

A Vision of Coupled Presence

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ABSTRACT

A white-hair asks, as a man, when I meet a woman, what do I sense? This is answered as a single young man, a married father, a divorced man, and as an elder. From a pre-Sixties youth where sex was religiously defined in terms of marriage and women as mothers-to-be, through the Free Sex movement as a young adult, to experiences of prison sex as a religious radical, into married, divorced and finally elder sexuality, the search is to understand the play of sexuality and intimacy. "Slap the bitch!" prison sex makes clear the source functionality of the mythic Adam's Rib account in determining the currently dominant global view of sexuality and intimacy in the digital age. A vision of coupled presence is presented wherein ritual practices are referenced that enable men and women to embody the fullness of their sexuality and intimacy.

Keywords: free sex; intimacy; prison sex; sexuality; vision.

As I entered my elder years, I realized that in the different phases of my life my interpretation of the relationship between Adam and Eve² drove me to either new insights or profound despair concerning my understanding of femininity and expression of masculinity. Looking back I discerned that the objective of the Garden of Eden story was to answer

1. Francis X. Kroncke, one of the "Minnesota 8" raided Selective Service draft boards in 1970. He served fourteen months of a five-year sentence. A lay theologian and Conscientious Objector, prior to prison he served at the University of Minnesota Newman Center and taught at several Catholic colleges. Later he worked in prison reform for the American Friends Service Committee, completed four years in a joint-doctoral program at UC, Berkeley and the GTU ("ABD") as a religious historian. In 2008, a play, "Peace Crimes: the Minnesota 8 vs. the war," premiered at the University of Minnesota. See, www.minnesota8.net.

2. Genesis 2-3 remains "enormously influential...even now in post-Christian society [it] has a disproportionate amount of currency among the biblically literate and illiterate alike." Deborah W. Rooke, "Feminist Criticism of the Old Testament: Why Bother?" *Feminist Theology* 15.2 (2007), p. 160.

the question, "When in the presence of a woman, what do I sense?" My answer in each phase reflected and enabled me to transform my sense of masculinity.³

Over time, my interpretations justified a relationship of dominance and dominion, then of political and theological revolt, shifting to assessing the story as idiotic and meaningless, and finally to an insight into the hidden revelation of the story, one that presently challenges me more deeply than any other and is source for a vision of coupled presence.

*Part 1*⁴

Q: As a man, when in the presence of a woman, what do I sense?

Since I am a white-hair, let me explore the answers to this question as I would have as a single young man, a married father, a divorced man, and now as an elder.

a. Single Young Man: Religious Sex

I was born in 1944, so life up to my late teens was pre-Sixties, a cultural revolution marker. As a youth I met women as girls, mothers and grandmothers. My imagination was fuelled and bounded by a strict religious tradition in which, for example, to have pre-marital sex meant that you had to marry the woman, if you ever wanted to consider yourself a moral man or right with God. There was a clear and deep divide between the worlds of boys and girls, which was in the main also evident in the secular culture. In the sectarian classroom, there was desk-assigned gender segregation. I attended a Catholic seminary high school and all-male college. The Catholic girls' college was ten miles away. Only seniors could have cars, and few went off campus except on weekends for bar dancing.

This question, back then, was never part of a public conversation. Its unvoiced answer was terse, cloaked within a catechetical tone: "Girls are mothers-to-be."⁵ That described both their functionality and their mystery. As daughters of Eve, functionally they were helpmates and mothers, "And the Lord God said: It is not good for man to be alone: let us make

3. Equally, I faced, "When in the presence of a man, what do I sense?" This question is Part 2.

4. I employ personal narrative with all its myopic pitfalls because of the transformative power of the act of personal witnessing, especially in terms of transforming myself.

5. "The chief effects of the sacrament of Matrimony...the special help of God for husband and wife to love each other faithfully...and to bring up their children properly." *The New Baltimore Catechism* (Catholic Book Publishing Company, 2nd edn, 1962), p. 219, q.466.

him a help like unto himself" (Gen. 2.18).⁶ "And Adam called the name of his wife Eve: because she was the mother of all the living" (3.20). Critically, part of their mystery lay in their being derivative and dependent beings, "And the Lord God built the rib which he took from Adam into a woman: and brought her to Adam. And Adam said: This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh" (2.23-24). Clearly, the intimacy shared with a woman was mainly as a wife but because of a woman's core mystery, that is, her inability to resist serpentine evil, Adam had to go beyond familial paternalism and define their relationship as one of absolute dominance and dominion—sexually, culturally, and spiritually. God's words justified Adam's authoritarianism as he sourced Adam's troubles in his admonishment, "Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife" (3.17). Significantly, I never engaged a woman in a conversation about all this, rather our roles were ingrained through and unchallenged by our catechetical lessons.

Since sex education was non-existent, as were sexual conversations between boys and girls, I learned about females by observing how my father treated my mother and his monitoring of the type of boy he'd let date my older sister. Only if they came from "good" Catholic families and went to Daily Mass would he let them into the house. My father left my instructions as to "the birds and the bees" up to the priestly Father whose eighth grade lecture was, "Hands off! Don't touch!"

