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WHEN GOD LOVES A (WO)MAN:
Creation and Marriage in Genesis 2:4b–3:24

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> A man shall leave his mother
> And a woman, leave her home
> They shall travel on to where the two shall be as one
> As it was in the beginning, is now, until the end
> Woman draws her life from man and gives it back again
> There is Love, there is Love.
>
> – Wedding Song (There is Love)[1]

These words from a modern wedding song capture what has become a paradigm of marriage: a man and a woman journeying through life together, growing in union "as one." This image and the notion that "woman draws her life from man" clearly bear imprints of the creation story in the Book of Genesis:

> The rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman for out of Man, this one was taken." Therefore a man leaves

[1]N. Stookey, "Wedding Song (There is Love)," in *A & M Gold Series: Captain and Tennille*, performed by Captain and Tennille (Public Domain Foundation Inc., Warner Bros. Music, Polygram International Music Philippines, 1991), cassette.

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> his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Gen 2:22–24)[2]

God's creation of the man-woman in marriage in Genesis chapter 2 may well be the love story of the "first couple." But it only sets the stage for the drama in chapter 3 which has come down in Judeo-Christian tradition as the story of the "fall" of humankind represented by "Adam and Eve," whose disobedience of God brought sorrow, suffering, and death to human existence and exile from Eden. The story is usually read as the *genesis* of the *troubled* relationship between God and the human family, and between men and women.

This article hopes to show how the rich figurative language of the story renders it capable of yielding a less melancholic reading, a more nuanced notion of the "fall" and an uplifting yet down-to-earth view of marital relations. This article takes the Eden narrative in Genesis 2:4b–3:24 in its present canonical form as a *literary unity* related to, but distinct from, the creation story in Genesis 1:1–2:4a. Using a reader-response method but drawing as well from commentaries and exegetical studies, the article explores the Eden story as a drama on the Divine-human relationship and the man-woman relationship with their delights, demands and dilemmas. The article also explores the significance of the marital motif in this Divine-human drama. The notion of marriage as a union of man and woman in a tripartite partnership with God emerges so clearly that the drama may well be entitled "When God Loves A Man-Woman" or "When God Loves a Wo/Man." But the androcentric orientation is embedded as well, hence the title of this article "When God Loves a (Wo)Man."

The first part presents the article's assumptions. The second part does a close reading of the text. Hopefully this reading will deepen appreciation of this story and why it continues to strike resonant chords in the human heart.

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[2]All Scripture quotations in this article are from the Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Catholic Edition.

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Entering the Narrative World of Eden: Assumptions and Parameters

This article approaches the Eden narrative primarily as *story*. Like all literary work, the story requires the reader to suspend disbelief and enter into its narrative world.

Truth in a World of Pure Imagination

Like all stories on primeval time, the Eden story represents the author's attempt to make sense of human existence and the troubled world, e.g., "Where did we come from? Why were we created? Why do we suffer? Why do we die?" Whether or not the story is "true," i.e., factual or historical, does not matter. As J. Rogerson and P. Davies point out:

> The stories of all the peoples of the ancient world that wrestled with the questions of life, death, and origins were true, for at least some of those who wrote and heard them. This was not so much an intellectual truth as a truth that enabled the world to be coped with and lived in …. In Gen 1–11, the truth of these stories is bound up with their effectiveness in explaining for the Old Testament writers the origin and destiny of the world and humanity in the light of their belief in God.[3]

A central question in the story is: What is the appropriate human relationship with God? While Israel's faith is monotheistic, the author plays around with a *popular motif* from pagan myths in the ancient Near East, i.e., that *knowledge and immortality are divine prerogatives jealously guarded by the gods*.[4] This motif, symbolized in the story by the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" and "the tree of life," is crafted into a fascinating drama on the boundaries between the Divine and human realms.

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[3]John Rogerson and Philip Davies, *The Old Testament World* (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2005), 115.

[4]Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 78.

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Like most stories in the Old Testament (OT), the Eden story is a folktale.[5] As narrative genre, the folktale aims to entertain listeners as well as to teach a moral lesson on human nature.[6] Thus, while the Eden story contains profound themes, it is also meant to be enjoyed as a *delightful didactic tale.*

In the OT, folktales also tend to be etiological, explaining how things came to be as they are.[7] Essential features of the folktale include fantasy and credulity, projecting a world of imagination where different rules apply, e.g., animals talk, magical events are normal.[8] Aside from talking animals, folktales often have a *trickster* character, a mix of good and evil who sometimes helps people, and other times is a mischief-maker.[9] The trickster also has a capacity to transform situations and overturn the status quo.[10] The Eden story, notably, has a talking serpent that the woman claims "tricked" her (Gen 3:14). Scholars say the serpent in the story is depicted more as a mischievous trickster creature, a trouble-maker, and not as a demon or agent of a rival deity or of *Satan,* in Hebrew, ***haśśāṭān***.[11] This article wishes to explore precisely this view of the serpent.

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[5]Susan Niditch, "Folklore and Biblical Narrative: A Study of Genesis 3," in *Folklore and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 33–47.

[6]"The Folktale," http://www.glencoe.com/sec/literature/course/course3/unit/folktale.shtml. Accessed Feb. 18, 2006.

[7]Rogerson and Davies, *Old Testament World*, 133.

[8]Rogerson and Davies, *Old Testament World*, 133.

[9]"Folktales," http://www.eve-tal.com/Folktales.html. Accessed Feb. 18, 2006.

[10]Susan Niditch, "Genesis," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (London: SPCK, 1992), 14.

[11]Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, *Text*, *and Interpretation*, trans. David Green (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), 22; Gerard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 87; Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 26; Vawter, *On Genesis*, 77; Niditch, "Genesis," 14. Note however that in the Book of Job

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A Man's World

The word "man," in Hebrew *hāʾāḏām,* is repeated many times in the narrative. The term *ha-adam* is not the personal name of the male character who in some contexts has a generic collective inclusive sense, i.e., denoting *humankind.* Clearly, a main theme in the story is what it means to *be human* vis-à-vis God and the rest of creation.[12]

However, the story is also interested in depicting what it means to be *man vis-à-vis woman* or vice versa. For, as H. Bloom notes, the story's mode of creation of woman is the only one of its kind in the ancient Near East.[13] In this article, the *male* character will be referred to as "the man"; if both sexes are implied, the term will be "the wo/man."

Genesis chapter 2 is also unique, says C. Westermann, in its appreciation of human existence as a *partnership of man and woman*.[14] The depiction of *marriage* as *the foundational partnership* thus merits attention.

