

## **Study 2 The diocese of the Murray clergy conference. Gen 1-3**

*In discussing what the Bible teaches on men and women, no part of the Bible is more important than Genesis chapters 1–3.* In his informed of these chapters, Richard Hess, say the importance of these chapters cannot be overemphasized in any study of the man–woman relationship. He writes,

The account 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 text in the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, the German conservative Old Testament scholar and complementarian, Werner Neuer, says, “Genesis 1–3 are the most fundamental chapters about man and woman in the Old Testament.” These chapters, he adds, are of “supreme importance.”<sup>2</sup> To these comments we may add the conclusions of Pope John Paul II in his authoritative encyclical, *On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*.<sup>3</sup> He says these opening chapters of the Bible, particularly what they say on man and woman, are “the basis of all Christian anthropology.”<sup>4</sup>

### **The reason.**

The Biblical story in four steps

Creation – ideal

Fall – the present reality.

New creation inaugurated by Christ yet to be perfected

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<sup>1</sup> “Equality,” 79.

<sup>2</sup> *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective*, trans G. Wenham, London: Hodder and Staughton, 1990, 59.

<sup>3</sup> *Apostolic letter, Muliers Dignitatem of the Supreme Pontiff, John Paul II on the dignity and vocation of women on the occasion of the Marian year*, Boston, MA: St Paul’s, 1988, 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 22,

Genesis chapters 1 to 3, read in canonical context (i.e. as they are in our Bible), give “a continual narrative”.<sup>5</sup> They tell us that God created man and woman as the climax of his creative work and that he placed them in the Garden of Eden. Tragically, however, the devil enters and both the man and the woman fall into sin and as a consequence their relationship with God, each other and the created world are damaged and they are banished from the garden. Christian theologians see this story as theologically foundational: It explains why there is sin in the world and why a savior and a renewed creation are needed. The story line makes sense, but we have in these three chapters two very different accounts of “the beginning”. They are “a literary doublet”.<sup>6</sup> In Genesis 1, in repetitive and stylized language, God creates everything “good” in six days with the crown of his creative work, the creation of man and woman in his image and likeness. Chapter 2 gives a different account of the beginning in the form of a dramatic narrative interspersed with dialogue filled with symbolic elements (an idyllic garden “in the east,” a forbidden tree, a talking snake, woman created from the man’s side, expulsion from the garden, etc.) presented in seven “scenes”, each marked out by a change of actors, situation, and activity.<sup>7</sup> Step by step God supplies what is needed in the Garden; first vegetation, then water, then man/’*adam* to till the ground and then a partner for him in the woman. In this Garden “the Serpent” appears and leads the woman

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>6</sup> Hess, “Equality”, 82.

<sup>7</sup> The seven scenes are as follows.

1. 2:5-7: narrative: God the sole actor, ’*adam* present but passive.
2. 2:18-25: narrative: God the main actor, ’*adam* minor role, animals passive, woman created to ’complete’ ’*adam*, marriage now possible.
3. 3:1-5: dialogue: serpent and the woman in dialogue.
4. 3:6-8: narrative: man and woman on center stage: God absent until the end of the scene.
5. 3:9-13: dialogue: God, man and woman on stage together.
6. 3:14-21: narrative: God main actor, he addresses serpent, woman and man in that order.
7. 3:22-24: narrative: God the main actor, man and woman passive.

Bruegermann, *Genesis*, 44, speaks of four scenes.

and the man to disobey God's command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of God and evil. The rest of this narrative tells of the consequences of their sin.

These two accounts of creation cannot be simplistically reconciled and thus how they are related is possibly the most important issue in establishing what the writer of Genesis chapters 1 to 3 in their present form was seeking to say

### **The agreed interpretation of Genesis 1.**

There is virtually no scholarly debate over what Genesis 1 says on the sexes. As the pinnacle of his creative work God, creates man and woman. In Genesis 1:27-28 we learn four things:

1. Man and woman alike are made in the image and likeness of God. This means first of all that man and woman have the same status and dignity. Any denial of the essential equality of all human beings on the basis of sexual identity, race, social status, caste, education or age, is a denial of the God-given status and dignity of every human being.

