

Deuterocanonical and  
Cognate Literature  
Yearbook 2012/2013

# Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature

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Family and Kinship in the  
Deuterocanonical and  
Cognate Literature

Edited by  
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## Preface

This volume represents the deposit of careful and detailed research on the concept of family relationships in the biblical tradition, at Qumran, in the ancient Christian literature and in Hellenistic Judaism up to the time of the Judaism of the present day. To summarise very briefly, it shows that family relationships are a metaphor for the situation which Israel and the primitive Christian community are living in their time – a situation determined by the awareness of the presence/absence of the divine, of the need for Wisdom to know the divine plans, etc. – and also a metaphor for the relationship with God. It is within this general frame of reference that the reflection on the relationships within the family (husband-wife, father-child, mother-child, parents-children, children-elders, etc.), but also on every relationship which might have a familial character, is carried out, always with the need for fidelity to the faith and the traditions of the fathers, and in obedience to the Law. The family's task of education (in particular, that of the parents) consists, therefore, in teaching, in recounting the deeds of God and in the transmission of the faith. To be fathers and teachers are complementary tasks; in fact, the figures of the father and the teacher are metaphors for each other, as is the case also with the figure of the mother and that of Wisdom.

The family is the place where there are relationships of freedom, care for the person, and warm affections; never ones that are impersonal or detached. For this reason, it is a guarantee of Jewish identity through the generations, and, for Christians too, it offers the model for the transmission of a precise identity. Particularly in a time when living together in a multi-ethnic setting, especially in a foreign land, had triggered off an inevitable confrontation with cultural and religious pluralism, launching a necessary process of revision in the biblical and Jewish world with regard to the paternal role, to the family, to the woman and to sexuality. It is precisely on the transformation of these roles that, the deuterocanonical books, Tobit and Sirach, display interesting perspectives and offer a picture of the changing situation in which Jewish society was finding itself.

Certainly, the importance given to the family and family relationships is typical of a time of peace. 2 Macc shows how, in a time of violence, fidelity to God is more important than the family; the pre-eminence of familial relationships is a luxury which the Jewish community cannot allow itself. The early Christian community will also have to search for a balance between the relativising of familial links and their importance. What are the bonds which matter in the time preceding the parousia? Bonds which are

not those of flesh and blood but which are not for this reason any less real and strong. Thus, the reflection on the family does not remain stuck in sociological stereotypes, nor does it dwell on exclusive psychological perspectives, but opens itself to the mystery of God to whose discreet but pervasive presence it bears witness.

The production of a volume which is the outcome of an international Conference organised by the International Society for Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature, is always an opus that requires a patient effort of sharing and participation by so many people who, in different ways, have given of their time, their energy and their skills in work that is often obscure but necessary. For this reason, my gratitude is due particularly to the generous helpfulness of Dr. Giuseppina Zarbo who was Chief Secretary of the General Secretariat of the Conference which was held in Palermo from 27 June to 1 July 2011, but who, above all, has read the manuscript and, with patience and expertise taken care of the sections of the Indices and the Abbreviations. That Secretariat also included Dr. Giovanni Pappalardo who last year returned, suddenly, to his Father's house. To his memory we would like to dedicate this volume. He awaited it with interest, as did Giuseppe Rugolo, Pietro Lo Vecchio, Daniele Centorbi, Luigi Bocchieri, students of the diocesan Seminary of Piazza Armerina and of the Theological Faculty "Saint John the Evangelist", and Antonio Zarcone and Erasmo Schillaci, both students of the same Faculty, all of whom performed the difficult work of the Secretariat with care and accuracy.

My personal gratitude goes to the Theological Faculty "Saint John the Evangelist" which hosted the Conference, as also to Antonella and Giacomo Bucaro of the Conca d'Oro Travel in Palermo who took on the organisation of the travel of all the participants.

This volume would not have seen the light of day but for the scrupulous attention and care of Dr. Michael Tait who with tireless availability and specialised knowledge translated into English texts that were originally in Italian and French. To him are due my most warm thanks which are extended also to Dr. Salvatore Tirrito who has been a valuable and irreplaceable collaborator in IT matters.

Thanks also to Francesco Bonanno, who edited the (selective) Index of biblical and extra-biblical quotations (References) and to my colleagues Giuseppe Bellia and Rosario Pistone for their valuable suggestions.

*Last but not least*, my thanks must go to the publishers, W. de Gruyter: to Dr. Albrecht Döhnert, Katrin Mittmann, Sophie Wagenhofer and Sabina Dabrowski, for having accepted this volume for publication and for the "familial" collaboration which they have constantly offered me.

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# Abbreviations

AASF	Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ABG	Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
AncB	Anchor Bible
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
AugR	Augustinianum
AzTh	Arbeiten zur Theologie
Bac	Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBET	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des Antiken Judentums
BeOr	Bibbia e Oriente
BETHL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum Lovaniensium
Bib	Biblica
BiOr	Biblica et orientalia
BK	Biblischer Kommentar
BiLi	Bibel und Liturgie
BiRe	Bible review
BJS	Biblical and Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar. Altes Testament
BN NF	Biblische Notizen. Neue Forschung
BOT	De boeken van het Oude Testament
BUL	Biblioteca Universale Laterza
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAT	Commentaire de l' Ancien Testament
CBC	The Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBET	Contributions to biblical exegesis and theology
CBQ	Catholic Biblical quarterly
CBQ.MS	Catholic Biblical quarterly. Monograph series
CEJL	Commentaries on early Jewish literature
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CThM.BW	Calwer Theologische Monographien. A. Bibelwissenschaft
DBS	Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplément
DCLY	Deuterocanonical and cognate literature yearbook
DCLS	Deuterocanonical and cognate literature studies
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert

