

and he speaks of God as his Father and "his brothers' Father", his God and theirs. Later, his sudden appearance does not cause fear among the disciples and they rejoice. The centrality of faith is emphasized by Thomas' unbelief. John shows Jesus going out of his way to convince the doubter who touches the risen body and makes the final confession "My Lord and my God". But the purpose of this bodily experience is only to emphasize that it is not necessary for faith. John does not expect his readers to perceive the risen Christ with their senses, but to believe without seeing him.

This has important consequences for the translation of these texts. Church language, when speaking of the Easter event, has become more religious than the evangelists'. According to the Gospels, the "angels" use two common words to tell the woman what happened to Jesus which the Good News Bible translates as: "he has risen" and "on the third day he will rise". This is different from the French "revenu de la mort à la vie", and "qu'il revienne de la mort à la vie" (Luke 24.6-7) and from the German Gute Nachricht Bible: "Gott hat ihm vom Tod erweckt" (God has aroused him from death) whilst in the New Testament it was "er ist auferstanden". The Greek words *ēgerthē* and *anastēnai* stand for getting up, for instance, from sleep. They describe an ordinary bodily movement, are purely natural and could be translated in French by: "il s'est levé" and in German by: "er ist aufgestanden". The traditional English term "he is risen" has today become church language, like the German "er ist auferstanden".

My attempt at discovering how the writers of the Gospels use or do not use religious symbolism in communicating their religious experience has to end with the remark that Bible translators should give special attention to their own use of the religious language of their readers. The New Testament is about religion, but the very way it uses the symbols standing for spiritual reality which cannot be perceived by our senses is to be respected if the full impact of its message is to be experienced by the hearers of the Word.

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### "LITTLE ONES" IN MATTHEW

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There is a group of texts in Matthew which are difficult to translate satisfactorily. They are 18.1-14, 21.15f., and 10.40-42. The difficult phrases in them are *paidion toiouto* (traditionally translated "this little one"), *hena tōn mikrōn toutōn* ("one of these little ones"), and *paides* ("children"). The doubts arise from the vagueness of the Greek expressions as they were translated from the Aramaic; the short tradition of the parallel to Mt 18.1-14 which we find in Mark 9.33-37 and above all because the term *mikros*, outside these contexts, has the sense of an insignificant, humble member of the church, quite contrary to what these contexts imply.

The term *mikros* can take on several meanings, related to time, space, size, age, social position etc. Exegetes tend to relate the term to the social position of the persons concerned—though they never try to tell us how much humbler these people were, compared with the generally humble followers of Jesus. Yet

to take the term as referring to the age of the persons in question would create serious difficulties for the church; it would turn everything upside down. As in modern Greek, the term was also used in hellenistic Greek with reference also to age. In the New Testament, beside the use of the word *mikros* in the texts mentioned and in parallel texts, we have no citations to support either the established interpretation, or the interpretation which will be proposed in this article. James the *mikros* (Mk 15.40) can mean both "the younger one" and "the short one", in comparison with another James who was either older or taller. I regard the first interpretation as the more probable, because this usage is much more common in both ancient and modern Greek. In the case of Zacchaeus the publican, it is specifically added that he was *tē hēlikia mikros* (Lk 19.3). As for the meaning of *mikroteros en tē basileia tōn ouranōn* (Mt 11.11 and par. Lk 7.28), the patristic tradition accepts it as also meaning *neōteros*, "younger"; as Chrysostom put it, "the younger in age and the greatest in glory".

It is time to look at the text of Matthew 18.1–14.<sup>1</sup> There is general agreement that in chapter 18 as a whole, the evangelist is giving rules for life and behaviour for people inside the Christian community; regulations affecting relations of individuals or groups in the church. The chapter starts with the important subject, "Who is the greater in the Kingdom of God?" From Jesus' answer, it is clear that "greater" has no reference to any particular eschatological glory of any among the apostles, such as the mother of the two sons of Zebedee requested in Mt 20.20f. The question in Mt 18.1f is about the leadership of the church at the time of the evangelist, living in anticipation of the coming of the Kingdom. The question is answered in vv. 3 and 4. The answer is understood by ancient interpreters as referring to innocent and humble children in general. Modern interpreters basically do the same. They consider, however, as qualities of the "children" in question not just innocence or humility, but the readiness of the disciples to accept the lowly and inferior position that children usually had in Jewish society. One who is not free from self-satisfaction and self-centredness will not enter the Kingdom of God. Even the modern interpretation disregards the context, ignoring the fact that everyone mentioned in the text belongs to the church.

