The Transformation of Kinship in the New Testament

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Introduction

One of the most challenging questions asked of Jesus is to be found in Matthew 22: 23-30, Mark 12: 18-24 and Luke 20: 27-35. The Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, address Jesus, telling him the story of a widow who, because of the Levirate law, ends up marrying seven brothers sequentially. "In the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her" (Matthew. 22: 28). The Sadducees wish to embarrass Jesus by driving him to a logical jam, attempting to show the impossibility of resurrection. But, Jesus answers: "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matthew. 22-30).

Jesus manages to overcome the challenge of the Sadducees and affirms his prescription of love. The Sadducees only think in terms of mimetic rivalry: if the Kingdom of God exists, it is threatened by the brothers' jealousy over their wife. Jesus' answer is a way, once again, to proclaim a Kingdom free of mimetic rivalry: brothers who shared a wife will not be rivals, because there are no husbands and wives in the resurrection: only angels all participating of God's love.

This is a most important passage for mimetic theorists and Girardians. It further proves Jesus' program of love, placing emphasis on the need to avoid mimetic rivalry. But, the passage is also significant for another important reason: it is one among many passages that display a reaction against traditional concepts of kinship.

The New Testament as a whole may be compared to the most widely read Greek tragedy before the rise of psychoanalysis: *Antigone.* The Greek heroine is sentenced by her uncle Creon, tyrant of Thebes, after having performed the funerary rites upon the corpse of Polyneices, her brother killed in battle. The conflict between Antigone and Creon has

traditionally been interpreted as the struggle between kinship and State: tradition and modernity. Yet, Antigone's role as a representative of kinship and Creon's role as a representative of the State are very ambivalent. In Judith Butler's words (2000: 6), "opposing Antigone to Creon as the encounter between the forces of kinship and those of state power fails to take into account the ways in which Antigone has already departed from kinship . . . how her language, paradoxically, most closely approximates Creon's, the language of sovereign authority and action, and how Creon himself assumes his sovereignty only by virtue of the kinship line that enables that succession."

Neither Antigone nor Creon has a definite stand on kinship. They defend kinship relations and duties as much as they ignore them. This same attitude is to be found in the Bible. Kinship is a major concern in the Old Testament. To a certain extent, Ancient Judaism was a kinship-based religion, and throughout all of the Hebrew Bible, kinship is a privileged institution. In the New Testament, kinship no longer enjoys the same prominence; a vast number of passages react against it. Yet, the very first passages of the New Testament (Matthew 1) are a complex genealogy of Jesus. How are we to account for such ambivalence?

Part of the answer may be provided by mimetic theory. Kinship is one of the most important institutions of Culture. If Girard is right, all cultural institutions have their origin in sacrifice. Thus, kinship is, like religion, language and every other major institution, founded upon an originary murder, whose dynamics are kept hidden. Inasmuch as the gospels unveil this murder, cultural institutions no longer work as they used to. Once the truth about the origin of the world is found out, kinship relations are no longer sustainable.

Jesus has come to bring the sword and not peace. His message is profoundly apocalyptical, for in a world where once the truth is known, sacrifice no longer works, and the cultural institutions it supports come tumbling down. Perhaps one of Jesus' most disturbing words are to be found in what is known as the "Little Apocalypse" in Mark 13. There, he announces the terrible violence that the world will bear. One of the most eerie announcements is: "And brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents, and have them put to death" (Mark 13: 12).

For Raymund Schwager, this passage was of capital importance for his biblical hermeneutics: "At the end of time, conflicts among human beings will become so severe that even the most intimate family relationships will be incapable of healing the rifts, or even of covering them up. To be sure, deadly persecutions within families are not mentioned in general but only in connection with the gospel. But this could very well become the occasion for special enmities, precisely because it uncovers the hidden truth among family members as well as among others" (2000: 149). Even the core of society, the family, will be threatened by the gospels' revelatory power. Kinship will no longer function, for it is based upon a sacrificial violence that the gospels have made ever more difficult.

There is not, however, a complete withdrawal from kinship institutions in the Bible, not even in the New Testament. As far as kinship is concerned, the New Testament is, to use Gil Bailie's (1995) words, a "text in travail." The gospels' non-sacrificial program certainly is consistent with much of the New Testament's approaches to kinship. Yet, the New Testament seems to draw the wise conclusion that, even if kinship is sacrificial, we can not reject it altogether. It is certainly one of the "powers and principalities" of this world, but as Paul wisely advised, to reject these powers altogether is a rather foolish thing to do. In what follows, we shall approach how kinship is a sacrificial institution, how the Old Testament made of kinship a central tenet, and how the New Testament displays some significant transformations regarding this issue.

2

What is kinship and how does it arise?

