Children in Antiquity and Early Christianity: Research History and Central Issues

Reidar Aasgaard
University of Oslo (Norway)

Sumario

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Dentro de los actuales estudios sobre la antigüedad (clásica y tardía) y el cristianismo primitivo (Nuevo Testamento y período patrístico), y especialmente la cultura romana, el mundo de los niños y la infancia ha suscitado gran interés y adquirido un desarrollo notable. A pesar de las dificultades metodológicas, han sido puestos de relieve diversos aspectos relativos a la vida de los niños, si bien cabe aún esperar nuevas aportaciones sobre todo en lo concerniente al cristianismo primitivo. El artículo ofrece un panorama general de la investigación y muestra los núcleos principales del tema y en los nuevos retos planteados. Se concentra principalmente en las actitudes hacia la infancia y en las relaciones padre-niño, así como en las diferencias que, en el entorno cultural, ha introducido el cristianismo en lo referente a la infancia. Al final se ofrece una amplia bibliografía que puede ser útil para profundizar en el estudio del tema.

Palabras clave: Niños, Infancia, Antigüedad Judía y Greco-Romana, Nuevo Testamento, Cristianismo Primitivo, Historia Social, Historia de la Investigación, Historia de las Ideas.

Abstract

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Children and childhood has become a field of growing interest within modern research on Antiquity (classical and late antiquity) and Early Christianity (New Testament and patristic times), and research has flourished particularly within Roman studies. In spite of the methodological obstacles related to the field, a diversity of aspects of children's life has been dealt with. Much also awaits further study, both as material and as perspectives are concerned; this is very much the case with the period of early Christianity. The article gives a general survey of research and presents central issues and challenges. It focuses particularly on attitudes towards children and on parent-child relations. It also raises the question of the difference Christianity may have made for children. The article has an extensive bibliography as an aid for further study.

Key Words: Children, Childhood, Roman, Greek, Jewish, Antiquity, New Testament, Early Christianity, Research History, Mentality History, Social History.

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The issue of children and childhood has been a field of growing interest within modern scholarship, in the humanities as well as the social and natural sciences. A similar development has taken place during the last two decades in the study of Antiquity and early Christianity. The aim of this article is to give a survey of research, to present central issues and challenges, and to supply a select, but fairly extensive, bibliography for those wishing to study the field more closely.

Methodological challenges

The study of children and childhood in Antiquity and early Christianity is faced with some specific challenges:

(1) *Adequacy of the sources.* The material on children come down to us is limited. Antiquity was basically an oral, not a written culture, and much of what was written has been lost. Much is literary and rhetorical, depicting ideals rather than reality, and it also originated within a small elite at the top of society or of church hierarchies. Almost everything is written by men, and a disproportionate number of sources come from limited geographical areas, primarily centres such as Rome and Egypt. Obviously, these are serious challenges for

24

the study of children in Antiquity; however, they are not insurmountable, but can be met by conscientious and balanced work on the sources.

(2) *Children are only to a limited degree made an issue in the sources*. Childhood does not belong among the many standard topics of Antiquity. Instead, it is usually dealt with in passing and in fragmentary ways. For research this has also its benefits, however, since the issue of children then is often handled with more disinterest, with information showing through with less rhetorical or ideological adaptation on the part of the authors. Thus, much can be read between the lines, e.g. of the life conditions of children, of attitudes towards them, etc.

(3) *The children are themselves by and large silent in the sources*. We meet them almost exclusively through others, *viz*., through adult persons' descriptions. Thus, the sources mainly give us outsider, not insider views of children and their lives. In fact, this is a special version of the general emic-etic (from the inside/the outside) problem, which becomes particularly pressing due to our long distance in time from the classical and early Christian world. Consequently, the sources must be read very much with this in mind.

Children and childhood as research field

When studying children and childhood it is necessary to reflect on what this research field comprises. We may divide the field into these main areas:

1. *Basic living conditions*, esp. demography; birth/death rates (abortion, infanticide, exposure, adoption); nutrition (food, etc.); health (diseases, etc.); physical environment (clothing, housing).

2. *Formation*, esp. life phases (infancy, childhood, youth); upbringing (e.g. ideals, means and contents of education, children's culture); gender roles.

3. *Family roles*, esp. children's position and functions; parent-child relations; sibling relations; violence and sexual exploitation; death, burial and commemoration.

