

Genesis III and Contemporary Interpretation

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This exegetical study of the Biblical account of the Fall is being made with special reference to contemporary interpretation. This may raise the question: What is so special about contemporary interpretation? Genesis three is a part of the Holy Scriptures. If contemporary interpretation of it is therefore made from the approach of Christian faith that the Holy Scriptures are the inspired and inerrant Word of God, we would not expect it to be much different from such interpretation in the past. What, on the other hand, will we find if contemporary interpretation is not made from this approach of faith? Can we expect it to be much different from interpretations made from an unbelieving approach in the past? No, basically it will not be different. Since each new garb in which error makes its appearance has its own particular dangers, however, especially for the uninitiated and the unwary, we have good reason to note carefully how unbelief currently deals with the Biblical account of the Fall.

A few quotations from *In the Beginning God*¹ can serve well in setting forth the general approach currently followed in expounding the early chapters of Genesis. We read in the foreword of this book:

The change in contemporary thought regarding the early chapters of Genesis is one of the most striking that has occurred in the renewal of Biblical faith. Once men were sharply divided between those who accepted these chapters as literal history and those who rejected them as primitive superstition. Now there is a great and growing tendency to recognize a third alternative, an alternative as different from one of these as from the other.

This third way arises from the recognition that the inspired authors of the stories in Genesis were really dealing with the universal human predicament. The stories are not accounts of debatable events which happened too long ago to permit any valid process of verification, but are, instead, accounts of the nature of enduring human problems. These accounts are so universally accurate that they are essentially dateless. The story of the garden and its famous residents is the story of earth and its human inhabitants. Always moral insight comes at a price; always man differs from the beasts in that he asks what he ought to do; always man's freedom involves attendant dangers of great seriousness. Man can rise higher than any beast, but he can also sink lower than a beast can fall.²

Along the same lines we read in this book itself

It is absolutely essential that we understand clearly the nature of the message of the early Genesis stories in order that the light that is in them may illumine our own needs. These stories throb with a message that only our spiritual hearing can detect. They are parables, not history or explanations. Consequently, they continually imply that beyond the words is a meaning which "he that hath ears to hear" may hear. But there is no attempt to formulate intellectual propositions to state basic truths. Instead, the method is that of poetic imagery and symbolism. The aim is to awaken in man an awareness of his existence in the presence of God and of his utter dependence upon God. The stories are told in such manner that when I read them, I realize that I am not reading an account of history; I am looking in a mirror! This is not Adam I am reading about; this is myself The ability to provoke this intense personal response is a

¹ William M. Logan, *In the Beginning God*, the meaning of Genesis I-XI, with Foreword by Elton Trueblood (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1957).

² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

mark of divine inspiration and is one of the things that sets the Biblical record apart from similar material we possess from other sources.³

In these quotations we find expressed a number of the basic features common to the type of contemporary interpretation that is hailed as an altogether new approach to the first eleven chapters of Genesis. These chapters, of course, include also the account of the Fall. These accounts are not treated as history, but as religious parables. The material found in these chapters is thought of as mediating religious insights of a very general nature by means of poetic imagery and symbolism rather than of revealing definite religious truths which can be formulated in precise doctrinal propositions valid for all people and all times.

Basically this is still the approach of unbelief, which is not ready to let God's Word stand as it actually reads. Underlying this approach, in the final analysis, is an unwillingness to acknowledge a direct and specific revelation of God and a divine intervention in human affairs. That we discern this concerning such contemporary Genesis interpretation is very vital.

In the course of this exegetical study of Genesis three we shall, therefore, seek to point out the fallacies which are involved in this current type of interpretation. For this very purpose it is vital, first of all, that we begin this exegetical study by considering at some length the entire structure of the book of Genesis, its general over-all theme, and its clearly discernible parts. This will make it quite evident from the very start that the writer of Genesis, none other than Moses, did not set forth the account of the Fall as a symbolical story, but as the divinely inspired account of a most significant historical happening.

I - The Full Context of Genesis III

In the book of Genesis we have the primordial history of the kingdom of God.⁴ Genesis relates how almost from the beginning, specifically ever since man fell into sin, God in His free and faithful grace has been active in behalf of the salvation of mankind.

The first eleven chapters - to be exact, until 11: 26 - tell us how God directed His saving activity upon the whole human race, as it existed, first of all in the descendants of Adam and then, after the Flood, in the descendants of Noah's three sons. In the last thirty-nine chapters we are told how God, in a new program of this same free and faithful saving love, carefully trained the patriarchs through three generations. This training was His first step in building up His special people of Israel, through whom He purposed to carry through His plan of salvation and in the fulness of time bring forth the divine Redeemer for all mankind.

There is something further to be said about this significant structure. Anyone carefully studying Genesis will immediately become aware of the ten *toledhoth*⁵ in which the entire material from 2:4 to the end of the closing fiftieth chapter is divided. Each *toledhoth* is a history which sets forth how the thing or person by which the individual *toledhoth* is designated developed or what developed from it. One could also say that each *toledhoth* is an account of such development which took place while God was active in behalf of the salvation of mankind. Five of these *toledhoth* fall into the account of God's kingdom, His saving activity, as it was directed upon the whole original world, five as it was directed upon the patriarchs.

The account of the Fall is found in the very first of these *toledhoth*. Before saying anything about it, let us look at the other nine. The last five *toledhoth*, those of Terah, Ishmael, Isaac, Esau, and of Jacob, can leave no doubt that they are meant by the inspired writer as historical accounts. The *toledhoth* of Terah shows how God in the interest of His plan of salvation chose Abram of the household of Terah and trained him to trust wholly in the great complex of promises given to him. These promises all found their purpose and meaning in

³ *Ibid.*, p. 15-16.

⁴ In this statement of the theme of Genesis the concept of God's kingdom is used in the manner in which it is employed in the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, to designate an activity, God's saving activity. In this usage it does not designate the people upon whom God's saving activity has been effective, His church of believers.

⁵ These *toledhoth* are found in 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19 36:1; 37:2. The translation "generations" found in the Authorized Version does not adequately express the meaning of the term in this tenfold usage. History would be a satisfactory English rendition. Though a Hebrew plural, *toledhoth* is an abstraction; and abstractions very frequently occur in a plural form in Hebrew.

the final assurance that through Abram all the families of the earth should be blessed. This *toledhoth* of Terah lets us hear how God finally gave Abraham the son of promise in Isaac, and how Isaac was clearly established as Abraham's heir. Since Ishmael, the other son of Abraham, formed a side line, his *toledhoth* is very brief, though it is of sufficient length to point out that the one promise given even to him as a son of Abraham, that twelve princes were to descend from him, went into fulfillment. God's promises, even when they pertain to a side line, do not fail.

The *toledhoth* of Isaac tells us that the second patriarch, in whom faith under God's training manifested itself in triumphant submission under many trials, had two sons. Even before their birth the Lord had made it known that they would both develop into nations, but that the elder, Esau, should serve the younger, Jacob. We hear how Jacob, the chosen one, was prone to trust in his own ingenuity and to take recourse to faithless schemes of deceit and cunning.

Yet by adverse experiences on the one hand and by His unmerited grace and protection on the other God trained and purged Jacob until he learned to cast himself humbly upon God's grace and thus became an Israel, a patriarch who in such humble faith had power with God and man.

The *toledhoth* of Esau relates how this son of Isaac, though again forming a side line, also developed into a nation, namely that of Edom, even as God's Word had predicted before his birth. The final *toledhoth* of Genesis, namely that of Jacob, shows how this patriarch in his twelve sons developed into a family of seventy souls, who together with their households were brought into Egypt. Here they were to grow and develop into that chosen nation which the book of Exodus thrusts before us as the express object henceforth of God's Old Testament kingdom activity. All this is accomplished by God's marvelous guidance and direction, in which He makes even evil serve His great purposes.

We are now ready to go back to the first part of Genesis, depicting God's saving activity as it was directed upon the entire original world. The last four of the five *toledhoth* in which this first part is divided impress themselves upon the unprejudiced reader in equal measure as historical accounts. The *toledhoth* of Adam sets forth the progenitors of the Savior from Adam through Seth until Noah. The individuals listed are clearly incorporated as such actual progenitors in the New Testament genealogy of Christ given in the Gospel of Luke. This *toledhoth* at the same time tells us that even the descendants of Seth, among whom and through whom God had established the public proclamation of His Savior's name, gradually despised their heritage and defected likewise. They joined the descendants of Cain who already at an earlier time were estranged from God and given to a life of self-glorification, arrogant pride, violence, and worldliness.

The *toledhoth* of Noah relates how through this Sethite, who among his contemporaries had by God's grace remained believing and devout, God preserved the eight souls of his family in an ark while He carried out a judgment of universal destruction through the Flood waters. All this is a part of God's saving activity in behalf of mankind, assuring the ultimate fulfillment of the Protevangelion. All of God's judgments, while they are indeed a manifestation of His holy wrath upon sin and obdurate unbelief, nevertheless stand in the service of His saving grace, and are at the same time always a deliverance for His own, His believers. This will be true also of the final judgment.

The *toledhoth* of the sons of Noah shows how the human race, also as it developed anew from Noah's three sons, by and large again pushed God's Gospel promise aside, sought self-glorification instead of the glorification of God's Savior name, sought to work out its own welfare and salvation rather than to cling to God's gift of salvation. Then follows the *toledhoth* of Shem, which lists as an account of what developed from Shem merely his descendants through Arphaxad down to Terah and his three sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran. This *toledhoth* therefore serves to lead over to the account of God's kingdom activity among the patriarchs, the account which we have already delineated.

How then could the first *toledhoth*, which includes the account of the Fall, without itself presenting history be lined up in this carefully built-up structure of Genesis, in which all the other nine *toledhoth* are closely connected historical accounts? A *toledhoth* offering symbolical stories would be a glaring incongruity. Yet as a mere collection of symbolical stories the *toledhoth* of heaven and earth would not merely be an incongruity. What is even more decisive, it would leave a vacuum. It would rob the historical course of God's

saving activity as depicted in the other nine *toledhoth* of its starting point. It would remove the factual, historical situation to which God responded in carrying through His saving activity in behalf of mankind. Without man's Fall into sin as a historical happening the other nine *toledhoth* become quite unintelligible.

To see the account of the Fall in its proper perspective in the entire message of Genesis, we need to note also what precedes this account. This is true, first of all, of the creation account of Genesis 1:1-2:3.⁶ This portion of Genesis precedes all the *toledhoth* and furnishes the introduction to them all as they constitute the primordial history of the kingdom of God, that is, of God's saving activity in behalf of mankind.

Whatever this creation account clearly asserts concerning the origin of all things is factually true. It is a part of the inspired and inerrant Word of God. At the same time the creation account was not given to us primarily to satisfy our curiosity about every detail of the origin of all things. Hence we need not be surprised that it leaves endless questions unanswered. No, it serves primarily as an introduction to the primordial history of God's reign of saving grace. It emphasizes those things which form a most vital and indispensable background for the understanding of this saving activity of our God. We can briefly sum up these emphases in this way: The creation account as an introduction to the theme of Genesis emphasizes that the eternal, almighty, all-wise God created all things in perfection for the benefit of man, whom He made in His own image to be the special object of His love, and whom He drew into His own Sabbath rest of joy and satisfaction. Man had blessed fellowship with God and rejoiced in all of His works.

After this introduction Genesis 2:4 begins with the very first of the *toledhoth*, the *toledhoth* of heaven and earth. Here we are told of the extraordinary development which heaven and earth experienced when man, the very crown of God's creation, was drawn into sin and not only brought death and damnation upon himself, but gave occasion also for the entire animate and inanimate creature world to be made subject to vanity and to be placed under the bondage of corruption.⁷ It was to this dire development that God in His free and faithful grace responded with His primordial kingdom activity in behalf of man's salvation as set forth in the book of Genesis.

Even in this first *toledhoth* of heaven and earth the initial section, the remaining verses of chapter two of Genesis, serves to give us further valuable background for the cataclysmic development of the Fall, that we may evaluate it aright. We are given a more detailed picture of the Creator's intimate relation to man, His foremost creature. It lets us see how God revealed Himself as the Lord,⁸ who lavished His love upon man and in every way showed Himself intent upon making man blessed and happy. He formed man carefully. He fit out Paradise for man as a wonderful first home on this earth to meet all his needs and to satisfy all his capacities. He gave man satisfying activity in caring for the garden. In the tree of the knowing of good and evil He provided man with a simple, yet effective opportunity to express his thankful devotion and obedience and thus to progress from concreated innocence to conscious holiness. With the institution of marriage God supplied man with earthly happiness through a fitting help and companion.

As portrayed in Genesis two, man himself appears as a holy and sinless creature, who clearly bears God's image. All of his thought processes were in perfect harmony with God's blessed thoughts. With his feelings and emotions man evaluated everything in full harmony with the perfect judgment of God's heart. All of man's impulses were exercised in harmony with the holy will of his God; all of man's conscious desires were directed toward that which was pleasing in God's sight. Man possessed this sinlessness, the image of God, in the bond of perfect trust toward God, with which he was created. Destroy this trust, this faith, and everything would be awry for man. All the blessings of God's love and fellowship would come to an end for him. This is what the tempter reckoned with. This is what happened in the Fall.

⁶ Anyone struck by the fact that this unit, even as some of the previously mentioned units in Genesis, does not follow the chapter divisions, needs to be reminded that our chapter divisions are not a part of the original sacred text. They were inserted in the 13th century A.D. through the labors of Stephen Langton. In spite of their great usefulness these chapter divisions do not always indicate the actual divisions of subject matter.

⁷ Romans 8:20-22.

⁸ With this name we of course, have the Tetragrammaton, יהוה, in mind, which designated God as the God of free and faithful love. After the entrance of sin into the world it becomes God's designation as the Savior of men.

With this introduction, which lets us see Genesis three in its true setting in the book of Genesis, we are properly prepared for a careful exegetical study of the account of the Fall. We realize that the writer could not have thought of it in any other way than as a historical happening. It was a most momentous historical happening. We can sum up the whole third chapter of Genesis with the statement: When man became unfaithful, the Lord remained faithful in His love.

