

And She Called His Name Seth . . . (Gen 4:25): The Birth of Critical Knowledge and the Unread End of Eve's Story¹

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EVE. FOR HOW MANY centuries now has she been frozen under the tree of knowledge with the deadly, sinful apple in her hand? We have seen the paintings, we know the quotations, some of them, like 1 Timothy 2:8-15, in the New Testament, and many more in the church fathers and other texts and traditions. Throughout the ages the patriarchal Christian discourse has bound her to the nakedness of her ageless body and to never-ending debates about femininity, sexuality, and sin. Turned into a pillar of salt she had to stand there under the tree, testifying that womanhood equals guilt, incapacity to think, fallibility—and the need of infallible male guidance. Since ever and forever.²

In the meantime, we have started in manifold ways and voices to deconstruct this image of Eve as a male idol.³ The pressing question for a

1. Presented at the Inauguration as Professor of New Testament at Union Theological Seminary on April 22, 1999. The lecture under the title "Out from under the Tree: Reflections on Eve" was preceded by a presentation by Alan Cooper (Jewish Theological Seminary/Union Theological Seminary), inaugurated as Professor of Bible, who gave a Jewish perspective on Eve.

2. An excellent compilation of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources interpreting the biblical account of Eve and Adam (Gen. 1-3/5) as a pivotal text for defining femaleness and maleness has been provided by K. E. Kvam, L. S. Schearing, and V. H. Ziegler, eds., *Eve & Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999). The traditions covered range from 200 B.C.E. until the Reformation era and up to the nineteenth/twentieth-century debates in the United States.

3. "Egalitarian" interpretations as opposed to dominant hierarchical readings of Eve and Adam, however, have existed from the beginning, the most prominent New Testament example being Gal. 3:28, which proclaims the end of "male and female" (cf. Gen. 1:27) in Christ. Contrariwise and with further reaching consequences in church history a text like

biblical scholar, however, is: To what extent is the biblical text itself involved in this kind of patriarchal idolatry—and/or resistant to it? What I want to share with you right here is a tiny piece of “resistant text” and a kind of discovery: the suppressed end of Eve’s story. How it continued with her after—unnoticed by the dogmatic debates—she finally got rid of the tree and started to grow: to grow adult, to grow old, to grow wise.

Not that I have dug a new extracanonical document out of the sand—digging in the text can be at least as much exciting. And it has been there in the text all the time: two little verses at the end of Genesis 4, which rarely have been really read. Under the censorship of the dominant reading interests they were just seen as a more or less disconnected appendix, perhaps related to chapter 5. In fact, these two verses, as I read them, contain the very climax and reversal of the whole story of Eve.⁴

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*Gen 4:17-24*⁵

17 Kayin knew his wife; she became pregnant and bore Hanokh. Now he became the builder of a city and called the city’s name according to his son’s name Hanokh.

18 To Hanokh was born Irad, Irad begot Mehuyael, Mehuyael begot Metushael, Metushael begot Lemekh.

1 Tim. 2:8-15 demands the subordination of women, as Eve has been created secondary to Adam but sinned prior to him. Both strands of tradition are documented in the above-mentioned collection by Kvam/Scheering/Ziegler. Lost and suppressed countertraditions on Eve have also been traced by E. Goessmann, ed., *Eva—Gottes Meisterwerk* (Munich: Archiv für philosophie- und theologiegeschichtliche Frauenforschung, Vol. 2, 1985) and *Kennt der Geist kein Geschlecht?* (Munich: Archiv für philosophie- und theologiegeschichtliche Frauenforschung, Vol. 6, 1994). For an introduction to the current exegetical debate see A. Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

