

MALES AND FEMALES AS EQUALS IN MELANESIA (AN EXEGESIS OF GENESIS 2:18-25)

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INTRODUCTION

While many Western societies strongly emphasise gender equality, often shooting past the mark, in that biological sex differences, such as physical strength, patterns of thought, particular abilities, etc.,¹ are neglected, in Melanesian thought, the idea of female subordination under man is still deeply rooted. Biblical texts, like Eph 5:22-24 and Gen 2:18-25 are taken to support this view. Although men, according to their own understanding, practice the kind of love called for in Eph 5:25-33, or, perhaps, just because of that, they demand the submission of their wives, i.e., the acknowledgment of their superiority. Women, too, often willingly submit to this, with reference to the same texts, thus cementing their own inferiority.

Gen 2:18-25, the text in question here, is claimed to support this view in two ways. Firstly, הַיְהוָה (YHWH) decides to make a “helper” for the man, so that he may not be alone (v. 18). A helper or assistant, it is quickly perceived, is clearly subordinate to the one, who is offered that help.

¹ Specifically on cognitive, intellectual, and psychological differences, cf. Anne Moir, and David Jessel, *Brainsex: the Real Difference Between Men and Women*, London UK: Arrow Books, 1998, which, in a very readable way, presents the findings of modern gender and brain research.

Secondly, the call for submission is based on the fact that man was created first, woman second (if not third, i.e., after the animals), which is taken to naturally establish a hierarchy.² According to the biblical account, this order is an undeniable fact, and its interpretation may be culturally appropriate in Melanesia. However, are both these arguments really warranted by the text, as a whole, as well as in particular?

The author believes they are not. They are, rather, based on an inaccurate exegesis that misses a major part of the actual thrust of the narrative. Thus, the biblical challenge is avoided, consciously or unconsciously; it certainly does not have any significant effect on gender relationships. This essay, therefore, aims at bringing out the full intention of Gen 2:18-25, through a proper exegesis that includes both the obvious and the more-concealed ideas. In this way, it intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of gender roles and relationships in God's creation.

A note must be added here about the author himself. Because he is a Westerner, from Germany, and naturally has been influenced by the ideas of gender equality in his own culture, he may be accused of being culturally biased. It is certainly true that, exactly because of this background, he recognises the above-described problem more clearly, and is probably more concerned, too. Nevertheless, he believes to have left most cultural bias out of the exegesis, since every exegete should aim at letting the biblical text, itself, speak. In this case, he was even more cautious to do so. The reflections on the application of the findings, however, will bear a Western cultural stamp, although they have been carefully considered. They, therefore, have to be taken *cum grano salis*: not as a final statement, but as a preliminary and imperfect contribution to a wider theological and social discourse, which is yet to take place among Melanesians.

THE CONTEXT AND OUTLINE OF GEN 2:18-25

Gen 2:18-25 forms part of the so-called Yahwistic creation narrative. In contrast to Gen 1:1-2:4a it not only makes use of the name of God, יהוה,

² This argument was brought forward even by a female (!) participant in a course on "Marriage and Family Life" at Martin Luther Seminary, Lae, in 2002, which shows how deeply it is embossed on the Melanesian perception.

(*YHWH*), and is a much less structured account, but it is also less interested in the creation of the universe as a whole. Instead, it focuses on decisive points in the act of creation “at the time when God יְהוָה (*YHWH*) made the earth and the heavens” (Gen 2:4b): moisture from the earth makes it possible that אָדָם (*ādām*)³ is formed, who then becomes a living being, through the breath of God; a garden is planted (Where do the plants come from?!), which is thoroughly described (vv. 8-14); אָדָם (*ādām*) is put in the garden with a task and a commandment (vv. 15-17); the animals are created and named (vv. 18-20); the woman is created out of אָדָם (*ādām*) (!) and both discover that they belong together as male and female (vv. 21-25); finally, the breaking of the divine commandment of vv. 16f leads to catastrophe (ch. 3).

