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The Role of The Holy Family in the Education and Mission of Jesus: A Model for Christian Formation of the Youth

Rowland ONYENALI, CMF

Abstract

The question regarding the source of the wisdom of Jesus was one that troubled his adversaries. This question could imply that Jesus did not attend any official Jewish rabbinic school. Moreover, the formulation of the question in Mk 6:1-6 makes a subtle link to the realization of the role of the Jewish family in the training of their children. This is true to fact. This essay, therefore, argues for the importance of the family in the training of children through an examination of the influence of the holy couple of Joseph and Mary on the formation and mission of Jesus. Although Jesus is presented as the wisdom of God (cf. I Cor. 1:24), there is ample evidence to show that his submission to his earthly parents went a long way to instilling some core principles that formed the crust of his teaching. This could serve as model for families and the society at large to take more seriously the role of the family in the formation of children.

1. Introduction

Since "many religious rituals revolve around the birth, naming, coming of age, and education of children,"¹ it is important to

¹ D. S. Browning/M. J. Bunge (eds.), *Children and Childhood in World Religions, Primary Sources and Texts* (New Brunswick, 2011), 1.

consider the important theme of the formation of the child and its influence on the society at large. This importance is very well documented in the Jewish religion. As Elisheva Baumgarten observes, since the commandment to procreation is a central obligation in Judaism, “children and childhood, which follow from the duty of procreation, can be expected to be central to the social organization of the Jewish people.”² Reading through the Torah and the Oral Law (Mishnah and Talmud), one sees the way the life of a Jew is supposed to be regulated by divine precepts. These divine precepts contain injunctions on how the pious Jewish male and female should direct every aspect of their lives “including procreation, childrearing, education, and financial support of children.”³ This training is all too important considering the variegated history of the Jews as the Jewish nation evolved through various stages of nationhood. The different times that the Jews lived as a subject nation implies the danger of Judaism being swallowed up by the dominating cultures. Hence, Jewish parents had to be strict on the correct formation of their children. It is then relevant that there exist varieties of cultural and religious institutions in which the child participated to ensure its socialization in Judaism.

There is much scholarship concerning the early education of Jesus.⁴ But to my knowledge, none has linked his learning to

² E. Baumgarten, ‘Judaism’, in D.S. Browning & M. J. Bunge (eds.), *Children and Childhood*, 15.

³ E. Baumgarten, ‘Judaism’, in D. S. Browning & M. J. Bunge (eds), *Children and Childhood*, 15.

⁴ Among them include G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (vol 1.). New York, 1971, pp.308-322; H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*. New York, 1956, 317; W. Barclay, *Train up a Child: Educational ideals in the Ancient World*. Philadelphia, 1956, pp.11-42.

parental influence.⁵ It is only from the third Evangelist that we see a series of stories concerning the presentation of Jesus in the Temple and his participation in the Jewish pilgrimage at the age of twelve.⁶ Apart from this both the New Testament and biblical scholarship are almost silent about the intervening years between the birth of Jesus and the beginning of his public ministry. The way the Nicene Creed jumped from “born of the Virgin Mary” to “suffered under Pontius Pilate” is but one instance of the neglect of these intervening years.⁷ It is this vacuum that the present work tries to fill. It argues that the public ministry of Jesus was shaped by the life he experienced with and the teaching he received from his earthly parents during these silent years. This is where our modern families could learn the importance of the family in the education and formation of their children.

2. The Concept of Education

The concept of education and the concept of formation cannot be easily separated. From the Latin root of education (*educare*) we speak of a breeding, a bringing up, and a rearing. Education helps to rear the child into a better individual. This implies that the main

⁵ See, however, J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (vol. 1). New York, 1991, pp.253-352; B. Heininger, *Familienkonflikte: Der zwölfjährige Jesus im Tempel (Lk 2:41-52)*, in: C. G. Müller (Hrsg), „Licht zur Erleuchtung der Heiden und Herrlichkeit für dein Volk Israel: Studien zum lukanischen Doppelwerk (BBB 151), Hamburg 2005, p.49-72.

⁶ The non-canonical gospel according to Thomas also contains series of stories concerning the infancy of Jesus.

⁷ This point has been noted by S. J. Case, “The Alleged Messianic Consciousness of Jesus,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 46, No. 1/2. (1927), pp. 1-19, here p.7

focus of education or formation is the not-yet dimension.⁸ The importance of this rearing of the human person is so important that it has preoccupied the history of philosophical thought. One is reminded of Plato's allegory of the cave which serves to explain the role of education in the life of a person.⁹ In summary, the allegory presents humanity as being tied up in a cave. The dwellers in this cave see the shadows cast around them in the cave and take them to be the reality. For Plato, the educated person is the one who has been freed from the cave and who later comes to perceive reality outside the cave as it really is. In the words of Stumpf, "it is the function of education to lead men out of the cave into the world of light."¹⁰ The whole process of escape from the cave is encapsulated in the word education or formation.

