

I INTRODUCTION

SAMPLE

The Duality of Man: Biblical Anthropology of the Sexes

Reference to the sexual differentiation in man is one of the axioms repeatedly stressed in biblical anthropology. Apart from this differentiation, it would be impossible to conceive of the *humanum*, of “humanness,” in any expressible terms—at any rate in all respects that affect human existence in this world. Whereas all racial differences are “variations of one and the same structure”¹ and thus are miscible and therefore inconstant, the sexes have an indelible character.² Our Lord says in Matthew 19:4, 6: “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female . . .? What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.” This *logion* indicates a line that connects the order of creation with the order of redemption.

The differentiation of the sexes is so constitutive of humanity that, first, it appears as a primeval order (Gen. 1:27; 2:18 ff.) and endures as a constant despite its deprivation in the Fall (Gen. 3:16),

¹ As Karl Barth quite rightly says in *Church Dogmatics*, III, 2, p. 286.

² The fact of homosexuality, which, anthropologically speaking, rests upon a latent—that is, to a large extent somatically undetectable—mixture of the two sexes in one individual (cf. O. Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter* [1922], *Sex and Character* [English trans. of earlier edition, 1906]), does not disprove this thesis. First, because this acquired immanent bisexuality bears witness to the polarity of the sexes, instead of ignoring it, and also because it can actually be adduced as a help in understanding the phenomenon. Second, because the homosexual must always understand himself in terms of his disparity with the “normal” polarity of the sexes and to this extent also remains bound to it. (Cf. the chapter on homosexuality.)

and, second, that to it is attributed symbolic value for the fundamental structure of all human existence, that is to say, for the existence of man in his relationship to his fellow man, for the fact that he is defined by his being as a Thou in relationship to a Thou. Barth rightly says that man does not have the "choice to be fellow-human or something else. . . . Man *exists* in this differentiation, in this duality." And "this is the *only* structural differentiation in which he exists."³

The creation of the woman from Adam's rib (Gen. 2:21 ff.) parabolically suggests this constitutive character of the fact that man and woman belong together. At the same time the very ground and goal of this act of creation points to the fact that man's being has been determined by God as a "being in fellow-humanity" [*Mitmenschlichkeit*], the representative expression of which is that man and woman belong together.

With respect to his other works of creation God speaks his word of approval and says that they are *good*. Only with respect to the creation of man does he utter the negative judgment "not good": "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). The solitary Adam is not yet "man"; he is still not the fulfillment of the creation of man. Accordingly, the woman is created as his "helper." And what is meant by this is a partnership, such as is intended, for example, in the idea of a fellow worker (*synergos*) referred to in II Corinthians 1:24. The idea here is that of a vis-à-vis which has the character of a Thou, of that which corresponds to the man, as, indeed, the Hebrew text requires to be translated, "I will make him a helper as his opposite."⁴

This means that the relationship of fellow humanity, represented by the man-woman relationship, is emphasized and given privileged status over against all I-It relationships. For among man's animal fellow creatures there was not a partner that was "fit for him" (Gen. 2:20), whereas Adam, confronted with the Thou of the female being created for him, breaks out in the cry, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). Therefore he gives her his own name ("Woman") and in this way, too, singles her out in the naming of the animals.

³ *Church Dogmatics*, III, 2, p. 286.

⁴ H. Greeven, "Die Weisungen der Bible über das rechte Verhältnis von Mann und Frau," in *Kirche und Volk*, XII, p. 4, or "a helper fit for him" (Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis, A Commentary*, trans. by John H. Marks [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961]), p. 80, or a "mirror of himself, in which he recognizes himself" (F. Delitzsch, *Neuer Kommentar über die Genesis* [1887], on Gen. 2:18).

The duality of the sexes expresses with great precision and strong symbolism this dependence of the one upon the other. For in this passage the emphasis is not only upon their dependence upon each other in the realm of working together (*synergeia*), but rather upon a mutual dependence that extends even to the biological, somatic realm. Alongside of the specifically theological significance which this reference to the sexes in the creation story possesses, we must not overlook this symbolical value which it has for the concept of fellow humanity as a whole. The sex reference is, so to speak, not a subsection within the rubric "fellow humanity," but is rather the representation and prototype of fellow humanity. Man cannot understand himself in his creaturely relationship to God without at the same time expressing his relationship to the Thou of the neighbor. This double relationship constitutes his humanity. To this extent we have here an adumbration of Jesus' correlation between love of God and love of one's neighbor (Luke 10:27). Therefore when Emil Brunner says that "God has created two kinds of human beings, male and female,"⁵ we must say that this is really an unfortunate way of putting it. What is meant here is not the coexistence of two sorts of human beings, but rather a polarity which is constitutive of man as such. Therefore man and woman do not find each other, as it were, *subsequently*; they rather come to each other from each other.

