

From Misogyny to Cult: An Etiological Reading of Genesis 3

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Summary

The complexity of issues involved in the history of women demands and deserves a wider and more detailed treatment than it has received till now. The aim of this article, which will limit itself to the religio-historical context, is to outline and highlight two extreme “positions” of women within the bipolar male-female world. The position of woman, her role and attitudes held about her, are predominantly determined by the Judeo-Christian tradition. This stance is, in turn, largely defined by the biblical account of the woman’s succumbing to the “snake” in Genesis 3.

Since then, the woman has been marked as “weak” because it was she who succumbed to the “snake” and thus robbed humanity of a blissful existence in the Garden of Eden. In this way, the woman opened the door to the enemy of human souls as well as to the fallen fate of humankind. Nevertheless, the historical consequences of this biblical account on the position of women in society and family are not one-dimensional. On one hand, it brought about misogyny (hatred towards women), and on the other, an ongoing worship of the woman as the originator of human life exists in the form of the cult of fertility which is one of the most widespread religious expressions. As a syncretistic deviation, it also appears in the Old Testament text. In some Christian traditions, this cult appears as the counterpart to misogyny.

Key words: misogyny, misandry, patriarchy, sex, gender, Amazons, etiology, disharmony

I. MISOGYNY AND CULT

What about Paradise and Gender?

The Fall from Paradise. The mythology related to paradise, and the expulsion of humans from paradise, are universal religious motifs. Humanity's fateful and fatal loss of paradise and of its blissful state can be found in most religious systems. This is understandable because no culture is perfect, devoid of internal conflict and struggle, so every paradise was doomed to fall and perish. The descriptions of the fall and destruction of paradise and its blissful state contain various patterns and structures. In the biblical account, it is the Garden of Eden and the expulsion of humankind. There are also other ancient oriental myths which depict similar events. The biblical text offers one pattern arranged in a narrative structure which locates eating, drinking and feasting in the causal center of the loss of the bliss of paradise. This starts in Genesis 3 where food (edible fruit from the tree) becomes the center of the subsequent development of the narrative. There is a similar pattern including eating and drinking in Genesis 19 which is followed by the condemnation of Sodom and Gomorrah, and again in Daniel 5 where, in the midst of eating and drinking at a feast, a condemnation is pronounced over King Balthazar. The proverbial biblical pattern of "let us eat and drink" or "eat, drink and be merry" is well known as a sort of "blissful state of paradise," but also as the introduction to a fateful doom (Ex 22:13; Lk 12:19). This narrative structure and pattern, in which eating occupies a special place in view of the impending doom of the "blissful state of paradise," is aptly identified and described in detail by Diane Sharon in her book, *The Doom of Paradise* (Sharon, 1998:56-64).

In the chain of events which includes the offer of a fateful food – "and the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for eating" (Gen 3:6) – a critical place is occupied by the woman as a *dramatis persona*. This biblical account about the destruction of earthly paradise actually, albeit in an indirect way, assigns a critical role to the woman and not to the man. This paves the thorny path which the woman will tread in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Her role in society, family and in the religious community is cemented through this tradition. She is the one who was deceived, not the man (1 Tim 2:14); she becomes the "weaker sex" in cognition (1 Pet 3:7); the woman must receive instruction "in silence" (1 Tim 2:11) or ask her husband (1 Cor 14:35).

Gender Wars

Social relationships and the social system are also regulated through gender

identity from a theoretical to a very down-to-earth practical level. Every personal identity is basically multifaceted. Such a plurality of identities is also characteristic and evident in the gender identities of a man and a woman. In this sense, the woman may be, or is, one or more of several possibilities. She may be a mother or grandmother, a wife and/or daughter, a girl or a mature woman, married or free. Each woman inevitably falls into, and is defined by, at least one of the aforementioned categories.

