian marriage has become 'blurred'[4]? Since, then, 'Christian' marriage shares so much with 'secular' marriage, the question remains, 'Is there a difference'?

In order to explain the affirmative answer which believers would want to give, it is necessary to be rid of the bad habit of speech which uses the phrase 'Christian marriage' as a kind of shorthand for either 'the marriage between Christians' or the 'Christian doctrine/theology of marriage'. For herein lies the difference from secular marriage, not necessarily in the practices of marriage but in the beliefs about it, beliefs about its origins, its purposes and its possibilities. For Christians, there is a 'God-dimension' in their marriage which influences the understanding of their union and affects the practical out-working of that union. What is this God-dimension? What are its effects? Of what does a Christian theology consist? In this study only very general answers can be given, those points raised which will have most relevance to the rest of the thesis. Thus, consideration will be given briefly to three aspects - the source of marriage, the symbolic nature of marriage and marriage as a sacrament.

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[4] Oppenheimer, Marriage 57.

The source of marriage.

Although it is rightly recognised that marriage (in the form of pair-bonding) is part of human nature, yet, Christians would want to maintain that the source of that human nature, indeed the source of all things is God. Barton, among others, reminds of the importance for Christian belief of the creation stories in Genesis. These stories point to a God who is 'good', whose whole creation is 'good'. 'This means that the material world is to be regarded as "good", sexuality is "good", the complementarity of man and woman is "good"'[5]. Indeed, it is interesting that the only thing in the creation story regarded as 'not good' is 'that man should be alone' (Gen. 2.18). Thus, this pair-bond of male and female is both the creation of God and has the divine seal of approval - 'everything was very good' (Gen. 1.31) and God 'blessed them' (Gen. 5.2).

These same stories identify what the creation of 'adam' (humankind) meant for men and women themselves, namely 'their equality as human beings whatever be their distinctions in functions'[6] and their equal value as images of God. They also, according to Christian theology, account for what would be given the name of marriage, what would become the institution of marriage. Herein lies the justification for the belief that marriage/pair-bonding is part of God's creative purposes. Between them the varying Old Testament accounts highlight the main purposes of the creation of man and woman. It may be noted, too, how often in the New Testament, in Gospels or Epistles, comments about marriage almost invariably refer back to these creation stories with the implication, surely, that 'marriage is not based on human regulations but on God's command'[7]. What, then, do these stories say about 'marriage'?

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[5] Barton, Priests and People 311.
[6] Lawler, Secular Marriage 6.
[7] Brown, C., 579.

Firstly, as separate individuals, men and women are to be images of God, for they are 'made in his likeness'. Secondly, together, they are to be 'one flesh', not merely in a genital and sexual sense, but as a 'fully personal union' where each 'so complements the other that they become adam'[8], representing the wholeness of humankind as well as the equality and mutuality between the sexes[9]. This union, for which 'a man leaves his father and mother' (Gen.2.24), has traditionally been interpreted as marriage. Moreover, it is, as Hill says, 'the monogomous union which is more likely to do justice to', (although obviously does not guarantee), 'the proper equality of men and women within the institution of marriage'[10]. And, thirdly, their union is 'to be fruitful'. In other words, one of the purposes of this union, of this marriage, is the creation of family life. Parents and their children may thus be said to be part of the divine plan and purpose. Moreover, it would appear that family life 'fits' human nature. Human nature is that nature which 'fits' the structure of human life. Marriage and family life appear to 'fit' the biological, psychological, emotional and intellectual components of human nature[11]. For Christians, the God who created their nature must also bear responsibility for the creation of the union which 'fits' their nature and to which their nature calls them.

In summary, then, marriage for Christians is seen to have its source in God, is recognised as part of God's creative plan for his world and as an example of God's love and care in supplying his creation with all that it needs.

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[8] Lawler, Secular Marriage 7.
[9] Tetlow, 45.
[10] Hill, 151. It is clear that such a generalisation needs to be questioned but this is not something to which attention can be given here.
[11] For fuller discussion of this point, see Midgley, Fisher, B & P Berger and Dunn, M., 'Defining'.

However, in any discussion of a theology of marriage or family, a very pragmatic situation must be recognised, namely that of marriage failure from which Christians are not immune. How does the belief in God as the source of marriage relate to its failure? It needs to be remembered that the Genesis stories , in particular, tell of a world before sin and evil entered it, an ideal world with ideal relationships, a world where love, care and mutuality prevailed. The injunctions to man and woman are part of that pre-Fall story, more, perhaps, part of the creation than salvation story although the two cannot really be separated. It is in this Garden of Eden that the individual creature is 'good' and the relationship of man and woman is 'good'. After the Fall, just as man and woman fall short of the ideal to be the image of God, so, by implication, all relationships, including marriage and family relationships, fall short of the ideal. 'Sin disrupted the created order. fragmented the original relationship, aborted the intended partnership'[12], thwarted the intention of the Creator.

Although lengthier consideration of the New Testament texts will be given later, it is worth noting here that 'the New Testament introduces the possibility of the restoration of the created order'[13]. Whereas in Romans, for example, Paul emphasises the newness of life in Christ (Rom. 8.19), in Colossians it seems to be the restoredness which is emphasised. In Colossians, the principal messages are of the Lordship of Christ over all creation (Col. 1.15), the affirmation of God as Creator (Col. 3.9), the making anew of humankind in the image of God and a transformation to that state of mutuality and equality where 'there is no longer Jew nor Greek . . . . slave or free' (Col. 3.11). And it is as a corollary to and a natural consequence of that message, that Paul gives his advice, albeit culturally

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[12] Tetlow, 48.
[13] Ibid 48.

conditioned (Col. 3.18-21), on how the restored and renewed (Christian) family should live as a response to the recognition of the Lordship of Christ and the intention of God. In other words, in Christ and through his death and resurrection, the world and human kind is or can be restored to that state where male and female bonding, the man/woman relationship is again 'good', leading to 'harmony and mutuality' and no longer 'distorted into a hierarchy of power and subordination'[14], that is to say, to the state where it more truly reflects the image and likeness of God. Not only, then, are marriage and family part of the original created order, they are also part of the renewed and restored order of creation made possible by the sacrifice of Christ. Moreover, it may be claimed that both 'creations' reveal God as their source and marriage and family as his intention.

However, while Scripture tells us what was meant to be, gives reasons for the failure of that plan and reveals the possibility of transforming the situation, the fact remains that for everyone, including Christians, 'marriage is hard'[15]. But, here again, Christian theology maintains that God is not only its creative source but is also its sustaining source. The 'great challenge' (of marriage) is 'possible only through grace'[16], says Richard Hays. What this means is more fully developed below in the discussion of marriage as a sacrament but what is of relevance here is that grace is one of God's gifts given to sustain individuals in their relationships and to maintain the union which has been created by God.

In summary, then, Christians will hold to the view that marriage has its source in God. He is its creator, its redeemeer and its sustainer.

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[14] Ibid 47.
[15] Hays,347.
[16] Ibid 347.

However, there are further dimensions to the Christian view of marriage which must also be given consideration.

The symbolism of marriage.

One of the important words which Christians often use to describe or think about marriage is the word 'covenant'. This is an important word in that it can describe the actual relationship between a married couple, but the meaning of their covenant can be enhanced by the theological understanding of covenant and vice-versa. That is to say, the nature of the covenant relationship between husband and wife can be informed by reference to the covenant relationship between God and his people. Thus, 'Christians have come to understand this relationship' (of marriage) 'as covenantal because it is seen as an expression of the more fundamental relationship into which God calls all people'[17]. In other words, marriage, for Christians can be regarded as a symbol - a symbol of the relationship between God and humankind.

Yet, just as the danger in saying the Adam and Eve figures are some spiritual beings remote from real people must be avoided, so, too, there is a need to beware of considering the covenantal relationship of marriage only in spiritual, theological or symbolic terms. The covenant of marriage is an earthly covenant between two human beings. The book of Common Prayer refers in the marriage service to 'the covenant which is being made'. As Anthony Harvey points out, the word, 'commitment' is the nearest more modern equivalent to 'covenant' and clarifies what is involved, namely, 'an absolute determination that it' (the marriage) will work out'[18] despite the difficulties and failures which will be an inevitable part of married life. What is involved in the covenant/commitment of

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[17] BSR. 1996 86.
[18] Harvey, A.E., 82.

marriage has been dealt with already (Ch.2) and will continue to be throughout this study so need not be repeated here. However, having stressed that the marriage covenant must be seen as the actual commitment of husband and wife to one another, for Christians its symbolic significance is of supreme importance, not least for supplying them with an example of what their own covenant means and how it ought to be kept.

What, then, does the covenant between God and His people reveal? What does Scripture say about its nature? In brief, it is a freely chosen relationship (Jos. 24.15); it is an intensely personal relationship (Jer. 31.31); it is a committed relationship, demanding faithfulness - even in the face of infidelity and betrayal (Hosea; Jer. 31.3-4); it is a relationship of self-giving love (Eph. 5. 21,25; Mk. 10.45; Lk. 22.26). Here, surely, is also a picture of how Christians regard marriage. The Scriptures of Old and New Testaments reveal a God who, having committed Himself to His people, never gives up on them, despite their failures, broken promises, disobedience and neglect of Him. His commitment extends even to death for their sake. God's covenant/commitment, in other words, still stands even when the other party reneges on the agreement. It bears the hallmarks of 'firmness and resilience, of depth and permanence'[19]. It represents a faithfulness that endures to the end. This is the covenant which Christians hope to reflect when making their covenant with one another in marriage, the covenant on which they aim to model their marriage.

Moreover, just as it was for the people of God in the Old Testament that their failures often led, through repentence and renewal, to a deeper understanding of God's commitment and to a stronger relationship with

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[19] Ibid 81.

God, so, for husband and wife, the same may be the case and their relationship with each other may be deepened and strengthened, enabling them to hold fast to their marriage vows.

One final word about Christians' use of the term 'covenant' ought to be mentioned. Those who understand the marriage vows they make to one another in terms of covenant are likely also to understand and believe that they are making their covenant before God. That is to say, for Christians, God is party to and part of their covenant. It is not entirely and wholly a human covenant since, in making their promises before the God to whom they have already committed themselves as individuals - and often also in the presence of the community of saints (the Church) - a couple rely on and can expect God's help and 'grace sufficient to keep these promises'[20].

For Christians, then, marriage is not only a covenant between two people with all that means for their life together. It is also a covenant between themselves and the God whom they have chosen to follow and on whom they depend for the working out of their life together. Above all it is a constant reminder of God's self-giving love for them both as individuals and as a couple, as well as a potent symbol of God's faithfulness and never-ending commitment to his people and to each partner in the marriage relationship. Let Richard Hay's sermon at a wedding stand as a summary of the Christian view of marriage as a covenant. He says to Tim and Sue, ' Your marriage is a covenant which must stand firm. In making the covenant of marriage, you make a covenant to love one another as God has loved you - that means to love one another unconditionally, freely, sacrificially'[21].

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[20] Hays, 372.
[21] Ibid 375.

Theology sees in marriage other symbols which explain and justify the high value placed on marriage by Christians. But, before giving examples, a salutory reminder about the use and limits of symbols seems in order. In Oppenheimer's words, 'a symbol can be more fragile than the reality without being meaningless . . . has real and deep significance . . . ought to be treasured but treasuring should not mean idolising it'[22]. Quite so. It must never be forgotten that any symbol may represent both differing and changing ideas of a reality. It is dangerous to see any symbol as the only, or, worse, the final, definitive representation of an idea. Examples of this might be the 'symbol' of the maleness of Jesus as High Priest becoming a barrier to the ordination of women or the symbol of the Headship of Christ over the church justifying patriarchy in church, family or state. In both cases, the symbol has become idolised. Nor should the danger of not recognising the limitations of symbols be forgotten. When, for example, marriage is said to symbolise the union of Christ and the church, the question of indissolubility may arise. Although there is argument about whether marriage is indissoluble in a metaphysical and spiritual sense (and we certainly do not want to go down that thorny pathway), nevertheless, the reality is that marriages do break up all the time - always have and probably always will, this side of eternity. Can we, do we, want to say that marriage which, in reality, is dissoluble, symbolises fully the union of Christ and the church? Is that union also dissoluble? The symbolism cannot be pushed that far, can it?

Despite this, however, symbols abound in theological thought and biblical material, probably inevitably so, given the nature of the subject matter, their objective being to teach, remind about, bring reflection upon some truth about God. In other words, a real situtation can act as a

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[22] Oppenheimer, Marriage 58.

representation of some spiritual truth. The 'real situation' of marriage serves in this way. Alerted to the dangers of misusing symbolism, we turn now to consider other ways in which marriage may represent a spiritual truth.

Firstly, it may act as a symbol of divine reality. Marriage is both physical and spiritual. The scriptural description of marriage as 'becoming one flesh' denotes, as we saw, not only a physical act of intercourse. It means so much more. It is an expression of a union of body, mind and spirit, of whole persons; but 'in physical love-making, a man and woman both create and express their unity-in-plurality. Their separate individuality is not destroyed but enhanced'[23]. Unity-in-plurality is a concept difficult to grasp yet pervades Christian theology in, for example, Trinitarian doctrine (God in Three Persons), in Christology (Jesus -God and Man) and in the Body of Christ (many different members but one body). It refers to 'the possibility of a kind of union which is not a confusion nor a blending, which is more than co-operation but more complex than mathematical oneness'[24]. Marriage provides a very practical and concrete example and experience of how individually distinct people can become one as their marriage develops. Personal experience or personal observation confirms how often couples 'grow together' so that, although they remain clearly two individuals, yet they also have what might be called a unified persona where 'we' means 'I', where husband and wife are becoming husband-wife. In this persona, a common mind is formed, not by the imposition of one partner's beliefs on the other but by 'the harmonising in love and with love of each other's wills'[25].

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[23] Oppenheimer in NDCE 366.
[24] Oppenheimer, Marriage 60.
[25] For a fuller discussion of this point, see Oppenheimer, Marriage 61-62.

Such a relationship of unity-in-plurality is clearly extremely difficult to articulate and to understand intellectually but, for many, marriage brings experiential realisation of its meaning.[26] 'We have some acquaintance with what it means for two wills to be united while remaining two'[27]. Therefore, insofar as marriage can clarify to some extent such theological mysteries as the relationship of the three Persons of the Trinity or the Body of Christ, it provides a potent symbol of a spiritual truth. It gives expression to a union which is yet thoroughly compatible with individual distinctness. Moreover, as was the case with covenant, reflection on what lies behind the symbol - the nature, for example, of the union of Father, Son and Spirit - informs, directs and challenges, turning such divine and spiritual unions themselves into symbols/pictures of what, for Christians, the earthly union of marriage can and, perhaps, ought to be.

Secondly marriage 'stands as an arresting symbol of the relationship between Christ and the Church'[28]. This is, perhaps, the most common theologically symbolic use of marriage, prin cipally based on Ephesians 5. Its use as a symbol of a spiritual union has already been referred to but it stands also as a symbol of the nature and character of that union. It symbolises the characteristics which identify the meaning of that union. It may well be difficult to deny that Ephesians 5 appears irresistibly hierarchical, encouraging the headship (interpreted as the power, authority and domination) of husband over wife but weight must, as ever, be given to the culture and traditions prevalent at the time of writing.

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[26] Perhaps I may be allowed a very personal example on this point. From time to time in writing this thesis, I have referred to my husband's book on Discipleship. I have found it particularly difficult to put what he has said into my own words for the very reason that over 34+ years his words and mine have become difficult to separate. Which of us said what?

[27] Oppenheimer, Marriage 61.

[28] Moss, 93

Moreover, that such a notion has lasted so long (from the early Church Fathers, through sixteenth century Reformers and nineteenth century Victorians) is also because, until this century, it fitted with cultural norms and society's organisation.

However, it is important to recognise the context in which the symbol is set, namely within the Household Codes. The concern of the moment is not with these codes themselves, which will be considered in some detail later, but is rather with the characteristics deemed appropriate for the marriage relationships of Christians. These characteristics of marriage have come to be seen as concrete symbols of the relationship between Christ and the Church. In other words, one means of understanding that relationship is to look at the relationship between husband and wife. Two characteristics, in particular, stand out from this passage in Ephesians - service and mutual love.

Both of these are recurrent themes throughout this study and, therefore, do not require elaboration here. Suffice it to say that the whole tenor of this code, whatever the relationships cited (parents, children, masters), is characterised by the headline exhortation, 'Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ' (5.2). The underlined words are important since, without them, domination and subordination would come into play whereas, with them, 'the notion of subordination is transformed by the understanding of it as mutual'[29]. When husband and wife voluntarily and willingly give way to one another, where they set aside their own desires for the sake of the other, where they put themselves out in service of one another, where they support and bear each other up, carry one another's burdens, enter into each other's joys and sorrows, then their relationship may be regarded as a symbol of the relationship of Christ

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[29] Tetlow, 70.

and the Church. Such a marriage, in other words, reveals a spiritual truth - the relationship between Christ and his followers which is a relationship of self-giving love and mutual service.

Consideration has been given to the Christian view of marriage as part of God's plan and purpose and symbolic of covenant, of spiritual union and of the characteristics of the relationship between Christ and the Church and, although much more could be said on these themes, these brief comments must satisfy for the moment, not least because some will subsequently be given fuller treatment.

The sacrament of marriage.

One final view of marriage, as seen through Christian eyes, needs to be mentioned, namely, marriage as a sacrament. For the Christian, the sacramental implies both grace and faith. In simple terms, a sacrament may be called a means of grace which is made effective through faith. 'Grace is never automatic in sacrament. It needs the faith of the participant'[30]. A sacrament is an outward symbol of an inner reality. It both represents the grace of God through the earthly, the material and the physical, and makes effective that grace in and to those who accept the sacrament with faith.

For the Christian, marriage is a sacrament in this sense. 'It is both a sign' - an outward, visible, earthly and earthy sign - 'and an instrument of the presence' (and grace) 'of God'[31]. The marriage union is in itself the sacrament, the means of grace to each of the partners. The married couple, not any priest or clergy, are ministers of the sacrament to one another, are the instruments through whom God's grace is given to each. But the grace, just like the marriage bond itself, does not become effective because

30 NDSW, 812.
31 Ibid 811.

or when certain words are spoken. Effective grace requires more. It requires both a recognition of human fallibility and a recognition of the need of faith in God's grace in each partner individually. Christians enter marriage, believing that they will be ministers of the sacrament, will be a means of grace to one another. They recognise, however, their own weakness, their own lack of faith and power to be effective channels. Thus, Christian partners individually look to God both for the power and the increase of faith which are necessary in order to make their marriage a fuller sacrament, better able to be a vehicle of God's grace not only to each other but, through each of them, to other people.

The Christian Family.

Before summarising this discussion of Christian marriage, it seems sensible - and clearly necessary, given the subject of this thesis - to make some comment on the 'Christian' family. Since, as was noted earlier, the family per se was either taken for granted in Scripture or contrasted and subordinated to discipleship - a feature which provides the stimulus for this study and will, therefore, need to be discussed in greater detail below - only a few key points need be highlighted now.

Again, two preliminary qualifications seem necessary. Firstly, what was said about the phrase 'Christian marriage' applies equally here; that is, the phrase is a short-hand for a family in which there are Christians or refers to the theological view of family. Secondly, and again similar to the case of marriage, the meaning of family will vary in Christian thinking from those who consider only one particular structure as family to those who acknowledge a very wide range of structures as family. As the BSR report says, 'Because the Christian heritage has many strands and the Church exists in many institutional forms . . . it is impossible to set out a

single theology of family'[32]. However, any theological thinking about family has to take account of the many varied structures which, from time immemorial and to this day, documented in Scripture and/or acknowledged by Church and State, have been and are regarded by those belonging to them as family. Theology cannot 'ignore the sociological and anthropological evidence of different ways of organising family'[33]. It is encouraging, surely, that the Lambeth Conference ten years ago and the BSR 1996 report both acknowledge a variety of structures as family. 'What is important, at least pastorally, is not the identification of one particular structure of marriage or family as Christian'[34].

Despite these riders, however, it is likely that most 'theologies' of family would broadly agree on the following points. First, the source of all life and, consequently therefore, of family life, is God. The creation of families is part of the purpose of the creation of male and female, indeed, as we saw earlier, may be regarded as a command of God (Gen. 1.28 - 'be fruitful and multiply'). Second and consequently, families may be regarded as a gift of God, 'for the giving and receiving of love'[35]. Thus, the sexual relationship and the children produced by it are both gifts from God. Third, for theologians as for those in any other discipline, the family is a primary community. However, for Christians, the characteristics, functions and practices of this community will be governed by their understanding of God and his vision of community; that is to say, a community founded on agapaic love, reliant on divine grace and wisdom for its continuance through change and chance, and bearing witness to the transforming power of God which can restore, renew and

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[32] BSR (1996) 84.
[33] Borrowdale, Reconstructing 47.
[34] Ibid 42 and BSR, (1996) 66.
[35] BSR (1996) 84.

reconcile when relationships within the family community are damaged and broken by human frailty and sin.

Since much of the above - for example, the topic of gift and givenness and the family's witnessing function - is expanded in the final sections, it is not necessary to say more here. With these brief comments on the theology of family to add to the fuller ones on the theology of marriage, some answers may now be given to questions about 'Christian' marriage and 'Christian' families.

Conclusion

In summary, then, what have Christians to say about marriage and family life. Firstly, so-called 'Christian' marriage is human marriage and is not a different institution. Christian and non-Christian marriage both mark the initiation of a pair-bonding union. Both are given the same social, public and legal recognition. They share many of the same characteristics which identify marriage as marriage - commitment, fidelity, obligations, mutual service and altruistic love. Given their common roots and common characteristics, to distinguish between them is not easy and is made harder by the short-hand language usage which, with the term 'Christian marriage' gives an impression of a totally different relationship.

Secondly, however, having recognised the above, Christians do want to maintain that, although differences in practice may (but equally may not) be small or difficult to distinguish, yet, in matters of belief about marriage there are differences which affect and guide the practices. To begin with, marriage is believed to be part of God's plan and purpose for his creation and he is held to be the source of the human nature which calls men and women to this union. When Christians marry they enter not just matrimony but holy matrimony, that is to say, 'The Christian

believes God Himself ratifies the marriage bond and strengthens those who enter into it'[36]. Marriage, for Christians, therefore, is in some sense a sacrament, a means for God's grace to have an outward expression. God is, therefore, not only the source of marriage but the sustainer of it.

Moreover, the characteristics of both marriage and family life are viewed theologically. For Christians, the fidelity, service, love etc. practised in their married and family life are understood by reference to God and are, or at least aim to be, reflections of divine characteristics. Furthermore, insofar as they do reflect the divine, marriage especially may be regarded as a symbol - of God's covenant with his people and of spiritual relationships, for example, between Christ and the Church. Perhaps, then, in the light of this theological view of marriage, the question of whether there is such a thing as 'Christian' marriage may be answered thus - "Christian marriage is a form of human marriage which has been transformed through faith, grace and agape into a Christian reality'[37].

Thirdly, and most importantly, what really makes the difference between 'secular' and 'Christian' marriages and families is not only beliefs about these, nor even their theological significance as symbols of spiritual truths. The difference may be summed up in one word - discipleship. 'Discipleship is what makes marriage' (and family) '"Christian"'[38]. 'Marriage' (and, we may add, family) is an aspect of discipleship'[39]. Since these statements lie at the heart of this thesis, it surely goes without saying that an adequate understanding of discipleship is necessary if marriage and family life are to be understood in Christian terms. To discipleship, therefore, we now turn.

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36 Macquarrie, Theology 235.
37 Tetlow, 39.
38 Ibid 85.
39 Hays, 372.

PART TWO.

Discipleship

CHAPTER FOUR. Defining Discipleship.

The aim in Part One was to attempt to reach an understanding of what is meant by family, no easy task given the wide interpretation and variety of forms that the family has. In turning, in Part Two, to our third task, the understanding of Christian discipleship, similar questions - Who or what is a disciple? Is there a clear disciple 'type'? What does 'being a disciple' mean? What are the identity markers of discipleship? - and similar difficulties present themselves. Indeed, 'one of the most fundamental and recurring questions in the history of the Christian tradition has been the definition of Christian discipleship' [1]. To answer these questions about discipleship, it is clear that the NT - and the Gospels in particular - must be the most important source book. Indeed where else more important is there to look since these documents are the basis for the Christian faith? Moreover, herein lies both the picture of the first disciples of Jesus and also Jesus' teaching about discipleship.

At the same time, although the New Testament will provide most information, it should not be forgotten that discipleship was and is a concept known and understood outside the context of Christianity. For example, although the actual word 'disciple' is hardly used in the Old Testament, there is evidence of master/disciple relationships in the prophets (Is. 8.16, 54.13), the scribes (Ezra. 7.6,11), and wisdom traditions (Prov. 22.17, Jer. 18.18)[2]. Moreover the disciple was a well-known and understood figure in the Hellenistic world whose meaning could range 'from being the follower of a past master/thinker like Socrates, to being a

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[1] Segovia, 1.

[2] Wilkins, 'Disciples', DJG 176 for further references.

pupil of a philosopher like Pythagoras, to being the devotee of a religious master like Epicurus'[3].

In the Judaism of Jesus time, 'disciple' had a similar range of meanings. It was taken to refer to those who had, as it were, 'signed up' in allegiance to a particular leader or teacher or organisation. So, the NT gives examples of particular disciples - Mk. 2.18 refers to 'the disciples of John', Lk. 5.33, to 'the disciples of the Pharisees', and Jn.9.28 to the disciples of Moses, while Mt. 3.10 speaks of Simon, 'the Zealot', possibly indicating his discipleship of a nationalistic organisation. Paul, too, in rebuking the Corinthians, indicates that within early Christianity, the followers of Jesus had designated themselves as disciples in a particular 'school' - 'I am Paul's man; I am for Apollos; I follow Cephas' (1Cor. 1.12).

Throughout history and to this present day, the concept is a familiar one for it has been and is the basis of all craft apprenticeships. Wherever the school, whatever the craft to be learnt, whoever the master, a disciple is shown to be 'a follower of, an adherent, a student of a great master'[4]. Disciples attach themselves to another whom they and others consider more expert in order to learn to do and be like the master.

Who then were these first disciples? There were 'the twelve', with Peter, James and John as an inner group, who travelled daily with Jesus (the 'nuclear group', perhaps?). Then there was the much wider group of those who followed, some named, some described only as 'disciples' or 'followers' (the 'extended group', perhaps?') (cf. Mt. 10.42, 20.34, 27.57; Lk. 8.2,3, 10.13).

One thing above all, perhaps, stands out from even the most cursory glance at these first disciples as described in the NT, namely the variation in type of persons and way of life. For example, disciples who

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[3] Ibid 176.
[4] Ibid 176.

were called, according to the differing accounts of the Gospels, included the impetuous and hot-headed (Simon Peter, Jn. 18.10, James and John, 'the sons of Thunder', Mk. 3.17), the pragmatic and practical (Philip, Jn. 6.8, and Martha of Bethany), the brave and the doubter in one person (Thomas, Jn. 11.16 and 20.25), the disillusioned (Judas Iscariot, Jn. 12.4), the loving and caring (John, 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', Jn.19.27; and Mary Magdalene, Mt.27.61). Not only their personalities varied but so also did their way of life and position in society, - fishermen, tax-collector, housekeepers and homemakers, sinners and prostitutes, the 'respected member of the Council' (Mk. 16. 42), the student of the law (Nathanael, Jn.1.44ff), the beggars and lepers, to those who were rich, poor, good, bad, foreign, or outcast, the privileged and the insignificant (for examples cf. Mt. 8.19; Lk. 6.13.17; 8.1.2; 10.1; 23.49; Jn. 3.1).