A further modern mistake is to understand vv. 5 and 6 in the light of vv. 3 and 4, instead of the opposite. The question here is very simple: do we have in these verses to do with ordinary children, or with young men, a particular class of people in the church? I believe that vv. 5 and 6 can only be understood in the latter sense, and that vv. 3 and 4 must be seen in the light of the following verses, since they belong to the same context. What can be the meaning of "accepting" an ordinary child "in the name of Jesus"? What can "acceptance" mean in a context where the subject is "who is greater in the Kingdom of God?" In Jesus' answer to the last question, expressed through the evangelist, we can see his fear of leaders who might come up in the church, power-oriented, self-centred and self-satisfied organizers and systematizers. What

<sup>1</sup> We leave out of account problems of the history of the text, namely what might have been the meaning of its components found in Mark 9.33–37. Here we are interpreting Matthew and what this evangelist has done with traditional material.

would be more natural, in the face of such a danger, than to turn the community's attention to the self-denial and self-sacrifice of youth? However, it is evident from v. 3 onwards that these young followers of Jesus, called *paidion* or *paidion toiouto* or "these little ones who believe in me", are not presented here just as a model for the disciples who "came to him . . . saying . . ." (v. 1); here the whole context (coming perhaps from the time of the evangelist) implies also a problematic relation between the two groups. There is a tension in the relations between "such children" or "these little ones" on the one hand, and the disciples, or their successors in the leadership of the church, on the other hand. Nor must we minimize the tension; we have a parallel situation in Corinth around A.D. 90, which Clement of Rome tries to deal with in his First Epistle, chapter 37. In Corinth the *neoi* had revolted against the *presbuteroi*.<sup>2</sup> Here, in Matthew's communities, it is the other way round: the suppression of younger groups in the church by the elderly ones. Against this background I can certainly understand better v. 5: "And whoever welcomes in my name one such child as this, welcomes me".

It is surprising that interpreters and translators have missed this tension between the two groups, expressed so strongly throughout the passage, particularly in the verbs *dexētai* (v. 5), *skandalisē* (v. 6), *kataphronēsēte* (v. 10), *apolutai* (v. 14). Nevertheless, our critical edition of the text starts v. 6 with a new paragraph, suggesting a new theme. What do our main common language translations do? The German has: "Wer auch nur einen einfachen Menschen, der mir vertraut, an mir irre werden lässt, der käme noch gut weg, wenn man . . ." The English has ". . . one of these little ones . . . lose his faith in me . . ." The French: "Celui qui fait tomber dans le péché un de ces petits qui croient en moi . . .". The English and French renderings do not make any effort at a dynamic equivalent translation. As for the German, one would have two very serious questions: (a) Who are these "einfache Menschen, die mir vertrauen" ("simple people who trust me") in relation to the rest of the church community? (b) Why are these "simple people" treated so badly (*ou dechomai, skandalizō, kataphronō, apollumai*), and by whom? Can the German reader understand what the text means? Our proposal makes the situation clearer. The behaviour of the church leaders to these young people may be such as to make any of them lose their faith or start doubting about Jesus' messiahship. The punishment of such a scandal-maker is excommunication (*ekkopson, exelthe*). We cannot know precisely what is meant here by the word *kataphronēsēte*. It would be very helpful if we did. The verb has a wide range of meanings, from simple neglect to ugly suppression. The same verb is used of Timothy, because of his youth (1 Tim 4.12: *Mēdeis sou tēs neotētos kataphroneitō*). One is impressed by the last of these warnings. These people have such a special place in the heart of Jesus and his church that, if one of them goes astray, the leaders of the church must leave all the church flock and run after the lost one! It must also be noted how very severe is the punishment of those who scandalize and despise or suppress these young people, as well as the latter's very prominent position before the heavenly Father: "In just the

<sup>2</sup> "Those without honour revolted against those with honour, those without glory against the glorious, the fools against the wise, the young against the elder" (chapter 3). "The great ones cannot operate without the little ones (*mikroi*), neither can the little ones without the great."

same way your Father in heaven does not want any of these little ones to be lost." The strongly accentuated will of the Father (v. 14), that no one is lost, carries a special significance.