The most persistent and longest of all social conflicts among humankind are the gender wars fought along the male-female division. It is clear which side has historically drawn the shorter stick in this bi-polar world. The reality of these male-female “wars” is manifest in the everyday life of joint living. We can also speak of the war of the worlds, the male world versus the female world. This is also a good chance to mention a few words about the distinction between *sex* and *gender*. *Sex* and sexuality are biologically determined and are based on the biological difference between a man and a woman. *Gender* and gender identity are largely established by social relationships and determined by the cultural roles of men and women in given societies (Simkins, 1998:35). It is obvious that gender and gender identity are also rooted in sexual difference, but ignoring gender as a social and cultural by-product, typical of a given human community in a specific period of time, can lead to numerous, and sometimes barren polemics in biblical hermeneutics. A favorite example, based on the biblical report and ecclesial practice, is found in the attitude towards women and a woman’s behavior and position in the church community. Thus the Apostle Paul advises Christians in Corinth: “As in all churches of the saints, let women keep silent in the meetings“ (1 Cor 14:33). This is an example of gender identity specific to one social and cultural context. It would be risky to use these specific instructions as a basis for a general inference about the normative rights and values pertaining to a woman in society or church. One may not draw general conclusions, build a general worldview or define normative behavior (which also applies to the relationship between men and women) on the basis of an individual text, ignoring the complexities of the given context. The woman’s role in the family and society cannot be considered independently of the gender identity which is socially and culturally determined. It is also clear that the history of misogynous relationships has been the cause of many conflicts.

On the other hand, a hint to *disharmony*, even *animosity*, can be identified between men and women in the context of the event described in Genesis 3. The disharmony appears on three levels: between the *man* and *woman*, between the *human being* and the *Creator*, and between the *human being* and the *creation*. They are already alluded to in Genesis 3:14-16: “I will put enmity between you and the woman.”

The problem historically appears with a *misogynous* (sexist?) reading, or in modern times, a *feminist* (politically correct) reading of biblical texts, the readings which then place men and women in a certain interrelationship and question their joint responsibility for this and that. The Judeo-Christian tradition has largely determined the general attitude towards women in society, their place in the family or in the community of faith. It is difficult to think of any other biblical text which is so pregnant with this historical baggage, which has brought up so many challenges to the human existence and the co-existence between the sexes, and which has so many widespread consequences, as the text in Genesis 3.

Etiology

One particular biblical-hermeneutical method looks at the *current state of affairs* and uses *past events* to interpret the present. Such past events – fictitious or actual – are put forward as the cause of the current state of affairs (comp. Rebić, 13). Biblical toponymy and onomastics also often have an etiological force (etymological etiology).¹

In essence, etiology denotes the search of the cause, so that in medicine it refers to the research whose purpose is to determine the cause of an illness. As a question of methodology in biblical theology, etiology primarily denotes an exegetical-hermeneutical area of research. Biblical etiology pays special attention to those biblical texts which, in one way or another, refer to the causes of the current, or detected, state of affairs. In this sense, it includes many etymological questions regarding word formation or name formation.

Etymological etiology is used particularly in Old Testament texts, especially in Genesis. Thus the histories of place name formation (toponymy) and of personal name formation (onomastics) play a particularly important role. The nature of a person, or a state of affairs with detectable causal historical background are marked by a name. Jacob becomes Israel: “You will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel” (Gen 32:29), which is immediately followed by an etymological-etiological explanation: “because you have struggled with God and with men” (32:29b). Another example from the Bible gives the etymology (the manner of emergence) and etiology (causes and reasons) of a person’s name as a reflection of the person’s nature. Nabal, the husband of Abigail, was a particularly quarrelsome man who hurt David and his family. By way of an apology, Abigail says to David, “May my

1 The word “etiology” comes from the Greek word *aitia* (cause). Etiology is thus a literary form which, through the arrangement of the text, interprets the causes of events, names of places (toponyms) or the origin of personal names (onomastics).

lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name” (1 Sam 25:25).²

There is also *historical* and *theological* etiology. This refers to those biblical texts which recount events that point to the real causes of the state of affairs, and then interpret them theologically. In this context, history becomes an “interpretational tool,” whether the historical events are real or fictitious. In the exegetical-hermeneutical sense, those texts which abound in etiology are particularly useful, and they can be found in Genesis 1-11 where etiology is utilized as a biblical way of interpreting the current state of affairs. Some of these descriptions need not also have real historical value. Was the woman really made from the rib of the man (Gen 2), even if the first account gives a totally different story? Did the Babylonians actually plan to erect the tallest building in the world (of the time) in order to reach God (Gen 11)? Or was it a matter of “building a city unto ourselves” and “obtaining a name for ourselves?”

For example, and with reference to this investigation, why is the current state and position of women today as it is? Her historically subordinate position in the family and society, her overall inequality in relation to man, her questionable cognitive capacity, hardships, etc. – all of these are etiologically explained through woman’s responsibility in yielding to the temptation which the Devil put before her in Genesis 3. Because of this, the biblical text casts the woman in a negative role as an anti-hero on several occasions. In many such texts, to obey the woman would mean to play with doom and perdition. In contrast to man, such texts put the woman (whether a wife or a mother) in the context of the cause of trouble. She is assigned the unenviable role of a wavering *Eve*, a weak woman who is easily duped (“The snake deceived me” – Gen 3:13); a suspicious *Sarah* who burst into cynical laughter (שָׂרָה שִׂחָקָה) when she heard the angelic announcement that she would become pregnant and give birth to a son (18:12), a troublemaking *Rebekah* who advises her son Jacob, “Let your curse fall on me” (27:13); a Job’s wife who, in the midst of trouble, does not support her husband but provocatively tells him, “Curse God and die” (Job 2:10).