DSD	Dead Sea Discoveries
EHAT	Exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
EHS.T	Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe XXIII, Theologie
EI	Eretz-Israel
EstBib	Estudios Biblicos
EtB	Études Bibliques
ETHL	Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses
ExpTim	Expository Times
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FCB	The Feminist Companion to the Bible
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
Greg.	Gregorianum
GSL.AT	Geistliche Schriftlesung. AT
HAR	Hebrew annual review
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBS	Herders biblische Studien = Herder's biblical studies
HCOT	Historical commentary on the Old Testament
Hen	Henoch
HSAT	Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testamentes
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HThK.AT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HThR	Harvad theological review
HUCA	Hebrew Union College annual
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
JAJ	Journal of Ancient Judaism
JBL	Journal of biblical literature
JHS	Journal of hellenic studies
JJS	Journal of jewish studies
JQR	Jewish quarterly review
JSHRZ	Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit
JSJ	Journal for the study of Judaism
JSJ.S	Supplements to the Journal for the study of Judaism
JSNT	Journal for the study of the New Testament
JSNT.S	Journal for the study of the New Testament. Supplement series
JSOT	Journal for the study of the Old Testament
JSOT.S	Journal for the study of the Old Testament. Supplement series
JSP.S	Journal for the study of the Pseudepigrapha. Supplement series
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
LAPO	Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient
LBNT	Libri Biblici. Nuovo Testamento
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LeDiv	Lectio Divina
MPI	Monographs of the Peshitta Institute Leiden
MVÄG	Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch-Ägyptischen Gesellschaft
NEB.AT	Neue Echter Bibel. Altes Testament

NETS	A New English Translation of the Septuagint
NRT	Nouvelle revue théologique
NSK.AT	Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar. Altes Testament
NTS	New Testament Studies
NT.S	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTMes	Old Testament Message
PRSt	Perspectives in religious studies
PSV	Parola Spirito Vita
PVTG	Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece
QD	Quaestiones disputatae
RB	Revue Biblique
RdQ	Revue de Qumran
RHRP	Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses
RivB	Rivista Biblica
RivB Suppl.	Supplementi di Rivista Biblica
RStB	Ricerche Storico Bibliche
RTL	Revue Théologique de Louvain
SBL.DS	Society of Biblical Literature. Dissertation series
SBL.EJL	Society of Biblical Literature. Early Judaism and Its Literature
SBL.MS	Society of Biblical Literature. Monograph series
SBL.SCS	Society of Biblical Literature. Septuagint and cognate studies series
SBL.SP	Society of Biblical Literature. Seminar papers
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SETh	Salzburger Exegetische Theologische Vorträge
SJOT	Scandinavian journal of the Old Testament
SOC	Scritti delle Origini Cristiane
SPB	Studia post-biblica
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
STAR	Studies in Theology and Religion
STDJ	Studies on the texts of the Desert of Judah
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti pseudepigrapha
TBT	Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of New Testament
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of Old Testament
ThBN	Themes in biblical narrative
ThPQ	Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift
ThWAT	Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testamen
ThWNT	Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testamen
TRE	Theologische Realenzyklopädie
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum
TThSt	Trierer Theologische Studien
TUAT	Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments
UTB	Uni-Taschenbücher
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VT.S	Vetus Testamentum Supplement

WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZB	Zürcher Bibelkommentare. AT
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft

# From Tobit to Ben Sira: from nostalgia to the recovery of fatherhood

GIUSEPPE BELLIA

The only biblical book that tells of the life of the Jewish communities in the Diaspora of Mesopotamia in the obscure Assyrian period, Tobit is a text which is wholly immune to any objective historical configuration and any realistic social environment. Unusual too is its theological and exegetical fortune: rejected from the Jewish canon and taken into the Christian one, it continues to attract criticism and agreement from the specialists on account of its anomalous literary form. The little book by the specialists is presented as a paraenetic novella or it is brought back into the typology of the popular narrative, the so-called folk-tale, and, finally, with Wills it is decided to define it as a "Jewish romance"<sup>1</sup> or, more accurately, a "historico-religious romance."<sup>2</sup> In fact, it is an attractive sapiential tale which incorporates didactic, hymnic and prophetic elements, recounting an edifying event in a family environment.<sup>3</sup> We are before an evident work of fiction, one, however, that claims to be attested as an historical memory within a precise spatial-temporal framework, a setting, however, which is almost entirely imaginary. But how do we read a fictional text historically?

## 1. Introduction

If scant historical value is generally attached to the writings of the wise scribes of Israel on account of their didactic intent, it is withheld wholly from the Book of Tobit because of its declared apologetic intent in support of the Deuteronomistic doctrine. Because of their pedagogic purpose, their desire to give advice and impart maxims of perennial and universal value, the writings of the sages show little interest in defining concrete

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- 1 Cf. GRABBE, Tobit, 736-737; MOORE, Tobit, 588b-589a; SOLL, Tobit and Folklore Studies, 39-53; WILLS, The Jewish Novel, 68-92; ZAPPELLA, Tobit, 18-20.
  - 2 SOGGIN, Introduzione, 523-524; FITZMYER, Tobit, 31-33; TOLONI, Echi omerici, 13. For the biblical narrative more generally, cf. ALTER, L'arte della narrativa biblica; GROTTANELLI, Sette storie bibliche, 17-21 and 22-38; NAVARRO PUERTO, Racconti biblici.
  - 3 DESELAERS, Das Buch Tobit, 278-279; FITZMYER, Tobit, 46-49.

contexts. Their reflections mirror the eternal problems of man, and so their sayings transcend times and places, cultures and institutions, social customs and attitudes. This is an even more pertinent observation when a text, as is the case with Tobit, locates itself right from the beginning as an instructive parable of human faithfulness rewarded by divine justice. To show the benefits of an existence which is blessed from on high if lived in conformity with the laws and traditions of the fathers pushes the author on to the ethical plane of persuasion and certainly does not require compelling historical details on the literal level.<sup>4</sup>

In my opinion the historico-anthropological approach that has been used many times in the past for the wisdom texts can also be applied to the trajectory of the paternal function which extends from the Book of Tobit to the text of Ben Sira, allowing the reading of those cultural traits that underlie every literary communication and are necessarily shared by the author and his readers.<sup>5</sup>