It becomes clear from this brief overview that the focus is clearly on human existence, not on creation, as an act of God, as such. Who is אָדָם (*ādām*)? What is his task? How is he different from animals? Why are male and female attracted to each other? These, and similar, are the questions addressed. It is only logical that, in this context, there are far more detailed statements on the relationship of the sexes than in Gen 1, where it is merely stated that both male and female represent the image of God (Gen 1:27).⁴ They are concentrated in vv. 18-25, which, in themselves, again follow a clear outline.

Firstly, there is the word of God that אָדָם (*ādām*) is not made for being alone; there is need for a companion. A first attempt at finding such a companion for אָדָם (*ādām*) is made (vv. 19f), but it turns out to be unsuccessful (v. 20b). Another approach is then taken, and the woman is formed from a rib of אָדָם (*ādām*). This time, the man immediately

³ Since the English word “man” does not differentiate between human (as independent of gender) and man (as opposite to woman), the author prefers to use the Hebrew אָדָם (*ādām*), or English “human” to describe the species.

⁴ Thorough exegesis would show that there is far more in Gen 1:27f than stated here; cf. Christl Ruth Vonholdt, “Ehe – Die Ikone Gottes in der Welt”, in *OJC-Salzkorn. Anstiftung zum gemeinsamen Christenleben* 194 (5/2001), Reichelsheim: Christen in der Offensive e.V., 2001, pp. 208-214.

recognises the new being as his companion, and acknowledges her effusively (vv. 21-24). The final statement in v.25 again emphasises the total unity, and the innocence, of man and woman, preparing the stage for Gen 3.

EXEGESIS

After this look at the context and outline of Gen 2:18-25, it is now time to go through the text, verse by verse.

GEN 2:18

It begins with the words of God יהוה (*YHWH*), regarding the solitariness of אָדָם (*ādām*), apparently spoken to Himself, as a verbalised thought. The “not good” stands in sharp contrast to the frequent “good” in Gen 1, despite these being two entirely different streams of tradition. While, only once, in both creation narratives something is described as “not good” (2:18), it is stated seven times that something God created was “good”,⁵ once, among these, even “very good”.⁶ Bearing in mind that, in Hebrew understanding, the attribute of “good”-ness is not only a relative assessment, in the sense of “better than . . .”, but an absolute statement about the quality of the creation, it becomes all the clearer that solitariness of אָדָם (*ādām*) misses the goal. There is only “good” and “not good”, as absolute opposites, and it is “*not good* for the man to be alone”.

This is not a statement about אָדָם (*ādām*), as such, but only about a certain given situation, which prevents him from living up to his full destiny. From the beginning, it is said, אָדָם (*ādām*) is created for companionship, as a relational being. His solitariness is understood, not as emotional loneliness, but, quite practically, as helplessness, which reveals a rather unromantic view on male-female relationships.⁷ On the other hand, the loneliness of אָדָם (*ādām*) is not the expression of a general desire for a helper or company; it rather calls for a **corresponding** partner, who is able

⁵ Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25.

⁶ Gen 1:31.

⁷ Cf. Gerhard Von Rad, “Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis”, in *ATD* 2-4, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1981p. 57.

to fill the gap in his existence, and to whom he could be a companion of the same kind.

This is expressed by the Hebrew words עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ (ēzer k^eneg^edō), which are worth a closer look. The first, עֵזֶר (ēzer), in the Old Testament, is generally used with reference to God, with few exceptions.⁸ It is rarely personified to mean “helper, assistant”,⁹ but, more often in an abstract way, designates “help, assistance, internal and external support”, as such¹⁰, although, even then, it is “frequently used in a concrete sense to designate the assistant”.¹¹ Thus, any notion of hierarchical subordination is excluded from the outset, because the function is in view, not the personal relationship. This is further supported, considering that any thought of God, Israel’s, or the faithful’s עֵזֶר (ēzer), being subordinate to a human being, would undoubtedly be identified as nonsense. On the contrary, the conclusion could be drawn that the one requiring assistance is inferior to the one offering it, but this may be stretching it too far. In any case, it is obvious that the use of עֵזֶר (ēzer) quite soberly indicates a lack, or need, in life or existence of אָדָם (ādām), while there is no idea, whatsoever, of subordination, or hierarchical relationship, between persons.

