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Chapter 1

The Story of Eden

(Genesis 2:4b- 3:24)

"And there was not a man to till the ground"(vss. 4-9)

It has been observed that the beginning of verse 4 adds a dimension of time to the narrative and links the account with History, especially because of the word תולדות.¹ Whether or not this is true, it would seem to me more appropriate to consider the increased anthropocentricity of Genesis 2:4-3:24 as a literary unit.² This aspect is especially apparent in the first expositional passage in verses 4-6.³ It is important to note in this regard that in biblical narrative, the exposition is strictly confined to the factors which contribute most directly to the essence of the conflict. In most cases these consist of two facts which have to be logically connected in the mind of the audience.⁴

In the present instance, man is presented as being the cause of the process of vegetation. Two entwined reasons are given to explain why no vegetation grew. One is that God had not yet caused the rain to fall on the earth; the other is that there was no man to cultivate the ground. Clearly the logical sequence implies that man was the ultimate factor that made growing things spring from the earth. In other words, from the order of statements we may conclude that, even if God had sent the rain, the process of growth would not have been possible without man.⁵

In Genesis 1 we were told how man's introduction into the world gave momentum to life's processes and the multiplication of living things. Thus a distinction is drawn between the creating of things and the process of their existence. Such an interpretation may offer a solution to the discrepancy between Genesis 1 and 2. For it seems plausible that the Priestly author had understood that while Genesis 1 concentrated on the order of Creation, in which the culmination was man, Genesis 2

centres on man as the cause of existence. Thus the two literary units complement each other. That this existential aspect is the main point of the account in Genesis 2 is perhaps to be understood, as well, from the emphasis placed on man's having become a נפש חיה (= "a living soul" in KJV; "a living being" in RSV and NAS)

However the chief aspect of the narrative of Genesis 2 is the central role assigned in it to man. This attitude towards man is reinforced in other parts of the chapter. It is man who gives names to all living creatures, and even the response to the creation of woman is testified to only by man's statement. Having thus been made aware of the anthropocentricity of attitude here, we must conclude that man cannot be expected to act in this narrative merely as an obedient being, having no freedom of choice. And if the course of the narrative corresponds to what has been laid down in its exposition, then the essential nature of the conflict must be re-examined. For it no longer seems entirely appropriate to regard the story of Eden as the story of the origin of sin and man's fall.

The Four Rivers

Although it is quite customary in Old Testament narrative for a story to be placed in a geographical setting, the detailed information which is furnished about the four rivers in verses 10-14 is a feature which stands out quite noticeable in the text.⁸ The fact that the four rivers do not surround the garden, and are therefore not to be regarded as boundaries, is not very significant. Since we are told nothing about the river which went out of Eden to water the garden, the four rivers which parted from it remain the only features by which the location might be identified.⁹

In order to understand the function of the description in Genesis 2:10-14, the nature of its details must first be considered. The quantity of information which is furnished concerning each river is in inverse ratio to the listener's knowledge. It is as though the more the audience knew of a particular river, the less needed to be said about it. In the case of the Euphrates, no explanation was required; so it might be disposed of in the mere statement: "And the fourth river is Euphrates."¹⁰ On the other hand, the relatively long description given of the first river, Pishon, would indicate that the audience may not have been able to identify it

by its name, and that each additional detail only aroused further astonishment and wonderment; causing the narrator to continue his account to a point that all doubt might be allayed, with the announcement that "the bdellium and the onyx stone are there."¹¹ The Tigris was certainly as well known as the Euphrates. So that the added intelligence that "It flows east of Assyria" would seem to come as a consequence of analogical correspondence with the second river, Gihon, which had to be defined in a formulaic way. Thus after being exposed to a disconcerting quantity of detail, the audience had to be assured that this was really the same Tigris as the one they were familiar with.

The entire passage contained in verses 10-14 is therefore structured so as to present the site as bordered by a very familiar river, on one hand, and by a river which was completely unknown on the other. This may be taken to signify that the story takes place on the treshold between reality and imagination, and should be classified accordingly as being close to the genre of parable¹² rather than etiology.¹³ In other words, at the core of this story is an effort to present a philosophical problem having to do with principles, and not an attempt to identify certain particular phenomena of life.¹⁴ However an assumption such as this needs to be verified by a close analysis of the narrative.

