

MAN &

WOMAN

IN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Man and Woman in the Old Testament

1 Man and Woman in Genesis 1-3

Genesis 1-3 are the most fundamental chapters about man and woman in the Old Testament. They also constitute an indispensable presupposition for the New Testament view of the sexes, a presupposition which is explicitly confirmed and deepened by the Christian revelation. Because of the supreme importance of these first chapters of the Bible for the New Testament we want to concentrate our description of the Old Testament view of male and female on these chapters and outline only briefly the rest of the Old Testament teaching. Three basic ideas will serve as keys in studying biblical texts about the sexes: the affirmation of sexuality, the equality of the sexes, and the assumption of the differences between man and woman.

Before we begin the study of Genesis 1-3, a few observations on the character and interpretation of these chapters are indispensable. Genesis 1-2:4 is the account of the creation of the world, Genesis 2 describes the creation of mankind, and Genesis 3 the fall. All three chapters are composed in poetic language. The common assumption in Old Testament scholarship that Genesis 1 comes from a different source from Genesis 2-3 is of no real significance for our study. The attempt of some exegetes to demonstrate a real theological difference or indeed contradiction between Genesis 1 and the following chapters is not convincing. We shall show in our study of Genesis 1-3 that they agree on the main points and that they complement each other fruitfully.

In this connection it is of decisive importance that we read Genesis 1-3 in two ways. On the one hand the chapters report something that happened in the past (*e.g.*, the creation and the fall of man); on the other they make statements about our present situation (*e.g.*, about man and sin). What happened in the fall of the first human pair reflects the danger to and the sin of mankind today. The story of the fall is therefore both an account of a past primeval event and also an illustration and mirror of present human sinfulness. So Genesis 2 does not make statements just about the relationship of Adam and Eve, but simultaneously it makes fundamental statements about male and female which claim to be fully valid for the present as well. This intertwining of 'factual report',¹⁷⁸ which of course must not be misunderstood as an exact historical report, and statements about present reality run through the whole narrative of the creation of man and the fall.

A fine example of the switch from a report about the past to a fundamental statement about mankind is in Genesis 2:23-4. Genesis 2:23 portrays Adam's excitement when he first saw Eve. Genesis 2:24 draws out from this the truth still valid today: 'Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.' Immediately the report about Adam and Eve resumes, '[They] were both naked . . .' This example shows clearly the fusion of statements about the past and the present.

In our analysis of Genesis 1-3 we shall try to be faithful to this mixture of historical truth and permanently valid truth within the texts. But of course the emphasis will be placed on the fundamental statements about men and women that are still valid today.

a The Affirmation of Sexuality

The report on the creation of the world in Genesis 1 reaches its climax in the creation of man: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them' (Gen 1:27). This verse affirms human sexuality to be something given from the beginning,

and indeed a human characteristic which was intended by God. God did not create man as a sexless spirit, but as male and female. The statement of verse 27 receives additional weight through verse 31: 'And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.' To be a man or a woman is therefore to enjoy God's whole-hearted approval. Men and women are 'very good' in God's eyes and therefore must be accepted by humanity as 'very good' too. Verse 28 puts the physical aspect of human sexuality under God's special blessing: 'And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth . . ."' Offspring, a goal of human sexuality, is the fruit of divine blessing and an outworking of God's plan.

Genesis 1 is free of all types of antipathy to the body which devalue it as the animal side of man or despise it as the prison of his soul (*cf.* Plato). The affirmation of human sexuality, of corporeality, and of sex is so unrestrained that it cannot be exceeded. For what greater can be said about the sexes than that they are the realisation of the very good thoughts of God? The Old Testament scholar Claus Schedl is therefore perfectly correct to say, 'If ever a total "yes" to sexuality was spoken, then it was in the creation account.'¹⁷⁹ The history of Christendom shows sufficiently how uncertain the total 'yes' to sexuality has often been among Christians.¹⁸⁰

It is tragic that this first chapter of the Bible experienced an interpretation that turned its affirmation of man as a sexual being into the opposite. As late as this century there have been exegetes who have understood verse 27 to express the creation of an androgynous first being, that is a male-female dual creature. This interpretation translated the end of the verse as follows: 'God . . . created it [mankind] as male-female.' If this interpretation were correct, it would have severe consequences for the understanding of mankind and its sexuality. The sexually determined person would not then correspond to the original divine intention, but would be a later development labouring under the suspicion that he or she is merely a degenerate form of the original human being.

