ABSTRACT

THE CHURCH AS THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD: A BIBLICAL AND

SOCIOCULTURAL STUDY

by

Simon K. Varghese

This study investigates the image of the church as the household of God and the

relevance of this image for effective mission in India, using a sociocultural approach.

Three major areas are studied: biblical, Greco-Roman, and Indian concepts of household.

Close attention is given to three important aspects of the household: roles, functions, and

relationships within the household setting, in order to present the gospel meaningfully.

The missiological concern is how to embody church community in household units that

overcome caste, language, geographical, and denominational segregation.

Chapter 2 discusses the biblical teaching on the household of God from Genesis

onwards. In the Bible the household image developed from the very beginning and

culminates in the image of the great marriage of the bride, the church, at the second

coming of Christ. Sibling language in Scripture is discussed in relation to Israel and the

church and its significance for the mission of the church in India and elsewhere is

investigated.

Chapter 3 traces household understandings and practices in the Greco-Roman

world and explains how the early church challenged the existing system with the biblical

understanding of the household of God.

Chapter 4 describes the household system in the Indian social setting and its basis

in the Hindu sacred scriptures, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, and *Manusmrti*. The household

concept in Indian society presupposes and enforces caste differentiation, thus dividing the community along caste lines. Both positive and negative aspects of the Indian household system are noted in examining household roles, functions, and relationships.

Chapter 5 draws out the missiological implications of the household of God and assesses the challenges facing the church in India today. The argument is advanced that the household of God model provides a functional basis for all Christian brothers and sisters to mingle together socially, overcoming caste, language, denominational, and geographical barriers. The household of God approach can be an effective way to challenge the age-old caste system of Indian society.

Chapter 6 summarizes the study and evaluates the potential for the mission of the church in India through contextualizing the household of God within Indian household understandings and practices. In this approach the church need not be identified with a particular building but rather can meet as the household of God wherever the brothers and sisters can come together. Also, since the household of God image is a universal one it provides a basis for the church in India to relate effectively with the church in other parts of the world. In contrast, other models which were introduced in India from the West have had a very limited influence on society and have attracted only a limited number of people. This study provides evidence that the household of God image can enable the church to have an impact on the Indian community and can help to overcome caste and denominational barriers.
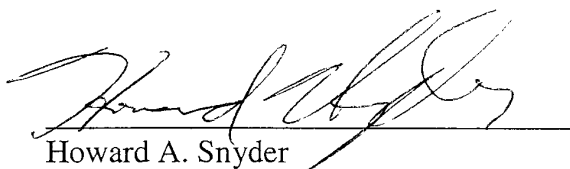
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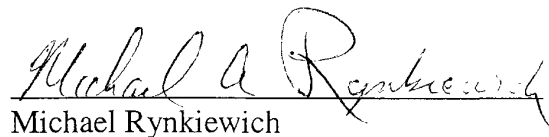
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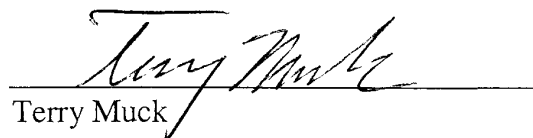
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FIGURES

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All glory, honor and praise belong to the heavenly Father through the Son Jesus Christ our Lord who enabled me to complete this project. I kneel down before the Heavenly Father and worship because of his great mercy and love towards me.

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CHAPTER 1

A Vision of the Household of God

This dissertation topic came out of my personal experience and involvement in

ministry, in India as well as in United States. I grew up in a house church context; the

church met in our house, where my father was the pastor. He was instrumental in

planting a number of other house churches in our state, Kerala, India. The story goes

back to the 1930s, when my parents and grandparents were immersed with believers'

baptism. This change was a result of a serious of bible studies when a Hindu friend

questioned my grandfather's Christian identity. The Syrian Orthodox Church, in which

they had grown up, considered this baptism as an offence to church tradition and

excommunicated them, pronouncing an anathema on them. The Syrian Church

considered that they had not only broken away from the tradition but also had joined a

new heretical sect.

After they were excluded from the church community, they began to meet in

their own house for worship and prayer every Sunday. When they began to share their

new experience in Christ with neighbors and friends, others also joined them for prayer,

worship, and bible study. Thus the first house church in our village was formed.

Following this, a few other house churches were formed in other parts of the village,

Trichur District, Kerala State. My father led the church for more than 50 years.

Loving and caring fellowship attracted high caste as well as the low caste people into

the church. They were not particularly aware of biblical teaching on the nature of the church; they were just meeting the needs of the time, considering themselves as the family of God.

When I committed myself for full-time ministry in 1974, I also continued the same pattern of the house church. In 1986 my wife and I started a house church near the seminary where we were teaching. At this point I began to study seriously the biblical teaching on the nature of the church. During this time I happened to read *The Community of the King,* by Dr. Howard Snyder, which became an inspiration for me to continue this research. Snyder notes,

> The Bible gives very little specific guidance regarding church structure. It paints a clear profile of what the Church is intended to be, and gives the early history of the Church in two cultural contexts: Palestinian Jewish society and first-century Greco-Roman society. On the basis of this biblical witness the Church in every age forms those wineskins which seem most compatible with its nature and mission within its cultural context. (1977:139)

In 1995 we resigned from the seminary and moved into the northern part of Kerala State, to be involved in church planting ministry. Here I started a Bible study in a rented building, which was our house. This house later on became the gathering place for a church. Then we started a missionary training center, along with some friends, and began to plant house churches, in association with the Sharon Fellowship Church (Simon 1986:21).[1] We started this house church ministry in North Kerala 1994, and there are now 45 of these house churches among the Hindu community in the remote villages of northern Kerala State. These house churches are also part of the network of the Sharon Fellowship Church.

This background is part of the reason for my interest in this topic. However in this research I am not directly dealing with house churches. Rather, my concern is to study the household of God concept in the Bible and within the sociocultural setting of the early church, then to draw the missional implications for the church today, with special focus on the Indian cultural context as explained below.

The Church Background in India

According to well-substantiated traditions, India had the privilege of hearing the gospel from the Apostle Thomas in A.D. 52.[2] It is believed that Thomas preached to the Hindu communities, performed miracles, and founded seven churches in Kerala, India. He was speared to death by high-caste Hindus while he was preaching at Mylapure, now part of the city of Madras (Moffett 1998:34; Firth 2001:3). The presence of Christians in India has been reported from then onwards.[3] Moffett concludes, "So the tradition remains and grows stronger with the years that already before the end of the second century the Christian Church had been planted halfway across Asia in India, first by the apostle Thomas, not Bartholomew, and was then strengthened by the visit of the theologian Pantaenus from Egypt" (1998:39).

In the fourth and seventh centuries, other Christians migrated to the Malabar coast of India from Mesopotamia (Syria, Arabia),[4] and the St. Thomas Christians subsequently assimilated this immigrant community (Moffett 1998:266-270; Neill 1970:12). When Western missionaries began to appear in the thirteenth century, both St. Thomas Christians and the immigrant Christians in India were enjoying the

privileges of local Hindu *Rajas* (kings) and were classified as part of the high-caste

community (Firth 2001:33).[5]

Christianity was understood from the very beginning by Indians as a foreign

religion, with its own distinctive beliefs and practices. Church buildings represented the

styles of the home countries from which the Christian missionaries had come. "Up to

about 1914 the churches built for communities connected with western Missions were

unashamedly western in appearance" (Firth 2001:256). The result was that the Church

had very little to do with the Hindu community, and the gospel had a limited influence

on the Indian people (Firth 2001:257).[6] In the Hindu understanding, the Church was a

special kind of building where the Christians met once a week for some sort of prayers

and worship. Generally Hindus were not welcomed or invited to attend the Church

services. Hindus do not have a concept of common gathering for worship once a week,[7]

so they thought "church buildings and assembly halls represent secular activity more

than sacred" (Aghamkar 2002:7). This was similar to the way Hindu temples were

owned and maintained by the high castes for their household or family worship; no one

else was permitted to enter into the temple premises.

These facts disturbed me and became my motivation to investigate biblical

models of the Church so that the gospel might have much more impact on everyone,

irrespective of caste or denominational distinctions. In my doctoral research therefore I

decided to focus my attention on the biblical image of the church as the household of

God and the missiological implications of this image in the present-day context. The

concern is to contextualize the biblical image of the Church as the household of God

into the Hindu idea of household. In this attempt of contextualization three important areas of the household are closely examined: the roles, functions and relationships. This also has missiological implications for the Church in other parts of the world.

Statement of the Problem

Using a sociocultural approach, this research investigates the concept of the "household of God" in Scripture and in the life of the Church within first- and second-century Greco-Roman society. Based on this investigation, it then assesses the relevance of this model for Christian mission within the contemporary Indian context by examining Indian concepts of household. The study thus examines household roles, functions, and relationships in Scripture, in Greco-Roman society, and within Indian culture.

Research Questions

The following questions provided the focus for the research:

1. What meanings does "household of God" have in the Old and New Testaments?

2. What is the missiological significance of these meanings?

3. What were the major meanings of "house" or "household" (*oikos*) within first- and second-century Greco-Roman society?

4. How did the Christian concept of the "household of God" function within this Greco-Roman cultural context? Did it have missiological value and significance, and if so, in what ways?

5.   What are the major conceptions of "house" or "household" in historic

and contemporary Indian culture?

6.   Based on biblical and early-church understandings and practices of the

"household of God," what lessons can be drawn for effective Christian mission in India

today?

Reasons for Selecting the "Household of God" Image

It is interesting to note that the Bible does not offer a definition of the church,

but instead relies on images and narratives to disclose its meaning.   "The image can

communicate a vision with power," states John Driver. He continues, "Images also

inspire the church and challenge it to live up to its real reason for being. The images we

use reflect what we are; they also largely determine what we will become" (1997:12).

The Bible contains many images of the Church. Paul Minear discusses in his

book, *Images of the Church in the New Testament,* ninety-six different important

images. These include body, temple, building, household, family, saints, new Israel,

new creation, branches of the vine, and so on. But all these images cannot be dealt with

in detail with in the limits of this research, because of the vastness of the subject and the

approach I wished to employ. I have selected only one image, the household of God, to

be the focus of this study, because of its relevance today.

Household of God: The literal meaning of the Greek word *oikos* is "house,"

"dwelling." Sometimes specific houses are meant, e.g., a "temple," a "treasure-house,"

a "place," even a "grave." *Oikos* also mean "domestic affairs," "wealth," "possessions."

In the LXX *oikos* is mostly used for "family," or "race" (Genesis 7:1; 2 Samuel 7:11;

1 Kings 2:24) (Michel 1967:119-120). Meeks notes the broader significance of the term, "*Oikos* is the way persons dwell in the world toward viability in relation to family, state, market, nature, and God. *Oikos* is the heart of both ecclesiology and political economy" (1989:33).

Oikos theou is a fixed term for the sanctuary in the LXX (Genesis 28:17, 19). In the New Testament *oikos tou theou* is used for the Christian community (Hebrews 3:6; 1 Peter. 4:17; 1 Timothy 3:15). Otto Michel notes, "in the OT 'my house' refers to Israel itself and in the NT 'house of God' represents the church community" (1967:129).

When the Hindus define household, they mean a joint family system functioning under one elder, a male, who controls or takes care of all the members of the family. This includes three or more generations living together under one authoritative figure (Ross 1961:31). The Hindu concept of household, explained in Chapter 3 of *Manusmrti* is mostly community-based; which means that each member of the household is responsible to guard or protect the name of the family. It includes marriage, family life, performing Vedic rituals, hospitality, and ancestral worship (Prakash 2000:75-81). The Indian concept of household is elaborated in chapter four of this dissertation.

This image of the Church as the household of God is particularly relevant for the following reasons:

1. The household of God image is central to the self-understanding of the Church, and it runs through the entire biblical narrative (Driver 1997:139). Hoehner views the household of God as including generations before and after Abraham who truly

believed God. He states, "In the present times, those Jews and Gentiles redeemed by Christ's death have formed a new entity called the church. Those in the new entity are saints who are fellow citizens with all the saints of past generations, who are also members of God's household" (2003:396).

2. The household of God image is related to the temple, the kingdom, the race, and the nation (1 Peter 2:5-10), and it has wider implications in the biblical story of redemption. The biblical story of redemption relates to the redemptive story of the people of Israel. Christians share the household of God image with Israel, as the chosen people (Minear 1960:67).

3. The concept of the household of God pictures the church as a family beyond mere biological connections. Members relate to others in a larger family, beyond physical and national boundaries (Horrell 2001:305). So the household of God idea becomes a primary means to understand the nature and mission of the messianic community (Banks 1994:53-55).

4. The household of God image was explicitly mentioned in the life and ministry of Jesus and the apostles (Matthew 12:46-50; John 14:2; Ephesians 2:19;-22; Hebrews 3:3; 1 Peter 2:3ff; 4:17). This demands our closer attention in order to apply it in the practical contexts of the church today (Nacpil 1998:155-183).

5. This image is especially relevant in the Indian context. Early evidence of the Indian joint-family system is reflected in the Hindu religious texts of the *Mahabharata*[8] and the *Ramayana*;[9] this concept of family has impact on the entire country even today. Hindu households like to identify with the ideals of their god and goddesses. Sivananda

notes, "The *Ramayana* gives a vivid picture of Indian life. Even today our domestic, social, and national ideals are copies from the noble characters in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*" (1977:31).

The household concept in Hinduism has a direct impact on the mission of the church in India. Hinduism is greatly bonded to the family setup. Each family has its own gods and goddesses and each family member, male and female, is obliged to perform certain assigned duties for the welfare and protection of the family. This is known as *Kula Dharma* (duty of family). Hindus experience the presence of the divine in the family shrines with their entire family. These family shrines moved into a temple structure in the later years to accommodate the entire household in one location. But the individual members worshiped their own special gods (*Ishtadevatha*) according to their preference in their own houses. So the temple does not have the primary role in the spiritual matters of an individual (Sivananda 1977:56). Aghamkar notes, "Hindu scriptures such as Vedas do not mention temples mainly because they were not required for the quasi-domestic rites of worship during their times" (2002:29). Dutt notes,

> To know the Indian Epics is to understand the Indian people better. And to trace the influence of the Indian Epics on the life and civilization of the nation, and on the development of their modern languages, literatures, and religious reforms, is to comprehend the real history of the people during three thousand years. (1953:163)

Mangalwadi states, "Hinduism puts society above the individual because the Vedas teach that at the beginning of human history, God created a perfect social order – *Varnashram Dharma*" (1997:126).[10] Every individual in India is known by his or her

family or clan. This motivates me to study the household idea in depth and to suggest its missional importance in the Indian cultural context.

6. The household of God concept holds the potential to challenge the age-old Hindu religious caste system of India.[11] The Hindu religious communities need to be challenged in their own household concept with the household of God of the Bible and also from practical experience. Christians need to treat one another as brothers and sisters, beyond the lines of denominations and castes.[12]

I have not come across any study on the image of the household of God, however, which is focused on the Indian cultural context. I want to investigate how the household of God concept might be able to unite the distinct caste groups in India so they can meet together for worship, for fellowship, and for building up their communities based on biblical values.

7. Christian missionaries who came to India understood some of the indigenous evils of the social institutions and did their best to eradicate such things as sati, the caste system, child marriage, female infanticide, drunkenness, the use of opium and others (Vinay Samuel and Sugden 1987:203). But Indians viewed Christianity as a Western religion. E. S. Raj writes, for example:

> Christianity was brought into India by the boats of the western trader. It marched into our motherland under the shadow of the Union Jack. It flourished under the pelf and patronage of the foreign rulers. Now with the disappearance of the white man, the colonial appendage called Christianity deserves deportation. (2001:17)

One of the reasons for this attitude was that the church and the Christians were not assimilated into the socio-cultural setting of the land.[13] The church became very

separated from social institutions like the household, and even introduced the age-old

pattern of the caste system in a different package, for the sake of church growth. It is

relevant therefore to ask about the relevance of the household beliefs as a factor in

church growth and indigenization.

The caste relationships and behavior need to be challenged; conscience needs to

be awakened for the emancipation of the low caste in India. The Christian message

must be a liberating experience in the soul, spirit and life of the individual and

community. An organized institutional church setting has limitations in imparting this

message to all the people. I believe it can be possible only by the transformation of

individuals and society with kingdom values based on the Bible. Thus, my attempt in

this research is to provide a wider understanding to the Indian churches about the

biblical view of the household of God, in order to motivate them to unite beyond caste

and denominational wrappings.

The reader of McGavran's book *Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from*

India, gives an impression that caste distinction in India is not a major issue, except in

certain areas.[14] But the reality is different: caste consciousness is very prevalent even

today in the entire country and in all sectors of the Indian Church and society. This is

confirmed by the April 2001 conversion to Buddhism which took place in New Delhi.[15]

Sharma reports 20,000 conversions at Delhi in April 2001, and quotes the words of

Harish Khare who converted to Buddhism.

> "The message of Buddhism is that all human beings are equal," said Harish
> Khare, a 36 –year-old government employee who traveled from the western
> state of Maharashtra to participate in the ceremony. Nearly one-fourth of
> India's more than one billion people are low-caste Hindus or "dalits." Also

known as untouchables, they occupy the lowest rank in the caste system that is dominated by the once-priestly class of Brahmins. (Sharma 2001)

Donald McGavran states,

> The theme of this book is that Christianity ought to flow into every ethnic unit. Christ has commanded us to disciple *ta ethne* – the ethnic units of the world. As Christianity flows into each unit in all six continents, it takes on much of its color. It becomes indigenous to that unit – that class, or caste, or tribe. After it has flowed in and a substantial part of the unit has been churched, the Christians, led by Christ their Lord and guided by the Bible which they have accepted as their sole Scripture, purify, and beautify and transform such elements of that culture as they themselves perceive need to be transformed. (1979:21)

It is hard to imagine how this transformation can occur concerning elements in the cultural baggage which are so deeply rooted in the socio-religious settings of India. I feel McGavran understood the caste system in India only from a sociologist is perspective.[16] He states, "All I plead for here is that, as in India, the Church presses on this goal, she offers all communities the option of becoming Christian in their normal ethnic groupings. Denominations and missions in other lands also should think in terms of such indigenous and natural people movements" (McGavran 1979:112).

But the caste system in India has its roots in all sectors of life. Each and every Indian is born into a caste. This means they are allowed to do only the job which is traditionally assigned by the religious leaders. They must live in a particular geographical location and be available to the service of the high caste. They are forbidden to use the language of the high caste and also certain restrictions are imposed on each caste in mingling with other castes, especially higher casts. No one is allowed to change their caste in any circumstances; caste identity determines the life and destiny of an individual.[17] The Indian caste community often rejects this system with all their

strength in demonstrations, rallies and even moving from village to village. But the

high caste Hindu religious authorities oppressed the efforts of the untouchables with all

possible means.[18] Ambedkar was the spokesmen for the untouchable of in 1900. He

believed that casteism is a belief, a state of mind. Therefore eradicating casteism is not

a matter of demolishing a physical structure. It requires changing beliefs and feelings

(Ambedkar 1986:82-83).[19] So, Ambedkar, after earning doctorates from Columbia

University in New York City and from the London School of Economics, returned to

India in 1923 to join the emerging untouchable movements.

> He was outspoken and confrontational, once ending a political really by burning
> a copy of the Laws of Manu. In that one heretical act he declared war.
> "Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste
> system," he declared. His position was clearly defined: Abolish the religious
> underpinning of civil life. (O'Neill 2003:19)

Ambedkar 1924, the leader of the untouchables during the time of the struggle for

independence from the British colonial government, pushed for a separate electorate for

the untouchables. O'Neill states, "Gandhi resisted Ambedkar's position on religious

principles, fearing that secular solutions to caste problems would destroy Hinduism"

(2003:19).

My concerns is that when people embrace Christianity they need to be accepted,

treated with dignity, and have the same freedom to move into the social ladder as people

in the other communities. But in India even after conversion people were (and are)

treated as low caste and oppressed without any consideration of the fact of their being

fellow-partakers of the kingdom of God. The low caste need to be invited to the high-

caste houses; the high-caste need to have the openness to be the guests of the low caste.

The high-caste should have the openness to see low-caste brothers and sisters as partakers of the kingdom of God. This can be possible in the Christian household of God setting, where we meet needs individually and enjoy the fellowship together as one family. Paul writes to Philemon about his runaway slave Onesimus, "no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother ..." (1:16).

Theoretical Framework

The biblical usage of the image of the household of God is the most important source for this study. Historical scholarly works are used as sources for understanding the world of the early church. I am employing a socio-cultural approach to study the early church community, examining not only concepts but also social and cultural pattern and behavior. The expansion of early Christianity was closely connected with social networks. This fact has motivated researchers to define more precisely the nature of the early Christian communities in the light of the social environment in which they were situated (Hellerman 2001:3).

An understanding of the church as the household of God is evident in the life of the early church, in the language early Christians used to address one another, in the relationships they maintained, and in the fellowship they enjoyed. All these were distinctive when compared with the surrounding communities. The new community emerged within a social context and became unique in ethical standards and relationships, being obedient to the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ (Theissen 1992:7). So I will be collecting data from the literature available on the household of God as a socio-cultural reality in relation to the early Christian communities.

A sociocultural approach will help us to understand how the early Christianity responded and impacted to their social setting. Social life of the community is rooted in the cultural life, too, and it is hard to understand community life without understanding both of them together. Culture is the social heritage which individuals receive and transmit (Niebuhr 1951:33). Luzbetak notes,

> By viewing a way of life as a society's design for living, we mean that culture is (1) a plan (2) consisting of a set of norms, standards, and associated notions and beliefs (3) for coping with the various demands of life, (4) shared by a social group, (5) learned by the individual from the society, and (6) organized into a dynamic (7) system of control. (1988:156)

So social and cultural existence go together, including worldviews, values and customary behaviors.

Tidball writes, "Sociology is an attempt to understand society and social relations within society in a disciplined way" (1984:12). Turner states, "The term 'sociology' literally means the scientific study of friendship or companionship, namely the study of the social forms of intimacy and reciprocity between individuals" (1996:22). In this process relationships with family, society, and religion play a major role. There are certain values which bind people together into a community, giving it social integration. Turner notes, "In sociology, religion has been universally regarded as a central component of this integrative value system" (1991:ix). He continues, "Religion is a social cement, binding individuals and social groups into a communal order." Another important role: "Sociology examines the social meaning of collective life, the significance of social action and the forms of knowledge and understanding, which are a necessary feature of all social relations" (1991:ix).

The Christian message is a challenge to every social and cultural pattern of the communities of the world. But it is interesting to note that God choose to work through the cultural matrix in which human beings are immersed, to communicate the good new of the gospel (Kraft 1984:103). Kee observes, "Beginning with the career of Jesus and on down through subsequent decades, the claims of Christianity were expressed in terms of historical events and in concepts developed in dialogue with the contemporary social and cultural world" (Kee, et al. 1991:2). Thus sociocultural study is necessary to understand the Christian community in the world.

Christianity was born within a society which had its own distinct features. But this new community began simply as followers of the prophet Jesus who came with a message of imminent judgment and the promise of the kingdom of God. Tidball notes, "Membership of the community was not limited to any one social or radical group but the demands made on the members were radical and transformed normal social and economic structures. They avoided political involvement because they considered it irrelevant" (1984:25). This religious community was formed on the basis of faith in a divine revelation (Malherbe 1983:9).

In recent times biblical scholars have expended a lot of effort to understand the social setting of the biblical world. I will be relying on literature concerning the social setting of the Greco-Roman world, specifically on the household idea (Banks 1994:6-7). The concept of the household of God had a great impact on the early church's perspective of life and witness, according to Elliott. The household idea assured Christians in Asia Minor and throughout the Roman Empire that God alone is Father

and Judge, and that it is this God alone to whom the family owes fear and reverence
(Elliott 1990:xxiv).

The household image underscores the fundamental relationship of God as Father
to his sons and daughters. The biological relationship is transcended when one
participates in the family of God; one assumes new covenantal relationships (Driver
1997:145). I will be investigating whether and how the household of God concept
changed people's ideas about their relationships with one another and gave a new
perspective on their relationship with God.

In employing a sociocultural[20] approach to analyze and apply the image of the
household of God, I am concerned with how social and cultural factors contributed to
the expansion of the church, specifically through the household. I am interested in the
basic unit of society, the family or the household, from the missional perspective of the
early church, and its implications for the church today. Martin states, "By our share in
the human family we are both inescapably personal and inevitably social" (1979:13).

The application of a sociological perspective to the early church will provide
greater clarity to the New Testament world and the text (Tidball 1984:9). Social
scientific study is widely used today to interpret the New Testament. John Elliott
contends that social scientific criticism complements different disciplines of exegesis,
such as textual criticism, literary criticism, narrative criticism, and so on (1992:7). In
this study I will be dealing with only one social institution, the household, and will try
to explain it in the social and cultural context of the Greco-Roman world where

Christianity found its roots. To the degree that sociologist concepts and categories are used, I am employing qualitative rather than quantitative research.

I will investigate first of all the biblical meaning of "household of God" in the social and cultural setting of the people of Israel and the early church. Secondly I will be looking at how the household idea integrated the Greco-Roman community. Thirdly, when individuals became followers of Jesus' teachings, how did the household of God integrate them together? What were their actions and behavior in the new atmosphere? After exploring the significance that the image of the household of God had in the Greco-Roman context, I want to relate the theological understanding and the spiritual formation which shaped this new community to the Hindu understanding of the household in India.

My approach is not primarily to analyze the biblical text critically; instead I am interested in tracing the meaning of the household in the Bible and its missiological significance. I have used the New American Standard Bible for references and for quoting. Then I will study the meanings of the "house" or "household" institution in the Greco-Roman society in the first and second centuries. I will be investigating the function of the Christian concept of "household of God" within the Greco-Roman cultural context and its missiological implications, as noted above.

I will then study the household concept in contemporary Indian society and culture. My goal is to develop a missiological approach to India from a biblical perspective, taking into consideration early-church understandings and practice.

Two challenging dynamics are present whenever the church is exposed to various social settings. The church is challenged by the social environment in which she is planted, and the social cohesiveness of the church often challenges the outside world. The key factors here may be illustrated as follows:

Household of God
in the Bible:
Roles
Functions
Relationships

Household concept
in the Greco-
Roman world:
Roles
Functions
Relationships

Household concept
in the Hindu
religious setting:
Roles
Functions
Relationships
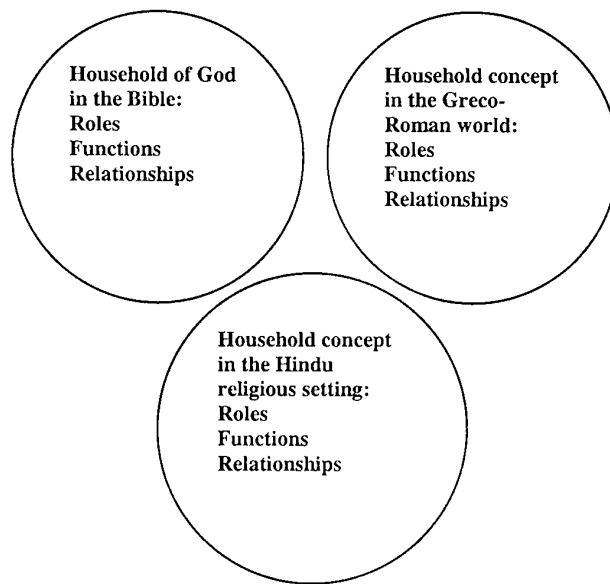
Figure 1. Views of the household in three different sociocultural settings.

The Bible presents an inclusive and a unique call, both to Israel and to Christians, in the midst of other nations and religions. Kostenberger and O'Brien states, "The divine call to Abram and the promise of blessing to him and his family, as well as to all peoples on the earth, are presented against the backdrop of a humankind under divine judgment" (2001:28). The prophets were emphasizes that the calling of Israel as a nation is for the sake of the whole world. God as the father of all humanity, loves everyone, irrespective of their religious or cultural background and anticipates every

one to acknowledge Him as the Lord of their heart (John 1:12). Thus household of God become unique and differs from the other two in the figure 1, but at the same time three of the household circles shares the roles, functions and relationships. The investigation focuses on three specific areas in the three different social settings mentioned in the above diagram: *roles, functions,* and *relationships* and presents how to contextualize the gospel into the Indian sociocultural context.

1. The focus on *roles* will help analyze the typical patterns of behavior of the households. The study focuses on the family as a unity of interacting persons, each occupying a position(s) within the family to which a number of roles are assigned. I investigated the internal structures of the household in a Hindu society. What are the typical patterns of behavior found in a household setting? What role does religion play in the household concept? What are the reciprocal expectations in a household setting?

2. The study of *functions* helped me to analyze the effects of behavior in the family and society. Two important aspects were the focus of the investigation: microfunctionalism (within the family) and macrofunctionalism (within the society). In both of these the concern was how the family functions with recurrent social actions, interactions, and transactions, within the family (microfunction) as well as in the outside agencies (macrofunction). The question was how the household concept is formulated in Hindu society. What are the social and cultural needs met in a household environment? What are the functions of religion in the household? What are the reasons for varied conduct in a household setting?

3. The focus on *relationships* helped me understand how members of the household were connected with one another and with their neighbors. When dealing with relationships was also interested in the changes which occur in individuals and communities after coming into relationship with Jesus Christ as their Lord. The questions I asked in regard this were: What are the languages used to address one another in the family and society? How does the specific language both reflect and shape the patterns of social relationships?

The concentration of this study was how the household of God concept can be contextualized and applied to the mission of the church in India and elsewhere. The basic assumption is that the household, or family, is an important unifying factor in every society, and that through an analysis of the roles, functions and relationships of each social setting from the perspective of the household, the mission of the church may become more meaningful and effective.

Delimitations

1. This study does not focus on the house church concept itself, or one specific house-church practices. Instead it tries to understand the image of the church as the household of God in the social and cultural context of the first and second centuries.

2. This study does not look at the various biblical texts from a literary-critical point of view; instead I am interested in describing the social setting of the Greco-Roman world in order to understand the early church. I will be examining how the household or family as an institution functioned in the early Christian communities, in the midst of other religious communities around them.

3. This research is not an attempt at a comprehensive ecclesiology, but rather focuses on biblical and sociocultural views of the household of God as they relate to the church. My attempt is to contextualize the message into the sociocultural setting of India and to contribute to a missional ecclesiology.

4. This investigation is limited to the Hindu religious communities because they influence most of the other Indian religious communities such as the Buddhists, the Christians and the Muslims. Hinduism cannot be viewed as a religion of a particular text but draws its teachings from different texts and mythological legends developed through many centuries. Hinduism is an accommodative religion and certain elements of the other religions are also found in popular Hinduism, or folk Hinduism. This challenges Christians to present the uniqueness of Christ in a pluralistic setting of India.

5. I am not doing an exhaustive analysis of family patterns and structures in India because of its cultural and religious diversity. Rather my investigation focuses on patterns that are dominant and influential in Hindu society. The Hindu household system is a dominant pattern in India, and it is based on the great epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. In some places there may be variations, but there is unanimity in the household concept. This enables the Hindu community able to celebrate one particular festival based on different legends. The core content stays be same - for example, the "holi" festival.

6. Any student of the Hindu scriptures will be limited in understanding them because of their philosophical immensity and their applicability in the day-to-day life of the religious people. In this research I am trying to examine the core facts of the Hindu

scriptures. I am not dealing with all branches of the different philosophical strands and arguments of Hinduism.

7. I will not deal with Hindu sects like *Vaisnavas, Saivas,* and *Saktas,* because of their immensity and diversity. Instead I will focus on the household roles, functions and relationships in the social-cultural setting of India in general.

8. I am limiting this research primarily to the two great epics of Hindus, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha,* because these are narrative applications of the *Manusmrti* and the *Vedas.*[21] The great epics are believed to narrate actual events even though this belief lacks historical support.

9. The role of women is an important issue for churches around the world today, but the major focus of this study is the household of God. So this study does not deal directly with the role of women in the Indian church, but at the same time it deals with the role of women within the household of God, in relation to the Indian sociocultural setting.

10. I am forced to use several Sanskrit words which carry a very wide variety of meanings. Even though I add English translations for these words and some explanations in the footnotes, these are limited ways to get the meaning in depth from a Hindu perspective.

11. This research does not deal with the entire *Hindu Dharma*[22] in detail. The focus instead is on the *Grihasthasrama Dharma* (duties of a householder), which is the second stage of the *Hindu Ashramas.*[23] The *Grihasthasrama Dharma* is the only one which handles the matters of home and society.

<u>Methodology</u>

My primary research method has been a study of relevant literature, conducted both in the United States and in India. Three areas supply the focus, as I mentioned earlier. The following are the most important sources for this study:

1. The Bible and related materials on the household of God in the Jewish community.

2. Selected Hindu scriptures that are particularly relevant to this study; the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and the *Manu Smrti*.

3. Books on the household system in Hindu society, in Greco-Roman society and in the early church.

The synoptic Gospels and the Epistles are the most important biblical sources for this research. The historical works of Josephus are another most illuminating source, depicting the Jewish world of the time.

Secondary materials are scholarly reflections on these subjects published in books, and articles in dictionaries and encyclopedias. For the Greco-Roman world I have depended mainly on material published by a number of scholars (Foakes-Jackson 1924; Kerenyi 1962; Michel 1967; Green 1970; D'Souza 1972; Conzelmann 1973; Theissen 1977; Kee 1980; Malherbe 1983; Tidball 1984; Verner 1984; Hernack 1988; Birkey 1988; Elliott 1990; Holmberg 1990; Theissen 1992; Esler 1994; Banks 1994; Stark 1996; Harnack 1998; Jeffers 1999; Keener 2000; Sanders 2000; Osiek and Balch 2000; Hellerman 2001; Batson 2001; Malina 2001; Ferguson 2003).

For analyzing the Indian social setting, I am using the Hindu religious scriptures such as the *Mahabharata,* the *Ramayana,* and the *Manusmrti,* as primary material as noted earlier. The two epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana,* have a direct impact to the household concept of the Hindu society. While the *Mahabharata* explains the *Hindu Dharma* of a man, irrespective of person and circumstances, the *Ramayana* depicts an ideal man and his duties to his family members. Both of these scriptures portray the struggles of life to maintain relationships in the family and to establish righteousness. Both are the application of the *Manusmrti* and most Hindus try to identify and organize their life according to these two epics. O'Neill notes,

> Hindu caste system has its own instruction manual. The Laws of Manu, compiled at least 2,000 years ago by Brahman priests, prescribes for each *varna* what to eat, whom to marry, how to earn money, when to fight, how to keep clean, whom to avoid. "Manu is engraved inside every Hindu," said Umashankar Tripathy, a Brahman priest I met in Varanasi, the revered pilgrimage city located on the banks of the Ganges River. (2003:15)

This necessitates a detailed study of the Hindu texts as the primary source in this research. Secondary materials are to be the interpretations and expositions about the Hindu scriptures published by Indian scholars and others (Thomas 1948; Dutt 1953; Hill 1953; Ross 1961; Kurian 1961; Kapadia 1966; Devanandan and Thomas 1966; Neill 1970; D'Souza 1972; Sivananda 1977; Boyd 1977; Turner 1979; Padilla 1985; McGavran 1970; Doniger and Smith 1991; Uberoi 1993; Aleaz 1994; Mangalwadi 1997; D'Souza 2000; Prakash 2000; Firth 2001; Raj 2001; Mangalwadi 2002; Aghamkar 2002).

A significant part of my research was done in India June, July and August 2004, studying and getting first-hand experience of the present trends of the society. I visited

the Government Sanskrit University college library, Puranattukara, Kerala; the Calicut

University library, Kerala; and the United Theological College library, Bangalore.

These libraries are great resources on the Hindu religious communities and on writing

about the Hindu scriptures.

I visited several Hindu communities to have first- hand experience of the

religious and social setting of the people. I also made an undisclosed visit to two

Hindu Ashrams near the Sanskrit University in Puranattukara, Kerala and Hindu

University, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.

During my time in India, I made the following first-hand observations from

different sections of the society.

1. I visited 16 high caste families and 20 low caste families, to participate in their

family meals, and to observe the behavior patterns of the household members.

2. I participated in two marriage functions and observed the influence of their

scriptures in selecting the bride or bridegroom and their influences on the household.

3. I was a guest of a Hindu friend when they observed the "right of passage" for

the first day of schooling of one of their family members. I observed how the

household concept influenced the daily life of the younger generation.

4. I attended two of the festivals, Onam and Ganapthy Puja, and observed the

household influence on the members of the family and the society during these

celebrations.

5. Death and funerals were most important events of the household life. I attended

two funeral ceremonies and observed how the priests and the family members

participated. Each of the ceremonies was different, and in one the priest was one of the male family members. I observed how the ceremonies were conducted for the deceased and how the rest of the family viewed them.

6. I attended a teaching session of a Hindu guru who taught the household duties towards ancestors, Brahmins and parents.

7. I had a good discussion with a Hindu friend about the structure of the household in the Hindu society. We also discussed how the household structure is passed on to the new generation in present day developments and the influence of the western media

8. I visited 3 house churches planted among the Hindus in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, 6 in Delhi, Haryana, 8 in Pune, Maharashtra, 2 in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, 3 in Bangalore, Karnataka and 5 in Calicut, Kerala. I was blessed in worshiping with the churches and enjoyed their hospitality. I also had very good discussions with the church leaders about the meaning of the household of God in their lives. They also reflected on how this concept functions in the family and in the community. I observed the language they used for addressing one another after accepting Christ as the Lord of their life.

The Biblical Understanding of Church as "Household of God"

The meaning of the word "church" remains unclear or confused today even though it is frequently used by Christians as well as others. This is not only a present-day issue. "Already within the first generation tension began to build between the mode of church that emphasized *being* rather than *function,* and *institution* over movement" (Kung 1967:179).

Rather than defining the church, the Bible relies on images and narratives to disclose its meaning. The general tendency of scholars, however, is to define the word "church" through an etymological study of the word, tracing its origin and development. An etymological study does help us understand some historical images and concepts of the church. The English word "church" comes through German and Latin from the Greek *kuriakon*, which means "that which belongs to the Lord." But the Greek word *ekklesia* has dominated through the centuries as the primary word for church (Minear 1962:607). The word *ekklesia* most commonly used in the Bible to signify "church."

But word studies do not tell us the reason, purpose and goals of the church. If we are satisfied with a propositional definition, we will not have explained the church's structure, purpose, destiny or mission. The better choice would be to define the church the way Jesus and the New Testament writers did, using images and metaphors.

The symbolic language of images has universal appeal and validity; it can translate into multiple cultural settings because it represents common human life situations. Together these images form a composite picture, like a great painting, filled with boundless meaning.

Use of *Qahal* in the Old Testament. The Septuagint uses *ekklesia* almost a hundred times as the translation for the Hebrew *qahal* (generally translated "assembly" in English). The basic meaning of both these words is a meeting or gathering. It is the people and the purpose which give significance to the *qahal*. Unfortunately in our day the word "church" often signifies in the first place a building, a place where people gather for worship. In the Old Testament *qahal* may be a gathering of men for military

duty or a public action (Numbers 16:3; 1 Chronicles 28:8). The word *qahal* is used for all kinds of gatherings, including gatherings of those who gather to work evil (Psalms 26:5) as well as those who worship God (2 Chronicles 30:13). The most significant *qahal* in the Old Testament is the assembling of Israel before God on Mount Horeb (Deuteronomy 4:10; 9:10; 10:4; 18:16), when God sealed his covenant with them (Minear 1962:608).

Use of *Ekklesia* in the New Testament. In the New Testament, the word *ekklesia* occurs 112 times, with ninety percent of the occurrences in Acts, the Pauline Epistles, and in the Book of Revelation (Minear 1962:607). It does not appear in the Gospels except in Matthew where once it refers to the church universal (16:18) and twice to the local Christian community (18:17).

In Hellenistic Greek, the word *ekklesia* denotes an assembly of persons which has been summoned for a particular purpose. The purpose may be secular or religious, and also the meeting may be regularly constituted or more spontaneous in origin (Zodhiates 1992:541). In the New Testament the word *ekklesia* is never understood as a church building but denotes the assembly of people called out for a particular purpose. This is understood as the church worldwide of all times (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:44, 47; 9:31; 1 Corinthians 6:4; 12:28; 14:4,5,12; Philippians 3:6; Colossians 1:18,24) as well as the churches in a particular locality (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 16:19; 2 Corinthinas 1:1).

When we closely examine the concept of the church, the new community represented by the disciples of Jesus, we find that the Gospels often describe the church

using the Greek equivalent of Old Testament terms, showing continuity with the life of

Israel, the people of God. Jesus constantly spoke of a new people of God whom he

came to gather. He referred to them as his flock (Mark 14:27; Luke 12:32), God's

building (Matthew 16:18), and the family of God as pictured in the table fellowships, in

which God is the Father (Matthew 23:9), Jesus is the master of the house, and followers

are his household (Matthew 10:25). The family image of the church is prominent and

connects with the Old Testament understanding as well as the New Testament images.

The Household of God (*oikos tou theou*). In general Greek usage, the word

oikos means "house" or "dwelling" (Michel 1967:119). In this sense it can be a

"temple," a "treasure house," a "place," or even a "grave," as previously noted. *Oikos*

also mean "domestic affairs," "wealth," or "possessions" (Michel 1967:120).

In the Greek Old Testament *oikos* is used to denote "family" or "race" (Genesis

7:1). But o*ikos theou* denotes the sanctuary in the LXX (Genesis 28:17; 19). In

Proverbs, *oikos* is used in a metaphorical sense, "house of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:1).

There are also expressions such as "permanent house," and "house of the Torah"

(1 Samuel 2:35; 2 Samuel 7:16; 1 Kings 11:38).

In the New Testament the phrase *oikos tou theou* is used to denote the Christian

community itself (Hebrews 3:6; 1 Peter 4:17; 1 Timothy 3:15). A similar expression is

oikos pneumatikos (1 Peter 2:5). These phrases may have been common in primitive

Christianity and became a permanent part of the preaching tradition (Michel 1967:121).

The church as the household of God is a common image in Paul's writings (1Timothy

3:15; Ephesians 2:19-22). Michel notes, "The Church is the house of God, the pillar,

the bastion, because the Spirit dwells within it, revelation is committed to it, and the tradition is proclaimed by it" (1967:128).

This image, the church as the household of God, is implied also in the teachings of Jesus on the kingdom of God. It has present and future applications. The Gospel of Mark clarifies what it means to participate in the "true family," or the household of God. Explicitly rejected is the biological family (Mark 3:20-21, 31-35), the religious family (3:22-30), and the geographic or political family (6:1-6) as primary images of Jesus' disciples. None of these families could recognize the kingdom which was present in Jesus. Only a radical conversion could prepare people to be accepted into the "true family of God" (Driver 1997:144).

The early Christians understood "house of God" as an image for the community. "In the OT 'my house' refers to Israel itself, so that NT exegesis reminds us of the equation of 'house of God' and the community" (Michel 1967:125). Hebrews 3:3-6 expounds Christ as the builder of the Old Testament community of God. Michel explains,

> As the Son He is set over the house (3:6), and we cannot boast of being God's house unless we keep the confidence and boasting of our hope firm to the end (3:6). ... The idea that the community of God's house is obviously related to, and grows out of, the early proclamation that the community is God's temple. (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). (1967:126)

This New Testament idea of community is quite different from the ideas of community in Gnosticism and Philo. For them, what is important is an individualistic piety in which the pure soul of the individual becomes God's house. But in the New

Testament, the community becomes the house of God (Ephesians 2:19-20; 1 Peter 2:3ff.

4:17; 1 Timothy 3:15). Michel comments,

> One may well say that this traditional material is an integral part of the primitive Christian κηρυγμα. The motif of the οικος του θεου is referred to the community, yet it is not really a metaphor for the *familia dei,* but οικος remains an actual house, a spiritual, supra-terrestrial, divine, and heavenly structure. (1967:126-127)

The household of God is contrasted with the physical temple in Jerusalem. The

New Testament explains that the church community is the household of God and that it

is metaphorically a building, being built with a living cornerstone, Jesus Christ (1 Peter

2:4).

The basic social unit in the Hellenistic world was the family, or household,

whose members lived in a particular house and were subject to the householder's

authority. Keener notes,

> Aristotle and others thought that order in the household would produce order in society as a whole; thus societal norms and household norms affected one another . . . . Citing the three groups that appeared in household codes from Aristotle forward, Paul adapts the content of the codes but retains their structure (Ephesians 5:21-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1), possibly to help Christians witness within their culture (1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Titus 2:5,8). (2000:353)

The household idea in the Greco-Roman milieu and the early Christian idea of the

household of God largely corresponded to each other. But the Christians' perspectives

on the household of God were different from those of their surrounding community.

McCartney notes, "Early Christianity, including the New Testament itself, to a large

degree addressed people not as separate individual entities but as connected to the

household" (1997:511). The Christian idea of the household of God provided a wider

spiritual meaning and belongingness beyond the Greco-Roman community to the

lenist world. If that is the case, then I need to study how the early church functioned the "household of God" in the midst of the Greco-Roman society.

Conclusion

Investigation in the four above-mentioned areas provides insights for a :thodology to do mission in India's sociocultural setting. Ministry experience in lia and as well in the United States underlines the importance of the church ictioning as a family or household. As mentioned earlier, the author examines the usehold concept of the Bible and makes this the foundation for the other two areas of : research, Greco-Roman world and the Indian context. When the household concept the Greco-Roman world is studied, the early church's responses and challenges also : focused. This helps show the way the early church practiced the household of God a hostile environment. In this research the Hindu sacred scriptures are examined to ow the foundations of the household concept in Indian society. In all these three :tions the missional aspect of the household, especially in India, is the basic interest. e next chapter will examine the Biblical foundation for the household of God.

ENDNOTES Chapter 1

[1] Sharon Fellowship Church is an indigenous independent Pentecostal movement started in 1950 under the leadership of Pastor P. J. Thomas. Pastor P. J. Thomas was the founder president of the Sharon Fellowship Church. Sharon Fellowship is a network of churches which functions as an ecumenical body among the Pentecostals under indigenous leaders, using local means and cultural patterns to plant churches. Dr. T.G. Koshy is the president of the church, which has more than 1000 congregations all over India. The church head office is in Tiruvalla, Kerala, where all the churches meet together once every year for a revival at the end of November. All other regional revival meetings take place after this annual gathering. Sharon Fellowship has a strong emphasis on mission in India by using native cultural patterns. At present they have nine missionary training centers in different language groups and also one seminary (Faith Theological Seminary) which offers the masters degree in theology. This is the only Pentecostal seminary in India affiliated with Serampore University (Simon 1986:25).

[2] There are at least two different sources, Acts of Thomas and oral traditions, which report that the Apostle Thomas did preach Christ in India. Moffett notes, "The evidence is oral and traditional. It is not tangible, datable documentation of written sources that historians prefer. But the songs and poetry of a living community handed down from generation to generation sometimes strike closer to the truth of ethnic and religious origins than manuscripts and mutilated inscriptions" (1998:33-34).

[3] Marco Polo, a European traveler to India in 1288 and 1292, records a Christian pilgrim center in Mylapore, where St. Thomas was buried. The European travelers who visited South India in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries also refer to a church of St. Thomas. The earliest witness from India to a shrine of St. Thomas was in the sixth century in a letter from a certain Theode to Gregory of Tours (Moffett 1998:35-36). When the Portuguese arrived and settled in India in the sixteenth century, they found Christians in the Malabar coast of India, Kerala, sharing the same stories of St. Thomas (Firth 2001:4-5).

[4] Persecution in Persia led some Christians to migrate to India. Moffett notes, "In connection with that persecution, a persistent tradition from India relates that in 345 a Nestorian merchant, Thomas of Cana, reached Cranganore on the Malabar Coast in southwest India, bringing with him a group of Christian families, perhaps as many as four hundred people, including deacons, priests, and a bishop. They were welcomed by the Christian community they found there but were dismayed to find that these Indian Christians, who traced their origins back to the apostle Thomas, were without local

leadership, had become badly divided by false teachings, and were dwindling in numbers" (Moffett 1998:266).

[5] The local kings in South India gave an honored name for the Christians as "Mappilla" (king's children) and provided them special land and privileges. This provided them an elevated position among the Hindu community, and the Christians thus came to be considered as one of the high caste groups. So the low castes became servants of the Christians just like they served the high caste Hindus. The result was no mingling between Christians and the caste groups whatsoever (Simon 1986:8).

[6] Aghamkar notes, "Church building symbolize the foreign presence invading native tradition and culture in India" (2002:5).

[7] Aghamkar quotes Alain Danielou, "Essentially temples are not the meeting places of the faithful but are the homes of deities, places where a particular aspect of divinity is honored and worshipped by priests who are its servants" (2002:28).

[8] The *Mahabharata* is the history of the *Pandavas* and the *Kauravas*. It gives a description of a great war, the battle of *Kurukshetra*, which broke out between the *Kauravas* and the *Pandavas,* who were cousins and descendants of the lunar race. The Mahabharata is an encyclopedia of *Hindu Dharma*. It is rightly called the fifth Veda (Dutt 1953:333).

[9] The *Ramayana*, the *Adi-Kavya* or the first epic poem, relates the story of *Sri Rama*, the ideal man. It is a story of the family of the solar race descended from Ikshvaku, in which was born *Sri Ramachandra,* the Avatara of *Lord Vishnu*, and his three brothers. The ideal characters like *Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata* and *Sri Hanuman* that we find in *Ramayana* firmly establish *Hindu Dharma* in the Indian mind (Dutt 1953:154).

[10] *Varnashram Dharma* is explained in the *Manusmrti,* which is the first and most important religious law book of ancient India. Prakash notes, "The text of Manu-Smrti, in sum, is 'an encompassing representation of life in the world, how it is, and how it should be lived. It is about Dharma, which encompasses the English concepts of 'religion', 'duty', 'law', 'right', 'justice', 'practice' and 'principle'" (Prakash 2000:23).

[11] Caste in India has at least three thousand years of history and influences all aspects of the society. Caste system has at least four roots: racial, occupational and economic, migrational, and religious (Ebenezer Raj 1985a:10). Each caste is identified through their occupation, and people cannot, or they are not allowed to, change their occupation in any circumstances. These caste identities are assigned by the Hindu religious authorities, and are derived from the Hindu Scriptures. The caste system

functions in watertight compartments; there is no mobility whatsoever in any area of life. Each is born into a caste and no one can change it in any circumstances.

[12] Ambedkar, the greater leader of the scheduled castes, publicly adopted Buddhism as his religion. Following his pattern three and a half million untouchables have accepted Buddhism since 1956. Before embracing Buddhism Ambedkar was a devoted student of the Bible, but he was not ready to accept Christianity. B. A. M. Paradkar notes, "Ambedkar was aware of the Christian contribution to the humanization of western society and its cohesive influence on western culture. But in India, since it worked along the grooves of caste and was split into denominations, the question remained as to whether Christianity could provide the unifying basis for integrating outcastes who were already much sub-divided" (1972:59).

[13] The Laws of Manu (in Sanskrit, the *Manavadharmasastra* or *Manusmrti*) are intimately connected within Hindu thought. These deal with the social obligations and duties of the various castes and of individuals in different stages of life. The third, fourth and fifth chapters in particular have an elaborate discussion on the Hindu household or family system, *Grhastha Vyavastha* (Doniger and Smith 1991:XVI).

