
A table of contents for *Anvil* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_anvil_01.php

Home to Home: Towards a Biblical Model of the Family

MICHAEL MOYNAGH

Introduction

Three Models

Contemporary theological perspectives on the family can be grouped broadly into two models. The covenant model highlights similarities between God's covenant with his people and the marriage relationship – for example an initiative of love which invites a response and creates a relationship; a moral affirmation (an oath or vow) which secures the relationship; obligations (commandments) which undergird it; blessings promised to the faithful; and an element of sacrifice (eg an end to singleness and dependence on parents).[1] The model can be extended to include children. 'In a moral sense, what brings people together as a family is the covenant of loyalty to one another from birth to death.' Children are nurtured within 'a circle of covenanted care'.[2]

This model is incomplete, however. It takes insufficient account of what the family is for. It emphasizes the mutual obligations of family members without stressing enough the ultimate purposes of these obligations. The model would be more satisfactory if it highlighted the family's destiny, which – as we shall see – is to help create the eschatological family.

The sacramental model, seeing God as present and active in the world (not just the Church), maintains that the family mediates prevenient grace. It enables members to reach their appropriate perfection. Grace is mediated when God's love breaks through into married love, enriches it, and enables human love to rise above its natural limitations and become – precisely as a human institution – a sacred sign of a greater and deeper love.

1 G. R. Dunstan, 'The Marriage Covenant,' *Theology* 78, 1975, pp 244-52. See also David Atkinson, *To Have and To Hold: The Marriage Covenant and the Discipline of Divorce*, Collins, London 1979, pp 70-98.

2 Lewis Smedes, *Mere Morality*, Lion, Tring 1983. See also Ray S. Anderson & Dennis B. Guernsey, *On Being Family: A Social Theology of the Family*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1985, pp 29-52.

The sign is no symbol, but effects what it signifies.[1] Similarly, in procreation parents participate in God's creative power. Parental love, suffused with divine love, sanctifies the children by working to bring them to perfection. The parents in turn are made more perfect since children open the well-springs of maternal and paternal love.[2]

This model can be taken to mean that grace is mediated automatically through marriage, so long as the couple are baptized and enter matrimony with the right intentions. This would then run up against the brutal reality of many marriages, created by baptized people with the best of intentions. If on the other hand the mediation of grace is thought to depend on the actual behaviour of family members, the model would be straightforward Pelagianism.[3] The sacramental view can be more properly expressed in terms of an eschatological perspective on the family.

The eschatological model is tentatively and all-too-briefly developed here. It is presented very much as work-in-progress, needing considerable further refinement and an application (which space prevents) to the realities of modern family life. The argument briefly is that grace is mediated not through the family institution *per se,* but through the demands of the eschatological family as they confront natural families. The purpose of earthly families is to help create the eschatological family. The death of the divine family saves human families from their inability to achieve that purpose, and in so doing brings the eschatological family into being. The values of the eschatological family then confront the earthly family, challenging it to play a role close to its original purpose. To develop this argument, several assumptions must be spelt out first (though space prevents their full elaboration).

Four Assumptions

One is that the family should be defined in broad terms. The Old Testament word for 'family' (*mishpaha*) is a fluid term blurring distinctions between family and tribe, and family and household. The family consists of

---

1 Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery,* Sheed and Ward, London 1965, vol. 1, p xxiv.

2 'Marriage' in Karl Rahner with Cornelius Ernst & Kevin Smythe, *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology,* Burns & Oates, London 1969, pp 414-8; 'Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World', part 2, ch. 2, in Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II,* Geoffrey Chapman, London 1967, p 252.

3 Exegetical and theological objections to the sacramental view of marriage (basically, that it is never explicitly taught in Scripture) are summarized by David Atkinson op. cit., pp 50-64, and Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex,* James Clarke, Cambridge 1964, pp 130-44. The exegetical debate has traditionally centred on the interpretation of Eph. 5:32. Schillebeeckx has shifted the focus of the debate by attaching prime importance, for the sacramentalist position, to 1 Cor. 7:12-15. See Schillebeeckx, op. cit., pp 155-70.

those who are united by common blood and common dwelling-place. To found a family is to build a house (Neh. 7:4). The term for 'house', *beth*, is also fluid. It may refer to the smallest family unit, the clan or even the entire nation (the 'house of Israel').[1] As Pederson put it, the family in ancient Israel 'extends as far as the feeling of unity makes itself felt.'[2] This is the definition adopted here: a family is what people think is a family.

The second assumption is that the eschatological community has a family character. Though Jesus inaugurates the Kingdom, the fact of God's reign, the New Testament describes the character of that reign in family terms. Believers have the status of sons, not slaves (John 8.35f.). Jesus' followers are to address God as 'Father', not King. The New Testament calls God 'Father' 245 times.[3] When Christ's reign is complete, the Kingdom will be handed back not to a King but to a Father, and Jesus' status will be that of an obedient son rather than subject (1 Cor. 15:24ff.). Paul uses family images to describe the Church, the earthly form of the heavenly community, so often 'that comparison of the Christian community with "family" must be regarded as the most significant metaphorical usage of all.' Christians are addressed or described as brothers in almost every paragraph of Paul's letters.[4] The eschatological community, God's family, resembles earthly families in its basic Father-sons structure and in the family-type quality of its relationships.

Thirdly, it is assumed that this structure should be understood as a Parent-child, rather than specifically a father-son hierarchy. Moltmann has shown how we cannot see the Father purely as male. God-likeness is expressed in both sexes (Gen. 1:27). Where God's pity is spoken of, the metaphor of mother is used (Pss. 22:9; 123:2; Isa. 42:14; 66:13). The Son proceeding from the Father has connotations of giving birth. We should see God as a 'Motherly Father'.[5] Since those who have seen the Son have

1 Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions,* DLT, London 1961, pp 20-1.

2 Johs Pederson, *Israel: its Life and Culture,* OUP, London, 1926, p 48.

3 Thomas A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father,* H & S, London 1980, p 49.

4 Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community,* Paternoster, Exeter 1980, p 53. See also Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man,* SCM, London 1967, pp 229-30 and more generally Helen Oppenheimer, *Law and Love,* Faith Press, Leighton Buzzard 1962, in which 'God's family' is a central concept.

