Marquette University
e-Publications@Marquette

Dissertations (1934 -)

Dissertations, Theses, and Professional Projects

"Now These Things Happened As Examples For Us" (1 Cor. 10:6):the Biblical-Narrative Depiction Of Human Sinfulness

Stephen Frederick Jenks
Marquette University

Follow this and additional works at: https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu

Part of the Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons

Recommended Citation

Jenks, Stephen Frederick, ""Now These Things Happened As Examples For Us" (1 Cor. 10:6):the Biblical-Narrative Depiction Of Human Sinfulness" (2014). *Dissertations (1934 -)*. 348.
https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/348

“NOW THESE THINGS HAPPENED AS EXAMPLES FOR US” (1 COR. 10:6): THE BIBLICAL-NARRATIVE DEPICTION OF HUMAN SINFULNESS

by

Stephen F. Jenks, B.A., M.Div., Th.M.

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

May 2014

ABSTRACT
"NOW THESE THINGS HAPPENED AS EXAMPLES FOR US" (1 COR. 10:6):
THE BIBLICAL-NARRATIVE DEPICTION OF HUMAN SINFULNESS

Stephen F. Jenks, B.A., M.Div., Th.M.

Marquette University, 2014

For several decades voices from various sectors of Christianity have decried the loss of compelling language for sin. The atrophying of sin language is of no small moment due to the organic connection between theological loci. Sin talk relates to salvation-talk, human-talk, and Christ-talk. Further, the loss of compelling sin language threatens to silence the church's voice in the culture.

Both classic and contemporary theologies of sin, pursuing the essentialist methods of the past, attempt to define sin and derive the fullness of the doctrine of sin from these distillations. However, many of these renderings of sin are insufficiently attentive to the importance of narrative modes of thought in theologizing. Specifically, they often almost completely ignore the witness of the biblical narrative—both individual narratives and the Bible's overall narrative structure. Furthermore, they tend to appropriate the narratives, and especially the narrative of the fall in Genesis 3, in ways that actually subvert the narratives' narrativity through historicizing, mythologizing, and decontextualizing. They therefore provide thin descriptions of the human condition and consequently offer distorted depictions of redemption, humanity, and the divine-human relationship. These patterns can be seen in both feminist theologies that build their definitions of sin from particular views of the human and evangelical theology which derive their definition from biblical propositions.

In this dissertation we seek to begin to offer a narrative theology of sin by providing a reading of Genesis 1-11 that attends to its literary character and seeks to identify the reference point for sin and discern its development in the narrative. We will discover that both the reference point for sin and the axis of its development relates to the depiction of the human as the *imago dei*.

We will conclude by demonstrating that indexing the doctrine of sin to a narratively construed *imago dei* offers a more robust language for sin and in particular, offers a more natural bridge to Christ. Indeed, in the story of redemption, Christ becomes the ultimate reference point for describing sin.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Stephen F. Jenks, B.A., M.Div., Th.M.

A degree that takes a decade and a dissertation that takes half of that guarantees a host of debts and dependents. It would be impossible to name all those who have cared, inquired and prayed for me during my education.

I am grateful to the leadership and congregations of two churches for their support throughout the entire doctoral process: to Racine Bible Church for giving space for a young thinker to teach and grow, and to Union Christian Church for patience with their pastor during months of divided attention.

I am thankful for several instructors who have shaped me as a thinker and a minister: Paul Feinberg, John Feinberg, Kevin Vanhoozer, William Kurz, Mickey Mattox, readers D. Stephen Long and Sharon Pace, and my advisor, Lyle Dabney.

I give thanks for a series of conversation partners who have accompanied me along my educational journey and at various moments confirmed, refined, and rebutted my thinking: Joe Thomas, Eric Tully, Darien Bowers, Keith Kenyon, Tim Moore, Kent Millen, Paul Cady, Jon Jenks, Phil Skoglund, Yervant Kutchukian, Tim Decker, and Morgan Gravley.

I thank my parents, Peter and Mary Lou Jenks, for the love and support that they have shown in so many ways throughout my life and education. To Ellyn for making sure I got enough study breaks for play.

And to Debbie, my patient companion, who is herself an example to me of the image of Christ. *Sine qua non*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS i

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION: SIN AND NARRATIVES IN THEOLOGY 1

Defining Sin 3

Problems with Defining Sin 5

Two Examples: Evangelical and Feminist Theology 6

Sin in Evangelical Theology 6

Sin in Feminist Theology 9

Definitions of Sin and Theological Epistemology 12

Narrative and Theology 14

The Narrative Turn 14

Story and System 15

Story and Self 17

Types of Narrative Theology 19

Critiques of Narrative Theology 21

Narrative and Beyond 24

Narrative and Drama 25

Narrative in Evangelical and Feminist Theology 26

Evangelicals and Narrative Theology 27

Feminists and Narrative Theology 29

Narrative and Biblical Studies 30

Biblical Narrative Studies 30

The Nature of Biblical Narrative 31

Narrative Coherence and Typology 33

Evangelical Theology and Biblical Narrative 34

Feminist Theology and Biblical Narrative 35

Summary 37

Stories of Sin, Self and the Savior: The Scope and Direction of this Project 40

The Structure of the Argument 41

Critique of Non-narratival Theologies of Sin 41

Narratives of Sin and the Narrativity of Sin 44

The Limits of this Study 45

Relationship to Recent Studies 47

2 SIN, SELF, AND STORY IN THE FEMINIST THEOLOGY OF MARY DALY AND RITA NAKASHIMA BROCK 51

Sin, Self, and Story in the Theology of Mary Daly 57

Mary Daly's Methodology and Anthropology 58

Mary Daly's Theology of Sin 60

Defining Sin 60

Original Sin 62

Noetic Effects of the Fall 63

Total Depravity 64

The "Fall" 64

Applying the Definition 65

Mary Daly and Biblical Narrative 68

Mary Daly and Genesis 3–11 70

Sin, Self, and Story in Mary Daly: Summary 71

Sin, Self, and Story in the Theology of Rita Nakashima Brock 72

Rita Nakashima Brock's Theological Methodology and Epistemology 74

Rita Nakashima Brock's Theology of Sin 78

Rita Nakashima Brock and Scripture 81

Rita Nakashima Brock and Genesis 3–11 82

Sin, Self, and Story in Rita Nakashima Brock: Summary 84

Mary Daly and Rita Nakashima Brock on Sin: Strengths and Weaknesses 85

Sin and Being Human 86

Mary Daly's Self-Naming Self 87

Rita Nakashima Brock's Relational Self 89

The Explanatory Value 91

The Story of Sin 92

Epistemology 92

Feminist Theology, Story and History 93

Past, Present, or Future Self? 96

Sin and the Biblical Story 100

Reading into the Narrative 100

Narratival Selectivity 102

A Story with No Ending 104

Content without Context 108

Sin and the Stories of Genesis 110

Interpretational Tools 111

Storied Relationship 111

Conclusion: Sin, Self, and Story 114

3 SIN, SCRIPTURE, AND STORY IN THE EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY OF WAYNE GRUDEM AND MARGUERITE SHUSTER 116

Sin, Scripture, and Story in the Theology of Wayne Grudem 121

Wayne Grudem and Feminist Theology 121

Wayne Grudem, Scripture and Theology 123

Wayne Grudem's Theology of Sin 124

Defining Sin 125

Sin and Genesis 3–11 127

Wayne Grudem on Sin: Summary 129

Sin, Scripture, and Story in the Theology of Marguerite Shuster 130

Marguerite Shuster and Feminist Theology 131

The Imitation of Christ 131

Sin and Gender 132

Feminist Definitions of Sin 134

Marguerite Shuster, Scripture and Theology 135

Marguerite Shuster's Theology of Sin 136

Genesis 3–11 in Marguerite Shuster's Theology of Sin 137

The Fall, Historicity, and Narrativity 138

The Covenant Context 140

Reading Strategies 141

Marguerite Shuster on Sin: Summary 144

Wayne Grudem and Marguerite Shuster on Sin: Strengths and Weaknesses 144

Defining Sin 145

Sin and Humanity 145

Sin and Salvation 146

Sin and Christ 147

Sin and Society 148

Sin, the Narratives, and Narrativity 150

Decontextualization 150

Historicization 151

Story and Illustration 152

Story and Eschatology 154

Escaping the Story 155

Conclusion: Sin, Scripture, and Story 157

4 STORIES OF SIN: THE NARRATIVE DEPICTION OF SIN IN GENESIS 1–11 159

Genesis 1–11 in its Literary Context 160

The Role of Genesis 1–11 in the Book of Genesis 160

The *Toledot* Formula 161

Theme and Focus 163

The Role of Genesis 1–11 in the Pentateuch 166

The Structure of Genesis 1–11 and the Structure of the Pentateuch 166

The Theme of Genesis 1–11 and the Theme of the Pentateuch 167

Thematic and Typological Foreshadowing 168

The Narrative Character of Genesis 1–11 169

Poetic Structure, Narrative Effect 170

Narrative Time and Characterization 171

Plot Structure 173

Obstacles to Unity 176

Summary: The Theological Unity of Genesis 1:1–11:26 179

A Narrative-Attentive Reading of Sin in Genesis 1–11 179

Genesis 1–2 - The Narrative Background 181

The Setting 182

The Characters 184

The Plot 188

Summary 190

Genesis 3:1–24 – Fall and Fallout 190

The Narrative Context 191

The Narrative 192

The Narrative's Depiction of Sin 196

Genesis 4:1–26 – Mounting Violence 202

The Narrative Context 203

The Narrative 206

The Narrative's Depiction of Sin 208

The Narrative Aftermath 214

Summary 215

Genesis 5:1–32 – Genealogy of Grace 215

Genesis 6:1–8 – Cosmic Chaos 216

The Narrative 217

The Narrative's Depiction of Sin 218

Genesis 6:9–9:17 – Corruption, Catastrophe, and Cleansing 220

The Narrative 220

The Narrative's Depiction of Sin 221

Genesis 9:18–29 – Old Sins in a New Creation 222

The Narrative 222

The Narrative's Depiction of Sin 224

Summary 226

Genesis 10:1–11:26 – Towering Offense 226

The Narrative Context 227

The Narrative 228

The Narrative's Depiction of Sin 230

Summary 232

Summary and Conclusion: The Depiction of Sin in Genesis 1–11 233

Vocabulary for Sin 233

Fall or Falls? 235

The Character of Sin 237

Sin as Law-breaking 237

Sin as Pride 238

Sin as Mistrust 239

Sin as Corruption 240

Sin and Violence 240

Sin as Character 241

The Development of Sin 242

The Reference Point for Sin 244

Conclusion 247

5 SIN AND STORY IN THEOLOGY 248

Theologizing with Genesis 1–11 as a Theological Unity 248

Sin in Genesis 1–11: Basic Observations 249

Genesis 1–11 and Feminist Definitions of Sin 250

Genesis 1–11 and Evangelical Definitions of Sin 250

Sin and the *Imago Dei* 251

Emil Brunner on Sin and the *Imago Dei* 252

Sin, the *Imago Dei*, and Conceptual Tensions 255

Vertical or Horizontal Sin 256

Individual sin or Corporate Sin 257

Sin and other Polarities 258

Sin, Story, and the *Imago Dei* 259

Narrative and the *Imago Dei* 260

Narratival *Imago Dei* in Genesis 1–11 262

The *Imago Dei* and the Development of Sin 264

Sin, the *Imago Dei*, and Christ 266

Christ and the *Imago Dei* 267

Christ, the *Imago Dei*, and the Individual 268

Christ, the *Imago Dei*, and the Community 269

Summary 271

Sin and the Image of God in Christ 271

Summary 275

Types of Sin 275

Narrative and Typology 277

Types of Sin in Genesis and the Old Testament 278

Types of Sin in the New Testament 280

Types of Sin and Christ 281

The Types of Sin in Genesis 3–11 282

Improving the Image 282

Overstepping the Image 283

Resisting the Image 284

Abusing Image-Bearers 284

Thinking *with* Types of Sin 285

Sin and Christ 286

Sin and Self 287

Sin and Systems 289

Sin and Salvation 290

Conclusion 291

6 CONCLUSION: SIN, STORY AND THE SAVIOR 293

The Story of Sin in Feminist and Evangelical Theology 294

Sin and Story in Feminist Theology: A Review 295

Sin and Story in Evangelical Theology: A Review 296

The Story of Sin in Genesis 3–11 298

Sin, Story, and Theology 300

Sin and the *Imago Dei* 300

From *Imago Dei* to *Imago Christi* 301

From Definitions of Sin to Types of Sin 302

Conclusion 304

BIBLIOGRAPHY 306

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
SIN AND NARRATIVES IN THEOLOGY

In 1973 Karl Menninger posed a now famous question in the title of his book *Whatever Became of Sin?*.[1] There Menninger traced what he saw as the decline of sin-language in popular thought. The concept of sin, he noted, had given way to the ideas of "crime" and "sickness." These moves in turn shifted the burden of dealing with "sin" to the state (crime) or to the clinic (sickness). As a psychiatrist, Menninger regarded somewhat positively the dissipation of puritanical notions of sinfulness that focused so heavily on the sexual. In that same capacity, however, he was eager to recapture the category of sin for religious and therapeutic purposes. In addition to providing his own definition of sin, Menninger surveyed and modified the existing traditional categories of sin and proposed the addition of a few more culturally relevant modes of sinfulness that he felt were missed by the standing definitions. Two sins in particular that exercised him were those involving corporate complicity: the mistreatment of the environment and the injustice of the penal system. Twenty years later Andrew Delbanco came to a similar conclusion by means of an historical survey of the "death of Satan".[2]

While Menninger's treatment was not especially theological, his point about the loss of culturally relevant ways to talk about human sinfulness was well-taken. In 1993,

---

1. Karl A. (Karl Augustus) Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973).

2. Andrew Delbanco, *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995). Delbanco offers a history of the demise of meaningful talk of Satan and evil in the American experience. The prescience of Delbanco's lament can be seen in Susan Neiman's assessment of the lack of compelling language for evil in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks (Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002], 283).

the journal *Theology Today* approached the issue of sin in a decidedly more theological vein. In an assessment strikingly similar to Menninger's, Thomas Long lamented that "the word 'sin' has all but disappeared from the landscape, covered over by the kudzu of bureaucratic speech and the seemingly more pertinent and positive language of therapy."[3] Sin's homelessness extends beyond the popular culture. In the same issue of that journal, David Kelsey traced the movement of sin from one theological locus to another; it can be found in theological anthropology, Christology and soteriology.[4] Kelsey further remarked that the disappearance of sin from theology would be serious because "the doctrine of sin is one of those doctrines in which Christian life-forming is held closest to Christian truth-claiming, practical theology closest to dogmatic theology."[5]

Other evidence of the decline of the language of sin and evil could be adduced. But the above is sufficient to prompt the question: Why has the topic of sin so atrophied at a time when it is needed as much as ever to address the human situation at all levels: personal, corporate, national and even ecclesial? While the historical surveys offered by Menninger and Delbanco are helpful, part of the answer may be found in the definitions of sin that have been offered and the theological methodologies that occasioned them. In short, theologizing about sin has failed to speak relevantly and freshly to a changing culture and by failing to speak clearly, theology has lost its voice. This is no small matter. Due to the organic nature of theological topics, Christof Gestrich asserts, "If we could once again speak about sin in an understandable and definite way, theology could also

---

3. Thomas G Long, "God Be Merciful to Me, a Miscalculator," *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (July 1993): 166.

4. David H Kelsey, "Whatever Happened to the Doctrine of Sin," *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (July 1993): 169–78.

5. Ibid., 169.

win back all the other subjects of Christian doctrine for our time."[6] The erosion in sin-talk is devastating because it is so tightly related to other central theological languages: self-talk, salvation-talk, and ultimately Christ-talk.

DEFINING SIN

In spite of the widely recognized need to express theology in keeping with changes in human understanding, discussions and definitions of sin have changed little throughout church history. Most genealogies of the doctrine of sin trace the roots of today's sin-talk to Augustine's classic equivalence of sin and pride. "When we ask the cause of the evil angels' misery, we find that it is the just result of their turning away from him who supremely is, and their turning towards themselves, who do not exist in that supreme degree. What other name is there for this fault than pride? 'The beginning of all sin is pride.'"[7] Augustine's definition reveals the two main features of a classic understanding of sin: it is a turning away from God that is motivated by pride. The turning away, often exhibited in the flaunting of divine law, is the fruit of the root of pride.

---

6. Christof Gestrich, *The Return of Splendor in the World: The Christian Doctrine of Sin and Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997), 11. Gestrich later raises an even more frightening possibility regarding the loss of sin language. He asks, "Is *sin* no longer a distinct word in our era; or is the actual problem the fact that *God* is no longer a distinct word? If the latter is true, what meaningful path can be followed to renew the theological doctrine of sin?" (43, emphasis original). Alistair McFadyen ponders something similar when he writes, "Losing our ability to speak of the world's pathologies in relation to God represents a serious, concrete form of the loss of God that is a general characteristic of contemporary, Western culture. The doctrine of sin is not so much an isolated case of Christian embarrassment concerning anachronistic aspects of Christian faith, as a crucial test of our ability to speak of God in relation to the world at all." Alistair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4.

7. Augustine, trans., Henry Bettenson, *City of God*, a new translation by Henry Bettenson, with an introduction by John O'Meara, Penguin Classics (London, England: Penguin Books, 1984), XII.vi.477 Augustine himself is quoting Ecclesiasticus 10:15.

While Augustine's discussion of sin and evil extended beyond this cryptic statement (one thinks of his influential description of evil as *privatio boni* and the role of concupiscence) his distillation of the essence of sin to pride has enjoyed particular longevity and influence. Though certainly more nuanced, one can see the influence of Augustine's thought as recently as Reinhold Neibuhr's treatise on human nature. Niebuhr summarized sin as "pride and will to power."[8]

Though not all theologians have followed Augustine on the matter of sin's nature, they have followed his impulse to name sin's essence. For Anselm, "sin [was] nothing else than not to render to God his due."[9] Luther spoke of sin as pride, self-will, the flesh and self-righteousness, but ultimately stated that the essence of sin was unbelief.[10] For John Calvin, sin was essentially unfaithfulness.[11] For Tillich, sin is essentially "estrangement."[12] Cristof Gestrich applies aspects of psychology to propose that sin is fundamentally "self-justification."[13] Each of these definitions, though expressed differently and arrived at variously, shares the desire to define sin's essence. And frequently the principal manifestation of the pride, self-will, or unfaithfulness is violation of the divine law.

---

8. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Human Nature*, vol. 1 of *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945), 179.

9. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo?*, XI.

10. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, translated and edited by Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 249–50.

11. Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II.i.4.

12. Paul Tillich, *Existence and the Christ*, vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 44–47.

13. Gestrich, *Return of Splendor*, 26 Marguerite Shuster suggests that self-justification was also identified by Luther as a significant component of sin. (*The Fall and Sin: What We Have Become as Sinners* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub., 2004], 115).

These definitions are more than mere quibbling. Entire systems of theology and church practice hinge on some of these definitions of human sinfulness. Due to the organic nature of theology, how one understands sin shapes not only one's view of salvation but also depicts the nature of the human person and the nature of the divine–human relationship a certain way. Furthermore, these descriptions of sin, salvation, and the human person are formative for one's ethics and pastoral care. More devastatingly, as Menninger, Delbanco and Gestrich attest, the neglect of a robust understanding of sin threatens Christian theology's relevance in the public square.

Problems with Defining Sin

A perpetual problem that definitions of sin suffer is reductionism. As even the distillations above attest, definitions of sin must negotiate a variety of polarities: sin as act vs. sin as disposition; sin as personal vs. sin as corporate/systemic; sin as primarily against God vs. sin as primarily against the other; sin as active vs. sin as passive; sin as positive reality vs. sin as negative unreality or lack; sin as spiritual vs. sin as physical; sins of commission vs. sins of omission. Critics of any definition of sin or of the essence of sin often fault the definition for overemphasizing one or more of the polarities. While there has been some recognition of sin's two-sidedness, perhaps most notably Kierkegaard's summary of sin as both weakness *and* defiance,[14] this observation has not been widely applied.[15]

---

14. See especially his discussion of the various types of "despair" in Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition of Edification & Awakening by Anti-Climacus*, ed. and trans. Alistair Hannay (Penguin Classics, 1989).

15. For instance, though Niebuhr acknowledges Kierkegaard's idea of sin's dual character, he ultimately decides in favor of pride as definitive.

That definitions of sin struggle to hold together these tensions may in itself suggest that the approaches used to define sin or even the effort to define sin at all may be misdirected. As Menninger and others demonstrate, definitions of sin have atrophied or disappeared in recent years. But even in places where sin is still being talked about the definitions, old and new, suffer the same deficiencies.

Two Examples: Evangelical and Feminist Theology

For two examples of theologies where one-sided definitions of sin hold sway, one may consider evangelical and feminist theologies. Sin is an important piece of both of these theological strains though for different reasons. Additionally, as we will investigate more closely later, theologians in these traditions arrive at their understanding of sin via distinct theological methodologies. However, perhaps ironically, the net result is similar—a too narrow definition of sin.

Sin in Evangelical Theology

For much of evangelical[16] theology, sin is captured in the Johaninne phrase "sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4).[17] Their focus is more on the "turning away from God" portion of Augustine's definition than his isolation of pride as the root. This trend can be clearly

16. I am aware that the term "evangelical" may be waning in its usefulness as a descriptive category of theologian. For the purposes of this dissertation, I subscribe to David Bebbington's enumeration of the features of evangelicalism: conversionism, biblicism, activism, and crucicentrism. Other similar lists have been offered. For more on this see especially Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 196, n. 4.

17. This is not to suggest that many evangelical theologians cite this phrase from 1 John as the basis for their definitions of sin (although see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), 491). Rather, upon surveying many evangelical definitions of sin (various names given below), one encounters the pattern of sin being primarily defined as the violation of divine law. Thus the Johannine turn of phrase aptly summarizes the position even if it itself is not used to support it.

seen in the work of A. H. Strong, an influential theologian of the early 20th century. He defined sin thus: "Sin is lack of conformity to the moral law of God, either in act, disposition or state."[18] Sin is failure to obey God's law; sin is essentially disobedience. One can hear the echoes of Strong in two authors of later systematic theologies. Wayne Grudem defines sin as "any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude or nature."[19] Once again, sin is failure to keep the moral law. Millard Erickson sees at the heart of sin "any lack of conformity, active or passive, to the moral law of God. This may be a matter of act, of thought, or of inner disposition or state."[20] These definitions, of course, have as distant relative the response to the Westminster Shorter Catechism's question "What is sin?": "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God."[21]

With reference to the aforementioned polarities, sin thus construed is primarily as act, personal, and theocentric—against God. In Evangelical theology this issues forth soteriologically in an atonement theory heavy in forensic language. The divine-human relationship seems to be primarily one of law giver-law breaker or Judge-criminal. On

---

18. Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Commonplace-Book Designed for the Use of Theological Students* (Philadelphia: Griffith & Rowland Press, 1907–9), 549.

19. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 490.

20. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 596.

21. There are, of course, other evangelical voices. Theissen prefers to speak of sin as "selfishness" at its base (a move akin to Augustine's "pride") (Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949], 246. Earlier Thiessen describes sin as "want of conformity to God's law" (242)). Donald Bloesch sides with Calvin on "unfaithfulness" (Donald G. Bloesch, *God, Authority, and Salvation*, vol. 1 of *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978], 92). Two other voices which we will have cause to consider in more detail later are Stanley Grenz and Cornelius Plantinga. Grenz attempts a more relational definition of sin: "sin is essentially both the lack of and the loss of community."(Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994], 187) Plantinga summarizes sin as "culpable *shalom*-breaking" (Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 14).

this model, salvation is achieved through the outpouring of divine wrath upon an innocent victim, Jesus, whose sacrifice appeases divine wrath and pays for human sinfulness—the so-called penal substitution theory of atonement. Though this telling does draw together several themes and texts in Scripture it has been faulted by many (and especially feminist theologians) for overemphasis on the death of Christ as the salvific moment. It is asserted that salvation through divine violence sanctions human violence and leads toward a view of submission to violence and self-abnegation as the core of the Christian response to redemption. This theology of self-abnegation, so tightly linked to a view of sin as pride, serves to further oppress the downtrodden rather than liberating them.[22]

Many of these evangelical studies begin their inquiry into sin from the diverse biblical vocabulary for sin and attempt to distill a definition of sin and its essence from this data. Oddly, though some recognize the obvious metaphorical character of the vocabulary for sin (sin as "missing the mark," "bearing a burden", "stain") the methodological relevance of the biblical authors' resort to metaphorical language for sin is rarely considered nor is their penchant for depicting sin in narrative.

While the notions of pride and lawlessness are rooted in biblical thought and stress the aspect of personal culpability in sin particularly well, they have been attacked for paying insufficient attention to other biblical imagery and for providing little ground for the consideration of sin's corporate and systemic aspects. It is also argued that the overemphasis on forensic language for sin and salvation distorts the biblical presentation. For instance, as Gordon Fee has pointed out, images for sin and salvation are typically

---

22. These ideas can be found in many feminist theologians. Two examples suffice: Nicola Slee, *Faith and Feminism: An Introduction to Christian Feminist Theology*, Exploring Faith. (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 2003), and Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

linked. The particular language of salvation that Paul uses (redemption, resurrection, reconciliation) depends upon what image of sin Paul has in mind (bondage, death, estrangement).[23] Restrictive definitions of sin flatten these rich metaphorical contours. Additionally, many have reacted against the cross-and-suffering heavy version of atonement that this emphasis on forensic language leads to.[24] Indeed, much of the discussion has focused on theories of the atonement without extensive consideration of the depictions of human sinfulness they entail. This, of course, speaks to the ineluctable link between understandings of sin and salvation.

Sin in Feminist Theology

Like the evangelicals, the concept of sin is important to feminist theology, though for different reasons. For some, the doctrine of sin is point of departure for critiques of traditional theology. Many feminist theologians take issue with both the implications of the narrative of the so-called "fall" and the definitions of sin supposedly derived from it.

In an article that some point to as the beginning of the feminist theological movement, Valerie Saiving critiqued Reinhold Niebuhr's treatment of human sinfulness

---

23. Gordon Fee, "Paul and the Metaphors for Salvation: Some Reflections on Pauline Soteriology," in *The Redemption*, Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, O', and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 51.

24. For example, see Stephen J. Patterson, "Beyond the Passion," in *Beyond the Passion: Rethinking the Death and Life of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2004) and Denny J. Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). There are voices within evangelicalism raising similar questions. See Joel B. Green & Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament & Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000). These discussions have resulted in a retrenching on the penal substitution theory of the atonement in certain sectors of evangelicalism as can be seen in Mark Dever's *Christianity Today* article "Nothing but the Blood," *Christianity Today* 50, no. 5 (May 2006): 28–33. At the same time, others are seeking to appropriate the diversity of biblical atonement language for pastoral use. See Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Death by Love: Letters from the Cross*, Re: Lit (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008).

as reductionist because it failed to take into consideration the female experience of sin.[25] She claimed that the sin of pride is "male sin", whereas the female tendency is toward insufficient self-actualization.[26] That is, males sin due to a surfeit of self-estimation and females due to a shortage.[27]

In response to the traditional definitions, feminist theologians have offered definitions of sin such as "dualism", "false naming", "struggle", and "brokenheartedness." Many of these definitions, reacting as they do against the perceived imbalance of the definitions above (and especially sin as pride), only swing to the other extreme of the polarities, emphasizing sin as systemic, dispositional, and primarily against the other, not God.

Feminist theology's identification of sin with systemic patriarchy and sexism has helpfully emphasized structures of sinfulness. But as Angela West,[28] Wanda Warren

---

25. Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, Carol P. and Judith Plaskow Christ (New York: HarperCollins, 1979), 25–42 Daphne Hampson adds to Saiving's critique by suggesting that Neibuhr also has an extraordinarily individuated concept of the human being, who finds himself essentially caught up in competitive relationships" Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, Signposts in Theology. (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: B. Blackwell, 1990), 122. Judith Plaskow expanded Saiving's critique in her dissertation. See Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin, and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Washington: University Press of America, 1980).

26. As Delbanco chronicles, sin as pride was problematized long before the feminist critique. In the midst of the economic expansion of the late 19th century it became clear that those attributes once attributed to Satan—avarice, desire and ambition—were now those qualities most likely to ensure success in the new economy. He writes: "[I]t had become unconvincing to evoke the devil from pulpits and soapboxes as the embodiment of 'unchecked self-interest' because America was now all about the glory of self-interest." Delbanco, *Death of Satan*, 96–97.

27. As William J. Cahoy notes, this observation is strikingly similar to Kierkegaard's assessment of two ways of sinning. Cahoy helpfully develops both Kierkegaard's and feminist thought on the ways of sinning and their anthropological significance (William J. Cahoy, "One Species or Two? Kierkegaard's Anthropology and the Feminist Critique of the Concept of Sin," *Modern Theology* 11, no. 4 [October 1995]: 429–54).

28. Angela West, *Deadly Innocence: Feminist Theology and the Mythology of Sin* (New York: Cassell, 1995).

Berry,[29] and Mary Grey[30] have argued, the diverse definitions of sin in the work of such feminist theologians as Mary Daly, Letty Russell, and Rosemary Radford Ruether betray an inadequacy to encapsulate the whole of the human condition. In particular, there seems to be a lack of attention to the individual responsibility for sin. Angela West suggests that many feminist theologians have come perilously close to defining sin in such a way that exonerates women. The insufficiency of these definitions to capture the complete picture of sin is further attested by the proliferation of definitions within feminist theology and the demurring from a "feminist consensus" by women of other racial contexts, e.g. womanist, *mujerista*, and Asian feminist theologies.[31]

Ultimately it is unclear whether there is anything distinctly male or female about these ways of sinning. As Kierkegaard acknowledged, not only are there men and women who struggle with the iconic sin of the opposite sex, there are elements of weakness in defiance and defiance in weakness. That sin has this multifaceted character points away from the likelihood of tidy definitions. This last observation both reinforces and undermines the feminist position. On the one hand, it acknowledges the value of the emphasis on the reverse of pride as an aspect of human sinfulness. On the other, it shows the weakness of experience based theological methodology—it fails to speak as univocally as one might like.

---

29. Wanda Warren Berry, "Images of Sin and Salvation in Feminist Theology," *Anglican Theological Review* LX, no. 1 (1978): 25–54.

30. Mary Grey, "Falling Into Freedom: Searching for New Interpretations of Sin in a Secular Culture," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 47, no. 2: 223–43.

31. Angela West comments especially on the disconnect between feminist and womanist theologians in chapter 6 of *Deadly Innocence: Feminist Theology and the Mythology of Sin*, 38–48.

Definitions of Sin and Theological Epistemology

Why might two theological strains come to such distinct understandings of human sinfulness? And why are both of their definitions demonstrably deficient? One possible answer relates to their theological epistemology and methodology. Both evangelical and feminist theologies operate with thoroughly modern religious epistemologies. Much of evangelicalism is still shaking loose from a scientific approach to theology that regarded the biblical text (and in a lesser sense nature) as the storehouse of facts about God.[32] This gave way to an at times facile method of proof-texting Christian doctrines. While these methods are falling out of favor in the academy they are still widely practiced at the lay level and certainly within the fundamentalist strain of Protestantism. Many evangelicals still operate with a foundationalist epistemology, a correspondence theory of truth, and a propositionalist theological methodology. As a result they articulate doctrines through statements and definitions. This combined with an ardent biblicism and adherence to a doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Scripture leads them to focus on words and discursive biblical texts as the preferred mode of expression of truth claims. Furthermore, Scripture, and biblical narrative in particular are approached with the tools of history rather than literature.

Feminist theological methodology may rightly be traced to Friedrich Schleiermacher, the so-called "father of modern theology" for whom the point of departure for theological reflection was neither the biblical text nor the accepted creeds

---

32. Charles Hodge offered one of the classic statements of this in his systematic theology. "The Bible is no more a system of theology, than nature is a system of chemistry or of mechanics. We find in nature the facts which the chemist or the mechanical philosopher has to examine, and from them to ascertain the laws by which they are determined. So the Bible contains the truths which the theologian has to collect, authenticate, arrange, and exhibit in their internal relation to each other." Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 1:1.

but rather the experience of redemption in the community of faith.[33] Rather than starting from the presupposition of an infallible, authoritative text, feminist theology begins in concrete human experience, namely, of women. Doctrines and theological formulations are checked against lived experience, especially the experience of the oppression of women under patriarchal societal structures even in, or especially within, the church.[34] In this feminist theology is certainly akin to liberation theology and has spawned a host of other contextual theologies such as womanist, *mujerista*, and gay and lesbian theologies.

Neither of these methods have fared well in the postmodern critique. Among other critiques, the postmodern thought problematized such totalizing "metanarratives" as those offered by evangelical and feminist theologies, be it propositionally authoritative revelation, or gender typical experience. Specifically, while their preferred epistemologies—revelational rationalism and gendered experientialism—account for certain aspects of the process of human knowing, both accounts fall short of encapsulating the process of human knowing. Accordingly, the theological methodologies and outcomes derived from them are insufficient.[35]

---

33. B. Gerrish, and Sergio Sorrentino, "Scleiermacher, Friedrich," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 12, Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2005), 12:8160–61 Kathryn Greene-McCreight (among others) makes this connection between Schleiermacher and feminist theological methodology. She also finds their roots in Immanuel Kant and ultimately Ludwig Feuerbach. See Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions of Christian Doctrine: Narrative Analysis and Appraisal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 29.

34. For a compelling demonstration that a correspondence theory of truth can even be found in such prominent feminist theologians as Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Mary Daly see Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Problems with Feminist Theory: Historicity and the Search for Sure Foundations," in *Embodied Love: Sensuality and Relationship as Feminist Values*, Paula M. Cooey, Sharon A. Farmer, and Mary Ellen Ross (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 79–95.

35. Gestrich points to a particular feature of this modernist orientation, its anthropocentrism, when he writes, "Even when they leave the traditional, exclusive orientation toward the individual behind them, most theological doctrines of sin still have a modernistic—anthropocentric and modernistic—subjectivist orientation. The distortion of humanity and the threat to *man* [*sic*] posed by sin are emphasized: for example, his disturbed *psychological* condition, the *development* of *society* or (human) *history* 'in the wrong direction,' his failure to

NARRATIVE AND THEOLOGY

Concurrent with Menninger's revival of sin language, the movement now known as narrative theology was beginning to gain strength. Though its purposes are not merely practical, among the features that commend it to many is its ability to speak meaningfully to the human experience. Practitioners of narrative theology regularly claim that theology done in a narrative key is better attuned to both human thought and experience and the way the world actually works. Furthermore, it is argued that narrative is an important element in human knowing, the recovery of which ameliorates some of the postmodern criticisms of other epistemological systems.

The Narrative Turn

While like most intellectual movements the rise of narrative thinking cannot be traced to one particular issue or moment, a legitimate place to begin is H. Richard Niebuhr's essay "The Story of our Life," written in 1941.[36] There he wrote,

> The preaching of the early Christian church was not an argument for the existence of God nor an admonition to follow the dictates of some common human conscience, unhistorical and super-social in character. It was primarily a simple recital of the great events connected with the historical appearance of Jesus Christ and a confession of what had

---

assume personal responsibility. The slandering of God and the agony and disorder prevalent among nonhuman creatures (the disruption of world order), as well as sinful forces having a fateful effect that transcends the personal dimension of life, are less in view," a critique the ostensibly theocentric evangelicals might find arresting. Gestrich, *Return of Splendor*, 37–38.

36. H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Story of Our Life," in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 21–44. In the introduction to this volume Hauerwas adds that Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* should be included in discussions of the rediscovery of narrative for theology (Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, "Introduction: Why Narrative?" in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones [Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989], 5 n.4). For more on Barth's use of biblical narrative in his theology see David Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the "Church Dogmatics"* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1981).

> happened to the community of disciples. Whatever it was that the church meant to say, whatever was revealed or manifested to it, could be indicated only in connection with an historical person and events in the life of his community. The confession referred to history and was consciously made in history.[37]

Niebuhr's recommendation of the preaching of the early church was no facile attempt at theological repristination, nor a rejection of the theology produced by thinkers abetted by philosophy. It was, however, a clarion call to consider the irreducibly historical character of Christian theology in the face of methods that sought to get behind the Christian story through demythologization or to systematize the story through doctrine.

Eventually this observation of the narrative basis for Christian claims led to the realization that the value of narrative was not merely an historical accident but due to the fact that narrative is "a crucial conceptual category for such matters as understanding issues of epistemology and methods of argument, depicting personal identity, and displaying the content of Christian conviction."[38] The last of these (the value of narrative in displaying Christian conviction) is congruent with Niebuhr's point. The other two—issues of epistemology and argumentation and depicting personal identity—are equally important.

Story and System

First, it is claimed that narrative is a fundamental component of human knowing. Narrative offers a distinct way to organize information that in some cases is superior to the organization offered by systems. This is far from a simplistic appeal to the importance or ubiquity of stories in human society. As Stanley Hauerwas writes, "[T]he crucial

---

37. H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Story of Our Life," 21.
38. Hauerwas and Jones, "Introduction: Why Narrative?" 5.

appeal to narrative is not because of the significance of 'stories,' though that may be part of it; rather what is significant is the recognition that rationality, methods of argument, and historical explanation have, at least to some extent, a fundamentally narrative form."[39]

This priority of narrative to system is at the heart of narrative theology. Terrence Tilley contrasts narrative theological methodology with a propositional method. "A Christian *propositional* theology engages in exploring transforming and proclaiming the doctrines of Christianity. A Christian *narrative* theology undertakes exploring, transforming and proclaiming the stories of Christianity. If stories give meaning to the metaphors / stereotypes / codewords / doctrines which we use, then a narrative theology is more fundamental than a propositional theology."[40] His pithy remark, "The stories of God cannot be captured in a system,"[41] expresses well many narrative theologians' attitudes.

Yet the appeal to narrative is not a simplistic replacement of systems with stories.[42] Johann Baptist Metz describes the relation between story and system: "There is no question of regressively obscuring the distinction between narrative memory and theological argument. It is much more a question of acknowledging the relative value of rational argument, the primary function of which is to protect the narrative memory of

---

39. Ibid., 4.

40. Terrence W. Tilley, *Story Theology*, Theology and Life Series, vol. 12. (Wilmington, Del.: M. Glazier, 1985), 11.

41. Ibid., 16.

42. Historian Louis O. Mink regards narrative highly but seems to put it on par with, rather than above theory as an epistemological tool. "Even though narrative form may be, for most people, associated with fairy tales, myths, and the entertainments of the novel, it remains true that narrative is a primary cognitive instrument—an instrument rivaled, in fact, only by theory and by metaphor as irreducible ways of making the flux of experience comprehensible." Louis O. Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," in *The Writing of History*, ed. Robert H. Canary, Henry Kozicki (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 131.

salvation in a scientific world, to allow it to be at stake and to prepare the way for a renewal of this narrative, without which the experience of salvation is silenced."[43] David F. Ford likewise doesn't pit story against system so much as he sees them (along with performance) as aspects of the theological task. "My position on the interrelation of the other two modes with that of performance is that the systematic questions are unavoidable and need to be thoroughly pursued, and that the story-related questions require a similarly specific attention."[44]

Story and Self

Hauerwas's other claim, that narrative is an essential component of "depicting personal identity," is likewise important. Storytelling both draws us together as humans insofar as virtually all humans tell stories, but also sets us apart in that we each inhabit our own narratives and understand ourselves in light of those narratives. In fact, it is through narrative that we attempt to articulate a cohesive view of ourselves. Whereas system is of limited use in connecting my younger self to my current self, narrative offers a way of relating them. Stanley Grenz writes, "[A]ny semblance of meaning in the present is linked to at least a rudimentary sense of narrative continuity with a meaningful past and a conceivable future, which gives the impression that the person is en route from somewhere to somewhere and hence that the person's narrative constitutes some type of a

---

43. Johann Baptist Metz, "A Short Apology of Narrative," trans. David Smith, in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 259.

44. David F. Ford, "System, Story, Performance: A Proposal About the Role of Narrative in Christian Systematic Theology," in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 204.

whole."[45] Anthony Giddens speaks of the contemporary project of self-identity as one of maintaining a coherent, ongoing narrative of the self in the midst of rigid systems and a welter of choices. "The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems."[46]

This narrative self-understanding is necessary for ethical reasoning as well. As Giddens suggests, one may be able to give an internally coherent account of their actions, but "What makes a given response 'appropriate' or 'acceptable' necessitates a shared—but unproven or unprovable—framework of reality."[47] In this he agrees with Alasdair MacIntyre who, in *After Virtue*, argued that ethical reasoning and behavior could not be rightly understood apart from some narrative context. He wrote, "Every particular view of the virtues is linked to some particular notion of the narrative structure or structures of human life."[48] What this means is that without some shared, over-arching narrative framework, communities cannot come to agreement regarding what is ethical or not. The delineation of ethical systems and specific ethical values is subsequent to the development of a shared narrative. It has been argued that this is in part because human experience has a fundamentally narrative shape.[49] We make sense of our lives and

---

45. Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, Matrix of Christian Theology, vol. 1. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 135.

46. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 5. Giddens contrasts self-narration with collage, the placing of various stories side by side with no fundamentally uniting texture.

47. Ibid., 36.

48. Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 174.

49. Hauerwas and Burrell write: "It is that ordering, that capacity to unfold or develop character, and thus offer insight into the human conditions, which recommends narrative as a form of rationality especially appropriate to ethics" (Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, "From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics," in *Why Narrative?: Readings*

communicate about ourselves through stories. Furthermore, we understand ourselves to be a part of various stories (e.g. familial, denominational, national).[50] Story works at the level of both the individual and the collective.

Types of Narrative Theology

Like most theological movements, narrative theology is not of one piece. While a variety of typologies have been proposed, an enduring distinction has been the association of groups of thinkers with two "schools": the Yale school and the Chicago school. Gary Comstock has attached more descriptive labels to these forms of narrative theology. He calls them "pure" and "impure" narrative theologians. "*Pure narrative theologians* are those tied to, or inspired by, what has gone on in New Haven: the antifoundationalist, cultural-linguistic, Wittgensteinian-inspired descriptivists. (Hans) Frei, (George) Lindbeck, (Stanley) Hauerwas, and David Kelsey believe narrative is an autonomous literary form particularly suited to the work of theology. They oppose the excessive use of discursive prose and abstract reason, insisting that Christian faith is best understood by grasping the grammatical rules and concepts of its texts and practices. Narrative is a privileged mode for doing this."[51] This is clearly not an exhaustive list nor description. Regarding the "impure" narrative theologians, Comstock writes, "*Impure narrative theologians* are those with loyalties to, or sympathies with, what has gone on in

---

in Narrative Theology, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones [Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989], 180).

50. Vicente Balaguer summarizes these impulses toward narrative succinctly when he writes: "[E]s narrativamente como se puede acceder a la comprensión de sí mismo, como se puede dar un valor ético a las acciones en el marco de una vida narrada, como puede entenderse la Historia, o incluso, como debe entenderse al final todo discurso crítico." (Vicente Balaguer, "La Teología Narrativa," *Scripta Theologica* 28, no. 3 [1996]: 690)

51. Gary L. Comstock, "Two Types of Narrative Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 4: 688.

the Second City: the revisionist, hermeneutical, Gadamerian-inspired correlationists. (Paul) Ricoeur, (David) Tracy, (Julian) Hartt, and (Sallie) McFague agree with their purist cousins that stories are a critical and neglected genre in which important religious truths and practices are communicated. But they deny narrative unique theological status. Believing that Christian sacred narratives are irreducibly infected with historical, philosophical, and psychological concerns, they seek to apply the methods of those disciplines to their interpretation. For them, narrative is neither pure nor autonomous."[52]

Scott Holland describes the difference between these schools of thought in a different yet helpful way. He writes, "While Yale theologians seem most interested in keeping their community's story straight, those drawn to the work of David Tracy and the Chicago school are much more interested in doing theology while listening to other people's stories."[53] This difference can be seen in authors' preference for biblical narrative or personal narratives of those in the faith.

As the interest in narrative has become increasingly popular and taken up by theologians in various traditions, these distinctions have become less clear and perhaps less relevant. The epistemological value of narrative for theology and many other fields has reached a level of agreement that means that even thinkers not intending to employ narrative in any comprehensive way acknowledge its value. Further, as we will comment more below, awareness of narrative in a simple sense has found its way into the work of many theologians whose relationship to it is not as strict as for those listed above.

---

52. Ibid.

53. Scott Holland, *How Do Stories Save Us?: An Essay on the Question with the Theological Hermeneutics of David Tracy in View*, Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs (Louvain ; Dudley, MA: Peeters ;, 2006), 98.

Critiques of Narrative Theology

Not surprisingly for a novel theological approach, there has been no shortage of criticism of narrative theology as a whole as well as the work of its individual practitioners. Often these critiques take the form of affirming the benefits of the narrative turn while ultimately questioning whether narrative can bear the weight required of it. In a book focusing on the work of Stanley Hauerwas, Gale Heide questions whether narrativists can really leave behind "system." He concludes: "In the end, it seems as though a certain amount of system, perhaps as merely a coherentist effort at maintaining consistency with Scripture, is inescapable in theology."[54] Preferring the vocabulary of "drama" to that of narrative Francesca Aran Murphy offers a wide-ranging critique of narrative theology that has itself been both praised and panned.[55] Murphy essentially accuses narrative theology of falling into all of the same epistemological traps from which it claims to be escaping.

In 1987, Carl F. H. Henry, then one of the most prominent evangelical voices, engaged in a brief debate with Hans Frei concerning narrative theology. While appreciative of narrative theology's commitment to the centrality of the biblical text and to Frei's insistence that the reader should seek to fit his or her world into the world narrated by Scripture, Henry was ultimately wary that Frei's language about the biblical narratives and the gospel accounts in particular failed to defend their full historicity. In particular, Henry worried that the narrative approach undermined the reality of the

---

54. Gale Heide, "System and Story: Narrative Critique and Construction in Theology" (2009), xvii.

55. Francesca Aran Murphy, *God is not a Story: Realism Revisited* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press Oxford, 2007).

resurrection.[56] Comments like Lindbeck's that "[t]he Bible is often 'history-like' even when it is not 'likely-history'" do not sit well with many evangelicals.[57] Similar concerns have been raised regarding the propriety of applying narrative critical techniques in biblical interpretation. However, V. Phillips Long makes a strong case that narrative crafting and historical reliability are not mutually exclusive.[58]

A distinct critique comes from Michael Goldberg. He notes, "What Jews have asked of Christians for the past two millennia is nothing if not narrative dependent: what justification do Christians have for identifying the deity whose salvific activity is depicted in the gospel story as the One whose saving acts are portrayed in Israel's prior story?"[59] Goldberg goes on to compare and contrast the narrative depictions of God in two paradigmatic events: the Exodus and the Resurrection. He sees an important asymmetry. Whereas the Old Testament narrative depiction portrays God accomplishing salvation in conjunction with humanity, the work of redemption in the cross and resurrection of Jesus appears too one-sided. Per the tools of narrative criticism, the characterization of God in these two narratives suggests two different characters.[60]

With a nod to Augustine's *Confessions* and the Puritan practice of journal keeping as a spiritual discipline Alan Jacobs detects a defect in narrative theology's focus on storytelling in the community at the expense of personal narratives. He writes, "In short,

---

56. Carl F. H. Henry, "Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal," *Trinity Journal* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 3–19.

57. George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 122.

58. V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, vol. 5. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

59. Michael Goldberg, "God, Action, and Narrative: *Which* Narrative? *Which* Action? *Which* God?" *The Journal of Religion* 68, no. 1 (January 1988): 40.

60. One might remark that perhaps Goldberg has overlooked the importance of the doctrine of the Incarnation and the full humanity of Jesus Christ. Insofar as Jesus was fully human this plan of salvation *does* include human participation.

what is currently needed, it seems to me, is a narrative theology that draws on the great resources provided by the thinkers I have mentioned—MacIntyre, Newbigin, Hauerwas, and so on—but which also understands what Augustine and the Puritans understood: the importance of thinking narratively about individual lives. If we are to achieve this goal, we must cultivate as our primary resources, a faculty and a virtue: memory and hope."[61] Those sectors of Christianity open to narrative theology but still concerned with the importance of the definitive experience of personal conversion may resonate with Jacob's critique.

In a monograph on the theological hermeneutics of David Tracy, Scott Holland voices what may be the most telling critique of narrative theology. He writes,

> Although reflection on the religious meanings and claims embodied in stories has always been a task of the theologian, the turn to the narrative genre as a privileged theological category became one of the most significant methodological emphases of late 20th-century theology, hermeneutics, and critical theory. Yet despite hundreds of books, articles and conferences on the topic there is clearly no consensus concerning how stories are to be used theologically in the conversations and debates within the contemporary theological guild.[62]

What Holland highlights is the fact that for the most part, the question of narrative's usefulness to theology has been mired in seemingly endless discussions of methodology, either between practitioners of the difference styles of narrative theology, from other theological positions, or even from other disciplines such as philosophy.[63] Though there

---

61. Alan Jacobs, "What Narrative Theology Forgot," *First Things*, no. 135 (Ag-S 2003): 27.

62. Holland, *How Do Stories Save Us?*, 72.

63. See Keith E. Yandell, ed., *Faith and Narrative* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Though the philosophers represented in this volume generally regard renewed interest in narrative as a felicitous development, they are less convinced than the narrative theologians (and especially the pure narrative theologians) that narrative can displace more discursive modes of thought at least in the philosophical project. They go so far as to claim that "narrative discourse is neither a source of religious or moral knowledge not otherwise available, nor a basis for principled assessment of competing theological or ethical claims" (3).

is widespread agreement regarding the value of narrative in the theological task, it is unclear how best to appropriate it.

Narrative and Beyond

Not surprisingly, such a novel approach has occasioned both devotees and detractors so many of the early volumes were defenses of the movement with minimal application of the method.[64] As the movement has matured, more detailed attention to specific issues and theological loci has become common. James McClendon has contributed significantly with his influential *Biography as Theology*[65] as well as a three volume systematic theology.[66] The importance of ethics for narrative theology can be seen in McClendon's unique ordering of the theological material. He begins with *Ethics* in volume 1, moves to *Doctrine* in volume 2 and closes with *Witness*. Samuel Wells makes a similar application of narrative theological thinking to ethics in his *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics.*[67] Gabriel Fackre has also contributed significantly with his introductory *The Christian Story* and *The Doctrine of Revelation: A Narrative Approach.*[68] Many other works incorporate narrative modes of thought less comprehensively.

---

64. See, for example, John A. Beck, *God as Storyteller: Seeking Meaning in Biblical Narrative* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2008); Tilley, *Story Theology*; William J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984); John Shea, *Stories of God: An Unauthorized Biography* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1978); Mark Ellingsen, *The Integrity of Biblical Narrative: Story in Theology and Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

65. James Wm. McClendon, *Biography as Theology; How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974).

66. James Wm. McClendon, "Systematic Theology" (1986-c1994).

67. Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004).

68. Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story: A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1978); Gabriel Fackre, *The Doctrine of*

Narrative and Drama

Acknowledging their debt to Hans Urs von Balthasar,[69] some theologians and biblical scholars have proposed the superiority of the language of drama to that of narrative to describe the biblical story and how it informs Christian doctrine and practice.[70] Various theories have been proposed as to how best to divide the biblical drama into acts. N.T. Wright sketches a five-act drama in his *New Testament and the People of God*: Creation, Fall, Israel, Jesus, Church and Restoration.[71] Building from Wright, Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen suggest a six-act drama, roughly: Creation, Fall, Israel, Christ, Church, and Consummation. Their version is cast as the tale of a king who establishes, loses and regains his kingdom.[72] Other proposals organize the biblical material differently.

Both story and drama have become popular ways to talk about the coherence of the canon but the extent to which these works actually theologize on the basis of such narrative or dramatic development varies greatly. In evangelical circles, the drama of Scripture is often merely put alongside the discursive, propositional doctrines. That is, the

---

Revelation: A Narrative Interpretation, Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997).

69. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

70. Of course, with the language of drama comes debate as to whether the biblical drama is more comedic or tragic in form. J. Cheryl Exum, though open to the possibility that the Bible as a whole evinces classic comedic elements, argues persuasively that several biblical tales are tragic (*Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* [Cambridge, [Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1992]). Looking more expansively and theologically at the question of revelation, Francesca Aran Murphy makes a case for a more comedic structure (*The Comedy of Revelation: Paradise Lost and Regained in Biblical Narrative* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000]). Obviously one must be careful not to expect extra-biblical categories such as tragedy and comedy to be applicable to biblical narrative without remainder.

71. N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 141–42.

72. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 27.

narrative telling of Scripture is more a form of biblical theology than dogmatic or systematics.

One exception is the work of Kevin Vanhoozer who has applied the concept of drama further than most others in his *Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*.[73] Vanhoozer's target is not narrative theology *per se* but rather the relationship of Scripture, doctrine, and church as he observes it in George Lindbeck's "cultural-linguistic" model. Accordingly, he is not especially concerned to defend any particular dramatic layout of the biblical story but rather to articulate, using dramatic categories, the relationship of Scripture to doctrine and doctrine to the church. In the end, his work is almost too detailed but is responding to the critique of merely propositional approaches to doctrine.

NARRATIVE IN EVANGELICAL AND FEMINIST THEOLOGY

Narrative theology arose in part as an antidote to the excesses of modernist epistemologies and as an attempt to ameliorate some of the postmodern critiques of totalizing systems. Though certain strains of narrative theology would still maintain the existence of a biblical 'metanarrative' in the face of the postmodern critique, it can also be argued that the biblical metanarrative is not totalizing in the same way as systems are. Thiselton argues:

> 'Plots,' or 'emplotment,' allow for reversals, conflicts, surprises, complexities, hopes, frustrations, and fulfillment. They are the very stuff of human *life* (not theoretical thought) with which Christian Doctrine interacts. A 'grand narrative' (although not in the sense implied by Lyotard) may recount God's dealings with the world; 'little' narratives

73. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

> may also portray the appropriation of divine acts on the scale of particular events and persons, with all the ambiguity and need for interpretation that characterizes a journey or narrative *en route*. There is room for what Ricoeur terms 'a hierarchy of levels.'[74]

Thus narrative theology tries to navigate between the certainty and totality of modern system and the uncertainty characteristic of much postmodern thought.

How far has the narrative turn penetrated Evangelical and Feminist theology? While there are elements within it that should be amenable to each, its epistemological claims as well as its relationship to the biblical text run counter to their own.

Evangelicals and Narrative Theology

Though it is certainly not the last word on the topic, Carl Henry's unease about narrative theology has been shared by other evangelicals. The question of the historicity of biblical narrative is ever-present and many evangelicals are uneasy with the fact that many of the chief advocates of narrative theology reject inerrancy. Furthermore, when narrative theology is put in the service of a view of the nature and use of Christian doctrine such as George Lindbeck's "cultural-linguistic" model they are further suspicious.

Gabriel Fackre represents a more optimistic evangelical viewpoint on the value of narrative theology. He notes that there is considerable overlap between the concerns of narrative theology and some of the values of evangelical theology. In evangelical theology he detects a commitment to the overarching story of Scripture, immersion in the

---

74. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 66.

individual biblical narratives, and an emphasis on the personal narrative of conversion.[75] He rightly warns, however, of the limits of personal narrative in evangelical estimation. "Evangelical narrative will be critical, however, of any point of view that rests its narrative case in such way with celebrations of affect, autobiography or biography, or reads the Christian story as a species of the genus, universal experiential story. Biblical narrative has an integrity of its own and cannot be absorbed into human experience as such."[76]

There is evidence that evangelicalism is appropriating aspects of the narrative proposal. Kevin Vanhoozer has tried to rehabilitate Lindbeck's model with his own "canonical-linguistic" model of the nature and function of doctrine.[77] What is more, prompted in part by David Steinmetz's article "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis" the movement known as the "theological interpretation of Scripture" has arisen and has prompted a burgeoning bibliography.[78] This movement is bringing theologians and biblical scholars into closer proximity resulting in more theologically sensitive readings of texts as well as more textually sensitive theological appropriation of the biblical material. However, the movement is still young and is just beginning to apply the fruits of these labors to specific theological loci. It remains the case that much evangelical theology is still employing modernist approaches to the theological enterprise.

---

75. Gabriel Fackre, "Narrative Theology from an Evangelical Perspective," in *Faith and Narrative*, Keith Yandell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 192.

76. Ibid., 195.

77. Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine* Vanhoozer draws on Hans Urs von Balthasar as well as N. T. Wright's proposal of a dramatic layout to the biblical canon.

78. For an introduction to theological interpretation of Scripture see Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

Feminists and Narrative Theology

The role of the narrative mode of thought in feminist theology has not been much more significant. Kathryn Greene-McCreight quotes Alvin Kimel's assertion that "the fundamental weakness of feminist theology is precisely its rejection of the narrative identification of God."[79] Though she tempers this blanket statement somewhat, she goes on to chronicle the systemic shortage of attention to narrative in feminist theology. Indeed, the narrative depiction of God and Jesus is problematic to feminist theology due to his maleness and the consistent depiction of God not only as Father, but as a less than nurturing, affirming character.[80] Feminist theologians have scoured the Scriptures in search of more feminine depictions of God such as Sophia[81] and the Shekinah[82] or have sought to re-identify God and Christ in feminine form through the language of Goddess, Thealogy, and Christa.[83] Whatever the recourse, what remains clear is that the biblical narrative presentation of God and Christ is not only not formative for feminist theology but consistently rejected.

---

79. Alvin Kimel, "It Could Have Been..." *Pro Ecclesia* 3 (1994): 393; quoted in Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 5, n. 15.

80. Kathryn Greene-McCreight helpfully charts the various solutions that feminist theologians have proposed to this problem. What is relevant for our purpose is her observation that none of the responses reckon with the narrative portrayal of Christ. See chapter 4 of Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*.

81. This identification of a divine feminine builds primarily from the presentation of Wisdom personified in Proverbs thought it incorporates various New Testament references to the "wisdom of God."

82. Reference to the Shekinah—the radiant glory of God—as a feminine divine trades on the fact that the word Shekinah is feminine in Hebrew. The term itself does not occur in the canonical text but was formed from the word "to dwell" which is found in several passages which speak of God's presence in the tabernacle or with his people.

83. Rita Nakashima Brock traces the origin and development of Christa. See especially chapter three of Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) and Rita Nakashima Brock, "Communities of the Cross: Christa and the Communal Nature of Redemption," *Feminist Theology* 14, no. 1 (2005): 109–25.

NARRATIVE AND BIBLICAL STUDIES

The story of the influence of the literary turn in biblical studies is parallel to and overlaps with the history of narrative theology but deserves separate comment. In the latter half of the last century interest in biblical studies began to shift away from attention to the history and sources of texts to attention to literary wholes. In Pentateuchal studies, for instance, this meant a move away from the documentary hypothesis that had dominated the field, to attention to the final form of the text and how they fit together than where they came apart. More energy and attention was paid to literary and rhetorical strategies than source and form. Biblical theology began to focus more on the theology of entire books or sections of literature.

Biblical Narrative Studies

Attention to literary features included increased attention to genre and narrative in particular. Literary and specifically narrative criticism became popular additions to other forms of criticism.[84] Narrative criticism pays close attention to the features of narratives—plot, character, dialogue, narration, gaps, time, setting—and distinguishes between the implied author and reader and the original author and reader. Various of these features can be seen in the work of Adele Berlin, Meir Sternberg and Robert Alter,[85] among others, and in countless works addressing discrete biblical corpora or

84. For a helpful, brief introduction to narrative criticism, see Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* Guides to Biblical Scholarship. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

85. Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative Bible and Literature Series*, 9 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

specific books.[86] These methods have breathed new life into texts that had at times suffered painful dissections under the knife of other critical approaches.

The Nature of Biblical Narrative

A particularly important observation regarding the nature and function of biblical narrative, an observation that contributed to the development of narrative theology came in Erich Auerbach's influential study *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature.*[87] The most cited chapter in his lengthy study is his analysis and comparison of the Genesis account of the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22) with Homer. What Auerbach discerned was a distinctive tendency in the biblical narratives to suppress details thereby accentuating the salient features of the narrative.[88] Later Hans Frei drew further attention to the way the "realistic narrative" quality of biblical narratives distinguishes them from both mythical and historical texts. Frei in particular chronicled the turn away from reading the biblical narratives as realistic narrative and toward the tendency to assess them as history or as myth.[89] This turn resulted in the application of various critical tools to Scripture either to confirm or deny their historicity or to access some kernel of truth

---

86. See, for instance, John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 2 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1991); William S. Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993); Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, Foundations and Facets. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986–90).

87. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis; the Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Translated from the German by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

88. Meir Sternberg would later deny the stark difference Auerbach painted between Biblical and Homeric narration, but the effect of Auerbach's work still stands (Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 232).

89. Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative; a Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

behind the historical or mythical husk of the text.[90] We will see these impulses in the evangelical and feminist theologians we examine.

A central claim regarding narrative in general but applicable to biblical narrative is the claim that the meaning of the story cannot be separated from its form *as narrative*. Though certainly no narrative theologian, Flannery O'Connor commented succinctly on this point:

> When you can state the theme of a story, when you can separate it from the story itself, then you can be sure the story is not a very good one. The meaning of a story has to be embodied in it, has to be made concrete in it. A story is a way to say something that can't be said any other way, and it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is. You tell a story because a statement would be inadequate. When anybody asks what a story is about, the only proper thing to tell him is to read the story. The meaning of fiction is not abstract meaning but experienced meaning, and the purpose of making statements about the meaning of a story is only to help you to experience that meaning more fully.[91]

This was Hans Frei's concern regarding the prevailing approaches to biblical narrative. Whether regarding it as history or myth, there was an attempt to unearth a meaning beyond the story itself. This impulse is as in evidence in Rudolf Bultmann's famous project of 'demythologization' as it is in the contemporary preacher's moralizing sermons.

