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# Male-Female Equality and Male Headship

## Genesis 1-3

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Why go all the way back to the first three chapters of the Bible, if our concern is with manhood and womanhood today? Because as Genesis 1-3 go, so goes the whole Biblical debate. One way or the other, all the additional Biblical texts on manhood and womanhood must be interpreted consistently with these chapters. They lay the very foundation of Biblical manhood and womanhood.

My purpose in this essay is to demonstrate from Genesis 1-3 that both *male-female equality* and *male headship*, properly defined, were instituted by God at creation and remain permanent, beneficent aspects of human existence.

Let me define *male-female equality*:

*Man and woman are equal in the sense that they bear God's image equally.*

Let me also define *male headship*:

*In the partnership of two spiritually equal human beings, man and woman, the man bears the primary responsibility to lead the partnership in a God-glorifying direction.*

The model of headship is our Lord, the Head of the church, who gave Himself for us.<sup>1</sup> The antithesis to male headship is male domination. By male domination I mean the assertion of the man's will over the woman's will, heedless of her spiritual equality, her rights, and her value. *My essay will be completely misunderstood if the distinction between male headship and male domination is not kept in mind throughout.*

Evangelical feminism argues that God created man and woman as equals in a sense that excludes male headship. Male headship/domination (feminism acknowledges no distinction) was imposed upon Eve as a penalty for her part in the fall. It follows, in this view, that a woman's redemption in Christ releases her from the punishment of male headship.<sup>2</sup>

What, then, did God intend for our manhood and womanhood at the cre-

ation? And what did God decree as our punishment at the fall? The first two chapters of Genesis answer the first question and the third chapter answers the second.

### What God Intended at Creation

Genesis 1:26-28

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

<sup>27</sup>So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup>And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." [RSV]<sup>3</sup>

In verse 26, God announces His intention to make man. This divine fanfare, unparalleled in the creation account, sets the making of man apart as a special event. God seems almost to jeopardize His unique glory by sharing His image and rule with a mere creature. Nevertheless, such a one God now intends to create. Verse 26, then, has the force of riveting our attention on God's next creative work, the zenith of His genius and benevolence.

Verse 26 teaches the glory of man in three ways. First, God says, "Let us make man. . . ." In verse 24 God had said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures. . . ." By the sheer power of His spoken will, God had caused the living creatures to emerge from the earth "by remote control as it were."<sup>4</sup> In the creation of man, however, God Himself acted directly and personally.

Second, man was created to bear the image or likeness of God. Taking in the whole of Scripture, I think it probable that the image of God in man is the soul's personal reflection of God's righteous character. To image God is to mirror His holiness.<sup>5</sup> Other interpreters construe the image of God in a more general sense, including human rationality, conscience, creativity, relationships, and everything we are *as man*.<sup>6</sup> But however one interprets the *imago Dei*, God shared it with man alone. Man is unique, finding his identity upward in God and not downward in the animals.

The third indication of man's greatness in verse 26 is his special calling under God: ". . . and let them have dominion. . . ." Man stands between God above and the animals below as God's ruling representative. Man is the crown of creation.

In verse 27, God fulfills His purpose as declared in verse 26. In describing God's supreme creative act, Moses shifts from prose to poetry:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.<sup>7</sup>

Each of these three lines makes a point. Line one asserts the divine creation of man. *We came from God*. Line two overlaps with line one, except that it highlights the divine image in man. *We bear a resemblance to God*. Line three boldly affirms the dual sexuality of man. *We are male and female*. Nowhere else in Genesis 1 is sexuality referred to;<sup>8</sup> but human sexuality, superior to animal sexuality, merits the simple dignity given it here. Further, Moses doubtless intends to imply the equality of the sexes, for both male and female display the glory of God's image with equal brilliance: ". . . in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." This is consistent with God's intention, stated in verse 26, that both sexes should rule: ". . . and let them rule. . . ."

Finally, in verse 28, God pronounces His benediction on man. In verse 22, God spoke His blessing out over the mass of the lower creatures. But here in verse 28 we read, "God blessed them and said to them. . . ." With man alone, male and female alike without distinction, God shares an I-thou relationship. In His benediction the Creator also authorizes male and female together to carry out their mission to rule the lower creation.

To sum up: Man was created as royalty in God's world, male and female alike bearing the divine glory equally.

Most evangelical feminists would heartily agree with this interpretation of the text. Genesis 2 and 3 are more controversial. But I must challenge two points of feminist interpretation before moving on to chapter two.

First, in commenting on verse 26, Gilbert Bilezikian notes that God refers to "them," both male and female, as "man." He writes:

. . . the designation "man" is a generic term for "human beings" and . . . encompasses both male and female. This fact is made especially clear in Genesis 5:2 where the word *man* designates both male and female: "He created them male and female; at the time they were created, he blessed them and called them 'man.'" (NIV)<sup>9</sup>

This is a striking fact, indeed. It demands explanation. After all, if any of us modern people were to create a world, placing at its apex our highest creature in the dual modality of man and woman, would we use the name of only one sex as a generic term for both? I expect not. Our modern prejudices would detect a whiff of "discrimination" a mile away. But God cuts right across the grain of our peculiar sensitivities when He names the human race, both man and woman, "man."<sup>10</sup>

Why would God do such a thing? Why would Moses carefully record the fact? Surely God was wise and purposeful in this decision, as He is in every other. Surely His referring to the race as "man" tells us something about ourselves. What aspect of reality, then, might God have been pointing to by this means? Bilezikian continues:

Thus, when God declares, "Let us make man in our image . . ." the term *man* refers to both male and female. Both man and woman are God's image-bear-

ers. There is no basis in Genesis 1 for confining the image of God to males alone.<sup>11</sup>

Who, I wonder, is teaching that men only bear God's image? No contributor to this volume will be found saying that. But not only is Bilezikian's argument diverted by a non-issue, it also fails to explain what the text of verse 26 does say.

How may we understand the logic of God's decision to describe the human race as "man"? Let me suggest that it makes sense against the backdrop of male headship. Moses does not explicitly teach male headship in chapter 1; but, for that matter, neither does he explicitly teach male-female equality. We see neither the words "male-female equality" nor "male headship" here or anywhere in Genesis 1-3. What Moses does provide is a series of more or less obvious hints as to his doctrine of manhood and womanhood. The burden of Genesis 1:26-28 is male-female equality. That seems obvious—wonderfully obvious! But God's naming of the race "man" whispers male headship, which Moses will bring forward boldly in chapter two.

God did *not* name the human race "woman." If "woman" had been the more appropriate and illuminating designation, no doubt God would have used it. He does not even devise a neutral term like "persons." He called us "man," which anticipates the male headship brought out clearly in chapter two, just as "male and female" in verse 27 foreshadows marriage in chapter two. Male headship may be personally repugnant to feminists, but it does have the virtue of explaining the sacred text.

Some contend that, in principle, one ought not to refer to the human race as "man." Such terminology is unfair to half the population, they insist. I am not arguing that one must always use "man" in social and theological discourse to avoid misrepresenting the truth. I am arguing, however, that, in light of Genesis 1:26-27 and 5:1-2, one may not call this linguistic practice unjust or insensitive without impugning the wisdom and goodness of God.

My second challenge is directed at the concept of the image of God found in feminist interpretation. Aida Bensançon Spencer writes, "Male and female are together needed to reflect God's image."<sup>12</sup> That is, man and woman together as collective man, rather than the man and the woman separately as individuals, reflect the image of God. Leaving us in no doubt about her meaning, Spencer makes this claim:

There is no possibility, according to [Genesis 1:26-27], that Adam, the male, could by himself reflect the nature of God. Neither is it possible for Adam, the female, by herself to reflect God's nature. Male and female are needed to reflect God's nature.<sup>13</sup>

There is *no possibility*, in light of Genesis 1:26-27, that either the man or the woman alone could display the image of God? What, then, of Genesis 5:1 and 3?

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. . . . When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.<sup>14</sup>

God created man in His image. Later, Adam had a son in *his* image.

Implication? Adam, who was in God's image, passed the divine image (albeit flawed by sin) on to his son Seth. The divine image resided in the *individuals* Adam and Seth. So Spencer's insistence on a collective divine image in man-plus-woman is unwarranted. Genesis 1:26-27 can and should be construed to say that each individual created by God bore His image, male and female alike.

For this reason, Spencer's practical application of the *imago Dei* to church leadership lacks force. She writes:

Females as well as males are needed in positions of authority in the church to help people better to comprehend God's nature. God's image needs male and female to reflect God more fully.<sup>15</sup>

Even if it were true that the *imago Dei* would necessarily be incomplete in a single individual, it would still not follow that both men and women are needed *in positions of church authority* "to help people better to comprehend God's nature."

#### Genesis 2:18-25

There is a paradox<sup>16</sup> in the creation account. While Genesis 1 teaches the equality of the sexes as God's image-bearers and vice-rulers on the earth, Genesis 2 adds another, complex dimension to Biblical manhood and womanhood. The paradox is this: God created male and female in His image equally, but He also made the male the head and the female the helper.

For clarity's sake, let me restate my definition of male headship (not male domination):

*In the partnership of two spiritually equal human beings, man and woman, the man bears the primary responsibility to lead the partnership in a God-glorifying direction.*

That is, God calls the man, with the counsel and help of the woman, to see that the male-female partnership serves the purposes of God, not the sinful urges of either member of the partnership.

What will now emerge clearly from Genesis 2 is that male-female equality does not constitute an undifferentiated sameness. Male and female are equal as God's image-bearers. They are spiritually equal, which is quite sufficient a basis for mutual respect between the sexes. But the very fact that God created human beings in the dual modality of male and female cautions us against an unqualified equation of the two sexes. This profound and beautiful distinction, which some belittle as "a matter of mere anatomy," is not a biological triviality or accident. It is God who wants men to be men and women to be women; and He can teach us the meaning of each, if we want to be taught. We ourselves can feel intuitively the importance of distinct sexual identity when we see, for example, a transvestite. A man trying to be a woman repulses us, and rightly so. We know that this is perverse. Sexual confusion is a significant, not a slight, personal problem, because our distinct sexual identity defines who we are and why we are here and how God calls us to serve Him.

