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MICHAL'S LEGACY: BRIDGING BIBLICAL NARRATIVES WITH ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN

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Abstract. This article explores biblical narratives, focusing specifically on Michal's story from the books of Samuel (1 Sam 14:19, 18:20-28, 19:11-17, 25:44, 2 Sam 3:12-16, and 6:16-23), the daughter of King Saul who became the wife of David, to shed light on women's challenges. Through narrative analysis and feminist interpretation, it highlights the relevance of Michal's story in addressing contemporary societal issues. By drawing insights from these narratives, the study advocates for societal transformation and gender equality, emphasizing the urgent need for action to alleviate the struggles faced by women. As the Church upholds the dignity of every individual, regardless of their attributes, this article aims to foster a deeper appreciation for the invaluable contributions of women. In the words of Pope Francis, they serve as pillars in our communities, often laboring silently yet steadfastly, nurturing and sustaining life.[1]

Keywords: Feminism, Michal, Narrative Criticism

[1] See Pope Francis, *Dignitas Infinita*, no. 66.

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Introduction

The name Michal occurs seventeen times in the Bible, mostly in the books of Samuel.[2] She appears ten times as the daughter of Saul[3] and two times as the wife of David.[4] Her appearance seemingly suggests her significant role in the early Israelite monarchy. Whatever her role may be, Michal's context, just like any woman in the Old Testament period was undeniably dominated and controlled by men. In fact, the recurring theme of the Books of Samuel, where Michal's stories are embedded, is about political power manifested through marriage and sexual access, which is far and wide acceptable in the patriarchal society of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament.[5]

Numerous studies have already been undertaken about Michal. From historical-critical studies that delve into the historical reconstruction of the person of Michal,[6] to literary-theological-cultural studies that explore the effects of Michal on the readers of the Bible.[7] In these studies, Michal has always been put in relation to

[2] See 1 Sam. 14:49; 18:20, 27–28; 19:11–13; 19:17; 25:44; 2 Sam. 3:13–14; 6:16, 20–21, 23; and 1 Chr. 15:29.

[3] See 1 Sam. 14:49; 18:20, 27–28; 2 Sam 3: 14; 6:16, 20, 23; and 1 Chr. 15:29.

[4] See 1 Sam. 19:11; 2 Sam. 3:13.

[5] See J. Kessler, "Sexuality and Politics: The Motif of the Displaced Husband in the Books of Samuel," *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 62 (2000): 416–417.

[6] See A. Anderson, 2 *Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary 11 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989); W. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1990); P. Miscall, 1 *Samuel: A Literary Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986); K. McCarter, I *Samuel*, Anchor Bible 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980); K. McCarter, II *Samuel*, Anchor Bible 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984).

[7] See C. Camp, "The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model of Women in Early Israel?" CBQ 43 (1981): 14–29; P. Hiebert, "'Whence Shall Help Come to Me? The Biblical Widow,'" in P. Day, ed., *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 125–41; N. Jay, "Sacrifice as Remedy for Having Been Born of Woman," in C. Atkinson, et al., eds., *Immaculate and Powerful:*

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David and the monarchy. During the past decades, moreover, gender studies and feminist criticism contribute to a more holistic approach to Michal studies.[8] While drawing on insights from these scholars, this article discusses the relevance and implications of Michal's character for contemporary Philippine society. It analyzes Michal's character in the books of Samuel using narrative criticism, focusing on key elements such as character, point of view, and plot.[9] Additionally, applying feminist hermeneutical principles[10]—including a hermeneutics of experience, domination and social location, suspicion, critical evaluation, creative imagination, remembering and reconstruction, and transformative action for change—allows for a deeper understanding

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The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality, Harvard Women's Studies in Religion Series (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 283–309.

[8] See D. J. A. Clines and T. C. Eskenazi, eds., *Telling Queen Michal's Story,* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 119 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1991); J. C. Exum, "Michal: The Whole Story," in *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)Versions of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press, 1993); D. Bodi, *The Michal Affair: From Zimri-Lim to the Rabbis* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2005); T. Ilan, "A Secular, Jewish, Feminist Look at the Bible," in S. Schroer and S. Bietenhard, eds., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation,* JSOT Sup 374 (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 94–102.

[9] See R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible,* JSOT 70 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989); A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative,* Bible and Literature Series 9 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983); M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); D. M. Gunn, "Narrative Criticism," in S. R. Haynes and S. L. McKenzie, eds., *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 175.

[10] See M. Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); H. A. Choi and K. P. Darr, eds., *Engaging the Bible: Critical Readings from Contemporary Women* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); A. Y. Collins, ed., *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship,* Biblical Scholarship in North America 10 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985); E. S. Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon press, 1992).

of how Michal's story can inform contemporary Filipino society, a perspective worth exploring.

This article argues that the biblical portrayal of Michal, when analyzed through narrative criticism and feminist hermeneutics, reveals a pattern of manipulation and victimization of women within patriarchal structures, a pattern that resonates with contemporary challenges faced by women, particularly in the Philippines, highlighting the need for societal transformation and gender equality.

The Biblical Michal

We begin by examining Michal's character as she appears in various passages in the books of Samuel, so we can gain insight into her attitudes, roles, and values.[11] Michal's story is found in the following six texts within the books of Samuel: a) 1 Sam 14:19; b) 18:20-28; c) 19:11-17; d) 25:44; e) 2 Sam 3:12-16; and f) 6:16-23. We will now explore these texts individually and uncover the liberative aspects of Michal's character.

1 Sam 14:49

Our first text, 1 Sam 14:49, introduces the family of Saul. The immediate literary context, which begins in v. 47 and ends in v. 52, describes Saul's ongoing wars against the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zobahites, Amalekites, and Philistines. In v. 48, the text highlights how Saul rescues the Israelites from those who plundered them.