[14] McGavran writes, in *Ethnic Realities and the Church*, "In North India those who read this book will feel that India is not nearly as caste conscious as I have portrayed her. They will insist that the Church is almost free of caste prejudice. They will be irritated at my 'misrepresentation' of the situation... South Indian readers are likely to feel that there is more caste in the Church than I have indicated. Since many South Indian leaders and missionaries burn with desire to bring more brotherhood into the Church, South Indian readers will probably blame me for underplaying caste" (1979:19-29).

[15] Lawrence Landis reports, "Thousands of *dalits* intending to convert to the faith traveled all night from across the nation to reach New Delhi from Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Predesh, Utter Pradesh by road, while a large number of them undertook train journeys from the farther states" (2001).

[16] O'Neill notes, "To be born a Hindu in India is to enter the caste system, one of the world's longest surviving forms of social stratification. Embedded in Indian culture for the past 1,500 years, the caste system follows a basic precept: All men are created unequal. The ranks in Hindu society come from a legend in which the main groupings, or *varnas*, emerge from a primordial being" (2003:8-9).

[17] O'Neill providing the picture of a man, Amrutbhai Sarasiya, and writes, "Amrutbhai Sarasiya does his job, immersing himself in excrement to unclog a sewer in Ahmadabad in Gujarat state. He is a Bhangi, a member of a scavenger caste – lowest of the hundreds of Untouchable castes. Some 10,000 Bhangis in Ahmadabad earn money

by manually cleaning latrines, sewers, and gutters, and by removing dead animals from the streets. Working without protective gear, many suffer from stomach and lung infections" (2003:8).

[18] O'Neill reports a recent violent attack on untouchables, "Undisguised hatred of untouchables incites members of a private army in a Bihar village. Outraged by the wage and land-reform demands of untouchables, the Renvir Sena, a militia led by landowners, has been implicated in the massacres of more than 500 untouchables. The attackers have gone largely unpunished. Activists fear that the recent surge in violent incidents across India will only intensify as more untouchables try to break the chains of caste" (2003:30).

[19] O'Neill reports Babulal Bairwa's, an Untouchable landowner in Rajasthan village of Chakwara, experiences in his own village, "One morning, for reasons he himself is not sure of Bairwa decided to bathe in the village pond, off-limits to untouchables. That evening a mob surrounded his house and threatened to kill him. Bairwa filed reports with the police and a human rights organization. Now he never travels alone for fear of attack. Bairwa expects that because of his legal challenge the pond will eventually become open to all castes. In the meantime he fights quietly and lives the only way he can. "I am clean. I don't smoke or drink or eat meat. I work hard. I do everything right. Why am I untouchable?" Because he was born one. One hundred sixty million Indians serve this life sentence" (2003:31).

[20] Both social and cultural aspects bind together the life of an individual and society. Culture is the social heritage which individuals receive and transmit (Niebhur 1951:33). Luzbetak view that the life in every society design by cultural expressions like, norms, standards, belifs, worldvies, values and customary behaviors. He notes, "By viewing a way of life as a society's design for living, we mean that culture is (1) a plan (2) consisting of a set of norms, standards, and associated notions and belifes (3) for coping with the various demands of life, (4) shared by a social group, (5) learned bythe individual from the society, and (6) organized into a dynamic (7) system of control" (1988:156). Both social and cultural aspects are emploryed in this study to understand the meaning of the household and how to involve in missions, especially to the Indian sociocultutal setting.

[21] The Hindus Vedas are the eternal truths revealed by god to the great ancient *Rishis* of India.

[22] The word *Dharma* derived from Sanskrit root *Dhr* means to hold; its etymological meaning is "that which holds" this world, or the people of the world, or the whole creation, from the microcosm to the macrocosm (Sivananda 1977:50).

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[23] There are four *Ashramas* or stages in life, viz., *Brahmacharya,* the period of studentship, *Grihastha,* the stage of householder, *Vanaprastha,* the stage of the forest-dweller or hermit, and *Sanyasa,* the life of renunciation or asceticism (Sivananda 1977:72).

CHAPTER 2

The Biblical View of the Household of God

My beloved father used to tell us stories about his personal relationship with the

Lord Jesus Christ during morning and evening family devotions. Among other things, I

heard that our Syrian Church tradition was higher than all other Christian claims. So I

was more curious to learn our church tradition from my relatives. Whenever all the

children of our extended family would meet together I felt at home with them, thinking

our church tradition was greater than all others in the village.

When in 1968 I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, my inquisitiveness

was directed to learn our family roots from the Bible. That was when my father's

conviction began to open up before me. Both theological education and my involvement

in ministry have amplified further the curiosity to explore the meaning of the household

of God.

As I read, I discovered that the "household of God," the family image, constitutes

a major biblical theme, both in the Old and the New Testament. The word "house" is

used more than two thousand times throughout the Bible, referring to an abode, varying

from the simplest home of a peasant to the palace (house of the king) and the temple

(house of God). Both Hebrew (*bayith*) and Greek (*oikos*) words for "house" many times

refer to the family, however, not to the physical dwelling (Sellers 1962:657). Christopher

Wright comments, "The word 'family' is used to translate several Hebrew words, none of

which means exactly what 'family' means in modern, Western usage" (1992b:761).

There are three words used in the Hebrew Bible to denote Israelite society, "tribe"

(*sebet*), "clan" (*mispaha*), and "family" (*beit-'ab*) (Joshua 7:16-18; Judges 6:15; 1

Samuel 9:21; 10:20f.). All these three, tribe, clan and family or household, had very important functions in the sociocultural setting of Israel.

The very origin of Israel and its existence are based on its relationship with Yahweh. Israel's religious tradition was deeply woven into the fabric of Jewish family life (Barclay 1997:68). The individual and social lives of the people were expected to be the reflections of the character of their God.[1] Perdue notes, "Israel understood that its moral requirements as set forth by Yahweh were largely carried out in relationship to the members of the household" (1997:238). The social and cultural patterns of the people of Israel were conditioned by their understanding of God, because Israel's households were the recipients of the divine grace.

The Household of God in the Old Testament

The family/household is a central feature of the created order in the Bible.[2] The world is God's home and he lives among the people in personal and familial relationships. Marriage as the foundation of family life is well expressed in Genesis 2:20-24. God commands the man and the woman to "be fruitful and multiply" in Genesis 1:28. People expected that they would form a distinct family unit in which a man and his wife would become father and mother in turn. So marriage is a divine invitation to partake in the creative process with God. This family concept was inaugurated by God in the Garden of Eden when God created man and woman in his own image. Kaiser notes,

> The first and the seventh ordinance in the usual list of creation mandates extending from Genesis 1:28 to Genesis 2:23-24 are closely related and bear directly on the subject of the family. God ordained the union of male and female in marriage to meet their personal need for companionship, to multiply the human race, and to be the main unit and central authority for responsibly subduing the earth and exercising control over it. Human family life, then, constituted God's

norm for meaningful existence as the pattern is set forth in Genesis 2:4-5:1. (1983:153)

The following figure introduces how the household of God can be viewed from the beginnings of the human race.

Figure 2. The Household of God Before the Fall of Man

God delegated man and woman to rule over the whole creation in the sea and the air and on the land. The nature of God's blessing makes the family of key importance to the working out of God's project (Goldingay 2003:184). God also desired partnership with humanity in social relations. Man and woman need community and partnership both with one another and with God. Barth states, "Among all creatures we are those whom God has engaged in partnership in his kingship and who are thus especially responsible to him. The fact that we are his responsible commissioners lies at the heart of the biblical witness to our nature and destiny and is a final reason for Israel's praise of the Creator" (1991:28).

The family/household was also the center of rebellion and disobedience to God.[3] The first actual death in the Bible was recorded in Adam and Eve's family: Cain killed his brother Abel. The rebellious nature of Cain thus extended to family life; he was

trying to satisfy himself independent of God. He moved out of the presence of God, building a city and naming it after his son. Ellul states, "The city is the direct consequence of Cain's murderous act and of his refusal to accept God's protection" (1970:5). The rebellious nature of the family is further expressed in the life of Lamech. First he took two wives, the beginning of polygamy, and secondly he returned death for a simple injury. He exacted harsher retribution than his father, Cain, saying, "If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold" (Genesis 4:24).

God established the family to reflect his image through humanity to the entire creation, but the rebellion of the human race against his love and authority isolated people from God. Right after Lamech's statement, people realized their isolation and began to call upon the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26). They marred God's purposes for humanity and for creation by being disobedient to his plan. But still the grace of God reaches to redeem humanity-Adam, Cain and Lamech, and the fallen world   through the family.

The family/household was the center of God's act to save humanity and the earth from total destruction by the flood. The growing web of corruption and violence led all the families on the earth, except Noah's family,[4] to judgment by the flood. God is concerned about humanity even though they shun his presence and continue in rebellion against his plan and purpose. The following figure illustrates the plan of God for the fallen universe and the way he wants to use the family as an instrument to save humanity from impending destruction.
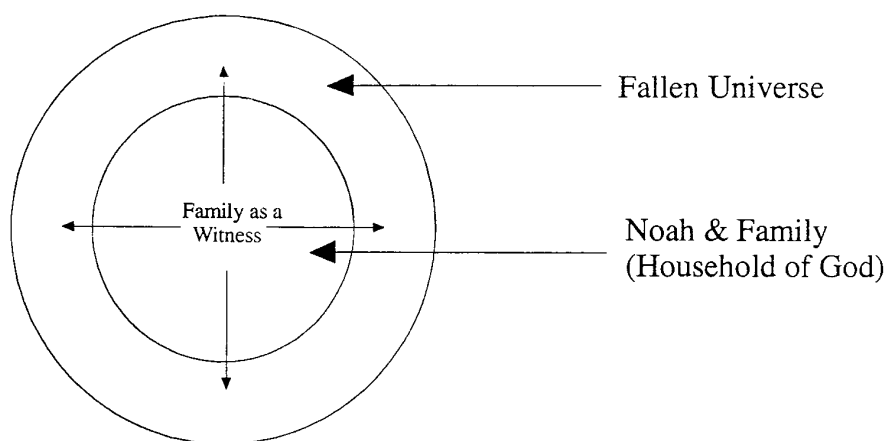
Figure 3. The Household of God after the Fall

When Noah and his family came out of the ark, God made a covenant with him, his family, and with humanity as a whole. God blessed Noah and his family to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1).

But even the flood did not eradicate the basic human problem of disobedience. In Genesis 11 we find that the rebellious nature of humanity and its effects reaches to a global level, with humanity scattered in division and confusion across the earth. The scattering of humanity across the face of the earth was to fulfill the mandate of God, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1, 7). Is there a hope for human families on earth in such a condition? Is there a way to restore these families to the blessing and favor of the heavenly father?

God's answer to humanity was the election of one family, Abraham and Sarah, husband and wife, both old in age and childless. After hearing and responding to the call of God, Abraham's family kept on moving, obeying God's voice and trusting in his promises, without knowing where they were going, leading a nomadic life.[5] God kept renewing his promises with this family, in spite of their limitations and shortcomings.
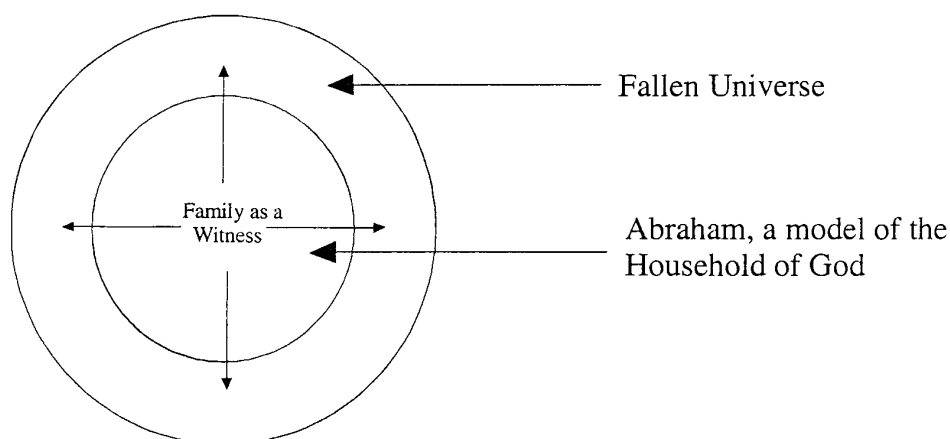
Figure 4. The Inclusive call of Abraham

God views all the families of the earth through Abraham. His call was inclusive

of all humanity. The above figure illustrates the plan and purpose of God for the all

humanity through the family of Abraham. This household/family marks the beginning of

the history of Israel. Goldingay notes, "The prominence of these family stories in

Genesis affirms God's involvement in family life and God's working through it. Perhaps

it implies that the family has priority over the nation" (2003:277).

The family metaphor is employed in two important ways in the Bible, in relation

to Israel and in relation to the church. The Old Testament is the story of a people who

formed a living society with its own customs, institutions, laws and culture. Their social

system is a legitimate subject for the attention of sociology (C. Wright 1995:147).

The Use of "Household of God" in the Hebrew Scriptures

The family metaphor was used in the Hebrew Scriptures to explain the

relationship between God and Israel. This is very well articulated throughout Hebrew

literature.[6] The people of Israel were called to be unique, distinct from all the

surrounding communities, because of God's grace and his faithfulness to promises which

he made to their forefathers (Wenham 2000:75).[7] The household of God image is the

expression of God's nature and character, because it is based on who God is for Israel and for others. Ross and Gloria Kinsler note, "Liberation from slavery, from Egypt, must lead to responsible living in social relationships that are liberating and just. Yahweh would reign not only in Israel's liturgies but also in Israel's daily life; not only in the Tabernacle but also in their homes, fields, communities, tribes, and nation" (2000:9). This is fully expressed in the Exodus and in the covenant.

> You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession among all the people, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel. (Exodus 19:4-6)

The election of Israel is not for exclusive privilege but to fulfill greater responsibilities. In the Exodus God heard the people's cry, saw their struggle, and came down to deliver them from bondage. The people of Israel were slaves in Egypt, but God chose them to be a treasured possession[8] for him (Exodus 19:5-6). Through the Exodus God showed also that he was concerned about all the families of earth, including the whole creation. Goldingay notes,

> God's deliverance gains much of its significance from its contributing to the fulfillment of God's purpose in creation as well as God's word of promise. Creation is not merely backdrop for God's involvement in history. God's involvement in history is designed to further the fulfillment of God's creation purpose. (2003:293)

This is well expressed in the writings of the prophet Amos, "Hear this word which the Lord has spoken against you, sons of Israel, against the entire family which he brought up from the land of Egypt, you only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:1-2). The people of Israel felt ultra-holy and super-safe because they were the children of the Exodus and the

Covenant. But on the basis of this covenant Amos concluded with God's verdict:

"Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." The prophet Amos makes the

people of Israel understand that if they were not fulfilling the purpose of the Exodus and

their election, their migration was no different than the migrations of other peoples

(Amos 9:7) (Senior and Stuhlmueller 1983:99).

The Old Testament prophets emphatically convey the message of the purpose of

electing the people of Israel as a nation (Isaiah 60:3; Jeremiah 3:17) and appealed to the

Israelites to act out the norms of sibling solidarity in their interpersonal relationships:

"Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal

treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers"

(Malachi 2:10). The brotherhood assumes a blood relationship and this is traceable back

to Israel's patriarchs.[9] Every Israelite, beyond family, clan or tribe, is to treat his fellow

Israelite as a brother (Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:17-20; Isaiah 58:6; Jeremiah

7:5-6; 22:3; Zechariah 7:8-10). Hellerman notes, "To be the children of Abraham was to

be the children of God" (2001:61). Family relationship is based on loyalty to the

covenant which God made with them. This is very clearly demonstrated in Exodus

32:25-29 at Mount Sinai when the people made the golden calf. Moses said, "Whoever is

for the Lord come to me." The Levites came to him, and he commanded them to execute

the disobedient Israelites without considering who they were. This event led Moses to

make the legal codification in Deuteronomy:

> If your brother, your mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife you
> cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying, 'Let
> us go and serve other gods' (whom neither you nor your fathers have known, of
> the gods of the peoples who are around you, near you or far away from you, from
> one end of the earth to the other end), you shall not yield to him or listen to him;
> and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him. But you shall

> surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and
> afterwards the hand of all the people. (Deuteronomy 13:6-9)

This again makes it clear that blood relationship is not sufficient for inclusion in the

people of Israel; more important is that one is willing to obey the covenant. Thus, on the

basis of their faith confession, non-Israelites, like Rahab and Ruth, are accepted into the

community of Israel. Jesus also emphasizes this in his teaching, saying that doing the

will of God qualifies one to enter into the kingdom of heaven, not simply calling him

Lord (Matthew 7:21-27).

A Hebrew child born in the Israelite family was never assured a place among the

people of God, unless he or she kept the commandment of God personally (Deuteronomy

24:16; 2 Kings 14:6; Jeremiah 31:29-34; Ezekiel 18:4,19-20). This opens up the

provision for the entire world to be children of God by having faith in the God of Israel.

God used Israel as a demonstration to convey his love and concern to all humanity. So

by choosing Israel as the household of God, all humanity is included, at least potentially.

People are called to witness to their faith in Yahweh in all their life situations, which

includes their religious, social, political, cultural and economic life. The prophetic

messages envisioned the day when Gentiles would be added to Israel by faith (Isaiah

60:3; Jeremiah 3:17; Zechariah 2:11; 8:22-23; 14:16).

In the biblical text, just as the "family" is considered part of the "clan," so the

"clan" is considered as part of the "tribe." Bendor notes,

> The word 'tribe' (*sebet*) generally appears as a component in the framework of
> "the twelve tribes of Israel" and connected in the organizational schemes
> including the sequence *beit'ab /mispaha/ sebet*, and of course in texts connected
> with tribal boundaries. The tribe appears as an active social unit primarily in the
> literature concerning the period of settlement and the beginning of the monarchy.
> (1996: 87-88)

Israel was comprised of twelve tribes named after one household – the sons of Israel (Jacob), which included two grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh (Joseph's two sons). The names of the tribes often have geographical significance (Deuteronomy 34:1-3). "Geographical terms such as 'land' or 'mountain' are often defined by the names of tribes, most commonly Judah, Benjamin and Ephraim, but also others, to a lesser extent" (Bendor 1996:88). There are three types of tribal social structures found in Israel, the tribes themselves, the intermediate sub-groupings of households, and the smallest units – the extended family households (C. Wright 1995:149). Gottwald has made a thorough analysis of these three levels:

The Tribe (*Shevet/Matteh*).[10] This was the larger and most important social unit that provided the major territorial and kinship organization in ancient Israel. The term "*shivte Israel*" is translated as "the tribes of Israel"; the expression "*shivte Yah*" (Psalm 122:4), "the tribes of Yah(weh)." Each *shevet* carries its own name-Reuben, Simeon, Judah, etc. The *shevet* stands as one of the primary segments of the whole people and shares jointly the status equally with all the other *shivte Israel* (Norman Gottwald 1979:245). De Vaux notes,

> A tribe is an autonomous group of families who believe they are descended from a common ancestor. Each tribe is called by the name or surname of the ancestor, sometimes, but not always, preceded by "sons of."...What unites all the tribesmen, then, is this blood-relationship, real or supposed; they all consider themselves "brother" in a wide sense. (1961:4-5)

All the members of David's clan are considered as the members of one family and thus they are all called "brothers" (1 Samuel 20:29; 2 Samuel 19:13). Thus the whole social organization can be summed up in a genealogy which descends from God. There are references of other foreign groups also incorporated to Israel on the basis of their faith

affirmation.[11] De Vaux notes, "The importance of the Israelite confederation was primarily religious; it was not only the feeling of kinship, but also their common faith in Yahweh, whom they had all agreed to follow (Joshua 24), which united the tribes around the sanctuary of the Ark, where they assembled for the great feast" (1961:7). These fusions took place on the basis of their common identity in Yahweh. That is the faith affirmation is the characteristics and a consciousness of being part of the body known as "Israel," the "people of Yahweh" (C. Wright 1995:149).

The Clan (*Mispaha*). This is the secondary subdivision of the social structure in Israel. The word *mispaha* was a unit of descent which is smaller than a tribe but larger than a family.[12] The m*ispaha* functioned as a secondary level of social organization between the tribe and the extended family household. Wright notes, "It was both a kinship grouping, incorporating a number of related families, and a territorial entity, often based on a village or a locality of identical name" (1995:150). The m*ispaha* functioned as a restorative and protective organism to its constituent families through redemption of the land or persons in danger of passing out of the hands of the kinship group (cf. Leviticus 25). Gottwald argues that "all available evidence suggests that the *mispahah* lived together in the same village or neighborhood, a matter of great importance for plotting the location of the *mispahah* in a general anthropological typology of social organizational forms" (1979:257).

The term *mispaha* is more accurately defined by Gottwald as a "protective association of extended families" (1979:258). The term *mispaha* has often been translated as "family," but biblical records make it clear that the *mispaha* is a larger unit

encompassing a number of *beit-'ab.* (2 Samuel 16:5; Joshua 2:12-13, 18; 6:25; Joshua 7; 1 Samuel 10:17-27).

The alternative word for *mispaha* was *'elep,*[13] when used in military contexts. The *mispaha* provided fighting men for the tribal military levy. The *mispaha* bonded, sustained, and preserved the household units, yet did not suppress their social or economic autonomy (C. Wright 1995:151). *Mispaha* was higher than the extended family in a numerical, geographical and functional sense. It did not interfere or control the smaller units. Faith in Yahweh was the means to belong to *mispaha,* the extended clan, and its biological connections were secondary.

The Family (*beit-'ab*). This is the third level of organization represented by the tribe and by the clan. The literal meaning of the word *beit-'ab* is "the household" or "father's house" (Gottwald 1979:285). *Beit-'ab* is an extended family comprising all the descendents of a single living ancestor; it includes male and female slaves and their families, resident laborers and sometimes resident Levites. The hierarchy of the three terms, *beit-'ab, mispaha* and *sebet/matteh,* is clearly expressed in Joshua 7:14-18. C. Wright notes, "Thus, the *bet'ab* included the head of the house and his wife (or wives), his sons and their wives, his grandsons and their wives, plus any unmarried sons or daughters in the generations below him, along with all the nonrelated dependents" (1992b:762).[14]

A *beit-'ab* could have comprised 50-100 persons, if the head of the family got married in his early age, all residing in a cluster of house units.[15]
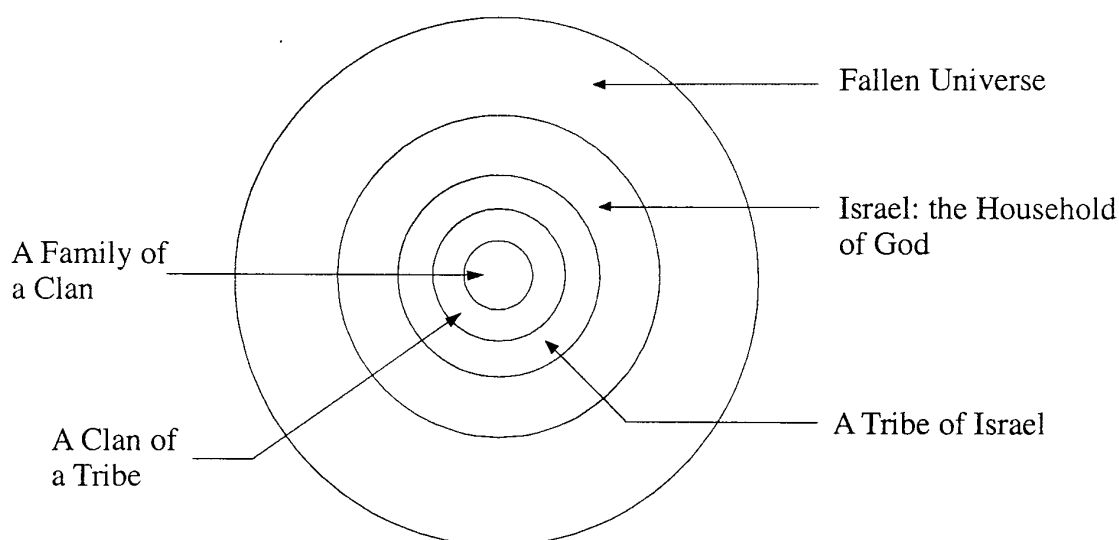
Figure 5. The Household of God: Mission of Israel

The election of Israel is an inclusive call as was the election of Noah and Abraham. Israel is God's people chosen to fulfill his concern for the whole world, being the household of God. The mission of Israel is to be a demonstration and a witness as the household of God (Deuteronomy 4:5-9). The above figure illustrates this mission of Israel as the household of God.

These three divisions of Hebrew society functioned to fulfill the commitment of total community. Gottwald observes that the autonomous extended families grouped themselves into local protective associations to give mutual socioeconomic aid and to levy troops. The *mispaha*, the autonomous protective associations, joined together in regional tribes to extend the mutual aid group and to field an effective force. The autonomous tribes associated in a national confederacy or league called Israel with cultic, military, and judicial functions. The final encompassing confederacy was co-terminus with the social system and was the result or end product of aggregated or pyramided small units (1979:330-331).

The sociocultural settings of the surrounding communities of the Canaanites were different from those of the Israelite settlers. The Israelites are strictly prohibited from following their patterns of life. The Covenant with Yahweh makes it plain that they must be distinct in their ethical, social, economic and political spheres (Deuteronomy 7:1-9; 9:4-6). The social structures of the Canaanites were similar to that of other Near Eastern countries. Haldar notes,

> Three social groups existed: freemen, clients, and slaves. A great part of the slaves were war captives and foreign slaves, but most were natives – e.g., defaulting debtors and unemployed men and women, who sold themselves into slavery to obtain their livelihood; furthermore, children were often sold by their parents or exposed, and then they could sustain themselves only by slavery. The position of the slaves was of various character: there were state slaves, temple slaves, slaves working as farmers but without possessing their own land, and finally, a number of unfree men who worked in crafts. The clients were a class only half free. (1962:497)

Canaanite society and economy were mainly based on agriculture. The society functioned under a feudal system in which the kings controlled everything. Haldar states, "The king was the head of the society. He was the owner of the largest properties; he was the head of the military organization and of the religious organization; and he was likewise the most important industrialist and merchant" (1962:497). Among the Israelites, however, the religious life was at the center, and their individual lives, family and social life were required to reflect the character of God. Gottwald notes, "To be a worshipper of Yahweh meant commitment to the common social project of Israel and thus willingness to come to the aid of Yahweh whenever Israel was under attack" (1979:572). Yahweh was the king of Israel and everyone come under his power and authority (C. Wright 1995:60).

The solidarity of the family was maintained by its organization around the father

figure. The father figure used in the Old Testament has a deeper meaning than what we

understand today. He was responsible for conveying the family's faith in God to sons

and daughters, through words and actions (Deuteronomy 4:9-10; 6:7, 20-25; 11:19;

32:46; Joshua 4:6-7). This was based on the father's experience in Egypt and

deliverance, God's protection in the wilderness journey, provision and care and giving

them land. Thus the family in Israel functioned as a religious community, preserving past

traditions and passing them on through instruction and worship. The *beit-'ab* in Israel

was patrilineal: after marriage a girl left her father's house and resided within the *beit-'ab*

of her husband. The husband as the authoritative figure exercised power in his family

within each *beth-'av* (father's house). Gottwald notes,

> The "father" of a *beth-'av* as a living group was not its founder but only its head
> pro tem, and this position would pass to his descendants in his lineage. The
> *beth-'av* was thus the functional living unit gathered around a family head at any
> given moment, and it was, in a narrower and more definable sense, the lineage –
> i.e., all the biological descendants of a known common ancestor (distinguished
> from a fictitious ancestor), thus distinguishable from members of the living group
> who participated by marriage or by adoption or by incorporation. (1979:287)

The Israelite family operated within the larger social structural units of the clan

and tribe, as noted above. The household in Israel was multigenerational and generally

consisted of two or three families, related by kinship and marriage. They lived in a

residential compound of two or three houses connected together. The role, functions and

relationship of the household were most important in the Israelites' social setting.

The Role, Function and Relationship of the Household of God in Israel

The household in the Bible occupied a central place in Old Testament theology

and ethics. The character and the activity of God were shaped by discourse concerning

the family. Human morality concerned behavior found in the context of the household.

The household of God in Israel can be studied from three perspectives: its role, its function and its relationships. Perdue notes, "Major metaphors for Israel's self-presentation were drawn from household roles, especially those of the wife (the bride/wife of Yahweh), the son and the daughter, the impoverished kin (redeemed by Yahweh), and marginal members (debt servant, slave, resident alien, and sojourner)" (1997b:225). The function of the household affects behavior in the family and society. This leads to an investigation of the relationships of the household members with one another and to society.

Israel functioned as a social system based on a broad equality of kinship groups. The heads of the family exercised authority and made decisions at the local level. The identity of the people of Israel was formed by recognizing Yahweh as their God and by obeying his covenant. The behavior pattern expected in the *beit-'ab* and in the *mispaha* units were based on the regulations of law given by Moses.

Land was a major feature of an Israelite family household. The recognition of each family household is the inherited domain in the land. Brueggemann notes,

> Nothing is more radical than this, that the sojourner becomes a possessor. The precarious sojourner has the heady new role of controller of what is promised and now given. The moment drastically redefines who Israel will be. Land entry requires of Israel that it cease to be what it had been in the wilderness and become what it has never been before. Land makes that demand. At this moment Israel does indeed become a new creation, a slave becomes an heir, a helpless child becomes a mature inheritor (Ezekiel 16:1-14). (2002:43)

Land was a gift from God and each family household was responsible to protect the land and safeguard their portions (Leviticus 25:23). C. Wright notes,

> The household, with its landed property, stood as the basic unit at the center of several spheres of Israel's life. Socially, it was the fundamental cell of the kinship

structure of the nation, greater in social and practical relevance than the larger groups – the "clan" and tribe. Economically, it was the smallest, viably self-sufficient unit within Israel's system of land division and tenure; and since that system had a strong religious rationale, the household was an integral part of Israel's "land theology." Thus also religiously, the household had a crucial role in maintaining the covenant relationship between the nation and God and in preserving its traditions throughout succeeding generations. (1990:1-2)

In this connection the role of the *mispaha* becomes very important and works primarily to protect and restore of the constituent households. This role focused on the figure of the *go'el*, the "kinsman-redeemer." The *mispaha* set bounds of the extent to which the *go'el* was to act for a man who belonged to the kin.[16] The regulation of the land redemption by a relative in Leviticus 25:49 makes it clear how far the *go'el* needed to act for a relative. "The responsibility starts with a brother, moves to uncle, cousin, and then to 'any blood relative [lit. "of the flesh of"] in his *mispaha*'" (1992b:763).

The father figure in Hebrew society was gifted with two particular characteristics. First, the father ruled as head of the household and he was well respected by all the family members, having absolute authority over his family. Secondly, he had the responsibility of guarding, supporting and helping the other members. Both these characteristics are present when this metaphor is ascribed to Yahweh (Hofius 1986:614).[17] Perdue notes,

> Metaphors for both the representation of Yahweh and the portrayal of Israel's relationship of Yahweh are often drawn from the household. Yahweh frequently assumes the roles of the household, including father, husband, redeemer (*go'el*), and mother, while Israel (Judah, Zion/Jerusalem) is cast in the roles of wife, son and daughter, and marginal household members, including debt servants, slaves, resident aliens, sojourners, widows, and orphans. (1997b:229)

The household roles in Israel are derived and shaped after God's character. God was the redeemer for the people of Israel and that needed to be reflected in family and social life.

The way God acted in history to deliver the people from Egypt was the model they needed to demonstrate within their family and society (1995:139).

The family is the focal point of covenant faithfulness and social stability in Israel.[18] The family plays a greater role in the religious life of the people of Israel. C. Wright notes,

> The sign of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel was circumcision, an act carried out within the family. Appropriately, therefore, the family was also the prime place for the teaching of the faith, history, laws and traditions of Israel and circumcision itself became a metaphor for covenant obedience – 'circumcise your hearts'(Deuteronomy 10:16). (2002:13-14)

This made the household institution of Israel unique in the midst of the surrounding communities. There are three specific roles which can be traced in the household institution of Israel: the father's responsibility towards the extended family, responsibilities among family members, and accountability of the family to the larger community and to the nation.

The father begets, instructs, disciplines, and loves his children. The father is the head of the household responsible to teach the law and bring up the children in the fear of Yahweh (Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 4:6ff). He also performs the judicial functions, internal as well as external, without any reference to outside legal authority. He makes decisions in the marriage of his children, in divorce, in making permanent a slave's relationship to himself, or in any parental discipline short of the execution of a death penalty – which had to be brought before the elders (1995:152). In external functions of the household, the father acts as one of the elders to perform a public judicial action which takes place at the city or village gate.

The family/household was also the basic economic unit in the Israelite social system. The family unit produced the basic means of subsistence for all its members and consumed much of what was produced. There was some division of labor as each family produced utensils according to the needs of the household member. The roles of the family are well demonstrated during the time of festival and at the time of jubilee celebrations.

Parents were responsible to bring up the children in the fear of the Lord. The Hebrew family's descent was identified through the male member of the family. So they longed for a son in the family to maintain the family identity in society. "Sons are to be disciplined and carefully trained in the traditions of the community and in the meaning of wisdom (Deuteronomy 8:5; Proverb 3:12; 13:24; 19:18; 29:17)" (Baab 1962:239). Children were expected to be obedient to their parents and follow the pattern of their faith. There was a strong reciprocal role between parents and the children from birth onwards. The parents' roles were to bring up the children in the fear of the Lord, and the children's role was to obey, respect and follow the faith of their parents (Deuteronomy 5:16; 6: 4-10; Exodus 20:12). Children learned the household duties from the very early years of their life.[19] This helped the family function as one unit and experience bonds of love with parents and siblings.

The household of God metaphor united the entire people as a single nation, Israel. Their family identity was crucial in fortifying themselves against all social and cultural assimilation (Barclay 1997:68). This idea of the household of God enabled them to survive in exile as well as in Diaspora. Barclay notes, "Children were born into a tradition which it was assumed they would perpetuate, and they learnt from their parents

what it meant to be a Jew. The family constituted the key arena for the socialization of each new generation, who would be equipped to raise the following generation, in turn, as Jews" (1997:68). The household concept functioned to equip the new generation with their responsibilities in the home as well as in society. In Israel the educational system functioned in the context of the household. Parents were responsible to convey the religious and historical roots to the new generation and make them fit into the social system (Deuteronomy 6: 4-7). The younger generation was helped to understand the meaning and message of their existence in the land through special days of observation, feasts, and sacrifices.

The Israelite household functions were dynamically interlocked and interdependent. These functions consisted of all activities imperative for the continuity of the co-residential group: economic (production and consumption of goods), sexual-reproductive, educational and judicial (Meyers 1997:23). All these activities contributed to family household continuity, that is, the transmission across generations of the skills, values, and resources necessary for survival.

The household functioned as the primary system of care for its members, both those who belonged to the kinship and marriage structure and also the resident aliens (Perdue 1997a:192). This system functioned in the household as charity on behalf of the poor who did not enjoy the nurture and support of their own households. The central means in the household system for care of family members was the institution of the *go'el* (redeemer), who was the next-of-kin responsible for the justice and well-being of the family. Gottwald summarized four major functions of the *go'el*:

(1) to raise up a male heir for a deceased family head; (2) to buy up or buy back property so that it remains in or returns to the social group; (3) to purchase the release of a group member who has fallen into debt slavery, or to pay off his debt so that he does not fall into debt slavery; (4) to avenge the death of a member of the group. (1979:263-267)

Family solidarity was evident under the *go'el*, a redeemer, a protector, a defender of the interests of the individual and of the group. The duty of the *go'el* followed a certain order of kinship, and this is specified in Leviticus 25:47-49: first the parental uncle, then his sons, then other relations. The *go'el* could renounce his right or decline his duty, though not without blame.[20] By taking off one shoe (Ruth 4:7-8) a man proclaimed that he gave up his right of redemption. There was also a procedure in the law of levirate to avoid the responsibility, but it brought disgrace to the brother-in-law (Deuteronomy 25:9).

Another function of the household was to take care of the sons, daughters, and grandchildren. Perdue notes, "From birth, infants and the very young received the care of their parents and other household members, until they began to contribute to the labor tasks of the family" (1997a:193). Children were to honor their parents as God's representatives on the earth. Kaiser notes,

> The child, on his or her part, was to "honor" the parents. This honoring, if we are to judge on the basis of the usage of the verb "to honor" in the Old Testament, involved: (1) highly prizing them (Proverb 4:8); (2) caring and showing affection for them (Psalms 91:15); and (3) showing respect, fear, and reverence to them (Leviticus 19:3). (1983:156)

The word "hospitality" does not appear in the Old Testament. However, it was practiced with all diligence among the people of Israel. Hospitality was a necessity in the desert life and it was considered as a highest virtue among the nomads (Kooy 1962:654). Selman states, "It was also a demonstration of faithfulness to God (Job 31:32; Isaiah

58:7). One might even entertain Yahweh (Genesis 18:1-8) or his angels (Judges 6:17-23; 13:15-21; cf. Hebrews 13:2), while God in his turn held a feast on the day of the Lord to which guests were invited (Zephaniah 1:7)" (1996:485). Abraham gave a lavish reception to the three men at Mamre, and Laban was eager to welcome Abraham's servant (Genesis 18:1-8; 24:28-32). Perdue states, "The 'resident alien' (*ger*) was the foreign immigrant who did not own land. The *ger* wished not only to enjoy the law of hospitality operative in the household but also to gain its protection" (1997a:198). Jewish law offered protection to the *ger* as a marginalized household member (Leviticus 19:33-34). Law also guaranteed justice to the *ger* and even welcomed them to the congregation of Israel.[21]

There are three major themes that are clear in offering hospitality to the resident alien or *ger*. First, the people of Israel were strangers and aliens in the Egypt so they are commanded to show mercy to the people who are living among them as aliens. This is a demonstration of love which God showed to them when they were aliens in a foreign land, Egypt. (Deuteronomy 29:10-15). This is an open invitation for the resident alien to be a member of the household community of God by faith confession.

Second, God's character should be reflected in the life of Israel, by Israel loving, caring and doing justice for the alien. The law offered equal status for alien as well as Israelites (Exodus 12:19,48-49; Leviticus 18:26; 20:2). Aliens are also eligible to partake in the tithe when it is distributed to the Levites (Leviticus 19:10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-21).

Third, the children of Israel also were considered as strangers and alien before God in a symbolic sense, because he is the owner of the land. "The land, moreover, shall

not be sold permanently, for the land is mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with me" (Leviticus 25:23). When the children of Israel offer hospitality it becomes a reminder to them that they are also standing before God as strangers and aliens. They are his children because of his grace and mercy and they need to share same qualities in their treatment of others. The whole life pattern of the people of Israel should be a demonstration of God's faithfulness in their lives. All are welcomed to the household of God and experience his loving-kindness through his children.

The relationships of the household also derive from Yahweh's treatment of the people of Israel from the very beginning of their history. The origin of Israel's story begins from God's love towards them and the covenant which he made with their fathers. God delivered them from Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and provided them with a new land on the basis of the relationship which he had with their forefather Abraham. Abraham was God's friend, and the people are addressed as children of God's friend (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8). God revealed to Israel, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6, 15-16;4:5). God identified himself as the family friend of the fathers of Israel.

The household was influenced by the nomadic way of life, and this also fashioned their solidarity thinking. The functional aspects of the family and society are based on these factors. Eichrodt notes, "The clan as a closely integrated unit not only determines the external structures of society, but ensures that the common life of the members of the clan is founded on a spiritual and psychical unity in which each individual is a representative of the whole, and in turn has his entire private attitude to life shaped by the whole" (1967:233). The head of the household functions as a responsible person to

safeguard the family, clan and tribe. Eichrodt notes, "It is a legacy from the father of the tribe that the tribal order is unassailable and binding on every member; but at the same time it also bestows well-being and peace on all who belong to the community" (1967:233). The individuals' function in ancient Israel was inseparably bound up with the society as a whole. The thoughts and actions of the people were to a very large extent determined by the community. The blessing as well as the wrongdoings of the fathers will be visited on the children, to the third and the fourth generations (Exodus 20:5; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9;7:9; cf. Psalm 85:5;105:8).[22]

Israel's society functioned under the law given by Yahweh through Moses (Exodus 24:12). Yahweh was responsible for bringing the people out of Egypt and leading them through the wilderness, providing, protecting and teaching his ways to them. There are different pictures of Yahweh which we can trace through the Bible concerning his relationship towards the people Israel: one is Father (Deuteronomy 32:6; Psalms 68:5; 103:13; Isaiah 63:16; 64:18), to his sons and daughters (Exodus 4:22-23; Deuteronomy 1:31; Hosea 11:1). Yahweh also is portrayed as husband and Israel his wife (Hosea 2; Ezekiel 16; Isaiah 54:4-8).[23] Driver notes, "In the context of the covenant, Israel understood itself as brothers and sisters in the family of God (Jeremiah 31:31-34; cf. Deuteronomy 15)" (1997:141).

This relationship with Yahweh must have been the experience of family and the social life throughout Israel. The household of God is used in more of a realistic sense than a mere metaphor. It is not as an implied comparison, but it is an experiential reality. The holiness of God is a repeated expression in the Bible. The law was given for the children of Israel to reflect their fathers' character in their personal, family and social life.

His holiness is the criterion for them to follow in their daily life. His holiness includes

his righteousness, justice and faithfulness to humanity. The moral life of Israel, in the

family context and in society should match the standards of their father, God (Leviticus

11:44;19:2). The moral demand on the people of Israel is based on the deliverance from

Egypt, and this is repeated time and again in the Old Testament: "For I am the Lord who

brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God: thus you shall be holy, for I am

holy" (Leviticus 11:45). The law was given in the context of Yahweh's holiness and it

concludes: "These are the statutes and ordinances, and laws that the Lord established

between himself and the people of Israel on Mount Sinai through Moses" (Leviticus

26:46). God brought the people of Israel from Egypt to follow him through the rest of

their lives. The head of the household in Israel was responsible to guide each member to

fear Yahweh and to safeguard the family from moral, spiritual and physical decay.[24]

People's entire lives functioned to glorify their God and to lead the other nations to know

Yahweh as the living God. They were instruments to witness to the wonderful deeds of

Yahweh to the nations.

Missiological Implications

The call of Abraham, in terms of its promise, was inclusive of all the people of the

earth (Genesis 12:1-3). God initiated the salvation of all humanity through Abraham and

his descendents. Kaiser notes, "God had repeatedly blessed his creation with his word of

benediction, now as he introduces this new word of grace in Genesis 12:1-3, he repeats

five times his determination to "bless" Abraham, his seed, and all the families of the

earth" (2000:18). This promise to bless all the peoples and families on earth is repeated

in Genesis 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; and 28:14.[25] All humanity was in the mind of God when

he elected the family of Abraham. This intent was assured in the Abrahamic covenant

(Genesis 15:1-8). Kostenberger and O'Brien notes,

> The terms of the Abrahamic covenant are rested in Genesis 17, and ultimately the promise refers to a company of believers of whom Abraham is father (cf. Romans 4:16-17). The many nations of whom Abraham will be father are not his natural descendants, but because of the divine promises he will become for them the channel of blessing. And, in order to reinforce his promise, God changes the name of Abram (the father is exalted) to Abraham (father of a multitude). (2001:31)

God's dealing with the people of Israel as father is explicitly expressed in the

Exodus. Israel is redeemed for a particular purpose in God's plan described at Mount

Sinai.

> Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to yourself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites. (Exodus 19:3-6)

The Exodus and Israel's wilderness journey are likened in the Bible to a father dealing

with his son (Exodus 4:22-23; Deuteronomy 1:31; In Hosea 11:1). God's dealing with

Israel is the example of his dealing with the other nations, because God as loving father is

concerned about all humanity.

God's concern with all humanity is also found in the poetic and wisdom literature

of the Old Testament. Psalm 67 has often called the "Old Testament *Pater Noster*," the

"Our Father" Psalm. Kaiser notes, "It is also the psalm that focuses on the promise made

to Abraham that he would be a blessing to all the families of the earth" (2000:30).

Psalms are not only the worship songs of Israel but also reminders of their calling and

mission to the people around them. For example, Psalm 96:2-3 exhorts Israel to "Sing to

the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among

the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples." Kaiser notes,

> The context demands that God's character ("glory") and his conduct ("deeds") be
> "declared" (Hebrew :*spr*) universally and internationally (v.3). The psalm goes
> on to address all the "families of nations" (v.7) and instructs them to "ascribe
> glory to the Lord" and to bring sacrifices and worship into his courts. This is not
> an exclusively Israelite privilege; "all the earth" is to "tremble before him" (v.9).
> (2000:34)

This psalm is not only talking about Israel but also envisaging the new converts from all

the earth proclaiming that "Yahweh reigns" and that he will come to "judge the people

with equity" (v.10).

Wisdom literature is not only aimed at Israel but also people everywhere. Most of

the wisdom discourses deal with the practical realities of family life based on experience.

The master images of this discourse are two personified abstractions, named Wisdom and

Folly (Dumbrell 2002:264). Most of the discourses in wisdom literature are based on the

family atmosphere, like father and son, wise lady and good wife. The themes of

Proverbs, especially addressing right living based on true wisdom, depend on the

understanding of God's purpose in creation in salvation history (Dumbrell 2002:273).

The prophets of Israel specifically speak of the purpose of God in electing Israel

to be a light to the nations. The prophets repeatedly remind Israel to reflect the character

of their Heavenly Father who brought them out of the land of Egypt and planted them in

the Promised Land. The prophet Isaiah calls the nation to function as a missionary to the

Gentiles and the nations. This is very well expressed in the Servant Songs of Isaiah 42-

49. Isaiah specifically mentions Israel as witnesses of the Lord, and thus they need to act

as his servant. "You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have

chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me" (Isaiah 43:10).[26]

Husband and wife is another family image used to describe the relationship of God and Israel. Ferguson notes, "This imagery occurs frequently in the prophets for God and Israel (e.g., Jeremiah 2:2; Ezekiel 16:8-14; Hosea 2:1-3:1)" (1996:115). Bridal imagery is used to convey the submissive response of the people and the desire to please God. Deviation from the will and purpose of God led Israel to misery and suffering. So the message is to return to the first love and to fulfill the mission which has been entrusted to them. Dumbrell notes, "The attempt to make vivid the enormity of her cultic apostasy through the intimate series of images in verses 2-5, which in itself suggests the closeness of the covenant relationship and its personal nature, ends only in a declaration of self-interest by Israel (v.5b) to pursue the fertility deities" (2002:172). The prophet Hosea brings out the true nature of Israel and recalls the time in the wilderness as a honeymoon period in the relationship. Now he calls for a new start, drawing Israel into the wilderness for a second honeymoon to fulfill the mission which God expected through them (Jeremiah 2:2-3; Hosea 2:14-16) (Goldingay 2003:459).

The Old Testament provides ample evidences for the household of God idea in Israel. The household of God concept in Israel is unique compared to the other nations around them. The inclusive call to Israel is to demonstrate the character of Yahweh in her life and witness. All are welcomed to the household of God by their faith affirmation that Yahweh as the living God. The distinctiveness is not for exclusiveness but to fulfill the mission of God; Israel is to be the light to the nations. The household of God in the Old Testament is the basis for the household concepts in the New Testament.

The Household of God in the New Testament

The Old Testament household of God is the foundation for understanding the New Testament image of the church as the household of God. From a promise fulfillment view, God in Christ Jesus was fulfilling the covenant which he had made with Abraham. In the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, it was expressed explicitly and implicitly that by faith in Christ we become members of the household of God. This began by the preaching of John the Baptist, exposing and challenging the claims of the Pharisees and Sadducees saying, "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Matthew 3:9). A biological connection is not the basis for being a member in the Hebrew community; instead, becoming a part of the household of God is by having faith in God, like Abraham their ancestor. Jesus marveled at the faith of the centurion and said, "I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:11-12; cf. Luke 13: 28-29). He challenges his listeners to have faith in God over against their exclusive biological claim to be the chosen people of God.

Jesus' Teaching on the Household of God

Jesus' life and ministry was focused in the context of houses and families. The beginning of Mark's Gospel points to Jesus' healing of the mother-in-law of Simon Peter in their house (Mark 1:29-31 cf. Matthew 8:14). In the same way the second chapter begins with his teaching at a house, and people began to flock to it. Jesus tells Nicodemus, in John chapter 3, that the basic qualification to be in the Kingdom of God is

a born again experience; again it is an imagery of birth into a family. Scenes of domestic

life play a major role in the life and teachings of Jesus. Elliott notes,

> Of the thirty-one parables which Luke relates, no less than eighteen involve
> aspects of domestic activity and household management (i.e., oikonomia). Some
> few of these come to Luke from the tradition, such as Luke 8:5-8; 12:35-40; 2:42-
> 46; 13:18-19; 14:15-24; 15:3-7; 20:9-18; and many others are unique to Luke:
> 7:41-43; 11:5-8; 12: 16-21; 13:24-30; 14:7-11; 14:28-30; 15:8-10; 15:11-32; 16:1-
> 8; 16:19-31; 17:7-10. (1991:227)

Jesus taught the importance of the Kingdom of God as based on doing rather than

listening, which is explained in the parable of building the house on rock instead of on

sand (Matthew 7:24-27 cf. Luke 6:46-49). Jesus' teaching on discipleship was organized

around household concerns (Luke 12:1-53 and 14:1-17:10). These passages focus on the

right and wrong way of living in the household of God.[27] The kingdom parables of Jesus

were focused mainly on the daily home context of the people (Matthew 13: 36-43; 51-

53). Jesus also explained the meanings of the parables to the disciples in a private house.

Jesus' teachings emphasized clearly that the household of God serves as the

appropriate sphere and symbol of social life under the reign of God. The bonds of mercy,

faith, and obedience constituted the household of God in the teachings of Jesus. In these

bonds the boundaries are expanded to include the marginalized, the outcasts, Samaritans,

and Gentiles (Elliott 1991:227). The life and ministry of Jesus demonstrated a

household concern in the gospels. God as father loves humanity and sends his son to

offer joy, peace, and wholeness to the world. The heavenly 'father' expects his child to

reflect his character by being in the new family relationship, by having faith in him, and

by treating one another as brothers and sisters. Jesus is the model householder who

presides at the meals as well as serves (Luke 22:7-38; 24:28-31, 36-49) and this becomes

a sign of inclusiveness, fellowship, status reversal, reciprocal service, and joy typical of life in the kingdom/household of God (Elliott 1991:228).

Jesus was very much involved in the household settings of his time. He went to the houses of the people without considering their status in society. He openly accepted their invitation, but he also expressed his desire to be in their homes without any prior invitation (Luke 19:1-10). He took part in family dinners and accepted their cultural reception (John 12:1-4).

Jesus used the title "Son of Man" in reference to himself, expressing his mission and ministry. This Christological title appears sixty nine times in the Synoptic Gospels and thirteen times in John. Gruenler notes,

> The explicitly redemptive character of his ministry is evidenced by his personal claim that "the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Of the passages in so-called Q (Matthew 8:20; 11:19; 12:32), the first indicates his servanthood, the second sounds his familiar theme of open table fellowship with outcastes, and the third concludes a powerful passage on his binding of Satan and a warning about "the unforgivable sin" against the Holy Spirit, by whose power Jesus is invading the demonic kingdom – another personal claim to correlativity with God. (1984:1035)[28]

This title shows how Jesus identified with the ordinary context of humanity and their family life settings.

