

Biblical questions on God, creation, sin and women

By Douglas Groothuis

Is the biblical deity a male who ordains that men rule over women who are their inferiors? Does Genesis teach that God created Eve to amuse Adam and that Eve alone is to blame for the entrance of sin into the world? Is the God of the Bible really inferior to the Goddess?

Lia Saliccia (*ODE*, July 15) would have us believe these things. If Christianity taught what Saliccia claims, there would be little incentive to be Christian. But there is more to be said. Let's consider three of her concerns: the creation account, the gender of God and the nature of the Goddess.

Genesis gives us a different creation account than Saliccia's rendering. Genesis chapter one, verses 26 and 27, says God made both male and female in his image and likeness. Genesis chapter five, verses one and two, echoes this important item of creation and further clarifies that both female and male are included in the Hebrew term "adam," which is translated "man" in most English bibles.

Furthermore, God commissioned both male and female to be stewards of the unfallen earth. There is not a whiff of hierarchy here. Genesis chapter two offers a complementary account that adds several particularities. God first creates male and creates the female from his side to be his "helper."

However, the original Hebrew text does not imply or assume that the woman is inferior to the man or subordinated to him. Rather, the meaning of the woman "helper" is that she is fit to complement the man as his equal. Our first parents were equal in stature and authority before the fall.

Genesis chapter three reveals that the woman was tempted and deceived by the serpent to take and eat of the forbidden fruit. (There is no mention of any "apple.")

This was the one thing that God had placed off limits. After her mutiny, she offers the fruit to Adam, who eats and also shuns the counsel of the Almighty.

Is the woman saddled with all of the guilt for bringing sin into creation? She is not. When God asks the primordial couple what has happened, they deny their guilt and shift the blame. But the text is clear that (1) both partners disobeyed the clear direction of the Creator in succumbing to the snares of the serpent, and (2) both partners are responsible for their disobedience to God.

Because of human sin, God then pronounces a curse on the earth that affects men and women somewhat differently. Men will try to dominate women, and women will have pain in childbirth. But the effects of the fall are not normative in Christian ethics.

Paul calls men and women to "submit to one another" (Ephesians chapter five, verse 21) and declares that male and female are one in Christ (Galatians chapter three, verse 28). Jesus repeatedly insists that the greatest in the Kingdom of God are the ones who serve and sacrifice for others. Sexist domination is not mandated by God, but condemned. Jesus is the model. He said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark chapter 10, verse 45).

But who is the biblical God? The Scriptures refer to God as a personal being who both loves and judges justly. Unlike goddess religions, the Bible affirms that God is the Creator of the universe who is distinct from what has been created, but concerned with it (unlike Deism).

Is God male? By no means. God is not a sexual being. As Jesus said, God is "Spirit" (John chapter four, verse 24). Sexuality is a created mode of being designed by God for marital intimacy and offspring. English lacks a personal pronoun that is neutral with respect to gender. But English translations do not use the word "it" for God

because the Scriptures never describe God as an impersonal force or principle, but as the "I am who I am" (Exodus chapter three, verse 14). Therefore, one should be careful not to read more into the references to God as "He" than is intended by the text itself.

Saliccia is correct in highlighting the injustices done to women by some Christians throughout history, even if she overstates the point. Nevertheless, we can also cite cases of Christians throughout the centuries and on every continent who have fed the poor, worked to abolish slavery and caste, built hospitals, and yes, championed the cause of women's rights through women's suffrage and other reforms. Yet the crucial issue is what the Bible itself says about men and women and God.

Many are attracted by the notion of the Goddess as the processes of nature, but they should consider that this deity — despite the references to "She" and "Mother" — is really nothing more than an impersonal force, principle or source that is imbedded in nature. This idea of a female deity is strictly metaphorical or poetic, not literal or actual.

The Christian Scriptures, on the contrary, claim that God himself has taken on human flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the promised Messiah of the Hebrews. God is not an impersonal force under the cloak of the Goddess, but a holy being who lived an incomparable life, died an incomparable death on a Roman cross and rose triumphant from the dead in order to liberate people from their bondage to sin. Women and men who want to know the Christian view of God should not neglect Jesus Christ — the one whom Christians confess as God incarnate. You will not find a sexist. You will, if you heed his words, find truth and life abundant.

Douglas Groothuis recently received a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University.