The subsequent history of the early church as recorded by Luke in the book of Acts shows more clearly that disciples came in many shapes and forms - from many countries and backgrounds, with great variety in skills, intellectual abilities and social status. The saints throughout the ages, those who, from the day of Pentecost onwards, right up to the present day, in every age and culture, have called themselves Christian disciples, testify to the variety of peoples included in that term (cf. 1Cor.1.26ff). A disciple, still, may be male, female, married, celibate, rich, poor, established and fixed in a particular place and life-style or able to move freely from one sphere to another. 'Truly a disciple defies classification'[5].

Is this not precisely the dilemma posed when trying to define the family? Both family and disciples take so many forms that trying to pin them down brings all the dangers of narrowness and exclusiveness previously indicated (Ch.2). The solution to that previous dilemma came

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[5] Ibid 187.

from considering not the forms or structures as most significant for defining the family but instead from looking at those characteristics which expressed what 'being a family' means.

It would seem appropriate, then, to apply the same method to the subject of discipleship. Given that disciples do come and have always come in a variety of forms (indeed some might want to say that the disciples mentioned in the Gospels were not actual people but merely representative types, their purpose being to show there is no single pattern of a 'disciple'), the more productive question may well be , 'what does being a disciple of Jesus mean'? In other words, what is it that marks off this person as 'a disciple' and that person as 'not a disciple' What are the identity markers of a disciple of Jesus, the characteristics of discipleship?

CHAPTER FIVE. The Characteristics of Discipleship.

Following Jesus.

'Discipleship meant first and foremost following Jesus'[1]. 'The rule of discipleship is Jesus - as Jesus was so the disciple must be'[2]. 'At its heart it' (i.e. discipleship) 'is the imitatio Christi'[3]. These quotations sum up the basic nature of Christian discipleship, the second and third answering the unspoken question arising from the first, namely, 'what does following Jesus mean'?

In very general terms what is meant is that the disciple of Jesus, having chosen to be his disciple, was expected to imitate the master. This certainly involved passing on his teaching but also meant actually living it out as he did. This was and is no unknown concept. Learning, any learning, comes not only from watching, listening and questioning the master but from doing what the master does. This is the raison d'être of all craft apprenticeships whether disciples in the school of Jesus ben Sira, the school of Michelangelo or Luther or Keynes or Leavis or even just Mrs. Smith, the local headteacher. But, whereas disciples, learners, apprentices would hope one day to be masters themselves, for Christian disciples there is and can never be any other master than Jesus. This belief stemmed from the recognition of the person of Jesus himself as well as from the realisation that only through Jesus (by means of the Spirit) is the latter day disciple able to follow him. The Christian disciple saw Jesus as different from any other teacher and master. This is true not only for Jesus during his earthly life when he was clearly Master but even more so when he was risen and their 'Lord'. The concept of discipleship continues

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[1] Dunn, J., Call 105.
[2] Best, 3.
[3] Rausch, 282.

through the cross and resurrection. Thus Acts 6.2 refers to 'the twelve calling together the whole community of disciples'. Indeed throughout Acts, from the account of Pentecost onwards, the disciples are not only those who have followed Jesus during His earthly ministry but are also those who are followers of the risen Jesus. The recognition of Jesus as risen Lord (Rom. 10.9-10) was fundamental in the decision to become a disciple. Such a declaration led to the realisation that Jesus must remain always the master and the disciple always a disciple. Moreover, although the disciple would pass on the teaching of Jesus, would, through millenia, interpret that teaching in many different ways, would create creeds, traditions and institutions from his teaching and passion, it was the *following* of a person, the imitation of the life of that person which was the fundamental mark of Christian discipleship.

It needs to be borne in mind, however, that imitation need not mean copying. The worlds of art and theatre are reminders of this. Painters in the school of Raphael, actors in the school of Joan Littlewood, while modelling themselves on the master, bring to their work their own personal gifts and skills and creativity. They do not aim to make every brush stroke or tone colour, every gesture or voice inflexion an exact copy. So it is and must be for the Christian disciple. The imitatio Christi cannot be an exact imitation of the life-style of the historical Jesus, although some of the early ascetics - Bernard and Francis - and some still today, do try to match that life-style as far as possible. Paul, writing to the Corinthians (1Cor.11.1) invites disciples to be 'imitators' but nowhere does he clearly refer to the historical life-style of Jesus. Although many scholars have questioned whether there was an idea of 'imitatio Christi ' in the NT and particularly in Paul, since he says so little about Jesus apart from his death

and resurrection, the claim still has considerable substance[4]. Luke's Gospel, for example, portrays Jesus as a man of prayer, surely something to be imitated, Rom. 15.1-3 cites Jesus' conduct in regard to self and neighbour as something worthy of imitation, and Phil. 2.5 counsels, 'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus'. However, 'an imitation of Christ that imitates first century ideas of history and nature is no more demanded than an imitation of the contemporary Galilean diet and clothing of Jesus'[5]. The imitatio Christi might be summarised thus: for the Christian disciple, it is Christ who provides the model to imitate; it is Christ-likeness which is the goal of the imitation; and it is the Spirit of Christ who makes the imitation possible (2Cor. 3.18).

However, in seeking to imitate Christ (in NT terms), the Christian disciple can only find a very general picture. There are no specific commands about a particular life-style. Two things are there, however. Firstly, there is the teaching of Jesus about the principles and characteristics which mark out the disciple as a disciple - love your neighbour (Mt. 22.39); seek first the kingdom of God (Mt. 6.33) - and, secondly, in Jesus' own behaviour, there is the example and model of how to put these principles into practice. Given that the NT deals in generalities rather than specifics, we may read the Gospels as 'lives of Christ for potential disciples'[6], and having established that discipleship is, at its most fundamental, imitating Christ, is it possible, at least to pick out those characteristics/markers which identify a disciple of Christ? It is to

[4]Although 1Pet. 2.21 is regarded as the classic text on the imitatio Christi, it is less relevant for this thesis since it concerns the example of suffering.
[5] Tinsley, 208.
[6] Tinsley, 293.

the NT we must turn for the answer and within it that these identity markers will be found[7].

It is our intention, as it was in considering what it means to be family, to select what appears to be the most prominent and repeated characteristics of discipleship, those markers which seem to express what 'being a disciple' means, which define the very nature of discipleship. Commitment, service, and altruistic love all appear to be basic to Christian discipleship and, therefore, call for particular attention.

Commitment.

Throughout the NT and particularly in the Gospels, we read of 'crowds' following Jesus. This was a somewhat motley crew who had many varying purposes for following. Some came to hear Jesus' teaching (Mt. 5. 1,2) or for healing (Mt. 4.24; 8.1-17); some came to cheer and praise him (Mt. 21.9,11), to wonder at or deride him (Mt.9.33; 13.55; Lk.23.21). But not all of these were disciples. Their 'following' was a physical act. They literally went where Jesus went but their minds and hearts were not necessarily also 'following'. John, in 2.23-25 and 6.66-68 makes a clear distinction between an inadequate faith and genuine commitment. The Gospels, then, distinguish those who literally followed from disciples by using the term 'crowd'. It was this crowd, however, from whom Jesus gathered his disciples. Indeed the very purpose of his teaching and healing ministry was to change members of the crowd into disciples. How did that change come about? When might a member of the crowd become a disciple? The change came with understanding followed by commitment (Lk.24. 31; Jn. 11. 27, 45.)

[7] Since this is not a NT study as such, it is neither necessary nor possible to go into detailed analysis of the texts cited. This can be found, e.g. in Barton, Discipleship.

It was understanding, at least in part, who Jesus is and what discipleship means which provided a reason for commitment. The meaning of commitment, already discussed (Ch.2) need not be repeated here. Suffice it to say, that, for Christian disciples, commitment to Jesus, commitment to the discipleship of Jesus, means entering a new relationship, means identifying themselves as his followers by agreeing to a particular way of life. That is to say, there is commitment both to a person and to a way of life. Thus, the women, who are described frequently as 'with' Jesus, are not merely part of the crowd but committed disciples who show their commitment, for example, in identification with him at the cross and in their desire and attempt to anoint his body (Lk. 23. 49, 55). In the earliest Christian mission, discipleship began with baptism, baptism 'in the name of Jesus' (Acts 2.38). The phrase is probably an idiom from commerce, meaning to make over to the possession of the one named (cf.1Cor 1.12-14). And the ceremony itself would involve a public statement of changed allegiance with significant social and ethical corollaries - a similar effect to that of a public marriage ceremony. Disciples were called 'believers' because they 'believed into Jesus' (literally), that is, committed themselves to him as disciple or slave to Lord.

Commitment, then, it may be said, is a characteristic of discipleship, is part of what it means to be a disciple. Identification with Jesus and commitment to the way of life he both advocates and makes possible is what marks off a 'disciple' from a 'non-disciple', from the 'crowd' who also followed. Thus, it can surely be claimed that 'one of the pre-requisites of discipleship (is) committing oneself to the cause'[8].

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[8] DJG, 177.

Service.

Both Jesus' life and his teaching put great emphasis on service as an essential characteristic of discipleship. Indeed it is rightly said that 'Jesus' ministry is characterised as service'[9]. To get a clearer picture of this characteristic, it may be useful to pick out and comment, in a general way (for this is not an exegetical exercise), on some specific Gospel passages. All the Gospel writers point to this aspect of Jesus' ministry, in the recorded incidents of his life and in the sayings attributed to him. Let us consider, then, Jesus' teaching on service. Sometimes the teaching is direct and didactic, sometimes hidden in parables, sometimes demonstrated in practice, but taken together these texts may, hopefully, provide a clearer picture of the service expected from Christian disciples in the beginnings of Christianity.

Mk. 9. 33-37 and 10. 35-45 are clear examples of Jesus' direct teaching in this area of discipleship. These passages may be said to contain the heart of Jesus' teaching on service (and it may well be of note, as pointed out by Wilkins, that they also occupy 'a crucial position within the larger [discipleship] section of 8.27-10.45'[10]). However, in order to understand what Jesus is saying about service, it needs to be remembered that Jesus' over-riding message is about the kingdom of God. To those first disciples, 'kingdom' implied authority, power and dominance over others. This was quite understandable given that this was their experience of the world in which they lived and which was also testified to by Jesus himself. They knew about 'rulers who lorded it over them' (Mk.10.42). They knew about 'scribes having the best seats at synagogues and places of honour at banquets' (Mk. 12.38). Their experience of authority and power and greatness was so earth-bound, so this-worldly, that they could not conceive

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[9] Tetlow, 23.
[10] DJG, 184.

of these things in any other terms than that of the dominance and lordship over others manifested in the kingdoms of this world, and certainly not in terms of service and servanthood, despite the fact that care and concern for the poor and needy was a long standing tradition and part of the Jewish moral code.

There was, therefore, a very deeply held (and probably ingrained) belief that in any kingdom there would be, <u>must</u> be, a hierarchical system where some held positions of power and authority. Thus, as members of Jesus' kingdom, these first disciples assumed they would be that privileged group with a special position in the kingdom (Mk.10.35). It is in order to correct this false assumption that Jesus explains how different is his kingdom. 'The distinctive mark of those who belong to the kingdom of God will be the rejection of power in favor (American) of service to one another'[11]. The request of James and John, therefore, for a position of privilege and authority is totally inappropriate. It is non-applicable to the kingdom of God for no such position is available. Rather, says Jesus, the position of the members of God's kingdom will be much more akin to the position of a child (Mt. 18.3; Mk. 9. 35).

'At a metaphorical level it (Mt.18.3; Mk.9.35) identifies children as a model for discipleship'[12]. In what respect is this so? Although Carter brings out a number of respects, for example, dependency and subordination, one has particular relevance here. Amongst other children, each child has an equality with others. None is more important or more valuable than another. None holds an authoritarian role over another. In status, they are all the same. Thus, when Jesus exhorts the disciples to receive the kingdom 'as a little child', he invites them to

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[11] Ibid 749.
[12] Carter, 90.

'participate in an egalitarian not hierarchical way of life'[13] and to serve others, not in power and domination but in humility (Mk. 10.44,45).

Matthew 6.24 and Luke 16.13 are reminders of what was known in the time of Jesus and is known from personal experience today. Many things and/or people demand our loyalty; loyalties constantly conflict; and, above all, divided loyalties are not really possible, are almost a contradiction in terms. Commenting on the Matthean passage, D. Hagner points out that there were cases of slaves having two masters (e.g. brothers). In such a situation, conflicting loyalties must have been a constant difficulty. 'Where there is an attempt at shared ownership, there is failure'[14]. Compromise would, no doubt, have been often necessary. Yet Jesus' message to his disciples is clear and uncompromising: 'the slave with two masters can do justice to neither'[15]. Those who choose to serve God are expected to be totally loyal and committed to the service of God and none other. There can be no compromise, no half and half service, no 'partial or part-time'[16] discipleship. Nothing or no-one can expect the Christian disciple's primary service, Jesus seems to say (although see Part Three). Loyalty is not only important but essential, indeed part of the very nature of the service demanded by the discipleship.

A brief glance at the parables recorded in Mt. 24.45-51 and in Luke 12.42-46 adds another dimension to the kind of service expected of disciples. Both parables emphasise the conduct of servants (disciples). In the parables, the servant is expected to do the work appointed by the master (Mt. 24.44; Lk. 19.13); to keep on doing it (Mt. 24.45) even although the master is absent and his return is uncertain or unknown and although there are temptations to do other things (Mt. 24.49) or to do nothing (Lk.

13 Ibid 91.
14 Morris, 155.
15 Hagner, 155.
16 Ibid 160.

19.20). In other words, the servant is to be trustworthy. Jesus, by means of these stories confirms his teaching that the service which characterises discipleship is faithful service rendered by a servant/disciple who can be trusted.

Throughout his teaching and particularly in Matthew's description of the last days when all will be judged, those who are deemed 'blessed', 'fit' to inherit the kingdom are those who have shown their service of God in practical actions (Mt. 5.16,41,42; 10.7,8; 25.31-46). Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for those in any kind of need - in sickness or loneliness - giving time to outcasts and strangers, this is the kind of service expected of disciples. Discipleship is to be not only a matter of head and heart but of hand also (Mt.10.8). In the words 'you did it to one of the least' there is again a reminder that service is not about doing good to those who can return that goodness. It is about caring for those who need care (Mt. 9.16); it is ultimately about serving Jesus himself and those whom he considers his brothers and sisters in humility and with no thought of personal and immediate reward (Mt. 6.4).

Thus, it is surely clear from the teaching of Jesus, not only that service is an integral part of discipleship but that the expected service is to be humble, loyal, faithful and practical. However it is not only in his teaching but in his very way of life that Jesus showed what serving him was to mean for his disciples. The Gospels present so many examples of practical service - the many who were healed, the lonely who were befriended (Zaccheus), the outcasts who were welcomed - but one in particular, perhaps, exemplifies much of what has been already said and so deserves particular comment.

John 13.1-17, the account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet, is the passage in question. It must be said immediately that the two main interpretations of this passage - as an action prophesying and symbolising

Jesus' death and/or an example of service - are acknowledged[17]. However it is the interpretation of it as an example of service which has special significance for us here.

The act of foot-washing, of course, was not in itself an odd feature in the culture of Jesus' time, nor was it was an extremely lowly and degrading task. Children washed their parents' feet, wives their husbands', slaves their masters', not necessarily in servility, but in love and respect.

Given the background to this action, two significant features stand out in John's account. Firstly the foot-washing occurred after, not before, the meal. It is surely not inconceivable that the point here is to draw attention to the action by placing it at such an unexpected point in the proceedings. What was being done was being highlighted by when it was being done. Its timing 'stopped the show' and forced awareness and thought about what was being done and said. Which of the prophetic, sacramental or exemplar purposes were the more important in the action is not for discussion here but that the action was significant is surely emphasised by the unexpectedness of the timing of it. In other words, this action was of great importance for the disciples of Jesus, not only to understand but also to copy.

Secondly, it is significant that it is Jesus himself, acknowledged rightly by the disciples to be their 'Teacher and Lord' (v.13) who washes their feet. Here is Jesus' practical demonstration of the reversal of roles and values in his kingdom, where becoming like children (who amongst other things wash their parent's feet) is required (Mt. 18.3; Lk. 12.37; 22.27).

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[17] For fuller discussion see e.g Brown. R. E., 558ff. It is inappropriate to consider the historical value of the Johannine traditions. What matters is the way in which the Gospels present Jesus' teaching in this theme.

But how does this account illumine our search to understand the kind of service that marks discipleship? Despite the debate about whether the event actually happened, there appears to be general agreement that this was an illustration of the kind of service which marked a person as a disciple. It was a practical demonstration of what Jesus taught, for example in Lk. 22.27 - 'I am among you as one who serves' (also Mt. 20.27-28; Mk. 10. 42-45). Here is an example of the nature of service required. As has been noted before, the Gospels give a broad and general picture of the kind of service basic to discipleship and not specific actions. Although throughout the ages some have taken this action literally and some do it now during a Maundy Thursday service, 'the majority of Christians from the beginning seem to have felt that what Jesus was commanding was an imitation of the spirit of the foot-washing'[18]. The execution of the teaching needs must be appropriate to a particular age, culture and individual.

The foot-washing account serves to emphasise what we have already seen in Jesus' teaching, namely that the disciples of Jesus are required to be humble, to carry out acts of love and devotion, to put themselves out for others by doing more than is required or expected of them. 'Jesus' action', says Bultmann, 'is an example binding on his disciples'.[19] Moreover, the very fact of their discipleship, indeed the proof of it is in this kind of service. John's Gospel in the following chapters (13.34; 15.12.) goes on to emphasise that service is an integral part of being a disciple of Jesus. There is what D. M. Smith calls 'an indissoluble connection between theology and ethics' and so ' the realising of faith (and

[18] Ibid 558.
[19] Bultmann, 475.

we would want to say also 'of discipleship') 'belongs to the essence of faith' (and discipleship)'.[20]

One final point about the service required of disciples, seen both in the account of the foot-washing but perhaps also in Jn. 12 in the account of the anointing of Jesus' feet. This service is mutual service. Indeed Jesus says to Peter, 'If I have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet' (v.14), and continues (vs. 34-35) to emphasise the point that disciples are required to love and care for one another. None is to be only a giver (of love and service) but is to be also a receiver. It is clear from the account that the disciples, Peter in particular (vs. 6-8), found it difficult to accept the role of recipient of Jesus' action, to accept this role-reversal. And many Christian disciples from then till now have found it hard to accept help/service from others since so doing seems an acknowledgement of weakness, need and vulnerability. But Jesus may be said often to set just such an example before his disciples.

The account of the anointing of Jesus feet in Jn.12 may be interpreted in that light. Although its primary meanings and usual interpretations suggest this event anticipates Jesus' burial or, according to C. K. Barrett, is a proclamation and recognition of Jesus' kingship,[21] Bultmann brings out what he, probably rightly, considers 'the original point, namely the extravagant act of love' of a disciple for the Master.[22] Did Mary understand or intend her action to be prophetic? Very probably not. Jesus certainly used it as a teaching point but more importantly he accepted it for what Mary intended it to be, something she wanted to do, a service she wanted to perform as an expression of her love, her gratitude and her discipleship. Jesus received the washing of his feet as well as

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[20] Smith, 217.
[21] Barrett, 341.
[22] Bultmann, 415.

washed the feet of others. Throughout his life, ministry and even death, Jesus received the service of others - hospitality in homes, water when thirsty, a boat from which to preach, a donkey to ride, a bearer of his cross and a tomb in which to be buried. Mutuality, therefore, also characterises that service which is at the heart of Christian discipleship.

The amount of space given to this element of discipleship shows its importance as an identity marker. Yet service, although so prominent in Jesus' teaching, is not the most basic characteristic. What above all marks a disciple of Christ is love. Love is the foundation on which discipleship is built, the well-spring from which service, loyalty, commitment all spring. Such is the importance of this identity marker of discipleship that it warrants a fresh chapter.

CHAPTER SIX. The Primary Characteristic - Love.

A very few words summarise the nature of the love expected of Christian disciples. It is love 'just as I have loved you' (Jn.13.35). Here again, the followers of Jesus are given clear teaching and a practical example of how to love. It perhaps goes without saying that love, although very crucial in all religions and for many individuals who count themselves non-religious, is of supreme importance in the Christian tradition. Indeed it may be regarded as its very foundation since Christianity is surely, above all, about the revelation of the love of God. For Christians, it is God's love which is revealed both in the creation of a 'good' world (whose crown is humankind made in the image of God. Gen.1.31) and also in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Jn. 3.16, Rom. 5). Even more important, however, than the Christian claim about the revelation of God's love in Christ, is the proclamation, as in 1Jn. 4.8., that 'God is Love'. That is to say, 'He is the source, the way, the fulness of love' [1]. Ubi caritas ibi Deus est.

Love, then can be seen as a major theological principle for Christian disciples. But it is so much more than a principle. It is, for example, a catalyst for discipleship. Barth believed that 'without love for Jesus, there can be no following of Jesus'[2]. Love sparks off discipleship. An individual's declaration of love for Jesus initiates discipleship and continuing love for him sustains discipleship. Furthermore, it is the recognition of love, the love of God in action, creating and redeeming which provides disciples with reasons to love Jesus in the first place. 'We love him because he first loved us' (1Jn. 4.19). Thus, love motivates the disciple.

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[1] Dreyer, 620.
[2] Burnaby, 357.

One other point should be re-iterated to show the importance of love in Christian discipleship. Not only is love a theological principle, a catalyst, a motive for discipleship, it is also the demonstration of discipleship. 'By this shall everyone know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another' (Jn. 13.35). 'There can be little doubt that the fourth Gospel (and John's Epistles also) presents love as the primary characteristic of the true disciples of Jesus'.[3]

Meanings of Love.

What, then, is this love which is so inextricably part of Christian discipleship? The inadequacy, at times, of the English language is, perhaps, no more clearly evident than in the word 'love'. The Greeks could do better with their ability to distinguish between different kinds of love - eros, philia, agape. Unfortunately, in Christian thought, these came to be seen as having hierarchical positions - eros below philia below agape - and/or as being totally distinct, even contrary or irreconcilable. Indeed, 'Christianity harbours a suspicion about earthly love (eros) and friendship (philia)'[4], seeing them as forms of selfishness. But recognition and acknowledgement of the unity of mind, body and spirit, of a more 'holistic anthropology'[5], has led to an understanding both of the interconnection of eros, philia and agape and to the multi-faceted nature of love. Nevertheless, it may yet be useful to consider these different facets of love separately in order to get a fuller picture of what is contained in the meaning of the word and how the differing elements fit together.

a) Eros has often had, as it were a bad press, being seen as selfish, seeking its own satisfaction and pleasure. For example, Nygren would

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[3] Tetlow, 113.
[4] Williams, 200.
[5] Dreyer, 614.

want to maintain that 'eros is always ego-centric, pursuing a good for self'.[6] Yet is this not an unfair, even wrong, interpretation of the word eros? Yes, eros, is a desirous love. It is a great longing for something or someone. But this great desire, longing, passion even, need not necessarily be selfish. For Plato and the Greeks, eros was the desire for beauty and goodness, for a variety of virtues. For Augustine and Aquinas, their eros was a deep desire for union with God. There may indeed be a sense in which it might be said that even God's love is 'erotic'. In his desire to create man in his own image and in his passion to restore that image, is it not eros which moves him to act? How otherwise are we to explain the canonical status of the Song of Solomon or the frequent use of marriage imagery both in the OT (e.g. Is. 62.4,5) and the NT (e.g. Eph. 5.25-32) to describe the relation between God and his people and between Christ and his Church?

What these examples surely show is that eros is not in essence selfish. It is outward not inward looking. Eros 'moves us towards another', 'directs us beyond self to other'[7]. Indeed, with eros, the other, the beloved, is seen as worthy and valuable in itself and is not regarded as a means solely to the pleasure and satisfaction of the lover. C. S. Lewis gives a positive picture of eros. He recognises the dangers in eros, that is to say, the dangers of 'fickleness and transitoriness'[8] in such love, and recognises that this love may be jealous, possessive and demanding. Yet he gives honour where honour is due to the real underlying desire to seek the good of the beloved, to be altruistic, unselfish and other-directed. Recognising that the dangers of eros are caused by flawed human nature, he acknowledges the need for the grace of God in order to let eros be truly

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[6] Burnaby, 355.
[7] Zion, 353, 351.
[8] Lewis, Four Loves 104.

free to be eros. Indeed, for Lewis, eros is 'really and truly like Love Himself, has in it a real nearness to God'[9], for it is in loving others for themselves alone that we learn and practise divine love. Without eros it is impossible to understand what love is. Thus, it is difficult to agree with Nygren that eros always pursues its own good. Eros is, surely, much more of an icon, mirroring, albeit imperfectly, the love of God. Its danger lies in the possibility of its becoming an idol which prevents and obstructs the way to loving God.

b) What, then, of philia, describing the kind of love experienced primarily as friendship[10]. Philia includes the friendship between blood relations (parents/children; spouses), between same or different sexes, between married and single. Philia is Aristotle's 'rare and infrequent'[11] friendship of the good, not the friendship of utility and pleasure.

Philia, at its most genuine, is altruistic, 'actively promoting another person to be most fully their own self'[12]. Is this not what parents primarily aim to do for their children and what spouses aim to do for one another? Philia involves obligations of care and concern for the friend, a commitment and faithfulness to the friendship, trust and loyalty to one another and, above all, an acceptance of the other as he or she is, for philia is not based on any authoritarian, hierarchical or patriarchal system but on mutual acceptance of the other for him or her self alone. Thus, a friendship between an employer and employee, a parent and child is perfectly possible (although may on occasions cause tensions) so long as the friendship does not rest on or even consider the difference in standing. In such, or any other friendship, 'a full mutuality obtains no matter how

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[9] Ibid 101.
[10] For a fuller treatment of friendship, cf. Rouner.
[11] Deutsch, 21.
[12] Ibid 27, footnote 10.

different the participatory roles'.[13] Its basis is affection and self-giving, common interests, concerns and desires. Thus, in the NT, <u>philia</u> is the term used to describe those who are connected by faith in Christ. Each has the same concern and interest in learning to be a disciple and a strong desire for Christ-likeness. The commonality of interest in discipleship and love for Christ creates and sustains a friendship amongst his followers which breaks down hierachical relationships since it is based on acceptance, altruism and mutuality.

<u>Philia</u>, like <u>eros</u>, of course, has inherent dangers, not least those of exclusiveness and preference which can lead to pride and superiority. There is an almost inevitable risk of what Moltmann calls 'closed' friendship[14], since an individual is able to decide who will be a friend and who will not and preference is given to one person over another. That preference is likely to be based on some form of like-mindedness. For Aristotle, <u>philia</u> was only possible between people who are alike in social standing, a belief stemming surely from the society and community in which he lived. Such choosing, however, inevitably leads to exclusion, to the setting up of boundaries. Some will be outside the circle, beyond the boundary of the friendship. 'Friendship', says Lewis, 'must exclude' and 'from the innocent and necessary act of excluding to the spirit of exclusiveness is an easy step.'[15]

But both Judaism and, more particularly Christianity, oppose this Aristotelian idea in their references to the people or 'friends' of God, a much wider concept and less exclusive. Indeed, Jesus was very much a 'boundary-breaker'[16], both by example and in his teaching. He ate with

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[13] Ibid 25.
[14] Moltmann, 38, 39.
[15] Lewis, <u>Four Loves</u>, 80.
[16] Dunn, J., <u>Call</u> 62-91.

tax-collectors and sinners (Mt. 11.19; Mk. 2.16; Lk. 5.29.); in a time when women were considered inferior, he had women friends (Mk. 15.40-41; Lk. 8.2; Lk. 10.38-42). Since the requirement for Jesus' friendship was the keeping of his commands, his friends inevitably would include a very diverse group of people, even those who had been/were enemies and persecutors (Mt. 5.44-45). However, the temptation to a jealously-guarded and exclusive (and thence, excluding) friendship is an ever present reality in <u>philia</u> love. The experience of the first Christians, Peter and Paul quarrelling over whether Jesus was exclusively for Jews (Gal. 2.11-16) and denominational squabbles today over who has the true gospel, bear witness to the dangers of exclusiveness.