Jesus speaks of God as "Father," which is another familiar family usage. This expresses his intimate personal relationship with the father. The fatherhood of God is one of the most important teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. Jesus' addressing God the Father is striking because in the Old Testament God as the Father refers only to his relationship with the people of Israel (Deuteronomy 32:6; Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 31:9; Malachi 1:6; 2:10) (Hofius 1986:617). The contemporary pagan world of the day of Jesus held its gods in fear, but Jesus called God his father, expressing an

intimate relationship (Guthrie 1981:81). Witherington notes, "Abba means something like 'father dearest,' connoting both intimacy and endearment" (2001: 125). Kummel comments,

> But this Aramaic word *abba* was never used in Judaism as an address or a designation of God; Jesus rather made a word of children's language, which had become the familiar form of address for a father generally, into the designation of God, and thereby made it clear even in the form of his language that he did not want to speak of God with a traditional designation, but wanted to preach with specific urgency that God seeks to encounter man with fatherly love. (1973: 40)

The Father God cares for his children and also for all his creatures (Matthew 6:26-31). Jesus' teachings on the fatherhood of God are unparallel in his time. Jesus said it is unnecessary to have anxiety for food and clothing because our Father in heaven knows what we need (Luke 12:30; Matthew 6:8). Our heavenly Father knows what we need even before we ask him (Matthew 7:11).[29] The life and ministry of Jesus was focused on doing the will of his Father in heaven. Senior and Stuhlmueller notes, "Jesus' teaching, therefore, also focuses on the typical theme of "obeying the will of my Father" (cf. Matthew 7:21), of "leaving all" for the sake of the kingdom (Mark 10:28-31), of "forgiving as you are forgiven" (cf. Matthew 6:12, 14-15). The failure to respond is ultimately destructive of human life; it invites judgment" (1983:152).

The believers were privileged to call God "Abba, Father" as Christ expressed in his prayer at Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). The Apostle Paul writes about it in two ways. First, all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God, and that 'when we cry, "Abba, Father," it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God' (Romans 8:14f). Second, in Galatians 4:6 we read, 'God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!"' Guthrie notes,

> It is the same Spirit who enabled Jesus at the hour of his agony to cry 'Abba', who now enables all the adopted children of God to approach the Father in the same way. It is one thing to know we are children of God, it is another to act like children of God, with full awareness of utter dependence on and love for God as Father. This could never have happened without the aid of the Spirit. (1981:555)

The Spirit works towards the new relationship into which believers have entered. This privilege is beyond caste, color, language and all physical boundaries because by faith every one is born into the family of God (Galatians 3:28). Guthrie notes,

> In the New Testament the fatherhood of God is seen in three ways. He is Father of Jesus, he is Father of the disciples of Jesus, and he is Father of all creation. It is important to note that the father-child relationship in reference to God is almost wholly reserved for those who are believers. The relationship is the result of the redemptive activity of God. (1981:81)

In the life and ministry of Jesus, house and family played a great part. He was born into a family and lived as a responsible member of that family for thirty years with his mother and brothers. Jesus' view of the family was inclusive of every one who does the will of God (Mark 3:33-35; cf. Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 8:19-21). Doing the will of God binds the families of the whole world together. Nacpil notes,

> There is no doubt that the bonds of family are what a sense of community should be: strong, cohesive, intimate. They express open communication, mutual concern, loving care for one another, loyalty to the family interest and welfare to the point of sacrificing personal welfare. The family is a model of human community. (1998:153)

Jesus expressed this well in his dealing with his followers, in feeding the five thousand, in healing the sick, and in equipping his disciples. Jesus' death on the cross was a sacrifice for all of the families of the earth. The Last Supper was in part a memorial by which he left behind a memory of how much he cared for the families of the earth. The Last Supper was held in a house. The elements which he used were exact

symbols and expressions of the work and toil of the household/family. At the table of the Lord all the families of the earth meet as one, the household of God.

The Household of God in the Epistles

The New Testament epistles talk very clearly about how we become the household of God beyond our physical and geographical limitations. They show the importance of the household of God image by using sibling language showing the relationship of Christians with one another. Three dimensions of the household can be seen in the epistles. First is the husband and wife metaphor (Ephesians 5:23-32), showing the depth and intimacy of the relationship between Christ (as husband) and the community of the New Covenant (as wife). The vision of the church is an eschatological family life with Christ. Paul writes to the believers that you are betrothed to Christ as a pure bride (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Second, believers participate in a common heritage (Romans 8:17) which derives from believing in Jesus Christ, sharing in a common character and a common destiny (Ephesians 2:19-22). In this common heritage there is no difference between Jew or Gentile, male or female, we are one in Christ (Ephesians 3:6).

Third, the epistles mention how ministers are to behave in the household of God (1 Timothy 3:15). This perspective of the church sees its ministry performing ordinary family functions, reflecting how the head of the household takes care of the children, disciplines them, and directs them in their struggles of life (1Timothy 3:4-5). Paul is concerned about building a high standard of Christian character in the church as the family of God. Verner notes,

> The author of the Pastorals presents an ideal of domestic life that reflects the prevailing view in his church. According to this ideal, the model domestic

situation is a prosperous household managed skillfully and prudently by the householder. The householder exercises authority over his wife, children and slaves and ultimately must account for their behavior. The subordinate members of the household recognize their proper roles and behave in such a way as to reflect credit upon the household. (1983:145)

This is a reflection of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Paul writes in Romans 8:29 that Jesus, as the firstborn within a larger family, is the Lord over the household. Jesus is the supreme example for a believer to follow. He is the only beloved Son of God who obeyed his father even to the point of death (Philippians 2:8). Driver notes,

He is also the "firstborn within a large family" whose members are also called to obedience (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15). Jesus is concretely the measure and norm of our sonship. As sons and daughters of God, we are born of God into a new family, a new creation, in which we are "predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29). (1997:146)

The character of Jesus Christ provides the vision of the church that the Apostle Paul has in his mind, so he writes to the Ephesians: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (5:1-2). In this passage Paul mentions what their position was before Christ and what Christ did in order to make us the children of God. This reflects the life and teachings of Christ in Matthew 5: 44-45a "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."

Family imagery is used to explain the whole of the Christian life, such as a father's relationship with his children and the children's relationship towards their parents (1 Thessalonians 2:7-12). The writer of Hebrews compares the discipline of the earthly father and the heavenly father to help people understand the purpose of God in our life (Hebrews 12:9-10). Relationship with the heavenly Father is characterized by

obedience and submission (1 Peter 1:14; Mark 3:35). The heavenly Father provides, protects and helps his children grow in him and this reflects his faithfulness towards humanity (Galatians 3:26).

The children of the heavenly Father are responsible to carry out his mission to humanity. The parable of the Prodigal Son illustrates how eagerly the Father in heaven waits for his children to return to him (Luke 15:11-31). This parable illustrates the unease of the father and his joy when the son returned to him. This is also represented in the messianic banquet theme in which he waits for all his lost children to return to the father's home (Senior and Stuhlmueller 1983:153). Also illustrates the failure of the older brother, representing Israel, to welcome those that the Father has welcomed.

The Role, Function and Relationship of the Household of God in the New Testament

The concept of the household of God had a great influence in the early church community. This idea challenged the traditional pattern of family life and it changed their roles and behaviors. The household of God united believers beyond the biological, economic, class and caste lines and made them one in Christ. Padilla notes,

> Throughout the entire New Testament the oneness of the people of God as a oneness that transcends all outward distinctions is taken for granted. The thought is that with the coming of Jesus Christ all the barriers that divide humankind have been broken down and a new humanity is now taking shape in and through the church. God's purpose in Jesus Christ includes the oneness of the human race, and that oneness becomes visible in the church. (1982:23)

There was clear distinction in the function of the community and the relationships which people maintained among themselves and with outsiders. This begins from the very incarnation, and the teachings of Jesus. The Holy Spirit empowered the disciples at the day of Pentecost and the early church functioned as the household of God. The disciples understood a new age is dawning by the coming of the Holy Spirit. N.T. Wright states,

> A new age had begun in which the living God was going to do new things in the world – beginning then and there with the individuals who were listening to him. This promise is for you, he said, and for your children, and for everyone who is far away (Acts 2:39). It wasn't just for the person standing next to you. It was for everyone. (2002:ix)

The following sections look at how the role, function and relationships as the household of God were maintained in the early church, and how these united the body in Christ Jesus.

Jesus was modeling and equipping the disciples to assume the role of travelers, moving from place to place preaching the kingdom of God and healing the sick.[30] He became homeless in order to invite people to come home to God the father (Matthew 8:20). He motivated the disciples to experience the same in their lives and to join with him in calling people to his father's house by faith in him. The household of God is not identified with a particular geographical location or attained by biological line. But Jesus taught that leaving the family of origin and becoming a member of the kingdom of God is not a matter of choice, but an obligation for every disciple (Luke 14:26). Jesus expected a behavioral change in his disciples, fully trusting God and becoming members of the family of God by faith. He was challenging the existing household pattern of the day. Even Jesus' own family could not understand the teachings and the patterns of his living. Mark's Gospel records, "When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind" (Mark 3:21). The true family, according to Jesus, was not the physical family but those who hear and do the will of God in heaven (Luke 8:19-21) (Theissen 1977:12).

Jesus criticized the use of status titles like "Rabbi," since he maintained that his disciples were all brothers who had the same teacher, i.e. himself (Matthew 23:8).

Guthrie notes, "He linked with 'Rabbi', the title of 'father' and 'master'" (1981:709). Jesus taught the disciples the inherent nature of the Fatherhood of God through his life and ministry. Jesus asked Mary to report to the disciples (John 20:17), 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' Jesus taught the disciples the role of the heavenly Father in their daily life if they fully trust in him for all their needs (Matthew 6:25-32).

In the epistles God is many times described as the Father of Jesus Christ as well as the father of all humanity (Ephesians 3:14, 15). This metaphor expresses that fatherhood is the nearest approximation to the relationship between God and man. This is expressed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus, 'the son of God', entered into the world and was committed totally to the will of the Father both before and after all things are subjected to him. The further subjection of the Son is intended to mark and demonstrate the perfect harmony of all things in God. The Son has no other desire than that the Father might be everything to every one (Guthrie 1981:319). This intimate relationship Paul discusses in Galatians and reminds people that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba, Father' (Galatians 4:6 cf. Romans 8:15). The relationship between the Father and Son is to be the pattern of the believers.

The disciples and the early church were giving a new meaning to existing patterns of the Mediterranean family. Malina notes,

> Success consists in having and making the right interpersonal connections, in being related to the right people. In other words, given belongingness as the organizing principle, success in life means maintaining ties to other persons within sets of significant groups. The central group in this set is one's kinship group. A person's identity depends on belonging to and being accepted by the family. (2001:29)

The Mediterranean family concept was based on biological connections as well as adoption, but the disciples and the early church were demonstrating, in either case, that faith in Christ is the basic component of belong to the true family, the family of God. In God's family there is no difference between Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free; all are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). In the family of God race, gender and social status are swept away as every one stands equal as sons and daughters of the heavenly Father (Malina 2001:155).

The teaching of Christ concerning the household of God constituted a climactic articulation of the new fellowship in faith whose bonds were as strong as the power of the cross (Minear 1960:172). This was seen in the life of the apostles and in the early church. They functioned in one accord when they began to face the practical realities of their life. The newly formed communities were practicing the teaching of their master in a hostile surrounding. They ministered one to another and to the community around them on an individual basis and the Lord kept adding to the church daily (Kreider 2001:20). This new believers' perspective on life attracted others to follow their way, and they became known as the people of the way (Acts 9:2; 18:25f.; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14,22).

Jesus' teachings equipped the disciples to lead a community life based on Kingdom values. This was well expressed in the radical teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:43f). They found this functional aspect of his teaching in the life and ministry of Jesus.[31] He loved tax-collectors and sinners, although the religious authorities were criticizing his actions and words. He taught them the meaning

of forgiveness beyond the letter (Matthew 18:21f). Jesus' attitude towards his

persecutors was different; he prayed for them even from the cross: "Father, forgive them;

for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). The disciples were identifying

themselves with their master and leaving the aggression against them in the hands of the

heavenly Father who judges every one righteously. These are several reasons why people

from all walks of life were attracted to Christianity. Michael Green notes,

> Undoubtedly the love of the Christians had a lot to do with it, so did the moral
> qualities they displayed, the warmth of their fellowship, their manifest
> enthusiasm, the universal applicability of their message... The assurance and
> confidence of the Christians, who were quite willing to lose home, comfort,
> friends, and even life itself in propagating their cause won its share of converts; so
> did the fear of judgment, which became an increasingly strong emphasis in the
> second century. (1970:147-148)

Hospitality was another important function of the family found in the New

Testament, as mentioned earlier in the Old Testament. The earthly ministry of Jesus

(Mark 1:29ff; 2:15ff; Luke 7:36ff; 10:38-41) and of the apostle's (Acts 10:6ff; 16:15;

17:7) was greatly dependent on the hospitality they received. Pohl states, "Jesus

welcomes and needs welcome; Jesus requires that followers depend on and provide

hospitality. The practice of Christian hospitality is always located within the larger

picture of Jesus' sacrificial welcome to all who come to him" (1999:17). Jesus was not

welcomed into his own people (John 1:11), whereas he graciously welcomed children

and prostitutes, tax collectors and sinners into his presence (Pohl 1999:17). Jesus taught

hospitality (Luke 14: 12-24) which extends beyond the siblings, friends and rich

neighbors. Jesus' teaching was focused on the nature of the kingdom which represents

the very character of God. The household of God reflects the character of God by

extending hospitality to those who are not part of their family. This will bring people,

poor, lame, crippled and blind, who are rejected and ignored by society into the kingdom where they will experience the love of God.

The apostles' lives and teaching opened up reception and hospitality in the places they went. Jesus enjoyed and taught the importance of hospitality (Luke 10:38-42; 14:7-14). The book of Acts records incidents of hospitality extended to the apostles in different houses, those of Cornelius, Lydia, and in the jailer's house. Malherbe notes, "Luke writes that, after her baptism, Lydia, another God-fearer, confronts Paul with a test of the validity of his preaching: "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And he adds, "And she prevailed upon us!" (16:15). Luke clearly sees a theological significance in the practice" (1983:66-67). The teaching on hospitality is frequently found in the epistles and is viewed as the concrete expression of Christian love.[32] "Let love be genuine, love one another with brotherly affection... contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality" (Romans 13:9-13). "Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrew 13:1-2). "Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:8-10). Malherbe notes, "It was not only Paul the Apostle who could expect hospitality; he also claimed it for his coworkers (cf., 1 Corinthians 16:11). At the end of the first century, traveling Christians still availed themselves of the hospitality of their brethren (cf. III John)" (1983:68).

The early church practiced hospitality not only to the household of God but also to the strangers and aliens, as in the Old Testament times. They were aware that their

citizenship is not here and that they are strangers in this world (Ephesians 2:19;

Philippians 3:20; 1 Peter 1:1). The early church believers were looking expectantly for

an unshakable Kingdom made by God himself (Hebrews 12:28). Hospitality therefore

was the discharge of a debt of gratitude before God. They were also aware that they

belonged to the household of God and shared equally in the presence of God. So

hospitality was an expression of the brotherly love which they experienced in their

fellowship with one another in Christ (Hebrews 13:1-2).

Another functional aspect of God's household in the early church is found in their

fellowship. The Greek word *koinonia* refers to the fellowship of the believers.

Birkey notes, "The word comes from the adjective meaning "common," the ruling idea

being "sharing" in commonality. Theologically, it is the common inheritance in Christ's

life in which every believer shares. The possibility of koinonia comes to us from above,

the vertical dimension of fellowship (1 John 1:2)" (1988:141). The practice of *koinonia*

is relational, on the horizontal level.[33] The Apostle John writes, "We declare to you what

we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our

fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Snyder

observes three different words which explain the functions of the early church: *leitourgia*

("service" or "worship") *koinonia* ("fellowship" or "sharing") and *martyria* ("witness" or

"testimony") (1996:76). He notes further,

> The church is a community or fellowship of shared life, a *koinonia*. The church
> witnesses to what God has done in Jesus Christ and in its own experience, even
> when its *martyria* leads to martyrdom. Above all, the church performs the service
> of worship (*leitourgia*) to God, not just through acts of worship but by living a life
> of praise to God. (1996:76)

The first century Christians were living as the household of God. One of the expressions of this was they met for worship in the house of the believers.[34] Those who belong to the Lord were seen primarily as members of a common family. When the early Christians met in homes for worship, this was an expression of the fact that they belonged to one family, God's family. Paul's letters are full of descriptive terms of family-type relationships, which explain the functional and relational aspects of the church in the first century.[35] Banks notes,

> Indeed, all of this closing section of Romans and the closing sections of many other Pauline letters witness to the strong "family" character of the relationships built up by Paul and various members of the churches he moved among. Here we also need to remember the way in which Paul speaks of his relationships to various communities as a whole by means of analogies drawn from family life, e.g., "father," "mother," "nurse," and so on (1 Corinthians 4:14-15; 10:14; Philippians 2:12). (1994:52)

The relationship aspect of the household of God was explained when Jesus answered Peter's question:

> Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age – houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions – and in the age to come eternal life." (Mark 10:28-30)[36]

When Jesus was answering the crowd, He was declaring that the true family is not biological but "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:46-50). Ferguson notes,

> This is an important declaration concerning his spiritual family and an important description of what characterizes that family. Human children have the nature of their parents and tend to imitate them. The same is true of the spiritual family. "To do the will of the Father in heaven" is to express his nature (1 John 2:29; 3:2,9; 5:1-2,18) and to imitate his love (Ephesians 5:1-2). (1996:119)

The teachings of Jesus about family relationships move beyond biological lines. This

caused an embarrassing situation to the family of Jesus when they came to see him (Mark

3:20-31). Jesus restored meaning and relationship of the family beyond biological ties.[37]

In the family of God every one relates to one another as children of the heavenly father;

an eschatological vision comes true in daily life. This is clearly expounded in the

epistles, especially in the writings of Paul.

In Christ Jesus we are privileged to call God "Abba," a term of intimacy (Romans

8:15; Galatians 4:6). In Paul writings this freedom is received purely by grace. Driver

states,

> To be a person is to participate in a family, to be integrated into a people. To the
> saving activity of God, as Father, we owe the possibility of being fully persons.
> By God's grace, those who were nobody can be fully persons. "In the very place
> where it was said to them, "you are not my people,' there they shall be called
> 'children of the living God'" (Romans 9:26). (1997:146)

Relationships within the family of God have a new and different perspective. Paul writes

that Jesus is the first born, and He becomes the supreme example of obedience

(Colossians 2:15). We as sons and daughters of God are born of God into a new family, a

new creation, in which we are "predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son"

(Romans 8:29; Colossians 3:10) (Guthrie 1981:180). The heavenly Father's character is

expected in the lives of the sons and daughters in the household of God. This is summed

up in Ephesians 5:1-2, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in

love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to

God." Paul acknowledges the fatherhood of God when he prays for the Ephesians, "For

this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on

earth takes its name" (Ephesians 3:14-15). Paul's prayer is aiming for solidarity both

with the heavenly father and among the brothers and sisters in the household of God.

Relationships within the household of God are different from those which occur among

those outside the family (Matthew 5:43-48; 1 John 3:10-11).

Relationships in the household of God are marked by the relationships maintained

between brothers and sisters in the church. It is significant to note that the term brothers

and sisters is used quite often in the New Testament to denote relationships in the

household of God.[38] This relationship united by Christ and it reflected in the church as

the household of God (Philippians 3:1; 4:1; 1 Corinthians 15:58). Paul's use of family

terminology in the epistles is noteworthy. The term *adelphos* (brother/sister) occurs

forty-one times in first Corinthians alone (1 Corinthians 1:26; 2:1; 3:1; 16:11-12 and so

on). Paul's affection and intimate relationship with the Corinthians is expressed in the

familial language: "Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I

proclaimed to you." (15:1) (Hellerman 2001:100). Paul refers to Corinthian believers as

his children whom he begot in the gospel (1 Corinthians 4:15). Paul also used the same

term when he introduces Timothy to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 4:17) and Onesimus

to Philemon: "I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my

imprisonment" (Philemon verse 10). This familial terminology is found throughout the

letters of Paul and the other apostles,[39] and it expresses the relationship between the

Apostles and the believers. There was no difference between the rich or poor, slave or

master in the household of God, everyone was considered as brother and sister. Michael

Green notes,

> But when the Christian missionaries not only proclaimed that in Christ the
> distinctions between slave and free man were done away as those between Jew
> and Greek, but actually lived in accordance with their principles, then this had an
> enormous appeal. Not only to be accepted by others of different class, but to be

adopted into the very family of God – this must have been almost too wonderful to be true for the average Hellenistic slave – until he remembered that the founder of this faith was himself a Servant, who knew from personal experience what ignominy and underserved suffering meant. (1970:141)

The relationships which the early Christians maintained in the household of God attracted outsiders to the church. Stark proposes three principles for the advance of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world. The first is that Christianity offered a better explanation of the terrible plagues that ravaged the Roman world in the second and third centuries than did pagan religions. The second is that Christians, because of their theologically driven care for one another at these times, had a higher survival rate than did pagans. The third is that Christians offered care for their pagan neighbors during such times, and they survived through their other friends and neighbors may have perished. Pagan survivors would have been attracted to Christianity (1996:73-75). The early Christians did not see themselves as isolated individuals but as part of household communities. They experienced belongingness of joy with the family of God. Paul writes to the Ephesians, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:19-20).

Missiological Significance

The household of God played a fundamental role in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and the mission of the early church. Jesus used family or bridal imagery to explain the present realities of his ministry (Mark 2:19). His family imageries were more inclusive of the whole humanity. Vallet notes, "The Bible is the story of God's love for and redemption of the world. The human role in God's love of the world is to be a steward of God's household in carrying out God's mission" (1998:20).

The birth of Jesus in human form into a human family was God's deliberate attempt to enter humanity in its condition and categories. Vellet notes, "God became part of the human household so that humans could become part of the household of God" (1998:37). Jesus' life and ministry was focused on being faithful in the household of God. This was well expressed in the temptation narrative: the provider is greater than the provision, the master is greater than the servant, and shortcuts will not work in fulfilling the mission of God which is entrusted to him. Jesus becomes the supreme example of faithfulness and obedience to the Father in the household of God. The author of Hebrews compares and contrasts the life and ministry of Jesus with that of Moses. He also opens up the believers' privilege to be in the household of God if we hold firm the confidence in Christ Jesus our Lord (Hebrews 3:4-6).

The life and teaching of Jesus inaugurated the presence of the kingdom of God. He invited people to be part of the kingdom by becoming the family of God, having faith in Jesus as the Messiah (Luke 24:27; John 1:45; 5:45, 46). In this kingdom each family is important, there is no difference between high or low, caste or color, male or female, all stand equal before the king. God the father is the king and all the rest are sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, one to another. Jesus spoke to the followers you are 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world' (Matthew 4:16). Jesus also taught the people to let their light so shine before others so that these might see their good works and glorify their heavenly Father (5:13-16). Jesus was equipping the disciples to continue the mission for which he came to the world. Theissen notes,

> Giving up a fixed abode was an essential part of discipleship. Those who were called left hearth and home (Mark 1:16; 10:28ff.), followed Jesus, and like him became homeless. 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son

of man has nowhere to lay his head' (Matthew 8:20) is a saying which applied to them. (1977:10)

Jesus' ministry was directed not only to Jews but also to Gentiles, "And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations" (Mark 13:10). The motive of the mission of Jesus is recorded in Mark 10:45 "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." Senior and Stuhlmueller notes, "Mark invites the church to take up the powerful redemptive mission of Jesus, a mission that embraced Jew and Gentile. But this mission will be genuine only when the community has been transformed by a servant Jesus and his cross" (1983:229).

Jesus equipped his disciples to carry on the mission based in intimate love which in turn is based on family values. This is expressed by the New Testament writings using sibling language. Jesus' mission was to introduce the heavenly Father to humanity. So Jesus said, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent me, I also send you" (John 20:21). The reason and purpose of the incarnation was to express the deepest love of God to humanity, a fatherly concern for humanity (John 3:16). Jesus' love is expressed in various ways, such as friendship, trusted companionship, understanding people's needs and helping them grasp the purpose of his ministry. So he told them that they are no longer servants but his friends (John 15:15). Jesus met the disciples at the beach, calling them and asking "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" (John 24:5). This is another picture of a loving father, who follows them and helps them to understand the bases of the mission, 'love towards the master' (John 21:15, 16, 17). Love is the basic identity which makes one known as a disciple of Jesus Christ. "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love

one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34).

The early believers were concerned about family relationship other than the place they met, so they choose the household setting for worship. The household continued as the model of apostolic mission for the first three centuries, even beyond Jerusalem (Driver 1997:149).[40] There were at least three levels of house churches can be observed in the first three centuries, local, regional and provinces. Gehring notes,

> It cannot be assumed, however, that the Jerusalem Christians only met in these two houses, as Luke reports that the church grew quite rapidly (cf. 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7). Even if his figures of three thousand (2:41) and five thousand (4:4) were exaggerated, these two houses alone would not have had adequate space for even a tenth of these numbers of the Individuals. (2004:86)

In the first three centuries there were churches in Jerusalem, in Galatia (Galatians 1:2); Corinth (Corinthians 16;19). Paul also greetings the churches of Asia, (Corinthians 16:19) churches of Rome (Romans 16:1ff).

The early church, as the household of God, met in houses of the believers until about A.D. 200. The fastest church growth was recorded when the churches were meeting in believers' houses (Snyder 1994:298). The early Christians, from different socio-cultural background, considered themselves as the family of God and it made them to worship in different homes. Birkey notes, "Social mixture would be found in any house church community. For example, racial diversity, social oneness, and sexual equality are vividly portrayed in the decentralized house churches of Rome (Romans 16)" (1991:70).[41] Apostles teaching on unity beyond class divisions in the churches are one of the examples of social mixture found among the early Christians. Paul writes to the Galatians "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who

were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise" (3:26-29).[42] N. T. Wright comments on these verses,

> Those who are baptized have thus 'put on the Messiah'. They are the Messiah's family. As a result, old distinctions cease to be relevant in terms of their status in the family, their standing before God or one another. This is not to say that every aspect of their human identity becomes irrelevant; Paul is still aware of himself as a Jewish Christian (see, e.g., Romans 11.1-6), but his not the basis of his stand as part of the true family of Abraham. He is still aware of some people being slaves and others free, or why would he have written the letter to Philemon? He is still aware of maleness and femaleness, as numerous passages indicate. But the point is that all these are irrelevant for your status in Christ. The ground is even, as has often been said, at the food of the Cross. 'You are all one in the Messiah, Jesus'. (2002:42)

The household of God that met in different houses had a missional influence in the society. They were united as one family in Christ by faith and the distinctions diminished beyond comprehension (Padilla 1982:29). N. T. Wright states, "And if he is Lord of the whole world, then those who believe in him, who give allegiance to him, must form a single family. There cannot be divisions based on nationhood or race" (2002:16). Birkey observes, "House churches provided a fertile seedbed for the most revolutionary equalization of racial, class, and sexual distinctions brought about by the Christ event" (1991:71). This promoted a decentralized missional freedom for creative expression within cultural diversity.

Households remained the most important location for hospitality in the early church. The early Christians welcomed one another with God's love beyond socio-cultural and geographical distinctions. Pohl notes, "God's household represented the welcome of Gentiles into the inheritance together with Israel (Ephesians 2:19), and

relations within this new household explicitly transcended ethnic boundaries" (1999:42).

The home setting of the early church provided a natural environment for expressing personal qualities of hospitality. That was one of the reasons for the expansion of the church within a short time period, the first three centuries. Pohl notes, "Fellowship and growth in the earliest churches depended on household-based hospitality among believes (Acts 2:43-47; 9:42-10:48; 16:14-15; 18:1-11). The church was made up of family households, but it was more than a sum of those individual households" (1999:41).

There were also problems in the household of God. Apostles address these in the epistles: correcting, admonishing, and helping them to see the plan of God for the humanity in Christ Jesus (Romans 14:1-5; 1 Corinthians 5:11; James 2:1-5; Philemon 16-17; 1 John 5). Paul writes to the Romans to accept one another as God welcomed them in Christ (Romans 14:3). Paul writes to the Thessalonians that he was ministering to them gently and tenderly as a nursing mother, and exhorting and encouraging each one as a father would his own children (1 Thessalonians 2:7,12). He admonishes the believers to follow his example and experience genuine fellowship beyond all distinctions. The early Christians were also known for extending hospitality to Jews as well as Gentiles. Pohl states, "Worship, care, and hospitality in early Christian households included believers from different political, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and early congregations developed a translocal and transethnic identity" (1999:42). This made the church grow in the hostile Greco-Roman environment. New Christians were introduced and were welcomed by the house churches, where they felt at home as brothers and sisters. Barnabas introduced Paul to the apostles when they were reluctant to accept him as a follower of Christ (Acts 9:26-27).

<u>Conclusion</u>

The household of God in the Old Testament and in the New Testament united

people as one respectively, the people of Israel and the church. The primary identity of

the people of Israel was based on their relationship to Yahweh as their Father and they as

his children. This family language is widely used in the Bible to explain God's

relationship with the people and their relationship to one another. The distinctiveness of

the people of God was their relationship with the father, Yahweh.

The same was true in the New Testament; the uniting factor was that the believers

all belonged to one family, the household of God. The believers were not living together

in a house but by faith in Christ they belonged to the family of God. They considered

becoming the family of God to be a privilege as well as their identity in the world around

them. All were united in Christ, beyond race, sexual distinction, economic stability,

power and education. Christ is the firstborn of God and whoever accepts him as the Lord

of one's life will be privileged to become the child of God. They understood one another

as brothers and sisters in Christ. The believers got a new identity as the children of God.

That changes their role, function and relationship with one another and with the people

around them. This was well expressed in the teachings of Jesus and in the teachings of

the apostles and the early church. The early Christian communities were well aware of

their existence in the Lord, and they share this good news wherever they went. Riddle

notes,

> It is of primary importance that in the beginning it was people, not documents,
> who spread the good news about Jesus. It was the spoken word – the human
> voice – which carried their messages. Before anything was written the early
> Christian *keryks* voiced his *kerygma.* These messengers went about from place to
> place; coincident with Christianity's expansion and growth they traveled

throughout wide-spread territories of the Mediterranean world in their work of carrying the gospel story to all its peoples. (1938:145)

The expansion of Christianity was not focused on one particular community, but believers shared their experience with the Lord with everyone and invited them into the household of God. In the household of God all the believers felt at home, enjoyed fellowship, accepted one another in their homes, shared things in common, and the kingdom of God expanded.

The Christian church sprouted and expanded in the Greco-Roman world. The household concept in the sociocultural context of the Greco-Roman world provides lessons how the church responded and challenged in that hostile environment, which focused in the next chapter.

ENDNOTES Chapter 2

[1] The religion of Israel's ancestors was characterized by a strong clan or family solidarity. Even the names borne by individuals suggest the close personal relationship between the clan and the deity who was regarded as "father," "brother," or patron of the "family." So, for instance, the name *Ab-ram*, which contains the element "father" (*'ab*) means "The (Divine) Father is exalted." Considering the vivid awareness of the deity's involvement with the patriarchal family, as reflected in names of this type, it is proper to say that "the God was the unseen head of the house; its members, the members of his family" (Anderson 1986:44-45).

[2] The world is God's home; it is not merely a place for human beings to occupy. Goldingay notes, "Speaking of the cosmos itself as God's home suggests that this is not merely a matter of analogical language, whereby we use a term from within creation simply because we have no direct way of speaking of God's actual dwelling. While it is no doubt true that the incorporeal God has a metaphorical dwelling, the First Testament also implies that the physical heavens are God's actual home" (2003:85).

[3] "All the peoples of the world have a common origin (cf. Acts 17:26). There is a family relationship between them. The strife that spoils their life is strife within the family. The drawing of distinctions that marginalizes or attempts to dehumanize some nations or peoples or races denies the reality of this family relationship" (Goldingay 2003:186).

[4] The association between family and property permeates the basic terminology: in Genesis 7:1, God orders Noah, 'Go into the ark, with all your house...' The word 'house' of course does not refer to bricks and mortar, but to the members of Noah's family, who are enumerated in v.7: 'Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives...' The term 'house' therefore describes a patriarchal family, including married adults and presumably their children, all under the authority of a single head (Westbrook 1991:12).

[5] De Vaux notes, "At the beginning of their history the Israelites, like their ancestors before them, lived as nomads or semi-nomads, and when they came to settle down as a nation, they still retained some characteristics of that earlier way of life" (1961:3).

[6] The family metaphor is used in different passages in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 8: 5; 14:1; 32:6; Psalms 68:5; 82:6; 89:26; 103:13; Proverbs 3:12; Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 31:9; Hosea 1:10) (Hellerman 2001:60). This metaphor is used to explain God's faithfulness with whoever trusts in him. The story of Ruth is a good example. Janzen notes, "Central to the familial paradigm is the preservation and continuation of life, understood simply as biological human existence, but including dimensions transcending such existence" (1994:40).

[7] This is well illustrated in Deuteronomy 9:5 "It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you are going in to occupy their land; but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is dispossessing them before you, in order to fulfill the promise that the Lord made on oath to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

[8] "'Treasured' possession is an expression that was used in the Old Testament of private property held by royalty (Ecclesiastics 2:8) or David's own personal treasure over which he alone had control (1 Chronicle 29:3). The point here is that Israel is Yahweh's special people whom he has chosen 'out of all nations'; they are those over whom he has particular sovereignty" (Kostenberger and O'Brien 2001:33).

[9] The Hebrew term *'ah* (brother) is used in different ways, (1) one born of the same mother and /or father as another (Genesis 4:2,8); (2) a relative in a wider sense (nephew, Genesis 13:8); (3) a member of the same tribe (Numbers 18:2,6); (4) a member of the Israelite community (Exodus 2:11; 4:8).

[10] Both these are alternative terms for the same social groupings (*shivet* and *matteh* together used in Numbers 36:3), but *matteh* is typical of a smaller number of Priestly traditions which display a serious effort at systematization of the social organizational terminology (Gottwald 1979:245).

[11] "The Bible gives a clear picture of the process in its references to the Calebites. They were originally outside the Israelite confederation, for Caleb was the son of Yephunneh the Qenizite (Numbers 32:12; Joshua 14:6,14; comp. Genesis 15:19; 36:11), but they had contact with Israelites from the time of the sojourn at Qadesh, where Caleb was named as Judah's representative for the exploration of Canaan (Numbers 13:6). Their integration into this tribe is recorded in Joshua 15:13; cf. Joshua 14:6-15, and in the end Caleb is genealogically attached to Judah" (De Vaux 1961:6).

[12] The word *mispah'* is often translated as family in English versions, but this is misleading because a *mispaha* could comprise quite a large number of families. Christopher Wright suggests that the clan is perhaps the best available rendering since it signifies some thing smaller than a tribe at the same time larger than a family (1992b:761). According to De Vaux "Several related families constitute a clan, or fraction of a tribe, called, according to the locality, either *hamuleh* or *'ashireh*" (1961:7).

[13] *Elep* also stands for the numeral 1,000, which was perhaps the ideal number of soldiers (Wright 1995:151).

[14] The word *bayith* had double meaning, the immediate household and the wider people of Israel descended from its ancestor (cf. Romans 4:11). Gottwald notes, "A *bayith* is more than a building, "a house" or a dwelling for a social unit, "a home"; it is a social organism which is "built up" through procreation and adoptions, "a household'"" (1979: 248). De Vaux notes, "The *beth'ab*, the 'house of the one's father', was the

family, which comprised not only the father, his wife or wives and their unmarried children but also their married sons with their wives and children, and the servants" (1961:7-8).

[15] Gottwald notes, "The *beth'av* is an extended family. It is composed of two or more nuclear families and optimally comprises all the generations living at any one time in a given lineage, which means that as many as five generations of Israelites might be encompassed in a single *beth'av*" (1979:285).

[16] Boas acts as the *go'el* for Elimelech and Naomi family and accepts Ruth as his wife. A *go'el* can have the responsibility to beget children, redeem all the wealth of the deceased and maintains his family name among the Israelite tribal families.

[17] Metaphors for both the representation of Yahweh and the portrayal of Israel's relationship of Yahweh are often drawn from the household. Yahweh frequently assumes the roles of the household, including father, husband, redeemer (*go'el*), and mother, while Israel (Judah, Zion/Jerusalem) is cast in the roles of wife, son and daughter, marginal household members, including debt servants, slaves, resident aliens, sojourners, widows and orphans (Perdue 1997b:229).

[18] God's covenant promise to Abram (Genesis 12:1-3, often repeated) not only depends for its fulfillment on the gift of a family to Abram and Sarai themselves, but also has in view the ultimate blessing of 'all families (or clans, *mispehot*) of the earth' (Genesis 12:3) (C. Wright 2002:12).

[19] Meyers notes, "As early as age five or six, both boys and girls might be assigned tasks of fuel gathering, caring for younger children, picking and watering garden vegetables, and assisting in food preparation" (1997:27).

[20] "According to Deuteronomy 25:5-10, the person who rejected his responsibility of serving as a *go'el* was shamed in public (cf. Naomi's kinsman who refused to serve as *go'el* in Ruth 4)" (Perdue 1997a:192-193).

[21] Selman states, "Failure to provide for the traveler's needs was a serious offence, liable to punishment by God (Deuteronomy 23:3-4) and man (1 Samuel 25:2-38; Judges 8:5-17). The use of *pesa'* (1 Samuel 25:28), a term employed for transgression of covenants, indicates the importance attached to such obligations" (1996:485).

[22] There are historical instances of God's judgment on the generations of Korah (Numbers 16), King Jeroboam (1 Kings 14:19), and King David (2 Samuel 12:10).

[23] Family imagery is used, in Isaiah 40-55, to argue the ineffable relationship between God and Israel. The rebellious child metaphor (Isaiah 44:21-22) emphasizes human irresponsibility and guilt. Unlike Yahweh's obdurate children, the servant does not rebel against God. To the contrary, he is utterly obedient (Darr 1994:68).

[24] Holiness in life and conduct was required from every individual. This was specifically mentioned in Leviticus 20:9-26. Kaiser notes, "The issue at stake in every one of these crimes is the holy status of the family. Every assault against an individual here is simultaneously an attack on the very existence of the family. ... The gravity of the punishment ought, instead, to indicate the importance and the significance of the family in any kind of holy living and responsible biblical system of ethics" (1983:125).

[25] Geneses 12:3 and 28:14, "all the families" is rendered in the Greek Old Testament *phylai* which means "tribes" in most contexts. Piper notes, "So the blessing of Abraham is intended by God to reach to fairly small groupings of people." But the other three repetitions of Abrahamic promise in Genesis is "all the nations" (Hebrew: *Kol goye*), which the Septuagint translates with the familiar *panta ta ethne* in each case (18:18; 22:18; 26:4). This suggests that the term *panta ta ethnie* refers to people groups rather than to Gentile individuals (Piper 2003:168).

[26] The servant figure represents a collective term that points to an individual as well as to the whole group that the individual represents (Kaiser 2000:56).

[27] Elliott explains the details of these passage and notes,
"(a) Luke 12:1-53: Verses 1-3 = no household secrets; 4-12 = no anxiety over survival; 13-21, 22-31, 32-34 = inheritance, covetousness, possessions, almsgiving, trust in a divine Father's care; 35-40 = household vigilance; 41-48 = domestic steward's faithfulness; 49-53 = divisions in the household.
(b) Luke 14:1-17:10: 14:1-6, 7-11, 12-14, 15-24 = dining, healing, in inclusive hospitality; 14:25-35 = renunciation of family to follow Jesus; 15:1-32 = eating with and embracing the "lost"; 16:1-9, 10-12 = prudent and faithful household management; 16:13, 14-15 = household loyalties and priorities; 16:16-17 = household [kingdom] entrance; 16:18 = marital unity; 16:19-31 = domestic inhospitality and unrepentance; 17:1-3,5-6 = offense to children ["little ones"], forgiveness of brothers, faith; 17:7-10 = the duty and status of household servants" (1991:227).

[28] Guthrie presents a lengthy discussion on the Son of Man and in conclusion notes, "Jesus thought of himself in terms of a heavenly Messiah fulfilling on earth a ministry on men's behalf which would culminate in scenes of final glory. It can be well understood in the light of this why Jesus did not use the title Messiah to describe his mission, since his work was not political but spiritual. Jesus' own awareness that his spiritual mission could be accomplished only through suffering and death, it seems reasonable to suppose that he identified himself inwardly with the idea of the suffering servant" (1981:281).

[29] Senior and Stuhlmueller notes, "The disciples are not to be anxious, because God cares for them more than for the lilies of the field and the birds of the air (Matthew 6:26-30). His nourishing love outstrips the care of human parenthood (Luke 11:10-13)" (1983:152).

[30] When the Apostle Paul visited Jerusalem, three years after his conversion, he found only Peter (Galatians 1:18). The others were traveling through the country, on missions of preaching and healing (Theissen1977:9). They were inviting the people to join the family of God by having faith in Lord Jesus Christ. From the day of Pentecost onwards they began to proclaim Jesus as the Lord (Acts 2:36; 4:12; 9:22).

[31] Jesus loved people whom they considered as their enemies. Luke records the disciples' request to command fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans who objected to the Lord's journey to Jerusalem through Samaria. But Jesus rebuked them and said "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of, for the Son of Man has not come to destroy the lives human beings but to save them." (Luke 9:53-56).

[32] Nouwen described hospitality as "the virtue which allows us to break through the narrowness of our own fears and to open our house to the stranger, with the intuition that salvation comes to us in the form of a tired traveler. Hospitality makes anxious disciples into powerful witnesses, makes suspicious owners into generous givers, and makes closed minded sectarians into interested recipients of new ideas and insights" (1972:91).

[33] The common meal was the heart of Christianity in the early church. Banks notes, "The most visible and profound way in which the community gives physical expression to its fellowship is the common meal" (Banks 1994:80).

[34] It was in 323 AD, almost three hundred years after the birth of the church, that Christians first met in something we now call a "church building." For all three hundred years before that, the church met in living rooms! Constantine built these assembly buildings for Christians not only in Constantinople, but also in Rome, Jerusalem, and in many parts of Italy, all between 323 and 327! This then triggered a massive "church building" fad in large cities all over the Empire (Rutz 1992:47). One may argue that the Acts 2:46 shows that they were meeting in 'temples and homes'. In fact, the Jews and the early Christians were thinking of the way of Jesus as a revival movement in Judaism. So they met in temples, synagogues and homes. But as time went on, especially after the conversion of Paul, it became impossible to meet in the temples or synagogues, and the church met in the homes of the believers until the time of Constantine.

[35] Paul regards Onesimus as his "child" and he as his "father" (Philemon 10; Colossians 4:9; about Timothy he says, "I have no one like him" because he served Paul as a son to his father (Philippians 2:22; Colossians 1:1). He addresses "Apphia our sister" (Philemon 2), and "our sister Phoebe" (Romans 16:1).

[36] Hellerman notes, "Among the family relationships to be sacrificed in order to become a member of Jesus' group is the follower's "father." This has already been modeled earlier in Mark's account that portrayed John and James leaving "their father Zebedee" in response to Jesus' call (1:20). But notice in Mark 10:30, above, the absence

of "father" among those relationships that one who follows Jesus will gain in return" (2001:78).

[37] "In Judaism, biblical brotherhood and sisterhood became exclusively brotherhood. Jesus and the messianic community recovered a full-orbed vision of familihood in which sexual prejudices are overcome" (Driver 1997:144).

[38] The terms brothers and sisters are employed some 250 times in the book of Acts and the epistles alone (Driver 1997:147).

[39] The term *adelphotes* appears (literally brotherhood) only twice in I Peter (2:17; 5:9), but the idea is much more pervasive. Implied by this brotherhood was unity of spirit, suffering, sympathy, humility. Brotherhood also referred to the mutuality of sharing in Jesus' suffering, his death, his suffering, his spirit, his sanctification, his kingdom (Romans 8:39-40; Hebrew 2:11d.) (Minear 1960:171).

[40] "The conversion and baptism of a number of households is also recorded, such as that of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-11:48); Lydia (Acts 16:13-15); the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31-34) and Crispus (Acts 18:8)" (Tidball 1984:81).

[41] Hellerman notes, "The reader encounters a final concentration of sibling terminology in the last chapter of the epistle, in which Paul refers to a number of his fellow Christians by name: I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae (16:1). Greet Asyncritus, Phlegom Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them (16:14). Gaius, who is host to me and to whole church, greet you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you. (16:23) Francis Watson plausibly suggests that Paul in Romans 16 challenges his readers to greet one another in order to ameliorate a division existing between Israel and Gentile Christians in Rome. We may assume that Paul draws upon the *adelphos* word group in order to better accomplish this goal" (2001:114)

[42] Gehring notes, "The pairs slave/free, male/female in Galatians 3:28, a text foundational for the Pauline churches, demonstrate that the *oikos* was in view from the very beginning.... On the one hand, in 1 Corinthians 7 it is clear that the foundation of the *oikos* can be shaken through the conversion of one of the spouses (vv. 12-13); on the other hand, Paul does not draw this conclusion. On the contrary, he proceeds quite cautiously and places a high value on preserving the marriage in Christ and thereby preserving the *oikos*" (2004:252-253).

CHAPTER 3

The Greco-Roman Household and the Christian Challenge

Christianity sprouted in the Greco-Roman environment. So Greco-Roman history

and its sociocultural setting provide the basis for understanding the challenges which

Christians faced during the first and second centuries. This chapter will be looking at

how the household system functioned in the Greco-Roman world and how Christianity

extended its influence and expanded in the midst of such a hostile environment. The

response of the first century Christians to the household concept of the Greco-Roman

world will help us understand possible responses to the household concept in the Indian

social setting today.

Early Christianity owed much to the Greco-Roman social environment in which it

was situated (Hellerman 2001:3).[1] This environment shaped Christians' thinking and

way of life. Batson notes, "Rome, the capturer of Greece, was at the centre of the known

world and was itself enthralled by its captive; Greek culture permeated Roman life, Greek

art and Greek thought dominated the Roman intellectual and artistic scenes. The phrase

'Graeco-Roman' came to personify Mediterranean life" (2001:x). Roman rule

throughout the lands of the Mediterranean seaboard was the dominant fact of the last fifty

years of the pre-Christian era and of the first century A.D.

The household was the major institution in Roman life to which all others were

secondary. The Roman's family values high respect for the gods. Roman community

was considered itself a family, the *patria* ("father-land"). Jones and Sidwell state,

> The standard image of Aeneas escaping from Troy is of a man with his old father on his shoulders and his young son in his hand. As developed by Virgil, this becomes the icon of Roman *pietas* ('respect'): the family man who looks back respectfully to the past generation and fights to secure the hope of the next. With his family, he carries the sacred symbols of its continuity, the Penates. (1997:208)

The first Christians lived among the peoples of the Roman Empire and challenged the stability of the traditional lifestyle and the social structures of the Greco-Roman world.[2] The early Christians confronted the existing boundaries, social and national, of the Greco-Roman world by relating themselves to brothers and sisters outside of Rome. Moreover, Christianity offered its adherents an eternal identity beyond their physical world. The early church struggled to survive in the midst of persecution, but it was able to challenge the conscience of the authorities and the common people by following the Master, Jesus Christ. Jeffers notes, "For three centuries Christians were unable to meet and worship freely because Christianity was not recognized by the Romans as a legal religion. Expect in rare cases, the Romans did not attempt to hunt down Christians and prevent them from meeting. But Romans were nervous about unsanctioned organizations, fearing that they could be politically subversive. (1999:72-73)

The household setting in the Greco-Roman world of the first and second century will form the substance of this chapter. The first two centuries mark the beginning of the church's growth in the midst of Roman cultural influence. I will also trace the identity of new believers as they adapted and responded to this changing social and cultural setting. How did the church grow rapidly in the different parts of the Mediterranean world and what are the contributing causes for the expansion of the early church?

<u>The Household in the Greco-Roman World</u>

The English words family and house are not direct translations from Greek,

Hebrew or Latin. Osiek notes, "The Greek *oikos, oikia*, Hebrew *bayit*, and Latin *domus*

can all refer to the physical building but can all just as well, and more often do, mean:

household, including material goods and slaves; immediate blood family; or family

lineage" (1996:6). The Latin *familia* is a legal term, referring to all persons and objects

under the legal control of the male head of household, the *paterfamilias* (Jones

1997:208).

> According to Roman tradition, the family was the heart of pagan society; it was
> the basis of society and its most important part. Despite great economic, political,
> and social changes taking place during the Republic and Principate, this
> traditional view was largely maintained throughout the Classical period. A deeply
> rooted respect surrounded the family. (Lassen 1997:104)

The household in the Greco-Roman World was a basic socio-political unit. The

Roman *familia* was headed by the *pater familias* (Tidball 1984:79). Tidball notes,

> The old senatorial families of the republic declined whilst, at the same time, the
> increased distribution of wealth led to the founding of many more household
> communities. In addition to the extension in the number of households a further
> step elevated the importance of the structure. Augustus, needing to secure his
> authority, strengthened the personal links between himself and his servants and
> citizens. To do this he exploited the paternalism which was implicit in the
> household system and, using the emotional ties which it involved, he became the
> *pater familias* of the Empire. Consequently the empire became on a macrocosmic
> scale what the household was in microcosm. The empire was a complex network
> of households which all loyally interlock into one grand system under the
> authority and protection of the Emperor. (1984:79)

The Roman emperor made himself Lord of his kingdom and expected his subjects to

follow the same in their families. The *pater familias* becomes the authority figure who

controls and protects the household. So the political pattern of the empire reflected the

Roman household system, as noted in Figure 6. The people of the Roman Empire were

divided into very definite social classes and indicators of social statues (Figure 6).

Everyone knew his or her place in the social order. The following figure gives a picture

of the gulf between the upper class and all others; they had virtually nothing in common.

Senate (300 families, patrician & plebian)
Equestrian (.01%)
Decurion (5%)
Respectable Populace

Free Poor
Tenant farmers
Urban day laborers
Dependents of patrons
Destitute
Orphans
Widows
The ill
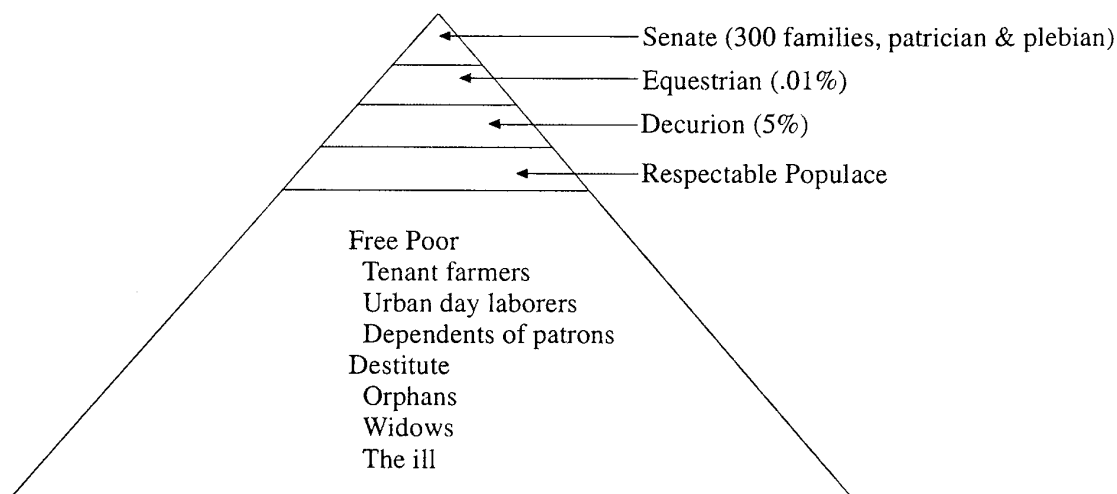
Figure 6. Social Clan in the Roman Empire
(Jeffers 1999:181)

The Greco-Roman household also was a religious unit. All who came under the

household passed into the service and protection of its gods. When a woman married,

she exchanged the religion of her father's household for her husband's. This exchange

was part of the marriage arrangement as she was introduced to the gods of her new

household and brought under their protection. Newly bought slaves also were introduced

into the household cult.