It is true, of course, that the theological relevance of this sex differentiation has not always remained undisputed. That is to say, when theology is "eschatological" instead of eschatological, and, to use Bonhoeffer's terms, it overlooks the "penultimate" in its preoccupation with the "Ultimate" and thus becomes visionary and utopian [*schwärmerish*], the result is a leveling down of everything that is concrete and distinctive. So this kind of theology, appealing to the promise that in the Kingdom of God there shall be no marrying or giving in marriage (Matt. 22:30), perpetrates a relativizing of the sex difference, which in some ascetic schools of thought has frequently resulted in the actual defamation of sex.⁶ This is to sidestep and evade in visionary fashion our "being-in-the-world," which, after all, is the very context which shows us that our love, hate, faith, and

⁵ *The Divine Imperative*, trans. by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947), p. 374. Cf. the criticism by M. C. van Asch van Wijk, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁶ Cf. Fr. Hauck, *Markus-Evangelium* (1931), p. 146; Strack-Billerbeck IV, p. 891.

the assaults upon our faith occur only as we encounter the concrete media of this world. In other words, my faith comes into being only as I face certain definite, concrete events and circumstances and believe in the face of them and in spite of them. Therefore faith can never be detached from the media of the world within which and in spite of which it prevails, just as the assaults upon my faith come to me by way of these media. In the same way, my loving is influenced and determined by the concrete framework within which I love, whether it be erotic love or love of parents and children, love of friends or love of enemies, whether it be a matter of spontaneous loving emotions— influenced possibly by tenderheartedness or temperament— or of real struggle to love a person whom I know I “should” love. Whenever human existence is thus illegitimately “eschatologized” the result is that we overleap these media within which the spiritual acts occur and come into being. And by the same process the result is also the tendency to ignore the sex difference, which then produces an abstract concept of “man” which has been stripped of all reality. In this kind of thinking Adam is made the representative of man as such, rather than Adam *and* Eve together.

On the other hand, the theological ontology of human existence must not go so far as to imagine that it can express the idea of *imago Dei only* by means of this sex differentiation.⁷ It is true that this differentiation is very important as a medium of our relationship to God and our fellow man and thus is one of the media in which, through which, and despite which that relationship is realized. The *imago Dei*, however, both in its implications for our creaturehood and its Christological implications,⁸ expresses our unmediated relationship to God.

This explains why it is that when we are dealing with this immediacy to God and thus with the eschatological aspect, the sex differentiation loses its force and validity. This becomes apparent, first, in the reference already mentioned to the effect that there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage in the Kingdom of God (Mark 12:25). It is apparent again in Paul’s complete disassociation of life from all

⁷ Thus van Asch van Wijk, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁸ Cf. *ThE* I, §690 ff. and §829 ff.

sexuality "in the dim twilight of changing aeons" (I Cor. 7:1 ff.).⁹ It is apparent again in the question of our status in the sight of God: under the Law "all" of us are *sinners*, without any distinction (*dias-tote*) whatsoever, and hence without sexual distinction (Rom. 3:23), and under the Gospel we receive justification "freely" (i.e., without having to meet any conditions and without any possibility that any differences whatsoever could bring us closer to or take us farther away from grace). In *this* dimension, therefore, we are "equally pardoned" without differentiation.¹⁰ When it is a question of this form of immediacy to God and therefore of the eschatological dimension of humanity, it is a level beneath all differentiations that is addressed.

It is true that a relationship of higher or lower status in the "penultimate" realm is altogether consistent with this solidarity in the "ultimate" dimension.¹¹ And yet this ultimate solidarity before God will also make itself apparent in these "penultimate" areas. The equality of status which arises in the encounter of I and Thou in the presence of God will also break through the hierarchy of superiority and subordination and inform it with personal, mutual responsibility.

In this connection it is worth noting that even from a purely quantitative point of view the references to this partnership under God in the biblical anthropology greatly outnumber the references to possible differences of superiority or subordination in the earthly, penultimate realm.

In the first account of creation there is no indication whatsoever of any distinction of rank between man and woman (Gen. 1:26-28). The threefold reference to God's "creating" in verse 27 leaves no room for any distinction of value. Both, man and woman, are equally immediate to the Creator and his act. Furthermore, both together receive (v. 28) the blessing as well as the command to subdue the earth (1:28 f.).

