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GOD, MANKIND AND CONNUBIAL RELATIONS IN THE QUR'AN

While looking into some of the books of the Hebrew Bible, one stumbles sometimes upon places where God is shown to have love for His people, just as a husband has for his wife or a lover for his beloved one; such is the case, for instance, in the prophetic writings, where we find instances in which God's people is depicted as an unfaithful, ungrateful wife, that doesn't live up to her just, caring yet jealous husband's demands and expectations. This is what adds to this relation a sentimental dimension in which God takes on the role of the stable element, of the faithful husband, who loves his wife disinterestedly (a corollary of love in this case is fierce jealousy – as it is also reflected in books other than the prophetic ones – see, for example, the epithet *qannā* ' ('jealous') used of God as not bearing any gods or idols being worshipped beside Him (Ex., 20:5, Deut., 4:24, 5:9) – although He constantly and repeatedly manifests His readiness to forgive His 'wife' and re-establish connubial relations – i.e. the covenant – with her, on condition she repents and resumes the attributions incumbent on her); as for God's people, it appears as the ever unstable element, always disloyal, always ready to give itself to whoever seems capable of satisfying its material needs and whims at a certain moment.

Thus, we can see in the Book of Jeremiah (2: 1-3) how the path covered by the chosen people in its relation with God is traced through an allegory telling about the evolution of a young girl, from the period preceding marriage until the age of maturity; the stages experienced by the young girl suggest the historical stages covered by the people, starting with the period before Moses (*zākartī lāk Hēsēd n^{ec}ūrayik*... 'I've remembered the grace (shown to you during) your youth...') and culminating with the revelation on Mount Sinai and the migration through the desert, equated here with the wedding and the beginning of the young girl's new life as God's wife (... *'ah^abat k^elūlōtayik lektēk*

'aH^aray bammidbār b^e- 'érelō'z^erû^câh '...the love of your wedding, (of the time when) you followed me in the desert, in a barren land' – Jer., 2:2). A similar, but much more developed allegory is to be found in the Book of Ezekiel, where we find a whole chapter (ch. 16) dedicated to the same motif of the young girl of humble origin whom God takes under His protection and with whom He makes a covenant she subsequently breaks by perpetrating acts of idolatry. As for Hosea (ch. 1-3), he seems to have inextricably intertwined God's message to His unfaithful people with elements of his own biography, making his marriage with Gomer, the 'whorish wife' (*'ēšet z^enûnîm* – Hos., 1:20), into an allegory similar to those mentioned above.

These instances of metaphorical and allegorical depiction of God's relation with His people can be analyzed on the basis of George Lakoff's theory on metaphor, according to which 'the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing or experience in terms of another' (Lakoff, Johnson 2002: 512), implying that metaphor is not merely a figure of speech, but a process playing an important part in shaping man's 'ordinary conceptual system' (Lakoff, Johnson 2002: 511) to such an extent that this system is metaphorical in nature (one example given in this context is that of the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, that makes man see arguments as conflicts implying that one of the parties involved has to win and the other has to lose etc.). As a consequence of this overwhelming importance conceded to metaphor in shaping the way man thinks of and conceives certain notions, Lakoff postulates that metaphors manifest themselves in a systematic way, exerting the function of 'highlighting and hiding', i.e. of making us seize some aspects of a particular concept and ignore others. This is what we can see in the above-mentioned metaphors, where the breaking of God's covenant by His people is seen as an act of debauchery and not, for instance, as an act of treason towards a partner in a military alliance (we do not claim, however, that this is the only way of conceiving God's relation with His people, neither in the prophetic writings of the Hebrew Bible nor in the Bible as a whole, for there are other places, even in the prophetic writings themselves, where the underlying metaphorical structure is that of the father-son relationship – see, e.g., Hos., ch.11; our only claim is that there are places where this relationship is depicted in connubial terms in a coherent manner). Lakoff also identifies different types of metaphors, among which there is the 'structural metaphor', defined as a case where 'one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another' (Lakoff, Johnson 2002: 517); this is the type we think is suitable for our analysis, since our aim was to look for instances suggesting that the relationship between God and His people (or rather, as it is the case in the Qur'an, with the believers' community or mankind as a whole) is structured in the terms of a connubial relation.

We began our article with a short excursion into some of the Biblical texts so as to make clear what type of metaphorical structure we were looking for in

the Qur'an. And since so far we haven't found in it anything that might support the presence of such structure, in the following we will apply Lakoff's theory in a reversed manner, by trying to see what elements of the Qur'anic text this metaphorical structure might highlight not by its presence, but by its apparent absence, and whether they can be viewed as manifestations of a coherent thought system that might have hindered its emergence.

In order to achieve this goal we will look into the Qur'an from certain viewpoints relevant to this matter, and the first issue we will approach is that of the inter-human relations and the way they are conceived from a gender-orientated perspective. Thus, we can find instances where there is a clear recognition of men and women being meant to live together, as it can be seen in this verse treating with regulations to be followed while fasting:

'uHilla la-kum laylata S-Siyāmi r-rafatu 'ilā nisā'i-kum hunna libāsun la-kum wa-'antum libāsun la-hunna... (II, 187)

(‘Permitted to you, on the night of the fasts, is the approach to your wives. They are your garments and ye are their garments...’)¹

There are also verses which contain a recognition of feelings existing between spouses as something established by the Creator Himself, while wives and children are regarded as a legitimate source of joy and satisfaction for believers:

huwa l-laḏī ḥalaqa-kum min nafsin wāHidatin wa-ḡā'ala min-hā zawḡa-hā li-yaskuna 'ilay-hā... (VII, 189)

(‘It is He Who created you from a single person, and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her (in love)...’)