4. *Societal roles*, esp. children's position in society at large (social variation, child labour) and in religious settings (degree of participation, functions in religious rituals).

5. *Cultural roles*, esp. views on the nature of children; children as paradigms for adults; children as cultural symbols; childhood as source for metaphor.

6. *Historical change*, esp. whether changes took place in the living conditions or in the attitudes towards children in Antiquity, and particularly with the growth of early Christianity.

25

As regards Antiquity and early Christianity research has been done on all of these areas, but to varying degrees. We shall return to some examples below.

Research on Greco-Roman and Jewish Antiquity

Descriptions of children in Antiquity and early Christianity often take their point of departure in Philippe Ariès' *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (*Centuries of childhood*, 1960). In this seminal study, Ariès presented two hypotheses, (1) that children all the way up to the 16th century lived under very bad conditions and usually experienced lack of respect from adults, and (2) that childhood was recognised as a stage of life with its particular characteristics only from the 13th century on, and not fully before the 16th/17th centuries.

Ariès' contribution was an impetus for other scholarly work on children in Antiquity and early Christianity. His hypotheses have been heavily criticised, and later research has been far more nuanced than his. But his views still loom large in the views of several scholars.

The first, and early, book to deal in some detail with children in Antiquity was W.K. Lacey, *The family in Classical Greece* (1968). Typical of this book, and of research in the years to come, however, was that children were primarily dealt with within the framework of the family, not as an independent issue. After this, several years went by without much being done, except for some works on youths, cf. Stephen Bertman (1976) and Emiel Eyben (1972; 1973; 1981) –this was the period of the "youth revolt".

In the mid-80s, however, there was among Roman scholars a considerable rise in interest in the study of the family. The central name is that of Beryl Rawson, who gathered scholars for conferences which resulted in the very important books *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives* (1986), and *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (1991). In both books childhood was singled out as an issue in its own right. In the wake of these contributions many other studies followed (both monographs and articles), most of them focussing on Roman material. Much of the research on the ancient family was summarised in Suzanne Dixon's *The Roman Family* (1992).

The focus on children was gradually –from the early 1990s up to now– singled out and strengthened in further studies by Rawson and collaborators, such as Keith Bradley (1991), Dixon (2001), Eyben (1993; 2003), Richard P. Saller (1994), and Paul Weaver (1997). Research has flourished and diversified, with a variety of issues related to children being currently dealt with. Worth particular mention are Thomas Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire* (1989), the first full monograph on children within a Roman setting, and the recent,

26

very valuable book by Beryl Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (2003); in it, she summarises a life of research on family and children. A fresh fruit of research is also the book by Christian Laes, *Kinderen bij de Romeinen. Zees eeuwen dagelijks leven* (2006).

Although research has very much centred on the Roman world, the interest in the *classical Greek* tradition has also grown. Here, however, focus has generally been on the family, and less on children in particular, cf. Sarah B. Pomeroy (1997), Cheryl A. Cox (1998), and Cynthia B. Patterson (1998). There are a couple of important exceptions to this, however, *viz.*, Mark Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens* (1990), and the recent book edited by Jenifer Neils and John H. Oakley, *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece: Images of Childhood from the Classical Past* (2003) .

Within *Jewish* tradition research on children is very meagre. The most important contribution so far is the book edited by Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Jewish Family in Antiquity* (1993), in which some of the contributors specially focus on children's role within the family. Some can also be found in the books edited by Samuel Safrai and M. Stern (1974; 1976) and by Leo G. Perdue, *Families in Ancient Israel* (1997), and in some contributions by John M.G. Barclay (1997), van Jan Willem van Henten/Athalya Brenner (2000), and Margaret Williams (2005).

Research until the 1990s has been marked by some characteristics: a strong focus on Rome and on literary sources, but also an awareness of the importance of family dynamics, gender differences and social, class-related variation –the fruits of a feministic and social scientific orientation of research. From the 1990s on, new trends have also entered research. Worth particular mention is the interest in (1) *life course studies* and its effects on the dynamics of family, e.g. Dixon's book from 1992, and Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence's *Growing up and growing old in ancient Rome: A life course approach* (2002).

