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A study of Biblical families from the perspective of family systems therapy

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A STUDY OF BIBLICAL FAMILIES
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF
FAMILY SYSTEMS THERAPY

by

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This study proposes that family systems therapy can prove useful in understanding Biblical families and thus add to our understanding of the Bible. Employing family systems therapy is appropriate because the Biblical narrative contains a comprehensive treatment of the human family. The Bible deals with family overall, many specific families as in the Jacob cycle, and ends with a vision of the family of God that exists already in the kingdom of heaven. Family systems theory is often useful to the pastor in understanding his/her own family, and the larger extended family of their church congregation. Thus, with new freshness family systems helps us grasp the truth that Biblical families are like the families we know, our own families. Such appreciation can provide useful material for preaching, teaching and pastoral counselling.

This study will begin by outlining some basic concepts of family systems therapy in the first chapter. It will follow by examining the Old Testament concept of family in Genesis 1-3 and analyse a number of representative families in the Old Testament such as Adam and Eve, Jacob, Moses, Ruth and Naomi, and David's families. Proceeding to the New Testament there will be a focus especially on issues of fusion, differentiation, and triangulation applying these concepts to Jesus, Paul, Peter and the Prodigal Son. The chapter on the New Testament will close by offering a suggestion about what the eschatological end of the family might be. Finally, this study points out limitations in the use of family systems therapy for Biblical interpretation, outlines possible pastoral applications, and discusses how far we can use Biblical models of family in support of the concept "traditional family values."

Chapter 1 - A Brief Outline of Family Systems Therapy

Family systems therapy was developed by Murray Bowen, Salvador Minuchin, Nathan Ackerman, Carl Whitaker, and others in the 1950's. Their work received its impetus from the insights of Gregory Bateson, who worked at the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, California. Vincent Foley (1989) defines family therapy "as an attempt to modify the relationships in a family to achieve harmony" (p. 435). It differs from the earlier psychodynamic therapies based on the discoveries of Freud in one important respect: whereas psychoanalysis treats people only as isolated individuals, family systems therapy sees the individual as part of a larger system or family. Psychoanalysis treats the "sick" individual in isolation, while family systems treats the dysfunctional system. Foley (1989) states, "In family therapy, the 'identified patient' is seen as but a symptom, and the system itself (the family) is viewed as the client" (p. 435).

It is not my purpose to provide an exhaustive documentation of all the clinical tools and methods available in family systems therapy. Such a project is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I will highlight a number of key concepts in family therapy, beginning with definitions of family and system. Then I will apply these concepts to examine how the Bible understands and describes the behaviour of families in the Old and New Testament. Again, providing a systems analysis of all the families in the Bible will not be possible. Instead, I will take only a representative sampling of Biblical families to illustrate how a family systems approach may be used in examining Biblical families. I will choose families and family situations that are described in sufficient detail to allow for meaningful analysis using family systems concepts. In

general, my approach to the Biblical text will look to the plain, grammatical meaning. I will employ other types of interpretation, such as literary-historical, only if they are critical to understanding the text. Thus, I will show how family systems therapy can be helpful in understanding Biblical families.

1. a. What is a Family?

The institution of family has been undergoing considerable upheaval in recent decades in the Western world. Partly in response to these changes, many experts have sought to modify or stretch the definition of family far beyond the traditional nuclear unit consisting of mother, father and their children. Individuals and groups have attempted to push the definition of family from a configuration of relationships based on ties of blood to include configurations based on choice. My thesis will use the definition of family employed by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in 1988. This agency defines the family as being: "a group of two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together" (Hartman, 1993, pp. 476, 477). Although the above definition will cover most of the types of families described in the Bible, I hope to illustrate that the Bible presents considerable variety in its various family groupings.

1. b. What is a System?

A variety of components make up a system but all systems have two things in common: 1. system components are interconnected, interdependent and affect each other, and 2. the interrelationships are stable over a period of time. Systems must have a level of homeostasis or they are simply random and chaotic. Systems can be open or closed. A body of water such as Lake Ontario is an *open system* because water flows into the lake and flows out. People travelling to work on a bus are a *closed system*, because while the bus is in motion no can one

get on or off. Families are generally open systems, though some families may attempt to close in on themselves and shut out the world. According to Foley (1989), families have three main characteristics: 1. wholeness; 2. relationship; 3. equifinality.

Wholeness means that the family system is more than the sum of its individual components or members. It also includes the ways in which they interact. Therapists gain a deeper understanding of an individual when they see how the individual acts in the presence of the rest of their family members. Relationship refers to the patterns of interaction between family members. Therapists look for what is going on between family members, rather than what is going on inside an individual. Equifinality refers to the self-perpetuating nature of systems. If we change how a system operates, then this change will remain unless something happens to alter it again. Thus, family therapists concentrate not on what happened in the past, but work to change what the family is doing now (Foley, 1989). This is not to say family therapy ignores the past. In fact, some therapists such as Murray Bowen analyse transgenerational family history, but in the main family systems is *now* oriented. If therapy can solve present-day problems, then the therapist may not even need to go into family history. Family systems is solution focused rather than content focused. Family systems therapy aims to aid families by helping them find healthier ways to interact.

Family Systems Concepts

Family therapy employs a number of concepts that are useful in examining the nature of all families. I think the following concepts will be especially useful in examining Biblical families. I will now present these concepts.

1. c. Triangles

According to Murray Bowen (1978), a configuration of interlocking emotional triangles is the basic building block of a family system and provides the key to understanding family dynamics. Triangles come into being because two-person, or dyadic, emotional systems are inherently unstable. Foley (1989) posits the following axiom: "Whenever the emotional balance between two people becomes too intense or distant, a third person or thing can be introduced into the system to restore equilibrium and give it stability" (p. 457). The existence of triangles helps explain why conflicted couple relationships come in with a "presenting problem." A third person, such as a troubled teenager, is presented to the therapist, by the couple, as the "problem." The therapist is then expected to "fix" the presenting problem and ignore the underlying tensions between the couple. Other things or persons can also become part of couple's emotional system such as school authorities, the police, substance abuse, an extramarital affair, overwork, or debt. The less emotionally mature the couple, the more intense and active will be the triangles in the family. Much of Murray Bowen's work involved triangles that extended over three generations of families. To aid in this work Bowen developed the genogram. The genogram is a multi-generational map of the family system and charts the relationships of family members over the generations. By employing genograms, Bowen provided his clients with insight as to how destructive patterns of behaviour were transmitted from generation to generation. Other therapists, such as the structuralist Salvador Minuchin, are more concerned with present-day triangles that exist between mother, father and various siblings. All family systems therapists, nevertheless, believe that the key to emotional health involves de-triangulating various family members from these self-defeating patterns of behaviour.

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One common triangle found in conflicted families is the victim-persecutor-rescuer triangle. It is touched off when one family member (the persecutor) attacks or criticizes another family member (the victim). A third family member (the rescuer) jumps in to help or rescue the victim. When a triangle like this is "hot" -- i.e., the members of the family have heavily invested their emotions in it -- then the three roles switch back and forth with bewildering rapidity. For example, mother (persecutor) tells the teenage daughter (victim) she is grounded until her room is cleaned. Father (rescuer) jumps in and takes the daughter's side. Mother cries that the husband never supports her. Mother has now become the victim and father the persecutor. Daughter comforts the mother, now the daughter is the rescuer and the father, ashamed and confused, beats a hasty retreat, becoming the victim. We can see another example when the police intervene in a domestic dispute and try to rescue one partner from an abuser. Once the fight is over, the abused person may seek to protect their abuser from prosecution. Or both partners, together, may turn on the police. In both cases the police feel like the victims. One common characteristic of triangles is that the roles change constantly, but that all members of the triangle play out these roles in a fixed and almost ritualistic manner. Family members act out the same tired drama endlessly, to the complete frustration of all concerned.

Finally, we should note that becoming triangled into rescuing another is not always a sign of dysfunction. It is not dysfunctional to rescue people who genuinely need help. This would include many individuals such as a drowning person, an assault victim, a terminally ill person, or a refugee. Persons exhibit dysfunction when they persistently rescue people who can solve their own problems. Dysfunction is evident when rescuing makes others dependent and unwilling to help themselves. The triangle is completed when the rescuer comes to resent this responsibility,

and thus feels victimized.

1. d. Fusion vs. Differentiation

A basic concept of family systems therapy is that of fusion versus differentiation. Murray Bowen described an imaginary "differentiation of self" scale. The scale of differentiation runs from zero to one hundred. Zero represents the completely undifferentiated self or no-self. The greater the degree of undifferentiation or no-self, the more the individual is fused emotionally with others in a common or collective self. Bowen believed some fusion is always present in any emotional relationship and reaches its climax in the emotional interdependency of marriage (Bowen, 1978). The differentiation of self scale is an attempt to assess the amount of basic self possessed by an individual. Basic self expresses who the person believes themselves to be and is not negotiable within a given relationship system. Basic self will not change by pressure or coercion, nor can it be seduced by praise or the need for approval. The basic self will only change from within itself in response to new knowledge or experience. Basic self is illustrated when the person uses a lot of "I" statements to affirm their fundamental beliefs and convictions. Along with the basic self Bowen posited a fluid, changeable level of self he termed the "pseudo-self." The pseudo-self consists of one's social persona, it is the front presented to society and is formed by the need to conform to social convention. Pseudo-self consists of beliefs others have taught but which the individual has not owned for themself. Individuals operate from the pseudo-self when they say the things they feel they must say and do things to receive the favour and approval of others. Bowen (1978) states *"The pseudo-self, acquired under the influence of the relationship system, is negotiable in the relationship system"* (p. 473). Pseudo-self can accept a plausible sounding theory one minute, depending on the emotional state of the individual and

change to another plausible sounding theory only a short time later. The pseudo-self is highly

prone to fusing with others in an emotional field.

According to Bowen (1978) those persons who are in the bottom half of the scale of

differentiation exhibit many of the following qualities:

> People in the lower half of the scale live in a "feeling" controlled world in which
> feelings and subjectivity are dominant over the objective reasoning process most of the
> time. They do not distinguish feeling from fact, and major life decisions are based on
> what "feels" right. Primary life goals are orientated around love, happiness, comfort and
> security; these goals come closest to fulfilment when relationships with others are in
> equilibrium. So much life energy goes into seeking love and approval, or attacking the
> other for not providing it, that there is little energy left for self-determined, goal-directed
> activity. They do not distinguish between "truth" and "fact," and the inner feeling state is
> the most accurate possible expression of truth. A sincere person is regarded as one who
> freely communicates the feeling process (pp. 473, 474).

Families with high degrees of fusion and thus low differentiation are also intensely

triangulated. Such families are difficult to leave physically and emotionally. Even if the children

of these families leave physically and move thousands of miles away, they remain triangulated

and emotionally fused with their families of origin. Members of families with low

differentiation find it difficult to separate their feelings from their thoughts, or to separate their

feelings from the feelings of those close to them. Their family life places the emphasis on "we"

rather than "I." They believe that to think or act independently of what their family believes is

unacceptable and may destroy their relationships. Early in his career Bowen (1978) termed

families with very low levels of differentiation an "undifferentiated family ego mass" (p. 476).

The opposite end of the scale, to which Bowen assigned the value one hundred,

represents the greatest degree of differentiation. Bowen (1978) describes highly differentiated

individuals in the following way:

> People in the upper half of the scale have an increasingly defined level of basic self and

less pseudo-self. Each person is more of an autonomous self: there is less emotional fusion in close relationships, less energy is needed to maintain self in the fusions, more energy is available for goal-directed activity, and more satisfaction is derived from directed activity . . . They are operationally clear about the difference between feeling and thinking, and it is as routine for them to make decisions on the basis of thinking as it is for low-level people to operate on feelings . . . The high-scale person is less reactive to praise or criticism and he has a more realistic evaluation of his own self in contrast to the low-level person whose evaluation of his own self is either far above or far below reality (pp. 474, 475).

Education, intelligence or an individual's place in the socioeconomic strata does not affect their level of differentiation. Although the differentiated person thinks or acts independently of his or her family, realizing that **this independence does not mean they have rebelled or cut their family out of their lives** is crucial. They are not simply a "loner" or a "rebel." In fact, the more a person rebels against their family values, the more likely they are motivated by a high rate of fusion, and the greater the unresolved emotional problems they are seeking to overcome. Highly differentiated persons retain independence but also remain sensitive and caring towards family. The person being differentiated, or defining oneself, has successfully resolved the various developmental crises associated with living in, and then leaving, one's family of origin. Thus, they depart their family freely and remain on good terms. Consequently, they feel comfortable in returning home for periodic visits because unresolved tensions are absent or minimal. Defining oneself or differentiating means to **separate but remain connected**. A family in which the members are well-differentiated can tolerate a great deal of differentness among its members but still maintains contact and communicates acceptance (Bowen, 1978).

One very significant finding made by Bowen was that most people marry partners at about their own level of differentiation. They even tend to socialize with people at their own level of differentiation (Bowen, 1978). Therefore, once someone has attained a given level of

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differentiation, they function in all their relationships from that level. Whether such individuals remain single, form a couple, start a family, or join an organization they operate from the level of differentiation they attained in their family of origin. Bowen believed that it is extremely difficult to move up on the differentiation scale. One is stuck with the level of differentiation one receives from one's family of origin. He states: "There are many life experiences that can raise or lower the *functioning* levels of self, but few that can change the basic level of differentiation acquired while people are still with their parental families. Unless there is some unusual circumstance, the basic level from their parental family is consolidated in a marriage, following which the only shift is a functional shift" (Bowen, 1978, p. 475).

Significant movement up the scale would, among other things, involve undergoing a process of de-triangulation from one's family of origin. Once an individual becomes cognizant of their family patterns, they can choose rationally to act in a different or more differentiated way. Conversely, high levels of pain, stress or suffering can cause one to regress or move down the scale of differentiation. Bowen believed most people were below sixty on his scale of differentiation. He did not believe anyone was a hundred.

Before leaving this topic, I would like to make two comments. First, Bowen has been criticized for too much emphasis on use of the intellect and rationality as a sign of mental health. Should people who are naturally intuitive or temperamentally passionate always be considered as low on the scale of differentiation? I would also contend that obedience to God's will may allow a person to move up on the scale of differentiation. I intend to show this, when discussing Biblical families, especially the family of Jesus. Conversely, disobedience to the will of God will cause one to move down on the scale of differentiation. I hope to demonstrate this with Adam

and Eve.

1. e. Boundaries

Boundaries are barriers, visible or invisible, beyond which we may or may not need special permission to pass. They mark a transition from one state or region to another. In his book *Families and Family Therapy* (1974) Salvador Minuchin defined boundaries in family subsystems as "the rules defining who participates and how" (p. 53). According to Minuchin (1974), "The function of boundaries is to protect the differentiation of the system" (p. 53). Proper boundaries allow each individual family member to grow, mature and maintain personal autonomy, and differentiate from other family members. For families to function well, they must maintain clear boundaries. Clear boundaries allow family members to perform assigned tasks and to enjoy appropriate levels of emotional/physical intimacy with other family members. Where families have diffuse boundaries, they become enmeshed. The members find it difficult to differentiate themselves from the family or family subsystems. Autonomy suffers and the members are too close. Or certain individuals become too close. A couple's marriage vows also establish a boundary around their relationship. When a couple is in conflict, or their marriage ceases to satisfy the partners, then the boundaries of the couple dyad may become diffuse or be broken. For example, one or both disaffected partners may form emotional alliances with their children. The mother may become too close with her son. She parentifies him to provide her with the emotional support her husband does not give her. Mother and son are then in an alliance against the father. Mother and son develop a fused relationship that, in time, may also become conflicted as the son seeks to regain some sense of differentiation. A husband alienated from his wife will sometimes enmesh or fuse with his daughter for the same reasons and with the same

negative results. The fusion of son to mother, and daughter to father, can make it exceedingly difficult for the children to leave home and start their own families. Even if they can move out such an arrangement may not be permanent. The adult children may live away until some crisis or setback brings them back. Fused relationships between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons are also common. These alliances, which underlie conflicted triangles, cause the various roles within the family to become confused.

