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Early Christian Paraenesis
in Context

Edited by
James Starr and Troels Engberg-Pedersen

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"Brotherly Advice"

Christian Siblingship and New Testament Paraenesis

by

Reidar Aasgaard

1. Paraenesis in Early Christianity?

The concept of paraenesis in early Christianity is a much disputed matter.¹ In modern scholarship, the concept is defined in various, and at times very different, ways. The classical understanding, formulated by Paul Wendland and Martin Dibelius, focuses on form: paraenesis is advice on practical everyday issues, and consists of a number of loosely connected injunctions, which can be developed into "two ways" schemes, vice and virtue catalogues, and household codes. In content, paraenesis is conventional, and its "Sitz im Leben" is general catechetical instruction of neophytes.² According to Dibelius, central paraenetical passages in the New Testament are the Sayings Source (Q), the latter part of many of the letters, and the whole of the letter of James, the example par excellence of paraenesis.³ This understanding, which emphasizes paraenesis as a literary genre, has later been expanded and also modified by a number of scholars.⁴ For instance, Johannes Thomas can define a whole writing or speech as paraenetical. He

1 For a succinct presentation of the concept of paraenesis and a history of research, see Popkes 1996, esp. 13–52. For useful discussions, see the contributions in Perdue and Gammie 1990, esp. Gammie 1990; Perdue 1990b; Williams 1990. In my article, I also owe very much to discussions with the scholars participating in the Nordic paraenesis project.

2 According to Dibelius 1975 (=1926¹), 65, paraenesis is "eine Aneinanderreihung verschiedener, häufig unzusammenhängender Mahnungen mit einheitlicher Adressierung". Dibelius seems not fully consistent in his understanding, however: in Dibelius 1976, 3, he defines paraenesis as "a text which strings together admonitions of general *ethical* (German: *sittlich*) content." Although "*sittlich*" can be interpreted very broadly (probably more so than "ethical"), it nonetheless represents a narrowing down of the concept of paraenesis. See my section 9, point 7 (below p. 264).

3 For example Romans 12–13; Galatians 5–6; Philippians 4; 1 Thessalonians 4–5; Colossians 3–4; Ephesians 4–6; Hebrews 13; 1 Peter 2–5, and parts of the Pastoral Letters, particularly 2 Timothy; see also Gammie 1990; Popkes 1996, 107.

4 See Popkes 1996. 35–38 for a survey.

also focuses on paraenesis as being based on a fundamental conviction shared by the authors and their addressees, and underscores the function of paraenesis more strongly than Wendland and Dibelius do (Thomas 1992, 272). This is followed up by Wiard Popkes, who defines paraenesis very broadly, as having to do with almost all types of Christian (and classical) texts which aim at influencing the attitudes and actions of their addressees (Popkes 1996, 51–52, also 28–29).

In an American setting, scholars such as Abraham J. Malherbe and Leo G. Perdue have expanded on the Wendland-Dibelius tradition. For example, they understand paraenesis as basically conventional advice, which has been “christianized” with the aid of various kinds of theological motivations and justifications. They also emphasize the functional aspect far more strongly, especially the element of authority present in a “paraenetical” situation (for example in the call to imitation), and the social setting in which paraenesis takes place. Thus, they focus on paraenesis as an act, on the paraenetical message as a totality, not only as single injunctions, and on specific social contexts for paraenesis, such as the instruction of Christian neophytes.⁵ According to this view, a central aim of paraenesis is socialization: paraenesis is about creating cohesion and group identity.⁶ Within this context, a broad range of the New Testament material can be viewed as paraenetical, for example the whole of 1 Thessalonians and most of 1–2 Corinthians (Malherbe 1989, 49–66, 74).

A number of scholars have followed up this view, but have focussed particularly on the ideological (usually theological) motivations given in the paraenetical material.⁷ Several among them, for example Lauri Thurén, hold that such motivations not only represent secondary additions. Rather, they are at the heart—or even are the heart—of New Testament paraenesis: the aim of these motivations and justifications is to preserve and strengthen the attitudes and beliefs of the addressees (Thurén 1995, 226).

Thus, in the history of research the perception of early Christian paraenesis has undergone a considerable development: a much broader range of texts is now usually taken into consideration, with focus both on form and function, and with a view both to the conventional and to the socio-contextual setting of the material. This development often reflects bewilderment and also conflictual views as regards the nature of paraenesis. However, it can also be perceived more positively, as a development

5 See for example Perdue 1981, 246–51; Malherbe 1986, 23–29, 124–25; Malherbe 1992, esp. 267–70, 278–87, 293; Perdue 1990b, 5–7, 11–14, 19–23, and 27; also Popkes 1996, 41–44, and the contributions in Perdue and Gammie 1990.

6 Perdue 1981, 251–56; also Perdue 1990b, 23–26.

7 See Popkes 1996, 45–48 for a survey.

towards a more flexible approach, in which various understandings of paraenesis supplement rather than exclude one another. In what follows, I shall take my point of departure in an understanding of paraenesis which encompasses both form and function.⁸ A large number of the texts which I shall deal with, belong form-critically to the material regarded as “paraenesis proper” in the Wendland-Dibelius tradition; other texts, however, should be classified as paraenetical in the vein of Popkes, Malherbe and Perdue. As regards the function of the paraenesis, I shall not take up the discussion of its “Sitz im Leben” in general. Rather, focus will be on a more limited area, namely on *social* background: what impact does a social frame of reference have on the character and contents of early Christian paraenesis?

For reasons of limitation, the important issue of authority/power in the paraenetical situation has also been left aside.⁹

Although scholarly unanimity on a precise definition—and understanding—of paraenesis is likely to remain unattainable, I believe nonetheless that less stricter definitions can be both viable and valuable, at least as heuristic means and working tools. One such definition is that of the Nordic paraenesis group:

Paraenesis is concise, benevolent injunction that reminds of moral practices to be pursued or avoided, that expresses a shared, articulated world view, and that does not anticipate disagreement.¹⁰

This definition, which reflects the relative consensus of a number of scholars, takes its point of departure in literary, more or less genre-specific features (“concise,” “injunction,” “articulated”), but also to a considerable extent includes functional aspects, such as that of authority/power (“benevolent,” “shared,” “does not anticipate disagreement”) and of social and cultural setting (“moral practices,” “world view”). As a definition, it combines central elements from the Wendland-Dibelius tradition with elements from scholars such as Malherbe and Perdue, leaving the impression of a definition rooted in the “classical” tradition, but moderately expanded.

In what follows, I support this definition—and the understanding underlying it—in its main outline. But it is also my intention to offer a critique and propose some revision of its formulations. I will do this by pointing to the central part played within the New Testament by a specific

8 In the history of research, two main views can—very roughly—be singled out: one emphasizing form (*Gattung*), one emphasizing function, see Perdue 1981, 241–42; Popkes 1996, 49.

9 See Popkes 1996, 28–29, 41–42, 51; also Aasgaard 2004a, chapters 14–15.

10 This tentative definition was worked out by the scholars participating in the paraenesis conferences in Lund 2000 and Oslo 2001.

kind of Christian self-understanding, namely that of siblingship, a self-understanding which very likely was modelled on notions tied up with the social sibling role. My contention is that this idea of a siblingship of Christians has a central role within New Testament paraenesis, and that it contributes significantly to the shape and effect of its rhetorical strategies.¹¹

2. "Brotherly Advice": Siblingship and Paraenesis in the New Testament

A characteristic feature of the New Testament is the *centrality of social roles*, be it roles related to the nuclear family, the household, friendship, patron-client relations, or other relationships. In this respect, the New Testament in various ways strongly reflects the general social structures of Antiquity. As individuals and as a group the Christians inescapably remained a part of their old world and society: they were still mothers, children, masters, slaves, patrons, friends etc. The need to handle these givens can be clearly seen in many places in the New Testament. Indeed, many of the texts which have been regarded as paraenetical, are concerned with precisely this, for example, Paul's advice to husbands and wives (1 Cor 7) and the household codes of the post-Pauline letters (Col 3:18–4:1; Eph 5:21–6:9; 1 Pet 2:11–3:7 etc.).

Of special interest here, however, is the *metaphorical* use of social roles in the New Testament, particularly of family roles.¹² The Christians are characterized as fathers and mothers, sons and children, sisters and brothers—they are the fictive kin of one another, and of God. Especially frequent is the *sibling language* (brother/sister, ἀδελφ-): the root ἀδελφ- occurs as often as 380 times in the New Testament.¹³ In the Gospels and Acts it is used in 88 out of 172 instances in a non-literal sense, in the rest of the New Testament in 203 out of 208 instances. And in almost all of these 291 metaphorical cases, at least 266, it is employed to characterize Christians exclusively.¹⁴ Thus, in at least 70 % of the total occurrences of ἀδελφ-, and in more than 90 % of the metaphorical occurrences, it is employed as a designation of people belonging to this particular group.

