THE FAMILY OF NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

The New Testament family fulfilled tasks that today are mostly performed by the state, the churches, and other institutions.

Peter Lampe

Familia in the Roman Empire meant more than kinship, more than parents, children, or grandparents. A whole household was *familia*. Large and rich households could comprise the master, his wife, their children (young, adult, adopted, and foster children), and other persons related by blood or marriage, plus slaves and freedpersons and their spouses and children. So-called "clients" arrived at the atrium of the Roman house in the mornings to greet the master; for some compensation they surrounded him as entourage, accompanied him to the bath, or trod behind his sedan-chair.[2]

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At the other end of the social scale, the poor man and his wife and children lived somewhere on the fifth floor of a tenement house, under the roof (*ad summas tegulas*) between pigeons' dung and rain stains. Sometimes several parties shared the same cramped apartment (*cenaculum*). In the tangle, it was almost impossible to define where one household, one family, started and the other one ended. The neighbor Novius, however, in the tenement apartment next door—so close and yet so far—was isolated and hardly known.[3]

A Matter of Definition

Picking up on the Latin and Greek terminology, I will define "family" as "household" (*familia, oikos*) in this study. These ancient languages have no term for family in our sense of the word as a group of persons who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption. By defining family as household we might, however, run the risk of explaining an X by a Y.

Unfortunately, the term "household" is less clear than it seems at first glance. It cannot be restricted to those persons who sleep under one roof, since there existed large ramified—branched—households with many slaves and freedpersons and much real estate; these households sometimes even had branches in other cities (see the discussion on "Work and Economic Production," pp. 23-25).

The Roman legal definition does not help much either. It considered *familia* those persons who legally were set under the authority of the same *pater familias*, father of the household.[4] If we went by this definition, children, slaves, and freedpersons would be part of this household, but not the wife of the *pater familias*. Usually married *sine manu* (without being under the husband's legal power), she would be a member of her father's household.

Each of these definitions that focus on kinship, coresidence, or legal subordination bears some truth but is too narrow or too large taken by itself. The members of the household could—but did not need to—be blood- or marriage-related. They could—but did not need to—be under the legal authority of the *pater familias*.

A fourth parameter, the economic one, needs to be added. I tend to define "household" (*oikos*) as an economic entity, led by one person who could be either a man, the *pater familias*, or a woman.[5] The other household members were economically dependent on the household leader. Taken by

itself, though, even the economic definition does not totally satisfy. Being fully able to enter into heritages,[6] the wife of a household master could be economically independent from her husband.

Economic dependency taken by itself also would be imprecise for another reason. A ceramics merchant, for instance, was "economically dependent" on the ship's captain who imported his fragile goods, without the two necessarily belonging to the same household. The latter would be the case, however, if one were subjected under the authority of a third person for whom they worked.

orders of the other or if both were subjected under the

To me it seems most appropriate to combine the three criteria of hierarchical order-obedience structure, economic dependency, and marriage.[7] A "household" comprised (a) those persons who were economically dependent on one master to whose authority they felt subjected (this could include children, even adult sons, slaves, freedpersons, and "clients"), and (b) the spouses of all these persons, including the master's own spouse, as long as these couples lived together. This definition may not be wisdom's last word in the scholars' struggle for defining family,[8] but it might surpass those that focus solely on coresidency or kinship.[9]

We are going to look at these various private households in the first 150 years C.E. Did they fulfill tasks in the society of the Roman Empire that today are mostly performed by the state, by the churches, or by other institutions? For example, did the private household take care of the children's education? Today the family sometimes totally delegates this task to society, to day-care centers and schools with long hours. As another example, did the family take care of the transportation of mail? The question is surprising. Today we simply walk to the U.S. Postal Service mailbox on the corner. In the Roman Empire, however, the private households had to take care of their mail by themselves, for instance sending it through their own slaves (*tabellarii, cursores*). This simple example flags a problem. Rich households with slaves could more easily fulfill those tasks that the state and other institutions of the society neglected. And there were a lot of areas where the private households were left on their own without help from somewhere else.

First we will look at some areas where the private households performed tasks that the state or other institutions of the society ignored. Then we will analogously ask which tasks and needs in the life of the early church were met by the private households. Thus, this essay will deal only peripherally with the internal family structure and the roles of certain family members, such as the child, the woman, or the slave. We will rather focus on

the role of the family as a whole in church and society of New Testament times.

Roman Society Tasks and Needs Met by Private Households

In the Roman society we can identify four categories of tasks and needs that were met by the private households: social tasks, education, work and economic production, and the juridical function.

Social Tasks

The Roman central government and the local city administrations did not feel much urge to provide social services; they did not supply nursing homes, hospitals, orphanages, or any systematic poor relief.[10] These social tasks were taken over by "a thousand points of light," by some charitable clubs,[11] by private benefactors, and mainly by the private households.

Exposed children perished—or were raised as foundlings by another household. Sick and mentally disturbed were taken care of by their families—or died. Large households employed their own physicians and established their own sickrooms (*valetudinaria*).[12] "Clients" were helped by their patrons by means of presents, legal assistance, and above all by means of the daily *sportula*, a small amount of money, which functioned as a sort of private unemployment compensation. It at least fed the "client."

Elderly people, weak and poor, gave up their hopes—unless they inherited something from a relative or were helped in other ways by their families.[13] The private household had to take care of the elderly. Needy relatives were to be supported by their kin (1 Tim. 5:4,8). Especially Christian households had to be admonished in this way, because they sometimes were tempted to dump this responsibility onto the Christian community as a whole, i.e., onto the communal money box of the local church (cf. 1 Tim. 5:16).

