

Adam and Eve—Community: Reading Genesis 2-3

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Begin thinking about human community and its possibility at the beginning, or almost at the beginning, one step after the immemorial beginning.¹ The biblical story of the creation of Man (*'adam*) and Woman (*'isha*) and their expulsion from the garden places humans in the world in a particular way; it creates a habitation for human life so that the history shared by humans and the story that manifests community includes the possibility of gathering together all humans as unique individuals rather than simply as members of a collective. This story tells of God, humans, and community together: the creation of human beings as other than God and, therefore, also from each other, and the relevance of that insurmountable separation to community. In short, the story tells of the coming-to-be of human being. In doing so, it speaks of the divinity of humanity, a divinity that finds its possibility, not in absorption into or in rebellion against Deity, but in “standing across from” Deity – in distance: relation as well as difference. As we will see, the story shows us the particularity, otherness, and opacity that are an essential part of being gathered together in community.

It has often been noted that Genesis begins with two accounts of creation, roughly that of chapter one and that of chapters two and three. Some point to this as evidence for the fact that the text has its origin in other, more ancient texts, and frequently those who see these two accounts consequently see the text as contradicting itself. In the first, for example, human beings are created late among things, on the

last day of creative work. In the second account, however, Man is created before anything else.²

Of course, it is not to be denied that the text did not spring up *ex nihilo*, created by a writer without reference to previous texts. The redactor undoubtedly had a number of texts to which he could refer in creating the Genesis text, and he undoubtedly used works already familiar to him as sources. Or it is conceivable that there was no individual redactor or set of redactors, but only the solidifying of an oral tradition. For our purposes, it does not matter. In either case it is too much to assume that the final text is merely contradictory. There may be contradictions within the text, but the more obvious those contradictions are, the less likely it is that they are contradictions that undo the text. It is too much to assume that the redaction of Genesis was a product of blindness. A considerable amount of “cut and paste” work was surely involved in the creation of the Genesis story, but unless we can come to no other reasonable conclusion, we should assume that the text is cut and pasted in this way rather than some other for a reason. Thus, it would be a mistake to think that the elements of the narrative merely contradict each other.³ The story we have before us is *one* text that calls to be read as such, as I will.

It is an oversimplification to do so, but I take Genesis two and three to be an account of the creation that focuses specifically on the moral creation of human beings, so I will deal primarily with chapters two and three. Nevertheless, there are elements of Genesis one that we must deal with to understand better the second account. I begin there with the account of the sixth day of creation:

“God said: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created

he him; male and female created he them.” (Genesis 1.26-27)

In these verses, the creation of humans is set apart from the rest of creation by several things. First, human creation is introduced by a preamble, something absent from any other act of creation. Second, Adamic persons are given rule over the rest of creation. Third, the creation of humans is mentioned repetitively (three times in Genesis 1.27). Finally, they are created in the image of God.

The preamble to the creation of humans serves notice that this is the creation of something different. At each other moment, creation required only that God speak the name of the thing. For example, “Let there be light: and there was light” (Genesis 1.3). In this moment, however, the phrase, “let there be,” is replaced with an extended phrase: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” What God says is more counsel than command: “Let us.” Human creation is not a simple act of God’s fiat; rather, creation is a subject of consideration and discussion. This phrase, “let us,” creates difficulties for any monotheistic theology: if there is only one God, with whom does he take counsel? There are a variety of theological solutions to the problem, but since the text rather than theology is our concern, I will not take them up. However one deals with this verse theologically, the text is clear: God creates humanity in response to others, rather than as a mere act of self-will. Even in the beginning there is already relation: there is no absolute beginning, not even in the beginning.

6. Not only does verse twenty-six say something surprising about the beginning of the world – that it is not a metaphysical beginning – it also says something different about the object of creation that it describes. For the discussion of human creation includes both the form of that which is created (“in our image”) and its place with regard to the rest of creation (“let them have dominion”). From the beginning, humans are given a form, that of divinity, and an ontological as well as spatial location, as

those who dominate creation. In verses fourteen and fifteen we see the only similar reflection on creation: “Let there be light in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: and let them be for light in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth.” However, this earlier moment of creation discusses the purpose rather than the form or place of the thing created. Thus, the Genesis text goes out of its way to indicate that humans are different than the rest of creation, and it tells us how they are different.

The word translated *dominion*, *rule*, or *reign* is part of the technical language of royal rule.⁴ Human beings are the queens and kings of creation. However, contrary to some common ideas of what it means to be a king or queen, the Israelite king was not merely a willful tyrant. The king was the representative of the people before God. His righteousness brought blessing on the nation, and his unrighteousness brought them to ruin. The use of royal language shows not only the human position with regard to the rest of creation as its ruler, but also that in ruling over the world, humans are its gods, those through whom creation is either condemned or destroyed. In this, humans are like God: we and the world are judged through our dominion; God and the world are justified by his. Genesis 2.15 underscores this point, for it says that Man is put into the Garden of Eden to serve (*dress* or *till* in most translations)⁵ and preserve it.

God has called each of the previous stages of creation good, and he has said that creation as a whole is good (Genesis 1.3), but human creation is not said to be good, even though humans are part of creation as a whole. Perhaps that is because, they are good or bad only as they exercise their dominion, in being the representatives for creation before God. Perhaps they are good or bad only as they serve and preserve creation as a whole. The irony is that creation as a whole is good in that it has the possibility, through human action, of being not good. The ethical indeterminacy of

human being qua human being makes the world as a whole good. Contrary to what one expects, indeterminacy is prior to determinacy.