Naturally the question arises: Do we have any information that besides mature men and women, young people were also following Jesus and had a special relation to him? I think that even if we had not, we should have to suppose such a circle of young disciples. Do we know any revolutionary movement in history from which youth was absent? We actually have some allusions to them in the synoptic gospels. There is the case of the young man (*neaniskos*) whom Jesus asked to sell his belongings, and "then come and follow me" (*deuro akolouthei moi*). This does not mean membership of the wider community of Jesus, but the fulfilment of a particular task in the narrower circle of the disciples (Mt 19.21). We are also reminded that, at the time of Jesus' arrest, "a certain young man" (*neaniskos*) who "was following Jesus" (Mk 14.51–52) had the covering stripped from his body, so that he fled naked. It is more than probable that these *neaniskoi* who followed Jesus were a particular group. I think that we must relate to this group the "children" (*paidas*) who, at the entrance of Jesus to Jerusalem and because of his activities in the temple, were shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David"; that is, they greeted Jesus as Messiah. That shouting by the young men (*paidas*) did more than anything else to arouse the indignation of the Jewish hierarchy (Mt 21.15–16). The word *paidas* here does not of course mean babies or ordinary little children. It means young men, followers of Jesus, who proclaimed, as young people do in any similar circumstances, the meaning of their Messiah's actions. From this sparse and scattered information, the conclusion can be drawn that around Jesus there was a circle of young people who followed him in his itinerating mission (*deuro akolouthei moi*, Mt 19.21). Once this is accepted, one can more easily understand that Mt 18.1–14 is about the relation of the church leadership to these young men. We shall not examine here the terms *neōteroi* or *neaniskoi* in Acts 5.6, 10, the *neaniskoi* of 1 John 2.12–14, or the *neōteroi* of Polycarp.<sup>3</sup> These texts, however, strengthen our thesis.

We come now to a more difficult but very interesting passage for our subject: Matthew 10.40, 42. It is generally agreed that Mt 10 contains instructions to missionaries and for missionary work. This work cannot be conducted without the support of members of the church, or people well disposed to Christianity. It is natural that this collection of sayings on mission should end with a saying stating the rewards awaiting those who will give support to people engaged in missionary, or more generally itinerant, work for the business of the church. Verse 40 presents no exegetical problem: One who accepts the disciples of Jesus accepts the Lord himself, and the one who recognizes the disciples as missionaries and gives them hospitality is doing this to the Lord himself, and becomes the host of God who sent Jesus. Something very close to this meaning of *dechomai* as "recognize as sent by God and give hospitality" occurs in the following sentences; the expression clearly has the same meaning in *kai hos an potisē . . . potērion psuchrou . . . eis onoma*

<sup>3</sup> ". . . Similarly deacons unharmed in front of him . . ., like deacons of God and Christ . . . (3) Similarly the *neōteroi* also must be unharmed in everything . . . submissive to the presbyters . . ." Polycarp, *Philippians* 5.2–3.

*mathētou*, where itinerary work is also implied, together with acceptance and a minimum of hospitality.

We shall not examine parallel texts, but only one of the most characteristic occurrences elsewhere—the behaviour of Diotrephes in 3 John. The verb used there is *epidechetai* (vv. 9 and 10). It is only a small additional step to suggest that *dechomai* in Mt 18.5 may have the same meaning as *epidechomai* in 3 John 9, 10, though in Matthew of course it is addressed to the disciples: "And whoever welcomes in my name one such child as this, welcomes me."

Similarly, Mt 10.41 presents no problem as to its meaning. We know, even from Matthew (7.15–23) and the rest of the New Testament and the Didache, of the activities of itinerating prophets. Those who recognize a prophet as such, an authorized itinerating preacher, and give him hospitality because he is a prophet, will receive themselves a prophet's reward. It is difficult in verse 41b to understand the term *dikaïos* in a context of itinerary or missionary functionaries of the church (*dechomai*, with the same sentence structure as for the disciples and the prophets). It is impossible to think of these *dikaïoi* as being just good Christians in a general sense. On the contrary, they are a particular category, alongside the disciples and the prophets. Matthew found already in Judaism the righteous men alongside the prophets: "... many prophets and righteous men have desired to see..." (Mt 13.17, AV); "... yet build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous" (23.29, AV).<sup>4</sup> Even in the Christian church, *dikaïoi* could be a group of itinerating church officers. We have, for example, the information from Hegesippus, through Eusebius, that James the brother of Jesus had been given this title by the people (*Church History* IV 22.4; see also III 11.12). The recognition of someone as "righteous", and the granting of hospitality to him in his travel, is rewarded as if it were the work of the righteous man himself. We wish we knew more about these "righteous" church officers; however, the little we know leaves us in no doubt.