Michael Root offers a similar critique about the use of story and the relationship of the reader to the story that we will find helpful in our later analysis. He suggests that

---

90. In *Deep Exegesis* Peter J. Leithart demonstrates that both those that approach the narratives as history and those who regard them as myths end up treating the text as a husk. The mythical approach cracks open the text in search of a transcultural principle. The historical approach drills through the text in search of an event. *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2009).

91. Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), 96.

there are two ways that the Christian story (and by extension individual narratives) can relate to the life of a reader: illustrative and storied. He explains:

> The story can bear an *illustrative* relation to the reader's life and world. The story illustrates certain redemptive truths about self, world, and God. The soteriological task is to bring out the truths the story illustrates and show how they are redemptive. Only when the narrative is transcended does the redemptive relation become clear.
> The Christian narrative can also bear a *storied* relation to the reader. The Christian story and the life and the world of the reader do not exist in isolation, but constitute one world and one story. The reader is included in the Christian story...The task of soteriology is, then, to show how the reader is included in the story and how the story then is or can be the story of that reader's redemption.[92]

The illustrative use of stories assumes that the meaning is behind the story or is a truth that can best be expressed otherwise but which the story illustrates. All stories are "just so" stories or fables with easily determinable morals. But this approach transgresses the inherent polyvalence of narratives. Bausch goes so far as to describe stories as "pluralistic."[93]

Narrative Coherence and Typology

One of the main contributions of narrative thought is a form of coherence that rivals that offered by system or even history. History places events in chronological relationship to one another. Complex causal relationships might also be determined. Systems put people and events in fixed relationship to one another. Narrative, or story, offers further ways to relate events and people to one another. In narratives earlier events

---

92. Michael Root, "The Narrative Structure of Soteriology," in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 266. (emphasis original).

93. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*, 110.

may foreshadow later events. Later events may fulfill aspects of prior events. Narrative offers a way to talk about the development yet continuity of concepts and identities.

One specific way that narratives and biblical narrative in particular use to related events within the narrative is through typology. In typology earlier and later characters and events shed light on one another, assisting in the interpretation of those events. This offers a manner of connection far richer than that offered by system or mere chronology and causation. There has been a resurgence in this sort of figural reading because of how seriously it takes the narratives and characters as they stand but also offers connectivity between earlier and later sections of scripture.

Evangelical Theology and Biblical Narrative

Biblicism is a hallmark of evangelical theology and yet, when coupled with a particular view of doctrine and how it functions in the church, it becomes clear that some parts of Scripture are prized more highly than others for their doctrinal payout. Ironically, in spite of these theologians' avowed biblicism, the biblical narratives (especially read *as* narratives) play very little role in the theological task. The *a priori* decision to regard them as primarily historical accounts relegates them to the role Michael Root terms "illustration", a status that falls short of the now broadly agreed upon epistemological capacity of narrative. While it would be unfair to characterize all Evangelical usage of narrative as illustrative,[94] it is clear that with many of the Old Testament stories in particular, the tendency is to regard them as illustrations of principles that are taught discursively elsewhere.

94. For instance, when considering the cross-work of Christ it is clear that evangelical thought leans toward the inclusion of the believer in the story of Christ. However, interaction with other narratives tends towards Root's principalization-illustrative category.

Even when the fall narrative is considered, the approach is often heedless of its narrative features and its context within a broader narrative (both within the book and canon) and typically only finds there a confirmation of a definition of sin derived from a more discursive biblical genre. Though it is generally agreed upon that Genesis 3–11 narrate the decline of humanity into sin, not much theological use is made of this. In keeping with Frei's observation, much ink is also spilt defending the historicity of the Genesis 3 account.[95] As important as the matter of historicity may be, Frei is correct that excessive attention to the history can obscure the theological intent of the narrative. To paraphrase Lindbeck, perhaps the evangelical may be best served by regarding the text as story-like even while affirming that it is history.

Feminist Theology and Biblical Narrative

Feminist theology's relationship with Scripture in general and with biblical narrative in particular is much less friendly. The combination of the conviction that the biblical narratives were composed in patriarchal societies with the sordid history of the use of biblical narratives to support oppression of women, even in the church, has led many women to reject the biblical narratives outright. As Greene-McCreight summarizes, "Without feminist theology, the Bible is understood to be dangerous to women's health."[96]

---

95. The literature on the historicity of the Genesis accounts of creation, fall and flood is enormous and increasing all the more so as prominent voices raise doubts and propose new solutions to the problem of coordinating the biblical material with scientific and archaeological discovery. See John Walton and the debate at www.biologos.com.

96. Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 39.

As Greene-McCreight and others have shown, there are various ways that feminist theologians have approached or appropriated Scripture.[97] Many of these methods have much in common with a "hermeneutics of suspicion"; it is assumed that the text's provenance in a patriarchal culture has tainted whatever message the text might have.[98] It is not uncommon for feminist exegetes to offer "new" readings of texts seeking to redeem them from their patriarchal past and recapture them for religious use.[99] This is especially true of the iconic narratives of the Old Testament where the mistreatment of women by men is often graphically portrayed (e.g. Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, Lot and his daughters, Jephthah and his daughter). Yet while many of these readings give detailed

---

97. Carolyn Osiek offered one of the first typologies of feminist appropriation of Scripture: rejectionist, loyalist, revisionist, sublimationist, and liberationist. (Carolyn Osiek, "The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adele Yarbro Collins [Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1985], 93–105). Greene-McCreight (among others) finds typologies of feminist use of Scripture problematic and opts instead to appropriate David Tracy's practice of examining how feminist theologians construe Scripture. She discerns four main feminist construals of Scripture: as inspired witness, as vehicle for patriarchy, as vehicle for patriarchy and racism, and as cultural artifact. Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 38–40.

98. It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze and critique feminist theology's use of Scripture more broadly. However, in addition to Kathryn Greene-McCreight's critiques, several others have expressed concern at the effects of privileging personal experience over divine revelation. George Stroup summarizes succinctly the problem: "All interpretation takes place within a hermeneutical circle, but when a critical principle determines the meaning of the text, then the principle itself becomes the primary authority for Christian faith and the Bible becomes a witness to the critical principle rather than a witness to the God revealed in Jesus Christ" (George W. Stroup, "Between Echo and Narcissus: The Role of the Bible in Feminist Theology," *Interpretation* 42, no. 1 [1988]: 31).

99. Emily Cheney explains and exemplifies a variety of approaches for loosing biblical texts from their sexist strictures. See Emily Cheney, *She Can Read: Feminist Reading Strategies for Biblical Narrative* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996). Two works by Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza are important as well. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

attention to the text, attention to the biblical narratives *as* narrative is overshadowed by the concern to de-patriarchalize the text.[100]

There is no doubt regarding the patriarchal cultural provenance of the biblical literature nor of the reprehensible views concerning women propped up by questionable exegesis.[101] However, one wonders if in rejecting the biblical narratives they have thrown out the theological baby with the patriarchal bath water. Cultural features that a story contains do not necessarily reflect the message of the story.[102] Attention to the literary features of narrative together with a broader narrative approach might assist the reader in not focusing too narrowly on offensive features of the story that may not bear on its overall meaning.

SUMMARY

Christian sin-talk has atrophied and this threatens the loss of the Christian prophetic voice in the public square. In two sectors of Christianity—Evangelicalism and Feminism—sin remains a central topic. But neither of these traditions offers a compelling definition of sin. Their reductionistic definitions of sin overemphasize certain aspects of humanity and salvation while muting others. At the same time, there has been a growing awareness of the place of narrative in personal and intellectual development. What is more, the biblical narrative is being read freshly after decades of inattention.

---

100. Greene-McCreight suggests that feminist depatriarchalization of the text is analogous to Rudolf Bultmann's demythologization project. Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 30–31.

101. Mary Daly's relatively brief historical survey of various theologians' views on women is enough both to establish the fact and to sadden the reader. See chapter 2 of *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).

102. Stephen Fowl exposes the problems of committing oneself to the idea that texts themselves have ideologies, an accusation feminist theologians commonly hurl at scripture. See Stephen Fowl, "Texts Don't Have Ideologies," *Biblical Interpretation* 3, no. 1 (1995): 15–34.

In response to the renewed awareness of the importance of narrative for human knowing, it seems obvious that the Christian theologian would turn first to consider the narratives understood to be authoritative for the church. In the case of both the evangelical and feminist theologians cited, it could be argued that the theologians' embrace of an outmoded modernist epistemology which underestimates the value of narrative is ingredient in their truncated appropriation of Scripture and arrival at a partial definition of sin. Indeed, in both cases, their prior theological and methodological commitments have limited them in even the most basic application of narrative in their theologizing—theological reflection on the biblical narratives. While for the evangelical theologians mentioned the Bible is the preeminent theological resource, the continuing commitment to "propositional" knowledge and the treatment of the narratives primarily as history result in either the avoidance of the biblical narrative as theological resource or a handling of them in a manner inattentive to their narrative form. Tilley may overstate the case when he says that "[p]ropositional theology presupposes that narratives are dispensable portrayals of religious faith,"[103] but it is true that the theological value of narrative as narrative has often been underappreciated. In the feminist theologies listed "narrativity" of a sort is important (the female experience of patriarchal oppression), but the biblical narratives themselves are not regarded as an authoritative source because of their provenance in patriarchal cultures and their centuries-long use to legitimate patriarchy.[104]

---

103. Tilley, *Story Theology*, 12.

104. In *Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and the Christian Tradition*, Mary Grey repeatedly acknowledges the importance of myths for the formation of human thinking about matters such as sin and redemption. To that end she makes frequent reference to narrative episodes from ancient mythology and contemporary literature that she feels illustrate her point. Curiously absent is much reference to biblical narrative episodes, except occasionally to propose

Interestingly, there are movements in both of these theologies that suggest that more robust appropriation of the biblical narratives may be possible. In addition to changes within evangelical theology with respect to epistemology,[105] there is considerable interest in the practice of the "theological interpretation of Scripture" within evangelical circles. This cross-disciplinary movement is bringing biblical scholars and theologians into closer contact and bodes well for the theological appropriation of "forgotten" aspects of the biblical text. What is more, fresh thinking is being done in evangelical circles about the relationship between narrative and historicity in an effort to retain the high view of the historical accuracy of Scripture without sacrificing the literary component. For their part, feminist biblical scholars, in an effort to unmask the abuse of biblical texts in service of oppression, have given detailed attention to biblical narratives, in some cases applying some of the tools of narrative criticism. One thinks of the work of J. Cheryl Exum[106] and Phyllis Trible.[107] While for neither of these theological streams is the pure narrative theological approach likely to be an option, an increased appropriation of narrative modes of thought beginning with more conscientiously narrative approaches to biblical texts is not an impossibility.

---

a more suitable form of the story. (Mary Grey, *Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and Christian Tradition* [London: SPCK, 1989]).

105. Steven Sherman surveys some warming of evangelicals to a chastened epistemology and cites Kevin Vanhoozer, Robert Webber, and John Franke as examples. See Steven Sherman, *Revitalizing Theological Epistemology* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2008).

106. See especially J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty*; J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)Versions of Biblical Narratives*, JSOT. Supplement Series (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993).

107. Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

STORIES OF SIN, SELF, AND THE SAVIOR: THE SCOPE AND DIRECTION OF THIS PROJECT

After this survey of the status of the theology of sin and the rise of the importance of narrative a fundamental question remains to be asked. Have theological discussions and definitions of sin taken adequate account of narrative modes of thought and specifically the presentation of sin in biblical narrative? How might a narrative sensitive reading of specific biblical narratives offer a better depiction of human sinfulness for use in both theological and pastoral applications? In this dissertation we propose to demonstrate the effects on a theology of sin of non-narrative approaches to the biblical narrative and the theological task and then to move from an examination of the narrative development of sin in one set of narratives to appropriating those insights into the development of a narrative sensitive description of sin.

While some have regarded narrative theology as a passing fad, there is little doubt that there is at least a lingering sense that biblical narrative has been insufficiently tapped for its theological potential. Paul House's attitude is reflective of a growing consensus and the perspective of this dissertation: "I believe in narrative theology in the sense that I am convinced that narrative analysis yields theological data that involves readers in the biblical story in a unique and telling way. To be more specific, how the Bible itself depicts God, Israel, and other primary characters through statements, settings, and events can lead interpreters to legitimate and accurate theological comments that come from the text itself."[108] We propose to offer just such a narrative analysis with a view to

108. Paul R. House, "Examining the Narratives of Old Testament Narrative: An Exploration in Biblical Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 67 (2005): 230.

discovering those "accurate theological comments" from the text that will help balance overly discursive approaches.

The Structure of the Argument

Critique of Non-Narratival Theologies of Sin

First, to demonstrate the shortcomings of non-narrative sensitive approaches to defining sin we will examine in detail the work of two feminist theologians (chapter two) and two evangelical theologians (chapter three). These will be compared and contrasted and their strengths, weaknesses and presuppositions will be addressed. In particular we will observe how narrative modes of thought and specific biblical narratives have—or have not—played a role in their theology of sin.

For feminist theology the work of Mary Daly and Rita Nakashima Brock will figure prominently. Mary Daly's work is important for two reasons. First, in Daly's theology one encounters a full expression of feminist theology. Daly took the feminist methodologies to what she saw as their logical conclusion—the rejection of Christianity. If there is an epistemological and methodological deficiency of the order that we are suggesting, such a bold statement of feminist thought should put it in stark relief. Second, Daly's specific definition of sin and salvation as the obstruction and reclamation of self-naming is particularly ripe for comparison with the biblical narrative description. As a complement to Daly's approach I will also consider the work of Rita Nakashima Brock. Brock makes a good dialogue partner for several reasons. First, her work is from an Asian-American perspective which highlights the diversity within feminist theology. Second, in one work in particular, *Proverbs of Ashes*, Brock and co-author Rebecca Ann

Parker seek to engage in theological reflection on redemption (and by extension, sin) in an intentionally non-discursive mode through the use of personal narratives. Finally, since behind some of the concern of this dissertation is the loss of sin language in popular culture it is noteworthy that several of Brock's works are written to appeal to a wider audience than the academic community alone.

To examine the role of narrative in the theology of sin of evangelical theology in chapter three I will consider the work of one standard systematic theology—*Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem[109]—as well as a more focused work, *The Fall and Sin: What We Have Become as Sinners* by Marguerite Shuster.[110] Grudem's work is relevant not for its scholarly rigor nor because it is particularly representative of what is happening in academic evangelical theology but because it typifies the early-modern methodology of generations of evangelical theologians even as it remains extremely popular at both the seminary and lay levels. Even if it can be argued that there has been movement in evangelical theology as a result of postmodern critique and in light of narrative theology more specifically, it has not "trickled down" to the pew or even the pulpit. Shuster's work, a recent book-length treatment of sin, is a valuable contribution to the discussion because she represents a more "liberal" strain of evangelical theology, comfortable with more mythological readings of Genesis and the complementarity of biblical revelation with scientific theory. In particular we will attempt to discern what role, if any, narrativity and specifically the biblical narratives play in their theology of sin.

---

109. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*.
110. Shuster, *Fall and Sin*.

What we will discover is that the renderings of sin proposed by these theologies, derived as they are using modernist methods and founded on modern epistemologies, are insufficiently attentive to the importance of narrative modes of thought in theologizing. Further, in their definition of sin, they often almost completely ignore the witness of the biblical narrative—both individual narratives and the Bible's overall narrative structure. While one particular narrative, the so-called "fall" narrative of Genesis 3 has long figured prominently in theological reflection on sin (e.g. reflection on Genesis 3 was central to Augustine's description of sin as pride) this text is often appropriated in ways that actually subvert the narrative *as* narrative. As a narrative it works as a whole whereas its appropriation in a theology of sin is usually done without reference to its broader context (evangelicals) or is discarded or "transvalued" (feminists).[111] These theologies therefore offer thin descriptions of the human condition and consequently distorted pictures of redemption, humanity, and the divine–human relationship.

What is particularly lacking in both of these theologies of sin (and evident in their handling of the biblical narrative) is any way to handle continuity between the past and present that allows for development. Their epistemologies depend upon fixed notions of the human (feminists) and revelation (evangelicals) that remain unchanged across time. The narratives are approached as myth (feminists) or history (evangelicals) in ways that overlook their narrative character. Their definitions of sin, while capturing certain aspects

---

111. Meir Sternberg diagnoses the lack of attention to context as a primary cause of misunderstanding of narrative when writing that the underlying questions regarding the narrator's intent are not recognized more fully "is largely due to the tendency to read biblical texts out of communicative context, with little regard for what they set out to achieve and the exigencies attaching to its achievement. Elements thus get divorced from the very terms of reference that assign to them their role and meaning: parts from wholes, means from ends, forms from functions. Nothing could be less productive and more misleading." Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 1–2.

of the human situation with startling clarity, are nonetheless insufficient and speak less than prophetically in the current intellectual milieu.

Narratives of Sin and the Narrativity of Sin

Of theological interpretation of narrative Ronald Thiemann writes, "Theologians have often been criticized for imposing upon Scripture grand interpretive schemes which ignore or violate the structures of biblical texts. Theological interpretation of narrative, if it is to avoid that danger, must be characterized by close textual analysis guided by clear textual warrants. Such analysis requires in turn a limitation of the material discussed."[112] In chapter four we will essay to follow this advice as we engage in a reading of Genesis 3–11 with specific emphasis on the episodes that narrate sin. Our focus will be upon how the narrative depicts sin: what is the reference point of sin? who is it against? how, if at all, does sin develop in the narrative? We will observe that when read as a whole a more multi-faceted view of sin is developed than that in Genesis 3 alone. Sin is not easily reduced to either side of the polarities involved. Furthermore, sin is presented not as a fixed concept but as one that develops in relationship to humanity. Most importantly, we will propose that the clearest reference point for sin is neither God directly nor the other but is the description of the human as created in the image of God, relational, and commissioned, an identity that the narratives depict humanity beginning to live into. We will further observe that rather than depicting humanity and sin as fixed realities, these foundational narratives present humanity and sin in a dance of development: advancement in one area challenging the other.

---

112. Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987, c1985), 114.

Using the insights gained in this narrative reading, in chapter five we will propose key elements of a narrative depiction of the nature of sin and bring it into dialogue with the systematic approaches discussed earlier to demonstrate how such a reading would strengthen or reframe those positions. We will see that a concept of sin related to the depiction of the human as the *imago dei* as a narrated reality enriches sin-talk and offers ways to link the definition of sin more directly to Christ. We will conclude that rather than offering myths of the original sin or illustrations of a fixed concept of sin, the narratives of Genesis 3–11 serve as types of sin that narrate humanity's character and depict sin rather than define it.

Finally, as we revisit the flow of the argument in chapter 6 we will conclude with proposals about the direction of further study. We will suggest that the more multifaceted depiction of sin that such a reading provides offers a more diverse vocabulary for use in pastoral (and apologetic) applications in a cultural and social context where the traditional language of sin as pride and disobedience have lost their voice. The ultimate goal is to offer a depiction of human sinfulness that speaks more adequately of and to the human situation by way of the types of sin portrayed in the expanded fall narrative.

The Limits of the Study

Any study investigating a topic so broad as sin, so current as narrative theology, and so endlessly debated as the primeval history must necessarily limit itself. As Thiemann suggests we must restrict the textual focus. For us it will be Genesis 3–11. A fully developed narrative theology of sin would want to consider many other narratives such as Israel's resistance of Yahweh's covenant advances in the later Pentateuch or

perhaps the sinful decline observable in the book of Judges.[113] But the significant role that these narratives play in the overarching narrative of sin and redemption warrants the narrowness of our focus. While a fuller defense of this selection will await a later chapter, suffice it to say that it is the opinion of many that Genesis 3–11 uniquely depicts human sinfulness. One example will suffice: "In contrast with this [the Old Testament's lack of theorizing about sin], the Jahwist's great hamartiology in Gen. III-XI about the way in which sin broke in and spread like an avalanche is undoubtedly something exceptional: for never again did Israel speak in such universal terms of sin as exemplified in standardized models, and yet at the same time in such great detail."[114]

For the purposes of this study we will approach the finished form of the biblical text and not engage in the discussions of source, redaction, authorship or dating.[115] Since narrative approaches do give consideration to the implied author and readers we may have cause to comment on author or narrator in that sense. Furthermore, we will not engage the debates surrounding the historicity of the primeval narrative. Since our analysis is primarily narrative some important exegetical issues may be bracketed or relegated to the footnotes.

We must be modest about what contribution this dissertation might make to a systematic hamartiology. As Stephen Fowl notes, "In terms of biblical interpretation,

---

113. For instance, both K. Lawson Younger (*Judges and Ruth*, The NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002]) and Daniel I. Block (*Judges, Ruth*, The New American Commentary, vol. 6 [Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999]) argue that the theme of Judges is the sinful decline of Israel to the moral status of Canaanites.

114. Gerhard von Rad, *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, vol. 1 of *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D.M.G Stalker (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2005), 154.

115. Some feminist efforts at reclaiming sexist narratives appeal to the compositional history of the text suggesting that earlier versions of the story may not have evinced the patriarchal bias of the current form of the text. This approach can be found beyond biblical interpretation as, for instance, Mary Grey speculates on the possibility of earlier, less patriarchal versions of Greek myths. See Grey, *Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and Christian Tradition*.

being able to identify oneself as a sinner injects a crucial element of provisionality into one's interpretive practices."[116] That is to say that as a sinner one should expect one's interpretation of Scripture (and perhaps especially one's interpretation of passages about sin?) to be partial if not distorted.[117] What is more, a fully-orbed systematic theology of sin would have many more elements to take into consideration beyond the narrative depiction of sin. There is certainly a place for word studies, analysis of the metaphors (along the lines of Anderson's study, see below), context and genre sensitive exegesis of other biblical corpora, etc.

Relationship to Recent Studies

At least two recent studies are animated by similar concerns and traverse overlapping territory with this dissertation. It behooves us to distinguish this project from theirs. These are Gary A. Anderson's 2009 book *Sin: A History*[118] and Robert Gonzales's recent book *Where Sin Abounds: The Spread of Sin and the Curse in Genesis with Special Focus on the Patriarchal Narratives.*[119] Both deal with sin and the biblical narratives in some detail.

In *Sin: A History*, Gary A. Anderson attempts to identify and trace the dominant metaphors for sin in Scripture. In particular he argues that one can identify a shift in the

---

116. Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology. (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 82.

117. For a discussion of various models of the noetic effects of sin see Stephen K. Moroney, "How Sin Affects Scholarship: A New Model," *Christian Scholars Review* 28 (Spring 1999): 432–51. On Emil Brunner's model, one expects the effects to be most severe in matters of theology. It seems reasonable to suggest that the noetic effects of sin might be most severe on our understanding of sin! (Though Moroney ultimately suggests that our perceptions of God are more effected than our knowledge of self.)

118. Gary A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

119. Robert Gonzales, *Where Sin Abounds: The Spread of Sin and the Curse in Genesis with Special Focus on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010).

primary metaphor of sin in Scripture from “sin as weight” to “sin as debt”. He further links this shift in thinking to a shift in primary concepts of atonement and ultimately to the practice of almsgiving. Anderson’s work is a valuable contribution to biblical and systematic theology. Specifically, any comprehensive theology of sin would be well-served to consider his careful treatment of the biblical metaphors for sin and what the metaphors for sin contribute to a biblical or systematic theology of sin. In fact, the biblical tendency to speak of sin metaphorically, like its preference for narrative presentation, further supports the contention that sin is resistant to definition much less reduction to an essence. What is more, Anderson raises the issue of theological development, a question that any attempt at narrative theology must reckon with. If there is discernible development in a theological idea in Scripture, how does one rightly appropriate the earlier material? In considering the metaphors, Anderson has helpfully moved the discussion beyond mere word studies. However, as important as metaphors may be in capturing human experience and depicting sin, there is a fuller picture to be seen by considering how narratives of sin depict the human condition, not only the metaphors to which the condition gets reduced.

Closer to our project is Robert Gonzales’s recent book *Where Sin Abounds: The Spread of Sin and the Curse in Genesis with Special Focus on the Patriarchal Narratives*. Gonzales argues that sin is a major theme throughout the narratives of Genesis, not just in chapters 3–11. He proceeds to examine the treatment of sin through the patriarchal narratives to trace the spread of sin. While we will have much cause to interact with Gonzales’s work, this project differs from Gonzales’s in distinct ways. First, whereas Gonzales claims that too much attention has been paid to sin in the primeval narratives to

the detriment of the patriarchal depiction, it is my contention that insufficient theological use has been made of the presentation of sin in the primeval narrative because of a too restrictive focus on Genesis 3 as a fall narrative. Second, Gonzales admits that the breadth of his study disallows attention to "literary devices or the overall structure of the patriarchal narrative"[120] whereas our approach trades on the notion that the theological import of the passages cannot be safely separated from the literary elements. In short, both of these works do important biblical groundwork without approaching too explicitly the systematic theological task.

Two dissertations also address themes similar to our project. Margaret Dee Brachter's dissertation "The Pattern of Sin and Judgment in Genesis 1–11" is characterized by careful literary attention to the primeval narrative.[121] Through an analysis of structure and plot she attempts to discern a pattern to the way the stories of sin and judgment play out. While Brachter's attention to details of narrative and plot will prove useful to our investigation, her work is more strictly literary and does not bring her conclusions into meaningful dialogue with a theology of sin. Harold Shank's 1988 dissertation focuses more narrowly on the depiction of sin in the Cain and Abel episode.[122] Having set this episode within the context of the theme of Genesis 1–11 which he discerns to be "the self-limitation of God" Shank concludes that the Cain-Abel episode does not contribute to a story-line of the spread of sin, but rather to the aforementioned theme of God's self-limitation. Once again we may have cause to interact

---

120. Ibid., 14.

121. Margaret Dee Brachter, "The Pattern of Sin and Judgment in Genesis 1–11," Ph.D. diss. (Louisville, KY: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1984).

122. Harold Shank, "The Sin Theology of the Cain and Abel Story: An Analysis of Narrative Themes Within the Context of Genesis 1–11," Ph.D. diss. (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University, 1988).

with some of Shank's literary work, but our thesis will differ from his substantially. Like Brachter, Shank's work does not attempt to make theological use of the discovery.

CHAPTER 2

SIN, SELF, AND STORY IN THE FEMINIST THEOLOGY OF MARY DALY AND RITA NAKASHIMA BROCK

Unlike some strands of Christian theology, sin has occupied a place of importance in feminist theology from the discipline's inception. Serene Jones goes so far as to say,

> [N]o single topic in Christian theology has more resonance with feminist theory than the much disdained topic of sin...feminist theory is based upon the belief that the oppression of women is profoundly *wrong*, that the world is not as it should be, and that the brokenness we experience cuts deep into our social fabric and has done so for a long time. This recognition of the pervasive, insidious, and historically persistent forces of destruction at work in the world sits at the heart of the feminist movement."[1]

Despite this centrality, what sin is and what role it plays in feminist theology varies from theologian to theologian.

Many trace the origin of feminist theology to a 1960 article by Valerie Saiving that addressed the deficiencies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Anders Nygren's definitions of sin.[2] Saiving judged that Niebuhr's definition of sin as prideful self-magnification failed to take into account women's experience. Saiving rooted her critique in an assessment of the distinct modes of being unique to males and females. She wrote, "In a sense, masculinity is an endless process of *becoming*, while in femininity the emphasis is on *being*."[3] This distinction she linked to the inherent passivity of the female bodily experiences of menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause. Accordingly she proposed that

---

1. Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*, Guides to Theological Inquiry. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 96.

2. Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, Carol P. and Judith Plaskow Christ (New York: HarperCollins, 1979), 25–42.

3. Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," 32.

the fundamental forms of female temptation were different than those of males whose identity is primarily developed through action. She concluded:

> For the temptations of woman *as woman* are not the same as the temptations of man *as man*, and the specifically feminine forms of sin...have a quality which can never be encompassed by such terms as 'pride' and 'will-to-power.' They are better suggested by such items as triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lack of an organizing center or focus; dependence on others for one's own self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence; inability to respect the boundaries of privacy; sentimentality, gossipy sociability, and mistrust of reason—in short, underdevelopment or negation of the self.[4]

As important for feminist theology as her specific critique of sin was Saiving's approach. Her criticism was not that Niebuhr's definition failed to ring true to the biblical witness nor the Christian tradition. In fact, in naming sin as pride Saiving acknowledged that Niebuhr was squarely in the tradition dating back to Augustine. Instead, she judged that Niebuhr's definition failed to resonate with female *experience*. The problem of a partial definition of sin stemmed from an insufficiently developed anthropology, an anthropology that failed to assess male and female human experience differently. Saiving's solution sought to root a more female understanding of sin in a more accurate understanding of the female, that is, on a different anthropology. In her case it was an experience-based approach to anthropology that suggested that there was as much (or more) different about males and females as the same.

Others soon followed Saiving's lead.[5] In particular, in *Sex, Sin, and Grace*, Judith Plaskow expanded upon several of Saiving's ideas.[6] While expressing in more detail the

---

4. Ibid., 37.

5. Somewhat curiously Susan Nelson Dunfee offered a very similar critique of Niebuhr some twenty years later that makes no reference whatsoever to Saiving's article. Comparing Dunfee's piece to Saiving's does reveal the development of feminist theology, however, as Dunfee utilizes themes and language now common to feminist theology only nascent in Saiving's

distinct ways of being human unique to males and females Plaskow was careful to note that rather than speaking of mutually exclusive gender experience categories "feminine experience reveals in a more emphatic fashion certain aspects of the human situation which are present but less obvious in the experience of men."[7] Accordingly, her claim was that Niebuhr and Tillich were guilty of reductionism and her goal was a more holistic definition of sin better attuned to the human condition.[8] Like Saiving, Plaskow's complaint about Niebuhr's definition of sin was an anthropological one. She judged that Niebuhr, by failing to render rightly the nature of human persons as male and female, had erred in his definition of sin and its essence. The solution, therefore, was a corrected anthropology. We should note, however, that this implied a different epistemology, an approach to knowing that privileged human experience as the source of knowledge.

As Plaskow expanded Saiving's critique, so many other feminist theologians critiqued and developed those early feminist theological stirrings, especially as it related to the understanding of humans and sin. By 1978 Wanda Warren Berry could survey several distinct feminist hamartiologies.[9] As the feminist theological movement grew it gave birth to other disciplines such as womanist and mujerista theology with their distinct

---

critique. (Susan Nelson Dunfee, "The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Account of the Sin of Pride," *Soundings* 65 [Fall 1982]: 316–27).

6. Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin, and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Washington: University Press of America, 1980).

7. Ibid., 5.

8. As Saiving, Plaskow and Dunfee are quick to point out there are places in Niebuhr's treatment of sin where he acknowledges a certain two-sidedness to human sinfulness. The reverse of sin as pride for Niebuhr is sin as sensuality. All three claim, however, that Niebuhr ultimately subsumes sin as sensuality under sin as pride and proposes a single antidote—self-sacrificial love.

9. Wanda Warren Berry, "Images of Sin and Salvation in Feminist Theology," *Anglican Theological Review* LX, no. 1 (1978): 25–54 Berry surveyed the work of Rosemary Radford Reuther, Mary Daly, and Letty Russel.

viewpoints.[10] In 2000 Mary Elise Lowe offered a *status quaestionis* on feminist theology and sin, surveying the work of several theologians: Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sally McFague, Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, Angela West, Linda Mercandante, Delores S. Williams, Mary Potter Engel, and Mary McClintock Fulkerson.[11] As part of her examination and critique she categorized their approaches. She suggested that Ruether, McFague, and Suchocki represented relational or panentheistic approaches to sin as opposed to the theistic approaches of West and Mercandante. She saw both Williams and Engel working from distinct social contexts, namely those of black women and victims of abuse respectively. As a result of her post-modern, post-structuralist, discourse-analysis approach to reconceptualizing sin Fulkerson was categorized alone. These diverse methodologies generate diverse hamartiologies. Lowe's article (including responses in the same volume from many of her interlocutors) is a helpful map of many of the issues in feminist theology both in sin-talk and beyond.

As we see, sin, or at least a critique of the traditional understanding of sin, has been important in the feminist theological project from the outset. At the core of this critique—both of definitions of sin specifically and of the theological enterprise more broadly—is a repudiation of an androcentric approach to the theological task that neglects or even suppresses the distinct human experience of women. Though few if any feminists reference Menninger's work it is clear that feminist theology is concerned about the state

---

10. By 1993 Christine Smith's survey of sin in feminist thought had to interact with far more proposals from distinct contexts: Carter Heyward (lesbian theology), Rita Nakashima Brock (Asian-American feminism), Mary Potter Engel (victims of abuse), Karen Lebacqz (feminist ethics), Katie Cannon (womanist), and Beverly Wildung Harrison. (Christine M. Smith, "Sin and Evil in Feminist Thought," *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 [1993]: 208–19).

11. Mary Elise Lowe, "Woman Oriented Hamartiologies: A Survey of the Shift from Powerlessness to Right Relationship," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 39, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 119–39.

of sin-talk in the church and culture. From Saiving's article onward, central to the feminist critique of classic sin-talk is the assertion that the very way theology has spoken about sin has not only failed to take female experience into consideration but has itself served to further the extent of true sin—the oppression of women. For them the regnant lexicon of sin is part of the problem. As Rachel Sophia Baard points out, several feminist theologians refer to this sinful sin-talk as the fall or "original sin", thus "making use of a classic hamartiological notion, one that they have criticized as oppressive to women, to deepen their very critique of classic sin-talk."[12] As we will see, however, though employing some of the classic categories of sin-talk, feminist theologians are less sanguine about the usefulness of classic narratives of sin.

Feminist theologians have been clear about the anthropological basis of their critique of classic sin-talk. That is, their understanding of the meaning of sin is tied very closely with their understanding of what it means to be a human self. Indeed, anthropology is the controlling feature of their theology and sin-talk a subset thereof. They contend that a poor view of the human makes for lackluster language about sin and salvation. The question remains, however, as to whether feminist theology has itself offered an adequate anthropology. In particular, have feminist theologians moved beyond modernist assumptions about the nature of humans and the role of human experience in knowing?

Postmodern thinking has destabilized any essentialist notions of the human and similar totalizing categories. Along with that critique has been the realization of the inherently narratival structure of experience and particularly of the development of the

---

12. Rachel Sophia Baard, "Constructive Feminist Critiques of Classic Sin-Talk: A Rhetorical Reading," Ph.D. diss. (Princeton Theological Seminary, 2004), 160.

self. This aspect of the narrative turn raises the questions that are the concern of this chapter. What role have narrativity and the particular narratives of Scripture played in the feminist theologians' development of a definition and doctrine of sin? And how is this borne out in their use of biblical narrative and the narratives of Genesis 1–11 in particular? In departing from the narrow definitions that they find in the tradition do they move to something more in keeping with the narrative development of humans and humanity? In this chapter I propose to analyze the work of two feminist theologians on sin: Mary Daly and Rita Nakashima Brock. After examining their approach to the issue of the self and sin and their definition of sin in particular I will critique their method and conclusions from a narrative perspective. What role does an awareness of the narrative nature of human experience play in their thought? How does the overarching narrative or dramatic structure of Scripture influence their position? Finally, how, if at all, do the biblical narratives regarding sin play a role in their theologizing about sin?

Daly and Brock are good interlocutors because they not only offer different definitions of sin, but they also offer differing anthropologies. Daly operates with more essentialist categories in her description of the human person and therefore sin while Brock prefers a more relational approach to anthropology. Further, Daly's work is cast in a more academic vein while Brock clearly writes with a popular reader in mind.

As we consider these definitions of sin from feminist theology our question from chapter one remains. Do these definitions of sin speak effectively to the contemporary human self-understanding? In particular, do they reflect an awareness of the important narrative component in human experience and self-understanding? What we hope to show is that while the definitions of sin offered in feminist theology do succeed in

shining light on certain aspects of the human condition, they ultimately fail to offer compelling sin-talk for two reasons one material and one formal but both related to narrative. First, they begin with reductionist depictions of the human person and the process of human knowing. That is, they fail to offer compelling definitions of sin for the same reason that they have critiqued traditional definitions. Second, they move unidirectionally from this anthropology to definitions of sin rather than recognizing the mutually forming and informing relationship between sin and human self-understanding, a reciprocal relationship captured best in narrative and in particular in the biblical narrative.

SIN, SELF, AND STORY IN THE THEOLOGY OF MARY DALY

For several decades Mary Daly was at the forefront of feminist theology. One can almost follow the trajectory of the feminist theological movement in miniature in tracing the path of Mary Daly's development as a feminist theologian.[13] Between each of her first few works of feminist theology one can detect significant shifts. As a result, discussing her work is an exercise in correlating later work to earlier.[14] Her first work of feminist theology, *The Church and the Second Sex*, exposed sexism both in Catholic practice and in doctrine. Her proposals for realignment of particular church doctrines and practices were modest. The negative reaction to her book, however, prompted the more

---

13. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki says of Mary Daly that "[h]er works span—and arguably inaugurate—the past three decades of feminist reconsideration of God" ("The Idea of God in Feminist Philosophy," *Hypatia* 9, no. 4 [October 1994]: 58).

14. Daly does a bit of this correlating herself in forwards and epilogues to reprints of her earlier works. In fact, her "Feminist Postchristian Introduction" and "New Archaic Afterward" to the 1985 publication of her groundbreaking work *The Church and the Second Sex* (originally published in 1968) treats the Mary Daly of that text as naive about the possibility of continued relationship with Christianity.

thorough critique and reworking of traditional theological methods and teachings that one encounters in *Beyond God the Father.* In *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*, as the title suggests, Daly cast her net beyond theology to apply her tools of feminist critique and construction to philosophy.[15] Though mainstream feminist theology and Mary Daly eventually parted ways, her influence on feminist theology is difficult to overstate.

Mary Daly's Methodology and Anthropology

Daly offers her first definition of sin in *Beyond God the Father.* Since the feminist critique of traditional definitions of sin is fundamentally an anthropological one it is no surprise that her definition of sin is closely linked to her understanding of what it means to be human, that is, to her theological anthropology. As we examine her work our question is two-fold. First we must consider the adequacy of Daly's definition of human nature. Then we will consider the definition of sin that she derives from that understanding of human nature and ask whether she has rightly rendered the relationship between sin and human nature. In particular we are concerned to see if and how Daly's definition of self and sin accord with the narrative character of human experience and the biblical narratives.

For Daly, to be human is to have the power to name.[16] "To exist humanly is to name the self, the world, and God. The 'method' of the evolving spiritual consciousness

---

15. Daly held doctoral degrees in both theology and philosophy.

16. Daly does not explicitly connect this capacity for self-naming to humanity's creation in the image of God. However, this approach to anthropology, rooting the nature of humanity in some capacity, is reminiscent of positions on the significance of the *imago dei* that root it in particular human capacities such as language and reason. Borrowing language from Emil Brunner, Stanley Grenz refers to this type of approach to the *imago dei* as a "structural" approach because it refers to something embedded in the structure of human nature. He contrasts this with relational approaches to the image of God and offers a survey of the development of the doctrine.

of women is nothing less than this beginning to speak humanly—a reclaiming of the right to name."[17] Naming is not merely a matter of denomination but rather is an act of self-realization. "Naming is a verb that evokes and that *is* a process of active Realizing."[18] To exist humanly is to have and to exercise the ability to self-actualize through the "naming" of self, world, and God.

Though humanity possesses this power of self-actualization, the exercise of it is threatened by a deeper problem: the danger of nothingness. At the core of humanity's problem for Daly is a conflict between the potential for self-identification and the desire for security. This desire for security arises from the threat of nothingness.[19] In search for a personal identity, a significance to ward off nothingness, many succumb to the temptation of security and accept stultifying, pre-packaged identities. Of this conflict Daly writes:

> The only alternative is self-actualization in spite of the ever-present nothingness. Part of the problem is that people, women in particular, who are seemingly incapable of a high degree of self-actualization have been made such by societal structures that are products of human attempts to create security. Those who are alienated from their own deepest identity do receive a kind of security in return for accepting very limited and undifferentiated identities. The woman who single-mindedly accepts the role of 'housewife,' for example, may to some extent avoid the experience of nothingness but she also avoids a fuller participation in being, which would be her only real security and source of community.[20]

Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, Matrix of Christian Theology, vol. 1. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 142.

17. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 8.

18. Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 203.

19. Daly reveals and acknowledges a dependence on Paul Tillich's discussion of humanity's anxiety in the face of "non-being."

20. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 23.

As will be seen below, it is patriarchal society's penchant for sexual stereotypes that perpetuates the restricting of women to roles that offer security but not "full participation in being."[21]

Mary Daly's Theology of Sin

As with other aspects of her theology, one can observe a development in Mary Daly's understanding of sin from her early to later work. In a way, sin is programmatic for Daly's theology as the drive to expose it in its many forms informs several of her books. Despite the fact that she denounces traditional theology and renounces traditional methodologies, her "doctrine of sin" bears an uncanny resemblance at least structurally to traditional formulations. That is, one can identify the notion of a "fall", a correlate to the doctrine of total depravity, and a version of the noetic effects of the fall.

Defining Sin

Daly's fundamental definition of sin is built directly off of her understanding of the nature of humans. Since to be human is to self-name, sin is false-naming. Yet very early it becomes clear that the sin of false-naming is not something that characterizes all humans in the same way. Rather, in Daly's thinking, one group of humans are guilty of

---

21. In addressing the conflict between self-actualization and the desire for security Daly takes up issues that Anthony Giddens presents as endemic to the experience of the self in modernity. Daly may be speaking generally of how security and self have operated in humanity throughout history, but her focus is clearly on the current cultural milieu. What Giddens's treatment offers that Daly's does not is the notion of a trade-off between "ontological security and existential anxiety." Giddens sees the formation of the human self in a reflexive relation depending upon but also differentiating itself from the institutions that offer it "ontological security." Daly presents the individual (woman) with an either/or option. *Either* one capitulates to the pre-packaged identity *or* one self-actualizes, self-names. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 35.

false-naming themselves, the world, God, and most importantly, the other group of humans. Namely, men are guilty of the sin of mis-naming and women are the primary victims. Daly claims that "it is necessary to grasp the fundamental fact that women have had the power of *naming* stolen from us. We have not been free to use our own power to name ourselves, the world, or God."[22] The result is that women have been systematically excluded from participation in the fullness of human existence.[23] Daly's several books detail the various areas of human concern in which this has been the case.

An important feature of Daly's understanding of sin is its systemic expression. For Daly, the problem of false-naming is not primarily individual acts perpetrated against women. Rather it characterizes an entire system and way of thought that prevents women from full self-actualization. This patriarchal system is indeed enforced by individual acts but extends much deeper. This system of false-naming works by acting on women in deep psychological ways. Women are systematically excluded from society and self-naming by corrupt institutions and cultural expectations. Several of Daly's books detail these institutions. She cites such cultural practices as Indian widow-burning, Chinese foot-binding, and female genital mutilation. She likewise critiques technical knowledge systems, health professionals (both physical and psychological), and academia as participating in the perpetuation of systems that deny women their rightful human power of self-naming.

---

22. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 8.

23. In defining full humanity as freedom to self-name and sin as the denial of it, Daly is ahead of many other feminist theologians who, like her, insist that women have been denied full humanity, yet unlike her, without ever defining what they understand full humanity to be. As we will see, Daly's definition is problematic but it is at least consistent.

Original Sin

As was suggested, Daly repurposes elements of traditional theological sin-talk in her theology. While many have jettisoned the notion of original sin, Daly finds the idea still useful though different for males and females. The original sin of patriarchy is the pinning of human sinfulness on women. That is, Daly points directly to the narrative of Genesis 3, the so-called "fall narrative", as the heart of patriarchy's sin. She writes:

> Theologians and scholars generally have failed to confront the fact that in the myth of the Fall the medium is the message. Reflection upon its specific content and the cultural residues of this content leads to the conviction that, partially through this instrument, the Judeo-Christian tradition has been aiding and abetting the sicknesses of society. In a real sense the projection of guilt upon women *is* patriarchy's Fall, the primordial lie. Together with its offspring—the theology of 'original sin'—the myth reveals the 'Fall' of religion into the role of patriarchy's prostitute."[24]

Echoing Valerie Saiving's work, Daly declares that the "original sin" for women is not pride or false-naming but rather the acceptance of patriarchal society's depiction of women as evil. "The first salvific moment for any woman comes when she perceives the reality of her 'original sin,' that is, internalization of blame and guilt."[25] Whereas Saiving saw women tempted to diffuseness and triviality, Daly sees them beholden to inhuman views of themselves.

Of course, the method of transmission of original sin has been a perpetual discussion. But unlike some views whereby the taint of sin is inherited biologically, for Daly sin is inherited through "socialization processes." Daly deflects guilt for submission to these socialization processes away from women: "The fault should not be seen as

---

24. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 47.
25. Ibid., 49.

existing primarily in victimized individuals, but rather in demonic power structures which induce individuals to internalize false identities."[26] A host of environmental issues, then, are what cause women to mis-name themselves and others. Daly even goes so far as to relate the distraction that societal structures cause in women's self-actualization to evil.[27] Evil is what distracts humans, and especially women, from actualizing their human potential fully.

Noetic Effects of the Fall

To refer to the effects that human sinfulness has on human thinking and reasoning theologians speak of the noetic effects of the fall. Because of sinfulness humans, though capable of reason, are flawed in their reasoning. Mary Daly's theology of sin includes a similar notion. Due to the effects of cultural and societal structures women are incapable of thinking rightly about their position and subjugated position. Patriarchy is such that "it is inevitable that this artificial atmosphere be filled with subliminal messages intended to incapacitate on deep psychic levels. These messages are designed to prevent women from Realizing our Elemental potency."[28] Women are often unaware of these "deep psychic levels" and the extent of the ways in which their perspective has been shaped by the patriarchal societal structures.

---

26. Ibid.

27. "Years ago, Hannah Arendt wrote accurately of 'the fearsome word-and-thought-defying *banality of evil*.' I am suggesting here that banality itself can be evil, in the sense that 'evil is whatever distracts.'" Daly, *Pure Lust*, 254.

28. Ibid., 153.

Total Depravity

Naming, of course, means much more than mere denominating. For Daly, the power of naming is the power of definition, of forming one's identity, one's very essence. So patriarchal false-naming is an assault on the very personhood and humanity of women. Further, false-naming implies the inaccurate construal of the world. According to Daly, males have inaccurately named all aspects of our world. Daly believes that every field of enquiry and every aspect of human life and thought has been touched by patriarchal misnaming. This is an analogue to the reformed doctrine of total depravity. The doctrine of total depravity holds that human fallenness and sin touch every aspect of human thought and activity. Nothing is left pristinely untouched by sin's stain. Obviously, such a grim view of the extent of sin's effects if left untempered by some counter-doctrine of grace can issue forth in a pessimistic outlook on humanity. Indeed, the tenor of much of Daly's writing evinces such a pessimism.

The "Fall"

Mary Daly rejects traditional readings of Genesis 3 as a symptom of the problem of sin rather than as an explanation of sin's origin. However, as Rachel Sophia Baard pointed out, Daly co-opts the language of "the Fall" for use in her theology. "This movement beyond patriarchy's good and evil can be seen mythically as 'the Fall'—the dreaded Fall which is now finally beginning to occur, in which women are bringing ourselves and then the other half of the species to eat of the forbidden fruit—the knowledge refused by patriarchal society. This will be a Fall from false innocence into a

new kind of adulthood."[29] She goes on to summarize: "Rather than a Fall *from* the sacred, the Fall now initiated by women becomes a Fall *into* the sacred and therefore into freedom."[30]

Applying the Definition

After developing the concept of sin as false naming Daly then uses this definition to expose heretofore obscured aspects of sin in patriarchy. In naming the seven deadly sins of lust, avarice, glutton, pride, anger, envy and sloth Daly claims that patriarchy has misnamed sin in order to use the concept of sin and the specification of these particular sins to misname and victimize women. Daly proposes renaming the sins of patriarchy, a renaming based off of the original categories. First, Daly identifies the root problem, namely a sin that patriarchy failed to name: deception. Patriarchal thought has deceived itself into thinking it has rightly named the world, women, and sin.[31] Pride she renames "professions" by which she means the codification of bodies of technical knowledge that only serve to stultify true human knowing. Avarice becomes possession, specifically the male possession of female energy. Anger she renames aggression. She sees all male violence aimed at women. Male lust she calls obsession. She rejects the negative characterization of the word lust and reclaims it to refer positively to the pure female conception of reality. This move is the focus of her work *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy.* In this renaming gluttony is no longer a matter of physical consumption but rather the manner by which patriarchy seeks to assimilate women to its ways effectively

29. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 67.
30. Ibid., (emphasis original).
31. Though Daly does not make the connection, it is of more than passing interest that in the narrative of Genesis 3 it is the woman who excuses her partaking of the forbidden fruit by claiming that she was deceived.

devouring them. Envy, renamed elimination, is the attitude of patriarchal males toward those females who seek to self-identify. Finally, sloth is recast as fragmentation, the fragmentation of women's identities by reducing them to busy work through the enforcement of sexual stereotypes. Here Daly intersects with Saiving's original identification of female sin with sloth or triviality, though in Saiving's work it was a temptation for women and in Daly's it is a sin by males of which women are the victims. These eight sins are not so much identifiable in individual actions (though they certainly may be) but are "incarnated in the institutions of patriarchy and in those who invent, control, and legitimate these institutions."[32]

Exposing these sins and the patriarchal institutions which support them becomes programmatic for Daly as she herself explains in the introduction to *Quintessence*. *Gyn/Ecology* started the discussion and treated the sins of processions (deception), professions (pride), and possession (avarice) in particular. *Pure Lust* addresses aggression (anger) and obsession (lust) exposing the sinful male versions of these behaviors and calling women to life-giving anger and lust. *Quintessence* takes up the final three: assimilation (gluttony), elimination (envy), and fragmentation (sloth). So it would be fair to say that sin, understood as false naming of women and the world, stands at the center of Mary Daly's theology.

The final move in Daly's demolition of traditional theologies of sin, those theologies she brands as products of patriarchy, is to name what the patriarchal system truly regards as sin, namely, the rising up of women to name themselves and the world. Indeed, as the subtitle of her book *Amazon Grace: Re-calling the Courage to Sin Big*

---

32. Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 31.

suggests, she calls women to sin, that is, to violate the patriarchal taboo of strong, self-identified women. "Self-presentiating women—being WRONG according to the prevailing assumptions—may be said to Sin."[33] She develops this more fully in subsequent books. "To Sin against the society of sado-sublimation is to be intellectual in the most direct and daring way, claiming and trusting the deep correspondence between the structures/processes of one's own mind and the structures/processes of reality. To Sin is to trust intuitions and the reasoning rooted in them. To Sin is to come into the fullness of our powers, confronting now newly understood dimensions of the Battles of Principalities and Powers."[34] This move really completes Daly's project and demonstrates how her theology is essentially an extended reflection on sin and evil as she understands them. Re-naming sin as patriarchal false-naming of women was followed by an analysis of the manifold ways in which this false-naming takes place and an exposure of the systems and institutions that serve to perpetuate it. Escape—or salvation—from these cycles and structures involves the realization by woman that she has internalized the guilt that patriarchal society has placed upon her and then the active rejection of society's naming and reclamation of her pride and self through self-naming.

Of course, one's definition of sin shapes how one conceives of good and evil and therefore what one thinks it means to act ethically. Because the standards of the culture are so misshapen by patriarchy, women must learn to resist the cultural notions of what is good and evil. "The beginning of liberation comes when women refuse to be 'good' and/or 'healthy' by prevailing standards. To be female is to be deviant by definition in the

33. Daly, *Pure Lust*, 151 (emphasis original).
34. Ibid., 152.

prevailing culture."[35] Obviously Daly is proffering no less than a radical new ethic, an ethic which she extends in *Gyn/Ecology*.

Mary Daly and Biblical Narrative

As it is for many feminists, the Bible is a very problematic book for Mary Daly.[36] And, like other aspects of her theology, her regard for Scripture and its role in theology developed over time. At the time of *Church and the Second Sex* one can classify Daly's position as a fairly standard "liberal" approach to Scripture. There she applied the traditional historical-critical tools to compare the later creation account of Genesis 1 with the earlier version found in Genesis 2. Though not charged with the tone of her later anti-patriarchal polemic, even then she regarded the biblical text as the product of its cultural situation and the biases of its authors. Accordingly, she questioned its authority to speak to the contemporary female situation. Because the Bible's authors were men of their times, "[i]t is therefore a most dubious process to construct an idea of 'feminine nature' or of 'God's plan for women' from biblical texts."[37] This reveals her experiential epistemology; woman's experience corrects scripture. However, she employs what might be called an "ethical trajectory" approach to Scripture's portrayal of the male-female relationship suggesting that "[i]n the writings of Paul himself there are anticipations of a

35. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 65.

36. Kathryn Greene-McCreight offers a helpful categorization of ways in which feminist theologians construe Scripture (Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions of Christian Doctrine: Narrative Analysis and Appraisal* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2000], 38–39). The literature on feminist theology's *use* of Scripture is too vast to summarize here.

37. Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 75.

development toward realization of the full implications of this equality."[38] It is the task of theology to help us move further along this trajectory.

Daly's later handling of biblical narrative is a combination of a hermeneutic of patriarchal suspicion combined with the use of free-wheeling symbols, especially "the Goddess." This can be observed in her handling of a passage that does not address the issue of sin. After developing the concept of the goddess as tripartite, a state of affairs Daly claims as the predecessor of the patriarchal doctrine of the trinity, Daly applies this image to the account of the visit of the Magi. The three magi represent the goddess casting the symbols of their authority before the infant Christ. She concludes: "All of this suggests that if the subliminal message in the story is that the Goddess was brought to her knees before Jesus, the implications are indeed vast. If, symbolically speaking, Goddesses and no mere kings were throwing down their crowns, then star-crowns were thrown down, indicating a surrender of the whole cosmos...The message of surrender of mind/spirit to the incarnate boygod is obvious."[39] The message of the narrative has nothing to do with authorial intent, its place in the discreet narrative of the gospel, nor in the overarching drama of Scripture. Rather, concepts foreign to the biblical drama are employed as hermeneutical keys.[40]

---

38. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 83.

39. Daly, *Pure Lust*, 88.

40. One can observe the effects of Daly's method when applied to stories in a brief comment she makes about fairy tales. She writes that society trains people to blame their mothers because "nearly everyone has been indoctrinated from infancy in the mother-hating myths of the controlling religion: Patriarchy. Fairy tales (for example 'Snow White' and 'Cinderella') teach that the only good mothers are dead ones, thinly disguising living mothers as 'evil' stepmothers." In failing to interpret these stories with reference to the context (story) which gave rise to them—a context in which the premature death of one's parents and the necessary recourse to other relatives for care was fairly common—Daly misses the rather obvious fact that the stories revere the birth mother as the preferred care-giver and relation. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 266.

Mary Daly and Genesis 3–11

Like many feminist theologians Daly finds the traditional narrative of Adam and Eve's fall into sin extremely problematic. Her handling of the text is predictable based on her prior methodological commitments regarding the place of experience in theologizing and in her essentialist anthropology. While in her early work (*The Church and the Second Sex*) she approached the text with the standard tools of historical-critical inquiry, shortly she gave primacy to female experience and subjected the text to her depatriarchalizing lens. As we saw above, she reads the Genesis 3 narrative as evidence of the patriarchal mis-naming of women as the origin of sin.

An essentialist view of the sexes is evident in Daly's use of the Genesis 3 narrative as well. By reading the story as an account of how women will share with men the knowledge that leads to salvation, she makes the same category mistake as the interpreters she has denounced for misogynist readings of the text. Treatment of the text as a myth in which Eve stands for woman and Adam for man fails to take into consideration a broader and more fundamental category that the story may be working with, humanity, and ignores the more fundamental detail the text uses to describe the nature of the humans, the *imago dei*. In an earlier comment she comes closer to the mark. In *The Church and the Second Sex* Daly said of the Genesis creation narratives: "Today, both the Genesis accounts, whatever their relative merits, are understood to teach that man and woman are of the same nature and dignity and that they have a common mission to rule the earth"[41] But this is as close as Mary Daly ever comes to reckoning with the biblical presentation of humanity on its own terms. In *Beyond God the Father* Daly

41. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 78.

makes a startling use of the text. As we have already noted, Daly repurposes the concept of "the fall" to describe both the turn that religion and society made toward patriarchy *as well as* to describe what women need to do to break free from patriarchy's tyranny. Strikingly Daly does not only use "the Fall" as a theological concept but attempts to link her new concept of fall to the features of the narrative. She writes:

> I am now suggesting that there were intimations in the original myth—not consciously intended— of a dreaded future. That is, one could see the myth as prophetic of the real Fall that was yet on its way, dimly glimpsed. In that dreaded event, women reach for knowledge and, finding it, share it with men, so that together we can leave the delusory paradise of false consciousness and alienation. In ripping the image of the Fall from its old context we are also transvaluing it. That is, its meaning is divested of its negativity and becomes positive and healing.[42]

In this version of the fall, the woman, rather than being deceived and leading the man after her, is finding illumination and sharing it with him. She is at least completely honest about what she has done, "ripping the image of the fall from its old context" and "transvaluing" it. This use of the text, of course, pays little to no attention to the text in its context or as part of a larger narrative. The interpretive controls are not drawn from the context in which the narrative is embedded but from Daly's rendering of the past and future of the sexes.

Sin, Self, and Story in Mary Daly: Summary

Mary Daly takes sin seriously. Exposing the sin of patriarchal misnaming of women provides the outline for her entire theological project. She goes to great lengths to identify the soul-stultifying tendencies of human (male) institutions that dehumanize women. This prophetic project is grounded in her understanding of what it means to be

---

42. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 67.

human: the ability to self-define. Sin is that which thwarts the person's attempts at self-definition. Her emphasis on the theological resource of personal experience leads her to conclude that the balance of sin has been against women by men, not so much by individual acts as by cultural institutions and ways of thinking that serve to prevent the self-definition of women. For similar reasons she finds that the biblical text as well as much of the history of theology is complicit in the oppression of women and thus ignores it or reads it in ways that subverts the original message.

SIN, SELF, AND STORY IN THE THEOLOGY OF RITA NAKASHIMA BROCK

A brief survey of Rita Nakashima Brock's work reveals that she is animated by many of the same concerns that inspired Mary Daly and other feminist theologians. However, a closer look reveals some distinct emphases. Of mixed Asian and Puerto Rican descent but raised in the United States, Brock brings a diverse cultural perspective to her theology. Some of her work taps directly into the concerns of Asian women.[43] As we shall see later, the issue of violence is of particular concern for Brock, especially violence against women. Distinct from Mary Daly is the obviously popular tone of some of her work, most notably *Proverbs of Ashes* and *Saving Paradise*, both co-written with Rebecca Ann Parker. While her work has not been as systematic as Daly's she warrants our consideration because of her special focus on the atonement as well as for her incorporation of personal narratives in her work, especially in *Proverbs of Ashes*. Furthermore, her relational anthropology differentiates her from Mary Daly's more

---

43. See especially Rita Nakashima Brock and et al., eds., *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007) and Rita Nakashima Brock and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Casting Stones: Prostitution and Liberation in Asia and the United States* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

essentialist and structural stance and lets her serve as representative for a host of similar approaches.

Central to Brock's work is a critique of traditional views of the atonement. Her main criticism flows from her special concern about violence. Having diagnosed violence at the core of humanity's problem, Brock finds it incoherent to suggest that an act of violence like the crucifixion of Jesus could have any positive effect. Instead she characterizes the penal substitution theory of the atonement as "cosmic child abuse."[44] Furthermore she claims that this view of the cross condones violence and attempts to valorize suffering in a way that leaves victims of violence no way of resisting the suffering. These issues can be seen to be behind all of her major works. In *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* she sought to write a feminist christology that addressed the shortcomings of traditional atonement theories as well as other feminist concerns. In *Proverbs of Ashes*, she and Rebecca Ann Parker take on the dangers of the idea of "redemptive suffering" and the notion of love as self-sacrifice. Most recently, in *Saving Paradise*, Brock and Parker attack what they perceive as an unhealthy crucicentrism in contemporary Christian piety and call the church away from the cross and back toward a Christianity shaped by visions of paradise here on earth. Brock regards traditional atonement theology with its emphasis on guilt and the cross to be complicit in the ongoing oppression of women.

Before considering Brock's distinct definition of sin and the role of scripture in its formation, we will briefly survey the methodological and epistemological underpinnings of her project. This will be important for our later assessment of the inclusion or

---

44. Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 157.

exclusion of narrative modes of thought and biblical narrative in her theology of sin. As we did with Mary Daly we will examine her anthropology and its relationship to her definition of sin. We will conclude with critical interaction with these aspects of her thought.

Rita Nakashima Brock's Theological Methodology and Epistemology

Unlike Mary Daly who sought to rewrite the entirety of philosophy and theology in a feminist mode, Rita Nakashima Brock's writing has been more selective and less systematic than Daly's. But a careful reading of her work makes her methods clear. In *Journeys by Heart*, Brock differentiates her method from those linking their Christian thought and practice to Jesus. She writes:

> If Jesus is a model for self-giving, for filial obedience, for love, or for liberation, the question a Christian must ask is, 'What would Jesus do or have me do in this situation?' Such a question leads the focus of feeling and action away from self-awareness, away from our inner selves, our contexts, and our history because we are not compelled to ask 'How do I feel right now, how are others feeling, and what can I do to lessen all our pain and suffering in this context?' The first question focuses on reality external to us as the prime source for love and action, on obedience to ideology, conformity to heroic norms, self-sacrifice, and vicarious feelings. The second moves toward heart—toward self-possession, profound relationality, and the emergence of creative caring. The reclamation of heart is crucial to the redemption of Christ and ourselves.[45]

As is clear, Brock takes her personal experience of suffering and the suffering of others as her point of departure for theological and ethical reflection. This she feels is closer to the nature of the human as relational and more attuned to our ways of knowing. "Heart" becomes for Brock an important way to refer to the whole human.

