

THE THEOLOGY OF SEXUALITY IN THE BEGINNING: GENESIS 1-2

RICHARD M. DAVIDSON
Andrews University

The first two chapters of the Bible deal directly with the question of human sexuality. Not only is human sexuality presented as a basic fact of creation, but an elucidation of the nature of sexuality constitutes a central part of the Creation accounts. These opening chapters of Scripture, coupled with the portrayal of disruption and divine judgment presented in Gen 3, have been described as of seminal character and determinative for a biblical theology of sexuality. It has been correctly noted that a clear understanding of these basic statements is crucial, since here "the pattern is established and adjudged good. From then until the close of the biblical corpus it is the assumed norm."¹ In this article we will focus upon the theology of sexuality in the creation accounts (Gen 1-2), and in a subsequent article we will explore the theological insights on sexuality emerging from Gen 3.

1. *Sexuality in Genesis 1:1-2:4a*

In Gen 1:26-28 "the highpoint and goal has been reached toward which all of God's creativity from vs. 1 on was directed."² Here in lofty grandeur is portrayed the creation of man (*hā'ādām* = "humankind"):

²⁶Then 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." ²⁷So

¹Dennis F. Kinlaw, "A Biblical View of Homosexuality," in Gary R. Collins, ed., *The Secrets of Our Sexuality: Role Liberation for the Christian* (Waco, TX, 1976), p. 105.

²Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, 1961), p. 57.

God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸And 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."³

It has been rightly observed that discussion among theologians over this passage has largely focused on the meaning of man's creation in the "image of God" and has almost entirely ignored the further affirmation that humankind is created male and female.⁴ In harmony with the concerns of this study we must focus in particular upon the neglected statement—"male and female he created them"—without ignoring the question of the *imago Dei* and the wider context of the chapter. The fundamental insights into the theology of human sexuality which emerge from Gen 1:1-2:4a are here discussed under seven major subheadings.

Creation Order

In the clause concerning man's creation as male and female (Gen 1:27c) we note, first of all, that sexual differentiation is presented as a creation by God, and not part of the divine order itself. This emphasis upon the *creation* of sexual distinction appears to form a subtle but strong polemic against the "'divinisation' of sex"⁵ so common in the thought of Israel's neighbors.

Throughout the mythology of the ancient Near East, the sexual activities of the gods form a dominant motif.⁶ The fertility myth was of special importance, particularly in Mesopotamia and Palestine. In the fertility cults creation was often celebrated as resulting from the union of male and female deities: "Copulation and procreation were mythically regarded as a divine event. Consequently the religious atmosphere was as good as saturated with mythical sexual conceptions."⁷

³All English renditions of Scripture herein are from the RSV.

⁴Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A Study of Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1975), p. 19.

⁵Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York, 1962), 1:27.

⁶Raymond Collins, "The Bible and Sexuality," *BTB* 7 (1977):149-151, conveniently summarizes the major aspects of sexuality (fertility, love-passion, destructive capacity, sacred marriage) in the ancient Near Eastern myths.

⁷Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:27.

In contrast to this view of creation as divine procreation, the account of Gen 1, with its emphasis upon the transcendent God (*Elohim*) and a cosmic view of creation, posits a radical separation of sexuality and divinity. God stands “absolutely beyond the polarity of sex.”⁸ The sexual distinctions are presented as a creation by God, not part of the divine order.

A Duality from the Beginning

Secondly, it may be noted that God created the bipolarity of the sexes from the beginning. The popular idea of an ideal androgynous being later split into two sexes cannot be sustained from the text. Gerhard von Rad correctly points out that “the plural in vs. 27 (‘he created them’) is intentionally contrasted with the singular (‘him’) and prevents one from assuming the creation of an originally androgynous man.”⁹ The sexual distinction between male and female is fundamental to what it means to be human. To be human is to live as a sexual person. As Karl Barth expresses it, “We cannot say man without having to say male or female and also male and female. Man exists in this differentiation, in this duality.”¹⁰ Whether or not we agree with Barth that “this is the only structural differentiation in which he [the human being] exists,”¹¹ the sexual distinction is certainly presented in Gen 1 as a basic component in the original creation of humankind.

Equality of the Sexes

A third insight into the theology of human sexuality stems from the equal pairing of male *and* female in parallel with *hā’ādām* in Gen 1:27. There is no hint of ontological or functional superiority or inferiority between male and female. Both are “equally immediate to the Creator and His act.”¹² In the wider context of this passage, both are given the same dominion over the earth and other living creatures (vss. 26 and 28). Both are to share alike in the blessing and responsibility of procreation (vs. 28). In short, both participate equally in the image of God.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 60.

¹⁰Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3/2 (Edinburgh, 1960):286.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex* (New York, 1964), p. 7.

