CHAPTER FIVE

THE KINGDOM AND THE HOUSEHOLD

"So do not worry; do not say, 'What are we to eat? What are we to drink? How are we to be clothed? It is the pagans who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on his righteousness, and all these other things will be given you as well."

Gospel of Matthew 6: 31-33

Jesus of Nazareth (c.6 B.C.-A.D. 30) is the most important figure in the history of Western thought. His recommended general strategy for dealing with the economic problem is the Solution by Seeking the Kingdom. In the gospels, the strategy is enunciated most clearly during the Sermon On The Mount (Mt. 5-7; see also, Lk. 12, especially verses 22 to 32). Jesus’ most active missionary disciple, Paul of Tarsus, proposed much the same solution except that given the political and social circumstances under which he preached, Paul substituted the concept of “the Household” for that of “the Kingdom”.

The Sermon on the Mount

At an early stage in the gospels of Matthew and of Luke, Jesus is confronted with the issue of what he is going to do about the phenomenon of scarcity. The confrontation occurs during the Temptation narrative (Mt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-3), which narrative aims at, “enlightening the disciples on the nature of the Messiahship of Jesus and the methods appropriate to such a Messiahship.”1 Here, the devil challenges Jesus: “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves”. (Mt. 4:3). Jesus’ reply makes it clear that he does not understand his mission as one involving the abolition of the burden of scarcity. He has not come to deny mankind its primeval choice of independence in this respect (see, Chapter One). Rather, he has come as part of the Father’s response to man’s choice. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy at the devil: “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Mt. 4:4). Jesus’ mission is orientated to life through the word.

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After this, in the Matthean sequence, Jesus hears that John the Baptist has been arrested, begins preaching, and calls the first four men who are to assist him in this work (c.f. Mk. 1:14-20). However, Jesus does not merely "proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom." He also sets about restoring dependent members of the community to a condition where they can better fend for themselves in the business of procuring their daily bread. Jesus cures, "all kinds of diseases and sickness among the people." (Mt. 4:23-25). This sets the scene for the Sermon on the Mount.

The opening chapter of the Sermon is about the character of the Father, and about living in terms of the kingdom. Much of the teaching is summed up by the concluding verse: "You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt. 5:48). Then, Jesus moves on to teach his listeners how to pray (Mt. 6:9-13). This prayer—the "Our Father"—is also given in Luke 11:2-4.

Perhaps the most innovative feature of the prayer in terms of the history of ideas is offered by the probability that Jesus used the Aramaic term "'abba" for "father" in reference to Yahweh. The significance of "'abba" is that it affirms the existence of an intimate, filial relationship between the individual person and Yahweh. This affirmation, it should be remarked, seems to be even stronger in Luke than in Matthew since Luke uses the simpler form of address. Howard Marshall comments:

"Jewish prayers referred to God as Father, but the simple form is not attested in Palestinian usage... The use of the intimate form was the amazing new thing that Jesus wished to teach his disciples, initiating them into the same close relationship with the Father that he enjoyed... The force of the term is to assure the disciples of God's loving care for them, so that they can ask him for gifts with the certainty of being heard." 1

It is within the context of "'abbâ" that the succeeding petitions of the prayer might be best understood, and these include the request: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Mt. 6:11, R.S.V.). Here, there is the suggestion that Yahweh will no more allow anyone who lives in terms of filial

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