...wa-l-laḏīna yaqūlūna rabba-nā hab la-nā min 'azwāḡi-nā wa-durriyyāti-nā qurrata 'āyunin... (XXV, 74)

(‘and those who pray, “Our Lord! Grant unto us wives and offspring who will be the comfort of our eyes...”’)

wa-min 'āyāti-hī 'an ḥalaqa la-kum min 'anfusi-kum 'azwāḡan li-taskunū 'ilay-hā wa-ḡā'ala bayna-kum mawaddatan wa-raHmatan... (XXX, 21)

(‘And among His signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts)...’)

These statements go hand in hand with others where not only men, but all living creatures are shown as having a sexual nature, as it can be seen in places where the noun *zawḡ* appears in the dual form (for in this form it has clearly the meaning of ‘pair’), and also in its singular and plural forms, provided the context leaves no ambiguity as to its meaning:

¹ The English translation of the Qur'anic verses cited in this article is that of Abdullah Yusuf Ali (*The Holy Qur'an Meanings Translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali*, Dar al-Arabiyyah, Beirut).

yā 'ayyuhā n-nāsu ttaqū rabba-kumu l-laḏī halaqa-kum min nafsīn wāHidatin wa-halaqa min-hā zawġa-hā wa-batta min-humā riġālan katīran wa-nisā'an... (IV, 1)

(‘O mankind, reverence your Guardian-Lord who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered countless men and women...’)

...wa-min kulli t-tamarāti ġā'ala fī-hā zawġayni tṇayni... (XIII, 3)

(‘...and fruit of every kind He made in pairs, two and two...’)

wa-llāhu halaqa-kum min turābin tumma min nuṭfatin tumma ġā'ala-kum 'azwāġan wa-mā taḤmilu min 'untā wa-lā taDa'u 'illā bi-ilmī-hī... (XXXV, 11)

(‘And God did create you from dust; then from a sperm-drop; then He made you in pairs. And no female conceives, or lays down (her load), but with His knowledge...’)

fāTīru s-samāwāti wa-l-'arDi ġā'ala la-kum min 'anfusi-kum 'azwāġan wa-mina l-'ar'āmi 'azwāġan yaḏra'u-kum fī-hi... (XLII, 11)

(‘(He is) the Creator of the heavens and the earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves, and pairs among cattle: by this means does He multiply you...’)

wa-min kulli šay'in halaqnā zawġayni... (LI, 49)

(‘And of every thing We have created pairs...’)

fa-ġā'ala min-hu z-zawġayni ḏ-dakara wa-l-'untā (LXXV, 39)

(‘And of him He made two sexes, male and female’)

There are also verses where the meaning of ‘pair’ can be less unambiguously ascribed to the noun *zawġ*, although this is most likely its actual meaning², such as:

...wa-'anzala mina s-samā'i mā'an fa-'ahraġnā bi-hī 'azwāġan min nabātin šattā (XX, 53)

(‘...and has sent down water from the sky. With it have We produced divers pairs of plants each separate from the others’)

...wa-tarā l-'arDa hāmidatan fa-'iḏā 'anzalnā 'alay-hā l-mā'a htazzat wa-rabat wa-'anbatat min kulli zawġin bahiġin (XXII, 5)

(‘...and thou seest the earth barren and lifeless, but when We pour down rain on it, it is stirred (to life), it swells, and it puts forth every kind of beautiful growth (in pairs)’)

'a-wa-lam yaraw 'ilā l-'arDi kam 'anbatnā fī-hā min kulli zawġin karīmin (XXVI, 7)

(‘Do they not look at the earth, - how many noble things of all kinds We have produced therein?’)

wa-l-'arDa madadnā-hā wa-'alqaynā fī-hā rawāsiya wa-'anbatnā fī-hā min kulli zawġin bahiġin. (L, 7)

² The only case where the noun *zawġ* bears clearly the meaning of ‘group’, ‘class’, ‘category’ and not ‘pair’ seems to be that of LVI,7: *wa-kuntum 'azwāġan talātatan* (‘and ye shall be sorted out into three classes’).

(‘And the earth – We have spread it out, and set thereon mountains standing firm, and produced therein every kind of beautiful growth (in pairs)’)

Within such a context it is only too natural to find passages where there is a strong condemnation of celibacy and ascetic life as situations and attitudes contrary to the order of things as God has established it, alongside with others exhorting the community to marry the single ones:

wa-llāhu ḡā'ala la-kum min 'anfusikum 'azwāḡan wa-ḡā'ala la-kum min 'azwāḡi-kum banīna wa-Hafadatan wa-razaqa-kum mina T-Tayyibāti 'a-fa-bi-l-bāTili yu'minūna wa-bi-ni'mati llāhi hum yakfurūna? (XVI, 72)

(‘And God has mad for you mates (and companions) of your own nature, and made for you, out of them, sons and daughters and grandchildren, and provided for you sustenance of the best: will they then believe in vain things, and be ungrateful for God's favours?’)

wa-'ankiHū l-'ayamā min-kum wa-S-SāliHīna min 'ibādi-kum wa-'imā'ikum (XXIV, 32)

(‘Marry those among you who are single, or the virtuous ones among your slaves, male or female...’)

tumma qaffaynā 'alā 'ātāri-him bi-rusuli-nā wa-qaffaynā bi-'isā bni maryama wa-'ātaynā-hu l-'ingīla wa-ḡā'alnā fī qulūbi l-ladīna ttabā'ū-hu ra'fatan wa-raHmatan wa-rahbāniyyatan-i btada'ū-hā wa-mā katabnā-hā 'alay-him 'illā btigā'a riDwāni llāhi fa-mā ra'aw-hā Haqqa ri'āyati-hā... (LVII, 27)

(‘Then, in their wake, We followed them up with (others of) Our apostles: We sent after them Jesus the son of Mary, and bestowed on him th Gospel; and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy. But the monasticism which they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe for them: (We commanded) only the seeking for the good pleasure of God; but that they did not foster as they should have done...’)