Wholeness

A fourth theological insight will serve to bridge our discussion from “male and female” to the *imago Dei*. In Gen 1:27 the generic term for humankind (*hā’ādām*) includes both male and female. “The man and the woman together make man.”¹³ The holistic picture of humankind is only complete when both male and female are viewed together. Such a description points to the individuality and complementarity of the sexes, and will be more fully developed in Gen 2.

Relationship

The existence of the bipolarity of the sexes in creation implies not only wholeness but relationship. The juxtaposition of male and female in Gen 1:26 intimates what will become explicit in Gen 2: the full meaning of human existence is not in male or female in isolation, but in their mutual communion. The notion of male-female fellowship in Gen 1 has been particularly emphasized by Barth, who maintains that the “I-Thou” relationship of male and female is the *essence* of the *imago Dei*. For Barth, Gen 1:27c is the exposition of vs. 27a. and b. Man-in-fellowship as male and female is what it means to be in the image of God.¹⁴

Barth’s exclusive identification of the sexual distinction with the image of God is too restrictive. Our purpose at this point is not to enter into an extended discussion of the meaning of the *imago Dei*.¹⁵ But it may be noted that the Hebrew words *selem* (“image”) and *dēmût* (“likeness”), although possessing overlapping semantic ranges, in the juxtaposition of vs. 26 appear to emphasize both the concrete and abstract aspects of human beings,¹⁶ and together indicate that the person as a whole—both in material/bodily and

¹³Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (London, Eng., 1926), 1-2:61-62.

¹⁴Barth’s discussion of this point extends through major portions of his *Church Dogmatics*, vols. 3/1, 3/2, and 3/3. See the helpful summary of his argument in Jewett, pp. 33-48.

¹⁵The literature on this subject is voluminous. For a survey of views, see especially Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, 1984) pp. 147-155; G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1962), pp. 67-118; Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1986), pp. 33-65; and cf. Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia, 1978), p. 29, n. 74, for further literature.

¹⁶See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 854, 198 [hereinafter cited as

spiritual/mental components—is created in God’s image. In his commentary on Genesis, von Rad has insightfully concluded with regard to Gen 1:26: “One will do well to split the physical from the spiritual as little as possible: the whole man is created in God’s image.”¹⁷

Von Rad has elsewhere further elucidated the meaning of the *imago Dei* in terms of mankind’s dominion over the earth. Just as earthly kings set up images of themselves throughout their kingdom as a “sign of sovereign authority,” so in the context of Gen 1:26-28 man is God’s representative—his image—to uphold and enforce his claim as sovereign Lord.¹⁸ If the image of God includes the whole person, and if it involves human dominion over the earth as God’s representative, this, does not, however, exclude the aspect of fellowship between male and female emphasized by Barth. The sexual differentiation of male and female (vs. 27c) is not identical to the image of God (vs. 27a-b), as Barth maintains, but the two are brought into so close connection that they should not be separated, as has been done for centuries. The synthetic parallelism of vs. 27c, immediately following the synonymous parallelism of vs. 27a-b, indicates that the *mode* of human existence in the divine image is that of male and female together.¹⁹

The aspect of personal relationship between the male and female is further highlighted by the analogy of God’s own differentiation and relationship in contemplating the creation of humanity. It is hardly coincidental that only once in the creation account of Genesis—only in Gen 1:26—does God speak of himself in the plural: “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness.” There have been many attempts to account for this use of the plural, but the explanation that appears most consonant with both the immediate context and the analogy of Scripture identifies this usage as a plural of fullness. The “let us” as a plural of fullness “supposes that there is within the divine Being the distinction of personalities” and expresses “an intra-divine deliberation among ‘persons’ within the divine Being.”²⁰

BDB]; cf. N. W. Porteous, “Image of God,” *IDB*, 2:684-685; von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 57-58.

¹⁷Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 58.

¹⁸Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:146.

¹⁹See the argumentation for this point in Jewett, p. 45, and *passim*.

²⁰See Gerhard Hasel, “The Meaning of ‘Let Us’ in Gen 1:26,” *AUSS* 13 (1975):58-66; the quotation is from p. 65. Cf. Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction*

The juxtaposition of the plurality of the divine “let us” in vs. 26 with the plurality of the “them” (male and female) in vs. 26-28 is not without significance. Karl Barth appears to be right in his contention that a correspondence or analogy is intended “between this mark of the divine being, namely, that it includes an I and a Thou, and the being of man, male and female.”²¹ The statement of this correspondence “preserves with exceeding care the otherness of God,”²² precluding any notion of the bisexuality of God, and yet at the same time underscores the profound importance of the personal relationship and mutuality of communion in human existence as male and female. Just as there takes place in the divine being deliberating over humankind’s creation—“the differentiation and relationship, the loving coexistence and co-operation, the I and Thou”²³—, so the same are to be found in the product of God’s crowning creative work.