For the time being, we shall ignore the intriguing and profound views of David Schneider (1984), an eminent anthropologist who has denied the existence of kinship. Even if his views are worthy of consideration, let us assume *a priori* that there *is* such a thing as kinship, and that it has occupied a most important place in the configuration of virtually all cultures.

Kinship may be broadly defined as a system of special relationships among a certain people. This definition, of course, is far from being satisfactory, for individuals may relate to each other and not be relatives. For decades, anthropologists believed that biology is the determinant factor of kinship: two individuals are relatives inasmuch as they share a biological nexus. But, it became increasingly evident that many of the so called 'relatives' do not necessarily have a biological connection. Thus, it is a *cultural institution*, and it is usually (but by no means always) based upon biological facts. Brian Schwimmer (2003) defines it as a system of relationships "constructed from a set of categories, groups, relationships and behaviours based upon culturally determined beliefs and values concerning human biology and reproduction."

Schwimmer summarizes kinship's universal features as follows:

- A lengthy infant maturation period that requires a major commitment from one and usually both parents to nurture and educate dependent children.
- The presence of a marital bond that creates an enduring and socially regulated sexual and domestic relationship between two or more people,
- A division of labour based on gender
- A prohibition of intercourse and marriage between close kin, which regulates a widely articulated network of relationships between individuals related by marriage.

Virtually all cultures have instituted strong parent-child relationships, husband-wife bonds,

man-woman division, and special relationships, cultural roles, and statuses, according to one's biological connection with other individuals. In a word, all cultures know of some form of kinship relationship, for the incest taboo is universal, regulating sexual relationships and establishing differences among people according to their kinship status.

The incest taboo may be considered the core of kinship systems. Inasmuch as restrictions on sexual partners come up, Culture creates a system of differentiated relationships that assigns a specific place to each individual, according to his position in the larger system. The incest taboo gives rise to the first great kinship differentiation among individuals: there is a group of people one is forbidden to have intercourse with (relatives), and a group of people one is permitted to have intercourse with (non-relatives).

The incest taboo is a universal institution; thus, kinship is also universal. Yet, this universality is by no means a biological fact. Even if it is a universal feature, it is a *cultural feature* that regulates *biological behaviour*. In other words, man is biologically incestuous, but Culture regulates his behaviour, imposing incest regulations and thus creating the cultural concept of kinship.

That is, at least, the view of Claude Levi-Strauss (1967), the *guru* of kinship studies during the last few decades. Levi-Strauss, a thinker who for the most part is unconcerned with the question of origins, does attribute the origin of Culture to the incest taboo: man became man inasmuch as he regulated his sexual conduct, imposing incest restrictions and differentiating individuals into different kinship classes. Incest taboo and kinship constitute the core of the transition from Nature to Culture, a recurrent cultural theme, according to Levi-Strauss.

Levi-Strauss has gone great lengths explaining *how* this transition may have occurred. Yet, he has failed (he has not even bothered) to explain *why* such transition took place. He takes for granted that, all of a sudden, kinship appeared, but he is absolutely not interested in the circumstances that may have forced the appearance of kinship. Perhaps, Girard is right when he denounces that "Levi-Strauss has revived once again this absurd idea [of 'social contract' origins], blithely suggesting that one fine day prehuman groupings decided (after some kind of constitutional referendum, no doubt) that cultural differentiations, language, and other cultural institutions would be nice things to have" (1987a: 125).

There must have been an important reason for the appearance of cultural differentiations, kinship being one of the most important. That, according to Girard, must have been the threat of violence. Kinship is a system of cultural differentiation, and differentiation is a reaction and prevention against the threat of undifferentiated mimetic violence. Girard agrees with Levi-Strauss that the incest taboo may have been the first of kinship institutions, but refuses to accept the idea that it is the origin of Culture as such. Before the incest taboo, there must have been a concern and an event that forced human groupings to

separate individuals into kinship classes. These, of course, were undifferentiated violence and the victim mechanism.

"If we compare alimentary prohibitions with the incest prohibitions," Girard writes, "we observe that they function in exactly the same manner. In both cases, in fact, prohibition falls not on rare, distant, or inaccessible objects, but on those that are nearest and most abundant, since the groups has a monopoly on their production" (1987b: 75). In order to avoid violence, men were forbidden to have access to their closest females: their mothers and sisters. This is due to the fact that "the most available and accessible objects are prohibited because they are most likely to provoke mimetic rivalries among members of the group" (1987b: 76). Thus, the fear of violence pressured the first and foremost distinction of kinship systems: the separation of individuals allowed and forbidden with whom to have sexual intercourse.

