

Female Images of God in Christian Worship



In the Spirituality of *TongSungGiDo*
of the Korean Church

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LITURGICAL STUDIES

Introduction

When I suffered from a gynecologic disease in my late twenties, I questioned whether God would know my physical pain and the subsequent mental and physiological sufferings. This was because I had been taught that female/woman is inferior to male/man, and only the male body represents God, the Father. In those days, I was hardly able to pray to God because I couldn't find the appropriate words for God. If God is male, how could God know and be sympathetic to my suffering? Since then, my journey of exploring God's gender in relation to the identity of worshipping women has continued.

During the journey, I recognized the deep contradiction between the biblical teaching in Genesis 1:26 that female and male are created according to God's image and the Christian tradition's hegemonic assumption that the female body cannot represent God's image. It has inspired me to trace female images of God in the Bible and to examine the female deities in the religious traditions of the neighboring countries of ancient Israel and ancient Korea. It has encouraged me to seek ways to use such images in the context of Korean Christian worship.

While researching the biblical female images of God and the female deities in other religious traditions, I realized that the activities of female deities were primarily related to lamentable situations. Thus, I found an experimental setting for God's female images in the Korean Church: *TongSungGiDo* (TSGD). TSGD, a particular form of lamenting prayer expressed in the Korean Church, developed as a direct response to the uniquely Korean emotion of *han*. *Han* is a concept that simultaneously describes both deep active racial resentment and passive lamentation; most *hans* of Koreans are collective. *Han* in both an active way and passive way, is caused by the sufferings from national misfortunes such as frequent invasions by neighboring nations and/or from other patriarchal oppressing powers.

As the collective conscious *hans* have accumulated over the centuries, the *hans* became the collective unconscious *han* of Korean. In other words, almost all Koreans are not free from this collective emotion of resentment and lamenting. Thus, the biblical female images of God shown in lamentable situations fit the spirituality of TSGD. Providing biblical female references for God in relation to lament when TSGD is practiced in Korean Christian worship and prayer meetings offers an excellent example of inculturation of worship for

Korean lament, based on the unique national feelings and emotions of Korean worshippers.

Biblical female images of God, especially motherly ones, heal *hanful* people more effectively than patriarchal male/masculine images of God, because many lamenting situations in humanity result from patriarchal societies and the overwhelming power exerted by patriarchy. Patriarchal images of God, in fact, work negatively in dealing with the emotion of *han* which is often caused by the patriarchal oppressing powers.

This book draws primarily on literary sources, particularly those related to the Bible. The Bible translation used in this research is the New Revised Standard Version. I limit the scope of my research to theoretical study, hoping that I will write some examples of worship services for local churches in the near future, based on the spirituality of TSGD and biblical female images of God related to lament. Meanwhile, the Korean Church in my dissertation mostly excludes the Catholic Church, for the Korean Catholic Church has developed independently of other Christian churches with no TSGD.

The first chapter deals with complex issues of Christian identity when God is depicted only with one sex/gender image and examines how the Bible testifies to female and male as God's image. "The discussion of the grammar of the self" examines how references for God affect the self-sense of the worshipping women in relation to God. An expanded self-grammar teaches worshipping women who they are as female Christians and how they might live in resonance with the grammar received through their chosen worship practices.

The second chapter traces female deities in the religious myths of the ancient Near East, myths that possibly influenced the religious traditions of Israel. It examines the female deity, Asherah or female reminder, *asherah*, in relation to the masculine image of YHWH (El), asserting that an understanding of God as a male/female pair is not contradictory to monotheism for the ancient Israelites, and balancing sex metaphors for God does not contradict the concept of one God in Christianity.