The passage also lists Saul's three sons. The first is Jonathan, whose heroic deeds are recounted on 1 Sam 13:3-4, 16; 14:1-18, 24-30, 43-45, revealing his strength and resolve, traits he shares with his father, Saul. Jonathan was killed in a battle against the Philistines (cf. 1 Sam 31:2, 6; 1 Chr 10:2; 2 Sam 21:12-14) and was buried by the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead (1 Sam 31:11-13). Another son, Ishvi, is mentioned

[11] Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical texts will be taken from the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV).

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nowhere else in the Bible except here, leading to conjecture, based on 1 Sam 31:2, that Ishvi and Abinadab might be the same person. Finally, Malchishua, a third son, is mentioned in 1 Sam 31:2, 1 Chr 8:33; 9:39; and 10:2—all about the battles involving their father Saul.

Additionally, the text lists Saul's two daughters: Merab and Michal. Merab was betrothed to David by Saul in 1 Sam 18:17-18 but was given to Adriel as a wife in 1 Sam 18:19. Michal became David's wife in 1 Sam 18:27 and later the wife of Paltiel in 1 Sam 25:44. Thus, this verse enumerates Saul's children: Jonathan, Ishvi, Malchishua, Merab, and Michal. The Bible provides no further information about the mother of these children, including Michal.

1 Sam 18:20-28

After being introduced as the younger daughter of Saul, Michal is revealed on Sam 18:20-28 to be in love with David. This scene is part of the larger narrative in 1 Sam 18, which is composed of five distinct episodes:[12]

a) Jonathan's covenant with David in vv. 1-5;

b) Saul's attempt to kill David in vv. 6-16;

c) Saul's offer of Merab to David in vv. 17-19;

d) Michal marries David in vv. 20-28; and

e) David's success and Saul's fear in vv. 29-30.

Michal's character is central to the fourth episode, where she is described as Saul's daughter who loved David (v. 20). Saul is pleased by Michal's love for David (v. 20). At the end of the episode, the narrator again highlights Michal's love for David (v. 28), which becomes one of the reasons for Saul's growing fear of David. Notably, in the previous episode (vv. 17-19), Saul had initially promised his eldest daughter, Merab, to David. However, when the time came for Merab to be

[12] See W. Brueggemann, "Narrative Coherence and Theological Intentionality in 1 Samuel 18," *CBQ* 55 (1983): 226.

given to David, she was instead given to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife (v. 19).

Walter Brueggemann argues that Michal's love, mentioned twice in this episode (v. 20, v. 28), shapes the entire chapter.[13] It is the only instance in the Bible where a woman is explicitly described as loving a man. Michal's love (**'āhēb**) stems from her emotions, a term often used to describe relationships between human beings (e.g., the love of a father for his son in Gen 22:2; Jacob and Joseph in Gen 37:3; Samson and Delilah in Judg 14:16; 16:15; Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi in Ruth 4:15; Elkanah and his wife Hannah in 1 Sam 1:5; Rebekah and her son Jacob in Gen 25:28, etc.). The term reappears in v. 22, where Saul's servants are instructed to tell David, "See, the king is delighted with you, and all his servants love you; now then, become the king's son-in-law."[14]

In 1 Sam 18:20, the word "love", as D. Bodi suggests, may carry a political overtone, representing political loyalty, partisanship, or even a diplomatic or commercial contract.[15] This political dimension is evident earlier in the narrative when Jonathan made a covenant with David in verse 3: "Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul," and in verse 16, where "all Israel and Judah loved David; for it was he who marched out and came in leading them." Thus, David becomes a dangerous political rival to Saul (cf. 1

[13] See Brueggemann, "Narrative Coherence and Theological Intentionality," 231.

[14] See Wallis, "'āhēb," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, 101–18.

[15] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, 13. The political connotation of the term 'love' is well attested both in the Bible and in ancient Near Eastern literature. Haldar ("'āhēb," TDOT 1: 101) notes:

"The Amarna letters state that princes 'love' each other, that the vassals 'love' the pharaoh and that the pharaoh 'loves' the subjects, and that the subjects should 'love' their king. This love includes primarily loyalty, fidelity, and obedience."

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Sam 18:15, 28). Bodi thinks that Saul intends to use Michal's love for David as a means to ensnare David.[16] He notes:

> Michal's tragic love for David is born in the shadow of the political meaning of the term "love." Despite the rising tensions and occasional outright animosity between the two men, Saul's daughter loves her father's rival. The love Michal feels will be sacrificed by her father, who exploits it to eliminate his political adversary. The happiness of his daughter is of little consequence to Saul. She is trapped in their power struggle.[17]

Regrettably, there is no mention of David's love for Michal in this narrative.[18] In v. 26, when Saul's servants report Saul's offer for David to marry Michal, David is "well pleased to be the king's son-in-law." It seems that David is primarily interested in the status of being Saul's son-in-law and will do whatever it takes to achieve this. However, what he lacks in his relationship with Michal is "love."[19]

1 Sam 19:11-17

This passage illustrates how Michal expresses her love for David. The pericope can be seen as part of the episode in which Saul attempts to kill David, described in 1 Sam 19. In this chapter, Saul openly announces his intent to kill David to "his son Jonathan and to all his servants" (v.1). The preceding narrative outlines Saul's indirect attempts to kill David: first, by the hand of the Philistines (1 Sam 18:17; 21; 25), and second, through marrying Michal to David (1 Sam 18:20).[20] The main character in this scene is Michal, who by this time is already

[16] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, 13.

[17] Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, 12.