The addition of כְּנֶגְדּוֹ (k^eneg^edō) emphasises, and further elaborates, this fact. Only used here, in the Old Testament, it contains the aspects of both similarity and complementarity.¹² Literally, it means “as in front of”,¹³ with a strong “connotation of prominence (being conspicuous)”, due to the specific meaning of its root נָגַד (nāgad), “to place a matter high,

⁸ Vonholdt, “Ehe – Die Ikone Gottes in der Welt”, p. 216; and עֵזֶר (ēzer) in R. Laird Harris, et al, eds, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1980, no 1598a, p. 660.

⁹ E.g., Ex 18:4; Deut 33:29; Ezek 12:14; Hos 13:9; and others.

¹⁰ E.g., Deut 33:7, 26; Ps 20:3; 33:20; 70:6; 115:9-11; 121:1f; 124:8; 146:5; Is 30:5; Dan 11:34; and others. Cf. Von Rad, p. 57.

¹¹ עֵזֶר (ēzer) in *Theological Wordbook*, no 1598a, p. 660.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, International Critical Commentary, Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1930 (reprint 1963)p. 67.

conspicuous, before a person”.¹⁴ Thus, it should be understood as “corresponding”. It particularly stresses the equality of the two counterparts, while their distinction is well preserved. In conjunction with עֶזֶר (ēzer), it becomes obvious that any being is not suited as a companion for אָדָם (ādām), in order to fill the need in his life, particularly no one who is subordinate to him, but it must correspond to him, it must be an adequate opposite partner. This is the most important criterion by which the stage is set for the following verses.

GEN 2:19-20

In order to fulfil his task, God creates the beasts and the birds – those creatures that share with אָדָם (ādām) the same environment: earth and air. For various reasons, it has been suggested that vv. 19-20(a) are secondary to the original tradition of the narrative.¹⁵ Their omission, together with that of vv. 5 and 9, would make Gen 2f “an account, not of the creation of the world as a whole, but simply of the making of man, and of his life in the garden”,¹⁶ thus eliminating some of the inconsistencies in the text. Practically, none of the reasons given, however, can stand a closer examination.

Firstly, the animals’ formation “out of the ground” does not affect what Simpson describes as “the force of one of the main points (cf. 3:19, 23b) of the original narrative”,¹⁷ i.e., that אָדָם (ādām) is taken out of the ground, too, and, therefore, is bound to return to it. The focus in ch. 3 is entirely on the human-divine relationship, and the human fate, while the non-human world, there, is not in view at all. In addition, there is a decisive difference between the animals and אָדָם (ādām): the animals do not receive the “breath of life”, as אָדָם (ādām) does (v. 7b). While they share with him (and the trees, v. 9) the same bodily substance, they are, in no way,

¹⁴ נָגַד (neged) in *Theological Wordbook*, no 1289a, p. 549.

¹⁵ A list of the arguments in Cuthbert A. Simpson, *The Book of Genesis. Introduction and Exegesis*, The Interpreter’s Bible, vol 1, New York NY: Abingdon Press, 1952, pp. 497ff.

¹⁶ Loc.cit., pp. 498f.

¹⁷ Loc.cit., p. 494.

equivalent to him. This explains, among other things, why, later, no companion for אָדָם (*ādām*) is found among them, and, at the same time, emphasises common status of אָדָם (*ādām*) and the animals, as created beings.