---

45. Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), xiv.

Brock further contrasts her "journey by heart" with theological methodologies of the cognitive-propositionalist strain.

> Christian theology has tended to focus on cognitive, analytic, and often polemical methods of discourse, a noisiness that makes the quiet, inner journey to heart difficult. I believe a liberating faith lies on the borders of our thinking where heart links thinking with feeling, perception, and the body. This looking toward and from the heart is what has compelled me to turn patriarchy inside out and to examine the broken heart of male dominance. And there, in examining my own wounds, I found the power that heals and allows the touching of heart to heart, the most sacred power I know.[46]

Here she ties together the themes of heart, the feminist criticism of patriarchy, and her turn to personal experience. Implicit is a linking of the "cognitive, analytic, and often polemical methods of discourse" with patriarchy and male dominance. It can be seen, then, that she shares Mary Daly's critique of patriarchally influenced methods of enquiry.

Equally important is Brock's understanding of the nature of humans and human knowing, that is her anthropology and her epistemology. Not surprisingly, these are tightly linked. Brock begins her discussion of the human person by discussing power. She contrasts "male power", power expressed through dominance, with Erotic power. Erotic power is "[t]he fundamental power of life, born into us, [that] heals, makes whole, empowers, and liberates. Its manifold forms create and emerge from heart, that graceful, passionate mystery at the center of ourselves and each other. This power heals brokenheartedness and gives courage to the fainthearted."[47] This power, like humans, is fundamentally relational and fundamental to human existence.

> Erotic power is the power of our primal interrelatedness. Erotic power, as it creates and connects hearts, involves the whole person in relationships

---

46. Ibid., xvi.
47. Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 25.

> of self-awareness, vulnerability, openness, and caring. Common understandings of power as dominance and the ability to have one's way—as volitional self-assertion—posit power as causality: the more direct causality, the more power a self possesses. However, erotic power as an ontic category, that is, as a fundamentally ultimate reality in human existence, is a more inclusive and accurate understanding of the dynamics of power within which dominance and willful assertion can be explained. Power as a causal concept is better understood when set into the ontic framework of erotic power as the most inclusive principle of human existence. Hence all other forms of power emerge from the reality of erotic power.[48]

Here Brock posits this relational power as woven into the very fabric of existence, a "fundamentally ultimate reality" and an "ontic category." One may observe some influence of process thought in this identification of the relationality and interconnectedness of all reality. She summarizes her position on the relationship between power and human existence by asserting that "Erotic power is the fundamental power of existence-as-a-relational-process."[49] The human person, for Brock, is a relationally constituted being.

This fundamental relatedness of humanity issues forth in a particular view of human knowing. The essential power of the universe, erotic power, is relationally mediated. Accordingly, knowledge is attained through relationship. Knowledge of self and others cannot be achieved through sensory perception. On the basis of her understanding of our essential relationality and its implications for human knowing, Brock, like Daly, assesses the limitations of technical knowledge.

> The difficulty of understanding power as relational bonds is lodged partly in the Western tendency to focus on sensory perception as the only reliable, measurable knowledge. Through such knowledge, things are known externally to us, especially in unilateral, causal relationships that are objectifiable. Sensory perception is an important way we know our

---

48. Ibid., 26.
49. Ibid., 41.

> world, but not our inner selves. The inner physical feelings of our body and the emotions we know inside our bodies are not told to us through our five senses. The knowledge of ourselves stored in our memory and the messages sent to us in dreams come from a world not tied in any immediate way to our senses. Yet these are important, subjective forms of knowing. They are, as it were, knowing by heart.[50]

Knowledge of our inner selves both physically and emotionally is beyond the reach of sensory perception.[51]

Brock attacks directly the modern epistemological fallacy of objectivity.

> Our technocratic, rationally oriented society has great difficulty dealing with dreams and the shamanistic magic of mythic images, except to relegate them to fiercely rational psychological analysis, or to images as art. In rejecting anything that might smack of supernaturalism, we draw our truth concepts predominantly from cognitive awareness. The literalism and reductionism of scientific thinking and its reliance on objective truth results in a one-to-one fusion of self and world, cause and effect, predictability and control. The self disappears into its objective observation of objects and pretends it has removed itself. This outmoded but still common concept of objectivity in Western thought assumes that a neutral place exists from which an observer, whose presence does not interfere with the event taking place, can tell what 'really' occurred. This assumption of objectivity grounds the scientific method and is used to subordinate ideas that overtly take an advocacy position. This myth of objectivity has been challenged in Marxist, feminist, and process thought and by relativity physics.[52]

Human knowledge, then, is fundamentally subjective and relational. What seems to be lacking is any control or check on the knowledge one comes to through the heart.

---

50. Ibid., 37.

51. She speaks of the possibility of dreams coming from a source not touched by the senses. This seems to be the acknowledgment of a spiritual realm that interfaces with our physical existence, but Brock does not develop this aspect of her metaphysics enough for the reader to conclude. Given that she calls these knowings "knowing by heart" she may merely consider the inner person the source of these revelations.

52. Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 44.

Rita Nakashima Brock's Theology of Sin

In discussing sin Brock, like many feminist theologians, begins by offering a critique of traditional definitions. Not surprisingly, her critique relates directly to woman's experience of the traditional doctrines of sin. Like Mary Daly, she finds a tight link between the traditional doctrines of sin and the real problem—patriarchy. "Sinfulness, as a category within Christian analyses of humanity, is tied to the reinforcement of patriarchal theology."[53] That is, the definitions of sin and salvation that are offered in theology are complicit in the continued mistreatment of women. Specifically, "[s]infulness is aligned with blame, punishment, and guilt, and blame has usually been assigned to woman as the originator of sin, or to our maternal, organic birth which must be transcended by a higher, spiritual birth."[54]

Brock summarizes the traditional view this way: "The Christian notion of original sin, based in traditional, dualistic assumptions about good and evil and patriarchal notions of obedience and disobedience, claims that we are born with a tragic flaw that we do not choose, but for which we bear the penalty if we do not take responsibility for the flaw that results in evil. At the same time we are powerless alone to remove the penalty for our flaw and, therefore, must reply on a higher power whose pure goodness and grace pardon us from the penalty."[55] To Brock, this rendering of the human condition and its solution relies too heavily on divine initiative and agency. This overemphasis on the divine side of sin and salvation is itself a result of our true damage. Brock writes: "I believe it is our damage—in which one major factor is patriarchy—that has produced a doctrine of sin as

53. Ibid., 6.
54. Ibid., 6.
55. Ibid., 16.

a description of our original human state. The existence of that category requires us to misplace divine incarnation and human redemption in someone else's perfection and heroic action, or in a power outside ourselves that helps us transcend the concrete realities of life."[56] Though less stridently expressed, one observes here a critique shared with Mary Daly that a major place where sin is found is in the traditional definitions of sin.

Like Mary Daly and other feminists, Brock's sees the problem as rooted in anthropological considerations. "The claim that Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection are the way out of the consequences of sin has rested on particular notions of the character of being human, of the human character, and of redemption."[57] This is in no small part due to the tradition's exclusive focus on Christ, a male. "The son, as a model for all human behavior, no matter how prophetic, feminist, or androgynous, cannot include women. For he is still male, and no woman is allowed to represent human existence in the same inclusive way."[58] Accordingly, there is little place for Christ in Brock's theology.

Like Valerie Saiving, Judith Plaskow and others before her, Brock finds the traditional focus on pride to be wanting. Once again, the problem is not so much a misidentification of a feature of broken humanity as it is a shortcoming in the proposed solution. "In identifying sin as pride, Christian theology rightly undercuts the angry violence suppressed behind a false nostalgic picture of the self. However, in reaching for the underside, theology confuses the self-abnegation and humiliation that produce pride

---

56. Ibid., 9.
57. Ibid., 2.
58. Ibid., xiii.

with the healing and self-affirmation, the grace, that come from legitimate anger and honest memory."[59] In countering pride with self-abasement, Brock asserts, traditional theologies of sin only commit a reverse error against the human person, an error that is felt more acutely by women than men.[60]

Brock's critique of traditional understandings of sin and her constructive suggestion are rooted in her relational anthropology. For instance, she rejects the traditional concept of original sin as a state into which all human beings are born because "[s]infulness is understood to be a state that is prior to the particular relationships that shape human beings."[61] Because we are fundamentally relational beings, placing the origin of sin prior to the instantiation of our concrete relationships creates a theological concept that fails to take our human nature into sufficient consideration.

Brock goes on to explain what sin is in her relational anthropology. Sin, or brokenness as Brock prefers, is a natural result of our relationality.

> If we begin with an understanding that we are intimately connected, constituted by our relationships ontologically, that is, as a basic unavoidable principle of existence, we can understand our brokenness as a consequence of our relational existence. This ontological relational existence, the heart of our being, is our life source, our original grace. But we are, by nature, vulnerable, easily damaged, and that vulnerability is both the sign of our connectedness and the source of the damage that leads to sin."[62]

---

59. Ibid., 19.

60. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to determine whether the feminist criticisms of Augustine's definition of sin as pride is historically accurate and fair reading. While it is true that this idea is found in Augustine, Jesse Couenhaven argues that Augustine's views on the root of sin were importantly shaped by the Pelagian controversy. He suggests that the mature Augustine propounded a view of sin that has more in common with the feminist concerns. See "'Not Every Wrong is Done with Pride': Augustine's Proto-Feminist Anti-Pelagianism," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 1 (Fall 2008): 32–52.

61. Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 6.

62. Ibid., 7.

Our relationality is central to who we are as humans and to be truly relational, for Brock, includes being vulnerable. The damaged condition that leads to sin is found in our vulnerability. Because of how dependent upon relationships we are for our very being, we are able to wound and be wounded to the very core of our being through how we treat one another in our relationships. "Sin emerges because our relationships have the capacity to destroy us and we participate in destruction when we seek to destroy ourselves or others. Hence sin is a sign of our brokenheartedness, of how damaged we are, not of how evil, willfully disobedience, and culpable we are."[63] Sin, here, is not an innate condition of individual humans but rather something that "emerges" out of the nexus of relationality and vulnerability. It is an unavoidable part of being relational beings. She concludes: "I am suggesting that sinfulness is neither a state that comes inevitably with birth nor something that permeates all human existence, but a symptom of the unavoidably relational nature of human existence through which we come to be damaged and damage others."[64] It is hard to see how this is that much different than sin as a state into which we are born; it merely pushes it a step further back. Worse yet, it roots sin in our very make-up as humans leaving little hope for escape.

Rita Nakashima Brock and Scripture

In light of the preceding methodological and epistemological considerations it is not surprising to find that the interpretation of scripture plays a relatively minor role in Brock's theological practice. While perhaps not as overtly antagonistic toward scripture as Mary Daly, Brock submits scripture to her feminist critique and finds in it a pastiche of

63. Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 7.
64. Ibid.

culturally conditioned ideas of varying theological value to the contemporary situation. For instance she writes: "Readers of the Bible must carefully weigh the prophetic texts against each other, not as infallible commands but as a range of human responses to crisis. Listening to the Bible requires testing various texts in light of moral questions that the Bible itself raises about its own traditions."[65] Here she rejects the propositional authority of scripture. Brock finds that there are themes or traditions in the Bible that call into question other messages within the canon. Accordingly, scripture is to be read against itself, so to speak. "The scriptures must be read critically and carefully for religious and ethical guidance, using principles that the Bible itself provides. John's Gospel should be weighed against its own report that Jesus, a Jew, said, 'I came that they might have life.' The Gospel is clear that the will of God is that life should flourish."[66] It is beyond Brock's purpose to elucidate what these embedded principles are. What is not in evidence, however, is any attempt to orient the diverse biblical texts to an overarching narrative and to use that narrative structure as a guide to the evaluation of divergent traditions.

Rita Nakashima Brock and Genesis 3–11

Though she does not comment on them in detail, the unavoidability of sin in Brock's thought suggests how she might handle the Genesis 3–11 narratives. Because sin is an unavoidable aspect of being relational, there need be no etiological narrative. For Brock there was no primal time of innocence from which humanity has fallen. Rather,

---

65. Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008), 22.

66. Ibid., 49.

these narratives that have played such a crucial role in the development of traditional doctrines of sin need to be submitted to critical feminist analysis. One of Brock's (and feminist theology more broadly) complaints about the Genesis 3 narrative is that it blames woman for sin. Brock is right to reject such readings of Genesis 3. Most of those readings are done too narrowly without sufficient attention to the narrative development of the concept of sin. But rather than offer a more narratively adequate reading, Brock discards the text altogether.

In *Saving Paradise* Brock (and Parker) do offer brief commentary on the early chapters of Genesis particularly how they compare with other contemporaneous cosmogonies.

> Like the Sumerian stories, the book of Genesis set the stage with 'at the beginning of Creation,' and then told of things going wrong. Humanity failed the requirements of life in paradise. Disasters followed. God exiled the woman and the man from the garden. Childbirth became arduous. Men dominated women. Brothers murdered and deceived one another, wrangling over their inheritance and fighting over blessings. Fathers raped their daughters. Tribes invaded and colonized lands, killing or oppressing their inhabitants. Somewhere, paradise remained in the world, haunting every tale of folly, injustice or greed.[67]

This matter of fact recitation of the evils recorded in Genesis and beyond is not submitted to theological scrutiny nor is the narrative development of sin considered. The potential theological significance of the similarity in the plot structure of these ancient cosmogonies, biblical or otherwise, is not considered either. The embeddedness in human thinking of notions of a pristine primeval period sullied by human (and/or divine) misdeeds as an explanation of the current condition merits more examination than Brock affords it.

---

67. Ibid., 16.

They do note that the Genesis account evinces a more positive anthropology. "In Genesis 1, humanity, male and female, shared in the divine image. They were not the flawed grunt labor for the gods in the Sumerian stories—not slaves, but gods. Instead of being impaired by exploitation, humanity was empowered and given agency to act ethically."[68] As is clear, this understanding of the nature of humans in the creation narratives coincides with Brock's discussion of power or agency as a distinct feature of human nature. Beyond this agency, however, Brock offers little by way of explanation of what it may mean for humans to bear the *imago dei* nor does she offer an interpretation of what caused humanity to so misuse this agency.

In looking at the divine prohibition of Genesis 2–3, Brock softens somewhat the traditional view of this as a divine law. "When God explained to the earthling that not all the trees were safe to eat, the story suggested that Creation had boundaries that should not be crossed and that acquiring knowledge carried risks."[69] Given the carnage of the following chapters, Brock's assessment of the divine decree as a "suggestion of boundaries" underestimates its significance. Other than this and the summary of the remainder of Genesis quoted above, Brock offers no sustained reflection on the Genesis account of humanity.

Sin, Self, and Story in Rita Nakashima Brock: Summary

Sin is not as central a theme for Brock as it is for Daly. It is related to our innate relationality and is an unavoidable feature of our humanity. Because we are relational we must be vulnerable and because we are vulnerable we become damaged, brokenhearted.

---

68. Ibid., 14.
69. Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*, 16.

The signal example of our brokenheartedness is violence against the other. Again, male conceptions of power, knowledge and relationship only contribute to the spread of brokenheartedness.

Brock summarizes her position on sin and salvation succinctly:

> We are broken by the world of our relationships before we are able to defend ourselves. It is not a damage we willfully choose. Those who damage us do not have the power to heal us, for they themselves are not healed. To be healed, we must take the responsibility for recognizing our own damage by following our hearts to the relationships that will empower our self-healing. In living by heart, we are called not to absolve ourselves of the consequences of an inherited flaw. We are called to remember our own brokenheartedness, the extent of our vulnerability, and the depth of our need for relationships. Hence we are not called to dependence on a power outside ourselves, but to an exploration of the depths of our most inner, personal selves, as the root of our connections to all others.[70]

We become damagers by being damaged by others in the relationships that are inherent in our humanity. Salvation, to the extent that there is such, is found within as we choose to pursue good relationships.

MARY DALY AND RITA NAKASHIMA BROCK ON SIN: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

We have now seen the outlines of Mary Daly and Rita Nakashima Brock's theologizing about sin. Their positions have both strengths and weakness, often closely related. As we critique their work side by side we will see how their positions are weakened by a failure to take into consideration narrative modes of thought as well as sketching their relationship to the biblical narratives and metanarrative.

---

70. Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 16.

To help us evaluate their stance toward narrativity the work of Stephen Crites will be helpful. Stephen Crites defines as a feature of the modern mindset the attempt to break free from a sense of narrative time in our self-understanding.[71] That is, we employ various strategies to provide a coherent understanding of our lives, strategies that seek to circumvent the inherently narrative structure of experience. Two such strategies that he highlights are "abstraction" and "contraction." In abstraction "images and qualities are detached from experience to become data for the formation of general principles and techniques."[72] Features of human experience are excised from their context and granted an explanatory power that may surpass their explanatory value. The second strategy Crites details is "contraction." In contraction the narrative structure of experience is overcome by narrow focus on one image, moment or feeling. Attention is constricted "to the particular image isolated from the image stream, to isolated sensation, feeling, the flash of the overpowering moment in which the temporal context of that moment is eclipsed and past and future are deliberately blocked out of consciousness."[73]

Sin and Being Human

As we observed, much of the feminist critique of the traditional definitions of sin takes issue with traditional notions of the human. One strength of both Daly's and Brock's projects is how closely tied their definitions of sin are to their understanding of what it means to be human. The strength of this is how directly and relevantly they are able to speak to human experience. All of us have experienced "brokenheartedness" in

---

71. Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 85.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid., 85.

the context of our relationships and have been thwarted in our efforts at self-definition. However, it is necessary for us to examine their construal of the human more closely particularly as it relates to the narrative construction of the self.

Mary Daly's Self-Naming Self

As we saw, Mary Daly's definition of being human is the capacity to self-name. Sin, by contrast, is having that capacity stolen or thwarted. In short, sin is that which threatens our humanity. We will see later that such a definition is useful. However, we must ask whether Daly's definition of the human is adequate.

Daly's version of the human—self-definition—is problematic in that it overestimates the power of the self and underestimates the role of factors external to the self in the formation of the individual. Anthony Giddens argues that the construction of identity is a more reflexive process in which there is a balance between the controlled and the uncontrolled. Giddens casts this reflexive activity in specifically narrative terms. "A person's identity is not to be found in behavior, nor—important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self."[74]

As Giddens points out, rather than being capable of complete self-definition, our identities are formed in the give and take of what we control and what we don't.[75] He

---

74. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 54.

75. Like Daly, Giddens recognizes that systems are not always tuned to human development. "Holding out the possibility of emancipation, modern institutions at the same time

gives the specific example of economic systems: "Consider the example of money. In order to utilize money, an individual must participate in systems of economic exchange, banking and investment and so forth, over which she has little direct control. On the other hand, this process allows the individual—given sufficient resources—a diversity of opportunities which would otherwise be absent."[76] On Daly's account, such economic systems are inherently problematic because they restrict the capacity of the human to self-name. Cast in the terms not of self-naming but self-narrating, Giddens's account is more nuanced.

This definition of humanity as self-naming runs afoul of the biblical narratives as well. While Genesis 1–3 show humans with incredible responsibilities and powers of self and world actualization, they stop short of giving humanity absolute power of self-identity. If anything, these early narratives and Genesis 3 and 11 in particular speak directly to the issue of the limitations on self-definition.[77]

---

create mechanisms of suppression, rather than actualization of the self." Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 6.

76. Ibid., 193.

77. It is further problematic because, though Daly is intent upon forging unity amongst women, her definition of humanity drives one toward individualism. Such an individualism cuts against Daly's aims to unite women in some fundamental way against men. Daly recognizes this problem and attempts to compensate for it by positing some transcendent idea of womanhood. She writes: A problem that is implicit in such Naming is the classic philosophical problem of 'the one and the many.' For it is clear that Lusty women are profoundly different from each other. Not only are there ethnic, national, class and racial differences that shape our perspectives, but there are also individual and cross-cultural differences of temperament, virtue, talent, taste, and of conditions within which these can or cannot find expression. There is, then, an extremely rich, complex Diversity among women and within each individual. *But there is also above, beyond, beneath all this a Cosmic Commonality, a tapestry of connectedness which women as Websters/Fates are constantly weaving.* (Daly, *Pure Lust*, 26–27.) Women are therefore defined with reference to this trans-cultural, trans-temporal "tapestry of connectedness." It is hard not to see this as the establishment of a new foundation from which to theologize. Indeed, several writers have criticized Mary Daly and other feminists on just this point: the establishment of a new "foundationalism." For our purposes it is sufficient to note that this essential connection amongst women transcends the narrative of humanity and human development.

Rita Nakashima Brock's Relational Self

Similarly, Brock's relationally construed self has much to commend it. Contemporary discussions of the human person have come to recognize the importance of relationships in being human. Indeed, as we shall see, the biblical narratives and Genesis 1–3 in particular, present humanity in a variety of relationships integral to their role in the story.

However, narrow focus on relationality is in danger of abstracting a concept from human experience in an effort to provide comprehensive explanation. This is an example of Stephen Crites's category of abstraction. Though on the one hand Brock's concept of relationality is supposedly derived from human experience, it becomes a heuristic concept unhitched from the narrative context that gave it rise. This can be seen in the manner in which she attempts to root relationality in the very nature of existence, human or otherwise, by calling relationality "an ontic category." Like Daly's self-naming, Brock's relationality becomes more useful if it is set as one feature in the context of a narrative.

In a brief article Meic Pearse diagnoses the anthropological efforts of the likes of Daly and Brock as a modern attempt to address a postmodern problem: the dilemma over personhood and identity. Pearse denies that the two categories can be separated.

> The attempted distinction between 'person' and 'identity' is also unreal in practice. It is an attempt to emphasize human essence (the former), by way of distinction from relationality (the latter). Yet what we mean by a human person is an individuated human being. It is the modern/postmodern dilemma that has thrust upon us the quest for our personal 'essence', precisely because postmodern conditions have made our identity so unclear. In the absence of stable identity, we go looking for who we

> 'really' are; that is, we go in quest of personal essentialism, an essence that is not contingent upon our (fleeting) social relationalities.[78]

Pearse goes on to suggest that personhood is likely found "in the polarity between essence and relational/identity" but reasons that the inscrutability of human "essence" makes it a poor starting point. In fact, rooting personal and human identity in either of the poles is problematic. Pearse writes: "Certainly an unbalanced emphasis upon personhood as 'essentialism', leading to a ceaseless quest for the 'real self', can only fuel the monstrous egotism and self-centeredness epitomized by the consumerist mindset, that full flowering of self-assertion. On the other hand, the apparent corrective, namely that of rooting personhood in relationality, can only encourage the obverse side of the same coin, namely...pathetic self-loathing and 'low self-esteem'."[79] Indeed, Daly's work is an example of the former and Brock's of the latter and the tone of their writings display the difference. Daly's human as essentially self-naming leads her to a call for self-assertion, at least among women. Brock's call for empowerment through relationality leads inexorably toward the danger of endless evaluation of the "authenticity" of one's relationships. Once again, the narratively construed self offers a balance of the two; there are both fundamental relationships and realities but in the context of a narrative with development and continuity.

---

78. Meic Pearse, "Problem? What Problem? Personhood, Late Modern/Postmodern Rootlessness and Contemporary Identity Crisis," *Evangelical Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (2005): 10 Interestingly, Pearse traces the postmodern condition of rootlessness in particular to the problematization of distinctions between people, particularly on the basis of gender. Accordingly, for the postmodern individual "a basic aspect of existence has been rendered problematic." He goes on. "The attack on traditional roles and the assault on 'stereotypes' were doubtless intended to free groups deemed to have been oppressed by past metanarratives. But by kicking them aside, we render our own situatedness and identities problematic, since we only know who we are in relation to others. By forbidding ourselves to discriminate, we forbid ourselves to discern." (9)

79. Pearse, "Problem?" 10.

The Explanatory Value

An important aspect of any evaluation of a definition of sin is its explanatory value. How well does the definition serve to critique or highlight the human condition? As we saw in chapter 1, many definitions fail to speak relevantly to the contemporary culture for one reason or another. Both of the definitions of sin offered by Mary Daly and Rita Nakashima Brock serve as lenses that expose important elements of the human condition.

Mary Daly's definition of sin as that which thwarts self-naming is particularly well-suited to exposing structures of sin that limit women's capacity to self-actualize. Indeed, as we observed, her work can be summarized as an effort to expose systems of oppression in every aspect of life. She finds evidence of opposition to women's self-actualization embedded in virtually every area of human culture. This makes some of her work compelling reading. Unfortunately, Daly's gender-specific definition makes her evaluation lopsided. Equal attention could easily be paid to the manner in which various cultural institutions and practices thwart male self-actualization or full humanization.

Brock's emphasis on relationship connects directly with contemporary self-understanding of our relational make-up. Her description of individuals from fractured relationships replicating those fractures in other relationships out of their own "brokenheartedness" captures many people's personal experience. However, the lack of specificity of the ways and deeper reasons behind these behaviors and the lack of any clear path to "salvation" makes her work less than compelling sin-talk in the contemporary culture.

The Story of Sin

One of the features of narrative thought is the continuity that it offers from past to present and into the future. To say that God, humanity or sin are narratively developed is to put earlier and later events within each history into a certain relationship with each other. As in the life development of any individual, earlier events are formative though not entirely constitutive of the person. Later events (whether foreshadowed in the narrative or not) also play an important role in the understanding of the character at any given point in the narrative.

Epistemology

In her apparent embrace of the subjectivity of human experience and knowledge Brock is in good company with many postmodern critics of modern epistemology. However, some have challenged whether feminists like Brock and Daly have truly avoided the pitfalls of modernity. As Sheila Greeve Davaney points out, in spite of espousing the claim that all knowledge is interest-laden and culturally contextual, most feminists do not embrace the radically nihilistic implications of the subjectivity of all knowledge. Instead, they privilege the knowledge acquired through feminist experience thereby creating an objective truth base or foundation. In summarizing her assessment of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Davaney writes, “Truth, then, is assessed according to the norm of the extent to which a vision promotes the full humanity of women, and such

promotion is assumed to correspond to divine reality and its purposes."[80] In Brock's case in the specific matter of sin, the correspondence is between the objective standard of the heart and violence. That which is objectively violent or that which breaks the integrity of the standard of "heart" is sin.

Feminist Theology, Story and History

Another evidence of the non-narratival nature of both Daly and Brock's theology can be seen in their attitudes toward history and the role that the past plays in our understanding of the present. Regarding the usefulness of the past Daly states quite definitively, "My method contains no built-in assumption that we should direct our efforts toward salvaging anything from the patriarchal past."[81] For her, the conviction that the past and all our records of it are irredeemably corrupted by patriarchy militates against finding any place for a revelatory past. This attitude overlooks too cavalierly the reality of how much of who we are as individuals and as a species is shaped by our past. We may indeed be more than our past but we cannot understand ourselves or our situation apart from it nor is a total break from it possible. For Daly our past is exactly what must be overcome. Our past has falsely named us and we must rename ourselves and our world.

This rejection of the past is, of course, linked to the turn to experience as primary theological resource. As we saw earlier, Daly rejects the possibility that past events could possibly trump present experience. Of the assumption that any trans-historical, trans-

---

80. Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Problems with Feminist Theory: Historicity and the Search for Sure Foundations," in *Embodied Love: Sensuality and Relationship as Feminist Values*, Paula M. Cooey, Sharon A. Farmer, and Mary Ellen Ross (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 89.

81. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 83.

cultural revelation can be accessed from past events she wrote, "This is problematic in that it tends to be backward-looking, assuming at least implicitly that past history (that is, some peak moments of the past) has some sort of prior claim over present experience, as if recourse to the past were necessary to legitimate experience now."[82] This is precisely what a Christian theology attentive to the narrative structure of human existence claims, that peak events, namely the Christ event at the very least, put in perspective human experience now as well as the events that preceded them. To deny some role to the past is solipsism at worst and chronological snobbery at best.[83] Later events (whether foreshadowed in the narrative or not) also play an important role in the understanding of the character at any given point in the narrative.

A particular problem that this creates for Daly is the inability to account for good or progress from the past. This can be seen in her diatribe against gynecological medicine in *Gyn/Ecology*. Focusing on the bumbling and at times lethal manner in which modern medicine and gynecology in particular developed, Daly exposes it as yet another patriarchal tool for female domination and denigration going so far as to compare it to

---

82. Ibid., 73–74.

83. The problematic nature of this ahistorical tendency has led to countless efforts among feminists to recover a more matriarchal past. These efforts can be plotted on a continuum from the ideologically light search for influential women in the past to the ideologically heavy reconstructions of a thoroughly matriarchal past complete with a fall into patriarchy. The later Mary Daly evinces a preference for this latter approach. Cynthia Eller critiques the idea of such a matriarchal prehistory. Ironically she finds that this recovery of a matriarchal past rather than ultimately bolstering the feminist claims actually constricts the identity of women due to its narrow identification of women with procreation, relationality, and bodiliness. "[T]he gendered stereotypes upon which matriarchal myth rests persistently work to flatten out differences among women; to exaggerate differences between women and men; and to hand women an identity that is symbolic, timeless, and archetypal, instead of giving them the freedom to craft identities that suit their individual temperaments, skills, preferences, and moral and political commitments" (Cynthia Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future* [Boston: Beacon Press, 2000], 8). In Mary Daly's terms, Eller is claiming that in the attempt to re-name history for women, the myth of the matriarchal past has severely limited individual women's ability to self-name.

Nazi medicine practices.[84] While we must acknowledge that medical progress has not always been cautiously pursued with at times lamentable results for patients, it is difficult to deny that there has indeed been progress that has resulted in a marked increase in the quality of life for men and women alike. But Daly's application to the past of her definition of sin as patriarchal false-naming allows no such tension. One of the strengths of a narrative approach is its ability to hold in tension issues such as these. Daly's approach leaves her no room to reconcile the difficulties. As we will see in a later chapter this tension is demonstrated repeatedly in the narratives of Genesis 3–11.

Daly explicitly rejects any notion of past revelation having any present relevance. This is, of course, because nothing can trump present female experience as a theological resource. "[The] assumption that one can extract 'religious truth' from 'time-conditioned categories' seems to mean that we can shuck off the debris of a long history of oppressiveness and get to the pristine purity of the original revelation. This is problematic in that it tends to be backward-looking, assuming at least implicitly that past history (that is, some peak moments of the past) has some sort of prior claim over present experience, as if recourse to the past were necessary to legitimate experience now."[85] Daly sets up a false choice here that does not conform to human experience of the world. In our personal experience of forming a self-identity the present and the past are in relationship to one another. Neither holds exclusive power to define who or what we are. The past and present are held in narrative relationship to one another with the past exercising an important though not finally definitive role to the present. Instead Daly suggests that

---

84. See chapter 7 "American Gynecology: Gynocide by the Holy Ghosts of Medicine and Therapy" and the same chapter's conclusion and afterward "Nazi medicine and American gynecology: a torture cross-cultural comparison" in Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*.

85. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 73–74.

women can find their identity sufficiently in present experience. "In contrast, women have the option of giving priority to what we find valid in our own experience without needing to look to the past for justification. I suggest that this is the more authentic approach to our problems of identity."[86]

Brock's attitude toward the past is similarly skeptical, though less pronounced than Daly's. Brock rejects theologies of salvation focused too narrowly on the cross of Christ. This is due in part to her rejection of the idea that an act of violence might save us. But its backward orientation disturbs her as well. "We cannot rely on one past event to save our future. No almighty power will deliver us from evil. With each minute we wait for such rescue, more die."[87] Like Daly, then, Brock wants to narrow our focus to the experience here and now rather than in some past moment. Accordingly she looks for the source of sin not in some etiological myth but in the fabric of our relational being and for the source of salvation not in some first century historical event but in our exercise of personal agency. But this too offers no way to hold together the narrative of human experience and identity, male or female.

Past, Present, or Future Self?

Without the notion of a developing narrative in which to situate their views of the person, Daly and Brock are forced to situate it in the past, the present or the future. As was seen above, they reject the past outright. Daly, while giving priority in theology to present experience, arrives at an anthropology that is in a sense a future oriented one. If the essence of what it is to be human is to name oneself that work can never be final. To

86. Ibid., 74.
87. Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 105.

name oneself and not grow and develop as a person would be stultifying. Daly's rhetoric does evince this future orientation. In several of her works she engages in fantasies that have her reporting back as it were from the future "Biophilic Era" when the sin of patriarchy has been overcome. Furthermore she frequently uses the language of women Spinsters weaving ever new spirals of self-hood and sisterhood. It seems even when the gains of the present must be left behind for that yet better vision. True humanity seems forever postponed.

On its face Brock's relational focus seems to offer more linkage with the past. Women of the present share with women of the past their deeply seated need for relationship and the vulnerability and sin that attends it. Yet rooting humanity in relationality is no more narratival than Daly's model; the past offers no clues to the present or future. The fact of our relationality is unchanged but the nature of our relationships changes with the times. Brock's view does not allow the past to say much to the present because what is important is our experience of our relationships now. So there is a radical presentism to Brock's thought. In fact, since the quality and function of various relationships has changed so much through time, the past has little to offer us in thinking through our present relationships. People of the past, though equally relational as we are, have nothing to say to us because they just don't understand our relationships.

In his argument for conceiving of doctrine in narrative terms Anthony Thiselton warns against the dangers of over- or under-realized eschatologies. "An overrealized eschatology will err on the side of conceiving of God (and doctrine) as 'already defined.' Here God becomes entirely 'the God of propositional revelation' without as it were loose ends. This system is closed rather than open. On the other hand, a one-sided futurist

eschatology risks conceiving of God as 'not yet defined,' akin to the God of process theology."[88] In their views of the human self, Daly and Brock evince these two poles. For Daly's self, tasked with self-naming in a hostile environment selfhood is forever deferred. Accordingly she leaps far into some longed for future in which women are able to fully self-realize. Brock's eschatology is over-realized in that the human self as relational is fully constituted with no development necessary. Stanley Grenz similarly warns against the distorted eschatologies that are implicit in particular approaches to the human and sin. He writes, "In existentialist developmentalism, the anthropological focus lies with the potentiality present within the human person to become a self. Consequently, existentialist theologians give little if any place to the language of human destiny, to a corporate human history, or to any type of temporal eschatological consummation to creation."[89] Brock in particular falls afoul of this. For Brock, the focus is the "present potentiality" for relationship in which inheres the brokenness of sin. There is no eschatological consummation; existing relationally in the present is what it means to be human with little or no connectivity to that which has preceded or what will follow.[90] What is missing is anything to hold the storyline of the self together. Thiselton points to Ricoeur's description of the narrative continuity and coherence that is achieved through

---

88. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 64.

89. Grenz, *The Social God*, 178.

90. Rosemary Radford Reuther highlights the non-eschatological orientation of much feminist theology: "Thus redemption is about the transformation of self and society into good, life-giving relations, rather than an escape from the body and the world into eternal life. Otherworldly eschatology is usually not explicitly denied, but it is put aside." Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 8.

the mind's performing "three functions: those of expectation...attention...and memory."[91] Thiselton explains: "Christian doctrine relates closely to the memory of God's saving acts in history; attention to God's present action in continuity with those saving acts; and trustful expectation of an eschatological fulfillment of divine promise."[92] Daly dismisses the revelatory past, sees only the ongoing hegemony of patriarchy in the present, and offers no sure hope of a future of full self-naming. Brock similarly denies the value of past and future and focuses only on a relational present.

Whereas Daly denounces the past and stakes her hope on a utopian "Biophilic" future, Brock mostly ignores both the past and the future. She is reluctant to locate salvation in either the past or the future. "Life is actually sustained...by integration, interaction, and exchange in the present—it is ecological, not eschatological."[93] In *Saving Paradise* Brock (and co-author Rebecca Parker) do excavate the Christian past but really only in search of different images to drive their present focused theology. They explicitly reject the narrative development of the Christian story and opt to replace the notion of sacred time (or narrative) with sacred space. They write:

> Early church sensibilities about salvation were oriented to space—to a world of many dimensions, blessed by the all-permeating Spirit. However, the modern Western religious consciousness imagines salvation almost entirely in temporal terms. Theologians speak of sacred and profane time, of salvation history, and of hope. They interpret the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise as the beginning of salvation history: the world runs along a hard arrow of time, beginning with human sin and culminating in a final New Age, kingdom of God, Second Coming, or New Heaven and Earth. Humanity lives 'between the times,' awaiting a future yet to be consummated. Christ will return to fulfill God's promise of salvation, which the faithful will receive after death, after God destroys this evil world, or after God creates a just world and has beaten all swords

91. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 19–20.

92. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 65.

93. Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*, 388.

> into plowshares. While these future-oriented themes are present among early Christian ideas, they did not delay salvation until after death or in an indefinite future time. They pictured salvation as the landscape of paradise, an environment full of life that was entered here and now through the church.[94]

Brock offers a false choice between sacred space and sacred time. Narrative and especially dramatic understandings of the Christian story and human development hold together both space and time.

A properly narratival approach to theology recognizes the importance of the past without acting as though the past exercises hegemony over the present. The interpretational practice of typology is rooted in the conviction that past and present relate to one another in a mutually informing way and avoid privileging one over the other.

Sin and the Biblical Story

We have seen that these feminist theologians embrace epistemologies and anthropologies that ignore the element of narrative. How does this shape their approach to the overarching narrative of Scripture? Again, Crites's categories of abstraction and contraction will be helpful.

Reading into the Narrative

In her analysis of feminist theological reconstructions Kathryn Greene-McCreight notes the profound shift in theological outlook that comes from a change in one's governing doctrine. She points to such a change in governing doctrine in feminist

---

94. Ibid.

theologies of sin. The governing doctrine is, in her words, an "extra-narratival" claim about humans. She writes: "What we see, then, over the generation of feminist scholarship on the primary Christian doctrine of sin, is a parsing and refining of the particularities of women's sin. The extra-narratival claim that women's experience and therefore women's sin are distinct from men's experience and men's sin becomes a governing doctrine which then determines the understanding of sin. The unintended effect is a virtual cataloguing of the difficulties, both personal and social, faced by women of different races and classes."[95] Because sin is being analyzed through the use of a concept external to the biblical narrative, the role of the biblical narrative as a whole and discrete narratives within the whole is minimized.

In making this move Greene-McCreight sees feminist theology making two mistakes, one philosophical and one theological. Greene-McCreight finds totalizing assumptions about the nature of men and women in feminist theology's handling of sin. Though many feminist theologians may reject essentialism, their arguments about sin require something of the sort. "[F]eminist constructions of the doctrine of sin tend to require, despite their best intentions, a universalizing of anthropology of the feminine."[96]

Greene-McCreight's theological critique of feminist theologies of sin is more explicitly narratival. She notes that while there is no precise definition of sin in Scripture, the feminist theological vision falls short by failing to take the picture of sin as painted in the canon into consideration. "[F]eminist theologians' consideration of the doctrine of sin shows itself to be non-narrative, insofar as it defines women according to an

95. Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 59.
96. Ibid., 61.

anthropology constructed almost entirely independently of the biblical drama."[97] This essentialist, non-narratival anthropology is then brought back to the biblical texts as the basis for reinterpretation or rejection. "[A]fter considering woman as defined according to the extra-narratival claims of a particularly late-twentieth-century North American framework, the feminist theologies then want to make use of this picture as a governing doctrine through which to reinterpret the biblical concepts of sin, grace, and divine agency."[98]

Daly's definition of humanity and its concomitant definition of sin demonstrate Greene-McKreight's point starkly. Daly defines being human as self-defining. It could be argued according to the biblical narrative of Genesis 3–11 that "self-naming" is the definition of sin! At the very least, the narratives that bookend the primeval narrative—the "fall" narrative and the tower narrative—warn against human attempts at self-definition.

Narratival Selectivity

Theologizing in view of the overarching narrative of Scripture implies accepting the whole of Scripture. Addressing herself specifically to those feminist theologians who still regard the Bible as revelatory in some sense, Greene-McCreight concludes that from a narratival perspective there is something disingenuous about the selective appropriation of scripture. "It seems inherently contradictory for feminist theologians to claim to be able to read Scripture as witness to the divine reality *and* to claim that it needs a warning label indicating its toxicity, if the God we are talking about is that of the biblical

97. Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 62.
98. Ibid.

narrative."[99] What she means is that if we accept that characters of a narrative or drama are revealed progressively throughout the narrative, we can't select moments in the narrative as accurate and representative and reject others for being inadequate. Similarly if humanity and sin are portrayed in narrative, selectivity only serves to distort not refine the image. Here Daly is more intellectually honest than Brock because she ultimately jettisoned the entirety of Scripture except to offer readings that transvalued the content of the narrative.

While generally in agreement with Daly's critique of classic sin-talk, Mary Grey is concerned about the implications of Daly's moving "beyond good and evil" precisely due to its effects on the role and usefulness of the biblical narrative. She writes:

> But it is not at all easy for Christian theology to undertake a new naming of sin. For when it is asserted—as it is, for example, by Mary Daly—that the whole construction of Christian soteriology, the necessity of salvation in Christ, the doctrines of Atonement, grace, forgiveness and eschatology, rest on a false naming of evil—as Daly claims—then a re-naming will hold the risk of the rejection of Christian theology, *at least in the form in which we know it*. Is the price too high? Daly's own solution is well-known. She wants to move beyond the patriarchal naming of good and evil, into a new naming, the naming of True Being and New Creation. Therefore the old framework of the story is useful to her in so far as it can tell the story of 'falling into freedom' and 'falling into the sacred…However, Daly's solution, based on the exodus covenant of cosmic sisterhood, assumes a monolithic interpretation of scripture as an oppressive underpinning of patriarchy, and ignores counter-traditions of a God who sets free form bondage, and an understanding of Jesus as Liberator.[100]

Grey also concludes that Daly's manner of handling the biblical narrative and narratives "ignores the way that the stories have also had liberating as well as oppressive

---

99. Ibid., 68.

100. Mary Grey, "Falling Into Freedom: Searching for New Interpretations of Sin in a Secular Culture," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 47, no. 2: 236–37.

effects on women."[101] It remains the case that for centuries and into the present women have been spiritually nourished by the biblical narratives even apart from feminist readings of retrieval. It may be that this conflict stems from an inadequate understanding of the relationship between the biblical metanarrative and some of its discrete narratives.

Anthony Thiselton distinguishes the biblical narrative from the totalizing, philosophical narratives rejected in postmodernity. "The Christian narrative is different. For although the biblical writings and Christian doctrine do offer an overreaching narrative of God's dealings with the world from creation to the end-time, alongside this drama the Bible offers 'little narratives' about *particular people* in *particular places* at *particular times*. A dialectical interplay of coherence and contingency characterizes these texts."[102] An overarching understanding of the metanarrative guides the interpretation and theological appropriation of the discrete narratives. Lacking these hermeneutical tools, the feminist readers either reject the whole (e.g. Daly) or appropriate it selectively (e.g. Brock). This latter move becomes a species of the error of isolating a "canon within the canon."[103] But the move is predictable because of the impossibility of correlating all of the biblical narrative to a concept foreign to it.

A Story with No Ending

As we saw Brock defines sin not as a characteristic of humans but as an unavoidable result of our relationality. Accordingly, it had no beginning *per se* but was a

---

101. Ibid., 237.

102. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 127 (emphasis original).

103. William J. Abraham mentions this tendency in his critique of Rosemary Radford Ruether's theology and notes its similarity to a similar tendency in other sectors of Protestantism. Indeed, we will have cause to consider the "canon within the canon" problem in our examination of evangelical definitions of sin. William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 444.

natural result of our fundamental relational human nature. We saw as well that Brock does not see our relationality as something that was previously unmarred by this damage and later corrupted. The ability to damage and be damaged is endemic to the human condition. Brock's solution—"an exploration of the depths of our most inner, personal selves, as the root of our connections to all others"—doesn't suggest that there is any final solution to humanity's problem. Rather individuals find "healing" in this life through pursuing heart-healthy relationships with their whole hearts. Brock posits no final resolution of humanity's broken relationships in part because her system does not allow it. If the damage that results in sin is endemic to our nature, there is no possibility of transcending that situation except by transcending relationship which would make us something other than human.[104]

That sin as a feature of human existence is without clear beginning nor final resolution betrays the absence of narrative in Brock's thought. In spite of her appeal to full selves there is not a clear vision of what a human is to be nor what humanity as a whole is pointed toward and therefore no clear identification of where it is going nor how to get there.[105] Consequently, there is a lack of clear basis for any of the ethical

---

104. Interestingly, Angela West links the focus on present activism with a modernist, Enlightenment way of thought in contrast to a Christian eschatological framework. "In the interpretation of social change as the practical meaning of theological hope, this theology displayed its origins in the empirical and humanist philosophies of the Enlightenment, which saw human history in the here and now as the arena of human transcendence. This replaced the ancient Christian eschatology which looked forward to a consummation at the end of world history in which divine judgment would set to rights the misery and injustice of the world." Angela West, *Deadly Innocence: Feminist Theology and the Mythology of Sin* (New York: Cassell, 1995), 14.

105. On this point it is curious that Brock speaks of "the full humanity of women" far less often than many other feminist thinkers. Her relational anthropology is not dependent on some notion of "full humanity."

outworking of her concerns. As both Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre have argued, ethical reasoning takes place within the context of some shared narrative.

One metaphor that Brock uses frequently is that of life as a journey. On its face it seems that this image may have much in common with a narrative structure of life. Journeys, like narratives, have a starting point and a trajectory as well as a mixture of elements within the journeyer/character's control and those imposed unbidden from without. Journeys, like narratives, unfold in a certain way and like narratives, particular moments in a journey are placed in an orienting context by both earlier and later parts of the journey. However, Brock's use of the metaphor of journey shows it to be lacking a key ingredient that might cement the similarities: a destination. Of the new christological vision of erotic power that she promotes she writes, "This risk is the process of being on the way, not to a goal at the end of history or time, but always on the journey of expectation that comes from the courage of living by heart."[106] Unlike most narratives and journeys the journey Brock proposes has no orienting telos. Normally, one's destination is a crucial though not exclusive determinant of one's path along the journey. What guides the journey for Brock? She answers: "The journey into the territories of erotic power like the women's journey to Jesus' tomb is a journey with surprises and no definite goals. It can only be followed as our hearts lead us."[107] The solution, then, is a radically interiorized and personalized perspective.

While acknowledging the gains of relational anthropologies in several feminist theologians, Derek Nelson registers some reserve particularly on the depiction of sin that eventuates. His concern is the "absence of culpability." He writes:

---

106. Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 105.
107. Ibid., 107.

> When the self is conceived so thoroughly in relational terms, it becomes harder and harder to see how the relational self is a responsible moral agent. Victims of childhood abuse internalize their abuse as it forms their sense of identity or their sense of self. Those sinful relations contribute to making the self who it really is (even as that self is not as it 'should' be), and it is logical that future actions of this self will stem from its own self-understanding. Thus it is, in a way, understandable when a childhood sexual abuse victim becomes a sexual abuser of children. Yet the Christian doctrine of sin simply must (if anywhere, here!) say that this is simply wrong. Child sexual abuse is against God, is against God's creature, and is unequivocally sin.[108]

Though Nelson's critique is aimed specifically at the work of Margaret Suchocki, it is apposite here. Brock's insistence that sin is woven into the fabric of our innate relationality and that we hurt others out of our own brokenness from being hurt by others, seems to exonerate us. What is more, it appears to create an infinite regress, sin has no beginning, a decidedly unnarratival concept.

At the close of *Saving Paradise* Brock and Parker soften somewhat their realized eschatology somewhat by acknowledging the tension between paradise and pain in the world. "What we need now is a religious perspective that does not locate salvation in a future end point, a transcendent realm, or a zone after death. Paradise is not withheld, closed, or removed from us. Realizing this requires us to let go of the notion that paradise is life without struggle, life free from wrestling with legacies of injustice and current forces of evil. Assuredly, we are in a world in which the struggle continues. However, it is also true that we already live on holy ground, in the presence of God, with bodies and souls sanctified by the Spirit's anointing, surrounded by the communion of saints."[109] This sounds like the tension that one finds in a narrative view of the progress of

---

108. Derek R. Nelson, *What's Wrong with Sin?: Sin in Individual and Social Perspective from Schleiermacher to Theologies of Liberation* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 157–58.

109. Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*, 417.

redemption. But Brock and Parker's solution offers virtually nothing to those who by nature of the extremity of their suffering cannot experience the paradise this world has to offer. They do not offer a satisfactory end to the story and so sin and death seem to win.

Content without Context

Crites's concept of "abstraction" describes how thinkers seek to escape narrativity by abstracting certain concepts for use as an explanatory device. Brock does this both with the concepts of relationality and violence. As we have seen, violence is central to Brock's definition of sin, her understanding of the human condition, and her critique of traditional atonement theologies. However, her understanding and use of the theme of violence is marred by her failure to understand the nature of human existence narrativally. Brock nowhere defines what she means by violence though she frequently asserts what violence does. She thinks that the nature of violence is obvious. However, violence is an abstract concept. It finds its content in and through some context. Whether we regard an act as an act of violence is shaped by a variety of factors including the intent and the context in which the violent act took place. For a simple example, self-defense with a weapon is regarded very differently than assault.

She analyzes the crucifixion with her relational anthropology and finds it appalling. Rather than assessing the significance of the act of God's self-offering in the person of Jesus Christ within the story line of God's self-revelation through his relationship with humanity and Israel in particular, a story that culminates with the glorious inbreaking of the promised resurrection, she analyzes it as an event in a father-son relationship and deems it cosmic child-abuse. No act, no matter how relational,

makes any sense in isolation. Excising the cross from its narrative context will always distort it in some way. As Peter Leithart has pointed out, later events effect earlier events. In his example, a shooting at 10:00 AM can become a murder or even an assassination at 1:00 PM when the victim dies. The later event (death) provides content to the former event.[110] This is commonplace in the relationships between events in narrative and dramatic settings. When applied to the crucifixion it becomes clear that it was indeed an act of violence on the part of the human perpetrators, but succeeding events and the nature of the Father-Son relationship render it as some other sort of act, but not a violent one. Attention to both prior and later pieces of the narrative is required to truly understand any event.

Interestingly, Brock's transparent autobiographical revelations expose the dangers of a failure to think narratively. After recounting her strained relationship with the man she believed to be her father but later learned was her adoptive father Brock observes the following:

> At every opportunity I misjudged his behavior and drew the most ungenerous conclusions about him. I was grateful to have come to a moment when I could see his life more clearly and to acknowledge the goodness in him, but my gratitude was weighed with sadness. My reassessment of his life came a decade after his death, when it was too late to restore our broken relationship and heal old wounds. And my life had been turned upside down by the knowledge that he was not my birth father. He conferred grace on someone else's daughter.[111]

Brock's personal experience depicts poignantly the impossibility of full and accurate assessment at any given point and time of our own personal narratives. What Brock is acknowledging is a feature of the narrative or dramatic nature of human

---

110. Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2009), 42.

111. Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 243.

experience and the need for epistemic modesty characteristic of some postmodern thinking. Later information and events give meaning to earlier events and place them in a context whereby they can be more accurately understood and assessed. While she has observed this as a feature of her own lived experience she does not recognize the relevance to her theology. With a dramatic approach to biblical theology and doctrine one acknowledges that later events, even those yet to occur, give final significance and context to the earlier ones. As we have seen, though, Brock has cut herself off from the possibility that some later, "eschatological" events might put earlier ones in context. She insists, rather, that the theological picture must make sense personally *now*. As she wrote in *Saving Paradise*, "Life is actually sustained...by integration, interaction, and exchange in the present—it is ecological, not eschatological."[112] She affirms this in at the personal level as well. She writes, "I do not know what I think of life after death. I do not live with the thought of what will come after I have died. If a conscious personal life transcends my physical body, I am prepared to discern what to do when that time comes."[113] But if there is some post-mortem existence in which people retain some measure of personal identity, does it make any sense to suggest that the two parts of that existence—the pre-mortem and post-mortem—bear little or no relation to each other nor mutually inform each other?

Sin and the Stories of Genesis

As a final piece of our critique we want to examine Daly and Brock's stance toward the specific narratives of Genesis 1–11. Specifically we are interested in whether

112. Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*, 388.
113. Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 227.

their appropriation or rejection of the narratives reflects a sensitivity to their narrative quality. Given the value of narrative in reflecting the complex relationship between humans and sin, it is interesting to note the absence of explicit use of the biblical narratives in feminist theology. As Lowe observes of the theologians she surveyed, "although most retain the concept of original sin as a way to account for the brokenness of our existence, none of the proposals (save that of Angela West) attempts to recover or interpret the image of the Fall of Adam and Eve in the garden."[114]

Interpretational Tools

In general we may observe that the interpretational methods that both Daly and Brock bring to the Genesis narratives are not especially literary. Both bring a hermeneutic of suspicion to the text. As we saw, Daly's earlier work was fairly standard historical-critical interpretation. Later, she began to employ a more free-flowing symbolism in her biblical interpretation with an eye to subvert traditional readings. Brock pays scant attention to the text, except to reject traditional readings. It would be accurate to say that both Daly and Brock spend more time reacting to readings of the text than they do interpreting the text itself.

Storied relationship

Stephen Crites's categories of abstraction and contraction were useful in elucidating how one's theology may seek to break free of the narrativity of human experience. Michael Root offers a further way to evaluate the relationship between a

114. Lowe, "Woman Oriented Hamartiologies," 137.

story and the reader's world that is useful in assessing a theologian's appropriation of biblical narratives. Root suggests that a story can bear a *storied* relationship to the reader's world or an *illustrative* relationship. In an illustrative relationship, "the story illustrates certain redemptive truths about self, world, and God. The soteriological task is to bring out the truths the story illustrates and show how they are redemptive."[115] This is a less than fully narratival way to appropriate the story because the story itself must be transcended for its redemptive features to become clear. That is, one must reach to something beyond or behind the story for it to speak.

Root contrasts this illustrative approach with a storied approach which he describes thus:

> The Christian narrative can also bear a storied relation to the reader. The Christian story and the life and world of the reader do not exist in isolation, but constitute one world and one story. The reader is included in the Christian story. The relation of story to reader becomes internal to the story. As a result, the relations between the story and the reader become storied relations, the sort of relations that are depicted in narratives...These storied relations, rather than general truths the story illustrates, mediate between story and reader. The story is good news because redemption follows from the primary form of inclusion in the story. The task of soteriology is then to show how the reader is included in the story and how the story then is or can be the story of that reader's redemption.[116]

The narrative is not seen as something outside the reader's world that can be translated into principles that speak to the reader's world but rather is regarded as of a piece with the reader's own world and life experience.

On the basis of this distinction, how do Mary Daly and Rita Nakashima Brock relate to the biblical narratives of Genesis 1–11? Daly at first rejects the illustrative use to

---

115. Michael Root, "The Narrative Structure of Soteriology," in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989), ???

116. Root, "The Narrative Structure of Soteriology," 266.

which the fall narrative is put because of how often it is used to illustrate the sinfulness of women. Later, however, she finds a way to read the narrative illustratively in favor of her purposes by selectively using the images she finds there. We cite again her re-reading of the fall:

> I am now suggesting that there were intimations in the original myth—not consciously intended—of a dreaded future. That is, one could see the myth as prophetic of the real Fall that was yet on its way, dimly glimpsed. In that dreaded event, women reach for knowledge and, finding it, share it with men, so that together we can leave the delusory paradise of false consciousness and alienation. In ripping the image of the Fall from its old context we are also transvaluing it. That is, its meaning is divested of its negativity and becomes positive and healing.[117]

Here, Daly's appropriation of the narrative of the fall is mythical. But she freely admits that reading it that way requires one to excise it from its original context, its original embeddedness in a narrative. This reading obviously takes little consideration of the literary features of the narrative, intentionally ignores the narrative context (both near and far), and serves as little more than an illustration of the sea-change that Daly hopes the rising tide of feminist concerns cause.

As we saw, Brock makes little use of the narratives of Genesis 1–11 in her theology. She regards the series of narratives as illustrative of human behavior parallel to other ancient literature. Though dissatisfied with readings that present woman as the guilty party, she does not offer much of a counter reading. And since sin is endemic to the relationally constituted human, no story of the origins of sin is necessary. The stories are little more than one culture's illustrations of the range of ways that humans display relational brokenness.

---

117. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 67.

As we will see in a later chapter, it is unfortunate that these thinkers reject the narratives of Genesis 3–11 so quickly. There is certainly much within those texts that overlaps with their concerns. Homicidal Cain, abusive Lamech, and the violence of antediluvian humanity coincide well with Brock's concern with violence. Similarly, Lamech's boorishness and the corporate aspects of the sin that precipitated the flood and the dispersion at Babel echo Daly's concerns of systemic sin and even the fallenness of language. If nothing else, it is telling that while one may read Genesis 3 in such a way that lays culpability at the woman's feet, the succeeding narrative present the sinners as principally male. But, having fallen into the same trap as the readings they reject—a narratively restrictive reading of Genesis 3 as illustrative of sin—they deny themselves rich theological resources.

Conclusion: Sin, Self and Story

Since its inception feminist theology has been concerned with sin. Eager to transpose Christian doctrine and sin in particular into language that speaks relevantly to female experience, feminist theologians have offered a range of retellings of Christian scripture and doctrine. Rejecting the patriarchal and biblically based traditional versions of sin, feminist theologians have attempted to articulate a definition of sin based off of experientially derived anthropologies. In this study we examined the movement of two theologians from anthropology to hamartiology and then critiqued the result. While in some ways their definitions of sin did open up fresh ways to speak prophetically against it, most notably structural sin, in the end their definitions of sin leave much to be desired.

A particular piece that is lacking is any sense of development, particularly the development captured in narrative. Their theology is controlled by concepts that admit of little development, concepts such as female experience and relationality. These totalizing concepts mark their work as modern and render their work of limited use in speaking freshly to culture on the issue of sin.

We saw in particular that when these notions are brought to a reading of the biblical texts regarding sin the outcomes are predetermined. The literary character of the text—and especially its narrative character—is trumped by prior philosophical and theological commitments. Accordingly, the biblical narrative and narratives are most often seen as impeding feminist theology than supporting it.

CHAPTER 3

SIN, SCRIPTURE AND STORY IN THE EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY OF WAYNE GRUDEM AND MARGUERITE SHUSTER

Perhaps no Christian subgroup is more concerned than feminist theologians with the role of sin than conservative Evangelicalism in both its Reformed and non-Reformed branches. The centrality of conversion that David Bebbington identified as a defining mark of Evangelicalism[1] is tightly linked to a precise understanding of personal complicity in the reality of human sinfulness. What is more, the doctrines of original sin and total depravity have played a significant role in Evangelical theology. Indeed, words like "Calvinist" and "Puritan" have come to be used pejoratively to describe excessive attention to human depravity and sinfulness. Evangelism and the call to conversion continue to be central to the evangelical ethos and so sinfulness, however it may be defined, remains important to the group's theological self-identity.

Whereas feminist interest in the doctrine of sin is born out of the intersection of traditional definitions and the female experience, evangelical attention to the doctrine of sin is rooted in adherence to the biblical text. Conservative Evangelical theology is biblicist; though the biblical witness is construed a certain way. As William Abraham narrates in his excellent study *Canon and Criterion*, various theological traditions responded variously to the challenge to find epistemic grounds for the faith.[2] In the previous chapter we observed the direction that feminist theology takes in this matter:

---

1. One could likewise trace a link between Evangelicalism's crucicentrism (another of Bebbington's helpful identifiers) and the centrality of sin-talk in Evangelical theology.

2. See especially chapters 5, 6 and 12 for the background to evangelical approach to scripture and chapter 16 for Abraham's evaluation of feminist theology's position. William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

grounding faith in experience. Following the Reformation, Evangelical Protestantism opted for a form of theological foundationalism that grounded the authority of the faith in Scripture alone. This move necessitated a robust doctrine of Scripture including a strong doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy.[3] The priority of the doctrine of Scripture can be seen in the structure of many evangelical theology texts where discussion of the doctrine of Scripture precedes and undergirds any of the other theological loci.

Combined with this biblicism was a rationalist and quasi-scientific approach to the theological task which regarded the theologian's responsibility as that of culling the biblical witness for data that could be synthesized into propositions and definitions. Charles Hodge offers one of the clearest statements of this theological approach. "The Bible is no more a system of theology, than nature is a system of chemistry or of mechanics. We find in nature the facts which the chemist or the mechanical philosopher has to examine, and from them to ascertain the laws by which they are determined. So the Bible contains the truths which the theologian has to collect, authenticate, arrange, and exhibit in their internal relation to each other."[4] Though phrased in less scientific language, we will see that at least one of our evangelical interlocutors has not strayed far from this definition of the theological task.

Hans Frei recounts a parallel narrative concerning theologians' approach to the historical quality of the biblical narratives in his *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*.[5] Historical criticism of the biblical narratives forced a decision between regarding the text

---

3. This legacy remains in the rather curious content of the doctrinal basis of the Evangelical Theological Society which requires entrants to agree only to the inerrancy of Scripture in the autographs and the doctrine of the Trinity. http://www.etsjets.org/about/constitution#A3. Accessed 11/29/2013.

4. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 1:1.

5. Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative; a Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

as myth or history. When faced with this choice, evangelicalism opted for history. As Frei notes, the result has been an often apologetic enterprise seeking to support the text's historical claims externally. Ironically, this has often resulted in an inattention to the specific features of the text as it has been supposed that the revelation is the event *behind* the text rather than the text itself. So despite avowed biblicism, the evangelical reader reads the event, not the text. Texts are not allowed to speak on their own, but merely point beyond themselves to the historical events they purport to record.

It was specifically on the matter of the historicity of the resurrection that evangelical spokesman Carl F. H. Henry took issue with Hans Frei in an interchange about narrative theology. Henry appreciated the narrative theologians' attention to the biblical text but was concerned that their stance toward the historical reality behind the texts was insufficient.