2. The expression, "made in the image of God", however also implies that man and woman conjointly are given the mandate "to rule the earth."<sup>8</sup> We could say accurately that their God-given status makes them both God's vice-regents. This is certainly the most likely inference of what "made in the image and likeness of God" means but this joint mandate to rule in any case is explicitly given to man and woman in the words following; "God blessed *them*" and said, "Have dominion ... over every living thing". Andreas concludes, "By placing his image on the man and the woman and by setting them in a particular environment, therefore, God assigns to them the mandate of representative rule. This rule is the joint *function* of the man and the woman."<sup>9,10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *God's Design*, 29.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>10</sup> *God, Marriage and the Family*, Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2004, 34.

3. Genesis 1:27 reads,

God created the '*adam* in his image;

In the image of God he created them.

Male and female he created them.

This verse is a threefold Hebraic poetic stanza. In the first line '*adam* is in the singular, in the second line the plural "them" appears, and in the third line the reason for the plural "them" is made plain. '*Adam* is male and female.

The Hebrew, "'*adam*" in this stanza must mean "humankind" because the '*adam* is the male and female.<sup>11</sup> In Genesis 2 the word '*Adam* can refer to the man in distinction to the woman and later become a personal name for the first man (Gen 4:25) but this does not question the meaning "humankind" in Genesis 1:27. Hebrew has no word for "humanity" other than '*adam*. What Genesis 1:27 teaches is that humanity *is* male and female. God created one species, humankind, in two sexes. This means sexual differentiation is a creation—given and good.

And it implies that the two sexes *complement* each other. Man and woman are humankind; not man alone or woman alone. They are together more than the sum of the parts; they *complete* what it means to be human, especially so in marriage, the most intimate of male—female complementary relationship.

4. In the fourth divine word on the man—woman relationship in Genesis 1:27-30 God commands them "to be fruitful and multiply". This is often called "the family mandate". The first readers of this text were aware, like us, that men impregnate and women get pregnant, procreation involves sexual complementarity, but the Genesis texts says nothing about this

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<sup>11</sup> As far as I can see all modern scholarly commentators agree on this. The only supporting evidence that the Köstenberger's give for their contrary opinion is the complementarian Raymond Ortland, "Male—female Equality and Male headship," 98.

difference. What the author of Genesis 1 wants to stress is that “the family mandate” is given to man and woman alike. It is a shared responsibility and privilege. Nothing is said about different “roles”.

With its unambiguous and emphatic affirmation of the essential equality of the two differentiated sexes who complement each other ringing in our ears we now turn to Genesis chapters 2 and 3.

### **The interpretation of Genesis chapters 2-3.**

It is obvious, as we noted earlier, that we have here a second account of the beginning. On coming to this chapter all evangelicals should be very wary of any interpretation of Genesis chapter 2 that denies what is unambiguously taught in chapter 1, namely that man and woman have the same status, dignity and authority. Most of us, I am sure, cannot accept that texts that stand side by side, could be teaching opposing truths. What is more likely and plausible is that they say the same things in different words or complement one another. In opposition to those who are opposed to the ordination of women argue that Genesis 2 “supplements” Genesis chapter 1 by introducing the idea of “man’s leadership in the marriage and the wife’s role as his suitable helper.”<sup>12</sup> This chapter, in other words teaches something that Genesis 1 would seem to exclude. The man rules over the woman. She has the “role” of obeying.

For centuries, theologians read Genesis chapter 2 as “supplementing” chapter 1 in the sense that it added something not said in chapter 1, namely that God has set the man over the woman. Because these men lived in an entirely patriarchal culture, they unreflectingly read Genesis 2 to be confirming what their everyday experience was; men rule, women obey. Many details in the story were taken to teach just this. I give the most common *inferences*

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<sup>12</sup> *God’s Design*, 23, 33

that are drawn to reach this conclusion.<sup>13</sup> Note carefully, the text itself says none of these things.

1. The man was created first and this means he is “first” in every way.
2. God created woman as man’s “helper” (i.e. a subordinate).
3. Woman was made from and for the man, not vice versa.
4. God gave the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to Adam, not to Eve, thereby making it clear that he was in charge in the Garden.
5. Adam named the animals and Eve and naming implies “authority over”.
6. Eve was the first to be deceived by the serpent/devil. This demonstrates that women are more prone to sin and deception, and thus need the leadership of men.
7. After they had both sinned God spoke first to Adam, again showing that he had put him in charge.