LETTERS

Record straight

On July 15, Dan Williams, vice president for administration at the University, "set the record straight" regarding rent increases for family housing. Williams said three quarters of the proposed increase will be used to maintain and operate housing. But whose housing will be maintained at whose expense?

In June, family housing residents received a letter from housing that said that because the projected rent increases were so high, they would have to "cut maintenance items and equipment purchases to a minimum level to lessen the impact of the increases."

This statement and numerous budget documents prove that the University is not using three quarters of the proposed increase for repair and maintenance of existing family housing; rather, they are prioritizing University-wide administrative costs and building projects unsuitable for family occupancy over existing family housing maintenance.

According to these documents, the maintenance allocation of the increase for Amazon is closer to one fifth, and the overhead assessment and the debt service at 18th Avenue and Agate Street.

Most troubling is the disputed overhead assessment of \$300,000 from housing. Despite numerous inquiries by tenants, administrators have been unable to substantiate claims that we are not completely self-supporting through rents. Not only is Williams using phantom maintenance projects to justify the increase, he is charging us for phantom services as well.

On June 26, the family housing board, which is comprised of faculty, administrators and tenants, voted unanimously to oppose the proposed increases on the basis that the overhead assessment is unjustified.

Nancy Forrest
Family Housing Board

Don't condemn

Scott Camp's letter (*ODE*, July 22) in response to a letter I wrote (*ODE*, July 20) really missed the

mark on what I had intended it to mean. I was trying to point out that Christianity is changing as our society changes.

True, Christianity has historically been notorious for placing women in a role subservient to men. But I think that you will find that there are many branches of Christianity that are breaking away from the patriarchal background that has clouded the important issues of Christianity for years.

To lump all Christians together and accuse them of sexually harassing women is unfair to those Christians who want to see a change in their religion because they don't believe their God makes any distinctions between male or female.

It is becoming much more commonplace for women to hold positions of leadership in churches today. At colleges like Northwest Christian College (here in Eugene, across from the law school), more women are graduating as pastoral ministry majors than ever before.

To continue with Camp's analogy, is it fair to accuse all Germans today for Hitler's atroc-

ities more than 50 years ago? No, it isn't. Should we hate all of humanity because it has been patriarchal in the past? No, we shouldn't. Nor is it fair to accuse all of Christianity for what it historically has been, when there are Christians whose entire denominations hold to a non-patriarchal belief. As society is changing, so is Christianity.

Thomas Huckaba
Biology/Political Science

Expansion

In my previous letter regarding family housing rents, published in the July 15 *Emerald*, I described the basis for the planned increases in the Amazon, Westmoreland and east campus areas. After meeting with some student tenant representatives, I want to expand on my explanation of two of the points.

First, it is difficult to establish comparability between the University's family housing stock and rental housing in the Eugene-Springfield market. Nevertheless, I think it is reasonable to compare two-bedroom Amazon units, slated to rent for \$175 a month, with

similar ones in the local community that average about \$350 a month. Likewise, it is reasonable to compare two-bedroom Westmoreland units, which will rent for \$200 a month, with ones in the local market that average \$450 a month.

Second, it is evident that University administrators and family housing tenants have differing points of view about the definition of "operating costs" on which the increased rents are based. My use of the term incorporates the costs of amortizing the bonds sold to pay for new construction in east campus, as well as the first-time charge for centralized University administrative services. That's the reason I attribute a larger percentage to operating costs than the tenants do.

I want to stress again that the University empathizes with the plight of many students whose often limited resources are being outpaced by escalating costs for tuition, housing and other educational expenses.

Dan Williams
University Vice President

Watch Out For Our New Dance Floor!

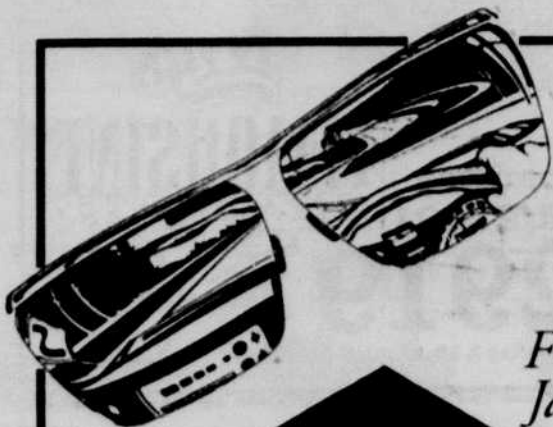
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