But, as D. Clines points out, the androcentric orientation is undeniable.[15] The first human character, *hāʾāḏām,* that God forms out of the earth in Gen 2:7 may be interpreted to be a *sexually undifferentiated* earth creature, as P. Trible proposes.[16] This article adopts the view

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chapters 1 and 2, Satan is depicted to be part of the heavenly court of God.

[12]Niditch, "Folklore and Biblical Narrative," 41.

[13]Harold Bloom, *The Book of J*, trans. David Rosenberg (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 9, 178. Bloom proposes that the author is probably a woman.

[14]Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scuchin (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974), 232.

[15]David J. A. Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament*, JSOT Supp. 94 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990, 1994), 40–41.

[16]Phyllis Trible, "A Love Story Gone Awry," in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 80. Rashi says that rabbinic midrash interpeted Gen 2:21 to mean that God first created *ha-adam* with two faces, i.e., as bisexual, and that God later divided him. See Rashi, *Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary*,

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however that the imaginative language—God forms a female figure from *hāʾāḏām*'s rib or side (Gen 2:21)—suggests that the first human character, even if inclusively generic denoting humankind, is male-sexed.[17] The narrative language and development, as will be seen, prioritizes the man's relationship with God. B. Stratton proposes, rightly, that in the narrative, God expects obedience *primarily* from the man.[18]

An androcentric story may be expected to cast the man-woman relationship into a patriarchal mold. But a question is: Is the narrative intrinsically sexist?[19] Is it derogatory towards women? An attentive ear to the nuances may yield unexpected surprises.

Imaging a God of Surprises

The imaging of God in the story is enigmatic. For example, E. H. Pagels notes: "Why does God prohibit the Tree of Knowledge? Was the Lord surprised or disappointed by his human creatures?

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trans. A. Silbermann (Jerusalem: Silbermann Family, 1929), 12. This view—that the original human was androgynous and God had to divide it into two gendered beings for procreation and human life to begin—is also held in feminist readings of biblical inclusive language. See Carol Meyers, "Eve," in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books and the New Testament*, ed. Carol Meyers, et al. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), 80.

[17]Samuel Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood and Womanhood* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1985), 9; Patricia A. Williams, *Doing Without Adam and Eve: Sociobiology and Original Sin* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 89.

[18]Beverly Stratton, *Out of Eden: Reading, Rhetoric, and Ideology in Genesis 2–3*, JSOT Supp. 208 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 102.

[19]Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 63.

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… Details that delight storytellers often trouble theologians."[20] K. Armstrong also notes that in the Hebrew Bible, when God becomes inextricably involved with men and women, he frequently appears to be as ambiguous, contradictory, and dubious as they themselves are.[21]

W. Brueggemann helpfully points out that *metaphor* was a central element in Israel's articulation of YHWH; Israel's theological rhetoric is *evocative,* not descriptive:

> Yahweh is presented as a key character in a story. This means that Yahweh is not subject to the norms of critical inquiry or classical theology in its commitment to essence …. Israel's dramatic rendering of Yahweh is characteristically intended to be playful, inviting, teasing, rarely hardened into claims that push outside the drama itself.[22]

The drama in Eden, some scholars say, evokes the dynamics of a parent-child relationship. For example, U. Cassuto sees God depicted like a wise generous father, rebuking but giving remedies.[23] H. Bloom on the other hand sees the man and woman as misbehaving little children, but God is like a cruel parent, imposing unjust punishments; it is a "children's story that ends unhappily."[24] A. Brenner sees God rendered as a benevolent, but also tyrannical, male parent; the maturation of children however requires their eventual separation from parents.[25]

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[20]Elaine H. Pagels, "On Adam, Eve and the Serpent," www.geo.tcu.edu/honors/_PAGELS.doc. Accessed February 18, 2006.

[21]Karen Armstrong, *In the Beginning: A New Interpretation of Genesis* (New York: Random House Publishing, 1996), 13.

[22]Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Advocacy, and Dispute* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 69–70.

[23]Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1978), 113, 135, 163.

[24]Bloom, *Book of J*, 184, 186.

[25]Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 125–27.

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N. Rosenblatt and J. Horwitz think that the imaging of God as Parent offers a "helpful role model that strikes a balance between the extremes of child-rearing, between discipline and permissiveness, between asserting control and letting go, between unconditional love and clearly stated expectations."[26]

D. Gunn sees the story in continuity with Genesis 1, depicting the contradictory character of God who desires dominion but also values exploration, "God saw that it was good" (Gen 1:24).[27] R. Hanson reads the story allegorically as the "rise" of man, where discovering likeness to God requires leaving the "cradle."[28] R. Simkins sees the man and woman like children in a rite of passage, transformed into humans living in a real world.[29]

This article explores the story as a family drama-cum-love story: the Creator is depicted as a Parent, firm but caring; the man and woman are married to each other, but are still like little children. This mixes metaphors, but in fantasy, different rules apply.

Framework: Boundary vs. Union

It is commonly agreed that a major purpose of the story is to show the limits of human existence in relation to the Divine.[30] This

[26]Naomi H. Rosenblatt and Joshua Horwitz, *Wrestling with Angels: What the First Family of Genesis Teaches Us About Our Spiritual Identity, Sexuality, and Personal Relationships* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1995), 31.

[27]David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: University Press, 1993), 201–3.

[28]Richard S. Hanson, *The Serpent Was Wiser: A New Look at Gen 1–11* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973), 41, 49.

[29]Ronald A. Simkins, *Creator and Creation: Nature in the Worldview of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 185.

[30]Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, 17; von Rad, *Genesis*, 89; Donald E. Gowan, *From Eden to Babel: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 1–11* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Edinburgh: Eerdmans, 1988), 37.

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article adopts this notion of *limits* and calls it "boundary." The notion of *boundary*—a *dividing* line indicating or fixing a limit or extent—is a familiar motif in Biblical stories, and also in contemporary paradigms on relationships.

The article proposes the *boundary motif* as the framework of the Eden drama. Unlike the preceding creation story where the boundaries set by God establish order out of chaos, the Eden story shows the divinely-set boundary as double-edged, protecting *order* as well as provoking *disorder*. This is because God does not program the Divine-human relationship. The drama shows what T. E. Fretheim calls a "relational model of creation":

> In the very act of creating, God gives to others a certain independence and freedom. God moves over, as it were, and makes room for others…. Creation involves … a degree of openness and unpredictability wherein God leaves room for genuine decisions on the part of human beings as they exercise their God-given power.[31]

Thus the storyline is: God sets a boundary, the couple trespass, God sets a new boundary.