Other types of boundary violations occur when the spouses have affairs, or form alliances with their own parents, or in cases of incest. Boundaries in families can also be overly rigid. Minuchin (1974) terms these families "disengaged" (p. 54). Rigidly disengaged families demand a great deal of loyalty from their members but they have difficulty in communicating and showing love and nurture towards their members. Disengaged families tend not to respond to problems and act as if they do not care. Members of disengaged families complain that the rest of the family does not validate their feelings. By contrast, when problems occur, enmeshed families tend to overreact and the problem affects everyone. They care "too much." The members of enmeshed families frequently have trouble sorting their own feelings out from the feelings of other family members. Most families are in the mid-range, with relatively clear boundaries, most of the time.

Of course the concept of boundaries is not unique to family systems therapy. Other types of therapy and different disciplines employ it as well. As far as family systems is concerned, however, an understanding of clear boundaries is essential to the healthy functioning of a family or a couple.

1. f. Family Projection Process

Bowen (1978) describes the family projection process as one "by which parents project part of their immaturity to one or more children" (p. 477). The child who receives the projection of the parents' immaturity becomes the "problem" member of the family, or the "identified patient." An example of this scenario may occur when conflict flares between husband and wife. The father begins to distance himself from the rest of the family. Then one or more of the children will begin to "act out," or develop symptoms of emotional distress. The disturbed child does this to draw the father back into the emotional system of the family and thus maintain the homeostasis of the family system. Other family members then see the disturbed child as the "identified patient"-- or the one with the problem. In fact, the parents have projected their stress onto the child, diverting attention from their own problems, thereby maintaining family homeostasis. Family therapy seeks to resolve the problem in the couple subsystem, so that the child no longer needs to "act out" to maintain family homeostasis. Bowen (1978) observes that "The child who is the object of the projection is the one most emotionally involved with the parents, and ends up with a lower level of differentiation of self" (p. 477).

1. g. Multi-generational Transmission Process

Multi-generational transmission process refers to the fact that emotional disturbances and mental disorders run in families, generation after generation. Sometimes transgenerational dysfunction is due to genetic factors, as in schizophrenia. Dysfunction such alcoholism, anxiety, some types of depression, divorce, emotional, physical and sexual abuse, low self-esteem, family conflict and break-up, however, can sometimes be transmitted via family alliances and transgenerational triangles. This is not to deny a biological or genetic component in the

aforementioned dysfunction. Rather, it is to state that their genesis and development seem more closely tied to emotional factors or external traumas than to genetic factors. Thus, we can see multi-generational transmission as the psychotherapeutic equivalent of the Biblical statement concerning God, "You show steadfast love to the thousandth generation, but repay the guilt of the parents into the laps of their children after them" (Jer. 32:18, see also Ex. 20:5,6). In other words, the sins of the parents are passed down through the generations. McGoldrick and Gerson (1985) document in their book *Genograms in Family Assessment* how not only is dysfunction and failure transmitted across generations, but so are health and success. Genogram studies reveal families where the men consistently marry women who are sick and need a great deal of care; women who marry alcoholics generation after generation; families where second-borns marry other second-borns, daughters who have successful careers in medicine. These are universal patterns and cut across all social classes. Bowen (1978) describes this phenomenon as "the pattern that develops over multiple generations as children emerge from the parental family with higher, equal, or lower basic levels of differentiation than the parents" (p. 477).

The phenomenon of multi-generational transmission may partly stem from deep family loyalties. Boszormenyi-Nagy (1973) believes that "The concept of loyalty is fundamental to the understanding of the ethics, i.e., the deeper relational structure of families and other social groups" (p. 39). He understands family loyalty as not just an external visible loyalty but also as consisting of invisible ties. For Nagy these invisible ties are ontic, not simply feeling or affect. The invisible ties begin when the child is but an infant and completely dependent for life on the parent. Parenthood, even when incompetent, creates an obligation in the child to the parent that is too great ever to repay. Countless other nurturing actions reinforce this

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fundamental reality that then further obligate and bind the child to its parents. The bond of loyalty extends not just to the parents but also the values of one's family or group (e.g., ethnic or religious). Though grown-up children may leave their parents and move thousands of kilometres away, unresolved loyalty conflicts can linger all their lives. These can be seen, for instance when couples from different religious or cultural backgrounds marry. Originally, the young couple may have been partly attracted to someone who was from a different culture or religion as a way of escaping the dominance of their families. Once they are married, however, particularly if they have children, they frequently find it difficult to resolve the conflicted loyalties they feel between the traditions of their family of origin and the new family formed with their spouse. Should the children be baptized, circumcised or neither? Moving thousands of miles away from their families cannot resolve these loyalties, since the couple will take these invisible ties of loyalty with them to the ends of the earth.

McGoldrick and Gerson (1985) have noted how loyalty issues may play a role when subsequent generations undergo significant transitional life events (marriage, accidents, suicides, deaths, divorce, births) on the same anniversary dates as parents. Actor Margaux Hemingway committed suicide on the same day as her famous grandfather, Ernest Hemingway took his life. Family loyalty would have dictated that she commit suicide on the same date as Ernest. Many deaths in the extended Hemingway family have been the result of suicide. To give a personal example: my mother had a fused relationship with my grandmother. My grandmother died at age sixty-two after minor surgery. My mother died at age sixty-two after complications due to minor surgery. Perhaps my mother's untimely death was partly the result of the deep loyalty she felt for her own mother. McGoldrick and Gerson document many deaths and suicides that occur

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on the anniversaries of the deaths and suicides of other family members. While it is impossible to confirm absolutely a causal link, genograms do reveal intriguing family patterns. Boszormenyi-Nagy believes this phenomenon, and other types of patterns, may be the result of invisible ties of family loyalty.

1. h. Birth Order

According to Richardson (1987), birth order in the sibling constellation can be a useful means of understanding why individuals adopt a particular role in their family of origin, and the roles they choose later in life. For example, oldest children tend to assume parental responsibilities and accept leadership positions. Oldest children usually identify more with the parents and work to preserve the status quo, or the traditions of the family or group. More than half of the presidents of the U.S. have been oldest male children, while 21 of 23 American astronauts were oldest or only children. An oldest male child's best match in marriage is a youngest sister with older brothers. His worst match is an oldest sister, since they are likely to have "king" and "queen" battles. An oldest sister is similar to an oldest male child. Her best match in marriage is a youngest brother of older sisters, since he would be open to her mothering and willing to accept her leadership. A middle child is caught in the middle. They must compete not only with the oldest, but also the baby in the family, who frequently gets a great deal of attention and nurture. His or her best match in marriage can be a youngest or oldest, since middles share many characteristics of the youngest and the oldest. Youngest children tend to be the "babies" all their lives. They are usually more easy going and not as successful in life as an oldest. They look to others to decide for them. The youngest is more spontaneous and usually quite creative. If they attain to leadership, their leadership style is less formal and not

authoritarian; they are popular with subordinates. Their best match in marriage is an oldest, but they frequently end up rebelling against the authority of their spouse all their lives (Richardson, 1987).

. Although these findings are useful, they are not written in stone. A number of factors can modify the role one takes up in one's family. For example, if the first-born in a family dies, then the family frequently recruits the second-born to replace the deceased first-born. Thus a second-born can become the recipient of all the hopes and expectations of a first-born, should his or her older sibling die. If a number of deaths, stillbirths, or miscarriages precede the birth of a child, the parents become very protective of their surviving child. He or she may develop a sense of specialness, even more intense than what normally falls on a first-born or only child. If a youngest boy is born into a family of older sisters, he may indeed grow up to be a baby who wants a woman to look after him all his life. However, if a youngest boy is born into a family of older brothers, then sibling rivalry may make him combative, rebellious, and resentful all his life. Character development may also be influenced by whether or not the relationships among siblings were nurturing or combative, male or female, distant or close. Age differences also can be a critical factor. If a youngest is say, fifteen years younger than his or her next oldest sibling, the youngest may grow up with many characteristics of an only child (Richardson, 1987). Birth order and style of nurturing seem to have affected a number of Biblical characters and the roles that they played.

Having completed our brief outline of family systems therapy, we will now apply these concepts to study family and families in the Bible.

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1.i. Literature Survey

A search of the CD-ROM catalogue revealed no titles of books or articles that employed a study of Biblical families from a family systems perspective. This may not be surprising, upon some reflection. Family systems therapy is a relative latecomer within the discipline of psychotherapy as compared to psychoanalysis. Biblical scholars may hesitate to employ family systems concepts as a hermeneutical tool because they may not know of them, lack sufficient expertise to employ them, or fear such concepts may be reductionistic. The lack of articles from the psychotherapeutic community may partly be related to a bias against religion. Except for marriage and family therapists, many mental health professionals have lower rates than the general population when it comes to belief in God and religious practice (Koenig, Larson, Weaver, 1997). Even when mental health professionals are involved with religion, their involvement is more likely to be in the direction of non-traditional religious groups or practices (Koenig, Larson, Weaver, 1997). In spite of periodic attempts to bridge the chasm, the fields of Biblical criticism and mental health remain as "two solitudes."

Chapter 2 - Families in the Old Testament

2. a. Family Before the Fall (Genesis 1, 2)

A concept employed by family systems that we first encounter in the Bible is that of **boundaries**: "God *separated* the light from the darkness" (Gen. 1:4). The Genesis narrative builds the concept of boundaries or separation into the very structure of reality: "So God made the dome and *separated* the waters" (v.7): "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to *separate* the day from the night" (v.14). (italics added). When God creates man, the man is separate from the other creatures in that no suitable helper as his partner (2:18) is to be found for him. A boundary exists between the man and the animals.

The man or, in Hebrew *adam*, is alone. God creates a helper/partner suitable for him. This second creation story tells us that God causes a deep sleep to fall over the man. Then God fashions woman from a rib of Adam's own body. Thus the barrier of boundary between human and animal is overcome, for man and woman are of the same flesh (2:22,23). Since man and woman are of the same flesh, a boundary now exists around their relationship into which no other may enter: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh" (2:24). According to Genesis, the only appropriate physical uniting for humans is between husband and wife. A boundary exists around this relationship that excludes other humans as well as animals. Interestingly, Genesis 2:24 describes the male as leaving his family of origin but not the female. Genesis may imply that the woman will remain connected with her family, perhaps especially with the female members, while the man will be seperated from his family of origin by the uniting with his wife. By stating that the "man leaves his father

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and mother and clings to his wife," (2:24), we see that from the earliest creation the Bible tends to characterize male by separation, and female by connection. Linguist Deborah Tannen (1990) reflects this theme of male/separation and female/connectedness when she states: "Though all humans need both intimacy and independence, women tend to focus on the first and men on the second. It is as if their life blood ran in different directions"(p. 26). By having the man do the leaving to accomplish the cleaving, Genesis describes the male as the initiator in that the man moves toward the woman while she waits for him to unite with her.

In the first creation account, the author of Genesis tells us that "in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them." This would imply, first that *adam* should be understood in a generic sense. Humanity, or humankind consists of male and female. Both genders must be present for *"adam"* to be truly human. That God created humanity in his image, and that humanity includes both male and female, means that male and female together reflect the image of God, not separately. Again God, through creating woman out of the man (male)'s flesh and in the divine image, overcomes the boundary between male and female.

When God creates woman, the second creation story, as translated by the NRSV, tells us that God's purpose in creating woman is that she be "a helper as his partner" to *adam* (2:18). William Harper (1885/1978) translates the Hebrew word *kenegedo*, which describes the relationship between the man and the woman, as meaning literally "as-over-against-him" (p. 87). However we choose to understand what Genesis means here, it clearly implies that before the fall, the relationship between male and female was one of complementarity. Male and female were peers. Here in Eden we do not see the domination and subjugation of female by male that comes after the fall.

In the first three chapters of Genesis we find no use of the word family. There is some indication in the first creation story that the first male and female would have children (Gen. 1:28) but they do not begin their family before the expulsion. The only human relationship described is that of couple, a male and a female, who live together in harmony and as peers. At this point the instability inherent in the couple bond described by Bowen is not operative. Before the fall, the couple have all they need for perfect happiness without having to triangle in God, the serpent, or their children.

Family systems therapy would recognize here much that is healthy in the couple relationship between Adam and Eve. Though Adam may have some precedence by virtue of being created first, Eve is his peer and not a subordinate. Adam is not a boss and Eve not an employee, they work together tending the garden. This working relationship would indicate both members of the couple dyad are relatively equal. At this point they are maintaining the proper boundaries that are essential to a healthy couple relationship. Their level of differentiation is good. They are one flesh and yet separate individuals. Their individuality can be seen in the fall (3:1-6). Eve is alone and separate from Adam when tempted by the serpent. She makes her own decision to eat the fruit, and so does Adam.

2. b. Family After the Fall (Genesis 3)

In Gen 2:15-17 God gives the first couple a commandment: "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (2:17). Thus God places a boundary around the tree beyond which the man and woman may not pass. The boundaries that God sets for Adam and Eve are good in that the Creator institutes these limits for their blessing and protection. The commandment to observe a boundary or limit

contained in 2:17 is a reasonable limit designed to protect them from harm. It is similar to the boundary set by a parent when it instructs a child not to touch a hot burner or jump off a roof. Thus, God designs limits for the couple to nurture them, to limit harm, rather than to limit the full development of their humanity.

When we think of boundaries in terms of creation we realize that boundaries, or limits, are intrinsic to creation and therefore good. God uses boundaries to cause creation to come into existence. The establishment of boundaries (e.g., the separation between night and day) allows unique objects and phenomenon to come into, and maintain, their existence. Without boundaries creation would have remained as one dark, unformed, undifferentiated, amorphous mass.

When the first couple break the boundary, it signals that they are not willing to live within the reasonable limits prescribed to them by God. Humans will not accept God as God, or themselves as creatures. They want to be gods in their own right. Ironically, their disobedience leads to a separation or boundary between them and their creator. Previous to the fall the couple enjoy a direct relationship with God. They speak directly to God as one speaks to a good friend. The only boundary is the one between creator and creature. Now arises a new and terrible boundary, the chasm of sin and death. The humans fall out of grace and life, into sin and death. The direct relationship between God and humanity now becomes an indirect relationship. Humans no longer speak to God. They speak about God, in the third person. Theology and religion will soon arise to replace direct relationship. Through disobedience the couple aspire to be more than what they are, and tragically become less than what they were. Violating the boundary around the tree is to reject God's sovereignty over creation, and to reject God the source of all life and author of creation.

Even though the couple bond is intrinsically unstable, Genesis does not describe any conflicted triangulation prior to the fall. Only after God confronts the two with their sin do conflicted triangles, with their dreary cycle of blaming and victimizing, make their appearance. Thus conflicted triangulation becomes part of the fallen creation. We see this when God appears before the couple and asks them how they came to know they were naked. The man immediately victimizes the woman by blaming her for giving him the fruit to eat. He blames her directly -- "she gave me some fruit"-- and God indirectly -- "the woman which *you gave me*" (italics added) (Gen. 3:12). Thus, the man triangulates the woman into his conflict with God. The woman, for her part, triangles in the serpent by blaming the tempter -- "the serpent tricked me and I ate" (v. 13). God breaks up the human attempt at triangulation by his wise, just and compassionate response. In the future, however, Adam and Eve and their descendants will be unable to handle triangulation with anything near the justice, compassion and wisdom of God. After the fall conflictual triangulation blights human relations and causes great emotional suffering.