Education enables the formation of the rightful use of human reasoning. It trains persons towards an interpretation of reality that is rationally based. Writing on the heels of the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) notes that the being of a person is only made manifest in maturity and the rightful use of his freedom as a subject of the moral law.¹¹ Before the period of Enlightenment, most humans were seen as rationally immature and unable to think and scrutinize reality for themselves. With the Enlightenment, humans were able to "question authorities and modes of thought, even when these modes have been accepted as

⁸ Cf. H-G., Ziebertz, *Religious Education in a Plural Western Education: Problems and Challenges*. Hamburg, 2003, p.84.

⁹ Plato, *The Republic*, VII.514a-520a.

¹⁰ S. E. Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre and Beyond: A History of Philosophy*. McGraw-Hill, 1966, p.54.

¹¹ I. Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung*. In: Ders.: *Werke in sechs Bänden*. Weischedel, W. (Hg), Bd. VI. *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichts-philosophie, Politik und Pädagogik*. Darmstadt, 1783/62005, 51-61, here, p.53.

dogma.”¹² It is only when humans have arrived at this level of cognition that they would no longer be slaves to the law. Rather, they would be rational moral agents docile to the spirit of the law. This is achieved through education.

From a psychological angle, Jean Piaget (1896-1980) sees the role of education as the achievement of a balance between the influence of the person on the environment and the influence of the environment on the person.¹³ This influence is possible through the processes of assimilation and accommodation. Through assimilation, the world is interpreted to fit the subjective experience of the reflecting person. Through accommodation, the subject realizes the impossibility of expressing all realities according to his/her private modes and structures. When this happens, the subject is forced to adjust his/her ways of thinking and acting. This gives room for further learning. This agrees with the submission of Wilhelm von Humboldt who sees education as the interaction between the self and the world. In this case, the human person aims at connecting the world to his/her personality.¹⁴

One can then conclude by saying that education/formation is an all-embracing process of mental, affective and motor growth. It is

¹² R. Onyenali, *Appraising the Nigerian Problem through Education and Religious Dialogue: A Cognitive Approach*. Frankfurt, 2013, p.74.

¹³ Cf. G. Mietzel, *Psychologie in Unterricht und Erziehung. Einführung in die Pädagogische Psychologie für Pädagogen und Psychologen*. Göttingen, 1986, p.64.

¹⁴ W. von Humboldt, *Theorie der Bildung des Menschen*. Bruchstück. In: Ders.: *Werke in fünf Bänden*. Bd. I. Flitner, V. A./Giel, K. (Hg), Darmstadt, 2002, 239. This idea is also shared by Anton Bucher who sees learning as the interaction between a subject and the world. See his *Kindertheologie: Provokation? Romantizismus? Neues Paradigma?*, in: JBKTh 1 2002, p.13.

“the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behavior which are of positive value to the society in which he lives; that is to say, it is a process of disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction or the society or both.”¹⁵ Hence, the ultimate goal of education is the development of the human person in his/her totality. It becomes more profitable when such an educational process connects the learning subject with the world around him/her. This explains why practical learning is easily assimilated more than theoretical learning. It also explains why experience could be the most important channel of education.¹⁶ In the end, education helps the learning agent to cultivate, with intentionality a critical eye and a hopeful heart so as to become a change maker.¹⁷ Hence, education is not limited to the four walls of a school. In as much as Jesus had some formal Jewish education, it seems right to consider the extent of parental influence in his formation.

¹⁵ A. B. Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria*. London, 1974, p.17.

¹⁶ On the other hand, one of the most important education psychologists, John Dewey, once made a series of scathing statements concerning some experiences and their effect on education. He argues that “experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative. Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience.” See his *Education and Experience*. New York, 1938, p.25.

¹⁷ This idea of cultivating a “critical eye” and a “hopeful heart” has been explored by V. Ramanathan/H. Han/T. Matlock, “*Educating Children to Bend the Curve: For a Stable Climate, Sustainable Nature and Sustainable Humanity*” in: A. M. Battro/P. Léna/M. S. Sorondo/J. von Braun (eds.), *Children and Sustainable Development: Ecological Education in a Globalized World* (2017), p.5.

