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ORIGINS OF GENDER DIFFERENTIATION AND SEXUALITY AS REPRESENTED IN THE BUDDHIST AND CHRISTIAN GENESIS MYTHS

by

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Attitudes towards sexuality and gender in the Western world have been largely determined by the belief system associated with the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition. Similarly, it can reasonably be maintained that the religious belief system associated with Buddhism acted as a determinant of social attitudes in this area in a large part of the Eastern world which came under the influence of Buddhism. Scholars and theologians of the Christian tradition consider the Biblical creation account in the Genesis story as central to the formation of the Christian attitudes towards sexuality and gender. In Buddhism too, there is an account of the origins of earthly life and social institutions given in the form of a Buddhist myth, which may to a certain extent be compared with the Christian Genesis story, although the Buddhist myth stands in direct contrast to the metaphysical standpoint of the Judaeo-Christian one in its intended rejection of a theistic origin of things. In some recent studies on the Buddhist attitudes towards sexuality and gender, reference has been made to the Aggafīya Sutta implying that the Buddhist myth contained in it performs the function of denigration of women and deprecation of sexuality in much the same way as the Genesis in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. It is suggested that an overwhelmingly patriarchal and androcentric approach is reflected in the Buddhist myth of genesis and that it is therefore largely comparable to the Judaeo-Christian myth in this respect. However, a detailed comparison of the two myths shows that any attempt to draw too close a parallel in their intent and purpose will be unfounded, and that contrary to there being a close similarity, the two myths diverge in a number of significant respects. In the introduction to her most informative source book on "Images of the Feminine in Mahayana Tradition" Diana Paul observes: "Like Judaism and Christianity, Buddhism is an overwhelmingly male-created

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institution dominated by a patriarchal power structure. As a consequence of that male dominance, the feminine is frequently associated with the secular, powerless, profane, and imperfect."! Referring to the Aggafīya Sutta, she suggests that it speaks of an original Golden Age of corporeal beings, which deteriorated due to the indulgence of human beings in sexuality.² According to her interpretation of the Aggafīya Sutta, the Buddhist story speaks of a devolution, or a Fall from the Golden Age in which living beings were asexual. With continual devolution "sexuality became immoral and violent". It is suggested that the Buddhist myth, like the Biblical myth of Genesis, portrays woman as the cause for the **Fall** of the human race.) Tracing the overall Buddhist attitude towards sexuality and gender to the Aggafīya Sutta, she further observes that for Buddhism "What was feminine or sensual was sarpsara, the world of bondage, suffering, and desire, which led to cycles of rebirths. This world of the feminine had to be vanquished at all cost."⁴What is implied here is that the Aggafīya Sutta can be conceived as being the source of Buddhist misogyny as much as the Paradise Narrative of the Genesis in the Old Testament can be conceived as the source of a good deal of Christian misogyny.

Making a classification of the distinct attitudes toward women and the feminine in early Buddhism, Alan Sponberg identifies among others, one which he calls "ascetic misogyny".⁵ According to Sponberg, the place of the anti-feminine depictions in the Buddhist tradition could be better understood if we first look at the cosmogonic myths that the early Buddhists inherited from the older Indian culture. The opinion is expressed here that like other non-Buddhist contemporaries, the Buddhists too inherited from the older Indian culture the view that this world has evolved (or rather devolved) from a pure realm of formless asexual

1. *Women in Buddhism - Images of the Feminine in Ma*

: *7ayana radition* (Asian Humanities

Press, Berkeley, California 1979), p.xiii-xiv.

2. *Ibid.* p.xx.

3. *Ibid.* p.4.

4. *Ibid.* p.5.

5. "Attitude Toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism" *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, edited by Jose' Ignacio Cabezon (State University of New York, 1992).

