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## DEPATRIARCHALIZING IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

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Biblical faith challenges the faithful to explore treasures old and new. In this context I propose to examine interactions between the Hebrew Scriptures and the women's liberation movement. I am aware of the risks. Some claim that the task is impossible and ill-advised. The two phenomena have nothing to say to each other. As far as the East is from the West, so far are they separated. To attempt to relate them is to prostitute them. Others aver that the Bible and the women's movement are enemies. "Patriarchy has God on its side," declares Kate Millett, introducing her sexually oriented discussion of the Fall. She maintains that this myth is "designed as it is expressly in order to blame all this world's discomfort on the female."<sup>1</sup> Making a similar point from within the Christian faith, Mary Daly writes of "the malignant view of the man-woman relationship which the androcentric myth itself inadvertently 'reveals' and perpetuates."<sup>2</sup> For her this story belongs to a patriarchal religion oppressive to women.

It is superfluous to document patriarchy in Scripture.<sup>3</sup> Yahweh is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as well as of Jesus and Paul. The legal codes of Israel treat women primarily as chattel. Koheleth condemns her "whose heart is snares and nets and whose hands are fetters," concluding that although a few men may seek the meaning of existence, "a woman among all these I have not found" (7:23-29). In spite of his eschatology, Paul considers women subordinate to their husbands,<sup>4</sup> and, even worse, Timothy makes woman responsible for sin in the world (2:11-15).<sup>5</sup> Considerable evidence indicting the Bible as a document of male supremacy. Attempts to acquit it by tokens such as

*Jewish*  
*Christian*  
*movement*

Deborah, Huldah, Ruth, or Mary and Martha only reinforce the case.

If these views are all which can be said or primarily what must be said, then I am of all women most miserable. I face a terrible dilemma: Choose ye this day whom you will serve: the God of the fathers or the God of sisterhood. If the God of the fathers, then the Bible supplies models for your slavery. If the God of sisterhood, then you must reject patriarchal religion and go forth without models to claim your freedom.<sup>6</sup> Yet I myself perceive neither war nor neutrality between Biblical faith and women's liberation. The more I participate in the Movement, the more I discover my freedom through the appropriation of Biblical symbols. Old and new interact. Let me not be misunderstood: I know that Hebrew literature comes from a male-dominated society. I know that Biblical religion is patriarchal, and I understand the adverse effects of that religion for women. I know also the dangers of eisegesis. Nevertheless, I affirm that the intentionality of Biblical faith, as distinguished from a general description of Biblical religion, is neither to create nor to perpetuate patriarchy but rather to function as salvation for both women and men. The women's movement errs when it dismisses the Bible as inconsequential or condemns it as enslaving. In rejecting Scripture women ironically accept male chauvinistic interpretations and thereby capitulate to the very view they are protesting. But there is another way: to reread (not rewrite) the Bible without the blinders of Israelite men or of Paul, Barth, Bonhoeffer, and a host of others.<sup>7</sup> The hermeneutical challenge is to translate Biblical faith without sexism.

### Themes Disavowing Sexism

One approach to translation is through themes which implicitly disavow sexism. Israel's theological understanding of Yahweh is such a theme. Here is a deity set apart from the fertility gods of the ancient Near East; a deity whose worship cannot tolerate a cult of sexuality; a deity described as one, complete, whole, and thus above sexuality (cf. Deut. 6:4). To be sure, the masculine pronoun regularly denotes this God, but just as faithfully the Hebrew Scriptures proclaim that Yahweh is not a male who requires a female. There is no *hieros gamos* in Yahweh religion.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the danger of a masculine label for Deity is recognized. While depicting Yahweh as a man, Israel repudiates both anthropomorphisms and andromorphisms. God repents, we read

in some passages.<sup>9</sup> According to others, God is not a man that he should repent.<sup>10</sup> In his poem on Israel the faithless son and Yahweh the loving deity, Hosea beautifully presents this paradox of affirming while denying anthropomorphic language (11:1-11). Yahweh is the parent who teaches the child to walk, who heals tender wounds, and who feeds the hungry infant. Strikingly, these activities belonged to the mother, not to the father, in ancient Israel.<sup>11</sup> Like a human being, Yahweh agonizes, struggles, and suffers over the wayward child. Then as love overcomes anger, this Deity accounts for a verdict of mercy by denying identification with the male. Thus comes the wonderful climax, "for I am God (*El*) and not man (*ish*), the Holy One in your midst" (11:9).

Feminine imagery for God is more prevalent in the Old Testament than we usually acknowledge.<sup>12</sup> It occurs repeatedly in traditions of the Exodus and Wanderings. The murmuring themes focus often on hunger and thirst.<sup>13</sup> Providing food and drink is woman's work, and Yahweh assumes this role. Even as women fetch water for their families,<sup>14</sup> so the Lord supplies water in the desert for the people.<sup>15</sup> As mothers feed their household,<sup>16</sup> so Yahweh prepares manna and quail for the children of Israel.<sup>17</sup> But the children continue to complain, and an angry Moses reproaches God in a series of rhetorical questions:

Did I conceive all this people? Did I bring them forth, that thou shouldst say to me, "Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries the sucking child, to the land which thou didst swear to give their fathers'?" (Num. 11:12)

This extraordinary language indicates that Yahweh was indeed mother and nurse of the wandering children.<sup>18</sup> Further, the recital of *Heilsgeschichte* in Nehemiah 9 introduces Yahweh as seamstress:

Forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing; their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell. (Neh. 9:21)

The role of dressmaker is not unique to the God of the Wilderness. This same Deity made garments of skin to clothe the naked and disobedient couple in the Garden (Genesis 3:21). As a woman clothes her family,<sup>19</sup> so Yahweh clothes the human family.

Second Isaiah boldly employs gynomorphic speech for God. Yahweh speaks of her birth pangs:<sup>20</sup>

\* Now I will cry out like a woman in travail,  
I will gasp and pant. (42:14b)

The Deity compares her loving remembrance of Zion to a mother nursing her child:

Can a woman forget her sucking child,  
that she should have no compassion  
on the son of her womb?  
Even these may forget,  
yet I will not forget you. (49:15)

Third Isaiah continues the maternal picture. Yahweh is like Zion in labor, bringing forth children:<sup>21</sup>

Shall I bring to the birth and not cause  
to bring forth?  
says the Lord;  
shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb?  
says your God. (66:9)

Yahweh is a comforting mother:

As one whom his mother comforts,  
so I will comfort you. (66:13)

The maternal Deity may also be a midwife:<sup>22</sup>

Yet thou art he who took me from the womb;  
Thou didst keep me safe upon my mother's breast.  
Upon thee was I cast from my birth. . . .  
(Psalm 22:9-10a; cf. Psalm 71:6; Job 3:12)

Midwife, seamstress, housekeeper, nurse, and mother: all these feminine images characterize Yahweh, the God of Israel.