Education

The Roman central government of the Empire did not care much about the education of its populations.[14] Mainly in the Greco-Hellenistic east of the Empire the local *poleis* (city-communities) would hire primary teachers, but the pupils' families paid.[15] In the Latin west the public dimension was even less prominent. The initiative for education was up to the family. Since

there was no compulsory school attendance anywhere in the Empire, the attitude and the finances of the family determined whether or not a child was educated, and how well and long this was done.[16]

Rich children often were educated at home by private tutors.[17] The less well-to-do family sent its offspring to the private school of a primary teacher (*ludi magister*) once the children were six years and older. In the mornings this private teacher, who was paid by the parents, would teach writing and counting somewhere at the market place under a sun awning of a shop in the middle of the street noise. The quality of this instruction was correspondingly bad, the reputation of the primary teacher poor, and the monthly tuition per child ridiculously low.[18]

The state did not care. It was not before the fifth century C.E. that the state felt obliged to remunerate the primary teachers out of the public treasury.

The problem emerges again. Rich households with their own private tutors met the needs—in this case the educational needs—that the state neglected. The less well-to-do families had to put up with the inferior private elementary instruction somewhere under an awning at the market place.

The financing of any education was in the hands of the private households. Many papyri letters talk about remittances from parents. The sums sent were respectable, but usually not as high as the 2000 *sestertii* that a spoiled son named Philomusus squandered in Rome every month.[19] Not only free children were educated at the expense of the private household. With some self-interest, some masters also invested in the training of slaves as craftsmen, primary teachers, musicians, actors, physicians, or financial administrators. In rare cases the master even let a slave attend philosophical lectures, as did the master Epaphroditus, who allowed his slave Epictetus to listen to the stoic lectures of Musonius Rufus.

Apart from financing education, the household and in particular the parents were asked to serve as ethical models for their children:

> Let your infant son stand in the way of the sin that you are about to commit. . . . Some day he shall show himself like to you, not in form and face only, but also your child in vice, following in all your footsteps. . . . (Juvenal, *sat.* 14)[20]

The methods of raising children were gentle compared to the severe treatment recommended by Cato the Older, which had become obsolete (at

least in the socially elevated circles of Pliny). Pliny the Younger expressed the attitude that had become more common in his circles, stealing an angry father's thunder:

> Have you never done anything your father could complain about? . . . Don't you still sometimes do things that your son could criticize as severely if he suddenly became father and you his son? . . . I am writing to you as one friend to another so that you, too, may never be too harsh and strict with your son. Remember that he is a boy and you have been a boy yourself, and use your rights as a father without forgetting that you are only human and so is your son.[21]

According to Quintilian, physical punishment inflicts shame and "breaks the heart."[22] Contemporary Christian sources sound very similar: Parents should not oppress their children, that they may not lose heart (Col. 3:21; cf. Eph. 6:4, 1 Tim. 2:24-25). This does not mean that the children should be spoiled. In Christian houses punishment was also exercised (Heb. 12:7-10). And Pliny sneered at a lawyer's son and his Gallic ponies, "dogs of all sizes," nightingales, parrots, and blackbirds. Quintilian complained about too much candy for toddlers and lamented over adults who were amused by their youngsters' curse words without correcting them.[23] In other words, children often *were* spoiled, at least in the upper classes where infants "grow up in sedan chairs."[24] Moralists like Quintilian tried to counteract.

A special case of education at home was a son's training in a craft by his own father. Jewish households particularly valued this kind of education.

> Who does not teach a craft to his son, almost teaches him to become a robber (bQidd. 29a). Fitting is learning in Torah along with a craft, for the labor put into the two of them makes one forget sin (Abot 2.2).

Famous Jewish scribes were trained as tailors, sandal makers, or constructors. The tentmaker Paul was only one of them.

Work and Economic Production

Each society is economically productive, but where did the work take place in the Roman Empire? In the private households? For rural areas we have to answer yes: "The master of the household has to be a seller, not a buyer." This famous saying of Cato (*de agr.* 2.7) expressed the rural household's striving for self-sufficiency. Each household tried to supply its requirements by its own work.

Cato's saying was still valid in the first century C.E. Petronius' Trimalchio, for example, ran a self-sufficient household by living on the products of his own landed estates: "Everything is produced at home" (Petronius, *sat.* 38). As another example, in the villages of rural Palestine there existed no money exchangers,[25] which indicates that trade, selling, and buying were minimal in rural areas. The private households covered their home needs mostly by their own production.

In the cities the picture changed. The coins found in Pompeii betray a rapid circulation of money, i.e., lively selling and buying activities.[26] The private city household depended much more on work done outside of its own boundaries. In the craftsman's household the labor was specialized. The city household therefore had to buy and to sell. Nevertheless, also in the city, work and production mostly took place within the framework of the private households. For their internal needs, large households gave work to confectioners, pastry cooks, barbers, and ladies' hairdressers among their own slaves. Often a household comprised a workshop in which the slaves and freedmen of the family labored.

The less-well-off household master and craftsman ran a tiny rented workshop (*taberna*) and also lived, ate, served his customers, and slept there. If he was a fuller—one bleaching cloth—the sulfur steam tickled the noses of his family and guests, with the place for work and dinner party being the same.[27] At nighttime the family crawled up the ladder to a mezzanine over the shop or crowded into a back room to sleep. During the day, the children scurried around the workshop.

These businesses were sometimes in the families for generations. A family as production pool can be found even in the early Christian sources. In Corinth, the Christian Aquila and his wife Priscilla represented a household, which at the same time was a tentmaking workshop, giving work at least to one employee (Acts 18:3; cf. 1 Cor. 4:12).

Fairly recent studies cast light on "family associations" that were involved in big, often superregional businesses. These prominent households comprised a great many freedpersons who could be active in many places.

The family of the Faenii traded with fragrances and had business branches in Capua, Puteoli, Rome, Ischia, and Lyon, which were run by the family's freedpersons. The Caecilii of Baetica in southern Spain traded oil with Rome. Similarly the Fadii of Narbonne traded oil between southern Spain, Italy, and Gaul. The Olitii were in business both in Rome and Narbo, the Aponii both in Narbonne and Sicily. Freedpersons of the senatorial

Laecanii owned large land tracts near (modern) Trieste; these freedpersons' own freed slaves were in business in Italian ports. Other senators' and local elites' families had freedpersons or slaves working in the production and sales of textile materials or in the construction business.