In the historical and in the contemporary complementarian interpretation of Genesis chapters 2 and 3, the punishment God gives to the woman for her sin, namely that she will desire her husband but he will rule over her (Gen 3:16), introduces *nothing* new. Adam ruled over Eve before the fall. Genesis 3:16 speaks of an intensification of that rule, or as Knight says, the imposition of an “autocratic and unloving rule.”<sup>14</sup>

Absolutely basic to the contemporary complementarian position is the view that before the fall the woman was subordinated to the man, and all or some of the seven arguments just outlined are given as proof, admittedly usually worded more euphemistically than in past times.

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<sup>13</sup> Payne, *Man and Woman*, 43–54, list and discusses eleven such arguments and then gives twenty statements in Genesis 1–3 that depict man and woman as equals, 52–54.

<sup>14</sup> “The Family,” 346.

Because all complementarians ground the subordination of women in creation before the fall, it is for them the God-given ideal, a trans-temporal and transcultural norm. This “theological truth” explains for them everything said about the man-woman relationship in the New Testament. It is the “glasses” they wear as they read the Gospels, Acts and the Epistles.

In responding in some detail to each of these seven arguments for the pre-fall subordination of woman, which I am about to do, I note first of all that each one of them is an *inference* drawn from details in the story. The text itself says none of these things and chapter 1 teaches explicitly the opposite: God gives to men and women in creation the same dignity, status and authority.

We now critically assess the seven arguments for the pre fall subordination of women.

1. *Created second indicates that woman is second in status, or in complementarian terms, man is to be the leader.* The chronological order in which creation takes place says nothing about who is socially “first.” According to Genesis chapter 1, man and woman are created last and yet they stand at the apex of God’s creative work. In Genesis chapter 2 man is created after the earth yet he is set over it. Often what is created second is superior, such as a later model of something. An old joke says, “God created Adam, took one look at him and said, ‘I can do better than this’, and created Eve.” John Calvin with his usual clear sightedness said, the argument that woman is second in rank because she was created second does “not seem very strong for John the Baptist was before Christ in time, yet was far inferior to him.”<sup>15</sup> Paul once mentions that man was created first, then Eve (1 Tim 2:13), but what he was inferring by this comment is to be found in his literary context in which his words are found— i.e. in 1 Timothy, which we will consider later.

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<sup>15</sup> *I Corinthians and 1 and 2 Timothy*, 217.

2. *Woman is taken “from man” and “for man”.* This argument reflects what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:8–9, echoing exactly rabbinical teaching. In reply one need first to look at what Paul says in verses 11–12 following, “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man so now man comes through woman.” This is certainly a balancing comment, if not a self-given, apostolic corrective to what Paul says in verses 8 and 9. In the text of Genesis itself woman is created “for man” because he is helpless and incomplete on his own and “from man” to make the point that she is “bone of my bones flesh of my flesh” – just like me but woman. The idea that derivation necessarily implies subordination is special pleading. It is simply not true. The narrator of Genesis makes it clear that he does not believe this. In Genesis 2:5 he tells his readers that ‘there was no one to till the ground’ (*adamah*) and so God formed the ‘*adam*’ from the *adamah* (v. 7). Adam’s derivation from the earth does not mean he is subordinate to it, just the opposite. It seems that what the narrator of Genesis intended to be understood in speaking of woman being made from the ‘*adam*’s “side” is that alike both man and woman are God’s creation and alike both have the same dignity, worth, and potential. Indeed many theologians have thought that taken from ‘*adam*’s “side” indicate equality. Peter Lombard, just before he became Archbishop of Paris in 1157, wrote in his famous theological *Sentences*, “Eve was not taken from the feet of Adam to be his subordinate, nor from his head to be his master, but from his side to be his partner.”<sup>16</sup> The Puritan commentator, Matthew Henry, gives the same conclusion in more colorful language.<sup>17</sup>

3. *The woman is created to be man’s subordinate helper.* A “helper” is not necessarily a subordinate. Parents help their children.<sup>18</sup> A helper can be a superior, an equal or an inferior. The Hebrew word *ezer* (“helper”) is used 21 times in the Old Testament, 15 times of God, the

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<sup>16</sup> *Libri Sentenarium*, Liber 1 et 11, second ed., Florentiam: A. D. Claris Aquas, 1916, 18 C1 (p. 388).

<sup>17</sup> *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, 1, London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1960, first published 1708) 7.