Misogyny

The dictionary definition of *misogyny* is hatred or animosity toward women. The woman hater’s sentiment, misogyny, certainly falls into the category of the pathology of animosity against women, but in various “milder forms” it is more prevalent and better disguised than usually expected. In this pathological form,

2 Heb. “nabal” means insane, worthless.

the conflict assumes various shapes, from benign marriage quarrels to mutual male-female hatred accompanied by miscellaneous *sexual deviations* and *social excesses*. Because of the nature of events where every action has an equal and opposite reaction, this misogynous attitude breeds a *reactive manifestation* in the form of female hatred of men (misandry).

From a historical vantage point, the beginnings of misogyny, and then of the identical reaction in the form of misandry, are anchored in the majority of religions which most often represent closed patriarchic systems. The *Judeo-Christian tradition* is not an exception. What is more, if its etiological hermeneutics are observed, particularly for Genesis 3, it becomes the historical foundation of misogyny.

Women have been persecuted throughout history. They were often convicted as witches during the Middle Ages, and even today they are subordinate to men. It must also be mentioned that, until very recently, history was written and sacred texts were interpreted almost exclusively by men. Women hardly ever took part in these activities. How many women, in proportion to men, were involved in recording history or exegeting sacred texts? The answer to the question is clear and understandable if one takes into account the historical inaccessibility of education for women. Teaching, learning and formal education have been the prerogative of men.

As a result, post-patriarchic societies witness the emergence of *militant feminism* as a reaction to patriarchy. It is present and active in all areas of society, family and religion. We may consider recent public statements which were disguised as opposition to faith and religion. Certain slogans recently appeared in public spaces and in public transport vehicles, such as: *Without God – without the Master*. This author is convinced that these were not only demands for the freedom to “profess” atheism. It is quite likely that, to a certain degree, the slogans reflect a female reaction to a “male god,” the master, who wants to reassert his lordship over women. In this sense, traces of misandrian reaction against the deep-seated social and religious patriarchy can be detected.³

3 The term antonym of misogyny is *misandry*, the repugnance and hatred of men. Since misandry is, in some way, a reaction to misogyny, the mythology of classical times offers the contrast to patriarchy. It appears in the shape of a mythical people of women warriors – the *Amazons*. Legend has it that the Amazons settled in the area of contemporary Turkey having arrived from the mountains of the Caucasus. It is believed that the etymology of the term Amazon is connected with the Greek noun *mastos* (breasts; its negation *a-mastos* would thus point to women without breasts). According to that tradition, the Amazons would remove the right breast of girls so that they could more easily handle a bow and arrow in their wars against men. Ac-

Judaism, and particularly the rabbinic midrash of the book of Genesis (B^ereshit Rabbah), present the woman as the weak link from her very creation. The midrash compares the Creator with the builder who uses fine, and not so fine, sand to make the creative earthen mould. In this mould from which the first pair of created humans was created, the man (Adam) is the stronger connecting material and the woman (Eve) is the weaker. The midrash interpretation of Eve's exit (expulsion) from paradise, the Garden of Eden, is comparable to the ancient Greek myth about Pandora's box from which all the evils of the world are released (B^ereshit Rabbah, 19:10). In this context, Genesis 3 and the first woman are compared to Pandora, and Eve embodies the opened Pandora's box, responsible for all evils which befall the world.

Despite the fact that a misogynous attitude towards women was also generated in the context of the Judeo-Christian tradition, misogyny is primarily a pathology and a social malady, and was, in no way, a biblically-founded teaching. Despite certain cultural hints which can also be found in New Testament texts, the conclusion that the Bible encourages misogyny in any way is ill-founded. Actually, the Bible speaks contrary to misogyny. Unfortunately, some etiological hermeneutical approaches have resulted in animosity for women. At this point, the important Christological element of gender equality cannot be ignored, the equality which instead of *ethnicity* and *gender* offers a third determiner, *tertium genus*, because the Apostle Paul claims: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Further, the author can only briefly mention the important role played by many women in the Bible.