In fact exegetes who started with the idea of an androgy-

nous being have posited a primeval fall whereby the human being sank into physical sexuality. Theodor Böhmerle, for example, saw the primeval fall as consisting of Adam 'instead of carrying the female principle within him, wanting to have it beside him. In that direction lay a false, anti-God solution of the feminist problem, and thereby the whole destructive stream of sin's corruption was let loose.'¹⁸¹ Even more bluntly Theodor Culmann maintained: "The creation of woman is such a fearful catastrophe, only exceeded by death itself, whose forerunner she is."¹⁸² It is obvious that such an interpretation must lead to an antipathy to the body and a devaluation or denial of human sexuality.¹⁸³

This interpretation which has just been outlined is untenable for three reasons:

1. Genesis 1:27 says explicitly: 'God created . . . them [not him] male and female.' Gerhard von Rad rightly says that the plural 'them' 'prevents one from assuming the creation of an originally androgynous man', since the preceding singular form 'God created *man*' leads one to expect a singular 'him' here.¹⁸⁴ At the same time the expression 'them' shows that the usual translation 'God created them as man and woman' is fully justified in fact, and that it aptly represents the sense of the Hebrew text's 'male and female', though it is not a literal translation.

2. The parallel passage Genesis 5:2 confirms our interpretation, for there too the plural form 'them' instead of 'him' is found ('Male and female he created them, and he blessed them . . .').¹⁸⁵

3. Genesis 1:28 unequivocally disproves the assumption that verse 27 speaks of an androgynous human being: 'God blessed *them*, and God said to *them*, "Be fruitful and multiply . . ."' Both the plural ('them') and the demand to produce descendants only make sense when God is dealing not with a bisexual individual, but with a human pair.¹⁸⁶

The idea of an original androgynous man is not of biblical, but of clearly heathen origin. It is found in Plato,¹⁸⁷ in Philo,¹⁸⁸ a philosopher influenced by Platonism, and in Gnosticism.¹⁸⁹ The non-Christian conception of androgynous

humanity gained influence over some church fathers (e.g., Gregory of Nyssa¹⁹⁰) and especially in the theosophical school of thought of Böhme, Oetinger, J. M. Hahn, de St Martin, Franz von Baader, Soloviev and Berdyaev,¹⁹¹ without ever establishing itself in the church. Happily it remained a fringe phenomenon within Christianity.

The uninhibited affirmation of sexuality in Genesis 1 is also found in Genesis 2: the creation of the woman is greeted with shouts of joy by the man (Gen 2:23) and is regarded by God as the *completion* of his human creation, which is not good without the woman (Gen 2:18). Not until there are two sexes is the situation reached in Genesis 2 that Genesis 1:31 describes as 'very good'. Genesis 2:24 regards man and woman becoming 'one flesh', in a psycho-spiritual and sexual union, as a divinely willed goal of creation. Genesis 2:25 emphasises that Adam and Eve were naked without being ashamed. This innocence of paradise expresses clearly the untroubled and unconditional 'yes' of the first human couple towards their sexuality. So, like Genesis 1, Genesis 2 is free of every kind of disapproval or devaluation of the sexual.

b *The Equality of the Sexes*

The first chapters of Holy Scripture are informed by the conviction that the sexes are equal before God. A particularly impressive witness to the equal worth of men and women is Genesis 1:27: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.' Men *and* women are here dignified with being God's image. Neither sex has an advantage which makes it more valuable than the other. In Genesis 1:27 'the equal worth of the sexes is emphasised: both together constitute the human species'.¹⁹² In Genesis 1:27 it is evident that 'the idea of man . . . finds its full meaning not in the male alone but in man and woman' together.¹⁹³ According to Genesis 1, humanity comes into existence in both the man and the woman, which both represent equally valuable manifestations of humanity. Genesis 1:27 is the permanently valid biblical 'no' to the

devaluation of women in whatever form this appears. Woman possesses the full dignity of the image of God. Verse 27 could be paraphrased: 'And God created man and woman in his image, in the image of God he created them.'

Does the image of God ascribed to human beings relate also to their sexuality? Are men and women the image of God only in regard to their common human nature, or do they also reflect God's nature through their sexual distinctiveness? In what follows we shall try to answer these questions, as we clarify what the concept 'image of God' means.

First, it should be pointed out that in the original Hebrew two different words are used, 'image' (*selem*) and 'likeness' (*demut*). Both words have roughly the same meaning. *Selem* (image) mostly means 'sculpture', 'statue' or 'shaped image'; it is thus always a description of a material image. Whereas *demut* (likeness) is a term of comparison, which presupposes the similarity of one thing to another and like *selem* may be translated 'image'.¹⁹⁴

Whether both terms are translated 'image' or 'representation' or whether the sense of 'image' should be distinguished from 'likeness' is irrelevant to the meaning of this verse. Both words attest 'a correspondence between man and God',¹⁹⁵ a unique comparability of humanity with God, which rests on a real similarity between creator and creature. Genesis 1:27 expresses the special place of humanity in all creation. In the statement about humanity's divine image 'the total superiority of man over the animal . . . is summed up'.¹⁹⁶ 'Humanity is not made according to the measure of the animal, but according to the measure of God himself . . .'.¹⁹⁷ Genesis 1:27 does not say only that man is created *according to* God's image, but *as* the image of God, for image means something tangible, the image of something else.¹⁹⁸ Man is the image, 'precisely the embodiment of God within creation'.¹⁹⁹

Is this statement still true for humanity after the fall? Certainly sinful man cannot be seen as God's image in the same way as he was before the fall. But equally certainly, the similarity to God mentioned in Genesis 1:27 is not simply lost in the sinner. Passages like Genesis 5:1 and 9:6 make it clear

that mankind after the fall still has the image of God (cf. Ps 8).

