

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL DESCRIPTION OF THE AFRICAN FAMILY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter intends to spell out the present context of the researcher more clearly. From the vantage point of an African socio-descriptive approach, it is imperative to come to terms with the family in Africa. In this regard the family as “reality”, that is, the family of flesh and blood with its values, roles, peculiar forms of interaction, etc., will be investigated. Oduyoye (1991:466) attempts to describe the African family and maintains that “the traditional African family is an ever-expanding, outward-looking community structured as concentric circles in which relationships are moderated by conviction. The cohesion of the African family and the quality of relationships expected has become the basis of the whole society.”

Kayango-Male and Onyango (1984:1) point out that although families throughout the world do have similarities, the African students, lecturers and scholars often find Western textbooks on the family unsuitable for a full understanding of the dynamics of African family life. The African family is a meeting place of natural and the supernatural. It is the core, nucleus and heart of the tribe, clan, community and also the nation. It is in the family where an individual experiences a sense of wholeness, harmony, prosperity and security. This same feeling is found in the individual clan in relation to the tribe or nation. This is the daily life of an African. The child and parent living in the community are expected to participate in the integral development of that community. The children

from different families are to work together for the welfare of the tribe. In the community, the child is expected to honour and respect every adult (Mönnig 1967:219).

Van Niekerk (1995:22) maintains that all the forces, which have raged against Africa, could not prevail against the African family:

“In Africa there is one institution that has consistently and spontaneously succeeded in the struggle against poverty: neither the Transitional Corporations, nor the Western colonial governments, nor the post-colonial African government, neither bigger nor smaller development projects; but the family.

Though the state of human and social development is critical, one cannot be blind to the numerous successes in various social fields in a number of African states. Nor should the role played by African religious, customs, traditions, and indigenous social structures, particularly the extended family, in protecting the social fabric, and in offering mutual support to many families and local communities be ignored.”

Kayango-Male and Onyango (1984:1-2) also underline the resisting nature of the African family. They say that the European and Arab contact with Africa initiated highly disruptive changes which also affected the family. For instance new economic systems changed family production systems, political actions led to forced labour, racial segregation and alienation of land - all of which had implications for

family life and religious proselytization altered the symbolic meaning for family life. Slave trade was justified by racist ideas which of course assumed that Africans had no meaningful family life, no culture and no civilisation, but all of these racist notions, and many other factors put together could not destroy the coherent nature of the African family. It is not only in the biblical sciences where such observations on the African family is made, but also in other theological disciplines. Müller and van Deventer (1998:260) indicate the crucial nature of understanding the African family in pastoral counselling:

"All spheres and dimensions of our land and lives are increasingly permeated by "the African way", which, contrary to popular perception, does not merely consist of a string of strange customs and interesting rituals, but is in fact a manner of being. Growing consensus exists among black and white African theologians, religionists, philosophers and other scientists that, in the midst of numerous variables, a dominant cosmological view of life and of the world prevails in Africa."

Müller and Van Deventer (:260) further state that this type of African cosmology can be observed in several examples, but is profoundly actualised in family dynamics, e.g. the Venda muta. The muta, therefore, as cosmological family spiral both integrates and enhances the predominantly Western understanding of the meaning of concepts such as family life, family pathology, family care and counselling and the place and role of the pastoral family therapist.

The current chapter endeavours to explore African family values. In chapter two the cosmology and the African values in general were stated and discussed. It was adequately argued that these African values could and should be utilised by those reading the Bible in an African context. This chapter looks specifically at how the African family values could enable Africans to relate to the text, the biblical message and the gospel. Like the Romans and the Jews (cf chapter 4), the Africans have a conception and experience of family. Furthermore, like any other community in the world, Africans have their own salient rules such as concerning the obligations of spouses towards each other and of parents towards their own children, rules which govern the co-operation of daily life and expressed support by a system of values enshrined in religious belief (Mair 1969:1). The nature of the family, the role of the father and mother, marriage and place of children will be discussed.

3.2 The nature of the African family

Research indicates that there is a general agreement on the point that the elementary level of the sociology of the African family is what is usually referred to as the family unit or in the words of Mbiti (1990:105), “the family at night” (see also Mair 1969:1). Kuper (1964:88) has done an extensive research on the kinship relations amongst the Swazi people of Southern Africa. She maintains that:

“The starting-point of Swazi kinship system - the “elementary family” of father, mother and child - depends as in all societies on a recognition of a social relationship which may or may not coincide with a physical tie. The Swazi say, “a child is one blood with its father and its mother.”

Ashton (1967:18) maintains that the basic family group among the Basuto is the biological family of parents and children. Nzimande (1987:31f) studies the development of the family structure of the ethnic groups in South Africa. She, like the others, maintains that the initial phase in this structure is what is known as the nuclear type family. This is what can be loosely known as the biological family. This small family unit provides for its own economic and emotional support among its members. In other words in the vast network stretching laterally (horizontally) in every direction, to embrace everybody in any given tribe or nation, “the family at night” is seen as an initial stage (see also Preston-Whyte 1974:177).

Although this family unit, the husband, his wife and the unmarried children is residentially separate, it does not normally sever ties and relations with the families of origin and other significant relatives. This is what is commonly known as the extended family.

Nzimande (1987:32) contends that the African concept of the extended family is based on the rules governing the kinship structure in a society, which make it possible for certain categories of people to live together and regard each other as family members. The common extended family structures might either be vertical, in a multigenerational link-up, or horizontal, when married brothers of the senior agnate join their families to his household. Another dimension of the extended family system is that of the plural marriages. The man has more than one wife, and all wives and their children are accommodated in the same household.

Kayango-Male and Onyango (1984:6) maintain that the most significant feature of African family life is probably the importance of the larger kin group beyond the nuclear family. Inheritance is commonly the

communal variety wherein the entire kin group own the land. In many parts of Africa, for instance, the bridewealth is still paid to the family of the bride, with the resulting marriage linking the families rather than simply the bride and the groom. Conflict between husband and wife is mediated by relatives instead of being sorted out privately by the couple. Thus, members of the extended family still have a lot of say about the marriages of their younger relatives. These family members are also linked in strong reciprocal aid relationships, which entail some complex rights and responsibilities. Households in rural and urban areas have extended kin members living close to them or far away. The relatives may or may not be contributing financially in terms of helping in the division of the family labour, yet they are allowed to remain. Children may go and stay with distant relatives for schooling or special training courses. Relatives also have much influence over the decisions of the couple.

In identifying the nature of the extended family, Nyirongo (1997:127) refers to the inner-circle (family unit) and a broader circle. The extended family is the broader circle of the African family structure for example, my father's brothers are also my fathers and my mother's sisters are also my mothers. My father's sons are my brothers and my mother's sister's daughters are my sisters. One must also be able to trace one's aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, grandparents, great grandparents and ancestors. This network of relationships is so vital to the African that grandparents carefully instruct children to trace "backgrounds" concerning who is who in the whole genealogy. To fail to trace one's genealogy is not just bad manners but, a betrayal of one's true identity.

Mbiti (1969:104) says that the kinship system is very much peculiar to Africa. Oduyoye (1991:469) maintains that maybe, something next to it in the West is family life in the rural areas where livelihood is rested in agriculture. Like Nyirongo, above, Mbiti (1969:104) says that in the African extended family "...each individual is a brother or sister, father or mother, grandmother or grandfather or cousin, or brother in law, uncle or aunt, or something else, and there are many kinship terms to express the precise kind of relationship pertaining between individuals. When two strangers meet in a village, one of the first duties is to sort out how they may be related to each other and having discovered how the kinship system applies to them. They behave to each other according to the accepted behaviour set down by society."

Van Niekerk (1997:4) submits that the extended family holds the key to the solution of many of Africa's problems. Murray in this regard (1980:101) states that:

"...we cannot forget that the African cultural heritage enshrines a broader, more noble concept of family than that of the West. The extended family has proved a marvelous security for those for whom, otherwise, there was no security at all. The extended family is a net wide enough to gather the child who falls from the feeble control of neglectful parents, it receives the widow, tolerates the batty, gives status to grannies."

Harden (1994:66) gives a report of a meeting of African Ministers responsible for human development in their countries. The conference

was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia February 20-21, 1994. The ministers stressed the crucial role of the African family:

“The failure of the state left a void, and the extended family filled it. The most dramatic filling of the void occurred in 1983, when neighboring Nigeria, in a fit of xenophobia, ordered the expulsion of more than 1,3 million Ghanaian workers. The mass deportation could not have come at a worst time. Unemployment was at a record high, most crops had failed, and a worst-of-the-century drought had triggered bush fires that burned out of control across much of the country. Hunger and malnutrition were widespread. It was as if 20 million penniless immigrants had poured into the United States - within two weeks - at the height of the Great Depression. Anticipating social upheaval and fearing mass starvation, Western relief agencies drew up emergency plans to erect feeding camps. Foreign journalists descended en masse to chronicle the expected suffering. Within two weeks, however, the deportees disappeared, absorbed back into their extended families like spilled milk into a new sponge. What was potentially the greatest single disaster in Ghana’s history was defused before foreign donor or government policy makers could figure out what to do about it.”

Nzimande (1987:34ff) maintains that the extended family provides an important support system in the structure of the African family. It provides emotional support that is described as “information that we cared for and loved”.

In an event of death striking in a family the whole extended family including the community rallies around the bereaved family. The sisters, aunts, and neighbors (women) sit on the mattress (laid on the floor - usually in the bedroom of the deceased). For the whole week, words of encouragement are expressed to the family. The church members hold evening services at the home affected before the funeral. On Friday before the funeral on Saturday, a nightlong vigil is held. Large crowds of people turn for the funeral. The family feels comforted by the presence of many people during such a time.

The other form of support characterising the extended family is to the widowed women and her children. Kayongo-Male and Onyango (1984:63) maintain that:

“At times of death, the children of the deceased are looked after by the extended family, often the uncles or aunts. The children brought into the household of relatives are treated equally with those of that household. This means that the children are given an equal chance to grow and develop and look after others in adulthood. When there are disputes in terms of marriages, land or inheritance, the members of the extended family participated in the reconciliation and, because they knew the family better, they were better judges of disputes than an outsider trying to resolve conflicts from a theoretical perspective.”

The use of the lobola money (bridewealth) in most African communities makes the woman virtually a lifetime member of her adopted agnatic kin. If and when she became widowed, she and her children remained under

the effective control of her deceased husband's agnatic kin. The African culture provides for the assured socio-economic support for herself and the children. She could even marry her husband's brother if she wished. Those who think that this is no longer practiced are wrong.

The support in the extended family is not only provided to the woman and her children. In an event where in the "nuclear" family the male spouse becomes incapacitated, or rather the family becomes needy for some reason or the other, it becomes the responsibility of an able brother or relative in the extended family to come to the rescue.

The significant role of the extended family is also seen in the support and protection of the aged. Seniority in age is revered. The aged are accorded a place of honour and in the lineage of the hierarchy. This ensures that they are not relegated to the background, and that they did not run the risk of not being cared for. In some African cultures they are even venerated as ancestors whilst still alive.

