

THE CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE ACCORDING TO NAZARETH AND PAUL

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RESUMEN

Este artículo parte del ejemplo del “estudio de caso” de dos familias concretas: la familia de Jesús de Nazaret y el conjunto de familias que Pablo tuvo que ayudar y encontró en Corinto. La primera se presenta principalmente como un modelo por la descripción de su historia y entorno. El artículo trata los problemas de Pablo frente a las nuevas familias en Corinto. Para estudiar este caso, se eligió el texto de 1 Co 7 porque expresa la respuesta de Pablo a algunas cuestiones y situaciones con las que se encuentra en Corinto. La familia de Jesús y la familia de Corinto en Pablo, son vistas desde el contexto teológico y no solo desde la perspectiva sociológica del Nuevo Testamento. Este punto de vista intenta ver como Pablo hace un lugar teológico de la familia.

Palabras clave: Jesús, Pablo, Nazaret, Corinto, matrimonio, relaciones, Dios, familia.

ABSTRACT

This article departs from the example of two concrete family “case study”: the family of Jesus in Nazareth and all the families Paul had to help and encountered in Corinth. The first one is presented mainly as a model through the description of its history and environment. Then the article discusses the problems Paul faced in Corinth with the new christian families. In order to study this case, the text of 1 Cor 7 is chosen because is itself an answer Paul offers to some difficult questions and situations he met in Corinth. The family of Jesus and the family of Corinth in Paul are seen in the context of theology, not just through sociology of the New Testament. This view is made to try to see family as a locus theologicus like Paul does.

Keywords: Jesus, Paul, Nazareth, Corinth, matrimony, relationship, God, family.

INTRODUCTION¹

God and the family say each other and say one another, one tells the other. God tells the family and the family tells God. Saying God is saying family and saying family is saying at least something divine. To say God you have to make use of the analogy of “family”. God to say Himself has to use the analogy, the image and the reality of “family”. So He incarnated in the family of Nazareth and from thereon He passed to be known as a God of family, as a familiar God, a near God in the completion of times after a long history with Israel (cf. Heb 1,1-2). To reveal Himself as love God assumes the flesh in the most fine experience of love from them all, that is, a familiar love, making Himself family with us in His own Son. This means that family, from the beginning is an adequate trinitarian image which even God Himself uses and assumes to tell Himself. Thereafter some questions can be asked, questions that go together in the relation of God to the world and in the relation of mankind to God: but at the end of what kind of family are we talking about? Which is the family of God? Are all the families possible? All have the same value and fulfill their mission of what is supposed to be a family as such? Is not the sort of family different or no to be a family as such? Are all the love experiences a family? Are they even supposed to be called a love experience? Is God able to tell Himself in all the families or in every kind of family? What is a family? What makes a family to be a family? What can a family give to God and from God? What does God give a family and to our families?

Just to think about the trinitarian God is only possible in a familiar faith from a familiar revelation as well, whose consistency and unity faith itself discovers as a familiar one. Thought gains access to God in a familiar way for God presents Himself as such, in such a way. But the questions remain: being family an institution and a human reality, in what manner sacramentalizes an experience that transcends itself, an experience of love that goes far beyond? How come that this experience of transcendence is not automatic?

In this small paper the companies of the synoptic gospels and especially of Paul will be preferred²: the second for his contact with families enabling him

¹ This is the revised version of a paper presented in the International Symposium *The Institution of Marriage in the three Monotheistic Religions 10-11 October 2011*, Center for Religions and Juridical Canon Law Studies, at the Universitas of Constanta on the 11th October 2011.

² It is quite extensive the Pauline literature about the use the apostle makes of the familiar image; just cf. DANIEL VON ALLMEN, *La Famille de Dieu: La symbolique familiale dans le paulinisme*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, 41), 1981; ABRAHAM J. MALHERBE, “God’s New Family in Thessalonica”, in L. MICHAEL WHITE – O. LARRY YARBOROUGH (eds.), *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995, 116-125; H. MOXNES (ed.), *Constructing Early Christian Families Family as Social Reality and*

to begin the Church at home as a familiar experience at home in Thessalonica where the pauline Church started as a family in the places where families lived and worked; the gospels for presenting Jesus born within a family, growing and being educated in that atmosphere, not without describing the enlarged family of Jesus that sprout out of the kingdom preaching (cf. Mc 3,31-35). In vv.34b-35 Jesus enlarges his family limites far beyond the boundaries of Nazareth: “here are my mother and my brothers (adelphoi).³⁵ Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother (adelphos) and sister (adelphê) and mother (meter)”³. The family of Jesus does not stand upon blood ties, for blood may not transmit any familiar life or experience.

Our approach will not put itself in the field of fundamental ethical reflection which deals with the very important issue of the relation between faith and moral. For the case of Corinth, Paul supposes his contemporaries know very well the beauty of christian moral. Paul preaches a christian ethic because it can be sustained as reasonable and profitable for human growth in an epicurist and stoic culture like the one he finds in the capital province of Achaia – Corinth. This means that the teachings and the problems Paul faces about the issue “family” can be solved and accepted in that culture. As it will be seen, when Paul responds in 1 Cor 7, he is just bringing together the christian marriage moral with the classic ethical teachings of the greek culture, showing that the christian moral does not opposites nor contradicts the classic ethical conquests, rather improves it⁴.

Metaphor, London, Routledge, 1997; E. E. JOHNSON, “Apocalyptic Family Values”, *Interpretation*, 56/1 (2002), 34-44; R. AASGAARD, *My Beloved Brothers and Sisters: Christian Siblingship in Paul*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 2004.

3 A. LOZÁN PUN LAY, “Pertener a la verdadera familia de Jesús. Un estudio de Mc 3,31-35”, *Estudio Agustiniano*, 45/2 (2010), 232 resumes very well the three main readings of this adelphic and son relation of Jesus: Helvidius in 380 A.D. identified these “brothers” with the blood brothers (a reduction the Greek does not allow); Epiphanius, bishop of Salamina in Cyprus around 383 A.D. defended that these “brothers” would be the sons Joseph might have had with another woman than Mary; at last, Saint Jeronimus wanted to preserve the virginity of Mary, and in this way rejected the thesis of Helvidius (so Jeronimus identified these “brothers” with some “cousins” of Jesus, sons of Mary the wife of Cleophas and sister of the Virgin Mary). To check these different views cf. Ph. SCHAFF (1819-1893), *History of the Christian Church (New York 1882)*, III: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity. A.D. 311-600*, Michigan, Grand Rapids, CCEL, 2002, 162.

4 On this subject, among several perspectives, above all see: R. ZIMMERMANN, “Jenseits von Indikativ und Imperativ: Entwurf einer ‘impliziten Ethik’ des Paulus am Beispiel des 1.Korintherbriefes”, *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 132 (2007), 259-284; F. BLISCHKE, *Die Begründung und die Durchsetzung der Ethik bei Paulus*, [= Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 25], Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2007, 14-19; W. WOLBERT, *Ethische Argumentation und Paränese in 1Kor 7*, Düsseldorf, Patmos, 1981, 59-60; W. POPKES, *Paränese und Neues Testament*, [= SBS 168], Stuttgart, Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1996, 51; K. FINSTERBUSCH, *Die Thora als Lebensweisung für Heidenchristen: Studien zur Bedeutung der Thora für die paulinische Ethik*, [= Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testament 20], Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1996, 185-187; U. SCHNELLE, “Die Begründung

