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HUSBANDS, WIVES, AND OTHER STRANGERS:
Another Look at the Hosean Broken Marriage Metaphor

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The Hosean marriage metaphor captures the religious imagination not simply because it images God as a faithful Husband. It also depicts the YHWH-Israel covenant as a *broken marriage*.[1] In Hosea chapter 1, God is a Husband wedded to a promiscuous Wife. In chapter 2, his unfaithful Wife unrepentant, his marriage over, God struggles with wrath, but moves from misery to awaken new life. In chapter 3, while there is no happy ending, hope glows in the promise of a new beginning.

As an image of a broken marriage, the Hosean metaphor portrays the crisis from the viewpoint of the Husband/God. Taking chapters 1 to 3 as a literary unit in its canonical form, this article shall explore nuances of its symbolic language that may provide openings for a deeper insight into the covenant of God with Israel.

Part I presents the paper's assumptions. The story of Husband God/Hosea is viewed against the backcloth of marriage relations and the YHWH-Israel covenant. Using a reader-response critical method,

[1]Bernard Oestrich, *Metaphors and Similes for Yahweh in Hosea 14:2–9 (1–8): A Study of Hoseanic Pictorial Language* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1998), 96.

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Part II proposes re-reading Hosea chapters 2 and 3 as a drama of the inner tensions in a faithful Husband. Ultimately, the paper aims to show how the broken marriage metaphor invites the believer to enter into the mystery of being Elect, loved by a God who yearns passionately to be known as "Beloved Spouse."

The Broken Marriage Metaphor: Framework of Assumptions

> On that day, says the LORD, you will call me "My husband," and no longer will you call me "My Baal." Hos 2:16[2]

These words of God as Troubled Husband in Hosea chapter 2 verse 16 offer a significant insight into the YHWH-Israel covenant, and a possible key to the drama.

The significance lies in the word *ba'al*—which, the NRSV footnote says, means "master"—and the use of the term *ba'al* in the marriage relationship. In ancient Israel, the husband through marriage becomes the master, lord and owner—in Hebrew, *ba'al*—of his wife.[3] The wife addresses her husband as "master," just as the slave does his owner, or the subject, his king.[4]

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[2]All Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Catholic Edition. The numbering of the Hosean texts follows this NRSV edition.

[3]J. C. de Moor, "*Ba'al*," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* II, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Hemler Ringgren (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975), 181–2.

[4]Karl Hermann Schelkle, *The Spirit and the Bride: Woman in the Bible*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1979), 25. For John Otwell, in a culture such as ancient Israel's where corporate identity takes precedence over the individual identity, the term *ba'al* for husband and lord may simply be to identify this individual authority figure as a personification of the group. See John H. Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed: The Status of Women in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 82–3.

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That marriage puts the wife under the authority of the husband does not mean tyranny of the husband. A. Shalvi points out that the marriage contract *(ketubah)* gives the woman security, her husband being obligated to honor, support, and maintain her in proper style.[5]

The term *ba'al* also has another connotation. That Israel shall no longer call God "my Baal" may also be seen as an allusion to the polemic against the cults of the Baals with which Israel's whoredom is associated in chapter 2, e.g., "I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals when she offered incense to them" (Hos 2:13a). The line following Hos 2:16 does refer directly to the cult-polemic: "For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth" (Hos 2:17).

However, H. W. Wolff points out that the text of Hos 2:16 is simply a *word-play* on the *ba'al* cult motif: if the cult-polemic was being directly referred to, the text should have said, "You will call me 'Yahweh' or 'my God' and no longer will you call me 'my Baal'." But what is primarily being referred to in Hos 2:16 is the marriage relationship.[6] In this verse, the Hebrew term used for "husband" is *'iš,* or "man"; thus, "my husband" is translated literally as "my man."[7] In Hos 2:16, God thus seems to be saying to Israel: "You will call me 'my man', 'my husband', no longer will you call me 'my lord and master'."

Wolff explains the significance of Hos 2:16 thus:

> "My husband" is apparently an endearing expression; it addresses the husband as one who belongs to, and even enjoys, a personal relationship with, the wife. On the other hand, the address "my lord," "my Baal," emphasizes the legal position of the husband as lord and owner of the

[5]Alice Shalvi, "Agunah the Abandoned," http://www.bet-debora.de/2001/jewish-family/shalvi.htm. Accessed April 14, 2005.

[6]Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, trans. Gary Stansell (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 49–50.

[7]Panagiotis Bratsiotis, "'ish, 'ishsha," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* I, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), 230–2; J. A. Emerton, "Names of God in the Hebrew Bible," http: www.crain.english.mwsc. edu/jonah /name_of_god.htm. Accessed April 2005.

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> wife. There is not necessarily a correspondingly genuine and personal devotion to her as his wife. Hence this saying announces that Israel will not just respect Yahweh somewhat reluctantly since he is its legal lord, but it knows itself to be placed in a completely new, loving relationship with him.[8]

For H. D. Beeby, the change of appellation from *ba'al* to "my husband" also means more than merely removing the "names of the baals from her mouth," for the Hebrew *'iš* (husband) and its corresponding *'iššah* (wife) reflect an endearing mutuality, a truly personal relationship rather than the connection implied in the word *ba'al* with its suggestion of "boss."[9] According to P. David, that the YHWH-Israel relationship is one of Lover-Beloved forms the core of Hosea's radical covenant theology in chapters 1 to 3.[10]

The Covenant as Marriage

A major confession of faith underlying Israel's sacred writings is the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel, his chosen people. The covenant is expressed in the formula "You shall be my people and I shall be your God" (Dt 26:17–18). This meant worshipping only YHWH: "The LORD is our God, the LORD alone" (Dt 6:4).

It is possible, as M. Friedman imagines, that the author of Hosea 1–3 saw the Exodus-Sinai tradition allegorically as the initial marriage proposal of God and Israel's consent. That the covenant is understood as mutually desired is expressed in Exodus:[11]

> [The LORD said] … "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now

[8]Wolff, *Hosea*, 50.