¹¹ On the importance of social roles in paraenesis, see Perdue 1990b, 20–23.

¹² In this context, I use the term "metaphor" in a rather broad and unspecific sense. For a discussion of metaphor, Aasgaard 2004a, 23–31.

¹³ Excepting the two instances of the city of Φιλαδέλφεια, see Rev 1:11; 3:7. See Appendices in Aasgaard 2004a for a survey of all New Testament letters/epistles, and Aasgaard 2004b for a complete New Testament survey.

¹⁴ Acts make up for 21 of the 25 other instances of metaphorical usage, and it is here always used for Jews. A possible, but not very likely, exception may be Matt 25:40. For a discussion in the case of Paul, see Aasgaard 2004a, 4 (n. 5), 115–16.

Within a broad spectrum of the New Testament writings the sibling metaphor plays a central part in the understanding of Christian relations, that is in their ecclesiology.¹⁵ Significantly, the sibling terminology *strikingly often occurs in paraenetical settings*, and far more often than in other kinds of material (Aasgaard 2004a, 272–75, 275–85). This is the case both in texts that traditionally have been regarded as paraenetical, but also in material that has more recently been categorized as such. An indication of this is the accumulation of metaphorical sibling language in the Sermon on the Mount and in the community regulations of Matthew (Matthew 5 and 18), and in the latter, "paraenetical parts" of the Pauline letters.¹⁶ Thus, there appears to be a strong, but overlooked, connection between the sibling language and paraenetical material.¹⁷ The character of this relationship will be demonstrated below, with the aim of showing how notions associated with siblingship are employed in order to give strength and direction to the New Testament paraenesis. First, I shall briefly present the occurrence of the sibling metaphor in the New Testament, and sketch its background and dependence on notions of concrete siblingship current in antiquity. Then, in the main part, I shall deal with characteristic ways in which the sibling metaphor is employed in the service of New Testament paraenesis. Finally, the findings will be summarized with particular attention to the tentative definition of paraenesis given above.

3. Metaphorical Siblingship in the New Testament

As noted, the ἀδελφ-root is employed for Christians in at least 266 instances in the New Testament. They occur in a variety of ways:

(1) Nearly 100 instances are cases of direct address in the imperative, almost always as "siblings" (ἀδελφοί), occasionally as "brothers, men" (ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί) or as "brother" (ἀδελφε).

(2) Almost 160 instances speak of Christians in the third person, of which most are in the plural, but several also in the singular (of a specific person, or of a Christian in general).

(3) "Sibling love" (φιλαδελφία) occurs six times, in writings of different provenance (Rom 12:10; 1 Thess 4:9; Heb 13:1; 1 Pet 1:22; 2 Pet 1:7 [twice]).

¹⁵ Aasgaard 2004a, 3–4, 114–16, 308–14, and Aasgaard 2004b.

¹⁶ For a survey, see Aasgaard 2004a, chapter 14 (Paul); also Gammie 1990 (Matthew).

¹⁷ Very few scholars have paid any attention to this, with Petersen 1985 and Schäfer 1989 as (relative) exceptions.

Outside the New Testament writings this is a rather rare word,¹⁸ and it is almost only in the New Testament that it is used in a metaphorical sense (Aasgaard 2004a, 151).

(4) "Sibling-loving" (φιλάδελφοι) occurs once (1 Pet 3:8).

(5) "Siblingship" (φιλαδελφότης) is used twice (1 Pet 2:17; 5:9).

(6) Finally, Paul employs the expression "false sibling" (ψευδάδελφος) twice (2 Cor 11:26; Gal 2:4).

Although the sibling metaphor appears to have been accepted as an apt self-characterization in a broad spectrum of the early Christian groups, there is nevertheless considerable variation as to how often it is used. It is most frequent in Paul (120 times in the seven undisputed letters), whereas it is rare in the Deutero-Pauline and the Pastoral letters (21 times, 9 of which in 2 Thessalonians). The metaphor is also used in the Synoptics: frequently in Matthew (19), more rarely in Mark (6) and Luke (7). In addition, it also appears frequently in Acts (33), James (20) and 1 John (13), and occasionally in Hebrews (9) and 1–2 Peter (9), whereas it is very rare in John (2). This shows that the sibling terminology received an uneven emphasis within different early Christian traditions.¹⁹ Various writings also employ the metaphor in the female, such as Mark (twice), Paul (5 times), 1 Timothy (1), and James (1); this reveals on their part a certain awareness of the issue of gender.²⁰

Such metaphorical use of the sibling language is not limited to Christian sources, however. It is also employed occasionally in some social contexts and within certain philosophical and cultic groups, but most commonly within Jewish milieus (Aasgaard 2004a, 107–16, esp. 112–16). In some respects, the Christian use of the sibling term appears to be parallel to such a usage. However, a metaphorical use seems to have been much more frequent, varied, and deliberate in a Christian context than as attested in other sources.²¹ This indicates that the metaphor was not simply taken over by the Christians from other milieus, nor that it only amounts to a conventional usage with little semantic meaning. For several reasons, it is more likely that the Christian use of the sibling metaphor has its basic and primary frame of reference in social siblingship and in general notions associated with such a relationship.²² After all, siblingship was a kind of

relation with which everyone in antiquity was familiar from everyday life, and which could serve as a model for a metaphorical understanding. Thus, Christian siblingship can probably be viewed as an analogy to and a reflection of what social siblingship was perceived to be like. According to this, it should be possible to detect important common features in the understanding of sibling relations in the classical sources and in the New Testament. That such common features existed, will be shown below. On the basis of this close interrelatedness of social and metaphorical usages, we are also warranted to conclude that general perceptions about siblingship in important ways influenced how the Christians understood themselves: being a Christian meant to be responsible for thinking and behaving according to a set of expectations that were tied up with the sibling role.²³ This does not mean, of course, that notions of social siblingship were superimposed or forced upon the Christians; rather, it means that such notions were particularly well suited and very much corresponded to how Christians in fact perceived themselves and their relationships.

In this way, there exists a close relationship between Christian siblingship and ethics (Aasgaard 2002, 528–30), a relationship which is likely to be highlighted in various kinds of hortatory material in the New Testament, that is, in its paraenesis.

4. Being a Sibling in Antiquity

Before turning to the New Testament material in more detail, we must therefore give a brief presentation of the character of the sibling role: what was implied in being a sibling in antiquity? On the whole, this relationship was marked by specific material presuppositions and by relatively clearly defined expectations and ideals. Despite some differences in the Roman, Greek and Jewish traditions respectively, the common factors are much greater, so that we are justified in speaking of a general mentalité.²⁴ This means that we can expect all New Testament texts, irrespective of any differences in provenance etc., to reflect a shared social and cultural understanding as concerns siblingship.

The following features should be mentioned, most of which characterized sibling relations in particular:²⁵

¹⁸ The term and close Latin and Hebrew parallels (*fraterna benevolentia*, אהבה חסד) occur in Plutarch, Qumran, 4 Maccabees, Hierocles and Valerius Maximus; for references, see Aasgaard 2004a, 65–66, 71–75, 97–99, 151–52; Schäfer 1989, 135–58.

¹⁹ See Aasgaard 2004b for a presentation.

²⁰ Mark 3:35; 10:30; Rom 16:1, 15; 1 Cor 7:15; 9:5; Phlm 2; 1 Tim 5:2; Jas 2:15.

²¹ Aasgaard 2004a, 3–4, 116, 311–12, and Aasgaard 2004b.

²² Aasgaard 2004a, 308–10; Aasgaard 2002, 516–18.

²³ For a brief discussion of this, see Aasgaard 2002, 518–20, 528–30.

²⁴ For argument (and secondary references) in favour of this, see Aasgaard 2004a, 35–36, 61–62.

²⁵ For broader presentations of the following points, see Aasgaard 2002, 518–20; 2004a, 61–92, esp. 91–92.

(1) The sibling relation had a *central position within the social structures* of antiquity. It was by far the most durable human relationship, usually lasting for forty to fifty years. Low mobility meant that siblings often maintained life-long contact. An adult group of siblings usually consisted of only two or three individuals, which increased the possibility of personal closeness.

(2) Adult siblings had *important functions within the family unit*, the household, with a share in the responsibility for the economy of "the father's house" and for preserving family traditions, not least in the sphere of religion. They acted as a safety-net for each other and for other family members, and provided important psycho-social support in the family. Here, sibling relations helped to give the individual a sense of *identity and belonging*.

(3) Above all, sibling relations were expected to be *marked by love*: both in attitude and behaviour siblings should display love towards one another.

(4) The *emotional* side of this loving relationship was regarded as very important: sibling relations should be emotionally intimate and positive, and open and trusting.

(5) Siblings were also expected to show *mutual tolerance*. Family harmony was held in high esteem. In spite of differences in status, abilities, attitudes and behaviour, siblings were nonetheless to be generous towards each other, and strive to put up with and soften inequalities between "weak" and "strong" siblings. If matters went wrong they should be *forgiving*.