The African concept of family does not only end with the "nuclear" and extended families. The family goes beyond that. This reality is adequately chronicled by Mpolo (1985:318):

"In Africa the "dead" are part of the family. They do not represent hostile powers whose malevolent influences must be neutralised by magical rites. Neither are the dead to be excluded from events in the life of the clan. Their presence is truly experienced as the participation of the invisible beings in the world of the living. The libations and offerings of food made to the dead are marks of respect and fraternity

in a cultural context in which communication with the invisible realm is an aspect of the total, lived reality. If the “worship” of the ancestors is not to be confused with the “worship of spirits,” it is precisely to the extent that the community seeks in its customary life a quality of communication in which those who have departed on before are far from having “disappeared”; they continue to be part of the life and experience of the family."

Mbiti (1969:105) further elucidates this stark reality:

“The kinship system also extends vertically to include the departed and those yet to be born. It is part of traditional education for children in many African societies, to learn the genealogies of their descendants. The genealogy gives a sense of depth, historical belongingness, a feeling of deep rootedness and a sense of sacred obligation to extend the genealogical line. Through genealogies, individuals in the sasa [present] period are firmly linked to those who have entered into the Zamani [sphere of the dead]”.

Theron (1996:29), working as a missionary amongst blacks in Southern Africa has observed the same:

“The belief in ancestral spirits is perhaps the primary focus of African traditional religion (ATR). It is also closely related to the family, authority and power structures in African society. The ancestors are in an ontological position

between the other spirits and human beings, as well as between the Supreme Being and human beings.”

How is the departed regarded as part of the family? Thorpe (1991:39) maintains that among the Zulu, the ukubuyisa idlozi ceremony (bringing home of the spirit ceremony) is held by the deceased's descendants six months or a year or even two after his death. A ritual feast is held. The deceased's eldest son and the men who hold positions of authority in the tribe preside over this ceremony. A cow or other animals is sacrificed and selected portions are given to the collective ancestors by placing them in the sacred area reserved for the amadlozi (Zulu word for ancestors) at the back of the hut. The recently deceased's name is included in the praise list of ancestors at this time and he/she is called upon to take his/her place among the protectors and defenders of his/her line (see also Daneel 1973:53f; Hammond-Tooke 1974:328; Oosthuizen 1977:273).

The ancestors are involved in the life of individuals and family. Their influence is usually applicable only to the direct descendants. The ancestral spirits appear to family members in dreams or visions or even in the forms of certain animals. For instance in the case of the Zulu, the appearance of a snake could be interpreted as a visit from an ancestral spirit. The ancestral spirits appear to the family to warn them against danger, or to reprimand them because they neglected certain duties towards the ancestor. In such a case the matter is rectified by offering sacrifices to the ancestor. These can take the form of food, beer or an animal. The ancestors are venerated in order to protect the family. They can also cause misfortune or illness. They do this when they are angry, and withdraw their protection. People can ask the ancestors for help or

advice. This can be done by an individual himself/herself or through a specialist like a medium.

3.3 Marriage

The African marriage, more like the Western practice, is a contract or association between two persons for mutual support and the furtherance of the human race and rearing of children. But in Africa marriage has a wider aspect of an alliance between groups of kin. Any marriage is a matter of interest not only of the “family unit” but to a wider circle of relatives, particularly the members of the lineage of each. Every marriage requires the consent of some senior person, sometimes not even the nearest male relative but the lineage head (Mair 1969:4).

Mbiti (1969:133) maintains that in the African culture everyone must get married. He endeavors to highlight the dimensions of an African marriage and he says that:

“Marriage is a complex affair with economic, social and religious aspects which often overlap so firmly that they cannot be separated from one another.”

For African people, marriage is the focus of their existence. It is the point where all the members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born. All the dimensions of time meet here, and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalised. Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator. Therefore, marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone must

participate. Otherwise, he who does not participate in it is a curse to the community, he is a rebel and a lawbreaker, and he is not only abnormal but 'under-human'. Failure to get married under normal circumstances means that the person concerned has rejected society and society rejects him in return.

Krige (1962:20f) uses two expressions to explain the marriage amongst the Zulu- "rite de passage" and "rapprochement". It is "rite de passage" in the sense that both the boy and girl are transferred from the group of the unmarried to that of the married. For the girl, however, it is a double transition, for she has to be loosened from her own group and incorporated into that of the husband. Marriage is also far more than a transition for the girl and boy, it is a gradual rapprochement of the two sibs, that of the boy and that of the girl, and there are actions and reactions between the two groups in order to produce a feeling of friendship and stability.

The African marriage is also, therefore, characterised by "rivalry". The tension is manifested by the first visit of the bridegroom's delegation to the bride's home to break the news of their son's interest in their daughter. On arrival, the bridegroom's party is given a cold shoulder. In some cultures the bride's relatives refuse to talk to their counterparts until the bridegroom's group has paid the vulumlomo (literally meaning the money to open the mouth i.e. to make them to speak).

The African marriage also means the loss of a member of a family to another. This loss disturbs the equilibrium between the two groups, and this has to be put right by giving in return of something else of great value in the lives of the people. Hence the bridewealth or passing of

cattle from the group of the boy to that of the girl. A Zulu father in giving his consent to the marriage in the old days usually said; “people of such and such a sib, you have stabbed me,” i.e. injured him and his sib and the giving of a daughter in marriage was not a joyous occasion. Therefore, in the words of a Zulu, something had to be done to soften the blow, and the other sib thus brought with it a number of valuable possessions, consisting of cattle or hoes to present to the relatives of the girl. Their motive in giving these presents was to obtain the friendship of the girl’s family (Krieger 1962:120-121).

Having children is considered as a validating factor in the African marriage. In Africa a married woman who does not produce children feels very much miserable. The agonies of being childless are so immense that the woman stops at nothing to help herself bear children. Mbiti (1975:86) captures the depth of such misery, pain and despair in this prayer articulated by a childless woman in Rwanda:

O Imana (God) of Rwanda
If only you would help me!
O Imana of pity, Imana of my father’s home (country)
If only you would help me!
O Imana ... if only you would help me just this one!
O Imana, if only you would give me a homestead and
children!
prostrate myself before you ...
I cry to you: Give me offspring,
Give me as you give to others
Imana what shall I do, where shall I go!
I am in distress: where is the room for me

O merciful, O Imana of mercy, help this once.

Uka (1985:190) also says that amongst the Africans the problem of childlessness is a very serious one:

“Hence every newly married couple look forward to having a child or children shortly after nine months of marriage, believing that they extend their life and immortalise their names especially through their male children. Children are the glory of marriage and in most African societies with a rural agricultural base, having many children is a highly prized achievement. This is one of the potent reasons why marrying more than one woman was upheld. Also providing many children provided a man with an enhanced social stature and much needed labour force. In fact parents laboured to train their children in order that they might support them when they became old, weak and incapable of looking after themselves.”

In order to address the problem of childlessness in marriage and also in the spirit of the extended family, we shall discuss levirate system and sorology.

3.3.1 Polygyny

Polygyny has been widely practiced in Africa, and had important functions. In situations where the wife could not have children, the husband could marry another wife. Besides, this reason the African man tends to enjoy having more than one wife as it is the measure of wealth.

The African man does not only value variety, but he also needs many people to work on his land and marrying many wives satisfied this need (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984:64f).

Although getting married to two or more wives is a custom found all over Africa, in some societies it is less common than in others (Mbiti 1969:142). It is inaccurate to generalise that polygyny has been widespread in Africa. The following statistics serve to illustrate this fact. Dr Livingstone made a count in 1850 in a Tswana village of Kae. Out of 278 married men 43% had more than one wife, 94 men had 2, 24 had 3 wives and only 2 had four wives. In more recent times in Venda (a vast district in the Northern Province) a few of the ordinary people have more than 2 or 3 wives and headmen rarely more than 6. Amongst the Swazi in Swaziland, polygyny is imposed by status, and that a commoner who has more than 5 or 6 wives wakens the enmity of less successful men. In what is today called Lesotho, in 1912, one man in every 5,5 had more than one wife and one in 27 more than 2 (See Mair 1964:10ff; Kuper 1964:88ff).

Although polygyny has been discouraged by those who maintain that it causes jealousy and strife among the many wives, Mbiti (1969:142) contends that this practice fits well into the social structure of traditional life, and also into the thinking of the African people, i.e. serving their useful purpose. Hillman (1975:114) also claims that sheer polygyny is culturally accepted and practiced as a form of marriage, it is usually done on the grounds of its socio-economic functions. Polygyny has therefore the economic, social and religious advantages.

3.3.1.1 Economic situation

If a man has more wives, and consequently more children, there could be more people to help with work, the tilling of the fields, the herding of the livestock, and the caring for the bigger household. This is of course in the light of the traditional subsistence economy where every family was responsible for producing its own food. The changing economic situation in Africa has not in anyway changed this practice. Wealthy men still marry more than one wife. We have in South Africa top people such as Cabinet ministers and University professors especially in Kwa-Zulu Natal married to more than one wife. Another economic factor involved in polygynous marriages is acquiring the bride price. The bridewealth for a daughter raises the economic status of a man (the father). At the same time the acquiring of a daughter (daughter-in-law), who would give birth of sons benefits the receiving family economically (see Mbiti 1969:143; Theron 1996:53).

3.3.1.2 Social situation

Hillman (1975:115) maintains that “where the desire for as many children as possible is paramount, as it is in the family units of almost every African society, the practice of polygamy may be seen as an efficient means of realising socially approved goals and social ideals.” Theron (1996:534) claims that the practice of polygyny fulfils an important social function in the sense that the continued existence as well as the stability of the family is dependent on many descendants. It fosters the solidarity of the family and performs an integrating function in the kinship system. The extended polygynous family nurtures the unity of the whole

community, tribe or clan. The social standing of a man with a large family is enhanced, he enjoys esteem in the community.

A spinster who has passed a marrying age carries with her a negative stigma of not being married. Her family also shares in the shame of her singleness. In a society where polygyny is practiced, chances of having unmarried women is limited. Women stand the chance of self-fulfillment in marriage and also bearing children. In the polygynous household, the woman who does not have children can fulfil her motherly instincts towards the other children in the household. Furthermore, due to the several sexual taboos, such as refraining from sexual intercourse at certain times such as during menstruation, before and after childbirth, there is no need for the husband to turn to prostitutes or have extra-marital affairs. Most of Africa have being affected by migrant labour system. Husbands left their homes and families (in rural areas) for a very long time. These men would have two families. One in the urban area and the other one at home (at the village) (Mbiti 1969:143; Hillman 1975:122-126; Theron 1996:54).

3.3.1.3 Religious function

Polygamy also plays a role in the ancestor cult. It is essential to have a great posterity in order to be remembered and venerated as the ancestor. If there are no descendants then the ancestor is forgotten and not venerated as an ancestor. (Mbiti 1969:134) maintains that the ancestor enjoys a state of personal immortality as long as he or she is remembered by the descendants.

3.3.2 Levirate system and sorority

The African levirate custom arises in the context where a man's brother dies leaving a wife and children. The widow and her children are given to the dead man's brother as husband and father respectively. This should be understood in the light of the nature of the marriage institutions. It has already been indicated that marriage involves the individual, but also many people in the lineage. Therefore, marriage is both personal and a social alliance. This practice is partly intended to protect the woman and her children and also serves to beget children in cases where a man died leaving no children. Sorority (hlatswadirope - in Northern-Sotho) is a system where a wife is infertile or dies without giving birth. Then her sister or another female member close to her in the extended family, is sent to bring forth children for her. In an event of sterility, where the wife still alive, the marriage continues, and no bride price is paid for her sister or relatives (Preston-Whyte 1974:188; Falusi 1982:303; Theron 1996:57).