Secondly, while the naming of the animals may not be aetiological, it is not “without significance”¹⁸ either. It is obvious, from other biblical texts, and also known in many cultures, that knowing somebody by name, and, even more so, giving a name to somebody, means to have certain powers over him or her. So, in naming the animals, אָדָם (*ādām*) already exercises his dominion over the creation.¹⁹ Skinner puts it that “the name – that by which the thing is summoned into the field of thought – belongs to the full existence of the thing itself”.²⁰ It certainly makes the thing available for manipulation; the thing becomes the object of rational thought and action. Because this act of naming, then, is an expression of the dominion of אָדָם (*ādām*) over the animals, thus, of their essential difference, the search for a suitable companion, naturally, must be unsuccessful. The names given to the animals do not match with the name of אָדָם (*ādām*), in the same way as אִשָּׁה (*iššāh*) and אִשָּׁה (*iššāh*) (v. 23), which rather emphasises the close similarity, and mutual attraction, of man and woman, and, at the same time, explains – though, allegedly, etymologically wrong²¹ – the similarity of the Hebrew words.

The weightiest argument for vv. 19-20(a) being secondary is that they appear not only to take a deviation from the main direction of events, i.e., finding names for the animals instead of finding a companion for אָדָם (*ādām*), but this undertaking rather bears the character of an unsuccessful

¹⁸ Loc.cit., p. 498.

¹⁹ Cf. Gen 2:15; 1:28.

²⁰ Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 20. According to Walter Russell Bowie, *The Book of Genesis: Exposition*, The Interpreter’s Bible, vol 1, New York NY: Abingdon Press, 1952, p. 498, the name determines the behaviour and existence of the animals.

²¹ Simpson, *Genesis*, p. 498. Simpson just states this without giving any reasons; so this would need to be verified.

experiment – as if God did not really know what to do.²² A look through the whole account of Gen 2f, however, reveals quite strong anthropomorphic tendencies in the description of God and His acts: He forms אָדָם (*ādām*) from dust, like a potter (2:7); He plants a garden (2:8); He develops plans (2:18); He walks in the garden “in the cool of the day” (3:8). The method of trial and error, then, does not entirely seem out of line; although it may push the anthropomorphism to an extreme, it still can be seen as consistent with the other parts of the narrative. As concerns the “detour” taken, it has already been shown that the naming of the animals, while accomplishing a task of its own, precisely through the failure of this attempt, leads on to the next stage. So, these verses, nevertheless, play a vital part in the whole of the account, in that they show that the animal world does not provide an equivalent companion for אָדָם (*ādām*). Their role is, although a deviation, an advance through negation.

GEN 2:21

Because the first attempt in finding a suitable companion for אָדָם (*ādām*) failed, as it seems, a second attempt is undertaken. It is described in almost accurate medical detail: God brings a narcotic sleep on אָדָם (*ādām*), performs a surgical operation to remove a rib bone, sutures the wound (closes it with flesh), and then forms a female from the material won (vv. 21f). Many scholars assume that this part of the account originally was an aetiological legend, which explained why the human rib cage does not extend further down over the stomach.²³ This suggestion, however interesting as it may be, in terms of tradition-history, can be neglected here, because the aetiological aspect has become secondary in the current context of vv. 18-25. Although it is still contained, it was of no interest to the author of the narrative, as we read it now.

Of much greater interest, is the fact itself that a rib is taken, not any other bone, or even a piece of flesh. The rib, particularly the one that is now

²² Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 67, therefore, speaks of the “[extraordinary] naïveté of the conception. . . . Not only did man exist before the beasts, but the whole animal creation is the result of an unsuccessful experiment to find a mate for him”.

²³ Von Rad, “Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis”, p. 59. It does not explain, however, why the same is the case in animals!

“missing” above the human stomach, is the bone closest to both the kidneys and the heart. These are, to some extent, synonymous in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, the kidneys are rather perceived as the biological and, especially, the emotional and moral centre of a human, while the heart is seen as the centre of intellectual and conscious life.²⁴ The matter, from which the companion of אָדָם (*ādām*) is formed, is taken, not from the periphery of human nature, but right from the centre, as close as can be to the centres of his existence. Yet, it provides for difference, because had it been taken from the heart and the kidneys, themselves, it would have become nothing more than a copy of the original.