Procreation

It is clear from Gen 1:28 that one of the primary purposes of sexuality is procreation, as indicated in the words “Be fruitful and multiply.” But what is particularly noteworthy is that human procreativity “is not here understood as an emanation or manifestation of his [the human being’s] creation in God’s image.” Rather, human procreative ability “is removed from God’s image and shifted to a special word of blessing.”²⁴ This separation of the *imago Dei* and procreation probably serves as a polemic against the mythological understanding and orgiastic celebration of divine sexual activity. But at the same time a profound insight into the theology of human sexuality is provided.

Procreation is shown to be part of the divine design for human sexuality—as a special added blessing. This divine blessing/command is to be taken seriously and acted upon freely and responsibly in the power that attends God’s blessing.²⁵ But sexuality cannot be

and Commentary, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL, 1967), p. 52.

²¹Barth, 3/1:196.

²²Trible, p. 21.

²³Barth, 3/1:196.

²⁴Von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 60-61.

²⁵The Hebrew word for “bless” (*berak*) in Gen 1 implies the power to accomplish the task which God has set forth in the blessing. See Josef Scharbert, “ברך

wholly subordinated to the intent to propagate children. Sexual differentiation has meaning apart from the procreative purpose. The procreative blessing is also pronounced upon the birds and fish on the fifth day (vs. 22), but only man is made in the image of God. Gen 1 emphasizes that the sexual distinction in humankind is created by God particularly for fellowship, for relationship, between male and female. This will become even more apparent in Gen 2, where the motif of relationship dominates and procreation is not mentioned at all.

Wholesomeness and Beauty

A final insight from Gen 1 into the theology of human sexuality emerges from God's personal assessment of his creation. According to vs. 31, when "God saw everything he had made"—including the sexuality of his crowning work of creation—"behold! it was very good." The Hebrew expression *ṭōb m'od* ("very good") connotes the quintessence of goodness, wholesomeness, appropriateness, beauty.²⁶ The syllogism is straightforward. Sexuality (including the act of sexual intercourse) is part of God's creation, part of his crowning act. And God's creation is very good. Therefore, declares the first chapter of Genesis, sex is good, very good. It is not a mistake, a sinful aberration, a "regrettable necessity,"²⁷ a shameful experience, as it has so often been regarded in the history of Christian as well as pagan thought. Rather, human sexuality (as both an ontological state and a relational experience) is divinely inaugurated: it is part of God's perfect design from the beginning and willed as a fundamental aspect of human existence.

It is not within the scope of this study to draw out the full range of philosophical and sociological implications that follow from the theology of human sexuality set forth in Gen 1. Perhaps it may suffice to repeat again the central clause—"male and female created he them"—and then exclaim with Emil Brunner:

brk" *TDOT*, 2:306-307; Hermann W. Beyer, "εὐλογέω, εὐλογητός, εὐλογία, ἐνευλογέω, *TDNT*, 2:755-757.

²⁶BDB, pp. 373-375; Andrew Bowlings, "טוֹב (ṭōb)," in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago, 1980), 1:345-346 [hereafter cited as *TWOT*].

²⁷Harry Hollis, Jr., *Thank God for Sex: A Christian Model for Sexual Understanding and Behavior* (Nashville, TN, 1975), p. 58. (This is Hollis' phrase, but not his view.)

That is the immense double statement, of a lapidary simplicity, so simple indeed that we hardly realize that with it a vast world of myth and Gnostic speculation, of cynicism and asceticism, of the deification of sexuality and fear of sex completely disappears.²⁸

2. *Sexuality in Genesis 2:4b-25*

In the narrative of Gen 2:4b-25 many of the insights from Gen 1 into the theology of human sexuality are reinforced and further illuminated, while new vistas of the profound nature of sexual relationships also appear.²⁹

Creation Order

The accounts of creation in Gen 1 and Gen 2 concur in assigning sexuality to the creation order and not to the divine realm. But while Gen 1 does not indicate the precise manner in which God created, Gen 2 removes any possible lingering thoughts that creation occurred by divine procreation. In this second chapter of Scripture is set forth in detail God's personal labor of love, forming man from the dust of the ground and "building"³⁰ woman from one of the man's ribs.

Androgyny or Duality from the Beginning

Some recent studies have revived an older theory that the original *hā'ādām* described in Gen 2:7-22 was "a sexually undiffer-

²⁸Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt* (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 346.

²⁹Weighty evidence presented by several recent seminal studies points to the conclusion that the first two chapters of Genesis do not represent separate and disparate sources as argued by proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis. See especially Jacques Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story: Its Literary Structure*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 5 (Berrien Springs, MI, 1978). Doukhan's literary/structural analysis shows that instead of comprising multiple sources, Gen 1-2 provides a unified dual perspective on Creation—and on the God of Creation. In Gen 1:1-2:4a we find the picture of an all-powerful, transcendent God (*Elohim*) and a cosmic view of Creation. In Gen 2:4b-25, God is further presented as the personal, caring, covenant God (*Yahweh Elohim*), with Creation described in terms of man and his intimate, personal needs. From this unique dual perspective of infinite/personal God and cosmic/man-centered creation emerges a balanced and enriched presentation of the divine design for human sexuality.