All the household members learned the obligatory rites by watching their parents.

The household members were required to present in all the most important events in the

family, such as marriage, burial and mourning. The son succeeded the headship of the

household, carrying forward the household cult into the next generation (Verner

1983:29). The Greco-Roman culture was ingrained in the household religious practices.

The background of the Greco-Roman world shows the importance of the

household practices in their social setting. The household concept integrated the whole Greco-Roman world into a single powerful nation under the Roman emperor.

The Background of the Greco-Roman World

At the time the New Testament was written, Rome was considered the center of the known civilized world (at lest to people in the Mediterranean region).[3] "Rome took its name from the capital city in Italy, the original settlement from which the Roman state grew" (Tenney 1961:1). The city was thought to have been founded in 725 B.C. with a community comprising a union of small villages in its vicinity and ruled by a king.[4] Rome gained control of all Italy by 265 B.C. by making alliances with surrounding communities and through a long succession of wars. Conquered peoples were bound by treaty to keep the peace and were absorbed gradually into the Roman domain. The rapid territorial expansion brought great changes in the life of the Roman people.

Under Emperor Augustus (27 B.C. to A.D. 14) the power of the imperial state was established through the Senate, which was the ruling body (Tenney 1961:1).[5] All of the emperor's rights were founded upon a constitutional basis rather than upon any arbitrary seizure of power. Augustus' reform improved the morals of the people and revived the state religion. The Julian laws of 19 and 18 B.C. restored family life by encouraging marriage and the establishment of homes (Tenney 1961:4).[6] During the forty-one years of Augustus' rule, he restored confidence in the government, replenished the treasury, introduced an efficient public works department, and promoted peace and prosperity. Although Emperor Augustus was followed by less capable rulers, still the provinces enjoyed considerable liberty under the Senate. The Romans did not interfere with the religions of the people, as long as they were loyal to the authorities and accepted the

Emperor as Lord. But because Christians confessed Jesus as Lord, Rome persecuted the church and tried to destroy the church by all possible means.

The cultural atmosphere of the first century owed its origin not only to the political organization of Rome but also to the diffusion of the Hellenic language and culture that had permeated both the West and the East. Rome's conquest had absorbed the Greek colonies. Greek slaves, many of whom were more learned than their masters, became part of Roman households. Often they were not only employed in the more menial tasks of the house, but were teachers, physicians, accountants, and overseers of farms or businesses (Grant 1978:77).

The people of the Roman Empire were divided by very definite social classes and status, with a wide gulf between the upper class and all others (Jeffers 1999:181-182). The whole of the social system was controlled by law and favored the upper class. For example, the law forbade people to marry someone not in one's own class; thus there was strict control of the mobility between the classes. Jeffers states, "Romans used the term *order* (*ordo*) to describe the classes in their society, but they used the term somewhat differently from the way we use the term *class* today. Membership in a given order gave one greater honor and privileges than those possessed by members of a lower order" (1999:182).

The vast majority of the Roman's world's wealth was in the hands of a small number of traditional aristocratic families, and these were the members of the Senate. Jeffers notes, "A young man from a senatorial family could join the senate once he could claim ownership of property worth one million sesterces (250,000 denarii's)" (1999:182). Thus, the Senate was regulated and controlled by the upper class, wealthy group in the

society. But, as James Jeffers mentions, a man could join the Senate if he possessed

enough financial resources. Romans considered wealth an essential requirement of the

virtuous life.[7] They believed that only the rich could afford to be honest. The marks of

distinction for a Roman were "family and wealth." So Jeffers states, "A Roman's name

generally announced his heritage and thus his class. As a result, stealing a family's name

was considered a crime" (1999:190).

Roman society was relatively static. Its strict regulation made the poor work most

of the day to meet immediate needs. The condition of the poor was pathetic. Jeffers

states,

> The poor tended to congregate in the cities, where they had a better chance of
> finding day work or other means of support. Often the larger the city, the larger
> the proportion of poor. In the city of Rome, they made up something like a third
> of the population. Their situation was not helped by the fact that the state did not
> provide for the needs of the aged, widows, orphans, the disabled or the sick.
> (1999:188-189)

The only way anyone could move up the social ladder was by the accumulation of wealth

and the establishment of a credible standard of life.[8] Jeffers notes, "Leadership in the

cities was monopolized, generation after generation, by the same small, ruling classes"

(1999:191). Malherbe states,

> The property requirements for membership in the senatorial and equestrian orders
> were of such magnitude that those orders constituted far less than one-fifth of 1
> percent of the total population of the Empire. While there was no middle class as
> we understand it, statistically there was one. Between the top and bottom, taking
> into a single glance the entire empire, a range of intermediate wealth made up the
> aristocracy of small cities. In a given city, however, the aristocracy nevertheless
> stood upon the summit of a very steep social pyramid. The feel of society, the
> living sense of its proportions, thus did not harmonize with statistics. (1983:86)

Roman society was structured with the aristocracy at the top, the freedmen,

residents, transients, and rural folk at the bottom (See Figure 6). Roman citizenship was

considered as a privilege and an advantage. It could be obtained in four different ways:

(1) birth to citizen parents, (2) manumission of slaves by citizens of Rome, (3) as a favor

for special service to the empire, (4) or on discharge from service in the military

auxiliaries or an enlistment in the legions in cases of emergency recruitment (Ferguson

2003:62-63). The advantages of citizenship included voting, freedom from degrading

forms of punishment, and the right to appeal to Rome and thus receive exemption from

ultimate jurisdiction of the local authorities and the Roman governor (Ferguson 2003:63).

Ferguson continues the discussion on extending citizenship and notes, "Whereas in the

first century the initiative was normally with the emperor, in the second century cities and

not individual petitioned for citizenship. By the second century, too, the content of

citizenship had been reduced as concerns public duties and honors" (2003:63).

Slavery was prevalent in Roman society. By some estimates one in five of the

residents in Rome was a slave (Ferguson 2003:59).[9] The legal status of a slave was that

of a "thing," a "living property." The slave had no legal rights but was subject to the

absolute power of the master. Slaves had no right to marry and their children belonged to

the owner of the slave mother (Ferguson 2003:59).[10] Everett Ferguson states, "The

Greeks defined four characteristics of freedom, which were denied to the slave: the right

to be his own representative in legal matters, to protection from illegal seizure, to work

where he pleased, and to freedom of movement" (2003:59). The treatment the slaves

received was just above the household's livestock in status. "The head of the household,

the *paterfamilias* in Roman terms, held great power over the slaves" (Jeffers 1999:229).

The freed slaves of the Roman Empire automatically became the citizens. Thus slavery was often a process more than a permanent state, at least for slaves in the cities, and it often put them into a better way of life. Jeffers states,

> The proportion of freedmen to the total population increased greatly under the Empire since Romans freed their slaves with great frequency. During the New Testament era, a majority of the residents of the city of Rome most likely were either slaves or of slave origin. In fact, Caeser Augustus become so alarmed at the high level of emanicipation that in A.D. 4 he made thirty the minimum age at which slaves could be freed and limited how many were freed each year. (1999:290)

Roman power was declining and Christianity was sprouting while Romans were persecuting the Christians. Roman citizens were leading life of despair in the family and society. Robinson states,

> Travel was easy along the safe, straight Roman roads; the whole empire was open to Roman citizens; Roman law and order were imposed with ruthless firmness, yet impartially, and generally with a desire to be as fair and generous as possible; the Mediterranean had become a Roman lake. Yet there was a deep sickness at the heart of things. Belief in the old gods had died and no real substitute had been found; family life had broken down; luxury, licence and lust were the keynotes of the life of the upper classes in Rome itself; the whole edifice of society was built upon slave labour, and it has been calculated that there were 500,000 slaves in and around Rome and 60,000,000 in the whole empire; the dignity of labour had been lost. (1968: 264)[11]

Christianity stretched its roots into this context and expanded with great influence in the culture. Christians' attitudes towards their fellow believers and others challenged the Greco-Roman social structure with higher ethical standard. The message of the budding church, as the household of God, was giving voice and meaning especially to people who were living in misery and disappointment.

The Household System, Structure and Relationships in the Greco-Roman World

The family, or the household, was the heart of Roman society. Lassen states, "Despite great economic, political, and social changes taking place during the Republic

and Principate, this traditional view was largely maintained throughout the Classical period. A deeply rooted respect surrounded the family" (1997:104). In many cases the households were the hereditary residential estates (houses and land) (Verner 1984:28). Foreigners and the other classes of non-citizens were not qualified as households, by order and status. As mentioned earlier, household in the Roman Empire was a legal category. The people in the lower strata did not necessarily belong to the household structure (Jeffers 1999:238-239). Paul writes to the Ephesians about the previous life of the believers and explains how they got the privilege to be the household of God along with all the saints. Roman households constituted a basic socio-political unit as well as a religious one. Wealth was the determining factor for citizenship and power. So the old Roman families became the heads of the household to control the rest of the people in the country. The father of each household controlled the family, and his son took over after his death. Verner states, "Normally the household passed as a matter of course from father to son. If there was more than one son, the *oikos* could be divided into shares, or, if the *oikos* was too small to be divided, one son would find some other means of livelihood such as serving in the military or volunteering to go as a colonist to a new settlement" (1984:29).

Daughters and wives were not citizens in a full sense and could not inherit from the father. If there were not children, the lord of the household could adopt a son to become his heir or divorce his wife on the ground of infertility and marry another (Verner 1984:29).

The father, *paterfamilias*, exercised power over the members of the family, as noted ealier. Jones and Sidwell note,[12]

> Stated at its most dramatic, the power of the *paterfamilias* was absolute: the power of life and death over his *familia*, that is his legitimate children, his slaves, and his wife if married in a form that transferred paternal control to the husband. The *familia* could be seen as a state within a state: its members were subject to the judgment and absolute authority of the *pater* ('father') just as citizens were subject to the judgment and absolute authority of the citizen body. (1997:212)

The Roman household system worked differently than that in many other societies. The father controlled everyone in the family, even if a son held a higher power in public office. The son was treated like a slave at home under his father's power. Legal fatherhood was most often created through Roman marriage and gave the man an almost omnipotent position (Lassen 1997:105).

Roman marriage was not as stable. One feature of Roman marriage is very surprising: marriage was both made and unmade informally. Jones and Sidwell note,

> A legal marriage (*iustum matrimonium*) was a union between two Roman citizens not otherwise legally disqualified from marriage. Simply to live together by consent as man and wife made a marriage, without any formalities, ceremonials before witnesses or signing of registers; and simply to separate constituted legal divorce. Either partner could leave the other, without discussion or consent; and though it was conventional to offer reasons for doing so (which ranged from failure to produce offspring to finding the partner's behaviour irritating), and it might be prudent to satisfy public opinion or the censor that you had not behaved irresponsibly, there were no legal formalities involved, nor courts to be satisfied. (1997:214)[13]

Although this sounds rather egalitarian, in practice the prerogatives were generally much greater for men that for women. The marriage tie could be a source of prestige and so it might not last long. A woman might be given as a gift by the emperor, and the relationship with her might be temporary for that man. The marriage relationship could also be maintained to fulfill pleasure, and no bonding beyond it. The social convention ensured that on the whole women remained at least notionally subject to male authority, that of the father or husband. No man or wife found themselves under a legal or religious

compulsion to remain together. Children are always under the custody of the father,
unless he had emancipated them, giving them total independence (Jones and Sidwell
1997:25). Verner states,

> Married women from respectable families were obliged to conform to a social
> code that severely restricted their activities and freedom of movement. They were
> expected for the most part to stay at home and supervise the household. A woman
> who was forced to work outside the home to help support the family or to do her
> own shopping in the market place, because she had no servants to do these chores,
> suffered social stigma. (1984:31)

Women generally did not have as much mobility as men. If the wife intentionally went
out in public, she risked her reputation as a faithful wife. The woman was expected to
remain in her quarters even when her husband gave dinner parties for his friends.

A major section of the Roman households belonged to an agrarian setting. The
household in this context was bound together in the daily routine. Slaves who worked on
the farms ate their meals at the master's table. They also participated together in the
household cult with all the other members. The head of the household possessed an
unlimited power over wife, children, and slaves, as previously noted. A woman
transferred all her property to the husband when they got married, and he was required to
return only her dowry upon divorce. The children were also property over whom the
father possessed sole rights. Daughters continued under the father's protection until they
married and then came under the power of a husband (Verner 1984:33-34).

Roman household structure was strictly hierarchical in nature and paralleled the
emperor's authoritative rule. Family as well as society enjoyed freedom within the limits
of the powers of the emperor. The relationship with one another was limited in the
family, as well as in the social context. Mobility was restricted for the family members,
as well as for the slaves. Everything was determined by the dictated structure of the

household, from emperor to the people. There were no alternative family structures for the people to choose from because everything was founded on the Roman household system and controlled by powerful people in authority. The Christian understanding of the household of God challenged this Greco-Roman social structure however, and offered a substitute for everyone to participate in the greater plan of God.

The Christian Concept of the "Household of God"

among First and Second Century Christians

The early church envisioned a kingdom beyond physical limitations, a kingdom that never ends. Moreover, they expected an unshakable kingdom, which was a gift from the heavenly Father (Luke 12:32; Hebrews 13:28). So the call was to rebuild the ruins of the dwelling of David (Acts 15:16-18). The rebuilding of David's house is accomplished through "all the Gentiles who are called by my name" (Minear 1960:78-79). In this kingdom all the families of the earth are to be included because God views all the world through the provision of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16). All can have access to the Heavenly Father through Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).

The unifying factor of the early Christians was that they believed and were eager to practice the idea that they were one family in Christ belonging to God the Father. This was well expressed in the writings of the Apostle Paul and other disciples. Paul argues in his epistles that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile but all are one in Christ. N.T. Wright notes in his commentary on Galatians and Thessalonians that:

> According to Paul, Jesus' death and resurrection mean that this God is now building a new family, a single family, a family with no divisions, no separate races, no one-table-for-Jews-and-another-for-Gentiles nonsense. Jews believed that when the Messiah came he would be Lord of all the world; so Paul argues, he'd have to have just one family. And, though this family is the fulfillment of

what this God had promised to the Jews, the remarkable thing is that, because of Jesus, you don't have to be a Jew to belong. The God of Israel wants to be known as 'father' by the whole world. (2002:4-5)

Paul challenges the Jewish and Gentile communities that God is building a new single worldwide family in Jesus Christ, and that he (Paul) is an apostle commissioned to convey this good news to everyone. His apostleship comes from God and from Jesus the Messiah to carry out this great task of building the family of God (1 Timothy 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1). Jesus' death and resurrection offers the opportunity for everyone to be a member of the family of God by faith (John 1:12). There cannot be divisions based on nationhood or race, color or caste, rich or poor, literate or illiterate, for all stand equal before the Heavenly Father.[14] The household of God is one of the images speaks of the church in the epistles. The Apostles taught that one must accept and learn to live by a new identity leaving their old memory and practice for a new foundation in Christ Jesus Christ. The Apostles were answering to one basic question to the Jews and to the Gentiles: "who is God's true Israel" or "who can be a citizen of the new kingdom" (N. T. Wright 2002:49)[15]

The Gospels and the Epistles

The Gospels and the epistles reflect the teaching of Jesus and his practices about the family of God. As mentioned earlier, the family image was explicit in the teachings of Jesus[16] and in his practices (Matthew 12:48-50). Driver states, "In the Gospel of Mark we find a clear statement of what it means to participate in the 'true family.' Three alternatives to the true family are explicitly rejected in the Gospel: the biological family (Mark 3:20-21, 31-35), the religious family (3:22-30), and the geographic or political family (6:1-6)" (1997:144). Jesus called people for a radical conversion to become God's

true family. In this new family, God is the Father who is in heaven and all those who believe in Jesus get the privilege of being his children and calling him 'Father.' In Jesus Christ the meaning of the family is restored. All humanity can participate in the household of God by receiving and believing in Jesus Christ.

The disciples taught and practiced the household of God in their lives. Jesus' teaching challenged existing family systems, and motivated them to pursue the household of God beyond their geographical location (Mark 6:1-6), religious and biological family identity (Mark 3:20-35) (Driver 1997:144). At the day of Pentecost the disciples' horizon stretched to see the act of God beyond their limited geographical sphere. Boer states,

> At Pentecost fundamental changes took place in the character and structure of the people of God:
> a. The New Testament universal church replaced the strictly Israelite congregation as expressed in temple and synagogue.
> b. The people of God ceased to be a national people and became an international, a universal community.
> c. The preacher replaced the priest, the pulpit replaced the alter, and the church's witness to the sacrifice of Christ replaced the ceremonial sacrifice of animals.
> (1976:17)

The reality of a household of God that reached beyond the chosen race, the children of Israel, was hard for people to understand. The Jewish community was not willing to welcome or entertain this new teaching. The church met both in the temple and in homes of the believers' where they experienced the meaning of being God's household (Acts. 1:13; 2:46; 5:42; 12:12). They eventually began to realize that since Jesus was the Lord, he opened up the way for all of humanity to experience the love of the Heavenly Father by having faith in him (Acts 4:12). Tidball notes, "The early church grew from a small local sect into a great international movement without the use of its own special buildings and with only the occasional resort to public buildings (e.g. Acts 19:9) of any kind"

(1984:82). The early church was a cross section of the society and cared for one another

in their needs (Acts 2:44; 4:34; 6:1-6).[17]

The church in Antioch provides an instructive example of the household of God, a

cross section of the society, believers from the Jews and Gentiles. The believers at

Antioch gathered for prayer and worship, beyond their previous religious identity,

because they were all united in Christ. Gehring states,

> In Antioch the transition was made, then, to gathering God's people from the
> Jews *and* the Gentiles. Everything seems to indicate that this gathering was done
> in small house groups. That the church in Antioch met κατ οικον in the private
> domestic houses of affluent members as in Jerusalem is probable simply because
> this was the case for the overwhelming majority of all believers in the early
> Christian movement for the first three centuries. (2004:111)

It appears that the early church often met in the houses of wealthy believers for prayer

and worship (Romans 16:4, 5, 14, 15 and 23; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; and

Philemon 2).

Among the first Christians, the message of Jesus was transforming the idea of

household which existed in the first century. Rich and poor, slave and master, and Jew

and Gentiles mixed together in the early Christian groups (Gehring 2004:169).[18]

Christians saw themselves as brothers and sisters and demonstrated to the world they

were the disciples of Christ (John 13:34-35). Theissen notes,

> We find in it both members of the new upper class and their sympathizers – the
> wife of Herodian official Chuza (Luke 8:3), an intimate of Antipas (Acts 13:1),
> Zacchaeus the chief tax collector (Luke 19:1ff.) – and members of the middle
> classes who were threatened with debt and a decline in fortunes: farmers,
> fishermen and craftsmen. (1977:45)

Those who followed the way of Christ gathered together in different houses and

began to count themselves as "one family," the household of God. Tidball states, "The

apostolic church was a cross-section of society reflecting the social mixture which would

have been found in any household community   from wealthy landowner to common slave" (1984:83).

Paul emphasizes the Christian identity as family of God in his writings. The first letter to the Thessalonians stresses the family of God image using sibling terminology and parental expressions. This epistle also shows the interpersonal relationships that function in the household of God. There are 13 occurrences of sibling terminology that emphasize the family of God (Hellerman 2001:92).[19]

Paul's letters provided confidence and identity to the new believers about their relationship in the household of God and their place in Christ with all the other brothers and sisters in Christ. These new believers were living in the midst of their pagan households, and this was a challenge to them (Ephesians 2:1-2). So Paul uses family terminology such as God as Father, adoption as sons and daughters, and inheritance which is available to all. Thus he motivates the readers to live out the metaphor in their daily life (Romans 4:1-8; 8:12-29; Galatians 3:26-4:7; and 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12).

The Apostle Paul writes, "God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"(Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). The image of the church as the household of God includes the Father, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, slaves, servants, and stewards. Minear states, "To early Christians nothing was more distinctive of their common life than their existence as sons of God" (1960:167). In the Asian context, especially, the question "Whose son are you?" and the answer greatly determine the respect and weight given to the person. The claim of the early Christians was that they had become the sons and daughters of the living God by accepting Jesus as the Lord

of their life. Thus among the early Christians the familial forms reinforced the self

understanding that they were the family of God.

All Paul's "family" terminology has its basis in the relationship which exists

between Christ and the Christian and God. The very call of the Christian is to be part of

a divine family, and Paul regards the head of the family as Jesus Christ (1Thessaloians

1:1, 3; 3:11, 13; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2; 2:6).[20] "In a unique sense Jesus is God's Son,

and it is only through his identification with humans and his actions on their behalf that

they are able to 'receive adoption as children' (Galatians 4:4-5 cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:10)"

(Banks 1994:49).

The Holy Spirit witnesses to believers' spirits that they are "children of God, and

if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellows heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:16-17).

The early Christians who left their households and followed the way of Christ gained

confidence that they were members of a greater family, a family of God. The unity of

the early Christians as the household of God was found only in Christ. "This unity

certainly transcends all religious, social, and sexual differences, all of which are

foundational for the present world; however, it does not abolish them" (Gehring

2004:232). All humanity stands on equal ground to receive salvation and become the

family of God. This was unique and counter-cultural in the Greco-Roman world.

Roman religion was focused on the household members and the household spirits.

The head of the family performed the rites; outsiders were not included. Miller and

Miller Lane note, "In very early times Roman religion centered in the home, with the

paterfamilias heading its simple pattern of belief and worship. The *lares*, embodying the

spirits of the family dead, were *tuterlaries* honored in the household, as were the *penates*,

guardians of the food pantry" (1952:625). Some of the words in the above quote provide

insight to their worship pattern. The word *lares* denotes the 'household spirit', which is

the guardian spirit, the spirit of the deified ancestors. The term *tuterlaries* denotes a god

who protects and watches over. The term *penates* denotes another type of the household

gods of the ancient Romans, guarding the food pantry.

In the Roman cult, the privilege of worship belonged to the Roman born within

the Empire, whereas Christianity opened an avenue for every person to worship the living

God, by accepting Jesus Christ as the Lord of their life. When the Apostle Paul wrote his

letter to the Roman church he addressed a mixed audience from many lands (Miller and

Miller 1956:625). They functioned as brothers and sisters of one family.

When Paul talks about the common meal before the Lord's Supper in 1

Corinthians 11, he talks about the body of Christ, which is one and not divided. Verner

states,

> Well-to-do members probably supplied the food for the common meals, and, in
> accordance with common practice in the feasts given by the associations,
> probably also provided themselves with more and better food than they provided
> the poorer members. This practice humiliated the poorer members and denied
> any sense of unity and fellowship in the church (1983:12).

Paul reminds the believers about their relationship with him in Christ when he says: "Be

imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

The disciples appointed seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of

wisdom to serve in the tables (Acts 6:1-6). The disciples laid hands on the people, thus

making the first appointment of deacons to serve the believing community. Then we read

when the first church council met in Jerusalem there were elders, perhaps representing

different churches in Asia Minor. During the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas

appointed elders "in every church" (Acts 14:23). There were also deacons in various churches, as we read in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8ff. When the Apostle Paul writes to Timothy about the criteria for appointing elders and deacons he says, "but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth' (1 Timothy 3:15). The image of the church as the household of God was in the mind of Paul when he talks about the ministry of the church (1Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9). This explains the criteria he set for a minister in the church. Gehring notes,

> If one understands the church as the house of God, then it logically follows that a *pater familias*, God himself, would be at its head. In 2 Timothy 2:20-21 the members of the church are described as objects in a large house (μεγαλη οικια). God is called δεσποτης (head of the household, 2 Timothy 2:21). He has appointed a local church leader (επισκοπος, over seer) as an οικονομος (house administrator or manager; Titus 1:7). This overseer is supposed to carry out the function of the householder (1 Timothy 3:5) in the church of God (εκκλησια θεου), in that he directs/manages, commands/leads, rebukes/corrects, and so forth. That he has the ability to do so is something he was supposed to have demonstrated in his own *oikos* (1 Timothy 3:4). It is evident here that an analogy can be made between the function of the householder and the church office holder. (2004:262-263)

In the household, mutual relationship is more important than hard and fast structure of authority. This is well expressed in Paul's criteria for appointing an elder or deacons in the churches.

Family usage is prevalent elsewhere in the writings of Paul, as well. When he writes to the Ephesians, "I bow my knees before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ from whom every family in heaven and on the earth is named" (3:15), he pictures God as naming the family as the human father names his own children. The present tense of the verb indicates that God is still naming every family because he is still creating them. The origin of every family, whether in heaven or on earth, is in God the Creator and thus

heavenly families are linked to earthly families in their common dependence on the Father (Hoehner 2003:475). Paul writes to the Ephesians, "So then you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household" (Ephesians 2:19). A resident alien may live in a foreign country, but this will not make him a part of the "family" of the nation in which he is residing. But Paul's argument is that by the blood of Christ, through regeneration, all received the privilege to become the family of God.[21] When Paul uses the terms fellow citizens with Israel and members of God's household, he emphasizes that the church is the continuation of Israel and that God was creating a new humanity in Christ, beyond religious, cultural and geographical boundaries (Hoehner 2003:395-396).

In the Epistle to Philemon, Paul encourages and challenges Philemon to live as the household of God by accepting his former slave who had run away. Paul writes this letter to the church in Philemon's house and refers to Philemon as his "brother" (vv. 7, 20). He also highlights the fatherhood of God (v.3) and refers to Paul's role as the spiritual father to Philemon as well as to Onesimus. So Paul requests Philemon to consider Onesimus as his fellow brother and partner of the new social reality. With love and authority, Paul encourages Philemon to practice the household of God before the house church which meets in his house.

The Apostle Peter encourages and exhorts the Christians who are now in exile because of persecution by assuring them that there is a home for them in the family of God. Christians need not feel estrangement due to the pressures from the persecutors and from society in general, but they can have a confidence that they are secure, at home with God. Peter writes to the Christians who are scattered and living in different places

because of faith in Christ, that God alone is father and judge and that it is this God alone to whom his family owes fear and reverence (1 Peter 2:17) (Elliott 1990:xxiv). Peter encourages the believers to get a wider perspective of the household of God as an all-embracing image of the believing community in the entire world. Thus Peter is communicating to the believers who are scattered everywhere, assuring them that the whole family of God is with them when they go through the hostilities. Elliott notes, "All believers, former Gentiles and Jews alike, were members of the household of God (*oikeioi tou theou*, Ephesians 2:19). All believing households together constituted the one household of God (1Timothy 3:15; cf. 3:4-5; Hebrews 3:6; cf. 10:21; 1 Peter 2:5; 4:17)" (1990:189). It may be hard for believers to understand the reality that they are the members of the household of God. But Peter gives them the confidence that they are the children of God, children of the Heavenly Father who cares for them. Scattering and living with strangers in a foreign land is part of the divine plan of the heavenly father (Craddock 1995:31-32).

The New Testament writers challenged the practices of the Greco-Roman world and explored the new meaning of life together in Christ Jesus. When Stephen spoke against the temple in Jerusalem, before the Sanhedrin, it brought up in his martyrdom. His argument was that the temple was merely a man-made house originating with Solomon, but the house in which God dwells today is not made by hands. God lives in hearts of the individual by faith in Christ Jesus (Acts 7:48f) (Turner 1979:116). Note that Stephen used sibling language when he addressed the authorities.

Family structure in Gnosticism was another challenge to Christianity in the second century, mainly existed in the mythological patterns, but little is known of

Gnostic social life. Gilhus notes, "These mythological families are used as cognitive tools shaped to carve out Gnostic thinking about the nature of human beings and the process of their salvation. In other words, family relations are used as mythical paradigms and metaphors" (1997:235). These mythological family structures transcended normal family relationships and so they were not applicable to the social realities of the people. These mythological families were used to generate religious meaning, far from what the human mind could comprehend. But the household of God in the early church was real and practical. The early church fathers understood it in a real sense, and practiced and expressed it in their teachings and writings.

The Church Fathers

The early church fathers, for at least the first two centuries, encountered and were challenged by the different heretical teachings and concentrated on responding according to the teaching of Christ and his disciples. The early Christians also engaged the religious philosophies of their time, mainly Gnosticism. A major challenge during the late second century was setting the biblical canon of the New Testament.[22] Christianity was known as a book religion when the canon was set, and it was hard for the pagan world to understand the importance of the book.

During the first and second centuries the church took care of the widows and orphans. Slaves were well treated and counted equal with all other believers. No distinction was made.[23] The tensions were dealt with by the teaching of the household of God.

The early Christians were well aware of their role in the society and helped the people in need according to the instruction of their leaders. They respected the bishops as their "Father." Chadwick notes,

> The Latin papa, or Greek *pappas*, 'Daddy', was used by early Christians of a bishop to whom they stood in a filial relation . . . . When the plague struck Carthage in 252, Bishop Cyprian sent his people out to nurse the sick and bury the dead. More than a century later the emperor Julian 'the Apostate' was complaining that the Christians look after 'not only their own beggars but ours as well'. (1990:36-39)

The clergy not only ministered word and sacraments but also performed social roles for their flock. There was a great sense of oneness among them, irrespective of the background of the person. They were well aware of the family relationship with one another in Christ Jesus.

The early Christians helped one another in their need and their unity as the household of God was praiseworthy.[24] This shows the sibling mindset among the early Christians. They considered themselves as the members of one family and treated each other as brothers and sisters. The expression of this unity was found in sharing one another's burdens and in helping each other with material resources.

The second century church fathers, Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Justin Martyr (Rome), used kinship and family language when they wrote to the churches. Hellerman notes,

> The reader of Clement's letter to the church at Corinth encounters frequent uses of kinship terminology, such as "brother" (*adelphos*) (4.7; 13.1; 14.1; 33.1; 37.1; 41.1-4; 45.16; 46.1; 52.1; 62.1); "brotherhood" (*adelphotes*) (2.4); "fratricide" (*adelphotonia*) (4.7); and "love for the brethren" (*philadelphia*) (47.5). Clement addresses his Corinthian recipients as "children" (*tekna*) (22.1), quoting psalms 33 (LXX). In the next chapter, God is described as "the all-merciful and beneficent Father" who "has compassion on those that fear him, and kindly and lovingly bestows his favours on those that draw near to him with a simple mind" (23.1). Later, in 29.1, God is called 'our gracious and merciful Father'. (2001:130)

This letter portrays the themes of family loyalty and the concerns of the Father to the children. Clement also reveals his own ideal of family solidarity when he instructs the church. Hellerman notes, "Let the strong care for the weak and let the weak reverence the strong. Let the rich man bestow help on the poor and let the poor give thanks to God, that he gave him one to supply his needs" (2001:132). Clement uses kinship and sibling terminology when he addresses the believers. That shows that deep rooted teaching on the household of God prevailed among the Christians in the second century.

Ignatius of Antioch wrote seven extent letters to the Christians at Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Philadelphia, and Smyrna as he was being led to Rome to be martyred for his faith (2001:133). The content of the letters was to exhort his fellow believers to live in a manner befitting their calling as a followers of Jesus. Ignatius employs kinship terminology in each of his letters. Hellerman notes,

> Brethren, I am overflowing with love to you, and exceedingly joyful in watching over your safety. (Phild.5.1)
> The live of the brethren at Troas salutes you; and I am writing thence to you by the hand of Burrhus, who was sent with me by the Ephesians and Smyrenaeans as a mark of honour. (Phild.5.1)
> Suffer me, my brethren; hinder me not from living, do not wish me to die. Do not give to the world one who desires to belong to God, nor deceive him with material things. (Rom.6.2)
> The love of the brethren who are at Troas salutes you, whence I am writing to you by Burrhus, whom you together with the Ephesians your brothers sent with me, and he has in every way refreshed me. Would that all imitated him, for he is a pattern for the minister of God [Smyrn. 12.1]. (2001:140-141)

These letters also contain both sibling terms and family metaphors that illustrate the household idea of the Christians. Ignatius' letter corresponds to the realities of the Mediterranean family values. He also extends the family relationship to people who are outside of the Christian fellowship.

Justin Martyr is a well known Christian apologist of the second-century. His

writings are directed to those outside the community of faith which offer a defense of the

Christians to literate and educated pagans. Justin focuses primarily upon the Christian

belief system and less upon social interaction of the Christian community. In this also he

uncovers a significant amount of family terminology. His dialogue with Trypho, a Jew,

combines three family images of inheritance, fatherhood, and ancestry. Hellerman

quotes, "And we shall inherit the Holy Land together with Abraham, receiving our

inheritance for all eternity, because by our similar faith we have become children of

Abraham. ... Thus, God promised Abraham a religious and righteous nation of like faith,

and a delight to the Father" [Dial Tryph.119]" (2001:147). Justin, like the other church

fathers, expects the kinship metaphor to be reflected in day-to-day Christian life. His

writings also reveal his familiarity of the Mediterranean family system and the

community life of the believers. He describes the means by which community resources

are collected and distributed on a weekly basis. Hellerman quotes,

> Those who have more come to the aid of those who lack, and we are constantly
> together. Those who prosper, and so wish, contribute, each one as much as he
> chooses to. What is collected is deposited with the president, and he takes care of
> orphans and widows, and those who are in want on account of sickness or any
> other cause, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers who are sojourners
> among [us], and, briefly, he is the protector all those in need. (2001:148)

Justin describes the sharing of community resources and living together as a family. In

the Mediterranean family system, loyalty is central to their solidarity. When the

Christians change their commitment from the natural family, they also deal with tensions.

Justin emphasizes that the Christian's sacrifices are an expression of their loyalty towards

God. Justin expands the concept of the fatherhood of God to all human beings and to all

creation. In dialogue with the educated pagan opponents, Justin wants to emphasize the

universal fatherhood of God in order to persuade his opposition of the credibility of the

Christian beliefs.

The family metaphor is central to Clement of Alexandria's understanding of

Christian social organization and behavior. Clement refers to the father-children

relationship throughout his work. Hellerman quotes Clement as saying:

> God himself our Father, through whom all things have come into being and exist .
> . ., by the very act of loving the Father to the limit of our personal strength and
> power we gain incorruption.
> For to every one who turns to God in truth and with his whole heart the doors are
> opened and a thrice-glad Father receives a truly penitent son . . . . And if we,
> being evil know how to give good gifts, how much more does the Father of
> mercies.
> He does not withstand His children when they beg His mercies. (2001:154)

Clement also uses sibling terminology throughout his work, but also employs father-

children imagery and inheritance terminology. The family of God is more important than

the blood-family relations. So Clement urges his readers to opt for loyalty to God the

father over loyalty to those relations considered most important in Mediterranean family

systems. He admonishes Christians that enjoyment of worldly pleasures and visible

wealth will lead into the sad experience of losing the soul at the end. Clement conveys a

message to the rich people who accepted Christ as their Lord to understand that their

riches are not their own but have been entrusted to him by God for the benefit of his

Christian brothers and sisters. He stresses that one's attitude toward one's possessions

needs to be changed to a heavenly perspective, to serve the Lord with possessions. Love

towards God must be the motive in serving the brethren.

Irenaeus writes against the heresies, especially Marcion, and preserves Old

Testament narratives as inspired texts for the Christian community (Hellerman

2001:161). He is also concerned to demonstrate that Christians are God's true adopted

sons and daughters. He identifies Christians as the true children of God versus the false

claims of his Gnostic opponents. Irenaeus compares the idea of God as father with other

familiar designations for the deity (Hellerman 2001:159). The themes of sonship and

adoption are central to Irenaus's argument, and he uses family metaphors to explain

them.

<u>Missiological Significance of the Household Image</u>

Faith in Christ led believers to become the household of God, and through this

metaphor God integrated the first century Christian community. Early believers practiced

being the household of God in their social and cultural context. The concept was very

different from the surrounding community, and it attracted people to the new faith. The

Apostle Paul used a biblical understanding of the household concept and applied it to the

contemporary Greco-Roman world for the expansion of mission. N. T. Wright states,

> In the end Pauline mission based in the household proved to be highly successful. Without the Christian mission the contemporary closely structured, hierarchical society would have probably collapsed, plunging the Greco-Roman empire into much turmoil and uncertainty. However, by taking the existing extended family as the base cell of the mission, the church was effective in redeeming a collapsing world, by transforming the kinship, trade and neighbourly relationships integral to the household. (2001:40)

The household usages found in Colossians and Ephesians are different from the existing

structures, the socio-cultural pattern of the Greco-Roman world. The household

metaphor also played a significant part in the expansion of Christianity into different

communities in the Greco-Roman world.

The household of God idea had a missiological and socio-cultural importance to

the early Christians. The *oikos* structure corresponded closely with the ancient society

around them, as the ancient *oikos* reflected the social order of that time (status, rank,

position, class, profession). The Christians were not limited to specific groups in the

population and they were able to reach all levels of society with the gospel. Blue notes,

> The house-to-house expansion of the early church quickly spread Christianity
> from the shores of Galilee to remote corners of the Empire. In fact, in c.112 the
> Provincial Governor Pliny commented on the proliferation of the Christian faith
> when he wrote to the Emperor Trajan: 'The contagion of this superstition is not
> confined to the cities only, but has spread through the villages and rural districts;
> it seems possible, however, to check and cure it'. (1994:120)

This is evident in Paul's writings to the Ephesians where he encourages Christians

to understand the privilege and identity of being the household of God. The very life of

the Christian community was attracting the outside community to embrace faith in Christ.

Gehring states,

> Christians are encouraged to reflect a household ordered by God in Christ in their
> own families and house churches, where they were to project an image of order
> inwardly and outwardly and live an exemplary life with the goal of reaching
> others with the gospel. The integration of the house church within the *oikos* had a
> positive effect not only for the spread of the gospel; it also enabled continuity,
> duration, and tradition. With the integration into *oikos* infrastructures, the
> Christian church became capable of long-term survival and was given the
> potential to transition from one generation to the next. (2004:292)

The social aspect of the early Christian community was another factor for the

expansion of Christian faith. Paul admonishes the Corinthians to practice oneness in

fellowship meals as the household of God (1 Corinthians 11:17-22). Short states,

> Consider again the picture of the church as we must conceive it. It was composed
> of the poorer and humbler sections of the community; among them there were
> undoubtedly servants and slaves. Yet there also appears to have been a sprinkling
> of the more well-to-do and socially refined elements of Corinthians society.
> Doubtless these had their own impelling social affinities and would instinctively
> shrink from the rougher and more uncouth members of the congregation. But that
> spirit has to be disciplined and exorcised if there is to be any real fellowship at all.
> (1953:132)

The loving care of the believers made the church to expand in the Roman world.

Paul writes, "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in

Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so

that we have no need to say anything" (1 Thessalonians 1:8). The expansion of the early

church was spontaneous and natural, because the faith of the household of God

penetrating in the community.

The image of the church in the first three centuries can be diagramed as follows

(Figure 7). The small circles each symbolize families and individuals represented in the

household of God, the church and the three or four such small circles represent the

churches in various locations. The big circle stands for the household of God in a region,

Rome, Ephesus or Corinth; the large circle is the world outside the household of God, in

whish the brothers lived and witnessed to the love of Christ. The early church took the

great commission of the Lord Jesus Christ seriously and presented the love of God in

Christ Jesus all the possible ways (Romans 1:8; 1Thessalonians 1:7, 8).
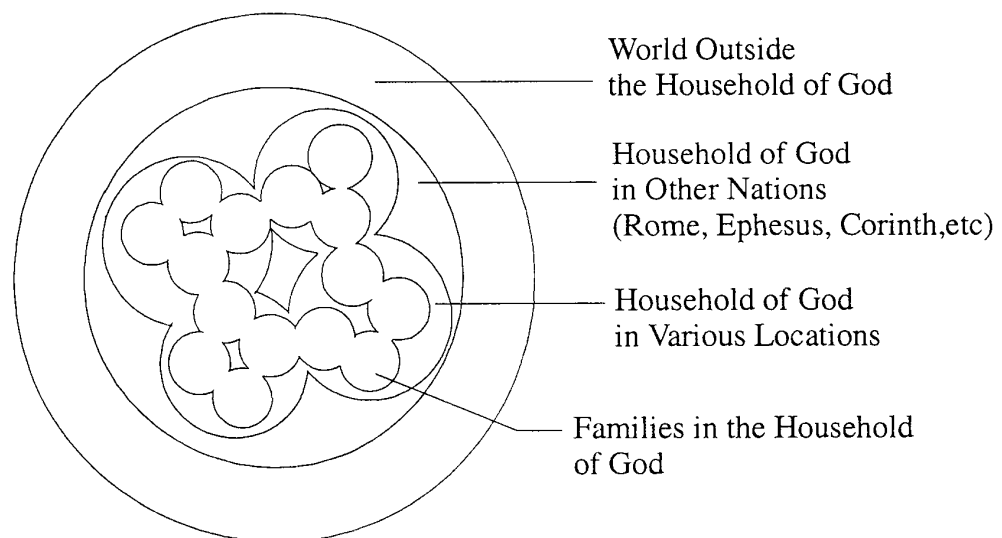
Figure 7. The Image of the Church as the Household of God
in the First Three Centuries

The household of God image contributed to an experiential understanding of the church's essence. The fundamental emphasis in the New Testament on the church as the family of God and the household of faith (Romans 8:15-16; Galatians 4:5-7, 6:10; Ephesians 2:19, 3:14-15, 5:1, 6:23) made an impact on the sociocultural setting of the Greco-Roman world (Tidball 1984:86). The household of God was an experiential reality and this in itself was the means to attract others to the love of Christ. Birkey notes,

> The church that meets in their house intensified the emphasis on interpersonal family life, and reflects a Hebrew model of Christian education where parents are the primary influencers. Since household and family are universal norms in cultures everywhere, missionaries who maximize a "family of God" household consciousness in planting church structures are most congruent with the apostolic mission ideal (1991:70).

The household of God concept helped the early church practice social integration. The early church was a cross section of society, from wealthy land-home owner to common slave. This social integration was explained in the house churches of Rome (Romans 16),[25] where there were racial diversity, social oneness, and sexual equality. Paul argues in Romans that God accepts every one on the basis of faith in Christ (Romans 14:1-3). There is no special position for any one; Jew or Gentiles, apart from Christ there is no place in the household of God. The household of God idea transcends all outward distinction (Birkey 1991:70).[26] Smith states,

> It is difficult to discover within the New Testament any real evidence to support the homogenous unit principle. There were unquestionably occasions when racial, social and cultural tensions threatened the unity of the church but, rather than yield to these pressures, believers are always and everywhere exhorted to 'keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace' (Ephesians 4:1). The church in Jerusalem could have been divided along homogeneous unit lines to solve the problem of the tension between its Greek and Aramaic speaking members – but so such division was allowed. Homogeneous units may actually have been established in Corinth – but Paul roundly condemns them. The social

tension between rich and poor members of the congregations to which James writes could have been eased by separating them allowing each group of worship Christ within their own social class. Such a solution is not even contemplated. (1985:28)

The early church stood firmly against all sorts of divisions and practiced the household of

God in their day to day life. They proclaimed that they were one in Christ. That was the

fundamental principle that shaped the apostolic missiology and ecclesiology.

The household of God idea also served to support local and interregional mission.

The complementary relationship that existed between itinerant evangelists and the local

followers of Jesus played an important role in the expansion of the Gospel. This was

clear in Paul's missionary journeys. He was supported by material gifts to cover his

travel costs and hospitality by the men and women of different social strata. The

households of the local area supported both local and regional mission. Gehring states,

> The house and household were a training ground for co-laborers and leaders for mission outreach. Household heads, their slaves, and their clients were all able to develop their organizational, administrative, and (particularly the housefathers) their teaching skills even before their conversion to Christianity in the context of the ancient *oikos*, so that by the time they came to faith, they were in many ways ready-made house church leaders. (2004:293)

The cross of Christ not only changed racial and class distinctions but also led into

equalization of the sexes in the community of faith. This opened more avenues for

evangelism and leadership in the church. Birkey states, "Not only must the Jew

forthrightly stop considering the Gentile a second-class citizen, and not only must the

master step down to the same level as the slave, but most radically of all, the male must

now realize that there is no distinction based on gender" (1991:71).

Women played a major role in founding the first century churches and also

shouldered leadership functions in the church (Acts 16:14-15, 40; Romans 16:1-2, 3-4; 1

Corinthians 1:11, 16:19; Colossians 4:15; 2 John). The household of God approach of

the early church opened doors for the missionaries everywhere because it was culturally

relevant. This also provided unique Christian fellowship and worship which attracted the

Gentile world. The indigenous nature of the church was another factor for the expansion

of the church. Household conversions were also common in the early church (Acts 10:1-

2, 16:13-15, 31-34, 18:18).

The Christian practice of hospitality contributed to the mission of the early

church. "Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for

thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:1-2). The emphasis on

hospitality is repeated in other epistles (Romans 13:9-13; 1 Peter 4:8-10). Malberbe

notes,

> Paul writes to his friend Philemon to prepare a guest room for him (v.22). He also
> expects his churches to bear the expenses for his trips. This is the connotation of
> *propempo*, translated "to speed on a journey." The term is used not only in
> connection with traveling Christians in the New Testament, apparently in the
> sense of Titus 3:13f.: "Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on
> their way; see that they lack nothing. And let our people learn to apply
> themselves to good deeds, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not to be
> unfruitful" (1983:68).

Early Christian hospitality was an important factor in the transmission of the

gospel (Riddle 1938:152-154).[27] Hospitality was considered one of the virtues both by

the pagans and Jews. Early Christian hospitality excelled the surrounding communities

and conveyed the meaning of the gospel in the realities of life. Ferguson states,

> The moral dangers at the inns made hospitality an important virtue in early
> Christianity. Hospitality occupies a prominent place in Christian literature
> (Romans 16:23; I Peter 4:9; 2 John 10; 3 John 5-8; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Clement 10-
> 12; *Didache* 11-13) because of the needs of missionaries and messengers of the
> churches and other Christians who happened to be traveling. The churches
> provided an extended family, giving lodging and assistance for journey. (2003:89)

When a missionary was welcomed into a house church, arrangements were made to hear from him. Thus, there was another opportunity to proclaim the gospel to their family members and neighbors.

In this chapter I have dealt with two major points: first I traced the household concept in the Greco-Roman world and the roles, functions and relationships in the sociocultural setting of the first two centuries. I have shown that in the Roman world a legal household functioned very strongly under the power of the emperor. Household other than that of the emperor followed the pattern of the emperor and the head of the household exercised power over the family members. There was very limited freedom in the household setting. There were quite a number of people living in Roman Empire without a household identity giving them status.

Secondly, we see that the Christian message not only challenged the Roman household system but offered a possibility for every person to be the household of God by having faith in Christ. Jesus taught and practiced the household of God and invited everyone to be part of the Heavenly Family. The Disciples and the New Testament writers emphasize the household of God and accepted everyone without any distinction. The epistles addressed issues directly relating to the household of God. The Christian household offered freedom to the family members. The church fathers followed the same emphasis in their teaching and practice of the household of God. The roles, functions and relationships in the household of God were different than in the Roman world. So the household of God itself was one factor in the mission of the early church. The early Christians welcomed new believers into the household of God by their faith affirmation

in Jesus Christ. The household of God was another factor for uniting the family members beyond their local identity and this challenged the Roman powers.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I have been tracing the household understanding of the Greco-Roman world and Christian responses to it. The household of God concept of the early church helped early Christians expand rapidly into different parts of the Mediterranean world. When Greco-Roman culture tried to classify people into different household categories, the Christian household concept integrated everyone in the household of God. Although the Greco-Roman world made social distinctions only on the basis of economics, the Christians made distinctions on the basis of confession of faith. So mobility was possible because everyone could become a member of the church. Tidball notes, "The solidarity of the household was expressed in the adoption of a common religion, chosen by the head of the house, which would serve not only to integrate them but to mark off their boundaries from others who worshipped different gods" (1984:81). The Christian understanding of the household of God was open for everyone and it gave equal status for all adherents, beyond economic, social, religious and gender distinctions. Christianity offered a new status and new opportunities for all Christians to participate fully in religious activity. The love and unity of Christians attracted the pagan world to discover the realities of their faith. The teachings on family life of the early church were very different from the Greco-Roman social setting. Family life and the husband and wife relationships were more secure among the Christians. This was another factor for the expansion of the church. The early church experienced a spontaneous growth, in the midst of a very restricted socio-cultural

environment. The Holy Spirit empowered the early Christians to be witnesses for the gospel wherever they went.

As I mentioned in the introduction, for Christians who were going through a crisis situation in life, the household of God was a comfort and joy. Wherever the household of God idea is practiced faithfully, there the church takes root into the culture. The economic, caste, color, language barriers give away to the gospel.

ENDNOTES Chapter 3

[1] Alexander's vision of one world stretched far beyond the political sphere. In agreement with his teacher Aristotle, Alexander's conviction was that Greek learning is superior to all other. So in all lands of which Alexander captured taught Greek language and culture. This process of "Greek-izing" the world became known as *hellenizing*, since the Greeks called their own land *Hellas* and themselves *Hellenes*. Hellenization had a profound and lasting effect, for Greek was widely accepted as the common language of commerce and international correspondence (Kee and Young 1957:11-12; Gundry 1970:3-5).

[2] Christians not only shared a faith based on belief in a Risen Savior, a strange concept to the ancient world, but also discharged a caring responsibility within their own localities that involved practicalities such as the provision of subsistence for the alleviation of poverty and distress, problems that were of first-hand experience for some of them (Batson 2001:xiv).

[3] Rome controlled many parts of the world at the time of Jesus. Tenney states, "From the Atlantic Ocean on the west to the Euphrates River and the Red Sea on the east, and from the Rhone, the Danube, the Black Sea and the Caucasus mountains on the north to the Sahara on the south, there stretched one vast empire under the headship and virtual dictatorship of the emperor, called in the New Testament both "king" (I Pet. 2:17) and "Augustus" (Luke 2:1)" (1961:1).

[4] The Roman Empire came into existence through a long process of development in which the little city-state of Rome (traditionally founded by Romulus and Remus in753B.C.) extended its power at first under kings, some of whom were Etruscan, and after 508 under a republican form of government headed by two magistrates elected annually (R. Grant 1962:103).

[5] The social structure of the Empire resembled a pyramid. At the top were the members of the Senate and their families. Below them were the knights or equestrians. The vast majority of Roman citizens belonged to neither order and were sometimes called plebeians. In addition there were many freedmen, ex-slaves who usually did not become citizens. Finally there were the slaves, who perhaps constituted a third of the population (R. Grant 1962:104-105).

[6] Gundry notes, "The typical Greco-Roman family had a low birth rate. To encourage the larger families, the government offered special concessions to parents of three or more children. Bachelors were probably taxed for being bachelors" (1970:28).

[7] Wealth was an important component of social status, but it was not a sufficient indicator for those in the highest social strata. Advanced education and the ability to

speak well were also important. But to be honored among the very elite, one needed above all things the right family of origin (Jeffers 1999:190).

[8] The talent and aggressiveness of an individual certainly contributed to his or her upward mobility, but the sponsorship of someone in authority also was a major factor. For example, the emperors promoted prosperous or promising provincials to the equestrian or even senatorial order (Jeffers 1999:191).