To summarize: Although the Old Testament often pictures Yahweh as a man, it also uses gynomorphic language for the Deity.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, Israel repudiated the idea of sexuality in God. Unlike fertility gods, Yahweh is neither male nor female; neither he nor she. Consequently, modern assertions that God is masculine, even when they are qualified,<sup>24</sup> are misleading and detrimental, if not altogether inaccurate. Cultural and grammatical limitations (the use of masculine

pronouns for God) need not limit theological understanding. As Creator and Lord, Yahweh embraces and transcends both sexes. To translate for our immediate concern: the nature of the God of Israel defies sexism.

The Exodus speaks forcefully to women's liberation. So compelling is this theme of freedom from oppression that our enthusiasm for it may become unfaithfulness to it.<sup>25</sup> Yet the story does teach that the God of Israel abhors slavery; that Yahweh acts through human agents to liberate (agents who may not even acknowledge him; agents who may be *personae non gratae* not only to rulers but also to slaves); that liberation is a refusal of the oppressed to participate in an unjust society and thus it involves a withdrawal; and that liberation begins in the home of the oppressor. More especially, women nurture the revolution. The Hebrew midwives disobey Pharaoh. His own daughter thwarts him, and her maidens assist. This Egyptian princess schemes with female slaves, mother and daughter, to adopt a Hebrew child whom she names Moses. As the first to defy the oppressor, women alone take the initiative which leads to deliverance (Exod. 1:15-2:10).<sup>26</sup> If Pharaoh had realized the power of these women, he might have reversed his decree (Exod. 1:16, 22) and had females killed rather than males! At any rate, a patriarchal religion which creates and preserves such feminist traditions contains resources for overcoming patriarchy.

A third theme disavowing sexism is corporate personality.<sup>27</sup> All are embraced in the fluidity of transition from the one to the many and the many to the one. Though Israel did not apply this principle specifically to the issue of women, in it she has given us a profound insight to appropriate. "For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded," says Jeremiah (8:21). To the extent that women are enslaved, so too men are enslaved. The oppression of one individual or one group is the oppression of all individuals and all groups. Solidarity marks the sexes. In sexism we all die, both victim and victor. In liberation we all live equally as human beings.

### Exegesis: Genesis 2-3

Another approach to translation is the exegesis of passages specifically concerned with female and male. With its focus on the concrete and the specific, this method complements and checks the generaliz-

ing tendencies of themes. Hence, I propose to investigate briefly the Yahwist story of creation and fall in Genesis 2-3. Many feminists reject this account because they accept the traditional exegesis of male supremacy. But interpretation is often circular. Believing that the text affirms male dominance and female subordination, commentators find evidence for that view. Let us read with an opposing concern: Does the narrative break with patriarchy? By asking this question, we may discover a different understanding.

Ambiguity characterizes the meaning of *adam* in Genesis 2-3. On the one hand, man is the first creature formed (2:7). The Lord God puts him in the garden "to till it and keep it," a job identified with the male (cf. 3:17-19). On the other hand, *adam* is a generic term for human-kind. In commanding *adam* not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the Deity is speaking to both the man and the woman (2:16-17). Until the differentiation of female and male (2:21-23), *adam* is basically androgynous: one creature incorporating two sexes.

Concern for sexuality, specifically for the creation of woman, comes last in the story, after the making of the garden, the trees, and the animals. Some commentators allege female subordination based on this order of events.<sup>28</sup> They contrast it with Genesis 1:27 where God creates *adam* as male and female in one act.<sup>29</sup> Thereby they infer that whereas the Priests recognized the equality of the sexes, the Yahwist made woman a second, subordinate, inferior sex.<sup>30</sup> But the last may be first, as both the Biblical theologian and the literary critic know. Thus the Yahwist account moves to its climax, not its decline, in the creation of woman.<sup>31</sup> She is not an afterthought, she is the culmination. Genesis 1 itself supports this interpretation, for there male and female are indeed the last and truly the crown of all creatures. The last is also first where beginnings and endings are parallel. In Hebrew literature the central concerns of a unit often appear at the beginning and the end as an *inclusio* device.<sup>32</sup> Genesis 2 evinces this structure. The creation of man first and of woman last constitutes a ring composition whereby the two creatures are parallel. In no way does the order disparage woman. Content and context augment this reading.

The context for the advent of woman is a divine judgment, "It is not good that *adam* should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (2:18). The phrase needing explication is "helper fit for him." In the Old Testament the word helper (*ezer*) has many usages. It can be a proper name for a male.<sup>33</sup> In our story it describes the animals and the woman. In some passages it characterizes Deity. God is the helper of

Israel. As helper Yahweh creates and saves.<sup>34</sup> Thus *ezer* is a relational term; it designates a beneficial relationship; and it pertains to God, people, and animals. By itself the word does not specify positions within relationships; more particularly, it does not imply inferiority. Position results from additional content or from context. Accordingly, what kind of relationship does *ezer* entail in Genesis 2:18, 20? Our answer comes in two ways: (1) the word *neged*, which joins *ezer*, connotes equality: a helper who is a counterpart.<sup>35</sup> (2) The animals are helpers, but they fail to fit *adam*. There is physical, perhaps psychic, rapport between *adam* and the animals, for Yahweh forms (*yatzar*) them both out of the ground (*adamah*). Yet their similarity is not equality. *Adam* names them and thereby exercises power over them. No fit helper is among them. And thus the narrative moves to woman. My translation is this: God is the helper superior to man; the animals are helpers inferior to man; woman is the helper equal to man.