<sup>18</sup> On what follows see Payne, *One In Christ*, 44–5; Hess, “Equality”,

sovereign helper of his people, Israel. Nowhere is it used of a subordinate helper. We thus must ask, what sort of helper does God provide for Adam? The text itself tells us that “the helper” is not a superior or a subordinate. The Hebrew word *kenegdo* that qualifies *ezer*, defines the helper as one corresponding to him – literally “according to, or the opposite of”<sup>19</sup> The two words taken together thus speak of a fitting partner or companion for Adam.<sup>20</sup> The

4. *God’s command specifically to Adam, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good indicates that God had placed him in charge of the Garden.* The major problem with this argument for male leadership in creation before the fall is that Eve did not exist at that time. Also problematic for this argument is that later the author of Genesis chapters 2 and 3 implies that the command was given to both of them (Gen 3:1).

5. *Naming indicates “authority over”.*<sup>21</sup> This is simply untrue. To name someone or something is to distinguish one from another; to identify a person or place. To name someone “John” means he is not Bill or Mary. In the OT, the giving of a name often signifies something about the person. Jacob is given his name because he grabbed his twin brother’s heel at birth and his name testifies to this fact. By naming the Lord, *El Roi*, Hagar is certainly not claiming authority over God (Gen.16:13). If name-giving does indicate authority over, it is anomalous that women most commonly name children in the OT.<sup>22</sup> We should also note, that in Genesis 3:23 Adam does not name Eve before the fall. He simply identifies her as woman in distinction to man. It is *after* the fall when he rules over her that he names her Eve (Gen 3:20). This argument for man’s headship, based on naming, cannot be accepted by any evangelical. It introduces a contradiction in scripture. In Genesis 1:28, man and woman together are given authority over all the animals. This means, if we do not want to set

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<sup>19</sup> On the words used and their meaning see Payne, *Man and Woman*, 44–45

<sup>20</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 177, thinks the best translation would be either “partner” or counterpart”.

<sup>21</sup> Köstenbergers, *ibid.*, 48–49.

<sup>22</sup> There are 46 examples of child naming in the Old Testament, in 28 cases the mother names the child, in 18 the father.

scripture in conflict with scripture we cannot believe that the naming of the animals indicates that man alone has been given the ruling mandate. The good thing is we do not have to believe this because the text of Genesis chapter 2 does not say this. This opinion is simply an *inference* drawn by those wanting to support what they already believe.

6. *The Serpent tempts the woman first and she falls into sin first. This demonstrates that women are more prone to sin and deception, and thus need the leadership of men.* If the serpent speaking first to the woman is indicative of something, then the differing order in which the actors come on stage in each scene, something we have noted is characteristic of how this story is told, then the chronological order in which characters appear in each scene would all need to be indicative of something. No one suggests this. We should also note that the narrator explicitly says, “and her husband was with her and he also ate” (Gen 3:6). They were both deceived and both disobeyed. Some commentators argue that in having the serpent speak first to the woman, the author of Genesis is suggesting he found her more interesting or alluring than Adam. A humorous explanation of this mute detail is that the Serpent reasoned, “If I can deceive the woman, the man will be a pushover”! He was right. In 1 Timothy 2:14, reflecting the situation in the Ephesian church where woman had been deceived by the false teachers, Paul says, remember you women, it was Eve whom the devil first deceived.

7. *God addresses Adam first after the fall. This shows that he was in charge and ultimately responsible for their sin.* This inference has seemed compelling to male commentators for centuries, and to complementarians today, but it is not. It is only one of many inferences or deductions that could be drawn. We could equally argue that God addressed Adam first because he was most culpable as another human being led him into sin whereas Eve was less responsible because she was led astray by the serpent, a symbol of the demonic.

We should also note that when God asks Adam why he ate of the tree, he replies it was not my fault but hers. “She gave me the fruit from the tree and I ate” (Gen 3:8–13). In these words, Adam is depicted not as the master in the Garden, but as someone weak who does not take responsibility for his own actions.

### **The contemporary scholarly interpretation of Genesis 1-3**

The majority of scholarly commentaries on Genesis written in the last thirty years<sup>23</sup> and Pope John Paul II,<sup>24</sup> following the best of Catholic scholarship – categorically reject the interpretation of Genesis chapters 2 and 3 just given. The Pope’s interpretation is binding on the almost one billion Catholics. What follows is thus not an idiosyncratic evangelical egalitarian reading of Genesis 2–3, but what the vast majority of contemporary scholarly commentators conclude, and what all Roman Catholic theologians teach.