The context of v. 42, about giving a glass of water to "one of the least of these my followers because he is my follower" presents problems again. This expression is usually taken as referring specifically to the lowliest and socially most despised people in the three previous categories (TEV "to one of the least of these my followers because he is my follower"; French common language translation "à l'un de ces petits parmi mes disciples parce qu'il est mon disciple..."; German "Und wer einem der Geringsten von meinen Jüngern auch nur einem Schluck kaltes Wasser gibt—einfach weil er mein Jünger ist...") Again one has a problem in understanding these texts. What kind of *Sitz im Leben* must one suppose in making this distinction, among followers or disciples of Jesus? The sentence construction in v. 42 is in general accord with that of the previous ones. It starts with the conjunction *kai* like v. 41b, which means that we have here a fourth category of people. Linguistically, the expression *tōn mikrōn toutōn*, if referred to the disciples, prophets or righteous people, would cover the totality and not a part of them, namely the lowliest among them. We think that the most probable understanding of the text is that here, we have a coming down from the highest to the lowest in the field of

<sup>4</sup> The juxtaposition of "prophets" and "righteous men" is to be found in the tradition of later Judaism. See for example Baruch, *Apocalypse* LXXXV 1.3.12.

mission (apostles, prophets, righteous people, young missionaries). The phrase “only because of the name of a recognized disciple” or better, “just for being nothing else but only a disciple” cannot be explanatory: it must be related to “in the name of a prophet” and “in the name of a righteous man”. Nor can one miss the fact that the *humas* (the apostles) and “one of these little (or least) ones” were necessarily people present when the logion was spoken, whereas the saying on the prophets and the righteous ones does not necessarily require that they were present.

In conclusion, it may be suggested that “these little ones” are the same people we meet in Mt 18.1–14, namely, a group of young disciples who were not held in great esteem in some circles in the church. Matthew’s aim everywhere is to establish their function and ministry in the church.

If our understanding of Matthew 18.1–14 21.15f and 10.40–42 is correct, then one would have to propose: (a) No new paragraph at 18.6, and (b) in Matthew a rendering of the terms *paidion toiouto*, *paidas*, and *hena tōn mikrōn toutōn* which will really help the reader to understand what is going on. I would propose for the first: “such a young follower”, and for the two others, “younger disciples”.

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## TRANSLATING ‘SEED’ IN GALATIANS 3.16, 19

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In the Old Testament accounts of the promise made to Abraham, which is appealed to in Galatians 3.16, “seed” is used collectively of Abraham’s descendants. Moreover, in Galatians 3.29 “seed” is used collectively of Christ and his “line.” The question then arises concerning the usage of “seed” in Galatians 3.16, 19. Is the corporate interpretation to be preserved or does Paul here introduce a singular usage, limiting “seed” to Christ himself? Burton is unconvinced of either interpretation, so he suggests the possibility that Galatians 3.16b (“It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many; but to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ which is Christ.”) may originally have been a scribal comment which was only later introduced into the text.<sup>1</sup> Although this option may not be ruled out *a priori*, it ultimately raises more difficulties than it resolves, and one is left to decide between the other two alternatives.

### Analysis of Galatians 3.1–29

It will be helpful to make a brief analysis of the entire third chapter of Galatians in order to understand its role in the overall letter. Following this, special attention will be given to the specific function of verses 16 and 19 within this chapter. Galatians 3.1–4.31 forms what Betz terms the *probatio* section of the letter.<sup>2</sup> This is the section where the apostle presents his major “proofs”

<sup>1</sup> Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1952), p. 502. Elsewhere Burton seems to vacillate between individual and corporate interpretation: “*to sperma* is, doubtless, to be taken in the same sense as in v. 16b, viz., Christ, if v. 16b is from Paul . . . otherwise as in v. 29, those who are Christ’s.” (p. 189).

<sup>2</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 137.