I. THE FAMILIAR LOVE OF GOD

Throughout Israel's history, Yahweh has shown that He loved indeed, His love was profound. Yahweh was very found of his own people. To show His love, Yahweh not only spoke, He acted as well, He committed Himself with his people's life and adventure. Yahweh has not limited Himself saying He saves: in fact, in reality He saved, He gave an historic experience of His saving love. This began in Egypt. To show that He saves, Yahweh actually saved his people. Yahweh loves saving and saves loving. He is the only One who saves, the Only one really loves Israel. No one else does that for Israel. This relation reached moments of great intimacy, of deep familiarity. Moses had the privilege to be face to face with the Lord on the Horeb (cf. Ex 33,1). The desert is the time and the place where many times God tries to save his own marriage with Israel (cf. Jer 2; Ez 16). God presents himself to the people as a "father", even though that is related very few times in the Hebrew Bible: "Is Ephraim, then, so dear a son to me, a child so favored, that whenever I mention him I remember him lovingly still? That is why I yearn for him, why I must take pity on him, Yahweh declares" (Jer 31,20). From the beginning of the Exodus Yahweh has loved, He has shaped motherly his own people, He has taken very good care of Israel and Moses takes note on that very accurately: "Was it I who conceived all these people, was I their father ...?" (Num 11,12a), even though Moses becomes amazed with the following history of freedom God gives Israel. Within this history, Moses attest the level up to the family of God got: "They have acted perversely, those he fathered without blemish, a deceitful and underhand brood⁶. Is this the return you make to Yahweh? O people brainless and unwise! Is this not your father, who gave you being, who made you, by whom you subsist? ... You forget the Rock who fathered you, the God who made you, you no longer remember.¹⁹ Yahweh saw it and, in anger, he spurned his sons and daughters" (Dt 32,5-6.18-19). Trito-Isaias recognizes this is a family God shaped Himself like a potter: "And yet, Yahweh, you are our Father; we the clay and you our potter, all of us are the work of your hands." (Is 64,7). God modeled his own people with an everlasting love (cf. Jer 31,3) and the Israelites became the

und die Gestaltung der Ethik bei Paulus", in R. GEBAUER – M. MEISER (eds.), *Die bleibende Gegenwart des Evangeliums*, Marburg, Elwert, 2003, 109-131; L. ALVAREZ VERDES, "La función de la 'razón' en el pensamiento ético de S. Pablo", *Studia Moralia*, 34 (1996), 7-42; Th. SÖDING, *Das Liebesgebot bei Paulus: Die Mahnung zur Agape im Rahmen der paulinischen Ethik*, [= Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen 26], Münster, Aschendorff, 1995, 270; J. ECKERT, "Indikativ und Imperativ bei Paulus", in K. KERTELGE (ed.), *Ethik im Neuen Testament*, Freiburg, Herder, 1984, 168-189; R. BULTMANN, "Das Problem der Ethik bei Paulus", *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche*, 23 (1924) 123-140; H. WINDISCH, "Das Problem des paulinischen Imperativs", *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, 23 (1924), 265-281.

people consecrated to the Lord: “you are the children of God the Lord of yours” (Dt 14,1-2), a people Yahweh continues to prefer in spite of their sin, even if they disobeyed and have forgotten Him.

But God was not only *father* to the people of Israel. He was as well “father” of Israel’s king and father of the messianic king. Nathan’s prophecy to David attests the divine fatherhood over the king of Israel in an absolute family way: “... I will be to him a father and he will be to me a son” (2 Sam 7,12-16). This fatherhood is alike to the ones of neighbouring countries and expressed the kings’ vicinity to the people’s god (“you are my father, you are my God, the rock of my salvation”: Sl 89,27). The cronist tried to make tangible this prophecy applying it repeatedly to the messianic king⁵. To the community after the exile the messiah will be the annointed one (like the monarch of Israel) gifted with the abundance of the Spirit’s assistance (cf. Is 11,1-2). He will be the son of Yahweh in an absolute unique and intimate way (cf. 2 Sam 7,14: “Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace”). He will have Yahweh as his Father (cf. Sl 89,27) and savior (cf. 1 Sam 2,10b; Sl 89,22). But, Yahweh the God of Israel will have no goddess creating with Him. Nevertheless, the image of Yahweh the Father of Israel is marked with features and signs not exclusively masculine. The Old Testament uses as well motherly images and feminine outlines to announce the mercy of God and to signify that God acts either fatherly either motherly towards Israel his first-born: “This is what Yahweh says: Israel is my first-born son” (Ex 4,22). One has yet no to forget that the substantive “îm” (mother) never qualifies directly God in all the Old Testament. But, in a noteworthy and paradoxical way, the divine defining form in the Old Testament is itself in terms of philology and adjectives a feminine one (cf. Ex 34,6: “hanûn werahûm”). This formula is inspired in the most intimate and strong love experience of a woman’s pregnancy.

This family relation reaches its peak in Jesus God’s own Son, whose incarnation in any moment is divided or predicted in an explicite way in the Old Testament. This fatherly relation builds something absolute new and unexpected to Judaism in the first century. The incarnation of Jesus has in Israel only an analogy, nothing more than that. This analogy of God’s rare figure as a “father” in Israel just prepares Jesus incarnation and his absolute unique abbatc relation with the Father the God of Israel. Incarnation will allow to think and to believe God in a most familiar manner. The following christian reflection built in the theology of the Holy Spirit will facilitate to think our God as a triunitarian family. This pneumathological relation pre-exists, remaining the concept

5 Cf. 1 Cron 17,13; 22,10; 28,6. See S. SABUGAL, *Abba. La oración del Señor* [= BAC 467], Madrid, Cristiandad, 1985, 373.

of “father” yet as one of the best categories to name God fatherly revealed in His Son Jesus Christ, even if this category it is not the only one. God wanted to make family with us, wanted to familiarize Himself with us and His own Son. The Love between both – the Spirit – activated this process from the moment the Virgin Mary “was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1,18). The fourth evangelist will speak about that with the image of the “tent” (Jo 1,14). God “eskênosen”, God has prepared a pavilion, has constructed a tent entering in a family historical relation with all of us. God has entered in history in the most familiar way possible. With the incarnation God has thus entered in history in a definite way in the eschatological sense of it, entering the womb of the Virgin of Nazareth. This is the best and most appropriate word of God’s presentation, in a familiar atmosphere, incarnating in our own familiarity, in a family relation, the most wombbed one, the innermost one. If God Himself raises a porch in our family condition, becoming familiar to us, if God builds a “tent” among us, then is easier to *understand* that God reveals Himself rather in a household, it is easier to see why God as a *tent* in one family. This takes place historically in an inter-subjective relation to form a communion, a familiar communion⁶. The family of Nazareth fulfills this mission of the tent. She is the tent of God from the womb of Mary. To reveal He really loves, God goes up to point of submitting Himself to the a mother – Mary. He continues to submit Himself to that motherhood in the period after Easter – in His spouse the Church. Therefore, God continues to familiarize Himself with humanity in order to remain with her.

God raised a tent with the contribution of His family members – the Son and the Spirit, and like any other tent it has little in it. This tent will open itself and receive the sun of faith and of believing, but it will bear as well the stormy burden of our sin. This tent stands available for everyone, it can be visited by everyone. It is a tent among any other tent, in the middle of our tent, in the middle of the tent of our sin. So, it is not definitive. After Easter, Luke replaces the tent of incarnation by the tent of the Spirit’s presence. In this tent God gives a lot of space, for the tent can be connected to others. In this tent everybody eats at the same table and no one is excluded, no foreigner, no pilgrim, no refugee. This permanent tent of the Spirit does not match the *sukkôt* that every year Israel raises in the desert at the end of the summer (cf. Lev 23,33-43).

6 The theological concept of “revelation” will be totally redrawn by this in contemporary theology, mainly after the theological renewal movement initiated and continued by Karl Barth. This new theological stream will be received in Vatican II: cf. DV 2.12.

