

WOMAN'S GRANDEUR AND MISERY

The image of the woman throughout the history of mankind

It is written that on the sixth day of creation God formed man out of earth dust, in his image, and breathed his divine breath into him, whereby man became a living being. Considering the fact that animals are also living creatures, although nowhere is it written that the Creator also breathed his breath into them, man must have been endowed with a different kind of aliveness through the divine breath, namely that which made him God's image.

God created a male and a female. Although this is also the case for most animals, God only said about human beings that the man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24). The experts disagree on what exactly is meant by the words one flesh. Some, predominantly male interpretations, speculate that this refers to the sexual act. But the Scripture's words are too dramatic for this to exclusively refer to intercourse; one does not, after all, have to leave one's father and mother just to engage in sex. Furthermore, biblical rhetoric describes the act of copulation with very different metaphors, for example *to lie with a woman*, *to visit a woman*, *to see a woman* and numerous others, but nowhere is the metaphor *to become one flesh* mentioned in unambiguous situations.

According to a different interpretation *one flesh* means the establishment of a family. Here the scholars refer to the Bible passages where *flesh* stands for a family relationship. Yet, on closer inspection of the particular Bible passages, one ascertains that the word *flesh* is always preceded by a possessive pronoun:

We are your own flesh and blood. (1Chronicles 11:1) or the demonstrative pronoun: *Although we are of the same flesh and blood...* (Neh.5:5) Therefore, this interpretation also seems somewhat far-fetched. But the word *flesh* also appears in another biblical context, namely in the Prologue to the Gospel according to John,

where it says: *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.* (John 1:14) We all know that *flesh* here means Jesus, not only his physical body, but the person Jesus as a unity of body, soul and spirit. *Flesh* in biblical terms does therefore also represent the human being as such. If one thus refers to the use of the word *flesh* as pars pro toto, God's words should be understood in the sense that man and woman will be so tightly physically, mentally and spiritually linked in a tender, invisible network that they shall form a unit. This kind of oneness is the Creator's objective; it is celebrated in the sexual act, but also exists independently from it. In a caring relationship man and woman remain one even when they are not physically together. There is a deep intimacy, closeness and commitment that exists between them. Husband and wife complement each other as equals.

God created woman and placed her beside man as an ezer, a term that means help, helper, saviour or salvation, and is frequently used for God in the Bible. It is your destruction, O Israel, because you are against Me, against your help. (Hosea 13:9) Thus the woman was not placed beside the man as a kind of unqualified, unskilled labourer, and therefore in need of guidance as the Creator did not, in fact, differentiate between the two when he gave them the task to rule over the earth. It was only after the Fall of Man that the entire creation experienced a rift and suddenly man and woman were separated from God, from nature and even from each other. In the state of oneness, the ish (the man) without hesitation takes the fruit from the ishah's (the woman's) hand although he should recall the command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, as it was he whom God had warned, the woman had not even been created at the time. That doesn't mean, of course, that she didn't know. After the Fall, however, he suddenly distances himself from her by placing the blame on her. The tender, invisible network which made them into one, is destroyed. From now on they no longer view each other in God's light and are therefore ashamed in front of one another. This alienation is also reflected in the new name. The man no longer calls his wife Isha, as he did when he still felt her to be part of himself, but Chava (Eve). With the new

name he gives her a new identity - mother of all living beings - and thus moves her a little further away from himself.

By giving in to temptation, Adam and Eve suddenly created an entirely new situation: fallen from the splendour of paradise and separated from their Creator, they are left to fend for themselves in a now inhospitable environment which has sunk to a lower level because of man's sin. They are now on their own and have to discover for themselves how to get together in order to function.

However, the Creator instilled a dark feeling of the original oneness in the woman's heart, of the comfort in God, of the harmony of paradise. She pines for that feeling and, driven by that emotion, she tries to reclaim a bit of the lost paradise through her relationship with the man as he is all that is still left of paradise.

The woman is now essentially tempted to expect too much from the man, to need his complete approval, to find her identity in him. As she has no more direct insight into his feelings, she projects her own feelings into him. When the man courts her, showers her with his attention and woos her with tender words, she is quickly inclined to believe this is love, responds with love and wrongly imagines herself to be within reach of the lost Garden of Eden. Once the man's behaviour suddenly turns after he has conquered the object of his lust and she wakes up to realise his behaviour was not love, but that very common male mating ritual, she is deeply disillusioned and unhappy.

