

## THE SINS OF SCRIPTURE

Spong, John Shelby. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005),

John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005),

It is a mysterious book, the Bible. It possesses a strange kind of power. It has been the best-selling book in the world every year since printing began. There is hardly a language or a dialect in the world today in to which the words of the Bible have not been translated. Its stories, its words and its phrases have permeated our culture, infiltrating even our subconscious minds.<sup>1</sup>

The words of the Bible enrich our everyday speech whether we are aware of it or not... Far more than anyone realizes, all of Western life has been deeply shared by the fact that content of this Bible has washed over our civilization far more than two thousand years. Biblical concepts are so deeply written into our individual and corporate psyches that even nonbelievers accept them as both inevitable and simply a part of the way life is.<sup>2</sup> [*The Bible influenced many people to do good to others - charity, justice, etc. It affected many people to give their lives for the common good of humanity*].

In the history of Western world however, this bible has also left a trail of pain, horror, blood and death that is undeniable. Yet this fact is not often allowed to rise to consciousness. Biblical words have been used not only to kill, but even to justify that killing. This book has been relentlessly (사정없이) employed by those who say they believe it to be God's Word, to oppress others who have been, according to these believers, defined in the "hallowed" pages of this text as somehow subhuman. Quotations from the Bible have been cited to bless the bloodiest wars. People committed to the Bible have not refrained from using the cruelest form of torture on those whom they believe to have been revealed at the enemies of God in these "sacred" scriptures. A museum display that premiered (공개) in Florence in 1983, and later traveled to the San Diego Museum of Man in 2003, featured the instruments used on heretics by Christians during the Inquisition (문초). They include stretching machines designed literally to pull a person apart, iron collars with spikes (대목, 뽕족한 금속) to penetrate the throat, and instruments that were used to impale (찌르다) the victims. The Bible has been quoted throughout Western history to justify the violence done to racial minorities, women, Jews and homosexual. It might be difficult to some Christians to understand, but it is not difficult to document the terror enacted by believers in the name of the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 3.

<sup>2</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 4.

<sup>3</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 4.

## 7. CREATION

### THE WOMAN IS NOT MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.

*You (woman) destroyed so easily God's image (man). - Tertullian*

Patriarchy and sexism are certainly not limited to our own Judeo-Christian heritage, though that is the channel through which these evils have entered most of us in the Western world. It is also through that particular lens that I will seek to trace their ramifications. Before beginning that, however, I need to note the all but universal quality among human beings of a pro-male, anti-female bias. This realization points us to the fact that there is something deep in the human psyche that fuels an anti-female bias. If it is not a human phenomenon, it is at least present in the depths of the male psyche, and since prejudice is always a reaction to fear, it must, therefore, be assumed that men's hostility toward women expressed a primal threat that needs to be addressed.<sup>4</sup>

Plato, in *The Republic*, recorded Socrates as saying, "Do you know anything at all practiced among mankind in which the male sex is not far better than the female?"

Xenophon stated, "The ideal woman should see as little as possible, hear as little as possible and ask as little as possible."

In the Sacred text of the Hindus, we learn, "It is the highest duty of a woman to immolate (제물로 바치다) herself after her husband's death." In another part of Hindu tradition, we read, "Women are to be debarred from being competent students of Vedas." The Hindu law of Manu state, "In childhood a female is subject to her father. In youth, a female is subject to her husband. When her lord is dead, she shall be subject to her sons. A woman must never be independent."

In Buddhism one is reborn a woman because of one's *fad kama*. Buddhist prayer include: "I pray that I may be reborn as a male in a future existence."

Jewish men are taught, in a book of Jewish prayers, to say, "Blessed be the God who has not created men a heathen, a slave or a woman." Talmudic writers added: "It would be better to burn the words of Torah than to entrust them to a woman."

In the Muslim Quran (Koran) we learn that the woman is regarded as "half a man" and that "forgetfulness overcomes the woman. "They are inherently weaker in rational judgment."

The reason for this overwhelming negativity toward the woman are varied but its reality is consistent. One reason, in early human history, was that woman generally did not grow to be as large as the man and her ability to run and to compete in various test of strength, upon which the survival of the tribe dependent, were obviously limited. She was thus determined to be something of a second-class human being. The vulnerability of the Childbirth process and the necessary dependency the woman exhibited in the later stages of pregnancy and while nursing helped cast her in the role of "the weaker sex."<sup>5</sup>

The study of ancient human traditions has uncovered other source of fear that illumine this inquiry. Anthropologists and mythologists, such as Joseph Campbell, suggest that there was a time in human history when the feminine was the analogy by which God was defined. The fertility cults of prehistory were dedicated to the Earth Mother, who was seen as the source and sustainer of tribal life. In time the male deity who lived beyond the sky and who impregnated the passive Mother Earth with the rain of his divine semen replaced her. This powerful sky deity was modeled after the tribal chief, whose strength led the tribe both in battle and in the hunt. This shift from the earth goddess to the sky god can also be discovered in the lingering tension that existed in the ancient world between nomadic people and agricultural people. The former were always seeking food and water for their herds, which tended to produce a male deity who governed the wind and the rain. The settled agricultural people were more

<sup>4</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 71.