The third chapter explores biblical female references and images of God, particularly in the Hebrew Bible. Here, the focus is on embodied female images of God rather than other spiritual figures described through grammatical feminine naming. This chapter demonstrates that biblical female references for God are primarily associated with passages of consolation for those in the midst of lament. This affirms a similar pattern in relation to the use of female God images to what was described in relation to other female deities of the ancient Near East in chapter two. The last chapter examines female deities in

the Korean native religious traditions, and answers the question of whether biblical female references and images could work for the Korean Church, given the pervasive influence of the aggressive or overpowering patriarchal ideas of Buddhism and Confucianism. Female imagery of deities is not strange to the general public of Korea and thus the effective use of female references for God in Korean Christianity is not impossible. In the mind of Korean Christians, biblical female imagery could substitute for the native female deities who have been with them, consoling and healing their *hans* from very ancient times. Defining TSGD as communal lamenting prayer based on *han*, I assert that these biblical female images of God are absolutely necessary for those who are lamenting to God in TSGD, as well as for those seeking their own identities in resonance with God's female images.

Chapter 1

THE IMAGE OF GOD: A SELF-GRAMMAR IN WORSHIP

In his book *Worship and Christian Identity*, E. Byron Anderson states that “Christian worship provides a ‘grammar’ of the self through which we interpret our relationships to God and neighbor.”¹ Christian worship is not only a time and space for praising God, but also for discovering who we are in relationship to God and our neighbors. In other words, Christians acquire a self-grammar through the practice of worship.² Through the practice of Christian worship “we make meaning about our lives and acquire a sense of orientation to why and where we are.”³

What kind of self-grammars have female-women⁴ acquired in the practice of Christian worship? One of the grammars that we have been familiar with is the conviction that we are created in the image of God just as male Christians are. The creation account in Genesis 1 has been the main source for that grammar. Nevertheless, Christian worship hardly provides any grammar to support and affirm the resemblance between God and female-woman. Rather, the language of Christian worship has provided a mistaken grammar for female Christians and even for males. The words and images for God in our

1 E. Byron Anderson, *Worship and Christian Identity: Practicing Ourselves*, ed. Don E. Saliers (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 29.

2 Ibid. I want to borrow the definition of Anderson about practice. According to Anderson, “a practice is a pattern of action that we do repeatedly, over time, with particular intent.” (footnote 41).

3 Anderson, 64.

4 Because there are many definitions for female and woman in the modern argument about sex and gender, it is not easy for me to use the words appropriately on the basis of this modern philosophical tendency. I prefer to use “female-woman” to designate the one who has the female anatomical body and the identity of woman. The definition of woman is affected and could be changed by the perspectives of the society and culture, and even the definition of female has been questioned about the criteria. Nevertheless, from now on for the convenience of readers I will use the words, female and woman separately according to the emphasis except some sentences.

practices of worship are filled with masculine pronouns, titles or names, and other metaphors that evoke male-like beings.

Christian worship practices as ritual and ritualization “give life sense and value.”⁵ Through the language of symbol and the images of God in Christian worship, we not only praise God, but also discover who we are and what we have been called to do, namely our self-grammar. Therefore, the language for God that is ritualized in Christian worship is very significant for worshipping Christians to discover how to live as well as how to praise God.

In spite of the theological truth that females and males are created in God’s image, women are hardly provided with a female grammar of God in Christian liturgical practices. Rather, it is said that the female is not the original image of God, and therefore not able to represent God in Jesus Christ, especially in presiding at the Eucharist. When female Christians are not permitted to stand as the embodied “subjective agent” for the sacraments in the Church, they cannot find their embodied grammars of the self, reflecting the image of God. This mistaken grammar of the self in the practice of Christian worship makes worshipping women feel marginalized from the community. In other words, women become acutely aware of the difference between the theological truth in the Bible and the practice of theology in the liturgy. “Theological work must really and truly take place in the form of a liturgical act.”⁶

In this chapter, the origin and status of the female creature and her relation to the male creature and God are explored; the meaning of God’s image in the Bible, especially in the Creation accounts and the teachings of the churches are examined. In addition, the relation between the human body and God’s body are investigated: How do people think of God’s body? What parts of God’s body have people ever seen? Are our associations of God’s body male since people have assumed that God is a male or male-like? Then, sex/gender balanced images of God as a theologically sound grammar of the self for worshipping women as well as for worshipping men are suggested.