³⁰See below, pp. 16-17.

entiated earth creature,"³¹ or "basically androgynous: one creature incorporating two sexes."³² But such an hypothesis is not supported by the text. According to Gen 2:7, 8, 15, 16 what God creates before woman is called *hā'ādām* "the man." After the creation of woman, this creature is denoted by the same term (vss. 22-23). Nothing has changed in the makeup of "the man" during his sleep except the loss of a rib. There is no hint in the text of any division of an originally bisexual or sexually undifferentiated being into two different sexes. It should be concluded that *hā'ādām*, "the man" formed before woman, was not originally androgynous, but was "created in anticipation of the future."³³ He was created with those sexual drives toward union with his counterpart. This becomes apparent in the man's encounter with the animals which dramatically points up his need of "a helper fit for him" or "corresponding to him" (vss. 18, 20). Such a need is satisfied when he is introduced to woman and he fully realizes his sexuality vis-à-vis his sexual complement.

Equality or Hierarchy of the Sexes

The one major question which has dominated the scholarly discussion of sexuality in Gen 2 concerns the relative status of the sexes. Does Gen 2 affirm the equality of the sexes, or does it support a hierarchical view in which man is in some way superior to the woman or given headship over woman at creation? Over the centuries, the preponderance of commentators on Gen 2 have espoused the hierarchical interpretation, and this view has been reaffirmed in a number of recent scholarly studies.³⁴ The main elements of the narrative which purportedly prove a divinely-ordained hierarchical

³¹Tribble, p. 80.

³²United Church of Christ, *Human Sexuality: A Preliminary Study of the United Church of Christ* (New York, 1977), p. 57.

³³C. F. Keil, *The First Book of Moses* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1949), p. 88.

³⁴For examples, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Study on the Role of Women in the Church* (Berrien Springs, MI, 1987), pp. 31, 71-79; Barth, 3/1:300; 3/2:386-387; Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An examination of the Roles of Men and Women in the Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1980), pp. 23-28; Jerry D. Colwell, "A Survey of Recent Interpretations of Women in the Church" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary, 1984); Susan T. Foh, *Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism* (Phillipsburg, NJ, 1979), pp. 61-62; S. H.

view of the sexes may be summarized as follows: (a) man is created first and woman last (2:7, 22), and the first is superior and the last is subordinate or inferior; (b) woman is formed for the sake of man—to be his “helpmate” or assistant to cure man’s loneliness (vss. 18-20); (c) woman comes out of man (vss. 21-22), which implies a derivative and subordinate position; (d) woman is created from man’s rib (vss. 21-22), which indicates her dependence upon him for life; and (e) the man names the woman (vs. 23), which indicates his power and authority over her.

Do these points really substantiate a hierarchical view of the sexes? Or is Phyllis Tribble correct in asserting that “although such specifics continue to be cited as support for traditional interpretations of male superiority and female inferiority, not one of them is altogether accurate and most of them are simply not present in the story itself.”³⁵ Let us look at each point in turn.

First, because man is created first and then woman, it has been asserted that “by this the priority and superiority of the man, and the dependence of the woman upon the man, are established as an ordinance of divine creation.”³⁶ But a careful examination of the literary structure of Gen 2 reveals that such a conclusion does not follow from the fact of man’s prior creation. Hebrew literature often makes use of an *inclusio* device in which the points of central concern to a unit are placed at the beginning and end of the unit.³⁷ This is the case in Gen 2. The entire account is cast in the form of an *inclusio* or “ring construction”³⁸ in which the creation of man at the beginning of the narrative and the creation of woman at the end of the narrative correspond to each other in importance. The movement in Gen 2 is not from superior to inferior, but from

Hooke, “Genesis,” *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible* (London, Eng., 1962), p. 179; James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1981), pp. 206-214; Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York, 1958), pp. 156-157.

³⁵Tribble, p. 73.

³⁶Keil, p. 89.

³⁷For discussion of this construction, see especially the following: James Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” *JBL* 88 (1969):9-10; Mitchel Dahood, *Psalms*, AB (New York, 1966), 1:5; Phyllis Tribble, “Depatriarchal-izing in Biblical Interpretation,” *JAAR* 41 (1973):36.

³⁸Muilenburg, p. 9.

incompleteness to completeness. Woman is created as the climax, the culmination of the story. She is the crowning work of creation.

If a hierarchy of the sexes is not implied in the *order* of their creation, is such indicated by the *purpose* of woman's creation, as is suggested in a second major argument for the hierarchical interpretation? Gen 2:18 records the Lord's deliberation: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him *ēzer kēnegdō* [KJV, "a help meet for him"; RSV, "a helper fit for him"; NASB, "a helper suitable to him"; NIV, "a helper suitable for him"]." The Hebrew words *ēzer kēnegdō* have often been taken to imply the inferiority or subordinate status of woman. For example, John Calvin understood from this phrase that woman was a "faithful assistant" for man.³⁹ But this is not the meaning conveyed by these terms!