> Narrative hermeneutics embraces uncertainty over historicity. The primary interest of Christian interpretation need not be and is not historiography. But a narrative-dramatic approach involving kerygmatic creativity is so open to realistic theological fiction that it readily obscures historical fact and clouds the foundations of a stable faith. The Christian Gospel is inseparably dependent upon God's self-revelation and soteric sacrifice within the historical space-time continuum, and it is incumbent on those who claim that narrative story and history are not incompatible to clarify which historical specifics are nonnegotiable.[6]

---

6. Carl F. H. Henry, "Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal," *Trinity Journal* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 13 Henry's critique also reacted on the basis of narrative theology's relationship to core evangelical doctrines like inerrancy. "Narrative theologians reduce biblical historicity and inerrancy to second-order questions; historical reliability is not a basic exegetical premise, nor is biblical inerrancy. Since narrative hermeneutics focuses upon the received text, questions of what lies behind the text—such as its authorship and its historical referentiality—are bracketed. These questions, it is said, are not forefront concerns for the believer living in the biblical world" (14). Henry is right but merely demonstrates that evangelicals and narrative theologians (*pace* Abraham) search in different places for the epistemic grounding for their claims.

Because of his focus on the historicity of the text Henry overlooked many of the advantages of construing the biblical text as an overarching narrative.

Both narrative theology and evangelicalism's relationship to it have developed since Henry's initial interaction with it. All of these matters—epistemology, theological methodology, and history—are topics of active discussion in evangelical theology. In particular a work like Kevin Vanhoozer's *The Drama of Doctrine* interacts with questions of the doctrinal propositionalism and the function of the canon in the church.[7] Furthermore, the movement referred to as the "Theological Interpretation of Scripture" has been influenced heavily by criticism of dry, modern, scientific approaches to the biblical text and seeks to appropriate scripture through greater literary attention and informed by theological considerations not unlike the pre-modern guide of "the rule of faith."[8] And V. Phillips Long, among others, has made careful arguments that historical accuracy and literary shaping are not mutually exclusive.[9] Furthermore, influenced in part by N. T. Wright's articulation of the drama of Israel in *The New Testament and the People of God* there has been a marked interest in framing the entirety of scripture in the terms of an overarching narrative.[10]

---

7. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

8. Indeed, one of the seminal documents of this movement is David Steinmetz's "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis." David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *Theology Today* 37, no. 1 (Ap 1980): 27–38.

9. V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, vol. 5. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

10. Several works of biblical theology have taken up the rubric of narrative to address all of scripture or sections within it. The whole Bible: Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), the Hebrew Bible: Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), and discrete biblical books: Timothy G. Gombis, *The Drama of Ephesians: Participating in the Triumph of God* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010).

Though there are certainly movements afoot within evangelicalism seeking to reshape the movement's approach to Scripture and theology, it is clear that, broadly speaking, there is still an attachment to a biblicism that leans toward proof-texting and a preference to summarize doctrines in propositions. This is especially true at the pastoral and lay level. Hence, as was surveyed in chapter 1, there is broad acceptance of the definition of sin as found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism question 14: "What is sin? Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God."

Evangelicalism, however, is not of a piece. Reformed and non-reformed theologians approach the biblical text and discrete theological loci from different angles and with different emphases. In this chapter we will examine two approaches to the topic of sin from within different sectors of evangelicalism, in the work of Wayne Grudem and Marguerite Shuster. For our purposes Grudem represents traditional, evangelical theology and theologizing. As we will see, his approach is biblical, historical, and propositional. His work is widely read in conservative evangelical circles and his *Systematic Theology* is a popular college and seminary text. Furthermore, Grudem has continued to apply his theological method in a host of other areas: work, politics, and economics.[11] Marguerite Shuster represents a moderate, reformed, evangelical position. She uses a covenantal approach to scripture but is more open to dialog between science, history, and the biblical text. As we survey their approaches to sin we will find that their approach to Scripture and theology is the controlling factor in their interpretation much as the category of anthropology (or self) was for the feminist theologians surveyed in the previous chapter.

---

11. Wayne Grudem, *Business for the Glory of God: The Bible's Teaching on the Moral Goodness of Business* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003); Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); Barry and Wayne Grudem Asmus, *The Poverty of Nations: A Sustainable Solution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013).

SIN, SCRIPTURE, AND STORY IN THE THEOLOGY OF WAYNE GRUDEM

For our purposes, Wayne Grudem will represent the conservative end of the Evangelical continuum. This is not because he is especially influential across the broad sweep of academic Evangelicalism but because his theology and approach to Scripture represent the "old guard" of Evangelicalism, a movement that is still very much alive especially at the pastoral and lay level. His *Systematic Theology* while again, not reflecting the shifts and changes in Evangelical theological methodology, is still very popular as a college and seminary text and highly regarded at the lay level. Before we examine Grudem's theology of sin directly, we will briefly consider his relationship to feminist theology and his approach to Scripture and the theological task more broadly.

Wayne Grudem and Feminist Theology

Grudem has written extensively on what he terms "Evangelical Feminism."[12] Much of this has not been theological interaction with significant thinkers in feminist theology but rather with the movement within Evangelicalism called "egalitarianism" which argues for equality between the sexes in the church and home rather than defending role and leadership distinctions. The main focus of his work there concerns practical considerations such as male and female roles in the church, home, and society. Grudem has not offered a sustained biblical or theological critique of feminist theology and its methods, choosing instead to focus on the handling and interpretation of specific

---

12. Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006); Wayne Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism* (Sisters, Or.: Multnomah Publishers, 2006); Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (Sisters, Or.: Multnomah Publishers, 2004).

texts.[13] Since much of the debate about male and female roles is centered in the text of Genesis 1–3, we may find his approach to countering feminist readings of those texts illuminating of his approach to scripture in general and the Genesis texts in particular.

Perhaps the only point of agreement between Grudem and feminist theologians is on the sinfulness of chauvinism. "For most cultures through most of history the most serious deviation from biblical standards regarding men and women has not been feminism, but harsh and oppressive male chauvinism. It still exists today, not only in some families in the United States, but also in a number of cultures throughout the world."[14] Grudem asserts that the concept of the *imago dei* in Genesis 1:27 establishes the fundamental equality of men and women and renders unacceptable the mistreatment of women by men.

> Wherever men are thought to be better than women, wherever husbands act as selfish 'dictators,' wherever wives are forbidden to have their own jobs outside the home or to vote or to own property or to be educated, wherever women are treated as inferior, wherever there is abuse or violence against women or rape or female infanticide or polygamy or harems, the biblical truth of equality in the image of God is being denied. To all societies and cultures where these things occur, we must proclaim that the very first page of God's Word bears a fundamental and irrefutable witness against these evils.[15]

Unlike most feminist theologians, however, Grudem does not see evidence of this chauvinism inscribed in the structures of culture nor in the rhetoric of Scripture. To the contrary, he believes that the Bible repudiates male chauvinism. He does not, however, offer a comprehensive approach for reckoning with the presence and even apparent acceptance of some of these practices in scripture.

---

13. See especially Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth*.
14. Ibid., 524.
15. Ibid., 26.

Wayne Grudem, Scripture and Theology

Grudem begins his systematic theology and adverts to his theological method with a definition of systematic theology. "*Systematic theology is any study that answers the question, 'What does the whole Bible teach us today?' about any given topic.*"[16] While he acknowledges that others include consideration of historical and philosophical investigation in their definition of systematic theology, he concludes that despite what those fields may contribute, "only Scripture has the final authority to define what we are to believe."[17] Not surprisingly, therefore, he articulates the process of theological study as "collecting and understanding all the relevant passages of Scripture on any topic."[18] This definition and process appears to regard both the discipline of theology and the text of Scripture in much the same way as those who approached the Bible as the storehouse of theological facts and systematic theology as the science of organizing the data as captured in the quote from Charles Hodge included in chapter 1. What is missing is any overarching structure for the approach to scripture or narrative to orient the various parts. Apart from any other description, one must conclude that Grudem will approach all texts in an undifferentiated way.

There is, in a sense, conflicting evidence on Grudem's approach to scripture. On the one hand, one of his recent editorial projects is *Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible* which includes survey essays on the various biblical corpora and is headed by a

---

16. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), 21 (emphasis original).

17. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 22 It could be argued that Grudem is conflating theology, doctrine, and dogma in this definition. Interestingly, a later distillation of his *Systematic Theology* was perhaps more appropriately entitled *Bible Doctrine*. Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, ed. Jeff Purswell (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

18. Ibid., 35.

chapter offering "An Overview of the Bible's Storyline."[19] This idea of "the Bible's storyline" seems influenced by the movement toward narrative theology. The very notion of a "storyline" includes some concept of plot development. Additionally, as president of the Evangelical Theological Society Grudem made a call for "whole Bible exegetes" to take up the task of informing the church on what the whole Bible says on topics various.[20] Grudem has taken up this task himself on questions such as male and female roles, business, and more recently, politics and economics. On the other hand, Grudem has been sharply critical of William Webb's "redemptive-historical hermeneutic", a method that purports to read a trajectory of ethical development in scripture on topics such as slavery and women's roles in church and society.[21] While Webb does not speak in terms of narrative, his method acknowledges an unfolding not unlike that which one expects in a well-plotted narrative. Grudem, by contrast, regards the text as a doctrinally consistent whole that can be approached at any point directly with the same set of tools.

Wayne Grudem's Theology of Sin

After a brief chapter introducing the concept of systematic theology, Grudem breaks down his work into seven parts which unfold in a fairly traditional manner. As is common in biblicist theologies, part one concerns the "Doctrine of the Word of God." Only then does he turn to the doctrine of God, then man. The topic of sin finds its place

---

19. See Vern Poythress' Chapter 1 of Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds., *Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible: A Guide to Reading the Bible Well* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

20. Wayne Grudem, "Do We Act as If We Really Believe That the 'the Bible Alone, and the Bible in Its Entirety, is the Word of God Written'?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 1 (March 2000): 7.

21. William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

after a discussion of the creation of man, man as male and female, and the essential[22] nature of man.[23] The chapter on sin itself addresses the definition of sin, the origin of sin, inherited sin[24], actual sin, and the punishment of sin.

Defining Sin

Grudem starts the chapter with his definition of sin. "We may define sin as follows: *Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.*"[25] In that definition one can hear more than a mere echo of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. This "failure of conformity" extends beyond acts to include desires, evidence for which Grudem finds in the tenth commandment's prohibition of coveting. This lack of conformity is not merely a matter of acts which fail to conform to the law but includes the nature of sinful humans. Accordingly, Grudem writes that "[e]ven while asleep, an unbeliever, though not committing sinful actions or actively nurturing sinful attitudes, is still a 'sinner' in God's sight; he or she still has a sinful nature that does not conform to God's moral law."[26] He does not, however, unpack much in what this sinful nature consists. In so saying, Grudem positions himself vis-à-vis the condition vs. act polarity of sin. Sin is *both* condition and act, though the emphasis falls on act.

---

22. By "essential" Grudem speaks more to the composite parts of a human—body, soul, spirit— than to the question taken up in much feminist literature regarding the essentialist or contructivist understanding of gender.

23. On David Kelsey's reading, the move of the doctrine of sin from the area of creation to theological anthropology is just one of a series of migrations that the doctrine of sin has made, each with its own set of theological implications. David H Kelsey, "Whatever Happened to the Doctrine of Sin," *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (July 1993): 172.

24. Grudem explains his use of the term "inherited sin" as opposed to the more common "original sin" by saying that the latter term "seems so easily to be misunderstood to refer to Adam's first sin, rather than to the sin that is ours as a result of Adam's fall." He finds the phrase "inherited sin", therefore, more readily understandable. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 494.

25. Ibid., 490.

26. Ibid., 491.

Grudem acknowledges that there are other definitions of sin's essence on offer, in particular he mentions "selfishness." He finds this definition wanting, however, because the Bible doesn't define sin thus, some self-interest is approved in scripture, many sins cannot be said to be selfish, and such a definition would seem to impugn God's character since he seeks his own glory.[27] As the first point makes clear, his principal problem with defining sin as selfishness is a biblicist and propositionalist one, namely, that the Bible does not define it that way. He concludes:

> It is far better to define sin in the way Scripture does, in relationship to God's law and his moral character. John tells us that 'sin is lawlessness' (1 John 3:4). When Paul seeks to demonstrate the universal sinfulness of mankind, he appeals to the law of God, whether the written law given to the Jew (Rom. 2:17–29) or the unwritten law that operates in the consciences of Gentiles who, by their behavior, 'show that what the law requires is written on their hearts' (Rom. 2:15). In each case their sinfulness is demonstrated by their lack of conformity to the moral law of God.[28]

Grudem makes absolutely clear that God is the ultimate referent of the definition of sin. Sin's impact on other humans, the self, or the world is not emphasized. He expands slightly on the concept of sin being contrary to the *law* of God by saying that sin is what is contrary to the *character* of God. "In a universe created by God, *sin ought not to be approved*. Sin is directly opposite to all that is good in the character of God, and just as God necessarily and eternally delights in himself and in all that he is, so God necessarily and eternally hates sin. It is, in essence, the contradiction of the excellence of his moral character. It contradicts his holiness, and he must hate it."[29] But clearly the

27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 492.

controlling notion is the concrete concept of the law of God, a law that manifests God's character.

Several observations can be made at this point regarding Grudem's definition of sin. First, he approaches the biblical text expecting to find and then finding a definition of sin, a definition he later refers to as a definition of sin's essence. Second, this definition, as the quote above reveals, is heavily dependent on the more discursive texts in scripture, such as the epistolary literature. Third, sin is an assault against God. Its effects on other humans or the world are secondary at best. Fourth, sin is primarily a legal matter. While Grudem will comment on sin having the effect of damaging one's relationship with God, the relational aspect so central to other theologies is almost non-existent here. By contrast, he underscores the legal aspect several times. "In terms of our legal standing before God, any one sin, even what may seem to be a very small one, makes us legally guilty before God and therefore worthy of eternal punishment. Adam and Eve learned this in the Garden of Eden, where God told them that one act of disobedience would result in the penalty of death."[30] Fifth, sin is personal. Nowhere in the discussion of this chapter does Grudem recognize any social or corporate aspects of sin.

Sin and Genesis 3–11

It is not until his discussion of the origin of sin that Grudem engages the narrative of Genesis. His principal objective is to explain how sin came to be a part of the world. While he does not give it extended attention, he acknowledges that prior to the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden sin was already in the world through the fall of

30. Ibid., 501.

Satan and the demons.[31] From a human perspective, however, sin entered the world through Adam and Eve's act of eating of the tree as narrated in Genesis 3. There is no doubt that Grudem regards the narrative of Genesis 3 as a fall narrative. But we should note here that he already equates the situation of Satan and the fallen angels with that of humanity.

While Grudem's literalist interpretational method does not allow for Adam and Eve and their actions to be understood mythically, he still wants to find something universal or representative about their act. "Their eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is in many ways typical of sin generally."[32] So he intends to find in this originary sin further information about the definition of sin. His analysis finds that their sin offered divergent answers to the questions "What is true?", "What is right?", and "Who am I?", questions of reality, morality, and identity. Eve erred by doubting the veracity of God's word, by trusting her own judgment, and by trading subordination to God for an attempt to become like him. Grudem suggests that the narrative of the fall reveals the truth that sin is ultimately irrational; the choice of Adam and Eve to disobey was a foolish choice.

Grudem insists on the "historical truthfulness of the narrative of the fall of Adam and Eve."[33] Since the account is part of a book that is historical narrative, "so also this account of the fall of man, which follows the history of man's creation, is presented by the author as straightforward, narrative history."[34] Having regarded the text primarily as history, Grudem nowhere interacts with any of the literary features of the text, features

31. Ibid., 492.
32. Ibid., 492–93.
33. Ibid., 493.
34. Ibid.

that, as we will see in the following chapter, problematize the isolation of this narrative. He effectively decontextualizes the narrative, not only from what follows but also from what precedes it. Meir Sternberg identifies this as a principal error in the use of narrative. He notes "the tendency to read biblical texts out of communicative context, with little regard for what they set out to achieve and the exigencies attaching to its achievement. Elements thus get divorced from the very terms of reference that assign to them their role and meaning: parts from wholes, means from ends, forms from functions. Nothing could be less productive and more misleading."[35] In the case of Grudem's reading of Genesis 3, the prohibition regarding the tree is in singular focus without reference to the *prior* instructions regarding fruitfulness and dominion. Accordingly, Grudem is interpreting the event, not the text, an ironic twist given his avowed biblicism.[36] A more literary approach to this text would consider how the fall of Adam and Eve related to the *imago dei* and their call to steward the earth. It might further examine the fall out in the following chapters.

Wayne Grudem on Sin: Summary

We will reserve our critique of Wayne Grudem's theology of sin for later but we will pause here to summarize what we have seen. Grudem's approach to theology and the question of sin is thoroughly biblicist and propositional. In David Kelsey's rubric,

---

35. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 1–2.

36. Like Peter Leithart's comment in chapter 1, John Sailhamer brings this specific charge against evangelicals: "The effect of overlooking the text of Scripture in favor of a focus on the events of Israel's history can often be a 'biblical' theology that is little more than a philosophy of history, an exegetical method that is set on expounding the meaning of the events lying behind Scripture rather than those depicted in Scripture itself." John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 17.

Grudem regards the doctrines of scripture as its authoritative voice. His definition of sin, the violation of divine law, focuses on the individual's act against God. He approaches the biblical narrative text as history and therefore reads the act of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 as an isolated incident that is not informed substantially by the context nor any literary features of the text.

SIN, SCRIPTURE, AND STORY IN THE THEOLOGY OF MARGUERITE SHUSTER

As was discussed above, Marguerite Shuster occupies a different sector of Evangelicalism than does Wayne Grudem. She theologizes within the context of Reformed, covenantal theology. It will be instructive to see whether her approach to Scripture and theology or her feminine perspective shape her understanding of sin in profitable ways. Some of her work has been done in conjunction with Paul Jewett.[37] Her stand-alone volume on sin was produced in part from the late Jewett's notes and on the basis of their previous collaboration.[38] Before examining her definition of sin and the role that Genesis 3–11 play in her formulation of it, we will consider her relationship to feminist theology and its definitions of sin. Following that brief orientation we will turn to examine Shuster's handling of sin and the role that the narratives of Genesis 3–11 play in her formulation of the doctrine.

---

37. We may have cause to reference her collaborations with Jewett: Paul K. Jewett, *God, Creation & Revelation*, with sermons by Marguerite Shuster (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991) and Paul K. Jewett, and Margurite Shuster, *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human: A Neo-Evangelical Theology*, and with sermons by Marguerite Shuster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

38. Marguerite Shuster, *The Fall and Sin: What We Have Become as Sinners* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub., 2004).

Marguerite Shuster and Feminist Theology

Though the concerns of feminist theology are not of primary interest to Shuster, she writes with an awareness of the many issues that animate feminist theology. At times her work evinces the influence of feminist contributions to the theology of sin. In general, however, her position vis-à-vis the feminist theological project is a contrary one. Shuster acknowledges the feminist concern that "a traditional understanding of the Fall fosters many evils rather than setting men and women on a good and true path."[39] Likewise she acknowledges the important role that structures of sin play in the transmission of sin, though she ultimately rejects the environmental explanation as insufficient on at least biblical if not experiential grounds.[40] She comments more extensively on several other points that intersect with feminist hamartiological concerns.

The Imitation of Christ

In a provocative article Shuster confronts an issue near to the heart of feminist critiques of traditional doctrines of sin: the misuse of the idea of the imitation of Christ.[41] As we saw in chapter 2, feminist theologians like Rita Nakashima Brock react negatively to a Christian piety of self-abnegation which they link directly to the identification of the root of sin as pride and its remedy, the *imitatio Christi*, because of what they perceive to be its negative effects on women. Shuster's critique of the theology of imitation popularized by such books as *On the Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis and more

---

39. Shuster, *Fall and Sin*, 56.

40. "The environmental view [of the transmission of original sin] has widely been seen as seductive but as inadequate to the actual depth of evil (not to mention that the Bible does not speak as if the environment is the fundamental problem)." Shuster, *Fall and Sin*, 203.

41. Marguerite Shuster, "The Use and Misuse of the Idea of the Imitation of Christ," *Ex Auditu* 14 (1998): 70–81.

recently by Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps* is a biblical critique rather than an experiential one.[42] She notes a "dubious selectivity" in the appropriation of elements of Jesus's life for imitation and identifies this as another example of "our ongoing tendency to domesticate scripture, and indeed, to domesticate Jesus."[43] In the end Shuster links her concern with the piety of imitation with the doctrine of sin. She writes: "I have an overriding concern that imitation themes *taken alone* seriously underplay the effects of the Fall on all of our faculties and endeavors."[44] She fears that the impulse to imitate underestimates the severity and totality of our fallenness. Ultimately, she traces the point back to Christ. "My fundamental point is that what we need, and what the NT offers us, is first and foremost, not an example, but a Savior. My major caveat with respect to imitation themes is that they tend to obscure that fundamental point."[45] Of course, at this point it is clear that Shuster's concern with the *imitatio Christi* is far different from that of the feminist theologians. What is of interest, however, is how tightly linked the criticisms are to the understanding of sin.

Sin and Gender

Though she does not deal with gender and sin at length, Shuster does comment on this dimension of the fall and sin with the narrative of Genesis 3 as her starting point. She notes that "since the judgment pronounced bore differently on men and women, it is reasonable to conclude that differing circumstances would generate different

---

42. Sheldon's book, written at the turn of the last century, enjoyed a recent popular resurgence which was partially responsible for the "What Would Jesus Do?" movement within evangelicalism. In taking aim at this manifestation of the imitation of Christ, Shuster shows herself to be, like Brock, interested in popular piety not just theological abstraction.

43. Shuster, "Imitation of Christ," 76.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., 74.

temptations."[46] Yet Shuster sees no essential female characteristics embedded in the narrative. Instead she observes: "The tendencies labeled in our day as particular problems for women appear in the narrative itself as a result of the Fall rather than as due to the intrinsic nature of woman—a rather remarkable bit of self-transcendence for the biblical writer, who apparently did *not* blithely assume that the traditional place of women is part of the very structure of creation."[47] This last assessment, of course, runs counter to the common feminist claim that the biblical texts betray the social conventions of their day. While we will see that she finds some material in the Genesis 3 narrative fruitful for reflection along gender lines, she ultimately concludes that "both the fall narrative and our human experience are too richly textured, and our sins too convoluted, to lend themselves to entirely tidy categorization along gender lines."[48]

Beyond the narrative of the fall itself Shuster is wary of the feminist tendency to cast the discussion of sin in terms of gender. She echoes the concerns of Angela West and others when she warns women against the danger of self-exoneration. While implicitly acknowledging Valerie Saiving's concern for the inclusion of gender in the discussion of sin in principle, Shuster rejects the application of gender as the primary lens. "Swinging from paying no attention whatever to possible gender influences on behavior, to relying too exclusively on them, may allow one to fail to attend to the sins she actually commits, either because her nemesis is stereotypically that of the other gender, or because she absolves herself of responsibility for sins presumably 'wired in' by her gender identity on the grounds that she cannot help them."[49] In so saying she clearly sets herself and her

---

46. Shuster, *Fall and Sin*, 155.
47. Ibid., 58.
48. Ibid., 58–59.
49. Ibid., 157.

method apart from extreme positions like Mary Daly's but even from more moderate conclusions like those of Rita Nakashima Brock.

Feminist Definitions of Sin

Shuster explicitly rejects the notion that traditional definitions of sin need revision because they rob humans (and especially women) of dignity and risk casting them into despair. Even further, she denies that focus on individual sin should be discarded in favor of attention to sin's corporate and systemic dimensions. She writes:

> Not, of course, that we should lose sight of the labors and insights of those who have sensitized us to the devastating effects of structural and systemic evils, including oppression and discrimination in their myriad forms. Sin is not just a matter of small-scale nastiness. Nonetheless, loss of the category of sin at the individual level more surely robs us of dignity and of hope than does the most punishing 'miserable sinner' theology of another age. After all, 'miserable sinners' retain the status of those who have responsibility for their behavior and the prospects of a Savior who can deliver them. Those who are only victims of governments, cultures, psychology, or biology are shut up to whatever help compassion for their state may (or may not) evoke, whatever healing a new technology may provide, or whatever transformations the latest public reform efforts or private bootstrap operations may produce—a set of options that should not cheer the clear-eyed observer of human history. These efforts to protest individual innocence, that is, come at an extremely high—not to mention unbiblical—price.[50]

Later, Shuster explicitly counters feminist calls for more human-friendly definitions of sin in terms of weakness or brokenheartedness rather than blame and guilt. "We do not see it as merely fortuitous, and certainly not as indifferent, that many feminist discussions of 'sin' have moved away from anything that traditionally merits that name and in the direction of emphasis on our fragility and finitude."[51] After briefly

---

50. Ibid., 101.
51. Ibid., 157.

summarizing the work of Rita Nakashima Brock as representative she concludes: "One can hardly avoid the conclusion that either these authors wish to define what is traditionally meant by sin out of existence, or else they are confusing sin and certain of its effects."[52] Other than this censorious remark, Shuster's comments on feminist theology are cast more as a demurral from the feminist position rather than as a sustained critique.[53]

Marguerite Shuster, Scripture and Theology

Due to the nature of her work, Shuster's book does not offer an extended treatment of her theological methodology at the outset as does Grudem's. But since she does regard it as essentially an extension of Jewett's work, we can gather some sense of method from his earlier volumes. Jewett's discussion of theology as a science and the challenges of theological language as well as his recognition of the contributions of philosophy and history to the theological task make his account of the practice of theology more nuanced than Grudem's. He begins his work not with the doctrine of Scripture but with the doctrine of God's self-revelation in creation and providence, in Jesus Christ, and finally, in Scripture where he addresses canon, inspiration and inerrancy, articulating a nuanced but more or less evangelical position.

In a brief excursus Jewett interacts briefly with the idea of narrative theology. His conclusion, which is borne out in Shuster's handling of scripture, is that "the biblical

---

52. Ibid., 158.

53. Shuster also rejects the notion that sin, however defined, is endemic to the human condition and intrinsic to creation. "To suggest that evil is intrinsic to the creation (or to say that humankind fell not *in*, but *into* history) impugns the Creator: it implies that he lacked the power or the will to make a world and human beings that were simply good, as Genesis 1 proclaims—whether because of the limitations imposed by finitude or the recalcitrance of matter or whatever." Shuster, *Fall and Sin*, 5.

story is to be understood historically, in contrast to those who accept the more radical conclusions of historical criticism."[54] He allows that not all biblical narrative material can be read in a completely historical way, however. "This does not mean that we will look upon the Bible as a simple reporting of historical fact from cover to cover. Such an approach, in our judgment, is fraught with difficulty, especially when applied to the primal history of Genesis 1–11 with which the Bible begins, and to the Apocalypse with which it ends. We do not understand the opening Chapters of Genesis as science nor the book of Revelation as Monday morning's headlines on Sunday. But neither is the biblical story, for us, a fiction like the myths of ancient Greece."[55] Here we can see Jewett (and Shuster) trying to carve out a more nuanced historical and genre attentive stance on Scripture but we will have to see how this works out in practice.

Marguerite Shuster's Theology of Sin

Though Shuster, unlike Grudem, theologizes in the context of covenantal theology, quite quickly it becomes clear that this reference point does not have a profound effect on the definition of sin that she offers. In explicating the conditions of the covenant she declares that "The fundamental requirement of the covenant is obedience."[56] If the primary demand of the covenant is obedience, then the fundamental failure in the covenant is, by implication, disobedience. What is important to note is that unlike Grudem, the foundation for Shuster's thinking about the definition of sin is not scripture directly (consider his reference to the *definition* of sin in 1 John) but rather the

54. Paul K. Jewett, *God, Creation & Revelation*, 16.
55. Ibid.
56. Shuster, *Fall and Sin*, 17.

concept of covenant that she holds structures the divine-human relationship and provides the best framework for understanding the biblical material. However, the end result is essentially the same: sin is disobedience to divine law.

While we will offer a more sustained critique later, it is appropriate to pause here and note that summarizing the requirement of the law as obedience runs afoul of Jesus's own summary of the covenant relationship, namely, love for God and neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40). Further, we observe the conceptual affinity between offering a "definition" of sin's essence and attempting to isolate the "fundamentum" of the covenant relationship.

Unlike many other evangelical theologians, the biblical terminology for sin does not enter in to Shuster's argument significantly. She appends to her work almost as an afterthought a brief overview to the biblical vocabulary for sin. Interestingly for this study, however, is the final summary she offers which turns out to be the final statement in the book. After surveying the New Testament vocabulary for sin she summarizes: "In each case, though, God's order, norm, or standard has been breached."[57] One can see how the biblical vocabulary continues to make its presence felt even in treatments that demur from philological study as theological method.

Genesis 3–11 in Marguerite Shuster's Theology of Sin

Unlike Grudem, Shuster gives prominent and extended attention to the narrative of Genesis 3. "[T]he fall narrative has a kind of prominence due to its position in the Bible, its familiarity, and the power of the story itself that requires us to come to grips

57. Ibid., 265.

with what the story (and its place in the primal history) means."[58] Its importance for Shuster is specifically *as* a fall narrative.[59] While she acknowledges a scholarly trend to dismiss the notion of a fall as theologically useful and the Bible's silence with reference to the idea, she asserts that the concept of the fall is necessary and warranted by the narrative. "[W]e demur from the conclusion that it does not matter whether anything that can be called a 'fall' occurred in the chronological past, but only that we recognize now that things are out of joint."[60]

In her examination of the fall she finds evidence for the motivators of pride and unbelief. "While we cannot—must not—explain the Fall, we can reflect descriptively upon its nature, as laid out in the biblical story. As an act, the seizing of the fruit was an act of disobedience to the express divine command, a disobedience that the narrative implies involved both disbelief in the divine word and a coveting of the divine prerogatives (pride)."[61] It is hard to see in these comments how Shuster has avoided "explaining the Fall." But in finding both pride and unbelief in the narrative, Shuster brings together two streams of Christian thought.

The Fall, Historicity and Narrativity

Though she insists upon the importance of situating the origin of sin in the chronological past Shuster avoids making any firm statement as to the historicity of the

---

58. Ibid., 5.

59. Shuster is aware of the debate both biblically and theologically regarding receiving Genesis 3 as a fall narrative. "We must acknowledge that the contemporary predilection of many biblical scholars and theologians to give short shrift to the Fall—even at a time when there is a renewed interest in sin—does not lack reasons. It is true that the Bible itself does not speak directly of a 'fall,' nor does the rest of the Old Testament or the Gospels refer to the events of Genesis 3 as such as the source of human ills." Shuster, *Fall and Sin*, 4.

60. Ibid., 5.

61. Ibid., 49.

Genesis narratives. In this she differs from the strongly historical position that Wayne Grudem takes. Indeed, her statements on the matter verge on the contradictory. Referencing her earlier collaboration with Paul Jewett[62] she denies that the early chapters of Genesis contain "empirical, scientific reporting, or information about geography or botany or zoology or scientific anthropology," affirming instead that they give "theological insight about the nature and destiny of humankind."[63] While not scientific, it is still unproblematic for her to defend the historicity of the Fall because "to affirm the historicity of the Fall is not fundamentally different than to affirm the historicity of other central aspects of our faith."[64] At the same time she warns against attempting to "read the meaning off the brute facts."[65] She elaborates on this warning by clarifying in what sense she understands the events to be historical. "To say that the essential events to which the primal history refers took place in time and space is not, however, to suggest that we can date and locate them, or that we should assume the details of the account correspond literally to historical events that we could have recorded if only we could have supplied a video camera."[66] Rather, "We have access to that primal event through the symbols of the narrative."[67] These words signal a posture toward the historicity of the text and a procedure for interpretation that corresponds to Hans Frei's categorization of the biblical narratives as realistic narratives or Linkbeck's remark that they are history-like even if not likely history, though Shuster herself does not make these connections. Shuster further confirms her conception of the biblical narratives in comparing the situation

---

62. Paul K. Jewett, and Margurite Shuster, *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human: A Neo-Evangelical Theology*.
63. Shuster, *Fall and Sin*, 11.
64. Ibid, 10.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid., 9.

between the narratives of Adam and Christ. "In speaking of neither Adam nor Christ, neither Genesis nor the Gospels, however, can we get behind the narratives to a secure grasp of the historical details."[68]

The Covenant Context

Not surprisingly, given her Reformed context, Shuster puts the narratives of Genesis 1–3 in the context of covenant and finds details within the narrative that accord with the concept of the covenant. Orienting these narratives to covenant is part of a broader theological reading strategy in which the specific narrative is read in light of the entire canon.[69] While she does not make an extended argument for the covenantal sub-structure of Genesis 1–3 she highlights those elements amenable to such a position. Since she understands a covenant to be a relationship with God as its "supreme Disposer" she finds the centrality of a probation and the overall brevity of the account to focus "on the divine sovereignty of the arrangement."[70] The sovereign administration of this covenant relationship is further verified by the apparent arbitrariness of the prohibition against eating from the tree. The purpose of the prohibition was "to focus human obedience in terms of the will of God alone. The first couple were to obey when there was no obvious reason for the obedience other than the express commandment of God their maker."[71] Shuster later reiterates that understanding the prohibition is not important. "The key thing is not that we should understand the reason for the command, as if we could stand apart from it and judge for ourselves its validity, but that we be so related to the God who gave

68. Ibid., 8.

69. "We thus signal that we do read the primal history in the light of Scripture as a whole, while also wishing to give due weight to the narrative as it stands." Shuster, *Fall and Sin*, 6.

70. Ibid., 12.

71. Ibid., 18.

it as to receive it gladly as the expression of his will for the structuring of our lives."[72] Of course, "the fundamental requirement of the covenant is obedience."[73] Though put in a slightly broader and therefore less abstract context than Grudem, we can see that the emphasis on obedience is the same.

Reading Strategies

In contrast to Grudem's sharply historical and literal approach to Genesis, Shuster employs other reading strategies in the course of her treatment of Genesis 3. Though she doesn't apply any particular set of literary tools in her interpretation, she observes that "the narratives [of Genesis 2–3] have a particular sort of literary artistry about them that signals a kind of universal intent."[74] This universal intent prompts her to endorse a cautiously existentialist reading of the text.[75] "We are not wrong if when we hear Genesis 3:9 read—God calling out, 'Where are you?'—we hear ourselves being addressed. Thus far the existentialized view is proper. We argue only that it should not be so expressed as to deny the historical givenness and definitiveness of the original event."[76] She further defines the limits of the existential reading. In particular she is concerned that an overly existential approach might undermine Adam and Eve's individuality. "We are given our humanity as individuals and so must think of human origins in terms of individuals. Even though we have granted a certain limited validity to the existential approach to the primeval history, the persons of that history are not simply 'Everyman' and

72. Ibid., 51.
73. Ibid., 17.
74. Ibid., 9.
75. "[I]t is not only proper but necessary to read the narrative existentially as well as in terms of a past event." Shuster, *Fall and Sin*, 28.
76. Ibid., 9.

'Everywoman': note, for instance, that the story of Cain and Abel emphasizes the different behavior of the two brothers."[77] This position contrasts sharply with those readings of Genesis 3 that treat Adam and Eve as archetypes, a reading strategy demonized by some feminists and employed by others. As we saw earlier, Shuster is also eager to defend the reality of the Fall as an event in time. As a result she believes it is incautious "so to existentialize the Fall as to assume that it changed nothing but instead merely reveals the situation of Everyman and Everywoman at the moral crossroads; and that we can therefore simply identify current conditions with those that always and necessarily prevailed."[78] Shuster's semi-existential approach to the text bears some relation to a narrative approach to the text but develops the continuity of text and reader differently than does a narratival approach since the present day reader is encouraged to leap over the intervening narrative context to identify directly with Adam and Eve.

Shuster's commitment to read the text canonically and theologically is revealed in one or two places in her interpretation. For instance, though she does not develop the point extensively she references the connection between Adam and Christ. "Theologically speaking, the two Adams constitute the beginning and the end of the human story."[79] Shuster does not develop what this connection might mean for theological anthropology or for the doctrine of sin. Nor does she discuss the nature of the

77. Ibid., 13–14.

78. Ibid., 47. Such an approach contrasts with Rita Nakashima Brock's reading of the story as revealing humanity's essential broken-heartedness.

79. Ibid., 8.

Adam-Christ connection. But the reference does acknowledge the orientation of the fall narrative to a grander narrative that is somewhat typologically connected.[80]

At a few points in her interpretation of Genesis 3 Shuster employs the language of sacrament, if somewhat hesitantly. She writes of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil that "The Tree itself we might think of as sacramental, as a physical object used to convey a spiritual reality."[81] Later she writes similarly of the Tree of Life: "We would take the Tree of Life in the Garden as sacramental of this higher form of life."[82] She develops this sacramental idea a bit further when she reasons why the way to this tree was barred following the Fall. She compares the restricted access to the Tree of Life to the limited access to the sacraments under the covenant of grace. "Since it is [the sacraments'] function to be both sign and seal of the blessing of salvation, life restored in Christ, it would be at best a meaningless and at worst a sacrilegious act to partake of the outward sacraments in hopes of gaining the blessing when one has no inner conformity of heart, no faith to bring to the sacrament."[83] She even briefly considers the idea of the serpent as sacramental in a negative sense.

This brief survey reveals that Shuster employs a pastiche of reading styles or interpretational devices in her approach to Genesis 1–3: existential, sacramental, semi-historical, and covenantal. And while her general approach to the narratives is perhaps more narratival than historical, her ensuing reading, as will be made clear below is not especially literary nor narratival in approach.

---

80. We should note that Shuster nowhere employs the language of typology. But what we observe in her linking of the figures of Adam and Christ is consistent with a typological handling of these characters.

81. Shuster, *Fall and Sin*, 18.

82. Ibid., 26.

83. Ibid., 27.

Marguerite Shuster on Sin: Summary

As can be seen, Shuster's take on sin is considerably more developed and nuanced than that of Wayne Grudem. Unlike Grudem, who brings no overarching concept to his reading of the texts, Shuster subsumes her reading under the rubric of covenant. Accordingly, her definition of sin, though similar to Grudem's in its focus on violation of a divine standard, is couched in the concept of the covenant relationship. However, Shuster does not develop the concept of the covenantal relationship much so one gets the impression that the covenant is primarily one of obedience. This far too easily collapses into Grudem's more simplistic view. With a slightly looser stance to the historicity of the text, Shuster has more flexibility to attend to the features of the narrative but instead of any one approach she employs several lenses somewhat vaguely and offers comments that are at turns existentialist, mythical, and sacramental.

WAYNE GRUDEM AND MARGUERITE SHUSTER ON SIN: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

As we did with the feminist theologians in the previous chapter, we will critique our two evangelical exemplars side by side as their similarities and differences highlight important trends in evangelical theology. Once again we will consider the relationship of their thought to narrative thought broadly, how it relates to the biblical meta-narrative, and how it handles the Genesis narratives in particular. We will also consider how useful their definitions of sin are in general.

Defining Sin

As we saw, the definitions offered by Grudem and Shuster are essentially the same: sin is disobedience, understood as deviance from the divine law or the covenant demands. Shuster couches the law in the context of a covenant relationship but the results are similar. Before we consider the shortcomings, we should ask what are the strengths of this definition?

As Karl Barth comments, "When in the application of the method the thinking and teaching are biblicist if not biblical, by a happy inconsistency they could and can produce serious results."[84] And indeed, this definition produces serious results. It takes very seriously the reality of individual sin. Linking sin to the law and covenant also makes sense of much of the biblical material. Clearly much of the Pentateuch and the prophetic literature enjoins the reader to lawfulness. Despite these strengths, however, in terms of theological usefulness this definition has several weaknesses.

Sin and Humanity

Grudem's and Shuster's sin-talk implies certain anthropological commitments. Just as the definitions of sin offered by the feminist theologians we surveyed narrow the understanding of what it means to be human, so also do these evangelicals' and Grudem's in particular. The human is bound by the law of God. Human existence is not characterized so much by freedom and cooperation with the divine as it is by boundary and obedience. This focus on prohibition and violation casts the divine-human

---

84. Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. IV.1 of *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1956), 367.

relationship in strongly legal terms. That is, the divine-human relationship is cast as a law-giver to law-keeper (or breaker) relationship. While one cannot deny that legal language is used at places in Scripture to depict aspects of the human condition, there are many images of the divine-human relationship that cut against construing it primarily in legal terms. Indeed, in the context of Genesis 1–2 the language of "image and likeness" is used rather than language of any legally binding relationship.[85] James McClendon warns against the direction that these definitions lead: "Legalist theories defined sin as the breaking of the divine moral law (thus Calvin), but these fell too easily into the depersonalization of divine-human relations that the term 'legalism' reproaches."[86]

Sin and Salvation

With the emphasis on law it is not surprising, therefore, that evangelical theology has tended to emphasize legal language for salvation as well, specifically justification. This attention to justification has a long, mostly post-Reformation history. But the language of justification is surely metaphorical and therefore to privilege it over other metaphors for salvation is ill-advised. We recall Gordon Fee's observation concerning Pauline sin and salvation language that no metaphor captures all of sin and salvation, rather, images of sin and salvation come in matched pairs:

> [N]o one metaphor [for redemption] embraces the whole of Pauline soteriology. There are at least two reasons for this. First, here we are dealing with another divine mystery which is simply too large to be captured in a single metaphor. Second, and for me this is the important point, in almost every case Paul's choice of metaphor is determined by the

85. On the basis of Genesis 1:28 and 5:3 and even Luke 3:38 one might detect Father-son imagery in Genesis.

86. Jr. McClendon, James Wm., "Sin," in *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, in *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, ed. Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 445.

> aspect of human sinfulness that is in immediate purview. Slaves to sin (and law) are 'redeemed'; those in enmity to God are 'reconciled'; those who are guilty of transgressing the law are 'justified.'[87]

By defining sin so narrowly with reference to divine law, not only is the divine-human relationship construed too narrowly, but much of the rich imagery for salvation in scripture is sacrificed.

By contrast, Jesus's own distillation of the law focuses not on obedience but love. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment" (Matthew 22:37, 38). Indeed, Jesus suggests that obedience flows from love: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). This is much more in keeping with the divine character as love (1 John 4:8).

Sin and Christ

Flowing from this issue is a further one: the link between sin and Christ. In defining sin as violation of law there is no clear and implicit link to Christ. As we saw, Grudem can link the law to the character of God but there is not a logical, direct link with the person and work of Christ. With the emphasis on legal status and justification one can make a clear link to the cross of Christ construed in a sacrificial, penal substitutionary sense.[88] Not surprisingly, therefore, evangelicals are at times at a loss to explain the need for the life of Christ when it seems that his sacrificial death was all that was necessary.

---

87. Gordon Fee, "Paul and the Metaphors for Salvation: Some Reflections on Pauline Soteriology," in *The Redemption*, Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, O', and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 51.

88. This is not to deny that there is a thread of New Testament thought that supports the penal substitution theory of the atonement. Rather we acknowledge that this is not the *only* thread but point out that evangelical decisions further up the theological chain result in this being virtually the only option emphasized.

Thus there is a crucicentricity to evangelical theology but not so much a christocentricity. The focus on the law seems to make the person of Christ incidental to our understanding of the nature of humanity's plight and speaks only to its solution. But as Karl Barth and others have suggested, "[O]nly when we know Jesus Christ do we really know that man is the man of sin, and what sin is, and what it means for man."[89] Our evangelical definitions of sin in their current form do not provide us a way forward to define sin with reference to Christ.

Sin and Society

Because of its orientation to the individual and to the act, theologically Grudem's definition does not offer much of a lens for the examination and prophetic critique of structures of sin or trends that fail to promote human flourishing. There is really no way to talk about corporate sin with this definition. Feminist and liberation theologies have rightly exposed systems of sin that enslave and oppress. It is not sufficiently nuanced to suggest that these systems are merely collections of individual acts. To suggest so contradicts the clear emphasis in Genesis 1 on the corporate nature of humanity's outworking of the *imago dei* as well as in the depiction of corporate sin and punishment at the flood and the Tower of Babel, never mind the heavy emphasis on corporate sin in the storyline of Israel.

Shuster's incorporation of the concept of covenant seems promising at first since the emphasis on covenant in Scripture is on the corporate people of God (in both Testaments). However, Shuster never really develops these ideas; her definition of sin

---

89. Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 389.

though couched in the context of covenant seems as individualistic as Grudem's and she doesn't develop the idea of the purpose of the covenant relationship—a holy nation, a kingdom of priests—as a way to illuminate the deeper character of sin. In short, the covenant remains a bit of an abstract concept.

It is also not clear that biblical law covers the gamut of ways in which humanity may sin. There are many behaviors that the law does not cover, even in the context of Israel and the Torah. Furthermore, the law in scripture is a shifting reality. The laws recorded for Israel during wandering are distinct from those added on the eve of her entrance into the land. It would be impossible to enumerate a complete list of laws to articulate the full picture of the divine intention for humanity.

Finally, a further shortcoming of this legal definition of sin and salvation is that it makes use of concepts of guilt that while familiar in many western societies, are unfamiliar in other cultures. Some evangelicals have testified to the difficulty of communicating the necessity and profundity of the redemption in cultures that do not share modern, western conceptions of jurisprudence. Cultures where the concept of shame is more common than guilt are often cited as particularly resistant to juridical rendering of the cross.[90] Perhaps an expanded definition of sin could bridge these differences.

---

90. For an evangelical approach on these issues see Mark Baker and Joel B. Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in the New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Sin, the Narratives and Narrativity

From these preliminary observations about the shortcomings of these definitions, let us move now to consider the role that the narratives of Genesis 3–11 have in the formulation of these theologies. What we will see is that their approaches to these texts reveal their stance toward the issue of narrative more broadly.

Decontextualization

The single clearest criticism of both Grudem's and Shuster's theological appropriation of the Genesis narrative is their almost complete decontextualization of it. In his discussion of sin in Genesis 3, Grudem references the context of Genesis 1 and 2 minimally, only to get the prohibition that precedes the violation.[91]

Shuster's treatment of the narrative of the fall is more extended than Grudem's and she attends to the details of the narrative more closely than he does. However, like Grudem she reads the narrative of chapter 3 in isolation from the surrounding context. The extra-textual category of covenant is far more determinative for her than are the details of the surrounding context. She attends to chapters 1 and 2 more than he does but primarily to troll for details that will undergird her covenantal reading of chapter 3. Though her book length treatment of sin offers her more space to consider other biblical evidence, the narratives following Genesis 3 receive virtually no attention whatsoever. While many commentators have noticed the deluge of sin in these chapters the theological commitment of both Grudem and Shuster cut them off from making much of

91. Grudem, of course, interacts with those chapters in his sections on creation and humanity.

the details. Once the covenant (Shuster) or law (Grudem) is breached there is not much more to be said about sin.

Historicization

A further error that both make concerns the literary quality of Genesis 1–3. Neither pays much attention to the literary features of the text, though Shuster is more attentive than Grudem. Grudem's principal category for the biblical text is historical, not literary. As we saw, he insists on the literal, historical interpretations of the biblical events. Viewed as an historical event, the fall of Adam and Eve can have a single meaning apart from any surrounding events. In focusing so narrowly on this text, Grudem is guilty of Crites's charge of contraction. He has isolated a singular moment in the narrative as that which is ultimately explicative. But this decision flows logically from the categorization of the text as history rather than narrative. Context and literary features are secondary to the event behind the narrative. His approach to narrative is not especially attentive to literary features and he shows a preference for the more discursive portions of scripture. Indeed, as we saw he holds that 1 John 3:4 "Sin is lawlessness" is the biblical definition of sin. This definition is then brought to the text of Genesis 3 where it is confirmed.

David Clines warns against the dangers of overlooking the narrative quality of the biblical text and relegating it to some other genre: "When we say: this is myth, this is legend, this is history, this is poetry, this is hyperbole, we are not looking at the story, but straight through it, at what may be behind it."[92] John Sailhamer, himself an evagelical

92. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 104.

reacts against such historicizing of the biblical narratives. He writes: "To say that the text is an accurate portrayal of what actually happened is an important part of the evangelical view of Scripture, but it does not alter the fact that God's revelation has come to us through an inspired text, and thus no amount of delving into the history of Israel as an event apart from the text can take the place of the meaning of the scriptural text."[93] Because it is a text and a narrative text at that, to be faithful to it one must attend to its literary features; it is the text that is revelatory, not the event.[94]

Story and Illustration

Grudem's historical approach leads him to two movements that both run afoul of a narrative sensitive appropriation of the text. First, using the categories provided by Michael Root, Grudem puts the narrative of Genesis 3 in an illustrative relationship with the reader's life rather than a storied relationship. As Root explains, on this approach "[t]he story illustrates certain redemptive truths about self, world, and God."[95] The reader can make a direct link from the narrative to themselves: This is what sin is like. The story of sin and the depiction of humans does not offer categories to help illuminate the present

93. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 18.

94. Grudem's historical argumentation is on clearest display in his interaction with William Webb on the topic of male headship in Genesis 2. Webb asserts that one must be careful how much male authority should be read into Genesis 2 on the grounds that some of what is portrayed there is for literary effect rather than to describe historical facts in the garden. Webb suggests that evidence of patriarchy in the garden is for the purpose of foreshadowing the fall in chapter 3. To this Grudem replies: "Webb is saying that patriarchy did not exist in the garden *in actual fact*, but the author placed hints of it in the story as a way of anticipating the situation that would come about after there was sin in the world. This then is also an explicit denial of the historical accuracy of the Genesis 2 account." Whether Webb or Grudem is right is immaterial. What is clear is that Grudem essentially denies any literary or artistic features to the text as modes of explanation of what the text means. Further, the literary relationship between the chapters is not considered. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth*, 115.

95. Michael Root, "The Narrative Structure of Soteriology," in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 266.

but rather articulates realities, essences, and natures that purport to define the contemporary person. Even more specifically it illustrates a proposition about sin—sin is lawlessness— that is found elsewhere. There is a strange tension here for Grudem. On the one hand, because of his historicist approach to the text, the narrative of Genesis 3 is a discrete, unrepeatable event in history. At the same time, he wants to claim that "Their eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is in many ways typical of sin generally."[96] That is, he wants this sin to be representative somehow, but his historical method does not offer any way for the contemporary reader to be in that sort of relationship to the original event. Illustrations highlight one point of the text like Aesop's fable. But narratives invite the reader into a variety of themes and tensions.[97] Thiselton writes, "Models that stress 'history' are...insufficient, for history may be understood in bland ways that do not preserve and convey the 'dramatic tension' that inheres in Christian doctrine."[98] Indeed, Grudem's rather bland reading of the narrative of Genesis 3 as an example of law violation overlooks many themes in the text that could prove fruitful for examining the human condition: knowledge, blame, nakedness, shame, covering and death.

---

96. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 492–93.

97. David Ford puts this observation in terms of the "middle distance" of the biblical narratives where the perspective is neither too narrowly focussed on one character nor too broadly construed. Grudem and Shuster's approaches err toward the latter of these regarding which Ford comments. "[I]f one takes too broad an overview and subsumes the particular people, words, and actions into a generalization, a trend, or a theory, the middle distance loses its own integrity and becomes, at best, evidence or supportive illustration." David F. Ford, "System, Story, Performance: A Proposal About the Role of Narrative in Christian Systematic Theology," in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 195.

98. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 68–69.

Shuster's thinking about the how to regard the historicity of the fall and even her cautious existentialist approach to the text signal a step away from the sharp historical literalism of Grudem toward a more narratival appropriation of the text. Similarly, Shuster rightly recognizes the deep significance of the tree and the serpent but elects to see them as quasi-sacramental rather than narratively informed. The on-going role that both trees and serpents have to play in the biblical drama does not enter into her consideration. Clines warns against this existentialist reading by suggesting a more nuanced narrative approach. "The Pentateuch thus does not admit of a purely existentialist reading, however deeply it probes the character of human existence and however sharply it challenges the reader existentially. The theme of the Pentateuch is entirely concerned with a future bound to a past out of which the present lives."[99]

Story and Eschatology

In their handling of sin and Genesis 3 both Grudem and Shuster fall short of a rich understanding of the narrative development of doctrine by finding a doctrine of sin fully formed in Genesis 3. Thiselton critiques this method of theologizing on the basis of its eschatological outlook. "An overrealized eschatology will err on the side of conceiving of God (and doctrine) as 'already defined.' Here God becomes entirely 'the God of propositional revelation' without as it were loose ends. This system is closed rather than open."[100] There is no space for development in the understanding of sin and Grudem's

---

99. David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 10 (Sheffield, Eng.: Dept. of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield, 1978), 116.

100. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 64 Thiselton goes on to warn about the opposite danger, an error we diagnosed in Rita Nakashima Brock. "On the other hand, a one-sided futurist eschatology risks conceiving of God as 'not yet defined,' akin to the God of process theology."

definition of it. Sin is a violation of divine law and Genesis 3 handily illustrates just such a definition.

But it is just these fixed senses of sin, the self and salvation that are a hallmark of modernist thinking. Contemporary thought pushes toward construing the self and the broader environment much more dynamically even if not always in the language of narrative. Stanley Grenz says of the contemporary sense of the self: "[A]ny semblance of meaning in the present is linked to at least a rudimentary sense of narrative continuity with a meaningful past and a conceivable future, which gives the impression that the person is en route from somewhere to somewhere and hence that the persons's narrative constitutes some type of a whole."[101] We conceptualize self and the world with some sense of telos, of direction. Scripture evinces this eschatological orientation but the definitions of sin and the human that these theologians present suggest no inherent direction or eschatology.

Escaping the Story

As we saw in the previous chapter, Stephen Crites suggests that there are two main ways that thinkers seek to "break the sense of narrative time": abstraction and contraction. The evangelical approaches to Genesis 3 and the topic of sin evince a form of abstraction, "the formulation of generalized principles and techniques."[102] One move that Wayne Grudem makes in particular reveals a departure from the biblical narrative.

---

101. Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, Matrix of Christian Theology, vol. 1. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 135.

102. Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 85.

Grudem asserts that prior to the fall in Genesis 3 “sin was already in the world” through the fall of Satan and the demons. This has a couple of effects. First, it equates demonic and human sin such that there is nothing distinct about human sin. Attached as it is to divine law, sin has become an abstract concept that can be applied in an undifferentiated way to humans and spirit beings quite apart from the separate narratives that they inhabit. Further, it distorts the flow of the biblical narrative. Nowhere is the fall of Satan and the demons specifically narrated. It is, from the perspective of Genesis at least and perhaps the entirety of scripture, irrelevant to the question of the human condition. But what it does to the story of God with humanity is push the real entrance of sin into the world before the events narrated in Genesis 3. Grudem treats this as if it is relevant back story when clearly the biblical authors and the author of Genesis in particular did not regard it so.

The single most significant hermeneutical and theological decision that Shuster makes is to set the narrative of Genesis 3 in the context of covenant. This is her way of orienting the events into a larger framework. There is little doubt that the context of covenant provides more depth than does Grudem’s more atomistic reading. It also provides useful links in moving forward through the canon. However, her use of covenant appears to be an example of narrative avoidance through abstraction. Shuster attempts to read the narrative through the lens of covenant and fits the narrative to that setting. This requires a selective reading of the narrative, muting those elements that do not accord with a covenantal reading. In particular it mutes the clear theme of the image of God as that which is descriptive of the divine-human relationship and wherein the humanity finds its identity and mission. Additionally, it requires one to read against the

grain of the narrative. The language of covenant, which is certainly thematic in the book of Genesis and beyond, does not appear until chapter 6:18 with reference to the flood. To assume that the narrative can be read better by importing the concept of covenant into the narrative earlier than the narrator introduces it works against the plot function that the narrator intends the theme of covenant to play. As it is written, covenant plays a role in the administration of the divine-human relationship *after* it has been compromised. John Goldingay notes: "By not speaking of the relationship between God and the first human beings as a covenant, Genesis has perhaps implied that there was no need for formally binding commitments before the time of human disobedience and divine punishment."[103]

CONCLUSION: SIN, SCRIPTURE, AND STORY

The feminist theologians we surveyed in the previous chapter were driven in their theological task and attitude toward scripture by their experiential theological methodology. This resulted in their virtual dismissal of the biblical text and definitions of sin that while tightly linked to their understanding of the human experience, ran roughshod over the biblical material and the centrality of Christ even as they were able to speak relevantly to particular human problems. In this chapter we have seen in two evangelical theologians a similar distortion of the Genesis narrative and difficulty in connecting sin, the self and Christ. Armed with a biblicist theology, a propositionalist approach to doctrine and a historical and atomistic approach to texts, Grudem brings a definition of sin as violation of God's law to his reading of Genesis 3 and finds that the narrative there illustrates his expectation. Shuster, reading the narratives through her

---

103. John Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, Old Testament Theology, vol. 1. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 181.

covenantal lens, similarly finds evidence of covenant and its breach—disobedience—in the narrative. Neither looks much further in the Genesis narrative for help in understanding sin. And for both, the simple, individualistic definition of sin has impact in the coherence of their theology and, in particular, their ability to link humanity and its fall with Christ and his remedy.

CHAPTER 4

STORIES OF SIN:
THE NARRATIVE DEPICTION OF SIN IN GENESIS 3–11

To this point we have made the case that definitions of sin offered by various feminist and evangelical theologians are inadequate and that this inadequacy can be traced at least in part to their handling of narrative in general and in specific the narrative of the so-called "fall" in Genesis 3. As we have seen this is because these theologians tend to approach the text atomistically, that is, excised from its broader literary framework, and historically (evangelicals) or ideologically (feminists), rather than narratively. Furthermore, there has been a tendency to contract focus to single details or to abstract concepts from their narrative embedding to serve explicative functions. As a result, they tend to set the reader in an illustrative relationship with the narrative rather than in a storied relationship. It is our purpose in this chapter to begin to redress these moves by offering a more contextual and narrative-attentive reading of the depiction of sin in Genesis 3–11. In the following chapter we will examine what such a reading offers a theology of sin.

We will begin by demonstrating the narrative unity and character of Genesis 1–11. We will highlight some of the overarching narrative movements in this section. Then we will move to offer a reading of Genesis 3–11 with an eye to the depiction of sin. Finally, we will draw together the data regarding the narrative presentation of sin in these chapters.

GENESIS 1–11 IN ITS LITERARY CONTEXT

While the theologians we have surveyed isolate individual narratives for theological appropriation, commentators are almost unanimous in their recognition of the unity of Genesis 1–11 and warn against its atomization. Nahum Sarna declares that "a fragmentary approach to it cannot provide an adequate understanding of the whole. To be preoccupied with the smallest units of literary tradition may have its purposes; but the exercise is ultimately of limited value. A totality—things in combination—often possesses properties and engenders qualities neither carried by nor necessarily inherent in any of its discrete components."[1]

What this survey will demonstrate is that Genesis 1–11 is both closely connected to what follows yet distinct in important ways. Because of both this uniqueness and connectivity, it is legitimate to approach it theologically as a textual whole.

The Role of Genesis 1–11 in the Book of Genesis

The structure of the Pentateuch and Genesis in particular has been a topic of debate for centuries. Many early debates were driven by the findings of source criticism and its identification of seams in the narrative that suggested the stitching together of disparate sources by various redactors, most notably the Jahwist, Elohist, Priestly, and Deuteronomist. In their pursuit of the early forms of Israelite religion in the earliest forms of the text, these studies emphasized the *disunity* of the Pentateuch over its later unity. In recent decades research has focused more on the final form of the text and attempting to

1. Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis = Be-Reshit: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, commentary by Nahum M. Sarna, JPS Torah Commentary. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), xviii.

discern and explain the structure of entire books (Genesis) or collections of books (the Pentateuch). This is especially true of those methods of interpretation interested in the literary character of the biblical texts.[2] Once attention returned to the final form and literary features of the text, the door opened to discover the structural, literary and thematic connections tying the books together. Nevertheless, there is considerable debate about the fundamental structural features of the book of Genesis as well as how the various parts, and particularly Genesis 1–11, relate to the whole.

The *Toledot* Formula of Genesis

Much of the discussion of the structure of Genesis has focused on the so-called "*toledot* formula." Ten times in the book of Genesis a new section of the narrative begins with the Hebrew phrase אֵלֶּה תוֹלְדוֹת (usually translated "these are the generations of...". These occur at Genesis 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10 and 27; 25:12 and 19; 36:1 and 37:2 and reference, respectively, the generations of "the heavens and the earth", Adam, Noah, the sons of Noah, Shem, Terah, Ishmael, Isaac, Esau, and Jacob. As the references make clear the repetition of the formula is combined with an asymmetry in the length of the

2. Wenham judiciously expresses the contribution of the two approaches: "Literary criticism tells us what the stories meant to the final editor; source criticism, how he composed Genesis." Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), xxxiv. Meir Sternberg warns against simplistic rejection of source criticism's findings in favor of literary methods. "Not even the widely accepted constructs of geneticism, like the Deuteronomist, lead an existence other than speculative. Small wonder, then, that literary approaches react against this atomism by going to the opposite extreme of holism. But the excesses and fruitlessness of traditional source criticism no more legitimate the waving aside of its available data than they illegitimate its goals." Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 13.

accounts and in the figures referenced.[3] Further, it is important to note that in several cases, the narrative following a *toledot* formula focus more on the descendants of the titular figure rather than on the figure himself.

Many, though recognizing the importance of the formula, demur from according it primary significance in understanding the book of Genesis. Gary Smith, for instance, while acknowledging the attraction of the *toledot* formula for the interpretation of Genesis, warns against overlooking other details. "The primary structural characteristic that most identify is the recurring heading, 'These are the generations of....' A more thorough look at the structural unity of the repeated and interrelated themes and phrases indicates that a much more significant creative design is embedded in the structure of Genesis 1–11."[4] And David Carr, though generally agreeing that the *toledot* formula is intended as a structuring device, acknowledges that it is ultimately not up to the task. "In sum, Gen 2,4(a) and the other genealogical headings throughout Genesis form an overall structural framework for the book, yet they do not always fully master the material they label."[5] A good example of this is in the *toledot* of Noah's family which appears to be broken off for the insertion of the narrative of the Tower of Babel, only to be picked up again thereafter. It is likely that a thematic impulse is at work in the structuring of these narratives, not merely the genealogical.