God has no intention of blurring sexual distinctness in the interests of equality in an *unqualified* sense. In fact, there are many areas of life in which God has

with a trace of perplexity and sorrow in his eyes. God says, "Son, I want you to lie down. Now close your eyes and sleep." The man falls into a deep slumber. The Creator goes to work, opening the man's side, removing a rib, closing the wound, and building the woman. There she stands, perfectly gorgeous and uniquely suited to the man's need. The Lord says to her, "Daughter, I want you to go stand over there. I'll come for you in a moment." She obeys. Then God touches the man and says, "Wake up now, son. I have one last creature for you to name. I'd like to know what you think of this one." And God leads Eve out to Adam, who greets her with rhapsodic relief:

This is now bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called woman,  
because she was taken out of man. (2:23)

These are the first recorded human words, and they are poetry. What do they express? The joy of the first man in receiving the gift of the first woman: "This creature alone, Father, out of all the others—this one at last meets my need for a companion. She alone is my equal, my very flesh. I identify with her. I love her. I will call her Woman, for she came out of Man." The man perceives the woman not as his rival but as his partner, not as a threat because of her equality with himself but as the only one capable of fulfilling his longing within.

This primal event explains why we see men and women pairing off today, as Moses teaches in verse 24: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."<sup>19</sup> The Garden of Eden is where it all started—not in the social evolution of mankind but in the original, pre-fall creation by God. At its very heart, marriage is not a human custom, variable according to changing times; it is a divinely created institution, defined for all ages and all cultures in our shared, primeval, perfect existence.

And what does marriage mean? What distinguishes this particular social institution? Moses reasons that marriage is the re-union of what was originally and literally one flesh—only now in a much more satisfying form, we would all agree. This is why "He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh."<sup>18</sup> Becoming "one flesh" as husband and wife is symbolized and sealed by sexual union, it is true. But the "one flesh" relationship entails more than sex. It is the profound fusion of two lives into one, shared life together, by the mutual consent and covenant of marriage. It is the complete and permanent giving over of oneself into a new circle of shared existence with one's partner.

Lastly, verse 25 seals the creation account with a reminder of the perfection in which Adam and Eve<sup>19</sup> first came together: "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." They felt no shame because they had nothing to hide. They lived in perfect integrity together.

In the conspicuous phrase, "a helper suitable for him" (2:18, 20),<sup>20</sup> we encounter the paradox of manhood and womanhood. On the one hand, the woman alone, out of all the creatures, was "suitable for him." She alone was Adam's equal. A man may enjoy a form of companionship with a dog, but only on the dog's level. With a wife, a man finds companionship on his own level, for she is his equal.

On the other side of the paradox, the woman is the man's helper. The man

no intention of levelling out the distinctions between us. Consider the obvious: God does not value intellectual or aesthetic equality among people. He does not value equality in finances, talents, and opportunity. It is God who deliberately ordains inequalities in many aspects of our lives. When I came from the womb, I had only so much potential for physical, intellectual, and aesthetic development. Some are born with less than I was, others with more. Because God is ultimately the One who shapes our lives, I have to conclude that God is not interested in unlimited equality among us. And because God is also wise, I further conclude that unlimited equality must be a false ideal. But the Bible does teach the equal personhood and value and dignity of all the human race—men, women, and children—and that must be the only equality that matters to God. One measure of our wisdom as God's image-bearers is whether we share this perspective with God. One measure of our reconciliation with God is whether His sovereign decrees draw from us a response of worship or resentment.

How, then, does Genesis 2 teach the paradoxical truths of male-female equality and male headship? The crucial verses are 18-25, but we should first establish the context.

God created the man first (2:7) and stationed him in the Garden of Eden to develop it and to guard it (2:15). God laid a dual command on the man. First, the man was commanded to partake freely and joyfully of the trees God had provided (2:16). Second, the man was commanded not to eat of one tree, lest he die (2:17). Here we see both God's abundant generosity and man's moral responsibility to live within the large, but not unrestricted, circle of his God-ordained existence. For the man to step outside that circle, to attempt an autonomous existence, freed from God, would be his ruin.

That is the scene as we come to verse 18, which hits us from the blind side:

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him a helper suitable for him."

Amid all this stunning perfection in the Garden of Eden, God said, "There is something wrong here. The man ought not to be alone." God put His finger on the one deficiency in Paradise. The man needed "a helper suitable for him."

Surprisingly, however, God did not immediately create this helper. Instead, God paraded the animals before the man for him to name them (2:19-20). Why? Because the man did not yet see the problem of his aloneness. And so God translated the man's objective aloneness into a feeling of personal loneliness by setting him to this task. In serving God, the man encountered his own need.

This is so, because the task of naming the animals entailed more than slapping an arbitrary label on each beast. The task required the man to consider each animal thoughtfully, so that its name was appropriate to its particular nature. Out of this exercise, it began to dawn on the man that there was no creature in the garden that shared *his* nature. He discovered not only his own unique superiority over the beasts, which the privilege of naming them in itself implied; he also discovered his own solitude in the world.<sup>17</sup> We may surmise that an aching longing welled up within the man for the companionship of another creature on his level.

And so God performs the first surgical operation (2:21-22). Imagine the scene: As the last of the beasts plods off with its new name, the man turns away

was not created to help the woman, but the reverse. Doesn't this striking fact suggest that manhood and womanhood are distinct and non-reversible? Doesn't this make sense if we allow that, while the man and the woman are to love each other as equals, they are not to love each other *in the same way*?<sup>21</sup> The man is to love his wife by accepting the primary responsibility for making their partnership a platform displaying God's glory, and the woman is to love her husband by supporting him in that godly undertaking.

So, was Eve Adam's equal? Yes and no. She was his spiritual equal and, unlike the animals, "suitable for him." But she was not his equal in that she was his "helper." God did not create man and woman in an undifferentiated way, and their mere maleness and femaleness identify their respective roles. A man, just by virtue of his manhood, is called to lead for God. A woman, just by virtue of her womanhood, is called to help for God.

Must the male headship side of the paradox be construed as an insult or threat to women? Not at all, because *Eve was Adam's equal in the only sense in which equality is significant for personal worth*. Woman is just as gifted as man "with all the attributes requisite to attaining wisdom, righteousness and life."<sup>22</sup> In a parallel sense, a church member has as much freedom and opportunity to achieve real significance as does a church elder; but the elder is to lead, and the member is to support. There is no cause for offense.

Why then do some godly people resist this teaching so energetically? One reason is a smothering male domination asserted in the name of male headship. When truth is abused, a rival position (in this case, feminism) that lacks *logically* compelling power can take on *psychologically* compelling power. But male domination is a personal moral failure, not a Biblical doctrine.

If we define ourselves out of a reaction to bad experiences, we will be forever translating our pain in the past into new pain for ourselves and others in the present. We must define ourselves not by personal injury, not by fashionable hysteria, not even by personal variation and diversity, but by the suprapersonal pattern of sexual understanding taught here in Holy Scripture.

The paradox of Genesis 2 is also seen in the fact that the woman was made *from* the man (her equality) and *for* the man (her inequality). God did not make Adam and Eve from the ground at the same time and for one another without distinction. Neither did God make the woman first, and then the man *from* the woman *for* the woman. He could have created them in either of these ways so easily, but He didn't. Why? Because, presumably, that would have obscured the very nature of manhood and womanhood that He intended to make clear.<sup>23</sup>

Another indication of the paradox is that Adam welcomes Eve as his equal ("bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh"), yet he also names her ("she shall be called Woman").<sup>24</sup> God charged the man with naming the creatures and gave him the freedom to exercise his own judgment in each case. In doing so, Adam brought the earthly creation under his dominion. This royal prerogative extended to Adam's naming of his helper.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the name he gives her, "Woman," springs from his instantaneous recognition of her as the counterpart to "Man."<sup>26</sup>

Let us note this carefully. In designating her "Woman" the man interprets her identity in relation to himself. Out of his own intuitive comprehension of who she is, he interprets her as feminine, unlike himself, and yet as his counterpart and equal. Indeed, he sees in her his very own flesh. And he interprets the woman not only for his own understanding of her, but also for her self-understanding. God

did not explain to the woman who she was in relation to the man, although He could have done so. He allowed Adam to define the woman, in keeping with Adam's headship. Adam's sovereign act not only arose out of his own sense of headship, it also made his headship clear to Eve. She found her own identity in relation to the man as his equal and helper *by the man's definition*. Both Adam and Eve understood the paradox of their relationship from the start.

Still another signal of the paradox is detected in verse 24. Because the woman alone is the man's very flesh, their re-union in marriage is a "one flesh" relationship. Adam could not have joined himself to a lesser creature without degrading himself. But it is the man who leaves his parents to found a new household with his new wife at his side. His wife does not leave her family to initiate the new household; this is the responsibility of the head.

Genesis 2 supplements Genesis 1 by showing that God's commission that we "have dominion over the earth" (1:26, 28) as male and female works out practically through marriage. And in marriage the man heads the home for God and the wife helps him to fulfill the divine calling.

We ought to be sufficiently agile intellectually and emotionally to accept this paradoxical truth. Christians, of all people, have a reason to live with paradox. After all, God exists as one Godhead in three Persons, equal in glory but unequal in role. Within the Holy Trinity the Father leads, the Son submits to Him, and the Spirit submits to both (the Economic Trinity). But it is also true that the three Persons are fully equal in divinity, power, and glory (the Ontological Trinity). The Son submits, but not because He is God, Jr., an inferior deity. The ranking within the Godhead is a part of the sublime beauty and logic of true deity. And if our Creator exists in this manner, should we be surprised and offended if His creaturely analog on earth exists in paradoxical form?

But what does evangelical feminism have to say about Genesis 2? Spencer adopts a most eccentric view of "a helper suitable for him."<sup>27</sup> She dissects the Hebrew word translated "suitable for him" (*k'neged*) into its three constituent parts: *k'* + *neged* + *ô*, that is (very roughly), "*as* + *before* + *him*." Spencer then paraphrases the sense as "a helper 'as if in front of him.'" This is not strictly incorrect, but it would be more effectively paraphrased, "a helper corresponding to him." That is, the woman is a helper suitable for the man, on his level, in contrast to the animals. But Spencer goes further in interpreting the *neged* element in the construction: "Front' or 'visible' seems to suggest superiority or equality."<sup>28</sup> A helper *superior* to Adam? Spencer cites as evidence favoring her view the fact that the noun *negid* means "leader," which it does. She reasons as follows:

The same preposition [*neged*] when converted into a noun (*negid*) signifies "a leader, ruler, prince or king," an "overseer." Literally it signifies the "one in front."<sup>29</sup>

There is no evidence, however, that *neged* is "converted into a noun" to become *negid*.<sup>30</sup> By Spencer's line of reasoning we could argue that the English adjective "front" converts into the noun "frontier," suggesting that the word "front" connotes sparse habitation and primitive living conditions. This is simply invalid reasoning. Moreover, if *neged* means "superior to," then what are we to make of, say, Psalm 119:168? "All my ways are before (*neged*) you." Is the psalmist saying, "All my ways are superior to you, O Lord"? Not only is that an



unbiblical notion, the whole burden of Psalm 119 is the excellency and authority of the law over the psalmist. The *neged* element in *k'negdô* merely conveys the idea of direct proximity or anteposition.<sup>31</sup> The woman, therefore, is a helper corresponding to the man, as his counterpart and equal.

