



**THE FAMILY (REALITY AND IMAGERY) AS A
HERMENEUTICAL PROCEDURE FOR
INTERPRETING THE GOSPELS WITHIN THE
SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE
ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WORLD:
AN AFRICAN SOCIAL-DESCRIPTIVE
APPROACH**

BY

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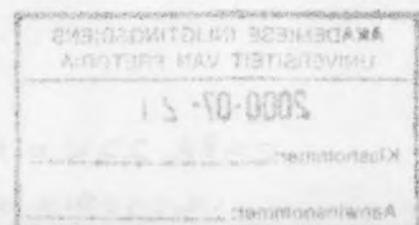
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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Reading and interpreting the Bible, whether as an “ordinary” or “critical” reader, has always been strongly influenced and shaped by a person’s unique character and life-story (Kitzberger 1999:Preface).

The nature of the theological enterprise is hermeneutical, by which is meant that theology is based upon a search for understanding and therefore in need of interpretation (Lombard 1995:104).

1.1 Introduction

In recent times biblical scholarship and hermeneutics in Africa have been dominated by what is called contextual theology. Holter (1999:1) observes that:

“In Africa – as everywhere else – the interpretation of the Bible takes place in various different contexts; different, of course, with regard to theological and ecclesiastical tradition, but different also with regard to educational level and sociological setting.”

This implies doing theology in which one takes into account, the spirit and message of the Bible and the gospel, the culture of the people and the social

changes in that culture (Bevans 1992:1). Ukpong (1999:1) calls this approach “inculturation hermeneutics”.

“The focus of inculturation hermeneutic is on the reader/interpreter and his/her context in relation to the text and its context. In inculturation hermeneutics it is required that the reader be an “insider” in the culture that is the subject of interpretation. This means that someone who has acquired knowledge, experience and insights of the culture and is capable of viewing it critically”.

Mbiti (1977:28) calls the Western and Northern American interpretation of the Bible in Africa, cultural imperialism. At the same time he calls for its termination:

“Cultural imperialism must terminate first, in order to allow the indigenous culture to relate more effectively to the Gospel, on its own terms and without pressure from outside. With humility and gratitude let us borrow and learn from other cultures, but let us not become their cultural slaves.”

Mosothoane (1973:86ff), the only Black African professor in the Old Testament in South Africa, maintains that the excessive use of Euro-centric biblical scientific methodologies stifles initiative in Africa. Emphasis placed upon form criticism, source theories, redaction criticism, etc. are not relevant to African students – who are far more concerned with real-life contexts in which the various Old Testament Scriptures arose. It should however be

noted that Mosothoane is here referring to Old Testament Studies as a theological discipline, both in South Africa and internationally. It is important to note that he is not saying that African theologians reject the findings of or conclusions of current Old Testament scholarship, but that the methodology employed and scientific emphasis evident have a negative effect on African students.

Kalu (1999:1) calls this enterprise, interpreting the Bible with African lenses:

“An image for preservation depends much on the type of lens used in capturing it. And this is true concerning African lenses, which can portray Africa differently depending on whether one is wearing the pre-colonial, colonial or post-colonial or post-independence lenses. Why African traditional lenses? These give the correct indigenous reading concerning what before the advent of Western, Islamic or other external influences came into Africa.”

Mugambi (1999:1f), rather than the term “contextualisation”, prefers the concept “encounter” because he says that the gospel encounters an African in his/her own total culture. The acceptance or rejection of the gospel is shaped by his/her own culture and his/her understanding of the gospel is within the parameters of the African knowledge and experience. Thus, there is nothing to be contextualised, because there is a two-way flow between the gospel encounter and the respondent.

In this study, the researcher takes as a point of departure this scenario in African biblical scholarship and hermeneutics. From the above analysis, there are two major methodological streams of biblical interpretation today in Africa. One can be identified as the intellectualist stream, which follows the pattern of Western biblical scholarship. It combines the search for truth with a professed commitment to scientific objectivity, and seeks to discover the objective meaning of the biblical text for the purpose of drawing general principles to be applied to reality. The other is the contextual stream, as already explained above.

In his assessment of the two streams, Obeng (1999:7) maintains that the emphasis of the context of the modern reader by African scholars has led to the demise of due attention to the text itself. In other words African scholars today are more inclined to interpret the text taking into consideration the context of the reader. Obeng calls upon the African biblical scholarship towards an appropriation of the text, thus making its meaning available to today's reader and interpreter of the Bible.

This research identifies the family as a paradigm, which can enable the interpreter in Africa and elsewhere to take into consideration the context of the reader without losing sight of the meaning of the text. This research, therefore is an attempt to employ the family as a hermeneutical procedure to interpret the New Testament text and message. This is because the mounting and upsurge of the bibliography in the area of the family in biblical criticism, is indicative of the need of research in this regard. I find the observation of Joubert and Van Henten (1996:121) appropriate:

“Judging from the large number of recent publications on the family and related matters in antiquity, it is clear that historians and biblical scholars nowadays share a renewed interest in the make-up, functions and general characteristics of families in the ancient Mediterranean world” (see also Van der Horst 1993).

Rawson (1991:7) maintains that the:

“Study of “the family” in modern and pre-modern societies continues to engage the interest of historians, demographers, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and lawyers (amongst others). This is not only a recognition of the central role which the family has played in most societies but also a response to the complexity and variety of that role and indeed to the challenge of defining “the family”.”

Spelling out the importance of family in biblical criticism, Van der Watt (1997b:1) says that:

“The family imagery is the major way in which the relationship between God, Jesus and the believers are described...”

Lassen (1997:103) contends that the family has played a significant role in the shaping of the Christian faith:

“The family metaphors played an important role in the formation of early Christianity. The Christian theology was

centred upon filiation: God was the Father, Jesus the Son, the converts were the brothers and sisters of Christ and the true heirs of Abraham.”

Garnsey and Saller (1991:151f) maintain that:

“The family was a central institution of the Mediterranean society of the first century. Through the family, the wealth of the social status was transmitted in the family, the individual found support, solidarity and the protection...”

Malina, Joubert and Van der Watt (1996:10) maintain that the family was the nucleus of the ancient world. They say that as in other social structures in the Mediterranean world, everything and everyone within the family were viewed according to their gender roles. Moxnes (1997:1) also acknowledges the importance of family in the Bible particularly in the New Testament. He, however, observes that it is strange that, even if "family" is such an important topic in Christianity:

"There have been few comprehensive studies of family in early Christianity, there has been interest in certain aspects in particular in ethical issues concerning marriage or the so-called household codes but much less on the social behaviour and forms of family as a social institution among early Christians."

Neyrey (1995:156ff) also indicates the need for further studies of fictive kinship, i.e. the ways in which the first Christians regarded and treated each other as "family" (see also Osiek 1997 and Lampe 1992).

Underscoring this need (Moxnes 1997:30) says that:

“There is good reason therefore, to look at early Christian texts with a view also to what they say about relations between husband and wife and between parents and children, that is in terms of the family that was established through marriage” (see also Malina 1993:117ff).

1.2 What is family?

The meaning of what family is may differ from one person to another and from one culture to another. Moxnes (1997:13) narrates how he normally responds to the question posed in casual conversation with "relative strangers" or colleagues at conferences, "do you have a family?":

“Yes, my parents are alive, and I have two brothers and a sister who are married and who have children...my grandparents live with my uncle, an aunt and their children live in separate households in a large farmhouse. Each summer the house is filled with several cousins, with uncles and aunts and even great-uncles and great-aunts and second cousins were occasional visitors. We all make up a larger extended family.”

The supposed bewilderment of the enquirers [including myself when I posed the same question to him during the Context Group congress in Oregon - Portland in 1996] is indicative of the fact that they did not receive the answer to the question they answered. By family they meant, the family of procreation. In other words; "are you married?", "how many children do you have?", "what is your wife doing?" etc.

Such questions about the family are usually posed in the family context in Europe and North America, i.e. the restricted nuclear family consisting of husband, wife and children. Mbiti's (1990:104f) answer to such question/s would not differ much from that given by Moxnes, because he maintains that in Africa, the family has a wider circle of members - children, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters who may have their own children and the other immediate relatives and also the departed ones.

1.3 The Problem

Biblical criticism, particularly the Euro-centric scholarship and its historical and literary approaches to the Bible, has been perceived by some as a guild of practitioners existing in an ivory tower. These critics, generally contends that the nature of any theological enterprise should be hermeneutical. In other words, theology is based upon a search for understanding and therefore the need for interpretation. However, throughout the history of biblical criticism, several sections of the world community such as women, the poor, the oppressed, the ordinary Bible reader, etc. were not taken seriously.

A feminist, Zikmund (1985:21f) contends that up to the nineteenth century, theology was conducted from a pre-feminist perspective. Researchers, theologians and authors were not consciously aware that an understanding of women's experience was essential for intellectual work. Feminist scholars from third world countries went even further to articulate what they called "a trilogy of oppression". William (1990:24) wonders:

"...which of the many oppressions in my femaleness and in my Blackness weigh the heaviest on me? Which of my liberations do I thirst for most? Do I thirst for most of all to be liberated from my colour, from my class, my ignorance of my tradition, from economic domination? Or is it the liberation from all male domination that women all over the world are struggling for today?"

It was thus the women themselves who established (and still are continuing) feminist biblical hermeneutics. Gradually they came to believe that their experience as women was ignored. They began to agitate for change. They started the quest for the reinterpretation of some of the texts, which were not negative to women. They started to portray these texts in a favourable light (see Masenya 1994:120; Sakenfeld 1985:57). The Bible, Christianity and the gospel and how they applied to women became the centre of attraction (see West 1991:85).

The voices that the traditional historical and literary critical methods were becoming redundant have been increasing. The criticism of these paradigms is not only coming from contextual, liberation, Black, feminists or African

theologians. For instance, Elliott (1993:13), a North American New Testament scholar says that:

“It has gradually become apparent to a growing number of scholars across the globe that historical criticism has proved inadequate to the task of a comprehensive Bible and the biblical world. Many biblical interpreters agree that a more sophisticated method is required for examining and understanding the biblical writings as proclaimed of and responses to their social and cultural environments.”

In the light of the above, a paradigm, which accommodates a scholar and an ordinary reader of the Bible in whatever culture, is suggested. The focus in this research is the assessment of the family during the Graeco-Roman era and also as it is portrayed in the Gospels. It is not possible to study the family in the New Testament without encountering the familial language, God as the Father, the church as the family of God, Christians as brothers and sisters, the Christians bound by love, Christians as children of God, the church as the bride, etc. – in other words the family as imagery (see Howard 1950:2ff; Hammerton-Kelly 1979:82ff; Meeks 1983:85f; Lee 1995:140; Spencer 1996:433ff; Van de Watt 1997c:557). This therefore, means that the New Testament is encoded in familial language and imagery. This method and approach of reading the text represents a shift from the notion that we read the text to the end and then step back and comment on the final outcome of the reading. It engages the reader with the text. The reading experience of the modern reader is thus enhanced by such an approach. The sources for such an endeavour will primarily be the texts themselves.

Furthermore the larger context of the first century Mediterranean world will be taken into consideration. The data accumulated by historians, theologians, sociologists, social anthropologists on the subject of the family in antiquity will be deciphered. Thus, the socio-economic and the historical cultural aspect of the Mediterranean world are important. Be it as it may, the New Testament does not treat the institution of family in a systematic manner. Some of the values were presupposed as will become clear in chapter 4 (see Goodey 1983:6ff; Lenski and Lenski 1987:176ff Saller and Kertzer 1991:8ff;).

1.4 The programme of research

This study focuses on family in the New Testament as reality and imagery. The four major perspectives in the New Testament, the synoptic gospels and John will be investigated. Although the gospels will be the major focus in this study, the other New Testament texts will also and when necessary be referred to. **Chapter two** focuses on the approach to be followed in this study as my basic point of departure, I shall focus on the Context Group. These scholars, interpret the New Testament from the vantage point of social-scientific criticism. Although in their quests they still use the procedures of the historico-critical approaches, they have distinguished themselves from the former hermeneutical procedures. They analyse the New Testament, using findings of history, archaeology, ancient literature, sociology, etc. Their major focus is that the New Testament text is both a reflection of and a response to the social and cultural setting in which the text was produced. Therefore, meanings explicit and implicit in the text are

determined by the social and cultural systems inhabited by both authors and intended readers. This study could not ignore such an immense contribution.

The contributions of the Context Group, in terms of their analyses of the values and social institutions of the first century Mediterranean world, will be combined with research by African scholars in terms of typical African views on cosmology, personality, family, etc. In terms of a basic approach to the New Testament, this combination of social scientific analyses and African analyses of biblical material, will provide us with a helpful tool to describe and interpret New Testament material from the perspective of the family. Various theoretical aspects of this so-called “African socio-descriptive approach” will be discussed in chapter 2. The researcher is an African, living in South Africa and reading the Bible in an African context. Chapter 2, therefore, looks at how the concept and experience of family in “traditional” Africa can harness a reading and understanding of the New Testament. This approach is part of an ongoing discussion of the importance of biblical studies within the broader scope of African Christian theology (Mbiti 1978:72ff; De Villiers 1993:23; Punt 1997:124;).

It is indicated in **Chapter 3** that any study must take the context of the interpreter seriously. Any study of the New Testament takes place within a specific context. Up until the present most approaches to the New Testament were undertaken by Western scholars. This research endeavours to read the New Testament from an African perspective. Therefore it is imperative to spell out the context within which the author finds himself specifically, African views on family forms the framework from which the author proceeds to understand the New Testament. Therefore chapter 3

offers a social description on relatively high level of abstraction on the African family in terms of its nature, customs, values, etc.

Chapter 4 investigates the family as reality and imagery in the New Testament world, from which the Gospels were written. Since the New Testament views in this regard were not formed in isolation from the surrounding context, one should take cognisance of typical views on the family in the “Umwelt”. This entails a brief investigation of the family in the Roman and Jewish world. Firstly the Roman family in the Graeco-Roman world is assessed. The family formed the nucleus of the Roman pagan society. Despite the economic, social and political changes taking place, the family institution remained largely intact. Different aspects of family life are identified - the nature of the Roman family, the “paterfamilias” and his “potestas”, women, children and slaves in society and marriage. The Roman family and how it was experienced, saliently underlies Christianity and the New Testament. This means that in its inception the Christian faith was inter alia shaped by the values, institutions and ideologies in the Graeco-Roman world. The second part of chapter 4 looks at the patriarchal and androcentric nature of the Jewish family during the Graeco-Roman period. Literature from the inter-testamental period and the Old Testament are utilised in this regard. Like the Roman family, the Jewish family set-up also impacted Christianity and the New Testament. Jesus and the early church drew heavily from the Jewish traditions, most importantly from their family experience.

In **chapter 5** the researcher endeavours to indicate that the Gospel writers employ many analogies and images to describe the nature of Christian

fellowship. One of the most common analogies, permeating the New Testament, is that of the family. The Christian groups conceived of themselves as the family of God. The author to the Galatians says:

“Ἄρα οὖν ὡς καιρὸν ἔχομεν, ἐργαζώμεθα τὸ ἀγαθὸν πρὸς πάντας, μάλιστα δὲ πρὸς τοὺς οἰκείους τῆς πίστεως”
(Gal 6:10).

The “ekklesia”, regarded itself as God’s family consisting of those who have responded in faith and obeyed the invitation of God. The New Testament corpus leaves us, thus, with this tension, i.e., the egalitarian structures emerged within a patriarchal household. It is hardly possible to describe a lifestyle in early Christianity which is brotherly/sisterly and not household-like, fellowship of believers, as a family consisting of brothers and sisters articulating and incarnating in conversation with the traditional cultural forces of a patriarchal society.

In the concluding **Chapter 6** the researcher attempts to answer some pertinent questions in the African hermeneutical scenario. Can the New Testament be appropriated in Africa? What is the relationship if any, between Africa and the biblical text? The researcher endeavours to show how African family values can make a meaningful contribution in the interpretation of the New Testament. It is furthermore contended that the African concept and experience of family is more closer to the narratological symbolic world of the New Testament than that of the Western world. The world, which shaped the New Testament, has many affinities with Africa. Therefore, the New Testament message is proclaimed in a language and

cultural milieu already experienced in Africa. The researcher contends and argues that the family as reality, imagery and its language as experienced by the first century Mediterranean authors and readers and also by the modern reader of the New Testament in every culture, is a paradigm for understanding the New Testament and the Christian message. Even if to a larger extent the first Christians denounced Roman paganism as well as their patriarchal Jewish past (family) in favour of their own (the household of God), they drew from the rich resources (structure and language) from the Graeco-Roman family. The same holds true for the Jewish even for the African families. The thesis closes with a submission to those reading the Bible in an African context. The family (as reality and imagery) is another way of interpreting the Bible in Africa.

CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC CRITICISM FROM AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

2.1 Introduction

The current chapter is an excursion on the family (as reality and metaphor) as a hermeneutical procedure for interpreting the New Testament from the social-scientific vantagepoint. Some remarks about the nature of the paradigm itself will be helpful. When this approach was still in its infancy, some scholars cautioned that it was too soon to predict the influence, which it will have in biblical criticism:

“The usefulness of social – scientific data in biblical studies is now at its infancy, and it is still too soon to predict the influence that this sort of comparative approach may have”
(Wilson 1984:81)

Mosala (1989:57f), an African philosopher and scholar also casted some doubts as to the success of the social – scientific approach:

“It moves us one step forward to the extent that it focuses our attention on the social nature of our texts, but it pulls us two steps backward in that it not only reintroduces the old ideological hunches inherent in the historical-critical methods, but it hides them under the cloak of a more systematic

approach. Thus it blunts the edge of a possible new social and political biblical hermeneutics that could liberate the Bible itself to become a more liberating tool.”

Masuetto (1983:7) adds to a list of criticisms when he states that the social - scientific criticism does not actually represent a theoretical break with historical-criticism, but rather it amounts to no more than the sociological potentialities of liberal biblical criticism along interpretative sociological or structural functionalist lines.

Criticism, such as the examples cited above, represents a partial comprehension of the procedure itself. For instance the remarks by Mosala and Masuetto give an impression that social-scientific exegetes’ endeavour is to break with the historical-critical approaches. The contrary is true. Elliott (1993:7) adequately dispels this misrepresentation:

“..social-scientific criticism is a sub-discipline of exegesis and is inseparably related to the other operations of the exegetical enterprise: textual criticism, literary criticism, redaction criticism, tradition criticism, form criticism. Social-scientific criticism complements these other modes of critical analysis, all of which are designed to analyse specific features of the biblical text.”

The strides and successes made by the social-scientific exegetes further invalidate unfair criticism of the paradigm. Mentioning some of its successes, Osiek (1979:88) maintains that:

“The current popularity of the encounter between the social sciences and biblical study needs no demonstration, the mounting bibliography in this area is indicative of its increasing popularity.”

Writing less than a decade ago, Garrett (1990:382) also negates the doubts cast on the success of the social-scientific method:

“In the few decades, theologians and biblical scholars have turned in ever - increasing numbers to an appropriation of the models, concepts and methods of the social sciences, especially sociology to guide their research enterprises. Indeed, this trend has become so pronounced that it may well signal a methodological revolution of similar proportion to the higher criticism ... The utilisation of social scientific constructs can appreciably add to the stock of knowledge available to biblical researchers, but only if those constructs are handled with discernment and sophistication in their application to textual interpretation.”

As stated above, the focus in this chapter is on the appropriation of the social-scientific paradigm, i.e. the use of models from the social sciences to interpret the New Testament text. Most, if not all of the social-scientific exegetes who will be used and quoted throughout in this enterprise are those doing theology in the West and North America. The researcher, being an African, living in South Africa and reading the Bible in an African context endeavours to go beyond Western orientated social-scientific criticism. The

necessity of such an approach has been chronicled by several scholars in Africa:

Punt (1997:124) maintains that in reading the Bible in Africa, the strategies of ownership should be explored:

“In post-colonial Africa as in post-apartheid South Africa there is an ever-increasing emphasis on theology as perceived and done in Africa: also as far as the academic study of the Bible is concerned. There is no doubt that the discovery of the contribution Africa can make to biblical studies, although belated, is a very rightful and necessary perception. However, as in all attempts to make the Bible address contemporary settings and concerns, many dangers accompany these efforts to relate the bible to African culture – and in particular its corollary: the attempt to show up Africa as the most (only) appropriate setting or context for understanding the Bible.”

Bediako (1997:32) submits that such a contextualisation and reading the Bible in Africa is unavoidable:

“We live in Africa and the best way to serve God effectively and productively is through the expression of our unique identity. God is our father, not a stranger. We must serve Him the way we know Him and understand Him. We should not be carbon copies of other people’s experiments and styles. We

should be ourselves and create our own forms of worship from our own perspective”

Mugambi (1989:9) contends that this endeavour has to do with being African:

“In post – colonial Africa both the orthodox and unorthodox initiatives in the Africanisation of Christianity have continued with varying degrees of success from country to country and from denomination to denomination. Nevertheless, the initiatives are there. Beneath the veneer of imported ecclesiastical institutions African Christians remain African. In spite of translated hymns and prayer books, foreign ecclesiastical vestments and architecture, theological training in a foreign language – in spite of all these, Africans in the imported denominations remain Africans and Christians at the same time.”

Anum (1999:2) calls this process biblical hermeneutics in African theology:

“Similarly, African theologians in post-colonial and post-missionary times are trying to reconstruct African theology in their own context. Contextual theology has a certain agenda that is related to its own tradition. Thus the agenda for African scholarly readers is to develop forms of African theology which is located in its cultural history as well as the political and

economic realities that Africans are facing up to in their various contexts.”

Theron (1996:18) says that contextualisation in Africa means developing an own indigenous theology. In the process of theologising, cultural, socio-economic as well as the political contexts should be taken into consideration. Schoonhoven (1989:13) maintains that, “...the Bible itself is an interpreting text.” This means that the Bible, and in particular the New Testament is about the interpretation of the early believers’ faith. Therefore the need for reinterpretation or contextualisation finds its origin in the continuing context of situations people find themselves in. An African interpretation of the Bible, for instance has to be considered not only legitimate but necessary (cf Roberts 1964:83; Hastings 1976:37; Mbiti 1977:26; 1986:47; Pobee 1979; 15f; Fage 1986:454; Schoonhoven 1989:13).

The current trend in African biblical scholarship is therefore going beyond the Euro-centric biblical criticism. In recent times, within the circles of Black or African theology, the expression "contextualisation" has been the buzzword. It implies the contextualisation of theology as a means of developing an own indigenous theology. In the process of theologising, cultural, socio-economic as well as the political contexts should be taken into consideration. In the light of this, the researcher will endeavour to apply what he calls “African social-descriptive criticism”, i.e. the understanding and also the appropriation of the African value system as a means of interpreting the New Testament texts.

2.2 The social-scientific paradigm

Many social-scientific critics share the same views in their description of the upsurge of this paradigm. They maintain that the epoch-making publications of the 1970s (Meeks 1972; Gager 1975; Theissen 1978; to mention just a few) were nothing new but a renaissance of a movement which commenced during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Scroggs (1980:164) maintains that:

“Interest in the social reality of early Christianity, of course, is nothing new. Especially during the preceding one hundred years keen interest has often been expressed in such matters. This interest peaked during the first third of this century...”

Van Staden and Van Aarde (1991:55f) also echo the same sentiments. They assert that the interest in the situational context of the biblical documents and the traditions they contain, is not new. They quote the two well-known attempts at a sociological interpretation of early Christianity which are the Marxist reading of Scroggs (1980:177-179) and the Chicago school of New Testament studies. Both of them have been implicitly or explicitly reductionist in postulating social causes for all religious phenomena. The so-called form-critical school also had an enquiry into the socio-historical background of a text as part of its exegetical programme as early as the beginning of the century. The works of Matthew (1897; 1930); Deissmann (1908); Case (1914; 1923); Cadoux (1925) and Lohmeyer (1953) are cited as the most important.

It is necessary to describe what social-scientific criticism is and what it is not. This elucidation becomes significant because for instance, the two expressions “social description of the New Testament world” and “the social-scientific criticism” in some circles are confusingly and interchangeably used (see also Gager 1979:175; Gottwald 1982:143; Schultz 1982:1; Osiek 1984:4).

2.2.1 Social-scientific criticism

Malina (1993:xiii) outlines the use of models from cultural anthropology in social-scientific criticism:

“Models from cultural anthropology do not offer an alternative explanation of the Bible, nor do they do away with literary critical, historical, and theological study. Rather, they add a dimension not available from other methods, along with a way to check on the hunches of interpreters when it comes to questions of social context.”

Van Staden (1990:22) also defines this approach:

“A social-scientific study of the New Testament presupposes a relationship between the text and the socio-historical environment from which it originated. This relationship can be described in different configurations, in each of which specific elements are accentuated. This study supports the view that a text is both a social product, its formation being prompted by

some societal (including religious) stimulus, and a social force, able to effect some change in society."

Elliot (1993:7) also gives a well-knitted description of the social scientific paradigm:

"Social-scientific criticism of the Bible is that phase of the exegetical task which analyses the social and cultural dimensions of the text and of its environmental context through the utilisation of the perspectives, theory, models, and research of the social sciences. As a component of the historical-critical method of exegesis, social-scientific criticism investigates biblical texts as meaningful configurations of language intended to communicate between composers and audiences. In this process it studies (1) not only the social aspects of the form and content of texts but also the conditioning factors and intended consequences of the communication process; (2) the correlation of the text's linguistic, literary, theological (ideological), and social dimensions; and (3) the manner in which this textual communication was both a reflection of and response to a specific social and cultural context - that is, how it was designed to serve as an effective vehicle of social interaction and an instrument of social as well as literary consequence."

These quotations clearly portray the nature of the social-scientific criticism. Thus, this hermeneutical procedure goes beyond the description of the New Testament world, that is beyond a mere and just collection of social data. In

attempting to distinguish the social scientific approach from the social description, Van Staden and Van Aarde (1991:55ff) refer to the pendulum swinging from “what did the author mean?” (social description), to “was there anything in the contemporary society’s structure that this utterance should be a reflection to?” (social-scientific criticism).

Social-scientific biblical critics share the basic assumption that any communication can only be understood properly within the social and cultural codes or cues from which it originated. Since it is accepted that the texts presuppose and encode information from the social system from which they emerge, the meanings communicated in them can only be ascertained with the help of information from those social and cultural systems. Not taking these factors seriously can only lead to a misinterpretation of the text (see Craffert:1991:123; Elliot:1993:9; Malina:1993:12).