[9]H. D. Beeby, *Grace Abounding: A Commentary on the Book of Hosea* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), 29.

[10]Pablo S. David, "From Owner to Lover: Re-imaging God in Hosea 3:1–3," *Landas* 15:2 (2001), 94.

[11]Mordechai Friedman, "Israel's Response in Hosea 2:17b: 'You Are My Husband'," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99:2 (1980), 202.

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> therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation." … The people all answered as one: "Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do." (Ex 19:4–6a, 8a)

Redeemed from slavery, Israel is God's *possession*. Israel's chosenness is an unmerited favour (Dt 7:6b) but it also carries accountability and choice:

> If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God … by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous and the LORD your God will bless you …. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish. (Dt 30: 16, 17–18a)

The Hosean imaging of the covenant as a marriage suggests that the marriage relationship had the power to stir up emotions and values of loyalty and commitment as much as, but different from, the model of the covenant as political treaty. P. David says that the political treaty model showed the wide gap between treaty parties—king and subjects, or overlord and vassal—which Hosea attempted to bridge with the relational model of marriage.[12] That Hosea however depicts the marriage bond as *broken* shows his alarm over the estrangement between Israel and YHWH. The broken marriage metaphor, says Oestrich, is a vehicle particularly for the religious motifs of *God's jealousy* and *the people's idolatry or worship of other idols as fornication*.[13]

The culpability of Israel, imaged in chapters 1 to 3 as a forsaking whoring wife, is undeniable. Writing on the marriage metaphor picked up by the prophet Jeremiah, A. C. Welch proposes a view on why it is likely that Israel forsakes her husband:

> Yahwism had this iron core in it. The iron core was that Israel could only have Yahweh on his terms …. Yahwism was no colorless faith

[12]David, "From Owner to Lover," 94.

[13]Oestrich, *Metaphors and Similes for Yahweh*, 123.

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> which was simply the expression of the people's pride in itself and its destiny. It laid a curb on men, it had a yoke and bonds. The bonds were those of love, but love's bonds are the most enduring and the most exacting.[14]

That the covenant involves hard demands on God's people explains the harsh strident tone in Hosea. To be God's possession is to think and behave differently "from the nations," surely a difficult expectation to live up to. Given the disparity in the capacity of the covenant partners to be faithful, the broken marriage metaphor may be viewed as depicting God's dilemma regarding the agreement being chronically violated by elect Israel, for, as the following section shows, chapters 1 to 3 portray a Divine Husband who suffers the anguish of the broken marriage. More importantly, it is also he who labours to renew the broken relationship.[15]

YHWH as Faithful Husband: Overview

The Hosean metaphor is, essentially, that of a *broken but renewed marriage*—broken by the forsaking Wife but renewed unilaterally by the forsaken Husband.

Chapter 1 lays the basis for the marriage metaphor in God's first call to Hosea:

> When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." (Hos 1:2)

Hosea's prophetic calling is to get married, have a whoring wife and children in order to be the public sign of God's marriage to the "whoring" land, i.e., the people Israel. Hosea obediently follows: "So

[14]Adam C. Welch, *Jeremiah: His Time and Work* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1951 reprinted), 33. Quoted in Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1–35* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988), 34–35.

[15]Oestrich, *Metaphors and Similes for Yahweh*, 120.

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he went and took Gomer, daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son" (Hos 1:2).

The names of the three children whom Gomer births contain both positive and negative undertones, symbolizing the strained relations between God and his Wife. The first name "Jezreel" alludes to the Jezreel Valley where the Jehu dynasty had established power through much bloodshed (2 Kgs 9–10); the name symbolizes God's judgment against using violence for power: "for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel" (Hos 1:4b).

The second child's name "Lo-Ruhamah" or "Not Pitied" contains *ruhāmāh* meaning "mercy," with the negative form *lo'* meaning "not." *Lo-Ruhamah* symbolizes God's gradual turning away: "for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them. But I will have pity on the house of Judah" (Hos 1:6–7a).

The climax comes with the third child's name: "Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not your God" (Hos 1:9). This alludes to the covenant formula. *'Ammî* means "my people," thus *"Lo-ammî"* means "not my people," symbolizing the Elect's wanton disobedience. The words "… and I am not your God" signify God's repudiation of the covenant. God declares that his marriage with Israel is over. As H. D. Beeby puts it, "God's rejection of Israel was … but a recognition and a confirmation of Israel's own choice. God's love, though endlessly patient, could not be coercive."[16]

Yet, hinting that repudiation is not the final word, chapter 1 in the NRSV ends on a note of hope: "Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea … and in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God'"(Hos 1:10b).[17] The children are also addressed in the

[16]Beeby, *Grace Abounding*, 18.

[17]A footnote in the NRSV says that the text above, Hos 1:10, is considered chapter 2 verse 1 of the Hebrew Bible. This numbering difference should be noted.

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positive forms of their names in the opening verse of chapter 2: "Say to your brother Ammi and to your sister Ruhamah" (Hos 2:1).[18]

The rest of chapter 2 portrays the crisis, the divorce, triggered by the adultery of the Mother/Wife, assumed to refer to Israel/Gomer as Husband refers to YHWH/Hosea:

> Plead with your mother, plead—for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband—that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts or I will strip her naked and expose her as in the day she was born. (Hos 2:2–3a)

The words "she is not my wife and I am not her husband" reflect the *Husband's* divorce declaration. The language evokes a court, or legal, setting. But the initiative for divorce is not only by the Husband. As H. Wolff points out, the words "or I will strip her naked" are significant, because historically, it is in a divorce *initiated by the wife* where the husband indicates his freedom by "stripping her naked"; the same image used here leads Wolff to propose that it is the Wife who actively seeks the end of the marriage.[19] For Beeby, the wish for divorce appears to be mutual, although it originates with the Wife in her persistent faithlessness.[20] Y. Sherwood likewise proposes that the case seems to be one of both parties seeking separation: the Husband's dismissal of his Wife coincides with her initiative to leave, and prefigures the subsequent chapters where Israel's decision not to be a peculiar people coincides with YHWH's decision to send her back among the nations.[21]

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[18]This verse is considered chapter 2 verse 3 in the Hebrew Bible.