5 Jurgen Moltmann, 'The Motherly Father: Is Trinitarian Patripassianism Replacing Theological Patriarchalism?' in Johannes-Baptist Metz & Edward Schillebeeckx, eds., *God as Father,* Paulist Press, New York 1981, pp 51-6. Moltmann's view does not mean that we should abandon 'Father' in prayer. Father as symbol takes us into 'an infinitely receding tracery of associated meanings that extends far beyond our capacity to rationalise or apprehend them.' The concreteness of the term makes possible a relationship, while the lack of a precise definition of God's character helps to preserve his transcendence (as well as enabling us to conceive of him in motherly terms). William Oddie, *What Will Happen to God? Feminism and the Reconstruction of Christian Belief,* SPCK, London 1984, pp 87-97.

seen the Father, we should expect the motherly side of the Father's character to be reflected in the Son. In his life and willingness to accept death, Jesus displayed in a marked way such 'female' traits as gentleness and submissiveness. Indeed, arguably male and female traits are evenly balanced in his life. His death is described by an expression referring to child-birth (Acts 2:24). If the Father-Son language of the first two persons of the Trinity is not meant to exclude their pronounced female traits, presumably 'brothers' of Christ includes sisters!

Finally, it is assumed that the language used of God's family can be understood in an analogous sense. It is not mere picture language.[1] Adopted into God's household, believers relate to the Father as sons and to Christ as brothers. As will become apparent, earthly families are to replicate the Father-Son relationship revealed by the first two persons of the Trinity. To the extent that they do this, they can be said to derive from God's family (cf. Eph. 3:14f.).

This emphasis on the parent-child relationship implies a stress on the procreative rather than unitive aspect of marriage. It witnesses to the near truism that childhood experiences greatly influence subsequent marital relationships. God's purpose for the family involves perhaps the most fundamental of all human ties. But what is that purpose?

The Purpose of the Family in Ancient Israel

The Anglican reformers' three causes of marriage – procreation, to avoid fornication and mutual support and encouragement – focuses the purposes of the family on what is achieved for its members. The biblical ethic, by contrast, shifts attention to what the family accomplishes by creating a particular type of community. The focus is more outward looking than many traditional 'defences' of the family.

In approaching first the Old Testament it is important, of course, to recognize the immense differences between ancient Israelite society and our own. We cannot simply read off Old Testament statements about the family as if they were automatically applicable today. We need to understand the principles which governed the family's role in ancient Israel, and then see whether there are New Testament indications that these principles have a continuing validity.

Creating a Family-Like Community

Hints about the family's ultimate purpose appear in the Genesis accounts of creation. Though not concerned primarily with the family, Genesis 1-2 have implications for the family. Children were given to the first man and woman not simply to complete their creation – to enable them to show

1 This is not the place to comment on the debate over the nature of religious language. Karl Barth's critique of the analogous view of religious language is helpfully discussed by Robert Brecher, 'Karl Barth: Wittgensteinian Theologian Manque,' *The Heythrop Journal* 24, 1983, pp 290-300.

parental love – but in the explicit context of creating a community which would fill the earth. 'In contrast with the creation-narratives of other ancient peoples, the Old Testament does not hold that towns and temples (ie the original *states*), or certain peoples were created. The nations all form one great family . . . '[1] By multiplying the human race, the smallest family units were to give birth to a global family.

As a result of the Fall, this global family was to be created by the absorption of the surrounding peoples into the nation of Israel. Sarah was blessed with offspring not to enable her to realize her maternal potential or to save her from the social disgrace of being barren, but to achieve God's purpose of creating a particular community. Israel itself is seen as a community bound together by family ties. The nation's tribal structure reflects a sense of common descent from the family of the first Israel. The Hebrew word for people, *'am*, which is used of the nation, originally denoted the connection between kinsfolk.[2]

The closeness of relationships in the smallest family unit, so that what happens to the individual directly affects the whole and *vice versa*, seems also to characterize the national family. The people appear to have been tied by a psychical unity, so that they looked on themselves 'as one living whole, a single animated mass of blood, flesh and bones, of which no member could be touched without all members suffering.'[3] The present generation was at one with their ancestors and descendants. God could therefore address the contemporaries of Amos as 'the whole family which I brought up out of the land of Egypt' (Amos 3:1).

The smallest family unit was to help create this wider family through procreation. Procreation was of immense importance to the Israelites for a number of reasons, one of which was that it was a means of accomplishing God's promise to Abraham of many descendants – that he would have a national family. The smallest family unit was also a means of bringing foreigners into the nation. Foreign women taken in battle could become members of the covenant community through marriage (Deut. 21:10ff.). Residence in an Israelite home brought alien slaves into the covenant (Gen. 17:12f.).

Creating a Godly Community

Ancient Israelites were reminded of their moral obligations in a variety of ways, priests, prophets and cultic rituals being of obvious importance. The

1 Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, Blackwell, Oxford 1962, p 216.

2 Ibid., p 214. We have also noted how the terms 'family' and 'house' are applied to the nation as well as to the smallest family unit.

3 W. Robertson-Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, quoted by H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1981, p 28. Robinson's concept of corporate personality has been criticized for its dependence on discredited anthropological theory, but others maintain that the concept can be derived from the OT. The debate is summarized by Cyril Rodd in his introduction to the 1981 edition of Robinson's work.

smallest family unit also had a critical role: it, too, was to help ensure that the national family was a godly family. The ideal was contained in the implied expectation that the first parents, Adam and Eve, were to pass on to their descendants the image God had implanted in them – an intention which survived the Fall (Gen. 5:3).[1] In the light of Old Testament teaching on parental responsibilities, it is to be assumed that this image was to be transmitted not only genetically, but in the way that parents raised their children. Presumably children were to respond by freely choosing to obey God.

The object of parenting in ancient Israel was to enable children to make an informed choice about whether to obey God. So on the one hand parents were to provide human models of God's character through their law-keeping. They were to teach the nation's laws and traditions which reflected God's character (Exod. 12:24ff.; Deut. 6:6f). They were to discipline their children (Prov. 13:24), just as God frequently punished the people (Prov. 3:11f.). Children were to learn what it meant to obey God.