In college my date and I prayed together before a statue of the Virgin Mary. She was the Blessed Mother and also the Mother of God, although no one ever called her a goddess.⁷ Praying together was an act of respect toward the woman I was dating. It assured her that as she opened the secrets and mysteries of the feminine world to me, I would remain steadfast in my commitment to her to be a husband-to-be. Together we would venture into the complex world of sexuality with the mutual commitment to become a holy couple.

Marriage was a way to cope with erotic temptations, to protect myself from damnation. Scripture admonished, "But if they can't control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It's better to marry than to burn with lust." (1 Cor. 7.9) I sensed the presence of a woman as casting a seductive spell which could thrust me into the fires of hell.

6. The Douay-Rheims version was the bible of my Catholic youth.

7. "Mary...has nothing of the primal creatrix about her. She is a mere, lowly, mortal woman, 'lifted up' by Yahweh's divinely disembodied attention..." Monica Sjo and Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2nd edn, 1962), p. 350.

Whew! Fatefully, the more I came to desire her as mother-to-be—facing my sexual cravings—the more I came to wanting to cast her aside: “Be gone, demon!” Since “touching yourself” was equally a ticket to damnation, I reached the then sectarian year of decision at twenty-one a physical virgin in all aspects.

The segue to how I answered the question as a married father did not develop as I then or you now might anticipate. At twenty-three, I proposed to a Catholic nurse. Her answer was, “Why?”

b. *Single Young Adult: The Feminist Revolution of Why?*

Two years before hearing “Why?” I encountered my first feminist during a Q&A where I asked a Catholic women’s college professor, “Didn’t Aquinas state that the female is ontologically inferior to the male?”⁸

Thomas Aquinas was a medieval Catholic theologian whose works provided the framework for my college’s curriculum. Since in the Garden of Eden there were just two males: Adam and his Father God, and given that there were no women around—and no Mother Goddess as consort to the Father—he interpreted the divine revelation about men and women in terms of the ontological character and quality of being. Whether or not the rib story was literal or allegorical, the interpretation was that in every way—biologically, psychologically, spiritually—the female was dependent on the male for her being and existence.⁹ It was a short leap to reason that this dependency applied to economics, politics, sports, and so forth.

In my world, then, the rightness of women’s dependence on men had a mythic basis and ontological interpretation which was source for determining a universe of personal relationships, especially sexual ones. The relationship was clear. “God” had revealed how women came to be, so there was not much for a guy and a gal to discuss—we just obeyed. That women through Eve tempted Adam and as a couple they sinned only reinforced the role that Adam, and all males, were to take, that is, to protect women from their own weak character and nature. I

8. “But in a secondary sense the image of God is found in man, and not in woman: for man is the beginning and end of woman; as God is the beginning and end of every creature.” So when the Apostle had said that “man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man,” he adds his reason: “For man is not of woman, but woman of man; and man was not created for woman, but woman for man.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (5 vols.; Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province; Texas: Christian Classics, 1981), I, qu. 93, art. 4 ad 1.

9. Though differing, Aquinas followed St Augustine’s interpretation of Adam and Eve, both inspired by St Paul. Two of Augustine’s five books on Genesis are: *The Fathers of the Church. Vol. 84: St. Augustine on Genesis: Two books on Genesis against the Manichees* and *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book* (trans. R. J. Teske, S.J.; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991).

was to pity them, guide them, and love them because they were ontologically inferior creatures.

The “Why?” from my girlfriend had ontological roots—it challenged the very basis of my understanding of reality. It was truly a question of mythic proportions and significance. Her answer left me speechless. I had expected a yes, was even subconsciously prepared for—though certainly not anticipating—a no. But a “Why?”

Her “Why?” pushed me into the Sixties. During that era, the question was no longer about the mating roles of men and women as much as it was about male and female identity, about masculinity and femininity. It was no longer about coupling but rather individual sexual practice and pleasure. My anticipated transition into being a married man was catastrophically derailed!

Ms *Why?* was a Catholic nurse and we did have conversations—many and clamorous—about Adam and Eve. Her words still echo, “All that’s just crap! Just another male trick to control women.” What was once simply theological was now *personally* political in terms of her no longer accepting herself as “a male prisoner!” That’s how she interpreted Eve coming from Adam’s body. The rib was like the iron bars of a jail cell. More, “The male body is not the birthing body!” Such conversations proved to be no-win situations for me, and any other male, as for her and so many Catholic feminists of the “Beyond God the Father”¹⁰ era, nothing in the biblical story was salvageable. More than that, everything in the biblical story was deemed as demeaning, debasing, and enslaving.

If she didn’t want me to sense her as a mother-to-be, then what was I now, if not a father-to-be? Not to marry meant not to couple. Most shocking, *pre*-marital sex was now a topic, at times the only topic, of discussion between us. “I’ll become a mother when I choose to” became a mantra. Suddenly, women were in control of baby-making. Once on the pill, their “Why?” could be voiced with an air of triumphal conquest, or demeaning condescension to the hapless male, or as a challenge to reimagine the mythic structure of Western culture. I clearly heard all three vocal tones: conquest, condescension, and challenge. When I met a women I sensed... *What actually was I sensing?* Well, I was bewildered, estranged, and unsure how to proceed.

c. “Freedom-from” Free Sex

Free sex continues to be an imprecise, somewhat mystifying phrase. At first, free sex was spoken about as a celebration of a freedom “from.”

10. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

Sexual intercourse was freed from its chained bondage to conception. Women boldly professed, "Our bodies, ourselves!" They brazenly claimed that men must now look at them as individuals—*What?*—as persons! Freed from biological destiny, women were rewriting ontology. They trumpeted: Women and female bodies are *not* derived from the masculine or dependent upon men for their identity or protection. Humorously, these Eves weren't going to stand for Adam's ribbing anymore.

When Hugh Hefner published his "Playboy Philosophy,"¹¹ he made many guys quite happy because his "freedom-from" meant that men had no obligations or responsibilities for what happened to a woman before, during or after sex. He claimed that he was in agreement with feminists—to the consternation of many—because he championed a woman's control over her body and interpreted her newfound equality as making her *an equal* in the war of the sexes. Males were in no way responsible for how women thought, felt, acted, and so on. Vice versa, women could do whatever men could do or what they wanted to do—a guy was simply not to stand in her way. Male nobility lay in being a fair-minded bedmate and seeing to a woman's pleasure.

A peculiar and distinct sensing now manifested itself when in the presence of a woman. She was there for a no-holds-barred, "Let's be honest about this, you want me, I want you, so, *let's fuck!*" The f-word ceased to be deemed offensive as it became the simplest way of describing what women were now able to say and do that men had always said and done.

Right off, I found *Playboy* to be virulently anti-female. Women were even less than human; they were bodies to be played with, playmates—more honestly, fuck-mates. In the morning-after, not knowing a fuck-mate's name was acceptable. On this turf, free sex was the acceptable practice of mutual masturbation. Getting off was the prime concern, and the courtesy was that one take no more than they gave. A certain arithmetic equation of fairness emerged as standard operating procedure.

Hefner and the freedom-from feminists made the bed just a place to "do it." Much as in the biblical mythic tradition, Hefner's Adams did not see women as persons. Amazingly, the more naked they became each ensuing year in *Playboy's* centerfold, the less visible these Playmates became as humans, ending up simply as embodied sex toys. Of course, women were free now to see men in the same light—as "boy toys."

11. <http://brentdanley.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2007/04/theplayboyphilosophy.pdf> (published in 1962).

Hefner reigned triumphant. Ironically, while many feminists rejected the biblical male god, they adopted Hef's secular patriarchal version of free sex. Likewise, although other feminists scorned his bosomy Playmates, they accepted—even promoted—the rise of “sex workers.”¹² A host of associated traditional values shifted. Single-mother families became common. For many, serial monogamy replaced marriage. Infidelity bore little stigma. Pornography became a respected industry, even a career choice.

Over time, these “freedom-from” sexual revolutionaries broke down the barricades of tradition and stormed the Bastille of middle-class morality. Sexual athleticism became normative, inspired by the explosion of Internet porn sites. The sex toy industry skyrocketed to the status of a serious investment opportunity. Free-sex couplings proliferated into groups—from threesomes to gangbang orgies. Non-traditional families emerged, practicing polygamy, polyandry and other formats. The concepts of sexuality and gender were distinguished, and heterosexuality acquired equal footing with homosexuality, bisexuality, transgender sexuality, and for some, even inter-species sexuality.

Truth be told, I hated being a nameless fuck. I was supposed to wallow in the wild pleasures of feverish orgies, grunt and snort my bestial sounds, and awaken from my erotically drugged bliss a sated male. Tellingly, although free sex was rocking my religious morals, I was more absorbed by my struggle to ground my growing anti-war nonviolent pacifism in a Christian theological tradition. Publicly declaring that I did not want to participate in the male orgy of war's erotic craziness—rape, murder of the elderly and the young, torture and bestial forays—caused no end of agony. “Are you a fag?” was publicly thrown at me in the fall of 1968, when this term still meant “not a real man.” I must admit that I was failing miserably in integrating both nonviolence and free sex into my life.

By summer's end of 1968 I had a Master's in theology, had lived in the Haight-Ashbury, and during the hippie “Summer of Love” often strolled through Golden Gate Park, wading in and out of billowing clouds of fragrant smoke, watching diaphanous sprites crowned by flowers seemingly fly between dimensions—between my staid world and theirs of freedom-from-everything.

