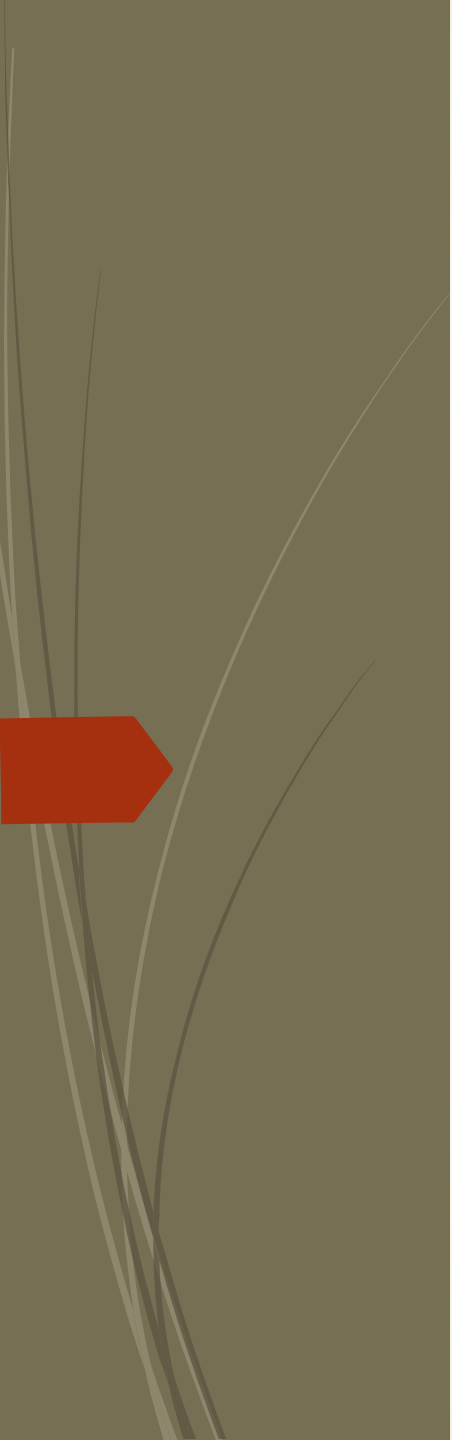




Myths and Mythology (HPHP4006)

Women, Life, and Creation: Eve and her
'Afterlife' in Jewish and Christian Interpretations

Catrin H. Williams

‘Eve’ in Biblical Texts

- [Genesis 1:27, 2:4b-4:2a](#): explanation of the origins of creation and humanity.
- [II Corinthians 11:3 \(Paul\)](#): ‘But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.’
- [I Timothy 2:11-13](#): ‘Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived, and became a transgressor.’

The 'Afterlife' of Eve

- 'No biblical character has been more misunderstood or more maligned than the woman of the Garden' (Trevor Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, page 8).

Gauguin, *Human Miseries and Eve* (1889)





The 'Afterlife' of Eve

Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*

The story of Eden should be rejected as a personification of patriarchy.

David Clines, *What does Eve do to help?*

The text of Genesis 2-3 is totally male-oriented and, as a result, should be abandoned in favour of biblical passages that proclaim a message of salvation to all humanity.



A New Reading of Genesis 1-3

An attempt to 'depatriarchalize' (Phyllis Tribble) the creation narratives by focusing on the form and structure of the text, as well as its content.



Specific details in the text need to be examined anew.



How have certain key terms in the original (Hebrew) text been translated by generations of scholars and translators?



The ‘Woman’ and the ‘Man’

- ‘The woman’ or ‘the female’ ,
not ‘Eve’ (a name that she
does not receive until Genesis
3:20).
- ‘The male’ or ‘the man’ ,
because the term ‘*adam*’ is
not used as a proper name
(Adam) until Genesis 4:25.



Two Creation Accounts in the Hebrew Bible

Genesis 1:1-2:4a - the
Priestly author or 'P'
(sixth century BCE).

Genesis 2:4b-3:24 - the
Yahwistic author or 'J'
(tenth or ninth century
BCE).



Account 1: the Creation of Humanity in the Image of God

‘It was quite obvious that woman - not even her soul - was created in the image of God’ (Diodore of Tarsus, *Fragments on Genesis 1:26*).

‘For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection (or ‘glory’) of God; but woman is the reflection (or ‘glory’ of man’ (I Corinthians 11:7).

Creation of Humankind

‘So God created
humankind in his
image,
in the image of God
he created them;
male and female he
created them’.

(Genesis 1:27, New
Revised Standard
Version).

- Humankind
- Hebrew: 'adam (cf. 'adamah = soil/dust) > 'one from the soil/dust' > 'earth-creature' (Trible.
- No suggestion of sexual hierarchy or the absence of the divine image (*imago Dei*) in the female.
- Their unity is highlighted; both together are blessed by God and receive a command to multiply and to fill the earth (1:28).