So what precisely does the image of God consist of? The context of Genesis 1:27 gives an important clue to answering this question. In verse 28 God commits authority over all creation to humanity: '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."' The image of God in man and dominion over creation clearly stand in a close relationship to each other. Man reflects the lordship of God, in that he himself is lord over the earth. Of course that does not mean that the image of God in man is identical with man's lordship over creation, it is rather the presupposition for his rule:²⁰⁰ because man is the image of God, he is capable and equipped to rule the earth. Man is created as God's image irrespective of whether his rule over creation is just or not. The statement about the image of God describes in the first instance not a task, but an essential aspect of humanity, from which certain quite distinct tasks flow, tasks which are compatible with being in God's image. So the divine commission to rule the earth is to be understood as an appropriate material expression of the image of God given to man.

If the image of God is the presupposition of man's commission to rule, it seems likely that it should be associated with his mind and soul, with his capacity for thinking, willing and acting, which represents the necessary presupposition of his rule over creation. This is in fact in the history of interpretation the commonest understanding of our passage.²⁰¹ In its favour there is the illuminating insight that man, precisely through his mind, through being a person, reflects the personality of God and is qualitatively different from the animal kingdom. God's personhood expressed in his thinking, willing and acting has its image in man's personal thinking, willing and acting. In passing, the idea that man could through his material body portray God's totally immaterial being appears quite misguided.

However, this interpretation is not wholly satisfactory.

Dillmann in his commentary pointed out that the human mind cannot be separated from the body in this way:

In so far as this intellectual nature [of man] gives to his external appearance the honour and dignity (beautiful form, upright posture, commanding bearing) that distinguish him from all earthly creatures . . . his bodily shape, the expression and instrument of his spirit, is not to be separated from his intellectual nature. So it should certainly not be excluded from the idea of the image of God.²⁰²

One can only concur with this view, for it conflicts both with the wording of Genesis 1:27 and the Old Testament view of man to relate the image of God in man solely to his mind-soul. In Genesis 1:27 it is not the human soul, but man that is described as the image of God – even though there is no precise equivalent in Hebrew to mind (the closest would be the Hebrew term, *leb*, 'Heart'). The term man (*adam*) always means in Hebrew the whole man, who as a whole is God's creation and cannot be envisaged without a body. Also verse 27 includes the corporeality of man, for it refers to human sexual differentiation (male and female). It cannot therefore be said 'that only the mind is created in God's image. Man . . . bears God's impression as a totality, as a body-soul being.'²⁰³ He is, as a whole, God's image.

This has consequences for our initial question whether the image of God also relates to his sexuality. Since sexuality involves the whole person it is likely that it should be connected with his being in the image of God,²⁰⁴ the more so because Genesis 1:27 explicitly speaks of being male and female. However, one must proceed very cautiously in attempting to answer the question. In what way do man and woman reflect God? For on the one hand our text says nothing about it, and on the other the fact that the whole person reflects God in no way means that the person reflects God in every aspect. The human being is not only God's image but is also a creature of God, and is in that respect bound much closer to the creation than to the creator.

Although, then, his body belongs to the divine image, in

that it makes possible human life, thought and action, man's material form is not the divine image, for God's existence is totally independent of a material body. Genesis 1:27 speaks not only of a relative similarity between God and man (the image of God) but also of an absolute dissimilarity, namely of the irremovable difference between creator and creature. We must therefore always ask in what respect man reflects God and in what respect he does not, in which way human sexuality is an image of God and in which it is not. In posing this question we have left the realm of the exegesis of Genesis 1:27 and have entered the realm of systematic theology. We cannot answer the question of how far male and female reflect God in their sexual nature through further exegesis of Genesis 1, but only through a systematic theological investigation built on the total witness of Holy Scripture (see Chapter 10, section 4). But we can affirm as a secure result of our exegesis that male and female are understood in Genesis 1 as equally in the image of God, and every form of the devaluation of woman is thereby categorically rejected.

In Genesis 2 the equality of the sexes is clearly expressed. Verse 18 states: 'Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."' The woman is here termed as man's helper, and more precisely as a helper 'matching him'. Gerhard von Rad has correctly pointed out that the expression 'matching him' involves both 'the notion of similarity as well as supplementation',²⁰⁵ that is of an equal but different partner. The equal worth of the sexes comes even more clearly to expression in verse 23, where the man hails the wife created for him with a 'jubilant welcome'.²⁰⁶

This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.