(6) Related to this, siblings should *not pass judgment* on one another, and certainly not in public, for instance by taking a brother to court. In fact, lawsuits involving brothers were not infrequent, particularly as concerns inheritance. For a New Testament example of this, see Luke (Q) 12:13–14, 16–21. This shows that sibling relations also involved *tensions* and could be experienced as conflictual. Instead of public litigation, conflicts should be solved internally, for example by employing private mediators.

(7) Siblings were also to *preserve unity* vis-à-vis outsiders. In spite of differences and tensions, they should side with one another against the outside world, and as an economic unit be as *self-supportive* as possible.

(8) Finally, siblings were to *defend the honour* of their family and of one another. In a culture in which honour and shame were central concepts, siblings should ensure that the family did not lose face in the sight of outsiders, and that conflicts were dealt with internally.

Such were—briefly described—the characteristics associated with social siblingship. These elements demonstrate the importance of the relationship, and the high expectations tied to it. Obviously, such expectations were often at odds with reality, in which social relations, also family relations, were exposed to change and conflict.²⁶

26 See Aasgaard 2004a, 53–60, 77–81, with references.

5. Sibling Paraenesis in the New Testament

We shall now investigate how sibling language and paraenetical material of various kinds are intertwined in the New Testament texts. We must limit the investigation to writings in which the sibling metaphor appears to be particularly central, and the texts can only be dealt with briefly. The material will primarily be presented thematically, and not with reference to individual authors or writings. Although this may conceal important differences, the benefit is greater, since it will more clearly uncover the general relationship between Christian siblingship and paraenesis. Besides, the many common features in these New Testament authors and writings will in fact prove to be more striking than the differences.

The investigation will be made along various paths, which to an extent belong on different levels, but which also each in their way relate siblingship to paraenesis. First, I shall present some of the texts that have traditionally been associated most closely with paraenesis: the individual injunctions focussed on by Wendland and Dibelius. Then, less explicit forms of paraenesis will be discussed, namely material concerned with various matters of community instruction. Third, I briefly deal with motivations and justifications employed in paraenesis, that is, the material which Thurén, Popkes, and others have brought to our attention. All the way, I shall—when necessary—touch upon issues of form and content, as well as function.

6. Individual Injunctions to Christian Siblings

Throughout the New Testament writings, and especially frequently in the letters, there is spread a great number of injunctions of various kinds.²⁷

27 In this connection, we should note the similarities between the paraenetical language of the Hellenistic popular philosopher Plutarch (A.D. 50–120) and the New Testament, especially Paul. Plutarch's essay "On brotherly love" (περί φιλαδελφίας, *De fraterno amore*, Plutarch, *Mor.* 478A–492D) is a broad discussion of the characteristics, challenges and ideals of siblingship, and very much reflects traditional attitudes (see Aasgaard 2004a, 91–106, esp. 91–92; also Betz 1978). The advice in the essay does not readily stand up to a narrow definition of paraenesis, since it consists mainly of counsels given through learned reasoning and examples taken from everyday experience, history and mythology. Nevertheless, Plutarch's writing very much appears as paraenetical in intention and function, and may be characterized as "sibling paraenesis." Common terms with the New Testament are παρακ(α)λ-, διδασκ-, (ἐπι)τρέπ-, νοθεύ-, συμβουλ-, παραιν- (the last term, a favourite one in Plutarch's writing, occurs only twice in the New Testament, however; see Popkes 1996, 20). Thus, Plutarch in his advice to social siblings employs much of the same language as does the New Testament to Christian "siblings." Although there are some differences, they may be more due to personal style than to anything else.

These injunctions can be sorted into a limited number of types, which very often also appear in a stereotypical form. The degree of standardization may, however, differ among and within each type.²⁸

Interestingly for us, the *sibling metaphor* occurs in a significant number of these types of injunctions, in some of them even as part of the standard core of the expression. Usually, the metaphor appears as an address in the vocative form ἀδελφοί.²⁹ Since these expressions are often stereotypical in form, we should of course take care not to overrate their semantic content or rhetorical force. Nonetheless, the sibling metaphor very often appears to have a central place in the expressions, and to “color” what is being said.³⁰ Here, I shall very briefly treat the most characteristic types of injunctions in which the sibling metaphor occurs.³¹ In our context, we should pay particular attention to two things: (1) the form of the expressions, especially the place of the sibling terminology, and (2) their content: what the addressees are exhorted to do.

6.1. A Firm Appeal: The Request Formula

One of the most frequent formulas is the request formula, which is sometimes called a παρακαλῶ-sentence. The word παρακαλῶ has often been regarded as the paraenetical term par excellence in the New Testament material (Popkes 1996, 23, 26–28). A characteristic example is Rom 12:1:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies etc.³²

The formula occurs in about sixteen instances in the New Testament, most frequently in Paul.³³ In its standard form, the formula consists of six elements,

²⁸ See Aasgaard 2004a, 275–84 (chapter 14); also Schäfer 1989.

²⁹ On address in paraenesis, Gammie 1990, 57, 59–60. Very few scholars have brought attention to the use of the sibling metaphor in these expressions. Exceptions are Schäfer 1989; Aasgaard 2004a.

³⁰ Aasgaard 2004a, 275–76, 284–85. The sibling address often functions as structural “glue” at points of transition in the texts, signalling the “sibling” character of Christian relations. On such transition indicators, Holmstrand 1997, 21–32.

³¹ Not all occurrences can be grouped according to very strict and formal criteria; thus some overlap is unavoidable. For a more detailed presentation, see Aasgaard 2004a, 275–85.

³² I use the NRSV for quotations, but occasionally take the liberty to adjust its text (in the case of “sibling”).

³³ Rom 12:1; 15:30; 16:17; 1 Cor 1:10; 4:16 (no address); 16:15–16; 2 Cor 10:1 (no address); Gal 4:12 (uncertain); 1 Thess 4:1, 10–11; 5:12, 14; 2 Thess 2:1; 3:6; Heb 13:22; 1 Pet 2:11.

in a fixed sequence:³⁴ (1) the verb, usually παρακαλῶ, occasionally other verbs,³⁵ (2) a particle, usually οὖν or δέ (Nauck 1958), (3) those addressed: you, ὑμεῖς, (4) the vocative address, always ἀδελφοί, without epithets,³⁶ (5) often a prepositional clause, giving a theological rationale, generally introduced by διὰ (occasionally ἐν or ὑπέρ), and formulated in various ways, for instance “by the mercies of God,” and (6) the request/exhortation: a ἵνα-clause, a verb in the imperative, or an infinitive construction.

Most of the instances contain the sibling address. Several other injunctions also resemble the standard request formula (for instance 2 Cor 2:8; Phil 4:2–3; Phlm 10),³⁷ but are of less interest here, since they lack the sibling address. In fact, the more standardized the request formula is, the more likely it is to include a sibling address; and the more it deviates, the more likely it is that an address will be lacking. Thus, the sibling address appears to belong to this paraenetical formula’s “standard core.”

The request formula probably has its background in Hellenistic-Greek family letters, although it also occurs in official letters.³⁸ The New Testament authors’ adoption of this mode of expression appears to underscore the family tone of their letters.³⁹ However, only the sibling address (ἀδελφοί) is employed in the formula, not for example “children”; this attests to the importance of the sibling relationship in this context.

Paul seems to have given the formula his own twist, by frequently adding the motivating prepositional clause (element no. 5), which is rarely found in Hellenistic letters elsewhere.⁴⁰ By this move, he has given the expression a *Christian rationale*. Sometimes, the contents of the motivations do not seem to be very distinctly related to their situational context, and the additions may primarily serve to underscore the urgency of Paul’s request or to heighten the intensity of the injunctions (for instance 1 Thess 4:1, Bjerkelund 2004, 24–28, 188–89). But more frequently the motivations appear to relate more closely to their context (for instance Rom 12:1; 15:30). This will be developed below, in section 8. Worth particular notice here,

³⁴ Bjerkelund 2004, 17 counts five elements; however, six is more precise.

³⁵ For instance, ἐρωτῶ: 1 Thess 4:1; 2 Thess 2:1; παραγγέλλω: 2 Thess 3:6; and δέομαι: Gal 4:12; also 1 Pet 2:11.

³⁶ Except for 1 Pet 2:11, which, however, has ἀγαπητοί. See Bjerkelund 2004, 191 n. 3.

³⁷ 2 Cor 2:8; 6:1; 10:2; Eph 4:1; Phil 4:2; 1 Thess 5:27; 2 Thess 3:12; 1 Tim 2:1; Phlm 9, 10; Heb 13:19; 1 Pet 5:1–2. See Bjerkelund 2004, 13–18; also Schäfer 1989, 323–30.

³⁸ Bjerkelund 2004, 57–58, 87, 108. They may also have a broader, oral origin, see Schäfer 1989, 327 n. 85, with references.