It is the word “helper” that suggests the woman’s supportive role. Spencer argues, however, that this description of Eve “does not at all imply inherent subordination.”<sup>32</sup> She adduces the fact that God Himself is portrayed in Scripture as our “Helper,” which He is. She then interprets this fact: “If being ‘one who helps’ inherently implies subordination, then, in that case, God would be subordinate to humans!”<sup>33</sup> This reasoning is not really fallacious. The fallacy lies in the implication of what she says, namely, that God cannot be subordinate to human beings. It is entirely possible for God to subordinate Himself, in a certain sense, to human beings. He does so whenever He undertakes to help us. He does not “un-God” Himself in helping us; but He does stoop to our needs, according to His gracious and sovereign will.

Similarly, I subordinate myself to my children when I help them with their homework. I do not empty my mind of my own knowledge; but I do come down to their level to see their questions from their perspective and to point them toward solutions they can understand. Their needs set my agenda. In this sense I subordinate myself to my children whenever I help them with their homework. So it is with God. When He helps His people, He retains His glorious deity but (amazingly!) steps into the servant role, under us, to lift us up. He is the God who emptied Himself and came down to our level—below us, to the level of slavery—to help us supremely at the Cross. Therefore, the fact that the Old Testament portrays God as our Helper proves only that the helper role is a glorious one, worthy even of the Almighty. This Biblical fact does not prove that the concept of helper excludes subordination. Subordination is entailed in the very nature of a helping role.

I see this fallacy again and again in feminist argumentation. “Subordination = denigration” and “equality = indistinguishability.” Whence this insight into reality? Is the Son of God slighted because He came to do the will of the Father? Is the church denigrated by her subordination to her Lord? Are church members less than “fully redeemed” on account of their submission to their pastors and elders? Are children less than “fully human” by virtue of their submission to their parents?<sup>34</sup>

“But,” someone will say, “doesn’t hierarchy in marriage reduce a woman to the status of a slave?” Not at all. The fact that a line of authority exists from one person to another in both slavery and marriage, and, for that matter, in the Holy Trinity, in the Body of Christ, in the local church, in the parent-child relationship—the fact that a line of authority exists from one person to another in all of these relationships does not reduce them all to the logic of slavery. Feminists seem to be reasoning that, because *some* subordination is degrading, *all* subordination must necessarily be degrading. On the contrary, what Biblical headship requires and what slave-holding forbids is that the head respect the helper as an equally significant person in the image of God.

Why then this arbitrary equation of submission with dehumanization in manhood and womanhood? For what logical reason *must* equality be defined in terms of position and role? This thinking did not spring up out of evangelical soil. It grew up out of worldly soil, and it has been transplanted into evangelical soil and

is sustained there artificially by the potent fertilizers of the worldliness and doctrinal confusion widespread in the evangelical movement.

Bilezikian concludes his discussion of Genesis 2 with the following statement:

Whenever the principle of equal rights is denied and one sex is subjected to another, a natural outcome is the denial of the right of privacy for the subordinated party. Violation and exploitation ensue. The obscenities of rape, prostitution and pornography are the sinful results of male dominance. To strip a woman naked and hold her down under the power of a knife, a fistful of money, or the glare of a camera is the supreme expression of man’s rule over woman. Such rulership was not a part of God’s creation ideal.<sup>35</sup>

I challenge this intemperate statement at several levels. First, the issue is framed in terms of “equal rights.” That sounds noble, but does God really grant husbands and wives equal rights *in an unqualified sense*? Surely God confers upon them equal worth as His image-bearers. But does a wife possess under God all the rights that her husband has *in an unqualified sense*? As the head, the husband bears the primary responsibility to lead their partnership in a God-glorifying direction. Under God, a wife may not compete for that primary responsibility. It is her husband’s just because he is the husband, by the wise decree of God. The ideal of “equal rights” in an unqualified sense is not Biblical.

Second, the “natural outcome” of godly male headship is female fulfillment, not a denial of female rights. And anyway, in a one-flesh relationship, who has a “right of privacy”? I am an open book to my wife—not that I always enjoy that, but it is true. After nineteen years of marital intimacy with her in every sense, privacy is more than a moot point; the very idea is inane. If you wish to preserve your right to privacy, don’t get married!<sup>36</sup>

Third, how is it that in the last twenty years or so, as we have increasingly lost our understanding of male headship and as feminist ideals have been aggressively pursued throughout our society—how is it that, under these conditions, sexual exploitation and confusion and perversity have exploded in incidence? Male headship is not to blame. Male domination and feminism are the two viruses attacking our sexuality today. They vandalize God’s creation and multiply human misery. How can anyone who loves God’s glory, who feels for people, and who cherishes the gift of our sexuality not be inflamed at the enormities being committed by these two monsters, male domination and feminism?

Finally, Bilezikian asserts that such perversities as rape, prostitution and pornography are “the supreme expression of man’s rule over woman.” But if we define “man’s rule” from Holy Scripture as godly male headship, then the supreme expression of it is the woman’s nobility, fulfillment, and joy.

Bilezikian’s incautious paragraph simply asserts the feminist perspective without evidence or argumentation. Neither does he show any awareness of the nuances of the position he earlier claimed to be answering—a position, like ours, which advocates male headship without male domination.<sup>37</sup>

### What God Decreed at the Fall

How did our fall into sin affect God’s original, perfect, and paradoxical ordering of the sexes? What did He decree as our punishment at the fall?

Those who deny the creation of male headship in Genesis 1-2 often argue that, in Genesis 3, God imposed male headship/dominion (no distinction is allowed) upon the woman after the fall. As the corollary to this interpretation, they go on to argue that redemption in Christ reverses this decree and reinstates the woman to "full equality" with the man. We have seen, however, that God built male headship (not male domination) into the glorious, pre-fall order of creation. Our purpose here is to summarize the doctrine of manhood and womanhood taught in Genesis 3, especially in verses 16-19, and then to challenge feminist interpretation of this passage.

Genesis 3 is one of the crucial chapters of Holy Scripture. If it were suddenly removed from the Bible, the Bible would no longer make sense. Life would no longer make sense. If we all started out in Edenic bliss, why is life so painful now? Genesis 3 explains why. And if something has gone terribly wrong, do we have any hope of restoration? Genesis 3 gives us hope.

Because Paul in 1 Timothy 2:14 cites the woman's deception as warrant for male headship to be translated from the home into the church,<sup>38</sup> we will survey the narrative of that deception on our way to verses 16-19.

In verses 1-5, Satan, masquerading in the guise of the serpent, draws Eve into a reconsideration of her whole life. To paraphrase and amplify his reasoning,

"Queen Eve," the serpent inquires in astonishment and disbelief, "something is bothering me. Is it really true that God forbade you two to eat of any of these trees? That perplexes me. After all, didn't He pronounce everything 'very good'? And hasn't He put both you and King Adam in charge of it all? Our loving Creator wouldn't impose so severe a limitation on you, would He? I don't understand, Eve. Would you please explain this problem to me?"

Eve hadn't even known there was a "problem." But the Serpent's prejudiced question unsettles her. It knocks her back on her heels. And so the Serpent engages Eve in a reevaluation of her life *on his terms*. She begins to feel that God's command, which Adam had shared with her,<sup>39</sup> has to be defended: "We *are* allowed to eat of these trees, serpent. But there is this one tree here in the center of the Garden—God said, 'Don't eat of it; don't even touch it, lest you die.'" God had actually said, "You shall *freely* eat from *any* tree, with only one exception." But Eve's misquote reduces the lavish generosity of God's word to the level of mere, perhaps grudging, permission: "We *may* eat from the trees." Already the Garden doesn't look quite the same to Eve. No longer is the Tree of Life at the center of things (cf. 2:9). She doesn't even mention it. Now, in her perception of reality, the forbidden tree is at the center. Life is taking on a new, ominous feel. Eve also enlarges God's prohibition with her own addition, "you may not touch it." In her mind, the limitation is growing in significance. At the same time, she tones down God's threat of punishment: "you shall *surely* die" becomes the weaker "lest you die."

With Eve's view of the consequences of sin weakened, the Serpent springs on that point: "You will not surely die." Now we see that he hasn't been seeking information at all. He knows exactly what God had said. And then the Serpent pretends to let Eve in on an important secret:

"Eve, I'm going to do you a favor. I hate to be the one to break this to you, but you deserve to know. God has a motive other than love for this restriction. The truth is that God wants to hold you back, to frustrate your potential. Don't you realize that God Himself has this knowledge of good and evil? He knows what will enrich life and what will ruin life. And He knows that this fruit will give you two that same knowledge, so that you will rise to His level of understanding and control. Eve, it may come as a shock to you, but God is holding out on you. He is not your friend; He is your rival.

"Now, Eve, you have to outwit Him. I know this Garden seems pleasant enough; but, really, it is a gigantic ploy, to keep you in your place, because God feels threatened by what the two of you could become. This tree, Eve, is your only chance to reach your potential. In fact, Eve, if you *don't* eat of this tree, you will surely die!"

It was a lie big enough to reinterpret all of life and attractive enough to redirect Eve's loyalty from God to Self. The lie told her that obedience is a suicidal plunge, that humility is demeaning, and that service is servility. *And so Eve begins to feel the aggravation of an injustice which, in reality, does not exist.*

Having planted the lie in her mind, the serpent now falls silent and allows Eve's new perception of reality to take its own course (3:6). With Moses' enablement, we can imagine what her thoughts might have been:

"It doesn't *look* deadly, does it? In fact, it makes my mouth water! How could a good God prohibit such a good thing? How could a just God put it right here in front of us and then expect us to deny ourselves its pleasures? It's intriguingly beautiful, too. And with the insight it affords, I can liberate us from dependence upon our Creator. And who knows? If He finds out we've caught on to Him, He'll take this tree away and we'll be stuck in this prison forever! Let's eat it now while we have the chance!"