2.2.2 Social description

Scholars employing social descriptive analyses of the New Testament attempt to explain the situational context of the New Testament texts and traditions. The interest is primarily historical in character for theological relevance. Joubert (1994:37) identifies the social description of the New Testament as an endeavour to analyse the early Christian world by employing findings from history, archaeology, ancient literature social theories etc. (see also Scroggs 1980: 164). This approach is also referred to by different names such as, social analysis, social description, socio-historical approach, social history even sociological analysis. Osiek (1989:270) maintains that roughly speaking the scholars whose interests lie

in the social description of the New Testament milieu work at a lower level of abstraction focusing more on particularities and the interrelationship of social facts, letting the models arise from the ancient texts themselves. Hence, those engaged with this procedure study the societal phenomena during the time of early Christianity for the purposes of historical interest. The question facing the researcher changes from "what did the author mean?" to was there anything in the contemporary societal structure that his audience could be a reflection of? The texts are processed in this manner until every piece of information that might have some societal relevance has been tagged and included in a database. This data is sorted into categories such as "cultural", "political", "economical" and "religious". Van Staden and Van Aarde (1991: 55) say that:

"each of these categories contain the information on the different social institution that could be assigned to it. The accumulated information serves as a new source from which to extract the information needed to reconstruct any of the settings that could be deemed connected to an utterance in order to facilitate the understanding of that utterance.

Osiek (1984:4) maintains that thereafter, co-operation for the reconstructed setting is sought from both the same period, biblical and unbiblical literary sources from the same period and from archaeological evidence. In this way a picture emerges of the time of the origin of early Christianity (see also Ebertz 1987; Horsley 1989; Blasi 1997).

2.2.3 The thrust of social-scientific-criticism: Bridging the broken author-reader contract

After providing descriptions of social-scientific criticism (2.2.1) and social description (2.2.2), we proceed briefly to allude to the nature and function of the paradigm. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:9) see as the main thrust of the social-scientific criticism, the bringing to the surface the unwritten text of the New Testament. What is actually implied in this assertion is that, in writing the text, the New Testament authors presumed that their audience knew and understood how their world functioned.

Since the invention of the art of writing, it has never been possible or even necessary to put everything down in writing, which needs to be communicated. Author/s always depend on the general and cultural knowledge of the reader. Malina and Rohrbaugh (:10) point out that doing all these in good faith, the New Testament authors were not conscious of the fact that they were breaking the contract with their future readers who would be interested in their writings and even call them "Word of God". They, (Malina and Rohrbaugh :10), further remind all the contemporary readers of the New Testament corpus that their composers did not have any of them in mind. It is also doubtful that the New Testament authors were conscious that they were committing to paper what would be so extensively and ideologically read and even referred to by many as "Word of God".

Furthermore, Elliott (1993:7) maintains that the task of social-scientific criticism is to investigate the biblical text as meaningful configuration of language intended to communicate between the authors and their readers. In

this process of course not only the social aspect of the form and content of the texts, but also the conditioning factors and intended consequences of the communication process are given attention. The correlation of the text's linguistic, literary, theological and social dimensions and the manner in which this textual communication was both a reflection of and a response to a specific social and cultural content, that is, how it was designed to serve as an effective vehicle of social interaction and instrument of social as well as literary and theological consequence, is also investigated (see also Elliott 1982:8; Rohrbaugh 1987:103).

In his elucidation of the nature of the social-scientific criticism, Malina (1993:xi) maintains that the meanings which people exchange, are deeply rooted in the social system that envelops them. Therefore in order to understand what another person says and means, requires a listener or reader to somehow share in the world of meaning of the speaker or writer.

Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:20) say that there is a distance between the contemporary readers and the New Testament. Such a distance is a social, temporal as well as a conceptual one and entails radical differences in social roles, values and general cultural features. This distance is the most fundamental, and creates the possibility to understand the New Testament from an emic perspective (refer also to Richter 1984; Rohrbaugh 1987 and Van Staden 1988; Malina 1993).

2.3 The basic values of Africa:

An African social-descriptive approach

After a brief overview of the social-scientific criticism as a paradigm in biblical studies, the researcher intends to delineate the framework for an indigenous, African approach to the New Testament. In other words, the themes inherent to the basic value systems shared by African people on a high level of abstraction will be spelled out here. What the researcher refers to as African social-descriptive approach is an attempt aimed at making a contribution in an ongoing discussion of the importance of biblical studies within the broader scope of African Christian theology (see Punt 1997: 124; Mbiti 1978:72ff; De Villiers 1993:2ff). 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 texts? its historical settings or historical canonical fixing(s)? How can the biblical and African contexts be adequately dealt with? These questions, including many others, call for an appropriate hermeneutic in an African context, which Onwu (1985 :145ff) refers to 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 large extent on the 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 belongs to Africans themselves (see also Bujo 1977:125).

2.3.1 Defining the concept "African"

The expression "African" will in this section be constantly and consistently used - for an example, African culture, African philosophy of life, African community, etc. Countless books, conference papers and articles about Africa, Africanism, Africanness, etc. are written and read without a clear attempt to state who or what an African is. It is ostensibly taken for granted by the writer and/or presenter that the listener or reader has the same conception of an African as him/her. This dissertation does not fall into that mode. Due to the fact that the researcher works on the high level of abstraction, it is constrictive for the designation "African" to be defined from the onset.

Sundermeier (1998:9) attempts to identify who an African is and states that:

"Anyone encountering Africans will find that they are passionate lovers of life. They are not influenced by the philosophy of Plato, who questioned the phenomenological world and gave real ontological value only to the invisible. The philosophy of Descartes, who put a distance between human beings (*res cogitans*) and the world (*res extensa*) do not influence them. This led to the domination of nature and animals, which were held in such contempt that in the end the cry of an animal was not valued more highly than the noise of the machine. Africans turn to this world in order to experience wholeness."

Anyanwu (1981:180) indicates some of the problems encountered when trying to define who an African is:

“To define an African as a person born and bred of African stock is really a secular definition, because one then has to define African stock. On the other hand, by African we mean a person born and bred on the continent of Africa, then we have Africans of various types: Bushmen, Pygmies, Nilotics, Bantu, Berbers, Arabs and even Whites, and others. It is a biological fact that these physical types differ from each other in easily recognisable bodily characteristics.”

The above statements indicate that the designation African means different things to different people. Although, sometimes the term Black is interchangeably used with African, it has political undertones referring to those people who were or are still politically, economically and socially disadvantaged. As stated above, for the purpose of this discussion, the designation African, will be consistently employed.

Several meanings and definitions are advanced:

- 1) the traditionally indigenous people of the African continent
- 2) anybody who is committed to Africa
- 3) those who want to see the United States of Africa (Pan-Africanists)

4) Black Africans

5) Those living in sub-Saharan Africa

6) Those who have their citizenship in Africa

The list can still continue. The above-mentioned discourse suggests the identity of who an African is not simplistic. Writing less than a decade ago Oosthuizen (1991:35) observed that "although less than a third of Africa is considered to be urbanised, the process of secularisation or modernisation has been intensified." Even before Oosthuizen, Mazrui (1980:8) pointed out that forces such as Christianity, have tremendously impacted Africa (see also Mazrui:47; Tienou 1990:24). African philosophers and observers agree to the reality of this phenomenon but another reality is that the African people are still hanging on to their traditions and customs. Temples (1959:17f) maintains that even though the Africans are civilised or Christianised in terms of Western standards "will revert back to their behaviour whenever they are overtaken by moral lassitude, danger or suffering." Oosthuizen (1991:35f) says that urbanisation is more of a "mental construction than a material phenomenon".

Rauche (1996:21) says that concepts such as black consciousness, black power and theology are important indicators that Africans are resisting Western influence and attempting to preserve their own identity. The African traditional community obviously has not yet transcended its mythological thought patterns. The belief in mystical powers is a dominant

phenomenon. The inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the first Black State President of the Republic of South Africa in 1994 is a classical example: The first part of the ceremony which included the oath by the President, gun salute and formal speeches was observed according to Western standards but the second part at the Paul Kruger Square in Pretoria was characterised and crowned by African traditional ceremonies and rituals.

In view of the above, the expression “African” in this context is a person whether living in the city or village who is culturally and historically attached to Africa. The one who is committed and identifies with Africa. A concise overview of African cosmology will further elucidate the identity of an African.

2.3.2 African cosmology

The attempt to describe African cosmology is not only aimed at further defining an African but to lay a foundation for our understanding of the African value system. The following concerning African cosmology will be discussed, the supreme being, spirits and powers, the vitality force, African concept of time and the cult of the ancestors.

2.3.2.1 Belief in the supreme being

Belief in a supreme being is generally encountered in African religions as a prominent factor. Busia (1971:5) concurs that “the postulate of God is universal throughout Africa.” Anyanwu (1981:163f) maintains that the African people believe in a divine power. This divine power manifests

himself/ herself/ itself in everyone and everything. It/he/she is the giver of this experience, the author of the experienced divine qualities. Thus, the African goes beyond the visible to an invisible world of spirituality, a world of faith, which is the crown of culture. Therefore God or the supreme being in Africa is viewed as that power who/which organises and integrates the world beyond the physical appearance.

Temples (1959:20) maintains that the African people have been having the most pure form of the concept of God, the supreme being, creator and dispenser of the universe. In articulating this desire Mbiti (1969:229) claims that:

"historically Christianity is very much an African religion, but also that as a Christian faith, is capable of being apprehended by African terms without being made difficult."

Tutu (1978:366) maintains that the African has a genuine knowledge of God:

"It is reassuring to know that one have had a genuine knowledge of God and that we have had our own ways of communion with the deity, ways which meant that we were able to speak authentically as ourselves and not as pale imitations of others."

Idowu (1969:18) says that :

"The worship of one supreme deity is universal among all really primitive peoples."

Faith in that supreme being therefore lies at the root of all traditional religions and socio-cultural conceptions manifested inter alia in:

- *Animism - the belief that spirits can infuse human beings
- *Dynamism - all things are subject to the influence of cosmic powers
- *Fetishism - the belief in an object, natural or manufactured which is infused with power that can give a person fortune or protection.

Gyekye (1987:195f) says that most African people do have a concept of God as the supreme being who created the whole universe out of nothing and who is the absolute ground of all being. There are however some African scholars epitomised by Nyirongo (1997:10) who maintain that prior to the coming of the Christian missionaries to Africa, the Africans did not worship God but gods. Nyirongo's submission is unpopular with many African scholars.

2.3.2.2 Spirit and powers

Gyekye (1987:196ff) maintains that the African ontology besides the supreme being recognises other categories of the lesser spirits, which are variously referred to as deities, spirits, gods, nature gods, divinities, etc. Theron (1996:12) says that these spirits and magical powers are a reality to many. It is believed that the whole universe is infested with spirits, the

spirits of rivers, mountains, hills, etc. The spirits of affliction are those used by people to harm other human beings. Anyanwu (1981:164) submits that living in a community, the African believes that there are mysterious forces surrounding him/her. He/she is in communion with these forces (his/her fellowman, nature, forces animate and inanimate). A person is expected to cope with these spirits and forces determining his/her life. McVeigh (1974:32) calls them "a myriad of spirits". In African communities these spirits are taken care of. There are specialists who are gifted and possess the capacity to manipulate and interpret the workings of these spirits and forces in people. These "mediums" specialise in communicating with the spirits, the "diviners" use the "dolosh" (bones of animals and sea shells) to determine the will of the spirits and the "medicine men" specialise in the knowledge of herbs and animal flesh to ward off the spirits.

2.3.2.3 Vitality force

In addition, but, distinct from the world of spirits and powers, Mbiti (1969:21) asserts that the African people believe in the existence of a force, power or energy which is permeating the whole universe. This, in his opinion should be regarded as a separate ontological category. Rauche (1996:20) identifies this phenomenon as the "muntu" (vitality force), which he says manifests itself as a hierarchical order of life-forces. According to him this vitality force is of existential significance and constitutes justice. Crafford (1996:41) maintains that this force is available to human beings for utilisation at a restricted degree. It brings illness, ill-fortune and causes accidents (see also Parrinder 1962:21; Mbiti 1969:16).

2.3.3 African concept of time

Time and a concept thereof is one of the most abstract and intangible concepts in human thought. Kearney (1993:98) maintains that most people around the world relate to time much as a fish relates to water, that is, uncritically swimming through it and of course, being largely oblivious of it. The African conception and experience of time plays an important role in traditional African thought. Most writers on African culture and traditional religions depend on Mbiti's (1969:22f) submission. He defines a period of time, which he calls "sasa". This, he defines it as the present, the immediate future and the immediate past. It is the period in which people are conscious of their existence. The next period of time, he calls "zamani". This is the past-terminal period of time.

Some people refer to coming late for a meeting or an occasion as African time. This is not entirely true because the African does not have an objective value of time. It is only when something is taking place, that time happens or occurs. This, therefore, means that when nothing takes place, there is no talk of any wastage of time.

Oosthuizen (1991:42) contends that in the African approach of time, the future is not an event and thus plays a minor role, while of course, in the secularised world, the future is the centre of the time concept. Basically, the African has a two-dimensional concept of time, namely, a dynamic present and a long past. The future is in this cyclic concept of time greatly devalued. Events merely come and go. But the past receives the main emphasis, it is

where the human being finds his/her orientation, that is, where his/her roots lie and where he/she finds security.

Theron (1996:9) says that the African has a great sense of the past, that is a long history. Time, therefore, does not move into the future but rather into the past. The past provides the motivation for the present. Some observers maintain that the African conception of time has tremendous consequences for the African continent. It has led to poor planning and development. The present is more important in the sense that harmony and balance should be maintained, change should be avoided as much as possible because it will disturb the harmony. Tradition is regarded as essential and should be maintained.

Although there are elements of truth in some of Mbiti's submissions and those who are influenced by his writings, some of the cases are overstated or exaggerated. It is a fact that Africans are event driven more than being conscious of time as an objective reality. But to them what is important is not the time in which an event takes place but the fact that it has taken place. What Mbiti and those persuaded by his thinking fail to observe, is that an African does not have a problem in adapting to the Western conception of time. For instance, a group of Africans working at a company operating according to Western values including conception of time, will not have a problem in being punctual at work and their submission of tasks but the same group of people will not see it inappropriate to arrive minutes late at a funeral service or a traditional occasion where African values operate.

2.3.4 The cult of ancestor veneration

The cult of ancestors is to the African what Jesus is to Christianity and what Mohammed is to Islam. It is the main focus of the African traditional religions. The ancestral spirits are in an ontological position between the other spirits, the supreme being and people. This belief forms the nucleus of African traditional religions. Crafford (1996:46) maintains that the cult of ancestors is important because it deals with the everyday life of the individual and that of the tribe. The ancestors are also regarded as the mediators between people, the tribe and the supreme being. Setiloane (1986:17) says that the interaction of one's spirit with those of other people in the community does not terminate with death. Even after death, the "vital participation" of the deceased is experienced in the community in general and also in the home and clan circles in particular. The cult is therefore the experience in the life of the people (see also ; Daneel 1973:53ff; Oosthuizen 1977:273).

Who/what are the ancestral spirits? They are the spirits of the departed. They are also called the living-dead. The first step in the cult is the funeral itself. But before the day of the funeral some rituals are performed on the corpse and on the close members of the family. As much as possible close contact with the members of the public is avoided. The shaking of hands is strictly forbidden. The widow/widower for instance is not supposed to talk to the other mourners unless very close to her/him. On the day of the funeral all members of the family are obliged to attend. African funerals are characterised by large crowds. More than empathising with the bereaved family, those attending the funeral, together with the family members,

relatives and the community at large pay tribute to the deceased, thus gaining his/her favour.

After a minimum of six months up to a year, after the spirit has wandered around, it will come back home. A special ceremony is made to welcome home the spirit. This is called in Zulu, "Ukubuyiswa ekhaya" (the bringing-home ceremony). In most cases a cow is slaughtered. It is an occasion in which the mourning cloths are taken off. In some African cultures this ceremony is more important than the funeral itself. It should be noted that it is not the ceremony which brings the spirit back home, but a mere formality of welcoming him/her back. From that time, the spirit becomes part of the family. The family can now start to offer sacrifices in the form of food, beer, snuff, etc. at the corner of the hut or at the cattle kraal.

2.3.4.1 The category of spirits

The ancestral spirits are categorised:

(a) Children

In most cases, children are not regarded as ancestral spirits with influence. They are remembered but not venerated.

(b) Men and women

In most African cultures the spirits of men are more important than women. The women spirits are remembered and inherited by her immediate family,

whereas the men's spirits would be venerated by his brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, etc.

(c) Family heads

Their spirits are more important than the rest. Under normal circumstances, the ancestor is remembered for a few generations. Thereafter the person's name as an ancestor moves to the background. The family head and chiefs are remembered and venerated by generations to come.

(d) Notorious people, criminals

These are not venerated as ancestral spirits. They are regarded to have, through their criminal deeds, injured the tribe. It is believed that they become wandering spirits continuing their evil practices.

2.3.4.2 The function of the ancestral spirits

The ancestral spirits fulfil a wide range of functions. It should be indicated that the role and influence of the ancestors is essentially applicable only to the direct descendants. This of course, as indicated above excludes the spirits of great names such as Shaka to the Zulus. Their spirits are never forgotten. They will forever be venerated by the entire Zulu nation throughout the ages. The ancestors can however, collectively (as a community of the living-dead) be called upon to help in a specific crisis situation such as drought, pestilence, floods, etc. Such a call can be made by

a tribe or nation at special occasions or community rites, such as agricultural rites, rain making ceremonies, etc.

The ancestors remain part of the social community and also unite the community. They take care of the daily needs of the tribe and bestow rain and fertility. They also protect the morals and traditions of the family, tribe and nation. The ancestors are therefore the guardians of the community's morality. This means that a transgression of the order and rules of the community is at the same time a transgression against the ancestors (see also; Parrinder 1962:59; Mbiti 1969:84f; Crafford 1996:46f; Theron 1996:31f).

There are two omissions or misconceptions made by many writers on the cult of ancestors which deserve to be observed. This is due to the fact that the "the people who first brought it to the notice of the world were definitely biased ... and ignorant" (see Setiloane 1986:17). Statements such as "these ancestors however do not play a role in the personal lives of individuals members ... " (in Theron 1996:31) are inaccurate and misinformed. It should be acknowledged that in general, Africans are a communal society but the starting point in the veneration of ancestors is the family. Who welcomes the spirit back home? It is not the tribe but the family. It is true, as indicated above that there are times when the ancestors are collectively approached but the ancestors are involved with families and individuals in those families. It is not only the tribe or family which needs protection but the individual also needs it from the ancestors. The second omission is that though the ancestors are important in the relationship between people and the inanimate world, there are times when they are by-passed. During the

times of calamity, severe drought, crisis, pestilence, etc., the Africans would approach the supreme being directly. For instance in Kwa-Zulu Natal there are places or mountains called "iziguqo" (place to kneel) where the tribe would go and kneel and talk to *Qamata* (Zulu name for God).

2.4 Resemblances between typical ancient Mediterranean values and typical African values (on a high level of abstraction)

Where do we search to find the meaning of a word or an action? The meaning of words are found in a dictionary, we might say, but the meaning of actions depend on the culture, the people and their circumstances. Take for instance eye-contact. In African culture the avoidance of eye contact is an expression of respect and reverence. In Western culture not making eye contact means that a person has something to hide or lacks character. The same action has two different meanings in the two different cultures. If one does not understand the culture and its values, one would interpret the action incorrectly. The same may be experienced when the actions of the biblical characters are interpreted. We can translate the Bible by using a Greek and Hebrew dictionary. But that does not mean that we will understand the Bible and its message fully. In order to truly understand the meaning of what the Bible says (especially the actions and utterances of biblical characters) we need to understand the culture and the values of that time. Biblical scholars who apply social-scientific methods have made a valuable contribution in our understanding of these actions and utterances. Numerous resemblances apparently exist between ancient Mediterranean values and African values (as will, hopefully, become clear in the following subsections). Some of them will be used as an example to demonstrate the

interrelatedness of African and ancient Mediterranean values, albeit at a high level of abstraction - dyadic personality, honour and shame, purity - pollution system and “insiders” and “outsiders”.

2.4.1 Dyadic personality

2.4.1.1 The Mediterranean world

Malina (1993:65) describes the typical dyadic personality as a non-individualistic, strongly group orientated disposition of the first century Mediterranean world. In his description Elliott (1993: 128f) contends that in contrast to individual personality, dyadic personality is a sense of self which is determined by and dependent upon the perceptions and evaluations of others. This conception is externally rather than internally orientated, shame-faced rather than guilt-based.

Social scientists, especially psychologists are on an ongoing basis engaged in trying to define personality, individuality or personology. In their endeavours, they use different theories. The word personality is often used to explain the individual's social dimension. Someone who is said to be having a strong personality, could be someone who can use his/her influence or impress people easily. The word personality could also be used to refer to someone's general behaviour patterns, his/her nature. Predictions are therefore, sometimes made about someone's behaviour on the basis of his/her personality. It can also be said that some actions on the part of an acquaintance confuse us because the behaviour does not fit in with the person's personality. “Personality” can therefore be understood as the

changing but nevertheless relatively stable organisation of all physical, psychological and spiritual characteristics of the individual which is responsible or determines his/her behaviour in interactions with the context in which the individual finds himself/herself (see Meyer, Moore and Viljoen 1997:11f).

Malina (1993:67) attempts to compare the first century Mediterranean world conception of personality with the Western perspective. Concerning typical Western views he states:

“You might not have thought this is what you think you are like, but take the time to consider this description of an individual. In our culture we are brought up to stand on our own two feet, as distinctive wholes, distinctive individuals, male and female. We are motivated to behave in the “right” way, alone, if necessary, regardless of what others might think or say. In our process of identity formation, we are led to believe and act as though we do so singly and alone, responsible only for our own actions, since each person is a unique sphere of feeling and knowing, of judging and acting. When we relate to other people, we feel that they are as distinct and unique beings as we ourselves are. In addition to being unique and distinct persons, each of us lives within our unique social and natural environments. This is individualism.”

Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992: 229) further elucidate the Western view of personality and individualism:

“In contemporary North American culture we consider an individual’s psychological makeup to be the key to understanding who he or she might be. We see each individual as bounded and unique, a more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness and judgement that is set over against other such individuals and interacts with them.”

The sort of personality and individualism as explained above has been rare or non-existent in the cultures of the New Testament world. Malina (1993:64) portrays the conception and experience of the personality which appropriately describes the persons, their utterances and actions encountered in the pages of the New Testament:

“One unique personhood, one’s inner self with its difficulties, weaknesses, confusions, and inability’s to cope, and one’s distinctive, individual realm of hopes and dreams are simply not of public concern or comment. Rather, persons of such inculturation know how to keep their psychological core hidden and secret. They are persons of careful calculation and discretion normally disavowing any dependence on others.”

Furthermore Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:22) contend that:

“In the Mediterranean world of antiquity such a view of the individual did not exist. There every person was

embedded in others and had his or her identity only in relation to these others who form a fundamental group. For most people this was the family, and it meant that individuals neither acted nor thought of themselves as persons independent of the family group. What one member of the family was, every member of the family was, psychologically as well as in every other way. Mediterranean's are what anthropologists call "dyadic." that is, they are "other-oriented" people who depend on others to provide them with a sense of who they are."

2.4.1.2 African views of personality

Before it could be demonstrated how this value (used as a model), dyadic personality as seen by the social-scientific critics, can be utilised to interpret the New testament texts, it is appropriate to allude to the African view of personality with a view of seeing how the African social-descriptive paradigm can also make a contribution.

In making the contrast between the African and Western concept of personality, Menkiti (1979:157) says that:

"..whereas most Western views of man abstract this or that feature of the core individual and then proceed to make it the defining or essential characteristic which entitles ascribing of the description "man" must have, the African view of man denies that persons can be defined by focusing on this or that physical,

psychological characteristics of an individual. Rather, man is defined by reference to the environing community. One obvious conclusion to be drawn from this dictum is that, as far as Africans are concerned, the reality of individual life histories, whatever these may be and this primacy is meant to apply not only ontologically but also in regard to epistemic accessibility. It is in rootedness in an ongoing human community that the individual comes to see himself as man.”

Gbadegesin (1998:292) maintains that in order for one to comprehend the African conception of individuality and also the community, it is useful to trace the coming-to-be of the new member of the family, i.e. birth. The new baby would arrive with the waiting hands of the elders of the household. The experienced elderly women in the household see to it that the new baby is delivered safely and that the mother is not in danger after delivery. They introduce the baby into the family with cheerfulness, joy and prayers. From there on the new mother may not touch the child except breastfeeding. In all these, the importance of the new arrival as a unique individual is reconciled with his/her belonging to the family which decides his/her name but also has a duty to see his/her birth as a significant episode in its existence.

Gbadegesin (1998:292f) continues to state that:

“The meaning of this is that the child as an extension of the family tree, should be given a name that reflects his/her membership thereof, and it is expected that the name so given will guide and control the child by being a constant reminder to

his/her or his/her membership of the family and the circumstances of his/her birth.”

Oduyoye (1991:466) makes a contribution in this regard and elucidates the perception of the personality of the African people of Ghana:

“To constitute the African people of Ghana, one begins by identifying the groups of people whose language is understood without too much effort; the linguistic phenomena called dialects also mark affinity of people. In Ghana the Akuapens, Akyem Asante, Brong, Fante, Kwahu, all large groups belong to the Akan family. They share a world view that rests on a religious interpretation of the universe. They are one people with a variety of interpretations and expressions of fundamental systems which they have in common.”

The above, concerning African personality, clearly indicates that Africans have a distinctive feature of collective consciousness which is manifested in their behaviour patterns, expression and spiritual self-fulfilment in which values such as the universal brotherhood, sharing and treating other people as humans are concretised. In traditional Africa, human beings are not existing as individuals. A person does not easily take a decision on his/her own, and will not act as an individual. He/she is part of the social community and the society has priority over him/her. Everything is aimed and meant for the well-being of the society and at harmony in the social order and life. A human being, thus exist only in and for the community.

According to traditional Africans, individuality and the sense of personhood is fulfilled through his/her participation in the tribe. In other words the individual is not a person until he has been accepted by the community. In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He/she owes his/her existence to other people, including those of the past generations and his/her contemporaries, including the departed spirits (cult of ancestors). The community must make, create or produce the individual for the individual depends on the corporate group (see Mbiti 1969:108; Nyirongo 1997:101).