Let us pursue the issue by examining the account of the creation of woman (21-22). This episode concludes the story even as the creation of man commences it. As I have said already, the ring composition suggests an interpretation of woman and man as equals. To establish this meaning, structure and content must mesh. They do. In both episodes Yahweh alone creates. For the last creation the Lord God "caused a deep sleep (*tardemah*) to fall upon the man." Man has no part in making woman; he is out of it. He exercises no control over her existence. He is neither participant nor spectator nor consultant at her birth. Like man, woman owes her life solely to God. For both of them the origin of life is a divine mystery. Another parallel of equality is creation out of raw materials: dust for man and a rib for woman. Yahweh chooses these fragile materials and in both cases processes them before human beings happen. As Yahweh shapes dust and then breathes into it to form man, so Yahweh takes out the rib and then builds it into woman.<sup>36</sup> To call woman "Adam's rib" is to misread the text which states carefully and clearly that the extracted bone required divine labor to become female, a datum scarcely designed to bolster the male ego. Moreover, to claim that the rib means inferiority or subordination is to assign the man qualities over the woman which are not in the narrative itself. Superiority, strength, aggressiveness, dominance, and power do not characterize man in Genesis 2. By contrast he is formed from dirt; his life hangs by a breath which he does not control; and he himself remains silent and passive while the Deity plans and interprets his existence.

The rib means solidarity and equality. Adam recognizes this meaning in a poem:<sup>37</sup>

This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh.  
She shall be called *ishshah* (woman)  
because she was taken out of *ish* (man). (2:23)

The pun proclaims both the similarity and the differentiation of female and male. Before this episode the Yahwist has used only the generic term *adam*. No exclusively male reference has appeared. Only with the specific creation of woman *ishshah* occurs the first specific term for man as male (*ish*). In other words, sexuality is simultaneous for woman and man. The sexes are interrelated and interdependent. Man as male does not precede woman as female but happens concurrently with her. Hence, the first act in Genesis 2 is the creation of androgyny (2:7) and the last is the creation of sexuality (2:23).<sup>38</sup> Male embodies female and female embodies male. The two are neither dichotomies nor duplicates. The birth of woman corresponds to the birth of man but does not copy it. In responding to the woman, man speaks for the first time and for the first time discovers himself as male. No longer a passive creature, *ish* comes alive in meeting *ishshah*.

Some read in(to) the poem a naming motif. The man names the woman and thereby has power and authority over her.<sup>39</sup> But again I suggest that we reread. Neither the verb nor the noun *name* is in the poem. We find instead the verb *kara*, to call: "she shall be called woman." Now in the Yahwist primeval history this verb does not function as a synonym or parallel or substitute for *name*. The typical formula for naming is the verb to *call* plus the explicit object *name*. This formula applies to Deity, people, places, and animals. For example, in Genesis 4 we read:

Cain built a city and called the *name* of the city after the *name* of his son Enoch (v. 17).  
And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his *name* Seth (v. 25).  
To Seth also a son was born and he called his *name* Enoch (v. 26a).  
At that time men began to *call* upon the *name* of the Lord (v. 26b).

Genesis 2:23 has the verb *call* but does not have the object *name*. Its absence signifies the absence of a naming motif in the poem. The

presence of both the verb *call* and the noun *name* in the episode of the animals strengthens the point:

So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air and brought them to the man to see what he would *call* them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its *name*. The man gave *names* to all cattle, and to the birds of the air and to every beast of the field. (2:19-20)

In calling the animals by name, *adam* establishes supremacy over them and fails to find a fit helper. In calling woman, *adam* does not name her and does find in her a counterpart. Female and male are equal sexes. Neither has authority over the other.<sup>40</sup>

A further observation secures the argument: *Woman* itself is not a name. It is a common noun; it is not a proper noun. It designates gender; it does not specify person. *Adam* recognizes sexuality by the words *ishshah* and *ish*. This recognition is not an act of naming to assert the power of male over female. Quite the contrary. But the true skeptic is already asking: What about Genesis 3:20 where "the man called his wife's name Eve"? We must wait to consider that question. Meanwhile, the words of the ancient poem as well as their context proclaim sexuality originating in the unity of *adam*. From this one (androgynous) creature come two (female and male). The two return to their original unity as *ish* and *ishshah* become one flesh (2:24):<sup>41</sup> another instance of the ring composition.

Next the differences which spell harmony and equality yield to the differences of disobedience and disaster. The serpent speaks to the woman. Why to the woman and not to the man? The simplest answer is that we do not know. The Yahwist does not tell us any more than he explains why the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was in the garden. But the silence of the text stimulates speculations, many of which only confirm the patriarchal mentality which conceived them. Cassuto identifies serpent and woman, maintaining that the cunning of the serpent is "in reality" the cunning of the woman.<sup>42</sup> He impugns her further by declaring that "for the very reason that a woman's imagination surpasses a man's, it was the woman who was enticed first." Though more gentle in his assessment, von Rad avers that "in the history of Yahweh-religion it has always been the women who have shown an inclination for obscure astrological cults" (a claim which he does not document).<sup>43</sup> Consequently, he holds that the woman "con-

fronts the obscure allurements and mysteries that beset our limited life more directly than the man does," and then he calls her a "temptress." Paul Ricoeur says that woman "represents the point of weakness," as the entire story "gives evidence of a very masculine resentment."<sup>44</sup> McKenzie links the "moral weakness" of the woman with her "sexual attraction" and holds that the latter ruined both the woman and the man.<sup>45</sup> But the narrative does not say any of these things. It does not sustain the judgment that woman is weaker or more cunning or more sexual than man. Both have the same Creator, who explicitly uses the word "good" to introduce the creation of woman (2:18). Both are equal in birth. There is complete rapport, physical, psychological, sociological, and theological, between them: bone of bone and flesh of flesh. If there be moral frailty in one, it is moral frailty in two. Further, they are equal in responsibility and in judgment, in shame and in guilt, in redemption and in grace. What the narrative says about the nature of woman it also says about the nature of man.