This tragic fate of women is narrated in Genesis 3:16,17, where the arduousness of their future life is heralded to the first human couple and the woman is told that she will long for the man, but the man will rule over her. The end of equality! They no longer jointly rule the earth, but are assigned separate roles. His physique, qualifies the male to act as protector and provider. He quickly finds his way around this role. From now on success and recognition are important to him. As the weaker of the two, the woman can prosper under his protection and raise children. She depends on him and he gains power over her. She is one of his possessions like his livestock and household effects. He can freely decide over her.

Agricultural cultivation methods require a large workforce, an abundance of children is therefore a blessing. Seeing that the woman is no longer the man's equal anyway but his personal possession, who serves him as a sex object, to bear him offspring and to labour for him, he takes several as his wife. In this way, the man combines the useful with the pleasant, because many wives and children signify wealth, power, authority and prestige, and make his sex life more varied and lust enhancing.

The woman's position, on the other hand, becomes even more disagreeable and seems to be hopeless. Many men die in battles, and because matrimony is the only perspective for most girls, they have no choice but to accept their fate as a second or third wife of the remaining men. Once survival is at stake, affection becomes immaterial.

The Creator's objective, however, was a community where man and woman are equal constituting a unit. If one man "outweighed" two or even more women, there could be no question of equivalence between man and woman. It was for this reason that the first man was given only one woman. It was the man who created a polygynous, patriarchal society structure on his own authority. God permitted him to do this because he never interferes with his creatures' decisions, but he also does not protect them from the consequences. Polygyny has caused jealousy, arguments, hatred, division and even murder among a man's wives and children.

The human heart is not governed by will; feelings have their own dynamics. Even the best husband is unable to justly spread his affection among several wives, thus emotional wounds are an inevitable result of polygynous marriages.

Sexual relations with more than one wife lead to comparisons and render it impossible for the respective female partner to confidentially give herself to her husband. As not to disadvantage any of the wives, sex has to be scheduled. The thrill of spontaneity is lost, the sexual act is reduced to the performance of one's duty. Just copulation instead of an intoxicating uniting in love!

Closer reflection of biblical examples reveals not a single instance

where polygyny compares favourably. The best illustration is the biblical example of Jacob's wife Leah. She was the older sister of Rachel whom Jacob fell in love with at first sight. When Jacob asks for Rachel's hand in marriage, her father seizes the opportunity to palm Leah off on him on the wedding night and gives him Rachel at a later stage. Thus, he married both his daughters in one go. Leah must have loved Jacob and, like every woman in love, must have believed that her devoted love would conquer his heart. But the human heart follows its own rules and those led Jacob to fall so passionately in love with Rachel that the seven years he worked for her father to obtain her hand in marriage seemed like days to him. She remained his great love until death. Jacob most certainly fulfilled all his matrimonial duties the law dictated for Leah; she was materially well looked after, her sexual needs were satisfied, she was the envied mother of many children and yet she was unhappy. Desperately in love with Jacob, she longed to be noticed and loved by him as a unique person. She did not want to accept sex as per schedule but to be romanced and courted in perfect union and savour all the pleasures of love together. Every child she gave to her husband renewed her hope that Jacob would grow fond of her. His loving glances would have made her bloom, his love would have delivered her from her existential loneliness. But Jacob's heart beats only for Rachel and he therefore sees no reason to delve into Leah. Her soul is of no interest to him and thus Leah's love remains unrequited. This is the tragedy of her life, particularly as she is aware that Rachel does by no means love Jacob as much as she does. Having numerous offspring is far more important to Rachel than Jacob's love. Would she otherwise have exchanged a romantic night with him for some mandrakes? Would she otherwise have silently agreed that Leah was led into the bridal chamber on the wedding night instead of her?

When Leah finally, at the birth of her fourth son, understands that her life's purpose is not a fulfilling, happy existence with Jacob, she directs her feelings towards God by thanking and praising him. However, this does not mean that her love for Jacob died, because at the birth of her last son her thoughts are once more occupied by Jacob

and she hopes that he will now honour her. Whatever she imagines this to be, it is now clear that she has relinquished the hope that he returns her feelings.