Ironically, as my theology, politics, and sexual practices became more radical my nonviolent masculinity was boldly challenged and criticized by radical feminists, especially by my first true love. When Ms *Why?* first entered my life, she was just finding feminism as a justice cause as I was discovering peacemaking as mine. Our paths began to diverge as

12. “Feminists for Free Expression,” http://www.ffeuusa.org/html/statements/statements_pornography.html

her feminism damned every male—pro or anti-war—as simply beyond the pale: in essence, ontologically violent, irredeemably so.¹³

I felt robbed of two treasured aspects of my masculinity. One, I couldn't be nonviolent and considered a "regular guy." Two, I steadfastly wanted to marry and become a dad.

d. "*Freedom-for*" *Free Sex*

Ms *Why?* moved into an all-woman commune—awkwardly, we adopted a politically correct style of dating where we made love only at my place, never at the commune. For her, *freedom-for* was a clear choice—to explore her lesbian self. She flipped the mythic story upside down. The biblical imagery that had been translated for millennia into a woman's accepting that her body was *not* her own—it was her man's—was replaced by her revolutionary claim, "My body, myself!" Instead of a subservient Eve being derived from her man's flesh, she thundered, "I am woman, hear me roar!" But what was this revolutionary woman roaring? As a guy I heard an echoing series of *Why*'s? Why marry? Why can't I be on top? Why do we stop after you ejaculate? Why am I not satisfied by just one man? *Why can't I have a lesbian lover and you, too? Why...?*

All this was bewildering, at times deeply embittering. Yet since the feminist struggle for justice was so closely aligned to my own core struggle to become a nonviolent male,¹⁴ the times were more often bitter-sweet as I was simultaneously hurt by, while supportive of, my lover's transformation. It was clear that the bed was at the front line of revolutionary activity in respect to whatever "*freedom-for*" free sex meant. For me it meant heeding the call for a radical reimagining of sexuality's mythic significance—asking, *Who is woman if not Eve?*

Her clarity, however, thrust me into darkness. If her body was not for baby-making, what the hell was I supposed to do with her? Worse: what was I supposed to do with *my* body? Especially when I and so many guys were rocked by despair when hearing that a woman *can have multiple orgasms!* Women were roaring *Why?* and penises were shriveling as men were also hearing, "No. It wasn't good for me." This stunning reply led to demands by females that we males satisfy them...even that a woman be satisfied before her man or—*gasp!*—when he was not.

13. Valerie Solanas, "S.C.U.M. Manifesto" (Society for Cutting Up Men), <http://www.womynkind.org/scum.htm>

14. After serving two years of Alternative Service as a Conscientious Objector, in 1970 as a "Catholic Radical" I raided Selective Service draft boards and went on trial as one of the "Minnesota 8." I began serving a five-year sentence in 1972. Francis X. Kroncke, "Resistance as Sacrament," *Cross Currents* 21.4 (1971), pp. 369–76. And "Prison, Bottoming Out, the Mother," *Cross Currents* 28.1 (1988), pp. 53–63 <http://www.minnesota8.net>

Given the still regnant law of the male universe that a guy who didn't ejaculate was no man at all, this womanly screed—"I can't get no satisfaction!"—volcanically rocked the personal and collective male ego.

Before prison, Ms *Why?* and I lived together and explored freedom-for. I was unprepared to respond to her roaring power. We floundered, at times struck gold, even shared moments of ecstasy. In awe, I knelt beside her and was seductively entranced by every aspect of her body. As I learned patience and practiced exploratory self-control, her body continually surprised me with pleasures and unnerving insights, and induced a total change in how I sensed my own male body.

A confession: I first learned about female genitalia by secreting a urology textbook under my (pre-collegiate) novice monk's robes and poring over it in my monastic cell. Even more than most young men during their first sexual escapade I slavishly followed my penis more than my brain as it seemed oriented like a magnet to the North Pole. *Somehow* I consummated the act.

Truly, we experienced radical changes in our depth of intimacy. We became co-creators, the male and the female weaving in and out of one another through uninhibited sensual explorations. I tasted her, moving my whole body in gustatory delight over hers. I smelled her rich aromas, taking time to flow with the heat rising from our lusty embraces. We were touch, often lingering long hours, relaxing—toes wiggling and fingertips dancing and kisses that pressed our hearts into every crevice and corner of our fleshy geography. I heard her fully name and deeply express my maleness and my precious heart as she whispered, teased me, shouted across the room and breathed quietly, "I love you, Francis." Nevertheless, we were unable to mould a "normal relationship." What was normal anymore, anyway? Unhappily, we agreed that we could not stay together. She argued—and I came to despondently accept—that only by being intimate with another woman could she honestly open herself to herself as goddess. No male, least of all me, could do that, not back then.

My white-haired self howls in grief and joy as I remember these years. Oh, how truly sad that we lacked a robust language of sexual intimacy. We had more freedom-from than freedom-for language. Nevertheless, the one word I discovered with her was *goddess*—freedom-for discovering her as goddess and the goddess within me.

Experimentation

Once freed from the world of Adamic males, women sought to plumb the mythic depths.¹⁵ If not bound to men, weren't women free to experi-

15. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Goddess: 20th*

ment with sexual relationships with other women? In the same vein, men with men?¹⁶ *Gay* became a code word of freedom-for, and *Ms Why?* heralded lesbian love-making as an act of social justice. While lesbianism existed in prior times and all cultures, radical lesbians were dethroning the male Father God as they (re)discovered the female Mother Goddess. Wondrously, lesbians found the Mother Goddess through embracing the bodies of her daughters: each and every woman, in her flesh, was the presence of the Mother Goddess—and these goddesses thundered! *Ms Why?*, on a prison visit, revealed her commitment to an exclusive lesbian commune. I complied mainly because I was facing a five-year stint. Savagely, her words roared through my heart and soul and tore me apart.