The words translated 'Man' and 'Woman' are based on a play on words in the original Hebrew, namely *ish* (man) and *ishshah* (woman). 'The choice of these expressions indicates

that this creature has the *same nature*, (*ish*) as the man, but is different from him, see the ending *ah*.²⁰⁷ The term *ishshah* for the woman 'expresses both the equality and the different nature'.²⁰⁸ The naming of the woman shows how deeply the man feels that she is an equal and a partner of identical worth.

The equality of the sexes is underlined by the following verse: 'Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh' (v. 24). The becoming 'one flesh' expresses the equal partnership of man and wife, 'their personal community in the broadest sense, . . . bodily and spiritual community, mutual help and understanding, joy and contentment in each other'.²⁰⁹ Genesis 2:24 is free from every devaluation of woman: 'She is obviously so precious to her husband, that he leaves his dearest, his family, for her sake.'²¹⁰ The weight of verse 24 can only be adequately understood when it is seen against the background of the high value placed on parents and family in the Old Testament. Here the wife is valued even more highly than the husband's family, which was so highly respected in Israel! The wife is the husband's most precious partner who cannot be displaced by anyone (whether ancestor or descendant). The one-flesh union, the most perfect and most intimate form of human fellowship, is only possible between husband and wife. Clearly, Genesis 2:24 is dealing with monogamy: it only mentions explicitly one man and one woman who become one flesh. Even if the verse does not directly speak of marriage as a life-long institution, its phraseology is totally incompatible with (misogynous) polygamy. It refers only to monogamy.

These few observations should be sufficient to show how free Genesis 2 is from any devaluation of women. It is no surprise that the Old Testament scholar Claus Westermann concludes that Genesis 2 is unique in its high valuation of women 'among the creation myths of the whole of the Ancient Near East'.²¹¹

c *The Differences Between the Sexes*

Genesis 1-3 confirms that the nature, place, and function of the sexes are fundamentally distinct. Genesis 1 emphasises that God created humanity male and female, without specifying more precisely where the differences between the sexes lie. That sexuality is mentioned in the fundamental verse about the image of God in man indicates that maleness and femaleness are not secondary but are an important feature of human existence. Genesis 2 and 3 then explain in detail what the natural differentiation between the sexes consists of. These chapters offer a more precise illustration of the importance of the two sexes for mankind. In what follows we shall try to make clear those truths about the differentiation of men and women which are addressed in Genesis 1 and 2.

A lovely testimony to the fundamental difference between the sexes is Genesis 2:18: 'Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."' The verse speaks explicitly of the man's need of help, the state in which he finds himself without a wife as his match. The man is portrayed as a being in need of help and completion, who desperately requires a wife. Without a wife the man is in an unsatisfactory situation, which does not enjoy the total approval of God. Only with the creation of a wife is the unsatisfactory situation of man relieved and a state produced that deserves the verdict 'very good' (Gen 1:31).

With a wife, the 'help' is there to complete man just where he needs it. It diminishes the text if the idea of help is limited to the process of procreation, in which the woman conceives, carries and gives birth for the man. Dillmann rightly observes that in verse 18 there is no talk of procreation.²¹² Just as becoming one flesh (Gen 2:24) does not just mean sexual union but the total personal fellowship between husband and wife, so the term 'help', which Luther aptly translated 'helper', describes the comprehensive help, both physical and spiritual, that the husband experiences through his wife.

Even though it is not explicitly put into words here, our verse does not speak only of the completion of the man by the

wife, it also presupposes that the wife experiences help and completion through her husband: God does not create a complete person as a match for man, but he creates a person who is to complete the man, not a further human development to replace the man. Genesis 2:18 is a denial of every concept of a perfect person who needs no further completion. If it is not good for the man to be alone, it is also not good for the woman to be alone. Both sexes need completion and help from each other. Genesis 2:18 shows that there are real differences between men and women. These serve to supply the lacks and needs of the one sex through the gifts of the other.

The difference in nature between men and women becomes clear in Genesis 2 in the different way God creates them. The man is formed out of the earth (v. 7), but woman is created out of man's rib (vv. 21-2). The different ways of creating man and woman are closely related to their different tasks, which they fulfil in creation according to Genesis 2-3. The man is formed from the soil, whose cultivation is entrusted to him by God (Gen 2:15; 3:17), while the woman is created quite differently, out of man's rib, to be his helper. This is her God-given task in life (Gen 2:18). The appointed tasks of the sexes are as basically different as the ways in which they were created by God. Their different modes of creation are intimately related to their tasks in life. It is worth noting that Genesis 2 and 3 in their own language make clear the very different world-outlooks of the sexes, which we have already met in the anthropological-psychological part of this book (Chapter 4, section 3). While the man has an immediate relationship to the world of things, the woman is primarily directed to the world of persons (*i.e.*, in the first instance to her husband).