Cult

Any serious student of the Bible very quickly becomes aware of the significance which biblical texts ascribe to the motifs of fertility and sexuality (Hoffner, 1966).

According to the legend, on one of his last heroic journeys, the Greek hero Heracles undertook a campaign against the Amazons and their queen Hippolite. The legend further speaks of another Greek hero Theseus, who, in an attempt to outdo Heracles, managed to seduce, kidnap and eventually marry Hippolite, the queen of the Amazons.

"Amazons lived in the area around Termodont in Pontus, and they were a large tribe of women who engaged solely in male activities. They raised only female children. They assembled in military units and undertook military campaigns. As a token of her dignity, their queen Hippolite wore a belt which she received as a gift from nobody else but Ares, the god of war" (Schwab:164).

In contrast to misogyny, the cult of women is directly related to the fertility cult. It is not by accident that the Bible pays so much attention to the portrayal of God's sovereignty precisely in examples of the fertility or infertility of certain women in the Bible. This also becomes an important theological motif which points to God's sovereignty. Within this context, the list of biblical women who are barren and then become fertile would be quite long. It is indicative that in all these descriptions there is no hint at male infertility, except perhaps in the case of Abraham. In this example, the biblical text mentions the end of Sarah's fertility and states that "it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women" (Gen 18:11). It also makes note of Sarah's addition: "my lord being old also" (Gen 18:12b). In the biblical context, masculinity was measured by two criteria. One was related to fertility and the ability of the man to procreate, to be (fertile) and become a father, and the other was physical strength and prowess in battle. It is interesting that the same criteria remain main indicators of true masculinity even in current times. While physical strength and the ability to impregnate have regularly been ascribed to men, infertility has been *a priori* ascribed to females. There is no doubt that, even today, in certain more primitive communities this division according to sex and gender still exists.

Rituals and magical practices intended for increasing fertility are universal elements in pagan religions. The Old Testament seriously and consistently warns against these customs related to the fertility cult which were so typical of the nations surrounding Israel. One such warning is an apparently unusual regulation: "Do not cook a goat kid in its mother's milk" (Ex 34:26b), which was a kind of magical ritual for increasing the fertility of the livestock. It is not altogether clear if Genesis 30 refers to primitive genetic engineering or to the magical practice of a fertility cult when it relates how Jacob cut off sticks, carved lines in them and placed them in plain sight of the sheep and goats, "turned their heads towards the sticks" as they were mating so that goats gave birth to striped, red and multi-colored kids (30:39).⁴

In addition to their basic and concrete sexual identity, a woman carries many other metaphorical values which mostly originate from the history of religions. A fertility cult which is determined in religious or mythical terms provides "mother nature" or some such being. On the other hand, following the same line, the male identity provides a metaphorical "father of the nation" or the "head of the family." When speaking about family inheritance (in Croatian), we always speak of "fatherhood" and never of "motherhood." Croatian lexicology does not know

4 With regard to symbols and the symbolism of masculinity or femininity in the Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern culture, see H. Hoffner, "Symbols for Masculinity and Femininity."

any such notion.

Now, however, in contrast to the misogynous hatred of women, there is a radically different attitude towards women, the cult of woman worship. This cult also originates from the history of religions, it is based in the fertility cult, and betrays distinct syncretistic traits. It spills from one religion to another and mixes with different ingredients. In the Bible, such syncretistic practices end up in incredible religious compromises between the worship of Yahweh and pagan practices. The same can be observed in modern times throughout the history of Christianity through the veneration of Mary in Roman Catholic theology and in the worship of the Blessed Virgin. This is actually another instance of the blending of the pagan fertility cult and the veneration of the woman, mother.

The Jews of biblical times drove such a cult to the point of absurdity in the context of Yahwism. They decided that in addition to Yahweh they would also fervently worship the “queen of heavens”:

Then all the men who knew that their wives offered unto other gods, and all the women that stood by, a great assembly, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying: ‘As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly perform every word that is gone forth out of our mouth, to offer unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then had we plenty of food, and were well, and saw no evil. (Jer 44:15-17).⁵

Interestingly, in addition to the female fertility cult, a male fertility cult was also most probably practiced, although it was not as prominent. This can be inferred from Ezekiel 8 through the worship of Tammuz. In his visions, the prophet Ezekiel is transferred to another place where he is shown “abominations” performed by Israel’s elders:

‘Son of man, hast thou seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in his chambers of imagery? for they say: The LORD seeth us not, the LORD hath forsaken the land.’ He said also unto me: ‘Thou shalt