[18] L. Klein, "Michal, the Barren Wife," in *Samuel and Kings: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. A. Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 37.

[19] Lawton, "1 Samuel 18," 425.

[20] D. T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel,* New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdsman, 2007), 489–526. He further outlines 1 Sam. 19 as follows:

married to David. To understand Michal's significant role in this scene, the episode may be outlined as follows:[21]

a. Michal helps David to escape (vv. 11-13)

After learning that David has returned home, Saul sends messengers to watch over him and kill him in the morning. This marks Saul's third attempt to kill David, but this time, Michal intervenes. She saves her husband's life by letting him down through a window (v. 12, cf. Josh 2:15). J. Cheryl Exum suggests that Michal's actions are an illustration of her love for David.[22] A. Laffy believes that Michal used her prudence, courage, and cunning to save David from Saul's pursuit and certain death. [23]

Verse 13 shows how Michal uses a teraphim to buy time for David's escape.[24] She "laid it on the bed, put a net of goats' hair on its head,

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Scene 1: "Saul Orders That David Be Killed" (vv. 1–7) illustrates the relation of David and Saul which is now in crisis. Jonathan remains loyal to David by protecting him from his father's fatal order. Hence, he serves as intermediary between David and Saul.

Scene 2: "David's Victory Over the Philistines" (v. 8) narrates David's war against the Philistines.

Scene 3: "Saul's Second Attack on David" (vv. 9–10) records Saul's second attempt at stabbing David. The first attempt is recorded in 18:10–11. Unlike in 18:10-11, 19:10 uses the verbs *nās* and *wayyimmālēt* (fled and escaped) which indicate that David would now be cautious of his father-in-law's cruel intention of him.

Scene 4: "David Escapes from Saul" (vv. 11–24) may be taken as a direct sequel of David's *nās* and *wayyimmālēt* in v. 10.

[21] See D. T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel,* 493–98.

[22] See J. C. Exum, "Michal at the Window, Michal in the Movies," in *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women*, ed. J. C. Exum (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1996), 57.

[23] See A. Laffy, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 109–10.

[24] See H. W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), 166.

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and covered it with clothes" (v. 13). Bodi interprets this act as that of a devoted wife who, in her commitment to her husband,[25] renounces her allegiance to her father. Michal is portrayed as a courageous and resourceful woman willing to take risks to ensure David's safety.[26]

b. Michal deceives Saul (vv. 14-17)

For the second time, Saul sends messengers with the specific instruction to kill David in the morning (v. 11). Michal tells the messengers that David is sick (v. 14). Saul, assuming David is resting in bed, instructs his messengers to find him, but they instead discover the teraphim. Realizing that his daughter has deceived him, Saul, for the first time, speaks directly to Michal in v. 17: 'Why have you deceived me like this, and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?' Michal's deception, aided by the teraphim, has clearly offended Saul.[27]

I believe that Michal can be seen as a forceful initiator of action in 1 Sam 19:11-17. She demonstrates her love for David through her words and actions during a critical moment when her beloved's life is threatened by her father. Michal is portrayed as an energetic and cunning wife who comes to her husband's aid. David Clines remarks: "Michal takes an utterly reckless action, breaking family loyalties and risking Saul's unpredictable anger, just because she is in love... she is loyal to David."[28] John Lees adds: "Michal was evidently a woman of unusual strength of mind and decisiveness of character. She manifested

[25] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, 26.

[26] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, 26. Bodi also conjectures that the use of these household idols might indicate that the house of Saul was implicated in idolatry.

[27] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, 27–30. Bodi puts in the striking resemblance to the *teraphim* episode between Laban and Rachel in Gen. 31:32. Both Rachel and Michal were the youngest daughters; both Laban and Saul were tricked; both events occurred during flight. This allusion may foreshadow a fatality shared by Rachel and Michal—Rachel having become the object of Jacob's unwitting curse because of theft. See also R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* 120.

[28] D. J. A. Clines, "The Story of Michal, Wife of David, in its Sequential Unfolding," in *Telling Queen Michal's Story: An Experiment in Comparative*

her love in an age when it was almost unheard of for a woman to take the initiative in such matters. For the sake of the man she loved, she braved her father's wrath and risked her own life."[29] In summary, Michal's love drives her to choose her husband over her father, not out of hatred for Saul, but out of a desire to save David from her father's selfish motivations.

1 Sam 25:44

Although Michal betrays her father by helping David escape, she remains obedient to him. Verse 44, at the end of 1 Sam 25, recounts that Saul gave Michal to Palti, a man from Gallim in the northern part of Israel (cf. Isa 10:30).[30] Such a decision, according to Bodi, appears to be politically motivated.[31] Saul likely recognized that David's political influence had grown through his marriages to Abigail and Ahinoam. Thus, Michal is seemingly used as a pawn in the political struggle between David and Saul, becoming a victim of her father's ambition to bolster his own position.[32] Unfortunately, Michal remains silent in this text, as does her new husband, Palti.[33]

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*Interpretation,*eds., D. J. A. Clines and T. C. Eskenazi, JSOTSup 119 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1991), 131.

[29] J. Lees, "Michal," *BibleWorks*, Version 8 (2009).

[30] See J. Levenson and B. Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," JBL 99 (1980): 507–18. After recounting the story of David and Nabal in vv. 1–39, the narrator presents an account of David's wives in vv. 40–44—the immediate context of v. 44. David takes Abigail as his wife, along with Ahinoam of Jezreel (cf. 2 Sam. 3:2–5; 5:13–16). By marrying both, David strengthens his political influence in Israel.

[31] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair,* 34.

[32] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair,* 34.