So opinions on the structural importance of the *toledot* formula vary widely from viewing it as evidence of the documentary hypothesis (and therefore the fragmentary

---

3. Note that the fourth *toledot* references not one figure, but three (Shem, Ham and Japheth), and that Shem receives his own *toledot* shortly thereafter.

4. Gary V. Smith, "Structure and Purpose in Genesis 1–11," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20, no. 4 (D 1977): 310.

5. David Carr, "Biblos Geneseos Revisited: A Synchronic Analysis of Patterns in Genesis as Part of the Torah (Part One)," *Zeitschrift Für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 110, no. 2 (1998): 170.

character of Genesis) to asserting it as the key to the interpretation of the entire book.[6] For our purposes the *toledot* offers tidy textual divisions, the significance of which other evidence may explain if the *toledot* formula itself does not. Accordingly, our focus will be on the first five *toledot* sections: the heavens and the earth (2:4–4:26); Adam (5:1–6:8); Noah (6:9–9:29); Noah's sons (10:1–11:9), and Shem 11:10–26.[7] For convenience we will often refer to this as Genesis 1–11 though chapter 11 has six additional verses beyond the last *toledot*.

Theme and Focus

Though the *toledot* formula provides a unifying structure to the entire book of Genesis, readers of the book have long noticed the distinct stylistic and literary differences between chapters 1–11 and the remainder of the book. There are features of the text that are prominent in the primeval history yet absent in the remainder of the book: genealogies, etiologies, and poetry. Westermann sees these features setting the primeval narrative apart. "This is the only place in the Old Testament where genealogies and narratives are put together in such a way. It is this that gives the primeval story its unique character."[8]

The focus of the material seems distinct as well. Wenham observes: "The opening chapters have a universal perspective dealing with all mankind and are obviously related in some way to other oriental traditions about creation, flood, and the origins of arts,

---

6. Woudstra offers a helpful, if brief, overview of the way in which the *toledot* formula has been regarded. See Marten H. Woudstra, "Toledot of the Book of Genesis and Their Redemptive-Historical Significance," *Calvin Theological Journal* 5, no. 2 (N 1970): 184–89.

7. It is generally agreed that Genesis 1:1–2:3 represent a prologue to the book which is structured along the lines provided by the *toledot* formula.

8. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984), 3.

crafts, and the nations. Chaps. 12–50, on the other hand, deal almost exclusively with Israelite concerns."[9] Many others have voiced this observation.[10] The stylistic and thematic differences set the first eleven chapters apart from what follows.

Wenham regards Genesis 1–11 as essentially a prologue with the book's emphasis lying with the patriarchal narrative. "Clearly Gen 1–11 serves simply as background to the subsequent story of the patriarchs, and their history is in turn background to the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt and the law-giving at Sinai which forms the subject matter of Exodus to Deuteronomy."[11] As we have seen, it is certainly literarily distinct from what follows it. Specific vocabulary from these early chapters is not thematic in the remainder of the book. But Wenham overlooks how many of the themes of the prologue are continued in the patriarchal narrative. This leads Lim to conclude that "Gen 1–11 functions not merely as a prologue but sets the stage for what is to follow. These chapters are the 'seed plot' for the subsequent chapters."[12] Themes such as the conflict between brothers, issues in child-bearing, and food shortages find their root in the primeval narrative.[13]

---

9. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, xxii.

10. Robert Gonzales suggests the differences are threefold. "First, the primeval narrative focuses on human history in general, whereas the patriarchal narrative focuses on Jewish history in particular. Second, the primeval narrative follows a fast pace and spans long periods of time, whereas the patriarchal narrative slows the tempo and spans only four generations. Third, many scholars see a shift in thematic emphases." Robert Gonzales, *Where Sin Abounds*, 2.

11. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, xlv.

12. Johnson T.K. Lim, *Grace in the Midst of Judgment: Grappling with Genesis 1–11*, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft (Berlin ; New York: W. de Gruyter, 2002), 191.

13. While David Clines is convinced that the primeval narrative is sufficiently unique to warrant its own theme distinct from the overall theme of the Pentateuch, he nevertheless sees that some of its discrete themes can be traced deeper into the book of Genesis. "The universal famine of the Joseph story is a counterpart to the primeval universal deluge; the strife between Joseph and his brothers, which is resolved in reconciliation, brings to a happy conclusion the fraternal rivalry that begins with Cain and Abel and runs throughout the patriarchal stories." David J. A.

On the basis of its plot Claus Westermann also finds the content of Genesis 1–11 to be distinct from what follows. "As for the content of the narrative sections, the three groups described above (creation, achievements, crime & punishment) belong exclusively to the primeval story; there is no sign of them in the patriarchal cycle, even though the story of Sodom and Gomorrah has something of crime and punishment about it."[14] In his ensuing analysis he focuses particularly on the trope of crime and punishment. This is the distinctive feature of the primeval plotline. "The first sign that we are dealing here with a special kind of primeval story is that, besides the creation stories and genealogies, there are only stories with this particular theme," viz. crime and punishment.[15]

Summarizing these differences, Westermann concludes that they amount to a demand for a separate interpretational approach.

> [Chapters] 1–11 of Genesis must be regarded as a separate element of the Pentateuch, that is, as a relatively self-contained unity, and not primarily as a part of 'Genesis.' It is a relatively late component. The point of departure of our exegesis then cannot be those literary types whose form and content have been discovered in Gen 12–50. Such cannot be imposed on chs. 1–11. Nor can we without more ado apply the theological plan which draws together the patriarchal cycle to the story of primeval events. We must recognize this story as a distinct unity, as a separate element of the Pentateuch, and take it as our starting point."[16]

These differences justify viewing the section as a distinct literary unit.

Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 10 (Sheffield, Eng.: Dept. of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield, 1978), 85.

14. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 19.
15. Ibid., 47.
16. Ibid., 2.

The Role of Genesis 1–11 in the Pentateuch

For some time it has been generally acknowledged that in its final form Genesis does not stand on its own but is part of a larger literary work, the Pentateuch. Accordingly, it is legitimate to assess the character and role of Genesis 1–11 in light of that larger whole.

The Structure of Genesis 1–11 and the Structure of the Pentateuch

Genesis 1–11 resists tidy genre categorization in part due to its terse style but also because of the interspersing of poems and genealogical material between the narratives. Some suggest that this confirms the patchwork nature of these early chapters. John Sailhamer, however, sees these insertions as part of a larger strategy. The Pentateuch, he argues, is meant to be read as a unity and Genesis 1–11 "form an introduction to both the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch as a whole."[17] But, while he accords importance to Genesis 1–11 in the overall structure of the Pentateuch, he is dismissive of the programmatic nature of the *toledot* formula. He notes that the formula fails to cover the entire Pentateuch or, even within Genesis itself, the Abraham narratives.

What Sailhamer proposes instead not only supports the unity of Genesis 1–11 but answers some objections regarding the diverse genres encountered in those chapters: narrative, poetry, and genealogy. Literarily, he calls attention to the alteration between narrative and poetic texts. He sees a compositional strategy in miniature in Genesis 1:1–12:3 that foreshadows a similar strategy that is pursued at the macro level of the Pentateuch. In Genesis 1–11 he sees the pattern of narrative, poem, and epilogue which

---

17. John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 81.

sets up the following narrative. For instance, the narrative of the creation of the man and the woman is followed by the man's poem (Genesis 2:23) and an epilogue (Genesis 2:24, 25). This pattern repeats throughout Genesis 1:1–11:26.[18] This pattern suggests that the final editor of the Pentateuch intended these chapters to be introductory at least stylistically and probably thematically, as we shall see below.

Theme of Genesis 1–11 and the Theme of the Pentateuch

Several scholars have attempted to discern the theme of the Pentateuch and the role of various sections within it to contribute to that theme. We already observed that Westermann sees these chapters as distinct from the rest of Genesis and the Pentateuch.

David Clines was one of the first to attempt to articulate a theme for the entire Pentateuch. Clines was convinced that the Pentateuch should be approached as a narrative whole.[19] He therefore sought to offer an overarching theme on the basis of its plot. He concluded: "The theme of the Pentateuch is the partial fulfillment—which implies also the partial non-fulfillment—of the promise to or blessing of the patriarchs. The promise or blessing is both the divine initiative in a world where human initiatives always lead to disaster, and a re-affirmation of the primal divine intentions for man."[20] However, he further found that he could not easily reconcile Genesis 1–11 with that theme. "Not only is its material temporally prior to the first statements of what is to be the theme of the rest of the Pentateuch, and therefore hardly capable of being subsumed

---

18. John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 35.

19. "The first way begins from the recognition that the Pentateuch is essentially a *narrative*. To suppose that because it is 'torah' it is therefore 'law' is a fatal mistake." Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 102.

20. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 29.

under that theme, but also the tendency of Genesis 1–11 is apparently in quite a different direction from that of the remainder of the Pentateuch."[21] After surveying the suggestions on offer, Clines determined that the theme of the primeval narrative was Creation-Uncreation-Recreation. We will look at this theme more below.

Sailhamer agrees with Clines that the Pentateuch ought to be approached as a narrative whole. He has spent more effort than most discerning its overall shape. He is convinced that Genesis 1–11 serve as an introduction to both the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch as a whole.[22] He reads the Pentateuch as a narrative that contrasts the lives of Abraham and Moses as representatives of faith and law, respectively.[23] And though the specific narratives of Genesis 1–11 appear infrequently in the remainder of the Pentateuch, Sailhamer maintains that they are fundamental.[24]

Thematic and Typological Foreshadowing

Sailhamer's observations about the role of Genesis 1–11 in the Pentateuch go beyond the structural patterning described above. He sees a variety of themes in Genesis 1–11 that recur throughout the Pentateuch. The "seed" spoken of in Genesis 3:15 is an important motif. The tension between good and evil in the early chapters foreshadows the later distinction between clean and unclean. He goes on: "the tabernacle is portrayed as a return to the Garden of Eden. The instructions given to Noah for building the ark

---

21. Ibid., 15.

22. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 81.

23. "[T]he Pentateuch is an attempt to contrast the lives of two individuals, Abraham and Moses. Abraham, who lived before the Law (*ante legem*), is portrayed as one who kept the law, whereas Moses, who lived under the Law (*sub lege*), is portrayed as one who died in the wilderness because he did not believe." Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 61–62.

24. Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 289.

foreshadow those given to Moses for building the tabernacle."[25] Though we do not have space to unpack all of Sailhamer's claims, it is clear that there are strong textual and thematic links between Genesis 1–11 and the remainder of the Pentateuch.

The relationship between the events narrated in Genesis 1–11 and the remainder of the Pentateuch at times borders on the typological. Sailhamer writes: "In the writing of historical narrative, events of the past often find new meaning and significance in relation to certain issues and ideas present in the author's own day."[26] Sailhamer believes that typology is the best way to describe how the author understood the relationship between these various events.[27]

THE NARRATIVE CHARACTER OF GENESIS 1–11

The observations above have already begun to hint that Genesis 1–11 exhibits more than structural unity; equally compelling is the narrative cohesion of the text. Attention to the literary features of the text quickly leads one away from textual or theological atomization of the primeval narrative. As Thomas Brodie points out, these methods of textual binding can be obscured if the text is approached as history. "If Genesis is defined initially as history, even antiquarian history, then it indeed lacks unity. But once allowance is made that the genre is more complex, that it uses history as a mantle for artistry—literary art that is theology-oriented—then it begins to emerge as

25. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 39.
26. Ibid., 31.
27. "[O]ne can also view the similarities as part of a larger typological scheme intending to show that future events are often foreshadowed in past events." Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 37.

unified."[28] Yet due to the apparently arbitrary interspersing of short narratives, poems and genealogies it is not surprising that many have adopted an atomistic and episodic approach to reading it. Brodie goes on, however, to argue that the format is intentional. "What is essential is that Genesis is not a collection of episodes that are loosely connected or poorly edited...Rather, it uses episodes and episodic technique as gradual steppingstones within a larger narrative development of moving from myth to history, from obscurity to clarity, from the fragmented world of expulsion and murder to a unified account of acceptance and reconciliation."[29] Brodie is suggesting not mere literary development but a development of a particular sort, one with a narrative cast and direction. We will address briefly how the narrative character and plot of Genesis 1–11 hold it together as a unity.

Poetic Structure, Narrative Effect

We have already had cause to consider Sailhamer's theory regarding the relationship between the internal structure of Genesis 1–11 and the remainder of the Pentatuech. Sailhamer also suggests that the poems in the primeval narrative have not only a structural function but a literary one as well. The poems play an important role in the closure of each episode since they represent "the final word of the central character of that narrative."[30] The poems are not just a simplistic way for the narrator to editorialize. "Instead, they express the author's understanding of the events of the narratives as they are mediated through the viewpoint of the central character(s). The reader sees the

---

28. Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11.
29. Ibid., 15.
30. Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 34.

narratives as if he or she were one of the characters in the narrative. Rather than having to rely on didactic comments by the author or the narrator, the reader learns the meaning of the narratives firsthand, just as the characters within the narratives learn it by experiencing it."[31] What Sailhamer is seeing is a distinctly narrative feature of these texts. Not only are the texts moving from one to the next, but the style is designed to draw the reader in as a participant. In addition to confirming the narrative connectivity of these chapters, the pattern also sets them apart as a unity. Sailhamer concludes: "Viewed as a whole, Genesis 1–11 follows a recognizable compositional strategy that links together an otherwise loose collection of independent narratives. The strategy consists of attaching poems to the end of each narrative."[32] This observation steers the reader away from regarding these chapters as merely history and toward something richer.

Narrative Time and Characterization

We already noted the manner in which the content in the first eleven chapters of Genesis differs from the remainder of the book. The distinct way these chapters handle time and character set these chapters apart for narrative if not theological reflection. Concerning time, the section offers little in the way of chronological markers common to narrative. However, it employs genealogies effectively to develop the sense of history and passage of time.

This distinct narrative focus can be seen particularly when the matter of characterization is considered. While characterization is important for narrative, Genesis 1–11 presents a challenging case. As Brodie points out, "Characterization...appears

31. Ibid., 319.
32. Ibid., 35.

slowly. There is only a minimum amount of characterization in chapters 1–11; Adam, Eve, and Noah are scarcely sketched."[33] This is seen most sharply in contrast to the narratives following Genesis 11 where Abraham, Jacob and Joseph are developed more fully as characters. In Genesis 1–11, many characters remain nameless, and many that are named, such as Abel and Lamech's wives, Adah and Zillah, are little more than props in narratives focusing on other characters. Where characterization occurs it is selective though significant. For instance, the serpent is described as "more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made" (Genesis 3:1). In contrast, the narrator describes Noah as "a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9).

That said, it is clear that the most fully developed character in these narratives is God.[34] God is depicted principally through action and speech, though the two are difficult to separate at places. Humphreys notes that little or no physical description of God is offered in Genesis or elsewhere in Scripture and that the reader is given little insight into God's internal mental processes.[35] We shall see that the development of God's character is an important part of the reading of both the development of humanity and human sinfulness.

The paucity of human characterization may be a unique feature of the narrative, especially as compared to other biblical narratives where characters are developed more

---

33. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 13.

34. Humphrys writes, "If the book of Genesis as a whole is an extended (by biblical standards) narrative with a distinct plot, or at least a patterning that binds it into a whole, then the character of God, through what he does and says, is critical to its development." W. Lee Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 11.

35. Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis*, 12.

fully. But it may also point in another direction. Westermann notes that the word for "man" is thematic in Genesis 1–11. "The concentration of the word [אדם] in Gen 1–11 is in marked contrast to Gen 12–50 where it occurs only in 16:12. This indicates that אדם in the Old Testament describes a human being without further qualification. The passages in Gen 1–11 deal with the creation of humanity and the limitations of the human state."[36] Since many have noted the universal character of these chapters, is it possible that the character that the narrator is seeking to develop is not Adam, Eve or Noah, but humanity? If this is the case, then the material in these chapters is much richer in characterization. Furthermore, such an observation steers the reader away from sharp characterization of males and females as is common in feminist interpretation. In either case, these chapters share a narrative style frugal in characterization that sets them apart from what follows.

Plot Structure

Shamai Gelander comments that the development of plot constitutes the most compelling evidence for the unity of Genesis 1–11. "I would argue that Genesis 1–11 is constructed so as to form a single linear narrative sequence. This can be demonstrated by considering its literary features, but principally by unravelling the conflict of the linear plot."[37] Clines and Westermann have adverted to the cycle of crime and punishment that characterizes these chapters. But the development is more than merely episodic. In the reading that we will offer below we will attend to features that stitch adjacent narratives together. But here we want to sketch one of the overarching plot movements that influences theological appropriation of the text.

---

36. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 202.

37. Shamai Gelander, *The Good Creator: Literature and Theology in Genesis 1–11*, South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1997), 6.

Perhaps the most theologically significant literary features of Genesis 1–11 is the clear parallels between creation and the fall and the flood and its aftermath. This is the Creation–Uncreation–Recreation theme of which Clines wrote.[38] The flood and what follows seem consciously crafted to suggest a recreation and second "fall." Brodie sees this as one of the main structuring features of the primeval narrative. "[T]he drama of Genesis 1–11 consists of two acts (1–5 and 6–11), and each act contains three two-part scenes. In simplified terms, the three scenes of act 1 (chaps. 1-5) are grounded on Adam; those of act 2 (chaps. 6–11) on Noah. The relationship between the two acts is one of continuity and variation."[39] Sailhamer puts it in terms of fathers and sons: The narratives of Genesis 1–11 "are aligned along a singly story line from Adam and his three sons to Noah and his three sons."[40]

Smith sketches some of the links between Genesis 1 and 2 and chapters 8 and 9 that reveal this relationship.

(a) Since man could not live on the earth when it was covered with water in chaps. 1 and 8, a subsiding of the water and a separation of the land from the water took place, allowing the dry land to appear (1:9-10; 8:1-13);

(b) "birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" are brought forth to "swarm upon the earth" in 1:20-21, 24-25 and 8:17-19;

(c) God establishes the days and seasons in 1:14-18 and 8:22;

---

38. Clines surveys this theme as one of the possible overarching themes for the primeval narrative. He prefers it to Von Rad's "sin-speech-mitigation-judgment" cycle and a "spread of sin, spread of grace" theme. See Chapter 7 "Prefatory Theme" Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 67–86.

39. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 17.

40. Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 307.

(d) God's blessing rests upon the animals as he commands them to "be fruitful and multiply on the earth" in both 1:22 and 8:17;

(e) man is brought forth and he receives the blessing of God: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" in 1:28 and 9:1, 7;

(f) man is given dominion over the animal kingdom in 1:28 and 9:2;

(g) God provides food for man in 1:29-30 and 9:3 (this latter regulation makes a direct reference back to the previous passage when it includes the statement, "As I have given the green plant"); and

(h) in 9:6 the writer quotes from 1:26-27 concerning the image of God in man. The author repeatedly emphasizes the fact that the world is beginning again with a fresh start. But Noah does not return to the paradise of Adam, for the significant difference is that "the intent of man's heart is evil" (Gen 8:21).[41]

To these could be added the similarity between Adam's naming and Noah's collecting of the animals. Indeed, the description of the waters prevailing on the earth in Genesis 7:24 paints a picture of the earth's return to its original watery chaos (1:2). In Genesis 8:1 God sends a wind to cause the waters to subside and calling to mind the Spirit hovering over the waters.

These clear parallels between creation from chaos and recreation after a return to chaos are made even more significant by the way the episode between Noah and his sons immediately after the flood parallels the "fall" narrative of Genesis 3. There are remarkable formal parallels between the story of Noah and his sons and the account in Genesis 3. In both a fruit lies at the heart of the story. Noah, like Adam is described as a

41. Smith, "Structure and Purpose in Genesis 1–11," 310–11.

"man of the soil." In both stories the main characters end up naked.[42] In both stories there is a covering, by God in Genesis 3 and by Shem and Japheth in Genesis 9. Both stories end with a curse.[43] Tomasino concludes: "These parallels show that history truly does repeat itself, albeit with an ironic twist or two. The story of Noah's drunkenness provides us with both a new "Fall", and a new conflict between brothers. Thus, it gives further evidence that world history from the Flood through the Tower of Babel is essentially a replay of the history from creation through the Flood."[44] It remains to ask what, if any, kind of advancement or development there may be in the depiction and understanding of sin.

This narrative device raises important questions for the theological use of these narratives. If the text consciously depicts a cycle of creation-fall-uncreation-recreation-and fall, is it legitimate to isolate the first fall narrative as a theological starting point? Might not this literary feature point towards a more literary and holistic approach to these narratives? And if so, how might the image of sin be reshaped by this broader perspective?

Obstacles to Unity

One of the potential obstacles to the thematic and theological unity of Genesis 1:1–11:26 is the interspersing of genealogies amongst the narrative episodes. From a

---

42. Tomasino notes that the aspect of nakedness in the two stories is almost a mirror image. Adam and Eve ate and saw their nakedness, Noah drank and didn't recognize his. Anthony J Tomasino, "History Repeats Itself: The 'fall' and Noah's Drunkenness," *Vetus Testamentum* 42, no. 1 (Ja 1992): 129.

43. There are differences as well. Westermann notes that unlike many of the other crime and punishment stories God is not the one who punishes, rather Noah utters the curse. Further, the sin of Ham is offset by the act of respect of his brothers, a feature lacking in any of the other narratives.

44. Tomasino, "History Repeats Itself: The 'fall' and Noah's Drunkenness," 130.

modern standpoint, the genealogies break up the flow of the narrative. Clearly, however, the narratives of Scripture (Genesis or elsewhere) are distinct from those of contemporary literature. Westermann regards the collation as the distinctiveness of these narratives[45] and warns against overlooking them: "To devalue implicitly the genealogies or to leave them aside must have far-reaching effects on one's final understanding of and judgment on the primeval story."[46] Heeding this warning we will have cause to consider briefly what the genealogies of Genesis 1–11 contribute to the depiction of sin in these chapters as we encounter them in our reading.

Robinson articulates the delicate role that genealogies have to play in preserving the theological coherence of the Genesis narrative.

> The delicate interplay between the narratives and the nonnarrative genealogies places Genesis at a fluctuating, never specifiable point between the complete predestination of events embodied in the strict prophecy-fulfillment structure of the *Odyssey* and the nearly complete autonomy of successive events familiar from modern plots. That point is not meant to be fixed. Events retain their full contingency, characters the moral control of their wills; yet somehow God is in charge, and creation follows the will of its creator. The interplay of story and genealogy, narrative and nonnarrative, is a literary strategy which, in a sense, defies the restrictions and reductions of the neat logical oppositions of free will versus determinism or contingency versus foreordination which, perforce, we use in our analysis. Logic cannot affirm both sides of these oppositions without contradiction. But the literary structure of Genesis has found a way to maintain both sides and thus to give expression to a deeper reality.[47]

---

45. "This is the only place in the Old Testament where genealogies and narratives are put together in such a way. It is this that gives the primeval story its unique character." Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 3.

46. Ibid., 3.

47. Robert B Robinson, "Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (O 1986): 608.

So according to Robinson, the genealogies combined with the narratives provide a balanced narrative that evokes the tensions of human existence between determinism and contingency.

The diversity and repetition found in Genesis has been seen by others as an obstacle to its unity. Many have noted the shift from Elohim in chapter 1 to Yahweh Elohim in chapter 2. Others point to the repeated narratives of Abraham and Isaac surrendering their wives for self-protection. Wenham argues, however, that a literary approach to the text alleviates many of those concerns. "Repetition, duplicate narratives, varying names of God, and other changes in vocabulary were typically seen as marks of different sources. But according to literary theory, such features may not be signs of a change of author but of the skill of one sophisticated author intent on holding his hearer's attention by recapitulating the story at key points (repetition) and by introducing subtle variation (contradictions)."[48]

The literary artistry is brought out in the use of repetition and theme words that connect adjacent texts as well as bridge between more distant texts. Johnson T. K. Lim comments succinctly that the "first eleven chapters (for that matter the Pentateuch as a whole) is to be read as a unified narrative which is derived from the arrangement of texts such as intertextual patters of repetition, verbal and thematic linkages and others. Within that narrative coherence, there is a unified structure and a common purpose."[49] Themes and vocabulary such as land/earth, naming, fruit and fruitfulness, the good, curse and blessing are repeated in Genesis 1–11 and beyond. We will draw out some of these recurring words in the reading below.

---

48. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, xxxvi.
49. Lim, *Grace in the Midst of Judgment*, 90.

Summary: The Theological Unity of Genesis 1:1–11:26

The cautions from commentators combined with this survey of the structural, literary, and thematic unity of Genesis 1–11 argues against atomization of the text and for the approaching the text as a theological unity. Lim regards these chapters as the "seed plot" for the remainder of the book.[50] Sailhamer goes further and argues for the fundamental character of these chapters for the theological development of the entire Pentateuch. "The function of this composition of Genesis 1–11 is to present these various theological themes and viewpoints at the beginning of the Pentateuch and thus to provide a context for the development of these themes in the remainder of the book."[51] Standing as the Pentateuch does at the head of the canonical literature, it is not illegitimate to suggest that these chapters represent the foundational material for the theological storyline of Scripture as a whole.[52]

A NARRATIVE ATTENTIVE READING OF SIN IN GENESIS 1–11

We turn now to read Genesis 1–11 attending to its literary quality and with special attention to the depiction of sin. Several readings of Genesis 1–11 on offer seek to attend to the literary features of the narrative. There are many themes and threads to trace through these chapters. Our focus is specifically on how sin is depicted in the various

---

50. Ibid., 191.

51. Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 314.

52. One may object to describing these chapters as fundamental when the characters and events narrated therein are so infrequently referenced in the remainder of the Hebrew Bible and only scarcely more so in the New Testament. This assessment overlooks not only specific passages that do echo these narratives but, more importantly, the number of themes in the Hebrew Bible that have their source in these chapters: rivalry between brothers, exaltation of the younger over the older, garden and tree imagery, flood imagery for judgment, Edenic tranquility and *shalom*. One could perhaps argue that these events, rather than being recalled become part of the scenery and setting against which the later narratives are played out.

episodes in which it appears and whether there is a discernible development of sin over the course of the 11 chapters.

True narrative criticism focuses on matters of setting, narrative time, character, plot and plot gaps, and speaks of the implied author and readers.[53] While we may have cause to consider some of these features (especially plot), the narratives of Genesis 1–11 differ from the narratives later in Genesis and certainly from those in the longer narrative works of the former prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings). Accordingly, the standard tools of narrative criticism will be of less use than the more general tools of literary readings. From the discussion of the literary unity of the text we have already observed some of the literary devices used in Genesis 1–11. Before proceeding to the reading, however, we will briefly comment on the presence of the more specifically narrative features.

The presence of a discernible plot sets narrative apart from other biblical genres and is especially important to careful orientation of discrete narratives within a whole work. While other features common to narrative may not play a significant role in Genesis 1–11, plot is a key feature of these chapters and the argument of this dissertation. Key words, repetition, and other structural features help the reader to discern the plot line and steer away from an atomization of the text. According to Sidney Greidanus, "To discover the plot line, one should ask: What is the conflict in this story and how is it

---

53. For a basic survey of narrative criticism focused more on its New Testament application see Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* Guides to Biblical Scholarship. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990). Some of the classic works focusing attention on Old Testament narratives are: Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 70 (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1989), 295; Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative Bible and Literature Series*, 9 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983); J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 2 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1991); and Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*.

resolved?"[54] However, identifying a singular plot in Genesis 1–11 is not easy. Due to the important place that these chapters fill in the book of Genesis, the Pentateuch and Christian Scripture they are rife with plot possibilities. Greidanus goes on to say that the "various plot lines [in Genesis] don't neatly follow one after the other but are interwoven with overarching plots."[55] We will need to come to some conclusions, at least tentatively, regarding the plot of Genesis 1–11 and how the depiction of sin relates to it.

To set the stage, we will consider chapters 1 and 2 for what they reveal about the characters, the setting, and any hints they may offer regarding the plot of what is to follow. We will then proceed through the narratives tracking the theme of sin and its development. In particular we will ask how sin is depicted in each account and what its reference point is.

Genesis 1–2 - The Narrative Background

Though there is some disagreement regarding how to divide Genesis 1–11 as a literary unit, it is generally agreed that more significant plot movement begins in Genesis 3:1 with the introduction of the serpent. However, a case can also be made for the unity of 2:3–3:24. Interpreters offer a variety of ways of regarding chapters 1 and 2. On the basis of the *toledot* formula in Genesis 2:4, many regard chapter 1 as an introductory prologue. Thematically, however, it is evident that chapters 1 and 2 present partially overlapping accounts of creation.[56] As befits a good narrative, it is difficult to find a neat dividing point between the introduction and the action proper. When reading for unity, it

54. Sidney Greidanus, "Detecting Plot Lines: The Key to Preaching the Genesis Narratives," *Calvin Theological Journal* 43, no. 1 (Ap 2008): 65.

55. Ibid., 69.

56. The account in chapter 2 is commonly regarded as the older account and it attributed to the Yahwist. Chapter 1 is the work of the Elohist.

makes sense to regard these chapters as introductory and offering important background information on the main characters and the setting of the drama that is to unfold. However, the manner in which the two chapters do this is distinct with the creation narrative of chapter 2 being more closely related to the narrative that follows it.[57]

The Setting

Both creation narratives provide background for the ensuing narrative in the form of setting and the introduction of the principal character: God. Humanity is presented in chapter 1 but is not thematic. As a created entity, the earth is depicted as having an origin and being under God's control.[58] The sequence and ordering of the days of creation in chapter 1 speak to an ordered and orderly creation.[59] This is in contrast to the "formless void" of Genesis 1:1. God's action of separating suggests the setting of boundaries and separate spheres of operation. There are several details in the narrative that suggest that the creational setting of the narrative is inscribed with limitations and boundaries. Day and night, land and sea, sky and land are all separated. One day is set apart for blessing and rest. Many trees are given; one is prohibited. The garden is bounded by rivers.

The earth itself is not an isolated, inert, inactive set for the drama. The land is not set off from heaven as two totally separate realms. Wenham suggests that the alteration between heaven (days 1, 2, and 4) and earth (days 3, 5, and 6) in the creation account

---

57. In a unique approach to the structure of Genesis, Thomas Brodie sees chapters 1 and 2 as the first of several "diptychs" throughout the book of Genesis. These facing panels should be read together. We will see that this approach is most useful with the first four chapters but becomes less clear as the narrative proceeds. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 15–19.

58. Much has been written concerning the manner in which the creation narratives undercut various aspects of the worldviews and cosmogonies of the nations surrounding Israel. This is doubtless true but not relevant for our study.

59. Westermann suggests that this sequencing mimics the genealogies and presents creation as a set of generations. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 81.

communicates the interlocking relationship of the heavens and the earth.[60] What is more, the creation accounts present the earth as participating in the act of creation. Though blessed with fecundity, the created order is not depicted as perfect and complete. Rather, it needs to be put under dominion (Gen 1:28). Chapter 2 presents this more starkly suggesting that the ground was in need not only of rain but of someone to till it for it to become productive (2:5). These observations cut against theories of the inherently perfect and paradisiacal character of the pre-fall world. As we shall see, the setting, the created world, serves as more than merely backdrop for the narratives that follow.

A final description of the creational backdrop of the narrative is God's repeated assessment of its goodness.[61] Six times in chapter 1 God sees his creation and sees that it is "good", טוֹב, (vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) or "very good", טוֹב מְאֹד, (v. 31). In the context of the well-ordered creation, "good" refers to fitness to its purpose.[62] Sailhamer specifies that purpose when he suggests that "the 'good' is that which is beneficial for humankind."[63] These usages inform the following chapters and God's first assessment that something was *not* good (i.e. Adam's loneliness) as well as our understanding of the significance of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Further, the depiction of the land as good yet in need of cultivation leaves space for both appreciation of its inherent qualities and for some sense of its development and perfection going forward. That is, there is space for narrative, teleology, or eschatology.

---

60. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 7.

61. Insofar as time may be regarded as part of the setting there are a few observations about time in the introduction. The celestial lights are given for the purpose of setting apart day and night, times and seasons. Furthermore the seventh day is set apart as holy, thus sanctifying time.

62. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 18.

63. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 88.

The Characters

The principal character in the narrative is God. In the first creation account, God[64] is depicted as powerful. God is principally revealed through his action, though most of these actions in chapter 1 are "speech-acts."[65] God creates,[66] separates,[67] names, fashions, sees and blesses.[68] In chapter 2 God is presented more intimately related to the creation as he fashions man from the dust and breathes life into him, then recognizes his loneliness and remedies it. God blesses and commissions humanity and provides for its needs through the giving of the trees of the garden. The characterization of God is of double significance because of the light it throws upon the description of humanity.

The introductory chapters of Genesis narrate what amounts to three creation narratives of humanity each building on the previous. In each, humanity's identity is clarified with via its relationship to something else: to God as image bearer (1:26-28), to the ground and creation as steward (2:7-17), and to a human other as partner (2:18-25).[69] Each of these narratives is important in establishing the human identity and we will see that they are a crucial reference point in the following narratives.

---

64. The title "Elohim" is used some 35 times in 1:1-2:3. In chapter 2:4–3:24, the title changes to "Yahweh Elohim". From 4:1 on the title is shortened to "Yahweh."

65. The text uses the phrase "and God said" ten times leading some interpreters to make a link to the decalogue.

66. The word create (בָּרָא) is used six times in 1:1-2:3 and is predicated only of God.

67. God separates light and dark (1:4), waters above and below (6, 7), and day and night (14, 18).

68. God speaks blessings over sea creatures and birds (1:22), the humanity (1:28), and the Sabbath day (2:3).

69. Interestingly, in each of these "creation narratives" multiple elements are present. Animals are created on the same day as humans in narrative 1 and both male and female are mentioned in parallel. In creation 2 where humanity's relationship to the soil is emphasized he is animated by the divine breath. Finally, prior to the creation of the woman, the man is presented with animals as possible helpers before finding none suitable.

The first creation narrative says of the human characters that they are made in the image and likeness of God (בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ), a description that has been the subject of a great deal of speculation.[70] Within the narrow confines of the narrative the best clues to the significance of the *imago dei* are those describing what God is like. Indeed, in succeeding chapters humans are presented imitating several of the actions ascribed to God in chapter 1. In chapter 2 the man names the animals. In chapter 4 the woman celebrates her reproductive capacities like Yahweh's.[71] And in chapter 3 it is the woman's God-like assessment that the fruit is "good" that precipitates their eating.

It is also legitimate to find at least some of the meaning of the "image of God" in the phrases immediately following where humanity is given dominion over the creation and commanded to be fruitful, the so-called cultural mandate. Asselin summarizes, "This first chapter of Genesis presents *Elohim* as an active and absolute sovereign over the universe and all its parts...In other words, man is God's image because he shares God's power and dominion over creation."[72] From a narrative perspective, one would not expect the text to reveal the significance of humanity's identity in its fullness at the beginning of

---

70. The literature both exegetical and theological on Genesis 1:26–28 and the *imago dei* is forbiddingly vast. Various positions have enjoyed consensus if briefly. Early positions making a sharp distinction between "image" and "likeness" have been abandoned, in favor of regarding the words as roughly parallel. At present there is a general consensus that what is in view are not abstract qualities of God such as reason or other such capacities. There is also some agreement that there is royal representation imagery behind the language of "image and likeness." Further, many see at least the broad outlines of the meaning of the image in the call to exercise dominion. More recently there has been increased attention to the relational aspect of humanity and therefore to understand the *imago dei* as in some sense relational. In addition to the commentaries, there are several articles that survey the history of interpretation. See, for instance, David J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 53–103.

71. Eve's statement in 4:1—"I have produced a man with the help of the Lord"—is subject to both positive and negative interpretation, either acknowledging God's help or touting her own creative capacities. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 111. Sailhamer opts for the negative reading while Gonzales reads it positively. Sarna suggests that Eve's statement, unique in calling a baby "man", is influenced by Adam's wordplay on the words for man and woman in 2:23. Sarna, *Genesis*, 32.

72. David T Asselin, "Notion of Dominion in Genesis 1–3," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (Jl 1954): 282.

the story. Indeed, the significance of what it means to be human and in the image of God will unfold in the succeeding chapters. Stanley Grenz agrees: "Genesis 1:26–28 does not define the *imago dei* in detail but rather opens the door to the possibility of the answer emerging from the broader biblical narrative in which the creation story is placed."[73]

In both the first and second creation narratives humanity is depicted in close relationship with the created order. Indeed, it can be said that it was created and ordered for them. Bruce Waltke writes, "The word *land* connotes that which is benevolently ordered by God's sovereignty in the interests of human life and security."[74] They are commissioned with exercising dominion over it (1:28) and then later the man is placed in the garden to work and keep it (2:15). In chapter 2 the man is formed from "the dust of the earth" (עָפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה) and this connection is underscored by the word play between אֲדָמָה (soil) and אָדָם (man). The significance of this link will be seen in key places in the narrative such as humanity's fate to return to the dust (עָפָר) and Abel's blood crying out from the ground (אֲדָמָה). Finally, among the penalties for sin in these chapters are elements that relate to the ground: Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden to work the ground, Cain is cursed from the ground, humanity's corruption leads to the destruction of the land with flood,[75] and the people at the tower of Babel are dispersed over the face of the earth/land (אֶרֶץ).[76]

---

73. Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, Matrix of Christian Theology, vol. 1. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 223.

74. Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 62.

75. In the prelude to the flood in Genesis 6:6, 7 both the words for land (אֶרֶץ) and ground (אֲדָמָה) are used.

76. John Sailhamer makes a convincing case for translating the term אֶרֶץ as "land" rather than "earth". Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 86. See also *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account*, (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Dawson Media, 2011).

The description of the creation of humans in Genesis 2 adds considerably to the cryptic statement in 1:26–28 both regarding the nature of humans and their task. Furthermore, the human is placed in a specific plot of ground that he is to tend and keep and which is designed to furnish his needs. That this task will not be a merely agrarian one may be hinted at as well. Regarding the apparent digression concerning the lands surrounding the garden in 2:10–14, Kidner comments: "There is a hint of the *cultural* development intended for man when the narrative momentarily (10–14) breaks out of Eden to open up a vista into a world of diverse countries and resources. The digression, overstepping the bare details that locate the garden, discloses that there is more than primitive simplicity in store for the race: a complexity of unequally distributed skills and peoples, even if the reader knows the irony of it in the tragic connotations of the words 'gold', 'Assyria', 'Euphrates'."[77]

But chapter 2 also presents the human in an intimate relationship with another like unto him.[78] While some have attempted to find something subservient about the description of the woman as a "helper fit for him", there is increasing agreement amongst commentators that the term communicates equality. More importantly, Sailhamer notes that read in the context of God's repeated declaration of the goodness of creation, his

---

Westermann suggests something similar: "The verbs indicate the creation of a world that is meant to be a living space for humankind, not the world in the sense of the universe." Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 87.

77. Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 61.

78. One should distinguish the man's act of recognition when presented with the woman (2:23) from Adam's act of naming Eve (3:20). The man's word play between the Hebrew words for man, אִישׁ, and woman, אִישָׁה, suggests that this is a recognition of fundamental sameness. It is only after the first sin and the pronouncement of separate consequences that Adam names Eve in light of her specific reproductive role, and thereby emphasizes the difference between them.

preparation of the woman for the man is an "archetypal example of God's knowledge of the good."[79] This provides important background to the events of chapter 3.

Finally, the way the narrator presents the creation of humans in chapters 1 and 2 both exalts their status and qualifies it. Many commentators argue that the organization of the material such that humans are created on day six presents humanity as the climax of the creational process. At the same time humans are created on the same day as land animals which modifies slightly the exalted position. Similarly in chapter 2 humanity is presented as both unique among the animals in that they are animated by the breath of God, but humbled by being derived from dust. The very presence of these distinct descriptors suggest the possibility of tension between the poles of humanity's honor and its humility.

The Plot

As we suggested, many regard the introduction of the character of the serpent in chapter 3 as the beginning of plot possibilities.[80] This is particularly true with the prediction of enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent in Genesis 3:15. However, even in the context of chapters 1 and 2 there are hints of narrative possibilities. In chapter 1, for instance, the commissioning of humanity to a particular task opens up both the possibilities of success or failure. Because the *imago dei*

---

79. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 101.

80. Michael Root writes: "The fall, of course, is not the first event in the Bible. But only the entrance of sin into the created world is seen as initiating narrative movement. The fall is then analogous to the murder in a stereotyped mystery novel. It may not occur on page 1, but it sets the narrative tension that impels the plot's movement and whose resolution constitutes the story's end." Michael Root, "The Narrative Structure of Soteriology," in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 269.

is described not as a static nature *per se* but rather something that must be worked out in action; it is possible that it will not be.

In chapter 2 further narrative possibilities open up. For one, there is a subtle theme of problem and resolution in the passage. Genesis 2:5 presents the "problem" of a land barren of plant life for lack of rain and someone to keep it. These problems are resolved in the ensuing verses with the sending of a mist (2:6), the formation of the man from the dust (2:7), and the causing of trees to grow (2:9). Further, the chapter relates the problem of the man's loneliness. Here the chapter links with the previous chapter's drumbeat of God's assessment of his creative acts as "good" and even "very good." In that context, God's first declaration in chapter 2 that the man's solitary existence is "not good" echoes loudly. Indeed, a significant portion of the chapter is given to resolving this problem, first through the parade of animals before the man and finally through God's act of creative surgery. The two chapters come together to reinforce that God knows the difference between good and not good and takes action to resolve it. This foreshadows, if dimly, the direction of the narrative.

The reference to the pre-creational state as "formless and void" hints at the possibility that it could return to such. In fact, similar language is used in the midst of the flood narrative to depict the earth's return to a watery chaos swept over by a divine wind (8:1).[81]

81. Sailhamer suggests that the intent of the phrase "formless and empty" in describing the land is to highlight its uninhabitability. He then calls attention to similar language used in Isaiah 45:18 to describe the land of Israel after the exile. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 85.

Summary

These introductory chapters offer crucial context for the interpretation of the narratives to follow. Westermann summarizes an important aspect of the depiction of creation: its forward looking orientation rather than static existence. "Everything that God makes or creates is given a destiny. For the earth or the world there is no need for this; but everything else, on the earth or in the world, is given a purpose; their significance is established with their creation (the purpose of plants and animals is only mentioned later). Creation is not just making something which is then there; it is an action which has a goal; it is an event whose aim is to give each object of creation a meaning and function."[82] By speaking in terms of destiny, Westermann captures the forward moving, narrative development of the story and creation itself.

Genesis 3:1-24 - Fall and Fallout

It is doubtful that any chapter of scripture has been subjected to more scrutiny than this one.[83] This testifies to humanity's perpetual struggle to understand its own condition. Among the vexing features of this and subsequent narratives is the absence of commentary. The stories are told very briefly and the reader is often left to puzzle out the meaning and even the narrator's stance. Brueggemann's warning is sage: "The themes and tones of the story move in so many different dimensions that it diminishes what is

---

82. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 88.

83. Brueggemann asserts that despite the amount of attention the text of Genesis 2–3 has received that it "is an exceedingly marginal text", an assessment he bases on the virtual silence of the rest of the OT regarding this text. He goes on to debunk the ways the text has been used: as a "fall" narrative, as a story on the origin of evil or death, as a narrative of human sexual awakening. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 41.

given when we press the story too far toward any single meaning or intent."[84] Of course, much theological interaction with the text has done just that.

The story is well known and briefly recounted. The woman (and the man) are engaged in a conversation about the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil by a serpent. The serpent denies the divine warning of the consequences of eating and suggests instead that the fruit will make them wise like God. They both eat. The immediate consequence is an awareness of their nakedness, which they try ineffectually to cover. This is followed swiftly by divine interrogation and penalties imposed on all three participants. Finally, God covers the couple and expels them from the garden.

The Narrative Context

When appropriated for theological reflection such as the interpretations surveyed in previous chapters, Genesis 3 has often been almost completely excised from its context. We have noted, however, that these narratives are tightly constructed making such decontextualization inadvisable. What are the bounds of the Genesis 3 narrative? Is it legitimate to interpret it in isolation from what precedes and follows?

Though we have characterized chapter 2 as part of narrative background, there is good reason to link chapter 3 quite tightly with chapter 2. First of all, chapters 2–4 constitute the first *toledot* section. Second, the themes of the garden, trees, and relationship are thematic in both chapters 2 and 3. From a narrative perspective, Brueggemann analyzes chapters 2 and 3 into four scenes bounded by placement in and exile from the garden. Also, there is clearly a movement from the relational harmony of

84. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 44.

chapter 2 to the disharmony of chapter 3. Brueggemann ties these themes together: "Thus, the garden (scene I) exists for community (II). When the community is violated (III), the goodness of the garden is lost (IV)."[85] The chapters are similarly held together by the theme of the trees and eating. Chapter 2 introduces the tree of life, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the trees given for food. All three of these are present in chapter 3. Further early in chapter 2 the man is placed in the garden and at the close of chapter 3 he is expelled.[86] We will also see, however, that chapter 3 is tied quite tightly to chapter 4.

The Narrative

In addition to excising the narrative from its context, historical and mythical readings often reduce the details of the narrative—the tree(s), the serpent, nakedness, and death—to literal features or symbolic concepts. However, as the beginning of a cohesive narrative we should expect the features of this episode to be richer and deeper than this and contribute to the overall flow of the narrative and the depiction of sin in particular.

Chapter 3 begins with the introduction of a new character to the drama. While the other characters have been introduced through the narration and activities of the preceding chapters, the serpent is characterized more succinctly and directly as "crafty" (עָרוּם). This term can have positive or negative connotations. It also offers a play on the word "naked" (עֲרוּמִּים) used to describe the human pair in the preceding verse perhaps

85. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 45.Ibid., 45.

86. Wenham, adapting Walsh, sees seven scenes in Chapters 2 and 3, each set apart by the balance of narrative and dialogue. At the heart of the two chapters is the narrative of the eating of the tree in 3:6-8. What this structure reveals is that the narratives can have both tight internal structures while also being closely linked together with subsequent narratives. Chapter 2 echoes chapter 1. Chapter 3 links to chapter 2. We will see that chapter 4 echoes chapter 3. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 51.

intending to highlight a contrast between their innocence and the serpent's subtlety. Such direct characterization is rare in the primeval narrative and therefore likely important.[87] Sailhamer thinks it is crucial to the narrator's depiction of the sin: "The description of the serpent as 'crafty' is in keeping with several features of this story which suggest that the author wants to draw a relationship between the Fall and the human quest for wisdom."[88]

Of course, in the history of interpretation, the serpent has been connected with Satan.[89] In the near context the snake represents the animal created order at least; the narrator specifically refers to him as a creature of the field. That the human pair should parlay with him is striking in view of the near context in which the man found no suitable companion amongst the beasts of the field paraded before him. How does an animal now become a conversation partner?

Whatever else the serpent might come to represent in the narrative of Scripture, the curse between the woman and the serpent speaks at the very least to a breach in the peaceful relationship between humans and the animal order and therefore a complication in their mandate to exercise dominion.[90] Fretheim strikes the balance: "[T]he text speaks of no supernatural being and no language of evil is used for it. It is simply identified as a

---

87. "Now, explicit characterization of actors in the story is rare in Hebrew narrative, so it seems likely that in noting the snake's shrewdness the narrator is hinting that his remarks should be examined very carefully." Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 72.

88. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 103.

89. Most contemporary commentators reject out of hand any facile connection between the serpent and Satan though some conservative commentators still make the connection (Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 90). John C. Collins stakes out a somewhat middle ground by suggesting not that the serpent is Satan himself but his that "a competent reader from the original audience would have been able to infer that the snake is the mouthpiece of a dark power." John C. Collins, "What Happened to Adam and Eve?" *Presbyterion* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 28.

90. Brueggemann is perhaps the most reticent to ascribe any special significance to the serpent but his conclusion is driven by a desire to be faithful to the constraints of the narrative. "Whatever the serpent may have meant in earlier versions of the story, in the present narrative it has no independent significance. It is a technique to move the plot of the story." Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 47.

beast of the field. This means that the serpent is firmly grounded within God's creation; it is neither primordial nor transhistorical. At the same time, it shows that the serpent is transpersonal, as does talk about the seed of the serpent and God's judgment upon it. This is more than simply the externalization of an inward struggle." In short, when seen in the broader context of Scripture, the character of the serpent is ripe for narratival development.

Like the serpent, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is pregnant with significance but resistant of tidy summary.[91] Again, when viewed within the confines of the narrative, we must relate the tree first to God's declarations of what is good and not good. Bonhoeffer warns against simplistic interpretations of tree and serpent. "The ambiguity of the serpent, of Eve, and of the tree of knowledge as creatures of the grace of God and as the place of the voice of evil must be maintained as such and must not be crudely torn asunder in an unambiguous interpretation."[92] There is simply not enough information in the narrative to explain the tree's significance. Brueggemann asserts that the "trees are incidental to the main point that God's command is a serious one."[93] Fortunately, a full explanation is not necessary to understand the thrust of the narrative.

Much is made of the dialog between the serpent and the woman.[94] Often the text is dissected to address the changes made to the divine word by both the serpent and the

---

91. Wenham offers a brief overview of the possible significance of the tree: consequences of obedience or disobedience, moral discernment, sexual knowledge, or omniscience. He decides for divine wisdom but that which is inscrutable to humanity. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 63.

92. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1–3 [and] Temptation* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 65.

93. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 45.

94. Several characterize it as the first theological discussion and note the dangers of God's word becoming the focus of abstract debate.

woman.[95] Moving away from focus on the prohibition, Sailhamer suggests that the topic of the conversation is "the question of the knowledge of the 'good.'"[96] This is a helpful narrative observation since it puts the discussion squarely in the context of the repetition of God's declaration of the good in chapter 1 and the creation of the woman in chapter 2 as a remedy for the man's "not good" rather than focusing on the tree as a legal abstraction The question seems to be whether, to paraphrase 2 Peter 1:3, God has indeed given them everything good and necessary for life and godlikeness. The pair conclude otherwise, that there are other goods—the fruit's beauty, its potential nourishment, and its provision of knowledge. Sailhamer concludes, "The thrust of the story, with all its simplicity, lies in its tragic and ironic depiction of the search for wisdom."[97] The wisdom on offer is to be in service of the human identity; per the serpent, the fruit will assist them in being who they already are, like God. This is important because it is precisely here that many interpretations inject the notion of pride—that the couple wanted to be like God. But it is not necessary (or helpful) to introduce such psychologizing; the offer seems to be within the ambit of their own identity and destiny as image bearers.[98]

---

95. Hamilton notes that the messiness of the dialog is heightened by ambiguity within the text as though the issue itself is ambiguous and therefore any discussion of it would necessarily be. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 189.

96. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 103.

97. Ibid., 104.

98. Hamilton, for instance, reads covetousness into the woman's deliberations: "Here is the essence of covetousness. It is the attitude that says I need something I do not now have in order to be happy." But the text says nothing about Eve trying to remedy a shortage of happiness. Her judgment may be patently wrong but her motivations are opaque. Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 190.

As Wenham points out, the narration of the act is remarkably brief in contrast to the narration that precedes it and the judgment to follow.[99] Narratively, the act itself is central but minimally developed.

The Narrative's Depiction of Sin

Traditional interpretations focus on this event as the historical beginning of sin in the human race or as a mythic representation of the nature of sin. As we have seen, much attention is focused on the violation of a clearly stated divine prohibition and the hubristic motivation of divine likeness. Feminist interpreters have accused the narrative of pinning blame on the woman and therefore read against it or discard it. It is impossible to deny that the narrative presents the man and woman violating a specific divine prohibition. God's question, "Did you eat of the tree..." puts a fine enough point on it. However, there are a host of details of the passage that temper this blunt assessment. What is this sin really about? Is it principally a hubristic violation of a divine law? Who or what is the sin against? The narrative does not seem to cast it so neatly.

So often, interpretations of Genesis 3 fail to read it in context of the surrounding materials. The divine prohibition is presented as an abstract concept. However, there are contextual features that mitigate somewhat against reading the nature of the sin so simplistically. First, the prohibition is given in the context of vocation of tending to the trees/garden and God's gracious provision of trees for food and a helper for the task. Further, these elements are given in the shadow of the broader description of humanity as

---

99. Wenham also regards 2:4-3:24 as a unity. Rather than break it down by scenes as does Brueggemann, Wenham divides it according to its narrative and dialogical parts and compares the presence and activity of specific characters. The result is nearly chiastic with God's action and human passivity present in prologue (2:5-17) and conclusion (3:22-24) and the narration of the human action at the climax (3:6-8). Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 50.

image bearers and tasked with dominion and procreation. That is, the prohibition regarding the tree is a subset of the command to tend the garden which is itself a subset of the mission of the *imago dei* in ch. 1. Brueggemann wisely warns that these elements should not be separated. Commenting on Genesis 2:14-16 he writes:

> These three verses together provide a remarkable statement of anthropology. Human beings before God are characterized by *vocation*, *permission*, and *prohibition*. The primary human task is to find a way to hold the three facets of divine purpose together. Any two of them without the third is surely to pervert life. It is telling and ironic that in the popular understanding of this story, little attention is given the mandate of *vocation* or the gift of *permission*. The divine will for vocation and freedom has been lost. The God of the garden is chiefly remembered as the one who *prohibits*. But the prohibition makes sense only in terms of the other two. The balance and juxtaposition of the three indicates that there is a subtle discernment of human destiny here.[100]

Interpretations that view the prohibition in abstraction from its context result in distorted readings of the human, the divine-human relationship, and of the nature of sin and redemption. Brueggemann concludes that the narrative "insists...that the *freedom* of human persons to enjoy and exploit life and the *vocation* of human persons to manage creation are set in the context of the *prohibition* of God."[101]

It is true that the prohibition regarding the tree relates also to humanity's relationship with God. But Westermann ties relationship with God to humanity's identity as divinely appointed steward.

> The meaning of the command becomes clearer when it is compared with the duty imposed on the man in v. 15b. The duty of tilling and keeping the garden is something comprehensible; the command need not be comprehensible, and such is the case here. The meaning is this: the command remains the word of the one who commands. One can only hear it while one hears in it the one who commands and is obedient to him. The command then opens up the possibility of a relationship to the one who commands. By the command something is entrusted to the man; he is

---

100. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 46.
101. Ibid., 52 (Emphasis original).

> given an area of freedom which the animals do not possess; it is not a limitation but an enlargement of his potential.[102]

Read in context, the command is not an abstract point but is intimately related to humanity's commission to till and plant and implies an aspect of the divine-human relationship. Westermann's comment protects against a strictly negative conceptualization of the tree by placing it in a much broader nexus of identity, relationship, and destiny.[103]

Is the sin one of prideful disobedience? As suggested above, Sailhamer is convinced that at the heart of the narrative is the question of what is good for humanity with the thrust of chapters 2 and 3 being that "God will provide the 'good' for human beings if they will only trust him and obey him."[104] We already mentioned that he sees the depiction of the serpent as "crafty" pointing in this direction. It is also relevant to note that to a certain extent the woman is already exercising some sense of the knowledge of good and evil in her evaluation of the tree. "A narrative clue already points to the woman's assuming God's role of 'knowing the good' even before she ate of the fruit—that is, the description of the woman's thoughts in the last moments before the Fall."[105] Sailhamer believes that the depiction of the sin is not so much as of rebellion but of folly, foolishly thinking one could surpass God's evaluation of the good. Sailhamer concludes, then that "the temptation is not presented as a general rebellion from God's authority. Rather, it is portrayed as a quest for wisdom and 'the good' apart from God's

---

102. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 224.

103. Bonhoeffer suggests that the prohibition regarding the tree which was given to Adam as a grace is only experienced as "law" when passed through the serpent's distorting filter. "The prohibition which Adam heard as grace becomes law." Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 64.

104. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 104.

105. Ibid.

provision."[106] Brueggemann ties together Adam's "I was afraid" with the matter of relying upon God's goodness and demonstrates that it moves beyond Genesis 3. "It is the same answer that will be given by Abraham (20:11) and then by Isaac (26:9) and by all who cannot trust the goodness of God and submit to his wise passion."[107] Whether we find this ultimately convincing or not it certainly has the virtue of attending to more features of the narrative than many interpretations.

Sailhamer's reading is sensitive to many details of the text but one further observation may sharpen it. It is not a generic "good" that in is view but specifically the goods necessary for the fulfillment of the human call to live out the image of God in dominion and procreation. Many features of the text relate to the matter of the human destiny as the text has thus far revealed it. The consequences of their behavior touch on every feature of humanity's role and identity revealed to this point. In particular, their calling to exercise dominion and to fill the earth is complicated in consequence of their sin. As Wenham states succinctly, "The sentences on the man and the woman take the form of a disruption of their appointed roles."[108]

The communal and cooperative aspect of the human identity and mission implied in the shared bearing of the image from chapter 1 and highlighted by the special preparation of a "helper" in chapter 2 are problematized in the narrative of chapter 3. In chapter 2, the man was given a specifically designed helper in the woman after ruling out all other possibilities through the parade of animals. That helper was God's "good" for the man to cure his loneliness and cooperate in the fulfillment of the human mission. In chapter 3 these relationships are all complicated. First, the serpent postures himself as a

106. Ibid.
107. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 49.
108. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 81.

further helper and voice, illuminating and clarifying their calling. The man and woman subjugate themselves to his word rather than exercising dominion over him as a beast of the field. Then, the woman who was to be a help becomes a snare. Note that God rebukes the man for listening to the voice of his wife, not the voice of the serpent (3:17). There is almost the sense that the man has sinned against God and that the woman has sinned against the man. The breakdown of the image bearing community is further described in 3:16 as desire and rule rather than help and oneness.

The punishments reveal important details of the nature of the crime. As Brueggemann notes, "There is strange slippage between the crime and the punishment."[109] First, the human pair experienced shame in their nakedness indicating breakdown in their sense of self and of the other, a breakdown confirmed by the trading of blame. Further, they experienced fear in their relationship with God. Then both experienced limitations specific to ways in which they were to live out their calling as humans: procreation and creation care.

The fullest expression of their punishment is the concept of death.[110] Death was mentioned in chapter 2 but less as threat and more as boundary. It is on the serpent's forked tongue that mention of death becomes a threat.[111] Since no one physically dies in the text the reader is led to assume either that God performs an act of preservation[112] or that something more than physical demise is in view. Brueggemann says of death that it

---

109. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 48.

110. Wenham suggests that expulsion would have seemed worse than death to the original audience. "The expulsion from the garden of delight where God himself lived would therefore have been regarded by the godly men of ancient Israel as yet more catastrophic than physical death. The latter was the ultimate sign and seal of the spiritual death the human couple experienced on the day they ate from the forbidden tree." Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 90.

111. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 48.

112. "The miracle is not that they are punished, but that they live." Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 49.

"comes, not by way of external imposition, but of its own weight. So the nakedness of 3:7 and the hiding of 3:8 already manifest the power of death, even before the Lord of the garden takes any action."[113] Wolfhart Pannenberg similarly notes that "These are not penalties imposed from without and having no connection with the nature of sin. The conflict of sinners with creation, with other people, and even with themselves follows from the nature of sin as a breaking of the relationship with God. There is an inner logic here. The law of nature that leads from sin to death takes place without any special divine intervention."[114] Given how closely related the effects of their sin are to the very substance of their human identity, it makes sense to regard the concept of death presented here as that which is contrary to human identity. Of course, physical death signals the end of the individual's narrative.

Another angle to assess it from is in the context of the three foundational "creation" narratives that precede it that we argue shape the identity of the individual: created in God's image, created as creation caretaker, and created as relational. All three axes are involved in the event of chapter 3 and humanity suffers loss in all three areas, rendering them less capable of living out their identity vis-à-vis these reference points. They have been expelled from God's presence, experience conflict with one another, and are diminished in their capacity to produce and reproduce.

So, yes, sin here is depicted as the violation of a divine prohibition. But the texture of the story and the surrounding details suggest that God is not necessarily the main reference point of the sin. He is, but almost as a step removed as he is present to them in their identity and relatedness. Sin is deeply related to humanity's identity as

---

113. Ibid., 49.

114. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 270.

described in the preceding chapters, their identity as image bearers, an identity carried out in part in procreation and dominion. Because of their mishandling of their role, they experience complications in the pursuit of it. Oddly, however, their expulsion, in its way, expedites certain aspects of the commission to be fruitful and fill the earth. Though exiled from the garden, they are still positioned to fulfill the mandate to fill and subdue the earth. Sin and punishment do not negate nor finally thwart their call as humans.

While we will reserve most of our theological reflection on the narrative depiction of sin for the following chapter, it is appropriate to pause here and ask, "Is this sin paradigmatic?" It does conform to our experience that violation of God's word brings consequences. On the one hand, we might think that few of our sins come with such dramatic and person altering consequences. This would be true if we were to think of the lasting effects on humanity that Adam and Eve's sin had. Its place in the biblical narrative is part of the explanation for this drama, but something must be related to the nature of the sin. The sin had apparently nothing to do with cultivation and procreation, but that is where the consequences are felt. But if we look at the consequences of their sin diminishing their capacity to fulfill their identity and calling as humans as they understood it than we see that our own sins are similar in their impact.

Genesis 4:1-26 - Mounting Violence

Hard on the heels of the expulsion from the garden the narrative moves to the birth of Adam and Eve's two sons: Cain and Abel. There is nothing to indicate the timing, yet this episode keeps important themes moving forward, not least of which is the human fulfillment of the mandate to be fruitful and multiply even in the aftermath of the

curse.[115] But the narrative contributes far more to the plotline of human depravity than it does to positive themes of human fulfillment of the *imago dei*. Sarna comments, "The first recorded death is not from natural causes but by human hands, an ironic comment on the theme of chapter 3."[116]

This story is scarcely less well-known than that which precedes it. The crisis arises when the brothers, Cain and Abel, spontaneously offer sacrifices to God. To Cain's frustration his sacrifice is rejected while his brother's is accepted. God meets Cain in his anger and both warns and encourages him to do right. Instead, Cain lures his brother to the field and kills him. When confronted again by God, Cain is obtuse and unrepentant. Like he had on Cain's parents, God issues both a judgment of expulsion and a form of divine protection. Cain exits the scene to build a life and a city.