The preamble to human creation uses two words to indicate the form that humans will take: *likeness* (*dumuth*) and *image* (*zelem*): “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1.26). Though *likeness* can refer broadly to anything from a vague similarity (as in Ezekiel 1.5 and 26), to a mode, or to an exact copy (as in Isaiah 40.18), *image* is more difficult. In speaking of the word *image*, one commentator has said: “*Zelem* refers to the personal relationship that can only be found between ‘persons.’ The personality of man is placed vis-a-vis the personality of God.”⁶ As far as it goes, this remark is helpful: human beings are made in the image of God’s person. But we can go further. The word *zelem* is seldom used in the Bible, but when it is used, it seems to suggest visual representation (as in Numbers 33.52 and Amos 5.26). In fact, the Septuagint translates *zelem* (*image*) by the Greek word for the kinds of images and likenesses one finds in pictures or statuary (*eikon*). We also know that the word *image* appears on a statue, referring to that statue.⁷ Thus, the word *image* is less ambiguous than is *likeness*, and it suggests more than mere similarity. It emphasizes God’s duplication in humans, including visually. The anthropomorphism of this passage is inescapable,⁸ though it is more in harmony with the text to speak of the theomorphism of human beings. Given the historical and cultural context of ancient Israel, we can go so far as to say that the biblical text is arguing *against* the anthropomorphism of its neighbors’ gods in its claim that humans are theopomorphic.⁹ The text intends us to see humans as images of God (and so to rethink the character of both humans and God). And it does not intend this duplication to be merely metaphorical, as this use of the language of visual representation shows. We are not merely inferior copies of God; we are like him in a strong sense. Among other things, I will suggest that this story says we are like God in being absolutely other,

though not alone, in other words, in being finally opaque and unassimilable to comprehension, though always already in relation.

Irenaeus distinguishes between being in the image of God to begin with and coming to be in his likeness.¹⁰ Though I see nothing in the text itself to create Irenaeus’s distinction, the text does contain a double movement: humans begin like God and, at the same time, they come to be like him (as we will see in reading Genesis 3). Since the first of these is formal, I use the term *image* when referring to it. And following Irenaeus’s terminology, if not his exegesis, I use *likeness* to refer to the latter. The story of these chapters is the story of how humans are, in their very being, both in the image and the likeness of God: formally they are the same as God (*image*), and they are like him in continuing to be other than him – opacity always remains (*likeness*).

It is important not to understand the image as a mask or mere representation. As used here, an image is not something that portrays a reality which stands behind it, as a photograph might. To be in the image of God is not merely to represent God visually (though I do not want to forget the theomorphism of the passage). Rather, it is to incarnate him, to be an instance of him. Thus, because the image is not a mere representation of something else, we can say, quite literally, that it has nothing (nothing) behind it. The image of God, the human body, is sacred, untouchable, because, like God himself, that visible image hides a nothingness, an invisibility or opacity.

The invisibility that the image hides means that each human being is essentially other than any other human being, sufficiently so that we can say each is absolutely other than any other: the difference between any two human beings cannot be erased; it is absolute. This otherness must be clarified: Paul Ricoeur distinguishes two kinds of identity: *idem* identity and *ipse* identity. The former, *idem* identity, is the sameness of two things that have identical characteristics. The latter,

ipse identity, makes it possible to identify something as a self. A self must differ widely in its characteristics over time, but there is still some sense in which it is the same as itself and different from anything else (*ipse* identity) while nevertheless, in another sense, the same as others who are also the same as only themselves (*idem* identity). The question of otherness is a question of *ipse* identity: whatever the case with the characteristics of two persons (or of one person over time), two persons cannot have the same *ipse* identity, and that difference is absolute, indissoluble.¹¹ Absolute otherness is necessary to personhood, per se, whether of God or human beings. In being absolutely other – having *ipse* identity – humans image God – have *idem* identity.

The biblical preamble to the creation of human beings shows us personal being and communal being as co-evally implicit in human being. Neither is the foundation for the other; both are, together, human being. God makes human beings in his image: to be human is to be in a relation of distance as well as to have self-identity. To be a person is to be individuated and particular (opaque) *and* to be in community with others, the first of whom is God. Unlike Kierkegaard's herdsman, a human being is not only a self in the eyes of cows. He is a self in the eyes of the Divine. Just as the divine fiat, "Let there be . . ." suggests the mystery and opacity of God (his individuality), those whom he creates are individuals. At the same time, just as the divine fiat, "Let us," suggests that God – as God – is not alone, those whom he creates are not fundamentally alone.

We will see, however, that the imaging and otherness of the first chapter of Genesis is incomplete. Though we see that relation, being-toward another, is fundamental to both divine and human being, we do not yet see the working out of this imaging and otherness. The image and imaging of God are promised in chapter one, but we do not yet see its actuality there, for the actuality of the nexus of particularity and relation that makes up human being must occur in life

with other humans, in human experience. That will come in chapter four and the pages that follow, with the relations of Man, Woman, and their offspring in a human world. In addition (and as a consequence), in verse twenty-six of chapter one, we see only one side of the movement of human being: the Divine is directed at humans, but they are not yet toward him. Thus, we see the completion of creation only in the Genesis two and three, in the completion of human creation as humans take up their relation toward God. Nevertheless, the account of chapter one foreshadows the completion of human creation in sexuality – Genesis three and four – and that completion foreshadows what comes with sexuality, namely the history of the world.