But within the story, like a counterpoint, is the motif of *union* which connotes joining separate things into one. This is signified by the *marriage motif*:

> Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Gen 2:24)

This passage provides a key to the drama: the conflict between union and boundaries.

J. Walsh finds the story to be structured into seven scenes like a chiasm, with the disobedience of the couple as the climax (D) of the plot, as shown below:[32]

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[31]Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in 12 Volumes* I, ed. Leander E. Keck, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 355–56.

[32]Jerome Walsh, *Style and Structure in the Hebrew Biblical Narrative* (Collegeville,

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A The man is placed in the garden (2:4b–17)
B Character relationships are established in harmony (2:18–25)
C Snake makes statements to the woman (3:1–5)
D Woman and her husband eat of the tree (3:6–7)
C1 YHWH God asks questions of the man (3:8–13)
B1 Character relationships are re-established in disharmony (3:14–21)
A1 The man is driven from the garden (3:22–24).

This article adapts this seven-scene structure by proposing that the dramatic plot is an alternate movement between two motifs: (A) the Divine-Human Relationship marked by boundaries and (B) the Man-Woman Relationship marked by union, as shown below:

A God forms man, sets boundary: tree of knowledge is off limits (2:4b–7).
B God creates woman, and marital love and union (2:18–24).
A1 Boundary is questioned in the encounter with serpent (2:25–3:6).
B1 Marital union leads to trespassing boundary (3:6b–8).
A2 God calls man and woman to accountability on boundary (3:9–19).
B2 Man recognizes his wife as Mother; God clothes couple (3:20–21).
A3 God sets new boundary; tree of life is off limits (3:22–24).
B3 Epilogue: Man and woman conceive; Eve acknowledges help from God (4:1).

The drama is divided into two Acts. Act I (A, B) shows the beginning—the creation of marriage as a tripartite partnership. Act II (A1, B1, A2, B2, A3) shows the tension and testing of the partnership. The Epilogue (B3) shows the partnership outside Eden.

Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001), 59, cited in David W. Cotter, *Genesis Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003), 28.

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Boundaries of Love: Reading Gen 2:4b–3:24

Act I. Beginnings: Gen 2:4b–24

Scene 1. God "Births" Man and Sets Boundaries (2:4b–17)

The drama opens, showing why the man was created—to till the bare earth:

> In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground. (Gen 2:4b–6)

The Creator is closely involved, hands-on, like a potter artist,[33] or a midwife:

> then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. (Gen 2:7)

The Hebrew word for "ground"—*ʾăḏāmāh*—is in the feminine form.[34] Formed from *dust,* the man is destined for *death,* but Divine Breath means he is willed into existence, an image of God, loved by God, created to be in relationship with God.[35] The image of *God's hands on the man* anticipates already the tension between human dependency and

[33]Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 20.

[34]Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Women* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 77.

[35]Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 43, 46, 47.

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separateness for the child to be.[36] The man comes from the union of *Mother Earth* and *Divine Breath*. The imagery of God breathing life into his nostrils is like a mother kissing her newborn's cheek. God then makes a "cradle" for his child:

> And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. (Gen 2:8)

The garden setting introduces the motif of boundary: a garden is usually marked off by walls. "Eden," meaning "delight," sets the mood—pleasure, satisfaction, joy.[37]

> Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen 2:9)

God generously provides. *Every* tree—not only the tree of life and the tree of knowledge—is pleasing to the eyes, appetizing, and beneficial to eat. The location of the tree of life "in the midst of the garden" marks another boundary within the garden.

The narrative world then expands to suggest that delights are not limited to Eden:

> A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. (Gen 2:10–14)

The man's duty—to care for the garden which provides his sustenance—is now emphasized:

> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. (Gen 2:15)

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[36]Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire*, 21.

[37]Gowan, *From Eden to Babel*, 40–41.

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God then utters his *first words* in the narrative, significantly *a command*:

> And the Lord God commanded the man: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die." (Gen 2:16–17)

God's command, notably, is one of *permission and prohibition*. God allows free eating of every tree except one—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The importance of this enigmatic tree lies not so much in its polyvalent meanings but in what it symbolizes: while the tree is appealing and beneficial like the rest, *it is declared off limits by God's Word*. God's command establishes the motif of *boundary*, and introduces the conflict and image of the God-human relationship: like a good Parent, God sets boundaries, provides freedom and limits for his son's movement and appetite. The consequence—"in the day that you eat of it you shall die"—is also the reason for the command, like a parent restricts a child by focusing on a negative outcome, "Don't climb that chair, or you will fall and hurt yourself."

Significantly, God does *not* prohibit the tree of life. But the fact that God does not mention this tree means that, in the narrative world, the man is not made aware such a tree exists. All throughout, only the audience is told of it. The man is made aware only of the tree of knowledge, ironically by the fact that it is off limits. Its being forbidden may heighten its appeal, but in the context of God allowing access to all the other just as delightful trees, may also render it marginal, in the periphery.

Also, significantly, the "you" in God's command (2:16–17) is in the *singular* form.[38] This signifies the personal relationship between God and the man: the man hears God's command directly, first-hand. God expects trust and obedience from *him*.

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[38]James G. Williams, *Women Recounted: Narrative Thinking and the God of Israel* (Wiltshire: Almond Press, 1982), 68.

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Scene 2. And Woman Makes Three (2:18–24)

God's work is not yet done:

> Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper as his partner." (Gen 2:18)

Like a wise parent, God does not simply impose what is good for the child, but creatively finds a way for the man to recognize his need for a human companion and partner:

> So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. (Gen 2:19)

As language—naming—is among the first things a child learns, so the man names the animals, developing and showing his capacity to discern similarity and differences:

> The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man, there was not found a helper as his partner. (Gen 2:20)

Perhaps, seeing the animals in pairs, the man senses that unlike the animals, he stands solo.[39] The man is ready for a "helper as his partner."

The Hebrew terms for "partner" and "helper," it is significant to point out here, connote equality, not subordination. The Hebrew for "partner"—*kanegdō*—means "counterpart," i.e., suitable for him; its root verb *ngd* from *neged* means "to place opposite, before, confront with"; the word is connected to *nāgad* which means "to go before."[40] As S. Terrien points out, the term connotes achievement, pioneering

[39]Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books Publishers, 1981), 30. He cites a rabbinic midrash in *Bereshit Rabba 17:5*.

[40]Felix Garcia-Lopez, "ngd," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* IX, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), 174–75.

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risk, and deliberate thrust into the unknown.[41] The place of the *partner* is thus to be *visible*, not behind, but alongside, an equal, to support, lead, or oppose, if need be!