3

But, not only does kinship prevent against mimetic violence. The origin of its development is the basic mechanism that controls violence: victimage. Kinship is, after all, a system of differences. And differential systems have their origin in the victimage mechanism. As the originary victim is murdered by the horde, the psycho-social dynamics of scapegoating create a space of peace. There had never been a moment such as this one. The impact of the victimage scene is so great, that Culture will arise as a system of differences taking the victim as its referent. In Girard's words, "because the victim, in so far as it seems to emerge from the community and the community seems to emerge from it, for the first time there can be something like an outside and an inside, a before and after, a community and the sacred" (1987b: 102).

Group solidarity and identity, a very special feature of kinship systems, arises from the victimage mechanism. Inasmuch as they have participated in the same murder, for the first time individuals develop a strong conscience of the nexus that binds them. If, before the victimage mechanism, they had certain conscience that they shared a biological nexus, now this nexus is even more strengthened by a cultural sacrificial force. Kinship perpetuates the solidarity and difference that, once generated by the victimage mechanism, is needed in order to sustain Culture.

It should not be surprising, then, that sacrifice and kinship have a very special relationship. In *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), Girard has provided some interesting ethnological examples of how this relationship is culturally articulated. Among the Tupinamba of Brazil, for instance, the word *tobajara* has a double meaning: ritual enemy for a cannibalistic feast, and brother-in-law. The difference between a man and his brother-in-law is, ultimately, the difference between scapegoat and scapegoater, victim and community. The brother-in-law is the perfect surrogate victim: he is both an insider and an outsider, well suited for the

transfer mechanism.

Another example provided by Girard is that of the Tsimshian and the Niga. At weddings, the kinship grouping of both the bride and groom simulate battles that only end up with the death (real or simulated) of a slave. His death symbolizes the kinship alliance between the newly wed and their relatives.

Out of all the examples provided by Girard, the Oedipus myth is perhaps the clearest expression of the relationship between kinship and the victimage mechanism. Oedipus' crimes constitute a serious threat to kinship: inasmuch as he is incestuous, he has destroyed all the differentiations needed to sustain a kinship system. Only his violent expulsion will re-establish kinship. The crisis of differences, metaphorically expressed through the plague, will cease after the community projects its violence upon Oedipus. Kinship will be once again born only with the death or expulsion of a scapegoat.

We may well add other examples not provided by Girard, further evidencing this relationship. Robertson Smith's (2002 [1889]) work on ancient Semite sacrificial ritual has become a classic of the anthropology of sacrifice. According to Smith, Semite sacrifice was originally a great festive meal where kinship groups (*i.e.* clans) strengthened their nexus by eating the flesh of their totemic animal, from which they claimed descent.

Godfrey Lienhardt's classical ethnographic study, *Divinity and Experience* (1988), is a detailed account of the sacrificial rites of the Dinka, an East African people. In one case, sacrifices are offered honouring specific individuals or groups. After the sacrificial victim is killed, its parts are distributed among the members of the community. Each part of the dead victim is assigned to a special category of relatives. Thus, kin classes are separated according to the differentiation of the sacrificial victim.

E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1940) and Meyer Fortes (1945) were well known for their "descent theory." During their work with the Nuer and the Tallensi, respectively, they theorized about the system of "segmentary lineages," which provided the basis of organization for many kinship systems. In these societies, kinship groups fuse into larger units depends on the situation of blood feuds. In a conflict, a kinship group sides with another, depending on the proximity of ancestors, thus forming a larger kinship unit. This fusion only takes place inasmuch as both groups share a common enemy. In such a manner, kinship solidarities are strengthened through a common enemy as much as a common ancestor. This same pattern was also noticed by the great 14[th]century social thinker Ibn-Khaldun (1969), who claimed that war strengthens the *asabiyah* (solidarity) of a tribe made up of cousins.

It has been noted by anthropologists that kinship is the fundamental institution of all non-Western cultures. Many societies speak no other language than kinship: politics is expressed in terms of kinship, economy functions according to kinship relations, legal systems are dependent on kinship relations, and most religions have a special relationship

with kinship. It seems to be a universal institution. Indeed, it is. But, its universality must be explained in terms of its relationship with the victimage mechanism. If, as Girard claims, Culture is only possible with the victimage mechanism, then kinship, a universal institution, must have its origins in scapegoating.

Anthropologists are well aware that Western societies are the least concerned with kinship. In Sir Henry Maine's (1987 [1861]) terms, the great Western achievement has been the transition from kinship to territoriality, from status to contract. Yet, once again, most anthropologists have not provided a satisfactory account of the reasons for such a transition. If we follow our line of argument, it should not be difficult to realize that, if Western society is the least concerned with kinship, it is because it is also the one society where sacrifice and scapegoating works the least.

Girard has gone to great lengths to demonstrate how the Bible, especially the Gospels, is responsible for Western society's distance from sacrifice and scapegoating. However, he has said virtually nothing about how the Bible, doing away with sacrifice, has also promoted a detachment from traditional kinship institutions. We now turn to the way in which the Bible has contributed to this process.