On the other hand, just as God respected the people's freedom and allowed them to reject him, so parents were to delegate moral responsibilities to their children as they matured. Ultimately, children were to choose for themselves whether to obey God – hence the reminders that parents are not held accountable for their children's sins (Deut. 24:16; cf. Ezek. 20:18). A son may be rebel enough to despise, mock or curse his parents (Prov. 15:20; 20:20; 30:11, 17).

Accordingly, the fifth commandment places a reciprocal obligation on children to honour their parents. A number of commentators believe that the fifth commandment originated in the need, within an extended household, to protect older parents from being slighted by their adult sons.[2] Though the command certainly covered that situation, in its Deuteronomic context its chief object seems to have been to safeguard the parental task of transmitting the faith to children (emphasized in Deut. 4:9f; 6:7, 20f.), The commandment's promise of prosperity in the land harks back to 4:40, where it is associated with parents' teaching role.[3]

Honour means 'to prize highly', 'to show respect', 'to glorify and exalt'. It has nuances of caring for and showing affection (Ps. 91:15).[4] While for the young child this presumably requires obedience, for the adult it involves more than respecting and caring for parents: it includes making wise decisions (which must be understood as decisions which reflect the

1 Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary,* SCM, London 1972, p 70.

2 B. S. Childs, *Exodus, A Commentary,* SCM, London 1974, p 418; Martin Noth, *Exodus! A Commentary,* SCM, London 1962, p 165; J. J. Stamm & M. E. Andrews, *The Ten Commandments in Recent Research,* SCM, London 1967, pp 95-6; Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary,* SCM, London 1966, p 58.

3 P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy,* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1976, p 158; A. D. H. Myers, *Deuteronomy,* SCM, London 1979, pp 69-70.

4 Childs, op. cit., p 418.

moral character of Yahweh). Proverbs 10:1, therefore, promises that the wise son will bring joy to his father, while Proverbs 23:22 urges the son to listen to his father, with the implication that the son must decide whether to follow the advice offered. Honouring is not morally neutral. It demands spiritual discernment. Adult children are therefore responsible for their own sins (Ezek. 18.1 ff.). An Israelite child honoured his parents by carrying forward into his own life the God-like qualities he had seen in, and learnt from them.

In the family context, then, the transmission of the laws and traditions of Israel depended on a reciprocal relationship between parents and children. The object of parenting was not merely to raise a child who would choose his own character (the modern view), but to raise one who, knowing the demands of Yahweh, could choose whether to follow him. The proper response of a child was to choose to walk in the Lord's ways.

The parent-child relationship, thus conceived, was to sustain the covenant, so that the whole family of Israel remained loyal to its Father (Deut. 32:6). Parental responsibilities in Deuteronomy 6 were designed not merely to promote the well-being of individual family units, but of the community as a whole. The responsibilities are given to the whole people ('Hear, O Israel' vv. 3, 4), so that the nation may fear the Lord, have a long life and enjoy good fortune in the land (vv. 2f., 24f.). Parental obligations were to keep the *nation* loyal to the Lord. Likewise the fifth commandment is given so that the people as a whole may benefit. The close parallel between the words in Deuteronomy 6:16b and 4:40 indicates that the basic issue involved in the commandment is the continuity of the covenant. When children honoured God-fearing parents, they carried forward the project of building a community fit to be called the family of God.

Creating a Salvific Community

The smallest family units were to help give the national family a salvific character by freeing its members from some of their imperfections, by saving people from exploitation and by saving people from the worst effects of death.

The family *saved people from some of their imperfections* through child-rearing which was meant to help the individual realize his moral potential (as well as his potential in other areas). The family performed a similar function when it was a means of drawing foreigners into the covenant. In exceptional cases, the family could be a route to emancipation. Slaves could share their master's inheritance (Prov. 17:2) and even succeed in the absence of heirs (Gen. 15:3). One slave married his master's daughter (1 Chr. 2:34f.). Marriage likewise was to enable the partners to realize more of their potential, so continuing the work started by parents. Genesis 1:27's reference to male-female relationships in general includes marriage. It suggests that the divine image is more fully reflected in the man-woman relationship than in either as separate individuals. Genesis 2:24 implies that marriage helps the couple mature into adults. The husband leaves home on

getting married (and so too did the woman according to the custom of the day).

Now the legal position of women in ancient Israel might seem to suggest that far from being an instrument of salvation, the family was a means of subjugating women. Legally the man owned his wife (Exod. 21:3, 22). But this is not the Old Testament's last word on the position of women. It can be seen as a necessary accommodation to patriarchal culture, which was itself subject to theological critique.[1] God in his grace tolerates the culture of fallen humanity, and then invites mankind to step back to the pre-Fall ideal.

The ideal is implied in Genesis 2, where man is seen as being fulfilled by his wife because she is a suitable helper (Gen. 2:18, 21ff.). Despite traditional exegesis to the contrary, the passage can be interpreted in non-hierarchical terms. Traditionally it has been said that, given the significance of naming in the ancient Near East, the man's naming of the woman in Genesis 1:23 is an expression of authority. But this naming of Eve can be seen more as an exclamation of delight than an expression of authority.

The creation of Eve is a response to the need to find a 'fit helper' for man. 'Helper' need not suggest subordination, since of the nineteen times it is used in the Old Testament, fifteen use it of God. The man's joy in seeing the woman (v. 23) was a recognition that she was indeed a fit helper. There seems to be a spontaneity which was absent from the more purposeful naming of the animals in vv. 19-20. Unlike v. 19, v. 20 omits any infinitive clause of purpose.

