

Passion and Compassion

Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye, ed, *With Passion and Compassion* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989),

Teresa Okure, “*Women in the Bible*”, in “*With Passion and Compassion*,” ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989),

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The first creation account (Gen. 1:26-2:4a) makes the theological statement that the human species is composed of male and female; that it is a unity in nature and a diversity in sex; and that as an entity it was created in the image and likeness of God. The term adam in this narrative is clearly a generic term for humanity defined as male and female(5:2). Conjointly created in the image and likeness of God and conjointly given dominion over the rest of creation (1:28), both the male and the female stand equal in honor and dignity. It is also conjointly as male and female that both can carry out the divine injunction to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (1:28), contrary to some rabbis who held that this command applied only to the male. ¹

While the first creation account defines the human species as composed of male and female who stand equal in dignity and honor before God and are given co-mastery over creation, the second creation account (Gen. 2:4b-24) emphasizes the identity in nature of male and female as a species distinct from the rest of the animal species. Second it underlines that this male and female were destined by God to belong to each other as husband and wife (Gen. 2:23-24). The main point of this second account is to be found in verses 23-24. In other words, the first unit in human society is that of husband and wife, and it is from this unit that the family, inclusive of children, develops. The visual imagery of the creation of the woman from the man’s rib vividly illustrates both their identity in nature and their destined union as husband and wife in “one flesh” (vs. 24). It can even be said to symbolize their equality, since, according to Augustine, they were thus intended to “walk side by side” and “together look where it is they walk.” ²

If these are the different thrust of the two creation accounts, then these accounts cannot be cited in support of the belief that woman is by nature inferior to man. Such a belief arises, rather, from the sociocultural practices of the sinful world in which the biblical authors and their subsequent interpreters lived. Jewish patriarchal society, as we know, was one in which the woman had no legal status, except insofar as she was an object of marriage and divorce. She could not, for instance, testify in court or inherit property; nor was she expected to keep all the 615 precepts of the Torah. Her sole *raison d’être* (존재이유) was the husband.³

She was his “home” and her duty was to secure his happiness and serve him in the meaner

¹ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 49.

² Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 49.

³ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 49.

and menial aspect of life. In short, the woman was *de facto* (사실상의) if not *de jure* (합법적으로) the property of the husband, for he could acquire her like a slave by money or sexual intercourse and divorce her if she caused the slightest ‘impediment’ to the marriage, like spoiling his food or growing old. The wife was held responsible for the husband’s piety or wickedness. Women were in general were believed to be “:gluttonous, eavesdroppers, lazy and jealous,” devoid of intellectual capacity, and living only for self-ornamentation. Given this prevailing attitude toward women, one understands why a man who allowed himself to be ruled by a woman was to be held in contempt, why Qoheleth finds woman “more bitter than death” (Eccles. 7:26), why Sirach regards the birth of a daughter as “a loss” (Sir. 22:3), and why the Jewish male counted it a daily blessing that God did not make him a woman.⁴

Of course, the Jewish attitude toward women is not exclusively negative, but the negative one dominates the literature and has exercised the greatest formative influence on society’s attitude toward women. Even the positive evaluation of women in the biblical and rabbinic literature are made from the standpoint of their usefulness to men, as for instance, the valiant woman in Proverb 31:10-31.⁵

Clearly this prevailing negative assessment of women is a far cry from the status accorded them in Genesis 1:26-27. How did it all come about? Genesis 3 attempts an explanation. Taken at its face value, the account of the fall in no way attributes to Eve the sole responsibility for the entry of sin in the world. If anything, the whole movement of the narrative indicates that the biblical author imputes greater blame to Adam, a term reserved here exclusively for the man; he personally received from God the prohibition against eating the forbidden fruit (2:16-17), hence his is the climactic punishment, which has a universal scope – the earth is cursed because of him (3:17), and death is pronounced as part of his punishment (3:19). Had Eve alone been guilty, as the church fathers and I Timothy 2:24, for instance, maintain, Adam would not have been personally punished, since God is a just judge. Moreover, given that nothing happened till Adam, allegedly the morally and intellectually superior sex, took and ate (3:6b-7), one cannot help but concluding that the sequel of the story and the fate of humanity would have been different had he not eaten.⁶

Strikingly, the woman is given the promise of salvation through her “seed” even before she receives her punishment (Gen. 3:15-17). The punishment of her subjection to the husband is clearly a description of the sociocultural reality that obtained in the author’s patriarchal society. By viewing this subjection as a punishment for sin, the biblical author rejects the idea that this state of affairs could have been the created order willed by God. The divine promise of salvation in Gen.