The Hebrew word for "helper"—*ʿēzer*—implies no inferiority either. God is often the the subject of the word; the Hebrew word *ʿāzar,* from which the noun *ʿēzer* derives, means "to succor," "to save or deliver from death."[42] God is *ʿēzer*, helper, savior of Israel, e.g., "The LORD is our help and shield" (Ps 33:20); "My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Ps 121:2). Thus, as Terrien notes, far from being a subordinated servant, woman as "helper" of the man is to be *savior* of the man.[43] The woman is "conceived," so to speak, to be *God's agent* of salvation for humankind.

God's creation of woman is thus a climactic moment in the narrative:

> So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. (Gen 2:21–22)

God puts the man to sleep to symbolize the making of woman is God's work alone, and thus highlights God's own intimate relationship with the woman.

Unlike the rest of creation, woman is unique, she does not come from the earth.[44] She comes from a living human being—*hāʾādām's* "rib," in Hebrew *ṣēlāʿ*. It is significant that it is only in this Biblical text that the word *ṣēlāʿ* is used as part of the human body, because in other contexts, *ṣēlāʿ* is used to refer to architectural support for the

[41]Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings*, 11.

[42]Eduard Lipinski, "Azar," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* XI, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, et al. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), 13.

[43]Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings*, 10–11.

[44]Trible, "A Love Story Gone Awry," 96, 102.

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sacred sanctuary, e.g., *side* chambers of the temple, or the shell of the ark of the covenant.[45]

The association of the word *sela* evoking the construction of the *sanctuary* suggests a notion that man and woman are the dwelling place of the divine, and they fulfil the destiny for which they are created, in union as husband and wife, and *as God's temple.*[46]

The imagery of the *sela,* the *side,* as bone-and-flesh rib, is also interesting. Anatomically, the *rib* or *side* is close to the heart—seat of affectivity, love, reflection, discernment and the will. Also, tickling the *ribs* induces laughter, thus the expression "rib-tickling" story; the rib as the funny-bone suggests that the man and woman bring delight and laughter to each other. The symbolic imagery denotes, as Westermann says, the personal community of man and woman in the broadest sense—bodily and spiritual community, mutual help, understanding, joy, and contentment in each other.[47]

The architectural imagery of *ṣēlāʿ* is amplified in the verb used in the narrative—"God made" (v. 22)—which connotes "to build."[48] God thus *builds* the woman to be of *sturdier* stuff. After all, bearing and birthing a human being is no small feat.[49]

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[45]Heinz-Josef Fabry, "Sela," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* XII, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, et al. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 402; Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings*, 12.

[46]Fabry, "Sela," 402.

[47]Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 232.

[48]Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings,* 12.

[49]From the author's personal experience in Lamaze childbirth preparation classes, the strength of the uterus to expel a baby from the womb is often described as sufficient to push a grand piano from one end of a theatre stage to the other.

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However, that the woman is the one separated from the side of the man seems contrary to real life where it is from the woman that human beings are separated to be born into the world. This imagery of the man who bears the "woman within" is depicted in a painting by Filipino artist Duddley Diaz entitled "Fertile is the Night:"[50]



The image graphically suggests that the man carries within him qualities associated with women such as nurturing, compassionate, non-violent, home-maker, listener, follower. In Hebrew Scriptures, the imaging of God—while male-sexed—does not exclude the maternal (cf. Is 42:14). Corollarily, the woman's coming from the man suggests that she bears within her qualities associated with men such as initiative, reason, aggressiveness, autonomy, independence. Biological difference is real; only a woman can birth children. But amazingly, this Genesis story critiques the rigid cultural-social stereotyping of characteristics as *either* feminine *or* masculine.

For Rosenblatt and Horwitz, the imagery of the woman being separated from the *side* of the man also suggests that man and woman are two halves of a larger whole.[51] This implies that man and woman will seek and find wholeness only in union with each other. At the same time, the reality of *man/woman*, or male/female, representing *two opposites* cannot be denied. N. Leibowitz relates *this profound reality* to

[50] *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Inquirer News Service), April 11, 2005, page D1.

[51] Rosenblatt and Horwitz, *Wrestling with Angels*, 28.

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the meaning of the passage in Gen 2:18: "It is not good that the man should be alone":

> The fact of man and woman's opposite characteristics is not by itself a guarantee that a combination of both will dispel the "not good" inherent in their isolation from each other. Only if they combine harmoniously in conformity with the will of God will these two opposites merge into a single whole. If they do not show themselves worthy, the result will be disharmony—a clash of opposites.[52]

The drama now unfolds, for, having built the woman, God brings her to the man, like a father bringing his daughter to her bridegroom. Seeing the woman, the man breaks out into a rhapsody. The first words by a human character in the narrative—and the Bible—are by the man, notably, in *poetic verse*, a love song:

> The man said:
> "This at last is bone of my bones
> and flesh of my flesh;
> this one shall be called Woman [ishshah]
> for out of Man [ish] , this one was taken." (Gen 2:23)

The triple repetition "This at last … this one … this one!" emphasizes the man's satisfaction. The man's declaration—"This is bone of *my* bones, flesh of *my* flesh"—defines the woman from *his* reference point. But her presence also gives him a new social identity. He is no longer simply "man" *hāʾāḏām* but also now *ʾîš, her man,* "husband."[53] He calls her "woman," in Hebrew *ʾiššāh*; it is a wordplay for it sounds like *ʾîš,* Hebrew for "man" or "husband"; the terms emphasize they are partners whose nature is the same as fellow creatures.[54] The terms *ish* and *isha*

[52]Nehama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Bereshit*, trans. Aryeh Newman (Jerusalem: Hemed Press, no publication date), 14.

[53]Simkins, *Creator and Creation*, 184.

[54]Panagiotis Bratsiotis, "'ish, 'ishsha," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* I, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), 226.

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also imply recognition of their physical similarity and difference, thus suggesting the *awareness already here of sexuality and sexual differences.*[55]

The expression "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" is an idiom in the Old Testament to denote kinship;[56] but C. Westermann notes that it is used here as a formula for a *permanent* relationship.[57] This relationship is the most intimate one—*marriage*—as indicated now in the narrator's words:

> Therefore a man *[ʾîš]* leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife *[ʾištō]* and they become one flesh. (Gen 2:24)

The reference to the husband and *ʾištō* "his wife" suggests a type of marriage formula. The relationship, the passage suggests, demands much—more—from the man.