The historico-anthropological reading must show itself to be respectful of the definitive conditions in which a biblical text reaches us taken in its formal interest, both from the literary point of view for its final redaction and from the theological point of view for its peculiar canonical configuration. However, a text speaks for itself when it becomes significant to mention also the voids, the lacunae, the blank spaces of the communicative act. Precisely in these spaces of memory or narrative voids one can profitably insert an honest dialogue “between exegesis and psychology or psychoanalysis in view of a better understanding of the Bible” as recommended by the important document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1993.<sup>6</sup>

An explanation is, however, necessary on the task of these last two disciplines which have already been employed in the past with different degrees of fortune in the interpretation of the different levels of reality expressed in the biblical texts, helping a better understanding of the experiences of life narrated and the rules of behaviour set down. The Book of Tobit and the subject chosen for this paper lend themselves to delicious and suggestive psychoanalytic forays which are difficult to control on the objective plane. In this research, therefore, the psychoanalytical investigation, above all, remains in the background.<sup>7</sup> The possible affinities, agree-

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4 SOLL, *Misfortune and Exile*, 209-231; BAUCKHAM, *Tobit as a Parable*, 433-459.

5 BELLIA, *Proverbi*, 56-63; ID., *An historico-anthropological reading*, 49-51.

6 PCB, *L'interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa*, 56.

7 Cf. the analysis of DREWERMANN, *Il cammino pericoloso*, and, on the psychological plane, STANCARI, *Il libro di Tobia*.



ments or allusions will be indirect and marginal, always induced from an historico-anthropological perspective, alert to analogy and previous human and religious developments recorded in the artistic and literary testimonies of the dominant Hellenistic culture.

Following the approach already adopted for the books of the sapiential pentateuch, I shall present first of all, in summary, the historico-literary framework in which the Book of Tobit is situated. By means of a sociological and anthropological investigation of the text, I shall try to draw out the family and religious culturology beneath the redactional tapestry. I shall, therefore, be seeking a comparison with an analogous and preceding recovery of the figure of the father recorded in the literary testimonies of the dominant Hellenistic culture. Finally, by means of an historico-anthropological reading, I shall trace some features of the path trodden by the paternal function from the Eastern Diaspora to the Jerusalem of the Second Temple which, at the time of Ben Sira, seems to have started to recompose itself in the furrow of a renewed tradition which carries, however, the oblique signs of a restorative intention.

## 2. The search for the historico-literary framework

For an anomalous literary genre like that of the Book of Tobit, where events, plots and characters are interwoven, it is an irksome job, and one which cannot be carried out with the normal criteria of research, to define the spatial-temporal coordinates of the work, identifying the author, addressees, and date and place of composition. A deeply dramatic fiction hinged on the account of the miracle of the cure of Tobit's blindness brought about by his son, so that it may be situated suitably, it requires that elements of comparison and literarily adequate points of reference be identified. In reality, the book contains numerous references to the foundational texts of Judaism by means of the adoption of theological theses or the reformulation of narrative themes, if not exactly by means of the mirroring of equivalent events.<sup>8</sup> Beside the biblical influences, we also find traces of not a few influences foreign to the world of the Bible, which, together with infra-biblical agreements, combine to draw a more likely ideological atmosphere, illuminating the historico-literary climate

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8 MOORE, *Tobit*, 20-21; VÍLCHEZ LÍNDEZ, *Tobit*, 74-75; NICKELSBURG, *The Search*, 340-342; ZAPPELLA, *Tobit*, 16-18; DI LELLA, *The Book of Tobit and the Book of Judges*, 197-206.

nearest to the work, its authors and addressees.<sup>9</sup> It is useful to be aware of these connections, reviewing them briefly.

The principal source of theological inspiration for the Book of Tobit is recognised in the imposing Deuteronomistic theological tradition. It has already been noticed that the author makes his story turn on the theology of the covenant, the observing of which procures salvation and blessing to the people as to each Israelite (Deut 7:12-15; 28:1-30; Tob 4:6), while infidelity provokes the curse of exile (Deut 4:27-28; Tob 3:3-4; 12:10). Beside this dominant idea we can glimpse other secondary theological elements:

- the centrality of the Jerusalem cult (Deut 12:1-14; Tob 1:4-6; 13:11-18);
- the command to fear and love God (Deut 6:13; Tob 4:21; 14:7);
- the summons to the prayer of blessing and praise (Deut 8:10; Tob 13:7);
- the certainty of his great mercy (Deut 30:1-4; Tob 13:2-6);
- the assurance of being assembled to live as blessed ones in the land promised to Abraham's descendants (Deut 1:8; 6:10; 12:10-11; Tob 13:13; 14:7);
- above all, the characteristic 'theology of remembrance' which also marks the highly paradigmatic theme of the journey (Deut 8:18; Tob 4:5).<sup>10</sup>

On the narrative level, the preeminent inspiration appears to belong to the figure of Job whose story seems to be taken up again in several ways, not only with regard to the key theme of the suffering of the righteous, but also in the weaving of the narrative.<sup>11</sup> The agreements in the structure of the two accounts can be summarised in the story of a righteous man proved by God in his faith (Tob 1:1-8; Job 1:1-5) who, after the trial of illness (Tob 2:10-11 and Job 2:7-8), regains his health, blessing and honour (Tob 11:13-21; 14:1-4; Job 42:12-15) on account of his faithfulness. In the two works, different journeys are narrated and the Book of Tobit offers different narrational innovations required by its own cultural context beyond that of its specific literary setting.

The commentators have pointed out the numerous analogies and multiple agreements with other biblical places. The unfolding of the plot seems to be inspired by the account of the patriarchs: the theme of the

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9 Cf. VÍLCHEZ LÍNDEZ, *Tobia*, 21-22.