Why does the serpent speak to the woman and not to the man? Let a female speculate. If the serpent is "more subtle" than its fellow creatures, the woman is more appealing than her husband. Throughout the myth she is the more intelligent one, the more aggressive one, and the one with greater sensibilities.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps the woman elevates the animal world by conversing theologically with the serpent. At any rate, she understands the hermeneutical task. In quoting God she interprets the prohibition ("neither shall you touch it"). The woman is both theologian and translator. She contemplates the tree, taking into account all the possibilities. The tree is good for food; it satisfies the physical drives. It pleases the eyes; it is aesthetically and emotionally desirable. Above all, it is coveted as the source of wisdom (*haskil*). Thus the woman is fully aware when she acts, her vision encompassing the gamut of life. She takes the fruit and she eats. The initiative and the decision are hers alone. There is no consultation with her husband. She seeks neither his advice nor his permission. She acts independently. By contrast the man is a silent, passive, and bland recipient: "She also gave some to her husband and he ate." The narrator makes no attempt to depict the husband as reluctant or hesitating. The man does not theologize; he does not contemplate; he does not envision the full possibilities of the occasion. His one act is belly-oriented, and it is an act of quiescence, not of initiative. The man is not dominant; he is not aggressive; he is not a decision-maker. Even though the prohibition not to eat of the tree appears before the female was specifically

created, she knows that it applies to her. She has interpreted it, and now she struggles with the temptation to disobey. But not the man, to whom the prohibition came directly (2:6). He follows his wife without question or comment, thereby denying his own individuality. If the woman be intelligent, sensitive, and ingenious, the man is passive, brutish, and inept. These character portrayals are truly extraordinary in a culture dominated by men. I stress their contrast not to promote a female chauvinism but to undercut patriarchal interpretations alien to the text.

The contrast between woman and man fades after their acts of disobedience. They are one in the new knowledge of their nakedness (3:7). They are one in hearing and in hiding. They flee from the sound of the Lord God in the Garden (3:8). First to the man come questions of responsibility (3:9, 11), but the man fails to be responsible: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (3:12). Here the man does not blame the woman; he does not say that the woman seduced him;<sup>47</sup> he blames the Deity. The verb which he uses for both the Deity and the woman is *ntr* (cf. 3:6). So far as I can determine, this verb neither means nor implies seduction in this context or in the lexicon. Again, if the Yahwist intended to make the woman the temptress, he missed a choice opportunity. The woman's response supports the point. "The serpent beguiled me and I ate" (3:13). Only here occurs the strong verb *nsh*, meaning to deceive, to seduce. God accepts this subject-verb combination when, immediately following the woman's accusations, Yahweh says to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all animals" (3:14).

Though the tempter (the serpent) is cursed,<sup>48</sup> the woman and the man are not. But they are judged, and the judgments are commentaries on the disastrous effects of their shared disobedience. They show how terrible human life has become as it stands between creation and grace. We misread if we assume that these judgments are mandates. They describe; they do not prescribe. They protest; they do not condemn. Of special concern are the words telling the woman that her husband shall rule over her (3:16). This statement is not license for male supremacy, but rather it is condemnation of that very pattern.<sup>49</sup> Subjugation and supremacy are perversions of creation. Through disobedience the woman has become slave. Her initiative and her freedom vanish. The man is corrupted also, for he has become master, ruling over the one who is his God-given equal. The subordination of

female to male signifies their shared sin.<sup>50</sup> This sin vitiates all relationships: between animals and human beings (3:15); mothers and children (3:16); husbands and wives (3:16); man and the soil (3:17, 18); man and his work (3:19). Whereas in creation man and woman know harmony and equality, in sin they know alienation and discord. Grace makes possible a new beginning.

A further observation about these judgments: They are culturally conditioned. Husband and work (childbearing) define the woman; wife and work (farming) define the man. A literal reading of the story limits both creatures and limits the story. To be faithful translators, we must recognize that women as well as men move beyond these culturally defined roles, even as the intentionality and function of the myth move beyond its original setting. Whatever forms stereotyping takes in our own culture, they are judgments upon our common sin and disobedience. The suffering and oppression we women and men know now are marks of our fall, not of our creation.

It is at this place of sin and judgment that "the man calls his wife's name Eve" (3:20), thereby asserting his rule over her. The naming itself faults the man for corrupting a relationship of mutuality and equality. And so Yahweh evicts the primeval couple from the Garden, yet with signals of grace. Interestingly, the conclusion of the story does not specify the sexes in flight. Instead the narrator resumes use of the generic and androgynous term *adam*, with which the story began, and thereby completes an overall ring composition (3:22-24).

We approached this myth by asking if it presages a break with patriarchy. Our rereading has borne fruit. Remarkable is the extent to which patriarchal patterns fade; the extent to which the Yahwist stands over against his male dominated culture; the extent to which the vision of a transsexual Deity shaped an understanding of human sexuality.

### Exegesis: Song of Songs

On this issue the Yahwist is not alone in Israel. Among his companions are the female and the male who celebrate the joys of erotic love in the Song of Songs. This poetry contains many parallels to the Yahwist narrative. Perhaps the Paradise described in Genesis 2 and destroyed in Genesis 3 has been regained, expanded, and improved upon in the Song of Songs. At any rate, its words and images embody simultane-

ously several layers of meaning. The literal, the metaphorical, and the euphemistic intertwine in content and nuance.<sup>51</sup>

Canticles begins with the woman speaking.<sup>52</sup> She initiates love-making:

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,  
for your love is sweeter than wine (1:2).

In this first poem (1:2-2:6) she calls herself keeper of vineyards (1:6). In the last poem (8:4-14) she returns to this motif (8:12), even as she concludes the unit by summoning her beloved (8:14). Thus the overall structure of the Song is a ring composition showing the prominence of the female. Within this design another *inclusio* emphasizes women. The daughters of Jerusalem commence and close the second poem (2:7 and 3:5).

As in Genesis 2-3, the ring composition of the Song of Songs encircles a garden.<sup>53</sup> Person and place blend in this imagery.

Let my beloved come to his garden  
and eat its choicest fruit (4:16c).

The woman is the garden (4:10-15), and to the garden her lover comes (5:1, 6:2, 11). Together they enjoy this place of sensuous delight. Many trees adorn their garden, trees pleasant to the sight and good for food:<sup>54</sup> the apple tree (2:3; 7:8; 8:5), the fig tree (2:13), the pomegranate (4:3, 13; 6:7), the cedar (5:15), the palm (7:8) and "all trees of frankincense" (4:14). Spices give pleasure as does the abundance of fruits, plants, and flowers: the meadow saffron (2:1), the lotus (2:1f, 16; 4:5; 5:13; 7:2), the mandrake (7:13), and others (2:12, 13; 4:13, 16; 6:11). Fountains of living water enhance further this site (4:12, 15), inviting comparisons with the subterranean stream watering the earth (Gen. 2:6) and with the rivers flowing out of Eden to water the garden (Gen. 2:10-14).