GEN 2:22

From the matter taken, God “makes” the woman, much like a craftsman. This is much different from God’s creation, through the word in Gen 1, but is not at all surprising, in the context of Gen 2, with its “hands-on” creational activity (cf. vv. 4b, 7, 8, 19). The result of this act of craftsmanship is woman. For the first time in Gen 2, a specific gender-related term is used. Previously, human was always referred to as אָדָם (*ādām*), which indicates “his” relationship to אֶרֶץ (‘*damāh*), the earth from which “he” was made. There is no gender aspect in that. The use of אִשָּׁה (*iššāh*) introduces exactly that aspect, perhaps, in order to show the difference to the first human: although taken from the matter of אָדָם (*ādām*), woman is not just another אָדָם (*ādām*), but a being different in some way, and independent from him. This confirms the above findings, regarding v. 21, and is further developed in v. 23.

The woman now is “brought” to אָדָם (*ādām*), just as, previously, the animals were “brought” to him (v. 19) in order that he name them. Then the search for a companion was unsuccessful. How much different now!

GEN 2:23

אִשָּׁה (*ādām*) bursts out in a poetic acclamation:

²⁴ Cf. Barker, Kenneth, et al, eds, *The NIV Study Bible*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1995, pp. 785 and 924 (study notes, respectively, on Ps 7:9 and 139:13).

“Bone from my bone,
Flesh from my flesh:
She shall be called wo-man,
Because she is taken from man.”

What had been prepared in vv. 21f is now plainly acknowledged: the equality in matter and the difference in personality. *Iššāh* is not *īš*, but both are **אָדָם** (*ādām*). This newly-created being is truly a companion for **אָדָם** (*ādām*), as asked for in v. 18. Now, only gender-related terminology is fully introduced and applied: **אִישׁ** (*īš*) and **אִשְׁשָׁה** (*iššah*). It is only in the encounter with his companion that the – initially gender-less – **אָדָם** (*ādām*) discovers that he is a man (**אִישׁ** (*īš*)).²⁵ Thus, humanity is neither exclusively male nor female, nor is it something above the genders, which is common to both, nor is it a kind of androgyny, but human only exists as **both** male and female, **אָדָם** (*ādām*) is synonymous with both **אִישׁ** (*īš*) and **אִשְׁשָׁה** (*iššah*) **together**.²⁶

GEN 2:24

This is further strengthened by the following verse, which, rather prosaically, states that, for this reason, a man will leave his parents, in order to live with his companion. That both man and woman equally are **אָדָם** (*ādām*), serves as an aetiological explanation for the strong attraction between the sexes. In becoming “one flesh”, the original unity of **אָדָם** (*ādām*) will be restored.

It seems unlikely that these words are still spoken by the man; they, rather, appear like an aetiological comment, which was inserted by the author, or even a later redactor. Anyway, while they are said from the perspective of the man, the same would be true, in the perspective of the woman. The relationship between the companions is stronger than the strongest relationship imaginable besides it: that to the parents. Thus, the narrative

²⁵ Vonholdt, “Ehe – Die Ikone Gottes in der Welt”, p. 218.

²⁶ Ibid.

circle is closed; the companion, who was looked for in v. 18, is found. There is no doubt that she corresponds to the man, in every respect.

GEN 2:25

Following this, v. 25 seems to be added on, like an afterthought. Stating that both man and woman were naked, though not ashamed, the verse prepares the stage for the account of the fall in Gen 3. At this point, the companionship between the two was perfect, and unaffected yet by sin (cf. Gen 3:7). Because of its position and function in the fabric of Gen 2 and 3, it may well be assumed that v. 25 is a redactional link between those two chapters, which, according to Von Rad, are, thematically and tradition-historically different, traditions.²⁷

SUMMARY

As the exegesis has shown, quite a number of issues are raised and addressed in the account of the creation of woman. Disregarding the minor points, like the aetiology regarding human physiology, only the major points shall be recounted here.