Although, in theological terms, I judged the rib account to be idiotic and spiritually meaningless, I had to admit that Hefner's secular Adamic freedom-from overshadowed freedom-for free sex and continued to rule both the secular and religious erotic imagination, arguably of the world. As much as early feminists strove to stake out their bodies as "ourselves," it was clear that Hefner's males continued to dominate in all areas of the culture and society. It has proven true over time that freedom-from feminism exists because it remains to the advantage of males for it to do so. Freedom-from free sex continues to be a dominating, patriarchal male's greatest primal fantasy—it echoes with a satisfying biblical affirmation, "And God (the Male) saw that it was good!"

In time, I aligned with the emerging men's movement¹⁷ (and those feminists)¹⁸ who challenged the assumptions and practices of "freedom-from" free sex. In "men's groups," we wondered what free sex was as a "freedom for." We wanted more than either the old biblical or Hef's way offered. We accepted that freedom-from had its moments but that in sum it drew out the worst in most males and females. Notably, freedom-from seemed to fit a single lifestyle but not a married one.

Anniversary Edition (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1999) and *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex, and Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 15th Anniv. edn, 1997). See "Tangled Web," <http://www.starhawk.org/> In the Catholic tradition, Mary Hunt's "Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual" (WATER), <http://waterwomensalliance.org>.

16. Gay radicals "came out" at and joined draft raiding groups that I participated in during 1969–1970.

17. The Mankind Project's *New Warrior Training*: "Men not afraid to revolt against repressive social norms, take off their masks, and break through their personal barriers." <http://mankindproject.org/>

18. "Starhawk does not accept the Dianic form of separatist witchcraft...seeking instead to include both men and women in her covens." Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 282.

e. Married Sex

My “Peace now!” Sixties ended when I left prison in 1973. Broken by my failure to bring peace or move my church even an iota toward non-violence, I simply abandoned the theological and spiritual framework I had cobbled together to survive all the violences and heartbreak of the “times they are a changin’.” During parole I directed a prison reform project and married a co-worker. We supported radical feminist causes. She didn’t share my Catholic background, but prison had catapulted me out of my religious comfort zone and parenting became our marrying bond. We raised two sons and stayed married for twenty-eight years.

These were churchless years and I consciously kept my sons from hearing biblical stories. Yet I accepted that I was powerless to prevent Hef’s secular interpretation of Adam and Eve’s sexual roles from impacting their answer to my question of “When...?” However, as I had observed my father’s relationship with my mother, so my sons saw a parenting relationship based upon respect, public affection, vigorous discussions about the rights of women, and deep questioning about what it means to be a male and a man. They also observed their father exploring pagan spiritual ways as their mother remained personally committed to Jesus.

While parenting remains the most fulfilling and gratifying experience of my life—as my married years took me deep into my mothering masculinity (a gift of my wife’s love)—my insights into the possibility of coupled presence only began to solidify around our twenty-fifth anniversary as we were entering our empty-nest period. A childless house moved me to reflect and ask, *Why are we together?*

Why are we together? forced me to look at our married sexuality. Raising kids diverts the river of coupled sexual energy into many draining side-streams. As parents know, children *are* sexual energy in that they innervate and enervate the coupled libido. Without being conscious of the fact, replacing freedom-from free sex was freedom-for familial love. Humorously, it was a variant of group sex—not just a coupled embrace but a family hug-fest. At any moment, Mom and Dad were on point, ready to care for and be amazed by the boys. We channeled our eros through nurturing, teaching, playing, healing, protecting...through parenting.

Jokes about married sex being “no sex at all” touches on a truth that is a taproot to a greater insight, namely, that family love is, erotically, a whole that’s greater than the sum of its parts.

I was not prepared to grasp what my wife was experiencing as she transformed herself into mother and me into father and us from a couple into a family—blossoming from lovers into parents. She had risked her

life, submitting her body to explosive creational forces, simply to nurture another human person to the Earth. If you're a guy and half-awake, the ecstasy of family love is sourced in this evolutionary mundane miracle of birth—which is a mind-boggling, heart-stomping, amazing *wow!*

"The mother of my child." It took me back to my earlier years. A sense of worship filled me. At the family birthing moment, I was back inside the Garden—but now aware that its Adamic revelation was the greatest of lies. Truth: it was she, this woman, my lover, my wife, my parenting mate, who made clear the revelation that for life to be, there must be a Mother Goddess—truly, I met *her* in her!

Married eroticism is the unleashing of the creational power of intimacy. Coupling was a moving beyond who we were as individuals and as a twosome. We beheld our child—whose body was hers and mine. We stood in amazement at what we had done, *together*. Finally, I knew why men and women couple: it is to be for the other the body through which each encounters and expresses Her and Him, the male and the female. By myself I am only male; by herself, only female. Coupled in family intimacy, we embody the creative life force—that never-ending love that rejoices ecstatically as a new human heart beats.