[33] The name Paltiel is from Hebrew *palat-el* which literally means "because God (*El*)." The Rabbis attest that Paltiel was saved (*niflat*) from sin, and did not touch Michal. A legend was told that "Paltiel placed his sword between them and said: 'Whoever engages in this [intercourse] shall be stabbed by this sword.'" Paltiel overcame his sexual urge to such an extent that he was regarded as a woman,

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M. L. del Mastro suggests that Palti, the son of Laish, was a kind man who treated Michal with great reverence, as though she were a "High Queen."[34] He is said to have spoiled and treated her "like a cross between a beloved child and a goddess."[35] Despite living together as a married couple, the Midrash reports that they did not engage in intercourse because Michal remained faithful to David.[36] Here we can describe Michal as an obedient woman, showing her capacity to comply with her father's decisions despite the circumstances.

2 Sam 3:12-16

This scene seems to depict a tense love triangle involving Michal, David, and Paltiel. The context is Abner's decision to ally with David, prompting him to send messengers to David with the proposal. In verse 13, David agrees to make a covenant with Abner, but on one condition: that Abner bring 'Michal, daughter of Saul' with him. The literary structure of this passage highlights Michal's importance to David. Bodi notes that the verse forms a chiasmus, with a single element at the center, emphasizing that this is the focal point of the speech.[37] David says to Abner, "Good; I will make a covenant with you; but one thing I require of you; that is,

A *lēʾmōr lōʾ-tirʾê ʾet-pānay*

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and not a man, as is learned in 2 Sam. 3:16: "*Ishah* [that could be understood either as "her husband" or "a woman"] walked with her"—he became for her as a woman. Proverbs 31:29 alludes the phrase 'Woman of Valor' to Paltiel. "[Many women have done well,] but you surpass them all" (BT *Sanhedrin* 19b–20a). See T. Kadari, "Michal, daughter of Saul: Midrash and Aggadah," *Jewish Women's Archive*, https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/michal-daughter-of-saul-midrash-and-aggadah (accessed 11 March 2024).

[34] See M. L del Mastro, *All the Women of the Bible* (New York: Castle Books, 2004), 313.

[35] See M. L. del Mastro, *All the Women of the Bible,* 313.

[36] See Tamar Kadari, "Michal, daughter of Saul: Midrash and Aggadah."

[37] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair,* 34.

B *kî ʾim-lipnê hĕbîʾăkā*

C *ʾēt mîkal bat-šāʾûl*

B′ *bəbōʾăkā*

A′ *lirʾôt ʾet-pānāy*

The repetition of key phrases, *ʾet-pānay* in A and A', and *ăkā* in B and B', underscores David's focus on Michal. Notably, David refers to her as "daughter of Saul" when speaking to Abner, which Clines interprets as reducing Michal to a mere bargaining chip in a business arrangement between David and Abner.[38] In v. 14, David sends messengers to Ishbaal, demanding, "Give me my wife Michal." The use of "my wife" here reflects a more emotive tone. While David acknowledges Michal as his wife, he simultaneously implies that Ishbaal bears responsibility for her current situation with Paltiel (v. 15).

A very emotional Paltiel enters the scene in v. 16. When Ishbaal took Michal from him, Paltiel followed her, "weeping as he walked behind her all the way to Bahurim." J. Kessler suggests that Paltiel was deeply attached to Michal,[39] to the point of experiencing painful humiliation, especially when Abner sarcastically ordered him, "Go back home!" His profound love for Michal is evident as he never harmed her and instead followed her in tears when Abner took Michal from him to return her to David.[40]

Despite Paltiel's love, Michal, who was deeply in love with David, chose to return to him. Though vv. 12-16 do not detail her feelings or perspective, it can be inferred that her decision to follow Ishbaal signifies her enduring love for David over Paltiel. By choosing David, Michal acknowledges that he is still her husband, despite the selfishness

[38] Clines, "The Story of Michal, Wife of David, in Its Sequential Unfolding," 131ff.

[39] See Kessler, "Sexuality and Politics: The Motif of the Displaced Husband in the Books of Samuel," 416–17.

[40] See Kessler, "Sexuality and Politics, 314.

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of his demand. Nonetheless, in this particular passage, Michal is portrayed as a woman whose love for her husband surpasses her obedience to her father. Even though David's motives (vv. 13-14) may have dehumanized her, serving his path to the throne, Michal remains loyal to him. [41]

2 Sam 6:16-23

This final story presents yet another image of Michal. While in the previous passages, she is portrayed as a loving and loyal wife, this scene portrays her as valorous and courageous, confidently correcting her husband with a sarcastic tone. The text in 2 Sam 6:16-23 is part of the larger narrative in vv. 1-23, which tells the story of David transferring the Ark to Jerusalem.[42] Verse 16 introduces Michal, identified as the daughter of Saul, watching the procession from a window (***nšəqəpâ bəʿad haḥallôn***). She observes King David "leaping and dancing before the Lord (***lipnê yhwh***)." Her reaction is immediate: "She despised him in her heart (***wttibez lô bəlibbāh***)." The text does not explicitly state why she despised him, but while David is celebrating, Michal seems to be in stark contrast, entering the scene as a keen observer. [43]

Michal's "looking out of the window" can be interpreted in two ways. First, according to Bodi, the expression ***bəʿad haḥallôn***, which also appears in 1 Sam 19:12 (cf. 1 Chr 15:29), is "comparable to other openings like the door, or the opening of the womb. The window represents a frontier between two spaces: the obscure and the luminous, the interior and the exterior, the included and the excluded. …this symbolizes the alternative between life and death."[44] At this point in her life, Michal may have already foreseen what her life would be like

[41] See Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel,* 259; see also Peterson, *First and Second Samuel,* 150.

