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The Theology of Gender – 2. Eve The Helper (Sofia Matzarioti-Kostara)

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The word "helper" itself presupposes an action for which Adam needs help. The only work that the text refers to is to protect and cultivate Paradise. The first interpreters of the sacred text understood that labor in Paradise was not handy work, but spiritual effort, meaning a labor toward perfection. According to several Christian writers, the human person was created physically perfect, but spiritually imperfect. St. Irenaeus of Lyons believed that the first man and woman were not made morally perfect from the beginning because in that case all their actions would have no moral significance[1]. "Though they were made having the image and likeness as their potentiality, they were required to become the image and likeness through spiritual labor and their free choice"[2]. "And the order to 'till (work) it' refers to no other labor than the keeping of God's commandment"[3]. Woman therefore was created to work together with Adam toward their spiritual growth. This is, according to the Fathers, why Eve was punished to be ruled by man in Gen. 3:16[4]. That is to say, instead of being an assistant to Adam's spiritual development, she became a temptress and caused his fall.

Wenceslas Hollar – Creation of man and beast (unknown date, author lived 1607-1677)

After woman's creation, Adam rejoiced that he finally (νῦν) found the help that God

had promised him. He then proclaimed and prophesied the destiny of this unity of the two[5]. Man and woman are meant to be one flesh, reshaping the face of humanity as God had originally intended — one human nature. We have here the institution of marriage with some innovative sociological insights. In the ancient Near East, a woman was to leave her family and join her husband's. Contrary to this custom, Adam commands men to leave everything and follow their wives. Nevertheless, this unity in one "flesh" contains the element of transience because "flesh" is temporary and mortal. Therefore, marriage is an institution for this present world and does not extend to the next life. For Saint John Chrysostom, man and woman are parts of the whole of humanity; both are incomplete in different ways from each other. They need the other part in order to be complete and their perfection depends on the unity of the two[6]. In Biblical typology, God is the νυμφαγωγός[7] of the first couple and of all couples in all ages.

The Septuagint remained faithful to the original Hebrew text and translated the word *adam* (from *adama*, which means ground) with the word ἄνθρωπος (human person). The authors change to the proper name Ἀδάμ (Adam) only in chapter 2:16 because from there the story of woman's creation is introduced beginning with God's plan that man should not be alone. Nevertheless, according to some interpreters, in the Hebrew text the word *adam* is not used as a proper name but with its literal meaning "humanity" or "people"[8]. Accordingly, woman was not created from the side of man (Adam) but from the side of the first human person. Thus, the proclamation of Adam that woman (*issa*) was created from man (*is*) makes it appear that this is a sociological influence inserted into the text[9]. This obstacle for the interpreters of the Hebrew text gave rise to the idea that the first human person was created as an androgynous being. However, this idea was never adopted by Christian theology.

The unique creation of the human person in the image and likeness of God is a great honor bestowed by God to humanity, but a difficult issue for the interpreters of the text. Although the double expression: *besalmenu kidemutenu* in Gen. 1:26 connects the descriptive *saelaem* (plastic picture, image) with the abstract *demut* (similarity, likeness)[10] as they have two different meanings, the translation of the Septuagint indicates the use of the terms "*image*" and "*likeness*" as interchangeable[11]. Nevertheless, the patristic interpretation understands "*image*" as given in the act of creation, while "*likeness*" has to be accomplished by the will of the human person working with God. Use of the descriptive word *saelaem* (plastic picture, image) in the text should not lead us to say that it is an attempt to present an anthropomorphism of God. On the contrary, it is a theomorphism of the human person[12]. The main point in the narrative is that the human person is not

self-sustaining but comes from God and lives a transparent life in His presence. Humanity came into existence from the beginning, sharing something with its Creator (His breath[13]) and representing God in this world according to the original meaning of the word *saelaem*[14].