10 DI LELLA, *The Book of Tobit*, 197-206.

11 TOLONI, *La sofferenza del giusto*, 17-58; cf., also, the monograph of NOWELL, *The Book of Tobit*.

daring expedition to find a spouse of the same family descent (Gen 24); the figure of Tamar, a woman who bears death but from whom will come the descent (Gen 38); Joseph, the foreign slave who rises to honour in the court of the great monarch (Gen 41).<sup>12</sup> The historical framework seems to derive from the Book of Kings, while the frequent appeals to the Law of Moses (cf. Tob 1:6, 8; 4:5; 6:13; 7:10, 12) refer to legislative norms present in the Pentateuch and in particular in Deuteronomy.<sup>13</sup> Multiple too are the contacts of the book with the sapiential texts, with Proverbs especially, and with the Psalms. Finally not without importance, a quotation of Amos (8:10) in Tob 2:6, while, in 14:4, the redactor evokes the prophetic figure of Nahum to confer authority on his own writing, but perhaps also to signal a hermeneutical orientation which claims to interpret historical events according to the style of actualising commentary of the Qumran *pesharim*. It is precisely in the caves of Qumran that a good four Aramaic and one Hebrew manuscripts of Tobit have been found.<sup>14</sup> Is this common prophetic address perhaps the scarlet thread which links Tobit to the men of that community?

No less interesting for our research is the correct valuation of the possible literary influences foreign to the biblical world and hailing from the non-Jewish, middle Hellenistic environment. Let us begin with the clearest data. Among the Greek texts, symptomatic but also surprising is the reference to the pedagogic story of Ahikar (1:21-22; 2:10; 11:19; 14:110) which the author of Tobit uses anecdotally, perhaps to reinforce the universal import of his moral lesson of the innocent who is unjustly accused but in the end rehabilitated by direct divine intervention.<sup>15</sup> It can be supposed that our author would have known of these or other similar popular legends that were widely diffused in his time and would have drawn from them only in part; it is certain, however, that he was able to integrate the fabulous elements with fertile inventiveness within a historico-religious plot entirely consonant with his own tradition.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, common and universal themes like those alluded to above, which are present in all cultures, present the problem of the real influence which a Jew, and especially a Jew of the Diaspora could have been subject to, not so much from the more widespread popular tales as rather from the pervasive and dominant Greek culture. It is unthinkable

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12 DESELAERS, *Das Buch Tobit*, 292-303; MOORE, *Tobit*, 8-9

13 FITZMYER, *Tobit*, 35-36

14 SCHMITT, *Die hebräischen Textfunde*, 569.

15 Cf. CONTINI – GROTTANELLI, *Il saggio Ahikar*, 22-26; TOLONI, *Tobi e Ahikar*, 141-165.

16 DESELAERS, *Das Buch Tobit*, 280-292; MOORE, *Book of Tobit*, 588; ID., *Tobit*, 11-12.

ble that an educated author like ours would not have had an adequate knowledge of the Greek classical world as it was taught in the Hellenistic schools of the period. It is enough to observe the prolix narrative with a happy ending that has been announced beforehand, the skilful weaving of the plot, the poorness of the historical and geographical details, the subtle and neat use of irony, the presence of animated dialogues and stretches of interior monologues which, with some mastery, are turned into prayer. This and other rhetorical expedients employed in the book reveal an advanced awareness of narrative techniques of the Hellenistic school which the author puts at the service of a didactic-sapiential project in support of his religious creed. In the past, with varying success, some authors have sought to explore the existence of thematic influences and literary agreements between the Book of Tobit and the works of classical Greece.<sup>17</sup>

More than other themes, the journey of Tobias to the East and the return of the long-suffering Ulysses to Ithaca have attracted the attention of scholars, pressing them into a comparison between Tobit and the Odyssey. Recently, these insights have been taken up again and weighed up starting from the literary genre of the two works, held to be close to the popular tale, and from their comparable compositional structure, in order to be able to pass on to a review of the numerous thematic analogies and the most significant similar *motifs*. I am not going into the merit of these readings. I limit myself to taking notice of a comparison between the two works that is certainly possible and really suggestive. I am able to indicate: the daring voyage to the remote regions of the East; the dangers and the unexpected happenings of an unknown journey; the dramatic world of family affections; the intense affair of conjugal love.<sup>18</sup> Among the shared narrative elements are to be signalled: the laborious father-son relationship; the symbolic presence of the faithful dog and the divine intermediaries; the humanity bare of tears; the trust in drugs and magic potions; and, finally, the decisive metaphor of blindness also.<sup>19</sup>

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- 17 Those who favour this point of view are: FRIES, *Das Buch Tobit und die Telemachie*, 54-87; GLASSON, *The Main Source of Tobit*, 275-277; critical, on the other hand, is VATTIONI, *Studi e note sul libro di Tobia*, 241-284.
- 18 Cf. TOLONI, *Echi omerici*, 17-22; for a comparison with the Greek world, cf. the volume edited by GRABBE, *Did Moses Speak Attic?*; in particular: ALBERTZ, *The end of the confusion?*, 31-45; BECKING, *The Hellenistic Period*, 78-90; LEMCHE, *The Old Testament – A Hellenistic Book?*, 287-318; AVERINCEV, *Atene e Gerusalemme*; WENDLAND, *La cultura ellenistico-romana*; HENGEL, *Ebrei, Greci e barbari*; *Id.*, *Giudaismo ed ellenismo*.
- 19 TOLONI, *Echi omerici*, 22-30. Cf., also, FINLEY, *Il mondo di Odisseo*, 199; GENTILONI, *Abramo contro Ulisse*; VERTOVA, *Il viaggio di Abramo*, 287-307.