4

A brief view of kinship in the Old Testament

In the sphere of kinship, the Old Testament and Ancient Judaism present great similarities with the rest of ancient religions. Ancient Israel's social organization is typical of many ancient societies: the society is differentiated among twelve "tribes," each claiming a common ancestor. Apart from their common monotheistic faith, the Hebrews appealed to kinship in order to hold together their national identity: they all descend from Jacob. Kinship is the core of most of their daily activities, their political organization and territorial distribution. Throughout the Book of Joshua, each territory of the Promised Land is to be occupied by each of the twelve tribes, according to their ancestors. Monotheism supposed a detachment from tribal conceptions of God, but religious worship was still determined by kinship: the Levites are granted the priestly and sacrificial privileges. To a great extent, Hebrew religious organization was not unlike the Hindu caste system: each kin group is assigned a special status and role in religious and social life.

In a society where individuals were granted roles and statuses based upon their kinship positions, the record of genealogies had to be rigorously kept. Anthropologists and historians know well that extensive genealogies are usually flawed, but Ancient Israel kept a relatively accurate record, due to the appearance of written tradition. Thus, the record of genealogy is a major concern in the Old Testament. For almost every major character that appears in the Bible, his/her genealogy (both ancestors and descendants) is elaborated: the

descendants of Cain (Genesis 4: 17-22), the descendants of the sons of Noah (Genesis 5: 1-32), the descendants of Levi (Exodus 6: 16-25). I Chronicles 1:1-9: 44 offers the most complete genealogy to be found in the Bible, from Adam to King Saul and his descendants.

There is no such thing as a "meritocracy" in the Old Testament. Individual achievements are secondary to the achievements of the kinship group. A harsh system of social exclusion is revealed as most individuals are denied ritual privileges because of their poor genealogical record. Some of these unfair stories are to be found in Ezra 2: 59-63 and Nehemiah 7: 63-64.

As far as social organization is concerned, the individual is still subordinate to the kinship group. Bastards and their descendants up to ten generations are denied access to ritual congregations (Deuteronomy 23:2). Theologically, the individual is also subject to the deeds of his ancestors. God will punish not only sinners, but their descendants as well (Exodus 20: 5, 34: 7; Numbers 14: 18, Deuteronomy 5: 9). There are, however, some exceptions. Deuteronomy contradicts itself, proclaiming in 24: 16 that children shall not pay for the guilt of their parents. Theological individualism is also proclaimed in II Kings 14: 6, where a man is to suffer punishment for his own sins, and not for those of his parents.

Kinship, being a cultural system, must impose differentiations among groups of individuals. Apart from incest regulations (Leviticus 18: 7-23, 20: 11-21), separating those allowed and those forbidden as sexual partners, the Old Testament also differentiates among the descendants of a man through primogeniture, an institution of great importance in ancient Israel. It was certainly the motif for mimetic rivalry, as the case of Esau and Jacob shows (Genesis 25: 25-34, 27: 1-40). Regardless of a man's preference among his sons' mothers, the law of primogeniture must be followed (Deuteronomy 21: 15-17). Once again, individuals are privileged and condemned, not according to their deeds, but according to their position in the kinship system.

Another most important differentiation of kinship is that between man and woman. In kinship-based societies, social organization is structured by descent groups, and to keep track of one's genealogy, genders must be clearly separated. Levi-Strauss has accurately mentioned that virtually all societies build binary oppositions and systems of differentiation on gender. Ancient Israel was no exception. Thus, cross-dressing is censured (Deuteronomy 22: 5) as abominable to God. Most likely, in most cultures transgressors of this law would be put to death, as Girard has brilliantly showed was the case for Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae.*

It is well known that jealousy and resentment among brothers, in great part due to the preference of the parents and God (through primogeniture and other institutions, such as sacrifice), is a recurrent theme in the Old Testament. Thus, to a certain extent, kinship accelerates mimetic rivalries among brothers. Apart from Jacob and Esau, we find the

stories of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4: 3-8), Abimelech and the assassination of his seventy brothers (Judges 8: 29-9: 6), Absalom and Ammon (II Samuel 13:22-29), Solomon and Adonijah (I Kings 1:1-4; 2:23-25), Jehoram and his brothers (II Chronicles 21:1-4).

For centuries, the Hebrews lacked a centralized state. And, when the tribes were politically united during the kingdoms of David and Solomon, the social organization continued to be based upon kinship. The safeguard of Hebrew society was religion, for it kept Israel's identity throughout the series of calamities they had to endure. But, being a kinship-based society, it also had to be safeguarded by a strong traditional family structure. The collapse of traditional family values would have been disastrous for the Hebrews, and with all certainty, they would have disappeared as people.