<sup>5</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 72.

intent on causing the earth to bring forth a sufficient amount of food to sustain their life, which tended to produce a female deity of fertility.<sup>6</sup>

There is also a sense in which women were treated in earlier male-dominated societies almost as "prisoners of war." They had few rights. Their freedom was curtailed, both by social pressure and by male power.<sup>7</sup>

If an attitude [toward women] finds expression in every prevailing religious system in the world, and in almost every society, one begins to suspect that this attitude has its roots in something very basic in our humanity. Religion becomes the place where we begin to search for answers to the sin of patriarchy, and when we do so the sins of the scripture in the form of the terrible text about women in the Bible come into view.<sup>8</sup>

Centuries after they [creation stories in Gen. 2: 18-19; 2:20b-23] were written, Paul quoted the words from this ancient Hebrew source to support his negative view of women, and through Paul these words formed the dominant New Testament understanding of a woman. She was not made in the image of God. She was designed to be a male helpmeet, not an independent person. Since this story has been so influential in defining the sexes to this day, it is worth retelling, especially if it can be distanced from the stained-glass accents and pious sounds of scripture and understood not as literal history but as an ancient Hebrew myth.<sup>9</sup>

... So the biblical writers said [understood and interpreted], "This is how the first woman was created." She, like the animals, was made by God, but she, like the animals, was also subject to Adam. He named her, as he had named all of the animals. She did not share his status, his glory or his divine image. He was made by God. She was taken out of his body. He was kin to him in a way that the animals were not, but she was to be subservient, obedient and aware of her second-class status. Her chief role in life was to be the male's helpmeet, to bring him pleasure, to relieve his need for sex and companionship. Sex, incidentally, was originally meant for recreation, not procreation. The story hints that childbirth, with its resultant pain, was punishment handed out after the fall, not something that was part of the original intention of creation.<sup>10</sup>

So in this way, according to this dominant biblical narrative, the sexes - male and female - came into being. Theirs was to be the relationship of the superior to the inferior, of the lordly male to the submissive female, of the master to the servant. No one could argue with this order since this story taught all who read it that this was God's very purpose. To argue was to violate or to subvert God's plan. One relates to this ultimate truth. One does not try to *change* it. So it was that the religious system called Christianity, which grew out of the Jewish womb that birthed this story, carried with this God-given definition of female inferiority and installed it in our civilization as one of its unchallenged suppositions. Women were taught that they fulfilled their purpose by accepting this divinely imposed understanding. If they rebelled, the superior men in their lives could punish them, divorce them, and even kill them without any fear of any other authority. Women were defined as less intelligent than men and therefore, incapable of being educated, entering the professions or voting.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 72.

<sup>7</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 73.

<sup>8</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 74.

<sup>9</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 75.

<sup>10</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 77-78.

<sup>11</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 78.

Long after this story was abandoned as literal history, the implications in this narrative continued to hold sway (기울다, 흔들리다). This is true even today as these definitions splinter (깨지다) and break apart under the impact of our secular society. In the name of God, women are still told that their sole purpose in life is to satisfy the man. They are told to obey their husbands in all things. Slowly but surely patriarchy turned into misogyny (여자를 싫어하기), and we are still dealing with the effects. Can Christianity in particular, or any religious system in general, continue to define any human being as subhuman or second class by nature and expect to be taken seriously by anyone? <sup>12</sup>

The biblical story, however, went on. It was through the subhuman woman that evil entered the goodness of God's creation and subverted it. So the woman is to blame for sin. <sup>13</sup>

## 8. SEXISM IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

*The female agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians.* Pat Robertson [quoted by Spong]. <sup>14</sup>

One of the most sexist institutions in the Western world is the Christian church. Its sexism is deep, pervasive and quite destructive. [Therefore, understanding and interpreting scripture texts are gravely important]. What makes this negativity doubly tragic is that the Christian church has wrapped this evil inside the rhetoric of the sweet piety. For centuries this overt prejudice against women has been called "the sacred tradition of the church." It has been attributed to God and is an expression of the divine will from which there is supposedly no appeal. It has been justified by quotations from the Bible that the church calls the "Word of God" and for which excessive claims for truth have been made. In the Western world it is not easy to escape this systemic sexism. The church's powerful influence has shaped the stereotypes, definitions and role models of what a woman is or can be that permeate not only the religious institutions but the whole culture of our civilization. It has set the limits within which women have been forced to operate. It has introduced responses of both violence and rejection when those limits have been transgressed. It has claimed that to oppose the church's views of human sexuality, and especially the sexuality of a woman, is to oppose God, the Bible and human decency. <sup>15</sup>

It has been nonreligious, secular society that has been the champion and chief ally of women in their quest for equality. [List of women who are working in political arena P. 80. read later and quote if necessary] <sup>16</sup>

In almost every instance of this cultural redefinition process, the Christian church has been on the wrong side of the debate, bitterly resisting what the secular society has acted to empower. Even today as the progress of women in every walk of life continues at a lively and brisk pace, the leaders of the Christian church persist in pontificating (오만한 태도를 보인다) about women, using archaic (원시적인) words to make indefensible (변호할 수 없는) pronouncement (선언) clearly belong to a world that no longer exists. Many of us who still call ourselves Christians find these ecclesiastical spokespersons an

<sup>12</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 78.

