

# *Eve & Adam*

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JEWISH, CHRISTIAN, AND MUSLIM  
READINGS ON GENESIS AND GENDER

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such causes as Eve's weaker nature or Adam's failure to master Eve. Thus, the Anabaptist uses of Genesis 1-3 were not fully egalitarian; but Anabaptists refuted many of the elements that had traditionally composed a hierarchical reading.

### English Dissidents: Puritans and Quakers

Protestant movements in England precipitated decades of theological and political controversy, both before and after Queen Elizabeth I (who reigned from 1558 to 1603) established Anglicanism as the state church of England, and thus the official form of English Protestantism. In this chapter, we are particularly interested in examining representatives from two dissident groups of English Protestants: Puritans and Quakers. No interpretation of Genesis 1-3 in Christian history has been more influential than its 1667 Puritan retelling, *Paradise Lost*; and no reformulation of the theological roots of power and authority among Christians was more far-reaching than that of the Quakers.

In *Paradise Lost*, John Milton challenged some of the classic features of a hierarchical reading of Genesis 1-3, but his reconstruction of the Garden of Eden was thoroughly patriarchal. Milton left no doubt that Eve was a good creation. "Godlike erect, with native Honour clad / In naked Majestie," both Eve and Adam to him "seemd Lords of all, / And worthy seemed, for in their looks divine / The image of thir glorious Maker shon . . ." (IV, 288-92). Milton was also convinced of the goodness of sexuality, describing the "conjugal attraction unrep'ov'd" that Eve and Adam felt for each other prior to the Fall. With "kisses pure," they were "imparadis't in one another's arms," innocently enjoying "their fill / Of bliss on bliss" (IV, 492-508). So right was the pleasure that Eve and Adam found in each other, Milton said, that all of nature rejoiced at their "Nuptial Bowre" (VIII, 506-32).

Though Milton saw the mutuality enjoyed by Eve and Adam as God's good gift, he did not posit Eve as Adam's equal. God created Adam "for God only, shee for God in him." Eve was created for subjection, but Adam's rule was so benevolent that Eve found it easy to heed his will (IV, 299-310). Ultimately, however, Eve's charms were so disarming that in her presence Adam was unable to remember that he, as the more rational of the two, was created to rule, and she to follow:

For well I understand in the prime end  
Of Nature her th' inferiour, in the mind  
And inward Faculties, which most Excell;  
. . . yet when I approach  
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems  
And in her self compleat, so well to know  
Her own, that what she wills to do or say  
Seems wisest, vertuousst, discreetest, best;  
All higher knowledge in her presence falls  
Degraded. . . (VIII, 540-52)

Adam's inability to rule his passions set the stage for the Fall. Milton depicted Eve's decision to disobey God as an act of lust. Eve sought not knowledge, but pleasure, as "greedily she ingorg'd without restraint" the forbidden fruit (IX, 791). Once having eaten, Eve wished to share the fruit with Adam, that he might be her equal in this experience of pleasure. Adam saw that disobedience had defaced and deflowered Eve, yet he could not bear to be separated from the woman who was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Adam made a chivalrous decision to join Eve in her disobedience, not, according to Milton, because she deceived Adam, but because, against his better knowledge, he was "fondly overcome with Femal charm" (IX, 896-999).

Only after the Fall did Adam question his earlier conviction that Eve was the "last and best / Of all God's works" (IX, 896-897). Disillusioned by the loss of paradise, Adam was no longer sure that God's decision to give him a woman for a partner was a good choice. Why, he asked, had God created

This noveltie on Earth, this fair defect  
Of Nature, and not fill the World at once  
With Men as Angels without Feminine,  
Or find some other way to generate  
Mankind? this mischief had not then befall'n,  
And more that shall befall, innumerable  
Disturbances on Earth through Femal snares. . . (X, 891-897)

Such deprecations of woman were the product of Adam's fallen reasoning. Nevertheless, Milton's point was that the Fall had occurred because Adam had failed to rule Eve. In the end, *Paradise Lost* presented a thoroughly hierarchical interpretation of Genesis 1-3.