This interpretation of Genesis 2–3 presupposes that these chapters complement, not contradict, what is said in Genesis 1. In the so called “second creation story”, a completely different picture of God’s creative work is given in a symbolic and picturesque narrative in a number of scenes in which the characters appear in different order in each scene. Sometimes God is first on the scene; sometimes the man, sometimes the woman, once the serpent. The

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<sup>23</sup> In post 1980 commentaries see, W. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Atlanta: John Knox, 1982; J. J. Scullion, *Genesis: A Commentary for Students, Teachers and Preachers*, Atlanta: John Knox, 1982; R. F. Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis*, second edition, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1991; M. Maher, *Genesis*, Wilmington, Del.: M. Glazier, 1982; C. Amos, *The Book of Genesis*, Peterborough, UK: Epworth, 2004; T. L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, Oxford: OUP, 2001; T. Fretheim, “The Book of Genesis” in L. E. Keck et al eds, *The New Interpreters Bible*, Nashville, Ten.: Abingdon, 1994; R. J. Clifford and R. E. M. O’Carm “Genesis”, in R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, R. E. Murphy, eds, *The New Jerome Commentary*, London: G. Chapman, 1989; W. S. Towner, *Genesis*, Louisville, Ken.: Westminster John Knox, 2001; M. Kessler and K. Deurloo, *A Commentary on Genesis*, New York, NY: Paulist, 2004; D. S. Briscoe, *The Communicator’s Commentary on Genesis*, Waco, TX: Word, 1987; D. W. Cotter, *Genesis* Collegeville, Minn., The Liturgical Press, 2003; L. A. Turner, *Genesis*, Sheffield: Academic, 2000; J. E. Hartley, *Genesis*, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2000; John H. Walton, *Genesis, The NIV Application Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

For the same opinion in pre 1980 commentaries see J. A. Skinner, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, 1, trans. I. Abrahams, Jerusalem: Magnes, ET 1961; B. Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading*, London: G. Chapman, 1977; R. Davidson, *Genesis 1-11*, Cambridge: CUP, 1973; G. Von Rad, *Genesis : A Commentary*, trans. John Marks, London: SCM, 1961; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, New York: Doubleday, 1969.

narrative begins with Adam in a garden where there is no water, plants, animals or woman. Step by step God supplies what he needs. I use the pronoun “he”, but Adam at this point is not man in distinction to woman, because man can only be man/the male in distinction to woman/the female when man and woman both exist. One thing God asks of Adam is not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God sees that Adam alone is *help-less*, incomplete, and brings the animals before him. He names them, but none of them is a suitable partner. To provide this for Adam God creates woman from Adam’s side (not his rib). On seeing her, he recognizes that she is just like him and so he exclaims, she is “bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh”, but different from him. He is man (Heb. *ish*), she is woman (Heb. *ishshah*) (Gen 2:23). Then the serpent, a symbol of the devil, appears, speaking in this scene first to the woman, with the man standing by her side (Gen 3:6). The Serpent first gets *them* to doubt and then disobey the one command God gave them – not to eat of this tree. In response to their joint disobedience, God decrees that man’s *labor* will always leave him unfulfilled and frustrated (Gen 3:17–20), and woman will find the man ruling over her and her *labor* in childbirth will be painful (Gen 3:16).

Genesis chapters 2 and 3 *complement* Genesis chapter 1 primarily in two ways First, chapter 2 complements chapter 1 by emphasizing that God has made us man or woman. This has been taught in chapter one, now it is highlighted. The differentiation of the sexes is what Genesis chapter 2 speaks, not the subordination of women. Second, this narrative account of the beginnings complements chapter 1 by explaining why there is evil in the good world God created. differentiated sexes, and adding an explanation as to why life is as it is: why there is sin in the world; why humankind’s relationship with God is broken, why men find work frustrating and seek to rule over women, and why women suffer in childbirth.

Having put aside the old patriarchal glasses, most modern scholarly commentators “see” nothing in Genesis 2–3 to *infer* the subordination of women before the fall, and much to the

contrary. They now recognize that all the *inferences* drawn from the text to confirm belief in the subordination of women before the fall are special pleading..

### **Genesis 3:16.**

What the text of Genesis 2–3 says explicitly is that male rule over the women is a direct consequence of the sin of the man and the woman (Gen 3:16). The Hebrew word translated “rule” (*mashal*) does not speak of despotic rule. The word is frequently used of God’s benevolent rule of his people.<sup>25</sup> The argument that before the fall the man benevolently ruled over the woman and the fall introduces a malevolent expression of this rule, as complementarians characteristically argue, is without merit.<sup>26</sup> The rule of the man over the woman is a consequence of the sin of Adam and Eve. It is not the God–given ideal and for this reason should be opposed by Christians.