4. Despite the well-known fact that the narrative structure of Genesis 4 is closely linked to Genesis 3 and that it is framed by a speech/naming act of Eve (4:1; 4:25), whose name is mentioned only in 3:20 and 4:1, chapter 4 played and plays hardly any role in the discussions about Eve, a rather striking example of how dogmatic bias can blind exegetical perception. Within a framework that confined Eve’s story to sin and Fall in Genesis 3, the two crucial opening and closing passages on Eve in 4:1 and 4:25 did not make much sense and were widely ignored, especially the latter. Among noticeable recent exceptions cf. M. Ph. Korsak, “Eve, Malignant or Maligned?” in *CrossCurrents* 44 (1994-95): 453-62, and I. Pardes, “Beyond Genesis 3: The Politics of Maternal Naming,” in Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, 173-93; see also B. Kahl, “Fratricide and Ecocide: Re-Reading Adama and Eve (Gen 2-4),” in D. Hessel/L. Rasmussen, eds., *Ecumenical Earth: New Dimensions of Church and Community in Creation*, forthcoming.

5. Translation E. Fox, *In the Beginning: A New English Rendition of the Book of Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983).

¹⁹ *Lemekh took himself two wives, the name of the first one was Ada, the name of the second was Tzilla.*

²⁰ *Ada bore Yaval, he was the father of those who sit amidst tent and herd.*

²¹ *His brother's name was Yuval, he was the father of all who play the lyre and the pipe.*

²² *And Tzilla bore as well—Tuval-Kayin, burnisher of every blade of bronze and iron. Tuval-Kayin's sister was Naama.*

²³ *Lemekh said to his wives:*

*Ada and Tzila, hearken to my voice,
Wives of Lemekh, give ear to my saying:
Aye—a man I kill for wounding me,
A lad for only bruising me!*

²⁴ *Aye—if sevenfold vengeance be for Kayin,
Then for Lemekh, seventy-sevenfold!*

Have you heard the voice of Lemekh? His song celebrates violence without any boundaries—death seventy-seven fold. Death for men. And death for children. It doesn't matter, it's just like a game. *A man I kill for wounding me, a lad for only bruising me . . . for Lemekh seventy-sevenfold vengeance.* Lemekh's retaliatory strikes obviously have a destructive power infinitely higher than the original damage, *seventy-sevenfold*. They destroy, pretending to protect, they are aggression under the veil of defense. In the biblical narrative Lemekh's "song of sword" (4:23-24) is the first military hymn in human history, the birth of the great narrative of war. Mass destruction and mass murder are proclaimed as the legitimate right of the superior, powerful male, whenever he feels *wounded*, or *bruised*, or *offended*.

Lemekh needs three persons to establish his discourse on good and evil, right and wrong. First of all he has his two wives parading in front of him: Ada and Tzilla, mothers of Lemekh's children, explicitly have to *hearken* to Lemekh's voice, and they *hearken*, without speaking. We do not know whether they listen obediently, respectfully, or trembling with fear. But their silence affirms and reinforces what Lemekh proclaims: that male power to wipe out life is above female power to bring forth life, *yeladim*, born ones. *A man I kill, and a lad. . .*⁶

6. The Hebrew term *yelad* (lad, boy, child) is both related to the verb *yalad* which refers to female and male capacity to bring forth life (give birth, beget—cf. 4:1 and 4:25) and to the noun *toledot*, which denotes the divine/human activity in bringing forth the universe and life (2:4—begettings/generations of heavens and earth by God; 5:1—begettings/genera-

And then there is Cain, Lemekh's great-grandfather. Lemekh turns him into the primeval war hero: *If sevenfold vengeance be for Cain, then for Lemekh seventy-sevenfold. . . .* We have to remember the earlier part of the chapter (4:9-15), the mysterious sign God placed on Cain when he had slain Abel and it turned out that this act of murderous, merciless strength in fact had made Cain hopelessly weak, uprooted, vulnerable, *wavering and wandering*. Confronted with a most frightened Cain God after all gave him a merciful chance to survive: a sign of sevenfold protection. *YHWH said to him: No, therefore, whoever kills Kayin, sevenfold will it be avenged. So YHWH set a sign for Kayin, so that whoever came upon him would not strike him down (4:15).*

Lemekh's rereading of the story is subtle but crucial. Sevenfold divine vengeance as sevenfold divine protection for a completely feeble Cain now becomes the pretext for seventy-sevenfold aggression by a most violent Lemekh. The story is turned upside down, and also God. But who will notice?