- 5 Comp. Jer 7:18: “The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes to the queen of heavens, and to pour out drink-offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke Me.” Despite the fact that there are two suggestions as to the identity of the “queen of heavens” from Jeremiah: Anat, a Canaanite fertility goddess (Albright), and Astarte, a Sidonian goddess whom, among others, also worshipped king Solomon (1 Kings 11:5), it is unquestionable that it was a matter of worshipping a woman within a context of the fertility cult.

again see yet greater abominations which they do.' Then He brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat the women weeping for Tammuz (Ezek 8:12-14).⁶

This kind of religious prostitution in the worship of woman in the form of a fertility cult also extended into New Testament times and was present among early Christians, not only on the cultic-religious level, but also in the actual practice of religious prostitution.

In Roman Catholic Christianity, Mary occupies the place which is occupied by Magna Mater in many ancient oriental cults. In this sense, the very title, Mother Church, is significant since Mary is referred to as the "Mother Church," and it seems not to conflict with biblical terminology in which the church is "the Body of Christ" of which Christ is the Head (Col 1:18).

Some will make this inference: "Since Mary is the Mother of the Church, must the children of Mary also not be the children of the Church. Or conversely, is it not true that the children of the Church are also the children of Mary?" (Bezić, 1978:234). Leaving aside the speculative nature of this inference, the scriptural teaching about the fact that Christians are primarily, and before all else, "the children of God" since "the Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are the children of God" (Rom 8:16) cannot be ignored.

On the other hand, it is possible that all this is a certain historical protest, a reaction or a surrogate to the traditional image of God as a man, the purpose of which is to achieve a balance, or bring reconciliation, in male-female disputes.⁷

The veneration of Mary and the cult of the Blessed Virgin have unquestionable syncretistic elements present in various forms of popular piety and deeply rooted in different aspects of the pagan fertility cult (comp. Belaj, 1993). Even Mariological nomenclature, in its manifold elements, relates to the cult of woman and the fertility cult and demonstrates syncretistic traits. The development of Roman Catholic Mariology actually owes much to the Reformation. It is precisely within the framework of the Counter-Reformation that the cult of the Blessed Virgin witnessed its rapid growth: "In the tridentine period, in the time of the

6 Tammuz or Dumuzi is a well known Sumerian deity, a god who represents the death and rebirth of vegetation, i.e. again directly related to the fertility cult. His sister is a Summerian goddess Inina or the Semitic goddess Astarte (Ishtar).

7 We could say that feminist theology has a vested interest here; but Grunfelder makes an astute observation: "To put blame on the whole society, father, men, and even God, for woman's state of neglect, in family as in the society, means to take one's own blame and put it on another's shoulders" (Grünfelder, 1988:35). On the other hand, we can join Grünfelder and ask about the woman Mary: "God's antagonist," "goddess," "mother" or "sister" (?)

Counter-Reformation, Catholics developed Mariology even faster than before, and that because the reformers of the Church tried to place Mary completely in the shadow of Christ the Redeemer (!), and they were concerned that the veneration of Mary would question Jesus Christ and his redemptive work” (Rebić, 1978:17) *Sapienti sat!*⁸

The cult of Mary has penetrated all areas of Croatian cultural heritage and language, from toponymy and botany to popular beliefs, which fortify and confirm national identity (“the Queen of Croats”). It follows that the national identity becomes questionable in the case of all who do not invoke the Blessed Virgin Mary as “the soul of Croatia.” Croatian botanical terminology abounds with terms pointing to the presence of the “mother” and “lady” in plant names, including “mother’s little soul,” “the lady’s grass,” and “the lady’s tears.” All this confirms a complete and undivided loyalty towards the Blessed Virgin, as well as the relegation of Christ the Redeemer to her shadow. The Croatian writer Marko Marulić enthrones Mary in his poem, “From the Lady’s Assumption” as the “queen of the heavenly court.” The fact that this is a matter of a certain syncretistic practice and popular religiosity, and not of genuine Christian teaching, is again confirmed in the area of botany – very few plants bear the name of Mary in their Latin designations. Jure Radić writes, “spiritual leaders of the Croatian people, obviously several centuries ago, changed the names of almost all plants in which their Latin designation contains the name of Venus and connected them with the Lady” (Radić, 1978:256).

All designations of Mary as “protector,” “helper” or “co-redeemer” particularly emphasize her role as helper. The motive for her readiness and ability to provide help is aptly described by Vitomir Belaj in his article “Another Mary: Elements of Syncretism in Popular Belief about Mary the Mother of Jesus (Belaj, 1993:150-167). The hypothesis that “the Reformers tried to place Mary in the shadow of Christ the Redeemer” is incorrect, if for no other reason than that it follows naturally from the Scriptures (1 Tim 2:5). Therefore, the connection cannot be made with the Reformers, rather with consistent exegetical-hermeneutical competence of the scriptural text.