[19]Wolff, *Hosea*, 44.

[20]Beeby, *Grace Abounding*, 23.

[21]Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective*, JSOT Supp. 212 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 315. Cf. Hos 8:1, 8:8, 9:17, 10:11–15.

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A key assumption therefore regarding the broken marriage metaphor is that the marriage is *mutually ended:* the Husband has dismissed his Wife who, flaunting her adultery, "wants out." The crux, however, as commentaries agree—and hence a crucial premise of the metaphor—is that the Divine Husband still desires the marriage; it is he who is torn apart between destroying his Wife, letting her go, and wooing her back.

Chapter 2, the heart of the drama, is composed of two movements set mostly in poetic verse. The first movement, vv. 2–13, is vitriolic, depicting the forsaken Husband's wrath. The boundaries between Husband YHWH and Husband Hosea are often blurred, but the second movement, vv. 14–23, glowing with hope, seems to focus on YHWH.

Of particular interest are the charges and the triple use of the word "Therefore" which is usually associated with judgement and punishment. The first accusation charges the Wife with pursuing lovers: "For she said, I will go after my lovers / they give me my bread and my water" (Hos 2:5b). This is immediately followed by the first "Therefore" announcing isolation and seclusion:

> Therefore I will hedge her way with thorns;
> and I will build a wall against her,
> so that she cannot find her paths. (Hos 2:6)

The second accusation cites the Wife's lack of knowledge of him: "She did not know / that it was I who gave her / the grain, the wine, and the oil" (Hos 2:8a). This is followed by a second "Therefore" announcing deprivation and public shaming:

> Therefore I will take back my grain in its time,
> and my wine in its season;
> and I will take away my wool and my flax,
> which were to cover her nakedness.
> Now I will uncover her shame
> in the sight of her lovers. (Hos 2:9–10a)

The wrath of the Divine Husband rages on:

> I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals,
> when she offered incense to them
> and decked herself with her ring and jewellery,

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> and went after her lovers,
> and forgot me, says the LORD. (Hos 2:13)

This punitive intent is immediately followed by a third "Therefore" which, *surprisingly however*, shifts to a tender conciliatory mode, and ushers in the second movement:

> Therefore I will now persuade her,
> and bring her into the wilderness,
> and speak tenderly to her. (Hos 2:14)

YHWH bares his longing for her reciprocal response:

> There she shall respond as in the days of her youth,
> as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. (Hos 2:15b)

As the language turns into prose form, there is also a turn-about. YHWH addresses his wife for the first time in the narrative, envisaging their new relationship:

> On that day, says the LORD, you will call me "My husband," and no longer will you call me "My Baal." (Hos 2:16)

Initiating a new covenant with creation (Hos 2:18), he will re-marry his Wife:

> And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD. (Hos 2:19–20)

Chapter 3 shows YHWH affirming his unconditional love for his unfaithful wife:

> The LORD said to me again, "Go love a woman who has a lover, and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the people of Israel who turn to other gods, and love raisin cakes." (Hos 3:1)

W. Brueggemann finds in Hosea chapter 2 a theme of *reversal*: The covenant was marked by a retribution theology, i.e., only by faithfulness can Israel receive blessings. But the discontinuity between Israel's infidelity and her reception of blessings suggests a different theological affirmation—blessings *do* come to the disobedient, because the

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promises are grounded in YHWH's initiating action "which is grace."[22] Brueggemann continues:

> Gracious gifts derive not from what Israel does, but from who YHWH is. The grounding of promise in grace rather than in obedience is not a complete departure from the old covenant … but a new emphasis. Covenant obedience is not the basis of the relation, and failure to obey does not void the relation …. God of the Covenant transcends the necessities of covenant agreement for the sake of relation.[23]

For Brueggemann, the punishment of Israel is certain because she is guilty, but because YHWH is sovereign, punishment may be averted.[24] In the context of the covenant, punishment for disobedience is warranted. But in the context of the metaphor's premise that the marriage is mutually ended, punishment would seem vindictive. Hosea's insight that YHWH sees Israel calling him "my man" and no longer "my master" in a renewed marriage is crucial. It implies perhaps that the quality of their marriage has not been satisfactory even to YHWH; he thus seeks a change in their new relations. As P. David says, what God desires from Israel his wife is not fear nor subservience but her *love*.[25]

Marriage Relations

Hosea's model of the covenant as marital love and partnership, not subservience, is interesting. It reflects a notion of marriage as *a love relationship and partnership* evident in OT stories, such as Isaac-Rebekah (Gen 24:67), Jacob-Rachel (Gen 29:1–30), Elkanah-Hannah (1 Sam 1:8).[26]

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[22]Walter Brueggemann, *Tradition for Crisis: A Study in Hosea* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968), 78–79.

[23]Brueggemann, *Tradition for Crisis*, 78–79.

[24]Brueggemann, *Tradition for Crisis*, 85.

[25]David, "From Owner to Lover," 92.

[26]Schelkle, *The Spirit and the Bride*, 30.

