

## GOD AND THE RHETORIC OF SEXUALITY

Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978),  
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**Phyllis Trible in her “God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality” (P. 31-34)** presents this story to define the meaning of *compassion*. The story tells of the motivation of the woman who offers to relinquish her child in order that he may live. She offers “because her *Rahamim (compassion)* grew warm, grew tender, or yearned (kmr) for her son” (v. 26). Motivated by *compassion (Rahamim)* this woman is willing to forfeit even justice for the sake of life. By exposing the absurdity and insolubility of the power struggle between the two women, the king has occasioned in one of them a transcendent love which brings truth and life. And only after this development does the word *mother* appear in the story. Throughout, the two females have been called harlots, women, or this one and the other. Finally, when their own words identify them, the king is able to call one a mother.<sup>1</sup> According to the story, the presence of a love that knows not the demands of ego, of possessiveness, or even of justice reveals motherhood.<sup>2</sup>

This ancient story becomes a paradigm for understanding a particular biblical metaphor. The motivational clause, “because her *Rahamim (compassion)* yearned for her son provides the key word.”<sup>3</sup>

Difficult to translate in the fullness of its imagery, the Hebrew noun *rahamim* connotes simultaneously both a mode of being and the locus of that mode. In its singular form the noun *Rehem* means “womb” or “uterus.” In the plural, *Rahamim*, this concrete meaning expands to the abstractions of “compassion, mercy, and love. Further these abstractions occur in a verb, *rahm*, “to show mercy, and in an adjective, “*rahum*” “merciful.” Accordingly, our metaphor lies in the semantic movement from a physical organ of the female body to a psychic mode of being. It journeys from the concrete to abstract. “Womb” is the vehicle: “compassion,” the tenor. To the responsive imagination, this metaphor suggests the meaning of love as selfless participation in life. The womb protects and nourishes but does not possess and control. It yields its treasure in order that wholeness and well-being may happen. Truly, it is the way of compassion. 완전하게 번역이 안되는 히브리어 단어의 명사형 Rehem 은 “자궁”이란 뜻이고 그 명사의 복수형 *rahamim* 의 구체적인 뜻이 *compassion* (연민, 동정?), *mercy*(자비), *love* (사랑)이라는 추상적인 개념으로 발전되었다고 한다. 말하자면 여성의 자궁이라는 육체적 조직/기관의 의미에서 인간의 심리적/마음의 (psychic mode) 형태로 발전했다고 보겠다. “자궁(womb)” 이 전달 수단 (vehicle) 이고 “compassion(자비)” 은 진로/행로(tenor)이다. 이 말의 추상적 의미는 생애 욕심없이 참여하는 사랑을 말한다. 자궁이란 보호하고 기르나 (nourish) 소유하거나 지배하지 않는다. 자궁은 (생명의) 전체성(wholeness) 과 안녕(well-being)을 위해 보물을 양보한다. 이것이 바로 *compassion* (자비)의 길이다.<sup>4</sup>

Although the vehicle womb is an organ unique to women, Men also participate in the journey of this biblical metaphor. For example, Joseph sees for the first time “his brother Benjamin, the son

<sup>1</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 32-33

<sup>3</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 26.

<sup>4</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 33.

of his mother.” Overcome, he seeks a place to weep, “because his *Rahamim* yearned (kmr) for his brother” (Gen. 43:30). 자궁은 여성에게만 있는 기관이지만 남자들도 같은 느낌을 가진다. 예를 들면 요셉이 처음으로 한배의 동생 벤야민을 만났을 때 동생을 그리워하는 자기의 연민 (*Rahamim*)이 속에서 솟아올라와 참을 수 없어 급히 서둘러 울 곳을 찾았다고 기록했다 (창 43:30)<sup>5</sup>

Benjamin is described not just as the brother of Joseph but also as “the son of his mother,” presence of metaphor *Rahamim*.” In the Psalm 103:13 is the metaphor extends to a father to parallel paternal and divine love. As a father has *compassion* (*Kerahem*) for his children, so the LORD has *compassion* (*Riham*) for those who fear him. 시 103: 13 에 부모가 자식을 긍휼히 여기듯이 (*compassion*), 주께서는 주님을 두려워하는 사람을 긍휼히 여기신다 (*compassion*)고 기록해서 인간 아버지의 *compassion* 이 하나님의 *compassion* 으로 이어진다.<sup>6</sup>