After his careful, detailed description of Eve's deception, Moses describes the actual act of Adam and Eve's sin very simply, as a matter of fact, without a hint of shock: "... she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (3:6b).<sup>40</sup>

Mark well what the text says and what it does not say. The text does not say, "... she took some and ate it. Her husband, who was with her, also took some and ate it." What actually happened is full of meaning. Eve usurped Adam's headship and led the way into sin. And Adam, who (it seems) had stood by passively, allowing the deception to progress without decisive intervention—Adam, for his part, abandoned his post as head. Eve was deceived; Adam forsook his responsibility. Both were wrong and together they pulled the human race down into sin and death.

Isn't it striking that we fell upon an occasion of sex role reversal? Are we to repeat this confusion forever? Are we to institutionalize it in evangelicalism in the name of the God who condemned it in the beginning?

But if Adam and Eve fell into sin together, why does Paul blame Adam for our fall in Romans 5:12-21? Why doesn't Paul blame both Adam and Eve? Why does Genesis 3:7 say that it was only after *Adam* joined in the rebellion that the eyes of *both* of them were opened to their condition? Why does God call out to

Adam, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9).<sup>41</sup> Why doesn’t God summon both Adam and Eve to account together? Because, as the God-appointed head, Adam bore the primary responsibility to lead their partnership in a God-glorifying direction.

This may explain why Satan addressed Eve, rather than Adam, to begin with. Her calling was to help Adam as second-in-command in world rulership. If the roles had been reversed, if Eve had been created first and then Adam as her helper, the Serpent would doubtless have approached Adam. So Eve was not morally weaker than Adam. But Satan struck at Adam’s headship. His words had the effect of inviting Eve to assume primary responsibility at the moment of temptation: “You decide, Eve. You lead the way. Wouldn’t you rather be exercising headship?” Just as Satan himself fell through this very kind of reasoning, so he used it to great effect with Eve. Presumably, she really believed she could manage the partnership to both Adam’s and her own advantage, if she would only assert herself. Adam, by contrast, defied God with eyes wide open.<sup>42</sup>

When confronted by God, Adam does not actually lie. He just shifts the blame to Eve: “The man said, ‘The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.’” (3:12). Why is it that we all feel Adam’s face-saving, despicable hypocrisy in his factual, but evasive, reply to God? Because we recognize, if only intuitively, that Adam bears the final responsibility for what happened. Eve, when challenged, can only hang her head and admit, “The serpent deceived me” (3:13).

In 3:14-15, God curses the Serpent, condemning him to humiliation and to ultimate defeat under the victorious offspring of the woman.<sup>43</sup> Our only hope as a fallen race is God’s merciful promise to defeat our enemy, which He will accomplish through human instrumentality.

In verse 16 God decrees a just settlement with the woman:

I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;  
with pain you will give birth to children.  
Your desire will be for your husband,  
and he will rule over you.

God’s decree is two-fold. First, as a mother, the woman will suffer in relation to her children. She will still be able to bear children. This is God’s mercy providing the means by which He will carry out His death sentence on the Serpent. But now the woman will suffer in childbirth. This is God’s severity for her sin. The new element in her experience, then, is not childbirth but the pain of childbirth.

Second, as a wife, the woman will suffer in relation to her husband. The exact content of her marital suffering could be defined in either of two ways. Either she will suffer conflict with her husband, or she will suffer domination by him.<sup>44</sup> The form and logic of Genesis 4:7b bear a most striking resemblance to our passage:<sup>45</sup>

3:16b: *w<sup>c</sup>-el-’išēk ršāqātēk’ w<sup>c</sup>-hū’ yimšol-bōk*  
4:7b: *w<sup>c</sup>-’ēlēkā ršāqātō w<sup>c</sup>-attāh timšol-bō*

And 4:7b reads, “[Sin’s] desire is for you, but you must master it.” To para-

phrase and amplify the sense: “Sin has a desire, Cain. It wants to control you. But you must not allow sin to have its way with you. You must rule over it.”

How does this parallel statement illuminate the interpretation of 3:16? Most importantly, it clarifies the meaning of the woman’s “desire.” Just as sin’s desire is to have its way with Cain, God gives the woman up to a desire to have her way with her husband. Because she usurped his headship in the temptation, God hands her over to the misery of competition with her rightful head. This is justice, a measure-for-measure response to her sin.<sup>46</sup>

The ambiguous element in the equation is the interpretation of the words translated in the *NIV*, “and he will rule over you.” We could draw one of two conclusions. First, God may be saying, “You will have a desire, Eve. You will want to control your husband. But he must not allow you to have your way with him. He must rule over you.”

If this is the sense, then God is requiring the man to act as the head God made him to be, rather than knuckle under to ungodly pressure from his wife. Accordingly, 3:16b should be rendered: “Your desire will be for your husband, but he must rule over you.”<sup>47</sup> In this case, we would take “rule” as the exercise of godly headship. This interpretation matches the reasoning in 4:7 more nearly, but another view is possible.

Second, God may be saying, “You will have a desire, Eve. You will want to control your husband. But he will not allow you to have your way with him. He will rule over you.” If this is the true sense, then, in giving the woman up to her insubordinate desire, God is penalizing her with domination by her husband. Accordingly, 3:16b should be rendered: “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”<sup>48</sup> The word “rule” would now be construed as the exercise of ungodly domination. As the woman competes with the man, the man, for his part, always holds the trump card of male domination to “put her in her place.”

But however 3:16 should be interpreted, nothing can change the fact that God created male *headship* as one aspect of our pre-fall perfection. Therefore, while many women today need release from male domination, the liberating alternative is not female rivalry or autonomy but male headship wedded to female help.<sup>49</sup> Christian redemption does not redefine creation; it restores creation, so that wives learn godly submission and husbands learn godly headship.

In 3:17-19, God decrees His judgment upon Adam:

“Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’

“Cursed is the ground because of you;

through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.  
“It will produce thorns and thistles for you,  
and you will eat the plants of the field.

“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food  
until you return to the ground,  
since from it you were taken;  
for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

God gives Adam up to the painful and ultimately futile attempt to eke out a liv-



ing from the cursed ground. Notice four things in the text. First, work is not Adam's punishment, just as childbearing was not Eve's punishment. The new punitive element is his pain in working the ground and his ultimate defeat in it. After a lifetime of survival by the sweat of his brow, the ground from which he was first taken will swallow him up in death.

The second important point here is God's rationale for this punishment. God does not say, "Because you have eaten of the tree which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it' . . ." God does say, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree. . . ." Adam sinned at two levels. At one level, he defied the plain and simple command of 2:17. That is obvious. But God goes deeper. At another level, Adam sinned by "listening to his wife."<sup>50</sup> He abandoned his headship. According to God's assessment, this moral failure in Adam led to his ruination.<sup>51</sup>

The third interesting point is the very fact that God addresses Adam with this introductory statement, "Because you have listened. . . ." God does not address Eve in this way, but God does issue a formal indictment to Adam before his sentencing. Why? Because Adam was the head, the finally responsible member of the partnership. His disobedience, not Eve's, was the pivotal factor in the fall. Notice this. God says, "It is because of you, Adam, that the ground is cursed" (verse 17). God does not say, "It is because of you both, Adam and Eve," as if they shared equal responsibility in an unqualified sense.

The fourth point here is that God told Adam alone that he would die. But Eve died, too. Why then did God pronounce the death sentence on Adam alone? Because, as the head goes, so goes the member.

By these dreadful, and yet hopeful, oracles of destiny, God shapes for us the existence we all share today. Under these conditions, our pain alerts us to a great truth: This life is not our fulfillment. This life is not meant to be a final experience. Our pain and limitations point us to God, to the eternal, to the transcendent, where our true fulfillment lies.

Adam understood this truth, I think. Instead of turning away from the bar of God's justice in bitterness and despair, Adam turns to his wife and says, "I believe God's promise. He has not cast us adrift completely. He will give us the final victory over our enemy and we will again enjoy the richness and fullness of life in God. And because you are the mother of all those who will truly live, I give you a new name—Eve, Living One. I believe God, and I honor you."<sup>52</sup> In contrast to the cruel, cutting words of verse 12, Adam reaches out in love to Eve and they are reunited in faith and hope.

I personally find that, after studying this profound and moving passage on its own terms, it is depressing to read feminist commentary. A work of truth and beauty is being defaced. For example, Bilezikian writes:

The fall had spawned the twin evils of woman's suffering in labor and of man's laboring in suffering. As a result of Satan's work, man was now master over woman, just as the mother-ground was now master over man. For these reasons, it is proper to regard both male dominance and death as being antithetical to God's original intent in creation. Both are the result of sin, itself instigated by Satan. Their origin is satanic.<sup>53</sup>

I respond in two ways. First, Bilezikian misrepresents the opposing view. Responsible interpreters do not advocate demeaning, oppressive "male domi-

nance." They advocate selfless male headship, in which the man undertakes to serve his wife and family by providing the leadership that will glorify God and benefit them without regard for the price the man must pay to fulfill that responsibility. Headship calls us men to lay down our lives for our families.

Second, if Bilezikian would still argue that the exercise of male headship is satanic, then I must conclude that he is profoundly misguided. In his Conclusion he refers to "the repulsive pagan practice whereby one spouse exercises power over the other."<sup>54</sup> If the mere exercise of headship power is repulsive and pagan (and, presumably, satanic as well), then is it repulsive when a parent exercises power over his child? It can be. But *must* it be?<sup>55</sup> Is it pagan when a church elder exercises power over a church member? It can be. But *must* it be?<sup>56</sup> Is it satanic when Christ exercises power over His church? That *cannot* be! His headship over us is our salvation. It follows, therefore, that the ugliness and paganism evident in other relationships must be blamed not on the exercise of power itself but on sinful abuses of the exercise of rightful power. The origin of marital misery lies not in male headship, which God created for our blessing, but in a multitude of other, personal factors.