Many Croatian popular and folk texts unquestionably point out the merging of mythological and pagan motifs and their incorporation in the cult of Mary. Considering numerous examples of Croatian popular poetry, particularly from the province where the Kajkavski dialect is spoken, Belaj identifies the merging of

8 For the history of Croatian Mariology, one ought to consult Rebić’s survey in the collection of essays issued on account of the First Croatian Mariological congress. The text is entitled: “Mariological Investigations among Croats” and gives an informed overview of the history and basic presuppositions of Mariological belief.

pagan and mythological components with Mariological devotion. He concludes that among the Slavic peoples,

“the ancient pre-Christian rural faith became a comparative religion which in practical living did not clash with Christian faith, but was considered as largely complementary. Christianity arguably explained to the peasant how he should imagine life in the Kingdom of God, and even how to shape his ethical being in order to make use of the salvific act of Jesus, but as far as the rural agricultural year is concerned, it retained the ancient and in this aspect of life “superior” rural faith with its fertility rituals” (Belaj, 1993:165).

II. THE ETIOLOGY OF GENESIS 3

The Snake “Said to the Woman” (3:1b)

The assignment of different roles to the protagonists of this narrative account of the Fall of Man is an important turning point for the subsequent development of this drama as well as for the etiology of this text. Although the devious provocateur (the snake) *de facto* throws the glove of challenge at both man (Adam) and woman (Eve), offering them, in an indirect way, the role of potential heroes, the person who is pushed into the limelight is the woman and not the man. Why is this so? And how can this be reconciled with the statement that the snake is “shrewder than other animals which the Lord created” (3,1a)? What would have happened if the woman succeeded in withstanding the shrewdest of creatures? Would the woman have assumed the position as the “stronger” sex, and not the man, or was Eve, in the etiological manner of her future position, deliberately assigned the unenviable role as the traitor of the human race instead of becoming the heroine?

What does this narrative account, as well as its etiological hermeneutics, presuppose and communicate? Why does the man not take the leading place in this provocation on the part of the snake? Does it demonstrate and imply the quality of the material from which the woman is built, which is different from the material out of which the man is built?⁹ Does it mean that the woman is

9 Susan Lanser outlines several feminist hermeneutics (Gen 2-3) and provides critical comments (Trible and Baal) related to the creation of man and woman as a simultaneous and not consecutive event.

If one accepts a traditional consecutive order of creation, then Eve may be seen as a certain material “leftover,” a side effect. This would allow for the interpretation that Eve (woman) is made of inferior building material and is a weaker sex in contrast

deliberately placed in the position of the loser, but that she simultaneously “saved the skin” of the man Adam?

The Woman Saw that the Tree was Good and Desirable (3:6)

The answers to the above questions can be gleaned from the scene which presents the woman, alone, before the tree of good and evil. The challenge before her is one she must now face all by herself, making a decision for which the consequences would be extensive and include more than herself. Philo, the Jewish philosopher from the first century AD, interprets this text in the following way. He states that one can surmise and appropriate that immortality and all good are represented in the man and under his authority, while death and all evil should be assigned to the woman. In the metaphorical sense, he continues, the woman represents the sensual, and the man the intellectual side of the human being.¹⁰ This distribution of roles means that the woman is assigned the sensual affinities for “good” and “beautiful,” but not cognitive abilities nor the ability for discernment, even though the text notes that she considers the fruit to be “desirable for understanding” (העץ להשפיל).

One speculative question remains: Did the act of picking the forbidden “fruit” by Adam actually seal the fate of human beings? Was the critical moment the moment when Adam took the fruit from the woman’s hand? Did that act by the man trigger the fateful consequences, and what would have happened if he had not taken the fruit from the woman’s hand?

The Woman whom you Gave me, she is... (3:12)

This paragraph in Gen 3:8-19 is a kind of court lawsuit. It was not the trial in which the human being was destined to lose, as some would like to present it, nor some mission impossible in which the human being was cast as the loser. This text has an unquestionably important and clear etiological character which presents the pre-history of the loss of trust and obedience, the pillars of the blissful paradise existence in the Garden.

to Adam (the stronger sex). The proposal about simultaneous creation (Gen 2:7-22) is based on the interpretation that “Adam” (earthling) was initially a sexless human being, and that the differentiation by sex and gender occurs with the creation of Eve (2:22), so that in this sense Adam and Eve, man and woman, as sexual beings came into being simultaneously. This would also imply equality between men and women (Lanser, 1988:69 ff).