All great ancient non-Western civilizations have emphasized some form of filial piety in their religious, political, social, and judicial systems. Confucianism's cardinal value, *hsiao*, has shaped Chinese life ever since. Filial piety is the basis of Chinese religious and social life: the due respect that children must show to their parents conditions most other Chinese institutions. One of the institutions that the Romans felt most proud of was the *patria potestas* in their legal system: a son is subject to his father's dominion until the latter's death, and must obey him at all times. *Pietas,* respect for ancestors, became an important tenet of Roman religious life; and Islam also places great emphasis on filial piety (Koran 31: 14).

Ancient Israel was probably in contact with ancestor worshipers. Monotheism, Israel's most distinguished institution, would never allow for ancestor worship. But, for a people so concerned with the Law, order in a kinship-based society must be safeguarded by a well-structured hierarchy within the family. Thus, even if ancestor worship was rejected, paternal authority and filial piety and respect still occupied a most important place among Hebrews (Exodus 20: 12; Leviticus 20: 9; Deuteronomy 27:16, 21: 18-21; Proverbs 13: 24). Not unlike the Oedipus myth, transgressors of this institution are to be severely punished.

5

National identity was a major concern for ancient Israel. Their national frenzy may appear quite xenophobic to modern eyes, but it was precisely the concern with national identity that allowed them to hold on to monotheism and resist their polytheistic surroundings. Endogamy played a major role in the preservation of national identity. The books of Ezra (10: 1-44) and Nehemiah (13: 23-31) place great emphasis on the need for religious and ethnic endogamy. Concepts of romantic individualistic love are suppressed in favour of national identity.

Ezra and Nehemiah placed great emphasis on endogamy because in prior centuries ethnic exogamy had brought disastrous results to Israel. In some instances, foreign wives are trusted and the relationships are harmonious, as is the case with Ruth. Solomon married

hundreds of wives from other nations. Exogamy, Levi-Strauss claims, has a *sociological* motif. Marrying-out is a way to form alliances with foreign peoples. Thus, Solomon, being a great strategist, came to realize that the best way to keep friendly relations with neighbours was through marriage. Being a cultural institution, then, exogamy is a manner of controlling violence. But, as it is often the case with the Bible, it is proven that conventional cultural solutions to violence are only temporary: strategic exogamy becomes problematic as the marital alliance between Israel and Judah is no longer operative (II Kings 8: 16-24). Furthermore, Solomon's kinship alliance with pagans (I Kings 11: 1-13) introduces idolatrous and sacrificial practices (I Kings 11: 8); once again, kinship and sacrifice are inseparable.

Apart from endogamy and exogamy, the Hebrews had two institutions that shaped their marriage system: the levirate and parallel cousin marriage. The Levirate rule (Deuteronomy 25: 5-10) held that if a man dies without sons, his brother must take the widow as his wife, and their offspring shall bear the name of the deceased brother. This institution may be seen as a way to look after defenceless widows, but it also displays the great genealogical concern of the Hebrews: not only was it important to know one's ancestors, one of a man's greatest honours is to have numerous descendants, as God's covenant with Abraham shows. If a man refuses to continue his deceased brother's seed and provide him with descendants, he is subject to censure or even divine wrath, as is the case with Onan (Genesis 38: 3-10). Once again, it should not come as a surprise that the victims of sacred violence are transgressors of laws that concern kinship, for this institution is one of the central pillars of Culture.

Patrilateral parallel cousin marriage, the marriage of a man to his father's brother's daughter, was also widely practiced among the Hebrews. If a man has no sons, he will make sure his daughters are married to their parallel cousins. Given the fact that both descent and inheritance were patrilineal, parallel cousin marriage ensured that a man's descent and property would stay within the lineage. Thus, his seed would continue.

The New Testament's transformations

Mencius, the great Chinese philosopher, once said that "it is the way of animals to have neither father nor brother" (quotes by Weber, 1951: 236). He was right. "Father," "brother" and all kinship categories are *cultural* constructs, usually based (but by no means always) upon biological facts. Thus, kinship is a *cultural* reality, and only human beings have Culture. Not to have father or brother is not to have Culture, to become an animal. Yet, Jesus proclaims that "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10: 37), or even more shockingly, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14: 26).

If Mencius were right, Jesus, by asking his disciples to abandon their relatives, is asking them to become animals. In a way, he is. He is asking his followers to transcend Culture, not to enter the domain of the animal kingdom as Mencius may have thought, but to enter the domain of God's Kingdom. There will simply be no kinship institutions in God's Kingdom, "for in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30).

This Kingdom may appear rather cold to human sensibility. Marriage is a beautiful institution, and to think that in eternity there will be no such thing is a scary thought. Yet, this is precisely what Jesus attempts to show: the Kingdom of God is very different from any worldly kingdom. Whereas, for example, the Koranic images of Paradise are very lively, sensual and human, Jesus' images are very alien to human institutions. Human kingdoms and their institutions are based upon surrogate violence; God's Kingdom is based upon love. With love, cultural institutions, such as kinship, will no longer be needed. In a Kingdom totally alien to violence, violence-controlling institutions are unnecessary.