Prohibition and Afterthought

The intention of God's prohibition is somewhat obscure, at least at this stage of the narrative. There is no agreement among commentators on the interpretation of "good and evil"; nor are they agreed as to whether God really meant man to exist without knowledge of these.¹⁵ However an examination of the structure of the paragraph of 2:15-18 may yield an insight into some aspect of God's attitude.¹⁶ God's observation that "It is not good that man should be alone" should not be seen as being isolated from its immediate context. Verse 18 is not the beginning of a new paragraph. So that God's words here should rather be understood as the direct consequence of His decree. In other words, if the first thing we are told after this severe prohibition concerns what God thought of man's being alone, then the statement must be understood as being God's response to His own command. What is therefore being alluded to is the idea that God Himself thought that man had been forced to confront an unbearable prohibition.¹⁷ The sense of solitude here is the

direct outcome of man's being compelled to deal with an unprecedented dilemma. Thus if God's prohibition to man is followed immediately by His concern over man's solitude, the implication would appear to be that God had understood that His command was excessively hard, if not even impossible to abide by.¹⁸

Although this does not really clarify the meaning of the prohibition itself, it perhaps helps us better to understand the nature of the story. It illustrates God's coming closer to man, thereby contradicting any conception by which God might be imagined as a remote and aloof deity, above all intent to limit human freedom, and who accordingly takes every precautions to prevent any possibility of rivalry or encroachment on man's part.¹⁹

Creatures and Names

There are two principal ways in which verse 19 might be interpreted. One is to see it as a naive attempt to ease man's solitude. Such an understanding inevitably points to a naive conception of God.²⁰ The second approach is somewhat more complex. The words ויצר האלהים at the beginning of the opening phrase should be translated as: "And the Lord God *had* formed" rather than merely "And the Lord God *formed*". This would indicate that God had already done His work earlier; that is to say, before His decree and before He gave any thought to man's solitude.²¹ I am not suggesting by this another placement for the verse, which is properly located. I am suggesting, rather, that it should be understood as the narrator's comment, introduced by him at this juncture in order to let us know that man was not absolutely alone, but was occupied in carrying out a task of the highest responsibility. The word "alone" must therefore have a specific meaning.

Appendix 1 discusses the significance of the act of appellation.²² Thus calling a creature by name epitomizes its nature; so that in telling us that God brought every living creature to the man to see what he would call them, the narrator means to convey to us that God had bestowed upon man the claim of lordship over these creatures. However in emphasizing that "whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name" (v.19), the narrator certainly did not mean that the names were chosen at random. The giving of names must have been a consequence of man's having become familiar with the nature and the

traits of all the creatures.²³ We are thus being given to understand that man was well acquainted with his environment, and that he had acquired experience and taken on responsibilities.

The implication is therefore that man's solitude was moral and spiritual in nature, and not physical; and that God had indeed learnt that this isolation was an outcome of the prohibition He had imposed upon man. And if this is the case, then it may also be reasonably assumed that God was not taken altogether by surprise at man's disobedience.

The Serpent and the Woman

By virtue of his role, the serpent seems to me principally to embody the idea of subversion of authority.²⁴ His direct and unequivocal subversion is aimed at the authority with which man was endowed. Now that God's prohibition has banned man from attaining ultimate superiority over nature, it also initiates an inevitable process of ever growing conflict between man and nature. This single prohibition thereby makes manifest the idea that man's access to nature's elements is limited. Thus it signifies, as well, the resistance of nature itself to man's governance — in other words, nature's assertion of its independence. In being characterized as "more subtle than any other wild creature" the serpent is implicitly made to represent this very aspect of nature.

But this conflict should also be seen from the perspective of man. Having become familiar at first hand with the cycles and successive movements of life — that experience concluding with the naming of creatures — man must have realized that implicit in nature itself is also the knowledge of good and evil. He must therefore have understood the acceptance of God's prohibition as representing man's acknowledgment of nature's superiority. In this sense, the serpent gives testimony of the wisdom inherent in nature, a wisdom which is denied to man.²⁵ From this standpoint, the serpent's role illuminates the reason for God's prohibition. Since nature's Knowledge of good and evil is inherent in its cycles of life and death, God's intention appears to have been to exclude man from their compass, for man was the only living creature made in God's image. This understanding of the text receives reinforcement from God's prediction of the consequences to man of his disobedience (3:17-19). Yet God's intention also to preserve mankind from

the process of nature is inherent in His imposition of His own ultimate goodness on man. As it turns out, this would seem to be the basis of the conflict in the story of Eden.²⁶

Thus it appears that the serpent speaks the truth in his encounter with the woman. For to him, as indeed to all the rest of the creatures and elements of nature, it is not the knowledge of good and evil which is the cause of death. If man — without whom the ecological process could not be set in motion — were to obtain knowledge of good and evil, he would acquire nature's wisdom and master it as well, thereby becoming like God.

