



THE NEW SHOFAR

The wo-man was made to complete the adam

Genesis 2:18-24 - Mark 10:2-16

Trinity 19

Before there was #Metoo there was God

It is rare to find biblical references in contemporary discussions about the way men and women should be relating in our modern world. While there is much talk about “equality” the word itself is so flexible in meaning it is just about useless in trying to clarify the fundamental nature of the place of men and women in creation. The first two creation stories in chapters one and two of Genesis set down the message Christians need to be preaching to the world. We believe God had a purpose in creating the man (*adam*) and the woman and it is that divine purpose that must be our starting point. Men and women are two but one in God.

I shall make for the man a helper

The creation story of **Genesis 2** has been going along nicely but we now find a change of tone as God creates the woman. So why this new direction? It is because God observed how *it is not good that man (adam) should be alone*. Human beings were never intended to be seen in any other way than in relationship with other human beings. Our modern notion of the primacy of the individual is a sin running in the opposite direction to the divine plan and it is a sin sitting at the heart of the majority of the woes afflicting our human community. It is because this *adam* (and the word in Hebrew means simply “human being”) is incomplete that God creates for *him* a partner (traditional translation is *helper*), a collaborator. It is notoriously difficult to translate the sense of the Hebrew noun but *partner/collaborator* are good because they place the stress on the way in which a person can only reach the fullness of their humanity when in relationship to others.

The adam needs the wo-man in order to be complete

What is of special importance here is the way the narrative shows how it is God who appreciates the way this *adam* was incomplete. It was not the *adam* who expressed feelings of loneliness or showed signs of missing something in life. What happens when God creates the woman is the result of an initiative of divine origin. It is God who wants the *adam* to live in community. On his own, this *adam* is going to prove to be inadequate for the task ahead. The *adam* needs to be completed in some way.

God is proposing the creation of someone who is going to be *like opposite him* – that is the literal translation and it is difficult to put into English. Perhaps something such as *matching him* picks up

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anathoth.hough@gmail.com - www.houghgod.com

the intent. God is not offering someone to help the *adam* out in his tasks, or simply help him with the task of procreation. These are all a part of what is being said but there is much more to it. This new creation is to be a companion in a mutual relationship with the man, a person on equal standing with him, *according to what is in front of him* (literal). An equal in the sense that this *wo-man* will be the one who will complete the man in every way.

In choosing the word *partner/collaborator* the editors were using a Hebrew word often chosen when describing the relationship God has with Israel and this provides a further very important nuance to the word. The relationship between the *adam* and *the woman* is to be every bit as sacred and as essential as the relationship between God and Israel. Israel only exists as a nation, as a people when the nation lives in relationship with God. So too the *adam*.

The woman is made from the rib of the adam

But note what God did: God *built the rib into a woman*. God did not create the woman in the same way it could be said he created the *adam*. He *built* her from a piece of bone. As the man was *taken from the earth* so now the woman is taken *from the man*. God made the woman and God made the woman from the man. It is always about God. The fact that it was a rib is of no importance. The focus is always on what God is doing. God is completing the *adam* by making a *woman*.

The response by *adam* is spontaneous and significant as it is the first example of a human creation speaking. Those first words were (appropriately) a poem of joy and exultation, a celebration of thanksgiving for the wonderful ways of God: *this one, this time, this one is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called woman, for she was taken from adam*.

God made adam and the woman to be together as one

In the final verse the editor adds a most important note...²⁴ *Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh*. Contrary to the normal Palestinian custom, it is the man who here leaves – or better “forsakes” his parents and his familial ties and *binds himself* to his wife, presumably living with her family. The two important words here are *forsake* and *binds*. Once a man enters into this new relationship with a woman, life’s priorities and perspectives are changed. Previously his fundamental responsibilities were towards his parents and throughout the Mediterranean and Ancient East, this was something universally considered as being the most serious obligation. Now all of that has been turned on its head and a man’s primary responsibility was to his wife.

The man *binds himself to his wife*. As Israel binds herself to God, so the man binds himself to the woman, suggesting that in this union a covenant is being made. This is furthered by the comment *the two become one flesh*. This is not just about sexual activity though clearly it is a significant part of the command to procreate and fill the earth. The point is more about solidarity. They cling together and in so clinging their humanity is strengthened. In becoming *one flesh* they have become a tower of strength and only then ready to live in God’s creation.

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