Through their slaves and freedpersons these noble family masters, being rich landowners and proud of not getting their own hands dirty by craft or trade, nevertheless were able to participate in "dirty" but lucrative businesses. A family business of this caliber could profit from a whole production circle in one area. The local landowner's sheep flocks, for example, produced the wool, which was subsequently worked into textile materials and sold by the household's own slaves and freedpersons.[28]

Juridical Function: Roman Household Courts

The master of the Roman household had the power to punish misdemeanors and misdeeds of family members. In severe cases he could call in a council of relatives and friends, and a private trial was held in the atrium of the house (*iudicium domesticum*). Even in cases that generally called for public criminal procedure, the private family court could be implemented, as long as no charge was raised publicly. The household master also decided civil law concerning quarrels within the community of the household (*disceptator domesticus*), thus again unburdening the public jurisdiction.[29]

An example of a household trial is given by Tacitus (*Ann.* 13.32). In Rome in the year 57/58 C.E., the noble Pomponia Graecina, the wife of a Roman consul, was arraigned for "alien superstition." However, the public court, in this case the Roman Senate, was glad to refer the case to the private jurisdiction of her husband:

> Following the ancient custom, he held the inquiry, which was to determine the fate and fame of his wife, before a family council, and announced her innocent.

It has been suggested that Pomponia Graecina's "alien superstition" was the Christian faith. Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.44) labeled Christianity a "superstition," and so did other pagan authors like Suetonius (*Nero* 16) and Pliny (*ep.* 10.96.8). Certainty, however, cannot be gained about Pomponia Graecina's "alien" religious activities.[30]

In 1 Cor. 6, Paul scolds the Corinthian Christians for trying to settle their quarrels in public pagan courts. He recommends asking a "wise" church member to arbitrate between the brawlers—if they cannot abstain from

suing each other. Abstaining and renouncing one's rights would be, of course, the most preferable Christian attitude for Paul (1 Cor. 6:7).

The early Christians held all their meetings in private households. The Christian arbitration procedure that Paul recommends in 1 Cor. 6 therefore is not only analogous to the jurisdiction of the synagogs. It also parallels the Roman family courts, which were as private as the Christian meetings in households were. The difference is that the master of the household, the *pater familias*, is not supposed to be the judge, but a Christian who is called *ad hoc* because of "wisdom" and arbitrating qualities.

Early Church Tasks and Needs Met by Private Households

Which church functions were fulfilled by the Christian households? The importance of the private households for the life of the early church can hardly be overestimated. Their dwelling rooms were almost the only real estate structure at the churches' disposal in the first two centuries C.E.[31]

Church-owned buildings and land did not exist before the third or even fourth centuries. Only in the third century C.E. so-called "homes of the church" (*domus ecclesiae*) were set up, i.e., special rooms that were exclusively reserved for worship purposes. In the first two centuries the Christian communities or "house churches" met in private dwelling rooms that, of course, were used for everyday purposes by their owners or tenants during the week.[32] In other words, in the first and second centuries the church existed not *beside* the Christians' private households, but exclusively *in* them. The socially elevated Christians held the church in their homes, opening them up for fellow Christians.

The "services" of the Christian house owners were praised accordingly, and the virtue of hospitality was emphasized. Those who opened their homes were greatly appreciated—whether they had houses or only apartments like the one on the third floor of a tenement house in Troas (Acts 20: 8-9) or like Justin's rental apartment "above Myrtinus' bath" in Rome.[33]

Being the only location for early Christian communal life, the private household performed a multitude of ecclesiastical functions. Among them were quality of communal life, commitment of the individual, and theological pluralism; mission; and the private household as a model for the universal church.

Quality of Communal Life, Commitment of the Individual, and Theological Pluralism

The private household as the locus of Christian meetings and worship naturally gave room only to relatively small groups, around twenty or thirty people on the average.[34] The size of these groups fostered personal contacts, frequent interaction, and affectionate relationships.[35] The individual could feel "at home" when he or she attended a house church meeting. Consequently she or he internalized the group convictions more easily. On the whole, a house church claimed the individual's commitment—more than any larger group could do. The bigger the group, the more room for anonymity and nominal membership. In a house church you were either committed and felt comfortable—or you left.

Not all Christians of a city could fit into one private household. Therefore several house churches coexisted in the bigger cities in New Testament times. In Jerusalem several Christian groups met, for instance, in the house of a certain Mary or in James's house. In the Lykos Valley in Asia Minor in the area of Colossae-Laodicea-Hierapolis, Christians met at the place of Nympha or at Philemon's house. In Corinth the houses of Stephanas, Gaius, Titius Iustus, and Crispus were crystalization points. In the capital city of Rome, at least seven Christian circles can be identified in the middle of the first century C.E.; in the third century there were about twenty with no central meeting place for a plenary.[36]

The structure of the early church was thus fragmented; several house churches met in one city with sometimes little contact among each other. This had far-reaching consequences. In Rome, for instance, the network of various independent house churches absorbed all kinds of theological doctrines that swept the capital city from various parts of the Empire. Ideas that did not reach or were rejected by one house church survived in another. This coexistence of various theological tendencies in the capital city, this doctrinal pluralism, was not seriously attacked until the end of the second century C.E. Then Bishop Victor tried to establish clear boundary lines between the Christian groups under his influence and the other church groups in the city that he deemed heretical, excommunicating them and styling his own (and Irenaeus's, his Gallic colleague) version of Christianity as "orthodox."[37]

Another consequence of the theological pluralism and the fragmented church structure—the church existed exclusively in various private households—was the delay of a central church government headed by a city

bishop. This delay is true at least for the metropolis of Rome. It was not until the second half of the second century C.E. that city bishops emerged who at least tried to subject all Christian groups of Rome to their leadership. They were not always successful in their attempts, not even Victor whose tenure fell into the last decade of the second century. Before the middle of the second century we only encounter leaders of individual house churches in Rome but no sole, central bishop.[38]

In the eastern part of the Roman Empire the delay may have been less dramatic. There the city bishop seems to have already emerged in the first decades of the second century. Ignatius, for example, called himself the only Bishop of Antioch. Whether these sole city bishops of early times were always acknowledged as such by all Christians in town is, however, doubtful. Also in the east some Christians did not want to be under the "bishop."[39] And still at the end of the second century at least the church of Ancyra in Asia Minor was led by a group and not by a single city bishop.[40] For neither the New Testament documents nor for 1 Clement nor for the Shepherd of Hermas can it be proved that the term "bishop" tagged a sole central leader of the Christians in one city. All these writings still reflect a collegial church leadership: a number of people governed the church in each city.[41] And this had to do with the fragmented structure of the church, represented by multiple house churches that were hosted by private households.