Made in the image of the Creator, humans are sources of creation: immediately on the creation of human beings, God commands them to be fruitful and multiply. Though this may be a pleonastic pair or hendiadys meant to show us that we are to have offspring, more seems to be contained in the notion of fruitfulness than merely that (though sexuality too is an obvious example of godlike creation – it is used by God in chapter three when he tells Woman the results of knowledge). Fruitfulness includes, as well, the idea of having consequence. If we think of fruitfulness with respect to the dominion that has been given, the commandment to be fruitful can be seen as a commandment to rule fruitfully over the rest of creation.

Unlike Genesis one, the account of creation in Genesis two and three tells us what humans are made of – dust. Though we rule over the earth, we are, nevertheless, of it. We are bound to the earth before leaving the Garden, not only as those who serve and preserve the earth, but also as those who are of the earth. Man, made in the Divine image *and* of the dust, is placed in Eden, the center of the world, and given the first prohibition: "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying: Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest

thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2.16-17). Having God’s uniqueness, individuality, and capacity for creation and action, Man is prohibited from having the knowledge of good and evil that is necessary to either ruling and being fruitful. He is prohibited from having the necessary knowledge – *though it is made available* – and he is warned that to have such knowledge will bring death. Because he is not yet subject to death, Man is incomplete. He is not yet wholly Man.

We might suppose that in *not* dying Man would be most like God. But, the text suggests that if he were to remain immortal, he would remain in the Garden, alone (even if alongside Woman) and unfruitful. Immortal Man would be unable to create and act in any full sense. He would be most *un*-like God. Paradoxical as it may seem, the text suggests that to be like God, Man must become mortal. (Notice that it is only after Man and Woman eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and become subject to death that God says man “has become as one of us,” Genesis 3.22.) Knowledge is inextricably bound to death. One can only have the knowledge – ethical knowledge – that makes creation and action as a human being possible if one is subject to death. Thus, it is death that defines human being, for death makes it possible for humans to become most like God. And, as Christianity understands this story, it follows from the fact that humans are in the image of God and that they must die that God, too, must die. Death is not the opposite of divinity, for only death reveals the divine: only through death can the beyond-the-image in the image be revealed. Death reveals the nothingness behind the image.

The fourth chapter of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, tells the story of how appetite seeks the death of its object and how, as a result, the master and the slave fight to the death demanding recognition. But, for Hegel, both the death of the master and the death of the slave are overcome in human-being: human being transcends death. In contrast, in Genesis we see death as defining human-being. Since human

being is necessarily finite, the death that is overcome in the *Phenomenology* is not human death; human being is not the being in question for Hegel. In Genesis, however, we encounter human death; Genesis marks off human being – and by implication also the being of God! – by placing it within a finite context.

Since at least the beginning of the modern period, we have thought of knowledge as certainty: to know something is to have in one’s mind the equivalent of a list of indubitably true propositions about that thing. Biblical thinkers, however, did not conceive knowledge in that way. It is a scholarly common place that in the Hebrew Bible knowledge is fundamentally a matter of intimacy and relation. Brown-Driver-Briggs gives these definitions for *yada*’:

“1. a. *know, learn to know, good or evil* [. . .]. b. *perceive* [. . .]; c. [. . .] *find out and discern* [. . .]. d. *discriminate, distinguish* [. . .]. e. *know by experience* [. . .]. f. *recognize, admit, acknowledge, confess* [. . .]. 2. *know a person, be acquainted with* [. . .]. 3. *know a person carnally* [. . .]. 4. a. *know how to do a thing* [. . .]. b. *be skillful in, [. . .] learned* [. . .]. 5. abs. *have knowledge, be wise.*”¹²

It is not difficult to see that knowledge by experience and acquaintance is basic to these definitions. In the Hebrew Bible knowledge is less an epistemological matter than it is an ethical/political/social matter. Knowledge is a matter of relating to others and to the world, in experience and acquaintance. But, since our relation to God defines what it means to be related to others and to the world, in the Hebrew Bible knowledge is ultimately a religious matter, a matter of one’s relation with God.

Thus, when Genesis 4.1 says, “And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain,” the word *know* is a not used as a euphemism for sexual intercourse. The word translated *know* (*yada*’) is not used to describe the mating of animals in the Bible, nor are euphemisms familiar to its writers. In the Bible, sexual

intercourse is paradigmatic of human knowledge. *Yada'* is the word for both knowledge and sexual intercourse because the embodied character of knowledge is inscribed in that word. In this story, Man and Woman will not learn, in an academic sense, the characteristics of good and evil so that they can give a rational account of the two. The knowledge of good and evil is not necessarily conceptual knowledge of any sort. Instead, they will come to that knowledge by encounter and acquaintance. But to know good and evil in that way requires death and sexuality.

Having prohibited Man from obtaining a knowledge of good and evil, God immediately provides the means for disregarding the prohibition. Declaring that it is not good for Man to be alone, God brings all of the animals of the earth to Adam to be named. Several things happen here. First, Man is given part in the creation of the world when God asks him to name the animals. Second, Man sees that he is not the same as any of the creatures brought before him: in seeing that there is no companion among them for him, he sees his incompleteness (and the incompleteness of creation) and the necessity of his relation to another, Woman. That results in the creation of Woman, bringing closer the expulsion from the garden and the beginning of history.