II. THE TENT OF NAZARETH

Jesus has access to the world in the tent of his family in Nazareth, He who comes from the trinitarian family. This is his contact with history. In the family of Nazareth He learns a lot of things, eventhough we know not much about it. The evangelists left us with the essential. God builds His family in Nazareth, marked by simplicity but by paganism as well, far away from the lights of Jerusalem, up north in Galilee. Nazareth is near and opened to greek culture in Séphoris, it has access to the world of trade, potters and crafting in Beth-Shean. The family of Nazareth receives a life that was not expected, but receives her, like the life of the Father is received in the life of the Son and of the Spirit. In order to receive the Second Trinity Person, the family of Nazareth needs at least two Announcements – to Mary and to Joseph. This family has relatives in Isabel and in John the Baptist. From the very beginning this tent is signed by modesty. Jesus begins establishing a familiar relation with the sheperds when He is visited by them in Bethleem, in the very smooth and romantic narrative of Luke. The same happens with the wise men's visit in Mt 2. But Jesus is already acquainted with this calmness and smoothness near the Father throughout the eternity. Nevertheless, this humble family of Nazareth got Jesus used to difficulties, to hardship. He began unattended and rejected in every place in Bethleem, after all a parable of His entire life. The tent of Nazareth could not put itself together in Bethleem, and the tent of God won't make it thirty years later, not far away from there, on the Golgotha in Jerusalem (cf. Mt 27,33). Both families – the one of God and the other of Nazareth – won't manage to build their tents. Mary is unattended in Bethleem and God is unattended on Holy Friday, God is thrown out of our human tent. Notwithstanding, both families do not fall apart, they do not separate, remain united, circumstances are not able to break down the strings amid the members of these families, for may not mankind divide what God has brought together. So God won't give up albeit He sees on Holy Friday his Tent teared down.

This family of Nazareth puts God in the first place. Therefore, she circumcises the little boy on the eighth day according to jewish tradtion (cf. Lc 2,21) and celebrates the first-born's ransom at the thirtieth day on the Pidion haBen. These and other great festivals rhythm the liturgical calendar in Israel. The family of Nazareth is therefore present. In these feasts the family of Nazareth discovers that our God is a familiar God, a family God, that is, a God who is a family and a God that has a family. No other people has such a God (cf. Sl 77,14), a God who intervenes in Egypt to rescue His own people, a God that "with your own arm redeeming your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph" (v.16). Jesus sees his family celebrating these great festivals, he sees Mary and

Joseph pacing time with these solemn celebrations in time of intimacy with Iahweh. So, naturally Jesus goes up to Jerusalem by the Feast of Passover. In spite of not being attested in the Gospels, the Purîm festival (cf. Est 9; 10,3) it is well known in the first century A.D. By that time the most important liturgical feast for any family is the weekly Shabbat. According to its “seudôt mitzvôt” (prescriptions), in these festivals one says well of God and Iahweh is present in the family. The same happens in the festivals of Shavuôt (Weeks), of Rosh Hashshanah (new year), on Yom Kippur (cf. Lev 16), by Sukkôt (tents), in the feast of Shemini Atzêret (in “the eighth day of the assembly”, on the twentieth second day of Tishrêi: cf. *b RoshHash* 4b), on Simhat Torah (the joy for the law), and on the great festival each family celebrates when a new family begins – the feast of marriage (Shidukin: cf. Jo 2). Yet, the family of Nazareth makes also fasting. In August or July (in the ninth day of Av, by Tisha Be’Av), in the great day of Fast, the Jewish religion commands not to drink wine nor to eat a whole day in order to remember the great destructions that fell upon Israel (cf. 2 Re 25,8; Jer 25,12) until the Second Temple period (cf. *taanit* 26b-29a). This Fast-day is preceded by a meal for the family to point out this event. This meal is the “seûdat hamafsêket” (meal of separation). So, in all these feasts, Iahweh celebrates them in a familiar atmosphere, with the family. Iahweh is not the only One celebrated.

Recently, biblical exegesis has researched and reread with much more accuracy and respect the talmudic and apocryphal literature. The apocryphal texts about the Virgin Mary offer us Jewish-Christian resonances within haggadic Jewish categories where it is still possible to trace some indication about the day to day life in Nazareth. As any other Jewish woman, when Mary wakes up in the morning she prayed with the all people praising the Lord of Israel with a blessing prayer (“blessed are You Lord who created me for your will”) or with the morning hallel (cf. Sl 144-150)⁷. Men had to recite three different praises other than the Shemá: “blessed are You Lord for You created me Hebrew and not a pagan” (sh’asany Israel shelô ‘asany yîshah shelô ‘asany bôr); “blessed are You Lord because You made me a male and not a female” (cf. *bMen* 43b; *tBer* 7,18; *yBer* 9,2.12b); “blessed are You Lord because You created me a free man and not a slave”. As any other Jew or Jewish woman Mary knows that her body is a menorah of God, it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 3,17). She knows the body is the most sacred and utmost place of God’s presence to the world and to human conscience (cf. Act 19,24; 1 Esd 2,16). This shrine is not the outer yard but the *qodesh qodashîm*, the sanctuary (*debir*) where the

7 Cf. I. ELBOGEN, *Jewish Liturgy A Comprehensive History* (1913), New York-Jerusalem, The Jewish Publication Society, 1993, 78.

Ark is (cf. 1 Kg 8,6) as a token of God's pledging presence to Israel in a familiar way. Mary could go every Saturday to the synagogue, although women were not obliged to do so. In the synagogue Mary could listen to the daily prayer of *Tephil'la* and the *Shema*'. Archaeology brought to light some synagogues in Gamlah, Jericoh and in Massada. Through such a prayer, Mary could build a *lectio conflata* of Num 15,37-41; Dt 6,4-9; 11,13-21 according to the rules of *derash*. This might have been a *gezerah shawah* in the orbit of her faith. When praying the *Shema*', Mary gives thanks to the God of Israel for all the creation, hearing the praying the blessings to the God creator of light (Yotzer 'Or) and the God of love (Ahaváh)⁸. All this is done in the synagogue family.

On shabbat Mary lights on the candles e proclaims the blessing like any other jewish mother in her family: "blesse are You Lord because You let us kindle the candles" (*Ber* 3,3-4). This means that she says very well of God when she prays with all these blessings. Through that she fulfills her mission of giving birth. Paul, the pharisee trained in the jewish tradition at Gamaliel's school (cf. Act 22,3) testifies precisely that when he remembers that "a woman saves herself giving birth" (1 Tim 2,15), becoming mother of a child. According to jewish sources, women in the first century A.D. wanted too to present themselves to the Lord in Jerusalem, but not three times like men ought to. Mary is present at the Bar-Mitzwah when Jesus is about twelve years old⁹. She might have heard Joseph praying something proper for the occasion, as whenever a family presented the first-born to start reading the torah in public: "blessed are You Lord for driving out from me the responsibility of this lad" (*GenRab* 63,14). She takes part in the water joy festival – the *simhat beth ha shoeva* – a feast during the period of *Sukkôt* in which a special role is assigned to the women: the temple yard for the women is illuminated and the *hassidim* dance (*Sukk* 51). During the youth years, Jesus sees and listens to Joseph praying the *Qaddish* when they read a text from the torah. Meanwhile, Mary prays inwardly the words of Her Son Jesus and of Joseph pleading that God's Name may be exalted, glorified and celebrated, that His kingdom might come to us¹⁰.

The family of Nazareth is poor, as God is poor: they only have two pigeons to offer when the Little one is brought to the temple in Jerusalem right after birth (cf. Lc 2,22-41). Jesus sees Mary and Joseph remaining faithful to their betrothal. Their faithfulness is a living sign for Jesus of God's fidelity, the biblical translation of truth (a word that does not exist in the massoretic text of the

8 Cf. C. DEL VALLE, *La Misna (c.220)*, [= BEB 98], Salamanca, Sigueme, ²1997, 1458.

9 Cf. R. J. ZWI WERBLOWSKY – G. WIGODER (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, 100.

10 Cf. *ib.*, 296.

Hebrew Bible). Mary and Joseph put God in first place in their lives. Therefore, they go up several times to Jerusalem and for different festivals. They attend the tent of God, either the synagogue tent or the temple. Every Saturday Mary kindles the shabbat candles of the menorah. Three times a day she listens to Jesus and Joseph praying the Shema'. Jesus celebrates the Bar-Mitzwah. Mary respects Joseph and Joseph respects Mary. He never applies the discriminating Jewish law of divorce (cf. Mt 1,15;). Like any other family, the family of Nazareth will open itself to the newness of Jesus. They will respect Jesus' freedom allowing Him to follow his own way, because He lives from the Father's liberating love and power. God the Father gives Jesus the humanity of family growth, supported by the utmost experiences of love which are supposed to be the relations of fatherhood and motherhood. Standing by the cross in Jo 19, Mary lives a divine experience as a mother who loses her son. As such a mother, Mary goes through the same experience (eventhought she does not completely sort out it) that God lives on Holy Friday when He goes up to the point of delivering His own Son for the world (cf. Rom 8,34). These fidelities draw up the boundaries of a family pregnant of love itself, rebuilt upon the tent of a faithful and true love, not any love whatsoever.