Verse 23 does not employ the Old Testament's standard naming formula which denotes authority. In the standard formula we find the verb 'to call' and the noun 'name' – as in Genesis 4:25, 'she bore a son and called his name Seth'. In Genesis 2, these words are found together only in Adam's naming of the animals (v. 19). In v. 23 'name' does not appear (and 'woman' is used as a common noun designating gender rather than a proper noun). Adam does not use the standard naming formula for his wife till after the Fall – in Genesis 3:20. Female subordination does not seem to have been a pre-Fall ideal. Complementarity is the central theme.[2]

Ancient Israel was summoned back to the Garden of Eden ideal. Genesis 3:16 has often been read as a divine injunction that men should rule over women, but it need not be taken in that vein. There is no imperative in the Hebrew. It is a prediction on account of the woman turning toward her husband, with the implication of turning away from God. The word normally translated 'desire' in English means 'turning', and is rendered as such in the LXX. The sense of the verse can be taken to be that the husband will

---

1 Phyllis Trible, 'Woman in the Old Testament,' *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* Abingdon, New York and Nashville 1976, Supplementary Volume, pp 962-66. See also Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality,* Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1978, *passim.*

2 Mary J. Evans, *Women in the Bible,* Paternoster, Exeter 1983, pp 14-7.

rule over the woman because she is turning away from God. By implication, if she turns back to God and ceases to be over-dependent on her husband, she can restore the Genesis 1-2 ideal of a partnership which completes the spouses.[1]

Such a relationship is celebrated in the Song of Songs, where male dominance and sexual stereotyping is entirely absent. The woman actively seeks the man for love-making (3:1ff). She is an independent person who keeps vineyards (1:6) and pastures flocks (1:8). Equality and harmony is expressed in the formula 'My husband is mine and I am his' (2:16; 6:3). Chapter 7:10 transforms the description of sin in Genesis 3:16 into an affirmation of mutuality and delight.[2] The Song indicates that Israel's legal understanding of the man-woman relationship did not obliterate the ideal of partnership.

These are signs that Israel retained some awareness of bringing spouses to completion in a relationship of mutuality rather than female subordination. Significantly, however, the purpose of marriage was not purely inward looking, to benefit members of the immediate family. The picture of the ideal wife sees her freeing her husband for his civic duties (Prov. 31:23). She meets the needs of the poor (31:20). As family members were helped to realize their potential, they were able to contribute to the well-being of the wider community.

The family was not only to save its members as far as possible, from their imperfections; it was also *to save people from exploitation.* It was to protect its own members. The *go'el* was to redeem a close relative sold into slavery (Lev. 25:47ff), or family property in danger of alienation (Lev. 25:25). Both situations could amount to much the same thing. If a sizeable piece of land passed out of the family, members of the household might be forced to work for another person. The family was also to protect the disadvantaged who were not immediate relatives. Land, which was held on a family basis, was to be cultivated so as to provide for the sojourner, fatherless and widowed – those without family protection who would otherwise have been cut off from a source of livelihood (Deut. 24:19).

As originally envisaged, the decentralized nature of economic and political power in Israel was to be ensured by locating that power in the extended family. In the Canaanite city-states all land was owned by the king and there were feudal arrangements with those who lived and worked on it. In Israel land was divided as widely as possible into multiple ownership by extended families. To preserve this distinctively egalitarian system, various laws (eg Lev. 25:8ff) encouraged land to be retained within the kinship groups. Likewise, political power was originally very decentralized and located – for the most part – in the wide network of local elders in each community. This economic and political structure was intended to militate against the political domination and economic

1 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics,* Academic Books, Grand Rapids 1983, pp 204-6.

2 Trible, 'Women in the Old Testament,' op. cit., p 964.

stratification typical of the chief political centres in the ancient Near East.[1] The extended family, in short, was to provide a bastion against the concentration of economic and political power which could be used to exploit those who were powerless.

In addition to its other salvific functions, the family was *to minimize the effects of death.* It was closely associated in saving its members from premature death as a result of sin. The redemption of first-born sons, at the heart of the sacrificial system, occurred within a family context (Exod. 12-13). Circumcision, the sign of the covenant, was a domestic act. Covenant blessings, such as prosperity, were experienced by the main landholding unit, the extended family. The family was a focal point for the covenant relationship.

The levirate was a means by which the family minimized one of the worst effects of death – the total extinction of a man's 'name'. If a man died without children, the 'name' of the dead man was to be perpetuated through the widow's marriage to her husband's brother. They were to have children 'for' the dead man (Deut. 25:5-10). Pederson comments:

> If a man, after having contracted marriage, dies without sons, then he dies entirely. It is this blotting out of life which is to be avoided. His nearest of kin, the brother, must perform this office of love in order to protect him from extermination. The wife, whose object in life is to bear him a son in whom his life is resurrected, must be enabled to do her duty towards him.[2]

Though the dead man died, his character did not entirely die with him. To the extent that his brother shared some of his characteristics and these were passed on to his son, his life was reborn in his son. The family mitigated the punishment of death as a result of the Fall.

So it was that the family was to help create not only a family-type community which was also a Godly community, but a community with a salvific character. The family was to help bring into existence the family of God. Its ultimate purpose was to be sought largely outside rather than purely within the family.

The Salvation of the Family

The Old Testament conveys a mixed picture of the family's success in living up to these high ideals. There are explicit examples of family achievement – the story of Ruth and the success of the Davidic line in producing a family fit to raise the Messiah, for example. There are hints – from the rich deposit of piety in ancient Israel and from the existence of 7000 prophets loyal to Yahweh at the time of Elijah (1 Kgs. 19:18) – that the family did have some success in transmitting knowledge of the Lord from generation

1 N. K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050 BC,* SCM, London 1978, p 10.

2 Pederson, op. cit., p 78.

to generation. Yet against this can be set the many cases of family failure recorded in the Old Testament.

The Failure of the Family

We need to be precise about whether this failure originated from outside the family, from family structures *per se,* or from individuals within the family. It is arguable that the widespread failure of the family to achieve its purpose was due to the breakdown of institutions outside the family and which were designed to support it. In the latter centuries of the monarchy, oppression and injustice were destroying families.[1]

This is only part of the story, however. The failure of families like Eli's suggests that destructive forces were also at work within the family. There are no signs that evil originated in family structures themselves – that the institution had a life of its own which corrupted its members. Rather, as one would expect given the systemic closeness of individuals to the structure, it seems that individuals contaminated family relationships, affecting the institution which in turn affected individuals.