The Babylonian Talmud acknowledges Leah as the first person to have thanked God. A woman, of all people, to offer God a prayer of thanksgiving! And that this was Leah is all the more amazing. One has to ask what this woman, so disappointed by her fate, thanked God for. Perhaps God revealed himself to her and divulged that he will accomplish great things in mankind's history through her and that every act of greatness carries its price which can only be paid for by suffering in the fallen world. As Levi's and Judah's mother she is the matriarch of the priest and king dynasty and hence also of the Messiah. Indeed, something unique.

But let us return to the woman's position in general. The Creator did not ever desert his creatures, even after the Fall of Man. He constantly kept his eyes on them and tried to direct them onto the right path through his Prophets. When the time had eventually come when the woman would regain her equality by divine decree, he let the Prophet Jeremiah proclaim the following: *For the LORD has created a new thing on the earth: a woman encompasses a man.* (Jeremiah 31:22) This evokes an image of a dignified, free, confident woman who no longer models her identity on her husband. She comprehends that he is equally as weak and vulnerable as she is and therefore embraces him protectively and tenderly. Up to then woman was subordinate to man; when she now embraces him in the prophetic image, this can only mean that she is once more equal to man, just as it was always intended in the divine design.

But how will God achieve this? Through a new *ezer*! Mary, the Lord's humble servant, is an *ezer* in every sense of the word, a redeemer in a difficult situation. Through her mankind was presented with the saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He restored the woman's dignity by facing her with respect and treating her justly, regardless of her position in society. In the Gospels he addresses his own mother as woman and thus shows that she plays an even more important role as

a woman than that of his mother. Mary is the prototype of the new woman liberated by Jesus. She is equal to man. Both complement each other and can once more become one by giving each other strength and stability. Jesus refers to the validity of the model specified by the Creator of the relationship between man and woman, based on both partners' equality by raising the woman back to her former position and admonishing the man because of his hard heartedness.

However, as always, he does not content Himself with equality, but takes it further by opening up a whole new perspective: *But it is not so among you; whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.* (Mark 10:43-44)

Leading by good example, Jesus instigated a lengthy process where women had to fight for one right after the next. Despite his example and although women did play an important role in early Christian communities, the later institutionalised Church shunted them aside again, regardless of the fact that women represented the majority of the faithful. According to some modern interpretations of the Apostle Paul's words that women had to remain silent in gatherings and how they should conduct themselves in general, this only applied to the then community of Corinth. Be that as it may, it proved extremely convenient for the clergy when they declared the woman as inferior, as the source of sin and necessary evil. Thomas Aquinas cemented this attitude towards women in his doctrine where he justified their inferiority and need of instruction not only with their ethical qualification but also with their feeble-mindedness. However, the following centuries kept producing individual women who proved their worth through their intellect as well as their ethical qualification and thus proved their equality through brilliant achievements and so forced their access into heretofore male-dominated areas.

But Jesus did not only revise the perception of women and emphasised their equality, he also invited man and woman to a much more glorious unity, the unity with himself. Whoever accepts Him and lives according to His teachings will experience heaven on earth.

The Gospel according to Luke says: *For behold, the Kingdom of God is within you.* (Luke 17:21) Jesus himself is the door leading into it. The fulfilment the women looked for over the centuries in the arms of the man is nothing by comparison. If earthly love is already powerful enough to merge two into one, how much more powerful is God's love when one opens up to it! *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.* (1 Corinthians 2:9) No earthly marriage can ever surpass this, no matter how perfect.

But the “serpent” did not remain in the Garden of Eden. What, after all, would human freedom be without temptation? Incidentally, Eve's reply to God's question means more than just *the serpent beguiled me* (Genesis 3:13), it also entails the meaning “the serpent has commanded me under her law”. Thus the “serpent” also had a kind of right to follow Adam and Eve from paradise. Besides, it knew God well enough to understand that the banishment from paradise was not a punishment, but an automatically generated result of Adam and Eve's disobedience and that God will now start to improve and educate his creatures; its task was by no means yet finished. Although Jesus defeated it through his self-sacrifice, this does not signify that all of mankind is now automatically free. His death on the cross rather opened a kind of “account in heaven” but each individual has to “activate the associated card” himself by consciously accepting Jesus as his saviour and by living in his discipleship. As the world is therefore basically still governed by the “serpent's law”, everywhere where something good is being initiated, the “serpent” with its destructive intrigues is also present. Conforming to its Greek name *diabolos* (confounder, confuser), it jumbles everything up and creates confusion by controlling the mainstream.