In Margaret Fell (1614-1702), however, English Protestantism offered a thinker who rejected the hierarchical model. Fell belonged to the Quakers, a dissident Protestant group founded by George Fox in the 1640s. By its very existence, Quakerism was a threat to traditional social hierarchies. Quakers did not have a formal clergy; they addressed each other as "thee" and "thou," refusing to use titles of status that set some persons above others; their marriage vows did not require wives to obey their husbands; and they insisted that an "Inner Light" indwelled each person and could empower any one—regardless of gender, class, or race—to speak God's Word.<sup>17</sup> To the dismay of the English mainstream, Quakers permitted women to testify in their religious meetings.

Such a worldview was subversive to the hierarchical presuppositions basic to most Christian theology. Accordingly, Fell's reading of Genesis 1-3 was radically egalitarian. She insisted that Adam and Eve shared the image of God equally and found little significance in the fact that Eve was first to eat the forbidden fruit. Though Eve had sinned first, Fell argued, God had promised that in Eve's seed the serpent would be rebuked. The Scriptures were clear that the Church was female—the church was, after all, the bride of Christ—so, if the female were not to speak in opposition to Satan, there would be none left to testify on God's behalf. Fell noted that it was women who first preached

the resurrection of Christ and that it was male disciples who initially rejected their testimony. Thus, those who "despise and oppose the Message of the Lord God that he sends by Women" rejected the gospel itself.<sup>18</sup>

Fell also pointed to numerous New Testament instances of women's preaching the gospel. She dismissed Paul's instruction (1 Corinthians 14) that women refrain from speaking in church as an admonition for women who were under the law, not the gospel. And she characterized 1 Timothy 2 as a discussion of domestic relations. Wives, she concluded from the text, should not dress immodestly for worship services, and in that sense ought not usurp authority over their husbands; but that directive was irrelevant to the question of women speaking in worship.

Fell's admission that wives should submit to their husbands by dressing modestly was the only explicit remnant of the hierarchical reading of Genesis 1-3. For the rest, her interpretation was remarkably egalitarian. She insisted that the Holy Spirit gave the message of the gospel to men and women alike and concluded that Christendom had fallen so far into apostasy that its opposition to women's speaking in church "had arisen out of the bottomless Pit."<sup>19</sup> Only when Christians freely accepted the Scriptural claim that the truths of the gospel were revealed through women as well as men, she concluded, would the revelations of God once more become clear to the Christian world. The egalitarian reading of Genesis 1-3 had, in the 16 centuries since Jesus's death, no more eloquent advocate than Margaret Fell.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 6, INTRODUCTION

1. Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 381. See also his *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).
2. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, translated by George V. Schick and edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), vol. 1, p. 115.
3. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, pp. 62-71.
4. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, pp. 147-62.
5. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, pp. 115-19, 137-38.
6. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, pp. 198-203, 132-35.
7. John Calvin, *Commentaries on The First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, translated by Rev. John King (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), vol. 1, pp. 95-96, 128-31, 145-54.
8. Calvin, *Commentaries*, vol. 1, pp. 95-96, 128-31, 172.
9. Jane Dempsey Douglass, "Christian Freedom: What Calvin Learned at the School of Women," *Church History* 53 (2) (June 1984): 160-66. See also John Lee Thompson, *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah: Women in Regular and Exceptional Roles in the Exegesis of Calvin, His Predecessors, and His Contemporaries*, *Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 259 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1992). As Dawn DeVries noted in a review of Thompson's book, neither Thompson nor Douglass interpreted Calvin as sympathetic to feminism or to women's ordination; *Church History* (March 1995): 114-15.
10. Jane Dempsey Douglass, "Women and the Continental Reformation," in Rosemary Radford Ruether, editor, *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster), pp. 299-301.