3. The Jewish Child Life

Children are considered a blessing in Judaism. In the same way barrenness is considered a curse. In some documents, the barren wife is seen as a dead woman.¹⁸ This explains why Sarah could hand over her maid to the husband for the sake of raising children for him (cf. Gen. 16:2). In the same way that the Jews valued children, they lavished much tenderness on them. This tenderness is seen in the multiplicity of expressions by which the Jews designated the various stages or circumstances of a child's life. Besides such general words as "*ben*" (son) and "*bath*" (daughter), we find as many as eleven different terms, each depicting either a fresh stage of the development of the child or the circumstances of the child.¹⁹ These terms include: *zehrah*, seed or offspring (Isaiah 44:3); *bakar*, first born (Jeremiah 4:31); *yanek*, suckling or infant (Isaiah 11:8); *gamul*, weaned child (Isaiah 28:9); *taph*, child clinging to his mother (Esther 3:13); *owlel*, child; boy (Psalm 8:3); *elem*, child becoming firm (Isaiah 7:14); *naar*, youth; servant²⁰ (I Samuel 16:18); *yathowm*, fatherless child (Psalm 10:14); *yeled*, son, young man (Isaiah 9:6); *bachur*, the ripened one; a young warrior (Isaiah 31:9). We thus see a plethora of lexical specifications related to the Jewish child. It is only rational to expect that a culture that has this sort of keen interest in its child would surely be devoted to its upbringing.

¹⁸ Baumgarten, "Judaism," p.28.

¹⁹ Cf. E. Youmans, Ed.D, "Early Hebrew Education" in https://www.chrysalisinternational.org/files/Early_Hebrew_Education.2.pdf. Accessed, 18.01.2018.

²⁰ F. Delitzsch concludes that originally, it denoted a new-born infant of either sex which has the derived meaning of 'shaking off, bringing forth (cf. Job 39:3). F. Delitzsch, „Pentateuch-kritische Studien, VIII," *Zeitschrift für kritische Wissenschaft und kirchliches Leben*, I (1880), pp.393-399.

4. Judaism and the Education of the Child

The premium placed on the education of the Jewish child is captured by this passage from the book of Proverbs: "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he shall not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Other passages that stress the importance of parental instruction include (Proverbs 1:8; 6:20). These pericopes enjoin the child to hearken to the advice of his/her father and mother. The implication is that the formation begins from the home of the parents as the child observes the religious rituals and rites performed by its parents. The vocation of Abraham involved the fact that he would command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him (Genesis 18:17-19). This implies that the education of the child was a religious duty²¹ which started from the home.

The religious training of the Jewish youth is given a clear expression in the Mishna (Pesachim 10:4).²² During the annual celebration of the Passover, the youngest child of every Jewish family is supposed to ask four questions related to the significance of the paschal celebrations. The questions bother on why this night is different from other nights. The aim of these questions and the answers supplied by the parents is to fulfil the biblical obligation to tell the story of the Exodus to one's children (cf. Ex 13:8). Edersheim has argued that the Jews begin before the age of three

²¹ C. J. H. Wright, "Family," in: ABD 2, New York 1992, pp.761-769, here, p.764.

²² We are not oblivious of the fact that later rabbinic specifications must not reflect the real situation during the first century of the Common Era. The Mishna was written down about two hundred years after the boyhood of Jesus.

to train the memory of the infant in things concerning the Jewish religion.²³ Most scholars agree that as early as the fifth year of the child, parents are obligated to bring their children up in religious matters.²⁴ This is presented pictorially in the account of the Mishna thus:

Rabbi Jehudah, the son of Tema, says: "At five years of age, reading of the Bible; at ten years, learning the Mishnah; at thirteen years, bound to the commandments; at fifteen years, the study of the Talmud; at eighteen years, marriage; at twenty, the pursuit of trade or business (active life); at thirty years, full vigour; at forty, maturity of reason; at fifty, of counsel; at sixty, commencement of agedness; at seventy, grey age; at eighty, advanced old age; at ninety, bowed down; at a hundred, as if he were dead and gone, and taken from the world."²⁵

Another slightly different curriculum has it that at the age of five years, the child should be found in the *bet sepher*, "house of the book" where he would be reading the Bible in the original Hebrew. The students began by learning the *Shema* daily (Dt 6:4-10; 11:13-21; Nu 15:37-41); the Book of Leviticus (containing the holiness code), the *Hallel*, then the Creation Story. The next stage would involve the reading of the Pentateuch, the Prophets and finally the Hagiographa (comprising of Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Canticles, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles). This is the first stage of Jewish formal education. However, it also marks the end of formal studies for most Jewish

²³ A. Edersheim, *The life and times of Jesus the Messiah*. Peabody, 1993, p.121.

²⁴ It seems that both the male and the female children are involved in this, family catechesis.⁴ So also I. Balla, *Ben Sira on Family, Gender, and Sexuality*, p.34. One learns from Sus 1:3 Susanna was trained in the Law of Moses.