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Alongside the notion of covenant as *marital love*, another aspect in the metaphor is the juridical legal aspect of marriage. Oestrich notes that the language of a divorce declaration and accusations conjures marriage as a relationship with mutual obligations and expectations: the husband's obligation is to provide food, clothing, and the wife's sustenance; the wife is expected to remain faithful.[27] In the law codes, the wife is mentioned as part of the patriarch's household, e.g., in the Exodus commandment:

> You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbour. (Ex 20:17)

That the wife is mentioned here in the category of a man's belongings suggests the notion of marriage as *legal possession,* i.e., the wife was regarded as property of her husband, the wife's status seems to be practically no higher than that of slave.[28] Interestingly, however, this commandment is formulated differently in Deuteronomy, suggesting a dynamic plurality in views regarding marital relations:

> Neither shall you covet your neighbour's wife. Neither shall you desire your neighbour's house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbour. (Dt 5:21)

That the wife is here named first and separately before the household suggests the wife's standing as an eminent part of the patriarch's household.[29]

The question of parity in the man-woman relationship in ancient codes on marriage is not easy to answer. The Law allowed the husband to divorce his wife, only with due cause, after writing a bill of divorce (Dt 24:1). But the Torah expressly prohibited a man from re-marrying the wife he had divorced, citing its dire consequence:

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[27]Oestrich, *Metaphors and Similes for Yahweh*, 97.

[28]David, "From Owner to Lover," 94.

[29]Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed*, 76.

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> Her first husband who sent her away is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that would be abhorrent to the LORD, and you shall not bring guilt on the land. (Dt 24:4)

The wife generally had no power to dissolve a marriage; but interpreters of the law did allow the woman to be released from her marriage, e.g., when degradation by the husband made cohabitation intolerable.[30]

A double-standard did exist regarding sexual behavior: a woman is culpable on the basis of *any* pre- or extra-marital sex, while a man commits adultery only with a married woman (Lev 20:10–21).[31] Adultery was a crime against *the husband* and was not subject to divorce but was punishable by death, with both guilty parties to be punished (Lev 20:10; Dt 22:22).

The broken marriage metaphor clearly grapples with these codes. Hosea's prophetic calling in chapter 1—to marry and live openly with a promiscuous wife and children—is a set-up for social derision, given the double-standard on sexual behavior.

In chapter 2, the adulterous Wife Gomer/Israel is *not* punished with *death,* although the threatened punishments sound like it. That YHWH sees Israel calling him "my husband," no longer "my master" (Hos 2:16), sees marriage as partnership and intimacy: according to Terrien, this suggests that Hosea is against the idea of marriage as a contract of ownership through which a wife is nothing more than the property of a man.[32]

The metaphor boldly defies religious convictions (Dt 24:4 above) when God, who has dismissed his unfaithful wife, decides to re-marry her and not ever dismiss her again: "And I will take you for my wife for

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[30]Schelkle, *The Spirit and the Bride*, 27.

[31]Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 272.

[32]Samuel L. Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood and Womanhood* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 54.

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ever" (Hos 2:19a). Writing on the marriage metaphor picked up by the prophet Jeremiah, Brueggemann points out this stunning revelation of God: YHWH's capacity as first husband to take back his wife, who has been defiled by a second relationship, is clearly precluded by the Torah, and yet in spite of the Torah, he yearns for the return of his wife to the covenant:[33]

> This yearning on the part of Yahweh violates the torah, yet Yahweh's great love for Israel is sufficient to risk God's own violation of the torah. The yearning also violates common sense and pride. No husband, so it may be assumed from social convention as well as the torah teaching, would be so vulnerable as to take back such a fickle wife …. Against all expectations which should lead to final rejection, Yahweh, the God of Israel, will risk humiliation and defilement.[34]

That YHWH's covenant love is a paradigm also for the prophet-husband is suggested by the narrative language. Oestrich notes that in chapter 1, the wording of God's calling to Hosea "Go take a wife" conveys the *juridical* character of marriage, a legal contract with mutual obligations.[35] In chapter 2, God's re-marriage to Israel uses the same legal language: "I will take you as my wife," but the language also emphasizes "taking" in terms of "steadfast love, mercy, faithfulness." Thus, in chapter 3, the wording of God's new call to Hosea—"Go love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress"—conveys a command to love unconditionally, like God, without expecting *reciprocity*. This notion of marriage not simply as a legal relationship but a commitment of faithful love, perhaps even one-sided unrequited love beyond the law, is significantly addressed to the husband. YHWH seems to be saying: "To be a husband is to love your wife, even though your love is unrequited, to stay faithful even if your wife is unfaithful." For Hosea, such one-sided love, the way God loves, is also the calling to him as

[33]Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down*, 40.

[34]Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down*, 40.

[35]Oestrich, *Metaphors and Similes for Yahweh*, 94.

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husband. In a patriarchal society, even today, no message can get more radical than that. Such a revolution only comes from revelation.

Thorny Gender Biases

While the broken marriage metaphor powerfully dramatizes covenant love, it is ambiguous and tense about woman's sexuality. Considering that Israel's God was aniconic, the patriarchal imaging of God as a Husband is not surprising. But the "whoring wife" to symbolize the Elect sets up the woman figure in the metaphor in a "no-win" situation: as Y. Sherwood says, the woman must be *promiscuous* to bring home the theological point and then *punished for being what she must be*.[36]

The images of sexual violence in chapter 2 may be read as symbolizing the historical misfortunes, e.g., the fall of the kingdoms and the Exile, as consequences of Israel's infidelities: "I will strip her naked / and expose her as in the day she was born / and make her like a wilderness / and turn her into a parched land / and kill her with thirst" (Hos 2:3); "Now I will uncover her shame / in the sight of her lovers" (Hos 2:10). But the metaphorical language is cause for alarm because, as R. Weems points out, it seems to associate God with sexual abuse of a woman as justifiable punishment.[37]

It is indeed significant to point out here that Hosea's image of God's wrath as *Husband* towards Israel as *Wife* in chapter 2 is a marked contrast to his image of God as *Parent* towards Israel as *Son* in chapter 11: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt, I called my son" (Hos 11:1). What is notable is the depiction of God in an inner struggle with wrath against his Son**:**

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[36]Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 317.

[37]Renita Weems, "Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor?," *Semeia* 7 (1989), 100; see also Naomi Graetz, "God is to Israel as Husband is to Wife: The Metaphoric Battering of Hosea's Wife," in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 136–45.