We may well argue that kinship is not *only* a cultural institution that controls violence. It is also a guarantor of love: frequently, relatives love each other much more profoundly than friends or other non-relatives. Jesus is well aware of this, and that is the reason why he never disregards kinship altogether; he is more interested in the *transformation* of kinship than in its total elimination.

Thus, Jesus is concerned with marriage and its indissolubility (Mark 10: 2-9, Matthew 19: 3-9), and he favours some continuation with Old Testament kinship institutions. As prescribed in Exodus 20: 14, Leviticus 20: 10 and Deuteronomy 5: 18 and 22: 22, Jesus censures adultery (Mark 10: 11-12). Yet, for Jesus, adultery is more of a spiritual sin than a transgression of a kinship law: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shall not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). Furthermore, even in the case of adultery, Jesus begins to show that kinship and marriage laws are only secondary in importance; love and forgiveness is his primal concern. When the Scribes are about to stone an adulterous woman to death, Jesus challenges whoever is without sin to do so. Whereas Moses' Law commanded stoning to death, Jesus forgives the woman (John 8: 3-11).

6

It is perhaps in the apocalyptical sayings where Jesus most prominently announces the demise of traditional kinship. "For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matthew 10: 35-36). We have no need to interpret Jesus' apocalyptic message; Girard and Girardians have extensively done so; it

suffices to say that Jesus announces terrible things to come because, the truth about humanity and God being revealed, human beings will no longer be able to get along through scapegoating.

The announcement of conflict is ever more terrifying if it takes place *within* the family. Ever since Aristotle, philosophers and sociologists alike have rightly viewed the family as the microcosm of society. Kinship is a system of *social* relationships; thus, it is largely based upon scapegoating. Families stay together inasmuch as they have a common potential enemy (hence *tobajara:* brother-in-law and ritual enemy). The gospel's revelation will affect even the core of society: families. Not even relatives will get along. Formerly, to do so, they needed scapegoating; now that it will no longer work, brother will turn against brother.

Jesus asks his followers to inaugurate a *new* community of love, free of kinship categories. Kinship presupposes violence. When Jesus asks his followers to abandon their relatives (Matthew 10: 37; Luke 9: 59-62, 14: 26), he is not asking them to abandon the people as such. He is asking them to abandon the *social bond based upon scapegoating violence* and form a new community based upon the love of God's Kingdom.

By no means does Jesus pretend a total destruction of kinship; we may reasonably say that he would have agreed with Mencius: to have no relatives is the way of animals. What Jesus is hoping for is a *new* form of kinship: one based, not upon scapegoating violence, but upon *love*, a spiritual kinship. Thus, when "someone told Jesus: 'Your mother and brothers are outside asking for you'. But, he answered: 'Who is my mother and who are my brothers?' And, pointing with his hand to his disciples, he said: 'These are my mother and my brothers. Because, he who does God's will, that is my brother, my sister, and my mother'" (Mark 3: 32-35). Jesus' relatives are those who do God's will, that is, those who love. One's kinship will be purely based upon love, *not* on cultural categories based upon violence.

Furthermore, Jesus uses the language of kinship to articulate his religious message. He expresses his relationship with God as that of a father and his son. Jesus' concept of "father" transcends biological and sociological facts altogether. The Pharisees, devoted to Mosaic Law and the Deuteronomic condemnation of illegitimacy, hope to embarrass Jesus by asking him "where is thy father?"; Jesus answers: "You do not know me, nor my father. If you knew me, you would know my father" (John 8: 19). Some scholars have interpreted this as Jesus' embarrassment over his hypothetical illegitimacy: since he does not have a clear biological and sociological father, he recurs to a spiritual father. Jesus' illegitimacy is unimportant. What *is* important is the fact that he confronts the Pharisees' understanding of "father," namely, biological and sociological, and puts forward a new *spiritual* understanding of "father" and kinship in general.

Apart from the gospels, the New Testament also shows some continuity with Old Testament kinship institutions. Jesus' genealogical track is thoroughly kept in Matthew 1: 11-17 and

Luke 3: 23-28. Paul censures homosexuality (I Timothy 1: 9-10; I Corinthians 6:9-10; Romans 1: 26-27), as does the Old Testament (Leviticus 18:22, 20: 13). Leaving translation controversies aside, homosexuality is seen as a major threat–above all, to kinship: it makes reproduction and perpetuation of genealogies difficult.Paul also places some emphasis on other traditional concepts of kinship. Obedience of children is recommended (Ephesians 6: 1-4), and he prescribes the traditional gender separation and recommends women's subjection to men (Ephesians 5: 22-24; I Timothy 2: 11-11-12).