Indeed, this famous passage, Gen 2:24, is significant. First, it runs counter to patriarchal culture where it is the woman who leaves her family to join her husband's household.[58] The statement does not sound like an etiology of patriarchal marriage. Of course, it may refer to the man heading his own patriarchal family when he marries, devoting his life no longer to his parents.[59]

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[55]Bratsiotis, "'ish, 'ishsha," 226; see also Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings*, 12–16; Reuven Kimelman, "The Seduction of Eve and the Exegetical Politics of Gender," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 251.

[56]Gowan, *From Eden to Babel*, 50.

[57]Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 232.

[58]The passage may echo the custom where the man becomes part of his wife's household, e.g., Jacob in Gen 29–31. See W. Gunther Plaut, "Genesis," in *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of Hebrew American Congregations, 1981), 31.

[59]Cassuto, *A Commentary*, 137.

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Still, the passage in Gen 2:24 suggests a radical reversal of values: the precedence of *maritality* over male filiality, the marital bond over the natal one; i.e., the man's first loyalty is to his wife.[60] S. Terrien notes that the Hebrew word for "leave"—*ʿāzaḇ*—means not only "to depart from" but "to forsake," to drop everything, as in putting oneself away from idols or pagan deities. The man is thus to *abandon parents* in favor of his wife. To "cling to his wife" means not simply an outward commitment, but the inner compulsion of love.[61]

Nowhere else in the OT is the phrase "one flesh" found.[62] The language, sensual and spiritual, suggests a theology of marriage. K. Schelkle says that the Hebrew word for "flesh"—*bāśar*—means "the whole person." "One flesh" suggests an indissoluble communion of two people becoming one person, a union possible only between *one* man and *one* woman; thus the term suggests the ideal of monogamy.[63] "One flesh" is not referring to an offspring nor to being clones, but the union of differences. This statement, says C. Westermann, talks of marriage not as an institution for begetting descendants, but primarily as a relationship of love and commitment between man and woman.[64]

Interestingly, says Trible, the identification of the man with "father and mother" suggests that the woman is independent. Though she is called *ʾiššāh* "his woman," she is not the man's possession but rather the one in whom he finds fulfillment. The man does not control her but moves *toward her* for union.[65] Indeed, the woman is perceived here as the stronger autonomous spouse. This counters assumptions that

[60]Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings*, 15; Meyers, "Eve," 80.

[61]Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings*, 15.

[62]Gowan, *From Eden to Babel*, 50.

[63]Karl Hermann Schelkle, *The Spirit and the Bride: Woman in the Bible* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1979), 9.

[64]Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 233.

[65]Trible, "A Love Story Gone Awry," 104.

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women are the weaker, more needy sex. In many cultures, young girls are conditioned to find their identity and security in the protection and providence of men—be it fathers, brothers, husbands. Even today, the image of a "clinging vine" automatically conjures up a woman. The notion of a husband "clinging to his wife" may seem strange, for it suggests the man's *dependence* on his wife for security, safety, salvation.

What is also striking is that the imperative for marital union in Gen 2:24, requiring abandoning filial ties, is addressed to the *man*. The man is to find his fulfillment, belongingness and wholeness not as "son" but as "husband." This famous passage, Gen 2:24, not only suggests a theology of marriage. This article proposes that the statement also serves a critical function in the narrative as family drama. The narrator is *not* necessarily stepping out of the narrative world when he refers to a "man leaving his father and mother and clinging to his wife." The statement also anticipates the dramatic conflict between divinely-set boundaries and marital union that unfolds in Act II.

Act II. Partners Walking with(out) God: Gen 2:25–3:24

The creation of woman establishes the "love triangle," the tripartite partnership of God-man-woman. God, who had earlier dominated Act I, now drops out of the scene.

Scene 1. Boundary Blurred (2:25–3:1–5)

While the couple are married, they are also still like little children learning to walk. U. Cassuto compares their state to Deut 1:30: "And your children who this day have no knowledge yet of good or evil."[66]

> The scene opens, signifying the couple's state of lack of awareness:[67]
> And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed. (Gen 2:25)

[66]Cassuto, *A Commentary*, 112.

[67]Richard Clifford and Roland E. Murphy, "Genesis," in *The New Jerome Biblical*

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Lack of shame at their nudity reflects their ignorance or lack of self-consciousness.

Enters now the trickster serpent.

> Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. (Gen 3:1)

The narrative here indulges in wordplay: the couple are "naked," in Hebrew *ʿārōm*; the serpent is "crafty," in Hebrew *ʿārûm*.[68] The naked smooth-skinned children are about to encounter a smooth operator. The serpent asks the woman about God's prohibition:

> He said to the woman: "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Gen 3:1b)

Asking the woman if God said *not* to eat from *any* tree, the serpent wants to confuse her. The pronoun "You" in his quotation of God—"You shall not eat"—is now in the plural form, as it will be in the woman's reply also.[69]

The woman's use of "we" establishes that she has been told of God's command and considers herself included in the command. The woman quickly corrects the serpent. She echoes both God's *permission* and *prohibition*:

> The woman said to the serpent: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die'." (Gen 3:2–3)

Commentary, ed. Raymond E. Brown, et al. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 12. The authors propose likewise that this section begins with Gen 2:25 and ends with 3:1–7 as the episode plays on the theme of awareness about nakedness.

[68]Herbert Niehr, "Arom," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* XI, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, et al. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 352; Vawter, *On Genesis*, 25.

[69]Fretheim,"Book of Genesis," 360.

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Her quotation of God's prohibition "but God said" shows modification, and needs interpretation. First, interestingly, the woman does *not* refer to the forbidden tree by its name "knowledge of good and evil." Rather she calls it "the tree that is in the middle of the garden." *This* is a confusing detail. Earlier the narrator had said that the tree "in the midst of the garden" was the tree of life (2:9) which was *not* included in God's prohibition (2:17). Does the confusing detail reflect simply the author/redactor's lapse, attributable to the process of composition? The subsequent exchange shows the woman and serpent both refer to the forbidden tree of knowledge.

This article proposes that perhaps the confusing detail is put in for a dramatic purpose. Assuming that the narrator's locating the tree of life "in the midst of the garden" (2:9) is no lapse, the woman's reference to the forbidden tree being "in the middle of the garden" (3:3) suggests the woman is a bit confused: the boundary has begun to blur, the line dividing the forbidden from permitted is hazy. The trees after all look the same.[70]

Also intriguing are the woman's words "nor shall you touch it," clearly an addition to the prohibition. This suggests that the wo/man accepts the gravity of God's command. If the trees look alike, it is possible to imagine that she or her husband may have gone near the forbidden tree but suddenly stopped, reprimanding either one, "No, don't touch it!" An analogy would be a parent who tells a toddler about to get an ordinary looking box of matchsticks on the table, "No, no, don't touch!"