After the fall the couple unite physically (Gen. 4:1) and become a family with the birth of their children, Cain and Abel. Pregnancy and child rearing take place in the world of the fall and not the world of innocence. Adam and Eve will not raise their children in the true family home of Eden, but in the land of exile, a wilderness where thorns and thistles infest the ground (3:18). Disobedience and broken boundaries now mark family life as they do all of creation. Therefore, family becomes an institution where the potential for lawlessness and the breaking of boundaries will be always be present. Biblical families, indeed families everywhere, will see their boundaries violated constantly through adultery, incest and rape. Families, and human culture in

general, develop in a context of broken boundaries since they come into being in a fallen world. An admixture of good and evil will mark all of family and human culture. Multi-generational transmission of good and evil patterns will characterize the universal human genogram.

A lack of parental responsibility will also, henceforth, characterize family life. When God confronts Adam and Eve with their sin, neither creature is willing to accept responsibility for eating the forbidden fruit. Eve blames the serpent for tricking her (Gen. 3:13), while Adam blames the woman directly, for giving him the fruit, and God indirectly, for giving him the woman (Gen. 3:12). Blaming and not accepting personal responsibility will figure prominently in future family conflicts.

Before the fall Adam and Eve conduct their affairs based on informal, personal relationships. There is no need for law because there is no sin or lawbreaking. Lawbreaking, however, becomes all too common after the fall. Increasingly, relationships become rigid and governed by laws enforced by power. A legal system becomes necessary because human beings break boundaries repeatedly and are lawless or sinful. Human rebelliousness will eventually lead to codifying the principle of boundaries in the law of Moses. The Mosaic law will enshrine the maintenance of boundaries in laws regulating every aspect of human activity such as sexual relations (Lev. 18), the separation of Israel from other nations (Lev. 18:24-30), and the holy and profane (Lev. 19 - 21). Principles of boundary also lead to laws regarding property rights, in that no one is allowed to steal.

The relationship between male and female undergoes a disastrous turn for the worse. Adam and Eve are no longer just the first man and woman, they now become the archetypal, conflicted couple. Pain curses woman in childbirth. Pain becomes ontic to the family. Woman

develops a pseudo-self: she will desire her husband and he will rule over her (Gen. 3:15, 16). Woman becomes the subordinate, rather than the peer of man. Man loses his helpful partner and instead becomes the master of a resentful subordinate (3:16). Woman will desire man. Yet she will also deeply resent her subordination and dependence on man, because her inner basic self cries out that such subordination and dependence is not authentic. Woman becomes marginalized. In the first three chapters of the creation saga, she is a major player. Now, in subsequent chapters, men will take centre stage, driving women to the fringes. Much conflict, bitterness and injustice will afflict relations between the genders.

Difficult, backbreaking, mindless labour curses man and absorbs all his time (Gen. 3:17-19). Whereas man and woman once had lots of time to spend with each other, the man will move away from his partner. Before the fall man defines himself through separation, but he did so to join to his wife (2:24). Now the burden of unending toil will greatly accentuate his tendency toward separateness. Man develops a pseudo-self which demands emotional distance from woman and the requirement that he always be strong and dominant. Pseudo-self will demand that the man deny any weakness and/or need for intimacy. Pseudo-self will war with basic self which cries out for intimacy and support. Man will share in the marginalization of woman not just by sharing in a common fallen humanity, but by the affliction of poverty and dehumanizing work. Man will spend most of his time in work, abandoning woman emotionally and physically. The woman then will respond to the man's movement away by desiring him and seeking to get closer for greater intimacy -- "your desire shall be for your husband." Both male and female become less differentiated: the woman loses some of her self because she desires her husband and becomes more dependent; the man loses self, because his independence comes at the cost of

losing intimacy with his wife.

Herein family therapy would recognize the roots of modern intimacy conflicts: one partner in a relationship, usually the female, wants to be closer while the other partner, usually the male, wants more distance. The saying that "women love men, men love work" can easily apply here. Further, much dysfunction in modern families occurs because father is emotionally distant from his spouse and children. He prefers to spend it working or in recreation with other males. One strategy of family systems therapy is to have the husband play a greater role in the nurturing of the children, and to connect more consistently to the emotional life of the family.

The fact that Genesis describes man as the initiator in his union with Eve also undergoes distortion as a result of the fall. Taking initiative will have the potential for degenerating into violence and aggression. Man will not only dominate the person who once was his peer; he will commit violence against her and the rest of the family. In time, this violence will spread to other members of society and blossom into periodic warfare.

The family develops after the rebellion of Adam and Eve. Its dysfunction results from human sin and the curse of God. As with all creation, however, the family will also be the theatre of God's grace and be subject to the creator's redemptive providence. Even as the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve will war with each other, sin and grace will war within the family. God's ultimate purpose will be to redeem the family and bless it (Gen. 12:1- 3).

2. c. Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel: Fusion and Distance (Genesis 4)

Most Biblical scholars would agree that Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel were not persons who lived in history (Brueggeman, 1982) but mythical archetypes employed by the authors of both the first and second creation accounts of Genesis. They present the Hebrew theological

perspective on how things came to be for human beings, why they are the way they are, and what God is doing about it all. What is fascinating about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, from a family systems perspective, is not just that they are archetypal individuals but the archetypal dysfunctional family. The parents could be revealing conflict at the birth of Cain, their first born son, when Eve comments, "I have produced a man with the help of the Lord"(Gen. 4:1). In this statement she gives no credit to Adam but only to God. Adam is thus distanced from the mother-child dyad. Although Adam dominates Eve as a result of the curse, Eve might be seeking to create an ally in her oldest son. Eve's second-born son is Abel and again Adam seems remote from the process. At the beginning of creation the man names all the creatures as a sign of his stewardship over the earth (2:19,20). At the creation of his partner, he bestows a name, *ishah* or woman, as a sign of their intimate relationship (2:23). Here Adam is so distant from his family he does not even name his children. Cain's loyalties seem divided: on the one hand, he is the closest to his mother because he is the one who was given to her by the Lord; on the other hand, he follows the occupation of his father by tilling the ground (3:17-19; cf. 4:2).

The family of Cain and Abel seems distant and non-nurturing. Eve, however, may be in an alliance with Cain against Adam, and some mother-son fusion could be present. There are hints that Adam and Eve are in conflict with each other. Perhaps each is still blaming the other for their expulsion from paradise. This conflict soon poisons the relationship between their children. Genesis tells us that the conflict between Cain and Abel develops because God prefers the sacrifice of Abel to the sacrifice of Cain (4:4-8). When Cain is reeling from pain and anger because God rejects his sacrifice, there is no one in his family with whom he can share his feelings. Cain receives no comfort or counsel from any member of his family. Both parents seem

to have little contact with their two sons. Only God attempts to address the feelings of Cain (4:6,7). Perhaps due to a lack of nurture, Cain acts out and becomes the "identified patient" in his family. He does this by murdering his younger brother in cold blood. In his lashing out, we may wonder if Cain is somehow reflecting conflict in the relationship between Adam and Eve. When Cain kills Abel, the parents are absent. They seem to have no reaction to the death of their child and do nothing in response. The only "person" who takes action is God, who punishes Cain for the murder of Abel. When children in troubled families act out, some parents do nothing. If the behaviour of the children is sufficiently antisocial, then outside institutions, such as school authorities, social agencies, police, or Childrens' Aid are triangled in. It is the outside institutions which take the role of parents because the real parents are not being responsible. Adam and Eve do not take responsibility for their children, just as they refused to take responsibility for eating the forbidden fruit. God is the sole responsible moral force present. God then must enter the triangle as an outside moral force, to restore order or moral balance to the situation (4:9-16). God's entry is not a sign of dysfunction, but an act necessary to redress injustice.

Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel may be a mythological family but they exhibit many symptoms of a clinically troubled family: conflict in the couple subsystem, distant father and non-nurturing mother, possible mother-son fusion, lack of parental responsibility, overly rigid boundaries between father and everyone else, family violence, an identified patient. All these dysfunctions will pass to the next generation. Genesis tells us that after the death of Abel, Eve had another son whom she named Seth (4:25). When a family loses a child, they will frequently have another child to replace the one lost, so the family feels complete. Seth, Genesis states, was in the likeness and image of Adam (5:3). Although Adam is created in God's image, the fact that

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Seth is created in the image of Adam means Seth, and those born in subsequent generations, will reflect the image of God less and less in each generation. Sin and evil will multiply and infect the following generations. Only the grace of God operating among the children of Adam will have the power to redeem them and propagate goodness. Thus multi-generational transmission of family dysfunction is a concept in family systems therapy, yet its reality was well known by the author(s) of Genesis.

2. d. The Families of Noah and Lot: Broken Boundaries (Genesis 9:18-28 and 19:30-38)

After the great flood Genesis tells us that Noah plants a vineyard, makes wine, and gets drunk (Gen. 9:20-28). In his drunkenness, Noah lies naked in his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, sees the nakedness of his father Noah and calls his two older brothers, Shem and Japheth. These two take a garment and walk into their father's tent backwards in order not to see their father's nakedness. Then they cover up the drunken, sleeping Noah. A cryptic verse follows: "When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son *had done to him . . . .* " (italics added) (9:24). This verse could mean that Noah realizes that his youngest son has somehow sexually abused him, or simply that Ham, the future father of Canaan (v.27), has not treated his father with respect while Noah slept drunk and naked. In any case Ham dishonours his father (Brueggman, 1982). Following his return to sobriety, Noah blesses the older sons Japtheth and Shem. Then he curses Canaan the son of Ham, perhaps so that Ham will suffer at the hands of his son even as Noah suffered at the hands of Ham. Thus Noah's curse would be introducing the poison of intergenerational conflict. Family systems therapy has noted that if children have unresolved conflict with their parents, when the children grow up, they in turn have unresolved conflict with their own children. The conflicts will continue on for generations.

The Biblical commandment in the Decalogue to honour one's parents (Ex. 20:12) could also be seen as an antidote for the poison of intergenerational conflict, by breaking the cycle of conflict.

A family systems perspective would note that Ham transgresses the boundary between child and parent through his actions, while his older brothers respect this boundary. Perhaps Ham has a conflicted relationship with his older brothers. This might partly explain why he acts in a spiteful and rebellious manner. Two other factors seem salient: first the mother is absent, and second there is abuse of alcohol. The strong presence of the mother could have formed a buffer between Noah and his sons, and strengthened the boundary between the parent and child subsystem. When incest occurs in a family, alcohol abuse frequently accompanies an "absent" mother. Her own substance abuse, or the violence of an abusive husband, usually causes her absence. The presence of diffuse boundaries would mean Noah's family seems enmeshed, whereas the family of Adam and Eve are more rigidly disengaged. Considering that God chooses Noah to build the ark because he is the most righteous man of his generation (6:8), Noah's actions indicate the human family is in serious trouble.

Genesis 10 gives the names of the descendants of the sons of Noah. Ham engenders the nation of the Canaanites (Gen. 9:22). The Old Testament consistently portrays the Canaanites as perverted idolaters, whom the Israelites must shun. If Israelites associate with Canaanites there is a great risk the Canaanites will seduce the people of God into idolatry and immorality. God's wrath upon sin would then destroy the nation of Israel. Thus, Genesis asserts that some peoples are unusually immoral because they spring from a wicked ancestor. The sin of parents creates a legacy that damages and corrupts their descendants. The patterns seen in genograms and the phenomenon of multi-generational transmission provide some support for this idea. None of us

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lives in isolation, we all have an impact for good or ill on those who follow. By virtue of our common humanity we are all part of each other and all those whoever lived. It is possible to document how, in some cases, family patterns originating in the actions of individuals, or in response to historic traumas, have been transmitted within a family for hundreds of years. For example, the fact that one is born into a family where alcohol has been a problem can leave a legacy of shame, keeping secrets, violence, abuse and a tendency to alcoholism on the part of subsequent generations. Being born into a royal family can mean the children are, among other things, heirs to deeply ingrained patterns of marital infidelity and the custom of keeping mistresses. Mafia families produce criminals, generation after generation. Sociologists have long been aware of the legacy that centuries of oppression and the Great Potato Famine have had on the modern Irish, centuries of slavery on Afro-Americans, anti-Semitism on Jews, the Highland clearances on the Scots. Sometimes individual family patterns can be traced if the families involved have held a prominent place in history. In most cases, though, the facts have been lost because either no records were kept or there was no one left to remember. A family systems perspective does not preclude the idea that people can choose a different path from the one given them by the legacy of their family history. People can choose to act in a healthier, more ethical fashion than their antecedents. The story of Ruth is a prime example of how an individual can rise above an immoral family legacy by obedience to the grace and calling of God. Therapists, however, know from clinical experience how difficult escaping from multi-generational transmission is for clients. A reality echoed by the Reformed doctrines of original sin as summarized in the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1648):

> The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consisteth in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of that righteousness wherein he was created, and the corruption of his

nature, whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually; which is commonly called Original Sin, and from which do proceed all actual transgressions (pp. 55, 56).

Genesis 10 also contains the idea that nations spring originally from the family of a common ancestor. Each of Noah's three sons become the ancestor of all the various peoples of the Near East. Similarly, Jacob has twelve sons, who in turn engender the twelve tribes of Israel, which then become the nation of Israel. Genesis 10 seems to say that nations are actually large, extended families. Therefore, to some extent, what we say concerning families is applicable to nations. This concept stretches the definition of the family we employed earlier, and will be important when we consider the eschatology of the family in our concluding chapter.

Broken or diffuse boundaries also make for an enmeshed family system in the story of Lot and his daughters. The story is found in Gen. 19:30-36. Although Lot escapes from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, his wife looks back. According to the narrative, Lot sees her turn into a pillar of salt. Crushed with despair at the loss of his wife, Lot gives up on life and dwells in a remote cave with his two daughters. The daughters despair as well, for Lot neglects to find them husbands and they fear they will die childless. Their solution is to get their father drunk and sleep with him. This they do and become pregnant. The child of the one daughter becomes the ancestor of the Moabites, the child of the other becomes the ancestor of the Ammonites. Israelites despise both the Ammonites and the Moabites. There is constant warfare between Israel and these two peoples (Dt. 23:3; Jdg. 11:4-35; I Kings 11:1-3). This story purports to explain that the evil of these two peoples stems from the sinfulness of their origin.

Lot's family shares two characteristics in common with the family of Noah: the absence of the mother and the presence of alcohol. Again the absence of mother could have served to

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strengthen the boundary between the parent and the child. Lot's abdication of his parental responsibilities begins with the loss of his wife. Lot's overindulgence in alcohol compounds his evasion of responsibility for maintaining the parent-child boundary and being a responsible father. His withdrawal from society and inability to cope with life after the loss of his wife would indicate he is greatly dependent upon her. This story provides a variation on the curse of Gen. 3: 16; though man will rule over woman, some men will become very emotionally needy and dependent on their wives. These needy men will literally be unable to live without their wives. The two daughters may then have responded to the emotional neediness of their father by taking their mother's place. They will "take care" of the father because the mother is not present. The roles of the daughters then become confused and dualized: the daughters, who are children, become parentified in that they become the mothers and wives of Lot. The boundaries between parent and children are violated to such an extreme that incest with two resultant pregnancies follows. The cases of both Lot and Noah reveal men who are emotionally needy and cannot function as fathers without their wives. Men must dominate not because they are strong, but because they are cursed.

Another type of boundary is broken in the story of Lamech (Gen. 4:19). When Lamech takes two wives, polygamy enters the world. Polygamy, though widely practised in the Old Testament and throughout human history, is a clear violation of the boundary that exists around marriage. A man who would cling must cling to his wife, not wives (Gen.2:24). On the issue of polygamy, Genesis 2:24 reminds us that the Bible does not always approve of what it records.