### FROM THE WOMB OF WOMEN

Phyllis would add that In the Hebrew scriptures the wombs of women belong to God. Yahweh closes the womb for sin or opens it up for fertility (Gen. 20: 1-18). Yahweh opens up Lea’s womb (Gen. 29:31-35) (Trible P. 34). Yahweh closed and opened Hannah’s womb (I Sam. 1:1-20). God forms body in the womb (Jer. 1:15).<sup>7</sup>

For Job, God molds in the womb all human beings, not just special ones. This organ is the place of human equality, an equality based in the creative work of a God who also governs life outside the womb. Social status and sexual differences (manservant and maidservant) mean nothing in the perspective of creation, and this perspective determines ethical norms and behavior. In choosing how he treats himself and other human creatures, Job must answer to the God of the womb of equality. Thus, the female organ becomes a moral and theological event. These two poets, Jeremiah and Job, who know so keenly the formative power of God in the uterus, wish most fervently to make the womb a tomb.

Jeremiah laments:

Cursed be the day on which I was born!  
 The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed!  
 Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, “A son is born to you,”  
 making him very glad.  
 Let that man be like the cities which Yahweh overthrew without pity;  
 Let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon,  
 because he did not kill me in the womb; so that my mother would have been my grave, and  
 her womb forever great.  
 Why did I come forth from the womb to see toil and sorrow,  
 and spend my days in shame?<sup>8</sup> (Jer. 20: 14-18).

God conceives in the womb; God fashions in the womb; God judges in the womb; God destines in the womb; God brings forth from the womb; God receives out of the womb; and God carries from the womb to gray hairs (Is. 46: 3-4). In biblical tradition, an organ unique to the

<sup>5</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 33.

<sup>6</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 34.

<sup>7</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 35.

<sup>8</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 36.

female becomes a vehicle pointing to the compassion of God.<sup>9</sup>

### **TO THE COMPASSION OF GOD**

The two adjective forms, “merciful “ and “gracious” are used only for the Creator, never for creatures. P. 38. (Ps. 111:4; 145:8; Neh. 9:17) and (Ps. 86:16) (Joel 2:13; 2Chron. 30:9; Jon 4:2).<sup>10</sup>

The verb and noun **Rhm**: Example of Hosea (2:21, 23, 25) p.39-40 Hosea speaks of Israel as child and Yahweh as parent. I shall no more show compassion (Rahem) on the house of Israel. Withdrawing love from the baby girl Yahweh closes the womb of compassion (Hos. 1:6) And in that day, says yahweh, I will have compassion (Werihanti) upon Not Loved (lo ruhama) (Hos. 2:21; 23 (23,25)).<sup>11</sup>

### **Jer. 31:20 (translation by Tribble in “God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality”)**

Thus says Yahweh: Is Ephraim (Israel) my dear son? My darling child? For the more I speak of him, the more I do remember him. Therefore my womb trembles for him; I will truly show motherly-compassion upon him.<sup>12</sup>

Yahweh’s love for Ephraim: *My love put his hand to the latch, And my inner-parts trembled within me.* Yahweh here speaks here of the divine inner-parts trembling for Ephraim the child. In some other passages, the word *inner-parts* parallels *womb* (Gen. 25:23; Ps. 71:6; Is. 49:1). It can be read “my womb trembles for him.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus exclusively female image extends its meaning to a divine mode of being: “I will truly show motherly-compassion upon him,” says Yahweh. These words and expression emphasize the tender memory and the earnest love of Yahweh for Ephraim: “ I do remember him lovingly (v. 20b); “I will truly show motherly-compassion upon him” (v. 20c).<sup>14</sup>

Parallels between Rachel and Yahweh occur in each of its three sections. The rhetorical question calling Ephraim a “darling child” suggests that God identifies with Rachel’s caring for her children. The motivational clause recalls Rachel remembering her lost sons with tenderness. And the conclusion makes explicit the maternal metaphor for God. As Rachel mourns the loss of the fruit of her womb, so Yahweh, from the divine womb, mourns the same child. Yet there is a difference. The human mother refuses consolation; the divine mother changes grief into grace. As a result, the poem has moved from the desolate lamentation of Rachel to the redemptive compassion of God. Female imagery surrounds Ephraim; words of a mother embrace her son.<sup>15</sup>

According to traditional interpretation, the narrative in Genesis 2:7-3:24 (most interpretations bypass the preface in 2:4b-6) is about “Adam and Eve.” It proclaims male superiority and female inferiority as the will of God. It portrays woman as “temptress” and

<sup>9</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1978), 38.