In the course of our discussion of African personality the expression “traditional African” has been constantly employed. This should in no way provide an impression that urban or modern Africans have a different conception. The concept of African individuality and community will never be lost. Even in urban areas such a philosophy and concept is entrenched and manifest. For instance the many social societies, where people help each other during the time of need, are growing. During the time of calamity or need, e.g. when a young man marries, the uncles and the other members of the family would assist him in paying lobola (bride wealth). Poor families are relieved by having their children sent to live with economically well-to-do families. It is not unusual in African society to have an elder brother or uncle paying for the education of his younger brother/sister (see Theron 1996:10).

Setiloane (1986:10) makes a significant observation about the people of African origin living in Europe for study or work purposes:

“There are numerous tragedies among Africans who go and live abroad in the countries of Europe and the US. Their most common complaint is “loneliness” and the distance of people in spite of their closeness and numbers. The privacy of life which Western man has come to almost make a religion of, to them becomes a hurdle, resulting in depression mental disturbances and often even suicide”

From the vantage point of the African social-descriptive approach, the first century Mediterranean world value of dyadic personality (as seen in Africa and in the first century Mediterranean world) can be used as a paradigm for interpreting some New Testament texts. For instance in Matthew 16:13-28 and Mark 8:27-30, Jesus and his disciples arrive at Caesarea Philippi. They are free from the danger of interference from the crowd. Jesus asks his disciples about the views held about Him by the people in general. But also what do they think about him:

“...ἤρῳτα τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ λέγων, Τίνα λέγουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου;” (Mt 16:13).

The clarification of the status of Jesus (Mt 16:13-20; Mk 8:27-30; Lk 9:18-22) in Caesarea Philippi therefore underscores this pivotal value of the first century Mediterranean world. The identity of Jesus is clearly stated:

“...Σὺ εἶ ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ζῶντος.”
(Mt 16:16; Mk 8:29; Lk 9:20)

In these texts, “Peter plays the role of a moral entrepreneur, supporting Jesus career and prodding it along. The keys of the kingdom refer to access to God’s benefaction. Peter would be a broker like Jesus. Binding and loosing seem to refer to declaring authoritative judgements of obligatory custom and empowerment given to all the disciples as well in 18:18” (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992:112).

This question/enquiry by Jesus manifests this basic value in the first century Mediterranean world and in Africa, i.e. how people (the community) viewed a person. One of the tragedies of Jesus as a person found in the pages of the New Testament is that he was rejected by his own, the Jews:

“...εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον,”
(Jn 1:11).

“...Αἱ ἀλώπεκες φωλεοῦς καὶ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατασκηνώσεις, ὁ δὲ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἔχει ποῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν κλίνει.” (Lk 9:58).

“οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ λίθος ὁ ἐξουθενηθεὶς ὑφ’ ὑμῶν τῶν οἰκοδόμων, ὁ γενόμενος εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας.” (Ac 4:11).

2.4.2 Honour and Shame

2.4.2.1 The ancient Mediterranean world

The lives of modern persons are probably centred around economics and all that goes with it such as labour, production, consumption and possession. These do not only motivate many people's behaviour, but claims most of their energy and time. Malina (1993:31) maintains that:

“In the United States, the social institution upon which most Americans focus their attention, interests, and concerns is economics. When the average U.S. family is in difficulty, it is invariably due to the fact that the U.S. provisioning system, the system of jobs, of goods and services production and consumption is in trouble. Thus we can fairly say, given our experience, that the focal institution of U.S. society is economics. In this framework, the organising principle of life in this country is instrumental mastery - the individual's ability to control his or her environment, personal and impersonal, to attain a quantity-oriented success: wealth, ownership, “good looks,” proper grades, and all other countable indications of success.”

During the first century Mediterranean world, economics was not the be-all and end-all. People worked primarily to conserve their status and not to gather possessions. Those who tried to make money were suspected of doing it at the expense of the group to which they belonged. The pivotal or

primary values of the first century Mediterranean world was honour and shame (Malina, Joubert and Van der Watt 1996:8).

Elliott (1993:130) defines honour and shame as a:

“Socially approved and expected attitudes and behaviour in areas where power, sexual status, and religion intersect. Honour is the public claim to worth and status (both ascribed and achieved) along with the social acknowledgement of such worth, status, and reputation. In ancient patriarchal societies, honour is associated primarily with male familial representatives and symbolised by blood lineage, name, and physical attributes (male testicles; strength).

Malina (1993:31f) also asserts that honour is the area where the three lines of power, gender and religion intersect. Power means in this context the ability to exercise control. There are therefore two sides to honour. The first was the person’s claim to worth, in other words, the amount of honour he (in all cases it was the male) thought was due to him. The second was the society’s acknowledgement of that claim. Honour was therefore, the status which one claimed in the community together with the recognition of that claim by others.

One could gain or loose his honour status. In order for a person to gain or consolidate his honour, he was expected to score victory over another person. The community watched and decided whether or not to confirm victory and by so doing validating the winner’s claim to greater honour. The

constant conflict between the Jewish leaders, particularly the Pharisees and the Scribes with Jesus was motivated by their honour status. In Matthew 12:1-9, Jesus went through the corn field on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and started to pick some ears of corn and eat them. The Pharisees made a public challenge to Jesus:

“...Ἰδοὺ οἱ μαθηταί σου ποιοῦσιν ὃ οὐκ ἔξεστιν ποιεῖν ἐν σαββάτῳ .” (Mt 12:2b).

Jesus now had to publicly defend his honour:

“...Οὐκ ἀνέγνωτε τί ἐποίησεν Δαυὶδ ὅτε ἐπείνασεν καὶ οἱ μετ’ αὐτοῦ; πῶς εἰσηλθὼν εἰς οἶκον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἄρτους τῆς προθέσεως ἔφαγον, ὃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἦν αὐτῷ φαγεῖν οὐδὲ τοῖς μετ’ αὐτοῦ, εἰ μὴ τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν μόνοις;” (:3-4)

Jesus did not only demonstrate his profound knowledge of the Scriptures by far more than them but that He was the Messiah:

“κύριος γὰρ ἐστὶν τοῦ σαββάτου ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου” (:8).

Jesus therefore successfully defended his honour (See also Mt 1:1ff.; 19:3ff.; 22:34ff; Mk 7:1; 8:5, 11; 10:2ff).

A more classic illustration of the challenge-riposte is between Jesus and Satan is to be found in (Mt 4:1-11). Soon after his baptism (Mt 3:13-17) which the confirmation of his honour, the devil challenges this status. Jesus successfully defends this claim by refusing to do as suggested by Satan. Another example of honour and shame in the New Testament is the death and the resurrection of Jesus. The death of Jesus on the cross represents his humiliation, and loss of his honour status. He was put to shame:

“ἔταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ” (Phlp 2:8).

The Jewish leaders had successfully put Jesus to shame by handing him over to the Romans to be executed. But the resurrection of Jesus from the dead signifies the reversal of the shame of Jesus. All the Gospel accounts (Mk 16:1-20, Mt 28:1-20, Lk 24:1-53 and Jn 20:1-21:14) state that the resurrection of Jesus was discovered on the first day of the week by Mary Magdalene. All but Matthew say that the stone had already been rolled away and Jesus was gone. The resurrection of Jesus, thus, signifies the restoration of his honour status by God the Father. Jesus is therefore established as the head of God’s household on earth (see Jacobs-Malina 1993:113).

2.4.2.2 Typical African views of honour and shame

Honour and shame also function as primary African values. In describing the significance of birth amongst the Pedi (Northern Sothos) Mönnig (1967:98) says that:

“Among the Pedi the birth of a child is an event of great importance. Not only does it initiate a new member into the group, but, in the case of a first child, it confers on the mother the status of parenthood which, for the Pedi, is synonymous with attaining the full status of a woman. It also concludes the obligations of the mother’s group to the father and his group, proves the manhood of the father and perpetuates his line. The rites connected with birth centre around the mother and the child. The mother is invested with a new status and the child is accorded the status of a new member of the group. The father does take part in some of the rites, but it is obvious that his status and role remain unchanged, although his prestige is considerably enhanced.”

The question of status plays an important role in the African value system. A person acquired his/her social status by birth. This, however, does not yet automatically secure for him/her the prestige and the full privileges which the clan or the tribe has to offer. For instance a man who is still unmarried e.g. cannot assume the leadership of an extended family or a tribe, even if he is the legitimate successor by virtue of his birth. He does not yet offer any guarantee that he will contribute his share towards the continuity of the clan (Breutz 1991:75).

Writing about the Zulu value system, Krige (1962:30f) explains the concept of honour and shame:

“The behaviour towards relatives-in-law is largely bound up with the custom of *hlonipha*. This word literally means to have shame or to shun through bashfulness, and affects women to a far greater extent than men. A married woman *hlonipha* her father-in-law and all his brothers, the elderly among her brothers-in-law, her mother-in-law, and all other wives of her father-in-law. This means that in their presence she must cover her body from armpits and shoulder-blade downward to cover her breasts, and she must put on her *umNqwazo* (band round the top-knot or over the eyes) and keep her eyes down. She must not eat in their presence nor chew food while standing or walking outside their kraals.”

The custom of *hlonipha* applies to men too, only in their case is it not so strict. A man and his mother-in-law may not pronounce each other’s names, and a man may not use his wife’s name, but refers to her as “*oka so and so*,” affixing the name of her father. He may not enter a hut in which his son’s wife may be, but this *hlonipha* may be removed by the present which he gives her to free her from covering her face in his presence.”

In the African value system the question of honour is crucial when coming to the choice of a marriage partner. There are different customs which are observed in the choice of a marriage partner. In some societies the choice is made by the parents, and this may be done even before the children are born. This could happen for instance when in a particular household there is a

young boy. His parents would go to another household where there is a young girl or where there was an expectant mother and put in an “application” for the present girl or for the child to be born in the event that it is a girl. Sometimes these arrangements could be done when two wives know that they are pregnant. The children, however, get married only when they are old enough and not immediately after birth (Mbiti 1969:135).

It was and still widespread in some African communities for parents to arrange marriage between their children. In most cases marriage is and was between relatives. As long as the parents and the family had an influence on the choice of the future partner, marriage between kinsmen were given preference than between strangers. This attitude was based particularly on the economic consideration that the marriage-cattle are thus retained in the family group. In this regard it is customary amongst the Botswana to state:

“Ngwana wa rrangwane nnyale kgomo di boele sakeng”
(marry at your brother’s place, so that the cattle may remain in the kraal).

The most significant factor in the choice of the partner is the family’s honour status. Concerning the Basuto, Ashton (1967:62) contends that:

“In choosing a wife for the senior son, the family is influenced by two considerations - the girl’s suitability and her family standing. She should be respectable, chaste, modest, hard-working and good tempered: the sort of girl who will make a steady wife and a good mother. Her family should have a

reputation for honesty, friendliness and respectability, and should be of at least approximately equal social and economic standing to theirs. Ordinarily there is a fairly wide choice for the Basuto are not particularly snobbishly but the chiefs and other leading families attach great importance to this point, and so limit their range of choice.”

African values (of honour), especially concerning the choice of a marriage partner provides a valuable premise in the interpretation of some New Testament texts. In the New Testament, for instance, the “kinship” of believers is clearly articulated. In their associations i.e. their horizontal relationships, the believers are encouraged not to be equally yoked to unbelievers:

“Μὴ γίνεσθε ἑτεροζυγοῦντες ἀπίστοις·...” (2 Cor 6:14a)

In his Second Coming of Jesus (parousia), Jesus will be coming to his own:

“Ἐπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἄρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἄερα· καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἔσόμεθα” (1 Th 4:17).

The African practice of the initiation rites also plays an important role in the bestowal of the honour status to the teenagers. The birth of the child as stated above (2.5.1) introduces him/her to the corporate community. But this is but just an introduction. The child remains passive and has still a long way to go. Mönnig (1967:111) says that:

“The uninitiated Pedi youths form a community of their own in which they enact much of the life of adult members of the larger community. As a group they are looked down upon by the adult members of the society. They are considered useless individuals, and they form a lawless gang whose actions fall largely outside the pattern of tribal law.”

The boy or girl must outgrow childhood and enter into adulthood, both physically, causally and religiously. This is also a change from passive to active membership in the community.

The initiation school amongst many African communities is a permanent institution:

“The rites of birth and childhood introduce the child to the cooperate community, but this is only the introduction. The child is passive and has still a long way to go. He must grow out of childhood and enter into adulthood both physically, socially and religiously. This is also a change from passive to active membership in the community. Most African people have rites and ceremonies to mark this great change. The initiation of the youth is one of the key moments in the rhythm of the individual life, which is also the rhythm of the corporate group of which the individual is a part" (Mbiti 1969:121).

Mönnig (1967:112) maintains that:

“The initiation of its youth is to the Pedi a sacred institution. The initiation of boys is taboo to all women and uninitiated children, and that of the girls is equally taboo to men. Everyone is extremely reticent in speaking about it, and women know very little about male initiation and men little about the initiation of girls. As an institution it is one of the cornerstones of the whole social and political organisation. It is not an individual affair, but is communally undertaken by the whole tribe, and is under the personal direction and control of the chief. It is not, as is the case with some other Bantu tribes, an initiation merely into adulthood. As an institution it is the means of investing the initiate with the status of citizenship of the tribal community, and of according the potential of full participation in the social, political and juridical activities of the tribe, according to the sex of the initiate.”

The candidates in the initiation school receive instruction and training in the laws, customs of the tribe and matters pertaining to adulthood. The school is greatly enveloped in secrecy and mystery. Those who have never been to the school should not have access to what is taking place. Those who disobey the orders given at the school or are found neglecting their prescribed duties are severely punished, and in the past were even killed. The candidates are exposed to adverse conditions such as washing with cold water and hunting animals for food (see Stayt 1968:101ff).

Upon completion of their course, the candidates return home amidst feasting and merry-making in celebration of their new-found status as men or women. Besides the physical drama which the initiation rites have, the occasion has also a symbolic meaning. The youth are ritually introduced to the art of communal living.

The African concept of honour and shame can be applied to the New Testament text, thus providing a premise for an interpretation of the text - African socio-descriptive approach. The New Testament narrates that when Jesus was eight days old was presented to the temple:

“Καὶ ὅτε ἐπλήσθσαν ἡμέραι ὀκτῶ τοῦ περιτεμεῖν αὐτόν, καὶ ἐκλήθη τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦς,...” (Lk 2:21a).

The rituals of purification were made. This has striking similarities with the African rituals of birth. In the Venda culture, after the birth of the child the rituals are performed. After the visit of the family medicine-man, the mother is ready to come from her seclusion. Before she could leave the hut, she is visited ceremonially by her husband. He would obtain powder, made from the blood of a menstruating woman, which he rubs on the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet. His wife presents him with a bracelet, matuvho (which means an intense desire). This bracelet must be given to him before he may accept food from her or sit anywhere in the hut where she has sat during the birth of the child. It is believed that if this purification is not duly performed, the husband will be attacked by a shivering decease from which he will not recover (Stayt 1968:87).

The African context, i.e. the salient features underlying the initiation rites, provides the basis for interpreting some biblical text. The Christian rite of baptism and its significance is an example:

“Baptism is the Christian experience of the passion, death resurrection of Jesus. Baptism symbolises expressly not only the beginning of a new life in Christ, but also death to the old man, the old life of sin. By baptism the Christian is washed, sanctified and made righteous in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. Christ sacrifices the church, cleansing it by the washing of water in the word (McKenzie 1976:80)”

Wilson (1976:96f) explains the significance of water baptism. The believers are 'buried' with Christ when plunged in the baptising water. It is a token that they had died to their old life of sins. They are raised again with Christ when they emerge from the water. This means that they receive a new life in Christ.

Käsemann (1973:159) maintains that baptism according to Paul in Romans 6:1ff, signifies that the believer has been freed from dead and has experienced new life:

“Freedom from death is presented so universally and therefore with such theological objectivity that individual existence threatens to be lost to view. If in a certain respect Christ is a bearer of destiny for the world as Adam was the destiny which

he brings is not a fate that of Adam. In what sense, then can it still be called destiny? The apostle stands before the task of making intelligible in terms of the reality of everyday life, of the community and of the individual, the universal realisation of eschatological life... he does this by characterising it as freedom from the powers of sin and the law and therewith summons Christians with inner necessity to confirm in their personal life the change of aeons that has been affected."

Such an interpretation of the biblical text in an African context goes beyond comparing baptism in the New Testament and the initiation rites in African traditional religions and culture. But it identifies features which undergird the African life and world-view and thereafter using it to identify a particular context in the New Testament text which will enable an African reader to appropriate the text.

Mönnig (1967:98) refers to African purification and initiation rites and the New Testament:

"The purification rites in the New Testament as well as the significance of baptism can be understood in the light of the African value in ritual initiating a child after birth or teenagers after the initiation school. The African reader of the Bible can therefore relate to the New Testament texts, because some of the practises encountered in it and their symbolic meanings are not unfamiliar to the African habitat."

The African ancestor veneration is another context which could be considered to interpret some of the New Testament texts:

“Then the woman asked, “Whom shall I bring up for you?”

“Bring up Samuel,” he said.

“When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, “Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!” (1 Sm 28:11-12 - LXX)

“After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.” (Mt 17:1-3)

“...This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:25b).

The above texts contain the same features of the cult of ancestral veneration in African traditional religions. In 1 Samuel 28:1-20, Saul consults with a witch at Endor, his request is that she should bring Saul back to life. The witch actually manages to bring back “an old man” to life. Saul communicates with Samuel. In Mt 3:1-2 the “two Hebrew ancestral spirits”, Moses and Elijah are brought to life. They are seen talking to Jesus. In 1 Cor 11:23 the author says that Jesus commanded his followers to continue partaking, in remembrance of Him. Is this not the same with the

cult of the ancestors? Such texts and many others have led to the so-called Christinisation of African rituals by some Christian traditions and African theologians:

“Natural theology makes adaptation in the Roman Catholic church easy. The Catholic church believes that something good remained in every human being after the fall. This good, and the good customs resulting from it, are begin claimed by the Catholic church in the name of Jesus Christ. This view is based on a synthesis between the indigenous truth and the Christian truth. Bridges should be build between Christianity and the local culture. In this process assimilation and accommodation is the focus” (Daneel 1973:60).

Mosotheoane (1973:86) has observed that:

“Despite a concerted effort on the part of at least some church leaders in at least some parts of Africa (certainly in South Africa) to eradicate any remains of the traditional ancestor cult among Black Christians. African believers continue to reverence their departed fore-bears. By adopting the view that the ancestor cult is “incompatible with an enlightened and spiritual conception of the Christian faith, and so cannot be tolerated as a practice in the Christian church.”

The question which the researcher observes is not necessarily the merits or demerits of ancestor veneration but the embodiment of the gospel features in

the cues of the cult. The Africans view ancestors as mediators between people and the supreme being. They (ancestors) are responsible for providing protection, guidance fortune etc. these features are also pertinent in the Christian view of God and Jesus Christ.

West (1999:4) clearly articulates this reality when he states that Africans do not transact with the Bible "empty-handed". Besides their distinctive experiences of reality, both religio-culturally and socio-politically the particular questions that such experiences generate, Africans have a range of hermeneutics strategies for interpreting the biblical texts. These interpretative tools of ordinary African interpreters should be adequately classified and analysed. These includes paintings and folk songs.

2.4.3 The In-group and out-group (Insiders and Outsiders)

2.4.3.1 The ancient Mediterranean world

Malina (1996:1) maintains that the New Testament writings are definitely ethnocentric. Reminick (1983:7) states that:

“Ethnocentrism is the technical name for this view of things in which one’s own group is the centre of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities and looks with contempt on outsiders. Each group thinks its own folkways the only right ones.”

Malina, furthermore says that all biblical documents are ethnocentric. He cites amongst others the destruction of the non-Israelites in the Old Testament. If Jesus was not totally anti-Gentile, He was surely unconcerned about the non-Israelite population. He came to proclaim God's Kingdom to Israel. Supporting Malina's submission, Griffith (1992:15) is of the opinion that were it not for the Gospel, which gave the Old Testament legitimacy, we would have for instance opposed Moses and the prophets. Malina (1996:6) strengthens his argument by rewriting some of the Matthean statements:

“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that lead to destruction, and those who enter by it are many [in Israel]” (Mt 7:13).

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to save and to give life as a reason for many [in Israel]” (Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45).

“The tombs also were opened and many bodies of the [Israelite] saints who had fallen asleep were raised and appeared to many [in Israel]” (Mt 27:52ff).

Malina (1996:6) and Sanders (1985:220) maintain that the composition of the Jesus Movement comprising of the Jews and Gentiles, or rather the opening of Non-Jews as members of the church is the post-resurrection innovation, of which Paul and Luke were responsible for.

One would expect Malina to be consistent with this vantage point that Jesus was anti-Gentile. It is surprising that in his social-scientific commentary on

the synoptic gospels with Rohrbaugh (1992:74f) they ignore the fact that the centurion who affirmed Jesus, "...surely this was a righteous man..." was a Roman (Gentile).

The following words by Jesus also weighs against Malina's submissions:

"...Ἀμὴν λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν, παρ' οὐδενὶ τοσαύτην πίστιν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ εὗρον" (Mt 8:10)

In v.13 of the above text Jesus says to the centurion, "Go it will be done just as you believed it would, and his servant was healed at that very hour."

If Malina's statements and submissions that Jesus was anti-Gentile or unconcerned about the non-Jews are serious and are to be believed, why did Jesus complement this high-ranking official's faith? Why did He heal his servant who was definitely Gentile? However, Malina's ideas shed some light into the sectarian or ethnocentricity of the first century Mediterranean world. The early church for instance employed familial language such as father, brothers, sisters, house of God, the world (denoting that there are outsiders), the holy ones, the called ones, etc. They differentiated themselves from the outsiders (see Meeks 1983:85ff). Esler (1997:143) states that Paul uses these variety of ways to create in his congregations, social patterns analogous to those expected among family members in the ancient Mediterranean.

2.4.3.2 Typical African views of insiders and outsiders

The African sense of regarding themselves as insiders and others as outsiders is very strong. Crafford (1996:9) maintains that:

"African cosmology consists of a unity, harmony and totality made up of the supreme being, the spirits, people, animals, vegetation and inanimate objects. A firm balance between all things is maintained by cosmic powers which are present in varying degrees in everything. The supreme being is the origin of life-force, and the spiritual realm its mediators, making it available in a limited way to people, animals, plants and objects. Life-force can be enhanced or diminished by magical activities."

Although in Africa today ethnicity appears to be a politically incorrect expression, some social scientists, contend that it is a stark reality in the post-colonial Africa. Scarrit and Hatter (1970-71:1) pose some realistic questions:

"What happens to the members of the formerly dominant ethnic-racial minority when an African state attains independence under majority rule. Under what conditions do they remain in the country, and if they remain how do their relationships with Africans change? Are they accepted as full members of the national community and do they change their values to the point where they accept such an identity or do

they become foreigners temporarily resident in an alien land? Specifically, how are the transformed majority-minority relationships reflected in the area of minority citizenship in the new African nation?"

Rich (1989:37f), also affirms the reality of ethnicity and maintains that the saliency of African politics need to be seen within the context of struggles for power at the political centre around the post-colonial state. In general, the state systems in Africa have been too weak to a national political leadership to emerge and politics have been characterised by factionalism and personal political leadership. In most cases, states in Africa have been confronted by a vacuum in national mythology which has been partially filled by an ethnic myth which may not as yet command universal allegiance.

Bekker (1993:1), writing in the context of the South African political scenario, maintains that although acknowledged by governments, recognised by development agencies, debated by scholars and sometimes built into institutions - there are wide disagreements as to what ethnicity is all about and there is little discussion in South Africa about the subject. Adam (1994:15ff) contends that ethnicity in Africa is reality. It however, manifests in different forms. The greatest challenge facing the government of South Africa, for instance is to skilfully manage this phenomenon. The Black Consciousness Movements dismiss the idea of building the rainbow nation and non-racialism as a liberal illusion and a strategic error. Different groups of Afrikaner nationalists reject the ideal of building a new united South Africa nation. They remain convinced that the Volkstaat (a people's

republic) is still an achievable reality. The Zulu nationalists epitomised by the Inkatha Freedom Party favour ethnic identity under the guise of a Federal State (Johnson 1994; Louw 1994).

The social reality of the in-group and outsiders discussed above can help in the interpretation of the New Testament texts. In the New Testament pages, the Jesus Movement is portrayed as a group which regarded everyone else as an outsider to be potentially included through their evangelistic endeavours.

2.4.4 Purity - Pollution system

2.4.4.1 The ancient Mediterranean world

In their description of the purity and pollution system, social scientists maintain that purity or sacredness has both a broader and a narrower reference and usage. In the broader sense “sacredness” is that which is protected, whether or not by religion against violation infusion or defilement. It also covers the religious, but is not limited to it. In this sense sacredness carries the meaning of the respected, venerated and invaluable. Accordingly, a wide variety of religious and non-religious objects, practices, places, customs and ideas may acquire a sacred or holy character (Gould and Kolb 1964:613). In the narrower sense sacredness refers to that which is protected specifically by religion against violation and intrusion and defilement. It is therefore that which is holy, sacrosanct or concentrated to or by religion.

Social scientists describe “profane” as that which is unholy, irreverent, blasphemous, defiled or opposed to the religious. It is that which is ordinary, common, unconsanctified, temporal or outside the religious. Thus, profanity refers to the treatment of the religious irreverently or contemptuously or to cause the holy to be defiled or desecrated by improper contact with the ordinary and unconsanctified.

Elliot (1993:132) endeavours to define purity-pollution system as:

A system of order based on the social construct that categorises phenomena and behaviour into the binary opposites of clean/unclean, whole/fragmented, sacred/secular, valued positively and negatively, respectively.”

Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:72) in their description of the purity-pollution system maintain that:

“All enduring human societies provide their members with ways of making sense out of human living. Such ways of making sense out of life are systems of meaning. When something is out of place as determined by the prevailing system of meaning, that something is considered wrong, deviant, senseless. Dirt is matter out of place. When people clean their houses or cars, they simply rearrange matter, returning it to its proper place. The point is, the perception of dirt and the behaviour called cleaning both point to the existence of some system according to which there is a proper

place for everything. This system of place is one indication of the existence of a larger system for making sense out of human living."

One traditional way of talking about such an overall system of meaning is called the purity system, the system of pure (in place) and impure (out of place) or the system of clean (in place) and unclean (out of place). Pure and impure, clean and unclean, can be predicated of persons, groups, things, times and places. Such purity distinctions embody the core values of a society and thereby provide clarity of meaning, direction of activity, and consistency for social behaviour. What accords with these values and their structural expression in a purity system is considered "pure," and what does not is viewed as "polluted."