One chapter after Eve has taken the apple of knowledge, bad is publicly proclaimed as good. Right and wrong, once defined by God, are usurped by the naming power of violent, war-minded propaganda. Any countervoice is silenced. Abel is dead and forgotten. The great dispute between God and Cain about sacrifice and sin and brotherhood (4:6-7) is buried in nonremembrance. Ada and Tzilla don't say a word. Even God has become speechless. Seven generations since Adam have passed and the power-driven male has become God-like. With human life multiplying death seventy-sevenfold, history rushes into disaster before it has really started.

But then, just at the point of no return, there *is* another voice. A disruptive and disturbing tune infiltrates Lemekh's song with dissonance.

Gen 4:25

Adam knew his wife again and she bore a son. She called his name: Shet/Granted One! meaning: God has granted me another seed in place of Hevel, for Kayin killed him.

What has happened? We thought Adam and Eve must have been dead long since long. . . . Well, if we take the narrative coherence of Genesis 4 and the wisdom of its final redactor—Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig talked about this "unitary consciousness" as source R (=

tions of Adam). Lemekh's murderous announcement concerning a *yeled* thus implies a statement about his destructive, power-centered way of perceiving "Genesis."

Rabbenu: our teacher)⁷—somehow seriously, Genesis 4:25 is the revision and restart of the whole post-Eden story. Right into the face of the triumphant victor a woman, carrying her newborn baby, starts to say the name of a victim: *another seed in place of Abel, for Cain has killed him*. Right into the space occupied by the glorious myth of strength, growth, forceful success she talks about one who got lost, who didn't make it—a *desaparecido*, her second son, Abel. And she simply calls Lemekh's great grand hero Cain, her first son, a killer.

Seth . . . another seed in place of Abel, for Cain has killed him. A seemingly private and motherly act of name-giving becomes public and a political scandal, if Genesis 4:25 is really meant to follow Genesis 4:24. With this one statement about Abel and Cain and God, Eve turns the whole history and ideology of victory upside down and just shows what is there: Abel murdered and Cain a murderer, and a God, who out of mercy beyond understanding grants another son—not a son to continue the murderously powerful and successful line of Cain, but a son *in place of Abel, for Cain has killed him*.

This is not how it all started. In the beginning, right after being out of Eden, Eve had quite different notions of God, Cain, and Abel:

Gen 4:1-9

¹ *The human knew Havva his wife, she became pregnant and bore Kayin. She said Kaniti/I have gotten a man, as has YHWH!*

² *She continued bearing—his brother, Hevel. Now Hevel became a shepherd of flocks, and Kayin became a worker of the soil.*

³ *It was after passing of days that Kayin brought, from the fruit of the soil, a gift to YHWH,*

⁴ *and as for Hevel, he too brought—from the firstborn of his flock, from their fat-parts. YHWH had regard for Hevel and his gift,*

⁵ *for Kayin and his gift he had no regard. Kayin became exceedingly enraged and his face fell.*

⁶ *YHWH said to Kayin: Why are you so enraged? Why has your face fallen?*

⁷ *Is it not thus: If you intend good, bear-it-aloft, but if you do not intend good, at the entrance is sin, a crouching demon, toward you is his lust—but you can rule over him.*

7. Cf. Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 23, 179.

⁸ *Kayin said to Hevel his brother. . . . But then it was when they were out in the field that Kayin rose up against Hevel his brother and he killed him.*

⁹ *YHWH said to Kayin: Where is your brother? He said: I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?*

Kayin: I have gotten/created a man as/with God, is Eve's proud announcement at the birth of Cain. This exclamation can be translated in different ways with regard to the (cocreative?) position of Eve vis-à-vis God and Adam/male (cf. 2:7, 23).⁸ Regarding Cain, however, things are clearer: Eve calls him a *man/ish*—and she puts him into close relationship to God: *a man created with God*, or even *a man-with-God* (like, e.g., Enoch in 5:22). Nowhere else in the Bible is a newborn baby called *ish*, *a man*. Eve celebrates and elevates the masculinity of her firstborn son that, according to the rules of patriarchal law, will put him into a power position over his brothers and sisters. Cain is “her man,” even if “her man” according to Genesis 3:16 will rule over her.⁹