³⁹ Bjerkelund 2004, 34–52 gives many examples from Greek papyrus letters; sibling address occurs at least fifteen times (39). Some of them may be a metaphorical usage.

⁴⁰ Similar additions exist, but diverge much from Paul, Bjerkelund 2004, 40–43.

however, is the fact that the appeal to the Christians as siblings seems more established in the formula than are the motivations; this has been almost completely overlooked by the scholars. The sibling address with its central position in the formula thus emerges as at least equally important as the theological motivations. The function of the address seems to be to appeal to the solidarity and common self-understanding of the addressees. Together, however, the sibling address and the theological motivation serve to reinforce one another in rhetorical power.

As regards the content of the παρακαλῶ-requests, a variety of issues turns up. The appeals are often moral in character, but formulated in a rather general way: the Christians are to live in a God-pleasing way (Rom 12:1; 1 Thess 4:1), to display love towards one another (2 Cor 2:8), to abstain from the desires of the flesh (1 Pet 2:11), and to earn their own living (2 Thess 3:12; also 1 Thess 4:10–11). Many appeals, however, are less concerned with moral issues in a narrow sense, but with Christian formation in general: the Christians are exhorted to make progress (1 Thess 4:10–11), to pray (Rom 15:30; 1 Tim 2:1), to be in agreement (1 Cor 1:10; Phil 4:12), to imitate their leaders (1 Cor 4:16; Gal 4:12) and respect them (1 Thess 5:12; Heb 13:22), and to keep an eye on and admonish deviants (Rom 16:17–18; 1 Thess 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1–2). In fact, the latter kind of appeal predominates in the case of the παρακαλῶ-clauses: they focus more on constructing a Christian identity in general than on specifically behavioural or (in a narrow sense) ethical issues. The Christians are—in their capacity as siblings—to live up to the standards of such an identity.

6.2. Sharing (a Secret) Knowledge: The Disclosure Formula

Another formula of a hortatory character is the disclosure formula. This formula, which is often found in Greek and Greek-Hellenistic private letters, also occurs frequently in the New Testament.⁴¹ A typical example is 1 Cor 10:1:

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors etc.

The formula—with its elevated, solemn style—either conveys the sender's desire or commands that the recipients "know" something. It occurs ten times, and with very little variation, consisting of six elements in an almost fixed order:⁴² (1) a particle, indicating a contrast to or a consequence of the

⁴¹ The formula has received less attention than the παρακαλῶ-sentence, see White 1971, 93; Schäfer 1989, 322–23.

⁴² Rom 1:13; 11:25; 1 Cor 10:1; 12:1; 15:1; 2 Cor 1:8; 8:1; Gal 1:11; Phil 1:12; 1 Thess 4:13. All have the sibling address. The formula only occurs in Paul in its most stereotypical form.

preceding: γάρ or δέ; (2) often a verb denoting will (sometimes stated negatively: οὐ): θέλω or βούλομαι, combined with (3) a verb expressing knowledge, such as ἀγνοεῖν or γινώσκειν, (4) usually those addressed: ὑμᾶς, (5) an address in the vocative, always ἀδελφοί, and (6) what is disclosed, introduced by ὅτι, περί, or the like.⁴³

In addition, similar, but less stereotypical expressions occur twelve times, referring to something already disclosed to the authors and their addressees, and all (except one) containing the sibling address, for example 1 Thess 1:4:⁴⁴

For we know, brothers and sisters, beloved by God, that he has chosen you etc.

Structurally, the disclosure formula has several features in common with the request formula, and here too the sibling address forms a fixed part of it. The almost obligatory address serves to create confidence, to impart a sense of closeness, and to convey a feeling of a common knowledge, which is often hidden from outsiders. A typical instance is 1 Thess 4:13:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died.

As for the contents, there is again a variety of issues; none of them, however, is concerned with moral advice in particular: the expression is employed to inform about the "plans" and election of God (Rom 11:25; 2 Cor 8:1; 1 Thess 1:4; Heb 6:9; Jas 2:5; 1 John 3:13), certain spiritual or scriptural truths (Rom 7:1; 1 Cor 7:29; 10:1; 12:1–2; 15:50; 1 Thess 4:13; 5:1–2; Jude 5), the gospel in general (1 Cor 15:1; Gal 1:11), and Paul's personal experiences (Rom 1:13; 2 Cor 1:8; Phil 1:12; 1 Thess 2:1, 9). Thus, the appeals mediated by this formula do not aim at informing the addressees about how they should act, but rather how they should think and understand. That is, the formula functions—on a motivational level—to convey a feeling of belonging to an elect group, with a special, sometimes esoteric, knowledge. And the ἀδελφοί address provides the framework for these exhortations: they are particularly appropriate within a community of siblings.

6.3. Influencing Attitudes and Actions: Exhortations in the Imperative

This type of usage is less standardized than the two mentioned above, but occurs in about thirty-five instances, particularly frequently in Paul and

⁴³ White 1971, 93–94, mentions nos. 2, 4 and 5. I have slightly altered the description of them and added nos. 1 and 3.

⁴⁴ Rom 7:1; 1 Cor 7:29; 15:50; 1 Thess 1:4; 2:1, 9; 5:1–2; Heb 6:9 (ἀγαπητοί); Jas 2:5 (uncertain); 3:12; 1 John 3:13; Jude 5 (no address; however, P⁷⁸, an important papyrus in Jude, has the ἀδελφοί address).

James.⁴⁵ If we also include the ἀγαπητοί address, ten other instances can be added.⁴⁶ It is an important type of exhortation, since the imperative admonition to a considerable extent embodies the “paraenesis proper” of Wendland and Dibelius; compare also the phrase “concise, benevolent injunction” of the paraenesis project. Of course, similar exhortations also occur very often without any sibling address; nonetheless, such an address is employed in so many instances and in such a variety of texts that its use appears striking.

Usually the expressions consist of (1) an exhortation in the imperative, combined with (2) the sibling address, and often with (3) an explication of the issue of the admonition, in the form of a verb or a noun, a prepositional expression, or the like.

Characteristic examples of the most plain kind are: “Brothers and sisters, do not grumble against one another” (Jas 5:9), and “Consider your own call, brothers and sisters” (1 Cor 1:26). Exhortations with explications are more frequent, however, such as: “Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord” (Phil 3:1), and: “Therefore, brothers and sisters, . . . consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him” (Heb 3:1).

Occasionally, the exhortation is not in the imperative, but in the indicative, and the appeal is implied by other means, for example: “From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not be so” (Jas 3:10; also 3:12).

As in the formulas discussed above, this type of exhortation too deals with a broad variety of issues. Some are moral in character: the Christians should not speak evil against one another (Jas 4:11), not favour anyone (Jas 2:1), not be weary in doing right (2 Thess 3:13); instead, they should wait for one another (1 Cor 11:33), help the ones who stumble (Gal 6:1; Jas 5:19–20), and take account of (or think about) anything that is true, honourable, and just (Phil 4:8). These are notions which clearly are in agreement with general ideals concerning sibling relations.

Many of the exhortations focus on religious issues: the Christians are to remain in their call (1 Cor 1:26; 7:24; 2 Pet 1:10), to be eager in prophecy (1 Cor 14:39), to stand firm in the Lord (1 Cor 15:58; Phil 4:1; 2 Thess 2:15), to

⁴⁵ 1 Cor 1:26; 7:24; 11:33; 14:20, 39; 15:58; 2 Cor 13:11; (Gal 4:12; Gal 6:1; Phil 2:12; 3:1, 17; 4:1, 8; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 2:15, 3:1, 13; Phlm 7, 20; Heb 3:1, 12; 10:19; Jas 1:2, 16, 19; 2:1; 3:1; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 10, 12, 19; 2 Pet 1:10; (1 John 3:13). See also Aasgaard 2004a, 280–82. A special, Pauline type of imperatival exhortation is the “therefore, my siblings” expression (Aasgaard 2004a, 279–80). For the οὖν *paraeneticum*, see Nauck 1958; cf. Rom 8:12; 1 Cor 14:26; Heb 10:19; also 1 Thess 5:4; Jas 3:10, 12.

⁴⁶ Rom 12:19; 1 Cor 10:14; 2 Cor 7:1; 1 Pet 4:12; 2 Pet 3:8, 14, 17; 1 John 4:1, 7; Jude 17 have ἀγαπητοί.

pray for others (1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1), to be patient until the coming of the Lord (Jas 5:7, 10), and to work out their salvation with trembling and fear (Phil 2:12). This kind of advice, which aims at personal and spiritual formation, is more frequent than admonitions of a moral and behavioural kind.

Another characteristic of some of these exhortations is their emphasis on imitation, which is a feature highlighted by scholars such as Malherbe and Perdue. The addressees are advised, for instance, to become like Paul, and to imitate him (Gal 4:12; Phil 3:17), to be faithful like Jesus (Heb 3:1) and patient like the prophets (Jas 5:10).