However, in talking with the woman, the means of subversion employed by the serpent are patently clear. He presents God's prohibition in words which are deliberately exaggerated and extreme. Had the serpent asked the woman whether it were true that she and the man could not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, then plausibly the woman would have denied it. However by putting the case as if man's authority had been circumscribed in the severest degree, the serpent compels the woman to defend her standing. Which she indeed proceeds to do by asserting that the prohibition was very limited, as was only the truth of the matter.

Two major points emerge from the dialogue between the serpent and the woman. In the first place it confirms for us that there was no misunderstanding of God's decree. The woman recalled God's words and was able to repeat them. The fact that she changes them by eliminating the words *כל עץ* and its attendant accentuation *אכל תאכל* only demonstrates that she considered this permission to be of no special significance.²⁷ But the dialogue also furnishes us with the immediate reason for her having been lured into eating of the fruit of the tree. As the representative of the wisdom of creatures, the serpent has provided the woman with an understanding she had lacked prior to this encounter. The serpent's assertion in 3:5 ("For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you would thus will be like God knowing good and evil")²⁸ would thus have been understood by her to mean that God's intention for mankind to have dominion over every living thing upon the earth was somehow ambiguous and enigmatic²⁹ — hence its challenge.

"So when the woman saw..." (v.6)

Genesis 3:6 possibly furnishes the grounds for a further understanding of God's prohibition, and of the challenge which the woman was made to confront. If the woman was able to see that the tree was good for food before having eaten it,³⁰ then the only explanation that offers itself to account for this circumstance is that *ותרא האשה* should not be translated as "so when the woman saw", but rather "when the woman saw" — i.e. "and since the woman had seen".³¹ In my view, this part of the verse refers to the past. The woman must have already known that the tree was good for food; but now that her obedience was challenged, it became also "a delight to the eyes".³² She could only have known that the fruit was edible if it were no different from the fruit of the other trees which were not included in the prohibition. It was the fact of the forbidden fruit being like other fruits in the garden that had made the prohibition seem unreasonable and therefore implausible.³³ Had the fruit of this tree been different, then this difference would have been sufficient reason unto itself for the prohibition. All that one needs to do when confronted by an inexplicable disciplinary demand is to get hold of some alternative or substitute reason to justify obedience. This might consist in the simple procedure of inference, such as saying: "Green is good for food, but this is red, and therefore it is not good." It is only in the total absence of a reasoned justification that obedience is put to the test. Hence if we assume that it was God's intention to question man's capacity to accept God's ultimate goodness, and therefore to test his obedience,³⁴ we should also have to maintain that the fruit did not of itself constitute any reason for the prohibition. The woman's test is thus a test in the most extreme sense.

This leads us to still further conclusions concerning the structure and meaning of verse 6 as a whole. What the verse presents us with are the stages of education, or rather of cognitive development. The first stage, as discussed in the foregoing, is that of intuitive thought.³⁵ The second stage is suggested in the words "and that it was a delight for the eyes", which are expressive of the desire to learn; whereas the concluding phrase, "and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise", in its way refers to analytical thinking.

The woman's thought process can also be seen as demonstrating the close link between rebellion and the readiness to learn.³⁶ But learning also involves exchange of experience; so that sociability is inherent in

the very nature of learning. This is how I understand the woman's action of giving some of the fruit to her husband — rather than to regard it as merely illustrating another way of falling into sin, by joining in the transgression.³⁷

Nevertheless the significance of the immediate consequences of disobedience must not be underestimated. So far as I know, most commentators have concentrated on the man and the woman's awareness of their nakedness, rather than on preceding words.³⁸ The statement "Then the eyes of both were opened," may contain an allusion to what followed God's first act of Creation, thereby establishing a significant parallel between the experiences of both God and man. The words "And there was light" are expressive of the divine objective perception of the initial result; while the assertion "Then the eyes of both were opened" describes the subjective perception of the living beings themselves. It is noteworthy in this regard that in other biblical contexts the opening of the eyes — or their brightening or being illumined — refers to a person's resuscitation rather than the merely attainment of understanding.³⁹ Therefore in the same way that God learnt the light was good after having created it, man's eyes were opened (or enlightened) after his act of rebellion; and just as God's inference concerning the light led to His completion of this labour by separating the light from the darkness, so did man complete his experience by acquiring knowledge of good and evil.