Further investigation of Genesis 2 and 3 confirms this interpretation. In addition to the man's task of food production through cultivating the ground and the woman's task of being man's helper, another task of the man and the woman is mentioned which confirms the greater thing-related outlook of the man and the stronger personal attachment of the

woman. In Genesis 2:19-20 the man is commissioned to name the animals. Giving a name is more than labelling: it is 'an act of appropriate ordering, by which a man intellectually objectifies the creatures for himself'. It is an 'act of recognition and interpretation that takes place in language'.²¹³ It involves organising conceptually the space which surrounds Adam. According to ancient ideas 'the nature of something is expressed by its name'.²¹⁴ Naming the animals helps to achieve a mental grasp of their character. It is 'only the actual expression of a previous inward interpretative appropriation'.²¹⁵ We see this very well in Adam's inventing of the words *ish* for man and *ishshah* for woman, which expresses both the difference in nature between the sexes as well as their similarity.

It is striking that the man is entrusted by God with naming the animal kingdom (*i.e.*, with comprehending the living world that surrounds him). In this way the theoretical task of comprehending his environment is added to the practical task of transforming the world. The man is given by God the task of mentally comprehending and practically transforming the world. Subduing the world, which was the commission given to man at creation according to Genesis 1:28, does not consist merely in making it subject to and useful for humanity, but also in its intellectual subjection. Naming is in ancient Near Eastern ideology the 'exercise of sovereignty, of command'.²¹⁶ In naming the animals Adam fulfils part of his commission to subdue the earth (Gen 2:18). It is no coincidence that Adam, not Eve, is entrusted with naming the animal kingdom. God wants to enable Adam not only to comprehend his environment intellectually, but to lead him to self-understanding, to realise that he needs the woman as a helper. So the report of naming the animals concludes with the sentence: 'The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him' (Gen 2:20). Through understanding the animal kingdom Adam discovered that his isolation and need for help could not be solved by a non-human creature.

The extent of Adam's commission to comprehend his environment appears not only in the charge to name the animals, but in his reaction to the creation of woman. His astonished shout is not just a joyful reaction, but an intellectual summary of the nature of male and female:

This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.

It is noteworthy that even here the man himself grasps the new situation, and that God himself does not introduce the woman to the man nor does she introduce herself. It is also not by chance that God informs the man, not the woman, of the prohibition not to eat of the tree of knowledge (Gen 2:16-17). In all this we see that God entrusted the man with the task of intellectually comprehending the world. Thus Genesis 2 and 3 attest in their own way the closer psychological relationship of the man to the world of things and physical relationships.

The greater personal interaction of the woman is visible in the second responsibility assigned to her in Genesis 2 and 3 alongside her appointment as man's help: motherhood is a further significant responsibility of woman in Genesis 3:16. Admittedly this verse deals with the execution of the divine sentence on the woman following the fall and not with formulating the responsibility itself. But the verse does presuppose motherhood and subordination to the man, just as the sentence on the man presupposes his responsibility to provide food. Both the sexes are affected in their principal responsibilities by the divine judgement. To be man's helper and a mother are according to Genesis 2 and 3 the fundamental responsibilities of the woman. Both are person-related responsibilities and exemplify the greater personal interaction of the female. Here it is worth noting that the primary responsibility of the woman is not said to be motherhood – which might be expected given the extraordinarily high valuation of motherhood in Old Testament Israel – but to live life as the man's partner!

Genesis 2 and 3 shed new light on Genesis 1:28's command to mankind to be fruitful and subdue the earth. Although this task is given to man and woman, as the wording of Genesis 1:28 makes clear, its fulfilment imposes different obligations on the sexes, as we can see from Genesis 2 and 3. While the woman as mother is entrusted more with the duty of propagating the human race, the man is particularly entrusted with subduing the earth; Genesis 2 makes this clear through his responsibility to cultivate the earth and name the animals. So man and woman together fulfil the divine commission, each contributing in the way appropriate to their sex. The Catholic philosopher and nun Edith Stein has appropriately described the different participation of the sexes in the divinely appointed task: 'In the man the call to rule is primary, whereas fatherhood is secondary. (It is part of ruling, rather than being subordinate to or an adjunct to it.) In the woman the maternal call is primary, and sharing the rule is secondary (it is partly included in mothering).'²¹⁷

We can conclude that Genesis 2 and 3 express clearly the natural differentiation of men and women and suggest correspondingly different responsibilities for the sexes. Finally we want to note the different attitudes of the sexes to each other as they emerge in Genesis 2 and 3.