III. THE TENT OF LOVE

With some small remarks, it is important just a fast glance over the letters of Paul to extract his most important teachings about these themes, mainly through the inspiration his grammar of love promotes. Paul uses either the concept either the verb. To "love" (*agapáô*) is a distinctive feature to the Christian and of God Himself: "someone who loves God is known by God" (1 Cor 8,3), for "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9,7). Love builds matrimony ("In the same way, husbands must love their wives as they love their own bodies; for a man to love his wife is for him to love himself": Ef 5,28). Therefore, "you also, each one of you, must love his wife as he loves himself; and let every wife respect her husband" v.33). Paul considers love as the fulfillment of the law: "one only thing you should owe to anyone is love for one another, for to love the other person is to fulfill the law" (Rom 13,8). Love outshines friendship ("As for brotherly love, there is no need to write to you about that, since you have yourselves learnt from God to love one another" 1 Tes 4,9), being that already a divine experience. This is a reciprocal love that begins at home, within the family, with the couple. For that reason, to the spouses Paul has particular mission: "Husbands should love their wives, just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her" (Ef 5,25). In the same area, Paul grants the same tea-

ching: “Husbands, love your wives and do not be sharp with them” (Col 3,19). Through here goes God’s familiarity.

So, love is not just a wish or an intention of Paul and his communities. It stands as a real activity of God Himself, God who loves and rewards that loving: “all there is to come for me now is the crown of uprightness which the Lord, the upright judge, will give to me on that Day; and not only to me but to all those who have longed for his appearing” (“... tois egapekósi tèn epiphaneian autou”: 2 Tim 4,8). This is a loving adherence. By loving God brings us to a new condition. The sons of God are the fruits of His love but the object of His love as well. They are active but are passive to that love since they are preceded by it, as one can see better in the translation of the New Jerusalem Bible: “As the chosen of God, then, the holy people whom he loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience” (Col 3,12). As loved ones, christians are chosen precisely because God has loved them before, God has preferred them, has made them their own (cf. 1 Tes 1,4; cf. 2 Tes 2,13). This choice does not make God. Yet it shows God, it reveals God as the One who loves in a great love: “God, being rich in faithful love, through the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our sins, brought us to life with Christ -- it is through grace that you have been saved” (Ef 2,4-5). In the same letter, God is preached as the One who loved us all in Christ in whom we live and who is given as a pleasant sacrifice to the Father (“follow Christ by loving as he loved you, giving himself up for us as an offering and a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God” Ef 5,2). This is practically a literal quotation from Gal 2,20.

Other than the verb, Paul distributes the concept throughout his letters. At the beginning of the second part of Romans, the love of God sustains hope giving it a content (“and a hope which will not let us down, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us”: Rom 5,5). This gift translates itself in donation towards our brothers and sisters, on behalf of our neighbor, and thus accomplishing the law. At that moment, love is law by itself and in itself (Rom 13,10). As a gift, love spreads during the all life as a specific feature of baptized christian in order that “may everything among you happen in love” (1 Cor 16,14). This love mirrors the love of Christ, a love that “embraces us” (2 Cor 5,14). In Gal 5,22 love is one of the Spirit’s fruits.

Paul exhorts the communities around Ephesus to root in love (cf. Ef 3,17) and to “support each and every one of you in love” (Ef 4,2). In his reflection about the Church, the ultimate horizon is love, not the institution nor power. Therefore, the body of Christ which is the Church is a building in love (cf. Ef 4,16). Since it is a human reality, the Church needs a permanent purification.

Then Paul prays “so that your love may grow ...” (Flp 1,9). This is a process, a dynamism, a challenge (“make love your aim; but be eager, too, for spiritual gifts, and especially for prophesying”: 1 Cor 14,1). In the note to Philemon, Paul receives that love which increases joy (“I have received much joy and encouragement by your love“ Flm 1,7). Paul searches this love too. To his faithful companion Timothy, Paul leaves love as the crucial prospect, as the main goal to every evangelisation (“The final goal at which this instruction aims is love, issuing from a pure heart, a clear conscience and a sincere faith”: 1 Tim 1,5). Instruction, education takes place in love and not in authority. This is the only way to teach in a proper manner, what embodies a pedagogical revolution¹¹.

Paul concludes his second part of Romans with a great theological synthesis about God. God is love. How does he says that? God “did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us ...” (Rom 8,32), a verse so important to modernity and unfortunately so badly understood. To thus think God, Paul departs from the human experiences of love, thus proceeding the analogical movement of faith and of theology. The *phenomenology of love* wants to show that the biblical wisdom perception is plainly fulfilled. According to it, love is stronger than death: “Set me like a seal on your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is strong as Death, passion as relentless as Sheol” (Cant 8,6). In fact, love postulate by itself a destruction of that destructive hypothesis of love, that is, love devises perpetuation, devises the impossibility of its destruction, it asks for eternity, wants not to die, wants for resurrection

“só o que se faz por amor dura para sempre e encontra-se imerso na consistência da realidade. Deste amor que se fixa na realidade é que se pode dizer que mostra a sua força pascal e triunfante aguentando e superando as tensões”¹².

To look for this love is to look for God, to love with this intention is the desire of God, means to want God because every one wants to be loved on such a high standard. Although God is not the result of this desire, He appears at the fulfillment of that desire. This enticing and irresistible love for ever faithful is God, this familiarity is God, this “Geborgenheit”¹³ (the security of this family confort) at least is divine. The theological category of “family” gives thus con-

11 This kind of revolution has been implemented with success in the great catholic social movement that takes care of young boys taken out of the streets, a movement founded by father Américo in Portugal, first in Coimbra then in Oporto. As a priest in the Dioceses of Oporto, father Américo founded homes where these boys could live and make the experience of “family”, an experience which most of them haven’t had.

12 Cf. W. KASPER, *Jesús, El Cristo* (1974), Salamanca, Sígueme, 71989, 191.

13 This feeling is testified by Matti in the diary of M. BERCK, *Sommer in Lesmona*, Reinbeck bei Hamburg, Rowolt, 332000, 21.

tent to the name “God”, what enhances it to become a sacrament of God and hence language of God.