<sup>13</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 78.

<sup>14</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* *CRIPTURE* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 79.

<sup>15</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* *RIPTURE* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 79.

<sup>16</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 80.

embarrassment. If one has to cling to antiquated definitions of the past as the price of religious devotion, that price becomes too expensive.<sup>17</sup> Virgin Mary and sexism of woman P. 84-85. 나중에 참고.

Every man [in this generation] raised in what people would call a Christian tradition, was infected with a deeply patriarchal mind-set, which institutional Christianity in all its forms clearly undergirded and enforced. That mind-set was not always conscious, but it was inescapable. It permeated the very air we breathed. It was incorporated into our rules of etiquette and our most intimate sense of the way things were and even ought to be. Sine men of [this generation] were by and large beneficiaries of this patriarchal system we could hardly have been expected to seek its overturn unless something forces reevaluation.<sup>18</sup>

## 9. WOMAN AS THE SOURCE OF EVIL

The ancient Hebrew myths with which the book of Genesis opens describes the biblical understanding of many things. Their purpose was to explain what is. It was men who undoubtedly framed these legends and eventually recorded them, since women in that society had no access to the power that explained God or to the ability to write. Furthermore, women were assumed to have no interest in, or understanding of, the realities of human life. Women thus neither influenced cultural assumptions directly nor shaped primal decisions about the nature of anything nor were they engaged in any decision-making processes. So it should come as no surprise that when this male-written and male-shaped biblical narrative seeks to explain how evil entered into God's good creation, it does so by declaring it to be the fault of that subhuman creature created by God to be the man's helpmeet. Her name was Eve.<sup>19</sup>

In a man's world women have been blamed for many things from that day t

o this. If a man rapes a woman, it is because she has tempted him with provocatively appealing dress. If a man abuse a woman, it is because she irritated him. If a man divorces a woman, it is because she became one with whom he found it no longer tolerable to live. If a woman is competent at playing the man's game, she is put down with suggestion that at best she is a hussy (달아빠진 계집) and at worst a bitch. If she resorts to feminine wiles to achieve her goal, she is playing "the female thing" for all she is worth. These assumptions continue the pattern established in this story told about the Garden of Eden. Eve is the reason for the man's downfall. She was responsible for the introduction of evil into the world. It is a wonderful story, but it is just that: a story. It is the narrative through which our ancestors tried to capture the "truth" of their existence.<sup>20</sup>

All of this, the story suggested, entered human history through the weakness of woman. She was made to bear blame and the guilt. She was the source of death, which was inescapable. It was terrifying charge to lay at the feet of the female, but that is what this primal myth does. It states that the reason evil and death are the most distinguishing marks of our humanity is he woman's disobedience. The apostle Paul certainly contributed to that definition [if we assume all the writings attributed to Paul are the authentic Paul's letters]. So did Augustine, the bishop of Hippo, in the fifth century. He made it the keystone of his thinking, and through him it was destined to dominate Christian thought for a thousand years. To this day this negativity toward women and sex is a major, if subliminal, feature of our religious life.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 80.

<sup>18</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 82.

<sup>19</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 87.

<sup>20</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 87.

<sup>21</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 91.

This is how a "terrible text" works. It is born in a patriarchal myth. That myth eventually loses its original power. No one today, outside the most rabid fundamentalists, think of Adam and Eve as real people. But the poisonous assumptions that were loosed into the bloodstream of Western civilization through the myth continue to live, to grow and to victimize anew in every century. Indeed it was relatively recently that this evil was challenged in the secular society and not surprisingly the challenge was resisted by the church as an act of "godliness."<sup>22</sup>

## 10. MENSTRATION AND THE MALE FEAR OF BLOOD

## 11. RECASTING THE NEGATIVITY

*In Christ ... there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:26-28).*

The Bible, the source of so many texts that have produced unspeakable horrors, at one and the same time can also be a resource to articulate the hopes for human life. There is the minority voices of holy people in the past who saw beyond boundaries of human security needs and whose words were included as nuggets of hope in a book that for many has been the sentence of death.<sup>23</sup>

(바울의 이중성) Paul came out of a rigid and traditional patriarchal background that he reflected over and over when giving instructions to his churches. Women were to keep quite in church (I Cor. 14:34) [if we assume this is an authentic Paul's saying]. Men were not to marry unless they could not control their passion (I Cor. 7:9). Women had to have their heads covered as a sign of respect (I Cor. 11: 5ff). A disciple of Paul's writing in the name of his master, extended Paul's patriarchy when he wrote, "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man" (I Tim. 2:12, NRSV).<sup>24</sup>