Contemporary feminists may well be scandalized by his words, yet it is Paul himself who, somewhere else, proclaims: "There is no longer any difference between Jews and gentiles, free men and slaves; there is no difference between men and women. For you are all one in Jesus Christ" (Galatians 3: 28). An apostle that so proclaimed "righteousness by faith" and not by the Law, could not avoid doing away with many of the traditional concerns with kinship derived from legal institutions. As an apostle to the Gentiles, he comes to appreciate the uselessness of genealogy: there is no need to prove one's origins in order to follow Christ. Thus, he warns against genealogical records (I Timothy 1: 4; Titus 3: 9).

Paul may have censured homosexuality because he may have considered it a threat to marriage, one of kinship's core institutions. Yet, marriage does not seem to be a prime concern for Paul. "He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord, but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife" (I Corinthians 7: 32-33). Marriage is a worldly institution and God is not concerned with it. Kinship concepts are alien to God's Kingdom. Yet, Paul knows well that we can not reject altogether the "powers and principalities," human institutions. Thus, even if non-marriage is better for the service of the Lord, marriage is allowed: "Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better" (I Corinthians 7: 37-38).

Even if it is a worldly institution unconcerned with God's Kingdom, Paul well knows that marriage may be a safeguard of love. Thus, even if it is better not to have sex (I Corinthians 7: 1); in order to avoid fornication and loveless sex, marriage, as well as benevolence between spouses, are encouraged: "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband" (I Corinthians 7: 3-4).

To sum up: both Jesus and Paul present an ambivalent attitude towards kinship. For some cases, Old Testament institutions are thoroughly followed and defended. Yet, for a number of important cases, both Jesus and Paul depart from traditional kinship concepts and reinforce a transformation of kinship categories. As a result, Christianity inaugurates a new understanding of kinship, based, not upon biological facts and sociological constructions,

but to spiritual relationships among the new relatives. If, as it has been noted by many anthropologists, for most cultures "blood is thicker than water," Christianity has put forward the innovation that "faith is thicker than blood."

7

Christianity, a modernizing religion

One of Girard's most emblematic and celebrated quotes is found in *The Scapegoat:* "The invention of science is not the reason that there are no longer witch-hunts, but the fact that there are no longer witch-hunts is the reason that science has been invented. The scientific spirit, like the spirit of enterprise in an economy, is a by-product of the profound action of the gospel text" (1986: 204-205). In a word, the gospels and Christianity are to account for the formation of modernity.

No sociologist or historian of modernity would dare deny this fact. Regardless of whether modernity is a good or a bad thing, Christianity has had its great share of influence in the formation of the modern world. This influence is too great to be approached in a short essay. Thus, in track with our main theme, we shall briefly explore how Christianity's transformation of kinship contributed to the rise of the modern world. If, as I have attempted to show, the New Testament's transformation of kinship is a logical consequence of the gospels' revelation of the scapegoating mechanism, then this revelation is the ultimate origin of the great transformations in the kinship systems of the modern world.

Probably since Max Weber (1951), historians and sociologists have all agreed that the Western kinship and family systems have been a determining factor in the formation of the modern world. Modernity is a rather broad concept, but sociologically speaking, we could follow Alan Macfarlane (2000) when he tells us that modernity's main feature is the "separation of spheres." In modern society, no area of social life is dominant over the rest. Whereas in Communism the economic sphere is dominant, or in Islam the religious one, in modernity all spheres are accordingly separated, thus creating a balance.

In most traditional societies, kinship is not separated from the rest of social life. Basically all institutions are expressed in the language of kinship, and economic, political, social and religious relations are modeled after the kinship structure. Thus, in order for modernity to appear, kinship had to be withdrawn from the other social spheres, mainly by reduction: kinship relations would be kept to a minimum so as not to interfere with other spheres.

When and how did this transformation occur? Historians do not seem to agree. Most of them hold the view that it must have occurred after the fall of the Roman Empire, by way of the German tribes' influence. As opposed to both Romans and Jews, the German tribes brought a reduced system of kinship. Descent was no longer *patrilineal*, as in the Roman and Jewish

case, but *bilateral*; that is, an individual belonged both to his/her father's or mother's kinship group. In such a manner, since a man belonged to both groups, he could not keep constant relations with both sets of relatives and could not choose between one and the other, thus limiting his kinship relations altogether.

This fact is undeniable, and its influence upon the Western kinship and family system is probably a reality. Christians living in the modern world must acknowledge the fact that their pagan origins are largely accountable for the transformation of kinship and its impact upon modern society. Yet, that is only part of the story. Only recently has a group of scholars explored the role Christianity played in the transformation of the Western kinship system.