²⁵ Aboth. v.21, quoted in A. Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*. New York, 2007, p.84.

children who could not proceed to the next stage. These, then concentrated in learning some family trade like fishing or carpentry. At the age of ten years, the brilliant child should graduate to the *bet Talmud*, “house of learning.” The central interest of this school is the teaching and learning of the Mishnah, which is the oral law. After three years, in the *bet Talmud*, the child enters the *bet Midrash*, “house of study.”²⁶ At this stage, the child is entrusted to a rabbi who drills him on the commandments.²⁷ The child graduates as *Bar Mizvah* (Son of the Commandment). The Jewish child begins to study the Talmud at the age of fifteen years. At the age of eighteen years he is ripe to marry. At age twenty he is in pursuit of trade and business. He is supposed to have reached full vigour at the age of thirty years. This was also the age when Jewish men entered the priesthood. Forty years of age is the age of intellectual maturity. Finally, with fifty years, he has reached the age of counsel.²⁸

Although some studies have argued that the rabbinic specifications concerning Jewish formal schools may not apply during the time of Jesus,²⁹ we note that from the age of rational thinking until the end of teenage years, the Jewish child is trained in the religion of his forefathers. If he marries at the age of eighteen and begets children, he, in turn begins the religious

²⁶ The importance of this house of study is highly extolled in Encyclopedia Judaica, *Bet (ha)- Midrash*. For the Jews, this place of study is more important than a synagogue. It is allowed for a synagogue to be turned into a *Bet Midrash* but a *Bet Midrash* could not be turned into a synagogue.

²⁷ This could be the stage at which it is said that Paul studied under Gamaliel (cf. Acts 22:3).

²⁸ Cf. Elizabeth Youmans, Ed.D, “*Early Hebrew Education*” in https://www.chrysalisinternational.org/files/Early_Hebrew_Education.2.pdf. Accessed, 18.01.2018.

²⁹ Cf. J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, pp.271-278.

education of his own children. The duties of the Jewish father include imparting on the children the precepts of the law with great distinction as though he received the Torah himself on Mount Horeb.³⁰ This he does until such a time as the child is old enough to be enrolled in the *Bet Sepher* (House of the Book). This does not relegate the role of the mothers who, with all intents and purposes are the first people entrusted with the training of the child.³¹ The mothers nursed their babies and taught them the domestic rites and songs of the weekly festivals, feasts and the annual festivals.³² It is supposed that in cases where the fathers died early, the early education of the Jewish child was a matter solely for the mother. In view of all this, Philo might not be exaggerating when he said that the Jews “were from their swaddling clothes, even before being taught either the sacred laws or the unwritten customs, trained by their parents, teachers, and instructors to recognize God as Father and as the Maker of the world”³³ and that, “having been taught the knowledge (of the laws) from earliest youth, they bore in their souls the image of the commandments”³⁴. To the same effect is the testimony of Josephus, that “from their earliest consciousness” they had “learned the laws, so as to have them, as it were, engraven upon the soul.”³⁵

³⁰ Cf. Sanhedrin 99b.

³¹ C. R. Fontaine, “*The Sage in Family and Tribe*,” in: J. G. Gammie/L. G. Perdue (eds.), *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, Winona Lake 1990, pp.155-164, here, p.161.

³² Cf. Elizabeth Youmans, Ed.D, “*Early Hebrew Education*” in https://www.chrysalisinternational.org/files/Early_Hebrew_Education.2.pdf. Accessed, 18.01.2018.

³³ Philo, *Legat. ad. Cajum*, sec.16.

³⁴ Philo, *Legat. ad. Cajum*, sec.31.

³⁵ Josephus, *Contra. Apion*, ii, 18. However, it would be naïve to uncritically accept Josephus’ submission that at the age of fourteen he had been frequently

Be that as it may, the fact that the contemporaries of Jesus addressed him as carpenter in Mk 6:3 serves as indication that Jesus may not have had the opportunity of entering the *Bet Midrash*. He must have taken over the occupation of his father which was normal for the majority of Jewish children who concluded their formal education at the *Bet Talmud* and then took over the family business or trade.³⁶ Therefore, considering the importance of the Jewish family and the role of the parents towards the proper upbringing of their children, when the question concerning the source of the knowledge of Jesus is posited, the immediate searchlight should beam on the family that produced such a wonder kid. Is it not because of similar consideration that a certain woman cried out from the crowd 'blessed is the womb that bore thee and the breast that you sucked (Lk 11:27)?

5. The Education of Jesus: Some Theological Considerations

There is a theological concern that bothers us in the aspect of the religious and cultural formation of Jesus. His divinity and the way the biblical tradition presents him as omniscient portray a Jesus that was not in need of human training and guidance. This supposition fails to appreciate the human aspect of the person of Jesus. Saint Paul tells the Philippians that Jesus emptied himself and took the form of a human (cf. Phil. 2:6). Writing to the Galatians, he asserts that Jesus was born a subject to the Law (Gal.

consulted by the high priests and principal men of the city about the accurate understanding of points of the law. Josephus, *Life*, 7-12; compare also Josephus, *Ant.* iv, 31; *Contra. Apion*, i, 60-68, ii, 199-203.

³⁶ This could fashion another reason why the immediate followers of Jesus were those who belonged to the lower cadre of the Jewish society.