Another danger, too, lies in the fact that <u>philia</u> is a <u>reciprocal</u> love. An individual (A) may choose to be a friend to (B) but genuine friendship (philia) does not exist between them until both A and B agree and then recognise and acknowledge their friendship. In other words, A cannot be B's friend unless B is A's friend. Such is the nature of friendship. Friendship's need for reciprocity narrows its range and sets a boundary. Only those who agree to be friends can be such.

Moreover, <u>philia</u> may suffer from wavering, inconstancy and change. Circumstances may mean a friendship, although genuine, caring, supportive at a particular time and place, withers and dies, not through any ill-will or coldness on the part of the participants but because of life-experiences or even mere geographic changes. For example, the friendships of some may survive the move of one partner to the other side of the world while in other friendships this spells the end of the friendship. This is, in part, a recognition that there are 'degrees' of

friendship from the 'just a friend' to the 'intimate' soulmate.[17] Therefore, philia is often in a changeable and unstable state.

However, as with eros, philia, too, despite some dangers, is of positive value. Indeed, for Plato, it was viewed as an 'instrument for attaining spirituality'[18] and this is surely to be considered a very worthy love. Lewis similarly maintains that 'natural love' (the love exhibited in friendship as well as in erotic, sexual love) is 'made the instrument of Love Himself'[19]. Thus, philia, like eros gives practical experience of loving. In genuine friendship, there is genuine love, the kind of love which mirrors and reflects the Divine love which Christian disciples are called on to imitate and display.

c) Finally, what of the love to which Jesus specifically calls his followers? The Greek word (rather uncommon in the language and thus more noticeable) for such love is 'agape'. Given, as Outka points out, that the search for understanding of this word has filled the minds and works of theologians from Augustine and Aquinas, through Luther and Jonathan Edwards and up to Outka himself today[20], it is inevitable that here we must deal in generalities. Agape is the word used to describe divine love and that love which is considered distinctively Christian. Thus, 'agape in the NT usually means divine love as manifested in Christ, as experienced by believers and as overflowing in their love to others'[21]. Thus, it is agape which is commanded by Jesus in the great commands to love God and neighbour (Mt. 22.33-40). It is agape (God's love) for humanity that led to Christ's death (Rom. 5.8). In 1Cor. 13, it is agape which is the subject of the hymn of praise and the model of love for

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[17] Parekh, 96.
[18] Hall & Ames, 81.
[19] Lewis, Four Loves, 122.
[20] Outka, 257.
[21] Dunn, J.,, DCS, 166-167.

Christian disciples. John goes further, both in Gospel and epistles, as we have seen, regarding agape, not just as the reason for human love towards God, nor just as the kind of love expected of disciples, and not even just as the love coming from God, but as the very nature of God. (1Jn. 4.7,16). The very distinctive characteristics of agape will be considered in a moment but perhaps its most striking difference from eros and philia lies in its unchangeability. The flame of desire and passion (eros) may burn low, may cool and be extinguished. Friendship (philia), through choice or circumstance, may wither and die. But agape (the divine love which is God himself) remains unaltered and unalterable, 'the same, yesterday, today and forever' (Heb. 13.8). Moreover, it never ends (1Cor. 13.8). In this respect it is greater than faith and hope which will become unnecessary at the end of time while love will then increase and continue for ever.[22]

It is surely clear from this understanding of agape why it is regarded as above and beyond all other love, is the most sublime, the purest form of love, of a higher order than any other love. Yet herein lies its danger. With such distinctions of value and hierarchy comes idealisation. Thus, agape becomes not only the goal to strive for (no bad goal) but also is an ideal which 'stands against our actions as the standard impossible of achievement'[23]. This latter view promotes the notion that eros and philia are to be eschewed since they fall short of the ideal. But, again, as Gudorf points out the idealisation of agape 'destroys human relationships and distorts the God/human relationship'[24]. In the regarding of agape as an ideal, we fall into the trap described by Lewis. 'The human mind wants to

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[22] Outka, 177.
[23] Gudorf, 182.
[24] Ibid 183.

make every distinction a distinction of value, being far more eager to praise and dispraise than to describe and define'[25].

These last pages have sought to describe and define love, to distinguish primarily between divine (agape) and human (eros and philia) love. But these, as was acknowledged earlier, cannot be easily separated. 'Divine love does not substitute itself for the natural'[26]. The divisions are less than helpful and are indeed inadequate for the view of the unity of body, mind and spirit in individuals. The eros desire, passion and longing for another person or for an ideal moves people towards rather than away from each other. Eros is the motivation for both philia and agape. Even at its most selfish, when it is 'inordinate love'[27], it is still love and, therefore, more acceptable to God and more reflective of God than no love at all. Philia, to a large extent, provides the practical experience of agape. Although its preferential nature is a narrowing of agape, philia is a means of learning and working out in ordinary life something of agapic love. It is this 'ordinary' (i.e. workaday, everyday) love that 'enables us to relate to what is beyond the ordinary'[28].

But what is surely clear is that each of these loves both needs God and expresses in some measure or another God's love. For God is ultimately the maker and sustainer of all love. The Christian's confession of faith is that it is only because agape, divine Love, is in us that we desire and do actively love others. Agape uses eros and philia as reflections of itself and as a means of revelation of itself. Agape's intent is both the encouragement of the virtues of eros and philia and also their transformation. The ideal of agape may be unattainable as all ideals are, but movement towards the ideal is possible. It is through eros and philia

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[25] Lewis, Four Loves 16.
[26] Ibid 122.
[27] Ibid 112.
[28] Zion, 333.

that agape becomes both a clearer ideal and a clearer reality. In other words, for Christians, no type of love is ungodly. Within every kind of love - of family and friends, 'of neighbour (near and far), of country and cosmos, in sexual, sensual and self-sacrificing love'[29] - lies the possibility of godliness. It is this fullness of love that Christian disciples are called to follow.

The Paradoxical Nature of Christian Love.

In practice, then, what is the nature of this full Christian love? Consideration of Jesus' teaching and more specifically his attitude and actions towards people will most clearly inform us about the nature and characteristics of Christian love, that love expected of Jesus' disciples. Certain characteristics appear at first paradoxical.

For example, this love is both all-embracing but at the same time specific and particular, universal and yet individual. And is this not inevitable as it reflects the love of a God who 'so loved the world that whosoever believed in him might be saved' (Jn. 3.16)? The universal love was also an individual love. The all-embracing was also specific and particular.

It was the openness and acceptance of people considered not to be within the scope of God's love which gave Jesus' ministry a distinctiveness which both attracted and alarmed. His teaching and his actions emphasised both the all-embracing characteristic of his love and its specificness. Thus, Jesus directly tells his disciples that his concern is for 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Mt. 15.24) and for 'other sheep' (Jn. 10.16), whilst by his parables, he shows his concern as Shepherd for the individual sheep (Mt. 18.12; Lk. 15.4). His call is to 'sinners' in the plural

[29] Dreyer, 622.

but his forgiveness comes to individual particular sinners - the woman who washed his feet (Lk. 7.48) and the man let down through the roof (Lk. 5. 20). Bearing in mind that 'sinner' included those considered by the Jews outside the law and, therefore, outside the covenant, Jesus' concern for sinners was not just for those who had done some wrong but was also for those who were society's outcasts.[30] His love embraced the marginalised but again manifested itself in care of specific and particular people. For example, there was Levi (Lk. 5.27), Zaccheus (Lk. 19.2), the haemorrhaging woman (Mk. 5.25), whose gender and bleeding doubly isolated her. He came for those who were 'sick and in need' (Mk. 2.17) of whom there were many, but it was Bartimaeus (Mk. 1 0.46.), Simon the leper (Mt. 8.2), Peter's mother-in-law (Mt .8.14), Jairus' daughter (Lk. 8.41) who were specifically healed, as individuals not as part of a mass healing ministry to 'the sick and needy'. Time and again, his teaching about the all-embracing nature of love is interpreted and translated into actions towards an individual, this emphasising the particularity of that love. So, the injunction to 'love your enemies and do good to those who hate you' (Mt. 5.44.) is enacted towards a Samaritan (Lk. 10.33, Jn. 4.7), to a Roman (Mt. 8.5) and to a Gentile (Mk. 7.26)

Jesus' ministry and teaching, then, surely makes clear this paradox in Christian love. It is both for all but also for each, as Methodism strongly proclaims. This is, in fact, the love that marks off, identifies the disciple of Jesus as his disciple. Whether and how a disciple may practice such love is the subject of chapters 11 and 12.

There is another paradox, however, in this love for it is both altruistic, even to the point of self-sacrifice and yet is egoistic also. It is both other-regarding and self-regarding. Eph. 5.29 and Rom. 12.3, for

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[30] Dunn, J., Call, Chap. 4.

example, suggest the rightness of self-respect and affirmation while Phil. 2.3,8 and Mk. 8.35 praise self-denial and sacrifice. But the paradox is, perhaps, most sharply posed in Mk. 12.30-31 (parallels Mt. 22.37-40; Lk. 10.25-28) and Jn. 15.12-13. Does not the former, in exhorting the love of God and neighbour as self encourage a love of self? Yet, does not the latter, in exhorting to 'love as he loved' and in describing the greatest love as laying down one's life, encourage the sacrifice of self? Moreover, the word for 'love' in the great command is 'agape', that divine love which is, perhaps, best understood as self-giving love.

It is, perhaps, worth noting at this point that, although the whole thrust of the NT (and the OT, too, in fact) is God's love for humankind, the great command is the only reference in the synoptic gospels to the love of humankind for God[31]. This command to love God and neighbour was, of course, to Jesus' hearers, in no way new. Indeed, the scribe who asked Jesus the question was fully aware of its significance (Mk. 12.32). The first part of the command, as part of the Shema (Deut. 6.5) was daily in the forefront of Jewish life. It was a call to include God in every part of one's being, 'a challenge to a comprehensive engagement with God with the total capacity of all one's faculties'[32]. This was a command which might be considered integral to the Jewish psyche.

Nor was the second part new to Jewish ears. Such a command had been inherent in Israel's ethical teaching long before Jesus' time. Various texts (Jub. 7.20; 36.7,8; Sir. 7.21) repeat the message of Lev. 19.18 to love one's neighbour[33]. But Jesus adds something new. For OT Jews, the sacrifice of self was not a command whereas Jesus' teaching and his own death suggest that self-sacrifice may have to be regarded as an inescapable

[31] Mann, 480.
[32] Nolland, 584.
[33] For fuller detail see e.g. Dunn, J. Romans.

consequence of the command to his disciples to 'love as he loved'. At the same time, understanding 'as yourself', that is, the place of self within the command to love, needs some comment since it epitomises this second paradox of Christian love.

D. D. Williams poses the question thus, 'How can the self maintain its vitality as a growing self-affirming free spirit and yet be giving itself away?'[34] How can we love self and yet renounce self? Is this paradox, rather than sacrificial love alone, Niebuhr's 'impossible possibility?'[35] In other words, what is the place of self in Christian discipleship?

How to regard the self (however that term itself is understood) has exercised philosophers, theologians and psychologists over many centuries. Much (most?) human behaviour, both good and bad, is an expression of how self is regarded. In modern times, for example, the market driven economy depends greatly on individuals having a high degree of regard for self. 'The idea that egoism is the basis of the general welfare is the principle on which competitive society is built'[36]. However, the continuing response of individuals to emergency situations throughout the world illustrates that altruism is still a powerful force.

In the matter of self-love, there has always been a spectrum of opinion about the place of self, about the rightness or wrongness of self-love and the relative virtues or otherwise of self-denial and sacrifice. Outka examines that spectrum at some length and, despite some of the probably legitimate criticisms of his stance, made by Stephen Pope, especially with regard to Outka's notion of 'equal regard', his spectrum may be profitably used.[37] His views may be summarised thus. At one end

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[34] Williams, 192.
[35] Ibid 193.
[36] Fromm, 127.
[37] This notion of 'equal regard' will be considered in Ch.11. For a summary and critique of two opposing positions on the ethics of love, see Pope, 167.

of the spectrum is the idea that self-love is 'wholly nefarious'[38] since, according to theologians throughout the ages[39], humanity is worthless, self is bad and has, therefore, to be kept in check, 'punished, humiliated'[40] and hated. This message has prevailed despite earlier traditions of Aristotle and Aquinas and the early Fathers who were more accommodating of self-love[41].

Less condemnatory is the view of the neutrality of self-love, 'not especially praiseworthy but not necessarily blameworthy'[42]. It is merely a fact of life. Normal living requires us to be concerned for ourselves, for our health and well-being. Such care and concern need not be either selfish or greedy, and is unlikely to be blameworthy and even less likely to be evil. Rather it is merely sensible and 'prudent'.[43] Moreover, understanding and having regard for one's own interest gives the knowledge of how to love others. In other words, self-love becomes the paradigm for equal regard of others'[44], enables us to do as we would be done by.

Next on the spectrum is the view that self-love and self-benefitting behaviour is justified, good and right if the reason for it is the welfare of others. Mt. 25.15ff, the parable of the talents, suggest one aspect of this. An individual has gifts, skills, capacities which may be used in the service of others. Thus, developing one's own capabilities, protecting and caring for oneself, even, at times, putting oneself first become, by this reasoning, justifiable exercises if others gain by our so doing. Consider, for example,

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[38] Outka, 56.
[39] See, for example, Augustinian traditions, some ascetics, Protestant Reformers like Calvin and, in this century, Nygren.
[40] Fromm, 120, footnote 2.
[41] Gudorf, 182 footnote 9.
[42] Outka, 63.
[43] Ibid 63,64. See also Pope, 169.
[44] Ibid 64.

carers within families (whether a parent, especially a mother, caring for children or an adult child caring for aging parents). For those in such or similar circumstances, concern for their own well-being, looking after themselves is vital in order to be fit and well to care for their charges. Failure to do so may lead to they themselves becoming worn out and a burden rather than a help to others. Outka sums it up thus, 'the agent (self) may also be obligated to look after his own welfare: negatively, in order not to burden others and positively, in order most effectively to further their good'[45]. The welfare of others justifies and validates, therefore, self-love and self-regard.

The opposite end of the spectrum from where we began - self-love is bad - maintains, not only that self-love may be justifiable but that it is a positive obligation. One has a duty to love oneself. Humanist and Christian ethicists alike seem to agree on the value of self-regard although for different reasons. Fromm, for example, maintains that 'self-love and the affirmation of the truly human self are the supreme values of humanistic ethics'[46]. Since the most usual and most virtuous reason for loving others is not an egoistic one (i.e. the hedonistic paradox not withstanding) but is rather along the lines of 'I care about others because they are human beings', then love of self must be equally virtuous since I am also a human being. Indeed the humanist, Fromm, maintains that the scriptural command, 'to love neighbour as self', is a recognition and reiteration of his own belief that 'respect for one's own integrity and uniqueness, love for and understanding of one's self, cannot be separated from respect for and love and understanding of another individual'[47].

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[45] Outka, 69.
[46] Fromm, 7.
[47] Ibid 129.

For many Christians, Bultmann included, these same words do, indeed, indicate a pre-supposition of self-love[48]. Self-love could, thus, be regarded as part of God's command. But the Christian belief in the rightness and virtue of self-love stems, not just from a particular interpretation of the great command but more from a larger, wider, more theological view of self. For the Christian, the reasons for loving oneself are rooted in an understanding and view of self from the standpoint of God. Stephen Pope's summary of Vacek's work Love, Human and Divine, puts it in a nutshell. ' Divine love provides the context for understanding the moral status of human love . . . love for God generates an expansion of caring to include all those people whom God loves'[49], that is, includes my self. The biblical message from the beginning emphasises the importance of the individual and, indeed, is the story of God's love and care for individuals Both OT and NT are full of references showing his love. Mt. 10.31, 'you are of more value than many sparrows' could be taken as a summary of them all. Above all, the Christian belief that 'while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5.8), gives the fullest justification for valuing the self. If God in Christ considers each individual so valuable that he is prepared to die, then, how can valuing of self be unjustified or wrong? The task of reconciling varying interpretations of scripture, to which we alluded earlier, with regard to the worthlessness or otherwise of self is a task too immense - and irrelevant - to the present study. However, the question may arise again, 'what is this self which God cares about and values? Is it that 'true self', according to Thomas Merton, where agape holds sway or is it the 'false self' where sin abounds[50]. Surely, the love of God makes no such distinction nor can

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48 Outka, 64.
49 Pope, 182.
50 Conn, NDCS 874.

distinction be made since both 'selves' are part of one warring whole (Rom. 7.21-24) while we remain in this body on earth. Indeed, it is God's love for the 'false self' which led to Christ's death and his love even to death which redeemed the 'true self'.

Although the concern of the previous paragraphs has been to show that self-love, self-regard, is promoted as a virtuous ethic by both humanists and Christians, it should be noted also that, psychologically, self-love is vital for the wholeness of the personality. It is not our intention nor is it necessary or possible to pursue this theme at length, although it will be referred to later. Suffice it to say for the moment, that self-love can be, from both a humanist and Christian point of view, an acceptable form of love.

Two false assumptions.

But, if self-love can be justified, why is it yet seen as a Bad Thing? Such a notion stems from two, separate but intertwined, false assumptions which may be summarised as follows. Firstly, self-love has been made equal/synonomous with selfishness and, secondly, self-love has been seen as an alternative to self-denial.

The first assumption, equating self-love with selfishness is not an uncommon error. However, it is a dangerous error since selfishness is probably universally regarded as more of a vice than a virtue. Selfishness implies having one's own way, getting what one wants, satisfying one's own ambitions, considering only oneself and all at the expense of or with no regard for other people. It is seen as a thoroughly nasty trait to be discouraged from earliest childhood ('Don't be selfish; let her play with your truck') and fought against through life. But the very phrase, 'Don't be selfish', has become what Fromm calls 'a most powerful ideological

tool'[51] for establishing the belief that unselfishness is a moral duty which everyone must obey. Moreover, only actions which call for submission, even sacrifice of self can be regarded as unselfish. On such reasoning, it may be logically possible to say that loving self is indeed selfish.

Yet, is it right that selfishness and self-love are the same? Here the psychoanalysts can be of help. Their experiences seem to show that many who do try to be totally unselfish, who give themselves ceaselessly for others (as in the examples mentioned earlier), do not necessarily find happiness in their lives nor satisfaction in social relationships. Indeed, the very opposite may be the case, with depression and tiredness resulting from their continual unselfishness. And yet, such is the force and power of the 'Don't be selfish, be unselfish' message, that people cling on to the unselfish actions, not only as a source of pride, but, perhaps also, as evidence, a proof to themselves, that they are good, worthy, valuable individuals. They are justified by their works, as Paul and Luther might say. The self-giving is a means to valuing self but it does not actually appear to work. The unselfishness which constantly ignores self actually is part of the cause of much unhappiness and dissatisfaction and is often counter-productive to the intention of the unselfish actions. So, for example, the father who works all hours, tirelessly and selflessly, intending to provide the best for his wife and children, may find his intention thwarted or proved misguided by the resulting damage to loving family relationships. The conclusion may surely be drawn that, far from self-love and selfishness being synonomous, they are, in fact, opposites. Selfishness is not the valuing of self but its devaluing, is not a loving of self but, at the very least is an ignoring of self and, at worst, even a hating of self. As Fromm says, 'selfish people are incapable of loving

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[51] Fromm, 127.

others but they are not capable of loving themselves either'[52]. Whatever the source of this incapacity to love self, whether stemming from the deeply ingrained prohibition against it, coming from particular theological traditions or from societal or cultural practices or just from parental or authoritarian disapproval, it is increasingly clear from psychological studies that lack of self-love, may, if it leads to hating self, become pathological. Studies of anorexia have, surely, made us all aware of the dangers ensuing from lack of self-love. In such cases (anorexics) or in the less dramatic case of the workaholic parent, can it not rather be said that it is the non-self-love which is ultimately selfish? Selfishness is surely to be avoided if it is unproductive both for social relationships and for personal development. But self-love, on the other hand, is surely to be pursued since it is vital for both. In other words, in order for unselfishness to prevail, for unselfish deeds and actions to ensue, selfishness and self-love must be seen as opposites - and not synonomous.

However, if self-love does not mean selfishness, what does it mean? Loving self is less about fulfilling one's own desires and much more about recognising the value and worth of oneself, that is to say, having good self-esteem. Self-esteem is based on personal appraisal and self-judgement. People may approve or disapprove of themselves. The balance between approval and disapproval will, of course, vary on different occasions and continual imbalance one way or the other is dangerous. Too high an opinion of self breeds arrogance, pride, a superiority complex, while too low an opinion breeds the opposite, feelings of worthlessness and inferiority. Self-love is based on a properly balanced self-esteem. Paul, writing to the Romans, describes it as 'not thinking of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think

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[52] Ibid 131.

with sober judgement' (Rom. 12.3). Thinking about self, 'soberly', recognises God's view of our worth, recognises gifts, talents, opportunities and responsibilities given to us (Rom. 12.6; 13.16b). Self-love is based on what the Bible describes as 'humility', a humility which, according to Ridley's 'Humility Chart', recognises and accepts both personal strengths and personal weaknesses, unlike pride which denies weakness and false humility which denies or rejects strengths[53].

Recognising and accepting that self-love is not a product of selfishness, but rather is a product of belief in one's own personal value and significance, enables us to acknowledge the worth of self-love per se. Self-love is, therefore, not to be disparaged but encouraged.

However, a second false assumption has meant a bad press for self-love, namely that self-love and self-denial are alternatives and, therefore, incompatible. It is impossible to love, affirm and fulfil self and also to deny self. One cannot do both. The assumption is that a choice between them is necessary. Is that really so? Must it be either/or? Can it be either/or?

The previous discussion on altruism (Ch.2) has, in a sense, answered these questions; so it is, perhaps uneccessary to repeat the arguments here. Suffice it to say that there may well need to be an acknowledgement and acceptance of the existence of the hedonistic paradox which recognises that all self-denial (or altruism) may have within it an element of self-fulfilment. There may well be, and often is, a feel-good factor, a warm glow, pleasure with self from an act of self-denial. Moreover, as we concluded earlier, concern for others, 'conduct aimed at the good of others'[54], has become part of human nature (partly as a

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[53] Ridley, 1132.

[54] Macquarrie, NDCE 19.

survival mechanism). The genes may indeed be selfish but, paradoxically, altruism is the way to fulfil that selfishness.

But it does not follow that, because humans do behave altruistically a great deal of the time, this behaviour is an alternative to self-love. This fallacy that self-love/self-fulfilment and self-denial are alternatives comes from that tendency, noted earlier, to impart a value or create a hierarchy instead of simply describing. Such thinking allows us, indeed compels us to say, self-fulfilment is less important, lower down the scale than self-denial. Self-denial and self-sacrifice are 'better' than self-love. Much of scripture seems to support this view. In particular, as recorded in the Gospels, Jesus' teaching (Mk. 8.35; Lk. 14.26) emphasises the value and importance of self-denial for his followers. For example, there are Jesus' words to the would-be disciples to endure hardship (Lk. 9.58), to abandon secure jobs (Mk.1.18, 2.14), to leave home and families (Lk. 18.29) and to the rich young ruler, to give up his cherished possessions (Lk. 14.33). Supremely, of course, there is the example of the ultimate self-sacrifice of Jesus himself. Above all, Jn. 15.13 makes the most clear and unequivocal statement about the place of self-sacrifice. This leaves no doubt, surely, as to the superiority of self-sacrificial love. Moreover, the purpose of this self-sacrifice is, also undoubtedly, the well-being of others.

However, as always, the context of these words is important. The words were spoken as part of what are known as 'the Final Discourses' in John's Gospel, part of Jesus' last words to his disciples, words intended by the Johannine Jesus both to help them make sense of his own impending death and also to understand the meaning of their own discipleship. But, although this may indeed be the primary purpose of these words, may they not also serve as an illustration, a further example, a re-emphasising of other parts of Jesus' teaching? For again as always, Jn. 15.12 needs to be viewed alongside other texts to give a fuller picture.

So, for example, Mk. 8.35 with its parallels in Mt. 10.39 and Lk. 9.25 speaks of 'losing life and (yet) gaining it'. It needs to be remembered here that some of the first readers and hearers of Mark's Gospel may have been persecuted. These words of Jesus came to them as a reminder that such trials had been his and would be theirs because of him. His words came also as an encouragement and promise that, as he had gained life by losing it, so would they. But, the promise of life again after its loss went beyond the actual experience of Jesus and the first disciples of physical death. Is not Jesus referring to new life in the kingdom of God, that kingdom which, according to Jesus, is here and now? Thus, the losing and gaining of life can happen and may be expected to happen in the here and now since this 'life' is not merely a reference to life in the physical body.

Indeed, making sense of such an apparently contradictory statement as Mk. 8.35 requires an understanding or acknowledging of the two separate meanings of 'life'. There is the physical bodily life and the spiritual 'inner' life, similar to the separation between the true and the false 'self'. Just as in abandoning selfishness, a truer, more fulfilled self is found, so, if not in the abandoning, then at least in the 'sitting loose' to physical and material well-being, an enriched life, life in all its fullness may be found. Here again is the 'already' but 'not yet' situation which is part and parcel of the salvation story - 'we are saved, we are being saved, we will be saved'. We lose life daily through the sacrifice of our old selfish self and we gain life daily through the renewal of our new self[55]. In other words, losing and gaining life refers to a continual, daily, here and now experience, not just to physical martyrdom and the hoped for resurrection after death which was the lot of many of the early Christians. And this is clearly recognisable in daily, personal experience. It is most

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[55] This is more fully elaborated in Paul's theology e.g. 2Cor. 4.77-18; see Dunn, J., Theology 18.

often in the giving of ourselves that personal fulfilment and enrichment are found. Indeed, it is often in the very taking of risks, in putting one's own security or reputation on the line, perhaps even in behaving in what might appear a foolhardy or dangerous fashion, that the fuller life is gained. Clinging on desperately to security, always playing safe, are really forms of saving life and, more often than not, they lead to a stifling and loss of real living. The importance of the physical sacrifice of the body, as emphasised by Jn. 15.13, needs, therefore, to be viewed in the light of Jesus' wider teaching and in the context of the Gospels' first readers. Not all are called to be martyrs but all are called to die to self and to live to Christ.

Other texts, too, in particular Mt. 19.29; Mk. 10.29 and Lk. 18.30, refer to 'rewards' and 'gains' while Jn. 12.24 describes metaphorically the fruitfulness and 'profit' from death. These statements again seem to suggest that self-denial and self-fulfilment are not alternatives. Moreover, neither are the rewards in a future beyond death. Although Matthew fails to mention a present reward, he does, like John in 3.3-8, 6.35-39, seem to suggest that the blessings of eternal life are 'a present inheritance' of the disciple[56]. Both Mark and Luke, however, quite clearly make the point that there are gains and rewards to be had 'now in this age' (Mk.10.30). The 'tension between the present age and the age to come, between promise and fulfilment' is clear again[57]. The kingdom of God with its concomitant blessings for those who have entered that kingdom through the new birth (Jn.3.3) is already established. Yet its final completion is still to come. We still 'see through a glass darkly' (1Cor. 13.12), have only 'partial realizations of the kingdom'[58]. But, the times in our human experience when chinks of light appear in dark places - in

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[56] Albright, 234.
[57] Lane, 370.
[58] Gudorf, 188.

the rehabilitation units when one addict in a hundred kicks the habit or, in the war-torn 'Bosnias', when a soldier continues after his spell of duty, to give material support to an injured child, or in the integrated schools of Northern Ireland or South Africa when children from warring groups come to consider each other friends - provide experiences of the kingdom in the here and now.

Given, then, that self-denial brings self-fulfilment, that self-denial can, according to Jesus himself, be expected to benefit self, it is surely a fallacy to say that self-denial and self-love/self-fulfilment are alternatives. Indeed, 'the two loves, so far from being opposites appear to require the presence of each other'[59]. Moreover, one is not always better or worse than the other. Both may be good, both may be bad. 'Self-sacrifice can become too prodigal almost as readily as self-regard can become too acquisitive'[60]. In some circumstances one will be good and the other bad. At times they will be alternatives, at others they will be co-dependent and inter-connected. Thus, the love of God is seen in love of neighbour; the love and worth of neighbour is acknowledged because of the recognition of the worth of self; the worth and love of self is recognised through the understanding of the redemptive love of God. What is surely required is a balance between self-love and self-sacrifice something which, as we noted at the outset, is emphasised in the great command to love.