IV. THE FAMILY TENT

For all those who have vocation to married life, Paul paves the way of God. Family is a way of God, the spouses sanctification is way of God to the sanctity of God. In this context, the family in Corinth might be an experience of God according to 1 Cor 7:

1 Cor 7,1-40 “Now for the questions about which you wrote. Yes, it is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman; ² yet to avoid immorality every man should have his own wife and every woman her own husband. ³ The husband must give to his wife what she has a right to expect, and so too the wife to her husband. ⁴ The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and in the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ You must not deprive each other, except by mutual consent for a limited time, to leave yourselves free for prayer, and to come together again afterwards; otherwise Satan may take advantage of any lack of self-control to put you to the test. ⁶ I am telling you this as a concession, not an order. ⁷ I should still like everyone to be as I am myself; but everyone has his own gift from God, one this kind and the next something different. ⁸ To the unmarried and to widows I say: it is good for them to stay as they are, like me. ⁹ But if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry, since it is better to be married than to be burnt up. ¹⁰ To the married I give this ruling, and this is not mine but the Lord’s: a wife must not be separated from her husband- ¹¹ or if she has already left him, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband - and a husband must not divorce his wife. ¹² For other cases these instructions are my own, not the Lord’s. If one of the brothers has a wife who is not a believer, and she is willing to stay with him, he should not divorce her; ¹³ and if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to stay with her, she should not divorce her husband. ¹⁴ You see, the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through the brother. If this were not so, your children would be unclean, whereas in fact they are holy. ¹⁵ But if the unbeliever chooses to leave, then let the separation take place: in these circumstances, the brother or sister is no longer tied. But God has called you to live in peace: ¹⁶ as a wife, how can you tell whether you are to be the salvation of your husband; as a husband, how can you tell whether you are to be the salvation of your wife? ¹⁷ Anyway let everyone continue in the part which the Lord has allotted to him, as he was

when God called him. This is the rule that I give to all the churches.¹⁸ If a man who is called has already been circumcised, then he must stay circumcised; when an uncircumcised man is called, he may not be circumcised.¹⁹ To be circumcised is of no importance, and to be uncircumcised is of no importance; what is important is the keeping of God's commandments.²⁰ Everyone should stay in whatever state he was in when he was called.²¹ So, if when you were called, you were a slave, do not think it matters - even if you have a chance of freedom, you should prefer to make full use of your condition as a slave.²² You see, anyone who was called in the Lord while a slave, is a freeman of the Lord; and in the same way, anyone who was free when called, is a slave of Christ.²³ You have been bought at a price; do not be slaves now to any human being.²⁴ Each one of you, brothers, is to stay before God in the state in which you were called.²⁵ About people remaining virgin, I have no directions from the Lord, but I give my own opinion as a person who has been granted the Lord's mercy to be faithful.²⁶ Well then, because of the stress which is weighing upon us, the right thing seems to be this: it is good for people to stay as they are.²⁷ If you are joined to a wife, do not seek to be released; if you are freed of a wife, do not look for a wife.²⁸ However, if you do get married, that is not a sin, and it is not sinful for a virgin to enter upon marriage. But such people will have the hardships consequent on human nature, and I would like you to be without that.²⁹ What I mean, brothers, is that the time has become limited, and from now on, those who have spouses should live as though they had none;³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning; those who enjoy life as though they did not enjoy it; those who have been buying property as though they had no possessions;³¹ and those who are involved with the world as though they were people not engrossed in it. Because this world, as we know, it is passing away.³² I should like you to have your minds free from all worry. The unmarried man gives his mind to the Lord's affairs and to how he can please the Lord;³³ but the man who is married gives his mind to the affairs of this world and to how he can please his wife, and he is divided in mind.³⁴ So, too, the unmarried woman, and the virgin, gives her mind to the Lord's affairs and to being holy in body and spirit; but the married woman gives her mind to the affairs of this world and to how she can please her husband.³⁵ I am saying this only to help you, not to put a bridle on you, but so that everything is as it should be, and you are able to give your undivided attention to the Lord.³⁶ If someone with strong passions thinks that he is behaving badly towards his fiancée and that things should take their due course, he should follow his desires. There is no sin in it; they should marry.³⁷ But if he stands firm in his resolution, without any compulsion but with full control of his own will, and decides to let her remain as his fiancée, then he is acting well.³⁸ In other words, he who marries his fiancée is doing

well, and he who does not, better still. ³⁹ A wife is tied as long as her husband is alive. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anybody she likes, only it must be in the Lord. ⁴⁰ She would be happier if she stayed as she is, to my way of thinking - and I believe that I too have the Spirit of God”.

This topic is retrieved few years latter in Rom 7,1-3

“As people who are familiar with the Law, brothers, you cannot have forgotten that the law can control a person only during that person’s lifetime. ² A married woman, for instance, is bound to her husband by law, as long as he lives, but when her husband dies all her legal obligation to him as husband is ended. ³ So if she were to have relations with another man while her husband was still alive, she would be termed an adulteress; but if her husband dies, her legal obligation comes to an end and if she then has relations with another man, that does not make her an adulteress”.

Paul testifies hereby the mutual relation in marriage as a paritarian one. Thus, Paul goes further the divorce libel of Moses, announces the monogamic marriage and its indissolubility. Such a family allows to make an experience of God. In 1 Cor 7 Paul goes beyond and presents a radical innovation to the surrounding jewish and greek worlds¹⁴. In 1 Cor 7 the woman appears in total parity with the husband, what was not the case in these two cultural and religious worlds. There, women had *de facto* and *de jure* a non equality status. For instance, a woman could not take decisions on her own, the husband had all the rights over her, she was set aside social life (what was not the case in pauline communities). When it comes to learn the Scriptures, pharisaism in the first century allowed only the men to go out for that. She had no access to study the torah nor could pray in loud voice the shema⁷. She had not the right to circumcision. In New Testament times, divorce in judaism was a matter entitled to men, it became an husbands’s arbitrary decision (cf. *mYebaim* 14,1; *mKetuv* 7,9-10; *mGit* 9,8). On the contrary, in 1 Cor 7 the woman had the same familiar rights before a divorce (vv.10.11), she is treated equally in the case of mixed marriages (vv.12.13) and in the so called pauline privilege (v.15)¹⁵, she begins to take in her hands fully her destiny and future in plain liberty and

14 In his work, W. DEMING, *Paul on marriage and celibacy. The hellenistic background of 1 Corinthians 7*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995 presents the initial response of Paul in v.1 as a confrontation the Apostle had with the stoic atmosphere of Corinth, in which Paul tries to establish a dialogue with stoicism in order to help his brothers Christians in the Corinthian community.

15 To see the implementation of this canonical rule in present russian society see M. KOZLOV, “I matrimoni misti con i cattolici nella Russia moderna: il punto di vista del parroco”, *Nicolaus*, 37/2 (2010). This article has been translated from the original russian language.

dignity¹⁶. The non christian member of a couple is not, consequently, sent away, nor rejected, nor rebuked, nor vice-versa. The move to separate is left to the non christian member of the couple in a mixed marriage (between a christian member and a non christian member). Hence, pagans foul no more, there is not yet anything pure or impure, sacred or profane, for everything and everybody is sanctified in Christ (cf. Ef 2,14).

Nevertheless, some pauline letters incorporated some latter intrusions from some non parity culture in what family concerns. Some texts like 1 Cor 14,33b-35; 11,2-16; 1 Tim 2,11-15a¹⁷ are now considered as further interpolations from a first century A.D. priestly culture from which Paul takes some distances. Yet, the Apostle criticizes as well polyandry and those several times divorced¹⁸. That meant several times married.

In 1 Cor 7,1-2 Paul starts with a stoic slogan very well known to corinthian culture, where some groups despised body, spurned human flesh or derided the world and its historical foundations¹⁹. We don't know exactly the meaning of v.1: "it is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman". It could very well have been a stoic slogan widespread in Corinth, or it could be just a play with words to Paul himself, since he could just be quoting the conviction some community members had they no longer need to marry neither to raise children²⁰, because they thought themselves in paradise right after resurrection thus belonging to a spiritualistic sectarian group²¹. Biblical exegesis has raised the hypothesis that Paul might have in mind some group of "eschatologi-

16 Cf. J. PAILLARD, *Règlement de Comptes avec Saint Paul (Stockholm 1966)*, Paris, Cerf, 1969, 190.

17 Cf. M. ADINOLFI, "Il velo della donna e la rilettura paolina di 1 Cor 11:2-16", *Rivista Biblica*, 23 (1975), 94-110; M. BOUCHER, "Some unexplored parallels to 1 Cor 11 :11-12 and Gal 3,28", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 31 (1969), 50-58; J. P. MEIER, "On the Veiling of Hermeneutics (1 Cor 11 :2-16)", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 40 (1978), 212-226; A. PADGETT, "Paul on Women in the Church: The Contradiction of Coiffure in 1 Cor 11:2-16", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 20 (1984), 69-86; E. PAGELS, "Paul on Women : A Response to Recent Discussion", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 42 (1974), 538-549; R. SCROGGS, "Paul and the Eschatological Women", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 40 (1972), 283-303; 532-537.