4:4). He had all the human elements of body (John 2:21), soul (John 12:27) and spirit (Lk 23:46). This explains why he had the human emotions and is subject to all human limitations except sin. Therefore, for him to achieve the demands of his vocation, he has to be enculturated, first by his earthly parents, and then by the wider Jewish society. He had to be prepared by human agents to reach the stage of maturation that would enable him carry out his mission of redemption of mankind.³⁷ He also learned to obey through what he suffered (cf. Heb 5:8). Since the Jews wondered how he knew Scripture when he has not studied (cf. John 7:15) and considering that his manner of life and the contents of his teaching were not according to the expectations of his contemporaries, it is then safe to conclude that his immediate family exerted a commendable influence on him. This means that we could reconstruct the spirituality of the *Holy Family* through the words and actions of Jesus. As Meier puts it: "being the firstborn son, Jesus would have been the special object of Joseph's attention, not only in the practical matter of teaching the son the father's trade but also in teaching the son the religious traditions and texts of Judaism."³⁸ This is another way of saying that most of the recorded actions and sayings of Jesus were expressions of the normal practice of the family that brought him up. The following sections expound this.

6. The Boy Jesus and Parental Influence

Perhaps, the first prominent New Testament text that clearly exposes the submission of Jesus to his earthly parents is the text

³⁷ Cf. R. T. Habermas, *Introduction to Christian Education and Formation: A Life-Long Plan for Christ-Centered Restoration*. Grand Rapids, 2008, p.60.

³⁸ J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (vol.1), p.276.

of Luke 2:51.³⁹ Here, we are told that Jesus went down to Nazareth with his parents and remained subject to them. This statement is in the context of one of the triannual pilgrimages to Jerusalem, which Jesus, at the age of twelve years, attended for the first time with his parents. The feast which they attended refers to the stipulation of Ex 23:14-17 and Deut 16:16 concerning the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The law specifies: “three times a year all your menfolk must appear before Yahweh your God in the place chosen by him: at the feast of Unleavened Bread, at the feast of Weeks, at the feast of Shelters” (Deut 16:16). Since the law made reference only to men as the participants in this feast, the inclusion of Mary and the child Jesus in this pilgrimage could be to expose the special piety of this family.⁴⁰ He must have been taken along by his family as part of the religious training parents were to oblige their children.⁴¹ In Lk 2:41 we read that this was the normal practice of the family.⁴² After the feast, the parents searched for him for three days and later found him in the Temple with the religious leaders where he was questioning them and listening to them (Lk 2:46). If Jesus attended a formal Jewish school,⁴³ he was

³⁹ The text of Lk 2:41-52 forms a transition between the infancy narratives about Jesus and those that tell of his public ministry. See J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Anchor Bible Commentaries, vol.28). New York, 1985, p.435.

⁴⁰ Cf. R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*. New Updated edition (AncB Reference Library), New York 1993, p.427f; J. A. Fitzmyer, *Lk* p.440.

⁴¹ Cf. E. Klostermann, *Das Lukasevangelium* (HNT 5). Tübingen, 1929, p.46.

⁴² The use of the Ptz. Pre anabainontōn refers possibly to the regular participation of the parents in this feast. Cf. I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC]. Grand Rapids, 1978, p.127. See also J. Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary* (35a), *Luke 1-9:20*, Colombia, 1989, p.129.

⁴³ R. Riesner invokes Mk 6:2; Lk 4:16 and John 7:15 to argue that Jesus did not have any formal schooling beyond the basics that were taught in the local

still in the *Bet Talmud* (house of learning) at this time and must have learnt some bit of oral law to enable him engage with the teachers of the Law. The astonishment exhibited by those who heard him (Lk 2:47) is indicative of a rare level of intelligence from the child Jesus. The question of his mother (Lk 2:48) was answered with the remark that he must be in his father's house (Lk 2:49). The use of 'your father and I' by Mary should not be seen as lack of awareness of the virginal conception.⁴⁴ Rather, it should be seen as a literary ploy to introduce the answer of Jesus: 'did you not know that I should be in the house of my father?' There is a parallel between the earthly father and the heavenly Father. This answer, which is the first recorded statement of Jesus in the synoptic gospels, pointed out already the mission of Jesus.⁴⁵ One could imagine the tension in the narrative as the family program seems to be placed against divine program.⁴⁶ But this tension is immediately resolved by the remark of the author that "Jesus went down with them and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority" (Lk 2:51). After this remark of his submission to his earthly parents, Luke was careful to remark that he increased in wisdom and age and in divine and human favour (Lk 2:52). Could these attributes not be intentioned as the effects of his submission to the human authority of Joseph and Mary?

synagogue. See his *Jesus als Lehrer: Eine Untersuchung zum Ursprung der Evangelien-Überlieferung* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament). Mohr, 1981, p.240-241.

⁴⁴ This is contra B. Heininger who sees in the answer of Jesus a clear indication of the lack of understanding of the parents to the mission of Jesus. See his *Familienkonflikte*, p.53.