Support for the interpretation that the opening of the eyes of the man and woman in Eden represents the moment of man's real coming to life is perhaps also furnished by the fact that this was the moment when the man called his wife Eve "because she was the mother of all living."⁴⁰ Nor should we overlook the fact that the explanation for Eve's name is given only after the act of rebellion had been committed, not before.⁴¹

Of all the interpretations which have been put forward concerning nakedness and consciousness of nakedness, that of Erich Fromm appears to me best to suit the present case.⁴² Thus according to Fromm, the authority which had earlier been transmitted to man results in the feeling of being exposed to the uncertainties of an unknown future.⁴³ Authority furnishes protection and security; for the demands, prescriptions, prohibitions, and limits that are imposed by authority also provide a shield against the intolerable burden that is the consequence of freedom.

Therefore the disobedience in the Garden is also an act of breaking away. The Garden with its four rivers can be seen as an ideal protective enclosure, a sanctuary where man could be spared the necessity of facing the choice between good and evil.⁴⁴ God in His Creation had already made the choice. Everything He had created was "Very good"; and He could do nothing other than to deny to mankind of His making any possibility of reverting to a premordial condition of struggle. For to the God of Goodness it was inevitable that He should present goodness as the only existing option.

Yet any step taken in the direction of maturing towards independence is an act of rebellion as well. The very first act of disobedience is itself a statement of dissent. Once a child has refused to accept the reason for any word of his parents, the child also faces an irreversible process of alienation which leads to independence.⁴⁵ And since independence is indispensable to the achievement of the virtue of goodness, it seems to me a very plausible interpretation of the story of man's first disobedience that it should be regarded not as an account of man's fall,⁴⁶ but rather the story of a tragic collision between God's uncompromising goodness and man's uncompromising need, inherent in the very process of human existence, to achieve goodness through a knowledge of good and evil obtained through his own experience.

The next stage in the story therefore need not necessarily consist in the alienation of God from man.⁴⁷ Rather, it seems to me, the story illustrates in more than one way how God, in His capacity as the God of Goodness, had manifestly to demonstrate that freedom of choice is a virtue even more sacred to Him than is obedience to His own goodness.

God's Response

The scene of the encounter with God opens by depicting how the man and his wife felt in His presence. Unlike the situation in other scenes setting out the response of God to sin in the book of Genesis, in the present instance God does not come down to see the evil.⁴⁸ On hearing the sound of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day,⁴⁹ the man and wife, though probably unconsciously, nevertheless sense God's closeness and can conceive it, even if they find it fearful.⁵⁰ Even their hiding can be understood in more than one way. It might be taken as evidence of their ingenuousness and incapacity to imagine an

omniscient deity. But it can also be interpreted as representing a symbolic step towards independence. For manifestly their eyes having been opened, the man and woman also wish to assert their individuality by freeing themselves from the presence of God,⁵¹ intending thereby to face their new reality.

In linking his nakedness with his fear, the man's response to God's questioning him also indicates that his exposure had raised a barrier between himself and the Deity. God's further questioning provokes the man into impertinence,⁵² when he refers to "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me". For the man's words would suggest that, should he stand accused, then the fault had been God's in the first place.⁵³ When the woman therefore next shifts the blame to the serpent, we are presented with a reverse chain of cause and effect that also leads back to the Creator.

Yet in the history of the commentary on the episode, efforts to understand the teaching of the story have concentrated entirely on the words of God in verses 14-19.⁵⁴ It is from these verses that many commentators derive their notions of either the etiological origins of this narrative or of its originally dealing with general philosophical issues concerning the mysteries of life.⁵⁵ According to a widely accepted view, the narrative of Genesis 3 was meant to furnish answers to questions about how evil came into the world, or concerning mankind's fate. Some have assumed that among these were specific questions, such as why childbirth should involve so much suffering and pain; or why man is condemned to work hard for his living; or why such enmity existed between man and the serpent; or even why mankind has been deprived of eternal life.⁵⁶

I would however propose that the story of Eden, at least at the stage of the redaction of the entire Creation narrative, reflects a level of thinking in which such questions no longer preoccupied the authors.⁵⁷ God's words to the woman and the man should thus be understood not as a pronouncement of divine punishment or retribution, but as representing God's tuition or guidance.⁵⁸ God's response, taken as a whole, bespeaks reconciliation rather than anger or disappointment — as if to say that having refused to accept God's goodness, and preferring to acquire knowledge in his own way, man should know what lay in store for him in the future. God thus manifests ultimate divine goodness by demonstrating His preference of free will even to His own goodness.

