

The
Significance
of the
Elterngebot

A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Investigation

**“Honor your father
and your mother”**

Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16

MONA LISA SIACOR

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The Significance of the *Elterngebot**:
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*The biblical commandment to honor parents,
in Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16.

MONA LISA SIACOR

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*For my parents, Elisa & Cirilo;
my ancestors, especially Lolo Jose;
my family, both nuclear and extended;
all my teachers and elders;
and Dr. Terry C. Dohm, friend and mentor.*

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE *ELTERNGEBOT*¹:
A BIBLICAL, HISTORICAL, AND SYSTEMATIC INVESTIGATION

PRELIMINARIES

A. *Existing Works on the Decalogue's Commandment to Honor Parents*

There are only a few scholarly books and articles that explicitly deal with the biblical commandment to honor parents. Even in as late as 1975 Judaistic scholarship had just for the first time produced and acquired a relatively extensive treatment of the topic.² A directly related subject, gerontology, or the study of the elderly, is overwhelmingly more predominant. While there are thousands of books and articles on the concerns of the aging members of western society,³ works that intentionally expound on the significance of the commandment to honor parents, here referred to as the *Elterngesetz*, with respect to the care of the elders is not as proliferate.

A major work on the *Elterngesetz* from the perspective of Christianity is that of Harry Jungbauer, "*Ehre Vater und Mutter*": *Der Weg des Elterngesetzes in*

¹ The biblical commandment to honor one's parents has a convenient German appellation, (*das*) *Elterngesetz*. (*Die*) *Eltern* is *parents*. (*Das*) *Gesetz* is *commandment*. *Das Elterngesetz* translates as *the commandment that pertains to parents*. *Elterngesetz* will sometimes be used in this dissertation, instead of "the commandment to honor one's parents," for the sake of convenience. The *Elterngesetz* is either the fourth or the fifth of the Ten Commandments depending on the tradition referred to. The same goes with the other commandments as to numbering. This will be shown using Table 1, further down. For this present work, "Fourth Commandment" is used, together with "Elterngesetz."

² Norman Lamm, "Editor's Foreword," in *Honor Thy Father and Mother: Filial Responsibility in Jewish Law and Ethics*, by Gerald Blidstein (New York, NY: KTAV, 1975), ix.

³ As of January 2017, the JenAge Information Centre (of the Sühnel Lab at the Leibniz Institute on Aging - Fritz Lipmann Institute (FLI) in Jena, Germany) alone lists 391 books on gerontology in its website. These books were published by at least 100 different mainline publishers on both sides of the Atlantic and more than 90% of these are more recent than 1999. Aside from books, 157 journals on gerontology are shown with links and 351 research papers are also identified (with information at this latter's webpage on where to look for the rest of the published papers on gerontology). The titles of the works that are accounted for here are in the following webpages, all accessed in January 30, 2017: <http://info-centre.jenage.de/ageing/books.html>; <http://info-centre.jenage.de/ageing/journals.html>; <http://info-centre.jenage.de/ageing/papers.html>. (Jena Centre for Systems Biology of Ageing [Germany], *JenAge Information Centre – Ageing – [links to] Books; Journals; Papers* (persons responsible, Rolf Hühne, Torsten Thalheim, & Jürgen Sühnel, webpage last updated October 8, 2012), <http://info-centre.jenage.de/about.html> (accessed 2017).

der biblischen Tradition.⁴ Done originally as a dissertation in 2001, it is an exegete's work revolving around the origins, receptions, and authority of the commandment to honor parents. The work comprehensively looks at materials from the period of the Old Testament right down to the Rabbinic⁵ literature—thus, the intertestamental literature, that of the Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism, those from Qumran, and of the New Testament are included.

Jungbauer's concern is on the relevance of the *Elterngesetz* to today's societal and familial order.⁶ The legitimacy of this commandment's authority in relevant situations today cannot be made clear unless there is an orderly understanding of its historical roots. Parents had always been figures of authority and thus the author asks, within the biblical perspective, how this authority had come to merge with the commandment to honor parents.⁷

However, it is also apparent that the *Elterngesetz* as literature does not elicit much attention nowadays despite the injunction's usefulness in certain areas of "therapy." This leads the author to ask also: "Under what conditions does the command have the 'motivational' force to determine behavior towards parents, and can it be expected from an exegetical point of view for this 'motivational' force to be reactivated for the present?"⁸ These concerns are very relevant when it is seen how many people today consider the commandment to honor parents as the biblical standard for the parent-child relationship and, despite that, how it has been relatively devalued by contemporary society.⁹