That family failure would have implications for wider society is suggested by Judges 19-20. The story begins with the desertion of the concubine, presumably because of ill-treatment by her husband (if the men's total lack of tenderness in 19:25 and 19:27ff. is anything to go by). Reconciliation is followed by gross inhospitality by a larger family unit – a point emphasized by the Levite's deliberate avoidance of Jebus to stay among his own people (19:12) – and civil war is the result. This completes the natural progression from the wife's departure which threatens the family's organic unity, to trouble between the anti-social Benjamites and the man, to a massive civil war which threatens the disintegration of the nation as a whole. A connection is made between the well-being of the smallest family unit and the health of the national family.[2]

The roots of family failure in the Old Testament lie in the family's failure to transmit knowledge of Yahweh. Evidence for this comes from the Book of Judges. The book can be read as an historical commentary on Deuteronomy, which emphasizes parental responsibility to teach children knowledge of Yahweh and the children's reciprocal duty to honour parents. Judges 2:20f. links the worship of Baals to the growth of a new generation which did not know the Lord, which suggests a widespread failure to keep these commands.

The Samson story reinforces the point. Samson has been seen as a 'type' of Israel – hence the relative anonymity of his parents (his mother is not

1 Christopher J. H. Wright, *Living as the People of God: The Relevance of Old Testament Ethics,* IVP, Leicester 1983, pp 192-3. How poverty and debt could destroy ordinary families is poignantly expressed, after the return from exile, in Neh. 5:4.

2 Susan Niditch, 'The "Sodomite" Theme in Judges 19-20: Family, Community and Social Disintegration', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44, 1982, pp 365-78.

named) and of Samson himself. His name seems to derive from the Hebrew word *shemo* (=name). The anomaly of Samson being the only judge to fight for himself rather than Israel can be explained by the fact that Samson *is* Israel. This also explains his parents' unusual steps of accepting Nazirite regulations for themselves and then imposing them on their son.

The regulations represent the Israelite covenant, and are kept just as the 'fathers' of the people in the Judges period had kept the covenant commands (2:22). But Samson falls away as Israel does. He breaks his Nazirite vows by eating from a dead and impure animal (14:8ff.), by – it is implied (14:10) – drinking wine at a wedding banquet and by cutting his hair (16:17ff.). This is associated with his attraction to foreign women, which also lay behind the nation's apostasy. He calls on the Lord in his time of distress (15:18), as the people do (3:9, 15 etc.). The Lord hears his prayer and delivers him, just as he delivers Israel under the Judges. Only when the people's violation of the covenant grows deep does Yahweh hand them over to their enemies (2:14) and Samson to the Philistines. But Samson repents, again like Israel, by acknowledging that his fate rests ultimately with Yahweh, so destroying his enemy's temple.[1]

Samson epitomizes the people's failure to honour completely their parents by fearing the Lord. The repetition of failure even among families of men who were close to God – such as Gideon, Eli, Samuel and David – suggests a near inevitability about it. Perhaps that is one reason for the warning on which the Old Testament concludes. At least one modern commentator has understood Malachi 4:6 in relation to the command to honour parents.[2] The alternative is presented between a return to family harmony in which knowledge of Yahweh is passed from generation to generation, and a curse on the land to replace the promise of blessing attached to the fifth commandment. Was the family to continue its failure to sustain its high calling?

Instead of being a means of salvation, the family becomes an instrument of moral decline. Deuteronomy 13:6ff. warns of the particular danger of being led into apostasy when the temptation comes from close relatives. Deuteronomy 7:3 forbade Israelites to inter-marry with the indigenious peoples. Failure to keep this command is associated with the adoption of Canaanite religious practices (Judg. 3:7). This is repeated throughout the nation's history (1 Kgs. 11:1ff.; 16:31; Neh. 13:23ff.; Mal. 2:11). Instead of the family bringing its members closer to perfection, intermarriage drew the people away from the covenant.

In particular, the family surrendered its position as a bastion against oppression. It did this when the representatives of the family, the elders, asked for a king. Though their demand arose largely from a desire to

1 Edward L. Greenstein, 'The Riddle of Samson,' *Proof-texts* 1, 1981, pp 237-60.

2 Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zachariah, Malachi – An introduction and Commentary*, IVP, Leicester 1972, p 252.

strengthen their military position (1 Sam. 8:20; 12:12), 1 Samuel 8's account of the decision to adopt monarchy is more concerned with the rejection of Yahweh implied by the demands (v. 7). What we see is a repetition of the familiar cycle of repentance (1 Sam. 7:2ff.) and apostasy. The demand for a king is linked to the worship of foreign Gods (1 Sam. 8:8).

There are grounds for assuming that the cycle was similar to previous ones in that it involved, and was at least partly the result of, failings in parent-child relationships. The elders who call for a King are contrasted with Samuel who has grown old (1 Sam. 8:4f.), suggesting that they were the wayward children of the generation which had returned to Yahweh. Despite their distaste for Samuel's children, their apparent rejection of their own parents' authority and their refusal to accept Samuel's opposition to monarchy gives them something in common with Samuel's rebellious sons (1 Sam. 8:1ff.). Whether through faulty parenting or lack of filial respect for parents (or both), obedience to Yahweh had not been transmitted from one generation to the next.

Samuel's warning that monarchy would oppress the family, separating children from parents and reducing the family's source of livelihood (1 Sam. 8:10ff.), was realized in the history of the kings. This made it even more difficult for ordinary families to reflect God's character in their moral life or to receive his blessings. Families became victims of the monarchy – but only because they had contributed to the spiritual declension which led to kingship in the first place.

A longer study would need to look at other instances of family failure – not least sibling rivalries which feature prominently in the patriarchal families and in the succession narratives of 2 Samuel 9-20, 1 Kings 1-2.[1] But perhaps enough has been said to show how family failure is a significant Old Testament theme. Instead of helping to build a national family, family behaviour could threaten the well-being of the wider community. Instead of creating a Godly community, families failed to pass on knowledge of Yahweh. Instead of producing a salvific community, families drew people away from the covenant and became victims of oppression. All too often families did the exact opposite of what was intended.

The Salvation of the Family

The failure of the family to achieve its purpose created the need for God, through Christ, to bring into existence what earthly families were unable to establish – a family community belonging to God.