11. Menno Simons, *The Incarnation of Our Lord*, in J. C. Wenger, editor, and Leonard Verduin, translator, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1956), pp. 816, 800.
12. Menno Simons, *Reply to Gellius Faber*, p. 742; *Foundation of Christian Doctrine*, p. 145, both in *The Complete Writings*.
13. Dirk Philips, "The Word of God," in George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal, editors, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, The Library of Christian Classics, Ichthus Edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), pp. 230-31.
14. Balthasar Hubmaier, "On Free Will," in Williams and Mergal, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, pp. 114-15.
15. Roland Bainton, *What Christianity Says about Sex, Love, and Marriage* (New York: Association Press, 1957), p. 94. For an excellent analysis of this argument, see M. Lucille Marr, "Anabaptist Women of the North: Peers in the Faith, Subordinates in Marriage," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 61 (4) (October 1987): 347-62. See also Sherrin Marshall-Wyntjes, "Women and Religious Choices in the Sixteenth Century Netherlands," *Archiv. Ref.* 75 (1984): 776-89; and Merry E. Weisner, "Beyond Women and the Family: Toward a Gender Analysis of the Reformation," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (3) (1987): 311-23.
16. Marr, "Anabaptist Women in Marriage," pp. 350-60; Hubmaier, "On Free Will," p. 130.
17. Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Her Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 89.
18. Margaret Fell, *Women's Speaking: Justified, Proved, and Allowed of by the Scriptures* (London: Pythia Press, 1989 [1666]), pp. 1-9.
19. Fell, *Women's Speaking Justified*, pp. 9-13.

#### FIVE REFORMATION THINKERS

##### Balthasar Hubmaier

Born between 1480 and 1485 in Friedberg (Germany), Balthasar Hubmaier was a Catholic priest who served as professor of theology at the University of Ingolstadt, cathedral preacher at Regensburg, and parish priest in Waldshut. In the 1520s, he fell under the influence of magisterial reformers Martin Luther (in German Wittenberg) and Ulrich Zwingli (in Swiss Zurich), only to ally himself, finally, with the Anabaptist wing of the Protestant Reformation. He and sixty Waldshut parishioners received believer's baptism from the Swiss Brethren pastor Wilhelm Reublin in April of 1525. On the following Easter Sunday, Hubmaier baptized three hundred others, thus providing the first instance of an entire congregation converting to Anabaptism. He then fled Catholic persecution in Waldshut (where he was suspected of supporting the 1525 Peasants' Revolt), only to be imprisoned and tortured in Protestant Zurich. Forced to recant his faith, Hubmaier moved to Moravia, where he published numerous defenses of Anabaptism. Seized by imperial forces, he was tortured and then burned at the stake for treason on March 10, 1528.<sup>1</sup>

Hubmaier departed from the classic Anabaptist doctrine (as articulated in the 1527 *Schleitheim Confession*) that true Christians should separate them-

cant—and much disputed—texts. In the pages ahead, we will examine Jewish, Christian, and Muslim authors from both the hierarchalist and the egalitarian positions. We must confess that this chapter created great difficulties for us as editors; we found so many intriguing twentieth-century treatments of Eve and Adam's story that we can offer here only a small sampling.

### Hierarchical Interpretations

Protestants have been particularly colorful in devising defenses for the hierarchical model of interpretation. At the turn of the century, Protestants who believed the Bible subordinated women to men found comfort in a movement dubbed "muscular Christianity." Muscular Christianity sought to convince men, in the face of cultural transformations that assaulted traditional gender roles, that Christianity was, above all else, a religion that put men first. As one proponent explained, nothing "emphasizes and exalts manliness, as does Christianity. The purpose, the incarnate idea of Christianity is to make magnificent manhood; to make men like Christ, the manliest of all men."<sup>3</sup>

Many liberal Protestants were attracted to a masculinized Christianity, producing such memorable titles as Harry Emerson Fosdick's *The Manhood of the Master*<sup>4</sup> and Bruce Barton's *The Man Nobody Knows*. The latter depicted Jesus as a well-muscled outdoorsman who was not only "the most popular dinner guest in Jerusalem" but also a magnetic salesman who became "the founder of modern business."<sup>5</sup>