It is possible that the last hagiographer re-elaborated an ancient tale of Tobit and Tobias with Greek assonances in order to give an energetic response to the questions of the Israelites of the Diaspora. It is likewise possible that he exploited the widespread knowledge of the Homeric narrative in view of the success and the enormous diffusion which the story of Odysseus had met with in the Hellenistic age, in order to confer a greater prestige and a vaster resonance on his own work, and to reanimate the expectations of the community by prophesying a return laden with blessing as had happened to the young and obedient son of Tobit. That the *Odyssey* is the inspiration of the Book of Tobit is an acceptable thesis but not a convincing one on account of some forcings in the parallels and the fact that the same authors have explained that we can detect a moral rather than a formal dependence on the part of our hagiographer on the Homeric model.<sup>20</sup> One can only point out a use of the folk-tale of the narrative of Odysseus as the ideal archetype which, in the manner of the Book of Job, acts as framework for the whole book.<sup>21</sup> However, judgement on the real influence exercised by the preponderant Greek thought on the fervent literary vein of the biblical authors of that period remains suspended. On this question, there is need of further research to understand what has allowed the hagiographer to carry out a theological operation aimed at protecting the hope of his coreligionists with compositional procedures which, far from the land of the fathers, must not cut a sorry figure before the superior technique of Hellenistic writing.

### 3. The social environment of Tobit

Up to now, something has been observed of the environment of the Book of Tobit, something in truth more ideological than historical. We must now take into consideration the possibility of a sociological and anthropological investigation of the text to seek to grasp its more realistic human and social environment. For this investigation, a valid model from which to take comparative patterns and parameters with which to understand the biblical data starting from their own cultural context is the Mediterranean anthropology of Malina.<sup>22</sup> In order to compare the characteristic

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20 TOLONI, *Echi omerici*, 34-35, where he cites TREBOLLE BARRERA, *La Biblia judía*, 200.

21 Cf. CANTILENA, *Odysseus tra folk-tale e leggenda eroica*, 9-21.

22 Cf. MALINA, *Nuovo Testamento e antropologia*, 41-72; in addition, the pioneering works of PITT RIVERS, *The People of the Sierra*; CAMPBELL, *Honour, Family and Pa-*

social actions of the Mediterranean area today with the historical data transmitted by the Scriptures (from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE), one must, however, pay attention to the fact that a certain cultural homogeneity has been safeguarded over a long period in such a way as to ensure that the paradigms of traditional life have not been upset by the processes of accelerated and untidy modernisation. In this perspective, the cultural Graeco-Roman *koinè* assures a trustworthy ethical framework of social mediation between the ancient world of the Jewish Diaspora and the collective imagination of the Western Mediterranean world where certain cultural stylemes and certain moral behaviour are still in vogue.<sup>23</sup>

The Book of Tobit is situated within the period considered by Malina, within the lively Hellenistic age, for it is the common opinion that it was composed around the third century BCE when the prophets had already been received as Scripture (Tob 14:4). The key values of the ancient Mediterranean culture proposed by Malina are too well-known to be re-exhibited here. For our enquiry, however, it seems useful to me to record that the three systems of social demarcation constituted by authority, by status of class and by respect, still quite common in the Mediterranean world, mark out where they coexist, today as in the past, that claim to socially recognised value called *honour*. An added reference should be made to the other significant value of the Mediterranean world represented by *collectivism*. The honour of the group to which one belongs requires the constant domination of the individual conscience by the collective conscience because the choice of the collective well-being must always be put before the search for individual well-being.<sup>24</sup>

In the Book of Tobit, it is precisely the symbolic and social value assigned to honour which plays an essential role in identifying the legitimate and acknowledged place which the characters occupy in society, defining their actual social position. In fact, "from a functionalist point of view, honour is the value of someone in his own eyes together with the value of

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tronage, and the volume edited by PERISTIANY, Honour and Shame; and, finally, GILMORE, Honor and Shame and the Unity.

- 23 BRANDES, Reflections of Honor and Shame, 121-134; CHANCE The Anthropology of Honor, 139-151; cf., also, the methodological reflections of HERZFELD, Honour and Shame, 339-351; for shame in biblical literature, cf. STIEBERT, The construction of shame, 25-86; DESILVA, The Wisdom of Ben Sira, 433-455.
- 24 MALINA, Nuovo Testamento e antropologia, 42-44 and 75-83. PITT RIVERS had distinguished honour as virtue from 'precedence' and from moral reputation (The People of the Sierra, 72), while HERZFELD had explained the semantic difference between the English honour, of Victorian origin, and the honour understood as 'respect' in Southern Italy (Honour and Shame, 340).

this person in the eyes of his social group."<sup>25</sup> In the light of this scenario of honour, the affairs of the different characters, male and female, treated in the book have been interpreted as the parable of a way of redemption, moral and religious, where the initial honour, threatened, damaged and lost, is unexpectedly regained, restored and recovered. We shall briefly glide over the steps of this socio-anthropological itinerary of recovery of lost honour, following the narrative order of the fourteen chapters.<sup>26</sup>

The initial genealogy of the book (1:1) itself signals the importance of the honour attributed to each person simply by force of his belonging to the family and clan. The opening framework (1:3-8) describes with light touches the honourable existence of Tobit in his serene and comfortable youth, in order to go on to recount his exemplary life as an adult (1:9-18). But already at the end of the first chapter (1:19-22), the path of Tobit's humiliation begins to be outlined when he is forced to hide and to flee after he has been accused before the king of having buried the dead. The narrative continues by describing the descending parabola of the reputation of the righteous and pious Israelite who, in the evening, in the shade of the sunset, weeps in his solitude (2:1-8). His descent along the path of progressive loss of honour has still to register a further let-down. After having been mocked cruelly by his neighbours (v. 8), he has to undergo the affront of apparent divine neglect which, as had already happened with Job, permitted the evil lot to rage upon Tobit. Deprived of all his goods, he is now put to the test in his own physical person, becoming blind, and then in his soul by undergoing the resentful rebukes of his wife (2:9-14). His physical blindness reveals to him his human and religious blindness as a righteous man, rigid keeper of the Law, the full observance of which he praises but which does not give him the ability to see and recognise the good in those around him who serve him and love him. Now having sharpened awareness of his disastrous condition of human and spiritual limitation, he retires to ask from God a liberating death (3:1-6). His prayer, although mirroring the tone of the lamentations and penitential psalms is the disconsolate entreaty of one who has lost his reputation in the eyes of the world, in the eyes of his dear ones, and in his own eyes: it is the terminal prayer of a man without honour.<sup>27</sup>

At this point, the skilful weaving of the plot introduces, with perfect narrative synchrony, an analogous journey of loss of honour, describing

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25 MALINA, *Nuovo Testamento e antropologia*, 68.