Firstly, אָדָם (*ādām*) is a relational being; it is not good that he is alone, but there is existential need for a companion, who is equal to, yet different from, him, in short: who corresponds to him. Then, there is the essential difference between human and animal, despite their sharing the same bodily substance; their relationship is not one of equality, but of dominion and subordination, which is both established and exercised at the same time, in the naming of the animals. Thirdly, woman is not an entirely new creation, but, being taken from the אָדָם (*ādām*) already in existence – particularly from close to his personal centres – she fully shares in his nature, yet is a person of her own, not only a copy. Finally, the mutual attraction of the genders is grounded in the fact that, by way of their creation, they truly correspond to each other.

Gen 2f is usually, and rightly so, taken as a complete unit, telling “of how man was expelled from the garden, in which he had lived a carefree life,

²⁷ Von Rad, “Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis”, p. 60.

... of his subsequent reduction, following the crime of Cain, to the cultureless life of ‘a fugitive and wanderer on earth’”.²⁸ The danger in this is that it may lead to a tendency to overlook the smaller details in the various sections of the narrative, and their particular meaning. That these are of great value, in themselves, has become evident through the above summary. Yet, while they may, to some extent, sidetrack one from the main topic, adding other ideas, they still serve their purpose, in the whole, and support the central message, which is: the only suitable companion for אָדָם (*ādām*) is the one who shares with him the same nature, and complements אִשָּׁה (*iššah*) as אִשָּׁה (*iššah*). The failure of the attempt to find one among the animals supports this, because it shows that a relationship of dominion cannot provide that companion; the relationship must be one of equality.

Attention must be drawn to the fact that the order of creation, although taken for granted in the account, plays no role whatsoever. It is neither the object of reflection at all, nor does it serve to establish any hierarchical order between man and woman. The focus is, entirely and exclusively, on the fact that both man and woman share in the same nature, thus being equivalent companions in their mutual relationship. This becomes particularly obvious in the contrast with the unequal relationship to the animals. Though different in their genders, both are – without any reservations – אָדָם (*ādām*). Only in their equal, mutually-complementary relationship, אָדָם (*ādām*) comes to his fullest being. This is the central message of Gen 2:18-25.

PROSPECTS FOR AN APPLICATION IN MELANESIA

Obviously, it is the Creator’s original intention that male and female should be equals, without any reservation. But it only takes one more chapter to overthrow this completely. In God’s punishment on the woman, after her and her companion’s disobedience, he tells her that “[her] desire will be for [her] husband, and he will rule over [her]” (Gen 3:16). This is the

²⁸ Simpson, *Genesis*, p. 441, who includes ch. 4 in this unit. Similar Von Rad, “Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis”, p. 51, who wants to see Gen 2f understood “as a whole, with unified train of thought” (translation by the author).

situation, which all other biblical writers are confronted with, and to which they respond. Thus Paul, in Eph 5:22-33, takes it for granted that wives should be submitting to their husbands, although he urges men to love their wives “just as Christ loved the church” (v. 25), which, ultimately, means an even greater degree of submission. In giving this advice, he, naturally, was caught up in the cultural values and ethics he was familiar with: those of the Jewish-Hellenistic world, in which male dominance and female submission were the norm. But he advances from there, and applies the principles that he has learned from his personal encounter with Christ, and his subsequent theological reflection. In doing so, while he feels obliged to the contemporary culture, he deeply criticises it, by challenging its gender-relationship values. Nevertheless, he remains far behind the ideal of creation, pictured in Gen 2:18-25.

What is the situation in Melanesia? The fact is that, in all Melanesian societies (like probably all over the world), women have to submit to male dominance, to a greater or lesser extent. In matrilineal cultures, a female surely has considerably more rights and powers, particularly because she owns the land, showing to the unprejudiced observer, in quite self-confident behaviour, yet it usually is a man, often the elder brother, who makes the important decisions for her. This being one end of the continuum, male superiority over females, then, is practised in varying degrees in different local cultures, up to the point, where women not only have to submit to their male counterparts, in practice, but are thought to be of different, yes, even poorer, if not evil, substance.²⁹ Such a view, of course, has to be rejected with all determination, based on the total equality in substance expressed in the account of the woman’s creation.