We have already discussed the second account of the creation of

*The words quoted are those of G. Gloege. Cf. the description of the eschatological background of I Cor. 7:29 ff. in H. W. Wendland (*NTD* VII, p. 37).

¹⁰ Ch. von Kirschbaum, *op. cit.*

¹¹ An extreme expression of this possibility occurs in Paul's letter to Philemon in which he recognizes the hierarchy of master and slave, though at the same time he speaks of the brotherhood of both in Christ. Cf. *ThE* II, 1, §2060 ff.

man (Gen. 2:7 ff.) and described the element of partnership between man and woman in it. The story of the Fall does indeed say that the man has superior rank: "He shall rule over you" (3:16). But that this is not a commandment but rather a prognostic curse is evident from the parallel *logia*: "in pain you shall bring forth children"; "thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you"; "in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" (3:16-19). In this context the fact that one shall "rule" over the other is not an imperative order of creation, but rather the element of disorder that disturbs the original peace of creation: for the domination of the man spoken of *here* is the result of the desire (the libido) of the woman. This indicates that sexuality has lost its original form. Whereas originally its purpose, in conformity with the common origin of both man and woman, was to maintain this original unity and make them "one flesh" (Gen. 1:24), now it is promised that the sexes will be "against" each other and the question is who shall triumph and who shall be subjugated. Now libido-thralldom on the one hand and despotism on the other constitute a terrible correspondency. This antagonism between the sexes immediately becomes apparent in the fact that now one partner proceeds to denounce the other (3:12). But all this is, of course, not in accord with the order of creation, but rather a disruption of the order of creation.

According to the Synoptics, Jesus dealt with woman as a human being, as a sister. When he did this he was addressing her, so to speak, as she was originally meant to be in God's creation; he was looking beyond the disturbed relationship spoken of in the story of the Fall. We can properly evaluate Jesus' dealings with women and his words to them and about them only if we view them against the background of the time in which he lived. The despised status of woman in rabbinical Judaism as well as in the contemporary Greek world is actually a kind of paradigm of this *disturbance* of the created order of the sexes, and Jesus' attitude is really a protest against it. Although late Judaism exhibits isolated statements in praise of the virtuous woman¹² and is also capable of saying that women have equal if not higher rights before God than men,¹³ the *general* attitude toward women presents a totally different picture: One should not

¹² *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* I, 782, 21 ff.; hereinafter referred to as TWNT.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 781, 30.

converse with a woman, not even with one's own wife; women are greedy eaters, curious listeners, indolent, jealous, and frivolous; "many women, much witchcraft"; "ten cabs of garrulousness descended upon the world, nine came down upon the women, one upon the rest of the world." "Blessed is he whose children are male and woe to him whose children are female"—in the light of the attitude toward woman expressed in these quotations this outcry of ben Kiddushin is understandable.¹⁴ When women headed funeral processions the etiological explanation of this custom is to be found in the role she played in the Fall: they stand closer to the doom of death than the man. Likewise, the anthropological thesis of Philo to the effect that man represents the intellect (*nous*), whereas the woman represents sensuality (*disuesis*), goes back to the story of the Fall and the judgment of God.¹⁵

Only if we see them against this background will the seemingly quite unpolemical and almost incidental references in the Gospels to Jesus' attitude toward women take on the significance of an extraordinary protest against the status quo. The very fact that he spoke with women at all meant that he was notoriously disregarding the written and unwritten laws of the community in which he lived. Thus he healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21 ff; Mark 7:24), the mother-in-law of Peter (Matt. 8:14 f.), Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2 ff.); out of compassion for his mother he raised the young man of Nain (Luke 7:11 ff.) and restored to life the daughter of Jairus (Matt. 9:18 f.). If we keep in mind that women were excluded from cultic life (the Torah should rather be burned than transmitted to women, says the Jerusalem Talmud; and the women were required to sit behind screens in the synagogues [TWNT I, 782]), we shall see how shocking is the account that it was the women who remained at the cross of Jesus (Matt. 27:55 f.; Mark 15:40 f.; Luke 23:49; John 19:25) and finally were also among the witnesses of the resurrection (Matt. 28:1 ff.; Mark 16:1 ff.; Luke 24:10; John 20:1 ff.). Even though Jesus definitely rejected divorce (Matt. 19:4 ff.) and insisted that at most it must be regarded as a "regulation of necessity" (because of men's *sklerokardia*, 19:8), he dealt mercifully and forgivingly with the adulteress (John 7:53-8:11). He bestowed his regard even upon the harlots who were particularly despised (Luke 7:36 ff.). Here the equality of woman before God and the created solidarity of man and woman is dealt with in real earnest over against the contemporary cultic and social degradation of woman.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 781, 41.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 782, 17. On the contemporary background cf. A. Oepke, TWNT I, 781 ff.; J. Leipoldt, *Die Frau i. d. antik. Welt u. i. Urchristent.* (1954); K. H. Rengstorf, *Mann u. Frau i. Urchristent.*, in *AG für Forschg. d. Landes Nordrh.-Westf., Geistesw.* 12 (1954), pp. 7 ff.