Finally, in several instances the exhortations clearly aim at speaking to the emotions of the addressees. This is also to a certain extent the case with the kinds presented above, but even more here. Such an emotional colouring is indicated particularly by the addition of “my” (for instance 1 Cor 14:39; Jas 1:2; 2:1) and “beloved” (for instance 1 Cor 15:58; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13; Jas 1:16, 19; 2:14). A good example, since it includes both elements, and is also extended with other epithets, is Phil 4:1: “Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.”

Both the focus on imitation and that on the emotions fit well with general ideas about sibling relations: siblings should emulate and show affection towards one another.

Thus, in this kind of injunctions, and also in the two other formulas dealt with above, many of the expectations associated with social siblingship are clearly reflected. With their exhortations, the authors also clearly aim at influencing their addressees, both as regards their attitudes and their actions, and—importantly—not only morally, but on a much broader basis. They do this *inter alia* by referring to ideal figures and by appealing to people’s sentiments. And the sibling address in very many instances forms part of the authors’ strategy for furthering the moral and spiritual growth of the Christians.

7. Exhortations to Christian Siblingship

Other, less explicit appeals to siblingship and φιλαδελφία also play a central part in the New Testament writings. Some of this material clearly belongs to the passages traditionally regarded as paraenesis. Other parts do not, however, but should nevertheless be included under the hortatory material of the New Testament. The texts are also characterized as paraenesis by most of the scholars who hold a functional view, even of a moderate kind.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ See the survey in Popkes 1996, 39–44.

Most of the material has a strong social colouring: the Christians are advised collectively, and the advice is made in support of them as a group with common interests.

Throughout the New Testament—in the Gospels as well as in the letters—these appeals centre around a limited number of issues. Importantly, these are issues that also were in focus in connection with social siblingship. The following issues are particularly worth mentioning:

7.1. Exhortations to Love

A prominent feature in the relations between social siblings was the ideal of a loving relationship. This feature is also strongly emphasized in the New Testament material, in various exhortations to sibling love. Such exhortations are found in a number of writings, most clearly articulated in Paul, Hebrews, 1–2 Peter, Matthew, and 1 John.

Paul appeals explicitly to *φιλαδελφία* both in his earliest (1 Thessalonians) and his latest extant letter (Romans). Thus, the ideas of Christian siblingship and of sibling love are thoroughgoing features in his thinking about Christian relations (Aasgaard 2004a, 151–52, 176–77). In both letters the appeal occupies a central position. To be sure, in 1 Thess 4:9 Paul at first does not explicitly appeal to *φιλαδελφία*. Rather, he himself refrains from appealing to it: he finds it unnecessary to do so, since they already know, and have even been “taught by God,” what sibling love implies. Clearly, we here have a case of rhetorical *praeteritio*: Paul appeals indirectly, and very forcefully, by referring to what they have previously learned and accepted. But in the following verses he becomes explicit, by addressing them as siblings (v. 10) and urging them to practise sibling love “more and more.” And the practice he prescribes is that Christians, in agreement with general sibling ideals, should strive for unity and harmony, and for being self-supportive and honourable vis-à-vis outsiders (vv. 11–12; Aasgaard 2004a, 157–65).

In Rom 12:10, the appeal to *φιλαδελφία* is more direct, although less precise in content. But the appeal is placed at a central point in the hortatory passage of 12:9–21, after the thematic statement of the passage about genuine love (v. 9, Ἡ ἀγάπη ἀνυπόκριτος); and it defines this love as a love of siblings (τῇ φιλαδελφίᾳ . . . φιλόστοργοι). The implications of *φιλαδελφία* is then exemplified with a list of obligations, in the form of exhortations in the imperative, which focus both on moral and spiritual issues (vv. 11–21).⁴⁸ Again, the advice concurs with sibling ideals: they must outdo one another in showing honour, meet the needs of others, live in harmony and peace

with all, etc. In v. 10, the rare word *φιλόστοργοι*, which is usually associated with love among family members, serves to give Paul’s exhortations a strongly emotional colouring (Spicq 1955, 507–10).

In Hebrews 13:1, the exhortation to *φιλαδελφία* occurs within a long passage of paraenetical material (from 12:1ff). It has a similarly central position here as in Rom 12:10, since it introduces the final part (13:1–19), serving as a heading for the concluding appeals. Some of the appeals resemble those of Romans 12 (see Heb 13:2–3, 5) and can also be related to general sibling ideals, whereas others cannot be so easily related to such notions (see vv. 7–17).

In 1 Peter 1:22, *φιλαδελφία* appears in a hortatory passage presenting a call to holy living (1:13–2:10). 1 Peter here exhorts the Christians to “love one another deeply from the heart.” Such a love has become possible, since they have purified their souls to live in “genuine” (ἀνυπόκριτος) *φιλαδελφία*. It is interesting to note that ἀνυπόκριτος both here and in Rom 12:9 is associated with (sibling) love; these are—with the exception of Jas 3:17—the only occurrences of the word in the New Testament. And this kind of love is further motivated by their new birth as Christians: they have through God’s word been born from imperishable seed (1:23–25) and are to live accordingly (2:1–3). Here, there seems to be a play on family metaphors: the Christians are newborn siblings, who are to grow in mutual love through the nourishment of God. In 2:17, as part of a household code, 1 Peter exhorts the addressees to love “the family of believers” (ἀδελφότης) which clearly refers to the Christian community. And in 3:8, the letter advises them to be *φιλάδελφοι*. Here, the word occurs in a catalogue of virtues, which sums up the household code, and the other virtues mentioned also agree with sibling ideals: unity, sympathy, tenderness, humility, mutual tolerance, and forgiving (vv. 8–9). In 5:9, at the end of the letter, the author refers to the siblingship among the Christians as a matter of fact: all who belong to the ἀδελφότης share the same conditions of suffering. Thus, a thinking of Christian siblingship and sibling love permeates the letter, and plays a central part in its moral advice (Elliott 1990, 202, 224–33).

Also 2 Peter speaks of *φιλαδελφία* at a central point, thus signalling this as an important notion in its thinking. After having declared that God has given them all they need for life and eternity (1:3–4), the Christians are admonished to follow this up in practice (1:5–9). This initial admonition has the form of a “golden chain.”⁴⁹ The chain, which begins with faith and goodness, ends up with “mutual affection (*φιλαδελφία*) and love” (1:7), which is thus presented as the ultimate moral aim. In turn, this true

⁴⁸ Wilson 1991, 129–32; Aasgaard 2004a, 166–67, 169–70, also 170–77.

⁴⁹ Or “sorites,” see Starr 2000, 207, with references; Aasgaard 2004a, 140–41 (Rom 8:29–30).

φιλαδελφία serves as a framework and starting point for the moral and spiritual guidance of the following verses, in which they are also exhorted as "brothers and sisters" (1:10: ἀδελφοί) to confirm their calling and election.

In the final antithesis in the Sermon on the Mount (5:46–47), *Matthew* admonishes his addressees not only to "love (ἀγαπήσητε) those who love you" and to "greet only your siblings (ἀσπάσῃς τοὺς ἀδελφούς ὑμῶν)," but even one's enemies. In these verses, which are to be read as a parallelism, it is assumed that siblings display love towards one another and receive one another. This is also to serve as a model for their relations with outsiders, even enemies. And as a motivation for this, the Christians are finally exhorted to be perfect (τέλειος), just like their heavenly Father.

Like *Matthew*, *1 John* does not use the φιλαδελφία term, but frequently combines the sibling metaphor with exhortations to love. In 2:9–11 the Christians are exhorted to love and not hate a sibling, in order to live "in the light." By doing this, a Christian avoids causing another Christian to stumble (σκάνδαλον), see 7.2. below. In 3:10–17, *John* develops the idea of sibling love further. The message about love is fundamental: they have heard it from the beginning (v. 11: ἀπ' ἀρχῆς—compare also 1 Thess 4:9). And those who do not love their siblings are not the children of God, but of the devil (v. 10). The obligation to love is exemplified with the negative case of the brothers Cain and Abel (v. 12). All who hate a sibling are even murderers (v. 15). And no one who has God's love and wants to follow the example of Christ, can shut one's eyes to the needs of a sibling (vv. 16–17). Although the passage mostly does not formulate its appeals in the vocative, the "paraenetical" thrust is very strong. Thematically, the passage also has several features in common with other texts (which are dealt with below, see Matt 5:21–26; 25:31–46; Rom 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11; Jas 2:14–16).

The notions of a Christian ἀδελφότης and of φιλαδελφία thus occupy a central position in a number of New Testament writings, which belong to a broad range of social contexts and times. In these writings, the idea of φιλαδελφία both serves as a basis for ethical thinking in general and occurs in the form of injunctions in typically paraenetical passages. And the praxis which is prescribed is very much in agreement with the ideals of social siblingship, such as emotional closeness, mutual love and support, and honourable living.