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beings. Sponberg quotes the following *from* Karen Lang in support of his view:

Both the Buddhist and Gnostic accounts of the fall have in common the following sequence of events: a deliberate act of eating brings about the transformation of originally luminous, incorporeal, and asexual nature into one that is now dark, material, and sexual. This transformation in turn, brings about an awakening of sexual desire and the subsequent satisfaction of the desire through sexual intercourse. These scriptures imply that, since sexuality was involved in the fall, abstention *from* sexual pleasures will weaken the ties that bind humanity to the lower material world and thus enable seekers after enlightenment to ascend to the luminous state of perfection.

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Sponberg suggests that the distinct attitude identifiable as "ascetic misogyny" in the early Buddhist scriptures is supported by the cosmogonic myth represented in the AggafifiaSutta. This attitude, according to Sponberg, is expressed in the categorical condemnation of the feminine and women as a threat to male celibacy.

A thorough comparison of the Biblical myth with the supposedly corresponding Buddhist one is likely to be greatly facilitated if at least the more important sections of both myths are presented. One preliminary observation that needs to be made about the socio-cultural function of the two myths is that whereas the Christian story was quite central to ethical and cultural attitudes relating to sexuality and gender in the Westernworld, no such centrality can be seen in the case of the Buddhist myth. There is no evidence whatsoever to the effect that subsequent generations of Buddhists kept the Aggafifia Sutta at the centre in the attitudes they expressed about women and sexuality.

In the Old Testament there are two creation myths commonly known as (1) the Priestly account of creation and (2) the Yahwist account of

6. Quoted in P.19, *Buddhism Sexuality and Gender from* Karen Lang, "Images of Women in Early Buddhism and Christian Gnosticism", *Buddhist Christian Studies* 2 (1982) :97.

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creation. The first account occurring in the Genesis is as follows:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light;" and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

And God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And

God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was

And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the

heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great lights,
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the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is

upon the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.⁷

The above account of creation is highlighted by Christian feminists who seek to interpret the Biblical account as containing an egalitarian view of the man-woman relationship. It is pointed out that according to this account man and woman had been created simultaneously. The commandment to have dominion over all living things, it is contended, does not imply that man alone has dominion over the earth or that man has dominion over woman but that both woman and man have an equal status.

The above section of the Genesis is immediately followed by what is known as the Yahwist account of creation (2:5-2:25) which is generally accepted as the older account.

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground—then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden

7. *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version (The World Publishing Company, Cleveland and New York, 1962) Genesis 1:26-2:4.

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in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is Pi'shon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Hav'i-lah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gi'hon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Cush. And name of the third river is Ti'gris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Eu-phra'tes. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. So the

Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

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To complete the mythical account of the Old Testament which was subjected to much interpretation in the history of the Christian tradition with the consequence of deprecation of women and condemnation of sexual pleasures, the following section of the creation story found in the Genesis has to be added:

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. ", But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I command you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." The Lord God said to the serpent,

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"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all cattle,
and above all wild animals;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise his heel."

To the woman he said,

"I will greatly multiply your pain in
Childbearing;

In pain you shall bring forth children,
Yet your desire shall be for your husband,

And he shall rule over you."
And to Adam he said,
"because you have listened to the voice of
your wife,
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
'you shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of
your life;
Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you;
And you shall eat the plants of the field.
In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread
Till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken;
You are dust,
And to dust you shall return."

The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the
mother of all living. And the Lord God made for Adam and
for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them. Then the
Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us,
Knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand

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and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever"-
therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden,
to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the
man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the
cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to
guard the way to the tree of life. ⁸

It is agreed by most of the Biblical scholars today that the story of
Adam and Eve in Genesis 2.4 is the older of the two dating 1000-900
B.C.E. while the account now placed first in Genesis 1.1-23 dates to
post exilic theologians dating around 400 B.C.E. There is also consensus
among scholars that the two creation accounts, originally separate
were later joined to make up the first three chapters of Genesis.⁹

The Genesis myths quoted above have shaped traditional Christian
attitudes towards sexuality and gender and the way Christians view
human nature. It is generally agreed that like creation stories of other
cultures the Biblical Christian story communicates social and religious
values. Jews and Christians in different times and places have given
different interpretations and derived divergent practical implications of
the story. While some recent scholars have attempted to derive feminist
ideals from the creation story, many others have pointed out that the
inherent purpose of the story is to give religious authority and sanction
to male supremacy and to blame all existential evil on the sinful disobedience
of man particularly in his actions connected with the sphere of
sexual desire.