3.4 The status of the husband

In African society, in terms of the male and female roles, older and young people are accepted largely without question because these roles are seen as "natural", and supported by the ethnic myths of origin. The men are usually responsible for the harder physical work. In the rural setting they hunt and take care of the cattle. Furthermore in the family structure and the position and status of the father or husband is that of authority. He is the normative head", the emotional leader, the supporter and the one capable of doing anything. According to Krige (1962:23f) in the Zulu society the father is respected at all times. A man does not talk when his

father is present unless he is addressed, nor may he be free in his speech in his father's presence. The mother is less respected than the father. Usually a man can say anything he likes to his mother. But this does not mean that he does not love her. If he is in trouble, he goes to his mother who will use her influence with his father and put his case tactfully before him.

Kuper (1964:89) asserts that the wife and children are perceived to the man's greatest assets and for this reason polygyny is the ambition most frequently achieved by aristocrats and wealthy elderly commoners. The Swazi king for instance sets the pace. He is expected to take more wives than all his subjects. The previous monarch who was born in 1902 had more than 40 wives. Not only do the queens enhance his prestige and provide him with labour, but they are diplomatically selected from a wide range of clans which thereby drawn into in-law relationships with the royal family.

The position of the father is embedded in the Venda name for father-khotsi. The word literally means a king. The respect and the behaviour pattern towards the father in most African societies is extended to his relatives or family. Stayt (1968:172f) maintains that a man calls all his fathers brothers and the cousins whom his father call brother, in the male line, khotsi muhulu and khotsi munene which means great father (elder brother to the father) and little father (younger brother to the father) respectively. Krige (1962:25) says that in the Zulu customs, even the women who are related to the father's side are considered as fathers and behave to as such, whilst a man on the mother's side is taken to be of the same status as the mother. Since one brother is the equivalent of another,

all the brothers of the father stand to you in the relationship of the father. They are called “father” and must be treated as such.

3.5 The status of the mother

In the discussion of marriage and the status of the husband, the position of the woman in society has been alluded to. Mair (1969:7) maintains that the inferior status of women is evident in the practice of polygyny, child betrothal, levirate system and sorority, the heavy load of work allotted to her, the submissive behaviour expected of women towards their husbands and the generally recognised entitlement of husbands (in some cultures) to beat their wives. The bottom-line is that an assumption exists that the women should be treated at a lower level than the men and exploited, have little freedom of actions and receive no respect.

The traditional status of women in Africa is chronicled by Masenya (1994:39). She maintains that in African culture the father is the head of the family. As the head he is to be given honour by all members of the family, including the woman. As African woman and wife falls within the category of “children”, in the family settings, the decisions taken by the heads tend to be final. Some African proverbs reflect on their low status of women and the superiority of men. As an African girl grows, she is under the authority of her parents and confined only to the home under the care of her mother. In this setting, girls are therefore restricted in exercising their intellect and gifts if they go beyond the expected rules.

Mpumlwana (1991:383) has observed the same about girls and women.

“Women as mothers can influence the situation by instilling proper values of respect for and equality with other people regardless of race, sex, religion and culture. Most women bring up boys and girls so differently that they inherit these differences. Boys are made to feel stronger than girls, they are allowed more freedom, are given a better hearing than girls. As kids it is a shame for a boy to cry and grow up with those stereotypes. Girls on the other hand are made to feel that their role at home and in the society is not to think but to serve boys/men who are doing the thinking. Girls are prohibited from exercising their intellect and gifts if they go outside the expected arena. By the time the girls are big and they get married, they know that their role is: to serve their husbands with their bodies and strength i.e. cooking, washing etc. if a girl does not do that, she is regarded as abnormal.”

Okure (1999:3) also attempts to articulate the plight of the African woman. She maintains that though patriarchy takes different forms in different cultures, its fundamental belief is the same, that the man is superior by nature, born to rule in walks of life; the woman inferior, born to be ruled and to serve the man. Patriarchy in Africa is the norm and it expands with other forms of domination such as racism, sexism and classism. In Africa, for instance, the experience of racism is an asset for understanding the dynamics of patriarchy and sexism, particularly receives further concretisation in gender issues, society’s determination of distinctive roles for men and women, based purely on sex. The belief in man’s innate superiority and woman’s innate inferiority resulted in the exclusion and marginalisation of women in all walks of life.

The area of dominance for the women is the household chores (kitchen). These tasks involve cooking, beer making, sweeping, washing, fetching firewood and water etc. In these responsibilities they are assisted by their daughters, who at an early age begin to be trained in this regard. In some societies agriculture is also the responsibility of women, they till the ground, sow, weed and reap the crops and later grinding the corn or mealies for use (see Krige 1962:184).

Kuper (1964:93) contends that the etiquette of Hlonipha (respect or shame) amongst the Swazi is demanded from a wife in her husband's home. She is forbidden to use the names, or words similar to the principal syllable of names, of her husband's nearest senior male relatives - his father's father, his father, his father's senior brothers, his own senior brothers - those living and the dead. She may not eat certain foodstuffs such as milk and eggs. She is not expected to even catch a glimpse of the father-in-law or the uncle's coffin. There are also certain husband's cloths, which are not supposed to be touched. This is common amongst the adherents of the African Traditional churches.

The woman's status does not only consist of the negatives. Mbiti (1991:63ff) gives a positive perspective and maintains that the women are pictured as being extremely valuable in the sight of society. The proverb "wives and oxen have no friends", means that the wife is so valuable that she cannot be given over to even the best of her husband's friends to keep her as his own. Another saying denoting that the woman is the mother of life says "a woman must not be killed". This means that even an aged woman is a blessing to men. Another proverb goes: "it is better to be married to an old lady than to remain unmarried".

The positive status of women can also be seen at the manner in which certain women are treated. The wife to the King or Chief is regarded by the entire tribe (including the men) with respect and reverence. The Zulus refer to their queens as Indlovukazi (the she-elephant). Some tribes are ruled by women. Furthermore, the category of traditional healers called mediums are in most cases women. Some women play a critical role in society, for instance the Rain-Queen Modjadji in the Northern Province is said to be causing rainfall.

Kayango-Male & Onyango (1984:3) also portrays a plausible picture of women and maintains that she is the emotional leader in the home. Seeing that she is closer to the children from birth she is supposed to keep a “happy home”. The children (including the boys) are thus emotionally attached to their mother than to their father. The mother acts as mediator and negotiator with their father.

3.6 The children

Uka (1985:191) shows that children are regarded as very important in African societies. He maintains that according to the Yorubas of Nigeria, a child has three names:

The one who gives honour

The one who covers us more than cloth

The one who gives us the boldness to speak in a gathering

The high esteem in which children are held is reflected very much in the names given to them. For instance the Igbos of Nigeria give such names as:

Nwa ka ego	A child is more valuable than money
Nwa di uto	A child is sweet
Nwa di Iche	A child is special
Nwa di uko	A child is dear
Nwa bu ugwu	A child gives dignity (to parents)
Nwa di nma	A child is good
(Nwa bu) nkasi obi	A child gives consolation

The importance of children in marriage is seen in the practices already discussed - levirate and sorority. The children are protected even before birth. The health of the child is traditionally safeguarded by long periods of abstinence from sexual relationship during pregnancy and also when the child was breastfeeding. Among some African tribes it is believed that sexual intercourse spoils milk and harms the child (Kabwegye 1977:206; Ombuluge 1981:57; Kayango-Male & Onyango 1984:6).

In African societies, children start to help their parents at an early age. Although not necessarily overworked, they are expected to contribute through performance of tasks compatible to their age and sex. Children learn persistence, co-operation and many other values in addition to skills of the performance of the task. Female children appear to be more burdened than the males. In urban areas girls are expected to perform more household duties after school like cleaning the house, taking care of their younger sisters and brothers and also preparing the food sometimes.

The education of the children is supposed to be the responsibility of the parents. This task is not exclusively restricted to the child's own parents like the Westerners do. In Africa, as already demonstrated, the child grows up in an extended family or household where there are a number of adults and many older children. When he/she is small any of the women may take temporary charge of him/her and as he/she becomes older any of the adults may admonish him/her. He/she learns a great deal including respect for seniority from play with older children. Most of the necessary skills are acquired by watching elders and beginning to help them at a very early age (Mair 1969:2).

3.7 The African family and Christianity

The above discussion is a clear description of the system of the African family. The values underlying it were also indicated. The attempt has been to show how these family values can make a meaningful contribution in interpreting the New Testament text. This approach is part of and is aimed at making a contribution to the ongoing discussion of the importance of biblical studies within the scope of the African understanding of the Bible (Mbiti 1978:72ff; De Villiers 1993:23; Punt 1997:124).

Some of the questions occupying the exegetes working or reading the Bible in an African context are: "Can the New Testament message be appropriated in Africa? What is the relationship if any, between Africa and the biblical text, its historical setting or historical canonical fixing(s)? How can the biblical and African contexts be adequately dealt with?" These questions, including many others calls for an appropriate hermeneutic in an African context, which Onwu (1985:145ff) refers to it

as “the dilemma of an African theologian”. Punt (1997:139) maintains that the development of a hermeneutic, particularly suitable for the African reading of the Bible, depends to a larger extent on perceived relationship between Africa, its culture its pre-Christian religiosity (African traditional religions) and Christianity. The Euro-centric hermeneutic, approaches and paradigms developed by Anglo - European biblical scholarship can be applied in the African reading of the text, but the quest for a relevant African hermeneutic and exegesis belong to Africans themselves.

How then are family values as discussed throughout this chapter relevant to New Testament criticism? The concept, and experience which permeates the African family is that it is not restricted to the nuclear unit consisting of husband, wife and children. As already mentioned, in Africa the family has a wider circle of members including children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters who may have their own children and the other immediate relatives and even the departed (dead) relatives (see Mbiti 1990:104f; Shutte 1994:30; Mulemfo 1995:33). To an African, therefore, family is of utmost importance. It is a means of growth for its members and the interaction, companionship and conversation between growing and fully-grown members. It is in the family where one experiences a sense of wholeness, harmony, prosperity and security. This same feeling is found in the extended family.

This (African) conception of family and the community is to greater extent close to that of the first century Mediterranean world which is the life -world of the New Testament text (see chapter 2). The African group orientation (ubuntu) forms a social structural love as it was the case in the New Testament world. Malina, Joubert and Van der Watt (1996:20)

maintain that an individual was always regarded as part of the group. The group had to decide to accept you or not. Thus, the individual had little say in matters which many of us today would refer to as individual or democratic rights. The African concept of family and community is also the same. Theron (1987:11) says that in Africa a person does not exist as an individual, he/she is part of the community. The interests of the community come first. The person exists for the sake of the community. Mbiti (1969:108) portrays the same understanding of an individual, family and the community. He maintains that in traditional life, an individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He/she owes his/her existence to those of past generations and as well as his contemporaries. He/she is simply part of a whole.