And then there is “his brother.” *She continued to give birth—his brother, Abel*. Whereas Cain is born as *a man*, Abel is defined as a relational, dependent being right by the semantics of the birth order. Abel is just another one, not the number one son. Eve is so absorbed by her pride in Cain that she even forgets to name him. Abel, the second-born, in a seemingly self-understanding way is given his name by the social position into which he is born: the Hebrew term *Abel/hevel* means nothingness, vapor, meaninglessness. *Nothing* is mentioned about any exclamation of joy or affection at Abel's birth, *nothing* about his relationship to his mother, his

8. *Kaniti* can mean both “I have acquired” and “I have created.” The preposition *’et* implies like/equally with God as well as together with God. According to U. Cassuto, Eve in her first naming speech boasts of her generative power as creator in bringing forth the second man “like God” or “together with God,” i.e., as God's partner (*A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1961–64], 201). Pardes goes beyond Cassuto by referring 4:1 not only to 2:7, but also to 2:23 (“Beyond Genesis 3,” 182f). Whereas in 2:23 “man” (*ish*) takes pride in bringing forth “woman” (*ishsha*), Eve in 4:1 reclaims female generative power. I would like to see a further linkage between 4:1 and Lemekh's song in 4:23–24 which takes up the key terms *man-woman-child* (*yeled*) again, now confronting two mothers who had given birth (*yalad*—4:20, 22) like Eve (4:1) with a proud male statement on the counter-generative power to kill “man” (*ish*) and “child” (*yeled*). Pardes's suggestion that Eve's speech in 4:1 be understood as a “condensation” of originally two verses “I shaped a child (*yeled*) equally with YHWH/I created a man (*ish*) equally with God” would very well fit into this antithetical parallelism between 4:1 and 4:23f, which has been observed in a more general way by U. Cassuto as well (p. 190f).

9. Translations usually render *ish/man* in 3:16 as “husband” and in 4:1 as “man/male child,” thus making the vital connection between the two verses invisible.

father, or God. Abel is nothing else than just *his brother*, the story will repeat this term not less than seven times. Cain is not called *his brother* a single time. He will not act as *his brother*. He will not know about *his brother*, after he has killed him. And he will tell God that he is anything else than *his brother's keeper*. He is a *man*.¹⁰

But God, *only* God will have regard for Abel. God looks at Abel's sacrifice, not at Cain's offering. Haven't we met the biblical God elsewhere having a preferential option for the small and neglected rather than the strong and big ones? It is God's absolute autonomy and free choice, yes, but it is not an arbitrary action.¹¹ God's election of Abel is God's mercy and justice in dealing with a birth order that in a somehow "natural" way has created social inequality, discrimination, hierarchy. And Abel's election does not mean Cain's rejection; rather, God talks to Cain, wrestles with him, wants to convert him to brotherhood (4:6-7). But Cain does not want to be converted into a brother. He wants to stay *a man* and a lord, and he wants to have a god who is with him, not with the (br)other. It is both his brother and the God-for-the-brother who are rejected by Cain, the *man (created) with God*, when he kills Abel.

What about Eve? She does not talk after naming and proclaiming Cain, *the man*, in 24 verses. God talks to Cain, not to Eve, about Abel. The earth, *Adama*, not Eve, cries out with Abel's blood in her mouth (4:11-12). And finally Lemekh sings his dreadful song with two voiceless women listening. But then, suddenly, she is there again. Let us think that the final redactor was serious about Eve's narrative come-back right at this point;