Jack Goody (1983) is perhaps the leading scholar who has defended the view that Christianity is largely accountable for the modern kinship system. According to his materialistic explanation, as the Church became *the* prominent institution of the Middle Ages, it began to accumulate wealth, both for mercantilist and humanitarian purposes. This wealth had to be taken from land owners. But, instead of articulating the inept solution of Communism (violent confiscation), it limited potential heirs, so that if a man died without successors, the Church would take over his property. This limitation of heirs was achieved by instituting a series of kinship reforms that reduced the number of a man's kindred and weakened the strength of kinship groups. Such reforms included bilateral descent, the ban on cousin marriage, polygyny and adoption, among others.

Goody claims that these reforms had precedents neither in the Bible nor in the Roman Civil Codes; they were a sudden innovation of the Medieval Church, probably for materialistic reasons. Thus, for Goody, Christianity's transformation of the kinship system was largely *despite* the content of the Scriptures. I hope to have demonstrated that Christianity's transformation of kinship was not despite, but rather, *due* to the contents of Scripture.

The great achievement of Western kinship has been, so sociologists and historians tell us, its minimization. A concept of spiritual kinship, as it is formed in the New Testament, logically enforces such minimization. If faith is thicker than blood, then kinship groups lose their strength, and this allows room for the development of other spheres of social life. If man's relation with a transcendental God becomes ever greater, his relationships with "cousins" will diminish.

Girard has reproached modern individualism for its due share in the romantic conception of desire. Yet, Christianity may be held accountable for the rise of individualism, as Louis Dumont (1992) and others have sufficiently showed. Our politically correct bias has made us think of individualism in extremely negative terms, but it is in great part due to individualism that we live in a modern democratic world. Tocqueville (2001), the man who first used the word "individualism," believed it was an essential trait of democratic societies,

with its ups and downs.

Christianity's role in the formation of individualism is multi-sided. We cannot explore every side of this influence in a short essay, but we could well argue that, even on the grounds of Girard's work and mimetic theory, Christianity is individualistic. Whereas Caiphas would prefer the death of a single man to the destruction of a whole nation, the gospels defend that single man's fate against the benefit to the group. Any religious system that comes to the aid and defence of victims winds up endorsing individualism: victims are usually a minority, individuals persecuted by crowds.

8

Thus, if Christianity is indeed an individualistic religion, then kinship will be thoroughly minimized, for individualistic societies, being concerned only with individuals, considerably reduce the size and prominence of kinship groups. If, as Jesus proclaims, he has no biological or sociological brothers, but *spiritual* brothers; that is to say, if he does not share a special bond with only some individuals, but rather with *all* victims and all those who decide to follow him and endorse the Kingdom of God, then he does not have tens of relatives, but rather thousands or millions of relatives, for victims and spiritual followers are much numerous than "cousins." To have a million relatives is, from a sociological point of view, to have none, or only a few.

Notions of spiritual kinship, then, reduce the size and prominence of sociological notions of kinship. And this is what Christianity has done, perhaps both consciously and unconsciously. It has done so consciously, inasmuch as the preaching of the Kingdom of God presupposes an existence that has nothing to do with human institutions. It has also done so unconsciously, for it is unlikely that the first Christians had the intentions of reducing the size and prominence of kinship groups for the benefit of the separation of spheres and the advent of modernity. Our individualistic modern world, which sometimes may seem frighteningly lonely, is a logical consequence of Christianity. If, indeed, it turns out to be lonely, it is in part due to the great acceleration of the secularization begun by Christianity. Yet, Christianity, if properly understood, offers relief. A God that never abandons victims, even at the toughest times, can be as comforting as a "nation of cousins" (to use Ibn-Khaldun's terms). Tocqueville, who was well aware of the loneliness of individualism, rightly observed that, among Americans, Christianity is the best alternative to combat loneliness.

No human can live without social relations and kinship. He would end up being a god (a scapegoat, we should add) or a beast, as Aristotle once commented. Kinship is necessary, both biologically and sociologically. Biologically, of course, it assures the continuation of the species and the nurture and protection of fragile human infants. Sociologically, it reproduces structures, provides the basis for learning, and offers comfort for social animals.

Moderns know this well, and that is why kinship has not and will not disappear in modern

times. Yet, for the comfort and greatness of a modern society, kinship must be held to its minimum. Otherwise, it would swing back into traditional society. This is precisely the attitude found in the New Testament: kinship is necessary, but it is better to minimize it. Even if it is originally sacrificial, humans cannot do away with it altogether. To do so, would be not only foolish, but insane. This was the tragic fate of Gnosticism: by rejecting worldly institutions such as kinship, it ends up being a religion doomed to failure and disappearance. We shall, to conclude, paraphrase Paul's words in I Corinthians 7: 33-40: better not to get involved with kinship institutions, but since that is impossible, keep it within limits.

9

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