The New Testament church regarded itself as a group, a family, the “Ecclesiai”. Although the church especially in the Pauline corpus is/are called the “ecclesia” (plural) (1 Cor 16:1, 1:19; Gl 1:2; 2 Cor 8:1; Th 2:14), there are instances where the singular form is used referring to the entire church as one or a unit (cf 1 Cor 10:32). Furthermore, this community had a special word describing itself – ἅγιοι (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Phlp 1:1; Rm 1:7; Eph 1:1; Col 1:2), those who are called; (τοῖς ἐπικαλουμένοις) brothers and sisters; children of God; body of Christ etc. Those who violated the interest of the group (the church) were to be disciplined.

Another feature of the African family and community which is close to the first century Mediterranean world is that of patriarchy. The man is the head of the family. He has the duty to protect his wife and children. Although not in a master-slave relationship, he is superior to his wife. He is endowed with the responsibility of providing leadership and co-

ordination in all social and family matters. To maintain and care for his family, the traditional man had to go hunting and fishing. The men sat in the “Lekgotla” (community council) to discuss matters which are affecting the community. The African community life, like the First century Mediterranean world, including the New Testament text, are patriarchal.

Oduyoye (1991:469) maintains that the African family is a symbol of the "oikos" of God, it is a shadow of ecumenism:

“The African family, henceforth referred to as the family, may be used as a symbol of what Christians mean by ecumenism, and oikos, a household whose ruling morality and ethics are of Christ, whose religion is the religion of Jesus of Nazareth, and whose faith is anchored in the Christ of God. The ecclesia, the church (of Christ or of God) becomes a kin-group, a community of Christ believers, called together by and around the Christ event.”

The New Testament church is a community within which the members feel at home. To be separated, is to experience alienation and exile, and therefore one surrenders, individualism in order to promote full individuality. It is a group within which the “self” is as important as the “other” for one defines the other.

Oduyoye (1991:470) makes yet appropriate similarity of the values of the church and those of the African family (with specific reference to the Akan family of Nigeria):

“The Christ family remains open to associates and co-operates with all who go about God’s business. In the same way as the Akan family has an open-door policy towards the outside and specific morals and norms exist to regulate these interactions, so the church seeks modes and levels of relating to other households of faith. The flexibility that marks the structure and relationships of the Family makes it a delicate yet resilient organism that has to be continually nurtured so that it might continue to be a living and life-giving matrix. It is very vulnerable because it is founded on loving the other as self.”

Africa is no stranger to the world that shaped the New Testament. In chapter two of this research, reference was made to Maimela’s (1990:70ff) submissions that Africa played an important part in biblical history, including that of Christianity. There are of course practises in the African family, which are not in line with the Bible. Polygamy, levirate system and sorority cannot be condoned. However there are elements in the African family which can be positively evaluated. It is therefore not difficult for the biblical message to be understood by Africans. The invitation of Christ to his Kingdom - the church, the universal brotherhood and sisterhood is already embedded in the extended family system. Christian baptism in the New Testament can be understood in the light of the "rites de passage." For instance the initiation rites have to do with the individuals’ transition from childhood to adulthood. Conversion and subsequent baptism marks an important stage from being a sinner towards being part of the church - the family of God.

CHAPTER 4

THE ROMAN AND JEWISH FAMILIES IN THE GRAECO- ROMAN ERA

4.1 Introduction

In order to understand the concept “family” in the Gospels an overview of families in the Roman and Jewish worlds will be given in this chapter. The New Testament did not come into being in isolation from its environment. Therefore the socio-historical context of the first century Mediterranean world must be taken seriously.

4.2 The Roman family

The mounting interest in the study of the family in antiquity is clearly stated by Rawson (1991:1):

"The study of "the family" in the classical period is gaining impetus and continues to engage the interests of historians, demographers, sociologists, anthropologists, etc. "

The Roman family, which will be discussed in this chapter covers the classical Roman period, i.e. from approximately the end of the second century BC to the end of the second century AD. In view of the nature of this excursion (the investigation of the family as reality and imagery), much discussion will evolve around the family during the Principate in the first century AD.

Garrison (1997:20f) maintains that the early Christian church has Graeco-Roman roots. Therefore the affirmation that early Christianity was also shaped by the Graeco-Roman world is stark reality. Lassen (1997:103) adds that the investigation of the classical socio-cultural milieu is not only a question of necessity but crucial for the understanding of the New Testament:

"As family metaphors constituted one of the ways in which to speak about the new religion, it follows that the Romans would relate to Christianity partly by relating to the Christian use of family metaphors. In other words the Romans would understand one kind of experience, the family. Therefore in order to understand how the Romans related to the new Christian religion, it is important to know about the family in "Pagan" Rome."

The quest for the understanding of the Roman family is essential, taking into consideration the fact that the Christian faith was first disseminated during the first few centuries AD, especially in the Roman world. The following aspects will now be discussed: the nature of the Roman family, characterisation or general features, "the paterfamilias" and "his potestas", marriage, role of women, the children and the slaves and Christianity and the Roman family.

4.2.1 The nature of the Roman family

"As far as the state was concerned, the family was usually perceived as a nursery, a breeding ground of soldiers and future tax-payers in particular. From any point of view, the

family is the basis of reproduction both physical reproduction of culture, that is, morality and national character" (Dixon 1992:25).

"The family was a miniature state under the absolute authority of the *paterfamilias*" (De Villiers 1998:151)

"The family was the heart of the pagan society; it was the basis of society and its most important part. Despite economic, political and social changes taking place during the republic and principate, this traditional view was largely maintained throughout the classical period. A deeply rooted respect surrounded the family" (Lassen 1997:104).

These three citations adequately chronicle in general terms the Roman conception of the family. All three share the assumption that the family was a central and basic institution in society and the wealth of a community relied on family life. In other words the ties of the state, society and household could only be described in one word - the family. The idea of family thus permeated all spheres of Roman life.

On a microcosmic level, Thomas (1976:411) claims that the Roman family was regarded as an entity of corporate life of a kind wholly different from the family as conceived of in any modern society including those with civilian systems. Still on this stratum, Dixon (1992:25) maintains that the family was regarded as an economic unit working together to produce the basic necessities of life such as food, shelter and clothing. Furthermore the family was a vital means of the redistribution

of property and also intangibles such as honour, family name, and the family cult. Such an interaction implied that members of the family would need each other at a certain stage of their life. For instance the children who were allowed to survive and reared within the Roman family, were expected to reciprocate or repay for the care spent on them during their dependency stages of infancy and childhood by looking after their parents at old-age.

Moving beyond the ambit of the miniature family towards the community, the impressions of family were implied. Lassen (1997:111) says that the metaphors of father-son were integrated into the political and administrative system in public officers. For instance the relationship between the quaestor and his superior, was likened to the union between the father and the son. The "pietas" formed the basis for the relationship between the quaestor and his superior. Pliny uses the same metaphorical language in connection with the relationship between a consul elect and a quaestor. Pliny wrote to the consul-elect:

"I will only say, he is a young man, who deserves you should look upon him in the same relations, as clear ancestors used to consider their quaestors, that is, as your son" (Pliny Ep. IV. 15).

On a macro level, the entire Roman state was perceived by its citizens as a family. Strasburger (1976:99) raises the probability that this notion originated in a Greek context, and the Romans themselves appear to have seen the paternal leader-figure as closely linked to the Roman tradition. Lassen (1997:111) states that the civil wars which occurred towards the end of the Roman republic were systematically described as the wars

between the brothers. Therefore, in this context the use of the brother metaphor puts across the meaninglessness, tragedy and absurdity of the civil wars.

Lassen (1997:113f) provides another insightful event to elucidate the fact that the state was a macrocosmic family. It was in 2 BC when Augustus' power over Rome, Italy and the provinces was at its peak. At this time he received the title of "pater patriae" from the Roman senate and the people. It was actually Augustus himself who wrote in his "Res Gestae":

"In my thirteenth consulship, the senate, the equestrian order and the whole people of Rome gave me the title of father of the father-land and resolved that this should be inscribed in the Curia Julia and in the Forum Augustum below the chariot which had been set there in my honour by a senate Consultum" ("Res Gestae" 35).

Most of the emperors who succeeded Augustus bore the title "Pater Patriae" and the paternal aspect of the imperial reign continued to form an important part of the political ideology of Rome. Another factor which also characterised the family in all levels of society was the patronage system. Patronage in this context can be defined as a mutual relationship between unequals for the exchange of services and goods. The client acquired support and access to power while the patron, the political support and honour. This system was thus based on informal and friendship ties, but it served ends that exceeded the personal domain because family, religion, politics and business were not clearly distinguishable spheres of life. The personal, familial, political and business affairs were not distinct but instead folded into one another. It

was a good way of keeping those who were socially inferiors dependent on their masters and also unable and unwilling to establish horizontal social solidarity (see Osiek and Balch 1997: 53f). Hammond and Scullard (1970:791) maintain that in the early days of Rome the members of the ruling families attached to themselves a number of poorer citizens to whom they gave financial or legal assistance in return for political or social services. This relationship (patron and client) was not enforced by the law but by a long custom it acquired a quasi-religious force.

4.2.2 The designation “family”

Before taking further strides, the use of the word family in Roman antiquity, as well as in this discussion should be established. Thomas (1976:411-2) persuasively outlines how the term "family" was used, understood and applied in the Roman context. His initial as well as general observation is that it was applied to both things and people. He further and meticulously juxtaposes three ways in which it could apply:

- (1) It could mean all which was subject to the “paterfamilias”, i.e. the humans civilly related to and under him, his slaves and all his assets
- (2) In another context it could denote the human dependants of the head of the household under his “patria potestate”
- 3) The group of human beings who were in a relationship of filiality to the “paterfamilias” which may be conveniently styled the family “proprio iure”.

The use of "family" in this excursion will to a greater extent be dictated to by the context. In an event where the context does not implicitly or explicitly indicate, the term will be employed to denote the "family at night", i.e. the father, mother and children.

4.2.3 Characterising the Roman family

Scientists in the humanities in the fields of history, anthropology, sociology, theology have succeeded in unearthing and unlocking a tremendous wealth of data characterising the family during the era under scrutiny. It is practically impossible to mention, discuss and evaluate all the features of the Roman family. A selection of certain aspects (relevant -according to the researcher's opinion) will be made and assessed. Although it is difficult to discuss an aspect of the family without referring to the others, an attempt will be made to give attention to them distinct from each other. The "paterfamilias" and his "potestas", the role and place of women, children and slaves will in the subsequent paragraphs be highlighted.

4.2.3.1 The "paterfamilias" and his "potestas"

"The wide powers of the family head (i.e. the oldest surviving male ascendant) have provoked surprise even disbelief in the modern reader" (Rawson 1986:16)

"Naturally the father was the major figure in the first century..." (Malina, Joubert and Van Der Watt 1996:6)

"Over the centuries the Roman "paterfamilias" has served as a paradigm of patriarchal authority and social order" (Saller 1994:102)

The three quotations cited above indicate that the Graeco-Roman world was a man's world. Men were superior and this conception was deeply inherent in society. Men were regarded as superior to women in nature, strength and capacity for virtue. The father had power over his entire household. In attempting to account for this status quo, Rawson (1986:16) maintains that the "paterfamilias" absolute power over the rest of his family may have been necessary or even desirable in the early days when the state had no regular courts or police force and did not much involve itself in private morality.