The word *ēzer* is usually translated as "help" or "helper" in English. This, however, is a misleading translation because the English word "helper" tends to suggest one who is an assistant, a subordinate, an inferior, whereas the Hebrew *ēzer* carries no such connotation. In fact, the Hebrew Bible most frequently employs *ēzer* to describe a superior helper—God himself as the "helper" of Israel.⁴⁰ The word can also be used with reference to man or animals.⁴¹ It is a relational term, describing a beneficial relationship, but in itself does not specify position or rank, either superiority or inferiority.⁴² The specific position intended must be gleaned from the immediate context. In the case of Gen 2:18 and 20, such position is shown by the word which adjoins *ēzer*, namely *kēnegdō*.

The word *negeḏ* conveys the idea of "in front of" or "counterpart," and a literal translation of *kēnegdō* is thus "like his counterpart, corresponding to him."⁴³ Used with *ēzer*, this term

³⁹John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI, n.d.), 1:129.

⁴⁰Exod 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26; Ps 33:20; 70:5; 115:9, 10, 11.

⁴¹Isa 30:5; Hos 13:9; Gen 2:20.

⁴²R. David Freedman, "Woman, A Power Equal to Man," *BAR* (1983):56-58, argues that the Hebrew word *ēzer* etymologically derives from the merger of two Semitic roots, *zr*, "to save, rescue," and *gzr*, "to be strong," and in this passage has reference to the latter: woman is created, like the man, "a power (or strength) superior to the animals."

⁴³Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, 2d ed. (Leiden, 1958), p. 591.

indicates no less than equality: Eve is Adam's "benefactor/helper," one who in position is "corresponding to him," "his counterpart, his complement."⁴⁴ Eve is "a power equal to man;"⁴⁵ she is Adam's "partner."⁴⁶

As a third alleged indication in Gen 2 of male superiority and female subordination, it has been argued that since woman came out of man, since she was formed from man, therefore she has a derivative existence, a dependent and subordinate status. That her existence was in some way "derived" from Adam cannot be denied. But derivation does not imply subordination! The text indicates this in several ways. We note, for example, that Adam also was "derived"—from the ground (vs. 7)—but certainly we are not to conclude that the ground was his superior! Again, woman is *not* Adam's rib. It was the raw material, not woman, that was taken out of man, just as the raw material of man was "taken" (Gen 3:19, 23) out of the ground.⁴⁷ What is more, Samuel Terrien rightly points out that woman "is not simply molded of clay, as man was, but she is architecturally 'built' (2:33)." The verb *bnh* "to build," used in the creation account only with regard to the formation of Eve, "suggests an aesthetic intent and connotes also the idea of reliability and permanence."⁴⁸ To clinch the point, the text explicitly indicates that the man was asleep while God created woman. Man had no active part in the creation of woman that might allow him to claim to be her superior.

A fourth argument used to support the hierarchical view of the sexes concerns the woman's creation from Adam's rib. But the very symbolism of the rib points to equality and not hierarchy. The word *šēlā*^c can mean either "side" or "rib."⁴⁹ Since *šēlā*^c occurs in

⁴⁴Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:149.

⁴⁵Freedman, pp. 56-58. Freedman notes that in later Mishnaic Hebrew *k^enegeḏ* clearly means "equal," and in light of various lines of biblical philological evidence he forcefully argues that the phrase *ʿezer k^enegdō* here should be translated "a power equal to him."

⁴⁶Ibid, p. 56; Gen 2:18, NEB.

⁴⁷Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 101.

⁴⁸Samuel Terrien, "Toward a Biblical Theology of Womanhood," in Ruth T. Barnhouse and Urban T. Holmes, III, eds. *Male and Female: Christian Approaches to Sexuality* (New York, 1976), p. 18.

⁴⁹BDB, p. 854. Numerous theories have been propounded to explain the meaning of the rib in this story: e.g., J. Boehmer, "Die geschlechtliche Stellung des Weibes in

the plural in vs. 21 and God is said to take “one of” them, the reference in this verse is probably to a rib from Adam’s side. By “building” Eve from one of Adam’s ribs, God appears to be indicating the mutual relationship,⁵⁰ the “singleness of life,”⁵¹ the “inseparable unity”⁵² in which man and woman are joined. The rib “means solidarity and equality.”⁵³ Created from Adam’s “side [rib],” Eve was formed to stand by his side as an equal. Peter Lombard was not off the mark when he said: “Eve was not taken from the feet of Adam to be his slave, nor from his head to be his ruler, but from his side to be his beloved partner.”⁵⁴

This interpretation appears to be further confirmed by the man’s poetic exclamation when he saw the woman for the first time (vs. 23): “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”! The phrase “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” indicates that the person described is “as close as one’s own body.”⁵⁵ It denotes physical oneness and a “commonality of concern, loyalty, and responsibility.”⁵⁶ Much can be deduced from this expression regarding the nature of sexuality, as we shall see below, but the expression certainly does not lead to the notion of woman’s subordination.