Transformed love.

But for the Christian disciple, the love demanded is not merely a balanced love, keeping love of self, love of neighbour, love of God in a right equilibrium. More is required. In order for this necessary balance to be maintained, a disciple's love must ultimately be transformed. How can

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[59] Outka, 70.
[60] Ibid 70.

that be done? Has not Vacek the answer - 'by prevenient grace and love to God'[61]?

Have we not, with such an answer, now come full circle? Are we not here brought back again to our initial consideration of the meaning of discipleship ? Jesus' call is, surely above all, a call to a transformed life, a radically new life. It is not primarily a call to the denial of self or the sacrifice of self but to the transformation of self. 'Be born again' (Jn. 3.3), 'become like a little child' (Mk. 10.15), 'be transformed' (Rom. 12.2.), this is the primary requirement of discipleship. The result of the transformed self is transformed love. Just as becoming a disciple involves a total transformation of self, so the love shown by that 'new creation' (2Cor. 5.17) is as radically transformed. This transformed self exhibits a transformed love which can both love self and deny self, can love God and neighbour and self and can keep these loves in proper balance.

Love so radically altered removes our original pardox. Such love will be and, indeed, must be both self-regarding and self-denying. This transformed love not only proves discipleship, since it stems from the transformed self, but also publicly identifies the disciple as a disciple.

One final brief comment (or rather reminder, since these points have been discussed more fully earlier) on the love expected of the Christian disciple which again shows the paradoxical nature of Christian love. It is both other-worldy and this-wordly, both heavenly (spiritual) and yet earthly. It has already been recognised that Christian love is agapaic since its source is God who himself is Love. Christians, therefore, within all their relationships, in all their loving, have the spark of divine love, agape. Theirs is a love transformed by the Spirit (Gal. 5.22) and so there can be no doubt that the love expected of disciples is a spiritual love.

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[61] Pope, 182.

However, it is certainly not a love which is so heavenly-minded that it is no earthly good. Scripture is full of practical teaching and practical examples of Christian love both from Jesus himself and from the first Christian communities. Many of these have already been referred to at some length in consideration of service as an identity marker of Christian discipleship. Moreover, the discussion on the great command to love God, neighbour and self re-iterates this point that Christian love is to be active and practical in the world. Paul and the other apostles in their letters continually emphasise the need for practical, down-to-earth love and the accounts of the early Christian communities in Acts surely provide sufficient evidence of how Christian love was practised among them.

In the beginning of these communities (churches), this practical love meant literally selling possessions, having all things in common and providing for the needy (Acts 2.45; 4.34-35). And, although the former became increasingly impractical as the communities grew and dispersed, still the concern for those in need continued to be a recurring message of the apostles. Indeed, before long the Jewish Christians, as a result of famine, were dependent on the newly-formed Gentile churches to provide for them (Acts 11.29-30; Rom. 15.27). Throughout Paul's letters, we find thanks for gifts received and for evidence of love in action (Phil. 4.18; 1Thess. 4.10) as well as pleas for practical aid (Rom. 12.13,20; 16.2; 1Cor. 16.1-4; 1Tim. 5.8; Titus 3.13-14) and practical love (1Cor. 16.13; 2Cor. 13.11; Eph. 5.22-6; Col. 3.4). It is worth noting how often such pleas for practical action come at the end of the epistles, deliberately, perhaps, in order to be seen as an example of how the gospel, expounded in the earlier pages, is to be worked out in ordinary, everyday living. Moreover, is not the primary message of James' letter to be active 'doers' of the 'right royal law' concerning love of neighbour (Jas. 1.22; 2.8)?

Above all, John's epistles, as we showed at the start of the discussion on love, are permeated with this message, 'Let us love in action' (1Jn. 3.18). Where there is need, there Christian love is to be exercised in practical ways, those who have 'the world's goods' helping those who lack them (1Jn. 3.17). Here is the rather more pragmatic side of John's teaching in contrast to his Gospel's seeming demand for martyrdom (Jn. 15.13). What the epistle appears to be emphasising for those early Christians was not 'the need for heroic acts of martyrdom, but for heroic acts of material sacrifice'[62].

But is not this paradox in Christian love inevitable? It is inevitably spiritual, that is , belonging to and springing from the Spirit but it cannot exist in a vacuum, in some spiritual stratosphere. For its functioning, it must be 'earthed', that is to say, grounded and expressed in practical actions in real-life situations (Ch.11).

Such a statement about the practicality of Christian love, brings us back again to our starting point. Each of the primary characteristics of discipleship which have been considered and which identify disciples as disciples - commitment, service and, above all and underlying all, love - are both spiritual and earthly. Their source, power, motivation is from on high, their expression is down to earth. And is that not also true of discipleship as a whole? Discipleship is not just something to be discussed and debated, something for which rules and regulations are devised (although greater understanding may well come from all that). Discipleship is something which is done, actions performed not merely words spoken and ideas constructed. Indeed, is it not true that, 'a discipleship which allows itself to become absorbed in theoretical debate and which does not come to expression in practicalities of everyday life is

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62 Marshall, 195.

at some remove from the discipleship of Jesus'[63]? It is to be hoped that this consideration of the meaning of Christian discipleship will make an affirmative answer to that question not only possible but inevitable.

Conclusion.

At the beginning of Part Two, our stated aim was to gain a clearer understanding of discipleship. The difficulty of the task has been acknowledged in that, clearly, disciples come in many shapes and sizes and the rules of discipleship come in general rather than specific forms and thus require interpretation for differing times, places and people. Even the seemingly direct commands to love God, neighbour and self, to do good to those who hate, to lay down life itself, all these are general and need to be interpreted in each particular situation.

Given these difficulties, then, it was judged more profitable to concentrate, as was done with the family, on characteristics, rather than on types or rules, and particularly on those which seem most markedly to identify a disciple as a disciple. In other words, those identity markers which are of the very nature, the sine qua non of discipleship, are the ones considered. By using mainly NT material, certain conclusions were reached.

First of all, commitment to the person of Jesus and, as a result of that, commitment to a new way of life and living, usually expressed by the public act of baptism, marked Christian discipleship from the first. Secondly, service to others was also clearly part of 'being a disciple'. Both Jesus' direct and indirect teaching, as well as his personal example, indicated how service was an inextricable part of discipleship. Moreover,

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[63] Dunn, J., Call 125.

this was a service dependent on the need of others, not the status, wealth, race or relationship of the other. Thus it was both altruistic and mutual, given and received, again as evidenced in Jesus' own life.

Thirdly, it was concluded that, above all else, love was the clearest marker of discipleship. But is this not a 'natural' human instinct, not specifically Christian? The discussion on what love is sought to maintain that all love, the 'natural' love of eros and philia, evident in the social bonds of family and friendships, can be, and, more often than not, is, an expression of agape, divine love, God himself. The paradoxical nature of this love was recognised, in that it can be both all-embracing and specific, for the 'world' and also for the 'individual'; it can be both other-regarding and self-regarding and, indeed, must be so, since only through a proper love for self can there be love of another, whether the other be neighbour or God; it can be, and again must be, both heavenly minded, for therein is its source and power, and earthily practical, for there alone can it be expressed. This is the love which is the mark of Christian discipleship.

However, it may be that 'paradoxical' is not the best word to use to describe this love. The better word may well be, 'transformed'. The love which lies at the very heart of discipleship is a transformed love and it is, perhaps, this idea which now may make possible a definition of 'being a Christian disciple'.

Does not 'being a disciple of Jesus' mean 'living a transformed life'? Such a transformation changes disciples' feelings and emotions, their thoughts and actions. Discipleship becomes a new way of living. Thus, commitment to the imitatio Christi, service above and beyond the call of any duty, love of God, neighbour and self, love like Jesus' love, all become

part of the transformed nature of the disciple and, therefore, are part of the very nature of discipleship too.

Now that we have gained this clearer understanding both of family and discipleship, how do we begin to compare the demands, the potentially competing demands (as they have often been portrayed) of family and discipleship? It will be at once apparent from the above discussion that discipleship, marriage and family have a number of similarities. Discipleship and families, both secular and Christian, come in many different forms, making them difficult to define. They are founded on love and share characteristics of commitment and service to others. They involve change and cost. They may even be said to be responses to a call of some kind.

However, although it is possible to tease out a number of general similarities, discipleship and families can only be properly related to one another when marriage and family means Christian marriage and family. It is just this juxtaposition, not just of discipleship and marriage but of discipleship and Christian marriage which suddenly pose themselves as potential antitheses in an unnerving way. For those who have committed themselves to Christian discipleship and also to marriage and family, for those who understand both as a response to God's call, a particular difficulty presents itself. How do these calls relate to each other? Is one call 'better', 'higher', 'more important' than the other? Does one have priority over the other? Are they separate and conflicting 'calls' or is one part of the other? These questions have been asked from the beginning of Chrisitanity, since the call of the first disciples, since the beginning of the institutional church and they continue right up to the pressent day. At its most basic, the question would appear to be, 'Is

marriage and family a threat to discipleship or an arena for discipleship?'
It is this question which now demands attention and an answer.

PART THREE.

Family Versus Discipleship

CHAPTER SEVEN. Discipleship's Prior Claims.

That there has been and is conflict between Christian discipleship and family should not be a surprise for is not this common to all ideologies and religions? Whether it be, for example, in Christianity or Communism, there is almost always, at least at the beginning, a conflict between loyalty to the movement and to family. It is almost inevitable, then, that disciples, whatever or to whomsoever they commit themselves, will find a conflict, not only at the start of their discipleship but throughout it. They will continually have to resolve the question of primary loyalty. Christian disciples are not, and have never been, exempt from this conflict of loyalty and this difficult choice. As Osiek says, 'The most difficult sayings about family . . . warn of deep divisions within the family itself over the issue of discipleship'[1].

Throughout Christian history, there have been those who, in order to be disciples, have renounced their family. There have been times, moreover, when this renunciation has been portrayed, not only by individual 'guru' or saintly figures, but also by the teaching and example of the Church institution itself, as the better way to practise and fulfil discipleship. Certainly it is not difficult, particularly if relying on the Gospels and the early Church Fathers for support, to find reasons for the conflict between discipleship and family and to find a strong basis for the idea that discipleship takes priority over family. Indeed, there is 'a fundamental tension of the biblical witness' over discipleship and its relationship with 'social and conceptual structures' like family[2].

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[1] Osiek, 6.
[2] Ibid 7.

It is the task of this chapter to highlight particularly the grounds on which discipleship's claims to priority are founded. It could be shown, for example, that, throughout the history of the Church, there have been many people whose power and influence have allowed this idea to take firm root so that it continued and flourishes even to this day. Time and space, however, allow for only a few examples of such people but, since their arguments were, more often than not, grounded in scripture, it is that 'biblical witness' which is given most consideration.

The New Testament.

For Christians, as already noted, it is Jesus who exemplifies discipleship. It is on him that disciples model themselves. But, in the matter of family what does Jesus' life seem to show? The Gospels show a man with no wife or children. They show a man with a mother, brothers and sisters, that is to say, with family responsibilities, who appears, even from an early age (Lk. 2.41-51), to turn his back on these, putting loyalty to God above all else and, as a result, apparently regarding his followers as a new family, responsibility to which supercedes that to his old 'biological' family. We could cite Mk. 3. 28-35 and Jn. 7.3 as but two examples among many, which show Jesus both rebuking and rejecting his family. Thus, Jesus' life would seem to supply a basis for the priority of discipleship over family.

To some extent, also, the decision of the first named disciples to leave everything, including family, to follow Jesus could be regarded as a requirement of discipleship. Indeed, the Markan account (Mk.1.16-20), according to Barton, in actually naming those who would come to be regarded as prominent in the new movement, seems to give 'the behaviour of those who leave natural ties to follow Jesus, an exemplary

status'. They are the 'models', the real-life exemplars of Jesus' teaching about discipleship and family (Mk.8.34-38)[3].

Jesus' words, according to the gospel accounts of his teaching, seem to support this particular out-working of discipleship which was exemplified by Jesus and these named disciples. There are numerous hard sayings which seem to suggest that godly obedience is more possible, Christ-likeness more attainable and discipleship more fully and realistically practised when family is marginalised or set aside. For example, does not Mt. 10.37 imply that a disciple who cares more for family than for Jesus is 'not worthy' to be a disciple? Moreover, Matthew appears to encourage celibacy (19.10-12) and to suggest both that the leaving of family brings 'eternal reward' (Mt.19.27-30) and that 'at best the family should be viewed as a holding operation' till the kingdom has fully come (Mt. 22.30)[4]. Luke's use of the word 'hate' to describe a disciple's attitude to family makes the case even more strongly (Lk. 14.26), as does his spelling out of what that means in practical terms - 'leaving the dead to bury their dead' (Lk.9.60), a statement which would have shocked to the core his Jewish hearers to whom the burying of a father by a son was such a sacred responsibility.

As for Mark, since his emphasis is so primarily on discipleship it is perhaps inevitable that the lack of information about Jesus' own family (no accounts of his birth, no family genealogies), the presentation of Jesus' mother and siblings in negative terms (Mk.3.31-34), the portrayal of Jesus' home territory (Nazereth) as a hindrance to his work (Mk.6.1-6), all seem to suggest that the family is a definite opponent of discipleship [5]. This is

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[3] Barton, Discipleship 66.

[4] Woodhead, 'Response' 42.

[5] For a fuller treatment see Barton, Discipleship 66-96.

the conclusion of John Barclay who sees the Jesus of the Gospels supporting 'a radical loosening of ties with family' and even requiring a 'permanent abjuration of family ties'[6].

What of the rest of the New Testament? Although the apparent harshness of the Gospels with regard to family may be much less conspicuous, those who seek arguments to promote discipleship over against marriage and family (and here we may justifiably include Paul himself) can find them in the NT epistles. In Romans 7, for example, Paul uses, what Peter Brown, quoting H. D. Betz, calls 'that peculiarly fateful "theological abbreviation" which seems to set the 'bad' body/flesh against the 'good' spirit (Rom.7.14), an understandable position for someone of Paul's educational background who, with Plato and Josephus, viewed the fleshly body as the seat of lusts and the source of sinful behaviour[7].

New Christian communities were also not exempt from Hellenistic ideas and from their apparently logical conclusion that the bodily relationship of marriage was (must be?) of a lesser order, was less spiritual than the unmarried state (1Cor.7). Moreover, many new Jewish Christians were, presumably, aware of the Qumran practice of celibacy as a way to enable spiritual devotion and progress. Such thinking may well have influenced the view of the Corinthian 'eschatological women'[8] who, with others, seem to have been promoting the idea of asceticism, continence and celibacy as the better, more spiritual way to behave, a view to which Paul responds in this letter to Corinth (itself a response to their letter to him 1Cor.5.9). In the statement of 1Cor. 7.7, Paul does indeed seem to give support to this by stating very directly that his wish would be

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[6] Barclay , SCE 49.
[7] Brown, P., 48.
[8] Fee 269 ft. 6.

for all 'to be as I am', one interpretation of which might be 'without marital and family ties'[9]. It is perhaps worth noting that the word for 'wish' implies a realisable desire and not an impossibility. Taking such a statement at face value, an argument could readily be made for an anti-family position, though, as will be shown later, such an argument is rather weak and ill-founded and does not properly reflect Paul's theological reasoning throughout 1Cor. 7. However, it does seem to be Paul's personal opinion (not, as he himself stresses, divine command 1 Cor. 7.25,26) that there are good reasons (which similarly will be considered later) for affirming that the unmarried state is preferable to the married (1Cor. 7.31-33).

This very general and brief look at some of the NT material highlights the tension between discipleship and family, a tension seemingly illustrated also in the differing emphases given by Jesus himself and his early followers both in their teaching and personal example. 'There is a fundamental tension in the NT portrait of the family'[10], and for those who seek them there would appear to be grounds throughout for giving discipleship priority over family.

Other Examples. The Early Fathers.

A few examples must suffice to show that there have been and continue to be apparently strong grounds for this idea. For the Early Fathers, four particular, inextricably linked theological ideas strengthened this notion. Firstly, ideas about the Creation and the Fall led to a belief that sexuality, marriage and family were a result of the disobedience -sin -

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[9] Though see, Barrett, 1Corinthians 158.
[10] Osiek, 2.

of Adam and Eve. This particular inte rpretation of Genesis 1 & 2, which said that sexuality, one of whose expressions was marriage and family, was not part of the original, good and perfect human nature but was part of the fall from grace, was a powerful influence on the notion that discipleship was to be preferred to marriage and family[11].

Secondly, there was the notion, for which Augustine must bear much of the responsibility, that sexual practice was wrong. Augustine recognised the sin of Adam and Eve as primarily disobedience to the will of God, but, since awareness of their disobedience came through the recognition of their nakedness, he concluded that, from this point, the sexual act became part of the new sinful nature and the source, through procreation, of humanity's continuing sinfulness[12].

Thirdly, understanding of the body as evil greatly affected theological thinking about the status of marriage and family. Considering the body as evil had its roots in Gnostic dualism where soul and body were as diametrically opposed as the good or evil gods who created them. Such thinking was evident in many extremist groups in the early Christian centuries although it was denounced as heresy, not least because of its impracticality for the increase of the human race (and thus also, the increase of the church). Despite, also, its theological suspectedness, it, nevertheless, established itself as a very deep-seated and long-standing belief which bore fruit both in the teaching about and the practice of Christian spirituality for centuries to come.

Fourthly, as a result of these ideas about sin, sexuality and the body, came a particular view of Christian spirituality. The official acceptance of

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[11] Brown, P., 399,377. See, also, Danielou for fuller treatment in this area.
[12] Brown. P. 404.

Christianity which ended the persecutions of the faithful, made it necessary, it seemed, to find another pathway to perfection than martyrdom. Celibacy, asceticism and monasticism took on that role. Within Western Christianity, there can be little doubt that until the Reformation, - and even beyond[13]- celibacy was regarded as a higher form of spirituality, a better way of discipleship than marriage. Those who practised it were already regarded as 'the angels of God' and the fifth century church was seen as 'giving pride of place to the continent'[14], by which was meant 'the celibate'.

The Reformers.

Although, as we shall see (Chapter Ten), there was a change of attitude at the Reformation, particularly through the teachings of Luther, nevertheless, partly because of changing social circumstances, it was not long before marriage and family again came to be regarded as an inferior form of discipleship. In particular, increasing industrialisation led, in some ways, to a (not necessarily deliberate) distortion of Reformation views. Firstly, the so-called Protestant 'work-ethic' gained more prominence than what might be called the Protestant 'family ethic'. For many Christians work became the mainstay of their discipleship, leading them to believe that rest and relaxation were idleness and sloth. Secondly, 'work' became redefined as that activity which happens outside the home, for which payment is made, thus effectively downgrading the 'work' of marriage and family life which appeared not to be 'productive labour'[15]. Thirdly, and consequently, the work-place came to be seen as the 'real'

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[13] Guardian Newspaper (22.6.96) letter writer C. Shelley quotes fromPope John Paul II. in Vita Consecrata:- ' the religious enjoys an objective superiority over the lay state'.
[14] Brown, P., 436, 428.
[15] Ruether, 111.

world and home the place of retreat from the world. There is a sense in which home took over the role that the monastery (or, more accurately, the nunnery) had played in pre-Reformation times in that it was both the place of escape from the materialism and sinfulness of the world and also the place for private devotions, religious observances, spiritual growth and learning.

All this affected thinking about discipleship since more emphasis was given to the exercising of discipleship in the world, not apart from it. However the 'world' had become the work-place and, thus, it was there, and not in the home, that discipleship would find its primary place. Much more could be said on the subject of work as the better way of discipleship, not least because of the effect this had on Christian women, many of whom were forced to renounce marraiage and family life in order to pursue their Christian vocation in the male world of 'real' work. However, enough has been said to indicate how marriage and family, once, in traditional Catholic theology, too much in the world, moved, post-Reformation, to be too much out of the world to be regarded as true discipleship.

The Modern Period.

Finally, are there, still today, grounds for regarding discipleship as a priority over family? There are certainly those in the theological world who would, it seems, want at least to play down the family to some extent. The reason behind this lies, partly, in the historical events of the middle twentieth century. The rise of the Suffragette Movement and the demands for womens' rights and opportunities, supported by the evidence from two World Wars of women's capabilities, created a backlash in that

there was also demand for the 'work' of the home to be recognised as work. This latter demand was given greater prominence and led to the promotion of home, marriage and family as an ideal to be attained. Indeed, over time, the idol of work was replaced by the idol of family.

It is clear that, for most people today, it is family, not work, which is the most important thing in life. It is, for many, family, not work, which now provides fulfilment and purpose in life. Self-identity and self-worth, whether good or bad, psychologists tell us, come from family life. Family relationships, not work, matter most and bring most personal satisfaction. Family seems to have become more important than anything else - even God. It is this late twentieth century idolisation of the family which has brought theologians to the point of re-stating the grounds, particularly the scriptural grounds, for the priority of discipleship over family. The fear is that, in the life of a disciple, family will have too strong a hold, hindering or replacing the allegiance primarily due to the master whom the disciple is called to serve.

Such a fear is certainly not groundless as a number of scholars, take pains to show[16]. Hauerwas' question, 'Could we make the family into a kind of god. . . investing it with a magic significance as the key to all problems?' sums up these fears[17]; and the answer may well be in the affirmative. In so far as the family has become the principal locus for self-identity, self-worth and self-fulfilment and the seed-bed of character formation and personal morality and, indeed, insofar as it has been regarded by many (92%)[18] as that which (perhaps, alone) brings purpose, meaning, value and significance to their lives[19] it moves towards idol

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[16] See Hauerwas, 'Family' 146- 157; Harvey, N.P.; Clapp.
[17] Hauerwas, 'Family', 146.
[18] Berger, B. & P., 164.
[19] Woodhead, 'Response', 41.

status. Such a 'presumption'[20] about family, is contrary to the meaning of discipleship which entails relinquishing that which gives us security, support, status and significance.

Moreover, since 'family loyalty' can become ultimate loyalty'[21], theologians are surely right to point out how far removed this is from discipleship where a Christian's ultimate loyalty is to God. It is, however, such thinking that has raised the family to a pedestal with, at times, the full support of a Church which has been slow to recognise and warn against the inherent dangers of making an idol of the family and slow to remind people, firstly, that it is God, through Christ, in whom fulness of life is found (Jn.10.10) and, secondly, that it is not the family but 'the crucified and risen Christ (who) represents and empowers life'[22].

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[20] Hauerwas, Community 86.
[21] Clapp, 85,86.
[22] Harvey, N.P. 36.

CHAPTER EIGHT. Jesus and Paul against the Family?

Having given explanations for an anti-family stance throughout Christian history, the purpose of this chapter is to examine more closely the contexts, particularly the first century context of Jesus and Paul, in which the apparent anti-family statements were made in order to offer alternative interpretations. In so doing, sound reasons may emerge for the apparent antithisis of family and discipleship. Firstly, then, we consider again the attitude of Jesus to family life - his example and his message.

It has already been noted in Chapter Three that the imitatio Christi should not, indeed cannot, be followed literally. Therefore, just as Christian disciples are not expected to eat and dress as Jesus did, no more need they be unmarried as he was. In the specifics of life, Christ and his followers throughout the ages have each had differing experiences - marriage, singleness, physical disability, mental illness, lack of a secure home, faithful and faithless friends, difficult temptations and choices etc., some of which Christ knew exactly and some he did not. But the message of the Gospels is not the imitation of the specifics of Christ's life experiences but the imitation of the attitudes to life's experiences - how, for example, to face difficulties and temptations, how to make decisions, how to set priorities. Herein lies the imitatio Christi, not in literal imitation. Moreover, 'Christ was constrained to accept certain limitations'. This was inevitably so since 'for Him, as for others, choice closed some doors even as it opened others'[1].

Christ's family life and involvement was, inevitably, limited, both because of other choices and priorities made and because of the time and

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[1] Lampe & MacKinnon, 75-76.

place in which he lived. His disciples, even if facing similar choices, for example with regard to the priority of family life, make their personal decisions in a differing context which may well produce a different outcome. For Jesus, in his time and place, the single life-style and the separation from family, was a necessity. For individual disciples, then and through the ages, it was not necessarily so. Why had it to be so for Jesus?

Jesus the Prophet.

Jesus was a man with a message from God. Indeed, he himself was that message (Jn. 1.14). How could he best deliver that message? What had been and was the medium by which messages from God were delivered? They had been, and were, delivered by prophets. Therefore, Jesus, of necessity, took on the role of prophet in order to proclaim that the kingdom of God was near (Mt. 10.7, Mk. 1.15, Lk. 10.9)[2]. Getting that message across demanded recognition as prophet; and what were the marks of a prophet? One of the 'long-associated' marks of a prophet was 'sexual abstinence'; so Jesus' unmarried state would raise no eyebrows amongst the crowds who heard him deliver his message. Is it not highly likely that his celibacy would have been regarded as merely 'an unremarkable adjunct of his prophet's calling'[3], perhaps, indeed, an added proof of that calling? In other words, in order to have his message heard, he had to be taken seriously as a prophet. Thus, Jesus had to be in the prophet's mould as it was perceived in the Palestine of his day, which meant living a life characterised by a singleness of purpose and unhindered and unhampered by the kind of distractions and responsibilities which marriage and family life might bring.

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[2] Wright, Chap. 4.
[3] Brown, P., 41.

A similar critique may be made of those first named apostles who, at Pentecost, took over, as it were, from Jesus, his prophetic task and moulded themselves, as he had, to the perceived image of prophets. Hence, their separation from home and their subsequent journeyings abroad to spread the good news (Acts) were part and parcel of their prophetic ministry. Moreover, as the community of believers grew, so, too, came a growth in number of those with the prophetic gift, with the special ability to bring 'reliable' messages from God. Such a gift was thought to be dependent on closeness to God, came from being very much in tune with the Spirit of God. It was believed by many people in those first centuries of Christianity, Jews and pagans alike, that prophets should provide in their bodies a free conduit for the movement of the Spirit of God. Abstaining from sexual intercourse made the prophet 'a more appropriate vehicle' for the Spirit[4].

In the context, then, of first century Palestine, given that Jesus had a divine message to put across, given that it was primarily the prophet who was regarded as the messenger of God and given the expectations of a prophet's life-style, was it not inevitable that Jesus and the first apostles had to live a celibate life? At this particular time in history, at the very beginning of the Christian movement, was this not one of the most recognisable and effective means of spreading the divine revelation? In other times and other places, with other media for the proclamation of the good news, such a way of life may be less useful and may even be a 'turn-off' from the gospel. In addition we should note the evidence of Mk. 1.30 and 1Cor. 9.5 that several at least of the apostles were married. The discipleship even of an apostle was not antithetical to family.

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[4] Ibid 66.

It could, perhaps therefore, be concluded that the imitatio Christi, in terms of living a celibate life, may not be a necessity for discipleship outside the particularities of first century Palestine's cultural and belief systems. To use Jesus' own example as a ground for elevating celibacy over family as a better way of discipleship, is to ignore the context in which he had to put across his message.

Moreover, Jesus' message, particularly in relation to family life, was affected by the initial intended recipients of that message. To whom was Jesus message initially directed? How did this affect the message and, as a result, attitudes to family? 'He came to his own people'(Jn. 1.11). He himself said he had been sent only to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Mt. 15.24) and encouraged his disciples to do the same (Mt. 10.6). Most of Jesus' hearers were Jews, much of his debating and arguing was with Jewish leaders and teachers, many of his challenges were to faithful and devout Jews. In other words, Jesus, as any good teacher would do, took account of his hearers' background and history, recognised and understood their religious beliefs and used what was known and familiar to them as a starting point for the message he wanted to get across.