Hanson and Oakman (1998:202) on their part illustrate how the New Testament text could be read. They define the sacred-profane system as:

"An ideology and system of regulating the proper place for everything: clean/unclean, sacred/profane, normal/deviant, in-group/out-group. This applies to objects, people, times, places, animals, and food, and these categories are often arranged in hierarchies. It provides a society with meaning, orientation, and maps of behaviour and belonging."

The above definitions, descriptions and reflections of the purity-pollution system are indicative of the fact that each and every culture has an ethos, i.e. a sense of right or wrong, good or bad, proper or out of place, meaningful

and meaningless. Each society therefore desires to regulate the conduct of people through a system of rules and regulations, as well as punishments prescribed for transgressions. The objective of course is to maintain an orderly community.

In the so-called first world countries, including some developing countries, personal freedom is an important value. A Bill of Rights and laws protecting these rights, are mechanisms meant to safeguard these values. People in these cultures have the right to privacy, the right to free speech, etc. and whoever and whatever infringes on these rights is punished by law. During the first century Mediterranean world, one of the fundamental values was purity. Greed was a cardinal sin against this ethic. Conduct that will be punished is any form of trespassing on one's neighbour's property. The basic offence against this system, was uncleanness.

The purity system was a way by which meaning was deferred. Purity had to do with wholeness. The system determined a proper place for everything. When something was out of place it was considered to be wrong, deviant, senseless, taboo or dirty. What was pure or clean was in place. People, groups, things and places could be in or out of place. It was required of each individual to be a complete, normal specimen of its kind (Osiek 1984:32f; Malina 1993:149ff).

2.4.4.2 Typical African views on purity and pollution

The purpose of discussing this value is not simply to explain some of the New Testament texts or behaviour patterns of some New Testament persons,

but to indicate how this value (purity-pollution) as a salient feature at that time can be one of the keys in unlocking some of the New Testament texts. In order to do that, we need to refer to some specific texts. However, before this exercise, in consistence with our discussion so far, it is appropriate to refer to the African concept of this value, sacred and profane.

One of the features of the African traditional religions is that the cosmos is perceived and experienced as a sacred environment charged with powers and spirits which exert their influence on human life. Such powers have to be manipulated by ritual and magical activities. There are some forests, rivers and mountains which are regarded as sacred. The African community is also understood as a closed, sacred tribal unit at the head of which is the sacral monarchy in which the chief is the mediator between the tribe, the supreme being and the cosmic powers. The traditional healers and diviners are revered as sacral people and fulfil various religious duties. The clan and the family heads are the community priests. Social and religious activities are not distinguished from one another (Crafford 1996:5)

Africans in general have a list of taboos in the areas of agricultural, pregnancy sexual intercourse, childbirth, food, death, etc. Mbiti (1969:111) says that:

"In many African societies the pregnant woman must observe certain taboos and regulations, partly because pregnancy in effect makes her ritually "impure", and chiefly in order to protect her and the child, one of the most common regulations concerns sexual intercourse during pregnancy. In some

societies as soon as a woman realises that she is expectant, she and her husband completely stop having sexual intercourse until after child birth. In other societies this is stopped two or three months before childbirth. This abstinence is observed by the woman after childbirth, for periods ranging from a few days to even two or three years..."

Another taboo related to pregnancy and childbirth is stated by Stayt (1968:84f.). He maintains that amongst the Bavenda (a tribe in the Northern Province of South Africa) after the discovery that the woman is pregnant, the mother-in-law and or some elderly women are notified, never her own mother. It is this woman who informs the husband. "He receives the news with great joy and his wife is ordered to take care of herself during this important period. Usually, during the first pregnancy the wife will stay with her husband until two months before childbirth. She goes to her mother's home until after the child has been born. In subsequent pregnancies the woman stays at her husband's home. Generally during pregnancy the woman is greatly respected. Great care is given to her. She, however, is supposed to observe some taboos of various foods imposed upon her."

Krige (1962:62) maintains that pregnancy amongst the Zulus is a time of great concern, not only for her health but for the future welfare of the child, who is easily affected by anything the mother may do, and stands in danger of being harmed by wizards. During pregnancy, the woman is required to be extremely careful because there are all manner of dangers in the world around her that may harm the unborn baby. In order to safeguard the unborn child from evil influences, the woman must be treated by a traditional

doctor, who will prescribe special medicine to her. There appears to be no special food taboos, but every expectant woman must at all times be careful about the type of food she eats, because of the fact that animals are supposed to possess the peculiarity of passing on their physical characteristics to the unborn child. For instance it is believed in some African circles that the woman who eats rabbit meat, will have a child with long ears.

There are some New Testament texts which indicate that the actions or utterances of the people portrayed are undergirded by the value system purity/pollution as it was understood in the first century Mediterranean world. What is important also is that the same text could be understood when we employ the African social-descriptive approach. In other words, the words and deeds of these New Testament people could be the same if they lived in traditional Africa because their value systems have much in common. This therefore, also means that an African will not find it difficult to relate to the message of the New Testament because its players are or would act more or less like him/her.

A selection of a few of these texts will be appropriate. It should be taken into consideration that in the culture of the first century Mediterranean Palestine, people were classified according to this value. For instance the high priest, the priests and followed by the Levites were the holiest of the people in Palestine. The Gentiles were the last in the hierarchy in this classification of people. Contact between the Jews and the people belonging the lower stratum was forbidden. The author of the Fourth Gospel makes the Samaritan woman to articulate this reality:

“λέγει οὖν αὐτῷ ἡ γυνὴ ἡ Σαμαρίτις, Πῶς σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ὢν παρ’ ἐμοῦ πεῖν αἰτίς γυναικὸς Σαμαρίτιδος οὔσης; (οὐ γὰρ συγχρῶνται Ἰουδαῖοι Σαμαρίταις,)” (Jn 4:9).

The Temple and the city of Jerusalem were regarded as the most holy places. The crowd which stoned Stephen brought accusation against him.

“...Ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος οὐ παύεται λαλῶν ῥήματα κατὰ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἁγίου [τούτου] καὶ τοῦ νόμου.” (Ac 6:13b)

The Jews from Asia happen to see Paul in the temple. They stirred up the crowd and accused him for desecrating the temple:

“κράζοντες, Ἄνδρες Ἰσραελῖται, βοηθεῖτε· οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ κατὰ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τοῦ τούτου πάντας πανταχῇ διδάσκων, ἔτι τε καὶ Ἕλληνας εἰσήγαγεν εἰς τὸ ἱερόν καὶ κεκοίνωκεν τὸν ἅγιον τόπον τούτον.” (Ac 21:28).

There were also places which were regarded as least holy than the others. Galilee was called “Galilee of the Gentiles”. It was simply not an auspicious enough place to imagine that a prophet could come out of it:

“...Μὴ γὰρ ἐκ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ὁ Χριστὸς ἔρχεται;”
(Jn 7:41b)

The system of purity-pollution in the first century Mediterranean world, as seen by social-scientific critics, and the African social-descriptive approach helps us in understanding such texts. As indicated above, the issue at stake is not only to understand these texts against the cultural milieu of Jesus' time. This would be simply the task of the social description of the New Testament. The social-scientific critics would endeavour to explain some of the actions and utterances of the New Testament people as being underlined or informed by this value (purity-pollution).

As early as during the earthly ministry of Jesus, the adherents to his Movement corporately regarded themselves as distinct from the other groups or formation and also holier than the other groups. Jesus altered the existing boundaries of holiness which were established by the Jews. He moved all over Galilee preaching, healing, feeding and teaching people. In this regard, he clashed with the other religious groups which forbade contact with those less holier than themselves. Borg (1987:131) maintains that Jesus changed the politics of holiness to the politics of compassion:

“Just as the ethos of holiness had led to a politics of holiness, so also the ethos of compassion was to lead to a politics of compassion. The ethos of compassion profoundly affected the shape of the Jesus Movement, both internally and in its relationship to the world. The “shape” of the alternative community of “counterculture” was visible in the constituency of its membership which stood in sharp contrast to the relatively rigid social boundaries of the Jewish social world: boundaries between righteous and outcast, men and women,

rich and poor, Jew and Gentile. These boundaries, established by the politics of holiness and embodied in the culture as a whole and in varying forms in other renewal movements, were negated by the Jesus Movement. The negation pointed to a much more inclusive understanding of the community of Israel.”

The early church regarded itself as separate from the world. As much as the first century Mediterranean world drew a line between different people, the early believers made a distinction or drew a line of demarcation between them and the world. The author of 1 Peter writes to the Christians (predominantly Jews) who were driven out of Jerusalem and scattered throughout Asia Minor:

“καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡς λίθοι ζῶντες οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικὸς εἰς ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον, ἀνευέγκαι πνευματικὰς θυσίας εὐπροσδέκτους [τῷ] θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.”

(1 Pt 2:5).

The author of Ephesians reminds readers about their identity:

“ἅπα οὖν οὐκετὶ ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι, ἀλλὰ ἐστὲ συμπολίται τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ,”

(Eph 2:19)

The members of the church who acted like the world were excommunicated. Their actions showed that they no longer belonged to the group which was holy.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The above discussion outlined the contribution of the social-scientific critics (predominantly Western scholars), that knowledge of the social values of the New Testament time would help in the interpretation of the texts. Social-scientific criticism has thus clearly distinguished itself from the historico-critical approaches and investigations, by concerning itself primarily with the social descriptions or analyses of the first century Mediterranean world. The underlying feature of the social-scientific criticism as indicated above, is its use of contemporary theories and methodologies from the social sciences in understanding and interpreting the New Testament.

This unique feature and distinction of the social-scientific criticism does not and should not provide a stage for unfair competition and dialogue with the adherents of the historico-critical and literary-critics of the New Testament. Some social-scientific critics are sharply criticising the historiographic approaches by making remarks such as, “the historiographic approaches are bankrupt”, “under the historico-critical approaches, the study of the Bible came to a standstill” and “the historico-critical exegetes have been conducting business as usual by sifting the same sand many a times.” On the other hand the historical-criticism exegetes refer to the social-scientific paradigm as “socialising the New Testament” and “marrying our old enemies” (see Gager 1975; Edwards 1979; Oakman 1996). It has not been

the intention of this thesis to explicitly or implicitly suggest that the social-scientific criticism paradigm can replace the traditional historical-critical methodologies.

Elliott's (1993:7) assertion spells out and is representative of the position of many social-scientific critics:

“...the social-scientific criticism is a sub-discipline of exegesis and is inseparably related to the other operation of the exegetical operations of the exegetical enterprise: textual criticism, literacy criticism, redaction criticism, rhetorical criticism and theological criticism. Social-scientific criticism complements these other modes of critical analysis, all of which are designed to analyse features of the biblical text.”

The researcher acknowledges the contribution of the Western New Testament social-scientific criticism. At the same time he went further to illustrate how, what he has referred to as an African social-descriptive criticism should be taken seriously in New Testament criticism. It should be taken into consideration that the evangelisation of Africa by the early missionaries from Europe and North America has been accompanied by processes such as colonialisation, Westernisation and domination. The Christian message and the gospel was meant to convert “pagan” Africa. To most missionaries, therefore, evangelisation meant the conversion of Africans from their pagan, heathen, savage and barbaric traditions and customs. Nothing positive was seen in African traditional religions. In most cases, after conversion, Africans were to be separated from their

unconverted relatives. They were made to change their “heathen” names and adopt Christian or biblical names. Christianity was brought to Africa by Western missionaries who for most of the time had a very negative approach to African culture. In many cases they did not only reject elements of culture that contradicted biblical principles alone, but African culture in totality. In practice it meant that Africans, when becoming Christians, had to adhere to Western culture as well. The whole process of acculturation was intensified by the effects of colonial rule in Africa. Theron (1996:17) agrees with Crafford (1993:165) when he says:

“Christianity came to Africa clothed in the garments of Western civilisation. The first missionaries to Africa viewed conversion to the Christian faith more or less as the parting with the traditional way life and the acceptance of Western civilisation, Traditional religion and culture were seen as irreconcilable with Christianity, and ever as inferior.”

These sentiments are held by Crafford (1996:165):

“Recently the scholars in the field of African Christianity (including those of Western origin) admit that the treatment of the early missionaries of the African religion and culture was an error of judgement. There are certain elements in African religion and culture which are compatible to Christianity and the Bible. For instance the African belief in the supreme being, who is creator, sustainer, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent is close to the biblical view of God. Although there are

negative elements in Africa traditional religion such as the sacralisation of the universe, the cult of ancestors, killing for “muti” purposes etc., African ideas can play an important role in the understanding of the Christian message and the reading of the New Testament.”

The interpretation of the New Testament texts also from the African social-descriptive vantage point underscores the contribution of Africa to the Christian faith and also the interpretation of the New Testament. Such an assertion, i.e. African contributions to textual criticism might however be frowned upon and also sound unthought of in some circles of Euro-centric biblical scholarship. What has Africa to do with the Bible, Christianity, worst still biblical criticism?

Maimela (1990:70ff) makes interesting and noteworthy remarks about Africa’s contribution towards the Christian faith. He regards the physical contribution of Africa towards Christianity as a prelude to spiritual contribution and as a platform for biblical hermeneutics. He maintains that Africans should be made aware of the fact that their forefathers and mothers have made a significant contribution to the origin and growth of Christianity. He goes further to state that:

“Indeed, one of my theses is that without Africa and its people the world would not have had Christianity and the Jewish religion both of which have been given birth through the African contribution.”

Few examples in this regard are cited. When Abraham, the carrier of God's blessings to the world, encountered all sorts of problems in Canaan because of the drought, we are told that he would have died of hunger had the Africans in Egypt not come to his rescue by giving him food and shelter. Thus by saving him from starvation and giving him sustenance, Africans in fact literally saved God's promises to Israel, promises that were later to be fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Maimela (1990:70) also refers to Jacob and Moses. In view of the fact that Africans are such welcoming people who do not discriminate against other people because of colour or religion, they accommodated Jacob and his sons. It is also not surprising that Joseph, "a foreigner" was elevated to the rank of governor and partner in the running of the affairs of the Egyptian state. It was because of this African help and intervention that the Israelites settled, multiplied in Egypt and later demanded their freedom. Furthermore, Moses who was used by God to free the Hebrew slaves was brought up in the African royal family and given the best education that Africa could provide at that time.

Finally, Maimela (1990:71) contends that when Jesus was threatened by Herod, Africa was ready to host him. Jesus went to his uncles and aunts in Africa. Joseph (the father of Jesus) did not run away from Bethlehem to Athens in Greece or Rome or London. Africa, thus acted in a caring and protective manner to the founder of the Christian faith. To crown it all:

“The Bible declares that even on his way to the cross, Jesus did not receive help from any of his Roman oppressors or from any of his Jewish sympathisers, rather it was from his African

uncle, Simon from Cyrene (modern Libya), that Jesus received help to carry the cross which weighed heavy on his shoulders.”

Besides this physical contribution of Africa to Christianity, on the level of biblical hermeneutics, Africa can also not be ignored. Crafford (1996:24) says that there are motifs which can be closely associated with Christianity and which can indeed help to better understand Christianity and its Scriptures in all its dimensions. It is therefore the task of Black theologians and philosophers from Africa to bring these correctives to the fore.

A challenge to African theologians is made by Fong (1980:30) that their knowledge of Africa is imperative before they can attempt to interpret Scripture:

“Theologians and Christian activists must first be rooted in a community before they can begin to evoke a theology meaningful and challenging for and with a community. As painfully slow as the process may seem at times, anything less than this would still be elitist or paternalistic”

The central thesis of the African social-descriptive paradigm is not to politicise the New Testament criticism. The submission of the researcher is not necessarily the call for the Africanisation of the Christian faith or the New Testament. The challenge is to invite African scholars to appropriate scientific methodologies from the social sciences in relation to African culture and value system to interpret the Bible for Africa. The position

affirmed here is not an African biblical scholarship against the Western biblical criticism, but a call of equal participation and co-operation.

In essence a basic framework for an African social-descriptive approach would entail:

- a. A clear identity of what the concept "African" means
- b. A clear view of African cosmology
- c. An understanding of the African concept of time
- d. A sympathetic understanding of the cult of ancestor veneration

These aspects form the building blocks of an African worldview. It is only from this perspective that Africans traditionally engage everyday phenomena and impose meaning on their experiences. It is also from this perspective that the Bible is read. Fortunately, these values, which the present researcher also shares have resemblances to the typical ancient Mediterranean values, albeit on a rather high level of abstraction. In this regard numerous points of contact exist in terms of both cultures' views of personality, honour and shame purity and pollution, etc., which makes intercultural communication between the African context and the context of the Bible possible.

An African social-descriptive approach, as defined in this chapter firstly takes seriously the present context of the researcher. (Therefore this context in terms of the African family will be further elucidated in the next chapter). Secondly, this approach enables the researcher to enter into dialogue with the world of the New Testament. Due to the various points of resemblance



between the African and the Mediterranean cultures, (as shown in this chapter) it is indeed possible to approach the New Testament optimistically. Thirdly, this approach is descriptive, therefore, it will approach relevant data in the New Testament world (with special emphasis on the Gospels) on a rather high level of abstraction in order to describe regular patterns, generalities, etc. The aim is not so much to explain complex exegetical phenomena, but to form a general picture of family that will enhance our understanding of the New Testament from an African perspective.

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:

“...ἀρχων 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 *Kidskin* " 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 ἐρίχαρμα 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).

CHAPTER 5

NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVES OF FAMILY

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters (3 and 4), the realities of African, Roman and Jewish families were stated and discussed. It was also sufficiently indicated in these chapters that the comprehension of the manner in which the family operate in African cultures as well as in the first century Mediterranean world, enables us to understand the Christian message which is enshrined in the New Testament. The current chapter endeavours to make an assessment of the “Ecclesia” as family in the New Testament. In the previous chapters the central position of family in both the African and ancient Mediterranean world was stressed. Clearly in cultures of this nature, where the family forms the basic social institution one could expect that the family would also be used metaphorically to enhance basic values to give sanction to existing institutions and ideologies and to legitimise new groups or formations. This is exactly what takes place in the New Testament documents. Here the church is primarily identified in terms of fictive familial concepts and imagery. This is to a greater extent characterised by loyalty and commitment of a transcendental kind to Jesus and God. This relationship took priority over the closest mundane ties, even that of the natural or earthly family. Harrisville (1996:425) calls this scenario a duality, or rather a contradiction. He maintains that this new family was rooted in the rejection of the legality of the blood family life. In spelling out the

distinctiveness of this family, Kee & Young (1960:47) maintain that during the first century Mediterranean world:

"there was no group... that stood apart from all the rest [like the Christians]. Like many others their chief concern was with the coming of the Messiah, but unlike the others they were convinced that the time had already come. They admitted freely that He had recently died, but far from spelling defeat for the movement, they felt that his death was essential to His messianic role."

Jesus is the central figure in the New Testament, and the authors concerned themselves with interpreting his utterances, actions and significance. The second important theme throughout the pages of the New Testament is the idea of the church. This community understood and defined itself in a variety of ways. Schweizer (1961:31) maintains that:

"One image which is not stated explicitly in the Bible and which does not seem to be in common use, but which has its roots in a variety of early Christian statements and which continues to have a clarifying and guiding force for us today, is the image of the church as the family of God."

Lassen (1997:103) maintains that in identifying and describing itself, these groups employed family metaphors. She observes that the familial language played an important role in the formation of the early Christian church and its theology. God was commonly regarded and called Father, Jesus the Son and the believers, the brethren.

This phenomenon, was however, not peculiar to the Jesus Movement. In the Old Testament for instance, Israel is referred to in familial language: "When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called him" (Hs 11:1). The Pharisees called their disciples "sons" and a rabbi occasionally was described as a "father". The Greeks also sporadically referred to members of the same political formation or friends as "brothers" (cf Banks 1980:59; Du Plessis 1988:208f). The discussion which follows, approaches the church as a family from the perspective of the synoptic gospels and John.

5.2 The synoptic gospels

Hamerton-Kelly (1979:82) says that the realisation by biblical scholars that the synoptic Evangelists (Matthew, Mark and Luke) were also interpreters of Jesus, as John and Paul, dawned relatively late. This therefore means that their gospels should be viewed as products of the activities within their communities. Traditional material was gathered by each Evangelist and presented in a particular situation to the community within its own theological and symbolic interpretation in such a way that the early readers would understand Jesus from a particular perspective. Expressing the same idea about Matthew, Van Aarde (1994:97) maintains that in writing his Gospel, the Evangelist used many traditions but formulated his own structure and gave his own interpretation (see also Crossan 1978:53; Peterson 1978:118; Lombard 1987:395; Du Rand 1990:52).

Jesus is the central figure in the synoptic gospels, and the authors are convinced to re-present Him to their readers in such a way that it

becomes significant to their life experiences. In their portrayal of Jesus they consistently employed familial language. This reality has two dimensions. Firstly it is the fact that the early Christians perceived and understood themselves as a new family. This is true in that Osiek (1997:800) observed that a prominent feature in the synoptics is the estrangement between Jesus and his own family, and his encouragement of his disciples to break family ties in favour of the surrogate family of the circle of the disciples. The second dimension is that in articulating their faith, the Christians used family language such as, inter alia, calling God the Father, Jesus the Son of God and themselves brothers and sisters. The researcher attempts to briefly focus on these aspects in each of the synoptic gospels.

5.2.1 Mark

No fruitful discussion of Mark's gospel can be conducted without due consideration of what the Markan community was going through. Matera (1987:53) correctly contends that any study of Mark's theology, requires a deep understanding of the experiences of the community. [The family perspective in Mark's gospel will be discussed under the following sub-headings: Mark's christology, Jesus as Son of Man, the composition of the new family, discipleship, Jesus and new family].

5.2.1.1 Mark's christology as interpretative framework

The beginning of Mark's Gospel states: "Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ" [υἱοῦ θεοῦ]: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God." Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:174) say that the contents of such a proclamation in the context of the Graeco-Roman culture included

amnesty on the accession of a new ruler. Over the years scholars differed on the meaning of the expression “θεος ἄνθρωπος” in Mark's christology. Kingsbury (1981:243f) and the others, such as Betz (1986:116), Achtemeier (1972:186f) and Wrede (1971:76) maintain that the clue to the christology of Mark is found in the story itself, not in the tradition Mark used nor in the community for which he wrote. The evangelist, being aware of the divine man as a Hellenistic concept, draped Jesus in the cloak of the divine man.

Arguments in this regard advanced by Tannehill (1976:386ff), Combrink (1988:38), Martin (1975:140) and Perrin (1970:161f) are persuasive. They say that Mark was engaged in correcting a false christology simmering amongst his parishioners. He was proclaiming the theology of the cross as against that of glory. Due to the delay of the "parousia", an idea began to circulate that Jesus was a divine man who performed miracles. His followers, were also divine men. This problem could have been experienced in the Hellenistic churches which had not been influenced to any great extent by Paul. There were probably a number of "divine persons", the miracle workers who travelled from one city to another. They aroused enthusiasm amongst many people through magical tricks and partly through the miraculous deeds produced and influenced by their own personalities and reputations. Matera (1987:24) says that the proponents of this divine man christology emphasised the miraculous aspect of Jesus' ministry, thus minimising and even neglecting the humiliating death upon the cross. They stressed the present salvation found in Jesus the Son of God, the divine man, that is the "theologia gloria". In addressing this situation the evangelist's task was not to play off the two christologies one against the other. Rather he depicts the Jesus of the miracle stories and that of the passion narratives

as the same (Combrink 1988:140). It is therefore against this background that we will be in the position of understanding Mark's view of discipleship.

5.2.1.2 Son of Man

Mark uses another familial expression, υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου that also deserves attention. Kingsbury (1983:159f) maintains that one of the striking features in Mark's Gospel is the title "Son of Man". He contends that its usage is unlike other christological titles such as, Son of David, King of the Jews (Israel) or even Son of God. The latter titles set forth the identity of Jesus, they specify who Jesus is. In the fullest measure, they provide a description of Jesus to his disciples and his foes alike. The "Son of Man" title in Mark is therefore without content as far as the identity of Jesus is concerned, for through it the reader is not informed about who Jesus is. The title, however, constitutes a title of majesty, for it is applied exclusively to Jesus in conformity with the unique contours of his life and ministry, earthly activity, suffering, death and rising and return for judgement and vindication (see Moule 1977:65; Kealy 1982:77; Kim 1983:1; Bornkamm 1995:177ff).

5.2.1.3 The composition of the new family (Mk 2:13-17)

“Καὶ ἐξῆλθεν πάλιν παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν· καὶ πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος ἦρχετο πρὸς αὐτόν, καὶ ἐδίδασκεν αὐτούς. καὶ παράγων εἶδεν Λευὶν τὸν τοῦ Ἀλφαίου καθήμενον ἐπὶ τὸ τελώνιον, καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ Ἀκολούθει μοι. Καὶ ἀναστὰς ἠκολούθησεν αὐτῷ. Καὶ γίνεται κατακεῖσθαι αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ, καὶ πολλοὶ τελῶναι καὶ

ἀμαρτωλοὶ συνανέκειντο τῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ· ἦσαν γὰρ πολλοὶ καὶ ἠκολούθουν αὐτῷ. Καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς τῶν Φαρισαίων ἰδόντες ὅτι ἐσθίει μετὰ τῶν ἀμαρτωλῶν καὶ τελωνῶν ἔλεγον τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ, Ὅτι μετὰ τῶν τελωνῶν καὶ ἀμαρτωλῶν ἐσθίει; καὶ ἀκούσας ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγει αὐτοῖς [ὅτι] Οὐ χρειάν οἱ ἰσχύοντες ἰατροῦ ἀλλ' οἱ κακῶς ἔχοντες· οὐκ ἦλθον καλέσαι δικαίους ἀλλὰ ἀμαρτωλούς”

In the preceding pericope (2:1-12), in the healing of the paralytic, Jesus has undoubtedly already made himself unpopular with the Jewish leaders: “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God” (:7). The controversy is set to continue. The calling of another disciple presents yet another family metaphor in the theology of the Second Evangelist of the church. Levi is invited to the inner circle, “akolouthei mou”. In the calling of a tax-collector to be one of his disciples, a statement is made. Hurtado (1983:28) maintains that the tax-collectors were unpopular with the Jews because they raised taxes for Herod and the Romans. In some instances they were accused of greed because they obtained their jobs by bidding how much money they would raise, and their own reward was determined by their diligence in squeezing the utmost from the tax-paying Jewish public. Cole (1973:69) adds that the tax-collectors were often, if not always rapacious and immoral, apart altogether from the nationalistic prejudice against them, especially if they were directly working for the Romans, they were classified as outcasts. The Gospels elsewhere couple them with sinners: “... a friend of tax- collectors and sinners” (Lk 7:34; see also Mt 18:17; 21:31).

Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:190) caution against exaggeration and naivety in an assessment of the tax-collectors. Firstly, they say such an assessment depends on the evaluator. In most cases those who regarded the tax-collectors as dishonest and regarded them with contempt were tradesmen and the rich. The poor and the day labourers had little or nothing from which such duties could be levied. It is therefore not expected from them to be amongst those who despised tax-collectors. Secondly, the statement by the authors of the Mishna: "If tax-gatherers enter a house the house becomes unclean" (M. Toharot 7:6) should be correctly interpreted and understood. A house referred to would belong to a Pharisee that was dedicated to ritual purity in table fellowship. This is therefore a special case. Another assumption is that if a tax-collector entered a house, he would handle everything in order to assess the wealth of the owner. But it is not that the tax-collector who was per se unclean. Any member of the out-group entering a house would be regarded ritually unclean according to the standards of the host and thus would defile the objects.

Through the calling of Levi, the Markan Jesus makes his intentions and acts even more clearer. In Mark 1:16-20 Jesus called Simon, Andrew and John. His calling detached them from their family and attached them to a new fictive family. It was abnormal behaviour, if not traumatic in anticipation for one to leave his own job, folks and father. In calling a controversial person (2:14), the evangelist indicates the new network of relationship, which Jesus came to establish.

After the calling of Levi, the sitting in the house of a new-comer, joined by the sinners and other collectors serves to drive the point home. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:141) maintain that meals in antiquity were what

anthropologists call “ceremonies”. Unlike “rituals,” which confirm a change of status, ceremonies are regular, predictable events in which roles and statuses in a community are affirmed or legitimated. In other words, the microcosm of the meal is parallel to the macrocosm of everyday social relations. Though meals could include people of varying social ranks, normally that did not occur except under special circumstances, for example, in some Roman burial clubs. Because eating together implied sharing a common set of ideas and values, and frequently a common social position as well (see Luke 13:26), it is important to ask: Who eats with whom? Who sits where? What does one eat? Where does one eat? How is the food prepared? What utensils are used? When does one eat? What talk is appropriate? Who does what? When does one eat what course? Answering such questions tells us much about the social relations a meal affirms.

This therefore means that the Markan church, the new family that Jesus came to establish is implied in this pericope. Jesus came to establish, a new community unheard and unseen in the Jewish, Roman and Greek culture. The rich, the sinners, the rabbis and everyone else who has heeded his call can sit together having fellowship and be regarded as brother and sister.

5.2.1.4 Discipleship

Barton (1994:57) maintains that one of the best ways of identifying the ethos and self-understanding of a religious movement or community is to analyse its attitudes to natural affinities. Such ties may be economic, geographical, racial or familial. Attitudes towards the natural family may function as a test of allegiance to the charismatic leader. The

subordination to the family may come to represent itself in familial terms, as a kind of alternative family or brotherhood whose role, norms and authority patterns are modelled to the same extent as those of the natural family (cf Harder 1976:155ff; Wallis 1979: 41ff).

Donahue (1983:4f) states that from the onset the author summons the reader to think about discipleship as an enterprise of utmost seriousness which has to do with an understanding of what it is to be involved with Him. Discipleship is therefore an important concern in Mark's Gospel. This is underpinned by a visible absence of the infancy narrative at the beginning of the Gospel and the fact the Jesus' mother and father are not given any place of prominence in the Gospel. The manner in which the disciples are portrayed, presupposes a new family. There is a substantial number of references which points in this particular direction. It is however practically impossible given the spatial constraint in this research to discuss them all. The pericope (Mk 3:20-21;31-35) shall be used to demonstrate this fact:

5.2.1.5 Jesus' new family (3:20-21; 31-35)

“Καὶ ἐρχεται εἰς οἶκον· καὶ συνέρχεται πάλιν [ὁ] ὄχλος, ὥστε μὴ δύνασθαι οὐτοὺς μηδὲ ἄρτον φαγεῖν. Καὶ ἀκόσαντες οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ ἐξῆλθον κρατῆσαι αὐτόν, ἔλεγον γὰρ ὅτι ἐξέστη.” (20-21)

“Καὶ ἔρχονται ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ καὶ ἔξω στήκοντες ἀπέστειλαν πρὸς αὐτόν καλοῦντες αὐτόν. Καὶ ἐκάθητο περὶ αὐτόν ὄχλος, καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ, Ἰδοὺ ἡ μήτηρ σου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί σου [καὶ αἱ ἀδελφοί

σου] ἔξω ζητοῦσίν σε. καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς αὐτοῖς λέγει, Τίς ἐστὶν ἡ μήτηρ μου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί [μου] ; καὶ περιβλεψάμενος τοὺς περὶ αὐτὸν κύκλῳ καθημένους λέγει, Ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ μου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί μου. Ὁ μήτηρ μου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί μου. Ὃς [γὰρ] ἂν ποιήσῃ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, οὗτος ἀδελφός μου καὶ ἀδελφὴ καὶ μήτηρ ἐστίν.” (31-35).

In the structure of Mark's Gospel, this section falls within the third part - Jesus teaching and the performing of miracles. This text is also permeated with the idea of the new family. The first aspect to be observed is that the setting of the episode is in a house. Malbon (1986:113) has done some research concerning the significance of the εἰς οἶκον as an architectural space in Mark's Gospel. It is one of a number of such spaces, which function symbolically in the narrative to convey the transformation and overturning of one order by another, which the ministry of Jesus represents.

“Jesus in a house ” expression represents a new realm of Jesus activities as against the temple and the synagogue. This new family no longer meets in the temple or synagogue because it is no longer welcomed. It is also possible that the trauma of the destruction of the temple was still fresh in the minds of the Jews. The house is used to separate the disciples, the new family, from the crowd and the Jewish authorities. Trochme (1975:12) maintains that "house" in Mark has another significance. Taking into consideration that Paul's ministry was already impacting on communities at this time, there is a certain link between the frequent reference in Mark to house and house churches of the early

Christianity (Rm 16:5; Col 4:15). For a more thorough discussion on the significance of the οἴκοι in Mark, see Malbon (1985:282-292).

Secondly, to underline the fact of the disciples as a separate group (new family) in this episode, the teachers of the law who came from Jerusalem are placed in the same category with Jesus' relatives who also make their way to the house. Both groups have something against Jesus. The Jewish authorities lay a charge against Him, Βεελζεβοὺλ ἔχει (:22). His family, came to take Him home for they said that He was out of his mind. The response of Jesus: "whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" is significant. He clearly separates the disciples from his family and the crowd (cf Schweitzer 1970:82ff; Best 1981; 22-27).

This interpretation although widely embraced by many scholars, leaves one or two questions in obscurity. What is the meaning of "those doing the will of God"? There is nothing in the episode itself suggesting that they were an active group, "doing the will of God". Words are put in the mouths of a passive audience. In order to answer this question, it suffices to observe that this passage is riddled with redactional activity. The three-dimensional emphasis of withdrawal, separation and instruction denotes what functions the house churches would have fulfilled in the early church.

Another question which is unclear, is the position of his mother and brothers (and sisters?). What is it in the pericope suggesting that they were not doing the will of God? This episode should, be understood in the light of Mark's portrayal of the disciples as the new family of God. For instance in Mk 1:16-20, Jesus called Simon and Andrew. They

immediately left their occupation and their father and followed Jesus. In Mark 6:1-6 Jesus is also rejected in his own hometown of Nazareth.

In the other family metaphors found in Mark, God is called Father. Jacobs- Malina (1993:1) says that this should be understood against the background that Jesus lived in a patriarchal social system where the father/husband was designated as the head of the family (cf Grindal 1984:78ff) Jesus is also called Son of God (cf Kim 1983:1ff). This new family of God is also called a flock (14:27) and a boat (4:1).

5.2.1.6 Summary

Some concluding remarks on the church as a family in Mark will be appropriate. The author of the Second Gospel presents a reconstruction of how the Markan church envisaged itself. In the Graeco-Roman period belonging to a particular family was of great importance. Becoming a follower of Jesus resulted in the subordination of natural family ties. Thus, Mark's Gospel evinces a contra and counter-cultural ethos. Jesus called people to become his disciples. In their response, they left their families and occupations. It is granted that the church is nowhere identified in Mark's Gospel as the family of God, but the idea permeates the entire Gospel. Why should people forsake their family ties? Why should they be prepared to sacrifice belonging to a secured establishment – their families? It is simply because that they have joined and became members of a new family which according to its ethos and self-understanding is different from the previous one. They are a new people of God. They are the real family of God through Jesus and God is their Father.

5.2.2 Matthew

Bornkamm, (1963:38f) maintains that there is no Gospel which is shaped by the consciousness of the existence of the church as Matthew's Gospel. Statements which depict the self-consciousness of the primitive church permeates the entire Gospel. It is for instance only in this Gospel where the word church is used (Mt 16:18). The disciples are the free sons of God (13:11), they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, the city which is on the hill (5:13).

In Matthew's Gospel, we find that the evangelist has marshalled the data he used in such a way that the picture of the church as it was known to his community is graphically presented. His fundamental intuition, however, is that by his words and actions during his public ministry, Jesus was already engaged in founding the church. What picture of the church did the author and the community have about themselves? Pelser (1995:4) maintains that Matthew portrays a picture of a suffering church. The manner in which the disciples should live is clearly spelt-out. They should imitate Christ. Following Christ implies the sole and continuous personal bonding with Him, which is expressed in accomplishing his teachings and doing his will. [In our discussion of family imagery in Matthew, the following aspects will briefly be given attention: the life of the new people of God, Matthew's discipleship (a new brotherhood), the theological significance of ἀκολουθέω, and the Kingdom of God].

5.2.2.1 The real/new people of God

Matthew's Gospel attempts to show that the historical Jesus came to fulfil God's promises for his people, Israel (Roloff 1993:143). Although the

universal nature of the gospel in Matthew's Gospel cannot be questioned, the ministry of Jesus is more directed towards the Jews. But when Jesus came to his own, they rejected Him. Does this therefore mean that because of this rejection, God's mercy and grace are given to those who responded positively to the message of Jesus? Is the church God's new people/nation meant to substitute the historical Israel? Many Matthew researchers agree with these notions (see also Pelsner 1995:664).

Schnackenburg (1974:70) maintains that it is important to realise the type of community Matthew was writing to. It is a widely accepted fact that the Matthean community was predominantly Jewish. This, however, does not mean that they perceived salvation as the sole possession of the Jews. They had probably, around the last twenty years of the first century outgrown any narrowly nationalistic mode of thought and regarded themselves as a universal redeemed community of Jesus Christ. The Jewishness of the Gospel should therefore be understood against the background of the unbelieving Jews who boasted about the Torah and its legalistic accomplishments, its pride in achievement and striving after merit. This created a particular consciousness in the Matthean church which is perceptible in Matthew's Gospel and also which contributed to its position as the "Ecclesiastical Gospel".

The starting point of understanding the church as a new people of God is found in the parable of the wicked husbandman (21:41ff) with particular reference to v.43. "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and be given to a people who will produce fruit." This verse is omitted from Mark and Luke, but this is not necessarily an indication that it is a later interpolation. Matthew was probably anxious to show his readers that Jesus was concerned with the problem of his

rejection by the Jews and consequently the emergence of a new Israel (Tasker 1961:205). Gundry (1994:429) maintains that characteristically, Matthew composed this (verse 43) after the pattern of certain Old Testament passages (e.g. 1 Sm 15:28; Dn 2:44; 7:27) - and as a verdict against the chief priests and elders of the people in favour of the church.

Although Jesus in this parable addresses the Jewish leaders, the whole Jewish people share the responsibility for the rejection and the crucifixion of Jesus (27:25 πᾶς ὁ λαός; Schnackenburg [1974:70]; Beare [1981:431]; Filson [1960:229]). Commenting on the church as the new people, Kingsbury (1977:78) maintains that because Israel had repudiated Jesus, the Messiah, God has withdrawn his Kingdom from it and given it to the church. The church therefore, as the central thought of the Gospel is the community in which God in the person of Jesus chooses to dwell to the end to the age (1:23; 18:19-20; 28:20).

Schnackenburg (1974:70f) says that the author of Matthew must have seen the withdrawal of God's divine providence and grace in quite a concrete form in the judgement and condemnation that had already taken place over Judea (destruction of the temple) and in the loss of national independence, (12:7). Who are "the people" then to whom the kingdom of God is given? It is no longer an ethnic, national reality but a spiritual people, a fellowship of people who "yield fruits of divine rule". This image of fruit reflects Matthew's views of the church. It also presupposes the existing set of beliefs already espoused by this new community. Followers of Jesus are the true people of God who are being formed on a new foundation comprising of members who are Jews as well as Gentiles. (12:21; 24:14; 25:32; 28:19).

Taking the above mentioned remarks into consideration, the church in Matthew is presented as a new family (a post-Easter community made possible by the salvation of Jesus 26:28). They are a fulfillment of the true Israel. Combrink (1988:95) in this regard for instance says that Matthew emphasises the continuing validity of the law. For example after healing a man, Jesus sends him to the priest to fulfil the law's demands (8:4). It is such features in Matthew which lead some commentators to accommodate the idea that Matthew could have perceived the church as the continuation of Israel. Roloff (1993:51), however, says that great caution should be exercised in hastily regarding the Matthean church as the new Israel of God. He says that nowhere in the Gospel the author expressly refers to the church as the new nation of God.

The warning of Roloff, is however, less convincing. Matthew does not necessarily have to use the word "new nation" and ascribe it to Israel for us to interpret and understand his community as a new family of God. For instance, some New Testament exegetes agree that even in the Gospel of John, where the word church does not appear, the idea of ecclesiology permeates throughout the entire Gospel. Therefore, Matthew's portrayal of the church is clearly that of a the family of God. The Jewishness of Matthew and the prominence of the law does not imply that the church was a renewed old Israel. The "Law" which was leading in this community is a "Lex Christi" surpassing the old Torah which Jesus, the eschatological envoy of God (5:17,12:41f) has authoritatively promulgated (see Matthew 5-7).

5.2.2.2 Discipleship in Matthew

The picture of discipleship in Matthew (as in Mark), has ecclesiological connotations. However, a distinctive feature of Matthew's portrait of the disciples is the unique relationship they have with Jesus Christ. There is widespread consensus about the general features of the disciples in Matthew (Luz 1971:159; Kingsbury 1977:78; Sand 1991:105; Roloff 1993:154). Some researchers such as Kingsbury (1981:8) see the idea of discipleship in Matthew as more developed than Mark and Luke. Jesus is "with them" and they are "with him." Jesus and his disciples form a "family" that stand apart from the rest of Israel. In relation to himself, Jesus declares that his disciples are his true relatives (12:19) and his brothers (28:10). In comparison to disciples in Mark, Sheridan (1973:243ff) says that Matthew's disciples, unlike those in Mark, understand virtually everything which Jesus teaches (Mt 13:10-17; Mk 4:10-12). For instance the Markan disciples did not understand about the bread (6:52). Matthew's account omits this ignorance of the disciples.

The discourse on Matthew's Gospel cannot be concluded without referring to the relation between family ties and discipleship. Matthew 10:16-23 could be cited as an example in this regard. Here for the first time the Twelve are identified as "apostles". However, the author does not use this concept in a technical sense. It merely refers to the fact that they are commissioned. But it is unlikely that Matthew 10:16-23 records an event which took place during the earthly ministry of Jesus. Matthew rather speaks of hardships within his own community. The words "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues."(v.17), seems to be reporting some of the

experiences of the Matthews church at a much later stage than this sending of the Twelve.

To elaborate this point: The fact that the Twelve were prohibited to take the gospel to the Gentiles and Samaritans shows the author's redactional activity. The Christians only began to preach the Good News to the Gentiles after the death of Christ. Even then the first preaching to the Gentiles was not done by the Twelve, but by unknown Hellenistic believers who were driven from Jerusalem by the persecutions which broke out after the martyrdom of Stephen (Ac 8:1,4, 11:19-21; Beare [1981:242]).

Matthew makes it clear in Matthew 10:16-23 that family life will be disrupted and division within a family will occur within his community. Brother will hand over brother. The only situation which could cause normal family ties to be broken, is to form allignments with other families. This means, therefore that by virtue of their relationship with Jesus, the Matthean church will forfeit family certain relationships. At the same time members of this community hears in this pericope: "Be on guard against men"...(v.17), "(They) will flog you in their synagogues" (v.17), "All men will hate you" v.22, "When you are persecuted in one place flee to another..."(v.22). These statements indicate that the evangelist is not warning his community against faceless people. He is addressing them against unbelieving Jews in their surroundings. Matthew's church is to be separate from the Jews who are still to be converted, the latter belong to ...the lost sheep of Israel. They should be invited to come into the family... the Kingdom of God.

5.2.2.3 Theological and metaphoric significance of ἀκολουθεῖν. (Matthew 20:29-34)

“Καὶ ἐκπορευομένων αὐτῶν ἀπὸ Ἰεριχῶ ἠκολούθησεν αὐτῷ ὄχλος πολὺς. καὶ ἰδοὺ δύο τυφλοὶ καθήμενοι παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν, ἀκούσαντες ὅτι Ἰησοῦς παράγει, ἔκραξαν λέγοντες· κύριε, ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς, υἱὸς Δαυίδ. ὁ δὲ ὄχλος ἐπετίμησεν αὐτοῖς ἵνα σιωπήσωσιν· οἱ δὲ μείζον ἔκραξαν λέγοντες· κύριε, ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς, υἱὸς Δαυίδ. καὶ στάς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐφώνησεν αὐτοὺς καὶ εἶπεν· τί θέλετε ποιήσω ὑμῖν; λέουσιν αὐτῷ· κύριε, ἵνα ἀνοιγῶσιν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ἡμῶν. σπλαγχνισθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἥψατο τῶν ὀμμάτων αὐτῶν, καὶ εὐθέως ἀνέβλεψαν καὶ ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ” (Mt 20:29-34).

Matthew employs the verb ἀκολουθέω (to follow) more than the other synoptic gospels. The Second Evangelist uses it eighteen times and Luke only seven times (Morgenthaler 1958:70). Matthean scholars are divided on the use of ἀκολουθέω in Matthew. The majority of commentators seem to indicate that the verb has ecclesiastical undertones. For instance, concerning the two blind men of Jericho in Matthew 20 these scholars would interpret the words they received their sight and followed him” (20:34), to mean that after receiving their sight they became Jesus’ disciples and followed him. Hill (1972:290), for instance maintains that the fact that in this healing story Jesus is followed by a great crowd suggests that messianic interest and enthusiasm were mounting as Jesus neared Jerusalem. Furthermore, the presence of two blind men, rather than one (as it is in Mark 10:46ff) may be due to the fact that two persons was the minimum number of witnesses required to authenticate an incident or fact. The restoration of sight to the blind men was to be a sign

of the messianic era (see also Trilling 1969:5f; Albright and Mann 1971:249).

Other commentators insist that not much can be and should be read into this verb in Matthew 20:34. It simply means that after they received their sight, the two men were in the company of Jesus and his disciples. Filson (1960:219) acknowledgeably, attaches spiritual significance in the two men following Jesus, but not to the extent that they became his disciples. For instance he says that, the fact that they identified Him as “Son of David” was based on a rumour that He was going to Jerusalem to restore the kingdom of Israel. The men were, thus more concerned about their physical healing than any other thing (see also Bonnard [1963:29]; Benoit [1961:128]).

A careful scrutiny of ἀκολουθεῖν in the healing of the blind men in Matthew 20, indicates that it has theological and metaphorical significance. Although there might be little or nothing in the context itself which suggests that the expression is used to indicate discipleship, there is enough evidence in the rest of the Gospel that this is a miracle coupled with a “call story”. Gundry (1994:406) maintains that Matthew modified the Markan equivalent of this miracle. As it is characteristic of the First Evangelist at the beginning of v.34 he replaces the “καὶ” of Mark to “δέ”. Furthermore, “σπλαγχνισθεῖς” is added in order to make the healing an act of service in line with v.22-28 (cf 18:27) for another distinctive occurrence of this form). “Jesus touched their eyes” replaces the Markan and the Lukan “Jesus said to him”. Therefore, the switch from speaking to “touching” causes the expression “go, your faith has saved you” to drop out. The blind men received their sight and followed Him. The aorist tense of the verb (v. 34) replaces Mark’s and Luke’s

imperfect. The avoidance of the words “on the road” further serves to make the climatic statement a general description of discipleship rather than a particular reference to the journey towards Jerusalem.

The general meaning of the verb “to follow” suggests that the two blind men did not only follow Jesus “on the road” but they also actually became his disciples. It is granted in the context that the men did follow Jesus “on the road to Jerusalem”. But the meaning of the verb does not only mean physically following a person. It also means to go behind a person, to accompany one, or to go after, or to be a disciple. The verb ἀκολουθῆν was frequently used for slaves following soldiers, or them (slaves) following the orders of the masters. These men were therefore convinced that Jesus is the Messiah and they followed Him. The First Evangelist, thus, uses the verb ἀκολουθῆν metaphorically. This means that those whom Jesus had freed from the kingdom of darkness or sickness no longer are without direction. They were following Him. They became his disciples and were guided by Him. They became part of a new family, the Matthean community.

5.2.2.4. The Kingdom of God

The expression or phrase “Kingdom of God” does not occur in the Old Testament but the concept or idea of God as the king is embedded there (Beasley-Murray 1986:20; Wolthuis 1987: 293). In the New Testament “the Kingdom of God” or “the Kingdom of Heaven”, signifying God’s sovereign rule, lay at the heart of Jesus’ preaching and teaching. As proclaimed by Jesus, the Kingdom of God had continuity with the Old Testament promise, as well as the Jewish apocalyptic thinking, but differed from them in some respects. For instance, God’s Kingdom in the New Testament denoted God’s eternal rule rather than an earthly

Kingdom. Its scope was universal rather than limited to the Jewish nation (Marshall 1992: 417).

Now, turning to Matthew's Gospel, the author probably offers a richer and more explicit picture of Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God than the other synoptics. At the very onset of his Gospel, the author provides a description of the preaching of John the Baptist. Wolthuis (1987:294f) maintains that in Matthew's Gospel the symbol of the Kingdom of God is given specific meaning by the narrative, and the reader is brought into the experience of that Kingdom by participation in the reading process itself. It is therefore the symbol of the Kingdom which unifies the theological concepts of the thematic aspects of the narrative.

The usual phrase "Kingdom of Heaven" occurs 32 times and it's never found elsewhere in the New Testament. Four times we find "Kingdom of God", an expression which is also found in the other New Testament books. The essential meaning of "Kingdom" is the actual kingship and effective rule of God, established by the work of Jesus Christ. The Kingdom has present and future aspects. Through Jesus Christ God was acting to defeat the power of Satan. However, God's reign was not yet fully realised and effective. It will be finally and completely established at the end of the age and the Son of Man will act on behalf of the Father in establishing it.

βασιλεία (Hebrew: Malkuth) means sovereign kingship, rather than a specific Kingdom. It means the authority of God is acknowledged everywhere. The First Evangelist therefore, uses the expression Kingdom of God to express what it means to be the people of God in the light of the coming of Jesus as the Son of God. For Matthew, God is the

heavenly Father who is “with us”, who also graciously, in the person of Jesus, calls people to repentance because the Kingdom of God is near. Matthew uses various means to illustrate the concept of the Kingdom of God. He uses for instance parables to achieve this purpose. In chapter 13, seven parables are related.

The parable of the sower, 13:1-9

The purpose of the parables, 13:10-17

The meaning of the parable of the sower, 13:18-23

The parable of the weeds, 13:24-30

More parables of growth, 13:31-33

Parables in prophecy, 13:34-35

The meaning of the parable of the weeds, 13:36-43

Three short parables, 13:44-50

The householder, 13:51-52

The parable of the weeds needs attention. This parable is found only in Matthew and also the first of a series of parables specifically said to refer to the Kingdom of Heaven. It has strong eschatological undertones, even though it also applies to the contemporary time of Matthew’s church. In this parable Jesus likewise uses the figure of the sower, but this time, deals with the character of the seed rather than the receptial, as it is the case in the previous parable. In Matthew 13:36-43, when the disciples later privately ask Jesus concerning the meaning of the parable, He identifies the field as the world, the sower as the Son of Man who sowed good seed, the enemy as the devil who sowed the weeds. The good seed is represented as the children of God and the weed as the children of the wicked one, the devil (Walvoord 1974: 100).

Beare (1981:303) maintains that the interpretation of this parable is undoubtedly the author's own creation. It, however, seems likely that he received this parable from the earlier source and reshaped it to achieve his own goal. Through this parable the author clearly indicates that his community members are the good seed. They are distinct from the weeds, the tares. They will operate in this manner until the end of time where clear separation between them and those who did not belong to the church will take place. Once more in this pericope we thus have the family metaphor of those who belong to the Kingdom. The Father is the head of the Kingdom. Those who become part of this Kingdom are now called the children of God, (Mt 5:9). They may call God Father when they address Him in prayer, (6:9). The relationship between God and his children is very intimate, but mostly goes hand in hand with respect (Mt 10:28).

This Kingdom of God (as a new fictive family) has new values or principles (Matthew 5-7). For instance, Matthew structures Jesus' teaching about the ethics of the Kingdom of heaven in Chapter 5 in three: the Beatitudes 5:3-12, salt and light 5: 12-16, antitheses contrast to the law 5: 17-48. Another three-fold series is found in chapter 6. And the first colon of chapter 7: Almsgiving, prayer and fasting is contrasted, with that of Jewish leaders (6:1-18) and trust in God than riches (6:19-33).

The purpose of the evangelist in presenting these teachings in series of threes is not hard to find. The principles, ethics and values of this new family are unique. Though some of them seem to be impossible to attain, it is possible once one is part of the Kingdom. These moral principles are actually designed to counteract the earthly views of the people of Israel (see Walvoord 1974:43).

5.2.2.5 Summary

In the foregone discussion the following aspects of the Matthean church were highlighted: The church as the real/new people, discipleship, the theological significance of following Jesus and the church as manifestation of the Kingdom of God. The believers in Matthew's Gospel are seen as having entered the Kingdom of God. The church is the result of those who have responded to the call of the coming king. It is a call to become the disciples of Jesus. The church, even on earth is certain of the presence of God. As it was observed in Mark, there is nowhere in the First Gospel where the church is referred to or identified as the family but the idea is implied throughout the Gospel. In the Old Testament, God (the Father) established a people (the Israelites) for Himself through Abraham. In Matthew's Gospel, God has called and established children for Himself through Jesus Christ. The Matthean community, thus, regarded itself as the family which was distinct from the "old family", the unbelieving Jews.