[42] See Bowman, "The Fortune of King David/The Fate of Queen Michal," 113.

[43] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair,* 51.

[44] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair,* 51.

with the new king of Israel as her husband. Second, Michal's 'looking out of the window' might evoke memories of Sisera's mother, who waited in vain for her son, who died in battle (Judg 5:28).[45] She became a 'son-less mother,' neglected by those who did not inform her of her son's fate. Similarly, Michal at the window appears as a "practically husbandless, ever-waiting, and neglected wife." [46]

In v. 20, Michal appears cold toward David. Unlike the warm reception David receives from the people, he is met with sarcasm at home. Michal, once again identified as the daughter of Saul, addresses David with scorn: "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" Her statement seems to criticize David's behavior as inappropriate. Perhaps Michal was deeply concerned about David's identity as the newly anointed king of Israel (2 Sam 5:1-25), or perhaps her relationship with David had brought her little joy.

If her concern was indeed about David's identity, there seems to be an issue of honor and shame in this confrontation (vv. 20-22). To Michal, David, as king, should preserve his "honor." Now that he is the king of Israel, Michal likely wanted to ensure that propriety was maintained. Her courage in correcting the king is impressive. However, on one hand, for David, what Michal viewed as a contemptible act was, in fact, an act of humble acceptance of his role as king of Israel in service to Yahweh (vv. 21-22).[47] On the other hand, if her relationship

[45] See Bodi, *The Michal Affair,* 53.

[46] See Clines, "The Story of Michal: Wife of David, in its Sequential Unfolding," 138. He argues that Michal's disgust has a sexual overtone. Clines writes, "She (Michal) cannot bear to see a man she has loved to flaunt himself as sexually available—presumably, that is, to anyone but her. His self-exposure earns the acclaim of the bystanders, but is in fact a humiliation to him, if only he could recognize the fact; and it is a humiliation to her as well, because it proclaims David's indifference in matters of sexual loyalty."

[47] See Clines, "The Story of Michal: Wife of David, in Its Sequential Unfolding," 138. However, Bodi states, "Whatever love Michal once felt for

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with David brought her little or no joy, this could explain the narrator's conclusion in v. 23: "And Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no child to the day of her death."[48]

Synthesis: Michal's Character Development

Love, Loyalty, Betrayal, and Tragedy

We have explored that Michal's story, which begins in 1 Sam 14:49 with her introduction as one of Saul's daughters, unfolds to us a narrative of love, loyalty, betrayal, and, ultimately, tragedy. As presented above, she falls in love with David, a love recognized by her father, Saul, in 1 Sam 18:20-28. This love compels her to save David's life in 1 Sam 19:11-17, even going so far as to take the reckless step of aiding his escape, thereby risking Saul's unpredictable wrath. Despite being given to another man, Palti, by her father in 1 Sam 25:44, Michal is eventually returned to David in 2 Sam 3:12-16, reaffirming her loyalty to him—a central theme of her story. [49] However, her love seems to be manipulated for political gain by the men around her. While Michal's motivations are personal, Saul and David, unfortunately, are driven by ambition. Her story concludes on a tragic note: after a confrontation

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him is now replaced by contempt and disdain. As king, David does not fulfill Michal's expectations. Like her father before her, she acts upon her feelings and expresses them to David. Although she could not control the previously portrayed situations in her relationship with David, she does have a measure of control in this one. Her estrangement from David is in part the result of her own actions and on her initiative. This then is her only protest against victimization by the fearful vengeance of her father, by the manipulative opportunism of her husband, and finally by the providential prerogative of her God." See Bodi, *The Michal Affair,* 55.

[48] Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 88. Exum argues that Michal might possibly refuse to have sexual relations with David. See also J. L. Ska, SJ, *Our Fathers Have Told Us,* Subsidia Biblica 13 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1990), 87.

[49] See Clines, "The Story of Michal: Wife of David, in Its Sequential Unfolding," 138.

with David in 2 Sam 6:16-23, she bears no children. Such a consequence seems to be a punishment on the part of Michal.

From a narrative criticism perspective, Michal is described as a loving and loyal woman who ultimately becomes a victim of betrayal. Both her father, Saul, and her husband, David, exploit her love to achieve their own ends—Saul to ensnare David, and David to secure his path to kingship. Despite her virtues, Michal is treated as property, a victim, and a pawn in their ambitions. In the words of T. Ilan, "… Michal is faced with an eternity of frustrated love and sexual abuse. . . . She is trapped within the machinations of the patriarchal system. . . . Michal was forced into a marriage her father chose for her. She was miserable."[50]

Her story reveals the dark side of ambition within a ruling family, where personal relationships are sacrificed for political expediency. The love that initially defined Michal's actions is twisted into a source of suffering, highlighting the destructive power of unchecked ambition and the corrosive effects of hatred within a family. She cannot but embrace the pain and accept the consequences of her actions and decisions. Such an act to embrace the pain has profound value. Brueggemann explains,

> By embracing the pain is meant the full acknowledgement of and experience of pain and the capacity and willingness to make that pain a substantive part of Israel's faith-conversation with its God. Such an act of embrace means to articulate the pain fully, to insist on God's reception of the speech and the pain, and to wait hopefully for God's resolution.[51]

By acknowledging and experiencing her suffering, Michal engages in a powerful act of faith, demanding God's attention and seeking resolution. This act of embracing pain becomes a form of resistance, a testament to her enduring spirit even in the face of betrayal and manipulation.

[50] Ilan, "A Secular, Jewish, Feminist Look at the Bible," 100–101.

[51] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 25.

This story of Michal revolves around love and ambition, love and hatred, and familial strife resonates in our society. Thus, the biblical Michal continues to exist in our midst where love is exploited, and where its true meaning is tragically lost. They are the "new Michals" who deserve our recognition.