7.2. Exhorting the Weak and the Strong

Various New Testament authors focus on differences—socially or spiritually—among Christians, and present the Christians in terms of groups of "weak" and "strong," which stand in tension. This is a pattern of

thinking which has its parallels in other classical sources.⁵⁰ With the aid of such a pattern, the same New Testament authors also try to handle and solve the problems which arise from these tensions.

This pattern emerges very clearly in *Paul's letters*, particularly in Rom 14:10–15:3 and 1 Cor 8:7–13, on the eating of idol food, two passages with many thematic and linguistic features in common.⁵¹ Here, Paul speaks of two groups, one of which consists of "strong" or "free" Christians (Rom 15:1: οἱ δυνατοί; 1 Cor 8:9: ἐξουσία; 9:1: ἐλεύθερος), and one of "weak" Christians (Rom 14:2: ὁ ἀσθενῶν; Rom 15:3: τῶν ἀδυνάτων; 1 Cor 8:11: ὁ ἀσθενῶν). Taking his point of departure in this distinction, Paul tries to regulate the relationship among them by instructing each group about adequate moral conduct (Aasgaard 2004a, 198–203, 211–16). In both passages he formulates direct exhortations (for instance Rom 14:13, 17, 19; 1 Cor 8:9), but also appeals to reason (for instance Rom 14:15–17; 1 Cor 8:10–12) and offers himself and Christ as models for imitation (Rom 14:14; 15:1–3; 1 Cor 8:13; also 11:1). Importantly, the sibling metaphor plays a strikingly central role in the texts, for example when Paul warns against causing the "fall" of a brother (πρόσκομμα, σκάνδαλον, Rom 14:13, 21; 1 Cor 8:11, 13; also 1 Cor 8:2; Rom 14:10). Paul even links it to a theological justification for the praxis which he expects of them: "So by your knowledge the weak sibling for whom Christ died is destroyed" (1 Cor 8:11; see also Rom 14:15).⁵² It is the weaker party in the conflict who is characterized as a "brother," which implies that Paul puts a heavy responsibility upon the strong to overcome the conflict. And although he does not argue in favour of equality between the weak and strong, he clearly pleads for a lessening of differences, through mutual care and tolerance—features which are also in agreement with the behaviour expected from social siblings. A similar thinking is apparent in Rom 12:16: "do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly" (τοῖς ταπεινοῖς).⁵³ Although the sibling metaphor does not occur here, the exhortation follows closely after Paul's appeal to φιλαδελφία in v. 10, see above.

In *Matthew* 25:31–46, the *Sondergut* parable of the judgment of the nations, *Matthew* deals with the question of who are righteous and who are not. The righteous are those who have supported the have-nots with food, drink, clothes, hospitality, comfort, and visits in prison—without knowing that they did it for the Lord (vv. 35–40). Here, many of the same Christian "virtues" are hinted at as those listed for example in Rom 12:11–21, particularly in vv. 13–15 and 20. The "weak" one *Matthew* designates as "one of the

⁵⁰ Reasoner 1999, 46–63; Aasgaard 2004a, 180–84.

⁵¹ Reasoner 1999, 25–35; Aasgaard 2004a, 178–80.

⁵² I have adjusted the NRSV translation more closely to the Greek text.

⁵³ However, the expression can also mean "humble tasks."

least of these" (vv. 40 and 45: ἐνὶ τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων), and appears to refer to Christians in particular (see also Matt 10:42; 18:6, 10, 14: one of these little ones, see below).⁵⁴ Strikingly, in v. 40 (but not in v. 45) these "least ones" are described as my siblings (τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου).⁵⁵ Matthew's intention in the parable seems to be to emphasize the obligations towards co-Christians who had run into difficulties and were in need. By combining the sibling metaphor with the expression "one of the least," Matthew displays a thinking and motivation very similar to Paul's exhortations in Rom 14–15 and 1 Cor 8 (see also Matt 7:1–6). These little ones are not to be made to stumble (see 18:6: σκανδαλίση!). The Christians are to take care of the weak, since they are siblings, and since Christ has identified himself particularly with them. Although the parable is not paraenesis in the narrow sense, it clearly has a moral-exhortational function,⁵⁶ and the sibling metaphor plays an important part in this rhetorical strategy.

As noted, the *Letter of James* uses the sibling metaphor very frequently. In 1:9–10, a sibling "who is lowly (ὁ ταπεινός)" is exhorted, in the third person imperative, to "boast in being raised up," and the rich (ὁ πλούσιος) "in being brought low." Although the terminology is somewhat different from Paul (but see Rom 12:16, and above) and Matthew, the pattern is the same: groups of weak and strong are juxtaposed. In this case, however, the paraenesis is directed at both groups, with the aim of softening tensions, but without explicitly wishing to overcome the differences.

The same pattern of thinking recurs in 2:14–16. In a discussion of the relationship between faith and works, James addresses his audience as "brothers and sisters" (ἀδελφοί), and then exemplifies his point by referring to how well-off Christians should support the poorer ones. Like in Paul and Matthew, the haves are to look upon the have-nots as their siblings.⁵⁷ Indeed, by being called siblings the poor ones are allotted a special prerogative in the relationship. This is underscored by the striking feature that James here states this as a prerogative which involves both male (ἀδελφός) and female (ἀδελφή) Christians. Again, the main responsibility for securing sibling relations is put upon the shoulders of the "strong." Although the passage does not contain explicit exhortations, its paraenetical character is very marked.⁵⁸

54 Compare Matthew's use of the sibling terminology elsewhere; also Gray 1989, 331–59, esp. 358–59.

55 Some witnesses omit the words (among them B*), but the omission has not a very strong support.

56 See for example Popkes 1996, 69–70.

57 The passage shares several features with Matt 25:31–46: James explicates in examples what Matthew has stated in parable.

58 See Popkes 1996, 108–11, for similar considerations.

7.3. Exhortations not to Judge

A typical feature of social siblingship was that siblings were expected to be lenient: they should not judge one another, particularly not by taking one another to the public courts.

Such ideas are clearly reflected in various New Testament texts. And although these are notions which were crucial within early Christian thinking in general, they become very prominent in passages in which Christian siblingship is thematized. Probably, the New Testament authors are here influenced by a general thinking about sibling relations.

In two important passages, *Paul* links siblingship with notions of judging and judgment. This is the case with Rom 14:10–15 (see also above). Here, the Romans are warned against passing judgment (v. 10: τί κρίνεις τὸν ἀδελφόν σου) or despising siblings, so as not to cause them to fall. This is motivated eschatologically: judging a sibling may entail that one oneself falls short in the judgment of God (vv. 10–12), and also christologically: it contradicts the saving action of Jesus—they must not cause the ruin of a sibling "for whom Christ died" (v. 15). And Paul's exhortation is formulated as an explicit paraenetical appeal: "Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another" (v. 13).⁵⁹

In 1 Cor 6:1–11, the issue of judging is—if possible—even more central. Here, we encounter one of the conflicts in Corinth: Christians are taking one another to court (v. 1). This is a praxis which Paul finds absolutely unacceptable (vv. 2–4, 7, 9–10). In his argument against it, the sibling metaphor occupies a strikingly prominent place, which is obviously rhetorically motivated. Paul describes the conflict as a case between brothers (v. 5b), and underscores the sibling relationship even more strongly in the following verse: "a brother goes to court against a brother" (v. 6). His use of the metaphor culminates in v. 8b: "But you yourselves wrong and defraud—and siblings at that." Paul employs theological arguments, particularly eschatological and christological ones (vv. 3, 7, 9, 11), but also social arguments: their conflicts and litigation bring shame upon them, and this is—as noted—even worse when it occurs among siblings (vv. 5, 7). Thus, by his focus on Christians as siblings here, Paul plays on common ideals concerning family and sibling relations, saying that siblings were the last to judge one another. Instead, the conflict should be resolved within the four walls of the house, and by private mediation (vv. 5, 7–8).⁶⁰ In the passage, Paul has only one explicit exhortation (v. 9). Most of his appeals (and in fact most of the text) have the form of questions. Here, these (partly rhetorical) questions clearly function as exhortations.

59 For a discussion of this text, see Aasgaard 2004a, 203–15.

60 For another strategy for solving a conflict internally, see 1 Cor 5:3–5, below. For a discussion of 1 Cor 6:1–11, see Aasgaard 2004a, 217–36.

The issue of judging a sibling also has a prominent place in the Q material of Matthew-Luke. In Q (Luke) 6:37–38, 41–42 (the speck in a brother's eye), the term ἀδελφός is repeated four times: three times a Christian is spoken of as a sibling, and once the addressee is depicted as addressing his co-Christian as a brother: ἀδελφέ.⁶¹ It is important to note that the sibling metaphor is here clearly tied up with the ideas of leniency and of carrying over with the faults of co-Christians. In the preceding verses, vv. 36–37, the issues of showing compassion and of not judging a fellow Christian are expressed even more explicitly. And they are motivated in the mercy of God and in his judgment: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge (μὴ κρίνετε), and you will not be judged.” These motivations are very parallel to those found in 1 Thess 4:9, of being “taught by God” on how to love one's siblings. And with its exhortations in the indicative (vv. 37–38, 42), the Q passage very much has the form of paraenesis proper.⁶²

Finally, James in 4:11–12 addresses the Christians as siblings (ἀδελφοί) and warns them against speaking evil of or judging a brother (κρίνων τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ). This is motivated by the fact that it is against the law and that God is the only one to judge, a motivation similar to that of Rom 12:10–12.⁶³ Both here and in Q it is the “weaker” party who is called a sibling.