As alluded to earlier, an important work from the perspective of Judaism is Gerald Blidstein's *Honor Thy Father and Mother*.¹⁰ The focus of the work is analyzing the rabbinic discussions on the commandment to honor parents without too much emphasis on the historical perspective. Side by side with saying that the work is not a treatment on Jewish families, the author says, "I describe and analyze some norms that helped form the concept of what a family ought to be, on the one hand, and that expressed and reflected Jewish family ideals and realities, on the other."¹¹ True to the topic in focus, half of the work makes it clear how significant the aspect of responsibility on the part of the

⁴ Harry Jungbauer, "Ehre Vater und Mutter". *Der Weg des Elterngesetzes in der biblischen Tradition*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen [Germany]: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

⁵ That is, those of the earliest stages of rabbinic Judaism. The discussion is in Part 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 372-3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, translated from the German text.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Gerald Blidstein, *Honor Thy Father and Mother: Filial Responsibility in Jewish Law and Ethics* (New York, NY: KTAV, 1975).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xiii.

children towards parents is. The rabbinic literature on the commandment are examined and systematized. Blidstein makes it clear, however, that the rabbis themselves were not so proliferate in their writings about the commandment to honor parents. He says, “The attentive reader will note that entire conceptual structures are extrapolated out of single Talmudic statements; that medieval commentators rarely broach totally new areas of the topic; that codifiers barely go beyond the Talmudic sources themselves; that we rely heavily on the *responsa* literature because rabbis ruled in matters of filial responsibility only when asked, and even then the number of such questions is always very small.”¹² With the author’s understanding of how arguments are made and handled within the belief system, he offers the explanation that perhaps the rabbis understood the reality of variation within parent-child relationships, from one family to another, and that they thought caution was needed against any attempt at formulating “generalized rules.”¹³

This practice of exploring issues as they arise is reflected in the rabbinic discourses. One is in the *mishpatim* (“judgments”),¹⁴ which are injunctions that may or may not be in the Torah but are all together deemed important enough to be considered as virtually part of it.¹⁵ Another is the *halakhic* way of addressing issues, that is, “they deal with specific, concrete problems and set forth the way Jews ought to pursue” by using the specific questions that may arise together with the arguments that ensue based on the ethical and legal principles so that a new principle emerges.¹⁶ The second part of Blidstein’s work features the fruits of this collective quest for relevant guidelines. It explores questions concerning conflict of interests between adult children and their parents that may hinder the application of the commandment to honor parents. Indeed, these are issues that are not tackled in the Scriptures, such as the “extent of filial piety”¹⁷ that explores questions on limitations to the validity of the commandment to honor parents.

A third great treatment of the commandment to honor parents is Peter Balla’s *The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and Its Environment*.¹⁸ The author gathered observations based on representative materials¹⁹ that range from Classical Greece to the New Testament writings in

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 29.

¹⁵ Ibid., 27.

¹⁶ Ibid., xiv.

¹⁷ Ibid., 75-80.

¹⁸ Peter Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and Its Environment* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

¹⁹ Ibid., 9.

order to find out if Jews in Jesus' time were conformant to the society's general regard toward parents, that is, regardless of whether a person was a Jew or a non-Jew. His work is valuable material because, aside from the wide range of sources, at the end of his work he compressed his findings into a comprehensive presentation that makes it clear to see as to perspectives and categories of which a certain issue in the topic of children-revering-parents is being taken up.

The book has two parts. The preliminaries in Part I investigate the background against where Part II can be investigated. In Part I of the book, Balla investigated the factors involved in the adult children's actuations towards their parents in three different societal contexts that are directly related to or are immediate precursors of the early Christian era. He looked over literary materials and pointed out the commonalities found among these sources. His book did not aim at an "all-encompassing" survey but is rather concerned with the "norms shared by the authors."²⁰ He looked first at the category or era he demarcated as "From Homer to the End of the Greek Classical Period." This ranges from around 750 BC until 323 BC and includes the ancient Greek philosophers and writers. The second category is the era he demarcated as "Greek and Latin Sources from the Hellenistic Period to the Third Century AD." The literary materials here are from the time range of 323 BC down to 31 BC, and then beyond that, until right before the 300's AD. Finally, the third category is of the "Jewish Sources in the Centuries around the Turn of the Era." This latter chapter's discussions are based mainly on the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, on the writings of Philo and Josephus, and on the Qumran documents. A chapter is dedicated for each of these three demarcated historical categories and Balla condensed his narratives into three sets of tables found at the end of each chapter. There is a surprising close likeness between all corresponding tables.²¹

²⁰ Ibid., 229.