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> How can I give you up, O Ephraim?
> How can I hand you over, O Israel?
> How can I make you like Admah?
> How can I treat you like Zeboiim?
> My heart recoils within me,
> my compassion grows warm and tender.
> I will not execute my fierce anger;
> I will not again destroy Ephraim;
> for I am God and no mortal,
> the Holy One in your midst,
> and I will not come in wrath. (Hos 11: 8–9)

That God as Parent is gentle with a Son, but as Husband is harsh with his Wife, makes the thorny language of Hosea's marriage metaphor an obstacle for women to get into the broken Heart of God as Husband. A critical reading of the metaphorical language is important. In the Philippines' own culture where wives are generally expected to be faithful even when husbands are not, the infidelity of a wife triggers resounding social disapproval, and God's violent behavior in chapter 2, which usually mirrors that of human husbands, may be taken as justifiable behavior of betrayed husbands. God's violence out of passion for his Wife risks being put in the category of "crimes of passion," exonerated under Philippine laws such as Art. 12 of the Revised Penal Code, which lists "circumstances that render one exempt from criminal liability"; among these: "Any person who acts under the compulsion of irresistible force" (Art. 12, Sec. 5, Revised Penal Code). G. Yee notes that the strategies to punish the erring wife—enforced segregation, physical and psychological punishment—unfortunately reflect methods of controlling women's sexuality and the abuse of male power; also the change of the Husband's behavior from violence to tenderness unfortunately tends to mirror patterns of domestic violence: "while God's (mis)treatment of Israel eventually ceases, a human husband's abuse of his wife usually does not."[38]

[38]Gale Yee, "The Book of Hosea: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* VII, ed. Leander E. Keck, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 225; see also Yvonne Sherwood, "Boxing Gomer: Controlling the Deviant Woman in Hosea 1–3," in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 101–25.

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In the Philippine context, it seems ironic that the image of God as Faithful Husband, manifesting one-way love, mirrors the way generations of most *Filipino wives* have tended to respond to a husband's infidelity.[39] The Hosean depiction of the Elect as a Mother would not be strange to Filipinos, given the figure of *Inang Bayan* to symbolize land and nation. Because mothers are revered as self-sacrificing icons, to apply Hosea's metaphor of a "whoring mother" to *Inang Bayan* would be jarring. But that is precisely what the metaphor is supposed to do—to jolt the audience out of complacency.

Still, considering that Hosea's fiery language castigates Israelite *men* in chapters 4 to 14—namely, the priests, rulers, and whoring men—the choice to depict the Elect in chapters 1–3 as a whoring wife seems ironic. Whether and how men can identify with a transgressing Wife is difficult to imagine, the tendency of men being to identify more easily with the troubles of God as betrayed Husband. Hosea's inside view into the heart of God as forsaken Husband may have aimed to elicit horror, shame, and the repentance of Israelites from their apostasies. But is it possible that the Hosean metaphor is also luring its audience into God's heart to experience not only God's love but God's way of being *Faithful Husband*? Indeed, despite—or because of—its androcentrism, is it possible to read chapter 2 also as an *inner struggle of God* as Husband, like in chapter 11, to deal with a beloved but chronically unfaithful spouse? The premise—that the marriage is *mutually* ended—would nuance the interpretation of the meaning of the Divine violence.

Struggling with Wrath: Options

The approach to read chapter 2 as God's inner struggle is taken by David Clines. Clines considers the third "Therefore"—the climax of the divine speeches—to be out of character with the preceding judgment speeches:

[39]Mary Alexis M. Salinas, "The God-Image of the Faithful Spouse: A Reversal in the Filipino Context," *Landas* 15:2 (2001), 103–4.

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> One may wonder whether the prophet (or redactor) saw these three decisions on the part of Yahweh as a sequence of actions God planned to take, so much as a set of options God opened himself up to. Could the mood of this poem then be one of divine indecision—which leads to an unexpected and unconditioned act of grace? One could hardly imagine were it not for the other glimpses Hosea gives us of God "struggling with himself." (Hos 6:14, 11:9)[40]

Clines proposes that Chapter 2 lends itself to a reading that can dispense with sequence on the historical plane, and presents the judgments of imprisonment and deprivation as a sequence of possibilities that Yahweh passes in review, only to decide against them, and for the third possibility: restoration.[41] Clines argues that the concept of *belonging* is central to the poem, and analyzes the plot as a dynamic with a *sequence of options* moving toward a resolution—*restoring Israel's relationship with YHWH*.[42] He explains why the first two "therefores"—imprisonment and deprivation—must be rejected by YHWH in favour of the third option—restoration:

> The first option blocks Israel's path to her lovers but does not restore her to Yahweh. The second option leads only to destruction and punishment and perhaps to the elimination of Israel herself; this option tends to the removal of the possibility of reconciliation. The third option, on the other hand, in restoring the relationship of Yahweh to Israel, does not issue in a *cul de sac* of a future, but opens up the way for a movement that will continue long after the poem is over.[43]

Clines' "options" approach assumes, rightly, that because the faithful Husband still desires the marriage, the struggle of the Husband is what

[40]David Clines, "Hosea 2: Structure and Interpretation," *Studia Biblica* 1 (1978), 87.

[41]Clines, "Hosea 2," 87.

[42]Clines, "Hosea 2," 99.

[43]Clines, "Hosea 2," 99.

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to do to restore the relationship. The focus of the narrative is on the options to woo back his estranged, unrepentant wife.

The Husband's wrath can be read as jealousy or pathos, i.e., "sadness of love."[44] At the same time, Oestrich notes that the ancient notion of wrath or jealousy in connection with marriage is related to the fact that the marriage was also a matter of possession, so the wrath is related more to the zeal of the husband to secure his rights, the wrath of the possessor whose rights have been violated.[45] Interestingly, the Troubled Husband in the story does not vent his wrath and rage at his wife's "lovers." This may seem surprising to a contemporary audience: gender differences in reacting to a spouse's infidelity indicate the tendency of betrayed husbands to direct their anger toward their *rivals*.[46] But in Hosea, the Wife's lovers who are implicated in the charges are invisible.[47] No threats of punishment are issued against the lovers; they are only a backdrop to the strife between Husband and Wife.