False Reliance on Family.

Jews assumed, indeed, seemed to take for granted, that they were in a priviliged position before God. This may be seen with reference to the fact that, in scripture, there are relatively few voices protesting against this notion. Although prophets showed God had brought other nations to himself (Jonah 3.10, 4.11; Amos 9.7) and could 'from stones raise up children to Abraham' (Mt. 3.9), yet the belief in their specialness in the eyes of God was very deep-rooted, part, even, of Jewish consciousness. This fundamental belief had its source and roots in the covenant made between God and Abraham. It is in this covenant that God binds himself

to Abraham and his family, choosing to have a special relationship with them (Gen. 17.1-7).

This idea is constantly repeated in the Old Testament scriptures, (Gen. 12.1-3, Deut. 7.6, 1Kg. 8.51,53, Ps. 33.12, Is. 41.8, 44.1, Jer. 10.16). Many other writings confirm that 'the conviction that Israel is God's elect, his chosen people, is axiomatic' and that to deny such election was to be a heretic in Jewish eyes[5]. Moreover, not only were they chosen to be God's people, they had also, at Sinai, been given God's law (Torah) which enabled them to remain his people. By committing themselves to the covenant and by the keeping of that law, they could be assured that they were still the sons and daughters of God. Thus, the Abrahamic and Sinai covenants gave Jews double security and assurance that they were the family of God. So it was that many of the Jews who listened to Jesus believed, indeed took it for granted, that they were already part of the family of God and in a right relationship with him.

But, for Jews, it was not only this covenant which guaranteed membership of the family of God, it was also their birth into the family of Abraham[6]. It was this belief in the importance of the blood tie which underpins the discourse with the, significantly Jewish, Nicodemus in Jn. 3.16. The message spells out, in no uncertain terms, that blood relationships are 'insufficient' for entry to the family of God. Jn. 1.13 makes clear that birth into the family of God 'has as its origins the creative gift of the will and power of God' is not 'the result of mixing bloods, of natural desire and of the exercise of human will[7]. This could, perhaps, be interpreted as an anti-family bias on the part of Jesus but is it not more likely that here he is challenging, even condemning, his Jewish listeners'

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[5] Dunn, Partings 22 & ft.22.
[6] See Post in JRE 150-152.
[7] Witherington, 56.

false reliance on natural family ties as a means of acceptance into God's family?

Moreover, according to Jesus, again particularly in John, not only is the natural family irrelevant for membership of God's family, it is also irrelevant for salvation and eternal life. The source of salvation is the 'lifted up' (Jn. 3.14,15), crucified Christ. In being lifted up, says this Jesus, he will bring all people to himself (Jn. 12.32). Here again, is the particular challenge to his Jewish listeners, his 'own' people who would recognise the allusion to Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness in order that those who looked on it might live (Num. 21.8-9). Although, as Witherington points out, these words of Jesus may well be the words of the early Christian communities, desperate to open the eyes of their fellow Jews to the salvation available through Jesus, nevertheless the underlying message is surely clear: 'There is no other name by which we must be saved' (Acts 4.12). Similarly Jesus' discourse with the Samaritan woman re-enforces the point, does it not? Jesus asserts that salvation is from the Jews and his teaching has the effect of re-enforcing the message that salvation is for all by means of belief in him, as the final confession of the Samaritans confirms (Jn. 4.42).

It has been important to highlight these two particular strongly held beliefs of the Jews since it goes some considerable way to explaining some of the apparent anti-family statements of Jesus. Given that Jesus' message was of salvation to all through him (Jn. 14.6), given that he was primarily addressing Jews during his earthly ministry, Jews who trusted in their special relationship with God both for membership of his family and for salvation, is it not inevitable that he should play down family connections? It was this false reliance on family connections which Jesus had to challenge in clear, forthright and unambiguous terms. Therefore, to use, in particular, the Johannine Jesus' teaching on birth, blood-ties and

salvation as anti-the natural family is to forget who his first hearers were and to forget how the message had to be adapted for those hearers.

Eschatological Urgency.

However, Jesus had another equally important message to bring, again one which was to affect the relationship of family and discipleship. This was the message, oft-repeated in the Gospels, that 'the kingdom of God had come'(Mt. 3.2; Mk. 1.15; Lk. 10.9). Although his message did, oftentimes, refer to a far-distant kingdom (Mt. 8.11,12, 13.39-42) as well as to a more immediate fulfilment (Mt. 16.28; Mk. 9.9; Lk. 9.27), there are also the clear indications that Jesus saw his own ministry as a manifestation in the here and now of God's rule (Mt. 4.17, 12.28; Mk. 1.15; Lk. 10.9, 17.21) What was most important about this message, however, was that it dealt with matters of life and death, matters of ultimate and personal salvation which required action on the part of the hearers. His constant reminders in so many varied parables and sayings, of the imminence of the Kingdom, his warnings about complacency and inaction, along with his emphasis on the value, worth and salvific necessity of the rule of God, all presented a challenge, and a most urgent challenge at that, to act now, without delay lest it be too late and salvation lost (Mt. 13.44-45, 24.43, 25.1-12)[8].

It is, therefore, in the context of the importance of the message and the urgency to act, that Jesus' attitude to family must be seen. Jesus' priority was to get that message across. His mission, it may be said, was to proclaim the good news of salvation, to appeal for a response, to make disciples who would do the same. Moreover, for these first disciples, similar priorities would obtain since they saw their task to be the same as

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[8] Dunn, Call Chap. 2.

Jesus' - to preach the gospel, stress the importance of a response and make disciples. This was their primary and most important task which informed and affected not only what Jesus and his followers said, but also how it was said and how they acted. Thus, the language attributed particularly to the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels, reflects these priorities. Are not black and white, exaggerated statements about hating family (Lk.14.25-27), leaving the dead to bury their dead (Mt.8.21-22) and forsaking everything, almost an inevitability in order to get across just how vital was both the message itself and a response to it?

Given, too, how highly regarded the family was in both Jewish and Hellenistic cultures, again is not the family the most obvious example to use in order to show the overwhelming importance of the message? Was it not, indeed, the very supremacy of family ties and family loyalty in the thinking of Jesus' first hearers, which provided the best picture, the clearest example, of how much greater, more important and more vital was the call and demand of discipleship? Only by contrasting discipleship and family, apparently setting them in direct opposition, even acknowledging an inevitability about conflicts of loyalty (Mt. 10.34-36), would it be possible to highlight sufficently the importance of the message, the need to spread that message and the claims and challenges of discipleship. 'Only so fundamental an issue as family is adequate to make the point'[9].

Two other possible explanations for the apparent anti-family words of Jesus, perhaps need mentioning, namely, the situation of the Gospel writers themselves and, also, their understanding of the eschaton, both of which influenced the recorded material.

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[9] Barton, Discipleship 217.

In order to accomplish the spread of the Gospel, there needed to be those who would indeed leave everything, including family, for that purpose. Such included the Gospel writers or those who influenced them. It was those who had indeed left everything, had literally separated themselves from their families, who so emphasised this aspect of Jesus' teaching and gave it a prominence which inevitably drew attention away from more pro-family attitudes and teaching. Why should this be so? Recognising the natural human need to explain one's personal actions, particularly when they fly in the face of cultural norms and conventions could it be that Jesus' recorded anti-family teaching in part sprang from a necessity, felt by the first apostles, to 'legitimate' **their own** (my words) 'subordination of household ties for the sake of Jesus and the gospel mission[10]? The Gospels represent Jesus through the eyes of those followers who were flying in the face of convention with regard to family. Surely, therefore, there was a need for a powerful explanation for their drastic action. The anti-family sayings of Jesus met that need for explanation, 'validated the activities of the first disciples'[11]. The good news of salvation, the claims and commands of Jesus, the challenge of discipleship, all these provided an explanation which was put in the most stark and explicit terms by those who had taken up that challenge and were actively engaged in a missionary endeavour which required a separation from family.

Moreover, in those early days of Christianity, the missionary endeavour was paramount. Jesus' own mission was to make disciples and his commision to them was to do likewise (Mt. 28.19). But by the time the Gospels were being written, these first missionaries were caught up in the persecutions from both Jewish and Roman authorities and were also

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[10] Ibid 123.
[11] Brown, P., 41.

facing the opposition and opprobrium of their own families as a result of becoming disciples of Jesus. Is not John Barclay right to conclude that Mark 10.30 and 13.12 'reflect social reality'[12]? Christianity was, in some measure, responsible for the break-up of families. When individuals converted to Christianity, it was often the families which first felt the impact since these conversions raised so many theological questions about the relationship of Judaism and Christianity and could be seen as a 'betrayal' of the Jewish religion [13]. In other words, Jesus' anti-family statements are, yet again, as much, if not more, an explanation of the factual situation being experienced by his followers, as much a justification and validation of pragmatic reality, as much these, as a directive to his followers to abandon family.

But the necessity to spread the message lay not only in its importance per se but sprang also from the understanding of the last days, the eschaton. The belief in the imminence of the eschaton increased the urgency with which the message was given. Although by the time of Jesus, there were a variety of religious groups who believed in some kind of life after death, what is of importance for our purpose is that 'within Judaism, resurrection from the dead was one of the important signs of the end of time'[14]. The Gospel authors, writing from a post-resurrection viewpoint, thus assumed that Jesus' resurrection heralded the start of the last days. Consequently, the message must be proclaimed NOW (2Cor. 6.2) and the response made, since the eschatological process had been set in motion. Moreover, given the actual experiences of Jews, during the upheavals in Jerusalem which caused a radical re-thinking of Judaism and of Christians persecuted and martyred for their faith, is it any wonder that

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[12] Barclay in Moxnes, 77
[13] Barton, Discipleship 222.
[14] Lane. D. A. 332.

the end time seemed very near and that Jesus' message of salvation was written down with such an over-riding sense of urgency and importance?

Again, therefore, Jesus' powerful statements about choosing discipleship over family must be seen in the light of the historical context and theological understandings of the time, particularly as regards the eschaton. Ignoring these leads to a failure to recognise the bias given to Jesus' words by the context and the theology. Jesus' anti-family statements represent the urgency with which the message must be proclaimed and the response made, given the belief that time was short. From this belief stem the statements which seem to insist on putting aside everything else, even family, and giving priority to obeying the call of discipleship.

Once again, then, the apparent priority that Jesus gives to discipleship over family must be considered in the light of the particular circumstances of the Gospel writers and the first Christians before assuming his was, primarily, an anti-family position. In other words, is it justifiable to say Jesus was anti-family, once the context is taken into account? Surely not.

Having given a number of alternative explanations for Jesus' anti-family statements, only a brief consideration is given to the apparently similar stand of Paul, not least because he, too, like the Gospel writers, was much influenced in these matters by his theological understanding of the eschaton. Why did Paul's feel there were 'good reasons' (Chapter Seven) for holding an apparently anti-family position?

One of the more obvious reasons is clear in 1Cor. 7. There is 'an impending crisis' (v.25), 'the appointed time is short' (v.29), 'the present form of this world is passing away' (v.31). It may not be entirely clear whether Paul is referring only to the distressing events at the time of Christ's return to judge all things or to the troubles and distress that these first Christians were experiencing in the here and now. It is probably fair

to assume, as Fee does, that singleness, the present distress and views about the eschaton are all 'inter-related'[15]. However, there can be little doubt, can there, that, for Paul, the end time had already begun? What the Corinthians were experiencing in terms of troubles, was, according to Paul, part of the 'already but not yet' which was the inevitable post-resurrection state of affairs for all who believed. It was not, primarily, concern that the full and final establishment of God's rule was very near which urged him on but the belief that the rule of God was already in operation. For Paul, therefore, there were two inevitable consequences of this already but not yet view of the eschaton. It changed priorities and it changed perspectives.

For Paul, his first and overwhelming priority was to attend to 'the affairs of the Lord'. And the affairs of the Lord in that particular time and place were the spreading of the gospel, the making of disciples and the building up of the Christian community. There must be as few distractions from these as possible. In Paul's eyes, there was a real danger that marriage and family life could become distractions. Certainly verses 32-33 do seem to imply that the affair of the Lord and pleasing him are, in Barclay's words, 'incompatible' with the affairs of the world and pleasing a wife[16]. But, although for Paul, personally, engaged in an itinerant missionary endeavour, these priorities may be incompatible with married life, does he really imply that this will be, should be the case for all Christians?

It needs to be remembered that this, in fact, was but one example of the point at issue in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. He was writing to a group of Christians who were wrestling with the problem of loyalty and priorities in relationships. How does loyalty to Christ, giving him priority

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[15] Fee, 336.
[16] Barclay, in Moxnes, 75

in one's life, affect the most close and intimate relationships within families was their question? It is clear that there were huge differences of opinion on these matters within the Corinthian church, not least because of a strong desire among, for example, the 'eschatological women', to show the difference between the Christian community and the Corinthian world in sexual matters. In 1Cor. 7.29-31, Paul seems to give an answer which highlights the effects of giving priority to Christ, namely, that there are new perspectives. Becoming a disciple involves seeing everything, including the most personal, close and intimate relationships in a new light. It does not necessarily mean abandoning those relationships but does mean considering them in the light of discipleship. So, the words, 'as though', repeated five times, sum up Paul's message about a disciple's new perspective. Disciples continue to live life in this world, sharing the same experiences as others - married, single, working, buying, selling, being sad or happy - but these things do not control or dominate their lives. The knowledge that all these, although part of the present age, are also part of the 'passing age' (v.31) enables disciples to sit loose to them all, to relativise them, to cultivate an 'inner detachment' from the world[17].

It is, perhaps, important to note that this message is not merely addressed to the married but to the single also. Both married and single. men and women, are warned about 'anxiety' (v. 32-34) which stems from a 'this worldy' view of life. Ultimately, Paul's plea to the Corinthians, both married and unmarried, is for a new perspective on previous priorities, priorities that have been determined by the present age and not by the new age brought in by Christ's death and resurrection. 'God's call to be in Christ transcends such settings' (of marriage or celibacy) 'so as to make them essentially irrelevant'[18].

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[17] Dunn, Call 57.
[18] Fee 307.

Paul's view of the eschatological reality, then, the already but not yet view of God's rule in the world and in the individual, his sense of the importance of the message to be conveyed and of the need to spread that message and make disciples which led to his own personal call to itinerant missionary work, taken along with the particular situation and concerns of the church in Corinth, all these provided reasons for these statements in 1Cor. 7 about marriage and singleness which, at times, have been taken to be anti-marriage and anti-family. But does not closer study of what Paul actually says make it inevitable that a resounding 'No' must be given to the question, 'Was Paul anti-family?' 1Cor. 7, to which we will return, is, above all, Paul's plea to share his priorities and new perspectives and to understand how the new relationship with Christ, that of discipleship, affects how relationships in the here and now are to be regarded - that is, with some kind of detachment and awareness of their transitoriness. In other words, as with the Gospels' hard sayings about family so with Paul's, there are alternatives to regarding them as against marriage and family.

CHAPTER NINE. Jesus and Paul Pro-Family.

So far, we have looked at the reasons why Jesus and Paul, in particular, come across to us now as anti-family - a sharp reminder that texts taken out of their historical context can be very misleading. In addition, however, it is important to realise how positive both Jesus and Paul were towards the family.

Jesus' Pro-Family Stance.

To begin with it should be noted, that from the beginning, those who left all to follow Jesus were a minority. The majority, 'the silent majority of careworn and decent householders'[1] who became Christian believers remained in the place and state they were in when called to be disciples. Jesus, himself, in his teaching, as gathered together in the Sermon on the Mount, appears to be putting forward what Lofink calls 'the ethic of discipleship' which is for all who follow him, for 'the sedentary adherents of Jesus' as well as the itinerant missionaries[2]. Included in this ethic are directions for the married which are even more rigorous with regard to marriage and divorce than Jewish custom allowed. Could that not imply that Jesus is again using exaggerated language, aiming to show just how demanding discipleship is in every state and circumstance of life. The 'righteousness of the disciple has to exceed even that of the scribes and Pharisees'(Mt. 5. 20)? Thus, the married have as difficult a task within their married life as the celibates in theirs, in living up to the demands of discipleship. Jesus' words, as recorded in Matthew 5.27-32 and Mark 10.2-12 clearly uphold, encourage, one might even say, demand, not the abandonment of marriage and family life but the

[1] Brown, P., 90.
[2] Lohfink, 44,32.

continuation of it and the exercising both of 'restraint and control in sexual relations'[3] and of faithfulness and monogamy within marriage.

It is surely clear, too, from the Gospels that there were many committed followers of Jesus who remained in their homes and exercised their discipleship there. Mention may be made of Joseph of Arimathea (Mk. 15.42-47) or of Zaccheus, to whose house salvation came (Lk. 19.8,9), of the household of Mary, Martha and Lazarus at Bethany (Jn. 11.11), the house of Simon the leper (Mt. 26.6) and the owner of the upper room who, according to Jesus, would understand who the 'Teacher' was and was ready prepared for him (Mk. 14.14,15). Moreover, could not Mk. 5. 19-20 almost be regarded as a clear and direct instruction by Jesus not to leave all but rather to witness to him and be his disciple in one's own home and among one's own neighbours? Despite the former demoniac's begging, he is directed to 'go home and tell how much the Lord has done'.

But these are not just evidences of disciples who remained within their families. They bear witness also to Jesus' recognition of the service that family and households provide. Homes, like that at Bethany, not only provided him with food, shelter and relaxation (Mt. 2.17, Lk. 10.38, Jn. 12.2) but also with opportunities to teach and spread the good news of salvation (Mk. 2.1-12, 15-17; Mk. 14.3-9). These homes were to provide similarly for those who became itinerant disciples (Mt. 10.12). Those who remained at home and were often thereby financially secure, could and did supply the needs of those who had given up such security (Mt. 27.55-56,60; Lk. 8.3). Moreover, while at home, whether rich or poor, all were part of the same mission as those who had gone out on the roads, their equally important task being prayer for the missionary work and practical

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[3] Barton, 'Family', DJG 227.

service of the needy at home Mt. 25.38-40). Are these not examples of a pro-family attitude by Jesus?

However, the endorsement of such an attitude becomes clearer when we consider some of his dealings with people. What emerges is a picture of someone very sensitive to family relationships, particularly where there is suffering and distress. Consider some of the stories of parents distraught over the sufferings of their children. Here is Jesus with Jairus and his family (Mk. 5.21-24, 35-43), recognising their need for privacy at what, for any parent would be their most nightmarish moment. Here is Jesus, disregarding rank, authority or nationality, hearing only the desparate and insistent pleadings of a Roman centurion father and a Syro-Phoenician mother (Mt. 15.21-28) for their needy children. Can it not be fairly said that it was understanding of and empathy with their distress, alongside their undoubted and commended evidence of faith, which contributed to Jesus' decision to heal these children despite his belief that his mission was only to the house of Israel (Mt. 15.25)? (For similar evidence of Jesus'sensitivity, see Lk.7. 11-15, 9.37-38) .

Moreover, there is evidence of Jesus' concern for the family of those who had gone on the road with him - Peter's mother-in-law, for example, (Mk. 1.29) - surely a recognition that, although physically apart from their homes, those left behind could not be easily wiped out from the mind and heart. Evidence, too, can be found of positive attitudes to his own family, even although that evidence may be historically suspect or show the bias which stems from authorial purpose. (Similar bias may also affect the negative emphases on family). Thus, Luke presents Jesus' mother and brothers in a more positive light (Lk. 1.26-35; 8.19-21) while John shows Jesus' concern for his own mother's welfare after his death.

The various accounts of Jesus with children also show evidence of care about families. Although, oftentimes, children are used as a kind of

visual aid to make a teaching point, can it really be said that they are merely 'objects' for a lesson and not 'subjects', given Jesus' concern for the weak and powerless. Even Mark, who, perhaps, most obviously uses a child as an illustration of discipleship (Mk. 9.36-37), paints a picture of a tangible warmth towards children and of a sympathy for those, (not necessarily all mothers), who wanted their children to receive what Jesus had to offer. As Francis points out, the word translated 'takes them up in his arms' is only used twice in the New Testament and both times relate to Jesus' physical contact with children. In his affectionate, tactile reception of them and his blessing of them, is he not affirming children's importance to God and their welcome by God into his kingdom as well as commending and encouraging the parental desire and responsibility to bring their children to God?[4]

This same incident shows Jesus' understanding of the importance of family duties and responsibilities, whether social or religious, which had been part of his own family life from the beginning. Only a few need be mentioned. There is the obligation of obedience of children to parents which Jesus himself followed (Lk. 2.51, 'Jesus continued to be under their authority'), children's responsibility towards parents (Mt. 8.21; Mt. 19.19; Mt. 15.3-6 and parallels) and the responsibilities of marriage (Lk. 14.10-12). Similarly, it might be said, there are accounts of Jesus' understanding of the rules and social traditions of family hospitality, glimpsed, from time to time, in Jesus' visits to homes (Mk.1.29; Lk. 10.38; Jn. 12.2-3; 13.5). Indeed, there may well be truth in the idea that at the wedding at Cana, 'the miracle was not, necessarily (my insertion), done for Jesus' own convenience but to save his host embarrassment because of the high value attached to the virtue of hospitality'[5].

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[4] Francis, J., 74,75.'
[5] Sanders, John 110.

When we turn to Jesus' teaching, also, it is clear that he is well aware of the realities of family life. Here are stories of sibling rivalry (Lk. 15.11-24), parental ambitions for their children (Mt. 20.28, 31), difficulties of parenting when children are awkward, disobedient and demanding (Mt. 21.28; Lk. 15.12), the continual forgiving and accepting shown by parents (Lk.15.24). Above all, we can see in how much of Jesus' teaching about his own relationship with God and the possible relationships for humankind with God, is expressed in family language. Here, again, we see Jesus' recognition of family bonds, their closeness, strength and importance to every individual. What better imagery can be used to describe the nature of God's concern for his creatures than that of family relationships (Mt. 5.9,45; 7. 9-11; 18.3-5; Lk. 15.11-23; Jn. 1.12; 3.16)?

Hopefully, this consideration of Jesus' practical and daily dealings with people and a wider view of his teaching give a more balanced perspective on his attitudes to family over against the Gospels' apparent anti-family stance and shows that he not only assumed family life for the majority but also affirmed and encouraged it. It does have to be said, however, that in matters of family, as in other areas of life, (religious, for example), Jesus did indeed show radical tendencies. In affirming family, he was not merely content with the status quo but presented a challenge to it. Could not the challenge to abandon family life, (as the Gospels seem to portray), be but a call to widen, extend and, indeed, transform that family life in the light of a new relationship with God? So, for example, there comes his call to include and welcome into the family those who do the will of God (Mk.3.35; 10.30), a call to welcome the weak and powerless (Mt. 9.13-15), a call to open home and table to the sinful and needy (Lk.14). His is a challenge to family loyalty, to exclusiveness and narrowness in family life, to patriarchy and, perhaps, above all. a challenge to rethink the meaning of what it is to 'be family'.

Paul's Pro-Family Stance.

It was noted (Chap.8) that, in 1Cor. 7, Paul propounded a new perspective on life for those who are now Christians. All things, including the most intimate relationships are to be viewed both in the light of discipleship and in the knowledge of this life as a passing age. The relationship of the disciple to God transforms all other relationships but does not, necessarily, demand a change to another set of relationships. Neither does it mean, as much of 1Cor. 7 makes clear, an abandonment of marriage and family, nor a devaluing of them. With the repeated refrain, 'remain' and with pastoral sensitivity to the varying views within the Corinthian church, Paul seeks to emphasise that it is the transforming effect of the divine relationship on every other relationship which is important and not any particular worldly relationship per se.

It is worth remembering that Paul, here, is actually responding to the Corinthians' very negative view of marriage, as judged by the phrase, 'It is good for a man not to have relations with a woman' (v.1), which most commentators now seem to agree is a Corinthian not Pauline statement. Some Corinthian Christians, perhaps, as a result of their Hellenistic background, gave marriage and celibacy 'a religious significance'[6], seeing abstinence from sexual relationships as a 'better' spirituality. For Paul, however, 'one is no better off in one condition than the other'[7]. So, although in the particular historical context of the first century, Paul is minded to believe and suggest that the unmarried state may be 'more desirable', he does not at all suggest such a state is

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[6] Fee, 307.
[7] Ibid 307.

'intrinsically better'[8]. On the contrary, throughout the chapter, he urges continuity, maintaining the status quo, as the better way (vs. 1-16, 25-40).

Despite Paul's stated personal preference for celibacy, despite his comment that 'it is better to marry than burn - which suggests 'grudging condescension to those who burn with sexual passion and cannot be continent'[9] - he, yet, gives plenty of endorsement to marriage, reminding the single who later marry that they do not fall from grace nor enter a second-best relationship. They 'do not sin' (v.28).

Such a message is made clear in Paul's teaching on sexual relationships within marriage which is very positive. Each partner has a sexual obligation to the other and ought to fulfil it, says Paul, having already pointed out the possible consequences of the refusal of marital obligations (1Cor. 6.12-20). Moreover, even if they refrain from sexual relations, it should only be for a short time, for specific spiritual devotions and by mutual consent. In terms of our enquiry into the relationship between family and discipleship, it must be relevant to note that marital sex is valued as highly as prayer. Here, surely, is a clear recommendation both of marriage itself and of sexual relations as an essential and positive element in marriage (vs.3-5).

These examples from 1Cor. 7 have, hopefully, shown Paul as less anti-marriage than previously supposed. However, perhaps a more obvious place from which to recognise his more pronounced pro-family stance is within the household codes, particularly in his epistles to the Colossians (3.18-4.1) and Ephesians (5.21-6.9)[10]. There is no intention, here, of engaging in an exegetical analysis of these passages per se, nor does it seem necessary to debate which code came first, nor how much or how

[8] Barrett, 1Corinthians 181.
[9] Fee, 286.
[10] The codes in the Pastorals and 1Peter have had to be omitted.

little of these codes derived from Stoic or Hellenistic Jewish sources [11]. But since our purpose is to show how these passages may be seen as a promotion of pro-marriage and family attitudes, a defence of family life, it may be as well to consider some of the general reasons for these exhortations.

Firstly, despite there, perhaps, being some lack of evidence, is it not fairly likely that the dampening of hopes of an imminent eschaton played some part in the developing of the Christian household codes? As time passed and Christ did not return, Christians had to face the fact that they had to go on living in this world. The household codes were the practical recognition that 'they were stuck with the world as it was'[12], life had to go on until Christ came again and the eschaton was fully realised.

But, secondly, it is probably more likely that the codes represented the needs of new Christians - on the one hand, to show they were no threat to the social order and, on the other hand, to find for themselves a distinctive 'Christian' identity. Communities or religions which appeared to regard women as equals, allowed them leadership and authority (Rom. 16.1-2, 3, 6, 7, 12), which advocated fair treatment and a brotherly relationship with slaves (Phlm. 16), which, in other words, were upsetting the social hierarchical order of household management which the Graeco-Roman world regarded as both natural and necessary, were, almost inevitably, laying themselves open to charges of threatening society as a whole. The household codes, therefore, were the Christians' apologetic, their defence against the charge of anti-family and, therefore, anti-social behaviour. They were a response to the 'accusations of outsiders and a means of setting standards in line with common notions of propriety'[13].

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[11] See Balch, D. Let Wives; Balch, ABD 3; Dunn, J., 'Household Rules'.
[12] Dunn, J., 'Household Rules' 55.
[13] Lincoln, 358.

By the maintenance in the codes of the three-fold structure of relationships in most households - husband/wife, father/child, master/slave - Christians could show that their intention was to support, not undermine or overthrow the basic social structure. The fact that the household codes do, in the main, appear to uphold the hierarchical status quo (Eph. 5.22-23), suggests it is justifiable to regard them as a Christian apologetic fitting for that time, even although subsequently and still that hierarchical structure has created all sorts of problems.