26 GILMORE, *Introduction: The Shame of Dishonor*, 2-21.

27 DREWERMANN, *Il cammino pericoloso*, 29-36. Cf., also, STIEBERT, *The construction of shame*, 3-12; GIOVANNINI, *Female Chastity*, 61-74.

in the feminine the shameful condition of Sara (3:7-11a). Insulted by a slave on account of her status as an impure woman because possessed by a demon which causes the death of whoever get close to her, at the low point of her bitter humiliation, she thinks of committing suicide. The tormenting thought of her father prevents her; so as not further burden the already compromised reputation of her father, she too blesses God and seeks death from him (3:11-15). It is here that the 'great prolepsis' of the Book of Tobit is effected: anticipating the hearing of the two supplications, the dramatic force of the two misfortunes is unexpectedly softened, without causing a loss of interest and rhythm to the account.<sup>28</sup> The prayer of the two humiliated individuals, now arrived at the nadir of their state of being forgotten by God and rejected by men (cf. Ps 130:1), is accepted by the benevolent divine will: God, the God of the fathers, always listens to the prayer of men without honour (3:16-17). Unaware of the provident plan of God with regard to him, but certain of being heard by God in his request for death, Tobit disposes of his goods entrusting Tobias with his spiritual testament.<sup>29</sup> Imitating a literary genre that was widespread in the intertestamental literature of the Hellenistic period, he utters his farewell discourse, offering his young son the opportunity of preserving and rescuing the paternal honour, entrusting him, together with a list of counsels and precepts to be observed, with a fabulous and far-off inheritance to be recovered and of which he has regained the memory only at the point of death (4:1-21).<sup>30</sup>

From then on, under the attentive governance of Azaria/Raphael, unrecognised divine messenger, the steps of a gradual path of liberation from shame and dishonour are articulated. Precisely thanks to the successful path of initiation of the son, it will culminate in the blessing of a happy ending which has already been announced to the reader: the woman is freed from the power of the demon and the father is cured of his blindness. The conclusion of the account which celebrates the reconstituted harmony of the family supplies, however, an important theological lesson which it is worth noticing. The reader who, together with the protagonists of this 'Jewish romance' has travelled the path of the regaining of honour that has been denied or devalued by the imponderability of destiny and human shabbiness, is called, in the Canticle on Jerusalem, to be a witness and participant in the mysterious presence of God in the history of the believers

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28 Cf. VÍLCHEZ LÍNDEZ, *Tobia*, 60; ZAPPELLA, *Tobit*, 13-16.

29 DI LELLA, *Two Major Prayers*, 95-116; FITZMYER, *Tobit*, 148-149.

30 VÍLCHEZ LÍNDEZ, *Tobia*, 68 e 79; DREWERMANN, *Il cammino pericoloso*, 51-54; ; STANCARI, *Il libro di Tobia*, 33-40.



and the peoples, confessing the divine mercy and greatness (13:1-14:1). As Raphael recalls before revealing his angelic nature, the legitimate search for human respect should not lead to the forgetting of the absolute primacy of the divine honour (12:6-10). Only God is worthy of honour, and the reputation of the righteous receives dignity and glory from him alone. The light of the eyes given back to Tobit to see and contemplate the secret of the solicitous presence of God should thus help to cure also the blindness of the reader who has doubted divine providence.<sup>31</sup>

This socio-anthropological reconstruction of the story of Tobit, freshly understood in the perspective of honour as a typical value of Mediterranean culture, is undoubtedly loaded with fascination on account of the multiple suggestions which it can provoke, but must be filtered through an historical reading so as not to leave unanswered the search for a realistic setting for the book within the historical contest of the religion of Israel. A reading laid on atemporal data, risks giving the text an achronic understanding, where the actual human, family and social relationships are characterised and perceived as immobile and outside time, indifferent to the historical traumas which were involved in living the faith of the fathers in the land of the Diaspora.<sup>32</sup> The multi-ethnic living together in a foreign land had triggered off an inevitable confrontation with cultural and religious pluralism, setting in motion in the biblical and Jewish world a necessary process of revision in relation to the paternal role, the family, the woman and sexuality. It is precisely on the stratification and transformation of these roles that Tobit has something to say.

#### 4. Post-Exilic piety in the family

The destruction of the monarchy and the end of the temple cult had provoked in the religious circles of the Exile a period of burning disputes over the theological interpretation of the political catastrophe. The war

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31 ZAPPELLA, Tobit, 20; STANCARI, *Il libro di Tobia*, 83-91.

32 PINA-CABRAL (*The Mediterranean as a category*, 399-406) has shown up the artificial nature of the model of Honour and Shame which has been taken up to interpret Mediterranean society conceived as a single, homogeneous cultural area. The "academic Mediterranean lump" was a clever invention of Anglo-American anthropology which 'tribalised' that Mediterranean which was considered by historians as the cradle of urban civilisation. Ensuing studies, feminist and the like, have proved that that paradigm was not satisfactory to explain the complexity of a geo-historical area studied by anthropologists only on the basis of small and marginal rural communities.

for the acceptance of the prophetic theology of opposition had spurred the Deuteronomists, linked to the tradition of Jeremiah, to carry out a work of missionary teaching to combat the idolatrous contaminations and the syncretism which was widespread in the private sphere, eating away at the traditional religious foundation of the family. With the irreversible crisis of official religion and the dissolution of the political forms of organisation, the only social mediation that had survived was precisely that of the family with its patriarchal organisation. Moreover, family piety had been the pillar of the Yahwistic religion even before the Exile, allowing, in the rapid and sorrowful evolution of events, the preservation in its integrity of the popular soul of personal piety which, precisely from the more reassuring family relations, provided nourishment for an equally authentic and consoling relationship with God.<sup>33</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that after the Exile recourse was had to the faith of the patriarchs, recovering their exemplarity in the personal relationship with God as an antidote to social and religious dislocation which, in the Diaspora, seemed difficult to contain outside the family structure. The centrality of the family also protected the not secondary role of the woman, mother and wife, to whom was entrusted the early education of the children. Hence the importance of her figure for the maintenance of family traditions.