Bilezikian also labors to mitigate the moral repugnance of Eve's role in the conspiracy of Genesis 3. He seems to wish for Eve a sort of victim status in the affair. One must read his entire presentation to appreciate this unusual moral perspective, but let me quote him at one point:

The only ray of hope in the statement of the curse appears in relation to the woman. In Adam all die, but Eve, as the mother of the living, shall bring forth life—and from her seed will issue redemption.<sup>57</sup>

But does the Bible set Adam and Eve off as death over against life? Paul, in Romans 5, sets Adam and *Christ* off as death over against life. Bilezikian's feminism seems to have swept him away into an anti-male prejudice that completely misses the point of Genesis 3.

### Concluding Appeal

Male-female equality and male headship, properly defined, are woven into the very fabric of Genesis 1-3. Non-evangelical feminists recognize this. To quote one such writer, "Feminist theology must create a new textual base, a new canon. . . . Feminist theology cannot be done from the existing base of the Christian Bible."<sup>58</sup> Evangelical feminists, however, cannot create a new feminist canon without losing their evangelical credentials. So they reinterpret the sacred canon that exists to suit their purposes. I do not charge that they do so consciously. God alone knows our secret thoughts. But all of us know the stripping experience of discovering, to our dismay, that we have been making the Bible say things it does not really say. To make such a discovery and then to change is simply to grow in grace.

What might be the principal source of evangelical feminist blindness to the Biblical text? Consider the following. *There is no necessary relation between personal role and personal worth.* Feminism denies this principle. Feminism insists that personal role and personal worth must go together, so that a limitation in role reduces or threatens personal worth. But why? What logic is there in such a

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# EQUALITY WITH AND WITHOUT INNOCENCE

*Genesis 1-3*

Richard S. Hess

The accounts of creation, the Garden of Eden and the Fall in Genesis 1-3 may contain more doctrinal teaching concerning the nature of humanity as male and female, as well as the state of the fallen world, than any other single text in the Bible. Their position at the beginning of the Torah, and thus of Scripture as a whole, makes them an important starting point for the study of the biblical teaching on gender equality.

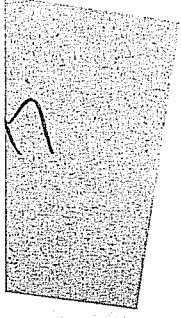
From the outset it may be affirmed that the record of Genesis 1-3 is a matter of God's revealed will for his people so that they might live in communion with him. Its readership was ancient Israel, the people who emerged in the hill country of Canaan in the latter part of the Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 B.C.) and those generations who followed them in building a society that struggled with their covenantal life before God.

## *Genesis 1: Creation in God's Image*

Genesis 1:26-28 describes God's creation of the man and the woman. As is clear from the parallel lines of Genesis 1:27, both are subsumed under the general rubric 'adam, which describes the species as "humanity."

God created the 'adam in his image;  
in the image of God he created him.  
Male and female he created them.

In Genesis 1-3 'adam has two different uses. It refers to "humanity" in Gen-



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esis I and to "the man" in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2-3. The first clearly attested usage of 'adam to denote the personal name Adam occurs in Genesis 4:25.<sup>1</sup> It should be pointed out that Old Testament Hebrew has no common term for "humanity" other than 'adam.<sup>2</sup> The generic 'adam was part of the West Semitic lexicon before Genesis 1-3 was revealed and written in the form in which it occurs. Therefore it is somewhat inaccurate to suggest that there was a conscious divine decision to use a masculine term to describe the human race. No other term was available, and there is no evidence that the writer of Genesis invented new words. It should also be noted that Hebrew has only two genders, masculine and feminine; there is no neuter. Moreover, the choice of gender for any noun is not predictable. And in any case, the evolution of a word from a common noun ("humanity" in Gen 1) to a title ("the man" in Gen 2-3) and finally to a personal name ("Adam" in Gen 4:25) is not unique to 'adam. It is a linguistic phenomenon shared by many languages.<sup>3</sup> In short, the nature of revelation, Hebrew language and vocabulary, the semantic range of 'adam, and the common linguistic development of words all argue against the presumption that "God's naming of the race 'man' whispers male headship."<sup>4</sup>

In verse 26, "Let us make 'adam in our image," the pronouns may simply be the plural of majesty, used in the Bible to refer to human masters (e.g., Judg 3:25; 13:8; 19:11-12, 26-27; 1 Sam 20:38; 25:10). Yet the absence of a plural reference to God elsewhere in Genesis 1-10 suggests that something special is intended here. As God is somehow plural in relationship, so the created 'adam is to enjoy the relationships that come from plurality. Although this is potentially true of all creatures, with 'adam it becomes especially significant. In this way the reference anticipates the story of Genesis 2 and the harmony between the man and the woman.

<sup>1</sup>Richard S. Hess, "Splitting the Adam: The Usage of 'adam in Genesis 1-v," in *Studies in the Pentateuch*, ed. J. A. Emerton, VTSup 41 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1991), pp. 1-15.

<sup>2</sup>A term such as 'am, "people," denotes a smaller group within the larger class of humanity, often referring to a group related by kinship or to residents of a particular geographical area. As a collective (like the other terms in Gen 1), this often refers to a group related by kinship or to residents of a particular geographical area (*HALOT*, 2:837-39).

<sup>3</sup>Hess, "Splitting the Adam," pp. 7-10; John Lyons, *Semantics II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 179-81.

<sup>4</sup>Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1-3," in *RBMW*, p. 98. This is also why Ortlund's statement referring to God's revelation makes little sense: "He does not even devise a neutral term like 'persons.'" Since there is no neuter gender in Hebrew, no term could satisfy the demand that it be neither masculine nor feminine. Masculine nouns do not "whisper" of male headship any more than feminine nouns "whisper" of female subordination.

However, it is equally important that while the text affirms 'adam's creation by God who holds plurality (and thus relationship) as a part of his nature, it does not explicitly identify this as part of the image of God that all people possess. Therefore one cannot assume that marriage or even social activity is somehow essential to the image of God.

What then is the meaning of the terms *image (tselem)* and *likeness (demuth)*, used here to describe the image of God? It is best illustrated in the practice of ancient Near East kings of erecting or carving out images in order to represent their power and rulership over far-reaching areas of their empires.<sup>5</sup> These represented the dominion of the ruler when the sovereign was not present in the region (see Dan 3:1).

The emphasis in Genesis is on rulership of creation through stewardship. Phyllis Bird argues that gender distinction does not belong to the image of God, or to dominion, but to the theme of fertility that is found in the first chapter of Genesis.<sup>6</sup> Fruitfulness and reproduction are part of the plant and animal world (Gen 1:12, 22-25) and thus are not unique to the image of God in 'adam. Whereas the term *image of God* in the surrounding culture applies only to royalty, Genesis 1 emphasizes the role all of humanity has in dominion over creation. Bird also suggests that the command to be fruitful and multiply is a polemic against Canaanite fertility rituals.<sup>7</sup>

The only divine statement regarding the creation of 'adam that can apply to the image of God is the command to have dominion over the earth. Thus 'adam is different from creation (as possessing the image of God and the role of dominion), though part of creation (as sexually differentiated and capable of reproduction; cf. Ps 8).

Dominion is set in the context of the ideal world of Genesis 1 and is not altered with the sins of the following chapters (Gen 5:1-3; 9:1-6). Rather its original context suggests a harmony. As the sun and moon rule over day and night, so through its multiplication humanity rules over the earth by its presence throughout the world.<sup>8</sup> Thus the verbs *to rule (kabash)* and *to dominate (radah)* suggest the taking of

<sup>5</sup>Hans W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1974), p. 160.

<sup>6</sup>Phyllis A. Bird, "Male and Female He Created Them: Gen. 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation," *HTR* 74 (1981): 134.

<sup>7</sup>The power of created life to replenish itself is a power given to each species at its creation and therefore is not dependent upon subsequent rites or petitions for its effect" (*ibid.*, p. 147).

<sup>8</sup>Bernard W. Anderson, *Creation in the Old Testament, Issues in Religion and Theology* 6, ed. B. W. Anderson (London: SPCK, 1984), p. 159; H. P. Santmire, "The Genesis Creation Narratives Revisited, Themes for a Global Age," *Interpretation* 45 (1991): 374-75.

the land and its stewardship (*kabash* is used in Josh 18:1).<sup>9</sup> Such stewardship is given to humanity as "male and female" in God's command for "them" to "rule over" creation (Gen 1:26-27) and is exemplified by the way the man "works and takes care of" (see NIV) the Garden (Gen 2:15) and names the animals (Gen 2:19-20). However, its ramifications go beyond gardening and zoology to include the ongoing activity of God's ordering and creating in the world and in civilization.

Does Genesis 1:26-28 address the question of the relationship between male and female? David Clines maintains that the reference to "male and female" (Gen 1:27) says nothing of their equality but reflects the two kinds of human beings, just as all other creatures are made "according to their kind."<sup>10</sup> However, this interpretation seems forced. Clines fails to demonstrate that male and female are ever understood as the *kinds* (*min*) used of different species in Genesis 1:21 and 24. Nowhere in Genesis is *'adam* so described; rather, other references to *'adam* connote the species as a whole. There is nothing in this first chapter to suggest anything other than an equality of male and female created together in the image of God.

### Genesis 2: The Home, Work and Partner of the Man

The second account of creation beginning in the middle of Genesis 2:4 does not contradict the first but provides a different emphasis. Whereas Genesis 1 describes God as Creator of the cosmos and all of life, Genesis 2 focuses on the creation of the man along with his home, work and companion.<sup>11</sup> The two accounts of creation, a literary doublet, anticipate the use of this style in the structure of Genesis 1-11 and of the book as a whole.<sup>12</sup>

The creation of the man in this account occurs in a context of the divine planting of the Garden of Eden. Further, the term *man* (*'adam*) here always occurs with a definite article, "the man."<sup>13</sup> In Hebrew a definite article is never used with a per-

<sup>9</sup>Richard J. Clifford, review of Udo Rüterswörden, *Dominium Ieruae: Studien zur Genese einer alttestamentlichen Vorstellung*, JBL 113 (1994): 701-2.

<sup>10</sup>David J. A. Clines, "What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Irredeemably Androcentric Orientations in Genesis 1-3," in *What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Readably Questions to the Old Testament*, JSOT-Sup 94 (Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic, 1990), pp. 25-48.

<sup>11</sup>There have been other attempts to understand these two accounts. The traditional critical approach, in which Genesis 1:1-2:4a represents the P (priestly) source and Genesis 2:4b-ff. represents the J (Yahwist) source, is exemplified by Carol L. Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).