Very important is also the awareness of the element of (2) *geographical, and implicitly cultural, variation* as concerns the roles of family and children. This has resulted in regionally oriented studies, e. g. on education: Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (2001). Very important books are Véronique Dasen, *Naissance et petite enfance dans l'Antiquité* (2004), which also focuses on Egyptian, Byzantine, and other traditions, and Michele George, *The Roman Family in the Empire: Rome, Italy, and Beyond* (2005), which in addition to Italy and Rome, also deals with such diverse areas as Palestine, North Europe, Hungary, North Africa, and Lusitania (!).

Finally, there has taken place a development towards (3) *greater diversity in the use of sources*. From an emphasis on literary and archaeological sources, research has increasingly taken art, epigraphy, and juridical documents into account, thus integrating a broader set of variables against which to study ancient childhood. Particularly

27

Rawson has during the last years focused on art and epigraphy (1997; 2003), Jeannine Uzzi on art (2005), Hanne Sigismund Nielsen and Janette McWilliam on epigraphy (1997; 2001), and Judith Evans Grubbs on legal sources (2005).

In works on other topics, such as women and slaves, there has also been growing awareness of children as a distinct category. And some have made in-depth studies of special aspects of children's life, e.g. John Boswell on abandonment of children (1990).

Research on early Christianity

Research on early Christianity has been slower than classical research to take on the study of family and children. However, much work has been done on the early Christian family since the beginning of the 1990s. Some scholars have focused on early Christian family life in general, whereas others have dealt with particular writings or authors, such as the canonical gospels, Paul, and church fathers (e.g. Cappadocians). Characteristic of many of these studies is that they also deal with figurative family language, for example of the church as a family of God, and very often base their readings on social scientific methodology. In these works, the issue of children has been taken up, but not in great breadth.

Some representative New Testament contributions dealing with the family, but also including children, are Daniel von Allmen's early *La famille de Dieu: la symbolique familiale dans le paulinisme* (1981); Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (1994); Halvor Moxnes (ed.), *Constructing Early Christian Families* (ed., 1997); Santiago Guijarro, *Fidelidades en conflicto* (1998); Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (2001); and Reidar Aasgaard, *"My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!" Christian Siblingship in Paul* (2004).

Less work has been done on family life in the patristic period, but Carol Harrison (1996) and Raymond van Dam (2003) should be mentioned. The books by Carolyn Osiek/David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World* (1997) and by Geoffrey Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity: The Rise of Christianity and the Endurance of Tradition* (2000) can serve as useful introductions to the New Testament and the patristic periods respectively.

As for the issue of children in particular, it is clear that this has been far less studied than the family generally, although there has been a distinct rise in interest the last few years. Two early, but partly outdated contributions, deserve mention however, *viz.*, Simon Légasse (1969) and H.H. Schroeder (1972).

Two more recent books deal at length with children in the New Testament in general. The first is Peter Müller, *In der Mitte der*

Gemeinde: Kinder im Neuen Testament (1992), to date the most thorough study. He analyses the New Testament material on the background of socio-historical sources, with focus primarily on the synoptic gospels. Some attention is also paid to the letters, although relatively sparingly in the case of Paul. The book by William A. Strange, *Children in the Early Church* (1996), is briefer and more popular, but is somewhat more attentive to differences among the synoptic gospels than Müller. Some scholars have dealt with children in the New Testament in articles, particularly James Francis (1996) and Judith M. Gundry-Volf (2000; 2001). Some studies taking up more specific issues related to children have also been published, such as Bettina Eltrop on Matthew (1996) and Taeseong Roh on the "familia Dei" in the synoptic gospels (2001). Of special interest is Peter Balla (2003), who we shall return to below.

Studies which deal with children in patristic times are comparably few. The early book by Michael Gärtner, *Die Familienerziehung in der alten Kirche* (1985) deserves mention, since it has relatively extensive analyses both of the upbringing of children in early Christianity in general and in John Chrysostom in particular. The Ph.D. thesis by Sarah Currie, *Childhood and Christianity from Paul to the Council of Chalcedon* (1993) also surveys quite a bit of material. A number of articles deal with special figures or limited issues, particularly Graham Gould (1994, eastern Fathers), Vigen Guroian (2001, John Chrysostom), Ellen M. Stortz (2001, Augustine), and Blake Leyerle (1997, John Chrysostom). The reception historical study of Sherman W. Gray, *The least of my brothers: Matthew 25, 31-46* (1989) is also worth mention. In addition, Wiedemann and Nathan (above) have separate chapters on children in early Christianity.