Thus, at the opportune historical moment, it introduced the subject “woman” in order to provoke the battle of the sexes under the guise of woman's liberation. Instead of equal worth the equal competence of man and woman is proclaimed and the woman is incited against

the man. The battle is even fought with language which is being violated and forcefully feminised.

The thus spurred on woman feels summoned to prove her equality in competence and therefore assumes the role of the male, accepts employment in typically male professions, earns the family's livelihood and lets the man look after the baby at home. She lets herself be persuaded that, as an "emancipated" woman, she would, if necessary, be able to replace the father and raise the children on her own.

As possible "accidents" during intercourse can be disposed of with the blessing of the law, she only allows planned children to come into the world and then she would rather be their friend than their mother.

To conform to the mainstream, she is prepared to do anything and everything, even if against her innate nature, even if she has to shoulder twice the burden, as long as she is not being associated with the publicly frowned upon image of the housewife.

Thus, her passive sexual role, determined by her physical attributes, is also thrown overboard. Instead of letting the male court her, the mainstream-conforming young woman of today has her lips injected with Botox, her buttocks enlarged and woos young men on social media with "selfies" in lascivious poses and with more or less direct verbal sexual promises – young men who are jaded by an overabundance of sexual stimuli and whose masculinity increasingly dwindles.

But, provided she is not lesbian, the woman who has adjusted herself to the mainstream, find herself in a conflicting situation. On the one hand she wants to use men as sex objects – just like she is being used by them – on the other the age-old longing for love and commitment, for someone she can completely give herself to and who protects her, is still deeply ingrained in her nature. Caught in a tricky situation like this, the woman, once commissioned by God to rule over the earth together with the man, feels ever more lonely, unhappy and empty inside. Instead of fulfilling God's mission, she is now being ruled by the futility of her existence.

To distract herself, she goes shopping, celebrates wild parties, undergoes various procedures for the purpose of body modification. If she then realizes that this does not help to fill her inner emptiness, she looks for ways out in esotericism, different religions or attends lectures by life coaches; if that doesn't help either, she may start harming herself in order to get some kind of relief, or she may seek oblivion in legal or illegal intoxicants. In this way, without being aware of it, she slips more and more into a downward spiral from which she can no longer escape without God's grace.

But this by no means ends the cycle as the game continues. Suddenly some “clever” heads pronounce sexual characteristics to be irrelevant, that everyone is what he or she deems him or herself to be, and introduce the term of *gender identities*. From now on there is no longer just male and female, but a whole array of genders. The woman as the counterpart to man has become redundant. The hardships her gullibility manoeuvred her into are of no interest to the public and she is therefore gradually removed from the public eye. Nobody wants to know how she is doing any more because the spotlight is now focussed at a new struggle in the social arena waged by until then unknown gender identities, which not only demand a rightful existence but also a legal right to what “the others” have, i.e. marriage, family, children... (How to do justice to any of these linguistically is still debatable.)

The whole situation has even escalated to a stage where individuals with male genitalia are prepared to undergo surgery in order to bear children and nurse them. It seems that Pandora's Box has been opened. Politics and the media massively promote gender equality. Consulting fashion magazines, one is confronted with numerous masculinised or asexual women or effeminate men.

In Slovenia a female “artist” lets herself be fertilised with canine spermatozoa, then suckles one of her dogs and this is celebrated as a “work of art”.

Amongst all this confusion one hardly dares to declare oneself as male or female in the traditional sense or to mention the classical

family unit as a valuable component of society for fear of being booed as a homophobe.

All this happens while referring to the individual's unimpeded development, social equality and justice. But without God man will never be able to create a just society. The Bible said: *Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it.* (Psalm 127) Those who trust in God know this. Yet they also know that God shall speak the last word over his creatures. Thus, even if it seems that the weeds sown by Satan will overgrow and suffocate the wheat, one may still be hopeful that the tapestry that God weaves with the threads that human beings are "spinning" in this world trough their choices will produce a meaningful pattern beyond the border of this earth valley, although on this side only a tangle of threads and knots can be seen.

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