If what God says to the woman is interpreted in this light, then *עצב* and *עצבון* need not to be taken to mean merely "pain" or "sorrow". The root *עצב* has also the meaning of "design" or "create"; which is why in various biblical contexts idols are spoken of as *עצבים* so as to imply that they were designed and created by man.⁵⁹ But even if we follow the traditional understanding of these expressions, still the meaning of God's words to the woman is that, since she and the man chose to acquire knowledge by their own experience, the process of procreation could no longer be as it was when man woke from a deep sleep to find beside him new flesh of his flesh. Free will had above all to be made manifest in the generation of life. Hence bearing children and bringing them up must be an unceasing process of making choices and decisions leading to design and creation.

There is another reason which seems to me to weigh in favour of understanding the episode in this way. It is unlikely that any Old Testament author or redactor, especially in periods of historical crisis,⁶⁰ was likely to have adopted a narrative which implied that childbirth was to be regarded as something painful and a cause of sorrow. The notion that bearing children is associated with happiness is the prevalent view in the Old Testament; whereas instances of painful delivery are exceptional, and connected with disaster.⁶¹

The same concept might be validly applied, as well, to the supposed etiological issue of man's being condemned to obtain his living by hard toil. Any advanced state of civilization must have been attended by an increased awareness that experience always teaches new ways of easing human toil, of obtaining relief from labour, and of enjoying a more luxurious existence. In those religious contexts which imply a protest against some of the fundamental concepts of environmental religions, such questions about the necessity of mankind's hard toil would seem quite irrelevant.

Thus God in speaking to man also predicts the consequences of man's choice. This interpretation calls for a re-examination of the word *ארוּרָה* (v.17), whose translation as "cursed" may be misleading. For *ארוּרָה* does not merely mean "curse"; it refers principally to a very specific curse which bears the sense of banishment, ostracism, or excommunication.⁶² This is apparent in those Biblical instances in which the context is more specific and elaborate, such as Jer.17:5-6: "...Cursed (=ארוּרָה) is the man who trusts in man. ...He shall be like a bush in the desert ...It is set in the scorched places of the wilderness, In a barren

land without inhabitant", or even 1 Sam. 26:19: "...If the Lord has incited you against me, let Him be appeased by an offering; but if it is men, may they be accursed (= ארורים) of the Lord! For they have driven me out today, so that I cannot have a share in the Lord's possession..." (See also Deut. 28:16,19; Jud. 21:18 etc.) So that ארורה האדמה בעבורך would be interpreted as meaning that there would be henceforth a barrier between man and the earth, and they would be alienated from each other; since by his act of rebellion man also "broke through the state of harmony with nature" of which he had been part.⁶³ Thus the thorns and thistles do not stand for instruments of punishment, but rather are a metonymic representation of the trials and errors through which man would have to pass on the way to his achievements.⁶⁴

The other details in God's address to the woman and the man can best be interpreted along similar lines. The second part of verse 16 is highly ambiguous — particularly since תשוקה occurs only in two other contexts in the Old Testament.⁶⁵ However the common denominator in the use of the term within the context of Genesis 3:16 and 4:7, as well as the structure of both verses, may give an indication of the idea which is being expressed.

In both verses משל and תשוקה represent two contradictory notions. The meaning of משל is not merely "to dominate". In its usage in Wisdom contexts, taken even as the name of a literary genre,⁶⁶ it implies the notion of domination through understanding or wisdom. Within the structures of both 3:16 and 4:7, תשוקה is presented as standing in contradiction to משל; so there are reasonable grounds to assume that תשוקה implies the idea of being dominated by uncontrollable desire.⁶⁷ Thus the phrase ואל איש תשוקתך והוא ימשל בך would seem to suggest the idea of tension between man and woman. On one side there is the dominance of reason; and on the other, submission to desire or passion.⁶⁸ This division of roles between man and woman reflects the conventional notions of patriarchal society in antiquity.⁶⁹ Yet in their present context these words, in their capacity as a prediction, also imply the idea as well that by the choice of the path of experience mankind was also led into a way of life in which the relationship between the sexes would inevitably be based on polarity.⁷⁰ We might even say that in the same way that God's harmony and order had emerged from primordial chaos, so too must harmony between man and woman now emerge from the condition of polarity. In creating woman as man's companion, God also

intended to prevent such polar tension between them; but their choice had brought forth the necessity for the whole process to take place.⁷¹

Three other points can be raised in support of the assumption that God's response to man's deed is to be understood as offering guidance and reconciliation rather than punishment.