5 Anderson, 64.

6 Karl Barth, translated by G. Foley, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963), 160, quoted in Don E. Saliers, *Worship and Spirituality* (Akron: OSL publications, 1996), 74.

We are the Image of God

Mistaken Identity in Christian Worship

One of the obvious theological truths in the Bible concerns the image of God: The female is created according to God's image. However, given the strong masculine images of God the Father in Christian worship, women may not feel that the God they encounter in worship provides any resemblance between God and them. Through the repeated invocation of patriarchal male/masculine images of God, the practice of Christian worship has strengthened male Christians' power over female Christians. "The ritual practices reinforce particular political or ecclesiastical structures, such as the hierarchy of the priesthood, the power or powerlessness of the baptized community..."⁷ God the Father appears only to be mirroring man's image and thus remains "the Other" to women; an incomplete grammar is provided to women. Especially in the Korean Church, this distorted grammar has overwhelmingly affected the Korean Christian women's identities as God's image because the Western patriarchal idea was woven together with Confucianism, in which king, father, and son exercise a triple patriarchal power and authority over the mother, wife, and daughter. Regarding the mistaken identity of female Christians, Anderson quotes Mary Catherine Hilkert:

Liturgy has become arguably the most divisive and painful reminder of the pervasive patriarchy... The church does indeed perpetuate itself in worship... At the same time, an androcentric worldview and patriarchal control are also perpetuated in a male-dominated sacramental system that is legitimated in the name of Jesus and by the authority of God's will.⁸

The self-grammars received from the church are destructive for women, and women scarcely are able to find their images in the patriarchal images of God. In other words, it is almost impossible for female Christians to find their whole identities as God's image in male-controlled worship because the grammars of worship come not from general biblical understandings but from male-dominated liturgical legitimization. If the grammars do not support female-woman's genuine identity as the image of God, they have to be changed. Feminist Christian women want to find our own genuine self-grammar by re-

7 Anderson, 67.

8 Ibid., 52.

examining the old grammars and rediscovering the hidden grammars in the Bible and in our practices of worship. Because “Christian thought and practice have accommodated themselves to the particular cultures, languages, and times within which they live,”⁹ the grammar of worship always should be re-written so as not to be corrupted by oppression and domination.

It might be questioned whether a new practice in worship could become familiar to older generations who are accustomed to the old practices. However, through the ongoing use of a new practice in worship, we can make it “second nature” to the congregation.¹⁰ In other words, ritual repetition can change a traditional ritual habit. This is the power of ritual for transformation. It gives the women Christians hope that they can change incorrect or incomplete grammar for women Christians through the ongoing use of sound theology in worship practices.

The Understandings of the *Imago Dei*

Throughout history, there have been many understandings of God’s image. Gail Ramshaw argues that the diverse understandings of God’s image reflect the ideas of God in the minds of the people or their hope for humanity. For John Calvin, the *imago Dei* is “humanity’s primordial moral perfection”; for Thomas Aquinas, it is “rationality because the divine nature is rational”; in recent ecofeminist thought, the *imago Dei* in humankind is “the responsibility for ecological care and healing.”¹¹ No matter what the definitions are, they should include an ethical responsibility of humanity, for God is good.

Nevertheless, in most Christian congregations, the patriarchal male image of God continues to abound with personifications or anthropomorphisms of the deity; and consequently, the present understanding of the *imago Dei* appears to be a statement about the gender-similarity between the man-like God and male-man, excluding the female-woman image of God.¹² In other words, the modern anthropological understanding of the *imago Dei* does not meet the ethical requirement; it excludes the woman, half of the worshiping community.

Thus, it is time to reconstruct a balanced image of God, providing the other sex/gender image of God so that female Christians may restore our right

9 Ibid., 51.

10 Ibid., 71.

11 Gail Ramshaw, *God Beyond Gender: Feminist Christian God-Language* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 16–17.

12 Ibid., 18–19.

grammar of self in God's image. Referring to God in female images in our practice of worship helps us as women feel a resemblance to God. Knowing about God in Christian worship and the understanding of the self are closely related; and the images for God presented in our practices of worship shape a self-grammar, namely "self-in-relation" to God.¹³ Ritual "as an embodied way of knowing"¹⁴ provides the participants in the practice of worship an awareness of who they are and of what they are doing.