Thirdly, the household codes were a statement of Christian distinctiveness over against the world. In their apparent subversiveness, the codes were 'signalling that being in Christ has ramifications for conduct'[14]. Some of these ramifications would, indeed, put Christians at odds with their surrounding culture but they would also provide a means of witness to the effect of their new life in Christ (cf. Chapter 12). Moreover, for Christian communities, the household codes would also have had what has been called, 'an internal integrative function within the church'[15]. They were a means of binding together the church as an entity and the individuals in it, providing a feeling of solidarity and security within the fellowship which gave them encouragement and courage to express in word and deed their distinctiveness from the often hostile world outside.

Despite similarities between all the codes, there are variations in each which suggest that there were particular reasons for the specific emphasis of each one. Each household code 'reflects concerns peculiar to a particular geographical area'[16]. So, for example, in Colossians, Paul is responding to those who promoted separation from the world and

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[14] Pokorny, 177. Ft 7.
[15] Fitzgerald, 'Haustafeln' 81
[16] Verner, 24.

asceticism as a superior mode of discipleship (Col. 2.18, 21) while, in Ephesians, although possibly also countermanding ascetic views given the extensive passage on the conduct of husbands and wives, there is a greater Christological emphasis, the purpose of which is not only to illustrate the closeness of Christ's bond to his church but, equally, is to stress the effects of discipleship in daily life and relationships, which means, in practice, being kind, forgiving, loving, forbearing and self-sacrificing, as exemplified by Christ (Eph. 4.2, 32, 5.2).

Although, then, there were a variety of reasons for the development of particular household codes, the underlying reason can be summarised thus. They were basically responses to the questions being raised by these first Christians about how their new found faith was to be expressed. Were they to conform to the world around them, separate from it or change it? How were they to go about any of that? How would their discipleship affect their personal relationships and obligations? Could they, should they, be abandoned, compromised, relativised or what? The houshold codes tackled such questions and gave some answers. It is, of course, the questions and answers with regard to marriage and family which are of most importance to this study. What were Paul's answers? Were they pro or anti the family?

Perhaps the first thing to be said is that the household codes, if nothing else, acknowledge and assume the continuance of marriage and family life, otherwise there would be no need for them. There is almost nothing of the Gospel talk of abandoning or playing down family relationships, of 'forsaking all', 'leaving the dead to bury their dead'. Quite the reverse, surely. As we saw from 1Cor. 7, Paul encourages Christians to continue in the normal relationships of the world, 'to live responsibly within the pattern of everyday relationships, not to discount

or abandon them'[17]. Thus, it appears that marriage and family, notwithstanding that the structure of the household codes is historically and culturally contextualised, are not only assumed but positively affirmed and supported.

However, this is no mere affirmation of the status quo, an encouragement to live and do as others, non-believers, in the world. Discipleship does make a difference to these primary relationships. Although to outward appearances, the structure of Christian families, their specific 'roles and duties' would appear similar to those around, 'to the participants they felt different' and, a closer examination would show that in attitudes and motivation and behaviour they were different[18]. Discipleship both sacralised and transformed marriage and family. The comparison of the relationship of Christ and the Church with the relationship of husband and wife in Ephesians, perhaps most clearly shows this element of sacredness in marriage relationships (Eph. 5.22-33). Mutuality and respect, humility and obedience (Phil. 2.1-5), tender care and self-sacrificing love, because they were imitations of Christ's relationship to his followers, marked out marriage and family as part of the sacred and holy. But, above all, it was submission to the Lordship of Christ, viewing every relationship in the light of Christ, that made the difference. 'The "in the Lord" statements show how for Christians, all parts of life are under control of Christ'[19]. Nothing 'in the Lord' is unholy (Col. 3.18-24). All relationships become holy in that light, just as Luther was to preach centuries later. Marriage and family relationships could, would, and should be regarded as something sacred and holy when viewed from a christological perspective (cf. Chapter 3).

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[17] Dunn, J., 'Household Rules' 59.
[18] Lincoln, 392-393.
[19] O'Brien, 220.

But, while the sacralising of marriage and family would be a felt reality for Christian believers, it might not be so evident to those outside the faith. However, discipleship also transformed marriage and family as it transformed all things and that transformation would have been evident to those with eyes to see. Indeed, the anxiety and fears of the authorities, which have already been recognised, stemmed from seeing, but misinterpreting, that very transformation. However, the goal of Christian disciples was not of any radical, revolutionary (and pragmatically impossible, given the first century political climate) transformation to a specifically 'Christian' society but was of a transformation 'in their minds' (Rom. 12.2). They were no longer totally 'conforming' to this world but were being 'transformed' in their minds (Rom. 12.2). Therefore, structures of family life, on the whole, were not transformed. They conformed to the pattern of their age. They were 'children of their time'[20]. But, the behaviour and the attitudes of the people in these structures were transformed as a result of their individual discipleship. Thus, in the home, wives could expect agapaic love from their Christian husbands, children could expect kindness and guidance within discipline from their Christian father and slaves could expect justice and fairness from their Christian masters.

What, then, can we conclude from these household codes? Although it may be impossible to make a definitive judgement about their source and to be certain about the reasons for them, yet it can, surely, be concluded that their very existence provides evidence that marriage and family life was assumed, affirmed, encouraged and promoted amongst the first Christians? But such life, such relationships, although maintaining the structural status quo, had yet a distinctiveness about them which was

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[20] Schnackenburg, 226.

the result of the transformation of unbelievers into believers. Here is no anti-family polemic but, rather, a very practical example of the transformation both to be expected from and made possible for disciples within their married and family life.

So far, no mention has been made of the fact that the family was also, in Paul's time, and with Paul's encouragement, the locus of the church. The topic of the church in the household, the family as church, is one too large and, perhaps, too peripheral, to this study and, therefore, only a brief comment can be made[21]. On a positive note, the fact of 'house-church' contributed to the promotion and encouragement of strong stable families since such would be the providers, not only of hospitality and care of new, individual Christians and missionary workers, but also of leadership and authority and examples for the Church community. (1Tim.3. 1,4,5) Moreover, for Paul, in particular, given his ambition to bring many Gentiles to salvation before Jesus' return, the family would be a much more attractive life-style than a celibate community. Thus, Paul's pragmatism encouraged the maintenance of family life to good effect since 'ties of family marriages and loyalty to the head of the household came to be the most effective means of recruiting members of the church'[22].

The aim of this chapter was to show that, although perhaps not so prominent and oftentimes ignored, there is much in the teaching and life of both Jesus and Paul which shows their positive and encouraging attitudes towards marriage and family life. The final task of Part Three is to bring together all these arguments for and against the priority of discipleship and family to see what conclusions may be drawn from them.

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[21] See Osiek, 14-24 & Banks.
[22] Brown, P., 90.

CHAPTER TEN. Conclusions.

The primary purpose of Part Three was to highlight the conflict between discipleship and family and, in particular, the claims of discipleship to priority over family. These claims and the grounds for them were set out in chapter seven and more closely examined in chapters eight and nine. What conclusions can be drawn from this examination of the claims to priority of discipleship over family?

Firstly, it may be concluded that many of the grounds for the promotion of discipleship over family or for regarding celibacy rather than family life as a superior form of discipleship, are not very firm. It would appear that such promotion stems, more often than not, from a particular historical or social situation or from a time-specific or group-specific theological belief. Hence, for example, Jesus' apparently anti-family stance or teaching could have resulted from the theological understandings, beliefs and experiences of his original hearers, the Jews. It was that particular group, at that particular time, in that particular place, with their very particular high regard for family, indeed their reliance on it for salvation, to whom Jesus had to relay his message of salvation for all through his death and resurrection. Similarly, much of Paul's apparent promotion of celibacy over married and family life sprang, not just from the particular social situation in the church at Corinth, not even primarily from his belief in an imminent eschaton (although both of these certainly informed his teaching), but, perhaps above all, from his own belief in his missionary call to the Gentiles.

Had we sufficient time or space, we could have demonstrated the same to be true for the history of the church. In other words, the promotion of a particular form of discipleship has been intended to meet a particular situation.

Secondly, it may be concluded that the consequences of this distorted and biassed message have, at times, been very negative, Reference was made to the consequences for women of the distortion of the message by a patriarchal society and to the effects of privatising and confining religion to the home where it appears irrelevant to the 'real' world, understood as the world outside the home. Such thinking has even affected very dedicated disciples whose exercising of discipleship is primarily pursued outside the family, in, for example, paid, full-time employment by the Church or related organisations or in unpaid, out-of-work, leisure hours (running church-related or other social activities). Separating the exercise of discipleship from family living, placing it outside the home, even fixing it in the organisational church can lead to the neglect of family, even the break-up of family or, on the other hand, to the abandonment of discipleship in favour of family where it seems a choice must be made. All of these possibilities are surely distortions of the Christian message with regard to family life and discipleship, foreseen and abjured by both Jesus and Paul. It needs to be said, again, that many of these negative consequences result from an understanding of Christian discipleship which defines itself in terms of a particular structure, that is, in terms of a very specific task or role - vicar, scout leader, lunch club organiser or prison visitor. Such tasks come to be regarded as more valued and valuable and 'real' Christian discipleship. But when men and women exercise their discipleship in such a way as to spend more time, energy and devotion on this perceived 'real' Christian work, as defined in a particular structure, then there are likely to be very negative consequences for family life. The result of such a distortion of discipleship could be that family is downgraded, side-lined or neglected, a very negative consequence indeed.

Similarly, this same privatisation of religion - or, perhaps, more correctly, the individualisation of religion - has meant today that Christian discipleship has become merely one item among many in the life-styles supermarket, a matter of purely personal and individualistic choice and taste and, as such, of little relevance to any but those who espouse it.

Thirdly, there is a more positive conclusion to be drawn from the discussion of discipleship versus family. In particular, there have been, from Christianity's beginning, clear indications of pro-family attitudes. Since many of the grounds for giving discipleship priority over family have their foundation in Scripture, that was where the discussion was concentrated. From the study of Jesus' life and teaching, from the statements of Paul and other apostles, from the existence and interpretation of the household codes, it can surely be concluded that family was regarded in a positive light by Christian disciples.

Given space, and using similar examples to those in chapter seven, this same fact could have been demonstrated throughout history. For example, there was an undoubted and inevitable pro-family stance amongst the Reformers, given their 'classical premise of the sanctity of all secular callings'[1]. Luther was particularly vehement against the celibate life and fulsome in his praise of marriage[2]. He made no distinction between the worldly and unworldly, between the secular and the divine. Would not Luther have regarded the notion of the home being separate from the world as a 'monasticising' of the home? For him discipleship must happen in the public arena not in the privacy of the cloister - be it cloistered monastery or cloistered hearth. Similarly, alongside the upgrading of 'work' as the place for discipleship, was the promotion, particularly by the Puritans and Dissenters, of the home as 'a little church'.

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[1] Allik, 784.
[2] Althaus, 86-89.

It is clear from the evidence of diaries, sermons and guidebooks on family life, with their particular references to religious observances, that family was regarded in a very positive light, not least as 'the transmitter' and sustainer of godly values[3].

Moreover, even the early Fathers were not so much anti-family as the theological beliefs and understandings, witnessed clearly in their writings, might suppose them to be. Indeed, where they recognised the dangers of extreme asceticism, they were most vocal in defence of marriage and family. Thus, Clement could point out that both celibate and married were equally called to the controlling of desire, to discipline and the service of God. He called, too, for recognition that marriage was 'a greater testing ground' which required even greater dedication and grace'[4]. Moreover, Augustine's high regard for family is revealed in his writing, On the Good of Marriage, in his admission of the 'body' as merely, 'problematic' and not 'evil'[5] and, above all, in his interpretation of Genesis 1, which gave family life the highest accolade, namely that it was part of God's original plan and intention for his creation. As Carol Harrison says, 'In terms of the Fathers' thought world, there is probably no better defence of marriage and the family, or higher evaluation of it, than this'[6].

Here again it must be said that it was the practical situation faced by, for example, Tertullian, with a wife, Chrysystom and Augustine with married congregations, that forced the issue and produced some very pro-family statements. There can be few lovelier descriptions, however, of Christian marriage than Tertullian's - 'two who are one in hope, one in desire, one in the way of life they follow. Nothing divides them, either in

[3] Durstan, 226-228.
[4] Harrison, 102.
[5] Ross, 94.
[6] Harrison, 104.

flesh or spirit' - or Augustine's married couple who 'are joined one to another side by side, who walk together and look together where they walk'[7]. Thus, even where and when the voices against marriage and family seemed most vociferous, these same voices proclaimed the joys of married and family life, not only their sensual pleasures, but also the mutual love and affection and bonds of friendship[8].

It can surely, therefore, be concluded that, throughout Christian history, there have always been those who have sounded positive pro-family notes, but, sadly, at times and for a variety of reasons, their voices have been drowned out by the clamour from a more anti-family lobby.

The recognition of these continuous pro-family voices, however, leads us to a final conclusion, one which will take us forward to the last part of this thesis. For the sake of argument, that is, in order to show how and why discipleship came to be seen as in some way antithetical to family, they were presented as opponents. This is clearly an artificial position since our evidence has shown that, amongst Christian disciples, family life has always been recognised and encouraged. This has been, and is, inevitable, given that family life is, in the main, the normal experience of the majority of people and of the majority of Christian disciples (cf. Part One).

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[7] Ibid 96 & 94.

[8] Part Four will, in part, counter the more modern negative remarks of, for example, Hauerwas, with an equivalent positive rejoinder.

PART FOUR.

The Place of Family in Discipleship

CHAPTER ELEVEN. The Impossibility of Separation.

It may be useful here to recap on the three tasks (cf. Chap. 1) set for this final part of our study which, primarily, concerns the relationship between family and discipleship. Firstly, we considered the history and examined the evidence of conflict between the two (Part Three). Secondly, in this chapter, we highlight the impossibility of separating the two which, consequently, leads, thirdly, (Chap. 12) to a discussion of how they may fit together. In order to show that the separation of family and discpleship is not really possible, it seems important, even necessary, to consider, very briefly, the distinction between the scriptural use of the terms 'call' and 'calling'.

Call and Calling.

This distinction between a call and calling is a very important one for Christians to make, not least because of its theological significance for Christian disciples. It is true that, within the NT, the words appear interchangeable at times but it seems fairly clear that most exegetes agree that the New Testament usage of the words 'call' and 'calling' refer to one primary call, namely the call to God, to enter a new relationship with him, to become saints (1Cor. 1.2). In other words, it is a call to discipleship with all that that means in terms of obedience to God's commands (1Cor. 7.19), commitment, service and transformation of life. So, for example, in 2Thess. 1.11, Eph. 5.1,4, Phil. 3.14 and Rom. 11.29, amongst others, there is 'no trace of any meaning except God's call in Christ'[1], no suggestion of a call to a particular occupation (apostle or prophet) or marital status

[1] Bartchy, 135. ft. 479.

(marriage or celibacy) or religious observance (circumcision)[2]. Scripture seems to suggest, therefore, that the theological significance of a Christian's call lies in its interpretation as the call of God to begin the new life of a disciple. The call to discipleship is the primary call of God to an individual but is also an overarching call to that individual to be for God. It is a call into the kingdom of God, a call to accept salvation, it is 'a way to describe Christian conversion'[3].

Paul, in particular, certainly recognises that there are a variety of charisms given to Christian disciples, (1Cor. 12.7-10), a variety of activities open to them, dependent on the particular gift they have received (1Cor. 7.7) and a variety of life-styles in which these may be exercised (1Cor. 7.10,12,17,24). However these do not represent the call of God (cf. the 'singular' verb) but are the corollary of the response to the call and not calls in themselves. Indeed, the whole tenor of 1Corinthians 7, according to Bartchy, is how to relate the call of God to the circumstances (the callings) of life[4]. For Paul, although there is clearly only one primary call, the 'condition' (NRSV 1Cor. 7.20), situation, circumstances in which disciples find themselves when called, may now, because of their discipleship, be 'dignified' by the title, 'calling'. That is to say, the call of discipleship means that all else in a disciple's life becomes part of that call and may rightly be 'designated a calling'[5] or, more accurately, 'the assignments of Christ to those who respond to the call'[6]. Therefore, marriage and family, along with apostleship, teaching, evangelising,

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[2] See Barrett, 1Corinthians 168.
[3] Fee, 309.
[4] Bartchy, 133.
[5] Orr & Walther, 216.
[6] Fee, 310.

ministering to others etc. may all rightly be designated as callings for those who have responded to the call to discipleship.

In short, then, we can speak of a distinction to be made between the call of God and callings. However, although there is a distinction, there cannot be a separation of them for the very pragmatic reasons to which we now turn.

Already Givens.

The first very pragmatic reason for regarding the separation of discipleship and family as impossible has been touched on several times before. It is the presence of what may be called the 'already givens'. When the call to follow comes, the prospective disciples are not in limbo. They are fixed in a particular situation, with particular responsibilites. This was clearly the case from the beginning. For example, Nicodemus was a leader of the Jews (Jn. 3.1), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8.27-39) and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16.25-34) were both engaged in their official duties, Cornelius headed a household (Acts 10.24-48) when the call to discipleship came; that is to say, there were 'already givens' in their lives in terms of family and work. Moreover, as we saw, interpretations of Paul's writings recognise these 'already givens'. Perhaps Barrett's comments on 1Cor. 7.17 make it most clear. He indicates that the life to which God has called refers to 'the condition in which a person is when called'[7]. But this must, inevitably, be so for God's call to individuals comes at a particular time and stage of their lives. Discipleship, therefore, begins with where and what disciples are, at the specific point of call. These 'already givens' may concern the particular, - for example, age, (is the disciple a child, a young adult, in

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[7] Barrett, <u>1Corinthians</u> 168.

middle or old age?), marital or family status (single, married, parent of young children, adult child of elderly parents?), work or community responsiblities, the skills and experiences gathered through life which have formed and shaped character, personality and beliefs - or the general - the historical age, geographical location, the pervading culture, not least the theological understandings of the time. In other words, at that point of call, individuals have already a personal history, (a past), and personal responsibilities, (a present), and are set in a particular context, all of which have a bearing on their discipleship. Since individuals each come with their own particular 'already givens' so these will make a difference to their particular outworking of discipleship[8].

Of course, the 'already givens' are not immutable. Circumstances and people change, some in the natural course of events (most children do grow into adults, more or less independent of their parents), some through events outside an individual's control (redundancy, accidents, natural disasters) and some through deliberate choice. But it is important to recognise that account must be taken of these 'already givens'. It is not easy, nor is it right (if we accept, for example, the many comments on 1Cor. 7.17-24) for Christian disciples to try to escape from that which has been assigned to them. As we saw earlier, the overwhelming message of 1Cor. 7 is 'to remain', surely a still valid exhortation to accept, whenever possible, the 'already givens' at the time when the call to discipleship comes.

[8] Wells, 6.

'Earthing' discipleship.

A second pragmatic reason for the impossibility of separation between discipleship and family stems from the need to 'earth' discipleship. Being a disciple means, in a nutshell, loving and serving God but, as was pointed out in chapters five and six, this has to be expressed in practical action. Those who belong to God are those who do the will of God, who feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the prisoner (Mt. 25.31-46). Although Jesus' parable may be and has often been interpreted as disciples doing these things on behalf of God, may it not equally be a lesson to disciples on how to love God - loving and serving the God we cannot see by means of loving and serving those we can see.

It may be helpful to the understanding of how and where discipleship must be earthed to use what has been acknowledged as the primary characteristic of both discipleship and family, namely love, to explore this issue of 'earthing'. It is surely right to say that 'any theoretical love is unreal until it is, in practice, grounded upon real love for concrete individual persons'[9]. In other words, the love expected of disciples is not a 'generalised benevolence'[10], a warm glow inside, an airy-fairy feeling of well being but rather is a love more likely to bring bad backs, raw hands and flowing tears (of both joy and sorrow). It is a hands-on love, a love earthed and concretised.

But, although there is little doubt that discipleship and love must be earthed, certain questions arise. For example, 'What does it mean in practical concrete terms for disciples to love? Does it mean, 'love everybody', a universal love? Does it mean 'love everyone in the same way', an equal regard? Does it mean give preference, even priority, to

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[9] Tetlow, 119.
[10] Pope, 179.

some over others, for example to friends and family? In summary, the question is, 'Where, more precisely, may love be earthed?' Our contention - of relevance to the relationship of discipleship and family - is that it must be earthed more in the particular than in the universal.

Universal or Particular Love?

The discussion in chapter six on the paradoxical nature of agape noted the fact that love was both universal and particular. God's love, we saw, was for the world and for whosoever repents (Jn. 3.16). May it not rightly be said, therefore, that disciples, as imitators of God, are required to love 'the world', for such love is in tune with God's love? If God loves and cares for all, should not his followers do likewise? 'Universal divine love warrants universal human love' argues Outka[11].

But, although such universal love may well be warranted, is it actually possible? It is likely that the disciples' love for God both 'generates' universal love and 'leads one to imitate the universal scope of divine love'[12]. But, although the call to love brings disciples a realisation of 'the legitimate claims' of all people to be loved, it does not follow that each person is 'responsible for meeting all these claims'[13]. Indeed, there may well be occasions and situations where a belief in universal love is used as an excuse to avoid or shy away from loving a particular person. For example, the celibate priest may use the busyness of 'loving the world' to avoid loving and caring for an elderly parent.

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[11] Ibid 174. This article is the basis of the argument of this section.
[12] Ibid 183.
[13] Meilaender, Friendship 100.

However, if it is accepted that love has to be grounded, expressed, worked out in relation to individual persons, then it has also to be said that universal love is unrealistic. Why? We are finite creatures. It is open to God, the Infinite, to love each individual in the world. It is not open, pragmatically, to us who are bound by space and time. 'Our general benevolence is limited because we are so', said Jeremy Taylor many centuries ago[14]. This, indeed, was the experience of God made Man. In Jesus, God's love was confined by space and time, limited to particular people in a particular place. Thus, although, in theory, disciples may rightly maintain that, as followers/imitators of God, they love all people, in practice, they can only express that love towards a few individuals. That is to say with Augustine, 'existence in time makes necessary particular attachments rather than a bond of universal love'[15].

But, even if it is conceded that disciples cannot practically express universal love, how are the individuals, who do come within a disciple's space and time, to be regarded? Are they to be equally regarded? Is no partiality, preference or priority to be given?

Equal Regard or Preferential Love?

On the face of it, equal regard , like universal love, certainly bears the hall marks of Christian love. It is an imitation of the love of God who makes the sun shine on the just and the unjust (Mt. 5.45) Moreover, equal regard recognises what God recognises, namely the value, worth and dignity of each individual <u>per se</u>. Their worth and value is not dependent, on status, position or even on a 'special relationship' (for example, within

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[14] Ibid 26.
[15] Ibid 21.

a family). Whatever the relationships between people, these are irrelevant, so the argument goes, to the exercise of Christian love and discipleship.

Much of the discussion about Christian love being understood as equal regard has come in the context of the relationship between the self and others (cf. Chapter Six). Moreover, often the aim of such discussion is to encourage, indeed to legitimise, love of self. In such a context, the regarding of one's self equally with others has considerable merit.

There are, however, some considerable problems with this idea of equal regard. To begin with, the very vocabulary, 'regard' or 'respect', (often used synonymously), seems to exude an air of detachment. Respect and regard, being much more products of the intellect, more cognitive acts, where reasoning has determined worth and importance, allow for a considerable degree of non- involvement. It is in thinking things through that my mind determines the proper attitude to others is respect and regard. In appearing as cognitively constructed rules for behaviour, albeit socially and morally worthy rules, they seem to have more to do with fairness, justice and tolerance than with love. Regard and respect, like universal love seem too general and impersonal to be a fair representation of love. They promote acceptance of all but without personal involvement. In other words, this interpretation of love is still not 'earthed' enough and, while love ignores or downplays the affections and emotions, it will remain insufficiently 'earthed'. But can Christian love be dispassionate and disinterested? Surely not. Is not Linda Woodhead right in describing Christian love as 'something much

warmer, deeply concerned and emotionally attached'[16]? It surely cannot be as impersonal and unemotional as regard and respect suggest.

There is, furthermore, a problem with the word 'equal', namely that it does not recognise what might be called the 'philia' or preferential element in love, what Stephen Post describes as 'a differential pull'[17]. Equal regard implies, even requires, impartiality in relation to others. All others (as well as self) are to be treated as on a par, at least in terms of claims to 'equal consideration if not identical treatment'[18]. But how practical is this? Such an understanding of love is not earthed in the realities of life. It takes little account of those social and emotional relationships which appear 'natural' to human beings (cf. Parts One & Two), seeming to ignore the chosen and special friendships and the bonds of marriage and family, all of which work against impartiality and equality of consideration.

Given these reasons, may it not be maintained that equal regard, that is, loving everyone in the same way, is not the most practical way for disciples to express Christian love?

The basic fact, which really cannot be ignored, is that love is, in reality, preferential and not impartial. As the discussion on philia showed (chapter six), most of us prefer some people to others, love particular people more than others. Christian disciples need not feel embarrassed, ashamed or guilty for so doing, nor should they since Jesus himself so acted, giving preference to three of his twelve disciples (Mk. 9.4), even perhaps having a favourite (Jn. 13.23), regarding Mary, Martha and Lazarus as special friends. Indeed, the Gospel stories portray a God who

[16] Woodhead, 'Love', 48.
[17] Pope, 169.
[18] Outka, 268.

shows partiality - to the sheep over the goats (Mt. 25.32), to Israel over other nations (Mt. 10.6) and to his 'Beloved" (Mk. 1.11). Moreover, the command to love one's neighbour implies, does it not, that the person who is near is to be the preferred object of love, whether that is a physical nearness (as it was for the Good Samaritan on the Jericho Road, or may be for a modern Good Samaritan in the local High Street), or an emotional nearness (to a friend, colleague or family member)?

Moreover, there is a sense in which partiality highlights the specialness of every individual per se. This is that proper partiality which, according to Oppenheimer, is 'the acknowledgement of individual mattering, love that appreciates and minds about particular people for their own sakes', a reflection of God's concern for the individual, an example of 'the august partiality of God'[19]. The dangers of exclusiveness, of closed friendships and insular families, certainly need to be guarded against but the possibilities of misusing partiality should not lead to its non-use. Rather, its use endorses the Christian message of the value and worth of each individual to God.

Moreover, preferential love recognises emotional realities. The ordering of love takes account of the very things that equal regard ignores, namely, the affections and emotions, the social and natural relationships which create a drive towards preference and partiality. Indeed, these are probably the potent forces which determine the order of preference, which decide who will be shown partiality. If such emotions and bonds are essential to human nature, are part of what it means to be human, then, can it not, also, justifiably be maintained that human nature itself makes preferential love inevitable? But, whether it is inevitable, it is at least

[19] Oppenheimer, Hope 131.

much more pragmatically possible than equal regard. Whatever the reason for it, whether because of nature or nurture, the fact remains that, in reality, it is preferential love which is manifested. Practical love, which demands personal involvement and personal feelings requires also partiality and limitation.

What, then, are the answers to the questions posed at the beginning of the chapter? Are disciples required to love all, to love equally or to show partiality in their loving? There is a sense in which the answer to all these questions is 'Yes'. However, as we have tried to show, there appear to be very valid reasons for saying that preferential love is true to the spirit of divine love but is also in tune with our human nature and as such is more possible for us to express. Moreover, as we shall see, this very preferential love may, in effect, lead to universal love since, as Augustine saw it, the particular loves are 'the means God uses to lead his creatures towards universal love'[20].

Priority of Family .

But can one go further? Is there any validity for the priority of family in love's preferences and, consequently, is there validity in the priority of family in discipleship? Let us see what case can be made for this proposition. Since much of that case will be built from the drawing together of issues previously mentioned, for example, creation ordering, human psychological need and natural pair-bonding, it should be sufficient here merely to illustrate the relevance of these issues to the priority of family in the ordering of love and in the exercise of discipleship.

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[20] Meilaender, Friendship 19.