2. e. Abraham and Isaac: Like Father, Like Son (Genesis 12, 20, 26)

In Genesis 12:10-20 Abraham and Sarah (at this point Abram and Sarai) sojourn in Egypt to escape a major famine. While in Egypt, Abraham allows Sarah to become part of the harem of the Pharaoh of Egypt. Abraham does this out of fear that the Egyptians will kill him to get Sarah. In addition, Abraham receives considerable benefit from the Pharaoh because he has allowed Sarah, whom he told Pharaoh was his sister, to sleep with Pharaoh. God eventually rebukes Abraham and he leaves Egypt. Incredibly, Abraham does this again with another king, Abimelech (Gen. 20), just before Sarah becomes pregnant with Isaac. In ancient times kings were considered super-potent males. Their potency was even supposed to be able to help the fertility of the kingdom. Thus, these two stories indicate the absolute barrenness of Sarah. Even two great kings are unable to impregnate her! Genesis can now present her pregnancy with Isaac as a true miracle and avow Isaac as the promised gift of God. Certain types of dysfunction run in families, and the family of Abraham is no exception. In Gen. 26 we find that Isaac, the son of Abraham, must sojourn with another Abimelech to escape a famine. Just as his father before him, Isaac allows Abimelech to take his wife Rebekah into Abimelech's harem. The author of Genesis has the same purpose as before -- to show that Rebekah was barren and could only give birth to Jacob and Esau with the help of God (Gen. 25: 21). From a family systems perspective, Isaac is repeating his father's pattern due to multi-generational transmission and family loyalty. Another family pattern among the Patriarchs is seen in that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob marry women who are barren or find it difficult to conceive (Sarah, 11:30; Rebekah, 25:21 and Rachel, 29:31).

We should not leave the story of Abraham and Isaac without commenting on Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac (Gen.22:1-14). God commands Abraham to sacrifice his only son

Isaac, as a means of testing the faith of Abraham. Did Abraham worship God for the sake of God alone, or because God gives him good things? The sacrifice of Isaac would reveal the true nature of Abraham's faith. Happily for all concerned, Abraham passes the test and God stops the sacrifice at the last moment. In this story we learn that the authority of God is supreme over the authority of the parents. Because Abraham must obey God regarding the upbringing of Isaac, Isaac learns that his father is under the authority of God. Abraham worships God and not himself. Thus, Abraham is not god to his children. Parenthood is a trust in which parents are stewards and not owners of their children. Parents are responsible to God for how they raise their children. Isaac and all children belong ultimately to God and not to their parents. Relativizing the authority of parents means parents may not abuse their children, sacrifice them, or treat them as slaves. Although parents are to be obeyed and loved by children, the parents do not have absolute power over their children. All persons, parents and children, must answer in the final analysis to God. For good reason the commandment in the Decalogue is to **honour** parents but to **worship** God (Ex. 20:12). This relativizing of the authority of parents creates the basis for clear boundaries between parents and children, limits fusion, and encourages differentiation of children from parents. Finally, the fact that Abraham involved Isaac so intimately in the practice of his religion created strong loyalty in Isaac toward the religion of his father. Among the descendants of Abraham, religion would pass down from father to son. This is different from many cultures, especially our own, where religious values are the province of the mother. Sarah plays no role in the religious initiation of Isaac. Henceforth, the God of the covenant will frequently identify himself as "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

2. f. Jacob and Esau: The Battle of Birth Order (Genesis 25:19-33)

The story of Jacob and Esau is the tale of two brothers who are rivals for their father's estate and his blessing. Yet it is also the story of two sisters, Rachel and Leah, who battle for preeminence.

In the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah there is some indication that Rebekah takes over the role of Isaac's mother, for Genesis makes a point of mentioning that when Isaac marries Rebekah, "Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (Gen.24:67). Being the very special child of promise for which Sarah and Abraham had waited for twenty-five years would have formed Isaac's need to be cared for. Sarah would have been exceedingly protective of her only son, especially after Abraham nearly sacrificed him on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22:1-14). Thus, Isaac was used to being cared for, particularly by women, and Rebekah to being a care giver (Gen. 24:15-21).

Jacob and Esau are the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. When Rebekah becomes pregnant God tells her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger"(Gen. 25:23). Esau is born first. Jacob comes directly after him, grasping at Esau's heel (Gen. 25:24-26). "To grasp at the heel" means figuratively "he deceives" (The NIV Study Bible, 1985, p. 44. See also Gen. 27:35,36). Jacob is true to his name. Though born at the same time, these two brothers are not identical twins and are in fact quite different. Red hair covers the body of Esau. His name means the "hairy one." Esau becomes a hunter. He enjoys a close relationship with his father Isaac, because Isaac enjoys the wild game that Esau catches (25:27). (Since Abraham, Esau's grandfather, had enough wealth to put 318 men of military age into the field [Gen.14:14], it is

unlikely that Esau hunts for his livelihood.) Esau's love of sport and lack of interest in responsibility shows that Esau exhibits some characteristics of a younger child, rather than a first-born. Jacob, on the other hand is a quiet man who stays near the tents and is close to his mother (25:27). By his caretaking of family affairs, Jacob acts more like a responsible first-born. Perhaps Jacob and Esau adopt these roles because of the parent to whom they feel closest. Esau, who is closer to Isaac (Gen. 25: 28), likes to hunt. Esau knows the estate and blessing of Isaac is his birthright so he does not have to try. He could afford to have fun. Meanwhile, Jacob who is close to Rebekah stays at home taking care of things -- and bides his time (25:28).

We see here the formation of four interlocking family triangles: Isaac and Esau against Jacob, Isaac and Esau against Rebekah, Jacob and Rebekah against Isaac, Jacob and Rebekah against Esau. Isaac is a man ruled by his appetites in that Genesis tells us he favours Esau because Esau brings him wild game (25:28). Appetite rules Esau, as it does his father. One day when Esau is hungry he sells his birthright to Jacob for some bread and a bowl of lentil stew (25:29-34). Rebekah is a deceiver like her son Jacob, in that she conspires with Jacob to deceive Isaac and steal Esau's blessing (27:5-26). Further, deception runs in her family, as we can see when her brother Laban deceives Jacob on his wedding night (29:15-30). It is not surprising that Rebekah is drawn to Jacob for he is so much like her. We would characterize this family as more distant, disengaged, and lacking in closeness and nurture. Again, though, there may be some fusion between Rebekah and Jacob and an alliance between Isaac and Esau.

According to the Old Testament laws of inheritance, the oldest son in a family inherits the father's estate. Even though Jacob is born only seconds after Esau, all of Isaac's property and blessing would go to Esau rather than Jacob. Further, since Isaac forms an alliance with Esau,

Isaac is not likely to change his mind, break with tradition and bestow the estate and blessing upon Jacob. Jacob conspires with his mother Rebekah against his older brother Esau and his father Isaac to attain the inheritance. Jacob loses the family power struggle and flees to the household of Laban in far off Haran, probably in modern-day Iraq. In his new home Jacob falls in love with Rachel, who is the second-born of Laban's two daughters. Jacob's attraction to Rachel is easy to understand. Jacob feels a kinship with Rachel for she, like him, is a second-born struggling for preeminence against her first-born sister Leah. Jacob sees in Leah his older brother Esau, who overshadowed him and now wants to kill him (27:41- 45).

Rachel's family of origin could also have played a role in attracting Jacob to Rachel. Family systems therapy has observed that a person from an unusually close family will be attracted to, and marry someone, from a distant family. Each seeks to get from the other what was lacking in their own family of origin. The person from a close family marries the one from the distant family, because she/he will finally get some privacy. The person from the distant family will marry into a close family to get some closeness and nurture. Frequently, however, that which initially attracted a couple to each other begins to repulse them. The one who wanted distance now feels lonely and abandoned, and starts chasing the other for more intimacy. The one who wanted closeness begins to feel overwhelmed and withdraws to get more privacy. Rachel's family appears to have been closer or more enmeshed than Jacob's family of origin. We will see this pattern of enmeshment appear in the dealings between Laban and Jacob. In time, the closeness of Rachel's family will become problematic for Jacob.

Jacob asks for the hand of Rachel, even though by custom the oldest daughter, Leah, must marry first. Alas, on the night of his wedding the deceiver is himself deceived, as Laban

tricks Jacob into marrying Leah. To marry Rachel he must work for Laban seven more years (Gen. 29:15-36). The marriage to Leah is not a happy one. Jacob takes out on Leah all the anger he feels at being deceived by Laban. Here he sees his own deception, by which he deceived Esau and his father. This causes shame as well as anger. Seeing a parallel in Leah likely intensifies his anger. Leah reflects the dominant first-born Esau, and he burns with the desire for revenge. Jacob rejects Leah. He does not love her because he feels he cannot love her. When Jacob forsakes Leah, God enters the triangle and stands with the brokenhearted Leah. God sends a message to Jacob that he must get past his feelings and show love to Leah. God does this by enabling Leah to bear many children, while Rebekah could conceive only with great difficulty.

We see symmetry in this story. Jacob and Esau, Rachel and Leah play out the conflict of the youngest against the oldest. It is a conflict we saw between Cain and Abel, and is true to life. Much sibling conflict occurs between older and younger and over who will dominate. One of the great hopes presented in the words of God to Rebekah, "the elder shall serve the younger," is that being the youngest, or the least in a family, will not necessarily deprive that person of God's blessing or success in life. The criterion of blessing is not birth order, but God's election and the faith and obedience of the individual. Thus the Jacob cycle provides a clear indication that the grace of God can break through the determinism of sin, multi-generational transmission and cultural customs. God can always create exceptions in the flow of genogram patterns.

Even though God favours Leah with many children, Jacob stubbornly continues to punish Leah for being first-born, either to satisfy his own desire for revenge, or Rachel's. In time, a division arises in the family of Jacob -- the ten children of Leah against the two children of Rachel. Conflict which began between the two sisters now extends to their children. Jacob's

household is a house divided. Jacob intensifies the conflict present in this family when he favours the children of Rachel. Jacob favours Joseph (37:3; 44:20-22) openly in front of the other children. Here he follows the pattern of his own family of origin, where Isaac openly favoured one child, Esau. Jacob hates this favouritism, but does it himself. When we see the deep unhappiness in the family of Jacob, we can only conclude that, contrary to male fantasies about the desirability of polygamy, monogamy is the gift of a merciful God. This family division continues into the kingdom of Israel, and comes to fruition when the northern and southern kingdoms divide.

When the time comes for Jacob to leave the service of Laban, his two wives Leah and Rachel transfer the loyalty they had for their father Laban to their husband Jacob. The two sisters ask Jacob, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and has been using up the money given for us" (Gen. 31:14,15). Here the two sisters verbalize their resentment, and the resentment of all women, at being treated as property to be sold for the financial gain of men. Eve's curse continues to plague women, and the fall poisons relations between male and female. Being sold is bad enough, but Laban squanders the money, showing how little regard he has for his daughters except as commodities. Laban, and to a lesser degree Jacob, breaks the boundary of Gen.2:24 which declares that a marriage must be monogamous. Laban's deception, and Jacob's acquiescence to polygamy, causes great resentment and conflict in Jacob's family. The daughters cut their ties with Laban because they know that Jacob will give them a prosperous lifestyle and families of their own.

Laban's family proves to be difficult to leave. Exiting Laban's enmeshed family is more

like escaping from prison. When Jacob departs he must do so in the night. Laban is soon hot on the trail of Jacob, and overtakes him, intending to bring Jacob, and his knack for making money, back (31:22-55).

In examining Laban, we may note that he is an intrusive presence who exploits Jacob for his own gain. Laban breaks boundaries by deceiving Jacob into marrying Leah. He then attempts to bring Jacob back when he leaves. Laban does so because he believes that everything that Jacob owns is his: "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine" (Gen. 31:43). Laban has a poor concept of boundaries, since he is unwilling to recognize separation between his own property and family, and the property and family of Jacob. Diffuse boundaries, as we have seen, are characteristic of enmeshed families. God intervenes in the situation, warning Laban he must let Jacob leave without inflicting harm (31:29). Laban allows Jacob to leave only after making a covenant with him and warning him not to mistreat his daughters (31:44-50). The charge not to mistreat his daughters again illustrates a lack of boundary recognition, in that Laban seeks to continue his control of Jacob's family. Further, the covenant is only a lukewarm endorsement of Jacob's leaving. Laban provides no blessing for Jacob and his daughters, he only promises to refrain from outright hostility (31:51). Indeed, sometimes it takes an act of God to allow members to leave an enmeshed family.

Leaving one's family of origin at marriage is one of the most difficult transitions an individual must make. Both Rachel and Leah must decide between leaving their father Laban, or going with their husband Jacob. They decide to go with Jacob. Their leaving is not free and joyful, for they feel a great deal of anger towards their father because he exploited them (31:14,

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15). The daughters illustrate a split loyalty to their father by stealing his household gods (31:30-35). On the one hand, this theft is an act of defiance against their father in favour of Jacob, since possession of the household gods meant legal title to property. Brueggeman (1982) refers to them as "tokens of inheritance" (p. 259. See also, The New Bible Commentary: Revised, 1970). Yet on the other hand, the theft shows loyalty to their father in that Rachel and Leah would continue to worship the deities favoured by their father. Outwardly, Rachel and Leah must worship the God of Jacob and his line, to show deference to Jacob as their husband. Inwardly, they will still worship the deities of their family of origin. Religious pluralism characterizes the family's religious orientation, a common situation in marriages of mixed religious traditions. These divided loyalties will show themselves in Israel's later history. The nation will undergo unending warfare between those who worship Yahweh and those who favour the deities of the ancient Near East.

2. g. Dinah and the Canaanites: The Father Who Failed His Daughter (Genesis 34)

Dinah is the daughter of Jacob through Leah and, therefore, not favoured by Jacob. Genesis tells us that Dinah wanders away from her home and socializes with the young women of a Canaanite town. The Canaanites are descendants of Ham, who showed disrespect for his father and broke the father/son boundary (Gen. 9:22). Dinah is in extreme danger because she is a single woman among a people, or an extended family, with a tradition of lawlessness and little respect for boundaries. Perhaps to flee an unhappy home, Dinah engages in high risk behaviour by leaving the safety of her family and "hanging out with a bad crowd." It is curious that Jacob is so unconcerned for the safety and welfare of his daughter. Jacob knows the unsavoury reputation of the Canaanites. He would have likely known the old stories and traditions about how

Abraham wanted Isaac to marry a woman of Haran, rather than Canaan (22: 2-4), the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:12-29), and the misery that Esau's marriage to two Hittite women, a Canaanite people, caused Isaac and Rebekah (27:46). Yet Jacob does nothing to warn or protect his daughter from possible harm at the hands of the Canaanites. His neglect of Dinah is also apparent in that Jacob does not carry out his duty as a father, and acquire a husband from Haran for Dinah. Dinah would be old enough to marry if she could visit the women of the land. In time, Shechem, son of Hamor, prince of the Hivites rapes the vulnerable Dinah. Jacob is unmoved by the assault on his daughter. He does nothing to comfort her, nor to avenge her honour. Instead, this task falls upon Dinah's brothers, the children of Leah. They go out and massacre the Canaanites responsible for the outrage. In a final act of insensitivity, Jacob's response to this terrible act of retribution is only to mutter, "You have brought trouble on me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land" (34:30). The message of Jacob to all Leah's children, not just Dinah, is clear: "I do not love your mother and I do not love you." Jacob's unwillingness to love all his children would have far-reaching results: not only would it turn Joseph's brothers against him, it would underlie the break-up of the nation of Israel into the ten northern tribes, and the two southern tribes. If we summarize the dynamics between Dinah and Jacob, in the father/daughter dyad, we see a father who consistently abdicates his responsibility towards his daughter. The daughter responds to his neglect by engaging in high-risk behaviour.