Until the rise of the complementarian movement all commentators took the “desire” of the woman to be for intimacy and/or a sexual relationship with her husband. The post 1970s novel complementarian interpretation of <sup>27</sup> Hebrew *teshugah* (Eng. “desire”) to be speaking of a “desire to control.”<sup>28</sup> They thus interpret Genesis 3:16 to be teaching that following the fall the woman will “desire” to control her husband and as a consequence the husband and the wife will be caught up in a never–ending struggle. The pernicious logic of this argument is that all or most conflict in marriages arises because women will not submit to the Godly rule of their husbands; they struggle against it as sinners. This novel understanding of the woman’s desire so popular among complementarians has had many critics and recently suffered a death blow. Janson Condren, an Australian Old Testament scholar, in a compelling

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<sup>25</sup> Payne, *Man and Woman*, 51.

<sup>26</sup> So Knight, “The Family”346

<sup>27</sup> First put forward by Susan Foh in her 1975 journal article, “What is Woman’s Desire?”

<sup>28</sup> *God’s Design*, 47-48.

journal article, shows that this argument is “fundamentally misguided”.<sup>29</sup> It is his conclusion that the Hebrew word *teshugah* should not be translated, “desire.” It speaks rather of “a returning to.” Genesis 3 :16 is saying, despite the man’s rule over her and the pain of childbirth, the woman wants to *return* to her husband, seeking the perfect intimacy she enjoyed with him before the fall.<sup>30</sup>

Genesis chapter 1 and 2 teach the substantial equality of the two differentiated sexes. The subordination of woman is entirely a consequence of the fall, and thus women’s subordination is not the God-given ideal. It reflects life in our fallen world.

If this is the case you need not read on. There subordination of women is not grounded in creation; the complementarian position is without any theological basis whatsoever.

### **The right way to read the Bible.**

The argument is compelling that the subordination of women is a consequence of the fall and as such not the God-given ideal. Nevertheless, we do find Paul exhorting wives to be subordinate to their husbands and some New Testament texts that do or can be read to speak of the subordination of women. What this means is that texts can be quoted by both sides in this debate to “prove” their case.

Seemingly conflicting texts is not a problem only in the matter of the status and ministry of women. It is a problem for every doctrine. What systematic theologians seeking to ground any doctrine in scripture have to do is find what is primary and foundational in the varied comments in scripture on the matter in focus. This problem was first recognized in the fourth century when Arius and Athanasius found themselves debating what in fact the Bible taught on the divinity of the Son. Arius found many texts that did or seemed to subordinate the Son

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<sup>29</sup> Condren, “Toward a Purge.” Walton, *Genesis*, 237, independently comes to the same conclusion

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 244–155.

to the Father. Athanasius in reply what is primary and foundational in “the whole scope of scripture” is that Jesus Christ is God and the Lord.<sup>31</sup> To establish his argument he enunciated a hermeneutical rule, later Augustine would call it a “canonical rule,”<sup>32</sup> based on what Paul says in Philippians 2:4–11. All texts that imply or speak of the subordination of the Son speak of him in the form of a servant; all texts that speak of him as God in all majesty, might and authority speak of him in “the form of God.”

When we come to the debate about the man–woman relationship such a rule is demanded. Genesis chapters Genesis 1–3 is the basis for this rule. It is this:

*All texts that imply or speak of the substantial and essential equality of the two sexes reflect the creation-given ideal; all texts that imply or speak of the subordination of women reflect the fall. They are not the God-given ideal. They either mirror the culture of the time, or give practical time-bound advice to women living in a world where their subordination is assumed, or address an exceptional situation where the behavior of some women is causing offence.*

All evangelicals who want to uphold the theological unity of scripture should be pleased to embrace this rule.

### **Questions for discussion**

1. Discuss the two opposing interpretations of Genesis 2-3. Which do you think is the strongest? What fresh thinking or questions have you had as a result of this study?
2. In the past, when patriarchy was taken for granted, what effect do you think this would have had on male theologians or pastors and on their interpretation of the Bible?

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<sup>31</sup> *NPNF*, “Discourses Against the Arians”, 3.29 (p. 409).

<sup>32</sup> *The Trinity*, 74, 82, 99.