Gen 2 und 3,” *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 79 (1939):292, suggests that the “rib” is a euphemism for the birth canal which the male lacks; P. Humbert, *Etudes sur le récit du Paradis* (Neuchâtel, 1940), pp. 57-58, proposes that the mention of the “rib” explains the existence of the navel in Adam; and von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 84, finds the detail of the rib answering the question why ribs cover the upper but not the lower part of the body. Such suggestions appear to miss the overall context of the passage with its emphasis upon the *relationship* between man and woman.

⁵⁰Westermann, p. 230.

⁵¹Collins, p. 153. It may be that the Sumerian language retains the memory of the close relationship between “rib” and “life,” for the Sumerian sign *it* signifies both “life” and “rib.” See S. N. Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer* (Garden City, NY, 1959), p. 146. This is not to say, however, that the detail of the rib in Gen 2 has its origin in Sumerian mythology. The story of creation in Gen 2 and the Sumerian myth in which the pun between the “lady of the rib” and “lady who makes live” appears (*ANET*, pp. 37-41), have virtually nothing in common.

⁵²Keil, p. 89.

⁵³Trible, “Depatriarchalizing,” p. 37.

⁵⁴Quoted in Stuart B. Babbage, *Christianity and Sex* (Chicago, 1963), p. 10. A similar statement is attributed to other writers as well.

⁵⁵Collins, p. 153.

⁵⁶Walter Brueggemann, “Of the Same Flesh and Bone (Gen 2:23a),” *CBQ* 32 (1970):540.

The last major argument used to support a hierarchical view of the sexes in Gen 2 is that in man's naming of woman (vs. 23) is implied man's power, authority, and superiority over her. It is true that assigning names in Scripture often does signify authority over the one named.⁵⁷ But such is not the case in Gen 2:23. In the first place, the word "woman" (*ʾiššāh*) is not a personal name, but only a generic identification. This is verified in vs. 24, which indicates that a man is to cleave to his *ʾiššāh* ("wife"), and further substantiated in Gen 3:20, which explicitly records the man's naming of Eve only after the Fall.

Moreover, Jacques Doukhan has shown that Gen 2:23 contains a pairing of "divine passives," indicating that the designation of "woman" comes *from God*, not man. Just as in the past, woman "was taken out of man" *by God*, an action with which the man had nothing to do (he had been put into a "deep sleep"), so in the future she "shall be called woman," a designation originating *in God* and not man. Doukhan also indicates how the literary structure of the Genesis Creation story confirms this interpretation.⁵⁸ The wordplay in 2:23 between *ʾiš* (man) and *ʾiššāh* (wo-man) and the explanation of the woman's being taken out of man are not given to buttress a hierarchical view of the sexes, but rather to underscore man's joyous recognition of his second self. In his ecstatic poetic utterance, the man is not determining who the woman is, but delighting in what God has done. He is saying "yes" to God in recognizing and welcoming woman as the equal counterpart to his sexuality.⁵⁹

In light of the foregoing discussion, I conclude that there is nothing in Gen 2 to indicate a hierarchical view of the sexes. The man and woman before the Fall are presented as fully equal, with

⁵⁷For examples of the oriental view of naming as the demonstration of one's exercise of a sovereign right over a person, see 2 Kgs 23:34; 24:17; Dan 1:7. Cf. R. Abba, "Name," *IDB*, 3:502.

⁵⁸See Doukhan, pp. 46-47, for substantiation and further discussion of these points. For other lines of evidence disaffirming man's authoritative naming of woman in Gen 2:23 in contrast to his authoritative naming of the animals in Gen 2:19-20, see especially Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, pp. 99-100, and Gerhard Hasel, "Equality from the Start: Woman in the Creation Story," *Spectrum* 7 (1975):23-24.

⁵⁹See Barth, 3/2:291; Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 100.

no hint of a headship of one over the other or a hierarchical relationship between husband and wife.

Sexuality as Wholeness

Both the first and second chapters of Genesis affirm the attribute of wholeness in the human sexual experience. But in Gen 2 we encounter a twofold amplification of the meaning of sexual wholeness. First, Gen 2:7 articulates a holistic view of man. According to the understanding of anthropology set forth in this verse, man does not *have* a soul, he *is* a soul. He is a living being, a psychophysical unity.⁶⁰ There is no room in such a view for a Platonic/Philonic dichotomy of body and soul. Excluded is the dualistic notion of the ascetics that the body is evil and therefore all expressions of the body pleasures—including sexual expressions—are contaminated. The holistic view of man presented in Gen 2:7 means that human sexuality cannot be compartmentalized into “the things of the body” versus “the things of the spirit/soul.” The human being is a sexual creature, and his/her sexuality is manifested in every aspect of human existence.