'Male and Female He Created Them'

'Adam and Eve' (Four-thirds
Camera, Calendar 2007,
myfourthirds.com)

Account 2: God Creates the First Woman (Genesis 2:4b-25)

A narrative about two individuals (one male, one female) who are created by God and are able to converse with God.

Women's inferiority has been argued on the basis of the following features of Genesis 2:

1. God created the female after the male.
2. She was created from the rib of the male.
3. Her role was to help her husband.



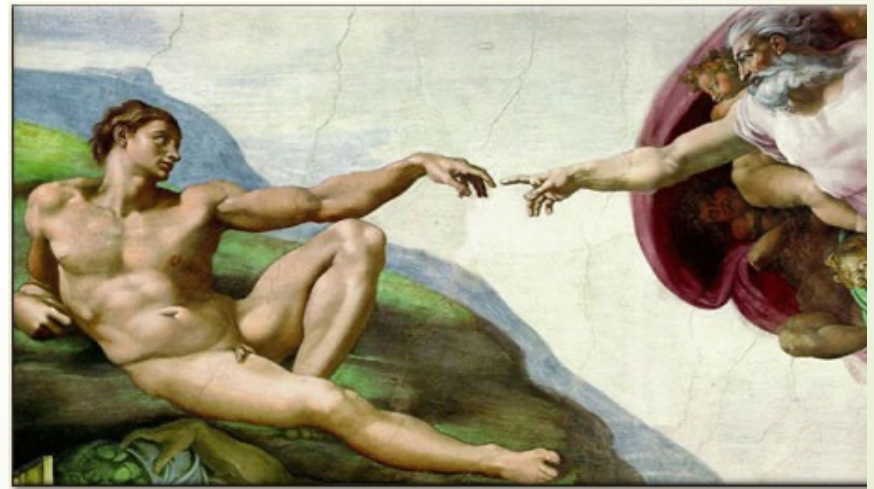
1. The Creation of Woman after the Man

‘Then the Lord God formed man (*ha-’adam*) from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being’ (Genesis 2:7).

1. The Creation of Woman after the Man

'The Creation of Adam' and 'The Creation of Eve' (Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel, The Vatican, 1510).

'Adam's perfection far excell'd hers in all real dignity' (John Milton, *Paradise Lost* 10:150-151).





1. The Creation of Woman after the Man

- Does the term *ha- 'adam* denote ‘*the Human Being*’, who only becomes a masculine figure after the woman is created (Trible: ‘earth creature’)?
- The beginning of account 2 (unlike account 1) does not refer to humankind in general, but to an individual.
- From the perspective of the author, every individual is either male or female.
- Note the phrase ‘the man (*ha- 'adam*) and his wife’ (Genesis 2:25; 3:8).



1. The Creation of Woman after the Man

Genesis 2:7 - sexual hierarchy and subordination of women?

No claim that temporal priority = male superiority over the female.

No suggestion made by later interpreters that humanity is inferior because of the temporal priority of the creation of the animals.



2. The Creation of Woman from the Side of the Man

The creation of humanity (four horizontal boards on a leaf of the Grandval-Bible in Tours, ca. 840 CE).

First row: angels look on as God forms the bodies of Adam and Eve. God, the potter, forms Adam, before removing a rib from Adam's side to form Eve.

2. The Creation of Woman from the Side of the Man

‘So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib (*sela* ¹) that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man’
(Genesis 2:21-22 New Revised Standard Version).



2. The Creation of Woman from the Side of the Man

The word *sela* ‘ is traditionally rendered as ‘rib’ . Elsewhere the same Hebrew word is used for:

- The sides of the tabernacle (Exodus 26:26)
- The side of the Temple (Ezekiel 41:11)
- The side of the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:12)
- The side or slope of a mountain (II Samuel 16:13).

Could the author of Genesis 2 also be thinking that God took one of the male’s sides rather than an (insignificant) rib in order to create the woman?



2. The Creation of Woman from the Side of the Man

The Creation of Eve - 15th century Spanish altarpiece by Fernando Gallego.



The Creation of Eve - 20th century lithograph from a French Bible.

2. The Creation of Woman from the Side of the Man

- Does the author of Genesis 2 intend to use the creation of the woman from the man's body as evidence of her inferiority? Is man inferior to dust?
- Side/rib and dust are the raw materials from which God gives life to the man and the woman.
- Man is incomplete until the woman is created, while the emphasis is on partnership rather than hierarchy.

‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken’ (Gen. 2:23).



3. The Woman as Helper

‘Why did God bother to create woman? She is of no use to the man when it comes to physical labour (Genesis 2:18) and her only role is to conceive and bear children’.

Augustine of Hippo,
*A Literal
Commentary on
Genesis 9:5.*

‘Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner’ (Genesis 2:18 NRSV).

God as the [helper](#) who offers support to his people (see Exod. 18:4; Deut. 33:7; Ps. 121:2).

Questions for Discussion

- What is the role of gender in the two creation accounts in Genesis 1-2?
- How is the creation of Eve depicted in theology and art?