²¹ There are three short tables presented for each era. Reference to the "first tables" within the narrative points to each of the first tables for the three different areas that are being considered in the discussion; likewise for "second tables" and "third tables." Attention, therefore, is needed as to the locations of these tables within the book otherwise the reader gets lost in the narrative. This is simply a reflection of the amount of attention that the author has rendered to the discussion as required by the intricacy of the topic itself. The "first tables" are in pages 37, 77, and 110; the "second tables" are in pages 39, 78, and 111; and the "third tables" are in pages 40, 79, and 111. The first tables show the concrete acts that children follow to show honor to their parents while they are still alive and also in the event that they die. The second tables list down the reasons for and corresponding acts of showing respect to parents as perceived to be within either the divine or the human "sphere." The third tables indicate "limits," that is, the limitations where actions of honoring parents may be forgone due to these reasons. (Ibid., corresponding stated pages).

Part II of the book asks and answers the question, “Did the first Christians conform to the standard expectation and teach that children had a duty to honour their parents?”²² The early Christians were part of a society that expected children to honor their parents. The implied imperative was obedience to them and the concrete manifestations were taking care of the needs of the old parents as well as venerating the ones who had already died.²³

It turns out that, although in all three categories the perceptions of rendering respect to parents were generally similar, it was among the Jews where punishment for non-compliance was the gravest—the threat of the death penalty—while at the same time the expectation for compliance was at the highest level.²⁴ That is, parents were expected to be honored regardless of any factor aside from the absolute priority who is God. In summary, and after also taking materials from the New Testament, Balla concludes that around the time of the New Testament and of the early Christians, honoring one’s parents was prominently seen as the will of the gods. Children honor their parents with this belief underlying all their actions in fulfilling this duty. Nevertheless, reverence for the parents came next only to the reverence for the gods. Outwardly, the Jews showed respect to their parents in almost the same way as the Gentiles did in the communities where they lived together.²⁵ One significant feature of the Jewish faith that Balla’s work has shown is that for the Jews in Jesus’ time the Yahwist perspective and drive for revering parents had been maintained despite the strong influence of the concurrent pervasive worldview, that of the Greco-Roman, the origins of which extended back to at least seven centuries earlier.²⁶

Very noteworthy also is the work by Bohlen, *Die Ehrung der Eltern bei Ben Sira: Studien zur Motivation und Interpretation eines familienethischen Grundwertes in frühhellenistischer Zeit* (that is, “The Honoring of Parents in Ben Sira: Studies on Motivation and Interpretation of the Fundamental Value of Family Ethics in the Early Hellenistic Period”).²⁷ This monograph was a *Habilitationsschrift*, hence, thorough and exhaustive, that explored a known but barely-studied theme within Sirach, which is the honoring of elderly parents by adult children against the societal context that was Early Hellenism. The study made it clear how Sirach was heavily influenced by Hellenism.

²² *Ibid.*, 229.

²³ *Ibid.*, 228-9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 231-2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 229-30.

²⁷ Reinhold Bohlen. *Die Ehrung der Eltern Bei Ben Sim: Studien zur Motivation und Interpretation eines familienethischen Grundwertes in frühhellenistischer Zeit*, Trierer Theologische Studien 51 (Trier: Paulinus Verlag, 1991).

Other works that deal with the theme of the commandment to honor parents are not as extensive as these ones mentioned, and these are not numerous as well, reaching only the length of an article or a chapter in a monograph. An important compilation of such is *Wohlfahrt und langes Leben: Luthers Auslegung des 4. Gebots in ihrer aktuellen Bedeutung* (translated literally: “Welfare and Long Life: Luther’s Interpretation of the Fourth Commandment in Its Current Meaning”) by the Luther-Akademie Sondershausen-Ratzeburg.²⁸ These are several pastoral messages and academic lectures by members of the Luther-Akademie Sondershausen-Ratzeburg during their conference in 2008 that also marks the association’s 75th anniversary.²⁹ These talks, as the title suggests, reflect on Luther’s interpretation of the *Elterngebot* and are set against varied contemporary social concerns that are of interest to each of the authors. They address some of the present issues that have to do with valuing the elderly members of society, which starts from the generation of parents on to that of the grandparents and great-grandparents. Now appearing as articles in this monograph, each explore areas of social life that address concerns over “welfare and long life” (or wellbeing and long life, for *Wohlfahrt und langes Leben*), a phrase that is taken from the promise in the biblical commandment to honor parents and which is also the theme of the conference.³⁰