The man according to Genesis 2:18 is the origin and goal of the woman. Woman is taken out of man and created for him to complete him and to help him. This relationship is not reversible. "That original creaturely "from there" and that original "for the sake of" applies only to the woman. A reversal of this relationship does not apply!"²¹⁸ Genesis 2:18 not only expresses the sexes' mutual need of completion and help but also a non-reversible orientation of the woman towards the man as the reference point for her life. Claus Westermann rightly insists: 'One could not say in [Genesis] 2:18 that man is created as a helper for the woman.'²¹⁹ Paul aptly sums up the content of Genesis 2:18 in the sentence: 'Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man' (1 Cor 11:9). The description of the man in Genesis 2 does not start with the woman, but the woman's description starts with

the man. This is connected with the man being set over the woman. For if the woman has the responsibility to assist the man in his God-appointed responsibilities, that means that the woman has to be subject to the man. Gertrude Reidick correctly recognises this when she writes: 'As regards that fellowship of man and woman in which she ought to stand by him, she occupies a secondary position; for whoever helps does not lead but offers support, accompanies, offers advice and action, but does not take the initiative.'²²⁰ The Lutheran systematic theologian Peter Brunner is quite right when he finds the content of the New Testament view that man is the 'head' of the woman (1 Cor 11:3) already in essence present in Genesis 2:18.²²¹

Other passages in Genesis 2 and 3 confirm that the leading role is attributed to the man whom the woman as a person of equal worth should stand by to give help to and support.²²² Edith Stein sees implied in the fact that 'the man was created first . . . a certain primacy'.²²³ It is at any rate striking that in Genesis 2 and 3 the man is viewed as God's primary partner in conversation. It is the man (not the woman) whom God addresses about his moral responsibility towards God. After the fall God first summons Adam, not Eve, although she led him into sin, 'Adam, where are you?' (Gen 3:9). Adam received the divine command not to eat of the tree of knowledge, and he is therefore in a special way responsible for upholding it. Eve, however, learned of the divine command only indirectly through Adam, not from God himself. That is why Adam and not Eve was first called to account by God. Adam in both Genesis 2 and 3 is addressed as the one to whom God has entrusted the responsibility of spiritual leadership. His is the responsibility to instruct Eve in the divine commandment and to make sure that neither she nor he transgress it. Martin Luther has beautifully portrayed Adam preaching to his wife in paradise.²²⁴ Even if we should abstain from such speculative portrayals, one can still say: 'From the garden of Eden story onwards Adam, not Eve, is put forward as preacher and guardian of the divine word.'²²⁵

The great fault of Adam in the fall was his denial of

responsibility for spiritual leadership, and instead of submitting to God's command submitting to his wife's leadership. So God begins his sentence 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife' (Gen 3:17). The sin of Adam therefore consists not just of disobeying God, which is of course decisive, but in the perversion of his created situation *vis-à-vis* Eve. He committed himself to her religious initiative and leadership instead of maintaining his own responsibility for leadership as God intended. The fall is therefore not only the rebellion of mankind against God, but the setting aside of the divinely appointed order of male and female. The Old Testament scholar J. T. Walsh has drawn attention to this point. In a valuable analysis of Genesis 2-3 he shows that before the fall there are four levels of authority (God—Man—Woman—Animal). In the fall this is inverted into precisely the opposite. The snake (representing the animal kingdom) gains authority over the woman, the woman authority over the man, while God's authority is suppressed through the influence of the snake.²²⁶ The English theologian Gordon Wenham aptly sums up the sinful reversal as follows: 'Eve listened to the serpent instead of Adam: Adam listened to Eve instead of God.'²²⁷ After the fall God reinstates the original structure of authority when he puts the snake under the woman, the woman under the man, and all three under his divine authority.²²⁸ The fourfold hierarchy of Walsh is so obvious that it cannot seriously be contested. That God represents the supreme authority needs no discussion. That the animal kingdom is subject to man is shown (apart from Gen 1:28) by man naming the animals, which discloses his authority over them (Gen 2:18-19). That the woman is subject to the man is clear not only in Genesis 2:18, but also in Genesis 2:23, where the man expresses his superiority over her by naming her. Of course in this fourfold grading of authority the steps in the hierarchy are in no way equal. God's authority stands absolutely over all other levels. The authority of mankind over the animals is essentially different from the authority of the man over the woman, which only consists of the right to lead in a partnership of equals.

Walsh's four-level hierarchy in Genesis 2 and 3 confirms the insight already reached that in both chapters the man is placed over the woman and appointed by God to lead. This is of great significance in understanding the fall. The leadership position of the man makes him specially responsible for the transgression of the divine commandment.²²⁹ P. Brunner concludes, not without reason, 'that the fall is made final by the man's action. Only by the man's deed does the fall become ripe for judgement . . . It is true that Adam is deceived by Eve, but the fall is completed by Adam.'²³⁰ The leadership position of the man intended by God in Genesis 2 precludes ascribing to Eve the chief guilt for the fall, as has happened time and again in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. His seduction by Eve offers no excuse for Adam, for he was pledged on the basis of his spiritual responsibility to correct his wife and to prevent the disobedience initiated by her from turning into joint rebellion against God.