Female images of God are an embodiment of the truth that we are created in God's image, in the resemblance of God's likeness. Only the representation of female images of God in our liturgies, and not just in our metaphysical theology, can finally confirm this truth. As the children of God, we are taught and formed to follow God's way. So, the personality, character, and even behaviors of God proclaimed in the liturgies suggest to us how to live and what kind of persons we should be. God's personality, character, and behaviors as expressed in female images will show worshipping women how to grow in the image of God. "Our images of God shape the way in which we perceive and respond to God."¹⁵ Female anatomical images of God, and associated behaviors and psychological activities, have the power to affirm the nobility of the woman's body and the consequent physical, mental, and psychological activities that have been treated as inferior to the male's body. They affirm the self and build it in relation to God through the embodied knowledge of worship.

Thus, my strategy is to restore female images of God based on the creation accounts in Genesis and other biblical texts, rather than reject male or masculine images for God. It seems almost impossible to remove all androcentric expressions of God, which have been deeply embedded in our worship contexts and even in the Bible. Furthermore, worshipping men also need male/masculine images of God in relation to their sexual and gender identity as female-women do, though some oppressing or abusive patriarchal male/masculine images should be removed.

Female and Male as God's Equal Images in Genesis

As stated above, one of the self-grammars for women Christians is the affirmation of our creation in the image of God. However, some patristic voices have not supported this affirmation. Ambrosiaster states that man is made in

13 Ibid., 114.

14 Ibid., 75.

15 Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Imagery for Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 41.

the image of God, but not woman.¹⁶ Insisting that only man is made in the image and glory of God, Augustine argues that the believing woman as co-heiress of grace “cannot lay aside her sex; she is restored to the image of God only where there is no sex, that is, in the spirit.”¹⁷ In other words, for Augustine, the female’s body denies her the right to be the image of God. Ambrosiaster¹⁸ and Augustine refuse the truth of the creation account in Gen. 1: God created male and female at the same time according to the image of God. Mary Daly criticizes these patristic ideas as follows:

On the whole, the Fathers display a strongly disparaging attitude toward women, at times even a fierce misogyny. There is the recurrent theme that by faith a woman transcends the limitations imposed by her sex. It would never occur to the Fathers to say the same of a man. When woman achieves this transcendence which is not due to her own efforts but is a ‘supernatural’ gift, she is given the compliment of being called ‘man’ (*vir*). Thus, there is an assumption that all that is of dignity and value in human nature is proper to the male sex.¹⁹

These patristic ideas are also seen in the Middle Ages, and they are little different in their understanding of woman. Thomas Aquinas asserts that the female is a defective being and “a misbegotten male,” and that woman is inferior to man in spite of her intellectual nature; a woman’s reason for being is for procreation.²⁰

The two creation stories in Genesis are the biblical resource that tells us who human beings, both female and male, are, and how they are related to each other in God. Nevertheless, ironically, the accounts of creation have been used as a warrant for male Christians to oppress female Christians: The female was created to serve the male, and thus women’s destinies are supposed to obey men’s.

Let us now examine the two creation accounts in Genesis, the so-called “P (Priestly)” document and “J (Yahwistic)” document in Genesis 1 and 2-3. In her book *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities*, Phyllis A. Bird comments that, despite the differences in language, style, date, and traditions in the two

16 Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex: With the Feminist Postchristian Introduction and New Archaic Afterwords by the Author* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 86.

17 Ibid.

18 Ambrosiaster is the name given to the anonymous author of the earliest complete Latin commentary on the thirteen epistles of Paul.