II - A Contextual Interpretation of Genesis III

וְהַנָּחַשׁ הָיָה עָרוּם מִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים ¹ 3

“Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.”

“Now the serpent . . .” This is not a normal Hebrew sentence. The subject instead of the verb is put in the emphatic position. Thereby the serpent is thrust before our eyes. We are definitely dealing, first of all, with a serpent, a snake. Nothing is said, however, about its kind, or its size. If we do not grant that we are dealing with a serpent, first of all, if we assume that it is only a symbol, then we could not be sure of the historicity of anything else in the chapter. Then other things could be symbols with equal right.

Moses asserts that this serpent was subtle-cunning, shrewd. Moses asserts that it was more subtle and cunning than all the beasts of the field. Since this cunning and subtlety is not described, not delineated, we must conclude that we are directed to perceive the subtlety from what the serpent says, namely, from the words spoken to tempt Eve, to draw her into moral evil.

This subtlety is, however, something that could only belong to a morally responsible being. No mere snake, a beast of the field, all of which are amoral, could display the craftiness and cunning displayed in the serpent’s discourse with Eve. The word “subtle” is, therefore, the first hint that we are dealing with more than a snake. Whatever subtlety the serpent possessed as its natural characteristic had become the vehicle of a subtlety which only a rational, morally responsible being can possess.

This serpent spoke. Yet serpents do not speak. Adam, who had named all the animals in a correct and meaningful manner, knew this. Also Eve, who possessed the same perfect faculties, must have realized that, though dealing with a serpent, she was at the same time dealing with more than a serpent. More we cannot say. By what the serpent said, denying God’s Word, questioning God’s goodness, the actual tempter speaking through the serpent revealed himself as an enemy of God. Still, Moses is content throughout the account of the Fall to speak of this rational, morally responsible, but wicked tempter who approached Eve in terms of the serpent, this beast whom the tempter used as his vehicle.

God has not been pleased in His Word to reveal everything in detail at once, and at one and the same time. God’s revelation is progressive, not, however, as frequently and erroneously asserted, in the sense that God’s later revelations serve to correct or even to set aside earlier imperfect revelation. God’s revelation is progressive, but only in the sense that as time passed on God’s revelation supplied ever further details, unfolded and clarified earlier revelation, never to correct or to contradict what was said before. The expressions and statements used in the earlier revelation are always of such a nature that they are fully adequate to embrace the additional truths and the additional details of information furnished by subsequent divine revelation.

God’s New Testament revelation still speaks of the serpent. Paul writes, II Corinthians 11:3: “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” Yet in unfolding this very admonition St. Paul makes it quite evident who it was who through the serpent tempted Eve. He indicates it as he adds the warning: “And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.” John in Revelation also speaks of both the serpent and of Satan in connection with man’s fall into sin, saying, Revelation 12:9: “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent called the Devil and Satan which deceiveth the whole world.” In Revelation 20:2, John speaks once more of “that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan.” Jesus identifies the tempter who originated the basic lie that both God and His will are not good, the tempter who through this lie brought death upon mankind. He

says to the unbelieving Jews, John 8:44: “Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He is a murderer (a) $\mu\kappa\rho\tau\omicron\delta\&\nu\omicron\nu$) from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”

Yes, the fatal temptation came to Eve through a serpent and by means of the serpent through Satan. But let us look at the tempter’s first question.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־הַאִשָּׁה אַךְ כִּי־אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל עֵץ הַגָּן:

“And he said to the woman: Is it really that God said: Ye shall not eat of all the trees of the garden?”

From the woman’s answer it is evident that the serpent’s statement is a question, although, as is often the case in Hebrew, it is not introduced by an interrogative particle. With this question the tempter implies that God’s commandment is a burdensome restriction. He knows and wants to know of no other purpose for a commandment. He knows nothing of a commandment as a blessed and welcome opportunity for man to show his love and thankfulness to his divine benefactor, as a blessed opportunity for man to exercise his heartfelt obedience. He does not know of a commandment as an opportunity in this way to become confirmed in such obedience. For Satan it is an either; or. Either God has not said this, has not given this prohibition, or He isn’t really good, isn’t really concerned about man’s happiness, about man’s welfare and bliss. This is his ultimate lie. To give way to it would be the opposite of humble trust. Both cannot be true. Either alternative that Satan offers would be fatal. The tempter’s main thrust in this first temptation is to make God’s Word uncertain for Eve. If he succeeded in this, he could readily induce Eve to transgress God’s will. With this, Satan still begins his temptations. Yet all along with this main thrust the tempter is at the same time already seeking to sow suspicion concerning God’s goodness.

Contemporary form critical existential interpretation is, of course, wholly dissatisfied with taking the serpent and his speaking seriously. Even less understanding does this interpretation have for seeing Satan as the real agent. It asks: Why should we be disturbed about a serpent’s speaking? We expect that in parables and fables, religious or otherwise, and think nothing of it. Quite correct. Yet this account of Genesis three does not bear the marks of a fable or parable. This was evident as we considered the larger and closer context in which this third chapter is found in the entire book of Genesis with its carefully-structured makeup of ten *toledoth* and an introduction. Yet this is also apparent in the account of this chapter itself. A didactic fable has a clearly discernible or even an expressly stated moral attached to it. None is attached to this account. Instead, man’s fatal action in this account has lasting consequences for all mankind. This is not true of actions in parables or fables.

Contemporary interpretation asserts that the serpent and what is expressed in his question is but a symbol for the evil thoughts and impulses which arise in the human heart concerning God and His will. In ancient traditions of the East,⁹ the serpent is the symbol of the sea, and the sea is thought of as being in rebellion against the Creator. Hence the serpent is the symbol of the forces of wickedness. Yet why, then, is such a strong curse spoken upon the serpent? Why speak of enmity between the serpent and the woman and of bruising the serpent’s head, if the serpent was not really there?

Others who are willing to acknowledge, at least, a temptation that took place, a temptation to which Eve as a real individual was exposed, still want the serpent to be a symbol of the woman’s inner reasoning with temptation. Yet how did Eve, who was created without sin, come to evil thoughts, if they were not first addressed to her from without through an agent of evil? No, contemporary interpretation only raises more questions in its futile attempt to solve some to the satisfaction of human reason.

⁹ Cf. Edward J. Young, *Genesis 3*, a devotional and expository study (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966). This 165 page interpretation of the Biblical account of the Fall offers many valuable insights, and at the same time effectively exposes the fallacies of contemporary interpretation which treats this account as a religious parable.

וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה אֶל-הַנָּחָשׁ מִפְּרֵי עֵץ-הַגָּן נֹאכְלִים:
 וּמִפְּרֵי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹךְ-הַגָּן אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בוֹ פֶן-תָּמּוּתוּן:³

“And the woman said to the serpent, Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat. But of the tree which is in the midst of the garden God has said: Ye shall not eat of it, and ye shall not touch it, lest ye die.”

Eve does not immediately give up her faith. She fights for it. She has been discerning. She has understood the main thrust of the serpent’s question, that he called the certainty of God’s commandment into question. She has also caught the insinuation that the commandment if it has actually been given is unduly restrictive and burdensome, that God’s goodness is therefore in question.

It is to these insinuations that Eve addresses herself first of all. “Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat.” This is a potential imperfect. מִפְּרֵי עֵץ הַגָּן is a collective. She asserts that there is no irksome restriction of their freedom involved at all in God’s commandment. The tempter had put it that way. He let it appear as though every worthwhile blessing was bound up with license to eat of each and every tree of the garden. If there was really a prohibition concerning eating of one tree in the garden, life was really a sordid lot. All of this was stated not by direct assertion, of course, but by implication. Yet just this made the tempter’s statement all the more dangerous and insidious. He meant to get Eve to accept a hidden false premise. This type is always the worst temptation. Eve in effect asserts: We are bountifully provided for as far as eating is concerned. Of the many trees of the garden we may eat. The prohibition concerning the one tree is no irksome restriction, though it is indeed a fact.

“But of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, not shall ye eat of it, and not shall ye touch it . . .” In her fight of faith against temptation from without, Eve asserts God’s Word. She makes a very clear testimony concerning it.

Many commentators contend, of course, that Eve changed God’s Word, that she added to it, especially with her “and not shall ye touch it.” Yet it is not out of place to observe the Eighth Commandment even in interpretation and to put the best construction on things where that is possible. The tempter does not pounce on this addition, does not hook into it with his next tempting remark. Hence we can understand her addition as a legitimate unfolding of God’s commandment.

It is as though Eve meant to say: Eating for food does not at all come into consideration as far as this tree is concerned. Eve was in all probability referring to that touching which would result in taking possession of the fruit as a first step in consuming it, and thus as a first step in disobeying God’s command. Hebrew uses “touching” in this sense of acquiring something for personal use in Genesis 20:6. Eve wanted to say: God simply has told us not to have anything to do with this tree. It is a matter of obedience, an opportunity to reveal the joyful obedience of our heart.

We can therefore understand Eve’s reply thus far as simple testimony. She adds, however, פֶן-תָּמּוּתוּן “lest ye die.” She now falls into argumentation. She stresses the reason for God’s prohibition. This, too, can be understood correctly. God did want to keep man from death. God wanted man to be aware of evil and of its terrible consequences. That is why God had said: “For in the day of thy eating of it thou shalt surely die” (2 :17) . It was a loving warning which was to give man occasion to shun this existing evil by a free choice, prompted by his trust and faithborn thankful love toward God. Gladly would man avoid what his loving God pointed out to him as dire evil. In this way he would become firm in the rejection and abhorrence of evil.

Whether meant in this correct way or not, Eve’s way of putting it, “lest ye die,” could easily be twisted into a wrong thought, as though the evil result of disobedience supplied the motivation, and was meant to supply the motivation for obedience. This God had not asserted. Such a motivation is still not pleasing and acceptable in God’s sight. Fear of consequences has its use as a curb of the Old Adam for us who have one. Sinless Eve did not as yet have need for such a curb. As yet she had no sinful flesh to contend with. As she fell into argumentation, Eve gave Satan an opening by the way in which she expressed herself. It is here that the tempter hooked in.

Let us be reminded that we are to assert God's Word. We are not asked to prove and to justify it. As we unfold God's Word, we need to be careful that we do not lay ourselves bare and give Satan an opening. We do that when we go beyond that for which we have warrant in God's Word. Edward J. Young, in his book *Genesis 3*, thinks that Eve did wrong by going into dialog with the serpent."¹⁰ Young holds that she knew full well that animals did not speak, that in doing so this serpent was raising himself above his God-assigned position. He also holds that by the content of the serpent's utterance he was placing himself even on a par with God, judging God's Word as to its merits. Young makes the application: As Christians we should ever be ready and prepared to give a reason for the hope that is within us, but we should never consider our Christian faith as only one of so many choices or options. We should not, for example, be willing to enter into what is called dialog with Roman Catholicism, as though we might mutually enrich one another by such discussion. Instead of uttering: "Thus saith the Lord" we are tempted to engage in dialog and to do so at the peril of our soul. There is a danger in willingness to meet error as though it were on a par with truth.

⁴ וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּחָשׁ אֶל-הָאִשָּׁה לֹא-מוֹת תָּמָתוֹן:

⁵ כִּי יִדְעֶה אֱלֹהִים כִּי בַיּוֹם אֲכַלְתֶּם מִמֶּנּוּ וְנִפְקְחוּ עֵינֵיכֶם וְהִיתֶם כַּאֱלֹהִים יֹדְעֵי טוֹב וָרָע:

"And the serpent said to the woman: Not shall ye surely die." Note the position of the infinitive absolute. If it were merely to deny or negate the certainty of death, it would read מוֹת לֹא תָמָתוֹן; the negative would be between the infinitive absolute and the finite verb. But the negative precedes both forms of the verb לֹא מוֹת תָּמָתוֹן. The tempter is quoting God, God who said: "Ye shall surely die." The tempter boldly denies what God said: "Not 'shall ye surely die.'"

Satan also claims to have a better knowledge of God and what He is like than Eve. "For," he says, "God is knowing all the while that in the day when you eat of it your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be like God knowing good and evil." Note the participle which he uses to characterize God. The Hebrew participle expresses action as continuous, as a characteristic; here the action, or rather the spiritual condition of a certain knowledge, is presented as characteristic of God. God is knowing all along. Thereby he charges God with being essentially envious and jealous instead of good and gracious. Satan pictures God as intent upon withholding something desirable from His creatures, lest they mount to heights which He wants to reserve for Himself.

"Be like God." This is to be preferred to the King James translation which takes the plural form for God's name to be a plural in force, gods. Yes, Satan asserts that God does not want man to be like Him, knowing good and evil.

Note the attractive suggestiveness. What this knowing of good and evil is, and what advantage it entails, Satan does not say. The thing charms by its vagueness. Mark also that God had actually called the forbidden tree the Tree of the Knowing of Good and Evil. The devil's beguilements, as always, are an inextricable tangle of truth and falsehood. For that very reason they are the more dangerous and insidious. The Tree of the Knowing of Good and Evil was actually to impart a God-like knowledge of good and evil to man.

By consciously obeying God's command in childlike trust, by wholeheartedly entering upon this obedience with mind, heart, and will, man would, like God, have gained an experiential knowledge of good. He would have become confirmed in devotion to that which was good. On the other hand, by being aware of evil and still rejecting it with mind, heart, and will in humble faith and thankful love, he would have become confirmed in a God-like aversion for all that is evil. Yet the knowledge of good and evil which Satan promises on the path of disobedience, but which he leaves undescribed, turned out to be something quite different. It became a knowledge of good as something lost, and a knowledge of evil as something experienced in all of its cursed reality.