The Narrative Context

Since we are interested in demonstrating the literary and therefore theological unity of Genesis 3–11, it is here, between chapters 3 and 4 that the links are perhaps most important. If it can be demonstrated that chapter 3 is tightly linked with what follows, it serves our case against the theological isolation of Genesis 3. What we will see is that the literary clues suggest that we read the narrative parallel to the previous one rather than in a strictly chronological or causal relationship.

---

115. Considerable debate swirls around Eve's post-partum proclamation "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord" (4:1). Commentators divide over whether it is an expression of cooperative humility and therefore positive or if it should be rendered "I have gotten a man *just like* the Lord", suggesting hubristic independence. Either reading fits into the narrative, though the latter one contributes to the plot line of human self-advancement better.

116. Sarna, *Genesis*, 33.

In a brief but detailed article, Alan J. Hauser examines the links between Genesis 4:1–16 and chapters 2 and 3.[117] He notes the many structural[118] similarities between the stories:

1. the main characters are described by their functions (keep garden/companion, farmer/shepherd),

2. there are two characters "created" and depicted in close relationship with one another though the relationship ends in alienation;[119]

3. there is warning prior to the misdeed in both accounts;[120]

4. God confronts the characters after the events and interrogates them;[121]

5. God pronounces a sentence on each, and Cain's sentence echoes that of Adam in that there is a curse on the ground;

6. the characters are exiled from their present location,

7. the characters are separated from God,

8. and at the close of each narrative the characters dwell "East of Eden."[122]

---

117. Alan J. Hauser, "Linguistic and Thematic Links Between Genesis 4:1-16 and Genesis 2–3," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23, no. 4 (December 1980): 297–305.

118. Wenham analyzes the two accounts structurally as well and notes symmetry in their alternating between narrative and dialogue in a concentric arrangement that focuses attention on the decisive moment when man/woman and Cain/Abel are alone and the sin is committed. Compare Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 50 and 99.

119. Hauser (and others) note the repeated reference to Abel as Cain's "brother" seven times in the relatively brief narrative. This repetition suggests the importance of the characters' filial relationship as a part of the thrust of the narrative.

120. Further linking the passages, God's warning to Cain, "Its desire (תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ) is for you, but you must master it (תִּמְשָׁל־בּוֹ)," (4:7) echoes the vocabulary describing the relationship between the man and woman in 3:16, "Your desire (תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ) shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you (יִמְשָׁל־בָּךְ)."

121. Note the similarity in God's questions to Adam and Eve—"Where are you?" (3:9) and "What is this you have done?" (3:13)— and to Cain—"Where is your brother?" (4:9) and "What have you done?" (4:10).

122. Hauser, "Linguistic and Thematic Links," 297–98.

Hauser concludes, "These structural similarities suggest more than a causal relationship between the two stories. In fact it would appear that the numerous key elements in the stories have been deliberately paralleled in order to lead the reader to relate major motifs in one account to major motifs in the other."[123] Wenham goes a step further in explaining the relationship between the stories. Though their differences must not be overlooked, he asserts that the "similarities between chaps. 3 and 4 confirm that the former should be read as a paradigm of human sin. Fratricide illustrates in a different way how sin works."[124] When the similarities and differences are taken into consideration the point of the parallel narratives becomes clearer. Wenham continues: "Clearly, then, though the writer of Genesis wants to highlight the parallels between the two stories, he does not regard the murder of Abel simply as a rerun of the fall. There is development: sin is more firmly entrenched and humanity is further alienated from God."[125] Goldingay similarly comments regarding the author's intention that the "parallels in the motifs in these opening stories in Genesis is a pointer to their being formally sequential but substantively parallel."[126] We will consider later whether Wenham's or Goldingay's statements express the development of sin fully enough, but for now, it suffices to notice that the narratives are tightly linked literarily and thematically.[127] It is important to note that the narrative

---

123. Ibid., 298.

124. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 100.

125. Ibid.

126. John Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, Old Testament Theology, vol. 1. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 151.

127. There are a host of other verbal connections that link the stories and serve to show how the events in chapter 4 build upon what happened in chapter 3. In recounting the birth of Cain, the narrator uses three terms loaded with significance in light of chapter 3: know, conceive and bear. Knowing was a central theme of chapter 3. Now a new type of knowledge is introduced and one that must be seen in light of the complications to human knowledge presented in chapter 3. Part of God's judgment upon the woman involved pain in conception and childbirth. "The repetition of these words in 4:1 points back to both the sentence in 3:16 and the act that lead to

does not suggest that the connection between these events is simple causation; there is a more textured relationship between them, the full significance of which is not easily articulated propositionally.

The Narrative

Though brief, the Cain-Abel narrative is a tightly structured unit. Brachter analyzes the story's plot with a modified version of Clines' sin–speech–judgment–mitigation plot structure. She sees an introduction (4:1–2), temptation (4:3–7), sin (4:8), discovery (4:9–10), judgment (4:11–12), mitigation (4:13–15), and expulsion (4:16). This more detailed structure highlights the parallels with the preceding narrative.

The occasion for Cain's transgression arises with the rejection of his offering and the acceptance of his brother's. The narrator offers no specific reason for this rejection though many have been suggested.[128] It is likely that Hauser is right that the narrator's

---

the sentence. This is another means used to tell the reader that all that takes place in 4:1–16 is a consequence of the fall." Hauser, "Linguistic and Thematic Links," 299.

128. The options divide between whether the problem lies in the offering itself or if it lies in Cain. The most popular suggestion is that the offering was rejected because it was not a blood sacrifice. However, the text calls them both offerings and it is not necessary that Abel's was a true blood sacrifice (Sailhamer, *Pentatuech as Narrative*, 112). Others suggest that Abel's offering was of higher quality than Cain's (See, for instance, Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 223). This requires a bit more reading into the text than is warranted. Sailhamer argues that the story functions in the Pentateuch as a guide for proper worship and that what is at issue is Cain's heart attitude. God rejects Cain's offering because it is given with an impure heart, the extent of the impurity being revealed by the later developments. Nahum Sarna appears to combine the two by suggesting that the "fatness" of Abel's sacrifice indicates its quality which in turn reveals the purity of his intention (Sarna, *Genesis*, 32). Both Westermann (*Genesis 1–11*, 296) and Brueggemann (*Genesis*, 56) root the difference in the immutable decision of God. Frank Spina forwards the idea that the problem with Cain's offering is that it came from the ground which had been cursed ("The 'Ground' for Cain's Rejection [Gen 4]: 'adãmãh in the Context of Gen 1–11," *Zeitschrift Für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 104, no. 3 [1992]: 319–32). And Jack P. Lewis offers a lengthy history of the interpretation of their sacrifices ("The Offering of Abel [Gen 4:4]: A History of Interpretation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 4 [December 1994]: 481–96).

interest lies in Cain's response rather than with Yahweh's rejection.[129] Brueggemann insists that God's freedom is central to the story. "Essential to the plot is the capricious freedom of Yahweh. Like the narrator, we must resist every effort to explain it."[130] Furthermore, the apparent arbitrariness of God's rejection of Cain's offering parallels the apparent arbitrariness of the prohibition to eat from the tree in chapter 2–3.[131] This ostensible divine caprice combined with the paucity of reflection on the mechanics of sin point to the inexplicability of both the occasions and causes of sin in human experience, a theme we may have cause to revisit in the next chapter.

In a move similar to the previous episode, the narrator again reveals to us Cain's emotional life. In the aftermath of his rejection Cain was very angry (וַיִּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד) and his "face fell" (וַיִּפְּלוּ פָנָיו).[132] The importance of these emotions is underscored by their exact repetition in God's question to Cain (4:6). As opposed to the case of his parents where the emotions described were a res*ult* of their sin, in Cain's case the narrator weaves them into the story as an *ingredient* in his sinful act. Whereas Adam and Eve were moved to sin by (faulty) reason, Cain is moved by twisted emotions. This is an

---

129. Hauser, "Linguistic and Thematic Links," 300.

130. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 56.

131. If the rejection is arbitrary, then the scenario can be seen as a sort of test of Cain's character as the tree was a test of Adam and Eve's trust. Of course, the depiction of Yahweh making this selection arbitrary is unsettling to some readers. Joel N. Lohr shows how the LXX translation of the Hebrew text subtly implicates Cain and his offering (and thus influenced NT interpretation) and Angela Y. Kim reveals how later interpreters inserted the idea of envy into the text to deflect attention away from Yahweh's caprice. Lohr rightly points out that the "caprice" is better seen as the first instance of the theme of God's election of the younger over the older, a theme frequently attested in Genesis. See Joel N. Lohr, "Righteous Abel, Wicked Cain: Genesis 4:1–16 in the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, and the New Testament," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (July 2009): 485–96; and Angela Y. Kim, "Cain and Abel in the Light of Envy: A Study in the History of the Interpretation of Envy in Genesis 4.1–16," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 12, no. 1 (April 2001): 65–84.

132. There is a difference of opinion as to whether the expression translated "he was very angry and his face fell" refers to anger or depression. Sarna and Hamilton lean toward depression, whereas Wenham sees his anger as a common precursor to violent action. We need not decide the case because it is clear that both anger and depression can be ingredient in sinful acts.

important development in the depiction of sin in Genesis 3–11. As we will see below in the narrative of the Tower of Babel, collective emotional concerns can contribute to sin as well.

The Narrative's Depiction of Sin

Traditional interpretations of the Cain narrative focus on the swiftness with which sin has escalated to point of fratricide. Cain's behavior is seen as emblematic of the human tendency toward violence. In both historical and mythical readings, this narrative is accorded less symbolic significance than the preceding. The narrative analysis above suggests that the stories may be more parallel than sequential. What is Cain's sin? Who or what is it against? How does it relate to the narratives preceding it? While the original and contemporary readers are aware of various divine prohibitions against murder, how does the narrative depict what is sinful about Cain's attack of his brother Abel?

Is Cain's sin against God? As in the preceding narrative, God seems more shocked—What have you done? (4:10, cf. 3:13)—than offended. God is depicted first warning Cain against sin's presence, then querying him about his brother, and finally imposing both judgment and mitigation upon Cain. Whereas Adam and Eve were sent out from the garden of God's presence, Cain leaves the divine presence himself (4:16). The sin is presented against God only by extension.

A clue to the reference point of sin in this narrative is to be found in the drumbeat of filial relationship made by the repetition of the word "brother" through which the narrator puts heavy emphasis on the intimate human and familial relationship that existed

between these two men.[133] This is further heightened by Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The term "keeper" (הֲשֹׁמֵר) is related to the term Yahweh God originally used to define Adam's task in the garden (2:15)—to tend it and to keep it (לְעָבְדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ). As a brother and a sharer in the divine image and mandate, a case could be made that Cain was indeed his brother's keeper. But even if not, surely there are postures between "brother's keeper" and "brother's killer" that Cain could have taken and not violated his human calling. The relational hairline fracture observed between the man and the woman in chapter 3 has become a fraternal compound break in chapter 4.

As with Adam and Eve's sin it is impossible to keep discussion of the nature and effects of Cain's sin on the plane of divine-human or human-human relationships alone. There are multiple features of the text that indicate that Cain's sin was profoundly related both to the ground and to his own self-perception. Cain's relationship to the ground is integral to the story. As a tiller of the ground (like his father) he brought a gift from the ground. His punishment (again, similar to that imposed against his father) involves the ground's recalcitrance in yielding its abundance. But the link between his crime and his punishment is not arbitrary on God's part; it is directly related to a role that the narrator (and Yahweh) depict the ground playing in the narrative. The setting of this crime is specifically named "the field" (שָׂדֶה). This term has been used earlier in the narrative to describe the location of the plants and shrubs (2:5) as well as the source of food for Adam after being exiled from the garden (3:18 - "the plants of the field"). As a farmer, the field was Cain's domain and that is where he led Abel to kill him. But the ground plays a

133. Bruce Waltke notes that the word "brother" occurs seven times in Gen. 4:2–11 and foreshadows the family tensions that will be thematic throughout the book. Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 98.

further role. Yahweh says that the ground has been involved in Cain's deed by receiving Abel's blood and then crying out in testimony against him (4:10–11). So God's judgment against Cain is not just specifically targeted against something precious to him, it is a fit punishment due to humanity's (and Cain's) identity as steward of the land/ground and the role that the ground was forced to play in Cain's act. Ellen Van Wolde suggests that the rhythm and rhyme of v. 11 emphasizes Cain's link with the ground and concludes: "Cain's brothers's blood (דמי אחיך), which flows from the hand of Cain into the earth, breaks the link between the אדם Cain and the אדמה."[134] In violating one human relationship, Cain sacrifices another.[135]

As with the previous episode, the "slippage" between crime and punishment is telling. We can say that God's punishment of Cain is based not so much on the fact that Cain has broken a law (indeed no law has been articulated) or even rejected the divine word of warning (though he has in fact done so) but because his act has transgressed his role as one charged with dominion of the land and in integral relationship with other image-bearers. Cain has failed to act humanly and has forced the ground to play a role it was not intended to play either. Hauser ties these points together well. "In 4:10...the writer emphasizes that Abel has been returned to the ground prematurely, violently and unjustly. Abel's blood, which bears his ravaged life, cries out from the ground in protest

---

134. Ellen van Wolde, "The Story of Cain and Abel: A Narrative Study," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 16, no. 52 (December 1991): 34.

135. Van Wolde finds several features of the narrative that speak to Cain's "negation" of his brother. Abel's name means "breath, or vapor." Cain's denial of knowledge of his brother's whereabouts. Cain's "empty speech" to his brother (v. 8). Of this last detail (a point of contention in the text), she says, "This 'empty' speaking would then suggest, or testify to, the negation of the existence of the other as equal, as a brother, and it can be seen as point ahead to the actual elimination of the other." van Wolde, "The Story of Cain and Abel: A Narrative Study," 35.

against the murder. As a result Cain, who heretofore had made his living from the ground, now has become an enemy of it."[136]

A few important details about the depiction of sin in this narrative are inscribed in God's comment to Cain in 4:7, "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." The first part of this parallels the clear prohibition against eating from the tree and what would happen if it were violated. However, there are several differences. First, "doing well" in this case is far less clear than formerly. What must Cain do well? The word translated "do well" is the verbal form of the noun "good". Presumably Cain knows what the "good" is.

Just as important for the depiction of sin is the last phrase: "but you must rule over it." In the introduction to the next significant narrative God will assess the plight of humanity dismally: "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (6:5). But here, God seems to suggest that Cain has every chance to master the sin that crouches at the door. Brueggemann says of Cain, "He is not the victim of original sin. He can choose and act for the good. Such an affirmation by the narrator suggests that chapter 3 must not be permitted to control chapter 4. Cain in this story is free and capable of faithful living."[137] So while Wenham may be correct that by the end of the primeval narrative the narrator appears sympathetic to an Augustinian account of original sin,[138] at this early stage he seems more sanguine about humanity's condition. Though there is a difference

---

136. Hauser, "Linguistic and Thematic Links," 302.

137. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 57.

138. "[A] close reading of these chapters does suggest that the author of Genesis would have been in general sympathy with the interpretation of St. Paul and St. Augustine." Gordon J. Wenham, "Original Sin in Genesis 1–11," *Churchman* 104, no. 4 (1990): 321.

of vocabulary between this term and those used in 1:28 to describe humanity's dominion over the creation, it is appropriate to make a connection between the ruling aspect of the *imago dei* and what Yahweh calls Cain to in this passage. He is to exercise the power that he has to dominate the sin rather than being taken in by it. Just as his parents should have exercised dominion over the serpent (described as a beast of the field), so Cain's proper response to the situation is cast in the terms of fulfilling his identity as a human.

This leads to perhaps the most striking feature of the presentation of sin in this narrative: the zoomorphic depiction of sin as an animal "crouching at the door."[139] Brueggemann says, "Sin is not a breaking of the rules. Rather, sin is an aggressive force ready to ambush Cain. Sin is larger than Cain and takes on a life of its own."[140] Indeed, one could say at this point that sin is depicted as a character in the narrative, a character who, like God, interacts with the other characters in deep and decisive ways yet without denying the freedom of those characters.

As our analysis suggests, it is impossible to limit the point of the narrative to a simple statement. Brueggemann captures much of the tension that the narrative evokes:

> The narrative is not for moral instruction. It enables us to reflect upon the enigmatic situation in which we are set. Every person is willy-nilly set between a sister/brother with whom we compete and a God who acts toward us in seemingly capricious ways. It is not only the problem of the brother, for Cain had quickly resolved that. Nor is it only the problem of God. It is the *brother and God together* that create conflict for Cain and finally lead to his unbearable destiny. We try as best we can to separate 'the human predicament' from the God question. Things are then bearable. But this narrative insists that they converge and cannot be separated.[141]

---

139. "If Genesis 3 brings us up short by portraying a snake acting like a person and speaking, then Genesis 4 does the same by portraying the abstract reality 'sin' acting like an animal and making its bed at the doorway of Cain's life or of his home." Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 151.

140. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 57.

141. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 61.Ibid., 61.

What Brueggemann emphasizes is that it is not enough to say that as humans we are caught up in different types of relationships. Rather, it is the way that those relationships overlap and intertwine (particularly between us, our brother and God) that is the stuff of human experience and the nexus in which sin and temptation occur.

It is common for interpreters to respond in shock at the fact that humanity has arrived at murder in just its second generation.[142] This is taken to suggest an acceleration of the seriousness of sin and its grip on humanity. However, the textual details we have examined above suggest that the sins are parallel as much as anything. Wenham attempts to capture the relationship between the narratives. "These similarities between chapters 3 and 4 confirm that the former should be read as a paradigm of human sin. Fratricide gives a further illustration of the way sin works."[143] They are told in parallel because they function together to depict the character of sin. Wenham goes on to suggest that these are not just parallel illustrations but rather present a complex development. "Clearly then though the writer of Genesis wants to highlight the parallels between the two stories, he does not regard the murder of Abel simply as a rerun of the fall, there is development: sin is more firmly entrenched and humanity is further alienated from God."[144] We shall see that this narrative development continues.

---

142. Gonzales is more dramatic than most. From chapter 3 to 4 "human sin not only moves from the first generation of human beings to the second, but there is a marked increase in sin's odious nature. What began as a seed planted within the hearts of the primoridal man and woman has taken root in the second generation and grown into an ugly weed of human hubris that will rapidly spread throughout the earth, turning what God intended to be a paradisiacal Garden into a howling wasteland of evil and misery. So begins the spread of sin!" Unfortunately, Gonzales overlooks that chapter 4 ends on a positive with the establishment of Yahweh worship and the godly line of Seth and chapter 5 is structured to highlight Enoch and Noah, both righteous men. Gonzales, *Where Sin Abounds*, 64.

143. Wenham, "Original Sin in Genesis 1–11," 314.

144. Ibid.

The Narrative Aftermath

Following the narrative of Cain and Abel is a brief genealogy which, like several of the Genesis genealogies highlights certain events or individuals. In this case, seven generations of Cain's descendants are listed with editorial comments about the first and last of them. First, in apparent defiance of God's judgment upon him to be a wanderer, Cain builds a city and names it for his son Enoch. In the seventh generation, Lamech fathers three sons all of whom are heralded for contributions to human cultural development: Jabal was the father of nomadic livestock herders, Jubal made advancements in music and instrument making, and Tubal-Cain is said to have developed metallurgy. However, these evidences of human cultural development are overshadowed in the narrative by Lamech's crass and violent behavior.

Building off of God's promise to avenge Cain, Lamech boasts to his wives that he has enacted his own vengeance for lesser crimes—"I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me" (Gen. 4:23-24)—and threatens a tenfold increase on God's promise of vengeance. Though the text contains no editorial comments on this vignette, attention to literary detail clarifies the narrator's stance. First, Lamech is described as having two wives. This contrasts sharply with the recent divine provision of one wife for Adam. To underscore this context, Lamech's boast is recorded as poetry. His poem of boast and threat contrasts dramatically with Adam's poetic exaltation at the creation of the woman. Clearly the author intends the reader to recognize the decline in relational harmony and the increase in human belligerence.[145] That this narrative comes at the close

145. Wenham notes that monogamy is implied by the creation of the woman in chapter 2. "Had Adam been supplied with several wives, he could have been fruitful and multiplied even quicker! The creation of one Eve thus shows that monogamy is more important than rapid

of a genealogy implies that these characteristics were in development along the familial chain.[146] Cain's use of violence against his brother becomes Lamech's claim to violent self-preservation and taints the harmony of the marital union with a threat. Lamech takes to himself the role of meting out vengeance that God so recently claimed as his own.

Summary

Cain's sin is presented as committed against God, another, the self, and the ground. Sin appears as an external force that one can and should resist. Out of anger, Cain acts using powers intended for one thing to accomplish another. He has failed to be fully human and receives the fruits of this failure in the very areas that constitute his humanity. Sin then appears to grow in his family line furthering the violence and compounding it with Lamech's appropriation of the divine right of vindication. Cain's sin seems to be focused against other humans than against God, but the consequences suggest that Cain has also sinned against the ground and himself.

Genesis 5:1–32 - Genealogy of Grace

The brief genealogy of Cain is paralleled by a longer genealogy in chapter 5. Rather than being headed by a narrative of violence, it starts with a reference to the line of Seth (5:4, cf. 4:25, 26) and a reiteration of the fact that humanity bears the image of

---

multiplication" (Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically*, Old Testament Studies. [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000], 31). This further implies that there is a hierarchy of value in the various aspects of human identity. Procreative fruitfulness is not a good in an abstract sense but within the bounds of the relational identity of the couple.

146. "The song may suggest that in the family of the undisciplined murderer, vengeance runs rampant, uncontrolled, and without limits. It fits the general theme of Gen. 3–11." Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 65.

God (5:1, 3) as if to assure the reader that despite the despicable behaviors recorded in the preceding chapters the creational mandate is still in force.

The similarity in names between the two lists encourages the reader to compare them. Whereas the Cain's genealogy spans seven generations and ends with a violent Lamech, Seth's genealogy spans ten generations and ends with a Lamech who doesn't threaten but hopes for rest through the work of his offspring Noah. The repetitive structure of the genealogy highlights both the ongoing blessing of procreation and the unavoidable consequences of sin in death.[147] Further, whereas Cain's genealogy speaks of escalating violence, the Enoch from Seth's genealogy offers a different possible end for humanity than death.[148] Though cryptic, these features help to move forward the drama through many generations to give the impression of the ongoing conflict between what humanity was made to be and the ways in which it fell short of that destiny. As suggested earlier, the parallel placement of these genealogies invites the conclusion that humanity has two possible narratives before it.

Genesis 6:1–8 - Cosmic Chaos

Sarna expresses the sentiment of most commentators when he writes of Genesis 6:1–4: "The account given in these few verses is surely the strangest of all the Genesis narratives. It is so full of difficulties as to defy certainty of interpretation. The perplexities arise from the theme of the story, from its apparent intrusiveness within the larger

---

147. "The sentences are as monotonous and have the same effect as those of Gen 1 , presenting as they do the steady, ongoing rhythm of events which stamp the course of human existence—birth, length of life, begetting, death; all that is essential. The real significance of what is happening lies in the continuity of successive generations." Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 7.

148. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 118.

narrative, from its extreme terseness, and from some of its vocabulary and syntax."[149] It is unlikely that we will solve these complexities. However, by reading the episode in its narrative context we can make some cautious comments on how it contributes to the flow of the narrative and even the depiction of sin.[150]

The Narrative

The story appears to relate two events that may or may not be related: the sexual intermingling of "the sons of God/the gods" and the "daughters of men", and the rise of the Nephilim.[151] After both (6:3 and 5–7), God offers commentary on human behavior similar to that uttered in 3:22 and later in 11:6–7. Both of these comments regard humanity's condition and contribute significantly to the depiction of sin.

Much of the debate centers on the identification of the "sons of God/sons of the gods" (בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים) and the nature of the sin.[152] Three main options have been put forward: (1) the "sons of God" are angelic beings and the sin is the disordered mingling of what God has separated; (2) the "sons of God" are the godly line of Seth and the sin is intermarriage with the ungodly line of Cain (or "the daughters of men"); or (3) the "sons

149. Sarna, *Genesis*, 45 Breuggemann is even more pessimistic about the prospect of understanding the narrative. "The meaning of the text is disputed and likely the effort taken in understanding it will not be matched by gains for exposition in the listening community." Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 71.

150. Within the broader context of the Pentateuch, Wenham suggests that this narrative "foreshadows the aversion to intermarriage with Canaanites and Hittites, a recurrent theme in the patriarchal stories." Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically*, 27.

151. It is ultimately unclear whether one should regard the Nephilim as the offspring of these unions or if the reference to them is more of a chronological reference. We need not decide this here because the subsequent divine assessment offers a clear picture of the sinful state of humanity quite apart from deciding that particular.

152. There are other issues in the text as well, such as the identification of the Nephilim and the apparent contradiction of the limiting of human lifespan to 120 years when the genealogies of chapter 10 and 11 record longer lifespans.

of God" are kings or other rulers and the sin is the abusive use of authority to pleasure themselves and multiply their progeny.[153] Other positions and variants have also been forwarded.[154] Each has strengths and weaknesses as well as fruitful points of contact with the current narrative. Many who espouse the "angelic" interpretation see the passage fitting with the depiction of God separating domains in Genesis 1 and regard the passage as yet another example of humanity attempting to better itself by transgressing divine boundaries.[155]

At the very least it is clear that the passage is another "crime and punishment" episode with God intervening to limit or judge the sin. The limitation of human life to 120 years is to be read in the near context of chapter 5 where the remarkable lifespan of individuals allowed for considerable reproductive fecundity, but also, apparently, for considerable growth in corruption. The reference to God's spirit (רוּחַ) in contention with humanity (6:3) recalls the animation of earthen humanity with the divine breath (2:7).[156]

The Narrative's Depiction of Sin

What all the readings share is that the sin involved the distortion of the fundamental human relationship of marriage. This is sin's reference point, the divine institution of marital unity. While it is common to depict a self-advancing motivation for the sin, a move which would make the sin more directly against God, the cryptic nature

---

153. Most commentators offer some summary of the options and their pros and cons. See, for instance, Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 139–140; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 371–372).

154. By dividing the text differently John Sailhamer offers a distinct interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 that smooths some of the difficulties created by the traditional interpretations.

155. So understood, this interpretation avoids the apparent conflict of the "sons of God" being the initiators while the "daughters of men" appear to be those who are punished.

156. The term for breath used in 2:7 is נְשָׁמָה. The two words are paired in 7:22.

of the passage makes this uncertain. In focusing on the distortion of human relationship this episode shares a theme with Lamech's bigamy and advances it. Interestingly, in the near context here, as there, the distortion of marriage is coupled with violence (4:23-24 and 6:11).

In the context of the preceding chapter's repeated formula of characters living many years after their first offspring and "having other sons and daughters," the limiting of the human lifespan to 120 years would suggest that God is not only trying to decrease the time in which persons may commit sin but is also actively curtailing human reproduction. The blessing is not revoked, but limited. If so, then the sin-judgment combination resembles that of the fall in the garden and the Cain-Abel narrative where we saw the consequences limit the human capacity to live out its humanness. Since humanity has distorted the reproductive relationship for its own gain (be that the pursuit of pleasure or of cosmic advancement), God responds with a judgment that restricts humanity's capability to fulfill its human mandate. Once again, then, humanity is depicted transgressing its own identity as human-in-the-image-of-God and human in relationship with the other, and ends up losing at least some of its ability to live out that identity.

We see a further development in sin over earlier chapters in the divine declaration that "that every intention of the thoughts of [humanity's] heart was only evil continually" (6:5). From the woman's reasoned deliberation in Genesis 3 and Cain's responsibility to master sin in chapter 4 humanity has now moved to a position of entrenchment in sin and sinful reasoning. No longer external to humanity, sin is now woven into all their reasoning and behavior. Accordingly, God determines to take drastic measures. In

keeping with the previous narratives, the effects of humanity's sin will be felt beyond the bounds of humanity as God declares that the consequences will be felt by "man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens" (6:7). This again highlights humanity's intimate connection to the created order; the condition and fate of the steward cannot be separated from that of the creation under dominion.

Genesis 6:9–9:17 - Corruption, Catastrophe and Cleansing

We have already addressed how the narrative of the flood functions in Genesis 1–11 as an uncreation-recreation story and some of the implications that has for the careful theological appropriation of these narratives. Here we turn to examine more closely the narrative of the flood to see how sin is depicted and what these narratives add to the images of sin already encountered in the text thus far. For our purposes we can divide the text into three sections: prologue to the flood (6:1–8) which we covered above, the flood narrative proper (6:9–9:17), and the epilogue (9:18–29), which we will address in a separate section.[157] It turns out that the prologue and the epilogue have more to say about sin specifically than does the flood narrative itself.

The Narrative

The familiar story of the flood is bounded by two short and perplexing narratives: the episode of the sons of God and the daughters of men and Ham's dishonoring of his

157. Here I am following Wenham's division (*Genesis 1–15*, 136ff). Sailhamer regards 6:1–4 as an epilogue to the genealogy of chapter 5 and begins the flood narrative at 6:5 (*Pentateuch as Narrative*, 120). Sailhamer's handling of Genesis 6:1–8 is unique and offers a way through some of the problems the text presents. While I find the reading compelling, since it stands outside the historic handling of the text interaction with it here would require more space than this project warrants.

father. God embarks on a creation cleansing program and reestablishes humanity and the created order through Noah. The themes of judgment and salvation are pronounced. The details and vocabulary seem explicitly chosen to echo the creation and commissioning at the beginning of the primeval narrative.

The Narrative's Depiction of Sin

Properly speaking, the theme of sin is absent from the flood narrative. As we have seen the narrative itself is cast as an uncreation-recreation story. However, the narrative does underscore several points that have been made previously. First, humanity's responsibility to exercise dominion is presented in detail in God's instruction to Noah regarding the collection and protection of the animals. Much as the animals were paraded before Adam to be named, so Noah parades the animals into the ark.

This positive portrayal of humankind's intimate relationship with the created order is in the context of the grievous effects that humanity's sin will have on that same created order; it will be undone. It is not that the violence and corruption detailed in the prologue has occasioned the judgment of humanity alone. Humanity's corruption has spilled over into the land itself; all must be purged. This again hints at the inadequacy of defining sin in legal terms and principally between God and man.[158] The relationships are more complex than that model allows.

---

158. Some would argue that the symbiotic relationship between humanity and the created order was embedded in the covenant between God and Adam. We have already examined some of the problems with construing the original divine human relationship in terms of covenant. Goldingay's comment is apposite: "By not speaking of the relationship between God and the first human beings as a covenant, Genesis has perhaps implied that there was no need for formally binding commitments before the time of human disobedience and divine punishment." Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 181.

Though humanity's sin and its consequences have been severe, the blessing and commissioning of humanity after the flood using much the same language as that employed in chapters 1 and 2 makes clear that humanity's destiny is still intact (Gen. 9:1-7). Noah and his descendants are called to continue the work of imaging God in the world through stewardship and reproduction. God's establishment of a covenant (9:8-17) suggests an important development in the divine-human relationship.

Genesis 9:18-29 - Old Sins in a New Creation

After the magnitude of the flood and before the decisive events at the Tower of Babel is a brief narrative that has attracted far less attention than most in Genesis 1–11, the narrative of Noah and his sons. Most of the attention has been focused on the vague description of the nature of Ham's sin against his father. However, as we observed earlier, this narrative plays an important role in the plot of sin as it depicts a "second fall" after the second creation following the uncreation of the flood.

The Narrative

The story is compactly told. Noah, enjoying the fruits of his labors in the vineyard becomes inebriated and exposes himself (wittingly or not). Ham chances upon this scene and invites his brothers to increase their father's shame by viewing him. Instead, Shem and Japheth go to great lengths to hide their father's nakedness without seeing it. Noah, aroused from his stupor, pronounces a curse upon Ham's son Canaan and a blessing on Shem and Japheth's descendants.

There are remarkable formal parallels between the story of Noah and his sons and the account in Genesis 3 to the point that it would not be inaccurate to describe this story as a new "fall" after the renewal of creation.[159] Rather than being a clumsy copy of the original story, the narrative stands on its own but is clearly related to the earlier tale. In the one brief narrative both the story of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel are recapitulated with distinct emphases.[160] These parallels offer important interpretive clues and move the story of sin forward in important ways.

In both a fruit lies at the heart of the story. Noah, like Adam is described as a "man of the soil" (9:20). In both stories the main characters end up naked.[161] In both stories there is a covering, by God in Genesis 3 and by Shem and Japheth in Genesis 9. Both stories end with a curse. There are differences as well. Westermann notes that unlike many of the other crime and punishment stories God is not the one who punishes, rather Noah utters the curse.[162] Further, the sin of Ham is offset by the act of respect of his brothers, a feature lacking in any of the other narratives.[163] Tomasino concludes: "These parallels show that history truly does repeat itself, albeit with an ironic twist or two. The story of Noah's drunkenness provides us with both a new 'Fall', and a new conflict between brothers. Thus, it gives further evidence that world history from the Flood through the Tower of Babel is essentially a replay of the history from creation

---

159. Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 35.

160. Wenham notes the similar effects in the families: "As in Adam's case the son's behavior is even more reprehensible than the father's and leads to dissension among the three brothers." Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 35.

161. Tomasino notes that the aspect of nakedness in the two stories is almost a mirror image. Adam and Eve ate and saw their nakedness, Noah drank and didn't recognize his. Tomasino, "History Repeats Itself: The 'fall' and Noah's Drunkenness," 129.

162. Noah's act of cursing Canaan (whether right or wrong, the narrative neither overtly censures nor approves Noah's act) shows humanity acting like God.

163. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 483.

through the Flood."[164] It remains to ask what, if any kind of advancement or development there may be in the depiction and understanding of sin.

The Narrative's Depiction of Sin

Like most of these narratives, the narrator offers no explicit commentary on the events of 9:18–26. Rather, the similarities and differences between this narrative and the "first fall" assist the reader in interpreting the narrative. Noah follows the type of Adam and Eve in being overcome by a fruit and being exposed as naked. In covering their father, Shem and Japheth mimic the behavior of God. Ham most closely resembles the serpent whose actions lead to the exposure and shaming of another character.

Noah is never censured for his behavior; the focus seems to be directly on Ham.[165] But the attentive reader will recognize that, aided by the wine, Noah's attitude toward his nakedness is quite different from that of Adam and Eve. Beginning from chapter 2 one can follow a progression from "naked and not ashamed" through "naked and ashamed" to "naked and without shame." Whether one ought to regard this as "sin" or not from the perspective of the narrative, it is clear that in the presentation of humanity this is a less than favorable development. Furthermore, the fact of human nakedness has opened up the possibility of a new way to sin that Ham embraces: shameless exploitation of another's shame.

---

164. Tomasino, "History Repeats Itself: The 'fall' and Noah's Drunkenness," 130.

165. Most of the commentators survey the biblical witness on the topic of wine and drunkenness. While drunkenness is rarely labeled sin directly, it is clearly regarded as folly. With an eye to the broader narrative context of Genesis, however, Hamilton points out that in the two cases of drunkenness in the book of Genesis—this text and the story of Lot and his daughter (19:31ff)—the results of drunkenness are some form of debauchery and even familial breakdown. (Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 321).

Further, the setup of the sinful encounter once again puts humanity in direct relationship with the land/soil. On the one hand, Noah's advances in viticulture and viniculture may be read as a proper expression of dominion over the created order; Noah is presented fulfilling his calling as image bearer. But too soon he comes under the effects of his wine and it begins to exercise dominion over him. What is Ham's sin? We need not speculate about the possible sexual nature of Ham's sin.[166] While there are several arguments for finding a more nefarious sexual significance behind the phrase "saw his father's nakedness" it is better to honor the vagueness of the narrative.[167] In the broader context where the experience of shame was presented as one of the first and most intimate effects of sin, the notion of preying on someone else's shame (or lack of) for your own titillation is sufficiently reprehensible to warrant an individual narrative. That it happens in the context of familial relationship only exacerbates the impropriety.[168] As such it fits within the ongoing storyline of the breakdown of family (and human) relationships.[169] For our purposes, the vagueness of the narrative regarding the exact nature of Ham's sin is felicitous. By not narrowing his behavior to some specific act of

---

166. John Bergsma and Scott Hahn survey the options—voyeurism, paternal incest, and castration—and suggest a fourth possibility, maternal incest, with Canaan cursed as the offspring of the illicit union. John Sietze Bergsma and Scott Walker Hahn, "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse on Canaan (Genesis 9:20–27)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 25–40.

167. Links are made, for instance, with the similar situation of the inebriated Lot in Genesis 19 and with the clearly sexual meaning behind the phrase "see the nakedness of" in Deuteronomy.

168. Gonzales notes the narrative's relationship to the Decalogue: "Fundamentally, Ham's sin is an intentional act of contempt accompanied by a mocking disclosure to his brothers—both actions the original audience would interpret as blatant violations of the fifth commandment (Exod 20:12)." Gonzales, *Where Sin Abounds*, 85.

169. "The outrage of Ham and his punishment by the father's curse is to be seen in the context of the narratives of crime and punishment in Gen 2–11. J's intention becomes clear: he wants to speak of one's culpability in the three basic communities of human relationships—between man and woman (2–3), brother and brother (4:2–16), parents and children (9:20–27)." Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 494 Goldingay clarifies that these stories should be set parallel, rather than conceived as some sort of logical development. Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 185.

sexual treachery, the narrative can serve a broader significance in warning against the ways that humans are prone to dishonor one another and to exploit each other's weakness and shame for their own purposes. As such the narrative serves as a better lens through which you evaluate a host of human behaviors.

Summary

Though in one sense sin does not feature significantly in the flood narrative, in another sense this is the most dramatic depiction of sin in the entire primeval narrative. The narrative is the story of judgment and cleansing for human corruption of itself and the earth. Humanity has so corrupted itself and the earth that an almost complete restart of the story is necessitated. Humanity's identity and destiny is squarely in view in both the story line and some of the minor details. Not only did their collective behavior bring judgment on them and the earth, but other developments further limited their effectiveness in carrying out their identity through procreation and dominion. The epilogue reveals that corruption and relational breakdown are recalcitrant and endure even after the cataclysmic cleansing.

Genesis 10:1–11:26 - Towering Offense

The final episode in the primeval narrative is the narrative of the Tower of Babel. Because of its apparent explicatory powers it has received attention similar to that of the fall and Cain and Abel. It is an incredibly brief and compact story that provides a fitting close to the primeval narrative and an introduction to the patriarchal narratives to follow. Its depiction of humanity is both poignant and borderline pathetic.

The Narrative Context

The final account in the primeval narrative is bounded by genealogies. The genealogy of chapter 10, the so called "Table of Nations", differs from previous genealogies in that its focus is more on groups than individuals.[170] That said, similar to the previous genealogies (ch. 4, 5) it includes editorial insertions that contribute to the flow of the primeval narrative. Whereas the genealogy of Cain's descendants in Gen. 4 commented on the cultural developments of Lamech's children, Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-Cain, so the genealogy of Gen. 10 comments on the hunting and city-building prowess of Nimrod. Rather than being an irrelevant insertion, the reference to Nimrod prepares for the narrative to follow. It is important to note that Nimrod, founder of Babel, was a descendant of Ham.[171] While some find the narrative's placement abrupt or intrusive, for our purposes the table of nations which precedes the Babel account and the genealogy of Shem that follows it serve to accentuate the narrative.[172] Surrounded by a sea of

---

170. Sailhamer finds a reference to the upcoming Tower narrative in the division of Shem's descendants at Peleg and Joktan. Of the dividing of the land during Peleg's time Sailhamer writes: "Thus, not only is the land divided in the confusion of languages (11:1), but more fundamentally, two great lines of humanity diverge form the midst of the sons of Shem. Those who seek to make a name (*shem*, 11:4) for themselves in the building of Babylon and those for whom God will make a name (12:2) in the call of Abraham" (Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 102). Sailhamer argues that the point of the genealogy here is to emphasize human unity. "Humanity in its totality is closely circumscribed. The author does not want the reader to lose sight of the unity among human beings." This is particularly important since the narrative will soon narrow its focus to one family line, that of Abraham. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 130.

171. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 133.

172. Some detect faulty editorial work in this since Babel is mentioned in 10:10 prior to the etiological tale in question. However, we should not make too much of this. With its references to known locations, the table of nations is beginning the transition to history. Additionally, Wenham suggests that the story of the tower of Babel corrects what might be a faulty understanding of the table of nations. To him, the table of nations is essentially positive and depicts humans living in harmony. The Babel account corrects that interpretation. He also sees this continuing a pattern in early Genesis of positive events or accounts being followed by negative ones. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 242.

genealogy, the narrative of Babel stands as prominently as the tower at its center. The author draws attention to the passage in this way.

Babel, then, serves as the last of the fundamental human narratives. In chapter 12 the focus of the narrative narrows to consider the life and experience of one man and his family, namely, Abraham. The book becomes the story of the patriarchs and the (pre)history of the people of Israel rather than a prehistory of the human race. The tower of Babel stands on this border and serves as a transition. On the one hand it tells its story with the same universal conception as the preceding chapters. On the other, by including the name of an historical city which plays a significant role in the rest of the OT, it serves to begin the fade from mere primordial mythology into something more akin to history.[173]

The Narrative

The story is so tersely told that recounting it requires more language than does the original. Humanity, driven by fear of dispersal and a desire for a lasting name, essays to build a city with a tower. Before the project proceeds very far, God descends to survey their work. To prevent future fatal human collaborations, God confounds their language, effectively dispersing them.

As many have noted Genesis 11:1–9 is rife with wordplay which befits a narrative that comments so directly on language. Similar sounding words are placed together: "let us make bricks" – נִלְבְּנָה לְבֵנִים, "bake them thoroughly" - (נִשְׂרְפָה לִשְׂרֵפָה), "tar" and "mortar" – הַחֵמָר and חֹמֶר. Additionally, the all-important "place" (שָׁם) is the basis for

173. Westermann wrote that Genesis 11:1–9 is not prehistory in the same way that the rest of Genesis 1–11 is because it focuses on the actions of one group. He evaluated this fact as evidence that "11:1–9 is clearly part of the transition from primeval event to history." Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 543.

their foray into "the heavens" (שָׁמַיִם) for the purpose of making a "name" (שֵׁם) for themselves. The story was also crafted with a paucity of vocabulary. This makes for wordplay between the fear of the people not to be "scattered" (נָפוּץ) and Yahweh's ultimate end for them—scattering (הֲפִיצָם). David Cotter and others have noted the play between the words name (שֵׁם) and there (שַׁם) in the passage as well. Wanting to dwell *there* to make a *name* for themselves, they end up with neither. Hamilton notes another wordplay. "The order of the consonants in Heb. *nāb̲ĕlâ*, 'let us confuse' (i.e., *n-b-l*), is the reverse of the consonants in *lĕb̲ēnîm*, 'bricks' (v. 3) (i.e., *l-b-n*). Does the reversal of the sounds suggest a reversal by God of the human machinations? Will he unbrick what they brick? Will the wrecking crew undo what the building crew has accomplished?"[174]

More than a few commentators have recognized implied humor in the contrast between humanity's upward aspirations and the divine need to descend, to "go down", to assess their project. The humans' self-assessment and the divine assessment are diametrically opposed. There is further irony in the passage. Though one stated aim is "to make a name" for themselves, the passage contains no names and vaguest indication of where they undertook their project. The only proper name included, Babel, is a farcical play on words, turning Babylon, "the gate of the gods", to Babel, "confusion."[175]

In fact, the passage plays out much like several other incidents in early Genesis where an event is narrated and God shows up immediately thereafter. All of these other incidents are clearly sinful: Adam and Eve eating of the tree, Cain murdering Abel, and

---

174. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 356. Fokkelman presses this wordplay even further. "Interpreting this, we see that the reversal of the order of sounds reveals another reversal: God reverses what the men make; the men build, God pulls down; opposed to men's construction we find, hard and direct, God's destruction. Even without this chiasmus the reversal was in the story, but in this way it becomes pressing, of a particular directness, almost oppressing." Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 15.

175. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 241.

the intermarriage between sons of God and daughters of men. It seems safe, therefore, to conclude that the building of the tower includes some underlying immorality that would justify divine punishment.

The Narrative's Depiction of Sin

If so, what is the sin? Against whom or what is it committed? How does it relate to the earlier narratives? Though they express it in different ways, most traditional interpretations come to the conclusion that it has to do with human pride. In seeking to make a name for themselves, the humans have overstepped their bounds.[176] Westermann suggests that like Adam and Eve in the garden, humans were no longer satisfied with the limited state of their existence but wanted to force their way into the realm of the divine.[177] We are, however, forced to deduce this from the text; no explicit judgment is given.

A more concrete suggestion for the nature of the sin here is based on consideration of the near context. Some think that what God reacts to is humankind's resistance to the mandate to disperse and populate the earth made after the flood.[178] This understanding makes good sense when read in light of the original statement of humankind's purpose as image bearers—to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth

---

176. Wenham likens the sin with that which preceded the flood. "Building a tower that would reach up to heaven has analogies with the intermarriage of the sons of God and human women in 6:1–4; both acts illicitly blur the boundary between God and mankind, and so attract divine wrath that affects the whole human race." Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 36.

177. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 552.

178. P.J. Harland argues that how one approaches the text determines whether one reads the narrative as presenting a vertical sin (hubristic attempt to attain god-like status) or a horizontal sin (fearful attempt to avoid dispersal). He demonstrates that those who separate the text into component parts prefer the former interpretation whereas those who interpret the passage more literarily and in its context tend toward the latter. (P. J. Harland, "Vertical or Horizontal: The Sin of Babel," *Vetus Testamentum* 48, no. 4 [1998]: 513–33).

(1:28).” This reading also makes sense of the placement of the “table of nations” before the account of the Tower of Babel. The division of humanity into nations and cultures was a part of the divine design for humanity. Nevertheless, humanity, as it had multiple times already in the narrative, sought to circumvent the logical outworking of its own identity. This also contrasts with the way the primeval narrative ends and the patriarchal narrative begins. Hamilton notes that chapter 11 begins and ends with stories of people moving and settling (vv. 2 and 31). But there is a difference: “With the first group, and their insistence on their selfishly conceived project, God is most displeased; but to the second group God promises great blessing.”[179] This echoes the function of the earlier genealogies in depicting humanity’s two possible paths.

An important detail to note in this narrative is the collective behavior of humanity. As in the prelude to the flood and in contrast to the narratives of the garden, Cain and Abel, and Noah and his sons, the “character” in question here is not an individual but humanity collectively. In fact the Tower narrative develops the collective depiction of sin from Genesis 6.[180] There God reacted against what could be considered the collected behavior of individuals. Here in chapter 11, the behavior is more the individual behavior of the collective. One can also see an advance in the depiction of God and humanity pitted against one another. In chapter 6 God thwarted humanity by decreasing their lifespan. In the Tower narrative God again thwarts humanity but this time by dividing their language.

---

179. Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 351.

180. It is instructive to note the shift from “sons of God” in chapter 6 to “sons of men” in chapter 11. Either two groups are being depicted or the steady movement away from God is shown.

Again we see the misuse of a feature of human godlikeness—language—resulting in the loss or diminution of that capacity. The centrality of language in this brief narrative and their dependence upon speech for their project, recalls the Genesis 1 creation narrative where God created through speech.[181] In this narrative, humans retain this aspect of godlikeness while at the same time *humanity* loses this capacity as a simple feature of their existence. Having used their linguistic unity in service of purposes contrary to their identity, God moves them toward fulfilling their destiny by complicating a feature of their corporate identity further complicating their ability to fulfill the human destiny.

Mark Boda summarizes well how the narrative of the tower depicts sin when considered in context.

> Much has been made of the Tower of Babel incident as one of the quintessential stories of wickedness in the Bible, especially related to the hubris of humanity; however, it appears that the sin in this passage is not pride but rather humanity's failure to obey the creation mandate in Gen 1:28. There humanity was commanded to fill the earth and subdue it rather than settle down in one concentrated place. In this way, the building of the city resonates with the practices of the line of Cain, who also built cities (4:17).[182]

One could almost argue that Boda is suggesting that the city builders at the tower of Babel are typologically related to Cain.

Summary

The sin of Babel is the least tidy of all. There is a mixture of motives that cannot be simply captured under the term "pride." What the narrative does make clear is a

---

181. The specification of earthy building materials possibly recalls God's own creation of the man from the earth.

182. Mark J. Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament*, Siphrut (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 23.

marked conflict between divine decree for humanity and human designs for themselves. Interestingly, the outcome both advances and diminishes humanity's pursuit of their identity and destiny. Just as Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden and Cain's exile served the purpose of pressing humanity beyond its own chosen borders, so too the disruption of human language served the forward movement of the narrative by pressing humanity to disperse into all the earth.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION: THE DEPICTION OF SIN IN GENESIS 1–11

Having concluded our narrative-sensitive reading of Genesis 1–11 we are in a position to summarize our findings. How is sin depicted in the plot of Genesis 1–11? Is there any clear reference point for the sins such as divine law or human nature? These conclusions will be used to address questions of sin in systematic theology in the following chapter. In particular we will look at the idea of "the fall", the development of sin in the narrative, the character of sin, and the implied reference point for sin. We will develop these themes in the following chapter.

Vocabulary for Sin

As we begin our examination of the summary of sin in Genesis 1–11, it is relevant to note that of the large lexicon of sin in both Hebrew and Greek very few occur in primeval history.[183] The most common OT word for sin, חַטָּאת, occurs in Genesis 4:7 in the divine warning to Cain. The LXX renders this with a word in the ἁμαρτια word

183. For a brief survey of the vocabulary and use see Robin S. Cover, "Sin, Sinners (Old Testament)," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 31–40 and David R. Seely, *Sin, Sinners (New Testament)*, vol. 6 of *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 40–47.

group. In the same narrative, the term עָוֹן, iniquity, is used, though translations differ over whether to render this as "guilt" or "punishment." Is Cain saying that his *iniquity* is too great or is he using the term metonymically to refer to the *punishment* for his sin? The LXX's αἰτία leans toward the latter. As Cover notes, "Metonymic usages of the term illustrate clearly the relationship in Hebrew thought between 'sin' and resultant 'guilt' and 'punishment,' since *'awôn* may denote any of these three senses (or all three meanings) in a single passage."[184] One could conclude that Cover's analysis of *'awôn* applies to the depiction of sin in Genesis more broadly. In Genesis 6:5, 11, and 13, the cause of the flood is said to be humanity's evil (רָעַת) and violence (חָמָס) (LXX: κακίαι and ἀδικία respectively). Both in God's assessment of the antediluvian condition and in his covenant with Noah, the text makes repeated use of the term שָׁחַת, both in the sense of corruption or ruin (6:11, 12 [2x]), and God's response to it, destruction (6:13, 17; 9:11, 15). This exhausts the vocabulary for sin and evil in the primeval history. So while many have argued that sin is a major theme in Genesis 1–11, such an argument must be made on bases other than lexical.[185]

184. Cover, "Sin, Sinners (Old Testament)," 32.

185. It could be argued that "curse" is more thematic than sin in Genesis. The word for curse, אָרַר, occurs five times in Genesis 1–11: at 3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29 and 9:25. Bartholomew and Goheen suggest that these five uses find their thematic counterpart in the five-fold use of the word for bless (בָּרַךְ) in God's promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 55.

Fall or Falls?

From a narrative perspective it is fair to ask if the narrative as it stands supports the traditional notion of a fall.[186] The evidence is mixed. First, we observed that literarily it is difficult to separate between Genesis 3 and Genesis 4. As Wenham says, "They are formally sequential but functionally parallel." Further, the narrator does not suggest any causal relationship Genesis 3 and 4. Rather, as Brueggemann pointed out, the text depicts Cain with every chance of resisting this sin. These details complicate the traditional reading of Genesis 3 as fall and everything else as details. The chapters following 3 and 4, however, perhaps suggest not a fall but a division of humanity, namely, those that call upon the name of the Lord and those that don't. The parallel genealogies of the line of Cain (ch. 4) and the line of Seth (ch. 5), and their corresponding conclusions—violent Lamech and righteous Noah—hint as much. Humanity, it seems, has two ways to live.

Further complicating the picture of a momentary cataclysmic fall is the clear creation-uncreation-recreation structure of the narratives. After the recreation following the flood we saw that the narrative of Noah, his wine, and his sons recapitulates many of the details of the narrative of Genesis 3–4. So there is in a sense a second (Cain) or third fall (Noah, Ham). Further we observed the depiction of individual sin (Adam and Eve, Cain, Lamech, Ham) and corporate sin (sons of God and daughters of men, Babel). So one might argue that there are both individual falls and corporate falls.[187]

---

186. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to address comprehensively the debate regarding whether Genesis 3 presents a "fall" or not. Beyond the simple answers of "yes" and "no" (Barr, Breuggemann, Westermann), are a variety of positions such as those that suggest that it is an *upward* fall, an improvement in human development (Irenaeus).

187. In the face of feminist accusations we should note that the narrative does not in any way suggest the woman's responsibility for the fall in an isolated way. There are not two falls: that of the woman and that of the man. Rather the focus of the narrative is on humanity as a unity.

All this supports the contention that if one must speak in terms of a fall, it is best to read the entire section, Genesis 3–11, as that fall, rather than Genesis 3 in isolation. Fretheim is moving in this direction when he notes that Genesis 3 can be seen to be a "fall" from a vantage point later in the narrative.

> In summary, chapter 3 witnesses to an originating sin that begins a process, an intensification of alienation, extending over chapters 3–6, by which sin becomes "original" in the sense of pervasive and inevitable with effects that are cosmic in scope. However generalizable the story in chapter 3, it alone cannot carry the weight and freight of the traditional view; the fall is finally not understood to be the product of a single act. But it is a beginning of no little consequence and chapters 3–8 together witness to a reality that subsequent generations can with good reason call a fall.[188]

What is important to note is that the Genesis 3 is the beginning of a process, a process that is ratified at every turn in the narrative.

We should point out that the notion of a fall from a primal state of perfection is not overtly supported by the text. We noted that the creation including the paradisiacal garden is depicted not in a state of primal perfection but rather in need of cultivation and development. It might be safe to assume that humanity, too, bears marks of needing development of various sorts.[189] As Terrence Fretheim remarks: "The charge given

---

Bonhoeffer captures this: "Eve only falls totally when Adam falls, for the two are one. Adam falls because of Eve, Eve falls because of Adam, the two are one." (Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 75) This would be the corollary to the idea that Adam wasn't fully human until Eve was created.

188. Terrence E. Fretheim, "Is Genesis 3 a Fall Story?" *Word & World* XIV, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 153.

189. Many contemporary interpreters point to Irenaeus's concept of the human race in need of maturation as a model more in keeping with the presentation of the narrative and narrative theology more broadly.

humans to fill the earth and subdue it means that God's creation is not a static state of affairs; its becoming is part of God's creational intention."[190]

The Character of Sin

Like a good story, the narratives of Genesis 1–11 depict the main characters of God and humanity in a variety of ways and even developing as characters through the narrative. These presentations are not always simple to reconcile. Sin has a variety of faces in these narratives. Though certainly not complete, Boda's summary of the depiction of sin in Genesis 3–11 highlights several aspects of sin. "Throughout Genesis 1–11, sin is described as violating God's command (chaps. 2-3), disobeying God's creation mandate to fill the earth (Genesis 11) and exercise dominion (Genesis 3), seeking to become like God (Genesis 3), and murdering (Genesis 4, 9:46). At first, sin is described as an external condition that must be mastered (Genesis 4), but soon it invades humanity's inner being resulting in an earth filled with violence (Genesis 6)."[191]

Sin as Law-breaking

Is sin depicted in Genesis 3–11 as law-breaking? We admitted that in the case of Adam and Eve the presentation of sin comes closest to being shown as a simple violation of a divine ordinance. However, the language of law is not used, though a case can be made that there are courtroom overtones in the interaction between the man, the woman and God. It is true that some of the sins committed in these chapters are codified as law

---

190. Fretheim, "Is Genesis 3 a Fall Story?" 147. On this point, Fretheim, as do many commentators, point to Irenaeus's concept of the primal pair as the human race in need of maturation.

191. Boda, *Severe Mercy*, 32.

later in the Pentateuch. But in these chapters, for the most part, there are no laws that serve as a reference point for the sins. Rather, as we have shown throughout the reading, the reference point for most of the sins is the description of God and humanity in chapters 1 and 2, including the *imago dei*, the call to procreation, dominion, stewardship, and human relationality.

Sin as Pride

In addition to depicting sin as violation of a law of God, many theologians have suggested that the root or essence of sin is pride. Do the narratives bear this out? Again, the evidence is mixed. In the account of Adam and Eve, the diagnosis of pride requires more reading into the narrative than is judicious. As Sailhamer suggests, it makes as much sense to read the narrative as an example of folly—relying on human discernment to achieve the goal of God-likeness. In the case of Cain, one can deduce the emotion of wounded pride, though the narrator focuses on anger and despondency. In desiring to "make a name" for themselves, the participants in the Tower of Babel narrative would appear to be emblematic of the sin-as-pride concept. However, that simple straightforward analysis is problematized in the narrative by the addition of their apparent anxiety "lest we be scattered."[192] In short, diagnosing pride as ingredient in these narratives requires more psychologizing than strict interpretation.

192. Source critics, of course, might take these almost contradictory goals as evidence of the amalgamation of distinct narratives. Westermann surveys the evidence on the question of the unity of the Tower narrative. See Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 536–39.

Sin as Mistrust

Since at least the time of the Reformers, it has been suggested that the root of sin is failure to trust, or lack of faith. Terrence Fretheim's reading is typical:

> The primal sin is thus not disobedience, pride, rebellion, or violence, or even the desire to become like God; each is symptomatic of a more fundamental problem of trust. There is no storming of the heavens language here, no desire to take over the divine realm or run the universe, no declaration of independence and no celebration of a new-found autonomy. And that, of course, may be precisely the point. Temptation and sin are often quiet, seemingly innocent realities, associated with that which seems far removed from obvious sins. Mistrust is never initially visible.[193]

On the face of the narratives themselves it is necessary to do a considerable bit of psychologizing of the characters to arrive at this conclusion; faith is not thematic in any direct sense in these chapters. However, when the narratives are placed within the context of the entire book of Genesis and beyond to the Pentateuch where faith is thematic, it is not unreasonable to inject some sense of it.[194]

Commenting on both mistrust and pride as roots of sin, Pannenberg notes that the motives behind our sin are often opaque.

> In the situation of the universal failure to achieve our human destiny that theology calls sin, unbelief is not always, then, the theme as the final basis. It is this only in encounter with the God of historical revelation. Again, the concrete starting point of sinning does not lie in the naked hubris of our human wanting to be as God. At many points this hubris is at work only implicitly in desire and in anxiety about our lives. When it comes out into the open, it can have destructive and even murderous effects. But in the everyday manifestations of sin its true nature and the depths of its wickedness are for the most part concealed.[195]

---

193. Fretheim, "Is Genesis 3 a Fall Story?" 151.

194. See especially John Sailhamer's argument that the Pentateuch as a whole plays the faith of Abraham off against the law of Moses. Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*.

195. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 252.

Under those circumstances it is not surprising that sin is so often depicted in narrative rather than analyzed theoretically. Corruption is, therefore, not only a static concept but one that will be worked out in the succeeding narrative.

Sin as Corruption

At the climax of the first sequence of narratives, the introduction to the flood, we observed that language of corruption was used. The image here is one of taint or stain, imagery that is developed much more fully later in the Pentateuch. What this language does is capture the tight link between humans and their environment by underscoring the widespread effects of their sin in the created order.

But the concept of corruption communicates something about the behaviors going forward, it predicts behavior. "Corruption is thus a *dynamic* motif in the Christian understanding of sin: it is not so much a particular sin as the multiplying power of all sin to spoil a good creation and to break its defenses against invaders."[196]

Sin and Violence

In the same context as the above, the manifestation of sin as violence is highlighted. The immediate context of chapter 6 does not explicitly mention violence, unless some violence is implied in the manner in which the sons of god took the daughters of men to themselves. However, the most significant preceding narrative is that of Cain and then its echo in Lamech, both stories of violence. The reader is led to assume

196. Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 32.

that the escalation that occurred between Cain and Lamech typified human development through the generations listed.

How is violence sin? Up to the point that Cain responds with violence toward his brother, God had not revealed his power in that way. Even in the aftermath of Adam and Eve's sin, God's response was grace and a limitation of his powers. Cain and Lamech express the fullness of their powers and, indeed, in inflicting death surpass their authority. Even if there is not enough information to say that the story has depicted God as the sole disposer of life and death, it is enough to note that murder is contrary to the call to fill the earth. Further, it extends the power of domination beyond the creation to other beings a confusion of at least two of humanity's fundamental relationships.

Insofar as it is shown as a feature of humanity the feminist theologians are right to highlight it as relevant. However, violence is not thematic in these chapters. Furthermore, God's response, the flood—an undeniable act of divine 'violence'—mitigates against simplistic application of the term to describe the human condition.

Sin as Character

As we observed earlier, the standard Hebrew vocabulary for sin is for the most part absent from these chapters. Where it does occur, therefore, its presence is remarkable. This is especially the case in the first instance of the word "sin" in Scripture. As we noted, in Genesis 4, in the context of God's warning to Cain, sin is depicted as a beast crouched and ready to pounce on unsuspecting Cain. As Breuggemann commented, "Sin is not a breaking of rules. Rather, sin is an aggressive force ready to ambush

Cain."[197] What is important to note is that this malevolent force is not depicted within Cain but is somehow external to him. At the same time, it is impossible to ignore that this "animal hunger" is a very real part of the narrative. The combination of the serpent in chapter 3 with the crouching enemy of chapter 4 goes far to present sin as an alien element in the story-world whose presence the human characters must reckon with.