Christ's work involved making a psychological break from his earthly family. That Jesus had to break with his family should come as no surprise.

---

1 It might consider the possibility – if Wheeler Robinson (op. cit. *passim*) is right in believing that the individual Israelite sums up in himself the past, present and future life of the nation – that these rivalries had significance for tribal conflicts in the later history of the people.

We have seen that one of the factors associated with family failure in the Old Testament was the family's capacity to draw its members into sin. It follows that people must break with the culture of the fallen family to identify with God's wider family. This is also a significant Old Testament theme. 'The history of salvation begins with Abraham's willingness to leave home, to break kinship ties'.[1] Levites were considered especially dedicated to Yahweh because they slaughtered their own sons and brothers for betraying Yahweh with the golden calf (Exod. 32:29). Samuel was separated from his family to enter temple service at a very young age (1 Sam. 1:24ff.).

Jesus brings this Old Testament ideal to fulfilment. Luke 2:41ff., where Jesus temporarily stays behind in the temple after his parents had left Jerusalem, is the earliest account of Jesus separating from his parents. What is significant is the direction of the separation. Jesus' question in v. 49 establishes a distance between him and his earthly parents in favour of his heavenly Father. This is taken further in Mark 3:31ff., where Jesus declares that his true family are those who do the will of his Father. Becoming independent of his relatives, so as to give total allegiance to the Father, involved an open conflict with them. Though Mark 3:21 is capable of various translations, there are good exegetical grounds for taking it to mean 'And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for his own were saying, "He is beside himself" '.[2] Jesus had to resist family expectations to accomplish his task.

Alongside this tradition must be set one that emphasizes Mary's release of Jesus. So total is this release that instead of expecting her son to honour her, Mary eventually honours him by becoming his disciple. Her instruction to the servants at Cana to obey Jesus (presumably after the Mark 3 incident) displays a faith in him in advance of the disciples (John 2:5, 11).[3] Mary becomes so complete a disciple that Jesus can consider her one of the first members of the new family created by him. His statement from the cross that Mary is now John's mother and John her son (John 19:26f.) is commonly seen as the symbolic birth of the Church – of the eschatological family, whose relationships are to be marked by mutual love, brought into existence by Christ's death.[4] Mary's enduring fellowship with her son was not based on Jesus' continued identification with his earthly family, but on her identification with his eschatological family.

Jesus' separation from his family released him to accomplish his work on the cross. In connection with the latter, Moltmann has provided a very suggestive Trinitarian theology. At the crucifixion God takes the suffering

---

1 Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teaching of Jesus*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1979, p 31.

2 Raymond E. Brown et. al., eds., *Mary in the New Testament*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1978, pp 54-9.

3 John de Satge, *Mary and the Christian Gospel*, SPCK, London 1976, pp 55-6.

4 Ibid, p 57, Brown et. al., eds., op. cit., pp 206-18.

world into his own trinitarian history. The cross involves a death in God. The Son suffers abandonment by the Father while the Father suffers the loss of his Son. The Spirit proceeds from the event between Father and Son and must be understood as the Spirit of the surrender of the Father and Son, as the Spirit which creates love for forsaken man and as the Spirit which brings the dead alive. The crucifixion must be understood in the light of the resurrection with its promise of life and reconciliation. It is through the crucifixion-resurrection that God opens up in himself life and freedom for sinners.[1]

The involvement of Father and Son in the crucifixion opens up themes for a family theology. Rejection lay at the heart of the divine experience. On the cross the Son felt totally abandoned by the Father – so much so that his cry in Mark 15:34 is the only recorded occasion on which he failed to address God as Father.[2] He experienced the utter isolation that comes from so complete a rejection. Jesus' fate was to be driven out of the family. 'He died as one expelled, expelled by the entire weight of the legitimate authority of the divine law.'[3] Because Jesus dies as man's representative, the Father suffers not only the loss of his son, but rejection of his authority by the Son. By becoming sin, the Son becomes the exact opposite of all that his Father represents. He is cast in the role of rebel, and suffers the death penalty prescribed in the Old Testament for persistently disobedient sons (though in this case death by crucifixion rather than stoning).

We can speculate that Jesus experienced death as if he was killed by his brothers, though there is a 'now but not yet' tension here. On the one hand, as in the Mark 3:31ff. incident, Jesus calls his followers his family as if it was true at that time. On the other, there is a sense in which men and women cannot be truly Jesus' brothers till after the resurrection, since they require Jesus' atoning death to be reconciled to him. Perhaps we should understand Jesus' description as indicating his solidarity with those excluded from the divine family but about to be incorporated into it through the crucifixion and resurrection. He gives them the status of brothers in anticipation of his death. Accordingly, we can assume that Jesus experienced the crucifixion as if it was done by his brothers. This means that the Son, experiencing death as an innocent victim of his brothers, suffered the role of family

1 Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, SCM, London 1974, pp 235-49. Moltmann's thesis hinges on the sense of total abandonment experienced by the son in his cry of dereliction (Mark 15:34). Despite the contrary views of some exegetes, this interpretation 15:34 is supported by D. H. C. Read, 'The Cry of Dereliction,' *Expository Times* 68, 1956-7, pp 260-2 and C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, CUP, Cambridge 1954, pp 458-9. The abandonment was real but, as Moltmann maintains, the Trinity was preserved because the Father and Son were united by a common will.

2 Jesus' failure to address God as 'Father' is not just because he was quoting from Ps. 22, as commentators sometimes maintain. In Luke 23:46 his quote from Ps. 31:5 is prefaced with *pater.*

3 Pannenberg, op. cit., p 263.

scapegoat. In that role, the Father's refusal to use his power to prevent the crucifixion represents a form of collusion with the Son's brothers.

These experiences of rejection, of course, do not exhaust the hurts felt by natural families. Not directly represented on the cross are painful relationships involving other family members – in-laws, aunts and uncles, grandparents. In particular marital conflicts are not directly represented. However, it is a commonplace to say that marital problems frequently stem from how spouses experienced their families of origin.[1] It can be argued that involved in the crucifixion are typically the most bitter of family interactions, and that these normally have the most profound effect on the child's subsequent relationships. The cross atones for the roots of marital and other family failures.