18 Cf. A. OEPKE, "gynê", in G. KITTEL – G. FRIEDRICH (eds.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 1-9, Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, I, 1933, 789; *Grande Lessico del Nuovo Testamento*, Brescia, Paideia, II, 1966, 728.

19 Accordingly J. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, "The First Letter to the Corinthians", in R. E. BROWNE (ed.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall, 1990, 804.

20 In this sense see J. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, "The divorced woman in 1 Cor 7:10-11", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 100 (1981), 601-606; W. SCHRAGE, "Zur Frontstellung der paulinischen Ehebewertung in 1 Kor 7,1-7", *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche*, 67 (1976), 214-234; W. WOLBERT, *Ethische Argumentation und Paränese in 1 Kor 7*, Düsseldorf, Patmos, 1981, 78.

21 Cf. G. BARBAGLIO, *La Prima lettera ai Corinzi Introduzione, versione e commento*, [= Scritti delle origini cristiane 16], Bologna, Edizioni Dehoniane, 1996, 330.

cal women”²² who thought they had no longer to remain married because the resurrection of Lord Jesus had already taken place, so all our bonds would be unleashed. In 1 Cor 6,12-20 Paul advised against immorality, against “porneia”. Could it be in 1 Cor 7,1 that the Apostle was asking his brothers not to attend prostitutes, since that was frequent in Corinth, almost normal to stoic morality, despite the paradox?²³ Had Paul to answer any gnostic group?

In 1 Cor 7,12 Paul makes a remarkable consideration (“For other cases these instructions are my own, not the Lord’s ...”) signifying that his own word is less important, weights less. He distinguishes from the very beginning what is important and what is just an opinion. On v.14 the non believing member (apistos) does not nullify the relationship. Nothing is said about uncleanness, impurity matters no longer for the non believing member transmits no longer contamination to the other member (even in sexual relations). This conveys the idea that you don’t need to flee from the world, from the other.

The exegesis of this chapter has always been pruned right from the start, since Paul has been accused of extreme rigorism, of too much ascetics, of putting the ideas of marriage and sexuality in second place²⁴, mostly for the woman. But if one reads v.1 as being pauline, it comes up a contradiction in Paul, because v.1b tells the opposite of v.1a. To say that “it is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman” seems to contradict Gen 2,18 “it is not good to man to be alone”. But Paul answers to “the questions about which you wrote”. He is answering the Corinthians, commenting one of their moral thesis or statements²⁵. Through this answer Paul demonstrates he is very much realistic²⁶, pragmatic, he advises but does not command. As a minister, he is very down-to-earth. It is fit, it is saving that the spouses attend each other not to fall into temptation. It is beneficial and constructive for both man and wife to visit each other bodily and love one another fleshly. Paul neither sponsors social inaction nor social immobility, not to speak of slavery. He just teaches that each and every one of us is able to do something in the situation each one finds himself

22 This is the legitime supposition of G. D. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, [= NIC-NT], Michigan, Grand Rapids, 1987, 269, 290.

23 Virtues were not the only part of stoic morality: see C. MUSONIUS RUFO (39-100?), *Diatribes* XII, in I. RAMELLI (a cura di), *Musonio Rufo Diatribe, Frammenti e testimonianze*, [=Bompiane Testi a fronte 31], Milano, Bompiani, 2001, 171; J. E. SMITH, “The roots of a ‘libertine’ slogan in I Corinthians 6:18”, *Journal of Theological Studies*, 59/1 (2008), 77-82; T. E. KLUTZ, “Re-reading I Corinthians after Rethinking ‘Gnosticism’”, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 26 (2003), 193-216; T. ENGBERG-PEDERSEN, *Paul and the Stoics*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 2000, 2; J. MURPHY-O’CONNOR, “Corinthians Slogans in 1 Cor 6:12-20”, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 40 (1978), 391-396.

24 Cf. J. D. G. DUNN, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1998, 693.

25 Cf. G. D. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 274-275; A. LINDEMANN, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, [= HNT 9/I], Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2000, 154-156.

26 In this same sense cf. G. BARBAGLIO, *La Prima lettera ai Corinzi*, o. c., 329.

in vv.21-24 not having to change his vocation or his entire life²⁷ (“if when you were called, you were a slave, do not think it matters - even if you have a chance of freedom, you should prefer to make full use of your condition as a slave. ²² You see, anyone who was called in the Lord while a slave, is a free-man of the Lord; and in the same way, anyone who was free when called, is a slave of Christ. ²³ You have been bought at a price; do not be slaves now to any human being. ²⁴ Each one of you, brothers, is to stay before God in the state in which you were called”). Paul is not advising, mainly slaves, to just stay as they are. Paul is advising something else: “do not let your social condition be a concern to you”²⁸. A great deal of reasons by which Paul wanted to say it is better not to marry can be understood in the broader context of social and religious life in the Christian community of Corinth, pressured by the idea that the remaining time is short. If this time left is short, then it is not even useful to change your life status or your life conditions²⁹, it is not worthy to follow another way or to choose another vocation in life. It must be taken into account that, at first, Paul wants above all to answer some questions the community put him by letter (cf. 1 Cor 7,1.25). Paul did not intend to organize a whole theology of marriage, far from it. V.17 is therefore decisive: “Anyway let everyone continue in the part which the Lord has allotted to him, as he was when God called him. This is the rule that I give to all the churches”. Paul underlines the relationship to Christ, that is decisive, that comes in first place and drives the entire way of life. His preference for his own sort of life is just a matter of “opinion”. As a result, in v.9 he brings up a very realistic tolerance, in a way of “concession” (“But if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry, since it is better to be married than to be burnt up”). This stands as a Pauline acknowledgment, one can say as a compromise. Marriage should not come as a rule from “burnt up”, burnt desires should not be the origin of a marriage. These should not be the reasons. To prove it, Paul presents Timothy as a model: he has a family that gave him tradition and education. Paul does not render a dualistic world vision or a dichotomist view on sexuality. God created man and woman, male and female, but first created mankind as such. Only then differentiates them male and female. Yet, both remain equal in dignity. That is why Paul cannot accept homosexuality or adultery, because Jesus had already proposed the same, because already that went against the condition creatures had and were intended to. Matrimony is not sin, is not sinful. Greek moral standards many times were much more lax than Christian moral or Pauline ethic standards.

27 Accordingly A. LINDEMANN, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, o. c., 171.

28 G. D. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 316. In the same sense A. LINDEMANN, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, o. c., 172-173.

29 So A. LINDEMANN, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, o. c., 176.

Some habits were just not compatible with Christian standards, they did not fit in the project of God nor in a thoughtful and mindful anthropology.