5.2.3 Luke-Acts

The portrayal of the church in Luke-Acts is different from what we have already observed in Mark and Matthew. Pelsner (1995:652) maintains that it appears that the Lukan church is the result of salvation-history. The time of the church is the third phase in the process of salvation-history. The first is the history of Israel, and the second the actions of John the Baptist and Jesus. Conzelmann (1977:195) calls this the tripartite scheme (cf also Giles 1981:121). Schnackenburg (1974:64) states that the Third Evangelist as a theologian is concerned about the place of the church in

the context of redemptive history and the tasks which, according to the will of God, it has to fulfil in its time. The church as a family in Luke-Acts shall therefore be discussed, giving attention to discipleship, the church and the Spirit, and the contrast between the temple and household and the ethics of the new family.

5.2.3.1 Discipleship

Like in Mark and Matthew, the word "church" is not found in Luke. But the manner in which Luke presents Jesus' work in the Third Gospel, presupposes that He was establishing a community which would later form an eschatological community, referred to as the church (Du Plessis 1995:58). Giles (1981:121) says that, whereas the church is commonly thought as coming into existence after Easter, in Luke it comes into existence during the ministry of Jesus. Luke's (narrative) creation of his disciples is intended to set before his readers a model Christian community. They are meant not to prefigure the church nor to represent the church in embryo: they are actually the church, all be it, in idealised form. This is based, amongst others, on the manner in which the author used and adopted the traditions about the disciples. Sheridan (1973:252) observes that in Acts, the term disciple is never applied to the Twelve or the Eleven. Although of course, the term is used frequently, it always designates the believers or Christians as a distinct group from the Twelve (cf Barrett 1956: 138ff).

Like in all the other Gospels, in Luke, the term "disciples" refer to those following Jesus. Du Plessis (1995:58-9) maintains that Luke's special way of referring to discipleship is not so much to "follow" but "to be with Jesus". To be a disciple transcended possessing a number of truths, but

rather the recognition, the search and the following of Jesus into new situations. Fitzmyer (1979:235) says that Luke's shift of emphasis from the ἔσχατον to the σημερον eliminated the need to focus on the imminent coming of the Kingdom and enabled him to present in his own way the important role of Christian discipleship. This is evident in Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and its effect on those who followed Him (Lk 9:51 - 19:28). In this journey, as constructed by the Third Evangelist, people who wanted to become disciples of Jesus, were required to follow Him along the road to Jerusalem - where He was to die, but also to triumph over death. This central section has few miracles. The main focus is on the parables and the other pronouncements of Jesus. The narrator, dealing mainly with Jesus' instructions to his disciples and conflict with his opponents (cf McFadyen 1993:444f) elaborately presents the journey.

Another most significant aspect of Luke discipleship is inferred in Luke 8:4-10, the parable of the seed and the sower. On completion of this parable, the disciples asked Him about the meaning of the parable. Before answering them Jesus makes a statement which, Du Plessis (1995:3) calls the "insiders" and "outsiders", or the "you" and "them" expression: "the knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables"(v.10). A similar thought surfaces elsewhere in Luke 9:37-43. There the disciples are surprised why they could not exorcise the spirit from the child. What He could do, they thought they too could do. Another incident is found in 9:49-50. The disciples were indignant because they saw another man using Jesus' name to drive out demons: "...we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us." Jesus answer imply that they are not the only members of this family, "for whoever is not against you is for you..." The same redactional activity of the Evangelist in defining and identifying his

community, which is also found in Mark (see paragraph 3.2.1.2), reflects the nature of discipleship as being part of a new "family" into new knowledge and new members.

5.2.3.2 The Spirit

Pelser (1995:53) says that one of the dominant features of the Lukan narrative is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Brown (1984:56) calls this the distinguishing feature of the Lukan ecclesiology. The Spirit is mentioned seventy times in Acts alone (almost one-fifth of the total New Testament usage's). Another fact worth noting is that Luke omits in Acts all further reference to Peter after the "church Council" in Acts 15. Even more disconcerting is that Acts ends abruptly when Paul gets to Rome without any reference to his subsequent career and death. This indicates that the author is not interested in people, per se, but in them as vehicles of the Spirit, bearing witness to Christ in Jerusalem, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Ac 1:8). Schnackenburg (1974:66) correctly maintains that the conferring of the Spirit upon the disciples is significant. It means that period of Jesus continues in the period of the church. He continues to be with them by the Spirit.

Two factors, which are important though seldom mentioned by commentators of Luke-Acts, deserve to be observed. Firstly, the second volume of Luke-Acts opens with the portrayal of the disciples after the departure of Jesus. In their expectancy of the Heavenly Gift which was promised to them, they remained together. During this time they replaced one of them who earlier betrayed Jesus. They felt the necessity of preserving the full compliment of the Twelve. No adequate explanation of this phenomenon can be found except that the disciples were

convinced (even after the departure of their master) that they were "a community" a family who was to carry on the will of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit descended during the time the Jewish feast of Pentecost. There were many Jews "from every nation under heaven" (2:5). However, the Holy Spirit descended only on the disciples who were engaged in prayer. This is phenomenal. It underscores what has been observed throughout this chapter that the disciples, the followers of Christ, the "insiders", etc., were indeed portrayed explicitly or implicitly by the three evangelists as the new family of God. The Holy Spirit did not go where He was rejected. He did not endue the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes or the crowd which gathered on pilgrimage in Jerusalem. He (the Holy Spirit) fell upon His own family, the disciples.

5.2.3.3 The household of God

Recently Elliott (1982 & 1991) and Esler (1987) made a significant contribution in the on-going debate on the ecclesiology in Luke-Acts. Throughout the years a lot of data has been generated on the subject, (Baltzer 1965; Bachmann 1980; Weinert 1981; Cassidy 1983; Casalengo 1984; Koenig 1985). Most of these researchers agree that the third Evangelist views the temple in a favourable light:

"Throughout Luke-Acts the main expression which emerges is Luke's positive regard for the temple. In his eyes it is an outstanding and genuine religious sanctuary, the prominent place of public worship and religious teaching in Israel" (Weinert 1981: 89).

"The overarching geographical perspective in Luke-Acts can be seen in the author's preoccupation with Jerusalem as the city of destiny for Jesus and the pivot for the salvation of mankind... Unlike the compositions of the other Evangelists, the Lukan Gospel begins and ends in Jerusalem..." (Fitzmyer 1992:164f).

Elliott (1991:211ff) added a new dimension in this research scenario. Influenced by the work of Mottu (1974:201ff), he maintains that the two, the temple and household, are two contrasting social institutions in Luke-Acts. Elliott (1991:214) cites Mottu's justification of this position based on the parable of the Pharisees and the tax-collector:

"...as long as the two antagonists look at the temple as their locus of reference, they stay in an alienated organisation of space that makes human reality inhuman. The skopos (goal) of the story seems to me to be located in an invitation to change the rules of the common spatial game, to transform collectives into groups and to give a "house" to displaced persons. No conversion, no morals, no opposition of two "characters" is the skopos; but a shift of space, a structural change, a transformation of where people live is what we are invited to accomplish. The opposition between the Pharisee and tax-collector is only the secondary aspect of the dominant contradiction which is the spatial contradiction between temple and house, collective and group, alienated and human space" (Mottu 1974:201-2).

Elliott (1991:213ff) says that the parable (Luke 18:9-14) is about the two groups in the Gospel. On the one hand, are those at the centre (the

Pharisee) and on the other side those on the periphery of Judaism's social and religious life (the tax-collectors). The story begins in the temple "the holy place" which is the conventional place for demarcating social and religious differences; but it concludes in the house, where it is stated "this man went down to his house justified rather than the other (18:14)." The parable functions to contrast the two locales: on the one hand, the temple (epitomised by Judaism) is indifferent to Jesus. On the other hand the household embraces the message of Jesus.

Elliott (1991:215) also observes this idea in the general structure of Luke-Acts. In the first volume, besides incidences such as the one mentioned above, the temple features prominently. Commencing with the story of Zechariah's priestly service (1:5-23), the Gospel concludes with the Risen Lord and return to Jerusalem where the disciples were continually in the temple blessing God (24:50 - 53). The temple scenes, thus, provide a grand framework or inclusion for the first half of Luke-Acts (cf Esler 1987:13ff Fitzmyer 1981:15). However the progressively negative attitude towards the temple becomes more and more evident towards the end of Luke.

In Acts, the second volume, the temple is both the scene and subject of conflict:

- (a) the healing of a man crippled from birth at the temple gates develops into conflict (3:1ff)
- (b) The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees in their jealousy oppose the apostles (4:1ff).
- (c) Stephen is charged for speaking against "the holy place" and "the Law" (6:13-14).

For Luke, therefore, "the temple is the object of critique and the arena of rejection", "Satan inspired", "conflict and death" (Elliott 1991:230). The household however, plays a paramount role in the ministry teaching and mission of Jesus and his followers. It serves as a historical and a metaphorical reality where people are taught by Jesus and where the new family of God could meet. The church which grows through household conversions, at the same time becomes a world-wide household of faith as illustrated in the missionary endeavours of Paul in Acts.

5.2.3.4 The ethics of the new household

We conclude Luke's portrayal of the church as God's family by referring to the ethics of the new Community. Luke 14:1-14 in this regard spells out the author's vantage point of a new social structure. This passage is important to Luke because it represents an excellent starting point for a study of Luke's view of the Christian Community. In this story a Pharisee acts as a host at a meal to which Jesus and a number of people from the village are invited. It is obvious that the host is a prominent and rich man in the village. The first striking feature in this scenario is that a man of such status has invited the non-elite sector of the city as well, thus he has broken ranks with family and elite friends. This reference to the break with the biological family and social networks reflects something of the author's view of his idea that the fictive family (the Lukan church) is to take the place of one's original family, is implied here. This thought is further taken up by the words of Jesus. He (Jesus) draws-up a new guest list. He starts with the negative one:

“Ἐλεγεν δὲ καὶ τῷ κεκληκότι αὐόν, Ὅταν ποιῆς ἄριστον ἢ δεῖπνον, μὴ φώνει τοὺς φίλους σου μηδὲ τοὺς ἀδελφούς σου μηδὲ τοὺς συγγενεῖς σου μηδὲ γείτονας πλουσίους, μήποτε καὶ αὐτοὶ ἀντικαλέσωσίν σε καὶ γένηται ἀνταπόδομά σοι” (Lk 14:12)

Then follows the new guest list which reflects the author's own "ecclesiological" agenda:

“ἀλλ' ὅταν δοχὴν ποιῆς, κάλει πτωχοὺς, ἀναπίρους, χωλοὺς τυφλοὺς· καὶ μακάριος ἔσῃ, ὅτι οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἀνταποδοῦναί σοι, ἀνταποδοθήσεται γάρ σοι ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῶν δικαίων” (Lk 14:13-14).

The above pericope mirrors the ethics of this new community - hospitality. At the same time the new community is called to perseverance. “πειρασμός” (Luke 8:13) in this regard does not only refer to the persecutions which the author's church is exposed to, but all trials associated to the Christian life. To persevere, therefore signifies to be on the side of the Lord and shows commitment to the Christian kerygma.

The position of the poor in the Gospel of Luke also receives particular emphasis. Although the Lukan community had wealthy and influential members, the social outcasts in society, (the beggars and the maimed) were viewed as honourable. Luke, thus, accords priority to the utterly destitute in the scheme of salvation, as well as in the ethnical matters. Tuckett (1996:95) maintains that the poor in Luke are clearly stated as the



πτωχοῖς...” (Lk 4:18). This  with a powerful critique of the rich:

“Πλὴν οὐαὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς πλουσίοις, ὅτι ἀπέχετε τὴν παράκλησιν ὑμῶν” (Lk 6:24).

The Third Evangelist does not imply that the gospel is for the poor only. What he implies is that, the poor are also legitimately part of this new family of believers. The maimed, the poor, the blind, etc. are also invited to the messianic supper. It is the new ethic of the new community.

5.2.3.5 Summary

From the foregoing discussion, like in the other synoptic gospels, Luke does not expressly state that the church is a new family of God. But to this believing community which was in the process of forming an own identity, the author implicitly states that they form part of a formation which should be distinguished from the other institutions in the Ancient Mediterranean World. In doing that he employs family imagery. They are the disciples, who are endued by the Spirit, a household of God with a new ethic. The church according to the author of Luke-Acts is therefore a new institution which was inaugurated by the new covenant which for Luke has eschatological overtones (see 5.2.3.4 above). They are the disciples of Jesus endued by his Spirit, household of God and here a new set of ethics. In identifying his church the author employs family imagery.

5.3 The church in the Fourth Gospel

Our discussion on the church and the Johannine community as the family of God will be slightly more elaborate than the other Gospels already discussed. This is largely due to two reasons. Firstly, the church in the Johannine writings remains a much debated subject. Secondly, it is because recent years have witnessed an increased interest in the theological and exegetical study of the "ecclesia" in John. The meaning of the church, discipleship metaphors, the implicit nature of the church, etc. will all come under the spot-light.

A number of the Johannine scholars maintain that the Fourth Gospel is more concerned with the church than the synoptic gospels. Schnackenburg (1965:102) maintains that on first sight John's Gospel does not seem to focus on the church as such. It rather seems as if the Fourth Gospel was considered as evidence of an individual, spiritualised, even "mystical" Christianity (cf 3:16, 36, 4:23, 5:24, 6:56, 15:5, etc). Kysar (1993:112) also argues against individualism by stating the collective nature of the church. He maintains that the dismissal of the concept church in John because the Evangelist does not mention the word "church" is premature. The Gospel articulates a view of the church without ever resorting to the use of the word.

On the opposite side stand some scholars who maintain that the Fourth Gospel reflects no visible signs of the church. These scholars claim that the church plays a minor role in the Fourth Gospel. Such negative claims stem from the fact that the word "church" is never used. Dunn (1977:118) maintains that:

“The individual Gospel is one of the features of this  it. Certainly there is a sense of both in the Gospel and in the First Epistle. And the horizontal responsibility is laid on each to love the brethren, in both as in Paul, this is the real of Christian believer.”

For further discussion on individualism in John, Bultmann (1971:8-9, 91) and Brown (1984:84) are valuable sources. The diversity of opinions concerning Johannine ecclesiology might seem to be so strong that these seemingly conflicting views are irreconcilable. The contrary is actually true. However, the differences among scholars is not so much about the fact of the church in the Fourth Gospel but it is more a question of emphasis. There is agreement among researchers that at least there are signs of the church (although implicit) in the Gospel of John. The exegetes also admit to the reference to the sacraments in the Gospel.

From this vantage point we now examine and analyse the various references to the Johannine community in the text, and also ask why the Fourth Evangelist presents the church in this fashion? (see O’Grady 1978:240; Roux 1981:33; Kysar 1993:112; Roloff 1993:291). Admittedly, John’s Gospel does not present the church as explicitly as we might expect to find in a document that comes to us from the end of the first century, at a time when Christianity was well on the way to firm establishment. Perhaps the author wished to concentrate on the meaning of the church and its practices. (The temptation to settle for the formal structure and forget the presupposition of the structure was as strong in the first century as it is today). The Fourth Gospel is basically christological and truly individualistic in its emphasis. The personal response of the believer in faith to Jesus Christ is stated in no uncertain

terms. This is the cent
understanding of the Gospel.



is such necessary for

Pelser (1995:7) maintains that the traditional metaphors of the church are absent in the Gospel (see also Kysar 1993:112; Roloff 1993:291). Dunn (1977:118) further articulates this:

“The individualism of the fourth Gospel is one of the most striking features of this remarkable document.”

“Die Johannes-evangelie het ‘n fundamentele/individualistiese karakter. Die verhouding van die individu teenoor Jesus as Verlosser en teenoor die Vader, staan vir die skrywer voorop” (Roux 1981:33).

“The ecclesiology of this heritage is distinguished by its emphasis on the relation of the individual Christian to Jesus Christ” (Brown 1984:84)

The reason for this is not obscure. The Fourth Gospel was presumably written at the time when church organisation was rapidly developing. The Gospel shows little concern for this development. At a time when there was high interest among the early Christians in the development of distinctive officers in the church organisation, John seems to have moved in the opposite direction. Even if many scholars agree on this individualistic nature of John’s ecclesiology, there are concepts, metaphors and expressions which indicate that the church was perceived corporately (Roux 1981:33; Pelser 1995:667). The discussion which follows, gives attention to the church as a family under the following:

- the church as a family, distinct from the synagogue
- the Johannine community locked in conflict
- the church as a flock
- the church/family metaphors in the farewell discourses

5.3.1. The church (as family) stands distinct from the synagogue (3:1-8)

5.3.2 The church in conversation with the synagogue

Firstly we turn our attention to the discourse between Jesus and Nicodemus. One of the distinguishing features in the discourse is the fact that Nicodemus appears not to have a personal agenda. He is made not to approach Jesus in his personal capacity, i.e. seeking personal spiritual aggrandisement. The verb οἶδαμεν (3:2) may refer to the Pharisees or the ἄρχοντες or both. It is possible that it is reference to the πολλοὶ of 2:23, because they saw the signs performed by Jesus. The discourse is therefore about the fact that Judaism cannot simply move forward over a level plain to achieve its goal in the Kingdom of God. This goal cannot be reached by either learned discussions between its distinguished teachers (such as Jesus and Nicodemus).

Meeks (1972:54) says that the primary message of this dialogue is that Jesus is incomprehensible to Nicodemus. The two belong to two different worlds, in spite of Nicodemus' good intentions (3:2). Jesus' world seems rather opaque to him. It therefore becomes significant to discover what or whom Nicodemus represents. Furthermore, his title, as depicted by the Evangelist, "ruler of the Jews" (3:1 and 7:50) further

betray him. Thus, Nicodemus according to Meeks (:55) is an envoy of these Jews probably mentioned in 2:23f “who believed in him”.

Bultmann (1971:134) maintains that Nicodemus comes with a question which Judaism must put to Jesus. It is the question of salvation. Summers (1979:65) in turn states that the Jews were proud that they were the descendants and children of Abraham by physical birth. To them to be a child of Abraham meant an exalted privilege and status. Jesus had to categorically state that to be a true son of Abraham is a spiritual matter and not a physical matter, but to be a son of God requires something more than that.

5.3.2.1. The family imagery of birth and rebirth

The discourse between Jesus and Nicodemus (the expression of faith through the symbol of the new birth) contains some of the most significant metaphors in the Johannine corpus. Hence Van der Watt (1997b:1) maintains that one of the most important “family imageries” and ethically powerful statements in the Johannine writings is the fact that “no one who is born of God will continue in sin...” (1 John 2:29, 3:10; 4:7 and 5:1-2 18). Malina, Joubert and Van der Walt (1996:21) in this regard state that birth was in the first century Mediterranean world the most important way of becoming a member of a family. The New Testament uses this image to say how a believer becomes part of God’s family. The Holy Spirit is responsible for this experience of a person being made a believer- a child of God, to be part of the divine family of God. This family metaphor of being born in the family of the Father permeates throughout the discourse, even beyond.

5.3.2.2. “...you must be born again..(3:3)

Jesus ignores Nicodemus’ confession or flattery, “...Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him” (3:2). Jesus confronts Nicodemus with a stunning statement, “... I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (3:3). Right from the onset Jesus uncompromisingly states that man, as he/she is, is excluded from salvation, i.e. from the sphere of God. Yet, he states that salvation may be possible for him to become another man - a new man.

The terms "born from above"; “born of the Spirit” appear to be used interchangeably and are virtually synonymous. The dualistic framework of John’s Gospel is also encountered in this pericope. The Spirit and flesh are mutually exclusive; since flesh begets only flesh and only Spirit can beget spirit (3:6; 6:63). The flesh is in this context not necessarily regarded as evil but it is incapable of effecting salvation (6:63; Miller [1976:44f]). Lindars (1972:153) also says that :

“The Spirit is not a component part of man, but the influence which directs the *whole* man once he has been reborn. This influence is analogous to the wind (verse 8). The man born from the flesh is a man as he is by nature, impelled by the forces of his own natural endowment. The man born from the spirit is man as he is when open to the influence of God, with all his natural forces brought under the control of the Spirit.”

The most important expression in this dialogue is γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν. The word γεννάω appears some ninety times in the New Testament, forty-five times in Matthew's Gospel and twenty-eight in the Johannine corpus. This word and the related concepts such as "beget", "bear", "become", etc. are used literally and metaphorically (Brown 1975:176ff). The expression "born again" can be understood as meaning "being born from above", "born new" (Hendriksen 1961:132-3; Earle 1986:84). Here Jesus explains the origin of the believer. The believer's true origin and existence does not belong to this world - his/her beginning and end are in God through Jesus Christ. The references of being born from above mean that man must receive a new origin. He must exchange his old nature for a new and be born again. This is an act of God (Brown 1975:179). Jesus meant to impress upon Nicodemus that he descended from God's presence to raise man to God. Jesus, therefore transposes the topic to a higher level. Whereas Nicodemus is on the level of the sensible, he must be raised to the level of the spiritual.

The Fourth Evangelist uses the family metaphor of the birth to express a spiritual reality of faith. The word ἄνωθεν implies that another birth has already taken place. Van der Watt (1997a:4) maintains that the family in the Mediterranean world was generally regarded as the basic social structure. Birth into a family therefore meant to become part of the family with everything that it involved especially on a social level. Pursuant of this notion, Blasi (1997: 259f) says that in the first century Mediterranean world to be a child of someone meant to participate in an identity and in a particular nexus of the parents' social networks. Just as one acquires family, friends, relatives, neighbours and a name from the parents, the Johannine church acquired these by being born in God's family. Birth was therefore an important way of determining one's

identity. This birth metaphor suggests the social orientation of the Johannine community. Blasi (1997:257) states that the evangelist's discourse between Jesus and Nicodemus is meant to describe the separation of the Johannine Christians from the community of the local synagogue (see also Baltz & Schneider 1978-80:243).

Still on the question of the social features of the Jesus-Nicodemus dialogue, Rensberger (1989:25) maintains that the determinative factor in the milieu of the Johannine church was a conflict with the synagogue. He says that in visualising the Johannine community, one must think of a group of Christians still entirely within the fold of the Jewish community. Its confession of Jesus as the Messiah, however brought them into growing tension with the authorities of the Jewish community. Unlike Paul, who describes the experience of being children of God in legalistic terms such as adoption, the Fourth Evangelist employs a simplistic metaphor, "to be born (begotten) by the Father". Also noting the simplistic nature of the Johannine rendering of the spiritual reality of rebirth, Brown (1966:138) observes that according to this community, man takes on flesh and enters the kingdom of this world because his earthly father begets him. In the same way man can enter the Kingdom of God only when the Heavenly Father begets him. Whereas life can come to a man from his father, eternal life comes from the Heavenly Father.

The Johannine church therefore appears to have affirmed their identity in terms of their election by the Father: "... whoever received him, he gave them power to become children of God" (1:12), "...from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace" (1:16).

Blasi (1997:258) acknowledges that even if the notion Christians “being born of God” did not necessarily start with the Fourth Gospel, but was perhaps grounded in the Pauline corpus, (G1 4:4-6), the Johannine church took this imagery and made it their own. Howard-Brook (1994:87) maintains that the Johannine community’s heart-felt desire was to bring the synagogue and its religious leaders to a commitment to Jesus. The Jesus-Nicodemus dialogue is actually a reflection of this ideal.

An attempt has thus far been made to investigate John 3:1-8 by way of raising questions pertaining to the cultural, social and religious location of the Johannine community. In this process, it has been illustrated that there is a connection between the Johannine ecclesiology and the first historical readers of the Gospel. In other words, the text of John’s Gospel contains an “ecclesiology” and christological ideology, which has encoded and replicated the community’s cosmology. Jerome Neyrey (1988:115-150) illustrates this assertion in his applications of a theoretical model of a cultural anthropologist, Mary Douglas (1984:34-41) to the Gospel of John. Mary Douglas has developed a model whereby she maintains that in a community the interaction between a sub-group and its larger social matrix is measured. She plots such an interaction as a graph with horizontal and vertical axes. In the horizontal axis, group positions range from strong to weak groups. The vertical axis is used to illustrate the correlation between the community’s experience and expectations of the surrounding social group ranging from low to high grid.

Neyrey (1988:118ff.) endeavours to show that the cultural and social cues of the Johannine community are embedded in the text. He maintains that during the time of Jesus, the overall system of ideology, values, structures

and classification was characterised by purity. Furthermore, Judaism was characterised by factionalism which manifested in different social configurations such as priests, Qumran volunteers, Scribes, Sanhedrin, etc. Each of these groups claimed to legitimately adhere to the system of Judaism. Thus the grid was low or failing as shown by the emergence of these competing sects and parties.

In the Fourth Gospel Jesus regarded Himself as a member of the Jewish covenant community (1:45; 5:39; 7:40-44;52). He, however, challenged the manner in which the Jewish faith and Scriptures were interpreted particularly by the Pharisees, as for instance the Sabbath (9:21-24, 5:16, 9:16). Thus the controversy between Jesus and the Jewish leaders further indicates that the grid was low and failing (see Neyrey 1988:128).

Malina, Joubert and Van der Watt (1996:12) maintain that one of the distinctive features of the ancient Mediterranean world was the distinction between group and outsiders. The “Jesus group”, though initially operated within Judaism, gradually was establishing itself as a separate group. It developed its own rituals, which were to serve as boundary lines to strengthen the structure or system of group. Neyrey (:128) claims that unlike Matthew’s “inheriting life”, the Fourth Evangelist’s language suggests grouping, “crossing” and “entering” (3:4-5; 4:38; 10:1-2). The ritual of water baptism, (born of water and the spirit – 3:5) makes one to be part of a group. Jesus makes Nicodemus feel that he belongs to another group, an outside group, “that which is born of flesh is flesh” that which is born of the spirit is spirit” (3:6).

5.3.3 The Johannine church in conflict (John 9)

The purpose of the Fourth Evangelist is skillfully articulated in John 20:30-31. Van der Loos (1965:6) maintains that the historicity of Jesus' miracles has been the subject of investigation and deliberations and of cause investigation in this regard is proceeding. Richardson (1942:1) contends that miracles in John are significant and the real climax in this regard is the resurrection of Jesus (see also Kegley 1966:xxiv; Gundry 1976:15ff; Rumscheidt 1981: 65ff; Jaspert 1984: 44ff; Mahlangu 1991: 15f)

Kysar (1993:19) refers to miracles in John as the explicit aim of the evangelist. In other words, the signs recorded in the Gospel are intended to engender faith in the part of his readers:

“To convince readers that this Jesus is the Messiah of Jewish expectation (the Christ) and a uniquely divine revealer (Son of God) is what it is all about. According to the reading of these verses, the Evangelist hoped to win new believers to the faith. The goal was to produce a document for the use in the missionary enterprise, one that would inspire belief among those who did not yet embrace the faith. The Fourth Evangelist was, then an evangelist in the modern sense of the word, one who proclaims the Christian faith in order to win converts.”