<sup>12</sup>Richard S. Hess, "Genesis 1-2 in Its Literary Context," *TynBul* 41 (1990): 143-53.

<sup>13</sup>Or with the possibility for a definite article in the consonantal Hebrew text.

sonal name. Therefore *'adam* in this context is a title, not a name. But to what does the title refer? In Genesis 2:5 the *'adam* is created from the *'adamah*, "the ground." The wordplay between these two terms is intentional. On the one hand it affirms *'adam's* intimate association with the dust of the earth and thereby humanity's physical and carnal nature. On the other hand, it prepares the reader for the man's responsibility in taking care of the Garden, an earthy task. Hence "the *'adam*" designation is an appropriate one to describe this responsibility of "the man."<sup>14</sup>

In the ancient Near East a leader of a city or region often was designated by a similar title, such as "the men of Tob" (2 Sam 10:6-8) who appear in parallel with "the king of Maacah." Thus the term in Genesis 2 does not merely designate the first created person. It also describes the governorship of the man over the Garden, a responsibility anticipated in the injunction of dominion in Genesis 1 and now realized in Genesis 2. The command "to work it and take care of it" (Gen 2:15 NIV) addresses "the man" as one who cultivates the soil of Eden.<sup>15</sup> Thus the title which becomes a personal name in Genesis 4:25 describes the man's task and anticipates the name of the woman in Genesis 3:20 as Eve (*ḥavvah*), which will also describe a task of hers.

Genesis 2:16-17 form an interlude that anticipates the events of Genesis 3. God commands the man not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil but does not command the woman because she has not yet been created.<sup>16</sup> Genesis 2:18-25 serve to further themes already introduced. First, naming the creatures continues the theme of reflecting the image of God through ordering creation, just as God had ordered the major areas of the world in the first three days of creation. Second, this naming identifies the ideal harmony that the world enjoys. God, the

<sup>14</sup>See Hess, "Splitting the Adam."

<sup>15</sup>Eleanor F. Beach and Frederic L. Pryor, "How Did Adam and Eve Make a Living?" *Bible Review* 11, no. 2 (April 1995): 38-42, argue that this phrase means that the first man was a "servant guardian" and not involved in tilling the garden. However, this requires the original omission of the feminine suffixes on the verbs (translated "it"), which would have been added later. These suffixes refer either to Eden or to the soil (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC 1 [Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987], p. 47). The natural sense of the text is that the man's role involved taking care of the Garden in its various aspects, cultivating as well as guarding.

<sup>16</sup>Some assert that because God spoke to the man here rather than the woman, this is proof that the man was given responsibility for leadership. See, e.g., Thomas R. Schreiner, "Women in Ministry," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), p. 203, who then argues that "God likely commissioned Adam to instruct Eve about this command." Not only is this lacking in the text, its absence is a key point in the narrative. See later in this chapter under "The Fall Narrative."



to consider whether there is in the text of Genesis 1-3, or in ancient Near Eastern parallels outside the Bible, any basis for the assumption that creation order establishes authority.

In its narrative, Genesis 1 declares that God (and no other deity) created the universe, the world and everything therein, while Genesis 2 explains humanity's special relationship with God by focusing on "the man" and exploring the harmonious relationships that he enjoyed with his God, his work, his world and his partner. In Genesis 2 the man is given responsibility over the Garden, a responsibility already given to both man and woman in Genesis 1, but he is not given authority over the woman. Genesis 2 nowhere suggests a hierarchical relationship between the man and the woman, and certainly not because of the "order of creation." Moreover, chapter 1 explicitly declares that the man and the woman share in God's image and bear the same responsibilities.

Some have argued that the sequence of creation reflects the patriarchal nature of ancient society. Regarding this it is worthwhile to compare the Mesopotamian creation story of Atrahasis (the copy we have comes from about the seventeenth century B.C., roughly the same culture and time as the production of the laws of Hammurabi), which provides parallel references to the creation of humanity in a paradise as well as a subsequent rebellion and a flood.<sup>20</sup> Though much of the text speaks of humanity without distinctive emphasis on gender, this is not the case at the point of humanity's creation and the discussion of marriage. There the woman is described before the man.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, whenever there is mention of the two genders, the woman is mentioned first.<sup>22</sup> No one would deny that legal texts, contracts and other sources for understanding the society of ancient Mesopotamia witness to a patriarchal society that exceeded ancient Israel in its value of the husband and subservience of his wife.<sup>23</sup> Yet in Atrahasis the woman is mentioned first. This indicates that the *sequence* of man's and woman's creation has no significance for im-

<sup>20</sup>Including many parallels with Genesis 6-9; see Alan R. Millard, "A New Babylonian Genesis Story," *TynBul* 18 (1967): 3-18; reprinted in "I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood": *Ancient Near Eastern, Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David T. Tsunura, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 4 (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994).

<sup>21</sup>Bernard F. Batto, "The Institution of Marriage in Genesis 2 and in Atrahasis," *CBQ* 62 (2000): 627; his lines 271-76 of tablet I.

<sup>22</sup>E.g., *li-ib-ti-[ru as-sa]-tum i mu-sa* "let a wife and her husband choose one another," in line 300 of tablet I; see also line 301; following Batto, *ibid*.

<sup>23</sup>On the general subject, see Sophie Lafont, *Femmes, droit et justice dans l'antiquité orientale: Contributions à l'étude du droit pénal au Proche-Orient ancien*, OBO 165 (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

man and the world continue in perfect relationship. Third, the process of encountering each animal that God has created accentuates the man's loneliness and need for a helper like him.<sup>17</sup> Thus the man and the woman were created sequentially in Genesis 2 in order to demonstrate the need they have for each other, not to justify an implicit hierarchy.<sup>18</sup>

Male leadership advocates, however, often cite 1 Timothy 2:13 as evidence that Paul understood the sequential creation of humanity to imply an intended hierarchy of man over woman, especially in light of conventions of ancient Near Eastern culture regarding the rights of the firstborn son—primogeniture.<sup>19</sup>

Such an argument is problematic for several reasons. First, no rights of the firstborn found in Scripture provide a logical connection to creation order as establishing authority. Second, the norm among the patriarchs is *not* primogeniture but God's blessing on the second or third born (e.g., Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over his brothers, Ephraim over Manasseh, etc.). Third, in the biblical laws only Deuteronomy 21:15-17 mentions this principle in the context of the firstborn son of an unloved wife. There the basis for the right of the firstborn is found in the statement because he "is the first sign of his father's strength" (NIV). This is the only biblical text that could be construed as a rationale for primogeniture (there are no parallel texts that speak to this issue).

But, one must ask, what does God's creation of the man before the woman in Genesis 2 have to do with being "the first sign of his father's strength"? Is this God's strength? If so, could not the creation of the rest of the world before the creation of man and woman be seen as the first sign of God's strength? Further, "the first sign of his father's strength" establishes rights of inheritance in a family context, which has nothing to do with God's creation order. God does not beget the man or woman, nor is the question of authority in human society part of any "inheritance" that God gives to the man. Moreover, God does not give his inheritance, because he does not die.

Having argued that primogeniture is an illegitimate model on which to ground man's supposed authority over woman in the context of the creation order, I need

<sup>17</sup>This is the purpose of the woman's "help": to overcome loneliness. If it were, as Schreiner suggests, "to help Adam with the task of ruling over creation" (*ibid.*, p. 204), then logic would require that she be created before the naming of the animals. The goal of overcoming loneliness is stressed in Genesis 2:23-24, not the woman's assistance in ruling over creation (though this is clear in Gen 1:26).

<sup>18</sup>Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1997), p. 137.

<sup>19</sup>Schreiner, "Women," pp. 201-3.

of the tabernacle (Ex 25:12, 14 et al.). Thus this represents a constituent part of the man that is used for the woman, a basic building pattern that can be drawn from the man and used to create a second person like the first.<sup>28</sup>

The man's exclamation and designation of the woman are, following G. W. Ramsey, "a cry of discovery, of recognition."<sup>29</sup> The only figure in the narrative who perceives what has happened (other than God, who does no naming after his creative work) is the man, making it logical and necessary that he call his new partner "woman." This is not a statement of power or authority. Rather, the man recognizes the woman as one taken from him (and thus "corresponding to him") by choosing terms for "man" (*ish*) and "woman" (*ishah*) that are so closely related that the only difference in their pronunciation is the characteristic feminine ending *-ah*.<sup>30</sup> These are the customary terms to differentiate man and woman. Though the other word for "man" (used until Gen 2:23) is *'adam*, its feminine form would be *'adamah*, which means "ground," a concept that has already been played upon in the creation of the *'adam* from the *'adamah*. Thus it is not used to designate the female; instead there is a corresponding wordplay between *'ish* and *'ishah*.

Schreiner argues that when the man named the animals he exercised authority over them, and thus when he named the woman he exercised authority over her.<sup>31</sup> This is unconvincing for several reasons. First, the text nowhere states that the man exercised authority over the animals by naming them. Rather, he classified them and thereby continued the work of the first three days of creation in chapter 1, where God divided the elements of matter. Second, there is no obvious way in which the man exercised any authority over either the animals or the woman. Third, Genesis 2:23, where the man designates the woman, begins with an affirmation of equality, "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."<sup>32</sup> Fourth, the second part of Genesis 2:23 is a chiasm (concentric structure) in which the words for "woman" and "man" are positioned at

<sup>28</sup>The verb *made* in the phrase "made a woman" of Genesis 2:22 (NIV) is *banah*, "to build."

<sup>29</sup>G. W. Ramsey, "Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere?" *CBQ* 50 (1988): 24-35, esp. 35. Ilana Paredes ("Beyond Genesis 3: The Politics of Maternal Naming," *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, The Feminist Companion to the Bible 2, ed. Athalya Brenner [Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1993], pp. 173-93, esp. 175 n. 1), cites seventeen cases in the Hebrew Bible where a male names a child and twenty-seven cases where a female names a child.

<sup>30</sup>Linguistically, *'ish* and *'ishah* probably have two separate and unrelated origins. It is linguistically accidental that they come to appear similar in Hebrew. However, that is not relevant, because the Bible does not argue a linguistic association. The similar sound of the words provides a wordplay designed to relate them, just as the narrative explicitly connects the two.

<sup>31</sup>Schreiner, "Women," pp. 206-8.

