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Patriarchy and Matriarchy

by Hugh Nibley

My story begins with Adam and Eve, the archtypal man and woman in <sup>which</sup> each of us is represented. From the most ancient times their thrilling confrontation has been dramatized in rites and ceremonies throughout the world, as part of a great creation-drama rehearsed at the new year to celebrate the establishment of divine authority on earth in the person of the king and his companion. There is a perfect unity between these two mortals. They are "one flesh". The word "rib" expresses the ultimate in proximity, intimacy, and identity. When Jeremiah 22:10 speaks of "keepers of my selah (rib)" he means bosom friends, inseparable companions. Such things are to be taken figuratively, as in Moses 3:22 and Genesis 2:22, when we are told not that the woman was made out of the rib or from the rib, but that she was the rib, a powerful metaphor. So likewise "bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23), "And they shall cleave together as one flesh"--the condition is that of total identity. "Woman because she was taken out of man" (Moses 3:23), which is interesting because the word woman is here mysteriously an extension of man, a form peculiar to English; what the element wo- or wif- means or where it came from remains a mystery according to the <sup>Oxford English Dictionary</sup> OED. Equally mysterious is the idea of the man and woman as the apple of each other's eye. Philological dictionaries tell us that it is a moot question whether the word "apple" began with the eye or the fruit. The Greek word is kora or korasion, meaning a little girl or little woman you see in the eye of the beloved;--the Latin equivalent is pupilla, from pupa, "little doll", from which we get our word pupil. What

has diverted me to this is the high degree to which this concept is developed in Egypt in the earliest times. The Eye of Re is his daughter, sister, and wife--he sees himself when he looks into her eye and the other way around. It is the image in the eye which is the ideal, the wdat, that which is whole and perfect. For "it is not good that man should be alone"; he is incomplete by himself--"the man is not without the woman in the Lord".

The perfect and beautiful union of Adam and Eve excited the envy and jealousy of the Evil One who made it his prime objective to break it up. He began by making both parties self-conscious and uncomfortable. "Ho, ho," said he, "you are naked. You had better run and hide, or at least put something on. How do you think you look to your Father?" They had reason to be ashamed, because their nakedness betrayed their disobedience. They had eaten of the forbidden fruit. But Satan wants to shock them with his pious show of prudish alarm--he had made them ashamed of being seen together and that was one wedge driven between them.

His first step (or wedge) had been to get one of them to make an important decision without consulting the other. He approached Adam in the absence of Eve with a proposition to make him wise, and being turned down then sought out the woman to find her alone and thus undermine her resistance more easily. It is important that he was able to find them both alone, a point of which the old Jewish legends have a good deal to say. The tradition is that the two were often apart in the Garden engaged in the separate tasks to which each was best fitted, ~~i.e.~~ being one flesh did not deprive either of them of individuality or separate interests and activities.

After Eve had eaten the fruit, Satan had won his round, the two were now drastically separated, for they were of different natures. But Eve, who in ancient lore is the one who outwits the serpent and trips him up with his own

smartness, defeated this trick by a clever argument. First she asked Adam if he intended to keep all of God's commandments. Of course he did! All of them? Naturally! And what, pray was the first and foremost of those commandments? Was it not to multiply and replenish the earth, the universal commandment given to all God's creatures? And how could they keep that commandment if they were separated? It had undeniable priority over the commandment not to eat the fruit. So Adam could only admit that she was right and go along: "I see that it must be so," he said, but it was she who made him see it. This is much more than a smart way of winning her point however, it is the clear declaration that man and woman were put on the earth to stay together and have a family--that is their first obligation and must supercede everything else.