The meaning of wholeness is also amplified in Gen 2 with regard to the differentiation between the sexes. Whereas from Gen 1 it was possible to conclude in a general way that both male and female are equally needed to make up the image of God, from Gen 2 we can say more precisely that it is in “creative complementariness”⁶¹ that God designed male and female to participate in this wholeness. Gen 2 opens with the creation of man. But creation is not finished. The man is alone, he is incomplete. And this is “not good” (vs. 18). Man needs an *‘ezer k‘negdô*—a helper/ benefactor who is his counterpart. Thus begins man’s quest to satisfy his God-instilled “hunger for wholeness.”⁶² Such hunger is not satisfied by his animal companions but by the sexual being God has “built” (“aesthetically designed”) to be alongside him as his complement. Adam in effect exclaims at his first sight of Eve, “At last, I am whole! Here is the complement of myself!” He recognizes,

⁶⁰Stephen Sapp, *Sexuality, the Bible, and Science* (Philadelphia, 1977), pp. 5-6.

⁶¹Terrien, p. 18.

⁶²Sakae Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex* (Washington, DC, 1980), p. 19.

and the narrative instructs us, that “man is whole only in his *complementarity* with another being who is like unto himself.”⁶³

A Multi-dimensional Relationship

Closely connected with “complementary wholeness” is the idea of relationship. If Gen 1 whispers that human sexuality is for fellowship, for relationship, Gen 2 orchestrates this fact with a volume of double forte, and the melody and harmony of the narrative portray richness and beauty in the relational symphony of the sexes.

According to Gen 2, the creation of Eve takes place in the context of loneliness. The keynote is struck in vs. 18: “It is not good that the man should be alone. . . .” The “underlying idea” of vss. 18-24 is that “sexuality finds its meaning not in the appropriation of divine creative powers, but in human sociality.”⁶⁴ Man is a social being; sexuality is for sociality, for relationship, companionship, partnership. In principle, this passage may be seen to affirm the various mutual social relationships that should take place between the sexes (as is also true with the “image-of-God” passage in Gen 1); but more specifically, the Genesis account links the concept of sociality to the marriage relationship. This is apparent from 2:24: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.” The introductory “therefore” indicates that the relationship of Adam and Eve is upheld as the ideal for all future human sexual relationships. Certain significant insights into the nature of sexuality call for attention in this verse.

First, man *leaves*. The word *‘āzab* is a forceful term. It means literally “to abandon, forsake,” and is employed frequently to describe Israel’s forsaking of Yahweh for false gods.⁶⁵ The “leaving” of Gen 2:24 indicates the necessity of absolute freedom from outside interferences in the sexual relationship. Barth has pointed out that in a very real sense Gen 2 represents the “Old Testament Magna Charta of humanity” as Adam was allowed freely and exuberantly

⁶³Collins, p. 153. Italics supplied.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵See BDB, pp. 736-737; Deut 28:20; Judg 10:13; 2 Chron 34:25; Isa 1:4; etc.

to recognize and affirm the woman as his partner.⁶⁶ Just as this freedom was essential in the Garden, so it is crucial in all succeeding sexual relationships.

What is particularly striking in vs. 24 is that it is the *man* who is to “leave.” It was a matter of course in the patriarchal society at the time Gen 2 was penned that the wife left her mother and father. But for the husband to “leave” was revolutionary!⁶⁷ In effect, the force of this statement is that both are to leave—to cut loose from those ties that would encroach upon the independence and freedom of the relationship.

Second, man *cleaves*. The Hebrew verb *dāḥaq*, “cleave,” is another robust term, signifying “strong personal attachment.”⁶⁸ It is often used as a technical covenant term for the permanent bond of Israel to the Lord.⁶⁹ As applied to the relationship between the sexes in Gen 2:24, it seems clearly to indicate a covenant context, i.e., a marriage covenant, paralleling the “oath of solidarity” and language of “covenant partnership” expressed by Adam to Eve.⁷⁰ But as was true with Adam, more is involved here than a formal covenant. The word *dāḥaq* especially emphasizes the inward attitudinal dimensions of the covenant bond. It “implies a devotion and an unshakable faith between humans; it connotes a permanent attraction which transcends genital union to which, nonetheless, it gives meaning.”⁷¹

Third, man and woman “become one flesh.” We may immediately point out that this “one-flesh” union follows the “cleaving” and thus comes within the context of the marriage covenant. The unitive purpose of sexuality is to find fulfillment inside the marital relationship. Furthermore, the phrase “man and his wife”—with

⁶⁶Barth, 3/2:291.

⁶⁷Some have seen behind this passage a hint of a matriarchal social structure, but evidence for such an hypothesis is not convincing. For further discussion of this theory, see Jewett, p. 127.

⁶⁸See BDB, pp. 179-180; G. Wallis, “דָּחַק *dāḥaq*,” *TDOT*, 3:80-83; Earl S. Kalland, “דָּחַק (*dāḥaq*),” *TWOT*, 1:177-178.