My answer to *Why?* found expression in the imagery of two candles. Distinct candles when merging their flames flare-up as One, a new thirdness, more than the sum of its parts. This thirdness is an experience of sacredness, of a wholeness as a Divine Couple. Nevertheless, while successful at parenting, we were less so at moving beyond the traditional roles—a shared generational liability. We grew up when boys and girls were not expected to be friends, even engage in deep conversations. Girls did not play like boys did, and the notion of being companions had no rootage. The answer to this second *Why* are we together? was much like the first. It caused an upheaval in my life; we divorced.

f. *Divorced Sex*

It was often hilarious to be "single again." Simply, I really couldn't be. I was a married male and you really can't unmarry and revert to singlehood. Once a family man, I cannot be anything but that. I knew my body in ways that single men don't and cannot. I looked at a woman and was aware of a potent intimacy co-creator—even if not of biological children, of an adventure into life's deepest mysteries. I had lived intimately with the moon mysteries of a beloved woman. I aged with her, shared the hard-earned wisdom of parenting, and faced life at its edges where both the deepest, darkest fears lie as well as the most unfathomable joys.

Dating? "Free sex" was coined in my generation, now I was dating the second wave of feminists for whom Hefner's "freedom-from" free

sex was a given. *Confession*: I got roundly schooled by women ten years or so younger than me. They regaled — and teased — me with adventures as “players” hobnobbing with jet-set millionaires, cavorting at the *Playboy* mansion, and engaging in every type of sexual athleticism imaginable. A telling event was my inability even to comprehend the question, “Do you think masturbation is a private or public thing?” Yet, there was a relaxedness about their casualness about sexuality that was comforting. Sensuality, even more than sexual acts, was more often the playing field. The sex toying-around led to erotic adventures not imaginable in my youth. The bottom line, however, was that the challenge remained — how to creatively engage one another in transformative acts that deepened our coupling.

Critically, from my observations it seemed that the second, even third, wave of feminists were basically survivors in an all-male world that was even more anti-woman than ever. Both the sexually athletic young and the drugged Viagra old males were simply in control of everything in that their “freedom-from” maleness came with little or no responsibility or obligation when it came to sex and/or the development of families.

What shocked me the most were the stories of sexual violence and abuse. In my youth a man who hit a woman was considered weak and despicable. These women were saying that such abuse was simply covered up in my time. Then I was rocked to my core by accounts of incest — which in time I grasped also happened to young boys. Violence against children was one of the horrors I had always challenged pro-war people and militarists to admit happened more than any other type of battlefield violence. Although the prevalence of incest in the secular culture shocked me, I was absolutely blown away by the rising accusations about holy molestation. I was re-entering the dating world about the time that the Catholic Church was being rent asunder by the victims of priestly sexual abuse, especially paedophilia. I had not personally experienced that horror, but former fellow seminarians and priest friends saddened me with their corroborating accounts.

Perplexingly, divorced sex also meant developing Internet-based “virtual relationships.” As a Cable TV national sales manager, we sold Hefner’s *Playboy* channel and other sex programming. Knowing my monastic past, the president asked if I had any qualms about selling smut. I was in my married phase, working hard, and simply shrugged it off as a freedom of individual choice situation. Ironically, my divorced self had to face what I helped promote: a global network of hyper-violent, demeaning erotica that included online dating sites but which was primarily driven, economically and in viewership, by pornography. By this

time, *pornography* was freed of its sinful aura and replaced by a notion of its therapeutic benefits expressed in terms of sexual health.

I laugh when I place my monk-hiding-urolgy-book escapade against surfing the Net and encountering every sexual act that I had only heard about as abominable and perverse in my youth. Oral sex had become mainstream during Hefner's early rise when he, amusingly in retrospect, self-regulated and showed only air-brushed mammaries and seductive poses of naked girls. For a time even Hef was caught with his pants-up as Internet porn sites showed pubic hair, in time shaved genitals—total exposure, front-door and back-door; eventually Hef adapted.

Internet porn sites reflect a certain kind of success. Guys are definitely free to probe, poke, lick, sniff and fuck any part of the female body—no restrictions. They can choose to ejaculate inside or outside or anywhere they want. Of course, women are empowered to say no to these male attempts. Since sex remained a mythic Garden event for me, all that I was getting from Internet porn was a greater appreciation of my Adamic self. Virtual women were trifling beings who properly worshipped my phallic self. All praise be to our erotic guru, Hef! (*Not really.*)

In divorcing I was hoping that there was another road. The first "Why?" had been asked by my lover; this second "Why are we together?"—was mine. This second road was dimly lit and simply frightening in that I had to accept that it might lead nowhere, possibly only to a precipice of life-ending loneliness. Or—my wager—to extraordinary depths of intimacy.

g. *Sexual Shadows: Prison and Intimacy*

The road that I would take was not the one so commonly walked by divorced men of my age—the Viagra thrill of "balling again!" I did not revel in my release from the marriage bond, eager to make up for lost time and go about screwing every female in sight. Marriage had hinted at depths of intimacy that I wanted more, not less of from a relationship. I wanted to discover freedom-for in ways unimaginable up to this time.