(바울의 이중성) Paul was not single-minded on this subject or any other. In every area of his life this man lived in conflict. In the person Paul there was a strange combination. He is defined both by the prejudices he possessed, the rigorous training he had undergone and the binding rigidity of his pious practices; but he is also defined by the freedom and love that he discovered in his conversion experience. Two sides of this man were never to live in reconciliation. Together they created for Paul a state of perpetual turmoil. There was a war, he said, going on in him between his mind and his body (Rom. 7:23ff.), between his past and his present, between his tradition and his eyes, from which Luke said: "scales" had fallen at the time of his meeting with the figure, the memory or even the vision of Jesus (Acts 9:18). Thus we see two sides of Paul, and one of them is quite contrary to the anti-female bias [if we assume he really said that] that has become his major legacy. This other Paul is reflected primarily in the book of Acts in his appreciation of the women who were his co-workers and colleagues - for example, Priscilla, the wife of Aquila (Acts 18:2, 26), Lydia (Acts 16:14, 40) and Chloe (I Cor. 1:11). One listens with wonder to the list of women to whom Paul sends his personal greeting in various epistles (Rom. 16:3, 6, 7, 13, 15; Col. 4:15).<sup>25</sup>

The most overt countering text to Paul's perceived negativity toward women, occurs in Galatians, which is probably Paul's most passionate and therefore most revelatory epistle. Dated around 50-51 CE, it may reveal the real Paul because he is so angry he does not take time to think about what he is saying and

<sup>22</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 92.

<sup>23</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 101.

<sup>24</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 102.

<sup>25</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture RIPTURE* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 102.

edit his words. His Christ experience, he ecstatically proclaims, is so powerful that the barriers erected to keep human beings secure in their self-knowledge, their prejudices and their perennial (끊임없는) struggle to survive their evolutionary history can be transcended. He lists those barriers as tribe, gender and economic bondage. The words "In Christ ... there is neither male nor female" are the part of that text that I want to lift now into our full consciousness. As result of the Christ experience, Paul says, the power equation between men and women - an equation presumed in the past to have been built on the will of God as expressed in the story of creation and used as the basis to impose second-class citizenship - has now been irrevocably broken.<sup>26</sup>

Think about how entrenched (입장을 굳히다) was the view of women that Paul encountered. For long periods of history women were considered to be property, owned first by their fathers and second by their husbands. Recall, for example, that the last commandment orders men not to covet other men's wives or their oxen (Ex. 20:17). Upon that tradition were built laws that enabled polygamy to become a way of life, for if a wife was property, a man could have as many wives as he could afford. These laws refused to allow divorce as an option for women, no matter how abusive the husband was. They fed a tradition that defined women as not educable - not intelligent enough to vote, to own property, to enter the profession or to be part of armed forces. This is what must be set aside, Paul stated in his revolutionary language to the Galatians, for in Christ there is neither male nor female, nor is there superiority or inferiority. Paul was articulating a startling, powerful new reality that exploded into this world in the Christ experience. Paul was suggesting that this is the vision, the experience, the reality that we must recover if the power of anti-female prejudice in Christian history is to be broken.<sup>27</sup>

We move on to the gospels in our quest for other evidence of the fact that this new and profound equality was present before the authority attributed to the patriarchal texts of the Bible began to be used in Christian history to suppress.<sup>28</sup>

Mark tells the story a woman who, in the last week of Jesus' earthly life, broke in upon him at a dinner in Bethany, at the home of a man called Simon the leper. Simon was presumably a cured leper who would have a greater sensitivity toward anyone who might be an outcast. The woman's purpose in interrupting the dinner was to perform an act of devotion. She poured upon Jesus' head and feet a perfume known as nard, imported from India. Her act was a violation of every Jewish patriarchal custom, every defining patriarchal norm, and all the men at the banquet moved to condemn her behavior. If such exceptions were allowed, the prevailing norms would no longer be norms. It was a potentially revolutionary moment. But Jesus is portrayed by Mark as rebuking her tormentors and affirming her right to be present, her actions and her motives. "She has done a beautiful thing," Jesus is quoted as saying. "She has anointed my body beforehand for burying" (Mark 14:3-9).<sup>29</sup>

That same story echoes three more times in the canonical gospels, with interesting variations. In Matthew the events are recounted almost identically: they occur at the same time, in the same place, and with the same result (Matt. 26:6-13). In Luke, however, there is a dramatic shift. The episode does not occur in the last week of Jesus' life, and it is not a prelude to his burial; rather, it is located by Luke in the early Galilean phase of Jesus' ministry (Luke 7:36-50). The setting is not the home of Simon the leper, but the home of Simon the Pharisee; that is, one who is known for upholding the moral norms and cultural taboos of the tradition.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 103.

<sup>27</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 103.

<sup>28</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 103.

<sup>29</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 104.

<sup>30</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 104.