The perception of female inferiority becomes most evident in its social consequences. Particularly, rape and domestic violence have to be named here³⁰, which are both not uncommon; in other words: must, to some extent, be tolerated by society – why?! The present campaigns to create an

²⁹ The reason for this extreme view has been suggested to be men’s fear of the special, life-giving, or attractive, powers of the other sex.

³⁰ Not to speak of the practices of torturing and murdering perceived “witches”, which have recently become public!

awareness of these abuses, and to provide for appropriate legal protection of the concerned women, indicate the underlying misconception. As long as women are seen to be worth less than men are, these acts will not be seen as serious crimes against the dignity, not only of women, but also of the human race, altogether. The exploitation of women in the entertainment industry must be seen along the same line. The newspaper advertisements for “beach babes”, “mud wrestling”, “body decoration”, “wet T-shirt competitions”, etc., speak of the view that is taken here: that the (only?) purpose of women is to please men’s desires, and that, apart from this, they are worth little. It is a contorted image of the mutual attraction between the sexes that Gen 2:24 speaks of.

Another, less-conspicuous and less physically-damaging consequence is the change in the practice of bride wealth exchange. While, traditionally, it primarily served the purpose of sealing the relationship between the two parties involved, there is a tendency, nowadays, that women are degraded to a mere commodity, which is traded according to the principles of supply and demand. This development, at least in part, may be due to the transition from barter to a money economy. The author recalls reading an article, written by a woman, who was strongly in favour of bride price, because it made the young ladies feel worthy, and it built up their self-esteem. He has no objection to that, but, if that is the only source of worth for young women, then something is seriously wrong!

Gender roles in Melanesian society are deliberately not included with the other negative consequences of the idea of female inferiority. Traditionally, there was a clear and useful division of labour in the community, with the women basically responsible for the regular food supply from the garden, and the raising of the children, and the men, representing the nuclear family in public, defending it against threats from the outside, providing shelter, and every now and then, contributing to the menu through hunting game. With that, the gender roles not only served the community, but also provided “a sense of identity”.³¹ Thus, they had a definitely positive value. When Mantovani states that “because roles are actually used to oppress,

³¹ Mantovani, “The Challenge of Christ to Traditional Marriage”, p. 137.

one cannot say that the ideal of roles is oppressive”,³² this is true in every respect. Yet, it is a proven fact that the ideal of gender roles is misused for oppression, and, in this regard, they would have to be listed here together with other abuses.

To be sure, Gen 2:18-25 presents the ideal, i.e., how originally the relationship of male and female was intended to be; we, who live in Melanesia today, live after the fall, which seriously disturbed this relationship. But this is no excuse to hold on to cultural practices – neither here, nor anywhere overseas – which disregard the fundamental equality of the genders. On the contrary, Christ, as the new **Ἀδὰμ** (*ādām*), existentially challenges our value systems towards (!) the – though, in this world, never complete – restoration of the original image.³³ This He does, in particular, when He responds to the Pharisees’ question regarding divorce, with the reference to the Mosaic law, only in order to immediately qualify it as given “because your hearts were hard”, i.e., because the situation is that, after the fall, and, therefore, as far less than ideal.³⁴ He does it fundamentally, in His absolute submission to the will of the Father, even to His death on the cross, by which He restores – in faith, though not yet in full – the original relationship between God and His creatures.

Thus, the challenge, in the case of gender relationship, would be to examine the existing practices in Melanesian cultures, and their underlying concepts and ideas, in the light of Gen 2:18-25. Some practices may be continued, with little or no adjustment at all, while others may need to be abolished completely, and, if necessary, be replaced by new customs, developed on the basis of God’s original intention for His creation. In this way, may the image of Christ, the new **Ἀδὰμ** (*ādām*), with the Spirit’s guidance, become more clearly reflected in Melanesian cultures!

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³² Ibid.

³³ Cf. Ibid., p. 124.

³⁴ Mark 10:2-9.

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