Animals inhabit two gardens. In the first they were formed, both beasts and birds, and received their names. As foils they participated in the creation of woman and provided a context for the total joy of *ish* and *ishshah*. In Canticles their names become explicit as does their contextual and metaphorical participation in the encounters of lovers. The woman describes her mate:

My beloved is like a gazelle  
or a young stag (2:9)

.....  
his locks are wavy,  
black as a raven (5:11).  
His eyes are like doves  
beside springs of water (5:12).

The man also uses animal imagery to describe the woman:

Behold, you are beautiful, my love  
behold, you are beautiful!  
Your eyes are doves  
behind your veil.  
Your hair is like a flock of goats,  
moving down the slopes of Gilead.  
Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes  
that have come up from the washing,  
Each having its twin,  
and not one of them is bereaved (4:1-2)  
.....  
Your two breasts are like two fawns,  
twins of a gazelle,  
that feed among the lilies (4:5).

The mare (1:9), the foxes (2:15), the turtledove (2:12), the lions and the leopards (4:8) also dwell in this garden where all nature extols the love of female and male.

The sensuality of Eden broadens and deepens in the Song. Love is sweet to the taste, like the fruit of the apple tree (2:3; cf. 4:16; 5:1, 13). Fragrant are the smells of the vineyards (2:13), of the perfumes of myrrh and frankincense (3:6), of the scent of Lebanon (4:11), and of beds of spices (5:13; 6:2). The embraces of lovers confirm the delights of touch (1:2, 2:3-6; 4:10, 11; cf. 5:1; 7:6-9; 8:1, 3). A glance of the eyes ravishes the heart (4:9; 6:13), as the sound of the beloved thrills it (5:4).

Work belongs both to the garden of Creation and to the garden of eroticism. Clearly man works in Eden and implicitly woman too. The Song alters this emphasis. The woman definitely works. She keeps vineyards (1:6; cf. 8:12), and she pastures flocks (1:8). Her lover may be a shepherd also (1:7), though the text does not secure this meaning.<sup>55</sup> By analogy he is a king (1:4, 12; 8:11, 12), but he neither rules nor dispenses wisdom. He provides luxury for the sake of love (3:9-11).<sup>56</sup> Together Genesis 2 and the Song of Songs affirm work in

gardens of joy, and together they suggest fluidity in the occupational roles of woman and man. In Canticles nature and work are pleasures leading to love, as indeed they were before the primeval couple disobeyed and caused the ground to bring forth thorns and thistles and work to become pain and sweat (Gen. 2:15; 3:16, 18, 19).

Neither the primeval couple nor the historical couple bear names, but both are concerned with naming. When *adam* names the animals, it is an act of authority consonant with Creation. When he names the woman, it is an act of perversion preceding expulsion. In the erotic garden roles reverse, authority vanishes, and perversion is unknown. The woman names the man:

For your love is better than wine,  
your anointing oils are fragrant,  
Your name is oil poured out;  
therefore the maidens love you (1:2b-3).

Her act is wholly fitting and good. Naming is ecstasy, not exercise; it is love, not control. And that love marks a new creation.

Song of Songs extends beyond the confines of Eden to include other places, people, and professions. We move from the countryside (2:14; 4:11; 6:11; 7:12) to the city with its squares, streets, and walls (2:9; 3:2, 3; 5:7). We hear of kings (1:9; 3:7; 4:4) and warriors (3:7; 6:4); queens, concubines, and maidens (6:8, 9); watchmen (3:3; 5:7) and merchants (3:6), brothers (1:6), sisters (8:8), mothers (6:9; 8:1, 2, 5), and companions male (1:7) and female (2:2, 7). Paradise expands to civilization. History, like nature, contributes to the encounter of the sexes.

Parental references merit special attention. Seven times the lovers speak of mother, but not once do they mention father.<sup>57</sup> The man calls his beloved the special child of the mother who bore her (6:9), even as the woman cites the travail of the mother who bore him (8:5). This concern with birth is also reminiscent of the theme of creation in Genesis 2. In yearning for closeness with her lover, the woman wishes he were a brother nursing at the breast of her mother (8:1). But these traditional images do not exhaust the meaning of mother. It is his mother who crowns Solomon on the day of his wedding (3:11). The female lover identifies her brothers as sons of her mother, not of her father (1:6). And most telling of all, the woman leads her lover to the "house of her mother" (3:4, 8:2). Neither the action nor the phrase



bespeaks patriarchy.<sup>58</sup> This strong matriarchal coloring in the Song of Songs recalls the primeval man leaving his father and his mother to cleave to his wife (Gen. 2:24; cf. Gen. 24:28; Ruth 1:8).

Like Genesis 2, Canticles affirms mutuality of the sexes. There is no male dominance, no female subordination, and no stereotyping of either sex. The woman is independent, fully the equal of the man. Her interests, work, and words defy the connotations of "second sex." Unlike the first woman, this one is not a wife. Her love does not include procreation.<sup>59</sup> At times the man approaches her, and at other times she initiates their meetings. In one poem the man moves vigorously and quickly over the hills and mountains to stand at her window. He calls her to join him outside:

Arise, my love, my fair one  
and come away;  
for lo, the winter is past,  
the rain is over and gone (2:10,11).

Next the woman actively seeks the man (3:1-4). Upon her bed she desires him. She rises to search in the streets and squares. Her movements are bold and open. She does not work in secret or in shame. She asks help of the night watchman: "Have you seen him whom my nefesh loves?" Finding him, she clasps him securely:

I held him and would not let go  
until I had brought him into  
my mother's house,  
and into the chamber of her that  
conceived me (3:4).

This theme of alternating initiative for woman and man runs throughout the poetry.<sup>60</sup> Further, each lover exalts the physical beauty and charm of the other in language candid and covert. Their metaphorical speech reveals even as it conceals. They treat each other with tenderness and respect, for they are sexual lovers, not sexual objects. They neither exploit nor escape sex; they embrace and enjoy it.<sup>61</sup> Both are naked and they are not ashamed (cf. Gen. 2:25).