The intruding woman likewise has been heightened in very negative ways in Luke. She is "a woman of the city" - quite clearly, a prostitute. She is unclean and unacceptable. Her actions are much more bizarre, highly sensual and they violate significantly the norms for women in her day. Only in Luke does she wash Jesus' feet with her tears and dry them with her hair. This is highly erotic in a society where a woman would never touch a man in public is a dramatic challenge to the imposed sexual roles of the day. As in the other accounts, the value system of the past emerges in the language employed by the male dinner guests to condemn her behavior roundly. They also condemn Jesus for allowing such provocative sexual actions to be done to him. "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what manner of woman this is." Because he does not condemn her, his credentials as a holy man are compromised in the eyes of the upholders of the moral laws. Because this is an unclean woman who has touched him, he is now, according to Torah, is ceremonially unclean person in need of purification. But Jesus sets aside these patriarchal rules with their doctrines of cleanliness, and in an act of startling freedom he affirms the woman, accepts her action and tears down the barrier that would cause her to be rejected. [He proclaimed a new humanity]. This new humanity transcends every ancient definition, every ancient rule and every ancient religious barrier. Something new is being born. A new consciousness is being formed. The text of the past, which held people inside their defining prejudices, are being set aside.<sup>31</sup>

In one other story (Luke 10: 38-42), Martha demands that Jesus order Mary to abandon the pupil role for the more acceptable domestic role of assisting with the dinner preparations. Jesus upholds Mary and defends her consciousness-raising act by stating that she has elected a higher choice. Jesus is asserting a revolutionary idea: a woman is educable; she can be a learner. Nothing in the new order that he has come to establish rules out this possibility, because in Christ there is neither male nor female. The divine barriers of power and pejorative (멸시적) definition are simply transcended.<sup>32</sup>

**Magdalene:** According to Spong's research, "Magdalene" has no reference whatsoever to a village of Magdala, as many have suggested with the translation "Mary of Magdala." No one has ever been able to locate an ancient village Magdala or any Jewish or Roman record that mentions such a village. Other possibility surfaces: There is a Hebrew word, *migdal*, which has the same consonants as Magdala. Could Magdalene be a play on that word? *Migdal* originally referred to a tower (*a migdal edor*) from which shepherds could view the fields in which their flocks grazed. Such a tower - tall, large and of great significance- is mentioned twice in the Hebrew scriptures (Gen. 35:21. Mic. 4:8). A play on the word would suggest that the early church, by calling Mary "Magdalene," was asserting that she was a tall, large or great figure - that she was "Mary the great" or "the great Mary."<sup>33</sup>

New value of radical equality would become the mark of the church of the future. In that church there would be no barrier erected against women, no attempt to define their worth as second-class citizens. That new church would adhere to the belief that in Christ "there is neither male nor female." As we worked toward that radical equality, the victory for women that has come through the secular society and against the entrenched patriarchy of the church will find a new ally in the Jesus who destroyed power boundaries and power definitions. This Jesus, who related to the primary woman in his life with the power of equal dignity, appears to have called women into a new being, to have enabled them to experience a new humanity.<sup>34</sup>

It is a shame that by denigrating the woman called Magdalene during Christian history, the church destroyed the healthiest female symbol in ancient Christianity. There is no evidence in the Bible to

<sup>31</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 105.

<sup>32</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 106.

<sup>33</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 107.

<sup>34</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 107.

support the familiar claim that Magdalene was a prostitute. That charge was fabricated beginning in the second century of the Common Era, when Greek dualism portrayed flesh as evil. This flesh-and-blood woman at Jesus' side was perceived by the dualism as a threat to his holiness. So the church set about trashing her reputation. Church leaders began to identify her with the woman taken in adultery in John's gospel (8:1-11), though there is not a shred of evidence to support this identification. Just to be safe, they also identified her with the unnamed woman of the city in Luke's gospel (7:36-50), though once again there is not a shred of evidence to support this identification. With her character in tatters, Mary Magdalene was left to play the role of the harlot in Christian history. In her place at Jesus' side, the church installed the sexless, and therefore unthreatening, virgin mother, who was docile, dependent and passive. With two major female figures in the Christian story relegated to the classical roles in male fantasy of virgin and whore, there was no viable female role model left in the Christian story.<sup>35</sup>

A new day is dawning in the lives of 50 percent of the human race. The church that was once the enemy of this new day, quoting and acting upon the basis of biblical text born in patriarchy, could become both the ally of these oppressed ones and the place where a new humanity in which there is neither male nor female can finally be acted out. Magdalene is a role model. The church that adopts this vision will change radically. The church that does not adopt this vision will die! There is no other possibility! Now do you still want to waste your time arguing that the full inclusion of women in the power position of church leadership violates scripture, overturns sacred tradition and threatens the unity of the church? That is the height of suicidal irrelevance for the Christian church. I prefer to grasp the new day, to expose the "sins of the scripture" and to claim the Jesus seen in the often hidden texts of the New Testament as the ally of a new humanity in every form. To follow that Jesus is to know that in Christ, humanity in all its fullness is what counts. Whether that humanity is male or female might determine biological functions, but it must never determine human worth or divine value.<sup>36</sup>

## **12. THE BIBLE AND HOMOSEXUALITY (THE ECCLESIASTICAL BATTLE OVER HOMOSEXUALITY)**

## **13. THE HOLINESS CODE FROM THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS**

## **14. THE STORY OF SODOM**

## **15. THE HOMOPHOBIA OF PAUL**

---

<sup>35</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 108.