John A. Phillips sees a connection between the Mother Goddess of
ancient Near-Eastern religions, honoured and worshipped with the title
"the mother of all the living" and the name given by Adam to the first
woman, Hawwiithor Eve, in the Genesis. The story of Eve is, according
to Phillips the story of the displacing of the Goddess by the asculine
God, Yahweh, whose name has the same derivation. ¹⁰ The purpose of
the creation stories of ancient Near Eastern cultures is explained by

⁸ Genesis 3.

⁹ *Eve - The History of an Idea* (Harper and Row 1985).

¹⁰ *Ibid*

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Phillips as an attempt to give a religious and cultural foundation for
society which secures the authority of men over women.

The great creation stories of ancient Near Eastern cultures
have at least two important things in common: All deal with
the initiation and sustenance of human civilization, the

securing of religious and cosmological foundations for the *p6hs*; and all presuppose or describe power struggles between masculine and feminine deities, usually with the masculine deities eventually gaining the upper hand. It is as though the writers believed that civilization could not begin or be sustained until the Feminine, as a dominant religious power had been mastered and domesticated. ¹¹

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Phillips also refers to the Mesopotamian creation story of the struggle between Marduk and Tiamat and observes: "The transparent image of Marduk is thus superimposed upon Yahweh." ¹² The statement that the world was *tohu-wa-bohu* "unformed and void" found in the opening verses of the Genesis shows the relationship of *tohu* to *tehom* the "deeps" which in turn is related to Tiamat, the formless, dark, menacing female of *Enuma ehsh*.

According to Lisbeth Mikaelsson, the real centre of interest in the myth is man and woman. The primary concern is with the structure of their relationship, and their interaction with the outside world. Adam is created first: "From the soil 'damah. Eve is made of Adam's rib. The purpose of her creation is to be a fitting companion for Adam. Lisbeth Mikaelsson observes that the separate creation of woman, while emphasizing the emotional value of the sexual relationship also expresses the point that man and woman do not have the same position in God's plan.

In this connection it must be noted that the divine purpose puts Eve and the animals on the same level; they are both meant to be remedies for Adam's loneliness.

II. *Ibid.* p. A

¹² *Ibid.* p. 5.

¹³ "Sexual Polarity: An aspect of the Ideological Structure in the Paradise Narrative, Gen. 2,4 - 3,24" *Temenos - Studies in Comparative Religion Presented by Scholars in Denmark*, Helsinki, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Vol. 16. 1980 pp. 84-91.

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Adam's naming of *w01119nas issiuh* is also considered as strong evidence of the different position assigned to the two sexes.

Both Lisbeth Mikaelsson and John Phillips argue that the narrative of the serpent's seduction of Eve is an attempt to put the greater burden on woman for the sins and ills of humanity. God as creator is not responsible for evil. Sufferings and evils of existence are explained in the myth as legitimate punishment for an outrage for which a woman, a representative woman, has to take the greater blame. Eve is portrayed as primarily guilty of setting in motion the series of events that led to the fall of man from paradise and the beginning for humanity of a state of existence characterized by pain, toil, alienation and death. John Phillips argues that the attempt on the part of some contemporary interpreters of Genesis such as Phyllis Trible ¹⁴ to relieve Eve's burden is "intellectually bankrupt and demonic. It amounts merely to abandoning the use of explicitly sexist theological imagery while failing to acknowledge its still persistent impact upon society." ¹⁵

In the early scriptures of the Judaeo-Christian tradition the story of Eve was widely used to explain evil and sin in the created world.