All "patresfamilias" were fathers but not all fathers were "patresfamilias". The "paterfamilias" was the head of the Roman family who exercised his power, "patria potestas", over the members of his "familia" (children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, etc.). He had paternal power over his children even before birth. Even from conception, the woman had no right to determine the fate of the child. The father possessed "ius vitae necisque" (power of life and death) over his children. He could sell his sons or bind them over to a creditor. His children could also be banished or sent to another family. Their marriage was not valid unless performed with paternal consent. The "paterfamilias" consulted the family council on some matters in his exercise of his "potestas". The adult members, both men and women, even if they were married, remained under his "potestas". The "paterfamilias" possessed the right to oversee or examine the affairs of his sons and daughters. They had no power to own or manipulate property in their own right, nor could they make valid wills.

The “paterfamilias” exercised his powers until his death whereby each of his male sons who were married would become “paterfamilias” themselves (see Thomas 1976:411; Rawson 1986:16; Bunson 1991:315; Dixon 1992:195ff; Malina, Joubert and Van der Watt 1996:6).

Due to the fact that the paterfamilias experienced practical difficulties in controlling his grown-up children, a large number of Romans, perhaps even the majority, set-up their own nuclear families at marriage. They most likely lived apart from the head of the household. This necessitated the working together between the paterfamilias and his adult sons. This applied in the economic sphere where a paterfamilias could offer some sort of economic independence where they administered their real estate, movables and slaves (Schultz 1951:154; Crook 1967:110; Lassen 1997:106).

4.2.3.2 Women embedded in the Roman society

Most of our sources in the investigation of the role and position of women during the Graeco-Roman period has not been by women themselves.

Rawson (1991:1) puts it this way:

"Pre-modern societies have left us little by way of consensus and other systematic statistics, or by way of personal memoirs of women, children, servants, and slaves: we are thus limited in our ability to quantify, to trace developments, and to discuss the more private aspects of family life in these societies"

Taking this matter further, Poetker (1996:2) maintains that in trying to portray women's realities and experiences, we are to a greater extent confronted by literature written by elite males. When going through these sources, one gathers the impression that the women were generally discriminated against even from birth. Dixon (1992:15f) contend that the birth of a son, more than that of a daughter, gave many fathers pride and joy. This was because of the fact that sons could follow in the father's footsteps in public life more than girls could. In the case of poor families, if the father had doubts about being able to raise a newborn child, a daughter was more likely to be abandoned than a son. The document "Senatusconsultan Velleianum" of the first century AD, was a piece of legal discrimination between women and men. This document viewed women as the weaker sex, impulsive and unstable of judgement, easily salvaged and discouraged and also subject to passions and follies from the consequences of which they needed protection. Men, thus believed that women were in greater need to guardianship than men. For this reason the position of women was relegated to the obscurity of the home. They were excluded from the sphere of life and activity (see Crook 1967:83ff).

Augustus is said to have made a proverbial and philosophical speech encouraging his contemporaries to marry:

"If we could manage without a wife, Romans, we could all avoid that nuisance; but since nature has laid it down that we cannot live peacefully with them but not at all without them, we must consider the long-term benefit rather than immediate satisfaction" (see Dixon 1992:84).

Even if women had inferior social and legal status as compared to men, in practice they appeared to have enjoyed some measure of independence. However, even if it seemed as pseudo-independence from one male (husband) it was actually not from another (paterfamilias). This can be illustrated by the fact that although the daughters could not pass on their family name to their offspring, they retained their own family name for life. Women did not change their family name on marriage. They remained members of their own family in a real sense. In addition, as far as sharing the family's property was concerned, if the father died intestate, daughters had equal rights. This therefore meant that wives were not completely dependent financially on their husbands. She was accountable for the money or property which she brought as dowry and this was usually reclaimable by the wife, should the marriage end in a divorce. A woman or wife could also have other property put at their disposal by her father, even if such property technically remained under the jurisdiction of the father (see Rawson 1986: 18ff; De Villiers 1998:152).

4.2.3.3 Marriage

Marriage was a very important institution of the Roman society:

"Soos in die meeste gemeenskappe, het in Rome, die huwelik ook uiters belangrike rol gespeel. Dit was die eintlike kern van die familia... die Romeinse huwelik word gedefinieer as 'n vereniging van man en vrou wat bestaan uit hulle onafskeidelike samelewing" (Van Warmelo 1971:67ff).

"The source and the centre of the family was marriage ..." (Spiller: 1986:60).

"Marriage was a union of a man and a woman and a community of life, a function divine and human law... marriage founded the familia, which was the foundation of Roman society" (Thomas 1986:141f).

These citations stipulate the essence of marriage. In other words, when two Roman citizens with a legal capacity to marry one another, each had the consent of the "paterfamilias" and lived together with the intention of being married, this union was recognised as a valid marriage, and the children born from the union were Roman citizens in the power to their father or "paterfamilias". Marriage was, thus, the cornerstone and foundation of the Roman people and an institution which produced legitimate children.

Future Roman citizens, rulers, soldiers, artisans, etc. were to be prepared through marriage. Dixon (1992:62) maintains that marriage linked different families both immediately in the marriage and in subsequent generation if children resulted from the union. The political elite used marriage as an important means of forging alliances. For instances the senatorial men married earlier than men lower down the social stratum, precisely because they needed the support of the two families' networks to assist them in gaining political office.

When the youth arrived at an age above puberty, fourteen for boys and thirteen for girls, the matchmaking game by the parents for their children commenced. Scholars differ in the details of how this "pick and choose"

game was played by the parents of the bride and the groom. The father played a significant role. Osiek and Balch (1997:61) maintain that it was the parents' responsibility to find suitable marriage mates for their children. Sometimes the children's consent was sought though of course as expected, the girl more easily and more commonly than boys yielded to the parental pressure to marry a spouse chosen by their family. De Villiers (1998:151) advances a position which appears to be more stringent than that advanced by Osiek and Balch. He says that marriage was arranged without the bride by her father or guardian and bridegroom's father. Thomas (1986:141) reinforces this vantage point:

"...Originally marriages were arranged by the respective patresfamilias by means of a formal verbal constraint which was enforceable by action"

Dixon (1992:63) seems to be steering a middle path from Osiek and Balch on the one hand and De Villiers on the other. She mentions that probably both parties the "filias" and "filia" had some say in the matchmaking process of the father.

The differences cited above are insignificant. It was unlikely that the boy or girl would differ with the parents about the partner chosen for him/her. All what this indicates is the extensive "potestas" the "paterfamilias" had over his children. The mother of either the bride or groom assumed the right to be actively involved in the process of marriage although she did not have any legal basis for this social assumption.

There is dearth of information concerning the orchestration of the dowry arrangement and marriage ceremonies. Thomas (1986:145) asserts that it

was generally or maybe a sense of duty for the father to provide to the husband of his daughter a dowry (consisting of property - corporeal or incorporeal, movable or immovable). The primary purpose or function of the dowry was to contribute to the expenses of a marriage. In addition, should a marriage end in a divorce, it thus follows that although the dowry became the property of the husband the whole dowry or part of it had to be returned to provide for the needs of the divorcee.

In describing the nature of a marriage contract, Thomas (1986:141) says that the “paterfamilias” made a verbal contract, enforceable by action. In his submission, Spiller (1986:60) agrees with Thomas in that the marriage contract was a mutual promise which was verbal, but he adds a dimension by stating that one way of doing it was by a written document drawn-up in each other's presence.

The wedding party (celebration) was attended by the members of the family and the general hlantry. The feasting, ostensibly commenced in the home of the bride which then proceeded (attended by torchbearers) to the home of the groom. The groom waited for the bride at his home, and on her arrival the entourage joined in a religious rite to mark her entry into her new home. The elaborateness of the occasion largely depended on personal preference, wealth and the age of the couple. The wedding of a young girl and probably the wealthy would for instance be more elaborate than of a mature widow or divorcee (see Dixon 1992:64f).

4.2.3.4 Divorce

"Divorce was commonly practiced in all ancient Mediterranean societies and usually did not carry with it any noticeable form of social stigma" (Osiek and Balch 1997:62).

"Divorce procedure was probably as informal as that of marriage could be. The decision to separate could be unilateral, either partner or sometimes a partner's paterfamilias, could bring about the end of marriage. A simple notification of intent to divorce was sufficient and no cause be given: on the whole the concept of the "guilty party" was not important" (Rawson 1986:32)

The fact that divorce was an uncomplicated simplistic procedure, is evident from these statements. Treggiari (1991:33f) says that if the initiation and continuance of a marriage relationship depended on the consent explicit or implied, of both spouses (and of any extent "paterfamilias" of either of them), then it follows logically that divorce constituted a mere withdrawal of that consent by one of the parties or by the decision of one party not to retain the relation. Rawson (1986:32ff) enumerates some of the possible causes of a divorce. One of the obvious reasons was the couple's failure to have children. Due to the low position occupied by women in Roman society in such an event it was assumed that the fault or failure to procreate was the woman's deficiency. Therefore, such divorces took place without public recrimination or unpleasantness.

Another reason for a divorce to take place was adultery. Although in this case the man and/or the woman could initiate a divorce the general

practice favoured the husband more than the wife. If a husband caught his wife in an act of adultery, she would be brought to trial for adultery even before he divorced her. It was regarded as his public duty. On the other hand, the wife could initiate a divorce because of the husband's extramarital activities and also could restore the dowry but could not initiate a criminal charge against him. Besides the advantaged position of the husband over his wife, in an event of a divorce another male (the paterfamilias) could unilaterally dissolve a marriage as cited above (Rawson 1986:32). Treggiari (1991:34) claims that it was likely that in earlier times, the paterfamilias had been able to create a divorce between his child and a daughter-in-law or son-in-law (see also Rawson 1986:34).

4.2.3.5 Children

The sources from which information about children in the Roman family are drawn were generated by the elite male. The general attitude toward children was as contained in the sources written from an adult male perspective. Thus, the physical, as well as the scholastic needs of the children were not determined by themselves, but by the adult community and the state. The twentieth century's obsession about the rights of the child which has so preoccupied the world, especially the West and North America, was non-existent (see Rawson 1991:7; Dixon 1992:98, 214).

A premature baby and child did not have any significant or legal status. This was seen before the baby was born. Contraception and abortion methods were known and practiced in the Roman society. It appears that the decision to abort the foetus was taken by the mother. At the same time the woman responsible for aborting her own child drew disapproval

for depriving her husband an offspring or rather for selfish avoidance of the responsibilities of motherhood. Even so, she was not guilty of a crime in the eyes of the law, and also incurred no religious disapproval (see Rawson 1991:9). Osiek and Balch (1996:65) maintain that the man accused the woman for abortion but then they themselves exposed their children.