One pivotal moment was my wife's response—defining her own chosen spiritual and erotic path—that she didn't want me to approach her as a goddess. When she said that, I realized that that was exactly what I was seeking: to be present to the goddess. Mine, I sensed, would be an arduous mythic adventure.

In my youth, the word *goddess* existed only in anthropology textbooks. No one worshipped a goddess, except pagans in need of salvation. During the freedom-from era, the term *sex-goddess* was bantered about but not with a tone of reverence so much as describing an over-

sexed playmate. Many academic feminists scoured past mythologies in an attempt to revive a goddess culture.¹⁹ While a lot of that spoke to me, what changed everything was my experience as a sexual prisoner.

In prison, sexual violence redeems, justifies, sates, and renders the errant soul whole (*whole*, because sexual violence is often the initiatory rite for prison gang membership). Sodomy is both punishment and reward. There I became the Man's bitch as everything that empowers a male was stripped from me. In a telling reversal, I experienced "my body, *not* myself." I lived in a collective and had no personal space—definitely no intimate space. I had no right to my own body, no control over my private parts. My name—now inmate 8867-147. My property—an unlocked three-by-three cubicle. My power—doors had no knobs and were opened by asking the Man. My privacy—not only doorless crappers but at any moment I was his to command: strip down, run hands through my hair, stretch wide my mouth, bend over, "Spread 'em!" baton molestation. More, I slept with up to seventy men double-bunked. Lights out meant listening to the groaning, bed-spring-creaking "Slap the bitch!" romantic banter of prison's sodomitic darkness.

In other articles²⁰ I have written about prison as a patriarchal feminization process and about discerning the presence of a Mother goddess who kept me alive to suffer but did not comfort or soothe me. Here I reflect that my search for the goddess in the body of a woman first came to me in the body of a male—myself, as I confronted and embodied my male Shadow as I simultaneously became a fag as I surrendered to the truth that *I am the Man's bitch!*

Prison broke me, as it does most, and I became a bitch and a fag.²¹ I was pushed into the deepest realm of darkness where I felt myself embodied as Other in the most despised of ways. I sensed in my flesh that I was what the dominant culture hated the most and which was mythically denied—a Mother. I realized that without a Mother Goddess women can only be bitches, remaining chained down in the darkest Shadow realm of society and culture. Likewise, without a Mother Goddess, "mothering men" can only be fags in the same Shadow imprisoning realm. I realized at this moment of insight why my nonviolent theology and political actions had been doomed to fail. Simply, I could not publically or spiritually express my mothering masculinity (as non-violent, as father, as brother lover) since I had no mythic Mother to model and teach me mothering. Only when I embodied myself as bitch

19. Sjo and Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother*. Ruether, *Goddesses*.

20. Francis X. Kroncke, "An Outlaw's Theology," *Cross Currents* 61.2 (2011), pp. 245–67 and "Prison," pp. 53–63.

21. I asked, "Was Jesus a Fag?" in Kroncke, "Prison," pp. 58–60.

and fag was I truly released from prison's darkness and, like the Phoenix, soared like a firebird! Only then did I become a divine Mother...and so a divine Father. Only then did I tap into the power of unconditional love—able to nurture myself and every other child on Earth.

Although I internally embraced myself as bitch and fag and so manifested the presence of Mother and Father, to move forward and express outward love to all, I sensed that I had to create a coupled presence that embodied and manifested the Divine Couple who would love all Earth's children. Clearly, I could not plumb the depths of my mothering masculinity, alone. Unlike Adam, I realized that I had an Earth mother who herself had manifested the Divine Mother as she birthed me. Now for me to birth a holy family of all Earth's children I would need to manifest a coupled presence—she and I as Divine Couple of a holy family.

h. Elder Intimacy: The Beloved and Coupled Presence

As with my wife, most elder women with feminist leanings could shed every aspect of biblical patriarchy except the ontology of monotheism.²² In prison I had met a Shadow Mother and after developing a methodology based upon that experience I sensed the presence of a Shadow Mother in Genesis 2–3.²³ I further realized that Genesis 1's "let us" passage offered an ontological insight into the polytheistic presence during Creation. This was consonant with the implication of the biblical God's assertion that he was *one among many* as he commanded, "I am the Lord your God... You shall have *no other gods* before me...you shall not bow down to them or serve them." Biblical monotheism is a choice. Polytheism is the ontological reality. Yet worshipping Her is the most challenging step for most feminists (men and women) to take. For me, unless I could worship Her in her, I would never be able to worship the Him in me.²⁴

22. Phyllis Trible challenged the biblical patriarchal structure. "To reclaim the image of God female is to become aware of the male idolatry that has long infested faith," in "Feminist Hermeneutics and Biblical Studies," *Christian Century* (1982), p. 117. In *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) she did not abandon the ontology of monotheism: "God is neither male nor female, nor a combination of the two" (p. 21). In 2003, she reaffirmed her conviction: "Reflections on the 25th Anniversary of *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*," *Lexington Theological Quarterly*, pp. 21–26. Likewise, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) controversially claimed that God's body was "veiled rather than nonexistent" (p. 22) but only "embracing a fatherly image of God" was possible: "Instead of feminizing men so they can have an intimate relationship with a male God, we might feminize this god, without always making him into a goddess" (p. 240).