Here we have the basic lie which Satan brought into the world, the lie that underlies all sin and all the delusions of sin. It is the lie that God and His will are not really good, that man's welfare and happiness do not

¹⁰ *op. cit.*, p. 26.

lie in clinging to God in humble, joyful trust and in doing His will in thankful love. It is the lie that man comes to happiness by striking out on his own, by putting his own will and judgment against God's will. Satan is an advocate of the new morality which denies the concept of an absolute authority and an absolute standard of conduct. How much even of modern psychology is saturated with Satan's basic lie. The human soul, it is asserted, is a very tender thing. To restrain it by the imposition of categorical law is to harm it. Our soul should be free to develop and express itself through freedom and love. Continue to submit to God's supposed commandments and you will become warped in your personality! Yes, we indeed want to make application to ourselves and to our times from the account of the Fall. Yet we make this application after we have first acknowledged that what the account tells us is an actual happening which had dire consequences. Contemporary interpretation of the Fall wants only application, without acknowledging that what serves as the occasion of application has in itself ever happened.

Faced by Satan's lie, Eve was forced to make a decision. Bearing God's image in a perfect bond of trust by God's creation, she had a free will and the strength to make that choice correctly. Also the whole creation about her and every experience of God heretofore formed a symphony of evidence for God's goodness and testified against Satan's bold lie. Still Eve did not use her freedom, but spurned God's love and goodness, and relinquished her trust in God. This is freedom: not that we do what we please, but that we do God's will; yet not because we have to, but because we want to, by compulsion from within, constrained by joyful trust and thankfulness. The woman, however, believed the lie of Satan, disobeyed God's commandment, and induced her husband to share her guilt. We cannot explain it. It will always remain a mystery for us. We acknowledge and accept it on the basis of God's clear Word which says in verse 6:

וַתֵּרָא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמַאֲכָל וְכִי תִאֱוָה־הִיא לְעֵינַיִם וְנִחְמַד הָעֵץ לְהַשְׁכִּיל וַתִּקַּח מִפְּרִיָו וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּתֶּן
גַּם־לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּה וַיֹּאכַל:

“And the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant for the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, and she took of its fruit and ate, and she gave also to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”

The poison of Satan's lie did its work. It caused her to give up her joyful trust in her God. She accepted the tempter's lie instead. Eve pushed God's Word aside; she subjected herself to Satan and his thinking. She saw that the tree was good for food. With her trust in God gone, the image of God which she had borne thus far was shattered. No longer were her thoughts in harmony with God's thoughts. She now saw this tree to be good for something for which God had not ordained it, that is, for food. Her feelings, her emotions, were no longer in harmony with the evaluation which God's heart had placed upon that which He had created. She saw this tree as pleasant for something for which God had not placed it in the garden. Also she began to strive with her will for something that God had not set as a goal, the attainment of wisdom through disobedience of God's commandment. Yes, with her trust in God relinquished and devoted to Satan's lie, sin had taken possession of her soul, of every aspect of it, of her heart, of her mind, of her will. This sin now manifested itself in action. She ate of the forbidden fruit. She also gave to her husband and he ate likewise.

Note that Adam's sinful action is presented as following out of the woman's action, the action that she gave the forbidden fruit¹¹ to her husband. We are not told that he, too, was seduced like Eve by Satan's lie. No, Adam disobeyed upon Eve's inducement. He was persuaded by Eve. This is in keeping with St. Paul's statement, I Timothy 2:14: “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.”

This does not make Adam's guilt less great. On the contrary, one could speak of it as being even greater! He sinned in spite of better knowledge. Yet St. Paul, by the very use that he made of Adam's and Eve's different mode of succumbing, calls to our attention that both fell out of their divinely assigned roles in the transgression. We shall presently be made aware of it in God's remarks as He lays chastisement on each. Eve, who had been created as a fitting help for Adam, presumed to take on the role of leader, a position for which

¹¹ Hebrew generally omits the obvious object.

God had not made her. Deceived by Satan, she took the initiative in disobeying God's commandment. Adam, who had been created for the role of leadership, did not supply such leadership. He listened instead to the woman and let her persuade him to follow her in transgressing God's commandment. St. Paul bids us to let this serve as a warning for us not to overthrow God's order of creation in the relation of the sexes.

We have now covered the first part of Genesis three, the first six verses, in which we have seen an account of how mankind in Adam and Eve was induced to spurn God's love and goodness. We have, of course, seen the text in the light of the conviction that this Genesis account relates something that actually took place.

Much of the contemporary interpretation will say that in regarding Adam as a historical character we have completely missed the point of the Genesis narrative. We have overlooked the deep and profound teaching which is really found here. These interpreters suggest that we recognize that these early chapters of Genesis are parables. A parable may or may not involve factual happenings. The important things about a parable is that it conveys a moral, a message.

Take the parable,¹² for example, which Nathan told when he rebuked David for his sin of adultery with Uriah's wife. It was to awaken abhorrence in David's heart, and is to do so still in our hearts, for a selfish act of cruelty such as is portrayed in the rich man's action with the poor man's ewe lamb. In this vividly portrayed selfish act of cruelty David was to recognize his own selfish cruelty. To have lost himself in the question of whether this had actually happened was beside the point. David momentarily assumed, that it had been an actual occurrence and vowed proper judicial action. Yet Nathan turned his thoughts away from such considerations by telling him: Thou art the man! This is the proper use of a parable. Taking the account of the Fall as a parable, contemporary interpretation says: The account of Genesis three is to teach me that I am alienated from God and need to be reconciled to Him. I am Adam. Every man is Adam. Only when I begin to understand this existential truth can I begin to understand this chapter. The actual revelation occurs when I am confronted with the truth that I am a fallen creature in need of God's revelation. Through the words of Scripture I have an encounter with God, and that is the revelation as a present reality. I am Adam. This is true when in reading the words of this chapter I am confronted with this truth and come to realize that I am alienated from God by my sin.

In answer to these contentions we will have to say, first of all, that it would be difficult, yes, impossible to derive such a meaning from the text of the chapter itself. This position is not taught in the Bible, and it cannot be derived from a simple reading of Genesis 3:1-6. It comes from elsewhere. It is imposed upon the Bible from without. The roots of such a conception of the Genesis account of the Fall come from the writings of existential philosophers.

Parables are, as we have already stated, told to inculcate a lesson. They are to be the basis for a lesson. Nothing like that occurs in Genesis three. No general lesson is drawn. No sermon is preached. No message is given. Every indication is present that the writer believed that he was writing about things that happened. For its proper understanding we are dependent upon what goes before and what follows after. The man and the woman, Adam and Eve, are the same in chapters two and four that they are in three. There are too many details in chapter two for a parable. The stress is upon the detail, and not upon a message to be learned. The emphasis is not upon a lesson, but upon an actual sad condition of mankind and of the creature world that resulted from what Adam and Eve did.

Furthermore, we have the clear witness of the New Testament. In Romans 5:12 we have a clear-cut assertion that sin entered the world by one man. The assertion that ultimate truth cannot be given in propositional statements calls for evidence. Such evidence is not being furnished. Scripture abundantly teaches absolute truth in propositional statements. We know that Christ died to save sinners because Scripture tells us so in the form of clear propositional statements. If we were dependent upon revelation through persons and symbols, we would of all men be most miserable. Scripture indeed presents prose and poetry, and also an abundance of symbols and figures of speech. We are to interpret each as its nature demands. One thing we are not to do. We are not to interpret prose as though it were poetry. We are not to consider historical characters as

¹² II Samuel 12:1-7

though they were mere symbols. Those who want Genesis three read as poetry are making a dogmatic assertion for which they adduce no evidence.

In II Corinthians 11:3 we read: “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” There can be no mistaking about the manner in which Paul refers to the serpent and its deed. If Eve and the serpent are symbols, there is little point to what Paul is saying.

In I Timothy 2:13, 14 we read: “For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” Unless Adam and Eve were historical characters and their deeds factual occurrences, Paul’s argument for letting the “woman learn in silence by subjection” loses its force. Of course, when we study an Old Testament passage, we are, first of all, to get its meaning from the very words in which it is clothed and the context in which it is found. But it is also very proper that we who have the New Testament revelation, for which the Old Testament is the preparation, look to its statements to verify our understanding of Old Testament passages. To do justice to any verse of Scripture, we are to take into account all that the Bible has to say about it. If we do that we will never come to the conclusion that the Genesis account of the Fall is merely a parable. The New Testament is too clear that there was an Adam and Eve, a serpent, and a garden, and an actual catastrophic Fall into sin.

Throughout the long course of the history of the Christian church no one seems to have understood that Adam is *everybody* involved in transgression and alienated from God. Neither does the interpretation make sense according to the Bible. Scripture presents Adam’s fatal deed not as a universal predicament but as a very unique experience.

Consider Romans 5:12ff. Adam fell from an estate that was good into an estate of being evil. This is not true of you and me. When we sin we merely give evidence of the sinful nature with which we came into the world. By sinning Adam became a sinner. When we committed our first sinful deed, we were already sinners. Adam’s sin plunged the whole human race into sin and death. That is not true of our sin. For Paul, Adam and also his fall into sin were unique.¹³ No other person is contrasted with Christ. If Paul was mistaken, his whole argumentation loses its force. Everything that he says about Christ’s corresponding saving work is unsupported by his argument from Adam’s parallel position.

Other documents which have come down to us from antiquity contrast the golden age of the past with a later age, when everything is no longer well. All of them leave unanswered what brought about this change. Genesis three alone explains how mankind became sinful and evil. It is unique. It is God’s Word presenting a factual happening!

When man became unfaithful, when man was seduced by Satan to spurn God’s love and goodness, God revealed Himself as the Lord יהוה, as the God of free and faithful grace. God remained faithful in His love. That is the real burden of Genesis three. The Lord’s free and faithful grace toward His fallen creatures is set forth in the entire section from verse seven to the close of the chapter. In verses seven to thirteen we are told first of all how the Lord God sought them out in solicitous love to lay bare their guilt. While God was doing this, Adam and Eve revealed their depraved condition.

7 וַתִּפְּקְחוּהָ עֵינֵי שְׂרִיָּהֶם וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי עִרְמָם הֵם וַיִּתְּפְרוּ עֲלֵהָ תְּאֵנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגָרֹת:

“And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin cloths.”

Even before God appeared on the scene after the Fall, Adam and Eve already showed themselves as fallen, sinful creatures. From a formal standpoint the serpent’s word had proved itself as true. Their eyes were opened in the sense that they came to a knowledge of good and evil. Still Satan’s statement had been a

¹³ Cf. Edward J. Young, Genesis 3, p. 46-56, as a valuable critical analysis of the contemporary parabolic interpretation of Genesis 3:1-6.

tremendous lie. What Adam and Eve experienced was not the desirable thing that the tempter had held out to them as a vague promise. Neither was it the knowledge of good and evil that God had in mind for them by placing the special tree in the middle of the garden. Note the Hebrew verb **יָדַע**; It does not designate intellectual understanding and comprehension, or mere awareness of something. That would be expressed by **בִּין** or **רָאָה**. **יָדַע** designates knowledge gained by experience, experiential knowledge. Adam and Eve now knew good and evil from the standpoint of sinners. They knew good as something that they had forfeited and lost, evil as something that they were experiencing in its true cursedness. They experienced their corruption.

The special point mentioned on which their eyes were opened was this that they experienced their nakedness. In 2:25 we are told of Adam and Eve, who had just been joined together in marriage, that “the two of them were naked, the man and his wife, and they were not at any time ashamed” (frequentative imperfect). While both still bore God’s image, their will was in full harmony with God’s will relative to all the impulses with which God had endowed them, also their procreative impulse. They exercised these impulses in perfect love toward God and in accordance with His will, and hence also in perfect love toward one another.

After having lost God’s image, after having become sinful human beings, Adam and Eve no longer had full control of their impulses. Selfish, inordinate desires concerning the use of these impulses began to assert themselves, and, as they became aware of this, guilt feelings likewise arose in their hearts and thus evoked a sense of shame. So strong was this feeling of guilt and shame in connection with their nakedness that they immediately sought to provide a remedy. They improvised loin cloths for themselves by sewing fig leaves together. Even a contemporary interpreter like Logan understands the matter along these lines: “The shame arose because each, in the new-found experience of self-will, became aware that sex could become a tool of selfish gratification, ministering to self-will, and that therefore there should be a pretense of virtue, attempting to use outward means to hide inward selfishness.”¹⁴ We shall presently see how reluctant Adam and Eve were as sinners to acknowledge and confess their guilt. Yet quite unwittingly and unintentionally they already confessed their guilt as they sought to cover their nakedness. The seed of death and corruption was now in their hearts, a seed that would ripen and break forth into physical death and eternal death, everlasting separation from God.

⁸ וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת-קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מְתַהַלֵּךְ בַּגֶּן לַרְיִחַ הַיּוֹם וַיִּתְחַבֵּא הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים בְּתוֹךְ עֵץ הַגִּן:

“And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at evening time, and the man and his wife scurried for cover from the presence of the Lord God in the midst of the trees of the garden.”

קוֹל could be translated either as “voice” or as “sound.” Since God’s walking rather than His speaking is mentioned in the immediate context, we prefer to translate “sound.” Adam and Eve heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. This is not an anthropomorphism. The account rather points to a theophany, a manifestation of God in human form for the purpose of speaking to man. The account strongly suggests that God had appeared in this manner before and spoken with our first parents. The time when this particular appearance took place was toward evening when a cool breeze was wont to arise. How long after Creation the Fall took place has not been revealed to us. Any conjecture on this point will remain just that, a conjecture. At former appearances of God, if there really were such, Adam and Eve would have rejoiced. Yet because of their sin, they now sought to hide. With the fear that they revealed they again unwittingly confessed their guilt. They showed that they realized that God would rebuke them and call them into judgment for what they had done against His clear will and word.