The need to keep the family united and solid in its traditional features convinced Ezra to join exigencies of a moral type with ethnic conditions as the vital presupposition for his cultic reorganisation. With his rigid reform intended also to protect the Jewish people most compromised with idolatry, he decreed the dissolution of mixed marriages because they were judged a risk of syncretistic deviations or various forms of apostasy (cf. Ezra 9:1-10, 44; Neh 10:31; 13:23-31).<sup>34</sup> Pressing forcefully for endogamous marriage, celebrated in the Jewish Hellenistic literature, both Greek, as is attested also in our book (Tob 4:12) and in the Testament of Job (45:3), and Hebrew (cf. Jub. 4:11), he intended to reduce the pressures which were corroding what remained of the tradition of the fathers. He imposed a practice that was excessively rigoristic and which clearly was not able to find ready acceptance in the Diaspora, where there were confrontations and collisions with the different models of Hellenistic culture, generating quite different reactions within the various forms of

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33 ALBERTZ, *Storia della religione*, 461-467 for the pillar type of family piety in the Yahwistic religion; for the piety of the microgroup in the time of the Diaspora, cf. 604-606.

34 Cf., also, Deut 7:2f.; Jos 9:6ff.; 23:7, 12; Jdg 2:2; 3:6; cf. 1 Kgs 11:3f.; 16:31; 2 Kgs 8:18. Cf. SMITH, *The Politics of Ezra*, 73-97.

Jewish membership. A minority group of exiles opposed a tenacious and sometimes also intolerant resistance to any openness to mixed marriages. They were obstinately bound to the institution of endogamous marriage as Tobit attests in a didactic and, all things considered, detached way. In the Diaspora, the observance of these norms had become the constitutive hinge of the new way of obeying the Torah, confirmed by the blind Tobit and witnessed to by the mysterious Azariah (6:16), but not taken up again by Raphael among the precepts transmitted by him (12:6-15).<sup>35</sup> In the land of exile, the father-pedagogue of Proverbs had already taught the fear of the contagion of wicked companions and the libertine customs of the foreigner (Prov 1:10-19; 5:1-23) which would have encouraged conformity with the fashions and tendencies emerging from the dominant Hellenistic culture, changing the models and behaviour of the healthy family tradition of Israel in an irreparable way.<sup>36</sup>

The insistence of Tobit on endogamous marriage in the Diaspora came up against the resistance of those who had a vision more open to the multi-ethnicity and multi-piety of the various cultures. For these Jews, the ethnic belonging of the woman to the house of Israel was not binding, although the foreign woman was required to convert to Judaism. To understand the climate of the lively theological debate, it is enough to think of the brief story of Ruth which tells of the salvific journey of the Moabitess, who, from being an immigrant, gleaning as a pauper, becomes part of the community of Israel, numbered among the mothers of Israel (Ruth 4:11-12), becoming the model of all female proselytes in later Judaism (cf. TgRuth 2:16-17). Moving in the same direction is the historical romance of Joseph and Aseneth (1<sup>st</sup> century BCE to 1<sup>st</sup> century CE), a writing characteristic of the Greek-speaking Egyptian Diaspora which celebrates the marriage of the Patriarch Joseph and Aseneth, the daughter of an Egyptian priest, only one who in the fiction of the romance had reached a certain practice of Judaism (JosAs 9:2; 10:1ff.).<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the Jewish tradition of the Diaspora sought in many ways to justify the mixed marriages of the patriarchal period, inventing genealogies, tribal associations and dynastic successions which ought to have reassured those who did not have

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35 ZAPPELLA, Tobit, 21-22.

36 BELLIA, Proverbi, 73-76; BIANCHI, La donna del tuo popolo, 74-83; COLLINI, Famiglia, 33-96.

37 In a clannish organisation, there could be wives of different or similar race and religion: Abraham (Gen 16:1-4), Esau (Gen 26:34-35), Joseph (Gen 41:50-52), Moses (Exod 2:21-22; cf. also 18:3), David (1 Sam 25:39-43). For Moses, there is mention of a Kenite marriage (Jdg 1:16; 4:11) and of an Ethiopian wife (Num 12:1). Cf. BIANCHI, La donna del tuo popolo, 24-68.

the intention of breaking their marriage bonds with foreigners who bore equally the seal of an identical divine blessing.<sup>38</sup> In *Tobit*, it is not said that the seven husbands were killed by the treacherous Asmodeus because they were not Jews but only because he loves Sarah and is jealous of them (6:14-15). The author of *Tobit*, then, takes the side of the Ezra tradition but without treating the condemnation of mixed marriages in a ferocious manner.<sup>39</sup>

It would be the family piety of the upper levels of Second Temple society, faithful to the sapiential tradition of the Torah, together with the personal piety of the prophetic-apocalyptic tendency of the lower classes that was to overcome the setback of the disastrous experience of the failed restoration. The Edict of Cyrus (538 BCE) had offered to the Jewish Diaspora in Babylon the opportunity to plan the re-establishment of a cultic community in Jerusalem in the ancient land of the fathers. The inability of those who returned to recover a significant historical and religious identity could not be compensated for by visionary projects of future reconstructions on the part of the disputed priestly caste or by the enthusiasm of groups of devout observants. Once again, the only institution that remained 'strong' and alive after the umpteenth collapse of all the hopes for the reconstruction of the national and cultic order was the family.<sup>40</sup> In the Diaspora, the attention to private religious sentiment, conveyed by the family tradition, had found its optimal form of preservation and increase in the cultic form of the synagogue where elements of the macrocult and the microcult were able to converge. From the Persian period onward, the dynamic and fruitful relationship between the official religion and personal piety will be assured only by fidelity to synagogue practice, helping to overcome that religious and social cleavage in Jewish society of the second post-Exilic age.<sup>41</sup> Here we must ask how on earth there is, oddly, no trace of this fervent synagogal world in *Tobit*.