⁶⁹See, e.g., Deut 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; Josh 22:5; 23:8.

⁷⁰For discussion of the covenant language used by Adam, see Brueggemann, pp. 532-542.

⁷¹Collins, p. 153.

both nouns in the singular—clearly implies that the sexual relationship envisioned is a monogamous one, to be shared exclusively between two marriage partners. The LXX translation makes this point explicit: “they *two* shall become one flesh.”

The “one-flesh” relationship certainly involves the sexual union, sexual intercourse. The physical act of coitus may even be in view in this passage as the primary means of establishing the “innermost mystery”⁷² of oneness. But this is by no means all that is included. The term *bāšār*, “flesh,” in the OT refers not only to one’s physical body but to a person’s whole existence in the world.⁷³ By “one flesh” is thus connoted “mutual dependence and reciprocity in all areas of life,”⁷⁴ a “unity that embraces the natural lives of two persons in their entirety.”⁷⁵ It indicates a oneness and intimacy in the total relationship of the whole person of the husband to the whole person of the wife.⁷⁶

Sexuality for Procreation

With regard to Gen 1 we noted that a primary purpose of sexuality was for personal relationship, and that procreation was presented as a special added blessing. The significance of the unitive purpose of sexuality is highlighted in Gen 2 by the complete absence of any reference to the propagation of children. This omission is not to deny the importance of procreation (as becomes apparent in later chapters of Scripture). But by the “full-stop”⁷⁷ after “one-flesh” in vs. 24, sexuality is given independent meaning and value. It does not need to be justified only as a means to a superior end, i.e., procreation.

The Wholesomeness of Sexuality

The narrative of Gen 2 highlights the divine initiative and approbation in the relationship of the sexes. After the formation of

⁷²Otto Piper, *The Biblical View of Sex and Marriage* (New York, 1960), pp. 52-67, explores the possible dimensions of this “inner mystery.”

⁷³See John N. Oswalt, “בָּשָׂר (bāšār),” *TWOT*, 1:136; N.P. Bratsiotis, “בָּשָׂר bāšār,” *TDOT*, 2:325-329.

⁷⁴Piper, p. 28.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷⁶Herbert J. and Fern Miles, *Husband-Wife Equality* (Old Tappan, NJ, 1978), p. 164.

⁷⁷Walter Trobisch, *I Married You* (New York, 1971), p. 20.

woman, the *Lord God* “brought her to the man” (vs. 22). The Creator Himself, as it were, celebrated the first marriage.⁷⁸ Thus, the “very good” which is pronounced upon humankind and human sexuality in Gen 1 is in Gen 2 concretized in the divine solemnization of the “one-flesh” union between husband and wife.

Sexuality is wholesome because it is inaugurated by God himself. Since the inauguration occurs within the context of a divine-human relationship, sexuality must be seen to encompass not only horizontal (human) but also vertical (spiritual) dimensions. According to the divine design, the sexual relationship between husband and wife is inextricably bound up with the spiritual unity of both man and woman with their Creator.

A final word on God’s Edenic ideal for sexuality comes in vs. 25: “And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.” The Hebrew construction of the last English phrase may be more accurately translated “they were not ashamed *before one another*.”⁷⁹ Viewed in contrast with the “utter [shameful] nakedness”⁸⁰ mentioned in Gen 3, the intent here is clear: namely, that “shameless sexuality was divinely ordered; shameful sexuality is the result of sin.”⁸¹ According to God’s original design, sexuality is wholesome, beautiful, and good. It is meant to be experienced between spouses without fear, without inhibitions, without shame and embarrassment.

Just as the “one-flesh” experience applied to more than the physical union, so the concept of nakedness probably connotes more than physical nudity.⁸² As Walter Trobisch states it, there is implied the ability “to stand in front of each other, stripped and undisguised, without pretensions, without hiding, seeing the partner as he or she really is, and showing myself to him or her as I really am—and still not be ashamed.”⁸³

⁷⁸See Brueggemann, pp. 538-542, for evidence for linguistic and contextual indications of a covenant-making ceremony.

⁷⁹BDB, p. 102.

⁸⁰This will be discussed in a subsequent article, “The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 3,” forthcoming in *AUSS*.

⁸¹Collins, p. 154.

⁸²See Kidner, p. 66: Vs. 25 indicates “the perfect ease between them.” The theory that Adam’s and Eve’s nakedness without shame refers to their lack of consciousness of their sexuality will be treated in my forthcoming article (See n. 80, above).

⁸³Trobisch, p. 82.

As we complete our discussion of the theology of sexuality in Gen 2, we must reject the claim that this chapter displays a “melancholy attitude toward sex.”⁸⁴ Instead, we must affirm with von Rad that Gen 2 “gives the relationship between man and woman the dignity of being the greatest miracle and mystery of creation.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴Cuthbert A. Simpson, “The Book of Genesis: Introduction and Exegesis,” IB (New York, 1952), 1:485-486.

⁸⁵Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:150.