At he same time, differences between the intrinsic nature of the two sexes are acknowledged and deemed the result of the vary way God has created mankind, and men are ascribed a status superior to that of women:

ar-riḡālu qawwāmūna 'alā n-nisā'i bi-mā faDDala llāhu ba'Da-hum 'alā ba'Din wa-bi-mā 'anfaqu min 'amwāli-him... (IV, 34)

(‘Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means...’)

This is clearly reflected in the elements of legislation contained by the Qur'an, where women appear to have a lower status, as it is the case when it comes to the partition of an inheritance or deposition of testimony:

yūSī-kumu llāhu fī 'awlādi-kum li-d-dakari miṡlu HaZZi l-'untayayni fa-'in kunna fawqa tnatayni fa-la-hunna ṡuluṡā mā taraka wa-'in kānat wāHidatan fa-la-hā n-niSfu... (IV, 11)

(‘God (thus) directs you as regards your children’s (inheritance): to the male, a portion equal to that of two females: if only daughters, two or more, their share is two-thirds of the inheritance; if only one, her share is a half...’)

yastaftūna-ka quli llāhu yufī-kum fī l-kalālati 'ini mru'un halaka laysa la-hū waladun wa-la-hū 'uhtun fa-la-hā niSfu mā taraka wa-huwa warītu-hā 'in lam yakun la-hā waladun (IV, 176)

(‘They ask thee for a legal decision. Say: God directs (thus) about those who leave no descendants or ascendants as heirs. If it is a man that dies, leaving a sister but no child, she shall have half the inheritance; if (such a deceased was) a woman, who left no child, her brother takes her inheritance...’)

...wa-stašhidū šahīdayni min riğāli-kum fa-'in lam yakūnā rağulayni fa-rağulun wa-mra'atāni mimman tarDawna mina š-šuhadā'i 'an taDilla 'iHdā-hunna fa-tudakkira 'iHdā-hunna l-'uhrā... (II, 282)

(‘...and get two witnesses, out of your own men, and if there are not two men, then a man and two women, such as ye choose, for witnesses, so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her...’)

The situation appears to be completely different when it comes to receiving retribution from God, for in this case men and women have equal status and receive equal treatment:

fa-stağāba la-hum rabbu-hum 'annī lā 'uDŦu 'amala 'āmilin min-kum min dakarin 'aw 'untā... (III, 195)

(‘And their Lord hath accepted of them, and answered them: “Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female...’)

wa-man ya'mal mina S-SāliHāti min dakarin 'aw 'untā wa-huwa mu'mininun fa-'ulā'ika yadhulūna l-ğannata wa-lā yuZlamūna naqīran. (IV, 124)

(‘If any do deeds of righteousness, - be they male or female - and have faith, they will enter Heaven and not the least injustice will be done to them.’)

wa-man 'amila SāliHan min dakarin 'aw-'untā wa-huwa mu'mininun fa-lanuHyiyanna-hū Hayātan Tayyibatan wa-la-nağziyanna-hum 'ağra-hum bi-'aHsani mā kānū ya'malūna. (XVI, 97)

(‘Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verily, to him will We give a new life, a life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions.’)

The same idea can be inferred, we think, from the verses treating with retribution of good and bad deeds, where names designating different categories of people appear in both their masculine and feminine forms, so as to emphasize that men and women are equally concerned by the message carried therein:

'inna l-muslimīna wa-l-muslimāti wa-l-mu'minīna wa-l-mu'mināti... 'a'adda llāhu la-hum mağfiratan wa-'ağran 'aZiman (XXXIII, 35)

(‘For muslim men and women, - for believing men and women... for them has God prepared forgiveness and great reward.’)

li-yu'addiba llāhu l-munāfiqīna wa-l-munāfiqāti wa-l-mušrikīna wa-l-mušrikāti wa-yatūba llāhu 'alā l-mu'minīna wa-l-mu'mināti... (XXXIII, 73)

(‘(With the result) that God has to punish the hypocrites, men and women, and the unbelievers, men and women, and God turns in mercy to the believers, men and women...)

*li-yudhila l-mu'minīna wa-l-mu'mināti ḡannātin taḡrī min taHti-hā l-'anhāru...
* wa-yu'addiba l-munāfiqīna wa-l-munāfiqāti wa-l-mušrikīna wa-l-mušrikāti...
(XLVIII, 5,6)*

(‘That He may admit the men and women who believe, to gardens beneath which rivers flow...and that He may punish the hypocrites, men and women, and the polytheists, men and women...’)

Moreover, when matters of faith are at stake, women do have the possibility to take the initiative independently of their husbands or even against their will and are even able to become an example or prototype for all mankind, believers or unbelievers:

*yā 'ayyuhā l-laḏīna 'āmanū 'idā ḡā'a-kumu l-mu'minātu muhāḡirātin fa-mtaHinū-hunna llāhu 'alamu bi-'īmāni-hinna fa-'in 'alimumū-hunna mu'minātin fa-lā tarḡī'ū-hunna 'ilā l-kuffāri... * wa-'in fāta-kum šay'un min 'azwāḡi-kum 'ilā l-kuffāri fa-'āqabtum fa-'ātū l-laḏīna dahabat 'azwāḡu-hum miṭla mā 'anfaqu wattaqu llāha l-laḏī 'antum bi-hī mu'minūna * yā 'ayyuhā n-nabiyyu 'idā ḡā'a-ka l-mu'minātu yubāyi'na-ka... fa-bāyi'-hunna wa-staḡfir la-hunna llāha 'inna llāha ḡafūrun raHīmun. (LX, 10-12)*

(‘O ye who believe! When there come to you believing women refugees, examine (and test) them: God knows best as to their faith: if ye ascertain that they are believers, then send them not back to the unbelievers... And if any of your wives deserts you to the unbelievers, and ye have an accession (by the coming over of a woman from the other side), then pay to those whose wives have deserted the equivalent of what they had spent (on their dower). And fear God, in Whom ye believe. O prophet! When believing women come to thee to take the oath of fealty to thee... then do thou receive their fealty, and pray to God for the forgiveness (of their sins): for God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.)