[9] A slave society is defined as one in which slaves make up at least 30 percent of the population and they transform the society's entire economy and its culture (Jeffers 1999:221).

[10] Members of the senatorial class, from the time of Augustus, were prohibited from marrying freed slaves. It may seem astonishing that any would wish to marry so far below their class in such a class-bound culture, but at times they did so (Jeffers 1999:228).

[11] The ownership of slaves made the masters dependent upon the labor and skill of their servitors to the extent that they lost their own ingenuity and ambition. Morality and self-respect were impossible among those whose only law was the will of an arbitrary master. ...In many households the children were entrusted to the care of these menials who taught them all of the vices and sly tricks that they knew. Thus the corruption that prevailed among the oppressed classes spread to their overloads (Tenney 1961:49-50).

[12] Osiek notes, "Household and family units included children, slaves, unmarried relatives, and often freedmen and freedwomen or other renters of shop or residential property" (1996:11).

[13] The best example is the Jewish Historian Josephus. His first marriage was an honour bestowed on him by Vespasian. There is no mention about the woman and no offspring mentioned. His second wife, from Alexandria, bore him three children of whom only Hyrcanus survived. Josephus divorced her, 'being displeased at her behaviour', and then married a Jewess 'of distinguished parents by whom he had two more sons (Whiston 1987:658-659).

[14] In Greco-Roman political writings and speeches, democracy is portrayed as the excessive freedom of the masses and the enslavement of the upper class (the "natural" leaders) to the lower class, resulting in chaos. Tyranny, at the other extreme, is portrayed as an excessively harsh and unbending rule whereby the upper class, an oligarchic faction, or a dictator rule without taking into account sufficiently the interests of the entire political body, including the masses. But when the stronger rules the weaker with restraint, and the weaker submits to the stronger in self-control, the interests of the entire city are protected, and everybody lives happily ever after (Martin 1995:420).

[15] Paul's argument is that now that the Messiah has come, and with him the new world where God's grace reaches out to all alike, if they try to embrace Judaism they are

declaring their preference for a system in which ethnic and territorial membership matters rather than membership in the Messiah's new family (N. T. Wright 2002:49).

[16] Many of the parables of Jesus are set in a household context, for example, the parables of the shrewd manager (Luke 16:1-13) and of the Talents (Luke 19:11-27). Furthermore Jesus is aware how crucial loyalty and unity were to such households (Luke 11:17) (Tidball 1984:81).

[17] Acts 6:1-6 brings to attention a context where the unhappiness of the Hellenists is evident against the Hebrews concerning serving the table. This may be because the Hebrews refused to have table fellowship with the Hellenists because these did not observe the ceremonial law in its entirely. There may also have been cultural differences between them. This led to inequality in the distribution of food to the poor Hellenist widows (Boer 1976:19).

[18] Meeks comes to the conclusion that with only minor exceptions, particularly at the top of society, all cross-sections of urban society are represented in the Pauline congregations (Meeks 1983:73).

[19] Pauline epistles uses three important family terminologies, found in a computer search; *adelph-* (brother/ sister) 118 occurences (*adelphe* = 5; *adelphos* =113); *pater* (father) 40; *kleronom-* (inherit/inheritance/heir) 14 (*kleronomeo* = 6; *kleronomos* =7) (cf. Hellerman 2001:246).

[20] The term "Father," with reference to God, is used frequently in Ephesians (1:2,3,17; 2:18; 3:14; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23). (Hoehner 2003:473).

[21] Hoehner observes there are two level of progression in this passage. "The first level shows that the Gentiles were outside the citizenship of Israel (v.12) and considered foreigners (v.19). This matches with the idea that now because of Christ's wok, both they and the Jews have been made one (vv.14-15) and they are considered fellow citizens with the saints (v.19). The second level shows that the Gentiles had no relationship to God by covenant, had no hope, and were without God (v.12) and considered resident aliens (v.19). This corresponds with the idea that now both they and the Jews, together in one body, have been reconciled to God (v.16) and are considered members of God's family (v.19)" (2003:394-395).

[22] The Gnostic critique and rejection of the Creator God of the Old Testament was taken to extremes by Marcion in the first half of the second century. He and his followers listed moral contradictions between the Old and New Testaments, and abominated allegory as a sophisticated device for evading difficulty. But the apostolic writings themselves had been corrupted, he taught, by unknown persons determined to keep Christianity Jewish, preserving the new wine of Jesus in old bottles (Chadwick 1990:28).

[23] I am not thinking that the early church was functioning without any tension but they were dealing with the problems in the light of the household of God teaching. Paul's writings especially deal with tension in the Corinthian church. He is asking whether there no one among you can decide between the brethren? He makes it more emphatic, ands, "why not rather be defrauded" (1 Corinthians 6:5-7).

[24] Hellerman quotes, Lucian who traveled widely in the East in the beginning of the second century, "Indeed people came even from the cities of Asia, sent by the Christians at their common expense, to succour and defend and encourage the hero. They show incredible speed whenever any such public action is taken; for in no time they lavish their all. ... The poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live for all times, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody, most of them. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws. Therefore they despise all things indiscriminately and consider them common property, receiving such doctrines traditionally without any definite evidence. So if any charlatan and trickster, able to profit by occasions, comes among them, he quickly acquired sudden wealth by imposing upon simple folk" (2001:128).

[25] As mentioned earlier, the ancient household includes, head of the house (father), wife, unmarried children, slaves (born in the master's house and freed slaves). This makes to assume that the house churches in Rome and other places were a social mixture of the community (Tidball 1984:80-81). Gehring states, "In addition, in Romans 16:10 those "who belong to (the household of) Aristobulus" and in 16:11 those "in (the household of) Narcissus" are greeted by Paul. These individuals are most likely groups of Christian slaves within extended households whose householders do not appear to be Christians. These groups do not constitute house churches, but rather some sort of house fellowship groups that belonged to house churches somewhere else in the city" (2004:145). It likely to assume that, these believers are known each other in a worshiping context of the church in Rome.

[26] In a homogeneous setting a group people may easily experience unity, but the evangelical mission in India fear syncretism and compromising of the Christian faith. K. Rajendran notes, "Evangelical and evangelical missions are afraid that mass movement will result in syncretism and compromising of Christian faith. This makes it sound as if there are no problems with individual conversions. Many quote circumstances like the mass conversions and baptisms years ago in part of North West India and note that today few Christians remain in those places"(1998:129).

[27] The early Christian hospitality was not limited to specialized functions with reference to poor relief, widows, and the persecuted. It is equally important that it operated in the dissemination of the gospel tradition. ... Before anything was written the early Christian *keryks* voiced his *kerygma*. These messengers went about from place to place; coincident with Christianity's expansion and growth they traveled throughout

wide-spread territories of the Mediterranean world in their work of carrying the gospel story to all its peoples (Riddle 1938:45).

CHAPTER 4

The Household in the Indian Social Setting

In one sense or another, all the stories that have ever been told are the stories of families – from Adam and Eve onwards. The family is a timeless and universal institution – everything begins here, and everything that happens outside the family mirrors what happens within it.

I have always been fascinated with how much a person's behavior and actions are shaped by the family atmosphere. The relationships which occur in the household setting have a great impact on each individual's daily life. Events in an individual's life also will have an influence on the family. Roles, relationships and functions in a household setting provide a most intense and most complex experience. The family as an institution functions in every socio-cultural setting to integrate individuals as a unit and also to provide identity for each of its members. This works both ways; the family influences the individual and events in an individual's life influence the family.

This chapter will explore the Hindu concept of household system in the Indian socio-cultural setting and look at the influence of the family in the socio-cultural setting of the country. India is a land of different faiths, languages and cultures. However Hindus are united by a common cultural link which is also mirrored in their social institutions such as marriage and family (Kapadia 1966:xxi-xxii). Cultural variations are obvious in marriages and other religious practices, but most of the ceremonies are based on their sacred texts, *Mahabharata, Ramayana* and *Manusmrti.*

India's people experience a unity in the core events taking place in different parts of the country. Speaking of Hindu society throughout India, Pandey states, "The right of

performances and the procedure of ceremonies were often determined by castes.

Marriage settlements were made according to social customs and rules. In selection of

bride and bridegroom, in copulation, pregnancy and rearing of children the rules of

eugenics and racial purity were followed" (1969:47). Variations within this system

depend on the castes and particular village traditions as I observed during the summer of

2004 in North, Central and South India.[1]

All Hindus, irrespective of the caste differences, respectfully observed their

sacred text, *Manusmrti*. S. Ramakrishnan states,

> Throughout India, Manu's *dharmasastra* is held in the highest esteem. ... There
> are royal and republican rulers on earth, but God has appointed Manu as ruler of
> all the worlds. The word *manusya* and *manuja* are derived from Manu. So too
> the English word "man".
> The Sanskrit word, man means to think. Manu was the first of the human race
> with its power of thinking. There is a saying in English: Man is a thinking
> animal. Since man's distinctive characteristic is his capacity to think the
> descendents of Manu came to be called *manusyas* (1995:137, 367).[2]

Hindus everywhere in India are very diligent in following Manu in their daily life. They

share common religious observances in the midst of plurality (O'Neill 2003:15). The

Hindu[3] sacred scriptures and the pilgrim centers unite the observances as one religious

tradition in India.[4] This is one of the reasons Gandhi could attract the Hindus to his

political action integrating the *nishkama karma* of the Bhagavad Gita, the passive

resistance and similar other religious principles (Almeida 1994:208). Gandhi raised

politics to the level of religion; his aim in life was *moksha* or self-realization, and he

wanted to lead the nation to that end (Sarma 1989:185).[5] Thus, since Hindus all over

India read the same texts, we are justified in considering Hinduism as the religion of the

Hindu community from the local to the national level. Presler states, "Hinduism is not

merely a scripture, although it has sacred books; nor is it simply a system of doctrine,

notwithstanding its impressive philosophies; nor is it only a worshipping congregation, however numerous its temples. Hinduism is more these things; it is a religious response to a life situation" (1978:39).

According to the 1991 Religious Census of India there are 672.6 million Hindus in India, 82.4 percent of the total population (K. M. Mathew 2001:533).[6] The Hindu *Maha Sabha* says that "A Hindu is one who believes in a religion which has originated in India" (Sivananda 1977:9).[7] Sunder Raj writes,

> Those who were converted thus to *Vedic Arya dharma* were identified scripturally and traditionally for ages by the following marks, which were codified by the Census Commission of 1910: (1) accept the supremacy of Brahmins, (2) receive *mantra* from a Brahmin or other recognized Hindu *guru*, (3) accept the authority of the *Vedas*, (4) worship Hindu gods, (5) are served by good Brahmins as family priests, (7) do not cause pollution by touch, (8) cremate their dead and (9) do not eat beef. (1986:110)

In this dissertation I am focusing on the Hindu community, which has spread all over India and dominates the socio-cultural, economic and political life of the nation. Generation after generation of poets have celebrated the heroes of the Hindu scriptures in poems and plays in both Sanskrit and the vernacular languages. Thousands of temples also have been built where sculpture, song, and drama have told their glory and enthroned the heroes throughout all of Southeast Asia (Dandekar 1958b:214). The month of August is known as the *Ramayana-massem* (*massem* means month) when people gather in the temple premises or other special places in order to read *Ramayana*. During this time *Ramayana* also will be read in the homes. It is a common practice all over India for people to imitate the heroes in their daily life. I observed this quite often during my visit to North as well as South India in the summer 2004. People were reading the scripture and expounding it to large gatherings of devout listeners in specially arranged places.

All religions in India are influenced by Hinduism; even Christianity has adopted

some of its practices with or without thoughtful consideration. One important example is

the caste identity of the church, which is still prevalent among the Christian community

in India (J. D'Souza 2000:399). The divisions between the caste communities among the

Christians may not be visible to an outsider, but they really affect the daily life of the

church and the believers. Stanislaus states,

> Although in the history of the Church, the Catholic and Protestant missionaries
> had their own understanding and interpretation of caste and the *Dalit* problems,
> the continuation of the discrimination against *Dalits* led them to protest and
> agitate against the Church, society and Government. The present uprising and the
> demands of the *Dalits* must be seen in the broad context of social justice which is
> denied to them both inside the Church and outside. (1999:155)

The socio-cultural realities of India provide perspectives on how the church needs

to exist and function in a Hindu cultural environment. The Hindu concept of household

has great influence in all the spheres of life, and this concept is rooted in the Hindu

scriptures. Shastri states, "The Hindu sacred scriptures are considered the foundation of

the nation, because the socio-cultural setting of the people can be found in them"

(1961:1). The household idea is a national phenomenon, and since it is rooted in the

Hindu scriptures, this investigation will begin with a study of these scriptures.

The Household Idea in the Hindu Scriptures[8]

Indian religious literature falls into two broad classes, *sruti,* "that which is heard"

and *smrti,* "that which is remembered."[9] There is another branch of *smrti,* known as

Itihasa-Purana, which contains legends about kings and sages believed to have lived in

the remote past (Basham 1989:70). In this study, two *Itihasa* (which belong to the branch

of *smrti*) the great epics of India, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata,* will be

considered. These two *Itihasa* are generally read by all the people of India and great

emphasis is placed on the lifestyles of the heroes.[10]

The household system thus is rooted in the sacred scriptures of Hinduism[11] and

very closely practiced in the sociocultural setting of the country. "To know the Indian

epics is to understand the Indian people better, for the epics present before us the most

graphic and life-like picture of the civilization and culture, the political and social life, the

religion and thought of the ancient India" (Vyas 1967:2). The sacred scriptures of

Hindus preserved social life intact, and the model pictured there still influences the

people today.

The ancient epics identify four ideals (*purusartha*) in a person's life.

Chackalackal notes,

> The sages of the past have identified four ideals of life (*purusarthas*), such as
> *artha* (wealth and power), *kama* (love and pleasure), *dharma* (righteousness and
> duty), and *moksa* (liberation and bliss) on which an individual may focus his
> attention and depend to mould the whole course of his action. A properly
> balanced practice of these four values at different stages of life of a man will help
> him to develop a fully integrated personality. The great epics have accepted this
> ideal and presented the lives of those who have accomplished a balanced pursuit
> of all these aspects as ideal personalities. (1992:4-5)

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are the practical application of these ideals. The

Mahabharata carries *dharma*[12] as its burden and the hero is *Yudhishtira*, the very son of

god of Dharma (*Dharma-putra*). By contrast, the Ramayana makes *Rama* its hero and

dharma (duty) itself is flesh and blood for him (Raghavan 1958a:210). In other words

the sacred scriptures of the Hindus, *Ramayana and Mahabharata*, provide a detailed

application of the four ideals, *purusartha*, in story form.

The *Ramayana* and the Household

A summary of *Ramayana* will provide an understanding of the importance and influence of the epic in the socio-cultural life of India. *Rama*, the eldest son and rightful heir of *Dashratha*, King of Ayodhya, is deprived of the throne by his stepmother's sudden demand that *Dasharatha*, in fulfillment of a boon granted long before, crown her own son king and banish *Rama*. So that his father may keep his pledge to his wife, *Rama* voluntarily withdraws to live in the wilderness for fourteen years with his faithful wife *Sita*. In the forest, the sages, who have been leading a life of penance and austerity, seek help from the great warrior *Rama* against the demons who are harassing them. This brings *Rama* into conflict with the demons, whose king, *Ravana*, abducts *Sita* and keeps her captive in his stronghold, hoping to win her love. After many struggles, *Rama* and his allies, the monkeys, overcome *Ravana* and rescue *Sita*. Thereupon *Rama* is restored to his throne in *Ayodhya* and sets an example as king with the most righteous and benevolent rule (Dandekar 1958b:213-214).

The *Ramayana* presents a society that is highly stratified according to the *varnasrama dharma* (caste system). This epic explains the story of two kings, *Dasaratha* and *Rama*. Under these kings society was divided into four communities, or castes: *Brahmana, ksatriya, vaisya* and *sudra*.[13] These communities functioned separately in their spheres of life with very careful boundaries separating the communities. Their privileges, duties and liabilities were well-defined in those times (Chackalackal 1992:17). Sivananda states,

> Hinduism is built on *Varnasrama Dharma* [the caste system]. The structure of the Hindu society is based on *Varnasrama Dharma*. Observance of *Varnastama Dharma* helps one's growth and self-evolution. It is very indispensable. If the rules are violated, the society will soon perish. The aim of *Varnasrama Dharma*

is to promote the development of the universal, eternal *Dharma*. If you defend *Dharma*, it will defend you. If you destroy it, it will destroy you. (1977:66-67)

As the society was divided into four communities, the life of an individual also was divided into four stages, known as *Asrama Dharma*. The *Asrama Dharma* laid down a path of self-improvement which would help an individual to fulfill all basic aspirations within his or her caste. Chackalackal notes, "The Ramayana recognizes four stages of life such as *brahmacharya-asrama* (state of a student), *grahastha-asrama* (state of a householder), *vanaprastha-asrama* (state of retired life), and *sannyasa-asrama* (state of homeless ascetic or mendicant)" (1992:20). Among the four *asramas,* the stage of the householder was held in high esteem and this is articulated in a conversation between *Rama* and *Bharata*. "While requesting *Rama* to return to *Ayodhya, Bharata* said: "Of the four conditions of men, that of the head of the family is the highest and most exalted. Why dost thou consider abandoning it?" (Chackalackal 1992:21).

The whole story of the *Ramayana* brings out the unparalleled value of this stage of life within the whole society. The people who belong to the householder *asrama* constituted the foundation of the society.

The *graham*[14] or family constitutes the nucleus of the Ramayana society. A family consisted of the father, his brothers, their wives, and sons and their wives, and offspring and the unmarried daughters, if any (Vyas 1967:73). The families depicted in the Ramayana, such as those of the kings *Dasaratha/Rama*, *Vali/Sugriva*, and *Ravana/Vibhisana*, show that in the normal course there was friendship and peace among the members of the family. The father or his eldest son, the head of the family, had an influence over the household who lived under one roof or perhaps in separate apartments. All transactions were conducted under the management of the head of the household.

Marriage settlements were made by him. The head of the household had a great concern

for the well-being of the children in making selections for their life partners. Vyas states,

"The important elements that kept up the unity of the families in the Ramayana were the

respect for the parents, affection for the children, love among brothers, fidelity of the

married couple, loyalty to the traditions and grateful remembrance of ancestors"

(1967:78).

The cordiality of the household demanded a lot of sacrifice from its members.

This is the remarkable story expounded in *Ramayana* and it gives expression to both the

social and devotional culture of India. Dandekar states,

> *Rama's* devotion to duty, to his father, and to his people, and *Sita's* long suffering
> fidelity to *Rama* have been regarded as religious and ethical ideals through the
> centuries. *Rama* is seen as the embodiment of *dharma*, and his triumph over the
> wicked *Ravana* as the overcoming of vice (*adharma*) in order that virtue and the
> moral law might prevail in personal and public life. *Rama* is adored also as the
> incarnation of the Supreme Lord who has come into the world to restore the moral
> order. (1958b:214)

Thus, the *Ramayana* presents the household as the basic unit of the society, where an

individual may grow and prosper to the fullness of his life, and acquire and enjoy the

riches of this universe. The hero of the *Ramayana* also reveals a positive outlook towards

the world when he renounces his rights as an act of obedience, love and devotion to his

father and father's wife. Sharma notes,

> Contempt for the world or its material pleasures is nowhere in evidence in the
> period, on the other hand, one finds that in their food and drink, in their fondness
> for good dress and ornaments, in the variety of their sports and means of
> recreation and in their economic pursuits, the people of this period display a
> healthy spirit of joy of life. (1971:440)

It is obvious that the people had material abundance and also enjoyed a relational life in

the household setting. The life of the community was built around the hero figures of the

Ramayana, the *Mahabharata* and others. There is also an enthusiasm to imitate them in their daily life and practice.

The *Mahabharata* and the Household

The *Mahabharata* is one of the popular scriptures of both the ruling class and the masses. The great epic of *Mahabharata* depicts the history of the *Pandavas* and the *Kauravas* (names of two families or *kula*). This epic focuses on the battle of *Kurukshetra* between cousins, the *Pandavas* and the *Kauravas*.[15] The epic centers on the *dharma* (duty) of man. Sivananda writes, "The Mahabharata contains also the immortal discourse of *Bhishma* on *Dharma*, which he gave *Yudhishthira*, when he was lying on the bed of arrows. The whole Mahabharata forms an encyclopedia of history, morals and religion unsurpassed by any other epic in the world" (1977:33).

The most important part of the *Mahabharata* is the *Bhagavad-Gita.*[16] Basham states, "Included in the *Mahabharata* is the *Bhagavad-gita*, nowadays the most important and influential religious text of India" (Basham 1989:82). It contains a dialogue between Lord *Krishna* and *Arjuna* on the battle-field, before the commencement of the Great War. Lord *Krishna* is acting as the charioteer of *Arjuna* and explains the *Dharma* (duty) which he needs to perform in the war against their cousins. Basham notes,

> He (*Arjuna*) is not so much afraid of being killed as of killing. His enemies are his kinsfolk, many of them known to him since childhood. They include elder statesmen, wise counselors, men of untarnished reputation and profound wisdom. Rather than kill such people, he would give up all his claims to the kingdom and become an ascetic. He does not wish to fight. ... there *Krishna* presents a lengthy homily to *Arjuna* on the duty of the warrior and on many other topics. (1989:83)

The Hindu believes that the *Bhagavad-Gita* contains the essence of Hindu religion. The war in the epic poses an ethical problem: is warfare justified? The answer is clear and brief, bodies can be killed, but you cannot kill the soul, which is eternal and must in any

case pass from one body to another. The idea of the eternal soul, the spark of Brahman in every living creature, leaves an opening for war and the killing of the body in Hinduism. Basham states,

> Pleasure, pain, all the experiences of the senses are transitory and must be put up with – the wise man is the same in pleasure and pain, realizing that his soul is eternal and does not participate in the activities of everyday life. On gaining full awareness of the eternity of the soul he rises above mundane things and realizes that there is no cause for sorrow in death. (1989:84)[17]

The Hindus also believe *Bhagavad-Gita* as the *Manava Kartavya Sastra* (code of duties of human being) of the Hindu community. The message of *Bhagavad-Gita* to its readers is to perform *Dharma* (duty) without considering yourself or even others. Nandan states, "In Hindu families there is holistic practice, to read some bits from *Gita* when any one in the family happens to exhaust his last few breaths" (2000:x). *Gita* reading and imitating the characters of it are highly praised among the Hindus even today. *Gita* is their text book of *Dharma* (duty). *Gita* 69:58 explains,

> *Dharma* sustains the society
> *Dharma* maintains the social order
> *Dharma* ensures well being and progress of Humanity
> *Dharma* is surely that which fulfills these objectives.
> (Jois 1996:2)

The motive of all actions or any action should be altruistic; performed without expecting a reward. The mind and heart should focus on the duty alone. This is known as *nishkamakarma* (selfless service). The thrust is that humans' business is with activity and work, not with its result. Any thought about fruits of the work will prevent the integration of the whole hearted mind to *Dharma* (duty) and it misses highest spiritual goal of *Dharma*. When a person does his *Dharma*, duty, with full sincerity to that duty, then everything else will take place according to the one who planned it. The highest spiritual achievement is the satisfaction of duty, *Dharma*. *Dharma* embraces every type

of righteous conduct, covering every aspect of life essential for sustenance and welfare of the individual and society. It includes those rules which guide and enable those who believe in God and heaven to attain *moksha* (eternal bliss) (Jois 1996:3).

The teachings of the *Mahabharata* concerning the household setting are similar. One should be selflessly active, one's only motive being the realization that one's deeds were appropriate to the norms of one's class and stage of life (*varnasramadharma*). Hindus look at every life as a battle and thus believe that everyone should prepare himself to fight his *Mahabharata*, like *Arjuna* with devotion and tireless attention. All of life is fulfilling *Dharma* without expecting or considering the result. Every one is encouraged to learn and follow the instructions of Lord *Krishna* and cultivate the disciplines and precepts advocated by him in the daily life. Hindus believe that to practice *Bhagavad-Gita* everyone must practice devotion like the hero, *Arjuna*. He was not a religious scholar but a common struggling householder who practiced the advices of Lord *Krishna* (Nandan 2000:15).

The *Mahabharata* proposes *Yoga* as a practical system of mental and spiritual development, whereby a man may reach complete detachment from the world. When one fully integrates the *yogin* views, then all friends and enemies, good and evil, will be the same. *Krishan* advised *Arjuna* to achieve the *yogin* by concentrating his eyes on the tip of his nose. The goal of *yoga* is to become *Brahman*, the ultimate impersonal spirit (Basham 1989:87-88). The *yoga* of the *Bhagavad-Gita* has a strong moral element and involves cultivating an attitude of calm benevolence. In the broad vision of practicing *yoga,* one could choose his path, recognize his duty in life, and pursue his allotted mission. Householders will have a hard time handling situations in life unless they

understand the teachings of *yoga* from the great epic of *Mahabharata*. In the same way

the soul must strive to detach from the *guna* (constituent qualities). The world is

permeated by three *gunas: sattva* (virtue, goodness), *rajas* (passion, activity), and *tamas*

(darkness, dullness). Basham states,

> The categories enumerated in the field are contained in *Prakrti*, generally
> translated as nature, and they evolved from *Prakrti* one at a time in the process of
> creation. All phenomena take place in nature. Involved with nature is *Purusa*,
> literally "(male) Person." Naturally quiescent, the *Purusa* becomes intimately
> linked with the three *gunas* and the various component of *Prakrti*. It is through
> the connection of *Purusa* and *Prakrti* that the process of transmigration goes on,
> and the full complete realization of the reality of *Purusa* and *Prakrti* and
> fundamental distinction between them leads to release from rebirth. (1989:88-89)

Brahman can be realized by those who subdue all desires and drop their sense of ego.

Such people draw near to *Brahman* in life, and at death they go to the *nirvana* of

Brahman. All the household members are expected to follow the pattern of the

Bhagavad-Gita and experience the realization of *Brahman*. The *Manusmrti* give a

detailed account of what it means to fulfill the householder's duty.

The *Manusmrti* and the Household

The *Manusmrti* has an impact on the personal, family, social and political life of

India. It integrates the whole of India under one major religion, Hinduism, even though

not all Indians are Hindus. Hindu society is founded on, and governed by, the laws of

manu (Sivananda 1977:27). The *Manusmrti* is considered to be an important source of

Hindu law and custom throughout the whole of the subcontinent. This textbook of Hindu

law and custom provides the details of religious life, civil law and, most important of all,

principles of about the *varnasrama dharma* (caste system), which is still prevailing in

India.[18] Doniger and Smith state,

A work of encyclopedic scope, *The Laws of Manu* (in Sanskrit, the *Manavadharmasastra* or *Manusmrti*, and informally known as Manu) consists of 2,685 verses on topics as apparently varied – but actually intimately interrelated in Hindu thought – as the social obligations and duties of the various castes and of individuals in different stages of life; the proper way for a righteous king to rule, and to punish transgressors in his kingdom; the appropriate social relations between men and women of different castes, and of husbands and wives in the privacy of the home; birth, death, and taxes; cosmogony, karma, and rebirth; ritual practices; error and restoration or redemption; and such details of everyday life as the procedure for settling traffic accidents, adjudicating disputes with boatmen, and the penance for sexual improprieties with one's teacher's wife. (1991:xvi-xvii)

The *Manusmrti* has a close connection to the epic text of the *Mahabharata,* which

contains several direct quotations from *Manusmrti*. A closer study of *Mahabharata*

reveals that many of its instructions are similar to those found in law book of *Manu*.

Practically every aspect of the ideal life of Hindu men and women is addressed in the

Manusmrti (Basham 1989:103).

The Manusmrti also speaks of four *Asramas* or stages of life (as noted above),

Brahmacharya or the period of studentship, *Grihastha* or the stage of the householder,

Vanaprastha or the stage of the forest-dweller or hermit, and *Sannyasa* or the life of

renunciation or asceticism (Swami Sivananda 1977:72). *Manu* regards family life as the

ideal social value. It enables man to realize his full social growth. *Manu* lays out Hindu

family life in detail, which includes the concepts of the body, sex, relationships between

humans and animals, attitudes to money and material possessions, politics, law, caste,

purification and pollution, ritual, social practice and ideals, and world-renunciation and

worldly goals.

The *Grihasthasrma dharma,* the householder's duty, is the second stage of a life,

the one which concerns me most in this research. The three upper classes of the society

should enter the state of marriage (*Grihasthasrama*) only after completing the study of

the Vedas, and after reaching an age of maturity (Manikam 1977:162).[19] The *Manusmrti*

offers a detailed explanation of the *grihasthasrma dharma,* which is the highest goal in

the life of an individual. *Grihasthasrma* focuses on *kama,* or the pursuit of love and

pleasure, as one of the ends of human existence. This is well attested in the Hindu

system of things through painting, sculpture, music, literature and theoretical texts

(Raghavan 1958c:254). At the same time withdrawal from the world, or renunciation of

pleasure and keeping away from the seductive charms of women, are also emphasized.

Raghavan states,

> One aspect of human pleasure much stressed in Hindu social and religious
> thought is the life of the married householder (*grhastha*). In more than one
> authoritative text, the householder's life is considered to be the greatest of the four
> stages of life. Family life and its attendant social obligations are considered to be
> enjoyable in themselves and to be necessary preparation for the final spiritual
> endeavor. But there is also love outside marriage, with all its pleasures and perils.
> Some of the greatest Sanskrit poetry reflects the longing of men and women in
> love, and it is in this poetry that the imagery of physical desire and spiritual love
> become ambiguous, as the longing of the lover for his beloved becomes the
> longing of the soul for God, and the pleasure of sexual union becomes the ecstasy
> of communion with the Divine. (1958c:255)

The sexual metaphor is used often in *Manusmrti* as well as in other scriptures because it

speaks of the ultimate form of human enjoyment. Sex is part of human life, commonly

available for everyone, and through it everyone can experience divine love without any

limit. For this reason *kama* is personified as the god of love.

The householder stage of life is supported by the other three, because this is the

only stage that affords full scope for the realization of the first three ends of man, that is

pleasure (*kama*), material gain (*artha*) and virtue (*dharma*) (Dendaker 1958a:226). The

grhastha is the very heart of Hindu life because everything depends on him (Sivananda

1977:76). The first thing a householder seeks after his student life (*upanayana*)[20] is to get

married and begin a family. *Manusmrti* has a very inspiring outlook on marriage, treating

it as a sacrament and the fundamental union within society. So the selection of the bride

requires maximum care. Manickam states, "The institution of marriage is the main

instrument of discharging the ordained duties of the *varnasrama dharama*. Hence a man

could marry only a woman of his own *varna*" (1977:164). The following are the

instructions of the *Manusmrti* for the householder when he chooses a wife.

> When he has received his guru's permission and bathed and performed the ritual
> for homecoming according to the rules, a twice-born man should marry a wife
> who is of the same class and has the right marks. A woman who is neither a co-
> feeding relative on her mother's side nor belongs to the same lineage (of the
> sages) on her father's side, and who is virgin, is recommended for marriage to
> twice-born men. When a man connects himself with a woman, he should avoid
> the ten following families, even if they are great, or rich in cows, goats, sheep,
> property, or grain: a family that has abandoned the rites, or does not have male
> children, or does not chant the Veda; and those families in which they have hairy
> bodies, piles, consumption, weak digestion, epilepsy, white leprosy, or black
> leprosy. (*Manusmrti* chapter 3:verses 4-7)

The *Manusmrti* lists all of the marks of a good wife that a householder needs to consider

for marriage. The husband cannot perform any religious ritual without his wife.

Sivananda states, "Husband and wife keep *Rama* and *Sita* as their ideal" (1977:76).

The *Manusmrti* also provides very elaborate guidelines for family and domestic

life, which includes sexual union with the wife, treatment of female relatives,

performance of daily domestic rites, ceremony for the dead, duties of the husband, duties

of the wife and children, worship in the homes, and so on. The house is the center for

worship and sacrifice for each family, and householders are responsible for this. In the

agni, fire, lit at the time of marriage, the householder should perform the domestic rituals

and five great sacrifices (*Pancha Maha Yajnas*)[21] in accordance with the rules and

regulations of the Vedas (Doniger and Smith 1991:49).

Hospitality is one the chief duties of the householder. The priority goes to the guest, *Brahmanas* (priestly caste) and the husband's relatives, only then should the husband and wife eat. The members of the household must submit to the authority and follow the decisions of the elder. Since the people in the other three stages of life are supported every day by the knowledge (daily personal study of the *Veda*) and the food of the householder, the householder stage of life is considered as the best. The householder should honor the sages with a private recitation of the *Vedas*. He must follow the rules for each ceremony mentioned in the *Manusmrti* (Doniger and Smith 1991:51).[22]

The *Manusmrti* directly applies to the high caste Hindus, such as *Brahmanas, Kstriyas* and *Visyas*. These high caste Hindu practices are considered as the highest in the community and the rest of the society comes under its influence. When I talked to some of the low caste people during my visit in India in the summer of 2004, they did not know why they were performing certain rites as the high caste does. Their only answer was it is good to follow the high caste pattern.[23] The high caste Hindu's justification is that everything is not for all people, and each needs to be satisfied doing their duties for the benefit of the society. Ramakrishnan states,

> Nothing discriminatory about this nor need there be any quarrel over the same. People belonging to the fourth *varna* do physical work to serve the world and in the process acquire inner purity. They will gain proficiency in their hereditary vocations only by learning them from their parents or grandparents. They do not require *gurukulavasa* over some twelve years [as is the case with Brahmins] nor do they have to learn the Vedas. If so their work will suffer. (1995:527)

The Hindu religion does not expect the low caste to follow the high-caste pattern in their ceremonies. But the Hindu religion has a great influence on the whole of the society, and everyone tries to follow the high-caste pattern. Hinduism is a way of life and a practice

in order to obtain success in this world and the hereafter. This fact is very well seen in

Indian social life.

<div align="center">The Indian Social Background</div>

Indian society is deeply rooted in the Hindu view of life, which is based on *Vedic*

thought. *Vedic* religion inquires into the nature of reality and proposes three main

theories the of causation of life in the universe – origination (*arambha*), transformation

(*parinama*), and apparent transfiguration (*vivarta*) (Dandekar 1958c:300). These theories

are developed into different schools of thought: *Nyaya, Sankhya* and *Advaita*.[24] These

three schools of thought agree that the universe and Brahman are the same in essence.

The soul of Brahman is in everything and in every living creature. These theories took

on different form in *Vedic* religion, the *Brahmanical*, which stratifies society into four

different castes,[25] with the *Brahmans* at the top. Weiler states,

> They belong to what is usually referred to as the *Brahmanical* tradition, that is,
> the system of ideas, beliefs, and ritual practices associated with the social
> dominance of Brahmans, the class that has provided a fairly well-defined and
> coherent interpretation of normative social and religious behavior and thought
> throughout the centuries. (1959:3)

The *Vedic* view is that man is composed of desires (*kama*). There are varieties of beliefs,

practices, and social customs that make the Hindu way of life easy for any one to follow.

Hinduism tolerates any religious ideas, but gives meaning to them from its own

scriptures. The Hindu way of life does not require uniformity of belief or practice for all

citizens within a nation or state, but at the same time it does require social conformity

within the groups that constitute the caste system. The basic premises of the social

setting are drawn from the Vedic scriptures, like *Mahabharata, Ramayana* and

Manusmrti.

Stratification of society into different castes also develops from the ideas about the creation of the universe found in the *vedic* scriptures. They talk about the creation of the universe and the origin of its inhabitants from a primal giant who existed from the beginning. Creation of the universe is also connected with a cosmic sacrifice which took place at the beginning of the universe in the ancient past. In that sacrifice, *Vishvakaraman*, as the world-maker or world-architect, becomes the sacrificial victim and the craftsman of the creation (Noss 2003:86).[26]

According to the Hindu scriptures there are four *Varnasrama darma* (caste duties). Mangalawadi writes,

> India's whole society was stratified and divided into four major castes: *Brahimins* (the priestly caste) who claim to be born from the mouth of God, *Kshatriya* (the martial caste) supposedly from the arms of God, *Vaishyas* (the business caste) from God's belly, and the *Sudras* (the labor caste and "untouchables") from God's feet. This led to abject human conditions throughout India. An invisible civil war among the people became its permanent order. (2002: xvi)

From the social perspective it is easy to interpret the caste system as any other system that assigns duties for a smooth functioning of the society, like the class divisions in other countries. But caste in India has its strong influence in all areas of life: religion, economics, politics and social life of the people.[27] Srinivas states, "Caste is undoubtedly an all-India phenomenon in the sense that there are everywhere hereditary, endogamous groups which form a hierarchy, and that each of these groups has a traditional association with one or two occupations" (1972:3).

Brahmana
(High Caste, Religious Group)

Kshatriya
(Ruling Caste)

Vaisya
(Business Caste)

Sudra
(Low Caste)

Untouchables
(Scheduled Caste)
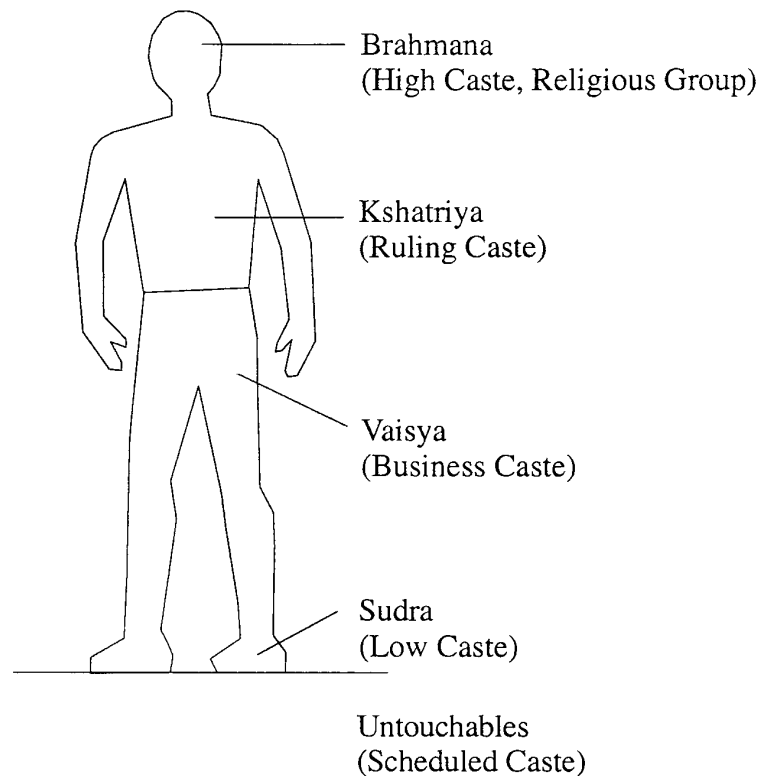
Figure 8. The Caste System in Hindu Indian Society

The above figure portrays on understanding of the caste system. The divisions of

the castes are related as in the figure; for further explanation refer to endnote no. 27 of

Chapter 4. The caste system is a religious institution and has strong rigidity which makes

upward mobility impossible from one caste to the other. The *Brahman* (high caste) is

born, not made, and so is a *Sudra* (low caste).[28] No member of a lower caste can rise to a

higher one, just as the Hindu religion by its peculiar constitution does not allow converts

from one form to another of its own faith. Gladstone notes, "Caste is an elaborate system

grounded in Hinduism which may almost be said to be without parallel in the world. It

was not merely a social or economic order of the society, but "a religious institution".

Thus it had a theocratic foundation and religious sanctions based on the belief that it was

a divinely ordained institution" (1984:16).

There is one more group that does not belong to the four castes mentioned above.

Varna denotes the four castes, whereas *Jati*[29] denotes endogamous groups that are the

practical units in the social structure. The word *Jati* (birth) is used to identify a persons'

background, geographical location, language and occupation. Gladstone notes,

> There are four *varnas* but there are thousands of *Jatis*. The *Varna* model of caste
> is seen all over India with its distinctive and immutable hierarchy while the *Jati*
> model of caste is regional with variations. According to the traditional
> understanding, those who are outside the pale of the *Varna* system are *Avarnas* or
> 'untouchables'. The *Avarnas* form a major group in the population of India.
> (1984:19)

The term untouchables was used because of religious and social reasons in Indian society

(Stanislaus1999:3).[30] The untouchables accept term *Dalit*[31] which means "those who

have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way"

(Stanislaus 1999:3). They are treated as the lowest of the low and considered totally

unholy, even their shadow can defiles the high castes. O'Neill writes,

> Many people would point out that the crudest, most overt forms of discrimination
> have largely disappeared, the result of sporadic reform movements before and
> after India's independence in 1947. It's true that at least in the public sphere,
> Untouchables have made progress since the days – within living memory – when
> they were beaten if their shadow touched a higher caste person, wore bells to
> warn of their approach, and carried buckets so their spit wouldn't contaminate the
> ground. Untouchables couldn't enter schools or sit on a bench near a higher caste
> person. (2003:14)

The government made a quota system that reserves seats in the federal legislature

equal to the *dalit* (untouchable) share of the population: 15 percent. Reserved spots

extend to positions in state legislatures, village councils, civil service, and university

classrooms. India's ruling parties supported this quota program despite widespread

opposition.[32] O'Neill reports,

> Mobs rioted for 78 days in 1981 in the state of Gujarat when a high-caste was
> denied entry to a medical school to make space for an Untouchable. Though

many quota positions go unfilled, particularly at universities, employment in the vast Indian bureaucracy has lifted the living standard for some Untouchables, propelling thousands into the middle class. (2003:14)

The *Brahmins* are born to fulfill *Dharma*, everything existing in the world is the property of the *brahmins*. On account of their origin, a *brahmin* is entitled to everything. Ignorant or learned, a *brahmin* is still a great deity (Chatterjee 1993:15).[33] At the same time untouchables are forced to wear a black thread on their necks or wrist to indicate their untouchability. Ambedkar,[34] a great leader of the untouchables, was greatly disturbed and humiliated by the caste system and this led him to burn a copy of the Laws of Manu in 1923 to express the feelings of the untouchable. O'Neill states, "In that one heretical act he declared war. 'Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system,' he declared" (2003:19).

Caste divisions in India still today function in a hierarchical order and as water-tight compartments, providing very limited possibility for mobility. The caste system is one of history's first grand attempts to create a social order by social engineering, but it turned into a disastrous experience to the people. This is the single greatest hindrance for the growth of individuals and society, because it takes away freedom and creates a deadlock in all walks of life. The Christian presence and preaching are weak or incomplete when it comes to the caste system because they have lost their prophetic voice. Ebenezer Raj states,

Where intercaste or noncaste egalitarian brotherhood has been made a condition for entry to the church, masses of 'lower' classes entered (the term is used in the Brahminical sense). When the caste system has been partially, or even fully, permitted inside the church some 'higher' castes have come into the church, but the 'lower' castes have stayed away. The conversions of many Hindus and some Christian to Islam is 1980-83 in Tamil Nadu are pointers to this fact. (1985a:13)

<u>The Indian Household and Family System</u>

There is a strong understanding of family in Indian society which comes from the Hindu religion. What does the household and family look like in India? The Hindu definition of family includes physical, social, and psychological elements. Ahuja, an Indian sociologist says, "a family is a group of persons of both sexes, related by marriage, blood or adoption, performing roles based on age, sex and relationship, and socially distinguished as making up a single household or a subhousehold" (2002:97).

In the Indian household setting, there is a great interdependency among the family members. The *karta* or the head of the family controls everything. After the head of the family, the elder brother takes the position and exercise authority over his brothers, as their father had done before him. Women are always under the control of a man: a father, a husband or a son. According to *Manusmrti* 5:147- 151,

> A girl, a young woman, or even an old woman should not do anything independently, even in (her own) house. In childhood a woman should be under her father's control, in youth under her husband's, and when her husband is dead, under her sons'. She should not have independence. A woman should not try to separate herself from her father, her husband, or her sons, for her separation from them would make both (her own and her husband's) families contemptible. She should always be cheerful, and clever at household affairs; she should keep her utensils well polished and not have too free a hand in spending. When her father, or her brother with her father's permission, gives her to someone, she should obey that man while he is alive and not violate her vow to him when he is dead.
> (Doniger and Smith 1991:115)

In the past women were not allowed to have any wealth by themselves and everything personal or family had to be handled by the men (Wilkins 1887:19). But, in recent years, there have been changes in these aspects of family life in India.

Women are enjoying freedom and dignity in India today. They have opportunities for education and employment in public and private sectors. The status of women in urban areas is higher than that of women in rural areas. Ahuja states,

> However, in the labor market, women are still in a disadvantaged situation. The labor market discriminates against women and is opposed to equality of opportunity – understood in a comprehensive sense to include equality of employment, training and promotional opportunities. In this sense, change is not possible in the sex segregated labor market whose structures ensure that the career patterns of women will normally be marked by discontinuity, unlike the normal male career patterns which assume continuity. Because of the constraints of the sex segregated labor market, women tend to cluster in a limited range of occupations, which have low status and are poorly paid. (2002:353)

Women normally prefer teaching, nursing, social work, secretarial and clerical jobs. There is general expectation that all wives must be housewives and subordinate to their husband.

In recent years, there has been a shift from the joint family to a nuclear family setting. However, even today the nuclear family is not entirely free from the influence of the larger family. During my research in India, I realized that nuclear families are increasing in great numbers, but yet this fact does not indicate the disappearance of joint the family system. The secularization[35] process is one of the reasons for the transformation of the joint family system in India today. Aleaz states, "Traditional type of joint family system is passing through severe stress and strains. At the same time the culture of joint family system is being retained through the mechanism of functional adaptation" (1994:78). Structural changes in the family system proved by the empirical studies conducted in last four decades by scholars like I. P. Desai,[36] K. M. Kapadia,[37] Aileen Ross,[38] M. S. Gore,[39] A.M Shah[40] and Sachchidananda.[41] These studies shows that joint family system in India is not disappearing but it is taking a functional form.

Instead of large joint families, now there are small joint families of two generations. That

is, there are nuclear families (husband, wife and unmarried children) functioning

independently but under the supervision or functional dependency on some primary kin

like father or brother (Ahuja 2002:101). All the family ceremonies[42] that I attended

during the summer of 2004 testify that the joint family system still operates in many

places in India, but it may take different forms.[43]

Hindu World:
Varna-asrama-dharma
(Caste System)

Gotra (Tribe)

Kula (Clan)

Graham (Family)
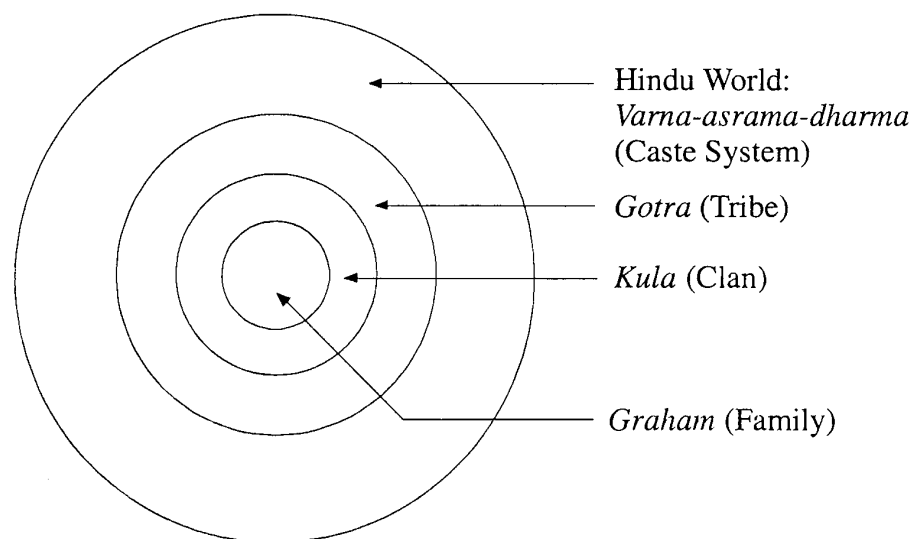
Figure 9. The Hindu Household System

The above Figure 9 shows the sociocultural setting of the Hindu household

system. As I mentioned earlier, each caste is in a water-tight compartment consisting of

their households and exercising power over the family members. There are three

different models of the Indian household system. The *graham*, or family, is the first,

where the young generation begins to study religious rites and rituals. Each family has its

own shrines, or at least a *pooja* (worship) room where they[44] keep their gods or

goddesses. They clean the *pooja* room early in the morning and evening.[45] An elder of

the house lights an oil lamp, burns incense before the idol, chants some prayers and does

worship.[46] The oil lamp represents the fire god *Agni* and it is considered the chief

domestic deity. Pandey states,

> As it is called the "houselord" in the *Rgveda*, so *Atar* (*Avestan* word for fire) is
> called the "houselord of all houses" in the *Avesta*. Its contact with man was very
> congenial in cold winters of northern countries. Consequently, it became the
> chief domestic deity that was a constant source of help in secular as well as sacred
> life of the householder. The family hearth was the first "holy of the holies." The
> fire that was kept burning in every house became a perpetual sign for all
> influences that bound men with family and social relations, and became the centre
> of all domestic rites and ceremonies. (1969:36)

The family members are encouraged to stand before the *Agni* god and do the chanting

according to their convenience and according to their preferences. Sinha notes, "Each

and every Vedic family used to perform the ceremonies according to own method"

(1999:35). The many idols of god and goddess also can be seen as *ishtadevetha* (favorite

gods) in one *pooja* room. There is no idea of congregational worship as Christians do.

Williams notes,

> Any idea of congregational religious duties has no place in his mind. A Hindu
> never enters a place of worship with the object of offering up common prayer in
> company with his fellow men. He has no conception of performing the kind of
> religious act which a Christian performs when he 'goes to church.' ... He goes to
> the temple to perform what is called *Darsana*; that is, to look at the idol, the sight
> of which, when duly dressed and decorated by the priest, is supposed to confer
> merit. ... His real religion is an affair of family usage, domestic ritual, and private
> observance. (1974:352-353)

But at the same time the family religion is deeply tied up with priestly involvement from

life to death. Williams states,

> Each man finds himself cribbed and confined in all his movements, bound and
> fettered in all he does by the most minute regulations. He sleeps and wakes,
> dresses and undresses, sits down and stands up, goes out and comes in, eats and
> drinks, speaks and is silent, acts and refrains from acting, according to precise
> rule. And the action of the priestly caste, commences with the first instant of his
> unconscious existence as a living organism. (1974:352)

In every village, the guru or religious teacher takes the lead because he is the one who teaches the Vedic *Gayatri mantra* or initiatory prayer to every child. The guru is the initiator of the *Gayatri mantra*. According to Hinduism, Sinha states,

> Logic gives the connotation of a human being (man) as "Man is a rational animal." Hindu religion also accepts that human being is animal from birth but rational approach towards life makes him a real human being. To lead an ideal life with selfless aim is actually to have an entrance in real human life. This aim, when achieved, gives the birth of a new life and that is known as "*Dwijatva*." "*Dwijatva*" (twice born) is achieved through "*Upanayan Samskara*" or Initiation ceremony. The initiation Ceremony, from the very beginning of the Vedic period, was supposed as the passport to the social, cultural and literary treasures of the Hindu life. (1999:88-89)

Only a guru can initiate *Gayatri mantra* to a child. A child formally begins to learn religion by memorizing *Gayatri mantra*. The child should have sufficient knowledge of Sanskrit to learn this mantra. This process is known as *Upanayana*. Ramakrishnan states, "*Upa* = near; *nayana* = to take or lead (a child). Near who or what is (the child) taken? Near the guru. That is what the *upanayana* means. Who is a guru? One who has mastered the Vedas" (1995:531).