10. The inequality and hierarchy between Cain and Abel as a hermeneutical key for the whole narrative of 4:1-17 has been pointed out by U. Cassuto (p. 202), whose commentary appeared in Hebrew already in 1944. It was also emphasized by K. Deurloo, *Kain en Abel* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, 1967) and is more widely accepted in recent commentaries: cf. W. Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation—A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 56; Pardes, "Beyond Genesis 3," 178, and the detailed analysis of E. van Wolde, "The Story of Cain and Abel: A Narrative Study," *JSOT* 52 (1991): 25-41. See also A. Boesak, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation, and the Calvinist Tradition* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984), 137f. The consequences drawn from Cain's superiority for the interpretation of the whole story, however, are diverging and not always very far-reaching, especially when it comes to the crucial question of why God preferred Abel's offering in 4:4f. Nor is Eve's role with regard to the "fratriarchy" (cf. C. Gordon, "Fratriarchy in the Old Testament," *JBL* 54 (1935): 223-31) usually considered.

11. Cf., e.g., W. Brueggemann: "Life is unfair. God is free" (*Genesis*, 56). Even if I would agree with Brueggemann that the point is not God's "preferring cowboys to farmers" and that God acts "inexplicably," I would not see this freedom of God as "capricious." God's support for Abel because of his weakness has also been underlined in the commentary on Genesis 4-12 by J. S. Croatto, *Exilio y Sobrevivencia: Tradiciones Contraculturales en el Pentateuco* (Buenos Aires: Lumen, 1997), 48, 50.

let us think that he was well aware that Seth, brother of Cain and Abel, is born six generations after it was his proper time to be born. Let us think that all this chronological and genealogical confusion was the only way, right at the brink of extermination, for God to re-create time and space for humanity to survive.

And it all depends on Eve now. If we trust the narrative logic, Eve, after triumphantly inaugurating human history with Cain, the powerful male, was doomed to witness the results. Over seven generations she was not allowed to die, but had to suffer death in her children, up to seventy-sevenfold.¹² It must have been hell, something like purgatory. If we take Eve as narrative character of Genesis 4 seriously, she saw the whole glory and disaster of human civilization developing before her eyes. First she saw how her favorite son, Cain, killed her other son, Abel, how he wanted to gain everything (and she believed in him!), but he lost everything: *wavering and wandering*. . . . Then she saw how the first city foreshadowing the skyscraping Babel was built; she saw musical instruments being invented together with blades of bronze and iron.¹³ And on top of all that, finally she witnessed Lemekh celebrating the overkill. It must have been a terribly long and torturous way for Eve to go, the stony way of coming to know. Everything she believed to be good in the beginning turned out as evil.

And there she is, with her third son, as if nothing had happened. Yet, everything is different this time:

Gen 4:25-26

²⁵ *Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son. She called his name: Shet/Granted-One! meaning: God has granted me another son in place of Hevel, for Kayin killed him.*

²⁶ *To Shet as well a son was born, he called his name Enosh/Mortal. At that time they first called out the name of YHWH.*

Genesis 4:25 is the first time in this story that Eve or any other human pronounces the name of Abel. She speaks for him. She mourns him. She

12. M. Ph. Korsak has pointed out that contrary to her "positive" New Testament counterpart Mary, Eve is generally not acknowledged in her role as a mourning mother ("Eve, Malignant or Maligned?" 462).

13. Metalwork, which might link Cain and his offspring Tubal-Cain to the tribe of the Kenites, enables not only the production of tools, but also of weapons; cf. U. Cassuto, pp. 180ff, 230, and N. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Jahwe* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), 577-80. The overall ambiguity inherent to the genealogy of Cain which in 4:17-24 presents origins of human culture (city-building, music, metalwork, and shepherding), but links them to the sons of Cain/Lemekh, has been shown by W. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 65f.

remembers him. She has her third son re-present him, pro-exist for him. She takes his side and at the same time confesses the murder Cain has refused to confess (*I do not know . . .*). Conversion happens, as does repentance toward justice and righteousness.¹⁴

And God is redefined and recognized as the ONE WHO HE/SHE IS (Exod. 3:14): a God who does not forget Abel, the small brother nothingness of Cain, even when everybody else has forgotten about him. It hardly comes as a surprise that after all that has happened humanity finally starts (again) to worship God in 4:26 with Enosh, Seth's son. The first and last verses of Genesis 4 close with the name of God; but whereas in 4:1 Eve has linked it to Cain, the dominant male, in 4:25-26 she has attached it to the weak and lost brother Abel.¹⁵ This is the decisive lesson about God and good to be taught after Eden. And Eve becomes the first to learn and proclaim it: the first theologian, teacher, prophetess, and—critical thinker of human history.