⁴⁵ R. E. Brown, *The Birth*, p.481: "it supplies a transition between revelation about Jesus by others (angels, Simeon) and revelation that Jesus himself will proclaim; for in 2:41-52 Jesus speaks for the first time."

⁴⁶ In this connection see B. Heininger, *Familienkonflikte*, pp.49-72.

We thus see a Jesus whose divine mission was formed under the authority of his earthly parents. It was a parental authority that had lots of bearing on his person and mission more than Jewish formal education. It seems that his obedience to his parents has become obedience to God while the authority of the parents over him has become a delegated authority from God. His teaching on love of enemy, a different interpretation of the Mosaic Law, surrender to the will of God, etc. bear distinctive echoes of the thoughts and actions of his earthly parents. The following section explores these aspects.

6.1 Joseph and the Woman Caught in Adultery

In Judaism, adultery, which is primarily sexual intercourse between a married woman and a man other than her husband, is the only sexual offence recorded in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:14). Alongside murder and idolatry, it is one of the three sins people should avoid even at the pain of death. The gravity of the sin of adultery is shown by the punishment which is death for the man and woman involved (cf. Lev 20:10). The Talmud calls it *ha'averah* (sin par excellence) while the rabbis teach that “all who descend to *Gehenna* subsequently reascend, excepting three who do not reascend: He who commits adultery with a married woman, publicly shames his neighbour, or fastens an evil epithet upon his neighbour.”⁴⁷ Hence, the OT and the rabbis viewed adultery as a matter of great concern.⁴⁸ This context defines the tension in the

⁴⁷ *Bava Metzia*, 58b, quoted by D. Schief, “Separating the Adult from Adultery,” in: W. Jacob/M. Zemer (eds.), *Marriage and its Obstacles in Jewish Law: Essays and Responsa*. Tel Aviv and Pittsburgh, 1999, p.86.

⁴⁸ To aggravate the situation, the offspring of an adulterous union is considered a *mamser* and prohibited from marrying a daughter of Israel. He can only marry a *mamser* and this defilement continues until the tenth generation which is

gospel narrative concerning the verdict rendered by Jesus with regard to the woman caught in adultery as recorded in John chapter 8.⁴⁹ The demand of the mob was that such women deserve to die (John 8:5).⁵⁰ It created a dilemma for Jesus. If he declared the woman innocent, he would be contravening the Law of Moses and the authentic rabbinic interpretations. The simple statement of Jesus that the one who thinks he is innocent should be the first to cast a stone on the woman (John 8:7) left the crowd confused. They dispersed one after the other, beginning from the oldest.

Looking at this encounter *prima facie*, one would easily notice the novelty created by Jesus as a new interpretation of the Law of Moses. It goes on to confirm the *antitheses*⁵¹ between the Law of

understood to mean forever. See D. Schief, "Separating the Adult from Adultery," p.88.

⁴⁹ This passage does not occur in the oldest and best manuscripts of the Johannine gospel and receives almost no commentary from Greek exegetes during the first millenium. Cf. B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd Ed.). Stuttgart, 2006, pp.187-189; J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, p.268. However, we accept that this pericope contains the marks of historical veracity that probably circulated orally.

⁵⁰ According to L. M. Epstein in *Sex, Laws and Customs in Judaism*, p.209 "capital punishment for adultery was meant by the rabbis to be and remain a theoretical teaching, but was not favored as a practical penal guide for the courts." Quoted in W. Jacob/M. Zemer (eds.), *Marriage*, p.86.

⁵¹ The use of "antitheses" to describe this section of Jesus' teaching should be used with caution. Marcion first employed it to show the decisive break between Jesus and the old dispensation. So H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*. Minneapolis, 1995, pp.200-201. But since Jesus did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets (Mt 5:17f), we should see in his declarations the fulfillment and not the abolishment of the Mosaic Law. So also Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 4.12.1. Again, in Mt, "de", unlike "alla", does not always signal a strong antithesis or contrast. See W. D. Davies/D. C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew, 1-7*. London, 1988, p.507.

God given through Moses and its interpretation by Jesus (cf. Mt 5:21-48).⁵² However, I would argue that a precedent was already set in this interpretation of the Law when the knowledge of the pregnancy of Mary first came to Joseph. Before the angelic visitation, Joseph must have concluded that the pregnancy of Mary was the direct result of adultery.⁵³ Matthew was quick to remind his readers that Joseph was a just man (Mt 1:19). In a purely legalistic sense, being just would have required a strict adherence to the injunctions of the Mosaic stipulations which should have demanded the public execution of Mary. Rather, being just moved Joseph to seek the merciful face of the law by trying to divorce Mary informally. It was while he was contemplating this that the angel of the Lord appeared and gave him a blueprint of the divine mission of the unborn child. The story of the birth of Jesus which must have been told and retold variedly by Jews⁵⁴ must have

⁵² For the dominical declarations as spontaneous expressions of Jesus' habitual mode of thought see A. Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*. London, 1909, p.76.