From a family systems perspective, a number of observations can be made. Within Jacob's family there is a deep, underlying conflict between Jacob and Leah. There is also a great deal of frustration and stress in the relationship between Jacob and Rachel because of her difficulties in getting pregnant (Gen. 30:1). Jacob's open favouritism of Rachel's children, and

barely concealed dislike of Leah's children, compounds the conflict in the family. The stress in the system focuses on Dinah. Dinah becomes the "identified patient" by hanging out with a "bad crowd," namely the immoral Canaanites. (As we will see later, Dinah is an Old Testament, female precursor of the Prodigal Son, in Luke 15:11-32.) She acts out by engaging in high-risk behaviour. She may have strayed too close to Shechem, her eventual rapist, because she is looking for an older male figure who would love and pay attention to her, unlike her father Jacob. Jacob's unwillingness to love Leah, and by extension Dinah, might have given Dinah the impetus to hang out with a bad crowd. The rape of Dinah sets up a deadly triangle, with Dinah the victim, Shechem the persecutor. Normally, it would be the task of the father to step into the role of the rescuer and avenge the honour of his daughter. Jacob, however, is far more interested in what his Canaanite neighbours might think and does nothing. If he does not avenge Dinah, then the Canaanites will remain well disposed towards him. Jacob will become rich by trading with them. Ironically, Jacob's attitude towards his daughter is similar to that of Laban's, who treats his daughters as saleable commodities (Gen. 31:15). Instead, the brothers of Dinah step into the triangle. First, they act as Dinah's rescuers by destroying Shechem's people. Nevertheless, the act of destroying Shechem transforms them into persecutors. When Jacob scolds them for endangering his good relations with the Canaanites, the brothers become the victims, while Jacob becomes the persecutor. It is the nature of triangulation that the different roles flip back and forth constantly. Finally, we may observe that both Dinah's acting out, and Jacob's desire to minimize her rape, have a decidedly modern ring to them. Jacob consistently ignores Dinah, her feelings, and her welfare.

2. h. Moses, Miriam and Aaron: Siblings in Conflict (Num. 12:1-12)

Of these three siblings Miriam is almost certainly the oldest, since when Pharaoh's daughter finds Moses, Miriam is old enough to speak and fetch her mother (Ex. 2:7). Further, Ex. 7:7 reports that Aaron is Moses' elder brother by three years. In terms of birth order, Moses is likely the youngest and therefore does not seem destined to be the great liberator, lawgiver and religious leader of Israel. Normally, families reserve the role of leadership for first-born sons. Moses has an older sister who cares for him (Ex. 2:4-7), and could conceivably intimidate or dominate him when they grow up. According to the rules of birth order, the role of a great leader would be reserved for Aaron, the oldest male child in his family. This scenario is quite possible, given Aaron's excellent verbal skills and Moses' lack of such skill (Ex. 4:10-16). Adoption of Moses by Pharaoh's daughter, and his nurture at the Egyptian royal court, however, overthrows the natural order of sibling dominance. Further, Miriam's quick thinking manoeuvres the princess into employing Moses's natural mother as a wet nurse for Moses (Ex. 2:10). Since wet nursing could go on a long time, there is every possibility that Moses knows his true parents and heritage. In addition, Moses is a greatly favoured son of the princess, since she has rescued him at the cost of disobeying her father, the Pharaoh of Egypt. Thus, her investment in him is considerable. It is possible that his nurture corresponds more to that of an oldest or only son. Therefore, although birth order destines Moses to be a follower, his nurture at the court as a dominant first-born, prepares Moses to be a strong leader. Again we see the Biblical theme of the oldest serving the younger (Gen. 25:23).

As the story of the Exodus unfolds, it is not surprising to find all three siblings exercising strong positions of leadership. The author refers to Miriam as a prophetess. She is also a worship

leader and leads the women in worship at the Red Sea shore (Ex. 15:20,21). Miriam is well equipped for this position because she is the sister of Moses, but also the first-born daughter in her family. Aaron becomes the high priest and in charge of all the religious observance in the Exodus community. The position suits Aaron because he is the brother of Moses. Aaron is the eldest son in his family, has good verbal skills, and most crucial, God has chosen or elected him for this position. It is also not surprising that Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses, their younger brother, and challenge his leadership (Num. 12:1- 2). Given their position in their family of origin, Miriam and Aaron would expect to be able to dominate, or at least challenge, their younger sibling, Moses. In examining this "palace revolt," one thing stands out: the challenge to Moses comes only from Miriam and Aaron. Here one would think that the extended families of Miriam, Aaron and Moses, such as husbands, wives, cousins, children, in-laws, would be involved in various alliances, either for or against, the three siblings. Yet only these three dominant siblings become involved in the power struggle. Perhaps Miriam and Aaron alone felt safe in challenging Moses. They may have believed that being such a close relative to Moses would protect them from the fate of being bitten by poisonous snakes (Num. 21:1-9), swallowed up by the earth (Num. 16:1-35), or devoured by fire (Num. 11:1-3) . Or perhaps Miriam and Aaron are so dominant they feel they do not need allies apart from each other. In most families, when siblings fight for control, the parents must step in to restore order and reestablish justice in the sibling constellation. The parents of these three conflicted siblings are long dead. Thus, God, the heavenly parent, enters the triangle to bring peace and confirms Moses as the leader of the Israelites (Num. 12:6-9). Again the Old Testament shows that leadership or the blessing of God does not stem from an accident of birth order, but by election or the grace of

God. A three-member sibling triad, with parents and other relatives absent, is unusual in life, and in the Bible. One might say this constellation in Numbers foreshadows the constellation of Lazarus, Martha and Mary in the New Testament.

2.i. Ruth and Naomi: A Family by Choice (The Book of Ruth)

Ruth is a family deviant in the sense that she departs markedly from the image the ancient Israelites had of the Moabites. Israelite tradition believed the Moabite nation or extended family system had descended from incest between Lot and his half-Sodomite daughter. One would expect Ruth's extended family of origin patterns to be a powerful influence towards violation of boundaries and sexual immorality. The character of Ruth, however, is full of virtues. She possesses great courage, loyalty, chastity, faith, wisdom, common sense, industriousness, and thrift. Ruth deviates powerfully from the family legacy of Moab. In fact, one suspects the Biblical writer wishes wistfully that all Israelites, men and women, are as godly as this Moabite. The story teaches that through some mysterious combination of God's grace/calling, and a free response in faith and obedience, a person can overcome the potential programming of negative family patterns and become a better, more whole individual. Ruth overcomes a negative pseudo-self, allowing a more positive basic self to predominate. If we choose to obey God's will, with God's help and the support of others, we can overcome past family patterns that would otherwise doom us to dysfunctional and self-destructive patterns of living.

The relationship between Ruth and Naomi clearly illustrates the difficulty in describing the "typical Bible family" and thus undermines the use of the Bible to support the idea of traditional family values. Ruth is originally the daughter-in-law of Naomi. When Ruth's husband dies, she ceases to be a daughter-in-law, since death dissolves the tie of marriage.

Ruth's only relation to Naomi is that of marriage and not blood. She has borne no grandchildren that would make for a stronger connection to Naomi. When Ruth's husband dies, her mother-in-law releases Ruth from all obligation. Yet out of great love and loyalty, Ruth chooses to stay with Naomi, adopting her faith and nation. Naomi in turn "adopts" Ruth as her daughter. This is doubly remarkable in that Ruth knows the nation of Israel despises the Moabites and there is frequent war between them. Ruth and Naomi become a family by choice. By their wit, faith, courage and the help of God they make a life for themselves. Not only do they triumph over the limitations of their culture but, remarkably, they also do so by keeping the rules of their culture.

The luring of the longtime bachelor Boaz into marriage illustrates a delightful aspect of the nature of the relationship between Ruth and Naomi. After Ruth has an encounter with Boaz, all in a society that forbids dating, Naomi says to Ruth, "How did things go with you, my daughter?" (Ruth 3:16). A hopeful, excited discussion ensues and then they plan their next move. The moment is touching and humorous. Many single women today enjoy getting together to discuss how their dates went the previous night. For some this "debriefing" is as important a ritual as the date itself. It is fascinating to see this type of connecting in operation thousands of years ago.

Finally, the story of Ruth provides a slight relief for women who grow weary of the preeminence of male children in the Bible. When Ruth bears a son, the women attending the birth declare to Naomi that Ruth, who loves her, "is more to you than seven sons. . . !" (Ruth 4:15). To an Israelite culture always tempted by intermarriage with non-Israelites, the story of Ruth is a witness that the men of Israel should marry women like Ruth and Naomi. To the patriarchy of Israelite culture, the story of Ruth is a witness that, though men might dominate

the culture, women are wise, virtuous and of equal worth. Ruth's faith adds positively to the spiritual legacy of Israel. No wonder her family eventually produces the Davidic dynasty (Ruth 4:22), which in turn engenders the Messiah (Matt. 1:5,6). A line which might never have come to be, had Boaz died a bachelor without children.

2. j. David: The Youngest Becomes an Oldest (1 and 2 Samuel)

As with Moses, David seems unsuited to become king of Israel, by virtue of his place in the birth order. David is the youngest in his family with seven older brothers. Further, being the youngest of seven older brothers could have made David argumentative and competitive, if he had experienced much conflict with his older siblings. A contentious nature might have made people unwilling to follow David. Still, again, there are factors in the traditions concerning the upbringing of David which prepare him to become king and help him to overcome the limitations of his birth order. For example, David spends little time around the house in contact with his brothers. Instead, he is away much of the time shepherding Jesse's flocks. From an early age David holds a responsible job with a fair degree of autonomy. Being absent for extended periods means he does not have to battle for preeminence with his older brothers. As a shepherd, he learns how to take care of his father's flock. This is excellent training for his later life, when he will lead soldiers, and then the nation of Israel, which is the flock of God. Being solitary, David has the time to be free and creative. During his isolation, David plays music, composes and sings psalms to calm his sheep, and entertain himself during his long, lonely vigils. Therefore, David develops in the direction of a responsible, oldest or only child and yet also retains the creative, spontaneous, playfulness of a youngest child. When God calls David to be king through Samuel, David responds positively. Years of nurture prepare him both to be the

king of Israel and the singer of its psalms.

Becoming a first class general and a competent king of Israel reflects David's first-born tendencies. Musical ability, his attractiveness to both men and women (e.g., Jonathan, 1 Sam. 20; Abigail, 1 Sam. 25; Bathsheba, 2 Sam. 11) reflect the qualities of a youngest-born. The women of Israel sing, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1 Sam. 18:7). His youngest child's playfulness comes out when David capers, and dances before the Ark of the Covenant, as he has it brought into Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:1-5). David's playful, youngest tendencies also work against him, for we find the great king unwilling, at times, to be tough when the situation requires toughness. Unlike an oldest, David tends not to enforce rules to maintain order and do what is right. This is likely part of the reason he is so popular: as we have noted, the youngest in a leadership position frequently exercises his or her leadership in a non-authoritarian manner, and remains popular with subordinates. We see this non-authoritarian approach to governing when David takes no action against his top general Joab. David spares Joab from death even though he knows Joab is a murdering thug, who kills better men than he, such as Abner and Amasa (2 Sam. 3:22-39; 2 Sam. 20:10; 1 Ki. 2:5,6). Even when Joab kills Davids' beloved son Absalom against his express wishes, the king still does not punish Joab (2 Sam. 18).

Another major failing, however, occurs when David's oldest son Amnon rapes Tamar, the sister of Absalom (2 Sam. 13). Amnon's immorality occurs soon after David's adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah (2 Sam. 11). Here, Amnon follows the pattern laid down by his father. Amnon's violation greatly angers David but he takes no action against Amnon for his crime. David favours Amnon because Amnon is his first-born (2

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Sam. 13:21). David does not do justice for his daughter. He fails to be a responsible father to Tamar, exactly as Jacob failed his daughter Dinah. In addition, David's indulgence towards Amnon costs him even more bitterness than Isaac's favouritism of Isaac towards Esau cost Isaac. Favouritism towards the first-born and the problems it causes, is a repetitive pattern in Old Testament families. Because of David's inaction, Absalom, the brother of Tamar steps into the triangle to ensure justice for his sister. Here the story parallels how Dinah's brothers step into the triangle because Dinah's father Jacob did not act with justice toward his daughter. Absalom murders Amnon and again David does not show the necessary toughness. He lets Absalom off with a slap on the wrist (2 Sam. 14). Absalom then repays David's generosity by starting a rebellion that nearly topples David from his throne (2 Sam. 15-18). The political chaos initiated by Absalom lingers (2 Sam. 19-21), though the author of Samuel informs us the root cause of the instability was David's adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:10, 11). The dysfunction of the Davidic royal family system travels through, and affects, the larger family system of the nation of Israel. David's children act out because of their father's sin. The central position of David's family in the life of the nation convulses all Israel with conflict.

2.k. Family in the Old Testament: A Summary

It is amazing to see how Old Testament families act like modern families, especially when viewed through the lens of family systems therapy. Old Testament families act like "real families." Thus, what the Old Testament tells us about family life is of abiding relevance. All the problems encountered by modern families, e.g., substance abuse, incest, adultery, violence, conflict, triangulation, alliances, divided loyalties, stress, boundary violation, favouritism, sibling rivalry, are to be found in Biblical families. Genesis describes family as a man united to

his wife. Though Genesis thus infers heterosexual monogamy, the Bible describes many different families and affirms that God's grace is active in all of them. Thus, finding clear guidelines in the Old Testament as to "traditional family values" can be difficult. Which family are we to take as our example? The families of Abraham, Jacob, Ruth and Naomi, and Solomon are very different from traditional nuclear families. Although Gen. 2:24 prescribes heterosexual monogamy, God was clearly willing to work with many different family models.

The stories of Jacob and Leah, Ruth and Naomi, and David show how the legacy of an individual's family has a great influence on one's life. Nevertheless, even unfavourable birth order, immoral ancestors, and female gender clearly cannot prevent one from receiving the blessings of God. By grace God elected Abraham and his offspring without any merit on their part. God designated Israel for blessing and through Israel promised to bless all of fallen humanity. Those who accepted this election and obeyed God in faith overcame the power of sin and received the promised blessing..

In Murray Bowen's model of therapy, an individual can raise their level of differentiation by understanding one's familial legacy, and choosing rationally to act in a more differentiated way. In the Biblical approach, one hears the call of God's grace, and "differentiates" by a free obedience in faith to the word of God. We have seen how this operates in the case of Ruth and I now will demonstrate how it operates in the New Testament.

Chapter 3 - Families in the New Testament

3. a. Jesus and the Genealogies (Matthew 1:1 - 16; Luke 3:23 - 38)

Matthew 1:2-16 and Luke 3:23-38 set forth genealogies of the ancestors of Jesus.

Historians have debated for many years the differences between the genealogies, and the fact

that the lists of ancestors are not the same for Matthew as for Luke. Today scholars, such as

Raymond E. Brown (1977), believe that the theological ideas of the authors are what primarily

shape the genealogies, rather than literal history. To this family systems could contribute

another perspective, namely the use of the genogram. Family therapists use genograms to

understand the transgenerational patterns in a family and how to deal with these patterns. An

analysis of genograms will frequently reveal that the most influential person in one's family may

not even be a direct ancestor, but one who had a significant impact on a direct ancestor. Thus,

perhaps we could view the gospel genealogies not simply as the history of Jesus' human

ancestors, or the theological statements of the gospel authors, but also as "spiritual genograms."