Undoubtedly another nuance of this determination of the relationship of the sexes is to be found in Paul. The repeated statement that the man is the head of the woman is enough to indicate this (I Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23). Nevertheless, closer examination shows that even here the solidarity of the sexes *coram Deo* is upheld.

In this connection the most difficult factor is the exegesis of I Corinthians 11, because here Paul's argument is interfused with two extraneous elements.

First, with the Gnostic doctrine of emanation by means of which the later creation of the woman (11:8 f.) is interpreted as meaning that the man was at a higher stage of emanation than the woman and consequently was a more immediate reflection of God (*eikon* and *doxa*), whereas the woman was at most an indirect reflection of this glory, since she was the *doxa* of the man (11:7).

Here, of course, the use of the doctrine of emanation for the interpretation of the story of creation reaches its limit in that the very thing that Paul does not do is to draw the implication that is inherent in it, namely, that the woman lacks completely the character of *imago Dei*.¹⁶ Moreover, his statement with regard to the man-woman relationship is made more difficult by the fact that here it is not a thetical and independent statement, but is meant merely to support the argument that the man should keep his head uncovered in the service of worship and the woman should keep hers covered (11:4 f.). A certain uncertainty and discontinuity in the argument (it is nothing more than this—this is not a “kerygmatic” statement!) arises from the fact that, alongside of the argument from the creation story and the doctrine of emanations, he also employs the obscure—again probably a Gnostic, mythological—reference to the doctrine of angels (11:10).

Besides these Gnostic elements, the passage contains a second extraneous element in which Paul argues that “nature” commands that men and women should wear their hair differently, indicating their difference in status (11:14). What Paul meant here by “nature” (*physis*) is undoubtedly social custom (and therefore a *thesis!*). But precisely this identification, which is *post festum* and therefore questionable because of the time interval, points to the real aim of Paul's argument here, namely, that the social difference in the role of man and woman and all the customs connected with it (which were understood not only by Paul but by all his contemporaries as being “natural”) should not be revolutionized by appeal to the fact that men and women are in solidarity *coram Deo*. For he, too, proceeds to emphasize this solidarity (11:11 f.). The emphatic stress he puts upon it here is meant to prevent us from drawing

¹⁶ Cf. Greeven, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

from the dissimilar social ("natural") position of the sexes the erroneous conclusion that such differences could have any validity in the sight of God. In exactly the same way, of course, we can also infer from the text what he is fighting against on the opposite front, namely, the threatening and equally erroneous conclusion that by appealing to this solidarity before God one can now postulate the social identification or leveling of the sexes. In saying this, Paul is employing the same kind of polemic that Luther used against the rebellious peasants, namely, forbidding them to demand their social freedom by appealing to the solidarity of master and servant under the gospel.

In summary we may say that here Paul is making a conservative judgment sociologically but a revolutionary judgment theologically, for certainly the equal status of the sexes before God was in contradiction to the social customs of the times. The double intention which he here pursues is directed against the fanatical, "eschatologic" leveling of the sexes as well as the orthodox Jewish differentiation of the sexes. It is only in this *intention* and not in the argumentation that the kerygmatic content of the passage lies. We are therefore dealing with the same kind of Pauline criticism and interpretation as we encounter when we are obliged to separate the aim of his theological statements from the form of his rabbinical exegesis (e.g., Gal. 4:21 ff.).

Moreover, the thesis stated in Ephesians 5:23, that the man is the head of the woman, cannot be understood as an *isolated* thesis, without taking into account the theological context. But if this is kept in mind, then again the same equality of status and equality of obligation before God appear, and here with the added emphasis that both have their effect upon the concrete, "worldly" cohabitation of the sexes.

