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During the first two centuries CE there was a common awareness that familial tensions were generated by conversions to the Christian faith. Yet studies of Christian origins have so far paid little attention to the impact of the Christian movement upon attitudes to family ties and natural kinship. Stephen C. Barton remedies this deficiency by means of a detailed study of the relevant passages in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. First, however, he examines the religious traditions of Judaism and the philosophical traditions of the Greco-Roman world, and shows that the tensions apparent within the Christian movement were by no means unique. In all three areas of thought and practice there is found the conviction that familial duty may be transcended by some higher philosophical or religious obligation. Mark and Matthew saw the Jesus movement as offering a transcendent allegiance, which relativized family ties and created the possibility of a new personal identity, based on association with Jesus himself and his community of disciples.

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# Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew

**STEPHEN C. BARTON**

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University of Durham*



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To Fiona  
and to our children  
Anna, Thomas, Joseph and Miriam

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## PREFACE

This study is a revised version of my doctoral thesis submitted to King's College London in October 1991. It was examined by Professors Leslie Houlden and John Riches, to both of whom I am much indebted for their encouraging reception of the thesis and their helpful comments. The birth of a study such as this, especially when the period of gestation has been some twelve years, brings with it many debts of gratitude. I should like to acknowledge some of those here.

My interest in social aspects of earliest Christianity goes back to my days as an undergraduate and early postgraduate at Macquarie University in Sydney, under the instruction and supervision of Robert Banks and Edwin Judge. They introduced me especially to the world of Paul. At Lancaster University, in the Religious Studies Department, David Catchpole initiated me into the traditio-historical study of the gospels. Under his supervision I wrote a short dissertation on 'Discipleship, Family Ties and Jesus of Nazareth in the Synoptic Tradition', which became the genesis of the present work. Then at King's College London, Graham Stanton became my supervisor and mentor. With great patience, he has nurtured my work, allowed me to develop my own style, and provided unfailing encouragement. For instruction in the social sciences, especially the anthropology of religion, I am indebted to Nancy Lindisfarne of the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London.

Since leaving King's in 1982, I have enjoyed the support of a number of institutions and the colleagues there. First, in the Religious Studies Department of the West Sussex Institute of Higher Education and at Chichester Theological College, where I taught part-time. Then at Salisbury and Wells Theological College from 1984 to 1988, during which years I was given time (and financial support from the Sarum St Michael Trust) to continue my research using the excellent facilities of Tyndale House, Cambridge. Finally,



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since coming to the Theology Department of the University of Durham, I have had not only great encouragement to complete this study, but also the support and practical help of Ann Loades, who as departmental head at the time made possible my sabbatical leave in 1991, and of my colleagues in biblical studies, especially Jimmy Dunn, Sandy Wedderburn and Walter Moberly. Among other friends and colleagues who have helped and supported me over these years of research and teaching, I should like also to thank: Colin Hickling and Sophie Laws (both formerly of King's College London), Sue Martin (also of London), Bill Gray (of Chichester), Reginald Askew, Trevor Dennis and Ruth Siddals (Salisbury), Erin White and Graham English (Sydney), and Robert and Julie Banks (now of Pasadena). One of my postgraduate students, Derek Tovey, has given invaluable assistance in the preparation of the manuscript for publication.

It has not been lost on me that there is a certain irony in writing about the subordination of family ties in earliest Christianity when my own family has had to bear so much of the cost. I should like therefore to record here my deep gratitude to my father (now deceased) and mother, George and Nancy Barton. The book is dedicated to my wife, Fiona, and to our children, Anna, Thomas, Joseph and Miriam.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

In general, the conventions followed for the abbreviation of the titles of journals and reference works are those of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 107 (1988), 579–96. In addition, note the following:

*KTR*    *King's Theological Review*  
*JTSA*   *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*  
*PIBA*   *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association*