Matthew and Luke have used the genealogies to map out the spiritual legacy of Israel. They

show us how all the people mentioned, the good, the evil, the foreign, the male, the female, the

famous and the unknown, and their family systems came together to produce the family system

of Jesus. Jesus was the product of many family systems, just as you and I are the product of

thousands of long forgotten family systems that have intermarried through the centuries. The

people listed may not all be direct lineal ancestors of Mary and Joseph, but through the

intermingling of countless family systems they are indirect ancestors who had a significant

impact. Rather, we might say they are direct *spiritual* ancestors. The genealogies would then be

saying that all people are important to God and play their role in the Messianic redemption of the world. By virtue of being an ancestor of Jesus the people of the genealogy helped create the spiritual legacy of Israel. This legacy is the fertile ground into which Jesus and the early apostles sowed the seed of the gospel, and then transplanted it to the rest of the world. In Christ God redeems the prostitution of Rahab and Tamar, the foreign, incestuous ancestry of Ruth, the adultery of Solomon and Bathsheba, the lapses in faith by Abraham and Isaac, the deceitfulness of Jacob, the foolishness of Rehoboam and the sin of Manasseh. By a mysterious interaction of divine grace and human faith, the failings of these individuals are transformed into something holy and beautiful. They are now part of the human family of Christ. By the Holy Spirit they are also part of the family of God, the communion of the saints, the body of Christ, the precious stones which are used as bricks to construct the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14, 18-21). The gospel genealogies hold forth the hope that one day the brokenness of our families due to sin, indeed the whole human family, will be woven together in the great tapestry of redemption and healed in Christ (Col. 1:20).

3. b. Jesus' Family of Origin: Fusion and Differentiation

The birth of Jesus signals a new phase in God's work of redeeming the family. God's choice of incarnating into a human family is a sign that God's grace is present and active in this very troubled, and at times, dysfunctional institution. The birth of Christ sanctifies the human family and renews the hope of eventual redemption.

From the perspective of family systems therapy Jesus is destined for leadership by virtue of being the first-born son. This would be accentuated in the Lucan portrait of Christ wherein Jesus is described as believing from an early age that he is God's only son (Luke 2:49) and

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having a special mission in life.

As with any other human child Jesus begins life fused to his mother, and undergoes differentiation as he matures. Perhaps, this is partly what may lie behind Luke's statement: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour" (Luke 2:52). Given the scanty evidence we possess in the New Testament, and continuing scholarly debate as to the historicity of the gospel accounts, assessing Jesus' level of differentiation is difficult. Some incidents recorded in the gospels, nevertheless, give us hints. When Jesus speaks with the teachers in the temple (Luke 2:41-51), he reveals a strong sense of his own self and mission. When Mary scolds him for leaving his parents, he replies, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know I had to be in my father's house?" (2:49). Afterwards, Luke tells us that Jesus goes home and is obedient to his parents (2:51). Jesus' actions in the temple are not signs of rebellion. Not only does Jesus remain connected to his family, he also returns home with them and is obedient. Rather, these actions stem from a sense of who he is and how he understands his mission in life. I would posit, therefore, that the temple incident indicates a high rate of differentiation for Jesus.

Murray Bowen has found that one's level of differentiation is primarily determined by one's family of origin. To posit a high level of differentiation for Jesus we would have to find some evidence indicating a high level of differentiation in his family of origin. What can we say concerning the differentiation of Mary and Joseph? What little we know of Jesus' birth parents is consistent with persons who are more willing to live out of a basic self than a pseudo-self. Let us first consider Joseph. The gospel of Matthew tells us that when he discovers that his betrothed wife Mary is pregnant, Joseph "being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public

disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly" (Matt. 1:19). Joseph, as would most men, believes that

his beloved has been unfaithful and out of love and respect decides discretely to cancel their

coming marriage. But just as he resolves to do this an angel of the Lord appears to him in a

dream. The angel urges him to marry her because the child Mary bears is not from another man,

but is conceived by the Holy Spirit. Their son Jesus is sent by God to save the people from their

sins (vss.20-23). Joseph obeys the message of God the angel delivers. In this action Joseph does

what few men would have done. He marries a woman whom he believes is pregnant by another

man. The marriage of Mary and Joseph is not likely to have prevented the sort of gossip that

frequently circulates in small towns and amongst close family members. And so Joseph may

have had to live, at least initially, with community disapproval. Joseph denies the social

convention of his society which is centred in his pseudo-self. In so doing he acts out of his true

or basic self. For Joseph this means to marry the woman he loves and obey the God whom he

worships. By going ahead with his marriage Joseph either illustrates a high rate of differentiation

or attains a higher level of differentiation by his faith and obedience. Much the same can be said

of Mary. When the angel announces that she will be impregnated by the Holy Spirit she responds

in faith and obedience (Luke 1:26-28). To be a virgin carrying the Saviour of the world, to be

exposed to the risk of public gossip concerning her virtue, to have her understanding of reality

challenged on such a visceral level by this miraculous pregnancy, means Mary must go against

the prevailing moral and spiritual climate of her society, as well as her human reason. As with

Joseph, Mary denies the social conventions of the pseudo-self. By her obedience she embraces

the grace of the God whom she worships in her true, basic self. As with Joseph, Mary's faith

and obedience indicates she either has a high level of differentiation or has attained to a high

level of differentiation as a result of her faith.

We may thus see that both of Jesus' parents appear to have a high level of differentiation. Therefore we may posit that Jesus' family had a high level of differentiation which they would then pass onto their oldest, first-born son. Jesus' sense of specialness concerning his mission in life and relationship to God, mentioned in Luke 2, could have its foundation in either a special calling from his heavenly Father, or from the experiences of his parents leading up to his birth -- or both. Mary and Joseph receive divine revelations concerning Jesus before he is born. Without even saying anything to Jesus, their treatment of him would communicate a sense of his specialness, that he is somehow God's child in a way no other child can be. And as God's special child he is sent into the world for a purpose. Family systems therapy has discovered how many parents communicate both positive and negative non-verbal messages to their children, and how the children will act out these messages years later. If wonderful miraculous events had occurred around the birth of Jesus, as the gospel stories tell us, Mary and Joseph would have communicated their fears, hopes, joys, expectations and awe concerning these events just as any other human parent communicates similar feelings to their children.

According to Lucan tradition, Jesus begins his ministry at about the age of thirty (Luke 3:23). What is apparent is, that sometime between the age of twelve and when he began his ministry, Jesus' human father Joseph seems to have died. Normally, Jewish men were supposed to marry in their late teens or early twenties. The singleness of Jesus at the age of thirty is unusual given his cultural context. Is it possible that Joseph died when his children were still quite young? Did Jesus stay home as a dutiful oldest son, to help his mother take care of the family? Thus, Jesus may have taken the place of his father in the family. (In positing this, I

recognize that Jesus might have been avoiding marriage, because of the nature of the mission he knew would begin at thirty. There may also be reasons for Jesus not marrying of which we are unaware.) Such an arrangement could indicate either a high degree of fusion between Jesus and his mother or a high level of differentiation, in that he was willing to defy social convention for a higher purpose. Here it is tempting to speculate that Christians down through the centuries may have had an intuitive understanding of an unusually close relationship between Jesus and his mother. This mother-child fusion would resonate strongly within individuals who had a similar type of mother-child fusion and could help explain the rise of the cult of the Virgin Mary. Deifying Mary would be easy for such Christians because of this fusion, or unusual closeness, with her divine son: to know Jesus is to know Mary, to know Mary is to know Jesus.

The story of the wedding at Cana of Galilee may indicate a fused and conflicted relationship between Jesus and his mother. John 2:1-11 relates that Jesus and his disciples are attending a wedding at Cana and how the bride and groom run out of wine. When they run out of wine Jesus' mother Mary comes to her son and says, "They have no wine." By this Mary implies that it is up to Jesus to fix the problem. Jesus then replies in a rather abrupt fashion, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come" (Jn. 2:3,4). One gets the sense from Jesus' abrupt response that Jesus and Mary have had this sort of conversation before. Could it be that Mary frequently came to her oldest son with her needs, and that Jesus may have at times found her overly demanding or intrusive? That Jesus tells her the lack of wine is no concern of either himself or his mother could be a recognition by Jesus that Mary is attempting to triangle him into helping her rescue the married couple. Therefore, Jesus could be cautioning his mother not to play the rescuer. Again, this may have been a chronic issue between Jesus and

his mother. We also get the sense from Mary's statement to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn. 2:5) that she is used to hearing cryptic statements from her first-born, but that she could invariably trust him to do the right thing.

When Jesus speaks to his mother, family systems therapy would recognize that Jesus is affirming the principle of boundaries -- "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?" In helping the young couple Jesus does not fall into a pathological triangulation, because he is not rescuing the couple from a problem they could have legitimately solved by themselves. Jesus "rescues" a couple who genuinely need rescuing, since to run out of wine at a wedding feast would lead to great public humiliation. Thus a scene in which Jesus appears to be fused and conflicted with his mother again illustrates a high degree of differentiation on the part of Jesus. That Jesus comes to the wedding illustrates a connection to his family and relatives. His response to his mother illustrates a sense of his individualism -- "my time has not yet come" -- and yet the miracle of turning the water into wine honours the connection to his family and their wider social circle.

Jesus exhibits a high degree of separation from his mother and siblings when they come to see him and he states, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35). This is likely in recognition that his family, particularly his brothers (Jn. 7:3-5), do not believe in his mission at the beginning of his ministry. Here, Jesus reveals a radical change in his understanding of family: true family will no longer will be a matter of blood or will (as in adoption) but a matter of spirit (Jn. 1:12,13). Again Jesus causes us to rethink our definition of family and questions how we use the Bible to support the concept of "traditional family values."

In the end, Jesus' idea of family does not promote permanent separation from his family

of origin. Although we do not know how many of Jesus' siblings accept the gospel, we know both Mary and Jesus' brothers join the Jerusalem church (Acts 1:14). By this, Jesus retains his connection with his human family in that Jesus' mother and siblings "leave" their own family and join Jesus' family, the body of Christ, the church.

Jesus also shows a high level of differentiation from his extended family, the nation of Israel. Jesus remains connected with Israel in that he was a practising Jew. The parents of Jesus circumcise him on the eighth day (Luke 2:21), they present him in the temple (2:22), he attends synagogue regularly (Luke 4:16). In Nazareth, no one questions his orthodoxy (4:22). Although Jesus is committed to the Mosaic Law, on many occasions, however, the evangelists present a picture of Jesus in conflict with the scribal and Pharisaic interpretation of the Mosaic law. (Conflicts which some in the church have wrongfully used to justify anti-Semitic actions or statements.) The gospels tell us Jesus feels such disobedience is justified if it constitutes true obedience to the will of God. Jesus obeys not just the letter of the law but the spirit. Therefore, it is Jesus' understanding of the gospel which causes him to differentiate from his "extended family system" of Israel. Jesus often reveals his negative attitude toward the Pharisaic traditions. For example, Jesus denounces the Pharisees for observing rituals of washing hands and utensils and not allowing unclean food to pass their lips, and yet tolerating far more serious sins and immorality (Mark 7:1-23). Jesus believes in keeping the Sabbath, but against the Pharisees does good and heals on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-14). Jesus pays taxes to Caesar, but teaches one should give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's (Mark 12:13-17). Adultery is wrong, but one should not stone a woman caught in adultery. One should not judge but leave the judgement to God (Jn. 8:1-11). Jesus accepts the sexual morality of his time (Matt. 19:4-6), yet

speaks to women in public (Jn. 4:27). When it comes to divorce, Jesus is more restrictive of the rights of men to divorce their wives than the Pharisees (Matt. 19:3-9). Jesus' attitude towards divorce works to protect women from being abandoned and impoverished in the cultural context of the New Testament era. Jesus keeps Jewish holidays such as the Passover, but makes innovations so significant that in subsequent generations the Passover develops into the sacrament of Holy Communion for the church. Jesus' single-minded obedience to the will of the Father means Jesus lives out of his true basic self rather than a pseudo-self ruled by social convention.

Jesus also illustrates a high level of differentiation in that he does not allow himself to be influenced by criticism (Jn. 8:48, 49) or flattery (Jn. 6:25- 27). Jesus speaks and acts in obedience to his heavenly Father. He does not act from emotion or feeling but from the Spirit of God. We see this most powerfully during his passion when neither excruciating physical pain nor the threat of death causes him to act from emotion and lower his level of differentiation. Though Jesus is in great agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, he prays "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done" (Matt. 26:42). When Pilate says to him "Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you? Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above' " (Jn. 19:10). While Jesus is on the cross he does not curse his enemies but asks the Father to forgive them (Luke 23:34), and he assures the repentant thief of salvation in paradise (Luke 23:39-43). In perhaps the most touching scene of all, the dying Christ makes provision for the future care of his mother. "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that

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hour the disciple took her into his own home" (Jn. 19:26, 27). Even in severe pain, and facing death, Jesus acts with reasoned compassion and not with extreme anger, fear or violence. Under great stress Jesus retains his high level of differentiation.

In the end, according to the gospel tradition, the Jewish community cannot tolerate the degree of differentiation shown by Jesus. The extended family of Israel, or the nation, obeys the heads of the family, its civil and religious leadership, and labels Jesus as a deviant from the family system. When that fails to stop his movement, the family becomes abusive towards Jesus. The final act of abuse comes in the Passion of our Lord. The leaders of the nation, the Sanhedrin and the Pharisees, are like the "parents" of the nation. Together they scapegoat Jesus as the "problem." They persecute and torture him. Finally, they deliver Jesus, one of their own family members, to the Romans to be crucified. This type of abuse has a number of parallels to the way an abusive parent will mistreat a deviant member of their own nuclear family.

In subsequent years, Judaism continued to view Jesus, and his movement, as a serious deviation from the traditions and values of the Jewish family system. The community of faith expelled the followers of Jesus. From a family systems perspective, we would say the extended family system of Judaism cut off the followers of Jesus from their family of origin. Within a few generations after Jesus a Jew could not practice both Judaism and Christianity.

From a Bowenian perspective we may conclude that Jesus' high level of differentiation stems mainly from his relationship with his heavenly Father. A strong perception of his mission as God's Messiah and Saviour of the world amplifies his healthy sense of basic self. Jesus' divine relationship with God helps him remain connected with, yet also powerfully differentiated from his human family of origin, and with his extended family, the nation of Israel. His family of

origin is able in the end to accept him, while the majority of the nation of Israel labels him as a deviant and cuts him off. The example of Jesus points out that a living relationship with God strengthens rather than weakens the personality of an individual. Again we see how freely obeying God in love can radically alter the lives of individuals.

3. c. The Trinity and the Body of Christ as Reflections of Healthy Family Systems

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity develops in part from the close relationship between Jesus, his Father in heaven, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus speaks of his relationship with the Father in the most intimate of terms; he says "the Father is in me, and I am in the Father" (Jn. 10:38) and "before Abraham was, I am" (Jn. 8:58). Yet as close as Jesus is to the Father, Jesus is not fused to the Father. Jesus retains his own sense of self and a healthy autonomy: " . . . I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father" (Jn. 10:17, 18). Whatever Jesus does, he does in free obedience to the Father. In family therapy, therapists view strong "I" language in a family by the individual members as healthy. A family where there is strong "I" language is well differentiated. Predominant use of "we" language indicates an enmeshed family where the members are poorly differentiated and fused together. On the one hand, Jesus describes his relationship with the Father with mystical closeness, which could indicate extreme fusion. Yet on the other hand, Jesus uses strong "I" language that points to high differentiation. Especially in the Gospel of John, we see language that speaks of mystical unity with the Father, virtually juxtaposed with "I am" speeches. Here follow only three examples: 6:35, "I am the bread of life" with 6:38 "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me"; 8:12, "I

am the light of the world" with 8:20, "the one who sent me is with me, he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him"; 10:11, "I am the good shepherd" with 10:30, "The Father and I are one." Jesus is one with the Father and also separate. Jesus enjoys maximum closeness with the Father and yet retains authentic autonomy. The closeness does not indicate an unhealthy fusion. Once again we may affirm that from a Bowenian perspective, Jesus would register quite high on a scale of differentiation.