The story of the fall is of abiding significance for us as it allows us to recognise the special risks facing men and women. It is an unmistakable warning of the danger which arises if the woman seizes the religious leadership that God has entrusted to the man. Eve's misadventure begins with her forsaking the spiritual leadership of her husband and involving herself without him in a dialogue with the snake (Gen 3:1-5). The story of the fall consists of two distinct scenes.²³¹ In the first scene the conversation takes place between the woman and the snake (Gen 3:1-5). There is no mention of the man. His absence is obviously presupposed, for it explicitly says: 'The serpent . . . said to the *woman* . . .' The first scene creates the inner predisposition in the woman to transgress God's command in the given situation. Only in the second scene, where there is no more talk of the snake, does Eve covet directly to eat of the tree of knowledge: '. . . the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise . . .' (Gen 3:6). The conversation with the snake sowed the seed for the transgression of the divine commandment. Now the seed sprouts, and Eve succumbs

to the temptation: '. . . She took of its fruit and ate . . .' (Gen 3:6).

Before the conversation with the snake there was no incentive to despise the divine commandment. Now, after the conversation, the temptation is there. The text no longer presupposes that the snake is present, but, in contrast to the first scene, it does presuppose the presence of the man: '. . . and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.' In both scenes Eve is the one who takes the initiative, while Adam appears just a passive onlooker who willingly lets his wife lead. It is obvious that at the fall the woman ruled over her husband and instead of being his helper to live as God intended, led him into evil. So quite rightly Edith Stein states that the woman 'in tempting the man put herself over him'.²³²

Straight after the fall God corrects the woman by explicitly endorsing the man's dominion: '. . . and he shall rule over you' (Gen 3:16). We shall look more closely at the interpretation of this controversial passage in Excursus 2. For our present discussion it suffices to establish that God sharply rejects the dominion and leadership of the woman that was apparent in the fall. The story of the fall shows that the woman fundamentally endangers herself and the man by her bid to dominate. But to maintain the divinely intended order of the sexes, as it appears in Genesis 2, is a protection against evil for both sexes. The reversal of this order makes both hostages to evil and brings destructive consequences. The story of the fall thus sheds new light on the divine ordering of the sexes. The divinely intended subordination of the woman has nothing to do with the oppression of women by men, but is a beneficial arrangement that protects men and women from the destructive power of evil. The woman runs into great danger when she steps outside this protective ordinance. The story of the fall shows the woman as a creature in special need of protection and particularly open to Satanic seduction. As many commentators have noted,²³³ it is not by chance that the snake goes to the woman. The snake addresses her because she 'is more receptive of new impressions'.²³⁴ Gerhard von

Rad sees in the seduction of the woman by the snake and the consequent seduction of the man by the woman an indication that the woman 'confronts the obscure allurements and mysteries which beset our limited life more directly than the man does. In the history of Yahweh-religion it has always been the women who have shown an inclination for obscure astrological cults.'²³⁵ This interpretation is not an exegetical fancy. There are in the Old Testament (cf. Exod 22:18; 1 Sam 28:7-25)²³⁶ and in anthropology²³⁷ serious hints that women are more open to the occult than men. This fits in with the fact that women have greater receptivity than men. They are therefore more liable to be affected by their surroundings. This characteristic of women is neutral in itself and can be used for good or ill. However, it was exploited by the snake. At the beginning of the history of condemnation stands the misuse of female receptivity. At the climax of salvation history God used female receptivity to make the incarnation of his Son possible. The receptive 'Let it be to me according to your word' (Luke 1:38) of Mary brings salvation to all humanity, just as Eve's misuse of receptivity brought condemnation to all. The greater receptivity and openness to influence of the woman which the snake exploited shows her particular need of help which her subordination to man serves. Placing the man over the woman in Genesis 2 is therefore a blessing which serves her good. It is a helpful ordinance for both sexes. The story of the fall shows that to upset this order ends in catastrophe for both sexes.

There are commentators who understand women's subordination to the man to be a result of the fall, arguing that it does not correspond to the original will of God.²³⁸ They appeal to Genesis 3:16, where God sentences the woman to be subject to the man. In that case it would be a punishment not a blessing. We want to examine in the following excursus the sense in which God's word to the woman, '... he shall rule over you', is to be understood.

Excursus 2

The subordination of the woman in Genesis 3:16

However Genesis 3:16 is to be interpreted, at least our treatment certainly shows that those interpretations are untenable which maintain that Genesis 2 affirms a total equality of rank between the sexes and that the subordination of woman is first addressed in Genesis 3:16. Our study of Genesis 2 and 3 has shown that the man is placed in authority over the woman in being given responsibility for leadership. The subordination of the woman is thus not a punishment caused by sin, but a creation ordinance that expresses God's will for the sexes. The equal worth of men and women according to Genesis 2:18 and other passages is not to be confused with their equal rank, but it includes a super/subordination of equally valuable partners.