The clearly most comprehensive contribution is the recent monograph by O.M. Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (2005), which deals with central topics on children from the NT to Augustine. After a presentation of children in the Greco-Roman world, it turns to patristic views about children's characteristics, and then to issues related to birth (e.g. abortion), sexuality, education, participation in worship, and to problems of combining Christian living (e.g. asceticism) and having children. The book has good surveys and discussions of central sources and is highly serviceable as an introduction to the patristic period in particular. However, it is brief on the NT; and material on several early Fathers, and art and epigraphic material is not included. Some topics are also only briefly mentioned, such as children's responsibilities within the family, and the illnesses, death, and commemoration of children.

Worth special mention is also Marcia J. Bunge (ed.), *The Child in Christian Thought* (2001), which presents the ideas of many central historical figures and writings from the NT and to modern times. The book gives an excellent general survey, but also several in-depth stu-

dies, and can serve a backcloth for the study of early Christianity as far as perspectives, methods, and material are concerned.

Research on children in early Christianity is, if not still in its childhood, then at least in its youth, and clearly still has much to catch up with from work done on other material, particularly in the Roman field. Little has e.g. been done on early Christian children in relation to gender, social class, and regional perspectives. One obvious merit on the part of early Christianity scholars, however, has been their efforts to bridge the gap to classical studies. Both fields have traditionally formed rather separate scholarly traditions, but important initiatives have been taken by scholars such as Moxnes and collaborators (particularly the Early Christian families group within the Society of Biblical Literature), and by Balch and Osiek (eds.) in *Early Christian families in context: an interdisciplinary dialogue* (2003).

Example 1: attitudes towards children

Research on attitudes towards children in Antiquity and early Christianity can serve as one example of scholarly discussions within the field. There has on this point taken place a development from one-sidedness to a far more diversified view. Ariès' early book, which depicted Antiquity as a dark age for children (see above), dealt rather superficially with the material. Later research went into much more detail, and has nuanced and partly refuted his claims. However, his spirit still lives on in some works, for example in Tony Chartrand-Burke's thesis on the Infancy Gospel of Thomas (2001), in which people in Antiquity are denied the capacity for insight into the life of children.

Rawson (2003) represents a more balanced view. By means of a broad variety of sources she tries to show that there was far more understanding and empathy with children than has been acknowledged, and that adults in Antiquity also were very much aware of children's psychological development and able to adapt to such factors.

At the other end of the spectrum, we also find scholars presenting a rosier picture of childhood, and especially in the early Empire, such as Paul Veyne, "La famille et l'amour sous le haut-empire romain" (1978).

This spectrum of opinions clearly mirrors differences in opinion about children in Antiquity and early Christianity, but it also highlights some methodological challenges as to the concept of "attitude", which are important to reflect on:

(1) When speaking of attitudes, what *levels* does one then refer to, that of ideas (how children were valued) or that of practice (what roles, etc., children had in the society and the family)? Clearly, the two levels are intertwined, but there is little agreement as to the relationship between them. Dixon (1991) holds that there was considerable tension

30

between ideals and actual practice, and maybe even conflict: reality could be much harsher and quite different from descriptions in the sources. On the basis of rhetorical considerations, Bakke (2005), however, is more confident in a correspondence between idea and reality, i.e. between what the sources say and what was practised.

(2) Was there *one* specific attitude? Should we rather speak of attitudes in the plural, even of conflicting attitudes? For example, children seem to be more negatively valued in literary than in epigraphic sources. And within the New Testament children appear to be more highly valued in the gospels than in the letters.

(3) How do we *measure* attitudes towards children? Were children highly valued, or devalued? The answer will very much depend on the standards against which we measure. According to modern standards, children probably can not be said to be highly regarded. Measured against similar groups in Antiquity, however, the answer may be quite different. It remains an open question whether attitudes towards children were more negative than towards others, at least when we measure them against other marginalized groups such as slaves, elderly, and disabled.

In spite of these methodological objections, there is still much to say about the issue of attitudes. Although the sources only to a limited degree give access to "reality", they nevertheless very much reflect general mentalities, i.e. popular ideas and ideals. For example, children were often seen as unfinished human beings, as adults-to-be. The apex of humanity was the grown-up, mature man. This was the standard against which children and others were measured, and which set the terms for how children were to be treated and brought up. Thus, the ideal for a child's formation was not to give room for play or to stimulate its creative abilities (cf. modern ideals), but to prepare them for their adult obligations, e.g. as a housewife or as a man of profession. In spite of this, however, there is –as noted– a growing recognition among scholars that the ancients to a considerable extent were able to identify with children, and to sense the characteristics in children's physical and mental development. This is not least evidenced in the ancient literature concerned with education and the school system (pedagogical handbooks).