⁴ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 50.

⁵ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 50.

⁶ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 50.

3:15 was ultimately fulfilled when Jesus, the seed of the woman, Mary, conquered sin and death on the cross and made us all God's children (cf. Gal. 4:4).⁷

Thus, as Eve, after the fall, became physically "the mother of all the living" (Gen. 3:20), thereby playing a role akin to that of God, the source and giver of life (Ps. 36:9; Job 33:4), so, at the annunciation and at the foot of the cross, Mary became spiritually the mother of God's children in Christ (cf. Jn. 19:25-27). Revelation 12, which is applied to Mary at the Feast of the Assumption, portrays the church, mother of God's children, as woman, just as in the Old Testament Zion was called "mother" (cf. Ps. 87:5). Hence motherhood, the bearing and bringing forth of life, remains a prerogative that God shares exclusively with the woman.⁸

Strikingly, Eve receives the name "mother of all the living" from Adam after the fall. It is as if henceforth all hope of life depends on her. For if death entered the world through one man (Gen. 3:19; Rom. 5:5), life was to be restored to humanity through the seeds of the woman (Gen. 3:16; Mt. 1:21). And mythologically the woman was formed from the man's rib (Gen. 2:21-22; I Tim. 2:14; I Cor. 11:8), ontologically every man is born of woman (Mt. 11:11; I Cor. 11:12). Furthermore, in the Christian tradition all human beings are Mary's children insofar as all are Christ's brothers and sisters "according to the flesh" (*Humani Generis*). For it must not be forgotten that Mary was the only human agent who cooperated with God in the incarnation and birth of Christ. This is a foundational doctrine of our faith.In order of creation, the woman is named Eve (from the root word meaning "life") because she brings to birth all the living. In the order of redemption, it is fittingly said that they found the child "with Mary his mother" (Mt. 2:11). The woman's role in God's scheme of creation and redemption is of paramount importance for humanity. The treatment of her as inferior or of no consequence finds no basis whatever in this scheme. Recognition of the woman's role in God's scheme of creation and redemption does not, however imply a denial of the woman's share in the sinfulness of the world. What is contested here is the traditional belief that all the sufferings of humanity are to be attributed to the woman as the sole cause. As Adam sinned against God, so did Eve. But unlike Adam she was humble enough to admit that she has been deceived. Thus women in the Bible exemplify the two faces of Eve: one the one hand, Eve, the instrument of life, exemplified in such women as Judith and Esther, God's instrument of salvation for the nation; on the other, Eve, an agent of sin and death, exemplified by such women as Jezebel (2 Kgs. 21:5-16) and Athaliah (2 Kgs. 11:1-3, 13-16). The former compare with male figures like Joseph and Moses, the latter with Herod (Mt. 2:16-18). Thus, whether as instruments of life or of death, both the man and the woman stand united in their common fate and destiny.⁹

⁷ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 51.

⁸ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 51.

⁹ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 51-52.

In has been noted that both the male and female were created in the image and likeness of God. Yet over the centuries, the male image of God has been well recognized, developed and projected into the human psyche; not so the female image. The treatment of woman as an inferior being goes hand in hand with the playing down or even conscious denial of the feminine attributes of God. In a male-oriented society, God is Father, not Mother, King of kings, not Queen of queens. And while God is readily feared as powerful, almighty, and possessing all authority, qualities usually associated with the father, God is not readily loved as humble, self-sacrificing, tender, and compassionate, virtues generally associated with the mother (cf. Hos. 11:1-1-11; Is. 49:11-15). God's fate thus proves to be very closely bound up with that of the woman insofar as a denial of the woman's ability to image God means denial of God's own feminine attributes, hence a distortion of the divine image itself. Only when the woman is granted her full honor and dignity in society will God also come fully into his/her own. Then humanity will not longer be ashamed to recognize and celebrate the womanliness of God. Thus will our knowledge of God also be enriched, and we shall come to relate to her/him more as the giver and foster of life (cf. Jn. 10:10) than as law and order or a power and authority to be feared.¹⁰