The problem in the story about the forbidden tree is *not* that it looks enticingly *different* from the rest, but rather that it looks *no different* from the rest and begins to look too familiar; it is off limits only because God says so. The man's naming the animals shows *he* has a capacity to

[70]R. Kimelman notes that the woman's description of the tree by its location "makes it seem like a nondescript tree." See Kimelman, "The Seduction of Eve," 245.

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discern sameness and difference, but *when the forbidden looks too much like the permitted, the challenge of discernment is real*. Such a predicament—when the forbidden is part of the scenery—was real for people like elect Israel, set apart yet living among the nations. Even in contemporary life, what is considered unacceptable (e.g., unwed pregnancy) or bizarre (streaked hair) becomes, with continual exposure, less forbidding. The blurring boundary thus suggests a problem for the wo/man who is quite fastidious, even anxious about obeying God's command, that she has added "Don't touch it" as an extra precaution.

As for the warning, God's original words were: "for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die" (2:17). The woman's version still echoes "you shall die" (3:3) but omits the urgent tone "in the day that you eat of it." That the warning sounds less ominous may suggest that their experience of God is not that of a fearsome threatening figure, but a familiar one, for as the text later mentions, God "walks in the garden at the time of the evening breeze" (3:8). That the woman does remember the warning shows she does not take God's word for granted.

Overall, the woman's reply to the serpent shows she knows God's command, modifies it a little, but defends it and abides by it. This suggests that the wo/man is obedient and contented staying within the boundary set by God.

The serpent now tries to show off that he has one up over her. Implying "I know something you don't," he gives an alternative version of God's command:

> But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God [gods], knowing good and evil." (Gen 3:4–5)

The craftiness of the serpent lies in taking away the sting of the warning. Saying "you shall not die" makes the forbidden tree look *even more* like the permitted trees. He also passes on information (from the garden grapevine?) that eating of the fruit will make them possess a divine attribute—"be like God, knowing good and evil," a claim which God's words later do validate (3:22). But the serpent cheekily insinuates that God's prohibition is motivated to protect Divine self-

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interest. The serpent tries to make trouble in God's relations with the couple by trying to cast doubt on God's benevolence, making God look like a despot.

Scene 2: Stumbling and Crossing the Boundary (3:6–8)

Given the serpent's description of its benefits, the tree—formerly the "don't-touch-tree in the middle of the garden"—now becomes the object of the woman's attention:

> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. (Gen 3:6a)

The woman's discernment process—"she saw the tree was good for food, a delight to the eyes"—echoes almost verbatim the narrator's earlier description: "every tree was pleasant to the sight and good for food" (2:9). This dramatizes how, in the woman's eyes, the blurred boundary disappears. The "don't-touch" tree is now just like any other permitted tree, but is also more appealing, "to be desired to make one wise," in reference to its fruit of knowing good and evil. Interestingly, the woman's thought process *does not echo* the serpent's words "to be like God," but focuses only on the tree's delights, the wisdom it can bring. She is like a child dominated by the senses, a boldness to risk reaching out for what seems reasonably appealing—wisdom. The narrative suggests, as L. Forman says, that the woman's motive is not pride but a sense of adventure and curiosity.[71]

The woman takes and eats, believing that it will bring her good, not harm. She does not consult her husband. Hers is an *individual* action, reflecting her autonomy. Significantly, nothing happens. Instinctively, she turns to share with her husband what she considers as beneficial. She does not seduce, taunt, persuade, nor twist his arm:

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[71]Lore Forman, "Bereshit: Untold Story of Eve," in *The Woman's Torah Commentary: New Insights from Women Rabbis in the 54 Weekly Torah Portions*, ed. Elyse Goldstein (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000), 51.

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> she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. (Gen 3:6b)

That her husband was "with her" may suggest that the whole time she and the serpent were talking, her husband heard the exchange, but did nothing. Considering that *he* received the command first-hand from God, he would be expected to refuse or at least to remind her.

However, his reaction is instant: "and he ate"; his wife had at least pondered on her decision. His immediate reaction may suggest passivity, taking the line of least resistance—"Whatever *she* decides is okay with me," or "It's a bother to go against the tide." The narrative, C. Westermann points out, is not characterizing the relationship between the sexes by saying that the woman is more susceptible and then *she* becomes the man's "temptress"; rather, the man's conformity, joining in as "tag-along," shows the human inclination to avoid making a decision whenever possible.[72] In the context of a love story, the husband may also be too dependent on his wife's affection to stand apart.

But the language—that he was "with her"—could also mean that he is totally *one* in agreement with his wife and her action. His conformity may indeed reflect a deeper drama: the fact that he is not seduced, persuaded, nor did he pause to deliberate suggests that *he* is bone of *her* bones and flesh of *her* flesh. His crossing the boundary ironically dramatizes Gen 2:24, how becoming "one flesh" means turning his back on God's command. The narrative here eloquently shows the dilemma and underside of marital union: as C. Westermann says, because human beings are subject to error, marital union is depicted here as ambivalent.[73] The partnership created *by* God can lead to partnership *with God* or *away from* God.

Curiously, it is only after the man eats the fruit that the effect of their action begins. This suggests that the *man's disobedience* is central to the drama:

[72]Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 232.

[73]Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 249.

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> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together, and made loincloths for themselves. (Gen 3:7)

Their eyes opening in awareness that they are naked dramatizes a change that is not a sexual awakening or awareness of sexual differences.[74] The awareness that they are naked and the move to cloth their loins may symbolize, not shame at their sexuality, but rather, a growth in self-consciousness, that they are human, *different from animals that go naked*; being human means it is not proper to be nude, or unclothed.[75] The wordplay tinges the scene with comic irony: it is through the action of the animal that is crafty—*arum*—that the humans discover they are naked—*arom*.[76]

The move to cover their nakedness may also imply their new experience or "knowledge" of vulnerability, having crossed a boundary. Indeed, the other radical change is their reaction of hiding upon hearing God's presence:

> They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (Gen 3:8)

Hiding—separating themselves from God—creates a boundary. But God seeks them out.

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[74]J. Milgrom reads this scene as symbolizing sexual awakening, i.e., sex not simply as carnal relations but as creative impulse and power which can either build a world (good) or destroy it (evil). See Jacob Milgrom, "Sex and Wisdom: What the Garden of Eden Story is Saying," *Bible Review* (December 1994), 52. Others argue, however, that this view implies that sexual relations had been banned, a notion that lacks textual support and goes against the grain of the positive attitude towards procreation that involves both commandment and blessing. See Kimelman, "The Seduction of Eve," 251.