Not to be outdone, fundamentalists composed such books as John R. Rice's *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Women Preachers*—a trio that Rice blamed for most of the ills of modern culture. As he put it, "to be a good Christian, it is clear that a citizen must be subject to his rulers, a child subject to his parents, a servant subject to his masters, a Christian subject to his pastor. God gives authority to some over others. . . . Rebellion against authority is the sin of bobbed hair, bossy wives, and women preachers."<sup>6</sup> To emphasize the point, Rice's daughter Elizabeth Rice Handford published *Me? Obey Him?*, arguing that God placed Eve below Adam in the divine "chain of command," and admonishing every wife "to obey her husband as if he were God Himself," for "she can be as certain of God's will when her husband speaks, as if God had spoken audibly from Heaven!"<sup>7</sup>

More recently, liberal Protestants have tended to find egalitarian readings of Genesis 1-3 more congenial to their democratic sensibilities, but the question of just how God intended men and women to relate to one another has stimulated considerable controversy among theologically conservative Protestants. In the past twenty years, as conservatives have debated the ordination of women, they have devoted considerable attention to Genesis 1-3. Writers such as Elisabeth Elliot have argued that God created women to be subordinate to men, noting that "every creature of God has his appointed place, from cherubim, seraphim, archangels, and angels down to the lowliest beast."<sup>8</sup> Others have echoed that sentiment, insisting, with Duane Litfin, "That the universe

should be ordered around a series of over/under hierarchical relationships is His [God's] idea, a part of His original design. Far from being extraneous to the Word of God, a kind of excess baggage that can be jettisoned while retaining the essential truth of the Scriptures, these ideas are the essential truths of the Scriptures. To reject them is to reject the Bible."<sup>9</sup>

Hierarchical interpretations of Genesis 1-3 have had far-reaching ramifications in the Southern Baptist Convention, where conservatives have successfully waged a campaign to wrest control of the denomination from more moderate Baptists.<sup>10</sup> The conservatives made a hierarchical reading of Genesis 1-3 the foundation of their "battle for the Bible." In 1984, they persuaded the Convention to adopt a nonbinding resolution claiming that the apostle Paul excludes women from pastoral leadership to preserve a submission God requires because man was first in creation and the woman was first in the Edenic fall.<sup>11</sup> In 1987, when a Southern Baptist church in Memphis called Nancy Hastings Sehested as its pastor, the local Southern Baptist Association disfellowshipped the congregation for setting a woman in a position of spiritual authority over men.

That action set off debate throughout the denomination. In 1988, the Convention passed a resolution designed to protect the authority of male pastors. Citing Hebrews 13:17 ("Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account," NRSV), the Convention urged Southern Baptists to obey their pastors and reminded them that 1 Timothy 2:12 forbade women to exercise authority over men. Hastings Sehested responded to the conservatives' campaign against women clergy by complaining that her opponents had acted "like a batterer treats a battered wife—they say they love you, but their actions are violent and abusive."<sup>12</sup>

In the readings selected for this chapter, we offer two contemporary examples of Christians arguing that God intends for women to be subordinate to men. First, "The Danvers Statement" is a position paper of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. The Council is a parachurch or non-denominational organization; its roster lists pastors, professors, and homemakers as members. Several members drafted the Statement at a 1987 meeting in Danvers, Massachusetts. Second, we have excerpted an essay entitled "The Head of the Woman is the Man," written by Susan T. Foh, a conservative Christian scholar. In this text, Foh argues that God assigned women subordinate roles within marriage and the church, even though God created women and men as essentially equal. In support of her position, she points to other functional subordinations including those of employee to employer and of Christ to God.<sup>13</sup> Practical applications of her position include prohibiting women from exercising several leadership roles in the church, including ordination to pastoral office.

In Judaism, hierarchical readings of Eve's story also continued in the twentieth century. While the Reform movement had previously loosened traditional ties between women's religious lives and Eve's story, the backlash from American Orthodox and Conservative Jews in the twentieth cen-