Sin has not been put on earth, but man of himself has created it. ¹⁶

From a woman was the beginning of sin, and because of her we all die. ¹⁷

According to accounts of the New Testament Jesus himself mentioned the story of Adam and Eve only once answering a question put to him by the Pharisees, the interpreters of Jewish law, about the legitimate grounds for divorce. Paul used the creation account to show that women must veil their heads in church, apparently to acknowledge their subordination to men. Justification for this is derived from

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creation story "for man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man".¹⁸ Ter

14. *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1978)

15. *Eve - The History of an Idea* op.cit. p.56.

16. Enoch 198:4-5.

17. Ecclesiasticus 25:24.

18. I Corinthians 11:3-16.

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Christians held beliefs diametrically opposed to each other on questions of marriage, celibacy and sexual relations. However, until modern times there has not been any difference in the stance maintained by generations of Christian theologians about the subordination of woman to man. Although Paul acknowledged that marriage was not sinful he encouraged those who were able to renounce it to do so. Later Christians fiercely debated what Paul meant. According to some only those who "undo the sins of Adam and Eve" by practising celibacy, even within marriage can truly practise the gospel. The majority of churches appear to have rejected such austerity and incorporated into the New Testament, letters in Paul's name, supporting traditional marriage to suit the prevailing patriarchal social structure and androcentric attitudes. In these instances too, justification was sought from the creation story of the Garden of Eden indicating that women being naturally gullible, are unfit for any role, but raising children and managing domestic affairs.

Women must "learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; She is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness with modesty."²⁰ Statements made by persons like Tertullian, and Augustine can serve as just a few more examples of how the Genesis myth was invoked in favour of the views held by later Christians on women and sexuality. Tertullian considers even the best of women as Eve's co-conspirators.

"You are the devil's gateway you are she who persuaded him whom the devil did not dare attack Do you know that every one of you is an Eve?"²¹ Augustine who was one of the foremost teachers of Western Christianity derived many of the attitudes about sexuality and gender from the creation story discussed above. He interpreted the story as implying that sexual desire is sinful; that infants are infected from the moment of conception with the disease of original sin; that Adam's sin corrupted the whole of nature itself.²² Augustine says: "We must conclude

19. *Ibid.* 7.3.

20. I Timothy 2: 11-15.

21. *De Cultu Feminarum*, 1.12.

22. See Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (Random House, New York 1988).

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that a husband is meant to rule over his wife as the spirit rules the flesh." Woman's formation from Adam's rib established her as the "weaker part of the human couple".²³ Woman is closely connected with bodily passion, and although she was created to be man's helper she became his temptress and led him to disaster.

Early and medieval Christian interpretations of the Genesis story resulted in ascetic interpretations of it. Certain early Christian moralists insisted that sexual intercourse should not be pursued for pleasure even among those monogamously married, but should be reserved solely for procreation. Christians embraced celibacy "for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven," and it was believed to be the kind of behaviour that Jesus and Paul exemplified. Although early Christians like Clement of Alexandria supported sexual activity in the form of conscious participation in procreation as "cooperation with God in the work of creation", celibacy and virginity came to be highly valued even in married life. Clement believed that the true Christian must be purged of the sexual passion that led Adam and Eve to sin. The married Christian must not only subordinate desire to reason but strive to annihilate desire entirely.

A man who marries for the sake of begetting children must practise continence so that it is not desire he feels for his wife that he may beget children with a chaste and controlled will.²⁴

Even in marriage a life of "chastity" involving the devotion of both partners to celibacy was considered better than a sexually active one. The Christian attitude towards contraception was also determined for centuries by its insistence on the doctrine that the sole purpose of marriage is for procreation and not for carnal pleasures.²⁵)

The original transgression of Adam and Eve is understood in the tradition as the introduction of sexual lust into the created order. It is held that the guilt of Adam and Eve is the guilt of all humanity. Augustine

23. De Civitate Dei 14. II.

24. Acts of the Martyr Justin and His Companions B.2, in Acts of the Christian Martyrs 49.

25. A comprehensive account is found in John T. Noonan, *Contraception - A history of its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts 1965).