Genesis one suggests that humans become good or bad only through their responsibility, their action. But, before Man has even begun to act, God says, using an emphatic negative, that Man's situation, his aloneness, is not good, and God moves from pronouncing that situation not good to Man's naming of the animals. Man takes part in the creation: though the world and its animal inhabitants exist, and though there is a human being in that world, the creation is not finished. In chapter one, God creates and names the light and darkness (Genesis 1.5), the expanse of firmament (Genesis 1.8), and dry land and the seas (Genesis 1.10). The only element of creation that he does not name are animals, specifically leaving that to Man, which suggests Man's procreative

work: with God, he is co-creator of the world. This clarifies the notion of dominion considerably by suggesting how Man's dominion is both a rule over the world and a representation of it before God: as co-creator, humans have dominion over the world, but in that dominion, in making the world either good or bad – in other words, *in their co-creation of it* – they must stand to be judged of God. To the world, human beings are gods. But to God, we are the intermediary for the world, that in which it has its being or its negation.

Seeing each of the animals, Man sees that among them there is no companion to him. None of the animals is in God's image; as yet, neither is Man, for he is not yet the *adam* spoken of in Genesis 1.26, the *adam* who is male and female, the *adam* who can be fruitful and multiply. The Divine has described merely individual Man as emphatically not good: without another, Man is not yet human. Alone in the Garden of Eden, he is not yet in the image of God. As Man names the animals, he can see that none of them is the other that will make creation complete.

As we have seen, the creation of human beings in Genesis one was not the act of a lone individual (Genesis 1.26). God's creation of human beings was an act of being-toward. Though radically other in that he cannot be reduced to or encompassed by any human being, the God of Genesis one is also among and with. As he names the animals, Man finds no other that he can be-toward as God is toward him. He has no community. Existing in a solipsistic universe, Man's imaging of the Divine remains meaningless; Man is not yet really like God in either image or likeness. Being in his image and likeness requires being-toward. For that, Man needs another human being.

To fill the gap in creation that Adam has discovered, and thereby to make human being possible, God creates Woman. Though the phrase he uses to describe her is often translated "help meet" or "appropriate helper" (Genesis 2.18), it means, literally, a "helper over against" or "another who

helps,” emphasizing the necessity to human being of the other. Individual existence is emphatically not good until it is no longer merely individual, until there is another who stands across from the individual, one toward whom one can be. Genesis 1.26 placed Man *and* Woman vis-a-vis God and he commanded them to produce after their kind. Now God creates Woman from Man, and in the face to face relation of Woman and Man the possibility of obedience to the command to be fruitful comes about.

The community that includes all humans is possible, not only because post-Edenic humans spring from common parents. That would give human community a merely historical origin. More importantly, human community is possible because even the primeval parents spring from the same source, a source that is itself not reducible to a mere singularity. Man is the creation of God; Woman is the creation of God. They are separate and exclusive individuals, but they are also individuals with a common, though in an important sense multiple source. Man and Woman can cleave or be bound to one another – they can have their being in being-toward-one-another – and “they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2.24).

Like Aristophanes’s tale in Plato’s *Symposium*, an old Jewish understanding of this account has it that rather than creating Woman from the rib of Man, God originally created a bisexual being from whom Man and Woman were separated, standing over against one another.¹³ For our discussion, however, it makes little if any difference to the meaning of the text to choose either of the two interpretations over the other. In either case, Woman is “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2.23). In either case, Man and Woman are to be bound to one another – they are to be-toward one another – and “they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2.24).

But, in what way are Woman and Man one flesh? The most literal meaning, of course, is that Woman was created from the flesh of Man: biologism. Sexual intercourse is also an obvious meaning of becoming one flesh, and it takes relatively little to think of

spiritual union as well. But the Hebrew word translated *flesh* can mean not only *meat*. Among other things, as the parallel between *heart* and *flesh*, and their joint parallel to *soul*, in Psalms 84.2 strongly suggests, *flesh* can also denote one’s very being, one’s identity, both body and soul. Thus, Genesis 2.24 indicates that Man and Woman are to be one in every sense. They *must* be in community; their relation to each other must imitate their relation to God in its commonality and sameness as well as its otherness and opacity. But the oneness of Man and Woman, their commonality and sameness, cannot be understood reductively, as if what makes each what she or he is is a shared essence, a totality that encompasses them, depriving them of their individuality and difference. That reduction would deny their likeness of God.

The problem of community first appears explicitly in Genesis 2.24, in that Man and Woman are to *become* one flesh. Woman is made from the flesh of Man. Even so are all humans made from the flesh of Man and Woman. That biological unity, however, does not make them one. Like Man, Woman is made uniquely in the image of God, as indeed are all human beings. Woman and Man are and will remain other than one another; each is infinitely opaque. Any account of human being, then, must take into account both the non-biological communality of human being, something to be striven for, and the opacity of individual humans. The world has begun with humans who are both the same and other. The creation story tells us that the community to be established must be a unity that is not merely biological and that does not deny the opacity of the individuals who are in community. The community must avoid elevating commonality and thereby becoming mere collectivity, and it must avoid as well elevating individuality into mere acosmism. If there is to be community, it must hold sameness and otherness jointly as “fundamental,” though reason will find it impossible to *hold* them together and will, therefore, continue to demand a reduction of one to another or a synthesis of the two. An

appropriate image is that of Heraclitus, the image of the bow (fr. 51): opposites, the two directions of force in the bow, give the bow its existence – but we seem only to be able to conceive the opposites and not the bow.