However, the real *power struggle* depicted in the poem is *within* the Husband as he wrestles with how to use his power to express his commitment and love for his wife. If YHWH destroys his wife, he executes justice as his Law demands. But how can he also destroy his beloved "treasured possession?"

Adopting Clines' notion of "belonging" as central to the marriage metaphor, the next section proposes exploring chapter 2 as the drama of a faithful Husband's *inner struggle to deal with a beloved unfaithful wife*.

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[44]Teresita Magno, "Understanding the Metaphor of Wrath in Hosea as the Sadness of Love: Pastoral Implications of a Ricoeurian Re-Interpretation." M.A. Thesis (Quezon City, Philippines: Loyola School of Theology, 1990), 91.

[45]Oestrich, *Metaphors and Similes for Yahweh*, 120.

[46]Rona Subotnik and Gloria Harris, *Surviving Infidelity: Making Decisions, Recovering from the Pain*, 2[d] ed. (Holbrook, Massachusetts: Adams Media Corporation, 1999), 98.

[47]Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 315.

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The notion of "options" offers a way to interpret YHWH's passage as troubled husband from misery to new life.

Lovers and Other Strangers: Re-reading Chapters 2 and 3

Because the crisis is told from the Husband's viewpoint, it is only his voice we directly hear. But in the following reading, attention will be paid also to the instances when the Husband quotes words the Wife allegedly said. The presence of these words in the text indicates their significance to the Husband and his inner struggle. This reading will explore nuances in the wife's words as possible openings to insight into the marital relations from the wife's point of view. The reader-response approach here to interpretation is cued by the varying notions of marriage as a love relationship, as partnership, and as legal possession. Unless otherwise stated, "Husband" will refer to YHWH/Hosea and "Wife" to Israel/Gomer.

Options of the Husband as "Baal-Owner": 2:2–13

The Husband initially pleads for his Wife to renounce her adultery. That he does not speak directly to her but through the children suggests the total mutual estrangement:

> Plead with your mother, plead—
> for she is not my wife,
> and I am not her husband—
> that she put away her whoring from her face,
> and her adultery from between her breasts. (Hos 2:2)

If she does not change, the plea becomes a threat. Divorce will be disaster for her:

> or I will strip her naked
> and expose her as in the day she was born,
> and make her like a wilderness,
> and turn her into a parched land,
> and kill her with thirst. (Hos 2:3)

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"To strip her naked" means he will no longer be her husband. Yet, coping with the end of their marriage, he reacts like a *ba'al*, asserting ownership over her. To "make her like a wilderness" and "kill her with thirst" may mean for YHWH to destroy the physical material land and thus execute the covenant agreement—that his people perish (Dt 30:18). For Hosea, this may mean simply no longer providing for her, letting her fend for herself.

The Husband also disowns her offspring:

> Upon her children also I will have no pity,
> because they are children of whoredom.
> For their mother has played the whore;
> she who conceived them has acted shamefully. (Hos 2:4–5a)

He now accuses her in her own alleged words:

> For she said, "I will go after my lovers;
> they give me my bread and my water,
> my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink." (Hos 2:5b)

The items bread, wool, flax etc. refer to basic needs of food and clothing which the Husband is expected by Law to provide. But here the Wife attributes to "lovers" her sustenance. What is also striking is the repetition of the possessive pronoun *my*: they give me *my* bread, *my* water, *my* wool, *my* flax, *my* oil, *my* drink. This repetition would not by itself be significant except that, as will be seen later, the Husband reacts to it. Y. Sherwood proposes that these words suggest the Wife's claim to equal ownership: in the socio-economic context, the items bread, wool, and flax are strongly associated with domestic activities of women; thus the Wife's words suggest that while she is being provided for, she is also a partner in providing for her sustenance.[48]

Restrict Her Movements

Reacting to her going after lovers, the Husband will set boundaries on her behavior and movements. His possessiveness, perhaps initially

[48]Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 315.

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protectiveness, becomes an obsession to defend his exclusive claim on her:

> Therefore I will hedge her way with thorns;
> and I will build a wall against her,
> so that she cannot find her paths. (Hos 2:6)

For Hosea, this may mean locking her up, or imprisonment. In the case of YHWH, the protective wall may be the Torah setting Israel apart from the nations. Now, in the contest between *his way* and *her way*, his threat to "hedge her way with thorns" and "build a wall against her" might mean to use fear, guilt, terror to keep her from leaving the marriage.

He imagines that she shall find a way to leave, but she too will be *forsaken:*

> She shall pursue her lovers
> but not overtake them;
> and she shall seek them
> but shall not find them. (Hos 2: 7a)

Putting words into her mouth, he imagines her with no choice but to return to him:

> Then she shall say "I will go
> and return to my first husband,
> for it was better with me then than now." (Hos 2:7b)

Is returning to him for pragmatic reasons better than nothing?

From hereon, the voice that takes over is that of the Divine Husband. YHWH now gives a reason for Israel seeking lovers—her lack of knowledge of him:

> She did not know that it was I who gave her
> the grain, the wine, and the oil,
> and who lavished upon her silver
> and gold that they used for Baal. (Hos 2:8)

Does YHWH accuse, or lament? For H. D. Beeby, the fact that Israel does *not know* YHWH as the source of gifts of Nature suggests that YHWH is being marginalized by indigenous cults of fertility, the

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Baals.[49] Perhaps cults are perceived as gracious and accessible compared to an aniconic God who is Spirit, whose Name one cannot even utter. Knowledge of YHWH as Redeemer can easily fade as people experience oppression. Perhaps YHWH is known, and feared, more as Law, a punitive Deity, with natural disasters perceived as his punishments.