Note the hithpael which Moses uses in describing their hiding to which they were moved in their fear. We know what happens when there is a mouse in a dark room and the light is suddenly turned on. The mouse will scurry here and there to find cover. Such action would be aptly expressed by a hithpael form of the Hebrew

¹⁴ William M. Logan, *In the Beginning God*, p.42.

verb with its reciprocal, intensive, reflexive force. With their fear of God and their resultant fearful actions Adam and Eve revealed their depraved condition. Yet we also want to take note of man's folly in his guilt-born fear of God. He vainly sought to hide from God, vainly sought to protect himself from God's just punishment for sin by his own vain efforts. Here is the beginning, of the *opinio legis*, man's vain thought of somehow rescuing and saving himself from God's just punishment by his own efforts. This opinion of the law has remained indelibly ingrained in natural man ever since.¹⁵

וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶל-הָאָדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לֵן אַיִּכָּה:

“And the Lord God called to the man and said to him: Where are you?”

The Lord did not abandon His fallen creatures to their just deserts. No, in solicitous love He sought them out to lay bare their guilt and to make them fully aware of it. In this way He meant to prepare them for the announcement of the new program of His faithful love. God did this though there was nothing to compel Him to do so but the love of His own heart. God's question is not for information; it is pedagogical to bring Adam to a full realization of his plight of sin.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת-קוֹלִי שָׁמַעְתִּי בְּגֶן וַאֲיָרָא כִּי-עֵירַם אָנֹכִי וְאֶחְבֵּא:

“And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” With this answer man betrayed his sin and his sinfulness. He betrayed it by admitting that he was afraid of God, that he was disturbed that he was naked. Adam knew full well what had brought about this fear, and why he was suddenly troubled about his nakedness. Yet the very sinfulness which he was amply revealing did not let him make an open confession of it. Vainly he sought refuge in half-truths, deceit, and evasion. Though he knew how he had come to be disturbed about his nakedness, namely through his fall into sin, he still sought to cover up. He sought to make his nakedness a plausible excuse for his hiding. He did not confess how he and Eve had scurried for cover when the sound of God's approach in the garden had come to their ears. Remember how we noted Moses' use of a hithpaed in reporting it. Moses, however, uses a niph'al form, the simple reflexive, when he sets forth Adam's own statement concerning his hiding. Adam sought to make it appear as a very proper and innocent action. It is as though he were saying: Surely I could not appear in your presence in my naked condition. So I stepped aside and hid behind whatever tree was at hand.

וַיֹּאמֶר מִי הַגִּיד לְךָ כִּי עֵירַם אָתָּה הַמִּן-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵבַלְתִּי אֲכָל-מִמֶּנּוּ אֲכַלְתָּ:¹¹
וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם הָאִשָּׁה הָאֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה עִמָּדִי הִוא נָתַתָּה-לִּי מִן-הָעֵץ וְאֲכַלְתִּי:¹²

“And He said, who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree concerning which I charged you not to eat of it? And the man said: The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave to me from the tree and I ate.”

Patently, earnestly God continued with His questioning. The Lord exposed Adam's vain evasions. With two straightforward questions God faced Adam with the demand to give straightforward answers likewise. Still, a simple, honest confession was not given. Adam sought to mitigate his sin. He sought to transfer the full responsibility for his sinful deed from himself, sought to transfer it to Eve, and finally to God, who had given Eve to him as a companion. Why had God given him such a companion who had seduced him?

Excuses never satisfy. Eve's guilt was real, but it did not excuse Adam. Adam, who should have been Eve's head, had yielded to her persuasion. Sin separates people from one another, though they may participate in the sin together. Man the sinner is essentially selfish. What a disgraceful confession Adam made as he tried

¹⁵ In the Apology we confess: Haec opinio legis haeret naturaliter in animishominum, neque excuti potest, nisi quum divinitus docemur. Concordia Triglotta, p. 196, par. 145.

to blame others, to blame Eve, and ultimately to blame God Himself. Where trust in God is gone, there is also no love for God; and where there is no love of God, real unselfish love for the neighbor also fades away. What a contrast between Adam's relation to Eve after the Fall and his joyful exclamation when Eve had first been brought to him as a fitting helpmeet for him. Then he had exclaimed with a grateful heart: "This one this time is flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone."¹⁶ Now Eve became the butt of his excuses. And that in a vain attempt to excuse his sin he now blamed God for giving Eve to him showed base ingratitude for what he had once recognized as a bounteous gift of love.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לְאִשָּׁה מַה־נָּעַמְתְּ עִשְׂיִת וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה הִנְנִי הַשִּׂאֲנִי וְאָכַלְתִּי:¹³

"And the Lord God said to the women: Why have you done this? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me and I ate."

A simple, honest, humble confession did not come forth from fallen Adam. It was the same with Eve, whom God addressed in a similar manner and for a similar purpose. Though she was forced to admit her sinful act, she did not assume the full responsibility for it. She blamed the serpent. During God's pedagogical questioning both Adam and Eve revealed their totally depraved condition since the Fall. Though they were not ready in their sinfulness and because of their sinfulness to acknowledge their guilt and to confess it in all humility, they had nevertheless become deeply aware of their guilt, so that they sought refuge and protection from God's just wrath.

In the faithfulness of His great love for man God now extended the help which His fallen creatures could not supply themselves. According to verses fourteen and fifteen the Lord God let them hear the new program of His faithful love: In verse fourteen we, first of all, hear how God laid a curse upon the serpent, the instrument of temptation, and therewith cursed above all the tempter himself, namely Satan.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶל־הַנָּחָשׁ כִּי עִשְׂיִתָּה זֹאת אָרוּר אַתָּה מִכָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה וּמִכָּל־חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה עַל־גִּחְוֹנֶךָ תֵּלֵךְ וְעָפָר תֹּאכַל כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:¹⁴

"The Lord God said to the serpent: 'Because you have done this, cursed are you among all the cattle and among all the beasts of the field. Upon your belly shall you move and dust shall you eat all the days of your life.'"

If we want to understand this verse we will have to cling to what we said in connection with verse one. When God spoke these words, a serpent was there, but He was also dealing with more than a serpent.

First of all, a serpent was there and God was dealing with a serpent. The text says so. It not only states in so many words that God spoke to the serpent, but it also speaks of a curse which the serpent as a beast from out of all the other beasts is henceforth to display in its circumambulation as a beast. It is to move, to crawl on its belly. In doing so it is to eat dust. This is not to say that dust itself will be its food, but rather that moving about as it does close to the ground it will invariably consume dust together with its food. Such a mode of circumambulation is a sign and symbol of defeat and humiliation. This creature in its action exalted itself above man and is now ever after to be degraded in man's eyes.

It is idle to speculate about the serpent's former mode of moving about, its mode of moving about before the Fall, and to what extent it was different. What is said here is said for the benefit of man living after the Fall; and we are told what we are to see in the serpent's present manner of moving about. We are to be reminded of the wicked fatal deed in which the serpent was involved as an instrument. At the same time we are to realize that his wickedness will end not in glory and success, but in utter humiliation and defeat.

Nevertheless we cannot stay with the serpent here. We need to face the fact that God spoke to the serpent. Addressing someone assumes that you are dealing with a rational creature. Yet according to the

¹⁶ Gen 2:23.

Creation account the serpent is not such a rational creature. Hence this speaking of the Lord God to the serpent is again evidence that He is dealing with more than a serpent, that He is dealing with the serpent as the instrument of the Evil One.

The words spoken by God to the serpent strike out at this Evil One, the Tempter of mankind, Satan. This is brought out also by the first statement of the Lord: “Because you have done this” These are words that can properly be addressed only to a morally responsible individual. It is Satan, rather than the serpent, that is held accountable for a wicked deed done. Also the announcement of humiliation and defeat which follows is therefore announced to Satan rather than to the serpent, though outwardly the serpent is to bear the sign and symbol of defeat.

That actually a sign or symbol of defeat and humiliation is involved is evident from other passages of Scripture where the same language is employed and even a reference to this recorded incident is included. In Micah 7:17 we read, for example: “They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of thee.” What Micah is here depicting is the ultimate triumph of God’s people, of God’s church, and the utter defeat and humiliation of its enemies. Of similar import is verse nine of Psalm 72: “They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust.” Noteworthy also is the fact that God asked the Tempter, whom He was really addressing in the serpent, no pedagogical questions. He addressed such questions to Adam and Eve as evidence of His faithfulness toward them, as evidence of His intent to show them mercy. God holds out no mercy and grace to the Tempter, to Satan, but only judgment, punishment as retribution for the violation of God’s majesty, not punishment as a corrective chastening.

Ultimately these words are spoken to the Tempter and to the serpent as his instrument for man’s sake. Adam and Eve were to hear these words, were to hear that Satan would not permanently triumph in his wickedness, but rather suffer humiliation and defeat, lasting humiliation and defeat. All this is carried out more fully in verse fifteen, in the protevangelium.

It is for man’s sake also that the serpent, the beast employed as Satan’s instrument, is to serve as a constant reminder of Satan’s ultimate and lasting defeat and humiliation. Elsewhere in Scripture we meet with instances likewise in which the irrational creature, which as such is not involved in moral responsibility, must nevertheless, not for its own sake but for man’s sake, suffer punishment outwardly. We read in Genesis 9:5 that the beast which is instrumental in the loss of human life is to be put to death, in order that man may be reminded of the inviolate sacredness of human life as sinful man’s God-given time of grace. For a similar reason it was stipulated in the Mosaic Law, God’s temporary discipline for His Old Testament people, that the ox that had gored a man was to be stoned.¹⁷ Similarly the Mosaic Law prescribed that in cases of human acts of sexual perversion with a beast, the beast likewise was to be put to death.¹⁸ Thereby man was to be reminded that such perversion was worthy of death. In the last analysis we know from the New Testament¹⁹ that the entire creature world, ever since the Fall, must perform a function of this kind for fallen mankind as it groans under the bondage of vanity and corruption, not because of a sinful exercise of its own will, but by God’s will, who wants the constant evidence of pain, struggle, futility, and death in the creature world round about us to be an ever present earnest reminder of the curse of human sin.

The victory over Satan and over his fatal act of temptation, already touched upon in verse fourteen, is fully announced for mankind’s great comfort in the fifteenth verse.

וַאֲיָבֵהוּ אִשְׁתֵּי בֵינָהּ וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה וּבֵין זְרַעָהּ וּבֵין זְרַעָהּ הוּא יְשׁוּפֶנָּה רֹאשׁ וְאַתָּה תְּשׁוּפֶנּוּ עֵקֶב: 15

¹⁷ Exod. 21:28

¹⁸ Lev. 20:21.

¹⁹ Rom. 8:19-22.

“And enmity will I establish between you and between the woman, and between your seed and between her seed. He shall crush your head (crush you with respect to the head), and you shall bruise his heel (bruise him with respect to the heel).”

We noted that verse fourteen already alluded to the Tempter. The serpent was, however, still in the foreground. Now the matter is reversed. The Evil One is definitely in the foreground, though still addressed as the serpent and spoken of as the serpent, in whose guise he was present.

The object, enmity **הֶבְרָתָא**, emphatically heads the sentence.

It is the all important concept. Eve had become the willing servant of Satan. She had obeyed his lie. She had renounced her trust in God and hence had withdrawn also her obedience from God. She had transferred both, her trust and her obedience, to Satan. Over all this Satan was rejoicing. He surmised that it would always stay that way.

God, however, announced: Enmity, hostility will I establish between you and between the woman. It is not that there was no enmity present thus far. We saw how Adam and Eve had become God’s enemies, hiding from Him in fear, refusing to accept the responsibility for their disobedience of His will. We saw also how man had displayed enmity toward the woman, blaming her for his transgression. All this enmity and hostility was misdirected, however. If man was to be helped, his enmity would have to be redirected in the proper direction again. He would have to acknowledge God anew in humble faith as his gracious friend, and his enmity would again have to be directed upon Satan. Unless this would come about, man would remain basically mistaken about all things and would in a fundamental sense continue to misjudge and misuse everything.

Note, however, that God did not proceed to counsel and advise Eve to redirect her enmity upon the serpent. She utterly lacked the power to follow such advice. Neither did God command Eve to hate the Evil One. She could not have discharged such a command. Instead God announced His own intentions. I, God, will put, establish, enmity between you and the woman. God Himself, God who alone was able, would do it. Proper enmity would be established by His divine initiative. It could be established in no other way. God was not promoting an enmity that was already potentially there, not arousing something that had temporarily become dormant and inactive.

Satan had to hear this, for it was said to him, as the serpent was directly addressed. For Satan it was an announcement of judgment and defeat. All that he could do was listen. God did not invite him to a response. As soon as God had made this pronouncement to the Tempter, the Lord again turned to Eve and Adam, whom He had previously drawn into conversation with searching questions. All this makes it quite evident that it was for Eve’s benefit and for Adam’s that God announced that He would do this great thing of again establishing enmity between Satan and the woman. Here we have an initial revelation of God’s unmerited, yet triumphant grace.

Would this divinely established enmity be restricted to these two individuals, to the serpent and the woman? Would it come to an end, when they would come to their earthly end? No, God promised more in His announcement. God is still the subject, enmity is still the object, and God is still speaking about establishing enmity as He goes on to say that He would put it likewise between “your seed,” i.e., the serpent’s seed, and between “her seed,” i.e., the woman’s seed. The Hebrew singular is, of course, a collective in both instances. It clearly refers to a plurality of individuals. This in turn makes it very clear that the previous statement concerning the enmity between the serpent and the woman does indeed have to do with two individuals, and does not treat in generic terms of serpents as a class or of womanhood in general.