The Contemporary Michal

Using Brueggemann's terminology, many women today have to embrace the pain[52] as they face treatment similar to Michal's—seen as property, victims of betrayal, and considered inferior to men. Surely, this pain that hurts the marginalized, especially women, does not reflect God's heart or design. Hence, Michal's story can stand as a metaphor that should inspire liberation for every woman. Her love and loyalty to her husband serve as a powerful example for every biblical reader, and God's believer as well, to "hope, daring to assert that somehow there is another arrangement of life; somewhere there is a listener who will be more attentive and more powerful and more faithful than the perpetrators of hurt are in their enormous power and in their massive infidelity."[53]

Strikingly, Pope Francis noted that women see things with different eyes than men, asking questions that men often cannot understand.[54] He also called women "the most beautiful thing God has made" and emphasized that "theology cannot be done without this feminine touch."[55] Michal's character is now reflected in the lives of the overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), and of women who seek justice and long for fidelity. Let us now hear some of their stories and see how they connect with the biblical Michal.

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[52] Emphasis mine.

[53] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text,* 51.

[54] See Pope Francis, "Eyes That Are Cleansed by Tears: Meeting with Young People at the University of Santo Tomas," 18 January 2015, *L'Osservatore Romano,* Weekly Edition in English, no. 4 (January 23, 2015): 14–15.

[55] See Pope Francis, "Eyes That Are Cleansed by Tears."

Michal's Sacrifice Reflected in the Lives of OFWs

In 1988, Pope John Paul II wrote that "A woman's dignity is closely connected with the love she receives by the very reason of her femininity; it is likewise connected with the love she gives in return."[56] While these words are beautifully expressed, they are often misunderstood. In the Philippines, where poverty remains a significant issue, many women sacrifice their own needs to support their families, often seeking better opportunities abroad out of love.[57] Unfortunately, this love is sometimes exploited.

A recent study conducted by J. Li highlighted the paradoxical state of affairs for women in the Philippines. While on one hand, Filipino women are among the most advanced globally in terms of academic, professional, political, and legal achievements, it is unfortunate, on the other hand that they face significant challenges, including marital abuse, economic hardships, employment discrimination, exploitation as migrant workers and in prostitution, and displacement due to ongoing conflicts in affected regions.[58]

An encounter with an OFW from Kuwait who expressed her frustration that her husband only contacts her to request for money, treating her more as a source of income than as a partner confirms the foregoing.[59] Despite her frustration towards her husband, her

[56] John Paul II, *Mulieres Dignitatem,* nos. 29–30.

[57] See Phillip B. Gresham and Marieke Smit, "Gender and Remittances: The Case of the Philippines" (paper submitted to the Oxfam Novib Expert Meeting on Gender and Remittances, The Hague, Netherlands, September 29, 2011); Katleen Keith Capol et al., "Home Alone: Exploring the Emotional Challenges on Children of Overseas Filipino Workers," *Florence: Interdisciplinary Journal of Health and Sustainability* 2, no. 1 (May 24, 2024): 32–36, https://doi.org/10.56183/s3xh5c42.

[58] See J. Li, "A History of Feminism and Gender Equality in the Modern," *EDUCATUM Journal of Social Sciences* 8, no.1 (2022), 42.

[59] Overseas Filipino Worker, interview by author, Iloilo City: Philippines, July 18, 2024.

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devotion to providing for her family is unwavering. This woman can be seen as a contemporary Michal in Philippine society—loving, caring, and self-sacrificing. However, her situation highlights the need for our government and society to ensure the promotion of female employment, the integration of gender perspectives into labor laws, and the protection of Filipino women from exploitation. Although Philippine government has sufficient laws and policy on these matters, in the 2021 analysis of Philippine Legislation conducted by International Development Law Organization (IDLO) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), much needs to be done in repealing, revising or amending existing laws or formulating new ones so they should continue to be responsive to the lived experiences of women.[60] As Pope Francis emphasized, "the legitimate rights of women must be respected, based on the firm conviction that men and women are equal in dignity."[61]

Michal's Courage Emulated by Women Seeking Justice

Many men and women today are actively working to overcome violence against women. Violence against them becomes a pervasive problem in the Philippines. Oftentimes, they belong to a structurally weaker position in terms of education, occupation, and economy in a gender-biased social and cultural construction. They experience violence, which may not only be physical in nature, but also sexual, psychological, and economic.

In the Philippines, the recent publication "Six Filipino Women for Justice" offers a profound exploration of resilience and the quest for equity, featuring six Filipino women at the forefront of challenging

[60] See International Development Law Organization (IDLO) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), "Strengthening Gender Equality in Law: An Analysis of Philippine Legislation," https://www.idlo.int/sites/default/files/pdfs/publications/philippines_-_strengthening_gender_equality.pdf (accessed 28 July 2024), 89.

[61] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 104.