The word *gotra* is the second term. It suggests a pattern of life based on a system of individual families, each consisting of several members under the leadership of the father, or the eldest brother to whom the *kula* belongs. The term *gotra* is used to denote a group of undivided families that functions under a leader (Tattwamayananda 2003:33). The elder of the family functions as the priest of the family and guides the family in worship. This is found in *Manusmrti* 1:92-94,

> A man is said to be purer above the navel; therefore the Self-existent one said that his mouth was the purest part of him. The priest is the Lord of this whole creation, according to the law, because he was born of the highest part of the body, because he is the eldest, and because he maintains the Veda. The Self-existent one emitted him from his own mouth, first, when he had generated inner

heart, to convey the offerings to the gods and the ancestors, and to guard this whole (creation). (Doniger and Smith 1991:13)

The domestic ceremonies connected with births, deaths and marriages are of more importance in popular estimation than temple or domestic worship, and they are certainly observed more frequently. A man may neglect the worship of the gods, but he will not neglect the ceremonies on which his status as a Hindu and a member of his caste depend (O'Malley 2000:112). The *namakarna samskara*[47] (naming ceremony) of a one year old child is one of the great events in the *graham,* or family. According to the *Muhoorthem,* (best timing, according to the star of the child) given by the *Jothishem* (the guru), all the *graham* and *gotra* gather in the particular house, only by invitation from the parents, and the grandfather names the child.[48] He is acting as the priest of the family and it is considered a blessing to the child and the parents.

The term *kula* used to denote one vast undivided family consisting of several branches (Tattwamayananda 2003:33). The Hindu scriptures, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana,* depict the joint family system. They are still popular in Indian society. In an Indian household system implicit and unquestionable obedience to the head of the family is considered as the highest duty of its members, especially of a son. This is illustrated in the *Ramayana,* where *Rama* cheerfully gave up the kingdom and royal comforts and went to the forest to live the life of an exile merely to enable his father *Dasaratha* to keep his word. The *Mahabharata* is the example of the great *Bishma* (the hero of the epic) who voluntarily takes the vow of celibacy and renounces his claim to his father's throne in order to remove all obstacles in the way of his father's marriage with a fisher-woman.

The individual *kula* have different god or goddess known as *Kula-devata* (god) which are kept in *kula* shrines. Worship of the *kula devata* or *kula devi* (god or goddess) was prevalent in the society since the very beginning of Hindu religion. Sinha states,

> Since ancient period, every family had a specific protecting family-God known as *Kula-devata*. People believed that the name of the child should be the name of the family-God so that the child would get success throughout his life. Gods as well as Goddesses were supposed to be the family-God or family-Goddess controlling the whole tribe. (1999:58)

People used to have annual festivals, sacrifices and celebrations in an elaborate form in these temples. Local people also joined in the temple festival that featured decorated elephants and fireworks. During the festival time people wore dresses to please that particular god (*prethishtta*) and prepared special food which the god liked. They then participated in the meal after first offering it in the temple. Every family that belonged to the *kula* was expected to follow their *kula-devata* apart from their favorite gods and goddess in their own *graham*. Each *kula* usually occupied one location and lived in different houses, but participated in the common festivals and celebrations.

Hindu religion considers *Samskara* (ceremony) to be very important. Sinha states, "In Hindu religion, *Samskara* or Ceremony is an important media to develop and elevate the outer as well as the inner qualities of human personality" (1999:v). *Samskara* is an important source of social and religious unity. Indians believe that the sense of duty and ideal behavior derive from family traditions, and so all the *Samskaras* are arranged in the context of the family context. Sinha states, "The ceremonies influence the society theoretically and practically both. The conception of duty as well as ideals comes in child's mind from the very beginning of life and this is due to the environmental effect of

his family. In behavior, whatever a child does, shows his inherent cultural mental idea" (1999:vii).

The stories of the family structure and relationship help to explain the household concept of India. Sinha states "From birth till death, there are so many rhythmical rituals for different occasions which inspire human feelings and co-relate life's ceremonial occasions with inspiring mystical influences" (1999:vii). So the household structure and relationships help people understand the socio-cultural setting, because all the religious *Samskaras* are focused in the family.

Structure and Relationships in the Household

The Indian household is united by the religious values found in the sacred scriptures, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the *Grhya-Surtas*, the *Dharmasutras* and the *Dharmasatras* (popularly known as *Smrtis*) (Tattwamayananda 2003:33). There are some variations that can be observed in their practices in different regions and castes, but the core of the ceremonies are the same, because all of them follow the same religious books. The family is the nucleus of social life from the very beginning of the religious history of India. So all the activities are centered on the family, according to the instruction found in the holy scriptures. *Rama* in the *Ramayana* or *Bisham* in the *Mahabharata* become the examples for implicit and unquestioned obedience to their fathers.

Mothers are also well respected like the fathers *Ramayana* portrays *Sita*, the wife of *Rama,* as the ideal wife, the dutiful and caring mother. Swami Tattwamayananda quotes from *Devala Smriti* and states, "There is no God equal to mother in greatness; and there is no *Guru* (teacher, preceptor) like father" (2003:33). The most venerated person

in a traditional Hindu family is the mother. Any remarkable achievements of a man will

be due to the blessing of a pious, God-fearing mother, or the spiritual power of the

chastity of her devoted life. Holiness and purity make a woman ideal and superior to

every one else. The law of Manu states in 2:145,147,

> The teacher is more important than ten instructors, and the father more than a
> hundred teachers, but the mother more than a thousand fathers.
> That his mother and father produced him through mutual desire, and he was born
> in the womb, he should regard as his mere coming into existence.
> (Doniger Wendy and Brain K. 1991:32)

Fathers and mothers are given an elevated position as gods, and this provides an added

credibility to the family in society. Ill treatment of parents brings disgrace and

humiliation to the family members.

Manu also defines the duties of a wife in relation to her husband. Manusmriti

5:154-158 states,

> A virtuous wife should constantly serve her husband like a god, even if he
> behaves badly, freely indulges his lust, and is devoid of any good qualities. Apart
> (from their husbands), women cannot sacrifice or undertake a vow or fast; it is
> because a wife obeys her husband that she is exalted in heaven. A virtuous wife
> should never do anything displeasing to the husband who took her hand in
> marriage, when he is alive or dead, if she longs for her husband's world (after
> death). When her husband is dead she may fast as much as she likes, (living) on
> auspicious flowers, roots, and fruits, but she should not even mention the name of
> another man. She should be long-suffering until death, self-restrained, and chaste,
> striving (to fulfill) the unsurpassed duty of women who have one husband.
> (Doniger Wend and Brain K. 1991:115)

Family life is based on the *asrama dharma* (duties pertaining to life). As I

explained earlier, Manu, the lawgiver, set the life of a man into four different ordinances,

brahmacarin (student life in the house of a guru), *grhastha* (stage of a householder),

vanaprastha (stage of a forest dweller as a hermit) and *sannyasin* (stage of wandering

mendicant) (Basham 1989:100).[49] The second stage, *grhastha*, is the most important in

whole of the *asramas* because at this stage a householder performs different ceremonies and sacrifices in relation to the family members (Tattwamayananda).[50] Indian family life is very closely aligned to community life because no one can perform the duties of the *asramas* without the support of the others. Tripathi states, "Hindu family, like other Hindu social institutions, stands on certain values and beliefs which, to a large measure, continue to fashion its structure even today" (1969:23).

Hindu scriptures specifically mention that one of the major objectives of a marriage is to beget *praja*, progeny. Unless a man begets at least one son, the aim of marriage is not fulfilled. *Manusmriti* 6:37 states, "But if a twice-born man seeks freedom when he has not studied the Vedas, and has not begotten progeny, and has not sacrificed with sacrifices, he sinks down" (Doniger and Smith 1991:121). In the eyes of the Hindu lawgivers, begetting a male child is not optional, but is a matter of obligation. A man remains in debt to his ancestors so long as he does not beget at least one son. Taylor states,

> A very ancient article of faith is that a man is born with three major debts (which are obligations an duties), to sages, gods and ancestors, and by procreating sons he frees himself from the third of these debts and also in this way secures immortality and heaven. This is echoed and reinforced in a number of ways. A man should not think of release or salvation until he has paid off these debts; indeed he seems to obtain release precisely by having a (living) son. The very word for son, *putra*, is taken to mean 'he who saves his father from hell'. (1969:8)

Sons, even today, are considered to be the assurance of security, sacred and social, in India. Sacred security relates to assuring salvation, and social security means providing economic support and care in old age. Only sons or grandsons have the right to light the funeral fire of the father and grandfather. Sons are seen as instrumental for happiness in this world and the next world. Girls are not appreciated as much by parents,

family or society. Girls are thought to be a liability in life. The results are often very sad

and heart breaking. The girl child can be mistreated or even thrown away. O'Neill gives

us a real picture of a baby girl rescued by a midwife in state of Bihar, "A baby girl found

abandoned beneath a bridge finds a home in the arms of a Bihar midwife who goes by the

name of Bedami Devi. Since exposure to blood brings impurity, untouchables deliver

most babies in rural India – often taking extra pay to kill females. Devi belongs to a

group fighting infanticide" (2003:20). This is an all-India phenomenon, for everyone

wants to have son to take care of the debts of the father and grandfather. This makes the

vivaha, marriage, a serious matter for the man and the woman. *Manusmriti* notes in

9:106-109,

> As soon as his eldest son is born a man becomes a man with a son, and no longer
> owes a debt to his ancestors; that is why the (the eldest) deserves to have the
> whole (estate). The son to whom he transfers his debt and by whom he wins
> eternity is the one born out of duty; people know that the others are born out of
> desire. The eldest brother should support his youngest brothers as a father
> (supports) his sons, and in duty they should also behave like sons to their eldest
> brother. The eldest (brother) makes the family thrive, or else he destroys it; the
> eldest is most worthy of reverence among people; the eldest is not held in
> contempt by good men. (Doniger and Smith 1991:209-210)

The Hindu lawgivers are very insistent about maintaining the progeny-chain. After the

marriage ceremony, there are two *Samskaras*, ceremonies, for the couple to help in the

process of begetting. The first is *garbhadhana*[51] (conception) and the second is

pumsavana[52] (quickening a male child). If this fails in a woman, then the *Manu* (9:59)

suggests, let the woman have union with his brother. In case a man's wife is physically

unable to bear sons for her husband, Dharma Shastras permit men to remarry (Tripathi

1969:25). All these laws show that the people are desperate to maintain the chain of the

family tradition at all costs. This thought is promoted in the sacred scriptures and

ingrained in the mind of the people. Tripathi states, "According to Mahabharata, a man

conquers the world by the birth of a son; he enjoys eternity by that of a grand-son and

enjoys eternal happiness by the birth of a great grand-son" (1969:25). These desires

make the family relationship more tense and anxious, and can lead into family problems

and domestic violence.[53]

The male in Indian society functions as the authority figure, and all others in the

family expect him to act. In the traditional family, the wife had no voice in family

decision-making process. But in the contemporary Indian family, the wife has more

voice in disciplining the children, purchasing goods and giving gifts, and in budgeting the

family expenditures. Ahuja states,

> The change in conjugal bonds is also evident from the increasing emancipation of
> wife. In urban areas, wife going with husband for social visits, taking food with
> husband or even before he does, going together to restaurants and movies, etc. –
> indicate increasing 'companion' role of wife. Husband no longer regards his wife
> as inferior to him or devoid of reasoning but consults her and trusts her with
> serious matters. As regards closeness of man to his wife and mother, man,
> particularly the educated one, is now equally close to both. (2002:105)

But the problem also remains in the modern Indian society, because in a market

economy, the male becomes the "bread-winner" and the woman is confined to the home

as a "housewife." Women enjoy a limited amount of freedom because often old pattern

of Hindu social structure prevail in the family life (Dietrich and Wielenga 1997:46).

The relationship between parents and children is also changing. In the traditional

family, authority was on the shoulders of the patriarch and he had power to decide

everything about education, occupation, marriage and the career of children in family.

But in the contemporary family, authority is shifting from patriarch to young parents.

They are helping the children make decisions by themselves. But the religious

phenomena play a greater role in the ceremonies than in everyday life, and the traditional

patriarchal role still comes into play as it did in ancient times (Kapadia 1966:170-172).

There are strong relationships between brothers and sisters in the family,

especially the joint family. They support the young, aged and the weak of the family.

Harmony is maintained through the joint family system and religious, economic, social

and cultural objectives of life are fulfilled. The developing economy in India, as

elsewhere, requires moveable nuclear families for workers, and this force has began to

weaken sibling relationships (Puttenkalam 1977:15). The religious community in India

reacts to this by trying to revive the old Hindu religious values. C. V. Mathew states,

> Mission in Hinduism has been *Aryanization* or *Brahmanization* of the world. The missionary goal is to make everyone an Aryan, a cultured and noble soul, or a Brahmin, the highest stage in the evolution of human nature. The primary tool to accomplish this is culture since Hinduism has more of a cultural character than that of a creedal religion. (2001:284)

This is the challenges for the Christian mission in the Hindu dominated cultural settings

of India. The household structure of Indian society should be seriously considered for

continuing the mission of the church. Christian church workers have to be aware of the

resurgence going on among the religious community.

Conclusion

The socio-cultural setting of India is deeply rooted in Hindu religious beliefs. The

Hindu religious culture embraces everything: the individual, the family and the whole

society. Hindu religion and ideals for society are deeply rooted in the life of the people in

India. The religious texts endorse the daily pattern of life and provide meaning to their

actions. There is an unconscious acceptance of the pattern of cultural behavior, since this

is based on the scriptures and the highest authorities practice it.

The household system unites the families under one head and provides identity and security to the individual. The religion provides freedom for the household to function under the leadership of the elder, as the heroes of the epics show. This provides credibility for the leaders to take care of the needs of the family members seriously and to try to imitate the heroes of the epics. Family members also cooperate with the elder of the household to receive blessings, materially and spiritually.

Festivals unite the community in one entity and bring the epic stories into reality. The *Ganapati* (a popular deity among the Hindus) festival is celebrated to revive traditionalism as opposed to the liberal reformers' version of religion. During the festival times, religious stories are enacted in different forms, such as drama, story and songs. During this time the whole *graham*, *gotra* and *kula* gather as one household to celebrate the festival. Thus, the household system in the Indian social setting is very deeply rooted and prevails in all sectors of the caste groups. This motivates me to see the importance and relevance of this system for the mission of the church in India today.

One of the dominant metaphors of the church, in Christian Scripture, is the "body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12-26). The point of the metaphor is equality and functioning for a higher purpose. All members of the body functions for the growth of the whole and all members honored together with the body. The same way when one member of the body suffers the whole body suffers. But the body metaphor works differently in Hinduism, the body is ranked from higher to lower and the *Dalits* are outside the body, under the foot. Each parts of the body functions independently, mainly, for the good of the head, high caste *brahmin*. This challenges the Christians in India, especially the caste line churches. Hindu religious thinkers tolerate Christianity as

far as Christians accept the social arrangement set by Hindu religion. Any attempt to

which questions caste system viewed suspiciously. The mission of the church is swim

against the tide and overcome the powers in the loving name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

ENDNOTES Chapter 4

[1] The marriage ceremony is arranged in the home of the bridegroom or in the temple. The ceremony begins by lighting an oil lamp, which represents the god of *agni* (fire). This was similar in all the places I visited. The important part of the ceremony was the bride and bridegroom garlanding each other and walking seven times around the light.

[2] Doniger and Smith discusses the idea of *Manu* in the Hindu Scriptures and note, "*Manu*" means the "the wise one", and *Manu* is the name of a king (an interesting attribution, given the priestly bias of *Manu's* text) who is the mythological ancestor of the human race, the Indian Adam. Thus *manava* ("descended from *Manu*") is a common word for "human" (which, in terms of the lexical meaning of *Manu* as "wise", might also be the Sanskrit equivalent of Homo Sapiens). The title therefore conceals a *pun: manava*, "of *Manu*", also means "of the human race" (1991:xviii).

[3] "Hindu" is the word that was applied by outsiders – Greeks and Persians – to the people who inhabited the land beyond the river Indus; it was not used until modern times by Hindus to differentiate themselves from other religious groups (Dandekar1958a:204). Sunder Raj states, "The use of the word 'Hindu' in connection with particular religion is of very late occurrence. The old inclusive term was *Arya dhrama*" (1986:109). Gandhi states, "As a matter of fact, *Aryanism* would have been a better descriptive word than Hinduism" (1986b:27).

[4] Some may object that a vast majority of Hindus in India are illiterate and only a section of the people can practice the religion. It is true that only the twice-born castes have the privilege of performing the sacrifices. But Hinduism has provided at least three other procedures by which the illiterate can practice religion and perform sacrifices. The first is that of *Katha*, story, which means the oral recitation of the scriptures by a learned Brahmin for the benefit of illiterates. Second is *Kirtan*, which is *Katha* plus music. For *Kirtan* the leader is both a preacher and a singer. Third is *Lila* or drama. The epics, *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*, are enacted during which the scripture itself is the text. Thus the illiterate can recite the entire Ramayana and act without the help of any *pandit* (teacher). This makes the Hindu religion unite the society into one entity (Presler 1978:265).

[5] The people of India knew that Gandhi was not simply a political leader or a social reformer or a friend of the poor, but, first and foremost, a man of God, a saint and a *sannyasin* after their own heart. He represented what every Hindu admired and tried to be, but could not achieve, renunciation (*Vairagya*), self-control (*Brahmacharya*), and penance (*Tapas*) (Sarma 1989:184).

[6] According to the 2001 Religious Census of India, Hindus have registered a 1.5 percentage point decline in population since the last census in 1991 and constitute 80.5

per cent of the population in 2001 (Hindu 2004:12). This information is not officially published by the government, even though it was reported in the Indian newspapers.

[7] The word Hindu does not occur at all in any Hindu ancient literatures. The first reference to it in an Indian book is a *Tantrik* work of the eight century A.D. where 'Hindu' means a people and not the followers of a particular religion (Sunder Raj 1986:109).

[8] The Hindu scriptures belong roughly to three different periods. "First, there is the *Rig Veda*, a collection of hymns chanted by the Aryan tribesmen who settled in the Punjab around 1500 B.C. The faith reflected in those hymns is entirely animistic, the gods being personifications of natural phenomena like fire, thunder, fermented juice, and so forth. The ritual is equally primitive, consisting solely of sacrifices, flatteries, and spells. There is no inkling in the *Rig Veda* of doctrines like transmigration, institutions like caste, tendencies like asceticism, or almost anything else that came to characterize Hinduism later on. Those ancient Aryans appear to have been a rough, tough, lusty lot, simple barbarians full of earthy wants and childlike imaginings.

Eventually they moved from the arid Punjab to the lush valley of the Ganges – perhaps around 1000 B.C. – and the new conditions of life profoundly modified the pristine religion. The hymns of the *Rig Veda* continued to be revered, but they had to be interpreted now, for their language had become archaic and their significance altogether mysterious. This fostered the growth of a learned class which became in time a priestly caste, and of a learned literature which became in turn a mysterious lore.

The literature was of two kinds: ritual books called *Brahmanas*, and philosophical commentaries called *Upanishadas*. In both the theology centered around one god named *Brahman*, who was described as the impalpable essence of the infinite universe, the indefinable vital stuff underlying all of Nature. *Moksha*, salvation, could be obtained solely through union with this *Brahman*, and the main problem was how such a union could best be affected. The ritual books maintained that the priest held the key, and therefore urged slavish observance of all priestly ordinances and exactions. The philosophical texts, on the other hand, insisted that each individual held the key, and that it could be turned only by those who devoted themselves to asceticism and contemplation. These two prescriptions were expounded at endless length and between them they all but buried the earlier faith. For some eight hundred years – approximately 1000 to 200 B.C. – the prevailing religion was no longer *Vedaism* but *Brahmanism*.

Finally, this in turn became supplanted by the jungle-growth of sects, cults, and philosophies which is modern Hinduism. Its most venerated scriptures are two enormous epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the latter of which contains the great *Bhagvad Gita*. In addition there are eighteen popular texts called *Puranas*, a number of esoteric documents called *Tantras*, and a mass of sacred liturgies, books of magic, and collections of myths. Though never formally canonized, these scriptures acquired abiding sanctity, being likened to a divine ocean from which the devout could distil the nectar of sublime and absolute Truth" (Browne 1946:57-58).

"The Law-code of *Manu*, though not included in their canon, the code of *Manu* has been so profoundly revered by the devotees of Brahmanism that it certainly deserves

to be counted as one of the scriptures. The work appears to be the product of numerous authors, some of whom may have lived as early as the fifth century B.C. In its present form, however, it probably does not date back further than the second century B.C. *Manu* is the semi-divine hero who survived a primeval Deluge and founded a new race of men. The ascription to him is therefore quite unhistorical, and scholars are inclined to trace the origin of the Code to certain ordinances first published by a family of priests known as the *Manavas*.

The work, which consists of twelve books, is only partially concerned with law in the strict sense of the word. Mostly it recounts legends, prescribes sacrificial and ceremonial rites, and discusses abstruse theological problems. From the beginning to end, however, its spirit is distinctly ethical" (Browne 1946:91).

[9] *Sruti* is considered as the most holy and oldest where as *smrti* is not so directly inspired. *Itihasa* is a Sanskrit compound noun, "thus (*iti*) indeed (*ha*) it was (*asa*)" and translated as "that which is remembered". The *Mahabharata* runs to nearly a hundred thousand verses, mostly of thirty-two syllables each making this the longest poem in the world (Basham 1989:70-71).

[10] The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are the two well known *Smritis* widely read by the Hindus. Sivananda States, "The two well-known *Itihasas* (histories) are the epics (*Mahakavyas*), *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. They are two popular and useful *Sastras* of the Hindus. The *Ramayana* was written by the sage Valmikti, and the *Mahabharata* by Vyasa" (Sivananda 1977:31).

[11] Macdonell writes regarding the Hindu Scriptures, "Sanskrit epic poetry falla into two main classes. That which is comprised of old stories goes by the name *Itihasa*, "legend," *Akhyana*, "narrative," or *Purana*, "ancient tale," while the other is called *Kavya* or artificial epic. The *Mahabharata* is the chief and oldest representative of the former group, the *Ramayana* of the latter . . ." (1929:281).

[12] The basic meaning of *dharma*, a word derived from the root *dhr*, "to sustain," is the moral law, which sustains the world, human society, and the individual. *Dharma* thus replaced the *Vedic* word *rta*, the principle of cosmic ethical interdependence. Although *dharma* generally refers to religiously ordained duty, in other passages it may just mean morality, right conduct, or the rules of conduct (mores, customs, codes, or laws) of a group (Raghavan 1958a:209-210).

[13] The duties of the castes are *Varna Dharma*. The Four castes are *brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaisya* and *sudra* (Sivananda 1977:66).

[14] The word *graham* means that which is holding together. The idea of *graham* depicts the socio-cultural life of India.

[15] The war between sets of cousins: the *Pandavas*, or five sons of *Pandu* (*Yudhisthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula,* and *Sahadeva*), and the *Kauravas* (descendants of *Kuru*), the one hundred sons of the blind *Dhrtarastra*, the eldest of whom was

Duryodhana. Both sets of cousins claim the throne of the *Kuru* land, with its capital of *Hastinapura,* about fifty-five miles northeast of modern Delhi (Basham 1989:71).

[16] *Bhagavad-Gita* means '*Upanisad* Sung by the Lord'. It is a poem of 18 chapters, containing 700 verses (M. G. Mathew 1993:42).

[17] This is the same idea Gandhi used during the Indian independence struggle. E. Mathews states, "The weapons Gandhi chose was were simple: We will match our capacity to suffer against your capacity to inflict the suffering, our soul force against your physical force. We will not hate you, but we will not obey you. Do what you like, and we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. And in the winning of the freedom we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you. So ours will be a double victory; we will win our freedom and our captors in the process" (944:152).

[18] The term *Varna* denotes class, *Asrama,* means 'stage of life' and dharma conveys the meaning 'duties' (Basham 1989:102).

[19] A perfect man according to Manu's definition, 'who consists of three persons united, his wife, himself and his offspring (Manikam 1977:162).

[20] A *brahman, kshatriya,* or *vaishya* boy was, still is today, formally taken to a preceptor to be initiated into the disciplined life of a student of sacred knowledge. This initiation (*upanayana*) constituted his second or spiritual birth – his birth from his parents being only a physical birth. Persons belonging to the first three classes are, therefore, called *dvijas,* or twice-born. The different initiation ages for the various classes suggest that their courses of study were different (Dendaker 1958a:224).

[21] The five *Yajnas* are: *Deva-yajna* – offering oblation unto *Devas*; with recitation of *Vedic Mantras. Rishi-yajna* – study of *Vedas* and teaching of *Vedas* to students, and offering of oblation to *Rishis. Pitri-yajna* – *Tarpana* or ablutions to departed souls and *Sraddha* or annual religious rites performed for departed souls. *Bhuta-yajna* – distribution of food to cows, crows, and animals in general. *Atithi-yajna* – giving food to guests and honoring them (Sivananda 1977:77).

[22] Every day, a priest should take (a portion) of the sanctified (food) for the ritual to the All-gods prepared according to the rules and make an offering in the household fire to the following deities: first to Fire, then to Soma, and then to both of them together, and then to the All-gods and *Dhanvantari*; and then to the goddesses of the new-moon day and the full-moon day, to the Lord of Creatures, to the earth and sky together, and finally to Fire of the Perfected Offering (Manusmrti 3:84-86 cf Doniger and Smith 1991:51).

[23] During the summer of 2004 I participated in two ceremonies, *antyesti samskara* (funeral ceremonies) and *namakarana* (naming) of the law caste and observed that both of the caste groups are doing the same thing. The dead body was led to the funeral place by the elder of the house with a lighted lamp (agni), and the son of the dead lighted the funeral fire. During the whole ceremony the elder of the house was considered as the

priest and was called '*enaken*', but for the high caste there was a professional Hindu priest called Poojari to perform the duties.

[24] All three schools of thought propose different imagery for their explanation of creation. The *Nyaya* school illustrates creation with the example of a potter making a pot out of a clay: God creates the universe as an agent. The *Sankhya* school pictures creation by pointing to milk curdling into a different form. The entire phenomenal world represents nothing more than manifold evolutions of the same matter. The Advaita school view is exemplified by a rope mistaken for a snake, or water seen in a mirage. In the same manner, the entire phenomenal universe is nothing more than but an appearance, projected by the basic reality called the Brahman (Dandekar1958c:300)

[25] The word *caste* is from Portuguese and Spanish origin: *casta*, meaning lineage or race. It is derived from the Latin word *castus* which means pure or chaste. This word was used in the sense of race by the Spaniards, and it was applied to India by the Portuguese in the middle of the sixteenth century. They used this word to denote the Indian institution, the caste system, as they thought such as system was intended to keep purity of blood (Stanislaus 1999:2).

[26] The *purusasukta*, "Hymn of the (Primeval) Man" (*Rg-veda* 10.90), tells of a mighty giant, larger even than the universe as we know it, who was at first the only being in existence. This primal being, feeling lonely, decided to divide itself and produced *Viraj* (Shining Forth), a feminine entity. Then the mating of *Purusa* and *Viraj* produced a second *Purusa*, and after him the gods. At this time, even before the universe existed, the gods decided to sacrifice to their father, the first *purusa*. As the victim they chose his eldest son, the second *Purusa*. He was slain and dismembered, and from the parts of his body the universe, including its human inhabitants, was fashioned.

[27] Ebenezer Raj discuss four roots of the caste system in India, (a) racial (b) occupational, and economic (c) migrational and (d) religious. His discussion focuses on the invasion of (the master class) *Aryans* and the struggles of the *Dravidians* (slave caste), who invaded India. He states "What was unique to Indian slavery was the divine seal on slavery. This was not challenged for three millennia (1985a:10-13).

[28] The origin of caste from the primal man is found in the Rg-veda poem 10.90. Basham quotes,

> When they divided the Man,
>   into how many parts did they divide him?
> What was his mouth, what was his arms,
>   what were his thighs and his feet?
>
> The Brahman was his mouth,
>   of his arms was made the warrior,
> his thighs became the vaisya [peasant]
>   of his feet the sudra [serf] was born.

The moon arose from his mind,
> from his eye was born the sun,
from his mouth Indra and Agni,
> from his breath the wind was born.

From his navel came the air,
> from his head there came the sky,
From his feet the earth, the four quarters from his ear,
> thus they fashioned the worlds.

With sacrifice the gods sacrificed to Sacrifice –
> these were the first of the sacred laws.
These mighty beings reached the sky,
> where are the eternal spirits, the gods.

(Basham 1989:25)

[29] Varna literally means 'color' and Jati comes from the Sanskrit word 'jan' which means 'birth'(Logan 1887:110-111).

[30] Gandhi proposed the term "*Harijan*" for the untouchables which mean children of God, but they themselves did not accept this, because it also mean illicit children born from *devadasis* (temple prostitutes). The Constitution of the Republic of India accepted the Simon Commission proposal in 1939, referring to untouchables as scheduled caste, and this term still continues (Stanislaus 1999:5).

[31] The term *dalit* is derived from the Sanskrit root *dal* which means to crack, open, split, etc. When used as a noun or adjective it means burst, split, broken or torn asunder, downtrodden, scattered, crushed, destroyed, etc . . . . It is Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) who coined the term *dalit* to describe the oppressed and broken victims of the caste-ridden society (Stanislaus 1999:2-3).

[32] "The Reservation system is also social engineering on a smaller scale, so its consequences are not as bad as those of the caste system. Reservation was a secular method of correcting our society's social ills. Its problem is that it makes the State the savior. It does help some people, but it fails to address root issues – our false beliefs and lack of love for one another – thus it creates fresh problems" (Mangalwadi 2002:17).

[33] Chatterjee presents the disparity between the high caste and low caste. "The Brahmin population is only 5% of the total population of India. In terms of numbers, they do not pose any threat to India. Yet in terms of cunning, deceit and treachery they far outgun all other people of India put together . . . . 5% Brahmins capture over 60% occupy all the top positions of the Government of India . . . . The average Indian literacy rate is 30% but the Brahmins are almost 100% literate . . . . Out of the total Indian doctors in the U.S.A. 67% are Brahmins. In the fields of engineering and law is 53% and 57%

respectively. In the field of education their teachers and professors make up more than 51%" (1993:12-15).

[34] Ambedkar was born in 1891 as a Mahar, a member of an Untouchable servant caste. He was made to sit apart from the higher caste boys at school, but he proved himself as a brilliant student. He earned doctorates at Columbia University in New York City and at the London School of Economics. He was the chief draftsman of the Indian constitution. He is known as the India's one true Untouchable hero (O'Neill 2003:19).

[35] The secularization process in India is different from that of the West. Aleaz states, "Secularization in the West may mean a movement from a state of alliance between religion and state towards a progressive separation between religion and state. In the case of India and Hinduism, to some extent, it is the reverse that is true. Hinduism has moved from a state of disengagement towards involvement in politics. In modern India, the power of religion had declined in the private sphere, while it had increased in the public sphere" (1994:79).

[36] Desai studies urban families of Mahuva in Gujarat in 1964 and found that: nuclearity is increasing and jointness is decreasing. The joint relations are mostly confined to parents-children, siblings and uncle-nephews, i.e., lineal relationship is found between father, son and grand son, and the collateral relationship is found between a man and his brothers and sisters (Desai 1964:41).

[37] Kapadia studied rural and urban families (18% urban and 82% rural) in Gujarat (Navasari town and its 15 surrounding villages) in 1955. His main conclusions are: in the rural community, the proportion of the joint families is almost the same as the of that of the nuclear families. The higher castes have predominantly joint family while lower castes show a greater incidence of nuclear family. In the urban community, there are more joint families than nuclear families (Kapadia 1966:112).

[38] Ross studies focused to the Hindu families in the urban setting of Bangalore in Karnataka State in 1957. She found that the traditional joint family is breakaway into nuclear family unites. The small joint family is now the most typical form of family life. Distant relatives are less important to the present generation than they were to their parents and grand-parents (Ross 1961:303).

[39] Gore studied the families in an urban, Delhi, rural and fringe areas of Rohtak and Hissar districts of Haryana in 1960 and found that two types of families: one husband, wife, and unmarried children, and the two, husband, wife, unmarried and married sons-dominated over all others (1970:208).

[40] Shah classifies the families as simple and complex; simple, consisting of whole or part of the parental family and complex, consisting of two or more parental families. He found that one-third families were complex and two-third was simple, indicating the breakdown of joint family system in rural India. Shah's studies focused to one village in Gujarat from 1955 to 1958 (1956:332).

[41] Sachchidananda studied families in 30 villages in one district, Shahabad, in Bihar state and found that; one-fourth families were nuclear and three-fourth were joint, indicating predominance of traditional families. There were more nuclear families in upper castes than in middle and lower castes (1980:258).

[42] I attended the two naming ceremonies, two weddings, five funeral services, two first days of education of a child, and one festival. In all these ceremonies the elders of the families had a greater role to play. The elder of the family had the right to perform rituals and no one is allowed to substitute on his or her behalf. Thus the nuclear family was connected to function within the broader umbrella of the joint family.

[43] The family members are not living in one big house and there is limited control over the members by the head of the family. But the family ceremonies are connected with the religious tradition and in all that the joint family comes into play. The elder of the joint family got the right to perform the ceremonies and they require the other members to follow the Hindu rituals as they are found in the tradition. There is also a great revitalization movement in Hinduism which leads its followers to practice the traditional ways.

[44] When visited different houses, during this summer, I noted that if the house does not have enough place to separate a *pooja* room, it will have a special place on the wall to keep the idol or pictures of the idols, as a place for worship every morning and evening.

[45] Evening worship, performed at nightfall, is called *aarti*. As darkness falls, people ring the bell and light the oil wicks and incense sticks before the god or goddess, then chant some portions of the epics and wave the oil lamp rhythmically and bow before the idols. The evening prayer ceremony will end with ringing the bell (Presler 1978:266).

[46] There will be some *veboothy* or ash of cow dug, will be kept in a pot before the god or goddess and each member of the household applies it on their forehead after their worship. The also take a cold water bath before the performance of the prayers and worship. In the same way the women of the house will put *Chendurapottu* (red mark) on the forehead after a bath in the morning and afternoon. Women are not permitted to enter into the room during their menstrual period. They are considered as unclean and isolated from all the domestic duties.

[47] There are seven *saisava samskaras* (Child ceremonies) which the high caste parents give to a child from birth onwards. 1) *Jatakarma samskara* (writing of horoscopy); 2) *Medhajanana samskara* (producing intellect); 3) *Namakarana samskara* (naming ceremony); 4) *Niskramana samskara* (first outing); 5) *Annaprasana samskara* (first feeding); 6) *Mundana Samskara* (tonsure); 7) *Karanbheda samskara* (boring the ears) (Sinha 1999:14). The whole *gotra* is not invited for all these ceremonies; some of them are celebrated in the *graham* and by the members of the immediate family, like sisters and brothers of the husband and wife.

[48] The grandfather will sit in front of an oil lamp (*Agni*) and the child's father takes the child from his wife's hand and presents the child to the grand father and he (grandfather) calls his name to the child. Then all the *graham* and *gotra* members call the name to the child and give gifts to the child. Most of the *gotra* members present a gold finger ring or earring or money equivalent of gold as gifts. And this followed by a good vegetable meal for every one.

[49] "'*Varnadharma*' is a system of life which enables an individual to perform his duties and obligations toward society, whereas '*asramadharma*' is a scheme of life which enables him to be an ideal man and ideal member of his family, enabling him to perform his duties and obligations towards himself and his family members. *Dharma* is the guiding principle of both" (Tattwamayananda 2003:34).

[50] "A householder's duties and responsibilities can broadly be divided into three categories, namely, a. *yajna* (sacrificial worship), b. *adhyayana* (study) and c. *dana* (liberality). A householder (*grhastha*) who lives with his family, relatives and children has three debts that he must repay in his worldly life. They are a) his debt to the gods to be repaid by performing *yajna*, b) his debts to his ancestors, or *pitryajna* which can be paid only through his offspring, c) the householders have debts to the ancient *Rishis* who are the traditional custodians of learning. This debt can be repaid only by contributions to learning, by propagating the spiritual ideas and by handing over the wisdom which he learnt from his *guru*, to his disciples. This debt, called the *Rishi-yajna* or *Brahma-yajna* chiefly consists of the study and the teaching of the Vedas. d) Worship of men or debt to one's fellow human beings. The householder has a sacred duty to show hospitality towards those belonging to the other three *Ashrams*. While *brahmacharia, vanaprastha* and *sanyasins* spend their time in spiritual contemplation and study of sacred scriptures, it is the householder who feeds them and supports them, by acting as their steward. e) the fifth one, called *bhuta-yajna* consists in feeding both the visible and the invisible living around us. The creation is considered as one spiritual family and an ideal householder has a duty to look after them all. Thus the minute creatures like ants and insects are considered to be a part of the world family" (Tattwamayananda 2003:35-36).

[51] The rite through which a man placed his seed in a woman was called *garbhadhana* (Pandey 1969:48).

[52] After the conception was ascertained, the child in the womb was consecrated by the *Samskara* named *Pumsavana*. By *pumsavana* was generally understood "that rite through which a male child was produced." Vedic hymns recited on this occasion mention *Puman or putra* (a male) and favour the birth of a son. The word *Pumsavana* is rendered into English by "a rite quickening a male child" (Pandey 1969:60).

[53] Taylor states, "Apart from the religious considerations, it is the socio-economic problems that motivate Hindus to beget sons. If a man is blessed with the birth of daughters only, after their marriage, he is left alone with his wife. Also, it is regarded among Hindus inauspicious to marry such girls who have no brothers and those fathers

want the offer of oblations (*pinda dana*) from the progeny of their daughters. In such a situation, a man with daughters only faces the difficulty of finding suitable grooms for them" (1969:16-17).

CHAPTER 5

Missiological Implications of the Household of God

In 1984-86 my wife and I were in central India for theological studies. During these years we came in contact with brother Mathetes's family. They were actively involved in sharing the good news of the gospel to everyone they came across. They had a worship service in their rented house with brothers and sisters from a Hindu background. We all felt at home in this house church. All were welcomed, accepted, loved, and ministered to by brother Mathetes. We also ministered to one to another. All of us related to one another as family members and shared our joys and sorrows. My wife and I could relate to this house church easily because we had experienced the same in our own home church. It was obvious that both of these churches operated as a family, each one eagerly awaiting for worship and Bible study every week. There was no discussion of or division according to caste identity; all felt at home as one family in God.

I knew there were high castes and low castes among the brothers and sisters in this and associated churches because I was part of the ministry team. But there was no caste distinction made between the Christians. We had communion together in worship and shared lunch together after every Sunday service. All the believers participated and enjoyed the lunch together. People hung around even after the worship and Bible studies to share with one another and to encourage one another. These house churches taught oneness in the family of God and encouraged the family to be in relationship with one another.

In this church some of the brothers and sisters also engaged in marriage relationships and other activities without regard to caste, such as helping the others build their houses, sending children to school, and taking care of other needs of the brothers and sisters. While we were in this church, one of the brothers, Charis, from a low-caste background, decided to get married to sister Aletheia, a high-caste family member. It was very hard for both the families which were Hindu, to accept this, and they were not willing to join with them in the marriage ceremony. Both families discouraged them, accusing them of breaking the tradition and warning them that the curse of the gods would come upon them. They also predicted that their *kula* (clan) and *gotra* (tribe) would not accept them. But brother Charis and sister Aletheia understood it as the will of God in their life to be united in marriage. The family of God, the church, stood with them. The church took the initiative and helped them to get married, and now they are residing in Northern India and serving the Lord with their talents in the location they are living. God blessed this family with two children. This young couple's life and testimony eventually led their family members to accept Jesus Christ as the Lord of their life in later years and to become members of the church.

Brother Phos, another low-caste person who lives in one of the slums of Central India, decided to get married to sister Charagma from a southern state of India. It was an inter-state, inter-language and inter-caste marriage which God worked out. He worked out everything very marvelously in their shared life as well. Now they are living in central India. Phos works in a company and Charagma takes care of their four children. Both of them are actively involved in sharing the love of God to the people around them. I met them in the summer of 2004 and enjoyed fellowship with their family.

Brother Phos provides leadership in the church which meets in one of the brothers' houses. In my conversation with Phos, he said, "We enjoy the nearness of the Lord as our Father in all our life situations. We together seek His face in prayer, Bible reading and fellowship with one another."

The message of the gospel changed the lives of these people and made them see the church as their new family, where they found a new identity and relationship with brothers and sisters. Paul contends in Galatians that the Christian identity is found in our membership in the family of God. Paul relates God's promise to Abraham, fulfilled in the Messiah, that he would create a single worldwide family, whose identity-marker would be faith (Galatians 2:15-21) (N. T. Wright 2002:26). There are various uses of family imagery found in the Bible, but, as mentioned earlier, I have focused specifically on the image of the church as the household of God. Ferguson states,

> "House" referred not only to the dwelling place but also to the dwellers in the building, the "household" or "family." This usage for the church is found not only in the text verse cited above but also in 1 Peter 4:17, where the "household of God" is "us," and Hebrews 3:2-6, where Moses is contrasted as a faithful servant in God's house with Jesus as the Son over God's house, "whose house are we" who hold firm our hope. Indeed, "household" appears to be the primary imagery of the church in Hebrews. The members of this household (Ephesians 2:19) share a common faith (Galatians 6:10). (1996:114)

The abundant usage of the word *oikos* in the Bible and its significance and function require an investigation of the relevance of this for our contexts today.

This investigation has focused on the identity of the church in the socio-cultural context of India while relating to the household of God in the world at large. In this chapter I examine the church concept of the Christians and the Hindus in India and explore missiological implications of the metaphor as the household of God. The intent is to assist Christians in India to become meaningfully involved in the mission of the

church today. Properly understood and utilized, the household of God approach could challenge the age-old Hindu caste system by incarnating this reality in the applying the household of God image of the church in India. This chapter therefore discusses how to contextualize the household of God found in the biblical literature within the Hindu household system.

The Indian Response to the Church

In India, over the centuries Christian faith has been challenged by the indigenous religion and culture wherever it sojourned. The message of the gospel awakened hearts toward a living and a holy God who is active in the lives of men and women. Christianity in India was accepted by some people while at the same time some opposed it from the very beginning of its inception. Christianity was viewed as a foreign religion by the Indian community when it began to confront the existing religious and social systems. Fernando states that some "Hindus rejected Christianity because they felt Christianity perpetuated the caste system" (2000:249).

Genuine Christianity does in fact challenge the caste system, and this leads Hindus to view Christian activities suspiciously. Clarke, Bishop of the Church of South India, Madras Diocese, states,

> The Christian population in India after independence was about 2.5 [percent] and now it is 2.6 [percent]. There are many causes for the very slow growth of the church and perhaps one of them is that we have failed to be true to our culture. The church has not grown because we have not been Indian enough for the people around us, for our environment and of our culture. This could well be one of the causes and perhaps rather a significant cause. We cannot point out that church growth has been retarded because of our failure to be more contextual. (1980:3)

Thomas Christianity in India identified with the high-caste Hindu community from the beginning, as noted in Chapter 1, and enjoyed the special privileges and powers of the

local kings.[1] Church buildings were considered as special, sacred places for the

Christians to meet on Sundays. There were understood temples as equivalent to for high-

caste Hindus. The common people related to the Christian community through the

church building. In many cases orthodox as well as militant Hindus of India openly

accused the church as being the friend of the white man (Gladstone 1984:60). Harper

states,

> When sixty thousand members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)
> gathered in Agra for a Seventy-Fifth Anniversary celebration on 13-15 October
> 2000, their leader, or *sarsanghchalak*, K.S. Sudarshan, used the occasion to warn
> RSS volunteers about threats to Hindu nation from Indian Christians. He argued
> that Christian conversions were undermining Hindu dominance and encouraging
> secessionist movements, that Christian churches were funded from abroad and
> dominated by foreigners, and that they encouraged an exclusivist rejection of
> Hindu culture. "How can we allow such people to work here?" Sudarshan asked.
> The *sarsanghchalak* particularly criticized Indian Christians for refusing to
> embrace their Hindu heritage and "called upon Christians to sever links with
> 'foreign' churches and set up a Church in India." (2002:183)

Difficulties of the Church Concept for the Indian Community

The Hindus often said that the Christian missionaries were destroying Indian

culture. But in fact that missionaries have contributed to the Indian society and culture

more than all other religions introduced to India. Judaism and Islam when introduced

into India mainly considered the welfare of their own adherents, whereas Christianity

made a lasting impact on Indian society which continues even today. For example, the

English educational system and philanthropic works introduced by the missionaries

elevated human values in India. Firth states,

> Modern Indian history begins in the nineteenth century with the consolidation of
> British rule and the impact of western ideas on the social, political and religious
> life of the country through the medium of the English language. It would hardly
> be an exaggeration to say that the Indian civilization we know today is the effect
> of English education on the old culture. (2001:181)

But the church has been slow to adopt cultural patterns of Indian society that are not

antithetical to the gospel.

Hindu religious leaders have had a hard time understanding the meaning and

purpose of the concept of the church. Grant states,

> India is an Asian country, but the forms of Indian Church life have been imported
> from Europe. Given the manner in which the Church was planted in India, the
> situation could not have been otherwise. Missionaries from the West brought
> with them the only ways of expressing Christianity they knew, and many
> supposed no other ways possible. Most converts, coming from classes that had
> long been excluded from participation in the traditional culture of India, readily
> accepted from the missionaries not only the jewel of the Gospel but also the
> setting in which it was encased. Western habits of procedure and thought, easily
> picked up in the early days of missions, have been perpetuated by the social
> isolation of Christians from their Hindu neighbors. The natural conservatism of
> the community, too, has caused some western ways to be regarded as intrinsically
> Christian ways. (1959:32)

Biblical teaching on the church, as I mentioned in the first chapter, is based on

personal faith affirmation and living in the community as children of God. The Bible

explains the image of the church as a family beyond all human-made boundaries,

incorporated by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible pictures family relationships

with God and humanity, beginning with Genesis and concluding with a vision of the

wedding feast of the Lamb (Jesus Christ) in the book of Revelation (Revelation 19:7, 9).

As explained in Chapter 4, Hinduism classified the community into various castes

and assigned occupations, languages, and geographical locations accordingly (Figure 8).[2]

As mentioned earlier, Christianity has generally identified with the "superior" castes

among the Hindus from the very beginning of the history of the church in India and this

has had a negative impact to the Indian community. Ambedkar, the leader of the low-

caste community, was hesitant to embrace Christianity when he noticed caste distinctions in the churches. Paradkar states,

> Ambedkar was aware of the Christian contribution to the humanization of western society and its cohesive influence on western culture. But in India, since it worked along the grooves of caste and was split into denominations, the question remained as to whether Christianity could provide the unifying basis for integrating outcastes who were already much sub-divided. Could Christianity be the solution which would give dignity to man and heal unhealthy social division? (1972:59-60)

Ambedkar was well acquainted with Bishop J. Waskom Pickett while Ambedker was in Bombay. He was a devoted student of the Bible, and he compared himself with Moses who liberated his people from slavery. But Ambedkar was suspicious about the numerical strength of Christians in India through conversion because he was thinking it would strengthen the hold of British imperialism in India. Paradkar notes,

> During those years Ambedkar believed that the teachings of Christ and the liberation message of St. Paul proved a 'perfect antidote to the poison Hinduism has injected into our souls and a dynamic strong enough to lift us out of our present degraded position.' But the churches created by the Christian Missions produced 'a different feeling.' He saw the Christian mission in western India as 'an instrument of de-socialization' as conversion to Christianity was making Christians of outcaste origin 'self and self-centered.' 'They don't care a snap of their finger what becomes of their former caste associates so long as they and their families, or they and the little group who have become Christians, get ahead. Indeed their chief concern with the reference to their old caste associates is to hide the fact that they were in the same community. I don't want to add to the number of such Christians.' (1972:60-61)

Ambedkar was disappointed in the caste distinctions he found among the Christians and the attitude of the new Christians toward the caste communities. The early missionaries took the lead in eradicating the caste system from the church but they found it is very hard to keeps caste distinction from functioning within the church. Neill wrote one of the actions of Bishop Daniel Wilson of Calcutta to change the caste system from the church.

He laid down the regulations under eight heads the points which he regarded as essential. Of these the most important are as follows: (1) all converts should sit together in church, (2) all should come without distinction to the Lord's Table, (3) the country-priest and catechist should receive into his house anyone that came to him on a religious errand, or on business, of whatever caste, (4) the congregations should admit into their houses the catechists, who are fully appointed to instruct them and read with them, (5) in the churchyard, no separate place should be allotted for the interment of those of the higher castes, as they are called. (1985:405)

Neill, when assessing the results of the early efforts to remove the caste system from the church, wrote, "Even after a century and a half it is not possible to say that all caste distinctions have been eliminated from the church. But where it still persists Christians have a bad conscience about it, especially where Hindus have gone beyond Christians in taking action against caste feeling and caste prejudice" (1985:406). The church in India, even today, struggles to finds answers to the age-old practice of the caste system (Keithahn 1971:170). The challenging question which the Indian church is facing today is how to bring biblical teaching into the daily realities of Christian life?

The answer to this question raises the more basic question of how Christians in India want to associate with the Indian people and to be known among their communities. As mentioned earlier, if the caste system is a major challenge to Christianity within India, the church building as an imported idea for the Christians in India is also an issue.

Hinduism considers temples as sacred places where the deity dwells (Neill 1985:411). Temples are not necessary for a Hindu to experience *moksha*, spiritual attainment however. Wilkins makes a comparison between the Hindu temple and Christian church buildings. He states,

The churches of Christendom have been built to hold the worshippers, who have come to join together in solemn prayer and praise, to witness processions of the officiants, to hear the solemn strains of music, and to listen to the instructions and exhortations of the preachers. But the temples of the Hindus, having a different

purpose to serve, are built in a different style. There are a few large temples, but as a rule they are small. No congregation gathers in them to witness an imposing ceremonial, or to listen to addresses on religion and morals. The Hindu's object in visiting a temple is not to enter, but simply to walk round the building, hand his offering to the officiating priest, if possible catch a glimpse of the idol it contains, and after prostrating himself before it, return home. (1887:57-58)

Hindu sacred scriptures are also silent about temples but they do talk about the priests. Hinduism emphasizes worship in the homes and it is one of the important duties of the household.[3] Temples are built to show the *bhakti* (devotion) of a person to a particular god or a goddess. The low castes and the untouchables are prohibited to enter into the temple area at any time because most of the temples are built by the high castes (Raghavan and Dandekar 1958:351). Wilkins notes, "Many of the temples are gifts of private individuals, who have erected them to obtain 'merit,' i.e. they are regarded as works of supererogation as a set-off against his sin" (1887:58). The temples are also built to demonstrate the devotion to a god through architectural ability of a devotee (Embree 1958:208).