<sup>36</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 109.

## 20. **MOVING BEYOND THE DEMEANING GOD INTO THE GOD OF LIFE**

### 이하의 문장을 읽어서 적절한 곳에 넣을 것

To step beyond religion is to grow into human maturity. It is to leave behind all of the security boundaries that we have erected against our fears. It is to recognize that the world is so large that differences can be embraced and honored. It is to step beyond tribal boundaries into a new and fuller sense of human identity. It is that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, Jew nor gentile. Tribal divisions come out of limited consciousness. A universal sense of what it means to be human is a gigantic step into something quite new, an expanded consciousness. Perhaps this is why a gentile soldier was placed at the foot of the cross in the earliest gospel, to point to that life on the cross that had been given away (Mark 15:39), that life that did not grasp at survival. This gentile said that that is what God is like: a life of endless giving, endless loving. Jesus' was a life so full that he did not resist hostility, a life so complete he had no need to cling to survival. His capacity to give was without limit. It was total. Nothing held in reserve. When we read Mark's story of the crucifixion we hear this centurion's words and translate them to say, "Truly this man was the son of God" (15: 39), as if he was affirming the credal orthodoxy of the third and fourth centuries.<sup>37</sup>

That is not what this story means, however. It is a narrative about one who stood on the other side of the great security divide that separated Jews from unclean gentiles and who crossed it to embrace the vision of a new humanity. The experience of Jesus meant to him that human life was not bounded and that God was not external. We human beings enter God and life simultaneously the moment we step beyond our fears and become free. One cannot be human and reject those who are different. One cannot limit God to that sense of holiness we meet only inside the boundaries of tribal worship. That is why Jesus could be heard to say that the first step into God is to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44), or to "do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:27-28). This Jesus was perceived as one who removed all fear.

Perhaps that is why those inside the Christ experience wrote that human life could never have produced the experience they found in him. He must have been of another realm. Perhaps his birth was said to have been announced by a star because a star does not illumine just a single nation; its rays shine over the entire world. His life drew all nations and all people beyond their limits. That is why the wise men came to present him gifts and to worship him. They were gentiles who recognized a new humanity in him. By their gift of gold they pronounced him king, the highest symbol of human achievement. By their gift of frankincense, they acknowledged that humanity at its fullest participates in the meaning of divinity from which it follows that the way into divinity is to become fully human. It was a new consciousness that overcame an old boundary. By their gift of myrrh they acknowledged that it was through the pathway of self-giving, including the giving of one's life, that the way is found into infinity. Death becomes the doorway into life. One dies every time one has the courage to give himself or herself away (Matt. 2:1-12). That is a new consciousness, the doorway into a new humanity. That is the Christ presence.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 290.

<sup>38</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 291.

Are males superior to females, free people superior to slaves, parents superior to children, heterosexuals superior to homosexuals, white people superior to people of color? That is the wisdom of a world dedicated to survival and driving all things into power relationships. But humanity is always impaired when it builds its sense of worth by denigrating the worth of another. What the Jesus experience showed was a vision of a new humanity and in that vision no one is diminished.<sup>39</sup>

Jesus crossed the boundaries separating males from females and invited women into full discipleship. His followers would say that in Christ there is neither male nor female, bond nor free, both of which were radical pronouncements in a rigidly patriarchal and slavery-practicing world. These followers of Jesus would also write that women were the first to stare into a tomb that they perceived could not contain Jesus' humanity and the first to draw the right conclusions (Mark 16, Matt. 28, Luke 24, John 20).<sup>40</sup>

Jesus also embraced the outcast. He touched the rotting flesh of the leper and gave him back his own humanity (Matt. 8:2-3). You are not repulsive, Jesus conveyed; you are human. Jesus welcomed the touch of the woman with the chronic menstrual discharge, though by touching him in her uncleanness she rendered him unclean according to the Torah (Mark 5:25-34). Jesus stood between the woman taken in the act of adultery and her accusers (John 8:1-11). No sinful deed made anyone ultimately rejectable, he said, certainly not worthy of death. That is the power that people experienced in him and it was so freeing, so life-giving, that they said God was in Christ. Given hope by the power, they stepped beyond the barriers of their security and began to taste the new humanity.<sup>41</sup>

Even religious rules are not ultimate, Jesus said time after time. Religious rules are seen to be invested with divine authority only because they have become part of our security systems. But, said Jesus, even the Sabbath is not to be treated as a rule into which human life has to fit. The Sabbath has value only to the degree that it enhances our humanity. The Sabbath was made for human life; human life was not made for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). So it is with every religious doctrine, practice and rule. God is not met in the religious symbols that serve our insecurity and that enable us to pretend that we are the saved, the true believers, the holders of ultimate truth. Those attitudes are not only a reflection of the evil present in religion, but also the sources of enormous human violence and pain. God can never be identified with religion. No human tradition can ever corner the market on salvation and pretend that it controls the only doorway to God. Human folly is all that those claims are!<sup>42</sup>

One who is fully human is not bound by all that seems to bind human life-tribe, prejudice, gender, sexual orientation, religion, finitude, fear. We are free of all of those things. That is the Jesus message. Or as St. Paul once observed, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" No! shouts Paul, answering his own

---

<sup>39</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 291.