After the Bible, Tatian was the first of the Christian writers to use the terms "image and likeness," and understood them as referring to the Holy Spirit which made man to share in God's immortality. After the fall, humans were separated from God's Spirit and became mortal[15]. "For man had been made a middle nature, neither wholly mortal nor altogether immortal but capable of either"[16]. According to Professor John Romanides: "Moral perfection and immortality […] constitute the whole basis of understanding the image and likeness of God and the early Christian doctrine of the fall and salvation"[17]. In spite of various interpretation of the image and likeness of God, we can see this as a cross with the horizontal dimension referring to the unity of human nature[18] and the vertical dimension referring to our relationship with God[19].

The beloved creatures were put into Paradise to enjoy happiness with only one restriction. There was a fruit that was forbidden to them. The tree of "knowing good and evil" is only mentioned in Genesis and nowhere else in Scripture. Saint Theophilus of Antioch says: "… the tree of knowledge itself was good, and its fruit was good. For it was not the tree, as some think, but the disobedience which had death in it. For there was nothing else in the fruit but knowledge; knowledge, however, is good when one uses it discreetly"[20]. In the Old Testament, knowledge is not theoretical and objectively far from the subject, but includes the subject [21] some times in a very materialistic way such as the knowing of Eve by Adam "*now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain*"[22]. Accordingly, in the Old Testament, knowing God is to be known by God and presupposes a mutual relationship. Thus, the knowing of God comprises a personal characteristic of mutual recognition. The same must apply in the case of the knowing of good and evil. This is how sin and evil entered human life.

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[1] J. Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin,* (Ridgewood, 2002), 126.

[2] Irenaeus, *Refutation* quoted in Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin,* 158.

[3] St. Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus*, in Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin*, 125.

[4] «πρός τόν ἂνδρα σου ἡ ἀποστροφή σου, καί αὐτός σου κυριεύσει» Gen 3:16.

[5] «τοῦτο νῦν ὀστοῦν ἐκ τῶν ὀστέων μου καί σάρξ ἐκ τῆς σαρκός μου · αὐτη

κληθήσετε γυνή, ὃτι ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρός αὐτῆς ἐλήφθη αὕτη' ἕνεκεν τούτου καταλείψει ἄνθρωπος τόν πατέρα αὐτοῦ καί τήν μητέρα καί προσκολληθήσεται πρός τήν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, καί ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν» Gen 2:23,24.

[6] More about Chrysostom's interpretation on marriage in S. Papadopoulos, "Ὁ Γάμος: Μυστήριο Ἀγάπης καί Μυστήριο «εἰς Χριστόν» (Θεολογική προσέγγιση τοῦ μυστηριακοῦ χαρακτήρα τοῦ Γάμου)" in the book Ιερά Σύνοδος της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος, Ὁ Γάμος στήν Ὀρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία, (Αθήνα, 2004).

[7]The one who brings the bride to the groom.

[8] Pentiuc, Jesus the Messiah, 8.

[9] Ibid., 21.

[10] W. Zimmerli, Ἐπίτομη Θεολογία τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης, Μετάφραση Π. Στογιάννος, Β΄ Έκδοση, (Αθήνα, 2001), 42.

[11] Pentiuc, Jesus the Messiah, 9.

[12] Zimmerli, Ἐπίτομη Θεολογία, 43.

[13] «καί ἐνεφύσησεν εἰς τό πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πνοήν ζωῆς, καί ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰς ψυχήν ζῶσαν» Gen 2:7.

[14] C. Westermann, Genesis 1-1: A Commentary, trans. John Scullion (Minneapolis, 1984), 147-155.

[15] Romanides, The Ancestral Sin, 147.

[16] St. Theophilus of Antioch, To Autolycus, in Romanides, The Ancestral Sin, 125.

[17] Romanides, The Ancestral Sin, 111.

[18]We are all connected to others because we all share in God's image.

[19] We need to be in communion with our Creator. See Pentiuc, Jesus the Messiah, 6, 13.

[20] St. Theophilus of Antioch, To Autolycus, in Romanides, The Ancestral Sin, 125

[21] Zimmerli, Ἐπίτομη Θεολογία, 185.

[22] «Ἀδάμ δέ ἒγνω Εὒαν τήν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ καί συλλαβοῦσα ἒτεκε τόν Κάϊν» Gen 4:1. Biblical texts in English are taken from *The Orthodox Study Bible*, (St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology, 2008).