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the nation's flawed judicial landscape, especially from 2016-2022 during the administration of former president Rodrigo Duterte.[62] The first story, "Continuing Journey to Freedom," details the unjust persecution of former senator Leila de Lima, who stayed behind bars for years without due process.[63] The second highlights Leni Robredo's dedicated service to the most vulnerable in society without counting the cost.[64] The third covers M. Ressa's relentless pursuit of truth and justice, especially against disinformation and the social media giants, which ultimately earned her a Nobel Peace Prize.[65] The fourth focuses on Risa Hontiveros, a politician and activist, who has been a steadfast opposition figure in public office.[66] The fifth recounts Conchita Carpio-Morales's formidable role in defending justice as a former Supreme Court associate justice and ombudsman.[67] The final story celebrates Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB, a feminist theologian and activist who founded the Institute of Women's Studies at St. Scholastica's College.[68]

[62] See Mylene D Hega, Veronica C Alporha, and Meggan S Evangelista, "Feminism and the Women's Movement in the Philippines: Struggles, Advances, and Challenges" (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2017); Rowena Laguilles-Timog, "Populism, Patriarchy, Protest: Feminist Issues, Responses, and Actors During the First Three Years of the Duterte Administration," *Review of Women's Studies* 30 (December 1, 2020): 87–106; Maria Tanyag, "A Murderous Plague: State Hypermasculinity, COVID-19, and Atrocity Prevention in the Philippines," *Global Responsibility to Protect* 14, no. 4 (2022): 432–61, https://doi.org/10.1163/1875984X-20220014.

[63] See A. D. Maramba, *Six Filipino Women for Justice* (Philippines: San Anselmo Press, 2024), 15–27.

[64] See Maramba, *Six Filipino Women for Justice,* 28–40.

[65] See Maramba, *Six Filipino Women for Justice,* 41–55.

[66] See Maramba, *Six Filipino Women for Justice,* 56–70.

[67] See Maramba, *Six Filipino Women for Justice,* 71–85.

[68] See Maramba, *Six Filipino Women for Justice,* 86–100.

These women have raised their voices to emphasize the ongoing subjugation and repression of women in the last eight years.[69] They strongly show how even amidst these prejudices, women are powerful instruments of justice and liberation.

Michal's Longing for Fidelity in the Hearts of Contemporary Wives

Fidelity in marriage is increasingly at risk. Studies show that men are significantly more likely to cheat on their partners, often engaging in infidelity that is more sexual in nature. They report higher rates of extramarital affairs than women.[70] While Filipinos generally disapprove of extramarital relations due to their disruptive impact on marriage, infidelity remains a common cause of marital conflict, causing immense distress both to the wife and to the entire family.[71]

One reason some men become unfaithful is the inability of their wives to bear children. When a husband discovers that his wife cannot give him a biological child, he may seek out another woman to fulfill his desire for a child "of his own flesh."[72]

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[69] See E. Rifareal and L. Bautista, *And She said No! Human Rights, Women's Identities, and Struggles* (Quezon City: National Council of Churches in the Philippines, 1990), vii. They wrote that in the Philippines, there is no such thing as women's rights. They believed that "The rights of women must be seen as integral to the corpus of basic and fundamental human rights. The struggle of women should be the struggle of all humanity. The sufferings of women are linked to the sufferings of humanity as a whole."

[70] See A. C. S. Ong, et al., "Gender, Adult Attachment Styles, and the Tendency to Commit Dating Infidelity: A Mixed Methods Study," *Philippine Journal of Psychology* 47, no.1 (2014): 91.

[71] B. Medina, "Issues Relating to Filipino Marriage and Family," in *The Filipino Family: A Spectrum of Views and Issues,* ed. A. Perez (Quezon City: UP Press, 1995), 31.

[72] Conversely, there are also tendencies among infecund men to commit infidelity. See Jeofrey Abalos, "Determinants of Men's Extramarital Sexual

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An encounter with Mrs. A, a 57-year-old widow, who was married to Mr. B several years ago.[73] After marriage, they discovered that due to her age, Mrs. A could no longer bear children, so they decided to legally adopt a boy. However, Mr. B was not content with an adopted child; he wanted a child of his own flesh and blood. Secretly, he began an extramarital affair with a young woman he met at work. Several months later, Mrs. A noticed that Mr. B frequently did not come home, and eventually, she discovered that he had impregnated his colleague. "It was a devastating situation. I wanted to kill them both," she recounted.

"I made a decision at last," she continued. "I told him to choose between me and the young woman. If he chose me, he had to cut all ties with her. If he chose her, he had to forget me and our child entirely." Unfortunately, Mr. B chose the young woman.

A few years later, Mr. B was paralyzed in an accident. In the hospital, none of his documents could be approved without the signature of his legal wife. "I didn't know what I felt at that moment," Mrs. A recalled. "I didn't want to go, but something pushed me to visit him in the hospital," she added. "Was it love?" she wondered.

Months later, Mr. B passed away. Mrs. A took care of the bills, burial, and other arrangements. Reflecting on her life as a wife, she realized that despite the heartache, she had managed to stand up and reclaim her dignity as a person and a wife. "He came to me on the first day of our marriage, but left me alone. He returned to me at the end, but then left me again for eternity. So where is God?" she lamented.

Mrs. A represents a modern-day Michal, yearning for a loving and faithful husband who would truly honor her as his wife. Although she could not bear a child of her own, she embraced and loved her adopted child, a decision in line with the legal provisions in the Philippines. However, she was deprived of the opportunity to experience her husband fulfilling the covenantal promise they made during marriage

Experience in the Philippines," *Philippine Population Review* 10 (2011): 51–74, especially 71.

[73] Mrs. A, interview by the author, Iloilo City, Philippines, March 15, 2024.

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to be true to each other in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, and to love and honor each other all the days of their lives.[74] The Catholic Church teaches:

> The family, which is founded and given life by love, is a community of persons: husband and wife, parents and children, relatives. Its first task is to live with fidelity, the reality of communion, in a constant effort to develop an authentic community of persons. The first communion is the one which is established and develops between husband and wife: by virtue of the covenant of married life, the man and woman 'are no longer two but one flesh,' and they are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving.[75]

In the New Testament, the spousal love between man and woman is compared to the mystery of Christ and his Church. In the deutero-Pauline epistle to the Ephesians, it is written: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church" (Eph 5:25-30). This deutero-Pauline comparison offers perfect clarity about what is decisive for every wife in the eyes of God. Pope Francis speaks of the "impressive examples of daily heroism" shown by wives in defending and protecting their vulnerable families.[76]

Synthesis: Michal's Enduring Legacy in Contemporary Women

As we have seen, Michal's narrative, far from being a relic of the past, resonates profoundly with some of the experiences of women today. We see echoes of her strength, vulnerability, and resilience in the lives of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), women advocating

[74] See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony,* nos. 62–63.