As summarized by one of the articles in the monograph, Luther’s interpretation of the 4th commandment features the importance of the following aspects: (1.) the reverence or worship of God, (2.) the provision and care for parents, (3.) how the Christian family life is represented before the world, (4.) the remembrance of one’s own origin, (5.) the promise of fullness of life, (6.) the positioning of the individual and family life within an overarching social structure, and (7.) the duty of parents, and of other individuals and institutions of similar function, to educate the consequent generation.³¹ With these features of the commandment to reflect on, the relevance to present society is not always obvious. This is especially so when it comes to the valuation of the elderly in society. Considering that society gives value to humans through the economic

²⁸ Friedrich-Otto Scharbau, ed. *Wohlfahrt und langes Leben: Luthers Auslegung des 4. Gebots in ihrer aktuellen Bedeutung*, Luther-Akademie Sondershausen-Ratzeburg, Band 5 (Erlangen [Germany]: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 2008).

²⁹ Hans Mikosch, “75 Jahre Lutherakademie Sondershausen-Ratzeburg: Ein Grußwort,” in *Wohlfahrt und langes Leben*, 24-5.

³⁰ Torleiv Austad, “75 Jahre Luther-Akademie: Geschichte und Aufgaben,” in *Wohlfahrt und langes Leben*, 26ff., esp. 27.

³¹ This enumeration is almost a translation of the German text. (Christof Landmesser, “Individualität und Sozialität: Perspektiven biblischer Theologie zur Intergenerationalität,” in *Wohlfahrt und langes Leben*, 49.

perspective, the challenge is great in integrating the less “economically useful” so that there is no discrimination directed towards them that comes both by way of the social environment and by a lowered self-esteem. The economic perspective that is advocated by society gives more value to those who could earn wages, particularly to those who earn better, and a lower value to the less able, less educated, or less skilled. This valuing is still lower for those who cannot work and earn anymore.³²

The 2008 conference of the Luther-Akademie Sondershausen-Ratzeburg was able to discuss such complex problems through a particular perspective that is hardly considered in common discourse but may yet prove to be a solution for society’s relational concerns. The older generation, particularly the elderly, can have an impact in society when the sense of the commandment to honor parents is heeded, so that the elderly are integrated into the daily lives of the younger generation, perhaps by mentoring, with themselves realizing also that their active relational participation in society may be of value that is definitely higher than what the economic perspective renders to categorizations of individuals based on “usefulness.”³³

³² Edgar Thaidigsmann, “Achtung und Bildung: Aspekte einer religionspädagogisch reflektierten Theologie,” in *Wohlfahrt und langes Leben*, 112-3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 125-127.

B. The Objective of This Investigation

With this dissertation we investigate how the Decalogue's injunction to honor parents was treated or applied throughout the history of the direct recipients of the Judeo-Christian teachings. This means treating biblical Israel first as the roots, next the Greco-Roman context that contains the New Testament and other contemporaneous literature, then western Europe and through it to wherever western European influence can largely be seen today (e.g., the USA). With such an extremely wide scope, and while trying to situate the relevance of honoring parents throughout this course of history, backgrounds that deal with the general situation and then of the family are given priority. Nevertheless, not all angles and all aspects or details could be included, so that at best it is an attempt to get a broad sketch of how the Decalogue commandment to honor parents had fared ever since Christianity took off from Palestine. There is no assumption, however, that any generation's treatment of parents and the elderly is a direct effect of how the commandment to honor parents is being taught at that historical point. That is, taking care of one's elderly parents is considered as part of the natural law, and so universal, regardless of the historical perspective. This work in no manner suggests that the way western European adult children treat their parents with honor and respect is dismal. On the contrary, it can be easily verifiable that European studies regarding the care for parents in special circumstances as well as for the elderly are far from scarce, which is all under gerontology, as mentioned above. What this work has tried to do is to trace what has happened to the commandment to honor parents, so to speak, in order to gain insights of its relevance to our present context.