19 Ibid., 89.

20 Ibid., 91.

creation accounts of Genesis, their essential declarations about woman are the same: “Woman is, along with man, the direct and intentional creation of God and the crown of his creation. Man and woman were made for each other. Together they constitute humankind...”²¹

The Priestly (P) document: Genesis 1

The Priestly writer (P) in Gen. 1:27 is eloquent in its brevity: “God created humankind (*ʿādām*) in his [her] own image... male (*zākār*) and female (*nēqēbā*) he [she] created them.”²² According to Phyllis Bird’s book *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities*, this verse is only the prefatory statement: “It simply makes the essential point that the species, *ʿādām* is bisexual in its created nature. There is no androgynous original creation in P.”²³ In other words, *adam* just means “humanity,” not just “man” excluding “woman,” and thus this verse claims the concurrent creation of man and woman in *adam* and their nobility as God’s image.

Phyllis Tribble analyzes the same verse, Gen. 1:27, commenting that it has only seven words and they are repeated to form a poem of three lines with four words each: “And-created God humankind in-his [her]²⁴-image; in-the image-of God created-he [she] him; male and female created-he [she] them.”²⁵ Tribble insists that the parallelism of lines one and two emphasizes that *him* in line two means humankind (*adam*) in line one, and that through the straight parallelism of lines two and three with the switch from the singular pronoun (him) into the plural form (male and female), this poem is reinforcing “sexual differentiation within the unity of humanity.”²⁶ That is, “the parallelism between *hā-ʿādām* and ‘male and female’ shows that sexual differentiation

21 Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing persons and mistaken identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 46. I leave the words as in their original to respect the author though I prefer to use female and male for the humanity God created in Genesis and to use the inclusive pronoun for God such as “her/his” rather than only “his.”

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 47. In fact, the Priestly writer shows some culturally determined ideas concerning appropriate roles and activities of men and women in his works. According to Bird, in spite of the implications of an essential equality of the two sexes in Gen. 1, they were only partially perceived by the Priestly writer; thus, in the rest of his work, an exclusively male priestly dominion and male genealogies are shown. See footnote 87 in Bird’s book, 47.

24 The words in [] are mine.

25 Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 16. It is the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible by Tribble.

26 Ibid., 16–17.

does not mean hierarchy but rather equality. Created simultaneously, male and female are not superior and subordinate.”²⁷

Regarding the equal dignity of both sexes and the dignity of humankind, it is worth noting Tribble’s further analysis of Genesis 1. Tribble suggests that although the land animals and humankind were created on the sixth day (1:24–31), the patterns are different. While the creation of land animals follows the pattern for the earlier creatures, the picture of the creation of humankind is distinctive:

Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion . . . and God created humankind in his image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them . . . and God blessed them and said to them ‘be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. . .’ (1:26–28).²⁸

In other words, humankind—including both sexes—is uniquely created in God’s special intention. Here, it is worth paying attention again to Tribble’s further comment that God’s blessing was made for “them” in plural, which means both female and male are equally blessed with the right of governing over the world(14).

Tribble gives us another important biblical insight. According to her commentary, although the land animals and humankind were created on the same day and both eat the same food, “yet only for humankind, not for any of the animals, is sexuality designated as male and female (1:27).”²⁹ Describing the process of creation in Genesis as a liturgy, Tribble insists that “this specific reference pertains not to procreation but to the image of God. Procreation is shared by humankind with the animal world (1:22, 28); sexuality is not. Hence, in this liturgy, the phrase ‘male and female’ holds a distinctive meaning.”³⁰

In other words, God’s mention of human sexuality is very intentional in supporting the equal dignity of both sexes as created according to God’s image. This insight from Tribble enables us to confront the patriarchal ideas that I have mentioned above, such as the notion that woman could be regarded in God’s image only after giving up her sex, that woman was born only for pro-

27 *Ibid.*, 18.

28 *Ibid.*, 13–14.

29 *Ibid.*, 15.

30 *Ibid.* In this creation account, only humankind’s sexes are mentioned in relation to God’s image, not animal’s. It means that God wants to expose the dignity of both sexes as God’s image, not only the dignity of male.

creation, that woman is inferior to man, or even that woman is not created in the image of God.