*Daraba llāhu maṭalan li-l-laḏīna kafarū mra'ata nūHin wa-mra'ata lūTin kānatā taHta 'abdayni min 'ibādi-nā SāliHayni fa-hānatā-humā fa-lam yuḡniyā 'an-humā mina llāhi šay'an wa-qīla dhulā n-nāra ma'a d-dāhilīna * wa-Daraba llāhu maṭalan li-l-laḏīna 'āmanū mra'ata fir'awna 'idā qālat rabbī bni lī baytan fī l-ḡannati wa-naḡḡi-nī min fir'awna wa 'amali-hī wa-naḡḡi-nī mina l-qawmi Z-Zālimīna * wa-maryama bnata 'imrāna l-latī 'aHSanat farḡa-hā fa-nafahnā fī-hi min rūHi-nā wa-Saddaḡat bi-kalimāti rabbi-hā wa-kutubi-hī wa-kānat mina l-qānitīna. (LXVI, 10-12)*

(‘God sets forth, for an example to the unbelievers, the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot: they were (respectively) under two of our righteous servants, but they were false to their (husbands), and they profited nothing before God on their account, but were told: “Enter ye the fire along with (others) that enter!” And God sets forth, as an example to those who believe, the wife of Pharaoh: behold she said: “O my Lord! Build for me, in nearness to Thee, a mansion in the Garden, and save

me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from those who do wrong”; And Mary the daughter of ‘Imrān, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into (her body) of Our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His revelations, and was one of the devout (servants).’)

The main idea emerging from this overview of matters concerning the status of men and women is the existence of a clear demarcation line dividing inter-human relations, which are dealt with on the basis of differences between genders being acknowledged and considered an inherent part of God’s creation, and relations of men and women with God, where these differences become irrelevant.

It is not without significance, in this same context, that sexual intercourse is regarded, alongside with other strictly human activities or conditions, as a cause of ritual impurity, for this strengthens the idea that sexuality, as utterly human and earthly, is incompatible with God’s nature, and man has to distance himself from all mark of his low material nature, including sexuality, when approaching God:

...wa-’in kuntum ġunuban fa-TTahharū wa-’in kuntum marDā ’aw ‘alā safarin ’aw ġā’a ’aHadun min-kum mina l-ġā’iTi ’aw lāmastumu n-nisā’a fa-lam taġidū mā’an fa-tayammamū Sa’īdan Tayyiban fa-msaHū bi-wuġūhi-kum wa-’aydi-kum minhu... (V, 6)

(‘...if ye are in a state of ceremonial impurity, bathe your whole body. But if ye are ill, or on a journey, or one of you cometh from offices of nature, or ye have been in contact with women, and ye find no water, then take for yourselves clean sand or earth, and rub therewith yor faces and hands...’)

If we are to broaden the perspective and look at the way living in this world is conceived, we find constant exhortations to always have in mind one’s fate in the hereafter and statements emphasizing its superiority over this world (see, e.g. III,14,15; IV,76,77; VI,32; VII,169); however, men are recommended to take care of themselves, to be moderate in their expenses and not to neglect their earthly lives:

qul man Harrama zīnata llāhi l-lati’ ahraga li-’ibādi-hi wa-T-Tayyibāti mina r-rizqi qul hiya li-l-laġīna ’āmanū fi l-Hayāti d-dunyā hāliSatan yawma l-qiyyāmati... (VII, 32)

(‘Say: Who hath forbidden the beautiful (gifts) of God, which He hath produced for His servants, and the things, clean and pure, (which He hath provided) for sustenance? Say: they are, in the life of this world, for those who believe, (and) purely for them on the Day of Judgement...’)

fa-kulū mim mā razaqa-kumu llāhu Halālan Tayyiban wa-škurū ni‘mata llāhi ’in kuntum ’iyyā-hu ta‘budūna. (XVI, 114)

(‘So eat of the sustenance which God has provided for you, lawful and good; and be grateful for the favours of God, if it is He Whom ye serve.’)

wa-^cibādu r-raHmāni...l-laḏīna 'iḏā 'anfaqu lam yusrifū wa-lam yafturū wa-kāna bayna ḏālika qawāman. (XXV, 63, 67)

(‘And the servants of (God) Most Gracious...are those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those (extremes)’)

wa-ttabi^c fi-mā 'ātā-ka llāhu d-dāra l-'āhirata wa-lā tansa naSiba-ka mina d-dunyā... (XXVIII, 77)

(‘But seek, with the (wealth) which God has bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget thy portion in this world...’)

Furthermore, punishment is to be feared also in this world, and the rewards promised to believers may also come before they die:

fa-'ātā-humu llāhu ṭawāba d-dunyā wa-Husna ṭawābi l-'āhirati, wa-llāhu yuHibbu l-muHsinīna. (III, 148)

(‘And God gave them a reward in this world, and the excellent reward of the hereafter. For God loveth those who do good.’)

... 'ulā'ika l-laḏīna lam yuridi llāhu 'an yuTahhira qulūba-hum la-hum fi d-dunyā ḥizyun wa-la-hum fi l-'āhirati 'aḏābun 'aZīmun. (V, 41)

(‘...for such – it is not God’s will to purify their hearts. For them there is a disgrace in this world, and in the Hereafter a heavy punishment.’)

'inna l-laḏīna ttaḥaḏū l-^ciḡla sa-yanālu-hum ḡaDabun min rabbi-him wa-ḏillatun fi l-Hayāti d-dunyā... (VII, 152)

(‘Those who took the calf (for worship) will indeed be overwhelmed with wrath from their Lord, and with shame in this life...’)

... 'ulā'ika HabiTat 'a^cmālu-hum fi d-dunyā wa-l-'āhirati... (IX, 69)

(‘...their works are fruitless in this world and in the Hereafter...’)