INTRODUCTION

At the Sinai revelation God stipulated³⁴ to His people the ethical foundation of the Hebrew community covenanted to Him. Worshipping Him is necessarily manifested by the adherence to and the application of these ethical guides. It is interesting that in the Decalogue the parents are the only personages besides God specifically mentioned to be honored. This commandment follows immediately after the ones pertaining to the worship of God, relegating the honoring of parents in a position of importance.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment is, his answer was:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Mt 22:37-40)

If this passage is the totality of all the Laws, then the leaving off of the specific mention of parents implies that it is incorporated either in the first part, “love the Lord your God,” or in the second part, “love your neighbor.” However, man’s loving God implies his obeying all of God’s precepts. The citation of the second part, “love your neighbor,” is somewhat redundant. This is perhaps allowing for the fact that man is prone to overlook this utmost manifestation of loving God.

Since the first part has the Divine as the object, human parents do not fit in this category. Thus, it belongs to the second. The urgency of honoring parents is downplayed when parents are incorporated as among one’s “neighbors,” where a neighbor being just another person as oneself is. Yet the stipulation is to honor one’s parents, carrying with it the function to render to them a higher priority than to oneself. If we consider the command to honor other persons as well aside from one’s parents, what, then, is the difference between honoring the one and the other?

It is not only the descendants of Abraham who know how to honor parents. Indeed, we have not heard of a culture where people do not honor parents. Yet around the world and throughout history the way aged parents are treated by their adult children comprises a wide spectrum. Though no culture

³⁴ A transitive verb here, to specify something, such as a condition, when making an agreement or an offer.

today can be categorically described as not honoring parents, the fact is that for many individuals the honoring of their parents is not placed among the priorities in their lives.

In a 2004 article in a Bible study website four factors were cited that lead to the tendency of “undermining” the honoring of parents in the U.S.A.:

- 1.) *There is the impact of technology.*
- 2.) *Because of the rapid increase of divorce, children are often called upon to honor one parent and to despise the other.*
- 3.) *If it is possible to pin the blame for our problems on someone else, it is also easy to pin the responsibility of caring for aging parents on someone else.*
- 4.) *Honor is due to more than just parents.*³⁵

Not long ago an article in an online British newspaper said of the famous actress Dame Judi Dench, “Judi Dench has lambasted ‘inhumane’ care homes, suggesting families should take in elderly relatives instead. [...] The sight of pensioners being left with little to keep their minds busy was, she said, particularly distressing – and a prospect that made her desperate to carry on working.”³⁶ In many countries now the care of elderly parents, pensioners, is a situation involving many issues, such as psychological and economic. The two illustrations above may serve to show that if only a perfect way can be found then the honoring of the elderly is rather hoped to be more satisfactorily met than it is being done now. The present dissatisfaction in many parts of the world in this area somehow suggests that the act of honoring parents is a fundamental consistency of being a human. It has been found out that there is a generally high respect for old people among so-called primitive populations around the world.³⁷ In particular, there was a research conducted among 71 people or tribes 16 in North America, 10 in Central and South America, 14 in Africa, 3 in Europe, 16 in Asia, and 12 in Oceania and Australia.³⁸ Without defining the term “primitive,” the study implies that these are people who possess societal and cultural traits that are not prevalent in industrialized settings such as hunting-gathering, shamanism, or the chiefdom in governance.³⁹ There is evidence that in “primitive” societies in different parts of the world the elderly are assured of

³⁵ Bob Deffinbaugh, “18. Between Child and Parent – Honoring Father and Mother (Exodus 20:12),” in *Bible.org* (May 13, 2004), <http://bible.org/seriespage/between-child-and-parent8211honoring-father-and-mother-exodus-2012> (accessed February 6, 2012).

³⁶ Liz Thomas, “Dame Judi hits out at ‘inhumane’ care homes: We should let our elderly live with us, says actress,” in *Mail Online* (January 31, 2012 [last updated]), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2094122/Dame-Judi-Dench-hits-inhumane-care-homes-We-let-elderly-live-us.html?ito=feeds-newsxml> (accessed March 29, 2017).

³⁷ Leo W. Simmons, *The Role of the Aged in Primitive Society*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1945), 51ff.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2-6.

care by younger family members. This care is present regardless of cultural differences among the different peoples.⁴⁰ Moreover, the old people in such societies do play active cultural roles in their communities despite their physical frailties. As such, they get to maintain a position of importance in the general scheme of things in their community.⁴¹

The Talmud describes specific ways of showing honor to parents. These actions aim at maintaining the dignity of elderly parents as they advance in age. Indeed, different communities around the world show honor to parents in varied ways. Anthropologically it may be seen that cultures keep on influencing each other. Only a few have remained isolated, even those whose ways no study about is yet available. Soon all cultures around the world will have influences coming from all over the globe, and especially that man has the propensity to keep on inventing in all aspects of living. Changes will just continue to come.