Paul places Corinthians flanked by three worlds: stoicism, epicurism and revelation. The Jewish influence and culture were much noted in Rome and in Galatia. In moral terms, Pauline communities live between stoic encratism and a certain libertine epicurist way of life (cf. 1 Cor 6,12-20)³⁰. In terms of what "family" is concerned, the Judaism in the Diaspora kept connected, attached to the Genesis commandment to fructify and fill the earth (cf. Gen 1,28), and it will continue to be so throughout the rabbinic movement. Paul announced what was not expected to a Jew when he came to grown age. Nevertheless, he did it regardless of those who heard him. The Talmudic literature sticks thus very tight to the Genesis commandment: "R. Tanhum stated in the name of R. Hanilai: Any man who has no wife lives without joy, without blessing, and without goodness. 'Without joy', for it is written, 'And thou shalt rejoice, thou and thy house'. 'Without blessing', for it is written, 'to cause a blessing to rest on thy house'. 'Without goodness', for it is written, 'It is not good that the man should be alone'" (*bYebamôt* 62b). In the same tractate a little bit farther: "R. Eleazar said: Any man who has no wife is no proper man; for it is said, *Male and female created He them and called their name Adam*" (63a). Or else: "R. Hama b. Hanina stated: As soon as a man takes a wife his sins are buried; for it is said: *Who finds a wife finds a great good and obtains favour of the Lord* ... Another [Baraitha] taught: R. Eliezer said, Anyone who does not engage in the propagation of the race is as though he sheds blood" (63b). But the Genesis commandment is not exclusive to rabbinic Judaism. The apocrypha maintained this order in Test. Levi 9,9-10 where Isaac warned Levi: "And he said to me, Take heed, my child, of the spirit of fornication (*apó tou pneumatos tês porneias*); for this shall continue, and shall by thy seed pollute the holy things. Take therefore to thyself, while yet thou art young, a wife, not having blemish, nor yet polluted, nor of the race of the Philistines or Gentiles"³¹. In the same manner, the Greek speaking Judaism confirmed this teaching in Tob 4,12-13: "¹²Beware, my son, of every kind of fornication. First of all, marry a woman from among the descendants of your ancestors; do not marry a foreign woman, who is not of your father's tribe; for we are the descendants of the prophets. Remember, my son, that Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, our ancestors of old, all took wives from among their kindred. They were blessed in their children, and their posterity will inherit the land.¹³ So now, my son, love your kindred, and in your heart

30 Cf. G. BARBAGLIO, *La Prima lettera ai Corinzi*, o. c., 364; A. LINDEMANN, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, o. c., 161.

31 Cf. A. LINDEMANN, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, o. c., 158.

do not disdain your kindred, the sons and daughters of your people, by refusing to take a wife for yourself from among them”.

The macedonian John of Stobi in the fifth century quotes some authors from times of Paul with the three main perspectives on marriage. He attests that for some marriage was “kalon” (beautiful) while for others matrimony was considered “ouk agathon” (not good) or not profitable, or was even disadvantageous (“asymphoron”). The stoics favored this latter view and Paul became near on this matter to Epictetus. Yet, Musonius follows Pitagoras and considers that “ouk empodion to i-philosophein” (wedding is not an obstacle to philosophy)³². Hierocles praises marriage (“symphoron einai ton gamon”) because it gives us children (“geneseos teknon”), a wife and so he does not understand how it can be thought as a burden (“hos baryn ... ton meta gynaikos bion”)³³. Antipatro of Tyre finds very useful marriage because allows a philosopher to remain free from the daily home affairs (“peri ta anagkaia eauton aperispaston”)³⁴. The vegetarian Apolonios of Tyana (2 a.C. – 98 AD) lived in a very strict way. This pythagorean refrained many times from food, refrained from children³⁵ and remained in continence. In pagan cults, the priests often abstained from sexual intercourse, like the Vestals virgins priestesses in Rome that took a vow of chastity and were freed from bearing children. The cult of Isis in Corinth sometimes imposed these same obligations³⁶.

This spectrum reveals a wide variety of thesis, some groups wanted marriage but others no³⁷. Paul depended on none of them, but to all these problems he had to give an answer, a viable one, a realistic one. Perhaps he had to immediately reply to a special group in the Corinthian community. Would we have here the so called “eschatological women” in Corinth³⁸ who thought marriage was no longer necessary, they could even abandon their own families? We cannot be certain. Yet, at least it can be said that the situation was very complex³⁹.

32 Cf. IOANNIS STOBÆI, *Anthologium (Eklogôn Apophthegmatôn Ypotekôn Bibliôn Tetarton)*, Recensuerunt C. WACHSMUTH – O. HENSE, vol. IV, Partem Priorem ab OTTONE HENSE, Berlin, 1909, 498. About this subject see R. B. WARD, “Musonius and Paul on Marriage”, *New Testament Studies*, 36 (1990), 281-289.

33 Cf. IOANNIS STOBÆI, *Anthologium*, o. c., 505.

34 Cf. IOANNIS STOBÆI, *Anthologium*, o. c., 511.

35 Cf. PHILOSTRATUS, *Vita Apollonii* I.13; see more information and more quotations in A. RAKOTOHARINTSIFA, *Conflits à Corinthe Église et société selon I Corinthiens Analyse socio-historique*, [= Le Monde de la Bible 36], Genève, Labor et Fides, 1997, 147.

36 Cf. A. RAKOTOHARINTSIFA, *Conflits à Corinthe Église et société*, o. c., 47-54.124.

37 See this stoic tendency in EPICTECT, *Diatribai* III 22,67-82.

38 Cf. G. D. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, o. c., 269-270.

39 Nevertheless, it is difficult to sustain the thesis of A. LINDEMANN, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, o. c., 158 to whom “in V.1b nicht von der Ehe die Rede ist, sondern von sexueller Praxis, und zwar

In 1 Cor 7,1-7 Paul begins to alert against “porneia” and continues helping to discover that marriage is a mean to fight against it⁴⁰, it is the time and place of an embodied love between the spouses in which none has supremacy over the other. This sort of love is the rule, the standard of nuptial reciprocity (vv.3-4). God Himself does not impose to his own family, to his people. Paul recognizes different gifts to different persons (v.7)⁴¹. Marriage and celibacy do not oppose each other, they are just gifts, expressions of different vocations. Paul urges monogamic marriage since there are so many moral threats, so many signs of porneia, of unfaithfulness (v.2). When he avers that a woman should not separate or divorce from her husband, he undoubtedly hints at the surrounding greek culture and legislation in which such a kind of things were allowed and normal⁴². In the hillelite tradition, it was enough a spoiled dish to send the woman way (*bKetuv* 75) or if you found another woman more beautiful than the one you had you could send her away as well. That was reason sufficient reason to change (*mGitt* 9.10). In these circumstances, the injured party, the abandoned had no word whatsoever on the subject, she became totally unprotected. Hence, Paul offers some criteria to avoid it, to give some security and confidence in a parity relation to both couple members. In the corinthian community many couples were formed with one of the members being a non christian. There, the children should continue not to be disputed. The unfaithfulness of one couple member cannot affect the love or the children’s lives, it cannot distress as well the life of the Church (v.15).

Paul remembers the present situation of community members whether a member might be circumcised or no, slave or a free man. This is not crucial to be before God. The most decisive issue is to obey the Lord’s commandments (v.19). Then it is not vital to change life, to modify our life way or condition, to marry or not to marry. To marry is not compulsory nor impeached. May each person follow his vocation. Paul speaks as a minister, he respects personal freedom⁴³ and God’s bigheartedness through which He gives different talents to different missions, nothing more. Paul discovers the complexity of corinthian christians’ state⁴⁴. Paul never tries to justify the last objectiv of marriage

des Mannes”. Naturally Paul has to deal with this problem in Christian couples in Corinth, but he goes further and answers as well with a reflection about marriage. VV.8-40 show it clearer.

40 In this sense see A. LINDEMANN, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, o. c., 158.

41 Cf. J. D. G. DUNN, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, o. c., 696.

42 Cf. G. D. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, o. c., 296; A. LINDEMANN, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, o. c., 164.