[75]James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 11; also Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 251.

[76]Ellen van Wolde, *Words Become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1–11* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1994), 7.

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Scene 3. Crossroads (3:9–19)

God now conducts a fact-finding counseling-cum-disciplinary session. Exercising tough love, he deals firmly with his misbehaving children. God elicits their admission of wrongdoing, and respects their freedom to explain their action.

> But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." (Gen 3:9–10)

That God calls "to the man," addressing him in the singular "you," indicates the priority of the man's relationship with God. The man's reply "I was afraid" suggests, perhaps for the first time, a "fear of God." God clearly holds *him* accountable for the command:

> He said, "Who told you that you are naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Gen 3:11)

The man's explanation, usually called blaming, actually reflects the marital dilemma:

> The man said, "The woman *[ishsha]* whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit from the tree, and I ate." (Gen 3:12)

His explanation refers to his earlier delight receiving from God his wife as partner-helper, his receptivity to her and oneness with her, leading to his action and decision to eat.

God now addresses the woman for the first time, to elicit also her admission:

> Then the LORD God said to the woman: "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." (Gen 3:13)

The explanation—that she was "tricked" by the serpent—means, in B. Stratton's words, that the woman thought her decision was made with good intentions, but she now recognizes the negative effect of the serpent's words; her action was a mistake.[77]

[77]Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 90.

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That the woman was "tricked" rather than "tempted" would further nuance interpretation of her motives. In Filipino, a tempted person says, "Natukso ako." It connotes admission of being inclined, perhaps from the start, to do wrong. However, the earlier discussion suggested that before the serpent's disclosure of information, the wo/man was content to stay within the boundary God set. The word "tricked" suggests being surprised, duped, taken for a ride; in Filipino, "Naisahan ako." It connotes being outwitted, fooled. An analogy would be like this. A tea lover receives a *balikbayan* box full of flavored teas. She is shown one box of tea bags that looks just like the rest but, she is told, has a strange pungent taste. With many other tea boxes, that pungent tasting tea would not be noticed, or if seen, would just be put aside. Along comes a prankster who says that the pungent tasting tea is in fact the best tasting and has a hidden treasure in it! She would inevitably look for the marginalized tea, only to find that it does taste pungent, there is no treasure, and it gives her a terrible stomach ache. The person would say, "I was tricked!"

Being tricked therefore means that the woman was more impulsive and gullible than malicious. Crossing the boundary would be equivalent to being *tripped up* by the serpent; the "fall" would not be from high places caused by pride but rather, a *stumbling to the ground* caused by vulnerability, like a toddler learning to walk.

God believes the woman's story and curses the trickster serpent. God does not question the serpent; only humans are accountable for their actions:

> The LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals, and among all wild creatures; upon your belly shall you go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." (Gen 3:14–15)

God castigates the serpent for his mischief by separating him from other animals and creating mutual hostility between him and humans.

God turns to the woman and man, but does not curse them. The words "sin" and "punishment" do not appear in the narrative but do

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so only in the next chapter on Cain and Abel (Gen 4:6, 13). God's words, like disciplinary measures of a parent guiding and correcting children, "open their eyes" to their partnership and labor for the human family: *reproduction* for the woman as child-bearer; *production* for the man as provider.

That God's words to the woman are not prefaced with the phrase "Because you—" suggests that God's words are not punishments but "reality bytes" to teach her how to be partner and helper. Built from the side of her man, the woman gets sustenance from him but *must care for him too.* Her husband's being one "with her" means she must also consider him:

> To the woman he said: "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you." (Gen 3:16)

That God, who built the woman's body for childbearing, will *greatly increase* her pains may mean she will experience *frequent pregnancies.* God's words can mean "I will increase your work and pregnancies"; in ancient times this was a blessing—even a necessity!—given the context of agrarian life where large families are needed to work the land.[78] God's words may also refer to the pains that do *intensify progressively* from pregnancy to birthing. But that despite such hardships—work, pregnancy, childbirthing pains—the woman shall *still* "desire her husband," i.e., seek conjugal sex, reflects a paradox in women's experience that is *not* a punishment: many women, writhing in extreme pain of labor transition before the baby's head crowns, do swear they will never have sex again. But the joy that follows birthing dissipates the pain. Motherhood can be so fulfilling that many a wife welcomes conjugal union and pregnancy again—more so when society or the woman values fecundity and motherhood as part of her self-worth.

The statement "yet your desire shall be for your husband" suggests moreover the vitality of woman's sexuality not simply for childbearing

[78]Meyers, "Eve," 81; Simkins, *Creator and Creation*, 190.

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but also for communion as wife and lover to her husband. God's words even hint that a wife's initiative in sex is to be expected, if not encouraged—a surprising notion from antiquity. The emphasis on desire for "your husband" commands the wife to be sexually faithful, perhaps to establish paternity over her offspring. To balance her capacity for autonomy, the woman will channel her *desire* to be wise (Gen 3:6) *toward intimacy* with her husband. God's words recognize that men and women have *different* sexual needs and attitudes, and this affects conjugal sexual intimacy. A wife especially in post-childbearing years may have little or no more desire for sex, unlike her husband. God urges the wife, for the sake of marital union, to consider her husband and his needs. God here is like a mother advising a strong-willed self-sufficient married daughter to welcome her husband's need for intimacy through sexual union as a core expression of marital love. This is the meaning and context of the words "your husband shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16b). In the narrative context of a husband who is enamored with his wife, God's words cannot be taken as a decree to subjugate, subordinate, humiliate women in the conjugal sexual relationship. Ultimately, God's words recognize the ambivalence of women's lives—the *burden and* responsibilities as well as the *blessing* and fulfilment of being wife and mother.

As for the man, God delivers a longer reprimand to him. Unlike in the case of the woman, God's words to the man are prefaced with "Because you," thus suggesting a *consequence* of his action. Taken from the earth, the man must care for the earth from which he derives sustenance; however, God lays out a regimen of discipline to develop the man's "backbone" by cursing the earth to make it resistant:

> And to the man he said: "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it', cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Gen 3: 17–19)

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God reprimands the man for "listening to the voice" of his wife rather than heeding God's command. Having received the command firsthand from God, the man is accountable not only to God but also to, and for, his wife. God scolds the man, repeating "eat" five times. The man's eating is more reproachable to God considering the privilege and responsibility of his having received God's Word. The androcentric story turns out to be a critique of the man, suggesting that, from the one who has more privilege, more accountability is demanded. God expects more from the one who has "priority"—in the story, in society, in the world.