The seemingly parenthetical note of Genesis 2.24 not only shows us that human being is communal, it also prefigures the expulsion of Man and Woman from the garden: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto each his wife.” Man and Woman will be forced to leave their father and mother – in this case God – and cleave to each other: in order to be human Man and Woman *must* leave the divine communion of paradise to live in community with others. In other words, they must die; they must live in history. We have already seen that knowledge and death are inseparably linked (Genesis 2.16-17). It is not simply that Man and Woman have the option of remaining immortally in the garden in ignorance or leaving with knowledge to die. But- if their lives are to be meaningful, if they are to be bound to one another, if they are to be fruitful, if they are to escape the emphatic negative with which God has judged the situation of one alone, in other words, if they are to be human – they must live in community and they must do so estranged from God.

Such a life in community demands both creation and action, and that requires, in turn, that Man and Woman partake of the fruit of knowledge and become subject to death. Remaining in the garden immortally – alone forever, even while they are alongside one another, alone because they have not left the mother and father and, therefore, cannot cleave to one another – would be real death. That is what must be avoided. The expulsion from the garden is, thus, not the consequence of a moral fall. It is the fulfillment of the creation of humanity. To remain would have been a fall.

The event that culminates in the expulsion, or – better – the birth into the world, begins with the serpent’s question to Woman: “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Genesis

3.1). In answer, Woman repeats the prohibition given,¹⁴ and the serpent says, “Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3.4-5).

Common Christian understanding notwithstanding, the serpent does not baldly lie to the woman. He is not *merely* evil. In the first place, his statement that they will not die is ambiguous. It can also mean, “It is not certain that you will die.” But, without considering the ambiguity, at face value there is a great deal of truth in what he says to her: their eyes are opened (Genesis 3.7), and eating the fruit does make Man and Woman “as gods, knowing good and evil” (see Genesis 3.22). There are several ways to understand what the serpent says, but however we understand it, if we take *day* in its ordinary meaning (a period of twenty-four hours), the serpent tells the truth when he says that they will not die in the day they eat of the fruit.

The deceptiveness of the serpent’s speech to Woman does not lie in his claim that by eating Woman may become like God. Neither is the serpent’s claim that she will not die in the day that she eats of the fruit clearly deceptive. The only way to make what the serpent says a lie would be to decide the ambiguity by taking it to mean that her death at some time is not a certainty. He lies if he tells her that she can be human in the Garden. The serpent’s deception is, therefore, not so much the content of what he says at it is his interpretation of God’s motives as mere covetousness and his equation of godliness with defiance. The serpent’s lie is his implication that God does not want Man and Woman to establish community among themselves and between themselves and God, that God has no intention of completing the creation of Man and Woman. The serpent implies that God wants his existence to be exclusive of Man and Woman, that he wishes them to be without likeness to him, that he does not want them to become as he is. But Genesis one has already shown us that he *does* want them to become as he is. God is not himself

acosmic – he is not alone; his being is toward – and he does not wish human beings to be acosmic. The message that Genesis gives us in the serpent’s temptation of Woman is that to refuse community and its divine ground is sin.

Seeing that “the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise,”¹⁵ Woman eats some of its fruit and gives it to Man to eat as well.¹⁶ As the serpent has predicted, they receive the knowledge of good and evil. Now they have experience of it; they have confronted it personally.

Previously, without knowledge, Man and Woman were not ashamed of their nakedness (Genesis 2.25). Now, with knowledge, ethical knowledge, they understand that nakedness, their exposure, and they make girdles of fig leaves for themselves. Without the knowledge of good and evil, they had been merely individuals and, therefore, had not been toward-the-other, they could previously have been neither exposed nor ashamed. Their being would have been only toward themselves. Though shame is a form of self-consciousness (in the ordinary sense of that word), it is only possible in relationship, in the presence of another. Thus, Man’s and Woman’s lack of shame was a sign that prior to eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they did not have human being. But with their acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil, they become human and can feel shame. Man’s and Woman’s shame, however, is not merely the shame of their nakedness as they stand before one another. It is also shame before God. They are exposed not only to one another, they are exposed to God. And in response to their exposure they hide in the trees from God’s presence.

Now the promise that they should die in the day in which they ate the fruit is fulfilled. Though, as the serpent promised, their physical death does not occur in that day, their spiritual death does. Having been made in God’s image, having their personalities placed vis-a-vis that of God,

and having lived in a world in which God could come walking in the cool of the day, Man and Woman have taken of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and must be separated from God; they must die from him. The irony is that the death that God foretold is their birth into human- and god-being. As the end of Genesis 2 explains, in order to become like God, in order to cleave to one another, Man and Woman must be separated from God. They must exist as individuals in community between themselves, and that community, though it has its base in the Divine and is created and supported by him, must occur in the mortal rather than the divine sphere.

The necessary death is both physical and spiritual. Humans are defined not only by their mortality, but also by their separation from God. But separation from God – spiritual death – and physical death have in them the seeds of human community, for these two deaths and the ever-recurring “death” of possibilities that is inherent in human action make possible the human imitation of God and therefore human glorification. Within the continual “dyings” and “births” of action, humans live out both their mortality and their alienation from God. Mortality and finitude show the importance of the moment: community is something that we must work for between ourselves and between ourselves and God, now. It cannot wait. Our mortality constantly reminds us that we cannot finish the infinite task of binding ourselves into a human community nor that of binding our human community to God; our being in the likeness of God constantly reminds us that we must continue to work to do so.