Firstly, there would appear to be a theological basis for placing family at the heart of any order of love. The Genesis accounts of creation, as we saw, present the union of one man and one woman (marriage) as a gift of God, part of his creative plan. Moreover, part of the purpose of their creation is to 'be fruitful', that is to produce families, to be co-creators with God. For Christian disciples, then, the parent/child relationship may be regarded as a special relationship since it is divinely created.

Theological language throughout Scripture seems to support this idea of the special relationship of family. For example, both the disciples' personal relationship with God and Christ's relationship with the Church is framed in family language. Linguistically, familial love becomes 'a close analogy for divine love'[21]. Marriage and family life are also used metaphorically as a kind of sacred symbol and, in being so used, they themselves take on a specialness of their own. Does not their identification as a primary symbol of the divine/human relationship give them a claim to priority in the human/human relationship and in the ordering of love?

Moreover, given that the primary business of disciples is to imitate God, this special relationship would seem most adequately to allow for such imitation. Post goes so far as to say that, 'In general, the Christian moral life is an imitation of God; specifically it is an imitation of God's love as parental care'[22]. In the creating of children, in loving, supporting, forgiving and accepting that creation, men and women are able, not only to understand experientially more of the heart of God but are also more able to fulfil their call to be imitators of God. Here again, there seems to be

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[21] Pope, 188.
[22] Ibid 187.

theological justification for giving priority in love to family since that provides most practical experience of imitating God's love. As Woodhead says, 'Such special loves are more likely to tell us about agape than any others'[23].

Secondly, there is a psychological basis for the family's priority in the ordering of love. It is the family which, typically, both forms the character and meets the needs of human beings for self-identity and meaning, for stability and security, for emotional expression, particularly of loving and being loved. Empirical evidence from psychological research supports this idea that it is the particular and special relationship of family which not only supplies human psychological needs but also 'nurtures our capacities for more extensive love and so', according to Post, 'forms the basis of moral life and (even) the basis for civilisation'[24]. It may appear rather grandiose to put familial love on such a high pedestal yet it is difficult to deny that such (familial) love does demand a very high place, indeed a primary place, in any ordering of love because of its importance to individual psychological well-being and flourishing.

Thirdly, there is the natural basis for the priority of human love. Marriage and family are relationships which seem best to 'fit' human nature in all its complexity. They are, indeed, tantamount to an instinct, in the sense of a 'strong and general tendency' within humans for monogamous pair-bonding[25]. If this is so, then is it not likely to follow that there will also be an instinct, Post's 'differential pull', towards those relationships in allocating love, concern and care? Indeed, they become 'the focal point of love'[26].

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[23] Woodhead, 'Love' 50.
[24] Pope, 189.
[25] See Ch.3 ft.11 for sources on this point.
[26] Pope, 169.

Moreover, the very nature of these relationships supports their priority in the ordering of love. 'Being married. 'being a family' means having particular loyalties, special obligations and a very special kind of love, (agape). Such meaning surely endorses, indeed validates the claims of family to be a prime recipient of love.

Conclusion.

The intention of this chapter was to show how impossible it is to try to separate discipleship and family. In the first instance, they are inextricably linked in that one (family) is a valid outworking of the other (discipleship). Every part of the lives of disciples is affected by the primary call to discipleship, including their family lives. For this reason, family life is incorporated into that primary call and, indeed, may itself rightly claim the title of calling. Moreover, as was concluded in Part One, family, regardless of its variation in structure, still represents the typical life-style for most Christian disciples. Even more so, then, is it going to have a prominent place in their discipleship.

Secondly, the 'already givens' suggest that family and discipleship not only cannot but should not be separated. Scripture and pragmatic experience join to confirm this view. Prospective disciples face their call with a past and a present which influence their response and help determine the manner of their discipleship.

But, thirdly, it is discipleship's need for 'earthing' which provides, perhaps, the strongest reason for making the separation of family and discipleship impossible. Furthermore, as, hopefully, the preceding arguments have made clear, discipleship is likely to be most realised in the particular rather than the general, in the specific rather than the universal.

There appear to be firm grounds for maintaining that family represents the 'particular'. Theology, psychology and human nature combine forces to make a powerful argument which allows family priority in the exercising of discipleship, particularly when discipleship is understood in terms of agape, love towards others.

If, then, discipleship and family cannot be separated, some obvious questions present themselves. What are the consequences of this fact? How do they then fit together? It is this relationship between them which will occupy the final chapters of this study.

CHAPTER TWELVE. The Family's Place.

If, therefore, discipleship and family cannot be separated, how, then, are they to relate to one another? In order to see how family and discipleship fit together, it may be helpful to employ a number of metaphors. For example, the family may be considered as an 'arena' for discipleship; a 'school' for discipleship; a 'practice ground' for discipleship; a 'witness-box' or a 'mission field'. Hopefully, each of these will show more clearly the links between family and discipleship, even producing a strong and binding chain. Let us examine each of these metaphors and see what they reveal.

Family : an 'arena' of discipleship.

Firstly, then, the family as an 'arena' for discipleship. It should be noted that there is a very deliberate use of the indefinite rather than the definite article here, in recognition of the fact that there are many arenas for discipleship. Family is only one of these arenas, one 'stage' for discipleship. However, given the previous conclusions that family life is the most typical life-style for most people, it follows that it is a typical arena for most disciples - indeed, not only typical but also likely to be both an initial and a continuing arena so long as both family and discipleship remain elements in individuals' lives.

It might also be noted in passing that an arena implies a public stage, where people can observe what is going on. Although it is true that much of what goes on in families may remain hidden from those outside, the discipleship of individual family members is 'played out' in the full view of a family audience. On that family 'stage', discipleship is often very brightly spotlighted.

However, there is a much more obvious reason for the use of this metaphor. Given how much has already been written about the conflict between discipleship and family, it is surely fitting to use the image of an arena. Whether it be the Roman arena, where Christians faced the lions, the boxing arena where Ali faced Foreman or the political arena where Hague faces Blair, the picture presented is one of conflict, rivalry and tension - things which are all too evident in and between discipleship and family. With its connotations of fighting and disagreement, an arena, then, can quite properly reflect the clashes in family life which must be faced, dealt with and, if possible, resolved, including the conflict between discipleship and family itself. However, our concern is not with conflict within families per se - on which much could be written - but, rather, with the particular conflict caused as a result of discipleship.

And there are, indeed, conflicts beween these two - over, for example, priorities, or over varying understandings of obligations, responsibilities and the meaning of discipleship itself. Moreover, the 'inevitable and normal'[1] conflict, which is the reality of daily family life, seems to work against discipleship, seems actually to create an arena of conflict where 'spirituality is challenged'[2]. If conflict is a fact of life, can this conflict be resolved? If 'resolving' means 'eliminating', the answer must be 'No'. Since all families are made up of diverse people, differing in personalities, with particular prejudices and irrationalities, and, since, within Christian families, there will be differing understandings and different levels of discipleship, conflict is almost inevitable. Much of that conflict stems from our very humanness. We are all different and we are all fallible, both as families and as disciples. Since we are imperfect beings, then all our endeavours, whether in family life or discipleship, will fall

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[1] Borrowdale, Reconstructing 144.
[2] dos Anjos, 101.

short of the perfect. Moreover, where and when the major part of our time and energy is engaged with one (discipleship, say), then the other (family) may well suffer, with tension and conflict ensuing. What Meilaender said with regard to friendship and vocation, namely, 'we should not imagine that the fit can ever be perfectly resolved in this life'[3], might equally well be said of family and discipleship. Recognition of the very fact of the existence of conflict, acknowledging that its elimination in this life is unlikely, that it cannot be solved once and for all is a first step towards dealing with it.

But, is conflict to be regarded as 'a Bad Thing'? Certainly, where conflicting claims of family and discipleship cause continual, chronic fighting between family members, where spouses or children are, or, at least, feel themselves to be, side-lined, neglected, even rejected as a result of discipleship (shades of the 24 hour vicar again or the adult children who renounce family and cut themselves off 'for the sake of the Gospel'), where children, in particular, deliberately turn deaf ears to the call to discipleship because of their observation and experience of the tension and unhappiness it seems to have caused, then there may well be justification for a negative view of conflict.

However, there also numerous reasons for seeing conflict, whether between family members or, as is our primary concern, between the claims of family and discipleship, in a more positive light. For example, although conflict, at its root, stems from the fact that there are 'differences', these need not always be interpreted, negatively, as 'disagreements' but may be, and, perhaps, should be, interpreted positively as 'diversity'. It is precisely the negative connotation of 'difference' which has led to all kinds of discriminatory 'isms' - racism, sexism, anti-

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[3] Meilaender, Friendship 100.

semitism etc. History and politics confirm that, where diversity is denied or prohibited, peace becomes increasingly fragile (e.g. 1930s Germany or 1990s Northern Ireland). Scientific theory also confirms that 'a chaotic, irregular system is actually more stable than a regular one'[4]. Attempts to harmonise, to make all conform to one pattern, to allow no room for diversity, are likely to have almost entirely the opposite effect and this applies to both discipleship and family.

There are, as we saw, a variety of ways of 'being family' of 'being disciples'. But, when there are attempts to bring conformity rather than to accept diversity, then there is likely to be conflict. Thus, if discipleship is expected to conform to a pattern which is likely to be antithetical to family, conflict is bound to arise between them. However, for Christian disciples, Scripture seems to make clear, from the beginning of the creation story and throughout the New Testament, that diversity and difference - whether in the created world itself, in family structures and patterns, in the race, gender, status of disciples, in the manner of discipleship or in the exercise of spiritual gifts - are acceptable to God, not a sign of failure, far less a sign of 'sin'.

In short, recognition of these positive elements provides a second constructive way of dealing with the inevitable conflict. By highlighting differences, conflict may bring both an appreciation and consideration of diversity, which leads to growth in understanding of people and situations, awareness of possibilities for beneficial change and fuller realisation of the value of different patterns both in family and discipleship, all of which will make for more harmonious relationships within families and between family and discipleship. This growth in understanding may, then, well lead to change in our life-style, in the

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[4] Borrowdale, Reconstructing 198.

manner of our discipleship and in our mind set about both. Preferences may be revealed as prejudices which not only aggravate the conflict but stunt or even prevent growth.

One particular example may suffice to show how the conflict between family and discipleship may act as a catalyst for change both in understanding and behaviour. The family has been referred to above as one of the 'already givens' in disciples' lives. But the implication in the words 'already given' of 'being stuck with it' has, at the very least, neutral, but more likely 'negative' overtones. That is to say that, for disciples, family appears to be something to be worked around or somehow 'fitted in' to the life of discipleship. '"Givens" invite only acceptance', says Wells[5]. One might want to add that such acceptance may well hide a resentment which sooner or later may result in tension and conflict. However, closer examination and deeper thinking of, for example, scripture, along with discussions or observations of other differing ideas, may well bring the realisation that family can be regarded, not only as an 'already given' but, much more positively, as a gift, and a divine gift at that, which 'invites a creative response'[6]. In the context of conflict between family and discipleship, this new way of regarding children in the family, not as 'passive' givens but as 'actively received' gifts, may well promote change in behaviour towards them, the development of healthier family life, new spiritual insights which enable disciples to grow in faith and in understanding of what it means to be a 'child' in the eyes of God and, not least, resolution of some parts of the family/discipleship tension.

A third step towards dealing with these conflicting claims of family and discipleship is to recognise within the tensions, that which will be

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[5] Wells, 9.
[6] Ibid 9.

enlarged on in a moment, namely, the opportunity to practise discipleship. The daily encounters of family life, with their inherent possibilities of conflict, require the fruit of the Spirit. This 'arena' of conflict can provide a place for these fruits and gifts of the Spirit to flourish and be appropriated. Indeed, perhaps more than anything, it is the conflict in and with the family, that has the greatest potential for displaying the meaning of discipleship since it forces us to show signs of discipleship. When the conflicts arise, the practical demonstration of the characteristics of discipleship becomes a real possibility and, although practice may not necessarily make perfect, it does usually increase and hone the skills which move us nearer to perfection. Thus regarded, the 'arena' appears less of a battlefield and more like the exhibition 'stage', referred to earlier where discipleship may be openly and conspicuously viewed and where its characteristics may be developed.

What, then, does the metaphorical use of 'arena' tell us about the place of family in discipleship? Firstly, with its connotations of contest and rivalry, it highlights the fact of conflict, both within family life, within discipleship and between them both which just has to be accepted as a fact. Moreover, this is a conflict which will never, in this life, have a permanent, once-for-all resolution. This was something realised long ago by St. Anselm who both recognised the tension and made clear that any kind of resolution can only happen, as he described it, 'ambulando', that is to say, in the walking through life, day by day, situation by situation. He said, 'The tension is "solved" only as it is lived out in a life understood as a pilgrimage towards God who gives us the friend and neighbour'[7] (and, we might add, 'family'). He it was, too, who recognised, not only the

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[7] Meilaender, Friendship 102.

clashes of loyalty but also the paradox, in that it is the same God who gives the 'earthly bonds' and who calls to discipleship.

Yet, as we have tried to show, that conflict may be seen in a positive light. The conflict reveals a diversity and variety which may be delighted in as a provider for differing needs and circumstances rather than feared as a disturber of harmony and unity. However, insofar as the family provides a place for the conflict with discipleship both to be joined and, perhaps, to be, in part and from time to time, resolved, it may rightly be regarded as an 'arena'.

Secondly, with its connotation of a public platform, the 'arena' of family puts discipleship centre-stage where its characteristics can be clearly and plainly observed. But the characteristics of discipleship may be as noticeable by their absence as by their presence. In revealing deficiences in discipleship, the 'arena' may encourage the development and practice of those traits which are essential for a more perfect discipleship. Insofar as family focuses attention on discipleship, brings it into the spotlight's glare, highlights its strengths and weaknesses, then it may, again rightly bear the label of an'arena'.

Family: the 'school' for discipleship .

Firstly it needs to be said straightaway that, just as with the 'arena' metaphor, the family is not the only school for discipleship but, rather, one of a number of 'schools' for discipleship. However, given that almost every discipline which has an interest in families -social scientists, psychologists, health practitioners, anthropologists, theologians - testifies to their educational role[8], would it not be foolish to maintain that the family is not also a fundamental school of discipleship, even the primary

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[8] Astley, 188 & BSR 1995, 70.

place for learning discipleship? There are those who would dispute such a claim and would, for example, wish to promote the church (not necessarily the 'institution' but the 'faith community') as the primary school for discipleship or, in broader terms, and in Stanley Hauerwas' words, as 'the school for character'[9], meaning moral and/or Christian character.

Hauerwas' argument here seems to imply that the family should not and, indeed, cannot be the context for character formation and that any attempts to make it so, lead to the idolising of the family. Such arguments seem to deny reality, that is, deny the proven fact that formation of character begins and is established in infancy and childhood where the primary influences on that formation is family. Such arguments fail to recognise that it is the family which is 'the first reference group whose values, norms and practices one assimilates and uses to evaluate the values, norms and behaviour of others[10]' and those who use such arguments seem unaware that 'experiencing God starts from the experience of family'[11]. It cannot, of course, be denied that the church does, indeed, provide a very important and useful 'school' environment for both the learning and practice of discipleship. However, to give it, as Hauerwas and others do, such a high place, where it takes precedence over family, is surely to fall into the very trap of 'idolising' which Hauerwas identifies in reference to the family[12].

It is difficult to see why, when all other kinds of 'education' have their foundation in family life, Christian discipleship should be an exception to this rule and have its educational foundation somewhere

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[9] Hauerwas, 'The Family' 146-157.
[10] Elias, 37.
[11] dos Anjos, 102. See also, Dunn, M., NEICE paper 2.
[12] See also Clapp, 25,77,86; Westerhoff, 5-14; and for a response, Astley, in Barton(ed), The Family 201-202.

else, for instance, in the church, in the community of faith. Therefore, while recognising that there are other 'schools' of discipleship, not least the communities of faith which include the institutional church, the family, by virtue of being a primary locus of education in general, must be regarded also as a primary source of schooling in discipleship.

A second preliminary comment, or, rather, disclaimer, should be made. It needs to be emphasised that our particular concern is with the family as a school for discipleship, that is with the 'specialist' school, specifically geared to the education and training of disciples. The family as a place of Christian education or Christian formation is not the primary focus, although these both have a role to play in discipleship. Therefore, emphasis is not on either the stages of faith development[13] or on the formal education of both children and adults. Our concern is with how - in what manner - the family functions as a 'school' for Christian disciples. In order to find this out, it may be useful to ask four questions. Who? (is in this school); Why? (What are the school's purposes?); How? (What are its teaching/learning methods); What 'subjects' are taught?

(a) Who?

In describing the family as a 'school for discipleship', it follows that all the family members are, de facto, part of that school. Being part of the family means being part of the school. Some will be already committed to discipleship, to learning more of what discipleship means and how it is to be practised. Others will be observers of or enquirers about the discipleship practised by the more experienced disciples. But, in educational jargon, this school for discipleship is comprehensive and non-selective, open to all the family. Since opportunities both to learn and to teach are open to all the family, who are the pupils and who the teachers?

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[13] For such, see Fowler, Stages

If our purpose was consideration of Christian formation, then the answer might well be that parents are the teachers and children the pupils. However, personnel are not so easily delineated in the school of discipleship, not least when Mt. 18.2 is called to mind. The child, for Jesus, is the model of discipleship for adults, the teacher rather than the pupil. Parents learn about themselves, about their personal strengths, abilities, weaknesses or shortcomings, about their personal beliefs and value systems through their dealings with their children. Moreover, very often, children reawaken or revive[14] or even instigate the discipleship of adults by their needs for the unselfish love and care of their parents, by their own wonder and delight in a world whose charms for adults may have faded and whose Creator disciples may have forgotten, and by their awareness (shown in pointed questions) of the differences between what is said (about discipleship, for example) and what is done. In these and many other ways, children act as teachers to both committed and would-be disciples alike.

However, roles will also often be reversed. Not least because of children's inexperience and immaturity, adult disciples are, more often than not, likely to be in the teacher role. They it is who have the knowledge and experience of discipleship which can be passed on to those, whether children or adult who are not yet committed or who are just beginning their discipleship.

In this 'school', then, all members of the family may from time to time function as pupils or teachers. They learn from one another's knowlege, insight and experience. But, those who have already responded in faith to the call to discipleship can and will claim as their supreme Teacher, the Spirit who' teaches all things' (Jn.16.13).

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[14] Astley, 196.

(b) Why?

Perhaps two possibilities among many aims and purposes could be singled out. The first aim of this school is to create an atmosphere which is conducive to learning - that is, learning which encourages and is helpful to the pursuit of discipleship. In particular, that means creating a place where learners/pupils feel safe and secure. This, of course, is a fundamental requirement for any learning, since it is when there is a strong feeling of safety and trust in others - whether teachers or fellow pupils - that it is less daunting, easier and more possible to push forward into new and unknown areas of knowledge and experience. This has a particular relevance for disciples, part of whose learning is to trust themselves to God. The family that creates a place of security and trust is schooling disciples in what is meant by being secure and safe in God.

An atmosphere conducive to learning means also a place of acceptance and openness. This, too, may be regarded as a necessity since such a climate allows for reflection, exploration and, very importantly, questioning, criticism, and even, dissent. The family 'school' where every member is certain of their acceptability and feels free to express their beliefs and even their most outrageous doubts is more likely to produce 'the condition of possibility for healthy faith' and a growing discipleship[15].

Finally, the atmosphere conducive to learning about discipleship needs to be an atmosphere of 'grace' which pervades the whole family and can be sensed by all in daily expressions of love, kindness, patience and mercy. Such an atmosphere is fundamental to the learning of discipleship since it serves as a reminder of what grace means for disciples both in terms of their personal salvation and in terms of their expected discipleship.

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[15] Natale, 248.

A second aim of the 'school' for discipleship may be described as growth for all its members - that is , growth as disciples. Such a statement will cover different kinds of growth. There will be growth in both the knowledge and intellectual understanding of discipleship as well as growth in its practical expression. Perhaps Scripture itself best summarises it. The 'school's' aim is the maturity of its pupils, that they move from 'milk' to 'meat', (1Cor. 3.1-3), that disciples grow from immaturity to 'the full measure of perfection' (Eph. 4.13) and that, above all, their growth should lead to transformation through the renewing of their mind and the exercising of their God-given gifts. (Rom. 12.2ff).

Many other aims, a longer 'mission statement' for the school of discipleship could be given. However, these two - the creation of an atmosphere conducive to learning and the growth of each member of the 'school' - would seem to encapsulate the most basic, fundamental and important aims for the family which wants to regard itself as a 'school' for discipleship.

(c) How?

To some degree or another, a variety of methods will be employed in the teaching and/or learning of discipleship - the subconscious, 'soaking up through the pores' nurturing, which is typical of early learning; modelling and imitation; and formal didactic education where the teacher gives information and passes on knowledge and skills. That is to say, there will be opportunities to instruct and/or learn about what Christian discipleship means, through what might be called 'intentional cognitive education'[16]. Such instruction was (and is) regarded as something very important in the Jewish tradition, indeed was laid upon Jews as a divine command (Deut. 6.4-7). As John Barclay says, 'In Judaism,

16 Astley, 189.

children could be expected to learn the divine decrees'[17]. Explanations, too, for Jewish practices were built into these practices themselves. For example, in the Passover meal the child's question, 'Why is this night special?', brings the knowledge of past history and experience. But what is most important for us to recognise is that this direct teaching was located within the family. The family was the school where direct instruction was given.

So it was, also, at the beginning of Christianity, when family provided the place for learning the stories about Jesus and the Gospel message and where instructions were passed on about how to live as disciples via, for example, the various Household Codes. Through the centuries, however, for a variety of historical reasons, some worthy, some less so - for example, the desire of the institutional church for power and control over people's thinking or the practice of state schooling for all - there has come a movement towards, indeed almost now a presumption, that Church (or school), not family, is the place, at least for the didactic instruction about discipleship (and almost everything else. Herein lies the previously mentioned danger of idolising the church as the fountain of all knowledge so far as Christian instruction is concerned). Yet, it need not and, perhaps, should not, be entirely so, since Christian parents, for example, as well as having the opportunity, have also the responsibility to explain their discipleship to their children, through direct instruction, through information giving and through explanations of practices just as was done by Jewish families in the past (and still today). But it is not only on Christian parents that this task is laid. All disciples in the family have to be ready to explain their discipleship to others who may not share it (1Pet. 3.4). All have knowledge, information and understandings with

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[17] Barclay, in Moxnes(ed)

which they can instruct others in the family. In a family atmosphere of security and acceptability, then, seekers and committed alike may each instruct the other in their discipleship.

However, this direct 'method' of teaching has, as Farley says, 'one specific and immediate task . . . (it) concerns the intellect and such ordinary matters as information, understanding, insight and skills'[18]. But, it is clear that, within the family school, many (most?) learning experiences occur in a very indirect way, without the realisation of either teacher or pupil. Particularly where younger members of the family are concerned, nurturing (in the faith) will be one of the most appropriate teaching methods. Before the intellect is developed enough to comprehend the meaning and implication of discipleship, much learning may still go on. Nurturing might be thought of as the pre-school stage where foundations for learning discipleship are laid. And what is meant by nurture with reference to discipleship[19]? Nurturing, in horticultural terms, is about preparing the ground, creating the right soil, feeding and watering the roots, preventing or removing harmful elements, is, above all, about producing growth. Christian nurturing 'begins with impressions and moves on to influences', says Randolph Miller on the Christian nurture of children[20]. So, too, it is with discipleship. The learning of discipleship, also begins with impressions. Just as there is what Miller describes as 'the spirit of a family' which embraces everyone within that particular family, so there will be in the school of discipleship, a 'spirit of discipleship' which pervades the whole school, touches, at a subconscious level, all those in the school. Nurture is very much tied up

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[18] Farley, E., 142.
[19] It is impossible to go into all that this phrase may mean. For further reading on Christian Nurture, the classic textbook is Bushnell; see also Boojamra; Farley, E; Fowler; Westerhoff.
[20] Miller, 256.

with the senses, with experiencing and with awareness rather than with intellectual knowledge and understanding. It is 'the teaching of a feeling rather than a doctrine'[21]. When, therefore, family members <u>sense</u> love, care, patience, gentleness, mercy, commitment, acceptance surrounding and enfolding them, where these are experienced in the daily realities of life, discipleship is nurtured in both the giver and the recipient of these spiritual gifts and graces.

Although this method may seem most applicable to the situation of children learning discipleship from their parents, it need not be so confined. For example, where any member of a family responds to the call of discipleship, when others in the family are uncommitted, the 'spirit of discipleship' will operate through that disciple to embrace the whole family. That 'spirit' will affect, for good or ill, all members of the family 'school', hopefully encouraging rather than preventing growth.

Most of those who make a study of the family, from whatever academic standpoint, are likely to agree that its nurturing function 'is far more foundational than any didactic function'[22] and so it is in the matter of discipleship. Given, then, that discipleship is more 'caught than taught' and given the recognised foundational influence of family on all aspects of personal development, nurturing is likely to be a primary teaching method in the family 'school' of discipleship.

A final word on learning/teaching by 'modelling' or example should, perhaps, be made. It is not very easy to separate nurture from example as Westerhoff's definition of nurture shows. He refers to 'the socialisation into the family's understandings and ways of life............ through active participation . . . especially in its rituals'[23]. But, where the

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[21] Bushnell, 51.
[22] Boojamra, 9.
[23] Westerhoff, 25.

first part does indeed seem to describe 'nurture' (with its subconscious element), does not the second half, with its emphasis on activity fit better with the idea of copying an example?

Using 'modelling' as a means to learn discipleship takes us back to our initial thoughts about discipleship as the imitatio Christi. There it was recognised that 'modelling' lay at the very heart of discipleship. Discipleship's basic meaning is imitating Christ, following his example. For each disciple, Christ is the ultimate role-model. However, within the family, each disciple may act as a role-model to others. All disciples are instructed to 'let their light so shine that other may see their good works and glorify the Father in heaven'(Mt. 5.16).

It is true, again, that such 'modelling' may be more directly regarded as the teaching method of parent to child. Just as parents are role-models for their children in so many areas of life, so Christian parents will be their children's primary role model of discipleship. Parents 'teach' discipleship by being disciples or, as Fowler, a 'guru' figure in the faith development field, has said,' the most powerful human influence on forming the faith of children (or, we might add, developing discipleship in them) is that exerted by parents' visible, consistent and joyful living and expression of their own faith'[24]. In so doing they provide an example to follow. In following that example, others may learn more of what being a disciple means. Certainly, in the case of children, empirical studies - for example, of Hunsberger and Brown in the U.S.A. and of Francis and Gibson in Britain - clearly show the importance of parental influence in shaping 'religiosity' and that 'parental example is necessary to maintain children's religious practice'[25]. Although this latter conclusion may be less applicable in the case of adults since they may find, in church or peer

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[24] Fowler, Faith Development 10

[25] Francis & Gibson, 248; also Hunsberger & Brown, 239-240.

group, sources for the maintenance of their discipleship, nevertheless, each member of the family 'school', children as much as adults, may provide 'models' for all disciples whatever their length or stage of discipleship. In other words, in the school of discipleship, modelling and/or copying examples of discipleship are effective tools for all to use whether they be teachers or learners or both.

(d) What?

And so, to the final question. What is the curriculum? What 'subjects' are taught? It is tempting to give two general, one word answers - 'Theology', the study of God, as a necessary forerunner to the slightly more specific 'subject' of 'Discipleship'! However, just as 'Theology' divides itself into a myriad of subject areas, so, too, does 'Discipleship'. Into what subject areas, then, is 'Discipleship' divided? Some have already been touched upon since they are subjects which are taught didactically. They would include information giving about discipleship - its identity markers as spelt out in Scripture, its traditions, practices and expectations as seen and developed throughout Christian history, its effect on personal identity and relationships within the family, towards the family and with those outside the family, all of which would certainly supply factual knowledge without necessarily engaging more than the intellect in the exercise. There also would (ought to?) be a place in the curriculum for critical analysis of that information. This is very often a neglected area in the school of discipleship. There is a tendency, particularly, it has to be said, within more fundamentalist family 'schools' to promote certain forms, practices and beliefs as the only valid, only 'right' or 'ideal' understanding of discipleship. However, if the aim of growth in discipleship is to be achieved, then, discussion, questioning and critical analysis of the type of discipleship promoted and experienced in individual families is vital, not only for clarifying individuals' personal

understandings and practice, but also for enabling them to face the inevitable and, probably, wider, variety of forms of discipleship than that promoted in their own family 'school'. As Astley says with regard to the faith education of children but which is equally applicable to the education of disciples, 'education that eschews any critical dimension will not create citizens (in our case, disciples) who will easily cope with the world outside the nursery of faith (or discipleship)'[26].