In short, the ultimate motivations for most of these sins are varied and inscrutable. There is fear and anxiety, pride and desire, grasping and ignorance. The narrative depicts the inextricability of these desires and motivations.

The Development of Sin

Since at least the time of Von Rad's Genesis commentary it has been customary to characterize the depiction of sin in Genesis 3–11 as an increasing tide, an avalanche of sin.[198] Wenham picks up the image: "The opening chapters of Genesis describe an avalanche of sin that gradually engulfs mankind, leading first to his near-annihilation in the flood, and second to man's dispersal over the face of the earth in despair of achieving international cooperation."[199] Some demur from this position. On our reading it is safe to say that there is development in sin but that avalanche might not be the best way to describe it. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the sin at Babel is more egregious than that of Cain. The consequences may be more dramatic in one sense, but they are similar in another. Both are cast out and both are marked for their own good: Cain with a brand against revenge and the Babelites with linguistic diversity to protect them from their own

---

197. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 57.

198. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H.Marks, Old Testament Library. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 105.

199. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, li.

success in deviousness. It might be better to say that the narrative depicts a series of roughly parallel crime and punishment narratives. Once again the creation-uncreation-recreation theme mitigates against a straightline narrative development in sin. If anything, a double crescendo might be discernible from Adam to the violence that precipitated the flood and again from Noah to Babel. We should note that this development may also be read from individual to corporate.

Another aspect of the development is the development of new ways to fall short of humanity's calling even as that calling is pursued. The first sin leads to the first creative act: the preparation of fig leaf coverings.[200] Procreation and the first act of Yahweh-worship lead to the first murder. The cultural advancement of music is immediately followed by a crass song of abuse. Waltke remarks on the tension: "This family line is a tragic image of sin's distortion and destruction. The arts and sciences, appropriate extension of the divine cultural mandate, are here expressed in a depraved culture as a means of self-assertion and violence, which climaxes with Lamech's song of tyranny."[201] Noah's advancements in viticulture and viniculture result in his shameful exposure. The Tower of Babel narrative highlights specific technology (bricks and mortar) but in the context of its misuse.

By the same token, developments in the presentation of God's character afford the characters new ways to image the divine positively and negatively. We saw this most clearly in the case of Shem and Japheth mimicking the divine act of covering nakedness

---

200. Leon Kass writes: "Like any invention, it tacitly asserts the insufficiency of the world and expresses the human urge to do something about it...By taking up the needle, the human beings, whether they know it or not, are declaring the inadequacy of the Garden of Eden." In the aftermath of sin, human energies originally designed to establish dominion are conscripted in the fight against humanity's sinful condition. Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 90.

201. Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 100.

even as their brother acted contrariwise to the character of God. Indeed, the shift in human self-understanding in the shame of nakedness opened the door to a new way of sinning that Ham illustrates: the sin of exploiting another's shame. There are other examples. To Cain God presents himself as avenger; Cain's descendent, Lamech, arrogates the role of vengeance to himself. In chapter 3 God reveals himself as a God who can both bless and curse. Later, Noah will do both as well.

There are two lines of development here. First, as God is revealed, human characters (and readers) are given more content with which to invest the *imago dei* and to evaluate human behavior. At the same time, advances in humanity's embrace of the cultural mission open up new vistas for sin.

The Reference Point for Sin

As we saw in the evaluation of both feminist and evangelical theologians, the question of who is the focus of sin is an important theological question. Feminist theologians found sin to be primarily against the other, while Evangelical emphasize offense against God. What does the narrative suggest? In that way that narrative does so well, the narratives of Genesis 3–11 do not give a single, clear answer to this question. When the man and woman eat of the tree, God does not seem particularly personally offended. Indeed, as most of the consequences pertain to them and to the ground, a case can be made that they have sinned against themselves and the ground rather than against each other or God. Obliquely the narrative depicts their separation from God in their hiding and the discontinuation of God's garden walks. In the case of Cain, it is clear that Cain's sin is against his brother, but again the ground and Cain himself are transgressed

as well. Noah may sin against himself, and Ham's sin, while ostensibly against his father, redounds to his own son's hurt.

What draws these various notions together is humanity's identity and purpose as described in chapter 1 and 2 and particularly the pregnant concept of the *imago dei* and the concomitant call to steward the earth. Because humans are in God's image, sin against another human is a sin against God. And since the human identity includes such a close connection to the earth both in essence (from dust) and function (stewardship), sin against God or another human being always implies some measure of estrangement from the ground. Further, since the human is in the image of God, both individually and in some sense corporately, one cannot sin against God or the other without deeply marking himself. The narratives of Cain and Ham (and perhaps also Lamech) illustrate this poignantly.

In keeping with a literary and narrative reading, we have looked for reference points from earlier in the narrative to answer the question of how sin is depicted and what the reference point is. By and large, the narratives make sense as a series of stories depicting how humanity does and does not live out its identity as sketched in chapters 1 and 2. In fact, one can make a case that the plot of these chapters is the success or failure of humanity both individually and corporately to live out the identity and commission sketched for it in chapters 1 and 2. That is the main crisis. What the narratives show is a fitful mix of success and failure.

We may tie this understanding of the reference point of sin to narrative development of sin as well. As God as a character is more fully revealed, so also are new vistas for human behavior both positive and negative presented. For instance, as God is

revealed in Genesis 3 as one who covers shame, so Shem and Japheth image this aspect of God in covering their father just as Ham rejects it. Similarly, in the Cain and Abel narrative, God shows himself as the one who avenges Cain. Immediately thereafter, Lamech arrogates such authority to himself and applies it far more broadly. Whereas God promises to exact vengeance sevenfold on anyone who kills Cain, Lamech threatens seventy-sevenfold vengeance on those who merely mistreat him. The narrative presents this expression of divine likeness as problematic.

Chapter 3 builds on the characterization of God from chapters 1 and 2 by showing God as one who judges and curses. Noah emulates this in cursing Canaan for the sin of Ham. The text neither explicitly condones nor censures Noah's act though the reader is left wondering if this is the best possible outcome. Indeed, in light of God's curses in Genesis 3 it is notable that God cursed the serpent and the ground but did not directly curse the humans. Noah does. Is this a salubrious development? Or should it be read as yet another example of human overextension of their divine likeness?

The divine-likeness reference point is highlighted perhaps most clearly in the Tower of Babel narrative. Afraid of dispersal (a specific aspect of the human identity) but emboldened by their linguistic and technological capacity, humanity undertakes a building project that stands in stark contrast to God's construction project in chapters 1 and 2. Working as God did with words and mud they form an image (the tower) which they hope will secure for them security and a name. This application of their divine likeness is in service of a goal diametrically opposed to the goals embedded in that identity: imaging God, not self, and expanding that image, not localizing it.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has covered considerable territory. From a brief defense of the literary, narrative and theological unity of Genesis 1–11 we moved to a reading of the narratives that attended to important literary features as they pertained specifically to the depiction of the human and human sin. What we discovered is that sin is depicted in a variety of ways. While ultimately sin is resistant to tidy summary, we argued that the best summary and even expression of the plot of these chapters is the matter of humanity living in light of its identity as individuals and a collective commissioned to bear the image of God and exercise his presence in the world through dominion and procreation by appropriately applying the God-like attributes they possess.

In short, the narratives depict the systematic rejection and distortion of the human identity as it is rooted in the character of God and worked out in relationship to others, oneself, and the world. The conclusion at the close is that humanity must be remade. In various ways and for various reasons humanity has failed to be the divine image. The question at the close of the primeval narrative is "Can humanity find its way back to its true identity and destiny? And if so, how?" The answer begins in chapter 12 with Abraham and God's promise to redefine him and reestablish him and his descendants as renewed humanity in right relationship with God, others , and the world (land), with given a destiny ("in you all the families of the earth will be blessed") (Genesis 12:1–3).

CHAPTER 5

SIN, STORY, AND THEOLOGY

To this point we have discussed the state of sin-talk and evaluated closely the theology of sin in two feminist and two evangelical theologians. We addressed their methodology and in particular their handling of literary features of biblical narrative and more broadly their use of narrative modes of thought. From that evaluation we moved to offer a reading of Genesis 1–11 that sought to attend to the literary and narrative features of the text. In the previous chapter we summarized how Genesis 1–11 depicts sin. We turn now to consider what contributions this reading brings to theology. How might it supplement or correct the definitions or descriptions of sin? We will begin by assessing some basic advantages of approaching Genesis 1–11 as a theological unity as it regards the theology of sin. Then we will explore the relationship between sin and the depiction of the human that we uncovered in our reading. This will lead us to consider the way in which a description of sin indexed to a narratively understood conception of the human destiny offers us a link between sin and Christ. We will return at the end to see how the narratives of Genesis 1–11 oriented in the grander narrative of sin and human destiny can serve as "types" and therefore be especially useful in theological critique.

THEOLOGIZING WITH GENESIS 1–11 AS THEOLOGICAL UNITY

It is certainly not new for commentators to recognize the unity and importance of Genesis 1–11. Several have noted the way in which the chapters work together to depict the human situation. Gerhard Von Rad recognized the unique status of Genesis 3–11 as quite possibly the only biblical example of a detailed harmartiology. "In contrast with this

[the Old Testament's lack of theorizing about sin], the Jahwist's great hamartiology in Gen. III-XI about the way in which sin broke in and spread like an avalanche is undoubtedly something exceptional: for never again did Israel speak in such universal terms of sin as exemplified in standardized models, and yet at the same time in such great detail."[1] What is less common, however, is to find theologizing about sin that takes seriously this literary and thematic unity. Some, like Wolfhart Pannenberg, acknowledge the way these chapters function collectively.

> Dogmatics should also consider that according to the story, sin does not attain by one event its dominion over the human race. It does so in a sequence that reaches first a climax with Cain's murdering of his own brother Abel and the final climax in the event of the flood. We are not to look at Gen. 3 in isolation and derive from it the idea of a single fall. We are to look at the whole process whereby sin increases in the race and God takes countermeasures against its aggression to preserve the race from the ruinous consequences of its own acts. This approach is more in keeping with the biblical text in these stories of the early days of human history.[2]

Nevertheless, as we have demonstrated, many approaches to the text have blunted its force considerably by atomizing it or mythologizing it.

Sin in Genesis 1–11: Basic observations

After the survey of these chapters what becomes most clear is that the depiction of sin in those chapters does not summarize simply. While evidence to support the usual definitions and motivations can be found there, it is reductive to claim that sin, as presented narratively is pride, mistrust, selfishness, or violence. It is in the nature of narrative to eschew simple definitions. In particular, these approaches leave little to no

---

1. Gerhard von Rad, *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, vol. 1 of *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D.M.G Stalker (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2005), 154.

2. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 263.

room for the possibility of the development of the concept of sin throughout the course of the biblical narrative and into the present.

Genesis 1–11 and Feminist Definitions of Sin

There are several observations from our reading of the image of sin in Genesis 3–11 that we can easily put into conversation with our feminist and evangelical theologians. For instance, we saw that sin is depicted as both individual and corporate rather than one or the other as their definitions suggest. For our feminist theologians we note that taken as a whole, the narratives seem to have more to say about male sin (Cain, Lamech, sons of God, Ham) than female sin, though in truth the matter of gender seems not to be thematic. Though we will develop it further below, we might also observe that sin seems to develop and accumulate, concepts difficult to relate to the evangelical definition of sin in particular.

Genesis 1–11 and Evangelical Definitions of Sin

Regarding the evangelical definition, we observe that Genesis 3–11 is short on direct divine command; most of the infractions are not depicted with reference to some previously stated law (though we acknowledge that many of the prohibited activities would later be codified as law). Further, we saw that though there are many acts of sin in the primeval narrative, sin is talked about in ways other than individual acts.

What is clearest of all after this reading is that just as few of the individual narratives are simply summarizable, neither is sin. Sin in Genesis 3–11 is multidimensional. As Emil Brunner writes of Genesis 3, “[Adam’s] sin is composed of

the mingled elements of distrust, doubt, and defiant desire for freedom. It is impossible for us to reduce it to a single formula; even in its inmost center it is tainted with ambiguity."[3] Karl Barth similarly suggests that sin is equivocal at its heart.[4] The ambiguity of sin in these chapters cautions against reductionistic definitions.

SIN AND THE *IMAGO DEI*

In our reading of Genesis 1–11 we saw that the clearest reference point for sin in those narratives is the description of the human as laid out in chapters 1 and 2, which is often summarized as the *imago dei*. Among other things, humanity in those chapters is depicted as physical, spiritual, verbal, sexual, and relational. They are commissioned to be stewards and caretakers of the land and garden and to reproduce in order to spread the influence of God's reign and presence throughout the world. The sins depicted in Genesis 3–11 represent deviations from this identity and destiny by both individuals and groups, by overreaching the limits of the image, failing to achieve it, or abusing powers necessary for its accomplishment. The motivations for these deviations are various: pride, fear, anxiety, mistrust, ignorance, selfishness, etc. It may be said that the persistent effort throughout these chapters is for humanity to mistake the extent to which it has the power to define itself in the context of its story. As Christof Gestrich comments, "For man's

---

3. Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), 132.

4. "It belongs to the very nature of evil that it is equivocal in its appearance." Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. IV.1 of *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1956), 398.

calamity is the fact that he cannot make himself *human*, but imagines that he can."[5] Sin is failing to be human and all things that thwart others from doing so.[6]

Emil Brunner on Sin and the *Imago Dei*

Few theologians have made as conscious a connection between sin and the *imago dei* as Emil Brunner in his *Man in Revolt*. While Brunner's definition of sin fits substantially within the tradition, his orientation of it to a broader theological framework is done consciously with reference to what humanity is designed to be. To be human, for Brunner, is essentially to be responsible, responsible to use one's power in service of the word of God and one's destiny: the image of God. Though humanity has strayed from this, it is only with reference to it that we can make sense of ourselves. "Even as sinner man can only be understood in the light of the original Image of God, namely, as one who is living in opposition to it."[7]

Rather than reaching beyond the fall to access some original description of the human from which we have fallen marring that nature, Brunner sees sin as itself evidence of what it means to be human. "Sin itself is a manifestation of the image of God in man; only he who has been created in the image of God can sin, and in this in he shows the 'supernatural,' spirit-power, a power not of this world, which issues from the primal

---

5. Christof Gestrich, *The Return of Splendor in the World: The Christian Doctrine of Sin and Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997), 57.

6. Barth comments similarly: "As the servant of God he can be essentially and perfectly man according to the purpose of his creaturely nature, participating in the lordship of God as he fulfills his determination as a partner in covenant with God. What a fool he is, fighting against himself, when he refuses and tries to escape from this order!" Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. IV.1 of *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1956), 435.

7. Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 105.

image of God."[8] This is in contrast to animals. "No animal is able to sin, for it is unable to rebel against its destiny, against the form in which it has been created; it has not the power of decision."[9] Pannenberg agrees: "But when it is a matter of the advantage of humans over all other creatures, the emphasis is not on intellectual ability but on the destiny of fellowship with God and the position of rule associated with closeness to God."[10] Again, the standard of reference is not some fixed notion of human nature but rather human potential, a potential that other created beings do not share: "Man must never be understood merely in the light of his being, but also in the light of what he ought to be."[11]

Brunner goes so far as to claim that it is precisely because of being made in the image of God that humanity is capable of sin. "But when you see sin you also see the image of God. Only where there is the *Imago Dei* is there also *peccatum*; sin itself is a testimony to the divine origin of man."[12] This is particularly true of the greatest of sins: making oneself God. "The most daring of all sins, that of self-deification, is only possible through the divine destiny of creation, which raises man above the whole of the rest of the created world."[13] This tendency to self-exaltation above the divine that many have noted in Genesis 3–11 is only possible because of humanity's innate link with the divine. "This sinful confusion, by which the copy makes itself the original, is only possible because it *is* a copy."[14]

---

8. Ibid., 133.
9. Ibid.
10. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 190.
11. Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 80.
12. Ibid., 187.
13. Ibid., 173.
14. Ibid.

Brunner importantly addresses whether sin abolishes the image or not. He rejects those views that think of the *imago dei* in terms of super-nature. What he wants to avoid is the suggestion that what post-fall humans share with pre-fall humans their human nature while what was lost was a "super-nature." "Man is fundamentally misunderstood when, by a method of subtraction, that which is common to fallen man and to man as originally created is contrasted as 'nature' with that which has been lost as 'supernature.'"[15] He says instead that "[t]hrough sin man has lost not a 'super-nature' but his God-given nature, and has become unnatural, inhuman."[16] To be human is to be like God. To the extent that we fail to image God, we become less human, we fulfill our function less effectively or prevent others from doing so. But deviation from the human destiny does not cut us off from it entirely. Pannenberg comments that, "Although misery of this kind runs contrary to our divine destiny, it does not itself alienate us from this destiny. That alienation takes place only when we live our lives in antithesis to our destiny."[17] This was borne out in our reading of Genesis where even as humanity was departing from the image it was progressing in it as well through various acts of procreation and creativity.

Sin, then, is humanity's deviation from, rejection of, or thwarting of the full imaging of the divine in humanity. "Man is a rebel against his divine destiny; he is the steward who pretends to be the master of the vineyard and then kills his lord's messengers."[18]

---

15. Ibid., 111.
16. Ibid., 94.
17. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 178.
18. Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 171.

Bonhoeffer speaks of the sin as the act of exchanging *imago dei*—the image of God—for that which the serpent offered to the human pair: to be *sicut deus*—"like God."

> *Imago dei*—Godlike man in his existence for God and neighbour, in his primitive creatureliness and limitation; *sicut deus*—Godlike man in his out-of-himself knowledge of good and evil, in his limitlessness and his action out-of-himself, in his underived existence, in his loneliness. *Imago dei*—that is, man bound to the Word of the Creator and living form him; *sicut deus*—that is, man bound to the depths of his own knowledge about God, in good and evil; *imago dei*—the creature living in the unity of obedience; *sicut deus*—the creator-man living out of the division of good and evil. *Imago dei*, *sicut deus*, *agnus dei*—the One who was sacrificed for man *sicut deus*, killing man's false divinity in true divinity, the God-Man who restores the image of God.[19]

This rejection of the human calling to be the image of God results in the human being both more and less. As Bonhoeffer points out, humanity has lost its uncomplicated relationship to its own identity as creature. "He *is* like God, and this 'is' is meant very seriously. It is not that he feels himself so, but that he *is*. Together with the limit Adam has lost *his creatureliness*. Limitless Adam can no longer be addressed in his creatureliness."[20] We might say that Adam can no longer be addressed in his "humanity." In the grasp for powers, powers that will now be wielded problematically in the pursuit of human identity, humanity lost the possibility of simply imaging God.

Sin, the *Imago Dei* and Conceptual Tensions

Indexing the description of sin to human identity and the image of God in particular bears considerable fruit. In particular, it addresses some of the polarities and tensions that arise in definitions of sin, polarities that the definitions of sin we saw from both feminist and evangelical theologians answered in unsatisfactory ways.

---

19. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1–3 [and] Temptation* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 71.

20. Ibid., 72.

Vertical or Horizontal Sin

As we saw in our survey of feminist and evangelical theologians, one perennial issue of definitions of sin is whether they place emphasis on sin being against God or against fellow humans. One strength of describing sin with reference to the human identity in the *imago dei* is that it stakes out a position between these two extremes. Since the *imago dei* describes humans with reference to God, any sin against a fellow image bearer is *de facto* a sin against the divine, an attack against one of God's chosen representatives. Similarly, any violation against the divine intention for the created order is a violation of one's divinely given stewardship responsibility and against the divine word since all was created by the word of God. As we saw repeatedly during the reading of Genesis 3–11 there was no sin that could be clinically excised from the nexus of relationships and identity markers that are inherent in the description of humans in chapters 1 and 2. Commenting on Genesis 3 in particular, Brueggemann ties together the vertical and horizontal dimensions of sin. Brueggemann commented regarding the early narratives of Genesis: "The issues which likely concern us are horizontal issues, problems of human and social relations. Yet the primary thrust of the story is vertical, trying to decide about the rule of God and the shape of human destiny. Clearly, our *horizontal propensity* and the *vertical agenda* of the story belong together."[21]

Indeed, with an eye to the narratives, it might be better to replace the concepts of vertical and horizontal with those of centrifugal and centripetal. Sin is centrifugal because it violates the inherent connections between humans and those outside themselves: God, others, and even the world. It is centripetal insofar as the narratives portray that in any sin

21. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 53 (Emphasis original).

the sinning person acts against themselves in deviating from their own identity as an image bearer or one charged with stewardship.

It is not sufficiently nuanced to say that these are vertical sins with horizontal *effects*. In addressing Cain, God seems first to be concerned that Cain has sinned against his brother and secondly that he has sinned against the ground. It is not so much that Cain's sin affects the ground but that his action indeed sins against it and the ground cries out in testimony. Similarly, prior to the flood it is said that the land had been corrupted. The devastation of the flood was not merely an effect of human sinfulness on the land, but rather indicates that human corruption had defiled the land; humans sinned against the land. Yes, all sin is against God, but the human identity and destiny is so tightly linked with the divine identity that any attempt to separate them is artificial.

Individual Sin and Corporate Sin

Another of the tensions felt in theologies of sin is whether the definition of sin emphasizes individual sin or sin's corporate and systemic aspects. As we saw in chapters 2 and 3, feminist definitions of sin emphasize the latter and evangelical definitions the former. Indeed, in both cases we saw that exactly this emphasis renders the definitions inadequate to speak convincingly of sin. The feminist definitions veer dangerously close to exonerating individuals (especially women) while the evangelical definitions give little help in examining corporate and systemic evils.

These problems are ameliorated somewhat by indexing sin not to the law of God nor to static definitions of human nature. Rather, as we have seen, the way human identity and the *imago dei* are presented in Genesis speaks to both the individual and the

corporate. Male and female were created in the image of God (1:28) and in Genesis 2 it is clear that the man needed the woman to fulfill the destiny of humanity. What we need is language that helps us hold together the individual and corporate aspects of our humanness without privileging one or the other.

As we saw, the narratives of sin in those chapters depict both individual sin—Adam and Eve, Cain, Ham—and corporate sin—humanity before the flood, and the Tower of Babel. Prior to the flood the narrative employed the concept of corruption which speaks of sin not as an individual problem but rather articulates eloquently the atmosphere of sin, evil and violence between humans and against creation that characterized that time period. Further, the narrative of the Tower of Babel shows corporate humanity acting in unity and being driven by shared emotions of fear and anxiety. The impression that one gets in both of these narratives is that the sinful whole is more than the sum of the individual sinning parts.

Sin and Other Polarities

The depiction of sin in Genesis 3–11 complicates some of the other tidy categories of sin as well. Is sin a spiritual reality or a physical reality? Genesis 3–11 would answer, "Both." Clearly much of the sin is physical: eating, murder, voyeurism, building. But in describing sin as "corruption" at the time of the flood, the narrator moves toward something more sinister. Further, the image of sin as an animal crouching at the door suggests a spiritual power more than just some physical act.

Is sin primarily an act or a disposition? Most evangelicals want to say that it is both though their definitions tend to emphasize the former. Feminists lean toward the

latter. While there are several distinctly sinful acts in Genesis 3–11, the effect of the narrative is to suggest an increasing tendency or disposition in humanity to sin. This reaches a crescendo at the flood and again at Babel.

SIN, STORY, AND THE *IMAGO DEI*

Thus far, we have linked sin talk to self-talk or human talk by detecting in the text of Genesis 1–11 a clear link between the depiction of the human and the depiction of human sin. That is, that Genesis 1–11 tells the story of humanity's failure to be the *imago dei*, to be human. Though the term *imago dei* does not capture all that the narrative says about what it means to be human, it is convenient shorthand to refer to the range of descriptors involved in the human per Genesis 1 and 2: created, embodied, gendered, sexual, verbal, relational, commissioned, etc.[22] Some might argue that the concept of the *imago dei* is not central to the Old Testament text. But as Stanley Grenz notes, "[T]he *imago dei* plays a role in the Old Testament anthropology as well as in the New Testament conception of the human person, which the Old Testament witness cradled. It silently underlies the text even when the concept remains hidden from direct view."[23] It is true that the words "image and likeness of God" are relatively rare in both testaments.[24]

---

22. Bonhoeffer even suggests that human bodiliness is related to the image. "He is image of God not in spite of but just because of his bodiliness. For in his bodiliness he is related to the earth and to other bodies, he is there for others, he is dependent upon others. In his bodiliness he finds his brother and the earth. As such a creature man of earth and spirit is in the likeness of his Creator, God." Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 48.

23. Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, Matrix of Christian Theology, vol. 1. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 185.

24. The Hebrew word for "image" occurs with reference to the image of God in man only in Genesis 1:28; 9:6. The term "likeness" in Genesis 1:26 and 5:1. In the New Testament the word translated "image" is more frequent, usually with reference to Christ as the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; . A few references concern humanity's conforming to the image of God or of Christ (Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 15:49; Colossians 3:10). Jesus's commentary

However, as Grenz says, the notion "underlies the text" throughout both testaments. The calling of Abraham and Israel to be a unique people in the world, the depiction of the king as divine representative, and especially the exalted anthropology of Psalm 8 testify to the ongoing notion of humanity both individually and corporately imaging the divine in the world. As we will see, the concept becomes more overt in the New Testament where it finds its fulfillment in Christ as the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). In fact, Grenz suggests that one can use the concept of the *imago dei* as one way to structure the entire biblical narrative. "The phrase 'image of God' is shorthand for the biblical narrative viewed from one particular metaphorical perspective."[25]

Narrative and the *Imago Dei*

Before exploring further how indexing sin to the *imago dei* is fruitful for theology of sin and beyond, it is important for us to underscore at this point that the notion of the *imago dei* and of the human destiny more broadly must be thought of in developmental terms, especially narrative terms. In chapter 2 we observed the feminist theologians tying their definitions of sin very closely to an understanding of the nature of the human, the self-naming human of Mary Daly and the relational human of Rita Nakashima Brock. We faulted them, however, for too static a notion of the human, for failing to include some notion of development, of narrative.[26] We could be in danger of making the same misstep

---

about the likeness of Caesar on the denarius may be read as a subtle reference to the image of God in humanity (Matthew 22:20).

25. Grenz, *The Social God*, 268.

26. Emil Brunner points to the relationship between faulty views of the relationship between human nature and sin, the classic question of whether the *imago dei* is lost or merely marred in the fall. "Man is fundamentally misunderstood when, by a method of subtraction, that which is common to fallen man and to man as originally created is contrasted as 'nature' with that which has been lost as 'supernature.'" Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 111.

by indexing our description of sin to the notion of the human as *imago dei* depending on how we construe it.

Stanley Grenz offers a survey of the history of the concept of the *imago dei*, a survey dominated by the concepts of image as involving innate God-like capacities (the substantial view) or the relational view. These ways correspond quite closely to those implied by the evangelical theologians (substantial) and Rita Nakashima Brock (relational).[27] He then proposes a "third understanding that sees the image as the divinely given goal or destiny awaiting humankind in the eschatological future and toward which humans are directed 'from the beginning.'"[28] This is not a nature that one possesses from the beginning and which the fall destroys or mars. Rather, it is a destiny that must be worked out and which will find its fullest expression in the end; it is eschatological. Grenz grounds this directly in the creation narrative. "Genesis 1:26-28 is not merely—or even primarily—a critique of the ancient Near Eastern concepts that gave it birth. This text stands within a narrative structure, and within that structure if functions as a prologue to all that follows, rather than as an ontological declaration about human nature."[29]

We have already had cause to reference Emil Brunner regarding the relationship between the *imago dei* and sin. Even in several of those quotes there is the whisper of a developmental, eschatologically oriented view of the *imago dei* in his repeated use of the word "destiny" with reference to it. In a few places he draws out more fully this developmental idea of the image of God. Though Brunner recognizes that it is difficult to

---

27. There is some sense in which Mary Daly's approach to the human as self-naming (though she doesn't refer to it as the image of God) approximates Grenz's third way. The act of self-naming is a life-long process and therefore developmental and potentially narratival. However, Daly's view is completely self-referential; there is no transcendent ideal of humanity to which one aspires. There is, in short, no end to the story.

28. Grenz, *The Social God*, 17.

29. Ibid., 201.

draw a clear line at what differentiates humanity from animals as it pertains to capacities, he contrasts them precisely on the basis of the developmental aspect of human nature. "Figuratively speaking, God produces the other creatures in a finished state; they are what they ought to be, and this they remain. But God retains *man* within His workshop, within His hands. He does not simply make him and finish him; human nature, indeed, consists in the fact that we may and must remain in the hands of God."[30]

Christof Gestrich argues that this eschatological orientation is indispensable in the formulation of the church's anthropology and hamartiology. "Without certainty and clarity in eschatology the church cannot speak of sin, for the concept of sin gains its specificity and its content from the question of whether there is a clear destiny for us creatures, a purpose we can fail to achieve."[31] One might say that it is the destination that informs the trajectory as much or more than the point of departure. This assertion is particularly interesting in light of Rita Nakashima Brock's use of journey imagery for the human experience, but a journey with no clear destination.

Narratival *Imago Dei* in Genesis 1–11

We saw that with respect to the human, careful attention to the text of Genesis 1 and 2 makes it clear that the concept of the human destiny as *imago dei* is not a static one. Rather, it is a destiny that must be lived into, thus supporting Grenz's third way. As he points out, "Although the use of the two nouns [image and likeness] suggests that as the divine image humans are to resemble their Creator, Gen. 1:26–28 only hints at the nature of this resemblance. Consequently, the search for the full meaning of the *imago dei*—that

30. Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 97.
31. Gestrich, *Return of Splendor*, 73.

is, the quest to understand how humans are to fulfill the role of being the divine image as creatures who resemble the Creator—leads the inquirer beyond the first creation narrative."[32] We saw this unfold in the drama of Genesis 1–11 in the various ways that humanity imaged God: man's naming of the animals, Eve's getting a child "with the help of Yahweh", the cultural developments of husbandry, music and metallurgy, Noah's curse of Ham/Canaan, the use of language, and even the Tower builders' endeavors. Indeed, we argued that it is specifically God's self-revelation as one who covers sin in Genesis 3 that provides the reference point for Shem and Japheth's imaging of God in covering their exposed father (Genesis 9). God's identity is revealed progressively and so, what it means to image him develops over time as well. So Grenz concludes: "Genesis 1:26–28 does not define the *imago dei* in detail but rather opens the door to the possibility of the answer emerging from the broader biblical narrative in which the creation story is placed."[33]

This view of the human improves upon that offered by our feminist theologians for whom human nature was found in the capacity to self-name (Daly) or relationality (Brock). Rather than such fixed ideas, the understanding of a narratively developed human identity is more flexible, not a nature but a role. Robert Jenson phrases it thus: "For each of us to 'have human nature' is to play a part in the coherent history of humanity, which is made one and coherent by the one determinate call of God to be his partner."[34] This is a distinctly narrative understanding. Jenson sees that to be human is to be caught up in the story of humanity, a story that is going somewhere. That call and

---

32. Grenz, *The Social God*, 202.
33. Ibid., 223.
34. Robert W. Jenson, *The Works of God*, vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 150.

destiny is partnership, a partnership captured by the notion of creation in the image of God. We critiqued the feminist theologians and Rita Nakashima Brock in particular for having a far too presentist notion of humanity; our humanness being exhausted by the reality and status of our relationships now.

What this means is that the identity of the human is, in a sense, a moving target, a growing reality. That is, as God is more fully revealed, so what it means to be the image will develop. We observed this within Genesis 1–11 as God was revealed to be one who covers shame in chapter 3 and his example was embraced by Shem and Japheth and eschewed by Ham in chapter 9. Similarly, as God was revealed as one who cursed and blessed, so Noah both blessed and cursed his sons. This trend, which is seen perhaps only in faint shadow in Genesis 1–11, can be seen as God and humanity are revealed throughout scripture and beyond.

The *Imago Dei* and the Development of Sin

What this means further for our understanding of sin is that it too is a concept in development. As humans more fully enact their destiny, more and different ways to sin will become available to them. We observed this pattern in the Genesis narrative. Chapter 1 shows a God who names and designates the role and identity of elements of Creation. In chapter 2, the man mimics this act of naming with divine approval (2:19). Yet, immediately after the ‘fall’, the man once again applies this power with reference to the woman, naming her identity with reference to just one of her human functions. In chapter 3 God reveals himself to be the one who covers nakedness. By chapter 9, Ham sins against his father by doing the opposite. God revealed himself to be Cain’s avenger only

to have Lamech misappropriate this aspect of the divine image for his own self-protection. In chapter 3 God reveals himself as a God who uses language to curse the ground and the serpent. In chapter 9, Noah appropriates this power in an ambiguous way and applies a curse to a human, something God did not do. As divine and human powers become increasingly known, new and different ways to diverge from the image of God and destiny of humanity arise. Pushing further into the Old Testament we can see the trend continuing with Abraham and then Israel. God's decisive acts become new information against which Abraham's and Israel's faithfulness to their calling is evaluated.

To refine this point even further, we suggest that the very places where humanity is exercising specific features of the divine image is where we are most likely to find the potential for egregious sins. And further, that at moments of creative expansion in human ability to enact the image the possibility to abuse those powers is most evident. In almost the same breath with which musical advancement is narrated (4:21) the bellicose song of Lamech is recorded. Noah's advances in viticulture and viniculture soon bear bitter fruit. Similarly, the technological comments regarding the materials used at Babel are put to use in a project in violation of God's commission to humanity. It is important to note that the strength of this narrative depiction is that the text does not censure music, fermentation, nor city-building but rather presents warning signs against the possible misuse of these viable human advances. As we will see below, these sins will recur even within the bounds of Genesis and the primeval narrative gives helpful perspective in evaluating those stories.

This understanding of a growing character of sin is in stark contrast to the linking of sin to law-breaking. Those defining sin thus are plagued by questions regarding which laws are binding. The definition of sin combined with biblical literalism forces them into abstract discussion about types of laws and which ones are abrogated by Christ and which ones are not. Even within the context of the Pentateuch the laws for Israel shift from those most pertinent to their wilderness context to ones better suited to their settled state in the land. The law and human destiny are not opposed to one another, indeed the law provides some of the clearest descriptions of how one lives in harmony with God and others. But the law cannot possibly cover the entirety of what living out that destiny entails.

SIN, THE *IMAGO DEI*, AND CHRIST

So Genesis 1–11 depicts sin with reference to the description of humanity and that humanity not as a nature but as a destiny, a story that must be lived into. Stanley Grenz expresses most directly the principle upshot of this narrative understanding of the *imago dei* and humanity. "The open-ended character of the text transfers the search for the full meaning of the *imago dei* to the biblical narrative as a whole and hence opens the way for a move from a creatiocentric to a christocentric anthropology."[35] That is, by recognizing the developmental aspect of the human described as *imago dei*, it opens up a way to link the meaning of the image not to a static, creational nature as is the case with views of the image of God as capacity, rationality, or even relationality, but rather to the story-line of humanity in scripture, and particularly how it finds its fulfillment in Christ. At creation humanity was not all that it could or would be. It was to grow into its role and destiny and

35. Grenz, *The Social God*, 18.

the New Testament uses the language of "image of God" with reference to Christ to clarify and extend that destiny. This is in contrast to our observations of the anthropocentric hamartiology of feminist theologians and the crucicentric soteriology of evangelical theologians.

Christ and the *Imago Dei*

Grenz charts how several New Testament authors appropriate the concept of the *imago dei* and apply it to Christ. He finds the transference of this idea from the first testament to Christ in the discussion of Christ as both the glory and image of God as in 2 Corinthians 4:4. "Glory" connects to the aspect of rulership that is part of the *imago dei*.[36]

Particularly important in this discussion is the hymn of Colossians 1 where Christ is referred to as "the image of the invisible God." Grenz believes that the hymn can be read with an eye to the entire narrative of human identity. "Taken as a whole, the hymn carries a clear narrative tone. Indeed, it brings together the Old Testament creation story with the story of Jesus' passion, and it anticipates the future consummation when creation's goal as well as the Colossians' glorification will be realized...It is Christ's role in this narrative that marks him as the manifestation of God and hence as the *imago dei*."[37] This is true not in some abstract sense but as accomplished through his life narrative. McClendon asserts that by his life, Jesus "proved himself true *anthropos*, authentic *homo*, progenitor of a human strain that fulfilled (rather than once again

36. Grenz writes: "The divine *kabod* is connected with manifestation of God's sovereign rule over, or presence within, nature and history." Grenz, *The Social God*, 206.

37. Ibid., 216.

deflecting) the promise to Adam ("Earthling") and to Eve ("Life")—the promise that in their human family God's own image would appear."[38]

Brunner agrees and likewise orients the concept of the *imago dei* in Christ to the beginning and the end. "The goal which has been shown to us in Jesus Christ is indeed also and first of all the restoration of that which was at the beginning, but it is much more than that; it is the eternal consummation which goes far beyond the Creation. Thus also that which is 'proper' to man, according to the Divine plan of Creation, can only be understood in the light of the End which is disclosed in Jesus Christ, the aim of the Kingdom of God."[39]

Christ, the *Imago Dei*, and the Individual

The presentation of Christ as the true *imago dei* offers to the individual a new reference point for understanding what it means to be human. Rather than a static notion of human characteristics or even the developing idea begun in Genesis 1, the new reference point is the life and person of Jesus Christ, which is, of course, in keeping with the image as depicted in the first testament. The follower of Christ is "in Christ." "Being 'in Christ' entails participating in the narrative of Jesus, with its focus on the cross and resurrection. It involves retelling one's own narrative, and hence making sense out of one's life, by means of the plot of the Jesus narrative."[40] This image and narrative is in contrast with another one on offer, namely that of Adam. Grenz contrasts the image of God in Adam and the image of God in Christ in terms distinctly amenable to narrative

---

38. James Wm. McClendon, *Doctrine*, Systematic Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 123.
39. Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 80.
40. Grenz, *The Social God*, 329.

thought. “Consequently, rather than being merely Adam and Christ as representatives of the two orders, the old human and the new human are two frames of reference from with participants in each realm gain their identity, and out of which, on the basis of which, or in keeping with which they conduct their lives.”[41] That is, the image in Adam, characterized by the failure to fulfill the image in the variety of ways detailed in Genesis 3–11 offers one possible narrative in which a person can fit themselves. The narrative of Christ is another. “Moreover, the ‘old human’ and the ‘new human’ bring into view two distinct narratives. The former looks to the story of the creation of the first humans and their subsequent fall into sin, as well as the entire narrative of sinful humankind. The latter, in contrast, draws into focus the narrative of God’s gracious saving actions on behalf of humankind, the center of which is the story of Jesus, especially his death and resurrection, and the ongoing story of Christ’s presence in the church through the Holy Spirit.”[42] We saw evidence of these two narratives in Genesis 1–11 particularly in the paralleling of the genealogies of Cain and Seth.

Christ, the *Imago Dei*, and the Community

Importantly there are resources here to hold together the individual and collective senses of the *imago dei*. As we saw in Genesis 1 and 2, collective nature of the *imago dei* was captured in the creation of humanity in a sexual duality. Derrick Sherwin Bailey comments succinctly, “The fact that God created Man as a sexual duality means that male and female, as isolated individuals, have been given no fixed and clearly-defined social status or function. They have simply been called to a life of partnership in all things—and

41. Ibid., 255.
42. Ibid.

as partners, therefore, they must seek together in love and humility to understand and fulfill their common destiny as Man."[43]

But as Grenz points out, in the story of scripture, human marriage, though fundamental, is depicted as a "penultimate reality."[44] The eschatological orientation of the *imago dei* drives us beyond its expression "in the beginning" to its final chapter. The ultimate expression of the image of God in humanity is not the individual, nor the couple, but rather the community. As the image of God, Christ is depicted as the beginning of a renewed humanity. "The humankind created in the *imago dei* is none other than the new humanity conformed to the *imago Christi*, and the *telos* toward which the Genesis creation narrative points is the eschatological community of glorified saints."[45] Believers participate in this renewed humanity and in so doing more fully achieve their human destiny. "Insofar as they reflect the new corporate reality in Christ, believers are in the process of becoming the image of God and hence of fulfilling their divinely given, human destiny."[46] Christ is the image of God and the church, the people of God, are the corporate expression of that image. This is perhaps captured best in references to the church as the "body of Christ."[47]

---

43. *The Man-Woman Relationship in Christian Thought*, (London: Longman, 283-284), quoted in Grenz, *The Social God*, 302.

44. "Although marriage is the primal male-female relationship, the biblical narrative points to the eschatological new creation as the fullness of fellowship toward which human sexuality has been directed from the beginning. For this reason, the image of God is not present solely, or even primarily, in the martial union of male and female, which in the end belongs to the penultimate age and not to the age to come." Grenz, *The Social God*, 302.

45. Ibid., 18.

46. Ibid., 240.

47. As Grenz highlights, this also ties in the important relational components of humanity though couching them in a grander context.

Summary

Grenz ties all these elements together in a paragraph worth quoting at length.

> Paul [adds] his voice to the chorus of New Testament writers who are convinced that Christ's preeminence among many *adelphoi* is nothing short of God's intent from the beginning. This eschatological purpose is the goal that was already in view in the creation of humankind in the divine image...In his risen glory, Jesus Christ now radiates the fullness of humanness that constitutes God's design for humankind from the beginning. Yet God's purpose has never been that Christ will merely radiate this human fullness, but that as the Son he will be preeminent among a new humanity who together are stamped with the divine image. Consequently, the humankind created in the divine image is none other than the new humanity conformed to the *imago Christi*, and the *telos* toward which the Old Testament creation narrative points is the eschatological community of glorified saints who have joined their head in resurrection life by the power of the Spirit...As many *adelphoi* are brought to glory (Heb. 2:10), Jesus Christ is truly the preeminent one and truly the Son. In this manner, the narrative of the emergence of the new humanity provides the climax to the entire salvation-historical story and becomes the ultimate defining moment for the Genesis account of the creation of humankind in the *imago dei*.[48]

The *imago dei*, the reference point for understanding what it means to be human, finds its fullest expression in the incarnate Christ; he is the true human. The church, a renewed humanity, finds its identity and calling in living in light of this new Adam.

Sin and the Image of God in Christ

What this begins to offer is a way to move with the story of Scripture to index the description of sin to Christ, a shortcoming we observed in both feminist and evangelical theologians. Several theologians, perhaps Karl Barth chief among them, express the importance of understanding sin in light of Christ. "Had we not to speak first of the incarnation and atoning death of Jesus Christ because the man of sin, his existence and

48. Grenz, *The Social God*, 231–32.

situation and nature, is revealed and can be known only in the light of it?"[49] Barth goes on to declare: "[O]nly when we know Jesus Christ do we really know that man is the man of sin, and what sin is, and what it means for man."[50] Christof Gestrich suggests the same thing: "Christian theology must always understand sin (and the fall) 'retrospectively' from the vantage point of faith in the redemption won by Jesus Christ."[51]

Emil Brunner agrees that static "nature" talk of humans is insufficient and must be supplemented by recognition of human destiny. "Man must never be understood merely in the light of his being, but also in the light of what he ought to be."[52] And, like Barth, Brunner relates this to the issue of sin. "Only in this new existence—what the Bible calls being 'in Christ'—can man truly understand himself; since only in Him, in the Word of God, man himself becomes true, can perceive the truth about himself, and also the great lie which we call sin."[53] Again, the ultimate reference point for our understanding of sin is not the law nor human nature *per se*, but rather the revelation of the destiny of humanity in the incarnate Christ.

James McClendon, a more consciously narrative theologian than either Barth or Brunner brings the point to its clearest expression: "By [his] faithfulness he [Christ] unveils sin: Sin is whatever falls short of, whatever denies, whatever misses the way of faithfulness to God's rule embodied in Jesus Christ."[54] Rather than directing attention to the law or to human nature or capacity, this description of sin focuses attention on a person, Christ. Elsewhere McClendon articulates this point even more directly.

---

49. Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 359.
50. Ibid., 389.
51. Gestrich, *Return of Splendor*, 83.
52. Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 80.
53. Ibid., 81.
54. McClendon, *Doctrine*, 124.

> If the positive features of the received church doctrine of sin are to be maintained while its dubious features are either reformed or discarded, it will be necessary to make a starting point, not in Adam's (or Eve's!) alleged act of sin on behalf of innocent babes and faithful believers born an aeon later, but rather in the full faithfulness of Jesus of Nazareth, who resisted the temptation that confronted him all the way to this cross, who overcame the principalities and powers of his day even at the price of his life, and who, risen from the dead, summoned followers to abandon every sin and to follow in good faith the pioneer of their salvation.[55]

The final reference point for sin is the person of Christ, the second Adam, not the supposed universal effects of the act of the first Adam.

Indexing sin to the person of Christ highlights the fundamental problem with the law. The principal shortcoming of the law was not that humanity couldn't keep it, but rather that it was and is inadequate to portray the fullness of the human destiny.[56] While the law did articulate certain boundaries for human health and flourishing, it could not cover the full breadth of what it means to be human, to be the *imago dei*. Only a person living the image of God could do that, exactly what the New Testament claims of Christ.[57]

Bonhoeffer articulates well the role of the law and its insufficiency to serve as the ultimate reference for sin. "God preserves the world by affirming the sinful world and

---

55. Jr. McClendon, James Wm., "Sin," in *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, in *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, ed. Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 446.

56. This inadequacy is evident in scripture itself. Note the way the wisdom literature supplements and "fills the gaps" left by the law on many questions of human life and behavior.

57. McClendon suggests that traditional definitions of sin and the human create some tensions in the idea of the sinlessness of Christ. However, thinking of humanity as the image of God and sin as deviation from that destiny ameliorates some of those issues. "Jesus' sinlessness (more appropriately, his unqualified faithfulness) simply indicates his lasting adherence to the covenant God provided for Israel, a covenant foreshadowed in the patriarchs, fully tendered at Exodus and Sinai, rehearsed by the prophets, and now renewed in the Messiah. In this case, Jesus is not (as 'sinless' might suggest) humanly defective; rather he is the truly and fully human One, the Son of man, and his faithfulness exposes any and all of our unfaithfulness as defects in the humanity he realized." McClendon, James Wm., "Sin," in *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, in *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, ed. Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 444.

directing it into its limits by means of ordinances. But none of these ordinances any longer have any eternal character because they are only there to preserve life."[58] The law given in Scripture is there to preserve life and provide boundaries to keep the story going, not as the final reference point. Rather, he points out, the laws themselves keep the story moving toward Christ. "All the orders of our fallen world are God's orders of preservation on the way to Christ. They are not orders of creation but of preservation."[59]

Karl Barth contrasts the focus on the law with the focus on the image of God in Christ. Christ "is therefore the eternal brother and archetype of every man, the true and living *lex aeterna* which is not enclosed in our hearts and consciences but closes in on us, which does not acquire validity in our expositions but as a *iudex aeternus*—it is a person and not an idea—expounds itself and creates its own validity."[60] The person of Christ provides a more comprehensive presentation of the destiny of humanity than the law could.

Furthermore, the focus on the image of God in Christ moves away from static notions of the person and to one individual with a personal narrative but also embedded in a narrative. Just as the stories of Adam and Abraham/Israel speak both of humanity universally and to the specific narrative of Israel, so the gospel accounts (and beyond) cleverly link the work of Christ to both the narrative of Israel and to that of humanity. This is seen most clearly in the very "Jewish" genealogy of Matthew's gospel which tracks Jesus's Israelite and royal pedigree through David to Abraham (Matthew 1:1-17) and in Luke's more universal genealogy with traces Jesus's lineage back to Adam and indeed, to God (Luke 3:23-38).

---

58. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 88.
59. Ibid.
60. Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 402.

Summary

The observation that the narratives of sin in Genesis 3–11 have as their clearest reference point the description of humanity in Genesis 1–2, and especially as summarized in the *imago dei* provides a way to link the definition of sin to Christ. This is made possible by a narrative understanding of the image of God as a destiny that humanity was to grow into even as the full sense of that destiny was progressively revealed. The New Testament depicts Christ as the apex of that destiny by labeling him "the image of God." Believers who are "in Christ", therefore, participate in a renewed humanity whose reference point is the entire narrative of the image of God but particularly how it came to expression in the life, ministry and suffering of Jesus Christ. Sin, therefore, rather than being violation of a law or deviation from a fixed notion of the nature of the human, is deviation from the human calling to be the image of God and that image is made clear to us in the person and work of Christ.

TYPES OF SIN

We have moved from the observation that sin in Genesis 3–11 is a violation of what it means to fulfill the human destiny as the *imago dei* to consider how that observation deepened the concept of sin and avoided some of the common pitfalls of definitions of sin. We saw in particular that such an understanding of sin, story, and the human provided a more natural way to speak of sin with reference to Christ. What remains is to return to the narratives of Genesis 3–11 to consider how then they might be accessed fruitfully in theologizing, not as a source for a definition of sin but rather as patterns of deviation from the divine image.

In our analysis of both feminist and evangelical theologians we faulted them for theological appropriation of the Genesis narratives that was inattentive to their literary features and narrative character. Our feminist theologians assessed the value of the Genesis 3 narrative and found it (or at least traditional interpretations of it) wanting because it failed to speak to their personal experience of sin. Furthermore, they tended to approach it mythologically or symbolically with the man and the woman representing maleness and femaleness as abstract concepts. For the evangelical theologians in view there was a strong historicist tendency and an expectation that the discrete narrative of Genesis 3 would illustrate the definitive essence of sin. The choices these two groups offered us were experiential epistemology and mythological text or historical text and propositional epistemology. In both cases, we saw that there was an attempt to get behind the text to some other revelatory reality.

By contrast, our purpose is to read the narratives of Genesis 1–11 with attention to their literary quality and then orient those texts within a broader narrative framework. What we encountered is that there are tight textual connections urging the reader to read these chapters together. Furthermore, as is the way with stories, we found that the details resist tidy summary. As Walter Brueggemann says of Genesis 3: "The story is not explained. It is simply left there with the listening community free to take what can be heard. There is, of course, talk here of sin and evil and death. But it is understated talk. The stakes are too high for reduction to propositions. The story does not want to aid our theologizing. It wants, rather, to catch us in our living. It will permit no escape into theology."[61]

61. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 50.

Rather than offering a single, clear definition of sin, what we saw was that the narratives depicted humanity's deviation from its destiny as the image of God in multiple ways and for a variety of reasons. We observed that this is much more in keeping with our own experience of human action. Accordingly, we suggest that the best way to appropriate these narratives is not as illustrations of a reductionistic definition of sin, but rather as parallel images of the variety of ways and reasons in which humans deviate from their divinely ordered destiny. They continue to speak today as types that can be used as lenses to evaluate personal and corporate behaviors and attitudes.

Narrative and Typology

In using the term "type" to describe these images of sin, we are employing one of the key tools in reading scripture in a narrative mode: typology. David Ford explains typology: "The working hypothesis of typology is God's providence guiding the story. This makes it normal for one event in the story to resemble and help interpret another regardless of the intentions of the actors or the human author."[62] As Ford's comment suggests, the notion of typology and narrative thought as well, is a theological one first and secondarily literary. That is, typology is a feature of the way the world works and thereafter is encoded in texts. Michael Goldberg summarizes Hans Frei's main point: "to take the structural shape of biblical narrative seriously is to take it as the shape of reality."[63]

---

62. David Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the "Church Dogmatics"* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1981), 86.

63. Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), 162.

Accordingly, Christopher Seitz can say, "The loss of figural reading is not the loss of an exegetical technique. It is the loss of location in time under God."[64] Figural reading or typological reading is rooted in a belief about the way God has ordered the world, that certain human events and characters can relate to others across time and space. To lose this view of the way the world works is first a theological loss that then cashes out in the loss of hermeneutical options. The biblical authors may seek to highlight certain details that sharpen the connections between texts, but it is fundamentally a feature of the world.

Of course, most typological thinking has focused on ways in which characters and events from the first testament are related to characters and events in the second testament, and principally in Christ and the church. However, as our earlier references to the dueling images of humanity in Adam and Christ suggest, it is equally legitimate to see Old Testament narratives setting up patterns which later biblical and extra-biblical characters may echo or not.

Before considering how these narratives might function as types of sin for theological reflection, we will survey the way that the narratives of Genesis 3–11 show signs of typological functioning within the near and far biblical context.

Types of Sin in Genesis and the Old Testament

There is evidence within the book of Genesis itself that these stories are functioning typologically. Cornelius Plantinga observes of the Cain and Abel narrative that "[i]n telling us this tale, the writer starts a lot more business than he finishes. But of one thing we may be sure: the story of Cain and Abel is not just a snapshot of an isolated

---

64. Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville [Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), viii.

incident. The story is rather a kind of paradigm, the first case in Scripture of a pattern that will appear again and again. In this pattern, God surprisingly prefers one person over another—typically the younger over the older—and then has to deal with the loser and his lethal envy."[65] Of course, that pattern is seen repeatedly in Genesis itself between Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers.[66] Similarly, Brueggemann notes that Adam's admission "I was afraid," "is the same answer that will be given by Abraham (20:11) and then by Isaac (26:9) and by all who cannot trust the goodness of God and submit to his wise passion."[67]

Just as there are similarities between Adam and Noah, a sort of second Adam, there are connections between Noah and Abraham. Paul Borgman highlights the links between Noah and Abraham. "Noah and Abraham are very much the same: the biblical writer distinguishes each by paralleled terms, 'righteousness,' 'wholeness,' and 'walking with God.' The similarity accentuates their striking difference."[68] What is more, there is more than passing similarity between Noah's inebriation and nakedness and Ham's violation and the later story of Lot and his daughters (Genesis 19). The sin of the sons of God and daughters of men that precipitated the flood may similarly illuminate the evil intentions of the residents of Sodom toward Lot's angelic guests and the conflagration that followed.

---

65. Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 160.

66. Matthew Schlimm follows this fraternal trajectory in *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Language and Ethics of Anger in Genesis*, Siphrut, Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures, vol. 7. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

67. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 49.

68. Paul Borgman, *Genesis: The Story We Haven't Heard* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 38.

The typological function of these narratives extends beyond Genesis into the rest of the Pentateuch. Sailhamer argues that "[t]he final shape of the Pentateuch reflects an interest in reading the historical narratives both typologically and eschatologically."[69] In specific he unpacks relationship between the sins of Genesis 3–11 and the purity code of Leviticus 11–16. Furthermore, "the tabernacle is portrayed as a return to the Garden of Eden. The instructions given to Noah for building the ark foreshadow those given to Moses for building the tabernacle."[70]

On the one hand, the narratives of Genesis 3–11 are rarely referenced directly in much of the Hebrew Bible. However, Henri Blocher argues that there are more references than is sometimes admitted.[71] He points to the presence of Genesis language in the prophetic literature some of which is quite direct. Hosea 6:7, for instance, compares Israel covenant failure to that of Adam. Isaiah 65:25 echoes Genesis in speaking of a serpent eating dust. Furthermore, the storyline of paradise lost and recreated is strong, especially in Isaiah. In short, many of the sins of the patriarchs and later Israel as a nation bear striking resemblance to the series of sins, both individual and corporate, that are presented in the primeval narrative.

Types of Sin in the New Testament

Many have noted that the stories of Genesis 1–11 do not feature heavily in the remainder of Scripture. One could perhaps argue that this is not because they are *not* fundamental, but rather that they are so fundamental that their presence is assumed

---

69. John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 38.

70. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 39.

71. Henri Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub., 1999), 43.

throughout. That said, the references to these stories in the New Testament conforms to their usage as types. Due to space we cannot treat these texts extensively.

Perhaps most familiar is Paul's typological use of Adam in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. There the narrative of the first Adam is contrasted with the effect of the life of the second Adam, Christ. In 1 John 3:11-16, the story of Cain is referenced as the quintessential example of lack of love for one's brother. The one who hates is a murderer and abides in death. The contrast in the passage is with Christ, the one who laid down his life. Two ways of living are offered, two narratives to inhabit. Jude 11, too uses Cain and other Old Testament figures as representative of a way of life. "Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion." By contrast, Hebrews 11:4 praises the better sacrifice of Abel, suggesting it was offered in faith and Jesus suggests that Abel was the first of the prophetic martyrs (Luke 11:51). In Matthew 27:37–39 Jesus uses the days of Noah to describe the suddenness with which the judgment will come. In both 1 and 2 Peter Noah is referenced as exemplar of righteousness.

Types of Sin and Christ

We have already noted in several places the typological relationship between Adam and Christ, a connection that is developed most specifically in Romans 5 but with echoes elsewhere. Christ, like Adam, establishes the human race. Christ, unlike Adam, does not deviate from the image of God. He accomplishes everything that his Father sends him to do (John 17:4) and does not pursue his own agenda (John 8:50). This is in stark contrast to the grasping human initiative of Genesis 3–11. More telling still is the contrast between humanity's pursuit of the name in Genesis 11 and Jesus, who like

Abraham, receives a name from God (Philippians 2:11). Many have noted the various ways in which Jesus recapitulates aspects of Israel's history: sojourn in Egypt, crossing Jordan, exile. The one history bears a typological relationship to the other.

One might expect types of sin to be in evidence in the climax of the storyline and perhaps even to be supplemented. On this reading of Christ as the new Adam and founder of renewed humanity, it is legitimate to read the temptations of Jesus as the establishment of a new set of types of sin, ones that echo, clarify and expand upon those encountered earlier in the drama. Jesus's temptations cover similar conceptual territory as the Genesis 3 narrative in particular but other of the narratives as well. We will see this in the summary that follows.

The Types of Sin in Genesis 3–11

Can we summarize any more tidily the types of sin that are on offer in Genesis 3–11? Of course, with too much summary we stray into the definition and systematization that narrative theology seeks to avoid. But we may improve upon merely restating the narratives by articulating trends visible even in the brief space of Genesis 3–11. As we have seen, we will articulate these trends with reference to the *imago dei* and the human destiny.

Improving the Image

Several of the sins against the human identity in Genesis 3–11 involve attempts to improve upon the image illicitly. The attraction of the fruit in Genesis 3 was in part its ability to make the human pair wise, a perceived improvement on their current status.

Similarly, Lamech's foray into polygamy could be regarded as a human effort to improve his chances of fulfilling the human mandate to be fruitful and multiply. We might also detect the same impulse behind the uncertain behavior of the sons of God and the daughters of men. Each of these cases suggests that boundaries inherent in the role of image bearer are a hindrance to the full expression of humanity's powers. Yet the counter evidence of the narratives is that while there is considerable space in which humanity can work out its identity as the divine image, there are types of knowledge that are harmful to it and boundaries that once crossed cannot be undone.

This temptation is not unlike Satan's offer of the world at the cost of false worship (Matthew 4:9). The offer is to avoid the divinely ordained path to glory and human destiny. Just as the serpent offered godlikeness—the destiny of humanity—via the fruit, so Satan offered lordship of the earthly realm through false worship.

Overstepping the Image

Another set of these narratives suggest that one type of sin against the image is overstepping the boundaries of the image. This interpretation of several of the Genesis narratives is fairly common though it is often associated with one or two narratives that we have classified above. In overstepping the image, the human characters arrogate to themselves aspects of the divine character to image in the world that God does not appear to have allotted to them. In this category we could include Cain's use of lethal force against his brother and Lamech's usurping of God's authority to exact vengeance. There are at least two other ambiguous events that may fall into this category as well: Adam's second naming of Eve, and Noah's curse of Ham. Within the narrow confines of these

chapters it is difficult to decide on the moral quality of these actions. Naming of humans and cursing seem to be divine prerogatives. Perhaps these two are concessions to the reality of living in a less than perfect world, but features that one hopes will one day be superseded.

Jesus similarly faced the temptation of the misuse of powers vested in him for the pursuit of his destiny when he was tempted to turn stones into bread. To use his power solely for himself would have been to decline or mistrust God's gracious provision and use for himself what was intended for the benefit of others.

Resisting the Image

Another view of some of these narratives reveals the category of sins against the image through resisting the divine direction of human destiny. This can be seen most clearly in the narrative of the Tower of Babel where for reasons of security and identity, the community resists God's call to disperse. This may also be seen in Cain's choice of settling down after being told he would be a wanderer (4:16). This redefinition of the human goals can be seen to foreshadow several of Israel's refusals of God's destiny for them. Their resistance to enter the Promised Land in Numbers 13 and their failure to dispossess fully the Canaanites of the Promised Land in Joshua and Judges. Individuals and communities are infinitely creative in redefining the direction and trajectory of human destiny.

Abusing Image-Bearers

Of course, a repeated type of sin in these chapters is the breakdown of relationships between image bearers. The chapters move from breakdown in the marriage

relationship in the blame between Adam and Eve in chapter 3 which escalates to Lamech's boorish behavior toward his wives in chapter 4. Further abuse within the human community is depicted in Cain's murder of his brother which escalates to Lamech's violence and culminates in the description of the earth as "filled with violence" (6:11). The cleansing effect of the flood is short-lived as family relationships are once again compromised by Ham's lewdness. John Goldingay comments on this trend in terms that are amenable to narrative and typology. "I presume we are to continue to see this series of parabolic stories as occupying parallel places in a montage. The story does not suggest that first the marriage relationship is spoiled, then the sibling relationship, then the parental relationship."[72] Rather, there is depicted the sinful tendency toward relational and societal breakdown and that virtually all of humanity's sins have just this effect.

THINKING *WITH* TYPES OF SIN

Robert Jenson says that the test of a theological claim is its hermeneutical value: "The scriptural test of a theologoumenon is its success as a hermeneutical principle: whether it leads to exegetical success or failure with mandated churchly homiletical, liturgical, and catechetical uses of Scripture."[73] In the case of definitions or descriptions of sin, we would ask whether the definitions of sin on offer provide the church with the conceptual resources, the hermeneutical principles to speak prophetically to itself and the wider culture. Our survey in chapter 1 regarding the loss of sin-language suggests that the regnant definitions fall short. Further, our interaction with feminist and evangelical

---

72. John Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, Old Testament Theology, vol. 1. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 185.