⁵³ One of the earliest claims that Mary conceived Jesus in an illegitimate way came from the third century philosopher Celsus. Through the refutations of Origen we are in possession of some fragments of his attacks against the virginal birth of Jesus. In his *Contra Celsum* we read: "...[Celsus] accuses [Jesus] of having 'invented his birth from a virgin,' and upbraids Him with being 'born in a certain Jewish village, of a poor woman of the country, who gained her subsistence by spinning, and who was turned out of doors by her husband, a carpenter by trade, because she was convicted of adultery; that after being driven away by her husband, and wandering about for a time, she disgracefully gave birth to Jesus, an illegitimate child..." Philip Schaff. *Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 4: Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second*. Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library. 699. See also Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 100.30.

⁵⁴ There are numerous anti-Christian tales that parody the birth of Jesus. Perhaps, the most infamous is the Toledoth Yeshu, a derogatory version of the life of Jesus, growing out of the response of the Jewish community to Christianity.

formed part of the early life of Jesus. Every traditional society understands how important the circumstances surrounding the birth of a child form the centre of the child's identity. Consequently, the verdict of Jesus concerning the adulterous woman created by the Jewish mob in John 8 functions as a family verdict and should be credited as the theological hallmark of a family founded on strict adherence to the spirit and not the letter of the law. This theological bent was introduced by Joseph in Mt 1:19 and is in harmony with the original spirit of the Law given to Moses.

6.2 Mary and the will of the Father

In the NT, the first human figure to submit to the will of the Father is the Blessed Virgin Mary. In her encounter with the angel, her proclamation of submission to the will of God (Lk 1:38) is seen as the beginning of the story of human redemption. The entire discussion with the angel shows that Mary never understood the full import of the angelic message. However, she submitted to the will of God. It is after her *fiat* that the angel left knowing that his mission of announcing the good news had been fulfilled.⁵⁵ This submission to God's will and teaching others to do the same is also evident in the encounter at the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee. After the seeming unwillingness of Jesus to perform the miracle (Jn 2:4), Mary simply turned to the servants and told them to do whatever Jesus tells them (Jn 2:5). The submission of the servants, at the command of Jesus, to fill the jars with water and to

⁵⁵ According to J. Fitzmyer, "the announcement story in vv. 28-37 is...primarily christological, and only secondarily mariological." See his *Lk, I-IX*, 337. However, there is no need to make this distinction since Mary sees herself at the service of the divine. She is the handmaid of the Lord.

immediately draw the contents of the jar out to give to the president of the feast (Jn 2:7f) is an expression of ultimate faith. This was encouraged by Mary.

In the same vein, submission to the will of the Father forms the bedrock of the filial relationship between Jesus and his *Abba*. In some places the NT shows that doing the will of God is the true qualification for belonging to the community of believers (cf. Mt 3:7-12; Mt 4:17; Mt 5:17-20; Mt 11:20; Mt 28:18-20). In these passages, doing the will of God is manifest through keeping his commandments and producing good fruits. In “the Lord’s Prayer” the doing of the will of God on earth completes the triad of the “thou” petitions.⁵⁶ In other places, doing the will of the Father is explicitly expressed as the foundation of fellowship with and followership of Christ. This is obvious in the passages of Mt 7:21-23; Mt 12:46-50 and Mt 21:28-32.⁵⁷ In these three passages the will of the Father is the direct object of the verb ‘to do’.⁵⁸ They can thus be seen as classical passages to explain Jesus’ insistence on the importance of doing the will of the Father.⁵⁹ The first text of Mt 7:21-23 comes at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. The discourse begins with proclamation about the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:3) and makes reference to the practice

⁵⁶ For analysis see W. D. Davies/D. C. Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, p.605.

⁵⁷ Mt 12:50 has been accepted as qualification of discipleship. See W. Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel* (3rd ed.). Muenchen, 1964, p.30; U. Luz, “The Disciples in the Gospel According to Matthew,” in: *The Interpretation of Matthew* (ed. Graham Stanton). London, 1983, p.123; M. J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthews Gospel as reflected in the Use of the Term Mathetes* (NTS vol. 59), 1988, 139.

⁵⁸ Cf. M. Palachuvattil, “The One who does the Will of the Father,” *Distinguishing Character of Disciples According to Matthew: An Exegetical Theological Study* (Serie Teologia). Rome, 2007, p.76.