... wa-'in yatawallaw yu^caddīb-humu llāhu 'aḏāban 'alīman fi d-dunyā wa-l-'āhirati wa-mā la-hum fi l-'arDi min waliyyin wa-lā naSrin. (IX, 74)

(‘...but if they turn back (to their evil ways), God will punish them with a grievous penalty in this life and in the Hereafter: they shall have none on earth to protect or help them.’)

...la-hū fi d-dunyā ḥizyun wa-nuḏīqu-hū yawma l-qiyāmati 'aḏāba l-Harīqi. (XXII, 9)

(‘...for him there is disgrace in this life, and on the Day of Judgement We shall make him taste the penalty of burning (fire).’)

wa-'atba^cnā-hum fi ḥāḏīhi d-dunyā la^cnatan wa-yawma l-qiyāmati hum mina l-maqbūHīna. (XXVIII, 42)

(‘In this world We made a curse to follow them: and on the Day of Judgement they will be among the loathed (and despised).’)

naHnu 'awliyā u-kum fi l-Hayāti d-dunyā wa-fi l-'āhirati wa-la-kum fi-hā mā taṣṭahī 'anfusu-kum wa-la-kum fi-hā mā tadda^cūna. (XLI, 31)

(‘We are your protectors in this life and in the Hereafter: therein shall ye have all that your souls shall desire; therein shall ye have all that ye ask for!’)

As for Heaven, it is depicted as a place providing a life that resembles, to some extent, life on Earth, as it is rather explicitly stated in some verses:

...kullamā ruziqū min-hā min tamaratin rizqan qālū hādā l-laḏī ruziqnā min qablu wa-'utū bi-hī mutašābihan... (II, 25)

(‘...every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: “Why, this is what we were fed with before”, for they are given things in similitude...’)

There are even instances where, if we are to adopt a literal interpretation, a similarity between this world and Heaven seems to be suggested both from the spatial and temporal points of view (in the last of the following three verses, this symmetry seems to apply to Hell as well):

wa-sārī'ū 'ilā maḡfiratin min rabbi-kum wa-ḡannatin 'arDu-hā s-samāwātu wa-l-'arDu 'u'iddat li-l-muttaqīna. (III, 133)

(‘Be quick in the race for forgiveness from your Lord, and for a Garden whose width is that (of the whole) of the heavens and of the earth, prepared for the righteous.’)

sābiqū 'ilā maḡfiratin min rabbi-kum wa-ḡannatin 'arDu-hā ka-'arDi s-samā'i wa-l-'arDi 'u'iddat li-l-laḏīna 'āmanū wa-rusuli-hī... (LVII, 21)

(‘Be ye foremost (in seeking) forgiveness from your Lord, and a Garden (of bliss), the width whereof is as the width of heaven and earth, prepared for those who believe in God and His apostles...’)

*fa-'ammā l-laḏīna šaqū fa-fī n-nāri la-hum fī-hā zafīrun wa-šahīqun * ḥalīdīna fī-hā mā dāmāti s-samāwātu wa-l-'arDu... * wa-'ammā l-laḏīna su'idū fa-fī l-ḡannati ḥalīdīna fī-hā mā dāmāti s-samāwātu wa-l-'arDu...* (XI, 106 – 108)

(‘Those who are wretched shall be in the fire: there will be for them therein (nothing but) the heaving of sighs and sobs. They will dwell therein for all the time that the heavens and the earth endure... And those who are blessed shall be in the Garden: they will dwell therein for all the time that the heavens and the earth endure...’)

The main difference between Heaven and this world is given by the former being depicted as an idealized version of the latter, as a place lacking all negative side, the dwellers of which are provided with pleasures evoking those found on earth and yet stripped of any inconvenient aspect that might accompany them or come as their result in earthly life. This is how food never ends in Heaven, its dwellers never get tired, death has no place in it, wine is not intoxicating etc:

maṭalu l-ḡannati l-latī wu'ida l-muttaqūna taḡrī min taḤti-hā l-'anhāru 'ukulu-hā dā'imun wa-Zillu-hā... (XIII, 35)

(‘The parable of the Garden which the righteous are promised!- Beneath it flow rivers: perpetual the enjoyment thereof and the shade therein...’)

*ḡannāti 'adnin-i l-latī wa'ada r-raḤmānu 'ibāda-hū bi-l-ḡaybi 'inna-hū kāna wa'du-hū ma'īyyan * lā yasma'ūna fī-hā laḡwan 'illā salāman wa-la-hum rizqu-hum fī-hā bukratan wa-'ašīyyan.* (XIX, 61,62)

(‘Gardens of eternity, those which (God) Most Gracious has promised to His servants in the Unseen: for His promise must (necessarily) come to pass. They will not there hear any vain discourse, but only salutations of peace: and they will have therein their sustenance, morning and evening.’)

*wa-qālū l-Hamdu li-llāhi l-laḏī 'adhaba 'an-nā l-Hazana 'inna rabba-nā la-ḡafūrun ṣakūrun-i * l-laḏī 'aHalla-nā dāra l-muqāmati min faDli-hī lā yamassu-nā fī-hā naSabun wa-lā yamassu-nā fī-hā luḡūbun. (XXXV, 34, 35)*

(‘And they will say: “Praise be to God, Who has removed from us (all) sorrow: for our Lord is indeed Oft-Forgiving ready to appreciate (service); Who has, out of His bounty, settled us in a Home that will last: no toil nor sense of weariness shall touch us therein”.’)