43 Cf. J. D. G. DUNN, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, o. c., 697.

44 Cf. J. D. G. DUNN, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, o. c., 698.

as being the bearing of children (*bonum fidei, sacramentis, et proli*)⁴⁵. This is not why people get married for Paul and this is not the utmost objective in pauline teachings on matrimony. The first good in a family relation is the couple's familiar love, the love that flows between the spouses. This is the first good and the first goal to reach. On this base, Paul establishes some principles about marriage in 1 Cor 7, looking back to the family relation God kept with Israel throughout history. Perhaps they could be labeled as the ten paulines comandments of marriage:

1. love between the spouses can only happen under mutual consent. This means that man and wife can love each other only by joint assent, and no one is an object for the other;

2. this reciprocity extends itself to the religious sphere and that tells us that religious freedom begins at home with the family members;

3. this implies that the woman has the same rights for divorce and in a divorce, for the reason that the new situation is supported by a parity relation. Nevertheless, Paul does not say divorce happens because one of the couple members wants or likes it. A divorce will only take place in a extreme situation which allow the injured party not to be oblided to carry an unsustainable burden. On the other hand, this does not deny indissolubility;

4. there is thus a reappraisal of marriage in terms of vocation, not in terms of obligation;

5. celibacy is just another possibility in the plain respect of sexuality;

6. Paul reveals a huge respect for the existing structures and institutions, because it is there and with them that we can live and accomplish our vocation;

7. Paul has marriage in the most high esteem. Since Paul considers matrimonial life something so beautiful and serious, he demands a very good preparation for someone to get married and to engage in family ties. This means to Paul to proceed the tradition of Israel where nobody gets married in wane, as the rabbis will continue to teach. Marriage is not an experience, is not an experiment to see how it goes, there are people's lives at stake. Since it is a vocation either you have it or you don't have it;

8. the same treatment in the case of pauline privilege and in the case of mixed marriages;

9. Paul puts marriage in the horizon of provisional, almost as a draft, since the great betrothal happens with Christ and to Christ. Even the spouses marry

45 Saint Augustine diverges here from Paul: cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *De bono conjugale*, XVII.32 [= PL 40,385.394]; IDEM, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, I.10.11 [= PL 44,420].

and keep marrying, they keep getting wedded until eternity, because Christ remains alive;

10. finally, the love between the husband and his wife is the first good in matrimony, not the children as it was the case in stoic Greece and in judaism⁴⁶.

At the end Paul teaches that you can be christian in the civil stage you are, you don't need to change your identity and you don't have to abandon your culture. Hence, christian matrimony in the order of salvation has the same dignity it has in the order of creation. Yet, 1 Cor 7 shows that not everybody thought that way. In this context, Paul must advise communities against the danger of moral collapse. Since the husband is to his wife and the wife to her husband, since our body is the temple of the living God (cf. 1 Cor 3,16.17; 6,19; 2 Cor 6,16), so fornication (imorality) is not compatible with Christ and with new life in Him (cf. 1 Cor 6,12-20). To sort out family in such a parity relationship keeps on the same tradition of Jesus, who indeed broke with the patriarchal jewish notion of family. This is something absolutely new for the time⁴⁷.

V. THE TENT OF THE CHURCH IN EPH 5,22-33

Deutero-pauline tradition continues this reflection about the family matrix of human condition as such, and consequently, of the Church itself. No only in the proto-pauline letter to the Romans (cf. Rom 9-11) is the Church presented as a family reality like the branches of an olive tree (cf. Rom 11,16-24)⁴⁸, but it is echoed too in the deutero-pauline tradition where family nearness with God still remains mirrored in our own familiarity, being the betrothal relationship and the wedding reality the conceptual and metaphorical vehicle for the pauline tradition to think the relationship between Christ and the Church. However, this reciprocal parity will get its evenness only in the alleluatic hymn of Rev 19,1-

46 See some more sociological notes in S. GUIJARRO, "Kingdom and Family in Conflict", in J. PILCH (ed.), *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible. Essays by the Context Group in Honor of Bruce J. Malina*, [= BIS 53], Leiden – Boston – Köln, Brill, 2001, 225; IDEM, *Fidelidades en Conflicto. La ruptura con la familia por causa del discipulado y de la misión en la tradición sinóptica*, Salamanca, Publicaciones de la Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1998, 76-77; R. AGUIRRE, *Del movimiento de Jesús a la Iglesia Cristiana*, Bilbao, Desclée de Brouwer, 1987, 100.

47 In the same sense see A. LOZÁN PUN LAY, "Pertenece a la verdadera familia de Jesús", *o. c.*, 212. For an accurate and thoughtful exegesis of these verses see R. SCHWINDT, "Mehr Wurzel als Stamm und Krone. Zur Bildrede vom Ölbaum in Röm 11,16-24", *Biblica*, 88 (2007), 64-91.

48 Good synthesis in J.-N. ALETTI, "Le Statut de l'Église dans les lettres pauliniennes. Réflexions sur quelques paradoxes", *Biblica*, 83/2 (2002), 153-174. This work is deepened with much detail in IDEM, *Essai sur l'ecclésiologie des lettres de Saint Paul*, [= EB 60], Pendé, Gabalda Cie, 2009.

9⁴⁹. In Eph 5 family is the place of eschatological spectacle like in a mirror. There the betrothal condition of the Church is viewed with the help of family reality. This reality is the light to where Paul looks to speak about the relationship between Christ and the Church, being this considered very accurately as a mystery because the relationship between a husband and his wife is itself condensed in mystery. There is something mysterious in both of these relationships. All this is concentrated in a tiny grammar unit “de” in Eph 5,32b which contrasts to the preceding text of v.32a. This particle intends to put into a new dimension such mystery, a mystery already presented on a determined and autonomous level (“this is a great mystery, indeed, I tell you regarding Christ and the Church”). Therefore, mystery refers to both levels of marriage, first to the matrimony between a man and a woman, and second to the nuptial relationship between Christ and the Church. When he tries to describe as best as possible this mystery, he finds the starting point in the wisdom tradition of Israel in Prov 30,18-19 (“¹⁸ There are three things beyond my comprehension, four, indeed, that I do not understand: ¹⁹ the way of an eagle through the skies, the way of a snake over the rock, the way of a ship in mid-ocean, the way of a man with a girl.”) and in Song of Songs (cf. Cant 8,6 “Set me like a seal on your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is strong as Death, passion as relentless as Sheol. The flash of it is a flash of fire, a flame of Yahweh himself.”). Nonetheless, the arriving point remains the relationship Christ-Church. So, the application of what Paul says is not universal, he refers it to the bond between husband and wife and not to any liaison between a man and a woman. This means that here Paul is not considering the greek or roman family from the civil law point of view. The letter to the Ephesians speaks here about a mystery within the Church, but does it inspired by the nearest image it has at hand. However, these realities stay dissimilar and uncomparable. Indeed, this familiarity mystery between Christ and the Church belongs to an eschatological frame. The relationship husband-wife stays enclosed in mystery. That’s why this mystery interprets anthropology. Eph 5 does not deal with the mystery of matrimony but with Christ’s mystery. This mystery the spouses should imitate. The husband does not save the wife. On the contrary, Christ saves the Church what puts up an uneven relationship. Mystery becomes thus an hermeneutical category, a concept that interprets and expresses simultaneously its new content. Through mystery an indication is offered about the validity of new realities, because the nuptial relationship between Christ and the Church just does not match the nuptial relationship between an husband and his wife. It’s its paradigm.

49 According to D. McILRAITH, *The reciprocal love between Christ and the Church in the Apocalypse*, Rome, Donal A McIlraith Publisher, 1989, 1.45.99.109.

CONCLUSION

Our triunitarian God is Himself a family not of three individual gods. He is family in the sense of a groupe of perichoretical relationships. By itself, this “family” category is an hermeneutical one. Therefore, other concepts or categories are needed, because God remains endless in his familiarity. No concept or metaphor is enough as a unique narrative space to tell God in His mystery. Every human language ends up in its analogy to be a little inadequate

“When metaphors, for example, become literalized to the point that they exclude other metaphors for the same subject or target domain, particularly in the case of God, they function as idols. Such has been said of the exclusive use of masculine imagery for God”⁵⁰.

This care, this attention was not overlooked in Israel’s theology. Rarely God gives permission on Israel to name Him, no nominate Him as “Father”. Rarely God presents Himself with that image. Nonetheless, the great human experiences of love keep up going still the best “transparency” to the triunitarian mystery of our loving God. The relationship between a husband and his wife, between father and son, between daughter and mother, between children and brothers still are places of God. Family, at the most high and noble sense, in its most fortunate practices, is language of God. Paul offered in Corinth a new sample of family rooted in Christ, a family in which man and woman could both build the house.

50 W. BROWN, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor*, Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2002, 10.