While they hide in the bushes, God calls to them, “Where art thou?” (Genesis 3.9). This is a call like that made later to Abraham (Genesis 22.1), Moses (Exodus 3.4), and Isaiah (Isaiah 59.9). As Martin Buber points out, God does not expect to learn something that he does not know. He wants to produce an effect in Woman and Man that can only be produced by such a question.¹⁷ The question shows Man and Woman the difference made by their

knowledge of good and evil, a knowledge they understand as yet only as shame, as recognition of their exposure. In eating of the tree, Man and Woman have believed the serpent's lie. They have seen themselves as individuals and they have understood individuality as exclusionary: at least implicitly, they have believed that God does not want them to be like he is. Therefore, they have also believed that they can only make themselves like him by an act of opposition, by a negation of their relation. The consequence of that belief, however, is a recognition of their exposure and consequently shame. Now rather than standing before him in their integrity, rather than replying "Here am I," as will Abraham, Moses, and Isaiah, Man and Woman hide themselves "from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3.8). With the final similarity to God and the creation of the possibility of human community – with the knowledge of good and evil – comes the possibility of guilt associated with the failure to work for that community. Though the possibility of community has been born, Man and Woman have accented their individuality as something over against community with God.

We see, too, that they have accented their individuality to the exclusion of each other. For, Man's reply to God's question, "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" (Genesis 3.11) seems to be an attempt to absolve himself by blaming Woman- and even God: "You gave me Woman, and *she* gave me the fruit." In return, her response seems to blame the serpent. Though they must leave their father and mother to cleave to one another, we do not see Man and Woman cleaving to anyone yet. That comes in chapter four. Instead we see them denying their community with each other, just as, in their defiance, they denied their community with God.

Responsibility and shame come because the possibility of community is also the possibility of alienation. In this case, Man and Woman have chosen both community

and alienation. They have chosen alienation from God because only in that alienation is human community possible. Thus, broadly conceived, human exposure and responsibility are inescapable, even if shame is not. Man and Woman feel shame before each other and God because the alienation to which they have come is grounded in defiance, in the negation of the other. But even without defiance there is separation, difference, between each of the pair, and between each and God, and that separation is necessary if the otherness of each and that of God is meaningful. Man and Woman must be separated from the Divine if they are to image the Divine, but separation necessarily carries with it the possibility of alienation. In fact, without community, separation necessarily *is* alienation. The sense of separation and the possibility of alienation it contains is the possibility of responsibility and the failure to meet that responsibility. In learning that they are like God in otherness and depth, Man and Woman come to know the possibility of failed responsibility, part of the possibility of community.

However, Woman and Man also learn that their separation is the ground of human and divine community; if they were not other than one another and did not have infinite depth and opacity (two ways of saying the same thing), community would not be possible.¹⁸ If our imaging of God did not include our particularity and opacity, at best we would be like him in having *idem* identity; we could not be individuals having *ipse* identity. But if we could not be individuals, then we would *not* be like him. We could have neither *idem* nor *ipse* identity; we could not be at all. Thus, otherness is necessary, the otherness of persons, both divine and human. Commonly we understand there to be only two possible relations to God: *idem* identity or alienation. We see here that this dichotomy is mistaken. We cannot have an identity relationship to the Divine; he does not swallow us up. But the otherness that results from the absence of that identity is not the otherness of simple alienation (though it can seem to be if we

are defiant, if we refuse community). The real choice is between community and alienation (the refusal to live the relationship that is “always already” there). Both of these alternatives have their ground in the otherness and opacity of human- and god-being.

Woman is told that the consequence of her knowledge of good and evil is pain, and Man is told that the consequence of his knowledge is labor. But these are not as distinct as they might at first seem to be. The fact that the pain of childbirth is, in English, called *labor* is helpful. The words are also closely related in Hebrew. In fact the Samaritan Pentateuch uses the same word for both.¹⁹ God does not say essentially different things to Man and Woman. What he says to one he says to both.

The pain of childbirth is a particularly appropriate beginning. For both creation and relation are represented in it. Knowledge, the knowledge of good and evil, the knowledge that brings mortality, makes pain possible. Pain naturally accompanies all creation and is at least possible in all relation. Pain is similar to what I have called guilt, and it is one way to describe shame. In addition, the pain of childbirth is not only a coming into being-toward-another, the child. It is clearly a consequence and continuation of being-toward-another, the father. Woman does not create and live in the world as merely an individual. God tells her that her desires – the root of her creation and relation – will be to her husband, and in this we see a representation of the fundamentality of community. To be human is necessarily to be toward-another. But that necessarily carries with it pain, both the pain involved in creation and the possible pain that can come through alienation, the failure of relation – exposure. To escape pain, of either kind, would be to cease to be human. And, as we have seen in this story, the escape from pain is impossible even for God. Being in relation to us, he cannot escape the pain of alienation that comes in any refusal by one of his children to be in community, nor can he escape the pain of separation and otherness that is necessarily part of having created us.

God cannot remove pain from the world without the annihilation of human- and god-being. And since, as chapter one shows us, human- and god-being are that through which even entities have their being, God could not remove pain without there ceasing to be a world. God must not only die, he too must weep (John 11.35; see also, from Latter-Day Saint scripture, Moses 7.29-31).

Labor too is an essential part of human-being. Following Alexandre Kojève, I distinguish between labor and toil.²⁰ Toil is merely the attempt to satisfy one’s own desires. Prior to their knowledge of good and evil, prior to coming to being-toward each other and God, Man and Woman were required to serve the garden and preserve it (Genesis 2.15), but they were not able to do so meaningfully. True, they could work in it, but their work would have been unconscious and self-gratifying toil. True labor is done only in relation to another (and it must include the otherness and depth of the other). Only in labor rather than toil can one have human being. The Hebrew word for work, *avodah* (which is etymologically related to the word translated “serve” in Genesis 2.15), can equally well be translated *service*. Labor is both concomitant with creation and required by relation. Thus, community is pervaded by labor as well as pain.