*'illā 'ibāda llāhi l-muḥlaSīna * 'ulā'ika la-hum rizqun ma'lūmun. * fawākihu wa-hum mukramūna * fī ḡannāti n-na'īmi * 'alā sururin mutaḡābilīna * yuTāfu 'alay-him bi-ka'ṣin min ma'īnin * bayDā'a laddatin li-š-šāribīna * lā fī-hā ḡawlun wa-lā hum 'an-hā yunzaḡūna (XXXVII, 40-47)*

(‘But the sincere (and devoted) servants of God,- for them is a sustenance determined, fruits (delights); and they (shall enjoy) honour and dignity, in Gardens of felicity, facing each other on thrones (of dignity): round will be passed a cup from a clear-flowing fountain, crystal-white, of a taste delicious to those who drink (thereof), free from headiness; nor will they suffer intoxication therefrom.’)

maṭalu l-ḡannati l-laṭī wu'ida l-muttaḡūna fī-hā 'anhārun min mā'in ḡayri 'āsīnin wa-'anhārun min labanin lam yataḡayyar Ta'mu-hū wa-'anhārun min ḡamrin laddatin li-š-šāribīna wa-'anhārun min 'asalin muSaffan... (XLVII, 15)

(‘(Here is) a parable of the Garden which the righteous are promised: in it are rivers of water incorruptible; rivers of milk of which the taste never changes; rivers of wine, a joy to those who drink; and rivers of honey pure and clear...’)

Pleasures evoking those of female companionship are also provided for Heaven's dwellers, as it is stated in the following verses:

...wa-la-hum fī-hā 'azwāḡun muTahharatun... (II, 25)

(‘... and they have therein companions pure and holy³’)

³ An interpretation of the epithet *muTahharah* suitable to this context would be, among other possible interpretations, ‘having no menstruation’, since female companionship is, like other heavenly pleasures, expected to be void of its earthly negative sides, and menstruation is explicitly defined as a harmful thing and is put in contrast with a state of purity: *wa-yas'alūna-ka 'ani l-maḤiDi qul huwa 'adhan fa-tazilū n-nisā'a fī l-maḤiDi wa-lā taḡrabū-hunna Hattā yaThurna...* (II, 222) (‘They ask thee concerning women's courses, say: They are a hurt and a pollution: so keep away from women in heir courses, and do not approach them till they are clean...’). This interpretation is also put forward, alongside others, by some of the *mufassirūn*: in the paragraph concerning this particular verse in az-Zamaḡṣarī's *al-Kaššāf*, for instance, it is said: *wa-l-murādu bi-taThīri l-'azwāḡi 'an Tuhhirna mimmā yaḡtaSSu bi-n-nisā'i mina l-HayDi wa-l-istiḤāDati wa-mā lā yaḡtaSSu bi-hinna mina l-'aqḏāri wa-l-'adnāsi* (‘and the meaning of companions being purified is that they've been purified from the blood and state of menstruation, which are particular

wa-l-ladīna 'āmanū wa-°amilū S-SāliHāti sa-nudhīlu-hum ḡannātin taḡrī min taHti-hā l-'anhāru hālīdīna fī-hā 'abadan la-hum fī-hā 'azwāḡun muTahharatun... (IV, 57)

(‘But those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, We shall soon admit to Gardens, with rivers flowing beneath,- their eternal home: therein shall they have companions pure and holy...’)

*ḡannāti °adnin mufattaHatan la-humu l-'abwābu * muttaki'īna fī-hā yaḡ'ūna fī-hā bi-fākihātin kaṭīratin wa-šarābin * wa-°inda-hum qāSirātu T-Tarfi 'atrābun* (XXXVIII, 50-52)

(‘Gardens of eternity, whose doors will (ever) be open to them; therein will they recline (at ease); therein can they call (at pleasure) for fruit in abundance, and (delicious) drink; and beside them will be chaste women restraining their glances, (companions) of equal age.’)

*'inna li-l-muttaqīna mafāzan * wa-Hadā'īqa wa-'ānāban * wa-kawā'iba 'atrāban* (LXXVIII, 31-33)

(‘Verily for the righteous there will be a fulfilment of (the heart’s) desires; gardens enclosed, and grapevines; companions of equal age.’)

The verses cited so far help creating the image of Heaven as a mirror reflection of this world, sharing with it many features, including those regarding the sexual nature of its dwellers (this is, however, an idealized reflection, since no negative aspect, no evil or suffering is to be found in Heaven)⁴. An idea of particular importance for our topic is that gender identity and sexuality are among the features of man and God’s living creation in general, both in this world and in Heaven.

When leaving the realm of creation and approaching the way God appears in the light of a gender-orientated perspective, we can see that not only is He not portrayed with features alluding to such an identity, but there is an overall concern to strip Him of every aspect, feature or attitude that might hint at the existence of any resemblance between Him and His creation, particularly humans. Thus, God does not need sustenance:

qul 'a-ḡayra llāhi 'attahīdu waliyyan fāTiri s-samāwāti wa-l-'arDi wa-huwa yuT'imu wa-lā yuT'amu... (VI, 14)

(‘Say: “Shall I take for my protector any other than God, the Maker of the heavens and the earth? And He is that feedeth but is not fed”...’)

*wa-mā ḡalaqtu l-ḡinna wa-l-'insa 'illā li-yaḡbudū-nī * mā 'urīdu min-hum min rizqin wa-mā 'urīdu 'an yuT'imū-nī * 'inna llāha huwa r-razzāqu dū l-quwwati l-matīnu* (LI, 56-58)

to women, and from other unclean and impure things, which are not’ – *al-Kaššāf*, Vol. 1, Dar al-kutub al-°Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 2006, p. 114).

⁴ Hell’s image in relation to that of the Earth is symmetric to Heaven’s image, in that it offers its dwellers only horrific torments, thus retaining the worst of man’s experience on Earth (see, e.g., VII, 36-41, X, 27, XLIV, 43-48, LVI, 41-56, LXVII, 6-11 etc.).

(‘I have only created jinns and men, that they may serve Me. No sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed Me. For God is He Who gives (all) sustenance,- Lord of Power,- Steadfast (for ever).’)