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held that the procreative act passes on original sin. According to this view the inherited sin is passed on to the children eternally. The development of Mariology is also connected with the idea of original sin. For the Fathers of the Church, Mary's virginity recalled Eve's virginal state, which was lost as both cause and effect of the fall from grace. Man "fallen through the woman" (Eve) maybe "redeemed through the woman" (Mary), by contemplating and emulating the virginity of the latter.²⁶

Turning to the details of the Buddhist account of the genesis in the Aggafiffia Sutta it becomes clear that the context in which the story is introduced and the role it plays in the history of the Buddhist tradition are very different from those of the Judaic-Christian scriptural tradition. According to the introductory section of the Aggafiffia Sutta, two Brahmins, Vase!!ha and Bharadvijja were undergoing their period of probation under the Buddhist order before they were admitted to the Buddhist order as full members. The Buddha inquires from them whether their Brahmin kinsmen do not accuse them for having left the Brahmanical fold and seeking ordination under the Buddha's order of monks. They respond by saying that their Brahmin kinsmen do indeed hurl much abuse upon them for having abandoned the Brahmin community which has a much more superior claim in the divine order of creation, and joining the inferior order of shaveling recluses who are born of the feet of Brahma. The Buddha is represented here as repudiating the Brahmanical claim to superiority by maintaining that Brahmins themselves are born of the wombs of mothers in the same way as all other human beings are born. The Buddha goes on to state that Brahmins make this false claim because they have forgotten their own historical origins (*porii}a}Jalsarantii*). It is in this context that the Aggafiffia Sutta gives an alternative account of the relative origins of the world, the beginnings of sexual relations, the emergence of the caste order and political society.

The relevant section of the Aggafiffia Sutta is quoted below for purposes of comparison with the Biblical story.

26. See Phillips, *Eve. the History of an Idea*. op. cit. p.135.

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Vase!!ha, there will be some time after the lapse of a long period when this world will begin to contract. In this process of contraction, living beings will in large numbers turn into a form of luminous existence. There, they will be made of fire, feeding on joy, self-luminous, traversing the sky, living in glory and they will stay for an immensely long period of time. Vasegha, there will be some time when after the lapse of a long period this world will begin to open up. When the world

begins to open up, living beings will in large numbers, depart from the world of luminous form and come to this world. They will still be made of mind, feeding on joy, self-luminous, traversing the sky, living in glory, and stay for an immensely long period of time.

At that time Vase!!ha, there will be only a single mass of water, and blinding darkness. Moon and sun will not be known, neither constellations nor stars, neither months nor half-months will be known; seasons and years will not be known; male and female will not be known. They will be reckoned merely as living beings. Then Vasegha, at some time, after the lapse of a long period, savoury earth spreads over the water for those beings, just as cooked milk rises that is getting cooled forms a scum on its surface. That was lovely in colour and tasty; and just as well made ghee or well-made butter was its colour. It was as pleasant in taste as the flawless honey of the bee.

Then Vase!!ha, a certain being of greedy disposition, thinking "what kind of thing could this be?" tasted the savoury earth with the finger. As the savoury earth was tasted with the finger, this being was suffused with its savour. Craving occurred to this being. Other beings too, Vasegha, imitating what this being did, tasted the savoury earth with their finger. These beings were also suffused with its savour, and craving occurred to them as well. Then, Vasegha those beings tried to eat the savoury earth by breaking off lumps of it by their hands. When, Vasegha those beings tried to eat the savoury earth by breaking off lumps of it by their hands the self-luminosity of those beings disappeared. When the self-luminosity disappeared, the moon

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and the sun appeared. When the moon and the sun appeared, constellations and stars appeared. When constellations and stars appeared, night and day were known. When night and day came to be known, months and half-months came to be known. When months and half-months came to be known seasons and years came to be known. With this much, Vasegha this world came again to be opened up.