The gift of the Holy Spirit, foretold in John 14, 15, and 16, and Luke 24, completes the divine economy of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of God and will have much the same role on the earth as Jesus had (Jn. 16:12-15). Among other things, the Spirit will be a spiritual replacement on the earth for Jesus. The Gospel of John describes something of the closeness and interconnection between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. In Jn. 16:14,15 Jesus says of the Holy Spirit "He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." From the perspective of family systems we may describe the Godhead as a community or a family. It is a healthy family, since each of the three members of this divine, spiritual family has a maximum closeness (oneness) and yet all three maintain their distinctness and authentic autonomy (healthy separation). Intimacy is in perfect balance with clear boundaries. The church has summarized the relationship of the divine family/community/Godhead by saying that Christians worship one God in three persons, the Holy Trinity. The closeness is so close that the three persons are one God, not three gods, yet all three persons remain distinct. The Trinity is not an undifferentiated ego mass. It represents a "family" of three without dysfunctional triangulation. Herein the Trinity hearkens back to the non-dysfunctional triangulation that

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marked the relationship between Adam, Eve and God before the fall. Family systems therapy could not describe a healthier differentiation and thus a healthier family. Christians might find it helpful to view the Trinity as the original model for a healthy, "normal" family. The inner dynamics of the Trinity are quite different from our human families that sin, and the curse upon the primal sin, have ravaged. Healthy in the sense that, with the Trinity, we see maximum closeness in perfect balance with authentic separation and individuality. The existence of the Trinity may explain why human beings form and live in families. Since God created us in his image, and the Godhead is a "family," we are following the divine pattern when we live in families or communities. This unity amid diversity can also be parallelled to Canada's policy of multiculturalism. Canadian society affirms the differentness of various ethnic groups and yet all remain united as Canadians.

From the perspective of family systems therapy, the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. then employs this divine model for a healthy differentiated family. In 1 Cor. 12:12-31, Paul describes the church or body of Christ as a human body with many parts. The parts of the body of Christ, the church, are as separate, and yet connected, as the persons of the Godhead. Each part of the church is as different and distinct from the other as the various parts of the human body, i.e., heart, eyes, hands, feet, ears, torso are different from each other. There is no fusion or enmeshment in the body of Christ as Paul describes it. Boundaries between the different parts are clear and respected. Like the Trinity, the church is not an undifferentiated family ego mass. Each part of the church is important to the body of Christ, as each part of the human being is important to the human body. Through being part of the church, the body of Christ, believers become part of the divine family of the Godhead.

Healthy Christian congregational/family life should be close-knit, yet tolerant of differentness and affirming of its various members. A healthy fellowship should not be chaotic where people feel insecure and confused due to powerful conflict; rigidly enmeshed, as in a cult; rigidly disengaged, where people feel distant from one another and there is little sense of community or pastoral care. Healthy communities keep boundaries clear and reasonable, cults blur or violate boundaries.

As with ancient Israel, however, the New Testament church had limits to the degree it would tolerate differences. The New Testament church had boundaries by which it would designate certain members as deviant and then cut them off from the "family." Those individuals who spread false teaching, persisted stubbornly in sin, or caused dissension it counselled and warned against their transgressions. If they persisted in deviant behaviour, the church expelled or cut them off from the church family. Only if they repented of their sin did the church allow them back in. The New Testament church initiated a type of cut-off or exclusion in order to rehabilitate the deviant and correct error (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; Gal.1:6-9; 6:1; 2 Thess.3:14; Titus 3:8-11). In initiating such exclusions, or excommunication of members, the church felt it was not being an abusive family system, but one that called its deviant members to take responsibility for their actions and encouraged them to greater maturity.

3. d. Jesus, Peter and Paul: Issues of Triangulation

Family systems therapy lays great stress on how individuals respond when their relational environment invites them to participate in triangles. Therapists see skill in avoiding dysfunctional triangulation as a sign of greater mental health and higher differentiation. The more intensely one is involved in triangles in one's family of origin, the greater the fusion, the

lower the person is on the scale of differentiation. Individuals introduce greater emotional health and differentiation for the various members into a family system, the more they can de-triangulate from each other. Here I offer a number of examples how Jesus, Peter and Paul handle the issue of triangulation.

1. Jesus

► **Mary, Martha and Lazarus (Luke 10:38-42)**

Mary, Martha and Lazarus are an unusual family. They appear to be three, unmarried, adult siblings living together in the same house. In this, their configuration reminds us of three other closely interlocked siblings in the Old Testament -- Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. Martha may be the dominant one, in that the gospel calls where they live "her home" (Luke 10:38). During Jesus' visit, Martha works very hard to provide hospitality, while Mary sits at the feet of Jesus, soaking up his teaching and enjoying his presence. Martha soon becomes exasperated that Mary is not helping her, and perhaps a little jealous. Martha attempts to recruit Jesus into a triangle in order to help exert control over Mary's behaviour. Martha says to Jesus, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." Jesus resists Martha's attempt to recruit him and says, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part which will not be taken away from her." Triangles occur when the tension in an emotional dyad builds to the point where the dyad becomes unstable. Martha feels the tension build between her and Mary. Finally, her anxiety becomes unbearable. Then, she attempts to recruit Jesus into the triangle in order to displace her anxiety and frustration with Mary. Older sisters often feel responsible for, then resent, and scold their younger siblings. The oldest frequently tries to lead

or "parent" the younger siblings. Although Luke does not specifically tell us that Martha is the oldest, she certainly acts it. Jesus resists her attempt at triangulation and does so, not by scolding Martha in return, but by speaking to the issue of her anxiety. He gives her permission to let go of the feeling that she must show such great hospitality. Once again, we see God blessing a house not because it is a traditional family, but because it has invited Jesus in. Once again, we see a (presumably) younger sibling like Mary being blessed by God, not by an accident of birth order but because she is receptive to Jesus.

▸ **Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10)**

In this story Jesus agrees to go to dinner at the house of a notorious and hated tax-collector named Zaccheus. This act is significant. The rest of the community has ostracized Zaccheus because his profession aids the hated Roman occupation. Tax-collectors were notorious for gouging the people. When Jesus announces his intent, the crowd becomes critical and shouts, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner" (Luke 19:7). Jesus handles this attempt at triangulation by ignoring the crowd. Sometimes the only option is to take the criticism and do what one feels is right.

▸ **Dividing the Inheritance (Luke 12:13, 14)**

Once a man attempted to recruit Jesus to help him in a property dispute with his sibling: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13). Here Jesus finds himself in the position of a parent who must intervene between his or her two squabbling children. Jesus refuses to be drawn into the battle. He says, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" Jesus will not play the judge nor take sides. Here he stays out of the triangle by not getting involved.

► **The Mother of James and John (Matthew 20:20-23)**

The mother of two of Jesus' closest disciples, James and John, comes to Jesus with her sons. She requests a place of preeminence for them when Jesus sets up his kingdom. Today, we would probably call her a "stage mother" who wants her children to become "stars." This request is an attempt to recruit Jesus into a triangle between the sons of Zebedee, and the rest of the disciples. In some ways, hers is not an unreasonable request, given that James and John are of the inner circle. Jesus, however, cannot show favouritism within his movement and so he must appear to be neutral. His answer is a model of how to avoid triangulation and yet satisfy a given request. Jesus tells the brothers and their mother that these things are in God's hands and not for him to decide: "You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." Jesus appears neutral and avoids the appearance of favouritism. Yet his reply does give James and John the concession that they will drink from his cup. The irony, of course, is that to drink the cup of Jesus means to suffer martyrdom, which overtakes James in the book of Acts (Acts 12:2).

2. Peter (Acts 10, 11; Gal. 2:11-14)

Unlike his master, Peter is far less adept at avoiding triangulation, and with quite negative results. The book of Acts records an early controversy in the church concerning whether or not believers are exempt from eating unclean foods. Some Christians, chiefly Gentile converts, believe they are exempt, while more traditional Jewish converts feel they are not. According to Acts, a vision reveals to Peter that it is all right to eat unclean foods, and therefore to have fellowship with Gentile Christians. In Galatians, however, Paul relates the process is more complicated. According to Paul's account, Peter has a relapse in his faith. Criticism from

the so-called "circumcision" party causes him to withdraw from fellowship with the Gentile believers, although he initially eats with Gentile converts. Other church leaders such as Barnabas follow the example of Peter. The apostle Paul confronts Peter and his circle, accusing them of hypocrisy and not living consistently with the gospel. Paul does not tell us if Peter changes his policy, but one thing is clear: Peter is trapped in a hot, active triangle between the Judaizers and the Gentile Christians. It is a triangle difficult, perhaps impossible to avoid. Here, Peter's model might have been the way Jesus deals with Zaccheus: to do what was right and ignore the criticism. Had he done what he knew was right, Peter would have had a powerful witness to the party of the circumcision, and could likely have counted on divine favour.

Family systems believes that when individuals are under stress, they revert to patterns of behaviour they learned in their family of origin. One's level of differentiation can decline under severe stress. Peter obviously feels under tremendous pressure in this conflict. We could interpret Peter's reversion to Jewish dietary practice as a return to patterns of religious practice he had learned in his family of origin and a move down the scale of differentiation. The party of circumcision represents these patterns learned in childhood. Peter proves quite susceptible to their pressure. He would have felt strong ties of invisible loyalty to his family and the religious traditions in which they raised him (Acts 10:14). Peter reverts to Jewish tradition and away from the gospel of grace. We see him waffle and cease to be the rock which Jesus called him to be. This controversy sheds light on why Peter became the apostle to the Jews, while Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:8).

3. Paul and the Letter to Philemon

In Philemon, Paul pleads the cause of a fugitive slave named Onesimus. This previously useless slave, runs away from his owner Philemon and takes refuge with Paul. Under Paul's tutelage Onesimus accepts the gospel, and reforms his sinful ways. He is now prepared to return to his master and do right. Paul, therefore, pleads on behalf of the slave. The apostle uses his good offices as the pastor of Philemon. The apostle has considerable moral authority with Philemon, since Paul is the one who introduced Philemon to the gospel. He requests that Philemon take Onesimus back into his service, for the slave who was once useless is now useful. Clearly entangled in a triangle between Onesimus and Philemon, Paul is attempting to rescue the runaway slave from the wrath of his master and Roman law. Nevertheless, as we have already noted not all triangulation is a sign of dysfunction. Here the apostle is not rescuing someone who is not in need of rescue. As a runaway slave, Onesimus has no civil rights. The slave would be in a precarious legal position if the Roman authorities were to investigate his status. Paul himself could have ended up being charged with harbouring a runaway slave. Onesimus genuinely needs help. Paul's involving himself by entering the triangle is not a sign of dysfunction but of Christian love.

What we see in all these cases of triangulation is that triangulation will always come our way. The way we handle it can make a huge difference in our lives and the effectiveness of our ministry. Jesus and Paul are examples of people who handle triangulation successfully, while Peter seems less successful. Many preachers preach sermons based on these very texts, yet just as many allow themselves to become triangulated by rescuing people and situations that do not need rescuing. Or they create resentment because they offer judgment where people neither need

nor want it. Interpersonal models on how to avoid these problems and survive in the parish are found throughout the New Testament. So many preachers end like Peter. They have great gifts for ministry but get constantly tripped up by interpersonal issues.

3. e. The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

As we have suggested earlier, the story of the Prodigal Son has a number of parallels to the story of Dinah and the Canaanites (Gen. 34). Dinah and the Prodigal seem not to be close to their fathers, and go out on their own into dangerous territory. Both act out through risk-taking behaviour, in that they associate with a "bad crowd" who could potentially hurt them. Both are hurt. Each loses their inheritance: the Prodigal loses his patrimony and his desirability as a husband, Dinah loses her virginity and her desirability as a wife. Both must return home sadder and wiser. These two stories present an interesting asymmetry: Dinah is reconciled with her older brothers, but remains alienated from her father Jacob. On the other hand, the Prodigal is reconciled with his father but alienated from his older brother.

That the return of the Prodigal causes resentment in the more responsible older brother, fits with what systems therapy has discovered about birth order. The oldest likes to be dominant in the family. Therefore, it is not surprising that the older brother resents the return of the Prodigal and all the attention showered on this "wastrel." The oldest is also more frequently in conflict with the parents than the youngest. In this story, the most bitter words spoken come in the exchange between the father and the older brother.

Another significant area of convergence between the Prodigal and Dinah is that the mother is not present in either story. Perhaps if Leah had been more involved with Dinah, or not so poisoned by bitterness towards Jacob, Dinah might not have begun to socialize with the

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women of Canaan. Similarly, if a mother had been present for the Prodigal, could she have restrained some of his wanderlust? For what is the Prodigal looking among the fleshpots of the city? Is he searching for a new family that is more carefree and less rigid than his own family of origin, a family with an unsympathetic older brother? Does he seek the mother he had lost, or never known, in the arms of the prostitutes with whom he consorts? Does he feel like an orphan or an outsider in his own home? Or did the father spoil and indulge him because he is the youngest? We will never know for certain, since the author does not give us enough details. All we know is that both Dinah and the Prodigal go looking in all the wrong places for something they feel they do not have at home. Both are hurt very badly in the process.

3. f. The Last Supper: Institution of the Family of God (Matthew 26:14-30; Mark 14:12-21; Luke 22:7-13; Jn. 13:1-11)

As we have noted, Jesus keeps Jewish tradition unless he feels the need to depart or innovate from it, in order to reveal the will of God. We see this tendency quite clearly in the way Jesus celebrates the Passover with his disciples. Normally, the Passover is a family celebration (Ex. 12:3,4), with honoured guests and even Gentiles present (Num. 9:14) The father of the family presides over the meal and conducts the liturgy. During the first century, Jewish religious teachers were nearly always the heads of families. Teachers would hold the Passover at their home with their wives preparing the meal, and the children of the teacher present. Here, at the Last Supper, the religious teacher presiding over the meal has no home, wife, children, or servants. Jesus is a single man without a household. The fact that those present at the Last Supper are not for the most part blood relatives is unusual, but not a radical departure from Jewish tradition, since honoured guests and Gentiles are welcome to attend. Those who prepare

the meal are not his wife or servants, but the disciples (Mark 14:12, 16) -- an interesting role reversal. Nevertheless, though Jesus is not the head of a family, he sits where the father of the family would sit. He is at the head of the table or presiding at the feast. Sitting in the place of the father of the family reaffirms Jesus' statements about, "I am in the Father, and the Father is in me" and "I and the Father are one." God the Father is present at the feast as his only son Jesus Christ. Jesus is one with the Father and one with his disciples. All present at this Passover are members of the family of God. A family formed not by flesh and blood, but by water and spirit. They are incorporate in this family not by the accident of birth, nor the statute of law, but by the word and calling of God. This then is the fulfillment of the words of Jesus when he said, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35). The family, which until now has been an institution of flesh, is now of the spirit (Jn. 1:12,13; 4:22,23). One day through Christ it will be incorporated into the Godhead, "so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). By the spirit, Jesus radically changes our idea of what constitutes family. For Jesus family is not a matter of blood, adoption, or shared residence, it is a matter of the spirit.

3. g. The Eschatology of the Family (Matthew 22:30; Revelation 21:24 and 22:1,2)

While debating the plausibility of the resurrection with the Sadducees Jesus states, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matt. 22:30). When Jesus speaks of heaven, he uses metaphor. Jesus describes what cannot be described in human terms. However, he seems to indicate that the couple relationship, as we have known it, will not be found in the world to come. Since the physical union of a male and female couple is what creates family with children, we must conclude that the family as we know it will not be found in heaven. The family unit is to exist only until the perfect comes. Jesus,

therefore, holds out a great hope for "the world to come." God will finally heal the conflict in couple relationships which resulted from the fall and subsequent curse. Male and female will be redeemed. The subordination of woman due to the fall will be undone; man will no longer seek to dominate woman. Thus Jesus seems to imply there will be no sexual coupling as we know it in heaven. This means there will be no more sexual dysfunction, perversion, or the domination of one partner by the other. If heaven will not have sex as we know it, then the "knowing" we will have of each other in heaven will be infinitely richer and more satisfying. We will know ourselves, God, one another, through our oneness in Christ (1 Cor. 13:12). The ecstasy of physical, sexual union on earth may be a kind of imperfect foreshadowing of the eternal joy which will accompany our spiritual union with Christ in heaven. How exactly God will accomplish this, we cannot know. We can, however, rest assured that nothing which is necessary for the perfect happiness of the people of God will be absent from heaven. If sexual intercourse, as we know it on earth, will be absent from heaven it is only because God will have something more glorious and perfect.