Now a "curse" is placed on Eve, and it looks as if she would have to pay a high price for taking the initiative in the search for knowledge. To our surprise the identical curse is placed on Adam also. For Eve God "will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception. In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children . . ." The key is the word for sorrow, tsavadh, meaning to labor, to toil to sweat, to do something very hard. To "multiply" does not mean to add or increase but to repeat over and over again; the word in the ~~LXX~~ is plethynomai, as in the multiplying of words in the repetitious prayers of the ancients. Both the conception and the labor of Eve will be multiple, she will have many children. Then the Lord says to Adam "in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life" i.e. the bread which his labor must bring forth from the earth. The identical word is used in both cases, the root meaning is to work hard at cutting or diggin<sup>g</sup>; both the man and the woman must sorrow and both must labor (the LXX word is lype meaning bodily or mental strain, discomfort, or affliction). It does not mean to be sorry but to have

a hard time. If Eve must labor to bring forth, so to must Adam labor (Gen. 3:17; Mos. 4:23) to quicken the earth so it shall bring forth. Both of them bring forth life with sweat and tears, and Adam is not the favored party. If his labor is not as severe as her's, it is more protracted. For Eve's life will be spared long after her childbearing--"nevertheless thy life shall be spared"--while Adam's toil must go on to the end of his days: "... in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life!" Even retirement is no escape from that sorrow. The thing to notice is that Adam is not let off lightly as a privileged character; he is as bound to mother earth as she is to the law of her husband. And why not? If he was willing to follow her he was also willing to suffer with her, for this affliction was imposed on Adam expressly "because thou hast hearkened unto thy wife and hast partaken of the fruit . . ."

And both their names mean the same thing. For one thing they are both called Adam, "... and he called their name Adam" (Genesis 3:20). We are told in the Book of Moses that Adam means many: a claim confirmed by recent studies of the Egyptian name of Atum, Tem, Adamu. The same applies to Eve, whose epithet is "the mother of all living".

And what a woman! In the Eden story she holds her own as a lone woman in the midst of an all-male cast of no less than seven supermen and angels. Seven males to one lone woman! Interestingly enough, in the lost and fallen world that reverses the celestial order the ratio is reversed, when seven women cling to one righteous man. <sup>(Isaiah 4:1)</sup> This calls for an explanation since God commanded his creatures to go into the world "two and two", and yet we presently find the ancient Patriarchs with huge families and many wives. What had happened? To anticipate our story, it so happened that when the first great apostasy took place in the days of Adam and Eve the women being wise after the nature of

Mother Eve were less prone to be taken in by the enticements of the Cainite world; for one thing they couldn't--they were too busy having children to get into all that elaborate nonsensical mischief. Seven woman could see the light when only one man could.

The numerical imbalance in the Garden is due to heavenly visitors on the scene, all male. Why are all the angels male? Some very early Christian writings suggests an interesting explanation in the earliest Christian poem (and perhaps the greatest) "The Pearl" and in recently discovered Mandaean manuscripts (the Berlin Kephalia), The Christian comes to earth from his heavenly home, leaving his royal parents behind, for a period of testing upon the earth; having overcome the dragon he returns to the heavenly palace where he is given a rousing welcome. The first person to greet him on his return is his heavenly mother who was the last one to embrace him as he left to go down to earth: "The first embrace is that which the Mother of Life gave to the First Man as he separated himself from her in order to come down to earth to his testing". So we have a division of labor. The angels are male because they are missionaries, as the church on the earth is essentially a missionary organization; the women are engaged in another, but equally important, task of preserving the establishment while the men are away. This relationship is pervasive in the tradition of the race--what the geographer Jean Bruhnes called "the wise force of the earth and the mad force of the sun". Beautifully expressed in an ode by Sappho:

The evening brings back all the things that the bright sun of morning  
has scattered  
You bring back the sheep, and the goat and the little boy back to his  
mother.

Odysseus must wander and have his adventures--it is his nature. But life would be nothing to him if he did not know all the time that he had his

faithful Penelope waiting for him at home. She is no stick-in-the-mud, however, things are just as exciting, dangerous, and demanding at home as on the road (in fact, letters from home to missionary husbands are usually more exciting than their letters from the field).