At the same time, children were also made objects of admiration, particularly by being idealised (as "pure") or sentimentalised ("sweet" and "funny"). This can be seen as a positive evaluation of children, but may equally well be reflecting needs of adults to touch up the harsh realities of their own lives.

Children were also very often viewed as liminal beings. As not-fully-human they were seen as beings on the threshold of another world, who in their purity were able to mediate truths from the gods. Children's roles in Greco-Roman religions as oracles and as partakers in religious processions may reflect this. Similar ideas can also be pre-

sent in early Christian worship, in which children could function as choir members and readers.

One particular field of scholarly study has been the use of children as source for metaphor; here, notions about childhood serve as means to express ideas about other things. This is a very interesting field, since it shows how the issue of children could be used rhetorically for a diverse number of purposes, while at the same time also revealing certain attitudes towards the children themselves. In this kind of usage, children could be presented as models for adult life. For example, in art children figures often served as symbols for happiness, and the emperor Augustus also used children imagery as means for creating a notion about the durability and future prosperity of the empire; see the works by Wiedemann (1989), Rawson (2001; 2003), and Beth Severy (2003).

The metaphorical use of childhood language has very much been an area of focus in research on early Christianity, more than in classical studies. This clearly has to do with the exceptionally frequent use of such language, particularly in the New Testament, cf. the works by von Allmen (1981), Sandnes (1994), Moxnes (1997), Roh (2001), Trevor J. Burke (2003), Aasgaard (2004), but also in patristic sources, cf. Hellerman (2001).

Example 2: parent-child relations

Considerable research has also been done on parent-child relations. This is no wonder, given the emphasis on family and hierarchy in the classical world. It is, however important to be aware that much of the material deals with parents and adult children, and not children in their minors.

Golden (1990) and Barry S. Strauss (1993) have focussed on parent-child relations in the classical Greek period and –partly– the Hellenistic period, as have also Pomeroy (1997), Patterson (1998), and Cox (1998). Far more research, however, has been done on the Roman period, and a significant amount of this is concerned with parent-daughter relations. An early study was made by Judith P. Hallett (1984), followed by a number of others, such as Dixon (1988) and Eva Marie Lassen (1990). Saller (1994) devotes chapters to questions about the authority of the father, discipline, and inheritance in the Roman family. Wiedemann (1989) has some material, but presents it less systematically than might be expected. A number of articles deal with both general features and special aspects of parent-child relations, e. g. Eyben (1991), Rawson (1991), Saller (1991), and Bradley (1991). Rawson also deals with it at length in her latest book (2003).

32

Much of the limited research on the Jewish family has been done on parent-child relations. Worth particular notice are the articles by O. Larry Yarbrough, Adele Reinhartz, and Ross S. Kraemer in the book edited by Cohen (1993). Very recently, Andreas Michel has focused on violence towards children, including parental violence, in the Old Testament (2003).

Parent-child relations have also been important within research on early Christianity, and several of these contributions deal extensively with the Greco-Roman and Jewish context of the Christian material. Examples are works by Guijarro on the historical Jesus and the Synoptics (1998; 2000), Harry Jungbauer on the love of parents command in the New Testament (2002), and Burke on 1 Thessalonians (2003). Much material on the patristic period can be found in Nathan (2000), Guroian (2001), Hellerman (2001), and Bakke (2005).

Research has focused much on the fundamental power structures of parent-child relations, and traditionally emphasized its hierarchical and patriarchal character. In addition the character of parent-child obligations have been much dealt with. Here, scholars have highlighted the obligation of parents to provide children with their basic needs, to give them basic instruction, to serve as moral models, and to secure inheritance for them. In return, children were to function as working power, to secure parents' old age, to provide for them a decent burial, and to carry on the family traditions. Mutually, parents and children should serve as a social network, show each other mutual respect, strive to avoid conflict and preserve internal harmony, and also defend family honour vis-à-vis outsiders.