Mission

Already the earliest migrating missionaries in Palestine depended on hospitable homes of followers. Coming to a town or village, they first tried to win over one household; from that base they would start their evangelistic outreach to the whole village. Also the mission in the rest of the Roman Empire would never have been accomplished without the Christian households. They were hospitable islands to which the missionaries could head on their travels. We hardly hear anything about their staying in taverns. The latter were of poor quality:

> An inn . . . gets holes and cracks, often becoming dirty, because people wreak havoc in them.[42]

Besides being hospitable to missionaries, the Christian households had an even more direct evangelistic task. By means of their behavior they were supposed to attract people to Christianity in a pagan environment. In the tenement houses the Christians had the chance to attract and to convince a neighbor by their conduct.[43] If the boundary line between Christianity and

paganism ran through one and the same household,[44] efforts were made to convert those differently minded. Christian women were encouraged to win over their pagan husbands (1 Peter 3:1-2). In partly Christian households, Christian slaves often proved to be effective missionaries, as the pagan critic Celsus lamented in the second century:

> We see in private houses workers in wool and leather, and fullers, and persons of the most uninstructed and rustic character, . . . when they get hold of the children privately, and certain women as ignorant as themselves, they pour forth wonderful statements [teaching the gospel].[45]

Converting a household could take a long time. Often the women were the first household members to open up to Christianity, with the men sometimes following only two generations later.[46] And even if a household master like Philemon hosted a house church and actively supported Paul's missionary work, there was no guarantee that he would succeed in converting his own slaves. Philemon's slave Onesimus remained pagan until Paul himself won him over.[47]

A great deal of mission, finally, was performed by the Christian households when they raised and instructed their own children in the Christian faith (Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 1:5, 3:15; Titus 1:6; 1 Clement 21:6.8; Did. 4:9; Barn. 19:5). Both father and mother were responsible for this task.[48] And their private household was by far the main source from which children got Christian instruction. The larger church let the children participate in its communal life but usually did not provide Christian education courses specially tailored for children.[49] Yes, the children were called to the kingdom,[50] and an adult sometimes even could learn from them (Matt. 18:2-5), but they were not entitled to special ecclesiastical instruction. The best that could happen were a few words directly addressed to the children during adult instruction,[51] but that was all.

The secular elementary education, on the other hand, was even less a source for Christian education and was even obstructive. For centuries Christian children went to the same secular teachers as pagan children did (cf. esp. Tert., *de idol.*). In these schools they were exposed to pagan mythology and values. A touching document of the fourth century is preserved, the exercise book of a Christian child who had to scribble down mythological names and racy anecdotes. However, when a new page started, the child first drew a cross and the Christ monogram (XP).[52] In sum, the Christian household was about the only place where a child could be taught the Christian tradition and values in ways a child could grasp.

However, even in this area of recruiting good Christians among their own children, the Christian households were not always successful. The demand that the children of church leaders needed to be believers and not profligates (Titus 1:6) apparently presupposed opposite cases in real church life. Justin, too, knew about Christian parents of pagan children. And in Rome, Hermas's Christian faith seems to have been denounced by his own children.[53]

The Private Household as a Model for the Universal Church

> Who proves to be qualified in [private] household matters will also show himself just in the state.[54]

Translated into the ecclesiastical context, this maxim of Sophocles sounds like this (as paraphrased from 1 Tim. 3:4-5, 12):

> Who proves to be qualified at home in the leadership of the own household is also capable of taking over church offices on the higher level of the local church.

The basis for this assumption is the idea that the private household is a model for the local and ultimately for the universal church. The church—on the level of the city and of the Empire—is "God's *house*." This notion is widespread.[55] Accordingly, terms describing functions and relationships within the private household—as, e.g., "father-children," "lord, master-slave, servant" reoccur in theological language describing the Christians' relationship to God.[56] Beyond that, secular traditions about right household management and dusty ideas about women's role in the private household were picked up and coined into Christian ethic, in order to regulate the women's and the church leaders' behavior in the church community.[57]

In other words, the private household was not only the material framework of the early church, the only real estate structure available for the church. It was also an ideational framework furnishing categories for the formulation of theology, ecclesiology and ethics.

Evaluation Splinters — Impulses for Further Reflection

When asking which tasks the family fulfilled in church and society, we constantly ran into the difference between poor and well-to-do households, the latter having been able to meet the needs much more easily. Only homes

with enough room could host Christian meetings. Rich families were able to secure a quality education for their children and to care for their sick and old members much more effectively than less well-to-do families in crowded tenement houses. Indigent families in many cases were not able to fulfill the tasks they were burdened with by a society in which the private households were expected to carry out a multitude of functions, while the state shirked responsibility in such important areas as education.

Are there parallels between the society of the Roman Empire and the U.S. social order today? Indeed, some concerns may be raised in regard to equal chances for quality health care or for quality education, for example. Are we moving toward a situation where only children of rich families are able to get a top education in privately financed schools? And what about those among us who cannot afford health insurance? Will their cancer not be detected until it is too late for cure? How much are we willing to burden the private households with functions of which the state—and therefore the society as a whole—does not sufficiently take charge?