Only at the end of chapter three is the creation complete. Genesis 2.5 tells us that the earth and the heavens had been made, as had the plants. But there was not yet “a man to till [or serve] the ground.” From there to the end of chapter three, we see the development of human being, the development of Man and Woman into beings who can labor, who can till the ground. However, only after Man and Woman have the knowledge of good and evil is there any mention of tilling (by implication in Genesis 3.19 and explicitly in 3.23).²¹ Thus, this story of the moral creation of humans is only complete when humans are able to labor. Verse twenty emphasizes this, for Eve is not named (created) until after God’s explanation to her and to Man that pain and labor will follow

from their having knowledge – and Man is never named.) Now that creation, signified by Woman’s ability to bear children, is possible, and now that labor has been introduced into the world, Woman can be named. Now her creation is complete, at least insofar as a creature who is essentially being-toward can be said to be complete.

Eve is the mother of *all* living. Through her, life has come to the world – to her, to Man, to everything. In that sense, though Eve is created from the flesh of Man, she is also the creator of Man as fully human. To ask who was created from whom would be pointless. Standing “across from” one another, they each create the other, and through their labor together they create the world.

Previously Eve and Man had been ashamed of their nakedness, of the exposure of their bodies. In an attempt to remedy their shame, they made fig leaf aprons to cover themselves, a poor covering at best. Now God makes genuine clothes for them (Genesis 3.21). Without God’s work, they could do no more than try to remedy their ignorance. Though the point is arguable, Benno Jacob²² says that the word translated *make* in Genesis 3.21 is used almost exclusively in reference to the creations of God.²³ However, it is not the word used to speak of the creation of the world and its various parts in Genesis one. Its use here, then, is strange. Except for the fact that God makes this clothing, there seems nothing special about its creation. But that is an important exception: clothing is the only cultural artifact whose creation is ascribed to God. All other artefactual creations are attributed to human beings (cf. Genesis 4.17-22).²⁴ God’s creation of clothing for Man and Woman stands out from the text, perhaps to show that they are unable to remove their shame themselves, to show that their exposure can be covered only by the Divine. Having defied God, having refused to be in community, they cannot remedy their error without his intervention. To be human is to be a god, but being human, one cannot simply will to overcome alienation from God. Alienation from God can only be

cured by God himself, though the cure is not simple absorption into him. The cure of alienation is not the overcoming of otherness. For mortals, it is not reunion with God, it is labor with other humans.

The nakedness of Man and Woman is often read as referring to their ignorance, their ungodliness. In chapter two they are innocently ungodly and, therefore, unashamed. They are not exposed because, not yet being human, they cannot know of their mortality and exposure. In chapter three, however, with the knowledge of good and evil, they come to know that they are mortal rather than divine and, consequently, they are ashamed. They try to absolve themselves of that ungodliness, but can only manage the scanty covering of an apron. Only God can clothe them; only he can remove their shame and overcome the alienation and exposure that has come with their separation from him. Man’s and Woman’s denial of God was the denial of their community with him, their denial that he was with them. It was the beginning of human being and the introduction of alienation. But there is no way to will oneself out of alienation. The denial of the ground reduces one to acosmism, and there is nothing within an acosmic world from which one could create community. Only an act of God can give us the power to be once again at one with him and others, to be in community again. But God’s saving act, his creation of community occurs only with human beings. In other words, he creates community only with those who are fully human, who have left his presence and to labor in the world with other human beings.

Thus, God performs the divine investiture, he robes Man and Woman in divine garments, and having done so can say, “Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil.” An alternate translation is, “Behold, he is become like the unique One among us.”²⁵ The story is an affirmation of human personality as imaging that of God in its uniqueness and individuality. But it is also an affirmation of human existence in community and, therefore, of human existence as the likeness

of God, that for which one works. Now, just as he did as in Genesis 1.26, God takes counsel. The parallel of Genesis 1.26 and 3.22 marks the latter as an event of creation, and in the creative act God reveals both his own being and human as communal.

Common Christian exegesis again notwithstanding, this is not an account of the human fall from a paradisiacal state. We do not see here a story of how humans have been condemned for having frustrated the plans and purposes of God. In the discussion of the necessity of leaving the garden to be bound to one another (Genesis 2.24), we have already seen that this is no unfortunate fall. Further evidence for this is implicit in the discussion of the necessary “completion” of the creation in labor. But notice also that nowhere in the text do we find the word *sin*. And, the so-called curses given to Man and Woman do not have the form of a legal penalty.²⁶ If we see that the introduction of death is also a birth (into the human world and the possibility of genuine human and, thus, godly existence among humans), then we see that Genesis 1-3 is an account of creation, not of creation and fall.

However, the creation of the world that is completed in the creation of Man and Woman and their separation from God is not something finished. For the labor of being-toward cannot be finished or it would cease to be being-toward-another. Creation is only complete in the sense that any individual is complete at his or her birth: our image is complete, but our likeness is not. Only historical existence – labor for and with others in community; being in the likeness of God – can take us beyond our image. Nothing can bring an end to that labor except absolute death, a possibility that always lies beyond human being.