Deprive and Destroy

Indeed, faced with his Wife's ignorance of him, or *ignoring* him, as Source of her sustenance, the Divine Husband considers withholding his provisions—a veritable natural disaster. He will punish by withdrawing. After all, he is no longer Husband with the duty to provide for her:

> Therefore I will take back my grain in its time,
> and my wine in its season;
> and I will take away my wool and my flax,
> which were to cover her nakedness. (Hos 2:9)

The repetition of the possessive pronoun *my* reacts directly to his Wife's earlier words: "they give me my bread, my wool, my flax." He repudiates her claim that her sustenance is hers or from her lovers. Rather, *he is the sole owner of everything she has*.

Outraged that she does not know him and his power, he will use his power to chastise and shame her:

> Now I will uncover her shame
> in the sight of her lovers,
> and no one shall rescue her out of my hand. (Hos 2:10)

The threat, however, sounds double-edged. With his Wife dispossessed, a spectacle for ridicule, the Husband becomes the "captor," ironically turning lovers into possible *rescuers*.[50]

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[49]Beeby, *Grace Abounding*, 32.

[50]Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 302.

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He also threatens to destroy all her feasting, even those instituted by his Law:

> I will put an end to all her mirth,
> her festivals, her new moons, her sabbaths,
> and all her appointed festivals. (Hos 2:11)

His resistance to her claim of ownership is amplified in the second quote of the Wife:

> I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees,
> of which she said,
> 'These are my pay
> which my lovers have given me.'
> I will make them a forest,
> and the wild animals shall devour them. (Hos 2: 12)

To destroy "her vines and her fig trees" will assert his power over her and all creation. Sherwood interprets the Wife's reference to "my pay" from "my lovers" as possibly the Wife's claim to financial autonomy, e.g., she strikes her own bargain with society through "wages."[51] The words imply the Wife's claim to be not simply any man's property—whether her Husband's or her lovers'—but a partner, an owner in her own right.

Based on what *he said she said*, the Wife's pursuit of lovers who give her a sense of ownership suggests a defiant woman claiming to be capable of taking care of herself. This image of a feisty woman with a mind of her own is not a rarity in scriptures, e.g., Rebekah told Jacob to trick his father (Gen 27:6–17); Rachel stole her father's household gods (Gen 31:32–35). However, the Wife's insubordinate behavior, depicted as sexual and economic autonomy, threatens the honour of her Husband. He considers chastising her:

> I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals,
> when she offered incense to them
> and decked herself with her ring and jewellery,

[51]Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 317.

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and went after her lovers,
and forgot me, says the LORD. (Hos 2:13)

The words "she forgot me, says the Lord" betray utter frustration, if not a tinge of self-pity. Will using his power stop her from forgetting him or make her love him voluntarily? Will destroying his Wife/Israel lead her back to him?

Options of the Husband as "Her Man/Lover": 2:14–23

A sudden shift of mood ushers in the second movement which suggests that while Wife Israel does not love him as he desires, YHWH truly loves her. In a seeming turn-about, YHWH now seeks to woo Israel back in ways that contrast his earlier options. What is striking is that he takes responsibility for making changes to awaken new life in their relationship.

Respect Her Self-Possession

The wilderness imagery, echoing the earlier image, suggests a "beginning again."

Therefore, I will now persuade her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her. (Hos 2:14)

If she does not change her ways, instead of destroying her, he will woo her again, communicating from his heart. He will acknowledge her right to ownership, a contrast to his earlier mock of her claims:

From there I will give her her vineyards,
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. (Hos 2:15a)

The "Valley of Achor" refers to Josh 7:22–26 with its punishment for disobedience. Turning it into a door of hope means consequences of her infidelities will not be cause for despair. YHWH envisages her reciprocating, not in fear, but in love, once again.

There she shall respond as in the days of her youth,
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. (Hos 2:15b)

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Partnership and Communion

Addressing his Wife for the first time, YHWH expresses his desire to belong to her, to be her possession:

> On that day, says the LORD, you will call me "My husband" and no longer will you call me "My Baal." (Hos 2:16)

To be "her man/husband" means that he does not dominate their relationship, imposing only his terms. Their relationship is one of partnership and mutual belongingness and vulnerability. Thinking now to himself, he envisions no more "masters"—whether husbands or idols. He himself will not bring up the past. This will enable his Wife to stop seeking, or speaking of, "her lovers."

> For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. (Hos 2:17)

Speaking to her again, he vows to use his power for her well-being and security:

> I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. (Hos 2:18)

Defying conventions and his own law, he will re-marry her, in a unilateral vow of love:

> And I will take you for my wife for ever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD. (Hos 2:19–20)

YHWH's five-fold bride-price represents the core of the covenant. As H. D. Beeby says:

> "Righteousness" is that response to the covenant which preserves the covenant community, healthy and intact. "Justice" is righteousness in its legal aspect when the laws are God's laws and rightly administered. "Steadfast love" is love that one has promised to another …. It therefore contains the strength of duty and sensitivity of kindness. "Mercy" is

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> the pity and piety that belong more to the mother than to the male ….
> And "faithfulness" is lived out truth, or "Amen" in action.[52]

In the context of the marriage metaphor, these gifts may suggest the Divine Husband's initiative to make the covenant possible for his Wife as she is, where she is. To turn to her and speak tenderly is his righteousness that renews the covenant. To give her her vineyards reflects his justice, recognizing her as partner in their marriage. His steadfast love will not allow him to turn his back on her needs. His mercy—*ru-hamah*—not only makes up for, but forgives, blots out, transcends, all her transgressions.[53] His faithfulness does not depend on hers.

These gifts of his devotion will lure her to cherish him. The goal and fruit of his unconditional love is "And you shall know the LORD" (Hos 2:20). This is what YHWH longs for: intimacy, into-me-you-see, knowledge of the Lord from his inside. In this communion, he will no longer be a stranger, she will know him as Her Man, Lover, Creator of Life—not a distant strange God but endearing, vulnerable, and accessible. His intimacy with her will generate new life, harmony and fruitfulness of all Creation:

> On that day I will answer, says the LORD,
> I will answer the heavens
> and they shall answer the earth;
> and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine and the oil,
> and they shall answer Jezreel;
> and I will sow him for myself in the land. (Hos 2:21–23a)

He will reconcile with her children, whom he had repudiated at the end of the covenant:

> And I will have pity on Lo-ruhamah
> and I will say to Lo-ammi "You are my people"

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[52]Beeby, *Grace Abounding*, 30.