The fact that the mother did not abort the child was no obvious guarantee that he/she would survive. There was yet another hurdle to cross - a fitness test to pass. A pregnant woman was required to notify the interested parties or their representatives, inviting them, if they wished to send person to witness the birth to the child. When the actual time arrived (i.e. when the woman experienced labour pains), those notified would come. Although the mid-wife was probably the first to inspect the new-born infant and advise on its fitness, the father (or paterfamilias) was involved if the child was found to be unfit, deformed or sickly; the umbilical cord was cut short and subsequently, the baby bled to death. The survival of the baby was the discretion of the father (or paterfamilias) and not the mother. It appears though, that the boys had more survival chances than girls (except when the girl was the first born). Even if it was not sanctioned by the law some of the babies who were not killed at birth but unwanted (or when parents were unwilling or unable to raise them) were exposed or abandoned (usually in a public place, doorsteps of temples, cross-roads or rubbish heaps) either to die or to be claimed and adopted by its founder (Rawson 1991:10f; Weaver 1992:172; Homblower & Spawforth 1996:321f; Osiek & Balch 1997:65ff).

The above-mentioned data spells out how the Romans regarded and treated children. On the hierarchy, it appears that they came after

women. This does not show that the children were not important, but indicates that the Graeco-Roman world was the man's world. The significance of children can be discerned from facts. The manner in which adoption procedures were fully developed, proves that a family which was childless and did not wish to divorce, had to have children. Furthermore, Dixon (1992:108) says that the children were of value in that they were to provide and support their parents at old age. They were also expected to bury their parents. Given these facts, it was the wish of each and every couple to have children. Another pertinent question was that of inheritance. The family assets were to have heirs. Those who did not have children and did not adopt any, hoped that their nephews or nieces would perform these office (Dixon 1992:108f; Lyall 1984:67).

4.2.3.6 Slaves

There is no chapter on the Roman "familia" without the discussion of slaves. Hence, Lassen (1997:109) maintains that the picture of any consideration of the Roman family is incomplete without mentioning two groups which were placed within or at the outskirts of the family: slaves and freedmen (see also Bradley 1994:27).

Thomas (1986:389) maintains that to define who a slave was, and his/her position during the Graeco-Roman period, is not simplistic as it may seem. He advances three ideas which help to elucidate what slavery meant and how it was conceived:

- (1) Slavery meant an institution of the law of nations whereby contrary to nature, one man was subject to the dominion of another

(2) Slavery devoted public slaves i.e. persons who were convicted on a capital charge or sentenced to the servitude

(3) A human being who was owned at a given moment by another human being i.e. a human chattel

In attempting to illustrate the practice of slavery and how slaves were regarded, De Villiers (1998:156) says that:

"A slave did not count as a person, but as the property of his owner, who could treat him as he wished. He could decide to buy him or sell him to punish or reward him."

Lassen (1997:109) states that the master had power of death over his slaves just as the "paterfamilias" had over his children (see also Bradley 1994:27). The Roman law did however impose a certain limitation on the owners' authority, since gross maltreatment such as death was prohibited. However, they had no legal individuality. Dixon (1992:53) asserts that the slaves had no legal right to marry. Although they did have de facto marriages and in a way attempted to maintain some family ties, their offspring belonged to the owner of the slave mother. The slaves in the Roman family, thus, occupied the lowest stratum of persons under the authority of the male head of the household or "paterfamilias."

Modern readers of the history of antiquity on the chapter of slavery will obviously find it difficult to imagine the thrival of slavery as an institution. What would constitute gross violation of basic human rights was perceived as normal in the Graeco-Roman era. As much as we

marvel at how human beings treated fellow-human beings, those who were involved in the practice (especially the slave owners) would also marvel at us, wondering how we think their economic system would be manned without slavery.

4.2.4 Christianity and the Roman family

The foregone discussion, though not purporting to be comprehensive data, attempts in an interpretative manner to put the Roman family in perspective. It is demonstrative from the above that the family was a dominant reality and symbol in the Graeco-Roman world. When analogically approached, the Roman family can be a model which could be used as a lens through which the Gospels as well as the other New Testament texts and the activities of the early Christians could be read and interpreted.

The first century Roman empire experienced increased stability in the cities throughout the empire. It was also a period of increased mobility. Lassen (1997:103) maintains that the Christian faith was disseminated during the first few centuries AD in the Roman world. In this endeavor the early missionaries used *inter alia* metaphorical language. Due to the fact that every Roman citizen experienced family life, the proclamation of the gospel was wrapped in familial language and metaphor. This would make sense to them and were able to relate to the new faith. Thus, the metaphors of family played a central role in the metaphorical work developed by the first Christians.

4.3 The Jewish family in the Graeco-Roman world

Joubert and Van Henten (1996:139) meticulously compared inter alia the Jewish families, which were enshrined in the books of Maccabees and Judith. At the end of the article they make an appeal for more research in the area of the Jewish family or families:

"The a-typical behaviour of the Maccabean family and the house-hold of Judith should lead us to reconsider the present scholarly consensus on the roles, interactions and stratifications in ancient Jewish families. Over and above present research, which is usually undertaken at rather high level of abstraction, investigations into individual Jewish families during the Graeco-Roman period could lead to a more nuanced picture in this regard and open up new vistas for research."

It is general consensus amongst scholars that the New Testament and Christianity are best understood and interpreted within the context of the Old Testament. Du Plessis (1998:308) maintains that at the time of Jesus, Palestine had already been influenced by Hellenism for almost three hundred and sixty years. The conflict between social, political and spiritual forces in this period all contributed to a shift in Jewish thought and customs not only the Old Testament but also Judaism which is important in interpreting the New Testament and Christianity.

4.3.1 The importance of the family

A substantial number of scholars who study Judaism as a background for New Testament studies have taken a keen interest in the Jewish family. Peskowitz (1987:9f) says that the family was the most crucial and central element of a singularly defined "Judaism". It fulfilled the role as an essential foundation of everyday religious and social life and Jewish identity. Levison (1932:124) maintains that the Jew was made in his/her home. It was the home influence and the family circle that made "Judaism" possible, and it is into the home that one should look to understand Judaism fully and the "typical" Jew. The Jew can only be known in his home life. Safrai (1976:748) claims that it was an accepted ideal that the Jewish family life was not only the fulfillment of a divine commandment but also the basis for social life, and the Jews tried to invest family life with an aura of holiness.

Barclay (1997:72) aptly puts it that it was part of ancestral custom that the tradition was preserved. It was natural that the family, the conduit of ancestral traditions, should be the principal carrier of Judaism. The family thus constituted one of Judaism's greatest strengths in the sometimes hostile atmosphere of the Graeco-Roman world.

In this section our discussion will be a consideration of the Jewish Palestinian family during the Graeco-Roman era. It is not possible to read the New Testament and ponder on Christianity without observing the glaring footprints of Judaism and particularly the Jewish family. At the end it will be argued that the Jewish family constituted an important basis for understanding the New Testament and Christianity. The aspects of the family, which will here receive attention, are: The socio-historical

factors, which shaped the Jewish family, the nature of the Jewish family, the social status of women, marriage, concept of children and slaves.

4.3.2 The socio-historical factors which shaped the Jewish family

Before mentioning and discussing specific aspects of the Jewish family, i.e. seeing how it looked like, it is appropriate to state in general and broad terms some of the socio-economic factors which shaped it. Joubert and Van Henten (1996:125) warn against a naive and one-sided presentation of the Jewish family. They admit and acknowledge that scholars are obsessed by the notion to provide scenarios, with general pictures of what the Jewish family looked like and how it functioned during the Graeco-Roman period. This, as they say:

"has a legitimate place but is wanting if the peculiarities of specific Jewish families and their interaction with their respective socio-historical environments are not taken into consideration. But focusing on the impact of the socio-cultural factors in the Mediterranean world such as regional customs, different perceptions of the family in the different social classes, the functions of different, culturally defined conceptualisations of the family in Palestine and the Diaspora and the influence of historical catastrophes such as wars and famines on specific families, a more nuanced picture of Jewish families from various angles of incidence (as socio-economic units, cultural products or historical entities) could be replaced by a historically more viable picture of people of flesh and blood who interacted with

their environments and whose respective roles and identities were influenced and/or nuanced by these social interactions".

A phenomenon, whereby the accumulation of land in the hands of the few elites developed in Palestine from the Hellenistic age. This process reached its peak during the Roman and Herodian periods. The land, being the main source of wealth and living in an agrarian Palestine, was bound to impact on the Jewish family. Guijarro (1997:44) mentions and evaluates a common feature in this scenario. He says that the rich landowners would lend money to peasants with economic troubles, thus forcing them to pledge their land as a guarantee for repayment. It was extremely difficult for the peasants caught up in this web of debts to free themselves. The result was that the lucky ones would remain tenants in their own hereditary land with the obligation of giving part of their produce to their new landowner. Another less fortunate possibility was that the peasants would end up as paid laborers, or worse still the landlord would use less "legal" methods of coercion, deception or threats to sell or abandon their plots of land (see also Oakman 1986:72ff).

Another economic factor that had an influence on the composition and functions of the family was the process of the marketisation of the economy. Joubert and Van Henten (1996:9) estimate that during the first century CE some eighty to ninety percent of the population in Palestine were farmers who earned their living on small holdings. Farming, just like most of the other economic activities, centered around the family. The family, which was the basic economic unit, raised certain crops or manufactured articles and sold them at market or exchanged them for necessities. Guijarro (1997:45) maintains that this intense cultivation in order to meet the needs of the market, caused changes in the structure of

the peasant family. The traditional family ceased to be a basic unit of production and became the instrument of the economy of redistribution under the control of the powerful landowners and the ruling class.

The above data does not in any way suggest that the traditional composition of the Jewish family was no longer in existence. It is only an indication that this institution, the family was going through a process of disintegration. Two consequences were evident:

- (1) the power of the head of the family was weakened because as a peasant he was subjected to a landowner
- (2) the peasant family lost the capacity to support their relatives because they were living at the margin of subsistence.

4.3.3 The nature of the Jewish family

Families in Roman Palestine had various forms and were characterised by varied arrangements and configurations. Guijarro (1997:57) maintains that the basic family group which lived in the same house consisted of the father, mother, the unmarried children, probably one or more married son/s with their own wives and children, and other family members such as servants and probably slaves. Adding to this picture, Peskowitz (1987:15) says that Jewish families in Palestine lived in various villas, stone buildings, caves, tents, and wooden structures with that shed roof. Families were either rich or poor. Some of them aligned themselves with other families in order to pursue the same trade. They lived in a wide variety of built environments, hamlets, villages, towns and cities (see also Killebrew and Fine 1991:47ff)

4.3.3.1 A religious family

Barclay (1997:8f) says that the Jewish religious tradition was deeply woven into the fabric of the Jewish family life. Judaism was fundamentally an ethnic tradition which fostered a conception and practice of religion bound up with Jewish ethnic identity, so that to be Jewish and to practice the "ancestral customs" involved a range of distinctive family practices which were of profound religious significance.

Meiring (1996:116) contends that the Jewish family was the carrier of the Jewish faith. He says that at the entrance of a Jewish home there would be fixed to the doorpost, a "Mezuzah" a small rectangular box. Through an opening in the box the word Shaddai, one of the names of God, was visible. Inside the "Mezuzah" itself, written on a small parchment scroll, were the first two paragraphs of the "Shema". A pious Jew would kiss the mezuzah each time they enter the house, in recognition of God's presence in the house and among the members of the family.