His nature is inaccessible:

lā tudriku-hū l-'abSāru wa-huwa yudriku l-'abSāra wa-huwa l-laTīfu l-habīru.
(VI, 103)

(‘No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision: He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things.’)

and He is not to be compared to anything in this world:

fa-lā taDribū li-llāhi 'amṭālan 'inna llāha yaʿlamu wa-'antum lā taʿlamūna.
(XVI, 74)

(‘Invent not similitudes for God: for God knoweth, and ye know not.’)

The Qur'an adopts a particularly strong polemical tone when rejecting those beliefs held by Christians and Pagan Arabs which seem to humanize God by attributing to Him sons or daughters⁵, that is by portraying Him as a sexual being able to procreate:

wa-ğʿalū li-llāhi šurakā'a l-ğinna wa-halaqa-hum wa-haraqū la-hū banīna wa-banātin bi-ğayri 'ilmin subHāna-hū wa-taʿālā 'ammā yaSifūna (VI, 100)

(‘Yet they make the jinns equal with God, though God did create the jinns; and they falsely, having no knowledge, attribute to Him sons and daughters. Praise and glory be to Him! (for He is) above what they attribute to Him!’)

wa-qālū ttahada llāhu waladan subHāna-hū bal la-hū mā fi s-samāwāti wa-l-'arDi kullun la-hū qānitūna (II, 116)

(‘They say: “God has begotten a son”: Glory be to Him.- Nay, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth: everything renders worship to Him.’)

*dālika 'isā bnu maryama qawla l-Haqqi l-ladī fi-hi yamtarūna * mā kāna li-llāhi 'an yattahida min waladin subHāna-hū 'idā qaDā 'amran fa-'innamā yaqūlu la-hū kun fa-yakūnu.* (XIX, 34,35)

(‘Such (was) Jesus the son of Mary: (it is) a statement of truth, about which they (vainly) dispute. It is not befitting to (the majesty of) God that he should beget a son. Glory be to Him! When He determines a matter, He only says to it, “Be”, and it is.’)

*qul huwa llāhu 'aHadun-i * llāhu S-Samadu * lam yalid wa-lam yūlad * wa-lam yakun la-hū kufuwan 'aHadun.* (CXII, 1-4)

(‘Say: he is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him.’)

⁵ Only one time is such a belief attributed to Jews: *wa-qālū li-llāhi 'uzayrun-i bnu l-lāhi wa-qālū n-naSārā l-masīHu bnu l-lāhi dālika qawlu-hum bi-'afwāhi-him yuDāhi 'ūna qawla l-ladīna kafarū min qablu qātala-humu l-lāhu 'annā yu'fakūna* (IX, 30), (‘The Jews call ‘Uzair a son of God, and the Christians call Christ the Son of God. That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. God’s curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the truth!’).

wa-yağ'alūna li-llāhi l-banāti subHāna-hū wa-la-hum mā yaštahūna. (XVI, 57)
 ('And they assign daughters for God! – Glory be to Him!- And for themselves (sons,- the issue) they desire!')

There are also verses in which marriage and offspring are mentioned and rejected together when talking about God, in what constitutes a clear indication that having a child could only be seen as the result of a connubial relation, hence as a humanizing factor:

bad'ru s-samāwāti wa-l-'arDi 'annā yakūnu la-hū waladun wa-lam takun la-hū SāHibatun wa-halaqa kulla šay'in wa-huwa bi-kulli šay'in alīmun. (VI, 101)
 ('To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth: how can He have a son when He hath no consort? He created all things, and He hath full knowledge of all things.')

wa-'anna-hū ta'alā ḡaddu rabbi-nā mā ttaḡada SāHibatun wa-lā waladan. (LXXII, 3)
 ('And exalted is the Majesty of our Lord; He has taken neither a wife nor a son.')

We also think we have identified a polemic allusion to one particular formula of the Hebrew Bible, which may have been considered to portray God in a humanizing way, in the sentence *tumma stawā 'alā l-'arši* ('then He sat on the throne'⁶), which, in our view, echoes and responds to *wayyišbōt* and *šābat* ('(and) He rested') in Genesis 2:2,3: *waykal 'elohim bayyôm haššēb'î* (or *haššiššî*) *m'la'ktô 'ašer 'āsâh wayyišbōt bayyôm haššēb'î mik-kol - m'la'ktô 'ašer 'āsâh * waybārek 'elohim 'et - yôm haššēb'î wayqaddēš 'otô kî bô šābat mik-kol - m'la'ktô 'ašer - bārā' 'elohim la-šōt* ('and on the seventh (or 'sixth') day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made'). This is sustained by the fact that five out of seven times the sentence in question occurs after the mention of the six-day creation (the two remaining occurrences following a mention of the same episode without the number of the days being specified), so as to reject God's feeling tired and hence needing to rest after this endeavor, and replace this seemingly inappropriate assumption with His sitting on the throne as Lord of His creation:

'inna rabba-kumu llāhu l-laḡī halaqa s-samāwāti wa-l-'arDa fī sittati 'ayyāmin tumma stawā 'alā l-'arši... (VII, 54)
 ('Your Guardian-Lord is God, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then sat on the throne...')

⁶ We have chosen not to follow Abdullah Yusuf Ali in the translation of this sentence, for he is obviously theologically motivated in obliterating the temporal sequence between the verbs *halaqa* (or, in one instance, *rafā'a*) and *istawā*, as it is conveyed by the particle *tumma*: 'and (He) is firmly established on the throne'.

'inna rabba-kumu llāhu l-laḏī ḥalaqa s-samāwāti wa-l-'arDa fī sittati 'ayyāmin tumma stawā °alā l-°arši... (X, 3)

(‘Verily your Lord is God, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then sat on the throne...’)

allāhu l-laḏī rafa°a s-samāwāti bi-ḡayri °amadin tarawna-hā tumma stawā °alā l-°arši... (XIII, 2)

(‘God is He Who raised the heavens without any pillars that ye can see, then sat on the throne...’)