Traditionally, scholarship (taking its point of departure in Roman legal material) presented parent-child relations as strongly hierarchical, with fathers having an almost omnipotent position. During the last two decades, however, a much greater variety of sources has been consulted, with the picture becoming far more balanced, showing that there were many restrictions on the "patria potestas". This clearly indicates that one must apply a set of variables in order to get an appropriate picture of parent-child relations.

Within classical studies, scholars have paid special attention to certain perspectives and issues, such as the range of formal parent-child relations (adoption, stepchildren, foundlings), e.g. Rawson (2003) and Laes (2003); gender (father/daughter, mother/son etc.), e.g. Dixon (1988; 1992); class, e.g. Dixon (2001) and Rawson (2003); inheritance, e.g. Champlin (1991) and Saller (1991; 1994); formation (aims, methods, violence), e.g. Saller (1991); emotional relations (degree of intimacy, mourning), e.g. Dixon (1991), Saller (1997) and Rawson (2003); conflicts (sexual exploitation, generational and inheritance conflicts), e.g. Bertman (1976), Dixon (1997) and Grubbs (2005).

Parent-child relations have generally received less attention as far as early Christianity is concerned. There are two notable excep-

33

tions to this, however; both are due to the special character of the Christian material. (1) Extensive work has been done on metaphorical parent-child language (God as father and Christians as children etc.), within the synoptic gospels, e.g. by Sandnes (1994) and Andries van Aarde (2001); on John, e.g. by Reinhartz (1999); on Paul, e.g. by Beverly R. Gaventa (1990; 1996), Mary Katherine Birge (2002), and Aasgaard (2004); and on 1-3 John, e.g. Dietrich Rusam (1993). (2) Important work has also been done on parent-child conflicts arising from persons joining the early Christian groups, both on children's loyalty conflicts towards parents, e.g. Barton (1994), Sandnes (1994), and Guijarro (2001), and on parents' towards their children, e.g. Bakke (2005).

A good example of a nuanced discussion of parent-child relations in the New Testament is Peter Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and Its Environment* (2003). Balla analyses New Testament texts within the setting of Antiquity in general, and focuses particularly on children's obligations and rights towards parents. He regards this to be a "from down below" perspective which has been neglected in previous research. Balla aims at explaining two seeming tensions in the New Testament material: the tension between the early Jesus followers' breakaway from their family and the social stability reflected in the household codes of the late NT letters, and the tension between the exhortations in the gospels to honour one's parents, and to leave or hate them. These tensions have in previous research often been used as indications of early Christians being in conflict with their social environment, and with the Christian community serving as a family of God to substitute the "old" family. Balla's view is –in my opinion correctly– that these tensions have been considerably exaggerated: the early Christians were all the time, *inter alia* motivated by Jesus' own attitudes, concerned with preserving the old social structures, and thus also with honouring their parents. Expressions such as to "leave" and "hate" one's parents were to a large extent hyperbolic, with parallels in non-Christian material. Their intention was to emphasise the radical aspect of Christian loyalty towards Jesus: honouring God should have higher priority than honouring one's parents. But it was only in exceptional cases that loyalties collided, since by living up to current expectations about honouring one's parents one also honoured God.

Interestingly, Balla also focuses on limitations set on children's obligations towards parents, and shows that children on occasion had the right to disobey, e.g. if parents were mentally or morally depraved or their will conflicted with that of the Torah.

Balla's view partly coincides with that of Guijarro (1998; 2001). However, Guijarro emphasises more strongly the seriousness of children's conflicts with parents, particularly among the earliest Jesus believers (e.g. those belonging to the Q milieu). Jesus and the early Christians were not at all anti-familial. But when households did not

34

tolerate that family members became Christian, this often led to the social ostracism reflected in the New Testament "conflict sayings".

The issue of parent-children conflict is also taken up by Bakke (2005), but from the opposite angle: when loyalties towards children become problematic for parents. In a chapter, Bakke discusses patristic material in which parents leave their children for the sake of a higher cause, to follow the will of God, e.g. to do missionary work, to live ascetic lives, or even to suffer martyrdom. Viewed together, these contributions leave us with a complex total impression, indicating that perceptions of the same relationship, the parent-child relation, could differ much when viewed from the perspective of parents or of children respectively.

Historical change: did Christianity make any difference for children?

Did there take place a change or development over time in how children were viewed and treated? This is a question which is sometimes, often implicitly, raised within research. The question is important, and fully legitimate, since it has to do with how ideology or mentalities interact with general living conditions over time, and with how new identities are shaped from encounters between old and new faiths, e.g. in the case of the new Christian religion.