Barclay (1997:69) adds that the "Shema" which was the pivotal text in early Jewish liturgy, reminded them of their unique commitment to "one Lord" and to the commands which were to be upon their hearts. They were to delightedly teach the children and talk about them when they are in their houses, when they walk by the way, when they lie down and also when they rise up. In Judaism, therefore, the children could be taught not merely to follow the example of their "pale faced" mothers and nurses, they could be expected also to learn and perhaps to read and study the

divine decrees which were promulgated for the ordering of their domestic routine.

4.3.3.2 The individual, family and community

Individualism and all which goes with it, democratic rights of a person, individual rights, etc., which are so characteristic of the Western world were unheard of in the first century Mediterranean Jewish Palestine. Malina (1993:67) aptly puts it:

"Instead of individualism, what we find in the first century Mediterranean world is what might be called a strong group orientation. Persons always considered themselves in terms of the group(s) in which they experienced themselves as inextricably embedded."

Malina, Joubert and Van der Watt (1996:53) maintain that it was almost sin to put the interests of the group second:

"Any violation of group laws, like children disobeying their parents, were seen in a very serious light. Someone could even be banned from the group if his transgressions were serious enough, which meant that his status as group member was changed to that of outsider. Sometimes transgressions were even punished with death".

Kalir (1980:101) states that there was no Jewish person who for one reason or another did not see himself/herself as dependent on others. The individual was respected, and privileges and responsibilities for all, were

clearly stated. However, Judaism affirmed the natural human society, the family and the community which grew up at the side of the family into an organisation. Justice, fairness, love and humbleness could be shown if they did live together with others.

4.3.3.3 A patriarchal and androcentric family

Roth (1966-70:1166) maintains that the Jewish family was patriarchal and androcentric in nature. He says matriarchy and patriarchy would prove fruitless and unconvincing. Because of the rigid male-dominated society the family was called “bet ar” (house of a father). Joubert and Van Henten (1995) dealt with the most famous of the Jewish families of the Second Temple period - the Maccabees. In their observation, one thing becomes clear: the make-up of the family was very much masculine: with hardly a woman member of the family mentioned, although several are presupposed to be mothers of the Maccabean brothers and their sons (13:16-19). It is only the mother of the Maccabean brothers and their sons who is anonymously mentioned in connection with the family.

“Καὶ ἕστησεν ἐπ’ αὐτὰ ἑπτὰ πυραμίδας, μίαν κατέναντι τῆς μιᾶς, τῷ πατρὶ καὶ τῇ μητρὶ καὶ τοῖς τέσσαρσιν ἀδελφοῖς.”

(1 Macc 13:28).

The whole story is manifestly androcentric. For instance when the Syrian officers compelled Mattathias and his sons to offer a sacrifice, he declared:

“...ἄρχων καὶ ἔνδοξος καὶ μέγας εἶ ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ,
καὶ ἐστηριγμένος ἐν υἱοῖς καὶ ἀδελφοῖς.” (1 Macc 2:17).

Joubert and van Henten contend that such an androcentric saying and many others is completely in line with the tenor of the rest of the book (see also Lohse 1974:148).

It is practically impossible to discuss and evaluate the patriarchal nature of the Jewish family without in one way or another referring to the women, sons and daughters. They will be mentioned here and there to underscore the extensive authority which the male and head of the family had. Malina, Joubert and Van der Watt (1996:5) portray the Jewish concept of gender roles in the first century Mediterranean world.

"Although there are many positive remarks about women in the Old Testament, the Jews of the first century thought that the wife was inferior to her husband and that men were by nature women's superiors, a popular belief was that women had caused the fall of man; so they were regarded as craftier, more vain and materialistic than men."

Archer (1990:21) maintains that economic control and positions of leadership (in government, religious life and family) lay in the hands of men and passed on along male lines. Men were full and independent participants in all aspects of life, on the other hand, women's involvement was severely restricted by social structures.

A woman was almost regarded as the man's property. Since the earliest times adultery was regarded as a crime deserving the severest penalty

(Lv 20:10; Dt 22:22; Ex 20:14). It was originally and primarily seen as an infringement of the husband's property rights. The punishment of death acted as a deterrent to would-be offenders (see Archer 1990:2). In the Talmud (Kiddushim 31a; 150) the "patria potestas" is clearly underlined. For instance a widow's son asked R. Eliezer if my father orders, "give me a drink of water" and my mother does likewise, which takes precedence? The response was:

"Leave your mother's honour and fulfil the honour due to your father, for both you and your mother are bound to the authority of your father".

The androcentricity of the Jewish family can also be detected in the attitude of the birth of the son. Archer (1990:24) maintains that a Jewish father reacted negatively at the birth of a daughter. He had the expensive task of rearing a child from whom he would not benefit, for when married she and her services could only be utilised by her husband and his family. The Talmud (Niddah 316:218) provides statements which show that the male child was preferred to the female:

"As soon as a male comes into the world, peace comes into the world, for it is said send the a gift for the ruler of the land"

"When a male comes into the world his provision comes with him, a female brings nothing with her".

In order to preserve their father's name, the daughters of Lot were prepared to do anything to have a male child. They said to each other:

"Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father" (Gn 19:32).

Ben Sirach captures the ordinary man's feelings regarding his son, the hopes that could not rest with a daughter in society whose ordering and continuity depended upon men:

“Ἐτεύτησεν αὐτοῦ ὁ πατήρ, καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἀπέθανεν, ὅμοιον γὰρ αὐτῷ κατέλιπε μετ’ αὐτον. Ἐν τῇ ζ ωῇ αὐτοῦ εἶδε καὶ εὐφράνθη, καὶ ἐν τῇ τελευτῇ αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔλυπήθη.” (Sirach 30:4 -5).

Archer (1990:22) says that for the family to have at least one son was therefore of paramount importance. Once he had reached the age of maturity and become a fully-fledged member of society, he could provide his parents with valuable support and assistance. A son therefore enabled the father to die with the knowledge (or at least the hope) that his name and family would not come to an abrupt end. By having a son, a man had the assurance that his property and goods would remain within his immediate family, thus preserving the economic strength and integrity of that social unit and profiting his direct male descendants and their dependants.

As the one who enjoyed full and independent participation in society, a son could take over exactly where his father left off. A daughter, in consequence of her removal at a relatively early age through marriage to her husband's house, could never be trusted and regarded as a permanent member of the family into which she was born (although of course in the absence of a son a daughter could inherit (see Nm 27:1 ff; 36:1f). An

overwhelming majority of females in Palestine were not free. It was only those who were widowed or divorced who were no longer under male domination.

Joubert and Van Henten (1996:122f) also studied the position of daughters and women. Daughters remained subordinated to the "potestas" of their fathers while the married women were subjected to the authority of their husbands. The Jewish society being structured along rigidly patriarchal lines, women were not allowed to act independently of male control. As a matter of fact, the woman was reinforced by duties of a personal nature which she was obliged to perform for her husband, such as making his bed and washing his face, hands and feet. On refusal to render these "services" she was liable to a fine.

4.3.4 Marriage

Archer (1990:123) maintains that in the ancient Near East, marriage was regarded with some degree of seriousness and it occupied a central position in the lives and thoughts of all peoples, the Jews included. The following quotations indicate that to the Jews marriage was regarded as a norm:

"Since the beginning of time man and woman find each other in marriage. It is the union which permits them to do their expected share for the future of their people. Judaism could be unthinkable without this bond. The ceremony is called in Hebrew *Kiddushin* "the holying", "a sacred relationship" (Kalir 1980:53).

"Marriage is the ideal human state and is considered a basic social institution established by God at the time of creation. The purpose of marriage in the Bible is companionship and procreation" (Roth 1966-67:102).

"To marry was regarded in Judaism as a divine commandment because the command given at creation to be fruitful and to subdue the earth (Gn 1:28) was understood as the divine establishment of marriage" (Lohse 1974:148f).

Archer (1990:123) says that celibacy was never considered as a virtue in Jewish thought. This means that the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gn 1:28) excluded the possibility of celibacy. Marriage and of course the raising of a family were regarded as duties to be fulfilled by all adults.

In the rabbinical literature (Yeb. 626 and also Ned. 41a) a man who was of age and did not desire to marry was seen as living without joy, blessing or anything good. So important was the duty of getting married "to be fruitful and multiply" that the rabbis declared:

"He who does not engage in propagation of the race is as though he sheds blood... as though he has diminished the divine image. Such a man would have to account for his action in the world to come." (see Yeb 636 and Sabbath 31a).

Du Plessis (1998:308) adds by maintaining that according to the Jewish understanding of the Scriptures there was no such word such as

"bachelor". The tie between man and wife in marriage was so highly rated that the New Testament actually uses it to illustrate the tie between Christ and his church. Marriage and family were the normal pattern of life.

Monogamous marriage was ideal and customary. This was clear from the creation story which depicted Eve as Adam's only wife. Apparently polygamy developed at a later stage:

"For it is our ancestral custom that a man have several wives at the same time" (Josephus: Antiquity xvii p14).

Polygamy and/or bigamy is mentioned for instance in the Tannaitic literature concerning the upper aristocracy. However there were certain Jewish schools of thought which outrightly forbade the practice. Various halakic and haggadic statements are based upon the assumption of monogamy and plainly recommended the practice. A halakah explicitly states that if a married man takes a second wife, the first wife is entitled to demand payment of the "ketubah" (money which the husband had agreed to pay her in the event of divorce and the husband must comply). From this it can therefore be assumed that monogamy was the widespread norm although here and there, particularly in the non-Pharisaic aristocratic classes, there were cases of families built around two wives, or of men who maintained two wives in separate households (see Safrai 1976:749f).

4 3.4.1 Betrothal

There was ostensibly no uniform age at which the young men and women married. Lohse (1974: 149) maintains that marriage was contracted by young men between eighteen and twenty four years. Du Plessis (1998:309f) says that the normal age for a girl's betrothal was between twelve and twelve and a half, and for a young man, seventeen and twenty three years. Safrai (1976:755) discusses some of the primary sources about the Jews' betrothal and marriage and wedding practices. She maintains that the various Talmudic statements regarding the proper age for marriage deal with the groom's age when his wife moves into his house but do not mention his age at the time of the betrothal. An old Talmudic saying states:

"At five one is ready to study the Bible... at eighteen for the wedding".

Another tradition, originating in the school of the sage who lived at the time of the destruction of the Temple, says that God waits patiently for man to marry before he is twenty, but if he remains single after that age God becomes angry.

From these statements, an inference can be made that young women married at relatively an early age. It seems as if the most acceptable age for her to be betrothed was before she would turn fifteen. It appears that for a young man the age was from sixteen to the late teens. There were cases where men remained single after this age often due to economic circumstances, i.e. reflecting poor economic situation.

The parents were directly or indirectly involved in the choosing of a spouse of their child. A young man's parents regarded it as their duty to choose his wife and organise his wedding. It is only in extremely exceptional cases that the young man would choose his wife himself, thus taking his own initiative. The consent of the young girl was on very rare occasion asked. Another rare case was a situation where the parents of a young woman choose a husband for him. Concerning endogamy, Du Plessis (1998:309) maintains that the Jew forbade marriage within certain degrees of affinity. These degrees are clearly defined in the Old Testament: "No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the Lord" (Lv 18:6).