So who was the more important? Eve is the first on the scene, not Adam, who woke up only long enough to turn over to fall asleep again; and then when he really woke up he saw the woman standing there, ahead of him waiting for him. What could he assume but that she had set it all up--she must be the Mother of All Living! In all that follows she takes the initiative, pursuing the search for ever greater light and knowledge while Adam cautiously holds back. Who was the wiser for that? The first daring step had to be taken, and if she let herself be tricked in her enthusiasm by the persuasive talk of a kindly "brother", it was no fault of hers. Still it was an act of disobedience and someone had to pay and she accepted the responsibility. And had she been so foolish? It is she who perceives and points out to Adam that they have done the right thing after all. Sorrow, yes, but she is willing to pass through it for the sake of knowledge--knowledge of good and evil that will provide the test and the victory for working out their salvation as God intends. It is better this way than the old way; she is the progressive one. She had not led him astray, for God had specifically commanded her to stick to Adam no matter what: "The woman thou gavest me and commanded that she should stay with me: she gave me the fruit, and I did eat." She takes the initiative and he hearkens to her--"because thou hast hearkened to thy wife. . . ." She led and he followed. Here Adam comes to her defense as well as his own; if she twisted his arm, she had no choice either; "Don't you see," he says to the Lord, "you commanded her to stay with me. What else could she do but take me along with her?"

Next it is the woman who sees through Satan's disguise of clever hypocrisy, identifies him, and exposes him for what he is. She discovers the principle of opposites by which the world is governed and views it with high-spirited optimism: it is not wrong that there is opposition in everything, it is a constructive principle making it possible for people to be intelligently happy. It is better to know the score than not to know it. Finally, it is the "seed of the woman" that repels the serpent and embraces the gospel: she it is who first accepts the gospel of repentance. There is no patriarchy or matriarchy in the Garden; the two supervise each other. Adam is given no arbitrary power; Eve is to heed him only insofar as he obeys their Father--and who decides that? She must keep check on him as much as he does on her. It is, if you will, a system of checks and balances in which each party is as distinct and independent in its sphere as are the departments of government under the Constitution--and just as dependent on each other.

The Dispensation of Adam ended as all great dispensations have ended in a great apostasy. Adam and Eve brought up their children diligently in the gospel, but the adversary was not idle in his continued attempts to drive wedges between them. He had first to overcome the healthy revulsion, "the enmity" between his followers and "the seed of the woman" and he began with Cain who went all the way with him "for the sake of getting gain."

Mos.—5:12. And Adam and Eve blessed the name of God, and they made ALL THINGS KNOWN unto their sons and daughters.

—13. And Satan came among them, saying . . . Believe it not. . . And men began FROM THAT TIME FORTH to be carnal, sensual and devilish.

Even in the Garden mankind were subject to temptation; but they were not evil by nature--they had to work at that. All have fallen but how far we fall depends on us. From Cain and Lamech through the Watchers and Enoch to the mandatory cleansing of the Flood, the corruption spread and enveloped all the earth. Central to the drama was a never-ending tension and conflict between

the matriarchal and patriarchal orders both of which were perversions. Each has its peculiar brand of corruption.

The matriarchal cultures are sedentary (remember that the mother stays home either as Penelope or as the princess confined in the tower); that is, agricultural, chthonian, centering around the Earth Mother. The rites are mostly nocturnal, lunar, voluptuous and licentious. The classic image is that of the great, rich, corrupt, age-old, and oppressive city Babylon, queen of the world metropolis, fashion center, the super mall, the scarlet woman the whore of all the earth, whose merchants and bankers are the oppressors of all people. Though the matriarchy makes for softness and decay, beneath the gentle or beguiling or glittering exterior is the fierce toughness, cunning, and ambition of Miss Piggy.