To be taken more seriously than the first type of interpretation is the idea that the woman's subordination in Genesis 2 is intensified into oppression by men in Genesis 3:16 as punishment for her sin. So, for example, Calvin writes in his commentary on Genesis: 'She had, indeed, previously been subject to her husband, but that was a liberal and gentle subjection; now she is cast into servitude.'²³⁹ But, it must be asked whether Genesis 3:16 can really mean that God nullifies the relationship between the sexes of Genesis 2 and *ordains* a despotic rule of man over woman. The text gives no warrant for holding that God imposes a punishment involving male tyrannical oppression of the woman or that it regards such despotism as good. The Jewish exegete Jacob has raised a telling objection: 'If the woman were now punished with subjection under the man, he would be given an advantage which he least deserved at this moment.'²⁴⁰ Attempts have been made to get round these difficulties by seeing Genesis 3:16 not as proclaiming a divine punishment but only a divine announcement.²⁴¹ So Genesis 3:16 should not be translated 'He *shall* rule over you' but 'He *will* rule over you.' So, for example, Hick insists

that the text merely expresses the fact of the man's rule even under the changed circumstances. It does not give a right to rule in an authoritarian way, and it certainly imposes no duty to do so.

It therefore follows that the woman is not burdened with a new duty of obedience. On the contrary the existing subordination (*cf.* Gen 2) continues in force despite the changed situation.²⁴²

According to this interpretation God does not alter the creation ordinance of Genesis 2 to the woman's detriment, but announces to the woman what she will have to suffer in the way of oppression by men. In favour of this interpretation it may be argued that it takes Genesis 3:16 seriously as a word of judgement without drawing untenable conclusions from it, either that the subordination of the woman originates as punishment for the fall or even that it justifies male oppression of women.

There is also an interpretation of Genesis 3:16 which holds that it just expresses what is already in the creation ordinance of Genesis 2. This interpretation is for example advocated by Thomas Aquinas,²⁴³ Luther,²⁴⁴ and in our century by the Jewish exegete B. Jacob.²⁴⁵ For it a whole series of arguments may be adduced.

1. The wording of Genesis 3:16 does not demand a negative interpretation, in which a despotic rule is presupposed. The Hebrew word for 'to rule', *mashal*, may describe a negative oppressive rule, but it may be used in an explicitly positive sense. For example, the Old Testament uses it for God's rule (*cf.* Isa 40:10; Ps 22:28), or of the eschatological reign of the Messiah (*cf.* Mic 5:1ff).²⁴⁶

2. In Old Testament thinking man's rule and the subordination of women is not something negative. It is therefore questionable to start out with modern presuppositions and see Genesis 3:16 as bemoaning the oppression of women. Westermann correctly insists that the 'situation of the woman' in the Old Testament was not felt to be "degrading" because of the domination of the husband, but only when she has no children or when she does not belong to any husband'.²⁴⁷

3. The suggested interpretation makes a plausible connection between Genesis 3:1-6 and Genesis 3:16. The woman broke loose in the fall from subordination to the man (Gen 3:1-6), and for this reason is explicitly redirected by God to the place that suits her in creation (Gen 3:16).

4. The wording of Genesis 3:16 does not at all warrant the conclusion that the order of the sexes in Genesis 2 has fundamentally altered. The wording gives no scope for questioning that man is the origin and goal of the woman or that she is his helper.

5. Though Genesis 3:16 is a sentence on the woman, this does not mean that all its statements are punitive in character. The remark

'he shall rule over you' is only one part of Genesis 3:16 and need not necessarily be a punishment, but it could be a summons to return to the creation subordination to the man (*cf.* point 3). Genesis 3:16 contains at least two remarks which in no way involve punishment. The remark that the woman will bear children is not punitive, only the accompanying circumstances of birth are punishments for the fall. Nor is the remark that the wife will long for her husband a punishment. This deals with a fact of the created order which is in no way negative but is related to woman's relationship to man in Genesis 2. That her desire for the man is not negative is shown by Genesis 2:24, where the same is said about the man: the man leaves his parents because he longs for a wife. So we see that the punitive character of Genesis 3:16 does not mean at all that the subordination of the woman must be a punishment.

6. In 1 Corinthians 14:34 Paul respects Genesis 3:16 as a still valid divine ordinance.²⁴⁸ Since everywhere else Paul always appeals to Genesis 2 in establishing his position about men and women (except for 1 Tim 2:13), it shows that he does not regard Genesis 3:16 as an innovation conditioned by the fall, but a creation ordinance. If Luther's basic principle is taken seriously, that 'Holy Scripture is its own interpreter', 1 Corinthians 14:34 must certainly be drawn on for understanding Genesis 3:16.

I leave the reader to choose which interpretation to adopt. But in our view there are only two worthy of serious consideration. Either Genesis 3:16 ordains only that subordination of women to men which is already part of God's creation ordinance in Genesis 2. Or Genesis 3:16 states that woman will be oppressed by men as a result of her sin, without justifying such oppression. At any rate it is quite untenable to understand Genesis 3:16 as proof that the subordination of women to men is a punishment or curse because of the fall.

2 Man and Woman in the Rest of the Old Testament

a *The Affirmation of Sexuality*

The affirmation of the sexuality and physicality of human beings is not only found in Genesis 1-3, but characterises the