<sup>32</sup>See Belleville, "Women," p. 143.

plications of the society's view of or assumptions regarding hierarchy.

In sum, the view that the man's creation before the woman's implies his authority over her cannot be sustained by study of the text of Genesis 2, the context of Genesis 1-3, the comparative literature of the ancient Near East or the invocation of putative customs of primogeniture in ancient Israel.

The designation of the woman as a "helper corresponding to" (*'ezer kenegdo*) the man in Genesis 2 has also evoked much discussion. Clines represents traditional thinking when he argues that the word (*'ezer*) must refer to someone who is in a subordinate position.<sup>24</sup> However, he dismisses the evidence of the many occurrences in the Bible in which God is the "helper" for Israel or for an individual who appeals to him.<sup>25</sup> Such examples leave no doubt that *'ezer* can refer to anyone who provides assistance, whatever their relationship to the one whom they aid.<sup>26</sup>

The solution to the man's aloneness comes when God builds the woman from his side. "Rib" (*seita*) actually refers to the side of the man, a part of the body that is neither above nor below him.<sup>27</sup> The term is also used for the sides of the ark and

<sup>24</sup>See Clines, "What Does Eve Do?"

<sup>25</sup>E.g., Genesis 49:25 (the only text in Genesis, other than 2:18, 20); Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29. See the affirmation of this argument in Linda L. Belleville, "Women in Ministry," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), pp. 142-43.

<sup>26</sup>Further, Clines's argument—that the patriarchal author's view on how Eve is a "helper" is that she is subordinate and serving the purely biological purpose of procreation—overlooks the main point of the text, which is overcoming loneliness or aloneness (pp. 27-37; also Ian Hart, "Genesis 1:1-2:3 as a Prologue to the Book of Genesis," *TynBul* 46 [1995]: 315-36, esp. 333). Ortlund, "Equality," pp. 102-4, introduces here the categories of ontological equivalence but functional hierarchy, but these are alien to Genesis 1-3, where hierarchy is explicitly ontological and functional between God, people and creation. See Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8; cf. Groothuis, *Good News*, p. 126.

<sup>27</sup>While her view that *'adam* was originally a sexually undifferentiated creature lacks explicit evidence (Hess, "Splitting the Adam," pp. 13-15), Phyllis Trible (*God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978], p. 90) is correct when she writes that woman is "a companion, one who is neither subordinate nor superior; one who alleviates isolation through identity." For other attempts at identifying "the man" of Genesis 2 as a hybrid, see Mary Phil Korshak, "Genesis: A New Look," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, The Feminist Companion to the Bible 2, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1993), pp. 39-52, who proposes the translation "groundling." Azila Talit Reisenberger ("The Creation of Adam as Hermaphrodite and Its Implications for Feminist Theology," *Judaism* 42 [1993]: 447-52) goes further by suggesting a hermaphrodite. Ellen van Wolde (*Words Become Worlds: Semiotic Studies of Genesis 1-11*, Biblical Interpretations Series 6 [Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1994]), pp. 13-31, proposes a similar theory (though for different reasons) but extends it to all references to *'adam* in Genesis 2-3. This is even more difficult to accept, given the distinction between *'adam* and the woman in Genesis 3:19 and 21, in addition to the lack of any difference in *'adam* before and after the woman's creation in Genesis 2.

the center, suggesting a corresponding and equal relationship to one another.<sup>33</sup>

The point of Genesis 2:24 about the man's leaving his father and mother and cleaving to his wife is not to indicate that ancient Israel was originally matriarchal, nor to justify the institution of marriage (which is assumed in the Bible), nor to suggest patriarchy in view of the man's initiating the process. Rather, it is to observe that marriage achieves a reunion of what God had divided in the creation of the woman. That is, by using the flesh of the man to create the woman, God created a division that is restored when the two become one flesh again. Thus the woman was taken from the man's body when God created her and the man reunites the two when he joins with her in marriage. This certainly involved more than physical union, for Hebrew concepts of the person do not recognize a distinction between the physical and the spiritual before sin and death, but it says nothing about a hierarchy between man and woman.

Finally, in Genesis 2:25 the couple is described as being "naked" and "not ashamed." These themes are introduced in order to prepare the reader for what is to come in Genesis 3, where this harmonious unity would know corruption and distortion due to humanity's sin. A relationship that was once equally shared in a uniquely complementary design would become burdened with a struggle for authority from which the man would emerge the ruler.

### Genesis 3:1-13: The Fall Narrative

The snake, who initiates the dialogue, approaches the woman.<sup>34</sup> Why not the man? Is this evidence of the snake's subversion of God's intended hierarchy? Should the serpent have given deference to the man before addressing the woman?<sup>35</sup>

Several points should be made in response to such an assumption. First, if name giving is intended to symbolize not domination but a kind of discernment and wisdom in determining the nature of a creature, then the man's task as caretaker of the Garden in 2:19-20 would have included the naming of the snake.<sup>36</sup> This would have implied the wisdom to see in the snake the characteristic of shrewdness. How this information was obtained we are not told, but there is no indication that the

<sup>33</sup>See J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 2nd ed., Biblical Seminar 12 (Sheffield, U.K.: JSOT, 1991), p. 37.

<sup>34</sup>See Richard S. Hess, "The Roles of the Woman and the Man in Genesis 3," *Themelios* 18 (April 1993): 15-19.

<sup>35</sup>Ortlund, "Equality," pp. 107-8; Schreiner, "Women," p. 209.

<sup>36</sup>See Ramsey, "Is Name-Giving an Act?"

woman was party to it or that the man informed her. Therefore she may have been more susceptible to the snake's persuasive powers.

Second, the reader never learns how the woman received the information that she cites to the snake. Yet it is clear from her words to the serpent that she knew God had forbidden them to eat from the tree. If the serpent and the man had dialogued and sin followed, there would never be certainty as to the guilt of the woman. The text wishes to make clear that both the woman and the man "who was with her" (Gen 3:6) participated in the guilt and both suffered the results, for both knew that eating the fruit was forbidden.<sup>37</sup>

Third, the text nowhere suggests that the snake approached the woman in order to subvert the man's authority over her. There is no mention by any of the characters of any such authority having been given. The challenge of the snake is not directed against the man's authority. It is against God's authority.

Following the dialogue between the woman and the serpent, the narrative resumes in a series of actions (Gen 3:6-8). The passive attitude of the man in contrast to the woman is evident in the initial verbs and their subjects. The fact that he is "with her" suggests the harmonious relationship that these partners shared and for which both were created; and it implies that the man knew what had happened in the preceding verses and thus fully shared in the guilt. In order for this to suggest that the man's leadership over the woman was here subverted, it is necessary to ask whence came that leadership. It is not in the text, nor is it necessary to the narrative.<sup>38</sup> The expression "who was with her" serves a completely different purpose.<sup>39</sup>

The couple's listening to the snake rather than to God is one irony. Another irony is that the trees, designed as a context for God's meeting the couple, are now used as a means of separating the two parties. These ironies enhance the effect the rebellion creates. This sin begins the alienation and breakdown of the harmony that God had so effectively created in Genesis 2. There is no longer an ideal relationship of trust and love. Everything takes a downward slide to suspicion and isolation.

The argument that God approached the man and addressed him first because he was the responsible party for the two has little merit.<sup>40</sup> It is derived from a pre-

<sup>37</sup>On gaps or omissions, see, e.g., David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, Oxford Bible Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 14-17, 20-21, 27, 91, 185, 203-4.

<sup>38</sup>Contra Ortlund, "Equality," pp. 107-8.

<sup>39</sup>The reader does not know how the woman presented the fruit to the man. A traditional view that she enticed the man to sin is not clear from the text.

<sup>40</sup>Ortlund, "Equality," pp. 107-8; Schreiner, "Women," p. 209.

disposition to see hierarchy in the text rather than from a study of the text itself. In fact God questions the man first and separately for three reasons. First, the man had first received the injunction not to eat. Second, the interrogation of Genesis 3:9-13 reverses the sequence in which the characters are introduced in Genesis 3:1-8. Such concentric or chiasmic constructions are prominent in Hebrew narrative and especially in Genesis.<sup>41</sup> The chiasm is completed in Genesis 3:9-13 with the reverse appearance in sequence of the man, woman and snake. In the center of this chiasm is the figure of God, on whom the narrative and subsequent interrogation hinge. Third, God must question the man and the woman separately in order for them to demonstrate the degree to which their sin has caused a loss of harmony in their partnership. In the order of the Hebrew text, the first word of both responses of the man and of the woman is the person or animal they want to blame (the woman! the snake!). Thus sin's breakdown of the creation order was not an abdication of divinely instituted hierarchy but the loss of loving harmony between the man and the woman.

#### Genesis 3:14-20: Judgments, Not Curses

Though the snake (Gen 3:14-15) and the earth (Gen 3:17) are "cursed" because of humanity's sin, the man and the woman are not. Most relevant is Genesis 3:16, which describes the judgment that God gives to the woman. Traditional understandings of this passage have suggested that it describes the origin of pain in childbirth and a subordinate status for women in relation to men (or at least to their husbands).

Regarding the first point, an alternative interpretation has been advanced by Carol Meyers, who argues that "toil" (*'isabon*) in Genesis 3:16 is not the labor of childbirth but rather the increased effort involved in assisting the man in the cultivation of the land.<sup>42</sup> The rationale for this interpretation lies in the judgment on the man in Genesis 3:17, where the same Hebrew word (*'isabon*) describes the "painful toil" (NIV) now required of him to extract nourishment from the cursed earth. Moreover, this form of the word is not used elsewhere to connote pain, including pain connected to childbirth. Thus Meyers's translation of the first clause of Genesis 3:16 ("I will greatly multiply your efforts and your childbearing")

<sup>41</sup>See Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*.

<sup>42</sup>Carol L. Meyers, "Gender Roles and Genesis 3:16 Revisited," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O'Connor (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), pp. 337-54. See also Meyers, *Discovering Eve*.

makes better sense of its syntax, as well as the meaning of *'isabon*. This meaning would then carry over to the second clause in this part of the woman's judgment: "with [in the sense of 'in addition to] *toil* you will bear children." It could also be legitimately translated "with *pain* you will bear children." Though taken from the same Semitic root, this form of the word (*'etsev*; Gen 3:16) is slightly different and is open to either the idea of "pain" or "toil" in a way that the previous form (*'isabon*; Gen 3:16-17) is not. Thus the woman is required both to work with her husband and to bear children, perhaps now with additional pain.