To make up for this, the pious hagiographer seems to share, tacitly, the moralising campaign against polygamy, exhibiting long-lived monogamous couples and holding out to the young Tobias the charm of a union

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38 Thus, it is explained that Aseneth, Joseph's wife, would have been the descendant of Dinah, violated in her time by Shechem (TgJGen 41:45; cf. Gen 34:2); while in the tradition of the LXX, Zipporah, the Midianite wife of Moses, would have been a descendant of Moses in the line of Ketura (cf. Gen 25:3<sup>LXX</sup>); there is a list of mixed marriages passages in Jewish apocryphal literature in COLLINI, *Famiglia*, 43-45.

39 BIANCHI, *La donna del tuo popolo*, 83-116; VIRGULIN, *La vita di famiglia*, 159-187; RAVASI, *La famiglia*, 59-72; PITKÄNEN, *Family life and Ethnicity*, 104-117.

40 ALBERTZ, *Storia della religione*, 467 and 665.

41 LEVINE, *La sinagoga antica*, 140-145.

that lasts for ever. An ethical battle, but also a theological one, engaged after the Exile within the zealous movements of opinion and by scribal currents equipped to accept the fact that polygamy did not belong to the original divine blessing. The texts of Gen 1:27 (MT) and of 2:24 (MT), considered as post-Exilic compositions, were not interpreted as hostile to polygamy or divorce. It would be the oral tradition that was to hand to Greek-speaking Judaism in the Diaspora a new take on the foundational text of Gen 2:24, introducing in the LXX translation a small but substantial gloss which established a new interpretation of the real addressees of the divine command and blessing on marriage: “and they two will be one flesh only” (cf. Pesh-TgJ; Pent Sam Gen 2:24). Restricting the primordial blessing to ‘those two,’ as Giovanni Rizzi shrewdly notes, has the effect of excluding every other relationship, putting polygamy out of bounds.<sup>42</sup> The fact that Tobit does not share or witness to this important evolution of meaning which certainly his time needed, spurs us to fix the place and date of composition of the book towards the Eastern Diaspora of Greater Syria, in a time prior to the Alexandrine version of the Septuagint.<sup>43</sup>

## 5. Blindness and nostalgia for the father figure

In the time of deep religious and social crisis of Jewish society in the second post-Exilic age, the emergence of a series of writings with female heroines has been noted. To the little Book of Ruth, the Moabitess should be added other books which praise heroines like Esther and Judith, not to mention the greater emphasis given to the role of women within the patriarchal narratives. There is agreement over these writings of edifying tales, or, better, true Jewish romances, which oscillate between “inclusive indulgence and exclusive defensiveness,” and which exalt feminine qualities and characteristics against the background of a constant absence or insignificance of male figures.<sup>44</sup> In these accounts, it is always the father figure who is hidden or lacking in these narratives. In the Book of Tobit, the author takes care to inform us that his protagonist was an orphan who grew up alone in faithful observance of the Law of Moses, thanks to

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42 A reading censuring polygamy assimilated by Jerome in Gen 2,24<sup>VG</sup> where, despite his proclaimed attachment to the *hebraica veritas*, he knows he has to stick to the meaning introduced by the LXX and translates: “*et erunt duo in carne una.*”

43 Cf. RIZZI, *Le antiche versioni*, 33-35; BONSIUVEN, *Le Judaïsme palestinien*, 207-216; MANN, *Il matrimonio nel giudaismo antico*, 139-191.

44 ZAPPELLA, *L'immagine dell'elezione*, 199.

the education afforded to him by his grandmother Deborah (1:8). The absence of the father figure has a clear symbolic value and, in a text received as canonical, should bear some theological significance. The story must be read, therefore, not only as symbol of an emotional void for what the absence of the father represents at the level of the family, but rather as a living metaphor of what the symbol can represent for faith in contemporary society.<sup>45</sup>

It is not necessary here to think of or have recourse to the father according to the various and shifting fortunes of the psychoanalytical readings which want him, now as the normative ideal, now as an ideological function, or yet something else. It seems to me more coherent to understand him within the biblical world where the father is seen first of all as the one who procreates, as the witness of the covenant, as the guarantor of the wise divine Law. In order to educate his son in a foreign land, where there is no religious or moral authority that can collaborate in his educational responsibility, the father of the Book of Proverbs has no resources other than his own patient work of persuasion.<sup>46</sup> In this case, the presence of the father figure, even if diminished and weakened compared with the patriarchal models, on account of the lack of support and the useless help of the community, always has a pedagogic role and a paternal responsibility to fulfil.<sup>47</sup> When the father becomes weaker, however, when the father is not there, the absence of the paternal function takes on a significance really most serious and disquieting if related to the corresponding symbolic value which the lack of a father carries on the social and religious level. Biblically, the lack of the father must correspond with the profound loss lamented by Daniel: "We no longer have prince or chief or prophet or holocaust or sacrifice or oblation or incense or place to present you with our firstfruits and to find mercy" (3:38). An irremediable loss, an agonising deprivation because, as the contemporary psalmist emphasises; "No one knows how long." The absence of the father can, perhaps, indicate an institutional void, but in those brief accounts, to the eyes of faith it stands, above all, for the slight authority of that role, the poor reliability of that function, the impracticability of that generating relation.<sup>48</sup>

In the Book of Tobit, the father is there, but he is blind. He is present, but he seeks from God to be allowed to die. He carries out his paternal function scrupulously, but he cannot bear witness to the fruit of the di-

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45 BARBAGLIO, *Simbologia religiosa*, 63-70; RICOEUR, *La paternité*, 458-486.

46 BELLIA, *Proverbi*, 69, 87; PINTO, "Ascolta figlio," 144.

47 POHIER, *Nel nome del Padre*, 13-63.

48 BERGER, *Una gloria remota*, 163.

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