53. Human being is to act, and the story of Man and Woman in the garden leads us to the full human ability to act. God has commanded them to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1.28). Now fruitfulness – which requires human action – is possible. That would seem to be why chapter four begins, “And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived and bare Cain.” This clause is a

summary of the creation of humans: they have knowledge in which they are in relation to one another, and through those relations they can be fruitful. Implicit in all of this is the grounding in the Divine: “I have gotten a man from the Lord” (Genesis 4.1).

The story of creation in Genesis lays the foundation for an understanding of the relationship of humans in community by pointing to Man and Woman as unique individuals bound to each other, and *in potentia*, to all others in community without absorption. From this theme springs a major theme of biblical writers, namely the return to true community.²⁷ In order for such a return to occur, humans must recognize themselves as created in the express image of God: in the image of God, unique, and potentially fruitful because they know good and evil. They must recognize themselves as bound to each other by their being, by pain, and by labor.

Notes

1. This remains a draft rather than a finished piece.
2. To remain true to the text, I will use the word *Man* as a translation of the multi-valenced term *'adam*. However, when speaking of human beings generally, I will use gender neutral language.
3. Cf. Cassuto, 84-96.
4. Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading*, (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 57.
5. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz Josef Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Trans. Douglas W. Stott, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), X:376-405.
6. Gutman, *Dat Umadda (Religion and Science)* 265. Quoted in Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in the Book of Genesis*, Trans. Aryeh Newman, (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1972), 2.

7. I am grateful to Paul Y. Hoskisson for pointing this out. See also: C. Dohmen, "Die Statue von Tell Fecherije unde die Gottesenbildlichkeit des Menschen. Ein Beitrag zur Bildterminologie," *BN*, 22 (1983), 91-96; J.C. Greenfield and A. Shaffer, "Notes on the Akkadian-Aramaic Bilingual Statue from Tell Fekherye," *Iraq*, 45 (1983), 109-116; A.R. Millard and P. Bordreuil, "A Statue from Syria with Assyrian and Aramaic Inscriptions," *Biblical Archaeology*, 45 (1982), 135-141; and V. Sasson, "The Aramaic Text of the Tell Fekharyah Assyrian-Aramaic Bilingual Inscription," *ZAW* 97 (1985a), 86-103.

8. Bruce Vawter, 55.

9. Michael Fishbane, *The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 50ff.

10. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, v.vi.i.

11. Much of the difficulty of discussing the problem of identity comes from the difficulty of separating these two notions of identity. If personal identity is taken to be a matter of *idem* identity, then it will be impossible to discuss the identity of one person over time, much less the identity of two people.

12. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, Eds. *The Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon, with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, (Oak Harbor WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2000, c1906), 395.1.

13. Part of the rabbinic version of the story probably stems from the identification of "Man" in chapter five with both male and female, a reflection of the plural in chapter one, "male and female created he *them*" (Genesis 1.27).

14. Notice, though it is not especially relevant to our discussion, that Woman changes the prohibition in several ways, but particularly by adding to it, "neither shall ye touch it" (Genesis 3.3).

15. Jacob says that knowledge is listed last because it was the least of her desires. See Benno Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible: Genesis*, Ed. and Trans. by E. I. Jacob and W. Jacob, (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1974), 25. Perhaps, but it may also be taken as no more

than an indication of her inability to see the relative importance of knowledge as compared to being good for food and desirable to the eyes, an inability resulting from the fact that she is not yet fully created.

16. Because Paul says that Man was not deceived, but Woman was (1 Timothy 2.14), much has been said in Christianity about Woman "succumbing" to temptation and then "tempting" Man – as if Woman is more responsible than Man in introducing sin into the world. Whatever we make of Paul's assertion, Genesis itself does not make such a claim. In the first place, an etiology of sinfulness is not part of the story. Man and Woman have the possibility of transgression from the beginning, or the prohibition God gives in Genesis 2.17 makes no sense, in which case Woman cannot have transgressed that prohibition. But, suppose that she did bring sinfulness into the world through an act for which she was not responsible. Then it is something she did not really do. It is not really one of her acts, so it is not an explanation of the origin of sin. In the second place, we see in the story no attempt by the redactor to place blame. In fact, if there is an attempt to place blame (perhaps Genesis 3.12-13), the text shows that attempt to be negative. The story is about Man and Woman, but we see them only one at a time because the literary conventions of Genesis require that conversation occur between only two people at a time. Thus, the sequence we see in chapter three suggests nothing about the relative merits of either Man or Woman or about the origin of the possibility of sin. In addition, Genesis 5:1, by naming *both* Man and Woman with the word *man* – *adam* – goes out of its way to make it difficult for us to simply identify references to man or Adam as specific references to the male of this primal couple.

17. Martin Buber, *Hasidism and Modern Man*, Trans. Maurice Friedman (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), 133.

18. Without otherness and opacity only *idem* identity is possible.

19. Bruce Vawter, 85.

20. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, Trans. James H. Nicholas, (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 42, 227-228.

21. I take it that the work of the garden was merely keeping up and preserving what was already there. It was not labor, and would not seem to have needed tilling.

22. Benno Jacob, 1.

23. It also frequently has the sense of ethical obligation, and it is the word used in such places as Exodus 23.22, Leviticus 19.37, and Deuteronomy 6.18 when God is said to make a covenant with Israel. See R. Laird Harris, L. Archer Gleason Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 701.

24. In fact, the others are attributed not just to humans, but specifically to the descendants of Cain – except for the creation of clothing, technology is descended from Adam through Cain.

25. Cf. John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 117-118.

26. Benno Jacob, 27.

27. Cf. Isaiah and his call to come forth from physical and spiritual Babylon so Israel can have being once again.