This is why Adam now names his wife Eve: God has revealed to her that she will be the "mother of all living" (Gen 3:20). Thus the first clause of Genesis 3:16 has nothing to do with pain in childbirth but describes (agricultural) work alongside the conception of children. The second clause may repeat these two ideas, or it may describe pain in bearing children. No matter which option is chosen, the woman is required both to work with her husband and to bear children. The giving of the name reflects an awareness of this role for the woman.<sup>43</sup> Eve in Hebrew is *hawwah*, which is associated with *hay* (living, alive),<sup>44</sup> denoting her function of giving and nurturing life.<sup>45</sup> Like *'adam* (which becomes a personal name only in Gen 4:20), *hawwah* may have first functioned as a title. It first appears after the judgments and refers to the one aspect of woman's judgment that differs from that of man, the bearing of children.<sup>46</sup> The name occurs elsewhere only in Genesis 4:1-2 in the context of the conception and birth of her first son, Cain, followed immediately by that of his brother Abel.

In the second part of the woman's judgment, the translation "to rule over" or "master"<sup>47</sup> preserves a meaning that is clear and should not be altered. Comparing the usage of the words *desire* (*'eshuqah*) and *ruler* (*mashal*), which occur together only

<sup>43</sup>Meyers, "Gender Roles," pp. 344-49.

<sup>44</sup>Richard S. Hess, *Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1-11*, AOAT 234 (Kevelaer, Germany: Butzon and Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener, 1993), pp. 19-24; Hess, "Roles of the Woman and the Man"; Scott C. Layton, "Remarks on the Canaanite Origin of Eve," *CBQ* 59 (1997): 22-32.

<sup>45</sup>The nominal form is best understood as designating occupation or profession.

<sup>46</sup>Lyn M. Bechtel, "Rethinking the Interpretation of Genesis 2.4b-3.24," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, The Feminist Companion to the Bible 2, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, UK.: JSOT, 1993), pp. 77-117, esp. 110, suggests that this name giving is evidence of Eve's maturity before the man's, whose name is not given until Genesis 4. This seems correct in terms of her acceptance of life's responsibilities. See also Lyn M. Bechtel, "Genesis 2.4b-3.24: A Myth About Human Maturation," *JSOT* 67 (1995): 3-26.

<sup>47</sup>Susan Foh, "What Is the Woman's Desire?" *WTJ* 37 (1975): 376-83.

here and in Genesis 4:7. Susan Foh suggests that woman's desire here is not a sexual desire but a desire to dominate, just as sin has a "desire" to "rule over" Cain (Gen 4:7).<sup>48</sup> Applying the basic hermeneutical principle of translating an expression in one context by the same expression in a nearby and related context, the text then depicts a struggle of the wills between men and women.<sup>49</sup> On this point Foh seems to have gotten it right and to have made an important contribution.

But she goes on to address the question whether the final statement of this verse is a statement of fact ("you will want to dominate your husband but your husband will rule over you"), or one implying a determined order on God's part ("you will want to dominate your husband but your husband *should* rule over you"), and she sides with the latter. However, the parallel with Genesis 4:7 and Cain's receiving advice to "rule over" sin is not decisive for solving this question (contrary to Foh), because of the nature of the judgments given the man and the woman. Rather, Genesis 3:16-17 is best understood as a description of the new order of things, of how life will be lived as the result of the Fall, rather than how it *should* be lived. It is not a command for one sex to rule over the other any more than Genesis 3:17-19 is a command for all Israelite men to be farmers or a prohibition of the use of weed-killer. These are not God's decisions on how things must be, such that violation of them would be sin.

Thus an additional burden of childbearing is placed on women, and there will

<sup>48</sup>The word *desire* occurs elsewhere only in Song of Songs 7:10. There it refers to the lover's desire for his beloved. Only in Genesis 3:16 and 4:7 do the verbs for "desire" and "rule over" appear in close proximity. Adrian Janis Bledstein ("Are Women Cursed in Genesis 3:16?" in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, The Feminist Companion to the Bible 2, ed. Athalya Brenner [Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1993], pp. 142-45) attempts to identify the word *desire* with Akkadian *kuzbu*, "sexual allurements", used of goddesses. However, there is no reason to connect these words as cognates, nor is it easy to understand how sin in Genesis 4:7 can be sexually alluring to Cain.

<sup>49</sup>Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, associates the reference to the man's ruling over the woman with the agricultural work. She suggests that it means an additional task for the woman, that is, the man would "predominate" over her in labors in the field by doing more work while she was bearing children. Moreover, he would be able to insist on sexual relations because of social and economic necessities for continuation of the tribe. While her interpretation is possible, the evidence of the parallel text (Gen 4:7) and the context of Genesis 1-3 (God's creation of harmony and the subsequent loss of that harmony) points toward a different understanding of the conflict of wills.

Adrian Janis Bledstein, "Was Eve Cursed? (or Did a Woman Write Genesis?)" *Bible Review* 9, no. 1 (February 1993): 42-45, translates the phrase as "you are attractive to your man, yet he can rule over you," suggesting, "the verse is concerned with men's arrogant abuse of power with regard to exploiting another person sexually." This is possible but not probable, as the parallel use of this expression (Gen 4:7) is best understood as "it's [sin's] desire is for you" rather than "it is attractive to you."

be a power struggle between the wills of the husband and wife. The man's predominance over the woman may have to do with the greater physical strength that a husband would often possess in relation to his wife and the sad situation of the exertion of physical force to establish the husband's will against that of his wife.

The result of these judgments is loss of harmony in relationships. The earth does not function in conjunction with the humans. Thus the woman and the man must work against the tendency of the land to produce thorns and thistles. The woman and man, as well, now possess a natural inclination to fight one another, each seeking to exercise their own will against the will of their companion. That this too easily degenerates into violence anticipates the fratricide of Genesis 4.

### Genesis 3:21-24: The Punishment of Expulsion

The expulsion from Eden in Genesis 3:21-23 can best be seen in light of sanctuary imagery.<sup>50</sup> The tunics of skin are God's means of providing for the sin of the couple by an animal sacrifice, perhaps anticipating the sacrifices of the tabernacle and temple. It literally covers them, thereby hiding their shame. The use of animal skins introduces physical death for the first time and suggests a barrier between God and his people,<sup>51</sup> between people and nature, and even between the man and the woman.

The expulsion from the Garden meant the cessation of the man's distinctive role as its caretaker (Gen 2:15); no longer would he cultivate it. Cast out from the presence of God and the opportunity to worship God at all times, man and woman would now have to fill their time with labor to meet life's basic needs and to raise a family. Worship of God, while still possible, would take on new meaning, requiring a separate and additional time of rest before God.

How does this fulfill God's promise of death to those who eat the fruit?<sup>52</sup> Death is a metaphor for personal decay, as can be found in a similar usage of the word

<sup>50</sup>See Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division A, Jerusalem, 1986, pp. 19-25; Terje Stordalen, *Enches of Eden: Genesis 2-3 and Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature* (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters, 2000).

<sup>51</sup>Robert J. Ratner, "Garments of Skin (Genesis 3:21)," *Dor le Dor* 18 (1989-1990): 74-80.

<sup>52</sup>Orlund, "Equality," p. 110, writes, "God told Adam alone that he would die. But Eve died, too. Why then did God pronounce the death sentence on Adam alone? Because, as the head goes, so goes the member." Although the man was alone when God warned of a death sentence, the second person common singular, *you*, in Hebrew regularly appears with a collective sense. In this case it was intended from the beginning to denote the entire human race. As noted, "shall surely die" is a legal term that regularly appears in the singular in laws that are intended as universal; e.g., Exodus 21:12, 15-18. The woman was correct to understand the punishment as applicable to her in Genesis 3:3.



over the woman, except as the sad result of their sin in the Fall and their ensuing judgments. Even then, such hierarchy is not presented as an ideal, but rather as a reality of human history like that of the weeds that spring from the earth. The resolution of this conflict in equality and harmony cannot be found in these chapters but looks forward to a future redemption.

death in the warnings of Deuteronomy 30:15, 19.<sup>53</sup> Thus death for the man and woman is primarily seen in their separation and alienation from Eden, from each other (blaming one another, the coats of animal skin) and now also from God.<sup>54</sup>

This is the real punishment for the sin of eating the fruit. It is not simply the creation of a hierarchy between the man and the woman. It is much worse. It is the collapse of the ordered and harmonious world of the Garden of Eden, the loss of worship with God, the demands of a struggle for existence in the world, and the emergence of disharmony and conflict between the man and the woman.

### Conclusion

The relationship between man and woman in Genesis 1-3 has been examined with regard to several points. First, they were created equally in God's image, though clearly in different ways and sequentially, one after the other. Thus one might speak of a "creation order," though not in the sense of a hierarchy of the man over the woman. Second, they were commanded to share dominion over the rest of creation. This is the only authority given before the Fall. Third, the woman was formed from the man as his "corresponding helper" or partner, with no implication of inferiority or subordination. Fourth, the man described her as "woman," reflecting unity in personhood and diversity in their gender. Later he names her Eve, describing the function she would have in bearing children as the "mother of all living" (hence one could speak of a "procreation order" that counterbalances the creation order; cf. 1 Cor. II:12). But the text does not mention anything about authority in the giving of names. Finally, after the Fall, God's judgment included for the woman hard work alongside her husband in addition to bearing children. She would also have a desire to rule him, though he would end up ruling her.

In short, both unity and gender diversity are clear themes in the creation accounts. God created the woman and the man to be one in unity and love. There is neither explicit nor implicit mention of any authority or leadership role of the man

<sup>53</sup>R. W. Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 39.

<sup>54</sup>Alan J. Hauser, "Genesis 2-3: The Theme of Intimacy and Alienation," in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature*, ed. David J. A. Clines, D. M. Gunn and A. J. Hauser, *JOTS* 19 (Sheffield, UK: JOTI, 1982), pp. 20-36. The view that the expression can mean "you deserve to die" rather than "you will die" (so V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, NICOT [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990]) is not supported by similar examples such as 1 Samuel 14:44 and Jeremiah 26:8. In these cases the statement is made by individuals whose threat is stronger than their ability to carry it through. Further, it is not clear that the Bible makes a decision between deserving to die and dying in terms of punishment.