Yet who is meant by the woman’s seed and the serpent’s seed, as God goes on to say that He will establish enmity between them also? The promise is certainly intended for all of Eve’s descendants. Potentially the woman’s seed would therefore be all of Eve’s descendants. But when we think of the actual establishment of the enmity envisioned in this divine promise, only those of Eve’s descendants could come into consideration who would come to be like Eve, when she would again be at enmity with the Tempter. Only then was Eve again at enmity with Satan when God had again brought her back to faith in Him, when she was led by God to trust in His saving grace. For this a complete change of heart was needed. Yet God had promised to bring this about. It would be the same with Eve’s seed. Those of her seed, her descendants, whom God would put at enmity with

Satan's seed, would be those in whom the Lord would likewise awaken a humble trust in His saving grace. They would be the believers. Satan's seed, or the serpent's seed, would be all of Satan's followers, evil angels and evil human beings, all who like Satan would be enemies of God and active in destroying His works. To think of physical descendants is out of the question, since physical propagation does not come into consideration as far as Satan is concerned. Essentially he is an angel. What Jesus asserts concerning angels, that marriage and propagation does not come into consideration for them,²⁰ therefore pertains also to Satan, though he is a fallen angel.

Such an understanding of the woman's seed and the serpent's seed is in keeping with the language of Scripture elsewhere. In the parable of the tares²¹ among the wheat, where the presence of the unbelievers in the world as God's field is under discussion, Jesus explains: "The good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil." On another occasion when Jesus upbraided the hostile Jewish leaders, scribes and Pharisees, who like their prophetslaying forefathers were obstructing and opposing God's saving activity, He addressed them, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers"; and like here in the protevangelium the Lord announced judgment to this serpent's brood, "how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"²²

When according to the Gospel of St. John Jesus was testifying to similarly hostile Jews, who scorned and rejected His Savior's work and person, He told them. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it."²³ This designation of unbelievers as Satan's seed or offspring is particularly significant, because in the unfolding of His assertion Jesus is clearly alluding to happenings and details pertaining to the Fall.

A striking confirmation of our understanding of the serpent's seed is found also in the third chapter of St. John's first epistle.²⁴ We will need to content ourselves with a few salient points. There we are told in verse eight: "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning." Notice that in speaking of sinners as "being of the devil" this is led back to "the beginning." Verse ten then sets forth a contrast: "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" This is then elucidated in verse twelve by an illustration: "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous" Eve's very first seed, her first son, because of his fruit of unbelief is designated as being "of that wicked one," namely Satan's seed, or the serpent's seed.

St. John closes the section with the exhortation: "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you" The enmity between the serpent's seed and the woman's seed, which the Lord announced as something that He would bring about continues still. It is the enmity which exists between God's believing children and the unbelieving world. It began with Cain's hatred of Abel, and it is experienced by Christians today. Not that the Christian hates the unbelievers as individuals. Like the heavenly Father, who so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son to redeem them and to make them individually His own by faith, also God's children, the Christian believers, are intent upon winning the world through the Gospel for Christ and His salvation. The hostility arises from the world as it remains adamant in sin and unbelief and resents the childlike trust and humble, thankful service which the Christian renders to his God and Savior in faith. It is by instilling such trust in the hearts of sinners through His Gospel and by constraining them in faith to loving service that God Himself gives occasion for enmity between Eve's believing seed and Satan's brood. Jesus speaks of this when He says: "Suppose ye, that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division."²⁵

²⁰ Matt. 22:30

²¹ Matt. 13:24-44

²² Matt. 23:33

²³ John 8:44

²⁴ I John 3:8-13.

²⁵ Luke 12:51. Compare also Matt. 10:34.

The Lord's announcement of mankind's ultimate victory over Satan, however, comes in the final distich : "He shall crush you with respect to the head, and you shall bruise him with respect to the heel . . ." ²⁶ After having spoken of a multiplicity of individuals involved on both sides in a God-effected enmity, the Lord again returns in His great announcement to the serpent as one individual. It is the serpent, not his seed, which shall bruise the heel of the woman's seed. The serpent will live on, even after the enmity has been extended to the serpent's seed and the woman's seed. This again brings to light that more is involved here than an actual serpent. The serpent that had a role in Eve's temptation surely died in the ordinary course of events after death had come upon the entire creature world. God is speaking of one more powerful than a serpent, of the one who used the serpent for his evil purposes. Since the serpent in this final distich is one individual, this strongly suggests that also the woman's seed, for that is the antecedent of the *הַרְעָה* in the last strophe, is to be taken as one individual. It is the woman's seed *ketxochen*, one outstanding descendant of Eve, the champion and special representative of mankind.

The Lord God told the Tempter that this woman's seed would crush him with respect to the head. "Crush" seems to be the fundamental meaning of *שׁוּפַח*. ²⁷ This is the meaning in the other Old Testament passage, Job 9:17, where it certainly occurs: "He shall crush me in a whirlwind." On the basis of the double use in this one verse, involving diverse subjects and objects, one can conclude that the scope of the meaning of this verb root is broad enough to include, on the one hand, a man's trampling upon the head of the serpent, and, on the other hand, the bruise or bite which a serpent may inflict upon a man's heel as it is administering its crushing action. The bruising or biting, pernicious and painful as it may be, does not rob the champion of his complete victory. But to crush the head of a serpent means to administer a fatal blow, completely destroying such a serpent's power.

Someone may want to raise the question whether it is permissible or not to take the woman's seed to be a collective in part of the protevangelium and then to take the pronoun in the last distich, which has the woman's seed as its antecedent, as referring to an individual. We are convinced that the Hebrew collective singular lends itself to just such a usage. This can be shown from other instances. The collective singular may refer to all the individuals making up a certain generic class and at the same time refer also to one individual member by which this class is in a special way represented.

In Galatians 3:6 Paul makes a point of the collective singular which is used in the Genesis 22:18 account of God's promise to Abraham: "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Paul says: "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many: but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Yet Paul knows that the believers are at the same time also Abraham's seed, that they are that through their close relation to Christ, who in the primary sense is the promised seed of Abraham. Thus Paul says in the closing verse of this same third chapter of Galatians: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

What the Lord God announced to Satan for the comfort of Adam and Eve in their fallen state was this: A descendant of Eve, as the champion and representative of mankind, would win a victory over Satan and rob him of his power. This could only refer to the power which Satan had gained over mankind through the sin into which he had drawn our first parents. In winning this victory over Satan, in inflicting this complete defeat upon Satan, this Woman's Seed would himself undergo suffering and pain at the hand of Satan.

Through this victory mankind would win continual victories over Satan. Thus St. Paul in Romans 16:20 alluded to Genesis 3:15 in giving the Roman Christians a promise of victory over those creating divisions and

²⁶ The Hebrew words for "head" and "heel" are both accusatives of specification. They define more precisely the exact point of incidence of the action of the respective subjects upon their objects in the two parts of this distich. Some of the vividness of the depicted actions is lost in the translation of our *Authorized Version* which converts these accusatives of specification into direct objects and turns the pronominal objects of the Hebrew text into possessives.

²⁷ For a thorough discussion of the Hebrew root *shuph* and of the manner in which the verb forms of verse 15c have been handled in the ancient versions, and for a good exegetical treatment of the protevangelium in general and also of its understanding in ancient Christian tradition, we would like to call attention to the monograph of a Catholic exegete, Dominic J. Unger, *The First Gospel* (St. Bonaventure, N. Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1954), 362 pp.

offenses contrary to the apostolic doctrine, saying: “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.”

The Christian church has had full warrant for seeing in Genesis 3:15 a protevangelium, the very first promise of the Savior and of His victory over Satan and sin, a victory won through suffering and death.

Contemporary interpretation is prone to speak of the Enmity oracle as an original aetiological explanation for the general aversion that human beings have for serpents. But even these interpreters generally agree that in what they call its present position in Genesis three, in the account of the Fall, this Enmity oracle has taken on a further purpose, that it is somehow symbolic for man’s constant struggle with the forces of evil and temptation. Yet also these explanations do not do justice to God’s announced part in bringing about this enmity. As the Lord God is the one in the account who establishes the enmity between the serpent’s seed and the seed of the woman, so He must also be seen as supplying the power for the ultimate victory of the Woman’s Seed over the Serpent. That is why we can say that already this promise bids us to look for more than a mere man in this promised victorious champion of mankind. Together with Luther we will also not want to miss the significance of the fact that He is spoken of as the woman’s seed, rather than the seed of Adam. We do not want to say that the deity of the Savior and His virgin birth are explicitly taught in the protevangelium. We will again say, however, that the wording of God’s initial promise was very carefully chosen so as to be quite adequate for embracing also these truths about the Savior when God was pleased to reveal them very explicitly.

Those who raise doubts about Genesis 3:15 as a Messianic promise are apt to stress that this divine statement is not quoted and treated as such a promise in the New Testament. We are ready to grant that except for the significant allusion to it in Romans 16:20 the protevangelium is not quoted in so many words in the New Testament. We do not want to lose sight, however, of the prominence and abundance with which our Savior’s work of redemption is presented in the New Testament as a victory over Satan.

In I John 3:8 we are told: “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” Not to be in any doubt as to what works of the devil Jesus had come to destroy, we need to bear in mind how clearly Jesus spoke in John 8:44 of Satan as the *anqrwpoktonoj* from the beginning, the one who had brought death upon mankind, who had done this as the liar from the beginning and as the Father of lies. We need to remember how Jesus, our great champion, faced Satan in a series of severe temptations at the very beginning of His public ministry.²⁸ We likewise should not lose sight of the fact that Jesus saw Satan’s prompting behind Peter’s attempt to dissuade Him from the course of the cross, at the time when He had solemnly announced it to His disciples.²⁹ In His final discourses with His disciples in the upper room on the evening before His death Jesus repeatedly spoke of His impending passion as a final bout with Satan, which would lead to full victory over him. Jesus told His disciples: “Now shall the prince of this world be cast out”³⁰ He assured them: “For the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.”³¹ In looking even beyond the victory to its proclamation in the power of the Holy Spirit Jesus promised that the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would now reprove the world “of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.”³²

In an unpublished paper Professor Martin Franzmann³³ has some noteworthy remarks on Romans 5:12-19. He points out that it is really a retelling of Genesis three. The Fall is seen from the vantage point of the raising up of the fallen world in Christ. The One Man at the beginning is confronted by the One Man at the end. Professor Franzmann asks: “Is there any indication in Paul’s words that the Spirit taught him to see in Genesis 3 any indication of the coming victorious One Man?” To this question he then himself makes the reply:

²⁸ Matt. 4:1-11

²⁹ Matt. 16:23

³⁰ John 12:31

³¹ John 14:30

³² John 16:11

³³ Martin Franzmann, “Hermeneutical Principles Involved in the Appraisal of the 1963 Essay on Genesis 3,” Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.

Paul calls Adam the “type of the One who was to come” (Rom. 5 :14) . The verb used here (*mello*) is one used frequently to denote that something must and will take place because the Word of God has promised it.³⁴ The only figure in the oracles of Genesis 3 that could be the subject of Paul’s *mellontos* is, it would seem, the Woman’s Seed.

The same author also feels that Paul in Romans 8:20-21 presupposes the protevangelium.

There Paul says that creation was subjected to futility and that when this subjection took place there was present a hope that creation too would be liberated and participate in the glorious liberty of the children of God. Now if we look in Genesis 3 for a word of hope uttered before the cursing of the ground for man’s sake, the only possible candidate is the word which speaks of the crushing of the Serpent’s head by the heel of the Woman’s seed.

Paul’s use of Genesis 3:15 in the letter to the Romans is allusive; the connection is presupposed and utilized, not argued or demonstrated. This makes these passages strong evidence for Paul’s conception of the Enmity oracle. The use of Genesis 3:15 in Rev. 12 is much more outspoken. The references to the Woman, the Woman’s Seed, the Enmity, and “that ancient Serpent” are so palpable as to be beyond dispute. It will suffice to call attention to one feature that might be passed over: that is the description of the church as “the rest of her (the Woman’s) seed” in verse 17.

The revelation of the Lord’s faithfulness in His love toward His fallen creatures did not end with the proclamation of the protevangelium in their hearing. It continued to manifest itself as the Lord announced the disciplinary chastening which He was laying upon the woman and the man.

16 אֶל-הָאִשָּׁה אָמַר ה'רְבֵה אֲרֻבָּה עֲצָבוֹנֶךָ וְהָרְנֶךָ בְּעֶצֶב תֵּלְדִי בָנִים וְאֶל-אִישׁוֹ תִשְׁוֹקֶתְךָ וְהוּא יִמְשָׁל-בְּךָ: ס

Verse sixteen lets us hear about the chastening laid upon the woman: “To the woman He said: I will greatly multiply your painful conception; in pain shall you bear children; yet to your husband shall be your desire, and he shall rule over you.”

Is this punishment, or did we correctly refer to it as chastening? In giving our answer we need to remember that these terms are not always used with the same strict distinction. They are frequently used interchangeably. In the strict sense and usage punishment which God’ inflicts is, however, compensation in suffering for the violation of His infinite majesty. Such punishment flows out of God’s holy and righteous wrath upon sin. All suffering now and hereafter will ultimately become such punishment for those who are obdurate and remain obdurate in their sin.

God’s chastening is suffering which He inflicts out of love for a corrective purpose. While God is still offering man a time of grace, all the sufferings which God sends upon sinners are still chastening. They purpose to make man mindful of his sins and their merited curses, and of his utter helplessness before God, so that he may take refuge in the grace of God proclaimed to him in the Gospel. Yet, during this earthly life God continues to send sufferings as such chastening also upon those who have come to faith and who enjoy His pardoning grace. This chastening is to aid them in their bitter struggle with their sinful flesh.

The context indicates that the suffering announced to the woman was, first of all, meant to be corrective chastening. It was intended to serve as a constant reminder of the sin to which the woman had succumbed, and which had made her subject to death and God’s displeasure. Yet in His faithful love God had permitted the woman to hear the Gospel message of the protevangelium. At the birth of her first son we do hear Eve confess her faith in God as the Lord, the God of free and faithful saving grace.

³⁴ Here the author lists the following N.T. quotations to prove this point: “(cf. for Paul, Rom. 8:18; Gal. 3:23; Col. 2:17; I Thess. 3:4; 2 Tim. 4:1; elsewhere in the N.T.: Matt. 11:14; 16:27; Luke 24:21; John 12:33; 18:32; Acts 11:28; 17:31; 24:15, 25; 26:22, 23; 1 Pet. 5:1, etc.)”