On the whole, however, the parallels between the ancient social order and us today should not be overemphasized. In spite of the deficiencies mentioned, the weight on the private households as prominent caretakers in church and society has been significantly lightened compared to Roman times.

The Secular Society

In the economic sector family businesses still exist but only play a subordinate role. Production takes place in other contexts, not in private households any more; farming, for instance, is one of the last domains where a production pool often is identical with a family. In the city, family and work for income usually have become two different and often competing areas in individuals' lives. Likewise education, social welfare, health care, and others (e.g., mail) do not rest as heavily—if at all—on the family's shoulders any more, as they did in Roman times.

As soon as a society as a whole tries to take care of these tasks, at least theoretically the possibility opens up that equal chances for all citizens are created—equal chances for a quality education or for good medical treatment. Whether or not this theoretical possibility is actualized by the public caretaker is another question.

The Church

In the church, too, the weight on the private households as prominent caretakers has been significantly lightened. The early church did not exist as an independent body *beside* the private households; it exclusively existed *in* them. The modern churches, however, have developed their own institutional structures and dynamics apart from the private households. This is advantageous to some extent. It has, for instance, become easier for the church to take charge of charitable responsibilities on a large scale. The churches run homeless shelters, orphanages, hospitals, and schools. In a downtown area they serve lunch to two hundred homeless people in one room. A network of private Christian households probably would be hopelessly overloaded by such a large-scale outreach to the community.

On the other hand, the modern church institution is in danger of losing touch with its constituency in the private households. Membership numbers in mainline denominations are shrinking. Church membership is less obliging than it was in New Testament times. The base in the private households often does not understand what the church governing bodies "up there" are deciding and doing. The modern church with its own institutional structures and dynamics is endangered by isolation—from its own people. This is more true for some denominations than for others.

Here the early Christian model of church life in private houses poses the question, Should the church increasingly go back to and use structures that already exist in the society (e.g., private homes); should it manifest itself more and more *there* and reduce its *own* institutional weight a little? Would this foster a better integration of the church in the society? Private homes could be increasingly used for all kinds of church activities, where it is appropriate.

They are, however, not the only institutional structures in the society on which the church might want to ride. Even factories could be considered, in which working priests laboring at the assembly-line serve their fellow workers by showing Christian love and (pastoral) care in an inconspicuous way, doing ministry more by how they act than by what they proclaim in words. This would be church *in* and not *beside* the fabric of the people's everyday lives.

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1. A basis for this article is my German essay, P. Lampe, "Zur gesellschaftlichen und kirchlichen Funktion der >Familie< in neutestamentlicher Zeit. Streiflichter," in *Reformatio* 31 (1982), pp. 533-542, which I updated.
2. For Roman "clients," cf., e.g., Martialis, *ep.* 12.68.1-2; 9.100.2; 4.40.1; 3.38.11; 3.36; 2.74; 1.108; 1.59; 1.55.5-6. In the Greek social system they were unknown. For freedpersons in the household of the patron, cf., e.g., Pliny, *ep.* 2.17.9. Also, guests often shared the life of the family for months (cf., e.g., Cicero, *ad fam.* 13.19.1).
3. For isolation in the tenement house, cf. Martialis, *ep.* 1.86. For subdivided tenement apartments, cf. Ulpian, *Dig.* 9.3.5. For the crowdedness in tenement houses, cf., e.g., Martialis, *ep.* 2.53.8; 3.30.3.
4. Cf. Ulpian, *Dig.* 50.16.195.
5. A woman could become head of a household after her husband's death, for instance, continuing his businesses. Some women ran their own workshops. Cf., e.g., E. Frézouls, "Gallien und Römisches Germanien," p. 502 (examples), and F. Vittinghoff, "Gesellschaft," p. 181, both in F. Vittinghoff, ed., *Europäische Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte in der Römischen Kaiserzeit* (Handbuch der Europäischen Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte, Vol. 1, Stuttgart: Klett, 1990). Inscriptions in Asia Minor seem to show female heads of households, both widows and married women. The latter probably enjoyed a higher legal status than their husbands. *De facto* these women behaved like male heads of households; the real life ignored the existing legal limitations according to which a woman could not carry out the rights and responsibilities of a *pater familias*. Cf. D.B. Martin, "Family Structures from Funerary Inscriptions: 218 inscriptions from a city in Asia Minor" (unpublished paper, Durham, N.C., 1990, pp. 8-10). Female heads of households in the New Testament were, e.g., Lydia in Acts 16:14-15 and Chloe in 1 Cor. 1:11. Also Nympha in the Lykos Valley of Asia Minor might have led a whole household; she hosted a house church (Col. 4:15).
6. This was particularly true for the Greek woman, whose legal position exceeded the Roman woman's legal status. However, also the Roman woman *de facto* owned property and freely disposed of it in imperial times. Cf., e.g., Vittinghoff, "Gesellschaft" (see n. 5), pp. 169, 178; K. Thraede, "Frau," RAC [*Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*] 8 (1972), p. 199.
7. "Marriage" needs to be defined in its larger sense as "living together for a relatively long time period as a sexually active couple." The formal Roman marriage, the *matrimonium iustum*, was nothing else than a private contract without public legalization. Many couples did not even have this contract, for instance, two slaves, or a slave and a free person. They were not allowed to enter into the *matrimonium iustum*, but considered themselves spouses anyway.
8. Cf., e.g., J. Casey, *The History of the Family* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 14: "'definition' is what all family history is really about."
9. Another scholarly debate tries to determine whether the nuclear households with just parents and children or the extended households were more numerous. The legal sources highlight the extended family; the linguistic evidence does not even provide a term for the nuclear family. Does that mean that the extended households predominated, as often has been concluded? R.P. Saller and B.D. Shaw found a dominance of the nuclear family in thousands of Latin funerary inscriptions ("Tombstones and Roman Family

Relations in the Principate: Civilians, Soldiers, and Slaves," JRS [*Journal of Roman Studies*] 74 [1984], pp. 124-156). More Greek epigraphic evidence needs to be analyzed (for a start cf. D.B. Martin, 1990, 8 [see n. 5]; his findings indicate a dominance of the extended family). For our study it will be insignificant whether the one or the other household type predominated in number. Both existed—and that will be enough for the systematic questions we are going to ask.