Also, God's strongly worded reprimand shows that the relationship with God supercedes and guides all other human relationships, even marriage. Marriage is a *love triangle:* God is not simply "the third party" but "the first party."

The consequence of eating of the forbidden tree is not death or mortality. As earlier noted, being formed out of dust means the man is mortal, destined to die. Rather, with God cursing the ground, what the man faces is "work, work, work, until you die." Backbreaking daily toil and struggle may represent a dying in itself.

Scene 4. Standing Up Again (3:20–21)

The couple does not complain. The man honors his wife. Like a parent who helps children stand up after they stumble, God honors the couple. There is no estrangement here, in the marriage, or between God and the couple.

> The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all who live. And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife and clothed them. (Gen 3: 20–21)

Exalting Motherhood, the man pays tribute to his wife when he names her "Eve" or "mother of all living," the first personal name mentioned in the Bible. It establishes the woman as the bearer, giver and sustainer of life; in her, from *her,* human beings will be formed. The name may also suggest that Eve's risk-taking behavior will mark the way of humankind.

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That God makes skin garments for each of them depicts God's continuing personal relationship with each one. Replacing their fig loincloths with divinely made skin garments, God affirms their efforts to cover themselves. The investiture confirms their dignity and honor as human beings. It also symbolizes a wedding rite: God blesses the couple as husband and wife.

Scene 5. God Sets New Boundary (3:22–24)

God now turns to his heavenly court:

> Then the LORD God said: "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat and live for ever." (Gen 3:22)

God confirms the serpent's claim (3:4–5) that eating of the tree of knowledge would enable the wo/man to become "like God, knowing good and evil." Is God upset and angry, or sympathetic and amused, accommodating his children into the divine domain of knowing good and evil? God does express concern about the wo/man's access to the tree of life. The narrative ends with the couple leaving Eden, but it is significant that the language imbues the departure with a sense of mission and purpose:

> therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. (Gen 3:23)

The wo/man is "sent out" to fulfill the purpose of human creation—to till the earth as stated in Gen 2:5. This means that Eden is just a cradle.

Exercising sovereign freedom, God sets up a new boundary: the tree of life is off limits. God acts to prevent human access to it.

> He drove them out of the garden, and at the east of the garden of Eden, he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life. (Gen 3:24)

Without access to the tree of life, humans lose the chance or possibility to live forever. And *this,* the story suggests, is why human beings die. Created mortal, human beings did not lose immortality; rather they

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lost *access to* immortality, to a life without dying.[79] The story is saying: To be human is, like God, to know good and evil. But unlike God, to be human, or "adam," is to be *mortal*.

In the end, God's word is fulfilled: "If you eat of the tree of knowledge, you will die." But the story ends, not tragically, but with hope. That God clothes the couple himself means that they journey into the world with a measure of divine protection.[80] Their partnership with God is not dissolved. They leave Eden to fulfill their mission to care for God's earth and for one another. Unaware of the tree of life, they leave Eden, *not knowing what they have missed, the chance to live forever*. They leave Eden as mortal as the day they were created, bearing their dignity as image of God, knowing good and evil. Given life's hardships, death itself is a blessing, a welcome rest. Their story is a good beginning for humanity.

Epilogue: Fruitful Life Outside Eden (4:1)

Chapter 4 opens with the birthing of offspring from the union of the couple.

> Now the man knew his wife Eve and she conceived and bore Cain saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the LORD." (Gen 4:1)

Eve's declaration—the first religious utterance in Scripture—suggests that leaving Eden did not result in the alienation of humankind from God. The generation of human offspring thereafter, attributed by Eve to the help of the Lord, signifies the divine-human partnership for posterity, the kind of immortality that would mark the human race.

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[79]Barr, *The Garden of Eden*, 108; William H. Propp, "Eden Sketches," in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters*, ed. William Henry Propp, et al. (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 192.

[80]Armstrong, *In the Beginning*, 33.

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Summary and Conclusion

The Eden story dramatizes the Divine-human relationship in ways that reflect what W. Brueggemann finds in the OT in general: human persons, like Israel, are God's partners, living an intense mutuality in relationship with God. Situated in the midst of Yahweh's sovereignty, they are to live on Yahweh's terms; when those terms are violated, trouble comes. Yet, Yahweh's love transcends boundaries of the moral system:

> The amazing thing is that in the midst of sanctions that Yahweh pronounces, in the face of guilt and in the face of mortality, in the face of both situations in which the human person is helpless, Yahweh is attentive. Full of steadfast love and compassion, Yahweh is like a father who pities, like a mother who attends …. That is the hope of humanity and, in the end, its joy.[81]

As family drama cum love story, the story yields some insights. First, human life is a tripartite partnership—God, man-woman. But no human communion, even marriage, can supersede or replace the primary place of God in this alliance. God expects to be "No. 1" in his children's life. This is echoed in the Babel story in Genesis chapter 11.

This androcentric story—of God giving the command to the man, holding him primarily accountable—also highlights *obedience* as a mark of the human relationship with God, a theme also depicted in the story of Abraham. But that the motif of *marital union* is the device to test the man's obedience is an interesting ambivalence in the story. On the one hand, the story locates the marriage relationship within the primordial order of creation as the original Divine Blessing. The call to marital union is particularly addressed to the man who "must leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). On the other hand, this same marital union can constitute a dilemma, for the man's choice to be *with* his wife becomes shared trespassing of God's boundary. The story suggests there are limits to marital union when obedience to God's Word is at stake.

[81]Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 69–70.

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Sifting the grain from the chaff in this androcentric story, the reading yields some insights on marriage. Marriage is a practical partnership: the wife balances her autonomy and fulfillment as mother with attentive consideration for the husband who must toil to feed the family. Most of all, marriage is a permanent relationship of union in mutual love and care. It is not surprising that in the New Testament, Jesus of Nazareth alludes to the Eden story in relation, not to sin or mortality, *but to marriage:*

> From the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. (Mark 10:6–9; also Matthew 19:4–6)

Reading the Eden story as a family drama cum love story uncovers nuances often missed before, showing the story to be not melancholic but delightful even in its ambivalence. The reading invites us to view "Adam and Eve," one another, even God, in a softer light—and chuckle. The story offers a glimpse of the faith of Israel, a faith that embraces with tears not only of sorrow but also of laughter the wonder of being human—man and woman, mortal, loved by God, created for love and union, stumbling and standing again, journeying through life together outside Eden, for better or for worse.

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