Ellen Van Wolde remarks that when God creates the plants and animals, God constantly speaks in the third person. By contrast, in the case of the creation of human beings God speaks in the first person, and “in so doing he [God] uses the word ‘us’ or ‘our’ three times: ‘let us make’, ‘as our image’, ‘in our likeness.’”³¹ According to Van Wolde’s study, the plural *us* in God’s monologue corresponds to the plural *they* that God uses for human beings.³² In both cases (‘let us make’ and ‘let them rule’) “God or the human being [*adam*] in the singular are connected with a verb in the plural.”³³ It means that, between male and female, “there is perfect equality, with no hint of one being superior to the other.”³⁴

The YHWHistic account (J document): Genesis 2-3

The other creation account in Gen. 2–3 is called the YHWHistic (J) account, which is a completely different genre, a narrative.³⁵ In this account ‘*adam*’ is used for the male, unlike the other account in Gen. 1. Here, people might claim that ‘*adam*’ is supposed to refer to the male only, but Bird makes a remarkable case about the misapplication of this word, arguing that it is deliberately ambiguous. In the J account, the creation of man (‘*ādām*’) is the beginning and the end of the story, which implies that “God’s primary creation remains incomplete until... that one is finally found for whom the man has waited and longed, namely, woman. With the creation of woman, man is finally his true self, a sexual and social being (‘*îš*’).”³⁶ Thus, though the genre of the creation accounts in P and J are different, the intention is the same, that the

31 Ellen Van Wolde, *Stories of the Beginning* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1996), 24.

32 *Ibid.*, 25.

33 *Ibid.*

34 Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes: Women’s Stories in The Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 45.

35 David W. Cotter, *Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 3–4. In this book, Cotter argues that the genre of the creation account in Gen. 1 is a kind of report or statement while that of the creation story in Gen. 2–3 is a narrative. In the first account seems to lack essential elements for a story: no tension, no plot, just a sequence of events. Although there are characters and events in the account, according to Cotter, no tension and no resolution of crisis destroys the story quality. Therefore, the account in Gen. 1 belongs to the genre of statement.

36 Bird, 47.

completion of ‘*adam*’ comes from the creation of woman, and that, without the sex of the woman, there cannot be the sex of the man; both man and woman are one in ‘*adam*’ who is designated as the image of God.

Alice Ogden Bellis argues that the second of the two creation stories is much earthier and focuses on different issues: While the first story emphasizes the orderliness and goodness of God’s creation, the second story tries to answer questions about “how humans ended up with so much work to do, how men and women came to be attracted to one another, and how life became disharmonious.”³⁷ In other words, Bellis reads this second story etiologically and thus she argues that Adam and Eve in this story should not be understood as historical individuals, but as representatives of humanity.³⁸ This etiological reading of the story provides a new insight. She challenges the idea that the female’s inferiority and thus obedience to the male was God’s intent from the creation of humanity. Claiming the imperfection or inferiority of the female-woman is proclaiming the imperfection or defectiveness of God’s creation, and further damaging God’s image, half of which is composed of the female.

Therefore, woman as ‘helper’ (*ezer*) in 2:18 should be reinterpreted. According to Bird, here “helper” does not mean “servant” because it does not carry any nuances of status; the Hebrew expression “*ezer*” is translated as “fit for” which means basically “opposite” or “corresponding to.”³⁹ In other words, woman and man are fit for each other, completing ‘*adam*’ in harmony but independence. Therefore, this text should be read with other texts, such as the creation account in Gen. 1. Furthermore, quoting Gerhard von Rad in relation to the second creation account in the J account, Mary Daly insists on the complementary relationship between the two sexes: “God designed a help for him, to be ‘corresponding to him’—she was to be like him, and at the same time not identical with him, but rather his counterpart, his complement.”⁴⁰ Therefore, the later creation never means the subordination and inferiority of woman, but rather suggests the close relationship between the two creatures as a pair, reflecting the images of God.