Commentators have debated that John's purpose was to awaken faith for the first time or to maintain and strengthen faith already espoused. This discourse is invoked by the variation of reading between the aorist “that

you come to believe” and the present “that you may hold the faith”. It is generally assumed that the evangelist wrote to encourage his community to continue in the faith. The explicit purpose is first an appendix which the author copied from the traditions he used (see Bruce 1983:395; Kysar 1993:19; Ridderbos 1997:650f).

Kysar (1993:20) maintains that beyond the explicit purpose of John’s Gospel, as stated above, the evangelist has an implicit purpose. He cites the healing of the man born blind in chapter 9 as an example. The theme of the physical healing of the man (9:1-7) gradually moves from physical blindness to the more serious matter of the spiritual sight, and the blindness involved, is the human response to God’s revelation. After the healing the neighbours are divided. Others are almost sure that it was the man who was born blind, while others saw close resemblance. The man puts an end to the speculation: “ἐκείνος ἔλεγεν ὅτι Ἐγώ εἰμι.” He is interrogated by the Jews, and when he, with an ill-concealed humour, asked whether the Pharisees possibly wished to become his disciples, he is expelled from the synagogue. The man encounters Jesus, who reveals himself to him and he makes a full confession, “ὁ δὲ εἶπεν, Πιστεύω, κύριε· καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ” (9:38 - Tasker [1960:122-126]; Kysar [1986: 48-158]).

Kysar (1993:21) contends that this story gives a good insight into the situation and the purpose of the evangelist. For instance, the term “the Jews” is used in John’s Gospel not as an ethnic reference but as an illusion to the primary opponents of the Johannine church at that time (cf 1:16-17; 5:18; 2:23-25; 3:1-2). Brown (1979:66ff) says in this regard that one of the key words or expressions found in the Fourth Gospel is “the Jews”. The synoptic gospels refer to the Jews only six times, while

John has more than seventy references. The manner in which John refers to the Jews has some tragic consequences. Kysar (1993: 67ff) states that the expulsion from the synagogues had taken place some time before the Gospel was written. Even after their physical and theological separation from the synagogue, they were still persecuted. They still lived in a place where there were synagogues.

The author of John's Gospel was living and working in a community which was locked in a crucial dispute with the local synagogue. The Jewish opposition was threatening the Christian community as much as the Christians' evangelistic efforts were threatening the stability of the Jewish synagogue. The result was that both communities were defending themselves. The narrative of the healing of the man born blind is yet another John's device of identifying his church. It is clear that the two communities are distinct. The reluctance of the man's parents to commit themselves by refusing to affirm the healing, serves to elucidate this distinction (9:22).

"The Jews" are blind and they fail to see the revelation of God. They call themselves the disciples of Moses (9:28) as against this man who became the disciple of Jesus. This pericope thus distinguishes the Johannine community as a family of God, a distinct community which was blind but now has seen the revelation of God. They no longer have Moses as their father. They are the disciples of Jesus and God is their heavenly Father.

5.3.4 The Johannine church as flock (10:1-21)

The imagery or allegory of the shepherd and the sheep and /or the flock is presented elsewhere in John (6:37-39; 17:6,8,11, 21:15-17), but in this



chapter it is well developed. The pericope has signs of individualism, in that the believers have a personal response and relationship to faith. Another reality is that the sheep in this discourse can be corporately approached (O'Grady 1978:242). In vv.1-3 the shepherd is contrasted with the thief and the robber. The shepherd goes to the sheepfold by lawful means διὰ τῆς θύρας. The αὐλήν in this case might be referring to a yard attached to the house and surrounded by a stone wall and topped with barriers (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:179), or an enclosed space where the sheep were kept at night under the watchful eye of the gatekeeper (Ridderbos 1997:354), or even part of a family courtyard. In view of v.3, it is better to think of a larger independent enclosure, where several families kept their sheep, leaving an undershepherd (the watchman of v.2 - Carson 1991:381). This describes the shepherd's relationship to them and the right of ownership. For him the way to them is not closed.

The good shepherd is contrasted to the thief and the robber. Some commentators see a continuation of the shepherd and sheep discourse with the previous healing of the man born blind (Ch 9) and the subsequent discourse (Barrett 1978: 367; Bruce 1983:223). The religious leaders, who were hostile to Jesus, were trying to illegitimately gain mastery over the people of Israel (v.16). They tried to gain the people through intimidation (9:22) and through expelling heretics, such as the Johannine Christians, from the synagogue (Hendriksen 1961:104).

The sheep know the voice of the shepherd (3:4b); they do not follow a stranger because they do not know his voice (3:5-9). This denotes an intimate relationship between the sheep and the shepherd. They are his own and they recognise the Shepherd with an unfailing certainty. This



means that those who have heard the authentic Word of God, and have obeyed it, have become members of God's flock, his elect people. They will listen to no other Shepherd, however much they claim to be speaking with divine authority (v.5; Tasker [1960:128f]).

In (verses 11-16) the parable is interpreted. The intimate knowledge is once more expressed, "... καὶ γινώσκω τὰ ἐμὰ καὶ γινώσκουσί με τὰ ἐμὰ, (10:14). The Old Testament notion that God has intimate knowledge of his people (Nah 1:7), is in this allegory exemplified in Jesus through whom God addresses his people (Bultmann 1971:382). In verse 16 the purpose of this knowledge is stated, to bring all into a unity (see Brown 1966:396). This relationship is designed as mutual knowledge: γινώσκειν. Such a relationship, whether it be man's knowledge directed towards God or God's knowledge directed towards man, expresses a union between the partners in a relationship. It is possible to speak of man's knowledge of God and of his representative, Jesus.

Another feature in this discourse is that the relationship between Jesus and the flock is modelled by the unity between Jesus and the Father (10:38 see also 14:11; 17:21). Van der Merwe (1997:339ff) in this regard summarises the theological understanding of Johannine discipleship. He says:

"Discipleship in the Fourth Gospel indicates a personal relationship between Jesus and his disciples. This relationship is modelled in the Father/Son relationship, which is elucidated, by agency model. A descent-ascent schema forms the setting for this concept, with the Johannine

dualism as the determining factor for this schema. The “agency” motif constitutes the conceptual framework which discipleship flows.”

In this allegory, as the unity between Father and Son (10:30) can be referred to as the Son being in the Father and the Father also being in the Son. It is also described by saying that the Son knows his disciples and they know Him. This implies a similar union, which is modelled by the relationship between the Son and the Father. As the Son knows the Father and receives life, so those who know the Son, know the Father and receive eternal life. This relationship also applies to the stringent bond that exists between the individual believer and Jesus.

Commentators interpret the flock in different ways. Firstly, it appears that some of the sheep in the sheepfold do not belong to Jesus- only those who hear his voice belong to him. The image may possibly be of many flocks in the sheepfold, each belonging to a different shepherd. In the morning the different shepherds enter the fold and the sheep that belong to each will follow him out. Such an interpretation could imply that the larger flock is an image of the Jews at the time of Jesus. Such an interpretation is consonant with Johannine ecclesiology. Careful scrutiny of implicit and explicit references to the evangelists community in the Gospel distinguishes his community members from the Jews - the synagogue (cf the episodes of Nicodemus and the man born blind). Jesus is said to call himself the door (10:7). The context of the allegory alludes to the fact that those in the sheepfold entered through the door. How could they have entered through Him if they do not belong to Him. The expression, “καὶ ἄλλα πρόβατα ἔχω ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τῆς αὐλῆς ταύτης...” (10:16a) cannot imply that the sheep are in the fold already.

It could be the Gentiles who are still outside, who are due to come to his fold (see Bultmann 1971:374).

The good shepherd allegory inevitably separates the people who belong to God and those who are not His. The author employs the family imagery to achieve this end. He uses household terminology, father, son, shepherd, sheep, hireling, etc. The evangelist once more employs the family metaphor to communicate his ideas about the true identity of the church.

5.3.5 The church as family in the farewell discourses (13-17)

The study of the farewell discourses might be approached from different vantage points. One of the themes developed by Johannine scholars in this regard is discipleship. It has been argued that a thorough understanding of Johannine discipleship goes hand in hand with perspectives in the Johannine community (Du Rand 1990:367ff, 1991:322). The discussion which follows, presents a selection from the farewell discourses of those sections which has ecclesiological undertones. The selection of these aspects does not suggest that they are only focal points in the farewell discourses. The purpose is to indicate how the members of the Johannine community regarded themselves as a family, separated from the world. The washing of the feet of the disciples (13:1-38), the vine and the branches metaphor (15:1-17) and the farewell prayer (17:1-26) will hereafter receive attention.

5.3.5.1 Jesus washes the feet of his own (13:1-38)

What emerges from this pericope is that Jesus has withdrawn from public and now talks to his disciples. The setting is that of the Passover meal. The opening words of verse 1 need no interpretation.

“...ἀγαπήσας τοὺς ἰδίους τοὺς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ...”

“His own” reminds us of the discourse on the good shepherd in chapter 10. It refers to those who belong to Him, who hear his voice and for whom He cares (10:3, 4,12,27 - Schnackenburg 1982:16). At the very onset of the farewell discourse, familial language is employed. Jesus had always loved those whom His Father had given Him.

Miller (1976:49) maintains that the language employed in 13:1 emphasises the intimate nature of the relationship between Jesus and those who belong to him. The footwashing episode which follows dramatises the inexpressible depth of the love of Jesus for “his own”, revealed in his death for them on the cross. Who are his own in this context? It is the twelve disciples (even though the Fourth Gospel does not use this expression). Within the context of the farewell discourse and the entire Gospel, the circle of “his own” is clearly bigger than those who are sitting with Him at the table. “His own” refers to all believers in the Johannine church. The language: “Father”, “Son”, and “his own” has strong family metaphorical undertones.

The other aspect to ponder upon in this pericope is the ethical dimension embedded in the discourse. Firstly, it is the symbolic meaning of the footwashing itself. Brown (1966:568) states that:

“The simplest explanation of the footwashing then, remains that Jesus performed this servile task to prophesy symbolically that he was about to be humiliated in death. Peter’s questioning, provoked by the action, enabled Jesus to explain the salvific necessity of his death: It would bring men their heritage with Him and it would cleanse them of sin.”

The first few verses (1-3) relate therefore to the salvific work of Jesus. The Father has handed over everything to the Son who will bring salvation through dying on the cross. In this sense Jesus is the servant of the Father who becomes the servant of humility. The action, which Jesus performs in washing the feet of his disciples, is on the superficial level an act of hospitality, but in this action the relationships are reversed. Whereas it was the task of the servant to wash the feet of the master as a sign of welcoming him/her home, Jesus, the master, is the one who performs this action for the disciples. When Peter objects “... Κύριε, σύ μου νίπτεις τοὺς πόδας;” (v.6b), Jesus' response is that they will only understand the significance of what He has done much later. All this is in line with other incidents in John’s Gospel such as the “cleansing of the temple” (2:22) and the entry into Jerusalem (12:16). The narrator comments that his disciples did not understand this at first, but when Jesus had been glorified, they remembered that these things were written about Him that they had done this for Him (12:16). This



incomprehension indicates a depth in action that is only understandable after the resurrection (Hartin 1991:344f).

The words of Jesus to Peter "...Ἐὰν μὴ νίψω σε, οὐκ ἔχεις μέρος μετ' ἐμοῦ (v.8) are significant. The notion of one having part in something or someone refers to inheritance and in the Jewish thought can refer to participation in the eschatological blessings (Mt 24:31; Rv 20:6). "Having part in Jesus" is given some context in John 14:1-3 and 17:24 Carson (1991:464). Being washed by Jesus is necessary to being counted one of his company. This is evidently symbolic of a cleansing action, which allows entrance into the new community of believers (Lindars 1972:450).

What follows is the ethical role of believer towards other believers:

"ὑπόδειγμα γὰρ ἔδωκα ὑμῖν ἵνα καθὼς ἐγὼ ἐποίησα ὑμῖν καὶ ὑμεῖς ποιῆτε." (:15).

Now that the believer has been baptised into the death of Christ, he/she must follow his (Christ's) role. The action of Jesus comes as an example, a model, and an analogy for the way the believer ought to act. The service to others in humility, to which this action testifies, must become the hallmark of a follower of Jesus. Even more than this, on the deeper level, just as Jesus gave his life as a life of service to the ultimate extent of dying on the cross, so too the Christian is called upon to be willing to participate in this trial of Jesus and to sacrifice his/her life if necessary (Hartin 1991:345f).



Another ethical consequence in the foot-washing discourse is the gift of the new commandment, “ἐντολήν καινὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους.” (v.34a). The events of the passion have been set in motion by the departure of Judas. The “νῦν” in v.31 is an important indicator of the transition. Therefore, the new commandment of love which Jesus gives his disciples as a provision in his testament and as a sign of their discipleship (v.35) immediately follows the statement about separation. In that context, it can be easily understood and interpreted as a recommendation to the disciples to preserve their relationship with Jesus after his departure by doing as He does and directing their care to each other (Bultmann 1971:403f; Schnackenburg 1982:53; Perkins 1990:974; Hartin 1991:346).

The author of the Fourth Gospel focuses on love amongst believers in a familial sense. Love is thus recommended to be a common attitude between the members of God’s family. Love indicates affection and an intimate relation between them. The Son commands the believers to love each other according to the example He has set (13:34; 15:12, 17). This will identify them as his disciples (13:15). Their identity will be determined by their love. In 13:1-17 therefore, Jesus sets an example of love (13:15) by washing his disciples feet, and in 15:13 he uses the example of death for (on behalf of) a friend as an indication of what the nature of this love is. This is commanded to be the nature of their love for one another. A member of the family should thus act according to the pattern which identifies that family (Van der Watt 1997b:24).

5.3.5.2 The Vine and the branches (15:1-17)

Johannine commentators generally agree that there are some inconsistencies or rather lack of continuity, in this pericope. The farewell context, which dominated the preceding chapter, is no longer present. There is no longer mention of the departure of Jesus nor the promise of the disciples' union with Jesus in the future time. Brown (1966:666f) contends for instance that vv. 1-6 appears to be a misfit in this context. Besides that it does not follow the sequence of chapter 14, it bears little resemblance to the succeeding section, 7-17. These verses (1-6) might have originally belonged to another context.

Barrett (1978:393) says that this discourse has its rightful place in the Eucharistic associations of the vine symbolism. Though John's Gospel does not explicitly portray the institution of the Lord's Supper, it is unlikely that John was ignorant of this tradition. Nevertheless, while this passage would be an appropriate communion meditation, it does not require such a context. There is no reason to suppose that the union of Christ with the believers envisaged herein, is seen only, or even primarily, in the sacrament. It could even be argued that the thought that Jesus alone is the true vine, excludes the idea of any other vine (see Bultmann 1971:529ff; Lindars 1972:287).

The metaphor of the vine and branches repeats the theme running throughout the series of the discourses of Jesus. It serves to further elucidate Jesus' relationship with his disciples and amongst themselves. The relationship portrays the four aspects of Johannine "ecclesiology" already alluded to. Firstly, the idea of individuality is encountered, maybe even more than in the shepherd metaphor. Secondly, the

corporate relationship between the believers and Christ is implied in the discourse, and thirdly, the fellowship amongst themselves is a reality. Fourthly, the relationship of the believers with the Father is highlighted.

a. Jesus' relationship with his disciples (μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί 1-6)

The essence of the first part of the allegory (15:1-6) is the phrase μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί (:4). The fact that the verb μένω occurs eighteen times in this section shows its importance as a theme. This reality is stated by some Johannine scholars. Commenting on the metaphor, Kysar (1984:71) says that this is a simple allegory, which has to do with the idea of residing in Jesus. It is like a branch acquiring its life from the body of the vine. Carson (1991:516) contends that this pericope expresses the dependency of the branch for life and its fruitfulness on the vine to which it is attached. Ridderbos (1997:517) states that the motif of "remaining" is characteristic in the Fourth Gospel and recurs in all sorts of expressions, but in this context it occurs more often and with greater emphasis than elsewhere.

The above citations elucidate the assertion implied in this part of the allegory (15:1-6), that remaining in Jesus, and also Jesus remaining in his disciples, are two sides of the same coin, for this is an attempt to describe the relationship between Jesus and the disciples. O'Grady (1978:40) maintains that in the parable of the vine and the branches the point of interest is that Jesus is the source of life and He alone can give life to the branches themselves should remain in Him. Hartin (1991:350) says that the expression "menein en" focuses on the fact that the disciples presently possess eternal life, which is the central feature in John's Gospel. Bearing fruit is symbolic of their possession of eternal life, which

ultimately expresses itself in the communication of that life to others. Kysar (1984:71) says that residing in Jesus is like a branch acquiring its life from the body of the vine. In other words, faithfulness is like a vine branch bearing fruit. On the other hand unfaithfulness results in being sheared off the vine and cast in the fire to burn.

There is no doubt that the expression *μενεῖν ἐν*, which is a popular aspect in this pericope, has some individuality. The expression is used by the Evangelist to denote the permanence of a condition or state between Jesus and the individual believer. A branch is useless and lifeless unless it remains attached to the vine. The disciples have to remain in union with Him and derive life from Him in order for it to produce fruit. This individual commitment to Jesus forms the basis of the Johannine corporate relation between Jesus and the church.

b. Jesus' corporate relationship with the branches.

When reading the text on the surface, the parable of the vine and the branches appears not to be having any thought of the relationship between the branches. However, thought of the presence of the idea of the church is not absent in this discourse. The vine and the branches make up a single unified reality and the Fourth Evangelist seems to insist that there can be no communal life apart from the personal adherence to Jesus as saviour and only then can there be a movement towards community in the church (O'Grady 1978:40).

Scott (1974:422f) maintains that in this metaphor the vine is not only a stem. The branches are part of the vine and are in the vine. It is through them that the vine sends forth its fruit. Both are mutually dependent,

although of course the branches are far more dependent on the stem. Still the one needs the other. This implies the corporate relationship between Christ and his church. It is a oneness of the believers with Him, their organic unity with Him, the centre and source of life.

The church-consciousness of this pericope is further underpinned by the insistent repetition of the command “...ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς” (15:12b). This indicates that one cannot be a disciple of Jesus in isolation from others. In this sense, therefore, the discourse has a genuine interest in the relationship of believers to one another, and thus assumes, and even demands, some kind of community. The fact that the scope of love is restricted to those abiding in the True Vine, presupposes the church; the existence of a closely-knit group acutely conscious of its alienation from the world. There is no command to love the outsider, whether he/she be a neighbour or enemy; it is love within the Christian circle that is stressed.

In the light of this interest in the relationship of the members of the church with one another, abiding in Christ comes to be seen as abiding in a community of love. To be outside the community, is to remain in the world, which means to remain in death. If φίλοι (friends) was one of the terms used in the Johannine circle to designate believers, this expresses the nature of the relationship between the friends of Jesus.

The expression “friends” expresses the esoteric orientation of the community. The “filioi” with reference to the Johannine church are those whom the Master takes within his confidence; to them He teaches all that he has heard from the Father. The Johannine believer is not like the household slave who must obey his master’s commands without

understanding the purpose behind them. Thus "filos" is used in this context as a technical term for Christians- the Johannine church (Miller 1976:50-51; Barrett 1978:399)

The corporate reality of the church in John 15 is also observed by Schweizer (1961:118). He contends that when Jesus refers to himself as the vine, He includes all the branches in itself, on which they all live. Tasker (1960:173) says that with this allegory has to do not only with a collection of individuals, but a corporate society, the new Israel of God. In the Old Testament Israel had often been pictured under the figure of the vine (e.g. Jer 2:21). Jesus description of Himself as the vine or genuine vine, implies that Israel had been an imperfect foreshadow of what was found to perfection in Himself. He is what God had called Israel to be, but what Israel in fact had never become. With Jesus, a new Israel emerges, the members of which draw their spiritual sustenance from Him above.

The idea of the corporate identity of the church in the metaphor of the vine is enhanced by the hatred of the world (15:18-27). The first part (15:1-17) focuses on the disciples' life in community with Christ and each other. It appears that in the previous section the thought was concentrated upon the small group of the friends of Jesus their union in love with each other and with Him, their obedience and their prayers. In the later part the author looks outwardly – to the relationship with the world.

Brown (1979:64f) says:

“That the Johannine community would be detested by non-believers who encountered it we may well suspect. Later records show the extent to which pagans were infuriated by the inner intimacy of the Christians with their “brother” and “sister” language and the Johannine community particularly valuable in that score”.

The love that the community ought to practise among each other in accordance with the example of Christ (15:12-17) is sharply contrasted with the backlash of hatred that they experience on the part of the world for sake of Christ. This is a reflection of how the Johannine community conceived and understood itself. This view is summarised in I John 13:13.

The Johannine community is bound to experience hatred and rejection because they belong to Him. This thought can be understood in the light of distinctive character of Johannine dualism. The dualistic thought in John’s Gospel comes to expression primarily in the Gospel’s representation of the relationship between Jesus and the “kosmos”. He does not belong to the world, because he descends from above (8:23). He is the light shining in the dark world (1:5; 8:12); He is the truth (14:6); Jesus has God as his Father while his opponents who epitomise the world in its rejection of Jesus, belong to their father, the devil - 8:44, (Kümmel 1965: 58; Miller 1979:31ff; Hartin 1991: 351).

5.3.5.3 Jesus' farewell prayer (17:1-26)

In this pericope Jesus prays to the Father and recalls His obedience to the work entrusted on him in the incarnation, and prays that the imminent hour (the passion) may prove to be the decisive means by which He glorifies the Father and the Father glorifies Him, the act at once of divine grace and of human obedience whereby He ascends to that state of glory which was his own in the beginning with the Father. In the second part of the prayer (6-19) Jesus prays for his disciples who at that time were gathered around Him. They have been drawn together out of the world and they are to be one. We shall endeavour to submit that in this prayer the symbolism of the family metaphor is present. We shall only refer to two aspects; the relationship between the Father and the Son, and the manner in which the Johannine church understood itself.

a. The Father/ Son relationship

Jesus lifts his eyes up to pray. In his prayer He addresses his Father in heaven and the focus in the first five verses shows the unique relationship between Jesus and the Father. In the first century Mediterranean world, the relationship between the father and the sons was very important. It has already been indicated that in a marriage there had to be children (sons and daughters). But sons were even more important than daughters were. The son was the pride of his father. He was the heir of the inheritance and also was to perpetrate the family name. One of the most important family ethics also related to the relationship between Jesus the Son of God, and his Father, was obedience. In 17:4 this ethic is echoed: The Son had to do the will of the Father. In his argument with the Jews, Jesus states that the Jews do the will of their father, the devil (8:38).



This relationship of obedience between the Father and the Son is put in an even bigger perspective in John's Gospel. In 10:37-38, Jesus earnestly appeals to his audience to believe in Him. In view of the fact that they do not believe what He says, He offers an alternative. They are told to believe his credentials, his works. These works are placed in perspective. These are the works of the Father. In other words Jesus is obedient to his Father. Because of the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son their works correspond (10:28-30). Jesus' actions are thus the works of the Father, because the Father is in Him and He is in the Father (14:10-11; see Van der Watt 1997a:15).

Van der Merwe (1997:338f) also refers to this unique Father/Son relationship. He contends that this close relationship between the Father and the Son is illustrated by means of both the content and nature of Jesus' words to the Father. Jesus says He has glorified his Father by completing the work entrusted upon Him. This is done on the basis of the relationship (functional unity) between them (17:20-23). The Father has sent the Son. Now that He has completed his work, He will return to the Father.

Van der Merwe (1997:340f) says that the sending motif is dominant in John's Gospel. The Father sends his Son with a mission, to reveal the Father (1:18; 5:37) in the world "below". This concept of the Father sending the Son is also discernible from some of the direct statements (8:42; 11:42). Kysar (1993:41) also says that the idea that the Son has been sent by the Father is associated with his heavenly origin and destination. The passages that express this idea are too numerous to examine, but suffice be it for now to mention 3:34; 4:34; 8:26; 9:4; 17:3.

Like a kind of cosmic prophet, the Son is sent forth into the world of humans. As one sent by God, He represents the Father and speaks for God. Typical of the emissary thought of the time, the one sent also carries the authority of the sender.

b. The Johannine church as the family

The second aspect of the family imagery implied in Jesus' prayer is the disciples. They can be categorised into two, namely the current disciples and the anticipated believers:

(a) “Ἐφάνέρωσά σου τὸ ὄνομα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις οὓς ἔδωκάς μου ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου...” (:6a)

(b) “...ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τῶν πιστευόντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτῶν εἰς ἐμέ,” (:20b)

The two categories of the believers have relations both with the Father and the Son. They are a family. As much as the Son has obeyed the Father, they are also obedient to Him (the Son). Furthermore this pericope is clouded by familial language. They are distinguished from the world. They came out of the world. Jesus protected them from the world and he now prays that the Father should continue protecting them (v1-12&15). They are supposed to be one (v21).

5.3.6. The family of the Father in the Fourth Gospel

The concept “Father” is prominent in the Fourth Gospel. In John 5:1ff Jesus is reported to have cured a hopeless case at the pool of Bethesda on

the Sabbath. The man walked away carrying his bed. When "the Jews" discovered that it was Jesus who was responsible for this action, they confronted Him. To their remonstrance Jesus replied, "My Father is working still, I am working". In the Fourth Gospel, God is called "Father" more after than anywhere else in the New Testament is. It is the main title used for God (118 times). The words "θεός" (God) and "πατήρ" (father) are used interchangeably. In John, God is called the Father in relation to his relationship with Jesus "the Son" Although the Fourth Gospel states the essential identity of the Son with the Father, he at no time loses sight of the distinction between them. The Son has been sent by the Father, He obeys the Father (15:10), He can do nothing without the Father (5:19-20), He speaks the Father's words (14:10), and has made everything to his disposal (cf 3:35, 5:20 - O'Grady [1978:233]; Lee [1995:145f]; Van der Watt [1997a:12]).