Analysis of the Bible has revealed the fundamental truth that the Bible and its interpretations embody both a divine and a human element with respect to women. The liberative elements in the Bible with respect to women stem from the divine perspective, the oppressive ones from the human perspective. The latter are socioculturally conditioned and sinful. The liberative elements emphasize the woman's equality with the man, her being made conjointly with him in the image and likeness of God, of equal dignity and honor, and her being given the special privilege, akin to God's, of bearing, mothering, and fostering life. The oppressive and sinful elements, on the contrary, portray her as an inferior being, subjected to the man, having no identity of her own, and ultimately the cause of sin and death. Throughout the Bible, we meet side by side the divinely liberative and the humanly oppressive elements concerning women.¹¹

On the liberative side, women serve throughout the Bible as God's coworkers and agents of life. In other words, God did not simply create the woman to be the mother of all the living and leave her at that. Rather, in keeping with his distinctive gift to woman of motherhood, God consistently involved women in the divine activity giving, preserving, and redeeming life.¹²

A few examples: Rebecca helped Jacob to steal the parental blessing from Isaac (Gen. 27:1-29, 41-28: 5). Seen from the twentieth-century perspective, her action is not to be condoned, but in the moral code of the time, she would be praised for her ingenuity, which was not directed toward her personal gain. When Rebecca secures the parental blessing for Jacob in place of Esau, she is

¹⁰ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 52.

¹¹ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 52.

¹² Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 52.

cooperating with God in her own way to bring about the realization of the divine plan. She also saved Jacob from Esau's destroying anger by sending him to his uncle, Laban, where he won wives from among his own kindred as well as abundant wealth, both important considerations in those days. Rebecca served as God's instrument as a decisive moment in Israel's history. So did the women at the time of Moses, in a crucial stage of Israel's history, namely, the exodus. This group of women worked concertedly with God in preserving both the life of Israel as a nation and of Moses as God's instrument of liberation for the nation (Ex. 2:1-11). While Pharaoh and his officials are bent on exterminating Israel lest the Israelites become their enemies, the Egyptian midwives refuse to comply with his orders to kill every male child of the Hebrews; as a result, Moses is kept alive at birth. Moved also by the maternal instinct to preserve life, Moses' mother devises a means of hiding the child. He is eventually rescued by Pharaoh's daughter who, unlike her father, is moved with pity for this "Hebrew" boy (2:6). Moses' sister then sees to it that the boy is brought up for Pharaoh's daughter by the boy's own mother. Thus through the concerted efforts of these women Moses is not only kept alive but also given the best education in the land. Later on, when he flees from Pharaoh, it is Zipporah who first provides a home for him as his wife, then saves him from God's destroying anger on account of his failure to circumcise his son (Ex. 2:15-22; 4:24-26).

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When we come to the final and greatest stage in salvation history, we meet again another great woman, who cooperated singlehandedly with God in conceiving and giving birth to the author of our salvation, namely Mary, the mother of Jesus and of the church, Mary who is both virgin and mother.¹⁴

In all these instances, God manifests a deep respect for the women by treating them as individuals in their own right. God deals directly with them instead of first passing through their husbands. Mary's case is particularly striking. In Jewish society the consent of the woman in marriage was not normally sought. Yet at the annunciation, God respectfully asks a maiden from Nazareth for her consent to be the mother of God's Son and waits for her reply (Lk. 1:26-38). The next person to know of this event is Elizabeth, while Joseph is kept in the dark for a long time.

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Jesus' deep respect for women is also well known: His compassion for widows, the most pitiable group of women in Jewish society (Lk. 7:11-17; 21:1-4; Mk. 12:40; Mt. 23:14), his respect for sinful Jewish women (Lk. 7:36-50; Jn. 8:1-11) and in particular, for the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:1-42). Jesus dialogue publicly with a woman whom any decent Jew would have shunned like the plague (Samaritan women were regarded as a permanent source of contamination; cf. Jn. 4:27), but

¹³ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 53.

¹⁴ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 53.