The Patriarchal order lends itself to equally impressive abuses. It is nomadic. The hero is the wandering Odysseus or Knight Errant, the miles gloriosus, the pirate, condottiere, the free enterpriser, not the farmer tied to wife and soil, but the hunter and soldier out for adventure, glory, and loot; not the city, but the golden hoarde, the feralis exercitus that sweeps down upon the soft and sedentary cultures of the coast and the river valley. Its gods are sky gods with the raging sun at their head. Its deprevations are not by decay but by fire and sword. As predatory and greedy as the matriarchy, it cumulates its wealth not by unquestioned immemorial custom but sacred and self-serving laws. The perennial routine calls for the patriarchal tribes of the mountains and the steppes to overrun the wealthy and corrupt cities of the plain only to be absorbed and corrupted by them in turn, so that what we end up with in the long run is the worst of both cultures.

In this great apostasy a new relationship of men and women is the keynote. Lamech got the same degree of Master Mahan as Cain did. These dire operations



entail great secrecy, and Lamech's wives "rebelled against him and declared these things abroad and had not compassion. Wherefore Lamech was despised and cast out, and came not among the sons of man lest he should die. And thus the works of darkness began to prevail among all the sons of men."

(Moses 5:53-55). Thus with infallible insight the Book of Moses introduces us into the perennial year-drama, which in the past fifty years has become a central theme of comparative world religion and literature. We cannot pursue this fascinating subject here, except to note that from now on the king in his ambition has to cope with equally ambitious females. Robert Graves takes us through all the primal myths of the Greeks where this deadly rivalry is the name of the game. "In the archaic religious system," he begins (Greek Mythology, 1, 28), "there were as yet neither gods nor priests, but only a universal goddess and her priestesses, woman being the dominant sex and man her frightened victim." Not a healthy relationship; but matriarchy and patriarchy must always be mortal enemies. Why? Because of the last part of the word, the -archy. In Bailly's dictionary the first definition given for the word -arche is "beginning, specifically the origin of a quarrel or 'a murder'; the second definition is "command, power, authority," which is what the quarrel is about. -Archy means always to be first in order, whether in time or eminence; the point is that there can only be one first. To be first is Satan's first principle: "Rather to rule in hell than be ruled in heaven" <sup>James 3:6</sup> ~~heaven~~ <sup>Insert</sup> Whatever the game, the object is to be No. 1.

Why do we lay more emphasis on the Patriarchal Order than the matriarchy in our world today? That is unavoidable if we would maintain a balance between the two. For the matriarchal succession enjoys a great natural advantage which, where it prevails, renders the other all but helpless. There is rarely any doubt as to who a baby's mother is; but paternity may always be challenged. In the end the only assurance we have of a true patriarchal succession is the word not of the father but of the mother, as the Egyptians well knew--Maat is the official approval of the mother, without which no dynasty could be secure. To assure a true patriarchal succession therefore requires something in the way of checks and <sup>controls</sup> ~~and safeguards~~ on the women; a stricter moral code than that required by the matriarchy, which, as we have noted, tends to become lax and promiscuous with the passing of time. With close rules, <sup>and vigilant surveillance it was only too easy</sup> ~~and safeguards~~ for the patriarchs to become arrogant, dictatorial, self-righteous and oppressive. The Gospel ~~sets absolute limitations beyond which patriarchal authority may not be exercised--the least hint of unkindness acts as a circuit-breaker, a "Amen to the priesthood or authority of that man." (DC 121:37).~~ But without ~~that sacred restraint~~ Without that sacred restraint patriarchal supremacy has ever tended to become abusive.

C A wonderful insight into the archaic order in the bad days after the flood is found in the Book of Ether:

Ether 8:7. Now Jared became exceedingly sorrowful because of the loss of the kingdom, for he had set his heart upon the kingdom and upon the glory of the world.

8. Now the daughter of Jared being exceeding expert . . . thought to devise a plan whereby SHE could redeem the kingdom. . . .