<sup>40</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 291.

<sup>41</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 291.

<sup>42</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 292.

question: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35-39).<sup>43</sup>

That is the Christ experience. That is what the New Testament is all about. Jesus, understood as the Christ, is both a call and the empowerment needed to answer that call. The call is to embrace a new humanity, to grasp a new consciousness, to enter a new order of being, to become fully human. The empowerment comes when that new humanity is claimed. Empowerment is experienced in the recognition that humanity and divinity are two sides of the same coin. Was he divine, we ask of Jesus? Yes, but only in the sense that by living fully and freeing his new humanity he was able to enter into the realm of divinity, of God. The two cannot be separated.<sup>44</sup>

The doctrines, dogmas and creeds of our tribal religious past were a stage in our development. They were part of our religious childhood. Nothing more. They are certainly not eternal. When they become lifeless, they should be allowed to die. Artificial respiration of yesterday's religious forms is a pious waste of time and energy. All creeds, doctrines and sacred forms serve only to point toward an experience they can never capture. That is why religious people spend so much time pretending that truth has been secured in these human forms. Our security demands that we be convinced of that. That is why we kill those people who threaten our religious convictions. That is why we reject those people who approach God and truth from a context different from our own. We call them infidels and pagans if they are in different religious systems; heretics if they were once part of our worldview. That is why we play religious games designed to prove our spiritual superiority.<sup>45</sup>

Humanity is expanding in consciousness. In the expansion of that consciousness God is less and less the supernatural parent figure who is our divine protector and becomes instead the ultimate consciousness in which our own consciousness participates and is a part. We cease being dependent recipients and become God-bearers to one another. That is why our ancestors in faith came to experience God in the person of Jesus. This Jesus, they perceived, understood and lived out the fact that he shared in the consciousness of God. He invited us to step into that divine power by stepping into our potential and full humanity. His invitation carried with it the power to risk. By doing these things Jesus reversed the human value system that was dedicated to survival and self-preservation. He lifted up the downcast and humbled those who trusted in their own power (Luke 1:51). He valued the contributions equally of those who had labored only one hour and those who had toiled through the heat of the day (Matt. 20: 1-16). He proclaimed that half- breed heretic Samaritans, when they obeyed the first law of the Torah and showed compassion on those in need, were more the children of Abraham than were the priest and the Levite who passed by without showing compassion (Luke 10:29-37). He honored the prodigal son because he came to himself, and Jesus made him equal to the elder brother who never ventured from home or duty (Luke 15: 11ff.). He ordered the outcasts from the highways and byways to be compelled to come into the kingdom

<sup>43</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 292.

<sup>44</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 292.

<sup>45</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 293.

(Luke 14: 12-24). He placed as great a value on a single lost sheep as on the entire flock (Matt. 18:12, Luke 15:4). He expanded the concept of humanity to include both our enemies and the objects of our prejudice and scorn (Lune 17:16).<sup>46</sup>

He called on his followers to love their enemies (Matt. 5:43) and to be willing to let their enemies love them (Luke 10:29-37). He entered humanity so deeply, possessed his own being so significantly, gave his life and his love away so freely, expanded the boundaries of his existence so totally that he became the human channel through which the reality of God was able to flow into human history. That is what people meant when they said, "God was in Christ." This was the experience that forced them to describe his entrance into life through a miraculous birth, his inability to be bound by finitude and the tomb in his resurrection and his union with God depicted in the cosmic ascension. People experienced in him the in-breaking of the kingdom of God and attributed its signs to him. They saw the fulfillment of the scriptures in him and portrayed him as living out its intimate details.<sup>47</sup>

Jesus was a product of the epic story of the Jews. On the eighth day following his birth, he was circumcised and became part of the Jewish story. Their history was his history. His genealogies portrayed him as the son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1-17, Luke 3:23-38). He was shaped by the epic that produced the tribal religion of the Jews, who understood themselves to be God's favorite ones, God's chosen, who assumed that their enemies were God's enemies who portrayed God rejoicing over the Egyptians who drowned in the Red Sea. But he was also part of the growth of that tribal God through the Exile as reflected in the demands for love and justice that the prophets added to the epic of the Jews. He was heir to the budding universalism that appeared in the latter days of the Jewish story when the Jews' God consciousness began to grow past the model of the tribal deity. Second Isaiah captured that universalism, which Jesus eventually embodied when he wrote, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9).<sup>48</sup>

Jesus seemed to understand that no one can finally fit the holy God into his or her creeds or doctrines. That is idolatry. We cannot continue to create God in our own image and expect God to serve our needs. We cannot continue to pretend that we are the chosen and all other people the unchosen. God is not an idol of our own creation. God is not our parent, our protector, our defender. God does not do our bidding or answer our prayers. God is God. You and I are not. The tribal deity of the Jewish epic was growing with the expanded consciousness of the people.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, in the words of an unknown prophet who called himself the voice crying in the wilderness, a messenger who we know as Malachi, "we hear that the boundaries on God imposed by our security needs are being broken open and the divine shackles are falling off from who God is. Malachi heard God saying, "From the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 1: 11).<sup>50</sup>

Boundless love will even love those who have sought to crucify the Love of God. It includes every

<sup>46</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 293.