Through Christ the Godhead accomplishes what earthly families have been unable to achieve on their own, which is to create the eschatological family. The cross redeems men and women from the empty way of life handed down from their families (1 Pet. 1:18f). Freed from the consequences of sin transmitted through the family, the individual is able to enter the eschatological family. No longer does membership of the family depend on belonging to the households of the people of God: it is accomplished by adoption through Christ. The power of Christ's blood breaks the power of blood relationships to create a new set of family bonds.[2]

The Eschatological Challenge

We can speak, then, of the salvation of the eschatological family because through Christ, God achieves what natural families are unable to do, which is to bring into existence that family. But we must speak also of the salvation of earthly families. For the eschatological family confronts the earthly family so that the latter conforms more closely to its original purpose. A theoretical starting-point is provided by Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* which argues that God reveals himself in promise.[3] This promise contradicts reality and so spurs man to change it. God is known 'horizontally' in this conflict between what is and what is to come, and in man's efforts to conform society to the future which promise anticipates. Certain ambiguities and inconsistencies in Moltmann's thesis have been discussed

1 See, for example, Jack Dominian, *Marriage, Faith and Love,* DLT, London 1981, where this is a major theme.

2 Discussion of precisely how this happens would take up beyond the space available.

3 Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope,* SCM, London 1967.

by Christopher Morse.[1] Taking account of Morses' clarifications, we can apply Moltmann's eschatological model to show how the promise of the eschatological family confronts the reality of the modern family.

Starting a Family

One of Jesus' most striking promises is that there will be no marrying in heaven. Mankind will become like angels (Mark 12:25). Marriage ceases because, in the absence of death, there will be no need for procreation.[2] Equally, there will be no need for a multiplicity of parents since the children of the resurrection are God's children (Luke 20:34ff.). The divine Fatherhood has replaced human parentage.[3] Human families have dissolved into one family.

In his teaching on divorce, Jesus shows how this future reality challenges our attitude to the present. He does not go so far as to call for the abolition of the family, for the Kingdom is not fully realized. It is in the process of coming, and the family still has a role to play. Rather, he expects some people to stay single for the sake of the kingdom (Matt. 19:12), which was a profound innovation in the context of the Jewish expectation that everyone should marry. The future's challenge to the present creates a new situation which itself advances the Kingdom. This is frequently treated from the very important standpoint of singleness, which Paul saw as freeing people from the concerns of the world so that they could be more totally committed to the cause of the kingdom (1 Cor. 7:32ff.). The exclusive love of Christ in total abstinence becomes an objective form in which the eschatological kingdom is partially realized in this world.[4]

Yet if singleness is made an option, so too must marriage which means – as Hauerwas notes – that the family is not something 'we do' because we are in the habit or it is necessary. Like the life of singleness, it is a vocation for creating a particular kind of community.[5] Entering marriage involves

1 Christopher Morse, *The Logic of Promise in Moltmann's Theology,* Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1979. For example, Morse (pp 119-27) highlights an ambiguity in Moltmann concerning the mode of God's being at the end of history. Will God, who currently reveals himself in promise, continue to reveal himself in that way? Or will his eternal presence be experienced in fullness, implying that he is no longer a God of the future manifest in the present through promise, but a God of the present alone? Morse argues that the former is more consistent with the rest of Moltmann's theology. If at the end God becomes totally present rather than eternally future, divine imminence must be accorded ultimate ontological status. Moltmann's dynamic conception of God will have given way to a static one.

2 P. K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female,* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1975, pp 110-1.

3 I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke,* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1975, p 742.

4 Schillebeeckx, op. cit., p 131.

5 Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic,* University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame Ind. 1981, p 174.

commitment to a vision – to the goal of helping to form the eschatological family through the life of the human one. The vision entails, as we have already seen, the human family acting as a foundational unit for the family of God by transmitting knowledge of God to the next generation and by performing certain salvific functions. The promise of the future confronts the present to make the vision more of a reality.

Forming the Eschatological Family

One of the most startling features of the eschatological family is its size: it embraces all followers of Jesus because the divine family has opened itself – at great cost – to include man. Membership is not merely promised for the future: it is to be experienced now, which means that two realities are to exist side by side – the reality of the human family and that of the eschatological family. One of the promises of the eschatological family is that eventually all boundaries between human families will be dissolved. This challenges the modern tendency to narrow the family to the 'privatized' nuclear model.

What the challenge may mean in practice is illustrated by the primitive Church, which saw no sharp distinction between the family household and the 'household of God' – hence their sharing of possessions, eating together, showing hospitality and house-based church worship. The Church grew as converted households dissolved kinship barriers to welcome others into God's family. Opening up the household helped to give the Christian community its family feel. People like Onesimus were to be regarded as brothers, not just slaves. They were to find in open homes a sense of belonging comparable to what a Middle Easterner finds in his village. The community was to welcome home those on the margins of society, who are Jesus' 'brothers' (Matt. 25:31ff.), as well as single people who were to experience a family warmth that would make their status truly anticipatory of heaven.

The new family was to compensate for the loss of one's own family sustained through following Christ. It was to provide the security that enables one to swap one's human family culture for the values of the redeemed family, the role models which enable one to learn those values, and a new source of identification – the Father – to replace identification with parents. Here, then, is a model of how the eschatological family can challenge the demarcations between earthly families, so that the latter can help to bring the redeemed community into being and give it a family character. The end of the family is the end of family distinctions.

Creating a Godly Family

Paul promises that at the *eschaton* Christ will hand the Kingdom back to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). The Son hands back to the Father authority which has been delegated to him. That all authority in the Kingdom has been delegated to the Son is clear from Matthew 28:18. This total delegation of authority contrasts with the reluctance of many human parents to release

their children by giving them increasing responsibilities as they mature.

The Son's responsibility is to accomplish the Father's redemptive project. When that has been achieved, the Son will hand the completed project back to the Father. Since the project was initiated by the Father and will be perfected in a way that pleases him, the Father will be able to see himself in the finished product. This again contrasts with the widespread belief that adult children owe parents minimal allegiance. Against the modern view that the child's freedom lies in rejecting parental authority is one which sees the Son choosing to carry forward a project (realizing the Kingdom) close to his Father's heart and reflecting the latter's character.