On occasion the woman expresses their relationship by the formula, "My beloved is mine and I am his" (2:16; 6:3). Once she says, "I am my beloved's and his desire is for me" (7:10). This word *desire* occurs only three times in the Old Testament: once in Canticles and twice in

the Yahwist Epic (Gen. 3:16; 4:7). "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" is the divine judgment upon the woman. As we have seen, its context is sin and perversion. *Desire* in the Song of Songs reverses this meaning of the male-female relationship. Here desire is joy, not judgment. Moreover, the possessive reference has switched from the wife's desire for her husband to the desire of the male lover for the female. Has one mark of sin in Eden been overcome here in another garden with the recovery of mutuality in love? Male dominance is totally alien to Canticles. Can it be that grace is present?

Let us stress that these lovers are not the primeval couple living before the advent of disobedience. Nor are they an eschatological couple, as Karl Barth would have us believe.<sup>62</sup> They live in the "terror of history" (Eliade) but their love knows not that terror. To be sure, the poetry hints of threats to their Paradise. If the first garden had its tree and its serpent, the second has its potential dangers, too. There is the sterile winter now past (2:11); the little foxes which spoil the vineyards (2:15); the anger of the brothers (1:6);<sup>63</sup> a knowledge of jealousy (8:6); and the anxiety of the woman seeking her beloved, finding him not (3:1-4; 5:6-8; 6:1), and suffering at the hands of the watchmen (5:7). In addition, death threatens eroticism even as it haunted creation (Gen 2:17; 3:3, 4, 19). But all these discordant notes blend into the total harmony of love. If death did not swallow the primeval couple, neither does it overpower the historical couple. "Love is strong as death" (8:6). The poetry speaks triumphantly to all terror when it affirms that not even the primeval waters of chaos can destroy love:

Many waters cannot quench love, (ahabab)  
neither can floods drown it (8:7).

In many ways, then, Song of Songs is a midrash on Genesis 2-3.<sup>64</sup> By variations and reversals it creatively actualizes major motifs and themes of the primæval myth. Female and male are born to mutuality and love. They are naked without shame; they are equal without duplication. They live in gardens where nature joins in celebrating their oneness. Animals remind these couples of their shared superiority in creation as well as of their affinity and responsibility for lesser creatures. Fruits pleasing to the eye and to the tongue are theirs to enjoy. Living waters replenish their gardens. Both couples are involved in naming; both couples work. If the first pair pursues the traditional occupations for women and men, the second eschews stereotyping.

Neither couple fits the rhetoric of a male dominated culture. As equals they confront life and death. But the first couple lose their oneness through disobedience. Consequently, the woman's desire becomes the man's dominion. The second couple affirm their oneness through eroticism. Consequently, the man's desire becomes the woman's delight. Whatever else it may be, Canticles is a commentary on Genesis 2-3. Paradise Lost is Paradise Regained.

Yet the midrash is incomplete. Even though Song of Songs is the poetry of history, it speaks not at all of sin and disobedience. Life knows no prohibitions. And most strikingly, no Deity acts in that history. God is not explicitly acknowledged as either present or absent (though eroticism itself may be an act of worship in the context of grace). Some may conclude that these omissions make the setting of Canticles a more desirable paradise than Eden. But the silences portend the limits. If we cannot return to the primeval garden (Gen. 3:23-24), we cannot live solely in the garden of eroticism. Juxtaposing the two passages, we can appropriate them both for our present concern.

### Conclusion: A Depatriarchalizing Principle

Suffice it to conclude that the Hebrew Scriptures and women's liberation do meet and that their encounter need not be hostile. Contrary to Kate Millett, the Biblical God is not on the side of patriarchy, and the myth of the Fall does not "blame all this world's discomfort on the female." Indeed, this myth negates patriarchy in crucial ways; it does not legitimate the oppression of women. It explores the meaning of human existence for female and male. It reveals the goodness yet frailty of both creatures; their intended equality under God and with each other; their solidarity in sin and in suffering; and their shared need of redemption. Thereby its symbols illuminate a present issue, even as they exercise a sobering check on it. In Yahwist theology neither male nor female chauvinism is warranted. Both are perversions of creation which signify life under judgment.

Song of Songs counterbalances this "undertone of melancholy" (von Rad) by showing woman and man in mutual harmony after the Fall. Love is the meaning of their life, and this love excludes oppression and exploitation. It knows the goodness of sex and hence it knows not sexism. Sexual love expands existence beyond the stereotypes of society. It draws unto itself the public and the private, the historical and

the natural. It transforms all life even as life enhances it. Grace returns to female and male.<sup>65</sup>

Alongside Genesis 2-3 and the Song of Songs we place the themes of the nature of Yahweh, of the Exodus, and of corporate personality. In various ways they demonstrate a depatriarchalizing principle at work in the Hebrew Bible. Depatriarchalizing is not an operation which the exegete performs on the text. It is a hermeneutic operating within Scripture itself. We expose it; we do not impose it. Tradition history teaches that the meaning and function of Biblical materials is fluid. As Scripture moves through history, it is appropriated for new settings. Varied and diverse traditions appear, disappear, and reappear from occasion to occasion. We shall be unfaithful readers if we neglect Biblical passages which break with patriarchy or if we permit our interpretations to freeze in a patriarchal box of our own construction. For our day we need to perceive the depatriarchalizing principle, to recover it in those texts and themes where it is present,<sup>66</sup> and to accent it in our translations. Therein we shall be explorers who embrace both old and new in the pilgrimage of faith.

### Notes

1. Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1970), pp. 51-54.
2. Mary Daly, "The Courage to See," *The Christian Century*, September 22, 1971, p. 1110. See also *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 32-42.
3. On the status of women in the male-dominated society of Israel, see Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961), p. 39ff; J. Pedersen, *Israel 1* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 60-81; 23-33; W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament I*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), pp. 80-82.
4. 1 Cor. 14:34-35; Col. 3:18; cf. Eph. 5:22-24.
5. On Paul see Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966); Madeleine Boucher, "Some Unexplored Parallels to 1 Cor 11, 11-12 and Gal 3, 28: The NT on the Role of Women," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, January 1969, pp. 50-58. For efforts to exonerate Paul, see Robert C. Campbell, "Women's Liberation and the Apostle Paul," *Baptist Leader*, January 1972; Robin Scroggs, "Paul: Chauvinist or Liberationist?," *The Christian Century*, March 15, 1972, pp. 307-09; *ibid*, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. XL, No. 3 (September 1972), pp. 283-303; G. B. Caird, "Paul and Women's Liberty," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (Spring 1972), pp. 268-81.