Then, Vasegha, those beings stayed an immensely long time eating and feeding on that savoury earth. Then gradually their bodies acquired grossness and variation in beauty and ugliness. Some beings became beautiful and others ugly. Then those beings who were beautiful looked down upon those who were ugly thinking "we are more beautiful than they and they are uglier than we". Due to their discrimination on the basis of beauty, the savoury earth disappeared for these beings who acquired a nature characterised by pride and conceit....

Then, Vasegha, for those beings, when the savoury earth disappeared, outgrowths on the land appeared. They appeared in the form of mushrooms. That was also lovely in colour, of pleasant smell and of pleasant taste. Then those beings tried to eat those outgrowths of the earth. ...Due to their discrimination on the basis of beauty the outgrowths on the land disappeared....

When the outgrowths on the land disappeared, creeping plants appeared... When the creeping plants disappeared, rice of sweet-smelling grain without powder and husk ripening in open spaces appeared. When they harvested it in the evening for the evening meal, it grew again in the morning and ripened. When they harvested it in the morning for breakfast, it grew

again in the evening and ripened. As these beings lived for an immensely long time, eating the rice ripening in open spaces, and were feeding on and were nourished by it, their bodies acquired grossness and variation in beauty and ugliness to a great degree. In the female appeared the distinctive mark of femininity, and in the male appeared the distinctive

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mark of masculinity. "The female contemplated on the male frequently, and the male contemplated on the female. When they contemplated on each other frequently, passion arose. Burning occurred all over their body. Due to the burning they indulged in sexual intercourse. When some beings were seen indulging in sexual intercourse others were throwing dust on them, others were throwing sand on them, others were throwing cow-dung on them saying "perish foul one, perish foul one. How could a being do such a thing to another being". Vase!!ha, that which was agreed to be unrighteous at that time is now considered to be righteous. At that time Vasenha, those beings who indulged in sexual intercourse were not allowed to enter a village or a township *for* three months or two months. When Vase!!ha, at that time, beings indulged in that unrighteous act frequently, they attempted to make dwellings in order to conceal that very unrighteousness.²⁷

It is clear that the main purpose of the Buddhist myth quoted above is the repudiation of the creation myth of the Brahmins which was meant to legitimise their claim to purity and superiority in the religious and moral sphere, and to show the baselessness of the belief in a hierarchical order of beings ordained by any creative principle, natural or divine. The Buddhist account does not refer to any original state of paradisaical purity *from* which human beings have fallen, but speaks of a cyclic processes of evolution and dissolution, contraction and opening up of world systems and *forms* of life, due to natural psychological and physical causes. The entire story needs to be interpreted as presenting an underlying philosophical theory of reality which shows a remarkable contrast with the Biblical story. Throughout the story an attempt is made to show the predominant role of craving in the process of change that occurs in the mental and physical world. The Buddhist story does not imply any special responsibility on the female sex *for* the sufferings of

27. Dfgha *Nikiya*, (Pali Text Society, London) Volume III, pp. 84-89. The translation here is by the author, but the author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to the translation in the Sacred Books of the Buddhists series Vol. iv edited by T.w. Rhys Davids (Oxford University Press 1921).

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humanity. In the Judeo-Christian tradition the myth of the creation of man and woman by God, was interpreted largely, if not entirely, assigning the greater burden of responsibility for the miseries of mankind to women. There have also been repeated attempts to subordinate women to the authority of men on the basis of such interpretations. The Buddhist story has no such implication even in the remotest possible way. According to the Buddhist story, the appearance of male and female characteristics among living beings was a natural process determined partly by the desires of human beings themselves. Woman is not represented in the story as a temptress. Members of both sexes are considered as suffering from the influence of carnal desire and lust which bring them together to indulge in carnal behaviour. Sexual desire is not conceived as the original cause leading to the **Fall** of man from an original state of paradisaical purity, but human greed and the desires of the senses are generally considered to influence the processes of moral degeneration.