The Hindu community in India believes that church buildings represent Western religion, and they are hostile towards Christians and church buildings even today. So why do the Christians in India need to insist on constructing special buildings for the churches, whether in the Western model or identical to Hindu temples? (Aghamkar 2002:98-99). Rajasekaran states,

> A temple is just the house of the deity just as the palace is the house of a king. The church has always been a corporation in the West. Hinduism does not tolerate this and prefers partnership in religion which permits liberty for the individual in his religious avocation. Hinduism has, therefore, rejected after due deliberation the idea that lies behind the church as detrimental to spiritual growth of the individual and also as fatal to the freedom and liberty of the soul. The Hindu profoundly distrusts the visible church for the very reason that it obscures the invisible powers for which he yearns whole heartedly. (1993:83)

The English word "church" was alien to the Indian people even if transliterated into the native Indian languages. Aghamkar notes, "Neither the word nor the humble structure gave any impression of the sacredness of the place to the native multicultural community" (2002:15). Neill comments that the early church buildings presented a wrong idea about the church to the people of India. He states,

> There had been churches in many places in India before there had been Indian Christians. The Indians had for years had before their eyes such fine buildings as St. John's Church in Calcutta and the Fort Church in Madras. It was natural for them to conclude that that was what a church ought to look like, and they became wedded to a tradition of nineteenth-century Gothic, the least suited of all architectural forms to a tropical climate. (1985:411)

Indian Christian Theologians' Response to the Western Model of Churches

Indian Christian theologians also find it hard to relate to the identification of the church with buildings. Boyd writes of the attitude of Chenchiah, an Indian Christian theologian, to the organized church,

> Coming into the Church from a Hindu background he found it oppressively alien and western, introspective and quarrelsome, more interested in administration than in the Christian life. Church administration, the hierarchy, property, ritual, fixed dogmas and doctrines – all these were features which he felt should be eliminated in order that men might be able to secure that direct contact with the living Christ which for him was the basis of the faith. (1969:159)

Keshab Chandra Sen, another Indian Christian theologian, was reluctant to join any church because he felt it was denationalizing and isolating the Christians from the Hindus and from the Indian culture (Boyd 1969:35). Sadhu Sundar Singh, a well known Indian saint, was baptized in an Anglican church, but later he surrendered his preacher's license when he found that it prevented him from preaching in churches other than the Anglican. For the rest of his life he preached wherever people would invite him. As occasion offered he partook of communion wherever he happened to be. But he was not really

interested in the church as a visible, organized institution, and preferred to think of it as the whole body of those who belong to Christ. Boyd quotes from his writings,

> I belong to the Body of Christ, that is, to the true Church, which is no material building, but the whole corporate body of true Christians, both those who are living here on earth, and those who have gone into 'the world of light.' When asked to which Church he belonged it was his custom to reply, 'To none. I belong to Christ. That is enough for me.' He continues, "we need the living Christ. India wants people who will not only preach and teach, but workers whose whole life and temper is a revelation of Jesus Christ. (1969:105)

Various Indian Christians have been highly critical of the organized pattern of the church and its identification with church buildings, chiefly on account of the church's "foreignness." The Hindu mindset in India is institutional in social life and highly individual in the religious sphere. The idea of the church as an institutional reality, therefore, does not attract Hindus (Rajasekaran 1993:83). This reality has led Indian church leaders and missionaries to experiment with the indigenous patterns of the religious life of the Hindu community. One result was Christian *ashrams*. Ashrams were familiar among the Hindus in different ways.[4] Could ashrams then effectively convey the meaning of the church in an Indian context?

The Hindu ashram is a house of peace, repose and tranquility.[5] Ashram is the abode of a holy man or guru and his disciples (Mataji 1978:43-46). The word *ashram* has been defined as the "abode of those who have conquered the 'ego' and gained complete control of the mind" (Thomas 1955:166).[6] The ancient Indian ashrams were forest schools situated near a river, in the midst of very peaceful natural scenery and under the direction of a *rishi* or *guru*.[7]

The Christian ashram movement began when the missionaries and Indian Christians realized that one of the greatest obstacles to Christianity was the prejudice in

the minds of the Indian people because Christianity was foreign and the religion of the ruling class. The earliest Christian ashram was started by an Indian Christian, Jesudasan, and his Scotish friend Forrester Paton at Tirupatur, Tamil Nadu State, South India, in 1921 (Thomas 1955:170). E. Stanley Jones started a summer ashram at Sat Tal in the foothills of the Himalayas in 1930 and in 1935 at Lucknow, Uttrapradesh, India (Taylor 1973:12, 14). Thomas states,

> Regarding the beginning of his Ashram, Jones says: "I suppose it began partly out of the urge to bring the Christian movement into closer relationship with nationalistic India and partly through the feeling that, as an evangelist, I needed to demonstrate in some concrete way, through an institution, the things I was talking about in the public. It would give me the discipline of concreteness, the necessity of trying out one's ideas under life itself." (1955:170)

The question remains whether the Christian ashrams met the needs of the Indian church. Did the Christian ashrams accept or welcome all the caste groups of the Indian society? As mentioned earlier, the ashram life excluded the *sudra* caste and the untouchables. Ashrams attracted the intelligent high-caste community. In Hinduism, each ashram was known after the *guru* for a special gift of yoga to lead his disciple to ultimate reality, Brahman. But Stanley Jones found there is a difference in the ashram ideal and in reality, and he closed the Lucknow Ashram in 1940. Thomas quotes Jones, "Perhaps this outer Ashram structure had to come down that the Ashram, the real thing, might come more deeply into our hearts. And perhaps out of the real thing in our hearts will some day be erected a more adequate expression of the Ashram" (1955:184). Thomas continues the discussion and states,

> In spite of all these experiences, Jones has come to the settled conviction that he has discovered "something that has the feel of the ultimate upon it." "Strip off the name 'Ashram' and its Indian framework," he says, "and you have a basis for living which can be universalized a group living together in cooperative fellowship under a common purpose, with physical needs met and each giving to

the collective good according to his ability, is an ultimate way of life." (1955:184-185)

Jones' efforts in adopting ashram ideals of the Hindus to Christianity made an impact on the educated non-Christians of India, but it was limited, for only a special few could afford to attend.

The image of the church as the family of God, however, lost its meaning in the ashram setting. In the family of God all are welcomed without any barriers of caste, education, finance, or even language. Ashrams however took people from the realities of life and encourage a life secluded from the society. But Christian spirituality encourages living among the people as a community, as the people of God.

Jesus invited everyone into the household of God, irrespective of their religious, social, economic or territorial boundaries.[8] Jesus offered Israel a freedom beyond their territorial identity and biological credentials.[9] He challenged them to have a change of heart which would change their perspective about the Heavenly Father and other people. So, for the Jews, the question which Jesus asked was very revolutionary, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" and it drove them away.[10] But he continued, "For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:33-34). This statement showed listeners how Jesus wants to welcome people into the household of God beyond their set of criteria (Nacpil 1998:152-154). Jesus was emphasizing the importance of doing the will of the Father rather than claiming the blood line of Israel's family. Osiek notes, "Luke, by giving Jesus' answer to the woman in the crowd who pronounces a blessing on his mother: 'Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it' (Luke 11:27-28), even adds to Jesus' lack of enthusiasm for his family" (1996:3). Jesus was speaking of the importance of the family of God, beyond biological

family relationships. Jesus speaks to the disciples' anxiety about their future when Peter

asked what they will get in following him. Jesus promised that in this life they will

receive a hundredfold – "brothers and sisters, mothers and children" (Mark 10:29-30).[11]

Stott states,

> . . . the Christian community is in essence a family, God's family. Probably the
> two strongest elements in our Christian consciousness are an awareness of God as
> our Father and of our fellow-Christians as our brothers and sisters through Christ,
> although at the same time we can never forget our responsibility to those outside
> the family whom we long to see brought in. (1978:192)

Those who put faith in Jesus Christ as the Lord of their life belonged to the household of

God. They also possessed the same Spirit of God and behaved with one another as

brothers and sisters (Romans 8:14-16; Galatians 4:5-7).

In the context of Jesus' teaching and practice, we need to examine planting

churches on caste lines in India. C. V. Mathew and Corwin observe,

> At present the homogeneous unit principle as articulated by the church-growth
> school is being tested within the Indian context. The reasoning does like this: it is
> strategically important that we minimize cultural barriers for people wishing to
> hear the gospel. Before people can group together there must be a degree of
> homogeneity – common language, common beliefs, common goals, common
> values. Cultural diversity tends to fragment a group, making mobilization of
> resources difficult. Evangelism following along homogeneous ethnic lines would
> appear strategically sound. But what of Scriptural admonitions on social equality,
> such as "no difference," "all one," "no middle wall of partition?" (1994:105)[12]

The problem of the Hindu caste system was that it categorized people under fixed

boundaries. If the churches are also following the same path of the Hindu caste system,

they are also expecting similar group behavior in the church and making similar

boundaries for each caste separately. Christ affirmed dignity and freedom for every one

beyond ethnic identity or origin.

The question then is: How can the church be true to the word of God? Houston states,

> At the heart of the thinking of Jesus is his concern for the individual. Everyone has to hear the Good News. The last lost sheep has to be searched for until it is safe in the fold (Matthew 18:12-14). His own work is a model. He calls each of the disciples personally. He takes times to let the faith of the centurion blossom, even though he is a Roman (Matthew 8:5-13). Whilst obviously concentrating on Jews, he responds to the insistence of the Canaanite woman that he cure her daughter (Matthews 15:21-28). Everyone matters. Though the task is global, and the units to be penetrated are many, the essential drive is to help people one by one discover the Father's love. (1979:262-263)

The Christian message provides freedom for everyone to be part of the family of God and to participate in the meals and ceremonies with each other. The family imagery, especially marriage, is used to explain the relationship with Jesus and the church. The bridal imagery is employed to stress the church's purity (2 Corinthians 11:2-3) and her sense of expectation in preparation for the eschatological consummation of union with Christ (Revelation 19:7-8; 21:2, 9) (Ferguson 1996:115). Paul presents his ministry and mission from the perspective of family imagery. When Paul writes to the Corinthians about the Lord's Supper, he affirms the oneness of the family in Christ is possible only by faith in him: "Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17).[13] Paul applies the same family imagery to himself as a "father" when addressing the converts (1 Corinthians 4:15), whom he cared for like a father (1 Thessalonians 2:11) and as a nursing mother (1 Thessalonians 2:7). He described the believers as his children (1 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4).[14] Paul promoted a family relationship between himself and his addressees and among the addressees themselves, who shared a sense of affection, mutual responsibility and solidarity (Horrell 2001:299).

In South India, especially in Kerala state, to embrace Christianity means getting into a high-caste level. This is because the Syrian Christians who migrated to India were considered as a high caste by the local *Rajas* (kings) and by the Hindu religious leaders (Thonippara 2000:71-72). But the Syrian Christians were reluctant to associate with or to receive the low caste into their churches. So generally in Kerala state Christianity acquired high status in the society. But in other states of India the case is different, and joining Christianity means joining the low caste (Basu 2000:87-88). This makes it hard for both high-caste and low-caste people to embrace Christianity. The caste-line church planting impacted the Hindu society in a wrong way in India, says McGavran. "To become Christian in India tends to mean 'becoming low caste.' As a result very few of the numerous openings among the respectable castes in Andhra State are being entered by either Churches or Missions" (1979:245).

My personal experience, as a pioneer church planter in India for the last 30 years, is that it is better not to make any distinction of caste from the very beginning of the ministry, but encourage everyone to relate as brothers and sisters. I was serious in teaching all the believers the biblical pattern of the family of God and encouraging everyone to take part in the fellowship meals arranged after the worship services, Bible studies, and cottage meetings. I also used to assign the church members to visit the houses of the brothers and sisters and minister to one another in their need. We used to arrange programs for the young people, irrespective of the denominational lines, so that they might mingle together and care for one another.

The biblical pattern of the church was not strictly homogenous (Acts 13:1-3), and

this biblical patter is more appropriate and desirable in India, as well as other parts of the

world (Jones 1970:86). Jones wrote,

> The Christian society, when true to itself, is a society of the sons and daughters of
> God, a family of God. The statement of Jesus is this: "One is your Father" and
> "all ye are brethren" – a family of God. In a family there is no class. So this does
> not reduce us to the class of the proletariat, it raises us to the family of God.
> Every person is "a person from whom Christ died." We all are equal before God,
> therefore equal before men. This gives us an equality upward. (1970:74)

The biblical vision of the family of God, from the time of Noah, Abraham, and

Israel was inclusive of all the nations. The nations (*ta ethne*) were in mind when God

called the people of Israel and commissioned them to be the light of the nations (Isaiah

42:6; 49:6; 51:4; Luke 2:32; 4:18-30; Acts 13:47; 26:23). Election, both of Israel and of

Christians, is to fulfill the mission of God by becoming the household of God, reflecting

the character of the Heavenly Father in daily life. The mission of Israel was not only to

tell others about the wonders of God but also to be a family of God and lead the nations

to the family of God. C. Wright states,

> The purpose of redemption is ultimately to restore the perfection of God's
> purpose in creation, that perfection which sin and the fall have corrupted. Israel,
> as God's redeemed community, was to have been a "light to the nations" – not
> just the vehicle of God's redemption, but an illustration of it in actual historical
> life. Israel's socio-economic life and institutions, therefore, have a paradigmatic
> or exemplary function in principle. It is not that they are to be simply and
> slavishly imitated, but rather that they are models within a particular cultural
> context of principles of justice, humanness, equality, responsibility, and so forth
> which are applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to all people in subsequent cultural
> context. (1990:xviii)

The call of the church is to present a world order which is higher than any existing order,

God's order, the kingdom of God. If the Christians in India, as well as Christians in other

parts of the world, can truly accept God as their Father, there will be oneness among the

people. Then the inferior and superior mindset will also vanish in the presence of the Lord (Jones 1970:76). The challenge is how to practice the household of God in India today.

Challenges for the Church in India Today

When Bishop Lesslie Newbigin was lecturing on the nature of the church, he asked the question, "What is the reason for the breakdown of Christendom?" He stated, "But there is a further reason for the fact that the breakdown of Christendom has placed the doctrine of the Church in the center of our thinking. One phase of that breakdown has been the dissolution of the ties which bound men and women to the natural communities of family, village, or working group, to which they had belonged" (1953:3). The question Bishop Newbigin raised was very relevant in the Indian context because the church in India is still in identity crisis, from within the church and outside of the church. The militant Hindu community speaks and writes against Christianity proclaiming that they are not part of India.[15] C. V. Mathew states,

> Only Hindus are the true sons of the soil, the true children of Bharat Mata and others are guests, refugees, invaders, aggressors, threats, enemies, traitors, hostiles, and potential fifth columnists. The options before the non-Hindus in Hindusthan, as suggested above, are to get assimilated into the Hindu race by losing their own identity, or to live wholly subordinate to the Hindu race with no rights, or to face a 'holocaust' – total annihilation. (2001:190)

Secondly, the crisis of the Indian church is her self-understanding among the Hindu community. There are two crucial problems the church faces today in India. First is the denominational identity and second is the caste identity in the church. Koshy states,

> All too often, people, both within the church and without, testify that we are not a New Creation! Is this not very largely due to the fact that we are still Pentecostal,

True Baptist, Anglicans and not in Christ. There needs to a change of direction, a true repentance. Let us be thankful for all the good things that have come to us through Luther, Calvin, St. Francis of Assisi or whatever the channel. Nevertheless, we are something less than what we ought to be in the church, and in the community, if we are not 'in Christ.' (1971:166)

The Church Beyond Caste and Denominational Lines

Planting churches beyond caste lines as well as beyond denominational lines is a challenge in India today. What should be the identity of such a church within India as well as outside of India?

The fact is that the biblical image church as the family of God is not identified with a denomination or with a particular nation. The beauty of the family image of the church is that it can identify to a particular location or a nation as well as it can relate the church in other parts of the globe (Figure 10). God so loved the world (humanity) beyond all human boundaries and sent his only beloved Son to the world (John 3:16). Paul argues that his apostleship is to build a new family of God in Christ Jesus. N. T. Wright states,

His apostleship, his commission to build this new family, came from God himself, and from Jesus the Messiah. For Paul, this isn't a system of salvation, or a new way of being religious. It's the announcement that Jesus, the crucified Messiah, is exalted as Lord of the whole world; therefore he is calling into existence a single worldwide family. (2002:6)

Family imagery is universal and thus it can connect the members easily to the larger family, which is the family of God in any part of the world.[16]

Indian Christian theologians have struggled to understand the church concept through the lens of Hindu philosophical teachings, but this did not give satisfactory results because it ignored the sociocultural realities of the people. As mentioned earlier,

the Hindu community functions by the household system within each caste. The identity of the individual is known by the castes and by the household names in the castes.

The church as the family of God, however, can provide identity and confidence to its members on a non-caste basis. The family of God offers a higher position and identity than the existing caste distinction in the community. Jones states, "We are all equal before God, therefore equal before men. This gives us an equality upward" (1970:74). The challenge is to actually embody the church as a family of God higher than the existing system.

The Brahmin community is considered as the highest caste and no one is above them. If the family of God is higher than the existing system, it can be a challenge in positive and negative ways for the churches in India. As mentioned earlier, caste sets the destiny of the individual and virtually no freedom can transcend caste. The church, as the family of God, offers freedom for the brothers and sisters to relate to one another beyond the caste and denominational lines. From his long experience as a missionary in India, Jones, wrote,

> If God is our Father, then men are our brothers. "One is your Father" and "all ye are brethren." The oneness of humanity under the oneness of God is an ultimate view of humanity and God. And is the evidence of the discovery of science bearing this out? Yes. If anything is emerging about humanity it is this: There are no permanently inferior races and no permanently superior races. Given the same stimulus and the same incentive the brain of humanity will come out about the same. (1970:76)

Hinduism was not a missionary religion until recently. Hindu religious values were propagated to the adherents by way of life and teachings. Hinduism was not based on an organized institution as is found in the churches or mission organizations.[17] The

people who propagated Hinduism emerged from the Hindu devotees, and people

recognized and followed their school of thought. Rajasekaran notes,

> The three *Acharyas* of Hinduism viz. Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa spread
> their creeds all over India without any organized band of preachers. Spiritual
> contagion – not conscious propaganda – was the real missionary. It is literally
> true in India that people caught religion just as they caught cold! The Western
> way of thinking that organization strengthens the forces of propagation was never
> true in India. (1993:86)

This is a lesson for contextualized Christian witness in India. Christians are

called to live out the message of the gospel in their lives and in this way challenge the

people around them. At the same time the church is also called to send missionaries into

other parts of the country as well as abroad (Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 10:14-15).[18]

The emphasis on the family of God from the beginning of such mission work can make a

positive difference in the field.[19] The church in India can expand as leaven permeates in

dough (Matthew 13:32). Where the churches practice the words of Jesus, to be the light

and salt of the society (Matthew 5:13-16), the expansion of the church will be

spontaneous.

The Household of God and the Hindu concept of *Avatara*

Practicing the image of the church as the family of God in the Indian context is

more challenging than elsewhere. An important aspect of the Christian message is based

on God's creation of the universe. The Genesis account says that it was through his word

that everything came into existence. This affirmation stands over against the Hindu

theories of beginnings mentioned in Chapter 4. According to Hinduism, the world itself

is God and therefore there is no need for creation. Everything that exists is simply a

manifestation of God, and is identical with him (Boyd 1977:48). Christianity, however,

maintains that God created the world, and that therefore matter is not something evil or

illusory, but is good. "God saw all that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis1:31). Boyd states, "The created world – including the human body – is not something evil to be shunned or abandoned; it is something good, designed and made by God, and worthy to be used and enjoyed in the way that God intended" (1977:49). As mentioned in Chapter 4, Hinduism's view is that everything is *Brahman* (*tat tvam asi* and *aham Brahman asmi*). The creation has no existence independent of *Brahman.* Christians understand God as more intimate and active in creation. God controls history and human life; he is concerned about humanity and became incarnated in the world in order to redeem the universe.

The Hindu understanding of incarnation is not redemptive but protective, to protect the righteous from the wicked. Christians understand the Incarnation as the greatest expression of God's love towards humanity (John 3:16). God incarnated himself in human form to save humanity, irrespective of caste distinctions, language, color, or nationality. The word *avatara* in Hinduism, often translated as incarnation, means "to descend" (Boyd 1969:80). Wilkins states, "The Hindu professes to believe in innumerable incarnations of deity, and finds no difficulty in adding to their number. When any great teacher or reformer arises he is either deified during his lifetime or by his followers after his death" (1887:138). The purpose of *avatara* is found in Bhagavadgita IV:7, 8, where Krishna says to Arjuna, "Whenever righteousness declines, O Bharata! and wickedness rises up, then I came forth myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for establishing righteousness firmly, I come into being from age to age" (Panoli 2003:204-205).

Panoli interprets these verses of the Bhagavadgita,

> Whenever harm occurs to the principles, which are the means to the well-being and liberation of beings, i.e. to the *varna-ashrama-dharma*, and wickedness pervades, then, O Bharata, I come forth myself through Maya. To afford protection to those who move on the righteous path, to destroy the evil-doers and to establish righteousness firmly, I come into being in every age. (2003:205)

There are at least three important aspects of *avatara* that challenge the Christian message on Incarnation. First, Hindu *avatara* appears to protect and reestablish the *varna-ashrama-dharma* (caste system). Secondly, *avatara* appears to destroy the wicked and to protect the righteous. Thirdly, *avatara* appears as *maya*, or illusion.[20] In contrast, the basic motive of the biblical Incarnation is to save the wicked as well as the righteous; the love of God was the motivation (Matthew 9:13; Mark 2:15). Biblical Incarnation happened only once and it remains effective for all of humanity forever. The message of Christian Incarnation is that God loves everyone in Jesus Christ, irrespective of their identity. The Incarnation of Jesus Christ did not fix or re-establish a system which divided by castes. On the contrary, Christian Incarnation opens up the gate for everyone to approach God without any barrier (Romans 5:1-2). This makes the Incarnation of Christ unique and universal. Boyd states, "There is only one Incarnation, that of Christ, for he is unique and in him God himself, *Parabrahman* than whom there can be none higher, becomes incarnate" (1969:181). Biblical teaching on Incarnation is of God assuming the form of a human being and living in the midst of the people in order to understand them and help them to know the Heavenly Father's will in their life. It is the basis for atonement by which all people, irrespective of caste, nationality, or ethnic identity, may be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. The Incarnation of Christ reveals the plan of God, the *oikonomia* of God, for the whole creation. Meeks states,

> From the perspective of the biblical traditions *oikos* can be understood first as the household in which God wants to give people access to life; second, it is the

household of the creation in which God wants God's creatures to live together in symbiosis; third, the *oikos* is the world that God wants to make into a home by establishing God's justice and peace among the peoples and nations. God's *oikic* work integrates economy, ecology, and *oikoumene* and demonstrates that redemption must be found interdependently in all of these dimensions. (1989:34)

God takes the initiative to reconcile with humankind and establish a redemptive relationship with the whole creation. In the sight of God there is no distinction; all people are equally in need of salvation (Romans 3:23-27) and are offered salvation.

The Household Roles, Functions, and Relationships in the Indian Church

Roles, functions and relationships play a very important part in the Hindu household setting. In the Hindu household the elder is responsible for the rest of the family members. In the household of God, respect must be given to all the family members, and all should be assisted in their time of need.

The roles, functions, and relationships of the Hindu community are based on the caste identity of each person by birth and the *dharma* assigned to each caste (as explained in chapter four). Thus *dharma* becomes the focus to understand the society and the Hindu way of life. Dandekar states, "There is no single English word that conveys all the meanings of *dharma*, but 'duty,' 'law,' 'obligation,' 'proper action,' and 'right behavior,' have been used by translators'" (1958a:217).[21] Manickam states, "Manu conceived the social order in the context of the creation of the cosmic order as an extension of the self of Brahma, the progenitor of all beings" (1977:152). The *Manusmrti* places *Brahmanas* (high caste) as the top in the social order (Figure 8), because they are the embodiment of purity and truth.[22] The concept of *dharma* found in the sacred scriptures of the Hindu sets the society intact and sets the boundaries for each caste in order.

The image of the church as the household of God, in contrast, offers opportunity, freedom, and dignity for every member irrespective of their caste identity. The Bible presents love as the motivation for God to act in humanity and men and women are expected to respond to it, not only towards God and also towards other people. While the Hindu community is built around *dharma*, duty, the biblical community is built around love (Deuteronomy 7:6-8; Matthew 22:37-40; John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-12). The motivation for any action of the household of God is response towards God's love. This reflects in the personal life and in the community.

The God of the Bible suffers along with the people as a father (Isaiah 63:9; John 12:32). Boyd states,

> For the Hindu, Brahman is *Ananda*, bliss, and so it is impossible to conceive of him as suffering or as sharing in the sufferings of men. The Christian, however, as he sees the Cross of Christ knows that God does suffer. Secondly, the Hindu doctrine of *karma* cannot be reconciled with the idea of redemptive suffering, for according to it all suffering is the result of evil deeds, in this life or previous ones, and no place remains for vicarious suffering. (1969:134)

The challenge for the church in India is to present the love of God in the midst of suffering and to go through the suffering along with the people to present the love of God in practical reality.

The challenge of the church in the India is to make the message relevant to its members and to the community around them. There is significantly less emphasis on collective spirituality in the Hindu religion, compared with Christianity, although the initiation process of gurus is a collective. Also, society is bound together by a joint family system. It functions as the controlling factor in the individual's life and conduct (Aleaz 1994:78). Aleaz observes,

The culture which is evolving in India today is not a complete abandonment of traditional culture but an acceptance of foreign cultural elements in accordance with the Indian traditions. Study of social change in India by various sociologists and social anthropologists show that the process of orthogenetic and heterogenetic cultural changes are both active in present day India. Orthogenetic process means the carrying forward of the traditional cultural elements into systematic modern cultural traits and heterogenetic process involves the creation of original modes of thought that are not in the traditional culture or are in conflict with old cultures and civilizations. (1994:79)

The church which focuses on Christian discipleship can bridge the gap between the caste groups. Churches founded along caste lines participate in the same oppressive system to which they have always belonged. Banerjee states,

> Dalit Christians too belong to the same caste as their Scheduled Caste Hindus do and go through the same agony and oppression as the others of the same castes. They all belong to the despicable Dalit community who are struggling to stand up and claim their legitimate right as the obedient nationals of this great nation.... Dalit Christians also live in the same system of oppression and have been denied real justice and human dignity. (1997:41)

How is it possible to save this people from a life of slavery? How many Christians are willing to share their own experiences and accept them, particularly the *Dalits*, into the household of God? The conscience of the Christians needs to be challenged with a message of the Lord Jesus Christ. There should be a community which practices the message and is able to live out Christian values. The Fatherhood of God over all needs to be demonstrated in order to break the barriers so the church can realize the brotherhood of one family. Every believer needs to understand the biblical perspective of the church, which is rooted in the household of God and demonstrates unity in Christ beyond caste or denominational lines. This will have an impact on society and give freedom for people to move in all the areas of life. All the caste groups, including the *Dalits*, should welcome one another as God has welcomed them. India needs to build a new family with ties beyond the caste lines.

This is possible only by having a different mindset, one that sees all humanity as brothers and sisters belonging to one family, the family of God. The segregating traditional household setting needs to be challenged by the message of Christ, with aspects from both the traditional and the biblical understanding of the household of God, and then each one will be able to experience freedom and dignity and peace and joy and mobility in their total life without any fear. When Christianity assumes or endorses caste identity, it fails to offer liberation and freedom from the oppressive caste system which has existed for centuries. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin's questions are very relevant for the Christians in India,

> Is there in truth a family of God on earth to which I can belong, a place where all men can truly be at home? If so, where is it to be found, what are its marks, and how is it related to, and distinguished from, the known communities of family, nation, and culture? What are its boundaries, its structures, its terms of membership? And how comes it that those who claim to be the spokesmen of that one holy fellowship are themselves at war with one another as to the fundamentals of its nature, and unable to agree to live together in unity and concord? (1953:4)

Transformation of the total personality into the likeness of Christ and accepting one another as the family of God must be the focus of the church in India. The Indian churches must disciple the believers and help them to practice the Christian message in their daily lives. Driver states, "Life in the household of God is not merely characterized by the Father-children relationship, basic as it may be. Since this family bears the stamp of God's character, the horizontal relationships of brothers and sisters in the family are also noteworthy and saving in their impact" (1997:147). Believers must be able to move freely within the household of God and identify as brothers and sisters. So the challenge is to help the church get a vision of the family of God and to relate to one another not

only with the local community but also with people in other parts of the country and abroad.

The church in India must seek ways to relate to the cultural patterns of the society and communicate the message of the gospel. The Household concept is an existing model for the Indian community, but at the same time, it is not inclusive since it assumes and endorses the caste itself. The responsibility of the church is to interpret the meaning of household biblically, beginning with the creation story of the Bible. Jacob states, "If we are really serious about sharing the gospel and its good news of love, we not only ought to seek for bridges over the abyss but also be ready to 'walk the bridge' for 'the sake of the gospel' in the Indian context" (Jacob 2002:190).

Indian society is in a process of change, and the church must take the lead in helping Indians understand God's plan for humanity. The church in India must equip its members to have the vision of the family of God. C. V. Matthew and Corwin state,

> The Christian church will grow best in Indian society if she first disciples her members so that they excel in all four kinds of human action – adaptive, cultural, social, and goal-attainment. By doing this the church will provide a model for secular society and equip her members with capabilities to upgrade life in the community. (1994:13)

The Household of God and Mission in India

Being involved in the mission of the church in India is crucial and complex. The early missionaries as well as the present missionaries in India are encountering religious, social, economic, and political issues. The church must focus on a total transformation in the lives of the people and of the society. Pothen notes, "Early missionaries like William Carey and his Serampore associates had this great vision of complete social transformation with the help of the Christian gospel" (1996:6).

In envisioning the transformation of the society, the mission of the church must have a two-fold focus. One is in relation to the household of faith and the other is with the community around them and afar. The first involves disciplining and practicing the household of God and the second involves moving among the people in the larger society with the message of the gospel. The mission of the church should be as natural as the blooming of a flower. Sunder Raj states,

> A flower cannot be produced in and by itself; unless it is a synthetic one. Natural flowers are product of inter-relationship: that between the tree and the soil, between the branches and the trunk, between the sap and the branches. The flower is just an outward expression of that energizing inter-dependence; that "abiding in." (1986:31)

The church as the household of God must seek to build communities of believers in their own locations by using their own means. Christians in the first three centuries differentiated themselves through the practice of radical ethics while at the same time using the existing cultural patterns of the household system. Hinduism must be challenged by the teachings of Jesus Christ, especially brotherly love and concern for one another. Gandhi stated, "As my contact with real Christians, i.e., men living in fear of God, increased, I saw that the *Sermon on the Mount* was the whole Christianity for him who wanted to live a Christian life. It is that *Sermon* which has endeared Jesus to me" (1986a:40).

The Church Beyond Distinction and Discrimination

The church as the household of God must be a community that is ready to understand the pain of others, especially the brothers and sisters in the church. Jesus innocently suffered on behalf of humanity. As mentioned earlier, Hindu incarnations were thought to save the righteous and destroy the wicked. Jesus' Incarnation, his

coming in human form and becoming a suffering servant, was his mission (Isaiah 53; Mark 10:45; John 13:12-20). This was the same Jesus whom the first disciples experienced. The fellowship between Jesus and his disciples was one of equality, intimacy, and friendship (John 15:15). Ebe Raj states, "Mother Teresa is an inspiring model. When she and her sisters were commended as social workers she very politely urged the journalist to see the truth that they were basically servants of Christ" (2001:32).

But Indian churches also face a unique problem compared to other parts of the world-caste distinction inside and outside the church. One of the questions often asked of the Christian missionaries is whether a new Christian should leave his or her caste identity when he or she embraces Christianity. The answer can be yes and no because when a *dalit* embraces Christianity from the scheduled castes, there are two factors involved. When some of the scheduled castes converts to Christianity, religion becomes a barrier for getting government reservation and concessions. Government grants are given to people only in the scheduled castes, on the basis of their standing with the Hindu religion. Secondly, if *dalit* Christians want to retain their caste identity, the social stigma, occupation, geographical location then caste divisions remain as stumbling blocks to them. Banerjee discusses the issue and states,

> Oppression in India is a unique system built on both the socio-cultural (caste) and economic (class) factors in society. Constituting the core of such caste-class oppression are the *Dalits*, literally "the oppressed whose social degradation (out-caste status) has become the cause and measure for their backwardness in social and economic terms." They remain the age-old victims of the caste-class ramifications. *Dalit* Christian are not only recognized by their castes (or no-caste status) but also by their adopted religion due to conversion to Christianity. Thus, they belong to the oppressed class. They are qualitatively different from their oppressors who are identified as upper caste or class elite. (1997:17)

The mission of the church in India is to face these realities and to help the

converts to work through their individual problems. The *dalits* must experience

liberation from the social and economic oppressors by having an identity as brothers and

sisters in the family of God. The family of God must raise its prophetic voice against the

oppressive systems and stand in unity, beyond the caste distinctions.

The household of God must be the channel to communicate the Christian message

to the people around them and to distant places. The goal of Christian mission must be

living as the household of God community living together locally, nationally and in

distant lands (Figure 10). Nacpil states,

> There is no doubt that the bonds of family are what a sense of community should
> be: strong, cohesive, intimate. They express open communication, mutual
> concern, loving care for one another, loyalty to the family interest and welfare to
> the point of sacrificing personal welfare. The family is a model of human
> community. By using the strongest bonds of family life – being a son of a mother
> and having brothers – to express the ties that bind his vision of a new community,
> Jesus was affirming his family and the family generally! (1998:153)

The proclamation of the gospel is the most tested arena today in India. How can

Christians continue to bear witness in this hostile situation? Christians should respect

other religious values and at the same time be able to practice the unique Christian

message in their daily life. The household of God must extend an invitation to become

part of the community of faith as believers share their experience individually rather than

in massive gatherings.

The household of God must be sensitive of the needs of the larger community and

be ready to help as a Good Samaritan, irrespective of caste or denomination. The essence

of obedience to the will of God is the love of God and is expressed in loving neighbors

and caring for them (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:28-34; Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-28).

The Uniqueness of the Lord Demands a Unique Mission in India

The uniqueness of the Lord Jesus Christ gives the church a unique mission. This uniqueness must be seen in the actions and words of the churches in India. Jesus said, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). The household of God must be open to welcome everyone into their homes and fellowships beyond all distinctions.

The household of God must practice hospitality which is considered one of the virtues among Hindus. But Hindu hospitality is limited to their caste communities and the low castes are not even allowed to come close to the high caste. This makes Christian hospitality much more meaningful and relevant. Christian hospitality is a gift as well as an obligation to be fulfilled to one anther. The early church extended hospitality for traveling evangelists (Romans 16:1-2; 1 Corinthians 16:15-18; Philippians 2:29-30;1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 John 5,8). Paul exhorts the believers to practice hospitality (Romans 12:13) and also thanks the believers for their hospitality (Gehring 2004:183). The household of God in India must practice hospitality to everyone, irrespective of caste distinction. Hospitality is one of the opportunities to share the love of Christ to the Hindu community.

The low castes and the *dalits* do not wish to be known by their caste identity. The high castes look down upon the low castes, and this makes it extremely shameful to be known by their caste names. Ebe Raj states, "The Harijans have adopted the titles

Prasad, Singh, Valmiki, etc., to conceal their own caste names. The Chamars call themselves Ravidas, the Pasis have taken Valmiki, whilst Rajak and Safi have been chosen for Dhobis. Thus these are the perceptible effects of Sanskritisation" (2001:109). In this context of inhuman annihilation of self-esteem, the message of Christ can offer freedom and identity. It offers the *dalits* hope and dignity. The mission of the household of God is to accept them and help remove the social stigma by giving new names at the time of baptism and the dedication of children. Bible studies also need to focus on helping brothers and sisters understand that they are the children of God in Christ Jesus (John 1:12; Romans 8:16).

The Indian community shows honor to parents, teachers, and elders by addressing them with special respectable names, like Achayan, Chettan, Annan, Tatha, Akka, Bahi, Bahen, and so on. These respectable names vary according to the caste, culture, and language. But the *dalits* are not addressed with any respectable name by the other casts because they are considered as *dasyas*, less than servants. The mission of the household of God is to encourage the use of sibling languages within the church and to the people outside of the church. In the Bible, sibling language is used for intimate relationships between God and his people and between the members of God's household.

The household of God must motivate all the castes to attain higher education. The church must provide opportunities and encouragement for education. Ebe Raj states, "Once the untouchables are educated and become aware of their rights it is but natural for them to assert their rights. But the Hindus tend to consider this as a challenge to the established traditional social order and an act of arrogance and indiscipline. This assertion of rights may take a mild or wild form" (2001:113).

The household of God must live as a true community, using all possible means to equip the people and teach them in the fear of the Lord. The Christian message liberates the oppressed and provides meaning to life where lived out in this way.

<u>The Household of God and Strategies for Mission</u>

As suggested earlier, the church in India has a unique call to present the uniqueness of Christ in a hostile environment. Indian society has been pluralistic in nature, having been multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and multi-religious for centuries. So churches should employ multiple approaches to present the gospel in this religiously diverse but segregated community. This process is difficult but at the same time it is necessary and urgent in Indian society.

Present economic development has positive and negative effects on the Indian community. "With higher-paying jobs changing the style of living in cities such as Bangalore, the streets are bustling with busy nightclubs and hotels" states Srivastava (2005:10). Living in communities and caring for one another is being replaced by individualism and autonomy. Ahuja observes that the family plays a decisive role in making these changes (2002:300). How can the household of God play a redemptive role in this context?

Based on the findings of this research and my own ministry experience in India[23], I propose the following fifteen suggestions:

1. Introduce the unique story of God's salvation plan in Jesus Christ to the people and invite them to be part of the family of God. The household of God must be the example for this in both actions and words.

2. Teach church members about their privileges and responsibilities as sons and daughters in the family of God. Teaching must be done through life, through demonstration as well as by words.

3. Enhance the upward mobility of all classes and castes by accepting all as brothers and sisters into the church fellowships. The household of God also must seek educational and employment possibilities for the brothers and sisters.

4. Encourage and equip people in the love of the Lord to meet together for worship, Bible studies, and cottage meetings. This will help the different caste groups meet each other and visit other each others' houses. It will become easy for the high caste as well as the low-caste to move with a group of believers in each others' houses without any embarrassment.

5. Arrange fellowship meals after each worship service and Bible study. Caste groups in India are separated at the meal table, fearing defilement by the food prepared by different castes. If we practice fellowship meals from the very beginning of the church-planting ministry, there will be easier to continue it.

6. Encourage inter-caste, interstate marriages with brothers and sisters far and near. Indian communities mostly prefer arranged marriages. If the pastor and the household of God can act as the matchmakers, this will be more acceptable to both parties.

7. Arrange special programs for the youth beyond denominational distinctions. Most young people are open to change and they are also willing to try new ideas. The household of God needs to make use of this opportunity and challenge the youth concerning the existing evils in the social system, preparing them for action.

8. Develop leadership beyond caste lines and recognize leaders by handing over the responsibilities of the church to the local believers. The leaders of the church must equip the new leadership team and stand with them, encouraging in them times of struggles. The ministry of all believers must be recognized and encouraged in the household of God. House churches encourage believers to visit one another's homes, beyond caste lines, thus providing them opportunities to minister to one another. God is the father of everyone and all are created in Jesus Christ to be his children, so believers must take care of one another by ministering and helping in their time of need (John 1:12).

9. Arrange programs to bring people out of their self-imposed enclosures. The caste system led them to be away from the social gatherings and mixing with people. They need encouragement to mix with brothers and sisters even in the church context. The low castes are often fearful and ashamed to ask questions or to come forward to do anything in the church. The leadership of the household of God must make a special effort to impart confidence and courage to the weaker brothers and sisters.

10. Encourage people to help one another in the area of education and occupations. The churches, especially in rural areas, must be well informed about the possibilities for the education of the young people. The church also must engage in adult literacy programs and equip the household members to read and write. The household of God also must teach work ethics for the community, because the caste division is made on the basis of occupation. The common tendency is for people to enter the traditional occupations but the church should encourage skills and interests. The church should arrange seminars, inviting skilled/diverse resource persons to teach in these areas.

11. Use Indian music and lyrics in worship and at other times. The Indian way of worship is mostly spontaneous. The household of God must give importance to the indigenous patterns of worship and spontaneous expression.

12. Equip the brothers and sisters to be missionaries and evangelists to local people as well as to other nations. India must to be reached with the gospel by Indians themselves because they are already familiar with the sociocultural patterns of the country. The household of God must be challenged and motivated for mission and evangelism. Each church must be a missionary church and every home must be open for worship and fellowship.

13. Motivate the believers to support the missionaries and full-time ministers. There are resources in India to support missionaries and ministers in India. The churches must be educated and plans made to support the missionaries and ministers.

14. The household of God must help the families to take care of the elderly and the weak in the society. The household of God must educate the families in health care, especially the elderly. Most of the low castes are not aware of the basic principles of health care. The household of God must arrange health care camps and village meetings for the community.

15. Establish relationships between the household of God and existing national churches and other international denomination church bodies. India needs to hear the love story of God in Christ Jesus, beyond denominational ties and caste identity. Those who are confessing Jesus Christ as Lord must unite into one family, the family of God, not only in India but all places. Oneness in the household of God will in itself be a mission approach to the other communities of India and abroad.

Introducing the household of God concept and encouraging unity beyond caste

and blood line relationships is not easy. It can be done only if individual believers and

the family of believers practice the message of the gospel in their daily lives. Estborn

tells of the experiences of a young Hindu convert who left his house and lived with a

missionary in another location because of persecution by his family members:

> "The longer I lived with the bishop Whitley in Ranchi", he says, "the closer I
> came to him, and found that his life revealed Christ to me. I have a new vision of
> Christ when I actually saw Christ's life of love, sacrifice, and self-denial in the
> everyday life of the bishop." The bishop's love for the young convert gradually
> compensated him for the loss of family affection, while Miss F. E. Whipman, an
> honorary S. P. G. missionary, in time took the place of Anath Nath's mother and
> sister. (1965:44)

As mentioned earlier, the household of God can elevate a person from an inferior

status into a higher identity by the person's accepting the Lordship of Christ and

becoming part of the part of the family of God by believing on Jesus Christ. Two such

examples were mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. When each household of

God functions as brothers and sisters, there will be a lasting effect in the sociocultural

setting of the community and in the nation. The household of God must be open to the

community outside by accepting and offering hospitality without any discrimination.

Life in the household of God is demanding and costly. Joy and peace in Christ

must be experienced individually and collectively in worship and in fellowship. Estborn

describes the struggles of another young Hindu convert, Paul Kadambavanam, making

his decision to follow Christ in his life.

> He lived in constant prayer and self-examination. "There are two drops," he said
> to himself. "One represents the blood of Jesus Christ. The other represents the
> tears of your mother. You have to choose between the two. Both cannot be
> accepted at the same time. If you care for your mother's tears, decide to remain a
> Hindu. Why all this worry? If you want to choose the blood of Jesus, forget your
> mother for the time being, take up the cross, be baptized and follow him. If you

love your mother more than you love God, you are not worthy of him at all. You cannot please and serve both God and man." (1965:49-50)

The Christian message offers unification of the new humanity in Christ. This is the central aspect of the revelation of the gospel. Smith notes,

> It is this fundamental principle which shapes apostolic missiology and ecclesiology, so that despite real problems and tensions resulting from the heterogeneous character of the congregations – problems which would have been easily solved by allowing the formation of separate mono-ethnic units – the apostle insists upon unity across racial and cultural lines. (1985:28)

The household of God is one of the ways to bring the body of Christ together. The household of God can meet in any place according to convenience, whether in a building or in a house setting or under a tree. It is the fact of being the family of God that makes the difference.

The biblical understanding of the household of God offers social, economic, and geographical mobility to all the castes, irrespective of their origin, color, or occupation. Caste feeling must be eradicated, not only from the official records of the government or the church, but also from the minds of people. Indian communities need to understand that everyone is equal before God. There is no high or low; everyone belongs to one family, the family of God. This can be made a visible reality only by presenting and practicing the gospel message in the languages and cultural patterns of the people. It is, indeed, a risky and dangerous task, but possible through Christ our Lord.[24]

Today Hindu nationalists are attempting to re-convert Christians, by means of what they call the "home-coming program," *shudhikaran kriyakaram*. In this kind of crisis in a believer's life, the household of God needs to stand together and affirm that we are one in the Lord (Jains 2002:43). Then the household of God in India can be a model for the universal church.

<p style="text-align:center">Conclusion</p>

The Christian church concept has had limited influence within the Hindu community at least in past because the people were suspicious about the Christian faith. Hindus viewed Christianity as the white man's religion which disrupts the society. Thus the Hindus considered Christianity as a threat to the people of India. At the same time, Christian missionaries were not open enough to understand the socio-cultural setting of the people. Missionaries were sincerely adopting some of the Hindu institutions in order to identify with the people, but they lacked adequate answers to the problems of the community.

The Indian church as well as the Hindu community today are in an identity crises because of the caste divisions in the society. Tensions remain in both Christianity and Hinduism. Does Christianity need to identify with the high caste or the low caste? If the Christians identify with a particular caste, one caste will not be able to associate with the other. How do we unite such a religious community whose very stratification is based on sacred texts? The image of the church as the family of God provides an avenue for all castes to attain identity and freedom. The family of God offers a higher pedestal than the existing religious system and gives a new privilege as the sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father. It is reasonable to utilize the household concept of Hinduism in Christian mission, providing a bigger picture of the family of God, based upon the Bible. In this new identity as the family of God, the church faces new social, economic, political, and religious challenges. The family of God must stand firm and be ready to give an answer to every one in love.

The mission of the household of God is to equip the family members to stay united and to witness to the people around them and abroad. The family imagery is rooted in the Bible from the very beginning of creation. The family concept is also universal, so it provides a basis for the church to relate to churches in other parts of the world. Cibling language applies to every believer in all the continents and helps us to relate to one another as the family of God. So the mission of the church is to invite people to be part of the household of God by accepting Jesus as the Lord of their life. The mission of the church is thus the same locally, nationally, and even internationally helping people to be part of the household of God.

ENDNOTES: Chapter 5

[1] A Nestorian merchant, Thomas of Cana, came to Malabar Coast in southwest India in 345 A.D. with four hundred people, including deacons, priests and a bishop. They migrated because of the great persecution in Persia of 340-380. Moffett states, "They were welcomed by the Christian community they found there but were dismayed to find that these Indian Christians, who traced their origins back to the apostle Thomas, were without local leadership, had become badly divided by false teachings, and were dwindling in numbers. The new arrivals reinvigorated the church and secured for it recognition and high caste status from the local Indian king in Malabar" (Moffett 1998:266).

[2] Hindu caste system is different than the ethnicity found in other cultures, even though some similarities can be observed. Ethnicity defined by Thomas Spira, is "an ethnic group consists of a people who identify themselves or are identified by others in cultural terms, such as language, religion, tribe, nationality, and possibly race" (Rudolph 2003:xix). As I mentioned earlier, caste is a religiously sanctioned division which prohibits people from moving of their assigned group, occupation, language and geographical locations. It works as a watertight compartment. No one is allowed to move out-side of the caste group in any circumstance. Waskom Pickett notes, "In a Hindu village in North India, each individual has a fixed economic and social status, established by his birth in any given caste. The effect of a caste occupation upon the distribution of wealth is enhanced by caste customs, traditions, and characteristics" (1933:88).

[3] The household life of an individual begins at the setting of the sacred fire, *agni* god, for the wedding of the couple. They take that fire and form it as the center of their household worship. Sacrifices should be offered daily at morning and at evening and also be celebrated monthly on the days of the new moon and of the full moon. The householders are also required to have a series of celebrations at certain times of the year at the household fire, on account of gods and goddess, ancestors, gurus, fellow human beings, and natures (Oldenberg and Muller 1982:xxvii).

[4] In the ancient days of Hinduism, yoga was the center of religious thought and ashrams were the centers of Yogic culture and training. In the later days Ashrams adapted according to the needs and conditions of the people, and changed and broaden their objectives to include social and national services. The ancient Ashrams were in the forest but the modern Ashrams also can be found near the towns. Thomas states, "Mahatma Gandhi's Ashram at Sabarmati was organized around the idea of national services by means of cottage industries. On the other hand, Rabindranath Tagore's Ashram revolved around culture, art, poetry, and agriculture. The Ashram founded at Thiruvannamalai by Ramana Maharshi is perhaps the nearest approach to the ancient

Ashrams of the Yogi period; meditation and silence form its man features" (Thomas 1955:169).

[5] Mataji states, "Ashram life has been considered from ancient times in India to be a very effective means of attaining union with God. In a setting that is simple, peaceful, austere and welcoming, it makes it possible for men and women to experience God without suffering from any dichotomy between contemplation and action. An ashram is, or can be, a powerhouse of the spirit with a prophetic and spiritual ministry, where the central concern is the 'recreation of man' and the attaining of the knowledge of God (*Brahmavidya*). This knowledge of God which the members of the ashram seek leads to God-realization, or eternal life" (1978:43).

[6] The derivation of the word ashram is variously given. Some say the "a" means "from" and "shram" means "hard work": i.e., an ashram is a cessation from hard work (Thomas 1955:166).

[7] A *rishi* was a man who had attained inner *shanty* (peace) through special *sadana* (process of meditation) and *yoga*. Each *rishi* will accept disciples to learn his way of *sadana* and *yoga* in order to attain *nirvana*. The Indian Ashrams are as old as the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The Ramayana described Ashrams as spiritual power-house (Jesudasan 1938:216).

[8] New Testament scholars differ in the universal mission of Jesus quoting Matthew 10:5-6, forbidding the disciples to extend their mission beyond Israel and his hesitancy to heal the daughter of a Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21-28. The same time Jesus is envisaging the coming of people from east and west into the Jewish messianic banquet (Matthew 8:11-12) and also commissioning the disciples to go into all the nations (Matthew 28:19). France states, "It is more typical of Mathew's method to believe that he could see both continuity and discontinuity in different respects with regard to the link between Jesus' ministry and the 'church age,' just as he was able to do with reference to the continuing relevance of the Old Testament law in the time of fulfillment" (France 1989:200). The focus in the dialogue between Jesus and Canaanite woman was more as a question, a test of faith. Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and all those who respond in faith are privileged to be the part of the household of God.

[9] John the Baptist preaches against the biological credentials of the Jewish community saying that it never makes any one fit into the kingdom, but spiritual conformity only makes a man part of the kingdom of God (Matthew 3:4-9). Jesus also challenges the Jews that the one who belongs to Abraham will have a different moral. Abraham welcomed and extended hospitality to the strangers and never attempted to kill them (Genesis 18:1-9). Jesus argues that the real Jew is the one who follows their forefather Abraham's character and faith. Jesus said that if they loved God they would have loved him also and obeyed his words (John 8:37-41).

[10] Osiek states, "Early in Mark's Gospel, Jesus' relatives come to fulfill their responsibility to care for an ailing member, to take him home because he was believed to be out of his mind (εζεστη, Mark 3:20). He responds by accusing them of the sin against the Holy Spirit, the deliberate misjudgment of the Spirits (Mark 3:28-30). When they try again, his answer is rejection of the demands of blood ties: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister, and mother." This is enough to drive the family away, for in the Synoptics they never appear again, in spite of the fact that they are well known in the locality (Matthew 13:55-56 par Mark 6:3; Luke 4:22; John 6:42)" (996:3).

[11] "The Gospel traditions provide clear evidence that Jesus' call to discipleship explicitly sanctioned the relativisation of Kinship and household ties: 'He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me' (Matthew 10:37-38; Luke 14:26-27)" (Barton 1997:81).

[12] Fernando notes, "In light of this strong emphasis on the breaking of human differences through the cross, we should be very careful about overemphasizing the homogenous unit principle that is very popular in evangelical missiological circles today. The church is characterized by the unifying of different peoples and not by the segregations of peoples according to their own kind. Indeed, with cultural contextualization, it is necessary to gear our evangelism bearing cultural distinctives in mind. But the truth must be balanced by the other truth that Christ joins different groups of people into a united community. This is not easy to practice. But we must patiently grapple to find a biblical balance without going head-long into unprincipled church growth" (2000:248-249).