10. Only a few examples of public social welfare are worth being mentioned. The motivations behind these exceptions speak for themselves.

(a) From Nerva (96-98 C.E.) until about 260 C.E. the emperors provided financial aid (*alimenta*) for needy freeborn children of Roman citizens in more than 50 Italian cities. In the little city of Veleia, e.g., where more than 300 children were supported, boys received 16 and girls 12 *sestertii* per month. 12 *sestertii* bought enough bread for one month (cf. for the prices P. Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten*, 2nd ed. [Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989], p. 163). [An English translation of this book is currently being prepared by Augsburg Fortress Publishers.] The purpose of these imperial *alimenta* was to counteract the decrease of Roman citizens in Italian cities. Needless to say, *exclusively* children of Roman citizens *only* in Italian cities benefited. Cf., e.g., Dio Cassius 68.5.4 and Vittinghoff, pp. 251-255.

(b) The emperors' free distributions of grain were similarly limited. Since the first century B.C.E. only adult male Roman citizens who lived in the city of Rome were entitled to receive a free monthly rate of grain, which was enough for themselves but not for their wives and children. The rest of the family supply had to be bought on the market where the emperors tried to keep the grain price low by subsidizing. Sporadically the emperors also would distribute money gifts (*congiaria*) to the masses of the capital city. The purpose of their generosity was not so much to help needy people, but rather to prevent riots in the neighborhood of the imperial palace. Alexandria and some other cities (Oxyrhynchos in the third century C.E.) might have seen similar free grain distributions by the emperors. On the whole, however, the phenomenon was mainly tied to the capital city. If occasionally free or subsidized food was offered in other cities, this was usually financed by rich *private* benefactors (CIL [*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*] XI 3811; 6054; IGRR [*Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes*] III 173; etc.). The city governments did not feel responsible for the support of the needy. Their task was to provide the local market with enough supply of basic foods and to keep the prices on a reasonable level, but not to engage in poor relief. Cf., e.g., Vittinghoff, pp. 255-257, 259.

(c) The army soldiers were paid money or granted land upon their retirement (cf., e.g., A. Neumann, "Veterani," KP [*Der Kleine Pauly*] 5 [1975] 1234). It was in the emperor's own interest to treat the army well.

(d) Other imperial welfare efforts only happened sporadically. The emperors became proactive in catastrophic cases such as famine, epidemics, or earthquakes. Antoninus Pius, for instance, effectively helped to reconstruct Asia Minor after an earthquake. Otherwise the emperors only considered relieving need when they were approached by individual petitioners. A systematic welfare program was absent.

11. Sometimes needy persons were supported out of the money box of a club. Charitable clubs with instituted relief funds, however, only existed in the Greek-speaking eastern part of the Empire. And even there they stayed exceptions under the reign of Trajan. Cf., e.g., Pliny, *ep.* 10.92-93; J.H. Waszink, "Genossenschaft," RAC 10 (1978) 105-106.

The *collegia tenuiorum* as self-help clubs of persons of moderate means are a scholarly fiction, as recent scholarship has shown. See Vittinghoff, pp. 210-211.

12. Cf., e.g., Columella 11.1.18; 12.3.7-8. Mark 3:21, 31-32 reflects the custom of mentally disturbed persons being taken care of by their families.

13. For the inheritance, cf., e.g., the *Shepherd of Hermas*, vision 3.12.2. For the care for the elderly, see, e.g., 1 Tim. 5:4 and cf. Mark 7:11-13; John 19:27.

14. Exceptions only prove the rule. Under Hadrian, e.g., the primary teachers in a mining district were granted exemption from certain obligations (CIL II 5181). Apparently nobody wanted to teach in that area, so that a lure had to be put out. For a primary teacher the privilege of exemption was exceptional. Usually only teachers of the higher educational levels, "grammarians" and rhetoricians, were exempted from certain services and duties (cf., e.g., Sueton., *Caes.* 42.1; IvE VII 2, #4101), if they were exempted at all (cf. the restrictions under Antoninus Pius: Modestin., *Dig.* 27.1.6.1-3).

    It is true, since Caesar and Augustus (Sueton., *Caes.* 42.1; *Aug.* 42.3) emperors tried to attract teachers of higher education to the capital city by fostering the liberal arts. Vespasian endowed chairs of Greek and Latin rhetoric in Rome. The Latin chair's first occupant, Quintilian, lived as prosperously as an imperial procurator (Sueton., *Vesp.* 18; the average teacher of literature lived miserably in Rome: Juv., *sat.* 7.215ss). Hadrian founded a sort of college, the "Athenaeum," on Capitol Hill in Rome. Marcus Aurelius endowed several chairs in Athens (cf. Dio Cass. 72.31.3). All these measures, however, did not affect the elementary school level, they did not affect the education of the masses. On top these measures were sporadic and do not disclose a political program the central government might have had in the sector of education.

    More could be expected on the local political level, at least in the east of the Empire. For example, a few cities provided scholarships for children of moderate means. The money often came from the interests of foundations given to the city by private persons. Mainly the private initiatives of parents and rich benefactors kept education alive. Cf. Vittinghoff, pp. 245-247.

15. Sometimes also a private donor gave money to a city-community for the hiring of a teacher. Cf., e.g., Pliny, *ep.* 4.13.6 (*". . . timerem, ne hoc munus meum . . . corrumperetur, ut accidere multis locis video, in quibus praeceptores publice conducuntur"*).

16. The vast majority of the population only attended an elementary school until the age of 10 or 12, if at all. A minority sent their teenagers on to the next two school levels of the "grammarian" (until the age of 16 or 17) and the rhetorician (until the age of about 20).