[53]Victor Salanga, "The Loving Kindness of God," in "'The Song of Miriam and the Song at Sea' and Other Essays." M.A. Thesis (Quezon City, Philippines: Loyola School of Theology, 1975), 42.

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> and he shall say "You are my God." (Hos 2:23b)

Lo-ammi's response symbolizes the renewal of the covenant, in response to God's love.

From Misery to Mercy and New Life

The first movement in chapter 2 shows Husband YHWH reacting in wrath, coping with his honor but leaving him alienated and estranged. The second movement shows his option to rise above his wrath, to respond in love, renouncing violence to create a new beginning. He considers using his power to create conditions no longer hostile but life-giving to his estranged Wife. YHWH bares his face and heart as Lover—powerful but vulnerable, passionate but also compassionate, assertive but now communicative of inner self.

Perhaps when his Wife gets to know him this way, she will love him and be faithful to him. He seeks to belong to his Wife as "her man," recognizing her vulnerability and autonomy, offering her devotion, mercy, and his own vulnerability. He does not expect her to change, nor does he need her repentance, before he loves her. He simply loves her. This baring of heart is disarming, revealing a Divine Husband whose authority lies in initiative and responsibility, whose control lies in compassion, whose lordship means unconditional love.

Love Means Giving Time and Space: 3:1–5

Chapter 3 shows that YHWH chooses to renew his marriage not because Israel returns, but regardless of whether she does. He does not own her, but neither does he disown her. He accepts their estrangement but does not force himself on her. This is dramatized in YHWH calling Hosea again to be a sign, this time of *unconditional love*:

> The Lord said to me again: "Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes." (Hos 3:1)

Hosea is called to rise above his own humiliation and love "the adulteress," assumed here to be Gomer. The public sign of this is

taking on the husband's duty to redeem his wife who apparently has been reduced to becoming a slave:

> So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver, a barley of homer, and a measure of wine. (Hos 3:2)

For David, Hosea's redeeming his wife from slavery symbolizes the same act of love and mercy of YHWH toward Israel.[54] Having redeemed his wife, legal ownership of her now reverts back to Hosea, signifying their re-marriage. Speaking to his estranged wife for the first time in the narrative, Hosea claims her as his own and admonishes her:

> You must remain mine for many days; you must not play the whore, you shall not have intercourse with a man, nor I with you. (Hos 3:3)

It is striking that while the husband exercises authority, he does not exercise his conjugal rights; he respects her self-possession; because they are estranged, their abstention recognizes that conjugal intimacy requires mutual love. This symbolizes "the wilderness" (Hos 2:14), that space in their relationship for solitude and beginning again. Whether she goes with him, the story is open-ended.

Parallel to Hosea's abstaining from sexual intimacy until his wife is ready, God's way of loving his people is also to "give them space and time to be," to make their own choices, even mistakes, to know what they want and whom they want:

> For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterwards, the Israelites shall return and seek the LORD, their God and David their king, they shall come in awe to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days. (Hos 3:4–5)

The "wilderness" will be the consequence of their own decisions, the loss of their signs of security—the kingdom, priesthood and prophecy. After a time, they will return on their own. Their awe at his "goodness" will come from the new beginning that the Lord has already graciously initiated while he waits for them.

[54]David, "From Owner to Lover," 93.

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Summary and Conclusion

The YHWH-Israel covenant expected Israel to love only YHWH. The broken marriage metaphor depicts the covenant in crisis. While YHWH is Israel's "husband" and Israel is YHWH's "wife" by Law, they are virtual strangers to each other. Israel's infidelities are a "declaration of independence" from YHWH. Going after "lovers," Israel has forgotten YHWH. Their marriage—the covenant—is mutually over.

Hosea chapters 2 and 3 show YHWH as Husband in an inner struggle to deal with the end of the covenant. At the heart of the crisis is Israel's lack of knowledge of God as Lord and Creator, but more importantly as Lover-Beloved Husband. The faithful Divine Husband considers using control, deprivation, and shaming, executing punitive justice as the covenant demands. The second movement of the poem however bares his heart's core yearning—compassion, not damnation; communion, not domination; renewal, not revenge, and so YHWH decides to re-marry her, unilaterally, risking himself and his love to be taken for granted, to renew the covenant, baring the depth of his love, and endowing his beloved with a worthiness of love beyond law or reason.

Hosea's broken marriage metaphor takes us into the heart of God, Husband and Lover, broken yet beating with infinite love. A heart that suffers because of Love unrequited, yet relents from violence and renounces it. A heart that refuses to use power to lord it over his beloved, risking rejection instead. A heart that recognizes a woman's dignity and claim to be partner. A heart that surely breaks when a wife is shamed by her husband who is a stranger to his wife. A heart whose mercy leads to repentance, whose loyalty atones for—and heals all—disloyalty.

And what does this God expect from his Beloved and her children in faith? Simply, in the words of the hymn based on the book of Hosea:

> Come back to me with all your heart
> Don't let fear keep us apart
> … … … … … … … … … … … .

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> Long have I waited for your coming home to me
> And living deeply our new life.[55]

This image of a powerful vulnerable God of Israel seems strange until one looks at Jesus of Nazareth. Then one can say, "Oh, that's what Hosea meant." The Israelite faith of Jesus "got" what Hosea meant. In the closing words of Hosea:

> Those who are wise understand these things;
> those who are discerning know them. (Hos 14:9a)

[55]Gregory Norbert, "Hosea," in *Rejoice and Sing* (Makati City: Religious of the Assumption Philippine-Thailand Province, 2000), 87.

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