7.4. Exhortations to Forgive

In 1 Cor 6:1–11, Paul exhorts the Christians not only not to judge, but also to be lenient towards one another: one should rather choose to be wronged and defrauded than to wrong and defraud one's siblings (vv. 7–8). Implicitly, he here urges them to forgive one another. Similar, but more explicit, exhortations to forgiveness occur frequently elsewhere in Paul, and often closely related to the sibling metaphor (Rom 12:14, 17, 19–21; 15:1, 7; Gal 6:1–2; 1 Thess 5:14–15).

However, in 1 Cor 5—the man living with his father's wife—Paul clearly signals that there also are limits to what can be accepted from fellow Christians (vv. 12–13). Nonetheless, the transgressor may, if he reverts, have a hope of being forgiven on the day of the Lord (v. 5). And Paul also recommends a procedure for how the church can deal with the problem, with himself present in spirit (vv. 4–5).

61 The use of the metaphor seems to reflect an established way of understanding oneself within the Q milieu. Probably, they—like in Paul—addressed and referred to one another as “brothers” (and possibly “sisters”).

62 Cf. section 1. above; also Popkes 1996, 65–67.

63 In v. 12, “sibling” is parallel to “neighbour” (τὸν πλησίον). This does not mean that “sibling” is here used for others than Christians. Together with other passages in James, the verses here also clearly aim at internal Christian instruction, with “neighbour” as a way of expressing the responsibilities towards co-Christians.

Interestingly, in 1 Cor 5 the sinning Christian is—although somewhat indirectly—denounced as a brother only in the name (v. 11: ἀδελφὸς ὀνομαζόμενος). Here, the sibling metaphor is actively employed in an exhortation not to engage with “deviant” believers, that is, in a strategy for excluding false believers, not—as above—for defending “weak” Christians (see also 2 Cor 11:26; Gal 2:4). In this way, Paul also uses their shared identity as siblings as a means for effecting exclusion: if the disagreement—cf. the paraenesis definition's “not . . . disagreement”—is sufficiently serious, this may in fact bring about a loss of this identity (Aasgaard 2004, 195–98, 209–11).

An appeal to forgiveness of siblings similar to that of Paul can be found in Luke-Q 17:1–4. The passage particularly focuses on forgiving sins committed towards oneself: “If your sibling sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive (ἄφες). And if the same person sins against you seven times, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent’, you must forgive” (vv. 3–4). Again, the sibling metaphor is combined with the idea of leniency and forgiving. And the passage also has several features in common with Paul, such as the warning against causing a Christian to stumble (v. 1 σκάνδαλα, see Rom 14:13; 1 Cor 8:13), the idea of sinning against a brother (see 1 Cor 8:12),⁶⁴ and a procedure for how to deal with the conflict (see 1 Cor 5 and 6, above).

In 18:15–35, Matthew takes over and develops Luke-Q 17:1–4. He places it within a chapter concerned with community discipline (chapter 18), and also expands the use of the sibling metaphor considerably (vv. 15, 21, 35). Matthew splits the Jesus saying in Q 17:3b–4 into two parts, vv. 15 and 21, and inserts detailed procedures for internal atonement and reconciliation, vv. 16–20. And after the Q material in v. 21 he has added a parable which also serves as a call to leniency and forgiveness: the story of the unforgiving servant provides a warning example of how one should not behave towards a Christian sibling. In order to underline this even stronger, Matthew in v. 35 sums up the parable by means of a Jesus saying: “So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your sibling (τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ) from your heart.” Thus, Matthew focuses on forgiveness, but he has emphasized it more strongly (see also 6:14–15) and tied it more closely to Christian siblingship than has for instance Q and Luke.⁶⁵ Here, then, Matthew clearly stands in the same tradition as Paul.

64 The expression in 1 Cor 8:12 is all the more striking, since it is the only instance in which Paul speaks of sinning against human beings (and not God, a precept, etc.).

65 V. 35 is revealing for how Matthew views this in terms of siblingship: whereas he speaks explicitly of forgiving one's brother, the Markan parallel to this saying in 11:26 (which, however, may not be original), does not specify the object of forgiveness at all.

In addition, Matthew has dealt with the issue of forgiving in a *Sondergut* passage in the Sermon on the Mount, in 5:21–24(–26), in which the sibling term occurs four times. Here, the Christians are exhorted to strive for harmony and unity: if they have insulted a sibling, they should go and be reconciled. And if dissension arises, they are obliged to show forbearance and to settle conflicts.

Finally, 1 John 5:16 should be mentioned. Here, John appeals to the Christians to pray to God for a sibling who commits a sin (τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτάνοντα), provided that the sin “does not lead to death.” Although in an indirect way, forgiveness and siblingship are tied up with one another: leniency is to be displayed towards a Christian sibling, also in front of God, since “God will give him life.”

Thus, all these authors relate forgiveness closely to Christian siblingship: just like siblings in general, so Christians are exhorted to forgive one another. In addition, most of them also describe procedures for solving problems, and for doing so “within the family.” And both Paul and Matthew (and Q?) speak not only of judging and forgiving in general: strikingly, they also tie it up with situations involving legal procedures and law courts (Matt 5:21–26; 18:23–35; also 5:38–42; 1 Cor 6:1–11), such as were commonly associated with family and sibling conflicts.

8. Theological Motivations for Christian Siblingship

Whereas Wendland and Dibelius focussed on the individual injunctions as concrete, common-sense advice on practical issues, other scholars—such as Thurén—have brought attention to the ways in which such injunctions and other hortatory material are ideologically (usually theologically) motivated, viewing such justifications as a significant characteristic of early Christian paraenesis. In the New Testament material, the motivations are taken from a broad range of theological topoi. Here this can only be outlined very briefly, so as to demonstrate their presence and importance.⁶⁶

In several cases, the paraenesis appears to be based on an idea of a “family of God”: the Christians are the children of God, their father, and one another’s siblings, perhaps with Christ as a brother in a special sense. This kind of motivation is worth special attention, since it draws on various metaphors taken from family life and combines them with the sibling metaphor. This combination of metaphors is elaborated on in various ways

⁶⁶ Popkes 1996, 169–91 has a broad discussion of the motivations and justifications employed in the New Testament paraenetical material.

by the New Testament authors.⁶⁷ Paul does not draw explicitly on it, but it may be implied in his mention in Rom 8:29 of Christ as “the firstborn among many siblings (ἀδελφοίς).” Matthew, however, makes explicit use of the idea: in 23:8–12, he has Jesus denounce the scribes and the Pharisees, saying that the disciples have only one teacher and father, God, and that they are each others’ siblings (v. 8: ἀδελφοί). In the Gospel of John, which rarely employs the sibling metaphor, Jesus in 20:17 tells Mary to “go to my brothers (ἀδελφούς) and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Here, John in a similar way to Matthew speaks of God as father, and the Christians (that is, the disciples) as his children and one another’s siblings. In addition, he also explicitly makes Jesus relate to them as siblings, they are his (μου) siblings. Heb 2:11–17 elaborates this even more: Jesus’ brotherly relationship to the Christians is justified by a reference to Ps 22:22 and Isa 8:17–18: “For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying: I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters (ἀδελφοίς μου). . . .” By their use of the ideas of a Christian siblingship and a “family of God” in combination, the New Testament authors have employed these metaphors in a way that very strongly underscores the mutual obligations of the Christians. Although the motivations do not occur in typically paraenetical passages, they nonetheless are likely to have served as a theological sounding board for the paraenesis of these authors.

Other motivations are more explicitly related to paraenetical texts, however. Many of these appeals are *christologically* motivated, with the Christians’ being in Christ (Rom 15:10; 1 Cor 1:10), with the meekness of Christ (2 Cor 10:1), and Christ’s love (2 Thess 2:13), and with the weak sibling being identified with Christ (Matt 25:40, 45; 1 Cor 8:12), particularly since Christ died for such a sibling (Rom 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11; 1 John 3:16).

In a number of instances, *eschatological* reasons are given, particularly with reference to the judgment on the day of the Lord (Matt 25:31–46; Rom 14:10–12; 1 Cor 5:5; 6:2–3, 9; 1 Thess 4:6; Jas 4:12).

Sometimes, the motivations are *generally theological*. They can refer to God’s love: one should love one’s siblings, since God “first loved us” (1 John 4:19–21; also 1 Thess 1:10; Jas 2:5) and has taught what sibling love is like (1 Thess 4:9). Or they can refer to God’s impartiality (Jas 2:1) or his mercy (Rom 12:1).