The sufferings and discomforts which the Lord now announced to her as her future lot were calculated to keep her mindful of her fateful, sinful deed. In believing Satan's lie and in eating of the forbidden fruit she had sought exquisite delights. What sin brought her was sorrow and pain instead. God states very emphatically: "I will greatly multiply your pain and your conception." It is, however, best to take עֲצָבוֹנָהּ וְהַרְנָנָהּ as a hendiadys. In this figure of speech two nouns are coordinated when in actual function one of them is really subordinate, serving the purpose of a descriptive adjective. That is why we previously translated: "I will greatly multiply your painful conception." For it is not the multiplying of the woman's conceptions in themselves which is to be thought of as an evil consequence of sin. In mankind's state of perfection, immediately upon man's creation as male and female, it is designated as an act of blessing on the part of God that He bade them to be fruitful and to multiply, and that thereby He enabled them to do so. The reminder of sin and its curses for the woman lay in the pain and the discomfort which was henceforth to characterize each conception, each pregnancy, and each birth, the whole process of bearing and rearing children. In pain should she now bear children: In other words, the fact that sin brought not joy but distress and pain was to be brought home to Eve in connection with her basic womanly functions, her functions as wife and mother of the human race.

"Yet to your husband shall be your desire." In her fall Eve had sought to act independently of man. She had taken the initiative and assumed a position of leadership. She had sought to control man by taking control into her own hands. By her persuasion she had even induced Adam to follow her in her transgression. But her sinful striving for independence from man and control over man had not brought her joy and satisfaction. It had brought sorrow and distress. It was a futile, fateful effort at overthrowing God's order of creation. Eve was given to hear that God's order still stood and would continue to stand. God the Creator made the woman to be a fitting help and companion for man who was first created. Even sin has not changed this order. Woman's desire and attraction will continue to be for her own husband. She will never really feel at ease and fully satisfied without her own husband. Yet all the distress that she will encounter in seeking to realize, satisfy, and fulfill the longing for her own husband will constantly remind her of the sin that woman brought into the world.

Also in the state of sin her husband will continue to rule over her. This is still God's order of creation. In the state of sin this rule has, however, all too frequently degenerated into harsh and heartless domination, into abject slavery for the woman.

What was here announced to Eve was obviously said to her not only as an individual but to her also as the representative and mother of all future women. That is why St. Paul in I Timothy 2:11-15 can bid Christian women to live within God's order of creation, to be warned by Eve's fatal departure from this order, and instead to evidence their saving faith and their love and holiness while they humbly and contentedly pursue their basic motherhood role: Sin has poisoned and corrupted a salutary and blessed order of creation established in God's institution of marriage and the home. Only in a Christian marriage is its original blessedness again approximated. It is approximated when and to the extent that Christian spouses in faith and faithborn love heed Paul's exhortation: "Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it"³⁵

It is worth noting that also contemporary interpretation sets forth many of the same thoughts and observations which we have stressed and unfolded in expounding God's announcement of the chastening which He laid on Eve and on womanhood in general after the Fall. Gerhard von Rad, for example, writes:

The woman and the man are not cursed (it is unthinking to speak of their malediction); but severe afflictions and terrible contradictions now break upon the woman's life. There are three facts which because they are related to one another in unresolved tension grind down the woman's life: (1) hardships of pregnancy, pains at birth, and (2) yet a profound desire for the man in whom she (3) does not find fulfillment and rest (Ruth 1:9), but rather humiliating domination! "In the bondage of

³⁵ Eph 5:22-25

compulsive drive and yet most immediately involved in the wonder of creation; groaning in pain, cramped in travail, humiliated, overburdened, care-worn, and tear-stained” (W. Vischer, *Christuszeugnis*, 80) . Whence these sorrows, these contradictions, this degradation in the woman’s life? It is not a small matter that our narrative absolves God’s creation of this. Here a primeval offense receives its consequences, which faith recognizes as a punishment inflicted by God.

Woman’s punishment struck at the deepest root of her being as wife and mother³⁶

Note the difference of approach in this representative of contemporary interpretation. Gerhard von Rad marvels at the religious insight of the Israelite narrator, the Jahvist, to whom he ascribes this portion of the Genesis account. He is of the conviction that this human narrator has sought an answer for the sorrows, contradictions, and the prevailing degradation in woman’s life. It is not a small matter in von Rad’s eyes that this narrator has not led these afflictions back to God’s natural order of things, that he wholly absolves God’s creation of these troublesome features. It is not a small matter for von Rad that this man in his faith has rather led it all back to a primeval offense which is receiving its consequences, that he recognizes in these troubles of womanhood a punishment inflicted by God.

In other words, according to von Rad divine revelation is by way of the deep religious insights of men of faith. These insights have a hard kernel of religious truth, though they still have aspects and features likewise that are conditioned by the experiences and the limited understanding of the particular Biblical writer and the specific social problems of his times. Hence modern man must preserve these insights, yet at the same time bring them up-to-date and make them fully relevant to our time and circumstances, and our understanding. We can still lead woman’s problems, as far as they are still thought to exist, back to mankind’s estrangement from God, yet without necessarily operating with a primeval offense. It is obvious what this kind of interpretation leads to. By carefully studying the text you may very clearly apprehend what is being said. Still, you choose what pleases you as deep religious insight also for our day. What does not please you, or what does not seem relevant for modern man, you discount as a limitation in the understanding of the religious insight of the Biblical writer.

Treasuring the certainties of God’s Word, we shall want to continue to take also this portion of Genesis three as a part of God’s inspired and inerrant revelation apprising us of something that actually happened; in humble faith we shall want to take to heart what God actually said to Eve, what He is still saying to all of her daughters, and finally to all of us.

The chastening laid upon Adam was similarly calculated to keep alive in him a keen remembrance of sin, to which he had consented and with which he had merited God’s displeasure and wrath.

17 וּלְאָדָם אָמַר כִּי־שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתְּךָ וְתָאָכַל מִן־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵאמֹר לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ אַרְנָה
הָאָדָמָה בְּעִבּוּרָהּ בְּעֶצְבוֹן תֹּאכְלֶנָּה כָּל יְמֵי תַיִיד:
18 וְקוֹץ וְדַרְדַּר תַּצְמִיחַ לָהּ וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה:
19 בְּזַעַת אֶפְיֶךָ תֹאכַל לֶחֶם עַד שׁוֹבְךָ אֶל־הָאָדָמָה כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ כִּי־עָפָר אָתָּה וְאֶל־עָפָר תָּשׁוּב:

“And to Adam He said: Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate of the tree concerning which I charged you, saying, you shall not eat of it: Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil shall you eat of it all the days of your life.”

Man had listened to his wife and submitted to her. He should have ruled. He should have supplied the leadership for which God had created him. As a constant reminder of this sinful default in his God-assigned role he was now to experience insubordination. He was to experience such insubordination from the soil, the הָאָדָמָה the tillable soil over which he would otherwise have exercised complete control.

³⁶ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis, a Commentary*, trans. by John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), pp. 90-91

Man would henceforth experience difficulty in securing his sustenance. The ground would produce its fruits, but winning them from the soil would always be attended by toil, difficulty, and misery. In toil man was now to eat of the fruits of the ground. The former ease of tilling the ground would be a thing of the past. A divine curse had blighted the fruitfulness of the soil. No longer would it be fitting for imperfect, sinful man to dwell in the midst of a perfect world. Divine pedagogy made the outward circumstances surrounding man to correspond with the inward state of man. Man needed to feel his wretchedness. For man's sake such a world that was put under the bondage of corruption and made subject to vanity (Rom. 8:19-22) would best serve to prepare man for the invitation to take refuge in God's saving grace.

"Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herbs of the field. In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread." That which man would now procure with his labors would be gotten in meager quantities. Undesirable elements would henceforth grow without receiving attention, while man would be eating the herbs of the field. Lifelong continuance of toil was imposed on man.

"In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground for from it you were taken. For dust you are and to dust you shall return." When Adam is told: "In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread," this is a drastic paraphrase of the previous statement (17d): "In toil shall you eat all the days of your life." It is not that eating would be so difficult that it would bring sweat upon man's face. Yet his labors would be so arduous and unrelenting that the moments of refreshment and relaxation would still find man bearing the signs of his labors. This life of toil would finally terminate in physical death, in the dissolution of man's body into dust, from which it was taken.

We again believe that we are here told how God actually described the immediate labors and difficulties which Adam would be facing in gaining a livelihood upon being cast out of Paradise. Yet the type of disorders mentioned are merely a sample and type of all the difficulties and vexations which man since the Fall experiences in labors of every kind, physical and mental, by which he gains his livelihood.

Contemporary interpretation devotes considerable time to ascertaining just what kind of a life is described here. The objective is to determine the environmental setting out of which the envisioned Biblical writer is supposed to have written this account.

As a part of his comment on these verses von Rad, for example, writes as follows: "Upon closer inspection, one finds that the curse speaks clearly of two different forms of life outside of Paradise." Von Rad then divides the text into A (vs. 17c, 19a, 19b) and B (vs. 18, 19a).

The one version (A) has in mind the life of the peasant (Fellah) and his unending troubles to exact a harvest from the clods; the other (B) the life of the Bedouin in the steppe. His existence is characterized less by the effort of preparing the ground than by the poverty and skimpiness of the livelihood accorded him. The misery, therefore, of both primary forms of life in Palestine is aetiologically established in this passage (Begrich, ZAW, 1932, 102). The fusion of the two passages, which at one time at an earlier stage were certainly independent, makes the curse of the clods and therewith the misery of agricultural life thematically predominant, but because of this union the passage has become more comprehensive; it speaks not only of hardship but also of the wretchedness of human existence.³⁷

In all this von Rad again sees merely the religious reflections of the Yahwist narrator rather than an actual curse spoken by God to Adam in Paradise. He says:

Must it be emphasized again that the passage does not consider work in itself a punishment and curse? Work was ordained for man even in Paradise (Ch. 2:15). But that it makes life so wretched, that it is threatened by failures and wastes of time and often enough comes to nothing, that its actual result usually has no relation to the effort expended - that the narrator designates as a dissonance in creation which is not accounted for by God's original ordinance. The passage touches on unfathomable

³⁷ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis, a Commentary*, trans. by John H. Marks. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 91

relationships between man and earth; it does not attempt to explain more closely what it says about the disturbance which began with man and now also brought the earth under the domination of misery. It only establishes the fact.³⁸

Von Rad goes on to note that the versions A and B, which he has posited as being now fused together, both conclude with the prospect of death as man's return to the earth. Yet he is seemingly not sure that in the original form of these separate statements death was considered anything but the normal termination of man's life which is depicted by both versions as fraught with difficulties. Yet he asserts that in the present plan of the whole narrative a threat of death precedes the account of the fall and that here in 19d the punishment pronounced upon man ends with a terrible statement about actual death. Still he feels forced to add:

We must in any case content ourselves with the fact that it cannot be made to agree absolutely with the threat of 2:17, for men did not die after their deed, and the penalty itself is directed so intensively toward life that it must be considered as maintained and not basically forfeited.³⁹

One is struck by the efforts that are made and the ingenuity that is expended in dividing what very naturally belongs together and in putting into contrast what quite well fits together and merely constitutes a further unfolding. Why is this? Let us realize that this follows out of the respective interpreter's presuppositions with which he begins.

Here we are reminded of a very pertinent point made by Edward J. Young:

All men, in so far as they act in consistency with their basic presuppositions, reason in a circle. And all men, whether consciously or not, have basic presuppositions. A man, for example, who starts with the presupposition, whether consciously adapted or not, that the Bible is not a special revelation of God, will arrive at conclusions which are consonant with his starting point and basic presuppositions. He is reasoning in a circle.⁴⁰

Then Young himself quotes R. J. Rushdoony, who also stated this truth very aptly:

“All reasoning is circular reasoning, but reasoning from God to God-given and God-created data has the validity of conformity to the nature of things. The opponents of inspiration reason from autonomous man's reasons, through brute factuality which has no meaning other than man's interpretation, back again to man's basic presupposition. In other words, all reasoning moves in terms of its basic presupposition, either God or autonomous man, interpreting all reality in terms of presupposition.” We need not fear, then, if the charge of reasoning in a circle be raised. It is the only way in which one can legitimately reason.⁴¹

It is vital that we call attention to this truth and keep it before our minds ourselves. This will let us realize how important it is that we keep mindful of the presuppositions with which contemporary interpreters begin their work. Interpretive conclusions and judgments which seem strange to us, and often enough also quite unnecessary, will not appear that way, or at least much less so, when we pause and try to look at the text from their presuppositions. This will then also guard us against trying to take over some of their findings and conclusions and against attempting to fit them into an exposition that is proceeding from an altogether different set of presuppositions, namely those which the Bible itself gives us, that we are dealing with God's inspired and inerrant word, given to us through human instruments as His special revelation for our salvation.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 92

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 93

⁴⁰ Edward J. Young, *The Study of Old Testament Theology Today* (London: James Clarks & Co., LTD., 1958), p. 26.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 26

Sometimes interpreters fall into the fallacy of taking over exegetical conclusions from others that have been arrived at from altogether different presuppositions than their own. It would appear that Norman Habel has done this in his comments on Genesis 3:16-19. He writes:

Man on the other hand cannot disclaim his involvement in the first sin. The Israelite villager can sense the tension and conflict between himself and the accursed ‘adarrcah’ from which he was taken, with which he must wrestle to eke out an existence, and to which he must return in the end. The rocky hillsides of Palestine, that drive man to sweat and pain as he tries to wring food from the soil, and the thorns or thistles of its arid pastures are the tangible signs of the reality of man’s downfall from grace and the enigma of life under the curse. The curse is “on account of man.” There is an inevitable connection between man and the earth, a sympathy of nature, as the very association of words between ‘adam and adamah’ already suggests.⁴²

One can understand von Rad when he speaks this way. After all he holds that the Yahwist narrator was expressing his religious insights concerning life as he saw it round about him and experienced it himself. To express these insights he, according to von Rad, used old traditional material, fragments of varied origin and background, fragments which originally served to transmit a somewhat different message. He now fused them together in a new way to set forth his own religious convictions, explanations, and insights. With such presuppositions one can with von Rad visualize the Yahwist writer having God in his narrative express Himself in the announcement of man’s disciplinary chastening as the Yahwist sees life’s distresses in the frustrations of Fellaah and Beduin. It is not so easy to understand how Habel can expound these words of God to Adam in this way with the presuppositions that he still claims to cling to, namely that the Fall narrative deals with something that really happened.

וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַיָּה כִּי הִוא הֵיְתָה אִם כָּל־חַיִּי:²⁰

“And the man called the name of his wife: Life (Eve), for she was the mother of all the living.”

חַיָּה means life. The Septuagint has *Zwh*; the *Vetus Latina* has *vita*. In faith Adam fixed his attention on the one comforting detail in the entire announcement of the Lord. This is more than the idea that God was indeed speaking the truth when He indicated that Eve would have offspring, and that for this reason she would become the mother of all the living. That is a truth which is quite evident and which would be readily believed. Thus it would hardly be significant enough to mention in such a solemn way. We rather have the conviction expressed here on the part of Adam that since all living beings should come forth from Eve, therefore also life in the fullest sense. Life in Scripture often is simply equated with salvation.

The significant way in which the matter is reported leads one to believe that Adam referred to the things implied in the promised victory over Satan, life in the midst of death. It is worth noting that this statement of Adam follows closely upon the announcement of physical death. This fact causes F. Delitzsch to say:

In the very face, therefore, of the death with which he is threatened, the wife is for Adam the security of both, as well for the continuance, as for the victory, of the race; and it is, therefore, a laying hold of the promise and of the grace in the midst of wrath, and with a consciousness of death incurred; in a word, it is an act of faith that Adam names his wife *havah* – Eve... In distinction from אִשָּׁה (woman) this is a proper name which as a memorial of promised grace, as Melancthon calls it, expresses the peculiar significance of this first of wives for humanity and its history.⁴³

⁴² Norman C. Habel, *The Form and Meaning of the Fall Narrative, a Detailed Analysis of Genesis 3* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Print Shop, 1965), p. 41.

⁴³ Quoted by John Peter Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, critical, doctrinal and homiletical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House), Genesis, p. 240.

Von Rad's interpretation is again in keeping with his contemporary form - critical presupposition. He says:

With the penalties in ch. 3: 14-19 which explains aetiologically in faith the severe dissonances and enigmas of human life, a high point, a kind of conclusion, has been reached. By continuing the narrative beyond this critical point, the author, who works altogether with preformed traditions, could not avoid certain irregularities and breaks. The transition from v. 19 to v. 20 has long been considered one such noticeable fracture, and the naming of the woman (a second time, moreover, after ch. 2:23!) was not thought acceptable as the first echo, so to speak, to the penalty.

'Mother of all living' is a name of honor; does it not presuppose, moreover, that she has already borne children? The Aramaic word, too, hewya (serpent), has led to the supposition that at the basis of the narrative there is a very different older form, in which only three acting partners appear: God, man, and a (chthonian?) serpent-deity. But nothing of that kind is palpable. Even though this verse may derive originally from another context and a seam be here recognizable, one must nevertheless seek to understand it in its present place. One must see the man's naming of the woman as an act of faith and certainly not faith in promises that lie hidden, veiled in the penalties, but rather an embracing of life, which as a great miracle and mystery is maintained and carried by the motherhood of woman over hardship and death. We said above, v. 19, that man could regard life in spite of all punishment as maintained and not basically forfeited.

This life, which over and beyond the death of the individual is passed on by mothers, he now takes and blesses even though , it is threatened by death. Who can express the pain, love, and defiance contained in these words.⁴⁴

וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לְאָדָם וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ כְּתָנוּת עוֹר וַיְלַבְּשֵׁם: פ²¹

“And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin and clothed them.”

Also this statement of chapter three falls under the thought carried out by the whole section from verses 7-24, namely the thought that the Lord God revealed the faithfulness of His love toward His fallen creatures. Yes, when man became unfaithful, the Lord remained faithful in His love. In such faithfulness, we are told in this verse, God clothed Adam and his wife appropriately in their shame.

We heard in verse seven that as soon as Adam and Eve had given way to Satan's lie, as soon as they had given up their trust in God and thus lost the precious image of God, shame asserted itself in their lives. Realizing that they no longer had control of their impulses to direct them properly and to use them according to God's holy will, they were conscious of their nakedness. As a result they made immediate, yet ineffective efforts to clothe themselves. They sewed loin cloths of fig leaves for themselves. Still God recognized this sense of shame as serving a vital, wholesome purpose during man's state as a sinner. By providing man with proper clothing God strengthened and fostered this sense of shame. It was to be a help and aid for man in his struggle against sin and temptation.

Let us note again how the creature world is made subject to death and vanity for man's sake. The creature must give up its life to supply man with vital clothing. How God made these garments of skin and how God clothed man is not stated. It could have been by instructing man to slay the animals for their skin and then likewise by directing man in the making of the garments as proper clothing. Our text informs us of the fact. It does not enter in upon the manner.

Edward Young sees a deeper meaning in all this. He writes:

⁴⁴ *Op. Cit.*, p. 93

With respect to this verse that we are now considering it is true that what meets us first of all is the fact that only God can provide an acceptable clothing for man, and to have learned that much is to have learned a great deal. We must remember, however, that the Scripture is dealing with something more profound than man's physical clothing. Those interpreters who have seen in this passage nothing more than a statement about man's oldest clothing or that man's cultural achievements are due to God have completely missed the point of the narrative. It is not mere physical nakedness and physical clothing with which the narrative is concerned.

As physical nakedness after the fall becomes a symbol of shame and shame is a sign of man's spiritually fallen nature, so also the clothing of that nakedness has a spiritual import. Man cannot clothe his nakedness, for man cannot deliver himself from the spiritual bondage into which sin plunged him. To be properly clothed, he must possess a clothing that is acceptable with God, and such clothing must be furnished by God.⁴⁵

Much as we agree with all these thoughts, we cannot share Young's conviction that these thoughts are taught here. Such allegorizing is dangerous in that it would really make the message of Scripture uncertain. Spiritual allegorizing, even when it sets forth vital Scriptural truths taught elsewhere, lends support to the idea that Biblical interpretation is a matter of human ingenuity in discovering rich hidden meanings. It is a different matter when we let the truth that God provided clothing for man's body and bodily nakedness remind us that according to Scripture He did also the much greater thing of clothing man's guilty soul with the garment of His forgiveness.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים הֲלוֹ הָאָדָם הִיָּה כְּאַחַד מִמֶּנּוּ לְדַעַת טוֹב וְרָע וְעַתָּה הוּא כְּנוֹרָא וְלִקְחָה גַם מֵעֵץ הַחַיִּים וְאָכַל וְחַי לְעֹלָם:²²
וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִגֶּן-עֵדֶן לְעַבְדֵי אֶת-הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר לָקַח מִשָּׁם:²³
וַיִּגְרַשׂ אֶת-הָאָדָם וַיִּשְׁכֹּן מִקֵּדֶם לְגִן-עֵדֶן אֶת-הַכַּרְבִּים וְאֵת לְהַט הַחֶרֶב הַמַּתְהַפֶּכֶת לְשָׂמֹר אֶת-דֶּרֶךְ עֵץ הַחַיִּים: ס²⁴

“And the Lord God said: Behold the man is become like one of us with respect to the knowing of good and evil; and now lest he stretch out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever - and the Lord God sent him forth out of the Garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. And He drove the man out and He placed eastward of the Garden of Eden cherubim and the flaming sword, the one that turned back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.”

A great deal is made of the plural, “like one of us.” Some contemporary interpreters see a remnant of polytheism here, taken from the old tradition from which this verse is supposed to have been taken. It is again a case of judging something in the light of presuppositions with which one has started out: there must be sources and so one sees signs and indications of sources. No real evidence is, however, offered or can be offered that Genesis three is a composite of various traditions. As so often, something is extracted from a Biblical statement that has first been placed there by the interpreter's own assumptions.

Others imagine that the plural refers to a divine court, consisting of angelical beings who work with the Lord. This, too, does not fit well into the context. For the specific point in which the likeness of man spoken of here is found is that of knowing good and evil like God. Throughout the chapter the contrast is between God on the one hand and man on the other.

Those fathers of the Church who saw in these words an adumbration of the truth of the Holy Trinity had a deep and penetrating thought, the only one that satisfies in explaining the plural. This plural, like the plurals in the account of the creation of man and like the plural in the very name of God in Hebrew אֱלֹהִים prepares for the

⁴⁵ Edward J. Young, *Genesis 3*, p. 147

fuller Scriptural revelation concerning the great mystery of God's being, the truth that in the unity of the Godhead there are at the same time three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, equal in essence, power, and glory. The unfolding of these truths goes hand in hand with the gradual unfolding and execution of God's plan of salvation.

The Tempter had seduced Eve as he extended the enticing assurance that by eating of the forbidden fruit they would become like God knowing good and evil. God Himself now states that man has indeed become like God in this very matter of knowing good and evil. We are ready to say with Luther that God says this in a divine and holy irony. Yet it is not irony in the sense of venting His amusement upon his fallen creatures. God rather takes note of the sad fact that man has come to a godlike experiential knowledge of good and evil, yet one that is a caricature of the knowledge of good and evil which God had intended for man. Man now knows good as something that he has forfeited and lost. Man now knows evil as something that permeates his being through and through, as something to which he is now enslaved by nature, and against which he must unrelentlessly fight even as he is brought back to faith by God's promise of salvation.

Man had sought to be like God; like God he had become, but in what a perverted sense. He was now the slave of evil. God is good and hates evil. Man is evil and hates that which is good.

This sad situation moved God to cast man out of Paradise. This casting out was one of the evil consequences of sin. Yet it was love which prompted God to cast man out of the special home that God had prepared for him. Man was not to eat of the tree of life and live on forever in his sin-stained condition.

It must have been the original purpose of the tree of life to confirm man in the possession of imperishable physical life and finally to make physical death impossible. In accordance with Luther this need not be thought of as though it was to be effected in a magical way through the tree of life, but rather through a sacramental manner, by virtue of the power of the word of God connected with this tree.

Yet God did not want this to happen. It would have hindered God in carrying out His great salvation through His incarnate Son, the Woman's Seed who was to crush the serpent's head. "Christ's work of restoration would have been precluded, where He changes this body of humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself, (Phil. 3: 2;)"⁴⁶ No, now that man had fallen into sin he was not to live on and on here on earth in his fallen state and in a sin-torn and sin-defaced body, as the obdurate shall live on and on in hell in unrelenting shame and torment. Rather man was to hear the Gospel message in this life that through it he might be brought back to fellowship with God in faith. Then by a blessed death he was to be received into the perfect fellowship of God in heaven. There he "shall eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."⁴⁷ This means that those who overcome, those who by faith enter heaven through a blessed death, shall there enjoy the eternal life in all its fulness which God wanted man to have in Paradise, the eternal life which Jesus has won anew for man after the Fall, the eternal life which he can now, however, enjoy only in heaven. .

Verse 22 is a protasis. It reads: "Behold, the man is become like one of us with respect to the knowing of good and evil; and now lest he stretch out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever. . . ." Now we expect an apodosis such as this: "I shall therefore drive him forth out of the garden." Yet Moses employs an anacoluthon instead. He passes from God's statement of purpose to God's action. The literary device of the anacoluthon is very effective here. There is no need that we be told what God said. To know what God did is fully sufficient. That the tragic possibility mentioned by God might not come to pass, God acted; God expelled man from the garden of Eden.

God had made this garden as a wonderful home for man. God had fitted it out in a way that it could meet all of man's physical needs and at the same time satisfy his deepest yearning for beauty. Here there were trees of every kind, trees for food and trees pleasant to the sight. Here there was gold, bdellium, and the onyx stone near at hand. Here there was a wonderfully arranged river and a constantly rising mist to keep the vegetation of the garden perpetually fresh and fruitful. In tilling and taking care of this garden man was to find satisfying

⁴⁶ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1942), pp. 181-182

⁴⁷ Rev. 2:7

activity, activity that in a pleasurable way was to enlist all of his physical, intellectual, and emotional abilities and capacities.

When God on the seventh day rested from his task of creation with great joy and delight, and satisfaction in the perfection of all that He had made, He blessed this seventh day, made it a source of blessing also for man, the crown of His creation. Man likewise was to find joy and delight in God's works and above all in His bounteous God and Creator, who had made all these things with divine perfection and made them all for man's joy and benefit. This was a rest of blessed fellowship with God. This rest man enjoyed in the Garden of Eden. Here he was to continue to enjoy it.

Amidst such joy and bliss in Paradise man might have been confirmed in holiness. This would have come about if man had continued to exercise and express his trust and thankful love toward God with reference to the tree of the knowing of good and evil. This would have come about as with mind, heart, and will he would consciously have entered in upon that which was good, would consciously have espoused it, and at the same time have rejected that which was evil in God's sight. As it was, man through his sin forfeited this life of blissful, restful fellowship with God. Through sin he had therefore also forfeited the rest and bliss which had once marked life in the Garden of Eden. It would have been futile to have tried to regain it by eating of the tree of life. Quite a different kind of life would have been perpetuated by such an act. The garden was no longer for man. Man's earthly life was henceforth to be spent outside of the garden, to be spent there tilling the ground from which he was taken. What this would mean we heard at length as we considered God's words to Adam and Eve in verses 10-19. It would be a life of wearisome toil and much sorrow and distress, ending in physical death. At that time we also noted fully the purpose of just such a life for fallen man. It was to serve as a time of grace.

Yes, God sent man out of the garden. God did more. He took measures which made it impossible for man to return to the garden and to get at the tree of life. God placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden to prevent reentrance on the part of fallen man.