Those who respond in faith to the Father are now called the children of God. The fatherhood of God is also seen in relation to the believers. Childhood is the result of Jesus' mission, that is, his revelation of the Father (1:12). The disciples are therefore, called the sons of God. They are members of this new family/community. The children of God now have a voluntary association of the believers transcending cultural boundaries. The universal nature of this relationship is stated in 11:52, (cf Barrett 1970:407; Minear 1977:168; Brown 1978:443).

One of the familial terms occurring throughout the whole Gospel is love. It is the focus point in the ethic of John. Houlden (1973:36f) says that the fact that the believers should love one another, is the only moral rule given by John. Furnish (1972:135) maintains that the "Johannine commandment to love one another is at the very centre of the moral and

spiritual legacy..." In this relationship of love the Father has set an example. The Father loves the Son, He has given the Son everything (3:35: 10:17 -18). It is also demonstrated and displayed in the continuous disclosure of all the Father does to the Son (5:20), but the Son also loves the Father. The love of the Son towards the Father is shown in his obedience to the Father. Furthermore the Father loves the believers, his children. Even before they came in the fold, He loved them (3:16). In John 17:21-23, the same measure of unity in the disciples is assumed in Jesus' prayer. Jesus prays that they may be brought to complete unity sharing richly in the love of the Father and the Son together.

The purpose of the prayer of Jesus is to let the world know that the Father has sent the Son, and "that you (the Father) loved them as you loved me." (17:23). The believers are said to reciprocate the love to the Father. If they love the Son, it also implies that they love the Father. "If God were your Father you would love me" (5:42). That the believers' love of the Father is expressed by their obediently following the commands of the Father and the Son. At the same time the Son has always loved his own who were in the world, and He loved them to the end (13:15). "His own" strongly implies the existence of a group/family which is very close to Him. The believers are also to love one another. They are commanded by Jesus to love one another (13:34; 15:12,17). The believer has no duties towards "the world", but towards the fellow believer. This is not just ordinary human love but brotherly love with divine content, (see also Brown 1966:497; Carson 1991:503).



5.3.7 Summary

The images of the family in relation to John's ecclesiology have been discussed above. The Fourth Gospel was most probably written in the last decade of the first century AD. The author was chiefly interested in christology. That appears to be the impelling motive for the composition of the Fourth Gospel. Yet it is surprising to observe how the Johannine scholars have, besides christology, identified the idea of the church, which is enshrined in the pages of John's Gospel. Besides the explicit familial language in the Gospel, - Father, Son, birth, begat, love, etc., the Johannine portrayal of the church is enriched by family metaphors. One of the most outstanding of these imageries is the image of the flock (15:1-8). This metaphor exercises a persuasive theological influence on the entire Gospel. What is implied in this metaphor, is the very nature of the church - the living union of the believer with Christ. The faithful are those the Father has "given" to the Son and brings to Him, and whom Jesus does not "cast out" but rather accepts and keeps and does not "loose" them. The Father is the real owner of the flock, but He has entrusted them to the great shepherd who in contrast to the hirelings (the Jewish authorities) loves and cares for them. Upon his (Jesus) going back to the Father, Jesus prays that the Father should preserve them in unity. The Johannine church, thus, conceived themselves as a new family, which is in conflict with the synagogue. The ethics of this new brotherhood are also spelt out.



5.4 Excursion: Paul and the church as family of God

In order to elucidate it that the rest the New Testament also emphasises the central role of the family, as an image for the people of God, the letters of Paul will be briefly dealt with in this excursion.

Roberts (1985:265) maintains that the numerous metaphors in Paul's corpus is indicative of the importance of "ecclesiology" in his theology.

- Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27, Eph 1:23; 4:12)
- Israel (Gl 6:16; Rm 9:6)
- People (Rm 9:25f)
- Olive tree (Rm 9:25f)
- The Elect (Rm 9:25f)
- A building (Eph 2:19f)
- A temple (Eph 2 21)
- A Dwelling Place (Eph 2:22)
- God's planting (1 Cor 3:6-9)
- Light (Eph 5:22ff)
- A letter (2 Cor 3:2f)
- A Bride (Eph. 1:23)
- Mature manhood (Eph. 4:13)
- One new man (Eph. 2:15)

Some New Testament scholars also attempted to identify the portrayal of the church in Paul's theology:

“In view of our imperfect knowledge of Hellenistic Christianity before and contemporary with Paul, it will not be possible to say with certainty to what extent he had assimilated the ideas of other missionaries and theologians, nevertheless his originality (body of Christ) is incontestable and his deeper penetration with the idea of the church is evident” (Schnackenburg 1974:77).

“All the old things that observers in the first century might have seen in it: a Jewish sect, a club meeting in a household, an initiatory cult, and a school. Yet it was more than the sum of these things, and different from the mere synthesis of their contradictory tendencies” (Meeks 1986:120).

“There is no single scholarly perception of the organisation of the Pauline communities to other groups which have family resembles; the second is to use some of these models (comparable groups) to describe the nature of the Pauline communities. The theoretical assumptions that govern these comparative activities should be carefully noted” (Craffert 1992:178).

5.4.1 The Pauline church as the people of God

Pelser (1995:647) maintains that one of the main designations of the church in Paul’s ecclesiology is “Godsvolk” (people of God). Paul’s use of the expression “the people of God” appears to be influenced by the Septuagint (LXX). The word “laos” is there used to denote a particular

people or group, whereas all other peoples or nations are designated by the term “ethnos”. Therefore the term “laos” signifies what brings people together – God’s election of them as his people. It appears that Paul throughout his letters remains faithful to the LXX usage when expressing his conviction about the people of God (1Cor 10:7; Rm 9:25-26).

In the title “people of God”, the themes of continuity and history exercise predominantly influences in Pauline ecclesiology. “The people of God” suggests a dynamic vision of God’s people, which is fundamentally on a historical pilgrimage. The people of God are thus a dependant people continually needing reform. The church is not perfect. It exists and struggles in history in an attempt to discern God’s action and call, and to find ways on answering that call (Schnackenburg 1974:79; Fung 1981:89, Worgul 1982:24, 27). One of the family imagery by Paul is found in Galatians 5:13-6:10.

Paul in this letter spells out the identity of the Galatian Christians. (5:13, 6:10) Throughout the letter, Paul employs the familial metaphors to establish their identity. The church members experience God as their Father (1:1-3); through Jesus they have become the adopted sons of God (3:26); in the experience of baptism they have “clothed” themselves with Christ (3:27); through Christ the seed of Abraham (3:16) they are sons of God (4:1-7). What Paul succeeds in doing is to illustrate to the church in Galatia that they ought to conceive themselves in terms of social patterns analogous to those expected among family members as understood in the first century Mediterranean world



5.4.2. The church consists of those adopted by God

Paul uses a family term of adoption to explain the idea of belonging or becoming part of the family. Lyall (1984:8) maintains that Paul is the only New Testament writer to use the metaphor of adoption. The term is used in three ways:

(1) In Romans 9:4 Israel the people of God are said to be adopted as sons. Their place as the chosen people is underlined.

(2) In Romans 8:15; Ephesians 1:5 and Galatians 4:5 the apostle uses the term adoption in its legal sense. The metaphor points to the selection of the believers as sons, their justification is their entry into sonship and from the point of conversion, they are members of God's family.

(3) Lastly adoption in Romans 8:23 has eschatological connotations. The believers are "eagerly awaiting for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies..." this refers to the final transformation at the second resurrection. They will have totally passed from their former state into something wholly new.

Thus, Paul employs the metaphor of adoption to describe the conversion of a person both Jew and Gentile, as God's new child into a new family who has responded to God's call. This therefore means that the natural family or kinship structure into which the person has been born and which previously defined his/her place and relationships with the society are here changed by a new of relationships (see Meeks 1983:87f).



Paul's use of the familial terminology of adoption can be furthermore understood when we take into consideration Paul's description of the inclusion of the Gentiles as part of God's family. Bossman (1996:163) says that Paul opens his fictive family to Gentiles more than it was advocated in the Gospels. Worgul (1982:24) refers to this scenario as a tension between a "particularism" and "universalism" with respect to Israel being the people of God - especially in the late prophetic literature. For instance Hoseah 1:9-10, records the divine command that Hoseah should name his child "not my people and to look forward to a new covenant with Israel. What is even significant is that Zechariah 2:11 goes further to envision the heathens eventually becoming part of the people of God.

These two texts display universalism as against particularism, which dominated most of Israel's history in the Old Testament (see McKenzie 1974: 316ff). Therefore, in Romans 9:30ff; 10:9-13; 11:11-12, 11:25 Paul alters the theological content of the Hebrew Scriptures to pursue his own theological purpose. His reworking of and expansion of the theological content was to a certain extent necessitated in his shift from and exclusively Hebrew horizon to a Judeo-Christian horizon. The most significant alteration Paul executed was his inclusion of non-Jewish Christians as a legitimate element in the people of God. To achieve this shift, Paul introduced his "original" distinction between Israel by birth and Israel by God's choice (Minear (1977:71-84 and Worgul 1982:24-25).

5.4.3 God as Father

The term "Father" is another frequent familial imagery in the Pauline corpus. According to Bossman (1996:164) it is used the second most after brother/s. The word is mainly used in two ways referring to God as the Father of the believers/household and the apostle as the father/mother figure to his churches:

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul states:

“...τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ
Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ...” (1:1)

In the mention of “Thessalonians”, attention is drawn to members of the church rather than the church's geographic place. Paul also described the church as "... in God the Father" - in the dative. This expression means that this church belongs to the Father. They are therefore redeemed from their previous existence due to the Father's action. God is thus viewed as the Father, the progenitor and the creator. The Thessalonians, being a Gentile community, are reminded of their calling into a new relationship with God (the Father) and they are his beloved children.

5.4.4 Paul as father/mother

Paul also designates himself as father to the communities with whom he corresponds. He describes his relationship and role with and to them. In 1 Corinthians 4:15.



“ἐὰν γὰρ μυρίους παιδαγωγούς ἔχητε ἐν Χριστοῦ, ἀλλ’ οὐ πολλοὺς πατέρας, ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς ἐγέννησα”.

This father metaphor indicates that the relationship between Paul and his churches is not a relationship of power or status. It is an image of a caring parent who is both instructive and gentle. It implies encouragement and reinforcement (see Bossman 1996:164f).

5.4.5 Brotherhood/Sisterhood

The term ἀδελφός, appears in Paul's letters. It is his favourite manner to refer to the members of the communities to whom he is writing. He also uses it with reference to those he perceived as colleagues in the work of the ministry (Gl 1:2; I Cor 16: 20 2 Cor 9: 3; Col 1 : 2). Paul applies this familial language to the Christians to show that they are a new family, the people of God. They are the children of God, and also that of the apostle. They are brothers and sisters bound together in the relationship of love. (Ellis 1971:53; Koester 1979:33ff)

5.5 Summary

The foregone discussion is an attempt to show that family was an important topic in early Christianity. It was indicated in the Gospels and an excursion of Paul's view of the church that the early believers regarded themselves on a κοινωνία. Christianity, therefore, entailed an invitation to enter into fellowship with God's new family. This implies that Jesus came and altered the existing religious conceptions and socio-religious structures of his day. Those He called, his disciples, the propagators of



the post-Easter faith subordinated their natural family ties in order for them to be with Him and to be engaged in his mission for the sake of the gospel. They obeyed Jesus, even at the cost of household based security and identity. This new family was a spiritual family, which co-existed, but superceded existentially and ethically the physical family to which a person belonged. The highest loyalty was owed to this spiritual family.

The disciples and the believers, therefore regarded themselves as the new people - the family of God. They became the true Israel. They articulated their being, activities, identity and experiences in familial language. As a result of this in their attempt to articulate the story of Jesus, the Gospel writers chose to use familial imagery. Familial language, actually permeates throughout the New Testament. God is the Father of Jesus and the believers. The Christian faith is a brotherhood, found together by the common faith and identity.

CHAPTER 6

EPILOGUE: THE AFRICAN FAMILY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT FAMILY

The foregone discussion largely focused on the submission that the family during the Graeco-Roman era and as it is portrayed in the New Testament is a paradigm, an approach, an exegetical procedure through which the New Testament text could be interpreted. The researcher introduced another perspective to this discourse. He postulated an approach, which he calls the African social-descriptive approach. Through this approach, he endeavoured to indicate how this vantage point could make a meaningful contribution in interpreting New Testament. It is therefore appropriate to finally compare the New Testament perspective of family with the African view of family from the perspective of the African social-descriptive approach.

The New Testament church conceived itself as distinct from the world. The first believers were a peculiar people, a holy nation and a chosen generation. They regarded themselves as foreigners and aliens in that present world. This conception is depicted in various family metaphors. God is their Father, Jesus is the Son of God, they are brothers and sisters, they are bound together by love, etc.

The view of Africans of themselves corresponds with that of the New Testament church. On a macro level, as a Continent, Africans view themselves distinct from the West. This feeling is manifested in processes such as African nationalism, black theology, liberation theology, African renaissance, etc. The symbol of this feeling of oneness,



harmony or belonging to an "African family" is a circle. For instance the traditional hut, the cattle-kraal, the grave and the village are round. It is within this circle where a person experiences life, unity, strength, harmony, fellowship, protection, etc. Outside this circle (which is also understood metaphorically) one encounters danger, death, illness, chaos, misery, etc. (see Van Deventer [1991:38]; Crafford [1996:10]). Van Niekerk (1987:625) maintains that it is in the traditional family context where a person will experience fellowship and prosperity. Everything, which is outside of this, is considered as evil.

The idea that the New Testament believers regarded themselves as one - a new family, goes beyond themselves to include the God-head. It is the family of the Father who is always with them through his Spirit. This concept was discussed in the Johannine view of the church. Analogous idea is encountered in the Africans cult of ancestor veneration. The departed spirits are called the living-dead. They are regarded as mediators between people and the supreme being. They also remain part of the social community and unify the community. They take care of the daily needs of people; they protect the morals and traditions of the family, clan, tribe and nation.

Although in principle both the New Testament church and the African community experience God or/and ancestors as one with them, there are some differences. The believers have an intimate relationship with the Father who is involved in their daily lives. The Africans on the other hand experience or view God as a concealed being who is not involved in the lives of the people. Another point of difference is that African cosmology consists of a unity and harmony, which also includes spirits,

powers, animals and inanimate objects. This leads to the sacralisation of nature.

The ethics of God's family in the New Testament has also much in common with ethics in traditional Africa. The African ethic can be summarised in the much-quoted concept in the New South Africa - Ubuntu. The most common manner of expressing the ethic of Ubuntu is the South African proverb, "umtu ngumuntu ngabantu" (a person depends on others to be a person). In the Sotho languages, "motho ke motho ka batho" (man is a man through others). Besides family solidarity, which is the essence of the Ubuntu ethic, some family values are also enshrined in this concept. Respect of each other and the elderly, compassion of those who are suffering, commitment to the ideals of Africanism, self-sacrifice and love for your fellow man are part of Ubuntu. Some of the slogans in the New South Africa such as Masakhane (let us build) and Simunye (we are one) should be understood in the context of Ubuntu. Analogous ways of viewing reality are found in the New Testament. The believers are born in the family of the Father. They are encouraged to love, have compassion, and care for each other. Some exceptions, though, exist in the New Testament family and the African view of neighbour. Whereas an African only finds security in the "circle", and everyone outside is an enemy, the New Testament family is encouraged to love and bless their enemies (Mt 5:44).

Besides making a contribution in biblical criticism - reading the New Testament from the African social-descriptive approach, this thesis endeavours to contribute to the reconstruction of the disintegrating family structure. At the threshold of the new millennium, the social stresses on the family are gaining prominence in the discourses around the family. In



a widely quoted article, now more than forty-one years old, Hill (1958:139ff), refers to the stress or crisis-provoking events. These are the sources of stress and situations for which families have little preparation. Stress events are never the source for different families but vary in the power with which they strike and the hardships that accompany them. Another social scientist, also writing around that time, Roney (1958:150), articulates the plight plaguing the family establishment. His description, though written some time ago, adequately chronicles the family at the threshold of the twenty-first century:

"Never before in the history of mankind has family life been under such stress and strain as today. Economic and social forces are at work which, while putting in the hands of the family more material sources than at any time in history, are exerting such influences that parents have difficulty providing children with protection, counsel and support, they need to reach their highest, potentialities. Specialists from many fields - sociologists, economists, psychiatrists and social workers - have analysed these forces and have described them in terms of their own special interests."

The family values and ethics suggested in this thesis as a paradigm for interpreting the New Testament text can also serve as a means of reviving family values in South Africa and Africa. Western individualism had a major impact in establishing a human rights culture in Africa. But teaching people about their moral duties as marriage partners, fathers, mothers, children, workers, politicians, citizens, civil servants, etc. is of fundamental importance. Some of the provisions in the New Constitution (8 May 1996) and the Bill of Rights are viewed by many Africans as an attack to the fabric of social morality. For instance in terms of the new

laws in the termination of pregnancy provisions, the consent of the woman's partner or husband should not be mandatory. In the case of a minor, she is advised to consult parents or responsible family members or friends, but abortion should not be denied if she does not choose to consult.

Furthermore, the Centre for International and Comparative Politics at the University of Stellenbosch has conducted a public opinion poll. Its conclusion is a strong support for conservative social values. Among the African National Congress (ANC) supporters 65,3% support capital punishment while 32,4% are against. Among the opinion formers in the party only 27,7% want to reinstate capital punishment with 58,3% against. 90,9% of National Party (NP) and 83,8% of Democratic Party (DP) supporters are for reinstating capital punishment. Interesting enough, supporters of the ANC and NP are equally negative about liberalising abortion legislation: 73,9%. Only 50% of ANC opinion formers support liberalisation of abortion legislation. The opposition among opinion formers in the NP is 56,6%.

Explicit sex in films is rejected by 80,5% of NP supporters, 67,5% of DP and 74,9% of ANC supporters. Among opinion formers 73,9% of NP, 40,4% of DP and 58,3% of ANC are against (Editorial, *Sterk steun vir galg in peiling*, Die Volksblad, 8 February 1996:1). These statistics are indicative of the fact that an overwhelming number of South Africans reject Western liberalism in favour of conservative social values.

The revival of African family values can also come to the rescue of some of African's major problems. Sub-Saharan Africa is at present faced with the crisis of the HIV/AIDS Pandemic. For instance 75% of the World's

HIV/AIDS is in Sub-Saharan Africa. By the year 2000 it is projected that between 15-20 million African children will be orphaned (see Purris 1996:34). Besides the HIV/AIDS problem, Africa is also ravaged by diseases and wars. The extended family system, the Ubuntu ethic, care for each other, etc. are an answer to these African problems.

In conclusion whether in the Western or Third world, the current or present reader of the New Testament has/is experiencing in one form or another a family. He/she has/had probably a father/mother, brother/s and/or sister/s. Within the family, tribe, clan, community or nation, a sense of belonging or identity is an obvious phenomenon. One is bound by allegiance, love or solitary to a group of people. The family as reality and the related components such as language, imagery, metaphor and symbolism is stark reality. The wrapping of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the familial language is therefore, a negotiating factor in any culture. The New Testament message of God's love, grace and mercy to all humanity is not communicated in a language from space, unknown to man. Anyone can understand the invitation of God through Jesus Christ to be part of the macro family of God. Hence the new family will be understood in the light of the old - the experience of family.

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SUMMARY

The study of the family in the classical period is gaining momentum and continues to engage amongst others, biblical scholars. This mounting interest by biblical critics is indicative of the fact that the family as reality and imagery could be a hermeneutical procedure and methodology through which the Gospels and other New Testament texts and message could be interpreted. The researcher has chosen the Roman, Jewish, African and New Testament families to substantiate this assertion.

The contribution of the social-scientific scholars to an understanding of how the family could be utilised as a paradigm in biblical criticism, is the first aspect to be stated and discussed. Their major thrust as far as the family is concerned is that the New Testament is both a reflection of and a response to the social and cultural setting in which the text was produced. Therefore, meanings explicit and implicit in the text are determined by the social and cultural systems inhabited by both authors and intended readers. The researcher goes beyond the contribution of the Western and North American scholars by postulating what he calls the African social-descriptive approach. It is an attempt to appropriate the results of the social-scientific biblical critics from an African perspective. It is therefore, contended that the concept and experience of the African family is closer to the narratological symbolic world of the Gospels during the Graeco-Roman era. As a result, the New Testament message can be proclaimed and interpreted in the context of the cultural milieu already experienced in Africa.

Concerning the Roman and Jewish families, it is asserted that when Christianity entered these cultures, a negotiation of meaning was necessary. To the Romans the Christian faith was to a large extent presented in a language of something valued by the Romans, the family. Whatever the obstacles in other respects to accepting the new religion, the Romans would find the Christian symbolism of the family recognisable and intellectually comprehensible. They would therefore, understand something new, Christianity by means of something old, the family. The Jewish tradition was also indelibly interwoven into family life. Although at that time the Gentile converts were welcomed, Palestine Judaism remained fundamentally an ethnic tradition fostering a conception and praxis of religion, which was bound up with Jewish ethnic identity. The family symbolism in the Gospels had much affinity with the Old Testament. For instance, God as the Father had converted Israel from a barren couple (Abraham and Sarah) and adopted them as his own. The New Testament message of the church as a family consisting of those redeemed and born in God's family was not to be new to the Jews.

The New Testament perspectives of family is also discussed by referring to the synoptic gospels and John. These New Testament writers use many analogies to describe the nature and identity of the church. One of the most common analogies was that Jesus came and altered the existing conceptions and experience of family ties. Those he called his disciples, the propagators of the post-Easter faith subordinated their natural family ties in order for them to be with Him and to be engaged in his mission for the sake of the gospel. They obeyed Jesus, even at the cost of household based security and identity - the family. In line with the New Testament family, the African family values are brought to the fore. The two are compared and contrasted. The areas of convergence are indicative of the

fact that the New Testament could be appropriated in an African family context. There are also differences. These dissimilarities illustrate that the New Testament can impact the family values in compliance with the biblical text and message. The research closes with a suggestion that at the threshold of the new millennium, where the family institution is tremendously under stress, the New Testament family is an ideal model.

OPSOMMING

Die studie van die familie in die klassieke periode verkry huidiglik momentum onder veral Bybelwetenskaplikes. Hierdie tendens is 'n aanduiding van die feit dat die familie as realiteit en as beeld die hermeneutiese sleutel en metodologie kan bied waarvolgens die Evangelies asook die andere Nuwe Testamentiese tekste en boodskap geïnterpreteer kan word. Die navorser het die Romeinse-, Joodse-, Afrika- en Nuwe Testamentiese families gekies om hierdie teorie te substansieer.

Die bydrae van sosiale wetenskaplikes ten opsigte van 'n verstaan van hoe die familie gebruik kan word as 'n paradigma in Bybelse kritiek, is die eerste aspek wat behandel word. Hulle belangrike bydrae ten opsigte van die familie lê daarin dat hulle die Nuwe Testament as beide 'n refleksie op, en 'n respons tot die sosiale en kulturele milieu, waarin die teks tot stand gekom het, beskou. Gevolglik word betekenis, eksplisiet en implisiet in die teks, bepaal deur die sosiale en kulturele sisteme van beide die outeurs en oorspronklike lesers. Die navorser gaan verder as die gewone westerse- en Noord-Amerikaanse denkrigtings deur, wat hy noem, 'n Afrika Sosiale-Deskriptiewe Benadering te postuleer. Dit is 'n poging om die sosiaal-wetenskaplike Bybelkundige kritiek vanuit 'n Afrika-perspektief te benader. Gevolglik word gekonkludeer dat die konsep en ervaring van die Afrika familie baie nader is aan die naratologies simboliese wêreld van die Evangelies gedurende die Grieks-Romeinse era. Die Nuwe Testamentiese boodskap kan dus geproklameer en geïnterpreteer word in die konteks van 'n kulturele milieu, wat reeds in Afrika bekend is.

Met betrekking tot die Romeinse en Joodse families word aangedui dat met die “verchristeliking” van waardes uit dié kulture binne die vroeë kerk ‘n betekenis oordrag plaasgevind nodig. Die Christelike godsdiens is grotendeels aan die Romeine verkondig deur middel van ‘n medium wat vir hulle baie belangrik was: die familie. Die vele struikelblokke wat die Romeine ervaar het in die aanvaarding van die nuwe godsdiens sou oorskadu word deur die bekende Christelike simboliek van die familie en sou gevolglik maklik verstaan kon word. Iets nuuts, sou dus verstaan kon word deur middel van iets bekends – die familie. Net so is die Joodse tradisie onlosmaaklik verweef met die familie lewe. Al is bekeerlinge in daardie tyd binne die kerk verwelkom, het Judaïsme tog oor die algemeen ‘n geldige etniese tradisie binne die vroeë kerk gebly, en is ‘n konseptualisering en praxis van die Christelike godsdiens sterk ingebed in die Joodse-etniese identiteit. Die Nuwe Testamentiese familie-simboliek het ‘n groot affiniteit gehad vir Ou Testamentiese konsepte. Die voorbeeld van God, die Vader, wat Israel voortgebring het uit ‘n kinderlose ouerpaar, Abraham en Sara, en hulle aangeneem het as sy eie, kan genoem word. Die Nuwe-Testamentiese beeld van die kerk as familie, bestaande uit dié wat gered en nuut-gebore is in die familie van God was dus geensins nuut vir die Jode nie.

Die Nuwe Testamentiese perspektiewe op die familie word ook bespreek deur verwysing na die Sinoptiese Evangelies, en Johannes-evangelie. Hierdie Nuwe Testamentiese skrywers gebruik baie analogieë om die natuur en identiteit van die kerk te verduidelik. Een van die bekendste analogieë was dat Jesus die gebruikelike konsep en ervaring van familiebande gewysig het. Dié wat Hy as dissipels geroep het – die verkondigers van die post-Pase geloof – het hulle natuurlike familiebande ondergeskik gestel aan hulle verbintenis met Jesus en hulle sending ten



opsigte van die evangelie. Hulle sou aan Jesus gehoorsaam wees, selfs al sou dit wees ten koste van huishoudelike sekuriteit - hulle familie. Die Afrika waardes met betrekking tot die familie word in lyn gebring met die Nuwe Testamentiese familie. Die twee word vergelyk en gekonstrasteer. Die areas van konvergensie is indikatief van die feit dat die Nuwe Testament wel in 'n Afrika familie konteks ingang sal kan vind. Daar is ook verskille. Hierdie areas van divergensie illustreer dat die Nuwe Testament wel die familie waardes kan beïnvloed in oorleg met die Bybelse teks en boodskap. Die tesis sluit af met 'n voorstel dat die Nuwe Testamentiese familie 'n ideale model kan wees vir die era rondom die draai van die millennium, waartydens die familie as instituut geweldige druk beleef.