Revelation 21:24 reads, "The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it." It has been an assumption from the beginning of this thesis that nations are large, extended family systems (Gen. 10). I readily admit that the Johannine Apocalypse means nations here, rather than extended family systems. I would suggest though, that what Revelation means here by nations may also be applicable to families. Genesis tells us that Adam and Eve have children after the fall. Families are full of dysfunction and sin because sin and disobedience infect family life. Genesis tells us that, from the beginning, sin and the curse mar couple and family life. Along with Genesis, however, the entire Bible indicates that in

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spite of sin and curse, the grace of God has never been absent from family life, even at its most dysfunctional. Not everything produced by human beings in their collective institutions such as nations/families has been bad. Therefore, that which is good, and healthy in family/nation/culture will be received into the kingdom of heaven and perfected for eternity. The glory of the nations (Rev. 21:24) will be brought into the New Jerusalem.

Revelation 22:1,2 affirms that in the New Jerusalem, both the river of life and the tree of life will be available for the healing of the families/nations. That which was conceived after the fall and laboured under the curse will be set free from sin and death. God, through the sacrifice of Christ, will lift the curse and heal the damage. Although social programs to help families and nations should be encouraged, although family systems therapy can help families, churches and couples to function better, the ultimate healing for families and all creation will only come to fruition when the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of heaven. Medicine can heal us from physical illness, but only the eternal life of God can heal us from sin and death.

Chapter 4 - Pastoral Applications

When we use the tools and concepts of family systems therapy to examine Biblical families, it is possible to see that Biblical families behave like real families. We encounter a gritty sense of realism when we delve into the families of the Bible. Family systems therapy can help us to understand and appreciate why Biblical families act the way they do, and gain additional wisdom into our own family processes. This study has brought home to me in a powerful way how the Bible is true and relevant to our human condition. Biblical families undergo the same struggles we do today. By examining them, we gain insights into how to deal more effectively with our own situations.

The knowledge of family systems therapy, and how the data on which these concepts are based is evident in Biblical families, can be useful in both preaching and teaching situations. Insights of family therapy can aid pastors in connecting with congregational members from a Biblical perspective. This happens when clergy relate Biblical insights in a way which speaks relevantly to family and life situations. For example, the idea for this thesis came from a Bible study I did in my congregation on Biblical families. All those who attended spoke of new personal and Biblical insights. I like to use insights from family therapy in my sermons. When I do, the response is knowing chuckles from my listeners and quick rapport. Understanding family process helps in understanding congregational process and heading off potential conflict. Looking at a congregation from the perspective of a family can help clergy "get a handle" on a congregation, and work towards creative change. Family systems training makes pastors more conscious of boundaries, and teaches the importance of not being triangulated. Knowing that

many of these same issues occur in Biblical families helps me to mediate family systems concepts to my congregation, in a way that resonates with their faith and my own.

I would like to share at least one concrete example of where family systems proved helpful in my pastoral work. One Sunday the congregation in which I am a pastor held a congregational meeting to try and address a chronic, financial shortfall. While they discussed this potentially divisive issue, I tried to avoid becoming enmeshed or fused with the congregation by doing two things: first, I arranged to have one of the congregation's leaders chair the meeting rather than myself. Second, I chose to sit with my wife, well apart from the rest of the congregation. For the most part I simply observed the proceedings. In doing so I was attempting to parallel the way a family therapist works with a troubled family. I deliberately created some distance in the hope of accentuating my differentiation, and encouraging healthy differentiation in the congregational family. I said little in the meeting except to affirm that I had experienced them as a caring group of people, and to remind them of how supportive they had recently been to a congregational family that had lost a mother due to cancer. Here I was trying to "join" with them therapeutically as a family therapist would try to join with a family in therapy. As people in the meeting spoke I noticed the topic move very quickly off the financial shortfall to a more general discussion as to how to improve the fellowship of the church -- a not uncommon scenario in these sort of meetings. I also noticed a number of statements made by members, that expressed regret at the number of members which had been lost from the congregation in recent years. Many of these partings had been on bad terms due to the frequent conflicts this congregation has experienced. As a result I began to wonder if the inner dynamic of this congregational family system was marked by a great deal of unresolved grief at the loss of

so many members.

The following Sunday was Remembrance Sunday. I decided to take a risk. In the sermon I would feed back to them my observations, as an outsider, of the previous Sunday's meeting. I directly addressed the issue of unresolved grief in the congregation. Using the image of a circle I spoke how we had lost members and felt the circle shrinking. I asked them to consider if unresolved grief was hindering the congregation from moving forward. I pointed out the finality of their losses, the need to move on, recruit new members and take care of the remaining members. I tried to end on a note of comfort and hope. To accentuate the theme of the circle I had the choir sing "May the circle remain unbroken." (Not a great musical piece for Remembrance Day I later concluded!) Afterwards people said very little to me about that sermon. However, at the end of the year the church finished in the black and paid off its accumulated debt from previous years. A recent Presbytery visitation to the congregation informed me they had found a very positive attitude in the congregation. It was my knowledge of family systems which determined my whole approach to this issue and, I feel, allowed me to deal effectively with it. A knowledge of family systems now influences my whole pastoral ministry. Perhaps we may paraphrase Barth, "Today's pastor needs to minister with a Bible in one hand, and a copy of Murray Bowen in the other."

Since that time I have been considering that what is applicable to a congregational family system might also be applicable to a denominational family system. I am presently serving as a minister of word and sacrament in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. In 1925 the Presbyterian Church lost more than 60% of its members to the United Church. The PCC had voted to enter the proposed Union but allowed those congregations who wished to vote themselves out of Union. If

the majority of the members of a congregation voted themselves out of Union then the congregation could leave with its property. The parting was not on good terms. There was a great deal of acrimony leading up to the Union. Families and congregations split badly on the issue. After 1925 a lengthy legal battle ensued between the continuing Presbyterian church and the new United Church. The United Church argued that the continuing Presbyterian church had no right to use the name Presbyterian, since the Presbyterian church had joined the United Church. Therefore, the continuing Presbyterian church had no legal right to any monies or property bequeathed to the Presbyterian church. Everything belonged to the United Church. Not until 1939 did the Supreme Court of Canada decide in favour of the continuing Presbyterian church.

It has been noted that the PCC is still haunted by this trauma of "Union." Many people feel that the PCC has stagnated as a result of this loss. Since 1925 a survivalist or fortress mentality has dominated the PCC. I would, however, posit that the survivalist mentality of the Presbyterian church may be a sign of unresolved grief over the loss of so many members. Let me explain. When a nuclear family loses a member through some trauma such as a sudden, unexpected death or suicide, it sometimes has trouble resolving the grief. There is lack of a sense of closure because the deceased and their family did not have a chance to say good-bye. If a strong conflict develops in a family and a member either leaves on bad terms, or without saying good-bye, then again a lack of closure may result. Grief over the loss remains unresolved. Unresolved family grief can linger and be passed on from generation to generation. Families that have not resolved their grief over the loss of a member frequently cannot let a living member leave, either to move away or to get married. They simply cannot bear yet another loss. I believe that the denominational equivalent of these symptoms may be operating in the Presbyterian

church. For example, it has been my observation, that as a denomination, the Presbyterian church is far more resistant to closing small, no longer viable congregations than, say, the United Church. During the 1950's the United Church closed or consolidated many small, rural congregations. The UCC reasoned that the advent of cars and all-weather highways meant people could drive longer distances to church, thereby eliminating the need for many small congregations. There was no such corresponding rationalization in the PCC. In fact, there were instances when the Presbyterians picked up United Church congregations which refused to close. Could it be that we can't stand losing any more churches, just as a grieving family can't bear to lose any more members? In my experience, far more than doctrinal deviations, the Presbyterian Church in Canada considers division in the church to be the worst heresy. Intercongregational conflicts cause the loss of many more members than doctrinal controversy. Very few clergy are ever removed from their pulpits for heresy, but many are removed if there is a split in the congregation. Unresolved grief causes people to fear and to lose hope in the future and thereby stagnate. Fear and lack of hope in the future could be the underlying causes for the historic survivalist stance of the post-1925 Presbyterian church. Unresolved grief leads to depression in the family system. Is the PCC a "depressed" denomination? Have people been leaving the PCC, or not joining, because they sense unresolved grief and collective depression? Presbyterian worship is well known for its solemnity and reserve. This solemnity is especially marked in communion services. The standard explanation for this sobriety is that Reformed worship lays great stress on feeling awe in the presence of a holy God (Isa. 6:1-8). But could the act of worship also be a time when the sense of loss is felt the most? We look out and see all the empty pews of those who left us for the United Church. Such a sense of loss would be especially

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poignant during communion and might help explain why Presbyterian communions are sometimes described in funereal terms. Communion for post-1925 Presbyterians could be the time when we mourn most acutely the "death/loss" of so many former members and the "death/loss" of the glories of pre-1925 Presbyterianism. I would emphasize that people would not need to have been around in 1925 to be affected by the feeling of loss. The denominational family system would retain the grief and pass it on from generation to generation by a kind of "emotional osmosis."

Over the years a number of Presbyterian congregations have begun appropriating styles of worship quite different from traditional Presbyterianism. Some congregations now identify with movements as varied as charismatic, Willow Creek seekers format, contemporary worship, evangelical-fundamentalism, liturgical renewal and others. From a family systems perspective we might say that such phenomenon indicates that at least some Presbyterians are tired of living in a depressed family system and looking away from traditional Presbyterianism, to find joy and meaningful worship in non-Presbyterian worship movements.

The easiest way to solve this problem of unresolved grief in the PCC would be for the denomination to swallow its pride, admit it made a mistake, and join the United Church. The family would finally be brought together and the loss repaired. I suspect that there are those who have always secretly desired this. I notice that even though "Union" was such a trauma, Presbyterians continue to use the term "Union," which has quite positive connotations in our culture. The continuing use of this positive term seems to indicate there remains unfinished business concerning Union and leaves the door open to a future rapprochement. Union with the United Church would appear especially attractive to those who are concerned about the rapid

decline of our denomination since 1960. Human pride being what it is it is, however, it is unlikely our denomination will join with the United Church in the near future.

I believe a family systems approach to this problem of unresolved grief in the PCC, over the losses incurred at Church Union, might be of salutary benefit. Perhaps the church could have denomination wide rituals or services, which would acknowledge the losses of Union, mourn them, accept the finality of this death, and then direct ourselves to move on in hope. One thing that should certainly be done is to re-name the "Union" event. To continue to use the term Union is to accept the understanding of this event provided by the old Unionists. We need to use a word that describes how the continuing Presbyterians actually experienced it. In consideration of the fact, that in 1925 a large number of Presbyterians left the United Church by voting themselves out of the Union, why not refer to this event as "The Exodus of 1925," "The Great Departure," or "The Great Escape?" It should be called anything but Union.

Conclusion

The wide variety of families described in the Bible means we should not be judgmental in how we relate to non-traditional families. The family lives of Old Testament saints such as Jacob and David hardly conform to a traditional nuclear family with conventional Christian ethics. Once the sons of Naomi die her relationship to Ruth neither corresponds to a traditional nuclear family nor to the definition of family in Chapter One of my thesis. The relationship of Martha, Mary and Lazarus is unusual. Mary, the mother of Jesus, may have raised Jesus as a single parent for part of their life together. The ministry of Jesus touches the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4:5-42), and the woman caught in adultery (Jn. 8:1-11). The Bible stretches our definition of what constitutes a family, especially once Jesus defines it from a spiritual

perspective. Therefore, we should be especially careful how we use the Bible to support the idea of "traditional family values." Particularly, since the Bible indicates that no type of earthly family systems will be found in the world to come. There are a wide variety of families in the Bible. God's grace falls upon them all.

Though family systems therapy can be a useful tool in examining Biblical families, it is not without its limitations. Biblical narrative provides only the barest of details when it comes to describing Biblical families. The information provided is useful in analysing families, but the Bible provides us with far fewer details than we would gather if we were working with a clinical family. Therefore, the realization that we may not have all the facts germane to our understanding must temper any conclusions we draw concerning Biblical families. Most Bible stories have at least a core of historical truth. Nevertheless, the majority of Biblical scholars believe the Biblical narratives have undergone considerable literary construction and editing at the hands of unknown, ancient authors. As literary critics have known for some time, it is dicey business doing psychological analysis of people who are not living, historical persons but creations of literary fiction. The critic who does psychological analysis of Hamlet must keep in mind Hamlet is not a living person. Our knowledge of Hamlet is determined by how Shakespeare chooses to develop his character. In the hands of a skilled author like Shakespeare, we find insight into the human condition, but this still is very different from what it means to be in the presence of a living person. We cannot have an "I-Thou" relationship with a literary character. (Especially, a literary character created by its author for a commercial purpose.) Likewise, our knowledge of all Biblical characters is dependent on the particular portrait and theological perspective the authors choose to give us. Given such a reality, we need to be sober

in our psychological assessments of Biblical characters and families. We should refrain from over-psychologizing them.

Finally, the Bible does not describe families in order to be useful in illustrating modern theories of family systems therapy. The Bible's purpose is to give its readers theological and spiritual insight through its narrative. As the Gospel of John states: "But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:31). Salvation, not psychology, is the Bible's aim. Therefore, those who employ family systems theory should avoid using it in a reductionistic manner. We best employ family systems to flesh out, or add to, theological and spiritual insights into Biblical interpretation and not replace them.

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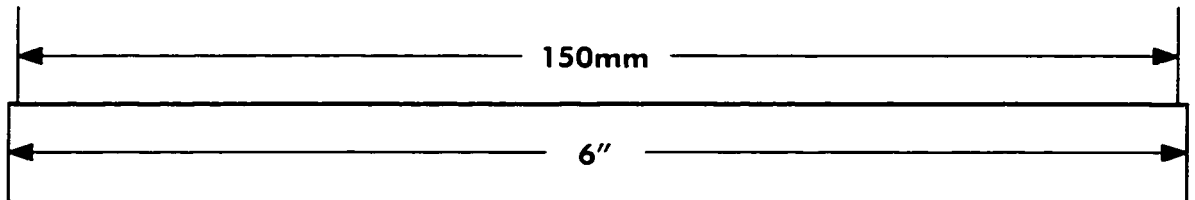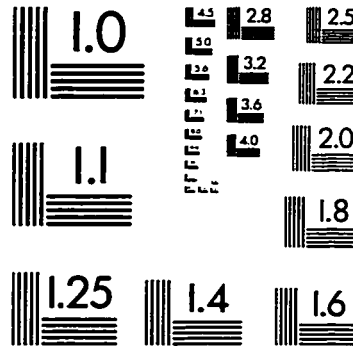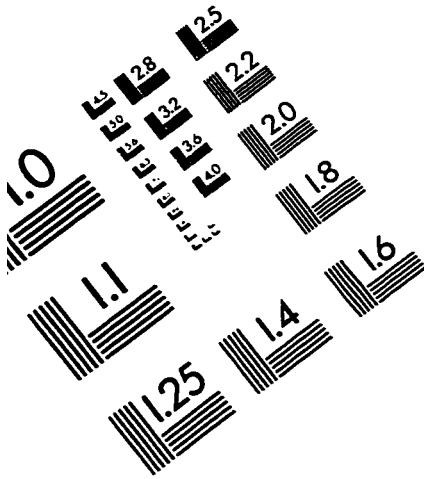
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