1. It was only at the end of the encounter with God that the man called his wife Eve (חַוָּה) because she was the mother of all living.⁷² This would correspond with the significance of the giving of names which was discussed earlier.⁷³ Accordingly, the particular order in which the events are set out would imply that the real commencement of life occurred only after man had made his rebellious choice. In other words, the process of life owes its actual existence to the woman's decision.⁷⁴ And if this is so, then it seems highly unlikely that it was the unambiguous intention of the narrator to treat the eating of the forbidden fruit as a sin and to present God's words as a sentence of punishment, so that the entire narrative of Genesis 3 might be read as the story of man's fall.⁷⁵

2. The apodosis of this scene (vv.8-21)⁷⁶ tells of God making garments of skins for Adam and his wife and clothing them.⁷⁷ Not only does this account portray God as an intimate and caring protector who consistently offers protection to the transgressors when it is most needed (as is shown also in the story which follows); but the entire scene is thereby invested with the meaning of reconciliation. In clothing Adam and his wife with the garments He Himself had made for them, God also equips them for their departure. Thus the couple's expulsion from the garden is not meant as an ending of the relationship, as though the gates had been slammed shut behind them.

3. As was pointed out by Cassuto, the succeeding story opens in an atmosphere which is altogether optimistic.⁷⁸ The way in which the narrator reports about the birth of a son and the woman's response demonstrates that Adam and Eve were not in a dejected frame of mind. This would have been out of place were it the narrator's main concern to express the idea of man's fall.⁷⁹

On the other hand, the only one who had not been questioned by God, and given the chance to defend himself, was the serpent. God's speech to the serpent may therefore rightly be interpreted as a sentence of punishment. And the reason for the severity of the banishment of the serpent is again to be seen as having to do with the creature's role as the representative of the wisdom of nature. Thus in isolating and banishing the serpent, God conveys the idea that henceforward man alone is assigned the task of acquiring knowledge and wisdom; and that he must achieve this by his own toil in order to exploit nature's gifts. Nature for its part will make no active contribution to human

accomplishments. The reciprocity of contribution to the achievement of a common goal could persist only in a state of harmony. But now that the harmony between man and his environment that had sheltered him was violated by man's own choice, it is left for man alone to bear the burden of providing for the ecology. The serpent, who had been the one to initiate the subversion against the existing order, must therefore become an eternal enemy of man. Nevertheless we need not necessarily interpret the serpent's fate in an extreme etiological sense. The words "upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat" are not intended to mean that the serpent could previously walk on legs, or had been nourished by a different diet.⁸⁰ They are rather being used figuratively. In the same way that the "thorns and thistles" which the ground would bring forth for man are employed as metonyms representing the fruits of error, so too are the serpent's creeping upon his belly and eating of dust metonyms. These are the creature's conspicuous characteristics; and in stressing them God makes it plain that the serpent would never trespass his limits again and communicate with man.

It seems to me therefore that to call Genesis 2-3 the "Story of Man's Fall" is inappropriate to the story's meaning.⁸¹ It should be seen rather as an account of the tragic collision between two virtues. On one hand there is the virtue of God's absolute and perfect goodness, which is inherent in the need to spare humanity the ordeals and hazards of experience. Juxtaposed to this is the uncompromising virtue of free will and the freedom of choice, in the absence of which no goodness is really ever obtained.

The order and structure of Genesis 1 had served to introduce God as a moral deity for whom the freedom of life, and therefore of will, was sacred. Thus the question which is at the core of the succeeding narrative in Genesis 2-3 would be a direct consequence of this premise. The question which it addresses is whether God's attitude to free will was stronger than even His expectation that Man would obey His decrees and worship the order He had established. The answer given is that God could only be reconciled with man's choice; and in consequence mankind was set on the long and tortuous path of self-experience. To understand the sequel, the questions that are principally at issue in Genesis 4 should be set out as follows: (1) What will be the consequences of man's disobedience? (2) How far will God go in preferring free choice to any other virtue; in other words, to what extent will God refrain from imposing His justice.