¹⁵ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, 53-54.

he also turns this notorious sinner into his effective missionary to the Samaritans (Jn. 4:28-30, 39-42).¹⁶

These few examples will suffice to illustrate how God worked with women as co-partners in giving, fostering, preserving, and saving life. There is no paternalism whatever in God's or Jesus' treatment of women. The Bible embodies nothing but liberative elements with respect to women.¹⁷

The oppressive elements in the Bible stem from the sinful human perspective. We can cite two key areas where this oppression is not operative, namely, the institution of marriage and the concern for ritual purity. Cohen observes that the Bible as a patriarchal book means that the husband had "absolute authority over his wife." This is true not only of the foundational statement in Genesis 3:16, but of subsequent biblical traditions right up to the New Testament (cf. I Cor. 11:2-12; 14:33b-36; I Tim 2:11-12; Tit. 2:2-3), where subjection to the husband is inculcated as a virtue to be performed "in the Lord" (Col. 3:18; Eph. 5:22). In marriage, the husband claimed absolute rights not only over the wife as a person, but over her very sexuality. We may think of humiliation to which the woman was subjected before marriage to ensure that she was virgin (Deut. 22:13-21) or the most pitiable treatment of the suspected adulteress prescribed in the mishnah. The wife has no corresponding rights or sanctions over the husband.¹⁸

Another important area of women's oppression in the Bible is that of cultic purity. Jewish laws concerning ritual purity were particularly biased against women. Since women were menstruants by nature, they could not be relied upon at all times to be ritually clean. For this reason they were barred, as a sex, for life from sacred places and ministries in Judaism. In the temple, women had their special court, next to that of the unclean Gentiles, beyond which they could not pass. This concern for ritual purity constituted the single most important factor in the exclusion of women from the ministerial priesthood in Judaism.¹⁹

Jesus uttered woes against the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew 23:25-27; or contrary to normal Jewish practice, Jesus touched and allowed himself to be touched by those who were legally classified as unclean, such as the woman with the issue of blood (Mk. 6:25-34). To continue to exclude women from certain Christian ministries on the basis of reasons inspired by outmoded Jewish taboos is to render null and void the liberation that Jesus won for us, and which allows of no social and ritual distinctions between male and female, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, since all constitute one person in Christ (Gal. 3:26-28).

¹⁶ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 54.

¹⁷ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 54.

¹⁸ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 54.

¹⁹ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 55.

NEW HERMENETICAL PRINCIPLES AND THEIR PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS P. 55

1. 창조설화에서 성서 본문들이 잘못해석되었거나 무시된 사실을 보았다. 성서는 남자들에 의해 쓰여진 가부장의 책이고 남자들에 의해 해석되었으므로 편협하게 한쪽으로 해석된 것을 정정하는 노력을 해야한다. 인류는 남, 녀로 창조되었고 똑같이 복을 받았으므로 신학적인 그리고 목회측면에서 성서는 여성들의 생각을 포함해서 제대로 해석되어야 한다.
2. 성서를 다시 읽어서 성서에 있는 하나님의 원칙과 인간 문화요소를 가려내는 작업을 해야한다.
3. 성서를 다시 읽을 때 어머니로서의 여성들의 사명을, 즉 하나님으로 부터 받은 생명을 잉태하고 생명을 낳는 도구로의 축복을 되살려내는 노력을 해야 한다. 이 노력은 하나님의 여성적인 면을 살리고 축복하는 노력이 되기도 한다. 하나님은 남자도 여자도 아니지만 인간 남, 녀가 하나님의 형상대로 지음을 받았다는 점에서 하나님이 함축하고 계신 남, 녀 양성의 질을 이해하므로서 하나님을 *compassionate* 하고 *merciful* 하고, 부드럽고, 생명을 낳고, 죄인들의 피란처가 되시는 어머니 같은 하나님의 형상을 회복해야 한다. 그래서 하나님이 인간에게 아버지지와 어머니가 되실 수 있도록 회복해야 한다.
4. 여성들은 하늘이 주신 자신과 다른 여성들의 존엄성을 되찾아야 한다. 여성들이 흔히 자신들의 적이기도 하다. 여성들이 자신들에게 주신 하나님의 형상을 무시하면 하나님 자신을 무시하는 것과 같다. 그래서 자신들에게 주신 생명을 낳는 권리외의 모든 척도(*Measure*)들을 배척해서 신이 주신 스스로의권리와 사명을 찾아야 한다. 이런 의미에서 남,녀 모두 함께 신학적으로, 문화적으로 갇힌사상의 감옥에서 함께 해방을 해야한다.²⁰

²⁰ Teresa Okure, *Women in the Bible*, in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella & Mercy Amba Oduyoye (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 55-57.