Van Wolde argues that the word *ezer* means a significantly important ‘help’ or ‘helper,’ and thus “God is often called an *ezer*, help, for human beings in the

37 Bellis, 45.

38 Ibid., 45.

39 Bird, 49–50.

40 Daly, 78.

Psalms.⁴¹ Van Wolde offers the critique that, in spite of the fact that this term itself denotes neither superiority nor inferiority, when God is called ‘help’, the word ‘help’ is seen as an indication of a superior, but when the woman is called ‘help’, then this is regarded as the suggestion of an inferior.⁴²

Regarding Gen. 2:23, in which the man says, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman; for out of Man this one was taken,”⁴³ Van Wolde insists that the man delights in his equality with the woman: “He celebrates the equality, not the difference; and seeing that he himself is now changed, he says that she (*ishsha*) has come out of him, the *ish*.”⁴⁴

Additionally, Van Wijk-Bos gives us a very important insight about the male-female relationship after the story of finding a fit counterpart in Gen. 2:24-25: “The narrator adds two comments about the male-female relationship. It will cause separation from parental ties, specifically here for the man. Next, there is no shame between male and female; their nakedness causes no insight into their vulnerability.”⁴⁵ Therefore, we cannot find any inferiority of the female in the second story in the Bible; rather, female and male are one flesh.

To insist on the female’s inferiority to the male, people have commonly argued from Gen. 3, in which woman seems to have to take the responsibility for the origin of humanity’s sin and its consequences. Pressed hard to take responsibility for original sin, women Christians in Church history have been deprived of the rights of the offices in the Church. However, although the pain of childbirth for females and the struggles of working for men have been regarded as the punishments for the first woman and man’s sins in ancient commentary; many modern biblical scholars have regarded them as etiologies. Bird comments that “the words of Gen. 3 are descriptive, not prescriptive... it

41 Van Wolde, 53.

42 Ibid., 53.

43 NRSV

44 Ibid., 54.

45 Johanna W. H. Van Wijk-Bos, *Making Wise The Simple: The Torah in Christian Faith and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 111–112. Van Wijk-Bos’ translation (Gen.2: 24–25): “Therefore a man will leave his father and mother, and cling to his woman, and they will be one flesh, and the two of them were naked, the human and his woman, and they were not ashamed.”

offers an explanation for the primary characteristics of the human situation as Israel knew it."⁴⁶

The devaluation of the female body and the female experience has distorted and damaged the woman's identity as the image of God. For example, the function of the woman in childbirth has been interpreted in the Church's teachings as a result of sin. However, this misinterpretation is obviously opposed to God's blessing for the flourishing of humanity in Gen. 1. "Be fruitful and increase in number" is a blessing for humanity according to the Bible itself (Gen. 1:28). Therefore, the idea that the woman's body, and its function in childbirth, is sinful or inferior to that of the man is a contradiction. Further, woman's subordination to man in Gen. 3 is "not the result of nature but rather of sin"⁴⁷; in fact, as we now shall see, the sexuality of female and male and the function of the female in childbirth are originally God's blessings for humanity.

The Restored Image of God in the New Garden

It seems that the etiology of male labor and female suffering from childbirth in Gen. 3 was not functional anymore for those who were no longer living in the highland where their ancestors had settled after the Exodus. In other words, this etiology might not work to explain their new lives in the monarchical period. Thus, through the Song of Songs, the biblical writers may have wanted to portray the restored relationship between male and female in a new garden, not the old Garden of Eden in Gen. 2–3. In her article "The Hebrew God and His Female Complements," Athalya Brenner comments that Song of Songs in the Hebrew Bible may be regarded as the recovered Eden story, which is contrasted to the story of the garden in Genesis.⁴⁸

In this Jewish literature, woman's subjectivity is recovered and woman's voice is heard. That which was lost in the old garden of Gen. 3 is now found. Unlike many other books in Hebrew Scripture, the Song of Songs restores the image of the female as God's image and makes use of metaphors for the woman. Besides the non-matrimonial love lyrics, the subjective female voice is one of the outstanding features of the collection. Most of the forms of monologues and dialogues are spoken by a *female* "I"; there is no mention of a "fa-

46 Bird, 49–50.

47 Daly, 79.

48 Athalya Brenner, "The Hebrew God and His Female Complements," in *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book*, ed. Timothy K. Beal & David M. Gunn (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 56.