The Bible is the most important literary work to many in the world. In 2010, it is reported that 31.7% of the world population are Christians.⁴² People, both as groups and as individuals, have differing perceptions of messages originating from the Bible. Still, constructs within this body of literature as we have it now is something that will remain constant, unless something astoundingly special happens that will modify the canon. Hence, looking at specific actions done by adults in the Old Testament toward the honoring of parents can be an important consideration in affecting how future generations of the varied cultures in the world will evolve with the times in relation to their valuation of parents.

This topic is relevant to this author's existential context in her country, the Philippines, that has the world's 6.9% of Roman Catholics.⁴³ In contrast, Italy has only 4.6% of the world's Roman Catholic population. For more than 300 years Roman Catholic Spain colonized the Philippines. Immediately after, American Protestantism came and had an enormous influence as well. Their impacts are most clearly seen in how the Filipinos' religiosity has evolved into its present unique form. Though for five centuries now the Philippines has been very strongly influenced by the Latin tradition of the church, and though it is hardly isolated from globalization, the Filipino's underlying worldview has not been radically "westernized," so to say. One pervasive cultural feature that it has which is similar to the biblical Hebrew's or ancient Israelite's is the constancy of

⁴⁰ Ibid., 177-216, esp. 215.

⁴¹ Ibid., esp. 216.

⁴² Pew Research Center—Religion & Public Life, *Global Christianity* (December 19, 2011), <http://features.pewforum.org/global-christianity/map.php#/global,ALL> (accessed February 14, 2012).

⁴³ Ibid.

the sense of community. This is one of the bases around which a Filipino's actions in society revolve. Another strong cultural characteristic is the notion of the Absolute God whose being is something simply accepted, comfortably, and His existence not thought to be questioned at all.

But now it looks as if still faster changes are taking place. Globalization is making the world smaller every day. Though until today in many societies in the world the honoring of parents is still an important component of morality, the popular view is that the younger generation is not anymore as respectful towards the elderly as it was in generations past. In the Philippines, the respect for the elderly is so basic that by consequence children are taken for granted to be ready to make "sacrifices" for their parents' welfare. Yet although this is the ground assumption, the present times have seen children acting dishonorably toward their parents in various ways. Nevertheless, this, too, is a propensity of man as evidenced by the various ways that the Bible has spoken of punishments for children who dishonor their parents.

The result of global upheavals that accelerated after the Industrial Revolution will continue to shape global ethos so much so that the Philippines' and all other people's traditional ways will continue to evolve into new forms. Many forces continue to shape and are in turn shaped by values. If the honoring of parents is such a fundamental part of a human being's set-up, then unchanging references of this phenomenon must be recognized. Such a reference can be acknowledged in the Old Testament. Although the Hebrew culture was as unique as the rest are, it is through it that God is believed to have communicated to man in a particular way. How biblical Israel's children are seen to have shown honor to parents will continuously convey messages to the present world for as long as man thrives. However, there is a very wide historical and cultural gap between ancient Israel and the modern world. It would be helpful, therefore, to include brief discussions of several societal circumstances along the historical line to serve as reference points on which the continuity or the discontinuity of the Sinaitic commandment to honor parents may be commented.

The Significance of the *Elterngebot*
A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Investigation

by Mona Lisa Siacor

This book looks into how the Decalogue's injunction to honor parents was treated or applied throughout the history of the direct recipients of the Judeo-Christian teachings. This means treating biblical Israel first as the roots, next the Greco-Roman context that contains the New Testament and other contemporaneous literature, then western Europe and through it to wherever western European influence can largely be seen today. With such an extremely wide scope, and while trying to situate the relevance of honoring parents throughout this course of history, backgrounds that deal with the general situation and then of the family are given priority. At best it is an attempt to get a broad sketch of how the Decalogue commandment to honor parents had fared ever since Christianity took off from Palestine. There is no assumption, however, that any generation's treatment of parents and the elderly is a direct effect of how the commandment to honor parents is being taught at that historical point. That is, taking care of one's elderly parents is considered as part of the natural law, and so universal, regardless of the historical perspective. What this work has tried to do is to trace what has happened to the commandment to honor parents, so to speak, in order to gain insights of its relevance to our present context.

— from the book

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