⁵⁹ A more elaborate work on these pericopes has been made by M. Palachuvattil, *The Will of the Father*, pp.67ff.

of an adequate form of righteousness (5:20) greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees. At the end, the one who will inherit the kingdom of heaven is neither the one who makes prophetic declarations nor the one who performs miracles. He is not even the one that employs the double vocative '*kyrie, kyrie*',⁶⁰ but the one who does the will of the Father (7:21). This shows us that declaring Jesus as our personal Lord and Saviour is not as important as being agents of the realization of the will of God. Similarly, the parable of the Two Sons (Mt 21:28-32) carries forth this idea of the importance of being obedient to the will of God.⁶¹ Here, it is the child who actually went to work in the vineyard that did the will of the father and not the one that rendered an empty '*ego, kyrie*'. This is also true of the determination of the true kinsfolk of Jesus. Those who are members of his household are the ones who do the will of the Father in heaven (Mt 12:50). Finally, the prayer of Jesus at the garden of Gethsemane shows his total surrender to the divine will. Matthew reports that three times Jesus offered the same prayer asking that the cup of sorrows will pass him by unless it was the will of the Father (Mt 26:39.42.44).

7. Conclusion: Formation of the Child in our Time

The above pages have shown a continuum between the recorded words of the holy couple of Mary and Joseph and their echoes in

⁶⁰ For the use of the vocative '*kyrie*' by those soliciting help from Jesus, see Mt 8:2.6.8.21.25; 9:28; 14:28.30; 15:22.25.27; 16:22; 17:4.15; 18:21; 20:31.33; 26:22. Lk 6:46 asks, 'why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I tell you?'

⁶¹ We have argued elsewhere on the importance of this parable as the centre of Matthew's accusation against the Jewish leaders. They utter empty words to God without producing corresponding fruits. See my *The Trilogy of Parables in Mt 21:28-22:14: From a Matthean Perspective*. Frankfurt, 2013, especially, pp.103-107.

the life and teaching of Jesus. What we have presented is not a pious exultation of the *Holy Family* but a concentration on the received text of the scriptures to show another line of interpretation that has been overlooked. It can fashion our modern families blueprints to reconsider the impact the family makes on the child and the society at large.

In our age of crave for material sustenance, it seems that many parents aim at training their children to become economically independent so as to be influential members of the society and also take care of their parents at old age. Hence, the interest is to send the child to the best educational institution within or outside Africa so as to receive the best form of Western education. The parents see their role as limited to the provision of school fees and other fees demanded by the respective institutions of learning. Because of this, we have a situation where the core moral values are no longer inculcated to the child by the parents as at when due. The effect is that we have uncountable number of educated youths who roam about with only but a modicum of home training and never conscientious about the accepted mores of the society.

Considering the identified impact of the family of Jesus on his person and mission which has affected almost the entire globe, we want to propose a type of parenting already advocated by Diana Baumrind who conceptualized four dimensions of parent-child interaction, namely, (a) disciplinary strategies; (b) warmth and nurturance; (c) communication styles; and (d) expectation of maturity and ability to self-control.⁶² When parents discipline their

⁶² Baumrind, D. *Child Care Practices Antecedent three Patterns of Preschool Behaviour*. Genetic Psychology Monograph 1967;75(1):43-88.

children with warmth and nurture and are able to communicate with them in all vectors of life, the children would be better enabled to reach a high level of maturity and self-control. This is what our modern families seem to fall short of. If parents respond adequately to the psychological needs of their children, they can make meaningful and reasonable demands on them which will lead to social competence and psychosocial functioning.⁶³ This is in contrast to the neglectful parents whose sole aim is to see their children occupy positions of affluence that benefit only the family with no consideration for the larger society. It is our belief that if parents take their role of formation of their children as a religious duty for God and for the human society, we will have individuals well equipped to change the face of the society which, we have identified, is one of the principal aims of education.

We recommend that parents should assert their authority on their children without being authoritarian.⁶⁴ With this, the development of the child would not be left entirely to the school system which

⁶³ Cf. Maccoby, E. E/Martin, J. A. *Socialization in the Context of the Family: Parent-Child Interaction*. In: Mussen, P. H/Hetherington, E. M, (eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology. Vol. 4. Socialization, Personality, and Social Development. 4th ed.* New York: Wiley, 1983:1-101.

⁶⁴ Research into the effects of parenting style on the behaviour of children shows that children from authoritative parents do very well in social competence, psychosocial development and instrumental competence while those from authoritarian parents may do well academically and behaviourally but are poor in social skills, have low self-esteem and an increased level of depression and risk of suicide. On the other hand, uninvolved or indulgent parenting produces children more likely to be involved in problem behaviours like substance abuse, deviant behaviour and school misconduct. See the research of M. F. T. Ayinmode, M. F. T/Adegunloye, O. A., *Parenting style and conduct problems in children: A report of deliberate selfpoisoning in a Nigerian child*. Available at <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/sajpsyc/article/viewFile/68848/56924>. Accessed 27.02.2018.

is largely devoted to career development and not to the integral formation of the child. If our families make the formation of the child a priority and a religious duty we would be in the process of producing agents for the transformation of our society.