[75] John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), no. 18.

[76] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium,* no. 212.

for justice, and wives yearning for faithful partnerships. Like Michal, these women navigate complex social and emotional landscapes, often facing manipulation and exploitation within patriarchal structures.

We considered the plight of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who, like the biblical Michal, are often treated as commodities rather than individuals. They endure prolonged separation from their families, facing loneliness, exploitation, and abuse in their pursuit of providing a better life for their loved ones. Just as Michal was used as a political pawn, these women are often exploited for economic gain, their sacrifices mirroring Michal's own forced choices and the profound emotional toll they exact. Their experiences highlight the ongoing struggle against patriarchal systems that prioritize economic or political objectives over the well-being and dignity of women.

We have highlighted how Michal's defiance of her father, Saul, to save David demonstrates her courage and commitment to justice. This same spirit is embodied by women who tirelessly advocate for the oppressed and marginalized in contemporary society. Like Michal, they challenge the status quo, risking personal safety and social ostracism to fight for a more equitable world. Their unwavering pursuit of justice echoes Michal's own, a courage born of deep conviction and a desire for a world free from oppression.

It is interesting to note that Michal's longing for a genuine connection with David, despite his political ambitions and personal failings, speaks to the universal desire for faithful and loving partnerships. This longing is mirrored in the lives of wives who yearn for husbands who are both present and committed. Like Michal, they navigate the complexities of relationships, often facing betrayal, neglect, or emotional distance. Their stories remind us that the struggle for mutual respect and affection within intimate relationships remains a poignant and enduring aspect of the human experience.

It is convincing to believe that the above-mentioned realities affecting the marginalized, especially women, are not abstract concepts. As in the Philippines, we encounter "new Michals" in our neighborhoods, churches, and workplaces. They can be the mothers

who sacrifice everything for their children, the activists who risk their lives for social change, and the wives who persevere in the face of marital challenges. By recognizing their struggles and celebrating their courage, we honor Michal's legacy and acknowledge the enduring power of her story in our lives.

Michal's story is not merely a biblical narrative or an experience of every woman in the neighborhood. More importantly, as a believer, her story is a call to action. As such, it challenges us to confront the ongoing injustices faced by women and to work towards building a society where women are valued, respected, and empowered. This task entails that by embracing biblical Michal's courage and resilience, we can strive to create a world where the "new Michals" among us are not victims of manipulation and exploitation, but agents of change and architects of a more just and equitable future.[77]

Conclusion

In this essay, we have pieced together the fragmented story of Michal in the Bible, found in 1 Sam 14:49; 18:20-28; 19:11-17; 25:44; 2 Sam 3:12-16; and 6:16-23. We have highlighted that Michal is the daughter of Saul and the wife of David, both of whom were kings during the early period of the Israelite monarchy. Given that she

[77] At the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, Antonio Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, underlined the need to pay attention to the vital role of women in global recovery from the health crisis. See Antonio Guterres, "Put Women and Girls at the Centre of Efforts to Recover from Covid-19," *United Nations*, April 10, 2020, https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/put-women-and-girls-centre-efforts-recover-covid-19. In the final document of the Synod on Synodality, while the ordination of women was still ruled out, the role of women in leadership in the Church, in the formation of clergy, and in decision-making was nonetheless highlighted. See Almudena Martínez-Bordiú, "The Synod on Synodality's Final Document: What You Need to Know," *ACI Africa*, October 26, 2024, https://www.aciafrica.org/index.php/news/12695/the-synod-on-synodalitys-final-document-what-you-need-to-know; and Almudena Martínez-Bordiú, "Expanded Leadership for Women in Final Synod Document," *The Tablet*, October 27, 2024, https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/expanded-leadership-for-women-in-final-synod-document/.

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was married to David, her cunning, courage, and prudence can be interpreted as signs of her love and loyalty to him. [78]

Applying feminist criticism, we have re-examined biblical Michal's story in light of contemporary experiences. In a world where marginalized women, the new Michal nowadays, are often treated as objects rather than persons, her character challenges our government and society to enact and implement laws that promote equality and justice. We need her feminine genius and dedication to help uplift the lives of the marginalized. She stands as a model of fidelity in a world where commitments are often tainted by materialism and egoism. Michal's name echoes the image of a God who is love—loyal, firm, fearless, and faithful. [79]

Feminist criticism encourages an ethically responsible interpretation of biblical texts. As believers, we are called to recover the feminine image of God in these texts, with Michal as our model:

- **By virtue of sacred yet broken personhood**, we participate in "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted" (*Gaudium et Spes* 1,1).
- **By virtue of our Christian identity**, through our baptismal vows, we actively embody God's call to be loving, compassionate, and loyal, even risking our lives for the sake of marginalized men and women.
- **By virtue of our devotion to Scripture as the Word of God**, we share our gifts and uniqueness in humble service and spiritual joy for the common good.

[78] See A. Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 108–9.

[79] The name *Michal* consists of the particle of interrogation mi, meaning "who"; ke, the common particle of comparison, meaning "like" or "as"; and El, the shorter version of Elohim, meaning "God." This means that the name Michal expresses an inquiry after the nature of God: "Who is like God?" (See Exod. 15:11; Ps 35:10).

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