10 Philo’s commentary on Gen 3:6: “Words... demonstrate that it was appropriate that immortality and all other good be present as subordinate to the man, and death and every evil subordinate to the woman” (Yonge, 1993:799).

The gardener of the Garden of Eden who “takes a stroll in the breeze of the day” (3:8) should be seen as the passionate protector of the garden and its inhabitants. He cares for the garden, but not as the Great Inquisitor who, in the last analysis, wants to bring harm to the man and rob him of the “state of paradise.”

It does appear, though, that the defamation of the woman continues. An etiological reading of these texts readily opens the door to the misogynous reading of Genesis 3. It is the man who is assigned the place of responsibility, and it is on his account that the curse falls on the whole earth (3:17b), and not the woman. In order to remove his own guilt, Adam throws blame on the woman, but also on God because he, the Creator, placed the woman next to him (3:12). This situation witnesses the beginning of the fallout in the relationship between men and women (see above about “gender wars”), as well between the human being (both women and men) and God. Mutual recrimination (“the snake deceived me so I ate”), demonstrates that in those circumstances, the man and the woman, Adam and Eve, do not unite in solidarity and loyalty. Thus, sin does not unite the man and the woman. The man betrays his wife in order to remove his responsibility, and indirectly blames God for making a mistake in creating the woman (“the woman you gave me”).

Desire will Drive you to your Husband, and he will Lord over you (3:16b)

The principles of etiological hermeneutics clearly demonstrate that the present text contains the history of the interpretation of the historical position of women. The conclusion indicates the reasons for the woman’s subordination and the seed of patriarchy.

As if the place of social inferiority is not enough, etiology also explains the physical pain which women will experience at childbirth: “I will multiply the suffering of your pregnancy, and you will give birth in pains” (3:16). The New Testament text will later confirm this presupposition of the woman’s childbearing pains as a kind of a catharsis, a rather unclear attitude for the redemption of women (1 Tim 2:15).

In addition, the present text clearly demonstrates that the harmony between the woman and the man dissipates. Although the woman was created and placed in the role of a helper, this did not mean that they did not co-operate. Now this disappears, and the attitude of the man towards the woman changes into a despotic relationship (“he will lord over you”).¹¹

11 The phrase that woman will be driven to her husband by “desire” is interpreted in two ways. It might be the wish for dependence on man, i.e. lack of independence. Others propose just the opposite, that a woman’s desire will be precisely the wish for independence from him, but that she will not be able to realize it, or only with great difficulty.

Women in the Judeo-Christian Tradition

The biblical text often presents women in a radical way, sometimes also in a somewhat reductional way, either as a blessing (“Who will find an excellent woman? She is more precious than pearls,” Prov 31:10), or as a curse of the harlot (Prov 5). She is either excellent and more precious than pearls, or is “as bitter as absinth” (5:3), “it is better to live alone in the desert than in the same home with a quarrelsome woman easy to get angry” (Prov 21:9; 25:24). Various biblical texts, from both the Old and New Testaments, place the woman in the context of, and categorize her in regard to, the following:

- (I) position in family and society
- (II) cognitive abilities
- (III) extensive historical responsibilities.

Subordination of Women in Family and Society

In the Old Testament, women call their fathers or husbands lord. Rachel calls her father Laban “my lord” (Gen 31:35) while Sarah says of her husband Abraham, “also my lord is old” (Gen 18:12). The New Testament continues in the same vein when Paul teaches that “the woman is not the lord of her body, but the husband” (1 Cor 7:4), or that “husband was not created for the wife, but the wife for the husband” (1 Cor 11:9).

Of course, it would be one-sided and incomplete to look at women in the Bible as mere subordinate servants. Women are consistently portrayed as faithful co-travelers and as an important factor in national-religious affairs, from holding a stable and crucial position in the family to acting as heroines like Ruth and Naomi. Even one prostitute, Rahab, takes an important place in the biblical national-religious portrait and is included in the list of heroes of faith (Heb 11:31).

Cognitive Abilities of Women

In the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, in the didactical and pedagogical sense, it is the father who educates children, which certainly means predominantly sons, i.e. male children.