3. What do you think it means for men *and* women to be made in “the image and likeness of God”? How does this idea enlarge your view of humankind?
4. In Genesis 1—3 gender equality and differentiation are both affirmed. Does this affirmation of gender difference support the idea that “men are from Mars, women from Venus”?
5. Does anything in modern life suggest to you that God has subordinated women to men?
6. Of what importance is it for evangelicals, Pentecostals and charismatics that Pope John Paul II in 1987 ruled that the egalitarian reading of Gen 1–3, as outlined above, is binding on all Catholics?
7. Why do you think it is so hard for men and women to fully respect each other and work harmoniously together?

**Addendum, man and woman in the fallen world of the Old Testament.**

Complementarias *infer* from the fact that the patriarchs, the kings, the priests and all the written prophets were men the principle of male leadership. In contrast, I infer from these facts that the Old Testament accurately reflects a fallen world where the man rules over the woman. This argument unconvincing. That the patriarchs are all men is certainly an empty argument. The word “patriarchy” means the rule of the father, or more generally, the rule of older men. When it comes to prophets and prophecy women are well-represented. The prophets were raised up by God to speak his word. They could call priests and Kings to account.

Moses’ sister, Miriam, is described as a talented musician, a poet, and a prophet who speaks for God. When the Israelites safely made dry land after crossing the Red Sea, we are told “the prophet Miriam” took up a tambourine to rehearse God’s mighty acts (Ex 15:20–21). The

prophet Micah, looking back at this time, speaks of God “setting before you [i.e. as leaders] Moses, Aaron and Miriam” (Mic 6:40). Deborah is described as a “prophet” (Judg. 4:4), a “judge/ruler” (Judg 4:5), a “mother of Israel” (Judg 5:7), and as “the wife of Lappidoth” (Judg 4:4). Huldah, the wife of Shallum, who lived in Jerusalem, is another example of a female prophet. In about 621 BC King Josiah sent a delegation to her to inquire about “the book of the law” found in the temple during its restoration (2 Kgs 22:14; 2 Chron 34:22). Speaking in Yahweh’s name, Huldah prophesied judgment on Jerusalem and Judah following Josiah’s death, a prophecy that was fulfilled. Noadiah is another named prophetess (Neh 6:14). There are also references to a number of unnamed women prophets. For example, the wife of Isaiah is said to be a prophetess (Isa 8:3),<sup>33</sup> and the prophet Ezekiel pronounces judgment against the daughters of Judah who prophesy falsely “out of their own imagination” (Ezek 13:17). In the Mishnah it is said, “Forty eight prophets and seven prophetesses prophesied in Israel.”<sup>34</sup> To point out that all the classical prophets (those who wrote books) were men is of no significance.<sup>35</sup> Women were not taught to read or write! We could also note that Prophets like Nathan, Elijah and Elisha were great prophets and we have no written record of their teaching.

Deborah is the most telling reply to arguments that in the Old Testament leadership is a male preserve. As noted above she is married, a prophet who speaks for God and a judge. One argument they make is that the word “judge” in the Hebrew Bible does not speak of a judge in modern sense of this word.<sup>36</sup> I do not know who suggested it did. This comment is a red herring. Daniel Block says, “the ‘judges’ functioned more as deliverers than as legal functionaries.”<sup>37</sup> Then he adds, the Hebrew *sapat*, “to judge” means “to govern administer,

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<sup>33</sup> In this instance the title may simply allude to the wife of a prophet.

<sup>34</sup> 6 Meg. 14a Bar.

<sup>35</sup> *God’s Design*, 57,

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 68

<sup>37</sup> Daniel L. Block, *Judges and Ruth*, The New Bible Commentary, Nashville: B&H, 1999, 23

exercise leadership.”<sup>38</sup> Like the other male “judges”, God raised up Deborah to deliver Israel from her enemies. When Israel is threatened by King Jabin of Canaan, Deborah “summons” Barak and puts him in charge of Israel’s army (Judg 4:6) Barak, a renown warrior, says he will only go into battle if Deborah comes with him (Judg 4:8). He needs her moral and prophetic support. Designating Deborah as a prophet also marks her out as an exceptional woman. To be called a prophet means the people recognized her as one who speaks for God “in the succession of Moses (cf. Deut 18:15–25).”<sup>39</sup> This a high dignity, and in the case of Deborah, it is bestowed to a woman.