The eschatological relationship between Father and Son is not meant to be so qualitatively distinct that it has no bearing on the human situation. For after all, earthly fatherhood derives from the heavenly Father (Eph. 3:14f) and God has chosen to reveal himself through the mode of family relationships. The presumption must be that relations within the earthly family are intended to reflect the eschatological pattern. We can capture what would be involved if we imagine the project of advancing the Kingdom being passed from one generation to the next, children being released by their parents to choose whether and how to contribute to the project.

In remaining faithful to the project a child honours his parents, handing back to them (as it were) his contribution to it. When the project is complete, it is taken up into the Kingdom which is itself handed back to the Father. In seeking to transform family relations so that they conform more closely to the eschatological model, men and women help to bring about that future. And as each set of parents embarks on a project which reflects God's character and successive generations carry that project forward, God's character is transmitted through history.

Creating a Salvific Community

The promise of the union between Christ and the Church in Ephesians 5:21ff. speaks of an intimate oneness within the eschatological family. This confronts the disunity of many contemporary families where marital conflict either leads to the complete break-up of the home, or involves a form of internecine guerrilla warfare in which one parent will often seek an alliance with the children against the other. Many exegetes would maintain that the Ephesians 5 passage challenges the husband and wife to establish their unity on the basis of male headship exercised in a considerate way.[1] This will promote unity within the family as a whole. Yet the passage is capable of a different interpretation, for it is governed by the notion of mutual submission in verse 21. The distinction between submission (vv 22,

1 Eg, Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in the Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences,* Servant Books, Ann Arbor 1980, pp 78-87.

24) and obedience (6:1, 5) indicates that Paul does not equate submission with obedience. On the other hand, too much should not be read into the distinction between love and submission. Paul's definition of the husband's role was so radical for contemporaries that Paul may have felt the need to use traditional terminology to make his arguments more persuasive.

The ideal of mutual submission suggests that submission involves surrender to the other person's interests. This would be consistent with the notion of headship (in v. 23) implied by Paul's treatment of Christ's headship in 4:15ff. There headship is presented not as authority over the Church (which undoubtedly Christ has), but as a function enabling the body to grow and be built up. The husband has the same role *vis-a-vis* his wife. As Evans notes,[1] this makes sense of the strong 'But' *(Alla)* which opens v. 24. Though the husband is head of the wife in (for contemporaries) the new sense of bringing her to fullness, the wife is to submit to him in the analogous sense of putting his interests first. A mutuality, consistent with v.21 and with 1 Corinthians 7:1ff which is addressed equally to husbands and wives and expects mutuality in their decision making, is thereby commended. Verse 25 returns to the theme of headship as self-giving to the wife.

The eschatological model of Christ's union with the Church, based on mutual self-giving, calls Christian marriages back to the creation ideal of sexual equality before God. The ideal is reaffirmed in Galatians 3:26ff, where the strong inference is that unity derives from an equality of status. The Ephesians 5 passage argues that union based on mutuality works toward the completion of the partners, and that what is true of the Christ-Church model should be true of marriage. That the Church is completed by her 'husband' is explicit in vv. 25ff. That Christ is also completed is implied from v. 31's quotation of Genesis 2:24. Woman was made to complete man's creation, as a solution to his loneliness. Paul's analogy of Christ as husband suggests that in a not dissimilar way the Church completes Christ by providing the brothers with whom he can have fellowship. This would be consistent with the interpretation (admittedly disputed) of 1:23 which takes it to refer to the completion of Christ. To the objection that Christ is already complete, it can be said that while this is true of his person and of his relationships within the Trinity, it is still not true of his chosen destiny which is to enjoy fellowship with the human brotherhood.

This model of the mutual completion of Christ and the Church is used to encourage change in marital relationships. The 'mystery' (v 32) is not that the reality of Christ's redemption is actual and present in marriage itself, leaving the couple with the task of making the presence visible in their life together.[2] This would be to reduce too sharply the distinction between

1 Evans, op. cit., p 75. This exegesis of Eph. 5 owes much to Evans, as well as to the very detailed commentary of Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* Doubleday, New York 1974, pp 607-749, on which Evans herself draws heavily.

2 As some interpretations of the Catholic position would hold.

God and man brought about by the Fall. In the context of verse 31, Paul is referring to the analogy between what Christ will accomplish for the Church and what God originally intended for marriage. The promise of the future is being used to call married couples back to what was intended at the beginning. The completion of the eschatological family – of Christ and the Church – challenges spouses to bring each other to completion. This will go beyond the provision of companionship in marriage. It may involve one partner providing the other, for example, with the security or the affirmation or the affection that was missing in his or her family of origin. It will involve helping one another to realize his or her potential more fully in a whole variety of ways.

Confronting spouses with their obligation to each other in this way can help to transform the family so that it performs its salvific purpose more adequately. As individuals are released from childhood experiences which stifle their creativity and are provided through their partners with new opportunities to express themselves, they can help to form the eschatological community by building on the foundations laid by Christ (1 Cor. 3:10ff.). This may involve drawing others into the community, thereby saving them through Christ from the consequences of sin, or helping existing members to become more complete – 'mature' (cf. Eph. 4:11ff.). The family will be helping to save others from their imperfections.

These are some of the ways in which the reality of the eschatological family confronts the natural family. As men and women seek to conform to this eschatological vision, their families will be brought more closely in line with God's design for the family. The promise of the future helps to realize in the present what God had intended in the past.

A longer study would be needed to develop these themes, and in particular – which would be of most interest – to consider their implications for contemporary families. But perhaps enough has been said to suggest that an eschatological model of the family may do more justice to the biblical material than the covenant or sacramental models. It would locate the family's purpose – to create a particular type of community – largely outside the family. This would challenge the contemporary tendency to justify the family in terms of what it achieves for its members. The model would take seriously the family's shortcomings and provide a family interpretation of the cross. It would show too how the eschatological family can challenge contemporary families to make the Kingdom more present in the world. There would then be less far to travel from home to home.

The Revd Dr Michael Moynagh is a curate at Emmanuel Northwood.