6. Happily, the paradigm in Josh. 24:14-15 resolves the predicament. It poses a choice between competing gods only if the people are unwilling to serve Yahweh.
7. Cf. Peggy Ann Way, "An Authority of Possibility for Women in the Church," in Sarah Bentley Doely, ed., *Women's Liberation and the Church* (New York: Association Press, 1970), pp. 78-82.
8. Eichrodt, *Theology*, I, pp. 121, 151ff; cf. Helmer Ringgren, *Israelite Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 197ff.
9. E.g., Gen. 6:6; Ex. 32:14; I Sam. 15:11, 35; Jonah 3:10.
10. E.g., Num. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29.
11. Cf. Ludwig Köhler, *Hebrew Man* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 58ff.
12. For much of this material I am indebted to an unpublished paper, "Yahweh's Relationship as Mother to Israel" (June 1972), by Ms. Toni Craven of Andover Newton Theological School. We have only begun to explore the topic.
13. Martin Noth, *Exodus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 128-40. For a technical discussion of the murmuring theme, see George W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1968), pp. 47-127, 249-54.
14. Gen. 21:19, 24:11, 13-20, 43-46; Exod. 2:16ff; I Sam. 9:11; I Kings 17:10.
15. Exod. 17:1-7; Num. 20:2-13; Neh. 9:15.
16. Prov. 31:14-15; Gen. 18:6; 27:9, 14; cf. II Sam. 13:7-10.
17. Exod. 16:4-36; Num. 11; Neh. 9:15; cf. Deut. 32:13-14; Hos. 11:4; Psalm 36:8; 81:10, 16.
18. Martin Noth comments tellingly on this passage in *Numbers* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), p. 86ff.
19. Prov. 31:21ff.
20. See James Muilenburg, "Isaiah 40-66," *The Interpreter's Bible*, V (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 473.
21. Muilenburg, op. cit., p. 765ff.
22. See the discussion on birth in de Vaux, op. cit., p. 42ff. Whether or not fathers were present at birth is debatable (cf. Jer. 20:15 and Gen. 50:23); certainly midwives were present (Gen. 35:17; 38:28; Exod. 1:15). While Samuel Terrien sees paternal imagery underlying Ps. 22:9-10, it is more likely that the metaphor is maternal (S. Terrien, *The Psalms and their Meaning for Today* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), p. 154ff).
23. See James Muilenburg, "The History of the Religion of Israel," *The Interpreter's Bible*, I (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), p. 301ff.
24. E.g., John L. McKenzie, *The Two-Edged Sword* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1966), p. 116; Bishop C. Kilmer Myers, *United Church Herald*, January 1972, p. 14; Albert J. duBois, "Why I Am Against the Ordination of Women," *The Episcopalian*, July 1972, p. 22.

25. For instance, the exodus theme is not a paradigm for "leaving home" and developing a community without models (so Mary Daly, "The Spiritual Revolution: Women's Liberation as Theological Reeducation," *Andover Newton Quarterly*, March 1972, p. 172ff.) The Exodus itself is a return home, with its models drawn from the traditions of the Fathers (e.g., Exod. 3:15-17; 6:2-8).
26. Cf. Hans Walter Wolff, "The Elohistic Fragments in the Pentateuch," *Interpretation*, Vol. XXVI, April 1972, p. 165: "... it is women whose actions are decisive for the formation of God's people."
27. H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality," in Paul Volz, Friedrich Stummer and Johannes Hempel, eds., *Wesen und Wesen des Alten Testaments* (Berlin: Verlag von Alfred Topelmann, 1936), pp. 49-62.
28. Cf. E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 172ff; S.H.Hooke, "Genesis," *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1962), p. 179.
29. E.g., Elizabeth Cady Stanton observed that Gen. 1:26-28 "dignifies woman as an important factor in the creation, equal in power and glory with man," while Gen. 2 "makes her a mere afterthought" (*The Woman's Bible*, Part I (New York: European Publishing Company, 1895), p. 20. See also Elsie Adams and Mary Louise Briscoe, *Up Against the Wall, Mother*... (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1971), p. 4, and Sheila D. Collins, "Toward a Feminist Theology," *The Christian Century*, August 2, 1972, p. 798.
30. Cf. Eugene H. Maly, "Genesis," *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1968), p. 12: "But woman's existence, psychologically and in the social order, is dependent on man."
31. See John L. McKenzie, "The Literary Characteristics of Gen. 2-3," *Theological Studies* 15 (1954): 559; John A. Bailey, "Initiation and the Primal Woman in Gilgamesh and Genesis 2-3," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, June 1970, p. 143. Bailey writes emphatically of the remarkable importance and position of the woman in Gen. 2-3, "all the more extraordinary when one realizes that this is the only account of the creation of woman as such in ancient Near Eastern literature." He hedges, however, in seeing the themes of helper and naming (Gen. 2:18-23) as indicative of a "certain subordination" of woman to man. These reservations are unnecessary; see below. Cf. also Claus Westermann, *Genesis, Biblischer Kommentar 1/4* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970), p. 312.
32. James Muilenburg, "From Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, March 1969, p. 9ff; Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966), *passim* and esp. p. 5.
33. I Chron. 4:4; 12:9; Neh. 3:19.
34. Psalms 121:2, 124:8; 146:5; 33:20; 115:9-11; Exod. 18:4; Deut. 33:7, 26, 29.
35. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), p. 591ff.

36. The verb *bnh* (to build) suggests considerable labor. It is used of towns, towers, altars, and fortifications, as well as of the primeval woman (Koehler-Baumgartner, p. 134). In Gen. 2:22 it may mean the fashioning of clay around the rib (Ruth Amiran, "Myths of the Creation of Man and the Jericho Statues," BASOR No. 167, October 1962, p. 24ff).

37. See Walter Brueggemann, "Of the Same Flesh and Bone (Cn 2, 23a)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, October 1970, pp. 532-42.

38. In proposing as primary an androgynous interpretation of *adam*, I find virtually no support from (male) Biblical scholars. But my view stands as documented from the text, and I take refuge among a remnant of ancient (male) rabbis (see George Foot Moore, *Judaism*, I, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), p. 453; also Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Meridian Books, World Publishing Company, 1970, pp. 152ff, 279ff).

39. See, e.g., G. von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), pp. 80-82; John H. Marks, "Genesis," *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 5; John A. Bailey, op. cit., p. 143.