In the main, all these 'lessons' - gathering and analysing information and knowledge - employ the intellect and are part of a deliberate and conscious instructive process. But there are other 'lessons' in the school's curriculum which are learnt through the nurturing and modelling methods. Such lessons are likely to be less about what discipleship means at the level of intellectual understanding but will have more to do with what discipleship means in practice. Within the family 'school', disciples will both teach and learn from observation of one another that, for example, discipleship is not always easy, that it may create problems (of loyalties), requires a willingness to learn, patience, strength above one's own and much personal effort to persevere with it. These are the kind of lessons which will come from being a member of this school, from soaking up its atmosphere and being socialised into it. Furthermore, in imitating or modelling themselves on other disciples, as well, of course, on the model of Christ, disciples will learn, within the family school what manner of behaviour is appropriate and necessary for those who consider themselves disciples. In other words, the school of discipleship supplies practical as well as theoretical 'lessons' in discipleship.

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[26] Astley, 200.

One final question remains to be answered on the subject of family as 'school', one which concerns the very metaphor itself. Is the metaphor of 'school' appropriate to the relationship between family and discipleship? Consideration of some of the essential and definitive elements of a school - its personnel, its purposes, its methods and curriculum - leads to the belief that the term is not inappropriate for the family/discipleship relationship. Insofar as the family functions as a place where both theoretical and practical lessons on discipleship are given, where a variety of clearly pedagogical skills are employed, where the whole family is, to some degree or another, caught up in either or both the teaching and learning of discipleship, then, it is surely valid to call the family a 'school' for discipleship.

Although it has not been specifically referred to as a teaching method, there has been throughout an underlying recognition of the most effective method of learning which revolutionised classroom techniques some thirty years ago - namely 'learning through doing'. Such a method is an absolute necessity for disciples, indeed, one might want to say there can be no other way for growth in discipleship than to 'do' it. And, here again, the family plays its part.

Family : the 'practice- ground' for discipleship.

Not only, then, is the family the school where the theories, information, knowledge about discipleship are accumulated, the family is also the practice-ground for trying it out. 'If faith' (or discipleship) 'wants to be truly alive, it must be experienced in practice - in everyday actions and behaviour'[27]. 'Do it 'aself', is one of our family sayings (coined from our eldest at the age of 2) and doing something by oneself is probably

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[27] Greinacher and Elizondo (eds) ix.

without doubt the most powerful and effective way both of learning and perfecting any skill. This not the same as modelling or imitating someone else, although, both consciously and unconsciously, there will be elements in any individual's actions which mirror those of others. But to the practice of anything, discipleship included, individuals bring their own particular personalities, their own style of thinking and acting, their own gifts and skills, their own experience. Thus, the manner of discipleship is affected by the personality and circumstance of the disciples and, therefore, will produce diversity in the practice of discipleship. Thus, although it may be that, in the end, some children, for example, come to act, think and believe in a manner very similar, even almost identically, to their parents, they may have (and one would hope they would have) reached that point via their own personal and reflective choice. This represents, in terms of faith development, the movement from unreflective to reflective faith. That is to say, in practising their faith (albeit with some imitation at first), they have made it their own and put their own distinctive stamp upon it.

It is, perhaps, worth remembering what the nature of a practice-ground is. A practice-ground is the place for developing skills through the intensive use of them; a place to adapt old ways in the light of new circumstances or beliefs; a place to experiment with new ways of doing things; a place even where mistakes can be made and corrected, where failure is allowable and there is yet the possibility of trying again. Such a statement, surely already, clearly suggests a picture of the family and its role as a practice ground for discipleship.

Since, as has been increasingly repeated, the family is for most disciples, the most obvious, the most accessible locus for discipleship, it can function as the practice-ground for the personalising of discipleship, for the developing of the characteristics of discipleship, for adaptation, experimenting and learning from mistakes, not least because it can

provide a place where individuals can be accepted and valued while they practise. Given too that, for most people, the family bond is not only very close but is also likely to be for life, the family provides a continuing practice-ground for the life-long apprenticeship in discipleship.

Moreover, since the characteristics which define what 'being a family' is, correspond so much with the characteristics which define what 'being a disciple' is, each may re-enforce the other. Developing and strengthening family life may/can enhance and strengthen the life of disciples and vice-versa since the same characteristics are practised in both. Thus, the practice of family life may inform and develop discipleship while the practice of discipleship may strengthen and even transform that family life.

The point has already been made that discipleship involves practical action, needs to be 'earthed' and that the family provides a very natural place for this to happen[28]. Regarding the family as a practice-ground for discipleship reflects the need both for this earthing of discipleship and for the practical action. Perhaps, also, it is worth spelling out more fully here how some of these characteristics of discipleship may be practised within the family. Since this has been hinted at throughout, only a few examples need be given to show, firstly, how the family per se provides for actually practising discipleship and, secondly, the effects of the practice in the development of discipleship.

Fidelity and commitment, love (as summed up in 1Cor. 13), forgiveness, patience and compassion (as summed up in Col. 3. 12-14) are part and parcel of discipleship, are some of the chracteristics for which the family provides a practice-ground.

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[28] Cf. Chapters 6 & 11.

Disciples recognise that fidelity/faithfulness both to God and to discipleship itself is part of their calling. Faithfulness is the inevitable corollary of commitment, the outward sign of the inward commitment. Faithfulness involves a continuous and continuing loyalty and allegiance to the one to whom a commitment has been made. It means 'keeping on going', 'sticking at it', 'standing by' no matter how hard or difficult it may be to do so. It may even mean remaining faithful when others' faithfulness fails. Faithfulness reflects a determination to continue the commitment no matter what ensues during, or as a result of, the commitment. If this is the kind of faithfulness which disciples have to practise, then a reminder of the marriage vow quickly shows how the family is a very obvious practice-ground for it. The words, 'for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health' are practical clarifications of a couple's intentions to remain faithful and committed to one another's well-being, no matter what. Those who make such a vow and who, throughout their married and family life, seek to keep it, are providing themselves with the opportunity to practise precisely the kind of fidelity and faithfulness which is required of those who have been called to be disciples. Their marital faithfulness can be translated into their discipleship as fidelity to God. The commitment and faithfulness to spouse and children which continues in and through both good and bad times is as the faithfulness required by disciples towards God throughout the hard, difficult and challenging times of their discipleship. Therefore, in the matter of practising this characteristic of discipleship, marriage and family life are an obvious and natural practice-ground.

It seems also blindingly obvious that marriage and family life are a major place for the practice of discipleship's primary characteristic, love - the self-giving, agapaic, Christian love which is, perhaps, most clearly stated in the great hymn to love of 1Cor. 13.

'Love is patient and kind,

Love envies no-one, is never boastful, never conceited, never rude,

Love is never selfish, never quick to take offence,

Love keeps no score of wrongs, takes no pleasure in the sins of others but delights in the truth.

There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, its endurance (1Cor. 13. 4-7).

Few, if any, can reach the standard implied by the word, 'never'. The text is a constant challenge to the love expressed in any close relationship but, perhaps, is most greatly tested in marriage and family relationships. As Anthony Harvey quite rightly remarks, 'When we have to cope every day with the irritation, frustration or sheer anger caused by another person's habitual selfishness, infuriating habits and occasional disloyalty, can we really say our love 'keeps no wrongs"'[29]? Daily dealings with small children or, perhaps worse, adolescents, test 'patient' love to the limit. The needs, even demands, of family members, whether for physical care or emotional support, can also, at times, test 'selfless' love to the limit.

But these, as Harvey says, are not just 'words of faith' but are also 'words of experience'[30]. There is that within the family bond itself which makes possible, on more occasions than perhaps are realised in the hurly-burly of daily living, expressions of agapaic, self-giving love. Although, perhaps, not as often and as many as we would like, still daily, in newspapers and the media, there are highly publicised examples of love that endures against mighty odds - parents who never give up on wayward children; those who care selflessly for severely disabled spouses; children who make huge sacrifices to support ageing parents. But, in less

[29] Harvey, A.E., 86.
[30] Ibid 86.

dramatic ways, personal experience shows how love can and does endure much anger, many personal hurts, cruel words and actions, disappointments and frustrations.And this is the love not only expected of disciples but possible for disciples through the Spirit of God. This love, as we saw, is the gift of God, the fruit of the indwelling Spirit. The experience of living in a family relationship provides for the growth of that fruit. Marriage and family life, not least because their survival depends on it too, are a potent way of practising this kind of love.

The fact that family relationships do not always run smoothly that the family is an 'arena' of conflict has already been commented on as has the fact that such conflict allows the family to be the practice-ground for those virtues or spiritual gifts which are necessary for resolving the conflict. Such virtues are also requisites of disciples, the people of God. Col.3. 12-14 highlights them - compassion, kindness, humility. gentleness, patience and forgiveness. All are evident in family life and necessary for its maintenance but, for the sake of brevity, let us consider just the last - forgiveness - since it is ultimately a form of love. Family life provides many opportunities for expressing forgiveness and, therefore, for disciples is a practice-ground for learning and developing this demand of discipleship. 'Forgiveness always pre-supposes a relationship'[31] and, indeed, the purpose of forgiveness is the maintaining, the mending or restoring of relationships which may be or have been damaged or broken. Given this purpose, it is obvious how important a role it has within the family and how often it is likely to be brought into play. It is not part of our purpose to explore the variety of occasions and offences in which and for which forgiveness is necessary[32]. Suffice it to say that both forgiver

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[31] Peters, 3.

[32] For a fuller treatment of Forgiveness within the Family, see Borrowdale in Barton (ed) The Family Chap.11.

and forgiven within families can experience much which is of relevance to disciples in their discipleship.

For example, the offender comes to recognise the need for repentance and, possibly, punishment or restitution but also comes to enjoy the fruit of that repentance in acceptance and restored relationships. The offended, on the other hand, may come to recognise the need for mercy, as well as justice, not least through understanding their own vulnerability, weakness and need for forgiveness. The constant endeavour, then, to maintain family bonds, through the forgiving and acceptance of one another, makes the family a perfect practice-ground for disciples who seek to follow the One who urged his followers to forgive others.

Consideration of faithfulness, love and forgiveness have, hopefully, shown the family per se to be a very natural and obvious practice-ground for just three of the characteristics of discipleship but it was intended also to consider the <u>effects</u> of the practice in the <u>developing</u> of discipleship.

Within the family setting, the very practice of discipleship itself acts as an ikon, as 'a window into the inner mystery of God's life'[33]. So, for example, the practising of faithfulness in family life mirrors the faithfulness and commitment of God to his people. Disciples' experiences of the cost, the sorrow, the anxiety, the frustrations, the sheer effort of perseverance needed to sustain commitment, to remain faithful and to continue to be supportive, all work together to illumine and clarify what is meant by the faithfulness of God who continued faithful to his covenant despite Israel's frequent failings. Or again, the practice of self-giving love, which is a prime characteristic of family life, although but a pale shadow of the Divine, yet may be an ikon revealing more clearly the

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[33] Parella, 292.

sacrificial love of God seen on the cross. Similarly, the practice of forgiveness - both the experience of giving and receiving it - awakens disciples to the reality of what it means to be forgiven by God. It highlights, for example, the hurt, sorrow and broken relationships caused by offences (sins); the need for and difficulty of balancing justice and mercy; the effects of grace and graciousness in terms of relief and release for the offender and the joy of restored relationships. Such experiences and practice of forgiveness within family life are crystal-clear windows to the forgiving God.

But the practice of discipleship may be said to act almost as a two-way window or rather a two-way mirror. How so? It certainly reveals more about God to disciples as they practise the imitatio Christi, but in the light of that revelation, their own discipleship is also revealed in all its shortcomings.

The family, then, in being a practice-ground for discipleship, provides opportunities for developing and strengthening the characteristics of discipleship, for appreciating more fully their meaning and for understanding more personally the character of the God to whose ways they have committed themselves. In other words, disciples see through the eyes of their practical family experience what God is like, what he feels, how great is his patience, forgiveness, love and commitment to his creation and people as well as how far short of the divine ideal falls their own commitment, both to family and to God.

Time and space do not permit such lengthy discussion on other metaphors which are or might be used to describe the family's place in discipleship but perhaps two which are to some extent inter-related deserve a brief mention, namely, the family as both 'witness-box' and 'mission-field'.

Family : the witness-box for discipleship.

Because of its primacy in people's lives, the family is again the most obvious place for disciples to bear witness to their calling. Indeed, it is inevitable that just by living within a family setting, disciples will, de facto, constantly, if not always deliberately and consciously, be witnessing to their discipleship. The family is almost a perpetual 'witness-box' from which there is little escape and where, it might be said in general terms, disciples may be called upon 'to give an account of the hope that is within them' (1Pet. 3.15). Here in the family 'witness-box', disciples will have many opportunities to testify to the vocation they are following and practising.

But one can be more specific with regard to the content of their testimony. Being in the 'witness-box' of the family is likely to involve disciples in the kind of clear verbal testimony to the Christian faith which was given by the early disciples as they spread the gospel (Acts 2.22-24, 8.35, 13.38-39, 17.22-31). The testimony will also contain evidence of the realities of discipleship in terms of its effects on the beliefs, values and behaviour of disciples. Such evidence may be given verbally but is more likely to be demonstrated by actions. This, as we saw, was one of the purposes behind the Household Codes. In living out a distinctive Christian life-style, exhibiting Kingdom values, where, to take just one example, there is no place for authority based on power and status, where all are valued, in recognition of their worth in the eyes of God, disciples bear witness, both in the family and as a family to their Christian-ness and to the reality of their discipleship.

Moreover, the testimony is also likely to reveal, through the evidence of failure to act as disciples and, through verbal expressions of doubt or experiences of 'the dark night of the soul', the difficulties of discipleship. Yet these very experiences may also be the means of

testifying to another reality of discipleship, namely, the power of the Spirit of God who makes it possible to do the good and refrain from evil (Rom. 8.12-14), to be 'more than conquerors' (Rom.8. 37). Christian disciples can witness within their family situations to the God within them who enables them to cope with the inevitable crises of life, guides them in times of indecision and change, sustains, supports and enables them even in the darkest hours. Nowhere, perhaps, is this more evident than in times of bereavement when the testimony of a disciple's word and/or behaviour bears witness to resurrection hope and faith.

But who hears and sees this testimony? At whom is it aimed? Who is, hopefully, to be convinced by the evidence? The answers will vary according to the situation of the disciple. For example, where the whole family operates as a Christian household, the witness will be to those outside the family and the aim will be to present evidence of the Christian-ness of that household. In practice this will mean the exhibition of the characteristics of discipleship - agapaic love, the fruits of the Spirit (patience, forgiveness etc.), the altruistic service of one another in the family, the care of the poor and needy both near and faraway as well as evidence of more clearly acknowledged 'religious' or spiritual practices such as worship, prayer and Bible-reading. Or again, within the family, Christian parents, through their attitudes and behaviour and direct teaching will bear witness to their children in the hope of presenting evidence which will convince and persuade them to respond personally to the call to discipleship. Where disciples find themselves in families antithetical or antagonistic to the Christian faith, the family is still a 'witness-box' where, perhaps, they will face hostile questioning and where, as a result, their words and deeds must even more clearly and openly testify to their discipleship.

The family, then, is a place where disciples both take the stand and take a stand on the matter of discipleship. It is within the family setting that their words, or more often and, more tellingly, their deeds, provide evidence of discipleship. Therefore, the metaphor of the 'witness-box' seems an apt one to describe the family's place in discipleship.

Family : the 'mission-field' for disciples.

Finally, let us consider the family as the 'mission-field' of disciples, that is to say, the place where Jesus' promise to make his followers 'fish for people' (Mt. 4.19) and his command to 'make disciples' (Mt. 28.19) can be fulfilled. Although that command is indeed primarily concerned with the spread of the Gospel beyond Israel to the Gentiles -'make disciples of all nations' - yet, it surely may also be interpreted as relevant to the making of new disciples wherever the followers of Jesus find themselves - not least, within their family settings. In this connection, it might be appropriate to change the old adage, 'Charity begins at home' to 'Mission begins at home' since this reflects both the practice of the first disciples and, indeed was part of the original command (Lk. 24.47). (Only with Paul did the Gospel 'take off' amongst the Gentiles). It is tempting to say that, for many disciples, mission to 'all nations' (impersonal strangers) may be easier than mission to (deeply personal) family members who know the worst as well as the best about them. But the promised ability, through Christ, to make disciples does not specify from whence these new disciples will come. Evidence from the New Testament, from Christian history and from personal experience suggests examples of many who became followers or were led further in their faith through disciples working in the family 'mission-field' (cf. Acts 9.10ff; 2Tim. 1.5; John and Charles Wesley and the many dedications of theological works to 'parents' who brought the authors to discipleship).

What is involved in this mission? The answer may well be summed up in one word - evangelism. It is certainly not our intention nor part of our brief to explore such a topic in depth but, for our purpose, the Church of England's 1945 Commission on Evangelism gives a succinct definition. 'To evangelise is so to present Christ Jesus that people come to trust in God through Him and accept Him as Saviour[34]'. Such a definition implies both preaching/teaching the Gospel and also bringing others into discipleship. Evangelism encompasses that which has already been highlighted in 'the family as witness-box' - that is, verbal testimony to the uniqueness of Jesus, seen in his birth, death, resurrection and ascension. However, it goes further than merely bearing witness. That witness is but a means towards the fulfilment of the primary mission - the making of disciples. Disciples make the family a 'witness-box' in order to carry out their obligations as disciples (Mk.16.15). This obligation, like the other obligations of discipleship, is not optional. It is part and parcel of 'being a disciple' (cf. Part Two) and it is an obligation on disciples wherever they are - in the family just as much as outside it.

Moreover, as was the case in the matter of witness, those to be 'evangelised' in the 'mission-field' of the family will be those inside the family circle as yet not disciples and also all those who come into that 'mission-field' as friends and visitors, all, indeed, whether inside or outside the family circle to whom God is still a stranger. This does not mean the equivalent of an evangelical appeal whenever anyone puts a foot over the doorstep. Heaven forfend! However, for disciples, serious about their discipleship, it does mean an alertness to opportunities to fulfil their mission to persuade, by their words and deeds, those who come into

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[34] Armstrong, 192

their families, not only of the need but also of the joy and blessing of discipleship.

It would, perhaps, be useful here to highlight one of the side-effects, indeed benefits, of regarding the family as a 'mission-field'. Such a view encourages the opening up of the family to encompass others not so closely related. In so doing, the previously mentioned danger of the privatising of families is lessened, the portcullis lowered, rather than drawn up. Clapp's comment is apposite: 'Our call is to live not in private havens but in mission bases'[35]. Perhaps the clearest means of opening up the family 'mission-field' is by means of hospitality. This certainly was an example given by Jesus himself. How often do the Gospels tell of Jesus sitting at table in family homes, welcoming people in and then expounding the Gospel to them either by word, deed or manner (Mt. 9.10ff; 26.18-26, Mk. 9.33ff; Lk. 19.9; Jn. 11.31). Moreover, hospitality, both to other Christians and also to strangers (Rom. 12.13) is greatly encouraged by the early writers as a testimony to discipleship (1Pet. 4.9) and a means of blessing (Heb. 13.2) and evangelising (Acts 18; 28.7; 1Cor. 16.15,19). In offering hospitality in their homes, disciples are following that example, creating opportunities to spread the Gospel so that 'the Christian home is a mission-base (where) the generous opening of our lives makes Christ publicly available and evident'[36].

Given all this, then, it is surely appropriate to regard the family as a 'mission-field' for the proclamation of the Gospel and the fulfilling of the divine command to make disciples of all.

It is clear that there are many other pictures of the family which might be used to show the relationship between family and discipleship. However, it is to be hoped that those considered above are sufficient to

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[35] Clapp, 156.
[36] Ibid 157.

enable final conclusions to be drawn about the place of family in Christian discipleship.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN. Final Conclusions.

Having suggested what place family might have in discipleship, it now seems appropriate to consider how far the initial questions in Chapter One have been answered and to draw some final conclusions.

To the question, 'Where does primary loyalty lie?', the answer for disciples has to be, 'Towards God' (Ch.11). Yet, as was argued there, marriage and family life may be taken up into that primary call and become part of it. Therefore, loyalty to God may be given expression in loyalty to spouse and children. A somewhat similar response may be given to the question, 'What does it mean for disciples to leave all?' That is to say, it need not mean the literal abandonment of family but rather a 'sitting loose' to all things in this world, including even the most intimate of relationships (Ch.8). Since the the third question - 'How can the ties of family and the demands of discipleship be reconciled? - forms the basis of the whole thesis the answers to it may serve as both final summary and conclusion.

Firstly, family and discipleship cannot be separated. Such a conclusion was drawn from the recognition that it is only actively possible to love a few people (Ch.2); that nature/instinct appears to draw us to 'special' relationships - in particular, family relationships (Ch.11); these, in turn, create specific obligations and responsibilities (Ch.2) which cannot be ignored by Christian disciples. Moreover, since, for most people, family, (however defined), is the most typical primary relationship and since discipleship needs to be lived out in the everyday world, the two would appear to be obvious companions. Pragmatism about the reality of human relationships, therefore, surely leads to the conclusion that family and discipleship cannot be separated but rather must be part and parcel of one another.

Secondly, family, it was concluded, is a valid form of discipleship. Not only can the two not be separated, there is no need to try to separate them. Scripture attests that, from Christianity's beginnings, despite apparent anti-family statements which stemmed from particular circumstances, the family was regarded, at the very least, as not antithetical to discipleship and, in many instances, as a bedrock for the creation and building up of disciples (Ch.9). Moreover, throughout Christian history this pattern continued. Alongside much apparent anti-family teaching and practice in the Church, there remained a recognition of marriage and family life as God's 'good' creation, and both a locus and a way of discipleship - as legitimate, to many minds, as celibacy (Ch.10).

Thirdly, tension between the two has to be recognised as both an inevitable and an unresolvable fact of life. Because of the importance of each in the lives of Christian disciples in terms of commitment, love, responsibilities and service, it is almost inevitable that, at times, there will be conflict, with one loyalty having to give way to the other. Moreover, the innate weakness and fallibility of human nature which shows itself in selfishness, hinders not only the striving for perfection in family life and discipleship but also prevents a once-and-for-all resolution of the tension between them, at least in this life (Ch.12) . Thus, while recognising their inseparability, it has also to be accepted that family and discipleship are, oftentimes, uncomfortable bedfellows where the tension can only be eased in piece-meal fashion or 'ambulando'[1].

Fourthly, however, it may be concluded that both their inseparability and the tension between them can be a power for good within family life and in the life of discipleship, can be creative and constructive rather than uncreative and destructive. How may this be?

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[1]Ch.12 ft. 8.

To begin with, because of the similarities in the characteristics which define them, they provide each other with support and encouragement to become 'better' families or disciples. The practice and experience of the characteristics of family - for example, commitment to one's family, or the giving and receiving of forgiveness within one's family - provide opportunities to live daily as disciples. Similarly, reflection on the characteristics of discipleship as revealed in Scripture through the acts of God and through the life of Christ provides greater understanding of what these characteristics mean and encourages the practice of them which brings benefit to the whole of family life.

Such reflection, however, brings not only encouragement but also presents a challenge. Insofar as disciples, in word and deed, reveal the self-giving love and unfailing commitment which God has shown to them in Christ, they may present a challenge to the love and commitment expressed within families, at times showing up the inadequacy, inappropriateness or inconstancy of that expression. In its turn, however, the reality of daily family living presents a huge challenge to discipleship. Indeed, for disciples, married and family life may be the hardest test of their discipleship since, there, they are best and most fully known and their faults and failings, both as family members and as disciples are likely to be most exposed. This is the setting in which the genuineness of and commitment to discipleship must be proved. In short, the continuance of discipleship in the face of the temptations, trials and tribulations of family life is both a measure of disciples' commitment and a testimony to the grace and power of the God whom disciples seek to emulate and serve. Thus, family and discipleship each challenge the other with regard to the characteristics which define them both. That is to say, they challenge notions each may have about what it means 'to be family' or 'to be a disciple'.

There is, perhaps, one other important and constructive outcome of the inseparability of family and discipleship, namely, the opportunity for transformation. On the one hand, families transform a possible 'theoretical', 'overly-spiritual' or too heavenly-minded' discipleship into a practical reality, earthing and concretising it in the everyday matters of life (Chs.2,11). On the other hand, disciples, themselves being constantly 'transformed' by the Spirit within them, may be the means of bringing transformation to family life - both their own and others - and even, perhaps, to the wider society's perception of what it means to be family. That change in family, reflecting both the transformation of the disciples' minds (Rom. 12.1) and the dealings of God with humankind, may be seen in a variety of ways - in the recognition of the value of each member, regardless of age, gender, ability, achievement, financial contribution etc.; in the handling of relationships with long-suffering, patience, justice, mercy and forgiveness; and in a faithfulness, commitment and love that will not let go and is not dependent on a reciprocal response.

The prime intention of this study was to build a case for a more positive relationship between family and discipleship than that suggested by the hard sayings of Jesus to his disciples. Examination of Scripture, consideration of history, recognition of social and personal realities have all been employed, hopefully successfully, to show that there has always been a positive relationship, 'even during periods when the prestige of celibacy was at its highest'[2]. Moreover, for those today who face the same tensions, there is the same possibility. Insofar as family and discipleship encourage, challenge and transform one another, their relationship may not only benefit each individual family member and each disciple, but

[2]Woodhead. Concilium 43.

may also be a sign of the Gospel, of Christ's presence in the world and of the Kingdom of God on earth.

ABBREVIATIONS.

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary, Freedman, D. N. (ed.) (New York: Doubleday)
ACC	Anglican Consultative Council
BSR	Board of Social Responsibility, Church of England
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly.
DCCA	Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology, Winthorp, R. (ed), (New York: Greenwood, 1991)
DCS	A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality, Wakefield, G. (ed), (London: SCM, 1983)
DJG	Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, Green, J.B. & McKnight, S. (eds), (Leicester: IVP, 1992)
DPCC	Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling, Hunter, R. (ed), (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990)
EHB	Encyclopaedia of Human Biology, Dulbecco, R. (ed), (Boston: Academic Press, 1991)
GES	Grove Ethical Studies
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs
JAP	Journal of Applied Philosophy.
JRE	Journal of Religious Ethics.
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the NT Supplement Series
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSSR	Journal for Scientific Study of Religion.
NDCE	A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics, Childress, J. & Macquarrie, J. (eds), (London: SCM, 1986)
NDCS	The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality, Downey, M. (ed), (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1993)
NDCT	A New Dictionary of Christian Theology, Richardson, A. & Bowden, J. (eds), (London: SCM, 1983)
NDSW	The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship, Fink, P.E. (ed), (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1990)
NDT	New Dictionary of Theology, Ferguson, S.B. & Wright, D.F. (eds), (Leicester: IVP, 1988)
NEICE	North of England Institute for Christian Education

NID	The New International Dictionary of NT Theology. Brown, C. (ed), (Exeter: Paternoster, 1976)
OCAB	Oxford Companion to Animal Behaviour, McFarland, D. (ed), (Oxford: OUP, 1987)
RE	Religious Education
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBLMS	SBL Monograph Series
SCE	Studies in Christian Ethics
SNTSMS	SNTS Monograph Series
TNDT	The New Dictionary of Theology, Komanchack, Collins & Lane (eds), (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1987)
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

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