*tanzīlan mimman ḥalaqa l-'arDa wa-s-samāwāti l-°ulā * r-raHmānu °alā l-°arši stawā* (XX, 4,5)

(‘A revelation from Him Who created the earth and the heavens on high. (God) Most Gracious sat on the throne.’)

al-laḏī ḥalaqa s-samāwāti wa-l-'arDa wa-mā bayna-humā fī sittati 'ayyāmin tumma stawā °alā l-°arši r-raHmānu fa-s'al bi-hī ḥabīran. (XXV, 59)

(‘He Who created the heavens and the earth and all that is between, in six days, then sat on the throne, God Most Gracious: ask thou, then, about Him of any acquainted (with such things).’)

allāhu l-laḏī ḥalaqa s-samāwāti wa-l-'arDa wa-mā bayna-humā fī sittati 'ayyāmin tumma stawā °ala l-°arši... (XXXII, 4)

(‘It is God Who has created the heavens and the earth, and all between them, in six days, then sat on the throne...’)

huwa l-laḏī ḥalaqa s-samāwāti wa-l-'arDa fī sittati 'ayyāmin tumma stawā °alā l-°arši... (LVII, 4)

(‘He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then sat on the throne...’)

An additional proof of this hypothesis is that the mentioning of the six-day creation is once followed by an explicit rejection of God’s weariness:

wa-la-qad ḥalaqnā s-samāwāti wa-l-'arDa wa-mā bayna-humā fī sittati 'ayyāmin wa-mā massa-nā min luḡūbin. (L, 38)

(‘We created the heavens and the earth and all between them in six days, nor did any sense of weariness touch Us.’)

As regards God’s attitude towards mankind and the likelihood of Him loving them as if He were involved in a connubial relation with them, we can see, by following the occurrences of the verb *'aḤabba* (‘to love’), that when God is its subject this verb is used without carrying a big emotional charge, in a quite neutral fashion (and its occurrence in the clausulae of the verses, that is in the most stereotypical and least expressive parts of the Qur’anic text, is in itself significant in this respect), when designating categories of people who win or do not win God’s approval, as it appears in these few examples:

... *'inna llāha lā yuḤibbu l-mu°taḏīna* (II, 190)

(‘...for God loveth not transgressors’)

... *'inna llāha yuḤibbu l-muḤsinīna* (II, 195)

(‘...for God loveth those who do good’)

... *'inna llāha lā yuHibbu kulla ḥawwānin kafūrin* (XXII, 38)

(‘...verily, God loveth not any that is a traitor to faith, or shows ingratitude’)

These formulas are also relevant in that they always show God’s love to be conditioned by man’s deeds and not to embrace the whole of humanity indiscriminately, thus drawing divine love further away from the type of love that binds the members of a couple. Furthermore, divine will is in one instance specifically opposed to human love, though not necessarily of the conjugal type, enhancing the discrepancy between human feelings and reasons lying behind God’s deeds:

'inna-ka lā tahdī man 'aHbaba wa-lākinna llāha yahdī man yašā'u... (XXVIII, 56)

(‘It is true thou wilt not be able to guide every one whom thou lovest; but God guides those whom He will...’)

On the other hand, the attitude with which God manifests Himself much more liberally, although not in a totally unconditioned manner, towards humanity is mercy, and in fact, besides only four instances in which inter-human relations are concern (XXX,21; LVII,27; XLVIII,29; XC,17), all words sharing the root *r.H.m.* associated to this meaning appear in passages ascribing mercy to God, as it appears in these examples:

...*kataba °alā nafsi-hī r-raHmata...* (VI, 12)

(‘...He hath inscribed for Himself (the rule of) mercy...’)

wa-rabbu-ka l-ḡafūru dū r-raHmati law yu'āhid-hum bi-mā kasabū la-°aḡḡala la-humu l-°adāba bal la-hum maw'idun lan yaḡidū min dūni-hī maw'ilan. (XVIII, 58)

(‘But your Lord is Most Forgiving, Full of Mercy. If He were to call them (at once) to account for what they have earned, then surely He would have hastened their punishment: but they have their appointed time, beyond which they will find no refuge.’)

fa-nZur 'ilā 'ātāri raHmati llāhi kayfa yuHyī l-'arDa ba'da mawti-hā... (XXX, 50)

(‘Then contemplate (o man!) the memorials of God’s mercy!- how He gives life to the earth after its death...’)

Also, the fact that two of the most frequent and important of the divine epithets, *raHmān* and *raHīm*, pertain to these root and lexical family is another argument for the centrality of mercy in God’s attitude towards mankind.

In sum, we think that the absence of a structural metaphor depicting God’s relation with the community of believers or mankind as a whole in terms of a connubial relation in the Qur’an has indeed proved to be a highlighting factor, since it helps revealing a set of particularly important elements of what may be considered a Qur’anic worldview in which we can detect a sharp distinction, a clear cut demarcation line drawn between the living creation, both on Earth

and in Heaven, where sexuality is a pervasive feature, and God, Whose essence is constantly preserved from being compared to anything worldly or human, with a particular emphasis on the rejection of those features pertaining to sexuality⁷. This is why human beings are supposed to act according to their gender identity and the two sexes lawfully enjoy each other's company, whereas in relation to God this side of their nature becomes irrelevant. As for God, He treats mankind not with a husband's love but mainly with mercy, as this attitude is more befitting to a relation vertically structured established between two entities one of which is incomparably superior to the other. These are all, in our view, elements of a general frame within which a structural metaphor of the type mentioned at the beginning of our article couldn't have emerged.

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⁷ The idea of a sharp distinction existing between the realms of the human and the divine in the Qur'an is also embraced by Régis Blachère: "Partout, dans le Coran, on retrouve... la distinction absolue entre l'Humain et le Divin. Jamais Mahomet n'a été effleuré par l'idée qu'une créature de chair et de sang pût prétendre à se fondre en Dieu." (Blachère 1991: 258).

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