17. Cf., e.g., Pliny, *ep.* 3.3.3; Tacitus, *Dial. de Or.* 29 (slaves as private tutors); Marcus Aurelius, *seips.* 1.4.

18. Cf., e.g., Vittinghoff, "Höhere Schule und Bildung als Monopol der Oberschichten," in Vittinghoff, pp. 243-249.

19. 1 *sestertius* = 4 *as* = 2 loaves of bread (cf. above n. 10). For "Philomusus," cf. Martialis, *ep.* 3.10.

20. Cf. also, e.g., Marcus Aurelius, *seips.* 1.3-4; Epict., *diss.* 1.11; 1.23; (Ps)Plutarch, *De liberis educandis* 14.A.4-6 (ed. Babbitt).

21. Pliny, *ep.* 9.12; cf. 8.22; and (Ps)Plutarch, *De liberis educandis* 13.D. (ed. Babbitt); Quintilianus, *Inst. or.* 1.3.14-17.

22. *"Frangit animum:"* Quintilianus, *Inst. or.* 1.3.16. Notwithstanding, Quintilian admits that physical punishment existed in everyday life.

23. Pliny, *ep.* 4.2.3; Quintilianus, *Inst. or.* 1.2.6-8.

24. Quintilianus, ibid. 7.

25. Cf. M. Crawford, "Geld und Austausch," in *Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Römischen Kaiserzeit*, H. Schneider, ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981), p. 268 n. 37.

26. In a random mix we found coins of all metals and all values, coined only a few years before the volcanic catastrophe. Cf. Crawford [n. 25], pp. 268, 264.

27. For the fuller's workshop in which the family lived and dined, cf., e.g., Apuleius, *met.* 9.24-25.

28. Cf. the literature reviewed by H.W. Pleket, "Wirtschaft," in Vittinghoff, pp. 40-41, 84, 125, 132.

    Many, but probably not *all*, freedpersons of the Laecanii, Caecilii, Aponii, Olitii, Faenii, and Fadii still belonged to their patrons' "households," because hardly *all* of them were still "economically dependent" on their patrons (see our definition of "household," pp. 19-20). Freed slaves, who most often were obligated to certain services (*operae*) for their patron after their manumission, nevertheless could accumulate a lot of wealth for themselves which made them economically independent. These successful freedpersons could be working as agents for their patron's businesses without actually belonging to the patron's "household." In other words, in the case of these large family businesses we have to reckon with the inner circle of the "household" and with a wider circle of economically independent associates who, however, helped to promote the businesses of the "household." Therefore I preferred the term "family associations" at the beginning of the paragraph.

29. For the family courts, cf., e.g., A. Pauly—G. Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Alterthumswissenschaft*, Suppl. IX, pp. 373-376; W. Kunkel, "Das Konsilium im Hausgericht:" ZRG 83 (1966), pp. 219-251. In imperial times no (free) adult seems to have been sentenced to death any more by any family court. The *pater familias*, however, still had the right to sell or expose a child (cf., e.g., Paulus, *Dig.* 25.3.4.; Cod. Iust. 8.46.10). He also could kill a slave if there were sufficient reason.

30. Cf. Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen* [see n. 10(a)], pp. 164-165.

31. Exceptions: At the very beginnings of Christianity, the Christian life also took place in the Jerusalem temple and in the synagogs. In Ephesus Paul preached in a rented lecture room (Acts 19:9).

32. For literary and archeological evidence, cf., e.g., Lampe, pp. 307-310.

33. For the services of house owners, cf., e.g., 2 Tim. 1:16-18; Philem. 2, 5, 7; 1 Cor. 16:15; cf. also Mark 10:30 and 1:29-35; 2:15; 14:3. For hospitality, cf., e.g., Romans 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8; 1 Peter 4:9; 1 Clement 1:2; cf. also 1 Tim. 5:10; 2 John 10. For Justin, see *Acta Iustini* 3.3.

34. For some archeological evidence, cf., e.g., Lampe, p. 161; J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* (Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1983), pp. 153-58. Ten men were enough to form a regular Jewish synagog (*Meg.* 4:3 = *T. Meg.* 4:14). If they brought their wives, the group had a size of twenty. Matt. 18:20 ("two or three" = "a few") presupposes even smaller worship communities.

35. The flip side is that small groups with little chance for anonymity not only foster affection between their members, but sometimes also relationships that are charged with negative emotions.

36. For Jerusalem, see Acts 2:46, 5:42, 12:12-17, 21:18; cf. 1:15-26, 2:2. For Asia Minor, cf. Philem 2; Col. 4:15; 1 Cor. 16:19 (Ephesos); possibly 2 Tim. 4:19. For Corinth, cf. 1 Cor. 1:16, 16:15; Romans 16:23; Acts 18:7; 18:8/1 Cor. 1:14. For Thessalonich, cf. possibly 1 Thess. 5:27 (Paul implores that the letter be read to all Christians in the city; this makes sense if at least two different house churches existed in town). For Rome, cf. Lampe, pp. 301-

313. We know of only one early central meeting place, where all Christians of one city assembled once in a while: Gaius' home in Corinth (Romans 16:23; cf. 1 Cor. 11:18, 14:23). Other cities did not have plenary meetings of several house churches, certainly not Rome.

37. For a detailed picture, see Lampe, pp. 320-334. For theological pluralism and tensions in other cities, cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 1:10-13 (Corinth); Gal. 2:11ss (separate meal communities in Antioch who differ in their opinions); Ign., *Smyrn.* 8:1; *Phil.* 7:2 (some Christians met and celebrated the eucharist without the bishop's consent); cf. Tert., *castit.* 7.3. It is beyond doubt that these divergent Christian groups met in different houses.

38. For the relatively late emergence of a monarchic bishop in the city of Rome, cf. in detail Lampe, pp. 334-345.

39. Ignatius, *Phil.* 7-8 (cf. *Magn.* 6-8).

40. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* 5.16.5.