In an indirect yet clear manner, the New Testament indicates that according to cognitive abilities, the woman ranks lower than man, and thus must behave appropriately: “Let the woman receive instruction with all subordination” (1 Tim 2:11). But (if she really must!) “let her ask at home” (1 Cor 14:35). The Apostle Paul concludes, “I do not allow the woman to teach” (1 Tim 2:12). How would it even be possible for women to teach, considering the absence of basic or formal education available to women throughout history? It cannot be concluded that

Paul was a misogynist, especially taking into account that he himself had women as co-workers (Rom 16:3-5; Phil 4:2-3).

The Historical Role and the Responsibility of Women

In the last analysis, the hermeneutical and etiological focus of the general attitude towards women relates to the imputed totality of her historical responsibility for the destruction of the “state of paradise” which human beings enjoyed. After all, as Paul observes, “Adam was not deceived, but woman” (1 Tim 2:14).

Biblical scenes often assign rather negative roles to women. One such account is of Job’s wife who does more than distance herself from her husband in his suffering. Instead of supporting him or taking pity on his exceptionally difficult state, she actually incites him to commit suicide. She says, “Curse God and die” (Job 2:9). The text later mentions that she abhors the very breath of her husband (19:17). Some contemporary authors want to present Job’s reaction as a patriarchic reaction of a male chauvinist. He tells her, “You babble like a mad woman” (2:10). It should not be overlooked that the Hebrew text here employs the plural, which leads to the possible translation “stupid women” (הַנְּבִלֹתַי תְּדַבְּרִי) (כְּדַבְּרַי אִתָּךְ), i.e. “you talk as stupid women talk.” Is this role assigned to Job’s wife just as a literary device or a theological statement? Is it just a coincidence or is it deliberate?

In addition to painful childbirth, the Bible appears to put additional historical blame on the woman (3:16). It appears that Paul, later in the New Testament, uses this situation as a kind of catharsis for women who will be saved through childbearing, if she stays in faith and love and holiness with moderation (1 Tim 2:15). Although there is not space here for a more detailed analysis of this passage, it can be stated with certainty that this represents a rather unlikely proposition. What, then, should unmarried women and those who cannot conceive and give birth do to be saved?

Instead of a Conclusion

Limited to an etiological reading of Genesis 3, the position of women would be determined by the Judeo-Christian interpretation which is unsympathetic to women. Further, it would not take into account an important distinction between sexual and gender identities. In this way, the text would be instrumental in assigning an inferior role to women, as is done so often, and under the despotic reign of the man. Such uncritical reading can also easily justify a misogynous interpretation of the attitude towards women. On the other hand, if syncretism of the fertility cult is tolerated, it might easily result in a popular religious theory and practice.

Since no text is without context, the reader is obligated to take the context (historical, cultural and social) into account, and, in this concrete case, to unreservedly take sexual and gender identity into account, eventually upholding the Christological emphasis of a new “gender” and a new creation (*tertium genus*) which is limited neither by ethnos nor by sex (Gal 3:28) as the main reference point.

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Translated by Davorin Peterlin

Od mizoginije do kulta: Etiološko čitanje Post 3

Sažetak

Cjelokupna problematika povijesti položaja žene traži i zaslužuje širu i detaljniju raspravu. Ovaj rad stoga ima namjeru, u religijsko-povijesnom kontekstu, naznačiti i problematizirati dva krajnja 'pozicioniranja' prema ženi u kontekstu bipolarnog muško-ženskog svijeta. Položaj, uloga i odnos prema ženi, uvelike je određen i judeo-kršćanskom tradicijom. Iz te je perspektive to znatno određeno biblijskim izvještajem o pokleknuću žene pred 'zmijom' iz Postanka 3.

Žena je od tada obilježena kao 'slaba', ona je ta koja je poklekla pred 'zmijom' i tako lišila čovječanstvo blaženog rajskog stanja vrta u Edenu. Ovime je žena otvorila vrata, neprijatelju ljudskih duša, ali i svekolikoj paloj sudbi čovječanstva. Povijesna posljedica tog biblijskog izvještaja položaj žene u društvu i obitelji ipak nije jednoznačan. S jedne strane, to je krivnja koja uzrokuje mizoginiju (= ženomrstvo); s druge strane, kako je žena nositeljica čovjekova života, trajno opstoji i obožavanje žene, u obliku kulta plodnosti, koji je jedan od religijski najraširenijih, a kao sinkretističku devijaciju nalazimo i u starozavjetnom tekstu. U nekih kršćanskih tradicija ovaj kult nalazi se kao antipod mizoginiji.

Ključne riječi: mizoginija, mizandrija, patrijarhalizam, rod, spol, etiologija, Amazonke, disharmonija