40. Cf. Westermann, op. cit., pp. 316ff.

41. Verse 24 probably mirrors a matriarchal society (so von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 83). If the myth were designed to support patriarchy, it is difficult to explain how this verse survived without proper alteration. Westermann contends, however, that an emphasis on matriarchy misunderstands the point of the verse, which is the total communion of woman and man (op. cit., p. 317).

42. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, Part I (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, n.d.), p. 142ff.

43. von Rad, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

44. Ricoeur departs from the traditional interpretation of the woman when he writes: "Eve n'est donc pas la femme en tant que 'deuxième sexe'; toute femme et tout homme sont Adam; tout homme et toute femme sont Eve." But the fourth clause of his sentence obscures this complete identity of Adam and Eve: "toute femme peche 'en' Adam, tout homme est seduit 'en' Eve." By switching from an active to a passive verb, Ricoeur makes only the woman directly responsible for both sinning and seducing. (Paul Ricoeur, *Finitude et Culpabilité*, II. *La Symbolique du Mal* (Paris: Aubier, Editions Montaigne, 1960). Cf. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 255.)

45. McKenzie, "The Literary Characteristics of Gen 2-3," p. 570.

46. See Bailey, op. cit., p. 148.

47. So Westermann (op. cit., p. 340), *contra* Gunkel.

48. For a discussion of the serpent, see Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, pp. 255-260.

49. Cf. Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), p. 84, note 4: "Is it not surprising that, in a culture where the subordination of woman to man was a virtually unquestioned social principle, the etiology of the subordination should be in the context of man's

primal sin? Perhaps woman's subordination was not unquestioned in Israel." Cf. also Henricus Renckens, *Israel's Concept of the Beginning* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), p. 217ff.

50. *Contra* Westermann, op. cit., p. 357.

51. I hold a natural (rather than an allegorical, typological, mythological, or cultic) interpretation of the Song of Songs as erotic love poetry. For various views, see Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 483-91, and Ernst Sellin and Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), pp. 299-303. A recent exposition of the cultic view, which revises the general theory of T. J. Meek, is Samuel Noah Kramer, "The Sacred Marriage and Solomon's Song of Songs," *The Sacred Marriage Rite* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), pp. 85-106.

52. For structure I am dependent on the forthcoming article by J. Cheryl Exum, "A Literary and Structural Analysis of the Song of Songs," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*. See also L. Krinetski, *Das Hohelied* (Düsseldorf, 1964).

53. In addition to the ring composition, Gen. 2-3 and the Song of Songs share other literary and rhetorical features: (1) Chiasmus: e.g., the order of serpent/woman/man, man/woman/serpent, serpent/woman/man (Genesis 3); face/voice, voice/face (Song 2:14) as well as the structure of Song 2:8-17. (2) Paronomasia: e.g., *adam* and *adamah* (Gen. 2:7); *ish* and *ishshah* (Gen. 2:23); *shemen* and *shmekka* (Song 1:3b); *tzei* and *hatzon* and *rei* and *haroim* (Song 1:8). For rhetorical devices in Canticles, see Exum, op. cit.

54. Cf. Gen. 2:9 and Song of Songs 2:3.

55. In Song of Songs 1:7 the verb *r'h* (to feed or to pasture) has no direct object, thereby producing ambiguous meanings. Some translators supply the object *flock* (or *sheep*) to make the man a shepherd (so RSV, NEB, JB, NJV). More likely, the verb is a *double entendre* for erotic play. In 2:16 and 6:3 the same verb occurs, again without objects in MT: the man pastures among the lilies. In 2:1,2 the woman is the lily.

56. See Albert Cook, *The Root of the Thing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), pp. 106, 125.

57. Cook, op. cit., p. 103.

58. Cf. de Vaux, op. cit., p. 20ff.

59. It is a moot question whether procreation is implied in the relationship of the primeval couple before their fall. Certainly it is not specified. Von Rad holds that "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24) signifies progeny (op. cit., p. 824). Gunkel maintains that the phrase means sexual intercourse (*Genesis*, HAT, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1902, p. 10). Westermann claims neither view is adequate; "one flesh" means the total communion of woman and man (op. cit., p. 317).

60. Cf. Cook, op. cit., pp. 131-46.

61. See Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), pp. 191-93.

62. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1960), pp. 291–300.
63. The meaning of the word anger (*nh*) is uncertain; see Köhler-Baumgartner, *op. cit.*, p. 609.
64. I use midrash here to designate a type of exegesis, not a literary genre. See Addison G. Wright, *Midrash* (New York: Alba House, 1967), pp. 43–45, 143, and Roger Le Deaut, "Apropos a Definition of Midrash," *Interpretation*, Vol. XXV, July 1971, pp. 259–82.
65. Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 103ff.
66. The task of recovering the depatriarchalizing principle in Scripture has only begun. For another recent effort, see William L. Holladay, "Jeremiah and Women's Liberation," *Andover Newton Quarterly*, March 1972, pp. 213–23.

## THE RESTORATION OF VASHTI

Mary Gendler

When I was a child, Purim was one of my favorite Jewish holidays. I loved to dress up as Queen Esther in a long, flowing gown, put a sparkling crown on my head, and feel brave and loyal at the thought that I might risk my life to save my people. As I grew older, this "acting out" felt less and less possible for me—at least, in this explicit way. The children dressed up in costumes, not the adults. Purim, at this level of identification anyway, seemed to have lost much of its intensive involvement for me.

I have only very recently come to see the deep significance of dressing up as the various characters in the Purim story. When we, as children—or adults—dress up as someone, we are, in a sense, identifying with them. The characters, in this way, serve as a kind of role model for us. It is at this level that I first began to have difficulty with the Purim story as I grew older. Queen Esther, although assuredly portrayed as a courageous woman in the story, felt less and less like someone with whom I wanted to identify totally.

Esther becomes queen as a replacement for Vashti, Ahasuarus's first wife. Vashti had been disposed of because of her refusal to display her beauty in front of Ahasuarus and other drunken princes of the land. Ahasuarus had prepared a great feast in order to consolidate his power and display his great wealth. Therefore, when the discussion turned to bragging about whose women were more beautiful, Ahasuarus was ready to display more property, this time his wife. However, unlike jewels and gold, people—even women—will not always allow themselves to be treated as objects. Vashti refused, and "therefore was the