However, beyond these degrees of affinity marriage to a member of the family was quite acceptable. In the Old Testament, for instance, we see Isaac marrying Rebecca his relative and Jacob marrying his uncles' daughter (Gn 29). Safrai (1976:754) observed that the importance of taking a wife from a man's own family was very much emphasised in the early literature of the second Temple period. In the book of Judith, for example, the heroine's husband Manasseh, was also of her family clan.

Endogamy is also particularly emphasised in the book of Tobit. The book of Jubilees likewise stresses the importance of endogamy, although it does not specifically require it, and, in his usual manner, the author says that the patriarchs adhered to this norm. Furthermore, consequent to the Jews' belief in their special destiny as God's chosen people, tremendous emphasis was placed on the need to maintain a racial purity. Only the Israelite of legitimate, unblemished ancestry could be assured of the promised messianic salvation.

It appears that, during the first century Palestine, betrothal was not practiced as in Western culture (engagement) and African "lobola" dowry. During the first century Palestine, betrothal was almost binding as matrimony: "Because Joseph, her husband, was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly" (Mt 1:19).

4.3.4.2 Marriage ceremony and celebration (wedding)

Although betrothal was marked by a ceremony the big occasion was the wedding celebration. The betrothal took place in the home of the bride's father where she was to remain following the ceremony. Betrothal was actually, a formal act of property transfer, wherein the groom gave his bride something of monetary value and told her that through it she became betrothed to him. The money therefore was at times merely symbolic. Safrai (1976:757) says that when the bride and groom felt ready for marriage, they would suggest that the wedding be held. The bride prepared her clothes and ornaments. The groom and his parents had greater responsibilities, including the preparation of the couples' home and of the feasts connected with the wedding. The groom could also help, especially if he was the member of the "shushbinut". This was a financial structure or organisation wherein members invested money and in turn to he helped financially during the time of need.

The wedding went hand-in-hand with all kinds of ceremonies which made the marriage public. The bride's preparation consisted mainly of bathing, perfuming and anointing, and the arrangement of a complicated array of clothes and adornments. She was driven in a decorated carriage through the main streets of the town. This was accompanied by singing,

dancing, musical instruments and applause. The groom would go out and receive the bride and bring her into his house. Blessings, requiring a quorum of ten men were recited during the wedding ceremony, food and wine was in abundance and the festivities lasted several days (see Safrai 1976:756ff).

4.3.5 The position of women

In discussing the nature of the Jewish family in the previous paragraphs (3.4), the status of women in the family and society was inferred. We will here mention some of the cardinal points of the general conception of women in Roman Palestine.

Archer (1976:207) says that at the age of twelve and a half the Jewish woman was released from the all embracing control of the "patria potestas". This was from the form of domination to the other because of similar degree of authority as that possessed by the father:

"She continues within the control of the father until she enters into the control of the husband at marriage (Kethuboth 4.5).

The outward sign of the woman's subordination to one man was the veil. The veil formed part of the marriage ceremony which then marked by visible means the woman's transition from the unmarried to the married state. In marriage it served as a symbol of her possession by her husband and it had to be worn whenever she was in attestation company or went out in public. It signaled the authority which society vested in the husband: "If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair

cut off and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head" (1 Cor 11:6).

The rationale and the basis of the subordination of the woman in this patriarchal structure is to be found and reinforced by the teachings of Judaism. Explaining Genesis 3:16 (the account of the fall of man into sin) Josephus has this to say:

"The woman, says the law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive, not for her own humility, but that she may be directed; for the authority has fear given by God to man" (*Contra Apionem* 2.20).

Concerning the same subject, Philo has this to say:

"In the next place she tasted deprivation of liberty and the authority of the husband at her side whose command she must perforce obey" (*De Opificio Mundi* 167).

The woman, single or married, was placed in the same category as minors and like them, as stated above was subject to the all-embracing power of the head of the household. This domination of women by men was thus like a divine order of the universe: the woman was created after the man and out of him. Archer (1976:209) maintains that the Jews viewed women as inherently incapable of taking responsibility for their actions:

"Only men were blessed with the faculty of rational thought; only they could act from the standpoint of sound, independent judgement."

Even if from a legal point of view women were certainly subordinate to men, it is inaccurate to assume that there was nothing positive about them. There is no doubt that in society woman was highly esteemed. Her duties were to prepare food, to tend the children and supervise the household. Her husband's marital obligations towards his wife is also another factor indicating that the man could not just do as he wished. He was expected to maintain sexual relations with this wife. If he took a period of abstinence for two weeks (according to Shammai) or even for one week (Hillel), he was required to divorce his wife. Sexual relations always required the wife's consent. For instance the husband had no right to force himself upon her even on her first night of purity after menstruation (see Safrai 1976: 762f).

4.3.6 Slavery

The chapter on the Jewish family cannot be closed without mentioning the position of slaves. The Jews, both had slaves and freed persons and were also slaves and freedpersons. Martin (1987:113) maintains that the practice of slavery among the Jews did not differ much from the structures of their neighbours. The relevant structures and the existence of slavery itself had socio-economic connotations and had very little to do with ethnicity or religion.

Slaves were usually held in large numbers by very rich families, but their numbers were limited among the middle-class families. An average house-hold had a manservant or a maid-servant. A male or female servant belonging to a Jewish family was not necessarily employed in agricultural labour or manufacturing. They were personal servants for the

head of the house. These were in most cases Gentiles who were either bought at the various markets in the environs of Palestine, or born to parents who were slaves in a Jewish house (Safrai 1976:750f). The word slave and servant could be interchangeably used sometimes referring to the same person or group of people.

Although the Gentile slaves remained like that for the rest of their lives, their "manumission" i.e. freedom under certain circumstances could take place. Safrai (1976:752) cites two scenarios through which slaves could be freed. Firstly it was when their master was on his deathbed. According to the halakah male or female slaves upon manumission became Jews, converts like other converts. It often happened that they remained with or near the families which had formerly owned them, and continued in their labors as before with the difference and understanding that their legal status had changed. Being free, they received payment for their services and would leave their employment whenever they chose.

Another reason for a Jewish family to free a male slave in particular was for the purpose of marriage with his daughter, an old tradition, ascribes the men of Jerusalem counsels:

"If your daughter has come of age, free your slave and give him to her."

It also often occurred that even without valid halakic manumission, slaves became assimilated within the family which is attested at least for certain families. Despite the fact that slaves were for certain purposes considered as Jews, in marital matters they were considered to be Gentiles until they had been granted their freedom.

4.3.7 Children

Unlike their Roman and Greek neighbors, the Jews valued children as a gift from God. Du Plessis (1998:311) says that a Jewish couple's greatest desire was to have many children. Safrai (1976:750) states that it is important to realise that the ideal of marriage was the perpetuation of the family line and therefore the number and survival of children was seen as the family's chief blessing. As a matter of fact, if after ten years the marriage was childless, the man was required to divorce his wife and marry another. Hence Roth (1966-70:118) is of the opinion that the greatest misfortune that could befall a woman was childlessness. Unlike the Romans, the Jewish traditions prohibited abortion and considered it to be possibly equivalent to murder, and also any idea of abandoning children after their birth was apparently quite alien. Upbringing was highly esteemed. Hence, Barclay (1997:69) maintains that the Jewish tradition is distinguished by the care it devotes to the instruction of their children. The children who were disobedient, failing to follow in the ancestral ways were bringing great shame to their parents. A few examples to elucidate this fact are given:

(1) Susannah is recorded as having being taught by her parent: "Her parents were righteous, and had taught their daughter according to the law of Moses" Susannah (1:3).

(2) The seven martyred brothers who are immortalised in 4 Maccabees one said to have been taught by their father the law and the prophets with the recital of famous biblical stories, the singing Psalms and the pronouncements of biblical proverbs.

The Jews regarded the male child as more important than the girl. For instance a boy was circumcised and named on the eighth day (Lk 1:59; 2:21 and Phlp 3:5), while a daughter was named only after a month. Archer (1990:17) declares that the birth of a son was not only significant but regarded as a special blessing from above, more often than not the direct result of divine intervention. Thus having given birth to the first child Eve triumphantly said: "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord" (Gn 4: 1).

The promise of God to Abraham and Sarah was not to give them a child but a son: "I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her ..." (Gn 17:16). Safrai (1976:50) also says that male children were seen as particularly important in the building of families, as a "baraita" rules:

"with both male and female children the world could not exist but blessed is he whose children are male and love to him whose children are female."

The inter-testamental writers emphasised the importance of sons. For instance in the Testament of Joseph the author gives as the reason of the Egyptian woman's behavior. It was not because of sexual frustration or dissatisfaction with her husband, but rather the fact that she had no male child. Joseph is reported to have said: "And because she had no male child she pretended to regard me as a son, so I prayed to the Lord and she bore a male child" (3:7), (see Archer 1976:18-19).

See also Ben Sirach:

“Αἰσχύνῃ πατρός ἐν γεννήσει ἀπαιδεύτου, θυγάτηρ δὲ
ἐπ’ ἐλαττώσει γίνεται.” (22:3)

“Ἐπι ’ θυγατρὶ ἀδιατρέπτῳ στερέωσον φυλακὴν,
μήποτε ποιήσῃ σε ἐπίχαρμα ἐχθροῖς, λαλιὰν ἐν πόλει,
καὶ ἔκκλητον λαοῦ, καὶ καταισχύνη σε ἐν πλήθει
πολλῶν.” (42:11)

4.3.8 The Jewish family and Christianity

The symbolic narratological world of the Bible is heavily dubbed in the family metaphor. The historical Jesus is the product of his ancestral Judaism, whose off-shoots go far beyond Moses to the second millennium BC. and the legendary patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

It might not be necessary here to exhaust and spell out how the knowledge of the Jewish family is important for Christianity and specifically to unlock the Biblical message. This task should be left to the chapter 5 (the New Testament perspective of the family). It will however suffice to mention two examples, God as the father and Jesus as the Son of God.

The designation, God as the Father should be understood in the context of the patriarchal order which has been discussed above. Throughout the Bible God is called Father, and He also designated himself as such. There are eleven places in the Old Testament where God is called Father (Dt 32:5 2 Sm 7:14; 1 Chr 17 13; to cite just a few), while in the Gospels

alone God is no less than one hundred and seventy times called Father by Jesus. Jesus never refers to God by any other name in prayer other than Father. The fatherhood of God in the Old Testament is only related to Israel. It denotes a particular relationship with God: "And you shall say to Pharaoh" Thus says the Lord Israel is my first-born son, (Ex 4: 22). "For I am a father to Israel and Ephraim is my first-born (Jr 31: 9).

This metaphor refers to the fact that Israel's being is owned to God. God has converted Israel from a barren couple (Abraham and Sarah). God has adopted and made them His own. This simile also has to do with the saving grace of God. When Israel was in captivity God miraculously liberated them from Egypt. God provided their needs, as the father would do.

Jesus' identity as "the son" is constituted by his relationship to God as the Father. In representing his most intimate understanding of God by the symbol "Father", Jesus drew not only from his Jewish tradition, but also from his own family experience." The oldest son had a special position as the first-born. Naturally, the New Testament is Jesus himself. Paul often uses the image of Christ as the image of first-born of the heavenly Father, who gave Him the position of authority (Rm 8: 29; Col 1:15 and 18).