73. Robert W Jenson, *The Triune God*, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 33.

theologians, two theological traditions interested in sin-talk demonstrated the limitations of their definitions in speaking creatively about sin. Does indexing sin to the meaning of being human provide better resources?

Sin and Christ

As we have seen above, the single greatest achievement of this reading is a more direct link between sin, humanity, and Christ. We observed in our appraisals of feminist and evangelical definitions of sin that there was no inherent connection to Christ. For the evangelicals, the heavy focus on law leads to a view of the incarnation and suffering of Christ as a form of *deus ex machina* rather than as an intricately woven plot element. Feminist theologians in particular fault traditional theologies for their dependence on an incursion from outside of history for its resolution. For the feminist theologians, their emphasis on experiential knowledge and the essence of humanity leave little room for a significant Christology, quite apart from the problems that Jesus's maleness causes them. That is to say that for the evangelicals Jesus is the unique one which comes from outside the system to redeem it whereas for the feminists Jesus is so embedded in the system he can play no role more than exemplar and even that is undercut by gender considerations. Conversely, orienting sin to the *imago dei* as a developmental concept that finds its fullest expression in Christ allows one to integrate the story of Christ seamlessly with the story that preceded it while at the same time highlighting it as a distinctive moment. These details overcome the dangers of over- or under-realized eschatologies by giving a meaningful ground in the present while still anticipating a fulfilled destiny in the future. Robert Jenson articulates the tension well:

> Yet the future that moves a story must somehow be available within it if we are to live the story while it is still in progress, as Israel worshiped her God even while in exile awaiting his salvation or as the church tells the gospel while awaiting the risen Christ's advent. If prior to the closure by which a narrated identity is resolved we can nevertheless recount certain events as the story of the someone then to be identified, there must be a way in which what will come 'unexpectedly' may nevertheless be told in advance.[74]

In Christ we can "tell in advance" the story of our own destiny while leaving its full expression for a later time. This ameliorates the over-realized eschatology of evangelicalism which articulates a fully-executed soteriology and the under-realized eschatology of feminism which sees salvation forever deferred.

Sin and Self

This way of talking about the human and sin conforms much more readily to contemporary notions of self-hood than do those offered by either our feminist or evangelical interlocutors. As many have noted, contemporary ways of thinking about being human have moved away from concepts of human faculties or nature and even beyond mere relationality to speak of the human self as an identity that is constructed in the nexus of many factors but which is heavily narrative in its cohesion. As Grenz comments, "The resultant postmodern condition retains a semblance of a 'self' that is constituted by a narrative, that is marked by a position in a vast relational web, and that looks to relationships for identity."[75] It is precisely the narrative sense that ties together past and present and offers a trajectory into the future. "[A]ny semblance of meaning in the present is linked to at least a rudimentary sense of narrative continuity with a meaningful past and a conceivable future, which gives the impression that the person is

74. Robert W Jenson, *The Triune God*, 67.
75. Grenz, *The Social God*, 17.

en route from somewhere to somewhere and hence that the persons's narrative constitutes some type of a whole."[76] Anthony Giddens agrees: "A person's identity is not to be found in behavior, nor—important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self."[77]

Giddens speaks of selves as reflexively constructed, that is, "which are shaped by—yet also shape—the institutions of modernity. The self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences; in forging their self-identities, no matter how local their specific contexts of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications."[78] This is in contrast to Mary Daly's overly assertive self and Rita Nakashima Brock's rather passive, relational self. Interestingly, in this context Giddens suggests that shame rather than guilt is predominant.[79] This is in contrast to the strong emphasis on guilt in evangelical definitions of sin and salvation and more consonant with the narratives of Genesis and chapter 3 in particular.

By understanding human destiny as a whole as developing narratively and finding its pinnacle in Christ, a connection is made with the narrative understanding of the self. As we observed before, insofar as they are "in Christ" believers understand themselves and their individual narratives with reference to the narrative of humanity as it finds its

---

76. Ibid., 135.

77. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 54.

78. Ibid., 2.

79. Ibid., 8.

expression in Jesus Christ. Sin involves the various ways we attempt to construct narratives of personal identity apart from the image of God as revealed in Christ. It further involves the ways individual actions and systems thwart others in their attempts to self-narrate.

McClendon suggests that understanding our personal narrative with reference to Christ allows the story to change from the tragedy of Adam to the Comedy of Christ. "We cannot say a good word for sin if we count its cost to Jesus the faithful One. Yet we have to reckon that if his own life-story, marred by the sin of others, was finally not tragedy but (in the classical sense) comedy; when that narrative of happy ending impacts our own, our tear-stained, sit-marred tragedies are turned into comedies as well. By his grace, there is laughter in the morning."[80]

Sin and Systems

One of the undoubted strengths of feminist definitions of sin is the way they highlight systems and institutions of sin in the culture. By linking sin to the full-humanity of women they helpfully exposed systemic ways in which female flourishing is prevented. However, their overly gendered and static view of the human blunted the usefulness of this critique. As we saw with Mary Daly, her single-minded focus on full womanhood failed to recognized how some of the same systems that thwart the full humanity of women do the same to much of the male population as well. Again, part of this problem was their static rather than developmental view of the human individual and human society. James McClendon agrees: "A dynamic view of social existence—its practices having an end, its stories a point or goal—requires a moving rather than fixed

80. James Wm. McClendon, *Doctrine*, 130.

understanding of social sin."[81] This conforms with our reading of Genesis 1–11. Humanity and human society is growing and changing. Innovations at one stage may ossify and become oppressive in another. Viewing the destiny of humanity as eschatologically oriented and narratively constructed yet at least partially present in the narrative of Christ provides the space to think more richly about societal structures and the ways in which they do or don't facilitate the fulfillment of human destiny. Indeed, positive developments in humanity can in time come to be used as efforts to resist or overstep the destiny embedded in the image of God. Static views of the human or the law are not flexible enough to keep pace with these sorts of shifts.

Sin and Salvation

We observed in our examination of both feminist and evangelical theologians that the language of sin shaped the language of salvation significantly. For Mary Daly, being human is to have the capacity to self-name, sin is having that capacity stolen, and salvation is recapturing the radical power of self-definition. For Rita Nakashima Brock, to be human is to be relational, sin is the brokenness we experience and inflict as a result of our relationality, and salvation moving toward healthier relationships. For the evangelical theologians, sin is violation of divine law that renders the sinner guilty before God and salvation is achieved through the transference of that guilty verdict onto Christ in his sacrifice. What these definitions do, however, is mute the rich theological language for both sin and salvation. Their definitions tend to privilege one or another biblical image. Brock privileges healing. The evangelicals privilege justification. But as we have seen, as early as Genesis there is diverse language and imagery associated with sin: death,

81. Ibid., 133.

corruption, shame, name-making, sin as crouching animal, violence, exposure. Other images from both testaments could be adduced. As we have had reason to point out, the diversity of images of sin are balanced by a diversity of language of salvation. To paraphrase Gordon Fee, for every "type" of sin there is a corresponding "type" of salvation.

Furthermore, the diversity for sin offered in the language of type combined with the fulfilling of the image of God in Christ offers a better way to speak about how the entirety of Christ's life relates to salvation rather than focusing only on a substitutionary atonement or moral example. Jesus's recapitulation of the history of Israel and of humanity is the required narrative antidote to the narrative of human sinfulness in the beginning.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have attempted to move from the way in which sin is depicted in the narrative of Genesis 3–11 to make some contributions to the question of sin in Christian theology. We began with the observation that the safest way to summarize the depiction of sin in Genesis 3–11 is by indexing it to the description of the nature and destiny of humanity in the earlier chapters. By indexing sin to the rich concept of the *imago dei* we were able to transcend a few of the tensions that weaken traditional definitions of sin. Quickly, however, we strove to cast our understanding of the human destiny in a narrative mode by recognizing that this destiny is something that was to be lived out in time and space rather than a static nature. This allowed us to avoid the static definition of humanity offered by our feminist conversation partners. More importantly, it

offered a way to trace the trajectory of human destiny, the *imago dei*, forward through the narrative of Scripture to its apex in Christ, thus offering a tighter connection between our understanding of sin and the person and work of Christ. Since the New Testament depicts Christ as the new Adam that inaugurates a new humanity, we could again pull together both the individual and corporate aspects of humanity and sin. Finally, we returned to the narratives of Genesis 3–11 to see how they might function in this narratively constructed understanding of humanity and sin. We chose the concept of typology to describe the relationship between these ancient narratives and the contemporary reader. The narratives of Genesis 3–11, rather than offering illustrations of sin as violation of divine law, are parallel images of a range of typical ways in which humanity deviates from the image of God. These first testament images are amplified by many from the second testament, most notably the images of obedience and conformity to the image of God found in the person of Christ and especially his resistance during temptation in the wilderness. These various ways of sin then provided us with better conceptual lenses for evaluating issues like systems of sin and easier access to the rich language of salvation. This conceptualization of sin also offered a more natural fit with contemporary ideas of the narratively constructed self.

We have thus moved from the text to theology and back to the text. It remains in the final chapter for us to summarize the entire trajectory of this study.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: SIN, STORY AND THE SAVIOR

Forty years ago Karl Menninger asked "Whatever became of sin?" raising an important question for the status of sin-talk in the contemporary theological and cultural milieu. Twenty years later James McClendon could still say: "The Christian doctrine of sin is clearly one on which much work is needed at present."[1] To be sure, some efforts have been made in the intervening years, but it is safe to say that the state of sin-talk in theology and in the broader culture is an area in ongoing need of development.

Does the church have a robust language of sin with which to engage the challenges of culture? This is the question with which we began. The loss of sin language, we maintain, is of serious consequence due to how closely tied it is to other aspects of theology: anthropology, soteriology, and Christology. As Alistair MacFadyen worries: "Losing our ability to speak of the world's pathologies in relation to God represents a serious, concrete form of the loss of God that is a general characteristic of contemporary, Western culture. The doctrine of sin is not so much an isolated case of Christian embarrassment concerning anachronistic aspects of Christian faith, as a crucial test of our ability to speak of God in relation to the world at all."[2] Much is at stake in the loss of compelling sin language.

---

1. James Wm. McClendon, "Sin," in *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, in *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, ed. Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 446.

2. Alistair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4.

We suggested that the demise of sin-talk was due in part to reductionistic sin language, language that failed to capture the richness of the concept of sin as encountered in Scripture. Due to the aforementioned organic relationships among theological loci, these reductionistic definitions of sin resulted in reductionistic depictions of the human person and the nature of salvation.

We then observed that during the very time period that Menninger was lamenting the state of sin language, there was a rise in the interest in both biblical narrative and in the role of narrative more broadly in human reasoning and understanding. In biblical studies, critical methods which attended to the literary features of texts took their place alongside (and in some cases displaced) earlier forms of criticism which tended to fragment texts. In theology, narrative was seen by some to be an important ingredient in the way we understand and explain the world and ourselves, a way that served as a corrective to some of the rationalist and totalizing epistemological options problematized in postmodernity. These two streams have combined, in a way, in efforts to express the whole of biblical witness in the form of a single, overarching storyline.

We suggested that one possible explanation for reductionist descriptions of sin was a failure to incorporate narrative modes of thinking into the definition and development of the doctrine. We then set off to determine more specifically what may be missing from contemporary accounts of the doctrine of sin.

THE STORY OF SIN IN FEMINIST AND EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

To diagnose the possible causes for the loss of robust sin language, we turned to examine the theology of sin in two strains of Christian theology where sin remains a

lively issue: feminist theology and evangelical theology. In both we observed an impulse to define sin and build upon that theology. However, in both we also discovered a problematic relationship to narrative and narrativity.

Sin and Story in Feminist Theology: A Review

The feminist definitions of sin, consciously reactionary against traditional models, were developed off of prior epistemological and anthropological commitments. That is, the feminist theological project employs an experiential epistemology and their definitions of sin were based off of a prior definition of what it means to be human derived from that experientialist epistemology. The human self and the self's experience were the controlling category.

We studied two examples: Mary Daly's self-defining human and Rita Nakashima Brock's relational human. The conscious link to human identity offered a definition of sin that served as a helpful lens to expose structures of sin, of which Mary Daly's thorough work is a prime example. Our principal complaint was that the view of the human and the resultant definition of sin abstracted from the narrative of humanity and particularly from the narrative of humanity sketched in Scripture. Daly, despite her desire to forge a historically and culturally transcendent sisterhood offered an ahistorical and individualized definition of the human in which the past offers no help and the future is entirely of one's own making. Brock's relational anthropology and definition of sin offered far more in the way of human unity by way of our relational connectivity and the concomitant fragility. But we observed that this too tended toward the ahistorical and non-narrival.

Neither offered any sense of development. Mary Daly's human is forever deferred, an overly eschatological reality to use Thiselton's term. Rita Nakashima Brock's human is forever mired in a state of relationality that both confers and damages one's humanity. There is neither escape nor development. We diagnosed both of these problems using a category from Stephen Crites, that of abstraction from the narrative structure of human existence. The critique can also be put in terms of over- or under-realized eschatology. Daly is all future and no past; Brock is all present.

Their commitments were clear in their handling of biblical narrative and in particular the narratives of Genesis 1–11. Like many feminist theologians both Daly and Brock are skeptical if not dismissive of the Bible. They approach the narratives of Genesis with strong suspicion due to the manner in which these narratives have been used against women. Often they seem to be reacting more to uses of the text than the texts themselves. In sum, their approach to the Genesis 3 narrative was as a myth in need of rejection or transvaluation. The literary features of the text were not observed nor was the narrative assessed in its broader literary and canonical context.

Sin and Story in Evangelical Theology: A Review

Not surprisingly our two Evangelical interlocutors articulated definitions of sin more in keeping with tradition. Unlike the feminists, their definitions of sin were textually based, or we could say, dependent on a prior bibliological commitment (and an equally epistemological one). This commitment is a combination of a construal of Scripture and narrative in particular in principally historical terms and doctrine in

propositional forms. A particular notion of scripture and scripture's narratives was the controlling feature in their theologizing about sin.

Wayne Grudem approached Scripture as a storehouse of theological information and expected to find a definition of sin there. Indeed, he found a definition of sin and then read that definition into the narrative of "the fall." Grudem's definition of sin is heavily juridical—the violation of divine law rendering the offender guilty before God—and so too is his soteriology. Marguerite Shuster offers a slightly more nuanced approach to Scripture and sin and greater attention to Genesis 3. For all that, her definition of sin is essentially the same. Like Grudem, she imports to Genesis 3 a definition of sin and a theological structuring framework in the form of covenant theology that both strengthens her approach and obscures aspects of the narrative.

Both theologians find a definition of sin in Scripture, see that definition borne out in the originary act, and then carry the definition of sin across the whole of Scripture without significant development. The definition of sin as law-breaking has a long history, of course, and has its strengths, not least how directly it implicates the individual in sin. However, we saw some limitations beyond those articulated by the feminist theologians. In particular, we addressed the problematic depiction of the divine human-relationship when cast primarily in legal terms.

These theologians' commitments were equally evident in their handling of biblical narrative. They were not especially attentive of the narrative's literary features. Nor did they attend to the literary embeddedness of the narrative of "the fall." Though Shuster took a somewhat looser stance than did Grudem to the historicity of the Genesis

narratives, both of them were hampered by prior commitments in appreciating key aspects of the narrative's presentation of sin.

In at least two ways we found our feminist and evangelical thinkers suffering similar shortcomings. First, both of their approaches were far too static. Their presentation of sin, the self, and scripture offered little avenue for development, particularly the type of development characteristic of narrative. Second, neither of the approaches—the experientialist-anthropological approach of the feminists or the propositionalist-biblicist approach of the evangelicals—offered any direct link between sin-talk and Christ-talk. The feminists largely ignored or rejected Christ. For the Evangelicals he functions a bit as *deus ex machina*. Neither of these streams of thought take into account the recognition in recent years of the narrative structure of human experience and identity and of Scripture itself.

THE STORY OF SIN IN GENESIS 3–11

We then turned to read Genesis 3 in the context of chapters 1–11with two particular questions in mind. First, what is the reference point for sin in these narratives? Is it some rendering of human nature as in feminist thought, the divine decree as in the Evangelical rendering, or something else? Second, how, if at all, does the concept of sin develop over these narratives?

What we observed is the tight literary artistry of these chapters that cautions against their atomization. Genesis 1–11 is a tight literary and narrative unity which connects with what follows but stands alone in important ways. Genesis 1–11 functions

uniquely in the context of the book of Genesis, the Pentateuch and the canon. As such, it warrants consideration as a literary-theological unity.

When we read these narratives attentive to their literary character and seeking their depiction of the reference point for sin we discovered that it was neither specific divine prohibitions *per se*, as in evangelical readings, nor a particular feature of human nature as in the feminist rendering. Rather, we made the case that the various narratives present the reference point for sin as the various aspects of the human identity and destiny as sketched in chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis and developing through the following narrative. The human being as made in the image of God, relationally situated between God, others and the world, serves as the reference point for these narratives. In particular we focused on the human as *imago dei* and observed ways in which within the narratives of Genesis 1–11 the character of the divine was revealed and ways in which humanity did or did not imitate the divine.

But further, we found the chapters to be a finely woven combination of the story of humanity's fulfillment of its identity and its deviation or distortion of that identity. Importantly, we observed that these threads were inseparable and mutually informing: success in fulfilling the human destiny as *imago dei* occasioned new opportunities to deviate from it even as the aftermath of deviation opened up increased opportunity to fulfill it. This is the principal way that sin developed.

At the close of our reading we were able to briefly summarize some of the findings and bring them into conversation with some of the traditional emphases of various doctrines of sin. What we observed is that the narratives of Genesis 3–11 portray sin in diverse ways. Sin is against God, others, the world and self. Sin is individual and

corporate. Sin is act, disposition and stain or corruption. The simplistic definitions on offer cannot capture this diversity.

SIN, STORY AND THEOLOGY

Armed with this view of the human and sin, we turned to assess what such a reading of Genesis 1–11 might contribute to a theology of sin. In moving from biblical text to theology we wanted to avoid the same habits as our feminist and evangelical conversation partners in defining sin too narrowly, or indeed *defining* it at all.

Sin and the *Imago Dei*

First, we discussed the advantages of indexing sin to the human as *imago dei* as a way to bridge the tension between the anthropocentric hamartiology of the feminists and the theocentric hamartiology of the evangelicals. Here we interacted with the work of Emil Brunner on the relationship between sin and human as image bearer. This relation of sin to the *imago dei* moves away from Grudem's equating of angelic and human sin and puts the story of sin more squarely within the human narrative. We also observed that the multifaceted depiction of sin in Genesis 3–11 suggests a via media between several of the other polarities commonly discussed regarding sin.

In relating sin to the nature of the human we were closer to feminist methodology. Both Mary Daly and Rita Nakashima Brock developed their definitions of sin from their understanding of what it means to be human. However, we improved upon the feminist understanding of the human self by embracing a more developmental and narrational understanding of the *imago dei* and the human person. The work of Stanley Grenz was

helpful here in seeing the *imago dei* (and human identity more broadly) not in essential or even relational terms but in eschatological ones as a story and destiny to live into. This balances the capacity to make oneself more carefully than does Daly and also places human relationality in a context better than does Brock's anthropology.

From *Imago Dei* to *Imago Christi*

One of the main faults we found with our feminist and evangelical conversation partners was the lack of a natural theological bridge to Christ from their definitions of humanity or sin. The feminist theologian's heavy emphasis on the distinction between male and female humanity makes connection to the male Jesus difficult. Their definitions of the human person as self-defining (Daly) and relationally constituted (Brock) offered no inherent link to Christ. Further, their insistence that salvation come from inside the human condition problematizes focus on Christ's cross work as salvific. Brock stated this most clearly: "I believe it is our damage—in which one major factor is patriarchy—that has produced a doctrine of sin as a description of our original human state. The existence of that category requires us to misplace divine incarnation and human redemption in someone else's perfection and heroic action, or in a power outside ourselves that helps us transcend the concrete realities of life."[3] For Daly, the conviction that any act from the patriarchally tainted past could hold present salvific value denied the theological significance of Christ for the contemporary self.

Christ, of course, is integrally important to evangelical theology and soteriology in particular. However, the heavy emphasis on law in the definition of sin we saw

---

3. Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 9.

narrowed the focus upon Christ to his cross work. From a narrative perspective we saw his coming and sacrifice functioning as *deus ex machina* where the resolution to the story is not well-integrated to it.

Still following Grenz, we made the most beneficial move of all in linking the human destiny as *imago dei* with the New Testament depiction of Christ as the *imago dei* and the church as the renewed humanity in the *imago Christi*. Connecting the destiny of the human from Genesis 1 with the fulfillment of that destiny in Christ provided an important link between the narration of the entry of sin in the human drama to the climax of that drama in the person and work of Christ and beyond. If sin is indexed to the *imago dei* and that as a narrated reality culminating in Christ, then Christ revealed and yet to come becomes the new reference point for sin—success and failure as humanity. Again in true narrative fashion, this development is both new and yet intimately connected to all that has gone before in the narrative of humanity. This is a dynamic rather than static view of the self, scripture, and sin.

In a way much more natural than either the feminist or evangelical paths, this avenue offers a way to speak about the redemptive significance of the life and ministry of Christ and not only his death. Jesus represents the second Adam and recapitulates Israel's history and offers the beginning of a new narrative in which humanity may live.

From Definitions of Sin to Types of Sin

Though linking our understanding of sin to the person and work of Christ as the *imago dei* is high point of the argument, we made one final conceptual move which was to return to the narratives of Genesis 3–11 to ask how they may be accessed theologically

and practically in light of the discussion. Our conversation partners had approached them mythically (feminists) or historically (evangelicals). In the case of the feminists they read the myth as one of many illustrations of the patriarchal tendency to oppress women. The evangelicals saw in the narratives a historical recounting of the origin of sin which likewise illustrated the nature of sin as law-breaking. Both of these fell short of the narrative ideal of setting the reader in a storied relationship with the narrative.

By seeing in these narratives a story both of development of and deviation from the divinely ordained human destiny, a destiny culminating in Christ, we proposed that the best way to relate to these narratives is through the mode of "type." That is, rather than being merely illustrations of the violation of divine law, these narratives present a range of ways in which humanity strays from its identity as the image of God even while increasingly living into that same destiny. Once a diverse range of types was presented, the biblical narrative turned to focus in the narratives of Abraham and the other patriarchs on the divine plan for restoration of the image of God in humanity.[4]

James McClendon puts the reader's relationship to the primeval narratives in distinctly typological and christological language: "Yet we approach all these narratives with Christian eyes, or at least with gospel-influenced reading strategies. So read, they are indeed types of the disobedience, human perversity, and false aims that were to oppose Jesus when he appeared."[5] These types or images then offer a diverse set of lenses for evaluating human behavior individually, corporately and systemically. We articulated a variety of stances toward the *imago dei* that these narratives displayed: rejection, over-

---

4. Further work could certainly be done on the way in which Israel is depicted as the renewed humanity and the ways in which they deviated from that calling.

5. James Wm. McClendon, *Doctrine*, Systematic Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 123.

extension, attempted improvement upon. These images combined with the direction provided by the overarching narrative of the image of God and its culmination in Christ, provide us with a broader range of language to use in speaking of sin.[6]

By summary we may say that the depiction of sin in Genesis 3–11 is deviation from the divinely ordered human destiny. This may be in act or attitude. It is individual and corporate and may be enshrined in cultural practices and human institutions whose structures and patterns work against human outworking of the image of God as often as they enhance it. Since the story of human destiny finds its high point in the person and work of Christ, he is the ultimate reference point for sin. The biblical narratives of human behavior provide images of the interweaving of human expression of *and* deviation from the divinely ordered destiny. We can use these images as lenses to evaluate current human behavior.

CONCLUSION

In his discussion of sin James McClendon observes, "Every Christian doctrine seems to require every other for its clear presentation."[7] We have discovered that sin-talk relates to human-talk (anthropology), salvation-talk (soteriology), and Christ-talk (Christology). Decisions made in one locus impact the options and emphases in another. We charted some of these effects in the epistemological and methodological decisions of

---

6. The combination of the specific "types" of sin with the overarching narrative of the *imago dei* brings together what Anthony Thiselton suggests about the function of the biblical narrative and its discrete narratives. A 'grand narrative'...may recount God's dealings with the world; 'little' narratives may also portray the appropriation of divine acts on the scale of particular events and persons, with all the ambiguity and need for interpretation that characterizes a journey or narrative *en route*." Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 66.

7. James Wm. McClendon, *Doctrine*, Systematic Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 123.

the feminist and evangelical authors, decisions with detrimental effects to the relevance and effectiveness of their theologizing. Based off particular views of the nature and knowledge of the self, our feminist conversation partners generated definitions of sin that, though they exposed certain aspects of the human character with laser-like precision failed to offer a sufficiently rich and nuanced language for sin. For their part, the evangelical theologians' particular notions of the nature and function of scripture produced definitions of sin equally well-tuned to expose aspects of the human predicament. We have suggested that it is the grander category of story that bridges the extremes of these two positions.

As we have shown, the Genesis narratives offer a range of ways in which humanity has strayed from or rejected its identity as *imago dei*. They cannot all be subsumed tidily under the heading of "pride" or "law-breaking." But they may all be summarized as types of deviation from the narrative presentation of the image of God as revealed in Christ. Genesis 3–11 and the narrative of Christ offer two distinct ways of life, two distinct narratives into which we may live. We may identify with the first Adam and the series of ways in which he and his progeny inhabited and evacuated their call to be image bearers or we may orient our lives in the narrative of the one who fulfilled the image of God perfectly. The ultimate reference point for our understanding of sin is not the law nor human nature per se, but rather the revelation of the destiny of humanity in the incarnate Christ. The narratives of Genesis 1–11 serve as types of sin, pictures of the manifold ways in which we deviate from Christ, the true humanity and the image of what we are to be and one day *will* be.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abraham, Joseph. *Eve: Accused or Acquitted?: An Analysis of Feminist Readings of the Creation Narrative Texts in Genesis 1-3*. Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs. Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2002.

Abraham, William J. *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

_____. *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2006.

Adam, A. K. M. *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.

Allen, Prudence. "Self-Creation and Loss of Self: Mary Daly and St. Teresa of Avila." *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 6 (1: 1976-77).

Allik, Tiina. "Human Finitude and the Concept of Women's Experience." *Modern Theology* 9, no. 1 (January 1993): 67-85.

Alt, A., et. al. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Würtembergische Bibelanstalt, 1968.

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books, 1981.

_____. *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. New York: Basic Books, 1985.

_____. *The World of Biblical Literature*. New York: BasicBooks, 1992.

Amit, Yairah. *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2001.

Anderson, Bernhard W. "From Analysis to Synthesis: The Interpretation of Genesis 1-11." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97, no. 1 (1978): 23-39.

Anderson, Gary A. *Sin: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Anderson, Walter Truett. *The Future of the Self: Inventing the Postmodern Person*. New York: J.P. Tarcher, 1997.

Asmus, Barry and Wayne Grudem. *The Poverty of Nations: A Sustainable Solution*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2013.

Asselin, David T. "Notion of Dominion in Genesis 1-3." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (Jl 1954): 277-94.

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Translated from the German by Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953.

Aulén, Gustaf. *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*. Authorised translation by A.G. Hebert. New York: Macmillan, 1967.

Augustine, St. *City of God*. A new translation by Henry Bettenson, with an introduction by John O'Meara. Penguin Classics. London, England: Penguin Books, 1984.

Baard, Rachel Sophia. "Constructive Feminist Critiques of Classic Sin-Talk: A Rhetorical Reading." Ph.D. diss. Princeton Theological Seminary, 2004.

Bach, Alice. "After the Garden." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 44, no. 1-2 (1990): 1-170.

Baker, Joel B. Green & Mark D. *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament & Contemporary Contexts*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Balaguer, Vicente. "La Teología Narrativa." *Scripta Theologica* 28, no. 3 (1996): 689-712.

Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*. Translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988.

Bar-Efrat, Shimeon. *Narrative Art in the Bible*. Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1989.

Barr, James. *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality: The Read-Tuckwell Lectures for 1990*. London: SCM Press, 1992.

Barron, Robert E. *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholicism*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007.

Barth, Karl. *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*. Vol. IV.1 of *Church Dogmatics*. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1956.

Bartholomew, Craig G. *"Behind" the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.

Bartholomew, Craig G., and Michael W. Goheen. *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.

Bassett, Frederick W. "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse of Canaan: A Case of Incest?" *Vetus Testamentum* 21, no. 2 (Ap 1971): 232-37.

Bausch, William J. *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*. Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984.

Beck, John A. *God as Storyteller: Seeking Meaning in Biblical Narrative*. St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2008.

Bergsma, John Sietze, and Scott Walker Hahn. "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse on Canaan (Genesis 9:20-27)." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 25-40.

Berlin, Adele. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative Bible and Literature Series*. 9. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983.

Berry, Wanda Warren. "Images of Sin and Salvation in Feminist Theology." *Anglican Theological Review* LX, no. 1 (1978): 25-54.

Biddle, Mark E. *Missing the Mark: Sin and Its Consequences in Biblical Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005.

Bietenhard, Silvia Schroer & Sophia, ed. *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. London; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003.

Blocher, Henri. *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle*. New Studies in Biblical Theology. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub., 1999.

Block, Daniel I. *Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary, vol. 6. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999.

Bloesch, Donald G. *God, Authority, and Salvation*. Vol. 1 of *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978.

Boda, Mark J. *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament*. Siphrut. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3 [and] Temptation*. New York: Macmillan, 1959.

Borgman, Paul. *Genesis: The Story We Haven't Heard*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Braaten, Carl E., and Robert W. Jenson, eds. *Sin, Death, and the Devil*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

Brachter, Margaret Dee. "The Pattern of Sin and Judgment in Genesis 1-11." Ph.D. diss. Louisville, KY: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1984.

Brock, Rita Nakashima. "Communities of the Cross: Christa and the Communal Nature of Redemption." *Feminist Theology* 14, no. 1 (2005): 109-25.

Brock, Rita Nakashima. *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power*. New York: Crossroad, 1988.

Brock, Rita Nakashima, and et al., eds. *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.

Brock, Rita Nakashima, Claudia Camp, and Serene Jones, eds. *Setting the Table: Women in Theological Conversation*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1995.

Brock, Rita Nakashima, and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite. *Casting Stones: Prostitution and Liberation in Asia and the United States*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

Brock, Rita Nakashima, and Rebecca Ann Parker. *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2001.

_____. *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2008.

Brodie, Thomas L. *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, & Theological Commentary*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Brown, William P., ed. *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Interpretation. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982.

Brunner, Emil. *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*. Translated by Olive Wyon. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947.

Burkhart, John E. "Mary Daly: Theological Orphan?" *Horizons* 2, no. 1 (Sp 1975): 119-120.

Cahoy, William J. "One Species or Two? Kierkegaard's Anthropology and the Feminist Critique of the Concept of Sin." *Modern Theology* 11, no. 4 (October 1995): 429-454.

Calvin, Jean. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960.

Carr, David. "Biblos Geneseos Revisited: A Synchronic Analysis of Patterns in Genesis as Part of the Torah (Part One)." *Zeitschrift Für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 110, no. 2 (1998): 159-72.

_____. "Biblos Geneseos Revisited: A Synchronic Analysis of Patterns in Genesis as Part of the Torah (Part Two)." *Zeitschrift Für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 110 (1998): 327-47.

Cheney, Emily. *She Can Read: Feminist Reading Strategies for Biblical Narrative*. Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996.

Christ, Carol P., and Judith Plaskow, eds. *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

Clark, Warren Malcolm. "Flood and the Structure of Pre-Patriarchal History." *Zeitschrift Für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 83, no. 2 (1971): 184-211.

_____. "Righteousness of Noah." *Vetus Testamentum* 21, no. 3 (Jl 1971):261-280.

Clines, David J. A. "The Image of God in Man." *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 53-103.

_____. *The Theme of the Pentateuch*. 10, 152. Sheffield, Eng.: Dept. of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield, 1978.

Collins, John C. "What Happened to Adam and Eve?" *Presbyterion* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 12-44.

Comstock, Gary L. "Two Types of Narrative Theology." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 4: 687-717.

Hampson, Daphne, ed. *Swallowing a Fishbone?: Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity*. London: SPCK, 1996.

Couenhaven, Jesse. "'Not Every Wrong is Done with Pride': Augustine's Proto-Feminist Anti-Pelagianism." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 1 (Fall 2008): 32-52.

Cover, Robin S. "Sin, Sinners (Old Testament)." In *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, David Noel Freedman, 31-40. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Coward, Harold. *Sin and Salvation in the World Religions: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2003.

Crites, Stephen. "The Narrative Quality of Experience." In *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, edited by Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 65-88. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989.

Cullinan, Colleen Carpenter. *Redeeming the Story: Women, Suffering, and Christ*. New York: Continuum, 2004.

Daly, Mary. *Amazon Grace: Re-Calling the Courage to Sin Big*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

_____. *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

_____.*The Church and the Second Sex*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.

_____. “Church and Women: An Interview with Mary Daly.” *Theology Today* 28 (3 O 1971).

_____.*Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1978.

_____. “I Jumped Over the Moon: An Interview with Mary Daly and Catherine the Cow.” *Feminist Theology* (1994).

_____. *Outercourse: The Be-Dazzling Voyage: Containing Recollections from My Logbook of a Radical Feminist Philosopher (Be-Ing an Account of My Time. Space travels and ideas--then again, now, and how).* San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.

_____. *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.

_____. *Quintessence-- Realizing the Archaic Future: A Radical Elemental Feminist Manifesto*. Illustrations by Sudie Rakusin. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998.

_____. *Websters’ First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*. Conjured by Mary Daly in cahoots and Jane Caputi. Boston: Beacon Press, 1987.

Davaney, Sheila Greeve. “Problems with Feminist Theory: Historicity and the Search for Sure Foundations.” In *Embodied Love: Sensuality and Relationship as Feminist Values*, Paula M. Cooey, Sharon A. Farmer, and Mary Ellen Ross, 79-95. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

Delbanco, Andrew. *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995.

Dempster, Stephen G. *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*. New Studies in Biblical Theology. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

Dennison, James T. “The Eschatological Reversal of the Protological Reversal: Narrative Analysis and Chiastic Paradigms in Genesis 2:18-3:24.” *Kerux* 23, no. 2 (2008): 3-13.

Dever, Mark. “Nothing but the Blood.” *Christianity Today* 50, no. 5 (May 2006): 28-33.

Di Vito, Robert A. “Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (April 1999): 217-38.

Dion, Michel. “Mary Daly, Théologienne et Philosophe Féministe.” *Études Théologiques et Religieuses* 62 (4, 1987).

Driscoll, Mark, and Gerry Breshears. *Death by Love: Letters from the Cross*. Re: Lit. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008.

Dunfee, Susan Nelson. “The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr’s Account of the Sin of Pride.” *Soundings* 65 (Fall 1982): 316-27.

Russell, Letty M. and J. Shannon Clarkson. *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

Eller, Cynthia. *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won’t Give Women a Future*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000.

Ellingsen, Mark. *The Integrity of Biblical Narrative: Story in Theology and Proclamation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

Embry, Brad. “The ‘Naked Narrative’ from Noah to Leviticus: Reassessing Voyeurism in the Account of Noah’s Nakedness in Genesis 9.22-24.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35, no. 4 (June 2011): 417-33.

Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998.

Exum, J. Cheryl, Editor. “Tragedy and Comedy in the Bible.” *Semeia*, no. 32 (1984): 1-148.

_____. “Murder They Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative.” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 43, no. 1 (1989): 19-39.

Exum, J. Cheryl, ed. *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus*. Semeia Studies. S.l.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1989.

_____. *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)Versions of Biblical Narratives*. JSOT. Supplement Series. Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993.

_____. *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Exum, J. Cheryl, and David J.A. Clines, eds. *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993.

Fackre, Gabriel. *The Christian Story: A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.

_____. *The Doctrine of Revelation: A Narrative Interpretation*. Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997.

_____. “Narrative Theology from an Evangelical Perspective.” In *Faith and Narrative*, Keith Yandell, 188-201. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Fee, Gordon. “Paul and the Metaphors for Salvation: Some Reflections on Pauline Soteriology.” In *The Redemption*, Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, O’, and Gerald O’Collins. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Fenn, Richard K. “Sin: The Taint of Time.” *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (Jl 1993): 265-78.

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler, and the assistance of Shelly Matthews. *Searching the Scriptures*. New York: Crossroad, 1993.

Fitzpatrick, Joseph. “Original Sin or Original Sinfulness?” *New Blackfriars* 91 (January 2010): 66-82.

Fletcher, John. “Sin in Contemporary Literature.” *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (Jl 1993): 254-64.

Fokkelman, J. P. *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses Studia Semitica Neerlandica*. 27. Assen, The Netherlands ; Dover, N.H.: Van Gorcum, 1981.

_____. *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*. 2. Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1991.

Ford, David. *Barth and God’s Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the “Church Dogmatics.”* Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1981.

Ford, David F. “System, Story, Performance: A Proposal About the Role of Narrative in Christian Systematic Theology.” In *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, edited by Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 191-215. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989.

Fowl, Stephen. “Texts Don’t Have Ideologies.” *Biblical Interpretation* 3, no. 1 (1995): 15-34.

Fowl, Stephen E., ed. *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997.

_____. *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation*. Challenges in Contemporary Theology. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1998.

Frei, Hans W. “Response to ‘Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal’.” *Trinity Journal* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 21-24.

_____. *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative; a Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

_____. *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology*, 173. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.

Frei, Hans W., George Hunsinger, and William C. Placher. *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Fretheim, Terrence E. “Is Genesis 3 a Fall Story?” *Word & World* XIV, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 144-53.

Fulkerson, Mary McClintock. “Sexism as Original Sin: Developing a Theacentric Discourse.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LIX, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 653-75.

Gelander, Shamai. *The Good Creator: Literature and Theology in Genesis 1-11*. South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism. Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1997.

Gerrish, B., and Sergio Sorrentino. “Scleiermacher, Friedrich.” In *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 12, Lindsay Jones, 8159-67. Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2005.

Gestrich, Christof. *The Return of Splendor in the World: The Christian Doctrine of Sin and Forgiveness*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991.

Goldberg, Michael. “God, Action, and Narrative: *Which* Narrative? *Which* Action? *Which* God?” *The Journal of Religion* 68, no. 1 (January 1988): 39-56.

_____. *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991.

Goldingay, John. *Israel’s Gospel*. Old Testament Theology, vol. 1. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

_____. *Models for Interpretation of Scripture*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995.

Gombis, Timothy G. *The Drama of Ephesians: Participating in the Triumph of God*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010.

Gonzales, Robert. *Where Sin Abounds: The Spread of Sin and the Curse in Genesis with Special Focus on the Patriarchal Narratives*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010.

Gorman, Michael J. *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001.

_____. *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

Green, Joel B., and Max Turner, eds. *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

Greene-McCreight, Kathryn. *Feminist Reconstructions of Christian Doctrine: Narrative Analysis and Appraisal*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Greidanus, Sidney. “Detecting Plot Lines: The Key to Preaching the Genesis Narratives.” *Calvin Theological Journal* 43, no. 1 (Ap 2008): 64-77.

_____. *Preaching Christ from Genesis*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Grenz, Stanley J. *The Named God and the Question of Being: A Trinitarian Theo-Ontology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

_____. *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

_____. *Theology for the Community of God*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994.

Grey, Mary. “Falling Into Freedom: Searching for New Interpretations of Sin in a Secular Culture.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 47, no. 2: 223-43.

_____. *Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and Christian Tradition*. London: SPCK, 1989.

Grudem, Wayne. *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*. Edited by Jeff Purswell. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.

_____. *Business for the Glory of God: The Bible’s Teaching on the Moral Goodness of Business*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003.

_____. *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*. Sisters: Multnomah Publishers, 2006.

_____. “Do We Act as If We Really Believe That the ‘the Bible Alone, and the Bible in Its Entirety, is the Word of God Written’?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 1 (March 2000): 5-26.

_____. *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions*. Sisters: Multnomah Publishers, 2004.

_____. *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?* Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006.

_____. *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.

_____. “Should We Move Beyond the New Testament to a Better Ethic?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 2 (June 2004): 299-346.

_____. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

Grudem, Wayne, C. John Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds. *Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible: A Guide to Reading the Bible Well*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2012.

Gunn, D. M., and Danna Nolan Fewell. *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible Oxford Bible Series.*, 263. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.

Hampson, Daphne. *After Christianity*. London: SCM Press, 1996.

_____. *Theology and Feminism*. Signposts in Theology. Cambridge, Mass.,: Blackwell, 1990.

Harland, P. J. "Vertical or Horizontal: The Sin of Babel." *Vetus Testamentum* 48, no. 4 (1998): 513-33.

Harland, P.J. *The Value of Human Life: A Study of the Story of the Flood (Genesis 6-9)*. Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, vol. 64. New York: Brill, 1996.

Harris, Harriet A. "Should We Say That Personhood is Relational?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* (1998), 214-34.

Harris, John L. "An Exposition of Genesis 2:4-11:32." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 44, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 39-55.

Hauerwas, Stanley. *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America*, 159. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

_____. *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, 367. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.

Hauerwas, Stanley, and David Burrell. "From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics." In *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, edited by Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 158-90. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989.

Hauerwas, Stanley, and L. Gregory Jones. "Introduction: Why Narrative?" In *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 1-18. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989.

Hauser, Alan J. "Linguistic and Thematic Links Between Genesis 4:1-16 and Genesis 2-3." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23, no. 4 (December 1980): 297-305.

Heide, Gale. "System and Story." In *System and Story: Narrative Critique and Construction in Theology*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series, xxviii, 305. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2009.

Heide, Gale Z. “The Nascent Noeticism of Narrative Theology: An Examination of the Relationship Between Narrative and Metaphysics in Nicholas Lash.” *Modern Theology* 12, no. 4 (October 1996 1996): 459-81.

Henry, Carl F. H. “Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal.” *Trinity Journal* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 3-19.

Hill, Susan E. “(Dis)Inheriting Augustine: Constructing the Alienated Self in the Autobiographical Works of Paul Monette and Mary Daly.” *Literature and Theology* 13, no. 2 (Je 1999): 148-65.

Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.

Holland, Scott. *How Do Stories Save Us?: An Essay on the Question with the Theological Hermeneutics of David Tracy in View*. Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs. Louvain ; Dudley, MA: Peeters ;, 2006.

House, Paul R. “Examining the Narratives of Old Testament Narrative: An Exploration in Biblical Theology.” *Westminster Theological Journal* 67 (2005): 229-45.

Humphreys, W. Lee. *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Hunt, Mary E. “Future Visions: Response to Mary Daly.” *Feminist Theology* (2000).

Hwang, Hye Sook. “The Radical Feminism of Mary Daly: A Metapatriarchal Theological Consciousness.” *Journal of Asian and Asian American Theology* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 71-85.

Jacobs, Alan. *Original Sin: A Cultural History*. New York: HarperOne, 2008.

_____. “What Narrative Theology Forgot.” *First Things*, no. 135 (Ag-S 2003): 25-30.

Jenson, Matt. *Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther, and Barth on Homo Incurvatus in Se*. London ; New York: T&T Clark, 2006.

Jenson, Robert W. *The Triune God*. Vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

_____. *The Works of God*. Vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Jewett, Paul K. *God, Creation & Revelation*. With sermons by Marguerite Shuster. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991.

Jewett, Paul K., and Margurite Shuster. *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human: A Neo-Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

Johnson, Elizabeth A. *She Who is: The Mystery of God in a Feminist Theological Discourse*. New York: Crossroad, 1992.

Johnston, evangelical options / Robert K., ed. *The Use of the Bible in Theology*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985.

Jones, Serene. *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*. Guides to Theological Inquiry. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

Kass, Leon R. *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis*. New York: Free Press, 2003.

Kelsey, David H. *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology*, 227. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999.

_____. "Whatever Happened to the Doctrine of Sin." *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (July 1993): 169-78.

Kermode, Frank. *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*. Charles Eliot Norton Lectures. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979.

Kidner, Derek. *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition of Edification & Awakening by Anti-Climacus*. Edited and translated by Alistair Hannay. Penguin Classics, 1989.

Kim, Angela Y. "Cain and Abel in the Light of Envy: A Study in the History of the Interpretation of Envy in Genesis 4.1-16." *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 12, no. 1 (April 2001): 65-84.

Korte, Anne-Marie, and Mischa F C. Hoyinck, Translator. "Deliver Us from Evil: Bad Versus Better Faith in Mary Daly's Feminist Writings." In *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*, 76-111. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University, 2000.

Kurz, William S. *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.

Lash, Nicholas. "Ideology, Metaphor, and Analogy." In *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, edited by Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 113-37. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989.

Lauritzen, Paul. "Is 'Narrative' Really a Panacea? The Use of 'Narrative' in the Work of Metz and Hauerwas." *The Journal of Religion* 67, no. 3 (July 1987): 322-39.

Lee, Dorothy A. "Women as 'Sinners': Three Narratives of Salvation in Luke and John." *Australian Biblical Review* 44 (1996): 1-15.

Leithart, Peter J. *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture*. Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2009.

Lewis, Jack P. "The Offering of Abel (Gen 4:4): A History of Interpretation." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 4 (December 1994): 481-96.

Lim, Johnson T.K. *Grace in the Midst of Judgment: Grappling with Genesis 1-11*. Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft. Berlin ; New York: W. de Gruyter, 2002.

Lindbeck, George A. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984.

Lohr, Joel N. "Righteous Abel, Wicked Cain: Genesis 4:1-16 in the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, and the New Testament." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (July 2009): 485-96.

Lohse, Bernhard. *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*. Translated and edited by Roy A. Harrisville. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.

Long, Thomas G. "God Be Merciful to Me, a Miscalculator." *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (July 1993): 165-68.

Long, V. Philips. *The Art of Biblical History*. Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, vol. 5. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

Louis, Kenneth R. R. Gros. "Genesis 1-11." In *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, edited by Kenneth R.R. Gros Louis, James S. Ackerman, and Thayer S. Warshaw. Bible in Literature Courses., 41-51. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974.

Lowe, Mary Elise. "Woman Oriented Hamartiologies: A Survey of the Shift from Powerlessness to Right Relationship." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 39, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 119-39.

Luciani, Didier. "Genèse 2,4: Théorie Documentaire Ou Analyse Narrative?" *Nouvelle Revue Theologique* 129, no. 2 (April-June 2007): 279-84.

Macchia, Frank D. "Unity and Otherness: Lessons from Babel and Pentecost." *Living Pulpit* 13, no. 4 (2004): 5-7.

McClendon, James Wm. *Biography as Theology; How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974.

McClendon, James Wm. *Doctrine*. Systematic Theology. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.

McClendon, James Wm. “Sin.” In *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*. In *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, edited by Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price, 442-47. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992.

MacDonald, Neil B. *Metaphysics and the God of Israel: Systematic Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.

McFadyen, Alistair. *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

McGrath, Alister. *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science.” In *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, edited by Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 138-57. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989.

MacIntyre, Alasdair C. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

McKeown, James. *Genesis*. The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 2008.

Mangis, Michael. *Signature Sins: Taming Our Wayward Hearts*. Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2008.

Marshall, I. Howard, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Stanley E. Porter. *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology*., 136. Grand Rapids; Milton Keynes, Bucks, UK: Baker Academic; Paternoster, 2004.

Martens, Elmer A. “Moving from Scripture to Doctrine.” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 15, no. 1 (2005): 77-103.

Menninger, Karl A. *Whatever Became of Sin?* New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973.

Metz, Johann Baptist. “A Short Apology of Narrative.” Translated by David Smith. In *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, edited by Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 251-62. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989.

Mink, Louis O. “Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument.” In *The Writing of History*, edited by Robert H. Canary, Henry Kozicki, 129-49. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978.

Moroney, Stephen K. “How Sin Affects Scholarship: A New Model.” *Christian Scholars Review* 28 (Spring 1999): 432-51.

Murphy, Francesca Aran. *The Comedy of Revelation: Paradise Lost and Regained in Biblical Narrative*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000.

_____. *God is not a Story: Realism Revisited*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press Oxford, 2007.

Neiman, Susan. *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Nelson, Derek R. *What's Wrong with Sin?: Sin in Individual and Social Perspective from Schleiermacher to Theologies of Liberation*. London: T & T Clark, 2009.

Newsom, Carol A. "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth." *Journal of Religion* 76 (April 1996): 290-306.

Niebuhr, H. Richard. "The Story of Our Life." In *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, edited by Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 21-44. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989.

Niebuhr, Reinhold. *Human Nature*. Vol. 1 of *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945.

Nussbaum, Martha C. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Nussbaum, Martha. "Narrative Emotions: Beckett's Genealogy of Love." In *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 216-48. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989.

O'Connell, K. G. "Tower of Babel." In *New Catholic Encyclopedia, 2nd Edition*, vol. 14, 128-30. Detroit: Gale, 2003.

O'Collins, Gerald, and Daniel Kendall. *The Bible for Theology: Ten Principles for the Theological Use of Scripture*. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.

O'Connor, Flannery. *Collected Works*. Library of America. New York: Viking Press, 1988.

_____. *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969.

Osiek, Carolyn. "The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives." In *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, edited by Adele Yarbro Collins, 93-105. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985.

Padovano, Anthony T. *Original Sin and Christian Anthropology Corpus Papers.* Washington: Corpus Books, 1969.

Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

Parmentier, Élisabeth. “Les Femmes Auraient-Elles Besoin d’Être Sauvées?: Les Concepts de Péché et de Salut dans les Théologies Féministes.” *Études Théologiques et Religieuses* 70, no. 4 (1995): 521-33.

Pate, C. Marvin, and et al. *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Patterson, Stephen J. “Beyond the Passion.” In *Beyond the Passion: Rethinking the Death and Life of Jesus*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2004.

Pauw, Amy Plantinga, and Serene Jones, eds. *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*. Columbia Series in Reformed Theology. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

Pearse, Meic. “Problem? What Problem? Personhood, Late Modern/Postmodern Rootlessness and Contemporary Identity Crisis.” *Evangelical Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (2005): 5-12.

Peters, Ted. *Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

Pfoh, Emanuel. “Una Breve Reconsideración Exegética de Génesis 4.” *Cuadernos de Teología* 26 (2007): 33-38.

Phelan, James. *Reading Narrative: Form, Ethics, Ideology*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989.

Phelan, James, and Peter J. Rabinowitz. *Understanding Narrative.* The Theory and Interpretation of Narrative Series, 286. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994.

Piper, John, and Wayne A. Grudem, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood.* Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991.

Plantinga, Cornelius. *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

Plantinga, Cornelius, Jr. “Not the Way It’s S’pposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin.” *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (July 1993): 179-92.

Plaskow, Judith. *Sex, Sin, and Grace: Women’s Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich*. Washington: University Press of America, 1980.

Portmann, John. *A History of Sin: Its Evolution to Today and Beyond*, 239. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.

_____. *In Defense of Sin*. New York, N.Y.: Palgrave for St. Martin’s Press, 2001.

Powell, Mark Allan. *What is Narrative Criticism?* Guides to Biblical Scholarship. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Translated by John H.Marks. Old Testament Library. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961.

Radford Ruether, Rosemary. "Sexism and the Theology of Liberation." *The Christian Century* 90, no. 45 (12 December 1973): 1224-29.

Ramm, Bernard. *Offense to Reason: A Theology of Sin*. New York: Harper & Row, 1985.

Ramsey, George W. "Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (Ja 1988): 24-35.

Reno, R.R. *Genesis*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Ricœur, Paul. *The Symbolism of Evil*. Translated from the French by Emerson Buchanan. Religious Perspectives, vol. 17. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.

Roberts, Robert C. "The Logic and Lyric of Contrition." *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (Jl 1993): 193-207.

Robinson, Robert B. "Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (O 1986): 595-608.

Root, Michael. "The Narrative Structure of Soteriology." In *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 263-78. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford, ed. *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism*. Introductions in Feminist Theology. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.

_____. *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1983.

_____. "Sexism and the Theology of Liberation." *The Christian Century* 90 (12 December 1973): 1224-29.

_____. *Women and Redemption: A Theological History*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998.

Ruether, Rosmary Radford. “Methodologies in Women’s Studies and Feminist Theology.” In *Methodology in Religious Studies: The Interface with Women’s Studies*, Sharma Arvind, 179-206. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.

Russell, Letty M. *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective--a Theology*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974.

Russell, Letty M., editor. *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985.

Sailhamer, John. “Creation, Genesis 1-11, and the Canon.” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10, no. 1 (2000): 89-106.

_____. *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account*. Colorado Springs: Dawson Media, 2011.

_____. *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009.

_____. *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

Saiving, Valerie. “The Human Situation: A Feminine View.” In *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, Carol P. and Judith Plaskow Christ, 25-42. New York: Harper Collins, 1979.

Sakenfeld, Katharine Doob. “Feminist Perspectives on Bible and Theology: An Introduction to Selected Issues and Literature.” *Interpretation* 42, no. 5 (1988): 5-18.

Sarna, Nahum M. *Genesis = Be-Reshit: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989.

_____. *Understanding Genesis*. Heritage of Biblical Israel, vol. 1. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1966.

Scalise, Charles J. *From Scripture to Theology: A Canonical Journey Into Hermeneutics*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

_____. *Hermeneutics as Theological Prolegomena: A Canonical Approach*. Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics. Macon: Mercer University Press, 1994.

Schlimm, Matthew Richard. *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Language and Ethics of Anger in Genesis*. Siphrut, Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures, vol. 7. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011.

Schneider, Laurel C. “The Courage to See and to Sin: Mary Daly’s Elemental Transformation of Paul Tillich’s Ontology.” In *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*, 55-75. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University, 2000.

Scholes, Robert E., James Phelan, and Robert L. Kellogg. *The Nature of Narrative*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Schuele, Andreas. “Uniquely Human: The Ethics of the *Imago Dei* in Geneiss 1-11.” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 27, no. 1 (2011): 5-16.

Schultze, Quentin J. “Civil Sin: Evil and Purgation in the Media.” *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (Jl 1993): 229-42.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. “Biblical Interpretation and Critical Commitment.” *Studia Theologica 43 No 1 1989* 5-18.

_____. *Bread not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.

_____. *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.

_____. “Emerging Issues in Feminist Biblical Interpretation.” *Christian Feminism*, 33-54. San Francisco, Calif: Harper & Row, 1984.

_____. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. New York: Crossroad, 1984, c1983.

_____. “Method in Women’s Studies in Religion: A Critical Feminist Hermeneutics.” In *Methodology in Religious Studies: The Interface with Women’s Studies*, Sharma Arvind, 207-41. Albany, New York: State University of New York press, 2002.

_____. “Reaffirming Feminist/Womanist Biblical Scholarship.” *Encounter* 67, No. 4 (Aut 2006): 361-373.

_____. *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, and M. Shawn Copeland, eds. *Feminist Theology in Different Contexts*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996.

Seely, David R. *Sin, Sinners (New Testament)*. Vol. 6 of *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. David Noel Freedman, 40-47. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Seitz, Christopher R. *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

_____. *Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

Seitz, Christopher, and Kathryn Greene-McCreight, eds. *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

Shank, Harold. "The Sin Theology of the Cain and Abel Story: An Analysis of Narrative Themes Within the Context of Genesis 1-11." Ph.D. diss. Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University, 1988.

Shea, John. *Stories of God: An Unauthorized Biography*. Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1978.

Sherman, Steven. *Revitalizing Theological Epistemology*. Eugene: Pickwick, 2008.

Shults, F. LeRon. *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Shuster, Marguerite. *The Fall and Sin: What We Have Become as Sinners*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

_____. "The Use and Misuse of the Idea of the Imitation of Christ." *Ex Auditu* 14 (1998): 70-81.

Slee, Nicola. *Faith and Feminism: An Introduction to Christian Feminist Theology*. Exploring Faith. London: Darton Longman and Todd, 2003.

Slenczka, Notger. "Feministische Theologie : Darstellung und Kritik." *Theologische Rundschau* 58, no. 4 (November 1993): 396-436.

Smith, Christine M. "Sin and Evil in Feminist Thought." *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (1993): 208-19.

Smith, Gary V. "Structure and Purpose in Genesis 1-11." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20, no. 4 (D 1977): 307-19.

Soskice, Janet Martin. *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

_____. *Metaphor and Religious Language*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Soskice, Janet Martin, and Diana Lipton, eds. *Feminism and Theology*. Oxford Readings in Feminism. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Spina, Frank A. "The 'Ground' for Cain's Rejection (Gen 4): 'adãmãh in the Context of Gen 1-11." *Zeitschrift Für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 104, no. 3 (1992): 319-32.

Steinmetz, David C. “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis.” *Theology Today* 37, no. 1 (Ap 1980): 27-38.

Sternberg, Meir. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.

Strimple, Robert B. “Bernard Ramm and the Theology of Sin.” *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987): 143-52.

Strong, Augustus Hopkins. *Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Commonplace-Book Designed for the Use of Theological Students*. Philadelphia: Griffith & Rowland Press, 1907-9.

Stroup, George W. “Between Echo and Narcissus: The Role of the Bible in Feminist Theology.” *Interpretation* 42, no. 1 (1988): 19-32.

Suchoki, Majorie Hewitt. “The Idea of God in Feminist Philosophy.” *Hypatia* 9, no. 4 (October 1994): 57-68.

_____. *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology*. New York: Continuum, 1994.

Tannehill, Robert C. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. Foundations and Facets. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986-90.

Thatcher, Tom. “Cain and Abel in Early Christian Memory: A Case Study in ‘the Use of the Old Testament in the New’.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72 (4 O 2010): 732-51.

Thiemann, Ronald F. *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987.

Thiessen, Henry Clarence. *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949.

Thiselton, Anthony C. *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Tilley, Terrence W. *Story Theology*. Theology and Life Series, vol. 12. Wilmington: M. Glazier, 1985.

Tillich, Paul. *Existence and the Christ*. Vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.

Tomasino, Anthony J. “History Repeats Itself: The ‘fall’ and Noah’s Drunkenness.” *Vetus Testamentum* 42, no. 1 (Ja 1992): 128-30.

Treier, Daniel J. “Biblical Theology and/or Theological Interpretation?” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 1 (Fall 2008): 16-31.

_____. *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

Trible, Phyllis. *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Overtures to Biblical Theology. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

van Wolde, Ellen. "The Story of Cain and Abel: A Narrative Study." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 16, no. 52 (December 1991): 25-41.

_____. *Words Become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1-11*. Biblical Interpretation Series, vol. 6. New York: E.J. Brill, 1994.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J., ed. *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.

_____. *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

_____. *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics*, 384. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002.

_____. *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.

_____. "From Canon to Concept: 'Same' and 'Other' in the Relation Between Biblical and Systematic Theology." *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 12 (Autumn 1994): 96-124.

_____. "Human Being, Individual and Social." In *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, edited by Colin E. Gunton, 158-88. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

von Rad, Gerhard. *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*. Vol. 1 of *Old Testament Theology*. Translated by D.M.G Stalker. Peabody: Prince Press, 2005.

Walsh, Jerome T. "Genesis 2:4b-3:24: A Synchronic Approach." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96, no. 2 (1977): 161-77.

Walters, Kerry. *Godlust: Facing the Demonic, Embracing the Divine*. New York: Paulist Press, 1999.

Waltke, Bruce K., and Cathi J. Fredricks. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

Walvoord, John F. "Thirty-Three Words for Sin in the New Testament." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 100, no. 397 (January-March 1943): 164-176.

_____. “Thirty-Three Words for Sin in the New Testament.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 100, no. 398 (April-June 1943): 244-55.

_____. “Thirty-Three Words for Sin in the New Testament.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 100, no. 399 (July-September 1943): 374-89.

Weaver, Denny J. *The Nonviolent Atonement*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Webb, William J. *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Webster, J. B. *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch Current Issues in Theology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Welker, Michael. *Creation and Reality*. Translated by John F. Hoffmeyer. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.

Wells, Samuel. *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004.

Wenham, Gordon J. “Coherence of the Flood Narrative.” *Vetus Testamentum* 28, no. 3 (Jl 1978): 336-48.

_____. *Genesis 1-15*. Word Biblical Commentary. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987.

_____. “Original Sin in Genesis 1-11.” *Churchman* 104, no. 4 (1990): 309-21.

_____. *Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically*. Old Testament Studies. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000.

West, Angela. *Deadly Innocence: Feminist Theology and the Mythology of Sin*. New York: Cassell, 1995.

Westermann, Claus. *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*. Translated by John J. Scullion. Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984.

Wénin, André, and John Bowden. “The Serpent and the Woman, or the Process of Evil According to Genesis 2-3.” In *Original Sin*, 41-48. London: SCM Press, 2004.

White, Hugh C. *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Wigen, Tore. “Narratives and Reference.” *Studia Theologica* 56 (2002): 164-11.

Wiley, Tatha. *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings*. New York: Paulist Press, 2002.

Williams, Michael James. “Deception in Genesis.” Ph.D. diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1999.

Willimon, William H. “A Peculiarly Christian Account of Sin.” *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (1993): 220-28.

Witherington, Ben. *Paul’s Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994.

Witten, Marsha Grace. “Preaching About Sin in Contemporary Protestantism.” *Theology Today* 50, no. 2 (Jl 1993): 243-53.

Woodhead, Linda. “Spiritualising the Sacred: A Critique of Feminist Theology.” *Modern Theology* 13, no. 2 (April 1997): 191-212.

Woudstra, Marten H. “Toledot of the Book of Genesis and Their Redemptive-Historical Significance.” *Calvin Theological Journal* 5, no. 2 (N 1970): 184-89.

Wright, N.T. *The New Testament and the People of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

Yandell, Keith E., ed. *Faith and Narrative*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Younger, K. Lawson. *Judges and Ruth*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

Zimmerman, Béatrice Acklin. “Sünde Aus der Sicht Feministischer Theologie.” *Stimmen der Zeit* 12 (Dezember 2003): 823-33.