Occasionally, the exhortations are supported by *soteriological* motivations, such as the holiness of the Christians (1 Thess 4:3, 7), their baptism and

⁶⁷ For presentation and discussion of this, see Aasgaard 2004a, 19, 135–36, 145–49, 311; also Aasgaard 2004b.

justification (1 Cor 6:11; 1 Pet 1:23), and the position this puts them in as "aliens and exiles" in the world (1 Pet 2:11).

Sometimes, *Old Testament* passages and examples are employed to substantiate Christian siblingship and sibling love: Christ and the Christians are siblings (Heb 2:11–13; compare Ps 22:22; Isa 8:18), those who speak evil against a sibling speak against the law (Jas 4:11), and the frightening example of Cain's murder of his brother Abel (1 John 3:12).

As we can see, the manifold justifications are drawn from central areas of Christian thinking, such as christology, ecclesiology, and soteriology. By their use of such "strong" motivations, the authors tend to "christianize" the otherwise rather conventional contents of the paraenetical material. Whether such justifications primarily are a veneer or whether they play a central part in the paraenetical "thinking" of the New Testament, is not easily decided and must be considered in each instance. However, the latter often appears to be the case: in the texts, these theological elements have such a prominent position both in the literary structure and in the argument that they in intention and (probably) also in effect should be regarded as essential. Thus, such theological justifications should be given a place within the concept of New Testament paraenesis, in accordance with a functional view. Considering the emphasis on motivations and justifications in the paraenetical material, the understanding of Wendland and Dibelius appears too narrow and unsuited.⁶⁸ In fact, even within the injunctions they regarded as paraenesis proper these motivational elements take up a central position—even though these scholars and some who have followed them have paid little attention to this.

9. Discussion and Conclusions

It is now time to summarize and discuss some of the findings, and with particular attention to the definition of the Nordic paraenesis project. The most important inferences to be drawn from the presentation above are:

(1) A metaphorical usage of the sibling term was current and accepted within a broad range of early Christian groups, and appears to have formed a vital part of their self-understanding and their perception of their relations internally and vis-à-vis outsiders.

(2) The sibling metaphor occurs in various types of New Testament material which during the history of research have been considered to be paraenetical, and more often in these kinds of texts than in others. It is

⁶⁸ This concurs with Popkes 1996, 49.

frequently employed in the injunctions that traditionally have been regarded as paraenesis proper (Wendland, Dibelius, and their close followers). But it also plays an active part in material that has been viewed as paraenetical in a broader sense, such as texts discussing various moral issues and giving theological motivations and justifications (Thomas, Popkes, Malherbe, Perdue, Thurén).

This indicates that the idea of Christian siblingship is important within New Testament paraenesis, however paraenesis is defined. Indeed, the massive use of the sibling metaphor in many paraenetical passages shows that for various New Testament authors there existed a strong link between the concept of Christian siblingship and paraenesis: the two belong together.

It is worth noting, however, that the sibling metaphor occurs only rarely in the household codes, a material classified by Dibelius as paraenetical. A reason for this may be that they focus on other roles within the church or the family structure, and aim at preserving and strengthening traditional hierarchy rather than propagating more "brotherly" relationships (see for example 1 Tim 6:1–2).

(3) There also appears to be a close correspondence between idea(l)s generally associated with social siblingship and notions of Christian siblingship, of Christians as brothers and sisters "in the faith." Typical common features are the focus on emotional closeness, mutual love, harmony and unity, leniency as concerns differences in status and gender, loyalty vis-à-vis the outside world, willingness to forgive, and avoidance of passing judgment upon each other. Such notions associated with social siblingship are likely to have influenced considerably, but also to have corresponded closely to, the ways in which Christians perceived their relations, both as concerns attitudes and behaviour.

(4) The emotional tenor inherent in the sibling language must also have added significantly to the rhetorical-pragmatic strength of the paraenetical passages (as an appeal to pathos).

(5) Various theological motivations and justifications (based upon christology, eschatology etc.) occur frequently in the paraenetical texts. These elements serve to "christianize" the contents of the paraenetical material. Although they sometimes seem only superficially integrated, such motivations more often play an essential part in the texts. Thus, they should be viewed as vital elements within the concept of paraenesis—in accordance with the view of scholars such as Thurén and Popkes. Somewhat squarely stated, New Testament paraenesis is not only conventional advice, it is also Christian advice.

This aspect of motivation is not very clearly reflected in the definition of the paraenesis project, however. Possibly, it can be subsumed under the

expression about "a shared, articulated world view," according to which a (theological) justification can be understood as a concretization and articulation of a Christian "view." However, this is not sufficiently clear. The tentative definition of paraenesis would probably have profited from being more explicit on this point.

(6) Together, the various theological motivations and the social "pressure" of the sibling language make up a very efficient rhetorical strategy, in which the two support one another and mutually contribute to the strength and—probably—effect of the paraenetical language.⁶⁹ Such a combined strategy seems to play an important part in several paraenetical passages. This clearly speaks in favour of including a functional element within the concept of paraenesis, either in a more moderate form (Thomas), or in a more radical form (Popkes, Malherbe, Perdue). Thus, paraenesis cannot be meaningfully dealt with only as a form-critical genre in the vein of Wendland-Dibelius.

(7) Differently from the definition of the Nordic paraenesis project, it is my opinion that paraenesis is not only concerned with ethical and moral injunction ("moral practices"), but also—more broadly—with advice on how to think and believe. Thus, a distinction between ethical/moral and "other" advice is artificial, also as regards the material which scholars traditionally have viewed as paraenesis.⁷⁰ There is in the many New Testament injunctions a great variety of content, and it seems untenable that similarly structured exhortations such as to "do good" and to "persevere in prayer" should not both be regarded as paraenetical in character. Such an understanding of the contents of paraenesis is in agreement with that of Wendland and Dibelius.⁷¹ Thus, paraenesis is advice both to moral life and to spiritual growth: it aims at the total formation of the believers, of their attitudes and behaviour alike.

(8) From this follows that paraenesis is very much concerned with the building of identity—this aspect has also been strongly emphasized by scholars such as Malherbe, Perdue, and Thurén. Generally, the New Testa-

ment paraenesis presupposes that the Christians share a common self-understanding, and it also has such a (further) construction as its aim. As I have tried to demonstrate above, an important part of this identity construction has to do with the idea of Christians being a family or, more specifically, a siblingship. Thus, in New Testament paraenesis the Christians are repeatedly and constantly reminded of their identity as siblings, and exhorted to strengthen this identity.

In my opinion, this aspect of New Testament paraenesis does not come into its own in the tentative definition of the Nordic paraenesis project. The problematic part of the definition is—again—the expression about "a shared, articulated world view." In particular, the use of "world view" appears too imprecise. This may refer to a general world view (cosmology or ontology) or to a religious or philosophical standing (Christian faith as a shared belief system, see point [5] above); the latter is probably what is intended. But its wording ("world view") makes it difficult to see that it can also refer to a shared understanding of identity (anthropology and/or ecclesiology). And the identity aspect is in my opinion much more important in paraenesis than the cosmology/ontology aspect, and at least just as important as the belief aspect. Thus, a proper understanding of New Testament paraenesis should also involve the element of a shared identity. This self-understanding may build upon a number of elements, but is in the New Testament very often tied up with being a family, usually with being a siblingship.

(9) Thus, paraenesis may—in an attempt at a reformulation of the definition above—be described as "concise, benevolent injunction that reminds of attitudes and practices to be pursued or avoided, frequently with various ideological motivations,⁷² and that expresses a shared, articulated self-understanding and belief,⁷³ and that does not anticipate disagreement."

Although not all New Testament paraenesis belongs to the category of "advice to sisters and brothers," much of it does. Consequently, early Christian paraenesis, both in form and in content, can only be fully understood when it is also perceived to be "brotherly advice."

69 The effectiveness of this double strategy can be sensed in the discourse (probably reflecting a growing tension) that must have taken place between the positions of Philemon and of 1 Tim 6:1–2: Paul's appeal on the part of the slave Onesimus as a "brother" of his master, and the "pastoral" appeal to slaves not to oppose their Christian masters unduly, see Aasgaard 2004b.

70 It may be that "moral practices" is here to be interpreted very broadly, but the formulation is nevertheless too narrow both in its wording and its focus. It does not sufficiently correspond to the character of the New Testament paraenesis, and—possibly—also not to the understanding(s) and practice of paraenesis in non-Christian sources from antiquity.

71 Dibelius is not quite consistent, though; see above n. 2.

72 If such motivations can be included within "self-understanding and belief," this point can possibly be omitted. Within a Christian context the "ideological motivations" usually are of a theological kind, but they need not always be so.

73 "Belief" is to be understood very broadly, as including philosophical, religious, and other kinds of beliefs ("views of life").