<sup>10</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1978), 39.

<sup>11</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1978), 39.

<sup>12</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1978), 43.

<sup>13</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1978), 45.

<sup>14</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1978), 45.

<sup>15</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1978), 45.

troublemaker who is dependent upon and dominated by her husband. Over the centuries this misogynous reading has acquired a status of canonicity so that those who deplore and those who applaud the story both agree upon its meaning. Impressive is even a partial list of specifics documenting this consensus:<sup>16</sup>

- A male God creates first man (2:7) and last woman (2:22); first means superior and last means inferior or subordinate.
- Woman is created for the sake of man; a helpmate to cure his loneliness (2:18-23).
- Contrary to nature, woman comes out of man; she is denied even her natural function of birthing and that function is given to man (2:21-22).
- Woman is the rib of man, dependent upon him for life (2:21-22).
- Taken out of man (2:23), woman has a derivative, not an autonomous, existence.
- Man names woman (2:23) and thus has power over her.
- Man leaves his father's family in order to set up through his wife another patriarchal unit (2:24)
- Woman tempted man to disobey and thus she is responsible for sin in the world (3:6); she is untrustworthy, gullible, and simpleminded.
- Woman is cursed by pain in childbirth(3:16); pain in childbirth is a more severe punishment than man's struggles with the soil; it signifies that woman's sin is greater than man's.
- Woman's desire for man (3:16) is God's way of keeping her faithful and submissive to her husband.
- God gives man the right to rule over woman (3:16).<sup>17</sup>

Although

- 남성 하나님은 처음에 남자를(2:7) 그리고 마지막에 여자를(2:22 창조하셨다. 처음은 우월을 그리고 마지막은 열등 혹은 종속(subordinate)을 의미한다.
- 여자는 남자를 위해, 즉 남자의 외로움을 치유하기 위한 배우자로 창조되었다 (2:18-23).
- 자연과는 반대로 여자가 남자에게서 나오게 했다; 즉 여자의 자연적인 출생의 기능마저 거부했고 남자에게 그 기능을 주셨다 (2:21-22).
- 여자는 남자에게 종신토록 의존해야되는 남자의 갈비이다(2:21-22).
- 남자에게서 나왔으니(2:23), 여자는 파생 (derivative)한 존재이지 독립된 (autonomous) 존재가 아니다.

<sup>16</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1978), 73.

<sup>17</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1978), 73.

- 남자가 여자의 이름을 지었음 (2:23) 으로 여자를 지배한다 (Power over her).
- 남자는 그의 아내를 통해 또하나의 가부장 단위(unit)를 세우기 위해 그의 아비의 집을 떠난다(2:24)
- .여자가 남자로하여금 불순종하도록 유혹 했으므로 세상의 죄에 대한 책임을 진다 (3:6); 여자는 신뢰할 수 없고, 속기 쉽고, 어리석은 존재다.
- 여자는 해산하는 고통(3:16)으로 저주를 받았다. 해산하는 고통은 땅과 싸우는 벌보다 더 심한 벌이다. 이는 곧 여자의 죄가 남자의 것보다 더 크다는 것을 의미한다.
- 하나님은 여자가 남자를 사모함으로 남편에게 순종하고 충실하도록 하셨다.
- 하나님은 여자를 다스리는 권리를 남자에게 주신다(3:16). P. 73.

According to Tribler, the creature (ha adam) was totally passive throughout the episode (of creating the woman) because God caused him to fall into deep sleep while God performed surgery to take out one of his ribs and created a new and unique life – the woman.<sup>18</sup>

The man was with her. Yet throughout this scene the man has remained silent; he does not speak for obedience. He presence is passive and bland. He follows his woman without question or comment. She gives fruit to him, “and-he-ate.” The story does not present him as reluctant or hesitating. He does not theologize; he does not contemplate. The man is passive, brutish, and inept.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Phyllis Tribler, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1978), 96.

<sup>19</sup> Phyllis Tribler, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1978), 113.