Scripture does not tell us too much about the cherubim. They are mentioned in Psalm 18:10 and in the tenth chapter of Ezekiel. Figures of cherubim facing each other were placed on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. With their wings they overshadowed the spot on the mercy seat where the blood of atonement was sprinkled in God's holy presence. Figures of cherubim spanned the holy of holies in the Solomonic temple. From all of these Scripture references we can conclude that they are ministering spirits of God, angels, who perform various tasks assigned to them by God; often with their very presence they symbolize the glorious presence and majesty of God. They assume various forms of manifestation, each serving the function for which they are currently employed. These physical forms do not belong to their essence and being as spirits. Though this is not spelled out in so many words, it seems very likely that in their mode of manifestation here at the garden the cherubim wielded the flaming sword which turned every way as an additional deterrent to keep man from attempting to reenter the garden. Literally we are merely told that God likewise placed at the east of the garden the flame of the sword. Yet in Hebrew the construct with its genitive frequently serves the function of our English noun with an adjective.

How long did the cherubim and the flaming sword guard the entrance of the garden? How long did the garden itself continue to exist? God's word is silent concerning both questions, Hence any speculation on our part is futile. As always when Scripture is silent our attention is directed elsewhere. What is to be impressed upon us is the truth that the bliss and glory of the garden is not meant for the earthly life of sinful man. Even Adam and Eve seemed to have had difficulty in submitting to this truth wholeheartedly and in accepting it. For we are not merely told that God sent man out of the Garden of Eden; we hear that God drove man out. God seemingly met with reluctance. This was true even though we noted a reawakened faith in Adam as he named his wife Eve. Yet he, too, had to struggle against his sinful flesh in this faith.

Sinful man still tenaciously clings to the thought that paradisaical bliss and glory may after all be attainable in this life. Though a child of sin and death, man constantly deceives himself into thinking that his malady is after all nothing more than a question of proper environment. Man hopes to reenter paradise by creating a paradisaical environment for himself by finding proper housing, proper schooling, proper recreation,

by bringing about greater wealth, prosperity, and abundance in material things, by making progress in banishing ignorance, poverty, and disease. He even makes heroic efforts to prolong life through the transplanting of vital organs. Thereby we do not want to say that the latter endeavor or any of the things mentioned are in themselves wrong and that they cannot be received with heartfelt thanksgiving as earthly blessings of God. What is wrong, and at the same time vain and futile, is when man directs all his efforts upon a feverish endeavor to turn this earthly life into a new paradise. What is wrong is when sinful man forgets that ever since the Fall the main function of this earthly life is that of serving as a time of grace. Amidst toil, sorrow, and pain as constant reminders of his sin and its curses man during this earthly life is to take refuge in faith to God's Savior-grace held out to him in the Gospel message. He is to do so, so that after returning to the dust from which he was taken he may ultimately rise from the dust in glory for an everlasting and blissful fellowship with God in heaven. For God does promise, Revelation 2:7: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

For the purpose of comparison let us again sample a few comments of contemporary interpreters on points in these concluding verses of chapter three. Concerning the garments of skin in verse 21 Alan Richardson says:

This is no mere childish speculation about the origin of clothing, as the old-fashioned commentaries tell us. Man stands guilty and ashamed before God, yet God respects him in his shame and clothes him with his own hand. Thus man may stand again in the awareness of God - not in the old relationship of innocence but in the relationship of 'religion' (So W. Vischer, p. 64: 'What is religion but man's sense of shame before God, and his attempt to clothe himself in his presence?'); nor yet in the new relationship that Christ establishes - clothed with righteousness (cf. II Cor. 5: 2) . It is of God's merciful goodness that man the sinner is still present to him, his nakedness covered. But there is a further insight here. God drives man out of paradise, but he does not abandon him. He preserves his life; all the 'orders of preservation', by which human life - even the lives of pagans, blasphemers, atheists, and so on - is kept in existence, are in truth evidences of the gracious providence of God which surrounds our sinful race.⁴⁸

Concerning the assertion in verse 22 that "man is become like one of us" Richardson, first of all, refers back to what he had stated relative to the plural form of the divine name in his notes on Genesis 1:1 and 26:

The O.T. writers convey the richly personal or societal nature of God's being by their imagery of God surrounded by his heavenly court, his angels, spirits, ministers - the 'sons of God'. We have here a poetical conception which is spoilt if taken in a woodenly literalistic way (cf. for examples, I Kings 22:19-22; Job 1: 6-12; Isa. 6:1-8) . God is the supreme and 'only' God, but he is not 'alone'. Hence the use of the plural in several passages (e.g., Gen. 1:26, 'Let us make man'; 3:22; 11:7, etc.). The Christian Fathers and the older commentators regarded such passages as adumbration of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Of course the O.T. writers had no such conception in mind; but yet they were in their own way insisting upon the truth which the doctrine of the Trinity teaches - that a 'unitarian' or lonely God is not the God of the historic biblical revelation.⁴⁹

From this viewpoint Richardson says the following concerning the statement: ". . . man is become like one of us":

The phrase means that man has become a responsible being -like the angelic beings who inhabit the heavenly court. But being sinful he must not forever possess attributes and powers which he would terribly abuse. Such a being must not continue forever; his existence must be brought to an end. But God

⁴⁸ Alan Richardson Genesis I-XI, Introduction and Commentary, (London: SCM Press LTD., 1953).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

has made provision for his ultimate redemption and re-creation. Man is to TILL THE GROUND FROM WHENCE HE WAS TAKEN until such time as he may be brought to himself and re-made in the image of God.⁵⁰

Concerning the tree of life Richardson had given the following comments in expounding Genesis 2:9:

Possibly this image is suggested by the primitive legends of magic trees, the fruit of which was a medicine of immortality. But J transmutes the idea far beyond the region of legend and magic. The tree of life represents man's unbroken communion with God. Such communion is proof against mortality. But man by his sin is excluded from unbroken communion with the holy God, as the parable goes on to show (3: 22-24) . The biblical writers look forward to its restoration. Thus, Ezekiel, using this same symbol of the tree of life, envisages the presence of such trees, watered by the river of life which flows out from the Temple in his idealized Jerusalem (Ezek. 47:12) . What the prophet has foreseen in his vision has been eschatologically realized in Jesus Christ - so the author of the Book of Revelation teaches: communion with God is made possible again through Christ. Therefore the seer, using the same symbolism, depicts the tree of life standing in the street of the New Jerusalem by the 'pure river of the water of life': 'and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.' Elsewhere he describes the tree of life as the reward of faithfulness (Rev. 2:7; 22:14).⁵¹

The reader will note that Richardson expresses some thoughts that are very close to what was set forth in our own exposition. Yet the exegetical procedure is quite different. We started out by taking the things and the actions reported throughout Genesis three as actual happenings and as things that really existed. Then we noted how the Scriptures in speaking elsewhere of the restoration of what man lost in paradise uses symbolic language which alludes to the happenings and circumstances of the original paradise. Richardson starts out by assuming symbols in Genesis three which a discerning religious writer of the Solomonic age drew from primitive legends and which he reinterpreted and filled with his deeper religious insights.

We see the same divergent approach in Richardson's comments on the cherubim in verse 24: "*Cherub* (plural, *cherubim*) is a winged sphinx with a human head, appearing frequently in Mesopotamian mythology from early times. In the O.T. it is a symbol denoting God's presence in majesty (e.g. Ps. 18:10) . The CHERUBIM here are appropriate to the poetical form of the parable, as also is THE FLAME OF A SWORD (lit. 'the flame of a whirling sword'). God's decree of expulsion from paradise is enforced by his active power and majesty."

To understand the approach by which Richardson comes to his interpretations we need to know something of his presuppositions, which are clearly set forth in the introduction of his commentary. He accepts the JEDP source analysis of the Pentateuch, though with the following understanding of these sources: "Each of them represents a current of tradition or way of thinking which persists throughout Israel's history, so that it is a mistake to regard J as belonging wholly to the tenth and ninth centuries or P as belonging only to the postexilic period."⁵² Like so many contemporary interpreters he is perfectly willing, however, to make use of criticism of the Bible which leads to conclusions contrary to the Bible's own testimony.

But like so many contemporary interpreters who accept the JEDP sources, he still wants more than documentary analysis. He wants an abiding message from the Bible. He is convinced that the Bible speaks to the people of our day likewise, and, that it is the interpreter's task to discover that message. The trouble is that you cannot get a precise and certain message from the Bible when you start out with the naturalistic premises on which the documentary theories are based. For in accepting these premises and the documentary theories which are deduced from them you cannot take the Scripture at its word in all that it says. Hence everything becomes subjective also when it comes to discovering the abiding message. One interpreter still accepts more than others

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63-64.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

of what the Bible states as belonging to the abiding message. Let us hear what Richardson has to say of the early accounts of Genesis in the light of his acceptance of the JEDP sources:

We must learn to think of the stories of Genesis - the Creation, the Fall, Noah's Ark, the Tower of Babel and the rest - in the same way as we think of the parables of Jesus; they are profoundly symbolic (though not allegorical) stories, which are not to be taken literally true (like the words of a text-book of geology), but which yet bear a meaning that cannot be paraphrased or stated in any other way without losing something of their quality of existential truth. To take them literally is to spoil them and miss their truth just as certainly as to look upon them as 'pre-scientific explanation'. Both taking them literally and dismissing them as legends are errors of spiritual adolescence; it is not the J writer who is immature, but the sophisticated people who have not reached an adult perception of the nature of religious symbolism and imagery.⁵³

Concerning J, to whom he ascribes the account of the Fall, Richardson says:

J (whether man or group) is essentially a prophet. He differs from the great prophets of the eighth and following centuries in that he is not (in the sense in which they were) in rebellion against contemporary civilization. He is rather a mouthpiece of an inward awareness shared by many in preceding generations and doubtless in his own. This is not to say that many of his ideas and practices are not naive and even superstitious if judged by the fuller knowledge of later ages; but then, every age, including our own, has its full share of naiveties and superstitions; credulity would seem to be, a constant factor in all ages of history.⁵⁴

From this sampling of the expositions of Alan Richardson and of the presuppositions as well with which he approaches the Biblical text we can glean a fairly basic picture of the concept of Biblical revelation which is shared by much of contemporary interpretation. Biblical revelation is not understood in the manner in which the Bible itself asserts it, namely, as a direct and inerrant revelation of truth from God, though mediated through human instruments and by means of human language. Instead Biblical revelation is held to consist in the profound religious insights of men of God from various periods of the past. In their presentation of religious truths these prophetic men, of course, also still included some naive and superstitious elements which were inevitable for their day. On the whole, however, they set forth truths which are still recognizable as valid religious truths today. Future generations will continue to recognize them as such abiding truths, though they, too, may have to cull out additional naive and superstitious elements which we still carried along in our understanding of these truths.

Thus Richardson himself writes:

Biblical scholars, however learned, cannot analyse for us the meaning of the parables of Genesis, although they can be an enormous help to us in supplying the essential background information which enables us to relate them to the whole corpus of our knowledge and experience - just as a visit to a cathedral or an art gallery is much more profitable if we have a competent guide. But in the last resort the stories of Genesis must make their own impact upon us; they must speak to us- personally, so that we see for ourselves that the truth which they communicate is true for us.⁵⁵

As we hear these explanations we can very readily understand why this kind of interpretation objects to propositional religious truths, statements of doctrinal truth which are to hold good for all individuals and for all generations.

We have again celebrated Reformation Festival. As we did so we were mindful of the fact that in the days before the Reformation the Bible had been largely taken away from people in the visible church. This was not true in the sense that the Bible had become a forgotten and unknown book, hidden and buried in dusty

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32

libraries. It was not even true that there were universal prohibitions against Bible reading for the laity. No, the Bible had been taken away from the people in a much more subtle way. The Bible had become an unclear and misunderstood, and undervalued, book. More and more people had been conditioned to underrate the Bible as the way to know God, as the prime source for their Christian faith and life. It was stated that the Bible was a difficult book for the ordinary Christian to understand. It was considered much better to rely upon the interpretation of the church, given through its Papal head, the decisions of the church councils, and through the great theologians of the church. As a result, the Gospel, the true message of the Bible, was lost.

Let us realize that in contemporary interpretation we have a similar trend by which people will be robbed of God's Word in the church. This is not done by taking the Bible away from people, but again by devaluing the Scriptures for them as God's inspired and inerrant Word, as the sure and clear source of a saving knowledge of God.

Through contemporary interpretation people within and without the visible church of our day are being conditioned to the idea that the Bible cannot be used just as it reads, that it must first be made relevant to modern man. The idea is widely fostered that the vital truths of Scripture cannot simply be drawn from its clear statements by noting the meaning of words, the grammar, the context, and the figures of speech, if any, that are employed. Contemporary existential, form-critical interpretation holds that it is not possible in this way alone to come to the abiding truths of Scripture. It is held that these truths cannot be summed up in doctrinal formulations which will hold good for every individual and for all generations. It is asserted that people of every generation, and all individually must determine anew what the Bible has to say to them. This is stated with the assumption that what the Bible will have to say to us will not always be quite the same as what it had to say to others in the past, not even the same as what it had to say to the very prophets and apostles who wrote the Holy Scriptures. People are advised to seek guidance from the great contemporary interpreters, who claim to understand advanced human thought and all the superstitions and inadequate concepts and thought patterns of the past, who claim to know the needs of modern man. These interpreters are recommended as able to, help people to decide what may or may not be permitted to stand as still true in the Holy Scriptures. The result will be that people are in danger of losing their Bible, though outwardly they may possess not merely one but a dozen copies. For if the Bible is set forth as an unclear book, its real message, its true message of human sin and of God's saving grace in Christ, will be lost. The Bible will again become a closed and misunderstood book.

Luther came to the firm conviction that the Holy Scriptures are in every word and statement what they claim to be, the divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God. This Word Luther courageously championed and defended against all adulteration, compromise, falsification, and disparagement. For the Gospel's sake we need to do so likewise, also in our interpretation of Genesis III.