[13] Megesa states, "It is useful to recall the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29. He points out the reality, and not just the metaphorical sense, of the Eucharist. It is a warning to the rich, to those who would introduce discrimination into its sign of oneness. The body of Christ is everyone who has accepted his message" (2001:7).

[14] Paul uses the metaphorical terms to describe and to construct the Christian community and the relationships between its members. The focus is on what has often been termed "fictive kinships" language and on the designation of the church community as a household (of God), and not on the relations between natural siblings or within actual households (Horrell 2001:295).

[15] Mangalwadi notes, "Hindutva argues that Christians cannot possibly love India and be loyal to her because "their holy land is far off in ... Palestine." They should not be ignorant of the fact that as early as the 5th century, St. Augustine (354-430 AD) had expounded the New Testament view that the "City of God" was not to be identified with the Palestinian city of Jerusalem. The Protestant missionaries carried with them the New Testament idea that each nation must become a "holy land." As William Blake wrote in his poem "Jerusalem," the English Reformation sought to transform England into a "Jerusalem" – the "City of God" – where Jesus would rule" (1997:297).

[16] In a general sense all men and women are the offspring of God because He is the creator (Acts:28, 29). This relationship is not sufficient to establish our connection with God as the father or to escape from the penalty of sin because the entire humanity individually separated from God through the sins which they committed (Romans 3:23). Therefore, for a sinful person to become a child of God, a miraculous transformation must take place. When an individual places his faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, he is born again into a new, spiritual, family relationship with God (Galatians 3:26). He gains God as Father (Ephesians 4:6) and other Christians as brothers and sisters (Hebrew 3:1). It is interesting to note that we are brothers and sisters with other Christians, beyond denominational, geographical, racial, or ethnic identity.

[17] C. V. Mathew states, "With reference to Hinduism, 'missionary' refers to the activities of the adherents of various Hindu *sampradayas* and organizations to disseminate and diffuse their teachings and practices, both within India and outside. Three results are anticipated: first, an increase of religious knowledge and loyalty among present professing Hindus; second, recruitment of more adherents and sympathizers to the Hindu faith; and third, a corresponding decline in the numerical strength of other religious traditions. The emphasis in terms of a goal may differ from movement to movement. Nevertheless, the policies and programs directed to the accomplishment of these goals are to be taken as missionary. This process, which may be carried out individually or collectively, need not necessarily be coordinated and controlled by a central organization or be systematically carried out by experts" (2001:18).

[18] Indian churches are involved in the missions in Indian and near by countries. According to the report published in 1997, 20,000 Indians are involved as cross-cultural missionaries (Rajendran 1998:48).

[19] Rajendran notes the early attempts of the missionaries in India to the high caste Hindus was not so successful. "Missionaries attempted in many ways to reach out to different sections of Indian people. Many concentrated among the elite and the high caste. This bore little fruit. Rupert Davis, surveying the growth of Methodism, observed that, "The early attempts at reaching the high-caste people had failed utterly, and it became a matter of policy to pursue evangelism by the indirect path of schools, colleges and hospitals." The chief barrier was the Hindu caste system because the higher castes could not care less. To them a Christian was synonymous with untouchable, an outcast. (1998:24).

[20] The word used for Incarnation in Sanskrit is '*Srijate*' normally translated as '*Srishti.*' But there is no idea in Hinduism creating something out of nothing. Panoli states, "According to the *Advaita* Philosophy, *Atman* is not created out of nothing, nor does it perish and birth is nothing but a projection of existing something which till then lay hidden. '*Shrishti*' in the *Vedanta* philosophy is compared to the project of the neck by the tortoise. The word used there is *Srijate*. In the light of these facts the appropriate term to be used here is "to project syself"" (Vidyavachaspati Panoli 2003:205).

[21] Dendekar notes, "It is difficult to find any single passage wherein the comprehensive character of *dharma* is adequately brought out" (1958a:217). Some of the passages of the Hindu scriptures about Dharma as follows, *Mahabharata* 12:110, "For the sake of the promotion of strength and efficacy among beings, the declaration of dharma is made. Whatever is attended with nonviolence (ahimsa), that is dharma" (1958a:217).

Bhagavadgita 3:35, "To die in performing one's own duty is nobler than to live in doing another's duty, for the duty of another is productive of effects which lead one to hell." Panoli interprets, "One's own duty though meritless is more praise-worthy than the duty of another performed efficiently" (Panoli 2003:186).

Manusmrti 8:15, "Dharma, when violated, verily, destroys; dharma, when preserved, preserves: therefore, dharma should not be violated, lest the violated dharma destroy us" (1958a:218).

[22] Panoli states, "Brahmana of the definition given above is the nectar of mankind. He is the very embodiment of purity and he knows not what untruth is. He is the custodian of the learning which reveals God, nay he walks with God, renouncing everything. He has no interest in anything except acquisition of knowledge which he will give those who deserve it. His lips will utter only benediction for mankind" (2003:217).

[23] The church which I planted in 1994 in North Kerala consisted of people from different caste groups. On one occasion all the brothers and sisters built a house for one of the brothers of our church, who came from a low caste background. All the believers were involved in this project, with all possible means. Some of them were helping in moving the material for the housing and others were helping workers. Unity among the brothers and sisters in building the house for the low caste brother was a witness to the community around them. This event made an impact on the message of the gospel to the Hindu community, and the church grew (Ministry dairy 1994).

[24] Jain writes, "The future for missions in India is exciting. We are being watched, monitored and assessed. We are also being challenged and threatened by the zealots of Hinduism. Yet, respond we must. ...I do not introduce myself as a converted Christian or convert to Christian faith. I am proud to say that I am a disciple of Jesus Christ and that I follow and worship no other as my Guru, God, and Master." (2002:43).

CHAPTER 6

Summary and Evaluation

The history of the church in India records the stories of men and women who

embraced Jesus Christ as the Lord of their life, accepted one another as brothers and

sisters and lived as one family beyond the caste distinctions. Chandra Lila was one

among the many of such followers of the Lord from Northern India who lived in the early

19th century and practiced the Christian message in her daily life. After accepting Christ

as the Lord she became an itinerant preacher who was anxious to see the message of

Christ break through the obstructions of the Hindu caste system and enjoy the fellowship

of the household of God in India with everyone. Batley writes,

> Much has been written and spoken about 'caste' and 'untouchability' in India,
> those intangible, but impassable, barriers which separate individual from
> individual, and group from group. Deep rooted in the religious sanctions of past
> ages, they have, until well within living memory, remained unchallenged and
> invulnerable, and from time immemorial Hindu men and women have lived and
> died within their narrow limits.
>
> Yet there are certain classes of people, even in Hindu India, for whom the great
> gulfs fixed by custom and religious observance have no existence. Their ranks
> are recruited from Brahmans and Sudras, tradition, and merge their individuality
> under a new title.
>
> These casteless citizens sometimes, though not invariably, wear a distinctive
> dress, and carry distinctive insignia. Some of them have homes of their own; they
> may congregate in special quarters in the villages, and even claim whole towns as
> their possession. For the most part, however, they have no abiding city. They are
> the great army of India's 'devotees'. (1937:xii)

These devotees did not seek to change religion or to be known as great saints. They were

searching after truth and, when they found Jesus Christ as the Lord of their life, they

practiced and enjoyed fellowship with one another, accepted the hospitality of everyone,

and thought of themselves as the household of God, united instead of divided by caste

lines and lineages. Previously, they had not known that there was a God who came down

to the earth in search of humanity and when they found him, their prayers were as Batley

states, "*I do not want salvation*" (that is, release from personality) – one hears them sing

– "*I desire only, in re-birth, after re-birth, to worship Thee, O Master*" (1937:xiii).

This concluding chapter will summarize the whole discussion of the image of the

church as the household of God and present the uniqueness of it for the church in India as

well to the church elsewhere. The difficulties and problems will be numerous when we

practice the household of God in each socio-cultural setting, especially in a land like

India because of its strong Hindu religious heritage. The question is how many are

willing to take up the challenges and follow the patterns of our master and Lord,

particularly when he said, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and

take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:35).

The Biblical View of the Household of God

The biblical view of the household of God began from the first family of Adam

and Eve, which represent all the families of the earth (Figure 1). Disobedience and

rejection of God led to consequences. But God, in his love and mercy, chose Noah and

his family as an instrument to invite humanity to be part of the household of God (Figure

2). When God chastised the world through a flood, Noah and his family were rescued

and with them all of nature was rescued and restored. Noah invited everyone to be part

of the family of God by being in the ark because it was the means God made for the

salvation of the humanity. But humanity, except for Noah's family, was not willing to

come under the plan of God which was offered through Noah.

Then God called Abraham and his family. God made a covenant that focused on what God would do in and through Abraham in relation to the all the families of the earth,[1] including the whole creation (Genesis 12:1-3). The obedience of Abraham and his faith journey is the foundation of the whole story of the Old Testament. God's purposes in Abraham included expanding the household of God to include the whole earth (Figure 3). So the election and covenant of Abraham was inclusive of all the families of the earth.

The covenant between God and Israel was the outgrowth and extension of the Lord's covenant with Abraham and his descendants. Participation in the divine blessings of Abraham was conditioned on faithful obedience (Genesis 17:9; 18:19; 22:18; 26:4-5). This time also the household of God was open for all people, irrespective of national identity or hereditary line. Inclusion was based on the faith affirmation in Yahweh and subsequent obedience to the law. The story of Exodus discloses this fact; the "Israel" that left Egypt was a mixed crowed, not all Hebrews. Kostenberger and O'Brien note,

> Briefly, Israel related to the nations in two ways: first, *historically* through incorporation, and then *eschatologically* through ingathering [Scobie 1992:286-292]. Concerning the first, Charles Scobie has rightly claimed that 'at most stages of Israel's history provision was made for the incorporation of people of non-Israelite decent' [Scobie 1992:286]. Examples of incorporation include the 'mixed crowed' [NRSV] which accompanied Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 12:38), the adoption of Rahab and her family (Joshua 6:25) and the acceptance of foreigners within the kingdom of David (2 Samuel 11:3; 15:19-23). (2001:35)

In the light of the grace of God and by the very existence of Israel, three ministries are required from them (Exodus 19:4-6). First, they are God's own possession, they belong to God. Second, their role was to be a kingdom of priests before God for the other nations. Third, they were to be holy, wholly set apart from the other nations for God's use. God stored up in Israel all the blessings for all the families of the earth (Kaiser

2000:23). This is expressed in Mosaic Law. Strangers and foreigners residing in Israel were to be treated equally and respected (Exodus 12:48; 22:21). They were also welcomed to experience divine grace and blessing when they confessed Yahweh as God. Ruth, a Moabite woman, is the best example of incorporation to Israel during the time of Judges, through her faith affirmation in Yahweh. Smith exegetes Ruth 2:11-12 and notes, "Boaz stressed all that Ruth has abandoned, but his chief lies on her acceptance of God of Israel, the only true God, who will surely reward her trust" (Smith 1953:841-842). She becomes the great-grandmother of King David and in God's sovereign saving plan of humanity she plays a very important role (Matthew 1:5).[2]

The household of God in Israel was structured into three sections, tribe, clan and family, and each functioned to fulfill the plan of Yahweh (Figure 4). Watson notes,

> That God's covenant, first made with Abraham and later extended to the nation that grew out of his family, promised the blessings of God to the family and household of the man who obeyed God (Deuteronomy 7:12, 13; 28:9-11). On the other hand, failure to obey the law of God would bring upon the disobedient disastrous judgment that would extend to his family and posterity (Deuteronomy 28:15). (1978:74)

The family unit was God's appointed means of communicating the knowledge of the covenant to succeeding generations (Deuteronomy 4:9-10; 6:6-9). Families are connected to the clan and to the tribe. They are called to share the burdens one another and help one another in their needs. Thus the purpose of the household of God comes true in its fullest sense, in the worship of God with the whole family.

Faith affirmation of the individual in the household of God was more importance than the biological or blood-line relationship in Israel. The prophet Isaiah articulates that God is Israel's Father for all time (Muilenburg 1956:739).[3] "For you are our Father,

though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us. You, O Lord, are

our Father, our redeemer from of the old is your name" (Isaiah 63:16).[4] Meeks notes,

> Life in God's household of freedom, then, means living in obedience to God's
> way of distributing righteousness. Keeping God's Torah economy is life;
> disregarding God's Torah economy is death. Those who live in the exodus
> community, in the household of freedom, learn in covenant faithfulness what the
> Torah requires in the distribution of what it takes for everyone in the household to
> live. (1989:84)

The call of Israel is to be the light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6; 51:4). The inclusiveness of

the call meant that Israel's mission was to make God's name known to the ends of the

earth. Their distinctiveness made Yahweh's treasured possession a witness before the

nations (Rowley 1944:50).

The Household in the Greco-Roman World

The household system in the Greco-Roman world worked like a pyramidal form,

emperor at the top and all the others at the bottom (Figure 5). Emperor's household is the

paradigm for every one to follow in all the systems in the country. The family was seen

as a state within a state. The family functioned as the microcosm of the *poleis* (city).

Men were set over women in the home, just as legal rulers are set over their subjects in

the city-state (Meeks 1986:21). The power of life and death over the family belonged to

the father. After marriage, rights over the daughter were transferred to the husband. The

same applied to all the family members, including natural born or adopted children and

slaves (Jones 1997:212). Wayne Meeks states, "The hierarchical pattern of the family, in

which the male was always superior to the female, as surely as parents to children and

masters to slave, was deeply enriched in law and custom and its erosion constantly

deplored by the rhetorical moralities and the satirists" (1983:23).

Figure 5 illustrates the structure of the Greco-Roman society; the so-called noble

household controlled the whole of society. The entrance to the senate was open only to a

person with noble birth and wealth. This kept away the common men from participating

in the administrative structure of the society. Mobility was very much limited for the

Roman citizens, though they were granted some privileges.

> At the very top of the social pyramid we find the *imperator*, his family, and the
> so-called *ordines* – the senators, knights, and so forth. They alone formed the
> upper class and together constituted about 0.5 percent (about a hundred thousand
> persons) of the total population (between fifty and eighty million). All the rest
> belonged to the so-called lower class – freemen, freedmen, and slaves – both in
> cities (*plebs urbana*) and in the country (*plebs rustica*). Noble birth was the
> primary criterion for ensuring membership in the upper class in the first-century
> Roman world. (Gehring 2004:166)

The Romans also realized that the dominant dimension of power was not physical but

psychological – the product of other people's perceptions of Roman strength rather than

the use of this strength. And this realization alone can explain the sophistication of

Roman strategy at its best (Luttwak 1976:3).

The Greco-Roman worldview and Hindu society are similar. As I mentioned

above, the Indian social setting was governed by strict religious systems whereas the

Greco-Roman world was controlled primarily by the political powers. Both of them were

used psychological tactics to control the common people and take maxim advantage for

those in the authority. In India, physical existence and the daily activities were

systemically interpreted to exploit the low caste people. When religion became the center

of life, the low caste people acted on it to please God for the good of their life, so any

violation of the set regulations were punished severely. The law caste, in the early days,

considered the high caste as gods and worshiped them. They are, even today, addressed

as gods. In the Greco-Roman world, the emperor was considered a god for a political

end, while Indian society used religion as a means to achieve self satisfaction, includes

political power.

The Household among the Hindus of India

The household systems of the Hindus are based on their sacred scriptures.[5] The

Hindus of India are classified under different *varana-sarma*, at the heart of the system

(Figure 7). The caste system functioned as water tight compartments in the society.

Theertha states,

> The Hindus of India are divided into about three thousand castes and a much
> larger number of sub-caste, every one of which forms an exclusive group
> consisting of persons born of members of the group. Every child born of a Hindu
> becomes, by virtue of such birth and no-other consideration whatsoever, a
> member of the caste and sub-caste of its parents. The members of one group are
> not allowed to intermarry or inter-dine with those of another group. Each group
> has a caste-name and a fixed place in the hierarchy of castes graded one above the
> other. One born low cannot by any means rise to a higher caste status. (1992:178-
> 179)

The Hindu caste system cannot compare with the class system in any part of the world

because it is intermingled with religion, occupation, language, and even geographical

location.[6] Each caste was distinguished from the other with regard to the specific roles

and functions they played in the community, and there are different concepts of taboo,

pollution, and purification rights attached to each of the caste groups. The household

system functioned in the above four-fold caste system with strict regulations (Figure 7).

The untouchables are generally excluded or ignored from the household system. The

male member of the family decides for everyone in the *graham* (family). The *kula* (clan)

and *Gotra* (tribe) unites the households as the Hindu community (Figure 8). The

household system provides identity for each caste group in the society, because each has

their own distinctive patterns and practices.

The sacred scriptures gives ruling in each detail of the social life and the high caste religious community imposed it on the common people. Mangalwadi notes, "Hinduism puts society above the individual because the Vedas teach that at the beginning of human history, God created a perfect social order – *Varnashram Dharma*. Righteousness, therefore, is to preserve that social order – the various relationships and duties of caste, of husband and wife etc." (1997:126).

Women can be saints in their sphere of activity, yet at the same time they are not really free at any time. The highest glory of women is considered to be devotion to their husbands, even to the extend of *sati* (widow burning along with the husband's funeral fire) (Mangalwadi 1997:126). There are changes in the modern Indian setting, but still Indian society must go a long way to experience freedom. O'Neill notes of K. R. Narayanan, India's first untouchable president, "In 2000, on the occasion of India's Republic Day, he paraphrased Ambedkar and said that unless untouchability and discrimination against women were eliminated, 'the edifice of our democracy would be like a palace built on a dung heap'" (2003:30).

The *avarnas* (untouchables) are often treated as slaves and given less respect as human beings. There were restrictions also assigned for the untouchable's life in the community, housing, food, and dress.[7] The discrimination against the *avarnas* still continues, and they agitate in different ways against their oppression.[8] The intolerable oppression forced them to renounce the Hindu religion and some of the recent examples are the mass conversions in 1984 and 2001.[9]

I have been struggling the last thirty years as a pioneer missionary to the Hindu community, asking the Lord to guide me to communicate the good news to the people

around me. These were the disturbing questions before me: What should be the image of the church I want to present before the Hindus? Is there a biblical pattern for the church which I can follow? How can the church idea become relevant to the people of India? What are the roles, functions, and relationships of the church members, between churches, and the church at large in India and elsewhere? What is the practical relevance of the message of the Bible to the context of the Hindu community as well as to the people of other religions? Unless the church embraces the household of God, it will be hard to involve in missions in India and else where. My personal meditations, Bible studies and reading scholars writing on the subject has helped us to understand the image of the church as the household of God.

The Church as the Household of God

The key to understand the love of God for humanity is Jesus Christ. The love which expressed in Jesus Christ can be understood in the family relationship between God and his people (Figure no. 10). The family relationships of God and the sibling languages used to address the people of Israel make it plain that the household of God is the focus of the Bible (Deuteronomy 1:31; Isaiah 46:3,4; 63:9; Hosea 11:1-3). God is building a household for himself from the world based on his standards, beyond human mandates, denominations, castes, languages, and geographical boundaries. God is the Father of humanity and expects every one to respond to Him by faith, through the Lord Jesus Christ. With God as the father, the children of God are called to relate to one another as brothers and sisters. The life and ministry of Christ was an example and a model for us to follow, He is the first born of the creation (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15). Through death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, everyone received access to God

the father. There is no discrimination, no partiality; all stand equal before God (Romans 3:25; 5:1-2). In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19).

The early church was living in the midst of a Greco-Roman social system, that divided the community into different sections. The early church as the family of God challenged the Greco-Roman household from a biblical perspective. The household in the Greco-Roman empire was a complex institution, as mentioned above. Obeying the family head was considered as the key to declare one's loyalty to the household. Paul uses the same imagery to help the early church understand God as the Father disciplines His children (Hebrews 12:9-10). Green notes, "Christian missionaries made a deliberate point of gaining whatever households they could as lighthouses, so to speak, from which the gospel could illuminate the surrounding darkness" (1970:253). The centrality of the household helped Christians to advance rapidly in the first three centuries. They accepted one another as brothers and sisters, as members of one family beyond the Roman family code and the city code. The believers of the early church, without considering the verdict of the emperor, bravely announced their allegiance to Jesus Christ as the Lord of their life. The household of God provides opportunities now to challenge the Hindu caste system, and it is an occasion to contextualize the gospel message to the socio-cultural settings of India.

Application of the Household of God in India

The church can function as the household of God without any discrimination of caste or denominational identity, because the biblical idea of the family is based on faith affirmation, that Jesus Christ is the Lord. In Christ all the barriers are removed and all have the privilege of being members of the family of God (Galatians 3:26-29). In the

family of God, the focus is not on teaching a particular a doctrine, but rather on study and meditation on the Word of God in order to know the will of the Father, who revealed himself through the Son Jesus Christ and revealed the ministry to the church (Ephesians 3:5-9; Colossians 1:26-27). The concern is to live out a Christian life as the family of God among the community and witness to the love of Christ with all the saints of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mission is not an invitation to a denominational church building but into the family of God. Three important areas are the focus in the family of God; relational, experiential, and interactional aspects. First, relational, in the family of God, everyone should relate to others as brothers and sisters and experience the fatherhood of God. In the relational aspect each person should experience the fellowship with one another and also to help one another.

Second, in the family of God, believers should experience the presence and the love of God along with all the saints. There must be times of sharing experiences with one another and encouraging each other to keep seeking the love of God in their life. This will help them to grow together with all others in Christ and also to minister to one another.

Third is the interactional aspect. Dependency can be a problem in the household system in India. Hindu holiness and spirituality are always individual and independent. Mangalwadi states,

> What becomes important to them is not inner holiness but social honor. They cover their sin and fight to guard their honor. When they think in terms of holiness at all, they think of external 'do's' and don'ts.' Holiness begins to be understood in terms of what I don't eat, whom I don't touch, and what I don't wear – the most holy man is the naked man. (1997:124)

But the household of God needs to teach and practice how much we need each other in building up social and spiritual life. There is no personal holiness possible without social holiness. Christian spirituality is seen in relationship with brothers and sisters in the local, national, and international level. Christian spirituality is not only individual and independent, but it is interdependent within the church and outside the church fellowship. This makes the Christian witness alive and expands the church to the community. Christian spirituality is the reflection of a believer's devotion and love toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the household context, evangelism can be informal and real. There is no artificial isolation between the preacher and the hearers or any difficulty in understanding the message preached. The sheer informality and relaxed atmosphere of the household of God can help hearers and understand one another in their needs. For a Hindu attending a formal church setting brings isolation from the community and the fear of conversion may keep many away from meeting Christians in a public place. But the church as the family can provide acceptance and confidence to the people. Church family setting can provide opportunities for the all the household members to hear the gospel at one time and makes it easier to make decisions.

The household of God will be one of the best methods to challenge the caste discrimination of the Hindu society. Hindu caste system keeps people away from each other in all public spheres. The family of God can meet any place, according to convenience and availability, for prayer, Bible study, and worship. They can make use of any family gathering for witnessing the love of God and all the castes can participate in it. Sharing food will be another opportunity for breaking caste barriers. All

discrimination can be tackled in the presence of the Lord by studying the Bible together and openly sharing the word with one another. The aim should be making disciples of Christ by imitating him in life (1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1).

Hindus understand that temples are built as a house for deities to dwell in. They also look at the church buildings from the same view, and it conveys a misunderstanding to the Hindus that Christian gods are living in the church buildings. But uniqueness of Christianity is not in the buildings but in following the Lord and in practicing the teachings of Christ in daily life. Snyder writes,

> Just think of it! "If you asked, "Where is the church?" in any important city of the ancient world where Christianity had penetrated in the first century, you would have been directed to a group of worshipping people gathered in a house. There was no special building or other tangible wealth with which to associate 'church,' only people!" (1994:298)

So the church in India must live out it life as the household of God and be a witness to the community around them.

When Jesus talked to the women of Samaria, he said, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24). Jesus emphasized how you worship, not where you worship. The promise of the Lord is "For where two or three have gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst" (Matthew 18:20). Paul says that Christians themselves are the temple of the living God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). It is not the building, but the people that matter. The early Christians first met in the temple and in houses for worship and study. Small gatherings were in the houses and large gatherings were in the temple and synagogues (Acts 2:46).

As mentioned, Hindu household settings are the arena for the younger generations to get acquainted with their religious and social values. The household of God also can be a place to equip leaders for the church and to bring them up in maturity in Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16; Colossians 1:28). In the family of God, there is no difference between *idiotes* (laity) and *kleros* (clergy) but all are the *kleros* of the Lord (Acts 26:17-18; cf. Ephesians 1:11; Galatians 3:29; Colossians 1:12). Yet pastoral ministry is a special gift and a calling, for men and women; it must be recognized in context of the church, the household of God. The household of God provides opportunities for the young leaders to serve the Lord and the people in response to their love towards the Lord. Thus, brothers and sisters can be equipped into the maturity of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16).

The mission of the church must be carried out by living as the family of God among the Hindu community. The early Christians challenged the Greco-Roman world by demonstrating their love and concern for one another and their devotion to Christ. The early church was known for their ethical purity and eagerness to serve one another. Paul addresses these issues and equips the young churches in Corinth.

The early Christians practiced hospitality and showed genuine interest in others, without considering economic or social background. This was another reason for the advancement of the gospel in Asia Minor (1 Thessalonians 1:2-4; Philemon). The Indian household setting also is known for hospitality, but it is limited within the caste groups. The household of God must welcome others beyond their social status and caste identity, then the mission of our Lord can come true in India.

Indian society respects the saints and devotees of all religions, even beyond their caste barriers. As mentioned, earlier Chandra Lila, one of the saints in India, lived and ministered to the people wherever she happened to be. Batley notes,

> All day she would travel and teach, scarcely stopping for the briefest rest. At night she would cook for herself, and eat a simple meal before she slept. Her eager spirit quickly drove her to "regions beyond." She used to stay away from the Mission for a month at a time, never asking for money, but trusting simply to God to supply her needs. She lacked nothing, for her hearers would ask if she were hungry, and if she answered, "Yes," they were glad to share with her their curry and rice. Some of those who listened to her message believed, and renounced idolatry. If in consequence they were out-casted, she never hesitated to take them in and care for them; sure that the God who supplied her needs would provide for them also. (1937:9-10)

Today the household of God in India needs devotees of Christ, ready to listen to Him and move among the people and break the barriers. People of India must see the uniqueness of Christ and Christianity by those living as the household of God.

There is no problem for the Hindus to accept Jesus Christ as one of the gods and worship him along with other gods and goddesses, but the challenge for Christians is to present Christ as unique in comparison with Hindu gods and goddesses. One of the challenges to Christians in India is the uniqueness of Christ. Gandhi sates,

> In spite of most devout attention to every word ascribed to Jesus in the New Testament, and in spite of my having read in a humble spirit all about Jesus, I have really not seen any fundamental distinction between Jesus and the other teachers. I can understand, explain and appreciate. (1986a:14)

When the Christian community fails to present the uniqueness of Christ, the existence of the Christian faith in India or elsewhere is questioned. Ramabai, another saint from India, was challenged by the lives of the Christians and accepted Christ as her Lord and Savior in 1881. Batley states,

> The time came at length when the Pandita became fully convinced of the truth of Christianity and ready to confess her faith in Baptism. Her decision was

strengthened by seeking the loving efforts of Christian women to reclaim their fallen sisters. "When I saw the works of mercy carried on I began to realize a real difference between Hinduism and Christianity. I was hungry for something better than the Hindu Shastras gave. I found it in the Christian Bible and was satisfied." (1937:19)

Presenting the uniqueness of Christ among the Hindu community is a challenge for the Christians in India. The uniqueness of Christ must be seen as love in action, in words, and in community living. Jesus demonstrated the uniqueness as the Son of God in words and in actions (John 14:6). Jesus was with the people and among the people to understand them and to help them in their needs. The highest quality of Jesus was seen in simplicity of life, humility in behavior, and in obedience to the Father.

As mentioned earlier, Indians are open to accept the saints and devotees of Christianity irrespective of the nationality. When they see their life, then they love and follow them. Stanley Jones was one among the many who came to India and tried to understand the sociocultural pattern of the people. Dr. Stanly Jones' deepest desire was to naturalize Christ in Indian soil. He writes,

There is a beautiful Indian marriage custom that dimly illustrates our task in India, and where it ends. At the wedding ceremony the women friends of the brides accompany her with music to the home of the bridegroom. They usher her into the presence of the bridegroom – that is as far as they can go, then they retire and leave her with her husband. That is our joyous task in India: to know him, to introduce him, to retire – not necessarily geographically, but to trust India with the Christ and trust Christ with India. We can only go so far – he and India must go the rest of the way. India is beginning to walk with the Christ of the Indian Road. What a walk it will be! (1925:220-221)

Indian spirituality is rooted in practical realities of life, which become the cultural pattern of the people. Now spirituality is measured as renouncing the world and leading a secluded life. The image of the church, as the household of God, must be able to practice the cultural pattern by giving a new meaning to it. Taylor writes,

The inclination towards simplicity rather than complexity will be rich inheritance to the Indian church from Indian thought. India has realized that the way to find life is to lose it; that self-sacrifice is the method of self-realization. Here we find a very close approximation to the Christian ideal, for life, through Christianity, is only found as it is laid down, only realized as it is renounced. (1973:53)

As mentioned in Chapter 4, Hindu worship is focused on pleasing and appeasing gods and goddess through individual prayers and sacrifices. But Christian worship is out of love and reverence on the basis of what God has done for us and on behalf of us (Psalms 95-100). The worship of the household of God must be a celebration of what God has done in Christ Jesus for each one and for the whole family. Corporate worship strengthens the family of God and provides hope for the believers and to the community.

The church as the body of Christ connects people to one another with the family of God in each location, nation, and relate inter-nationally (Figure 10). The image of the church as the body of Christ is not looking down on the other members of the body but honoring all the members and moving toward maturity (Romans 12:3-13). So the household of God image is providing a higher and privileged position in the cultural environment of the people in India.

The figure below shows the image of the church as the household of God. The small circles are the families in the household of God and the three or four circles are the household in different locations. The big circle which contains the small circles is the household in different nations and this is contained in a big circle which is the universal church. The outer circle is the world outside of the household of God. All these circles, except the outer circle are connected, which shows that all are connected with one another, at local, the national and universal levels. The household of God must be a community witnessing to the world around them concerning the love of God.

Household of God
in North/South America

World

Household of God
in Asia (India)

Universal Church as the
Household of God

Household of God
in Europe

Household of God
in Africa/Australia

Household of God
in different locations

Families in the Household
of God
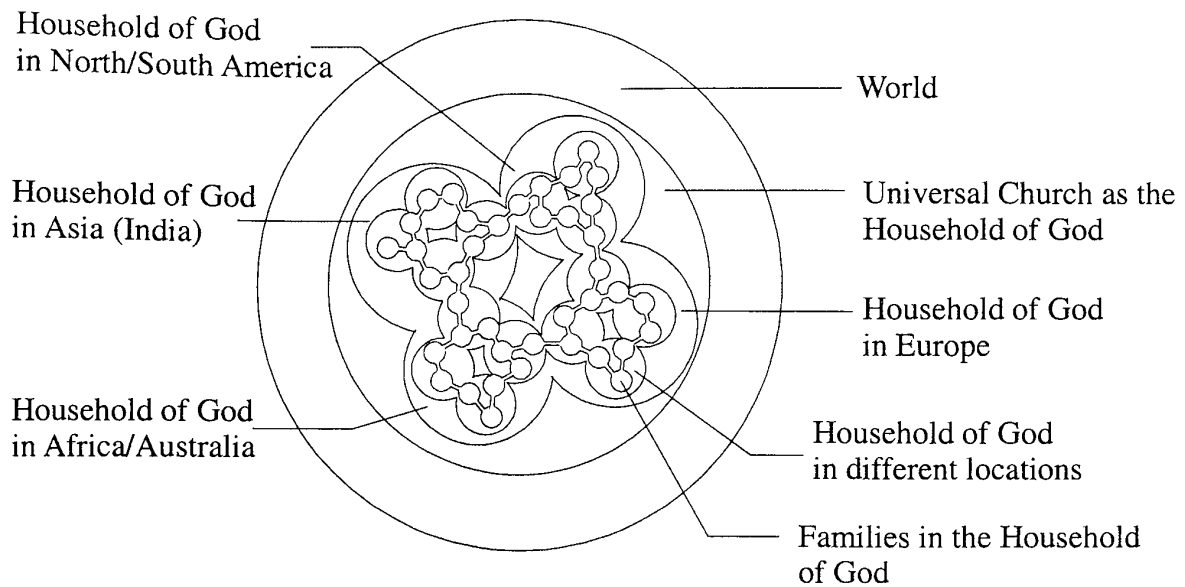
Figure 10. The Image of the Church as the Household of God

The church, the family of God, has been selected out of the world to be the

possession of the Lord, like the people of Israel. The family of God is constituted on the

basis of their faith affirmation in Jesus Christ as the Lord. That makes the household of

God different from all others around them. The call to be in the family of God is a

privilege as well as a responsibility. The family of God must be the light to the local area

and also salt to the community. Love, fellowship, and care must extend to the

community around them, beyond their own brothers and sisters. They are called to carry

out justice and mercy of the Lord to the community so that they may also come to know

Jesus as the Lord of their life. The household of God must stand for justice and peace in

their own lives and to the people around them.

<u>Suggestions for Further Study</u>

This study points out the need for contextualizing the Christian household of God

concept within contemporary Indian culture but does not propose specific ways to do this.

Further research and investigation are needed at this point in order to provide specific

models, methods, and case studies on such contextualization.

I propose that further research should be done on the ways and means of

conveying the story of God's love for humanity as the family of God. The focus of this

research would analyze the sociocultural context of different religious groups in India and

the possibilities of communicating bible stories in their own terms and categories. The

relevance and need of communicating the message of the gospel in Indian traditional

media, like *kathaprasangam, kavalidance, udukkupattu, bajena* and other cultural

patterns are urgent needs for further research. Traditional media are still used in India for

communicating religious stories among the communities. Research in the area of

communication must pay attention to understanding the worldviews of different castes

and the possibilities of bringing them together to listen to the biblical story.

The Indian socio-cultural context is built on Hindu religious sacred scriptures.

The sociocultural practices are mostly circulated by stories among the communities

according to the Brahmanical or high caste ordinances. Bishop Waskom Pickett states,

"The rule of the caste is not controlled by legal formula so much as by custom. The

leaders and their council do not often refer to an authentic code accessible in written form

– though they may be influenced by knowledge of ancient texts – but rely upon local

custom within the caste" (1933:33). So in order to contextualize the gospel to India we

are required to know the Hindu scriptures, the traditions and the present experiences of

the people. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the Hindu practices are produced in the communities through the stories of the heroes found in the sacred scriptures. "Stories are one of the basic modes of human life. Human life, then, can be seen as grounded in and constituted by the implicit or explicit stories which humans tell themselves and one another" (N.T. Wright 1992:38). In the Indian sociocultural context of the household of God there must be greater emphasis on circulating the stories of the Bible. The Bible is a big story of God's love towards humanity and their response to him (Figure 11).

The biblical story begins with the creation of the universe and reveals the plan of God for humanity. The biblical worldview is centered on the love of God and presents positive and negative responses of the people in biblical times. The biblical stories also reveal the concern of God towards humanity as father to his children and as husband to his wife. The biblical teachings on the kingdom of God are also built around the stories of the families who responded to the love of God positively and negatively. God sends messengers, prophets, priests, and kings, time and again to remind people of the plan of God (*oikonomia tou theou*), the economy of God (Meeks 1989:33). The ethical patterns of the families are based on the relationship with God as the father. The Biblical story unveils the story of a people, land, and their future. The father son relationship is based on love and obedience and breaking the relationship means bringing trouble on the people and to the land. The life and ministry of Jesus Christ is the continuation of the story which began in creation, Genesis. God as the loving father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem the creation from the trouble of eternal damnation. Jesus as an obedient Son shares the heart of His father and allows him to be crucified on behalf of the humanity. This opens up the future of the human families on the earth and also to the

whole creation. The family imagery is interwoven with the second coming of Christ, the

bride and bridegroom.
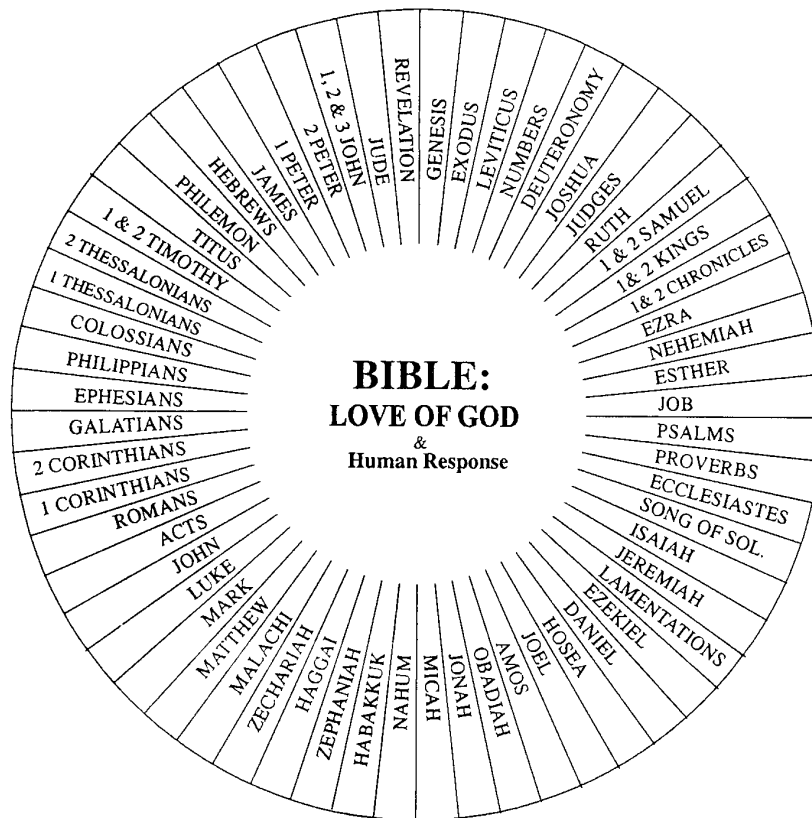
Figure 11. The Message of the Bible

The stories of the Bible must be circulated by the household of God, to the

communities around them, in action and in words. Stories will help the communities to

perceive and to be able to relate themselves to it and to the world around them (N.T.

Wright 1992:40). The church in India and elsewhere must engage in telling the biblical

stories and helping people of know the unique plan of God in Christ for the humanity.

Conclusion

The main issue of the whole discussion in this dissertation is the image of the church as the household of God and how his can relate to the sociocultural context of India. The household of God is one of the focuses of the Biblical message. The early church challenged the household setting of the Greco-Roman world with the Biblical pattern of the household of God. Similar household concepts are prevalent among the Indian community. Our discussion focused on how to contextualize the local household concept with the biblical pattern of the household of God. I realize that some of the practices of the Indian household can be adopted to the household of God; some need to be interpreted in the light of the household of God; and some practices need to be changed. The following are the major findings of the research:

1. The household structure of India is admirable; for example, family members taking care of each others and functioning under one responsible leader. This is helpful for easy communication and for teaching the young generations about spiritual, social and ethical values.

2. Exclusiveness must be addressed in the Indian sociocultural context. The church as the household of God must be an example for the Indian community, by everyone living beyond caste and denomination. The household of God must teach and practice the importance of each person for spiritual growth and maturity.

3. Social change is inevitable in the India sociocultural setting. A new perspective on life must be experienced beyond caste and denomination lines. This is possible in context of the household of God. A new work ethic must be taught and practiced in Indian society. People are often identified by the caste and their occupation. This

attitude must be changed; there must be an acceptance in the household of God beyond one's occupation and caste.

4. The household of God must be involved in arranging programs to strengthen the mindset of the low caste, who has been living under oppression for centuries. This can be achieved by equipping them for leadership through biblical teaching. The household of God must be taught that God is the Father of all humanity and knows everyone individually. All can talk to him and he answers everyone without considering their caste or color, language or region or occupation.

5. India needs to hear and experience the unique message of the gospel. All Indians need to accept the unique claims of Christ Jesus and be his disciples. This was well articulated in the writings of Stanly Jones who was a missionary to India. "Christianity must be defined as Christ, not the Old Testament, not Western civilization, not even the system built around him in the West, but Christ himself, and to be a Christian is to follow him. Christ must be in an Indian setting. It must be the Christ of the Indian Road" (1925:16).

6. The present institutional setting of the church in India calls for changes to regain vitality and meaning. As Snyder noted, "Wineskins are not eternal; not sacred. As time passes they must be replaced – not because of the gospel changes, but because the gospel itself demands and produces change! New wine must be put into new wineskins – not once-for-all, but repeatedly, periodically" (1996:16).

7. There is growing desire among the city dwellers of the Indians to be part of a family, especially the young people, because of the growth of nuclear families. They are in need of acceptance in a family where they can share their burdens openly, and be

comforted in a home like atmosphere. Indian Christians can make use of this desire by accepting them into the household of God and need then involving them in sharing the love of God.

8. In a hostile Indian context, believers are not concerned with church buildings, but they seek a family in which they can relate, enjoy fellowship and worship the Lord.[10] They are looking for a leader who can be a model for them to follow in their own lives. As McLaren contends concerning the need of a new church for the new world, "It is for people who want to help define and shape the church of the future, under the guidance of God" (1998:15).

9. The household of God image is a significant factor for the mission in India and elsewhere. All can be part of the household of God by believing in Jesus Christ. All must have opportunity to minister to one another and grow in the Lord. India is disintegrated into differing castes, languages and cultures. The message of the gospel can unite the nation into one family beyond all segregation. This is the challenge for the church in India and it is a unique mission.

10. If the Indian church can practice the image of the household of God, it will be a demonstration and a pattern which churches in other parts of the world can follow. Today family life is challenged in various ways: cloning, same sex marriages, and broken family lives. The household of God must practice and teach family values and the importance of fidelity in married life.

ENDNOTES Chapter 6

[1] Kaiser writes, "This promise of a universal blessing to the "people" or "families" on earth is repeated in Genesis 18:18; 22:18; 26:14. In Genesis 12:3 and 28:14 the Hebrew phrase used for "all the peoples/families" is *kol mispehot*, a phrase that is rendered in the Greek translation of the Old Testament as *pasai hai phulai*, meaning "all the tribes" in most contexts, but it could also stand for household as in Joshua 7:14" (2000:19).

[2] Incorporation was not permitted by intermarriages Nehemiah and Ezra forbids intermarriage with foreigners in the post-exilic period (Nehemiah 13:23-27; Ezra 9-10) (Kostenberger and O'Brien 2001:335-36).

[3] The Isaiah passage, 63:16, observes the faith affirmation of Israel based on their election as the sons. The prayer in Isaiah 63:15-64:12 remember the father son relationship of the people of Israel with God in the past. Isaiah 63:16 also reminds that the inclusive call of Israel ("Though Abraham does not know us..."). This passage relates to Jesus' saying about the faith of the centurion, "I say to you that many will come from east and west and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11-12; cf. John 8:39-42) (Muilenburg 1956:736)

[4] Contrary to biblical teaching, the Jews believed that they are safe and secure simply because they are the descendants of Abraham. Barclay writes, "The admiration which the Jews gave to Abraham was perfectly legitimate, for Abraham is a giant in the religious history of mankind, but the dedication they drew from Abraham's greatness was quite misguided. The Jews believed that Abraham had gained such merit from his goodness that this merit was sufficient, not only for himself, but for all his descendants also. Abraham's goodness, so they believed had been so great that he had built up a kind of treasury of merit on which all his descendants could draw. Abraham's credit balance with God had been so vast that all his descendants could go on drawing on it for ever and not exhaust it" (1955:28-29).

[5] Hindu theology is not making any difference between god and universe. They argue that the human soul is qualitatively no different from the soul of an animal, an insect, or a rock. Magalwadi states, "The only way to be free, to be a *jivan-mukta*, was to cease being an individual person, to transcend illusory personality, to try to be a god-man *en route* to becoming a non-person – the impersonal – infinite *Ataman*, the everlasting Silence, or Consciousness. Throughout Indian history, the idea of individual freedom within the context of a political community has been absent" (1997:45). In the household setting they had no rights for a person to violate the father or husband decision. They had no recourse, no one to whom appeals could be made. The law of karma operates over them. This was explained in Ramayana, Sita says to her-brother-in-law, "The Creator must, I am sure, have meant this body of mine for sorrow, Lakshmana; for you see that I am sorrow and suffering incarnate" (1997:44).

[6] Hindus look at the caste system as the result of *karma* sin or wrong doings of a person's pervious birth so he cannot do anything with it but to suffer. Saju Chackalackal states, "Though Sita was not conscious of any act by which she might have separated a wife from her husband, she thought that she might have done so, and therefore, it was her lost to bear the agony of separation from her own husband.... We find Rama, Sita, Dasaratha and almost all the major characters of the Ramayana referring to the past actions to give reasons for the evils they suffered at certain stages of their lives" (1992:33).

[7] The women of the Izhavas and Nadar casts were not given permission to wear cloths on the upper part of their body. In 1814 the government made an order regulating the dress of women, after the complaints of the Nair community. This order prohibited the use of upper cloth by the women of Nadars or Izhavas but did not prevent the use of loose jackets. But the government order did not touch the slave casts at all. This whole event led into violence between the low castes and the high caste and it is known as the Upper Cloth Revolt in 1858-1859 (Gladstone 1984:81-92).

[8] Undisguised hatred of Untouchables incites members of a private army in a Bihar village. Outraged by the wage and land-reform demands of Untouchables, the Ranvir Sena, a militia led by landowners, has been implicated in the massacres of more than 500 Untouchables. The attackers have gone largely unpunished. Activists fear that the recent surge in violent incidents across India will only intensify as more Untouchables try to break the chains of caste (O'Neill 2003:30).

[9] Mass conversion of the low caste happened in 2001 at New Delhi, capital of India. 20,000 untouchable flocked from all over North India and announced their allegiance to Buddha and converted to Buddhism under the leadership of Ram Raj, Chairman of the All India Confederation of the Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes (Sharma 2001:1).

In 1984, 25,000 untouchables converted to Islam at Meenakshipuram inTamil Nadu state of South India. One of the converts responded to the question, why Islam was considered superior to Christianity: "Christianity has one God but caste discrimination is also there, while Muslims have one God and no caste discrimination" (Gnanakan 1984:5).

[10] The Hindu brothers and sisters who received baptism, in January 2000 in North Kerala, never asked me where we would worship the Lord Jesus Christ. Their commitment with one anther as the members of the family of God helped move beyond the building and facilities. They are worshiping the Lord in a house environment (Ministry diary 2001 January 28).

GLOSSARY OF THE INDIAN/HINDU TERMS

Acharya	Spiritual leader, senior priest, master of Hindu religious ceremonies
Adharma	Wickedness
Adhyayana	Study
Agni	Fire
Akhyana	Narrative
Ananda	Bliss
Annaprasana-samskara	First feeding of a child
Antyesti samskara	Funeral ceremonies
Artha	Wealth and power
Arti	Hindu ritual singing with sacred articles
Ashram	Hermitage, retreat
Ashrama dharma	Hermitage duties
Atithi-yajna	Giving food to guests
Atman	Soul
Avarna	Untouchable
Avatara	Incarnation
Bbuta-yajna	Distribution of food to cows, crows, and animals in general
Bhakti	Devotion
Brahmacharya-asrama	Student life
Brahmana	Priestly caste (high caste)

Brahma-vidya	Knowledge of God
Bramacharya	Self-control
Dalits	Oppressed, broken, rejected
Dana	Liberality
Darsana	Gaze
Devadasis	Temple prostitutes
Deva-yajna	Offering oblation
Dhanvantari	Physician of the gods
Dharma	Duty, right, justice, principle
Dharma-putra	Son of duty
Dhr	Sustain
Dwijatva	Twice born
Enaken	A close relative of the deceased performing the funeral rites
Ganapati	Also called Genesha, the elephant-headed son of god shiva
Garbhadhana	Conception
Gayatri-mantra	Initiatory prayer
Gotra	Tribe
Graham	Family, house
Grahastha-asrama	State of a householder
Grhastha Vyavastha	Family rules

Grihasthasrama dhrama	The householder's duty
Guna	Constituent qualities
Guru	Teacher, preceptor
Gurukulavasa	Staying with a master, teacher
Harijan	Children of God (untouchable)
Hindutva	The essence of Hinduism
Ishtadevetha	Favorite gods
Itihasa-Purana	Legendary scriptures
Jatakarma-samskara	Writing of horoscopy
Jati	Birth (People who into a particular caste)
Jothishem	Seeking best time for ceremonies and special event in life through medium or seeking future of a person though a medium
Kama	Love and pleasure
Karanbheda	Boring the ears
Karta	Head of the family
Kata	Story
Kavya	Artificial epic
Kirthan	Song
Kshtriya	Ruling caste (martial caste)
Kula	Clan
Kula-deveta	Household goddess
Kula-dharma	Duty of the clan

Manavadharmasastra	Manusmtri (the laws of Manu)
Manava-kartavya sastra	Code of duties of human being
Mappilla	Kings children
Margam kali pattu	Early St. Thomas Christians song
Maya	Illusion
Medhajanana-samskara	Producing intellect
Moksa	Liberation and bliss
Muhoorthem	Best timing for a ceremony according to the
Mundana-samskara	Heading shaving
Namakarna samskara	Naming ceremony
Niskramana-samskara	First outing of a child
Pandit	Teacher, scholar
Parabrahman	Ultimate reality
Pitri-yajna-tarpana	Oblation to departed souls
Pooja	Worship
Praja	Progeny
Prakriti	Nature
Pumsavana	Quickening a male child
Puranas	Ancient tales
Purusartha	Ideals of life
Purusasukta	Hymn of the primeval man
Purusha	Man, person, supreme being, spirit. The world was created out of the sacrificed body of pursha

Putra	Son
Rabban pattu	Song of Thomas
Raja	King
Rajas	Passion, activity
Rishi	One who attainted inner peace
Rishi-yajna	Study of Vedas
Rta	Sound
Sadana	Meditational secret
Saisava-samskara	Child ceremonies
Samaj	Gathering of people
Sampradayas	A special way of doing things
Samskara	Ceremony
Sannyasa-asrama	State of a homeless, mendicant
Sati	Widow burning along with the husband's funeral fire
Sattva	Virtue, goodness
Shakti	Power; a sect in Hinduism which worships the god shiva
Shastras	Scriptures
Shivas	A sect in Hinduism which worships god shiva (the destroyer god)
Shudhikaran kriyakaram	Home coming program (the act of re-converting Christians to Hinduism)

Smrti	That which is remembered
Sraddha	Annual religious rites performed for departed souls
Srishti	Creation
Sruit	That is heard
Sudra	Low caste
Tamas	Darkness, dullness
Tapas	Penance
Upanayan samskara	Initiation ceremony
Vairagya	Renunciation
Vaisnavas	A sect in Hinduism worship god vishnu
Vaisya	Business caste
Vanasprastha-asrama	State of a retired life
Varna	Color, a basic division of the social structure, caste system
Varnashram dharma	Caste system
Veboothy	Ash used in temples for religious ceremony
Vedas	Scriptures
Viraj	Shinning forth
Vivaha	Marriage
Yajna	Sacrificial worship
Yoga	Controlling breath in order to connect to the soul to ultimate reality, Brahman

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