23. Kroncke, "An Outlaw's Theology."

24. The ontology of the biblical Divine Couple remains unresolved: "Through-

Elder Women and Mother Goddess

As an elder, I met women for whom the answer to *Why are we together?* was to “Rock the kosmos!” by claiming intimacy in terms of embracing their full humanity. Some with similar backgrounds were thea-ologists. Others sensed that they would find their full femaleness by embracing their maleness, through me and other men. Together, we moved into an unbounded, unmapped and wilding place where we intentionally confronted the depths of ourselves, mainly through improvised rituals.²⁵

Over time innovative language fragments and novel images emerged as we experimented with rituals of coupling. We discussed how to create safe ritual zones through which we could enter the depths of our Shadow worlds and emerge back into the Light. Our couplings required a fresh approach to our bodies: as singular, embraced and integrated. Our quest was to embody the world and all time in the now—to evoke a mythic moment. As a male this was my first female step, much like a woman embodying seed to incarnate another human life. For her it was a first manly step in that she had to conquer her deep fear of exposing herself to my chthonic sexual violence—she was Eve facing Adam, fearlessly. We grasped that the Adam and Eve story’s masked revelation was about the creative power resident in intimacy—sacred sexuality. In counterpoint, we didn’t want to honour the biblical tradition in any way and felt that our rituals actually exorcized the millennia of woman and Mother Goddess-hating energy that Genesis spewed. We set forth to heal one another, to become whole, to become the ecstatic oneness that emerges when two commune.

We meditated, prepared ourselves to boldly enter unexplored dimensions. We dedicated ourselves to each other. We blessed one another. We kissed in trust. We became moon and sun, rain and dirt, fire and wind. She was me and I was her, deepening our individuality by plunging into a *we*.

out scholarly research, the referent of the divine plural in Genesis 1 has experienced a proliferation of interpretations accompanied by a lack of consensus.” Thomas A. Keiser, “The Divine Plural: A Literary-Contextual Argument for Plurality in the Godhead,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34.2 (2009), p. 131.

25. I heeded the call implicit in Riane Eisler, *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995). “Today our sacred images and myths tend to focus more on death, punishment, and pain than on sex, birth, and pleasure. We no longer celebrate the return of life every spring, nor do we have images of the vulva and phallus as sacred. Neither do we any longer have stories in our religious mythology in which nature’s cyclical movements from dark to light, cold to warm, and especially fallowness to fruitfulness are linked with our own human cycles of life and death—stories in which the Earth from which life springs every year is imaged as a Great Mother to whose womb all life returns, like cycles of vegetation, to be reborn” (p. 376).

We held our bodies as intimacy maps to be explored. As crone and coot, as witch and wizard, as so old that we were childishly young once again, we kissed and pranced casting ourselves into a magical world such that all around us were the many dimensions of life itself, the many selves each of us was within; and it was a wondering that took us wandering into the Shadow and the Light.

We explored our genital selves, reclaiming them not only as parts of our bodily whole but as portals to open to venture into the depths of our personal intimacy. With humility, I communed with her womb. The act of intimate coupling became a search to manifest a wondrous presence of us as a unique "we." Just as prison sapped me of personal identity and reduced me to inmate 8867-147, so, in the reverse, within the precious intimate embrace a novel coupled presence emerged. We called our communing self by a sweet lover's name—"Beloved!"

My elder answer then is: When I meet a woman, I sense the Mother Goddess within myself. I also sense how she experiences herself as the Father God within herself when she meets me.

Coupled Presence

I celebrate my precious Beloved: The sheer delicacy of her undoes me. I who am bone and muscle, the conqueror, the smithy at the forge, manipulating the life we share, find myself but a whimper in her ear, a melting of heart on her lips. She comes to me and her mere presence, sighted from afar, buckles my knees and my mind is no longer mine, my heart so much bigger than I could ever imagine. For there is a healing that she is, a closing up of open-ended parts of me, a suturing together of flesh rendered asunder by blows and battles. In her presence I am humbled, dissembled, dashed into shallow pools of water. Yet so majestic am I when we embrace, as I am so full of her and me that I expand cosmically and sense myself as eternal, never dying, a precious coupled presence so fierce and formidable which we have unleashed with simple, even mundane words, words of enticement, of incantation, of seduction, of ecstasy—"Come to me, my precious beloved!"

On my elder journey, I have found the most pleasurable, ecstatic, humbling, maddening, and hilarious sense of my maleness as I sense a woman as the beckoning smile that invites me to receive her embrace and so begin the exploration of all that a male can be as dancing with all that a woman is. Within coupled presence intimacy flowers and all that we humans can be is embodied and manifested.

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