<sup>47</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 294.

<sup>48</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 294.

<sup>49</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 294.

<sup>50</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 295.

species, every plant, every planet, every tribe, every person. All become God's chosen. No one is an alien. No one is separate from God. We live in God; God lives in us. We are to be witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and "unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8, KJV). The name of Jesus is now Emmanuel, which means God with us (Matt. 1:23). When he says "Lo I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20, KJV) he is claiming the Emmanuel title. When God is set free as spirit, the boundaries of the nation-states, symbolized by their different languages, are erased and every person speaks the language of a universal love (Acts 2:1-4). As that spirit rolls through history, the barriers fall. Peter hears God say in a dream: "What God has cleansed, you must not call common [or unclean]" (Acts 10:9-16). Peter rises from that vision and baptizes Cornelius the gentile. The Jewish epic breaks into universality and becomes the human epic.<sup>51</sup>

Yes, we see still barriers of tribe, race, sex and religion in the human family. Many there are who think they serve God with murderous acts against the peace of the world. Some are Christians, some are Jews, some are Muslims, some are Hindus, some are Buddhists, but all are serving an idol, a tribal deity whose time in history is passing away. Do not mistake that passing away as something evil, even if it is marked by a rise of human fear and an increase of human hate and human killing. The vision of a new humanity is still emerging, and it will not be denied, for Luke has Jesus proclaim that the kingdom of God is near when sickness dissolves into wholeness (10:9). In Luke Jesus says that the kingdom of God is in the midst of us, that it is within each of us (17: 21).<sup>52</sup>

That is why Jesus is a God experience. That is why he was said to be the life that could not be contained by death or the grave; the life who made God available outside all the forms of the past, including the forms of religion. That is why the Jesus story was grafted onto the Jewish epic and served to increase the pace whereby that epic turned from a tribal history into a universal story of humankind.<sup>53</sup>

#### Reading Scripture as Epic History 297

Jesus is the first fruits of that new humanity .. these scriptures can never again be used to denigrate, hurt, oppress, enslave or diminish the humanity of any person. This is why the church must cease its quest for power, authority and that most insidious temptation of all, internal unity, and begin to transform the world, to reconcile our differences and to make known a barrier-free humanity. We cannot pray the Jesus prayer, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," unless we are willing to act as agents of that in-breaking kingdom by giving up our petty divisions, our excessive claims and our symbols of power and begin to devote all our energies to building a different kind of world.<sup>54</sup>

In the kingdom of God for which our world yearns, every person will have a better opportunity to live fully and thus to worship the God who is the Source of Life; every person will be freed to love wastefully and thus to worship the God who is the Source of Love; and every person will have a better chance to be all that each person can be in the infinite variety of our humanity-every race, ethnic group, gender, sexual orientation-for that is what it means to worship the God who is the Ground of All Being.

<sup>51</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 296.

<sup>52</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 296.

<sup>53</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 296.

<sup>54</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 297.

That is the Christ function and to serve this Christ is the only ministry that the church, which calls itself the Body of Christ, has. All else is human folly born out of human survival games.<sup>55</sup>

Jesus, according to the Fourth Gospel, did not come to make us religious, to make us righteous or moral, or even to make us orthodox. All of those are demonstrably killing formulas throughout our world. John said Jesus had only one purpose and that was to call us into life more abundantly (10:10). That is the meaning of God in our post-tribal and even post-religious world.<sup>56</sup>

The use of the Bible to justify our prejudices must be abandoned. We do not abandon that sacred story in which the sins of scripture are embedded in the "terrible texts," however. We rather claim it for our own. We recognize its humble tribal birthplace.<sup>57</sup>

We celebrate its growth, its breaking of barriers and boundaries. We watch it move from tribal deity to universal deity, and even beyond. Then we observe that in the person of Jesus this God presence drew near and entered our humanity, calling us beyond limits into a new consciousness. We place ourselves in this ever-expanding epic and write the next chapter as we embrace that new humanity. We have entered into the consciousness of God. That is what it means to discover that we are now God's dwelling place. There is no supernatural deity beyond the sky working miracles. There is only a God-infused humanity through whom the Source of Life, the Source of Love and the Ground of Being lives. We are the God-bearers of the world. We must rise to our new vocation and be God for one another. For in each of us is the promise of "Emmanuel," which means God with us. The only way that God can be with us now and through the ages is for each of us to allow God to live and love through us through our humanity.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 297.

<sup>56</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 297.

<sup>57</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 297.

<sup>58</sup> John Shelby Spong. *The Sin of the Scripture* (NY: HarperOne; HarperCollins, 2005), 298.