The statement that the man is the head of the woman—which has reference only to the *married* woman and therefore contains no sociological statement concerning the status of the woman—is inserted in a more general framework, namely, in the commandment to "be subject to one another," and to be so "in the fear of Christ" (*upotassomenoi allelois*, Eph. 5:21). Hence this cannot mean any one-sided domination on the part of the man; on the contrary, their common dependence upon the Lord, who is above them and is to be feared, places man and wife in a relationship of mutual service to each other, which is characteristic of our whole relationship to our fellow men (Gal. 5:13; I Pet. 4:10, etc.); for Christ is himself the prototype of the servant (*diakonon*, Luke 22:27).

This understanding of Christ as the one who serves must be kept in view when in the following text (Eph. 5:22 ff.) use is made of the analogy that as Christ is the head of his church so the husband is the head of the wife (5:23). From what has just been said it is already clear that what is meant here is something more and something different from a simple rela-

tionship of superiority, a kind of "leadership principle" [*Führerprinzip*] in marriage. The analogy can be understood only if we also see the way in which Christ is the head. But once this is seen, then both the limitations and the validity of the analogy become clear. The limitations lie above all in the fact that Christ has saving significance for the body (*soma*), of which he is the head (5:23b). This distinguishes his headship from that of the man, who does not possess this saving significance. On the contrary, he stands together with the wife *under* this salvation. And this is precisely what gives its peculiar stamp to his relationship to his wife. Apart from Ephesians 5, this is stated with unusual expressiveness in the first epistle of Peter where the author says that the husband should bestow honor on his wife as "the weaker sex" (*asthenestero skeuei*) because they are "joint heirs of the grace of life" (*sygkleronomois charitos zoes*, 3:7). This allusion to the wife as the weaker sex naturally cannot be interpreted in the sense of modern chivalry. It should rather be understood as a concessive clause: "though the wife is the weaker sex" honor should be bestowed on her. Even though she cannot demand this respect by reason of an equal partnership in the natural sense, she nevertheless can do so by reason of an "alien dignity" (*dignitas aliena*): she is equal before God. Here we have an instance of how Christian anthropology "infiltrates" the contemporary attitude toward, and evaluation of, woman.¹⁷

This in itself gives us a lead as to how the headship of the man in Ephesians 5 is to be understood. For this understanding it is important to note that verses 25 ff. are addressed to the husband. Their intent is not to be an objective doctrine of the sexes, but rather an appeal to the husband not to regard and act upon his position as the head in the sociological sense as being one of simple superiority, but rather in the soteriological sense of the imitation of Christ. In view of the prevailing contempt for women which we mentioned above, it is no wonder that this should be emphasized here, as in I Peter, and clearly directed against the man-wife hierarchy in the Jewish and pagan environment. Josephus, for example, thought of the headship of the husband purely in terms of "bridling" the wife and "ruling over" her.¹⁸

But now that the headship of the husband is to be understood in analogy with Christ we perceive a new and unprecedented tone: husbands should love their wives as Christ loved us all—men and women (5:25). And here "love" is to be understood not in the sense of *eros* but of *agape*. This is the new note which appears nowhere else in late antiquity. What *agape* means here is made amply clear in statements that follow (5:25 ff.) in reference to the service of Christ to his church. The respect the

¹⁷ *ThE* II, I, §2057 ff.

¹⁸ Greeven, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

woman should show toward the husband therefore has its correspondence in the sustaining love the husband bears toward her. It is a living, personal relationship which reminds us of the "golden rule" (Matt. 7:12).

We may leave out of account here the passage in I Timothy 2:11 which departs from the rest of the New Testament tradition. The etiological explanation of the subordination of the woman as resulting from her taking the initiative in the Fall is in contradiction to the statements which Paul makes on this question (Rom. 5:14). Furthermore, the employment of rabbinical teachings which are alien to the Bible is evident in this passage.¹⁹

We may sum up by saying that the male-female duality of man remains as a constant within the history of salvation [*Heilsgeschichte*]. It was ordained in creation and continues to endure through the crisis of the Fall, except that here it becomes a *disturbed* relationship (though it still remains a relationship!). Even in the distorted state caused by the libido and the urge to power, the indestructible correspondence of the sexes remains; the distortion occurs, so to speak, "within" this correspondence. In the order of redemption men are called back to the original design of creation in that the relationship of the sexes is oriented upon the Christological analogy: man and wife are again related to each other as persons who stand equally under the grace of God. The man's position as the "head" implies no patent of authority (since the correspondence of domination and servitude is the very mark of the disturbance caused by the Fall). It rather means only a primacy within a fellow-human relationship determined by love and willingness to serve. This provides a scope for freedom which allows us to distinguish the theological norm from its contemporary actualization and to leave this actualization to historical—including modern—modification. Every time is in *its own* way directly subject to that theological norm.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.