The truth is Deborah was a never–forgotten national leader and hero; “the only woman in the distinguished company of the Judges.”<sup>40</sup> I believe God put into our Bible the story of Deborah to make crystal clear that women can make superb leaders and he can be pleased to use them and bless their work.<sup>41</sup>

In the Old Testament we also find one Queen, Athaliah (2 Kings 11:1-16). Again I suggest God raised her up to make it plain to his people that even in a patriarchal world he was pleased to see woman in leadership.

### **Biblical Patriarchy.**

We should accept that Israel was a patriarchal society, men were family and communal leaders, but not that this is the biblical norm for all time. The fact is “that patriarchy as an institution [in the Old Testament] was benevolent and beneficial rather than intrinsically

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>40</sup> A. Cundall, *Judges and Ruth*, 82.

<sup>41</sup> See the excellent article by Pierce, “Deborah: Troublesome Woman or Woman of Valour”,

abusive and oppressive.”<sup>42</sup> “It provides a positive vision of the father’s role as a blessing to those around him.” in all cultures in all times.<sup>43</sup>

We can all agree that patriarchy can be benevolent institution and that it has prevailed for most of human history. In past times it was the only option available. This was how things were. Men were the strongest and they ruled. In patriarchal societies women accept and internalize their subordinate status because it is the cultural norm and no other option can be conceived. What is more, in most cultures the leadership of men is enshrined in an authoritative religious text which makes it God’s idea. Patriarchy also has rewards for women. Their father or husband provides protection and economic security and marriage gives women status a single woman does not have. The problem is that when anyone one or any group hold unchallenged power they use it to further their own ends. It invariably has malevolent consequences for the disempowered.

Let me just give a few examples. The patriarch Abraham takes the slave girl Hagar as a wife when Sarah does not conceive (Gen 16:3). She has no say in this. When Sarah becomes jealous of Hagar Abraham puts Hagar, the mother of his son, Ishmael, out of his home knowing full well this might mean her death (Gen 21:8–19). This is hardly benevolent behavior.

King David is another example. He has many wives as a noble patriarch, and in old age takes “a beautiful” young virgin to bed with him (1 Kings 1:1–4). Despite all his wives, David lusts after the “beautiful” Bathsheba, a married woman, and sleeps with her (1 Sam 11:1–12). The Bible makes it absolutely clear that this displeases God, but the point I am making is that David’s love life reflects the malevolent consequences of patriarchy.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 61.

Then we can think of the story of Amon, David's son, who raped his sister Tamah (2 Sam 13:1–22). His sin is condemned but he continued with his privileged life. In stark contrast, the consequences for Tamah in this patriarchal world were devastating and life-long. She becomes a disgraced woman through no fault of her own who can never marry (2 Sam 13:20).

I now add a few more general consequences for women that flow from the patriarchal presuppositions of the Old Testament. According to the law, a woman could not inherit property, divorce her husband, or be trusted to make a vow (Deut 21:16–17; 24:1–4; Lev 27:1–8). Daughters were considered the property of their fathers and could be either sold into slavery to pay off debt or married for a bride price (Gen 29:1–10; Ex 21:7; Neh 5:5). Wives were considered the property of their husband, although they held a higher status and more privileges than slaves and concubines (Ex 20:17). Marriages were typically arranged by the father before a girl reached puberty. While the virginity of young men was inconsequential, it could mean for a woman life or death. If a woman failed to bleed on her wedding night, she was to be executed on the doorstep of her parent's home (Deut 22:21). Daughters of priests who engaged in sexual relations outside of marriage were to be burned alive (Lev 21:9). When the home of Abraham's nephew Lot was surrounded by a mob of men from Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot refused to send out his guests to be raped but offered his virgin daughters instead; they were less valued. Virgins captured in war were considered plunder, along with children, livestock, and treasure taken from the besieged city (Num 31:1–12; Deut 20:10–14). In the book of Judges, when the Benjaminites were in need of wives, they simply abducted them from a neighbouring city when the young girls were out dancing in the vineyards (Judg 21:1–24).

It is my argument the Bible as a historical book accurately *describes* how a patriarchal society operated in Israel; it does not *prescribe* patriarchy for all places and for all times,

making it the God-given norm. Indeed, the Bible offers a powerful critique of it, even if in a somewhat oblique way in the Old Testament. When we come to Jesus and his teaching in the New Testament, to which we now turn, we find all the presuppositions of patriarchy are subverted, and a new vision of the man-woman relationship is envisaged. In this vision, man and woman stand side by side, each with head erect, neither with special privileges, as they did in creation before the fall.