Although there are rare instances in which Buddhist scriptures refer to the seductive nature of women and express misogynist sentiments, they derive no support from any Buddhist myths or doctrinal principles central to the tradition. If any implication is to be drawn from the Aggaffia Sutta on the relationship between the sexes with regard to their original status in the evolutionary process, it should be one of equality

and not of one being superior or subordinate to the other.

The Buddhist story, however, has certain implications regarding its evaluation of sexual behaviour. The first instance of any sexual relationship between the sexes is represented in the story as behaviour despised by people. According to the story, people viewed sexual intercourse as an impure act and those *who* indulged in it constructed huts to conceal the act. It also represents the Buddha as saying that although during his time it was not considered as immoral, when it first appeared in the "opening up period" it was considered to be so. This reflects the Buddhist attitude towards sense pleasures in general. Buddhism considered the mutual desire between the male and female for the gratification of sexual appetite to be the greatest hindrance to the much desired disenchantment with lower pleasures 'of the senses leading to the commitment towards the attainment of the higher delights of the cultured mind.

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The Buddhist tradition was not confronted with the problem of reconciling the duty of procreation with the avoidance of carnal desire which led to so much ambivalence in the history of the Christian tradition. Buddhism recognizes no special moral duty to procreate. It is also difficult to find a parallel to the Christian evaluation of celibacy and virginity following from its creation myth in the Buddhist tradition. Early Buddhism restricted male as well as female celibacy only to those who joined the orders of Buddhist monks and nuns, but never attempted to extend it to the order of lay disciples. The lay persons were usually referred to as those who enjoyed the pleasures of sense (*gihf kiimabhogzj*) and they were not expected to be celibate or live as virgins. The contradictory demand of religious duty involving procreative activity of married persons without sexual desire poses no problems in the Buddhist tradition.

We have noted above that Diana Paul characterizes the Buddhist view of sexuality and gender in the following terms: "What was feminine or sensual was sa!lsara, the world of bondage, suffering, and desire, which led to cycles of rebirths. This world of the feminine had to be vanquished at all costs." Such a characterization appears to be a result of reading into the Buddhist scriptures aspects of the Christian myth and its interpretations. There is no instance in Buddhism where the sensual or sa!lsara is identified exclusively with the feminine. Nor is there any instance in which Buddhism suggests that the world of the feminine has to be vanquished at all costs to overcome sa!lsaric misery. According to the Buddhist teaching, attachment to any object of the senses is productive of the process of sa!lsaric becoming. There is no attempt in Buddhism to make women scapegoats for the sa!lsaric suffering or make women responsible for Original Sin inherited by all human beings whether they are male or female. In this regard all the evidence in the Buddhist scriptures points in favour of Rita M. Gross's assertion "...the kind of archetypal mythic and symbolic thinking that is so much a part of the feminine principle is entirely foreign to the thinking of early Indian Buddhism I do not think that woman is a cosmic enemy in this literature.28"

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28. *Buddhism After Patriarchy* (State University of New York Press, 1993) p.45.

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A characteristic feature of early Buddhism is that it preferred psychological explanations to mythical explanations in the sphere of human experience and social relationships. Even when the mythical element was used in presenting Buddhist doctrinal positions, it came to be largely psychologized. This is evident in the Buddhist enumeration of the forces of Mara, the mythical lord of Death. It is also evident in the *Aggaffia Sutta* where the gradual evolution of the world and its social

order is explained in a mythical way. In this instance, the primary intention is the repudiation of the theistic Brahmanical view of the world and its social order. Only a passing reference is made to sexuality and gender in this story. Therefore, any attempt to draw conclusions corresponding to what follows from the Iudaean-Christian scriptural account is clearly unjustified.