41. Cf., e.g., Lampe, pp. 336-339.

42. For the inn, cf., e.g., Valentinus in Clement, *strom.* 2.114.3-6. For hospitable households hosting early missionaries in Palestine, see, e.g., Luke 10:5-10 (Matt. 10:11-14); Mark 6:8-11; cf. Matt. 10:40-41; Acts 9:43, 10:6, 32, 21:8, 16. For the same in the rest of the Roman Empire, see, e.g., Romans 16:23; Philem. 22; 3 John 5-8; Acts 9:43, 16:14-15, 40, 16:33-34, 18:2-3, 20:8, 20; Did 11-12; Lucianus, *Peregr.* 16; cf. also Acts 17:5-7; 2 Tim. 1:16, 18.

43. For attracting people in the pagan environment, see, e.g., Col. 4:5-6 and cf. 1 Peter 2:15; Heb. 12:14. For pagan neighbors in the same house, cf., e.g., Justin, *Apol.* 1.16.4; 2.1.2.

44. Cf., e.g., Luke 12:52-53; Matt. 10:35-36; Justin, *Apol.* 2.2; 2.1.2.

45. Origen, *c. Cels.* 3.55. For mission by slaves in pagan households, cf. also Titus 2:9-10; 1 Tim. 6:1: Christian slaves in Christian *and* in pagan households were reminded to behave faultlessly "so that they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God" and "the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed." These texts, it seems, projected pleasant conduct as missionary propaganda (cf. also 1 Peter 3:1-2; Matt. 5:16; 1 Tim. 3:7; Col. 4:5).

46. Third generation: Acts 16:1/2 Tim. 1:5. For later examples, see Lampe, pp. 122-123.

47. For Philemon/Onesimus, cf. Philem. 1-2, 5, 10-11. For the masters' attempts to convert their slaves "out of love," cf. Aristides, *Apol.* 15.6.

48. Cf. Col. 3:21; 1 Tim. 3:4, 2:15, 5:10; 2 Tim. 1:5; Titus 2:3-4; Polyc., *2 Phil.* 4.2.
The mother herself, however, was subjected to the instruction of her husband in matters of Christian faith and ethics, as Christian sources from the end of the first century on emphasized (1 Clement 21:6-7; the interpolation 1 Cor. 14:35; Polyc., ibid.; cf. 1 Tim. 2:11). They echoed conservative pagan writers (e.g., Callicratidas, *fragm.* 4 [107.6-11 ed. Thesleff]; PsAristot., *oec.* 1.4.1344a 17; Xen., *oec.* 7.7ss; Theano 197 [ed. Thesleff]; Pliny, *ep.* 1.16.6).

49. Only one early example of ecclesiastically organized Christian education is known, which, however, proves the rule. In the first half of the second century the Roman church commissioned a woman named Grapte to instruct the Christian orphans (*Shepherd of Hermas*, vis. 2.4.3). She thus replaced the deceased *parents* as Christian instructors. Where the parents were alive, even the Roman church did not feel a need to implement special courses for children.

50. Matt. 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17.

51. Cf. Eph. 6:1-3; Col. 3:20; Ign., *Smyrn.* 13:1.

52. Cf. Lampe, p. 298.

53. *Shepherd of Hermas*, vis. 2.2.2. For Justin, see his *Apol.* 2.1.2 and cf. also Luke 12:52-53; Mark 13:12; 2 Tim. 3:2.

54. Sophocles, *Antig.* 661-662. Cf. Seneca, *ep. moral.* 5.4.14; Cicero, *off.* 1.54; *fin.* 5.65; Aristotle, *pol.* 1.2.1252b; *Nic. eth.* 8.12.1160b 22-35; Philo, *praem. et poen.* 113.

55. 1 Tim. 3:15; cf. Titus 1:7; Eph. 2:19ss; 1 Cor. 4:1; 1 Peter 4:10,17; Heb. 3:6.

56. Cf., e.g., Romans 14:4; Eph. 3:14-15, 4:6; cf. also 5:23-25, 32 and the language of the synoptic parables.

57. This is not the place to go into details of the early Christian "household codes" ("Haustafeln") and other materials. The role of church leaders was defined in analogy to that of a good household master (cf., e.g., 1 Tim. 3:8-13, 3:2-5) or house-steward with God being the lord of the household, i.e., the church (Titus 1:7-8; Ign., *Eph.* 6:1). Church leaders had to demonstrate abilities and virtues that the pagan Greek *Oikonomikos*-literature expected from a good household manager.

    A conservative definition of the women's role in the church—silent in the church, subordinate to the men, confined to the household and its work—can be found in the post-Pauline texts of Eph. 5:22, 24, 33; Col. 3:18; 1 Tim. 2:9, 11-15, 5:10, 14, 18; Titus 2:4-5; 1 Peter 3:1, 4-6; 1 Clement 21:6-7; 1 Cor. 14:34-35 (interpolation); etc. These texts paralleled old-fashioned non-Christian traditions about the woman's role in the house (cf., e.g., Plutarch, *praec. coni.* 31-33; 29; Valerius Maximus 3.8.6). The actual role of the pagan Greco-Roman woman in first-century everyday life was much more liberated. In other words, the post-Pauline ideas about the women's role in the church were "dusty" and reactionary already for first-century observers. See P. Lampe—U. Luz, "Post-Pauline Christianity and Pagan Society," in J. Becker, ed., *Christian Beginnings* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 242-280, esp. 248-252. For a survey of the manifold Greek *Oikonomikos*-literature, cf. G. Schöllgen, "Oekonomik und Hauswirtschaft," RAC 13 (1986), pp. 815-830; D. Lührmann, "Neutestamentliche Haustafeln und antike Oekonomik," NTS [*New Testament Studies*] 27 (1981), pp. 83-97.

—— For Study and Discussion ——

1. To what extent is it legitimate to burden the private households with tasks that the state—and therefore the society as a whole—does not suficiently fulfill?

2. Which roles should the private household play in the life of the church?

3. Should the church increasingly use structures that already exist in the society (e.g., private homes), in order to be a church *in* and not *beside* the fabric of the people's everyday lives? What other structures besides the private homes can you think of?