Seth, with whom human genealogy will start anew in Genesis 5, thus means the rebirth of humanity *and* masculinity. He embodies the survival of the unfit and God's counternatural selection of the endangered and excluded. But it was Eve who has inscribed this memory and knowledge of the exterminated into his very existence.¹⁶ For she had finally understood that the future of her children could be good only in so far as the evil done to Abel would not be forgotten. If Eve/woman has been

14. The change in Eve's naming speech of 4:25 compared to 4:1 has been also observed by U. Cassuto, p. 246: mourning rather than pride, acceptance of God as creator instead of the initial hubris. Taking up the latter, Pardes sees in 4:1-25 the Jahwist pattern of pride/crime—punishment—reconciliation between God and the sinner at work ("Beyond Genesis 3," 186f.). In addition, I would stress the rebellious and resistant element in that reconciliation: Eve now accepts the divine supremacy in (pro)creation, not male supremacy, however, cf. also Pardes, 187. At the same time she deconstructs, contradicts, and counteracts the ideology of the Cain-Lemekh myth, i.e., the male power to undo (pro)creation.

15. That Genesis 4 defines faith in YHWH through Abel/Seth/Enosh as a religion of the weak and defeated has been emphasized by the Brazilian liberation theologian M. Schwantes, *Am Anfang war die Hoffnung: Die biblische Urgeschichte aus der Sicht der Armen* (Munich: Claudius Verlag, 1992), 81. The role of Eve, however, is not given any attention again.

16. In various ancient traditions Seth is seen as the beginning of a new, righteous generation and even given messianic connotations, e.g., in 1 Hen (90: 37-38): cf. A. F. J. Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic Literature NovTSup 46* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 22. Whereas one has to state that the priestly genealogy in Gen. 5:3 on the surface suppresses Eve's image by exclusively referring to Adam, one could also say that through Seth the subversive memory of Abel and Eve, the two "second-born/created," is incorporated at the very core of the patriarchal, all-male, and first-born centered structure of the Genesis genealogies, narratives, and social constructs.

blamed as the first who sinned (Sirach 25:24), she needs to be praised also as the first who found out how sin can be mastered.¹⁷

We have never seen this Eve whose face and body can no longer be young and undamaged. She has suffered a lot and learned a lot. She has stopped judging good and evil just by outside appearance and desire. Neither a good-looking apple, nor a well-sounding serpent, nor the boastful voice of male strength can mislead her any more. But we did not allow Eve to move away from the tree and to change. Maybe the bare-breasted seductress was much easier to handle than the resistant intelligence of a woman who publicly dares to de-mask and oppose the "right" propagated by the powerful as "wrong."

To ignore Genesis 4:25 is to read the passion narrative without the resurrection stories. The dogmatic discourse about inevitable human sinfulness in general and female sinfulness in particular has prevented us from listening to what the text actually talks about: restoration of life *after* death and sin have entered history; conversion in the midst of perversion; a woman's rising against the fall; sin primarily linked not to (female) sexuality, but to the (predominantly male) transgression of violence, murder, war, and the obsession with power.

It is time to turn to the unread end story of Eve. For it is only with Seth that Eve becomes truly the *mother of all living* (3:20), giving birth finally to a life-saving, life-passionate *critical knowledge* of good and evil, right and wrong. And if she hadn't been there, right after Genesis 4:24, Lemekh would have killed us long before we had had a chance to be born.

17. Mastering of sin, even after the "Fall," had been demanded by God from Cain in 4:7, who had failed: cf. F. Cruesemann, "Autonomie und Sünde: Gen 4 und die >jahwistische< Urgeschichte," in W. Schottroff and W. Stegemann, eds., *Traditionen der Befreiung*, Vol. 1 (Munich: Kaiser, 1980), 60-77.