Classical scholars differ as to whether they think that the question can be answered, and many are very reluctant to judge as to whether the sources allow us to make any such inferences at all. However, some are inclined to see changes taking place around the 1st century A.D. with the Empire replacing the Roman Republic, thus introducing a period of greater political and economical stability, with an improvement of general living conditions and an upgrading of the valuation of family life and –consequently– of children. But since most scholars have only investigated into limited aspects of the issue, few have ventured more comprehensive discussions of such a question.

Scholars on early Christianity have also dealt with the matter, with some, e.g. Currie (1993), being rather uncritical as concerns the effect –and positive effect– of nascent Christianity. Other scholars hold the opposite position; e.g. according to Nathan (2000) there occur with the Christian religion only small and superficial changes as concerns the lives of children; instead, Christianity largely forwards traditional attitudes, both as concerns ideas and practice.

Generally, however, scholars take a more nuanced stand. E.g. Wiedemann (1989) and Bakke (2005) discuss the matter, and hold that Christianity brought changes to the attitudes to children. And although it is not always clear whether the individual changes should

be interpreted as positive or negative, they serve in sum fundamentally to upgrade the position of children. Bakke and others focus on the following areas on which changes are likely to have taken place:

1. *Ideologically*: the idea of all humans being created in the image of God affected attitudes to children, both positively (they were regarded fully human) and more negatively (they were in a fallen condition and afflicted by sin).

2. *Abortion/infanticide/exposure*. Christianity was negative to such practice. It shared this attitude with some philosophical groups and with Judaism, but the view became much more widely disseminated with the growth of Christianity.

3. *Sexual relations between children and adults*. Early Christianity had a far more restrictive view than Antiquity in general, not least motivated by its emphasis on asceticism and on sexual moderation and abstinence.

4. *Formation and educational curriculum*. Changes gradually took place, partly in ethical ideals, partly in cultural heritage, with Biblical material supplanting classical material.

5. *Parents' involvement in children's formation*. Early Christianity put greater emphasis on parents' responsibility for the formation and ideological education of their children, with the aim being to make them into "good Christians".

6. *Moral conduct*. Since Christian children were expected to defend not only the honour of their family, but also of the Christian community and faith, stricter demands were put upon them as concerns moral conduct. Some sources even seem to emphasise more than was customary the need for using physical force as a means of formation.

As can be seen, these factors can, depending on how they are valued individually and in sum, be viewed as contributing both positively and negatively to the living conditions of early Christian children. Nonetheless, they show that it is not possible to make simple evaluations in one or another direction, but that a variety of factors must be taken into account in attempts to assess the effects of political changes in the Roman Empire or of the growth of the Christian movement.

Antiquity and early Christianity from the perspective of children?

There is still much research to be done on children and childhood in Antiquity and early Christianity. This is the case with the early Christian material in particular; here, there is clearly a need for more

36

in-depth studies of special topics, of individual writings and authors, and of epigraphic sources and art.

One issue should be especially mentioned here, however. Except from some attempts, e.g. by Rawson, Balla, and Bakke, few scholars have tried to view the sources systematically from the perspective of the children themselves. Although there are (as noted above) considerable problems inherent in such an approach, there is in my opinion more material on this in the ancient sources than has been commonly acknowledged. The sources have for example not been sufficiently combed on matters such as children's toys, stories, school exercises, dressing, diseases, and gender roles. Thus, I think that we should venture to inquire more deeply into questions such as: what was everyday life like for children, in Antiquity and in early Christianity? What did they do? What did they learn? To what degree was their environment adapted to their needs? How did they themselves have to adapt? What signs do we find of a "children's culture"? How did they see themselves?

Some scholars have also voiced the need for a Christian *theology of childhood* (e.g. Bonnie Miller-McLemore 2003; Joyce Ann Mercer 2005). Although this is a perspective foreign to the ancient sources themselves, it is fully warranted from our modern point of view. Just as we for a time have had feminist and liberationist readings of the ancient material, we should now also promote a "childish" reading, an interpretation of the sources from the perspective and interests of children. Within research on early Christianity it has for very long been the time of adults. It ought now to be the time of children, for letting the children come. They should no longer be stopped.

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(Entries are sorted according to main emphases, but may also contain material pertaining to other sections).

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44